

# BODENPLATTE

## The Luftwaffe's Last Hope

The Attack on Allied Airfields  
New Year's Day 1945



John Manrho and Ron Pütz



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In memory of Ron Pütz, a dedicated and passionate air war historian.  
He will be sorely missed. This book is a tribute to his work.

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## Authors' Introduction and Acknowledgements

**O**PERATION BODENPLATTE is an aspect of the 1939-1945 air war that will never cease to fascinate. What is so special about this operation? Is it the fact that it was the last full-scale attack by the Luftwaffe fighter force? Is it the sheer numbers of aircraft that were involved and lost? Is it the fate of the many pilots who went missing in action that day?

Ever since 1945 writers have dedicated pages to this operation. Most are to be found in magazines but scarcely a handful of books have been written about the subject. Credit should go to the late German author Werner Girbig who has done so much important work in the clarification of unsolved Luftwaffe losses. In fact, his book *'Start im Morgengrauen'* ('Six Months to Oblivion') dating back to the 1970s has been the springboard for many later works. When we started research in earnest for this book (1993), we decided to write the ultimate work on Unternehmen Bodenplatte making use of all available historic documents, information from local air war historians, but perhaps most importantly by listening to those who actually flew on that day or to those who were at the receiving end.

In our quest for participants we searched all over the world and despite the fact that many of these former youngsters are now well into their seventies and eighties, we managed to contact German, British, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Norwegian, Dutch and Polish airmen, to name but a few. The list of people who contributed with personal recollections, diary entries and photographs would certainly run to several pages – not to mention relatives of former airmen, the hard-working researchers in official archives and institutions, fellow air war historians and those who contributed indirectly. Special thanks should go to the following contributors:

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One of our goals was to describe as accurately as possible, the events taking place in the morning of January 1st 1945. Aggregating all these individual stories – taking place in merely a couple of hours over The Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany – has not been an easy task. We had to refrain from going into the nightfighter attacks of December 31st 1944 and for reasons of brevity we also had to let go of any other bomber or escort missions of the Allied air forces on January 1st.

The contents of the book have been divided into chapters dealing with the individual attacks of the Luftwaffe Geschwader. As a result, the subject matter is dealt with primarily from a Luftwaffe point of view. After all, it was a Luftwaffe operation. However, we have endeavoured to create a balanced view of each attack, showing in just as much detail the Allied perspective. At the end of each chapter, we have drawn our conclusions, carefully evaluating all available Luftwaffe and Allied points of view. Given

the huge concentration of aircraft (both Allied and Luftwaffe) within a geographically limited area and restricted by merely a couple of hours of operations, chronology could not always be strictly followed. In addition, for reasons of clarity, some events taking place at the same point of time or location are not necessarily dealt with within the same chapter. Think of aircraft from different units showing up over one and the same target. Sources have, where possible, been mentioned in endnotes and detailed appendices are included at the end of the book.

Losses mentioned within the context of this book and in the Appendices are solely in relation to Unternehmen Bodenplatte and do not cover January 1st 1945 in general. Both Allied and Luftwaffe losses are given as accurately as possible. However, with 55-plus years since the event, losses suffered by the Allies particularly cannot be reconstructed with any degree of comprehensiveness. For example, losses suffered by already damaged USAAF bombers on the Continent cannot be traced back to January 1st specifically. Besides, the numbers game is not really that interesting from a historical point of view. Success and failure are not the result of a simple equation and in the case of Bodenplatte it is common knowledge that personnel losses suffered by the Luftwaffe were disproportionate compared to the damage caused and the useful, lasting effect of this damage. It is the fate of the individual participants we have focussed on. Not without pride, we can say that as a side effect of our research the fate of 15 – missing Luftwaffe pilots – have been resolved. Eight of them were Bodenplatte pilots. Family members finally have a headstone to visit. In a similar manner, with this book, we hope to have erected a monument for all those who "were in it" on that cold morning of January 1st 1945. It is to you and your comrades who did not live to see the end of the war, that we dedicate this book.

We believe, we have exhausted most of the known sources of expertise and experience on the subject, but for reasons not known to us, there may be people who have additional information on Unternehmen Bodenplatte who have not yet sought contact with us. This book does by no means imply that we have stopped researching the subject. We encourage anyone who thinks he can add to- or correct any aspect of the story, to contact us.

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John Manrho and Ron Pütz  
The Netherlands 2003





## Glossary

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
AAA Aw Bn	Artillery Weapons Battalion
Abschuss	Aerial combat claim
ADLS	Air Dispatch Letter Service
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
Fliegerdivision	Flying Division
FG	Fighter Group
FS	Fighter Squadron
GCS	Group Communication Squadron
Gefechtsstand	Field Control Post/Headquarters
General der Jagdflieger	Commanding General of the Fighter Arm
General der Schlachtflieger	General of the Ground-Attack Arm
Geschwader	Wing
Gruppe	Group
Gruppenkommandeur	Group Commander
Jafü (Jagdführer)	Area Fighter Commander
Jagdabschnittsführer	Sector Fighter Commander
Jagddivision	Fighter Division
Jagdgeschwader	Fighter Wing
Jagdgruppe	Fighter Group
Jagdkorps	Fighter Corps
Jagdverbänden	Fighter Units
JG	Abbv. for Jagdgeschwader
Katschmarek	Wingman
KIA	Killed in Action
Luftwaffenkommando	Luftwaffe Command
MIA	Missing in Action
Nachtjagdgeschwader	Night Fighter Wing
Nachtschlachtgruppe	Night Ground Attack Group
NFS	Night Fighter Squadron
NSFO	National Sozialistischer
Führungsoffizier	Political Officer
Oberkommando der Wehrmacht	High Command of the German Armed Forces
PSP	Pierced Steel Planking
RP	Rocket Projectile
R&SU	Repair and Servicing Unit
R/T	Radio Transmitter
Schlachtgeschwader	Ground-Attack Wing
Schwarm	Element of four aircraft
Schwarmführer	Leader of a Schwarm
SG	Abbv. for Schlachtgeschwader
Stab des General der Jagdflieger	Staff of the General of the Fighter Arm
Stabsschwarm	Staff Schwarm
Staffel	Squadron
Staffelkapitän	Squadron Commander
TAC	Tactical Air Command
Tac/R	Tactical Reconnaissance (Mission)
Unternehmen	Operation
Zerstörer	Destroyer Aircraft
Zerstörergeschwader	Destroyer Wing
zur Verfügung	At disposal

# Prelude to the Offensive

**December 1944 – The objectives –  
Preparations for the attack – Pathfinders**



By the beginning of October 1944 the front line in the West was relatively stable. The Allied advance was losing its momentum and simultaneously, when they reached the Reich's borders, the German defence was stiffening.

**O**VER the coming months the German Army would be able to hold their positions. Also at this time, the Luftwaffe had withdrawn several of its fighter units from the front and was re-equipping them in Germany.<sup>1</sup> More fighter units were established by equipping former Zerstörer units with single-engined fighters. In these days also, the idea evolved of a massive attack on the US Eighth Air Force with some 2,500 single-engine fighters. This plan, called the 'Grosse Schlag' or 'Great Blow', was developed by the Stab des General der Jagdflieger under command of Gen.Lt. Adolf Galland. Although this plan seems to have been further discussed during meetings within the Stab and within I. Jagdkorps the following month, it was already clear by that time that this attack would not take place, as the re-built fighter forces would be needed elsewhere.

In the autumn of 1944 Adolf Hitler had initiated the plan to launch an offensive in the West, which was to take place in the Ardennes. Preparations for Luftwaffe participation began on September 16th when Adolf Hitler informed Generalleutnant Werner Kreipe, the Luftwaffe Generalstabschef, about the planned offensive.<sup>2</sup> On October 21st General Kreipe ordered Luftflotte Reich to prepare the transfer of six to seven Jagdgeschwader and one Schlachtgeschwader to Luftwaffenkommando West.<sup>3</sup> On November 14th, Göring gave the following orders for the forthcoming attack in the West:<sup>4</sup>

- a. An attack of II. Jagdkorps, with 3. Jagddivision attached to it, on enemy fighter-bombers at airfields near the front line.*
- b. An even more important task of II. Jagdkorps is to fly fighter cover for the Army to give it freedom of movement.*



- c. Schlachtgeschwader 4 is to operate mainly during the crossings of the Meuse.
- d. 3. Fliegerdivision is to attack airfields with their jet bombers and other targets with bombers and Nachtschlacht units. Nachtjagdgeschwader 2 was also to operate as a Nachtschlacht unit with its Ju88s.

The preparations were to be completed by November 27th and units were to be operational within three days. At that stage it was clear that a large attack on the Allied airfields was planned in conjunction with the offensive in the West. On November 18th, this was confirmed by the guidelines for 'Unternehmen Wacht am Rhein' as initiated by the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht:

*"...When the weather improves the main task of the Jagdverbänden will be to fly cover for the advancing Panzer units and their marching routes. Also, a surprise attack on the front line airfields of the enemy tactical air forces is to be executed."*<sup>5</sup>

These orders were incorporated in the operational orders of Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model for Heeresgruppe B of December 9th 1944.<sup>6</sup> By that time the commanding officers of the Jagdgeschwader had also been informed. On December 4th, Luftwaffenkommando West issued an order that the commanders of all Jagdgeschwader and Jagdgruppen, except JG 300 and JG 301, were to attend a meeting at the headquarters of II. Jagdkorps on the afternoon of the following day.<sup>7</sup> The headquarters was situated in an inn at Flammersfeld, some 10 kilometres south-west of Altenkirchen. The meeting was presided by Gen.Maj. Dietrich Peltz, who had been appointed commanding officer of II. Jagdkorps on November 15th. Others present were Obst. Walter Grabmann, Obst. Hanns Trübenbach, Obstlt. Gotthardt

Handrick and various staff officers. Here Peltz told his audience of the plan to attack Allied airfields in the near future and a master map, showing the frontline as it then stood, was handed to each Kommodore. The operation was then discussed and planned in minute detail. It was arranged that every airfield should be attacked simultaneously. The following code words for the operation were agreed upon:<sup>8</sup>

'Varus': Indicating that the operation was on and that it would take place within 24 hours.

'Teutonicus': Authority to brief the pilots and to arrange for aircraft to be armed and ready at the edge of the airfield.

'Hermann': Giving the exact date and time of the attack.

'Dorothea': Indicating a delay in the attack.

'Spätlese': Cancelling the attack after take-off.

In the early evening the Kommodore and Kommandeure returned to their units, probably with varying thoughts about the mission.

On December 4th, one day earlier than the conference held at the II. Jagdkorps headquarters, the first preparations for the mission had commenced. On this day I. Jagdkorps sent orders to II./NJG 100, I./NJG 101 and II./NJG 101 to provide Ju 88s to several Jagdgeschwader to act as Lotsen<sup>9</sup> for the next two weeks. The Lotsen were to ensure efficient assembly of strong day fighter formations in difficult weather. The crews were to report to the Gruppenkommandeur or the commanding officer of their advance detachment.<sup>10</sup> The same day similar orders were given by 7. Jagddivision to II./NJG 6. The next day 3. Jagddivision ordered II./NJG 1 and III./NJG 1 to provide Lotsen for JG 1.<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, the war diary of NJG 6 has survived, and a few details are known about the transfer of the II./NJG 6 Lotsen.

In the late afternoon of December 4th, Stab NJG 6 received a telephone call from the Ia of the 7. Jagddivision, ordering II./NJG 6, based at Schwäbisch Hall, to prepare 20 nightfighter crews for



Gen. Maj. Dietrich Peltz, Commanding Officer of II. Jagdkorps, presided over the meeting on 5 December 1944 at Flammersfeld during which he outlined the plan to attack Allied airfields. He is seen here in the spring of 1944 whilst he was commander of IX Fliegerkorps.

Fw 190 A-8, W.Nr. 173943 'Black 12' of 2./JG 1 seen at Greifswald in November 1944. (Roding)



transfer to other airfields (which will be identified later) for a period of two weeks, for a special mission by day fighters. At 17.20 hrs the order was given to Hptm. Helmuth Schulte, Kommandeur of II./NJG 6, to prepare his crews. At 08.00 hrs on December 5th II./NJG 6 confirmed that 20 crews with their Ju 88s would be sent to ten Jagdgruppen of II. Jagdkorps, where they would be used as Lotsen. Each Jagdgruppe would receive two Ju 88s and the transfer was to be reported by 18.00 hrs. At 14.00 hrs the transfer was postponed, as only 14 Ju 88s were ready.<sup>12</sup> Lt. Lothar

Hemmerich, one of the pilots of II./NJG 6, remembers: "The order to transfer from Schwäbisch-Hall came as a surprise and was to be executed as soon as possible. Most of the crews did not like the idea at all and consequently spirits were not high. I believe that some crews delayed their transfer flight, which was to take place on the same afternoon, by reporting their Ju 88s unserviceable."<sup>13</sup>

However, several Ju 88s took off in the afternoon of December 5th and by December 12th a total of 18 Ju 88s had departed for their designated Jagdgruppen.<sup>14</sup> These included several crews of 5./NJG 6, which had been based at Echterdingen since November 7th. Among them was Hptm. Fritz Griesse, Kapitän of 5./NJG 6.<sup>15</sup>

The following Nachtjagdgeschwader were ordered to provide Ju 88 Lotsen for the Jagdgeschwader:<sup>16</sup>

II./NJG 1	2 Ju 88s to III./JG 1
III./NJG 1	4 Ju 88s to I./JG 1 and II./JG 1
III./NJG 5	8 Ju 88s to I./JG 6, II./JG 6, III./JG 6 and IV./JG 54
II./NJG 6	20 Ju 88s to I./JG 26, II./JG 26, III./JG 26, I./JG 27, II./JG 27, III./JG 27, IV./JG 27, I./JG 77, II./JG 77 and III./JG 77
II./NJG 100	12 Ju 88s to I./SG 4, II./SG 4, III./SG 4, II./JG 53, III./JG 53 and IV./JG 53
I./NJG 101	16 Ju 88s to II./JG 11, III./JG 11, I./JG 2, II./JG 2, III./JG 2, I./JG 3, III./JG 3 and IV./JG 3
II./NJG 101	10 Ju 88s to I./JG 4, II./JG 4, III./JG 4, IV./JG 4 and I./JG 11



All units were to receive two Ju 88s. Thus 72 Ju 88s were to be used as Lotsen. Furthermore at least one Ju 88 of IV./NJG 1 and one Ju 88 of I./NJG 4 were also used as Lotsen. These Ju 88s were transferred to Drope (II./JG 1) and Altenstadt (III./JG 2) respectively. These two may have been a late replacement.

Little is known about any special preparations the Ju 88 Lotsen may have taken at their destinations or about preparations by the Jagdgeschwader too. Secrecy was apparently well maintained. In ULTRA transcripts we find only a few indications that something was planned. The first indication was on December 4th when II. Jagdkorps issued orders for stockpiling visual navigational aids as 'golden-rain' rocket-flares and smoke bombs at several designated pinpoints. Orders for use would be given in good time, and the length of operation was scheduled to last one hour.<sup>17</sup> No written observations were made by Allied Intelligence and it seems that no importance was attached to II. Jagdkorps' orders. The next signal came on December 12th when the first instructions were given by II. Jagdkorps to the Ju 88 Lotsen regarding the use of flares when leading fighter formations.<sup>18</sup> The next day the same and other instructions on the use of the Ju 88 Lotsen were given by Stab JG 27 to its Gruppen.<sup>19</sup> Allied Intelligence concluded that pilot aircraft were to lead formations in the tactical support role rather than on an interception basis, with a take off at first light. How more accurate could they be! However up to then, no indications on the possible targets were intercepted. On December 20th, a message from 3. Jagddivision was intercepted in which it

SS Panzer-Grenadiers from 1st SS Panzer Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler' attached to Kampfgruppe Peiper advance through the Belgian village of Honsfeld and past an abandoned US M3 halftrack during the initial stages of Wacht am Rhein on December 16th, 1944. It was crucial that, as the advance extended, German ground forces had air support from the Luftwaffe's Jagdgeschwader.





Above and below:  
Lt. Gottfried Just,  
Staffelkapitän of 2./JG 1,  
in the cockpit of his  
personal Fw 190 A-8,  
'Black 9' at Greifswald in  
November 1944. Lt. Just  
was shot down and killed  
on 27 December 1944.  
Note that the 'Black 9'  
has been painted over  
'White 17' a former Stab  
I./JG 1 aircraft. It is  
believed that Lt. Just was  
shot down in this  
aircraft. (Roding)

was confirmed that emergency landing grounds for the 'special undertaking' had remained unchanged.<sup>20</sup> This is one of the first indications that something was imminent, but Allied Intelligence did not comment. Over the following days a message from 3. Jagddivision was intercepted indicating that several Gruppen<sup>21</sup> had practised low-level attacks on practice targets or on *dummy aircraft*.<sup>22</sup> Also, an order of Stab JG 11 was intercepted to report the number of low-level attacks by each of its Gruppen.<sup>23</sup> In both cases there was no apparent link to the 'special undertaking.' The last warning came when on 31 December, 3. Jagddivision sent a message that the emergency landing ground for 'special undertaking' Leeuwarden was 'conditionally serviceable.'<sup>24</sup> Allied Intelligence suggested that the special undertaking was no more than support of the ground offensive – in other words, nothing special at all. How wrong could they be?

Meanwhile with the start of the 'Von Rundstedt Offensive' (the so-called 'Battle of the Bulge') on December 16th, the activities of the Jagdgeschwader had been concentrated on the support of the advancing Panzer Armies. Maximum effort was given, and even in bad weather, the fighter units attempted to provide cover to the armour. On many occasions they were intercepted by fighters of the 2nd Tactical

Air Force or Ninth Air Force and losses were high. During eight days of operations between December 17th-27th the Jagdgeschwader lost 644 fighters destroyed and 227 damaged. Some 322 pilots were killed, 23 captured and 133 wounded. Between December 23rd and 25th the losses had been especially high; on these three days alone, 363 fighters were lost. In fact, several Gruppen had lost half of their strength in operations over the battle area. As the end of December drew nearer and the land offensive seemed to halt, not many of the Kommodore and Kommandeure thought of the planned attack on Allied airfields any longer. In fact, some had already assumed the plan to be cancelled.<sup>25</sup> Persistent bad weather conditions had prohibited the operation from being carried out during the opening days of the ground offensive.

However, the opposite was true and in the early afternoon of December 31st the code words '*Varus-Teutonicus*' were issued.<sup>26</sup> The alert was given and the attack was to be expected within 24 hours, meaning that the attack would take place on January 1st 1945. As previously mentioned, the code word '*Teutonicus*' meant that the aircraft could be prepared and rolled to the edge of the airfield. At approximately 18.30 hours the final code word '*Hermann*' was given to the units as "*Auftrag Hermann 1.1.1945 Zeit 09.20.*"<sup>28</sup> The mission was to be executed on January 1st





and 09.20 hours was the planned time to be over the target<sup>29</sup> – New Year's Day 1945 would be a day to remember...

In his New Year's Day broadcast, Adolf Hitler announced: *"The world must know that this State will, therefore, never capitulate... Germany will rise like a phoenix from its ruined cities and will go down in history as the miracle of the 20th Century."*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Such as JG 1, JG 11, III./JG 54 and JG 77.

<sup>2</sup> Die Ardennen-Offensive 1944/1945 by Hermann Jung, Musterschmidt 3 Verlag, 1971, page 138. Based on KTB Werner Kreipe, 17.9.1944.

<sup>3</sup> OKL Führungsstab Ia Nr. 10309/44 g.Kdos. of 21.10.1944.

<sup>4</sup> Die Ardennen-Offensive 1944/1945 by Hermann Jung, Musterschmidt Verlag, 1971, page 139. Based on Der Reichsmarschall des Großdeutschen Reiches und Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe Nr. 10325/44 g.Kdos. Chef. of 14.11.1944.

<sup>5</sup> Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Nr.40/44 g.K.Chef. St. WFSt./Op(H) of 18.11.1944. As published in Die Ardennen-Offensive 1944/1945 by Hermann Jung, Musterschmidt Verlag, 1971, page 311.

<sup>6</sup> Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe B Ia Nr. 0180/44 g.Kdos. Chef.

<sup>7</sup> ULTRA Report HP8624. The order was issued to I. Jagdkorps, 1. Jagddivision, 3. Jagddivision, 5. Jagddivision, Jafü Mittelrhein and to II. Jagdkorps for information only. In many books this date is wrongly stated as December 15th, probably caused by the details in A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945. It is believed that not all the Gruppenkommandeure attended the meeting.

<sup>8</sup> Based on "Einsatzbefehl für I./KG 51" of 9.12.1944, Report of III./SG 4 on operation of 1.1.1945 and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 10.

<sup>9</sup> Lotzen = Pilot aircraft, more commonly known as 'pathfinder'. The German term Lotse has been used throughout the text.

<sup>10</sup> ULTRA Report HP8620.

<sup>11</sup> ULTRA Report HP8734.

<sup>12</sup> Kriegstagebuch Stab NJG 6, BA/MA Freiburg, RL10/542.

<sup>13</sup> Letter Lothar Hemmerich to Regis Decobek, dated 5.10.1987.

<sup>14</sup> Kriegstagebuch Stab NJG 6, BA/MA Freiburg, RL10/542.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of Hptm. Fritz Griese to mother of Uffz. Josef Knon, dated 15.01.1945.

<sup>16</sup> Based on several logbooks, KTB Stab NJG 6 and ULTRA Reports HP8620, 8689, 8734, 8856, 8982, 9138, BT243, 831, 877, 941, 1054, 1200

and 1595.

<sup>17</sup> ULTRA Report HP8930.

<sup>18</sup> ULTRA Report HP9391.

<sup>19</sup> ULTRA Report HP9491.

<sup>20</sup> ULTRA Report HP9981.

<sup>21</sup> I./JG 3, III./JG 3, IV./JG 3, all Gruppen of JG 27 and IV./JG 54.

<sup>22</sup> ULTRA Report BT65.

<sup>23</sup> ULTRA Report BT95.

<sup>24</sup> ULTRA Report BT849.

<sup>25</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 13.

<sup>26</sup> Based on KTB I./JG 26. It is mentioned that the code word was received at 14.30 hrs

<sup>27</sup> ULTRA Report 56-BT-878, at 18.30 hrs the units of 3. Jagddivision were informed. Other units may have been informed later. According to the KTB of III./KG 76 which received the order at 22.00 hrs: Tageseinsatz im Rahmen des Unternehmens "Hermann" laut Befehl Fernschreiben 1a/45 g.Kdos. vom 31.12.1944 22.00 Uhr.

<sup>28</sup> A note was found in one of the crashed Fw 190 of JG 1 reading "Auftrag Hermann 1.1.1945 Zeit 09.20 hrs" A.D.I.(K) report No. 158/1945, point 11.

<sup>29</sup> In many books it is stated that the mission was planned earlier and that take-off was delayed on January 1st. All available documents prove otherwise. See also A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, Point 10. In this document Hptm. Georg Schröder is said to have stated that the time of the attack was fixed at 09.20 hours the previous evening. See also Fernschreiben 1a/45 g.Kdos. vom 31.12.1944 22.00 Uhr, from Ia KG 51 to III./KG 76.

Fw 190 A-8s of 3./JG 1 at Greifswald with 'Yellow 5' and 'Yellow 9' in the foreground. (Roding)

# The Battle of Gandawa

**Jagdgeschwader 1 'Oesau' and the airfields in western Belgium**



All three Gruppen of Jagdgeschwader 1 had participated in the Battle for France and by mid-August 1944 they had lost so many aircraft and pilots that they were pulled back to Germany to receive reinforcements, bringing them back to full strength.



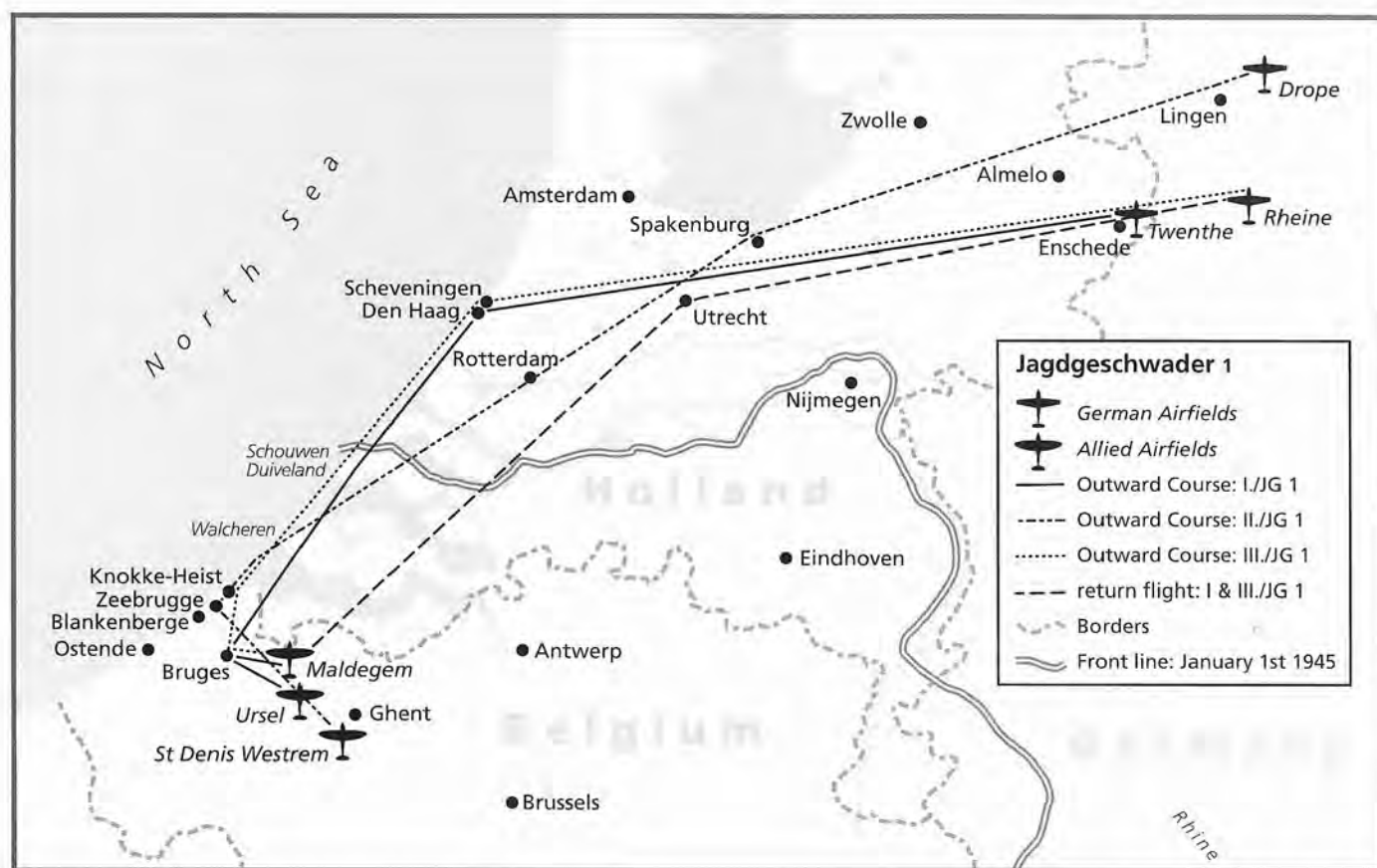
An interesting and rare picture showing 'Red 2', 'Red 3' and 'Red 4' of 4./JG1 at Greifswald in November. The W.Nr. of 'Red 2' seems to have been from the 350 000 series. (Roding)

THE I./JG 1 moved to Husum in northern Germany and II./JG 1 moved to Reinsehlen. III. Gruppe stayed in France and flew its operations together with II./JG 11, slowly retreating back to Germany. By mid-October, III./JG 1 was also pulled back and moved to Anklam where the Gruppe was to re-equip.

After withdrawal from operations, JG 1 received several new pilots, most of them directly from operational training units and often not more than 20 years old. Additionally older pilots from disbanded bomber units or disbanded flight schools joined the Gruppen. Before joining JG 1 they had received a short training course on fighters, but this training was also insufficient to prepare them for daylight fighter operations. Although in numbers the Gruppen were stronger than ever, most new pilots were inexperienced and lack of fuel hampered further training. By the



# THE BATTLE OF GANDAWA



beginning of November, I./JG 1 moved to Greifswald and II./JG 1 to Tutow where their training continued and where they were to resume operations in the Reichsverteidigung.

On November 21st 1944, I./JG 1 flew its first mission from Greifswald and it proved how inadequate training had been. The Gruppe started with an impressive 57 Fw 190s, but in trying to reach the bomber force attacking the Leuna synthetic oil plant, it was attacked by a strong Mustang force from the Eighth Air Force<sup>1</sup>. Flying in one large formation, I./JG 1 suffered a terrible blow. More than half of the Fw 190s were shot down, resulting in 15 killed and five wounded pilots.<sup>2</sup> Returning to operations on November 26th and December 5th respectively, II./JG 1 and III./JG 1 were treated much the same way. On these two missions alone, 24 pilots of II./JG 1 were killed. III./JG 1 lost an additional five pilots.

On the morning of December 16th the Fifth Panzer Army and Sixth SS Panzer Army struck in the Ardennes and all three Gruppen of JG 1 were ordered to the Western Front to support the offensive. Stab and I./JG 1 moved to Twenthe, near Enschede in the Netherlands, the first pilots arriving on December 17th. Twenthe was a large airfield built by the Germans in the early years of the war and had been the home to III./NJG 1 for several years. On the same date, the first pilots of II./JG 1 arrived at Drope, a small airfield north-east of Lingen. III./JG 1 moved to Rheine where



it joined I./JG 27 and I./KG 51. On December 18th JG 1 flew its first missions over the Front. Daily operations were flown during the period December 23rd-27th, resulting in heavy casualties. During operations to December 31st, JG 1 lost an additional 39 killed and 11 wounded. Although most of the victims were among the inexperienced young pilots on their first mission, JG 1 also lost some of its irreplaceable unit leaders such as Gruppenkommandeure Hptm. Erich Woitke (III./JG 1) and Hptm. Hans Ehlers (I./JG 1); Staffelkapitäne Oblt. Fritz Bilfinger

Pilots of 2./JG 1 in discussion with the Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 1. From left to right: Oblt. Emil Demuth, Lt. Gottfried Just, Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade, Uffz. Ernst-Adolf Schaumburg. (Roding)



A young Georg Hackbarth photographed in 1939. Hptm. Hackbarth was born on 21 February 1915, and flew numerous combat missions with Stab II./JG 51 on the Eastern Front during which he claimed 15 victories. From mid-1942 until October 1944 he served with different flying schools, finally as Kommandeur of I./JG 108 and I./JG 103. He volunteered for the Reichsluftverteidigung in October 1944 and after a Kapitänlehrgang joined I./JG 1 on October 26th 1944. Initially he became Ia of the Gruppe and flew in the Stabsschwarm. He became ill at the end of November and did not rejoin I./JG 1 at Twenthe until December 25th. When Kommandeur Hptm. Hans Ehlers did not return from operations on December 27th, Obstlt. Ihlefeld ordered him to take over the Gruppe temporarily. (Vanags-Baginskis)

(10./JG 1), Lt. Gottfried Just (2./JG 1) and Lt. Richard Förster (4./JG 1). Furthermore the loss of the older NCOs such as Ofw. Georg Hutter (5./JG 1), Ofw. Reinhard Flecks (6./JG 1) and Ofw. Friedrich Zander (11./JG 1), who had all flown with JG 1 for several years, was deeply felt.<sup>3</sup> This was the state in which JG 1 prepared for the mission on January 1st. The following letter, written by a I. Gruppe pilot to his wife on December 29th, shows that some German pilots understood their precarious situation;

*"How do I feel at the moment? One word says it all: miserable!. Each morning you do not know if you will be still alive at the end of the day. However, you get used to this situation and just accept what comes. Normally one would be indignant. Days go by and each day is the same. We are simply here to be used..."*<sup>4</sup>

### Preparing for the New Year's attack

It is not known whether Obstlt. Herbert Ihlefeld, Kommodore of JG 1, attended the briefing in Altenkirchen on December 5th, although this seems very likely. Perhaps even his Kommandeure were present, but two of them, Hptm. Woitke and Hptm. Ehlers, had been killed in action during the past few days. Following a mission on December 26th, the CO of II./JG 1, Hptm. Staiger, had landed in the Frankfurt area with a damaged aircraft and by the end of the month still had not returned to his unit.<sup>5</sup> Oblt. Fritz Wegner, Staffelpkapitän of 6./JG 1, had taken command of the Gruppe temporarily. So, none of the new Kommandeure were aware of the forthcoming operation.<sup>6</sup>

Following the substantial losses in December, several new pilots arrived at Twenthe, Drope and Rheine to fill up the gaps. Also, new aircraft were

delivered to the battered units. During the last two days of December, II./JG 1 received an additional 19 Fw 190s, which were flown by Überführungsflieger to Drope.<sup>7</sup> This meant however, that within II./JG 1 far more aircraft were available than pilots! This was solved in an unusual way. Oblt. Wegner remembers: "As our Gruppe had lost so many pilots in the last few days, I received orders to keep a group of approximately 15 ferry pilots with II./JG 1. They had delivered new Fw 190s to Drope. Among them were several experienced pilots who did not fly operations because of injuries sustained in the past, but also pilots who never had flown an operation at all! I kept them anyway."<sup>8</sup>

Also during the last days of December, some pilots of I./JG 1, which in turn had more pilots than aircraft, were ordered to transfer to II. Gruppe. The names of three pilots are known. Fw. Karl Hahn of 3./JG 1 went to 5./JG 1. Fw. Harijs Klints, one of the Latvian volunteers who had joined I./JG 1 in October, went from 2./JG 1 to 8./JG 1.<sup>9</sup> Not only experienced pilots were transferred; Ofhr. Hilmar Krebs arrived with 1. Staffel at Twenthe on December 29th from 2./JGr. Süd, but was sent to 7./JG 1 at Drope on the same day!<sup>10</sup> None of these three pilots would return from their mission on January 1st. It is evident that more pilots must have been sent from I./JG 1 to II./JG 1. Whether any of the ferry pilots actually flew the mission of January 1st is not known, but not a single casualty of II./JG 1 could be linked to a ferry unit.<sup>11</sup>

In the early afternoon of the 31st Oblt. Fritz Wegner and Hptm. Harald Moldenhauer, respectively acting commanders of II./JG 1 and III./JG 1, were ordered to visit the Stab of JG 1 at



Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade's 'Black 3' at Greifswald in November 1944. (Rodrig)

Twenthe for a special briefing by Obstlt. Herbert Ihlefeld.<sup>12</sup> At Twenthe, Hptm. Georg Hackbarth of Stab I./JG 1 joined them. Hptm. Hackbarth had joined Stab I./JG 1 on October 26th where he acted as Ia in the Gruppe. He was grounded due to illness in the first week of December and had rejoined Stab I./JG 1 at Twenthe from Greifswald on the 25th.<sup>13</sup> Following Hptm. Ehlers' death on the 27th he was appointed acting CO by Obstlt. Ihlefeld. At Twenthe the three unit leaders received their orders from Ihlefeld and immediately returned to their units to prepare them for the mission of the following day.

In the meantime I./JG 1 had received a special reinforcement. Three Bf 109 G-8 of 3./NAGr 1 had taken off from Niedermendig at around 14.00 hrs to join I./JG 1.<sup>14</sup> They were ordered to join the Gruppe on the mission and were to take photographs during and after the attack. In this way the results would be known immediately.

After dinner on December 31st, Hptm. Georg Hackbarth informed his Staffelführer of the impending operation. Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade of 2./JG 1 remembers: "After Lt. Just had not returned on December 27th, Hptm. Hackbarth had ordered me to take over 2. Staffel. I was still Oberfähnrich at that time. I had already been promoted to Leutnant, but the Staffel had not been informed yet. Just after dinner we were briefed about the mission by Hptm. Hackbarth, who told us that everything was "Strengstes Geheim" and that we were not allowed to inform the other pilots yet. Taking part in the festivities on New Years Eve was not allowed and all pilots were forbidden to drink alcohol. After receiving this information we were to bed, but of course we stayed up until midnight and still celebrated. A V-2 was fired from the Dutch coast at midnight. We were able to see it from Twenthe."<sup>15</sup>

Stab and I. Gruppe of JG 1 were to attack Maldegem airfield in North-West Belgium. However, 4. Staffel, commanded by 23-year old Oblt. Hans-Gottfried Meinhof, would leave the formation near Bruges and attack Ussel airfield instead.

At Rheine, Hptm. Moldenhauer briefed the Staffelführer and Schwarm leaders of III. Gruppe on the evening of 31st December. The Gruppe was to attack Maldegem airfield too. Marked maps with instructions were handed to the pilots. After the briefing, the formation leaders informed most of the pilots of the nature of the operation and target, and also gave instructions that they were to follow their leaders in to the attack, breaking away either when the Kommandeur gave instructions over the R/T, or when he was seen to leave the target area. They were then to fly on a bearing of 50-60 deg. to the German lines, and to land at Rheine if they could.<sup>16</sup> Apparently not all the pilots were briefed; Fj.Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt

remembers: "At 20.00 hrs we received orders to go to our quarters and not to celebrate or drink alcohol. We did not know of the operation of the next day, we only assumed that something special was planned."<sup>17</sup>

Finally, during the late afternoon of December 31st, Oblt. Wegner briefed the whole of II./JG 1 and pilots were shown a sand table model of the airfield they were to attack. The target was St. Denis Westrem, an airfield just south-west of Ghent. The pilots had already known that an important operation was being planned, but until the briefing, they did not know what it was.<sup>18</sup> Certainly each pilot of JG 1 had his own feelings about the mission for the next day, but all probably believed that they would somehow succeed. Some had more philosophical thoughts;

*"The year 1944 nears its end. With sorrow and worry we look back at this miserable last year. The new year 1945 begins. The first minutes are devoted to the future. What will this new year bring us? Peace for mankind or redemption?"<sup>19</sup>*



#### North-West Belgium, December 1944

Devoid of their AAA defences, which had already moved on to Gilze-Rijen in Holland, Maldegem (B-65<sup>20</sup>) was situated 15 kilometres east of Bruges. Only 15 kilometres to the south of Maldegem was B-67, Ussel airfield, and just 25 kilometres to the south-east of Ussel was the airfield of St. Denis Westrem on the outskirts of Ghent. Ussel and St. Denis were also without AAA protection.

In October 1944 No. 135 Wing of the 2nd TAF moved up from Merville near Lille in France to Maldegem. After the rain and the ankle-deep mud and living in tents, anything had to be better than Merville. On arrival at Maldegem the men of No. 485 Squadron found to their great relief and delight that they were to be billeted in a brick-built house and also to have a small hangar capable of housing two Spitfires, spares, armoury and administration offices. Three squadrons formed No.135 Wing – 602, 485 and 349 each with 18 Spitfires, equipment and personnel to cater for all

Spitfires of No. 349 Squadron seen in flight in October 1944 when the unit was stationed at Maldegem. (De Decker)





Grp. Capt. Aleksander Gabszewicz, CO of No. 131 Wing at the time of the Battle of Gandawa (Koniarek)

day-to-day tasks. The groundcrew living quarters were in a house a few minutes walk from the hangar and airfield and all the aircrew were accommodated in the village of Maldegem, a few kilometres away. No. 349 Squadron was operating from the other side of the airfield and apart from seeing the aircraft take off and land, 485 Squadron saw very little of it except at meal-times. No. 602 was in England at the time. The Officers and Sergeants Messes were in the village.

Ursel (B-67) was situated between Bruges and Ghent, the resident unit being No. 424 Re-arming and Refuelling Unit. Ursel's role was to refuel and re-arm Fighter Command squadrons that were temporarily used for short spells on the Continent. Up to 12 squadrons could be present at Ursel, but on January 1st none were there! The only residents were a damaged B-17, two damaged Lancasters and a Mosquito. A detachment of eight airmen was billeted in Ursel village.

The airfield at St. Denis Westrem near Ghent was home to No. 131 (Polish) Wing consisting of three squadrons of Spitfires and No. 85 Group Communications Squadron. The latter unit was equipped with Ansons, Austers, Mosquitos and Spitfires. B-61 also had a role as an emergency airfield for RAF and USAAF bombers which were not able to make it back across the Channel following raids. The three squadrons of Spitfires at St. Denis were No. 302 Poznanski, No. 308 Krakowski and No. 317 Wilenski Squadrons, the names referring to respectively the cities of Poznan, Krakow and Wilno. In the middle of October, No. 131 Wing, commanded by Group Captain Aleksander Gabszewicz, had arrived from B-51 (Lille) and by the end of December it

had received orders to move towards Grimbergen (B-60). So, while most were busy packing, Group Captain Gabszewicz had flown to B-60 to inspect their new base and W/Cdr Tadeusz Sawicz, the Operations Officer, was acting Wing Commander. Nos. 308 and 317 were equipped with low-altitude Spitfire LF Mk IXs; No. 302 also operated some of the later LF Mk XVI types and would eventually switch to this type completely. All three squadrons were to fly an early mission on New Year's Day.

### The attack on Maldegem and Ursel

It was still dark when the pilots of JG 1 at Twenthe were awakened. The groundcrew had worked all night to make as many Fw 190s ready for the mission as possible. At 07.00 hrs Hptm. Hackbarth gave a briefing.<sup>21</sup> Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade remembers: "At 05.00 hrs we were awakened and after breakfast we went to the officer's mess. Here the complete Gruppe was gathered and the operational orders were given. We were ordered to maintain radio silence at all cost. With pictures and maps they informed us about the target. Hptm. Hackbarth ordered me and my 2. Staffel to fly high cover as soon as we arrived over the target Maldegem and abstain from strafing attacks until the sky was clear. We were ordered to fly very low, at a height of 50 metres to prevent detection by radar and also absolute radio silence was ordered. They had even changed the settings of the radios!"<sup>22</sup>

Maps for the flight were issued at the briefing. The course was Twenthe/Enschede-The Hague-Schouwen-Bruges-Maldegem. The formation was to be led approximately as far as Schouwen by a Ju 88. At Bruges, 4. Staffel would leave the formation and head for Ursel. For the return flight a general course was marked from Maldegem to Utrecht and then back to Twenthe.<sup>23</sup>

At 08.12 hrs Obstlt. Ihlefeld was the first to take off, followed by 22 Fw 190s of I./JG 1.<sup>24</sup> The 1. and 3. Staffel had taken off first, followed by 2./JG 1 and finally 4./JG 1. The Gruppe assembled above the airfield behind the Ju 88 and then headed almost due west, flying at an altitude of 50 metres. The Ju 88 Lotse did not take off from the airfield, but had been waiting for the Gruppe over Twenthe.<sup>25</sup> Fw. Fritz Hofmann, one of the more experienced pilots of 3. Staffel, encountered engine trouble before take-off and started about ten minutes after the other aircraft of I.



Gruppe. He therefore flew on a direct course to the mouth of the Scheldt to catch up with the formation. Reaching the Scheldt he saw a Ju 88 on a reciprocal course, apparently one of the JG 1 Lotsen, before he encountered a formation of approximately 30 Fw 190s which, from their markings, appeared to belong to II./JG 1. Hofmann decided to join this force in the attack.<sup>26</sup>

At Rheine III. Gruppe had also started its preparations. Hptm. Moldenhauer briefed his pilots and handed out maps with the course to the target. Fj.Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt remembers: "At 05.30 hrs we had our wake up call. I receive my first operational orders. I have to replace another pilot. I collect my belongings and ask another pilot to look after them in case I do not return. Do I sense that I will not return? At 08.00 hrs we have to take off. Our Staffel can only provide five aircraft. Einsatzbefehl: Low-level attack on Maldegem airfield in Belgium."<sup>27</sup>

The course to Maldegem was almost the same as that for I./JG 1. From Rheine to Scheveningen, then to Schouwen, Knocke, Bruges and finally Maldegem. III./JG 1 would be led by two Ju 88 Lotsen of 9./NJG 1, guiding the Gruppe to Schouwen. The crew of Lt. Josef Hettlich, Bordfunker Uffz. Karl Meinert and Bordschütze Gefr. Georg Steinhauer flew the leading Lotse. Uffz. Ingomar Mayr, Uffz. Hartmut Woll and Uffz. Wilhelm Ehret flew the spare aircraft.<sup>28</sup> When the pilots of III./JG 1 arrived at Rheine they saw that the Bf 109s were lined up at the edge of the airfield and that they were covered by camouflage netting. All Bf 109s were pushed to the airfield to save time and fuel.<sup>29</sup> At 08.15 hrs the Gruppe, probably not more than a dozen aircraft,<sup>30</sup> took off and assembled with the two Ju 88s that were already in the air. Following I./JG 1 on the same course, the formation headed due west. The whole Gruppe flew at a height of about 100 metres in sections of four aircraft, the Gruppenkommandeur leading the first Schwarm.

The two formations started their flight over occupied Holland and below everything appeared to be quiet. Fj.Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt remembers: "At a height of 100 metres we flew over the peaceful countryside of Holland. A little snow had fallen during the night and had painted the land white. The quiet cosiness of the single farms and fields, the canals and other waterways reminded me of the day, New Years Day, a Sunday."<sup>31</sup>

However, peace did not last for long. Following their course over Holland, I./JG 1 and III./JG 1 were welcomed by fire from the numerous Flak positions. The Flak crews had not been informed of the operation and had not seen German aircraft for a long time. Spotting the large formations, they opened fire.

I./JG 1 suffered its first casualty ten kilometres west of Hilversum. Hit by Flak, the Fw 190 of Fw. Heinz-Jürgen Kilian, a pilot of 3./JG 1, crashed near Vreeland. Fw. Kilian succeeded in baling out, but was too near to the ground and his parachute did not open. Kilian was an experienced pilot who had joined 8./JG 77 in June 1943 and had accumulated eight victories in Africa.<sup>32</sup> Passing Scheveningen, the next turning point at the Dutch coast, disaster struck again. Naval coastal batteries opened fire and the next victim came down. Uffz. Egon Comtesse's 'White 3' crashed in to the sea near the Dutch coast and his body washed ashore two months later.<sup>33</sup> Obstlt. Herbert Ihlefeld's Fw 190 was also hit, but he succeeded in making a belly-landing near Rotterdam.<sup>34</sup> Finally Uffz. Heinz Böhmer's Fw 190 was hit. The exact crash location of his 'Yellow 15' is not known, but the body of the unfortunate pilot was found in July 1945 in a marshy area near Strijen, 12 kilometres south-west of Dordrecht.<sup>35</sup> Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade remembers: "We flew from the Zuiderzee to the coast where the coastal batteries had not been informed and they opened fire. We lost more aircraft at that stage than we did later. The Ju 88 was still leading us so we did not watch where we were, as we usually did. Suddenly this Ju 88 turned away and we had to find the target for ourselves."<sup>36</sup>

I./JG 1 passed Schouwen island when the Ju 88 Lotse, as seen by Ade, returned to its base.<sup>37</sup> Now Hptm. Georg Hackbarth took over and guided the Gruppe, or what was left of it, to the next turning point near Bruges.

In the meantime III./JG 1, trailing some minutes behind, had its encounter with 'friendly' Flak. Leading the formation beyond Utrecht, Lt. Josef Hettlich's Ju 88 was hit by 'Vierlingsflak' located near the bridge over the Amsterdam-Rijn canal in Maarssen. The aircraft started to burn and crash-landed in a flooded polder called Gerverskop, north of Harmelen. Hettlich, sustained fatal injuries, but the other two crewmembers, Meinert and Steinhauer, were recovered alive and were transferred to a hospital in Utrecht with severe injuries, where they would remain until April 1945.<sup>38</sup> According to some witnesses another aircraft of the formation was also hit and flew off in the direction of Amsterdam, trailing smoke.<sup>39</sup> This aircraft could not be identified. Events happened so fast that most pilots of III./JG 1 had not noticed the crash-landing of the leading Lotse.

Now the spare Lotse of Uffz. Ingomar Mayr took over. However, its luck had also ran out. Fj.Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt remembers: "We reached the Dutch coast near Scheveningen. Here the Ju 88 would leave us and we had to find our own way. In the fields and at certain landmarks, our divisions set up smoke signals. Red, yellow and white colours would show us the right way. At



Uffz. Egon Comtesse photographed in July 1942. Twenty-one year old Comtesse was shot down by German Marineflak near Hoek van Holland on the outward course and was killed. (Phielers)



Radar mechanic Cpl. Geoffrey Coucke looked down on "hordes" of JG 1's fighters from the lighthouse at Westkapelle on Walcheren. (Coucke)



Scheveningen we are shot at by Flak. The first red tracers of the German Flak pass my aircraft. Looking to the right I see the Ju 88 Lotse going down in flames. We continue under heavy fire, flying in sections of four."<sup>40</sup>

Mayr's Ju 88 G-6 crashed on De Beer island, west of Rozenburg. The crew was buried at the general cemetery at Hoek van Holland. In 1955 the three crewmembers were reinterred at the German War Cemetery Ysselsteijn.<sup>41</sup>

I./JG 1 and III./JG 1, continued their flight towards Schouwen, from where they changed to a course direct to Bruges. Flying low over the most western points of Schouwen and Walcheren, the roaring Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts left the civilians bewildered and took the occasional Allied soldier by surprise. One of them was Geoffrey Coucke, a corporal radar mechanic. In the early morning hours of January 1st he was in Ops Room at the top of the lighthouse at Westkapelle on the island of Walcheren at the mouth of the River Scheldt when the telephone rang. Upon picking it up he heard: "Two aircraft have just flown over us toward the Belgian coast. They have black crosses on their sides and swastikas on their tails and I suspect they are hostiles." This entered his ear on answering the phone in the Ops Room at the top of the

lighthouse. Geoffrey was on detachment from 15081 GCI Unit (Forward E-Boat Warning) then based near de Haan between Ostend and Blankenberghe. The station only operated at night and all the operators and controllers were absent – "I had, indeed, heard the two aircraft, but was used to that in those days. However, I did phone a Royal Navy Unit at Domburg. The response from that direction was far from reassuring. I was told to expect another two hundred anytime now! I had to make a quick decision, whether to go to the bottom or higher. The latter destination won, as the base of the lantern rested on a very solid cylinder of steel. This also had the advantage of a few "spy holes" about two or three inches in diameter. The Navy's information was soon confirmed. I was able to look down on hordes of planes flying towards the Belgian coast. They passed on both sides and many were nearer the ground than my perch. I shall always remember that grandstand view of the last major effort of the Luftwaffe."<sup>42</sup>

Shortly after passing the lighthouse, the formation approached the Belgian coast. Located near the coast was Knocke-de Zoute, a coastal airfield in northern Belgium that had been built by Baron Leon Lippens for his wife Suzy, at the time holder of many women's air records. The Germans had taken it over from 1940 until 1944, when No. 142 Wing moved in.

Squadron Leader G. Dickinson of No. 142 Wing remembers: "Approaching from the north we saw what, at first, was thought to be a Wing of UK-based Spitfires on Refuel and Re-arm call between attacks on German rocket sites in Holland. We learned differently very quickly. With one or two colleagues, I stood on the low flat roof of the pre-war clubhouse, when a vast swarm of Fw 190s and Me 109s swept across, mostly below the level of our rather invitingly-exposed vantage point. Urgently calling Group Ops on the direct line, my efforts to explain the position to the Duty Ops Officer were to no avail. Jovially, he insisted on wishing me a Happy New Year, reminding me that "This is January 1st old boy, not April 1st." Then I heard a strangled cry "My God! The Bastards are here!" and that was the last we heard from Group HQ for some time! Meantime the airfield was beginning to resemble the film set of Hell's Angels, with unfriendly aircraft all over the place. It was also noisy, very noisy until they finally departed, headed ESE. Our LDA (Local Defence Adviser) was a S/Ldr van Weigan from Merseyside who confidently forecast that the enemy would call back on the way home. He was so right! We had hastily assembled a machine gun on the roof. Our LDA pleading that he hadn't fired a shot in anger since the First World War, manned the gun. A Flying Control sergeant volunteered to be target spotter; his father was the Chester cathedral





No. 276 ASR Squadron was equipped with Spitfire Mk Vbs and operated from a coastal airstrip at B-83/Knocke-de-Zoute. (Bowden)

organist so we were quite confident he would know how to pull out all of the stops. Soon, returning waves of enemy aircraft flew along our western perimeter at zero feet. Our intrepid LDA, ably assisted by the Chester Herald, kept up a rapid low-raking fire with great success. I saw him hit at least three and everyone agreed that he had put up a jolly good show deserving of a medal of some sort. However, when the CO of 276 ASR Squadron reported that 'friendly' fire had damaged half the Spitfires in his dispersal, a machine gun prudently disappeared as did any thought of medals!<sup>43</sup>

Another eyewitness was Eric Bowden, a groundcrew member of No. 276 ASR Squadron with Spitfire Vb spotter aircraft and Walrus amphibian aircraft: "The 1st of January was a glorious morning with bright sunshine. We were operating from an airstrip at Knocke-de-Zoute on the Belgian coast. At exactly 09.00 we were attacked by a lone Fw 190 that came at us out of the sun. The first we knew about it was the noise of the machine guns. He made four circuits each time out of the sun so we could not see him. We hadn't had any air activity for a considerable time so I guess we were a bit complacent. All the aircraft were in a straight line; a good target. He must have been an awful shot because he missed the lot; not one bullet hole and casualty. Unless he was as pig-sick of the war as we were and he was not really trying."<sup>44</sup>

It could not be established which aircraft actually attacked Knocke (B-83), but they would have belonged to JG 1.<sup>45</sup> Most likely they came from I./JG 1. Both formations now neared Bruges and at this point we will look at both units individually again.



When I./JG 1 finally reached the last turning point at Bruges, 4. Staffel, led by Staffelkapitän Oblt. Hans-Gottfried Meinhof, left the formation and headed for Ursel. Its effort will be looked at later. The bulk of the Gruppe, although now reduced to not more than some 12 aircraft, headed straight east for Maldegem. During the attack it was planned that each Schwarm should make five passes over the airfield, circling anti-clockwise between attacks, but it did not work out as planned, and there was considerable confusion.<sup>46</sup>

Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade remembers: "I was already over the airfield with my Staffel before I could react. We banked and went in. I remember seeing about three four-engine bombers at Maldegem.<sup>47</sup> Together with my Staffel, I followed the others. Now we flew no longer next to each other, but behind each other. Stupidly enough we still had to maintain radio silence and therefore could not give any instructions. We simply had to assume that the others did the same as we did. I do not understand why we had to maintain radio silence

A rescued pilot climbs out of a No. 276 Squadron Walrus based at B-83. No aircraft were hit during the 'stray' attack on Knocke-de-Zoute by JG 1. (Bowden)



F/Sgt. Jozef Stanowski is strapped into the cockpit of his Spitfire. (Glowczewski)

over the target. They knew we were there, so what was the point? No one dared to break radio silence fearing repercussions. Later I discovered that my radio hadn't worked at all. Nobody had heard me! I do not know if this was the case with the other aircraft. Anyway, we could not communicate with each other. At this stage we were still with about ten aircraft. Everything was covered in smoke now and it was difficult to orientate. Strafing the airfield, I fired at the parked aircraft, achieved hits at some of them and pulled up again. There was a considerable mix-up over the airfield and aircraft of 1. Staffel and even of II. Gruppe mixed with my Schwarm. It seems that we also flew over St. Denis-Westrem! Suddenly somebody broke the radio silence and shouted "Spitfires!" Apparently they returned to base from an early mission. I saw a Spitfire and thought: "That one is for me!" I got hits on the Spitfire, but could not follow him as my fuel indicator already indicated that I had to return. Later a 4. Staffel pilot confirmed my victory. I banked to the right and suddenly I was alone. I looked around for other pilots of my Staffel, but looking at my fuel indicator I had to fly back to base if I did not want to end up as a POW.<sup>48</sup>

It seems that the confusion during the attack caused some aircraft of I./JG 1 to get absorbed with II./JG 1 and vice versa. The Spitfires Ofhr. Ade encountered were from No. 308 or No. 317 Squadron. Their exploits will be covered in great detail in the attack on St. Denis by II./JG 1. One of the pilots of I./JG 1 ending up over St. Denis was none other than Hptm. Georg

Hackbarth. He ran into the dogfight between II./JG 1 and the Polish squadrons. In this dogfight, F/Sgt. Jozef Stanowski of No. 308 Squadron had already shot down one Fw 190 before he encountered 'White 23' of Hptm. Hackbarth: "I then turned back and attacked another Fw 190 flying east towards Ghent. I opened fire with all armament at approximately 100 yards range, from 15 degrees astern, changing to dead astern. After the first burst, the enemy aircraft dropped the undercarriage. I fired another long burst and saw strikes on the cockpit and fuselage. The Fw 190 then dived into the town and crashed there."<sup>49</sup>

The stricken fighter crashed into the rear of the 'Toebaert' florist shop, leaving it through the shop-window at the front and smashing into the tram rails of the Elisabethlaan. Hptm. Hackbarth's body was recovered on the street and taken to a local cemetery.<sup>50</sup> Although Georg Hackbarth had high hopes of his first operational posting after a long career as Kommandeur of I./JG 108 and I./JG 103, the missions of December 1944 had already proved to him that his chances of survival were slim.<sup>51</sup>

After the dogfight, F/Sgt. Stanowski ran out of fuel and was forced to land on a field north-east of Ghent: "Jozef Stanowski had landed his Spitfire on the other side of the city, swung his parachute over his shoulder and took the city tram to base. That same evening he got an enormous basket full of flowers, all that was salvaged from the florist's. Later he was seen in various places with a pretty brunette. The rumour was that she was the owner of the flower shop. But who really knew or cared? Jozef was always in love with somebody."<sup>52</sup>

During the dogfight with the Poles another pilot of I./JG 1, Lt. Hans Berger of 3. Staffel, managed to shoot down a Spitfire.<sup>53</sup> Evading the dogfights, the remaining Fw 190s headed for home. Following I. Gruppe's attack on Maldegem, III./JG 1 also turned at Bruges. Wilhelm Wichardt remembers his attack vividly: "Below us is Bruges, our turning point. Another five minutes and we will reach Maldegem. We release our droptanks and we encounter no more anti-aircraft fire. My Schwarmführer gives the orders to attack by R/T. On the airfield are several aircraft, I can not identify the type, as I concentrate on my wingman. I make several strafing attacks and fire at the perimeter track. There is no anti-aircraft fire. Suddenly my guns are empty. My Schwarmführer gives the order to return to our homebase. I make another turn and head north."<sup>54</sup>

Although one source indicates that the attack was hampered by smoke coming from the burning aircraft,<sup>55</sup> the attack was akin to a training exercise. Not hampered by any enemy fire, the Bf 109s of III. Gruppe could pick their targets meticulously as Joe Roddis, a member of No. 485 Squadron's groundcrew, vividly remembers: "At about 8.30 am

The Toebaert family's flower shop was destroyed after Hptm. Hackbarth's Focke-Wulf crashed into it. (De Decker)



Bill Parker, the airframe Sergeant and I, the Engine Sergeant, after checking that the billet was empty of all men due on duty that morning, made our way back to the hangar to carry out our duties. As we came around the corner of the hangar the sound of aircraft engines in flight made us look across the airfield in the direction of the control tower. Three or four planes, slightly banked, were coming around the tower heading for our dispersal in a shallow dive at a height of about 30 metres. I distinctly remember saying to Bill Parker: "The Yanks are out early this morning." They looked like Mustangs and before he could reply, the leading edges of the incoming planes started to flash and sparkle and all hell broke loose. The visitors were doing a very thorough job in reducing our Spitfires to ashes. They took it in turns to dive onto our lines of parked aircraft and after each run across a Spitfire burst into flames, exploded and sagged in the middle. They were so clinical and accurate in what they were doing. I watched one coming from the village direction in a shallow dive, hit his target dead-centre then bank left over the top of where I was crouching. The pilot's head, clearly visible through his canopy, was looking to his left towards the burning Spitfires. Some of our Spits were still intact and one or two actually had the engine running where the fitter doing his ground-run had leapt out. One poor chap was trapped in the toilets! They were formed by an open square of bricks with a large bucket in each corner. About two metres high they afforded some protection, but this chap was glad to see the end of it all. He'd enjoyed a grandstand view, but was lucky to have escaped all the ammo that flew around. When eventually the 109s had either run out of ammo or were getting

low on fuel, they departed as quickly as they had arrived. Apart from two parked in the hangar, only three aircraft survived to fly again."<sup>56</sup>

The reports of No. 135 Wing and its two squadrons give a good impression of the attack:

No. 135 Wing reported: "*At visit at 0845 hours by the GAF who, in the absence of Ack-Ack opposition did everything except land and have a cup of tea. Damage to 14 aircraft may complete the write-off. Many incidents which amuse after the event but are not very funny at the time.*"

No. 349 Squadron reported: "*Presumably as a New Year's greeting the Hun got up early and strafed our airfield causing considerable losses to aircraft. The attack commenced at about 09.20 with probably a dozen Me 109s and lasted 7/8 minutes. At first a dummy run was made, they then came in at almost tree-top height with all guns blazing and making at least three strafing attacks, the first one out of the sun. They aimed at the aircraft and very little damage was caused to buildings and hangars. We were very fortunate in that we lost only one aircraft as against thirteen in 485 Sqdn. The reason for this was that all our aircraft were dispersed in a dip and the Hun coming in over them, could not see because of hangars and when over the aircraft it was too late for strafing. The airfield AA guns were moved some days previously and the only defence we could offer was by vigorously firing rifles, Sten guns and revolvers, which are hardly effective against diving aircraft.*"

No. 485 Squadron reported: "*The New Year opened with a burst of cannon and machine gun fire at 09.10 hours when six Me 109Es beat up the airfield and burned and destroyed 11 Spits, two damaged beyond*



Fj.-Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt of 9./JG 1 in a picture taken in February 1944. He joined III./JG 1 at Anklam in early December 1944. (Wichardt)



There was nothing much left of 'S' for 'Sugar' at Maldegem. (King)



Uffz. Alfred Fritzsche's Fw 190 A-8 'Red 1' of 4./JG 1 rests against a Belgian farmhouse at De Pinte. In the original picture, the W.Nr. 739269 can still be deciphered. (Sommerau/Morel)



*repair and totally destroyed the Wing Co. Flying's Spitfire at Wing Headquarters. The Squadron started the New Year with 5 aircraft. While the pillar of smoke and flame was rising from the airfield the pilots were engaged in directing revolver fire from the door and windows of the billet led by the CO with a Mauser rifle. The 'battle dress' was a variation between Cossack Pyjamas and polo-necked sweaters and underpants. No opposition whatever was given, there being not an Ack Gun on the field."*

J. Norby King was a pilot with No. 485 Squadron. He remembers civilians waving back at the attackers and the Spitfires being lined up as for parade: "A good sleep but something is horribly wrong. My watch says 10 past 9 and we are just coming to. The aerodrome is unserviceable through icing so we should have been able to become serviceable ourselves – gently and slowly. Last night we saw the New Year in, lubricating its

passage, so we expected an uncomfortable awaking. But not as startling as this. Those engine sounds are unfamiliar – foreign. That chatter of cannon fire means that we have been caught with our pyjama pants down. A good thing that the walls of the house are thick stone. From the doorway to the cobbled street we see evil black smoke boiling up in columns, rising above the rooftops. Jerry is blitzing the field half a mile away. Has blitzed it. The 109s are overhead now, arrogantly circling, hoods open, waving. Down the street civilians are waving back. Sitting ducks, our kites last night were lined up in an L on the tarmac. Lined up with parade ground precision"<sup>57</sup>.

After expending their ammunition on the parked Spitfires, the Messerschmitts turned north, heading towards the Scheldt. III./JG 1 had lost only one aircraft over the target area, though this was not caused by enemy action. Shortly after leaving Maldegem, Lt. Anton Guha's Bf 109 suffered engine failure and he had to belly-land his aircraft near Biervliet, some 20 kilometres north-east of Maldegem, and he was taken POW<sup>58</sup>. For the other Messerschmitts it was still a long way back to Rheine.

As mentioned 4. Staffel left the I. Gruppe formation near Bruges and led by Oblt. Hans-Gottfried Meinhof headed for Ursel. Even before reaching the target, they lost one Fw 190. Uffz. Alfred Fritzsche's 'Red 1' was hit by AAA fire and Fritzsche had to belly-land his Fw 190. He

Another picture of Uffz. Fritzsche's 'Red 1' in a derelict state after the first looting by civilians and military personnel. Note that the roof tiles have been put back in place! (Cornelissen)



landed near De Pinte village, south of Ghent. Sliding several hundred metres over the frozen ground, passing a cemetery and crushing two trees, the Focke-Wulf ended up against a cow shed.<sup>59</sup> Uffz. Fritzsche was recovered from the aircraft with serious burns and taken to the hospital in Ghent.<sup>60</sup> Just after 09.00 hrs, the small formation of Focke-Wulfs, probably not more than three aircraft, struck Ussel, where it fired at the B-17, the two Lancasters and the Mosquito. Jim Robertson was an NCO at Ussel: "I was standing on the far side of the airfield with another NCO, Sgt. Jock Law from Glasgow, when four low-flying aircraft appeared. I had a whale of a hangover from the previous night and having a good look through my blurred vision, I remarked to Jock: "Those bloody Yanks are flying low." Jock's quiet reply was: "They're not Yanks, they're Fw 190s and I'm off!" Suddenly they opened up. I have never moved so fast in my life as I did into a nearby wood for cover. After what seemed hours, I crawled out to see a Flying Fortress burning to a cinder. A hero at Ussel that day was Sqdn. Ldr. Bill Ireson, one of the finest COs I have served under. Always the welfare of his men came before everything. He rode around in the back of a Jeep with a Sten gun in his hands firing at the German planes. However, he could not prevent that all aircraft standing on the airfield were either destroyed or damaged."<sup>61</sup>

Now all the remaining aircraft of I. and III. Gruppe tried to return home, most of them flying alone, some in pairs. This would prove to be as dangerous as the approach route. Of I./JG 1, 2. Staffel would suffer especially. Gefr. Karl-Heinz Bauch, an inexperienced 21-year old pilot who had only recently joined 2./JG 1, was hit by AAA fire and parachuted from his Focke-Wulf. His aircraft crashed two kilometres south-east of the small town of Stadse Dijk, south of Willemstad.<sup>62</sup> He was taken prisoner by 62nd Anti-Tank (S.P.) Royal Artillery.<sup>63</sup> The next victim was Uffz. Paul Wunderlich. The Fw 190 of this 2. Staffel pilot was hit by AAA fire near the Dutch border. He tried to reach German lines, but could not make it. He hit a dyke and crash-landed north-east of Oudenbosch in the Netherlands.<sup>64</sup> Civilians recovered the unconscious pilot, who had sustained severe head injuries, and laid him on the ground. Another civilian gave first aid and soon the police arrived at the scene. The Canadian Military Police was notified and the wounded pilot was taken to a local hospital.<sup>65</sup>

Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade, the newly-appointed Staffelführer of 2./JG 1, also did not return: "I flew back following the coastline, the same course as we came in. Soon I saw a ship ahead of me. First I thought it was one of ours, but then it fired at me with everything it had got. I fired a few rounds

To the victors, the spoils: to left, F/Sgt. Jozef Stanowski of No. 308 Squadron. Centre with back to camera, Sgt. Kazimierz Hubert of No. 317 Squadron. Between them, three kills and one damaged during the Battle of Gandawa. Here both pilots inspect the Focke-Wulf of Uffz. Fritzsche. (Glowczewski)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Offhr. Wilhelm Ade of  
2./JG 1. (Roding)

until I was out of ammunition. I thought: "It's time to get the hell out of here!" I turned inland and saw another Fw 190. It had white markings. I believe it must have been from 1. Staffel. He also flew along the coastline. Almost immediately I lost track of him again. Some minutes later, near Amsterdam, I almost ran into a barrage balloon, saw another one ahead of me and just managed to avoid it again, heading east. Then I was over the Zuiderzee and saw a small island. I turned inland again in the direction of Baarn and just when I crossed the coastline coming from the north, the propeller

stopped. I thought: "No fuel left, I must have forgotten to switch to the other fuel tank, but..." I already had done so. No more fuel! Now I flew at an altitude of only 500 metres. I feathered the prop and started to look for a place to make a belly-landing. On the coastline there was a small village with a road coming into it from the south. Suddenly I saw some power lines and thought:

"This is what I am waiting for!" There was no way that I would be able to fly over them; I have to go through them. To the left there was a flat area – what seemed to be a frozen lake; to the right a flat area intersected with several small canals. I turned for this area and managed to get the aircraft down right after the first canal and bumped over a few canals and the aircraft came to rest just before the next one. I climbed out of the cabin and tried to report by R/T, but it did not work. Then I climbed on my Focke-Wulf and waited for something to happen. After a while some children approached, but waited a safe distance, the small canal between us. I had an emergency kit and some chocolate with me, so some of them came closer and I gave them some. Then all of them came and climbed all over the aircraft. I sent them away and saw an Oberleutnant on a motorcycle with sidecar approaching. He drove me to the Kommandantur in Baarn, where I got some food. That night I was driven back to Twenthe."

The few Fw 190s of 4./JG 1 would suffer a sore loss on their way back to Twenthe. Just east of Breda Oblt. Meinhof's 'Red 8' was hit by Allied AAA and crashed in flames. The body of the pilot was found 150 metres from his aircraft.<sup>66</sup> The only reference that Oblt. Meinhof was shot down near Breda, is A.D.I.(K) Report No. 117D/1945. In this report it is stated that Oblt. Meinhof was killed in a crash on the southern outskirts of Breda. However, the only known crash site near Breda on January 1st is more to the north-east of the town. Unfortunately, after the war a new road was built on the site, leaving no traces of this crash. Furthermore, it is known that an unknown German pilot was buried at Breda on January 1st, but it could not be confirmed that this was actually Meinhof. So, the ultimate fate and



Fw 190 A-8,  
W.Nr. 960553, 'Black 3'  
of 2./JG 1. This was  
probably the aircraft  
flown by Offhr. Wilhelm  
Ade on January 1st 1945.  
It was reportedly lost as  
'Black 9' on December  
27th 1944, but this is not  
believed to be true.  
(Roding)





location of the 4./JG 1 Staffelfkapitän's grave is still unknown.

III./JG 1 would also lose more aircraft on its way back to Rheine. As mentioned Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt of 9./JG 1 turned north after the attack on Maldegem: "Crossing the Scheldt, I am welcomed by concentrated AA fire. Red tracers are whizzing by. I go down to a height of 20 metres, then to 10 metres, to escape the fire. I am concentrating solely on the earth below me. Suddenly, with a tremendous bang, a shell hits my aircraft. I can not see where I am hit, I check the controls, everything is OK. I go to emergency power and try to fly even lower. At more than 500 kilometres per hour I race over the countryside. Below is a flat area covered with vertical anti-invasion posts. The German Army used them to prevent airborne assaults. After a few minutes I see two white smoke trails on both sides of the cockpit. They are coming from the engine. A quick check of the instruments tells me that the temperature of the cooling liquid is too high. The engine must be damaged, so it will seize soon. In a few minutes it will stop completely. I prepare myself for the crash-landing; I adjust the safety belts, remove my headset and start to look for a place to land. But where? The posts are everywhere. A city appears on the right, so I turn more to the left. Then the prop stops completely, the cabin is already full of smoke. I push the aircraft down and hope for the best. I hit the first

post, then a big bang and the aircraft slides further, hitting other obstacles. Suddenly there is silence, only the noise of the boiling glycol. After a few minutes I calm down and start to check my limbs; legs, arms and head. No pain, everything is OK. I climb out of my 'White 19.' I look at my aircraft; during the landing it had turned 100 deg. Five posts are lying on the ground. I look where the AA shell had hit the Messerschmitt. Direct hit in the coolant radiator. Smaller hits are in the fuselage. Walking around the aircraft I see some Dutch spectators, among them a policeman. Another Bf 109 flies over, probably from my unit. I wave with my yellow scarf. I turn the fuel handle and with a match I set fire to the aircraft. With my pistol I fire at the radio and leave the aircraft. The policeman comes towards me and in a mixture of German and English I ask where I am. He only indicates me to follow him. I look at my watch; it is almost ten o'clock. Together we walk to the main road. I light my small pipe, we do not talk. People in their best clothes look at me astonished. I greet them in a friendly manner, but they only nod.

Did I know what they had suffered already? Still I do not know if I am on German territory or not. Just before reaching the main road I see that a truck is already waiting for us. The white star on the side gives me the answer, Americans. A little US soldier comes towards me with his gun pointing at me. From some way off, he shouts, "Hands up!" The first English word I hear in captivity. A word which remembered me of the Karl May stories which I had enjoyed so much. However, today it is totally different. Suddenly I realise... the war is over."<sup>67</sup>

Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt landed just west of Goes. He actually managed to set his aircraft on fire and not much of it remained when Allied technical personnel inspect it.<sup>68</sup> For Fw. Wichardt his days as a POW had begun. First he was taken to the local police station where he met another shot-down pilot, Fw. Erich Ahrens of 7./JG 26. Both were locked up in a prison cell. Later in the afternoon Fw. Wichardt managed to escape from the cell, but he could only hide in the cellar of the same building. When he was discovered, he was beaten up by Dutch policemen and his private belongings were taken. On January 2nd he and Fw. Ahrens, together with a third pilot who had arrived at the police station, Fw. Hans-Joachim Steinkamp of 12./JG 54, were put on transport to Tilburg. In a cold, unheated factory they were interrogated for the first time: "At 20.00 hours an older gentleman wearing a blue overcoat appears. We are standing some distance from each other. I am first to be questioned. He asks me for name,

Far left: Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade and his 1. Wart in front of Ade's Fw 190 A-8, 'Black 3'. (Roding)



Oblt. Hans-Gottfried Meinhof, Staffelfkapitän of 4./JG 1. Meinhof was originally trained as a bomber pilot and had flown with III. and IV./KG 40 between 1942 and 1944. After training on single-engine fighters, he joined I./JG 6, but was later transferred to 4./JG 1 at Twenthe. On January 1st, Meinhof was killed by Allied AAA near Breda, but his grave has never been located. (Meinhof)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



There was little left to salvage at Maldegem, mainly as a result of the AAA moving to a nearby airfield days before Bodenplatte. Here F/O M.A. Collett stands next to what is left of his Spitfire. (Collett)



At Maldegem, the resident squadron – No.485 – was virtually wiped out. (Collett)



F/O Hodge, the Ussel Fire Officer gazes in disbelief at the damage inflicted to the strip. (Gee)



A four-engined aircraft burns at Ussel. (Gee)

rank, date of birth, etc. I answer his questions and call him 'Sir' as this is how the guards address him. He asks me to which unit I belonged to and where I was stationed. I do not answer these military questions, as I know the consequences too well; bomb raids and destruction of human life. I tell him that I can not answer these questions. They lead me back to the hall and I must face the wall. Erich Ahrens is next. Some time later they bring me for the second interrogation, and guards with machine guns try to intimidate me. But I refuse to answer and give only the details that are on my front pass.<sup>69</sup> I still address the man with 'Sir'. Suddenly he says that 'Sir' is for the British and not for a German. I should call him Captain. Well, Captain it may be. I give no answer and they take me back to the hall. I am thinking of home and try to find support, but no one can help me. After two hours facing the wall I am interrogated for the third time. Again the 'Captain' has a different way of questioning. When I refuse again, I am ordered to strip to the skin in front of this English 'officer'. I can not believe he is really an English Captain and now I know what kind of man he is. I am enraged about this treatment and become even more obstinate. My whole body trembles, more out of anger than of the severe cold. Is this the way to make defenceless prisoners speak? No, this man has made a mistake, he will not succeed with me! For one hour I stand naked in front of the mocking interrogator. He tries to get more answers from me, but my anger is stronger. After one more hour I am allowed to put on my trousers and shirt. The guards escort me back to the hall where I face the wall again. Barefoot, I stand on the cold stone floor. It is bitterly cold, the piercing cold makes me shiver all over. I am furious. Again I am interrogated. In front of the 'Captain' lies an envelope with the words 'His Majesty's Secret Service – London'. All my papers go into the envelope. Would 'His Majesty' know about this method of interrogation? I can not believe it. The other pilots are also interrogated in the same way. When they are finished with one, they bring in the other. In passing we try to support each other. January 3rd 1945. It is 02.30 hours. Until now we have not received any food or water. Never would I have expected such a treatment. We are still facing the wall. Again I am being interrogated, still refusing to answer. Minutes seem hours, how long am I standing here already? At daybreak, it must have been 08.00 hours – the sixth interrogation begins. At least the night is over. My thoughts are drifting away and I do not hear the questions until they shout at me in the face. Now they threaten to shoot me. I do not care – rather dead than a slave! Again I am brought back to the factory hall. They allow me to put on my socks, but it does not help much. My feet are still cold as ice. At some

distance I see Erich, also facing a wall. He seems to be doing well. Around ten o'clock another pilot is brought into the room. Later, I learn that his name is Paul Drutschmann.<sup>70</sup> He undergoes the same treatment. Erich and Jochen are also wearing their socks only. Paul is allowed to keep his fur boots on. The day is long. Hunger, thirst and the cold get the better of us. We all are shivering and unable to stop it. When will this end? The guards look at us without any emotion. Is this the other side of war? Do all POWs have to undergo this torture? In the late afternoon I am questioned again. The 'Captain' offers me food on a plate if I am willing to answer his questions. But I am strong and do not give in. Around 20.30 hours the guards bring me to the 'Captain' again. Again his mood seems to have changed. He sounds even friendly. I almost answer his question when I remember my grandfather who was killed during a raid on Bremen in 1943. Again, I find the strength and do not answer. I am brought back to the factory hall. I cannot resist much longer. I see that Erich is in bad shape and suddenly he collapses. None of the guards show mercy and they do not help him. Some time later the interrogator arrives with water and with some punches Erich recovers. Immediately he is interrogated again! After another half-an-hour I collapse too. The next thing I remember is that they slap my face. They let me sit for a few minutes. Then I have to stand up again. Some hours later we are brought to another room. We still have to stand up, but it is not so cold anymore. After some time they allow us to go to sleep. I fall down and sleep within seconds. Nothing really matters, just sleep...<sup>71</sup>

On January 4th, the four pilots were transported by lorry to Turnhout in Belgium. Other POWs, including Army personnel, were held in the local school where the treatment was not much better. Wichardt and the other pilots remained in Turnhout until January 8th, when together with nine infantrymen, the pilots were moved to a POW camp at Zundert. On January 10th, they were moved to one of the airfields in Brussels where they were held in cells. On the 12th, a group of pilots, nine fighter pilots shot down on January 1st and a Ju 88 radio-operator shot down the night before, were transferred to Ostend where they were boarded a freighter. Two days later, they arrived in London. From there they were taken to Camp No. 183, a POW camp east of the capital. Two days later, the group was moved to an interrogation camp where they were interrogated again, Wichardt by a 1./Lt. Wills. Again Wichardt refuses to answer questions about his unit and other operational matters. Finally, Wills asked Wichardt if he can read from the file which they have on him. Wichardt was shocked; they knew everything about him. Flight training, units, commanding officers and the names of the



pilots in his Staffel – 90 per cent of his military career was recorded in the file. Later he was sent to another cell where he met Ogfr. Theo Wichelmann, a Bordfunker of a Ju 88 G-6 of 5./NJG 3 who was shot down on the night of December 31st 1944. After the initial mistrust, they got along very well and start talking.<sup>72</sup> On January 24th, Wichardt was transferred to another POW camp. In February 1945 he was sent to Camp No. 186 near Colchester with 5,000 inhabitants. All POWs slept in 10-man tents. The rain had transformed the camp into a quagmire. In March, another move followed to Camp No. 177 near Bury, north of Manchester. Wichardt was transferred several times more before he was finally released in January 1947.<sup>73</sup>

Another pilot of III./JG 1 was not so fortunate on his way back to Rheine. Over the Scheldt estuary Fw. Wilhelm Kräuter of 10./JG 1 was apparently hit by AAA. He was able to exit his Messerschmitt, but his parachute became entangled in the tailplane.<sup>74</sup> The aircraft crashed near Melissant on the island of Overflakkee and Kräuter was killed instantly.<sup>75</sup> This was still German held territory at that time, but it is not known if the aircraft was shot down by German or Allied anti-aircraft fire.

One-by-one the remaining aircraft of I./JG 1 and III./JG 1 returned to their base. Between 10.30 and 11.00 hrs about ten Focke-Wulfs landed at Twenthe.<sup>76</sup> Thirteen Fw 190s of Stab and I./JG 1 were considered a total loss.<sup>77</sup> Nine pilots did not report back. Unknown to the Gruppe, five of them were killed and four were taken POW.<sup>78</sup> The loss of 13 Focke-Wulfs and nine pilots meant a dramatic 56 per cent material loss and a 39 per cent loss in personnel! When Obstlt. Ihlefeld, returning from his parachute jump near Rotterdam, was confronted with the losses, he was furious at the German Flak units who had accounted for some of the losses but also with Hptm. Hackbarth who got his share of the blame. Apparently Ihlefeld blamed him for the confusion over Maldegem. Hptm. Harald Moldenhauer's III. Gruppe was more fortunate. Only three Bf 109 G-14s were missing.<sup>79</sup> One pilot was killed and two became POWs.

I./JG 1 claimed 30 Spitfires destroyed on the ground at Maldegem.<sup>80</sup> Added to these were the two Spitfires shot down by Ofhr. Ade and Lt. Berger. No individual claims of 4./JG 1 and of III./JG 1 are known.<sup>81</sup> The initial report from the two Bf 109 G-8s of 3./NAGr 1 showed that on Maldegem five aircraft were left on fire and at Ursel one four-engined aircraft was probably destroyed and two others appear to have crash-landed.<sup>82</sup> However, further evaluation of the pictures showed that on Maldegem, 16 aircraft were destroyed with an additional six aircraft at Ursel.<sup>83</sup>

These figures more or less correspond with the actual losses on both airfields. At Maldegem, No. 135 Wing lost the Wing Commander's Spitfire. No. 349 Squadron reported one Spitfire destroyed and No. 485 Squadron reported 11 Spitfires destroyed and two damaged beyond repair. In total, 15 Spitfires were lost at Maldegem.<sup>84</sup> At Ursel all aircraft present on the field – a B-17, two Lancasters and a Mosquito – were destroyed. Considering the loss of 16 aircraft and 12 pilots, the destruction of some 20-plus aircraft by I. and III./JG 1 seemed to be unsatisfactory at least.

### The attack on St. Denis Westrem by II./JG 1

In the villages surrounding Drope airfield, the pilots of II. Gruppe were woken early. They gathered on the small grass airfield where they received a final briefing from Oblt. Wegner. Details such as the course, use of R/T, method of attack and return flight were explained again.<sup>85</sup> At 08.10 hours, 36 Focke-Wulfs took off.<sup>86</sup> Led by a Ju 88<sup>87</sup> from NJG 1, the Gruppe headed for the south coast of the Zuiderzee.<sup>88</sup> Arriving at the turning point near Spakenburg, II./JG 1 turned to a south-westerly course and headed for Rotterdam.<sup>89</sup> Still flying at low level, the Gruppe continued on the same course until they reached the Scheldt estuary.<sup>90</sup> Here they were joined by Fw. Fritz Hofmann of 3. Staffel. He had missed I./JG 1's take-off by ten minutes and by flying a direct course to the mouth of the Scheldt he hoped to catch up. However, he joined a formation of about 30 Focke-Wulfs, noticing the II. Gruppe markings. Shortly before he arrived at the mouth of the Scheldt he had seen a Ju 88 which flew past him on a reciprocal course.<sup>91</sup> This was probably the Lotse Ju 88 for II./JG 1.

While the Focke-Wulf Fw 190s of II./JG 1 were roaring over the Dutch countryside, their opponents at St. Denis had also planned something for the early morning. At St. Denis the morning of January 1st was sunny and the temperature was a few degrees below freezing. The squadrons of No. 131 Wing were scheduled to undertake a bombing mission with each squadron carrying out a separate mission. First to take off was No. 308 Squadron led by F/Lt. Ignacy Olszewski, the Red Section leader. The other two sections of four aircraft were led by F/O Wacław Chojnacki (White Section) and F/Lt. Bronisław Mach (Blue Section).<sup>92</sup> The 12 Spitfires, each loaded with one 500-lb and two 250-lb bombs, took off at 08.15 hrs.<sup>93</sup> Their target was the ferry crossing over the River Waal at Brakel, just east of Gorinchem.<sup>94</sup> Sergeant Jerzy Glowczewski has allowed us to use parts of his unpublished memoirs. They provide a very graphic account of the actions that took place that morning:



Fw. Willi Kräuter of 10./JG 1. One of the more experienced pilots of III./JG 1, he joined the Gruppe at the end of 1943 and claimed seven victories. (Kräuter)

*"Hurry up gentlemen. 308 goes first. The sooner it's over the sooner you can hit the sack again. I joined Tadek Szelankier and we ran together. While helping me fasten the straps in the cockpit my mechanic Ryszard turned his face and blew out. 'God, you smell like a distillery. Wait a minute.' He jumped down, grabbed an oxygen bottle, climbed back on the wing and pushed the rubber tip of the hose in my mouth. 'Breathe!' he yelled, opening the valve. The shivering stopped. Vision sharpened. In a few minutes we were airborne. The sun was up, snow on the ground; the sky was light blue. Cold, smooth. Nobody around. The whole world was asleep except for the 12 of us cursing and dozing. A bloody ferry."*<sup>95</sup>

Because of good visibility, the target was located without difficulty and successfully attacked. All bombs were dropped in the target area.<sup>96</sup> No. 317 Squadron was second to take off. Led by S/Ldr. Marian Chelmecki, 11 Spitfires Mk LF IX, each loaded with one 500 lb and two 250 lb bombs, took off at 08.35 hrs.<sup>97</sup> Their target was the ferry crossing between Werkendam and Boven-Hardinxveld over the River Merwede.<sup>98</sup> The bombs were dropped on both ends of the target, but no results were seen.<sup>99</sup>

Last to take off were the two sections of four Spitfires of No. 302 Squadron. They targeted railway lines in the Amersfoort-Zwolle-Apeldoorn area. The first section carried four 500-lb and eight 250-lb bombs, while the second section carried eight 250-lb bombs only. Lt. Edward Jaworski led the first section, taking off at 08.40 hrs.<sup>100</sup> He recalls the last days of December and the early morning of January 1st: "The New Year was approaching. An American ground crew finished their three-month job on a Flying Fortress standing at Gandawa<sup>101</sup> and tested its engines. We expected it to fly away to its base soon. There were twin-engined Avro Ansons near the airfield tower. One was ready to make a flight to England with eight passengers. The weather was frosty. There was a thin layer of snow on the ground. All Intelligence Officers and Squadron Commanders were informed that all our squadrons would fly a mission on January 1, 1945. They appealed to all pilots for responsibility with New Year's Eve celebrations. There was a reveille and light breakfast at dawn. Ground crews prepared aircraft, warmed engines, hung up bombs. Pilots took part in the briefing. No. 308 Squadron under command of F/Lt. I. Olszewski and No. 317 Squadron under command of S/Ldr. M. Chelmecki – a bombing mission to a crossing on the Waal River. No. 302 Squadron – a bombing attack on a railway line between Zwolle and Amersfoort. HQ set a task for No. 302 Squadron: attack in four-plane sections in intervals of 45 minutes. The first section took off at 08.49 hrs. I was leader of the first section of No.

302 Squadron. Sgt. F. Detka, Lt. L. Kraszewski, and Sgt. S. Celak flew with me. It was a frosty day, without any clouds, perfect visibility. We climbed to 3000 metres and flew to our target. Our route: Antwerp, Tilburg, and 10 kilometres to East of Amersfoort. Our target: a railway line from Zwolle to the SW alongside of the Zuiderzee. Germans used the line to supply their troops in the Netherlands."<sup>102</sup>

While the 131 Wing Spitfires were on their way to their targets, the Focke-Wulfs of II./JG 1 followed the Dutch-Belgian coast until Zeebrugge. Here the formation of 30-plus Fw 190s turned inland and headed directly for St. Denis Westrem.<sup>103</sup> At 09.30 hrs, the formation reached St. Denis and attacked at zero metres from the north. With cannon and machine guns the German pilots fired at the many Spitfires and other aircraft on the ground.<sup>104</sup> Soon the Focke-Wulfs came in from every direction and one by one the aircraft on the field burst in flames. As the ground defences had already been moved to Grimbergen,<sup>105</sup> for several minutes II./JG 1 had its 'fun and games', but it would be in for a big surprise.<sup>106</sup>

Nos. 308 and 317 Squadron were returning from their mission as the Focke-Wulfs struck their home base. The first indication they had that something was wrong, was when F/Lt. Olszewski, leading No. 308 Squadron, spotted an AAA barrage over a convoy of about 20 ships in the Western Scheldt, but saw no enemy aircraft. Flying at 4,000 feet the first enemy aircraft were sighted by No. 308 Squadron approaching the Lokeren area. F/Lt. Ignacy Olszewski recalls: "Observing the ground, I suddenly noticed a dozen Fw 190s crossing our flightpath flying from North to South. I followed the Fw 190s turning to the left and started diving after them giving the command to attack the Germans on the left. The difference in altitude was significant but they quickly came to view in my bombsight. Suddenly the last three of the formation turned to the left and I lost sight. I lifted the plane and soon they reappeared. I chose in the bombsight which one to attack. Suddenly they began to turn over and I figured that they were flying too low to carry out this manoeuvre. A moment later I saw three explosions on the ground."<sup>107</sup>

The formation spotted by F/Lt. Olszewski was, in fact, the tail end of the combined force of I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 heading for their target in the Brussels area. The Fw 190s were attacked and four aircraft were shot down.<sup>108</sup> Two were claimed by Sgt. Breyner, one each by F/Lt. Mach and F/Sgt. Soszynski.<sup>109</sup> The remainder of No. 308 Squadron flew towards base. In the meantime, they had received warning that their own base was being attacked. On approach, the aerodrome was found to be covered in dense smoke and several



formations of Fw 190s were engaged in strafing parked machines and buildings. The first to arrive over the airfield was F/Lt. Chojnacki who had encountered problems with his bomb release.<sup>110</sup> Wanting to make up for lost time, he took the shortest route back. Coming in for a landing, he noticed several Fw 190s approaching from the opposite direction. Commencing his attack, he shot down a Focke-Wulf in full view of the ground personnel. Sgt. Strobel, a pilot of No. 308 Squadron, reported: "Approximately seven minutes after the attack had begun, I noticed a single Spitfire arriving over base at 2000 feet height in a port turn. Three Fw 190s were just coming in to strafe. The Spitfire marked ZF-P piloted by F/Lt. Chojnacki noticed these enemy aircraft and while still in the turn fired at the rearmost from about 800 yards range. The enemy aircraft was hit in the tail and a large part of the tail flew off. The enemy pilot lost control over the aircraft and being low, below 200 feet, and diving for the attack hit with its starboard wing a tree, then hit the top of a small building on the airfield perimeter, finally coming to rest inside a Fortress standing on the ground. I lost the Spitfire behind the smoke from the burning Fortress but saw him a moment later chasing another Fw 190 with three other Fw 190s on his tail. The Spitfire broke off his attack with a starboard turn and I last saw him, in that turn, with three Fw 190s on his tail."<sup>111</sup>

F/Lt. Chojnacki's victim was probably Fw. Karl Hahn of 5./JG 1. His Focke-Wulf disintegrated on the airfield and Hahn was killed.<sup>112</sup> Although Hahn's belongings were discovered in the wreckage of his aircraft, the site of his grave is still unknown. He was probably buried as an unknown pilot at Ghent cemetery and later reinterred at Lommel cemetery.<sup>113</sup> Pursued by the three Fw 190s on his tail, there was no escape for the valiant Waclaw Chojnacki. His body was found thrown clear of his aircraft (MJ281) near Baarle, barely five kilometres north-north-west of the airfield.

Next over the field was F/Sgt. Jozef Stanowski, who had to break from his formation due to fuel shortage: "Consequently, I arrived over base ahead of the Squadron at 1,500 feet and saw enemy aircraft strafing the airfield. I closed in on one Fw 190 and opened fire with all armament, from approximately 60 degrees astern at a range of 200 yards and a height of 1,200 feet. The Fw 190 immediately caught fire and crashed in flames west of Ghent."<sup>114</sup>

As recounted, another Fw 190 would fall to F/Sgt. Stanowski, before he forced-landed north-east of Ghent due to fuel shortage. Now the remainder of the Squadron had arrived and flying at 3,000-4,000 feet, used its height advantage, and an engagement commenced in the vicinity of the

airfield. F/Lt. Olszewski continues: "I quickly neared the airfield and I saw the glitter of lights which soothed my nerves after all the previous events of the day. I turned left and headed through the smoke on the lookout for any enemy fighters. Everything seemed quiet but suddenly I saw a plane on the other side coming out of a cloud of smoke. My first reaction was that it was one of ours getting ready to land but then I noticed that it was an Fw 190. I dived and followed the plane sending a spurt of machine gun fire into its tail and saw smoke getting thicker and darker."<sup>115</sup>

The Focke-Wulf immediately turned on its back and crashed just east of Ghent.<sup>116</sup> When F/O Tadeusz Szlenkier arrived over base, he saw an Fw 190 attacking one of the Spitfires and went after the enemy aircraft: "I started to dive down at this enemy aircraft. While I was closing in, the enemy aircraft levelled out. I opened fire from dead astern, at 800 feet height and 250 yards range. I fired two long bursts with cannon and machine guns. After the second burst, the starboard wing of the enemy aircraft disintegrated and the Fw 190 rolled over on its back and crashed at J.1375. At this moment, I felt strikes on my aircraft. I took evasive action to starboard. My engine gave trouble and I was forced to crash-land about three miles from J.1374."<sup>117</sup>

F/O Szlenkier's victim was probably Uffz. Gerhard Behrens of 8./JG 1. His 'Blue 14' crashed near a farm in the Rosdamstraat, a few kilometres south-west of the airfield. The body of the 20-year old Behrens was found a few metres from the wreckage. Soon RAF personnel arrived and Behrens was buried at the local cemetery in Ghent.<sup>118</sup>

Pilots of No. 308 Squadron claimed several other Focke-Wulfs. F/Lt. Bronislaw Mach damaged one flying north and destroyed another west of Terneuzen. W/O Stanislaw Bednarczyk claimed an Fw 190 destroyed south-west of the airfield and Sgt. Jerzy Glowczewski claimed one north-west of Ghent. Sgt. Glowczewski saw an explosion in the cockpit and the Focke-Wulf rolled over on its back. Glancing behind him, he saw two Fw 190s closing in on his tail and had to break off the engagement. Not seeing the first Fw 190 crash, he was credited a probable. Finally P/O Andrzej Dromlewicz claimed an Fw 190: "I then turned towards base and saw one Fw 190 attacking one of our Spitfires. I closed in and opened fire with cannon and machine guns from dead astern, range 600-700 yards and at 2,000 feet height. The enemy aircraft broke off his attack and made a starboard turn. I followed, closing in to approximately 300 yards, I continued to fire in short bursts with all armament and saw hits on the fuselage and wings of the enemy aircraft. Then my cannons gave out. The enemy aircraft straightened out and started to climb. I fired another long burst from machine guns only and saw pieces flying off



F/Lt. Waclaw Chojnacki of No.308 Squadron was first in action over St.Denis. He rests at the Polish Military Cemetery at Mol, Belgium. (Putz)



## THE BATTLE OF GANDAWA



Uffz. Gerhard Behrens of 8./JG 1, a victim of the Spitfires of No. 308 (Krakowski) Squadron. (Decobek)

2nd January 1945: F/O Tadeusz Szlenkier of No. 308 Squadron stands in front the wreckage of the Fw 190 he shot down the day before. It is believed that this was the aircraft of Uffz. Gerhard Behrens of 8./JG 1 which came down near the Rosdamstraat at St.Denis-Westrem. (De Decker)



F/O Tadeusz Szlenkier in front of his belly-landed Spitfire Mk. IX, Serial MK346. (Delbaere/Hugot)

Both looking pleased with themselves are, straddling the nose of a Spitfire, Sgt. Jerzy Glowczewski (1/2 kill over Gandawa), and below, clasping the propeller blades, F/Sgt. Jozef Stanowski (two kills over Gandawa). (Glowczewski)



the enemy's starboard wing. The Fw 190 then turned on to its back and the pilot baled out."<sup>119</sup>

The unfortunate pilot was Fw. Fritz Hofmann of 3./JG 1, who had joined the II./JG 1 formation over the Scheldt estuary. He made three attacks on St. Denis and shot up a Spitfire during the first and a four engined bomber during the second. Coming out of his third run in, he shot down a Spitfire.<sup>120</sup> After that, his Focke-Wulf was hit in the wings and cockpit and he baled out at 200 metres.<sup>121</sup> His aircraft crashed near De Pinte leaving nothing more than a smouldering crater. Hofmann landed between De Pinte and Eke, where he was captured by civilians and received a thorough beating from them and some Belgian policemen. After two hours in a police station near Ghent, he was handed over to the British.<sup>122</sup>

Although II./JG 1 had already suffered severe losses during the engagement with No. 308 Squadron, there was more to come. Poznanski Squadron entered the battle for Gandawa. Sgt. Kazimierz Hubert reported: "On my way back from the operation I heard over the R/T that B-65 was being attacked by enemy aircraft. The Squadron patrolled the area for approximately 10 minutes before another message came through that it was B-61 which was attacked. We all flew immediately over, arriving over base at approximately 2,000 feet. I attacked a red-nosed Fw 190 which was flying at approximately 300

feet from astern and opened fire with all armament at a range of about 400 yards. I fired one long burst and the Fw 190 immediately caught fire, turned over on its back and crashed in a street in Ghent."<sup>123</sup>

At the same time S/Ldr. Marian Chelmecki, leading No. 317 Squadron, arrived over base. Soon F/Lt. Czeslaw Mroczyk overtook him, firing at an Fw 190, which disintegrated in the air. Meanwhile another Fw 190 latched on to the tail of F/Lt. Mroczyk's Spitfire. S/Ldr. Chelmecki moved in to attack this Focke-Wulf, but overtook it before he could fire and got between it and F/Lt. Mroczyk. The Fw 190 broke off its attack in a sharp port turn. S/Ldr. Chelmecki pulled up too, into the sun, and attacked another Fw 190 that strafed the airfield from the direction of Ghent. He shot down the Fw 190 over the airfield and his target hit the same building that was hit by Chojnacki's victim. F/Lt. Bendix, No. 302 Squadron's Intelligence Officer, witnessed the event: "I was just leaving my room when the enemy attack on the airfield commenced. I watched the whole of the attack and saw one Fw 190 strafing the line of our parked Spitfires, from the direction of Ghent. This Fw 190 was flying very low and in a slight starboard turn, when he got into the smoke of the burning Fortress and appeared to me to be out of control. This Fw 190 hit a small building and crashed in flames just behind the railway line. It was the second enemy aircraft to hit the same building. A moment later I noticed a Spitfire in a climbing starboard turn above the smoke of the Fortress coming from the Ghent direction."

W/O Zenobiusz Wdowczynski attacked a Focke-Wulf flying over Ghent and it started to smoke. Suddenly it dived down and crashed north-east of Ghent. This was probably Uffz. Erich Wenniges' aircraft. The Focke-Wulf of this 5. Staffel pilot crashed near Desteldonk, exploding on impact and killing its pilot. The BMW 801 engine bounced over the frozen ground and finally ended in a canal. The remains of the aircraft and the pilot were spread over a wide area. The Belgian residents of a nearby farm were ordered to collect Wenniges' remains; a sight they would never forget. Wenniges was buried at the local cemetery at Lochristi.<sup>124</sup>

Several other pilots claimed a victory. Both W/O Stanislaw Piesik and F/Lt. Zbigniew Zmigrodzki claimed an Fw 190 destroyed and another damaged. F/Sgt. Stanislaw Iwanowski was credited with a damaged Focke-Wulf.

F/Lt. Roman Hrycak was credited with a probable kill. LACs Zielinski and Gronowski and Cpl. Kalecki made witness statements in support of F/Lt. Hrycak's claim. One of the groundcrew even noted the markings of Hrycak's Spitfire. It

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was of no avail; the fact that his gun camera film did not register any conclusive evidence could not be countered.<sup>125</sup> Hrycak remembers: "When approximately 20 miles from Ghent we heard someone from the preceding Squadron say that Focke-Wulfs were observed. A few minutes later, black smoke started rising from several points, indicating burning petrol or aircraft. We called the Airfield Controller but there was no reply. We later learned that his radio was put out of action in the first attack run. In no time I found my self above the airfield seeing aircraft around me everywhere. Some Focke-Wulfs were strafing, some pulling up, others in a circle and then I suddenly noticed a Spitfire followed by two German aircraft. I decided to attack the second Fw 190 and we were all in a tight turn. Spitfires are better behaved in such a situation and I approached the Fw 190 to approximately 200 yards, opening fire and at the same time falling into a stall at about 3,000 feet. Controls became flabby and the aircraft slowly picked up speed, responding to controls at low altitude close to high tension cables. Minding fuel supply I reduced power a little and proceeded to the airfield being a few miles away. When I got there, to my amusement, the same situation developed but when I started my approach on the second aircraft, his leader noticed me and decided to go after me. I knew he would not be able to outmanoeuvre me and I kept turning. Then suddenly, the Fw 190s made a quick turn and departed in a northerly direction. I followed them for a few minutes with full power but they were faster. I turned back and found the airspace clear of any aircraft. Some explosions were observed and I realised that the bomb depot close to the fuel depot had been ignited. I flew on low engine power for a little while and eventually landed as the last aircraft. When slowing down, a bomb exploded 100 to 150 feet away and a fragment embedded itself in the fuselage. Every fighter had a camera installed in a wing taking pictures when the guns were firing. Mine showed distance, aim and stopped a few seconds later. As a result I was credited with a probable."<sup>126</sup>

No. 317 Squadron would also suffer a loss. F/Lt. Tadeusz Powierza, flying Spitfire JH-P, serial MK190, was shot down by a pilot of II./JG 1. His aircraft crashed a few kilometres south of Ghent. F/Lt. Powierza sustained severe head injuries and died the same day in a hospital in Ghent. In total, both Squadrons claimed 14 Focke-Wulfs destroyed in the skies above Ghent, for the loss of two Spitfires and their pilots. An additional seven Spitfires force-landed in fields around Ghent due to fuel shortage or battle damage. The claims of the Polish squadrons correspond well with the losses of JG 1 above Ghent. Besides the five losses described above, II. Gruppe lost another seven pilots around Ghent. Unfortunately it is



impossible to link each individual loss with a claim of one of the Polish pilots. Furthermore four II./JG 1 pilots are still listed as MIA and their exact crash locations have remained unknown.

Of II. Gruppe, 5. Staffel suffered most. Beside Uffz. Hahn and Uffz. Wenniges, the Staffel lost another three pilots around Ghent. Uffz. Edgar Ardner's Fw 190 received hits in the cockpit and tail, the controls went dead and Ardner baled out.<sup>127</sup> His aircraft crashed near Kerkebrugge, north of Ghent.<sup>128</sup> Lt. Walter Holick and Uffz. Otto Kuntzsch are still reported as missing around Ghent. Apparently the British found Uffz. Kuntzsch's body, but no grave location is known.<sup>129</sup> However, both aircraft must have crashed in the vicinity of Ghent as several Fw 190s with white II. Gruppe markings were found in that area.<sup>130</sup> The young Ofhr. Hilmar Krebs, the replacement pilot from I. Gruppe who had joined 7. Staffel, is also listed as MIA. No trace of his remains have been found. A very sore loss for the Gruppe was Ofw. Kurt Niedereichholz of 7./JG 1. This highly experienced Schwarmführer had been with the

P/O Andrzej Dromlewicz of No. 308 Squadron scored a kill over Gandawa on New Year's Day. (Glowczewski)



W/O Zenobiusz Wdowczyński, of No. 317 Squadron. (Grabowski)



Polish pilots gather for a photo in front of Spitfire Mk. IX 'Roma' just before or after Bodenplatte. From left to right: unknown, W/O Stanisław Piesik, Sgt. Kazimierz Becher, Sgt. Stanisław Breyner and Sgt. Zdzisław Ślawski. (Glowczewski)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

F/Lt. Roman Hrycak of No.317 (Wilenski) Squadron saw his bullets strike an Fw 190 from 200 yards, but was awarded only a 'probable'. (Hrycak)



Lt. Walter Holick of 5./JG 1. This twenty-five year old pilot had joined II./JG 1 on December 25th, 1944. He had previously flown the Me 321 and He 111Z with 3.(GS)/KGzbV 2 and GS-Kommando 1. (Träger)



Oftr. Hilmar Krieb of 7./JG 1. On December 17th he left 2./JGr. Süd to join I./JG 1 where he arrived on December 29th. The same day he transferred to 7./JG 1. He would not survive Bodenplatte. (Bedacht)



Gruppe since the summer of 1941 when it was known as I./JG 3. Having been victorious on sixteen occasions, he was one of those old hares who could guide the young inexperienced pilots and who the Gruppe could not afford to lose. His fate remains a mystery too. No trace of Ofw. Niedereichholz or his aircraft was ever found. The 8. Staffel lost two pilots in the dogfight. Fw. Harijs Klints, a Latvian volunteer, was the pilot shot down by W/O Bednarczyk and he crashed near the village of Zwijnaarde. Finally, Uffz. Rudolf Schober was shot down in his 'Blue 15', but managed to bale out and became a POW.<sup>131</sup> After some four or five attacks on the airfield, Oblt. Wegner ordered his unit to return to base.<sup>132</sup> At around 09.50 hours the last Focke-Wulfs disappeared to the north and the battered remains of II. Gruppe tried to reach base. However, as we will see later, their ordeal was not yet over.

Between 09.50 and 10.10 hrs, the Spitfires of No. 308 and No. 317 Squadron returned to St. Denis. At least seven Spitfires had to belly-land in the surrounding fields due to fuel shortage or battle damage. Several other Spitfires landed at other bases. F/Lt. Ignacy Olszewski remembers: "I checked the fuel gauge and noticed the needle at zero. I only thought of turning the plane to steady it for landing. I reached the desired altitude and the propeller jerked to a halt. Coming to a halt with two green lights just in front of me, I pulled the emergency gear lever and a group of mechanics pulled me out of the aircraft. I was happy to be back on the ground."<sup>133</sup>

Sgt. Jerzy Glowczewski describes his landing: "With flaps down, barely hanging in the air, I selected an empty strip between all kinds of junk and planes scattered over the field, burning. Twenty feet up the engine stopped. I landed with a heavy thud and kicked the rudder right. The plane whirled and stopped between a burnt out carcass with an undamaged tail showing a black swastika and a group of our groundcrew hiding behind a damaged maintenance lorry. Excitement and joy were contagious. Everybody ran up. They helped

me out. Carried my parachute. Hands slapping my back, reaching for my hand. Someone offered a bottle of whisky. We walked past the wreck of another Fw 190, without its wings and with the cockpit open. In it sat the pilot, still strapped in, but without a head. Someone was removing his documents from the breast pocket. Later one of the broken wings stood next to our dispersal hut. The Wing Commander's hut was packed. On the table a big map of the environs of Ghent. The telephone rang without stop. Each arriving pilot reported the flight and marked the location of his victory on the big map. Only then did we begin to fully appreciate the results of the battle."<sup>134</sup>

The extent of the battle over Gandawa would soon become clear to the pilots who had gathered in the hut. Damage to the airfield was extensive. At St. Denis at least 18 Spitfires of No. 131 Wing had been destroyed and another five were damaged.<sup>135</sup> One B-17 was completely destroyed and one damaged. A Short Stirling of No. 295 Squadron and four Ansons, a Mosquito, a Spitfire and an Auster of 85 Group Communications Squadron were also wrecked.<sup>136</sup> Besides this, considerable damage was done to the airfield buildings. On the ground, three men were killed and another 21 were wounded.<sup>137</sup>

No. 302 Squadron of No. 131 Wing was not involved in the dogfight with II./JG 1, although they were last to take off from St. Denis. As mentioned, the first section of No. 302 Squadron was detailed to strike a railway line in the Amersfoort-Zwolle-Apeldoorn area. F/Lt. Edward Jaworski continues his story on the events of that day: "Our mission was quiet except for a few bursts of enemy flak. Near Nijmegen-Utrecht, I received a R/T message from No. 84 Group controller about approximately 20 enemy aircraft near Utrecht, on my left-hand at 15,000 feet. We continued our mission according to the order. There were still 40 kilometres to the target. The enemy group circled over the Utrecht area. I intended to attack the target and then to climb to higher altitude and to attack the group from the East with dazzling morning sun at our back. Suddenly, my plan was changed. Just before the target the controller ordered to drop our bombs instantly and to fly at high speed to Eindhoven. The airfield at Eindhoven was under German attack. I decided to drop the bombs on the target because it was just in front of us. Three of our planes dropped their bombs, but the fourth had some problem with it and didn't drop bombs. There were approximately 100 kilometres to Eindhoven. We flew to the south of Eindhoven with full speed. Just several minutes later we saw explosions of fire and black smoke far in front of us. We were just powerless witnesses to the tragedy. Finally, we reached Eindhoven but the Germans had flown away. I



The remains of one of the shot down Fw 190s of II./JG 1 on St. Denis-Westrem airfield. Clearly visible is the II. Gruppe bar which seems to be blue, indicating an aircraft of 8./JG 1. (Grabowski)

reported via R/T that the enemy had left the area and asked for the enemy's course. I intended to pursue them. But I was ordered to patrol the Eindhoven area and I lost time. After several minutes of fruitless patrol I received a new order to fly towards Breda. Gilze-Rijen airfield was under attack. There were approx. 50 kilometres to Breda. We flew to Breda at low-level. We received shellfire from our own flak on the way to Breda. We climbed. Any flak hit at low-level could be hazardous. Light flak used magnetic bullets at that time. They were more dangerous than others. Sgt. S. Celak was hit and force-landed. Fortunately, he flew his damaged plane to the south-west of Antwerp and force-landed successfully. Our three-plane section approached Gilze-Rijen airfield. We saw burning planes and buildings in smoke. The control tower didn't answer, perhaps damaged by German planes. I reported via R/T to No.84 Group controller about destruction and absence of Luftwaffe. We landed at Gilze-Rijen a few minutes later because of lack of fuel. I could not see any undamaged aircraft on the ground. We could not find anyone just after landing. Later some ground personnel appeared. They needed some hours to find fuel for our planes. We took off again at noon. We flew to Gandawa with misgivings. We saw black smoke in the Antwerp area. It was the airfield at Deurne to the south of the city. I tried to contact our control tower in St. Denis. But I couldn't. When we saw black cloud we were sure that our airfield was attacked too. We saw large-scale destruction. Radio installations of our control tower were destroyed in the first attack of by Luftwaffe fighters. The Avro Anson had burnt away near the tower. The Flying

Fortress ceased to exist too. An Fw 190 had collided with its fin. The remains of the Fw 190 were everywhere. The only remains of the Fortress were the tips of its wings and its big fin. There were approximately 40 different planes destroyed on the ground. Among them a half of our Spitfires.<sup>138</sup>

The bombs of the first section of No. 302 Squadron were dropped on the railway line between Amersfoort and Apeldoorn. At least one 500-lb and six 250-lb bombs were dropped on the tracks near Terschuur, just north-west of Barneveld.<sup>139</sup> The second section had jettisoned his bombs in the east Scheldt on command of the GCC<sup>140</sup> and then patrolled the area against enemy aircraft without engagement. None of the eight No. 302 Squadron Spitfires had encountered enemy aircraft and the mood of the pilots did not change for the better when they heard of the success of the other two squadrons.<sup>141</sup>

After the punishment over Ghent, the long way back to their base at Drope remained for II./JG 1. Just before reaching the Scheldt estuary the Focke-Wulfs were welcomed by the anti-aircraft batteries guarding the entrance to the port of Antwerp. Already alarmed by the hordes of enemy fighters seen about an hour earlier, the gunners were waiting for the returning German fighters. Two batteries of the 54th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were stationed at Kloosterzande, on the banks of the Scheldt estuary. As soon as they heard the roar of the returning German fighters, the 40 mm Bofors cannons opened fire.<sup>142</sup> Near Kreeverhille, north of Kloosterzande, the 24-year old Kapitän of 5. Staffel, Lt. Ernst von Johannides' 'White 1' was



F/Lt. Ignacy Olszewski of No.308 Squadron shot down an Fw 190 east of Gent and landed with his fuel needle "...at zero." (Olszewski)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

'Marsha Sue', a B-17G Flying Fortress, s/n 42-97059, of the 533rd BS, 381st BG suffered a belly-landing behind Allied lines on December 12th, but met its true end on New Year's Day. (Foley)



Destruction at St.Denis.  
(De Decker)

This Short Stirling bomber, LJ986, of 'A' Flight, No. 295 Squadron from Tarrant Rushton came to grief at St.Denis-Westrem. (Foley)





## THE BATTLE OF GANDAWA



As lorries and stores burn following the raid, groundcrews bravely try to save what they can. (Koniarek)



Destruction at St. Denis-Westrem: in the foreground, the burnt out wreck of a Short Stirling. (Koniarek)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Above: Fw. Paul Mayr of 8./JG 1 sitting on the edge of the canopy of 'Blue 8'. This is probably Fw 190 A-8/R6, W.Nr. 730407, which was lost on 20 June 1944 when the Staffel was still designated 7./JG 51. Fw. Mayr wears his Iron Cross First Class which he was awarded on June 3rd, 1944. Mayr had previously belonged to Stab JG 51 where had received the Frontflugsparange in Gold. (Uzuber)



Right Fw. Paul Mayr, 8./JG 1, and left, probably Fw. Richard Henner. (Uzuber)

shot down. The experienced pilot was killed instantly. Near Zeedorp, about a kilometre to the south-west, another Fw 190 came down. This time it was 24-year old Fw. Paul Mayr of 8./JG 1. He also was not able to leave his stricken fighter and perished in the crash. Both pilots were buried

at the local cemetery of Zaamslag and in 1954 they were reinterred at the German Military cemetery at Ysselsteyn.

Finally, over eastern Holland, Uffz. Oskar Vetter of 7./JG 1, had to leave his aircraft. Flying as wingman to Lt. Günther Heckmann, Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 1, Vetter's Focke-Wulf was hit in the cockpit by one of the Spitfires and he was seriously wounded in his shoulder. Lt. Heckmann guided him back to base and when they neared the Almelo area of the Netherlands, Lt. Heckmann ordered Vetter to bale out. Uffz. Vetter was taken to hospital in Almelo.<sup>143</sup>

One-by-one the Fw 190s returned to Drope, and soon the losses would be clear. Of the 36 Focke-Wulfs that took off, 17 did not return.<sup>144</sup> Twelve were reported missing, one was destroyed (Uffz. Oskar Vetter's aircraft) and another four were damaged<sup>145</sup> – a staggering 47 per cent loss. The loss of experienced pilots such as Lt. von Johannides, Ofw. Niedereichholz or Fw. Mayr was not acceptable. In the dogfight over Ghent, II. Gruppe claimed to have shot down five Spitfires. Lt. Hans Rechenberg, Uffz. Herbert Dosch<sup>146</sup> and Uffz. Erwin Kurz, belonging to 5./JG 1, all claimed a Spitfire. Oblt. Fritz Wegner, the Kapitän of 6./JG 1, managed to shoot down a Spitfire which was chasing another Focke-Wulf of his Staffel.<sup>147</sup> Uffz. Heinz Henn of 8./JG 1 claimed

the fifth. Also Fw. Hofmann of 3./JG 1, who had joined the II./JG 1 formation, claimed a Spitfire. These claims more or less match with the loss of the two Spitfires of Chojnacki and Powierza and the numerous forced-landings due to battle damage or fuel shortage.

The reconnaissance aircraft of 3./NAGr 1 had also taken pictures of St. Denis and reported 28 single-engined aircraft on fire.<sup>148</sup> Complete assessment of the pictures was not possible due to the presence of smoke over the airfield.<sup>149</sup> Finally, the conclusion was that 28 single-engine and four four-engined aircraft were destroyed.<sup>150</sup> These figures match the actual losses on St. Denis-Westrem very accurately.

## Conclusion

As a result of the attack by JG 1 some 54 aircraft were destroyed on the ground. In the battle

between JG 1 and the Spitfires of No. 131 Wing an additional two Spitfires were shot down and at least seven were damaged in forced-landings. Although seemingly a considerable success, Jagdgeschwader 1 had paid dearly. Twenty-nine aircraft were lost and a further four were damaged, representing 47 per cent of the attacking force of about 70 aircraft. Even worse was the loss of the 24 pilots who did not return. Only seven ended up in Allied captivity, the others were killed. Also, Uffz. Oskar Vetter, the only wounded pilot to reach German lines, should be added to the list. He did not return to flying duties. A loss of 25 pilots for the destruction of 60-plus aircraft cannot be classified as a complete success. However, the damage at Maldegem and St. Denis Westrem had been considerable.



Lt. Ernst von Johannides, Staffelführer of 5./JG 1. Lt. von Johannides had joined JG 27 in 1941 and later transferred to JG 53. In November 1944 he joined II./JG 1. He had accumulated four victories. (von Johannides)



In a picture taken immediately following the Battle of Gandawa on January 1st, 1945, No. 308 Squadron pilots gather around the remains of a wing taken from an Fw 190 shot down over the airfield. From left to right are: F/O Tadeusz Szlenkier, Sgt. Stanisław Breyner, Sgt. Jerzy Glowczewski, Sgt. Ryszard Kaniok, F/Sgt. Józef Stanowski and F/Sgt. Zygmunt Soszynski. (Glowczewski)



Bewildered airmen at St. Denis take in the aftermath of the attack. (De Decker)



# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



The funeral held for the Polish airmen who fell victim to JG 1's raid on January 1st (De Decker)



Polish airmen inspect the remains of a BMW 801 engine from one of the Fw 190s which crashed on St.Denis-Westrem airfield. Note the Spitfire in the background. (Delbaere/Hugot)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Among others, the 352nd, 359th, and 364th FG scored numerous victories.
- <sup>2</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 and 11 by J.Prien and P.Rodeike, page 1322.
- <sup>3</sup> For more details on operations flown by JG 1 in the West during December 1944, see Jagdgeschwader 1 and 11 by J.Prien and P.Rodeike, page 1341–1395. This book was the primary source for details on JG 1 during the end of 1944.
- <sup>4</sup> Letter Hptm. Georg Hackbarth, acting Kommandeur of I./JG 1, to his wife, dated 29.12.1944.
- <sup>5</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by J.Prien and P.Rodeike, page 1383.
- <sup>6</sup> Oblt. Fritz Wegner was informed for the first time on December 31st 1944, Letter Fritz Wegner, 17.05.2000.
- <sup>7</sup> According ULTRA Reports 56-BT-877 and 56-BT-1054, II./JG 1 had 32 Fw 190s on the morning of December 30th and on the early morning of January 1st had 51 Fw 190.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted from Reichsverteidigung by E.Mombeck, page 292.
- <sup>9</sup> "Verlustmeldungen I./JG 1, RL2-III-1172/88 and RL2-III-1172/89, Info WAsT.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle 09.06.1997 and letter of Lt. Heinz Künnecke, Staffelführer I./JG 1, of 09.03.1945 to parents of Oblt. Kreb: "...Hilmar arrived on 29.12 with the Staffel, but was transferred to another Jagdgruppe where they had a shortage of pilots..."
- <sup>11</sup> According to Fritz Wegner most ferry pilots participated in the attack. Letter 17.05.2000. Unfortunately this can not be substantiated by other sources.
- <sup>12</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by J.Prien and P.Rodeike, page 1397.
- <sup>13</sup> All details concerning Hptm. Hackbarth from lengthy correspondence between Hptm. Hackbarth and his wife between October 1944 and December 31st 1944. Forwarded by Alex Vanags-Baginskis, letters originate from Burkhard Hackbarth, son of Hptm. Hackbarth.
- <sup>14</sup> ULTRA Report 56-BT-930, December 31st 1944.
- <sup>15</sup> Letter of Willy Ade of 19.12.1996 and interview between Willy Ade and Adrie Roding of unknown date. According to A.D.I.(K) Report No.123/1945 pep talk was given by Oblt. Ihlefeld, but Willy Ade could not remember the presence of Oblt. Ihlefeld.
- <sup>16</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.108/1945.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Wilhelm Wichardt, 14 February 1997.
- <sup>18</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.39/1945.
- <sup>19</sup> War Diary Fw.Wilhelm Wichardt, 9./JG 1.
- <sup>20</sup> For security reasons, airfields used by the Allies were referred to by a coded number instead of a location. American airfields were given 'A', 'Y' or 'B' prefixes. British airfields on the Continent were also numbered but with a 'B' prefix.
- <sup>21</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.123/1945. Letter of Wilhelm Ade of 19.12.1996.
- <sup>22</sup> Letter of Willy Ade of 19.12.1996 and interview between Willy Ade and Adrie Roding of unknown date. Again Willy Ade cannot remember seeing Oblt. Ihlefeld in the officer's mess.
- <sup>23</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.123/1945 and No.117D/1945.
- <sup>24</sup> Notes of Hptm. Ludwig Siegfried, I./JG 1 and logbooks of Lt. Hans Berger, 3./JG 1, and Uffz. W.Höpfner, 1./JG 1. Both logbooks indicate take off at 08.15 hrs. Letter Wilhelm Ade, 19.12.1996.
- <sup>25</sup> Letter Wilhelm Ade, 19.12.1996.
- <sup>26</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.123/1945.
- <sup>27</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt.
- <sup>28</sup> Letter Karl Meinert 14.5.1996. Namentliche Verlustmeldungen III./NJG 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview Wilhelm Wichardt, 14.2.1997.
- <sup>30</sup> According to Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by Prien & Rodeike, only 12 Bf 109s were available for the operation. A.D.I.(K) Report No.108/1945 and No.109/1945 indicate that perhaps up to 30 Bf 109s participated. According to the logbooks of Lt. Karlheinz Sundermeier and Ofw. Fritz Haspel, both of I./JG 1, take-off was at 08.15 hrs.
- <sup>31</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt.
- <sup>32</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.7432. Fw. Kilian was buried in Amsterdam and reburied at Ysselsteyn, Grave CT-8-198 a few years later. His aircraft was recovered in the late 1970s. There are indications that Fw. Jürgen Kilian was on his return flight when he crashed, but this can be not be proven.
- <sup>33</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.24080. Washed ashore on March 5th 1945, reburied at Ysselsteyn, Grave AF-1-21 in 1955. Namentliche Verlustmeldung I./JG 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, by Prien/Rodeike, page 1403.
- <sup>35</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.2082. Letter of Lt. Künnecke to parents of H.I. 1945. The loss of Uffz. Heinz Böhmer could also have happened on the return flight. No clear evidence could be found on the time of the crash.
- <sup>36</sup> Interview of Wilhelm Ade by Adrie Roding, unknown date.
- <sup>37</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.124/1945.
- <sup>38</sup> Letter Karl Meinert, 14.5.1996 and letter of Dutch researcher Henk Wilson, 18.2.1991.
- <sup>39</sup> Bulletin Airwar 215/16.
- <sup>40</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt.
- <sup>41</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung 9./NJG 1, RvO D.24075-24077, VDK Vorgangsakte 80497. March 1970 the aircraft was recovered by the Royal Netherlands Air Force.
- <sup>42</sup> Correspondence with Geoffrey Coucke.
- <sup>43</sup> Correspondence with S/Ldr. G. Dickinson 142 Wing.
- <sup>44</sup> Correspondence with Eric Bowden.
- <sup>45</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.158/1945.
- <sup>46</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.124/1945.
- <sup>47</sup> The authors have not been able to confirm the presence of four-engine bombers on Maldegem. There is a possibility that Ofw. Ade actually attacked Ussel instead.
- <sup>48</sup> Interview with Wilhelm Ade by Adrie Roding, unknown date.
- <sup>49</sup> Combat report F/Sgt. J.Stanowski, PRO AIR 50/434.
- <sup>50</sup> Details provided by Cynrik de Decker, 03.05.1995.
- <sup>51</sup> Correspondence of Hptm. Georg Hackbarth with his wife, October-December 1944.
- <sup>52</sup> Personal Memoirs of Jerzy Glowczewski.
- <sup>53</sup> Logbook Lt. Hans Berger, 3./JG 1. According Hans Werner Neulen's book 'Am Himmel Europas', page 310, also Lt. Arnolds Mencis, one of the Latvian volunteers within I./JG 1 claimed two Spitfires. However, this could not be verified and the account of Lt. Mencis himself seems to be unreliable.
- <sup>54</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt.
- <sup>55</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.108/1945.
- <sup>56</sup> Correspondence with Joe Roddis (groundcrew 485 Sqdn.)
- <sup>57</sup> Green Kiwi versus German Eagle, J. Norby King, Publicity Printing, Tauranga, New Zealand 1991.
- <sup>58</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.109/1945.
- <sup>59</sup> Details provided by Cynrik De Decker, 3.5.1995. Article by M.Fernandez-Somereau in Contact No.13.
- <sup>60</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.117C/1945 and letter of Alfred Fritzsche, January 1997, confirming information in A.D.I.(K) Report.
- <sup>61</sup> Correspondence with Jim Robertson.
- <sup>62</sup> See also Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No.264. According several sources Gefr. Karl-Heinz Bauch is still listed as MIA, but in fact he returned to his hometown in 1949 and died 29.07.1978.
- <sup>63</sup> War Diary 62 Anti-Tank (S.P.) Royal Artillery.
- <sup>64</sup> Northwest of Breda.
- <sup>65</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No.264, A.D.I.(K) Report No.124/1945, police report and letter widow Käthe Wunderlich, 01.01.1996.
- <sup>66</sup> Police report Heusdenhout, 3 January 1945.
- <sup>67</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt.
- <sup>68</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No.264, A.D.I.(K) Report No.108/1945.
- <sup>69</sup> Frontflugausweis.
- <sup>70</sup> Fw. Paul Drutschmann belonged to 9./JG 54 and was also shot down on January 1st.
- <sup>71</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt.
- <sup>72</sup> The authors think that most information contained in the numerous Interrogation Reports are based on such conversations. It is very likely that these prison cells were bugged. Almost every former POW states that they did not give any information during their interrogations. Yet, almost every A.D.I.(K) Report gives many details about their military career, last flight and units they belonged to.
- <sup>73</sup> War Diary Wilhelm Wichardt, written during captivity.
- <sup>74</sup> Recollections of Ofw. Fritz Haspel, 11./JG 1, in Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by Prien/Rodeike, page 1408.
- <sup>75</sup> Fw. Wilhelm Krüter was buried at Crooswijk General Cemetery in Rotterdam on January 6th. In 1949 he was reinterred at the German Military Cemetery Ysselsteyn, Grave BW-6-134. Ref. RvO D.11901.
- <sup>76</sup> Flugbuch Lt. Hans Berger, 10.36 hrs. Flugbuch Uffz. W.Höpfner, 11.00 hrs.
- <sup>77</sup> Militärarchiv Freiburg, Document RL2-III-852.
- <sup>78</sup> Fw. Fritz Hofmann of 3./JG 1 is included in this, although he had joined II./JG 1 in the attack and his exploits are covered in the account of the II./JG 1 attack on St. Denis Westrem.
- <sup>79</sup> Militärarchiv Freiburg, Document RL2-III-852.
- <sup>80</sup> Notes from Hptm. Ludwig Siegfried, I./JG 1.
- <sup>81</sup> According to his logbook Ofw. Fritz Haspel of 11./JG 1 claimed two Spitfires destroyed at Maldegem.
- <sup>82</sup> ULTRA-report 56-BT-1046 of January 1st.
- <sup>83</sup> Militärarchiv Freiburg, Document RL2-III-855.
- <sup>84</sup> ORBs of No.135 Wing, No 349 and No.484 Squadron.
- <sup>85</sup> Letter Fritz Wegner, dated 17.05.2000.
- <sup>86</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.39/1945 and Flugbuch Uffz. Herbert Dosch, 5./JG 1.
- <sup>87</sup> In Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by Prien/Rodeike, page 1403, it is reported that II./JG 1 may have flown without a Lotse Ju 88. However, at least since 23rd December, two Ju 88s were stationed at Drope (one belonging to III./NJG 1 and one to IV./NJG 1). ULTRA Report 54-BT-243. One Ju 88 did not return to Drope on 1.1.1945. ULTRA Report 56-BT-1054. There is no proof that this aircraft was lost on January 1st, but at least it seems evident that a Ju 88 flew on January 1st.
- <sup>88</sup> Officially the Zuiderzee had ceased to exist in 1932 when the Zuiderzee was cut off from the North Sea by a 29 kilometre-long dyke, called the Afsluitdijk. From that time this sea, now actually a lake, was called the IJsselmeer. However, as in almost every WW II account it is still named Zuiderzee, this name has been used throughout the book.
- <sup>89</sup> According Prien/Rodeike, Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, page 1403, II./JG 1 encountered friendly fire in the Rotterdam area, but no losses were sustained.
- <sup>90</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.39/1945, point 2.
- <sup>91</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No.123/1945, point 5.
- <sup>92</sup> Correspondence with Tadeusz Szelkier and Jerzy Glowczewski.



- <sup>91</sup> Operations Record Book No. 308 Squadron.
- <sup>92</sup> War Diary 2nd TAF, Sheet No. 2338. Target located at E.1862.
- <sup>93</sup> Personal memoirs of Jerzy Glowczewski.
- <sup>94</sup> Operations Record Book No. 308 Squadron.
- <sup>95</sup> Operations Record Book No. 317 Squadron.
- <sup>96</sup> War Diary 2nd TAF, Sheet No. 2338. Target located at E.040615.
- <sup>97</sup> Operations Record Book No. 317 Squadron.
- <sup>98</sup> Operations Record Book No. 302 Squadron. Take-off times in ORBs do not always correspond with data in logbooks. Actual take off times may differ considerably between two sources.
- <sup>99</sup> Gandawa = Polish for Ghent
- <sup>100</sup> Edward Jaworski via Michal Mucha.
- <sup>101</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 123/1945, point 6.
- <sup>102</sup> In the Personnel Combat Reports of No. 308 and No. 317 Squadron it is also mentioned that II./JG 1 probably attacked with small anti-personnel bombs. No other proof could be found to substantiate this information.
- <sup>103</sup> Letter of Franek Grabowski, Polish historian, of 2.3.1999, based on remembrances of Polish airmen. Other sources, such as Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by Prien/Rodeike, page 1406, state that II./JG 1 met strong AAA defences during their attack. Also A.D.I.(K) Report No. 117B/1945 and 117F/1945 report that aircraft were brought down by light AAA. However, not a single claim of an AAA unit could be identified.
- <sup>104</sup> Quoted from No. 317 Squadron ORB.
- <sup>105</sup> Correspondence with Ignacy Olszewski.
- <sup>106</sup> Operations Record Book No. 308 Squadron.
- <sup>107</sup> The exact circumstances of these claims are covered in Chapter Eight covering the attack of I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 on Grimbergen airfield.
- <sup>108</sup> Correspondence with Tadeusz Szlenkier and Ignacy Olszewski.
- <sup>109</sup> Personnel Combat Reports No. 308 Squadron.
- <sup>110</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 117B/1945.
- <sup>111</sup> Fw. Karl Hahn's grave had been registered at Lommel cemetery for many years, but in July 1996 it was discovered that this was incorrect and that a pilot from JG 11 rested in 'his' grave. Investigation into the grave location of Fw. Hahn continues.
- <sup>112</sup> Personal Combat Report of F/Sgt. J. Stanowski.
- <sup>113</sup> Correspondence with Ignacy Olszewski.
- <sup>114</sup> Personal Combat Report of F/Lt. I. Olszewski.
- <sup>115</sup> Personal Combat Report of F/O.T. Szlenkier.
- <sup>116</sup> Burial records Ghent and letter of M. Fernandez-Sommerau, 20 July 1999.
- <sup>117</sup> Personal Combat Report P/O A. Dromlewicz.
- <sup>118</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 123/1945, point 7.
- <sup>119</sup> Notes of Fritz Hofmann, forwarded by E. Mombeek.
- <sup>120</sup> Notes of Fritz Hofmann, confirmed by local eyewitnesses.
- <sup>121</sup> Personnel Combat Report Sgt. K. Hubert.
- <sup>122</sup> Burial reports Desteldonk and Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264. Complemented by details provided by Belgian historian C. de Decker.
- <sup>123</sup> Personnel Combat Reports No. 317 Squadron.
- <sup>124</sup> Correspondence with Roman Hrycak.
- <sup>125</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 39/1945, point 3.
- <sup>126</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.
- <sup>127</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, 17 February 1995.
- <sup>128</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.
- <sup>129</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, 17 February 1995.
- <sup>130</sup> Letter Fritz Wegner dated 17.05.2000.
- <sup>131</sup> Correspondence with Ignacy Olszewski.
- <sup>132</sup> Personnel memoirs of Jerzy Glowczewski.
- <sup>133</sup> Personnel Combat Reports No. 131 Wing.
- <sup>134</sup> Battle for the Airfields by Norman Franks, page 197.
- <sup>135</sup> Article Dr. Jan P. Koniarek.
- <sup>136</sup> Edward Jaworski via Michal Mucha.
- <sup>137</sup> ORB No. 302 Squadron. Bombs dropped at E.4998. See also War Diary 2nd TAF, Sheet No. 2338.
- <sup>138</sup> Ground Control.
- <sup>139</sup> The statement in the ORB of No. 302 Squadron that the aircraft of the Squadron had just returned when the attack of II./JG 1 begun, is incorrect. All Spitfires returned to St. Denis after the attack.
- <sup>140</sup> Article by Belgian historian Jacques de Vos, dated 7 January 1975.
- <sup>141</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung and remembrances of Lt. Heckmann published in Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11 by Prien/Rodeike, page 1407.
- <sup>142</sup> ULTRA-Report No. 56-BT-1054. At 08.00 hrs the II./JG 1 reported having 51 a/c on strength. At 22.00 hrs this was reduced to 34 aircraft on strength.
- <sup>143</sup> Militärarchiv Freiburg, document RL2-III-852.
- <sup>144</sup> Flugbuch Uffz. Herbert Dosch, 5./JG 1.
- <sup>145</sup> Letter Fritz Wegner, dated 17.05.2000.
- <sup>146</sup> ULTRA-Report No. 56-BT-1046.
- <sup>147</sup> FS. II. Jako. Ic Nr. 140/44 geh. vom 3.1.1945.
- <sup>148</sup> Militärarchiv Freiburg, document RL2-II-855.



# Buzz Bomb Alley

**Jagdgeschwader 2 and  
Schlachtgeschwader 4 head for St. Trond**

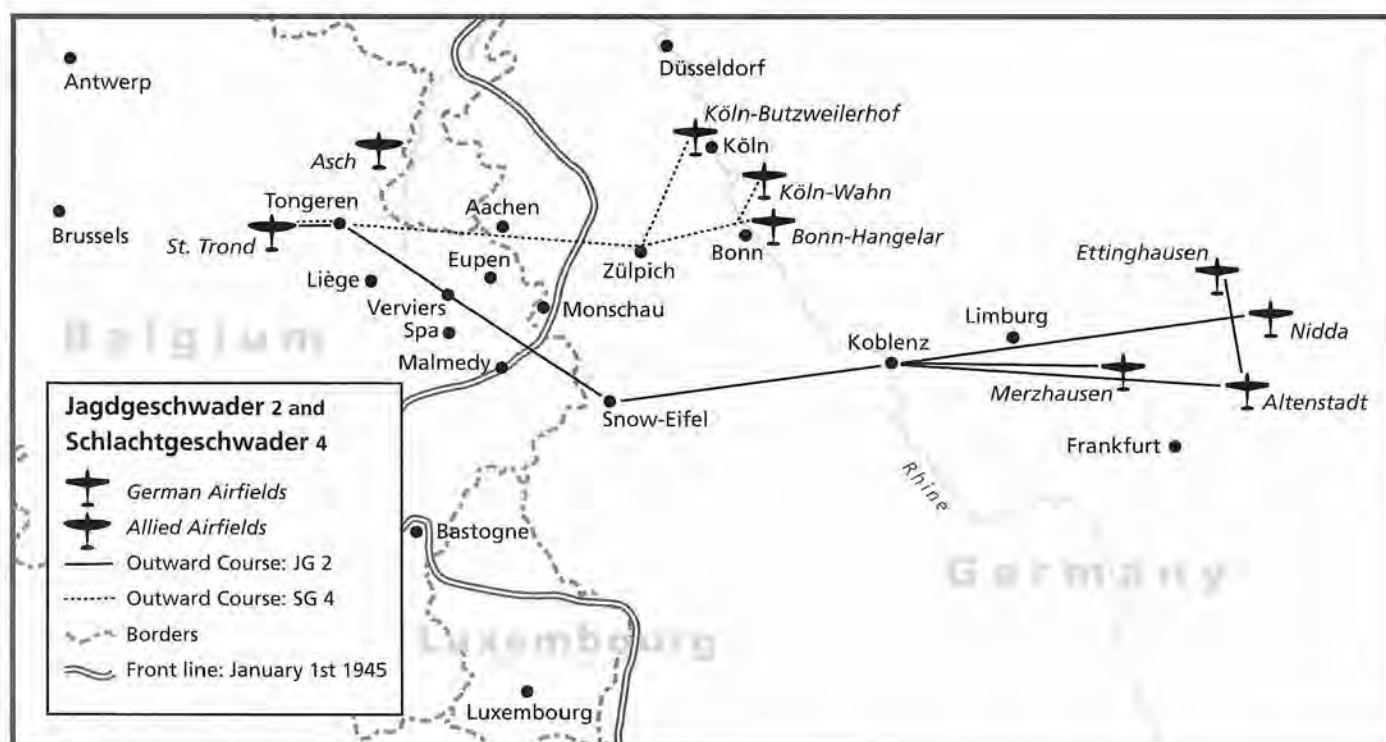
Commanded by the experienced Obstlt. Kurt Bühligen<sup>1</sup>, Jagdgeschwader 2, the 'Richthofen Geschwader', had been involved in almost every air battle on the Western Front since 1943. It would play a major role in Bodenplatte too.

**I**N the weeks following the landings in Normandy, I./JG 2 had suffered considerable losses during its operations and by the end of July had to re-equip in northern Germany. However, by mid-August it had returned to operations in France. In early September 1944 I./JG 2 retreated to Merzhausen, an airfield some 27 kilometres north-west of Frankfurt. From this airfield it would continue flying missions until March 1945. In September further losses were suffered, one of them the long-time Kommandeur Maj. Erich Hohagen, who was wounded in an emergency landing later that month. Hptm. Walter Matoni took over his command. At the beginning of December 1944, the Gruppe had a strength of some 34 Fw 190 A-8/R6s.<sup>2</sup> Further missions, especially in the area west of Koblenz, were flown in the first days of December. On the 6th, Hptm. Matoni was severely injured during a take-off accident and he

was replaced by 24-year old Hptm. Franz Hrdlicka, a veteran pilot with more than 40 victories. On December 17th the Gruppe suffered a severe blow when it lost at least six Fw 190s in combat with Thunderbolts over St. Vith in the Ardennes.<sup>3</sup> A few days before Christmas the Gruppe received its first 12 Fw 190 D-9s.<sup>4</sup> During the month of December it would receive, in total, 54 brand new Fw 190 D-9s.<sup>5</sup> On December 24th the Gruppe was completely taken by surprise when 198 B-17s of the 1st Bomb Division attacked Merzhausen airfield. The B-17s bombed in five waves and the bombs of all five groups hit the landing ground. The airfield was so extensively covered by craters that serviceability was reduced to take-off which could only be carried out with difficulty from the south-east and north-west corners. Almost all the station buildings on the north side of the airfield were destroyed or damaged.<sup>6</sup> Casualties were confined to one pilot

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



killed and one wounded. One groundcrew was also killed and another one wounded. Fortunately only one Fw 190 was reported as destroyed by the bombs.<sup>7</sup> Groundcrew immediately started clearing the strips for take-off and landing by filling the craters and by December 31st missions could be flown again. At the end of the month I./JG 2 reported a strength of 46 Fw 190s of which 38 were D-9s.

In late September 1944, Stab JG 2 and II./JG 2 moved to Nidda airfield, some 20 kilometres north-east of Bad Nauheim. Here both units would remain until March 1945. Since May 1944 II. Gruppe was commanded by Hptm. Georg Schröder. At 34 years of age Schröder was already an old-timer and had joined the Gruppe in August 1943 as Staffelkapitän. During the following months II./JG 2 received a high number of new aircraft and at the beginning of December it had an impressive strength of 58 Messerschmitts! On the first missions in December several losses were suffered. On December 17th three Messerschmitts were shot down on a fighter escort mission for III./JG 2 over the Eifel. One more was shot down during a transfer flight and one crash-landed at Nidda. Disaster struck again during a fighter cover mission for SG 4 on the 23rd when three Bf 109 G-14s were shot down and one crashed during take-off killing the pilot. On December 24th, 53 B-17s of the 1st Bomb Division attacked Nidda. The Geschwaderstab however had received early warning that the airfield could be attacked and all personnel took cover. After the attack some 160 bomb craters were counted, but no personnel were harmed and only one Messerschmitt was

destroyed. By the following day, ground personnel and locally recruited labour had filled in enough craters to make serviceable a 900 metre strip for take-off and landing.<sup>8</sup> Further missions were flown by II./JG 2 on December 26th and 27th and again losses were suffered. In fact, the Gruppe had lost considerable strength in the last few weeks and although 16 new Bf 109 K-4s had been delivered, its strength had dropped to 29 Messerschmitts by the end of the month.

After heavy losses in July and August 1944, III./JG 2 was withdrawn from France and was being rebuilt at Königsberg/Neumark. Since the death of Hptm. Josef Wurmheller in June, the Gruppe had been commanded by Oblt. Siegfried Lemke. Oblt. Lemke had risen through the lower ranks with I. Gruppe and was one of the most successful pilots of JG 2. At Königsberg the Gruppe received more than 40 new Fw 190 A-8/R.6s and started training of the new arrivals. By mid-October the Gruppe was fit for operations and moved to Altenstadt, about 30 kilometres northeast of Frankfurt. On its second mission on October 20th the unit lost eight Fw 190s in combat with six pilots killed and two wounded. The next day another four were killed and three wounded. November would be no better and losses mounted. On November 18th and 19th another 13 Fw 190s were lost and eight pilots killed and three wounded. Even worse, by the end of the month three Staffelkapitäne had been killed and one wounded!<sup>9</sup>

December saw no relief and operations continued and losses mounted. In mid-December the Gruppe moved to Ettinghausen, 15



kilometres east of Gießen. On December 21st, Göring visited the Gruppe during which he informed the unit of the upcoming Bodenplatte operation.<sup>10</sup> During this time the first new Fw 190 D-9s arrived of which the Gruppe would obtain the impressive number of 53 during this last month of 1944. On the 24th Ettinghausen was bombed by 43 B-17s of the 1st Bomb Division. Fairly short advance warning of the attack was received and all personnel immediately took cover in the trenches. Luckily the majority of the Gruppe's aircraft were out on an operational sortie and the remainder were parked around the airfield perimeter. Damage to the aircraft was confined to one destroyed and one damaged. Casualties amounted to two members of the ground staff injured. Almost immediately after the raid all members of the ground personnel, aided by a large number of local civilians set to work filling in the craters and by the afternoon of the following day a strip had been cleared sufficient for operational purposes.<sup>11</sup> On December 25th 9. and 10./JG 2 moved back to Altenstadt whereas the remainder of the Gruppe stayed at Ettinghausen. On the 26th the Kapitän of 12./JG 2, Oblt. Hermann Ansel, was lost west of Koblenz.<sup>12</sup> On December 31st the Gruppe reported a strength of 43 Fw 190s, 35 of which were D-9s.

### Schlachtgeschwader 4's arrival on the Western Front

Hitherto, little has been written about the operations of Schlachtgeschwader 4 in December 1944. To understand its situation on January 1st 1945, it is necessary to look in more detail at its arrival on the Western Front and its operations in the last weeks of 1944. SG 4 was established during the reshaping of all ground-attack units in October 1943. It had its origins in the Fw 190-equipped SG 2 and SKG 10. During the end of 1943 and until May 1944, SG 4 with I. and II. Gruppe operated over Italy. In June both Gruppen were withdrawn from the Front and rebuilt near

Pilots of III./JG 2 during 'Aufrischung' in Königsberg/Neumark in August 1944. In the centre is Oblt. Siegfried Lemke, the Gruppenkommandeur, while to his left is Uffz. Werner Hilbert of 9./JG 2. (Hilbert)



Pilots of 10. and 11./JG 2 in the autumn of 1944 at Hainchen, near Altenstadt airfield. From left to right: Gefr. Gustav Rall, Fw. Raimund Kock (WIA 19.11.1944), Uffz. Fritz Altpeter (KIA 1.1.1945), Uffz. Franz Biller (MIA 19.11.1944), Fhr. Walter Eckert (KIA 23.12.1944), Korn(?), unknown, Ogfr. Wilhelm Scherwadt (POW 1.1.1945), Fhr. Wolfgang Ortlepp (WIA 19.11.1944), unknown. (Kleinert)





Hptm. Hans Stollnberger greets a pilot of II./SG 4 after returning from a mission. The picture was probably taken in the autumn of 1944. (Jirousek/Stollnberger)

Turin. In the meantime, III./SG 4 was stationed in France and flew operations against submarines in the Mediterranean, although without ever actually spotting a submarine! During the Allied landings in Normandy the Gruppe flew missions against the Invasion, but again result were poor and losses high. In July 1944 all Gruppen were transferred to the Eastern Front. From bases in East Prussia and the Baltic States, ground-attack missions were flown in support of Heeresgruppe Nord and Mitte. Considerable results were achieved and many critical situations solved by the Focke-Wulfs of SG 4. By the end of October 1944, the Russian offensive in East Prussia had been halted and in November 1944, the Gruppen of SG 4 were withdrawn from the Front to be re-equipped again.

The first indications that SG 4 was to operate on the Western Front is when on October 21st Gen. Werner Kreipe, Chef Generalstab der Luftwaffe, ordered Luftflotte Reich to transfer one Schlachtgeschwader to strengthen Luftwaffenkommando West. The General der Schlachtflieger Obst. Hubertus Hitschhold emphasised to Göring the impossibility to operate Schlachtgeschwader in the West without heavy fighter cover. Göring thereupon, somewhat

vaguely, promised that JG 2 would be specially devoted to the task of escorting SG 4!<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of December Stab and I./SG 4 transferred to Ziegenhain, 21 kilometres north of Alsfeld.<sup>14</sup> In November II./SG 4 moved to Oppeln in Silesia but by the beginning of December joined I./SG 4 in the West and moved to Gütersloh.<sup>15</sup> Both units went into training in bad weather flying and blind flying, this being considered the only practical method of minimising losses. However, bad weather in November and the beginning of December prevented even this kind of training and SG 4 was not up to the mark when the offensive began.<sup>16</sup>

III./SG 4 was also withdrawn from the Eastern Front at the beginning of November and the groundcrew were transferred to Reinshlen, 18 kilometres north of Soltau. Over the following days nearly 50 new Fw 190 F-8s arrived at Reinshlen to equip III./SG 4. The pilots however were moved to Udetfeld to receive training on the Panzerblitz Pb1, an anti-tank rocket and the M.8 warhead. From November 4th to December 4th, all pilots of III./SG 4 received five training flights with their new weapons. However, results of the firing were very poor and it was clear that the pilots needed more time to

become familiarized with the rockets. On November 13th, the first pilots with five training flights on Panzerblitz Pb1 transferred to Reinsehlen. On November 14th Göring issued a directive that SG 4 was going to support the upcoming offensive in the West and with special emphasis on the crossings of the Maas.<sup>17</sup> The Gruppe realised that further training was necessary, especially in formation flying and the use of the Panzerblitz Pb1. On November 22nd the Gruppe received orders from Luftflotte Reich to transfer an Einsatzkommando of 20 Fw 190s with Panzerblitz to Hailfingen near Stuttgart. Major Gerhard Weyert, Gruppenkommandeur of III./SG 4, tried to change the order as he felt the Gruppe was not yet ready, but the order remained in place. Hailfingen however was found unsuitable and the Gruppe was to move to Kirtlach instead. On November 26th the Fw 190s left Reinsehlen but due to bad weather the transfer flight was delayed and by December 5th only 13 Fw 190s had arrived in Kirtlach.<sup>18</sup>

The first mission with Panzerblitz Pb1s was flown on December 7th when seven Fw 190 F-8s of III./SG 4 attacked motor transport in the Strasbourg-Haguenau area. One pilot, Ofhr. Theodor Rüttgers, did not return and all other Focke-Wulfs were damaged by AAA fire, two of them seriously. Maj. Weyert rated the operation a failure and proposed attacking less defended targets in future.<sup>19</sup> However, several days of bad weather followed and no further missions were flown from Kirtlach. On December 14th, 5. Jagddivision ordered III./SG 4 to move to Kirtorf. The next day groundcrew from the Gruppe arrived at Kirtorf where they discovered that II./SG 4 was based at the same airfield. The first aircraft of II./SG 4 had arrived at Kirtorf from Gütersloh on December 12th.<sup>20</sup>

On December 16th the offensive in the Ardennes opened and II./SG 4, still at Kirtorf, was put on alert.<sup>21</sup> Bad weather prevented any missions from being flown. The following day III./SG 4 transferred to Kirtorf as ordered, but on orders from Obstlt. Ewald Janssen, Kommodore SG 4, continued to Köln-Wahn where 11 Fw 190s landed at dusk. As a result of the continuous movement from one airfield to another, III./SG 4 had lost most of its strength, as the available 48 aircraft were spread over no fewer than five different airfields!

The other Gruppen of SG 4 moved to airfields in the Köln area as well. Around December 18th, Stab and I./SG 4 moved to Bonn-Hangelar and II./SG 4 moved from Kirtorf to Köln-Butzweilerhof.<sup>22</sup> I./SG 4 was commanded by Maj. Werner Dörnbrack, a very experienced pilot who had led the Gruppe since December 1942.<sup>23</sup> Since November 1944 II./SG 4 was commanded by Hptm. Hans Stollnberger. Stollnberger had flown

his first operations over the Channel in 1940. With all Gruppen concentrated in a small area, SG 4 would have to play an important role in the offensive.

On December 18th the first mission was flown by III./SG 4 when four Fw 190s were scheduled for an attack with M.8 warheads on St.Vith. However, the target was covered with clouds and all aircraft had to return to base with their bomb load. The following day only II./SG 4 appeared to have been over the Front; one pilot, Lt. Walter Schlegel of Stab II./SG 4 was lost near Elsenborn.<sup>24</sup> Due to bad weather no further missions were flown by either of the Gruppen until December 23rd. On that day the weather improved and at 07.30 hrs. the Gruppen were on alert. Bastogne was to be bombed by all Gruppen of SG 4. Jagdgeschwader 2 was to provide fighter cover. At 10.20 hrs 14 Fw 190s of III./SG 4 took off. At 10.36 hrs a telephone call was received from Obstlt. Janssen to call off the mission. Two minutes later, the order was revoked by Hptm. Wiesner.<sup>25</sup> Two minutes after that the Gruppe was recalled again! However, no contact could be established with the unit, but when the promised fighter cover did not show up, Maj. Weyert gave the order to return himself. All aircraft returned to Wahn safely.

The following day SG 4 was ordered to attack Bastogne again. At 08.55 hrs seven Fw 190s of III./SG 4 took off and were joined by approximately 15 Fw 190s of II./SG 4 and 15 Fw 190s of I./SG 4. Almost half an hour was spent assembling with the fighter cover and finally the formation, led by II./SG 4, flew towards Bastogne. Caused by a navigational error of the formation leader, the formation continued flying south over Bastogne and bombed a town approximately 60 kilometres south of the target. An Fw 190F-8 of 8./SG 4 was shot down by AAA and belly-landed in Allied territory. The pilot, Ofhr. Heinz Zotlötterer, became a POW.<sup>26</sup> The situation grew worse when the fighter cover had to return because of fuel shortage and a few minutes later the formation was attacked by Mustangs and Thunderbolts. In the dogfight that followed at least three Fw 190s were lost. Ofw. Lothar Kobuhs of 3./SG 4 was reported missing after combat with fighters near Bastogne.<sup>27</sup> Fw. Richard Vogel of 2./SG 4 was also shot down near Bastogne and was killed. II. Gruppe lost one pilot when Uffz. Willy Paschke of 5./SG 4 was shot down near Bastogne and also killed. Finally, the Focke-Wulf of Oblt. Herbert Eissele, Staffelpkapitän of 7./SG 4, received numerous hits in fuselage and wings but he managed to reach German lines. Another mission was on order for later in the day, but several contradicting orders from Stab SG 4 prevented any take-off.

On December 26th another mission was planned and again the Fw 190s of SG 4 were to attack the Bastogne area. The Gruppen appeared to have flown this mission individually. The operation of I./SG 4 ended catastrophically when its formation was intercepted by Allied fighters. Two pilots were lost. Hptm. Heinz Jungclausen, Ritterkreuzträger and Staffelführer of 3./SG 4, was shot down south of Bad Salzbig and was killed. Hptm. Erich Schümer, Staffelführer of 1./SG 4, crashed north of Bingen, and was also killed. II./SG 4 lost one pilot, Ofw. Heinrich Weinreich who was reported missing after combat with Allied fighters near Bastogne.<sup>28</sup> Finally III./SG 4 reported one loss after attacking a wooded area north-west of Bastogne with seven Fw 190s. Ofw. Karl Zumkeller of 7./SG 4 was reported missing after combat with 12 Thunderbolts and two Typhoons. He was later reported as being killed in action.

The poor performance of SG 4 over the Ardennes sank to the depths on December 27th. Again all Gruppen of SG 4 were ordered to bomb Allied troops near Bastogne. At 07.55 hrs, 10 Fw 190s of III./SG 4 took off and assembled with I. and II./SG 4. The formation was led by Major Dörnbrack, Kommandeur of I./SG 4. When he had to return with engine trouble, the whole of I. and II./SG 4 followed and dropped their bombs on German territory. III./SG 4 returned also. The R/T installation of Maj. Dörnbrack was out of order so his order to continue the mission was not heard. Some time later SG 4 took off again, but was recalled 20 minutes later as strong Allied formations were approaching. Later the day a court-martial investigation was held into the earlier mission at the Geschwader headquarters.

Over the following days, the Geschwader was grounded due to bad weather. Apparently a victim for the poor results of the unit had to be found and on December 29th, Obstlt. Ewald Janssen was relieved of his command. The disastrous operations of the last weeks and the inability to get the units up to strength on their forward bases primarily led to him being relieved. Obstlt. Janssen was given command of Cottbus airfield, a low standing in respect to his experience as an operational pilot.

Oberst Alfred Druschel replaced Obstlt. Janssen as Kommodore of SG 4. At 27 years of age, Druschel was already one of the leading personalities of the Schlachtwaffe. He had started flying operations in the Polish Campaign of 1939 and by October 1943 had risen to the rank of Oberstleutnant and was Kommodore of Sch.G 1. By that time he had flown more than 800 missions. In October 1943, he joined the General der Schlachtflieger, Oberst Hubertus Hitschhold, in his Stab. He was promoted to Oberst on July 1st 1944.<sup>29</sup> During the last days of December 1944 no missions were flown by SG 4 due to bad weather.

The new Kommodore used the time to visit the individual Gruppen. The New Year was waiting with another important mission for the Geschwader.

### Initial preparations for the attack

Without doubt, Obstlt. Kurt Bühligen attended the meeting at Altenkirchen on December 5th and after a few weeks he decided to unveil the plan for Bodenplatte to his Gruppenkommandeure. Some three or four days before Christmas, the Kommandeure were summoned to a meeting held at the Geschwader headquarters at Nidda. They were informed that it was planned to carry out a low-level attack on St.Trond airfield, with the object of delivering a damaging blow to the Allied Air Forces. Bühligen stressed the importance of the mission and the senior officers present were urged to take great care to give their pilots detailed and careful briefing. Aerial photographs of St.Trond airfield were available, some of which taken around the middle of December, and the accompanying interpretation report indicated that about 130 P-47 Thunderbolts, about six four-engined aircraft and a few Dakotas were on the airfield. Other photographic cover showed the airfield AAA defences.

Obstlt. Bühligen indicated that other Geschwader would attack other Allied airfields simultaneously, but he did not specify the units or airfields involved. The code word for the operation was given as 'Varus' and the date and time over target was to be announced later. The three Gruppen of JG 2 were to fly independently, but the proposed courses and flying times were to be such that all three formations would pass over Koblenz within a period of two or three minutes. The course from Koblenz to St.Trond, which was to be identical for all three Gruppen, was Koblenz-Schnee Eifel hills-Tongres-St.Trond.

The turning point over the Schnee Eifel hills was to be marked by a ground signal emitting orange-coloured smoke. After attacking the target, pilots were to fly due east so as to regain the German lines as quickly as possible. Each Gruppe was to be led on the outward course as far as the front line by a Ju 88 Lotse. The route to the target was to be flown at a height of 45 metres with the object of avoiding radar detection even at the expense of increasing danger of Allied light AAA fire. This light AAA in the front line area was viewed as a serious menace since the aircraft would be flying at a low altitude over a fairly broad front. It was anticipated that the AAA at St.Trond would be taken by surprise.<sup>30</sup> After the briefing the Kommandeure returned to their units and prepared the briefings for their pilots.

Two weeks earlier, in the evening of December 4th, I. Jagdkorps had ordered I./NJG





Pilots of I./JG 2 on the nose of an Fw 190 D-9 at Merzhausen in January/February 1945. From right to left: Fw. Otto Kleinert, Lt. Hans Eisen, Uffz. Paul Grassmann (WIA 17.2.1945), Uffz. Franz Brejl (KIA 2.3.1945), Uffz. Horst Buttgerit (KIA 17.3.1945), Ogfr. Manfred Ludwig (MIA 9.3.1945), Jähnig(?) and Brand(?). (Kleinert/König)

101 based at Ingolstadt-Manching to prepare two Ju 88 crews, each to transfer to the Gruppen of JG 2. They were to ensure assembly of strong day fighter formations in difficult weather.<sup>31</sup> A day or so after Christmas the two Ju 88s arrived with II./JG 2 at Nidda. One of them was parked beside the aircraft of 8. Staffel. Later at the Gruppengefechtsstand the pilots met the crew of the Ju 88s and learned about their mission.<sup>32</sup> Only one Junkers arrived at Merzhausen on December 31st.<sup>33</sup> It seems that no Ju 88 flew to Altenstadt to III./JG 2, but may have flown to Ettinghausen. However, it is believed that a Ju 88 of I./NJG 4 flew as Lotse for III./JG 2 and therefore it is possible that those from NJG 101 did not arrive.<sup>34</sup>

The briefing of the individual Gruppen was given by the Gruppenkommandeure. At Merzhausen the pilots of I./JG 2 were not briefed until the last day of December. Fw. Werner Hohenberg, a pilot of Stab I./JG 2, remembers: "Hptm. Hrdlicka, I./JG 2 Kommandeur whose wingman I was, gave me the secret orders for Operation Bodenplatte in the afternoon of December 31st. According to these orders the airfield at St. Trond was to be attacked in the early morning of January 1st. The employment of the entire Geschwader (three Gruppen of four Staffeln each) was envisaged as well as Schlachtgeschwader 4. The entire formation was to be lead by Hptm. Hrdlicka. We discussed the operation for some time. This mission, next day, was extraordinary. Apparently some 1,500 fighters and fighter-bombers were to be employed. We

thought this to be a high number. After all we knew most Geschwader and their personnel strength. Nonetheless, we believed the numbers to be true (probably because we wanted to believe it). We left quietly and soberly went into the New Year. The mission was classified as top secret and could possibly influence a turn in the tide of the war. Everything was aimed at raising moral, hope and fighting spirit. It was probably a desperate attempt to remove our attention from the oppressing numbers of the enemy air forces."<sup>35</sup>

All other pilots of I./JG 2 received their briefing at 15.00 hrs from Hptm. Hrdlicka or their Staffelfkapitän. The course from Merzhausen to

Pilots of I./JG 2. Fourth from left is Fw. Hans Petersen, then Fw. Otto Kleinert. Third from right Uffz. Franz Brejl, the remainder are unknown. (Kleinert)



Koblenz and onwards was described and the pilots marked this on their maps. The pilots were ordered to fly at low level until approaching the front line where they were to come down to tree-top level and continue to the target at this altitude. The function of the Ju 88 Lotsen was explained and the pilots were informed about the ground signals in the Eifel hills. Photographic coverage of St. Trond was circulated and the pilots were instructed that strict R/T silence was to be observed.<sup>36</sup> Uffz. Hans Wyssola, a pilot in 2./JG 2 remembers the briefing: "An Oberleutnant, whose name I cannot recall, carried out the briefing on New Year's Eve. Neither Hptm. Hrdlicka nor Obstlt. Bühligen were present. Take-off was scheduled at first light. We were to destroy aircraft and airfield structures and two to three attacks were to be carried out. In the morning we were given brief instructions about formation tactics and altitudes. Also we were told that the attack would be carried out by several Staffeln with individual targets. We were to be employed as ground-attack aircraft."<sup>37</sup>

After the briefing pilots were requested to be moderate in their celebration of New Year, a suggestion which in some cases fell on deaf ears.<sup>38</sup>

At Nidda, the II. Gruppe pilots were briefed much earlier. A few days after his own briefing by Obstlt. Bühligen, Hptm. Georg Schröder decided to hold a preliminary briefing for his pilots. The exact date of this is somewhat of a mystery. Several surviving members of II./JG 2 have different recollections and surviving documents give no clear answer. It is however believed that this must have taken place soon after Christmas. Uffz. Theo Hartmann, a pilot of 6./JG 2, remembers: "Returning from a mission over Christmas 1944, we were ordered to report to the Gefechtsstand and to refrain from going to our quarters at Unterschmitten. After a while, we were informed

that we would be detailed to attack some of the enemy's airfields as part of the ongoing winter offensive. Our target would be the airfield of St. Trond represented by a miniature diorama in our barracks and familiar to some of the pilots. Apparently all flak positions were taken into account in the scale model."<sup>39</sup>

Another pilot, Fj.Fw. Gerhard Querengässer, pilot of 8./JG 2, remembers the initial briefing too: "On December 30th we were led into a barracks where we were shown a scale model of an airfield with structures and other details. The senior pilots immediately recognised it as St. Trond in Belgium which we knew from stopovers and over-flying. We were to carefully study the airfield; there were no further instructions. We were not allowed off the field for the nights of the 30th and 31st and had to sleep in a special accommodation in the vicinity of the airfield. On the 30th were allowed to fetch some stuff from our private quarters at Oberschmitten/Nidda. Since our technical staffs too were restrained from leaving the field, we figured that something big was planned for New Year's Day."<sup>40</sup>

As the pilots were already briefed at this early stage, Hptm. Schröder ordered that they should stay on the airfield near the Gefechtsstand to prevent any leaks. As the Gruppe was still strong by mid-December and as the pilots knew St. Trond, they believed they could deliver a decisive blow to the Thunderbolts.<sup>41</sup> On the evening of December 31st, Hptm. Schröder gave the final briefing, handed over the maps on which the course was marked and told the pilots that 09.20 hrs had been fixed as the time over target.<sup>42</sup>

Oblt. Siegfried Lemke had also informed his III. Gruppe a few days in advance. Uffz. Werner Hilbert of 9./JG 2 remembers: "A couple of days before we were given a partial briefing for the mission of January 1st. On the 31st we had a thorough briefing and were given the name of the airfield. Also, aerial reconnaissance photographs were shown. Every pilot was assigned his own target at St. Trond and I was assigned the south-west corner of the airfield. Two attacks were to be carried out. The first one with 21 cm rockets and guns and the second one with guns only. On New Year's Eve there was no party, nor any alcohol. We spent the night on chairs and on the ground and in the morning we were briefed once again."<sup>43</sup>

Fhr. Haymo von Grebmer, another 9. Staffel pilot, remembers a few more details: "In the late afternoon of December 31st 1944 we were briefed by Oblt. Lemke, III./JG 2 Kommandeur, about the attack on the airfield of St. Trond the next day. The location was the airfield of Altenstadt to where we had transferred on December 25th because of the oncoming mission and for security reasons. There was to be absolutely no radio communication on the

Obstlt. Kurt Bühligen, the Geschwaderkommodore of JG 2, did not fly in Operation Bodenplatte. (Müngersdorff)





outward flight and we were to follow a Ju 88 Lotse.<sup>44</sup>

On the evening of December 31st the groundcrew of the three Gruppen did their best to get as many aircraft operational for the mission on New Year's Day. At Merzhausen they managed to get 35 of the 46 available ready, 29 of which were Fw 190 D-9s. Only 33 pilots of I. Gruppe were fit to fly so by 03.00 hrs the Gruppe reported 33 Fw 190s ready. II. Gruppe was able to report 20 out of 29 Bf 109s operational, 13 of which were Bf 109 G-14s. At 03.00 hrs, these 20 aircraft were reported as ready. Stab JG 2, which was also based at Nidda, had three pilots and three Fw 190 D-9s ready for the mission. Although contradicting information exists, it is believed that Obstlt. Bühligen did not participate in the mission.<sup>45</sup> III./JG 2 reported 40 Fw 190s operational, 34 of these Fw 190 D-9s. Oblt. Lemke however had a problem as only 28 of his 43 pilots were fit for the operation. So he visited some of the experienced pilots who were in hospital with minor injuries in the hope of putting them into the air. One of these was Fw. Otto Kleinert of 11./JG 2. Oblt. Lemke visited him in the late afternoon of December 31st, but did not say anything of the coming operation.<sup>46</sup> Probably satisfied with the fact that Fw. Kleinert or others could not fly Oblt. Lemke left and reported 28 Fw 190 D-9s available

for the operation. In total 84 aircraft of JG 2 were ready for the New Year's Day mission.<sup>47</sup>

Little is known about preparations by SG 4 for the attack. The first indications that they were to be involved is when in the evening of December 4th, two nightfighter crews of II./NJG 100 were ordered to each airfield; I./SG 4 at Ziegenhain, II./SG 4 at Kirtorf and III./SG 4 at Kirrlach. The crews were to report to the Gruppenkommandeure.<sup>48</sup> In the available war diary of III./SG 4, nothing is mentioned about the arrival of these Ju 88s until December 24th. On that date an attempt was made to transfer more Fw 190s from Kirtorf to the forward airfields around Köln. Six Fw 190s of III./SG 4 and several other machines of II./SG 4 were ready to take off and were to be guided to Köln-Wahn and Butzweilerhof by one of the Ju 88 Lotsen. The transfer was a failure as a number of Fw 190s were unable to take off and furthermore the Ju 88 got lost and landed in Krefeld!<sup>49</sup>

The number of aircraft available on the forward bases of SG 4 appears to have been a constant problem. Although on December 31st within SG 4 some 152 (!) Fw 190 F-8s and 129 pilots were available, the number of operational Focke-Wulfs at Bonn-Hangelar, Wahn and Butzweilerhof did not reach more than 60.<sup>50</sup> As a result of the Gruppen having the Fw 190s spread

Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring visits the pilots of III./JG 2 on December 21st 1944 at Merzhausen. The unit's Fw 190s can be seen in the background. (Hilbert)



over several airfields, a definite strength figure for the operation on January 1st is not easy to determine. Stab SG 4 reported three Fw 190s operational and two pilots ready on December 31st. I./SG 4 reported 21 Fw 190s operational and 27 pilots ready. All in all, at Bonn-Hangelar some 20-22 Fw 190s were available for the mission. II./SG 4 reported 27 Fw 190s operational on December 31st, but another report indicates that only around 16 of these were available at Butzweilerhof.<sup>51</sup> Finally, III./SG 4 reported 24 Fw 190s operational on December 31st, but only 16 of these are available at Wahn. This leads to an estimate of 55 Fw 190 F-8s of SG 4 participating on January 1st.

Only a few details are available on the preparations of SG 4's pilots of for the mission on New Year's day. At Wahn, Maj. Gerhard Weyert held a preliminary briefing early in the afternoon of the 31st and the pilots were informed that III./SG 4 was to be led by a Ju 88 and that the outward course to the target was to be flown at tree-top level. Each pilot was to make four attacks on St.Trond airfield.<sup>52</sup> In the war diary of III./SG 4 the following operational order is listed for January 1st:

*Time of attack: 09.25 hours.*

*Mission: Attack on St. Trond airfield with aircraft guns and M. 8 projectiles.<sup>53</sup>*

Some 45 kilometres south of SG 4's bases, another unit was preparing for a mission on January 1st. The 2./Nahaufklärungsgruppe 1 was stationed at Niedermendig, west of Koblenz. This Staffel was equipped with the Bf 109 G-6 and G-8 short-range reconnaissance aircraft. Oberleutnant W. Kohla was Staffelfkapitän. He later wrote: "The Staffel had the task to fly with individual Rotten to certain meeting points and to join the Jagdgeschwader in low-level flight and to take aerial pictures during the actual attack."<sup>54</sup>

Indeed two pilots of 2./NAG 1, the Rotte of Oblt. Hans Klawen and Lt. Harald Lehmann, was ordered to join SG 4 and JG 2 in their attack on St.Trond. Lt. Lehmann remembers: "Everyone of us was enthusiastic about the large scale attack by the German fighter and fighter-bomber units on the Belgian and Dutch airfields. On December 31st we already received the code word and for that reason New Year's Eve was spent quietly."<sup>55</sup>

### St. Trond airfield, eastern Belgium, December 1944

Commencing in 1941 the airfield at St.Trond, known locally as Brustem, had been expanded by the Luftwaffe into a large permanent airfield. Situated at the gateway to the Ruhr, St.Trond quickly became one of the Luftwaffe's foremost nightfighter bases. From May 1941 until March

1944 the famous II./NJG 1 was based there and in the period from then until the Americans approached St.Trond in September 1944, IV./NJG 1 under nightfighter ace, Hptm. Schnauffer, took off from Brustem on their nightly prowls. In the first week of October, two Ninth Air Force units landed at the former base of the 'Ghost of St.Trond'. They were the 404th and 48th Fighter Groups, both equipped with the P-47 Thunderbolt. At that time, St. Trond was the closest Allied airfield to the front. At only a couple of minutes flight time from Aachen, the airfield featured concrete runways and was a safe haven for crippled bombers. Numbers of these were always lingering along the taxi tracks and hard standings awaiting repairs.

### Jagdgeschwader 2 on its way to St.Trond

During the morning of January 1st the pilots of JG 2 woke early and prepared for their mission. Groundcrew had pushed the Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs to the edge of the airfield. No fuel was to be wasted. Shortly after 08.00 hrs, the pilots received orders to take off. Fw. Werner Hohenberg remembers: "Around 06.00 hrs, the Kommandeur and I left from our quarters at Usingen. Our two Rottenflieger were already waiting for us. Purely by coincidence, I was appointed the Fw 190 D-9 coded 'Major beim Stab'. Around 08.00 hrs we took off, preceded by two Ju 88 nightfighters. They were assigned to do the detailed navigation for us and to return at some point just before the front line. My position was to fly as Rottenflieger in the Kommandeur's Führungsschwarm. We were followed by our four Staffeln."<sup>56</sup>

Fw. Karl Tscheliesnig, a 3. Staffel pilot, had just taken off when he discovered that his undercarriage would not retract. He landed at Merzhausen and after hasty repairs had been carried out, he took off again and caught up with the I./JG 2 formation later.<sup>57</sup> Flying in sections of four in a loose vic formation and led by Hptm. Hrdlicka, I./JG 2's formation of more than 30 aircraft headed for the assembly point at Koblenz.

At Nidda, Hptm. Schröder prepared his men for the coming mission. Between 05.00 and 06.00 hrs a final briefing was given. The pockets of each pilot were checked for any document that could give the enemy information if the pilot was captured.<sup>58</sup> The first to take off were the Fw 190 D-9s of Stab JG 2. One report indicates that the pilots joined with one of the other Fw 190 Gruppen, probably III./JG 2. Finally, at 08.30 hrs, the 20 aircraft of II./JG 2 assembled over the airfield. Both the Ju 88s, already airborne, set off ahead of the formation on the prescribed course. Hptm. Georg Schröder flew on the left flank of the leading section of four. The remaining 16



Fw. Gerhard Querengässer, a pilot of 8./JG 2, seen here in July 1944. Querengässer was one of the old hares of II./JG 2, already flying with the Gruppe in late 1943. By January 1st, he had achieved at least five victories. (Querengässer/Nolde)

aircraft followed in four sections of four flying at equal altitude. After about four minutes flying time one of the Ju 88s broke away, the pilot having satisfied himself that the other Ju 88 was able to lead the formation.<sup>59</sup>

Fj.Fw. Gerhard Querengässer remembers the take-off: "Take-off was at first light but with relatively good visibility. Our II. Gruppe assembled over Nidda. On take-off and at assembly there were no difficulties so all aircraft proceeded on course. In the Koblenz area we were fired upon by Flak, but there were no hits taken by our Gruppe. I presume the gunners couldn't believe seeing so many German fighters in the air and probably thought we were enemy aircraft. After a slight evasion to the south we were west of the Rhine and took a direct course for St.Trond."<sup>60</sup>

Uffz. Theo Hartmann, also remembers the initial stages of the flight: "In the early light of January 1st 1945 I took off with my comrades from Nidda, taking a westward course in the direction of Koblenz-Aachen. We were flying at very low altitude behind a Ju 88 or Ju 188 nightfighter. I can still remember this because of the deer-like looks of the antenna-equipped aircraft. On the entire flight along the Rhein-Main corridor, we were fired upon by our own flak."<sup>61</sup>

In low-level flight, II./JG 2 headed for Koblenz. The outward flight was undertaken in radio-silence. Over the Taunus mountains, Lt. Paul Müngersdorff, the Staffelführer of 5./JG 2, saw an Fw 190, probably from one of the other Gruppen, go down. Nothing was said.

As mentioned, III./JG 2 was stationed at two airfields. The first element to take off was the Stabsschwarm led by Oblt. Lemke and 11. and 12./JG 2 from Ettinghausen. Joining the Ju 88 Lotse they headed to Altenstadt to join the other two Staffeln. Uffz. Werner Hilbert, pilot of 9./JG 2 and stationed at Altenstadt, remembers: "We took off from Altenstadt at 08.19 in the direction of St. Trond. The Lotse aircraft, a Ju 88, was already circling our field. We followed a little later after the aircraft from Ettinghausen had arrived."<sup>62</sup>

One-by-one, the Doras of 9. and 10. Staffel took off. Suddenly one of the fighters broke formation and crashed on the edge of the field. The wounded pilot, Ofw. Otto Wylezich, was lucky to survive and was taken to hospital at Bad Nauheim with a concussion and a leg wound.<sup>63</sup> Shaken, the other pilots of 10./JG 2 took off. Over the airfield the pilots assembled behind the Ju 88. There is some confusion about the identity of the Ju 88 Lotse assigned to III./JG 2. Uffz. Werner Hilbert does not remember seeing any Ju 88 on Altenstadt airfield nor did he see one take off on January 1st. There is however an ULTRA report indicating that a Ju 88 G-1 of 3./NJG 4 was stationed at Altenstadt and which took off at 08.28 hrs from that airfield.<sup>64</sup> No

further details have been found. However, it is very likely that this Ju 88 G-1 of 3./NJG 4, flown by Lt. Erhard Düttmann and his crew, was the Lotse for III./JG 2.

After assembling over the airfield the Gruppe, now some 28 Focke-Wulfs, proceeded on course at a height of about 460 metres and led by the Ju 88. Overcast made it difficult to maintain formation, but by flying below and, on occasion, above the cloud, the aircraft headed west towards Koblenz. However, with the loss of Ofw. Wylezich disaster had not yet ended for III. Gruppe. On his way to Koblenz, Uffz. Fritz Altpeter's 'Yellow 4' encountered engine problems and the 22-year old pilot of 11. Staffel broke away from the formation with his engine on fire. Apparently too low to bail out, Uffz. Altpeter was killed when his Dora crashed near Kausen, some six kilometres south of Dierdorf. He was buried at the local cemetery.<sup>65</sup>

One-by-one the Gruppen arrived over Koblenz. More than likely I./JG 2 led by Hptm. Hrdlicka was the first to arrive; he would lead the entire Geschwader in the attack on St.Trond.<sup>66</sup> The individual Gruppen of JG 2 did not assemble in one large formation over Koblenz, but actually carried on towards the Eifel as individual elements.<sup>67</sup> However, their take-off times had been synchronised so that they would arrive over Koblenz at around the same time. Indeed at least I. and III. Gruppe flew close together since pilots of both units saw the formation of the other.<sup>68</sup> Around 09.00 hrs all three units arrived over the Schnee Eifel hills and some of the pilots saw the ground markers. Above the Schnee Eifel a 40 degree turn to the right was made to continue on a direct course towards Tongres and St.Trond. It is believed that II./JG 2 may have continued a bit further to the west than the other two Gruppen and therefore was flying on a slightly more westerly course towards Tongres.<sup>69</sup>

Just after passing the Schnee Eifel and before crossing the front line the Ju 88 Lotsen leading the JG 2 Gruppen turned back.<sup>70</sup> They were to return to their base individually. Not all the Lotsen would return. The Ju 88 G-1 flown by Lt. Erhard Düttmann may have been in trouble already when it was spotted by 1st Lt. John W. Ginder of the 10th Fighter Squadron, 50th Fighter Group in the area south-east of Saarbrücken. Even when Lt. Düttmann had been attempting to get back to Rhein-Main, this does not explain why he and his crew ended up south-east of Saarbrücken. Was his aircraft damaged by AAA? We will



Uffz. Fritz Altpeter of 11./JG 2. He was killed when his Fw 190 D-9 developed engine trouble on the outward course. (Klein)



1st Lt John W. Ginder of the 10th Squadron, 50th Fighter Group who shot down a Ju 88 G-1 acting as Lotse for JG 2. (Pütz)





Lt. Erhard Düttmann, a pilot of 3./NJG 4 who flew with his crew as Lotse for III./JG 2, but who was shot down by 1./Lt. Ginder of the 50th FG. Here Düttmann is seen as young Flieger after joining the Luftwaffe in 1941. (BA Aachen)



Capt. Robert Sandager, commander of 'Dog' Battery of the US 531st AAA Battalion. One of his battery's Bofors guns brought down a Bf 109 near the village of Ster, close to Malmedy in Belgium. (Sandager)

never know. Lt. Ginder attacked the Ju 88 at 09.15 hrs and the aircraft was seen to crash near Eschringen.<sup>71</sup> Lt. Erhard Düttmann and his crew of Ogfr. Fritz Renke and Uffz. Friedrich Berberich were killed when their '3C+FL' crashed near the village of Hengstbach, some 15 kilometres due east of Eschringen.<sup>72</sup> All other Ju 88s seemed to have returned safely.

Around 09.05 hrs the aircraft of JG 2, now led by its Gruppenkommandeure, approached the front line between Malmedy and Hürtgen, with a concentration in the Monschau area. It appears that II./JG 2 was flying on the left side of the intended course and crossed the front line near Malmedy. The idea was to fly at right angles to the front in order to reduce flight time over the battle area and thus minimise danger from AAA. Complete R/T silence was still maintained.<sup>73</sup> After passing the front the Fw 190s and Bf 109s of JG 2 were welcomed by tremendous AAA fire. This can be best described by the pilots themselves. Uffz. Hans Wyssola of 2./JG 2 remembers: "When we took off, initially everything went just fine. We were flying at about 300 metres. Roughly between the towns of Malmedy and Eupen, we flew over a wooded hill after which we were suddenly fired at by a US AAA position equipped with quadruple machine guns. From then on, everything went very fast. I felt two or three impacts and the front part of my canopy was covered with oil. Smoke started coming out more and more and the engine was running roughly. Not wanting to crash, I decided to leave the aircraft by parachute and got rid of the canopy. However, I could not easily get away from the aircraft and hit the tail assembly with my upper leg. Now it was time to employ the parachute and I looked down on a wooded area, wondering where to land. Judging from the position of my left foot, I figured that the left upper leg was broken; the toes pointed backward. However, because of the situation I was in, I did not notice any pain. The parachute got entangled in a treetop and left me bungling about two and a half metres from the ground. I detached myself from the harness and fell face down on the ground. By firing several rounds from my pistol, I attracted attention and after about 45 minutes I heard and saw American soldiers approaching. They took me to their camp and later to a hospital at Eupen."<sup>74</sup>

One-by-one, German aircraft plummeted to the ground, parachutes floating. How could this have happened? The whole area between Malmedy and Aachen was in fact heavily defended by AAA units. Firstly, the area between Malmedy and Monschau had been the scene of heavy fighting between I. SS-Panzerkorps and the XVIII Airborne Corps and V Corps since the beginning of the German offensive. Secondly Liège had been under a constant fire from V-1

flying bombs and the AAA had the task of defending the city against the notorious 'doodlebugs'. The area east of Liège was known as 'Buzz Bomb Alley'.<sup>75</sup> Let us change our perspective and look in more detail at the defending AAA units, for example the 531st AAA. This unit reported:

*"09.50 hrs. During two enemy air raids (0840-0848) (0900-0950) over the 30th Inf Div zone, the following enemy aircraft were identified: 21 Me 109, 6 Me 210, 8 Ju 88s, 2 Ju 87s and 1 Fw 190. Within the battalion 1,414 rounds of 40 mm and 30,745 rounds of 50-caliber ammunition were expended during the numerous engagements. 16 category Is and 5 category IIs are being claimed. The category Is consist of 13 Me 109s, 2 Ju 88s and 1 Me 210. The category IIs include 4 Me 109s and 1 Me 210. Hostile activity by the enemy aircraft was limited to low-level strafing and reconnaissance. 30th Infantry Division and 11th AAA Group informed. 13 cat Is and 3 cat IIs forwarded for approval."*<sup>76</sup>

Robert K. Sandager was a captain commanding D Battery of the 531st AAA Aw Bn on New Year's Day when his unit was located at Ster in the Spa-Malmedy area in the Ardennes. Later, he made the following notes in the S-2 journal:

*"One Me 109 sustained numerous 40mm hits above town of Ster (10 kms SSE of Spa sic) and crashed near Malmedy. The plane seemed to stagger with each hit. Another Me 109 flew in a valley well within range of a D-Battery quad 50 cal. half-track and I watched in disgust as the gunner fired full course harmlessly behind the plane."*

Robert Sandager remembers: "I do not and did not have much confidence in the accuracy of reports coming from our S-2. Probably the number of planes reported and the number of hits claimed, were quite exaggerated. You must realise that with 32 40 mm gun positions and 16 half-track crews in our area it is certain that many were seeing, reporting and claiming the same planes. Our S-2 people tried to sort it all out but it was a very difficult task. Our men were far more qualified to identify the various types of German plane than the men of infantry and field artillery, but they sometimes made mistakes when excited. During my service in Europe I never saw any Ju 87s or Me 210s and the Ju 88s I saw, were flown at night. Also it was very difficult to be sure which unit should be awarded credit. Usually the award was made on the basis of where the plane crashed which was often several kilometres from the area where the fatal hit was scored and in the area of another AAA battalion attached to another infantry division. The only incident that remains clear in my mind about that day was that mentioned in a note at the bottom



of the page. I can still see those 50 caliber tracers passing behind the tail of that Me 109! I tried to fire at that same plane with a Brmo 8 mm light machine gun that I had previously picked up at an overrun German position and the damn thing wouldn't fire at high angles. It had a weak main spring so regarding that particular Me 109 I had a feeling of great frustration. The plane mentioned in the note on the right side of the S2 report, which sustained several hits before crashing near Malmedy, was brought down by one of the 40 mm guns in my battery."<sup>77</sup>

Closer to the Aachen area, AAA units of XIX Corps defended the front line. At the foot of the Eifel hills, Aachen and the surrounding countryside were heavily fought over in the autumn and winter of 1944-45. A truly horrific ground war was fought in the Hürtgenwald area, but also the area north of Aachen saw heavy fighting. Several JG 2 aircraft ended up in this area too. Again the guns roared and many a machine would be shot down. Twelfth Army Group reported:

*"Of the numerous AAA units which were afforded "good hunting" on New Year's Day 1945, when the Luftwaffe made an all-out effort against airfields and front line installations few, if any, enjoyed greater success than the XIX Corps AAA units operating in Ninth US Army. After the smoke of the battle had cleared and the score tallied, results showed that 32 enemy planes had been destroyed and 13 probably destroyed in the XIX Corps area. New Year's Day dawned bright, clear and cold. Shortly after 0900, hostile planes commenced to appear over the Corps area at altitudes varying from 200 feet to 2,000 feet. The attacking planes consisted primarily of "long-nosed" Fw 190D-9s and Me 109s which strafed and bombed ground installations within the area. During the ensuing 30 minutes practically every AAA automatic weapon in the Corps went into action, causing the attacking planes to take violent evasive action. Planes were crashing left and right and at one time, from a high point near the Corps CP five columns of smoke, indicating crashed planes, were observed in the vicinity of Hurtgen Forest. The majority of the day's action occurred during this intense half-hour, though action against smaller numbers of aircraft continued throughout the afternoon. Perhaps the most phenomenal piece of shooting was achieved by a 40 mm gun of the 445th AAA AW Bn. This gun, located in a small clearing of the Hurtgen Forest, was only able to fire one round at a Fw 190 because of tree masks; the round burst squarely under the fuselage, setting the plane on fire, and causing it to crash in flames less than a mile away. A strip map, taken from the pilot of a crash-landed Fw 190, showed the courses that the German planes were to have taken to American and British airports in Belgium. The map indicated that the German*

*planes that came over the Corps zone were well off course, resulting in disaster to a majority of the attackers.*

*"After filtering and careful examination of claims by the 12th AAA Group and Ninth Army AAA Section, AAA units of XIX Corps have been officially credited with definitely destroying 32 of the 64 planes over the area on New Year's Day, and probably destroying an additional 13 planes. Except for seven crashes which fell in the Hurtgen Forest or across the enemy lines, every crash was visited and identified on the ground by officers from the AAA Group headquarters; it was impossible to reach the scene of these seven crashes due to extensive minefields of the dense forest or proximity to the front line, though numerous witnesses testified to the pillars of black smoke from the crash sites. Col. Donald J. Bailey, commanding the 12th AAA Group, attributes the success of his units on New Year's Day to the following factors:*

- (1) A great element of luck and good fortune in having so many planes over the area during daylight at a low altitude.*
- (2) Excellent gunnery on the part of gun crews, most of whom have had considerable battle experience.*
- (3) Area defense disposition — except in the confined clearances of Hurtgen Forest where it was necessary for some units to "bunch" to obtain maximum fields of fire, uniform AAA coverage was provided throughout the Corps area. The uniform volume of fire brought to bear on all the enemy aircraft, regardless of the evasive action taken, proved the value of area defense."*

So far, only a few of these crash locations have been identified and certainly many a missing airman still has a silent grave in the dense and inaccessible forests to the south of Aachen. Although the coded coordinates have been identified as workable locations on maps of the area, it has proven impossible to identify individual aircraft or pilots on most locations. Partly, this can be explained by the fact that many of these locations have not been researched. In addition, there are many potential candidates in the heavily contested area and many are still posted MIA. Checking each of these locations will take several more years of dedicated research by a handful of researchers. Exemplary of the various AAA units positioned from Aachen down to Malmedy, we have included S3 and AAA Unit Reports from the 430th AAA AW Battalion, one of the many AAA Battalions of the 12th AAA Group, positioned in the Aachen area:

*430th AAA AW Battalion (40mm Bofors)  
HQ: Vicht 1 km NW (G); "A" Btry. Aachen-Brandt*

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Uffz. Georg Wilkens (right) in front of an Fw 190 of 4./JG 2, probably at Aix in France in April 1944. The identity of the other pilot is unknown. (Soltau)

(G); "B" Btry. Breinig (G); "C" Btry. Breinig 3 km N (G); "D" Btry. Vicht 1 km N (G)

*A Btry. To Co 430th: At 09.10, Guns #5, 7 & 8 engaged (1) Me 109 flying E to W strafing at 500 ft. Speed of plane 375 mph. Ammo expenditure: (950) rds 50 cal; (32) rds. 40mm. No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash 3 kms SW Aachen (Raid #1).*

*A Btry. To Co 430th - Raid #2: At 09.10, Guns Positions #6 & 7 engaged (1) Me 109 flying S to N at 500 ft. Speed of plane 375 mph. Ammo expended: (590) rds 50 cal; (32) rds. 40mm. No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash 3 kms NW Aachen.*

*D Btry. To Co 430th - Raid #1: At 09.10, Guns #1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7 and HT's 1 & 3 engaged (2) Fw 190s flying W to E at 200 ft. Alt. Speed of planes 250 mph. Ammo expenditure: (1210) rds 50 cal; (29) rds. 40mm. No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash east of Stolberg.*

*B Btry. To Co 430th: Plane crashed near #1 position;*

*Being investigated (Message in 09.35)*

*B Btry. To Co 430th: At 09.35, Gun #3 and half-track #2 engaged (1) Fw 190 flying W to E at 800 yds. alt. Speed of plane 250 mph. Ammo expenditure: (185) rds 50 cal; (14) rds. 40mm. No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash near Dorff, south of Stolberg (Pilot captured).*

*B Btry. to Co 430th: Raid #3 At 09.58, Gun Positions #5, 6, 7 & 8 and half-tracks #3 and 4 engaged (1) Fw 190 flying NW to SE at 100 ft. Speed of plane 300 mph. Ammo expenditure: (995) rds 50 cal; (43) rds. 40mm No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash southeast Stolberg (Pilot dead).*

*A Btry. To Co 430th: Raid #4 At 09.59, 1st pltn engaged (3) Me 190s flying E to SE at 1000 ft. Speed of planes 350 mph. Ammo expenditure: (50) rds 50 cal; (12) rds. 40mm. No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash south of Stolberg.*

*C Btry. To Co 430th: Raid #4 At 10.00, Guns #1, 5, 6 & 8 and HT #1 engaged (1) Fw 190 flying NW*

to SE low. Speed 300 mph. Ammo expenditure: (1075) rds 50 cal; (27) rds. 40mm. No damage to VA No casualties. One Cat I Claim. Coord. of crash northeast Stolberg (Pilot killed).

Pilot of Fw 190 which Btry B shot down at 09.35, left this HQ at 10.30 to be taken to 12th Gp CP (Time in: 10.35).<sup>78</sup>

Before the last gun had ceased firing, AAA units of the Ninth Army had knocked down 90 German aircraft.<sup>79</sup> Let us now return to JG 2 and see how it underwent the ordeal of AAA.

As recounted, Uffz. Hans Wyssola of 2./JG 2 was one of the first victims of the AAA. His 'Black 8' crashed near Eupen.<sup>80</sup> At least seven Fw 190s of I./JG 2 were lost due to AAA over the front line. In fact, the very first victim of I. Gruppe was Fhr. Richard Storkan. The 20-year old pilot of 1./JG 2 reportedly crashed near Elsenborn<sup>81</sup>, but is still posted as missing today. Two more pilots of 1. Staffel were lost as a result of the AAA. Uffz. Otto Dost's Fw 190 A-8 'White 9' received a direct hit and exploded.<sup>82</sup> The aircraft crashed a few kilometres east of Eupen.<sup>83</sup> Uffz. Dost was buried by the Americans at the military cemetery at Henri-Chapelle.<sup>84</sup> His fellow pilot, Uffz. Helmut Breitweg was also hit by light AAA, but was lucky to make a successful belly-landing near Eupen and ended up as a POW.<sup>85</sup> He also flew one of the few remaining Fw 190 A-8s of the Gruppe.<sup>86</sup>

Ogfr. Hubert Schyma of 2./JG 2 also encountered concentrated AAA fire and his Fw 190 D-9 received several hits. Schyma left the formation and baled out near Verviers.<sup>87</sup> Fw. Karl Tscheliesnig, also of 2. Staffel, was hit by light AAA just before reaching Verviers. He dived to port to evade and in doing so his aircraft came into contact with the top of a tree. His engine then caught fire, where upon he pulled up to 180 metres and baled out. His aircraft crashed south-west of Aachen.<sup>88</sup> Fourth Staffel also suffered under the concentrated AAA. Staffelführer Lt. Hans Eisen remembers: "There was Flak ahead and aft of us and there were several direct hits in my Staffel. After that, the formation was completely broken up."<sup>89</sup>

One of the losses was Uffz. Georg Wilkens. The 23-year old pilot was flying between Aachen and Liège when his aircraft received light AAA hits in the engine and wings. His engine immediately caught fire and he then pulled up to 300 metres and baled out. His 'Blue 8' crashed south of Aachen.<sup>90</sup> Uffz. Georg Wilkens became a POW, but unfortunately died from illness in a POW Camp near Dunham Park, England on July 10th 1945.<sup>91</sup> Both Gefr. Werner Piesker and Fhj. Uffz. Wilhelm Eggert of 4./JG 2 are still posted as MIA. Finally it is presumed that Ogfr. Albert Büttner, a 3./JG 2 pilot still listed as MIA, was lost in this area too.

Oblt. Siegfried Lemke's III./JG 2 is believed to have entered the same battle zone a few minutes after I. Gruppe. It too, would lose some ten aircraft due to the intense AAA fire. Uffz. Siegfried Binger of 10./JG 2 was one of the first to be hit. Almost immediately after having crossed the front line and when flying at 45 metres above the top of a hill, Binger's Fw 190 D-9 was hit by light AAA and he baled out. He landed near Kalterherberg, a few kilometres south of Monschau and became a POW.<sup>92</sup> Uffz. Werner Hilbert of 9./JG 2 was hit as soon as he passed the front line. He remembers: "On route to the target I was fired at by Flak and hit; my landing gear extended. I cannot tell whether I was hit by our own or enemy Flak. I think it was enemy flak. I then went into low-level flight with extended landing gear and headed back for Altenstadt. In the vicinity of Frankfurt, near Bonames, the engine suddenly halted. Since my undercarriage had collapsed I could not attempt a crash-landing so I baled out with my parachute, but because of the low altitude it did not fully deploy. I fell on a frozen field, breaking my foot and injuring my head and face. I was taken care of by personnel at the dummy airfield of Bonames on whose grounds I had come down and about two hours later, I was handed over to the Luftwaffe hospital at Frankfurt."<sup>93</sup>

In fact, Uffz. Hilbert was one of the lucky ones. He survived and did not fall into enemy hands. This could not be said of the other losses of III./JG 2 over the area. Uffz. Ernst Klein of 10./JG 2 was hit by AAA and was killed in a crash near Eupen-Binster. Although the crash site of Uffz. Klein is known, his grave location has never been identified. His remains were probably transferred to one of the military cemeteries as an unknown.<sup>94</sup> It is very likely that Fw. Josef Peschak of 10./JG 2 was shot down over the same area. No further details are known, but Peschak was lucky to survive and ended up as a POW.<sup>95</sup> Two pilots were also lost by 11. Staffel. Uffz. Richard Ruppel crashed west of Mützenich, a few kilometres north-west of Monschau, and was killed.<sup>96</sup> Ogfr. Wilhelm Scherwadt was luckier when, after his Fw 190 D-9 'Yellow 8' was hit by light AAA and the engine caught fire, he was able to pull up and bail out. He landed near Eupen and was taken POW.

The worst was to come for 12. Staffel, which would lose four pilots in the area. Uffz. Johann Jäger of 12./JG 2 was shot down near Lontzen, some 12 kilometres south-west of Aachen. Although his remains were identified by the Americans, he was buried as an unknown on the local cemetery of Lontzen.<sup>97</sup> In 1947 Jäger's remains were reburied at Lommel War Cemetery. Fifty years later, when the authors researched Jäger's fate, a document was found which stated that an unknown German pilot killed on January 1st 1945 was buried at the local cemetery of Lontzen. Fortunately, the crashed



Fhnjkr.-Uffz. Wilhelm Eggert of 4./JG 2. Reported missing during Bodenplatte, no trace of him or his Fw 190D-9 has been found. (Eggert)



His first mission was his last. Posted as MIA for more than 55 years, the fate of Uffz. Johann Jäger of 12./JG 2 was finally unravelled by the authors during the late 1990s. He lays at rest in the German military cemetery at Lommel, Belgium. (Grimm)



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fighter's engine serial number was noted; 106.152.2097.<sup>98</sup> This was identified as a Jumo 213 serial number. Presented with this evidence in 1995, the German authorities declared the fate of 19-year old Uffz. Johann Jäger as officially solved in 1996.<sup>99</sup> His relatives could finally be informed of the exact location of his grave.

Three more pilots were lost from 12./JG 2. Uffz. Adolf Redlich is still reported missing; no trace of him or his Fw 190 D-9 'Blue 1' was ever found. Fj.Ofw. Fritz Schuler crashed near Baelen, some five kilometres west of Eupen. Schuler, an experienced pilot, who had already flown 52 missions and claimed five victories, was killed in the crash.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately it is not known what happened to his remains and Schuler is still reported missing. Finally, Uffz. Michael Spiess was shot down near Malmedy. He had been flying at a height of just ten metres when his 'Blue 12' was hit by light AAA. The 24-year old pilot survived the crash and was taken wounded to an American field hospital.<sup>101</sup> It is also believed that Lt. Werner Edelhoff, who flew in the Stab JG 2 which accompanied III./JG 2, was shot down somewhere in the Eupen area. No further reports are known, but it is certain that he became a POW.<sup>102</sup>

This leaves only II./JG 2, which, as mentioned, flew a more westerly course towards Tongres. Crossing the front line near Malmedy, it seems that II. Gruppe encountered slightly less AAA fire than the other two Gruppen. However,

several losses were suffered. As mentioned, the 531st AAA stationed near Malmedy claimed a Messerschmitt as destroyed. This could very well be the Bf 109 G-14 'White 14' flown by Uffz. Helmut Bollwerk of 5./JG 2. The completely burned out wreck of his aircraft was found by Allied troops near Malmedy.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately Bollwerk's grave location could never be traced and the pilot is still posted as MIA. It is very likely that Fw. Fritz Keppler, one of the more experienced pilots of 8./JG 2, was shot down by Allied AAA. Keppler, who flew as Rottenflieger in the Schwarm of Fj.Fw. Querengässer, crashed near Sourbrodt, some eight kilometres north-west of Malmedy, and was killed.<sup>103</sup> The Staffelführer of 8./JG 2, Lt. Lothar Kabbe, also received numerous AAA hits crossing the front line and immediately headed east. He succeeded in making a belly-landing near the Laacher See, west of Andernach. He returned to Nidda after a few days.<sup>105</sup>

Continuing north-west, II./JG 2 encountered further fire near Verviers. These were the batteries of the 602nd and 789th AAA Battalions. Lt. Paul Müngersdorff of 5./JG 2 remembers: "Just before Liege we encountered Flak; it became very heavy over Liège. I later called this part of the flight 'Liège Hell'! This area was probably a flight path for V-1s. A little further west of the city I noticed a burning Messerschmitt go down in a crash-landing."

Ofhr. Rudolf Aickelin's Bf 109 K-4 'Yellow 13' received a direct hit and crashed. The 7. Staffel pilot, who was on his first flight after suffering minor injuries in a landing accident on December 23rd, was killed instantly.<sup>106</sup> Aickelin was buried at the US Military Cemetery Henri-Chapelle. The Messerschmitt of Hptm. Georg Schröder was hit in the radiator by AAA fire and the Gruppenkommandeur was forced to make a belly-landing near Verviers, which he accomplished successfully.<sup>107</sup> Together the 602nd and 789th AAA would claim seven Messerschmitts as Category I claims on January 1st.

By now the JG 2 formation no longer existed and consequently no effective attack on St.Trond was possible. Individually, or in Rotten, the pilots tried to reach their target. Others attacked targets of opportunity in the area. Allied reports are known to state that Fw 190s of JG 2 attacked ground targets in the Eupen area with air-to-air mortars.<sup>108</sup> These are believed to have been Fw 190s from III./JG 2 which were armed with W.Gr. 21 mortars.<sup>109</sup> The reports of pilots who continued the mission towards St.Trond clearly indicate that JG 2's attack had lost its momentum as a result of the heavy AAA fire. In spite of the damage caused by the AAA, pilots of all JG 2 Gruppen tried to reach their designated targets. Of I./JG 2, several pilots attacked an airfield. Lt.



The remains of 5./JG 2 pilot Uffz. Helmut Bollwerk have never been discovered and he is still posted MIA, but there is little doubt that his aircraft crashed in the Malmedy area. (Bollwerk)



Ofhr. Rudolf Aickelin of 7./JG 2. His Bf 109 K-4 received a direct hit from AAA and he was killed. (Aickelin)



Lt. Paul Müngersdorff of 5./JG 2 clearly remembered the 'Hell of Liège.' During his return flight, he was forced to belly-land his aircraft at Godorf, near Köln. (Müngersdorff)

Hans Eisen, Staffelführer of 4./JG 2, remembers: "When we came over St. Trond there were the first signs of ground fire and while attacking we flew directly over a quadruple AAA position. My aircraft was hit several times, in particular my canopy. As a result, I was forced to abandon my attack without hitting any targets and went on a homeward course."<sup>110</sup>

Fw. Werner Hohenberg, the pilot who flew in the Stabsschwarm of Hptm. Hrdlicka, carried through his attack too: "At some point on the flight in, there was a smoke marker designating the front line. While crossing the front as well as over the target we were fired at by light AAA. The aircraft at St. Trond were lined up in rows. The number could not be estimated because each attack only lasted a couple of seconds and all attention was needed for aiming and firing. Also, from the corner of our eyes, we paid attention to flak activity. I think most, if not all, aircraft on the field were hit. The first attack went fine. The second was more confused because of the smoke and fires. In the second attack, my aircraft was hit in the tail assembly. I turned to the left and set course for Germany. Incidentally, at the end of the attack, enemy fighters were over the airfield."<sup>111</sup>

Some pilots of II. and III. Gruppe managed to reach a target too. At least a few Schwärme of II./JG 2 managed to attack an airfield, but were welcomed by heavy AAA fire. After that several of them were involved in aerial combat with Allied fighters.<sup>112</sup> Fj.Fw. Gerhard Querengässer, who led a Schwarm of 8./JG 2, remembers: "On the eastern side of the field we were welcomed by Flak, but it was aimed too high. With my Schwarm, I attacked the southern part of the airfield where aircraft were obviously refuelling. After this attack, I veered to the left and noticed that only my Katschmarek, Uffz. Reinhold Ufer was still with me. We attempted a second attack when we were attacked by Mustangs coming down from about 2,000 metres from the West. Their numerical superiority urged us to abandon the attack and fly back to our base in a low-level southerly flight."<sup>113</sup>

Fhr. Haymo von Grebmer flew one of the Fw 190 D-9s of 9. Staffel which carried the 21cm mortars: "Together with my comrades, I approached the target, the airfield of St. Trond, and attacked aircraft on the ground two or three times with my 21 cm mortars and guns."<sup>114</sup>

The reports of almost all JG 2 pilots who claimed to have attacked St. Trond, mention the presence of enemy fighters, mostly Mustangs, over the field.<sup>115</sup> Numerous pilots reported damage caused by aerial combat after their return.<sup>116</sup> However, no Allied fighters were active over St. Trond on January 1st. Furthermore, from reports available of the attack on St. Trond, it is clear that this airfield was attacked by a force of



approximately eight Fw 190s and Bf 109s of Jagdgeschwader 4. Several of these aircraft were shot down by the AAA of St. Trond and all of them belonged to JG 4 and not to JG 2.<sup>117</sup> Consequently it is believed that most JG 2 pilots actually attacked Asch and Ophoven airfields instead of St. Trond. Mustangs of the 352nd Fighter Group and Thunderbolts of the 366th Fighter Group were present above these airfields. This conclusion is further bolstered by the fact that one Fw 190 D-9 of Lt. Eisen's 4. Staffel was shot down just south of Asch. This was 'Blue 5' piloted by Uffz. Friedrich Optenhostert.<sup>118</sup> Optenhostert was either killed by the Asch AAA defences or shot down by one of the US fighters. In 1992, part of the undercarriage and the Jumo 211A-1 engine of this particular fighter were excavated from a football field at Asch. What remained now was the long journey back home to Frankfurt. The sky was still full of danger.

After their attacks on airfields the Fw 190 D-9s of I./JG 2 headed back east. We continue with the story of Fw. Werner Hohenberg just after he started

Fw. Werner Hohenberg of the Stabsschwarm of I./JG 2. In 1997, he visited the crash site of his Fw 190 D-9. (Hohenberg).

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A dug-in 40 mm Bofors AAA position in the Hürtgenwald area. Heavy losses were suffered in this area, both in the air and on the ground. (Sandager)

his return flight: "Directly after the first hit, my aircraft was hit a second time. Now I experienced some real fireworks. I went full speed into a low-level flight. Above a village in a hilly area I was surrounded by a large number of exploding projectiles, some of which hit the streets and houses. The air was filled with pearl-chains of tracer ammunition. I had barely left the village when the same thing started up all over again. My engine received a hit and I shut down the ignition preparing for a forced landing. Slowly, the engine shut down, the propeller making a few more revolutions. In front of me, there was a fenced meadow. Beyond, there seemed to be a valley. I would not get that far. Thus, I took the risk and

pushed the aircraft towards the ground trying to take some fences, slowing down the approach. Then, I slid into an American AAA position. For a few seconds dirt and little stones fell down on the aircraft. Then there was (glorious) silence. The danger was over. Then my POW days began. American soldiers surrounded me, neither friendly nor unfriendly; maybe a bit curious. MPs took me in a Jeep to a house. There I was questioned by a Major aided by a translator. There was little to say. This interrogation was carried out in a civilised manner. At the next station, a tent in a field, there were already a number of pilots who had been shot down that morning. There was a good mood among the men, probably because they realised they had lived through the war."<sup>19</sup>

In fact Hohenberg had been shot down by 'B' Battery of the 430th AAA Battalion. At 09.35 hrs, his Fw 190 D-9 'C-II' crash-landed near the village of Dorff, a few kilometres south of Stollberg. Three other pilots of I. Gruppe were not so lucky and were all killed in the area south-east of Hürtgenwald. Their aircraft crashed behind German lines. It is not known if these losses occurred on the return flight, but location and time seem to indicate this. At 09.30 hrs, Gefr. Fritz Büscher, a 20-year old pilot of 3./JG 2, crashed 800 metres south of the village of Lückerrath, south-west of Mechernich.<sup>120</sup> Büscher was buried at the local cemetery in Bleibuir. After the war, relatives reburied Büscher in his hometown of Lemgo.<sup>121</sup> Ogfr. Franz Dworak of 3./JG 2 was also killed in this area. His Fw 190 D-9 'Yellow 1' crashed south of Heimbach in the Kermeter area. Although his remains were recovered in 1950, it took until 1995 when German researcher Franz Zimmermann



A pair of GIs inspect Werner Hohenberg's Fw 190 D-9 at Stollberg-Dorff, not far from the AAA position which shot it down. (Hohenberg)



could identify his grave location.<sup>122</sup> Finally, Uffz. Erwin Katzer of 4./JG 2 was killed in a crash near Eicks, a village three kilometres north of Mechernich.<sup>123</sup> Katzer is still listed as MIA.<sup>124</sup> It is believed that only a handful of I. Gruppe pilots returned to Merzhausen directly. One of them was Uffz. Herbert Körber of 3./JG 2. Although his Fw 190 D-9 had been hit during a strafing attack on an AAA unit and a bullet had grazed his left calf, he managed to make a normal landing at Merzhausen. Uffz. Körber was treated by the medical personnel of I./JG 2.<sup>125</sup>

The pilots of II./JG 2 encountered different problems during their return flight. Lt. Paul Müngersdorff, the Staffelführer of 5./JG 2, remembers: "On the return flight I was attacked by enemy fighters. The radio and engine cut out and I had to make a crash-landing at Godorf between Köln and Bonn. My Rottenflieger, Uffz. Erwin Kolmanitsch, landed at Nidda. We were probably attacked by Mustangs."<sup>126</sup>

Uffz. Theo Hartmann of 6./JG 2 had already encountered several problems on his way towards St. Trond. Suffering from a malfunctioning munitions supply indicator he had not been able to arm his guns. To make matters worse, his radio did not work either. Still, he continued and by gesturing, he communicated with Hptm. Schröder, indicating that two systems had failed to switch on. Hptm. Schröder gestured to Uffz. Hartmann that it was safer to continue with the formation than to fly back on his own. So, Hartmann participated in the attack, although he did not fire a shot! His return flight proved to be dangerous too, but for total different reasons: "I turned away, flying southward towards the front line in order to get over our own territory. With malfunctioning weapons and radio, I was unfit for battle and therefore I went into extreme low-altitude flight at mostly below 10 metres towards the Frankfurt area. I felt awkward flying an aircraft without weapons or radio. Ground fog forced me to land at Darmstadt-Griesheim airfield; in addition my fuel was running down. I reported to flight control and was instantly interrogated. Where did I come from and what mission had I flown? They knew about Unternehmen Bodenplatte. The interrogations were carried out by members of the military police and people in civilian clothes, probably secret field police. I was rather terrified at the time because men were ruthlessly transferred to the Luftwaffe field Divisions in Russia for the slightest mis-conduct."<sup>127</sup>

His Bf 109 G-14 was immediately inspected and soon tools were found under the engine cowl and it was noted that the cables to the guns and radio were not connected. Uffz. Hartmann believes that this could only be caused by the nervousness of the mechanics after the

attack on Nidda on December 24th. They probably forgot to inspect his aircraft thoroughly. However, three mechanics were sent to a Luftwaffe Felddivision.<sup>128</sup> Again, only a few pilots returned to Nidda directly. Fj.Fw. Querengässer was one of them: "When we landed, I and Uffz. Ufer were the only two who returned to Nidda. My aircraft had been hit in the left wing and tailplane. In the evening, I was informed that my Rottenflieger Fw. Keppler was probably shot down by Flak."<sup>129</sup>

In fact a few more pilots landed back at Nidda; one of them was Lt. Helmut Wagner of 5./JG 2. Although hit by AAA during an attack on an airfield and slightly injured, he returned with his damaged Bf 109 G-14. He was taken to II./JG 2's sick bay.<sup>130</sup>

III./JG 2 seems to have flown its return flight on a more easterly course coming from the Asch-Ophoven area. Lt. Christfried Clemens of 10./JG 2 was killed when his Fw 190 D-9 crashed near Millen, some four kilometres north-east of Sittard.<sup>131</sup> According to German reports he was shot down by Allied fighters.<sup>132</sup> He may have very well been the victim of F/Lt. Tony Gaze, a pilot of No. 610 Squadron. Stationed at Ophoven he had taken off on a patrol at 08.50 hrs. On his return to base he saw that it had been attacked: "I found myself alone when I got to our base. I was amazed to find several aircraft on fire as was the fuel dump. As I turned round the aircraft a group of 30-plus Fw 190s and Me 109s came by at low level but as we were flying in opposite directions, they had gone a long way by the time I had rolled round and started to chase them. After a short time I saw eight 190Ds in a better position, so turned after them. I caught them just after crossing the River Meuse but, as they were so low, I had trouble shooting because of the slipstreams. After a while they crossed a wood and as they lifted, I was able to get a good burst at one, hit it and the flaps and one undercarriage leg came down. It then crash-landed at high speed. I started after the others for a few seconds then decided I was well into Germany and outnumbered so I climbed away. I was followed to the river by Flak and picked up by American AA when I crossed, so formed up on a Mustang; then they stopped."<sup>133</sup>

Lt. Christfried Clemens – Tony Gaze's victim – was buried at Mierlo War Cemetery and in 1948 reburied at the German military cemetery of Ysselsteyn. In the same area another pilot of III./JG 2 was shot down. In fact it was the Staffelführer of 12./JG 2, Lt. Fritz Swoboda. This 11. Staffel pilot had just returned from a course at the Verbandssführerschule der General der Jagdflieger, when he was appointed Staffelführer of 12./JG 2 on December 27th.<sup>134</sup> Leading the Staffel on January 1st he may have been hit by AAA as his Fw 190 D-9 was seen to fly very low.



Obgr. Franz Dworak of 3./JG 2. He was reported missing on January 1st 1945 and his fate was not resolved until 1996 when his grave was located by the late Franz Zimmermann. (Dworak)



Gefr. Fritz Büscher of 3./JG 2, one of the many young, inexperienced pilots who would not survive January 1st 1945. (Büscher)



Lt. Christfried Clemens of 10./JG 2 poses for the family photograph album. He was killed when his Fw 190 D-9 crashed near the border hamlet of Millen in Germany, some four kilometres north-east of Sittard in the Netherlands.

Swoboda tried to avoid a row of poplar trees, but one of his wings hit a tree and the Focke-Wulf cartwheeled and crashed about a kilometre west of Wassenberg, north-east of Heinsberg.<sup>135</sup> Swoboda was killed immediately. His body was recovered by the 176. Infanterie Division and buried at the local cemetery in Wassenberg.<sup>136</sup>

Lt. Martin Enge of 10./JG 2 was killed when his Fw 190 D-9 'Black 9' crashed two kilometres south-west of Wisskirchen.<sup>137</sup> No further details are known about this crash, but it is assumed he fell victim to Ninth Army AAA units too. Finally, Uffz. Jasper von Schlieffen crash-landed his Fw 190 D-9 on the return flight and was slightly injured.<sup>138</sup> His Focke-Wulf was 50 per cent damaged.

Only a few pilots returned to Ettinghausen or Altenstadt. One of them was Fhr. Haymo von Grebmer. He remembers: "On the return flight I also engaged a column of trucks. I cannot tell anything about the results of my attacks. In order to establish our position we landed in a field, the name of which I cannot remember anymore. We immediately took off again and landed at Altenstadt."<sup>139</sup>

By the afternoon JG 2 was able to make its reckoning. Soon it became clear that the losses had been appalling. I. Gruppe at Merzhausen reported 18 Fw 190s destroyed and a further six damaged by AAA and enemy fighters. This was a staggering 73 per cent of the total force. No fewer than 15 pilots were reported as missing; six of them would survive as POWs. One pilot was wounded by AAA fire. The following day, the

Gruppe could only report 14 Fw 190s operational. II./JG 2 reported five Messerschmitts destroyed and three damaged, 40 per cent of the aircraft that had participated. Personnel losses were four missing and one wounded. Only one of the missing pilots, Hptm. Schröder, the Gruppenkommandeur, became POW. Of the three Fw 190 D-9s of Stab JG 2 one did not return, the pilot became a POW. Finally, III. Gruppe had suffered dearly. At Ettinghausen, Oblt. Lemke had to report 19 Fw 190s destroyed and three damaged. An unbelievable 79 per cent of the whole formation! Nine pilots were killed, four ended up as POW and two more were injured. The 10. Staffel of Lt. Rolf Bischoff was particularly badly hit; it had to report five pilots missing and one injured.<sup>140</sup>

No details are known about the claims of the returning pilots, but these must have been fairly limited. Only a few pilots reached an Allied airfield, but not the designated target of St. Trond. The following day JG 2 could only report 28 aircraft available for operations<sup>141</sup> – an extremely low number for the once proud 'Richthofen Geschwader'.

### Schlachtgeschwader 4 heads west

January 1st 1945: the pilots of III./SG 4 had been on alert since 06.30 hrs. The groundcrew of III. Gruppe managed to get 16 of the Fw 190 F-8s ready for Bodenplatte. Take-off time was set for 08.45–08.50 hrs. The Gruppe had to assemble over the field and fly to a point two kilometres north of Bonn where it was to assemble with Stab SG 4 and I./SG 4. Rendezvous was set for 08.57 hrs. The formation was then to fly west towards a point five kilometres west north-west of Zülpich, where II./SG 4 was to join it at 09.03 hrs. Then the course was set directly for St. Trond.

Even before take-off, III./SG 4 encountered its first problems. The outside temperature was minus 10 °C and although the Gruppe had asked for engine heaters, they still had not arrived. Several BMW engines had problems starting and as a consequence the take-off was delayed. On four Fw 190s the engines did not start at all! Finally at 08.53 hrs some 12 Fw 190 F-8s took off. Two of them returned immediately. Uffz. Hermann Gottschalk of 8./SG 4 suffered an engine failure and had to belly-land his 'Black 11' at Köln-Wahn.<sup>142</sup> A pilot of 7./SG 4 returned to Köln-Wahn as his oil pressure indicated zero.<sup>143</sup>

Kommandeur Maj. Gerhard Weyert continued with his ten remaining Fw 190s south-west towards the assembly point near Bonn when his path was crossed by a strong fighter formation flying north-west. This was actually JG 11 on course towards Asch airfield. To prevent ramming, Maj. Weyert had to push down and entered a thick ground haze in which half his pilots lost contact

Lt. Fritz Swoboda. This long-serving member of JG 2 had just finished his course at the Verbandsführerschule der General der Jagdflieger on December 24th 1944, when he was transferred back to 11./JG 2. On arrival at Altenstadt he was ordered to take over 12./JG 2, because Staffelführer Oblt. Herman Ansel had not returned from a mission on December 26th. (Swoboda)





with the formation. Some of these joined JG 11 instead, while others headed west on their own. After he had lost precious minutes evading the JG 11 formation, Weyert decided to guide the four remaining Fw 190s directly to Zülpich to meet the other Gruppen of SG 4 there. A short distance east of the town, some 25 Fw 190 F-8s in two formations were found circling. Weyert took them for aircraft of I. and II./SG 4 and even recognised some of the machines as II. Gruppe aircraft. The circling continued from 09.05 until 09.15 hrs, meaning that SG 4 was, in fact, already 12 minutes too late. At 09.15 hrs, three Fw 190s, which Weyert believed formed the Stabsschwarm of SG 4, turned east, all other Focke-Wulfs followed in a distance. Also other Fw 190s – believed to be I. and II./SG 4 – that had been circling more to the west of the others, headed east. Weyert now got the impression that the mission was cancelled, but stayed in the area with his Rottenflieger and tried to get in touch with the Geschwader on the ground through R/T. He asked for 'Spätlese', the code word for cancelling the mission, but probably because of the low height of 100-150 metres, he received no reply. At 09.20 hrs, Weyert also returned and as he passed Bonn-Hangelar, he could see several I. Gruppe aircraft in the landing pattern. Maj. Weyert and the other four pilots of III./SG 4 landed at Wahn and immediately Weyert reported back to the Geschwaderstab.<sup>144</sup>

With hindsight, SG 4's attempt to assemble into a large formation was a total failure. The fact that the whole Jagdgeschwader 11 formation crossed SG 4's path near Zülpich at approximately the same time may have contributed to the confusion.<sup>145</sup> However, other mistakes were made. The three Fw 190s seen by Weyert flying east were not Obst. Alfred Druschel's Schwarm as Weyert believed, but more likely the Stabsschwarm of II./SG 4 under command of Hptm. Hans Stollnberger.<sup>146</sup> It is believed that Stab SG 4 and I./SG 4 were circling more to the west. When II./SG 4 headed east, I. Gruppe seemed to have followed and abandoned the mission too. The only pilots left continuing the mission were Obst. Druschel with most likely his Rottenflieger and the five pilots of III./SG 4 who had lost contact with their Gruppenkommandeur in an earlier stage.

It is more than likely that Druschel headed west for St.Trond from Zülpich. In doing so he would have passed the front line near Hürtgen after some 3-4 minutes, some 20 kilometres from Zülpich. This would mean, he could have been over that area around 09.10 hrs. It was in this area that Obst. Druschel was seen for the last time.<sup>147</sup> Several American AAA units were stationed in the Aachen area and all of these batteries opened up when they saw the low-flying German fighters

approaching around 09.10 hrs. Around Hürtgen the 40 mm Bofors batteries of the 445th AAA AW Battalion opened up and in the next half hour, the 445th would claim seven German fighters destroyed.<sup>148</sup> It is not known if one of these was Druschel, but it is not unlikely. Today 27-year old Obst. Alfred Druschel is still listed as MIA. Only a few leads to his fate have been found until now.

A British A.D.I.(K) Report refers to a crash site in the American sector, at which a map was recovered showing a course from Bonn-Hangelar to Zülpich and then to St.Trond.<sup>149</sup> This could only come from an aircraft from Stab SG 4 or I./SG 4. As Obst. Druschel's loss of was the only one incurred by these units, it is clear that this map must have come from the wreck of Druschel's machine. Unfortunately the A.D.I.(K) Report does not list the location of the crash nor does it give any details about any other document. What is certain however, is that the US Army did not identify the crash site or the high rank of its pilot. This would certainly have caught the attention of the Intelligence community!

Another more recently discovered document mentions a crash site near the village of Höfen south of Monschau. The body of a pilot with the rank of Oberst was recovered and buried next to his Fw 190. The date is listed as January 5th 1945.<sup>150</sup> Oberst Alfred Druschel is the only known Oberst lost in that area so it would be reasonable to assume that this must be his crash site. Further investigations are being undertaken, but neither the exact crash location nor grave location had been identified by the end of 2003. The search for Oberst Alfred Druschel will continue.

This leaves us with the five remaining III./SG 4 pilots who continued with their mission although they had lost contact with their Gruppenkommandeur, Maj. Gerhard Weyert. Fj.Fw. Georg Rischbieter and his Rottenflieger Ofw. Hans Schmieder, both of 8./SG 4, headed west on their own and also ended up in AA fire around Aachen. Schmieder's aircraft was hit in the wings and engine by light AAA, as a result of which his engine began to vibrate badly. Schmieder turned to an easterly bearing in an endeavour to reach the German lines, but failed to do so and after pulling up to about 125 metres, baled out and came down behind Allied lines.<sup>151</sup> Rischbieter's Fw 190 was hit by AAA five times in the engine, fuselage and wings and he had to return immediately. He landed safely back at Köln-Wahn.<sup>152</sup>

Fw. Richard Heinz of 7./SG 4 also continued his mission probably linking up with JG 11. Heinz was listed as MIA up to 1997. During the research for this book, a document was discovered that listed a Richard Heinz shot down on January 1st 1945 near Aachen as buried at the US Military Cemetery of Margraten.<sup>153</sup> As a result of



Uffz. Hermann Gottschalk of 8./SG 4. He belly-landed his Fw 190 'Black 11' on Köln-Wahn airfield following an engine-failure. (Gottschalk)



Fw. Richard Heinz of 7./SG 4. He was shot down by Allied AAA near Aachen and was killed. It was not until 1997 that the location of his grave was identified. (Heinz)



this evidence the fate of Fw. Richard Heinz was solved.<sup>154</sup>

The Rotte of Fw. Rupert Rose and Fw. Rudolf Fye, both of 9./SG 4, had joined the JG 11 formation and found itself over Asch airfield. Rose managed to deliver an attack on Asch in which he claimed a Mustang damaged. Immediately after the attack, the Rotte was bounced by four Thunderbolts of the 366th FG. Both the Fw 190s pulled up into the clouds in which the pilots lost sight of each other.<sup>155</sup> However, Fye must have been hit and his Fw 190 F-8 'Brown 12' crashed near the road from Asch to Mechelen-a/d-Maas.<sup>156</sup> His remains were buried at the crash site and in 1952 reinterred at the German War Cemetery of Lommel. Fye's Fw 190 rose considerable interest within Allied Intelligence as rocket projectiles were found at the crash site. It was the first Fw 190 F-8 found with Panzerblitz Pb 1 or M.8 warheads.<sup>157</sup> At least five rocket projectiles were found at the crash site indicating that Fye had not completed his attack. Fw. Rupert Rose escaped from the P-47s and even managed to have a shot at one of the Thunderbolts. He landed back safely at Köln-Wahn at 10.10 hrs.

The fact that only six out of a force of more than 50 Fw 190 F-8s had continued their mission was bad enough, but that four of them did not return was even worse.<sup>158</sup> Nothing however could be compared to the loss of Obst. Druschel, one of the leading Schlachtflieger. Maj. Werner Dörnbrack took over command of SG 4 the same day and led the Geschwader during the few remaining missions in the West and from mid-January during the operations on the Eastern Front.

Finally, what happened to the two 2./NAG 1 pilots who were to join SG 4 in their attack? Harald Lehmann remembers his mission vividly: "I took off at 08.35 hrs with Oblt. Hans Klawen as Rottenführer. This was my third mission. Our orders were to fly with more than 400 fighter-bombers, Fw 190 D-9s, Fw 190 As and Me 109Gs, an attack on a big airfield to the west of Hasselt. We were to take aerial pictures of the attack. Assembly was over Köln, at 09.00 hrs. In low-level flight we headed for Köln. I discovered that my R/T did not function. I could no longer communicate with Oblt. Klawen and could no longer receive messages from ground control. A few moments later my compass went unserviceable. This was a shock as it meant that in a dogfight I could easily lose orientation. Still I continued – nobody wanted to abandon this important mission. At exactly 09.00 hrs the fighter-bombers arrived, over 400 of them, what a magnificent sight! The German Luftwaffe was not exhausted yet. Now we know this was not true, but we did not realise it at that time. We positioned ourselves at the tail of the formation and low on the deck, at 10-20 metres, we headed west. The Maas river was reached and to the

left of us we saw the first explosions – another unit was already attacking their target. I shuddered when I saw that several were shot down.

The enemy AA was terrible. We continued our flight, the Rb 20/30 and 50/30 cameras were already rolling since we crossed the Maas. Only a few more minutes and we should be there. There it is! Oblt. Klawen and I pulled up with emergency power (methanol) to 1200 metres as the fighter-bombers attacked the airfield with bombs and rockets. Soon Oblt. Klawen and I were the only ones over the enemy airfield. The enemy AAA concentrated their fire on us. With emergency power we flew twice over the airfield, our cameras rolling. Now we headed east again, leaving behind a scene of huge fires, explosions and destruction. Over Maastricht we suddenly encountered concentrated AAA fire. We pulled up into the clouds and lost sight of each other. I headed east, straight into the bright sun, which had just broken through. Over Düsseldorf I dropped out of the clouds and following the Rhine valley returned home. During my landing I saw that also Oblt. Klawen came in. Everybody returned safely. It was a big success."<sup>159</sup>

Of course the sight of 400 fighter-bombers seems to be exaggerated. Lt. Lehmann does not recall any confusion within the ranks of Schlachtgeschwader 4. It is assumed that his Rotte also joined the formation of JG 11 and witnessed their attack on Asch and Ophoven. It is further known that aerial pictures of Ophoven were taken on January 1st, most likely these were the pictures taken by Oblt. Klawen and Lt. Lehmann. The fire and explosions may have been the fuel dump at Ophoven, which was set on fire during the attack of JG 11.

### Conclusion

The attack by Jagdgeschwader 2 and Schlachtgeschwader 4 can, in both cases, only be described as a total failure. JG 2 had been decimated over the Ardennes by the concentrated and accurate AAA fire. A large portion of the 43 aircraft destroyed and 12 damaged, fell victim to those AAA units. In fact, half of the attacking force of JG 2 was lost in this operation. Plotting the outward course of JG 2 over the battle zone between Malmedy and Aachen had been a costly mistake. SG 4's attack was never really executed. Looking at their missions in the previous weeks, hardly anything better could be expected. Inadequate training and, without doubt, poor leadership led to miscommunication and calling off the mission before it even had really started.



Fw. Rudolf Fye of 9./SG 4. He was one of the more experienced pilots of III./SG 4 and was one of the few who persevered with the New Year's morning mission. He was shot down by a P-47 of the 366th FG south-east of Asch airfield and buried at the German military cemetery at IJsselsteyn, Holland. (Hempel)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Kurt Bühlingen had joined JG 2 in July 1940 as a Gefreiter!
- <sup>2</sup> Based on RL2-III-880/882, Flugzeugbestand und Bewegungsmeldungen. The Fw 190A-8/R6 was a standard A-8 equipped with the W.Gr. 21.
- <sup>3</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung I./JG 2 and RL2-III-852. Four pilots are still listed as MIA today.
- <sup>4</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 92/1945, point 10.
- <sup>5</sup> RL2-III-880/882.
- <sup>6</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 98/1945, point 9-11.
- <sup>7</sup> RL2-III-852.
- <sup>8</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 36-41.
- <sup>9</sup> Oblt. Albrecht Bellstedt (9./JG 2, DKIG), Lt. Hans Peter Hansen (9./JG 2) and Oblt. Dieter Meister (10./JG 2, DKIG) were killed and Hptm. Hubertus Huy (11./JG 2, DKIG) was wounded.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter Otto Kleinert, dated 16.11.1998.
- <sup>11</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 118/1945, point 12-15.
- <sup>12</sup> Jägerblatt Nr.2/XLIII, page 54.
- <sup>13</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 324/1945, point 80.
- <sup>14</sup> ULTRA-Report 52-HP-8689 and 53-HP-9333.
- <sup>15</sup> A.P.W.I.U. (IX Air Force) 92/1944.
- <sup>16</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 324/1945, point 81.
- <sup>17</sup> Der Reichsmarschall des Großdeutschen Reiches und Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe Nr. 10325/44 g.Kdos. Chef. dated 14.11.1944.
- <sup>18</sup> Militärarchiv Freiburg, RL10/539, Kriegstagebuch III./SG 4 (01.11.1944-20.01.1945).
- <sup>19</sup> Erfahrungsbericht über den Einsatz von Fw 190 mit Pz.-Blitz und M.8, dated 19.12.1944, by Maj. Weyert, Gruppenkommandeur III./SG 4.
- <sup>20</sup> ULTRA-Report 53-HP-9333 and A.P.W.I.U. (IX Air Force) 92/1944.
- <sup>21</sup> A.P.W.I.U. (IX Air Force) 92/1944.
- <sup>22</sup> RL10/464, page K10863. On December 15th I./SG 4 was still at Ziegenhain and II./SG 4 at Kirtorf, ULTRA-Report 54-HP-9520.
- <sup>23</sup> At that time still II./Sch.G. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Based on Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./SG 4. According to German Red Cross files Lt. Walter Schlegel is still listed as MIA today, but strangely his diary was found by US troops. See A.P.W.I.U. (IX Air Force) 92/1944.
- <sup>25</sup> According to A.D.I.(K) Report No. 242A/1945 (point 11), Hptm. Wiesner belonged to the Stab of General der Schlachtfieger.
- <sup>26</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 28/1945.
- <sup>27</sup> Ofw. Lothar Kobuhs is still reported missing today. Only a few months previously Ofw. Kobuhs had been awarded the German Cross in Gold.
- <sup>28</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./SG 4. Ofw. Heinrich Weinreich is still reported MIA today.
- <sup>29</sup> Based on documents Zentralnachweistelle Aachen.
- <sup>30</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 1-8.
- <sup>31</sup> ULTRA-Report 52-HP-8620.
- <sup>32</sup> Letter Gustav-Adolf Waldau to Peter Nolde, dated 22.05.1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde. Uffz. Gustav-Adolf Waldau was pilot in 8./JG 2.
- <sup>33</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 92/1945, point 2.
- <sup>34</sup> ULTRA-Report 57-BT-1595.
- <sup>35</sup> Letter Werner Hohenberg, dated 10.01.1996.
- <sup>36</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 92/1945, point 1-5.
- <sup>37</sup> Letter Hans Wysola, dated 03.07.1998.
- <sup>38</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 92/1945, point 6.
- <sup>39</sup> Interview with Theo Hartmann by Peter Nolde, dated 1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.
- <sup>40</sup> Letter Gerhard Querengässer to Peter Nolde, dated 20.08.1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.
- <sup>41</sup> Letter Gustav-Adolf Waldau to Peter Nolde, dated 22.05.1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.
- <sup>42</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 10.
- <sup>43</sup> Letter Werner Hilbert, dated 05.07.1998.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Haymo von Grebmer by Peter Nolde, dated 02.03.1996.
- <sup>45</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945 indicates that Oblt. Bühlingen did participate, but some pilots of JG 2 recall that he did not participate.
- <sup>46</sup> Letter Otto Kleinert, dated 16.11.1998.
- <sup>47</sup> RL2-III-734, ULTRA-Report 56-BT-1047.
- <sup>48</sup> ULTRA-Report 52-HP-8689.
- <sup>49</sup> Meldung III./SG 4, Auffüllung des E.-Kdos. auf 30 Flugzeuge, dated 25.12.1944.
- <sup>50</sup> Based on RL2-III-880/882, Flugzeugbestand und Bewegungsmeldungen, and RL2-III-734. Included in the number of 152 Fw 190F-8's are 48 that are listed as Geschwader-reserve.
- <sup>51</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-831. Sixteen Fw 190s of which 15 are operational and one Ju 88 are recorded with II./SG 4 on Butzweilerhof on December 30th 1944.
- <sup>52</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 99/1945, point 1-3.
- <sup>53</sup> Gefechtsstand III./SG 4, Erfolgsbericht Nr. vom 1. Januar 1945.
- <sup>54</sup> Private notes Oblt. W.Kohla, forwarded by Heinz Jirousek.
- <sup>55</sup> From "Meine Erlebnisse bei der deutschen Wehrmacht", private notes of Harald Lehmann, forwarded by Heinz Jirousek.
- <sup>56</sup> Letter Werner Hohenberg, dated 10.01.1996.
- <sup>57</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 110/1945, point 1-2.
- <sup>58</sup> Letter Gustav-Adolf Waldau, dated 22.05.1996.
- <sup>59</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 13-17.
- <sup>60</sup> Letter Gerhard Querengässer to Peter Nolde, dated 20.08.1996.
- <sup>61</sup> Courtesy of Peter Nolde.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview with Theo Hartmann by Peter Nolde, dated 1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.
- <sup>63</sup> Letter Werner Hilbert, dated 05.07.1998.
- <sup>64</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./JG 2.
- <sup>65</sup> ULTRA-Report 57-BT-1595. Take-off time is given as 07.28 hrs (GMT). Namentliche Verlustmeldung of I./NJG 4 says take-off at 08.28 hrs.
- <sup>66</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./JG 2 and letter Oblt. Werner Rossbach, Staffelführer 11./JG 2, dated 10.01.1945.
- <sup>67</sup> Letter Werner Hohenberg, dated 17.02.1996.
- <sup>68</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 118/1945, point 3.
- <sup>69</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 118/1945, point 4, and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 93/1945, point 4.
- <sup>70</sup> This based on the crash location of the losses of each individual Gruppe.
- <sup>71</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 18, Report No. 92/1945, point 2.
- <sup>72</sup> Mission Report 50th Fighter Group, 1 January 1945, and Mission Report 10th Fighter Squadron, 1 January 1945.
- <sup>73</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung I./NJG 4, RL2-III-1172/41, RL2-III-766/98, burial information from VDK-Kassel and information on Lt. Erhard Düttmann from Bundesarchiv Aachen.
- <sup>74</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 18.
- <sup>75</sup> Letter Hans Wysola, dated 03.07.1998.
- <sup>76</sup> The area to the east of Liège was known as Buzz Bomb Alley by the Allies; large quantities of AAA protected the city of Liège from the ever-present danger of imminent V-1 attacks (also known as 'Doodlebug and 'Buzz Bomb' because of its characteristic sound).
- <sup>77</sup> S2 Journal 531st AAA (Aw) Bn via Robert Sandager
- <sup>78</sup> Correspondence with Robert Sandager 1996
- <sup>79</sup> CABN-430-0.3, CABN-430-3, I A/A and S3 Unit Reports Jun 44 - May 45. The coordinates of each crash site have been changed to the approximate area for readability.
- <sup>80</sup> Ninth Army AAA by Col. John G. Murphy in Anti-aircraft Journal May-June 1949.
- <sup>81</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945.
- <sup>82</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945. However, the crash site near Elsenborn could not be conclusively identified.
- <sup>83</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung Uffz. Otto Dost, 1./JG 2.
- <sup>84</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 122A/1945.
- <sup>85</sup> Report of Burial Y-10-191. Reburied at Lommel War Cemetery in 1947.
- <sup>86</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 98/1945.
- <sup>87</sup> Schwarze 11, in fact a 2. Staffél aircraft.
- <sup>88</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 93/1945.
- <sup>89</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 110/1945. Interesting is that after take-off from Merzhausen Fw. Tscheliesnig noted that his undercarriage did not retract. He returned to Merzhausen where repairs were hastily carried out and took off again, catching up with the I./JG 2 formation over Koblenz. The loss reports indicates he flew a Fw 190D-9 'Blue 9' as the A.D.I.(K) report indicates he flew a Fw 190A-8 'Yellow 17'. No explanation could be given for this.
- <sup>90</sup> Letter Hans Eisen, dated February 1996.
- <sup>91</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 92/1945 and letter Lt. Hans Eisen dated 16.01.1945.
- <sup>92</sup> Letter Obw. Hans Doneck, Lagerführer Camp Nr. 189, dated 26.06.1946.
- <sup>93</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 118/1945 and letter Siegfried Binger, dated 18.6.1996.
- <sup>94</sup> Letter Werner Hilbert, dated 05.07.1998.
- <sup>95</sup> Based on documentation forwarded by Frau Blasius, sister of Uffz. Ernst Klein. Uffz. Klein was declared dead on 2.5.1958.
- <sup>96</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, dated 17.07.1996.
- <sup>97</sup> Files VDK-Kassel and letter Franz Zimmermann, dated 5.4.1996. His grave is at the Military Cemetery Vossenack.
- <sup>98</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 121/1945.
- <sup>99</sup> Burial files village of Lontzen, VDK-Kassel.
- <sup>100</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, dated 06.08.1996.
- <sup>101</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 122C/1945 and letter Lt. Rudolf Grief, Staffelführer 12./JG 2, dated 10.01.1945.
- <sup>102</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 120/1945.
- <sup>103</sup> Werner Edelhoff passed away in 1972.
- <sup>104</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945.
- <sup>105</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945. Fw. Fritz Keppler was first buried in Henri-Chapelle, later reburied at Lommel and finally in 1947 reburied in Vienna/Austria.
- <sup>106</sup> Letter Lothar Kabbe to Peter Nolde, dated 4.6.1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.
- <sup>107</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung 5./JG 2.
- <sup>108</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 89/1945, point 19.
- <sup>109</sup> Air Ministry Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 281, dated 20th January 1945, page 34.
- <sup>110</sup> From available sources it is known that Fhr. von Grebmer (9.), Uffz. Hilbert (9.), Uffz. Binger (10.) and Ofgr. Scherwadt (11.) flew with W.Gr. 21 cm mortars. All of these pilots belonged to III./JG 2.
- <sup>111</sup> Letter Hans Eisen, dated February 1996.

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

<sup>111</sup> Letter Werner Hohenberg, dated 10.01.1996.

<sup>112</sup> Letter Lt. Paul Müngersdorff to relatives of Uffz. Helmut Bollwerk, dated 18.1.1945.

<sup>113</sup> Letter Gerhard Querengässer to Peter Nolde, dated 20.08.1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Haymo von Grebmer by Peter Nolde, dated 02.03.1996.

<sup>115</sup> Fw. Werner Hohenberg, Lt. Paul Müngersdorff and Fj.Fw. Querengässer reported Allied aircraft, mostly Mustangs over the field.

<sup>116</sup> According to RL2-III-852 at least seven aircraft were destroyed and six damaged in aerial combat.

<sup>117</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>118</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945 and Report of Burial US Cemetery Margraten, Grave I-2-42.

<sup>119</sup> Letter Werner Hohenberg, dated 10.01.1996.

<sup>120</sup> Report of Ortskommandantur Lückerrath, dated 2.1.1945.

<sup>121</sup> Letter Ewald Bischer, dated 23.3.1997.

<sup>122</sup> Gefr. Franz Dworak is buried at the Military Cemetery of Kloster Mariawald, grave 432. Letter Franz Zimmermann, dated 5.4.1996.

<sup>123</sup> Information from Axel Paul.

<sup>124</sup> Although the grave location of Uffz. Katzer on Mariawald military cemetery is known, his fate has not yet been officially closed. Hopefully this will be done in the near future.

<sup>125</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung I./JG 2.

<sup>126</sup> Letter Paul Müngersdorff, dated 19.05.1995.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Theo Hartmann by Peter Nolde, dated 1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Theo Hartmann by Peter Nolde, dated 1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.

<sup>129</sup> Letter Gerhard Querengässer to Peter Nolde, dated 20.08.1996. Courtesy of Peter Nolde.

<sup>130</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./JG 2.

<sup>131</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 122B/1945 and Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 266, dated 21st February 1945.

<sup>132</sup> RL2-III-1197/142.

<sup>133</sup> Letter Anthony Gaze.

<sup>134</sup> Letter Lt. Fritz Swoboda, dated 29.12.1944 and letter Hptm. Hubertus Huy, dated 21.3.1945.

<sup>135</sup> Information of Willi Brudermanns, Karken.

<sup>136</sup> Letter Hptm. Schuster, stellv. Kdr. III./JG 2, dated 1.3.1945.

<sup>137</sup> Burial files at the VDK-Kassel and letter Deutsche Dienststelle, dated 17.7.1996.

<sup>138</sup> RL2-III-1197/94. Uffz. von Schlieffen was later killed in March 1945.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Haymo von Grebmer by Peter Nolde, dated 02.03.1996.

<sup>140</sup> Losses based on RL2-III-734 and Namentliche Verlustmeldungen Jagdgeschwader 2.

<sup>141</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-1061.

<sup>142</sup> Uffz. Hermann Gottschalk was later reported missing in February 11, 1945.

<sup>143</sup> Untersuchungsbericht über die zurückgebliebenen und vorzeitig umgekehrten Flugzeuge der III./SG 4 für den Einsatz "Varus" am 1.1.1945. Werfikommando I/112/XI, 1.1.1945.

<sup>144</sup> III./SG 4, Gefechtsstand: Meldung über den Einsatz "Varus" am 1.1.1945 von Maj. Gerhard Weyert.

<sup>145</sup> SG 4 was to assemble at 09.03 hrs and JG 11 passed Zülptch around 09.06 hrs.

<sup>146</sup> Perhaps this can be linked to the fact that Hptm. Hans Stollnberger was replaced by Hptm. Josef Berlage as Gruppenkommandeur around January 11, 1945 and had to take over a lower position as Staffelfkapitän of 8./SG 10. However, according to another source Hptm. Hans Stollnberger made a belly landing near Mönchengladbach. No evidence for a damaged Fw 190F-8 of II./SG 4 could be found in any loss records.

<sup>147</sup> DRK-Suchdienst and Namentliche Verlustmeldung Stab SG 4.

<sup>148</sup> CABN-445-0.1, CABN-445-0.3 A/A Rpt, and S3 Jnl. Jun 44 Apr 45.

<sup>149</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 77. Also in AMWIS Report No. 287, page 51.

<sup>150</sup> Anlage 2 zu Kdo g I Org./Is (I) Nr. 290/44 g.

<sup>151</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 99/1945, point 3.

<sup>152</sup> Gefechtsstand III./SG 4, Erfolgsbericht Nr. vom 1. Januar 1945.

<sup>153</sup> Report of Burial I-1-15.

<sup>154</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle dated 19.03.1997.

<sup>155</sup> Letter of Lt. Karl-Ludwig Klepke, Staffelfkapitän of 9./SG 4, to Mrs. Fye dated 13.01.1945.

<sup>156</sup> Letter Red Cross to Mrs. Fye dated 3.2.1947.

<sup>157</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 dated 16.02.1945.

<sup>158</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 324/1945, point 82.

<sup>159</sup> From 'Meine Erlebnisse bei der deutschen Wehrmacht', private notes of Harald Lehmann, forwarded by Heinz Jirousek.



# B-78 Gets Clobbered

## Jagdgeschwader 3 hits Eindhoven



Jagdgeschwader 3 'Udet' was one of the oldest Jagdgeschwader. Since June 1944, JG 3 had been led by Major Heinz Bär, one of the most controversial personalities of the Luftwaffe, but also one of its best formation leaders.

**D**URING the Allied Invasion in Normandy, Major Bär's Stab JG 3 operated in France. Having led several Gruppen of different Geschwader, Stab JG 3 returned to Germany in September 1944 and took over command of the JG 3 Gruppen in the Reichsverteidigung, with the exception of II./JG 3, which was withdrawn from operations on November 25th and was renamed in I./JG 7 for re-equipping with the Me 262. In early December a new II./JG 3 was established out of the core of II./KG 1, but the Gruppe would not be operational until the beginning of February 1945. During the last months of 1944, JG 3 would be operating with I., III. and IV./JG 3. Before coming to their operations in December and the preparations for the attack on New Years Day, it is appropriate to offer a brief summary of the operations of each Gruppe in the autumn of 1944.<sup>1</sup>

After its retreat from France at the end of June, I./JG 3 moved to Gütersloh and there it received a full contingent of aircraft – all Bf 109 G-6/AS variants. July was used to train the newly arrived pilots and by the end of the month, I./JG 3 entered combat again in the Reichsverteidigung. In August, the unit flew numerous missions, mainly in defence of the oil industry. In general, losses were high and results poor. In September, the Gruppe supported the German defences during 'Market Garden', returning to its Reichsverteidigung duties on September 27th. By this time the Gruppe was reduced to 30 operational aircraft and no more than nine fully operational pilots! However, instead of withdrawing the unit from front line duty to give it time to recover from its losses and to re-equip as with many other Reichsverteidigung Gruppen, I./JG 3 remained operational. However, during the month of October only a



Major Heinz Bär, the distinguished Kommodore of JG 3 and one of the Luftwaffe's finest formation leaders and tacticians flew the Bodenplatte mission in an Fw 190 D-9. (Eddie Creek)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



limited number of missions were flown. New aircraft and new young pilots were flooding in and by the beginning of November 1944, the Gruppe reached its maximum strength of 80 Bf 109s, mainly G-14/AS, and 64 pilots. High losses during the operations of November and early December reduced the strength of the Gruppe considerably. Some 43 Messerschmitts were lost and a further 22 damaged. Twenty-two pilots were killed, including two Kommandeure, and eight wounded. Results had been very poor, only on December 12th some success was achieved when I./JG 3 attacked a Lancaster formation without fighter escort and during which 13 bombers were shot down.

On December 16th, I./JG 3 was based at Paderborn airfield, some four kilometres south of the city.<sup>2</sup> The Gruppe was now led by Oblt. Alfred Seidl, an experienced former NCO pilot who had accumulated 30 victories, all with JG 53. The Staffelführer were also former NCO pilots with considerable experience. 1./JG 3 was led by Lt. Fritz Mrotzeck (18+ victories), 2. Staffel by Lt. Walter Brandt (38 victories), 3. Staffel by Lt. Theodor Kaiser (22+ victories) and finally 4. Staffel by Lt. Franz Ruhl (37 victories). Lt. Brandt and Lt. Ruhl had been awarded the Ritterkreuz. The Gruppe's first mission was on December 17th. Two P-47s were shot down, but unfortunately Lt. Mrotzeck was reported as missing<sup>3</sup> and Lt. Kaiser baled out of his aircraft and had to be taken to hospital. After losing two of his Staffelführer, Oblt. Seidl was forced to put Fw. Arnold Bringmann (1./JG 3) and Fw. Theodor Schmitt (3./JG 3) in charge of the Staffeln as no experienced officers were available within the Gruppe.<sup>4</sup> A further mission on December 24th made the situation even worse as the popular Lt. Franz Ruhl, Staffelführer of 4./JG 3, was shot down over the Ardennes and reported missing.<sup>5</sup> He

was replaced by Ofw. Friedrich Hameister, who had joined 4. Staffel at the end of December!<sup>6</sup> Hameister had no experience as a fighter pilot and the fact that he was given command of 4. Staffel is a clear sign of the desperate shortage of experienced formation leaders within the Luftwaffe. However, things grew even worse when, next day, Lt. Walter Brandt was injured in a take-off accident. Now Seidl had no other officers in the Gruppe and all four Staffeln were led by NCOs! Following the mounting losses in the second half of December the strength of I./JG 3 had been further reduced. On the evening of December 31st, I./JG 3 reported 22 out of 30 available Messerschmitts operational.<sup>7</sup> Of the 35 pilots available, 18 were combat ready and a further 14 with restrictions.<sup>8</sup>

On August 31st 1944, III./JG 3, under command of Hptm. Karl-Heinz Langer<sup>9</sup>, retreated from France to Germany. The Gruppe was in a poor state and in fact only a few pilots returned from France. On September 22nd the Gruppe was finally withdrawn from operations and in early October, the remains of the unit gathered in Esperstedt, some 34 kilometres south-east of Nordhausen. During its three months of operations over the Western Front losses had been horrendous. No fewer than 56 pilots – almost a complete Gruppe – had been killed during the operations. Another 23 were wounded and four were taken POW. Beside the Gruppenkommandeur and the three Staffelführer, only five other pilots returned without injuries. Around these men, a new III./JG 3 was to be built over the following weeks. Lt. Oskar Zimmermann (28 victories) was Kapitän of 9./JG 3, Lt. Hans-Ulrich Jung (15 victories) of 10./JG 3, Hptm. Raimund Koch (26 victories) of 11./JG 3 and the new 12./JG 3 was led by Oblt. Eberhard Fischler Graf von Treuberg (20 victories). The Gruppe received 70 new Bf 109 G-14s and



freshly trained pilots joined the Gruppe. On November 2nd 11. Staffel suffered a big loss when Hptm. Raimund Koch's aircraft was rammed by his wingman during a training flight and both were killed in the crash. Fw. Curt Clemens would lead the Staffel until a replacement for his Kapitän arrived. On November 24th, the Gruppe was declared fit for operations again and transferred to Schachten airfield, north-west of Kassel. During their first operation on December 2nd, six Messerschmitts were lost with four pilots killed and two wounded. One of the fallen pilots was the newly-appointed Kapitän of 11. Staffel, 26-year old Lt. Karl-Heinz Willeke.<sup>10</sup> On December 16th, III./JG 3 moved with 45 Messerschmitts to Bad Lippspringe, a few kilometres north-east of Paderborn.<sup>11</sup> On the following day, the Gruppe flew the first mission in support of the Ardennes offensive. The missions over the Ardennes proved to be very dangerous. In the period of December 17th-31st, III./JG 3 lost 15 pilots killed and six wounded. Twenty-five Bf 109s were destroyed and another 13 damaged. Only 13 Allied aircraft were shot down.<sup>12</sup> On December 31st III. Gruppe had only 24 Messerschmitts left of which 17 were operational. Of 44 available pilots, 26 were ready to fly the mission of January 1st.<sup>13</sup>

IV. Gruppe, or the 'Sturmgruppe' as it was also known, was equipped with the Fw 190 A-8/R-2

heavy fighter. The Gruppe had his origins in the Sturmstaffel 1 and the former IV./JG 3 equipped with Messerschmitts and had been involved in the bitter Reichsverteidigung missions of the summer and autumn of 1944. Although not withdrawn from operations completely, the Gruppe flew only a few missions in October 1944 and during that month received a considerable number of new Fw 190s. On November 2nd, the Gruppe flew the first mission and although 21 B-17s were claimed, the Sturmgruppe lost no fewer than ten pilots killed and an additional five wounded. Among those killed was Oblt. Werner Gerth, the Kapitän of 14. Staffel. With 22 four-engine bombers to his credit, Gerth had been one of the most successful pilots of the Sturmgruppe. Following these heavy casualties and due to fuel shortage, the Gruppe flew no further operations until the end of November. On November 19th the Gruppe transferred to Störmede, some 25 kilometres south-west of Paderborn. On December 2nd the Gruppe flew its next operation against the USAAF bombers and succeeded in reaching a formation of the 2nd Bomb Division. In total 22 Liberators were claimed to have been shot down.<sup>14</sup> After its attack the Gruppe was set upon by P-51s and in this dogfight eight Focke-Wulfs were shot down. Among the four pilots killed was one of the Staffelf kapitäne, Oblt. Wilhelm-Erich Volkmann of 16./JG 3. No

Pilots of 14. (Sturm)/JG 3 in the autumn of 1944 at Schafstätt. From left to right: Uffz. Heinz Bake (WIA 14.1.1945), Uffz. Herbert Leuchtenberger (KIA 27.12.1944), Uffz. Ortwin Streiter (KIA 2.11.1944), Uffz. Ewald Rusch (MIA 27.12.1944), Ogfr. Rudolf Bertoche, Uffz. Raab (MIA 1.5.1945), Uffz. Heinz Gaspers (MIA 25.12.1944), Lt. Gotthard Glaubig (KIA 27.12.1944), Lt. Helmut Beckmann (KIA 4.1945), Fw. Gerhard Leipholz (KIA 1.1.1945), Uffz. Werner Schanz (MIA 3.3.1945), Uffz. Oskar Bösch, Uffz. Helmut Keune (KIA 14.1.1945). (Boesch)





Fw. Gerhard Leipholtz of 14. (Sturm)/JG 3. (Wöhrle)



Lt. Siegfried Müller. On January 1st 1945, he was Staffelführer of 16. (Sturm)/JG 3 and acting Kommandeur of IV. (Sturm)/JG 3. During Bodenplatte, he led JG 3 towards Eindhoven. He is seen here wearing his Deutsches Kreuz in Gold which he received early 1945. (Müller)

missions were flown over the next two days. On December 5th Major Wilhelm Moritz left the Gruppe and was replaced by Hptm. Hubert-York Weydenhammer.<sup>15</sup>

In the afternoon of December 16th the Gruppe transferred to Gütersloh airfield. From here IV./JG 3 would take part in the Ardennes offensive. Over the following days several missions were flown and eight Allied fighters were shot down for the loss of five Fw 190s. One pilot was killed and another one wounded. On December 23rd, the weather improved considerably and the Allied Air Forces entered the battle in full strength. IV./JG 3 took off at 11.20 hrs. Flying west of Bonn, the Gruppe intercepted a B-26 Marauder formation and claimed 30 American machines shot down for the loss of six aircraft and two pilots! Fw. Gerhard Leipholtz, a pilot of 14. Staffel wrote: "On the 23rd, we flew a mission over the front and met a formation of 30 twin-engined American bombers without fighter protection. After a few minutes all lay burning on the ground. I was able to shoot down two of these terror machines. On Christmas Eve, Galland visited us and told us that we were the most successful Jagdgruppe in the West!"<sup>16</sup>

This would be one of IV./JG 3's last successes of 1944. A total of 72 B-26 Marauders were claimed by the Luftwaffe.<sup>17</sup> Forty-two B-26s were lost but a further 182 were damaged, some never to fly again. The commander of IX BD, Gen. Anderson, was shocked by the staggering losses and requested that the Eighth AF and RAF Bomber Command should attack Luftwaffe airfields. His request was granted and the airfields were attacked on December 24th.<sup>18</sup> The next day IV./JG 3 attacked a B-17 formation over Allied territory and claimed at least eight Fortresses for the loss of six Focke-Wulfs. One pilot was killed and five pilots who had baled out were taken as POW. Some time later the Gruppe was involved in a combat with Typhoons

of which four were shot down. Unfortunately Hptm. Wolfgang Kosse, Kapitän of 13. Staffel was lost in this battle and is still posted as missing. On December 25th in a similar action the Gruppe claimed one B-24 and four P-47s. However, during its attack on the B-24 formation, IV./JG 3 was surprised by P-51s and losses were severe. Nine Fw 190s were lost with five pilots killed and two captured. One of the losses was Kommandeur Hptm. Hubert-York Weydenhammer who was shot down near Liege and is still listed as MIA. Lt. Siegfried Müller, the Staffelführer of 16./JG 3, was to act as CO until a replacement for Hptm. Weydenhammer arrived. Oblt. Heinrich Schulenburg, a former nightfighter pilot of NJG 4, took over 13./JG 3.<sup>19</sup>

During the remaining days of December, IV./JG 3 flew several missions over the front with minimal result. Nine more Focke-Wulfs were lost and seven pilots killed, one of them Lt. Gotthard Glaubig, Staffelführer of 14./JG 3. Lt. Karl-Heinz von den Steinen, one of the more experienced officers within the Staffel, replaced him.<sup>20</sup> By December 31st the strength of the Gruppe had been reduced to 30 Focke-Wulfs of which 19 were operational. Still some 46 pilots were available within the Gruppe of which 33 were ready for operations.

### Eindhoven airfield in December

The Allies liberated Eindhoven airfield (B-78) on September 18th 1944 when they advanced north from Belgium in support of Operation 'Market Garden'. The airfield had seen little use by the Luftwaffe over the past two weeks and, in fact, it was found to be in reasonably good condition when captured. The hastily retreating Germans had had no time to mine the area and it was on 21st September that the quartermasters of the new occupants arrived. Only one day later, the first two



Guided by a wing-riding 'erk', a bombed-up Typhoon of No. 440 Squadron heads out for another mission. (Fochuk)



squadrons of No. 124 Wing flew in. The squadrons settled on the north-west area of the airfield; having first pick they naturally made sure that their aircraft were best dispersed. The sorely-tested men of the Second Tactical Air Force were quite pleased with the former permanent Luftwaffe airfield. They enjoyed the luxury of dispersed taxiways, hard standings, brick buildings and even squadron huts. Before too long, two more squadrons of Typhoons settled in and now the Wing was complete, comprising Nos. 137, 181, 182 and 247 Squadrons.

The Canadians made their home on the south-east side of the airfield. They used the dispersal area in front of the old German hangars. No. 143 Wing also boasted four squadrons of Typhoons: Nos. 168, 438, 439 and 440 Squadrons. However, Eindhoven was a large airfield; it would also accommodate No. 39 (Recce) Wing consisting of three squadrons of Spitfires and Mustangs: Nos. 400, 414 and 430 Squadrons. They moved to the north-east side of the field, along the unserviceable runway and close to the Beatrix-Canal. Due to limited space they were 'dispersed' in line. Ever since Normandy, there had been little or no Luftwaffe activity over the airfields so there was no reason to worry.

Besides these three wings, there were also No. 403 R&SU and some transport and communication flights. They were located at the end of the disused east-west runway. In addition there were some Bostons, a Hudson, a Hurricane and at least one B-17 undergoing repair after an emergency landing. Eindhoven, and specifically No. 143 Wing dispersal, was the most crowded target on the Bodenplatte target list.

In the months preceding Bodenplatte, the Eindhoven-based pilots were extremely busy with

ground support, tactical reconnaissance and artillery reconnaissance missions in support of the rapidly advancing ground forces. When not flying, the pilots would enjoy Jeep ride competitions to the Officer's Mess housed in the nearby Valkenswaard golf club. By November, winter had settled in and it would prove to be one of the hardest on the Continent. In most extreme weather conditions, Hitler started the Ardennes offensive in the middle of December and the Eindhoven squadrons would be heavily involved in stopping the German advance. To bolster the defences against the V-1 threat some of the AAA units were withdrawn south, but there were still four RAF Regiment Squadrons on guard, equipped with 40 mm Bofors and .303 Bren guns. The defences were made up of Nos. 2703, 2773, 2806 and 2817 Squadrons. On New Year's Eve most of the men at Eindhoven enjoyed well-deserved parties with the prospect of a rapid end to the war.

### JG 3's initial preparations on New Year's Eve

Some interesting details about the preparation of I./JG 3 can be learned from the logbook of Gefr. Horst Teschke of 3./NJG 101. Teschke was Bordschütze in the crew of Ofw. Bertsch and Uffz. Kühndel and they were to be the Lotse for I./JG 3. On December 6th this crew flew from Ingolstadt to Paderborn where they landed at 08.02 hrs. The following day, a comparison flight was flown to match the speed of the Ju 88 with that of a Bf 109. On December 20th formation flying was tried out during a 30-minute flight.<sup>21</sup> No more flying was undertaken after that until January 1st. This was probably to prevent the risk of a damaged aircraft.

The rocket-firing Hawker Typhoon was a fearsome machine, but a great number were shot up on the ground at Eindhoven. These examples belong to No. 137 Squadron. (Barnes)

Lt. Siegfried Müller  
(centre, front row) with  
other pilots of  
IV.(Sturm)/JG 3.  
(Müller/Mombeek)



It can be assumed that at least Major Heinz Bär, as Kommodore of JG 3, was present during the meeting of II. Jagdkorps in the afternoon of December 5th. However, there is no absolute proof and his logbook gives no clue to his whereabouts on this day.<sup>22</sup> It is also unknown if any of the Gruppenkommandeure attended the meeting at Flammersfeld, but if so, only Major Langer still held the position of Kommandeur by the end of December. According to Major Bär's logbook, he flew to I. Gruppe at Paderborn on December 18th but apparently he only inspected the Gruppe.<sup>23</sup> It seems certain that none of the Staffelkapitäne, let alone the pilots itself, were informed of the upcoming operation before the last day of December. On that day, the Kommandeure addressed their pilots in separate meetings and initial briefings were given.

At Gütersloh, Lt. Siegfried Müller, the acting CO of IV./JG 3, told his pilots that an attack on Allied airfields in Holland and Belgium was to take place the following morning and men were ordered to avoid alcohol that night.<sup>24</sup> Fw. Oskar Bösch, an experienced pilot<sup>25</sup> of 14. Staffel, remembers: "On the eve of December 31st, we were informed that we were not allowed to take part in the festivities of New Year's eve. At 10 o'clock we had to go to bed. As we were staying in private quarters in town, all contact with civilians was forbidden. We were not told what was going on, but we assumed something special was planned."<sup>26</sup>

At Paderborn all available I. Gruppe pilots gathered in the officer's mess.<sup>27</sup> At about 18.00 hrs they were briefed by Oblt. Alfred Seidl. The mission

was to attack Eindhoven airfield and pilots were told that it was a 'big show' in which the whole of the Geschwader and many others would participate. Pilots had no special briefing but were asked to refrain from too much celebration on New Year's Eve. However, the pilots were forbidden to leave the airfield.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the other Gruppen of JG 3, the pilots of I./JG 3 were informed of their target of the next day and each pilot received a detailed map on which the route of the flight was already marked. They were shown air photographs of Eindhoven airfield, and it was stated that they would find Allied fighter aircraft parked there.<sup>29</sup>

Several sources indicate that Gilze-Rijen airfield and a landing strip south-west of Eindhoven had to be attacked by JG 3. This seems to be based on a single captured map of a shot down I. Gruppe pilot. Allied intelligence officers believed that they may have been included in the original planning on which the map was based, but that they were subsequently abandoned as targets. No surviving JG 3 pilot nor any of the interrogated pilots knew anything about such alternative targets. Furthermore, a landing ground south-west of Eindhoven is unknown.<sup>30</sup>

As stated, the briefing of III./JG 3 followed the lines of the IV. Gruppe. Major Langer addressed his pilots and informed them that a 'Sondereinsatz' would take place the next morning, that all pilots were forbidden to consume alcohol and that they were not allowed to leave their quarters. No further briefing was given until the next day. Michael Vogl, at that time a 24-year old pilot in 10./JG 3, remembers a further briefing by his Staffelkapitän:



Fw. Oskar Bösch of  
14.(Sturm)/JG 3  
photographed in  
December 1944.  
(Boesch)



"On the evening of December 31st, Lt. Jung called the pilots of his Staffel to his room. He informed us of the upcoming attack of New Year's Day, but gave no details about the target. He had, so he told, contributed 1000 Mark to the Staffel funds that were to be spent on alcohol if he was killed. He was sure that he would not return and he would lose his life during the mission. He informed us that one Schwarm of 10./JG 3 would participate and he named the pilots who would fly. At the end he raised his glass and he toasted the success of the mission. For security reasons we were not allowed to leave the building and were ordered to go to bed immediately."<sup>31</sup>

Attending the briefing of III./JG 3 were also the pilots of Stab JG 3, including Major Bär. The Geschwaderstab and the pilots of the Stabsschwarm were billeted in the village of Schlangen, the Fw 190 A-9s of Stab JG 3 were stationed at a landing strip on the military training ground Sennelager.<sup>32</sup> Gefr. Bodo Siegfried was a pilot in the Stabsschwarm and he remembers: "On December 31st we received orders that we were not to leave our quarters. Around 18.00 hrs we gathered in a barrack at the airfield. It was cold and light snow covered the earth. During the briefing all doors were locked. First we were ordered that the information we would receive was highly confidential and that we were not allowed to talk about it. Then the operational order came: we were to fly in the direction of the Dutch border at dawn, guided by a Ju 88. We did not receive any details about the target. After the briefing we were ordered to return to our quarters and to go to bed immediately and were not allowed to take part in any festivities. Our groundcrew were ordered to take care of our aircraft, which were standing in the open, and get them ready for the operation."<sup>33</sup>

Another pilot of the Stabsschwarm was Uffz. Erich Miedl. Miedl, a young pilot of 15. Staffel, had been reassigned to the Stabsschwarm on December 28th. He remembers: "In the late afternoon of December 31st Kommodore Major Bär and his pilots of the Stabsschwarm drove to Lippspringe for a briefing with III./JG 3. The Gruppe was to fly a special operation in the early morning of January 1st. The Stabsschwarm of JG 3, without its Kommodore, was to join the formation of III./JG 3. Our Schwarm, led by the Rottenführer, was to join the Schwarm of Lt. Jung, Staffelführer of 10./JG 3. During the outward flight, which was to be flown at low level, the Gruppe would be led by a Ju 188 Lotse until the front line was reached. Over the front line the Ju 188 would switch on red signal lights to indicate that the Gruppe would take over. So much for the details. As the physical and mental fitness of the pilots was a requirement for the success of the mission, the pilots were ordered to go to bed at 20.00 hrs and they were not allowed to take part in the New Year's Eve festivities."<sup>34</sup>

The reason why Major Heinz Bär flew this mission on his own, has remained until now somewhat of a mystery. Two pilots of Stab JG 3, Uffz. Erich Miedl and Gefr. Bodo Siegfried clearly remember that Maj. Bär flew a Fw 190 D-9 on January 1st. This Focke-Wulf had been standing on Bad Lippspringe airfield for testing and Major Bär ordered the groundcrew to make the aircraft ready for the mission.<sup>35</sup> Miedl stated that the cruising speed of the Dora was too high for the Bf 109s and the Fw 190 As and that this was the reason why Major Bär had to fly the mission alone. Siegfried even witnessed Major Bär flying parallel to the formation, sometimes dropping behind and a moment later gaining on them. Even Bär's logbook does not clearly give an answer to this question. Although it is clear that Bär took off from Bad Lippspringe airfield, the aircraft type is marked as 'Fw 190 Do' but the logbook also seems to indicate that the Werknummer was 205267, a typical Werknummer for an A-9. Also, in strength reports for Stab JG 3 only five Fw 190A-9s are listed for December 31st. However, based on the two independent eyewitnesses and the logbook details, it can only be concluded that Major Bär flew a Fw 190 D-9 on January 1st.<sup>36</sup> Later we will read why Major Bär did not lead JG 3 into battle.

### January 1st, Jagdgeschwader 3 attacks Eindhoven

At Gütersloh, the pilots of IV./JG 3 were picked up at their quarters at 05.00 hrs. At 07.00 hrs, after a short breakfast, they were briefed by Lt. Siegfried Müller. The target was finally revealed as Eindhoven. No alternative target was given. The pilots received maps on which the course was marked and on which instructions to be followed during the flight had been previously inserted. The course was given as Gütersloh-Lippstadt-Dorsten-Helmond-Eindhoven.<sup>37</sup>

For obvious security reasons the first leg was not marked on the map and the last leg was to end at a point slightly to the north-east of Eindhoven airfield, so that on turning to port for the run-in, which was to be made in a south-westerly direction,<sup>38</sup> the formation leader and Schwarm leaders would be in the lead of their respective sections. The return flight was to be made from the target area on a bearing of approximately 90 deg., and pilots were told to head for any of the airfields that had been marked on their maps, according to convenience.

Flares, ground markers and searchlights, which were also marked on the maps, would be found available as navigation aids. A red ground signal emitting orange-coloured smoke was located at Kevelaer and a directional searchlight at Wesel. Finally, a green ground signal emitting white smoke was located at a point to the south of the line of flight in the vicinity of Krefeld.<sup>39</sup>



Gefr. Bodo Siegfried. This 19-year old pilot flew in the Stabsschwarm of JG 3 on January 1st 1945, although this picture was taken at Erfurt-Bindersleben in October 1944 while he was still with 1./JG 3. (Siegfried)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Fw. Oskar Bösch of 14./JG 3 prepares to climb into his Fw 190 A-8/R2 'Black 14' at Schongau in August 1944. (Boesch)

Pilots were instructed to switch on their FuG 16 on reaching the Rhine, but they had specific orders not to send any message until they had left the target area after having delivered their attacks. They were also told that they would probably receive orders from the formation leader, while the attack was in progress, telling them when the operation was to be broken off.<sup>40</sup> A Ju 88, which was already stationed at Gütersloh, would lead them to the front. However, the Ju 88 was unable to take part in the mission as it was reported unserviceable in the early morning. Lt. Siegfried Müller remembers clearly what happened next: "In the early morning of January 1st both our Lotsen (or was it only one? – I can't remember clearly) were reported unserviceable. We would have to fly without them. About two weeks earlier I had received orders from Major Bär to prepare this operation for Jagdgeschwader 3 for 'X'-day. This happened under command and control of General Grabmann.<sup>41</sup> For this I worked with a 1x2 metres size aerial picture of Eindhoven airfield and I also knew every course exactly. This is why Major Bär asked me in the early morning if I saw myself capable of leading the formation to the target. He, with his Stabsschwarm<sup>42</sup>, would fly over the formation so that he could intervene if something went wrong."<sup>43</sup>

Lt. Müller agreed and he and his IV./JG 3 would lead the whole of JG 3 in the attack. At Lippstadt the other Gruppen would join IV./JG 3; first I./JG 3, with III. Gruppe bringing up the rear.<sup>44</sup>

At Paderborn, pilots of I./JG 3 were given a brief weather report at 06.30 hrs – 5/10ths cloud at 400–500 metres, some fog and visibility of four–five kilometres was expected. Two Ju 88s, stationed at Paderborn, were to lead the Gruppe to the front line.<sup>45</sup> As with IV. Gruppe, the pilots were advised of the visual aids. Aircraft were to take off individually and assemble over base in Schwärme in echelon and stepped up from front to rear. Oblt. Seidl was to fly on the port extremity of the leading Schwarm. Pilots were instructed to fly at about 350 kp/h in order not to overtake the Ju 88 Lotsen. Only the Kommandeur and two other pilots, one in each of the two leading Schwärme, were to keep their FuG 16 switched on during the outward flight. Other pilots had orders to maintain strict R/T silence until they had delivered their attacks, and to switch on FuG 16 only on reaching the target area.<sup>46</sup>

The III./JG 3 pilots at Lippspringe were also picked up very early from their quarters and received a final briefing from Major Langer. The target, course and attack plan was outlined. The pilots were informed that the attack was to be

executed in Schwärme and that every pilot had to deliver several attacks. The aircraft were to circle the airfield anti-clockwise between each individual attack. Specially prepared maps were given to the pilots.<sup>47</sup>

The first aircraft to take off were the Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 3. At 08.22 hrs, Lt. Siegfried Müller took off in his 'Red 10' and started circling the airfield until all aircraft were airborne.<sup>48</sup> The pilots taking their positions, Lt. Müller lead the first Schwarm on the port side. Flying on his wing were three pilots of 14. Staffel, Fw. Oskar Bösch in his 'Black 14', then Uffz. Erich Pusch in 'Black 12' and finally Fw. Erich Leipholz in his 'Black 16'.<sup>49</sup> The leading Schwarm flew at a height of some 20 metres. Each of the remaining Schwärme flew some 100/200 metres behind the one preceding it, and were slightly stepped up so that the last Schwarm at the rear was flying at a height of about 50 metres.<sup>50</sup> In total 19 Fw 190s of IV./JG 3 would participate in the attack.<sup>51</sup> The formation complete, the Gruppe flew south towards Lippstadt to meet the other Gruppen.

III. Gruppe was now preparing for its take-off. Uffz. Alfred Dors, was already sitting in his 'Black 3', when, at the last minute, his Staffelfkapitän, Lt. Jung, ordered him to get out. Uffz. Dors later heard from the groundcrew that the aircraft of Lt. Jung was not ready. He was ordered to take another Messerschmitt and to take off later. However, this aircraft suffered an engine failure and Dors was not able to participate in the attack.<sup>52</sup> At 08.25 hrs, the first Bf 109s of III./JG 3 took off and were followed by the remainder of the Gruppe.<sup>53</sup> A few minutes earlier three Fw 190 A-9s of JG 3's Stabsschwarm had taken off from Senne and, according to their orders, joined the formation of III./JG 3.<sup>54</sup> In total some 15 Messerschmitts of III./JG 3 took off and led by the Ju 88 Lotse, they headed south-west for Lippstadt.<sup>55</sup> Immediately after take-off Gefr. Bodo Siegfried, flying one of the Fw 190 A-9s of Stab JG 3, noticed that he could not retract his flaps. Furthermore, his electrical trim malfunctioned. The Focke-Wulf nosed down heavily and only with extreme force could he control his aircraft. Over Lippstadt he had to return and barely succeeded in landing at Lippspringe.

The technical investigation confirmed his report and the 19-year old Siegfried sighed with relief, as otherwise a court-martial would have been likely.<sup>56</sup>

At Paderborn, the Ju 88 of Ofw. Bertsch took off at 08.25 hrs, immediately followed by the Messerschmitts, which formed up behind their leader, Oblt. Alfred Seidl.<sup>57</sup> They then followed the two Ju 88s, that were flying some 600 metres ahead of the formation, towards Lippstadt. In total 22 Messerschmitts of I./JG 3 had taken off.<sup>58</sup> After a few minutes, the acting Staffelführer of 2./JG 3 had to return with engine problems.<sup>59</sup>

Over Lippstadt all three Gruppen of JG 3 formed up to a large formation, IV/JG 3 at the head, followed at some distance by I./JG 3 and finally III./JG 3 joined last. Now, totalling nearly 60 aircraft, JG 3 flew west in the direction of Dorsten. Around the same time, at 08.45 hrs. Major Heinz Bär took off from Lippspringe for his solo flight to Eindhoven.<sup>60</sup>

Without incident, the formation passed Dorsten around 09.00 hrs and continued in the direction of Helmond. After passing over the Rhine, the FuG 16 were turned on and near Kevelaer the red ground signal was seen by some of the pilots.<sup>61</sup> Nearing the front, the Ju 88 Lotse shot some flares and turned away, signalling that the formation was now on its own to find Eindhoven.<sup>62</sup>

In the meantime the Allied squadrons at Eindhoven had been preparing for their early morning missions. It was a beautiful day: cold and crisp, with glistening frost sparkling in the bright rays of the morning sun. It appeared delightfully peaceful, as peaceful as it was possible with preparations under way for another day of battle. The first to take off were four Typhoons of No. 439 Squadron at 08.20 hrs. Led by F/O Bob Laurence they were scheduled for a weather recce in the St. Vith area.<sup>63</sup> Next were six Typhoons of No. 137 Squadron at 08.50 hrs led by F/Lt. George Clubley. They were detailed for an armed recce in the Minden area. Beside these six, a spare Typhoon, flown by F/Sgt. Lance Burrows, took off. Originally F/Sgt. Burrows was not supposed to be flying that day, but he had replaced another pilot, John Colton, who had flown over 100 operations by that time and who was feeling unwell. F/Sgt. Burrows took his place as 'spare man' for the squadron mission that day: this meaning that the spare aircraft was to take the place of any aircraft which might develop trouble. The spare would fly as far as the bomb line. If everything went well, he would come back.

Eight Spitfire IXs of No. 414 Squadron were also lined up for a mission. At 08.55 hrs, six Spitfires took off for Tac/R missions. F/Lt. J.H. Donovan and F/Lt. W.J. Pearson flew towards Köln. F/Lt. M.J. McRae and F/Lt. P.W. Grier followed them for a mission towards the Mönchen-Gladbach/Erkelenz area. Finally, F/Lt. Wally Woloschuk and F/Lt. Bill Sawers left for a Tac/R. in the Köln area. A few minutes later, at 08.59 hrs, S/Ldr. Gordon Wonnacott and F/Lt. S.C. Chapman took off on an Arty/R mission in the Heinsberg area.<sup>64</sup> At 09.00 hrs six Typhoons of No. 168 Squadron had taken off for an armed recce in the Prüm area. They were led by F/Lt. Joe Stubbs.<sup>65</sup> Finally, at 09.06 hrs, F/Lt. H.P. Gibbons of No. 168 Squadron took off for an air test on aircraft QC-D.<sup>66</sup> Several other aircraft, Typhoons of No. 438 and No. 440 Squadron, but also Spitfires of No. 430 Squadron were preparing for take-off or were taxiing on the field. Finally four



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



"I made myself as small as possible behind the big Typhoon engine": P/O Bill Harle of No. 438 Squadron survived the initial JG 3 attack while in take-off position. (Harle)

Spitfires of 83 Group Communications Squadron were receiving attention close to the main runway and three airmen were in the cockpit carrying out their daily inspections.<sup>67</sup>

Let us return to JG 3, which had now passed the front line and was nearing Helmond. At 09.15 hrs, the formation passed Helmond to the north, when disaster struck. The III./JG 3 formation had to pass a power line that ran from Helmond in the direction of Gemert. Suddenly, the Messerschmitt of Lt. Hans-Ulrich Jung burst into flames and disintegrated on the ground, killing the 22-year old Staffel-

kapitän instantly. Shock went through the formation as the pilots witnessed this awful scene. Uffz. Michael Vogl flew as Rottenflieger with Lt. Jung: "I was on the right-hand side of my Kapitän, a little behind him, when we had to pull up shortly to pass a power line. Suddenly I saw his aircraft burn fiercely, it nosed down and rolled over when it hit the ground. In a flash I saw the light AAA positioned at the edge of a small forest which fired at us. I was shocked and could barely hold the stick and hold my feet on the pedals. My Staffelkapitän had no chance to escape this sea of flames alive. His premonition of the day before became true."<sup>68</sup>

In fact most pilots believed that AAA had hit Lt. Jung's aircraft, but this was not the case. According to a Dutch police report Lt. Jung hit the power line with his auxiliary fuel tank, and tore away a 10 mm thick cable and pulled one of the posts down. Engulfed in flames, the aircraft crossed the canal between Helmond and Aarle-Rixtel and crashed near Overbrug, just south of Aarle-Rixtel.<sup>69</sup> Lt. Hans-Ulrich Jung had been one of the most successful pilots in the Gruppe and had recently been awarded the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold.<sup>70</sup>

Before reaching Eindhoven, I. Gruppe also suffered a casualty. Fhr. Friedrich Tazreiter's 'Green 6' was hit in the engine by light AAA. His aircraft crashed near Eindhoven airfield.<sup>71</sup> He remembers: "I baled out at very low altitude and I think an angel saved my life. After much consideration I believe the parachute opened at the same time as I fell in a fir tree. When I regained consciousness I was hanging in this tree a few centimetres above the frozen ground. I released my parachute and

wanted to get one of my boots, which was lying some metres away. Suddenly I felt a sharp pain in my right foot. After a few minutes my whole body began to ache. Later, it was established that I had broken two bones in my right foot, bruised my spinal column and right shoulder and had concussion. After some time, Dutch civilians spotted me and returned with a policeman who handed me over to British soldiers."<sup>72</sup>

At the same time as Lt. Jung's aircraft had gone down, Uffz. Erich Miedl of the Stabsschwarm, who was flying on his wing, saw Major Bär overtaking the formation on the right. Immediately Miedl and his Rottenführer, Ofw. Leo Schuhmacher, tried to catch up with him, pushing their Fw 190 A-9s to the limit. They succeeded in doing this and following their Kommodore, they were the first to arrive over Eindhoven, even before the first Schwarm of IV./JG 3, which they also had overtaken. Flying a left hand turn, Major Bär aimed at two "Tempests" which were taking off and shot them down – his 204th and 205th claims.<sup>73</sup> Both were later confirmed as Typhoons.

The two Typhoons belonged to a group of eight aircraft from No. 438 Squadron, which had just started their take-off run. The leader, 31-year old F/Lt. Pete Wilson, who had just been appointed squadron commander, was in one of the two aircraft in the take-off run. He throttled back and pulled to the side of the runway where he climbed out of the aircraft. He had suffered a gunshot wound in the lower stomach and died a few minutes after admittance to Sick Quarters. The pilot of No. 2 aircraft, F/O Ross Keller, became airborne but either he or the aircraft was hit. There were no eyewitnesses as to what had happened, but he was later found in his burnt aircraft in which he had attempted a forced landing just off the aerodrome.

By now the full armada of JG 3 was over Eindhoven. The leading Schwarm of IV./JG 3 consisting of Müller, Bösch, Pusch and Leipholz had closely followed Major Bär and the two Stabsschwarm pilots. The Sturmgruppe arrived over Eindhoven airfield without losses during the outward flight.<sup>74</sup> After a few minutes the Messerschmitts of I. and III./JG 3 followed them.

The pilots of the remaining six Typhoons of No. 438 Squadron were extraordinarily lucky. F/O Don Campbell could not get out of his aircraft due to the strafing and remained in it crouched down in the cockpit throughout the whole attack even though his machine suffered hits. The other five pilots, F/O F. Skelly, F/O W. Beatty, F/O J. Lord, P/O A. Harle and F/Lt. F. Regan managed to clamber out of their machines and lie on the ground where they managed to avoid being hit. Two of them found safety in a slit trench nearby. Others lay behind a small pile of sand and another lay in a frozen wheel track in the mud. Of the eight

aircraft due to take-off, three were burned, one cracked and broke up, one was 'Cat. Ac' due to bullet holes, one was damaged but repairable and two escaped undamaged. P/O 'Bill' Harle recalls: "On January 1st I was to fly 4th position in a flight of four Typhoons. We were briefed for an armed reconnaissance in Northern Holland.<sup>75</sup> At approximately 9:00 am the flight was taxiing out for take-off. As we neared the end of the runway I noticed a bright light which seemed to originate just back of our take-off position. As we approached the end of the runway and were ready to go, I saw that the squadron leader, Pete Wilson, and his No.2 Ross Keller were already taking off. It was then that I saw there was a number of Fw 190s and Me 109s flying directly down the runway facing me. I was aware that their cannons were firing and the shells were bouncing down the runway. The next minutes (I had no idea how long the beat up lasted) began by making myself as small as possible behind the big Typhoon engine and after a few seconds I undid my harnesses, eased myself out of the cockpit, off the wing, where I rolled to the side of the runway and then to a nearby bomb hole. From there I ran to the old ACP hut, which was located not far from the end of the airstrip. On entering the ACP hut I proceeded to pick up the phone to let the Squadron know I had survived the attack. Unfortunately just as I picked up the phone, a bomb burst not too far away and the ACP split up the middle. I took the opportunity to get out of the ACP hut and was picked up by a transport vehicle and taken to hospital for treatments of cuts from flying glass. Our Squadron leader, Pete Wilson and Ross Keller were both killed shortly after take-off. My aircraft was destroyed shortly after I left it."<sup>76</sup>

Several people witnessed the initial German attack and the pilots' run for safety. Sgt. M.A. Scott was in charge of a repair and salvage party with 403 R&SU. He was on his way with a Bedford lorry

and a Cole crane to a Typhoon with a collapsed undercarriage: "I was driving along the perimeter track behind a large queue of Typhoons taxiing for take-off when, low out of the sun, we were attacked by Fw 190s firing cannon. My party was at various points assisting the removal of the aircraft. One man, LAC Osborne, was killed by a piece of shrapnel in the chest and most of the others were injured in some degree. I myself was very fortunate: several cannon shells hit the Bedford lorry. One embedded itself in the spare wheel and another one entered through the passenger's door and kicked the back off the bucket seat in which I was sitting."<sup>77</sup>

Another witness who had a grandstand view of the attack was F/Lt. Robby van Zinnicq Bergmann. F/Lt. Bergmann was a Dutch pilot with No. 181 Squadron. The night before he had spent at his parents' home in nearby Vught. His elder brother had accompanied him back to Eindhoven and van Zinnicq Bergmann was showing his brother around the airfield when the attack started. They jumped into a nearby bomb crater and witnessed the raid: "Even if they had fired with their eyes closed, they would have hit something. Next to about 300 aircraft, most of them parked in line, the airfield was filled with vehicles of every type, fuel and ammo dumps and stocks of all sorts of equipment. Fires started all over the airfield, Typhoons preparing to take off, tried to get airborne. Others aborted their take-off; pilots



Sgt. M.A. Scott was in charge of a repair and salvage party with 403 R&SU at Eindhoven: "One (shell) embedded itself in the spare wheel and another one entered through the passenger's door and kicked the back off the bucket seat in which I was sitting." (Scott)

F/Lt. Robby van Zinnicq-Bergman of No. 181 Squadron was taking his brother for a tour around Eindhoven airfield when the Luftwaffe "dropped in". (van Zinnicq-Bergman)



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## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



F/Sgt. Lance Burrows of No. 137 Squadron had just touched down and was still taxiing when his aircraft was shot up by fighters from JG 3. He is laid to rest at Woensel Cemetery in Eindhoven. (Barnes)

leaping from their aircraft and taking cover. None of those aircraft remained untouched. One of the Typhoons that managed to get airborne, shot down a Luftwaffe aircraft before being shot down itself. Only a couple of metres away from us a courageous Canadian was firing his Sten gun from the end of the runway at the attackers."<sup>78</sup>

Besides No. 438 Squadron, other units were also caught taxiing on the airfield. Eight Typhoons of No. 440 Squadron were on the runway ready to take off and received a "going over" by the attacking Luftwaffe fighters. P/O R.A. Watson opened fire with his cannon from the

ground and damaged one Fw 190 before his aircraft was set on fire.<sup>79</sup> Fortunately all of the pilots survived the attacks though that was something of a miracle and many had close calls. P/O Ed Flanagan was the only serious casualty with numerous shrapnel wounds and a damaged eye.<sup>80</sup> Two Spitfire XIVs of No. 430 Squadron were caught on the perimeter and both pilots were wounded in the strafing. F/O W.P. Golden was wounded as a shell exploded in the cockpit of his aircraft while F/Lt. R.F. Gill suffered a slight head wound together with a broken arm while exiting of his Spitfire under enemy fire.<sup>81</sup> The airmen attending the Spitfires of No. 83 Group Communications Squadron saw the tails of their machines disintegrating as they scrambled out of the cockpits!

Another pilot was not so lucky. F/Sgt. Lance Burrows of No. 137 Squadron had just touched down as the attack started. He had turned on the perimeter track when he was hit (SF-Z JR261). Burrows was a Flight Sergeant because, although he had flown many operations, he had made an ill-judged crash-landing some months before the attack and as punishment had not received his promotion. On the day he was killed, he was promoted to Pilot Officer. This is the rank given on his gravestone in Eindhoven's cemetery: his widow received more compensation if her husband had been killed as a Pilot Officer than as a Flight Sergeant. Somebody obviously made the right decision for Lance's wife that day.

F/Lt. Howard 'Gibby' Gibbons of No. 168 Squadron, who had been conducting an air test, returned during the attack on the aerodrome. He was seen by LAC Whitfield to attack an Fw 190 from behind and above. F/Lt. Gibbons was then at 100 feet and the Fw 190 at 50 feet. The tail was seen to fly off the Fw 190 and it then crashed into the ground. Then F/Lt. Gibbons was bounced by three Bf 109s who succeeded in shooting him down. He crashed near his victim on the airfield.<sup>82</sup>

The Focke-Wulf shot down by F/Lt. Gibbons was probably 'Black 16' flown Fw. Gerhard Leipholz. This 14. Staffel pilot crashed on Eindhoven airfield during the attack and was killed instantly.<sup>83</sup> Feldwebel Leipholz had been one of the old hares of the Staffel. He had belonged to JG 2 before he had joined the Sturmgruppe.<sup>84</sup> For his victory on December 23rd he had been awarded the EK I.<sup>85</sup> F/Lt. Gibbons himself was probably shot down by Lt. Oskar Zimmermann, Kapitän of 9./JG 3. The 27-year old Leutnant claimed a 'Tempest' over Eindhoven as his 30th victory. He was the only Messerschmitt pilot claiming a Tempest or Typhoon over Eindhoven airfield and therefore must have been the victor over F/Lt. Gibbons. Another Typhoon was claimed by Lt. Siegfried Müller, the leader of IV./JG 3. He recalls: "On the way to the target I saw several aircraft flying parallel to us. They attacked us during our strafing runs and came from the right. I was just pulling up and turned towards them. The Typhoon lost his left wing due to my fire and crashed within the airfield boundaries."<sup>86</sup>

This Typhoon could not be identified, although it may be that both Lt. Zimmermann and Lt. Müller claimed the same aircraft. The attack on Eindhoven lasted anywhere between 23 and 25 minutes and there are many stories to tell: stories of great heroism, humour and drama. None of them, however, portrayed events quite so dramatically as the 247 Squadron diarist:

*"All pilots boarded transport and left early for the airfield as a long range job was in the air. Then, out of the blue, came the whistle of bombs, the scream of*



Fw. Gerhard Leipholz (centre) in front of his Fw 190 at Jagdgruppe Ost in October 1943. (Wöhrlé)





diving planes, the chatter of machine guns, the heavier thump of cannon, and it seemed as though the flood gates of Hell had suddenly swung back to release Old Nick's devilish horde. First came the jet bombers, and after bombs away, the Me's and Fw's<sup>87</sup>. Wave after wave they came in, strafing the airfield from end to end – twenty three minutes of Hell that paralysed everyone, but in a very few minutes the Regiment was pooping away, clawing down one after another of the Teutonic horde; and were those gunner boys pleased to have, at long last, that much desired opportunity of showing the RAF that even the Regiment had its place. But the Huns pressed on regardless, coming in at 50 feet and less, and apparently concentrating on destroying aircraft. One Screamer Squadron was caught on the end of the runway and suffered badly, several being complete burn-outs, the rest being rendered unserviceable. Petrol dumps were set on fire, a bomb dump of 143 Wing was set on fire and 1000 lb. bombs exploded every few minutes, individual kites in dispersal's were set on fire, rockets ignited and flashed in all directions, an equipment section went up in a glorious mass of flames, Austers flapped their wings and joined in the conflagration and slowly a pall of smoke settled in the air above the airfield, and blotted out the sun, to turn the morning light into evening twilight.<sup>1988</sup>

Ron Rowley, a member of No. 137 Squadron, had his own experiences: "As I bounded across to the Crew Room I noticed a whisker of smoke coming from the wheel well of our Squadron Hurricane which was the pilots' hack. So I grabbed two fire

extinguishers and went to put out what part was burning. I had just about got things under control when the extinguisher ran out, so I dashed to the crew room for two more. I was met at the door by Sergeant Page who asked: "What are you doing Rowley?" I told him. "Sod the Hurricane," he said, "Go get me a blanket, Chiefy's been hit bad." So off I carried to our hut and grabbed one of mine which lay on the floor where I had left them in my hurry to stamp out the fire. I dashed to Page; "Here you are Sergeant," but it was too late I'm afraid. The Chiefy (F/Sgt. Reginald Bazley, sic) had died so we just covered him over. Richardson was in there too and had gone deaf: a cannon shell had burst in the crew room. Things were in a mess. Page said: "There's nothing you two can do here. I will await the medics. You go along the Flight Lines to see if any of the kites are unserviceable." When we got out the Hurricane was well alight, as was everything else it seemed. Just as we started our task, there was one mighty explosion over the Canadian dispersals, which knocked us off our feet! We later learned it was their bomb dump that had gone up. I must point out that a flight of our aircraft were airborne: so the Squadron got off light with damage which is more than the other Squadrons could say. So we went to report to Sergeant Page and all the bods were going hither and thither in our normal days routine. Some day off this turned out to be! We learned later that Ron Norris had been hit; he had just been coming back from breakfast, the lorry had pulled up and everyone had dived underneath for cover, but Ron just couldn't

Fw. Leipholz in the cockpit of the same aircraft. (Wöhrlé)



Oblt. Eberhard Fischler Graf von Treuberg, Staffelführer of 12./JG 3 and a long-serving member of JG 52 on the Eastern Front. He was later one of the most experienced pilots with III./JG 3 with approximately 20 victories to his credit. (von Treuberg)

get under: he died of wounds. So we lost three good friends this day. A sad day."<sup>99</sup>

Technically speaking, there was a great deal of respect for the manner in which the attacks were orchestrated. "It appears that Jerry had it all its own way, the little flak that was supposed to intercept seemed away off. The enemy aircraft systematically climbed, dove and strafed and took time off to wave to some of the boys."<sup>100</sup>

No. 143 Wing Headquarters summed up events: "At 09.20 hours, two waves of mixed Fw 190 and Me 109 came onto the field at deck level, one out of the sun from East to West, the other directly down the runway North to South. Subsequent succeeding waves of about 12 aircraft each beat up the field in a well organized manner – persistent, well-led through."<sup>101</sup>

The German pilots had their own perception of the attack. Fw. Oskar Bösch remembers: "Led by Lt. Müller we arrived over the city of Eindhoven on the deck and we pulled up to attack the airfield. Soon hell broke loose. A fuel station with a Typhoon beside in full operation came under fire and blew in front of my Fw 190. In the shortest possible time the field was engulfed in flames and smoke and after some 4-5 attacks visibility was almost reduced to zero. By a few metres I missed a Focke-Wulf that passed in front of me. After the first or second attack everyone flew across the field individually, it was a miracle to escape alive!"<sup>102</sup>

Fw. Bösch was correct; it was dangerous over the airfield. At least one mid-air collision was reported.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately the aircraft involved could not be identified. Uffz. Erich Miedl, the young Stabschwarm pilot, had his own, somewhat strange experience: "Trying to gain contact with the Kommodore after his combat with the Typhoons I lost contact with my Rottenführer. Later I understood that the Oberfeldwebel had turned away as his aircraft had been hit by AA. I could not keep up with Major Bär and alone I continued attacking targets on the airfield. The first time I hit a twin-engined aircraft and during the second run, what appeared to be, a still undamaged fighter on the runway. Suddenly, during the second attack, a big explosion and a fire, a shockwave lifted me up. I thought now everything was over, but my Focke-Wulf was still in the air and the engine kept running smoothly. Now, perfectly calm, I started circling the airfield. In a sense of quietness, I could see the aircraft burning, an AA tower being shot to pieces and many ambulances near a barrack camp some 200 metres from the edge of the field. Taking my time, I turned away and headed for home."<sup>104</sup>

The big explosion Miedl witnessed was without a doubt the bomb dump of No. 440 Squadron that exploded. In contrast with Miedl's 'peaceful' description of events, the AAA units on the field did their best to defend the base. The four Regiment Squadrons and an uncounted number of hand-held weapons ranging from revolvers to Bren

machine guns gave their best. At the altitude the Luftwaffe fighters were flying, they were difficult targets for the Bofors guns: "Praise must be given to the Huns for the determined attack they put in but praise must also be handed to the gunners for the splendid way they stood up to the low-level cannon and machine gun fire. The planes were flying so low that they were not good targets for Bofors – 20mm or "quad" machine gun fire would have been a better deterrent."<sup>105</sup>

No. 2703 Squadron claimed five enemy aircraft destroyed and 19 damaged. No. 2817 Squadron claimed 10 aircraft destroyed and 31 hits on others. After assessment all the Squadrons, Nos. 2703, 2773, 2806 and 2817 were credited with five enemy aircraft (shared). Personnel losses were two killed, LAC C.B. Vessey and LAC W. Crooks, and five wounded.<sup>106</sup>

Indeed the claims of the RAF Regiment Squadrons correspond with the actual losses of JG 3 due to anti-aircraft fire. I./JG 3 lost at least three Messerschmitts to the AAA fire over the airfield. Uffz. Horst Schöne of 3./JG 3 crashed during the first attack and his aircraft exploded on impact with the ground, killing him.<sup>107</sup> However, he may also have been the pilot involved in the mid-air collision. Although the wreckage of his aircraft was inspected by the RAF and his body probably recovered, Schöne is still listed as missing. An unknown German pilot was buried at Eindhoven cemetery and it is very likely that this is in fact Uffz. Horst Schöne.<sup>108</sup> During this first attack, Uffz. Helmut Reineke of 1./JG 3 was also hit. Reineke had borrowed a 3. Staffel aircraft and flew as No. 2 to Fw. Theodor Schmitt, the acting Staffelführer of 3./JG 3. Reineke attacked an AAA position on his first run, but observed no results. He witnessed Schöne's crash and during his second attack on a Mustang he was hit by AAA and momentarily lost control of his aircraft. However, he managed to fly on an erratic course for some time at tree-top level, made a very bad belly-landing in a field and was immediately captured by Canadian troops.<sup>109</sup> His 'Yellow 7' crashed north-east of Batenburg, some 40 kilometres north of Eindhoven.<sup>110</sup>

Fw. Paul Fischer's Messerschmitt was hit in the cooler during his third attack on the airfield and slowly the cooling liquid ran out. The 2. Staffel pilot tried to reach the German lines, but the engine caught fire and he had to bale out. He landed between some fir trees, five kilometres north-west of Venlo. With a dislocated left arm, he was taken to a hospital in Hasselt.<sup>111</sup>

It is not known for certain if the other Gruppen suffered losses over Eindhoven, but some sources indicate that this was the case. It is believed that Oblt. Eberhard Fischler Graf von Treuberg, the experienced Kapitän of 12./JG 3, was shot down by AAA, either just before reaching Eindhoven or during the initial stages of the attack.<sup>112</sup> Other sources say that von Treuberg's aircraft was hit by an

Allied fighter and that he was seen to be struggling to get out.<sup>103</sup> No trace was ever found of Oblt. von Treuberg or his aircraft, and his fate remains a mystery.

Beside Fw. Leipholz' aircraft, another Focke-Wulf of IV./JG 3 seems to have been shot down on Eindhoven airfield. According to RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 a Fw 190 A with 2 x 30 and 2 x 20 mm guns was found on the airfield. Unfortunately, the authors have not been able to identify this aircraft or its pilot. It may have been the Fw 190 A-8/R2 'Red 9' flown by Uffz. Alois Schmidt of 16./JG 3. Uffz. Schmidt is still listed as missing and again no trace of this pilot has been found until today.

Not only the RAF Regiment put up a barrage against the attacking enemy fighters; some ground personnel took aim at them with Bren guns. One of them, Sgt. W.R. Large of No. 438 Squadron, was at the dispersal waiting to watch the Squadron take off when he saw the first wave of fighters pass the field. He took a Bren gun and aimed at the incoming fighters and succeeded in hitting at least one Fw 190.<sup>104</sup> This was, in fact, an aircraft of I./JG 6. A large force of this unit attacked Eindhoven in error as a result of the confusion in finding its own target, Volkel. At least one Fw 190 of I./JG 6 crashed on Eindhoven airfield, but this story will be dealt with in a following chapter.

Several witnesses at Eindhoven airfield had their own memories of the crashing German aircraft. F/Lt. van Zinnicq-Bergmann went to investigate the Luftwaffe fighter that had crashed not far from him: "I went to investigate the Luftwaffe fighter that had crashed behind our hiding place following the mid-air collision. Apparently, the young pilot had tried to leave the aircraft but since he was so low the parachute had failed to open. He was leaning against a tree, not far from his aircraft. Some distasteful joker had put a cigarette between his fingers. It was hard to believe he was dead, but the pale-grey look on his face betrayed him. A horrible sight. I could no longer watch and listen to the jokes a number of fitters were making. So this was what it was like getting killed..."<sup>105</sup>

Members of No. 247 Squadron also witnessed some horrifying sights: "Among other units there were other examples of miraculous escapes. Two guards, in bed in one of the hangars at 143 Wing, remained completely unhurt when a 109 crashed into the building. A Fw 190 crashed into a billet a short distance behind 181 dispersal and again the six occupants escaped unhurt. Although our airfield defenses had been so reduced, the guns remaining claimed the greater part of the fifteen aircraft (sic) that crashed in the vicinity. Two of the machines were quite near and we visited them. The first, which crashed behind our dispersal, was a Fw 190. Bits of it were scattered far and wide over the ground, only the cockpit and its occupant

remaining relatively intact. Looking at the torn, disfigured body of the pilot, it seemed impossible that, but less than an hour before, it had pulsed with life, had been afflicted with emotion or pain, harbored thoughts of home, or love, or perhaps of peace. It was not a pleasant sight to gaze upon. Little plumes of smoke were curling up from the body, tainting the air with the smell of burning flesh. Of the other machine there was nothing remaining but a heap of ashes. The body of the pilot was squatting amid them; a shrunken effigy of a man minus hands and feet, burnt to the color of dark coffee."<sup>106</sup>

The AAA fire put up by the defending RAF Regiment Squadrons was not the only danger for the attackers of JG 3. Witnesses on the ground saw how a lone Spitfire chased several German fighters away and was able to shoot down at least one of the attackers. This Spitfire was piloted by F/Lt. R.C. Smith of No. 442 Squadron. F/Lt. Smith had taken off at 08.57 hrs from Heesch for a sweep in the Lingen area, but he had to abort the mission because of problems with his drop tank. On the way home had picked up reports of enemy aircraft and a squadron mate who had made a crash-landing south of base. On the lookout for his mate, F/Lt. Smith ended up near Eindhoven airfield and noticed the airfield under attack: "I identified Fw 190s and Me 109s flying in a circle at about 200 ft. I went down to 400 ft and circled over the top of them. When I could pick one out that wasn't followed too closely by another, I would nip in and fire a quick burst, then break and climb up again. In this way I attacked three Me 109s, however I could not observe strikes all the time being on the lookout for other enemy aircraft. I had not yet seen any other Allied aircraft. After firing at the third Me 109, I noticed a Fw 190 closing in on me from the port side. He had already opened fire as I broke port. He stayed with me so I climbed steeply and he fell off to port. I came down on his tail and gave him a short burst from about 200 yards, no strikes observed. I then broke port again into a Me 109 which I chased down to the deck. My windscreen had oiled up so I broke off the attack and climbed to about 800 ft. I then noticed a Fw 190 coming up from the deck at the port side. I dove and made a head-on attack. We both opened fire at about 300 yards, no strikes observed. He broke to port at the last second and passed over top of me going away. I sighted another Fw 190 on the deck going away. I chased him and we had a bit of a do. He was a very good pilot and I couldn't get in a shot. He finally straightened out. I closed, in but my ammo had run out. I broke off the attack and headed for base, as my fuel was low. My engine cut at 7,000 ft and I glided to base making a successful wheels-down landing."<sup>107</sup>

On return to base, reports from ground observers came in stating that a Spitfire was seen to



Uffz. Alois Schmidt of 16.(Sturm)/JG 3 of whom trace has never been found and he is still posted MIA from January 1st 1945. (Thorne)



shoot down a Bf 109 from which the pilot baled out and obtain strikes on another Bf 109. Since Smith's aircraft was the only one airborne in the vicinity at the time, F/Lt. Smith claimed 1 Bf 109 destroyed and 1 Bf 109 damaged.<sup>108</sup> Strangely, according to the 2nd TAF Log of casualties, claims, assessments and losses, the claims of F/Lt. Smith were abandoned. This may be related with the fact that S/Ldr. Wonnacott also claimed a Bf 109 over Eindhoven at the same time. However, neither of F/Lt. R.C. Smith's claims were confirmed.

At 09.30 hrs, another Spitfire appeared over Eindhoven. It was one of the Spitfire IXs of No. 414 Squadron piloted by its CO, S/Ldr. Gordon Wonnacott. Owing to low cloud and intense flak in the Heinsberg area, he returned alone to base, separated from his No. 2. Approaching base, he saw much smoke and many enemy aircraft; he reported: "I immediately went into attack with cannon only from about 5,000 ft. I opened fire at about 450 yards using 20-30 degs deflection on the first enemy aircraft I saw – either a Fw 190 or a Me 109. I saw no strikes and broke off the attack as my aircraft seemed to be skidding and I was unable to hold my line of fire correctly (1 cannon stopped firing). I pulled up and saw a Me 109 which I attacked using machine guns only I opened fire at 100 yds seeing strikes and the enemy aircraft took evasive action. I again closed firing from below and using 10 degs deflection, strikes were again seen and after more evasive action the pilot jettisoned his coupe top and then baled out. I then attacked another Me 109 opening fire at 300 yds. and using some deflection. I saw strikes, the enemy aircraft took violent evasive action doing a loop and pulling out very close to the ground. I dove after this enemy aircraft closing from 250-100 yards, taking short bursts and seeing many strikes, black smoke and flames issuing from the enemy aircraft. I did not see this aircraft hit the ground as I had to take evasive action to avoid three Fw 190s which were attacking me from astern. I turned into these aircraft attacking No. 1 from 200 yds, saw strikes, broke hard left to avoid the two behind me which had opened fire and attacked the last of the section (Fw 190). My machine gun ammunition gave out after about 10 rounds were fired and I tried to get my cannon to fire, but it ceased after about three or four rounds. No strikes were seen. I saw a large column of smoke about 1 1/2 miles distance and on the track of the last Me 109 which I had attacked. I claim 2 Me 109s destroyed and 1 Fw 190 damaged."<sup>109</sup>

I./JG 3 in particular reported combat with Allied fighters over Eindhoven.<sup>110</sup> It appears that one of S/Ldr. Wonnacott's victims was Fw. Walter Rutkowski of 4./JG 3. Rutkowski, who had joined JG 3 on December 28th, had delivered four attacks on aircraft parked on the airfield and was leaving the target area when a Spitfire shot him

down. He was able to get out of his burning Messerschmitt and landed east of Eindhoven.<sup>111</sup>

The other Messerschmitt attacked by S/Ldr. Wonnacott was probably 'Green 7' piloted by Ofw. Friedrich Hameister. Ofw. Hameister had seen nothing on his first run because of the smoke over the airfield, but made several further attacks during which he had picked a petrol bowser and twin-engined aircraft, which he believed to be a Dakota. He shot up both and left them in flames. After leaving the target, he attacked and shot down a Spitfire which had just downed a Bf 109. This Spitfire could not be identified. A little later he was shot at by a Spitfire from behind, but he evaded. After that he was almost immediately engaged by light AAA and although he felt no impact his engine suddenly caught fire. As the AAA was not accurate enough, Hameister believed he must have got a strike in his radiator from the Spitfire that had attacked him just before. Because of the fire and further damage to the cockpit, Hameister could not open his canopy and decided to make a belly landing. He crash-landed his Messerschmitt in an area called Vredepeel, some 25 kilometres north-east of Eindhoven. Due to the heavy impact, Hameister was able to open his canopy and get out of his burning aircraft. After some 50-100 metres his aircraft exploded and completely burned out. Hameister succeeded in evading Allied troops for some time, but was taken prisoner the following morning.<sup>112</sup>

Around 09.45 hrs the ordeal for Eindhoven airfield was finally over and the last pilots of JG 3, in small groups or individually, headed for home. However, the return flight proved to be a dangerous one. Ofhr. Uwe Naumann of 11./JG 3 must have already been in difficulties as he appeared to have flown in a northerly direction instead of going east. Around 09.30 hrs, his Messerschmitt was spotted above Heesch airfield and immediately the guns of RAF Squadron Nos. 2734 and 2819 opened up and shot the unfortunate German pilot down. Naumann crashed a few kilometres east of Heesch airfield and was killed.<sup>113</sup> He was buried at the local cemetery of Nistelrode.<sup>114</sup>

Another strange loss was that of Fj. Uffz. Hans-Joachim Grell of 15./JG 3. He had probably lost his comrades on the outward flight and was seen to attack Volkel airfield from the east at zero feet at around 09.35 hrs! No. 3 gun of 2874 Squadron opened fire and obtained a hit. The Focke-Wulf went into a steep right-hand climbing turn to about 600 feet. Several of the Squadron guns opened fire and it appeared to be hit twice. Smoke poured from the stricken machine and it then was attacked by a Tempest just before turning upside down and exploding on the ground.<sup>115</sup> The Tempest belonged to No. 486 Squadron and was flown by F/O Bill Trott. He reported: "I was at a



Fw. Walter Rutkowski of 4./JG 3 flew his first war flight after joining I./JG 3 on December 28th 1944. (Rutkowski)



Ofw. Friedrich Hameister of 4./JG 3. It is interesting to note that Hameister wears a Frontflugspange in Bronze für Kampfflieger. He was a former member of KG 4 and KG 76. (Hameister)

height of 2,500 feet right over the drome when I saw tracer from the enemy aircraft which was shooting up the airfield. I turned and attacked out of the sun – opening fire at a range of approx. 250 yards in line astern – firing further bursts at 100 yards and 50 yards. I saw strikes all round the cockpit, along the starboard wing root and the port side of the fuselage. As I passed over the top of the Fw 190, its starboard wing appeared to crumple and it turned over on its back, hitting the ground and bursting into flames.<sup>116</sup>

Fj-Uffz. Grell's 'Yellow 10' crashed west of Mill and the pilot was killed. There has been some mystery concerning this loss as there is a German report that Grell's body was found near Siegburg. However, his grave has never been identified. RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 clearly states that a Fw 190 A-8/R2 with Werknummer 682751 crashed near Mill. It is also known that an unknown German pilot was buried nearby. His remains could not be identified and the authors believe that this must be the remains of Hans-Joachim Grell.<sup>117</sup>

Around 09.45 hrs four Typhoons of No. 439 Squadron, led by F/O Bob Laurence were returning from a weather recce around St.Vith. They were warned by radio of enemy aircraft in the area and made contact with them just east of Helmond. They engaged a group of 15-20 Focke-Wulfs that appeared to be beating up ground targets. Most likely these aircraft belonged to JG 6. One or two friendly Spitfires were also involved in the dogfight which lasted four or five minutes. F/O Bob Laurence and his wingman F/O Hugh Fraser both succeeded in destroying two Focke-Wulfs, but lost F/O Samuel Angelini. Apparently F/O Angelini was shot down by the Fw 190s, because he was found in the wreckage of his burned Typhoon near De Rips, some 30 kilometres north-east of Eindhoven. F/O Hugh Fraser's Typhoon was also hit by a Fw 190 but together with the other two remaining Typhoons, he landed at Volkel as Eindhoven was unserviceable.<sup>118</sup> At 13.10 hrs they landed back at Eindhoven.

At 10.00 hrs, two Spitfires of No. 414 Squadron piloted by F/O Wally Woloschuk and F/Lt. Bill Savers were also returning to base when they were attacked by Focke-Wulfs west of Roermond. In the following battle F/O Woloschuk succeeded in destroying one Focke-Wulf and damaging a Messerschmitt. He reported: "My No. 2 called that two aircraft were attacking and called a break to port. My No. 2 immediately got onto the tail of the leading aircraft and I observed the second aircraft attacking my No. 2, which enemy aircraft I engaged opening fire at 600 yds hoping to cause the enemy aircraft to break off his attack. The enemy aircraft did and I kept firing and closing to 150 yds, and when at 1,500 ft I broke off as the enemy aircraft was enveloped in flames and black smoke and was

descending out of control. We became separated and proceeded to base separately. About five minutes later, searching for my No. 2 and flying in a NW direction, I observed 12 Fw 190s flying south-east at 4,000 ft about 1/2 mile to my right. Immediately following these enemy aircraft was one Me 109 flying slightly below the previous formation in a SE direction. I turned starboard and at 350 yds range, using 25 degs deflection, I opened fire seeing strikes on the port wing. The enemy aircraft went into cloud at about 5,000 ft and I then proceeded to base."<sup>119</sup>

The Focke-Wulf may have been from JG 11 as a Fw 190 A-8 of III./JG 11 went down in that area. In the mêlée of battling Messerschmitts, Focke-Wulfs, Spitfires, Typhoons and Tempests north-east of Eindhoven, JG 3 lost a few of its own too. Uffz. Erich Pusch, a 14. Staffel pilot who flew in the first Schwarm of IV./JG 3, crashed at Vredepeel, most likely having been involved in an aerial battle with Allied fighters. Uffz. Pusch was killed and buried in a field grave. In 1949 he was reburied at Ysselsteijn Cemetery.<sup>120</sup> His Staffelfkamerad, Fw. Oskar Bösch had a narrow escape from an encounter with a Typhoon. He recalls: "I had used my ammunition during the strafing attacks except for my 30 mm MK 108 that signaled 'red' that it had jammed. This could have cost me my life. Shortly after I headed home on the deck, a Typhoon suddenly appeared in front of me. Unseen by him I closed up to about 30 metres from behind and tried to reload my cannon. If only one shell would hit I would be saved! What happened? Nothing! Unaware he continued and I carried on in his dead angle. We both were extremely lucky, if I only could tell him so..."<sup>121</sup>

Another pilot of IV./JG 3, Uffz. Gerhard Schmidt, was shot down by Spitfires in the same area. After delivering his first attack on Eindhoven. Schmidt's Schwarm had split up to reduce the danger of AAA fire and all subsequent attacks were made singly. He was able to destroy two Spitfires on the ground. After remaining over the target area for some 20 minutes, he left on an easterly course. After having flown about 30 kilometres on the homeward run, he saw a Spitfire behind a neighbouring aircraft, sent a warning over the R/T to its pilot and he was able to shoot the Spitfire down. Unfortunately his victim could not be identified. Immediately after doing so, he was himself shot down by a Spitfire on his tail and made a belly-landing. The 15. Staffel pilot belly-landed his aircraft in the Heidschepeel area, a few kilometres south-west of Venray. Schmidt hid for some time until he was arrested the following morning. His Focke-Wulf, almost undamaged, was completely dismantled by the Dutch population over the next two of weeks.<sup>122</sup>

Probably the last loss over Allied territory was Gefr. Rudolf Wieschhoff of 4./JG 3. Wieschhoff's 'Green 16' was hit by light AAA and crashed one



F/O Samuel Angelini, No. 439 Squadron, RCAF, was shot down in his Typhoon by Fw 190s and crashed at De Rips. (Prince)





Gefr. Rudolf Wieschhoff, later of 4./JG 3, seen during his flight training in early 1944. (Wieschhoff)

kilometre south of Sevenum, killing the 19-year old.<sup>123</sup> Wieschhoff was buried in a field grave and in 1947 reinterred at the German Military Cemetery of Ysselsteyn.<sup>124</sup>

Mostly flying individually, the pilots of JG 3 tried to get back to their base. However, some of them were forced to make emergency landings. Ofv. Leo Schuhmacher, flying one of the Fw 190 A-9s of the Stabsschwarm, had to make a belly landing as a result of AAA damage and sustained minor injuries.<sup>125</sup> Of I./JG 3, Ogfr. Siegfried Reuther of 3. Staffel was initially reported missing, but returned later with his aircraft.<sup>126</sup> However, he did not survive long as on January 28th he was reported missing flying a mission with 10./JG 3. Uffz. Michael Vogl of 10./JG 3 suffered engine failure and had to make a belly-landing south of Kalkar, 20 kilometres north-west of Wesel. He remembers: "After some minutes flying on an easterly course, I took a quick look over my shoulder and was just able to see that two aircraft had jumped on me from behind. I immediately recognized them as enemy fighters who tried to intercept us on the way back. From then on I did not look back and only with emergency power and flying on the deck could I be saved. Suddenly I was aware that I must have crossed the front line as people were waving at me. Because I flew too long with emergency power, the engine quit and I had to pull up and looked for a place to land. I belly-

landed my aircraft south of Kalkar and was able to leave the aircraft without injuries and the feeling that I had escaped death again. With my parachute under my arm I returned to the Staffel the next day. The mood was very low because of the heavy losses our Schwarm had taken."<sup>127</sup>

Finally Uffz. Ulrich Töllner of 16./JG 3 had to belly-land his Focke-Wulf after being hit by enemy fighters.<sup>128</sup> He remained unhurt. He was killed on another mission on February 8th near Stettin.<sup>129</sup> One by one the German pilots returned home. Uffz. Erich Miedl of Stab JG 3 landed safely at Senne. He remembers: "After my landing at Senne, I discovered that I was the only one who had returned. Kommodore Bär did not report back until after lunch and my Rottenführer, the Oberfeldwebel, not until the late afternoon. Both had made a belly-landing. The Oberfeldwebel was slightly injured and I never saw him back. You can imagine how the mood of the Geschwaderstab was when Major Bär did not return. Only when he reported back, did they take notice of me. Before that, they did not look at me and probably thought that I had made a run for it. As soon as Major Bär asked me if I could confirm his claims, was I accepted again."<sup>130</sup>

Strangely no report is known confirming Major Heinz Bär's belly-landing on January 1st. According to his logbook he made a normal landing at Lippspringe at 10.10 hrs.<sup>131</sup> The only explanation can be that Bär did not bother to report back to his Stab and stayed at Lippspringe for a few hours more and then returned to his headquarters at Schlagen.

Of the 22 Bf 109s of I./JG 3 that had taken off from Paderborn, 13 had returned by 13.00 hrs.<sup>132</sup> Two more pilots would return by the end of the day. Of III./JG 3 some ten Messerschmitts returned to Lippspringe. Lt. Siegfried Müller, who had led the JG 3 formation, landed back at Gütersloh at 10.10 hrs. Also, Fw. Oskar Bösch returned safely to Gütersloh, others diverted to other airfields.<sup>133</sup>

Although losses had been considerable, a flush of victory was present within Jagdgeschwader 3.<sup>134</sup> Bär summed up feelings at the time in his logbook:

*"On New Year's Day a big operation by all Jagdverbände over Holland and Belgium. Jagdgeschwader 3 attacks Eindhoven: 40-50 aircraft destroyed on the ground and 10 in the air. Two Tempests by me at 09.23-09.25. Aerial reconnaissance showed that of the 170 aircraft on the field, 80-100 were destroyed. Bravo!"*

The following report was written in the War Diary of III./JG 3:

*"Attacks of the Jagdwaffe on Allied airfields in Holland, Belgium and northern France. Our Gruppe*



*started with 15 aircraft within the formation of our Geschwader and was ordered to "clear" Eindhoven airfield. It would be the last big victory of the Luftwaffe in which Jagdgeschwader 3, destroying 116 aircraft on Eindhoven, had a major part.*<sup>135</sup>

According to a report made by Luftwaffenkommando West, the Eindhoven raiders had claimed 53 single-engined and 11 twin-engined aircraft destroyed. Five single-engined and one four-engined were claimed as damaged. After reconnaissance aircraft had taken some pictures it was concluded that about 90 single-engined aircraft had been destroyed at Eindhoven.<sup>136</sup> Another report indicates that the full damage at Eindhoven could not be established because of the heavy smoke over the airfield.<sup>137</sup> Besides the damage due to strafing, JG 3 claimed, at least, the following aerial victories:<sup>138</sup>

Typhoon	Major Heinz Bär	Stab JG 3
	Eindhoven A/F	
Typhoon	Major Heinz Bär	Stab JG 3
	Eindhoven A/F	
Spitfire	Ofw. Friedrich Hameister	4./JG 3
	Eindhoven area.	
Tempest	Lt. Oskar Zimmermann	9./JG 3
Unknown	Fw. Strebel <sup>139</sup>	9./JG 3
Spitfire	Uffz. Peter Bechthold	11./JG 3
Spitfire	Uffz. Gerhard Schmidt	15./JG 3
	Venray area.	
Typhoon	Lt. Siegfried Müller	16./JG 3
	Eindhoven A/F	
Typhoon	Fw. Harry Wald	16./JG 3

In the late afternoon a small party was set up at JG 3 headquarters, celebrating the success of the Geschwader, but also Maj. Heinz Bär's return. A coffee table with some cake was arranged. The cake was as hard as concrete and after it was torn apart in several pieces, Maj. Bär ordered Uffz. Miedl to get a saw. After some time, Miedl found a rusty specimen and to his surprise Maj. Bär used the saw to cut the cake to small pieces so it could be dipped in the coffee cups and eaten soaked with coffee!<sup>140</sup>

The morning mission would not be the only mission flown by JG 3 on January 1st. There is some confusion about losses and claims in the afternoon mission, as several sources have mixed them up with those during Operation Bodenplatte. For this reason the afternoon mission needs to be assessed. At 15.05 hrs a combined force of 10 Messerschmitts of I./JG 3 and III./JG 3, and an additional four Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 3 took off for a mission to protect the jets of KG 76 based at Münster-Handorf. Out of this force of 14 aircraft, one encountered difficulties and had to return early, most likely a Fw 190 from IV./JG 3. The remaining 13 reported combat with ten Spitfires and one Mustang over Münster.

The Spitfires were from No. 401 Squadron. The 12 Spitfires had taken off at 14.30 hrs from Heesch for a fighter sweep in the Rheine/Münster area. Just east of Münster an Me 262 was sighted and this jet led the Spitfires into a group of 12 Bf 109s and Fw 190s flying a circuit of the drome. The Spitfires went in and claimed three Bf 109s destroyed, 1 Bf 109 probably destroyed and a Fw 190 and an Me 262 damaged, for no loss. F/O D.F. Church reported: "I then saw an Me 109 flying away from the drome and fired one burst of about 4 seconds from 400 yards at 45°. I fired another 4 second burst from about 300 yards line astern. No strikes observed but a lot of black smoke from the engine and then the pilot baled out. The chute opened."<sup>141</sup>

Actually only two Messerschmitts were shot down and one Fw 190 was lost as a result of technical problems.<sup>142</sup> The two Messerschmitt pilots belonged to 10./JG 3. Ofw. Robert Reiser and Uffz. Alfred Dors were shot down near Münster, but both managed to bale out. Uffz. Dors remembers: "I was shot down by a Spitfire that was flying above me and that I did not notice. I was hit in the engine and slowly the bullets neared the cockpit and I was hit in my head. At 200-300 metres I baled out and floating down, I saw four Spitfires closing in. Afraid of being shot hanging in my parachute, I pulled the cords to descend quicker. Just above the ground, I released my grip and the parachute re-deployed. However, the English pilots did not intend to shoot at me, as they wagged their wings to celebrate their victory. I ended up in a hospital in Münster where I met Ofw. Reiser again."<sup>143</sup>

Ofw. Robert Reiser claimed one of the attacking Spitfires as his seventh victory, but No. 401 Squadron suffered no loss in the engagement. The remaining aircraft of JG 3 returned to their base, but shortly before they arrived two of them were attacked by Spitfires of No. 412 Squadron. Eleven Spitfires had taken off at 15.15 hrs for a recce sweep in the Münster area. S/Ldr. D.H. Dover



Uffz. Alfred Dors of 10./JG 3 in a picture taken at Bad Wiessee in the autumn of 1944. He escaped participating in Bodenplatte when Lt. Jung took over his aircraft, but was shot down by Spitfires later in the day over Münster. (Dors)

A lone Spitfire seen amidst columns of smoke, a result of JG 3's 'visit'. (Baird)





PR Spitfire, PL950, of No. 400 Squadron managed to escape the onslaught but was nevertheless listed 'Cat B'. (Baird)

reported: "I was Crystal Red 1 and we were flying SE from Münster at 12,000 when we spotted two aircraft on the deck. I dove to attack and closed behind a Me 109. I opened fire at 400 yds line astern and observed a strike on his starboard wing. He started to turn. I then closed to 150 yds, fired a two second burst with a strike all over the wings and fuselage and he flicked over on his back and went into the deck and exploded."<sup>144</sup>

According to the personal Combat Report, the Messerschmitt crashed eight miles west of Gütersloh. Without doubt this was Fw. Theodor Schmitt, acting Staffelführer of 3./JG 3, who crashed at Möhler, some six kilometres north-east of Oelde. Fw. Schmitt was killed in the crash and buried at Gütersloh.<sup>145</sup> F/Lt. J.A. Swan claimed the other Messerschmitt destroyed, but this loss could not be identified. The Spitfires suffered also a loss

when F/Lt. James B. Doak was shot down by a Fw 190 and was killed. In fact, F/Lt. Doak was shot down by Fw. Oskar Bösch, who had led the four Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 3. Bösch was already returning to Gütersloh with the two remaining aircraft when he was warned by R/T that 12 Spitfires were over Gütersloh at 2,000 metres. Climbing with his Schwarm, he spotted one and shot it down, the Spitfire crashing near Warendorf/Osnabrück at 16.15 hrs.<sup>146</sup> All German aircraft had returned by 16.30 hrs.<sup>147</sup>

## Damage assessment at Eindhoven

Although the damage assessment varies in several reports there is no doubt at all that a great amount of damage was done at Eindhoven. Obviously Jagdgeschwader 3 (and parts of JG 6) had concentrated on aircraft. There was no serious



Fw. Theo Schmitt of 3./JG 3, seen probably at Gütersloh in July 1944. (Schmitt)

Hawker Typhoon, JR261, of No. 137 Squadron went 'Cat B/E' damaged as a result of the New Year attack on Eindhoven. (Baird)



damage to permanent buildings and taxiways and runways had been cleared of debris by the afternoon, but the destruction among aircraft and aircraft installations had been significant. At least 44 aircraft were destroyed and some 60 damaged. Hardest hit were the relatively un-dispersed and crowded areas where the Canadian Typhoon Wing and the Recce Wing had settled down. Personnel losses were relatively high too – not so remarkable, given the huge amount of units present at the airfield. At least 15 men were killed in the attack on Eindhoven and more than 40 were wounded or injured. Again, losses were highest among the men of the Recce Wing and the Canadian Typhoon Wing.

Within No. 124 Wing, in all, some 24 aircraft have been identified as destroyed or damaged as a result of the attack. Hardest hit was No. 182 Squadron: *"The boys quickly sought cover and we were fortunate in having only two casualties. Corporal Rabbitt was caught in the open and fatally wounded while LAC Hodges had the misfortune to have his foot shot away by a cannon shell. What aircraft we had were all more or less damaged, but a refitting party was soon organised and were flown to England by Dakota. A very quiet evening was spent in the mess; most of us suffering from some degree of 'twitch'."*<sup>148</sup>

Its sister Squadron, 181, fared considerably better; it boasted the lowest losses: *"It was obvious that their objective were aircraft and a very good job they made on the airfield, but the 181st were very lucky in having no casualties among their personnel and only one aircraft was destroyed."*<sup>149</sup>

Although losses among aircraft were relatively low, No. 137 Squadron had the highest casualty rate in the Wing: *"The Hun came over in force and really carried out a superb attack on the aerodrome. His attack commenced at 09.20 hours and lasted until 09.45 hours – 25 minutes all told. Although he caused a fair amount of damage, we got off remarkably lightly. We had two aircraft shot by machine gun and cannon fire, one being Cat. B and the other Cat. Ac. Our casualties, unfortunately, were the heaviest of the Wing. F/Sgt. L.A.V. Burrows was killed as he was taxiing towards dispersal. F/Sgt. Bazley, our Fitter "Chiefie", was killed in the office. He was wounded in the first attack and was later hit by a cannon shell in the head and stomach. Nine other airmen were admitted to hospital, with serious injuries in some cases."*<sup>150</sup>

Jack Sinar was with 513 Mobile Signals Unit, attached to No. 124 Wing. He was billeted in a small workshop in the village of Zeelst and after the attack went to the aerodrome: *"So we went to the airfield to see what had happened. There was fire and smoke everywhere and the ammunition had been hit and there were bullets flying and bombs exploding for quite a few days. I remember one aircraft a Douglas Boston which was being repaired and everything was ready for it to fly that week but it got shot up and burned to a cinder never to fly again."*<sup>151</sup>

No. 247 Squadron registered six aircraft destroyed or damaged. In his own way the squadron diarist summed up the status of the airfield after the Luftwaffe had left: *"When the attacks eased off and only the friendly roar of Tempests*



A burnt-out Spitfire Mk XI at Eindhoven, with Bill Baird to the extreme right. (Baird)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Spitfire Mk IX, PA894, of No. 400 Squadron is hosed down at Eindhoven. Note the No. 137 Squadron Typhoon to the right. (Baird)



Another view of the burning Spitfire Mk IX, PA894, of No. 400 Squadron. (Baird)

and Spitfires filled the air, we emerged from our various hiding places and stood staring at the awful mess which but half an hour previously was a well-equipped aerodrome. A thick pall of oily smoke covered everything, blotting out even the light of the sun. Visible at numerous points through the haze were the ruby colored tongues of hungry flames, each group of which represented the site of an aircraft, no longer an object of powerful beauty, but a bubbling heap of molten metal. It was a horrible sight. Wherever one looked there were burning or shattered aircraft, spewing clouds of smoke

into the air. There was a constant popping of ammunition as the flames ate their way into the magazines and now and again a throaty sigh would announce the passage of an ignited rocket on its return journey from the zenith."<sup>152</sup>

Material and personnel losses were highest among No. 39 Wing. Obviously, it had taken the brunt of the attacks. In all some 30 aircraft were destroyed or damaged. Among the 'Cat. E' were three Mustang Mk Is, two Spitfire Mk XIVs and five Spitfire Mk XIs, four Spitfire Mk IXs, one



Mustang Mk I, two Spitfire Mk XIVs and four Spitfire XIs were labeled 'Cat. B'. One Spitfire Mk IX, two Spitfire Mk XIVs and one Spitfire Mk XI were registered 'Cat. Ac' and finally three Spitfire Mk XIVs and two Spitfire Mk XIs were deemed 'Cat A'. Among the casualties were two killed and at least 15 men wounded. No. 39 Wing had suffered hard: "Death was ever close all over the field. Especially in the area which housed the armament and maintenance sections. Caught in the cross-fire from every angle of attack, the tail end of burst whipped through or work shacks, loaded with enough high explosives, gun cotton and detonators to blow up the whole area. The bomb disposal truck took a direct hit from a burst, but the bullets missed the explosives a scant four inches."<sup>153</sup>

Aircraft losses were highest among No. 400 Squadron: "Fortunately only one airman was hit. The outcome of this left us with only three serviceable aircraft."<sup>154</sup>

With some 29 aircraft destroyed or damaged, No. 143 (Canadian) Wing was second hardest hit. Standing in the open at the southern edge of the field, there was no place to hide. The concentrated Luftwaffe attacks not only dealt with the aircraft on strength but many installations were hit as well, the most notorious being the bomb dump that went up shortly after JG 3 had left. Since the Canadian Wing was preparing for a mission, most of their aircraft were caught bombed and armed up.

Despite their precarious situation, losses among its pilots were relatively low. As the No. 438 Squadron diarist put it: "*Though we lost our Officer Commanding and another pilot, as well as five aircraft, we feel we escaped very lucky. Our complete dispersal is set back in the woods and was apparently missed in the strafing.*"<sup>155</sup>

As recounted, No. 168 Squadron lost F/Lt. Gibbons returning from an air test but they suffered only one squadron aircraft damaged on the ground: "*Three Squadron airmen were also killed in this attack.*"<sup>156</sup>

Many of the No. 439 Squadron pilots were in the squadron hut at the opening of the attack. Some of them made a low-level dive into a nearby slit trench, which had apparently filled with three feet of water covered by two inches of ice. In this action some of the men pancaked on others who were submerged in the freezing water. The squadron noted six aircraft damaged or destroyed. No. 440 Squadron was simply put out of action. At least 13 aircraft were destroyed in the raid: "*The Squadron were left with two aircraft Cat. AC and two Cat. B. These were transferred to Maintenance. During the afternoon it was decided by W/C F.G. Grant, the Wing Commander Flying, that 440 Squadron should cease to operate until replacement aircraft became available.*"<sup>157</sup>

Several other units at Eindhoven suffered losses. Among these were aircraft on charge of 403 R&SU, 83 GCS and 2nd TAF CS. But there were

A dazed member of the groundcrew stands by the smoking remains of a No. 439 squadron typhoon at B-78. (Fochuk).

# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

A card 'liberated' by Dutch civilians from a belly-landed Fw 190 south-west of Venray. The W.Nr. 960320 identified the aircraft as 'Yellow 12' of Uffz. Gerhard Schmitt of 15.(Sturm)/JG 3. (Willemsen)

Muster	Fw 190 A-8		
Zulassg.			
Werk-Nr.	960320		
Motor	BMW 801 D		
Luftschraube	Muster: VDM	Grundeinstellg: 25° - 12° 35'	
Höchstzulässige angezeigte Geschw b Bahnneigungsflg.		Fahrtmesser	
Höhe km	Va		
9	500		
7	600		
5	700		
3	800	Diese Werte sind durch Markieren an den entspr. Geräten vor dem Einstecken d. Karte zu kennzeichnen	
2-0	850		
Kühlmittel-Temp.			
Höhe km	max. Austr.		
Schmierstoff-Temp.		Triebwerks-Überwachungsgeräte	
	Eintritt		Austritt
min.	30°		
max.	70°		105°
kurzzeit.	85°		120°
Schmierstoffdruck		Beschriftung auf Einfülldeckel	
norm.	8-9 atü		
min.	7 atü		
Kraftstoffdr.: 1,25 - 1,75			
Schmierstoff:	Intara		
	Rotring		
Kraftstoff:	C 3		

Beanspruchungsgruppe:		HS <sup>2</sup>	
Motor-Belastgs.-Grenzen			
	zul. Zeit	Lade- anruck	Drehzahl bis km/h
Stand		1,42	2380 12"
Start	norm	1,42	2700
	Überlast	1'	
Flug	3'	1,42	2700
	30'	1,32	2400
	dauernd	1,20	2300
Laderschalt- höhe	Steig-Flug	2,7 km	
	Wasser-Flug	automat.	
Gleit-u. Landung	Höchst-drehzahl: 2500		
	Mindest-drehzahl: 2280		
Flugzeit u. Flugstrecke			
bei höchstzul. Dauerleistung für 640 Ltr Kraftstoffmenge			
Flughöhe km	0,3	2,0	5,0
Laderschalt- Geschwindigkeit			
Lade- druck	1,20	1,20	1,20
Dreh- zahl U/min	2300	2300	2300
Kraftstoff- verbrauch l/h	460	475	460
Wahre Geschw km/h	515	550	575
Gesamt- Flugzeit h'	1,2	1,3	1,3
Gesamt- Flugstrecke km	615	635	695
Tag:			





also visiting aircraft of other units – the odd Eighth Air Force bomber, some Bostons and a Hudson under repair. No. 83 GCS listed three Spitfires 'Cat. E', one Spitfire 'Cat. B', two Ansons 'Cat. E' and two Austers 'Cat. B'.<sup>158</sup> At least one Auster of 2nd TAF CS burned out. An American refitting party saw its B-17 collapse on fire after many a week of hard labour and three Bostons, a Hudson and a Mitchell burned to cinders. The picture drawn here is the most accurate that could be achieved, but there is little doubt that losses were higher...

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the attack by Jagdgeschwader 3 on Eindhoven can be considered a success. Although I./JG 6 may have contributed, at least two-thirds of the destruction must have been caused by JG 3. Losses however had been considerable. Fifteen Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs, 25 per cent of the attacking force of 60 aircraft, had been lost. Three more were damaged. Of the 15 missing pilots, nine were killed and six ended up as a POW.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This summary is primarily based on the books by Dr. Jochen Prien on Jagdgeschwader 3 and the loss records of the individual units.

<sup>2</sup> I./JG 3 were transferred to Paderborn on November 24th.

<sup>3</sup> According to RL2-III-1170/50 he was flying Bf 109 G-14, WNr. 785788, 'White' 12. According to our sources his remains were never found.

<sup>4</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 698/1944, point 9. That Fw. Theodor Schmitt took over 3./JG 3 is based on Messerschmitt Bf 109 in Einsatz bei Stab und I./JG 3 by Jochen Prien, page 457. Fw. Schmitt was one of the few remaining experienced Schwarmführer of 3./JG 3.

<sup>5</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung I./JG 3 and letter of Oblt. Seidl to parents of Lt. Ruhl.

<sup>6</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 141/1945, point 10.

<sup>7</sup> RL2-III-734. 10 Bf 109 G-10 and 12 Bf 109 G-14/AS.

<sup>8</sup> RL2-III-734. Soll/Ist-Stärke 31.12.1944.

<sup>9</sup> Most sources give his rank by the end of December as Hauptmann, but A.D.I.(K) Report No. 133A/1945, point 2, gives his rank as Major. Also the Verlustmeldungen of III./JG 3, which were signed by the Gruppenkommandeur, list his rank from November 4th 1944 as Major.

<sup>10</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./JG 3.

<sup>11</sup> RL10/639, Notes of Maj. Langer from KTB III./JG 3.

<sup>12</sup> 8 P-47's, 3 B-26's and 2 P-51's.

<sup>13</sup> RL2-III-734. Soll/Ist-Stärke 31.12.1944.

<sup>14</sup> According to The Mighty Eighth War Diary by Roger A. Freeman the 2nd Bomb Division lost 11 B-24's and another four damaged that day.

<sup>15</sup> Hptm. Hubert-York Weydenhammer was a former bomber pilot and had recently joined IV./JG 3 where he had been appointed Kapitän of 15./JG 3.

<sup>16</sup> Letter Fw. Gerhard Leipholz, 14./JG 3, dated 30.12.1944. In fact Fw. Leipholz was credited with only one B-26 Marauder.

<sup>17</sup> IV./Jagdgeschwader 3 1943-1945 by Jochen Prien, page 268.

<sup>18</sup> Based on MACR info and To Win The Winter Sky by Danny Parker, page 236.

<sup>19</sup> According to IV./Jagdgeschwader 3 1943-1945 by Jochen Prien, page 276. From at least 24.4.1943 until 16.05.1944 Oblt. Heinrich Schulenburg had belonged to 1./NJG 4. However, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 3/1945, point 14, gives Lt. Peter Sarfert as new Staffelführer of 13./JG 3.

<sup>20</sup> Lt. von den Steinen had accumulated three victories and was with the Gruppe since July 1944.

<sup>21</sup> Logbook Gefr. Horst Teschke, 3./NJG 101.

<sup>22</sup> Logbook Maj. Heinz Bär. No flights are recorded between December 2nd and December 15th. It can be assumed that Maj. Bär travelled by road to the Headquarters of II. Jagdkorps at Flammersfeld.

<sup>23</sup> Landing at Paderborn at 11.57 hrs and take off again at 14.30 hrs.

<sup>24</sup> According to Paul Fischer, pilot of 2./JG 3, Major Bär inspected the Gruppe. Letter Paul Fischer, dated 21.09.1996.

<sup>25</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 75/1945, point 1.

<sup>26</sup> Uffz. Oskar Bösch had joined Sturmstaffel 1 in April 1944 and remained with IV./JG 3 until April 1945. By the end of December 1944 he had accumulated 9 victories.

<sup>27</sup> Letter Oskar Bösch dated 27.4.1996.

<sup>28</sup> Letter Friedrich Tazreiter, dated 28.11.1996.

<sup>29</sup> Letter Paul Fischer, dated 8.3.1993. According to Paul Fischer a movie was shown to the pilots after this initial briefing with the name "7 years bad luck", which seems at least peculiar in retrospect.

<sup>30</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 90/1945, point 1-2, and confirmed by Friedrich Tazreiter in letter dated 28.11.1996.

<sup>31</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 43, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 133B/1945 and A.M.W.I.S. No. 287 dated 3.3.1945, page 49.

<sup>32</sup> Letter Michael Vogl, dated 07.08.2000.

<sup>33</sup> Senne, a landing ground which was also known as Haustenbeck and used as relief field for Paderborn airfield.

<sup>34</sup> Letters Bodo Siegfried, dated 25.08.2000 and 04.10.2000.

<sup>35</sup> Report of the mission of January 1st written by Erich Miedl and dated 28.12.1986. In his statement Erich Miedl writes that III./JG 3 was stationed at Paderborn. This is incorrect and statements made by Bodo Siegfried confirm that the briefing was held at Bad Lippspringe. Further Erich Miedl states that at the briefing on December 31st the target was already given as Eindhoven. However, all other interviewed pilots of III./JG 3 and Stab JG 3 denied this and stated that the target was only disclosed in the early morning of January 1st.

<sup>36</sup> Letter Bodo Siegfried dated 04.10.2000.

<sup>37</sup> Letters Erich Miedl, Bodo Siegfried and logbook Major Heinz Bär.

<sup>38</sup> References regarding maps used by JG 3 pilots can be found in several A.D.I.(K) Reports. Only one map, used by a III. Gruppe pilot, was actually captured, see A.D.I.(K) Report No. 133A/1945, point 3, although the compass courses listed there seem to be incorrect. However, it is considered that this reference is the most reliable and as all JG 3 Gruppen used the same course from Lippstadt on, this course also applies for the other Gruppen.

<sup>39</sup> Which is, in fact, in line with the SSW-NNE runway and towards the dispersals of No. 143 Wing.

<sup>40</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 133A/1945, point 6.

<sup>41</sup> Preparations of IV./JG 3 merely based on A.D.I.(K) Report No. 75/1945, point 2-6, and letters of Oskar Bösch, dated 27.04.1996 and 2.12.1996.

<sup>42</sup> Gen. Maj. Walter Grabmann was commanding officer of 3. Jagddivision which had its headquarters at Wiedenbrück, some 10 kilometres south of Gütersloh, the base of IV./JG 3.

<sup>43</sup> As recounted earlier, this would not be the case. Apparently Maj. Bär decided it was easier to fly alone.

<sup>44</sup> Letter Siegfried Müller, dated 22.02.2001.

<sup>45</sup> IV./Jagdgeschwader 3 1943-1945 by Jochen Prien, page 281.

<sup>46</sup> Based on letter Paul Fischer, dated 8.3.1993.

<sup>47</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 90/1945, point 6-9.

<sup>48</sup> A.M.W.I.S. No. 287, dated March 3rd 1945, page 49, and letter Michael Vogl, dated 07.08.2000.

<sup>49</sup> Logbook Lt. Siegfried Müller, take off 08.22 hrs, landing 10.10 hrs.

<sup>50</sup> Letters Oskar Bösch, dated 9.6.1996 and 2.12.1996.

<sup>51</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 75/1945, point 7-8.

<sup>52</sup> Based on strength report RL2-III-734. Only 19 Fw 190s were operational out of a total force of 30 aircraft available.

<sup>53</sup> Letter Alfred Dors, dated 15.02.1993.

<sup>54</sup> KTB III./JG 3 states 08.25 hrs as take off time and the Verlustmeldungen of III./JG 3 list 08.30 hrs.

<sup>55</sup> Letter Erich Miedl dated 28.12.1986.

<sup>56</sup> Number of participating aircraft according to KTB III./JG 3.

<sup>57</sup> Letter Bodo Siegfried dated 25.08.2000 and letter Erich Miedl dated 28.12.1986.

<sup>58</sup> Logbook Uffz. Horst Teschke, Bordschütze of Ju 88 G-1 9W+1L of 3./NJG 101. Also A.D.I.(K) Report No. 102/1945 and 141/1945.

<sup>59</sup> ULTRA-Report BT-945. According to strength reports for 31.12.1944 ten Bf 109 G-10 and twelve Bf 109 G-14/AS were operational.

<sup>60</sup> Letter Paul Fischer dated 11.08.1993.

<sup>61</sup> Logbook Maj. Heinz Bär.

<sup>62</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 75/1945, point 10.

<sup>63</sup> Letter Erich Miedl dated 28.12.1986. Ofw. Bertsch' crew landed at Paderborn at 09.50 hrs.

<sup>64</sup> No. 439 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>65</sup> No. 414 Squadron Operations Record Book, Form 540 and Form 541.

<sup>66</sup> No. 168 Squadron Operations Record Book, Form 541.

<sup>67</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. Gibbons, filed by F/Lt. Charbonneau, intelligence officer 168 Squadron.

<sup>68</sup> No. 83 Group Communications Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>69</sup> Letter Michael Vogl, dated 07.08.2000.

<sup>70</sup> Report Luchtschermingsdienst Aarle-Rixtel dated 1.1.1945.

<sup>71</sup> Lt. Hans-Ulrich Jung was buried at Woensel Cemetery, Eindhoven. In 1949 reinterred at Ysselsteyn, Grave Z-6-141. His remains were identified in the early seventies.

<sup>72</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 101/1945.

<sup>73</sup> Letter Friedrich Tazreiter dated 28.11.1996.

<sup>74</sup> Logbook Maj. Heinz Bär in which he gives the time as 09.23-09.25 hrs. The action was fully witnessed by Uffz. Erich Miedl according to his letter dated 28.12.1986.

<sup>75</sup> Letter Oskar Bösch dated 27.4.1996.

<sup>76</sup> This is incorrect. The eight Typhoons were detailed for an Armed Recce

in the St Vith area.

<sup>76</sup> Letter Bill Harle dated 8.12.1996

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Sgt. M.A. Scott dated 26th August 1996

<sup>78</sup> Het doel bereikt; Mr. R.J.E.M. van Zinnicq Bergmann; Van Mazijk Uitgevers Leiden 1990; p.175. Apparently a claim for F/Lt. Wilson was filed, but later this claim was cancelled. ORB No. 143 Wing.

<sup>79</sup> This claim is not confirmed in the 2nd TAF Log of casualties, claims, assessments and losses.

<sup>80</sup> No. 440 Squadron Operations Record Book

<sup>81</sup> No. 430 Squadron Operations Record Book

<sup>82</sup> According to one source his aircraft came down behind a convent in an area known as 'in het Broek' on the grounds of Aarle-Rixtel, but this seems too far from the airfield to be true. Based on Personal Combat Report by F/Lt. Charbonneau of 168 Squadron on behalf of F/Lt. Gibbons and Operations Record Book No. 168 Squadron.

<sup>83</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 dated 16.01.1945.

<sup>84</sup> Document Bundesarchiv Aachen.

<sup>85</sup> Letter Gerhard Leipholz, dated 30.12.1944.

<sup>86</sup> Letter Siegfried Müller, dated 22.02.2001.

<sup>87</sup> Incorrectly named Ju's as Junkers in the Operations Record Book.

<sup>88</sup> No. 247 Squadron Operations Record Book

<sup>89</sup> Account Ron Rowley 137 Sqn. via Brian Barnes. The third one being F/Sgt. Lance Burrows.

<sup>90</sup> No. 439 Squadron Operations Record Book

<sup>91</sup> No. 143 Wing Headquarters Operations Record Book

<sup>92</sup> Letters Oskar Bösch dated 9.6.1996 and 2.12.1996.

<sup>93</sup> Het doel bereikt; Mr. R.J.E.M. van Zinnicq Bergmann; Van Mazijk Uitgevers Leiden. Also Battle of the Airfields by Norman Franks, page 52.

<sup>94</sup> Letter Erich Miedl dated 28.12.1986 and amendment of unknown date.

<sup>95</sup> No. 2703 Squadron Operations Record Book R.A.F.R.

<sup>96</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2703, 2773, 2806 and 2817 Squadron.

<sup>97</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 90/1945, point 12.

<sup>98</sup> This unknown pilot was later reinterred at Ysselsteyn Grave Z-6-137.

<sup>99</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 90/1945, point 11-12.

<sup>100</sup> R.A.F. Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265 dated 29.01.1945.

<sup>101</sup> Based on letter Paul Fischer dated 8.3.1993, 11.08.1993 and 21.09.1996. Note that his account is contradictory with the information in his A.D.I.(K) Report No. 102/1945. In his letters Paul Fischer emphasised that these details were not correct.

<sup>102</sup> RL10/639, KTB III./JG 3 by Major Karl-Heinz Langer.

<sup>103</sup> As stated by a former member of III./JG 3, who had participated in the attack, to the parents of Oblt. von Treuberg in May 1945.

<sup>104</sup> Personal Combat Report Sgt. W.R. Large and F/Sgt. C.J. McGee, groundcrew No. 438 Squadron.

<sup>105</sup> Het doel bereikt; Mr. R.J.E.M. van Zinnicq Bergmann; Van Mazijk Uitgevers Leiden 1990; p.179

<sup>106</sup> Excerpt from Tale Spin (124 Wing Magazine) 1945: courtesy of 247 (F) (China-British) Squadron Association

<sup>107</sup> Personal Combat Report by F/Lt R.C. Smith, No. 442 Squadron

<sup>108</sup> No. 442 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>109</sup> Personal Combat Report by S/Lt G. Wonnacott, DFC, No. 414 Squadron. In a supplement to this report, a description is given of a crashed Fw 190 north-east of Eindhoven and the claim of S/Lt. Wonnacott was stepped up to two Me 109s destroyed and one Fw 190 destroyed. However, the authors believe this Fw 190, a JG 6 aircraft, is the one shot down by S/Lt. D.H. Dover and F/O E.D. Kelly of No. 412 Squadron.

<sup>110</sup> Based on letter of Oskar Zimmermann to parents of Gefr. Wieschhoff of 4./JG 3, dated 24.10.1946.

<sup>111</sup> Based on R.A.F. Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 91/1945 and letter by Mrs. L. Rutkowski, Walter Rutkowski's widow, dated 29.01.1993.

<sup>112</sup> Based on A.D.I.(K) Report No. 141/1945, point 3-4, and letter by Mrs. A. Hameister, Friedrich Hameister's widow

<sup>113</sup> R.A.F. Crashed Enemy Aircraft report No. 264 and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 133A/1945.

<sup>114</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.25269.

<sup>115</sup> No. 2874 Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment, Operations Record Book.

<sup>116</sup> Personal Combat Report by F/O W.A.L. Trott, No. 486 Squadron.

<sup>117</sup> The unknown German pilot now rests at Ysselsteyn Cemetery Grave CH-8-188.

<sup>118</sup> Personal Combat Report by F/O R.H. Laurence and F/O A.H. Fraser, both No. 439 Squadron and Operations Record Book No. 439 Squadron, Form 541.

<sup>119</sup> Personal Combat Report by F/O L. Woloschuk 414 Squadron

<sup>120</sup> Based on a thorough comparison with all German fighter losses in the area, it was concluded that Uffz. Erich Pusch crashed at Vredepeel. He was buried at De Rips and during his reinterment his disc was found and he could be identified. Rapport van Overbrenging D.10189.

<sup>121</sup> Letter Oskar Bösch dated 9.6.1996.

<sup>122</sup> Police report dated 12.01.1945, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 75/1945, point 11-12.

<sup>123</sup> Letter Wilhelm Wieschhoff, brother of Rudolf Wieschhoff, dated 3.4.1996.

<sup>124</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.378.

<sup>125</sup> RL2-III-852 and letter Erich Miedl dated 28.12.1986. Also letter of Bodo Siegfried dated 25.08.2000.

<sup>126</sup> RL2-III-1172. Apparently he returned with his aircraft as I./JG 3 reported 8 Messerschmitts lost at the end of the day.

<sup>127</sup> Letter Michael Vogl, dated 07.08.2000.

<sup>128</sup> RL2-III-1197/71 and RL2-III-852.

<sup>129</sup> Information VDK dated 18.6.1996.

<sup>130</sup> Letter Erich Miedl to Karl Bleckmann, undated.

<sup>131</sup> Logbook Major Heinz Bär.

<sup>132</sup> ULTRA Report BT-945.

<sup>133</sup> Letter Oskar Bösch dated 9.6.1996.

<sup>134</sup> As stated in letters of Oskar Bösch, Erich Miedl and Oskar Zimmermann.

<sup>135</sup> Based on KTB III./JG 3 by Maj. Karl-Heinz Langer. RL10/639 BA/MA Freiburg.

<sup>136</sup> RL2-II-855. Luftwaffenführungstab Ic, Fremde Luftwaffen West Nr. 1160/45 g.Kdos. dated 25.2.1945 and Nr. 4479/45 geheim dated 4.3.1945.

<sup>137</sup> Fernschreiben II./Jako. Ic Nr. 140/44 geh. dated 3.1.1945.

<sup>138</sup> Both victories of Ofw. Hameister and Uffz. Schmidt were not claimed as both pilots ended up as a POW.

<sup>139</sup> Based on information from relatives of Fw. Strebel, forwarded by Jean-Yves Lorant dated 14.10.2000.

<sup>140</sup> Letter Erich Miedl to Karl Bleckmann, date unknown.

<sup>141</sup> Personal Combat Report F/O D.E. Church, No. 401 Squadron.

<sup>142</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldungen III./JG 3, Fernschreiben II./Jako. Ic Nr. 140/44 geh. dated 3.1.1945 and RL2-III-852.

<sup>143</sup> Letter Alfred Dors, dated 15.02.1993.

<sup>144</sup> Personal Combat Report S/Lt. D.H. Dover, No. 412 Squadron.

<sup>145</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle 30.04.1999.

<sup>146</sup> Letter Oskar Bösch dated 9.6.1996.

<sup>147</sup> FS II./Jako. Ic Nr. 140/44 geh. dated 3.1.1945.

<sup>148</sup> No. 182 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>149</sup> No. 181 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>150</sup> No. 137 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Jack Sinar dated August 1st 1996.

<sup>152</sup> Excerpt from Tale Spin (124 Wing Magazine) 1945: courtesy of 247 (F) (China-British) Squadron Association.

<sup>153</sup> Letter from LAC Ace McGuire: 39 Wing dated 18th March 1998.

<sup>154</sup> No. 400 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>155</sup> No. 438 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>156</sup> No. 168 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>157</sup> No. 440 Squadron Operations Record Book.

<sup>158</sup> No. 83 Group Communications Squadron Operations Record Book.

# Raiders of the Lost Airfield

**Jagdgeschwader 4 in search of Le Culot**

In a sense Jagdgeschwader 4 was a peculiar Geschwader. For a long time only I. Gruppe existed. This Gruppe had been established in July 1942 from parts of JG 77. From December 1943 until July 1944 the Gruppe operated in Italy.

**F**ROM August onwards it operated in the West and later over the Reich. By December 1944 the unit was based at Darmstadt-Griesheim. During a mission near Aachen on December 3rd it suffered heavy losses. A Stab JG 4 was not established until June 1944. Major Gerhard Michalski, a 27-year old veteran with nearly seventy victories became Kommodore of JG 4.

II.(Sturm)/JG 4 was established in July 1944 under Obstlt. Hans-Günther von Kornatzki. The core was formed around former pilots and groundcrew of I./ZG 1 who were withdrawn from the front in mid-June as well as several pilots from Sturmstaffel 1.<sup>1</sup> Flying its first mission in early September 1944, the Gruppe suffered heavy losses and lost several of the old I./ZG 1 pilots as well as its Gruppenkommandeur, Obstlt. Von Kornatzki during the first two months of operations. At the end of December 1944,

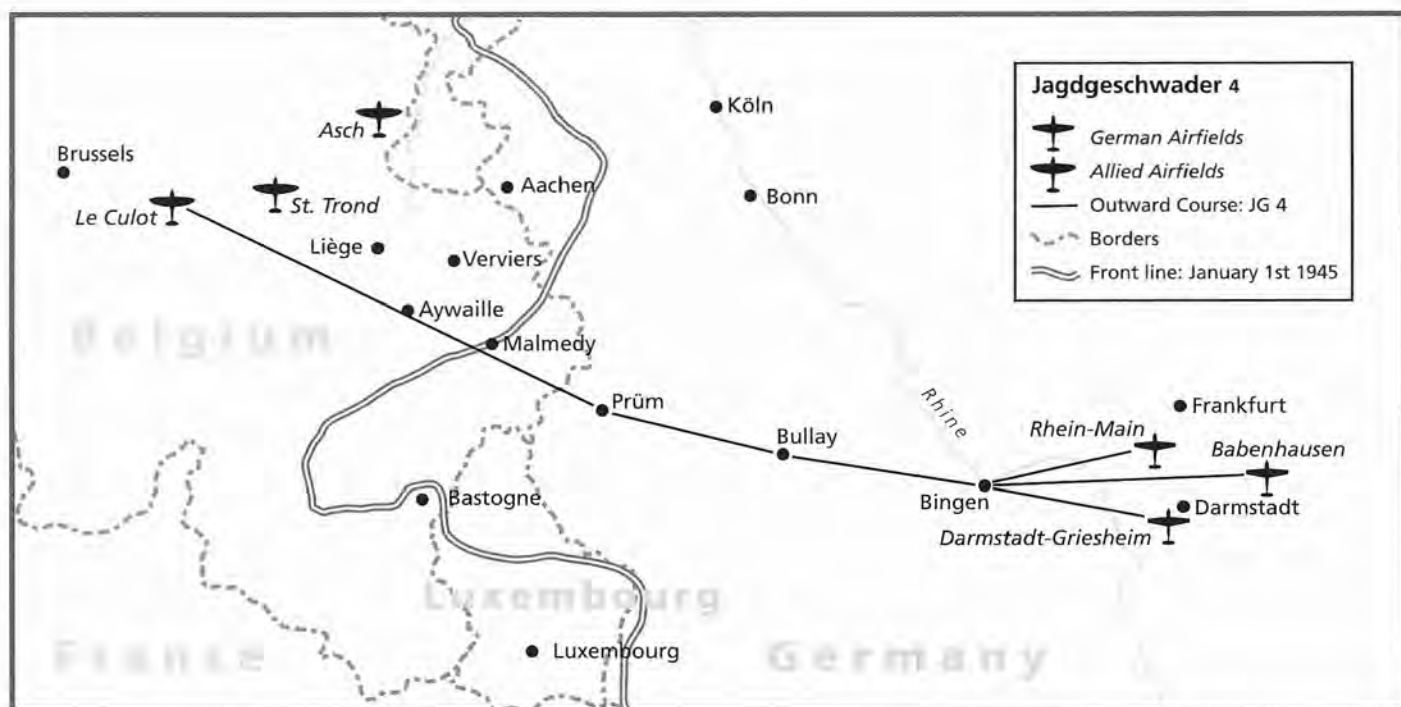
Welzow, September 1944. Pilots of 5.(Sturm)/JG 4 in front of the Staffel tent. Standing from left to right: Uffz. Erich Keller, Uffz. Herbert Chlond and Ofhr. Franz Schaar. Sitting from left to right: Unknown, Uffz. Albert Erler and unknown. (Brüch)





# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Even as late as the end of 1944, there were still large numbers of 'razorback' P-47s in use by the Ninth Air Force; here two 'bubble-tops' and a 'razorback' of the 36th FG are about to take off for another mission. (Queen)

II.(Sturm)/JG 4 was based at Babenhausen, some 14 kilometers south-west of Aschaffenburg. The Gruppenkommandeur was Maj. Gerhard Schröder. Although 32 years of age, he was quite inexperienced as a fighter pilot. He had been an observer with KG 55 and did not receive pilot training until 1943. He was not popular in his Gruppe and some young pilots thought he was a coward because he did not often fly. During most operations, the experienced Kapitän of the 7. Staffel, Oblt. Erhard 'Max' Niese, led the Sturmgruppe.<sup>2</sup> Oblt. Niese was a very experienced fighter pilot; by the end of December 1944 he had flown over 570 combat missions and shot down 23 aircraft. He had been Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 77 from mid-1943 till mid 1944 and had led III./JG 77 for a month. Most of his combat

claims (19) occurred during his stay with JG 77. He was awarded the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold on 26th July 1944.<sup>3</sup>

III./JG 4 was formed in July 1944 from the remnants of I. and III./ZG 1. The Gruppe was commanded by Hptm. Friedrich Eberle, former Gruppenkommandeur of III./JG 1, and was equipped with Bf 109s. After initial training in August 1944, the Gruppe flew its first operations on September 11th with catastrophic results. At least 17 Messerschmitts were shot down with 9 pilots killed. A little over one week later, III. Gruppe was involved in the battle around Arnhem and again suffered serious losses. More Reichsverteidigung<sup>4</sup> missions were flown in October and November 1944. On December 17, III./JG 4, transferred to Darmstadt-Griesheim to

take part in the Ardennes offensive. By that time it was still commanded by Hptm. Eberle.

IV./JG 4 had its origins in II./JG 5. This Gruppe had returned to Germany in June 1944 and had flown operations in France since the end of that month. In July 1944 the Gruppe was recalled to Germany and flew Reichsverteidigung missions until the end of October. Then II./JG 5 was renamed in IV./JG 4. In November 1944, the Gruppe transferred to Rhein-Main under the





An impressive looking view of a P-47 of the 22nd FS, 36th FG ('Easy's Angels'). (Queen)

command of Hptm. Franz Wienhusen. However, at the beginning of December 1944, IV./JG 4 suffered heavy casualties including its CO, Hptm. Wienhusen, who was reported missing on December 3rd.<sup>5</sup> Hptm. Ernst Laube took command of the Gruppe after Wienhusen's death. By the end of December 1944 Stab and IV./JG 4 were based at Rhein-Main airfield, south of Frankfurt.

As the individual Gruppen of JG 4 flew their attack on January 1st more or less independently, their exploits will be recounted separately. However, before studying JG 4's attack, let us turn to Le Culot, an airfield in central Belgium.

#### Le Culot airfield, December 1944.

Le Culot, situated about 45 kilometres north-east of Charleroi, had two airfields. The main strip was Le Culot (or A-89) known locally as Beauvechain, and an auxiliary field known as Le Culot East (designated Y-10) and known to the locals as 'Les Burettes'. Le Culot East had hardly been used by the Germans, III./JG 26 having been there for merely a week in May of 1940. The main airfield had seen extensive use by the Luftwaffe. Between 1940-44 several Kampfgeschwader operated from Le Culot, such as Stab, I and II./KG 30, I and IV./KG 3 and II./KG 6. Also the nightfighters from I./NJG 3 were based a while at this airfield. More recently, having been captured by the Allies, a number of Canadian Spitfire squadrons and a Mosquito nightfighter squadron had operated from the strip.

However, in the last week of October 1944, the Ninth Air Force had taken control of both airfields. On A-89 the 36th FG, part of XXIX TAC, took charge of Le Culot when its three squadrons, the 53rd FS, the 22nd FS and the 23rd FS landed their mighty P-47 Thunderbolts flying in from Juvincourt, France. Joining them was

another P-47-equipped fighter group, the 373rd FG. Its three component squadrons, the 410th, 411th and 412th flew in from Rheims in France. A little further away to the north-east, the 363rd TRG touched down and took possession of 'Les Burettes'. Operating the F-6 variant of the P-51 Mustang and the F-5 reconnaissance version of the P-38 Lightning, they were the "eyes of the infantry". The group consisted of an equal number of tactical and photographic reconnaissance squadrons but on New Year's Day, the two tactical reconnaissance squadrons, the 160th and 161st TRS were on detachment to Conflans (A-94) in France. Only the F-5s of the 33rd and 155th PRS were occupying Y-10 on January 1st. All these units were heavily committed to the Battle of the Bulge and, weather permitting, there were constant take-offs and landings from both airfields. During their stay at Le Culot the 36th and 373rd FG amassed a total score of 48 confirmed enemy aircraft shot down.<sup>6</sup>

#### Stab and IV./JG 4 attacks

Geschwaderkommodore Maj. Gerhard Michalski had attended the December 5th meeting at II. Jagdkorps HQ in Altenkirchen and therefore he was one of the few members of JG 4 aware of Bodenplatte. In his monthly report on operations in January he wrote:

*"Special Operation: With the goal of destroying the Allied fighter and bomber units stationed in the Dutch-Belgian area, the units of 3. and 8.*

*Jagddivision flew a special operation on January 1st 1945. This operation had been in preparation since the beginning of December. Jagdgeschwader 4 had the assignment to attack the airfield of Le Culot, south-east of Brussels, with all Gruppen. To make orientation easier and to make sure that the target*

*was reached, each Gruppe would be led by one or two Ju 88 Lotse. This meant that the pilots would not need to navigate and could concentrate on their position in the formation and low-level flying. Kommodore JG 4 would lead IV./JG 4. All other Gruppen would be led by their Kommandeure or their second in commands.<sup>7</sup>*

At 18.00 hrs on December 31st, Michalski briefed the pilots of IV./JG 4, including the Gruppenkommandeur and all four Staffelpitäne for the operation. He informed them that it was to be an important mission in which the entire Geschwader would participate. Pilots were shown a photograph of Le Culot airfield on which about 60 Thunderbolts and a few four-engined aircraft appeared. Major Michalski described the course to the target in detail and the pilots marked it in on their maps during the briefing. The first leg, which was from Rhein-Main direct to Bingen, was not drawn in for security reasons.<sup>8</sup>

The course from Bingen to Le Culot was identical to that planned for the other Gruppen of JG 4 – Bingen-Bullay-Prüm-Le Culot.<sup>9</sup> The aircraft, led part of the way to the target by a single Ju 88 Lotse, were to fly at low altitude in Schwärme in fairly close formation. Strict R/T discipline was to be maintained throughout the flight, but FuG 16 was to be switched on at take-off and kept on all the way to the target. Pilots were forbidden to celebrate the New Year and told to abstain from alcohol. Oblt. Lothar Wolff, Staffelpitän of 15./JG 4, remembers the briefing: "On the evening of 31st December the Staffelpitäne and the other pilots were called together to attend the briefing for the next morning's mission. The whole operation was very important and they tried to boost our morale. It was said that it was very important to start at dawn to surprise the enemy and that the success of this operation was very important for the future. They had reckoned we could destroy 800-1,000 aircraft. We even had to dress well – the complete uniform – as if one was taken POW it would make a good impression."<sup>10</sup>

As stated above, Maj. Gerhard Michalski would lead IV./JG 4 on January 1st.<sup>11</sup> At 08.20 hrs, the Lotse Ju 88 took off, immediately followed by the Bf 109 of Major Michalski and the Bf 109 G-14s and K-4s of IV./JG 4.<sup>12</sup> There was ground fog and snow during take-off, but all went well. In total, one Bf 109 of Stab JG 4 and 16 of IV./JG 4 took off from Rhein-Main for their mission against Le Culot.<sup>13</sup> Assembly took place over the airfield and they set course in Schwärme stepped up from front to rear. The first Schwarm was led by Oblt. Lothar Wolff. The pilots of the first Schwarm could clearly see the Ju 88 flying in the lead.

The formation flew in the direction of Bingen and continued its way to Bullay and Prüm. Most likely at this stage Michalski experienced

difficulties with his Messerschmitt and had to return to base.<sup>14</sup> Oblt. Wolff took over command of IV./JG 4. Some 25 kilometres west of Bullay the formation was joined by two Fw 190 A-8/R2s of II.(Sturm)/JG 4 that had experienced difficulties during take-off at Babenhausen and did not manage to find their own unit again. The Focke-Wulfs were flown by Ogr. Hans Peschel and Gefr. Walter Wagner of the 5. Staffel.<sup>15</sup>

Passing Prüm and approaching the front in the Stavelot-Malmedy area, the Gruppe experienced heavy and intense AA fire. Oblt. Lothar Wolff recalls: "Over the Ardennes, where the valleys are very short and where a Ju 88 can not fly very low, we were welcomed by concentrated AA fire. I could see our leading Ju 88 was being hit and how it turned back immediately. Luckily, he was able to reach our homebase again.<sup>16</sup> I took my Staffel up, away from the deadly AA fire and flew through a cloud layer at 800 metres."

Not all of the formation was able to follow Oblt. Wolff's manoeuvre. Even his wingman Ofhr. Arnolf Russow temporarily lost touch with his Schwarm, but succeeded in forming up with the formation some minutes later.<sup>17</sup> At this stage IV. Gruppe suffered its first casualties. Uffz. Lothar Schmidt, who belonged to 15./JG 4, but flew an aircraft of 14./JG 4 on this day, was flying in the rear and also lost contact with the formation. Desperately trying to find his Schwarm, he was shot down by AA fire. Uffz. Schmidt remembers: "We were flying in a westerly direction and were as low as possible trying to pass the front line unnoticed. This did not work and the Americans, who concentrated strong AA defences in the area, fired with everything they had. I was flying with two other pilots at the end of the formation when my aircraft was hit by a 75 mm AA shell in the engine. Flying too low to bale out and as oil was covering the front windshield, I decided to make a belly-landing. I belly-landed in a forest near Bütgenbach. Slightly injured, I was captured by Canadians, brought to Huy and transferred to the British."<sup>18</sup>

Another victim of the intense AAA was 24-year old Fw. Karl Berg of 15./JG 4. Flying Bf 109 K-4 'Yellow 4', he was lost in the same general area. No trace of him has been found and he is still listed as MIA today. Ofw. Hermann Holtkötter, a veteran pilot of JG 5, and now flying with 13./JG 4, crashed near Wibrin, some eight kilometres north-west of Houffalize. Not until the reburial of his remains at the German Military Cemetery of Recogne in 1953 could he be identified.<sup>19</sup> The 29-year old Holtkötter had joined 2./JG 5 in April 1942 and was one of the most experienced pilots in the Gruppe. He flew with 2./JG 5 in Norway, with 1./JG 5 in Bulgaria and Rumania and with 5./JG 5 in France after the invasion. He had been shot down three times and



Uffz. Lothar Schmidt, 15./JG 4, photographed in December 1944. (Schmidt)



Fw. Karl Berg of 15./JG 4 was shot down by Allied AAA somewhere over the Ardennes. He is still listed as MIA. (MB Air Research)





Ofw. Hermann Holtkötter of 13./JG 4 was one of the last old hares of II./JG 5 and is seen here in his Bf 109 while with the latter unit in Norway which he joined in April 1942. By July 1944, he had been awarded the Frontflugspanne in Gold. (Beitler)

was awarded the EK II, Frontflugspanne in Gold and Verwundetenabzeichen in Schwarz.<sup>20</sup> It is more than likely that also Lt. Elmar Ecker, pilot of 16./JG 4, was a victim of the same AAA. He crashed about 2 kilometres north-east of Ulmen.<sup>21</sup>

Uffz. Werner Anetzhuber of 13./JG 4 apparently also lost contact with his unit. Flying 'White 2', a Bf 109 G-14/AS, he ended up north-east of Eindhoven. Here he fell victim to the guns of two Tempests of No. 56 Squadron piloted by F/O D.E. Ness and P/O H. Shaw. Both pilots attacked the lonely Messerschmitt in turn. P/O Shaw reported: "I broke port and upwards and saw that the 109's engine cowling was ripped open and that flames were coming from the rear of the engine. The pilot was pushing his hood open. Still turning to port I watched the aircraft descend, it's airscrew windmilling slowly. He attempted to force land and just as he hit the deck, he went through a row of trees, turned over and broke up. I did not see the pilot get out."<sup>22</sup>

The Bf 109 crashed near Groot Bruggen, east of Helmond, and Anetzhuber was killed in the crash.<sup>23</sup>

Reduced in number now to approximately eight to ten fighters, IV./JG 4 was still trying to find its designated target at Le Culot. Oblt. Lothar Wolff remembers: "At a height of 1,000 metres we were through the cloud layer and I continued flying at this level. Having the correct course, I checked the time and calculated when we should be over Le Culot. After ten more minutes I thought we should be over the target and we went down through the clouds again and the airfield was directly beneath us!"

In fact the airfield IV./JG 4 had located, was not Le Culot at all, but St. Trond, home of the US

48th and 404th FGs! The mistake was easy to make. Although Le Culot was 25 kilometres further to the west, the prescribed course would have JG 4 passing St. Trond ten kilometres to the south! Thus it would be St. Trond rather than Le Culot that would suffer the JG 4 attack. The German pilots saw a Lightning, five B-17s and between 20 and 40 Thunderbolts parked close together. On arrival over the airfield, the aircraft split up and went in to make individual attacks. Oblt. Lothar Wolff recalls: "We were able to destroy several aircraft on the airfield. I believe six to eight aircraft were burning. Some of the groundcrew were just walking to the Thunderbolts to prepare them for take-off as we approached. Then we encountered heavy AA fire and having used all my ammunition I went up to 8,000 metres immediately and that saved my life." Both the 48th and the 404th FGs were surprised by the attack. Squadrons of both Groups were preparing for take-off. The 492nd was scheduled for take-off at 09.20 hrs. JG 4's attack came only five minutes earlier!<sup>24</sup> The 493rd FS report gives a vivid description:

*"January 1st, 1945, started the New Year out with a bang. A lovely bundle from Berlin in the form of Fw 190s and Me 109s made a beautiful strafing attack of our humble airfield. Near 09.30 hours of that day, we were peacefully minding our own business, and about to see the squadron take off on a mission, when a squadron of so-called "Spitfires" suddenly appeared on the deck and started strafing us. Needless to say, these "Spits" proved to be Me 109s and Fw 190s hell-bent on eliminating us. Never had a foxhole seemed more easy, inviting and*

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## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

*crowded than those in the Squadron area eight seconds after the first shot.*"<sup>25</sup>

Several pilots and groundcrew of the 48th and 404th FGs erroneously identified the aircraft as friendly, but soon they had to run for cover to escape the diving Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulf's. Flight Chief, 'B' Flight Armament of the 493rd, George Payne, was at the opening of the attack near Captain Lloyd White's aircraft. He and the crew chief were helping Capt. White get set: "We noticed a formation of fighters passing the field on the south side, just above the tree tops. At first glance we thought they were British, then one ship had to lift a wingtip and slide up to miss something (a tree I guess). I recognised it as a Me 109. Captain White saw it at about the same time. He came out of that cockpit like he had been ejected. We ran for cover (away from that aircraft with fused bombs, 3,200 rounds of ammo and a fuel load) and made it by the time fighters circled and made their first attack from the west. They attacked in formation and first hit some crippled bombers that were parked along the main runway. Then they dispersed and seemed to come from all directions."<sup>26</sup>

A little further away, Herbert R. Benson – a pilot in the 493rd Squadron – was taxiing out for a mission: "Flying an early morning mission after celebrating New Year's Eve of 1944 was bad enough, but an incident that took place that morning made it rougher. As we taxied toward the runway, we noticed what we thought were Spitfires buzzing the field to salute the New Year. The "Spitfires" turned out to be Me 109s. On the second pass they strafed the field and the P-47's taxiing to the runway. Needless to say, after setting the brakes, we exited our aircraft in a hurry. Those lucky to be close, dove into foxholes near the taxiway. Others took cover where they could. As I remember it, after more passes over the field, anti-aircraft shot down one of the Me 109s (in fact, a Fw 190, [authors]). The pilot baled out and landed near the foxhole where others and I took refuge. Several Airmen-Crewchiefs and myself apprehended the very young German pilot and escorted him to operations for interrogation."<sup>27</sup>

Sgt. J.V. Jamieson was a sheet metal specialist with the 493rd. At the moment of the attack he was standing at his workbench in the engineering hangar together with his buddy Edward M. Lambert: "I could see out the front door. Suddenly eight planes appeared. At first I thought they were British as they had stay-fixed tail wheels. But when they dropped their belly tanks I knew they were German. I headed for a bomb crater right outside the hangar. Well, it was full. Behind the hangar was a road about eight feet down so I slid under a wire fence down onto the road as the planes came low down the runway. Three of them

were shot down so the others crossed the field strafing. When they came from one way I would run to that side of the road. When they came back I would run to the other side of the road. There were some crippled B-24s on the field. They picked them out to strafe. One plane came right over me. I saw a tracer hit it right under the propeller and set it on fire. The pilot, who looked to be about eighteen years old, turned it on its back and baled out. He came down and landed near the top of a little hill. The plane came down on the side of the road by me. The pilot just sat down. About a dozen of our men ran up to where he was. Well, all the planes were shot down but one. An Fw 190 started to come back and strafe them. There was a 40mm ack-ack close by. They made it so hot that the plane turned back. Finally it was hit and landed in a beet patch. The pilot just sat still. Our guys went to him and got his wings and parachute. The pilot followed them back. I got part of that parachute and sent it home. My wife made our small boys a shirt out of it. The Belgians brought in the pilot who had landed in the beet patch."<sup>28</sup>

John Chlopick was an aircraft mechanic with the 493rd Squadron working on his aircraft; all warmed up for the pilot and pretty soon he came out, put him in and tied him up.

"I looked over my shoulder because I heard some planes. I saw a bunch of planes flying at tree top level and I said to the pilot. *"Those Limeys are out early this morning"*, and he looked over his shoulder and said: *"Hell they're not Limeys, they are Fw 190s. We better get the heck out of here."* He baled out and I stood around my plane, waiting till they got to the far end of the field. They peeled off and started to come in with guns blazing. I think they knocked out our multiple .50 ack-ack at the end of the field and they kept coming and they strafed the daylight out of us. When they got to the other end of the field, they turned around, peeled off again and came back. Back and forth, back and forth. A couple of them got shot down and pilots baled out. One plane crashed on the runway, caught fire and splattered all over the place. I saw one coming from the far end of the field in my direction. My plane was parked away from the rest of them and he's coming at me but he's on fire, flying about 30-40 feet off the ground. When he got near me he pulled that thing straight up and he went as it would go and he baled out. That plane spun around and it came right back toward me where I was... Looked to me like it was coming right for me and I said "Oh my God, I'm dead now." I pulled a shield over me and that plane hit and blew up. I looked out and ammo was going off and I was afraid to get out of there because I didn't want to get hit. Anyway, I watch the pilot come down and he lands. He sits right down, reaches into his pocket, pulls out a pipe and

lights it up. He's just sitting there while about twelve of the guys go up to him. They got him up and walked him down past my plane. Sgt. Flowers had a sub-machine gun on him. Hell, the guy wasn't going no place. They got near my plane and stopped. The pilot took off his jacket and gave it to Sgt. Flowers. They went on to the headquarters. I know Flowers told him to fork over the jacket and when they got into the headquarters, the Commander asked the pilot where his jacket was. He told him who had it and the CO made Flowers give it back to him. He had no business taking that man's jacket. This whole incident didn't last but ten minutes."<sup>29</sup>

Warren W. Sorensen was a pilot with the 493rd. At the time of the attack, he was at the chateau south of the north-south runway and had a bird's eye view of the attack: "Our Group was just taxiing out for take-off. My other buddies, not on the mission, and I were alerted by a chattering of anti-aircraft fire. We were billeted in a rectangular chateau about a mile south of the field. We rushed over to the windows to see what was going on. Off to the north I could see a flight of planes flying east on the deck. As I recall all we had around our field for air defence were a few multiple fifties. In a few minutes the fifties started chattering. There weren't many enemy planes that got to the field. I remember an Fw 190 coming over strafing with a belly-tank still on (a no-no) and a fifty got him in the tank, which caught fire. He did the most beautiful pull-up, half-roll, and dropout one could do, and came floating down. There was also a Me 109 that a multiple fifty got on the east end of our east-west runway. He went in scattering down the runway. When we went down to the field a short time later we found the pilot lying along the runway and nothing much left of the plane. One slug had got him right in the forehead, right between the eyes."<sup>30</sup>

Don Archer had not been scheduled to fly on New Year's Day and was well into the New Year's Eve party when another pilot informed him that he would not be able to fly the next morning and asked if Don would take his place. Archer agreed and immediately left the party to get some sleep. He remembers his preparations for take-off: "When taxiing, my crew chief always rode the left wing to watch for problems that might arise. We were about one hundred yards from the runway when I noticed two flights of fighter planes approaching. I paid little attention until they turned towards our runway. I then recognised the Me 109's. I cut the engine and yelled to my wingrider to "Get the hell out of here!" In leaving my plane, I was in such a hurry that I forgot to unhook my parachute. We ran twenty-five or thirty yards, found no slit trenches, so flopped 'belly-up' on the ground. With the parachute under me, I felt ten feet tall as tracers sped over my



nose into the aircraft. The attack was over in less than ten minutes. I gained new respect for the anti-aircraft crews who drove off the Me 109s, shooting down at least two. One pilot baled out and was captured by Lt. Benson and enlisted men whose names I can't recall. The other crash-landed on our runway and was found dead with a single bullet hole in his forehead. Both pilots looked so young; no more than eighteen or nineteen. I tried to hate them, but could only think of my own brother about the same age safe at home in California."<sup>31</sup>

Although the main force of the attack was directed at the 48th FG's area of the field, the 404th Fighter Group got their share of strafing. Kemal Saied was a pilot with the 508th FS in the 404th FG. In his memoirs, "Thunderbolt Odyssey, he wrote: "The situation was tense. We had been scared on Christmas Eve, and now additional precautions were taken to prevent surprise attacks. They included having four P-47s sitting on the end of the runway at all times on "alert", engines warm, ready for immediate take-off at the first sign of threat. Pilots were rotated for this assignment every hour and this was Sully's day to be on alert. They had been alert for about an hour and were bored waiting so long without action. They were to be relieved in ten minutes, so their radios were turned off to conserve the electrical system. Runway alerts had gone on for some time now, and day after day of that duty without any scrambles made an hour-long duty pretty boring. This being New Year's Day (the morning after the Big Night), not much activity was expected. I was not due for a mission that morning, and was in the ready room where we spent most of our time on the ground. There was a popping of arms fire from the runway area. More out of curiosity than alarm, those in the ready room rushed outside to see what was going on. By the time we reached the door, we could hear the roar of low-flying airplanes and the sound of machine guns. There were German Fw 190s and Me 109s all over, from

Warren W. Sorensen of the 493rd FS: "I remember an Fw 190 coming over strafing with a belly-tank still on (a no-no) and a fifty got him in the tank, which caught fire. He did the most beautiful pull-up, half-roll, and dropout one could do, and came floating down." (Sorensen)



# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



An explosion followed by billowing smoke amidst a group of P-47s from the 48th FG as they prepare to take-off for another mission from St. Trond as JG 4 makes its attack. (Payne)



twenty feet off the ground to not more than 500 feet. The first attack came down the runway strafing between the alert planes, missing all of them. Their second run crossed the runway at various angles down to the ground. By that time, the field's anti-aircraft guns went into action. One Me 109 (actually an Fw 190, [authors]) came across the field on the deck from south to north shooting, flying straight and level. Halfway across the field it was hit and burst in a ball of flame, zooming straight up. The pilot bailed out and was captured when he landed. A Fw 190 (actually an Me 109, [authors]) pilot was not so lucky. His plane crashed on the runway

just a few yards from the alert planes. Sully jumped out of his plane, oblivious of the danger around him, to where the young German pilot's body had been thrown. Sully recalled later that while viewing this pilot's body still steaming in the cold air, he wondered if this would be the way it would end for him and who would be looking at his body."<sup>32</sup>

In the 404th FG Photographic Section, Sgt Edward F. Dziadzio and his assistant were preparing the photo requirements for what seemed like another routine day: "Suddenly we were startled by a thunderous and staccato repeat of gunfire which



An Fw 190 banks low across St. Trond airfield early on New Year's morning. (Dziadzio)

seemed to emanate in the immediate vicinity. At that moment the door burst open and a blurred mass of a figure darted into the room diving under our workbench shouting: "*We are being attacked!*" Instinctively I grabbed my carbine, which had been my constant companion and cautiously kicked the door ajar to investigate. Parallel to the side of the building I observed a fighter plane zooming at tree-top-level flying from the north-east. It was so close that I felt I could almost touch it! I recognised it as a German Me 109 fighter plane (a result of previous intensive training in identification of enemy aircraft). Instinctively I fired two bursts from my gun at the broadside of the plane. I believe I had succeeded in striking it, but to date shall never know if any damage had been inflicted. From the time I had first seen the plane to the firing of my gun only a fraction of a second had elapsed: it was a spontaneous reaction. As the rapid and continuous sounds of gunfire re-sounded from all directions and confirming in my mind that we were involved in a full air attack I left my gun behind and picked up my 35mm Kodak Retina Camera, vintage 1931, which was nearby on the photo bench and moved along the side of the building. I did not know what to expect facing the airfield at my 11 o' clock position. I observed a fiery flash of fire in the near distance, indicating one of the German planes had been struck and was crashing. In the distance I saw a plume of smoke arising that seemed to indicate another plane had been struck. As I moved around the building in the direction of the hangar, I observed a Focke-Wulf 190 hovering in the vicinity of the Command Building. This photo appeared in Headquarters AAF Intelligence Report No. 45-3 dated 15 February.<sup>33</sup>



As stated, the effective AA defences had a devastating effect on the small formation of JG 4. On his second pass Ofhr. Horst Grüner, a 20-year old pilot of 15./JG 4, received a direct hit. The unfortunate pilot crashed on the edge of the east-west runway of St. Trond.<sup>34</sup> He was buried as an unknown German pilot at the Military Cemetery of Fosse, Belgium. In July 1949 he was re-interred at the German Military Cemetery in Lommel, Belgium. Until today his remains could not be officially identified, but with the documentary

A fighter from JG 4 explodes on impact with the ground, not far from a parked P-47 Thunderbolt of the 404th FG. (Dziadzio)

A German fighter streams flames as it flies low over St. Trond on the morning of January 1st, 1945. (Dziadzio)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

A German fighter – thought to be the Fw 190 of Ogfr. Hans Peschel of 5./JG 4 – seen having crashed on the flightline of the 494th FS at St. Trond. (Celis/Kupersmith)



proof gathered for this book at the time of writing, it is believed that this can be done in the near future.

On his first run Ogfr. Hans Peschel, one of the pilots of 5.(Sturm)/JG 4 fired on two AAA positions with unobserved results. On his second run, he attacked a Fortress and on his third run he fired bursts at a row of Thunderbolts. Almost immediately afterwards, his Fw 190 A-8/R2 'White 14' was hit by AAA, and after climbing to about 500 metres he baled out and landed about 200 metres away from the airfield boundary, his aircraft crashing on the airfield.<sup>35</sup> Men of the 493rd FS quickly apprehended him. Around the same time his 5. Staffel comrade flying 'White 11', 19-year old Gefr. Walter Wagner had made a belly-landing which would guarantee him a place in all the books which subsequently covered the attack.



Nineteen year old, Gefr. Walter Wagner of 5.(Sturm)/JG 4 made a belly-landing in his Fw 190 A-8/R2, W.Nr. 681497, 'White 11' which would guarantee him a place in all the books dealing with the Bodenplatte attack. (Wilson)

Fw 190 A-8/R2, W.Nr. 681497, 'White 11' under 'restoration' with her new owners. (48th FG Association)





On his first pass, almost immediately after leaving the target, his engine cut out and he put the aircraft to the ground just south of St.Trond airfield. It had been Wagner's third and final operational sortie of the war.<sup>36</sup> His 'White 11' would be the subject of several inspections and after being taken over by the 404th FG, it was repaired again.

Gefr. Karl Noppeney<sup>37</sup> of 13./JG 4 flying a Bf 109 K-4 was also hit by AAA, but not by the AA units stationed at St.Trond. After one of his attacks, he flew low over the village of Wilderen, northwest of St.Trond and was reportedly hit in the cockpit by a AA gunner. Gefr. Noppeney crashed 800 metres north of Wilderen and was killed.<sup>38</sup> Ofhr. Arnolf Russow, Oblt. Lothar Wolff's wingman, also failed to return. Ofhr. Russow, flying 'Yellow 13, was just making his second pass when he was hit by AAA. He then endeavoured to make for base, but a minute or so later he was forced to make a belly-landing. He landed just east of Ulbeek, north-east of St.Trond.<sup>39</sup>

In December 1990, a Belgian aircraft recovery group located the remains of a Bf 109 in a meadow belonging to the Chateau Trockaert, about 10 kilometres north-east from St.Trond airfield. The Daimler-Benz engine was located at a depth of about 5 metres. But literally hundreds of others parts were also recuperated, the most noteworthy being the twin machine guns and the cannon. Without doubt, the key find was one of the Messerschmitt manufacturer's plates marked with the Werknummer 461200. Indeed it was the Bf 109 G-14/AS in which Ofhr. Arnolf Russow of 15./JG 4 flew his last mission. Russow was extricated from the aircraft by a local civilian named Albert Wijgaerts who was assisted by the caretaker of Chateau Trockaert. They managed to disarm the pilot and duly handed him over to American soldiers. They only recovered the guns they could easily reach and then preceded to bury the rest of the fighter on the spot where it remained for the next 45 years.

Only two pilots remained from the force that actually reached St.Trond – Oblt. Lothar Wolff and Lt. Josef Kunz. Both tried to return to their base individually. Lt. Kunz had shot two B-17s and one Thunderbolt during the attack. Flying east, he encountered Mustangs of the 352nd FG and received hits in his oil tank. However, he managed to escape with a damaged aircraft and reached German territory. Near Idar-Oberstein he was forced to make a belly-landing.<sup>40</sup> Now only Oblt. Lothar Wolff remained: "Flying east at an altitude of 8,000 metres I had to cross the Rhine at some time. When I had reached it, I followed the Rhine valley south until I found our airfield. I was the only pilot to return to Rhein-Main.<sup>41</sup> Two or three others had landed at other airfields, but returned later. I had to report to Obstlt. Gotthardt



The US 404th FG at St. Trond refurbished Wagner's 'White 11' and procured a replacement BMW 801 engine abandoned by the Luftwaffe in France. (Wilson)

Handrick immediately and he was shocked to learn that almost no one had returned. He then ordered that we would have to fly the same mission on the next day! What kind of leadership is this? we thought! The Kommodore and the Gruppenkommandeur had to abort; of the other pilots of IV./JG 4 almost no one returned, we had serious doubts about the sense of these operations, which were actually nothing more than making some noise! The desired effect could not be reached by a few strafings. What was the use? When you're not able to lay a carpet of bombs to destroy the airfield, those few destroyed aircraft could be easily replaced. For me, this was not a good beginning of the New Year."



The Werknummer plate of the Bf 109 G-14/AS of Ofhr. Arnolf Russow of 15./JG 4. The engraving reads: '8-109 g 14 AS, 461200, MCU' indicating that the aircraft was built at Erla Maschinenwerk GmbH in Leipzig. The aircraft was recovered at Ulbeek, Belgium in the late 1990s. (Beckers)

Lt. Josef Kunz, Staffelfkapitän of 13./JG 4 seen in September 1944 when the unit was still 5./JG 5. (Scheufele)

Chaos at St. Trond – but effective AA defences had a devastating impact on the small JG 4 attack force. (Payne)



The damage at St. Trond resulting from the attack by the small JG 4 force was considerable. The 48th FG suffered most. The 492nd FG was hit the hardest of any squadron on the field, three P-47s being destroyed and ten damaged. The main fuel tank of one aircraft was ignited and the machine was completely destroyed by fire. Lt. Grimmer defied the strafing to start and taxi away a fully-bombed aircraft, which was parked only a few feet away from the blazing aeroplane. Sgt. DeLeuw received a minor shrapnel wound in the leg as he got out of bed and a 20 mm shell exploded inside his tent. Two trucks of the squadron were damaged.<sup>42</sup> The 493rd escaped damage, but the 494th reported six P-47s damaged, of which four were repairable. Three enlisted men were injured during the strafing, one of them seriously.<sup>43</sup>

The 404th FG came off lightly. When the shooting was over, the 506th FS counted one of its P-47 destroyed and four damaged. The 507th had five damaged P-47s. The 508th area remained untouched. No group personnel were injured. Some casualties were suffered by the AA defenders who had won the thanks and admiration of both Fighter Groups for their outstanding behaviour under fire and excellent marksmanship.<sup>44</sup> Further losses included some crippled heavy bombers – B-17s and B-24s – that had been sitting along the runway. They had landed due to heavy damage and all of them were now badly shot up. In total some ten aircraft were destroyed and 31 damaged at St. Trond.<sup>45</sup>

A post-raid report was made by XXIX TAC and it contains some interesting details on IV./JG 4's attack:

*"It is believed from the tactics employed that the squadron was led by an experienced pilot and that the remainder were young and inexperienced. The leader got away and his flying was reported as being far superior to the others. After completing a strafing run, he would make a tight low-level turn while the others did not turn as tightly or at as low an altitude. All AA claims were made on hits inflicted on the turns. Some of the E/A were carrying belly tanks but no bombs were dropped or observed. At no time during the attack did the altitude exceed 500 feet."*<sup>46</sup>

Although IV./JG 4 reported afterwards that 15 out of 16 Bf 109s had made a low-level attack<sup>47</sup>, in fact no more than six to eight Messerschmitts accompanied by two Fw 190s from the Sturmgruppe attacked an airfield and this was even not their designated target! Claiming three B-17s, a P-47 and one truck destroyed, two B-17s and two Mustangs severely damaged and two light AA batteries silenced, the results seem to be very poor<sup>48</sup>. As stated, the actual damage at St. Trond was heavier. Reporting seven Bf 109s as missing, a further machine destroyed and three damaged, the Gruppe suffered heavily<sup>49</sup>. The next day only seven Bf 109s could be put in the air for operations.<sup>50</sup>

## Disaster strikes the Sturmgruppe

In early December, Fw. Günter Kotschote, an instructor pilot of 5./NJG 101 based at Parndorf, 45 kilometres east of Vienna, received orders to fly to II.(Sturm)/JG 4 at Babenhausen for a special operation. He was not told the purpose of the operation and together with his Bordfunker,



Fw. Günter Kotschote, pilot of the Ju 88 G-1 Lotse for II.(Sturm)/JG 4. (Kotschote)

Ogfr. Karl Walter and Bordmechaniker Ogfr. Herbert Ludwig he prepared for the transfer.<sup>51</sup> Leaving around December 5th his Ju 88 G-1, 9W+BN, developed engine trouble and the crew spent four days at Würzburg and 14 days at Großostheim before arriving at Babenhausen just before Christmas.<sup>52</sup> Also, another Ju 88 was present, which was to fly as reserve Lotse on January 1st, but the crew of this aircraft has not been identified.<sup>53</sup> On December 24th, shortly after arrival of the Ju 88, 96 B-17s of the 3rd Bomb Division bombed Babenhausen. Several Fw 190's were destroyed, but with one severely injured and three slightly injured groundcrew, II.(Sturm)/JG 4 escaped with minor casualties. The Ju 88 and its crew remained unscathed. However, the airfield itself was badly damaged and rendered unserviceable. The airfield was repaired by civilians and Gruppe personnel and by December 31st was sufficiently serviceable for take-off and landing.<sup>54</sup>

At 18.00 hrs on the December 31st, all available pilots of II.(Sturm)/JG 4 and the Ju 88 crews were assembled in the barracks at Babenhausen. The six pilots of 6./JG 4 who had landed together with I./JG 4 at Darmstadt-Griesheim some days earlier, had also travelled to Babenhausen to attend the briefing, after which they returned to Griesheim. Lt. Gottfried Morio, 7./JG 4: "At the end of the afternoon on December 31st we were gathered in a big room in Babenhausen. The building was surrounded by a circle of armed soldiers, who forbid people leaving and entering the building. Here they informed us about the plans for the following day."<sup>55</sup>

Before the briefing took place, Obstlt. Gotthardt Handrick, Jagdabschnittsführer Mittelrhein, addressed the pilots. JG 4, together with JG 2 and JG 11, operated under the command of Jafü Mittelrhein. Obstlt. Handrick told the pilots that this mission was to be part of a large-scale operation under the coordination of Gen.Maj. Dietrich Peltz, CO of II. Jagdkorps, and one in which the entire Geschwader would participate. The freshmen in particular were highly enthusiastic about the mission.<sup>56</sup> He went on to say that there would be little or no anti-aircraft or fighter opposition because the enemy would certainly have been celebrating on New Year's Eve.<sup>57</sup> Each pilot was then given a slip of paper stating in large capital letters that this was 'Der Tag' and that 2,000 German fighters would participate.<sup>58</sup> Another circular was handed round the pilots giving extracts from the Geneva Convention, and they were all told that should they be unfortunate enough to become prisoners of war they were to give no information other than their rank, name, number and home address. Obstlt. Handrick then left the building, saying that he



had to visit the other Gruppen of the Geschwader. After he had gone Maj. Gerhard Michalski gave a short pep talk and warned pilots that if the mission was not carried out with determination and success, they would be sent back either at once or on another day to complete the job. All pilots then returned to the airfield.<sup>59</sup>

At Babenhausen a further briefing was given by Maj. Gerhard Schröder.<sup>60</sup> The pilots were shown photographic cover of Le Culot airfield in which about 96 Thunderbolts were parked together. Also three four-engined aircraft could be seen. The air cover included a smaller airfield or landing ground, which lay about 2.5 kilometres north of Le Culot. It was stated that this was in use as a form of aircraft park and was an alternative target for the attack. The Gruppe aircraft were to assemble over Babenhausen, where also the Fw 190s from 6./JG 4 were to join them and when the formation was ready, they were to follow the two Ju 88s which would fly as Lotsen in advance of the Gruppe on the outward course. The Ju 88s task was to lead the formation by visual means, and to check up the course to the target solely by dead reckoning. The Ju 88 was to fly within sight of Le Culot airfield and then to return alone to Babenhausen.<sup>61</sup>

Major Schröder outlined the course to the target and the pilots marked the relevant details on their maps during the briefing. To prevent the disclosure of the identity of II.(Sturm)/JG 4's base if one of the maps should fall into Allied hands, it was arranged that the first leg, on a due westerly bearing from Babenhausen to Bingen, did not appear on the maps. On the maps which were discovered by the Allied forces in two of the shot down aircraft of II.(Sturm)/JG 4, the following course was shown:

Fw. Kotschote with the Lotse crew of 5./NJG 101. From left to right: Ogfr. Karl Walter (BF), Fw. Günter Kotschote and Ogfr. Herbert Ludwig. All escaped miraculously uninjured from the crash of their Ju 88 G-1 near Aywaille. (Kotschote)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Ofhr. Franz Schaar of 5.(Sturm)/JG 4 thinks about a suitable name for his Fw 190A-8/R2 'White 16'. This is probably W.Nr. 681385. (Brüch)

And the name is there! 'Fratz III' was probably the third aircraft Schaar gave the name. This aircraft, W.Nr. 681385, he belly-landed on September 27th 1944. In the background can be seen Fw 190A-8/R2 'White 9', W.Nr. 681322, which was lost on October 6th 1944. (Brüch)



From	To	Bearing	Flight duration
Bingen	Bullay /Mosel	280 deg	9 1/2 minutes
Bullay	Prüm	288 deg	9 minutes
Prüm	Le Culot	198 deg	211/2 minutes

The return flight was to be flown on a reciprocal course back to Babenhausen, where the 6. Staffel was also to land.

The Gruppe was to fly in Schwärme stepped up from front to rear in a height of about 180 metres until approaching the front line, and then at tree-top level until reaching the target. Pilots were ordered to make at least four attacking runs over the target and to concentrate on aircraft on the ground. Maj. Schröder further emphasised the importance of observing strict R/T silence throughout the operation. Pilots were to switch on their FuG 16 on approaching the front line and were then to do nothing more than listen in for instructions which he, as leader, might see fit to give. R/T discipline was to be such that not even the Staffelkapitäne were permitted to use their equipment. Maj. Schröder recommended that pilots should concentrate on keeping formation and following him, thereby relieving themselves of the difficult task of navigation and leaving them free to keep a careful look out for Allied fighters.<sup>62</sup> That night all pilots, including the officers, had to sleep in barracks at the Fliegerhorst. They were instructed to abstain from alcohol, take no part in New Year's Eve celebrations and get to bed early in preparation for the flight. Uffz. Horst Tharann, a pilot of 8./JG 4, remembers: "On the evening of December 31st, we were informed about the

operation to be flown on January 1st and with a toast to the New Year we were ordered to go to bed. At 06.00 hours the night was over and the pilots were brought to the places where their individual Staffeln were located. As only few had experience in night operations, we had to wait for dawn.<sup>73</sup>

Another pilot, Lt. Gottfried Morio of 7./JG 4, recorded: "We go to the airfield where the groundcrew worked all night to prepare our aircraft. The runway is covered with a layer of 10 centimetres of snow and when the engines start running the snow is driven away. It takes a long time before the snowstorm settles down and this means visibility is worse on this already grey and foggy morning."<sup>74</sup>

At 08.08 hrs both Ju 88 Lotsen took off and circled above Babenhausen airfield, directly followed by 17 Fw 190 A-8/R2s of II.(Sturm)/JG 4.<sup>75</sup> First to start was the 7. Staffel with Oblt. Erhard Niese in the lead who was also to lead the Gruppe on this mission. Next was 8. Staffel under the command of Oblt. Hans-Martin Markhoff<sup>76</sup>, followed by the aircraft of 5./JG 4 led by the young Ofhr. Franz Schaar.<sup>77</sup> All seemed to go well and the Focke-Wulfs disappeared at the horizon. Suddenly the sound of an engine was heard and the 'Yellow 14' landed back at Babenhausen. As soon as the aircraft came to a halt, the pilot, Uffz. Walter Hübner, shouted that he had problems with his R/T installation. Gefr. Erwin Glasenapp, a technician in 7./JG 4, believes that there was another reason. According to his recollection, almost all pilots feared this mission, although nobody talked about it. After a few minutes Hübner took off again. During take-off his aircraft broke out and crashed into the forest on the edge of the runway.<sup>78</sup> Seriously injured the unfortunate 21-year old was recovered from the wreckage and taken to a hospital in Hanau where he died on January 12th.<sup>79</sup>

Once II.(Sturm)/JG 4 was airborne, the Gruppe formed up quickly behind the Ju 88s. After waiting a short time for the arrival of the aircraft of 6./JG 4, which failed to appear<sup>80</sup>, the lead Ju 88 G-1 flown by Fw. Günter Kotschote flew a direct westerly course from Babenhausen to Bingen where they were to meet with the other Gruppen of JG 4. The crew of the leading Ju 88 G-1 ignored the ground visual aids and flew by dead reckoning at a height of 50 metres. No radio communication took place between this aircraft and the fighters.<sup>81</sup> Fw. Günter Kotschote: "Assembly over base, absolute radio-silence and low on the deck in the direction of Bingen"<sup>82</sup>

In the meantime two pilots of the 5. Staffel encountered problems starting their engines. Finally, Gefr. Walter Wagner succeeded in taking off in his 'White 11', 10 minutes after the formation had left. Over the airfield, he was joined

by Ofgr. Hans Peschel in his 'White 14' who had experienced the same problems and together they flew west on the prescribed course hoping to catch up with their Gruppe. About 25 kilometres west of Bullay the two pilots linked up with a group of about 10 Bf 109s bearing the markings of JG 4, (black-white-black), on the rear fuselage.<sup>83</sup> This was IV./JG 4 and the exploits of Gefr. Walter Wagner and Ofgr. Hans Peschel have already been covered in the events of the IV. Gruppe.

On approaching Bingen after some 15 minutes of flight, the Gruppe was joined by the aircraft of the 6. Staffel, which had apparently flown directly from Griesheim.<sup>84</sup> Most likely these were lead by Oblt. Jacob Siller, the inexperienced Staffelführer of 6./JG 4.<sup>85</sup> No larger formation of Gruppen belonging to JG 4 was formed over Bingen and all Gruppen more or less proceeded individually on the prescribed course to Bullay/Mosel. The Gruppe continued their flight over Bullay and Prüm. It is very likely that the spare Ju 88 returned at this stage and led by Fw. Kotschote's Ju 88, the Gruppe crossed the front line near Malmedy. Instantly, the formation was welcomed by intense and accurate light AAA. One of the first victims of this barrage was Kotschote's Ju 88. After being informed of the loss of Fw. Kotschote's crew by Oblt. Niese, the Staffelführer of 5./NJG 101 wrote to Kotschote's wife on January 9th:

*"Only yesterday I received the very sad message that your husband did not return from a mission on January 1st 1945 and that he has been listed as missing in action. According to the commanding officer of the fighter unit, to which your husband was commanded since the beginning of December, your husband flew a mission against an enemy held airfield in the neighbourhood of Liège. The front was crossed in low-level flight and at 09.05 hrs. the formation encountered intense anti-aircraft fire near Aywaille<sup>86</sup>, about 20 kilometres south south-east of Liège. Your husband's aircraft received hits in the port engine, which burst into flames. The aircraft hit the ground and was destroyed. No information is available on the fate of the crew. It could not be observed if anyone succeeded in getting out of the wreckage. According to this report by Oblt. Niese, who flew on this mission and observed the crash, a possibility exists that the crew survived the crash, but it is also possible that they were killed by the anti-aircraft fire or in the crash of the plane."*

Fortunately, the crew survived the crash-landing of Ju 88 G-1, 9W+BN, and amazingly they were all uninjured. Fw. Günter Kotschote: "After crossing the front the starboard engine was hit and on fire. The aircraft became uncontrollable and at the moment we hit the ground, the burning engine rolled in front of me."<sup>87</sup>

Now the Gruppe was in deep trouble. Intense light AAA claimed more and more aircraft. It seems that the Fw 190s of 7./JG 4 and 8./JG 4 that were flying in the lead were the prime targets. Uffz. Günther Schwarzenau of 8./JG 4 flying 'Blue 15' was hit by flak and the engine was damaged. The pilot pulled up to about 450 metres and baled out. Schwarzenau landed near Palenberg, north of Aachen, and was taken POW.<sup>78</sup> Uffz. Horst Tharann of 8./JG 4 was also hit by AAA damaging his engine. Tharann recalls: "Over the hills west of the Mosel we were surprised by anti-aircraft fire of an intensity we had not anticipated. I received some hits in the fuselage to the back of me, which destroyed my radio. My wingman came closer and pointed at my aircraft, but I could not hear him. As my eardrum almost tore during the hit, I was certain that my radio came to an untimely end. At the same time my engine must have been hit, as it did not respond to the throttle anymore. I only could fly with full or no throttle at all, which resulted in me taking position either in front of the formation or straggling behind. However, I did not want to fly back through that hell again alone, and therefore decided to continue with the formation in the hope of getting rid of my ammunition and getting back with them together. The engine started quitting then and I found a landing ground between two haystacks and succeeded in bringing the aircraft and me down without any explosion. This was a miracle as fuselage and engine had sustained several hits. Canadian soldiers took me POW and guided me through some minefields."<sup>79</sup>

According to an RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report that gives details about his aircraft, Uffz. Horst Tharann belly-landed north-west of Geilenkirchen. However, his A.D.I.(K) Report gives the location as Hannut, some 30 kilometres west of Liège. As most of the Fw 190s of II.(Sturm)/JG 4 were forced to the north-north-east because of the intense AA fire, it is believed the RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report is correct.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, in several other cases errors were found in A.D.I.(K) Reports concerning crashsites. Another victim of the American AAA was Lt. Gottfried Morio of 7./JG 4. He remembers: "As soon as we pass the front line, AA opens fire. I can see the flames. My Fw 190 is hit and I lose speed. I try to stay with the Gruppe, but the gap is widening. When the Gruppe is out of sight I decide to cancel the mission and I will try to reach Germany. I turn to the north-east, crossing the Dutch-Belgian border and later cross a river which I believe is the Maas. At that time I am flying at a height of 10 metres and I must have been a sitting target for every novice fighter pilot! Now I try to find a place to land. Just after crossing the river I see a place, which seems to look OK, only a railway is crossing it. The contact with the ground is hard

and my aircraft collides with the railway track. Propeller blades, engine cowling and ailerons are flying through the air. I feel an intense pain in my back. Soon there are people to help me and they inform me that I am in Germany. The river I crossed was not the Maas, but the Rhine. First aid is being given in a convent, which I leave without regret; the youngest nun had just passed her 70th birthday! After three days I return to my Staffel."

The 24-year old Lt. Morio made a crash-landing near Wesel at 09.30 hrs. in which his Fw 190 was 65 per cent damaged, meaning that his aircraft was beyond repair. Morio had drifted off considerably in a north-easterly direction and was lucky to escape without severe injuries.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, 15-year old schoolboy Hans Helmut Lindner was attempting to sweep the chimney of No. 22 Prämienstrasse in Alsdorf, some 14 kilometres north-east of Aachen. On the roof he had a grandstand view of what would soon take place over this coalmining area on the first morning of 1945: "The sounds of numerous aircraft engines had already attracted my attention and at the same moment a fierce rattle of guns was audible from all directions. Initially I was watching the skies as if hypnotised. The sky was filled with Luftwaffe fighters at a height at which I could identify them as Fw 190s. Within seconds the air was like a stream of red dots (the Americans using red tracer ammunition) reaching like tentacles for the Luftwaffe fighters. Everywhere around me there were .50 calibre machine guns and here and there – and behind the house I had climbed on – there was a 40 mm AAA position. All were firing simultaneously and seemed to compete as to who could put up most ammo. Never before or after did I witness such intense fire as that morning. I even got dizzy and had to stick to the chimney in order not to fall down the roof. Soon the first parachutes were opening and starting their descent; all in all, I must have counted a dozen parachutes from shot down fighters in the general area. All of a sudden, I started to realise that the 40 mm in the backyard could wipe me off the roof and I climbed down as fast as I could. Arriving down in the street, I saw an Me 109 trailing smoke, approaching from the north; it was in a fast descent. The pilot was just leaving the aircraft and was lucky that his parachute opened in time allowing him to float for a couple of seconds. He must have landed on or close to the Anna II coalmine. His aircraft crashed about 150 metres before the hamlet of Schwarz at Alsdorf-Zopp. The engine had buried itself in a deep hole and parts of the wreckage were scattered in a meadow over 100 metres. When I reached the meadow, a second Me 109 banked away barely 20 metres over the crash site; apparently a comrade looking for a sign of life of a friend. This aircraft pulled so much AA fire that I wondered why it was not hit



## RAIDERS OF THE LOST AIRFIELD



Fw. Erich Güldenpfennig of 7.(Sturm)/JG 4. He was shot down by Allied AAA during Bodenplatte, which was his 10th mission. (Mombeek)

too. The crash site was already swarmed with American soldiers. Some of them were loading a complete wing on a truck. When asked what they were going to do with it (I was quite fluent in English at that time) one of them replied that they were going to remove the camera from the wing. The fighter's guns were still fully loaded and apparently none of the guns had been fired in anger. Belts of 13 and 20 mm ammunition were all over the place. All three propeller blades of the mighty in-line engine were broken. I still recall attempting to look inside the hub-mounted canon. The German pilot ended up dead on the ground. I was told by the Americans in our street that young Dutch soldiers, recruited by the

advancing Americans in Holland, had shot the unfortunate pilot when he hung suspended beneath his parachute."<sup>83</sup>

Stories of airmen being shot at, while suspended from their parachutes re-occur from time to time. Apparently individual German and Allied pilots engaged in these honourless acts of terror. In general, however, this was not customary. In this case Mr. Lindner's story could not be confirmed which does not imply, it did not occur. The Messerschmitt pilot could not be identified, but was most likely from either JG 11 or JG 4.

In the same area at least one Fw 190 of II.(Sturm)/JG 4 came down. Fw. Erich

Four pictures showing a crash-landed Fw 190 A-8/R2 of II.(Sturm)/JG 4. The armoured plating and II. Gruppe bar can be seen clearly. Careful analysis of the original pictures show that the marking was 'Yellow 2' identifying the aircraft as belonging to Fw. Erich Güldenpfennig of 7./JG 4. Fw. Güldenpfennig crash-landed his Fw 190 W.Nr. 682296 near Alsdorf, north-east of Aachen. (Ledger)



Ofhr. Franz Schaar was born on July 14th 1924. Although only 20-years old, he was already a relatively experienced pilot and acted as Staffelführer of 5.(Sturm)/JG 4 on January 1st. (Brüch)

Göldenpfennig's 'Yellow 2' of 7./JG 4 was hit by AAA and he crash-landed his Focke-Wulf near Alsdorf. His aircraft is believed to have been hit by 'C' Battery of the 559th AAA (AW) Bn. This battalion claimed six enemy fighters on January 1st.<sup>84</sup> One member of 'C' Battery, Paul Shelton, caught a round in the chest during the strafing and was killed. Although Göldenpfennig brought down his Fw 190 relatively intact, he must have suffered injuries from the AAA fire too, as he died of his wounds three days later. He

was buried by American troops at the German plot of the American military cemetery in Margraten, the Netherlands.<sup>85</sup> Fw. Göldenpfennig, who had accompanied Oblt. Niese on nine previous combat missions with the Sturmgruppe, was reported missing by his unit. Unaware of his crash near Alsdorf, Oblt. Niese wrote a letter to Göldenpfennig's father:

*"In the early morning of January 1st 1945, we started for a ground attack mission in the Dutch-Belgian front area. After crossing the front line and until Liège the formation, which was flying at extreme low-level, was torn apart by heavy anti-aircraft fire. I myself had to return near Liège as my aircraft had already been hit five times. My good companion on all missions, your son Erich, continued with the rest to complete the mission. After that, nothing has been heard of Erich again. I assume that he also received hits, which also must have happened to his wingman. Neither returned from this mission. Air combat was not reported, so I assume he must have made a belly-landing in enemy-held territory. This is the only comfort for you and us and this would enable us to shake hands with our fine comrade after the war."<sup>86</sup>*

So, now the leader of the Gruppe, Oblt. Erhard Niese, had to return too. It is assumed that he had to bail out of his badly damaged Fw 190 after he crossed the German lines again. No AAA-damaged aircraft was reported by II.(Sturm)/JG 4.<sup>87</sup> Fw. Erich Göldenpfennig's wingman Uffz. Willi Breves also failed to return. Breves disappeared without a trace. His 'Yellow 6' was never found and he is still listed as missing in the Malmedy area.<sup>88</sup> Finally the

5. Staffel had to pay its toll. Uffz. Erich Keller, one of the old pilots of 2./ZG 1, did not return to Babenhausen. No trace of him has ever been found and he is still listed as MIA. Uffz. Hans-Gustav Dierks died when his 'White 7' crashed near the village of Hausen in the area south of Spessart, probably on return from the mission. The village is only 20 kilometres south-east of Babenhausen airfield. A fellow pilot reported after the war that it was an accident.<sup>89</sup> Uffz. Heinz Richter also did not return initially, but he finally made it back to his Staffel uninjured.<sup>90</sup>

The last loss of the 5. Staffel was its leader, Ofhr. Franz Schaar. Apparently, he also tried to reach German-held territory by flying to the north-east like Lt. Gottfried Morio. However, he was shot down by Allied light AA fire near Vosberg, just north of Panningen, to the south-west of Venlo. The wreckage was spread over 800 metres and Schaar's remains were buried in a fieldgrave near the wreckage.<sup>91</sup> The 5. Staffel had suffered the heaviest losses – six pilots including their leader did not return!

In the meantime a group of about four Focke-Wulfs led by Oblt. Hans-Martin Markhoff managed to get through the AAA barrage. He remembered the events vividly: "Our formation was immediately completely dissolved and I saw our aircraft crashing everywhere. In the valleys we even flew lower than the AA batteries on the hills. We tried to use every depression and corner as cover. Suddenly I saw an Auster. I pulled up and shot him down, but received numerous hits from the AAA at the same time. By the time we were through the barrage, we had only four aircraft left. My Rottenflieger, Fhr. Winfried Brähler, had hit some poplar trees and had damaged his prop and wing leading edges. The others all suffered AA damage. We had no chance of reaching Le Culot now. When we found an airfield with American aircraft we attacked, regardless of the strong AA defences. We flew one or two attacks and I saw one of our aircraft going down. My aircraft shook in every turn and I feared that I would not be able to return. Together with Fhr. Brähler I headed east in the direction of Aachen. On our way we attacked a freight locomotive. I landed at Gelsenkirchen-Buer. Fhr. Brähler however believed that I had landed in Allied territory and continued further east. He ran out of fuel near Erfurt(!) and made a perfect belly-landing. After a few days he returned to Babenhausen. I had my aircraft patched up in Gelsenkirchen-Buer and returned to Babenhausen the same evening."<sup>92</sup>

The Gruppe claimed only one P-47 destroyed and two twin-engined aircraft hit on an unknown airfield, most likely Asch. Two trains were also severely damaged and two trucks shot on fire. As related, the Oblt. Markhoff/Fhr. Brähler Rotte claimed one train, the other being claimed by Lt.

Wolfgang Hankner of 6./JG 4. There are reports that Hankner suffered some injuries in the attack.<sup>93</sup> An Allied report further indicates that aircraft of JG 4 were also involved in road and strafing attacks in the Bastogne area.<sup>94</sup>

The Auster that was shot down by Oblt. Hans-Martin Markhoff may have been a Stinson L-1 Vigilant of the 125th Liaison Squadron. That morning this Squadron suffered a loss when two "Bf 109s" intercepted and attacked one of its L-5s between Maastricht and Liège. The pilot, Lt. D.K. Neil, evaded the first enemy aircraft but caught a burst of fire from the second. Both crewmembers were wounded, but while Staff Sergeant Owen Stafford survived the attack, Staff Sergeant William D. Fletcher died shortly afterwards in an army hospital.<sup>95</sup> Although many dogfights and combats took place over this area it is assumed that the Auster claimed by Oblt. Markhoff may very well be this Stinson. No Fw 190 of II.(Sturm)/JG 4 returned to Babenhausen directly and at least until 13.30 hrs the Gruppe had no idea of what had happened.<sup>96</sup> After the few survivors had returned in the next couple of days, it became evident that virtually the entire Gruppe had been wiped out.

#### I. and III./JG 4's combined effort against Le Culot

Both I. and III./JG 4 were stationed at Darmstadt-Griesheim and were to fly the mission of January 1st together. Gruppenkommandeur Major Wilhelm Steinmann of I./JG 4 had Flugverbot<sup>97</sup> and was not allowed to participate in the mission.<sup>98</sup> Instead, Hptm. Friedrich Eberle, Kommandeur of III./JG 4, would lead the mission. The preparations were more or less the same as with the other Gruppen. Fj. Uffz. Günther Wittbold, a pilot with I./JG 4, remembers: "New Year's Eve 1944. First a very good dinner, Major Michalski is also present. Then we go into a big room, no one knows what's going on. Officers are standing guard by the entrance. A very thorough briefing starts about the mission of the next day. Without alcohol or wine and without the festivities of New Year's Eve we spend the evening, eating biscuits and chocolate and smoking cigars. At dawn the engines are already running. The groundcrew had worked all night to get as many aircraft ready as possible. It is very cold and the airfield is covered with snow. The aircraft are standing in long rows so we don't have to roll out of our boxes to the airfield. According to calculations we will need every drop of fuel. In front of us are the aircraft of III. Gruppe, their Kommandeur Hptm. Eberle will lead the mission. I am sorry that our old man is not allowed to participate. The pilots are standing next to each other and quickly smoke a cigarette. We know what is at stake. Take off at 08.20 hrs to Beauvechain near Louvain. We know the airfield well; we were

stationed there a short time ago. We have to fly across the salient of Bastogne, so low-level flying on the way to the target! The groundcrew are watching us sceptical as they start the engines. Every crewchief shakes hands with his pilot before they close the canopy. Suddenly I have to think about the Kommodore's words on the previous night; anyone who believes he can not take on this important mission or who has a wife and children at home and therefore can not commit himself 100 per cent to the mission, should say so. No repercussions will be taken and the pilot will be replaced. We do not have enough aircraft after all..."<sup>99</sup>

First the two Lotse Ju 88s took off.<sup>100</sup> The first, a Ju 88 G-1, was piloted by Uffz. Günter Fengler of 6./NJG 101. Together with his crew of Ogfr. Karl Zechner and Ogfr. Kurt Stolle, he was transferred to I./JG 4 at the beginning of December from Parndorf, Austria.<sup>101</sup> It may be assumed that the other crew also belonged to II./NJG 101. At 08.20 hrs, both Ju 88s were followed by nine Bf 109s from III./JG 4 under the command of Hptm. Friedrich Eberle. III. Gruppe was followed by 26 Bf 109s of I./JG 4.<sup>102</sup> Over the airfield the formation assembled to an impressive 35 aircraft force and flew the same route towards Bingen-Bullay-Prüm as its sister Gruppen had. Fj. Uffz. Günter Wittbold: "Two Ju 88s are flying in front of us. They should lead us to the target. We have just passed the last smoke signal and are crossing the front when massive and concentrated Flak hits the formation. Lower on the deck is the only possibility. I cannot fly any lower otherwise my prop will cut the top of the trees! AA fire and tracers: a wall of fire hits us. Whose heart would not sink a bit lower at such moments...? Especially unpleasant is the fire coming from the side, although the chance of being hit is remote. You can see the tracers flying over the canopy and one wants to duck deeper into the cockpit. In these seconds I don't look to the side or behind me, just duck inside and peek over the engine cowling. Suddenly the Ju 88 veers off, black smoke trailing from its fuselage. The other Ju 88 had already left us before crossing the front. I could not see what happened to the Ju 88."

Uffz. Günter Fengler's Ju 88 G-1 '9W+QO' was hit. Shortly afterwards the Junkers crashed somewhere in the Ardennes area. None of the JG 4 pilots observed what had happened to their Lotse. The entire crew was listed as missing. It took until late 2002 to solve this mystery when a picture was located showing the remains of a Ju 88 G-1 with Werknummer 714830. The Junkers crashed in the Vielsalm area and the crew was reportedly buried beside their aircraft. Hopefully their remains will be recovered in the near future.



Ogfr. Karl Zechner of 6./NJG 101, Bordfunker in Uffz. Günter Fengler's crew, which flew as Lotse for I./JG 4. Their Ju 88 G-1 was reportedly shot down by Allied AAA. (Zechner)



A late war picture of Hptm. Friedrich Eberle, Gruppenkommandeur of III./JG 4. Leading the combined force of I. and III./JG 4, he would play a major role in the failure of these Gruppen to reach their designated target. (Manrho)





held-territory. No specific losses of III./JG 4 are known. According to the loss reports of III./JG 4, Uffz. Georg Bartels, belonging to 9./JG 4, was reported missing on January 1st. However, it is believed that this loss actually occurred on December 31st 1944. The date on the loss report has been changed from '01.01.1945' into '31.12.1944' and on another report the date is given as '31.12.1944'.<sup>105</sup> During the research for this book a Burial Report from Henri-Chapelle was discovered, listing the following information:

*"Body from M.E. 109G-14 plane. Plane #331504, serial number of motor 011101900, Grid Coord K.712105."*<sup>106</sup>

This was Uffz. Georg Bartels' aircraft and in August 1996 his fate was finally solved. Remarkably, the crash location was south-east of Niveze, east of Spa, Belgium. However, Uffz. Bartels could not have been lost on January 1st 1945 as the German numerical loss listings do not list a Bf 109 as missing from III./JG 4 that day. Consequently Uffz. Bartels must have been shot down on another date, most likely December 31st.

Some aircraft of I./JG 4 continued with the attack. Together with some other pilots, Lt. Hermann Weber, the Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 4, attacked some Spitfires with a brown camouflage scheme at an unknown airfield.<sup>107</sup> This could have been Ophoven airfield, where No. 125 Spitfire Wing was attacked. Further Lt. Hans Klaffenbach, also of 4./JG 4, reported one B-17 and two Thunderbolts shot on fire at an unidentified airfield. He landed back at Griesheim at 10.10 hrs.<sup>108</sup> Two pilots of 4./JG 4 did not return. One of them was 30-year old Fw. Franz Schneider, who was reported missing in the Liège-Louvain area and no trace of him has been found.

The fate of the other 4./JG 4 pilot was 'witnessed' by Ron Howarth, a British platoon sergeant with the Dorset Regiment in the 43rd (Wessex) Division. His regiment was guarding the northern flank of the American sector and was on its way to the Sittard area in the Netherlands to assume positions against a possible breakthrough of the Germans. He recalls: "Early in the morning we had started off in a convoy from the village of Hoensbroek and halfway to Sittard we watched a V-1 go down just to the right of the road. It was at around 09.30 hours that all of a sudden two Bf 109s appeared parallel to the road we were following. We immediately took cover, but the aircraft apparently were not interested and headed towards the city of Geleen (to the west of Sittard). Then, there was a rumble of guns and they watched one of the planes go down behind a farm just before Sittard. The farmer and his wife waved to the British column and in the farmer's hands were pair of boots he had apparently stolen from

A rare photograph of the remains of Uffz. Günter Fengler's Ju 88 G-1 '9W+QO' of 6./NJG 101 which acted as Lotse for I. and III./JG 4 on New Year's Day, 1945. The W.Nr. 714830 is visible. The Junkers crashed in the Vielsalm area of the Ardennes and the crew was reportedly buried beside their aircraft. (Ensival Historical Museum – Mr Guy Octave)

Fj.Uffz. Günther Wittbold continues: "Some Bf 109s are also hit. My God, what is happening to us? We have to get through! Suddenly III. Gruppe turns and flies east towards the sun. What's going on? Were we re-called? Did we receive the codeword? Everyone is flying in different directions and the AAA continues to fire. I could go insane! We should go to Beauvechain! But the guys down there shoot amazingly well. Nobody should tell me that they had a party on New Year's Eve! We were prepared for everything except this. The last few tracers are following us, then it stops. We fly above the Eiffel. Oblt. Neumayer throws his aircraft down and makes a belly-landing. His aircraft smoked terribly and it was about time to make an emergency landing. One by one, we arrive at Griesheim; many did not return. I feel exhausted."

According to one report, neither I./JG 4 nor III./JG 4 reached their target, due to strong AAA defences.<sup>109</sup> In fact, several individual pilots tried to reach their target and others may have lost contact with the formation. III. Gruppe reported two aircraft destroyed and one damaged.<sup>104</sup> This means that the losses were incurred on German

the fallen pilot!. Several minutes later the pilot of the second plane returned to see what had happened to his comrade. He was flying at about 100 feet and we expected it to open fire on us any minute. I grabbed a Bren gun from one of the lorries and opened fire on the aircraft. I emptied the full magazine. The magazine was filled with one tracer bullet in every five and we saw these enter the plane's fuselage and within seconds it started pouring black smoke and gradually as if held by string it came down slowly to crash in the woods behind Sittard, east of Tüddern in Germany. On arrival at our destination, I immediately contacted HQ to claim the shooting down of this aircraft, but was informed that another unit had already done so. This claim obviously referred to the first fighter but not the second one. Thus, I was robbed from a medal or citation".<sup>109</sup>

Several locals witnessed the event. Mr. Oberndorf from Sittard recalls this as his most-fearful day of the war! He remembers: "I took cover near the café at the Ophoven railroad crossing. Indeed, I saw two aircraft. The first I saw go down in flames at Sanderbout and a little later the second fighter flew over. This one was on fire too. I saw the pilot leaving the plane, but the parachute would not deploy and I think he must have fallen somewhere near the Overhoven church. The burning fighter flew on parallel to the Rijksweg Noord in the direction of Tüddern where it must have crashed."<sup>110</sup>

The Dutch town of Sittard is virtually on the border with Germany. On January 1st, all villages and cities just across the border in Germany had been evacuated by the Allies in preparation for the attack on the Ruhr ('Operation Black Cock'). This area was thus virtually no-man's land and it has proved impossible to find eyewitnesses for this and similar areas. As a result, only the crash site of the first Bf 109 could be located and identified. The unfortunate pilot was 21-year old Uffz. Werner Zetzschke, pilot of 'Blue 3', a Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-14 of 4./JG 4. His last minutes were recorded in a report by the local fire department:

*"The aircraft, approaching from the east, was first engaged by a British AAA position in a meadow, not far from the Rijksweg in the Sanderbout area, but despite this it continued its route in a westerly direction. Upon crossing the railway line it was again fired at and this time it was hit repeatedly, started to burn and turned back in a more north-easterly direction. While manoeuvring, the fighter came so low that one of the wings hit the roof of the Dols family house at Bloemenweg. The aircraft, now caught between two AAA positions, banked away in a wide circle and gradually lost height. A little later it lost its propeller, which whirled across the*

*roofs and ended up in the backyards of Bloemenweg. Then the fighter hit the ground while at the same time its right wing and forward fuselage struck the front of three houses in Bloemenweg. Leaking fuel hit these houses and burned their fronts black, creating havoc in the street. One of the inhabitants who just opened the door had his face burned. Meanwhile, as a result of the impact, the fighter was thrown across the street. As a burning ball of fire it slid on for at least several hundred feet until it finally came at rest against the railway line slope. The impact had thrown the pilot clear of the plane and he died within minutes. The fire was spreading fast and shortly his legs were on fire but swiftly one of the bystanders was able to stop the flames. The Sittard fire department was alerted at 09.32 hours, arrived on-site at 09.43 hrs and reported the fires under control at 10.20 hrs."*<sup>111</sup>

Uffz. Werner Zetzschke's remains were initially buried at the Wehrerweg cemetery. In August 1956, he was permanently re-interred in the German Military Cemetery of Ysselsteyn.<sup>112</sup> The official loss records indicate that one more I./JG 4 pilot was killed on January 1st. According to the report the Bf 109 K-4 of Gefr. Kurt Lack was shot down in aerial combat near Frohnhausen, north of Dillenburg. The pilot, who belonged to 3./JG 4, was killed. However, no dogfight is known above this area on January 1st and also the loss report for Gefr. Lack reports that the loss was reported by III./JG 4, most likely meaning that he flew operations with that Gruppe. Furthermore another report lists his loss on December 31st 1944. It is believed that Lack's loss actually occurred on December 31st 1944.<sup>113</sup>

As mentioned, Oblt. Alfred Neumayer, Staffelfkapitän of I./JG 4, had to make a belly-landing on the way back. He landed his Bf 109 G-14 near Hundheim, south of Koblenz. The damage to his aircraft was listed as 10 per cent.<sup>114</sup> Fj.Uffz. Günther Wittbold remembers: "Oblt. Neumayer returned on January 3rd from the Eifel carrying only his parachute. He had bruised his spine a bit, but he was still as jolly as usual."<sup>115</sup>

Finally Uffz. Oskar Fromberg of Stab I./JG 4 did not return to Darmstadt-Griesheim. Flying near Kleinseelheim, southwest of Kirchhain, on the return course, his Bf 109 K-4 'Yellow 1' was suddenly hit by German Flak. Looking at his wing he saw a 50 cm wide hole and decided to bale out. He struck an electricity pylon and injured his knee.<sup>116</sup>

In total, I. Gruppe reported two aircraft missing, one destroyed and one damaged. This corresponds with the loss of Fw. Schneider, Uffz. Zetzschke, Uffz. Fromberg and Oblt. Neumayer. According to the monthly report of JG 4 the results of I./JG 4 on January 1st were very poor. The Gruppe reported one hangar, one P-47 and



Sgt. Ron Howarth of the Dorset Regiment was "...robbed of a medal or citation" when another unit claimed the aircraft he had shot down with his Bren gun in the Sittard area on January 1st 1945. (Howarth)

several vehicles shot on fire and one AAA battery silenced.<sup>117</sup> Strangely the claims of Lt. Hans Klaffenbach – a B-17 and two P-47s, were apparently not added to the total in the monthly report. Also the Spitfires claimed by Lt. Hermann Weber are not reported. However, in none of the cases above is it known which airfield was attacked. As we saw III./JG 4 reported two Bf 109s destroyed and one damaged. The sudden retreat of Hptm. Eberle's III./JG 4 had some nasty consequences. Fj.Uffz. Günther Wittbold remembers: "Hptm. Eberle is faced with charges of cowardice in the face of the enemy. Every pilot is attending the trial. Fortunately Hptm. Eberle is acquitted."

Oblt. Lothar Wolff of IV./JG 4 also remembers: "The entire III. Gruppe under command of Eberle returned and according to the mission report Hptm. Eberle had given the sign to turn back. Suddenly he was gone and apparently he was transferred to infantry duties."

Although details regarding Hptm. Friedrich Eberle's trial are unknown, it is known that he was relieved of his command on January 8th. He was succeeded by Hptm. Gerhard Strasen. According to his Soldbuch, Eberle was transferred to Stab of General der Jagdflieger for further duties. His exact posting until the end of the war is unknown. Remarkably, also in the monthly report written by Obstdt. Michalski on February 1st no mention was made of III./JG 4's failure. It was even noted that III./JG 4 did not operate on January 1st 1945! Also, Eberle's trial was not mentioned – only his replacement by Hptm. Gerhard Strasen on January 8th 1945.

### Le Culot on January 1st.

What did happen at Le Culot? As JG 4 did not reach its target, was it attacked at all? Tom Glenn, a pilot with the 36th FG recalls: "I clearly remember that hectic period we called the 'Battle of the Bulge'. We were very busy from December 24th on. To my knowledge no German aircraft attacked Le Culot (A-89) at any time. On New Year's Day, 1945, I flew a mission leading Blue Flight. Before we got to the target area, we were vectored toward enemy bandits by our controller – these bandits turned out to be Spitfires. Again we were directed to enemy bandits, by now we had jettisoned our bombs, and this time we found them but they would not engage and turned toward Germany as we approached them. There was a great deal of Luftwaffe activity that day, but they never made it to A-89."<sup>118</sup>

The other unit at Le Culot, the 373rd FG also flew a mission on January 1st. At 08.53 hrs, the 412th FS took off with 11 aircraft for Mission 454. Each aircraft carried two 500-pound GP Bombs and a fragmentation cluster. The area controller 'Roselee' vectored the aircraft towards

the Aachen area. Over Limbourg, north-east of Verviers, one Bf 109 was sighted at a height of 3,000 feet but the fighter was lost in a chase to the south as it disappeared in the clouds. However, at 10.00 hrs 1/Lt Paul J. Walsh bounced a Bf 109 over St. Vith. The identity of this enemy aircraft has not been established although it may be assumed that this was either an aircraft of JG 2 or JG 4. The encounter report he filed, reads: "I was flying Turmoil Blue Three without a wingman on mission V89-6. 'Roselee' vectored us all over the sky to intercept enemy aircraft. Red Number 3 called in one bogey six o'clock low. I identified enemy aircraft as Me 109 and made a bounce from 8,000 to 3,500 feet out of the sun and jettisoned bombs as soon as I was positive of identity and about ready to fire. My first pass was from about 15 degrees down to about five degrees. I observed many hits as the enemy aircraft took evasive action in the clouds. I waited on top for him to pop out again and I got three good bursts in. I observed hits but these were dead astern shots and I couldn't get him to fire. He ducked in the clouds again and I waited below the strata (lowest part was about 100 feet). He popped out and I got a few hits and observed another Me 109 flying to the right of him. I called Turmoil Leader repeating my vector (150) and number of aircraft. At this time I saw three P-47s mistaken as Fw 190s. The e/a including his presumably wingman, turned into the other planes. I got a good burst in and saw hits as his canopy flew off. I didn't shoot at the other Me 109 figuring they were leading me into a bounce. It was impossible for me to investigate the crash, but I do believe the pilot bailed out. There was some black smoke coming from the plane prior to the time I saw the jettisoned canopy. He disappeared in the clouds and I pulled away from the other aircraft, climbed thru the overcast and saw that the planes were P-47s trying to locate a target for the rest of the squadron orbiting over the overcast. I claim one Me 109 destroyed."<sup>119</sup>

The remaining 30 bombs were dropped on a marshalling yard south-west of Euskirchen containing 12 freight cars and warehouses. The tracks were cut in two places. All 11 aircraft landed back at A-89 at 10.57 hrs.<sup>120</sup> Another pilot of the 412nd FS, 1./Lt. Glenn T. Noyes, was up for a test flight that morning. He remembers: "At about 0900 hours, I was asked to fly a test flight on a P-47 that had some control problems. I borrowed a jeep and went out to the airfield. After talking to the maintenance technicians about the problem, I pre-flighted the airplane, climbed in and started the engine. The weather was clear with unlimited visibility. There was some snow on the ground and patches of ice on taxiways and the runway. Because of the nature of the test flight, the guns on the P-47 were not armed. While taxiing out to



## RAIDERS OF THE LOST AIRFIELD



A forlorn looking 'White 11' awaits servicing by the 404th FG. (Wilson)

Col. Leo Moon of the 404th FG, checks out 5.(Sturm)/JG 4's Fw 190 A-8/R2, W.Nr. 681497, 'White 11'. (Wilson)



the active runway, I saw a Me 109 coming toward me at low level, maybe about 50 to 100 feet above the runway. He passed by about 150 feet from my airplane and continued north-west, toward Brussels. He made no attempt to turn around and attack our airfield, although I was a 'sitting duck.'

Fearing that there were more enemy aircraft in the area, I elected to take off rather than be strafed on the ground. I made a very rapid departure and climbed to about 6,000 feet. I saw only one other airplane in the air, another Me 109 flying eastward to St. Trond at low altitude. Without guns, I could

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

Two USAAF groundcrew – S/Sgt Robert Rakow and Sgt. Joe Sauri – pose for a publicity photograph in front of their paintwork! (Wilson)



All 'red and ready', but former Fw 190 A-8/R2, W.Nr. 681497 never flew again. (Wilson)

not launch an attack. With only a single airplane, it would have probably been foolish to do so even if the guns had been armed. Flying toward Brussels, I could see several Lancaster and Halifax bombers and at least a couple of B-17s and B-24s smoking on the tarmac. The attack had taken place within the last hour or so. I did not see any attacks in progress. Turning back eastward, I could see the fighter strip at St. Trond had sustained major

damage. There were several sizeable fires and lots of smoke. As far as I could tell the attack was over and no enemy aircraft were sighted. I called 'Roselee', the area controller, but was not able to raise him on the radio. Our control tower also failed to respond to my calls possibly because of the stand-down. I continued the test flight requirements and landed without any further enemy aircraft sightings. Our airfield had not been

touched, nor had the anti-aircraft battery responded to the threat. I reported to our intelligence officer what I had observed, but to my knowledge, there was no follow-up on the report. This has puzzled me for years because Le Culot at that time had the 373rd and the 36th Groups with something like 150 P-47s on the ground. There were also some 'heavies' that were undergoing repairs. We were a very lucrative target.<sup>121</sup>

As evidenced by the two eyewitnesses above, neither Le Culot nor Le Culot East was attacked on January 1st. The units at both fields could consider themselves very lucky!

## Conclusion

The results achieved by Jagdgeschwader 4 show that its mission was a total failure. Of the 75 aircraft participating, only around 12 actually attacked an airfield, a meagre 15 per cent of the total force. Their designated target was not reached at all. Of their own force 26 aircraft were destroyed or missing and six were damaged. In addition two Ju 88s were lost and one damaged. An astonishing 47 per cent of the attacking force had not returned!

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sturmjäger, Zur Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 4 und der Sturmstaffel I, p.152-166 by Eric Mombeek, Brussels 1997.

<sup>2</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 696/1944 pt.7, Lt. Eduard Schmidt of 8./JG 4, POW on 23.12.1944.

<sup>3</sup> Kriegsbeurteilung Oblt. Erhard Niese of 28.12.1944, BA-Aachen.

<sup>4</sup> Reichsverteidigung: Defence of the Reich.

<sup>5</sup> The fate of Hptm. Franz Wienhausen was finally solved in 1996 by the late German researcher Franz Zimmermann.

<sup>6</sup> Beauvechain <Le Culot> 1935-1945 p.142 by Robert Pied, Wavres 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Monatsbericht des Jagdgeschwaders 4 (Januar 1945) by Obstdt. Gerhard Michalski 01.02.1945, BA Freiburg document RL10/527.

<sup>8</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 70/1945. This report has been a reference for most details concerning preparation and flight of IV./JG 4 on January 1st 1945.

<sup>9</sup> For further details see text on operation of II.(Sturm)/JG 4.

<sup>10</sup> Transcript of interview with Lothar Wolff by Eric Mombeek. All subsequent recollections of Oblt. Lothar Wolff used in this chapter are based on the same interview.

<sup>11</sup> It is not known for certain if Hptm. Ernst Laube, Gruppenkommandeur of IV./JG 4, participated in the mission. According to Oblt. Lothar Wolff, Staffelführer of 15./JG 4, he did not take off as a result of engine trouble.

<sup>12</sup> Pilot's log Oblt. Lothar Wolff, 15./JG 4, take off 08.20. Pilot's log Lt. Josef Kunz, 13./JG 4, take-off 08.21. ULTRA-Report 55-BT-945, take off 08.20.

<sup>13</sup> ULTRA Report 56-BT-847 and 55-BT-945.

<sup>14</sup> Transcript of interview with Lothar Wolff by Eric Mombeek.

<sup>15</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 63/1945 and 64/1945.

<sup>16</sup> This information is confirmed by Monatsbericht des Jagdgeschwaders 4 (Januar 1945) in which it is stated that the Ju 88 which led IV./JG 4 was damaged.

<sup>17</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 70/1945.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Lothar Schmidt, 13.05.1996.

<sup>19</sup> Letters from widow Josefine Hartkämper, 06.12.1995 and 03.01.1996, including several official documents.

<sup>20</sup> Copy Wehrstammbuch, ZNS-Aachen and information by widow Josefine Hartkämper.

<sup>21</sup> Ulmen, SW of Mayen. Source Namentliche Verlustmeldung Flh.Kdr. Niedermendig.

<sup>22</sup> Personal Encounter Report F/O D.E.Ness and P/O H.Shaw, No. 56 Squadron.

<sup>23</sup> A.D.I.(K) No. 149/1945. Crash coordinates listed as K.628214, 4 miles ESE of Helmond. He was buried at Henri-Chapelle by US Forces. In January 1947, he was reburied at the German Military Cemetery of Lommel, Belgium.

<sup>24</sup> 492nd Fighter Squadron January History, Film AO-815, Frame 698.

<sup>25</sup> Unit Historical Report 493rd Fighter Squadron, 48th Fighter Group APO 595, St. Trond, Belgium.

<sup>26</sup> Correspondence with George D. Payne.

<sup>27</sup> Correspondence with Major Herbert R. Benson USAF (ret.).

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence with J.V. Jamieson.

<sup>29</sup> Correspondence with John Chlopick via Col. Jake Cooper.

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence with Warren W. Sorensen.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence with Don S. Archer (Lt. Col. USAF (ret.)).

<sup>32</sup> Thunderbolt Odyssey P-47 War in Europe pp.96-97 Kemal Saied; Stonewood Press San Springs 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Correspondence with Edward F. Dziadzio.

<sup>34</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No.264 and No.266, and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 122D/1945.

<sup>35</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 63/1945 and RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 and No.266.

<sup>36</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 64/1945.

<sup>37</sup> According to relatives, the true name of this pilot. In all loss reports the name is given as Noppener, which is not correct.

<sup>38</sup> Brochure Vereniging Militaria Sint-Truiden, 1996. Details forwarded by Luc Wittemans, dated 19.12.2000. RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Reports No. 264 and No. 266.

<sup>39</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 70/1945 and RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.

<sup>40</sup> Pilot's log Lt. Josef Kunz, 13./JG 4.

<sup>41</sup> At 10.08 hrs according to pilot's log Oblt. Lothar Wolff, 15./JG 4.

<sup>42</sup> 492nd Fighter Squadron January History, Film AO-815, Frame 698.

<sup>43</sup> Report of enemy action, 494th Fighter Squadron, Film AO-816, Frame 1247.

<sup>44</sup> Leap off 404th Fighter Group Combat History, p. 12 Andrew F Wilson San Angelo, Texas 1950. The 404th FG reported that one anti-aircraft soldier was killed and several were wounded.

<sup>45</sup> 493rd Fighter Squadron History, Film AO-816, Frame 654.

<sup>46</sup> XXIX TAC A-2 Periodic Report No. 2, dated the 2nd of January 1945. See also Unit History for the month of January, HQ 404th Fighter Group.

<sup>47</sup> ULTRA Report 55-BT-945.

<sup>48</sup> Monatsbericht des Jagdgeschwaders 4 (Januar 1945) by Obstdt. Gerhard Michalski 01.02.1945, BA Freiburg Document RL10/527. Added is the claim of one P-47 destroyed by Lt. Kunz.

<sup>49</sup> RL2-III-852.

<sup>50</sup> ULTRA Report 56-BT-1061.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from Günter Kotschote, 21.09.1996.

<sup>52</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 65/1945. According to information of Günter Kotschote, 22.10.1996, the crew stayed at Großostheim A/F and not at Köln-Ostheim which is stated in the A.D.I.(K) Report.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Günter Kotschote, 22.10.1996. This being confirmed by Monatsbericht des Jagdgeschwaders 4 (Januar 1945), by Obstdt. Gerhard Michalski 01.02.1945, BA-Freiburg, document RL10/527. In this document it is stated that II.(Sturm)/JG 4 was led by two Ju 88s on January 1st 1945.

<sup>54</sup> According A.D.I.(K) Report No. 65/1945 some 12 Fw 190's were destroyed. Other info from Namentliche Verlustmeldungen II.(Sturm)/JG 4, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945 and The Mighty Eighth War Diary by Roger A. Freeman, Arms and Armour Press, London, 1990.

<sup>55</sup> Recollections of Gottfried Morio, forwarded by Eric Mombeek on 22.10.1996.

<sup>56</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945. This report has been a reference for most details concerning preparation and flight of II.(Sturm)/JG 4 on January 1st.

<sup>57</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 146/1945. This is one of the rare occasions that the date for Operation Bodenplatte is linked with festivities on New Year's Eve in the Allied Camp. However, it is believed that this did not influence the planning for the attack and that January 1st was only picked for its favourable weather.

<sup>58</sup> Of course the number of 2,000 participating aircraft is exaggerated, further on it will be proven that no more than some 850 fighters participated in the attack.

<sup>59</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 146/1945.

<sup>60</sup> In A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945 it is stated that Gruppenkommandeur Maj. Gerhard Schröder was going to lead the Gruppe on January 1st. However, other documents, especially the letter which was written by the Staffelführer of 5./NJG 101 to the wife of Fw. Günter Kotschote after he was reported as missing in action, seems to indicate that Oblt. Erhard Niese led the II.(Sturm)/JG 4 on this mission.

<sup>61</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 65/1945. It seems that the pathfinding Ju 88s of JG 4 had been ordered to stay with the formation until the target was reached. Most Ju 88 Lotsen of other units were instructed to return just before crossing the frontline.

<sup>62</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945. Concerning the briefings of

II.(Sturm)/JG 4, this is primarily based on this A.D.I.(K) Report. Other sources confirm the contents of this report. Doubtful however is the fact of Major Gerhard Schröder leading the Gruppe on 1st January 1945.

<sup>63</sup> Recollections of Horst Tharann forwarded by Eric Mombeek on 11.06.1997. Horst Tharann died on August 25th, 1994.

<sup>64</sup> Recollections of Gottfried Morio, forwarded by Eric Mombeek on 22.10.1996.

<sup>65</sup> Letter Günter Kotschote 21.09.1996 and ULTRA-Report No.55-BT-945. Although the A.D.I.(K) Reports No. 62 and 146 reported that 28-30 Fw 190s took off, the number of 17 Fw 190s mentioned in the ULTRA-Report is far more likely as it also fits in the total number of 75 aircraft flown by the entire Geschwader, as reported in the monthly report of JG 4.



<sup>66</sup> Oblt. Hans-Martin Markhoff was a relatively experienced fighter pilot with 16 claims. He had flown as No. 2 to Maj. Günther Rall, Kommandeur of III./JG 52, in 1943 and 1944 at the Russian front, before volunteering for Reichsverteidigung in mid 1944.

<sup>67</sup> The Staffelführer of 5./JG 4, Oblt. Werner Vorberg, was still in hospital recovering from wounds received during a low-level attack on the airfield on December 3rd 1944. Oftr. Franz Schaar was one of the few old hands remaining from the I./ZG 1 time.

<sup>68</sup> According to memories of Gefr. Erwin Glasenapp, 7./JG 4, as published in *Sturmjäger, Zur Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 4 und der Sturmstaffel 1* by Eric Mombeek, Band 2, page 125.

<sup>69</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung Uffz. Walter Hübner, 7./JG 4.

<sup>70</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945. According to this report 6 Fw 190's of 6./JG 4 started at Darmstadt-Griesheim.

<sup>71</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 65/1945.

<sup>72</sup> Letter Günter Kotschote, 21.09.1996.

<sup>73</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 63/1945 and 64/1945.

<sup>74</sup> The only information on the operation of 6./JG 4 on January 1st could be found in A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945. The authors have found no other proof that 6./JG 4 operated. No aircraft were lost by this Staffel. Furthermore in the same A.D.I.(K) Report it is stated that 7./JG 4 did not operate on January 1st, while evidence exists that at least 5 Fw 190's of 7./JG 4 participated in the mission. No explanation could be found for these discrepancies.

<sup>75</sup> Oblt. Siller took over after Hptm. Manfred Köpke was wounded in combat on December 19th. Hptm. Köpke died of his wounds on December 31st. Oblt. Siller was an inexperienced fighter pilot who had joined the Staffel on August 11th 1944. Before that, he had been a pilot instructor. He was killed in action on January 2nd 1945.

<sup>76</sup> Note that this is on the direct course from Prüm to Le Culot implying that the Gruppe was still on their exact course.

<sup>77</sup> Letter Günter Kotschote, 21.09.1996. Please note that Günter Kotschote now mentions the right engine, as in the letter to his wife his Staffelführer mentions the left engine.

<sup>78</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 146/1945.

<sup>79</sup> Recollections of Horst Tharann, forwarded by Eric Mombeek on 11.06.1997.

<sup>80</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 266 dated 21.02.1945 and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 62/1945.

<sup>81</sup> Recollections of Gottfried Morio, forwarded by Eric Mombeek on 22.10.1996.

<sup>82</sup> RL2-III-767/13 and RL2-III-1199/22, BA-Freiburg and ULTRA report 57-BT-1701.

<sup>83</sup> Correspondence with Hans-Helmut Lindner.

<sup>84</sup> History of the 559th AAA (AW) Bn. and correspondence with Herman P. Ledger, former member of 'C' battery.

<sup>85</sup> Report of Burial Margraten, grave 1-2-45. In November 1946 he was re-interred at the German Military Cemetery Ysselsteyn, Netherlands. This report indicates that Fw. Güldenpfennig died of wounds and was buried on January 3rd, 1945.

<sup>86</sup> Letter of Oblt. Erhard Niese to Hermann Güldenpfennig, father of Fw. Erich Güldenpfennig, dated 12.01.1945, forwarded by Eric Mombeek.

<sup>87</sup> According RL2-III/852.

<sup>88</sup> Strangely, on the Namentliche Verlustmeldungen all losses of 7. and 8./JG 4 were reported in the Malmedy area, as all losses of 5./JG 4 were reported in the Dutch-Belgian area. No explanation can be given for this until now.

<sup>89</sup> Report by Uffz. Ernst Zeinert, II./JG 4. Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, 18.09.1995 and records of German War Graves Commission. Uffz. Dierks was buried at Ehrenfriedhof Hamm, Grave 17, Row 3.

<sup>90</sup> Werner Girbig in his book *Start im Morgengrauen* still listed Uffz. Heinz Richter as MIA after 01.01.1945. This probably based on the German Red Cross card of Uffz. Heinz Richter in which his mother stated that his relatives had not heard from him again after 20.12.1944. However, official

German records say that he died of wounds on the 16th of April 1945. Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, 18.09.1995. According to Eric Mombeek in his letter of 02.05.1995 Uffz. Heinz 'Emmes' Richter was shot while parachuting on the 16th April 1945. He is buried at Königswusterhausen, Germany.

<sup>91</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, including separate reports and Rapport van Overbrenging D.23347. On January 30, 1953, Oftr. Franz Schaar was re-interred at the German Military Cemetery of Ysselsteyn, Grave D-8-184.

<sup>92</sup> Remembrances of Hans-Martin Markhoff (+22.11.1990) published by Eric Mombeek in *Sturmjäger, Zur Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 4 und der Sturmstaffel 1*, page 131.

<sup>93</sup> *Sturmjäger, Zur Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 4 und der Sturmstaffel 1* by Eric Mombeek, Band 2, page 134 & 139.

<sup>94</sup> Air Ministry Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 281 of January 20th, 1945, page 34.

<sup>95</sup> Historical data Headquarters 125th Liaison Squadron, dated 18.4.1945, and The Fighting Grasshoppers by Ken Wakefield.

<sup>96</sup> ULTRA-Report, 55-BT-945.

<sup>97</sup> Flugverbot meaning "being grounded".

<sup>98</sup> Recollections of Günther Wittbold, pilot in 1./JG 4, forwarded by Eric Mombeek 11.06.1997.

<sup>99</sup> Recollections of Günther Wittbold, forwarded by Eric Mombeek on 11.06.1997. All other recollections of Günther Wittbold used in this chapter are based on the same material.

<sup>100</sup> In fact each Gruppe was assigned a Ju 88, but both flew in front of the combined formation.

<sup>101</sup> RL10/527, RL2-III-1172/58, Info Deutsche Dienststelle 17.01.1997 and records at the DRK-Suchdienst.

<sup>102</sup> ULTRA Report 55-BT-945 and logbook Lt. Hans Klaffenbach, 4./JG 4, take off at 08.25 hrs.

<sup>103</sup> ULTRA Report 55-BT-945.

<sup>104</sup> RL2-III-852.

<sup>105</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./JG 4 and RL2-III-1171/2.

<sup>106</sup> Report of Burial, Henri-Chapelle, Grave TT-10-191.

<sup>107</sup> *Sturmjäger, Zur Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 4 und der Sturmstaffel 1* by Eric Mombeek, Band 2, page 125.

<sup>108</sup> Logbook Lt. Hans Klaffenbach, Grüne 1, Griesheim 08.25 hrs., Griesheim 10.10 hrs., 33. Feindflug.

<sup>109</sup> Correspondence with Ron Howarth.

<sup>110</sup> Maas en Mijn articles 1978-1979, Sittard.

<sup>111</sup> Correspondence with Pie op den Camp, Guttecoven and Sittard Fire Dept. report.

<sup>112</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging, Uffz. Werner Zetzschke, VDK-Kassel.

<sup>113</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung I./JG 4 and RL2-III-1171/3.

<sup>114</sup> RL2-III-1197/125 and RL2-III-852 combined.

<sup>115</sup> Recollections of Günther Wittbold. Unfortunately Oblt. Neumayer would not survive the war. After I./JG 4 was disbanded, he was posted to a paratrooper unit in Austria. He did not report back after the war and is still listed as missing.

<sup>116</sup> *Sturmjäger, Zur Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 4 und der Sturmstaffel 1* by Eric Mombeek, Band 2, page 133. Based on logbook of Uffz. Oskar Fromberg, Aircraft data from RL2-III-1171/3.

<sup>117</sup> Monatsbericht des Jagdgeschwaders 4 (Januar 1945) by Oblt. Gerhard Michalski 01.02.1945, BA Freiburg document RL10/527.

<sup>118</sup> Correspondence with Tom Glenn.

<sup>119</sup> Encounter Report 1st Lt Paul J. Walsh 373rd FG.

<sup>120</sup> OpRep A No J1A, Mission 454, 373rd FG.

<sup>121</sup> Correspondence with Glenn T. Noyes 373rd FG.

# Hunting for Volkel

**Jagdgeschwader 6 and problems with Pathfinders**

Jagdgeschwader 6 was one of the last Jagdgeschwader to be established by the Luftwaffe. The first Gruppe to be formed was II./JG 6, which was built out of the core of II./ZG 26 in August 1944.

**Z**ERSTÖRERGESCHWADER 26 had carried the name 'Horst Wessel' and JG 6 continued the tradition. At the beginning of August the pilots of II./JG 6 retrained on Fw 190 As. By mid-August the Gruppe was apparently considered combat-ready and transferred to Northern France. Its first operations proved to be a total failure. On August 25th alone the Gruppe lost 19 Focke-Wulfs with 14 pilots killed in combat with P-38s from the 367th FG. By early September the Gruppe had to retreat to Germany itself and during further missions in mid-September suffered serious casualties once again. By mid-October the unit was exhausted and was pulled back to Hagenow airfield where it was to re-equip and brought up to strength. Hptm. Johannes Naumann, an experienced fighter pilot who had a long career with JG 26 where he had accumulated 28 victories, had led II./JG 6 since the beginning of September.

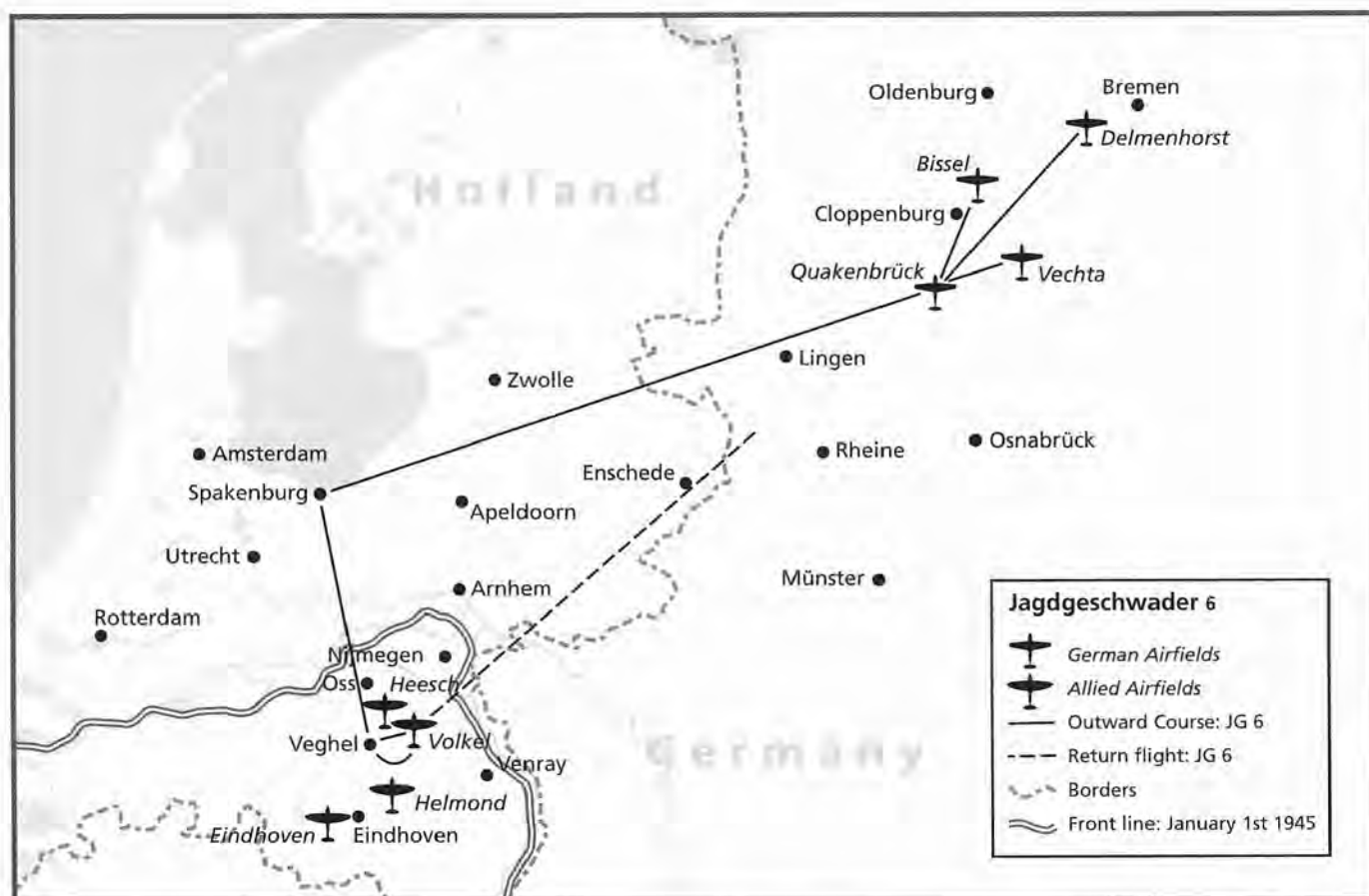
In October, two further Gruppen were added to JG 6. Stab JG 6 and I./JG 6 were established from Stab ZG 26 and I./ZG 26 respectively. The pilots retrained on Fw 190 As at Perleberg. Maj. Johann Kogler was appointed Kommodore of JG 6: he was a 33-year old Austrian who had been Kommodore of ZG 26 since July 1944. I./JG 6 was to be led by Hptm. Willy Elstermann, a 27-year old veteran pilot who had achieved seven victories with ZG 52 and NJG 3. Finally III./JG 6 was established by renaming I./JG 5. This Gruppe was also almost annihilated in France and was withdrawn to Wunstorf airfield. Here the Gruppe was informed that it was to be renamed III./JG 6. A few weeks later they were transferred to airfields around Schwerin. At the end of November, Maj. Helmut Kühle, a veteran of JG 52, had taken over as Gruppenkommandeur. He replaced Hptm. Theo Weißenberger, who moved to fly the Me 262 jets of JG 7. The first to re-enter combat was III./JG 6.



Obstlt. Johann Kogler, Kommodore of JG 6 photographed in December 1944 at Quackenbrück. (Kogler)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



During one of its first missions on November 26th, the unit was to join forces with two Gruppen of JG 1. However, they did not succeed in assembling into a larger formation and 15 Messerschmitts were lost in an engagement with the long-range fighters of the Eighth Air Force. The other Gruppen did not enter combat in November and by mid-December, the whole Geschwader was transferred to Northern Germany to participate in the Ardennes offensive.

Stab and II./JG 6 moved to Quackenbrück and Vechta airfields around December 10th. Stab JG 6, together with Stab II./JG 6, 5. and 8. Staffel were stationed at Quackenbrück, while 6. and 7. Staffel were based at Vechta.<sup>1</sup> The first mission was flown on December 17th. In the meantime I./JG 6 and III./JG 6 were also transferred and were respectively based at Delmenhorst and Bissel. Both Gruppen flew their first operations on December 17th as well. Until the end of 1944 several missions were flown over the Western Front and losses were heavy, especially for I./JG 6. By the end of the month, the Gruppe had lost 16 Fw 190s destroyed and 22 damaged. Eleven pilots were killed and at least two were wounded. The losses of the other Gruppen were slightly fewer. However, by the end of the month JG 6 was still a force to be reckoned with. On December 31st, the Gruppe reported 78 Focke-Wulfs and 21 Messerschmitts ready for combat!<sup>2</sup>

### Preparations for New Years Day

Obstlt. Johann Kogler<sup>3</sup> attended the briefing at the headquarters of II. Jagdkorps at Altenkirchen in the afternoon of December 5th 1944 and was surprised to learn that Gen. Maj. Dietrich Peltz had just been appointed CO of II. Jagdkorps. Also present were the COs of 3. and 5. Jagddivision and the Jafü Mittelrhein. A master map was handed to each Kommodore and the operation was discussed and planned in detail. It was agreed that every airfield would be attacked simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after returning to his headquarters, Obstlt. Kogler briefed the members of his Stab. Detailed maps were prepared in sufficient quantities, which were to be handed over at briefings. Kogler even arranged a sand table model of Volkel airfield to be prepared for each Gruppe.<sup>5</sup> Fhr. Georg Graf von Keller, a pilot in Stab JG 6 and Kogler's wingman, remembers: "The headquarter of Stab JG 6 was located at an inn in Badbergen, a small village some 10 kilometres south of Quackenbrück. At the same time it was also the living quarters for the officers of the Stab. Here the operation of January 1st was prepared in detail with the help of a model".<sup>6</sup>

Precisely when the Gruppenkommandeure and Staffelfkapitäne were informed of the coming attack remains unclear. One source maintains that Obstlt. Kogler informed his commanding officers shortly after he returned from Altenkirchen.<sup>7</sup>





The only known photograph of Hptm. Hans-Jochen Bobsien (right), the Lotse pilot of III./NJG 5 who guided JG 6 on January 1st. To the left of Bobsien is an unknown staff officer. Hptm. Bobsien had been flying in the Luftwaffe since 1934, but after an accident he was declared unfit for operations and had to leave the force in 1937. He then flew for Junkers at Dessau. In September 1940, at his request, he rejoined the Luftwaffe and flew missions over England with KG 40 and later with III./KG 100 in the Mediterranean with Dornier Do 217 K-2s and Hs 293s. He joined 8./NJG 5 in November 1944. (Bobsien)

However, von Keller is convinced that the detailed planning was done with great secrecy and that only the senior officers of the Geschwaderstab were informed.<sup>8</sup> Hptm. Ewald Trost, Staffelkapitän of 2./JG 6 remembers that he was not informed of the attack until December 31st.<sup>9</sup> Apparently some Staffelkapitäne were informed of the coming operation well before Christmas. Oblt. Bernhard von Hohenbruck, Kapitän of 1. Staffel, called it the long awaited attack on Volkel in his diary.<sup>10</sup> Uffz. Hermann Knue, a pilot of III./JG 6, remembers that by mid-December at least some pilots of III./JG 6 received an aerial photograph of Volkel and were instructed to study the details so they would recognise their target. However, the name of target was not disclosed to them.<sup>11</sup>

Several Ju 88s were detached to the Gruppen of JG 6 to act as Lotsen. The Stab of JG 6 and II./JG 6 were to be led by the crew of Hptm. Hans-Joachim Bobsien of 8./NJG 5. His crew consisted of Ofw. Hans Steinadler (Bordfunker), another Oberfeldwebel whose name is unfortunately not known and Gefr. Franz Purth (Bordschütze).<sup>12</sup> At 36 years of age, Hptm. Bobsien was a relatively old pilot. He had been in the Army since 1924 and had joined the Luftwaffe in February 1934. In 1936 he had a flying accident and sustained serious injuries to one leg. In May 1937, he had to resign from the Luftwaffe as it considered his injuries too serious for him to fly combat missions. Over the next few years he flew as a test pilot for Junkers in Dessau, but always tried to get back into the Luftwaffe again. In 1940 his request was granted and as an Oberleutnant he rejoined the Luftwaffe being detached to 2./KG

40, with whom he flew several missions against England. After numerous postings, he was sent to NJG 101 in September 1944. After two months of training, he finally joined 8./NJG 5 mid November. Here he formed his crew with two very experienced Oberfeldwebel-Bordfunktoren<sup>13</sup> and the young 19 year old Franz Purth as Bordschütze. In contrast to many other Ju 88 Lotsen, Bobsien's crew was still at Lübeck-Blankensee, the base of III./NJG 5, on December 17th, although they were ready to transfer to Quackenbrück.<sup>14</sup> It is very likely they joined Stab JG 6 and II./JG 6 on December 18th.

Other crews of III./NJG 5 were transferred to III./JG 6 and I./JG 6. On December 5th at 16.15 hrs, Ju 88 'C9+IT' of 9./NJG 5 took off from Lüneburg. The Ju 88 was flown by the crew of Ofw. Hans Engelhardt, which consisted of Ofw. Werner Knieriem (SN-2 Funker), Uffz. Adolf Flake (Flugsicherungsfunker) and Fw. Paul Betz (Bordmechaniker). The crew was not told the reason for the transfer. At 16.55 hrs. they landed at Delmenhorst. On December 7th they continued their journey and landed at Bissel, a few miles north-east of Cloppenburg at 10.26 hrs. Here they discovered that III./JG 6 had not yet arrived! Waiting at the airfield for several days they were eventually ordered to fly to Schwerin, the home of III./JG 6, on December 16th. Together with III./JG 6 they returned to Bissel next day, probably practising the low-level flight with the Bf 109 formation, and landed at 10.13 hrs.<sup>15</sup>

The plan which was developed by Obstlt. Kogler and his staff was as follows: all three Gruppen were to rendezvous over Quackenbrück and the entire Geschwader, led by a Ju 88 Lotse,

would set course on 260 deg. for Spakenburg, a small town on the extreme southern point of the Zuiderzee. Following the Ju 88 came Stab JG 6 with Obstlt. Kogler and his wingman, flying at an height of 100 metres. Close behind them would be II./JG 6 led by Hptm. Hans Naumann. Next would be III./JG 6 with I./JG 6 forming the rear. Navigation lights would be on until they reached the front line to assist in maintaining formation on the outward flight.<sup>16</sup> Spakenburg was to be the first turning point and the flying time for this leg was to be 30 minutes. Just south of Spakenburg green and white signals were to be expected, and at this point a course of 178 deg. was to be set. Just before the front line was crossed, the Ju 88 would break away and Obstlt. Kogler was to lead the formation to Veghel, which was considered the best landmark for Volkel airfield. Once over Veghel, I. and III./JG 6 were to fly directly to the airfield. I./JG 6 was to climb to 500 metres and open the attack in a dive, climbing again to 500 metres after each pass and circling the airfield anti-clockwise. The Messerschmitts of III./JG 6 were to climb to 1,500 metres during the approach to Volkel and were to orbit the airfield at that height while I./JG 6 attacked, in order to provide protection against any Allied fighters.

II./JG 6 meanwhile, after passing Volkel, was to follow Obstlt. Kogler on the southerly course in the direction of Helmond and then turn and approach Volkel from the south, climbing to 500 metres. Its arrival was timed to synchronise with the completion of I./JG 6's first attack and the Gruppe, following the tactics of I./JG 6, was to press home its own attack. Thus I./JG 6 and II./JG 6 would be circling the airfield, diving to attack and climbing again to 500 metres for the next dive, while III./JG 6 circled 1,000 metres above them. Finally, once the attacks of the other two Gruppen were completed, III./JG 6 was to attack, again adopting the same tactics. When this attack had been delivered, Obstlt. Kogler would give the order to assemble and the Geschwader was to return on a homeward course of 59 deg..<sup>17</sup> Navigation lights were to be switched on again to assist in re-grouping for the return flight. Indeed the attack on Volkel seemed to be well-prepared. Towards the end of December, JG 6 was heavily involved in operations over the Western Front in support of the Ardennes offensive. When the order for the attack on Volkel did not come soon after the start of the offensive in the Ardennes, Kogler thought the plan was abandoned. When the order finally did come through on December 31st, it came as a surprise.<sup>18</sup> Kogler informed his Kommandeure of the plan to attack and they started to prepare the aircraft and pilots. At Delmenhorst, Hptm. Willi Elstermann conducted the briefing for the I./JG 6 pilots on the evening of December 31st. His groundcrew managed to get

29 of the 34 available Focke-Wulfs ready for the operation and the pilots went to bed early. At about 21.00 hrs the pilots of III./JG 6 were summoned to Kommandeur Maj. Helmut Kühle, who informed them that they were to carry out an attack on an airfield the following morning. Major Kühle stated that the meteorological forecast indicated that favourable weather conditions were assured.<sup>19</sup> Hans-Joachim Rose, a pilot in 9. Staffel, remembers: "We were briefed on the night of December 31st. We were not allowed to return to our private quarters, but had to sleep in the barracks on the airfield itself. After dinner, our Kommandeur Major Kühle gathered all his pilots in the Gefechtsstand and briefed us for the mission of the next day. We were to attack Volkel airfield and we were able to study the target as aerial pictures were available. I remained at the Gefechtsstand as I was on duty and was not relieved until early in the morning by a pilot who did not have an operational aircraft."<sup>20</sup>

The briefing of the II. Gruppe followed the same pattern. Pilots were not allowed to leave the airfield and were to refrain from alcohol. After dinner the pilots were briefed by Hptm. Hans Naumann and each one was assigned his place in the formation. After the briefing the pilots went to bed.<sup>21</sup> Several of them may have had mixed feelings and started writing letters. An insight into the state of mind of a young Luftwaffe pilot at the time is offered in a letter written by Uffz. Franz Schröttle, a young pilot in 8./JG 6, to his parents on December 30th.

*"Every day is special and tough. It is dangerous, but we pilots do not spare ourselves as we know what the stakes are. The day after tomorrow is New Year's Day, what will it bring us? It doesn't matter, we will be brave and when God sees our life as fulfilled, He may call us. However, we will not fail and will not betray the deeds of our fallen comrades. Keep your fingers crossed for me that nobody will come on my tail, but always in front of my guns. I am now flying the aircraft of our Kapitän with the number 13 and I hope she brings me luck..."<sup>22</sup>*

Twenty-two year old Uffz. Franz Schröttle would not survive New Year's Day.

### Volkel airfield in December

Volkel, also known as B-80, was situated approximately 30 kilometres to the north-north-east of Eindhoven and was one of the airstrips closest to the front. A former Luftwaffe airfield, it was now packed with aircraft from two RAF Wings. 'Packed' not only because of the considerable number of aircraft, but more so because of the many craters left behind from the last Bomber Command attack on September 3rd which ended Luftwaffe operations on the field. The



ground-attack workhorses of the RAF at B-80 were from No. 121 Typhoon Wing under command of W/Cdr W. Pitt-Brown DFC. The other resident Wing was No. 122 and equipped with the mighty Tempest, it was among the most aggressive 2nd TAF fighter units on the Continent. Group Captain Wray recalls: "At the time I was Wing Leader of No. 122 Tempest Wing at Volkel comprising five squadrons, Nos. 3, 56, 80, 274 and 486 Squadrons. We shared Volkel with No. 121 Wing equipped with Typhoons. Earlier in the war I had taken part in a number of low-level search and destroy missions over France, Belgium and The Netherlands and was, therefore, fully versed in the tactics used in such missions. At Volkel there was a railway line that ran straight into Germany. No doubt it had been used to carry supplies to the base when Volkel was occupied by the Germans. With my low-level background I was always suspicious that the Germans would use this railway line to launch a low-level surprise attack on Volkel. Therefore I always endeavoured to make sure that at least three of my squadrons were airborne on missions first thing in the morning."<sup>23</sup>

However, with so many Typhoons and Tempests based at Volkel, this was indeed a worthwhile target for JG 6!

### January 1st, Jagdgeschwader 6 heads for Volkel

In the early hours of January 1st the groundcrews of JG 6 were still working on the 99 Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts in order to get them lined up

and ready for the mission. It was, indeed, an impressive number of aircraft for a Jagdgeschwader in December 1944!

It was still dark when Obstlt. Kogler and his wingman Fhr. Georg Graf von Keller left their quarters at Badbergen and headed for the airfield at Quackenbrück. Here the aircraft of Stab, 5. and 8. Staffel were lined up. The runway would be marked by lighting to ease take-off. Absolute radio silence was ordered and the radio devices were only activated in the machines of the Kommodore, Gruppenkommandeur and Staffelführer.<sup>24</sup> The remaining pilots were to switch on their radios at the signal point south of Spakenburg.<sup>25</sup> No further briefing was held and the pilots prepared for take-off. As Lt. Viktor Bahrdt, the Kapitän of 8./JG 6, was grounded owing to an injury sustained on the 24th, a deputy had been ordered to lead the Staffel. As this deputy was taxiing to the take-off point, his aircraft went unserviceable and at the last moment Lt. Hans Wulff was detailed to take his place as Staffelführer. Lt. Wulff was not happy as 8. Staffel was to take off immediately before the 5. Staffel, which was led by Hptm. Norbert Katz. Wulff, whose operational experience was slight, had misgivings about preceding the experienced Hauptmann.<sup>26</sup> Hptm. Norbert Katz had already flown operations with KG 26 over England in August 1940.<sup>27</sup> However, Stab and both Staffeln of JG 6, had to wait first for the remainder of the Geschwader to arrive over Quackenbrück. At 07.00 hrs, III./JG 6's pilots received a short, final

Pilots of No. 122 Wing in the snow at Volkel. From left to right top: F/O Keith Smith, F/O 'Wacky' Kalka, W/O Bill Campbell, F/Lt. Ralph Evans, 'Pip' Dowell, F/O Brian O'Connor, F/O Owen Eagleson, F/O Bill Trott, F/Lt. 'Happy' Appleton, F/O Ray Danzey. Front from left to right: F/O Sid Short, F/Lt. Colin McDonald, F/Lt. 'Ike' Fenton, P/O Jim Sheddan, F/Lt. Harold Longley (3 Sqn), F/Lt. Keith Theile (3 Sqn), S/Ldr. 'Spike' Umbers, S/Ldr. Evan Mackie (274 Sqn), 'Joe' Crafts (274 Sqn), S/Ldr. Bob Spurdle (80 Sqn), P/O Johnny Wood, F/O 'Pop' Melles, F/Sgt. Allan Inglis, F/Lt. Dusty Miller. (Urbanke)





Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger of 11./JG 6. Schwerdtfeger was on his first mission with III./JG 6 on January 1st, 1945. Previously he had flown numerous missions as a reconnaissance pilot and had received the Ehrenpokal on May 26th 1943. (Schwerdtfeger)

briefing from Major Kühle. Specially prepared maps were handed to them and they were instructed to confine their attack to aircraft and petrol installations on the airfield and no alternative target was given. Updates of the weather forecast were given and the pilots were told that the code word for cancellation of the operation was 'Spätesse'.<sup>28</sup> Finally the positions of the Staffeln and each individual pilot were given. After both Ju 88s had taken off, the Stabsschwarm led by Maj. Helmut Kühle would follow. Hptm. Wilhelm Kindler would fly as wingman to Maj. Kühle. This was strange as normally Uffz. Herman Knue, a 12. Staffel pilot, had been flying as wingman in the last couple of weeks. Knue asked Maj. Kühle why he was relieved as his wingman, but got no answer.<sup>29</sup> In fact Hptm. Wilhelm Kindler had joined III./JG 6 only a few days before and Maj. Kühle had appointed him acting Staffelführer of 11./JG 6.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately not much is known about 29-year old Kindler, but it is likely that he lacked experience as a fighter pilot and that he only led 11./JG 6 on the ground and that while in the air the Staffel was led by an experienced NCO. Knue would now fly as Rottenführer in the Stabsschwarm and Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger, a 11. Staffel pilot, would fly as his wingman. This would be Schwerdtfeger's first mission as a fighter pilot. Thirty year old Schwerdtfeger had flown numerous missions as a reconnaissance pilot since 1941 and had been decorated several times before he volunteered as a fighter pilot in the summer of 1944.<sup>31</sup> After the briefing the pilots went to their machines and waited. Shortly after 08.00 hrs, the order for take-off was given and at 08.17 hrs, the Ju 88 G-6 flown by Ofw. Hans Engelhardt took off followed by the second Junkers.<sup>32</sup> Immediately, III./JG 6, led by Major. Helmut Kühle and his Stabsschwarm, rolled forward and took off at 08.19 hrs.<sup>33</sup> One by one the Messerschmitts took off and formed up behind the Ju 88 Lotsen and the leading Stabsschwarm. Following the Stabsschwarm was 9. Staffel with only four aircraft. Led by Staffelpitän Oblt. Lothar Gerlach in his 'White 10', it consisted of Uffz. Hans-Joachim Rose in 'White 4', Fw. Bruno Thoms in 'White 7' and Uffz. Rudolf Schlossborn in 'White 14'.<sup>34</sup> The remainder of the Staffeln closed up behind. At 08.31 hrs. the last of some 20 Messerschmitts took off, representing half the total strength of the Gruppe.<sup>35</sup> A few minutes later the formation headed for Quackenbrück, about 35 kilometres to the south.

Meanwhile, the pilots of I. Gruppe at Delmenhorst had also received a final briefing by Hptm. Willi Elstermann and prepared for take-off. Around 08.15 hrs. the Ju 88 Lotse took off followed by Hptm. Willi Elstermann and his Stabsschwarm. One by one the Focke-Wulfs took off from the small grass airfield. Suddenly, the aircraft of Oblt. Eberhard Pfeleiderer, Staffelführer of 3./JG 6,

seemed to lose speed and stalled. The Focke-Wulf crashed just west of the airfield and Pfeleiderer was killed instantly.<sup>36</sup> After examining the remains of his 'Yellow 1' it was established that it suffered engine failure and that Pfeleiderer had no chance of survival.<sup>37</sup> Shaken but determined, the last pilots took off and assembled over Delmenhorst. Some 29 Focke-Wulfs of I./JG 6 headed for Quackenbrück to join the other Gruppen.<sup>38</sup>

At approximately 08.35 hrs, III./JG 6 arrived over Quackenbrück and quickly the sign was given to the Stab and II./JG 6 aircraft. First to take off was the Ju 88 G-6 of Hptm. Hans-Joachim Bobsien followed by Obstlt. Kogler and Fhr. Graf von Keller. With Hptm. Johannes Naumann's Stabsschwarm in the lead it was finally Lt. Hans Wulff's turn. Lt. Viktor Bahrdt, who was standing beside the runway, watched his friend take off in 'Blue 4' followed by Uffz. Franz Schrötte in his 'Blue 13' as his wingman.<sup>39</sup> The whole of 8. Staffel took off without any problems and it was followed by Hptm. Katz and his 5. Staffel.

Now the Geschwader had to assemble to one large formation. Leading was Hptm. Bobsien's Ju 88 followed by Obstlt. Kogler's Stabsschwarm and Fhr. Graf von Keller. Closely behind came Hptm. Johannes Naumann with his Schwarm, followed by 6. and 7./JG 6 from Vechta, where they had taken off some minutes earlier. Lt. Wulff manoeuvred his Staffel behind the 7. Staffel and Hptm. Norbert Katz placed his 5. Staffel at the rear end of the formation.<sup>40</sup> In total some 25 Focke-Wulfs of II./JG 6 participated.<sup>41</sup> Finally the formation set course on 260 deg. for Spakenburg. III. Gruppe, followed by I./JG 6 which had arrived from Delmenhorst, flew some six kilometres behind.<sup>42</sup> At a height of between 50 and 150 metres some 75 aircraft of JG 6 headed for Volkel.<sup>43</sup> Fhr. Georg Graf von Keller remembers: "We took off as soon as the other Gruppen arrived over Quackenbrück. Led by the Ju 88 the whole Geschwader flew west. I estimate that the Ju 88 flew at a height of 50 metres and together with our Kommodore we followed at 70 metres. The turning point was located at the southern point of the Zuiderzee, with a course of 180 deg. we should reach our target. The flight to the turning point was uneventful, I just had to watch my position and course closely, to prevent the formation from breaking up."<sup>44</sup>

After some 30 minutes JG 6 reached the southern point of the Zuiderzee. Here Hptm. Bobsien's Ju 88 turned left and headed on a course of 178 deg. for Volkel. Much has been written about this turning point in the past, but all evidence suggests that Hptm. Bobsien actually made the turning point at the correct moment. Several pilots did not notice the green and white ground signals south of Spakenburg.<sup>45</sup> Obstlt. Kogler even believed that they were incorrectly placed!<sup>46</sup> In contrast pilots of III./JG 6 did notice the signals and stated

that their Ju 88 turned at the correct moment. In fact JG 6 was still on the correct course and headed for the front line. A few moments after crossing the river Rhine<sup>47</sup> the Ju 88 turned away and it was up to Kogler to lead the formation to Veghel. At a height of 70 metres, Kogler and his formation crossed the river Waal, east of Tiel, and passed the city of Oss. Although exactly on course, JG 6 would be in for a surprise. Unknown to them they were heading straight for the airfield of Heesch, six kilometres south-east of Oss.

Heesch, or B-88 as it was known to the Allies, had been constructed between October and the end of November. It is very likely that the existence of this airfield was unknown to the Luftwaffe and therefore it had not been taken into account during the initial planning of JG 6's operations.<sup>48</sup> On December 2nd, the first echelon of No. 126 Wing, RCAF, comprising five Spitfire squadrons, had occupied the airfield. On December 6th, the Wing's Spitfires arrived and two days later the first operations were flown. The airfield was defended by two RAF Regiment squadrons, No. 2734 and No. 2819.

On December 31st all ranks were preparing to welcome the New Year, but they were warned that January 1st was just another ordinary working day and that they would have to be "...on the job!"<sup>49</sup>

In the early morning of January 1st No. 126 Wing prepared for its missions of the day. At 08.50

hrs, 11 Spitfires of No. 411 Squadron had taken off on a fighter sweep/armed recce in the Osnabrück-Münster area.<sup>50</sup> Seven minutes later they were followed by 13 Spitfires of No. 442 Squadron led by F/Lt. N.A. Keene for an armed recce in the same area<sup>51</sup>. At 09.14 hrs, ten Spitfires of No. 401 Squadron were lining up on the runway for their planned take-off at 09.15 hrs, when suddenly JG 6 appeared out of the blue:

*"The Squadron was at the end of the runway at about 09.14 hrs., ready to take off, when about 40 plus Fw 190's and Me 109's swept over in two waves, heading south. Fortunately this Wing was not their primary target because outside of several taking an odd squirt at some grounded Spits, they never bothered us."*<sup>52</sup>

Focused on their position in the formation, most of the German pilots did not even see the airfield or the Spitfires.<sup>53</sup> F/L Michael F. Doyle of No. 411 Squadron witnessed the 'attack' on Heesch: "I was at B-88, Heesch on New Years Day 1945 and I recall very clearly when the Luftwaffe overflew the airfield. I was on my way by foot to our (411 Squadron) dispersal at the time and I don't think the Germans knew there was an airfield at Heesch because, although they flew right over it, they didn't seem to have it targeted. There were at least 100 airplanes and they were very low: I suspect they

F/Lt. Michael F. Doyle of No. 411 Squadron: "I don't think the Germans knew there was an airfield at Heesch because, although they flew right over it, they didn't seem to have it targeted." (Doyle)



were heading for Eindhoven or Brussels or perhaps Volkel. I don't really know but what I do know is that as one of the last airplanes in the formation approached Heesch, he must have seen the airstrip and he fired a burst from his guns. I, of course, dived into the nearest ditch and when the last of the formation had disappeared I proceeded on my way to the dispersal which was an old barn. When I arrived there I found that during the course of the burst of gunfire, one bullet had penetrated the roof of the barn and had subsequently torn through the meteorological map that had been posted on the notice board in the middle of the barn which served as the pilots' room. As far as I know that was the only damage inflicted that day by the Luftwaffe on B-88, Heesch."<sup>54</sup>

A very hurried take-off of No. 401 Squadron followed and in the scramble most of the pilots were separated.<sup>55</sup> All ten pilots managed to get airborne. F/O Doug Cameron, flying Spitfire Mk IX MJ448, was the first to get in to action: "I took off and turned slightly starboard and sighted two Me 109s on my port side on the deck at 100 feet. I attacked the starboard one from astern, about 10 deg. starboard and 300 yards with a very short burst. I saw an explosion on the fuselage near the cockpit and this aircraft dove straight down towards the deck at less than 50 feet. I immediately turned on the other about 15 deg. starboard, about 200 yds and fired a short burst. I saw a large explosion on the fuselage at behind the cockpit followed by flames. This aircraft also dove down to port, with flames, at less than 50 feet. I then sighted another Me 109 to starboard. I at once chased him and opened fire at about 400-500 yards, from about 30-40 deg. port. I saw a small flash on the rear fuselage, I continued to fire short bursts with no results seen. I then chased to about 200 yards astern and after a fairly long burst (2-3 seconds) saw glycol streaming out. I was out of ammunition and flew very close on his starboard until he crash-landed in a large field approximately two miles north of the aerodrome. This aircraft smoked but was not burning. After two orbits of the crash I took a short cine camera shot of this aircraft. I claim three Me 109s destroyed."<sup>56</sup>

F/O Cameron landed back at his base at 09.30 hrs., only 15 minutes after his take-off!<sup>57</sup> Although he claimed three Messerschmitts, only two can be identified with some certainty. One of his first claims must have been the Bf 109 G-10 of Uffz. Karl Betz of 10./JG 6. His 'Black 12' struck frozen ground at an acute angle, his drop tank exploded and it disintegrated some three kilometres north-west of Veghel.<sup>58</sup> Twenty-four year old Uffz. Karl Betz was killed instantly.<sup>59</sup> Without doubt F/O Cameron's last victim was Ofhr. Johann Krumm of 12./JG 6. His 'Green 8' crashed just north-east of Berghem, about seven kilometres north of

Heesch aerodrome, where it completely burned out.<sup>60</sup> Ofhr. Johann Krumm did not survive the crash and he was buried at the local cemetery of Nistelrode.<sup>61</sup>

Another section of No. 401 Squadron led by F/Lt. Johnny MacKay was vectored to the Reichswald area. It too would be successful and F/Lt. MacKay claimed two Focke-Wulfs and one Messerschmitt destroyed. However, these losses were not related to JG 6. The RAF Regiments at Heesch also claimed several aircraft destroyed, but only one loss, a Messerschmitt Bf 109 from JG 3, seems to have been shot down by the Heesch gunners. No. 2734 Squadron was later credited with one enemy aircraft destroyed and five damaged.<sup>62</sup>

No. 401 Squadron's attack did not remain unnoticed by the other pilots of III./JG 6. Pilots asked permission to attack the Spitfires, but this was denied by Maj. Kühle who ordered them to stay put. When the first two Messerschmitts had crashed and the pilots again asked permission to take on the fight, Maj. Kühle ordered one section to attack the Spitfires.<sup>63</sup> In the meantime ground control at Heesch had recalled No. 442 Squadron from their mission and the three sections returned as fast as they could. Two No. 442 pilots were already in the area. F/Lt. Don Gordon was returning early with a rough engine and F/Lt. R.C. Smith was some distance behind him returning with an unserviceable drop tank. F/Lt. Gordon was at 7,000 feet over base when he saw AA fire and thought a jet aircraft was below, so he dived down to investigate: "I saw 50 plus 109s and 190s on the deck flying south. I picked out the nearest 190 and gave him a half second burst from 60 deg. starboard from 200 yards. I saw no strikes but the enemy aircraft flicked to port and went right into the deck exploding. I picked another 190 which was just ahead and to port of the previous enemy aircraft. I gave him a three second burst from line astern, range 300 yards. I saw many strikes on the fuselage and wing roots. He threw out black smoke, flew straight and level for about 5 seconds then nosed over into the deck exploding. I claim two Fw 190s destroyed".<sup>64</sup>

Only one loss can be linked to F/Lt. Gordon's claims and that is 'White 7' flown by Lt. Karl Grabmair of 5./JG 6. Lt. Grabmair was killed when his aircraft crashed south-east of Zijtaart, a few kilometres south-east of Veghel.<sup>65</sup> He was buried in a fieldgrave near the wreck of his Focke-Wulf.<sup>66</sup> F/Lt. Gordon was then hit from behind and wounded in the back of the head and back. He was forced to crash-land near Uden. He clambered gingerly out of his machine, only to be greeted by an enthusiastic Dutch woman who ran up, clapped him heartily on the back and said: "Happy New Year!"<sup>67</sup>



Lt. Karl Grabmair of  
5./JG 6. (Grabmair)





Fw 190 A-8 'White 17' of 5./JG 6 seen July/August 1944 and as flown by Lt. Karl Grabmair at that time. (Grabmair)

It is very likely that F/Lt. Gordon was shot down by the Staffelführer of 5./JG 6, Hptm. Norbert Katz. His wingman witnessed how Hptm. Katz shot down a Spitfire in this area.<sup>68</sup> F/Lt. R.C. Smith in the meantime had been warned of 'Huns' in the vicinity and had climbed to 17,000 feet when he heard F/Lt. Gordon reporting his crash landing. Flying south trying to locate Gordon he suddenly saw that Eindhoven airfield was attacked. He identified Fw 190s and Bf 109s flying in a circle at about 200 feet and attacked several German aircraft.<sup>69</sup> F/Lt. Smith's further exploits have been covered in Chapter Four.

Let us return to JG 6 and follow it towards Volkel. Obstdt. Kogler was still on course when he passed over Heesch, but apparently the confusion caused by the Spitfires was considerable. He continued too long on the southerly course and the formation had already passed Veghel when, in accordance with the instructions III./JG 6 began to pull up to 1,500 metres, at which height it was to provide top cover whilst I./JG 6 climbed to open the attack. In fact I./JG 6 did not locate Volkel at all but when some pilots noticed columns of smoke on their right-hand side and headed in that direction, I. Gruppe ended up over Eindhoven airfield, which was already under attack by JG 3!<sup>70</sup> At a height of 50–100 metres, II./JG 6 continued in the wake of the Kommodore further south and together with a large part of III./JG 6 ended up in the Helmond area, some 20 kilometres south of Volkel! We will take a closer look at both JG 6 formations and for reasons of clarity have to describe their efforts

separately, although the events took place at the same time.

#### First Gruppe attacks Eindhoven

With black columns of smoke rising to the sky as a result of the initial attack by JG 3, Eindhoven airfield was not hard to locate. It is believed that a large element, if not the whole of I./JG 6, headed for this target. Hptm. Ewald Trost, Kapitän of 2. Staffel, also noticed the smoke columns and he turned to the south-west. When he arrived over the airfield he counted 40–50 aircraft. Coming in from the west, he dived to attack and aimed at a Spitfire and saw it burning.<sup>71</sup> Oblt. Bernhard von Hohenbruck, Staffelführer of 1./JG 6, also dived to attack: "I participated in the big turmoil over the airfield. I definitely shot one Mustang into flames. It exploded immediately. Most targets I saw much too late and other pilots had better results. Well, finally I saw some action and the next time it will go even better and certainly with steadier nerves!"<sup>72</sup>

The Eindhoven attack has been described in detail in Chapter Four and here we will look only at JG 6's involvement. Some Allied documents mention that two waves hit Eindhoven after the initial attack, but it can not be proven that this was I./JG 6.<sup>73</sup> However, it seems that a large part of I./JG 6 did attack Eindhoven airfield and inflicted serious damage.<sup>74</sup> The unit claimed many aircraft destroyed.<sup>75</sup> The Eindhoven defences, especially the RAF Regiments, did their utmost to resist the attack and shot down several German fighters. One remarkable event took place when an attacking Focke-Wulf was hit by Bren gun fire. This Bren gun was operated by the Senior

Three JG 6 officer pilots in captivity. Standing from left to right: Schulz, Rademacher, Lt. Hans Wulff (8./JG 6), unknown, Bär. Sitting from left to right: Lenzmann, Hptm. Ewald Trost (2./JG 6), Hptm. Wilhelm Kindler (III./JG 6), unknown, unknown. (Trost)



Armament NCO of No. 438 Squadron: "At 09.20 hours Jan. 1st, 1945, I (Sgt. Large) was down the road from dispersal waiting to see the Squadron take off when I saw a number of enemy aircraft making an attack on the airfield. I first thought this was a hit-and-run raid, but after the second and third wave had passed over and I saw the enemy aircraft circle the field and continue their attacks from out of sun I figured they were playing for keeps and therefore hurried back to dispersal to the room where our Bren guns were kept. There I saw F/Sgt. McGee and we decided to take a whack at anything flying over dispersal. We each took a Bren gun and two boxes of clips and stood outside the dispersal door and waited for any Jerry who came within range. In all, we believe we fired at 10 or 12 Fw 190s and Me 109s. Strikes were seen on at least two aircraft. One aircraft coming from the south turned off the runway and made a steep climbing turn about 120 yards away from us at a height of not more than 40 feet. We both fired, each emptying a full magazine at him. We saw strikes down the engine cowling in the direction of the cockpit and we saw small bits and pieces fly off. The enemy aircraft flicked over on its other side and we saw black smoke come from the aircraft. We had to break off at this time as another enemy aircraft came in on us from the north firing his guns. During this time we used 300 rounds of .303 ammo."<sup>76</sup>

A few days later an Fw 190 was found some 500 metres south-east of the village of Oirschot, north of Eindhoven airfield. The Focke-Wulf had been struck by small arms fire on the port side and the pilot, who was taken prisoner, had .303 bullet wounds in his arm.<sup>77</sup> The unfortunate pilot was Hptm. Ewald Trost of 2./JG 6. Hptm. Trost had made three circuits of the airfield, diving to attack and climbing again to 500 metres. He shot up

three Spitfires and saw them burning. On his fourth approach to the target his aircraft was hit by AAA in the engine and fuselage. Trost remembers: "When I arrived over Eindhoven, several aircraft were already on fire. I attacked from the west, pulled up again, flew a left-hand turn and attacked again from the west. This I repeated twice and I aimed at the aircraft that weren't already burning. Preparing my fourth attack I saw another undamaged aircraft and taking aim I was suddenly hit by Flak. My ammunition was hit and started to explode and also flames entered the cockpit. I pulled the canopy handle and with a big 'wwwwoofff' it was gone. I opened the belts and was already half out of the cockpit when the flames extinguished. I climbed back again and decided to make a belly landing."<sup>78</sup>

Hptm. Trost crash-landed his 'Red 12' on the Aarlesche Heide, a heath some seven kilometres north of Eindhoven airfield.<sup>79</sup> He had suffered burns to his face and bullet wounds in his right arm. He was treated for his wounds in a Canadian army hospital and later by Dutch doctors. At the end of January he was moved to the UK for interrogation.

Another pilot of 2. Staffel, 25-year old Ofw. Walter Jung, was not so lucky. Jung, who was renowned for his aerobatics in the Staffel, followed his Kapitän towards Eindhoven. It is not known what exactly happened, but Jung was shot down, either by AAA or fighters, and crashed on Eindhoven airfield. He was killed instantly and his remains were buried at the general cemetery in Woensel, together with other Luftwaffe pilots.

The fate of Ofw. Walter Jung has been subject of much speculation.<sup>80</sup> This has largely been caused by a mistake on Ofw. Jung's loss report. The *Werknummer* and *Kennzeichen* of his Focke-Wulf are exactly the same as the aircraft in which Oblt.



Hptm. Ewald Trost, Staffelkapitän of 2./JG 6. From 1938 until 1941, he was a flight instructor. In June 1942, he joined 8./ZG 26 and flew missions in Africa. In July 1943, he became Geschwader-Adjutant of ZG 26. In March 1944, he became Staffelkapitän of 2./ZG 26. (Trost)



POW Camp No. 191 at Crewe Hall in Cheshire, England. It was here that Hptm. Ewald Trost spent most of his captivity. (Trost)

Pfleiderer was killed during take-off. This is, of course, not possible. Another document gives the correct identification for Jung's Focke-Wulf as Werknummer 737385 and 'Red 10'<sup>81</sup>. Red was the correct colour for a 2. Staffel aircraft. Another document, RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 dated 16th January 1945, listed this aircraft as crashed on Eindhoven airfield thus proving that Jung actually crashed on Eindhoven. All four German pilots who crashed and were killed on or near the airfield, were buried at Woensel cemetery in Eindhoven.<sup>82</sup> Further research showed that two of these were still listed as unknown in 1995. One of them was listed as having personal number 60835, which is in fact an incomplete Erkennungsmarke number. During the reburial at Ysselsteyn in 1949, it was also determined that this unknown had been approximately 26-28 years old. Of all the pilots missing from January 1st, only two had number 60835 in their Erkennungsmarke and Ofw. Jung was the only one of that age. In December 1996 the German authorities accepted and confirmed the identification of Ofw. Jung and thus, more than 50 years after his death, the fate of this pilot was finally solved.<sup>83</sup>

The fate of another I. Gruppe pilot was also a mystery. Uffz. Josef Zangerle, a 20-year old pilot of 1. Staffel, flew as wingman with Oblt. Bernhard von Hohenbruck. As both came from Tyrol, a special relation existed between the young pilot and his older Staffelführer. Shortly before reaching the target, von Hohenbruck had to make a sharp right-hand turn and during this manoeuvre he lost sight of Zangerle, who flew on his right wing. During and after the attack on Eindhoven, von

Hohenbruck searched for his comrade but was unable to locate him. After his return to Delmenhorst, von Hohenbruck could do nothing else but draw up a loss report and write a letter to Zangerle's sister that her brother was missing.<sup>84</sup> What would follow can only be described as bizarre and painful.

In early February 1945, the Gruppe received news that Uffz. Zangerle had baled out of his Focke-Wulf and had broken both legs during his parachute jump. He had landed near Christerode, a small village west of Bad Hersfeld, Germany and was hospitalised in Treysa. Christerode lies some 290 kilometres east of Eindhoven, an unbelievable distance from where Zangerle was last seen! All official loss reports were filed with the details now known and the sister was informed again.<sup>85</sup> But what really happened to Uffz. Zangerle? Why would he fly so far east before trying to land on an airfield? Furthermore, was it possible to reach Christerode with the fuel he had left? In March 1945 the Gruppe finally received further details from the hospital in Treysa and by then the mistake was clear. The man hospitalised in Treysa was actually Uffz. Walter Zangerle, a pilot of 6./JG 300 who was shot down on December 24th. A letter was sent to Uffz. Josef Zangerle's sister to inform her of the bad news. What really happened to Uffz. Josef Zangerle remains a mystery. No trace of him or his aircraft has been found and he is still listed as missing in action. A few years ago Zangerle's sister passed away, still not knowing what had happened to her brother.

After they had expended their ammunition, the pilots of I./JG 6 headed north-east. The long



Uffz. Josef Zangerle of 1./JG 6 – still listed as MIA and last seen in the Eindhoven area. (Roubin)



A very interesting picture of the wreckage of *Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger's 'Yellow 19'* near Groesbeek. This is one of the few pictures known where the red-white-red tailband of JG 6 can be seen. (Mol)



flight home would prove to be not without danger. Before we follow the Gruppe on its return flight, we go back to the remainder of the JG 6 force to see what happened to the other Gruppen and also what had happened at Volkel itself.

### The search for Volkel.

By the time JG 6 had assembled over Quackenbrück, the first mission from Volkel had already started. First to take off at 08.20 hrs. was an eight-aircraft armed recce of No. 3 Squadron led by S/Ldr. K.F. Thiele DSO, DFC, heading for the Paderborn area. It attacked several trains in this area and when JG 6 passed Veghel, it was already returning to Volkel.<sup>86</sup> At 08.35 hrs, three sections each of two Typhoons from No. 184 Squadron took off for an armed recce in the Enschede-Osnabrück-Münster area after which, a train was attacked with 60 lb RPs near Enschede and all six Typhoons returned safely to Volkel.<sup>87</sup> Shortly before 09.00 hrs, eight Tempests of No. 56 Squadron took off for an armed recce to Münster where they attacked some locomotives.<sup>88</sup> At 09.15 hrs, shortly before the arrival of JG 6 in the area, the last two squadrons took off. Six Typhoons of No. 174 Squadron, each loaded with six rockets and a long-range tank, took off for an armed recce in the Osnabrück area. Although some German fighters already appeared in the vicinity, the Squadron continued the climb and set course for the target area. At the same time No. 486 (New Zealand) Squadron, led by S/Ldr. A.E. 'Spike' Umbers DFC, took off with eight Tempest Mk Vs on an armed recce in the Hanover area. They had reached the Arnhem-Elst area when they were informed that Focke-Wulfs were reported in the Eindhoven area.

S/Ldr. Umbers' request to return was granted and his formation jettisoned its tanks and headed south.

As mentioned, Obstlt. Kogler was leading JG 6 too far south and by 09.25 hrs, had reached the Helmond area. Still flying at a height of 50-100 metres, Kogler was followed by Hptm. Naumann's II. Gruppe and neared Helmond from the north-west. Following the Focke-Wulfs, Maj. Helmut Kühle's III. Gruppe was starting to pull up to 1,500 metres when disaster struck. At the same time the unit gained height the Stabsschwarm of III./JG 6 was hit by fierce and concentrated AA fire. Immediately, Kühle's aircraft received a direct hit and his aircraft coded '<<' plunged to earth as a fireball and crashed north-west of Helmond, killing Kühle instantly.<sup>89</sup> A few seconds later, Kindler's aircraft was hit and was seen to trail smoke. Kindler kept his '<<' in the air for a few minutes, but finally had to abandon his Messerschmitt near Hunsel, west of Roermond. He escaped unhurt and was taken POW. Still horrified by the sight of his Kommandeur's crash, Uffz. Hermann Knue also saw that his wingman *Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger* was hit. Schwerdtfeger tried to reach German lines, but crashed near Groesbeek and was killed.<sup>90</sup>

Meanwhile, the Focke-Wulfs of Stab and II./JG 6, still flying on the deck, stumbled on a strip just east of Helmond. This was in fact B-86, an airfield still under construction by the British Royal Engineers. Despite of the absence of resident units on B-86 Helmond<sup>91</sup>, two RAF Regiment Squadrons, Nos. 2875 and No. 2881 were located on the field and in the adjacent area. S/Ldr. D.A.W. Stewart, CO of 2875 Squadron clearly recalls the events that morning: "My HQ

was at a small holding on the edge of the airfield and my office a hut and a slit trench from which I could view the airfield and be in touch with the AA guns by phone. I was having breakfast when the attack started on 1st January 1945 and was immediately viewing the proceedings from my slit trench. Fortunately, there were none of our aircraft on the ground at the time so my gunners, at the start, had the attacking Luftwaffe to themselves. These were just above ground level making it difficult for our guns to fire at such a low trajectory and we were told afterwards, our shells were bouncing up the adjacent roads before exploding. It was an experience to see an Me 109 tearing by with guns blazing only a few yards away. Before long some Spitfires arrived and chased the enemy away. We suffered no casualties.<sup>92</sup>

Without doubt several German pilots believed they had found Volkel and started to attack the strip. Both RAF Regiment Squadrons opened fire and claimed several German fighters destroyed or damaged.<sup>93</sup> It is very likely that detachments of these Squadrons were also responsible for the barrage, which welcomed the Stabsschwarm of III./JG 6. Finding no aircraft on the strip, several JG 6 pilots strafed other targets of opportunity.<sup>94</sup> Uffz. Hermann Knue attacked some vehicles on the strip and Lt. Wulff of 8./JG 6 opened fire on some transport columns. Fhr. Georg Graf von Keller witnessed the attack on B-86 Helmond: "As the Kommodore and I arrived over the airfield we saw that several aircraft were already making their first strafing run. We had no other choice than to pull up to stay out of their line of fire and also wanted to get an overview of the situation. We were now at 400-500 metres, made a right-hand turn and then made a long left-hand turn just east of the airfield. The Flak was unbelievable, but the Kommodore continued his left-hand turn anyway and passed the strip again. During massive defensive fire we followed the tactics of applying right rudder in a left-hand turn so the aircraft would slip and the gunners would have difficulty to aim. Therefore all shells exploded just in front of us and even seemed to pass between wing and propeller! As the tracers passed very close to my aircraft, I must have instinctively used more right-hand rudder and suddenly closed in on the Focke-Wulf of my Kommodore who flew on the right of me and at the same time I saw how a shell hit his aircraft. Seeing the hit the gunners stopped firing for a moment and this gave us the time to dive down again. I aimed at one of the Flak batteries that had started firing again, but had to turn away not to lose sight of my Kommodore. I just saw him leaving in a south-easterly direction and he vanished into some bushes. I quickly found his landing spot and he had already climbed out of his



cockpit and was standing beside his aircraft. I wobbled my wings to inform him that I had seen him."<sup>95</sup>

As soon as he was hit Obstdt. Kogler handed over command by R/T to Hptm. Naumann and belly-landed his Fw 190 A-9 '←+→' some seven kilometres west of Sevenum.<sup>96</sup> He had been slightly injured and was taken to a hospital. After a few days, he was transferred to a POW camp where he was discovered by Intelligence Officers and, in view of his rank, was immediately sent to England for interrogation.

Uffz. Hans-Joachim Rose, a young pilot of 9./JG 6, was also shot down by Allied AAA. He remembers: "During my second attack on the airfield, my propeller suddenly stopped. Although we were in a constant dogfight with Allied fighters, I believe my aircraft was hit by Flak. I tried to reach the German lines but because of the low height I was flying I soon had to start to look for a good place to land. I crash-landed on a low field just near a small brook. I only sprained my back and managed to climb out of my aircraft unaided. As I had apparently landed close to the front line, English soldiers arrived on the scene in minutes and took me prisoner."<sup>97</sup>

Uffz. Rose crash-landed his Bf 109 G-14/AS 'White 4' near 't Herselt, west of Groeningen, some 10 kilometres north of Venray.<sup>98</sup> Things were becoming uncomfortable for the remaining JG 6 force, as the first Allied fighters had appeared on the scene. At 09.35 hrs. the first to arrive were three Tempests of No. 3 Squadron. F/O D.J. Butcher was leading this section: "I was flying 'Blue 1' returning from an armed recce to Paderborn-Bielefeld. Of the original seven aircraft, four had returned earlier having exhausted their ammunition attacking trains. My section of three aircraft was approaching base between 2-3,000 feet when I saw two columns of black smoke about five miles SW of base. As we went down to investigate, Control told us there were eight enemy aircraft in the Helmond area. We

Unfortunately of poor quality, but still an interesting picture showing Obstdt. Johann Kogler's Fw 190 A-9 after its belly-landing. The red-white-red fuselage band can still just be seen. (in 't Zandt)



Uffz. Hans-Joachim Rose of 9./JG 6 who crash-landed his Bf 109 G-14/AS west of Groeningen after his engine was hit by AAA. (Rose)

dived in that direction and almost immediately saw at least four Me 109s flying south away from us through flak right on the deck. I saw the AA shoot one down, and then my No. 2 selected one 109 on the extreme right, and I took the one on the extreme left. This one broke to Port and headed east on the Deck. I do not think he saw us. I followed with Blue 3, and closed to about 200 yards. I was doing 440 and did not close rapidly. From 200 yards I fired two very short bursts dead astern, seeing strikes on the middle of the fuselage, from which white smoke streamed. The enemy aircraft slowed perceptibly, and as I overtook rapidly I fired another short burst from 150 – 100 yards, seeing a few strikes on the wing. I then had to break hard to Starboard, and as I broke I saw Blue 3 (W/O R. Worley [authors]) close in to very short range dead astern. I saw the enemy aircraft going in and hit the ground, catching fire. The enemy aircraft was not hit by AA while I was chasing it."<sup>99</sup>

The Messerschmitt F/O Butcher witnessed being shot down by AA fire was undoubtedly that of Maj. Helmut Kühle. It is very likely that F/O Butcher and W/O Worley shot down Uffz. Hans Schaupp of 10./JG 6. Uffz. Schaupp was killed when his Bf 109 G-14/AS crashed in an area called the Vredepeel, some 15 kilometres north-east of Helmond.<sup>100</sup> F/Sgt. M.J. Rose, the other Tempest pilot flying in the formation, reported: "I was flying Red 3 on an armed recce to Paderborn/Bielefeld and got separated from my section attacking trains. I joined up with Blue section. When we were just east of base, Control reported Huns in the Deurne area, probably on the deck. We turned south and when just NW of Helmond I saw light flak. I then saw about ten aircraft on the deck attacking ground targets. I circled above the flak, and, identifying some of the aircraft below as 109s, selected one and dived on it as it flew out of the flak at low level. I closed to about 200 yards and fired a short burst 5 deg. off. I am not certain whether there were any strikes, but I saw thick black smoke. I realised I had very little ammunition after my train attack, so I closed to less than 100 yards dead astern and fired the remainder in a medium long burst. I saw some good strikes at the end of the burst on the fuselage, but the enemy aircraft did not appear to be seriously damaged. I remained on its tail and called up to see if any of my section with ammunition could help me out. The Hun suddenly did a sharp turn to port, during which he appeared to fire his guns, pulled up to about 1500 feet, rolled over on his back and baled out. The chute opened. I think the aircraft crashed near Lieshout into a field and caught fire".<sup>101</sup>

The unfortunate German pilot was Uffz. Rudolf Schloßborn of 9. Staffel. He had heard over his FuG 16 that Allied fighters had been seen and seconds later he received: "...look out White 14!" and was almost simultaneously attacked by a

Tempest. As a result, his engine caught fire and the tail of his aircraft was damaged.<sup>102</sup> He baled out and landed near 't Broek, a few kilometres west of Gemert. Uffz. Schloßborn managed to evade Allied troops for some time, but was taken prisoner later in the day. On their way back to Volkel both F/O Butcher and W/O Worley stumbled on a pair of Focke-Wulfs but after firing some rounds their ammunition ran out and they could only inflict damage. By 09.50 hrs, all three Tempests had landed at Volkel.<sup>103</sup>

The next Allied fighters to appear over the battle zone were the No. 486 Squadron Tempests led by S/Ldr. 'Spike' Umbers. After jettisoning their tanks, S/Ldr. Umbers formation flew towards Eindhoven in a gradual dive from 9,000 feet. On approaching Eindhoven, they observed that it was being attacked and at the same time sighted three Fw 190s, two at 6,000 feet and one on the deck, flying east towards Helmond. S/Ldr. Umbers sent Green Section led by F/O R.J. Danzey after the two at 6,000 feet, while he broke down to port in pursuit of one on the deck. He reported: "I was closing on the 190 too quickly and had to weave above and behind to lose speed until I was able to approach in line astern at nought feet. I opened fire at 300 yards observing strikes on the wing roots and fuselage. The 190 streamed white and black smoke and slowed up very suddenly but I maintained my fire until the last moment and pulled up violently to avoid him. As I climbed I saw the 190 hit the deck, skid along and burst into flames. Whilst climbing away to port I observed an Me 109 about 1,500 yards at about 10 o'clock flying east at my own height which was now about 1,500 feet. The 109 spotted me and dived to the deck. I followed him down and overtook him, as I dived, to within 600 yards. I then saw 20 Me 109s at 11 o'clock to me at nought feet flying at right angles to my course and about 800 yards away. The single Me 109 turned sharp to starboard to join up with this formation. As he turned, I fired two short bursts from 400 yards with 45 deg. deflection, but did not observe any strikes. The 109 straightened out with the formation and then did a violent break to starboard changing it to port. I followed him easily and as he straightened out I closed to 100 yards dead astern and gave him one short burst observing strikes on the cockpit, fuselage and starboard wing root. The starboard wheel of the 109 dropped down as the enemy aircraft disappeared under my nose. I saw it hit the deck and explode. As my ammo had now been expended I had to return to base accompanied by my No. 2."<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately the Focke-Wulf shot down by S/Ldr. Umbers cannot be identified but there are several possibilities. The Messerschmitt could very well have been that flown by Oblt. Lothar Gerlach



since the experienced Staffelfkapitän of 9./JG 6 was last seen in this area. No trace of him has been found and Gerlach is still missing today. Two other pilots in S/Ldr. Umbers' Red Section also claimed a victory. Following Umbers back to base, F/O Bill Trott was warned of an Fw 190 attacking Volkel and shot it down. As recounted in Chapter Four, this was, in fact, a Focke-Wulf of JG 3. F/O Trott later sighted a Bf 109 heading east at zero feet and emptied his guns but could not shoot it down. Finally P/O Jim Steedman damaged an Fw 190 in the Volkel area. F/Lt. Ray Danzey's Green Section went for the other Focke-Wulfs spotted by S/Ldr. Umbers. P/O Gus Hooper reported: "I was flying Green 4 when flying due west towards Eindhoven I saw three Fw 190s flying more or less in line abreast in a northerly direction at zero feet. I was at about 1,000 feet and went down on the port 190. I closed in to about 200 yards dead line astern and opened fire but observed no strikes. My starboard guns stopped firing but I again fired almost at point blank range, and as I passed over the Fw 190 I saw a puff of smoke come from the starboard side of the cockpit. I pulled up to the starboard and I saw the 190 crash into a field and burst into flaming pieces. Just at this moment I was attacked from port by a Me 109. I did two turns gaining height and saw the 109 break off and dive steeply towards the deck. I immediately followed and quickly overtook, firing two bursts at 400 yards range slightly above and in line astern. I closed the range very rapidly and noticed that the Me 109 was streaming white smoke from the starboard wing. I fired a burst at very short range but my guns stopped firing due to my ammo having been expended. I pulled up to starboard and made one complete turn and in doing so lost sight of the Me 109. I claim one Fw 190 destroyed and one Me 109 damaged".<sup>105</sup>

The Fw 190 shot down by P/O Hooper may have been piloted by Uffz. Karl-Heinz Riedel, a 21-year old pilot of 7./JG 6. Uffz. Riedel had recently joined II./JG 6 and this was likely to be his first mission.<sup>106</sup> His Focke-Wulf crashed southwest of Stevensbeek, some 10 kilometres northwest of Venray. Uffz. Karl-Heinz Riedel was buried in a fieldgrave and in 1949 his remains were reinterred at Ysselsteyn. It took however until 1969, for his remains to be finally identified.<sup>107</sup> When asked about the New Year's Day battle of 1945, 50-plus years later, Gus still felt remorse about his generous expenditure of ammunition: "We got airborne and the ground station told us to go straight to Eindhoven, I think it was. There was another place there that they were attacking too, and there were dozens of them around – they were everywhere. They were all coming back after dumping their bombs and strafing Eindhoven. If we'd have used our heads I think we could have got a lot more. I should have



The crash site of Uffz. Karl-Heinz Riedel's Fw 190A-8 'Yellow 16' near Westerbeek, north of Venray. Clearly visible is the yellow II. Gruppe marking on the fuselage. (van Sleuwen)

had three or four aircraft that day. That's my opinion. You have only got about 16 seconds of ammunition – and I used up all my ammunition when I shot down a 190. He never turned left or right and just went straight down into the ground. He must have had a bullet through him or something. There was no bale out or anything as he was right on the deck. All the action was between the deck and 300 feet. I hung onto him firing too much ammo. What I should have done, when I saw the smoke coming off, was left him – I only had a few seconds of ammo left, when I struck the 109 later. After I shot the 190 down I was eyewitness to Bill Trott shooting one down in front of me. He shot the plane down when we were right over the top of Volkel – right over the aerodrome. I had a bit of a dice with a Me 109 up near the German border near Arnhem. We turned a few circles and all of a sudden he sort of broke away so I lined him up and gave him a bit of a squirt. He was still going when I left and had not slowed down. I wasted a lot of ammo. I should have been more precise about it. And even after that, there was still German planes coming towards me. They were all trying to get back to Germany."<sup>108</sup>

F/Lt. Danzey's Section returned to Volkel and whilst in the circuit over base, P/O Jim Sheddan, flying 'Green 3', saw AAA bursting at low altitude in the direction of Nijmegen. He flew towards Nijmegen and spotted several German fighters. He shot down an Fw 190 and returned to base.<sup>109</sup> By 10.25 hrs, all Tempests of No. 486 Squadron had landed back at Volkel.

During the battle between the pilots of JG 6 and No. 486 Squadron, some Spitfires of No. 442 Squadron, which had been recalled as soon as JG 6 flew over its base at Heesch, arrived. F/Lt. Norm Keene's Yellow Section returned first and sighted some 40 Bf 109s and Fw 190s strafing ground positions north-west of Venlo. F/Lt. Keene attacked an Fw 190 from starboard, fired a short



Uffz. Karl-Heinz Riedel of 7./JG 6, one of the victims of the Tempests of No. 486 Squadron. (Riedel)



Oblt. Lothar Gerlach, Staffelfkapitän of 9./JG 6. Previously, he had belonged to I./JG 5 since early 1942 and was appointed Kapitän of 1. Staffel. Gerlach is still reported missing from January 1st and no trace of him or his aircraft has ever been found. (Bundesarchiv)

The crash site of Fw. Helmut Grislawski's Fw 190 A-8 'White 16' of 5./JG 6 near Venray. It was a miracle that Fw. Grislawski survived the crash. (Willemsen/Talen)



burst from 600 yards, but no results were observed. He attacked again from 600 yards line astern and noticed strikes. The Fw 190 got right on the deck slightly diving over the contours of ground. The Fw 190 appeared to partially explode and then hit the deck in a cloud of smoke and debris.<sup>110</sup> It appears that F/Lt. Keene's victim was Uffz. Helmut Grislawski. This 5. Staffel pilot crash-landed his 'White 16' in some woods four kilometres north-east of Venray.<sup>111</sup> More dead than alive a Dutchman pulled him out of the burning wreckage. With severe burns, he was moved to an English hospital at Oostrum.<sup>112</sup>

Flying 'Yellow 3', F/O Len Wilson, followed by F/Lt. Dave 'Tex' Pieri on his wing, dived down on six Fw 190s. Losing each other in the mêlée, both went after one of the Fw 190s. F/Lt. Pieri damaged one, but before he could finish it off, he was attacked by a Messerschmitt. Suddenly Pieri spotted a Spitfire with a Fw 190 on its tail. This was in fact F/O Len Wilson's aircraft. Chasing the Fw 190, he waited too long before firing and had to push his nose down to avoid a collision, but wound up direct in front of his target! He immediately broke around to port but the Focke-Wulf followed easily and F/O Len Wilson's Spitfire was hit in the tail. Looking over his shoulder, F/O Len Wilson saw the flash of its wing guns and realised that the German pilot wanted to finish him off. However, at the same time the German pilot fired his guns, Pieri fired his and saw strikes in the cockpit. The Fw 190 pulled up slightly and then crashed into an open field and exploded. Wilson managed to reach Heesch with his damaged Spitfire and succeeded in making a normal landing.<sup>113</sup> After saving the neck

of his No. 1, Pieri spotted another Fw 190 and attacked again, seeing strikes in the starboard wing roots and cockpit. This Fw 190 pulled up to about 1,200 feet and spun into the deck and exploded. As his engine gave some trouble, he headed for home, but saw another Fw 190 going north-east on the deck. He dove to attack, closed to about 600 yards and gave him a one-second burst from line astern. He saw a large chunk of aircraft come off, but as his windscreen was oiling up and under intense accurate flak he lost sight of the enemy aircraft and returned home.<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately none of F/Lt. Pieri's opponents could be identified, but without doubt, they must have belonged to JG 6. Unfortunately F/Lt. Keene's Yellow flight lost F/O Dave Brigden, who was shot down and crashed in a field southwest of Venray. The aircraft burned and F/O Brigden was killed instantly.<sup>115</sup> In fact, F/O Brigden was shot down by Lt. Hans Wulff of 8./JG 6. Lt. Wulff had participated in the ground attack and as he turned away from attacking the transport, he saw a dogfight between several Fw 190s and a superior number of Spitfires and Tempests. He climbed and made for this and shot down a Spitfire, but whilst he was watching it, his own aircraft was hit. His aircraft went out of control and Lt. Wulff baled out. His aircraft crashed about 50 metres from the remains F/O Brigden's Spitfire. F/Lt. Bruce 'Mac' MacPherson of No. 412 Squadron had shot down Lt. Hans Wulff. He reported: "The Controller vectored the squadron to Venlo. About half way there we saw Tempests and 190s fighting on the deck at about 09.55 hrs. I sighted a lone Fw 190 flying east about 500 yards. He started climbing for cloud and I fired from dead



line astern at 250 yards range as he was just entering cloud. Flames and strikes around the cockpit were seen and he levelled out. Another dead line astern shot got more strikes in same area from 400 yards. I turned due to flak and looking around I saw a parachute just after leaving aircraft and the enemy aircraft crashed on the deck."<sup>116</sup>

Wulff landed a short distance from his Focke-Wulf and had sustained some minor injuries, mainly some broken ribs. He asked a Dutch farmer if he could hide him. There was a German offensive going on and after the war he would reward them amply. However, the Dutch family informed the authorities and Wulff was taken aback when English soldiers came to arrest him some 45 minutes later!<sup>117</sup>

No. 412 Squadron, led by S/Ldr. Dean Dover, had hurriedly taken off at 09.31 hrs, from Heesch and although being detailed for an Armed Recce in the Rheine/Münster area, they were quickly vectored towards Venlo. Here they spotted the fight between the Tempests and the Fw 190s and attacked. F/O Victor Smith attacked a Fw 190 north-east of Venlo and after observing strikes, saw that it flew straight into the deck, crashing into a wood in a cloud of smoke and flame. F/Lt. Joe Doak engaged a Fw 190 north-east of Helmond and after firing saw smoke pouring from it. It then flicked over and went into the deck exploding. It is possible that F/Lt. Doak's victim was Uffz. Erich Pusch of 14./JG 3. This pilot crashed some 12 kilometres north-east of Helmond.<sup>118</sup> Uffz. Paul Schneider of 7./JG 6 is presumed to be lost in this area. No trace of him or his 'Yellow 12' has been found and he is still listed as missing.<sup>119</sup> S/Ldr. Dean Dover was also successful: "I was leading Crystal Red Section, being vectored to Venlo to intercept enemy aircraft. Half-way to Venlo I spotted a Fw 190 going northeast on the deck. I attacked giving a two-second burst at 100 yds. Observing strikes along the fuselage and on the tail plane. I then asked Red 2 to have a go."<sup>120</sup>

F/O Eric Kelly, flying Red 2, took his turn: "As the Fw was still flying I attacked it from a near full deflection angle, giving about a three second burst from 200 yds. to about 75 yds. range. I saw strikes upon it and it started to burn. It then slowed and crashed into a wood seemingly under control, then burst into flames. G.G.S. was used but my camera was not used. I claim a share with Red One, S/L Dover in destroying this Fw 190."<sup>121</sup>

The Focke-Wulf claimed by S/Ldr. Dover and F/O Kelly must have been 'Blue 13' of Uffz. Karl Fries. This 23-year old pilot of 4./JG 6 had probably headed for home after I./JG 6's attack on Eindhoven and flying on the deck tried to reach German lines. His Fw 190 crashed in a small wood, some 1,500 metres north of De Rips, 12 kilometres north-west of Venray. Investigation of

the crash site proved that Fries was already mortally wounded in the air as 303 bullet wounds were found in his head. On impact the Focke-Wulf had disintegrated. Uffz. Karl Fries remains were buried in a fieldgrave.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, at 10.05 hrs, a few Tempests of No. 56 Squadron had returned from their armed recce and heard that No. 486 Squadron was in combat near base. Together, F/O Ness and P/O Shaw shot down a Bf 109 some six to seven miles east-south-east of Helmond. This was, in fact, a Bf 109 G-14/AS of 13./JG 4 piloted by Uffz. Werner Anetzhuber.<sup>123</sup> More information on his fate can be found in Chapter Five. All Tempests of No. 56 Squadron returned by 10.20 hrs, and the last Spitfires of No. 412 Squadron landed at Heesch at 10.36 hrs. Operations by the Heesch Spitfires and the Volkel Tempests proved a great success. Between 09.20 and 10.10 hrs, they claimed 25 German fighters destroyed and 12 damaged. During later missions and not related to Bodenplatte, Spitfires of No. 401 and No. 412 Squadron claimed another five Bf 109s destroyed, one Ju 88 destroyed, one Bf 109 probable and a Fw 190 and Me 262 damaged. Late in the morning F/O John Garland of No. 80 Squadron claimed two Fw 190 D-9s north-west of Münster.<sup>124</sup>

### Jagdgeschwader 6 retreats

One by one, or in pairs, the pilots of JG 6 attempted to reach their home base. Hptm. Elstermann's I./JG 6 had already lost Uffz. Karl Fries of 4./JG 6, who had been shot down by Spitfires. Fw. Karl Schubert, an experienced 2. Staffel pilot, also ended up in a mêlée of Allied fighters, but claimed to have shot down a Typhoon north of Venlo. This may have been a Typhoon of No. 439 Squadron, who lost F/O S. Angelini near De Rips.<sup>125</sup> Fw. Schubert landed at Twenthe airfield and returned to Delmenhorst later in the day.<sup>126</sup> The final loss of I./JG 6 was suffered around 10.30 hrs, when Uffz. Willi Voss of 1./JG 6 tried to make an emergency landing near Mittellohne, five kilometres west of Lingen. The aircraft hit sloping ground and disintegrated, killing Uffz. Willi Voss.<sup>127</sup> Another Focke-Wulf of I./JG 6 was lost, but the pilot managed to bale out. Two further 190s were damaged. However, the damage did not result from enemy action.<sup>128</sup>

Stab JG 6 and II. Gruppe had already suffered severely from the Spitfires and Tempests near Helmond, but their ordeal was not yet over. F/Lt. Dick Audet of No. 411 Squadron had participated in the Squadron's fighter sweep and had become separated from his section. Trying to catch up he was bounced by four Typhoons. He then steered an approximate course for base when he sighted an Fw 190. He attacked this Focke-Wulf and shot it down some 12 miles south-west of Enschede.<sup>129</sup>



Uffz. Karl Fries of 4./JG 6. He was killed when his Fw 190 'Blue 13' was shot down near De Rips, north-west of Venray. (Metze)



Uffz. Willi Voss, of 1./JG 6 who was killed on January 1st when he crashed near Nordhorn during his return flight. (Kirbach-Emden)





Pilots from No. 411 Squadron; third from left is F/Lt. Dick Audet (Doyle)

A few moments later F/Lt. Audet saw another Fw 190. He reported: "After climbing again to about 8 to 9,000 feet, I sighted a second 190 below heading in the same direction as the first and at about the same altitude. When I drew near for an attack this aircraft attempted to run for it, but as I closed he went into a gentle right-hand turn. I opened fire at about 250 yards. and 20 deg. closing to 50 yards. There were many strikes and pieces flew off, which included part of the fin and rudder plus part of the fuselage. His engine seemed to stop and I overshot. Diving down for a second attack, I thought this 190 was attempting a forced landing as he appeared under control but with a dead engine. I again opened fire from astern about 250 yds. but with .5's only as my cannon were out of ammo. Almost immediately the enemy aircraft dived into the deck about three-quarter's to one mile due east of Haaksbergen. I also took cine shots of this fire on the ground. G.G.S. MK. II and Cine Camera used in all attacks. Note: Second 190 still had jet tank on when I first attacked. No recollection of his dropping it."<sup>130</sup>

The Focke-Wulf was piloted by Hptm. Norbert Katz, Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 6. It is very likely that Hptm. Katz had experienced difficulties with his auxiliary fuel tank and that he had to return early.<sup>131</sup> Hptm. Norbert Katz crashed near the Buursestraat, just east of Haaksbergen and was killed.

A Luftwaffe unit from nearby Twenthe airfield recovered his remains. However, the remains could not be identified and he was buried as an unknown Hauptmann at the local cemetery in Enschede on January 4th.<sup>132</sup> Hptm. Hans Naumann, Kommandeur of II./JG 6, waited until January 20th for his Staffelkapitän, before he informed Gisela, Norbert Katz's wife that her husband was missing.<sup>133</sup> A long period of uncertainty began for the young wife and her daughter. In August 1948, the remains of the unknown Hauptmann were reinterred at the German Military Cemetery Ysselsteyn and during the examination of the remains an Erkennungsmarke with number 62722/98 was found. Finally the remains could be identified and Gisela Katz's uncertainty came to an end.<sup>134</sup>

In the meantime the Focke-Wulfs of Stab JG 6 and II. Gruppe retreated from the Helmond area. Fhr. Georg Graf von Keller remembers: "When I checked my fuel I saw that it was time to head for home. On a course of 80-90 deg., I crossed the front line and again the Flak opened up. More and more of our own fighters gathered behind me and also signalled that their fuel supply was short.<sup>135</sup> After we crossed the Rhine I noticed an Me 262 in his landing pattern. As I knew that jet fighters were based at Münster-Handorf. I landed also, followed by 18 others. Only two of them were from JG 6, all

the others were from other units! After the landing at Münster-Handorf, we had to take cover in manholes for several hours. Allied fighters strafed the airfield and several aircraft were damaged. Not until dusk were we able to refuel our aircraft and it was already dark when I landed back at Quackenbrück".<sup>136</sup>

Several others did not make it home. One Fw 190 A-9 of Stab JG 6 belly-landed on German territory, but the pilot remained unhurt.<sup>137</sup> Others were not so lucky. Uffz. Franz Schröttle, who had been flying as wingman to Lt. Hans Wulff, was also hit in the same dogfight with Spitfires and Tempests. He managed to reach German lines but trying to land his 'Blue 13' at Kirchhellen airfield, he crashed and was killed. His premonition of the last day of December had come true.<sup>138</sup> Another pilot of II./JG 6 baled out of his Fw 190 A-8 after his aircraft had been hit by Allied fighters, but luckily he was already over German territory and he was able to return to his unit. Two other Focke-Wulfs belly-landed, one as a result of engine failure, but both were only slightly damaged and the pilots remained unhurt.

Finally, the Messerschmitts of III./JG 6 tried to reach Bissel and Uffz. Hermann Knue, the only remaining pilot of the Stabsschwarm, headed back. He was soon joined by another pilot of III./JG 6 and together they flew north-east when they were spotted by four P-47s.<sup>139</sup> The other pilot of III./JG 6 made a run for it, but Knue remained on course. The P-47s did not attack and a few minutes later Uffz. Knue landed at Achmer airfield. Returning to Bissel in the late afternoon, he discovered that he was the first pilot of III./JG 6 who had landed back at Bissel!<sup>140</sup> Fw. Bruno Thoms, the last remaining pilot of 9. Staffel, did not return. He landed his damaged Messerschmitt on Twenthe airfield and returned to Bissel several days later.<sup>141</sup> Two other pilots of III./JG 6 managed to return with damaged aircraft and belly-landed behind German lines, escaping unhurt.<sup>142</sup>

## Conclusion

The attack by JG 6 on Volkel can only be described as a complete failure. In fact, the Geschwader did not reach the airfield and the few aircraft that did attack Volkel most likely belonged to other units. It is known that at least a Fw 190 of IV./JG 3 and a Bf 109 of I./JG 27 attacked Volkel by accident. Only single aircraft appeared over Volkel between 09.15-09.35 hrs and as No. 174 Squadron reported: "...made a rather abortive attempt to beat us up." At 09.40 hrs, two Tempests of No. 3 Squadron had a narrow escape when they were strafed while taxiing. Both pilots, P/O R.S. Adcock and P/O H.J. Bailey, remained unhurt.<sup>143</sup> At 09.40 hrs, five Bf 109s came in from the south-west and flew along the eastern side of the airfield at zero feet. They did not attack and the RAF Regiment Squadrons

opened up, but no hits were claimed. Finally, at 10.20 hrs, a lone Me 262 passed the field at 10,000 feet. This time the shells of the guns burst short.<sup>144</sup> As stated, the damage at Heesch was hardly worth mentioning. At Helmond, low-flying German fighters were continuously over the airfield and machine-gunned the strip. As no aircraft were present, only minor damage could be done.<sup>145</sup>

In fact the most successful JG 6 attack was I. Gruppe's erroneous attack on Eindhoven. Based on a German report it can be established that JG 6 claimed to have destroyed 33 single-engine aircraft and six twin-engine aircraft. A further 10 single engine aircraft were claimed to have been damaged.<sup>146</sup> Although at that time the pilots claimed to have destroyed these at Volkel, it is clear that these results could only have been achieved at Eindhoven. In the dogfights with the Tempest from Volkel and the Spitfires from Heesch, JG 6 also claimed some six aerial victories:

Typhoon	Fw. Karl Schubert	2./JG 6
	Place: North of Venlo	
Spitfire	Hptm. Norbert Katz	5./JG 6
	Place: Helmond area	
Spitfire	Lt. Hans Wulff	8./JG 6
	Place: West of Venray	
Spitfire	Unknown	III./JG 6
	Place: ?	
Tempest	Unknown	III./JG 6
	Place: ?	
Tempest	Unknown	III./JG 6
	Place: ?	

In fact, two Spitfires were shot down and another seriously damaged. One Typhoon was lost matching Fw. Schubert's claim, but no Tempest losses are recorded.

However, losses for JG 6 had been severe. Stab JG 6 recorded one total loss and one damaged Fw 190 A-9 out of three that had taken off. Losing Obstlt. Johann Kogler meant that his position as Kommodore had to be replaced. In early February, Maj. Gerhard Barkhorn took over and he would lead the Geschwader in its operations over the Eastern Front. I./JG 6 lost seven Fw 190s and a further two damaged from a total force of 29 aircraft. Considering the reasonable success at Eindhoven, the losses seem to be acceptable. However, losing two Staffelkapitäne in Hptm. Ewald Trost and Oblt. Eberhard Pfeleiderer, meant that the number of experienced pilots was reduced even more. II. Gruppe had lost eight Fw 190s destroyed and a further two damaged. As an attack force of 25 aircraft this meant a loss of about 40 per cent! Losses had been hardest for 5. Staffel. Not only did it lose its Kapitän Hptm. Norbert Katz, but also two experienced pilots in Lt. Karl Grabmair and Fw. Helmut Grislawski. However, losses had been worst for III./JG 6. Some 12



Hptm. Norbert Katz, Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 6. Katz was a pilot of considerable experience, having flown He 111s with II./KG 26 in 1940 over England and in 1941 over Sicily. On September 5th 1940, he barely survived the crash of his He 111 H-4 W.Nr. 5703 when he was shot down by AAA in the Netherlands. On January 1st 1945 he was shot down by a Spitfire and killed. (Katz)



Uffz. Franz Schröttle of 8./JG 6. Schröttle was killed when his Fw 190 'Blue 13' crashed near Kirchhellen, possibly due to damage from an earlier dogfight. This photograph was taken in September 1944. (Strobel/Weidel)

Messerschmitts out of a force of 20 did not return – a 60 per cent loss rate! The loss of its Gruppenkommandeur, Maj. Helmut Kühle, and the experienced Kapitän of 9. Staffel, Oblt. Lothar Gerlach, was deeply felt. These men could not be replaced.

In total, JG 6 had lost some 43 per cent of its total strength, 16 pilots were killed or missing and another seven were taken POW. What was the cause of such failure? There are three main reasons:

First, the Luftwaffe seemed to have been unaware of the existence of the airfields of Heesch and Helmond. When JG 6 passed Heesch, the Spitfires were warned and played a roll in JG 6's failure. As Stab JG 6 and the main part of II. and III./JG 6 stumbled on Helmond, some of the pilots believed they had found Volkel, contributing even more to the confusion.

Secondly, Obstlt. Kogler took his force too far south. In fact, the turning point at Veghel was already south of Volkel and possibly another, more easily recognisable, turning point should have been selected. The Ju 88 Lotse can not be blamed. Hptm. Bobsien had already turned away before JG 6 appeared over Heesch and at that time it was still on the correct course.

Most important were the Heesch Spitfires and the Volkel Tempests. Several squadrons had already taken off before JG 6 arrived and when several of the Allied fighters appeared on the scene, no concentrated attack on Volkel could be expected and, caught flying on the deck, the German fighters stood no chance.

A few days later JG 6 was withdrawn from operations and prepared for a transfer to the Eastern Front.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 11/1945 and No. 145/1945.

<sup>2</sup> RL2-III-734 Einsatzbereitschaft am 31.12.1944.

<sup>3</sup> Maj. Johann Kogler was promoted to Oberstleutnant on December 1st 1944.

<sup>4</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 8-11. The date of December 5th is based on ULTRA Report No. 52-HP-8624.

<sup>5</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 12.

<sup>6</sup> Letter Georg Graf von Keller, dated 19.04.1994.

<sup>7</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 12. This indicates that it is very likely that none of the Gruppenkommandeure of JG 6 attended the meeting at II. Jagdkorps.

<sup>8</sup> Interview Georg von Keller, dated 01.09.2000.

<sup>9</sup> Interview Ewald Trost, dated 24.07.2000.

<sup>10</sup> War Diary Bernhard von Hohenbruck, page 91.

<sup>11</sup> Interview Hermann Knue, dated 01.04.2000.

<sup>12</sup> Letter of Gefr. Franz Purth, dated 17.12.1944 and Namentliche Verlustmeldung 8./NJG 5, dated 7.3.1945.

<sup>13</sup> Both Oberfeldwebel were former Bordfunker of a Kampfgeschwader and had received the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold. Ofw. Hans Steinadler had received his in October 1942. Letter Franz Purth 17.12.1944.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of Gefr. Franz Purth, dated 17.12.1944.

<sup>15</sup> Based on Flugbuch of Uffz. Adolf Flake and memories of Adolf Flake recorded on 29.10.1994.

<sup>16</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 116/1945, point 17.

<sup>17</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 116/1945, point 5-11.

<sup>18</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 158/1945, point 13.

<sup>19</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 44/1945, point 1.

<sup>20</sup> Letter Hans-Joachim Rose, dated 07.01.1993.

<sup>21</sup> Based on Lt. Konrad Dammeier's report in "Battle of the Airfields" by Norman Franks, page 15.

<sup>22</sup> Quotes from a letter of Uffz. Franz Schrötle, 8./JG 6, to his parents, dated 30.12.1944.

<sup>23</sup> Correspondence with Group Captain John B. Wray, CBE, DFC.

<sup>24</sup> Letter Georg Graf von Keller, dated 19.04.1994.

<sup>25</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 116/1945, point 16.

<sup>26</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 145/1945, point 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Information from Mrs. Gisela Katz, widow of Hptm. Norbert Katz.

<sup>28</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 44/1945, point 2-3, and Report No. 57/1945, point 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Interview Hermann Knue, dated 01.04.2000.

<sup>30</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung says "Stv. Staffelführer". See also A.D.I.(K) Report No. 45/1945.

<sup>31</sup> Personnel Records of Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger and letters of Hildegard Schwerdtfeger, widow of Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger, dated 10.06.1997 and 15.03.1999.

<sup>32</sup> Logbook Uffz. Adolf Flake, 9./NJG 5. Take off 08.17 hrs. Landing 10.52 hrs.

<sup>33</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldungen III./JG 6.

<sup>34</sup> Letter Hans-Joachim Rose 07.01.1993.

<sup>35</sup> The total strength of III./JG 6 on 31.12.1944 was listed as seven Bf 109G-10s and 33 Bf 109G-14/ASs, but only three Bf 109G-10s and 18 Bf 109G-14/ASs were reported ready for combat. Other sources indicate that about 18 aircraft participated in the mission. See also RL2-III-734 and A.D.I.(K) Report Nos. 44 and 57/1945.

<sup>36</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung and notes of Gert Poelchau.

<sup>37</sup> KTB Ia Führungsabteilung Luftflotte 6, Fernschreiben vom 03.02.1945.

<sup>38</sup> RL2-III-734. Of 34 available Focke Wulf, 29 were reported combat ready.

<sup>39</sup> Letter Lt. Viktor Bahrdt to parents of Uffz. Franz Schrötle, dated 06.01.1945.

<sup>40</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 145/1945, point 3.

<sup>41</sup> According RL2-III-734 three Fw 190A-9s were available to Stab JG 6 and an impressive 46 for II./JG 6. It is known that at least all three Fw 190s of Stab JG 6 participated, but several sources give the total number of II./JG 6 aircraft to around 20-25.

<sup>42</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 116/1945, point 5.

<sup>43</sup> Several independent sources give the total number of aircraft as 60 (Kogler), 70 (Rose) or 85 (von Keller). Based on strength reports and all other sources a total number of 75 seem to be most likely.

<sup>44</sup> Letter Georg Graf von Keller, dated 19.04.1994.

<sup>45</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 145/1945 (Lt Wulff) and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 148/1945 (Hptm. Trost). The latter also confirmed in interview with Ewald Trost on 01.05.1993.

<sup>46</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 116/1945, point 14.

<sup>47</sup> In several sources the river is named as Lek; however the river is still called Rhine in this area and changes names further to the west.

<sup>48</sup> A German report indicates that even after the attack on January 1st, Luftwaffenkommando West believed that No. 126 Spitfire Wing was still based at Volkel.

<sup>49</sup> Operations Record Book No. 126 (R.C.A.F.) Wing

<sup>50</sup> Operations Record Book No. 411 Squadron, Form 541.

<sup>51</sup> Pilot Encounter Reports No. 442 Squadron.

<sup>52</sup> Operations Record Book No. 401 Squadron, Form 541.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Hermann Knue, Hans-Joachim Rose and Ewald Trost.

<sup>54</sup> Correspondence with Brigadier General M.E. Doyle

<sup>55</sup> Operations Record Book No. 401 Squadron.

<sup>56</sup> Personal Combat Report F/O G.D. Cameron, No. 401 Squadron.

<sup>57</sup> Operations Record Book No. 401 Squadron, Form 541.

<sup>58</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, separate report.

<sup>59</sup> Uffz. Karl Betz was buried next to his aircraft and reinterred at Ysselsteyn, Grave AV-2-30 in 1950.

<sup>60</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.

<sup>61</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.25270. Ofhr. Krumm was reburied at Ysselsteyn, Grave AK-11-261, in 1957.

<sup>62</sup> Ofhr. Uwe Naumann of II./JG 3 was killed in this crash. Operations Record Book No. 2734 and No. 2819 Squadron.

<sup>63</sup> Interview Hermann Knue, dated 01.04.2000.

<sup>64</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. D.C. Gordon

<sup>65</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.

<sup>66</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.10779. Reinterred at Ysselsteyn, grave L-6-139, in 1949.

<sup>67</sup> Operations Record Book No. 442 Squadron in which it is stated that F/Lt. Gordon was hit by a flak burst, but it seems likely that he fell victim to one of the other Focke-Wulfs of II./JG 6.

<sup>68</sup> Letter of Hptm. Hans Naumann to Gisela Katz, widow of Hptm. Norbert Katz, dated 20.01.1945.

<sup>69</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. R.C. Smith.

<sup>70</sup> Interview Ewald Trost, dated 01.05.1993.

<sup>71</sup> Interview Ewald Trost, dated 01.05.1993.

<sup>72</sup> Diary Oblt. Bernhard von Hohenbruck, page 92.

<sup>73</sup> Operations Record Book No. 143 Wing and No. 440 Squadron.

<sup>74</sup> Letter by Georg Graf von Keller, dated 17.11.1994. He stated that several pilots of I./JG 6 reported that they had, in fact, attacked Eindhoven instead of Volkel.

<sup>75</sup> Angriffe auf britische und amerikanische Flugplätze.

Luftwaffenführungsstab Ic, Fremde Luftwaffen West, Nr. 1160/45 g.Kdos.



BA/MA Freiburg RL2-II-855.

<sup>76</sup> Personal Combat Report of Sgt. W.R. Large and F/Sgt. C.J. McGee, groundcrew No. 438 Squadron.

<sup>77</sup> Notwithstanding the evidence, it seems that the claim was not confirmed.

<sup>78</sup> Interview Ewald Trost, dated 01.05.1993.

<sup>79</sup> Rapport Luchtbeschermingsdienst Best and RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.

<sup>80</sup> 'Start im Morgengrauen' by Werner Girbig. Here it is stated that Ofw. Walter Jung crashed on the bank of the Zuiderzee near Spakenburg. This is based on the testimony of Fw. Karl Schubert, another pilot of 2./JG 6. This is believed to be incorrect. After the return to Delmenhorst, nothing was reported on the loss of Ofw. Jung. When several pilots did see him go down on the shores of the Zuiderzee, why was this not reported and recorded in the loss report of Ofw. Jung?

<sup>81</sup> RL2-III-1171, page 61.

<sup>82</sup> Operations Record Book No. 143 Wing, Health Report.

<sup>83</sup> Letters Deutsche Dienststelle, dated 28.07.1995, 27.12.1996 and 04.08.1998.

<sup>84</sup> Letter Oblt. Bernhard von Hohenbruck, dated 05.01.1945.

<sup>85</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung Uffz. Josef Zangerle, dated 03.02.1945 and RL2-III-1197/71, dated 06.03.1945. Letter of Oblt. von Hohenbruck to sister, dated 11.02.1945.

<sup>86</sup> Operations Record Book No. 3 Squadron.

<sup>87</sup> Operations Record Book No. 184 Squadron, landing at 10.05 hrs.

<sup>88</sup> Operations Record Book No. 56 Squadron and Personal Combat Report F/O D.E. Ness and P/O H. Shaw.

<sup>89</sup> Based on interview with Hermann Knue, dated 01.04.2000, letter of Hptm. Lürs (Stab III./JG 6) to parents of Maj. Kühle of 04.01.1945 and report Luchtbeschermingsdienst Aarle-Rixtel. Major Kühle was buried at Woensel cemetery and only in 1958 were his remains identified.

<sup>90</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.5278. Letter of Lt. Grieseking to wife of Ofw. Schwerdtfeger, dated 28.01.1945.

<sup>91</sup> First echelons of No. 124 Wing would arrive on January 13th.

<sup>92</sup> Letter S/Ldr. D. Stewart dated 11.08.1996.

<sup>93</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2875 and No. 2881 Squadron. Although the ORB of No. 2873 Squadron states that it was based at B-86 Helmond too, this is doubtful as its report indicates it was at Eindhoven.

<sup>94</sup> Interview Hermann Knue, dated 01.04.2000 and Personal Combat Report F/Lt. N.A. Keene, No. 442 Squadron.

<sup>95</sup> Letter Georg Graf von Keller, dated 19.04.1994.

<sup>96</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 116/1945 and RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.

<sup>97</sup> Letter Hans-Joachim Rose, dated 07.01.1993.

<sup>98</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264. Although it is stated in his A.D.I.(K) Report that Uffz. Rose was believed to have been shot down by Allied AAA, he may have been a victim of Spitfires too. In a letter of Lt. Benno Bechel of 9./JG 6 to his parents of 26.01.1945, it is stated that he was last seen together with Oblt. Gerlach in a dogfight with Spitfires.

<sup>99</sup> Personal Combat Report F/O D.J. Butcher, No. 3 Squadron.

<sup>100</sup> Based on local evidence and Rapport van Overbrenging D.19187.

<sup>101</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Sgt. M.J. Rose, No. 3 Squadron.

<sup>102</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 57/1945, point 6.

<sup>103</sup> Personal Combat Reports and Operations record Book No. 3 Squadron.

<sup>104</sup> Personal Combat Report S/Ldr. A.E. Umbers, DFC, No. 486 Squadron.

<sup>105</sup> Personal Combat Report P/O G.J. Hooper, No. 486 Squadron.

<sup>106</sup> Based on letter written to his brother Walter Riedel, dated 31.12.1944.

<sup>107</sup> Burial records and correspondence with brother Walter Riedel, dated 1993-1997.

<sup>108</sup> Taped interview of Gus Hooper by Paul Sortehaug.

<sup>109</sup> This was in fact a Fw 190A-8 of IV./JG 54 and details can be found in the chapter on JG 27 and IV./JG 54.

<sup>110</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. N.A. Keene, No. 442 Squadron.

<sup>111</sup> In a small wood beside the Geystere Weg, the road from Oostrum to Geysteren.

<sup>112</sup> After surgery in English hospitals he was released in September 1946. Helmut Grislawski died in 1981.

<sup>113</sup> Len Wilson, 'Invasion without tears', page 162-165.

<sup>114</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. D.M. Pieri, No. 442 Squadron. The Spits of No. 442 Squadron landed back at Heesch at 10.01 hrs.

<sup>115</sup> F/O D.A. Bridgen's body was recovered and buried at the local cemetery of Nistelrode. After the war he was reinterred at Groesbeek War Cemetery.

<sup>116</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. B.E. MacPherson, No. 412 Squadron.

<sup>117</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 145/1945, point 10 and 11. Correspondence with W. Willemssen. Lt. Hans Wulff spent some nineteen days in hospital and was later transported to England. His time as a POW had a peculiar ending as he met his future wife, married her in 1948 and remained in England. He died in 1997.

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter Four for further details.

<sup>119</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung and information German Red Cross.

<sup>120</sup> Personal Combat Report S/Ldr. D.H. Dover, No. 412 Squadron.

<sup>121</sup> Personal Combat Report F/O E.D. Kelly, No. 412 Squadron.

<sup>122</sup> Amendment to Personal Combat Report S/Ldr. G. Wonnacott, No. 414

Squadron. Here the crash of the Fw 190 of Uffz. Fries was wrongly attributed to S/Ldr. Wonnacott. Further details in RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 and Rapport van Overbrenging D.19190.

<sup>123</sup> Personal Combat Reports F/O D.E. Ness and P/O H. Shaw, No. 56 Squadron and A.D.I.(K) No. 149/1945.

<sup>124</sup> Based on all Personal Combat Reports No. 122 Wing and No. 126 Wing. The Bf 109's were aircraft of JG 3 (see there) and the two Fw 190D-9s probably belonged to a Flugzeugüberführungsgeschwader. One of them can be identified as Fw. Bernado Lange, killed near Bevergern.

<sup>125</sup> Operations Record Book No. 439 Squadron, 3rd January 1945. See also chapter on JG 3.

<sup>126</sup> 'Start im Morgengrauen' by W. Girbig, page 181-184.

<sup>127</sup> Uffz. Willi Voss was buried as an unknown at Lingen Cemetery and it was only in 1988 that his fate was finally solved by German researchers. His family was located in 1998 and relatives were able to visit his grave. Just a few months after the visit, his brother died.

<sup>128</sup> RL2-III-852.

<sup>129</sup> See Chapter Eight for more details. The unfortunate Fw 190 was piloted by Uffz. Aloysius van Hooven, 12./JG 54.

<sup>130</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. R.J. Audet.

<sup>131</sup> According to German documents Hptm. Norbert Katz crashed at 09.55 hrs. This means that Hptm. Katz must have left the target area by 09.35 hrs, considering airspeed of 370 km/hr. The main force of II./JG 6 was still in combat with Tempests and Spitfires in the Helmond area at that time.

<sup>132</sup> Verlustmeldung Fl.H. Kdr. E(v)204/XI (Twenthe airfield).

<sup>133</sup> Letter Hptm. Hans Naumann, dated 20.01.1945.

<sup>134</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.9833 and correspondence with Mrs. Gisela Katz, dated 1992-1998.

<sup>135</sup> These fighters may have gathered behind the Focke-Wulf of Fhr. Georg Graf von Keller because of its Stab markings.

<sup>136</sup> Letter Georg Graf von Keller, dated 19.04.1994.

<sup>137</sup> RL2-III-1197/50, WNr. 980551, 70 per cent damaged. Strangely Fhr. Graf von Keller does not remember a third pilot of Stab JG 6 taking part in the mission and it is therefore very likely that this aircraft was flown by a II. Gruppe pilot.

<sup>138</sup> Based on letter of Lt. Viktor Bahrdt, dated 06.01.1945, Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./JG 6 and RL2-III-852.

<sup>139</sup> It seems unlikely that these were P-47 Thunderbolts. No P-47s are known to have been flying around 10.30 hrs. over that area.

<sup>140</sup> Recollections of Hermann Knue, dated 01.04.2000.

<sup>141</sup> RL2-III-1172, page 57 and articles in Jägerblatt 1988 and 1996.

Unfortunately Thoms died in 1996 before giving details about his mission on January 1st 1945.

<sup>142</sup> RL2-III-852.

<sup>143</sup> Operations Record Book No. 3 Squadron, Form 540.

<sup>144</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2874 Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment.

<sup>145</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2875 and No. 2881 Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment.

<sup>146</sup> RL2-III-855, BA/MA Freiburg.

# Dogfight over Asch

## The Massacre of Jagdgeschwader 11

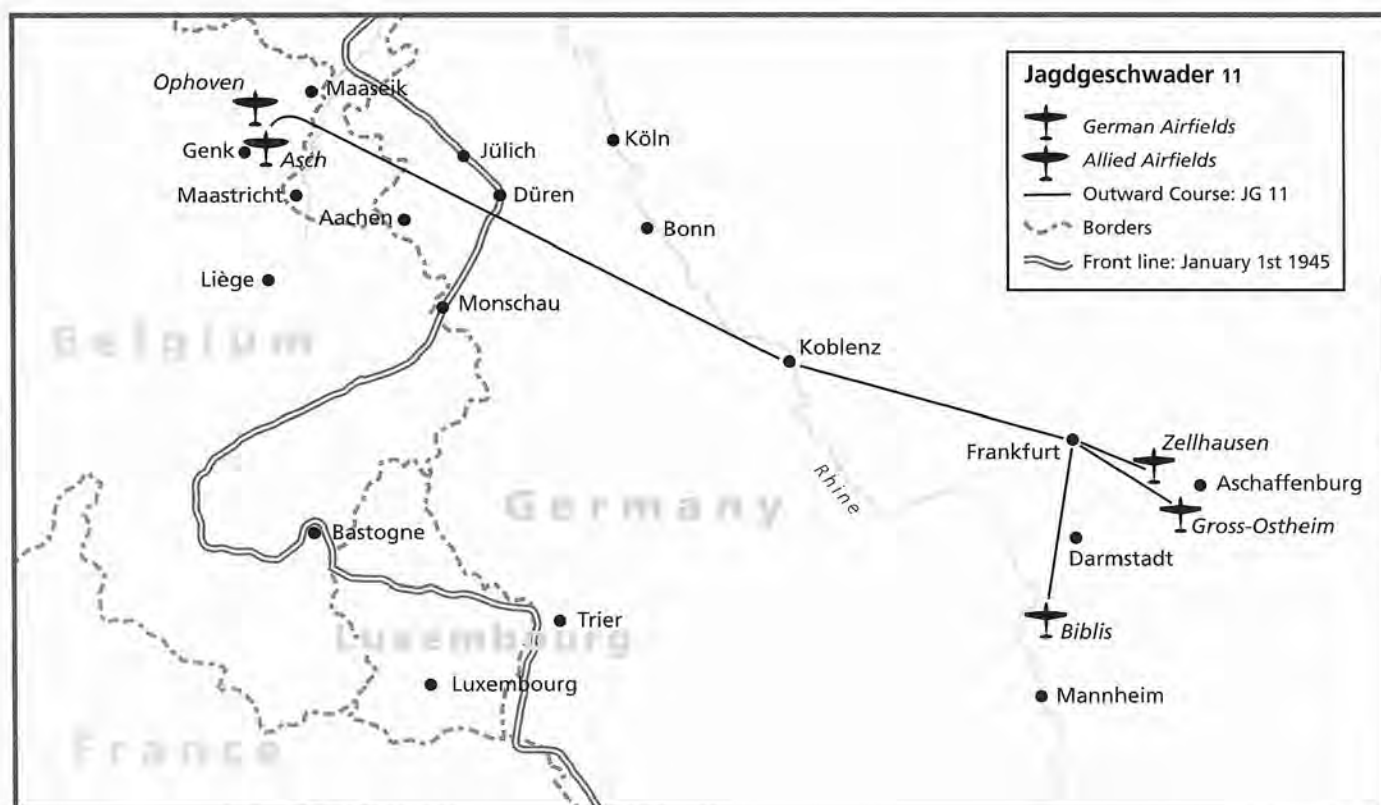
2./Lt. Melvyn R. Paisley and 2./Lt. John J. Kennedy inspect a piece from one of the numerous German aircraft shot down around Asch. (Paisley)

Close to Opglabbeek in Belgium was the tiny village of Ophoven. At hardly 10 minutes flight from the front line, it was the location of a fighter strip that was not on the Bodenplatte target list. This strip had only recently been occupied by a British fighter wing.



Y-29 was little more than a PSP strip cut out of a pine forest. Here P-47 Thunderbolts of the 366th FG are being serviced. (Brulle)

SINCE December 28th, Ophoven<sup>1</sup> – also known as Y-32 – was the new home to No. 125 Wing, comprising Nos. 41, 130, 350 and 610 Squadrons, all equipped with late-mark Spitfires. On December 31st the aircraft of No. 41 and 130 Squadron arrived from Diest and those from No. 610 and 350 Squadron flew in from Brussels. According to the wing diarist “...most of the chaps were tired by the end of the day, but a few remained up to bid farewell to 1944.” As usual a lone Luftwaffe aircraft, sometimes referred to as ‘Bed-check Charlie’, would drop the odd bomb and do some strafing. The men at Y-29, a few kilometres to the south, had already got used to this midnight stalker and the British were soon added to his visitor’s list. A few of the windows in their new billet failed to live long enough to let in the light of the new year but it was not ‘Bed-check Charlie’ who had caused the damage...



Y-29, also known as Asch, was an airfield situated close to the village of Asch, north-east of Genk in Belgium. Constructed in the early days of November 1944 by the 852nd Engineer Aviation Battalion, the airfield consisted of a PSP (Pierced Steel Planking) runway measuring 5,000 yards, flanked on both sides by taxiways and hardstands for some 150 aircraft. Among the other airfield constructions were two 21,000-gallon fuel tanks, five AA positions and a hangar. AA protection at Y-29 was provided by B and D Batteries of the 784th AAA AW Bn. under the local command of Maj. Mark Cox. The strip was home to 352nd FG of the Eighth Air Force and the 366th FG of the Ninth Air Force.

The P-47-equipped 366th FG moved in at Asch, arriving from A-70 (Laon-Couvron) by the end of November 1944. Y-29 was little more than a landing strip cut away from a pine forest. More importantly: it would never become more! The proximity to the front was evident with nightly harassing raids. At the commencement of the Ardennes Offensive, rumours of enemy troops roaming the area put many a man on edge. In the cold winter of 1944/1945 the Air Force men gained respect for the infantry. Living in tents was awful and the only shimmer of light they enjoyed was the occasional shower at the coalmines in Genk and an enjoyable evening in nearby Hasselt. The men at Y-29 were expected to heat their tents with wood and coal-burning stoves. The fuel would last only a few hours and they would wake up freezing in the middle of the night: "It was



really bad. I wore my flight suit, two pairs of pants, my B-4 jacket, shoes and two pairs of socks when I went to bed and believe it or not it was still cold. They gave us a helmet full of coal for each tent every day – it didn't even take the chill of the place."<sup>2</sup>

The 352nd and 361st FG were selected to reinforce the tactical fighters and bombers of the Ninth Air Force during the Battle of the Bulge and left for Belgium (Asch) and France (St. Dizier) on December 23rd. The Blue Nosed Bastards of Bodney (352nd FG) came in for some really blue noses as they ended up among the snow-topped slag piles of the Genk area in almost Siberian conditions. The men of the Ninth Air Force were accustomed to harsh conditions but the 352nd were quick to adapt: "Y-29 was nothing much but

Snow at Y-29 Asch, home of the 352nd and 366th Fighter Groups. Seen here are the tents belonging to the 352nd FG. (DeBruin)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Looking like a photograph from a polar expedition, this is the Operations Tent of the 352nd FG at Y-29. The winter of 1944/45 was the worst that century. (Rigby)

An abundance of Fw 190s at Gross-Ostheim airfield in December 1944. (Klair)

one emergency strip about six miles behind the Albert Canal which was close to the front at that time. When we got there a P-47 Group from the Ninth was operating off the metal strip. We found tents had been set up for us in the poorest part of the field and we lived in those all the time we were there. It was one of Europe's worst winters and we nearly froze to death. No sanitary facilities either. Used an outhouse arrangement. Used our helmets as washbasins. We did have to shave because of the oxygen mask we wore flying. It was a miserable time. We went into a coalmine facility at Asch occasionally (every couple of weeks) for a shower. The water was cold and not much of it. We did not worry much about being dirty, but the bitter cold was almost more than we could stand. We had plenty of blankets but we still froze. We mostly slept in our flight suits to try to stay warm. The only time I was warm while there, was when

we were in our airplanes. You might say we got an idea of how it was for the ground soldiers while we were there. It not only snowed, but we had terrible mud. Even worse, the Germans found out we were there and sent recon aircraft over, dropped occasional bombs and our anti-aircraft batteries were firing at them and making sleep difficult if not impossible. A couple of nights we were strafed. Not much damage and possibly a few casualties. Our missions were quite different. Instead of bomber escort, we were there to keep the enemy fighters off our troops. We flew patrols from the deck up to 10,000 feet under radar stations. They were really sharp and we got into some good fights."<sup>3</sup>

John D. Stearns adds a personal note to his memories of Y-29: "One of the most valued articles I had with me turned out to be the roll of toilet paper. What we were rationed was not enough and I virtually had to guard the roll with my life as everyone who knew I had it, was trying to get it. To play it safe, I took it with me inside my jacket all the time, even on missions. I guess you could say I covered my own butt."<sup>4</sup>

The 352nd FG's stay at Asch would be memorable for other reasons too...

### Central Germany, December 1944

On December 17th 1944, Jagdgeschwader 11 moved to airfields in the area south of Frankfurt to support offensive operations of the German Army in the West. All Gruppen were led by a Ju 88 Lotse to their new bases as the weather continued to be bad.<sup>5</sup> Possibly this also was used as an exercise for



the coming operation. More Gruppen are known to have flown with Ju 88 Lotsen in December 1944.<sup>6</sup> The Gruppen arrived at their designated airfields late in the morning; Stab and I. Gruppe at Biblis north-east of Worms. II. Gruppe at Zellhausen, a small airfield south-east of Offenbach and III. Gruppe at Groß-Ostheim, south-west of Aschaffenburg. The same afternoon the first operations were flown by all Gruppen and the first losses were suffered. In the last two weeks of December, JG 11 would lose 142 aircraft destroyed or damaged, 33 pilots killed or missing and a further 26 wounded during these operations. I./JG 11 suffered especially hard with 15 pilots killed and 13 wounded. These were staggering losses for operations flown over just ten days!<sup>7</sup>

Only a few details are known about the preparation of Stab and I./JG 11 for the mission of January 1st. Without doubt, Maj. Günther Specht, Kommodore of JG 11, had attended the meeting at the II Jagdkorps headquarters on December 5th, together with his Gruppenkommandeure. If or how Hptm. Rüdiger Kirchmayr prepared his I. Gruppe is unknown. However, following heavy losses in December, the Gruppe was exhausted and according to readiness reports only 16 Fw 190s were available; even worse, only six pilots were fully operational<sup>8</sup>. ULTRA reports indicate that on the last two days of December just two Fw 190s constituted the total strength of the Gruppe!<sup>9</sup> The Gruppe had a breathing space at the end of December and Oblt. Erich Hondt, the 22-year old Staffelfkapitän of 3./JG 11, wrote to his parents on December 31st:

*"...Our Gruppe is still withdrawn from operations. Last night it started snowing and the airfield is already covered with 20 cm of snow. My men are already looking forward to the festivities later in the evening. In spite of the heavy casualties the mood is excellent. Before we start the festivities, I plan to hold a small remembrance ceremony to commemorate our fallen comrades. This year we lost 65 pilots."<sup>10</sup>*

Nothing is mentioned of any planned operation for the next day. On the contrary, in a letter of January 1st Hondt described vividly the festivities on New Year's Eve. On January 1st only six pilots of I./JG 11 would participate in the mission, together with four of Stab JG 11<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, III. Gruppe had more aircraft available than fully operational pilots, so some pilots were transferred to Groß-Ostheim to participate in the attack by III. Gruppe. It is not known if they volunteered or not, but at least Lt. Gerhard Neumann, a pilot of 2./JG 11, filled up the ranks of Stab III./JG 11 and Ogfr. Karl-Heinz Sistenich of 1./JG 11 also joined III./JG 11, probably in the 11. Staffel.<sup>12</sup>



On the evening of December 31st, Hptm. Karl Leonhard, Kommandeur of II./JG 11, ordered his pilots to the local school building in Zellhausen, just north of the airfield.<sup>13</sup> The living quarters of most of the pilots were in this village. The pilots were shown photographic cover of the airfield to be attacked and a map was shown with the course to the target.<sup>14</sup> The II./JG 11 was to fly top cover for the Focke-Wulfs of the other Gruppen of JG 11. The identity of the target was not revealed until the following morning and all the pilots were ordered not to leave the building.

Immediately, after his return from Altenkirchen on December 15th, Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong had informed his Staffelfkapitäne and other senior officers that a large-scale attack on Allied tactical airfields was planned in which III./JG 11 would participate. No mention of the target or date was made and those present were ordered to treat this advance notice as confidential. Oblt. Hans Fiedler, the Gruppe adjutant had also attended this briefing. On December 23rd, Fiedler flew a mission over the Ardennes where he developed engine problems and was forced to abandon the flight. He made an emergency landing in Göttingen. He did not return to Groß-Ostheim until the afternoon of December 31st, where he was reprimanded by Hptm. von Fassong for his long absence. On his arrival Oblt. Fiedler heard rumours of a possible operation the following day, but as he did not expect to be ordered to fly, he worked in his office until about 22.00 hrs and did not attend the briefing.<sup>15</sup> This briefing was held in the Groß-Ostheim primary school and all pilots were present. Hptm. von Fassong informed the pilots about the details of the mission and the pilots

Pilots of JG 11 with their canine mascot at Hustedt near Celle. Second from left is Oblt. Hans Fiedler, the adjutant of III./JG 11. (Klair)



Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong, Kommandeur of III./JG 11 in a picture taken in late 1944 during a visit to his wife and son. (von Fassong)

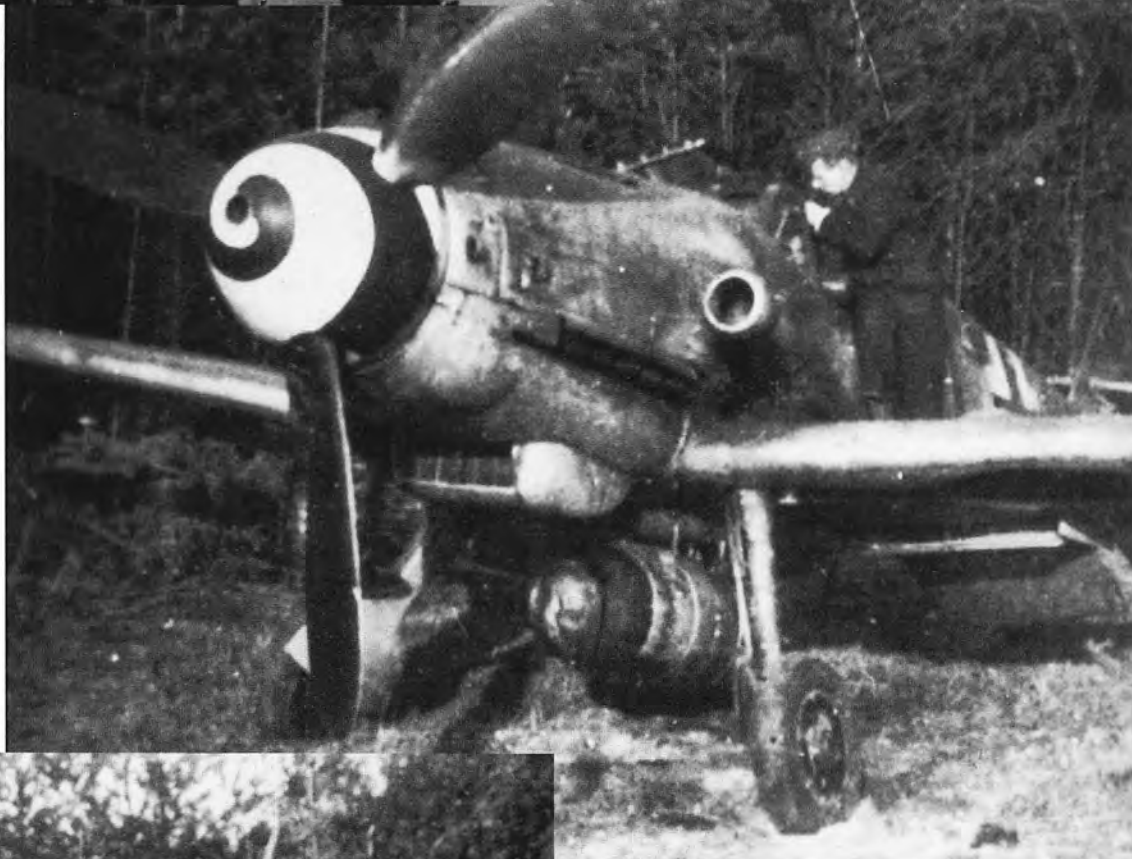
# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Pilots of 7./JG 11 in August 1944 at Wunstorf. From left to right: Uffz. Harald Schwartz (KIA 1.1.1945), Lt. Richard Franz, Ofhr. Erhard Rössner (MIA 5.1945), Lt. Rudolf Holdermann (MIA 1.5.1945). (Nau/Franz)

Bf 109 G-14/AS 'Yellow 18' of 7./JG 11. This aircraft was flown by Fhr. Theo Nau and was photographed at Zellhausen in December 1944. (Nau)



were divided over the available aircraft and assigned a position in the formation. The pilots were ordered to stay in the building that night and to go to the airfield early in the morning. After the briefing an irritated Hptm. von Fassong sought out Oblt. Fiedler and ordered him to fly the following day. However, Oblt. Fiedler still believed he would not be needed...

### January 1st – early morning missions from Asch and Ophoven

New Year's Day saw everyone awake early at Ophoven. Although three Spitfire Mk. XIVs led by F/O Vanwersch of No. 350 Squadron were up at 08.35 hrs from Ophoven, they had an uneventful patrol. B-party of No. 610 (County of Chester) Squadron and two spare pilots were on their way



from Brussels by road. Passing through Melsbroek their convoy was attacked by enemy aircraft, but all arrived safe at Ophoven. No. 130 (Punjab) Squadron was preparing for a mission and at 08.50 hrs, No. 610 Squadron despatched a four-man patrol that ran into intense 'friendly' fire north of Liège. Taking evasive action, F/Lt. Tony Gaze, an Australian with 7.5 victories to his credit, became separated from the others; we will read of his story later. No. 41 were out early too. Airborne at 08.35 hrs, S/Ldr Benham DFC AFC, led the squadron down to the Rhine north of Koblenz. The armed recce resulted in claims for a large three-ton transport vessel and 15 damaged railway trucks. They were to arrive back at base at 10.20 hrs.

At Y-29 the 366th FG was one of the first to have a squadron up. At 08.42 hrs eight aircraft of its 391st FS took off led by Captain Eber K. Simpson. They carried bomb-loads of 500 lb GP bombs and one aircraft was armed with rocket projectiles. Between 09.00 and 10.00 hrs, they attacked German Mark IV tanks at Ondenval, south of Malmedy in the Ardennes. Bombing and strafing left five of the tanks destroyed and five probably damaged. They also destroyed one motor vehicle and the town was left burning. Flak was light, intense and accurate at the target and one aircraft bellied in near Teuven north-north-east of Liege. The pilot, however, returned slightly wounded to base.<sup>16</sup> In the area to the south of Malmedy two Bf 109s, flying alone, were claimed destroyed by Lt. Donald Holt and Lt. John F. Bathurst, yet the pilots of the 391st FS still had no idea how many would follow!<sup>17</sup>

The mechanics of the 352nd FG were up at 05.30 hrs, to prepare their aircraft for the day's mission. The 352nd FG employed a three-squadron form of continuous patrol while at Y-29 one squadron being airborne; one squadron standing by or being briefed as next up; and one squadron resting. Momentarily, the 328th FS was in the briefing tent and the 487th FS was lining up for take-off. The Group was on standby for a bomber escort mission scheduled at 11.00 hrs. By 08.00 hrs the aircraft had all been serviced and the acting Group Commander, Lt. Col. John C. Meyer, was ready to get his machines into the air even though they were not scheduled to fly at that early hour. Col. Meyer had a hunch the 'Hun' would be up in force today and requested permission from IX. TAC to fly a routine patrol over the battle area.

### January 1st – JG 11 prepares its attack

The pilots of JG 11 were awoken early and were briefed again. At Gross-Ostheim the pilots of III. Gruppe were briefed at 06.30 hrs. During this briefing, Hptm. von Fassong opened an envelope, which contained details about the target.<sup>18</sup> The pilots were finally told that the target of all



Gruppen was to be Asch, a small airfield north-west of Maastricht, which, as stated in the briefing, was occupied by two US Fighter Groups. Just after 08.00 hrs<sup>19</sup> four Fw 190s of Stab JG 11 flown by Maj. Specht, Uffz. Schmidt, Fj. Ofw. Neuberger and Uffz. Krentz took off from Biblis, followed by six aircraft of I./JG 11. The latter probably led by Lt. Alwin Doppler, Kapitän of 2./JG 11.<sup>20</sup> The small group of aircraft formed up over the field and flew to the north where they were to be joined by the other Gruppen.

At Zellhausen, the pilots had arrived early on the field to prepare themselves for the flight. The groundcrew had worked all night to get the aircraft ready for the mission. At 08.10 hrs the Ju 88 Lotse, which had arrived a few days earlier, took off followed by 20 Bf 109s of the Gruppe.<sup>21</sup> The aircraft assembled over Zellhausen at 150 metres and after forming up continued in the direction of Frankfurt at 50 metres.<sup>22</sup>

At Groß-Ostheim Oblt. Hans Fiedler had gone to the Gruppe HQ in the morning, still thinking he would not fly. However, shortly before 08.00 hrs, he was called out, given a new aircraft and instructed to fly as No. 2 to Oblt. Heinz Grosser, Kapitän of 11./JG 11.<sup>23</sup> The groundcrew of III./JG 11 had managed to get 31 Fw 190s<sup>24</sup> ready for the mission and at 08.18 hrs, the Ju 88 Lotse, followed by the Focke-Wulfs took off.<sup>25</sup> The Fw 190s assembled north of the airfield in the vicinity of Aschaffenburg and then proceeded in the direction of Frankfurt-am-Main, flying at a height of 125 metres. Over Frankfurt, the other Gruppen were spotted and led by Stab and I./JG 11 a loose formation was assembled.<sup>26</sup> III./JG 11 followed closely and at some distance, the Bf 109s of II. Gruppe joined up resulting in armada of approximately 60 fighters.

The formation left the Frankfurt area in the direction of Koblenz, flying at a height of 50 metres. Passing Koblenz it continued on the same course crossing the front line north of Aachen.

A Bofors gun position of the 553rd AW Bn near Servaas Bridge, Maastricht. This position shot down an Fw 190 over Maastricht with just five rounds of 40 mm ammunition. (Pütz)

Here the Bf 109s of II./JG 11 climbed to 350 metres to give the Focke-Wulfs top cover.<sup>27</sup> Almost immediately after crossing into Allied territory AA batteries opened fire and JG 11 suffered its first casualties. Oblt. Hans Fiedler's Fw 190 received hits, damaging his engine and wounding him in the head. He lost consciousness and miraculously survived the crash-landing. Probably, he was shot down by a US half-track near Heerlen. Uffz. Hermann Barion of 12./JG 11 seems to have been another victim of the intense ground fire. His loss report indicates that he was last seen in the Maastricht area where a Fw 190 was seen to crash in flames.<sup>28</sup> Although his body was recovered, no details are known about Barion's exact crash location. II. Gruppe also sustained casualties. Fhj.-Uffz. Herbert Huss of 6. Staffel was hit by AA and immediately baled out. Landing near Maastricht he hid in some woods, but was soon spotted by farmers and turned over to the British.<sup>29</sup> Near Maastricht Fw. Alfred Tempel's Bf 109 was also hit and this 8. Staffel pilot taken POW.<sup>30</sup>

Still flying on a north-west course the formation neared the last turning point at the River Maas, north of Maastricht. Here the Ju 88s left the formation, where the Lotse of II./JG 11 attacked an AA battery which opened fire at the formation. Although achieving hits on the battery, the Ju 88 was hit too. However, it was able to return to Zellhausen.<sup>31</sup> Now the formation turned south-west to attack Asch from the north-east.<sup>32</sup> Leading the formation, Maj. Specht encountered ground fog in which it was difficult to navigate, but which also caused the formation to loosen up.<sup>33</sup> At this stage the formation was still heading for Asch, but purely by coincidence its course would lead it almost directly over Y-32 Ophoven, the airstrip housed by No. 125 Wing just five kilometres north of Y-29 Asch. When the strip was spotted, a large part of the formation thought this was Asch and started to strafe Ophoven, while the rest of the formation continued to Asch!

Some 30 Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts attacked Ophoven.<sup>34</sup> One of the resident units, No. 3206 R&SU (Repair and Servicing Unit), had moved towards Y-32 Ophoven on December 27th. E.J. Pritchard was a member of this unit and has vivid memories of the morning: "Our job was to service incoming aircraft on the forward airfields until such time as the airfield to which they belonged were able to move in and become established and take over. At the time of the attack, I was just starting to dig a slit trench near where the aircraft, we would be servicing would be. At the time I was only about one foot down and I can tell you I was lying face down in it, at least it was some protection."<sup>35</sup>

LAC Ollett of No. 130 (Punjab) Squadron was on his way to service his aircraft at Y-32 when the

attack commenced: "I was cleaning the hood and looking around. It was bloody cold. There was about three feet of snow and as we had been digging away some snow for the aircraft bay, there was at least some sort of windbreak. The night before, when we arrived, I stood at my aircraft about 30 feet from this Yank gunner with, I think, a .50 machine gun. I asked if he had used it. He said he had not, did not intend it, as he stood there with the plastic cover over the end of the barrel, and clapping his hands to keep warm. After my fitter had warmed up the Spitfire (AP-D), I topped it up with petrol. We had to do this every hour, night and day so as to keep the aircraft warm. No matter how much petrol was used, it had to be topped up. So at the time AP-D was filling up, I used to sit in the cockpit but this time I decided to sit on the starboard wing with my back to the engine cowling, which was quite warm, while chatting away to the Yank. While we waited for orders from the covered wagons in the middle of the field, I looked towards the distant skyline and I saw and heard the rat-tat-tat of machine guns and aircraft twisting and turning in the air. The Yank was doing likewise when something made me turn my head and look backwards; I watched the enemy aircraft approaching at low-level. I got to my feet and ran along the wing, shouting to the Yank. I dived off the wing on to the perimeter, which, I had forgotten, was frozen hard. There I was, sliding over the ice unable to stop as bullets and cannon-shells passed either side of me. As they went down on the strafing mission, I saw them hit an aircraft facing me at about 200 meters away and hit Corporal "Paddy" Mather, armourer, who was working under the port wing on one of the machine guns. I was lying there. You could not move as if you were part of the scenery while Paddy was lying there. Someone ran out and carried him to the first aid tent. Then with the air battle still going on, a pilot ran out and jumped into a Spitfire."<sup>36</sup>

This pilot was F/Sgt. Clay, who, at great personal risk, taxied two aircraft threatened by fire to a place of safety, during the attack.<sup>37</sup> One of the German pilots who attacked Ophoven was Lt. Georg Füreder, Kapitän of 5./JG 11: "Just short of the target we pulled up and fanned out to the left and right to look over the airfield, then we went into our firing runs. I pulled up and went straight into my attack. My approach was too steep to engage the fighters on the east side of the airfield, so I aimed at four or five C-47s in the north-west corner. I started a sharp 180 deg. turn to go for the fighters on the east side, when tracer rounds streaked past me. At first I thought it was flak, then to my surprise I saw two Thunderbolts behind me. One was firing at me with everything, but his aim was wild. I pulled sharply to port and his rounds passed astern of my plane. My pursuer and



his No. 2 gave up the chase and headed off west. I started after them, then broke away for a final run at the airfield heading south. At this time I saw no other aircraft over or near the airfield. A pall of black smoke rose from the southern half of the airfield, coming from several burning aircraft. I made my firing run somewhat higher because of the smoke."<sup>38</sup>

As stated numerous aircraft of JG 11 attacked Ophoven instead of Asch. The AA defences at Ophoven did their utmost to defend the airfield. No. 2794 AA Squadron fired approximately 250 rounds and claimed one Fw 190 destroyed. No. 2876 Squadron fired 437 rounds with ten guns engaged and claimed two Bf 109s and one Fw 190 destroyed. They also claimed seven Bf 109s and four Fw 190s damaged!<sup>39</sup> Finally F/Lt. Gaze, one of the three despatched aircraft of No. 610 Squadron returned alone from his mission and was amazed to find several aircraft on his home base on fire. He encountered several Fw 190s and Bf 109s and after a long chase managed to shoot down a Fw 190 D.<sup>40</sup> However, this German fighter belonged to JG 2 some of whose aircraft had also ended up in the Asch/Ophoven area. Meantime, the larger part of the JG 11 formation were right on course and headed for Asch, convinced they would be able to strike the two US Fighter Groups on the ground. They would be in for a surprise.

At 09.16 hrs the 390th FS of the 366th FG at Y-29 sent up two flights on a close-support mission to the 'Bulge'. Through pure chance they

were airborne 15 minutes earlier than planned.<sup>41</sup> Not knowing at the time, they would play a crucial role in breaking up the JG 11 attack formation that was approaching its target. Red and Yellow Flights were manned by the following pilots:

**Pilot**

Capt. Lowell B. Smith  
2./Lt. John J. Kennedy  
2./Lt. Melvyn R. Paisley  
F/O David C. Johnson Jr.

**Red Flight**

Red 1  
Red 2  
Red 3  
Red 4

**Yellow Flight**

1./Lt. John W. Feeney  
2./Lt. Currie B. Davis  
1./Lt. Robert V. Brulle  
F/O Joe F. Lackey

Yellow 1  
Yellow 2  
Yellow 3  
Yellow 4

We will follow the subsequent events starting with an account from Lt. Bob Brulle of 'Yellow 3'. Brulle was of Belgian descent and he and his parents had immigrated from the west of Belgium to the USA at the beginning of the century. Brulle felt especially good about being able to assist in liberating his parents' home country: "I was one of the eight to go on the early mission. I was very miffed in that I was scheduled to fly our group commander's ship B2-H, the 'Flying Carpet', an old razorback aircraft instead of my own B2-J, which was out of commission. Col. Holt was on a one-month combat leave and at the time there were only a few razorback P-47s left in the group.

Two Bf 109s flash in low over Y-29; the air combat over this airstrip was at low-altitude, fast and lethal. (Brulle)



Lt. Robert V. Brulle of the 390th FS, 366th FG seen here with 'Turbo' the Squadron mascot, was of Belgian descent and he took special pride in liberating his former countrymen. (Brulle)





F/O David C. Johnson Jr.  
This pilot of the 390th FS  
was shot down over Asch  
by a Bf 109 of II./JG 11.  
(Brulle)

All others were bubble canopy types. We took off at 09.15 with the weather clear and 4/10 cloud cover at 3,000 ft. We were taking off generally from east to west from our strip. Waiting at the west end were 12 P-51s from Col. Meyer's 352nd Fighter Group. We made a 180-degree turn after take-off and formed up into a close comfortable formation as we set course for the front lines. At that point, we saw AA fire slightly over to our left. Turning to investigate we saw that a large group of German fighters were coming directly at our airstrip and were already strafing the British strip Y-32. We met the German aircraft head-on. It was composed of about 50 Me 109 and Fw 190 fighters. As I did a wingover and dove down to attack the enemy aircraft I could see our field and saw the 12 P-51s taking off in one big formation. During this initial attack on the enemy, we were busy getting our aircraft cleaned up (jettisoning bombs), turning on our gun sights and guns, and switching the gas to main tank. I had latched on to an Fw 190 and was already on his tail before I had my gun sight on. He dove down to the deck and was really skimming the ground. I tried to get right behind him but his prop wash almost caused me to hit the ground. I could not depress my nose enough to bring my guns to bear on the aircraft and it was hard, because of my eagerness, to hold fire even though my bullets were going over him. Once he pulled back on the throttle and I almost overshot him, but slowed down enough to prevent it. For a few moments we were in tight formation together, and I can still remember seeing the pilot crouched over his controls. We finally came to some trees and as he made a turning pull-up over them, I got in a good burst and he blew up hitting the ground in front of me. The crash site was somewhere within five miles north-east of the field. I flew right through his explosion and my windshield got covered with his oil making it hard to see through for a few minutes. Another Fw 190 pulled in front of me and I started after him. I got into position behind him and as I started firing, I saw cannon shells flying over my canopy (captured on my combat film as fireballs curving over above me). Going into a steep turn I saw a Me 109 firing at me. I was fascinated by the slow flashes of the cannon firing through the propeller hub and the faster flashes of the machine guns on the cowling and wing. I kept in a steep turn for about 180 degrees as his shells went behind me when the Me 109 suddenly broke off combat. I then got on the tail of another Fw 190 and was able to get a few bursts at him. There were aircraft milling around all over the place. There were also some frantic calls on the radio for help in getting one or the other aircraft off their tail. I used up my ammunition shooting at an Fw 190 and had to break off combat. When I realised I was out of ammunition I hightailed it west to get out of the area. It so happened that I flew right over our field

at about 200 feet and had all our AA gunners shooting at me. I violently wagged my wings and they stopped shooting as I climbed to 3,000 feet so I was just below the cloud cover. I felt safe there since I could duck into the clouds in case any enemy aircraft came after me. From there I circled around and had a front row seat to the battle below. While watching the battle I observed an Me 109 heading back towards Germany pursued by two P-51s about 1,000 yards back. As the Me 109 started to go below my wing, I rolled over so I could keep my eye on him. He must have seen me, and thinking I was going to dive on him, veered away. This allowed one of the P-51s to turn inside him and get close enough to set up a deflection shot that nailed him. I always felt I should have got an assist for shooting down that enemy aircraft. When there was a lull in the battle I went in and landed. Just as I was turning off the runway, I saw two Me 109 aircraft coming right at me to strafe our field. I shut off the engine, scrambled out of my aircraft and was running away from it as they roared overhead. They strafed an aircraft on the other side of the field. The crew chief taxied the aircraft back to its parking place later. As I was walking back to our operations area I met Dave Johnson, one of the eight of us on this mission. He was riding a bike and carrying his opened parachute. A couple of Belgians were on another bike. When he saw me, he rode over and asked me to thank the Belgians for letting him use their bike to get back to the field. He had been shot down a few miles away but had baled out safely. He said he shot down the Me 109 that got him, but his aircraft was heavily damaged so he had to bale out. He landed near where the German fighter had crashed and walked over to see it. The pilot was dead, probably from loss of blood as he had been hit, but was able to crash-land his aircraft prior to expiring. From the identity card carried by the pilot, Dave said he was the German equivalent to a Lieutenant Colonel. One at a time our aircraft returned. Lt. Feeney's aircraft was damaged so bad he had to belly it in. Lt. Jack Kennedy was able to land his P-47 but it was junk. We therefore lost three aircraft and no pilots, but claimed we had shot down 12 German aircraft. Later, after our gun film review and ambiguous claims resolved, we got credited with eight German aircraft destroyed. My gun camera film captured the explosion of the Fw 190 I shot down. Mel (Mop) Paisley was credited with three aircraft and was the high scorer for our squadron. All the action lasted about 30 minutes. I had finally been in an air battle, and one where we were outnumbered at that.<sup>142</sup>

F/O Dave Johnson's story of the dead German pilot, supposedly Maj. Günter Specht, has never been verified. The authors endeavoured to contact F/O Johnson, but unfortunately he had passed away in 1976. "On January 1st 1945 Johnson was flying my brother's P-47 (B2-I) when he was shot

down. The 109 or 190 had crash-landed, was still intact and its pilot was dead but not dismembered or burned. Johnson removed the man's wallet and gun. He showed them to me. The wallet contained pictures of his blonde wife and two blonde children and his ID. We could not read German, but somebody who could, said he was the equivalent of a Lieutenant Colonel named Günther Specht and he commanded JG 11. Some time later the Red Cross came to Johnson and asked him for the ID and pictures. Johnson gave them to the Red Cross. He died in October 1976 and his wife gave me the gun."<sup>43</sup>

We believe this account is based on a misunderstanding of the abbreviation of German ranks. However, firstly F/O Dave Johnson claimed a Bf 109, whereas Günther Specht flew a Fw 190 A-9. Furthermore Günther Specht held the rank of Maj. at that time and was promoted to Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) after his death. The name of Günther Specht, we believe, was added to the story post-war. In fact F/O Johnson's victim was Oberleutnant August Engel, a pilot of 8./JG 11. The abbreviation 'Oblt.' for his rank is almost the same as 'Obstlt.' for Oberstleutnant. The type of aircraft matches and Oblt. August Engel's remains were identified by ID card Nr. 210, which gave his name, rank and home address.<sup>44</sup> As far as F/O Johnson's aircraft is concerned, it crashed near a pond on the outskirts of Opladbeek and parts of the wreckage were recovered during the 1980s. Not far from here in Asch was Oblt. Engel's crash site. Local eyewitness Emil Berghs remembers: "Early in the morning we were alerted by a tremendous noise. Shell cases rattled down on the roof of our house. Not far from where I live, we found a crash-landed Luftwaffe fighter with the pilot in it. He was dead. Americans were retrieving his papers and I clearly recall that this man was from Darmstadt and that his father's name was Ludwig Engel. In close proximity were two other crash sites but these aircraft were burned out and the remains of their pilots had been charred. I recall one of the bodies to be barely a metre long."

We continue the mission in 'Red 1' flown by Capt. Lowell Smith of the 390th FS: "On 1 January 1945, I was leading Relic Squadron on a close-support mission. We had just taken off and as we joined up Relic Red 2 called in flak bursts just NE of our field. I led the squadron to investigate. As we approached the flak, we sighted enemy aircraft strafing strip Y-32. Another force was sighted heading towards Y-29. We attacked immediately. I got into position on the tail of a Fw 190 and observed a few strikes around the cockpit. I overshot him but noticed that he was burning. My wingman stated that he saw this enemy aircraft crash. I then got on the tail of another Fw 190 and chased him 20 to 30 miles to the east. I was unable

to overtake him. I fired several bursts at extreme range but observed no strikes. I broke off and returned to Y-29. Just north of the field, I was bounced by a Fw 190. I broke right and succeeded in out-turning him. We were below 500 feet when he snap-rolled and dove into the ground."<sup>45</sup>

Capt. Lowell Smith claimed both Fw 190s as destroyed. Confirmation of one of the claims came from F/O Johnson. He saw Capt. Smith in a steep dive closing in on a Focke-Wulf and saw the enemy aircraft burst into flames and explode as it hit the ground.<sup>46</sup> Lt. Jack Kennedy was 'Red 2' and Captain Smith's wingman: "I was second off after Smith. I do not remember if we had belly tanks but we did have two 500 lb bombs. We all got off quite fast and I had just got on Smith's wing when Paisley called Relic Red leader saying he spotted bogies at nine o'clock on the deck. I looked and I did not see them at first. Then I picked them up just north of our airstrip. I do not know if an order was given to drop our bombs but I did. I do not know how many German planes there were but I guess there were 50 to 60. We were in the midst of them within seconds – I do not know if I lost Smith or he lost me. With all the aircraft just off the deck who could tell. I got on the tail of a Me 109, which at first I thought was a Spitfire. This 109 really filled the gun sight and I just got off a few rounds when I was hit in the tail end. I found two Me 109s on my tail. I broke to the right and of course those guys followed me still firing away. I got hit again in the right wing and a hell of a fire started with the hydraulic fluid burning. My first thought was to bale out and I unhooked ready to jump. They always told us to go out the right side and when I looked at the flames I thought I can't go through there. I broke to the left and was flying around a slag pile with those guys still firing away. I am glad I had the razorback because I did turn inside those devils. Two P-51s from the 352nd group got the 109s off my tail. We had a low ceiling that day and I ran for the clouds. By that time, the fire had burned out and the plane was still flying. I came out of the clouds and most of the fighting was over. Found the field – called Burdock telling them I had some damage. I shook the gear down and came in pretty fast – hit the flaps – no flaps – hit the metal strip at over a hundred miles per hour – hit the brakes – no brakes – ran out of the runway doing 30-40 mph – I was not going back up – it finally stopped."<sup>47</sup>

Lt. Melvyn Paisley would prove to be the high-scorer for the Squadron. He would also achieve distinction by destroying an enemy aircraft with an air-to-ground rocket! He published his memoirs in 'Ace' and has kindly given us permission to quote from his work. It is a very graphic account of the turbulent action in the early morning:

*"La Mort responded to the early morning start with a rough cough. Within moments, she was purring and*



Oblt. August Engel of 8./JG 11. This 31-year old pilot had joined 8./JG 11 in November 1944. Before that he had been a flight instructor for several years. (Heidel)



'Key Block': Capt. Lowell B. Smith led two flights of the 390th FS on a patrol which spotted the attacking force from JG 11. (Brulle)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



2./Lt. Melvyn R. Paisley would become the high-scorer for the 366th FG on January 1st. (Brulle)

my crew chief and armament sergeant guided me, one on each side. Smith and his wingman pulled out, and I followed close behind. The time was 09.15 according to the clock on my dash; we were out fifteen minutes early. The officer on the runway gave me the wave on to the flight strip. "Keep them rolling", he motioned with his arms. It was a brutally cold day to have wave-off duty; the Jug threw such a hurricane. As I rolled down the runway, vapour sprayed from the prop and wings, and a wreath of misty light with a tinge of rainbow obscured Smith's plane. "Good luck, sir," my crew chief yelled to the sky as he threw a highball. His voice vanished under the deafening thunder of our engines. Seconds later I rocketed into the air directly behind the first element. Taking off to the west, we started our first turn around the field for the join up. As we climbed over the field, I could see the 352nd Group crew chiefs at the west end of the field readying their P-51s. After our first three-sixty of the field, Yellow Flight started to join up with us. Once more around and we would veer off to the target. As Captain Smith started his turn westward, his wingman called out, "Flak puffs to the East!" Wilcox had not told us about any expected problems in that area so I quickly focussed on the swarm of activity. Visibility was virtually unlimited and I saw the raid blasting toward us. Excitedly I alerted Smith to the incoming German fighter sweep, "Relic Red flight leader, this is Mop! Bandits, lots of 'em. Two o'clock low! Coming in on the deck!" Captain Smith could not see them at first, "Mop you take the lead!" "Roger!" I responded instinctively, still surveying the situation. The enemy planes were at tree-top level, anywhere from fifty to eighty of them.

They had just hit the British 2nd Tactical Airfield at Y-32, and it was the Brits' AA guns that Jack Kennedy had seen. The adrenaline surged through every blood vessel in my body, and my heart pounded wildly. This was my first time leading the squadron and I was facing a raid the size of which we'd never seen before. I could feel a surge of sweat saturate my flight suit as I jettisoned my bombs and racked my plane around for a head-on pass at the closest 190. He broke left, whipping away from our field. Thrusting the throttle forward, my Jug seized the distance between us and I was smack on his tail. With a couple short bursts, La Mort consumed him. First the armour-piercing and incendiary projectiles shattered the oil and gas lines, then a huge fireball belched from his engine. He ploughed into the forest from about two hundred feet with a terrific explosion. "Good show" yelled Johnson. Turning slightly, I pulled onto the tail of what was probably his wingman cruising a tree-top level. We started a Lufberry and got through the first three hundred and sixty degrees. Through the tight turn, I tried desperately to keep a full circle of gun sight lead on him. Then my Jug hesitated in what felt like a high-speed stall, reminding me I was still carrying a full load of rockets. He was still in my sight as I squeezed the trigger, spraying the wingman with a stream of machine-gun fire. Fifty-caliber slugs were striking him everywhere as the deafening sound of ripping metal pierced the air. Seconds later the plane crashed to the ground and a mushroom of black smoke billowed upwards. This should have given the 51s an opportunity to get off the field, I hoped, though little time had passed. The eight of us needed help soon;

'La Mort' was "the aircraft of Lt. Paisley. He scored one of his hits with an air-to-ground rocket. (Paisley)







ten to one odds in Jerry's favour were simply too overwhelming. As I climbed to gain a little altitude, I spotted an Fw 190 on Johnson's tail.

"Johnson...Break left!" Before the 190 could react, I got in a good deflection, striking him in the fuselage. In the ruckus Johnson shook him. Another Fw 190 lurked on the deck, an easy target I thought, since his low altitude would pay off. Within seconds I got on his tail and let go of two rockets. Both were low.

Correcting, I fired another two rockets higher and the bandit burst into a massive ball of orange and red flames. Glancing back at my wingman, I spotted a Me 109 on his tail. Pulling a hard turn to the right, I slid behind the 109 as he pressed on Johnson's tail. As he came into my sight, I blasted him hard. His fuselage ripped into a thousand pieces to the pounding of my guns and he crashed to the ground in a fiery heap. The sky blackened as I climbed steeply in a turn, giving La Mort full power and water injection. In the muck below was a P-51 on the tail of a Me 109. The 487th had arrived! God kiss them all!

Rolling over and pointing the Jug straight down, I made a ninety-degree deflection shot, inflicting strikes along the full length of the Me 109 and shaking him off the tail off the P-51. Then I broke off the attack to take on another 109 heading for our field. The 109 was at two hundred feet: I was above him about one hundred feet. Turning on the water injection and full throttle, I hoped the extra manifold pressure, which the chief had added, would pay off. I was dangerously low on ammunition and this was the last time I dared use water injection. One try was all I had. I was gaining on him fast and I did not want to over-shoot. Letting the deflection angle go close to zero, his wings

more than filled the gun sight circle. He was closer than the three hundred yards at which the guns converge. At two hundred yards, I let the guns run out as he took a full blast. The eight .50-caliber guns, which shot over seven thousand rounds a minute, hacked at his wing and engine. A stream of oily smoke trailed him as he blasted towards the ground and disappeared in the muck. I called Marmite, the field control van, and told him I was coming straight in. Seconds later I dropped my wheels and flaps and landed short on the strip, heading right into the parking area. As I pulled into La Mort's stall, I chopped the throttle immediately and yelled to the chief, "Load her up, I'm going back out." I did not need any fuel; I had plenty. Without so much as a word, Sergeant Michano jumped on the wing, unsnapped my harness and hauled me out of the plane. The field was still under attack and they were not about to reload. He flung me into a slit trench alongside the plane. My flying was over for the day."<sup>18</sup>

In the mean time, at 09.20 hrs, the 487th FS was still at the west side of the PSP strip. John D. Stearns, a pilot with the 486th FS of the 352nd FG, draws a picture of the next few seconds: "Briefing was over and I had just come outside and noticed a Lufberry off to the east. Suddenly a flamer dropped out of the circle and I saw they were P-47s and German fighters. I started yelling "Bandits!" and someone got on the siren and started cranking it up. The 487th was on the taxi strip and starting take-off. The first plane rolling was J.C. Meyer and the Germans were starting to come across the field. J.C. lifted off and a

A huge air battle developed above the snow-covered airstrip at Asch. Against a combined defence formed by elements from the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces, the German attackers were repelled. (Jesup)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

Lieutenants Jesup and Huston of the 352nd FG at Y-29 in front 1/Lt. Al Rigby's personal aircraft, 'Eleen and Jerry'. (Rigby)



German came across the field from right to left, crossing in front of him. J.C. was shooting before his clamshell doors were fully up, and he knocked him down, crashing on the north side of the field. The rest of the squadron got off and went directly into dogfights with all tanks full."<sup>49</sup>

The next table shows the three flights put up by Meyer and the names and positions of the pilots:

### Pilot

Lt.Col. John C. Meyer  
1./Lt. Alexander F. Sears  
1./Lt. Raymond H. Littge  
1./Lt. Alden P. Rigby

### White Flight

White 1  
White 2  
White 3  
White 4

### Yellow Flight

Yellow 1  
Yellow 2  
Yellow 3  
Yellow 4

### Red Flight

Red 1  
Red 2  
Red 3  
Red 4

Maj. William T. Halton  
Capt. Henry M. Stewart II  
1./Lt. Sanford K. Moats  
1./Lt. Dean M. Huston

Capt. William T. Whisner  
1./Lt. Walker G. Diamond  
1./Lt. Nelson R. Jesup  
1./Lt. William C. Miller Jr.

Stearns continues with his account: "An Me 109 was at about 1,000 ft. and was being fired upon by two Mustangs from two different directions, and he rolled into a split-S and disappeared behind the trees going straight down; I expected to see a ball of fire come up but instead, the 109 came straight up out of the trees, ran into some more gunfire and hammer-headed back into the ground. I was standing not too far from the briefing tent, with my .45 in my hand taking potshots at the German

planes as they came over, when I heard a louder bang and saw a 109, head-on, coming in on a strafing pass, with the nose cannon firing. I took a jump at a small foxhole that someone had dug nearby, and landed on a pile of men. Everyone else close-by had the same thought. The 109 did hit a Mustang and set the oil tank on fire, which was quickly extinguished by one of the ground crew. Most of the few strafing passes made, were done on the junk B-17 sitting toward the southwest end of the field. The Luftwaffe was too busy with the 487th and some of the P-47s, from across the field, to do much damage. Only one of the 487th planes sustained some damage to the prop spinner, and that was due to ground fire."<sup>50</sup>

To the men on the ground this was their first chance to witness a dogfight. Dodging bullets and firing away with their Colt .45s they were both spectators and participants in perhaps one of the last great air battles of the war. Their memories are vivid: "We had a runway-side position to the damndest dogfight! There were P-51s all along the runway and about fifty yards in front of us there was a B-17. It looked real good, but I learned later it was a hulk, had been cannibalised of everything that could be used... Nine or ten Jerries would go for the B-17 and try to get a big victory, and it had no fuel or anything to catch fire, so it just sat there and absorbed their gunfire like a large sponge! We watched one Jerry cross the field at about 1,500 feet, chased by three 487'ers. Across the field they boxed him and he spun out below the tree line from us. It seemed like three minutes and he was seen slowly auguring upward again, and no P-51s were in sight. I often wondered about him."<sup>51</sup>

Let us change the perspective of the ongoing battle to the pilot's viewpoint. As might be expected, the intensity of the battle has assured that clear pictures have remained intact. Yet the battle cannot possibly be portrayed chronologically. However, the first aircraft we will board is Lt. Alden P. Rigby's 'Eleen & Jerry': "If I could adequately describe the morning hours of January 1, 1945, I could write for a good living. I will try to describe the events, and my feelings as my records and memory permits. Actually, the morning was filled with such history-making excitement that it would be difficult to forget. The day started for me about 07.00 hrs. The weather was the same dark, damp, cold, foggy feeling. The fog had lifted a little, and was being replaced with haze, and a cloud cover at about 1,500 ft. I had the feeling that this would improve to allow some sort of a mission a little later. I had checked my plane before breakfast and found the crew getting the ice from the wings, and the frost from the canopy and windshield. After eating, Sgt. Gillette had it started, and going through the pre-flight routine. Few of us were up and about, to even learn of a



Capt. Henry M. Stewart II of the 487th FS. He flew 'Yellow 2' position. (DeBruin)

long escort mission to Berlin, scheduled for later in the day. I had gone to the briefing tent and learned from Meyer that he had requested a short patrol mission before the Berlin run. Huston and I were requested to find a few more sober pilots, just in case. At about 09.00 hrs, the fog and haze had thinned to a point of being able to see the trees at the end of the runway to the east. General Quesada had just given the OK for a short mission, using only part of our planes. Start engines at 09.00, take-off at 09.20, and be back on the ground at 10.15. This would give us time to refuel, and meet the bombers overhead at noon. A few P-47 pilots from across the field were given the same instructions. The briefing was the bare essentials, since we did not expect more than a look at the 'Bulge'. Col. Meyer would lead the 12 planes, and I would be in his flight as 'White 4'. This was New Year's Day and we had not seen the 'Hun' aircraft for two days. The German pilots could be celebrating a little also – Wrong! Little did we know of their plans, for at exactly 09:20 hrs at Asch and 15 other Allied bases...

"I kicked the tires and climbed aboard at 09.00 hrs. The plane had been warmed up, and the tanks topped off. The cockpit was warm and I was ready for a comfortable ride, as I rolled into position



behind the Colonel. The P-47s had taken off a few minutes earlier and headed straight for the front lines below the clouds. We had just gotten the green light from the makeshift tower, when we noticed bursts of flak just east of the field. Surprise, and even shock would be an understatement. We next saw what looked like at least 50 German fighter aircraft about to make their first pass of the field. We could not have been

Personnel from the 366th FG watch a dogfight take place over their own base – an especially rare treat for the groundcrews! (Brulle)



1/Lt. Al Rigby and his personal aircraft, 'Eleen and Jerry' (named after his wife and son) pose for the camera at Chievres airfield in Belgium, some time after New Year, 1945. (Rigby)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Lt. Col. John C. Meyer of the 352nd FG goes over a mission with Maj. George E. Preddy, the leading ETO Mustang ace. This is the last known photograph of Preddy before he was shot down by friendly AAA fire in the Hürtgenwald area. (Huston)

in a worse position, unless loaded with external fuel (or bombs). We were sitting ducks, and our chances were slim and none. It was not a difficult decision to take off, since that was the slim chance. The next 30 minutes were filled with action and anxiety that perhaps had not been seen, or felt before or since. I had turned on my gun heater switch earlier, and now had the presence of mind (and prompting) to turn the main switch on. The take-off roll was very close, rapid and somewhat organised. We did not wait for help from the tower or our own departure Control Officer. We just went. I am certain there were a few short prayers to just get off the ground. I had my own sort of set prayer, consisting of six words that had been used many times. Being caught on the ground was simply a fighter pilot's nightmare. We had made the situation even worse by having our fuselage tanks filled. This would make a big difference in our manoeuvrability until about 50 gallons could be burned off. This would be my first take-off ever with the gun sight illuminated on the windshield. Things were happening too fast to even be afraid – that could come later. There was no training to cover such a situation, instinct simply had to take over and it would have to be an individual effort. Getting off the ground was extremely difficult. I was fighting Meyer's prop wash, so I had to keep the plane on the steel mat a little longer to establish better control. It was of some comfort to just get airborne. Our ground gunners were firing

a lot of shells at the enemy, and in all of the confusion, were firing at us as well. This would have been their first test in anything near such conditions, so they were not hitting anyone, but it was a little disturbing.

"My landing gear had just snapped into the up position, when I opened fire on a Fw 190 which was on Littge's tail. I told him on the radio to "break left." This put the 190 right in my sight. I could see strikes from the tail up through the nose. The plane rolled over from about 300 ft. and went straight in. I then picked out another Fw 190 headed east. It appeared that he was headed for the 'Fatherland'. I dropped down on his tail and opened fire at a greater distance than was necessary, since I had the speed advantage. During the chase my gun sight failed. The bulb had burned out, and I did not have the time to change it, even had I known where the spare was. I expended even more ammunition before enough hits brought the smoke and crash in the trees. I was now in a very difficult position, no gun sight, low on ammunition, and high on fuel. I had my tracers loaded to show only when I had fired down to 300 rounds. I was now into that short supply, with still a lot of fighting to be done. I knew that mine would have to be at very close range without the sight. There did not seem to be any over-excitement, or even caution. It was not just another day at the office, but more of a day that all of the training had led up to. The odds

were getting better with each minute. And I did have reason to be even a little optimistic. Considering getting off the ground in the first place, and being over friendly territory was much more than could be hoped for a few minutes earlier. The friendly territory added another dimension, since baling out (if necessary) meant friends on the ground for a change. I did not have any trouble finding the field after the lengthy chase on the second Fw 190. The flak was still there, though not nearly as heavy, and I could see at least 2 dogfights. I could see a few fires on the ground and wondered if any could be 'ours'. I could see a P-47 in a turn with an Me 109 at about 1000 ft. I knew that the 'Jug' could not turn with the German at the low altitude, which left me with a bit of a problem. I really needed what ammo I had left for self-preservation, but when the 109 had the advantage, I did not have a choice. As the P-47 rushed to the outside, I came up from beneath, and from very close range fired enough rounds to see hits on the left wing, through the cockpit and right wing. The 109 went in from about 500 ft. Before joining the fight, I reasoned that only I would know of my ammo shortage and gun sight problem. I thought perhaps sheer numbers would count for something. The fuselage tank would now permit reasonable manoeuvrability near the ground and I would very soon need that. I knew that I was now down to what could be my last burst, even if all six guns were working.

"My last fight was with the best German pilot I had seen at any time. He could well have been their Group Commander. I would be the second or third P-51 pilot to try for a reasonable shot. He put the 109 through manoeuvres that had us mostly watching, i.e. a "split-S" from about 1000 ft. I recall seeing the aircraft shudder, then pull wingtip streamers as his prop wash shook the tree-tops. He was then back in the fight and very aggressive. I was glad to have another P-51 in the vicinity, since my firepower could only be a bluff as far as I knew. I recall being very impressed by the way the 109 was being flown, and hoped that I could in some way get in a reasonable firing position. I knew that I would only have one chance, (if any) because of his ability and my limited ammo. After about five minutes, I did not see any more firing from the German. It could have been that his situation was as bad as mine. His manoeuvres now seemed to be on the defensive side. It was what seemed like ten minutes, (but was probably less) before the other P-51 turned the 109 in my direction, where he turned broadside to me from something less than 30-40 yards. It was close enough for me to see the pilot clearly, and what proved to be the last of my ammunition score a few hits on the left wing, the engine, and then shatter the canopy and cockpit. I had again

guessed right for the very close proximity, high-deflection angle firing without the gun sight. Some might think in terms of being 'lucky'. That could well have been, but I am convinced of other factors being involved (help from above for one). The fight was over, as well as any other that I could see anywhere near the field. I now had time to think and wonder about what had happened. How had we been able to get airborne? What had happened to the field and would it be suitable for landing? This would not be a problem since I still had plenty of fuel to find a field on the Continent, or even get back to England. How many of our planes did not get off the ground? How many of ours lost in the air or on the ground? What had happened to my gun sight and could I have done much more with it? I was not happy about wasting so much time and ammo on the second Fw 190. I was not at all anxious to land, though I knew the fighting had to be over. I would take my chances without ammo in the air rather than be in a hurry to get back on the ground at Y-29, or any field to the west. I could see several fires burning near the field and what looked like two or three on the field but the runway looked good. I could see the rows of P-51s and P-47s and could not believe the field could have gotten by with so little visible damage. My fuselage tank was down to fighting weight and the fight was over. Flying around the area at about 2,000 ft. with more airspeed than usual was a great feeling. I had not been able to use this much speed since chasing the second Fw 190. I also had the time and judgement to check to the rear which I had not done much of before. Things had happened so fast and as far as I knew, gone so well that I was getting curious about what the others had been doing. I could see three other P-51s in the area but did not join up. A check with the tower was not all that re-assuring about the condition of the field. After about 15 minutes of looking things over, I decided it would be safe to get back on the ground. I had clearance to land and would follow the P-51 on what was to be his break on the 360-degree overhead pattern. Instead, he came in on the deck and pulled up in the frequently done victory roll over the runway, with a few flak bursts following him. The ground gunners were still on edge. I had thought of giving the ground troops a little thrill also, but suddenly changed my mind. They had probably had enough for one day anyway. The frost had melted on the steel mats and the landing was a bit slippery. I was just happy to be back where it all started in one piece. Landing to the west left only a short taxi to my parking place and the foxhole used during this mission by some of the crew. As I cut the engine there was some emotion that I had not given any thought to. Sgt. Gillette knew something of what had happened, but of course did not know the numbers, my gun sight problem or my ammo

predicament. He was almost in tears as I made my account to him. I assured him that it was most probable that I had done better without my sight, because of the low altitude and very close range. We had always had a close relationship, but the events of this day and our visible emotions about what had happened left us with an even more common bond. It was almost unbelievable that we had not lost any aircraft or that damage on the ground was minimal. The only injury was almost humorous, a sprained ankle for Lt. Doleac as he stumbled while running for a foxhole. I do not recall any celebrations. There was a lot of excitement but nothing that was not rather subdued or even "matter of fact."<sup>52</sup>

Lt. Raymond Littge, in 'White 3', had perhaps the most peculiar kill of all. It led him as far as the Paris area. When all others had landed, Littge still had not reported in: "However, a sidelight of interest was during that afternoon, when the big excitement was over and 487th pilot Littge had called in from the Paris area that he was OK – no losses in the 487th."<sup>53</sup>

Littge subsequently reported: "Flying White Three, we had not yet formed after take-off, when we spotted 50 plus 109s and 190s NW of our field. I picked out a 190 flying at 3,000 feet and made a turn with it to the right, when I got strikes on the wingroots and cockpit. He snap-tailed to the right, recovered, then snapped again and hit the ground and exploded. I then picked out another 190 and started chasing it on the deck. I got strikes on wings and engine, and he started throwing black smoke. After this, he used violent evasive action, and I used up all of my ammo but got no more strikes. He had taken a westerly heading and since I could not have found the fight again, I stayed with him. He took me almost to Paris, when he started climbing and at approximately 3,000 feet he baled out in Allied territory."<sup>54</sup>

Lt. Raymond Littge claimed both Fw 190s as destroyed. Yellow Flight, made up of Maj. Halton, Capt. Stewart, 1./Lt. Moats and 1./Lt. Huston accounted for a large element of the attacking force of JG 11. Post-war, Maj. Halton would rise to Colonel before being killed over Korea in a P-51D in 1952, while 1./Lt. Moats retired from the Air Force in 1971 with the rank of Lt. General. Maj. 'Wild Bill' Halton had respect for his adversaries: "I was leading Yellow Flight as Col. Meyer, Squadron Leader took off. He ran into a large number of enemy aircraft north-east of the field. I took off and climbed to 3,000 feet and bounced three 190s on the deck headed north-east. I dove on one and he crashed and blew up as a result of Yellow 3's (Lt. Moats) fire whose victory I confirm. I fired at one at zero deg. deflection and he spun in and exploded in some woods. I fired at the lead ship and used the rest of my ammo but

observed no hits. I broke off my attack and returned to the field. I was attacked three times by 109s but managed to evade them. The enemy pilots were very eager. The 109s gave me plenty of trouble."<sup>55</sup>

Maj. Halton claimed one Fw 190 destroyed. Capt. Stewart had his own private race with a Bf 109 around slag piles in the Genk area. He would claim three kills that morning, but his racing opponent would be put out of the race by Captain Whisner: "I was flying Yellow Two on Maj. Halton's wing. Before I gave my ship the throttle on take-off, Col. Meyer had one 190 spinning down in flames. I followed Maj. Halton off and he started after two 190s. They were on the deck heading east toward the front line. I stayed at 2,000 feet giving Maj. Halton cover. He got a few strikes on one 190. The ground fire got so intense I had to break. When I broke, I ran into a 109. I made a few turns with him but could not get into firing position. I followed another 109 up through the clouds at about 150 mph but could not close and almost spun out. I came back down and went around with another 109. I fired but did not observe any strikes. I then came back toward the field and tagged on to a 109 heading toward our field. I closed on him and pulled the trigger, nothing happened. My knee had shut my switches off. I got them back on and fired. I got a few strikes. We started turning over a slag pile and Capt. Whisner came along and clobbered him. I came back toward the field again and saw two P-51s chasing a 109. The 109 broke; I cut my throttle and slid in behind him at about 100 yards and 100 feet off the deck. I fired and observed many strikes. The 109 went straight in and exploded. I pulled up to 2,000 feet and started a turn. I saw another 109 on the deck heading east. I closed my throttle again and dove behind him. At 150 yards range, I opened up and got many strikes on the wingroot and fuselage. The 109 went straight into the ground. All this time the ground fire was very intense; 50 cal and 20 mm. I started back toward the field and picked up another 109 on the deck, a P-51 chasing him. The P-51 broke and I dove down on the enemy aircraft, our altitude being about 100 feet. He turned and I followed him east. I closed to 150 yards and fired, getting strikes all along the right side of the plane. Coolant came out and the 109 crashed into the ground."<sup>56</sup>

Capt. Stewart claimed three Bf 109s destroyed. The Bf 109 hit by Capt. Whisner crashed into one of the coalmine buildings, going through two floors killing one of seven maintenance workers, present at the time. The charred remains of the German pilot who raced so brilliantly around the slag piles have never been identified.

There were only two pilots who would add four kills to their record that morning; one of them, 1./Lt. Sanford Moats would end up in a



1./Lt. Raymond H. Littge of the 352nd FG had to pursue his adversary all the way to the Paris area. (Huston)





1/Lt. Sanford K. Moats of the 352nd FG would continue his Air Force career until he retired in 1971 with the rank of Lieutenant General. (Huston)

dogfight with the low-altitude split-S Luftwaffe pilot who eventually was shot down by Capt. Stewart: "I was flying 'Yellow 3' in Maj. Halton's flight. As I took off I spotted about 15 plus Fw 190s at 100 feet coming from 3 o'clock on their way to make a pass at the airstrip to the north of our field. At the same time I noticed approximately 15 Me 109s flying top cover at 3,500 feet just below a thin cloud cover. Two 190s broke into my wingman, Lt. Huston and myself and we entered a Lufberry to the left under intense light, friendly (?) flak. I closed on the first 190 and looked back to see a 190 closing on the tail of my wingman. I called to him to break as the 190 started shooting at him. I then fired a short burst at 300 yards and 30 deg. deflection at the 190 ahead of me, observing strikes in the cockpit area and left wingroot. He burst into flames and I saw him crash and explode as I continued the turn. The pilot did not get out. Approximately 50 enemy aircraft were in the vicinity and the entire area was full of friendly flak. I chose a 190 that was strafing a marshalling yard as my second target. He broke left and started to climb. I fired a short burst at 200 yards and 20 deg. deflection, observing a concentration of strikes on both wing roots. Both wings folded up over the canopy of the enemy aircraft and he dropped straight in. The pilot did not get out. I continued my left turn and rolled out slightly above and behind another 190, which broke left. I fired a short burst and observed strikes on the left side of the fuselage, canopy and left wing root. He burst into flames, the canopy came



off and he crashed. The pilot did not get out. I then broke into several 109s and 190s who were coming at me from the rear, heading toward Germany. They split up and I picked one 190 who broke into me. We made several head-on passes and I pulled up and came down on his tail, firing a two second burst, observing strikes from wing tip to wing tip. He levelled off and hit the deck. I closed and fired several bursts from dead astern, observing strikes all over the tail and wing sections. As we passed over Maastricht I fired a short burst that exploded his belly tank, and my aircraft was hit by 40 mm ground fire. At this time

1/Lt Dean M. Huston on the wing of his P-51 Mustang. Huston shot down an Fw 190 on January 1st; he recalled: "All I know is I was one lucky hombre that day..." (Huston)

Capt. William T. Whisner of the 352nd FG in conversation with Lt. Bill Preddy, brother of the leading ETO Mustang ace who was tragically killed on December 25th 1944 (Huston)



I had only one gun firing and the enemy aircraft kept taking violent evasive action on the deck as we crossed the front lines. I fired a burst at him every time I had a chance and observed a few strikes around the wing root. The enemy aircraft broke left, pulled up slightly and dove into the ground. The pilot did not get out. I returned to our airdrome area and was fired at by ground batteries. A lone Me 109 came across the field and I made a pass at him. He broke into me and I fired my remaining few rounds of ammo at 90 deg. deflection and 100 yards range. He hit the deck and I chased him into Germany before returning to our airdrome to give it top cover. Another 109 came by and I followed him through a couple of barrel rolls but could not shoot as I was out of ammo. He went straight up, chopped throttle, tried to get on my tail, couldn't, stalled out, recovered and split s'd at 1,500 feet barely pulling out above the trees. Another P-51 came into the area at this time and shot the enemy aircraft down four miles north-east of the field. I later found out that the pilot of the P-51 was Captain Stewart. All enemy aircraft were very aggressive and the last 109 was absolutely hot. We were all handicapped by full fuselage tanks and ground fire and I feel very proud of our 12-ship squadron that destroyed 23 bandits on take-off, without loss.<sup>57</sup>

Lt. Sanford Moats claimed an impressive four Fw 190s destroyed. Lt. Dean Huston was flying 'Yellow 4' and managed to join 'Yellow 3', Lt. Moats, just after take-off. Huston was about 300 yards astern and above Lt. Moats when an Fw 190 approached Moats from behind. Lt. Moats was

already engaged with another ship and Huston told Moats to break left. Moats did and the Fw 190 followed, but not with enough lead. Lt. Huston broke down and under the Fw 190 coming up in a turn about 100-200 yards behind it, firing about a three second burst. Hits were observed all over the wings and fuselage, with flames resulting immediately. The Fw 190 went into a dive from about 2,000 feet and crashed into the ground. Lt. Huston observed no parachute and claimed one Fw 190 destroyed.

When asked about his memories, he replied: "I was among those who took off from Y-29 only to fly right into the Luftwaffe at the east end of the field. I got one 190 in the mêlée, but the most noteworthy part for me was that I got shot down by our own anti-aircraft fire. On the tail of a 109 at low-level close to the field, I was suddenly hit by gunfire. Looking around I saw nothing on my tail and then I saw my oil pressure reading 'zero.' I wheeled around for an emergency landing since I was so close to base. I touched down and the engine 'froze' on my landing roll, so I pulled off into the grass to clear the runway – talk about a close-call, I was too low to have baled out, but fortunate to be close to the field. All I know is I was one lucky 'hombre' that day. Must have had the right four-leaf clover in my flight suit. Later on that day some of us went over to where one of the German fighters had augured in and the pilot was still in there. I remember thinking that he looked like he was barely out of high school. I will never forget it – nor that day!"<sup>58</sup>

Flying his personal P-51 Mustang HO-W 'Moonbeam McSwine', Capt. William (Bill) Whisner led Red Flight into battle. Capt. Whisner ended the war with 15.5 confirmed aerial victories. Flying F-86 jets over Korea he would add another 5.5 ending up with a total score of 21 confirmed aerial victories<sup>59</sup>. "I was leading Red Flight. As we were taxiing out to the strip I saw some air activity east of the field. The Squadron consisting of three four-ship flights, was taking off singly. As I started down the strip Col. Meyer called the controller and inquired about bandits in the vicinity. As I pulled my wheels up, the controller reported that there were bandits east of the field. We didn't take time to form up, but set course, wide-open, straight for the bandits. There were a few P-47s mixing it up with the bandits as I arrived. I ran into about 30 Fw 190s at 1,500 feet. There were many Me 109s above them. I picked out a 190 and pressed the trigger. Nothing happened. I reached down and turned on my gun switch and gave him a couple of good bursts. As I watched him hit the ground and explode, I felt myself being hit. I broke sharply to the right, and up. A 190 was about 50 yards behind me, firing away. As I was turning with him, another P-51 attacked him and he broke off his attack on me. I then saw that I had several 20 mm holes in each wing, and another hit in my oil tank. My left aileron control was also out. I was losing oil, but my pressure and temperature were steady. Being over friendly territory I could see no reason for landing immediately so turned toward a big dogfight and shortly had another 190 in my sights. After hitting him several times, he attempted to bale out but I gave him a burst as he rose up and he went in with his plane, which exploded and burned. There were several 109s in the vicinity so I engaged one of them. We fought for five or ten minutes and I finally managed to get behind him. I hit him good and the pilot baled out at 200 feet. I clobbered him as he baled out and he tumbled into the ground. At this time, I saw 15 or 20 fires from crashed planes. Bandits were reported strafing the field, so I headed for the strip. I saw a 109 strafe the north-east end of the strip. I snapped after him and he turned into me. We made two head-on passes and on the second I hit him in the nose and wings. He crashed and burned east of the strip. I chased several more bandits but they evaded in the clouds. I had oil on my windshield and canopy so came back to the strip and landed. All of the enemy aircraft were very aggressive and extremely good pilots. I am very happy that we were able to shoot down 23 with a loss of none. We were outnumbered five to one with full fuselage tanks. The P-47's on the field did a fine job and helped us considerably. The co-operation among our fighters was extremely good and we did the job as a team."<sup>60</sup>

Capt. William Whisner claimed two Bf 109s and two Fw 190s destroyed. Lt. Walker Diamond



also shot down a Fw 190, but was not too economic with his ammunition: "I was flying Red Two as Capt. Whisner's wingman. We took off in string and were engaged immediately after take-off. I had not joined Capt. Whisner when he became engaged and I lost him before I could get close enough to stay with him. I got in trail with the first Fw 190 I saw and closed in on him firing. I saw scattered strikes on the fuselage and wing. We were very low and he crashed into some trees just as I overshot him. I got on another 190's tail and fired at him in a turn and level. I saw strikes on the wings but he did not crash. I was out of ammunition and broke away. I claim one Fw 190 destroyed and one Fw 190 damaged."<sup>61</sup>

With hindsight, Lt. Diamond holds a philosophical opinion about the pilot of the Fw 190 which he damaged: "The last one was obviously a very new pilot as he took no evasive action but just kept flying along with me hot on his tail firing wildly unable to get any decisive hits. I was soon out of ammunition in four guns and decided to break off while I still had ammunition in two guns in case I was attacked. Looking back on that day, I have always regretted that I did not pursue the attack in a different manner and score

1./Lt. Nelson R. Jesup of the 352nd FG and his crewchief. This photograph shows them with a P-51B with 'Invasion stripes' in the summer of 1944. (Jesup)



the second kill for the squadron record. But since that's the way it happened and it made no difference in the outcome of the war, I hope that young German pilot that I let get away matured into an asset for a free Germany."<sup>62</sup>

1./Lt. Nelson R. Jesup was flying 'Red 3' in Capt. Whisner's flight. He recalls: "We were sitting in our planes waiting to take off at the time that the enemy aircraft were approaching. We had been held up by a heavy ground fog for quite a while but it started to lift. Col. Meyer called for us to start engines and we were doing so when our control tower began to warn us. I was the eleventh plane to take off and as I went down the steel mat runway and pulled up very sharply, a blue-nosed Me 109 was coming down the runway at me. We flashed by each other probably 50 feet apart. When I got airborne it was total confusion, everyone yelling over the R/T, planes everywhere, our own flak shooting at everything moving in the air and every time I turned towards an enemy aircraft there seemed to be a P-51 on his tail. I finally singled out an Fw 190 off to the side and he took off for Germany. I followed him for a considerable time gaining very little, but he must have decided that he had shaken me and made a slight turn to the left and down. I went to war emergency boost and finally got within range."<sup>63</sup>

Jesup's after action report sums up the last seconds of this Fw 190: "At about 600 yards I fired two bursts from about 10 degrees deflection, but did not hit him. At 400 yards I fired another burst and observed a cluster of strikes in the region of the cockpit. He slowly rolled off to the left and

went down through a hole in the clouds in a spiral and went into the ground. I did not see the pilot get out. After this I climbed up through the clouds again and was attacked by a Typhoon and dove through the clouds and returned to base."<sup>64</sup>

Finally, after the attacking force had left, when the smoke had cleared and "...wounds had been licked", a damage assessment could be made. The arithmetic was easy: a fierce battle had been fought and an incredible victory had been achieved. The operations report of the 366th FG sums up what has become known as 'The Key Block'. Simply by being there at the right time, the 366th FG had caught JG 11 unaware at the initial point of attack. The confusion that followed, allowed the 12 Mustangs of the 487th FS to take off and the 'The Legend of Y-29' was written:

*"09.16 hrs – 10.48 hrs: eight aircraft took off from the 390th FS, led by Capt. Lowell B. Smith.*

*Squadron had just taken off on the mission and were forming over the field when they saw the 50-plus Fw 190s and Me 109s on the deck coming in from the north-east. Full bomb-load (16) and four rockets were jettisoned. Two or three of the enemy aircraft managed to make several individual passes across the field between 50 and 500 ft altitude.*

*Damage by strafing was 1 P-47 Cat A, 1 P-51 Cat AC, 1 C-47 Cat A. Two men were slightly injured and one seriously. Enemy aircraft were taken on in a great dogfight by our planes and P-51s of the 487th Fighter Squadron, 352nd Fighter Group. Claims for the 390th Fighter Squadron are*

1/Lt. Alden P. Rigby, Silver Star recipient, had his New Year's claims reviewed in 2000 and became an ace 55 years later! (Rigby)



*12-2-6, for the 487th Fighter Squadron 21-0-0. AA claims are 4-0-1. Two of our planes are Cat AC from enemy action and 1 destroyed. Pilot baled out three miles north of base and returned. Time of attack was 09.20 to 09.50 hours. Our planes returned at 10.48 hrs.*<sup>165</sup>

One man summarised the action of that morning in a fitting manner: "It was the kind of scene, one would normally see in a movie; so real and yet so sad. After all, those enemy pilots were human beings and they seemingly never had a chance that New Year's Day, 1945."<sup>66</sup>

Or, as another put it: "It could only be described as a panorama. I thought at the time if I only had a movie camera – this is history. We could see German planes going down in all directions. The P-47s were doing barrel rolls over the runway, which they always did after a kill. There was an old bomber hulk at one end of the field that seemed to draw a lot of attention from the Germans. We laughed a lot about that."<sup>67</sup>

The fierce battle in which JG 11 had become embroiled left it few opportunities to actually attack the airfield. Strafing runs had failed to result in damage to the majority of 100-plus potential targets made up of the 352nd and 366th FGs. One P-47 of the 366th FG was reported as Cat A and one P-51 was reported Cat Ac. The C-47 transport attached to the 352nd FG was also reported Cat A and the B-17 hulk, impervious to fire, soaked up most of the enemy bullets. At Y-32 a fuel dump was set ablaze and three Spitfire Mk XIVs of the Punjab Squadron were damaged. According to one source some Dakotas at Ophoven were also damaged.<sup>68</sup> Hardest hit was the resident Belgian squadron with seven aircraft damaged including one 'Cat. B' and one 'Cat. E'. Even if the aerial losses constituted by one P-47 'Cat. E' (pilot safe) and two P-47s 'Cat. Ac' are added to this, the damage was completely disproportionate to the losses suffered. There is no room for argument.

1./Lt Alden P. Rigby: "I have re-lived that day many times over the years since. It had to be a once in a lifetime experience for any involved. We were in the right place at almost the wrong time. One minute, or even 30 seconds later, and the day would have been a total disaster. I would have probably have 'been history' instead of 'writing it'. Being in take-off position on the runway, we would have been the Germans' first targets. My second mission of the day was uneventful except for a rough engine. My landing was a little fast for the still wet runway. My brakes raised the tail wheel several times while trying to slow the bird down. Turning off the steel mat runway was also 'hot' and I came very close to a twin-engined aircraft waiting to take off. I returned a friendly wave and gave them a 'thumbs-up'. I learned a few



minutes later that the two generals on board were Spaatz and Doolittle. They had come to congratulate us on 'the morning action'.<sup>69</sup>

According to some of the men, the generals were grinning from ear to ear as they received reports and stories from the pilots. The 487th FS would have the honour of becoming the first and only squadron ever to be awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation: "A silver twin-engined aircraft circled Y-29 and then landed. A short time later someone yelled "Tench-hut" and who had come to see what had happened that morning, but four Air Force generals. None other than Lt. General Jimmy Doolittle, Lt. General Carl Spaatz, Maj. General Hoyt Vandenberg and General Quesada."<sup>70</sup>

Another Allied aircraft entering the Y-29 circuit was not greeted so heartily. Probably still high on adrenaline from the morning raid, a patrolling Mustang pilot of the 352nd FG intercepted what he thought to be another Luftwaffe aircraft. S/Sgt. Art Snyder who was with the groundcrew of the 328th FS recalls: "The 328th was in the air and from the ground I saw these three planes in the air and of course at first we thought more Jerries, but taking a closer look we realised they were Spitfires and we all said hopefully no one would jump them. However, shortly after that we saw a P-51 line up on one and give it a burst and it blew up. The other two landed. They were Spits flown by Canadians – real sad – and I met the pilot who shot the Spit down. He said there was lots of static on the radio and could not understand any of it. After shooting, he realised immediately that they were friends."<sup>71</sup>

The British aircraft caught fire and went down in a long glide some distance from the field, near the village of Zutendaal. Cyrus Reap also witnessed the tragic event: "Four Typhoons apparently were approaching the field and one of

Pilots of the 487th FS talk over the 'big day' in front of their tents. Note the 'G-Pants'. (Rigby)



Ofw. Xavier Giese of 10./JG 11. Although it is known that Ofw. Giese crashed west of Opglabbeek, his grave location was never located and he is still recorded as MIA. (Boenigk)



Lt. Alwin Doppler, Staffelführer and one of the 'old hares' of 2./JG 11. In 1942 he had joined 8./JG 1 which was renamed 2./JG 11 in April 1943. During more than two years of operations, he claimed 32 four-engined bombers, two B-26s and two fighters. On June 13th 1944, he was awarded the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold and he was also put forward for the Ritterkreuz. (Kröll)



Fj. Uffz. Günther Hoffmann of Stab II./JG 11. He is still reported MIA from January 1st. (Hoffmann)



Fw. Herbert Kraschinski of 7./JG 11. (Kraschinski)

our pilots shot down one of them, apparently thinking he was coming in to attack the field as an additional attack following the morning one. The Brits were hopping mad about this incident and the pilot responsible was quickly returned to London and then the States."

Cyrus' identification was correct. The aircraft approaching the Y-29 circuit were Hawker Typhoons of No. 183 Squadron and they were on their way from their base at Gilze-Rijen to their new home at Chièvres. The unfortunate victim of 'friendly fire' was F/Lt. Don Webber, whose loss was deeply felt by the Squadron.

### Tragedy for Jagdgeschwader 11

Jagdgeschwader 11 had suffered a terrible blow. Twenty-four Fw 190s and Bf 109s were lost over enemy-held territory, of which only four pilots were taken POW. Several other pilots barely succeeded in reaching the front line and had to belly-land or abandon their aircraft. Only a few returned to their base. The hardest loss for JG 11 was that of Maj. Günther Specht. Specht had been Kommodore of JG 11 since May 1944 and was regarded as one of the most able unit leaders in the West. He had gained 34 victories of which 17 were four-engined bombers. In April 1944 he had received the Ritterkreuz. Furthermore, Specht's wingman, Uffz. Sophus Schmidt did not return. Both men are still listed as missing in action and no trace of these men or their aircraft have been found.

I./JG 11, which had participated only in limited numbers, suffered two pilots missing in action and a damaged Fw 190 which made a belly-landing. Fhr. Heinrich Wiethoff of 3./JG 11 did not return and is still listed as MIA, although his aircraft 'White 10' was found by Allied forces near Opglabbeek, north of Asch.<sup>72</sup> More sorely felt however was the loss of Staffelführer Lt. Alwin Doppler. Lt. Doppler had been flying with JG 1 and JG 11 since the beginning of 1942 and had accumulated more than 30 victories, comprised almost entirely of Eighth Air Force bombers! Doppler was also listed as missing and his fate was solved only in July 1996. Researching the Luftwaffe casualties for this book, we discovered that the original grave of a Fw. Karl Hahn of II./JG 1 was located at Opoeteren, just a few kilometres north-east of Asch. However, it is known from Allied documents that Fw. Hahn crashed at St. Denis-Westrem airfield, more than 140 kilometres to the west of Asch!<sup>73</sup> Searching for more detailed information, the authors found Fw. Karl Hahn's initial burial report in which it is mentioned that the pilot found at Opoeteren had carried Erkennungsmarke B65159/6. Apparently there had been a confusion during the identification of this pilot after the war, as this was the EM of Lt. Alwin Doppler! In fact, Fw. Karl Hahn had carried the EM B65159/5. The

German War Graves Committee was presented the evidence with the accompanying documents in early 1996 and the fate of Lt. Alwin Doppler was finally solved.<sup>74</sup> After more than 50 years Lt. Doppler's sister, aged 85, finally heard what had really happened to her brother.

Beside the two losses on the approach flight to Asch, II./JG 11 lost an additional six aircraft over Allied territory. Fj. Uffz. Günther Hoffmann of Stab II./JG 11 was reported as missing and no trace of him has ever been found. Fw. Harald Schwartz of 7./JG 11 was also killed. According to former pilots of II./JG 11 Fw. Schwartz tried to evade some light AA during which he struck some tree-tops and crashed.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately his crash-site is unknown, although his body was recovered.<sup>76</sup> In addition to Oblt. August Engel, whose loss already has been detailed, 8./JG 11 also lost one of its most experienced Schwarmführer, Ofw. Franz Meindl. He had been a long-serving member of 7./JG 51 on the Eastern Front, before joining II./JG 11 in July 1944. He was awarded the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold in September 1944.<sup>77</sup> It is more than likely that he was the Bf 109 pilot who impressed the US pilots over Asch with his daring manoeuvres. No trace of Ofw. Franz Meindl's remains has ever been found. Two further losses occurred on the return flight. Fw. Peter Reschke of 6. Staffel was shot down in the vicinity of Aachen where his remains were recovered by US forces.<sup>78</sup> Fw. Herbert Kraschinski of 7./JG 11 was shot down south of Eupen where his Bf 109 G-14/AS was inspected by Allied troops.<sup>79</sup> Although some sources say that Fw. Kraschinski managed to bale out of his Gustav and died of wounds on January 5th,<sup>80</sup> his burial report clearly indicates that he must have been killed instantly in the crash.<sup>81</sup> Finally, at least four additional Bf 109s were damaged, but were able to reach the German lines.<sup>82</sup> A few pilots succeeded in getting back to Zellhausen, such as Lt. Hermann Wolf, Staffelführer of 8./JG 11, whose Bf 109 had also received minor AA damage during strafing.<sup>83</sup> Most pilots however landed on other fields, like Lt. Füreder at Bonn and Lt. Köhne at Breitscheid.

The Gruppe had almost lost its Lotse. The Ju 88 was hit by AA, but returned safely to Zellhausen in spite of a severely damaged elevator!<sup>84</sup>

III. Gruppe losses were even worse, with 12 Fw 190s lost over enemy-held territory! Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong was seen to be shot down by two Thunderbolts over Asch. Uffz. Armin Mehling flew as Rottenführer with Hptm. von Fassong. Mehling had joined JG 11 in June 1944 from JG 51 and as Hptm. von Fassong had also previously belonged to JG 51, he asked Uffz. Mehling to join his Stabsschwarm. Mehling remembers the encounter with the Thunderbolts



## DOGFIGHT OVER ASCH



Ofw. Franz Meindl in front of his Fw 190 during his time with 7./JG 51 in the winter of 1943-1944. He received the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold in September 1944. On January 1st he flew with 8./JG 11 and is posted MIA since that day. (Dolzer)



Uffz. Max Milkreiter of 12./JG 11 was last seen in the area north of Maastricht and is one of the many missing pilots from III./JG 11. (Gill)



Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong, Kommandeur of III./JG 11 was seen to be shot down by two P-47s in the Opglabbeek area. He is listed as MIA. (Klair).

vividly: "Our Gruppe was completely surprised by the Thunderbolts. We flew at a height of 15 metres and the P-47s at 300 metres and they dived upon us. When we saw the P-47s, Hptm. von Fassong and I tried to pull up but we were followed closely by six Thunderbolts. Hptm. von Fassong's aircraft was hit and burned immediately. From 15 to 20 metres the Focke-Wulf hit the ground and cartwheeled in one big ball of flames. There was no escape for Hptm. von Fassong. I also received numerous hits and one bullet went through the armoured plate behind my head and

through the front windshield. A bolt in my seat was loose and consequently I sat very deep in the cockpit, hardly able to look over the edge of the cockpit. This saved my life."<sup>85</sup>

Hptm. von Fassong crashed in flames near Opglabbeek.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately his grave location has never been established and today he is listed as MIA. Uffz. Armin Mehling immediately tried to return to friendly territory. Heading east, he was followed by three Mustangs but as soon as he passed the German lines they turned away. He arrived at Gross-Ostheim where he was greeted by red light signals. Apparently one of his mainwheels failed to lower and he crash-landed on the airfield.<sup>87</sup>



Maj. Günther Vowinkel of Stab III./JG 11. This former Zerstörer and Nachtjagd pilot volunteered for Reich Defence duties in September 1944. He joined Stab III./JG 11 on November 3rd 1944. (Vowinkel)



Gefr. Gerhard Böhm of 9./JG 11. (Hallenscheid)

Beside Oblt. Fiedler, Stab III./JG 11 also lost Maj. Günther Vowinkel who is listed as missing and Lt. Gerhard Neumann, who made a belly-landing in his burning aircraft on German-held territory and was seriously injured. After two months he returned to I./JG 11.<sup>88</sup> The other I./JG 11 volunteer, Ogfr. Karl-Heinz Sistenich also failed to return.<sup>89</sup> Gefr. Gerhard Böhm of 9./JG 11 is also missing, although some sources say he was the Fw 190 pilot shot down by Lt. Col. Meyer during take-off. No definite proof has been found although there is no doubt about the incident. Staffelkamerad Uffz. Kurt Nüssle was also reported

### JG 11 aerial victory claims over Asch:

P-51	Uffz. Karl Krentz	Stab JG 11	Asch area
P-51	Fj. Ofw. Alfred Neuberger	Stab JG 11	Asch area
P-51	Ofw. Frank	4./JG 11	Asch area
P-51	Lt. Heinz Hackstein	5./JG 11	Asch area
P-47	Lt. Walter Köhne	6./JG 11	Asch area
P-47	Lt. Oskar Wimmers	6./JG 11	Asch area
P-47	Fhr. Theo Nau	7./JG 11	Asch area
Typhoon	Lt. Richard Franz	7./JG 11	Aachen area
P-47 probable	Fw. Alois Job	10./JG 11	Asch area
P-47	Fw. Alois Job	10./JG 11	Asch area
Single engined	Fw. Alois Job	10./JG 11	N. of Maastricht



Uffz. Kurt Nüssle of 9./JG 11. Although the remains of this pilot were found in 1985 it took until 1995 before his fate was finally solved. (Nüssle)

Fhr Theo Nau of 7./JG 11. On January 1st 1945, he claimed a P-47 over Asch as his second victory. (Nau)



missing and his fate was finally solved in 1995, although his remains and Erkennungsmarke had already been located near Asch in November 1983. 10./JG 11 lost three pilots, Uffz. Ernst Noreisch, Uffz. Walter Gattner and Ofw. Xaver Giese. Uffz. Noreisch was found in the wreckage of his Focke-Wulf near Maastricht.<sup>90</sup> The other two are still listed as missing, although it is known that Giese's aircraft crashed west of Opglabbeek.<sup>91</sup> Ofw. Robert Spreckels of 11. Staffel managed to belly-land near Aachen and survived with minor injuries.<sup>92</sup> Finally 12. Staffel lost an additional three pilots beside Uffz. Barion. Ofw. Karl Hiller was able to crash-land his Focke-Wulf after he was hit by a P-47 and a P-51. He sustained severe facial burns and was taken POW.<sup>93</sup> Uffz. Max Milkreiter is still listed as missing and his loss can be best described by the words of Oblt. Paul-Heinrich Dähne, his Schwarmführer on January 1st: "On the first of January we started at 08.20 hrs for a large-scale attack on enemy held airfields in Belgium. At 09.20 hrs we engaged many enemy fighters which had just taken off. The dogfight was very hard and unforgiving. Several enemy fighters were shot down. However, several of our own were also shot down. In this battle he lost contact with me as his flight leader. Also, the enemy Flak was very intense, so I believe he must have been shot down by either fighters or Flak. I, for myself, was just able to reach friendly territory with a badly battered aircraft."<sup>94</sup>

The pilots of JG 11 claimed several aerial victories over Asch (see table left).

From the US Fighter Group losses it is known that these claims were excessive, but in the chaos of the dogfight over Asch this can easily be understood. Walter Köhne, the former Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 11, remembers his victory over Asch clearly: "Over the airfield the P-47 pulled up to 500-600 metres. I could not get my fire in front of him and my fire fell short every time. Compared with the P-47, I had not enough power to overtake him. I had only a few shots left when the Thunderbolt suddenly made a turn to the right and I was able to hit him in the right wingroot. Slowly the wing starts to burn and becomes a trail of fire. Until the turn he had done everything right. Now the Thunderbolt makes a wide turn and disappears in a pine forest. I did not see the pilot, but he could have baled out. After the dogfight I headed east and tried to make it to the German lines. I feared I had not enough fuel so I flew with reduced power. At 10.20 hrs I landed at Breitscheid. When I returned to Zellhausen later, Lt. Wimmers told me that he thought that the P-47 would never go down. He had already filed my claim."<sup>95</sup>

His victory was probably the P-47 of F/O David Johnson who baled out just north of the airfield. Fhr. Theo Nau was also awarded a P-47 Abschuss. He remembers seeing hits on the P-47, which he attacked together with his Rottenführer,



Lt. Richard Franz, Staffelführer of 7/JG 11, in front of a Bf 109 at Wunstorf in August 1944. (Nau/Franz)

but did not see the Thunderbolt go down.<sup>96</sup> Other known 'losses' of the 366th FG were 1./Lt. John Feeney, who belly-landed his stricken P-47 on Asch airfield after being hit by enemy fighters in engine, propeller and left wing and 2./Lt. John Kennedy, who was able to land his stricken Thunderbolt on Asch. His aircraft had suffered severe damage in the tail and right wing. As recounted, Capt. William Whisner's Mustang was damaged by enemy fighters, but was also able to land at Asch.

Little information is known about the claims made by JG 11 as a result of strafing both Y-29 and Y-32. According to one German document, claims were made of 13 single-engined aircraft, one two-engined and one four-engined aircraft destroyed, and five single-engined damaged on 'Glabbeek' airfield,<sup>97</sup> in reality Ophoven.

Remarkable is the high number of fatalities and, especially, the high number of pilots posted missing. Today 12 pilots remain MIA. Some explanation is provided by the following statements of men who 'were there':

"I recall some instances taking place in the afternoon of 1 January. I drove a jeep carrying Army Graves Registration personnel looking for bodies of German pilots. I have a clear recollection of locating a crashed German aircraft a few miles east of Y-29. The pilot's body was thrown clear of the wreckage and pieces of his body such as both legs were severed. It was a gruesome sight and I was glad it was not my job to locate bodies for identification and burial."<sup>98</sup>

In some cases, crash impact was so great that it proved impossible to find sufficient remains to identify a pilot. Also, the wrecks were quite often completely burned out.

"A number of the troops that hadn't been flying were given the task of scouring the area around the field in the hopes of finding the bodies (or pieces) of Germans for identification and

Left: Gun camera footage taken from the Bf 109 of Lt. Walter Köhne, Staffelführer of 6/JG 11 showing the demise of F/O David Johnson's P-47 of the 366th FG. Köhne recalled: "I had only a few shots left when the Thunderbolt suddenly made a turn to the right and I was able to hit him in the right wingroot. Slowly the wing starts to burn and becomes a trail of fire." Johnson stepped out of his downed aircraft, borrowed a bicycle and rode back to base! (Köhne/Roba)



2/Lt. Jack Kennedy of the 366th FG was able to land his stricken P-47 at Asch. His aircraft had suffered severe damage in the tail and right wing. (Kennedy)



subsequent notification of the proper authorities. This was a gruesome task in that mangled bodies were in the crashed planes or body parts scattered in the near vicinity. We were given bags and told to pick-up anything, uniforms or body parts that could be returned to the Germans for subsequent identification. As I recall, one of the people in my group found the sleeve of a German pilot with the severed arm still inside. We looked all over the immediate area but were unable to find any additional body parts or uniform."<sup>99</sup>

Cyrus Reap was a Maintenance Officer with the 352nd FG. He too has an explanation for the high number of MIA's in the area: "One or two of the German planes crashed on nearby Belgian farms and before we could get to them the Belgians had stripped the German pilots of their gear. The Army was in charge of checking out these crashes, so we didn't get to see much of this up close."<sup>100</sup>

In cases where souvenir-hunters had 'liberated' insignia, wallets, papers and personal belongings, identification would have been very difficult. It

should be mentioned that the grave locations of at least six unknown pilots who were killed in the Asch area have been found at the German Military Cemeteries of Lommel in Belgium and Ysselsteyn in the Netherlands. However, few details are known and shortening the list of MIAs by means of re-identification will be a colossal task, if not impossible.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> This British fighter strip is not connected with the other Ophoven which is about 50 kilometres due north north-east of Asch. This village, near Maaseik, has often been confused with the other Ophoven near Oplabbek.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Henry M. Stewart via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with unidentified 352nd FG pilot through Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>4</sup> John D. Stearns via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>5</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Teil III, by Jochen Prien and Peter Rodeike.

<sup>6</sup> Meldung III./Schlachtgeschwader 4 betr. Auffüllung des E-Kdos auf 30 Flugzeuge, RL10/464 Seite K10858.

<sup>7</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Teil III, by Jochen Prien and Peter Rodeike, RL2-III-1170/1171 and Namendliche Verlustmeldungen.

<sup>8</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Prien/Rodeike, page 1409.

<sup>9</sup> ULTRA-Reports 56-BT-761, 56-BT-847.

<sup>10</sup> Letter Oblt. Erich Hondt, dated 29.12.1944.

<sup>11</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-847.

<sup>12</sup> Namendliche Verlustmeldung is marked with III./JG 11 and RL2-III-1172/51 lists Ogr. Sistenich as a member of III./JG 11. Flying "gelbe 6" indicates 11. Staffel.

<sup>13</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Prien/Rodeike, page 1399, gives the location of the school building as Klein-Krozenburg, a village north of Zellhausen. However, several sources say the school building was in Zellhausen itself and this was confirmed by Theo Nau in letter, dated 1.5.1999.

<sup>14</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 132/1945, point 1.

<sup>15</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 131/1945, point 1 and 2.

<sup>16</sup> This belly-landing was recorded in the diary of the 113th Cavalry Group.

<sup>17</sup> I./Lt. Donald G. Holt claimed a Bf 109 destroyed south-east of Malmédy. The pilot baled out. I./Lt. John F. Bathurst claimed a Bf 109 destroyed south-west of Malmédy. Both Messerschmitts probably belonged to JG 4, but cannot be identified.

<sup>18</sup> Info Armin Mehling, pilot in Stab III./JG 11, dated 8.5.1999.

<sup>19</sup> According to pilot's log of Uffz. Ludwig Bertram, I./JG 11, take-off was at 08.08 hrs.

<sup>20</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-847.

<sup>21</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-847 and Flugbuch Lt. Walter Köhne, 6./JG 11.

<sup>22</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 132/1945, point 2.

<sup>23</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 131/1945, point 5.

<sup>24</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-847.

<sup>25</sup> Take-off was at 08.18 hrs according to Fw. Alois Job's pilot's log of 10./JG 11 and according to a letter by Oblt. Dähne to Uffz. Milkreiter's father III. Gruppe took off at 08.20 hrs.

<sup>26</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 131/1945, point 8.

<sup>27</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 132/1945, point 2, and info Walter Köhne, dated 7.1.2000.

<sup>28</sup> Verlustmeldung Uffz. Hermann Barion, 12./JG 11.

<sup>29</sup> Information from Herbert Huss, dated 1994, and correspondence with widow 6.7.1997.

<sup>30</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 133/1945.

<sup>31</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Prien/Rodeike, page 1411.

<sup>32</sup> In a letter of Hfw. Sepp Brenauer of 19.3.1945 to the father of Uffz.

Milkreiter it was stated that the formation of III./JG 11 attacked Asch from the north. Confirmed by Armin Mehling on 8.5.1999.

<sup>33</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Prien/Rodeike, page 1411, based on the information of Uffz. Heinz Ziemer, pilot in 11./JG 11. Also Oblt. Ulrich Bolm, Staffelführer of 4./JG 11, wrote to Lt. Doppler's relatives and informed them of the fact that visibility was poor and the formation broke up over the target. Confirmed by Armin Mehling on 8.5.1999.

<sup>34</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2794 Squadron and No. 3206 Servicing Commando.

<sup>35</sup> Correspondence with E.J. Pritchard.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence with F. Ollett.

<sup>37</sup> Operations Record Book No. 130 (Punjab) Squadron.

<sup>38</sup> Based on 'Start im Morgengrauen' by Werner Girbig; section translated in 'To win the winter sky' by Danny Parker. In both books the enemy aircraft on the ground are listed as Thunderbolts, but the detailed description about the destroyed aircraft on the ground and the fire, prove that the airfield attacked by Lt. Frieder was in fact Ophoven, the black smoke coming from the fuel dump which was set on fire. Further info provided by Georg Frieder in letter dated 18.5.1999 confirmed this.

<sup>39</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2794 and 2876 Squadron.

<sup>40</sup> Correspondence with F/Lt. Anthony Gaze.

<sup>41</sup> 390th Fighter Squadron History, Film AO793.

<sup>42</sup> Angels Zero - Memoirs of R.V. Brulle; 1986.

<sup>43</sup> Correspondence with Sandy Ross.

<sup>44</sup> Report of Burial 1-2-41, US Cemetery Margraten, and copy of Ausweis Nr. 210 of Oblt. August Engel.

<sup>45</sup> Encounter Report Capt. Lowell B. Smith.

<sup>46</sup> Encounter Report F/O David C. Johnson.

<sup>47</sup> Correspondence Jack Kennedy with Robert Brulle.

<sup>48</sup> Ace! Autobiography Fighter Pilot WW II by Melvyn Paisley with Vicki Paisley, Branden, Boston 1992.

<sup>49</sup> John D. Stearns via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>50</sup> John D. Stearns via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>51</sup> James G. Cartee via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>52</sup> Memoirs (unpublished) of Alden P. Rigby.

<sup>53</sup> Dick Gates via Robert H. Powell.

<sup>54</sup> Encounter Report 1./Lt. Raymond H. Littge.

<sup>55</sup> Encounter Report Maj. William T. Halton.

<sup>56</sup> Encounter Report Capt. Henry M. Stewart II.

<sup>57</sup> Encounter Report 1st Lt. Sanford K. Moats.

<sup>58</sup> Transcript from interview with Dean Huston, through Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>59</sup> He sadly lost his life on July 21, 1989 after an allergic reaction to a wasp/yellow jacket sting.

<sup>60</sup> Encounter Report Capt. William T. Whisner.

<sup>61</sup> Encounter Report 1./Lt. Walker G. Diamond.

<sup>62</sup> Walker "Jack" Diamond via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>63</sup> Correspondence with Nelson R. Jesup.

<sup>64</sup> Encounter Report 1./Lt. Nelson R. Jesup.

<sup>65</sup> Operations Report 1.1.45 366th FG.

<sup>66</sup> Keith Akard 352nd FG via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>67</sup> Clarence Cameron via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>68</sup> 'To Win the Winter Sky' by Danny Parker, page 391.

<sup>69</sup> Memoirs (unpublished) of Alden P. Rigby.

<sup>70</sup> Dick Gates via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>71</sup> Art Snyder via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>72</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264/1945.

<sup>73</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 117B/1945.

<sup>74</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle Berlin dated 01.08.1996.

<sup>75</sup> Letter Theo Nau, dated 14.04.1999.

<sup>76</sup> US Cemetery Henri-Chapelle, Report of Burial Y-10-194.

<sup>77</sup> Info Zentralnachweisstelle Aachen and info of sister 7.12.1994.

<sup>78</sup> US Cemetery Margraten, Report of Burial G-10-243.

<sup>79</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265/1945.

<sup>80</sup> Jagdgeschwader 1 und 11, Prien/Rodeike, page 1413.

<sup>81</sup> US Cemetery Henri-Chapelle, Report of Burial T-5-82.

<sup>82</sup> RL2-III-852.

<sup>83</sup> Letter Hermann Wolf, dated 6.11.1995.

<sup>84</sup> Letter Theo Nau, dated 14.4.1999.

<sup>85</sup> Info Armin Mehling, dated 8.5.1999.

<sup>86</sup> Namendliche Verlustmeldung and RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264/1945.

<sup>87</sup> Info Armin Mehling, dated 8.5.1999.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Lt. Neumann's son dated 22.1.1998. Lt. Gerhard Neumann was reported missing again in April 1945 and never returned.

<sup>89</sup> Apparently Ogr. Sistenich's remains were found by Allied troops, but his grave could not be identified.

<sup>90</sup> US Cemetery Margraten, Report of Burial G-11-271.

<sup>91</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 266/1945.

<sup>92</sup> Scramble by Bob Braham, page 12.

<sup>93</sup> According to A.D.I.(K) Report No. 149/1945 this occurred by a Spitfire in the Eindhoven area, but this is not likely to be true.

<sup>94</sup> Letter Oblt. Dähne, 10.1.1945.

<sup>95</sup> Info Walter Köhne, dated 7.1.2000.

<sup>96</sup> Letter Theo Nau, dated 14.4.1999.

<sup>97</sup> RL2-II/855, Angriffe auf britische und amerikanische Flugplätze.

<sup>98</sup> Richard J. DeBruin via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>99</sup> Chet Harker via Robert H. Powell Jr.

<sup>100</sup> Transcript from interview with Cyrus Reap, through Robert H. Powell.

# Brussels revisited

**Jagdgeschwader 26 and  
III./Jagdgeschwader 54 strike at Evere and  
Grimbergen**

Obstlt. Josef Priller,  
Kommodore of JG 26, in  
the cockpit  
of a Fw 190 D-9 at  
Nordhorn airfield in late  
1944/early  
1945. (Mittag)

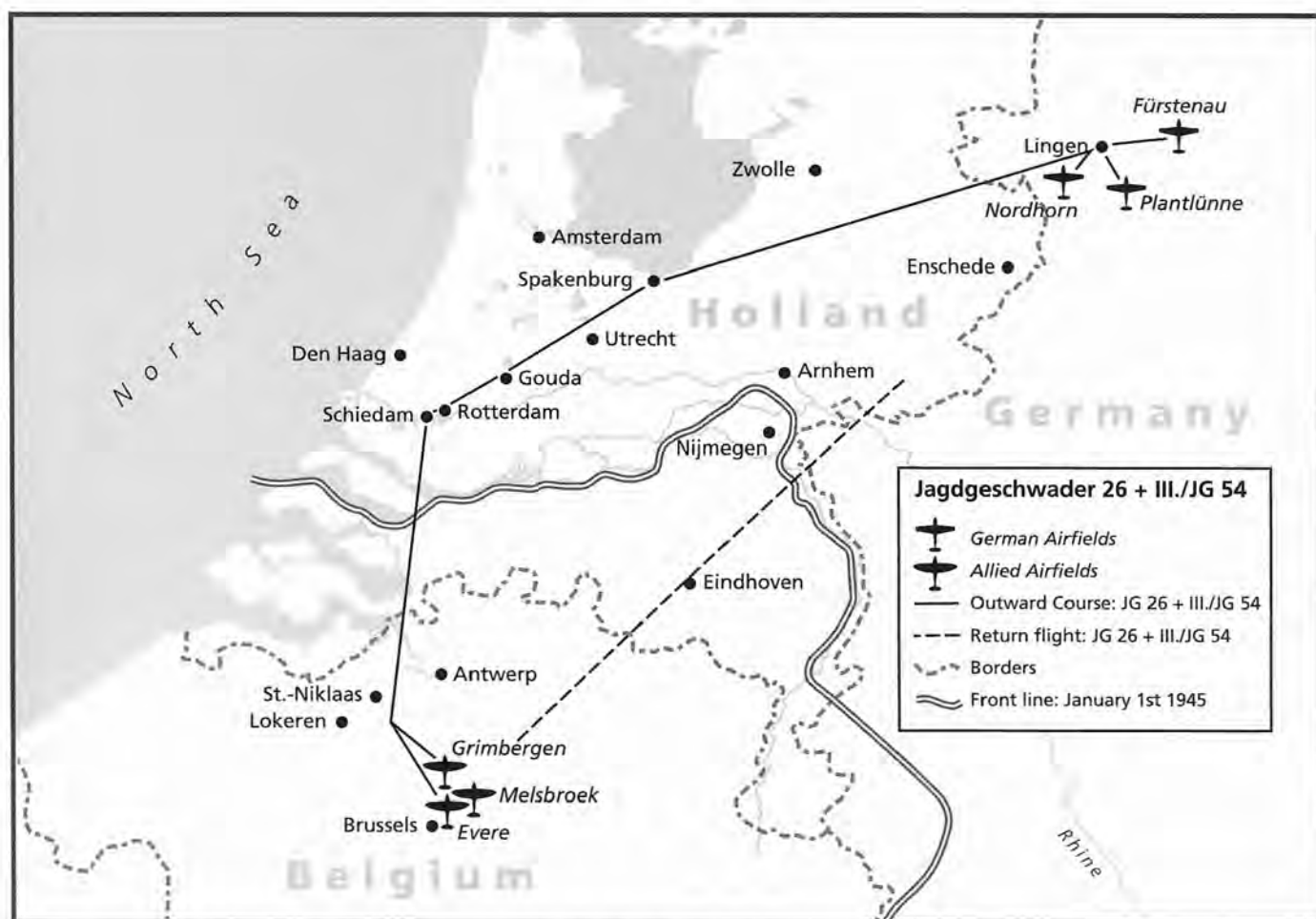
Jagdgeschwader 26 'Schlageter' was without doubt one of the best known Jagdgeschwader of the war. Having fought in every major battle on the Western Front, the unit had very experienced fighter pilots in its ranks and was even respected by its adversaries.



**S**INCE January 1943 JG 26 had been commanded by Obstlt. Josef Priller, one of the most successful Luftwaffe pilots in the West with 101 victories. He was still in command when the Gruppen of JG 26 flew their missions from north-west Germany in the last months of 1944.

On November 24th, Stab and I./JG 26 had moved from Greven, a grass airfield north-east of the town of Greven near Münster, to Fürstenau airfield. Both units stayed there until March 1945. I. Gruppe was commanded by Major Karl Borris. This 28-year old pilot had been in charge of the Gruppe since the summer of 1943 and was one of the most able formation leaders in the West. At Fürstenau the Gruppe finally received the long-awaited Fw 190 D-9s. Sixty-three such machines were delivered to the Gruppe in the second half of December. The first mission with the new type was flown on December 24th. The Gruppe flew





about 12 missions in support of the Ardennes offensive in which it lost at least 17 pilots; eight were killed, five wounded and four ended up as POW's. Twelve claims were submitted in the same period. By the end of the month the Gruppe had a strength of 49 Fw 190 D-9s and three Fw 190 A-8s.<sup>2</sup>

By mid-November 1944, II./JG 26 had transferred from Kirchhellen to Reinshen, some 18 kilometres north of Soltau. The Gruppe was given some time for training flights and was to re-equip again. Here the unit would also receive 55 new Fw 190 D-9s to replace the old A-8s and A-9s. These were handed over to other units.<sup>3</sup> Since the beginning of October II. Gruppe was led by the highly experienced Maj. Anton 'Toni' Hackl. Credited at that time with 166 victories, he was considered one of the best pilots of the Luftwaffe. On December 17th the unit returned to operations and transferred to Klausheide airfield, a few kilometres east of Nordhorn.<sup>4</sup> During the last two weeks of December, II./JG 26 was involved in the continuous battles over the Western Front. Missions were flown on eight days in which 17 victories were claimed. Six pilots of II./JG 26 were killed and three more were wounded. At least nine Doras were lost in combat. At the end of December, II./JG 26 reported a strength of 39 Fw 190 D-9s.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of October 1944, III./JG 26 had moved to Plantlünne, a fairly large grass airfield some 15 kilometres south-east of Lingen. The Gruppe was to stay there until mid-March 1945. Since September 1944 the Gruppe had been commanded by Hptm. Walter Krupinski, a veteran of the Eastern Front. Several missions were flown in the period December 16th-31st, but hardly any successes were achieved. The Gruppe lost three pilots killed, 13 Messerschmitts were lost due to enemy action. By the end of the month III./JG 26 reported a strength of 45 Bf 109s, 29 of these of the K-4 subtype.

III./JG 54 had been the first unit of the Luftwaffe to re-equip with the new Fw 190 D-9. It had received its first Doras in September 1944, but the unit did not return to operations as an entity until December 25th. On that day, all Staffeln were united at Varrelbusch airfield, some seven kilometres north of Cloppenburg. Since August, III./JG 54 was commanded by Hptm. Robert 'Bazi' Weiß, a highly experienced pilot with 121 victories. On December 27th the first mission was flown from Varrelbusch. The results were poor; in a combat with Tempests of No. 486 Squadron, III./JG 54 lost five Fw 190 D-9s for one Tempest. The next mission on December 29th was to be catastrophic for the Gruppe. Guided by



Maj. Karl Boris,  
Gruppenkommandeur of  
I./JG 26 who led the  
combined attack by I./JG  
26 and III./JG 54 on  
Grimbergen. (Urbanke)

ground control, III./JG 54 flew a fighter sweep in the Münster-Rheine area and found itself in numerous dogfights with fighters from the 2nd TAF. The results were devastating; 13 pilots were killed and two wounded. Seventeen Fw 190 D-9s were destroyed. Only eight Allied fighters were claimed shot down. Worse, one of the killed was Kommandeur Hptm. Robert Weiß. In only two days one third of the newly-equipped III./JG 54's aircraft were lost. This day would be remembered by the surviving pilots as 'Black Friday'.<sup>6</sup> One more mission was flown on the 31st and again a Focke-Wulf was lost. On the last day of December III./JG 54 reported a strength of 49 Fw 190 D-9s.

### Initial preparations for the attack

Whether Priller and his Gruppenkommandeure attended Gen.Maj. Peltz's briefing at Flammersfeld on December 5th is unknown, but it seems that at least Priller would have attended the II. Jagdkorps meeting. It can be assumed that he informed his Kommandeure on his return, if they had not attended the briefing themselves.

A day earlier, on December 4th, a telegram had arrived at the headquarters of II./NJG 6 at Schwäbisch-Hall with an order to prepare 20 crews for immediate transfer to other airfields for a special assignment with day fighters.<sup>7</sup> During the following days some 18 crews of II./NJG 6 departed Schwäbisch-Hall and headed for airfields in the Westfalen area. Six of the unit's Ju 88 G-6s were detailed to the three Gruppen of JG 26. Ofw. Helmut Bunje and Lt. Lothar Hemmerich were the pilots of the two crews that were posted to II./JG 26 at Reinsehlen.<sup>8</sup> Helmut Bunje remembers: "We were sent from Schwäbisch-Hall to Reinsehlen on the 15th or 16th of December. Shortly after landing we reported to the JG 26 Kommodore: Oberstleutnant Josef Priller. The Gruppenkommandeur, Major Anton Hackl was also there. Both were aces with Oak Leaves and Swords. The Kommodore's quarters were in a barracks and not larger than six square metres. As a result we were sitting about one or two metres away from both gentlemen. I had never seen that sort of decoration so close. Priller had a note in his hand and read from it that I was to be the leading Lotse and Lt. Hemmerich, the spare. This probably had something to do with my broader flying experiences, as I had been a flight instructor for several years."<sup>9</sup>

A few days later II./JG 26 moved to Nordhorn-Klausheide and on this transfer flight, the two Junkers were to act as Lotsen, Ofw. Bunje as lead and Lt. Hemmerich as spare.<sup>10</sup> Lothar Hemmerich remembers: "As far as Reinsehlen is concerned, my memories are bleak. I only remember that next day or some days later the Jagdgeschwader was to transfer to Nordhorn-

Klausheide. My comrade Helmut Bunje and I were to precede the formation with our Ju 88s as so-called 'Lotsen'. I still remember that the day fighters took off with their Fw 190s in complete disorder compared to our take-offs. On take-off one of these Fw 190s crossed the runway while I was taking off. Within minutes two fighters had collided in mid-air and one of the pilots had parachuted out. When landing, I decided to wait for all the others to land first."<sup>11</sup>

Nothing further is known about a fatality during the transfer from Reinsehlen to Nordhorn-Klausheide. According to the logbooks of several pilots, the Gruppe transferred on December 17th to Klausheide.<sup>12</sup> The other Gruppen of JG 26 also received their Ju 88 Lotsen. The Lotse for I./JG 26 probably arrived before December 13th, as on that date a training mission was flown with this Ju 88 and eight Fw 190s. The Ju 88 had been attached to the Gruppe as 'zur Verfügung'.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately no details are known about the aircraft detailed to I./JG 26, but it is assumed that these must have arrived well before Christmas too. III./JG 26 at Plantlünne welcomed their nightfighter pilots around the same time. Fw. Erich Heider of 5./NJG 6 and an unidentified Oberfähnrich<sup>14</sup> were detailed to act as Lotsen for the Gruppe.<sup>15</sup>

Some JG 26 pilots seem to have been informed at an early stage about the coming attack on the airfields. At least with III./JG 26 in Plantlünne, a sand model was used to instruct the pilots. Ofw. Willi Zester, one of the old hares of 9. Staffel remembers: "Early December a scale model of an airfield was built at the mess. Everything was in it: buildings, hangars, taxiways, fuel stations, runways, AA positions, bushes etc. Even more exciting; we knew the airfield but we simply could not recall the name. Several times a week we had simulation games with the scale model. When we saw the scale model our mouths yawned from boredom. If that was not enough, two Ju 88s with crews landed to teach us some blind-flying techniques. Fortunately, they stuck to theory only for our old Me 109 with wing-mounted guns, 3 cm cannon in the propeller hub and auxiliary drop tanks were hanging in the air like ripe prunes anyway. The only thing missing was blind-flying training with the scale model! Somewhere around Christmas one of ours saw the light; the scale model was a replica of Brussels-Evere airfield. Our Gruppe had stayed there on our glorious retreat. The Kommandeur denied this of course, but we were right."<sup>16</sup>

Strangely the pilots of II./JG 26, who would be detailed to attack the same target, were not informed about the mission until New Year's Eve. The target itself was not disclosed until the briefing at the early morning of January 1st. No explanation could be found as to why pilots of



III./JG 26 were briefed so much earlier; perhaps the Gruppenkommandeure had some freedom in preparing their pilots. The pilots of I./JG 26 were not briefed before December 31st, but in contrast with the pilots of II. Gruppe, they received a thorough briefing that afternoon.

### December 31st – final preparations

At 14.30 hrs on December 31st I./JG 26 was ordered to immediately refrain from further operations that day. Five minutes later the reason became clear; the code words 'Varus' and 'Teutonicus' were given.<sup>17</sup> The same orders were probably given to the other Gruppen. The groundcrew were now very busy. As many aircraft were to be made operational as possible and to be equipped with auxiliary fuel tanks. The men of I./JG 26 worked feverishly to get all the Doras ready for this important mission.<sup>18</sup>

Around 15.20 hrs, the somewhat surprised pilots of I./JG 26 at Fürstenau witnessed the unexpected arrival of 20 more Fw 190 D-9s. These belonged to III./JG 54, stationed at Varrelbusch, some 50 kilometres further north. On December 31st, III./JG 54 had flown a mission in the Limburg area. The 30 Fw 190 D-9s, led by Oblt. Hans Dortenmann, who had replaced Htpm. Weiss as acting CO, had encountered very bad weather and after a short encounter with some Mustangs, the pilots had tried to return to Varrelbusch. The larger element of the Gruppe landed at Achmer, while others returned to Varrelbusch or landed at other airfields. Shortly after landing at Achmer, the pilots were ordered to fly to Fürstenau, home of I./JG 26. The pilots

were puzzled. However, no further time was wasted and after the aircraft were refuelled more than 20 Fw 190 D-9s took off heading for Fürstenau. The weather was very bad and they arrived shortly before dusk.<sup>19</sup> They were told to remain by their aircraft and help the groundcrew to fuel and arm them for another mission. However, the pilots were soon picked up in lorries and driven to a nearby monastery at Kloster Handrup.<sup>20</sup> Together with the pilots of I./JG 26 they were briefed by Major Karl Borris, Kommandeur of I./JG 26. Maps with the exact course were handed out.

Lt. Karl-Heinz Ossenkop, a pilot of 2./JG 26, remembers: "In the afternoon of December 31st at around 15.30 hours (it was almost dark) all pilots were called to the middle of the airstrip at

Two Fw 190 D-9s of 3./JG 26 roll forward at a snow-covered Fürstenau airfield in January 1945. (Urbanke)

A snow-covered Handrup monastery in January 1945. Here the men of I./JG 26 were billeted and received their briefing for Operation Bodenplatte. (Urbanke)





Fensterberge, near Kloster Handrup at Fürstenau. Our Kommandeur, Major Borris, ordered us that we were not to get involved in any festivities with the local population in Fürstenau or other places. We were not allowed to leave the airfield. The reasons were given at the monastery and we were forbidden to discuss any of this with our ground crews. Indeed, we had wondered why 20 or so aircraft of JG 54 had landed at our strip in the afternoon. At the monastery we were all led into the dining room and the mission details were pointed out. For us pilots, there was a scale model of the airfield of Grimbergen, which we had abandoned with losses on September 3rd. The officer explained the objective of the mission: destruction of all parked aircraft with guns and cannon in three or four waves. Course to target 270 deg. until the southern-most tip of the Zuiderzee. Then a southerly course passing Rotterdam to the west towards Brussels. Two Ju 88 nightfighters were to lead us. The return flight was to be in a rough north-easterly direction; 45 deg. Take-off at first light with 250-litre drop tanks, life jackets and no radio allowed. Individual Staffel, Rotten and Schwärme were assigned targets such as AA suppression. We were ordered lights-out at 22.00 hours. We young pilots went to bed with mixed feelings.<sup>21</sup>

Three pilots of III./JG 54 who had returned to Varrelbusch, including Fw. Hans-Joachim Steinkamp of 12. Staffel, were picked up later in the afternoon by truck and brought to Fürstenau. They arrived late and missed most of the briefing. All they gathered was that they were to follow their leader.<sup>22</sup> On the airfield the groundcrew of I./JG 26 continued working well into the night to get all the Fw 190 D-9s operational.

As mentioned the pilots of II. Gruppe at Nordhorn-Klausheide did not receive a detailed briefing on December 31st. Early in the evening, orders were issued to the pilots of II./JG 26 prohibiting any New Year's Eve festivities. Pilots were forbidden to drink alcohol and instructed to retire early. They were told of the impending mission by their Staffelf kapitäne, but the target was not yet disclosed and no further orders were given. Lt. Siegfried Sy of 6./JG 26 remembers<sup>23</sup>: "At this point in time we were based at Nordhorn on a Feldflugplatz called Klausheide. We, pilots, were quartered with families in Nordhorn itself. In the morning a bus would pick us up and in the evening we were brought back again. It was only in the evening of December 31st that we were told of next day's mission. We knew it was going to be a special mission, but we did not yet know what our target would be. Nobody was allowed to go out and we were to be in bed by 22.00 hours. Penalties were promised if these orders were not obeyed. Also, we were not allowed to discuss the mission with the civilians."<sup>24</sup>

Unlike to the pilots of the Gruppe, both the Lotse pilots were informed that the target was Brussels-Evere in the late afternoon. As they were to lead the Gruppe, it was unavoidable to advise them of the course! Helmut Bunje, the leading Lotse, remembers: "We now learned that I had to follow a predetermined course (not straight) to lead the Gruppe to a specific location on a direct course to the target, Brussels-Evere. From there on the fighters would fly a straight course to reach their target five minutes later. Lt. Hemmerich was to fly about 100 metres to the left of me and a little higher; constantly prepared to take over the lead in case my aircraft would have to abort. At the point where we would leave the fighter formation, I would waggle my wings three times and turn sharp to the right on a homeward course."<sup>25</sup>

Not all the pilots of II. Gruppe obeyed their orders. A few of the old hares spent New Year's Eve in the bars of Nordhorn. Fw. Heinz Goman remembers: "On New Year's Eve we were ordered to hit the sack early and at 05.00 hrs we were all to be ready for take-off. We were based at Nordhorn, predominantly quartered with private individuals: very nice people. We were strictly ordered not to engage in any festivities. The young pilots all went to bed early. The older ones did not even think of that; besides there were only few of these left. In 5. Staffel there were Crump (sic) and I. In the other there were Oberleutnant Hoffmann and Leutnant Schulwitz and in the next Staffel there were Oblt. Vogt and Lt. Mayer. Thus we strolled to the Nordhorn inns and engaged in festivities."<sup>26</sup>

At Plantlünne the pilots of III./JG 26 had been more occupied with the daily missions than with simulation games with the sand model. On December 29th, after one of the last missions by III./JG 26 in 1944, several Bf 109s of the Gruppe had landed at Drope, the home of II./JG 1. The following day the pilots were unable to leave as the airfield was covered by a thick mist. At least eight Messerschmitts of the Gruppe were stuck at Drope.<sup>27</sup> Hptm. Staiger, the Gruppenkommandeur of II./JG 1, ordered the pilots to return to Plantlünne as soon as possible.<sup>28</sup> Ofw. Willi Zester was one of them; he remembers: "On December 29th we landed at Drope because of fuel shortage. On New Year's Eve we left there in half Qbi<sup>29</sup> because we had no credit at the mess and the resident Kommandeur, Hptm. Staiger – one of my former Kapitäne – suggested we should try to get to our homebase. He also told us something of a big show. We had to go. Take-off 09.07 hrs, landing at Plantlünne 10.05 hrs. Immediately our aircraft were thoroughly checked and readied for take-off. We were not allowed to leave our quarters and after supper, we were given some sort of a punch; a spicy red brew in which alcohol had been replaced by temperature."<sup>30</sup>



Oblt. Gerhard Vogt, Staffelf kapitän of 5./JG 26 who led his Staffel on the Bodenplatte mission, but who was killed 14 days later when he was shot down by P-51s near Köln. (Mittag)

In the evening Hptm. Krupinski briefed his III. Gruppe pilots. The course to be flown was roughly the same as that prescribed for I. and II./JG 26, namely to a turning point at Spakenburg and thence to the Rotterdam area where aircraft were to change course and fly due south towards their target at Brussels-Evere. Uffz. Walter Tepperis, a pilot of 11. Staffel remembers: "As usual we were given mission, routes in and out, altitude and armament. I cannot recall anything else in addition to that. The mission was to attack and destroy ground targets with our guns and cannon; in particular aircraft on an airfield in the Brussels area. I do not recall the name of that airfield but it was known to us at the time because we had been stationed there previously. The attack was to be flown in the early hours. On the way in and out we were to fly at extreme low altitude. The front had settled somewhere along the Scheldt river."<sup>31</sup>

Hptm. Krupinski ended his briefing and dismissed the pilots. He wished the pilots a good night's rest and ordered them to be in bed by 22.00 hrs. In addition to that no alcohol was allowed and Hptm. Krupinski personally checked all the quarters.<sup>32</sup> Although III./JG 26 had a total strength of 43 Messerschmitts, only 20 were ready for the mission on January 1st. The majority – 13 – were Bf 109 K-4s. Sufficient pilots were available.<sup>33</sup>

The pilots of JG 26 and III./JG 54 may have had an uneasy sleep. Did they believe in the mission? Some of the eager young pilots may even have looked forward to it. Lt. Siegfried Sy, a young but already experienced pilot of 6./JG 26, recalls: "This Unternehmen Bodenplatte was the last breath of the Luftwaffe fighter arm. Those responsible obviously expected a large psychological effect from this mission; militarily speaking there could be no justification. We were barely over 20 and had not really spent a great deal of time thinking about it. Did not we all believe that we had to do our duty for the Fatherland?"<sup>34</sup>

#### The targets: Grimbergen and Brussels-Evere

Unknown to the Luftwaffe, Grimbergen airfield (B-66), located some 12 kilometres north of Brussels, was almost completely abandoned on December 31st. Only days before, Grimbergen was home to four squadrons of Spitfires, but apparently Luftwaffe reconnaissance had failed to notice that the airfield had been vacated by No. 132 Wing, which had moved on towards Woensdrecht in Holland. Here, the Wing would enjoy an uneventful New Year's Day remaining largely unbothered by the hordes of Luftwaffe fighters roaming over the Low Countries. The new occupants of Grimbergen aerodrome had arrived a day earlier when Group Captain Gabszewicz and his adjutant of No. 131 Wing dropped in to inspect their new home. However, on January 1st, the

aircraft, personnel and equipment of the Polish Wing were still at St. Denis Westrem where they would see through a productive morning.

At Grimbergen precious few targets were left. As far as aircraft were concerned, there was a B-17 and a P-51 to the south-east and a Lancaster to the south-west of the field. Two or three Flying Fortresses in various states of readiness were scattered around the field. A Spitfire and a twin-engined aircraft completed the list<sup>35</sup>. On the early morning of January 1st, Grimbergen was asleep and the airfield was out of service that morning – a large white diagonal cross was visible from the air: the international signal for a non-operational airfield. Nonetheless there were some defenders present. Two flights of No. 2777 Squadron and one flight of No. 2719 Squadron whose equipment largely comprised of Bren guns mounted on recce cars, guarded the quiet airfield.

About ten kilometres south of Grimbergen, close to the centre of Brussels, was the airfield of Evere (B-56). This was one of the most densely populated bases in western Belgium: a bountiful target. The main fighting force of Evere was made up of 60 plus Spitfire Mk. XVI fighters of No. 127 (Canadian) Wing, led by the legendary Wing

Evere airfield in early 1945; note the long rows of aircraft in the north-west and south-east edges of the field. (Kloos)





Commander Johnnie E. Johnson DSO DFC. Of the four squadrons of the Canadian Kenley Wing only two were actually there, comprising more than 40 aircraft. On December 18th, No. 443 (Hornet) Squadron had left for No. 17 Armament Practice Camp at Warmwell, Dorset and were not to return to Evere until January 3rd 1945. No. 421 (Red Indians) Squadron had just completed the bombing and air-to-air firing course at Warmwell and were on their way to Tangmere to replace their Mark IXs for Mark XVIIs. Nos. 403 (Wolf) and 416 (Oshawa) were present though. Their aircraft were parked in line close to the perimeter track on the east side of the field since the ground was very boggy.

On the western side of the aerodrome was an impressive collection of the Allied inventory. There were shot-up B-17s and B-24s of the Eighth Air Force, Dakotas, Ansons, and Austers of various units such as the 2nd TAF Communication Squadron, the Air Fighting Development Unit and the Air Transport Auxiliary as well No. 83 and No. 85 Group Communication Squadrons. Also, there were a luxurious VIP Dakota and Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands' very own personal Beech 18. All in all, there were well over 100 aircraft on the field. Brussels-Evere was defended by two RAF Regiments; No. 2742 Squadron had its 'A' and 'B' Flight on the airfield equipped with Bren guns.<sup>36</sup> No. 2800 Squadron, based around Evere, was equipped with Bofors guns.

### I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 attack Grimbergen

The pilots of I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 were awoken at 04.30 hrs. A final briefing was held after breakfast in which details concerning take-off and attack were repeated. All pilots received a 1:500,000 map with the detailed course to Grimbergen; the first leg of the outward course was not marked to prevent disclosure of their homebase if the map fell into enemy hands. At each turning point the new compass bearing was indicated and at various points on the course flying times were given in minutes. Airfields, presumably for emergency landings were marked on the map at Enschede, Harskamp, Milligen and Soesterberg.<sup>37</sup> Around 06.00 hrs, the pilots were taken by bus to Fürstenau airfield where a magnificent sight awaited them; 68 Fw 190 D-9s were standing on the field ready for them, 16 of them belonging to III./JG 54.<sup>38</sup> The groundcrew had done a remarkable job in getting so many Focke-Wulfs ready for operation.

The take-off sequence was determined to be first the two Ju 88 Lotse, then Stab I./JG 26, followed by 3. Staffel under command of Oblt. Alfred Heckmann; 2. Staffel under Oblt. Franz Kunz; 1. Staffel under Lt. Georg Kiefner; 4. Staffel under Ofw. Erich Schwarz<sup>39</sup> and finally III./JG 54 led by Oblt. Hans Dortenmann. As some of the

aircraft of III./JG 54 which had landed the day before were not ready, at least six pilots of III./JG 54 were detailed machines of I./JG 26 and also flew in its formation. Uffz. Gerhard Kroll (9./JG 54) and Uffz. Aloysius van Hooven (12./JG 54) both were detailed 4./JG 26 aircraft. Lt. Jürgen Ratzlaff (12./JG 54) a 1./JG 26 aircraft and also Uffz. Heinz Müller (10./JG 54), Ofw. Werner Zech (11./JG 54) and Uffz. Otto Weber (11./JG 54) are believed to have flown within the ranks of I. Gruppe.<sup>40</sup>

At 08.13 hrs, the two Ju 88 Lotse took off and were followed by Major Karl Borris a minute later. Next was Oblt. Heckmann's 3./JG 26 which took off at 08.15 hrs followed by 2./JG 26.<sup>41</sup> However, a few Focke-Wulfs of 2. and 3./JG 26 had trouble starting their engines and take-off was delayed. They were followed by 1./JG 26 at 08.22 hrs, then 4./JG 26 and finally III./JG 54 at 08.30 hrs.<sup>42</sup> At 08.32 hrs, the last to take off was Lt. Theo Nibel of 10./JG 54. His Fw 190 D-9 'Black 12' had been reported not ready as one of its flaps had frozen stuck. When it came loose, Lt. Nibel took off in a hurry and attached himself to the trailing Schwarm. In total 64 Fw 190 D-9s took off and assembled over Fürstenau and then set course at a height of 20-40 metres, preceded by the Ju 88. One of the Fw 190 D-9s was piloted by Kommodore Obst. Josef Priller. It is believed that he also flew at the head of the formation, but Maj. Borris was actually leading it. The formation was to have been a series of vics, each composed of sections of four in line abreast, but this was not maintained owing to the low altitude and the prevailing ground mist. Soon the aircraft were strung out in a long line consisting of groups of 4-5 aircraft flying loosely in line abreast.<sup>43</sup> Lt. Karl-Heinz Ossenkop remembers take-off and the flight towards the Zuiderzee: "Early in the morning, like all other days, we left for the airfield in darkness. The ground crews had already started some of the engines. It was cold. Some aircraft simply would not start and the warming equipment was in demand. Those, whose aircraft was ready, strapped in and waited for the take-off order. At around 08:15, the Staffeln took off straight or diagonally across the field; this to save time. I took off with my 'Black 8' in the second Schwarm through the blown up snow of the preceding aircraft into a clear, frosty morning sky. The formation linked up in a curve to the left and shortly took up a westerly course. All went fine, not a sound on the R/T, only the monotonous roar of the Jumo 213A that we had got used to since last Christmas. It was a long time since I last saw an armada of 65 to 70 aircraft in low-level flight. Somehow, I began to feel good; I felt sure the attack was going to be a success."<sup>44</sup>

However, problems did occur and in the next hour or so, some 14 Fw 190 D-9s would return



The legendary W/Cdr Johnnie Johnson, DSO DFC, commander of No. 127 (Canadian) Wing, was not particularly impressed with the display of Luftwaffe marksmanship on January 1st. (Putz)



early as a result of mechanical failure or damage caused by AAA.<sup>45</sup> Around 08.50 hrs, the formation passed its first turning point at Spakenburg and turned left towards Rotterdam. Suddenly between Utrecht and Rotterdam the feared pearl chains of 20 mm anti-aircraft guns appeared among the formation creating the image of an orange Flak curtain. Lt. Ossenkop continues: "In front of me, to the left and right there were burning or smoking Focke-Wulfs and there were several impact fires on the ground. Proceed, proceed... No time to waste about who had bought it. Go lower and set course for Rotterdam!"<sup>46</sup>

The first victim of the German Flak was Ogfr. Manfred Niessen of 3./JG 26. He belly-landed his 'Yellow 5' near Blokland, 12 kilometres south-west of Utrecht, but remained unhurt. After a week he returned to Fürstenau.<sup>47</sup> Next was the Staffelfkapitän of 2./JG 26, Oblt. Franz Kunz, a 23-year old veteran with over 400 missions, was hit by German Flak and barely was able to crash-land his 'Black 1' near the village of Polsbroek, 10 kilometres south-east of Gouda. The seriously wounded Kunz was freed from the wreckage of his Focke-Wulf by civilians and later transported to a private clinic in Gouda. He would not return to his unit until late March 1945.<sup>48</sup>

The formation continued towards Rotterdam, but near Schiedam, the next turning point on the outward course, disaster struck. German Flak opened up again and Uffz. Gerhard Kroll's 'Blue 19' was hit. His aircraft was hit in the tail and he could only fly straight ahead. He belly-landed his kite as soon as he could. As soon as his Fw 190 came to a standstill, he discovered that it was on fire and Kroll wanted to leave it immediately! However, his parachute harness had entangled with his safety belts and the few seconds he needed to get himself freed were enough for the flames to burn his face. He managed to clamber out and ran as the ammunition of his Focke-Wulf was already exploding. The aircraft completely burned out. Uffz. Kroll was soon picked up and taken to a hospital in Vlaardingen and later to the larger Navy hospital in Rotterdam. After two weeks he was released and returned to his unit.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the formation, still led by the two Ju 88s continued southwards, and flew over the large delta of the Waal and Maas Rivers. Below, large parts on the ground had been flooded to slow down the approaching Allied armies. At approximately 09.10 hrs, the formation approached the front line. It was time for the Ju 88 Lotse to return, leaving Maj. Karl Borris to lead the formation on its final leg. Approaching the front line, the pilots were welcomed by a tremendous AAA barrage. It seemed that every gun opened up and soon the first aircraft were hit. The trailing formation of III./JG 54 apparently attracted the fire and being at the end of the

formation, they had given the gunners ample time to respond. One of the first to be hit was Ofw. Werner Zech of 11./JG 54. Just as he was hit by Allied 20 mm AAA, he momentarily looked away from his flightpath and collided with the top of tree. His prop damaged, his auxiliary fuel tank blown away, he could barely keep control of his aircraft. After he regained control of his 'Yellow 8', Zech headed north-east. After some time, he landed his Dora on the first airfield he saw. This proved to be Twenthe. When he inspected his Fw 190 D-9, he noticed considerable damage to the propeller, cooler and leading edges of the wings. Zech had narrowly escaped death. The Fw 190 D-9 of Fhr. Klaus Meixner of 12./JG 54 was also hit. His auxiliary fuel tank was on fire, but he was not aware. Other pilots watched in horror at the trail of fire, but could not help. Fhr. Meixner continued his flight and luckily the fire extinguished without apparently damaging his Fw 190 much.<sup>50</sup>

A few minutes later, the formation was over the Scheldt estuary and was fired upon again, this time by British naval artillery with slow-firing 40 mm Bofors guns. Coastal batteries, which defended the Scheldt estuary, joined the barrage. Once more Fw 190s plummeted to the ground and this time, I./JG 26 was hit hard. One of the first victims seems to have been Oblt. Alfred Heckmann, Staffelfkapitän of 3./JG 26. His aircraft was seriously hit and he turned back to Fürstenau.<sup>51</sup> His Rottenflieger, 21-year old Ogfr. Dieter Krägeloh was not so lucky. He remembers: "Over the Scheldt estuary we ran into some British naval vessels and they opened up a fierce AAA barrage. My machine was hit several times. When we continued on course, I noticed that the engine no longer gave the RPMs it should and I decided to make an emergency landing. I was already too low for bailing out. The flaps would not move so I came in at high speed. The contact with the ground was heavy. The belts had broken and I had crashed with my head against the cockpit panel. My spinal chord had been broken and my legs were stuck. I woke up after I was carried out of the wreckage and a doctor had treated me."<sup>52</sup>

Ogfr. Dieter Krägeloh had crash-landed his 'Yellow 13' near Heidekapel, about a kilometre north-east of Waasmunster. He was stuck in his cockpit and his Fw 190 had to be broken open at the side with an axe to get the pilot out. He was taken to a hospital and later transported to the UK.<sup>53</sup>

III./JG 54 also suffered from the accurate artillery fire. One of the first to be hit was Lt. Jürgen Ratzlaff of 12./JG 54. Lt. Ratzlaff actually flew an aircraft of 3./JG 26 and most likely flew in its formation as well. His 'Yellow 6' crashed on the southern shore of the West Scheldt near the town of Kloosterzande and Ratzlaff was killed. He may



Oblt. Franz Kunz, Staffelfkapitän of 2./JG 26. Kunz had joined 2./JG 26 in May 1944 from 11./JG 53. By the end of December, he had flown more than 400 missions and accumulated 12 victories. Seriously injured after being shot down by own Flak on January 1st 1945, he returned to the Gruppe at the end of March 1945 as Adjutant. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)



Ogfr. Dieter Krägeloh of 3./JG 26. Krägeloh had flown five missions with JG 26 before he was shot down on January 1st 1945. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Lt. Jürgen Ratzlaff. This 12./JG 54 pilot was shot down by Allied AAA over the Scheldt estuary and crashed near Kloosterzande. Although it is believed that his remains were recovered, his grave has never been located. (Ratzlaff)

have been a victim of fire from 40 mm Bofors of the British 54th LAA Regiment, which was stationed near Kloosterzande. The remains of Lt. Ratzlaff's aircraft, Werknummer 600346, were later inspected by Allied Intelligence.<sup>54</sup> What exactly happened to the remains of Lt. Ratzlaff or if they were ever found in the wreckage of his Fw 190 D-9, is unknown. He is still listed as MIA. Lt. Ratzlaff may very well have been buried as an 'unknown' at the nearby cemetery of Zaamslag. Nine German pilots who were killed on January 1st were buried in this cemetery. At the time of writing only four have been positively identified. The aircraft of two more pilots of 12./JG 54 were hit over the Scheldt estuary. First Uffz. Aloysius van Hooven reported being hit and turned north-east to head for home. We will return to him later. Finally Fw. Hans-Joachim Steinkamp, an experienced pilot of 12./JG 54 with more than 50 missions to his credit, received a direct hit from a 37 mm shell in the wingroot of his aircraft which damaged the engine and probably severed the aileron cables. He pulled up to about 1,220 metres in the hope reaching the German lines, but as he turned, the controls went unserviceable and he baled out. As he came down he saw his aircraft hit the ground in flames. Around 09.15 hrs, Fw. Steinkamp landed near the Dutch city of Hulst on the southern shore of the West Scheldt and was quickly taken prisoner by Polish forces.

As the formation crossed the Dutch/Belgian border a new threat awaited them. Twelve Spitfires were spotted east of Antwerp. The formation maintained R/T silence and its pilots hoped that they, in turn, would not be

seen – they had to reach Grimbergen.<sup>55</sup> This, however, would not be the case. The 12 Spitfires were from No. 308 Polish Squadron, and had taken off from St. Denis-Westrem at 08.27 hrs for a bombing mission on a Waal river ferry. On the way back the Squadron was warned by Operations that Allied airfields were undergoing attacks by enemy aircraft. North-east of Lokeren, the I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 formation was spotted by the Spitfire pilots and they attacked. Again the pilots of III./JG 54 fell victim to being at the tail end of the formation. We will follow the encounter through the eyes of the Polish pilots. One of their leaders, F/Lt. Bronislaw Mach, reported: "I saw the first enemy aircraft in the Lokeren area, flying east. I was at 4,000 ft. I dived and attacked a Fw 190 which was flying at approximately 1,500 feet, from approx. 30 deg. astern. enemy aircraft made a starboard turn, I followed, opening fire at approx. 200 yards, closing in to 100 yards. I saw hits on whole of enemy aircraft. The enemy aircraft turned on its back and the pilot baled out, coming down in the river near Termonde."<sup>56</sup>

The unfortunate pilot was Fw. Paul Drutschmann of 9./JG 54. Drutschmann's 'White 3' was hit in the starboard wing and as he saw a Spitfire aiming directly at him he thought it advisable to pull up to about 200 metres and bale out. His parachute opened just in time to break his fall into the River Durme, south of Waasmunster. Luckily there was not much water in the river and Fw. Drutschmann was able to get out of the cold water by himself. He was quickly apprehended by some Belgian civilians. Two more pilots of III./JG 54 crashed in the area. Sgt. Stanislaw Breyner claimed these two Fw 190 D-9s: "On my way



Wreckage of Ogfr. Krägeloh's Fw 190 D-9 'Yellow 13' near Waasmunster. As can be seen, the cockpit was opened up with an axe to free Krägeloh. The W.Nr. 500093 can be clearly seen on the tailplane. (Krägeloh/Girbig)





back to base, I saw what appeared to me, two enemy aircraft flying in close formation, in the Lokeren area. I broke formation with my Squadron and informed the leader over the R/T of that fact. We were at approximately 4,000 feet height. I dived after the two aircraft which were flying low and into the sun. Due to this fact it was difficult for me to identify them. I closed in to about 100 yards before I recognised them as two Fw 190s. Their height was about 200 feet. I was just going to fire when the two enemy aircraft apparently noticed me. They both pulled up very sharply, then rolled on to their backs and dived. One Fw 190 crashed into a building and the other in to the ground before they could pull out of their dive. It appears to me that both enemy aircraft stalled and went into a spin due to their sharp pulling up."<sup>57</sup>

The two Fw 190 D-9s were piloted by Hptm. Willi Bottländer and Ofw. Walter Eckert, both of 11./JG 54. They had probably overestimated their height in the light ground haze that still was present in the area and were unable to recover their aircraft. Both Fw 190 D-9s crashed just north of the village of Sinaai, killing both pilots. Hptm. Bottländer had been Staffelkapitän of 11./JG 54 since September 1944 and was very much liked in his Staffel. Both crash sites were inspected by British intelligence and therefore the exact locations are known.<sup>58</sup> Ofw. Walter Eckert was identified by the British and buried at Zaamslag cemetery together with eight other German pilots.<sup>59</sup> During reburial in 1954, Eckert was reinterred at Ysselsteyn Military Cemetery. Research by the authors has revealed that in one of the Zaamslag graves a gold ring was found with the engraving 'M.D.1937'. Correspondence with Hptm. Bottländer's widow soon revealed that this stood for Marianne Dudak and that 1937 had been their engagement year. Unfortunately Bottländer's fate could not be officially solved as the ring had been found in the grave identified as that of Ofw. Eckert. It is now believed that either Hptm. Bottländer is buried at Ysselsteyn in the grave next to Ofw. Eckert, or that both graves were mixed up during burial or reinterment at Ysselsteyn. Until Eckert's relatives have been traced to help solve this mystery, Hptm. Bottländer will remain MIA.<sup>60</sup>

Another Fw 190 D-9 was shot down near Sinaai. F/Sgt. Zygmunt Soszynski attacked a Fw 190 from astern and above. His adversary made a turn to port and the Polish pilot followed, opening with cannon and machine guns at approximately 100 yards range. F/Sgt. Soszynski saw strikes in the cockpit and tail and the Fw 190 levelled out and a moment later it rolled sharply on its port wing and crashed into the ground.<sup>61</sup> The Fw 190 came down on the road from Sinaai to Eksaarde, disintegrating on impact. The pilot

was catapulted out of his aircraft and his body lay burning in the street. Belgian civilians put out the fire, but the pilot was already dead. One of them recovered from one the pilot's uniform pockets a piece of paper with the name 'Helmut Schulze' or something similar.<sup>62</sup> It is now assumed that this must have been 20-year old Uffz. Heinz Schulz, pilot of 2./JG 26. Uffz. Schulz is still reported as missing and until today not a trace of him has been found. It can be assumed that Uffz. Schulz was also buried at Zaamslag cemetery together with Hptm Bottländer and Ofw. Eckert. As only the rear of the formation was attacked by the Spitfires, Uffz. Schulz must have been one of the pilots who had encountered difficulties during take-off at Fürstenau and had joined the tail of the formation. In total, the Polish pilots of No. 308 Squadron claimed four Fw 190s in the Lokeren area; an exact match with the losses of I./JG 26 and III./JG 54.

Reduced to some 35-plus aircraft, the formation led by Maj. Karl Borris passed the last turning point near Bornem at the River Scheldt, south-east of St. Niklaas, and was now only minutes away from Grimbergen.<sup>63</sup> Borris pulled up to 200-300 metres and the other pilots followed. Suddenly Lt. Peter Crump of 10./JG 54, saw that Borris and Obst. Priller were heading too far west and seemed to miss the target completely. Lt. Crump made a quick decision and rolled to the left and attacked Grimbergen airfield, followed by his own Staffel. The time was 09:22 hrs and on the airfield everything seemed to be very quiet. The I./JG 26 formation quickly understood their mistake and also turned east and attacked from the south-west, blending into the sunlight which rose in the east.<sup>64</sup>

Lt. Karl-Heinz Ossenkop remembers: "Then we saw the outlines of Grimbergen airfield. The first aircraft gained height to carry out an attack. When I pulled up, I noticed that there were only very few aircraft on the field; a four-engined aircraft was burning. The AA probably just woke up because there was hardly any defensive fire. I aimed for a fuel tanker and some soldiers. While pulling up to the east, I noticed black smoke billowing up in about 10 kilometres distance."<sup>65</sup>

The pilots were astonished by what they saw at Grimbergen; only four B-17s, a twin-engine aircraft and a Mustang could be seen. What had happened? Where were the promised Spitfires? Suddenly they saw a large white cross on the field – the field was not being used!

Grp. Capt. Gabszewicz and his adjutant were just about to leave for the mess to have breakfast when their quiet morning was brutally interrupted by attacking Fw 190s. The German pilots shot at the few targets available and also at lorries, hangars, AA positions and anything else worthwhile. Although I./JG 26 would later report



Thirty-one year old Hptm. Willi Bottländer, Staffelkapitän of 11./JG 54. Although the exact location of his crash has been identified, his grave location has not yet been found. (Urbanke)



Ofw. Walter Eckert of 11./JG 54. Together with his Staffelkapitän, he crashed near Sinaai having been chased by a Spitfire of No. 308 Squadron. (Urbanke)



Uffz. Heinz Schulz, 2./JG 26, who is still reported MIA from January 1st 1945. (Schulz)





Lt. Theo Nibel of 10./JG 54 and the wreckage of his Fw 190 D-9 'Black 12'. This 'long-nose' Fw 190 was the first to fall into Allied hands relatively undamaged and became the subject of several technical inspections. (Urbanke and Evans) (See page 301 for more pictures of this aircraft.)

that no AAA was present, it was wrong. Two Flights of No. 2777 Squadron and one Flight of No. 2719 Squadron engaged the attackers with Brens on recce cars and expended 2,300 rounds. Three Fw 190s would be claimed destroyed and two more damaged. I. Gruppe reported further that several Spitfires were seen to be over the target and that two Focke-Wulfs were shot down. This may have been caused by Spitfires flown by No. 403 Squadron from nearby Evere.

Several Fw 190s were lost during the attack on Grimbergen. One of the first was that of Lt. Theo Nibel of 10./JG 54, although this was not caused by enemy fire. As he approached the target, he saw a twin-engined aircraft which he attacked. Immediately afterwards he spotted a light AA position which he attacked once in a steep dive. On pulling out of the dive his engine cut out. After a few revolutions, the propeller stopped and instinctively Nibel let go of his drop tank. With what power he had left, he pulled the aircraft up and looked for a spot to land. Just ahead there were a couple of fields and he decided to do a wheels-up landing. Suddenly all was quiet and Nibel opened the canopy after a violent and

lengthy crash-landing. Evacuating the aircraft for fear of explosion, he quickly leapt away, but then he recalled orders that no aircraft was to be left intact to the enemy. Hurriedly, he returned and fired a couple of flares into vulnerable areas: nothing happened! A group of armed civilians and a Jeep with Military Police were approaching and he was taken prisoner.<sup>66</sup> The MPs took him to the Wemmel police station and later to Evere airfield. Lt. Nibel had belly-landed his 'Black 12' near the village of Wemmel, a few kilometres south-west of Grimbergen. His Junkers Jumo 213A-1 engine was brought to a halt by a partridge that had lodged into his radiator creating a hole several centimetres in diameter. Nibel's Dora was to be the first of the type captured intact by the Allies and it was subjected to numerous evaluations.<sup>67</sup>

Two more pilots of III./JG 54 were shot down over Grimbergen, the first of whom was Fw. Günther Egli of 11. Staffel. Some sources say this was caused by AAA, but subsequent research has revealed that he might have been a victim of one of the Spitfires.<sup>68</sup> This time there was no escape. He had to abandon his aircraft at low altitude and fell hard losing consciousness, as his aircraft

crashed into Schapenbaan in Grimbergen, burning fiercely behind a row of houses. The fire department arrived promptly but their efforts were hampered by freezing water and exploding ammunition.<sup>69</sup> After some time Egli was picked up by the British and gradually he regained his wits. When questioned at the aerodrome, he misled his interrogators by stating that his unit was JG 104 and this tale lived on for many years after the war. It is believed that Uffz. Gerhard Thoss, also of 11./JG 54, was shot down near Grimbergen as well. His crash location is not known, but he succeeded in baling out and was taken POW<sup>70</sup>.

1./JG 26 too suffered losses over Grimbergen. Fhr. Hans-Joachim Werner of 3./JG 26 was on his second run in his 'Yellow 8' when his aircraft caught fire, presumably as a result of AA. He quickly pulled up to about 200 metres and baled out. In seven missions Werner had had to make use of his parachute on two occasions, but this time he would float into captivity while his aircraft dived into the ground near the Linkasteel, on the edge of the airfield. The next victim was Fw. Karl-Heinz Hartmann, a former instructor who had joined 4./JG 26 on December 15th and who was on his first combat mission. He remembers: "At low level we continued towards Grimbergen. There we picked up some intense light AA. During our second or third approach I was hit; the engine started burning. The canopy had obviously been hit too for it was difficult to open. My aircraft quickly went down and I finally managed to bale out. After only one swing I fell on the frozen ground. A Jeep crew picked me up."<sup>71</sup>

Fw. Hartmann's 'Blue 3' crashed near Wolveterm, just west of Grimbergen airfield. What he had not noticed was that while pulling up, his propeller ate away Lt. Karl-Heinz Ossenkop's rudder! Lt. Ossenkop continues: "After a 360 degree turn, we attacked again. By now, several aircraft, vehicles and buildings were burning. Again I was looking for a suitable target. There was hardly anything left. I fired into the middle of the fire and rubble and pulled up. Suddenly at 60-70 metres altitude, there was an impact making the entire aircraft shudder. It started turning towards the right and became nose-heavy. I looked around and noticed a parachute deploying right in the middle of the airfield. Damn, someone had been hit! And I too. Take it easy; fasten your harness and find a place to land. But the bird flies and it does not even fly that bad except for the pulling to the right. I trim away the nose-heaviness, reduce the RPMs, put the flaps a little in take-off position and go over to low-level flight at safety altitude. I will not fly a third attack but will see how to get back safely to base. My God! The damned rudder! What has happened? Slowly I am getting cramp in my left

calf. I reduce speed to 230 km/h and let the left wing fall down while pressing with my right foot on the left rudder pedal. After about 20-25 minutes I thought I was out of enemy territory and started looking for a suitable airfield. I soon found it: Twenthe near Enschede. I fired ESN<sup>72</sup>, extended the landing gear and noticed the pins on top the wings popping up. The control lights turned green and the wheels were out; I landed."<sup>73</sup>

Lt. Ossenkop was greeted by some groundcrew and inspected the tail. Almost the complete rudder and part of the right horizontal stabiliser were missing. The Maintenance Officer had no doubt that the damage was the result of a mid-air collision, from a right-turning propeller damaging the tail section. Lt. Ossenkop's 'Black 8' was repaired overnight and he returned to Fürstenuau the following day.

In a mere 15 minutes, the attack on Grimbergen was over, there was nothing more to shoot at. Six aircraft, a number of vehicles, hangars and an anti-aircraft position were claimed in some ten or so strafing runs – a relatively accurate assessment of the actual damage. One groundcrewman was killed and two more wounded. After two strafing runs at Grimbergen, Fw. Harald Wülfken of 1./JG 26 became mixed up with the force from II. and III./JG 26 attacking Evere. He joined their formation and claimed to have destroyed two Spitfires in three further attacks on Evere.

Now the return flight remained for the pilots of 1./JG 26 and III./JG 54 and this proved to be just as dangerous as the outward course. The first loss was Ogfr. Karl-Heinz Braunert of 4./JG 26 who was killed when his 'Blue 10' crashed near Vremde, south-east of Antwerp.<sup>74</sup> He was shot down by Bren gun fire of the Headquarters Battery of the 296th LAA. Ogfr. Bodo Vogel of 2./JG 26 had elected to fly the reciprocal course and he was shot down by AAA over Walcheren Island and was killed when his aircraft crashed near Vrouwenpolder, five kilometres east of Oostkapelle.<sup>75</sup> Both Ogfr. Braunert and Ogfr. Vogel had been on their first mission. Other pilots seem to have taken a more north-easterly course, but this too was not without danger. Uffz. Willy Sydow, a 2./JG 26 pilot on his second mission, had the misfortune to fly over Eindhoven airfield on his way back. The AAA was wide awake after their earlier session with JG 3 and promptly shot down 'Black 6'. Sydow was killed when his Fw 190 D-9 crashed near the Apeldoornsestraat, north-west of Eindhoven. The time of the crash was reported as 09.40 hrs, which may indicate that Sydow had broken off the attack early.<sup>76</sup>

Other losses occurred even as the aircraft crossed German lines. Uffz. Heinz Wodarczyk of 4./JG 26, was killed in a crash just east of Wijhe, some 15 kilometres south of Zwolle. Wodarczyk had been



Uffz. Willy Sydow of 2./JG 26. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)



Uffz. Gerhard Thoss of 11./JG 54 was taken POW after he was shot down over western Belgium. (Urbanke)





Dutch children gather in front of the wrecked tailplane of Fw 190 D-9 W.Nr. 600147, which crashed north-west of Eindhoven; its pilot, Uffz. Willy Sydow of 2./JG 26, was killed. (Woortman)



Oblt. 'Addi' Glunz, Staffelfkapitän of 6./JG 26 (left) and Oblt. Gerhard Vogt, Staffelfkapitän of 5./JG 26 in the snow of January 1945. Glunz claimed a Spitfire on January 1st 1945. (Glunz/Bakker)

Obstlt. Josef Priller's wingman for some time, but it is believed that he flew in the ranks of his Staffel on January 1st. The cause of his crash is unknown, but one source gives it as 09.53 hrs, which leads to the assumption that he may have been on an early return with AAA damage too. Uffz. Wodarczyk was buried in Zwolle and later reinterred at Ysselsteyn Military Cemetery.<sup>77</sup> Uffz. Gerhard Reichow of 1./JG 26 had to belly-land his Fw 190 D-9 near Almelo after it had received some hits from Allied AAA.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Uffz. Karl-Heinz Zeidler of 4./JG 26 had to crash-land his 'Blue 2' with battle damage on the road from Lingen to Handrup near Lengerich. His aircraft was a write-off and Zeidler broke his nose in the hard landing.<sup>79</sup>

Two aircraft of III./JG 54 were lost on the return flight. Fhr. Klaus Meixner of 12./JG 54 had survived the hit in his auxiliary fuel tank, but as a consequence was now low on fuel and could not make it to an airfield. He belly-landed his Focke-Wulf 15 kilometres south-east of Kirchhellen airfield.<sup>80</sup> His Staffelfkapitän, Oblt. Hans Dortenmann just made it to Kirchhellen. The final loss was the unfortunate Uffz. Aloysius van Hooven. Hit by AAA over the Scheldt estuary, he had returned early and was flying south of Enschede when he was spotted by a lone Spitfire of No. 411 Squadron piloted by F/Lt. Dick Audet. Twenty-two year old Uffz. van Hooven had no chance and he was shot down and killed five kilometres south of Haaksbergen. Uffz. van Hooven's remains were not recovered until August 26th 1946 when a Dutch bomb disposal team from nearby Twenthe airfield dug up his Fw 190 D-9. He was initially buried at Haaksbergen cemetery and later reinterred at Ysselsteyn Military Cemetery. Many pilots landed at different airfields to refuel; for instance Lt. Crump and Maj. Borris at Twenthe. Others flew directly back to Fürstenau. One by one the last Fw 190 D-9s returned to their home bases.

Several aircraft were damaged. Uffz. Günther Kaehler (1./JG 26), Fw. Harald Wülken (1./JG 26), Fw. Walter Kerber (2./JG 26), Fw. Heinz Haeger (2./JG 26) and Ofhr. Wolfgang Franz (3./JG 26) all reported minor AAA damage. Lt. Georg Kiefner, Staffelfkapitän of 1./JG 26, recalled his return to Fürstenau vividly:<sup>81</sup> "It was one of the saddest days in my life. In the early morning we had taken off with 76(sic) aircraft from Fürstenau. Barely 12, including me, returned. Tables with drinks and precious foods had been prepared. I cried... I was 23 and completely disillusioned. I was glad though that Fred Heckman had returned. I flew on his wing when his drop tank was hit by anti-aircraft fire and started burning fiercely. Fortunately, he had been able to drop it."<sup>82</sup>

The last Fw 190 D-9 touched down on Fürstenau airfield at 11.24 hrs. Many pilots would report in over the following days, but the outcome was catastrophic. Although the correct target had been attacked, the losses did not weigh up to the few targets that could be destroyed at Grimbergen's nearly empty airfield. Only six aircraft were claimed to have been destroyed at Grimbergen, a figure later confirmed by aerial photographs.<sup>83</sup> Of the 64 Fw 190 D-9s that had taken off from Fürstenau, no fewer than 21 were reported destroyed and two damaged. At least eight other Fw 190 D-9s had sustained minor damage. Thus approximately half of the aircraft were lost. Worse however were the personnel losses. Seventeen pilots were reported missing of which eight would survive as POWs. Three more pilots had sustained injuries, one of them seriously. This was hardly any justification for the accomplishments at Grimbergen.

## II./JG 26 on its way to Brussels-Evere

At 07.00 hrs at Klausheide the pilots of II./JG 26 were gathered at the Gruppe Gefechtsstand. Just before the briefing began, Fw. Gomann and the other pilots who had partied in Nordhorn arrived. They had brought a surprise with them. Heinz Gomann remembered: "In one of the inns there was a band, perhaps four or five men. At 05.00 hrs we took them to the airfield and they played some tunes in between the mission details of the Gruppenkommandeur. They always played the same song: 'Blutrote Rosen...' It was a sort of farewell song for many believed they would not return from this mission."<sup>84</sup>

Around 07.00 hrs Maj. Anton Hackl briefed his pilots and disclosed the target as Brussels-Evere airfield. The detailed briefing of each Staffel was given by the four Staffelfkapitäne; Oblt. Gerhard Vogt of the 5. Staffel, Oblt. Adolf Glunz of the 6. Staffel, Oblt. Waldemar Radener of the 7. Staffel and Oblt. Wilhelm Hoffmann of 8. Staffel.<sup>85</sup> The pilots were told that the flight would be carried out at tree-top level. Elaborate preparations in the



form of ground visual aids and emergency landing grounds just inside the German lines were provided.<sup>86</sup> Each pilot received a specially prepared map with the exact course and other details. The first leg of the course from Nordhorn was on a compass course of 267 deg. to a point on the southern tip of the Zuiderzee near Spakenburg and thence to Schiedam, near Rotterdam, on a bearing of 262 deg. The turning point near Schiedam was to be marked by a smoke signal and flares. At this point the FuG 16 was to be switched on. From Rotterdam a course of 197 deg. was to be flown and two and a half minutes after passing Rotterdam guns were to be charged and navigation lights switched on. At this point the Lotse was to break away from the formation. When the River Scheldt<sup>87</sup> was reached at a point to the south-east of St. Nikolaas, the course was changed to 157 deg. for the run into Brussels-Evere.<sup>88</sup> Ofhr. Helmut Heuser, a 19-year old pilot who had joined 6./JG 26 in mid-November, remembers the briefing: "In the early morning we were briefed and the target was disclosed as Brussels-Evere. Any aircraft parked there, were to be destroyed by low-level attacks. We were not allowed to use the radio and navigation was provided by two Ju 88s preceding our formation. We were also instructed that the Evere AAA was to be knocked out by one or two other Staffel from another formation. Worth mentioning perhaps is the fact that some ferry pilots who delivered aircraft on December 31st also flew the mission. If I remember well, II./JG 26 participated with 44 aircraft. Take-off was at first light."<sup>89</sup>

Interesting is the statement of Helmut Heuser about the ferry pilots. On December 31st, II./JG

26 reported 32 of its 39 Fw 190 D-9s as operational.<sup>90</sup> It is believed that these 32 Fw 190s were all that was available at Klausheide, as II. Gruppe reported also seven aircraft still at Kirchhellen on December 31st, which were all unserviceable.<sup>91</sup> All surviving pilots of the Gruppe, the pilots of the pathfinders and subsequent research indicate that the number of aircraft of II./JG 26 participating in the attack lies between 44 and 52 aircraft.<sup>92</sup> It is safe to conclude that, as stated by Helmut Heuser, additional Fw 190s were delivered to II./JG 26 on the last day of December by ferry pilots of a Flugzeug-überführungsgeschwader. This presented II./JG 26 with another problem. On that day II./JG 26 reported 41 pilots of 50 available for operations, meaning that the Gruppe did not have sufficient pilots to man each aircraft.<sup>93</sup> To solve this, Obstlt. Priller ordered that these aircraft were to be piloted by the ferry pilots.<sup>94</sup> Exactly how many ferry pilots participated in the attack is unknown, but it is believed to be a low number. Only one ferry pilot has been identified; 23 year-old Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf of 4.(Mitte)/FlüG 1. Uffz. Altendorf was ordered to fly 'Brown 15', an aircraft of 7./JG 26, on January 1st.<sup>95</sup> Although several sources indicate that ferry pilots participated in the attack by I. Gruppe, no documentary proof of this has been found.

After the briefing the pilots went to their aircraft and made their final preparations for the flight. A little after 08.00 hrs, the signal was given for take-off. At 08.07 hrs the two Ju 88 G-6s of Ofw. Helmut Bunje and Lt. Lothar Hemmerich took off. Both were immediately followed by Maj.



Ofhr. Helmut Heuser of 6./JG 26. On December 27th 1944 he had received the EK II for his first victory on December 23rd. (Heuser)

Focke-Wulf Fw 190 D-9s of 7./JG 26 roll towards their take-off positions in February 1945 at Nordhorn-Klausheide. To the right of the picture is Ofw. Hansen, one of the groundcrew of II./JG 26. (Eickhoff)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Fw 190 D-9s of 7./JG 26 leave their safe hiding-place in the woods surrounding Nordhorn-Klausheide. (Eickhoff)



Fw. Karl Hött of 6./JG 26. After being shot down by his own Flak on January 1st and sustaining serious injuries, he returned to his unit on March 3rd, 1945 flying operations until May 4th. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)

Anton Hackl and his Stabsschwarm.<sup>96</sup> The take-off sequence of the Staffeln has not been determined for certain, but it is believed that 5. Staffel was the first to take off, followed by 8., 7. and finally 6./JG 26.<sup>97</sup> A few pilots experienced difficulties in starting their Jumo engines and the last Fw 190 D-9s took off around 08.30 hrs.<sup>98</sup> Take-off was hampered by the light snow that had fallen during the previous night. Helmut Heuser remembers: "The strip was covered with some light snow that took away completely any vision in the turbulence of earlier take-offs. I was flying as No. 2 in Staffelkapitän's Glunz' Schwarm. Ahead of us there were three Schwärme of another Staffel. The outward flight was at extreme low-level, about 15-20 metres height."<sup>99</sup>

The formation assembled over the Nordhorn-Lingen area and headed west, flying at low-level, towards the first turning point at Spakenburg on the Zuiderzee. Helmut Bunje remembers that part of the outward course: "We took off at 08.00 hrs in the early morning light, formed as planned and took off on our first leg of the course to the target at low altitude. Directly behind my left wing, so very close, was Major Anton Hackl. I could clearly see his face. Behind us, closely packed, like a flight of hungry seagulls flying behind a ship, followed the impressive Gruppe of 'long-noses'. It should have been 49 Focke-Wulf Fw 190 D-9s; I could not count them. I repeatedly turned to watch this impressive view. This seemingly endless formation of strong, shining metal machines in the early morning sun has always remained in my memories. We were not flying too long when Fred Weimann, the radio operator, called in that a fighter had crashed. It was

later, that we learned it had been shot down by our own Flak..."

According to surviving pilots the first shots by German Flak were directed at the formation near the Zuiderzee. This may very well have been the Flak stationed near the town of Harderwijk. Here several 2-cm Flak batteries defended amongst others the 'Hase' radar post, one of the 'Kammhuber Line' stations. Several sources indicate that the first losses of II./JG 26 were suffered at this stage. Lt. Hemmerich's Bordfunker witnessed two Fw 190 D-9s going down in flames. However, subsequent research has revealed that none of the known personnel losses occurred at this stage. The crashes witnessed by the two nightfighter crews could have been one of the material losses reported by II./JG 26.<sup>100</sup>

Around 08.45 hrs, the Ju 88s passed the turning point at Spakenburg and turned to a course of 262 deg. for the next leg. For the time being everything went well and the formation continued peacefully towards Schiedam. West of Rotterdam, the German Flak opened up again and once more aircraft within the formation were hit. One of them was 'Black 2' piloted by 27-year old Fw. Karl Hött of 6. Staffel. His aircraft received hits in the left wing and in the engine, which immediately burst into flames. Fw. Hött pulled his aircraft up to 200 metres and baled out. His Focke-Wulf crashed near the light tower at Steenenbaak, three kilometres north-west of Brielle, and sank into the flooded land.<sup>101</sup> With injuries to his left lower arm and lower chest Fw. Hött was taken to the Naval Hospital in Rotterdam. He would not return to his Staffel until early March where he continued flying missions until May 4th.<sup>102</sup>

The formation continued south and minutes later crossed the Haringvliet and the Grevelingen, the wide deltas of the Rivers Maas and Waal. Here the Flak opened up yet again and the next aircraft hit was the Junkers Ju 88 G-6 of Lt. Lothar Hemmerich. He remembers: "After about 20 minutes, the Flak started firing again (again it was ours; this was confirmed later) and this time my aircraft was hit. The right engine must have been hit because it started smoking fiercely. I pulled up the aircraft, cut the fuel-supply and feathered the propeller. The smoke disappeared; apparently the fire went out because I immediately switched off the fuel supply. I left the formation and my comrade, Bunje, led the formation alone. Flying on one engine I brought up the aircraft to about 300-

500 metres and headed back for Nordhorn. On the way back we had another incident. Suddenly the observer (doubling up as rearward-firing gunner) called out "fighter from behind!" As the aircraft approached, we identified it as one of our own Me 109s that apparently had lost contact with its formation. It was not one of the aircraft we had guided. The pilot had become disorientated and rightly assumed that this fat and lame Ju 88 would find the way back to a base. At Nordhorn-Klausheide, I was not allowed to land on one engine. Our colleagues on the ground were afraid that I would come down in a crash-landing, thereby blocking their own fighters the runway. Despite red flares being fired, I managed to bring the aircraft down on one engine with extended landing gear."<sup>103</sup>

Led by Ofw. Helmut Bunje, the formation continued south and passed the island of Tholen, which was already in Allied hands – the front line was now crossed. Now the formation had to deal with the Allied AAA, their true adversaries! Ofhr. Helmut Heuser was still flying on the wing of his Staffelfkapitän, Oblt. Adolf Glunz. He remembered the next few minutes vividly: "In the area around the mouth of the River Scheldt I noticed that Glunz was slipping to the right. I tried to pull the same manoeuvre but could not avoid the tracer streams. I was hit several times in the right wing. For the rest everything seemed to be in order. The engine ran smoothly; oil pressure and temperature were normal. I continued on my course but after two or three minutes when looking back, I noticed an oil plume behind me. At around that time I was hit again by another AAA position. This time the engine was hit and flames started to erupt. Probably one or more cylinders had been shot to pieces. I pulled the aircraft up but saw nothing but water, wherever I looked. I delayed bailing out and noticed a tiny island, the size of a sports field, about 400 metres away. I reduced throttle and made a 180 degree turn doing about 330 kilometres in the turn. I remember this clearly because I looked at the airspeed indicator. My height was about 100–120 metres. I tightened the belts and prepared for a belly-landing. I must have hit the instrument panel because I had a fiercely bleeding cut above my left eye. Also, I must have been knocked out for some time. When I regained consciousness the aircraft was about seven to eight metres away from a channel several metres deep. The aircraft had ploughed a trail through the field."<sup>104</sup>

Ofhr. Heuser had belly-landed his 'Black 16' two kilometres south-east of Scherpenisse. He walked to a farmhouse where he handed over his parachute and his watch. After some 20 minutes, a civilian came with a carbine who took Heuser 'prisoner.' He was taken to Poortvliet where he was handed over to men of the 62nd Anti-Tank (SP) Rgt. The same day Heuser was transferred to

the POW camp at Zundert where he would meet some of his companions from II./JG 26.

At approximately 09.05 hrs, the II. Gruppe formation crossed the West Scheldt estuary. At this point, the Allied AAA really opened up. Ofw. Helmut Bunje remembers: "In the distance we saw the East and West Scheldt in the faint winter morning light. We crossed Beveland and saw a collection of vehicles, equipment and soldiers; all in brown-greyish colours. Strange! Then all hell burst loose. Fred Weimann cried out. He had been hit in the upper leg. Other hits apparently had not done any real damage although we had heard many impacts. Engines, electrics and fuel tanks had escaped damage. In this decisive stage, shortly before the split-off point, I regarded it my duty to continue maintaining the lead. Fred moaned occasionally, but when asked, assured us that he would be able to hold out."<sup>105</sup>

The concentrated AAA fire of the batteries on the south shore of the West Scheldt and the ship-mounted guns in the Scheldt itself claimed two more victims within the ranks of II./JG 26. One of them is believed to have been Ogfr. Hubert Lott of 5./JG 26, who is still posted as missing today. In one source it is stated that Lott was shot down by German Flak near the Zuiderzee and that he slipped out of his parachute harness after he had baled out.<sup>106</sup> This was based on an account by a 6. Staffel pilot, Uffz. Norbert Risky.<sup>107</sup> There are however no indications that this story is true. None of the official records on Ogfr. Lott's loss – neither the loss report nor the JG 26 Ehrenbuch – confirm this story. Even a post-war letter by Norbert Risky to Lott's relatives does not give any further details.<sup>108</sup> There is however one document that does give a clue on what happened to him. In an Allied report on crashed enemy aircraft, an Fw 190 D-9 is mentioned with markings of a II. Gruppe aircraft marked 'White 11'.<sup>109</sup> Only one Dora-9 with 'White 11' markings flew that day – that of Ogfr. Hubert Lott. According to this report, this aircraft crashed near a place known as Hellegat. There is no such place, which could be linked to this crash site, but there is a Hellegatpolder on the south shore of the West Scheldt, some five kilometres north of Zaamslag. It is also known that at least nine German pilots were buried in the local cemetery at Zaamslag, of which five were never identified and are still recorded as 'unknowns'. It is very likely that one of these unknowns is Ogfr. Hubert Lott.

The mystery of another loss of a II. Gruppe Fw 190 D-9 in this area ended in 1996. On October 21st 1996, the fate of Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf, the ferry pilot of 4. (Mitte)/FlüG 1, was finally solved. In 1990 the first information was found when the authors examined documents related to the nine German pilots buried at Zaamslag on the south shore of the West



Twenty-year old Obgfr. Hubert Lott of 5./JG 26. He did not return from his first mission. (Ruhmland)





Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf of 4.(Mitte)/Fl.ü.G. 1. This ferry pilot was ordered to fly in Operation Bodenplatte with II./JG 26 and flew a 7. Staffel aircraft. He was reported missing and not until 1996 was his fate finally solved. (Prollius)

Scheldt.<sup>110</sup> In 1954 these pilots were reburied at the German Military Cemetery Ysselsteyn near Venray. Only three were positively identified. One of the others was recorded as a 'Fritz Altendorf.' This information was based on an Allied graves registration report.<sup>111</sup> A connection to Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf seemed very likely, but no further evidence existed at the time. Some time later the original loss report of Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf was found and it was established that he flew a Fw 190 D-9 with W.Nr. 210087 and number '15.' Another document was located in which it was stated that Uffz. Altendorf had flown a 'Brown 15' of II./JG 26.<sup>112</sup> In an Allied report on crashed enemy aircraft, the following details of a Fw 190 D-9 crash were listed:<sup>113</sup>

**Fw 190 D-9      Works No. 10087??**

**Kruisdorp      + 15 (red)**  
**Destroyed      Jumo 213**  
**No.10215221922**  
**Maker: jfr**

This was clearly the Fw 190 D-9 flown by Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf; serial number and markings corresponded. It was clear now that Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf had been a victim of the AAA too and had crashed near Kruisdorp, east of Kloosterzande. As all killed pilots in the area were buried at Zaamslag, a link to the unknown 'Fritz Altendorf' could be established. Furthermore, Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf's father was named Fritz Altendorf. It is possible that Uffz. Altendorf carried the name and address of his father and that this caused the Allied grave registration unit to assume his name was Fritz Altendorf. In any case sufficient evidence was now available and in August 1994 all the facts and documents were presented to the Deutsche Dienststelle in Berlin. This resulted in closing the file on Rudolf Altendorf officially in October 1996. More than 50 years after his death, Rudolf Altendorf's sisters finally learned the true circumstances and were able to visit his grave at Ysselsteyn Cemetery.

Horried by the scene of seeing their comrades going down in flames, the pilots of II./JG 26 continued south. Near St.Niklaas, some 35 kilometres from Brussels-Evere, the job of the Lotse was over. Ofw. Helmut Bunje relates his flight back to Nordhorn: "About 20 kilometres west of Antwerp, near a prominent, glinting curve in the River Scheldt, my task was completed. I waggled my wings; the Kommandeur responded, then I turned to the right while the hornet's swarm of fighters flew by heading for its target. We were alone. Now, we were to avoid taking any more risks. Close to the ground, we headed for the Scheldt estuary, only several metres above the water and closely avoiding the banks and any

islands that were probably taken by the enemy. We set course for the sea and within reach of the coastline headed north-east. When we were sure the coast was in our hands, we headed inland and passed the dunes at extreme low-level. Our naval Flak had a good reputation; they should not be offered any chance. Finally, still close to the ground, we reached Nordhorn without any further difficulties. Landing gear out. Hydraulics were fine too but it was just as good that I had learned to visually check anything; the right tyre had burst. All of a sudden I had this thought, which I could not get out of my head, although it was against all regulations. It was a vision or something like that; landing with the left wheel and tail wheel and keeping the right wheel as long as possible in the air. At touchdown of the right wheel, full throttle on right engine, apply brakes on left side and trim out with the vertical stabiliser and throttle controls. That's exactly the way it worked. Without turning around the axis, breaking the landing gear or doing a nose-up, we came to a stop. The ambulance raced towards us as we had fired a red flare. They took Fred to Rheine Hospital."<sup>114</sup>

Once Ofw. Helmut Bunje left the formation it was up to Maj. Anton Hackl; Brussels-Evere was only some seven minutes away...

### III./JG 26 heads for Brussels-Evere

At Plantlünne the pilots of III./JG 26 were awakened at 05.00 hrs. Breakfast was followed by a briefing by Hptm. Krupinski who handed out maps as well as emergency supplies and Pervetin stimulant pills. The course to be flown was the same as that prescribed for I. and II. Gruppe, namely to a turning point at Spakenburg and thence to the Rotterdam area where aircraft were to change course and fly due south towards Brussels-Evere. The Ju 88 would fly ahead continually firing flares and with its navigation lights on as far as Rotterdam. At Rotterdam there would be 'Golden Rain' guidance flares. The mission was to be conducted at extreme low altitude and in absolute radio silence.<sup>115</sup>

Around 08.15 hrs, the two Ju 88s took off and were immediately followed by the Messerschmitts of III. Gruppe which took-off at 08.20 hrs.<sup>116</sup> Some 29 Bf 109s took part in the mission, around half of the available aircraft.<sup>117</sup> What happened next remains one of the greatest controversies of the JG 26 mission. Hptm. Krupinski explained his version in Josef Priller's book *JG 26 – Geschichte eines Jagdgeschwaders*: "We wanted to assemble the entire Gruppe in a single 360 deg. turn. This went completely wrong and I ended up with my Stabsschwarm behind the leading Lotse and the rest of the Gruppe at a distance of one kilometre behind the second Lotse."<sup>118</sup>

However, the pilot of the leading Lotse, Fw.



Fw. Jürgen Heider (second from right) and crew in front of their Ju 88A. This photograph was taken when Heider and crew belonged to III./KG 76. Later they transferred to 5./NJG 6. On January 1st 1945 Heider flew as Lotse for III./JG 26. (Heider)

Erich Heider, remembers the take-off and formation very differently. We give his full account of the events of the take-off and the flight towards Brussels-Evere:<sup>119</sup> "At the briefing on the evening of December 31st, Hauptmann Krupinski ordered the two Lotsen not to fly a single circuit over the field to give the pilots time to assemble, but to fly west on the prescribed course immediately. Objections from the pilots were dismissed. On the morning of January 1st, both Ju 88s headed west immediately, followed closely by Hptm. Krupinski's Rotte and his adjutant. But that was it, no other Messerschmitts took off. Something was going wrong during take-off. The leading Lotse, Fw. Heider, was watching this and considered Krupinski's order to be unfeasible and turned left towards the airfield. The pilot of the other Lotse, Ofw. W. remained on course and together with Hptm. Krupinski and his Rottenflieger disappeared into the far distance and were not seen again. Later in the afternoon Ofw. W. told his Staffelnkamerad, Fw. Heider, that he had just arrived over Dutch territory; not even ten minutes had passed since take-off, when the Hptm. Krupinski's Rotte turned east again and landed on a landing ground, followed by the spare Lotse. It was said that Hptm. Krupinski's aircraft of had a malfunction. The mission was over. In the meantime Fw. Heider in his Ju 88 '2Z+CN' was flying low-level circuits over the field for 12 minutes, waiting until all fighters had taken off and assembled into one formation. Then the 50 (sic) aircraft formation thundered north-west at a height of 20 metres, crossing the Dutch border

and the river Vecht and then headed west south west towards the southern tip of the Zuiderzee. From there III. Gruppe would, with the Lotse leading until crossing the front line near the river Waal, fly directly towards Brussels-Evere, coming from the north-north-east. Rotterdam and Antwerp would not be passed, as the rest of JG 26 did, on the western, but on the eastern side. Just after crossing the Dutch border, other strong fighter formations came into sight; afterwards we learned that these were the Gruppen, which had taken off from Nordhorn and Handrup. The sight of these big formations brought pride to the four men crew of the Lotse. The NSFO<sup>120</sup> of III./JG 26, an old Major<sup>121</sup>, had joined the crew as air gunner. He had volunteered for the mission and he promised the crew an extra bottle of egg liqueur because he was permitted to participate in this decisive blow. The high spirits were soon over when, just after passing the river IJssel, tracers of light Flak raked through the formations, with devastating results for the I. and II. Gruppe. Two, three, four fighters were hit and rolled like balls of fire over the snow-covered landscape. III./JG 26 was lucky, the first shells aimed at the head of the formation from one o'clock had missed – time for evasion! Using a yaw-manoeuve but keeping course and by changing the altitude continuously, the formation succeeded in passing the danger zone. Not a single aircraft was hit. This could not be true! This was German, our own Flak! Only shouts of anger were our answer. What a mess, and this following several weeks of preparations. The operational plan was no good. Fw. Heider decided



Uffz. Heinz Schmidt, originally the Beobachter in the crew of Fw. Jürgen Heider. He also flew on January 1st 1945. (Heider)



Uffz. Walter Tepperis of 11./JG 26. He belly-landed his Messerschmitt after being hit by his own Flak and it took him several days to return to his unit. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)

to change course. In low-level flight he guided the Gruppe immediately south, passing Apeldoorn in the west. Several times changing course we went over the rivers Waal and Maas until reaching a point 10 kilometres east of Antwerp, close to the Albert Canal. Finally we turned into a course for Brussels-Evere and fired some white flares: the sign for the final run with direct course for the target. III. Gruppe jumped forward. Five minutes later they were over the target."<sup>122</sup>

This account by Erich Heider stands as an accusation of Hptm. Krupinski. But before going into this any further, what happened to Hptm. Krupinski according to his own words as related in Priller's book?

"The flight route was the same as with the other Gruppe; southern tip of the Zuiderzee, Rotterdam, south over the flooded Scheldt estuary to the final leg north-west of Evere. Crossing the front line I received a hit of light AAA on the hinge of my left engine cowlings, which opened and made me slide through the air. First I wanted to return, but as I felt that I could fly, I continued, although without taking part in the strafing attack."<sup>123</sup>

After a short time, Hptm. Krupinski returned with his wingman Uffz. Karl-Georg Genth to Plantlünne.

Which story is true? Heider's or Krupinski's? Unfortunately there are no records to confirm either one. Only a few eyewitnesses remain, whose memories may also have become blurred by stories told at reunions. There are however a few assumptions which can be made. First it seems that the confusion during take-off was largely caused by Hptm. Krupinski's orders. Fw. Heider's statement is quite clear on that and the confusion was confirmed by Krupinski himself. Fw. Heider's statement that Hptm. Krupinski and his wingman landed on Drope after only ten minutes is based purely on the story of the pilot of the second Lotse. Fw. Heider could not have seen this himself. In fact, a wartime interrogation document exists of a III. Gruppe pilot, captured during leave in Trier, and he confirms Hptm. Krupinski's story of being shot up by AAA and returning to Plantlünne.<sup>124</sup>

At least some surviving pilots confirm the route over Rotterdam, which contradicts Heider's story. Furthermore, several pilots of III. Gruppe were shot down on the outward course, when Heider stated they had received not a scratch. Supporting Fw. Heider is a statement by Ofw. Willi Zester from 1954 in which he confirms that the NSFO of III./JG 26 joined the crew of the Lotse and that this Ju 88 stayed with the formation until Antwerp! It seems likely that the larger portion of the Gruppe was led by Fw. Heider towards Antwerp, but that he failed to notice the losses on the outward course. Hptm. Krupinski

may have continued until Brussels, but probably flew back before the attack was over.

At least four pilots of III./JG 26 were shot down on their way to Brussels-Evere. The first victim was Oblt. Harald Lenz, a 21-year old Rottenführer in 11./JG 26. Lenz was shot down by German Flak near Nijkerk at the southern tip of the Zuiderzee. He may very well have been JG 26's first victim on January 1st. Lenz, who was on his 38th mission, was buried at the local cemetery of Harderwijk. Uffz. Walter Tepperis, also from 11./JG 26, was luckier. He remembers: "After crossing the front line we were occasionally fired upon by AAA. In the vicinity of Breda my aircraft was hit. The engine ran badly and smoked but did not burn. I turned, hoping to reach the north side of the Scheldt River. If I remember well, I notified my unit of my intentions. At the river mouth, I went for the nearest island and made a belly-landing right behind the dike. The land was flooded. There were no major difficulties with the landing; my aircraft suffered hardly any additional damage. I tried to destroy the aircraft but succeeded only partially. Initially, I did not know the name of the island because of the reduced vision in the particular situation. After some wandering, I stumbled across a German spearhead position. I think it was some naval artillery unit. It was here that I learned that I had landed at Schouwen. Since there was no mainland connection, I had to wait for several days until an accidental patrol of the Navy took me along to Overflakkee. From there, I travelled back to base via Groningen. It was here that I learned from others that the mission had not been a great success. I had been posted as lost since I had not reported back to base."<sup>125</sup>

Exactly where Tepperis' Bf 109 G-14 'Black 8' came down, is not known. No report is available on a crash site on the island of Schouwen.

Other pilots fell victim to Allied AAA over the Scheldt. Ofw. Willi Zester remembers: "At the mouth of the River Scheldt there were numerous vessels that 'greeted' us heartily. I must say that those Tommies or Amis fired a lot of ammo, but they also missed. One pilot made a belly-landing in a flooded area. When he was picked up, he noticed he had crossed the front line."<sup>126</sup>

The pilot who belly-landed his Messerschmitt was Uffz. Karl-Heinz Berndt of 12./JG 26. Flying as No. 2 with his Staffelführer Oblt. Schrader, Berndt's Bf 109 K-4 was hit in the engine by light AAA and he landed three kilometres north-east of St. Maartensdijk on the island of Tholen.<sup>127</sup> He was taken prisoner by personnel of the 62nd Anti-Tank (SP) of the Royal Artillery and together with Ofhr. Heuser of 6./JG 26 transported to Zundert.<sup>128</sup> One more loss was suffered from Allied AAA over the Scheldt estuary, but the exact circumstances are unknown. Gefr. Horst Sengpiel



was last seen over the Scheldt and was probably shot down by AAA. Some pilots noticed seeing him leaving the formation and flying west, initially believing that he had deserted.<sup>129</sup> However, no trace of him or his Bf 109 K-4 'Black 15' was ever found and he is still reported MIA.<sup>130</sup> Now the III./JG 26 formation, reduced to a mere 15 Messerschmitts, was only a few minutes away from its target.

## II. and III./JG 26's attack on Brussels-Evere

Brussels-Evere was far from asleep in the early morning of January 1st. Several missions had been planned by No. 127 Wing. However, it had been a frosty night and the single runway was covered by a thin layer of ice, preventing an early take-off. Delayed by grit-sprinkling, a dawn patrol of two Spitfires of No. 403 Squadron took off for a weather recce at 08.48 hours. They were F/Lt. Dick Reeves and his number two, F/O Mac Reeves.<sup>131</sup> Seconds after take-off F/Lt. Reeves radioed back that the runway was safe to use. The Reeves duo headed for the bomblines in the Weert-Eindhoven area. Next to take off from Evere were two Austers of the ADLS Flight<sup>132</sup> of 2nd TAF Communication Squadron. Piloted by F/O Stevenson and F/O Harvey they were in for a surprise. Shortly after 09.00 hrs, a second element of No. 403 Squadron, piloted by P/O Steve Butte and F/Sgt. G.K. Lindsay, prepared to take off. Meanwhile, No. 416 Squadron was called to readiness for a 12-fighter patrol. Led by F/Lt. Dave Harling, DFC, from Montreal, the Spitfires were taxiing along the perimeter track.

The first inhabitants of Evere to notice the impending German fighter attack were the two ADLS Auster pilots. F/O Stevenson made a head-

on encounter with the German force and flew right through the middle of the formation, weaving violently at low level. It is believed he met JG 27 on its way to Brussels-Melsbroek since one of the pilots of 13./JG 27 claimed an Auster in the Brussels area. However, Stevenson escaped and continued on to Ghent, only to find the airfield there being strafed. He returned to Brussels where cover was taken by flying up and down the main streets between the buildings until the raid ended. F/O Harvey, flying the other Auster, was not so fortunate. Having encountered the enemy some 45 miles north-east of Brussels, he attempted immediately to land his Auster on an abandoned tactical strip near Bourg Leopold.<sup>133</sup> The aircraft had not stopped rolling forward when a German attack holed the starboard wing, so he dived out and ran for cover; he had taken barely twenty paces when another attack set the Auster on fire, and in a short while it was completely burned out.<sup>134</sup>

At Evere, the second element of No. 403 was lining up with the runway. The time 09.26 hrs. P/O Butte and F/Sgt. Lindsay opened up their throttles and sped into the air in their Spitfire Mark XVI's. No. 416 was seconds after them and about to follow. One of the first to see the incoming attack was P/O Steve Butte. He had just become airborne when he sighted a formation of aircraft to port, flying approximately in the opposite direction and about 300 yards away. At first, he assumed it was a formation of American aircraft, but he quickly realised they were Germans. He closed the hood, passed the information on to F/Sgt. Lindsay and broke into the enemy formation opening fire immediately.<sup>135</sup> Almost simultaneously II. and III./JG 26 had



Uffz. Karl-Heinz Berndt of 12./JG 26 was taken POW after his Bf 109 K-4 was hit by light AAA after crossing the front line. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)



Gefr. Horst Sengpiel. This 12. Staffel pilot was last seen over the Scheldt estuary and no trace of him or his aircraft has been found. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)



Pilots of No. 416 Squadron, Christmas 1944. From left to right: Sharun, Dave Harling (on Spitfire), Bill Bridgeman, Wally Hill, Gordon Hill, Lou Jean, Webb Harten, Jack Leyland and 'Tap' Tapley. (De Decker/Russell)



An Auster burns to pieces at Evere, January 1st, 1945. (Vanackere)

arrived over Brussels-Evere – an Allied report assessed the number as approximately 35 Fw 190s and 25 Bf 109s. The formation made a very wide circuit over the airfield, jettisoned drop tanks on the edge of the airfield and started their first strafing attack at 09.26 hrs.<sup>136</sup> The Spitfires of No. 416 Squadron were caught on the ground. Only their leader, F/Lt. Dave Harling managed to take off in the midst of the attack and was seen to attack a German fighter, which he shot down.<sup>137</sup> However, he in turn was shot down by two Fw 190s and killed when his Spitfire crashed in the City of Brussels.<sup>138</sup> The other Spitfires were still on the perimeter track. Three pilots, F/Lt. Lou Nault, W/O Lou Jean and P/O Ken Williams were shot up while taxiing, but all were able to abandon their mounts without serious injuries.

Ken Williams remembers: "I was sitting in my Spitfire waiting to taxi on the sole taxiway for take-off on a regular operational mission. Looking toward Melsbroek airfield I saw many single engined aircraft diving towards the airfield. Because I had been a recent arrival I paid little heed. No one called on the radio of anything amiss, nor did the control tower give any comment, or warning. As I waited for my turn to taxi, the first wave of Fw 190s and Me 109s roared strafing across the airfield. Our leader was the only one able to take off, but he was shot down and killed. On the first strafing run my aircraft was hit from tail to nose but missed my cockpit. Before the next wave came in, I rolled out of the cockpit and crawled under the engine for protection as

my aircraft was facing into the wind and the strafing aircraft were flying their runs into the wind. My aircraft was hit again and shrapnel from the strikes caused body wounds. I then made it to a slit trench. In hospital, major shrapnel was removed. However the doctor chuckled when I asked him why he had left a piece of shrapnel in a toe on my left foot. You can keep it as a souvenir he said. I still have it."<sup>139</sup>

F/Lt. Neil G. Russell was in one of the other Spitfires. He had tossed coins with F/Lt. Harling as to who would lead the mission; Harling lost. Neil Russell remembers: "Started on armed recce at 09.30 when we were attacked while taxiing by 50 plus Fw 190s and Me 109s. F/Lt. Harling took off, got one 190 and then two got him over the centre of Brussels. Rest of us on the perimeter track ducked behind armour for first wave. Then jumped out and slid to earth and prayed. Between waves I crawled for shelter and by the time it was over had reached a trench."<sup>140</sup>

Dave Harling was greatly liked by all in the Squadron and his loss was deeply felt. Only days earlier he had been awarded a DFC. According to F/O Chuck Darrow, who had flown number two with him on several occasions, Harling had finished his tour and had asked for a 25 hour extension. It was in the first few hours of this extension that he was killed. Darrow considered him absolutely fearless.<sup>141</sup> On January 3rd F/Lt. 'Davey' Harling was buried with most of the Squadron in attendance to pay their respects to a "...swell guy and a good leader."<sup>142</sup>



The men of No. 416 Squadron. Picture taken at Kleine Brogel, March 1945. Left to right: Kneeling in front F/O Bill Roddie, F/Sgt. Bricknell, 1st row left to right: W/O Lou Jean, F/O Sam Bound, F/O 'Mac' McCallum, F/Lt. 'Doug' Douglas, F/Lt. 'Pic' Picard, F/Lt. Len Commerford, F/Lt. Neil Russell, F/Lt. Webster, S/Ldr. Mitchner, F/Lt. Gord Cameron, F/O 'Moon' Mullins. 2nd Row: F/Lt. Steve Straub, F/O Chuck Darrow, F/O Larry Spur, F/O Bert Parry, F/O Cliff Haines. F/Sgt. 'Mac' McGregor. 3rd Row: F/O Cliff Preston, F/O Gordon Hill, F/O Wally Hill, F/O Ken Williams, F/Lt. Jack Leyland, F/O 'Scotty' Scott. (De Decker/Russell)



F/Lt. Neil Russell of No. 416 Squadron in Spitfire IX DN-S at Brussels-Evere, February 1945. (De Decker/Russell)

How did II. and III./JG 26 experience those first minutes of the attack? As stated, both units arrived almost simultaneously over Evere. Fw. Heinz Gomann remembered: "Our Gruppe could not resist making an honour-orbit of Brussels. As we learned later, people on the ground were frightened by the thought that the Germans were returning and those who had been treating other Germans bad were especially scared. After this honour-orbit the actual attack took place. One Staffel was ordered to deal with the flak towers. These were quickly dealt with and within minutes everything combustible was burning: aircraft, petrol trucks, hangars etc."<sup>143</sup>

Ofw. Willi Zester of 9./JG 26 remembers the initial stages of III./JG 26's attack: "Evere was still

asleep and what an amount of aircraft we saw there. A real good 'breakfast' and then there was already fire and smoke. Three Spitfires had taken off. One was hit while taking off and crashed into a hangar on its back – landing gear and flaps still out. The other two were shot down over the airfield. A group of Fw 190s joined us and lent a helping hand. Unfortunately, airfield flak got one of them; the poor guy landed with his parachute just about in the middle of the field. He spread-eagled on his parachute. I do not know what happened to him."<sup>144</sup>

It is not known which pilot Zester saw parachuting down onto Evere. No matching Fw 190 loss is known. At least five Spitfires were claimed by II. and III./JG 26 over Evere. Maj.



Anton Hackl, Oblt. Adolf Glunz and Lt. Siegfried Sy all claimed a Spitfire at 09.25 hrs. Uffz. Gottfried Burckhardt of 8./JG 26 claimed a Spitfire over Brussels a minute later.<sup>145</sup> Uffz. Heinz Gehrke of 11./JG 26 claimed a Spitfire over Evere.<sup>146</sup> Siegfried Sy remembered his victory well: "We made our first attack on the parked aircraft. While climbing, I suddenly saw a Spitfire in front of me. Where she came from so fast, I cannot recall. It must have been some alert scramble or so. Anyway, I managed to shoot this aircraft down. I was almost shot down myself as another Spitfire had lodged in behind me, but Oblt. Glunz had noticed this and had shot it off of my tail."<sup>147</sup>

Only one 'real' aerial loss is known over Brussels – that of F/Lt. Dave Harling. It is assumed that Harling's Spitfire was claimed by several JG 26 pilots. Others may have claimed the strafed Spitfires of No. 416 Squadron as aerial victories. Another possibility is that they may have claimed some No. 403 Squadron Spitfires. As recounted, P/O Steve Butte and F/Sgt. G.K. Lindsay had taken off during the attack and immediately took up the fight. P/O Butte claimed one Fw 190 and two Bf 109s destroyed, but all of his claims seem to be aircraft of JG 27 and IV./JG 54 which were attacking nearby Brussels-Melsbroek. F/Sgt. Lindsay claimed one Fw 190 destroyed and one Bf 109 probably destroyed, which was later downgraded as damaged.<sup>148</sup> While their actions were futile against the overwhelming force the two-man patrol had done very well.

In the meantime the two other Spitfires of No. 403 Squadron, piloted by F/Lt. Dick Reeves and P/O Mac Reeves had also entered the scene. They had heard of the attack on B-56 by radio and had returned immediately. Dick Reeves remembers: "Unfortunately for me my engine would not respond when I gave it full throttle. I sent Mac Reeves ahead and he shot down two aircraft. Mac was a great pilot and a great person. It was my best chance of the war, but my engine let me down. I did have the unique experience of flying on

operations at Dieppe, D-Day and January 1st 1945."<sup>149</sup>

P/O Mac Reeves Personal Combat Reports depicts the next few minutes. It was approximately 09.40 hrs when he noticed 30-plus Fw 190s and Bf 109s milling around over the drome: "I chased one Fw 190 from line astern opening fire at about 250 yards, closing to 150 yards. I saw many strikes on wing and cockpit area with black smoke and bursts of fire. The Fw 190 rolled to the left on its back and crashed on the deck with a large explosion."

A little later, Mac Reeves selected another Fw 190 as a target and sent it down over the north-east of Brussels. The pilot of this aircraft managed to bail out. Again one of the Focke-Wulfs shot down by P/O Reeves seemed to be a IV./JG 54 machine attacking Brussels-Melsbroek. Although the Spitfires of No. 403 Squadron fought valiantly, they could not prevent the strafing of their homebase.

As stated, the first strafing attack on Evere occurred at 09.26 hrs and this was directed at the aircraft parked on the south-east side of the airfield. F/Lt. Jenkinson of 2nd TAF Communication Squadron described the initial stages of the attack: "With commendable alacrity the Squadron personnel dispersed themselves to various sheltered places, probably the most speedy move being made by F/Lt. Jarvis, who later avowed that his feet did not touch the ground between the Anson that he left with engines running on the tarmac apron and the foxhole some thirty yards away. The passenger for this aircraft, Air Commodore Worthington, took temporary refuge in the Operations Room with the Commanding Officer, who telephoned 2nd TAF Headquarters, where it was first denied that there was any possibility of a German air offensive!"<sup>150</sup>

Soon a variety of aircraft were on fire. In particular Air Marshal Coningham's new Dakota attracted special attention. The standard of marksmanship was not good, and three runs were made on this aircraft without apparent major damage, but after some 12 or 15 runs the forward part of the aircraft was blazing furiously. On the airfield the amount of 'lead' in the air was becoming distinctly unhealthy for the many groundcrew working on the field: "On New Year's Eve I drank more than was good for me, so next morning I decided not to go to work. The Sergeant came to where we were billeted and gave me 20 minutes to get to work or be charged with failure to report to work. I decided to go to work. We were sleeping upstairs in a hangar. When I walked out, planes were buzzing all over the place. An English soldier said to me: "You Canadians are celebrating New Year's Day in great style." I listened for a moment and replied: "You're wrong,

F/Lt. Richard Reeves (left) and F/O Mackenzie Reeves of No. 403 Squadron. Richard Reeves recalled: "Unfortunately for me my engine would not respond when I gave it full throttle. I sent Mac Reeves ahead and he shot down two aircraft. Mac was a great pilot and a great person." (Reeves)



Those are Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts." Just then, one plane flew by shooting into the hangar at a plane parked inside! There was a brick wall running parallel to the hangar. I laid down in the curb with the wall hiding me from the direction the planes were coming from. All of a sudden two English soldiers sat down on top of me. I had to pinch one real hard to get him to move. He jumped up and looked down at me and said: "Cor blimey, we're sitting on a bloody Canadian." I was able to look around the corner of the wall and watch four enemy planes shoot up the hangar behind me. The planes were so low, you could easily see the pilots."<sup>151</sup>

In Brussels, Air Marshal Coningham noticed the German attackers head for Evere and without hesitation, he ordered his driver to take him to there: "January 1st was a bright sunny morning and frosty. Round about 9 a.m. I was waiting in the Daimler outside the Air Marshal's Residence in the Avenue des Nations ( Now Ave. Winston Churchill) when with a whoosh and a roar and the rattle of machine gun fire, 8-10 German fighter types all with colourful markings zipped over at roof-top height. A dogfight developed. The action brought the Air Marshal to see what was going on. All of us were taken by surprise. We had not seen a German aircraft for months. I and the other members of the Air Marshal's Staff dived for cover. Not so Air Marshal Coningham. He raced to the highest vantage point from where to view the action. We saw they were attacking Evere airfield of the smoke and decided to drive there at once, so off we went in the Daimler. On the way we passed airmen and officers waiting at all the tram stops to get back to Camp after a night in Brussels. The Air Marshal was a bit taken aback at the state of the officers and aircrew. He was not at all pleased (afterwards the rules of staying over all night were reviewed). On arrival at Evere we saw the rescue squads at work. The Air Marshal's new luxury Dakota and a Mosquito aircraft were damaged."<sup>152</sup>

F/Lt. Nevin Boswell Filby (RAAF) had been posted to No. 2 TAF Communication Squadron after a tour with No. 98 Squadron Mitchells. His tasks included flying service personnel to and from advance headquarters, carrying despatches as well as an airmail service. Occasionally they would test and deliver replacement Mitchells for No. 98 and No. 180 Squadron. On New Year's Eve Boswell Filby did not fully participate in the celebrations as he was scheduled to fly at about 09.00 hrs on January 1st 1945. His memories are particularly interesting: "I drove to the hangars on that eventful morning and having checked my Auster aircraft with Corporal Wheaton, went into the shed adjacent to the main hangar to complete the paper work. Suddenly we heard a very heavy and close burst of automatic fire and went outside

to investigate. About 40 metres behind the hangar, a Me 109 was doing a very steep turn with his port wing about ten metres from the ground. He passed us, gave us a quick glance, flattened out and put a well-aimed and long burst of fire along the full line of Johnny Johnson's Spitfire Squadron which were conveniently parked about 100 metres from our hangar. The result was devastating. The German pilot pulled up and commenced to turn. Other Me 109s and Fw 190s were beating up other parts of the airfield. We looked to the Bofors gun sited about 100 metres to our right but it was silent and askew. Either the first burst we had heard had killed the crew and silenced the gun or it had not been manned. My own armament solely consisted of a 45-calibre Webley revolver.

"As the Me 109 completed his turn, he came back and again started to strafe the line of Spitfires. Errant bullets and ricochets whizzed past us. We dived into a nearby slit trench from which we were able to observe the uncounted destruction of most of the many parked aircraft around B-56 Evere. The aircraft I was supposed to fly was a write-off as were many in the hangar because on his fourth strafing run the Me 109 had wagged his tail and put a long burst directly into the hangar. I must admit that stunned and amazed us as it really was an excellent performance by this particular pilot who we had been able to closely observe. After a suitable time the Corporal and I hopped out of the slit trench, looked around and saw burning and smoking aircraft and exploding ammunition everywhere. Eventually we found Auster 624 to be flyable and to air test it (and to have a look around) we flew over the minor peripheral and other airfields like Melsbroek and Malines etc. and everywhere aircraft were burning. Even those, which we knew, had been discarded or crashed previously. By and large the Luftwaffe seemed to have carried out a very extensive and expensive raid. I do not know how many men or aircraft the Allies lost, but from the air the area I covered was in a real mess.

"It was fortunate that at the time our new aircraft and spare parts availability was very good. Our ground staff worked very hard and quickly to repair damaged aircraft and to prepare new ones ready for flight-testing. They deserved a high commendation. When Corporal Wheaton and I returned from our air test of Auster No. 624, I refuelled and flew to Gent and back with despatches. At Gent too there were many burnt out aircraft. After landing back at B-56 and completing the necessary paperwork, I returned to our Mess where members were talking to a senior English speaking German pilot who was dressed in a very nice grey leather flying suit. It appears that nearing the attack zone at low level, a



Groundcrew fight the fires at Evere following the Luftwaffe's attack on New Year's morning. (Anglin via Bracken/Fochuk)

bird had lodged in his air intake. His engine had overheated and seized up causing him to force-land in a Brussels street. He did not seem perturbed about his capture.

"The next few days were spent by me mainly air testing repaired aircraft and testing new replacements in our motley flight and on 3 January 1945, partially as a reward for his hard work, I took Corporal Wheaton with me on a routine 'despatches' flight to Tilburg and return. By January 9th we seemed to be back to normal but during the period 1st to 9th the few routine flights that I made in the repaired aircraft were a bit hazardous because on a couple of occasions our own anti aircraft took pot shots at me and did some minor damage. Everyone was a bit trigger-happy and the weather and visibility was really 'soupy.' Thus it must have been hard for them to tell friend from foe."<sup>153</sup>

The skilful pilot that was seen by F/Lt. Nevin Boswell Filby may very well have been Oblt. Adolf Glunz, the *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 26. Oblt. Glunz claimed to have destroyed five aircraft and damaged two further during his nine strafing attacks on Evere and succeeded in hitting a two-engined aircraft in a hangar through the open doors! The aircraft burst in flames. Major Anton Hackl flew seven strafing attacks and Oblt. Wilhelm Hoffmann, *Kapitän* of 8./JG 26, was later praised for his leadership during the attack.<sup>154</sup> Lt. Günter Seyd of 5. *Staffel* and Lt. Gottfried Dietze of 7. *Staffel* both claimed a four-engined bomber destroyed.<sup>155</sup> Not much is known about individual claims made by III./JG 26 pilots. Fw. Wolfgang Polster of 11./JG 26 claimed two Typhoons damaged, without a doubt these were two of the Spitfires of No. 127 Wing.<sup>156</sup> It can be assumed that both Gruppen had caused their share of the damage on Evere.

Several sources, Allied and German, indicate that there was virtually no reaction from the AAA units based at Evere and if any, they were silenced after a few attacks. However, both units claim to have defended the airfield to the best of their abilities. 'A' and 'B' Flight of No. 2742 AAA fired their Brens from their billet windows. Some 2,600 rounds were expended and hits on several aircraft were claimed.<sup>157</sup> The gun posts of No. 2800 Squadron had observed the impending attack and were only waiting for the order to fire. When this was given the Bofors guns opened up and the Squadron claimed three kills and ten hits, 350 rounds of 40 mm were expended.<sup>158</sup> One Thornycroft truck was destroyed by incendiary bullets.<sup>159</sup>

In fact, only a few aircraft of II. or III. Gruppe were lost over Evere. During his second strafing attack Uffz. Norbert Risky's 'Black 12' was hit by AAA and oil covered his windscreen. He immediately left the scene and tried to make for Nordhorn. His engine was losing oil and a trail of blue smoke followed his Focke-Wulf. He managed to reach the German lines, but shortly before reaching Klausheide airfield his engine quit and he made a rough belly-landing east of Zwolle, severely damaging his Fw 190 D-9. The same evening he is back in Nordhorn. Uffz. Risky's *Staffelkamarad* Uffz. Wilhelm Schmitz was not so lucky. His aircraft was probably hit in the engagement with No. 403 Squadron Spitfires and was seen skimming treetops and houses, heading north-west. Uffz. Wilhelm Schmitz was seen leaning forward in his belts, probably severely wounded. After some 25 kilometres, the Focke-Wulf hit a row of poplars between Wieze and Moorsel and exploded on impact. A couple of metres away, in a ditch, lay the decapitated body of the pilot, still strapped in its seat. Twenty-four year



old Unteroffizier Wilhelm Schmitz had completed his third and final mission.

According to Allied records the attack of II. and III./JG 26 on Evere lasted nearly half an hour.<sup>160</sup> Around 09.53 hrs, the last German fighter left the scene and headed north, a dangerous homeward leg still ahead of them. Damage to Evere airfield and its structures was extensive. As the No. 416 Squadron diarist put it: *"The year started with a bang and what a bang. The Jerries had the finger well out and pulled a surprise raid on us."*

No. 127 Wing (RCAF) HQ summed up the damage as one Spitfire XVI in the air, with 11 completely written off and 12 'Cat. B' on the ground. The aircraft belonged mainly to No. 416 Squadron which could only report four Spitfires serviceable on the following day. 11 MT vehicles were damaged with only one being completely destroyed. Casualties amongst ground personnel were comparatively light, with one killed, nine wounded and one dangerously ill. 2nd TAF Communication Squadron lost eight aircraft destroyed, eight aircraft damaged 'Cat. B' and six more damaged 'Cat. Ac'. Two MT vehicles were seriously damaged, but luckily no personnel were injured. Several aircraft such as Dakotas, Liberators, Ansons, Proctors, Mustangs which belonged to other units, as well as Prince Bernhard's Beech, were destroyed or damaged. Documentary proof exists that some 60 aircraft were either destroyed or damaged at Evere. One Allied source gives the number of 61 aircraft destroyed at Evere.<sup>161</sup>

For the attackers of JG 26 the long trip back to their homebase lay ahead and this was not without risk. Individually, or in small groups, the Fw 190 pilots of II./JG 26 tried to reach Klausheide airfield. Fw. Heinz Goman passed a British

liaison aircraft on his way back; he could have shot it down but thought by himself: "... Heck, those poor devils; let them live..." and waved at them.<sup>162</sup> Uffz. Edwin Kalbus of 5./JG 26 claimed a P-47 at 10.04 hrs in the Hasselt area. Most likely Kalbus had a shot at one of the P-47s of the 366th FG, but no corresponding loss is known. Uffz. Kalbus received the EK II on January 5th for his claim. Uffz. Ernst Lampferhoff of 5./JG 26 was less fortunate. After destroying at least three aircraft at Evere, one of them a Dakota, he had set course for base when he was hit by light AAA. He recalled: "On the return flight from Brussels I somehow messed up completely. All of a sudden I was at low-level over water. From the coastline I was fired upon and when I was hit from the rear the propeller hit the water. In front of me, I faintly saw some land. For as long as possible, I tried to reach some altitude with full revs and an unwieldy propeller. After some time the machine became more and more difficult to control and some oil circuits broke, causing the windscreen to smear. I had to bale out... Beneath me there was land; I had been lucky. I was captured immediately by a jeep patrol when I had landed about 100 metres from the beach in the Vlissingen area. I was treated fairly well. The first night I spent at the prison in Goes."<sup>163</sup>



Uffz. Ernst Lampferhoff of 5./JG 26. He joined 5. Staffel in July 1944 and completed nine missions before he was shot down on January 1st 1945. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)



A wrecked clipped-wing Spitfire at Evere. (Greenough)



This P-51D of the 361st FG was shot-up whilst visiting Evere on January 1st 1945. (Caskey)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

Pilots of 5./JG 26 in September/October 1944 at Kirchhellen airfield. From left to right: Uffz. Krusen (KIA 28.2.1945), Uffz. Kalbus (KIA 22.3.1945), Uffz. Hoffmann, unknown, Oblt. Vogt (KIA 14.1.1945), Uffz. Lampferhoff (POW 1.1.1945), Lt. Mayer (KIA 4.1.1945), Lt. Wirth (KIA 9.3.1945), Fhr. Schramm (KIA 29.4.1945) and Uffz. Just (KIA 25.2.1945). (Lampferhoff/Poelchau)



Uffz. Ernst Lampferhoff's 'White 7' crashed south of Goes and was destroyed.<sup>164</sup> He would not be the only pilot of II./JG 26 spending the night in Goes. Fw. Erich Ahrens of 7./JG 26 had chosen the same course as Uffz. Lampferhoff and his Fw 190 D-9 was hit by AAA in the coolant tank. Ahrens belly-landed his 'Brown 6' south-west of Goes and was also taken to the prison.<sup>165</sup>

Three more Fw 190s of 7./JG 26 were shot down on their way back to Nordhorn. Gefr. Hans-Karl Götz's – a 21-year old pilot on his first combat mission – had already been hit by light AAA on the outward course, but was able to

continue. After he had shot at two twin-engined aircraft on the ground at Evere with unobserved results, he made off in a north-easterly direction. Shortly afterwards, his engine caught fire and he baled out, landing on Gilze-Rijen airfield where he was taken POW<sup>166</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the loss of another 7./JG 26 pilot can be best told by Lt. Siegfried Sy: "I returned to base at lean mixture with Uffz. Speer of 7. Staffel; our fuel was running out. Near the front line German Flak shot down Uffz. Speer at 300 metres altitude with one, well directed, shot. German Flak must have slept badly this day. I myself



Uffz. Leo Speer of 7./JG 26, one of several pilots of the Geschwader who became a victim of their own Flak. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)

Fw 190 D-9s of 7./JG 26 return after a mission. (Eickhoff)



flew back to Nordhorn all alone and landed without incident.<sup>167</sup>

Uffz. Leo Speer crashed near Harderwijk, on the southern tip of the Zuiderzee, and was killed.<sup>168</sup> He was buried at the local cemetery of Harderwijk, before being reinterred at Ysselsteyn Military Cemetery in 1950. Finally the last loss suffered by 7. Staffel was Gefr. Willi Kunz. His loss is somewhat of a mystery as he crashed near Borger, some 20 kilometres south-east of Assen in the northern part of the Netherlands. This meant that Gefr. Willi Kunz flew too far north. According to Kunz's loss report he was hit by AAA on the return flight and after a while decided to make a belly-landing. Unfortunately, the terrain he chose was pretty rough and the Focke-Wulf overturned, killing 20-year old Gefr. Willi Kunz.<sup>169</sup> According to several logbooks, the remaining pilots of II./JG 26 returned to Nordhorn-Klausheide between 10.25–10.50 hrs.<sup>170</sup>

III. Gruppe pilot Ofw. Willi Zester remembers his return flight to Plantlünne: "After three or four runs my guns were empty. My wingman and 2. Rotte had independently left for home. I decided to head north at extreme low altitude. Suddenly, I realised something was not right and after some time I realised that my radio was out of order. Soon, I met up with some other Fw 190s and we proceeded along an approximate course. Just over two hours later, I landed at Plantlünne. Apparently, while approaching, I had gone a bit low; one of the propeller blades was slightly bent. There were fir needles behind the propeller hub and a rifle-calibre round had passed through the fuselage and cut off the antenna; that explained the radio silence. In the course of the day some more aircraft dropped in. Our Ju 88 was hit by our own flak in the fuselage but continued with us as far as Antwerp. When she was hit in the left engine over Antwerp, she returned and made a perfect one-engined landing at Plantlünne. Our NSFO was in that aircraft; he had always wanted to fly along on a real combat mission. After the Ju 88 had landed, he disappeared without a trace and changed his pants..."<sup>171</sup>

III./JG 26 lost two pilots on its way back to Plantlünne. Lt. Gottfried Meier of 9./JG 26 was killed when his 'White 15' crashed near Vrasene, eight kilometres north-west of St. Niklaas.<sup>172</sup> He was last seen on the return flight and probably was shot down by Allied AAA. A police report indicates that he had been hit in the neck and therefore may already have been mortally wounded before he crashed.<sup>173</sup> Finally Lt. Rudolf Leinberger, a 11. Staffel pilot, had been hit by AAA in the engine and decided to land at Kirchhellen airfield. However, he landed with too much speed and rolled into the forest during which he suffered injuries. The remaining pilots

landed at Plantlünne between 10.10–10.30 hrs.<sup>174</sup>

In total, the mission on January 1st cost II./JG 26 some 13 Fw 190 D-9s destroyed and two more damaged.<sup>175</sup> Nine pilots did not return. Four ended up as POW, five, including Uffz. Altendorf of Flüg 1, were killed or missing. One more pilot was injured. III./JG 26 lost six Bf 109s in total. Four pilots did not return, one became a POW and three others were either killed or posted missing. One pilot suffered injuries, but remained with the Gruppe. Unfortunately no details are known about the individual claims of II. and III./JG 26 or of the number of aircraft destroyed on the ground at Evere. A report dated January 4th indicated that II. Jagdkorps was still awaiting photographic coverage of the damage at Evere.<sup>176</sup> Another report gives the total claim for JG 26, including those claimed at Grimbergen, as 32 single-engine, 22 twin-engine and 13 four-engine aircraft destroyed and nine single-engine, six twin-engine and one four-engine damaged.<sup>177</sup> If we deduct the number known to have been claimed by I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 at Grimbergen, being one Mustang, one twin-engine and four four-engine aircraft, leaves the following for Evere: 31 single-engine, 21 twin-engine and nine four-engine aircraft. This corresponds well with the actual losses at Brussels-Evere given above.<sup>178</sup> The attack by both Gruppen of JG 26 should be viewed as a success. One critical point was the low number of destroyed/damaged Spitfires of No. 127 Wing. Apparently several pilots of JG 26 concentrated on the numerous twin-engine aircraft at Evere, instead of the Spitfires. These front line aircraft would have been a better choice than the transport aircraft. Although W/Cdr. Johnson and others were not too impressed with the Luftwaffe's marksmanship, they had done considerable damage. It was the ample supply of aircraft and spare parts and the hard work of the ground crews that put the aerodrome back into action within just two days.

### Conclusion

Although the pilots were not to blame, the attack by I./JG 26 and III./JG 54 on Grimbergen can only be described as a failure. As happened in many cases before, German intelligence proved to be unreliable. The attack by II. and III./JG 26 on Evere can be considered a success. Although the losses of II./JG 26 were considerable, the amount of destruction at Evere made up for the losses.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Several accurate books have been published on JG 26 and III./JG 54, therefore their activities at the end of 1944 are only summarised. For more details see *The JG 26 War Diary*, Vol. II 1943–1945, by Donald Caldwell and 'Green Hearts, First in Combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke.

<sup>2</sup> RL2-III-880/882, Flugzeugbestand und Bewegungsmeldungen.

<sup>3</sup> RL2-III-880/882, Flugzeugbestand und Bewegungsmeldungen.

<sup>4</sup> Flugbuch Uffz. Stumpf, Oblt. Glunz and Fw Hött, all II./JG 26.



Lt. Gottfried Meier of 9./JG 26. Meier had just recently joined 9. Staffel, but was killed on his first mission with JG 26. (BA Freiburg, RL10/266)



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<sup>8</sup> RL2-III-880/882, Flugzeugbestand und Bewegungsmeldungen.

<sup>9</sup> Based on 'Green Hearts, First in Combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke.

<sup>10</sup> KTB Stab NJG 6, Order Maj. Bratz, 7.JD-la-Nr. 17927/44 g.Kdos vom 4.12.1944.

<sup>11</sup> Ofw. Bunje and probably Lt. Hemmerich belonged to 4./NJG 6.

<sup>12</sup> Letter Helmut Bunje to Lothar Hemmerich, dated 7.4.1987. In fact the transfer from Schwäbisch-Hall to Reinschlehen took place on December 12th.

<sup>13</sup> Letter Helmut Bunje, dated 3.1.1987.

<sup>14</sup> Letter Lothar Hemmerich, dated 5.10.1987.

<sup>15</sup> Flugbuch Uffz. Walter Stumpf, 7./JG 26, 17.12.1944 09.30-10.10 hrs, Fw. Karl Hött, 6./JG 26, 17.12.1944 09.20-09.55 hrs, Oblt. Adolf Glunz, 6./JG 26, 17.12.1944 09.20-09.55 hrs.

<sup>16</sup> Info Don Caldwell, dated 27.02.2001, based on KTB 1./JG 26.

<sup>17</sup> 'This could have been Oftr. Alois Götz of 5./NJG 6, although this could not be verified as Götz and his crew were killed in a crash on January 17th, 1945.

<sup>18</sup> Based on documentation of Erich Heider (†1992), provided by Jürgen Heider 6.5.1998.

<sup>19</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.

<sup>20</sup> The code 'Varus' was given as pre-warning 24 hrs before start of the mission and 'Teutonicus' instructed the fighter units to roll all aircraft to the edge of the field to enable take-off at first light the following morning.

<sup>21</sup> RL10/258, Kriegstagebuch 1./JG 26.

<sup>22</sup> Flugbuch Lt. Peter Crump, 10./JG 54, 15.12-15.18 hrs.

<sup>23</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 139/1945, point 2.

<sup>24</sup> Letter Karl-Heinz Ossenkop, dated 17.8.1997.

<sup>25</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 140/1945, point 4.

<sup>26</sup> Lt. Siegfried Sy had belonged to 7./JG 26 until Christmas 1944. When on December 24th, Lt. Siegfried Benz of 6./JG 26 was killed, almost no officer remained in that Staffel and Lt. Sy was transferred from 7. to 6./JG 26. Letter Siegfried Sy, dated 29.8.1986.

<sup>27</sup> Letter Siegfried Sy, dated 29.8.1986.

<sup>28</sup> Letter Helmut Bunje, dated 3.1.1987.

<sup>29</sup> Letter Heinz Gommann, dated 25.02.1994. Heinz Gommann is mistaken concerning Lt. Peter Crump. Lt. Crump had already left 11./JG 26 for III./JG 54 in July 1944.

<sup>30</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-877.

<sup>31</sup> According to Oblt. Fritz Wegner, of 6./JG 1, Hptm. Staiger was not in Drope on December 31st. The contradiction between these two reports could not be explained.

<sup>32</sup> Qbi is a Luftwaffe abbreviation which stands for bad weather in which take-off was usually not allowed. In this situation the weather was apparently bad, but they just were able to take off.

<sup>33</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.

<sup>34</sup> Letter Walter Tepperis, dated 22.5.1994. Uffz. Tepperis had already received his assignment to transfer to the Stabschwarm of JG 26, but flew the January 1st mission still with his old Staffel, 11./JG 26.

<sup>35</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.

<sup>36</sup> RL2-III-734.

<sup>37</sup> Letter Siegfried Sy, dated 29.8.1986.

<sup>38</sup> Exact number and identity of aircraft unconfirmed.

<sup>39</sup> Operational Record Book No. 2742 Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment.

<sup>40</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 58/1945, point 4-8. Enschede and Soesterberg were regular airfields, the other locations only emergency landing strips.

<sup>41</sup> This means that 52 Fw 190 D-9s belonged to I./JG 26. I./JG 26 reported 49 Fw 190 D-9 available on 31.12.1944. This seems to indicate that more aircraft must have arrived, possibly transferred by FlG pilots, later in the day on December 31st.

<sup>42</sup> Ofw. Erich Schwarz replaced Lt. Waldemar Söffing who was recovering from an automobile accident a few days before Christmas. See also The 'JG 26 War Diary' Vol. II by Don Caldwell, page 397 and 402.

<sup>43</sup> Based on KTB 10./JG 54 and logbook info of Uffz. Weber and Ofw. Zech.

<sup>44</sup> Logbook Uffz. Heinrich Herbst, 3./JG 26.

<sup>45</sup> Logbooks Lt. Georg Kiefler (1./JG 26), Lt. Peter Crump (10./JG 54) and KTB 10./JG 54.

<sup>46</sup> KTB 1./JG 26, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 140/1945 (point 8) and No. 58/1945 (point 16).

<sup>47</sup> Letter Karl-Heinz Ossenkop, dated 17.8.1997.

<sup>48</sup> KTB 1./JG 26. Two of them were Uffz. Otto Weber, 11./JG 54, at 08.36 hrs, cause unknown and Uffz. Heinrich Herbst, 3./JG 26, at 09.02 hrs, with undercarriage damage.

<sup>49</sup> Letter Karl-Heinz Ossenkop, dated 17.8.1997.

<sup>50</sup> RL2-III-1172/84, RL10/266 and KTB 1./JG 26. The crashsite near Blokland could not be established through original sources and is based on secondary sources. According to the KTB of I./JG 26 Oftr. Niessen belly-landed on a 'Dutch island'.

<sup>51</sup> RL10/266 and Namentliche Verlustmeldung 2./JG 26.

<sup>52</sup> Based on 'Green Hearts, First in Combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke.

<sup>53</sup> Based on 'Green Hearts, First in Combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke. According to his logbook Ofw. Zech landed at 10.05 hrs.

<sup>54</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 126/1945, point 7.

<sup>55</sup> Letter Dieter Krügeloh, dated 04.01.1993.

<sup>56</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 134A/1945, report of eyewitness Jacques Reyckler, dated 23.11.1992, forwarded by Cynrik de Decker.

<sup>57</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.

<sup>58</sup> In fact Maj. Borris reported later in the KTB of I./JG 26 that the 12 Spitfires turned away and did not attack. Unfortunately for III./JG 54 this was not true.

<sup>59</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. B.Mach, No. 308 Squadron.

<sup>60</sup> Personal Combat Report Sgt. S.Breyner, No. 308 Squadron.

<sup>61</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.

<sup>62</sup> Graves Registration Report No. BAOR/DDGR/14150.

<sup>63</sup> Correspondence with Marianne Dudak, 1993-1997 and burial files Zaanslag cemetery.

<sup>64</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Sgt. Z.Soszynski, No. 308 Squadron.

<sup>65</sup> Eyewitness report of Robert Moens, forwarded by Luc Cox on 11.2.2000. Unfortunately the piece of paper could not be traced again, although Mr. Moens believes he still has it.

<sup>66</sup> Take-off was with 64 aircraft, 14 were early returns and a minimum of 13 were lost on the way to Grimbergen.

<sup>67</sup> Based on KTB 1./JG 26 and 'Green Hearts, First in combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke.

<sup>68</sup> Letter Karl-Heinz Ossenkop, dated 17.8.1997.

<sup>69</sup> Based on 'Het vliegveld van Grimbergen in de Tweede Wereldoorlog', by Frans van Humbeek, page 189.

<sup>70</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 58/1945, RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 263, dated 8th January 1945 and A.I.2.(g) Report No. 2305, dated February 1st 1945.

<sup>71</sup> Based on 'Green Hearts, First in Combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke.

<sup>72</sup> Based on 'Het vliegveld van Grimbergen in de Tweede Wereldoorlog', by Frans van Humbeek, page 191.

<sup>73</sup> There is a possibility that he may also have been shot down by the Polish Spitfires in the Lokeren area, but no matching crash location could be found.

<sup>74</sup> Letter Karl-Heinz Hartmann, dated 17.07.1994.

<sup>75</sup> ESN = Recognition signal with flare gun.

<sup>76</sup> Letter Karl-Heinz Ossenkop, dated 17.8.1997.

<sup>77</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report, No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.

<sup>78</sup> Fw. Karl Hoffmann, 2./JG 26, reported later that he witnessed the crash and saw that the aircraft was burning.

<sup>79</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 134/1945 and local research by A.van Lingen, J.Woortman and A. van Zanvoort.

<sup>80</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung, RL10/272, RL2-III-1172/55, RL2-767/1 and article by H.Brandt.

<sup>81</sup> RL10/258, KTB 1./JG 26.

<sup>82</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung und KTB 1./JG 26.

<sup>83</sup> Based on ULTRA Report 57-BT-1701 and 'Green Hearts, First in combat with the Dora 9', by Axel Urbanke.

<sup>84</sup> According to his logbook Lt. Kiefler landed at 10.35 hrs on Fürstenau.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Jörg Kiefler from 'Het vliegveld van Grimbergen in de Tweede Wereldoorlog' by Frans van Humbeek, page 195.

<sup>86</sup> RL2-II-855, Betr. Angriffe auf britische und amerikanische Flugplätze, Luftwaffenführungsstab Ic, Fremde Luftwaffen West Nr. 1160/45 g.Kdos. vom 25.2.1945.

<sup>87</sup> Letter Heinz Gommann, dated 25.02.1994.

<sup>88</sup> According to A.D.I.(K) Report No. 32/1945 and letter Helmut Heuser dated June 1994.

<sup>89</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 31/1945, point 3.

<sup>90</sup> In the source, mistakenly indicated as the river Lys.

<sup>91</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 33/1945, point 2-5.

<sup>92</sup> Letter Helmut Heuser, dated June 1994.

<sup>93</sup> RL2-III-734.

<sup>94</sup> ULTRA-Report 56-BT-886.

<sup>95</sup> As indicated by Helmut Bunje, Siegfried Sy, Helmut Heuser, Werner Molge (in Caldwell) and research by Gerd Poelchau (†). The A.D.I.(K) Reports indicate a number of 26 Fw 190 D-9s, however, this number seems to be too low.

<sup>96</sup> RL2-III-734.

<sup>97</sup> According to Namentliche Verlustmeldung of Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf: 'Auf Befehl des Kommodore des JG 26 am 1.1.45 mit Fw 190 zum Tiefangriff auf Flugplatz Evere gestartet.'

<sup>98</sup> RL2-III-1172/44 and Namentliche Verlustmeldung.

<sup>99</sup> As stated in Don Caldwell's 'JG 26 War Diary Vol. II', the Stabschwarm consisted of Gefr. Mittag, Oftr. Heuser and Oftr. Przybil. This was based on research by Gerd Poelchau, but has proven to be incorrect. Gefr. Wilhelm Mittag did not participate in Bodenplatte. He had landed with a shot-up canopy at Münster on December 29th and had not yet returned to Klausheide. Oftr. Heuser flew as wingman with his Staffelführer Oblt. Glunz. Based on correspondence with Wilhelm Mittag and Helmut Heuser.

<sup>100</sup> Flugbuch of Lt. Seyd (5.), Oblt. Glunz (6.), Fw. Hött (6.), Lt. Dietze (7.) and Uffz. Stumpf (7.) all give a take-off time of 08.20 hrs. No take-off sequence can be determined based on these logbooks.

<sup>101</sup> Based on research by Gerd Poelchau (†).

<sup>102</sup> Letter Helmut Heuser, dated June 1994.

<sup>103</sup> According to RL2-III-853, II./JG 26 reported 13 Fw 190s destroyed and 2 damaged. The pilots of only ten aircraft have been identified, meaning that the other five survived without injuries.

- <sup>100</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./JG 26.
- <sup>101</sup> Logbook Fw. Karl Höt, 6./JG 26, 21.07.1944-04.05.1945.
- <sup>102</sup> Letter Lothar Hemmerich, dated 5.10.1987.
- <sup>103</sup> Letter Helmut Heuser, dated June 1994.
- <sup>104</sup> Letter Helmut Bunje, dated 3.1.1987.
- <sup>105</sup> 'JG 26, Geschichte eines Jagdgeschwaders' by Josef Priller, page 271.
- <sup>106</sup> Unfortunately Norbert Risky already passed away in 1983.
- <sup>107</sup> Letter Norbert Risky to sister of Ogr. Hubert Lott, dated 17.12.1956.
- <sup>108</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.
- <sup>109</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.2524-D.2532.
- <sup>110</sup> Report No. BAOR/DDGR/14150.
- <sup>111</sup> RL2-III-1171/44.
- <sup>112</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.
- <sup>113</sup> Letter Helmut Bunje, dated 3.1.1987.
- <sup>114</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.
- <sup>115</sup> Flugbuch Fw. Wolfgang Polster, 11./JG 26, and notes Ofw. Willi Zester, 9./JG 26.
- <sup>116</sup> According to RL2-III-734 some 7 Bf 109G-14s and 13 Bf 109K-4s were ready for the mission on December 31st. ADI(K) Report No. 214A/1945 states that 29 aircraft participated., indicating that further aircraft were made operational during the night.
- <sup>117</sup> 'JG 26, Geschichte eines Jagdgeschwaders' by Josef Priller, page 272.
- <sup>118</sup> Report written by Erich Heider in 1989. All material provided by son of Erich Heider (†28.1.1992) in May 1998.
- <sup>119</sup> NSFO = National Sozialistischer Führungsoffizier. An officer who was in charge of keeping up the basic principles of Nazism in the Gruppe. Sometimes a choice of free will, but mostly appointed by the Kommandeur. The job was not highly thought of.
- <sup>120</sup> Probably Maj. Franz Rieser, born 24.12.1894. Major Rieser was killed in a strafing attack on April 9th 1945. It is believed that he was Ia of III./JG 26.
- <sup>121</sup> Report written by Erich Heider, dated 1.9.1989. Confirmed by letter of Bordfunker Uffz. Heinz Schmidt, dated 31.7.1991. It is believed that Ofw. W. the second Lotse, was in fact Oftr. Alois Götz, 5./NJG 6, but this could not be proven.
- <sup>122</sup> 'JG 26, Geschichte eines Jagdgeschwaders' by Josef Priller, page 272.
- <sup>123</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 214A/1945, point 3-5.
- <sup>124</sup> Letter Walter Tepperis, dated 22.5.1994.
- <sup>125</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.
- <sup>126</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 161/1945, point 3, and Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.
- <sup>127</sup> War Diary 62nd Anti-Tank (SP), R.A..
- <sup>128</sup> Based on research by Gerd Poelchau and Jochen Eickhoff.
- <sup>129</sup> According to report RL2-III-1172/62 he flew Bf 109K-4, WNr. 330379, 'Black 15'. The Namentliche Verlustmeldung lists his aircraft as Bf 109G-14, WNr. 464330, 'Black 12', but this has now been identified as an aircraft lost by 14./EJG 1 on 22.11.1944.
- <sup>130</sup> Operational Record Book No. 403 Squadron. The two pilots are not related.
- <sup>131</sup> A.D.L.S. = Air Dispatch Letter Service.
- <sup>132</sup> Probably the strip was B.76 Peer.
- <sup>133</sup> Operational Record Book 2nd TAF Communication Squadron.
- <sup>134</sup> Personal Combat Report P/O S. Butte, No. 403 Squadron and telephone conversation of 21 October 2001.
- <sup>135</sup> Operational Record Book 2nd TAF Communication Squadron.
- <sup>136</sup> Based on several sources. However, no claim of F/Lt. D.W.A. Harling was ever put forward.
- <sup>137</sup> Operational Record Book No. 416 Squadron and logbook F/Lt. Neil G. Russell.
- <sup>138</sup> Letter of Ken Williams to Cynrik de Decker, dated 12.12.1996.
- <sup>139</sup> Logbook F/Lt. Neil G. Russell, No. 416 Squadron.
- <sup>140</sup> Letter Chuck Darrow to Cynrik de Decker, date unknown.
- <sup>141</sup> Operational Record Book No. 416 Squadron.
- <sup>142</sup> Letter Heinz Gomann, dated 25.02.1994.
- <sup>143</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.
- <sup>144</sup> RL10/261, Abschlussliste II./JG 26.
- <sup>145</sup> 'The JG 26 War Diary, Volume Two 1943-1945', by Don Caldwell, page 414-416.
- <sup>146</sup> Letter Siegfried Sy, dated 29.8.1986.
- <sup>147</sup> Personal Combat Reports P/O Steve Butte and F/Sgt. G.K. Lindsay, 2nd TAF Log of Casualty claims, assessments and losses.
- <sup>148</sup> Correspondence with Richard Reeves.
- <sup>149</sup> Operational Record Book 2nd TAF Communication Squadron.
- <sup>150</sup> Correspondence with Ralph W. Caskey, aero-engine mechanic No. 127 Wing.
- <sup>151</sup> Correspondence with Frank Sayer (A/M Coningham's personal driver).
- <sup>152</sup> Correspondence with Nevin Boswell Filby.
- <sup>153</sup> Logbook Oblt. Adolf Glunz and also 'JG 26, Geschichte eines Jagdgeschwaders' by Josef Priller, page 270.
- <sup>154</sup> Logbooks Lt. Günter Seyd and Lt. Gottfried Dietze, both II./JG 26.
- <sup>155</sup> Logbook Fw. Wolfgang Polster, 11./JG 26.
- <sup>156</sup> Operational Record Book No. 2742 Squadron.
- <sup>157</sup> AIR 16/1035, No. 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 144.
- <sup>158</sup> Operational Record Book No. 2800 Squadron.
- <sup>159</sup> According to the Operational Record Book of 2nd TAF Communication Squadron the attack lasted from 09.26 hrs until 09.53 hrs.
- <sup>160</sup> Logbook F/Lt. Neil G. Russell, No. 416 Squadron.
- <sup>161</sup> Letter Heinz Gomann, dated 25.02.1994.
- <sup>162</sup> Letter Ernst Lampferhoff to Gert Poelchau, dated 10.12.1989.
- <sup>163</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 32/1945 and Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.
- <sup>164</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 103/1945 and Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.
- <sup>165</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 31/1945.
- <sup>166</sup> Letter Siegfried Sy, dated 29.8.1986.
- <sup>167</sup> All German reports indicate that Uffz. Leo Speer crashed during the return leg of the operation. The crash location seems to indicate that it also could have happened on the outward course. However, no proof for this could be found.
- <sup>168</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung Gefr. Willi Kunz, 7./JG 26.
- <sup>169</sup> Logbooks Uffz. Stumpf, Lt. Seyd, Oblt. Glunz, Lt. Dietze, all II./JG 26.
- <sup>170</sup> Letter Willi Zester, dated 2.2.1954.
- <sup>171</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16th January 1945.
- <sup>172</sup> Copy Policereport 'Bulletin de renseignements', unknown source.
- <sup>173</sup> Logbook Fw. Wolfgang Polster and notes Ofw. Willi Zester.
- <sup>174</sup> RL2-III-853.
- <sup>175</sup> Fernschreiben II. Jako, Ic Nr. 140/44 vom 3.1.1945.
- <sup>176</sup> RL2-II-855, Betr. Angriffe auf britische und amerikanische Flugplätze, Luftwaffenführungsstab Ic, Fremde Luftwaffen West Nr. 1160/45 g.Kdos. vom 25.2.1945.
- <sup>177</sup> In Priller the number was given as 60-65 single-engine, 24 twin-engine and 32 four-engine aircraft destroyed. This seems to be based purely on a report by Major Anton Hackl made well after the war. No documentary proof for this could be found and the numbers, especially the four-engined, are definitely far too high.

# Bull's-eye on Brussels

**Jagdgeschwader 27 and IV./ Jagdgeschwader 54  
re-design Melsbroek**

Jagdgeschwader 27 was one of the oldest Jagdgeschwader and had flown on every front during the war. From the beginning, JG 27 had flown solely with the Messerschmitt Bf 109 and this would continue until the end of the war.

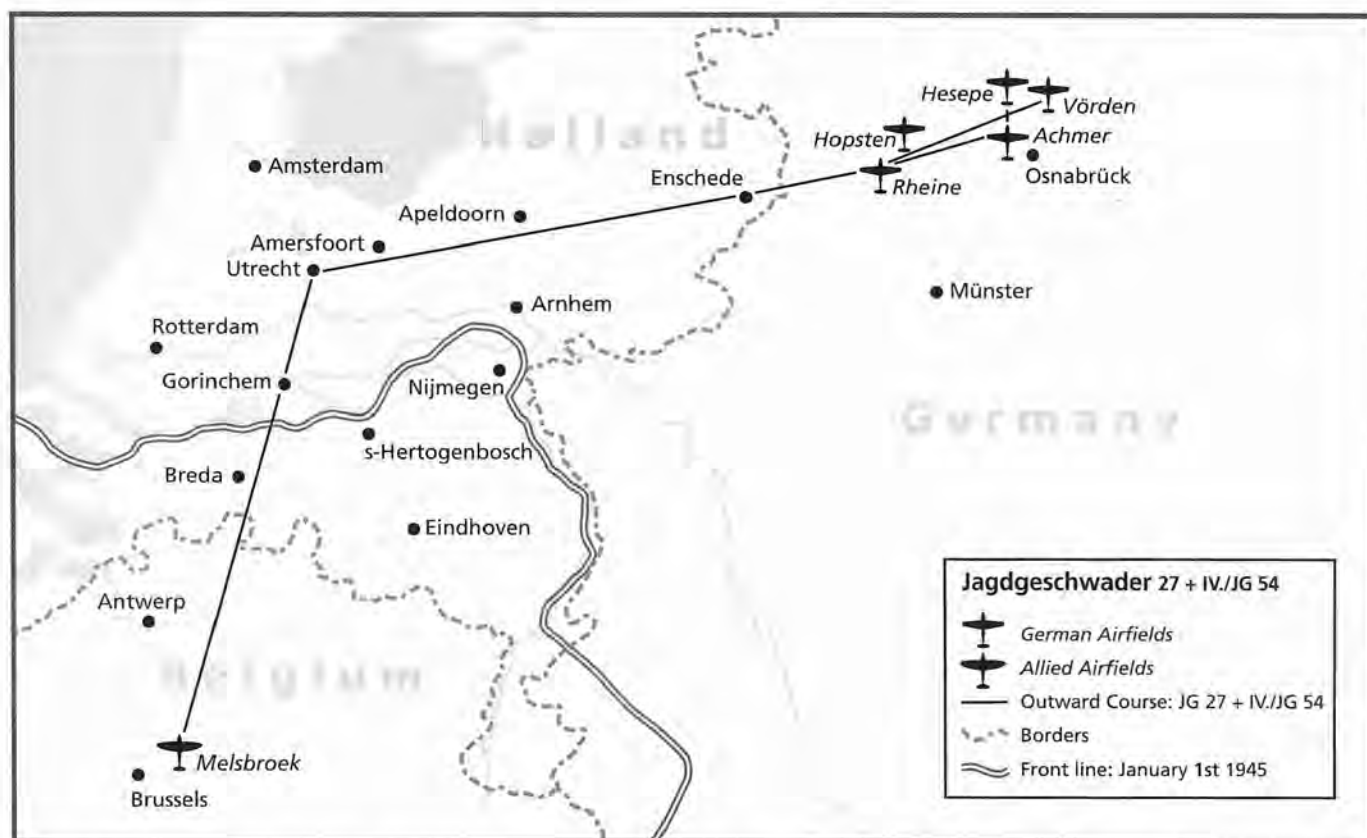
**I**N the second half of 1944, JG 27 had mainly been flying operations in the defence of Germany. A short description is now given of each Gruppe to offer a better understanding of the state of this Geschwader at the end of December 1944.<sup>1</sup>

From June 7th until August 2nd, I./JG 27 had been flying operations in France to counter the Allied landings. In just eight weeks, the Gruppe lost 22 pilots killed and 12 wounded. More than 50 Messerschmitts were lost. Some 35 Allied aircraft were claimed destroyed. In the following weeks after their return from France, the Gruppe was to be re-equipped at Hoya, an airfield south-east of Bremen. Numerous new pilots, mostly fresh from the training schools or former bomber pilots, filled up the ranks. New Bf 109 G-14s had been delivered. In mid-October 1944 I./JG 27 returned to operations again and moved to Riesa-Leutewitz, a small airfield three kilometres south-

east of Riesa. On November 2nd the first Reichsverteidigung mission followed which resulted in heavy losses; no fewer than 26 Messerschmitts were shot down and 11 pilots were killed. On November 19th, the Gruppe moved to Rheine near the Dutch border. On one of their first missions on the 21st, the Gruppe lost Lt. Karl Wünsch, Kapitän of 2./JG 27. With 23 victories he was one of the old hares of the Gruppe. Lt. Heinrich Wiese, a former NCO-pilot who had been with the Gruppe since November 1942, replaced him.<sup>2</sup> Until December 16th, the Gruppe lost a further seven pilots. One of them was Gruppenkommandeur Hptm. Johannes Neumayer, who was killed on December 11th.

From June until the end of August 1944 II./JG 27 had been flying operations over the south-eastern part of Germany. Then it moved to Finsterwalde, south of Berlin and finally to Gütersloh on September 17th, to support the





counter attack on the Allied operations near Arnhem. Here the Gruppe flew missions together with I./JG 76 and III./JG 4 under the command of Stab JG 11.<sup>3</sup> Until the end of September, II./JG 27 lost five pilots killed and three wounded in these operations. Some 10 Allied fighters were shot down, but 17 Messerschmitts were lost. At the beginning of October, the Gruppe returned to Finsterwalde and was withdrawn from operations. A few days later, II./JG 27 moved to Riesa-Canitz from where it flew a mission on November 2nd. On November 19th, II./JG 27 moved to Hopsten, an airfield 10 kilometres north-east of Rheine. Until the beginning of the offensive in the Ardennes, II./JG 27 claimed 14 Allied fighters destroyed, but suffered severe losses with 12 killed and eight wounded pilots. Some 25 Messerschmitts were lost!

In October 1944, III./JG 27 had been withdrawn from operations and had retreated back to Grossenhain, some 32 kilometres north-west of Dresden. In some three months of action in France and on the Western Front it had lost some 100 aircraft. Forty-four pilots had been killed during operations and a further 20 wounded. The Gruppe was utterly exhausted. In Grossenhain it received 75 new Messerschmitt Bf 109 K-4. The Gruppe was not given much rest and on November 2nd 1944, it flew its first mission against the American Eighth Air Force and sustained heavy losses. Until its move to Hesepe<sup>4</sup> in December to support the offensive in

the West, III./JG 27 would lose another 23 aircraft destroyed and 12 pilots killed. No more than two victories were claimed in that period.

IV./JG 27 had been withdrawn from operations in August 1944 after sustaining heavy losses in France.<sup>5</sup> At Hustedt, eight kilometres north of Celle, IV./JG 27 re-equipped and in the next two weeks new Bf 109 G-14s together with pilots steadily arrived, though the latter were mostly inexperienced and direct from flight school. Mid-October saw the Gruppe returning to operations and during three missions in November alone lost a shocking 15 pilots killed and seven wounded. Thirty-six Messerschmitts were shot down and destroyed!<sup>6</sup> In these engagements 14 American aircraft – two B-17s and 12 P-47/P-51s – were claimed. On November 19th, the Gruppe had moved to Achmer from which on December 12th a successful mission was flown against a Lancaster formation of the RAF. Eight were claimed as destroyed.

By December 16th all Gruppen of JG 27 were based in the Rheine-Osnabrück area – I./JG 27 at Rheine, II./JG 27 at Hopsten, III./JG 27 at Hesepe and IV./JG 27 at Achmer. The Geschwaderstab was based at the village of Steinbeck, a few kilometres north of Ibbenbüren. Until December 31st JG 27 would fly operations in support of the ground offensive. Missions were flown regularly during the second half of December and generally these proved to be catastrophic. In only eight days of operations JG 27 lost 43 pilots killed, 29 wounded

and one captured. Only 58 Allied aircraft were shot down for the loss of more than 100 Bf 109s destroyed! In a letter to his parents of December 27th, Fw. Gert Gäbel, a pilot of 3./JG 27, draws a clear picture of the situation:

*"Christmas lies behind us. How long... only three days? No, it seems like ages! Our 'festivities' were very sad. In the afternoon we flew a mission over the Front and lost three men from my Staffel alone. So we celebrated with the five who remained, including our Staffelkapitän. The empty beds, our small circle, the candle light, everything reminded us of the Kameraden who lost their lives. Even on this evening our thoughts reminded us of the missions. On Christmas Day we lost 'Sepp'. The next day I shot down an American fighter near Dinom, but before my eyes my Rottenflieger was killed. Beside my Kapitän, who is still not able to fly, we are only the two of us left. When I rejoined the Staffel we were with sixteen. On Christmas Day I was promoted to Feldwebel. Normally I would have been glad, at the moment it means nothing at all."*

Not only the inexperienced pilots were lost, but also several of formation leaders. On December 27th Lt. Helmut Beckmann, Staffelführer of 4./JG 27 was shot down, but was able to bale out and landed slightly injured near the German lines. II. Gruppe lost two Gruppenkommandeure, Hptm. Fritz Keller and Hptm. Herbert Kutscha, and two Staffelkapitäne in December. When on December 27th Lt. Gernot Stein, Kapitän of 7./JG 27, failed to return, the Gruppe had no Gruppenkommandeur or Staffelkapitän available to lead the Gruppe in the air! III. and IV. Gruppe had not lost any commanders, but without doubt the heaviest loss for IV./JG 27 was Ofw. Heinrich Bartels who was killed on December 23rd. With 99 victories, Bartels had been the most successful pilot of IV. Gruppe and had led 15. Staffel on several occasions.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of the heavy losses in each Gruppe during the last two weeks of December, their strength had steadily been reduced. On December 31st, the Geschwader reported the following number of aircraft/pilots available:<sup>8</sup>

Aircraft available	Pilots operational
I./JG 27 22	22
II./JG 27 13	19
III./JG 27 15	13
IV./JG 27 17	16

### IV./ Jagdgeschwader 54 in late 1944

During the summer of 1944, IV./JG 54 had been completely rebuilt and put under the command of Maj. Wolfgang Späte. Now equipped with the Fw 190 A-8 the Gruppe returned to the Eastern Front in July 1944. By early September IV./JG 54 had retreated further and was finally withdrawn from operations and moved to Löbnitz. After receiving a number of new Fw 190s and new pilots, the Gruppe was ordered to transfer to Plantlünne on September 18th, to support the Army against the Allied undertaking at Arnhem. Before the end of the month 16 pilots had been killed and a further four wounded. One of the dead pilots was Lt. Hans Ransmayer, who had scored 37 victories on the Eastern Front. Lt. Kurt Olsen, another very experienced pilot, was wounded on September 21st and would not return to operations before the end of January 1945. In early October, IV./JG 54 was withdrawn from operations and moved to Mörtitz, some 22 kilometres north-east of Leipzig. In mid-November IV./JG 54 returned to the Western Front and moved to Vörden, 20 kilometres north of Osnabrück. The Gruppe would fly their missions under the command of JG 27, which was based in the same area. Over the next days several missions were flown, losses being severe. On November 26th Oblt. Heinrich Sterr, Kapitän of 16. Staffel, was shot down by Mustangs while landing at Vörden. With 129 victories he had been the most successful pilot of the Gruppe. During the

Three pilots of IV./JG 54 pose for photograph on a Fw 190 A-8. From left to right; unknown, Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber, Ofhr. Werner Timpe. Ofhr. Timpe of 14./JG 54 was reported missing on December 17th, 1944. Fw. Bachhuber on January 1st 1945 during Operation Bodenplatte. This picture was probably taken in November 1944 at Vörden. (Jirousek/Urbanke)





Fw 190 A-8s of IV./JG 54 parked on an airfield in the fall of 1944. In the front 'White 16' of 13./JG 54. The blue RVT-Band can be clearly seen together with the ~, the IV. Gruppe marking. (Kirsch/Urbanke)



period December 16th-31st, IV./JG 54 flew operations in support of the offensive and although some success was achieved, losses had been high.<sup>9</sup> Twenty-three pilots had been killed. Two of them were Staffelkapitäne – Lt. Paul Brandt of 16./JG 54 and Lt. Alfred Budde of 14./JG 54. After these heavy losses IV./JG 54 could only report 15 of its 23 Fw 190s ready for combat and 21 pilots operational on December 31st.

#### Preparations for New Years Day

Not much information exists on preparations by JG 27 and IV./JG 54 for New Year's Day. However, from the few sources available it seems clear that at

least the COs were aware of the planned operation around the beginning of December. Oblt. Emil Clade, at that time Staffelkapitän of 12./JG 27, remembers<sup>10</sup>: "On December 16th we were informed that a 'special undertaking'<sup>11</sup> had been prepared. All that we learned was the codeword 'Varus.' We continued flying our daily operations in the St. Vith-Eifel area, suffering heavy losses. I had almost forgotten about it until on December 31st I returned from a mission and landed back on Hesepe when my crew chief welcomed me with 'Varus!.' Suddenly I felt a little bit worried. I immediately called our Kommodore in Hopsten, but received no more details. No man was to leave



Pilots of 15./JG 54 at Mörtitz in November 1944. From left to right: Gefr. Hans-Herbert Strakhof (KIA 21.11.1944), Ofw. Schmeink, Staffelführer Lt. Carl Resch (KIA 14.1.1945), Gefr. Otto Beckert (KIA 21.3.1945), Ofw. Arno Thimm (WIA 15.4.1945 with JG 7), Fw. Helmut Stix (KIA 21.11.1944), (Walter)



the airfield and I was ordered to a meeting with Major Franzisket.<sup>12</sup>

At this meeting all Geschwaderkommandeure were to be informed that in the early morning of New Year's Day all Jagdgeschwader based on the Western Front would attack Allied airfields in Belgium. This mission would bear the name 'Bodenplatte.' Oblt. Emil Clade would lead the III. Gruppe and would join IV./JG 27 led by Hptm. Hanns-Heinz Dudeck to form one formation. The target would be Melsbroek airfield near Brussels. Clade recalled: "To make the surprise complete we would take off in the dark so we would be over the target at the break of dawn. The course to Brussels would not be a straight line, but we would fly to Utrecht and then south, so the attack would come from the north. Although not much resistance was expected as a result of the New Year festivities, a few Schwärme were detailed to attack possible 2 cm AAA batteries."<sup>13</sup>

Hptm. Dudeck, Kommandeur of IV./JG 27, had first heard of the impending attack on Brussels-Melsbroek on or about December 19th, when he was told of it by Oberst Gustav Rödel. Oberst Rödel was at that time still Kommodore of JG 27. The date on which the attack was to take place had not been decided, nor was any meeting of the Gruppenkommandeure held to make detailed plans. At the end of December, Dudeck applied for leave, which was granted only on the condition that he was to remain within reach of Achmer. He duly went off to stay at a country house in the neighbourhood. The next thing he heard was on the evening of December 31st, when he was notified by

telephone that the attack was to take place on the following morning. He was somewhat surprised as he had by this time forgotten all about the projected operation, having assumed that it was scrubbed! After he was notified of the attack Dudeck phoned his Staffelführer and told them to brief the pilots in accordance with the material received from Geschwader headquarters. He then resumed his New Year's Eve celebrations!<sup>14</sup>

At Hesepe, Clade had returned from his meeting at the Geschwader headquarters by 22.00 hrs. What he had learned from his Kommodore he passed on to his young pilots in as much detail as possible. The briefing was concluded around midnight and without taking part in any festivities, the pilots went to bed.<sup>15</sup>

During the afternoon of December 31st, the few remaining pilots of II./JG 27 based at Hopsten were informed that 12 of them were to fly to Rheine that same afternoon.<sup>16</sup> After landing at Rheine they were not briefed and neither they nor those from I./JG 27 received any detailed information until the following morning. Information was given only to prepare for a mission at dawn.<sup>17</sup>

At Vörden the pilots of IV./JG 54 had been aware of a planned operation since the beginning of December. Two Ju 88 crews had been waiting at the mess for weeks.<sup>18</sup> Lt. Kurt Bell, a pilot of 15. Staffel, remembers: "The operation was prepared in great detail and under strict security. Everyone knew that something was going on, but the details were secret. Even our Staffelführer Lt. Carl Resch did not say a word, although he was involved in the planning of the attack."<sup>19</sup>

On the evening of December 31st, Gruppenkommandeur Maj. Rudolf Klemm and Lt. Resch informed the Schwarmführer of the upcoming attack on Brussels-Melsbroek. They in turn informed the individual pilots. Aerial pictures were available and the pilots were told that they had to fly at least four attacks against the airfield and that the remaining ammunition should be used on the return flight. Since take off would be in darkness, a Ju 88 would lead the Gruppe as far as Utrecht.

Strangely neither Maj. Klemm nor Lt. Resch would lead the mission, but rather Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber of 15./JG 54. Apparently Klemm did not feel like it and Resch was ill. Bachhuber had joined IV./JG 54 in August 1944, but had already achieved a respectable 11 victories by the end of December.<sup>20</sup> Although the pilots were forbidden to drink alcohol, most of them did not pay much attention to such an order as it was New Year's Eve and, as one pilot recalls: "...we were well trained in boozing."

#### Melsbroek, December 1944

B-58, known as Melsbroek, offered plenty of targets. There was the odd Liberator, P-51, Anson, Auster, Proctor, Oxford and a number of rare Handley Page Harrows of No. 271 Squadron from the so-called Sparrow Flight which was mainly engaged in transport and casevac duties. The resident bomber wing, No. 139, comprising 98, 180 and 320 (Dutch) Squadrons operated B-25 Mitchell bombers. On the other side of the field

were the Spitfires of No. 16 Squadron, the Wellingtons of No. 69 Squadron and the Mosquitoes of No. 140 Squadron. These three squadrons made up No. 34 Recce Wing. Finally, at the centre of the field, there was an Eighth Air Force 'graveyard' where stricken bombers were put to rest. As with all the other airfields in western Belgium there was little left in the way of defence. Only three squadrons of the RAF regiment were left behind; one of these, No. 2717 Squadron, consisted of one flight only, their armament being Bren machine guns.

#### January 1st – heading for Melsbroek

At Rheine the pilots of I. and II./JG 27 attended a briefing at 07.00 hrs. Photographic cover of Brussels-Melsbroek airfield was available for the pilots and each of them received a 1:500,000 map on which the course to and from the target had already been marked; Rheine to Utrecht and then south-south-west to Brussels. No alternative target was given. The I. and II./JG 27 formation was to be led by a Ju 88 Lotse as far as the river Lek, some 10 kilometres south of Utrecht. Here the guns were to be cocked and recognition lights switched off. The FuG 16 was to be switched on at Utrecht.<sup>21</sup> The formation would be led by Oblt. Eberhard Schade, who had taken command of I./JG 27 on December 22nd. The Lotse, Ju 88 G-1 '2Z+EP' of 6./NJG 6, would be flown by the crew of Ofw. Winkler.



A row of Mitchells of No. 320 (Dutch) Squadron in a typical line up at Melsbroek. (Kloos)

# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

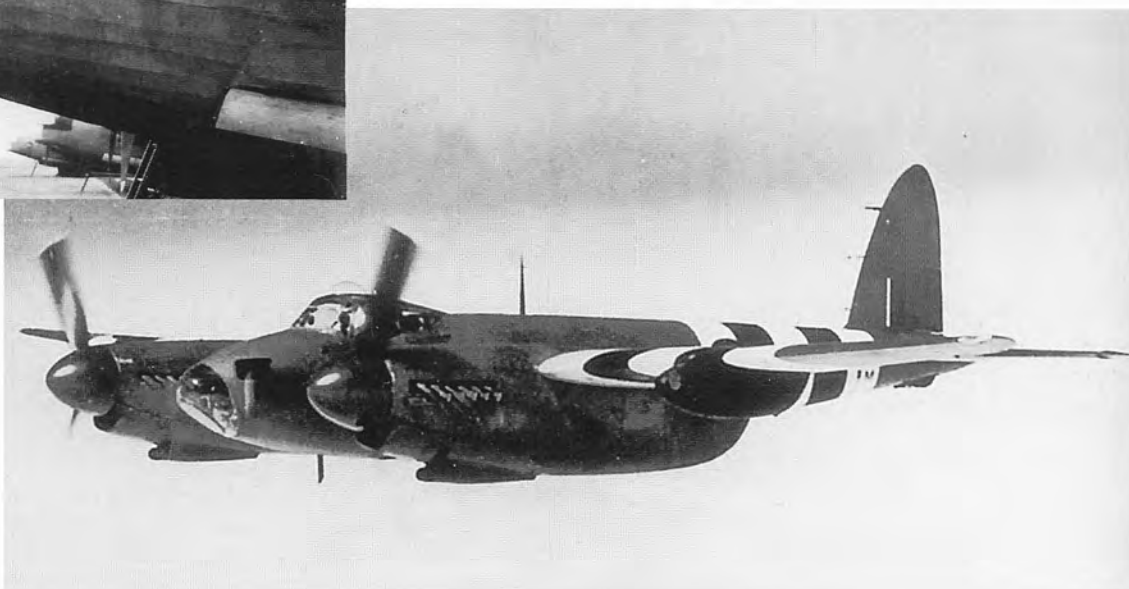


PR Spitfire XI serial  
PL890 of No. 16  
Squadron warming up at  
Melsbroek in December  
1944. (De Decker)

Lower right: PR Spitfire  
of No. 16 Squadron  
taking off at Melsbroek  
in December 1944.  
(De Decker)



Wellington of No. 69  
Squadron at Melsbroek.  
(De Decker)



A PR Mosquito of No.  
140 Squadron. (De  
Decker/Jackson)



The pilots were told that they would probably find Liberators, Mitchells, Marauders and Spitfires at Melsbroek, and in total some 180 aircraft would be standing on the airfield.<sup>23</sup> They were instructed to attack four-engined aircraft from a range of 300 metres, twin-engined aircraft from 200 metres and single-engined from 100 metres, being the respective ranges at which the wingspans of the target aircraft would fill the Revi sights. Each pilot was ordered to deliver four attacks on a north-to-south approach run and was expected to destroy one aircraft on each occasion. Pilots of II./JG 27 were told to return to Hopsten after completing their mission.<sup>23</sup>

At Hesepe the pilots of III./JG 27 were awoken at 04.00 hrs. After breakfast the pilots were brought to the airfield and a briefing was given by Oblt. Clade.<sup>24</sup> Hptm. Dudeck had left the New Year's Eve party at 04.00 hrs and when he arrived at Achmer the final briefing had taken place and the pilots already had their maps and knew the route. Hptm. Dudeck hurriedly familiarized himself with the course and then treated the pilots to a short speech telling them to follow him and shoot up as many aircraft as possible. The attack was scheduled to take place at 09.20 hrs and was to be made in sections of four, each section to make four runs over the airfield.

At Vörden Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber prepared his pilots for the coming mission. Bachhuber would fly the '<<<', normally the aircraft of the Kommandeur. The 15. Staffel would form the leading Schwarm with Gefr. Otto Beckert as Rottenflieger to Bachhuber. The second Rotte was led by Uffz. Rudolf Walter with Uffz. Gert Ohlenschläger on his wing.<sup>25</sup> The remaining Staffeln would follow in Schwärme.

At 08.25 hrs the 16 Messerschmitts of I./JG 27 took off from Rheine and were immediately followed by the 12 Bf 109s of II./JG 27.<sup>26</sup> The combined force assembled in a vic formation, each of whose arms was formed by three Schwärme, each of four aircraft line abreast. The leading Schwarm and those on the left of the formation belonged to I. Gruppe, those on the right to II. Gruppe. Oblt. Schade flew to the extreme port of the leading section as formation leader. After assembly, the formation came down to tree-top level and was led by a Ju 88, which was flying at the same height ahead and to the right of the attacking force, towards Utrecht.<sup>27</sup>

At Hesepe, III./JG 27 took off with approximately 15 Messerschmitts and over Achmer they joined the formation of around 17 Bf 109s of IV./JG 27, which had taken off at 08.15 hrs.<sup>28</sup> Led by the Ju 88 Lotse the formation headed west, some distance behind the combined force of I. and II. Gruppe. Clade remembers: "Engines were warmed up and we took off in Schwärme. In front of us was the Ju 88 Lotse. We

navigated with the help of his exhaust flames. The weather was clear and dawn began to break when we passed the Dutch frontier."<sup>29</sup>

At Vörden some 15 Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 54 had also taken off at 08.15 hrs. Led by its Ju 88 the Gruppe followed the same course and headed for Utrecht as well.<sup>30</sup>

Flying on the deck the formations flew over the peaceful countryside of Holland. Just before 09.00 hrs, I. and II./JG 27 approached Utrecht, where the Ju 88 left the formation.<sup>31</sup> Suddenly there was movement on the port side of the formation and seconds later Uffz. Heinrich Braun of 2./JG 27 crashed in flames near De Bilt, five kilometres east of Utrecht. What had happened?

At 08.29 hrs two Spitfire XIVs of No. 2 Squadron had taken off from Gilze-Rijen for a recce in the Leeuwen-Hilversum-Arnhem area. Flown by F/Lt. J.M. Young and F/Lt. L.J. Packwood they headed north. A few minutes later, at 08.32 hrs, they were followed by two Mustang IAs of No. 268 Squadron flown by F/Lt. A.D. Mercer and F/Lt. J.B. Lyke. They had been ordered to fly a Tac/R mission towards Utrecht. East of Amersfoort, Packwood and Young sighted two Ju 88s 'escorted' by 30-plus mixed Bf 109s and Fw 190s flying west. F/Lt. Packwood reported: "We turned up sun of the formation and attacked the last section. I attacked an Me 109 from dead astern and above, the enemy aircraft took no evasive action. I gave it a five second burst with cannon and machine guns, closing from 400-150 yards. I observed strikes on the cockpit and fuselage, the enemy aircraft disintegrated, the starboard wing broke off and flicked over on its back and hit the ground in flames."<sup>32</sup>

F/Lt. Packwood pulled up vertically and broke off the engagement. Without a doubt his victim was the Messerschmitt of Uffz. Braun. He crashed just north of the estate 'Houdringe', south-east of De Bilt. The local fire department arrived within minutes, but could not help anymore. Uffz. Heinrich Braun had been killed instantly.<sup>33</sup>

The flight of the two Mustangs also discovered some German aircraft. F/Lt. Dave Mercer saw them first over Utrecht. He reported: "I saw some enemy aircraft moving east from Utrecht. They were three Ju 188s with an escort of five Me 109s. I reported them to Longbow and then went down to attack. I selected the rear Ju 188, which had 1 fighter on its port side. I opened fire from dead astern at about 500 yards and closed to 100 yards, observing strikes on the tail and the fuselage, and then the starboard engine caught fire and burnt fiercely. My No. 2 attacked after I broke away and claims hit in the tail. The enemy aircraft flew on straight for a few moments and then crashed in a wood approx. E.3289. We observed him to break into flames, and thick black smoke arose from the spot which we could



Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber of 15./JG 54. Bachhuber was one of IV./JG 54's experienced pilots and had claimed 11 victories. He led the Gruppe during their Bodenplatte mission. (Bachhuber)



Uffz. Heinrich Braun of 2./JG 27. Braun was shot down near Utrecht on JG 27's outward course and was killed. (Braun)

still see rising when we had crossed the bomb line near 's Hertogenbosch."<sup>34</sup>

The three 'Ju 188s' may have very well been the Lotse Ju 88s of JG 27 and/or IV./JG 54. The Messerschmitts were probably early returns. The machine shot down by F/Lt. Mercer was, in fact, the Ju 88 G-1 'G9+AC' piloted by Uffz. Wilhelm Fischer which had taken off from Rheine. His crew consisted of Uffz. Heinz Böhle (Bordfunker), Ogfr. Simon Dagn (Bordwart) and Ogfr. Alois Stocklöv (Bordschütze) of 5./NJG 1. However, it is not known for certain that this crew acted as Lotse for the combined force of I. and II./JG 27. There are also indications that they may have flown as Lotse for III./JG 1.<sup>35</sup> After being hit by F/Lt. Mercer, the Ju 88 continued on an easterly course. In the village of Barneveld residents saw the stricken Junkers and could hear from the sound of its engines that something was wrong. Dangerously low, the Junkers seemed to avoid some buildings and crashed into a small forest, just north-east of Barneveld.<sup>36</sup> All four crewmembers were killed instantly. The following day the crew was buried in Apeldoorn.

Not only the I. and II. Gruppe formation encountered difficulties over Utrecht. A few minutes behind them were III. and IV. Gruppe. Oblt. Emil Clade remembers: "Over Utrecht our Ju 88 left us and we made a 90 deg. turn to the left, not at all easy with about 30 aircraft. Over the Waal/Rhine we would fly south towards Brussels, as this was easier to navigate. Shortly after, I noticed some disturbances on the right hand side in the until then steady formation. Two Spitfires had come up from behind and had nibbled two Messerschmitts out of our formation. We had orders not to interfere in a dogfight and continued on our course."<sup>37</sup>

It seems that Emil Clade is wrong since there are no claims known to fit the description. However, two Messerschmitts were lost near Utrecht. During the low-level flight Uffz. Heinz Frickmann of 11./JG 27 reportedly hit a tree and crashed into a farmhouse just south of IJsselsteijn, 10 kilometres south-west of Utrecht.<sup>38</sup> The fire department succeeded in extinguishing the flames quickly. Frickmann's body was recovered by men of the 4./gem. Flak abt. 617(v). Today he rests at Wassenberg war cemetery in Germany, 20 kilometres south-west of Mönchen-Gladbach, over 130 kilometres from the crash site. The reason for this distant burial location is not clear. When Uffz. Heinz Frickmann's relatives were located in the former GDR in 1995, it was learnt that his surviving sisters did not know of the existence of the grave at Wassenberg. After more than 50 years they finally heard what had happened to their brother.<sup>39</sup>

One more Messerschmitt of JG 27 was lost near Utrecht. Fw. Alfred Mannchen of 16./JG 27

was killed near Utrecht, but the circumstances of his crash are unknown. No trace of his crash location has been found.<sup>40</sup> Mannchen had been one of the more experienced pilots in the Staffel with 135 missions and six combat claims. He was buried in Utrecht and in 1948 reinterred at the German War Cemetery of Ysselsteyn.

Passing Utrecht, the JG 27 and IV./JG 54 formations continued on a southward course towards Breda. IV./JG 54 had not encountered any difficulties around Utrecht and would in fact suffer no losses at all on the way to Brussels.<sup>41</sup> But even after the losses around Utrecht, the ordeal for JG 27 was not over.

Around 09.05 hrs, I. and II./JG 27 approached Gorinchem on the River Waal. Suddenly, the port side of the I./JG 27 formation – especially 2./JG 27 – encountered heavy AAA. Lt. Heinrich Wiese's Messerschmitt exploded in the air. His wingman Lt. Joachim von Stechow, inexperienced as he was, tried to escape from the concentrated fire by making manoeuvres. Fhr. Otto Theisen, another pilot of 2. Staffel, warned him over the R/T to go down on the deck. As Theisen dived he saw that von Stechow's Messerschmitt was hit. The tail broke just aft of the cockpit and the aircraft nosed down and crashed. There was no escape for von Stechow.<sup>42</sup> Although not confirmed it seems that both aircraft were shot down by their own Flak.<sup>43</sup>

Lt. Heinrich Wiese's Messerschmitt crashed near Werkendam. Wiese was recovered by German soldiers alive, but succumbed to severe head injuries on his way to hospital. Lt. Wiese was buried at the local cemetery of Werkendam the following day.<sup>44</sup> Lt. Joachim von Stechow's Messerschmitt crashed near the village 't Zand, just east of Sleenwijk.<sup>45</sup> He was killed instantly and buried at the local cemetery.

JG 27 continued towards Breda and after passing east of the town, the formations headed straight for Brussels, now only some ten minutes away. When the city was sighted the formations of JG 27 were led in an anti-clockwise detour around Melsbroek in order to attack from the south-east.<sup>46</sup> Oblt. Clade remembers: "Over Brussels we flew a 120 deg. left turn and then we were to follow the road towards Melsbroek. During the long wide turn to the left I noticed a large square with many people, probably going to church, who waved at us believing we were the Allies!"<sup>47</sup>

With the formation of I. and II. Gruppe in the lead, JG 27 and IV./JG 54 was approaching Melsbroek at high-speed...

### The attack on Brussels-Melsbroek

Meanwhile the Allied crews at Melsbroek had woken early and were preparing for their mission.

The Mitchells of No. 139 Wing were detailed for an early mission to the Ardennes area and the



Uffz. Wilhelm Fischer the pilot of Ju 88 G-1 'G9+AC' of 5./NJG 1 which crashed near Barneveld. The complete crew of four were killed. Fischer probably flew as Lotse for I. and II./JG 27. (Mayer)



Uffz. Heinz Frickmann of 11./JG 27. He collided with a tree on JG 27's outward course and was killed. (Köppe)



field was bristling with activity: "Taxiing round from their dispersals for an early take-off, the Mitchells began lining up at the end of the runway, the polished Perspex gleaming in the sunshine, twin Cyclone engines bellowing across the flat expanse of Melsbroek airfield. In the belly of each aircraft nestled eight 500-lb bombs destined shortly to devastate the village of Dasburg, a communications center vital to Von Rundstedt's Panzer Divisions. At precisely 08.20 hours the leading aircraft surged forward and, with ever-increasing speed, gently became airborne. By 08.45 hours, the last box of Mitchells had taken off. They orbited their base, drawing together into tight formations as they gained altitude. Presently two waves of 18 aircraft set course and the pulsating clamour of engines slowly died away as six neatly spaced boxes disappeared into the distant tranquillity of the morning sky. For a moment all seemed quiet. Then everything seemed to happen at once..."

"The airfield controller saw them first. A single-engined fighter approached, flying very low, one wheel of its undercarriage hanging down. As he flashed it a red, thinking it was coming in to land, he caught sight of a swastika painted on the tailplane. Others, mostly Messerschmitts, followed flying in from the sun. There were three waves of 12, each wave heading in a different direction as they made their first approach. Abruptly the stillness was shaken by the slow drum-like rattle of cannon fire and the scream of supercharged engines."<sup>48</sup>

The Messerschmitts of I. and II./JG 27 swooped down upon the neatly parked aircraft and the pilots fired their cannon and machine guns. After the second or third run, the airfield was already in flames.<sup>49</sup> A few minutes later III. and IV. Gruppe arrived and the pilots saw that several aircraft at Melsbroek were already burning.<sup>50</sup> However, Oblt. Emil Clade, leading III./JG 27, remembers differently: "As we arrived over Melsbroek everything was peaceful. The AAA batteries were not manned and around the fuel stations, bombers and fighters were standing in circles as if cows around a water hole. Without hesitation everybody dove down on this prey as they arrived over the field. After a few minutes the whole airfield burned. The light flak tried to intervene, but this had no result. After the third run the airfield was so covered in smoke that I was amazed that there were no mid-air collisions."<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, the Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 54 arrived. After dropping their auxiliary fuel tanks over Brussels the Fw 190s swept down on Melsbroek. The field was already burning in several places and the pilots aimed at targets, which seemed to have escaped the previous attack.<sup>52</sup> Again and again, the Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs roared down on rows of grounded aircraft, parked close

together on the crowded dispersals. Flames leapt upwards and soon the sun was veiled by a pall of black smoke billowing above the burning wreckage.

The Mitchells that were left behind at Melsbroek were in for 'special treatment'. Their pilots had a habit of parking their aircraft neatly in line on a disused runway. Obviously, there was no way they would avoid detection by the raiders. Quickly, one after the other was hit and turned into a funeral pyre. No. 98 Squadron losing four, while No. 180 Squadron lost another five and No. 320 Squadron had to strike two off its strength. Dick Perkins, a pilot with No. 180 Squadron, was not on the mission to Dasburg and witnessed the attack: "I hung around the ops room doing some odd jobs and after everyone had taken off decided to walk back to 180's quarters on the other side of the airfield. Approaching the upwind end of the runway, I looked back to see if it was clear to cross. There was nothing in sight except a gaggle of Hurricanes on the downwind leg. *"I wonder where they've come from?"* I mused. Spitfires, yes, but we didn't usually see Hurricanes. Safely across, I looked back and saw them away in the grey murk turn across wind. Flying Control gave them a green and they banked, wheels and flaps down, on to their final approach. I looked again, harder this time. *"Funny looking Hurricanes,"* I thought. *"My God, they're 109s!"* Suddenly up went wheels and flaps and down they swept on the airfield in echelon at nought feet with guns blazing. For one horrified moment I thought the entire Luftwaffe was making a dead set at me personally. I flung myself to the ground, face buried in the grass, hands over my head, knuckles white, body rigid, as the rounds ripped into the grass around the sandbagged Bofors just behind me. There was a roar overhead and they were gone. Instantly I was up at Olympic speed, my insides seemingly tied in knots, for the safety room some two hundred yards away. Olympic speed? It was like a nightmarish slow motion horror film – running knee deep in treacle. The faster I ran the slower I seemed to go, and the further away the crew room appeared to be, while over my shoulder I could see the next wave coming in.

"I made it at last and hurled myself at the crew room door. It was locked. *"Open up. open up!"* I yelled *"Let me in!"* *"No fear, mate!"* called a cheerful Australian voice, *"It's bloody dangerous out there!"* Cursing and panting, I hurled myself into the corner of the wall by the latrines, fighting to get my breath back. *"What an appropriate spot,"* I thought wryly, hearing the zip and ping of ricochets. Through the gap between the hangars I could see that the control tower and headquarters buildings which I had just left on the other side of the airfield were receiving most attention. An ominous mushroom of black smoke was rising



Fw. Alfred Mannchen – one of the few old hares of IV./JG 27. Fw. Mannchen had joined I./JG 77 in May 1943 and flew several missions until he was wounded in November 1943. He returned to the front in June 1944 where he joined 16./JG 27. (Mannchen)



Lt. Joachim von Stechow of 2./JG 27. After several years as a flight instructor von Stechow joined 2./JG 27 in December 1944. (Zoll)



# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



An RAF Dakota burns at Melsbroek on January 1st. (Williams)

over to the right. *"Hope they don't get the bomb dump."* I thought. In they came, one after the other, Me 109s and Fw 190s, a steep climb away and round again for another beat-up. They were obviously enjoying themselves. Suddenly from near at hand there was a chatter of fire and a Dakota parked fifty yards away burst into flames. I cowered down even lower. A moment's silence, as if time stood still and then a shattering roar as a 109 with a yellow spinner burst over the top of the hangar, engine at full boost, hanging on its prop as it clawed skywards in a steep turn. "If only

I had a twelve bore," I remember thinking. "I could have had him." He was so close and in my time I had brought down more difficult pheasants. His canopy was open and for a fleeting moment I could see right into his cockpit, even see his instrument panel and his hand on the stick. Then, as suddenly, he was gone. And so was everyone else. *"Happy New Year, you bastard,"* I muttered. *"Happy New Year."* I have often wondered who he was."<sup>53</sup>

The aircraft of 34 Wing were prize targets. W/Cdr. Mike Shaw's night-flying Wellingtons were the hardest hit. Since No. 69 Squadron was a Night Special Duties and Visual Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, all of their aircraft were present and unsuitably camouflaged. The Tactical and Strategic Photographic Reconnaissance Spitfires of 16 Squadron were also employed during daylight and therefore some of these escaped an unglamorous fate. No. 140 Squadron, consisting of a daylight and night flight, was not scheduled for a mission that morning and prone to attack. All units suffered, but none more than 69 Squadron: "I remember that some of us were coming out of our officer's mess, having just had breakfast, when low-flying aircraft started zooming about. We thought they were flown by RAF chaps who were giving us a New Year's 'beat-up' until we saw they had black crosses on the

A No. 69 Squadron Wellington on fire after the raid. (De Decker)





The remains of Wellingtons of No. 69 Squadron litter the field following the German attack. (Shaw)



Left: Wellington Mk XIII, serial PH535, readying itself for a rare dawn flight. (De Decker)



wings! So we immediately dived into the shelter near the mess. The meagre anti-aircraft defences hardly got into action before the German aircraft disappeared. They certainly achieved their aim at Melsbroek by destroying the maximum number of Allied aircraft on the ground. Of my total strength of 24 Wellingtons in No. 69 Squadron I think 14 were completely destroyed and another five or six so badly damaged that they would not fly again. I can not remember how many losses were suffered by the Spitfires of No. 16 Squadron and the

Mosquitoes of 140 Squadron, but they were considerable. A Short Stirling which had landed after the Arnhem show some months earlier and which had just been repaired was also standing in our dispersal and was destroyed. I was due to take it up on its test flight that very day but was robbed of the chance. Just as well, perhaps, because I had never flown a Stirling before!

"I guess I had another lucky escape too. When I finally got to my office on the domestic side of the camp, I found that a German bullet had gone

To Wing Commander Mike Shaw's relief the Stirling due for an air test did not survive the Bodenplatte attack; he had never flown a Stirling before! (Shaw)

# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



A Spitfire – perhaps in the true sense of the word! (Shaw)



A PR Spitfire burns. (De Decker)



through a window and embedded itself in the opposite wall. Had the Luftwaffe attack taken place five minutes later, I would have been sitting at my desk with my head in line with the path of that bullet. So I reckon I was not due to go 'upstairs' at that time!"<sup>54</sup>

No 16 Squadron had its Spitfires dispersed on the north-east sector of Melsbroek. Michael Wetz was a pilot with 16 Squadron. With most of the other pilots, he had been invited to a grand party down in Waterloo which went on all night. He returned early in the morning and was in the Met Office drinking a strong cup of coffee, when disturbed by a loud noise he went outside to investigate and it gradually came home to him that the airfield was under attack.



"As there was not much we could do, we went back into the met hut and had another cup of coffee and sat under a stout table till it was all over. I had a bit of a hangover at the time and wasn't entirely sure I wasn't imagining it. Afterwards, I think I counted 150 burning aircraft on the field. Our unit had three destroyed and three damaged. As there was no shortage of aircraft at the time, they were soon replaced."<sup>55</sup>

F/Lt. Horsfall was also a pilot with 16 Squadron. He recorded in his diary: "Jerry started well by strafing drome. About 70 Me 109s and Fw 190s were orbiting Melsbroek and strafing clockwise. I remembered the German aircraft were quite low and had the impression there were so many of them they were preoccupied by collision and this was inhibiting the potential damage."<sup>56</sup>

Yet, damage was extensive and the all-wooden Mosquitoes of 140 Squadron did not escape attention. LAC Johnston was an engine fitter with the Squadron. He was on his way to the cook house when suddenly the Germans struck: "We dashed back to our hut and I grabbed a Bren gun and a case of loaded magazines and blazed away at the Germans. I don't know if I hit any of them, but I hope I at least scared some. I know they surely scared me! During the clean-up of the airfield I was two days in Brussels and when I returned some of the replacement Mossies had arrived and I was told that only one of our Mossies had survived the air raid. We were never officially told the total number of all the aircraft destroyed, but it was a substantial number."<sup>57</sup>

Only four Mosquito losses have been established although the damage to the Squadron is confirmed by another eyewitness account. Sgt. Lunt was on his

way to inspect serviceability of his aircraft and to see that all ground crew were out with the aircraft: "As I walked towards the nearest one, I was alerted by machine gun fire hitting the ground near me and on looking up, coming out of the bright, low sun, I saw five Fw 190s so close I could see the leader's face and goggles. Our aircraft were the main target and the one I ran to was hit in the engine and spurting liquid over me. At the end of the day I did not have one surviving Mosquito but in about three or four days time we were re-equipped with 20 new Mosquitoes from England."<sup>58</sup>

Strangely enough, some of the men entirely missed the action. Perhaps most incredible is the story re-counted by John Hommes of No. 320 Squadron: "On December 28th, 1944, an American B-17 made an emergency landing at Melsbroek, having been shot up over Germany. Although the aircraft was badly damaged, the crew was alright. They were given hospitality in the various messes and naturally enjoyed themselves hugely at the bars. One crewmember was billeted that night with a friend of mine. He told me that on that fateful morning when all hell broke loose – screaming aircraft engines – cannon and machine-gun fire – his American guest staggered to the window, yanking open the curtains. At that very moment a German fighter roared over, firing furiously at the runway ahead. The American closed the curtains again and turning back to bed muttered, "Boy, I must be bloody drunk – I thought I saw a Messerschmitt." He then went to sleep again."<sup>59</sup>

Len Fisher also missed the early 'show'. He had been visiting bars for most of the night and early in the morning, he had sneaked past the guards, crawling into bed. He remembers:



A once mighty Avro Lancaster slowly, but surely, collapses in flames. (Kloos)

"I am awakened by the erks preparing for breakfast and work. Bert nips back with a pint mug of tea. I drink half and back to sleep again. A violent shaking brings me round again, Ken Watson is screaming, *"Down the cellar Len, we are being raided!"* He leaves the room at the double. Ken came from Kent the area known as 'Bomb Alley' in the Battle of Britain and it left him rather nervy... I across to the window looking down into the courtyard, the iron railings now utilised as cycle racks. The trees are bare of leaves but the twigs are quite thick, looking through them the roof ridge of the opposite building meets the skyline. Three 'Spits' equally spaced, nose to tail, flash by on an anti-clock wise circuit. My eyes need hydraulic jacks to keep them open, Back to bed again. But not for long, this time to be disturbed by an electrician from next door, with the same gen. I reply about the Spits. He shouts they are not Spits but bloody Focke-Wulfs! They had kept their promise written on the black boards in the very room I was standing in: *"Achtung, we will return."*

"No activity in the vicinity of the Convent. Yes, you've guessed it... When I surfaced again it was in complete silence, I took a swig at the left tea to ease my parched throat and shuddered. I washed and shaved and went down to dinner and found myself near the front of the queue. My mates from R.&I. drifted in, all with individual stories, about dodging bullets. Surprising how many ended in a jocular mood, like the bloke who dropped into a funk hole filled with water with a thin coating of ice. He dodged the strafing but almost got a dose of pneumonia. Three other bods sheltering with heads down had a body fall on them. It turned out to be a Belgian labourer working on the airfield. When they finally sorted themselves out, he asked: *"Any cigarettes for sale Tommy?"* The 'Tommy' who had received the Belgian's boot in his ear gave him his answer and it had nothing to do with trading cigarettes.

"R.&I. had two 3-ton Bedfords usually driven by one of us corporals ferrying the lads to and from the airfield. I accompanied Bert H. as he slid under the steering wheel. Bert gives me a running commentary as we drive across the airfield. The old Dornier is still on the grass where Jerry had left it in his hurried retreat. I had inspected it earlier and was surprised to see the undercarriage tyres and wheels were that of a lorry and not aircraft parts, never knew why. Bert spills his passengers at the hangar approach and continues round the perimeter track to the village of Steenokkerzeel to pick up some boxes of aircraft oil. This part of the field seems to have got most of the Focke-Wulfs attention. There was a bevy of Wimpeys (Wellingtons of Photo Recce Unit) now all at crazy angles. The fabric of the rear fuselage missing, revealing the geodetic structure. Tie tail fins still pointing upwards, looking like

some kind of mechanical Stonehenge. There was also a wide variety of other aircraft that would never leave the deck again... Previous reports agreed it was one up to Jerry, but failed to give great credit to all three squadrons of 139 Wing, who at the time were winging there way fully laden to their target area. What would have happened if Jerry been an hour earlier, is beyond imagination. Hearsay stories said as the Focke-Wulfs hedge-hopped homewards they ran into a patrol of Spits, who had a field day because Jerry had expended all his ammo. Johnnie Johnson's Canadian Spits were linked to the story. Pukka or Duff gen I know not.<sup>60</sup>

Although subsequent reports vary considerably it seems that at least 30-50 Bf 109s and Fw 190s attacked the aerodrome between 09.15 and 09.50 hrs.<sup>61</sup> Several guns of the RAF Regiment were out of action as the gunners were on airfield patrols and only five guns could engage the attacking aircraft. Some 197 rounds were fired and four enemy aircraft were claimed destroyed and another four damaged.<sup>62</sup> This proved not to be the only danger for the attackers of JG 27 and IV./JG 54 as a flight of two Spitfires of No. 403 Squadron from Brussels-Evere had taken off just before the attack and found themselves in the middle of the strike on Melsbroek and their own airfield at Evere. P/O S. Butte and F/Sgt. G.K. Lindsay intervened immediately and were able to shoot down at least four of the attackers which probably all belonged to JG 27 and IV./JG 54.

I./JG 27 almost suffered its first casualty over Melsbroek when Oblt. Eberhard Schade's Messerschmitt was involved in a mid-air collision and lost parts of its tail. Fortunately Schade kept control of his aircraft and returned safely.<sup>63</sup> At least one Messerschmitt of I. Gruppe was lost over Brussels when Gefr. Arno Diesing of 4. Staffel crashed in the area of the Belgian capital. He was probably shot down by P/O Steve Butte of No. 403 Squadron who claimed two Messerschmitts destroyed over Brussels. Diesing's remains were identified by Allied soldiers, but unfortunately his grave location or crash site was never accurately recorded.<sup>64</sup> As a result he is still listed as MIA.

II. Gruppe lost Uffz. Petermichel Gisevius, a pilot of 7. Staffel, over Brussels. Again, he may have been the victim of Spitfires of No. 403 Squadron. According to Allied records Uffz. Gisevius crashed and was killed near Brussels, but his grave location has not been established.<sup>65</sup> Ogfr. Erich Heymann, a pilot of 10./JG 27, was also shot down over Brussels, either by the same Spitfires or the AAA. The remains of his Bf 109 K-4 Werknummer 331377 were found near Brussels, but again the burial location of the pilot could not be ascertained.<sup>66</sup> Ogfr. Erich Heymann is still listed as MIA as are his two comrades. IV./JG 27 was



Gefr. Arno Diesing of 4./JG 27. He was last seen over Brussels and is still reported MIA. (Nöth)

fortunate to lose no aircraft over Melsbroek.

The Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 54 also suffered since at least one of them was shot down over Brussels. P/O Steve Butte reported his encounter with the German fighters and with one of the Fw 190s in particular: "I was 'Black 1', and took off from B-56 with my No. 2 when enemy aircraft were over base but I did not know of their presence until I became airborne. My first warning was the sight of a formation of aircraft on my port; flying approximately in the opposite direction and about 300 yards away. I recognised them immediately as Me 109s and passed the information to my No. 2 and ordered jet tanks to be dropped. Mine failed to come off so I broke into the enemy formation and picked the nearest aircraft. I closed from about 200 to 100 yards, firing several bursts and saw many strikes. The aircraft crashed in flames. My No. 2 saw this one go in. Next I got on the tail of a Fw 190 and closed to approximately 100-125 yards. I saw strikes first on the starboard wing, then on the port wing, then on the fuselage. The aircraft continued on a straight course and crashed behind the first row of houses after taking part of a roof with him."<sup>67</sup>

The Fw 190 hit some houses at the Reyerslaan and crashed in a small courtyard at the Diamantlaan in Brussels. The unfortunate pilot



P/O Steve Butte of No. 403 Squadron is assisted by his engine fitter, Norm Trembath, to get strapped in for an operation. The picture taken at B-90 in March 1945. (Butte)

was Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber, the leader of the IV./JG 54 formation, who was killed instantly. An RAF report lists a Fw 190 A Werknummer (7)5009(5) as crashed near Brussels.<sup>68</sup> Without doubt this is the Fw 190 A-9, Werknummer 750093 of Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber. A photograph of the crashed Focke-Wulf exists showing clearly a black 'v' and what appears to be the blue Reichsverteidigung band. As Fw. Bachhuber flew the '<<' of his Kommandeur that day, it positively identifies it as Fw. Bachhuber's aircraft. Unfortunately it is not known what happened to Bachhuber's remains and he still is listed as MIA. Why several of German pilots killed over Brussels such as Fw. Bachhuber, Uffz. Gisevius, Ogfr. Heymann and Gefr. Diesing are still listed as MIA is not known. In one case it is known that remains of an unknown pilot were buried at the crash location, but in all four cases no trace of reburial of any kind at a cemetery near Brussels has been found. It is doubtful that any of these fates will ever be solved.

Two JG 27 pilots, Ofw. Reinhold Köhl of 5./JG 27 and Fw. Franz Wellmann of 14./JG 27 claimed a Spitfire during the dogfight over Brussels, but the only losses known are the Spitfire flown by F/Lt. Harling of No. 403 Squadron and three Spitfires surprised during take off at Evere. In all cases it is believed that these aircraft fell victim to the guns of JG 26. Uffz. Fritz Krüger, a pilot of 13./JG 27, found a lone Auster west of Brussels and claimed it shot down. Most likely this was an ADLS<sup>69</sup> Auster from Brussels-Evere flown by F/O Stevenson. He encountered the German force north-west of Brussels, but managed to escape.



Far left: The wreckage of Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber's Fw 190 A-8, W.Nr. 750093, after he hit the roof of a house on the outskirts of Brussels. The blue tailband and the IV. Gruppe marking can be clearly seen. Fw. Bachhuber was killed in the crash. (De Decker)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

A Liberator, nose-down, engulfed by flames. (Kloos)



Hands in his pockets, an Allied serviceman stares in disbelief at the burning wreckage of a Halifax bomber. (Kloos)

Right: All that remained of a B-24 Liberator at B.58. (Kloos)



Below: A B-24 Liberator smoulders – possibly from the 392nd BG. (Breedijk)



However, as noted, most of the German force would attack Melsbroek without interruption and picked their targets accurately. Several pilots claimed to have destroyed several Allied aircraft on the ground. Fw. Stefan Kanzler of 6./JG 27 claimed a Halifax destroyed and a Liberator and Boeing damaged during his strafing attack.<sup>70</sup> Uffz. Josef Härtleln of 7./JG 27 delivered four attacks on Melsbroek during which he saw that the empennage was shot off the Messerschmitt flying in front of him. The Bf 109 immediately plunged to the ground. It may have been the crash of Uffz. Gisevius which Uffz. Härtleln witnessed. Hptm. Hanns-Heinz Dudeck, the Kommandeur of IV. Gruppe, attacked five times, his score being one four-engined bomber, one twin-engined bomber and one fighter destroyed and two fighters damaged. Hptm. Dudeck felt that the AAA was not heavy and also noticed that some of the guns were not firing.<sup>71</sup> Fw. Winand Ubber, a pilot of 16./JG 27, was able to destroy two aircraft on the ground.<sup>72</sup> That strafing was not always without danger is evidenced by the recollections of Uffz. Rudolf Walter, a pilot with 15./JG 54: "My first attack was aimed at four Spitfires which were lined up as for a parade. I aimed at the first one and pressed on and stopped firing after hitting the fourth. I got them all in one run! I approached for my second attack when I suddenly hit a tree. Apparently the tree-tops were white with frost and with the snow-white airfield in the background and already aiming at new targets, I did not notice the tree. My whole right wing was battered and near the landing gear a big 10 cm hole could be seen. Also the pitot tube must have been hit as my ASI indicated 800 km/h. I immediately turned east and during the whole flight had to push the stick to the left. After passing the Rhine I wanted to establish my position by identifying some landmarks, but because of the difficult handling and the low-level flight over snow-covered land this was not easy. Finally I saw an aircraft preparing for landing; Hurray, an airfield! Slowly I glided down and in spite of the damage, the landing was excellent. The aircraft however turned more and more to the left and when I wanted to apply the right-hand side brakes to compensate for it, I discovered that the brake circuit on that side was also damaged. The left-hand turn became sharper and sharper and finally the right landing leg collapsed and my Focke-Wulf was lying on its right wing."<sup>73</sup>

Uffz. Rudolf Walter had landed in Kirchhellen and he discovered that several other pilots had made emergency landings on this airfield, with some of whom he returned to his homebase during the following days. Another pilot encountering difficulties over Melsbroek was Uffz. Johannes Härtleln of 7. Staffel. After witnessing the crash of his comrade he noticed that his engine power was reduced and that he lost

contact with his Schwarm. Apparently he had also been hit but had not noticed it because of the tension during the attack. On the deck Uffz. Härtlein tried to make for his base: "Suddenly my Messerschmitt rocked under the impact of a hit from the front. Slowly smoke engulfed the aircraft and then the first flames started to appear. As taught, I pulled up as high as possible with the damaged engine and baled out. The height was sufficient enough and I landed with my parachute in a small forest. I hid my parachute and walked to the edge of the forest where I saw that some vehicles stopped on the road nearby. I took my pistol but soon two English soldiers with rifles approached me and grabbed the pistol from my hand. They brought me to one of the cars and drove me to a nearby town."<sup>74</sup>

Hit by light AAA Uffz. Härtlein's 'White 7' crashed near Tielen, some 10 kilometres south-south-west of Turnhout.<sup>75</sup> In the meantime, the German aircraft had left the scene and in small groups or individually tried to reach their homebase. Oblt. Clade was one of the last to leave Melsbroeck: "As soon as the pilots were out of ammunition they immediately turned east. I stayed over the airfield until the end to determine the extent of the damage. I had saved some ammunition as I was to fly home alone. The sky was completely clear and in contradiction with our weather forecast not a single cloud which could have given us cover could be seen. I decided to go on to the deck and soon the front line appeared. Apparently the gunners were awake now and I flew directly into a 2 cm AA battery which started to fire. I returned fire and as I flew over it I could see the gunner frantically trying to turn the gun 180 deg. Before he could aim I was already gone. I was the last one to land at Hesepe."<sup>76</sup>

Not all return flights were as fortunate as Oblt. Clade's and several Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs were lost on the homeward leg. Fj. Uffz. Ferdinand Fink of 1./JG 27 crashed north of Beringe, 15 kilometres west of Venlo.<sup>77</sup> Fink was killed instantly and buried in a fieldgrave near the crash site. Although buried as an unknown, his remains were later identified as British soldiers had given the landowner a strip with the inscription: '627-68416 Pilot German Air Force 1 January 1945.' This was the Erkennungsmarke of Fj. Uffz. Ferdinand Fink.<sup>78</sup> The exact circumstances of his crash are not known, but it is believed he was shot down by AAA.

Fhr. Otto Theisen of 2./JG 27

ran out of luck when he, accidentally, flew over Volkel airfield on the way back to Rheine. His lone Messerschmitt was immediately spotted by the gunners of the three RAF Regiment Squadrons there. The fighter was engaged by one gun of 'B' Flight of No. 2809 Squadron which fired six rounds and was also engaged by No. 2834 and No. 2874 Squadrons. Hits were observed and the Messerschmitt appeared in difficulty as smoke was coming from it. The aircraft flew away to the north-east and disappeared behind some trees. Fhr. Theisen crash-landed west of Haps, some seven kilometres east of Volkel. The Messerschmitt struck some power lines, hit a number of trees and cartwheeled on the frozen ground. It finally came to rest in normal position. Troops of the 8th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment, whose HQ was about half a mile from the crash, arrived and soon freed the severely injured Fhr. Theisen from the wrecked Messerschmitt. Badly burned, and with severe facial injuries Theisen was taken to an army hospital.<sup>79</sup>

Fw. Gert Gäbel of 3./JG 27 was probably also shot down by AAA and crashed one kilometre south-east of Kerkwijk near Zaltbommel. Gäbel, one of the few remaining experienced pilots of the Staffel, was killed instantly.<sup>80</sup> He was buried at the local cemetery of Kerkwijk but in 1957 reburied in Ysselsteyn. On request of the next of kin, he was reburied at Bad Brückenau in 1958.<sup>81</sup>

With the exception of Uffz. Johannes Härtlein, the II. Gruppe was lucky to have no further casualties on the way back to Hopsten.<sup>82</sup> One further loss has been recorded for III./JG 27. Uffz. Heinrich Maus of 12. Staffel was probably hit by AAA south of Eindhoven. What exactly happened is not certain, but Maus ended up with leg wounds in Kriegslazarett 3/614 in Spellen, just south of Wesel. It seems highly likely that he parachuted from- or crash-landed his aircraft in that area.<sup>83</sup>



Bewildered RAF personnel wander the airfield following the Bodenplatte attack. (Breedijk)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Fw. Gert Gäbel of 3./JG 27. Gäbel was one of the more experienced pilots within 3.Staffel and had been accredited with three victories, the last one a P-47 on December 26th. (Gäbel)

IV./JG 27 lost two aircraft on the way back to base: Gruppenkommandeur Hptm. Hanns-Heinz Dudeck was flying near Venray when his Bf 109 G-10 'C3' was hit by light AAA and caught fire. He pulled up to about 45 metres and baled out. His parachute tore on some part of the aircraft and he descended at considerable speed. Dudeck landed in a tree and found himself in a hospital. His Messerschmitt crashed in the Spurkt area, a few kilometres north-east of Venray.<sup>84</sup> Finally, Fj.Uffz. Karl Rehak of 13./JG 27 was shot down near Koningslust, a few kilometres north-east of Panningen. Several aircraft from various units were shot down by AAA in that area and it is presumed this is the case with Fj.Uffz. Rehak too. The unfortunate pilot was killed in the crash and buried in a field grave.<sup>85</sup>

IV./JG 54 also lost two aircraft on the way back to Vörden. Uffz. Gerhard Ohlenschläger of 15./JG 54 was shot at by AAA and he decided to turn and attack the gun position. He was hit almost immediately and narrowly escaped by baling out of his 'Black 16' at low altitude, suffering a fractured pelvis when he hit the ground with high speed. He was recovered by the Canadians and taken to a hospital. According to

Ohlenschläger this happened in the Breda area but strangely, a crash site of a Fw 190 A-8 near Brussels has been recorded by the RAF and it is believed that this was Uffz. Ohlenschläger's Focke-Wulf.<sup>86</sup> Finally Uffz. Werner Köpp of 13. Staffel was shot down near Nijmegen. His loss was later reported by Lt. Karl Brill, Kapitän of 13./JG 54: "On January 1st 1945, Uffz. Köpp took off as Schwarmführer to attack Brussel-Melsbroek airfield. According to his Rottenflieger, Fw. Wolfgang Lehmann, they encountered heavy fire from light AAA while crossing the front line on the way back. Uffz. Köpp was overtaken by Fw. Lehmann and a few minutes later he saw that an aircraft crashed in flames some 300 metres left from him. He did not see a parachute."<sup>87</sup>

Although Lehmann believed that Köpp had been shot down by AAA, this was not the case. The retreating Focke-Wulfs had been spotted by Allied fighters. F/Lt. John MacKay of No. 401 Squadron had already shot down a Fw 190 when he spotted another one being chased by a Tempest that was closing in: "The Fw 190 started to turn sharply. In about one turn the Focke-Wulf was almost on a Tempest's tail so I engaged the Fw 190 on the deck. I fired short bursts, but ammo was



Above: Silhouetted against the horizon to the right is a B-25 Mitchell which remains unscathed. (Vanackere)

Above right: Clouds of smoke drift across Melsbroek where the damage was substantial. (Vanackere)

Right: To the right, a P-47 and to the left of it a B-25 Mitchell appear to have survived the attack in this quarter of the airfield. (Vanackere)





exhausted. I closed right in to 30 to 40 yards. The Fw 190 attempted to do a sharp climbing turn to port out of a shallow dive. His port wing and nose of the aircraft struck ice of a lake below and blew up. Cine film taken of burning enemy aircraft. East of Grave."<sup>88</sup>

The Tempest was probably flown by P/O Jim Sheddan who claimed a Fw 190 at the same time in the same area.<sup>89</sup> Uffz. Werner Köpp's Focke-Wulf crashed in the Wychense Ven, eight kilometres south-east of Nijmegen. Uffz. Köpp was killed and buried at a local cemetery before he was reinterred at Ysselsteyn in 1951 and identified by his Erkennungsmarke.<sup>90</sup>

One by one the remaining Messerschmitts of JG 27 and the Focke-Wulfs of IV./JG 54 returned to their base. Several did not return immediately, but landed at other bases. Fw. Winand Ubber of 16./JG 27 landed at Rheine at 10.25 hrs. At 16.00 hrs, he returned to Achmer with his 'Blue 3.'<sup>91</sup> Of IV./JG 54, Gefr. Otto Beckert was one of the few pilots that directly returned to Vörden.

### Damage assessment at Melsbroek

As the Mitchells returned from their mission to Dasburg they were diverted to Epinoy because Melsbroek was in no shape to receive them. P/O Malcolm Scott DFC was in a box of Mitchell bombers whose leader elected not divert to Epinoy. Ignoring the controller's instructions he went in for an approach to their usual runway at Melsbroek which appeared undamaged and un-obstructed. The others followed at approximately 10.40 hrs: "As we taxied to our dispersal, I could witness the chaos the attack had caused. It was a complete shambles. Columns of smoke rose from the funeral pyres of 20 odd Wellingtons, Mosquitoes and Spitfires and only burning wreckage could be seen of the Harrows. All six of the Mitchells we had left on the tarmac were damaged; three later being written off. Normally, on return from an operation the ground crew wanted to know how everything had gone, whether the aircraft had behaved properly and if there had been any damage. This time was different. As we climbed out of the Mitchell, they were all over us bursting to tell their experiences. They were excited and relieved it was over and felt having been shot at, they had something in common with us."<sup>92</sup>

The attack on Melsbroek airfield had been a great success. Despite the odd report of clumsiness on behalf of the Luftwaffe, mentioning attacks with droptanks still fitted, near-collisions and inexperience in general, an incredible amount of damage had been done. If the Mitchells had attempted to take-off a little later, the disaster would even have been greater.

Of the Recce Wing, nearly two squadrons had been wiped off the tarmac. No. 69 Squadron lost



A Mitchell on fire at Melsbroek after the attack by JG 27 and IV./JG 54. (De Decker)

11 Wellingtons destroyed and two damaged. Only four destroyed Mosquitoes of No. 140 Squadron could be identified, but it is believed that almost all the Mosquitoes of No. 140 Squadron were lost. At least five Spitfires of No. 16 Squadron were destroyed and a further three damaged. At least seven Harrows of No. 271 Squadron had been put out of action. No. 139 Wing reported five 'Cat. E' Mitchells and nine others as damaged. At least 15 other aircraft of the RAF, such as Ansons, Austers, Oxfords and a Stirling, etc., were destroyed. Finally numerous Eighth Air Force bombers had been shot to pieces in the graveyard in the middle of the field. We estimate the number of these between 15-20. Only four have been identified. True, these aircraft were already damaged, but several were in the process of being repaired and

Survivor: a foamed-down P-51 Mustang. (Kloos)



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## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

Mitchells on fire at Melsbroek after the attack by JG 27 and IV/JG 54. (De Decker)



Right: Wellingtons of No. 69 (Night Harassment) Squadron; one that made it and one that did not. (Johnston)

The remains of Wellingtons lie on the airfield like stranded whales on a beach. (Breedijk)





An aerial picture of Melsbroek taken on March 26th, 1945. The wreckage of the aircraft destroyed on January 1st is still present at the centre of the field. (De Decker)

they should be added to the losses. Besides these material losses six groundcrew were killed and another 25 wounded.

### Conclusion.

When the pilots of JG 27 and IV./JG 54 had made their initial report, they claimed some 85 aircraft destroyed and a further 40 damaged. Later, aerial pictures were made of Melsbroek and on these pictures could be seen some 49 destroyed aircraft.<sup>93</sup> At the same time it was reported that as a result of the smoke, the damage at Melsbroek could not be reliably established.<sup>94</sup>

Losses for JG 27 and IV./JG 54 had been severe, but in the light of the destruction at Melsbroek they were regarded as acceptable. JG 27 lost 11 pilots killed, three were taken POW and one was wounded. In total, 17 Messerschmitts were destroyed and at least two damaged. IV./JG 54 lost 2 killed and one taken POW. Three Fw 190s were lost and one damaged.

The attack on Melsbroek may have been a success in the light of the its objectives, but in retrospect, Emil Clade clearly states that the success was at it's best only temporary: "I did not know what had happened to the other Geschwader, but from my own perspective I

believed that the attack had been a success. I also underestimated the potential of the Allies to replace the destroyed aircraft in a matter of days. They had suffered no personnel losses and in our case every single loss counted. It would be one of the last heroic deeds of the Luftwaffe and now also the last of us recognised that not even a miracle could save us."<sup>95</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This information is primarily based on the loss records of JG 27 and further information in A.D.I.(K) Reports. For detailed information on the history of JG 27 see the three volume series on JG 27 by Prien/Rodeike/Stemmer.

<sup>2</sup> Personnel Records Lt. Heinrich Wiese. He had been promoted to Leutnant on August 1st, 1944.

<sup>3</sup> RL8/177, KTB 3, Jagddivision

<sup>4</sup> 20 kilometres north-west of Osnabrück.

<sup>5</sup> The Gruppe had lost 25 pilots killed, 15 wounded and 1 POW. Material losses were 98 Bf 109 destroyed. Some 60 combat claims are known of IV./JG 27 from June 6th until August 1st.

<sup>6</sup> Operations on November 2nd, 26th and 27th.

<sup>7</sup> Ofw. Heinrich Bartels accumulated 99 victories, the first one with JG 26 in 1941.

<sup>8</sup> RL2-III-734, see also one of the Appendixes.

<sup>9</sup> On December 18th five P-47s were shot down for the loss of two Fw 190s.

<sup>10</sup> Oblt. Emil Clade was a long-time member of III./JG 27. Scoring his first victory as an Unteroffizier on May 11th 1940, he had accumulated 24 victories by December 31st.

<sup>11</sup> In German called 'Sonderaktion'.

<sup>12</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date. Stab JG 27 was based at Steinbeck, a few kilometres south-east of Hopsten. Maj. Ludwig Franzisket had taken over as Kommodore from Oberst Gustav Rödel on December 27th.

<sup>13</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>14</sup> This account is based on A.D.I.(K) Report No. 130/1945, point 1-4.



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## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

Unfortunately these details could not be checked with Hanns-Heinz Dudeck before his death on April 9th, 1998. The authors feel that the account in the report should be taken with some reservations.

<sup>19</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>20</sup> So also Uffz. Johannes Härlein who had been ordered to pick up a repaired Bf 109 in Nordhorn on December 30th, and when he flew the aircraft to Hopsten on December 31st was told to continue to Rheine. Letter Johannes Härlein dated 13.11.1994. Logbook Fw. Stefan Kanzler, 6./JG 27, take-off Hopsten 16.03 hrs, landing Rheine 16.12 hrs. The Lotse Ju 88 of NJG 6 took off at 16.40 hrs and landed at Rheine at 17.00 hrs. Logbook Fw. Paul Wyphol.

<sup>21</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 76/1945, point 1. Also article by Otto Theisen, member of 2./JG 27, in Jägerblatt Nr. 6/XXXIII, December 1984.

<sup>22</sup> Letters Rudolf Walter, dated 23.11.1997 and 24.01.1999.

<sup>23</sup> Letter Kurt Bell to Rudolf Walter, dated 03.02.1999. Lt. Kurt Bell did not take part in Bodenplatte as he was wounded in a belly-landing on December 24, 1944.

<sup>24</sup> The 11th, a P-47 on December 26, 1944.

<sup>25</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 135A/1945.

<sup>26</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 104/1945. See also article by Otto Theisen, member of 2./JG 27, in Jägerblatt Nr. 6/XXXIII, December 1984.

<sup>27</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 76/1945, point 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>29</sup> Letters Rudolf Walter, dated 23.11.1997 and 24.01.1999.

<sup>30</sup> Logbook Fw. Stefan Kanzler, 6./JG 27, take-off Rheine 08.25 hrs. Take off Ju 88G-1 '2Z+EP' was at 08.20 hrs.

<sup>31</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 76/1945, point 6-10.

<sup>32</sup> Logbook Fw. Winand Ubber, 16./JG 27, take-off Achmer 08.15 hrs. Also A.D.I.(K) Report No. 130/1945. The number of Messerschmitts is based on the strength report for December 31st listed in RL2-III-734.

<sup>33</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>34</sup> RL2-III-734 reports 11 Fw 190A-8 and 4 Fw 190A-9 ready for combat on December 31st. Take-off at 08.15 hrs according to report written by Lt. Karl Brill, Kapitän of 13. Staffel on 4.1.1945.

<sup>35</sup> There is evidence that the Ju 88 Lotse of all JG 27 Gruppen and of IV./JG 54 left their formations near Utrecht.

<sup>36</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. L.J. Packwood, No. 2 Squadron.

<sup>37</sup> Based on police report De Bilt and letter written by Lt. Jung, Staffelführer of 2./JG 27, to parents of Uffz. Braun on February 5, 1945.

<sup>38</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. A.D. Mercer, No. 268 Squadron. After evaluation the claim was awarded to F/Lt. Mercer and F/Lt. Lyke together.

<sup>39</sup> Letters Frau. Mayer, dated 12.08.1996 and 20.11.1996, sister of Uffz. Wilhelm Fischer.

<sup>40</sup> Based on article in the newspaper of Barneveld of December 31st, 1984.

<sup>41</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>42</sup> The Namentliche Verlustmeldung reads: "Tödlisch abgestürzt, Baumberührung?"

<sup>43</sup> Letters Mrs. Köppe, dated 29.01.1945 and 05.03.1995.

<sup>44</sup> Some sources say this was in the Vianen area, south of Utrecht, but no evidence could be found.

<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Walter, a former pilot of 15./JG 54, heard that one Fw 190 was lost over Holland but did not witness the event. No losses over Holland on the outbound flight of IV./JG 54 are known. Letter Rudolf Walter dated 24.01.1999.

<sup>46</sup> Based on memories of Fhr. Otto Theisen who flew on right wing of Lt. Heinrich Wiese. See article in Jägerblatt Nr. 6/XXXIII, December 1984.

<sup>47</sup> Letter Heinrich Wiese, father of Lt. Heinrich Wiese, dated 4.12.1994.

<sup>48</sup> Letter Stabsarzt Dr. Frettlöh, Sanitätskompanie 112, to parents of Lt. Heinrich Wiese, dated 3.1.1945.

<sup>49</sup> Letter Lt. Hans Jung, Staffelführer of 2./JG 27, of February 2nd 1945 to mother of Lt. von Stechow. Letter of Frau. A. Zoll, sister of Lt. von Stechow, dated 7.2.1997. Vorgangsakte 113447 VDK/Kassel.

<sup>50</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 130/1945, point 10.

<sup>51</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>52</sup> Over Holland the Mitchells waited for the close escort of the Spitfires from Woensdrecht which were to accompany them to the target. After waiting in vain for 10 minutes, they went on, alone. The first concentrations

went down at 10.17 hours; an excellent pattern, covering the target nicely. The flak was slight and rather inaccurate. Over to You, August 19th 1945.

<sup>53</sup> Article in Jägerblatt Nr. 6/XXXIII, December 1984.

<sup>54</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 130/1945, point 10.

<sup>55</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>56</sup> Letter Rudolf Walter, date 24.1.1999.

<sup>57</sup> Correspondence with Dick Perkins 180 Sqdn.

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence with Group Captain Mike J.A. Shaw DSO.

<sup>59</sup> Correspondence with Michael Wetz 16 Squadron.

<sup>60</sup> Correspondence with J.M.C. Horsfall 16 Squadron.

<sup>61</sup> Correspondence with Hugh Johnston 140 Squadron.

<sup>62</sup> Correspondence with Bert Lunt 140 Squadron.

<sup>63</sup> Over to You, Issue 21 John Hommes 320 Sqdn.

<sup>64</sup> Correspondence with Len Fisher.

<sup>65</sup> Operation Record Books No. 2701 Sqn, 2871 Sqn, 16 Sqn, 69 Sqn and 139 Wing.

<sup>66</sup> Operation Record Book No. 2701 Sqn. RAF Regiment.

<sup>67</sup> Messerschmitt Bf 109 in Einsatz bei Stab und I./JG 27, by J. Prien, page 484.

<sup>68</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle 19.09.1994. Information based on Enemy Dead List. Gefr. Arno Diesing was declared dead on 20.04.1965.

<sup>69</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 135/1945 and Enemy Dead List 394 I/ED 16494. Uffz. Gisevius was declared dead on 14.06.1952.

<sup>70</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16 January 1945.

<sup>71</sup> Personal Combat Report P/O S. Butte, No. 403 Squadron.

<sup>72</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16 January 1945.

<sup>73</sup> Air Despatch Letter Service, a Flight attached to 2nd T.A.F.

<sup>74</sup> Communications Squadron.

<sup>75</sup> Logbook Fw. Stefan Kanzler, 6./JG 27.

<sup>76</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 130/1945, point 10.

<sup>77</sup> Logbook Fw. Winand Ubber, 16./JG 27.

<sup>78</sup> Letter Rudolf Walter, dated 24.1.1999.

<sup>79</sup> Letter Johannes Härlein, dated 13.11.1994.

<sup>80</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 76/1945.

<sup>81</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

<sup>82</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264, dated 16 January 1945. See also A.D.I.(K) Report No. 149/1945 and possibly also No. 135A/1945.

<sup>83</sup> Rapport van Overbrenging D.23774.

<sup>84</sup> War Diary 8th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment and eyewitness reports forwarded by H. Talen.

<sup>85</sup> Fw. Gabel had shot down three Allied aircraft.

<sup>86</sup> Letter Klaus-Dieter Gabel, brother of Fw. Gert Gabel, dated 25.09.1996.

<sup>87</sup> Logbook Fw. Stefan Kanzler, 6./JG 27, landing was at 10.17 hrs at Hopsten.

<sup>88</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung Uffz. Heinrich Maus.

<sup>89</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 130/1945, point 11, RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft report No. 264, and letters of local airwar historian W. Willemsen dated 21.12.1992 and 07.11.1998.

<sup>90</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 and Rapport van Overbrenging D.23760.

<sup>91</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264. Letter of Rudolf Walter 19.08.1999 based on discussions with Gerhard Ohlenschläger.

<sup>92</sup> Report Lt. Karl Brill, 13./JG 54, dated 4.1.1945.

<sup>93</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. J. MacKay, No. 401 Squadron.

<sup>94</sup> F/Lt. J. MacKay was credited with 0.5 destroyed, the other half credited to an unknown Tempest pilot. P/O J. Sheddan was credited with one Fw 190 destroyed.

<sup>95</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264. Crash location indicated as Map Reference E.654577. Also RvO D.2829.

<sup>96</sup> Based on logbook Fw. Winand Ubber.

<sup>97</sup> Correspondence with Malcolm Scott DFC.

<sup>98</sup> RL2-III-855.

<sup>99</sup> Fernschreiben II. Jako. Ic Nr 140/44 of 3.1.1945.

<sup>100</sup> Letter Emil Clade, unknown date.

# Of Pik As, Orange Tails and Hell Hawks

**Jagdgeschwader 53's French affair**

In the autumn of 1944, the majority of Jagdgeschwader 53 was concentrated in the south-western part of the Reich. Only I./JG 53 was stationed in Hungary and this unit would not reunite again with the other Gruppen for the remainder of the war.

**I**N October 1944, the Geschwader was expanded to four Gruppen when III./JG 76 was renamed IV./JG 53. III./JG 76 had its origins in II./ZG 1 when this Zerstörer unit was retrained as single-engine fighters in July 1944. By mid-October the lack of experience in fighter operations became apparent within IV./JG 53 and the Gruppe had to be reinforced by more experienced pilots from other Gruppen and further training was ordered. The Gruppe would return to operations on November 26th.

By the beginning of December 1944, Stab JG 53 was based at Bad Dürkheim, II./JG 53 at Malsheim and Huchenfeld, III./JG 53 at Neuhausen-ob-Eck and Germersheim and finally IV./JG 53 at Stuttgart-Echterdingen and Nellingen. During the month of December JG 53 flew mainly missions against the fighter-bomber units of the US Ninth Air Force. On December 15th, Stab JG 53 also moved to Stuttgart-Echterdingen. Once the

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-14s of 11./JG 53 parked at the edge of Neuhausen ob Eck airfield on December 22nd 1944. In the foreground is W.Nr. 462862 'Yellow 2'. (Bernhard)



# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

The 12. Staffel Gefechtstand at Kirrlach. Although now well inside Germany, the housing for the pilots and groundcrew at the primitive grass strips was not always 'luxurious'. (Bernhard)



Above and right: The Staffel quarters of 12./JG 53 at Kirrlach, January 13, 1945. (Bernhard)





# OF PIK AS, ORANGE TAILS AND HELL HAWKS



Kirrlach, January 13th 1945. Aircraft of 12. Staffel can be seen on the edge of a firebreak north-east of airfield. (Bernhard)

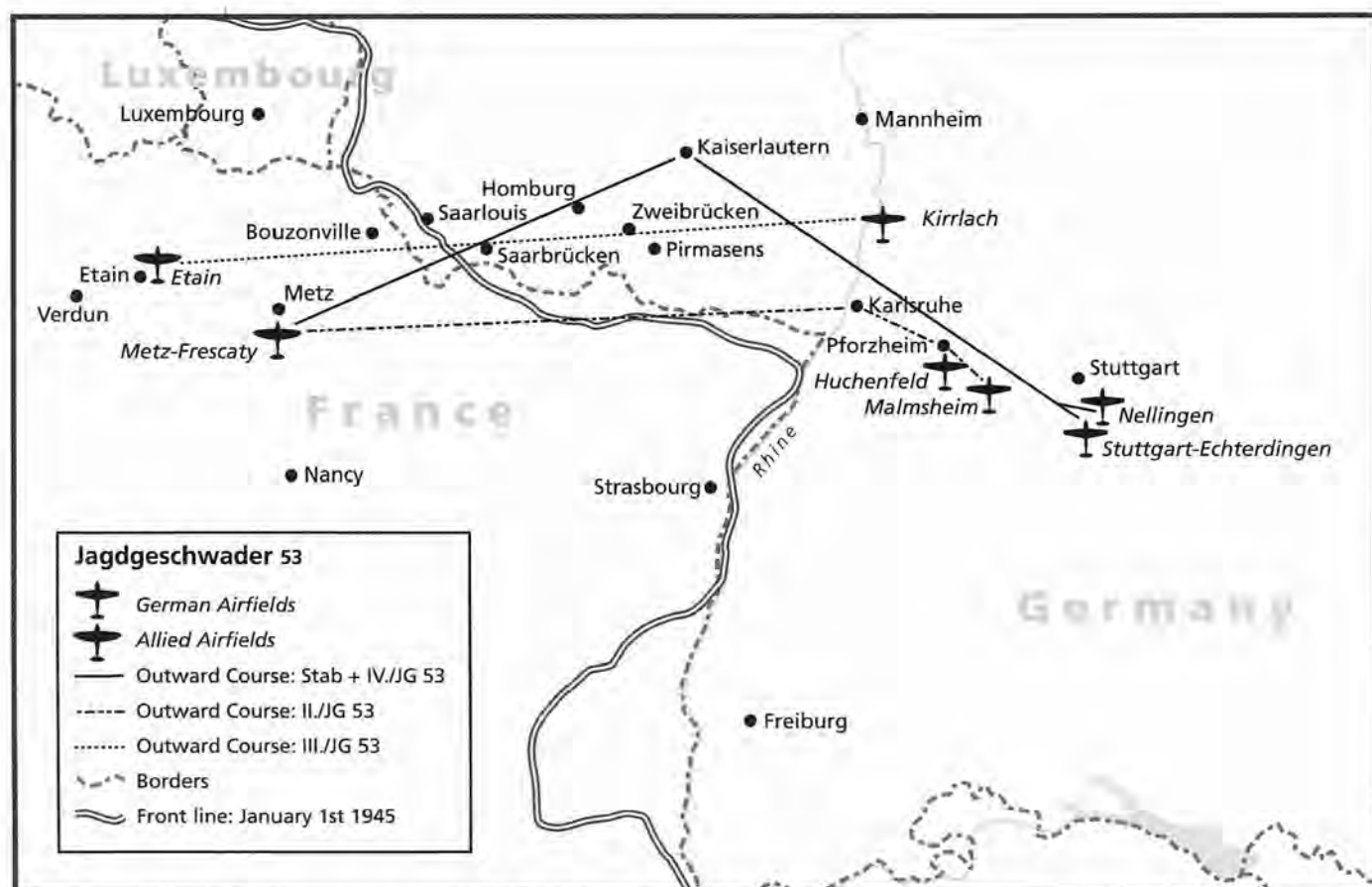


Pilots of III./JG 53 watch P-47s attack Kirrlach-Waghäusel railway station on January 10th 1945. From left to right: Oblt. Karl Ritter, Lt. Wilhelm Manz, Uffz. Karl Heitkötter, Ofhr. Horst Potreck, unknown, Ofw. Friedrich Scheer and Uffz. Willi Holtfreter. (Bernhard)

Pilots of III./JG 53, January 10th 1945. From left to right: Ofw. Friedrich Scheer, Uffz. Karl Heitkötter, Uffz. Willi Holtfreter, Fw. Gerhard Fieseler, Ass.Dr. Schwamb. Fifth from right Lt. Wilhelm Manz and further Ofhr. Horst Potreck, Oblt. Karl Ritter, Maj. Franz Götz and Lt. Dieter Harpel. (Bernhard)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



offensive in the Ardennes had begun on December 16th, the Gruppen flew missions over the southern part of the Front. The next day, III./JG 53 moved to Kirrlach, south-east of Speyer, where it would remain for the next two weeks.

Although suffering some casualties during the last week of December, JG 53 kept a reasonable strength as a Geschwader. The losses of the other Jagdgeschwader operating over the Ardennes were much heavier. However, in the month of December 1944 JG 53 lost at least 25 pilots killed, a further 12 wounded and two pilots were taken POW. At least 39 Messerschmitts were destroyed and four damaged. The sorest loss was without doubt Ofw. Alexander Preinfalk of 6./JG 53. This very experienced pilot with some 85 victories was killed in combat with Thunderbolts on December 12th. However, some 34 Allied aircraft, mainly P-47s, were claimed destroyed in the same time frame. They were hard-won victories.<sup>1</sup>

### The Ninth Air Force in north-eastern France

By the end of December 1944, the Ninth Air Force had a very strong presence in north-eastern France. Supporting the US Third Army in the Metz-Saar area was XIX Tactical Air Command. In mid-December 1944, this command consisted of the 354th FG at Rosières-en-Haye (A-98), the 362nd FG at Etain (A-82), the 405th FG at St. Dizier (A-64), the 406th FG at Mourmelon-le-Grand

(A-80), the 10th PRG at Conflans (A-94) and the 425th NFS at Etain. To support the Third Army's counterattack against the German offensive in the Ardennes, four more Fighter Groups were assigned to XIX TAC on December 23rd. Three Groups came from IX TAC; the 365th FG moved to Metz (Y-34), the 367th and 368th FGs moved to Juvincourt (A-68). Finally the 361st FG flying P-51 Mustangs was attached from the Eighth Air Force and moved to St. Dizier.<sup>2</sup>

Strengthening the forces of XIX TAC meant a dramatic increase in sorties flown by that Command. Between December 23rd-31st a staggering 4,846 sorties, of which 4,090 were fighter-bomber, were flown by its units. During these missions 2,883 motor vehicles, 484 tanks or armoured vehicles and 51 locomotives were destroyed. In aerial combat, a further 97 aircraft were destroyed. Losses were 60 aircraft and 49 pilots. The effort of the XIX TAC played an important role in countering the Ardennes offensive.<sup>3</sup>

In the Nancy area the 1st TAF supported the advance of the US Seventh Army and the French First Army. It consisted of the XII TAC with the 64th Fighter Wing and 1ere Escadre of the French Air Force. There were four Fighter Groups operating the P-47 Thunderbolt; the 50th FG at Toul-Ochey (A-96), the 324th FG at Dole/Tavaux (Y-7), the 358th FG at Toul-Croix

de Metz (A-90) and the 371st FG at Tantonville (Y-1). The French Spitfire-equipped 1ere Escadre was based at Haguenau (Y-39) and Luxeuil (Y-8).<sup>4</sup> Attached to the XII TAC were also the 415th NFS at Toul-Ochey and the Provisional Reconnaissance Group<sup>5</sup> at Nancy-Azelot (A-95).<sup>6</sup>

The units of both the XIX and XII Tactical Air Commands would play an important role in the most southern thrust of Operation Bodenplatte and not only because some of their airfields were the designated targets...

### **Jagdgeschwader 53 prepares for the attack**

At least two commanding officers of JG 53, Obstdt. Helmut Bennemann and Maj. Julius Meimberg, were present at the meeting in Altenkirchen on December 5th. There are however no indications that any other of the Geschwader's pilots were briefed before the last day of the year. The raid was probably discussed between the officers of the Stab and the Gruppenkommandeure, but no details are known. There were however other signs that 'something' was about to take place as Ju 88 nightfighters suddenly appeared on JG 53's airfields. Several fighter pilots wondered where they had come from and what their purpose would be. They were in for a surprise!

The Ju 88s belonged to II./NJG 100. This unit was stationed at Novy Dwor, some 33 kilometres north-west of Bratislava.<sup>7</sup> On the evening of December 4th, II./NJG 100 was instructed to transfer 12 crews with their aircraft to the individual Gruppen of SG 4 and JG 53. Each Gruppe was to receive two Ju 88 nightfighters.<sup>8</sup> One of the Ju 88 pilots was Lt. Albert Gerber of 4./NJG 100. He remembers: "In December 1944 we flew nightfighter-missions over Austria and Hungary against Russian and English aircraft coming from the east and south. Shortly before Christmas, I received an order from my Kommandeur to fly with two other Ju 88s to Stuttgart-Echterdingen to JG 53 and to be prepared to fly a Sondereinsatz on a later date. Both pilots of the other Ju 88s were Unteroffiziere. My crew further consisted of Uffz. Karl Hoffmann (Bordfunker) and Uffz. Alois Weiher (Bordmechaniker). The men of JG 53 pleasantly welcomed us and during our stay our relation with its men and officers was excellent. I cannot remember if we were immediately briefed on the purpose of our stay."<sup>9</sup>

At least some of the Ju 88s arrived quickly. The crew of Fw. Wilhelm Gössele of 6./NJG 100 was transferred to II./JG 53 at Malmsheim and arrived there on December 6th.<sup>10</sup> His crew consisted of Fw. Walter Vollmer (Bordfunker) and Fw. Herbert Weberschinke (Bordmechaniker). Together with this crew one more Ju 88 was transferred to II./JG 53. One aircraft was billeted with 7./JG 53, the other with 8. Staffel. Two other Ju 88s of II./NJG

100 were sent to Kirrlach to join III./JG 53. The nightfighters did not fly at all over the following weeks to minimise the chance of damaging their aircraft. Day after day went by and JG 53 continued its missions after Christmas until finally the last day of the year arrived. JG 53 was already preparing for the New Year's Eve festivities when suddenly, in the late afternoon proceedings were cancelled and the pilots were gathered for briefings.

At Stuttgart-Echterdingen the pilots of Stab JG 53 and IV./JG 53 gathered for the briefing on the airfield itself. Ofw. Stefan Kohl, one of the old hares of ZG 1 and now flying with 13./JG 53 remembers: "When the pilots on the evening of December 31st were returning to their private quarters, they received the following order; every pilot was to put on clean underwear and to wear his best uniform under his flight suit and to take a box of chocolate and return immediately to the briefing room on the airfield. Here we were told that the briefing was absolutely secret. The Kommandeur opened an envelope with the order and informed us that on New Year's Day we would have to fly an attack with all available aircraft on the fighter-bombers stationed at Metz-Frescaty. To prevent any navigational errors in bad weather, a Ju 88<sup>11</sup> would lead the formation. All radios were to be switched off and should not be used until the target was reached. Height was set at 30 metres. Just before the target was reached the auxiliary fuel tanks would be dropped. The course led us from Nellingen<sup>12</sup> to Kaiserslautern and then in the direction of Metz. Our groundcrew rolled the aircraft to the edge of the field in sequence of the formation. The first Schwarm was to attack the AAA positions at the airfield. The last one was to fly fighter cover and consisted of a Knights Cross recipient<sup>13</sup> and me. It was ordered that every single pilot had to destroy at least three enemy aircraft. A written statement had to be signed by everyone. If the formation did not reach its objective, our unit would have to repeat the mission on his own."<sup>14</sup>

Lt. Albert Gerber, the Ju 88 pilot, has clear memories about the briefing: "On the evening of December 31st a briefing was held by the Geschwaderkommodore of JG 53. The target of the attack was Metz airfield and take-off time, height and course were determined. It was also decided that only one Lotse would fly – the other two Ju 88 would not."<sup>15</sup>

As stated, the course was set from Stuttgart-Echterdingen and Nellingen, were 13./JG 53 was based, to Kaiserslautern and then directly to Metz-Frescaty.<sup>16</sup> This would bring the Messerschmitts at the limit of their range. The outward course would be 250 kilometres! Following a briefing from Obstdt. Helmut Bennemann, Oblt. Hans-Georg Schwidtal, the



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Groundcrew warming up the engine of 'Blue 4', a Bf 109 G-14 of 12./JG 53 on January 14th at Kirrlach. The W.Nr. is probably 462789.



28-year old Staffelkapitän of 16./JG 53, briefed the four pilots of his Staffel. He told them to fly as low as possible on the outward route, maintaining R/T silence, and to climb about 300 metres just before reaching the target. At this juncture each pilot was to select as a target one or more Allied aircraft on the ground and to attack with machine gun and cannon fire.<sup>17</sup>

At about 20.00 hrs all available pilots of II./JG 53 were assembled in the operations room at Malsheim. In absence of Gruppenkommandeur Maj. Julius Meimberg, who had been injured on an operation on December 26th and was in hospital, the briefing was held by a Hauptmann from Stab, probably from Jafü Mittelrhein. The

crews of the Ju 88s were also present. They had already been at their quarters in Renningen and a courier had brought them to Malmshcim.<sup>18</sup> The pilots were told that this sortie was part of a large-scale operation, in which several other Geschwader were to participate. Maps were distributed to all pilots, but no recent photographic cover of Metz-Frescaty airfield was available, the photograph displayed dating from the German occupation. It was known that Allied fighters would be found on the airfield and pilots were ordered to press home attacks with machinegun and cannon fire on the aircraft parked on the ground. The Ju 88 was to fly as Lotse in advance of the Gruppe on the outward flight. No definite alternative target was mentioned at the briefing, but pilots were told to attack any adjacent airfields should they for some reason or other, be prevented from strafing Metz-Frescaty. They were given the additional assignment of shooting up any motor transport observed on their return flight on roads in Allied territory. The course, which was to be from base via Pforzheim to Karlsruhe, thence westward to Metz airfield, was marked in by the pilots on their maps. No special return route was given at the briefing, but pilots were told to make their own way back to base on the shortest easterly course.<sup>19</sup>

Gruppe aircraft were to take off individually, and assemble over Malmshcim in Schwärme stepped up from front to rear. Schwarmführer were to switch on FuG 16 immediately, but other pilots were not to do so until crossing the front line. The formation and first Schwarm was to be led by Lt. Karl Broo, Staffelführer of 8./JG 53. The second Schwarm was led by Lt. Günther Wulf, acting Staffelführer of 5./JG 53, the third Schwarm by Fj. Ofw. Kurt Opitz of 5./JG 53 and the fourth Schwarm by Lt. Rudolf Hocke, acting Staffelführer of 7./JG 53. Finally, the fifth and last Schwarm was made up of aircraft from 6./JG 53 which were to take off from their base Huchenfeld, four kilometres south of Pforzheim.<sup>20</sup>

The briefing for III./JG 53 at Kirrlach followed the same procedure. As always, pilots of the Gruppe had gathered in the evening of December 31st at the Gruppe Gefechtsstand for the daily debriefing. Normally the orders for the next day were revealed. On New Year's Eve it was hoped there would be no flying the following day and so the pilots could enjoy a party and stay in bed the following morning. This was actually promised by Division HQ and the pilots were dismissed. However, the joy was short as after a few minutes the pilots were called back and then marched to the local school at Kirrlach, where one of the Staffeln was billeted. To their surprise the pilots were briefed for a 'Sondereinsatz'.<sup>21</sup> Ofhr. Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, a young pilot in 12./JG 53 remembers: "We were amazed to see

two guards with rifles in front of the school. This was normally not the case. Inside we were told that we were to be briefed for an operation on January 1st and that we were not to leave the room until the beginning of the operation. Strict secrecy was ordered. Our Kommandeur, Major Franz Götz, informed us what this was all about. A massive air attack was to be launched against the enemy airfields in the west. All available Jagdgeschwader would participate and III./JG 53 was to attack Etain airfield. Every single pilot had to sign a written statement to fly at least three low-level attacks and to destroy at least two aircraft on the ground."<sup>22</sup>

Etain airfield was situated some 20 kilometres north-east of Verdun and some 38 kilometres north-west of Metz. Etain was also known as 'A-82 Verdun' or as 'Rouvres'. As recounted, the 362nd FG and 425th NFS were based at Etain. Flying a direct course, the distance to the target was 205 kilometres. Ernst-Dieter Bernhard continues: "Two Ju 88s, which had been based at Kirrlach for several days, would lead us to the target. Apparently they did not think much of our navigational skills. Finally, we knew what the Ju 88s at Kirrlach were waiting for! To prevent early warning of the enemy, we were to fly low on the deck and maintain absolute radio-silence. Also during start, R/T was forbidden. Only after passing the front line near Saarbrücken was the FuG 16 to be switched on. Aerial combat was to be avoided. Only by flying a direct route to the target, would the fuel would be sufficient. Even if the aircraft flying at the rear of the formation were attacked, the remainder would continue its flight to the target. The low-level attack on Etain had absolute priority.

"During the briefing the outward course and individual assignments for each Schwarm was given. Our reconnaissance aircraft had taken pictures of the target and they showed us the location of parked aircraft, AA positions and buildings on the field. Every Schwarm was detailed a single target. A few Schwärme were to attack AA positions and billets first to oppress any resistance and to start confusion. Other Schwärme were to attack the parked aircraft first. Each Schwarm was assigned a part of the airfield to prevent that everybody would aim at the same target. We were to destroy as many aircraft as possible.

"The weather forecast for New Year's Day predicted a low, solid cloud cover. This was important as it enabled us to fly low on the deck on the outward course, without the chance of being attacked from above by surprise. As far as the take-off time was concerned, we assumed that we would take off as early as possible. This seemed to be so obvious as we were to attack all airfields in one blow. We would only surprise our enemy if



we were over the target at first light, before their operations began. We also hoped that the Allied pilots would have celebrated New Year's Eve and would be staying a little longer in bed. We had been planning something like that! We planned for take-off in the dark. As it gets light in the west later, we should be able to be over the target at first light. Not to lose any time in the morning we rolled our aircraft from the boxes to the edge of the field in the right starting sequence. We even installed 'runway lights' along the take-off strip to indicate the take-off direction and to ease a possible take-off in the dark."<sup>23</sup>

After the briefing, the pilots of JG 53 went to bed, although for some of them it was hard to fall asleep as information was still spinning in their heads. In spite of the risks, confidence was good. Finally 'something big' was about to happen and everything seemed well-planned. An attack on enemy airfields packed with aircraft seemed to be very promising and they needed the success badly!

### January 1st: early morning missions for the Ninth Air Force

On the evening of December 31st, the pilots of XII and XIX TACs were hoping for some New Year's Eve celebrations. However, since the start of the Ardennes offensive the COs had been a little itchy and early bed was ordered. 2./Lt. James O. Hall, pilot of the 366th FS/358th FG, remembers December 31st: "Our CO, Colonel Tipton, made a very clear announcement and directive to all pilots who were to fly the next day, from all squadrons. We were not to indulge in the New Year's Eve festivities, that we were to get some early sack time since he wanted all missions up and in the day at the earliest possible daylight hour. It was obvious, that with the Bulge problems, reports of intruders and clandestine activities all around the front and behind our lines, that there was a heightened alertness with top echelon Brass. My personal opinion is that since the German push into the Bulge was so unexpected and dynamic, that it led to some paranoia and imagined assaults and attacks stemming from isolated incidents that would normally have been dismissed as the regular probing and patrol activities that characterised front line warfare. In any event, things were tense, and I dutifully hit the sack for an early awakening."<sup>24</sup>

In fact, this caution seemed justified. Just before midnight a new German offensive opened in the Strasbourg area. Several divisions, among them the 21st Panzer and the 10th SS Panzer were heading towards Haguenau, north of Strasbourg while the Panzerbrigade 'Feldherrnhalle' also struck towards Strasbourg from the south. 'Operation Nordwind' was aimed at continuing the German initiative after the Ardennes offensive, by destroying more enemy forces and gaining area for future operations.<sup>25</sup> Although

much smaller than 'Wacht am Rhein', the offensive may have caused increased readiness of the Fighter Groups within XII and XIX TACs. However, none of the available reports indicate this. Completely unaware of the imminent attack of the *Pik As Geschwader*, both Commands despatched aircraft on armed reconnaissance missions in the early hours of January 1st.

The 50th FG started its missions of the day when 12 Thunderbolts of 10th FS took off from Toul-Ochey at 08.19 hrs for an armed recce. Sixteen 500 lb and eight 100 lb bombs were dropped on an ammunition dump and trains. At 09.15 hrs one Ju 88 was encountered on the deck some 10 kilometres south-east of Saarbrücken and 1./Lt. John W. Ginder destroyed it. In fact, this was a Lotse Ju 88 for III./JG 2 and the story behind this unfortunate nightfighter has been told in Chapter Three.

The 358th FG commenced its missions even earlier! At daybreak, 'Orange Tail' ground crews at Croix de Metz were labouring tirelessly in the bitterly cold weather. They were up before daylight, pre-flighting the aircraft and loading them with bombs and ammunition. The first squadron to take off from the field of frozen mud was the 365th, led by Capt. James C. Elledge. At 08.00 hours 11 P-47s took off for an armed recce mission in support of the Seventh Army. They were to recce rail lines for ground controllers in the Bitche-Dahn area. The route flown was Base-Bitche-Haguenau-Bitche-Kaiserslautern-Base. At 08.10 hours 12 aircraft from the 367th FS took off from Croix de Metz for another armed reconnaissance mission. Led by Capt. Winton Perry, the Squadron was about to engage on a mission that would later be remembered as an outstanding operation by the Ninth Air Force. Bombed up with two 500 lb and one 100 lb projectiles they headed for the Zweibrücken-Homburg area. Last to depart from Croix de Metz at 08.22 hours were 12 aircraft of the 366th FS led by 1./Lt. Charles H. Maehrlein, scheduled for an armed recce in the Homburg area. Although still unknown to them, the pilots of the 358th FG would have a major impact on the efforts of JG 53.

The other two P-47 Groups of XII TAC also flew early morning missions. At 08.00 hrs twelve P-47s of the 314th FS took off from Dole for an armed recce in the Kaiserslautern area. Bombs were dropped and railroads strafed. Two Messerschmitts were encountered at 09.57 hrs, flying north-east, but they flew away.<sup>26</sup> The 371st FG flew its first mission when 11 P-47s of the 405th FS took off for an armed recce at 08.15 hrs.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the day, the four operational groups of XII TAC would have flown an impressive 419 sorties and 12 further sorties by the Spitfires of the French 1ere Escadre.<sup>28</sup> The 50th,



358th and 371st FGs all would lose one P-47 each. Twelve additional Thunderbolts would be damaged by Flak, but all pilots were safe.

The eight operational groups of XIX TAC also flew several missions on January 1st against enemy transport, tanks and gun positions. The 365th FG at Metz, which was to be the target of the main JG 53 attack, arrived from Chievres in Belgium. The 365th FG, known as the 'Hell Hawks', had settled in on snowy Metz-Frescaty by December 27th. Temperatures were low and when snow was light enough the PSP runway and taxiways were cleared by taxiing P-47s around in circles to blow the snow away. Of the airfield buildings, little had escaped damaged by previous bombing raids. Surrounded in a U-shape by hills 500 feet high, the airfield seemed naturally protected. However, AA positions were strategically placed on these hills overseeing the strip. Metz-Frescaty airfield itself was defended by 'A' and 'C' battery of the 386th AAA AW Bn (SM).<sup>29</sup> Living quarters were set up on the southern edge of Metz in former French artillery barracks and a damaged brick residence. Lighting was not very reliable, but the 'Hell Hawks' lived more comfortably than at any time since they had left England. Metz itself offered little diversion. The battle for the city had taken a huge toll and most of the shops, restaurants and bars were closed. There was distinctly little to do and the Group's VD<sup>30</sup> rate took an encouraging drop. Because of events in the Bulge no one really felt like celebrating a traditional New Year's Eve. A 20.00 hrs curfew discouraged social life in town even more and as a result there was a minimum of partying anywhere and little else to do but sleep. The following morning, the 387th FS was the first to take off at 08.28 hrs when 12 planes led by Major Arlo C. Henry Jr. went for an armed recce in the St. Ingbert area. A few minutes after nine o'clock the 388th followed with 13 Thunderbolts led by Capt. Jerry G. Mast for an armed recce in the Kaiserslautern-Homburg area. The 386th FS was preparing for its scheduled mission at 09.30 hrs, but as will be read, it would not get that far. By the end of the day, XIX TAC flew a total of 457 successful sorties. The only losses were two P-47s of the 354th FG which were shot down in an attack on a Flak position and troop concentration in the woods north-east of Lutrebois near Bastogne. Both pilots were killed.<sup>31</sup> Now let us return to JG 53 and its attack on Etain and Metz-Frescaty airfields. First we will look at the operation by III./JG 53 against Etain. Then we will turn to the combined effort by Stab, II. and IV./JG 53 on Metz-Frescaty.

### III./JG 53 heads for Etain

At Kirdlach, the wake-up call was early and the pilots prepared themselves for their mission. It had been a clear night and any cover from the low cloud base would not be there to help them. The

men were ready and when the take-off order did not come as the day began to dawn, nervousness apprehension grew. Finally the order came and the two Ju 88s of II./NJG 100 followed by 26 Messerschmitts took off at 08.30 hrs.<sup>32</sup> The formation made a big turn to allow time to assemble and then the two Ju 88s headed west towards Saarbrücken. The first part of the mission went without problem and around 09.10 hrs, the formation was near Homburg when suddenly disaster struck. Ofhr. Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, who flew as Rottenflieger with his Staffelkapitän Hptm. Siegfried Luckenbach, remembers: "For a while time everything went according to plan. But then I saw that one of the Rotten at the back was pulling up. Thunderbolts came diving at us from out of the sun. Just when I looked forward again I saw my Staffelkapitän dropping his drop tank too and climbing steeply. I immediately dropped my tank as well and tried to keep track of my Rottenführer. In no time we were in a wild dogfight with some 30 Thunderbolts that had dived down on our now shattered formation. Now the weaknesses in our preparations occurred, as there were no orders as to how to deal with this situation. As we had not yet passed the front line, no R/T communications existed and our radios were still switched off. Whoever had seen the Thunderbolts first was not able to warn anybody. Major Götz, our Kommandeur, realised that continuing the low-level flight was useless and suicidal. However, his orders to take on the fight did not come through as it took a while for everybody to understand that – against the initial orders – the radios had to be switched on. Anyway, it would take a least a minute or so to warm up the radios. However, every pilot now followed his leader and all tried to gain height. The short moment of uncertainty had been enough to dissolve our formation completely. The Thunderbolts had a big advantage as they dived upon us and they used the speed advantage to gain height after their attack on our Messerschmitts. We, on the contrary, hung in the air like ripe plums during our climb."<sup>33</sup>

As previously mentioned, 12 Thunderbolts of the 367th FS had taken off at 08.10 hrs for an armed recce in the Zweibrücken-Homburg area. Some bombs were dropped on Lambsborn, five kilometres north-east of Homburg and others on a marshalling yard at Schönenberg, a few kilometres further to the north-east. The Squadron had one flight on its bomb-run when the two high flights at 5,000 and 13,000 feet respectively, jettisoned their bombs at this point and bounced as reported '... 30 plus Bf 109s, Fw 190s and two Me 410s' which were on the deck, heading south-west. The two flights were immediately followed by the third as soon as it had gained sufficient height. In the eyes of the American pilots, the enemy pilots appeared green



Capt. Winton Perry received his second DFC for the morning mission on January 1st in which he – very successfully – led the 367th FS. (Bowen)

and were not aggressive, for instead of turning to force the fight they sought to evade it.<sup>34</sup> One of the P-47 pilots was F/O Charles W. Cassidy. He remembers: "I don't recall what size bombs we were carrying or if we had belly tanks, but when someone sighted and called out the location of a goodly number of Messerschmitt 109s we all eagerly dropped what we had and hurried to engage them. The bombs and or tanks were quickly jettisoned and fell all over the open countryside. This was what we always wanted

– to take on the Luftwaffe in a big dogfight. It didn't take me long to get on the tail of a 109 and it was a short fight because as soon as the tracers from my eight 50 cal. machine guns started to hit his plane, he probably figured that the best place for him to be was somewhere else and he bailed out. Finding myself alone, I began to look around for more German planes and it didn't take me long to find them; the only thing wrong was that every one I encountered had a P-47 with a bright orange tail right behind him. Knowing that our original mission had to be scrubbed I hung around to see if any of my squadron mates needed help but I'm proud to say not one of them did."<sup>35</sup>

The leader of the 367th FS, Capt. Alfred W. Perry, had his share of the action: "As we started climbing back up to rejoin the formation, one of the flight leaders called in 30 plus Me 109s at low altitude going south-west. So, when I got back up to where we were all at 10,000, we jumped them. They were at about 1,000 feet and never saw us coming. We had 12 planes and didn't lose anybody. We claimed 13-1-6. Thirteen destroyed, one probably destroyed, and six damaged. Turned out later that the German Air Force had a major mission that day to strafe all the forward airfields in France. Our field and a field about 20 miles south of us were not strafed. We thought it was very likely that we intercepted the planes that were coming to strafe our field. The encounter lasted just a minute or two. I guess we got about half of the fourteen on the first pass coming down. I got one on the first pass, and then I caught another one diving away and followed it. They were pretty well disorganised after our first pass. They were all going in every direction. One of

our guys got three, and another guy and I got two each. I closed to about 300 or 400 yards before firing. All eight guns were bore-sighted to converge at 400 yards. I ran out of ammo shooting at the second plane. I'd used so much strafing that little locomotive. We buzzed our field, but didn't do any victory rolls. We weren't supposed to because someone might get hurt or killed. A roll at low altitude is not exactly a safe manoeuvre."<sup>36</sup>

Capt. Perry received his second DFC for this mission. Indeed the attack by the 367th FS was a success – four to six enemy pilots were seen to bale out. The following pilots claimed victories:

### Claims by 367th in combat with III./JG53

1./Lt. Wayne E. Owens	3 Me 109 destroyed
	2 Me 109 damaged
Capt. Alfred W. Perry	2 Me 109 destroyed
2./Lt. Daniel E. O'Riordan	2 Me 109 destroyed
2./Lt. George R. Freifeld	1 Me 109 destroyed
F/O Charles W. Cassidy	1 Me 109 destroyed
F/O Jerrald P. Evoritt	1 Me 109 destroyed
	1 Me 109 damaged
F/O Julius J. Rosenfeldt	1 Me 109 destroyed
1./Lt. William H. Schubert	1 Me 109 destroyed
	1 Me 109 destroyed (prob)
	1 Me 109 damaged
2./Lt. Robert R. Ueek	1 Me 109 destroyed
2./Lt. John J. Usiatynski	2 Me 109 damaged

There were no losses for the 367th FS during the engagement. In fact, only 1./Lt. William H. Schubert had received damage to his aircraft: just one 20 mm shell in his wing.<sup>37</sup>

The 12 Thunderbolts of the 367th FS were not the only ones that III./JG 53 had to engage. At 08.22 hrs, 366th FS had also taken off for an armed recce in the Homburg area. At 09.20 hrs, they saw 20 Me 109s and one Me 410 (sic) flying east on the deck. In fact these were the scattered remains of III/JG 53 heading for home. All bombs were jettisoned. The 366th was at 8,000 ft and only two flights engaged. 2./Lt. Jim Hall vividly remembered this mission: "As I recall, we had taxied out while dawn was just coming up. That time of year, days were shorter, of course, so I can't be sure of the time. We took off and as we formed up and headed east, we were looking into a fairly bright sun. We climbed up through several wispy low-lying cloud decks that were scattered enough that we could catch big glimpses of the ground below. It seemed to me that we were not more than 15 minutes out when, looking down, I spotted through one of the holes a flight of planes just slightly on our left side, practically on the deck, and flying a course that was the exact opposite track as ours! I don't know if I was the first to spot them or give the first alarm, but all of a sudden there was a lot of chatter as several pilots

saw them. The German markings were very clear, as was their type, looking down, and it was evident from their position and course that they were not after an aerial fight. In any event, we all jettisoned our bombs, and made a diving left split-S to the left to come in behind them. By the time we started down, they were already spooked, and with no apparent scheme, they all scattered wildly in all directions. I believe I was leading the second element with Horst<sup>38</sup> flying my wing. As I got down to the enemy flight level I had a good bit of speed. When I cleared the clouds, I picked out a 109 turning left and tried to tighten my turn to get on his tail. I just about made it and was able to rake his right wing with a good burst. Pieces of airplane flew off as he went into a vertical tighter left turn, and my speed, even with the throttle back, took me on past him. I wheeled left but he was out of sight among the low clouds and treetops. I really did some damage to him that I think would have prohibited him from getting back to Germany. I suspect that somebody else in the group that day caught up with him and finished him off. From that point on the fight was a nightmare. Airplanes were everywhere, all at low-altitude, but they were mostly ours. The Krauts were in full flight back to Germany and most of us raced east to try and find them. I spotted one about a mile ahead, but somebody up ahead of me hit him with a stream of tracers and he went in the trees with a flash of fire. I had lost Horst and was climbing up to three or four thousand feet, turning north towards a gaggle of planes and wispy clouds, when I saw a Me 109 coming down at right angles to me, about to cross in front of me. He apparently did not see me until too late to turn towards me, but then I did see what looked like a white flash several quick times on his nose, just as I turned towards him. He had launched some cannon shells at 90 deg. deflection and damned if I didn't run right into one of them. It hit me right in the wing root, below the cockpit and made a deafening noise as sheet metal exploded. I cranked hard left to follow Jerry down, but my plane was hard to control and the engine started to cough and kick. I had to forget the fight and turn my attention to my craft, which seemed to settle down as I bled off some airspeed. I couldn't see much out my right window, there seemed to be some fluid of some sort on it, oil or hydraulic. I watched for gasoline drainage, as the main tank was close by the cannon hit, but all indications were that I was not losing fuel. Since I was kind of limping along, watching the gauges and the feel of the ship, I turned for home to try and coax it in. I found out later that I did get shrapnel in the self-sealing gas tank, but it did its job, without blowing me up! I landed without incident, but with a rough engine and some unusual trim cranked in to make up for the aerodynamic loss of the big hole and jagged metal."<sup>39</sup>



2./Lt. James O. Hall in front of his P-47D. On January 1st he was able to damage a Bf 109 in the dogfight with III./JG 53. (Hall)

In this dogfight the 366th FS claimed 1-0-3, all Messerschmitts. 2./Lt. Dofel Brunetti was shot down and he was seen to bale out in enemy territory north of Hagenau. 'Dolpho', as his fellow-pilots called him, spent two months in a German POW camp before he was liberated by the Red Army and returned to his unit. His claim was added a couple of months after he returned from the Russian zone.<sup>40</sup>

#### Claims by 366th in combat with III./JG 53

Capt. Fred L. Hillis	1 Me 109 destroyed
	2 Me 109 damaged
2./Lt. James O. Hall	1 Me 109 damaged
2./Lt. Dofel J. Brunetti	1 Me 109 damaged

The last Squadron of the 358th FG also interrupted III./JG 53's mission. Being the first to take off at 08.00 hrs, the 365th FS had been bombing targets east of Pirmasens when two Me 210s (sic) were spotted going east. In the vicinity of Spirkelbach, the Squadron bounced the duo of enemy aircraft





Lt. Donald S. Flowers of the 358th FG ('Orange Tails') filed claims for one Me 210 destroyed and one damaged. These were, in fact, the Ju 88 Lotsen assigned to III./JG 53. (Flowers)

from a height of 6,000 feet. Don Flowers still remembers that morning, but realises that he mistakenly identified the Ju 88s as Me 210s: "We were flying north-east of Bitche when I spotted two Me 210s flying low and heading east. I called my flight leader's attention to them and we started down together. The flight leader lost track of them, so he told me to lead the way down which I did. Closing in right away, I opened fire on one of the planes at about 300 yards, observing hits on his wings. He broke away and started north, so I slid over and fired at the other one, which was still headed east. I saw strikes all over the plane this time, and pieces started flying off. Then the port engine caught fire. When this happened I over-ran him and had to break off. But as I pulled up I saw him crash land in an open field. Three men scrambled out of the burning ship and high-tailed it for cover."<sup>41</sup>

Lt. Flowers afterwards filled out a report for one Me 210 destroyed and one Me 210 damaged north-east of Bitche. In fact these two 'Me 210s' were the two Ju 88 Lotsen of III./JG 53. One Ju 88 of II./NJG 100 was reported destroyed by enemy fire, but the crew escaped unharmed.<sup>42</sup> According to other sources, the other Ju 88 belly-landed, but this can not be verified.<sup>43</sup>

Let us return to III./JG 53's mission and see how the German pilots experienced the attack by the different squadrons of the 358th FG. Ernst-Dieter Bernhard recalls: "As I climbed towards the Thunderbolts many things went through my head. Dropping the auxiliary fuel tanks had already been against operational orders. Were we allowed to take on the Thunderbolts with all our aircraft? Would we be able to disengage at all and still find our way to the target? If we reached our target at all the fuel would not last to bring us back to our homebase. In fact it could be that it wasn't even enough to reach our own lines. I did hear our Kommandeur calling his men, but only a few answered. Several of us were hit and bailed out. We were completely scattered and headed in every direction. I had a Thunderbolt on my tail and I had to pull on the stick with all my strength to make a tight turn and escape the fire of his guns. In doing so I lost sight of my Staffelführer. I could not find him back. Had I stayed with him, I would surely have been shot down. Later I learned that his engine had given up on him and burst into flames. Hptm. Luckenbach had to bail out."<sup>44</sup>

Hptm. Siegfried Luckenbach bailed out near Pirmasens and landed unhurt. The attack by the 358th FG had disastrous results for the III. Gruppe. Some ten Messerschmitts were shot down and one damaged.<sup>45</sup> 9./JG 53 lost three Bf 109s. Uffz. Hermann Heck had been completely taken by surprise by the P-47s and had not even had time to switch on his R/T. He tried to run for Saarbrücken to find cover from the Flak units, but he was hit and had to bale out at 1,500 metres. He pulled the

chord late fearing he would otherwise be an easy target hanging on his parachute. He landed on a dunghill in the courtyard of a farm in the middle of Kirrberg, a town a few kilometres south-east of Homburg. Some Wehrmacht officers took him to Kaiserslautern where he met Hptm. Luckenbach and some other pilots. Together they travelled by truck to Kirrlach.<sup>46</sup> Uffz. Wilhelm Holtfreter of 9./JG 53 was also hit by P-47s and had to belly-land his stricken Messerschmitt near Pirmasens. Finally Fw. Stein baled out near Pirmasens, but not before he claimed one P-47 destroyed. This may very well have been the P-47 of 2./Lt. James O. Hall, which was hit by cannon fire from one of the Bf 109s.

10./JG 53 lost at least one Bf 109 in the battle when Lt. Wilhelm Manz belly-landed near Pirmasens. Slightly wounded in one foot Lt. Manz was taken to the hospital at Neustadt a.d. Weinstrasse. Manz did not like the idea of spending time there and decided to hitchhike back to Kirrlach instead! Ten days later he was back in the air again, but again shot down, this time by Mustangs. He baled out but suffered severe injuries to his leg and would not fly again.<sup>47</sup>

Ofw. Friedrich Scheer's entire Schwarm from 11./JG 53 was shot out of the sky. Scheer and two other pilots remained unhurt after they baled out near Pirmasens. Fw. Heinz Plettner was not so lucky. His Messerschmitt received hits in the fuselage and wing and he was wounded in the leg. He managed to bale out and was taken to a hospital in Pirmasens.<sup>48</sup> Besides Hptm. Luckenbach, 12./JG 53 lost one other pilot, when Uffz. Karl Göller rammed a P-47 after he had been hit. He also baled out but suffered severe injuries and was taken to hospital in Homburg.<sup>49</sup> The P-47 may very well have been the aircraft flown by 2./Lt. Dofel J. Brunetti of 366th FS.

Scattered through the skies, the remaining pilots of III./JG 53 tried to reach their target or headed home. Ofhr. Ernst-Dieter Bernhard continues: "When I finally got rid of the Thunderbolt on my tail, there was no aircraft, friend or foe, in sight. I was totally alone. There was no R/T traffic either and my effort to get in touch with my unit remained unanswered. Only a few minutes had passed since the Thunderbolts had dived upon us. Today that does not amaze me anymore; those few minutes were enough to end our mission. Whoever had not been shot down was immediately engaged in individual dogfights, and flew alone or in pairs in the area just like me. I immediately headed for Etain and hoped to find my unit en route. During the flight I thought about how to carry out the attack and then I realised that although my fuel would be enough to reach Etain, it certainly was not enough to reach the front line again. This was not good at all, but I felt obliged to carry out the orders. In any

case I wanted to reach the target, the rest I would see then. Maybe I could bail out or belly-land and then try to reach the German lines.

"During the dogfight I had reached an altitude of 7,000 metres and now I used this height to gain speed. Suddenly there was a loud bang and the aircraft veered strongly to the left. Only with great force was I able to hold the aircraft level. First, I thought that somebody had hit me in the tail, but there was no one behind me! What was the reason that my aircraft was hardly controllable? I could not see anything on the outside. Everything was in vain and I tried to reach Kirrlach. I wondered what I would say to the groundcrew, if the secrecy was still in place.

"Flying at low speed the aircraft was easier to fly and without any further problems I reached Kirrlach. As I climbed out of the cockpit I saw that the wing root fairing on the left side was missing. Apparently some of the rivets had come loose following the tight turns in the dogfight. I was angry at my bad luck and assumed that the Gruppe had managed to reach the target with some aircraft. However, when several hours passed and, beside me, only a few Messerschmitts, among them Oblt. Martin von Vacano the Kapitän of 9./JG 53, returned, it became clear that this was a black day for our Gruppe."<sup>50</sup>

Of the 26 Messerschmitts that had taken off only a few returned to Kirrlach. Several others landed at other airfields. Some 11 Bf 109s, over 40 per cent of the formation, had been shot down by the P-47 Thunderbolts of the 358th FG. Even worse, one of the Ju 88s was destroyed and the other damaged. The attack by III./JG 53 on Etain was a total failure. The 362nd FG at Etain probably never realised what they owed to their Orange Tail comrades. They had completely compromised the intended German raid. The 358th FG received a Distinguished Unit Citation for operations between December 24th 1944 and January 2nd 1945. This entitled the men to wear a blue and gold bar over their right breast pocket.<sup>51</sup>

### **Jagdgeschwader 53's main attack on Metz-Frescaty**

In the early morning of January 1st the groundcrew of Stab, II. and IV./JG 53 prepared their Messerschmitts for the attack on Metz-Frescaty. The aircraft were rolled to the edge of the field to save fuel for the long flight to Metz. Stab JG 53 and the main part of IV./JG 53 at Stuttgart-Echterdingen had the longest outward course of all the Geschwader's Gruppen. The flight from Echterdingen to Kaiserslautern and then to Metz-Frescaty was more than 250 kilometres. It would be the first to take off that morning. II./JG 53 had 210 kilometres to cover from Malmsheim to Karlsruhe and then to Metz. They would take off a few minutes later.

Preparations by Stab JG 53 and IV./JG 53 were no different than those of III./JG 53 at Kirrlach. The pilots had been woken up early and received a final briefing from their commanding officers. Obstlt. Bennemann would lead the combined force of Stab JG 53 and IV./JG 53 to Metz-Frescaty. 13./JG 53, which was stationed at Nellingen, would join the formation at the rear. First to take off at Echterdingen was the Ju 88 Lotse of 4./NJG 100 flown by Lt. Albert Gerber. Although there is no clear documentary proof of the actual take-off time, the best estimate that can be made is 08.12 hrs.<sup>52</sup> The Junkers was followed by four Messerschmitts of the Stabsschwarm, led by Obstlt. Helmut Bennemann. Ofhr. Helmut Ballewski flew as Rottenflieger with Obstlt. Bennemann, and the remaining Rotte consisted of Fw. Friedrich Meyer and Oblt. Rudolf Schummer. Meyer flew one of the two Bf 109 K-4s that were available in the Stab. Schummer actually belonged to IV./JG 53, but had been assigned to Stab JG 53 to make the Schwarm of four complete. Next was IV./JG 53, led by Gruppenkommandeur Hptm. Friedrich Mürer. 13./JG 53 took off in Nellingen and joined the formation at the rear. It is believed that some 28 Messerschmitts took part in the mission.

At Malmsheim, II./JG 53 took off at approximately 08.35 hrs. First were the two Ju 88s of II./NJG 100, which would guide the II. Gruppe towards Metz. The leading Ju 88 was flown by the crew of Fw. Wilhelm Gössele of 6./NJG 100. During take-off, the aircraft of IV./JG 53 could be seen flying at some distance and already on their way to Kaiserslautern. The leading Schwarm of II./JG 53 flew at a height of about 20 metres, whilst each of the remaining Schwärme followed at stepped-up height at 200 metre intervals.<sup>53</sup> The first Schwarm was led by Lt. Karl Broo, who would also lead the II. Gruppe. The second Schwarm was led by Lt. Günther Wulf, the third by Fj. Ofw. Kurt Opitz and the fourth by Lt. Rudolf Hocke. After a few minutes flying a Schwarm of 6./JG 53, which had taken off from Huchenfeld, joined the formation at the rear end. The Schwarm was led by Ofhr. Karl-Heinz Trettau. He replaced Hptm. Alfred Hammer, the Staffelfkapitän of 6./JG 53, who was ill. Around twenty Messerschmitts of II./JG 53 would take part in the mission.

Stab and IV./JG 53's flight towards Kaiserslautern went without any problems. Lt. Albert Gerber remembers the first part of the mission: "The take-off was in the early morning of January 1st. After forming the formation over the airfield, I took the lead and flew towards Metz at a height of 50-100 metres. How many Messerschmitt took part, I don't remember. The fighters were led by the Kommodore of JG 53. While crossing the front line near Saarbrücken and also afterwards we encountered some light

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Pictures showing the tragic fate of 24-year old Uffz. Herbert Maxis. Maxis belly-landed his Bf 109 G-14 near a position of the 739th Field Artillery Bn at Ittersdorf. Climbing out of his cockpit he was shot by a member of the American unit. In some pictures Maxis's body can be seen lying on the wing of his Messerschmitt. His flying boots have been removed. (Williams)





# OF PIK AS, ORANGE TAILS AND HELL HAWKS



Above: Guncrew No. 1 of 'A' Battery gather for a snapshot at their .50-cal. Quad M51. From left to right: Harry Short, Curran, Flenory Griggs, Ferguson, Charles Reed. (Chandler)



Above: Picture of 'White 13' at a later stage. The aircraft is by now completely looted. (Chandler)

Members of 'A' Battery, 455th AAA, S/Sgt. Lloyd A. Glisson and Sgt. John Proctor standing beside the tail of 'White 13'. The W.Nr. 784993 can just be identified on the original photo. (Chandler)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

AAA fire. It seemed that our surprise attack would work. There were no losses caused by the AAA. Shortly before Metz I received the order from the Kommodore – 'Ju 88 turn away!' I took a reciprocal course and flying at a height of 2,000 metres I returned to Echterdingen without any problems.<sup>54</sup>

Lt. Gerber could not have been more wrong in his assessment, several Messerschmitts were lost due to AA fire. Battery 'A' of the 455th AAA AW Bn (M) was stationed near Ittersdorf, just south-west of Saarlautern. Between 09.16 and 09.20 hrs this battery engaged eight aircraft of a flight of 20 enemy aircraft consisting of Bf 109s, Ju 88s and Me 210s approaching from a north-easterly direction at 100 ft altitude.<sup>55</sup> This was the formation of Stab and IV./JG 53. The aircraft appeared to be flying in a loose gaggle, strung out over the area between Kerlingen and Felsberg. The Messerschmitts started to strafe the positions of the 455th AAA AW Bn and 739th Field Artillery Bn. During this action a personal duel developed when one Bf 109 strafing west along the road from Felsberg to Boulay passed over the gun section engaging it, and circled around for another strafing run. The gun section was No. 1 M51 quad of 'A' Battery manned by Pfc Flenory Griggs. The aircraft was immediately brought down 200 yards from the gun section. Billy M. Traylor of the 739th FA Bn remembers this event vividly: "I was in the pram-tent taking a crap when I heard small arms fire picking up from the front. The rule was everyone shoots at low-flying planes and we usually had a few minutes to be prepared. This had happened before and I wasn't too concerned and thought I'd just finish my job. The small arms fire gets so heavy and close I decide I better get out and see what's going on. Just as I step outside the pram-tent, I see a German fighter coming right straight at me about 300 yards away. I could see the fire from his guns. I hit the ground (snow) with my pants about half way up, keeping my eye on that plane. It quit firing before it got to me and I could see smoke coming from his engine. He banked the plane sharply and started back towards the German lines. He came into my battery area (right in the middle of it) firing his machine gun and 20 mm nose cannon and made a perfect belly-landing. By the time I got to the plane, the pilot had been shot and his flight-suit taken. He was lying in a pool of blood in his longhandles with one foot on the wing. He had coal black hair, about 20 years old or less, and looked just like a cousin of mine. A friend of mine, Smith,<sup>56</sup> shot the pilot as he got out of his plane, a Me 109. A Grave Registration Unit picked up the body and the next day officers of Corps Headquarters came to our unit to investigate. They didn't like it because a German had been brought in dead in his underwear. There was talk

of a court-martial, but the idea was dropped when told the pilot came in firing all his guns. I think we lost one man, hit in the leg, and I never saw that many German planes again."<sup>57</sup>

The unfortunate pilot was Uffz. Herbert Maxis of 13./JG 53. Uffz. Maxis belly-landed his 'White 13' just east of Ittersdorf along the road from Felsberg to Boulay. As he climbed out of the ship, Uffz. Maxis raised his hands and tried to surrender, but was immediately shot by a member of 'A' battery of the 739th FA Bn. The Messerschmitt had been firing both its machine guns and its 20 mm while belly-landing. A bullet had wounded Pfc. Camile J. LeForte of 'A' Battery and this was apparently sufficient reason to shoot Maxis on the spot. A court-martial was threatened for the gunner, but it seems the whole affair was covered up. In official reports it was reported that Uffz. Maxis made a move, which had been interpreted as hostile by the Field Artillery personnel.<sup>58</sup>

As Maxis' body was stripped by the men of the 739th FA Bn, no identification could be found by the Grave Registration Unit and it is more than likely that he was buried as an unknown. Today his grave remains unfound and Uffz. Herbert Maxis is still listed as MIA. 'A' Battery of the 455th AAA AW Bn claimed four 'Cat. Is' and three 'Cat. IIs' in this engagement, but only the loss of Uffz. Maxis is known in this area. The unit expended 1,943 rounds of .50 calibre shells and 68 rounds of 40 mm.

The attack by IV./JG 53 on the field artillery and AAA positions does not appear to have been a co-ordinated one. It seems that only a few pilots turned their attention to these positions while the others continued on their course towards Metz. Not all of them would reach Metz-Frescaty. Between 09.30-09.50 hrs 'D' Battery of the 455th AAA engaged 25 Fw 190s and Bf 109s in the Waldweistroff-Flastroff area, which were attacking field artillery positions. Some sources say that these were aircraft already returning from Metz-Frescaty, other sources indicate that they had not reached Metz at all.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, several aircraft attacked American positions from all directions. No material damage was caused, but three members of an M-51 gun crew of 'D' Battery, T/5th Charles E. Beets, Pvt. J.D. Smith and Pvt. Michael Kelly, were wounded by fragments when their section was attacked from the rear by a Bf 109 while they were engaging another Bf 109 in the opposite field of fire. Cpl. George R. Shouse, the only crewmember unhurt, continued to engage the approaching aircraft until he had destroyed one with his M-51 gun. When the aircraft had retired, he rendered first aid to his comrades. Cpl. George Shouse received the Bronze Star Medal for this heroic service.<sup>60</sup>



Fhr. Siegfried Leese of 14./JG 53. At 19-years old, he was one of JG 53's youngest pilots. He is posted as MIA from January 1st 1945. (Leese)



Fhr. Wolfgang Rosenberger of 15./JG 53. Only a month older than Fhr. Leese, Rosenberger is also listed as MIA after the Bodenplatte mission. (Rosenberger)



Gefr. Alfred Michel's 'Blue 2' being examined by US forces. Note that the propeller was already feathered when the aircraft belly-landed. (Williams)



Far left: Lt. George Batchelder, 1st Platoon commander of 'D' Battery, in front of Gefr. Alfred Michel's Bf 109 'Blue 2'. (Chandler)



Gefr. Alfred Michel's 'Blue 2' at a later stage. There has been considerable looting of the wreck. (Chandler)

One Messerschmitt crash-landed at Waldweistroff, south-west of Merzig. Its engine failed due to hits from .50 calibre shells. The pilot, Gefr. Alfred Michel of 16./JG 53, was unhurt and attempted to escape to some nearby woods. A section of 'D' Battery, 455th AAA, overlooking the crash scene fired two rounds of 40 mm ahead of him. At the sight of the tracers, Michel promptly stopped and sat down to await his captors.<sup>61</sup> His Messerschmitt 'Blue 2' had suffered little damage and upon investigation it was found its guns had not been fired, supporting the theory that these Bf 109s had not found Metz. Two other Messerschmitts came down close to investigate this crash-landing and they were engaged and shot down as they buzzed the scene of the crash. In fact 'D' Battery of the 455th AAA AW Bn (M) claimed no fewer than 10 'Cat. Is' in this engagement. No fewer than 3,630 .50 rounds and 318 40 mm rounds were expended. At least five carcasses were found and investigated. Unfortunately none of these crashes have been identified. It is believed that the following IV./JG



53 pilots fell victim to the guns of the 455th AAA: Fhr. Siegfried Leese of 14./JG 53, Fj.Fw. Werner Jaschek of 15./JG 53 and Fhr. Wolfgang Rosenberger, also of 15./JG 53. All of these pilots are still reported missing. Fhr. Siegfried Leese, who flew in the Schwarm of his Staffelkapitän Oblt. Karl-Wilhelm Romain was reportedly last seen over Metz-Frescaty and he may have been shot down on the return flight.<sup>62</sup> One Messerschmitt

Cpl. George R. Shouse of 'D' Battery with his quad .50 'Lady from Hell'. She sports two Swastikas from the action on January 1st 1945. Cpl. Shouse was awarded the Bronze Star. (Chandler)





Fw. Walter Vollmer of 6./NJG 100 photographed in 1940. Vollmer was Bordfunker in the crew of Fw. Gössele which flew as Lotse for I./JG 53 on January 1st 1945. Their Ju 88 G-6 was shot down by Allied AAA and the whole crew perished in the crash. (Collin)



Capt. Jerry G. Mast of the 388th FS, 365th FG. (Forsyth)

with yellow markings was shot down near Waldwisse, north-east of Thionville.<sup>63</sup> Fj.Fw. Jaschek flew a 'Yellow 2' and Fhr. Wolfgang Rosenberger a 'Yellow 12', so both are candidates for this crash. According to witnesses from the 455th AAA the pilot was young, which could lead to the assumption that it must have been Fhr. Wolfgang Rosenberger who crashed near Waldwisse. However, other sources say that AAA shot him down over Metz-Frescaty.<sup>64</sup> The remainder of IV./JG 53 continued their course towards Metz-Frescaty. A lonely Auster crossed the Germans' path and was duly shot down by Ofw. Eduard Isken of 13./JG 53. It was his 50th victory. It is believed that this was an artillery spotter of the 270th Field Artillery Battalion which crashed near the Saar River, killing pilot and observer.<sup>65</sup>

II./JG 53 had flown a more southerly course towards Metz. Coming from Karlsruhe they passed the front line south-west of Wissembourg. A few moments later AA fire struck the leading Ju 88 G-6 of Fw. Walter Gössele. The Junkers burst into flames and crashed near Ettendorf, north of Hochfelden.<sup>66</sup> All three crewmembers – Fw. Walter Gössele, Fw. Walter Vollmer and Fw. Herbert Weberschinke – perished in the crash. The grave location of the crewmembers has never been established, although it is presumed they rest as unknowns at the German Military Cemetery at Niederbronn-les-Bains.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, II./JG 53 encountered a few Spitfires and Lt. Karl Broo shot one of them down.<sup>68</sup>

Both formations, IV./JG 53 followed at some distance by II./JG 53, now approached Metz-Frescaty where activity had started early. Ground crews had been up since 04.00 hrs and had prepared the aircraft assigned for the day's mission with the assigned load of ammunition and bombs. After all aircraft were loaded, the ordnance crews returned to their temporary headquarters to rest.<sup>69</sup> The first mission of the day had taken off at 08.28 hrs when 12 aircraft of the 387th FS went for an armed reconnaissance in the St. Ingbert area. As they left their targets at 09.13, Captain Jerry G. Mast was about to take off, leading 13 aircraft of the 388th FS for a mission in the Homburg area. By 09.15 hrs they would be some 20 miles from Metz. Next was the 386th, which was preparing for a planned take-off at 09.30 hrs. At around 09.15 hrs there were crackles of flak in the distance. Ground crews looked up and watched a gaggle of aircraft approaching from the north over one of the hills. At first, they thought it was a squadron of Spitfires, for they also flew in loose formations. The flashes coming from the aircraft quickly made them realise that they were Luftwaffe aircraft. Since there were no foxholes, the men of the 386th FS went for every depression or shelter they could find, even slit trenches of the latrine!

T/Sgt. Marion Hill of the 365th FG HQ remembers:

"The weather on New Year's Day was clear and cold. Everyone was looking forward to a full day of successful missions. By 09.30, two squadrons had taken off for their missions, and a third, the 386th, was preparing to leave. The Combat Intelligence Section had by that time completed its duties of briefing the squadrons and began the day's routine paperwork activities. Usually just after briefings were finished, the next hour or so was light in duties and we would take the opportunity to relax. New Year's Day was the first opportunity on our new base to scrounge for anything we could use in our section tent, in our barracks, or to keep as souvenirs. Several group headquarters men and I strolled among some burned out buildings looking for anything of use. As we were doing so, I happened to look up at the ring of hills about 500 feet high that surrounded Metz and our base in the form of a U. At the same time we heard ack-ack firing in Metz and then saw flashes from the wings of a large number of planes. Everyone at about the same time yelled 'Messerschmitts!' and dived for any cover that could be found. (There were none of the usual foxholes because the frozen ground prevented digging).

"I and one other fellow dived for a foundation wall of a burned-out barracks. This barrier protected us in one direction only, but was better than nothing. As we were lying there, the first pass of the Germans was right overhead; they missed us. Then I looked toward the east end of the field where the German planes were flying back and forth, parallel to the way we were lying. They worked their way across the field, firing all the time until they were overhead. As I looked up, I saw one plane catch fire in his belly and began to fall, crashing a hundred yards to so away. This meant that the planes were hellishly close; we could hear the swish-swish of their shells. As I turned my head to remark about it to the man lying in front of me, I heard a whoosh! A shell had ricocheted and hit me in my face. However, I was not aware of being hit. As I looked down, I saw my gloves and lower arms covered with blood. The fellow in front turned around and said, 'You're hit in the face – blood is gushing out all over!' For the first time in my life, I thought I was going to die, and began to worry about the reaction of Susan and other people at home. My companion began to yell for assistance. As luck would have it, a medic from the medical section came over the foundation wall from the other side where he had been lying. After slapping on a gauze bandage he always carried in his fatigues, he and others got an ambulance, placed me on a stretcher and carted me and another fellow to the Army 34th Evacuation Hospital in Metz.

OF PIK AS, ORANGE TAILS AND HELL HAWKS



Many P-47 Thunderbolts were completely destroyed at Metz. Here is one such example, close to the 365th FG's accommodation tents. If it were not for the PSP some of the 'Jugs' would have vanished! (Johnson)

Below: Hardest hit Squadron in the raid on the 365th FG at Metz was the 386th FS, with 12 aircraft destroyed and seven badly damaged. (Johnson)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Officers of the 365th FG from left to right: Major George R. Brooking, Maj. John W. Motzenbecker, Col. Ray J. Stecker and Maj. Robert M. Fry. The latter took over the 388th FS from Maj. Hill on January 12th 1945. (Brooking)

The airfield was still under fire from the strafing aircraft.<sup>70</sup>

During the initial attack by IV./JG 53 at least nine men were wounded.<sup>71</sup> The next ten minutes were catastrophic for those on the ground. The German aircraft came in for pass after pass, guns blazing, primarily aimed at the parked Thunderbolts of the 386th FS. Meanwhile the 386th AAA Bn blasted away over the airfield and the surrounding hills. A Messerschmitt came down a short distance from a gun emplacement. Its pilot had been hit by a .50 in the eye and was thrown clear of his aircraft. A gunner ran out to the body to collect the parachute. A second aircraft was hit and smashed into a hangar. In the process 2./Lt Carl Riggs was hit by parts of wreckage as it cart wheeled over his hiding place into the building. The 365th FG later reported: "After the first pass at the field it was obvious that more than 25 German planes were participating in the low-level attack. For eight minutes they wheeled and turned over the field and a pall of smoke arose from the planes their cannon set afire. The calibre-50 machine guns manned by the anti-aircraft outfit mixed their chattering with the pop-pop-pop of the Me cannons and occasionally a heavy anti-aircraft gun would pump out a shell as if exasperated that the enemy planes were too low for them to train on. On the first dive one Me zoomed south beyond the field and the pilot bailed out. He was captured by MP's and brought to the field before being turned over to POW interrogators. A second German plane crashed into the ground in the midst of the 386th line area, and a third – a ball of flame – swept past Group Headquarters setting a communications truck afire and it crashed in a woods a hundred yards from the Headquarters building. The pilot was trying to bail out but his chute never had a

chance to open. Miraculously, that plane didn't injure a single person although it fell in a wood where scores of men had taken shelter. The German planes attacked the field in waves so that there was a lull between strafing passes while the Jerrys reformed. During these intervals in the shooting officers and GIs cautiously peeked out of holes or from around the corners of buildings to survey the mounting damage. At any moment it was expected that the P-47s of the two squadrons already airborne would return to the field in answer to a recall and then the audacious Germans would have a fight on their hands – and the watchers on the ground would see an unparalleled show. But the Group's Thunderbolts returned too late although anti-aircraft claimed nine German planes destroyed. The heavy cloud of smoke that hung over the field from the burning planes and gas trucks almost hid the sun."<sup>72</sup>

The enemy pilot who was shot down over the field was a very self-assured individual, who spoke excellent English. Before he let his captors take his picture he insisted upon combing his hair and shining his boots. Maj. George R. Brooking, the CO of the 386th FS went to Group HQ where the prisoner was held. During the course of the conversation with Major Brooking, the German went to the window and arrogantly pointed at the still-burning aircraft and said: "*What do you think of that?*" Maj. Brooking apparently felt like punching him on the nose and strode furiously out of the room. In the next few days, replacement aircraft arrived from Paris and Maj. Brooking made it a point to go over to Group HQ to see the German pilot. Walking to the window with him, Maj. Brooking pointed to ten or so new aircraft where charred hulls had sat a few days before, and he said: "*What do you think of that?*" The German pilot looked out the window and then with a rueful expression on his face turned to Maj. Brooking and said: "*That is what is beating us.*"

There were many personal experiences, humorous today, but certainly not at the time. Most poignant perhaps is the story of 1./Lt. Lavern Alcorn who, returning as a spare from the 388th, was '...flying along fat, dumb and happy' approaching the airfield when he was greeted by bursts of flak. Taking violent evasive action, he was later identified as "...some crazy pilot who was doing aerobatics during the attack."<sup>73</sup> Then there was Sgt. Hutchins of the 388th who was quietly reading the 'Stars and Stripes' in the outside latrine. Literally caught with his pants down, there was no way to run but down... He waited for the end of the raid in the latrine pit, amongst 'the scent of sweet-violets'. A similar thing happened to Maj. Brooking. Taking care of his daily constitutional, he heard machine gun fire and peered out of the latrine tent into the war-like noses of





A number of Thunderbolts were already bombed-up for a mission when JG 53 made its attack on Metz. (Johnson)

Messerschmitt fighters with their guns blazing. He dove out of the tent head-first into the snow with his bare behind exposed to the elements.

However, two men were at most exposed positions during the attack. Capt. Thomas E. Stanton and 1./Lt Samuel B. Lutz of the 387th FS were on the Alert Flight at the end of the runway. However, only one of the two alert aircraft was available and parked at the south end of the runway with Capt. Stanton sitting in it: "I am sure the Luftwaffe, knowing how Americans traditionally celebrated New Years Eve, would catch us with our pants down or hung over in the sack. However it was business as usual and we had an early briefing. The 387th & 388th Squadrons were already airborne on their assigned missions. The 386th's planes were loaded with 500 lb bombs and still on the ground. Sam Lutz and I were assigned to Air Alert at the South end of the runway. Sam's aircraft was not ready when I taxied out to the end of the runway. I shut off my engine and removed my cloth B4 flight jacket and placed it over the stick. I was quite comfortable with my radio on, tuned to the control tower, which was stationed on the side in the middle of the runway to my north. There was a Quad .50 caliber anti-aircraft gun emplacement about twenty feet back of me. They were in the process of cleaning their guns. Sam Lutz had come out to visit, as it was going to be sometime before his aircraft was to be ready. He visited with me a few minutes and then went over to visit with some engineers working beside the runway. At briefing we were told that we would have at least a five-minute warning to get airborne in case of an enemy attack. Radar would pick them up and give us plenty of time. The front lines were only about 20 miles away. I

had brought along a good book to read to pass the time. Alert was generally a very boring task and uneventful. The field was covered with snow and the ground was frozen. The anti-aircraft crew had attempted to dig a foxhole but were only able dig down about a foot and about four feet square. I was deep in my book when a high-pitched voice screamed over the radio "*Bluebird Red Leader, we are being attacked!*" My first thought was the 388th had been bounced but it was the control tower operator. I looked toward the north end of the runway and saw a bunch of fighters right on the deck. They were in-line engines and square wingtips. I wondered why those P-51s were attacking us. The last ship in the formation was an old model Me 109E with tail struts. It didn't take me two seconds to realize I didn't have a chance to get airborne and be a hero. I threw back the canopy and bailed out over the right side and slid down the wing and came to an abrupt halt. My helmet was still plugged in! I flipped off my helmet and laid down on the ground behind the plane looking up to watch the Me 109 pass right over me and chandelle to turn back to strafe right through the cockpit of my aircraft. His tracers set fire to my B4 flight jacket and knocked the recessed step out the other side. The Sergeant of the gun emplacement was yelling for an ammunition canister to load his guns. His crewman handed him an empty canister. Placing



The two Alert Flight pilots of the 387th FS: Capt. Thomas E. Stanton and 1./Lt. Samuel B. Lutz of the 387th FS. (Lutz)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Leaning against the prop of 'Hot Body' is Lt. Samuel B. Lutz at Fritzlar. (Lutz)

the canister in the gun he pulled back the bolt to charge the gun — empty, no ammunition. He swore and not too politely demanded a full magazine. They were able to shoot down one or more Me 109s. After about ten minutes it was all over and twenty-one of our P-47s were destroyed. Sam and I went over to our flight line to check on the men. We were fortunate that only four 387th flight line personnel were slightly wounded. We were standing in a group of a dozen or so men when the 500 lb bombs on the burning P-47s began pre-detonating. When the first one exploded, all the men hit the deck and left us standing talking to the air. I must say that even though the Germans caught us with our pants down by coming in on the deck under radar surveillance, they paid a terrible price. They wouldn't have lost so many aircraft if they had hit and run. They were there ten minutes making pass after pass allowing the anti-aircraft to shoot them down. We were taught to make one pass and stay on the deck or bounce back up to 12,000 feet.<sup>74</sup>

1./Lt. Samuel B. Lutz, the other Alert pilot, will never forget that morning:

This fuel truck was caught in the inferno. Although no fatalities were recorded, many groundcrew were wounded in the attack. (Johnson)



"Captain Stanton and I arrived at the airfield very early without, I'm sure, any breakfast or even a cup of coffee. The situation being normal ('SNAFU'). Only one airplane was parked at the end of the runway for alert duty (shades of Pearl Harbor, December 7th, 1941 another Sunday!) I stood around trying to keep warm with a group of enlisted men gathered by a steamroller parked nearby. Looking up, we saw aircraft, line abreast, approaching us at deck-level. Someone shouted, *"It's a raid!"* Never before had I felt so exposed on that level, bare, icy airfield. I dove for a nearby ditch, but it had filled with water, frozen almost up to the top and offered no protection. I went to the steamroller with everyone else and got on the opposite side from the enemy aircraft but the Me 109s split up into a starboard ground gunnery pattern and approached us from all sides. By now, I felt every gun on the ground and in the air was trained and firing at me personally! With nothing to loose, I stood up and began firing with my Colt .45 pistol (I carried two clips of extra ammunition) and cheered and hollered like at a football match as the tracers screamed by, and our P-47s burned and exploded with a terrible noise of explosions, smoke and flames. I glanced at our Alert ship. Could I make it and get that thing started and into the air? Just then, an Me 109 went for the Alert ship, putting a 20 mm shell into the cockpit. I could have touched him as he went by me and I don't think my pistol shots mattered.

"As I watched, the Me 109 hit the runway and disintegrated before my eyes. From the smoke, flame and debris, the pilot's body emerged, almost intact and rolled down the runway and before it came to rest, some of the anti-aircraft gunners came out and pulled off his flying boots! Another Me 109 pilot had crashed at the opposite end of the airfield into a wooded area, cutting a neat path, shredding airplane parts and flesh until the pilot's remains came to arrest in a crater. The head, arms and legs were gone and the remaining trunk steamed in the cold air. An enlisted man had recovered the pilot's cigarette lighter and offered it to me — No Thanks. I was still white and shaking an hour later. The next day I went up on a four plane mission (my 25th) and while strafing a staff car in a hilly, snowy, wooded area I almost ran into the ground and then into a house at a hilltop — wondering how my body would look after they had found the remains!"<sup>75</sup>

How did the German pilots experience the attack? The first to arrive over Metz-Frescaty were the remains of Stab and IV./JG 53. With Obstlt.

Bennemann in the lead, the Messerschmitts attacked. As mentioned, the men of the 365th FG were completely taken by surprise. The German pilots could see the groundcrew of the 386th FS working on their Thunderbolts, preparing them for the planned sortie at 09.30 hrs. However, the AAA went immediately into action and the first Messerschmitts were hit. Shortly after the first pass II./JG 53 also arrived on the scene. In pass after pass, the Messerschmitts took their aim at the parked Thunderbolts. A thick black cloud of smoke started to rise over the field. One by one, the Thunderbolts burst in flames.

However, as a result of the concentrated AA fire, losses for JG 53 over Metz were severe. During the first pass *Obstlt.* Bennemann's Messerschmitt was hit by shrapnel and damaged in the cockpit. The *Kommodore* was slightly injured, but was able to continue the mission. Next was *Ofw.* Stefan Kohl's Bf 109 G-14 'White 11'. He remembers: "Shortly before arriving at Metz-Frescaty we pulled up, got rid of the droptanks and activated our guns. With full throttle we dived on the parked US fighters. Our hope that the Americans were still recovering from their New Year's Eve party was in vain. The light Flak was apparently wide-awake and opened up with everything they got. As last plane of the formation I had little chance to escape it. Coming in low, I had a good shot at the Thunderbolts and was able to destroy a few of them. I was hit by the Flak in my aileron and left wing and the aileron was blocked. With the high speed and flying low on the deck an immediate belly-landing was out of the question. Instinctively I unbuckled, pulled the 109 in a steep climb, got rid of the canopy and slammed the stick forward: immediately I was catapulted out of the aircraft. As it was my fourth bale-out I realized that I had to pull the cord immediately to save my life at this low altitude. The opening of the parachute and the hard landing occurred almost at the same time."<sup>76</sup>

The Messerschmitt was hit by .50 calibre fire from 'A' Battery of 386th AAA Bn. *Ofw.* Kohl landed near a small cemetery in the village of Marly, one kilometre south-east of Metz-Frescaty.<sup>77</sup> As he had no insignia on his uniform which would give away his nationality, Kohl decided to slowly walk east and try to reach the front line. Indeed some of people walking by held him for an American pilot. Suddenly, a shot was fired and when he did not react, two more. Kohl now felt that he had to put his hands in the air quickly. Two men of the French Resistance came towards him. Kohl immediately started to speak in French and explained that he lived in Saarbrücken and was on his way home.<sup>78</sup> The two men took him to a small village where local people told him that for him the war was over. After a while two US soldiers came to pick him up and brought him to



the airfield.<sup>79</sup> In fact they were MP's attached to the 365th FG and they were very surprised to learn that the German pilot spoke in fluent English and French.<sup>80</sup>

Another pilot of 13./JG 53 was not so fortunate. *Oblt.* Otto Benz was shot down by AAA and crashed near St. Remy, some seven kilometres north of Metz.<sup>81</sup> The wreckage of his 'White 3' was investigated by Allied Intelligence, but unfortunately nothing is known about what happened to Benz and he is still listed as MIA today. However, one report states that his remains were found some 100 yards from the wreckage of his Messerschmitt. Considering the location of the crash, he may have come down on the outward course or on the return flight. II./JG 53 also lost several pilots over Metz. *Fj. Ofw.* Kurt Opitz had led his Schwarm in the attack and on his first run he shot up three Thunderbolts which were first in a line of about 40 aircraft parked wingtip to wingtip. The Thunderbolts caught fire. When pulling out from his attack *Ofw.* Opitz' Bf 109 G-14/AS was hit by AAA and the engine caught fire. He then climbed to about 400 metres and baled out.<sup>82</sup> He landed some 200 metres north of the airfield. Uffz.

*Ofw.* Stefan Kohl of 13./JG 53 refused to have his picture taken until he had combed his hair and polished his flying boots! (Crow)



*Fw.* Ernst Off of 8./JG 53 who was killed when his Bf 109 G-14/AS was shot down by Allied AAA near St. Ruffine, south-west of Metz. (Off)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Ofw. Stefan Kohl of 13./JG 53. A victim of American AAA, he became a POW on January 1st. He was one of the last II./ZG 1 pilots within IV. Gruppe. (Kohl)

Rudolf Könitzer, like Ofw. Opitz also from 5. Staffel, was hit by AAA during his first run and he made a forced-landing some 250 metres south of the airfield. Both pilots were taken POW.

Fw. Ernst Nachotzky, a pilot of 6./JG 53, was seen to be hit by AAA too and his aircraft burst into flames and crashed on or near Metz-Frescaty airfield.<sup>83</sup> His remains were recovered and buried at the Military Cemetery of Sandweiler in Luxembourg.<sup>84</sup> The last pilot known to be lost over Metz-Frescaty was Fw. Ernst Off of 8./JG 53. During the fourth wave his 'Blue 9' was hit in the belly by a 40 mm shell of 'C' Battery and an explosion followed. The aircraft continued in a northerly direction and crashed near the town of Ste. Ruffine, a few kilometres north-west of the airfield. Fw. Ernst Off was buried at the local cemetery of Ste. Ruffine.<sup>85</sup>

'A' and 'C' Batteries of the 386th AAA AW Bn (SM) defending Metz-Frescaty claimed at least eight Messerschmitts destroyed and one damaged.<sup>86</sup> This corresponds well with the previously mentioned five known losses of II. and IV./JG 53 near Metz-Frescaty. Other AAA units, such as the 411th AAA and 465th AAA stationed around Metz claimed also 6 'Cat. Is' and 4 'Cat. IIs'. Oblt. Otto Benz may have been a victim of these units. In total, some 10 wrecks were reportedly found in the Metz area.<sup>87</sup> Only six have been identified until now. Both the 387th and the 388th FS received a message of an attack being made on their home base. The 388th immediately jettisoned its bombs and returned to base. Maj. Henry, leading the 387th, also picked up the message and made for base. However, both squadrons arrived too late to intervene in the onslaught.

The German pilots who were taken POW and brought to the airfield drew much attention. Ofw. Stefan Kohl remembers: "I was taken to the airfield where several pictures were taken of me. They took me to an office where I was given a very friendly

welcome. I received a cup of coffee and some candy. Many visitors came to see the 'strange bird'. It was a strange situation as hardly an hour before we had been shooting very hard at each other. Among the visitors were the commanders of two AA guns who were fighting over who had shot me down. I had to decide. This was all very amusing, but I could not help them. I spent the night at the airfield with an armed guard next to my bed. They probably feared that I would steal one of the aircraft and fly home. The next morning an officer brought me in a jeep to Luxembourg for questioning. The whole ride we talked and sang and when we arrived in Luxembourg, the American officer let me ask directions in my German uniform. We both had a big laugh seeing the stunned civilians!"<sup>88</sup> Ofw. Stefan Kohl may very well have been the 'self-assured German' Maj. Brooking remembered!

When the last of the Messerschmitts had left, a balance could be made of losses both in material and men. In all 33 Hell Hawk aircraft were either destroyed or damaged in the raid, 22 being completely written off, eight suffering category 'AC' damage and three being classified as category 'A' damage. Hardest hit was the 386th FS with 12 destroyed and seven badly damaged. The 387th FS had nine destroyed and one damaged and the 388th FS had one destroyed and three damaged. Although no fatalities are recorded, many of the brave groundcrews were wounded in the attack.<sup>89</sup> Risking their lives, some went into action to save their aircraft from destruction. Three Purple Hearts and four Soldier's Medals were awarded to the valiant crews for conduct that morning.<sup>90</sup>

As the men of the 365th FG were counting their losses, the survivors of JG 53 tried to reach their homebase. Only a few would succeed. Several pilots did not reach the German lines and were probably brought down by Third Army AAA.<sup>91</sup> Uffz. Florian Juszak of 7./JG 53 was reported missing, the remains of this pilot have never been found. His Staffelfkamerad Fw. Johannes Müller was also shot down and killed. Fw. Müller had been a recce pilot for several years before he was retrained as a fighter pilot. He was awarded the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold on July 23rd, 1943 as a member of 1./NAG 12.<sup>92</sup> According to his burial records, Müller crashed near Dickweiler in Luxembourg, a few kilometres north-west of Trier. However, this has not been substantiated by other evidence.<sup>93</sup>

A long list of pilots did manage to reach the German lines, but did not make it to their homebase. Others had to crash-land on their base. Of the Stabsschwarm of JG 53 three Messerschmitts returned. First, Oblt. Bennemann, although injured, and his Rottenflieger Ofhr. Helmut Ballewski landed at Echterdingen. Some time later, Oblt. Rudolf Schummer landed with a damaged Bf 109, but remained unhurt.<sup>94</sup> The



The remains of one of the 365th FG's Thunderbolts at Metz-Frescaty. (Pruett)

fourth, Fw. Friedrich Meyer, belly-landed his Bf 109 K-4 near Koblenz out of fuel. He returned a few days later to Stuttgart-Echterdingen.<sup>95</sup> Uffz. Horst Pechardscheck of 16./JG 53 had to belly-land his 'Yellow 9' at Echterdingen following AA hits over Metz-Frescaty. Although his Messerschmitt sustained only five per cent damage, Pechardscheck was injured and had to be hospitalised in Böblingen.<sup>96</sup> His Staffelfkapitän, Oblt. Hans-Georg Schwidtal was hit by AAA just before crossing the front line and had to belly-land near Saarbrücken. Several other pilots of IV./JG 53 landed on other airfields and returned to Echterdingen later that day or during the following days. Of II./JG 53, several pilots had considerable difficulties getting back to base. Uffz. Erich Ernst of 6./JG 53 belly-landed his Bf 109 G-14/AS on Huchenfeld airfield. Fw. Sack of 6./JG 53 was initially reported missing, but returned to Huchenfeld after a few days, although without his 'Yellow 3'.<sup>97</sup> Gefr. Franz Reichert of 7./JG 53 had to belly-land his 'White 17' south-east of Pellingen, five kilometres south of Trier.<sup>98</sup> The exact circumstances surrounding his crash are not known, but it is believed that Gefr. Reichert returned to his unit. There are however indications that he may have suffered injuries. According to German records, Reichert died of injuries on March 28, 1945.<sup>99</sup> This could have happened on another mission and therefore not be related to the operation on January 1st. Fw. August Bermpohl of 8./JG 53 belly-landed his Bf 109 K-4 near Speyer after sustaining AAA damage and Fw. Bermpohl ended up at Lazarett Speyer with shrapnel injuries.<sup>100</sup> Two other pilots of II./JG 53 were initially also reported missing; Lt. Dieter Hartel of 5./JG 53 and Uffz. Helmut Schneider of 7./JG 53 returned to Malsheim unhurt, but their aircraft were total losses.<sup>101</sup>

In total, the JG 53 attacking force on Metz reported 20 Messerschmitts destroyed and a further seven damaged.<sup>102</sup> Of an attacking force of around 52 aircraft this meant a material loss of more than 50 per cent. Worse of course, were the personnel losses. Thirteen pilots were reported missing. Of these three were killed, six remain MIA today and four were taken as POW. A further three pilots were wounded and one slightly injured.

### Conclusion

The result of JG 53's attack on Etain and Metz-Frescaty can hardly be rated as a success. In the first place Etain was not attacked by III./JG 53. The material losses at Metz-Frescaty were as stated above – 22 P-47s destroyed and an additional 11 damaged. These actual losses correspond well with



the claim by JG 53 of 27 aircraft destroyed and eight damaged.<sup>103</sup> Added to this should be the four aerial victories claimed by JG 53. This leads to a total figure of 26 aircraft destroyed and 11 damaged by JG 53's attack.

JG 53's own losses were 30 Messerschmitts destroyed and eight damaged. Of a total force of 80 Messerschmitts participating in the attack, this meant a 48 per cent loss of own aircraft.<sup>104</sup> Worse were the personnel losses of 13 pilots missing (of which nine were killed and four taken POW) and six wounded. This was a considerable reduction in strength for JG 53. Facing both the XIX and XII TAC with a total of 12 US Fighter Groups, any reduction in strength of JG 53 would have a direct impact on fighter cover for the German Army. On January 2nd and 3rd, JG 53 could only manage 54 sorties on both days during several missions over the Saar area.<sup>105</sup> XIX TAC alone flew 407 fighter-bomber sorties on January 2nd.<sup>106</sup>

It is known that the material losses of the 365th FG were replaced within a week and that by that time the Group was back to full strength. To cover losses, JG 53 received numerous replacement aircraft in the first week of January and by January 10th reported 135 Bf 109 G-14/K-4s on strength. New pilots had arrived with the unit, but most of them were newly trained and not fit for front line operations. Consequently the number of fully operational pilots had dropped from 88 to 54 from December 31st to January 10th. The negative effect of Operation Bodenplatte on JG 53 was without a doubt greater than the results obtained during the mission.

Despite heavy material losses, the Hell Hawks were back up to full strength in a week. (Johnson)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For further detail on operations of JG 53 in December 1944 see 'Pik-As, Geschichte des JGs 53' by Dr. Jochen Prien.

<sup>2</sup> XIX Tactical Air Command Report, monthly reports of December 1944 and January 1945.

<sup>3</sup> XIX Tactical Air Command Report, monthly reports of December 1944.

<sup>4</sup> GC 1/3 'Corse' and GC 1/7 'Provence' at Haguenau and GC 2/7 'Nice' at St. Luxieul. On January 1st both GC 1/3 and GC 1/7 had to evacuate

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE

Haguenau because of the 'Nordwind' offensive and transferred to Toul-Ochey.

<sup>1</sup> The Prov. Rec. Group consisted of the 162nd Tac. Rec. Squadron, the 111th Tac. Rec. Squadron and the 34th Photo Rec. Squadron.

<sup>2</sup> Based on Ken Rust '9th Air Force and 'U.S. Army Air Forces Continental Airfields (ETO) D-Day to V-E Day' by 1./Lt. David C. Johnson.

<sup>3</sup> Other sources say that the unit was based at Wien-Seyring, some 15 kilometres NNE of Vienna. This could not be verified.

<sup>4</sup> ULTRA-report 52-HP-8689.

<sup>5</sup> Letter Dipl. Ing. Albert Gerber to Axel Urbanke, dated 12.02.1997.

<sup>6</sup> Information based on letter Fw. Walter Vollmer, dated 8.12.1944.

<sup>7</sup> In letter of Stefan Kohl stated as 'Do 217?'

<sup>8</sup> 13./JG 53 was based at Nellingen airfield, some seven kilometres north-east of Stuttgart-Echterdingen.

<sup>9</sup> Probably Ofw. Eduard Isken, 13./JG 53.

<sup>10</sup> Letter Stefan Kohl, dated 20.08.1998.

<sup>11</sup> Letter Dipl. Ing. Albert Gerber to Axel Urbanke, dated 12.02.1997.

<sup>12</sup> Course of 317 deg. to Kaiserslautern and then on 262 deg. direct to Metz-Frescaty. A.D.I.(K) Report No. 24/1945, point 1.

<sup>13</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 24/1945, point 2.

<sup>14</sup> Information of H. Bentel, who lived in the house in Renningen where Fw. Walter Vollmer of 6./NJG 100 was billeted.

<sup>15</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 105/1945, point 1-7.

<sup>16</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 105/1945, point 8.

<sup>17</sup> Based on remembrances of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 26.

<sup>18</sup> Based on remembrances of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 26.

<sup>19</sup> Based on remembrances of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> Email from James Hall dated September 2, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> KTB Oberbefehlshaber West, 31.12.1944.

<sup>22</sup> HQ 324th FG, Operational and Intelligence Summary, Operations for 1 January 1945. The two Bf 109s were probably returning JG 53 aircraft.

<sup>23</sup> Mission Report 1 Jan 1945, Y-1 Mission No. 53.

<sup>24</sup> Summary of operations by HQ 64th Fighter Wing.

<sup>25</sup> AAA Notes, No. 15, 30 Jan 1945, HQ Twelfth Army Group, AAA Action in the Metz-Bouzonville Area on New Year's Day.

<sup>26</sup> Venereal Disease.

<sup>27</sup> XIX Tactical Air Command Report, monthly reports of January 1945.

<sup>28</sup> Logbook Uffz. Hermann Heck, 9./JG 53, 08.30 hrs. Logbook Oftr. Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, 12./JG 53, 08.34 hrs.

<sup>29</sup> Based on recollections of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> Operations Report No. 169, 358th FG and 367th FS Mission Report and War Diary.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence with Charles Cassidy.

<sup>32</sup> From: Skywriting by Fred Alexander (The Winton Perry Story) via Robert Bowen.

<sup>33</sup> 367th Squadron War Diary via Robert Bowen.

<sup>34</sup> Logbook Uffz. Hermann Heck, 9./JG 53, 08.30 hrs. (email from James Hall dated September 5, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Email from James Hall dated September 2, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> 358th War Diary via Robert Bowen.

<sup>37</sup> Correspondence with Donald S. Flowers.

<sup>38</sup> RL2-III-855.

<sup>39</sup> Based on remembrances of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 30.

<sup>40</sup> Based on remembrances of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 29.

<sup>41</sup> RL2-III-853.

<sup>42</sup> Details provided by Hermann Heck, dated 14.11.2000. According to his logbook he baled out at 09.12 hrs.

<sup>43</sup> Information from Mrs. Edith Manz, widow of Wilhelm Manz, dated 10.11.1998. Also Namentliche Verlustmeldung of III./JG 53 for January 10th 9145.

<sup>44</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./JG 53.

<sup>45</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./JG 53.

<sup>46</sup> Based on recollections of Ernst-Dieter Bernhard, page 29-30.

<sup>47</sup> The text of the Distinguished Unit Citation was: 'The outstanding record of the 358th FG in aerial combat with the enemy reached its climax at the turn of the year when, during a major enemy assault in the Saarguemines area, twelve of the Group's P-47 type aircraft were engaged in armed reconnaissance of marshalling yards near Neunkirchen, encountered a large force of Focke-Wulf and Messerschmitt aircraft. Although outnumbered almost three to one the P-47 pilots jettisoned their bombs and closed with the enemy. In a gallant display of fighting courage and aerial skill they destroyed fourteen of the enemy planes and damaged six without loss of their own aircraft. The gallantry and extraordinary heroism exhibited during this crucial period of operations against the enemy reflect great credit upon the personnel of the 358th FG, and exemplify the finest traditions of the Armed Forces in the United States.'

<sup>48</sup> According to Diary of Oftr. Hans Bachmann, groundcrew of Stab JG 53. As mentioned in 'Pik-As Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 53' by Jochen Prien, page 1483. Two different A.D.I.(K) Reports, No. 24 and No. 113 give two different take-off times, respectively 08.15 and 08.25 hrs.

<sup>49</sup> A.D.I.(K) report No. 105/1945, point 10.

<sup>50</sup> Letter Dipl. Ing. Albert Gerber to Axel Urbanke, dated 12.02.1997.

<sup>51</sup> 455th AAA AW Battalion Journal entries on January 1st 1945.

<sup>52</sup> Name changed.

<sup>53</sup> Account Billy M. Traylor, 739th FA Bn, forwarded by Norman Traylor, 30.1.2002.

<sup>54</sup> Unit Report No. 2, 455th AAA AW Bn., 2 January 1945.

<sup>55</sup> AAA Notes, No. 15, 30 Jan 1945, HQ Twelfth Army Group and A.D.I.(K) Report No. 24/1945.

<sup>56</sup> Copy Citation Bronze Star Medal, Cpl. George R. Shouse, 36116369.

<sup>57</sup> AAA Notes, No. 15, 30 Jan 1945, HQ Twelfth Army Group, A.D.I.(K) Report No. 24/1945 and RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265.

<sup>58</sup> Letter Oblt. Karl-Wilhelm Romain, dated 4.1.1945, to the father of Fhr. Siegfried Leese.

<sup>59</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945.

<sup>60</sup> 'Pik-As Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 53' by Jochen Prien, page 1489.

<sup>61</sup> 243rd Field Artillery History, details provided by James R. Chandler.

<sup>62</sup> RL2-III-1172/72, RL2-III-855, files at VDK-Kassel and letters of Mrs. I. Collin, sister of Fw. Walter Vollmer, dated 16.08.2000 and 09.11.2000.

<sup>63</sup> Letter Deutsche Dienststelle, dated 8.11.1999.

<sup>64</sup> These Spitfires have not been identified. They may have belonged to one of the French Spitfire units based at Haguenau.

<sup>65</sup> Correspondence with Joe Lagana, Ordnance Officer 388th Squadron, 365th FG.

<sup>66</sup> Excerpt from 'Memoirs of Marion Hill' T/Sgt and NCO of S-2 at 365th HQ.

<sup>67</sup> The History of the Hell Hawks by Charles R. Johnson, page 365.

<sup>68</sup> Historical Data, 365th FG (Month of January 1945), dated 8 February 1945.

<sup>69</sup> Grateful acknowledgement to Charles R. Johnson for making use of fragments from 'The History of the Hell Hawks.'

<sup>70</sup> Email from Thomas Stanton dated 26 August, 1998.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Samuel B. Lutz Jr. dated 26 July, 1998. In fact, January 1st 1945 was a Monday, not a Sunday.

<sup>72</sup> Letter Stefan Kohl, dated 20.08.1998.

<sup>73</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945.

<sup>74</sup> Indeed Stefan Kohl lived in Saarbrücken.

<sup>75</sup> Letter Stefan Kohl, dated 20.08.1998.

<sup>76</sup> Report 386th AAA Bn, Btry A, dated January 1st 1945.

<sup>77</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, dated 29th January 1945 and US Intelligence Document listing co-ordinates of this crash.

<sup>78</sup> ADI(K) Report No. 105/1945, point 11-12.

<sup>79</sup> 'Pik-As Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 53' by Jochen Prien, page 1488.

<sup>80</sup> According to Report of Burial C-7-152, Sandweiler/Hamm Cemetery. There are however indications that his aircraft actually crashed near Ensdorf, south of Saarlouis. This however, could not be verified for certain.

<sup>81</sup> Burial records Fw. Ernst Off, VDK-Kassel.

<sup>82</sup> Unit History 388th FS, January 1945. The 365th FG lists a total of nine Messerschmitts destroyed over Metz. See Historical Data, 365th FG, (Month of January 1945), dated 8 February 1945. AAA Notes, No. 15, 30 Jan 9145 by HQ Twelfth Army Group lists 8 Cat. I claims for the 386th AAA units on Metz-Frescaty. Eight Cat. I and one Cat. II claim were filed by the 386th AAA AW Bn.

<sup>83</sup> AAA Notes, No. 15, 30 Jan 1945, HQ Twelfth Army Group.

<sup>84</sup> Letter Stefan Kohl, dated 20.08.1998.

<sup>85</sup> According to 388th FS records in total four were seriously wounded and 14 more were slightly wounded.

<sup>86</sup> 'Charles R. Johnson: The History of the Hell Hawks.'

<sup>87</sup> According to XIX TAC records at least six Messerschmitts were claimed by Third Army anti-aircraft units.

<sup>88</sup> Letter Bundesarchiv, dated 2.12.1996.

<sup>89</sup> Report of Burial C-7-154, Sandweiler/Hamm Cemetery. This report states that the remains of Fw. Johannes Müller were found near Dickweiler/Luxembourg and that the cause of death was 3rd degree burns. Date of death is listed as 'Estimated 2.1.1945.' This resulted in much speculation that Fw. Johannes Müller died of burns on January 2nd, 1945.

<sup>90</sup> 'Pik-As Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 53' by Jochen Prien, page 1491.

<sup>91</sup> RL2-III-1172/77 and 'Pik-As Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 53' by Jochen Prien, page 1491.

<sup>92</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung IV./JG 53.

<sup>93</sup> RL2-III-1172/63.

<sup>94</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 269.

<sup>95</sup> Gefr. Franz Reichert was buried at Bad Wimpfen near Heilbronn.

<sup>96</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung and RL2-III-1172/77.

<sup>97</sup> Combined information of RL2-III-1172/66, 1172/77 and RL2-III-853.

<sup>98</sup> RL2-III-853.

<sup>99</sup> Based on RL2-III-855.

<sup>100</sup> According to ULTRA-Report 56-BT-1034.

<sup>101</sup> ULTRA-Reports 56-BT-1086/1087.

<sup>102</sup> XIX Tactical Air Command Report, monthly reports of January 1945.



# Lost over Antwerp

Jagdgeschwader 77 orbiting Antwerp

In the late afternoon of December 4th, Stab NJG 6 received a telephone call from Maj. Bratz, Ia-Nacht of 7. Jagddivision. His orders were that II./NJG 6, based at Schwäbisch Hall, were, for a period of two weeks, to prepare 20 nightfighter crews for transfer to other airfields, for a special mission by day fighters.

ON December 5th II./NJG 6 confirmed that 20 crews with their Ju 88s would be sent to ten Jagdgruppen of II. Jagdkorps, where they would be used as Lotse aircraft. Each Jagdgruppe would receive two Ju 88s. The crews of Oblt. Hans Steffen and Fw. Stuhler, both belonging to 5./NJG 6, were ordered to join II./JG 77. On December 6th, at 14.55 hrs, Steffen and his crew took off from Echterdingen.<sup>1</sup> Flying Ju 88 G-6 '2Z+FN', they landed at 16.41 hrs at Gütersloh. After several transfers they finally arrived at Essen-Mühlheim, homebase of II./JG 77, in the early morning of December 18th.<sup>2</sup> Fw. Stuhler and his crew also probably arrived around this date. Unaware of what their objective was to be, the crews waited for something to happen.

## December 1944, Jagdgeschwader 77's role in the offensive

By mid-October 1944 Jagdgeschwader 77 had been withdrawn from the front and all three Gruppen were stationed in the Berlin area. Here they would receive a complete stock of new aircraft and be completely reequipped, their ranks filled with new, mostly inexperienced, pilots. By early December, the Gruppen were once again considered ready for operations, this time for the offensive in the Ardennes.

II./JG 77 returned to the Western Front on December 9th and occupied Werl airfield. Stab, I. and III./JG 77 followed a few days later. Stab and I./JG 77 were based at Dortmund and III./JG 77 at Düsseldorf. On December 17th II./JG 77 moved closer to the Front and transferred to Essen-Mühlheim. The following day it was joined by the

Above: Three members of 'B' Battery of the 494th AAA Bn., Dennis Christy, Stanley Rasko and Bernhard Soukowaz, showing pieces of Uffz. Muninger's Bf 109 K-4 'White 17'. (Cox/Christy)

# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Christmas 1944 for III./JG 77 at Düsseldorf. From left to right: Lt. Hans-Werner Renzow (St.Kpt. 10./JG 77), Hptm. Armin Köhler (Gr.Kdr. III./JG 77), Lt. Heinrich Hackler (St.Fhr. 11./JG 77) and Uffz. Hasso Fröhlich who was wounded on December 23rd. (Hackler/Twietmeyer)

Bf 109 K-4 'White 2' of 9./JG 77 seen in November 1944 at either Neuruppin airfield or, more likely, at its satellite field, Gentzrode, a few kilometers north of Neuruppin. (Buck)

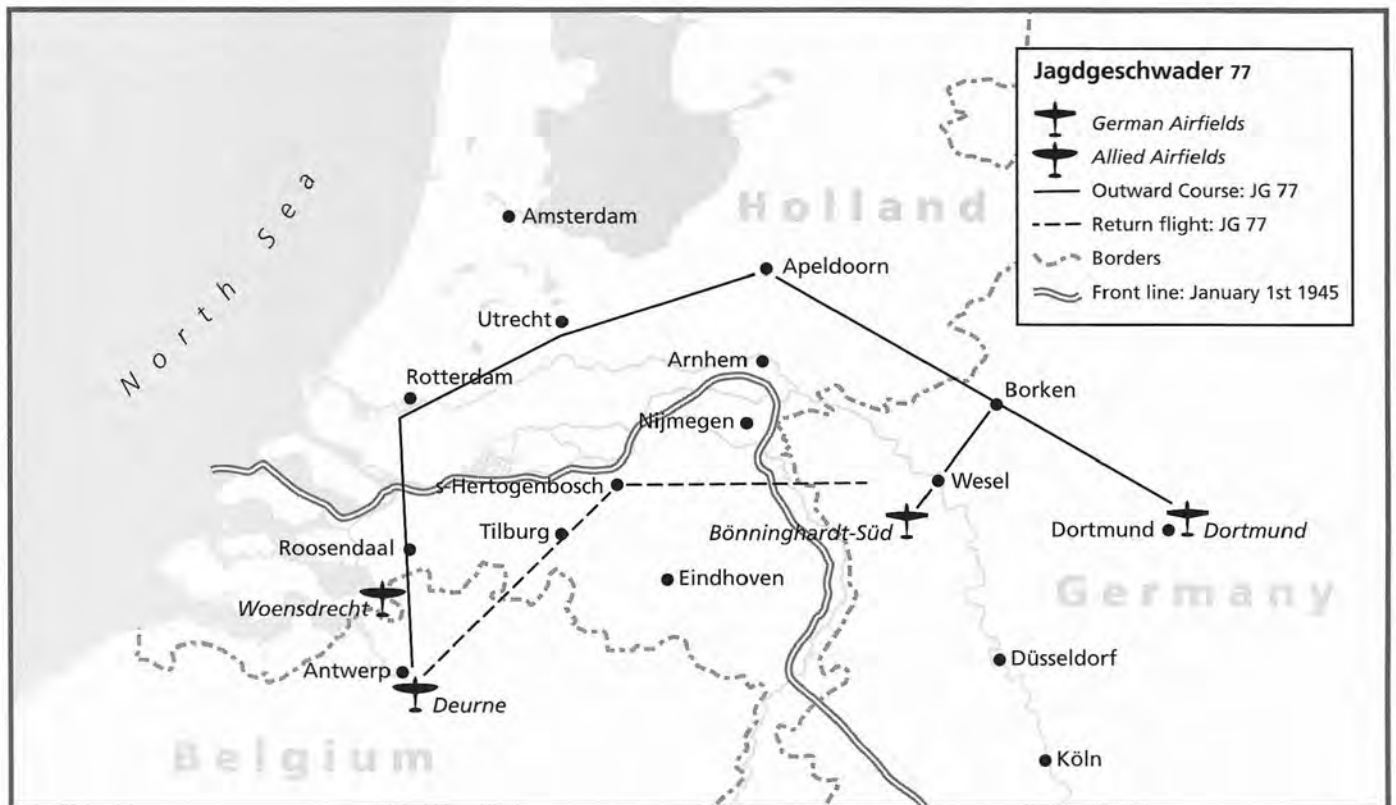
two Ju 88s of 5./NJG 6. All Gruppen flew their first operations on December 18th, during which the Geschwader lost three pilots killed and two wounded. Seven Messerschmitts were destroyed and four damaged. Only three victories were claimed. However, worse was to come. Over the following days, no operations could be flown due to the adverse weather. On December 23rd two Gruppen of JG 77 entered combat again and both suffered serious losses. In two missions, I./JG 77 lost six pilots killed, two wounded and no fewer than 15 aircraft destroyed and two damaged. Only two enemy aircraft, a B-26 and a P-47, were shot down! In the afternoon of the 23rd, III./JG 77 flew a mission to support advancing German armour, but were engaged by Thunderbolts in the Münsterfeld area. In the following battle, III. Gruppe lost two pilots killed and six wounded. Ten Messerschmitts were destroyed and another three damaged. The pilots of III./JG 77 claimed only three P-47s.<sup>3</sup>

On December 24th JG 77 attempted to support an attack by 5. Panzer and 6. SS Panzer Army whose advance had come to a standstill. In the early morning I./JG 77, took-off at 09.00 hrs from Dortmund with 24 Bf 109s to sweep the battle area in Luxembourg.<sup>4</sup> Soon after the Luxembourg frontier had been crossed, Lightnings and Thunderbolts were encountered. In the ensuing battle I. Gruppe was decimated. Sixteen Messerschmitts were destroyed and two damaged. Ten pilots of I./JG 77, including highly experienced combat leaders such as Kommandeur Hptm. Lothar Baumann and the Staffelfkapitän of 2./JG 77, Oblt. Iring Englisch, were killed. One pilot became a POW. Only one P-38 was claimed destroyed. These kind of losses had a devastating effect on the Gruppe and morale was low. III./JG 77 also flew a mission that day and encountered Spitfires and P-47s over the Eifel. The Gruppe claimed two Spitfires and a P-47, but lost two aircraft and one pilot.<sup>5</sup>

JG 77's ordeal was not over that day. Following the strong effort made by the Luftwaffe to support both Panzer Armies the day before, the Allies launched a maximum effort against airfields occupied by units operating over the front. All three Bomb Divisions of the Eighth Air Force participated, with a total of 2,034 'heavies' escorted by 818 fighters, mostly Mustangs. This would be the largest air strike operation of the war.<sup>6</sup> Primary targets were airfields and communication centres behind the front.<sup>7</sup> RAF Bomber Command participated with 338 aircraft, 248 Halifaxes, 79 Lancasters and 11 Mosquitoes. Their targets were the airfields of Düsseldorf-Lohausen and Essen-Mühlheim, occupied by III. and II./JG 77 respectively.<sup>8</sup>

At approximately 14.30 hrs, a hail of bombs came down on Düsseldorf-Lohausen and Essen-Mühlheim. At Düsseldorf, III./JG 77 lost two Bf 109s. One groundcrew member was killed. The landing ground was filled with craters and the hard frost over the following nights rendered the airfield unserviceable. After a few days only a small section of the airfield could be cleared. The damage at Essen-Mühlheim was worse. All runways were cratered and unserviceable, but grass strips were used instead. Over the next few days difficulties and delays





would be experienced in taxiing and landing aircraft when the ground was soft and wet. The effect of frost was, however, beneficial and the Gruppe was able to continue operating from the grass strips.<sup>9</sup> Four Messerschmitts of II./JG 77 were destroyed, but even worse, no fewer than eight groundcrew were killed and an additional six were seriously wounded.<sup>10</sup> Also both Ju 88 pathfinding aircraft stationed at Essen-Mühlheim were damaged. One was reported 70 per cent damaged, in fact meaning a total loss, and the other 20 per cent damaged. One of them was Oblt. Hans Steffen's Ju 88 G-6 '2Z+FN'.

Unfortunately Fw. Stuhler's entire crew consisting of Uffz. Adalbert Unglert (Bordfunker), Uffz. Josef Rieder (Bordmeßfunker) and Gefr. Werner Peters (Bordmechaniker) were killed when their shelter near the airfield received a direct hit.<sup>11</sup> In fact, these three airmen were the first casualties of Bodenplatte!<sup>12</sup> It is not known what happened further to Fw. Stuhler who remained unhurt in the attack. It seems likely that he returned to II./NJG 6. It is also likely that Steffen's crew travelled back to its Gruppe over the following days to collect a new Ju 88. It is believed that this

This picture of four Bf 109 K-4s of 9./JG 77 on the same airfield as the previous picture has not been published before. The outline of a 'White 8' or '9' can be seen on the second K-4 from the left. The first aircraft on the left is probably 'White 17'. The green Reichsverteidigung bands are not yet applied. (Buck)





was Ju 88 G-6 'ZZ+CP', a 6. Staffel aircraft.<sup>13</sup> As both Essen-Mühlheim and Düsseldorf-Lohausen were unfit to land a Junkers Ju 88, Steffen's crew flew to Dortmund to join JG 77 again.

In the last week of December, JG 77 tried to support the Ardennes offensive, but the heavy casualties suffered in the last week, especially with I./JG 77, meant that their effort declined. On December 25th, Maj. Johannes Wiese, Kommodore of JG 77, took off from Dortmund for a training flight, but was shot down by Spitfires. He survived but had to hand over his command to Maj. Siegfried Freytag, who took over the Geschwader until Wiese's replacement arrived.<sup>14</sup> The same day, I. Gruppe flew an operation against twin-engined bombers. They lost two pilots and four Bf 109s for no victories. On December 27th, all Gruppen of JG 77 flew operations, although in small numbers. Three Thunderbolts were shot down, for the cost of three pilots and four Messerschmitts. On December 29th a thaw had set in and the grass strip at Essen-Mühlheim became too soft and wet. II./JG 77 moved to Bönninghardt-Süd, a small grass airfield 15 kilometres south-west of Wesel.<sup>15</sup>

On December 31st III./JG 77 received orders to transfer its remaining aircraft to Dortmund.<sup>16</sup> About 12 Messerschmitts led by Lt. Heinrich Hackler, Staffelführer of 11./JG 77, took off from Düsseldorf. Uffz. Johann Twietmeyer, pilot in 10. Staffel, remembers: "In the afternoon of December 31st, III./JG 77, or what was left of it, took off for a transfer flight to Dortmund. Suddenly we received a message to fly to the Münster area. It was reported that enemy fighter-bombers were attacking ground targets. The Kapitän of 11. Staffel, Leutnant Hackler, was leading the formation. Visibility was poor, clouds at about 300 metres, some of them almost reaching the ground. Unteroffizier Heinrich Munninger flew as my wingman. Over Münster some Spitfires attacked us. They dived down through an opening in the clouds and in the dogfight several of our Messerschmitts were shot down."<sup>17</sup>

Third Gruppe lost three Messerschmitts and two pilots in this combat and the remaining aircraft landed at Dortmund. No claims were filed. The month ended as bad as it did when operations began on December 18th. Losses for JG 77 in the last two weeks of December had been horrific; 31 pilots were killed or missing, 13 wounded and one POW. With 86 destroyed or damaged Bf 109s, JG 77 had lost about 50 per cent of its total force in less than two weeks. Only 15 Allied aircraft were claimed as destroyed. In reality, the missions of JG 77 in the second half of December can only be described as a failure.<sup>18</sup>

### Preparations for the New Years Attack

Following its severe losses in December, JG 77 endeavoured to build up its strength in the last days of the same month. In III./JG 77, about 30 pilots had no aircraft.<sup>19</sup> A large number of pilots, (according to one source at least 27), were ordered to travel to the Regensburg Messerschmitt factories to collect new aircraft.<sup>20</sup> However, they would not return in time to participate in the operation of January 1st. Other pilots were ordered to obtain additional aircraft elsewhere. Fhr. Rolf Braband, a 19-year old pilot in 11. Staffel, remembers: "During the last days of December 1944 we were stationed at Ratingen near Düsseldorf. On December 31st I, together with two other pilots, received orders to go to Krefeld and to transfer three aircraft back to Düsseldorf. Arriving at Krefeld they told us we were to fly the Messerschmitts to Dortmund instead of Düsseldorf. We arrived at Dortmund in the late afternoon and saw that a large number of other aircraft and pilots had transferred to Dortmund."<sup>21</sup>

All III./JG 77's pilots who had arrived at Dortmund were ordered to the I. Gruppe Gefechtsstand where the pilots of that unit joined them. Uffz. Johann Twietmeyer remembers: "We landed at Dortmund where I./JG 77 already was stationed. At the Gefechtsstand we were informed that we were not allowed to leave the barracks. We learned the reason for this order after our joint dinner in the mess. In the early morning of January 1st some 2,000 German fighters would perform a low-level attack on every single enemy airfield in Holland and Belgium. Jagdgeschwader 77 under command of Major Freytag, Kommandeur of II./JG 77, was ordered to attack Antwerp-Deurne airfield. At this airfield, Tempest and Typhoon fighter-bombers were stationed. All had to be destroyed. The airfield would be attacked in sections of four and every pilot was to carry out at least four attacks. Return flight due east, if possible in formation. Also low-level flight was ordered and it was forbidden to use our R/T under any circumstances. Only after the attack could it be used again. Our formation would be lead by two Ju 88s, so we could fully concentrate on the low-level flight. At the first turning point we were to be joined by the II. Gruppe. Then we were informed about our position in the formation. Together with my wingman, Uffz. Heinrich Munninger we were to join the Stabsschwarm of Major Freytag. I was flying No. 3 and Uffz. Munninger as No. 4. Every pilot committed himself by handshake with the Kommandeur to do his utmost and to destroy as many aircraft on the ground as possible. There was no alcohol on New Year's Eve and at 22.00 hrs we were ordered to go to bed."<sup>22</sup>

All pilots of I. and III./JG 77 received maps detailing the course. From Dortmund the



Lt. Heinrich Hackler, Staffelführer of 11./JG 77. On January 1st he led III./JG 77 towards Antwerp. He had flown more than 500 missions and had accumulated 56 aerial victories. He was at that time the most successful pilot within III./JG 77. (Schopper)

formation would fly north-west to the first turning point near Borken. Here they would meet II./JG 77, which was to follow the combined force of I. and III./JG 77. The formation would then continue to Apeldoorn-south of Utrecht-Rotterdam/Waalhaven-Antwerp. The return course was from Antwerp direct to the north-east to 's-Hertogenbosch and then due east to the homebases. The first leg to Borken was not marked on the maps to prevent revealing the homebase in case the map would fall into Allied hands.<sup>23</sup> Two sources mention that beside Antwerp-Deurne airfield other industrial and military targets, were to be attacked such as the port installations at Antwerp. However, none of the surviving pilots remember this from the briefing.<sup>24</sup> After the briefing Twietmeyer overheard a conversation between Lt. Hackler and Lt. Schumacher. Lt. Hackler said: *"If I return from the mission tomorrow I will empty a full bottle of cognac!"* "You will leave some for me, won't you?" answered Lt. Schumacher. Together with Twietmeyer and another pilot the two Lieutenants spent the night in a room on Dortmund airfield. Twietmeyer had a good night's sleep, but apparently Lt. Hackler left for Siegen to visit his parents.<sup>25</sup>

II./JG 77's preparations were almost identical. On New Year's Eve, pilots of II. Gruppe were ordered to avoid alcohol in view of a possible operation the following morning, and were also told to remain within the limits of Bönninghardt-Süd airfield. The briefing however was held early in the morning of January 1st. Apparently Maj. Freytag conducted the briefing of the II. Gruppe too, although he was scheduled to lead the combined force of I. and III./JG 77. The briefing took place between 06.00 and 07.00 hrs and pilots were shown photographic cover of Antwerp-Deurne, which revealed considerable numbers of single-engined aircraft and four-engined bombers parked on one side of the airfield.<sup>26</sup> The pilots were handed the same maps as the pilots of I. and II./JG 77. They were told that a Ju 88 with navigation lights on would meet the formation in the vicinity of Bocholt, and would lead it to the Waal estuary. Aircraft of II./JG 77 were to show their navigation lights until the Ju 88 left the formation at this point. Also, the pilots were given instructions to switch on their R/T at the point where the pilot of the Ju 88 left formation, but were to observe R/T silence until they passed back into German territory on the return flight. The attack was to be delivered by individual aircraft, which had orders to make four circuits over the target airfield, delivering an attack on each circuit. Pilots were told to return, if possible, to Bönninghardt-Süd, where a rotating searchlight would be available to guide them to base.<sup>27</sup>



**Antwerp-Deurne, December 1944**

B-70 – as the Allies knew the aerodrome at Antwerp-Deurne – housed one of the largest contingents of aircraft on the Continent. Nine squadrons had settled on the V-1 infested airfield near Antwerp and on many occasions the flying bombs flew over or even came down near the airfield. To counter the V-1 threat, the Allies had established a belt of Bofors AA positions in the area. Between the cities of Terneuzen and Antwerp and along the Scheldt alone four Heavy and ten Light Anti Aircraft Regiments had set up their guns under control of the 105th Anti Aircraft Brigade. Consider the firepower in light of the fact that a Light Anti Aircraft Regiment boasted 54 gun positions, predominantly of the 40 mm Bofors type.

The nine squadrons at Deurne were divided among a Spitfire and a Typhoon Wing. In addition to these, there were also a number of Dakotas of Transport Command. No. 145 (Free French) Wing consisted of four squadrons of Spitfires – Nos. 341, 74, 345 and 329 Squadrons. No. 146 Wing was a Typhoon Wing made up of Nos. 193, 197, 257, 263 and 266 Squadrons. Of these, only two Typhoon squadrons were scheduled for operations on the morning of January 1st. No. 263 Squadron would be on army support east of Dordrecht and 193 Squadron had the Vianen bridge over the River Lek as its target. However, a blanket of snow, which had fallen over the night, coated the crowded airfield, and a layer of ice covered the runway. It was a very cold morning with temperatures approaching –20 degrees Celsius. All personnel were on snow-clearing

Three pilots of 10./JG 77 at Wien-Seyring in October 1944; from left to right: Uffz. Twietmeyer, Gefr. Munniger and Uffz. Wadowski. (Twietmeyer)

As the runway at Deurne is cleared of snow, a Typhoon prepares to take-off. (Gillam).



duties and the ice had to be cleared from the runway. It was a worthwhile target for JG 77.

### January 1st, Jagdgeschwader 77 attacks Antwerp-Deurne.

After II./JG 77's briefing at Bönninghardt-Süd in the early morning of January 1st, Maj. Freytag returned hurriedly to Dortmund to lead I. and III./JG 77. At approximately 08.00 hrs two Ju 88s, one of them flown by Oblt. Steffen's crew, took off and were followed by Freytag and the combined force of I. and III./JG 77. Both Gruppen could put up only 18 aircraft each following the heavy losses incurred in December.<sup>28</sup> I. Gruppe was led by Lt. Karl Kühdorf and III. Gruppe by Lt. Heinrich Hackler. The force of 36 Messerschmitt Bf 109s headed north-west in the direction of the first turning point at Borken. Uffz. Johann Twietmeyer remembers: "In the early morning our aircraft stood ready for take-off. The engines were warmed up and after the two Ju 88s had taken off we followed. The formation made a big turn over the airfield and all the aircraft closed up. At the first turning point near Borken, the II. Gruppe joined our formation. Jagdgeschwader 77 was complete, about 100 Messerschmitts. I was proud to be in the Stabsschwarm of this big, impressive formation!"<sup>29</sup>

Around 08.00 hrs II./JG 77 took off with 23 Messerschmitts from Bönninghardt-Süd.<sup>30</sup> When all were airborne, the formation, which flew at a height of 100-150 metres, moved off in a northerly direction towards the Bocholt area. Here II. Gruppe met the Ju 88 and the combined force of I. and III./JG 77 as witnessed by Uffz. Twietmeyer.<sup>31</sup>

With the Ju 88 some 1,000 metres ahead, the formation set course for Apeldoorn with Maj. Freytag's Schwarm in the lead. Without incidents the formation continued from Apeldoorn to Utrecht and from Utrecht to the last turning

point just south east of Waalhaven near Rotterdam. Uffz. Twietmeyer remembers: "Just before Rotterdam we turned left towards Antwerp. At this stage we received heavy fire from German Flak. Apparently they had not seen such a large German formation for a long time and they took us for the enemy."<sup>32</sup>

However, no losses were suffered and the formation continued towards Antwerp. Near the mouth of the Waal, the Ju 88 and two Messerschmitts of II./JG 77, including the Staffelführer of 6./JG 77, made for base. The two latter aircraft presumably returned on account of difficulties with their fuel supply, for pilots had been told that they were on no account to abort the flight on their own initiative for reasons other than a shortage of fuel.<sup>33</sup> Other reports indicate that at least one of the Ju 88s stayed with the formation some time longer and did not leave it until reaching Antwerp.<sup>34</sup>

Passing the front line the formation was welcomed by Allied AA fire, but again seemed to avoid casualties. Continuing its course due south the formation passed Woensdrecht airfield, just south of Bergen-op-Zoom. The occupant of Woensdrecht was W/Cdr Rolf Berg's No. 132 Wing, consisting of five squadrons of Spitfires – two Norwegian (Nos. 331 and 332), two British (Nos. 66 and 127) and a Dutch Squadron (No. 322) – although on January 1st only ground personnel of No. 322 were present at Woensdrecht; the Squadron's aircraft and pilots were expected to arrive any day. It is possible some of the JG 77 pilots thought this was Antwerp-Deurne or saw the Allied aircraft on the field and thought this was a good target too. It is believed that some pilots, probably from the trailing II. Gruppe, attacked Woensdrecht.

At B-79, (as Woensdrecht was known), minutes before the approach of the 'Herzas'





Spitfires of No. 132 Wing taxi out for another mission from Woensdrecht. (Myhre)



A bomb-carrying Norwegian-flown Spitfire at B-79. (Myhre)

Geschwader, 12 aircraft of No. 66 Squadron led by S/Ldr. Easby and another 11 Spitfires of 127 Squadron led by S/Ldr. Sampson had taken off to escort No. 2 Group Mitchells detailed to bomb Dasburg. They carried out an uneventful sweep in the target area and except for two that failed to catch up with the formation returning early and another five that ran short of fuel and had to land at B-60, all landed at base at 11.10 hours. The two Norwegian squadrons were not scheduled for operations that morning and their aircraft were dispersed across the airfield, which was blanketed under a slight haze at ground-level. Jeff Robinson was a RAAF pilot with 127 Squadron who did not fly the early mission to Dasburg. His memories of the attack – and in particular – one incident are vivid: “We did have a good look at the weather in the morning and because of the apparent conditions we were completely relaxed and at rest when the attack started. Like all attacks of this nature, they are frighteningly sudden. The number of aircraft at first were unknown but were obviously attacking our aircraft and our sleeping quarters, which were also dispersed. The noise from the anti-aircraft guns and the aircraft was deafening.”<sup>35</sup>

As between six and eight aircraft dived down, the resident AAA unit, No. 2872 Regiment Squadron, opened fire. It was all over in minutes. No shots were fired, no bombs dropped, no damage done to the base.<sup>36</sup> Firing a total of 44 rounds the Regiment claimed an Fw 190 destroyed by No. 4 Gun at 09.41 hrs which crashed four miles north of the gun post. Four minutes later No. 1 Gun reported a hit on a Bf 109 which was seen to be smoking and losing height.<sup>37</sup> This last Bf 109 was seen to crash near Woensdrecht airfield. It first clipped some of the buildings and it is not clear whether it was actually shot down by AAA or if it crashed as a result of an

error in judgement when diving towards the airfield. Jeff Robinson continues: “Moving out of our quarters at great speed, we noticed where one aircraft had crashed and this brought a certain amount of delight, thinking especially “Thank God, it’s not me involved.” In those days I considered myself a very fit athlete: I managed to sprint towards the crashed plane, dressed in flying gear, complete with flying boots that are not designed for sprinting but at least I was the first to the plane and was able to ‘drag’ or ‘assist’ the pilot out. I suppose the reaction was not so much to take a prisoner, but to get him out because an aircraft in a crashed position can mean all sorts of things. The rather tall, fair, young German pilot was obviously in a state of shock, not because of any obvious injury that was evident at the time, but simply because of the crash and in fact he was totally overcome with fear because of the hopeless situation in which he found himself. One could well understand his shock, fear and terror. At that moment other pilots were congregating around this man and there was certainly no means of communication between myself and the German pilot as I could not speak German and I doubt whether he could speak at all, let alone have knowledge of the English language. The scene soon changed however as many of the other pilots arrived and although with difficulty, the Polish pilots (sic Dutch groundcrew) were more adept and were able to question the prisoner. I doubt whether anybody was looking for history at this stage; it was purely interested enthusiasm more so than trying to develop the right dialogue. The

thrill of having a prisoner under my control during those moments did not fit well with my future objectives and as the Poles were able to communicate I agreed at their request that they take over and be responsible for the German prisoner.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately the authors have not been able to identify this pilot. None of the JG 77 casualties seem to fit Jeff Robinson's description. Neither do the Operations Record Book of No. 132 Wing and its individual Squadrons mention the attack on Woensdrecht. At 09.40 hrs, shortly after JG 77 had left the Woensdrecht area, No. 127 Squadron scrambled three aircraft under F/Lt. Covington with orders to cover the Antwerp area but no trace of the enemy was found. They landed back at base at 10.50 hours. At 11.20 hrs, Maj. Tvedte, the CO of No. 332 Squadron, took up his squadron for airfield defence duties, but this turned out to be another uneventful patrol.<sup>39</sup>

The main body of the JG 77 formation, which continued on its detailed course, could now see the vast dock area and Antwerp cathedral. Uffz. Johann Twietmeyer continues his account: "Just before reaching Antwerp we overfly one of its First World War forts. Here the remaining Ju 88 returns home. Still flying at low level, it should not be more than five minutes until we reach the target. A light haze covers the ground. Absolute radio silence is still maintained. As we are nearing Antwerp the tension grows. Concentrated anti-aircraft fire welcomes us. Major Freytag gains height to 100 metres and searches for the airfield. In the meantime everyone is flying at full power. Suddenly, I see the runway in the shape of a 'One' on the right-hand side. The Kommandeur continues his course – he does not see it! I break the radio silence and call the Kommandeur and shout "Target to the right!" Other pilots had seen the airfield too and not waiting for the order to attack they turned towards the airfield. I also turn

in, followed by Uffz. Munninger, coming in under an angle with the runway. We encounter heavy anti-aircraft fire. Where are the Tempests and Typhoons? I see only 12 or so spread at the edge of the airfield. I aim at one of them and my 30 mm shells destroy the aircraft, collapsing without burning. Next to me is Uffz. Munninger and he shoots at a truck which burns immediately.<sup>40</sup>

Several other pilots of III./JG 77 and I./JG 77 found the target. Fhr. Rolf Braband of 11./JG 77 attacked two Spitfires on the airfield and set them alight. However, not all the German pilots were so lucky. Over Antwerp the formation circled several times searching for Deurne airfield, but a number of aircraft, mostly from II. Gruppe, failed to locate the target.<sup>41</sup> In total, about half of the JG 77 formation attacked Antwerp-Deurne.<sup>42</sup>

Allied reports vary but an estimated 12 to 30 aircraft attacked the airfield between 09.25 and 09.40 hours and they did not catch the defences unaware when they appeared over the Scheldt embankment. The witnesses on the ground described the formation as a large gaggle flying at heights varying from 150 to 300 feet. To the bystanders the Germans appeared to be in complete disarray. Indeed they "put up a very poor show", entirely missing the aircraft of No. 145 Wing; not one of the Spitfires suffered so much as a scratch. J. 'Paddy' Dalzell was a pilot with No. 74 (Tiger) Squadron. The pilots were billeted in houses about one to two miles from Deurne airfield: "We were awakened by anti-aircraft fire and I rushed to a window and could not believe my eyes at seeing several Me 109s and Fw 190s at rooftop height. The French pilots were in houses next to us and they were shouting and tearing their hair out at the sight. We all rushed down to our transport and headed for the airfield where we immediately jumped into our Spitfires and started taxiing out with difficulty because of the snow and iced taxiways. Before we got to the runway we

A remarkable photograph of 'White 17' of 9./JG 77. This aircraft, W.Nr. 330320, was flown by Uffz. Heinrich Munninger of 10./JG 77 on January 1st, 1945. Uffz. Munninger was shot down by American AAA north-east of Antwerp. On the original picture the Werknummer can be deciphered on the lower end of the rudder, just beneath the horizontal tailplane. (Buck)





These visiting B-17 Flying Fortresses from the 94th BG had used Deurne as a safe haven on their return to England. They did not survive the Luftwaffe's raid on New Year's Day. (Gillam)

where ordered back to our dispersals because of the runway being snowed up. We had just vacated our aircraft and were entering the house where our operations room was situated when there was more anti-aircraft fire. I was in the doorway and turned to see what was going on and I saw two Me 109s, one firing at a petrol bowser about 50 metres away and the other firing at four of us in the doorway. I assumed they had been strafing the Antwerp docks and had only a few rounds of ammunition left which was lucky for us. We dived inside the building and later we counted the shells in the door posts and the ground. None of us were hit."<sup>43</sup>

The appearance of Fw 190s cannot be explained. However, one source reports that Fw 190s and Bf 109s with black stripes on their fuselages attacked Deurne.<sup>44</sup> These observations indicate that indeed a few aircraft of JG 26 may have attacked Deurne too.

Considering the large number of targets represented by 146 Wing, damage was relatively light. No. 193 reported three aircraft destroyed and 257 Squadron lost two Typhoons. No. 266 Squadron lost one aircraft and four others on strength with the Wing were reported written off. The larger types were the prime point of focus for the raiders and a visiting B-17 Flying Fortress and one of the resident Dakotas from No. 575 Squadron were also destroyed. Ken Gilham was

with 341 Squadron; he recalls: "On that cold winter morning we were trying to clear the snow from around the aircraft and some attempt had been made to clear the runway. Our priority was keeping the engines from freezing and we had to run them up by day and night with two critical incidents, that of squatting on the tails to hold them down as one of us ran up the engine or the cold job of topping-up the petrol tanks as petrol easily freezes and so could our hands. We were doing these jobs when someone shouted out 'Mustangs!' pointing out some low-flying aircraft passing across the eastern end of the airfield towards Mortsels. In those brief few seconds, we could not identify the aircraft for sure but wondered where Mustangs could have come from as we were not aware of any in the vicinity – but we never knew what was beyond our airstrips and we lived in a little world of our own. Within seconds the 'Mustangs' turned back across the airfield firing their guns as we ran for cover, falling about in the snow. I ended up behind a bit of a brick wall which was the remains of a hangar destroyed by the Luftwaffe before they moved out. As for damaged aircraft, there were a few Spitfires, Typhoons, a couple of Dakotas and I believe there was a Fortress bomber that had got there somehow."<sup>45</sup>

In the ORB of No. 257 (Burma) Squadron the attack was summed up as a "poor show". Grp.

Dakotas of No. 575 Squadron at Deurne. The machine nearest the camera has lost its cockpit following the Luftwaffe attack. (Gillam/Dillen)







The wreckage of Fhr. Rolf Braband's Bf 109 K-4 'White 12' of 11./JG 77. The aircraft has been completely looted and Dutch scrapdealers are about to salvage the remains. The green and white tailband can just still be seen. (Merx)

Capt. Gillam was heard to remark: "If any of my boys put on a show like that I'd tear them off a strip." This remark had its foundation in the fact that some of the obviously novice pilots kept flying in a straight line at low-altitude, thereby presenting themselves as easy prey to the AA gunners.

Alan Forbes had served with No. 74 Squadron since the Normandy landings. That morning he walked out of a noisy crew room straight into an enemy fighter making a pass: "I dived into an adjacent slit trench and kept my head down. Just on the northern perimeter of the airfield was a belt of heavy AA to fend off any V-1 attacks. Our German friends were probably not aware of this and had a pretty rough time passing through it. We had no aircraft airborne at this time and a working party was out on the runway trying to de-ice it. To my knowledge no aircraft of the wing were hit or damaged and no one was injured. I saw no German aircraft damaged or shot down. On the far side of the airfield there was a wing of Typhoons. I do not know how they fared, but saw no fire damage. It was all over in five minutes. I think we were probably too pre-occupied

licking our wounds from the V-1 and V-2 attacks to be too impressed by the Luftwaffe's recent accomplishment."<sup>46</sup>

The RAF Regiment stationed at Deurne, No. 2880 Squadron, fired an impressive 1,270 rounds, but managed to damage only one of the attacking Messerschmitts. This could very well have been Fhr. Rolf Braband's aircraft of 11./JG 77: "When I came in for the third attack, I was hit several times by anti-aircraft fire. Part of my left wing and parts of the cooling system were shot away. I could barely control the aircraft. Theoretically you could fly some 15 minutes without the cooling system. During the briefing we calculated that we needed 18 minutes to reach German lines, so I tried my luck flying low on the deck. However, it did not work and making things worse I was again hit by AAA and one shell exploded in the cockpit. Although I lost consciousness several times I somehow managed to make a belly-landing and I later woke up in a Canadian hospital."<sup>47</sup>

Fhr. Braband crash-landed his aircraft near the Gastelse Dijk, south of the village Stampersgat some 10 kilometres north of Roosendaal.<sup>48</sup> His belly-landing ended just in front of an anti-tank ditch and Fhr. Braband was very lucky to escape without serious injuries. He was taken prisoner by No. 62 Anti-Tank (SP) Regiment.<sup>49</sup> His 'White 12' was later dismantled. Uffz. Twietmeyer of 10./JG 77 was hit by AAA over Deurne: "Suddenly I received a hit in the right cooler and I immediately turned off the cooler and tried to reach the German lines. I also received hits in the fuselage. Flying half-power with the needles reading oil and cooling liquid temperature at 'maximum', I headed north-north-east, trailing white smoke from the shot-up cooler. Still the

engine ran without a problem and I had good hopes of reaching the German lines. I had lost contact with Uffz. Munninger and I saw several other Messerschmitts, but they flew much faster and disappeared at the horizon. Suddenly a Fw 190 D-9 joined me. This aircraft had many hits in the fuselage and wings. Probably this was a young pilot who had lost his orientation. As the engine, despite the high temperature, ran smoothly I was convinced that I would make it. I at least wanted to reach the front line and make a belly-landing. Then I made a foolish decision and attacked some parked trucks, and my new wingman also participated in the attack. When I pulled out of the attack I was hit again by heavy AAA and the engine seized with a big bang. Either it had received a direct hit or it was overheated. A few kilometres further I made a belly-landing on a field near a farmhouse.<sup>50</sup>

It is very likely that Twietmeyer's 'Red 7' was hit by a 90 mm HE round fired by 'B' Battery of the 494th AAA. Twietmeyer continued a little further but, as mentioned, belly-landed his Messerschmitt north-west of Galder, some four kilometres east of Rijsbergen.<sup>51</sup> He climbed out of his cockpit and asked the farmer where he was – German or Allied territory. When he learned that he was in Allied territory he tried to set fire to his aircraft and made his way to the front line. In the afternoon he found a bunker in a small forest and decided to wait for darkness. However, after half an hour he was discovered by Canadian troops and taken prisoner. Later in the day, he was handed over to the Military Police where he was beaten up by a Corporal. A Canadian officer

stopped the beating and he was transferred to Brussels where he met Fhr. Rolf Braband. Together they were transported to London by ship.<sup>52</sup>

Several JG 77 aircraft that were not able to locate Deurne airfield strafed targets of opportunity in the Antwerp area.<sup>53</sup> Some of them fell victim to the AAA units too. Lt. Herbert Abendroth of 9./JG 77 had apparently missed the attack on Deurne and together with two other Messerschmitts, he attacked 'D' Battery of the 405th AAA Gun Bn (SM) near Kalmthout, some 15 kilometres north of Antwerp. The American gunners returned fire and Abendroth's 'White 13' was hit and he immediately made a belly-landing just east of Kalmthout.<sup>54</sup> He was quickly taken prisoner by Allied troops, his aircraft left to be looted by Belgian citizens.<sup>55</sup> Gefr. Helmut Kofler, a 21-year old pilot of 3. Staffel, was more unfortunate. Attacking some of the installations in the port his Bf 109 was hit by AAA and he desperately tried to make an emergency landing. He crashed near Hoevenen, north-west of the village Kapellen, just north of Antwerp.<sup>56</sup> An eyewitness remembers: "I believe the German pilot tried to make an emergency landing as his landing gear was out. He landed in a meadow owned by the Joossens family. As a result of the roughness of the terrain, the aircraft overturned several times and disintegrated. The morning mass had just finished and many people gathered around the wreckage looking for souvenirs, not paying any attention to the dying pilot. After some time, a priest from Stabroek arrived and he tried to talk to the pilot but to no avail. He had already



The fuselage of Lt. Herbert Abendroth's Bf 109 K-4 'White 13' was carried through the streets of Achterbroek during the festivities of May 1945. The green and white tailband is clearly visible and in the lower right of the picture the beginning of W.Nr. 330204 can be seen. (Cox)

# Bodenplatte

THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



Oblt. Karl-Heinz Bartels of 3./JG 77. He had flown as a reconnaissance pilot from February 1942 to July 1944. He then received the so-called 'Windhund' training in late July and was subsequently posted to I./JG 77. He was reported missing on January 1st. (Bartels)



Fw. Paul Tanck of 8./JG 77. Fw. Tanck was reported missing following the Bodenplatte mission and no trace of him or his Bf 109 G-10 has ever been found. It is presumed that he crashed in the Scheldt estuary. (Tanck)



Uffz. Heinrich Munninger of 10./JG 77 who was killed when his Messerschmitt was hit by fire from the 494th AAA Bn. near St. Lenaarts, north-east of Antwerp. (Munninger)

lost consciousness. He was taken to a hospital in Kapellen where he later died.<sup>57</sup>

Gefr. Helmut Kofler died on the January 2nd and was buried at the local cemetery in Kapellen.<sup>58</sup> Two other pilots were lost without trace. It is not known if they actually crashed in the target area. Neither Oblt. Karl-Heinz Bartels of 3./JG 77 or Fw. Paul Tanck of 8./JG 77 nor their aircraft were ever found. At least one source reports that Tanck attacked targets near Antwerp, but no further details are known.<sup>59</sup>

After the attack, the Messerschmitts of JG 77 headed north-east to return to their base. Uffz. Heinrich Munninger, Uffz. Twietmeyer's wingman, had completed his attack on Deurne airfield and was flying north-east nearing the village of Sint-Lenaarts close to which was stationed 'B' Battery of the US 494th AAA Battalion which formed part of the defence of Antwerp against the V-1. Earlier in the morning some German planes had already flown over, but these had taken the gunners by surprise and they were not fast enough to take aim at the low-flying fighters. The battery was also strafed by some Messerschmitts but luckily no one was hurt. Now the battery was on guard. As soon as Uffz. Munninger's 'White 17' was in range it opened fire. The Messerschmitt was hit immediately and his colleagues saw Uffz. Munninger crash in flames.<sup>60</sup> A young Belgian schoolboy, Rik Geens, was first at the crash site and saw a big hole in the fuselage and that the aircraft was on fire. Munninger was dead. As the aircraft's ammunition began to explode, the spectators withdrew.<sup>61</sup> Uffz. Munninger's body was buried at the US Military Cemetery at Fosse.<sup>62</sup>

Lt. Heinrich Hackler, Kapitän of 11./JG 77 and leading the whole III. Gruppe on January 1st also failed to return. Lt. Hackler was one of the most successful pilots of the Gruppe. He had joined the unit in 1940 and had participated in the campaigns in the Balkans, Crete, the Soviet-Union, Africa and Italy. He had accumulated 56 victories and on August 19, 1944 was awarded the Ritterkreuz.<sup>63</sup> Hackler was seen to participate in the attack on Deurne airfield and during his third attack, he was apparently hit by AAA.<sup>64</sup> He managed to control his aircraft and headed north-east. After a few minutes, he flew west of Zundert and locals going to church saw the low flying Messerschmitt: "The fighter flew very low and came from the south. The pilot looked down on some pedestrians going to church. Suddenly the pilot seemed to try to avoid a farmhouse and turned left hitting the trees in front of the house with its left wing. It hit the ground and overturned several times disintegrating completely. Remains of the plane and pilot were spread over the field. English soldiers buried the remains in a field grave at the side of the road. A

wooden cross with his name marked the grave. According to the English soldiers it was a very experienced pilot who had been awarded the Iron Cross.<sup>65</sup>

It seems unlikely that an experienced pilot such as Lt. Heinrich Hackler would hit some trees during low-level flight and it may have been that he was already wounded during the encounter with the AAA and that his erratic flying was caused by his injuries. His aircraft crashed in a village called Raamberg, a few kilometres north of Zundert.<sup>66</sup> His field grave remained there for several years and when his body was reinterred at Ysselsteyn cemetery in October 1949, the name had disappeared from the wooden cross. The only information was found at the Community Administration where was noted that it was the grave of a Luftwaffe officer killed on January 1st 1945 with the name of 'Hermann Hachler', date of birth '1.1.1919'. German authorities could not identify this man and the grave at Ysselsteyn was marked with Hermann Hachler. No link was made with the fate of Lt. Heinrich Hackler of 11./JG 77. His widow and other relatives searched for many years to find a trace of him, but failed to do so.

During the research for this book several documents were found regarding Lt. Hackler's fate, including the original documents of the Zundert administration. Combining all details, a lengthy report was handed over to the Deutsche Dienststelle in 1996, which finally led to solving Hackler's case. In August 1997, his fate was officially noted and his grave was identified as being on the German Military Cemetery Ysselsteyn, grave X-11-260. Shortly thereafter Lt. Hackler's widow and other next of kin were informed.

The other pilots of JG 77 still had a long way to go before they would reach German territory. It seems that most of them followed the route given during their briefing. Flying north-east until reaching 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands, and then fly due east. Several of them would not make it to German lines. Gefr. Erwin Mannweiler, a 19-year old pilot of 4. Staffel, hit a tree and crash-landed near Klein-Dongen, about five kilometres east of Oosterhout. He was shot by Allied troops whilst attempting to escape, but luckily survived to become a POW.<sup>67</sup>

Lt. Hans-Jürgen Schumacher, a very experienced pilot who acted as Staffelführer of 10./JG 77, was flying east towards Nijmegen when his Bf 109 was spotted by a Spitfire from No. 401 Squadron. F/Lt. John MacKay had taken off from Heesch airfield at 09.16 hrs, when about 40-plus Bf 109s and Fw 190s had swept over the base. This was, in fact, JG 6 heading for Volkel, but Heesch not being a primary target, the Spitfires



were able to take off without problem. F/Lt. MacKay went after the German fighters right after take-off and had already shot down two Focke-Wulfs when returning to base at approximately 10.00 hrs sighted a Bf 109 heading east. After a three-quarters turn he got on the German's tail and forced him down on the deck. After taking violent evasive action, Schumacher was forced to straighten out for a second. He made a slight dive and struck an open field, bounced into some trees and his aircraft broke into pieces.<sup>68</sup> Lt. Schumacher crashed near Teersdijk, on the right hand side of the Grave to Nijmegen road. He was killed instantly and buried in a field grave nearby.<sup>69</sup> Another pilot of 10./JG 77, Uffz. Hans Gömmel, just managed to reach the German lines after he was hit by AAA over Antwerp and made a belly-landing near the Dutch-German border.<sup>70</sup>

Some of the II. Gruppe pilots had chosen an alternative route back to base. Gefr. Alfred Hoffschmidt, a young Schwarmführer in 6. Staffel, had lost his Schwarm in the confusion over Antwerp and low on fuel, attached himself to a group of three aircraft flying in the direction of Aachen. With them he strafed a train in the St. Trond area where apparently one of the four was shot down.<sup>71</sup> Gefr. Hoffschmidt, whose engine was now giving trouble, had to make a belly-landing near Eschweiler, north-east of Aachen. He had missed the German lines by a few kilometres and was taken prisoner by US forces. One by one the remaining Messerschmitts landed back at their base or at other airfields. One Bf 109 of I./JG 77 landed as far north as Drope.<sup>72</sup>

One more loss would be suffered before the day was over. In the early afternoon a Ju 88 was shot down just east of Dortmund airfield. This was Oblt. Hans Steffen's Ju 88 G-6 '2Z+CP', the JG 77 Lotse. The Germans thought the aircraft had been hit by AAA in the wing and that it had failed during approach.<sup>73</sup> In fact the authors believe the Junkers was the victim of a Spitfire flown by F/Lt. W.J. Banks of No. 412 Squadron. Nine Spitfires had taken off from Heesch at 12.00 hrs for a fighter sweep in the Dortmund area.<sup>74</sup> F/Lt. Banks reported: "I was flying Red 3 with 412 Squadron. I sighted a twin engined aircraft which I identified as a Ju 88 flying approximately east on the deck. I opened fire for one second about 300 yards dead astern. There was a strike on the port engine and a bit of smoke. I gave another one second burst at about 250 yards and the enemy aircraft burst into flames on the port side and crashed in a field where it exploded and burned. Nobody baled out."<sup>75</sup>

The whole of Steffen's crew – Uffz. Josef Knon, Uffz. Helmut Uttler and Uffz. Friedrich Kriebler – was killed in the crash. They were buried at the main cemetery in Dortmund. The crew had

previously been with III./KG 76 before being transferred to 5./NJG 6 in June 1944. They had flown several night fighting missions and had been shot down once on August 21st.<sup>76</sup> It is very likely that they did not notice Banks' Spitfire and were caught unaware. Between 15.12 and 16.20 hrs some four Bf 109s of II./JG 77 took off from Bönninghardt to fly cover for the German jets in the Münster area. Combat was reported with six Spitfires, but no losses or claims were filed.<sup>77</sup> With this minor operation the day ended for JG 77 and certainly for III. Gruppe at Düsseldorf at least, the mood must have been very low.

### Conclusion

The attack by JG 77 on Deurne can only be described as a complete failure. At Deurne about 14 aircraft were destroyed and nine or so more damaged. A Spitfire was claimed by Maj. Freytag, his 102nd victory, but no details are known. Compared with these limited results, the loss of 11 pilots and Messerschmitts and an additional two aircraft damaged was dramatic.<sup>78</sup> Of the 11 pilots listed as missing, six were killed and five became POW. The loss of Lt. Heinrich Hackler, one of JG 77's most experienced and successful pilots and who had lead III. Gruppe in many occasions, was a terrible blow for the unit. Add to that the loss of Lt. Abendroth, Lt. Schumacher and Uffz. Twietmeyer, all of whom had been with III./JG 77 for a long time, the situation was made even worse. Furthermore, two Ju 88 nightfighter crews and their aircraft were lost and we should add the Ju 88 damaged in the raid on Essen-Mühlheim. In contrast with several other airfields, there is no evidence that pictures of Deurne were taken after the attack and therefore it is not known if JG 77 was informed of the limited damage inflicted there.



In 1997 Lt. Heinrich Hackler's grave was finally identified, and a few months later the gravestone was corrected. (Manrho)



Uffz. Josef Knon, Bordfunker in Oblt. Hans Steffen's crew of 5./NJG 6. All of Steffen's crew were killed when their Ju 88 G-6 was shot down by F/Lt. Banks of No. 412 Squadron. Uffz. Josef Knon had previously flown operations with 7./KG 76 in the Mediterranean, before he was transferred to 5./NJG 6. (Knon)



Uffz. Hans Gömmel of 10./JG 77 seen here during his time as a trainee pilot. On January 1st 1945, he made a belly-landing near the German border. (Gömmel)

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Flugbuch Uffz. Josef Knon, 5./NJG 6. 5. Staffel was based at Echterdingen since November 7th, while the rest of the Gruppe remained at Schwäbisch Hall.
- <sup>2</sup> Flugbuch Uffz. Josef Knon, Bordsunker of Oblt. Hans Steffen.
- <sup>3</sup> Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 77 by Jochen Prien, page 2208-2243. Namentliche Verlustmeldungen JG 77.
- <sup>4</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 17/1945.
- <sup>5</sup> Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 77 by Jochen Prien, page 2208-2243.
- <sup>6</sup> The Mighty Eighth War Diary by Roger A. Freeman, page 398-400.
- <sup>7</sup> The airfields targeted by the Eighth Air Force were occupied by JG 2, JG 4 and JG 11.
- <sup>8</sup> The Bomber Command War Diaries by Martin Middlebrook, page 637.
- <sup>9</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 96/1945, point 31.
- <sup>10</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldungen II./JG 77 and RL2-III-854.
- <sup>11</sup> Kriegstagebuch Stab NJG 6, BA/MA Freiburg, RL 10/542 and Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./NJG 6.
- <sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that Uffz. Unglert's relatives received message that he was killed during a 'terrorangriff' on Essen-Mühlheim. Mortuary card. Uffz. A. Unglert.
- <sup>13</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung 5./NJG 6 on January 1st 1945, crew Oblt. Hans Steffen.
- <sup>14</sup> Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 77 by Jochen Prien, page 2232. Major Erich Leie would be appointed as new Kommodore, but did not arrive until mid-January.
- <sup>15</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 96/1945, point 31.
- <sup>16</sup> Also the Ju 88 Lotse of III./JG 77 left Düsseldorf. It is very likely that this aircraft flew directly to Dortmund. ULTRA Report 56-BT-831 reports 1 Ju 88 at Düsseldorf on 30.12.1944 and at 20.30 hrs on 31.12.1944 ULTRA Report 56-BT-886 reports no Ju 88 at Düsseldorf.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994.
- <sup>18</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldungen JG 77, RL2-III-854 and Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 77 by Jochen Prien, page 2208-2243.
- <sup>19</sup> RL2-III-734.
- <sup>20</sup> Geschichte des Jagdgeschwaders 77 by Jochen Prien, page 2237.
- <sup>21</sup> Letter Rolf Braband, dated 14.04.1994.
- <sup>22</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994.
- <sup>23</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 112/1945, point 3. A.D.I.(K) Report No. 97/1945, point 5-7.
- <sup>24</sup> Letter from Lt. Herman Hillebrand, 6./JG 77, to Gefr. Alfred Hoffschmidt's mother dated 03.02.1945 and letter from Lt. Hans-Werner Renzow, 10./JG 77, to Uffz. Heinrich Munninger's father dated 03.01.1945.
- <sup>25</sup> Information obtained from Hans Ring, forwarded by Nelly Schopper, widow of Lt. Hackler. His wife waited in Düsseldorf-Ratingen in vain. Letter Nelly Schopper dated 25.07.1994.
- <sup>26</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 96/1945, point 1-3. Interesting to note that the photographs of Antwerp-Deurne were not of a recent date, as the trees on it still bore their foliage.
- <sup>27</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 96/1945, point 4-11.
- <sup>28</sup> RL2-III-734.
- <sup>29</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994. The number of 100 aircraft is not correct. In reality the formation consisted of about 60 Messerschmitts.
- <sup>30</sup> ULTRA Report No. 56-BT-886.
- <sup>31</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 96/1945, point 13. Here it is reported that II. Gruppe took off with 64 aircraft, but this can not be correct as only 23 Messerschmitts of II./JG 77 were operational on December 31st at 20.30 hrs.
- <sup>32</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994.
- <sup>33</sup> A.D.I.(K) No. 96/1945, point 15. It is not known who was Staffelführer of 6./JG 77 at that time. Lt. Georg Karl who had lead the Staffel in December was wounded on the 26th and did not participate.
- <sup>34</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994.
- <sup>35</sup> Correspondence with N.J. Robinson.
- <sup>36</sup> No. 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 144 gives the following details: '09.25 hrs 8 Fw 190s and Me 109s approached airfield and were engaged by 7 guns. No attack developed.'
- <sup>37</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2872 Squadron.
- <sup>38</sup> Correspondence with N.J. Robinson.
- <sup>39</sup> Operations Record Books No. 132 Wing, No. 127 Squadron and No. 331 Squadron.
- <sup>40</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994.
- <sup>41</sup> A.D.I.(K) Report No. 96/1945, point 16.
- <sup>42</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994. According to his Leistungsbuch Uffz. Rolf Buck of 9./JG 77 claimed to have destroyed 'three Mustangs and two Thunderbolts' during his attack on Antwerp-Deurne at 09.05 hrs(!).
- <sup>43</sup> Correspondence with J. 'Paddy' Dalzell.
- <sup>44</sup> No. 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 144.
- <sup>45</sup> Correspondence with Ken Gilham.
- <sup>46</sup> Correspondence with Alan Forbes.
- <sup>47</sup> Letter Rolf Braband, dated 14.04.1994.
- <sup>48</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.
- <sup>49</sup> War Diary 62 Anti-Tank (SP).
- <sup>50</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994.
- <sup>51</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 and Report 494th AAA

dated 4 June 1945.

<sup>52</sup> Letter Johann Twietmeyer, dated 05.03.1994. According A.D.I.(K) Report No. 97/1945 Uffz. Johann Twietmeyer was shot down before reaching Antwerp-Deurne, but in his accounts to the authors he states that this is not true.

<sup>53</sup> Air Ministry Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 281, page 34. Uffz. Rolf Buck of 9./JG 77 claimed two trucks destroyed on a road south of Antwerp at 09.20 hrs.

<sup>54</sup> Report 405th AAA Gun Bn (SM) dated 31 May 1945.

<sup>55</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 and letter Luc Cox, dated 15.08.1999, with Belgian eyewitness accounts. It is interesting to note that in A.D.I.(K) No. 97/1945, point 23-24, it is reported that Lt. Abendroth made a belly-landing caused by engine trouble near Maaseik/Belgium. Obviously, this report is in error.

<sup>56</sup> RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264.

<sup>57</sup> Eyewitness account of Jozef van Roey, forwarded by Luc Cox 15.08.1999.

<sup>58</sup> Records German Red Cross and German War Graves Committee.

<sup>59</sup> Gefreiter Helmut Kofler was later reburied at the German Military Cemetery of Lommel, grave 2-58.

<sup>60</sup> Letter Lt. Heise, Staffelführer of 8./JG 77, to parents of Fw. Paul Tanck, dated 12.01.1945.

<sup>61</sup> Letter Lt. Renzow, Staffelführer of 10./JG 77, to the father of Uffz. Heinrich Munninger, dated 03.01.1945. The crash was witnessed by Ofw. Heinz Richter, pilot in 10./JG 77.

<sup>62</sup> Based on the account of Rik Geens and Dennis Christy, member of B battery of the 494th AAA. Forwarded by Luc Cox 15.08.1999.

<sup>63</sup> Report of Burial H-8-150. Uffz. Heinrich Munninger was later reinterred at the German Military Cemetery at Lommel, grave 59-506.

<sup>64</sup> Personnel file Lt. Heinrich Hackler, Bundesarchiv Aachen.

<sup>65</sup> Letter Kurt Bödefeld, pilot in 11./JG 77, dated 30.12.1956.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with several eyewitnesses at crash location, dated 10.09.1994.

<sup>67</sup> See also RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 264 where his crash location was reported as 'Moeren'. Indeed a place called De Moeren is not far from the crash site.

<sup>68</sup> A.D.I.(K) No. 112/1945.

<sup>69</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. J. MacKay, No. 401 Squadron.

<sup>70</sup> Later reinterred at Ysselsteyn. Sources: RAF Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, Rapport van Overbrenging D.2846 and Vorgangsakte Vg.47955.

<sup>71</sup> Letter Ofw. Heinz Richter, 10./JG 77, to Johann Twietmeyer, dated 11.02.1947.

<sup>72</sup> There are no details about a JG 77 loss in that area.

<sup>73</sup> ULTRA Report No. 56-BT-1054.

<sup>74</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung 5./NJG 6.

<sup>75</sup> Operations Record Book No. 412 Squadron, Form 541. The Spitfires landed back at Heesch at 13.45 hrs. Strangely the 2nd TAF Diary gives the time for shooting down the Ju 88 as 14.10 hrs.

<sup>76</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. W.J. Banks, No. 412 Squadron.

<sup>77</sup> Flight log books of Uffz. Josef Knon.

<sup>78</sup> Fernschreiben II. Jagdkorps, Ic Nr. 140/44 geh. dated 03.01.1945.

<sup>79</sup> Material losses from RL2-III-854.

# Dawn of a new era

**Kampfgeschwader 51 and  
Kampfgeschwader 76 buzz and bomb**

The summer of 1944 saw the final stages of jet aircraft development in Germany and the first attempts were being made to form operational jet units. The first trials with the notorious Me 262 as a bomber were undertaken by Erprobungskommando Schenck.

**C**OMMANDED by Maj. Wolfgang 'Bombo' Schenck the unit flew its first missions in July 1944 in France. Continuously in retreat, the unit inflicted nothing more than pinpricks against the advancing Allied armies, especially with the small number of Me 262 bombers available. By early September 1944 the unit was forced to withdraw to Rheine in north-west Germany. Here, it was incorporated in I./KG 51, which had, in fact, been the parent unit of Erprobungskommando Schenck. At Rheine, the Gruppe was commanded by Maj. Heinz Unrau, with Hptm. Georg Csurusky, Hptm. Rudolf Abrahamczik and Hptm. Eberhard Winkel as Kapitäne of respectively 1., 2. and 3./KG 51. On December 5th 1944, Obstlt. Wolfgang Schenck took over from Obstlt. Wolf Meister as Kommodore of KG 51.

On September 8th, the first loss over enemy territory was suffered when Lt. Rolf Weidemann of

3./KG 51 was shot down by light AAA while strafing troops at low-altitude. His Me 262 A-2 – W.Nr. 170040 '9K+OL' – crashed eight kilometres north-east of Diest in Belgium. Being the first example of an Me 262 to be examined, it attracted much attention from RAF Technical Officers!<sup>1</sup> By the end of December, at least 17 Me 262s were lost on operations. Some 11 pilots were killed or listed as missing and a further six were wounded. One of the sorest losses was Hptm. Rudolf Rösch, Ritterkreuzträger and Staffelkapitän of 3./KG 51. Hptm. Rösch was shot down and killed by Bofors guns whilst attacking Helmond airfield on November 28th. On December 31st I./KG 51 lost another experienced pilot when Ofw. Erich Kaiser of 1./KG 51 had to make an emergency landing at Hopsten. Although initially, his injuries did not appear to be serious, Kaiser had suffered severe injuries to his spinal column and died in hospital on January 3rd.<sup>2</sup>



Major Wolfgang 'Bombo' Schenck. (Eddie Creek)



# Bodenplatte

## THE LUFTWAFFE'S LAST HOPE



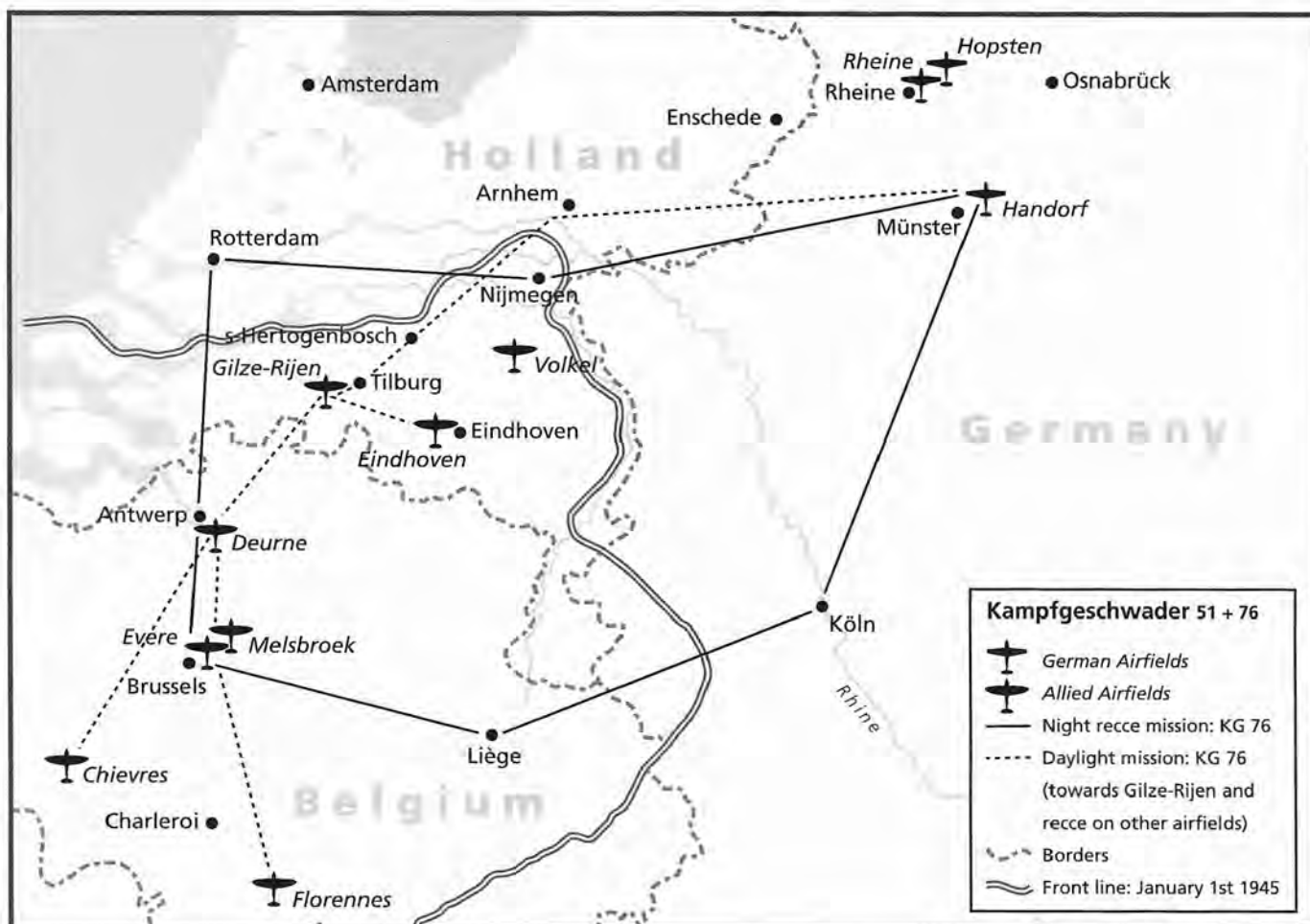
Me 262 A-2a 9K+BK, 'Red B', of 2./KG 51 is towed out of its camouflaged shelter at Rheine in late 1944. At this time, KG 51's jets were flying missions against Allied troops and strongpoints in Holland and Belgium. (Eddie Creek)

In December 1944 II./KG 51 was also equipped with the Me 262. Under the command of Hptm. Hans-Joachim Grundmann, the Gruppe had started training at Schwäbisch Hall and by December 17th several machines were transferred to Hesepe and Achmer to commence operations. On December 25th, the first loss was suffered when Oblt. Hans-Georg Lamle of 4./KG 51 failed to return after a bombing mission to Liège. His Me 262 '9K+MM' was hit by Bofors fire from an RAF Regiment and finished off by a Spitfire flown by F/Lt. J.J. Boyle of No. 411 Squadron. The jet crashed near Erp, some five kilometres south-east of Veghel and Oblt. Hans-Georg Lamle was killed in the crash.<sup>3</sup> However, only a few operations were flown by II./KG 51 during the rest of the year. The Gruppe suffered from a continuous shortage of Me 262s and replacement aircraft arrived from Schwäbisch Hall at a slow rate.<sup>4</sup>

Another jet-aircraft, the Arado Ar 234, had entered combat as a bomber by the end of 1944. In mid-1944 Kampfgeschwader 76 was selected to be the first bomber unit to fly the jet. In early June, III. Gruppe moved to Alt-Lönnewitz and in August, to Burg near Magdeburg to commence training with the Ar 234. On August 26th, the first two Arados were delivered to III./KG 76 and pilot training began. At the end of November 1944, an Einsatzstaffel was formed under the command of Hptm. Diether Lukesch, the Kapitän of 9./KG 76. The Einsatzstaffel comprised pilots of all Staffeln and the Stab, but mostly from 9. Staffel. On December 18th, two days after the opening of the Ardennes offensive, the Einsatzstaffel was ordered to move to Münster-Handorf. In total 16 Arados were transferred to Handorf. Over the following days, the weather closed in and the Staffel was not able to fly any missions until December 24th. That

The Gruppenkommandeur of I./KG 51, Maj. Heinz Unrau (right) shares a joke with fellow officers of his unit at Rheine-Bentlage in the autumn of 1944. Hptm. Rudolf Rösch is seen centre with Ritterkreuz, while to the left is Lt. Albert Maser of 3./KG 51. Rösch was reported missing following a reconnaissance flight near Helmond, Holland on November 28th 1944. Both Unrau and Maser were detailed to take part in Operation Bodenplatte. (Eddie Creek)





day nine Arados took part in an attack on Liège.<sup>5</sup> Until the end of December, eight further missions were flown with, in total, 60 Ar 234s. No losses due to enemy action were sustained and the only personnel casualty was when Lt. Erich Dick was seriously injured when he crashed during take-off on December 27th. Lt. Dick's windshield was misted up and his aircraft hit an earth wall at the edge of the field and burned up. Dick succumbed to his severe burns on January 4th.<sup>6</sup>

### Preparations for the New Year's attack

Whether any of the commanding officers of KG 51 or KG 76 attended the briefing at the headquarters of II. Jagdkorps is not known. No known report indicates their presence. On December 9th however, Obstlt. Schenck did send a detailed operations directive to I./KG 51. This directive has survived and contains some interesting details on the mission of I./KG 51 on New Year's Day. The most interesting parts of this order are given here as an English translation:

*Gefechtsstand, den 9.12.1944.  
Kampfgeschwader 51  
Kommodore  
B.B. Nr. 663/44 g.Kdos.  
Einsatzbefehl für I./KG 51.*

#### I. Order.

*K.G. 51 had received the following assignment during the attack of II. Jagdkorps on the tactical air forces of the enemy in the Dutch-Belgian area;*

- 1) Following the attack of our own fighter units on the described targets, I./K.G. 51 will confront the enemy fighter response and in that way cover the retreat of our own forces.*
  - 2) The Gruppe will fly reconnaissance over the attacked airfields and will take pictures of these airfields and the parked aircraft.*
- Main goal of the mission: Aerial pictures of the results of the fighter units.*

#### II. Time of attack.

- a) Warning of the upcoming attack will be given 24 hours in advance by the codeword 'Varus'.*
- b) Aircraft will be pulled to the edge of the field on the evening before the attack at the codeword 'Teutonicus'.*
- c) Date and time of attack will be given at following codeword 'Hermann'.*
- d) Postponement of the attack will be given by codeword 'Dorothea'.*

*Receipt of the codeword is to be reported by the Kommandeur to the Kommodore in person.<sup>7</sup>*



Hptm. Dieter Lukesch, Staffelführer of 9./KG 76 and commander of the first operational Arado Ar 234 B-2 bomber unit, seen here at Burg on December 18th 1944, just before the unit's transfer to Münster-Handorf. (Lukesch)

The Gruppe was apparently already informed of the attack by December 9th, just a few days after the meeting at Altenkirchen on the 5th. Further, it is interesting to note that the main objective of I./KG 51 was not to attack the airfields itself but rather the reconnaissance of the airfields after the attack by the conventional fighter units.

The same document reveals that as soon as the codeword 'Varus' was received, the Gruppe was to ensure that a maximum number of Me 262s would be ready for the operation. At the same time, pilots would be given a detailed briefing and as many pilots that were available were to participate. When the codeword 'Teutonicus' was received, the aircraft were to be pulled to the edge of the field during the evening twilight to guarantee take-off without delay the following morning.

Strangely, I./KG 51 was also ordered to transfer one Staffel to Euskirchen-Odendorf on receipt of the codeword 'Varus'. Supply of fuel would be taken care of by II. Jagdkorps. I. Gruppe was ordered to send an officer to Odendorf airfield to inspect readiness. Apparently, this was considered impossible as no aircraft of I./KG 51 were transferred to Odendorf, let alone on December 31st. Take-off time was to be chosen by the Geschwader so that the Me 262s would arrive over the target area once the piston-engined fighters were on their return flight. Every pilot was ordered to take aerial pictures of two airfields, with one of those two airfields as main objective. The names of the airfields and how they were divided among the pilots were to be reported to the Geschwaderstab. Even if enemy fighters were to attack the jets, aerial pictures would have to be taken. Pilots were further ordered to attack and shoot down such enemy fighters wherever possible to cover the retreat of the piston-engined fighters. Special care was to be taken in identifying friend or foe. The bombs, which had to be carried for stability reasons during take-off, were to be dropped on enemy AAA positions.<sup>8</sup>

KG 51 strength on December 31st

	A/c	A/c	A/c	Pilot	Pilot	Pilot	Pilot
	Auth	On Str	Serv	Auth	Pres	Ready	Not ready
Stab KG 51	1	1	0	1	4	1	3
I./KG 51	40	30	21	40	40	33	7
II./KG 51	40	13	3	40	20	0	20

Einsatzstaffel III./KG 76 strength on December 31st

	A/c	A/c	A/c	Pilot	Pilot	Pilot	Pilot
	Auth	On Str	Serv	Auth	Pres	Ready	Not ready
E.-Staffel							
III./KG 76	16	13	6	16	19	12	7

In addition, upon receiving codeword 'Varus' all Fu.G 25a units would have to be removed from the aircraft. Finally, the crews and other personnel would be instructed about absolute secrecy and the instruction would be recorded. The pilots were also to be instructed how they should act if taken POW. Their belongings were to be checked before take-off and only a Frontflugaussweis was to be carried as identity. In a case of baling out over or landing in enemy territory they were ordered to try to escape.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that only the officers of the Stab and the three Staffelkapitäne were involved in the initial preparations.

Even on the evening of December 31st, the pilots of I./KG 51 had not yet been informed, but were only ordered to go to bed by 00.30 hrs. They were told that the next day would be a "...special day."<sup>10</sup> Whether the same directive listed above was also sent to II./KG 51 at Hesepe is unknown. The strength report for KG 51 on December 31st gave the following numbers:<sup>11</sup> (see table below left).

From this strength report it can be concluded that only I./KG 51 was scheduled to fly operations on January 1st 1945. Some 21 Me 262A-2s were available to the crews. However, there are indications that at least a few pilots of II./KG 51 participated in the attack on January 1st. Therefore, Hptm. Hans-Joachim Grundmann may have ordered some of his pilots to fly the few operational Me 262s available at Hesepe.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of December, Einsatzstaffel III./KG 76 had been flying its operations under the direct command of Stab KG 51. It is no surprise therefore that the Einsatzstaffel received its orders for the operation from KG 51. Although no details of initial planning are known, the order to attack on January 1st has survived. The telex arrived on 31.12.1944 at 23.35 hrs:

*"Operational directive for 1.1.45 – codeword Hermann – Time of attack 09.20 hrs – Approach at high altitude allowed – attack height for bomb containers 1,000 metres, without delay – for other aircraft the height which is best – target area is the southern edge of the airfield, without taking defences into consideration."<sup>13</sup>*

Obstlt. Schenck, Kommodore of KG 51, signed the order. Although not mentioned in the order, the Einsatzstaffel must have received details about its target some time previously. The Staffel was ordered to attack Gilze-Rijen, a fairly large airfield some 15 kilometres east of Breda. No. 35 Recce Wing with Nos. 2, 4 and 268 Squadrons were stationed at Gilze-Rijen, or B-77 as it was known to the Allies.

The strength of Einsatzstaffel III./KG 76 on December 31st was reported as follows:<sup>14</sup> (see left).







Apparently the ground crew of the Einsatzstaffel continued working through the night since from information contained in the war diary, at least 10 Ar 234s were available on the morning of January 1st.

#### **Einsatzstaffel III./Kampfgeschwader 76's operations on New Year's Day, 1945<sup>15</sup>**

In the early morning of January 1st, the Einsatzstaffel received a direct order from Luftwaffenkommando West to fly a weather reconnaissance mission in the Southern Holland-Belgium-Rhine area in preparation for the attack later in the morning. In fact, this was the first night operation with jets in the history of aviation. Four Arado Ar 234 B-2s were prepared. At 04.00 hrs the first two pilots took off from Münster-Handorf:

04.00-05.10	Hptm. Diether Lukesch	F1+ST
04.04-05.20	Fj.Fw. Wolfgang Stauss	F1+CT

An hour later they were followed by two more Arados:

05.04-06.21	Oblt. Friedrich Fendrich	F1+HT
05.06-06.25	Uffz. Paul Winguth	F1+OT

The route of both flights was Handorf-Nijmegen-Rotterdam-Antwerp-Brussels-Liège-Köln-Handorf. Altitude was 5,000 metres. To conceal their real intentions, bombs were loaded and nuisance attacks were carried out. Attacks were made on

Brussels, where two hits were registered in the city and one on the railway station of Brussels-North, and one hit was registered in Liège. Hptm. Lukesch and Fj.Fw. Stauss released their bombs at 04.38 and 04.39 hrs respectively. Fj.Fw. Stauss dropped his SC 500 on the station at Brussels.<sup>16</sup> Oblt. Fendrich and Uffz. Winguth dropped at 05.46 and 05.56 hrs. In total one SC 500 and three SC 250 were dropped.

It was noticed that the Antwerp docks and the stations at Brussels were brightly lit. Strong enemy artillery fire was seen in the Elsenborn area. No enemy attacks, neither by nightfighters or AAA, were recorded. The main goal of the mission was however the weather reconnaissance. The night was clear and visibility was up to 40 kilometres. Between Liège and Köln there was cumulus with 6/10 coverage.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the weather was promising for the attack by the piston-engined fighters later in the morning.

As mentioned, the groundcrews of III./KG 76 did their best and managed to get ten Arados ready for the attack on Gilze-Rijen, so that by 08.55 hrs, the pilots were ready for take-off. The time of the attack was set for 09.20 hrs. Four pilots encountered difficulties with their jets and were not able to take off. Hptm. Lukesch and Fw. Dierks both suffered failure of the port engine.<sup>18</sup> Oblt. Fendrich's Arado suffered tyre damage and Lt. Rögele also was not able to take off. Apparently this delayed take-off for the other jets. Fw. Hachmann and Oblt. Stark were the first to take

The dawn of a new age:  
Ar 234 B-2s of III./KG 76  
lined up in the snow at  
Burg near Magdeburg,  
December 1944.  
(Eddie Creek)



Spirits was high within the Ar 234 unit. From left to right: Oblt. Walter Sass, Lt. Walter Schmitz (la), unknown, unknown, Oblt. Böhmer z. See, unknown, Lt. Eberhard Rögele, Oblt. Friedrich Fendrich (half covered), Hptm. Dieter Lukesch, unknown. (Lukesch)

off at 09.13 hrs. The following pilots participated in the attack:

Hptm. Diether Lukesch F1+BT  
Did not start owing engine trouble.

Uffz. Harry Thimm F1+CT  
09.17-10.40

Oblt. Friedrich Fendrich F1+FT  
Did not start owing to tyre damage.

Uffz. Rudi Zwiener F1+HT  
09.27-10.34

Fw. Adolf Dierks F1+NT  
Did not start owing to engine trouble.

Fw. Alfred Hachmann F1+OT  
09.13-10.18

Uffz. Helmut Sickert F1+QT  
09.14-10.35

Lt. Eberhard Rögele F1+ST  
Did not start, cause unknown.

Oblt. Walter Sass F1+CD  
09.14-10.22

Oblt. Artur Stark F1+DD  
09.13-10.03

In loose formation, the remaining Arados headed south-west.<sup>19</sup> As Uffz. Zwiener took-off more than ten minutes later than the others, he must have been trailing behind. A course was set from Handorf to Arnhem, from Arnhem to Tilburg and finally to Gilze-Rijen airfield.<sup>20</sup> The Arados climbed to 5,000 metres and then following a steady dive to 1,200 metres attacked Gilze-Rijen between 09.32 and 09.52 hrs.<sup>21</sup> Each aircraft carried one AB 500 bomb container with 24 SD 15 bombs. It was reported that the bombs fell on the airfield, but no results were observed. The pilots observed 30 single-engined fighters on the field.

Allied reports indicate that the attack on Gilze-Rijen started at 09.22 hrs and with intervals the attack lasted until 10.05 hrs.<sup>22</sup> Dutch eyewitnesses noted three 'Me 262s' attacking from 1500 metres and dropping bombs on the airfield. The jets were seen to pull up and the AAA guns opened up in vain to catch the fast machines. As quickly as they arrived, the jets disappeared on the horizon.<sup>23</sup> Whether these were actually the Arados of KG 76 is not known, but it seems likely. According to the Operational Record Book of No. 2736 Squadron some 30 enemy aircraft, attacked Gilze-Rijen. Other sources list a total of nine aircraft.<sup>24</sup> It is believed that a few pilots of other Jagdgeschwader, mainly JG 26 and JG 77, may have attacked Gilze-Rijen by mistake. Together both RAF Regiment Squadrons, No.



Hptm. Dieter Lukesch stands in the cockpit as a Kettenkrafttrad tracked motorcycle tows his Ar 234 B-2, F1+B2 along the runway at Münster-Handorf in December 1944. (Eddie Creek)



2736 and No. 2845, fired 806 rounds and claimed three aircraft destroyed and a further five damaged. More precisely two Bf 109s and an Me 262 were claimed destroyed. However, these losses cannot be identified. One loss of an Fw 190 D-9 of JG 26 and possibly an Fw 190 of JG 1 can be attributed to the RAF Regiments. No Me 262 loss is known in that area. Little damage was done

at Gilze-Rijen. Anti-personnel bombs came down near flying control, but caused no serious damage. One of No. 123 Wing's Typhoons was destroyed and a few others of No. 168 Squadron were damaged. Two Ansons of No. 84 Group Communications Squadron and one of No. 83 GCS were slightly damaged.<sup>25</sup> Seven airmen of No. 123 Wing were slightly injured. In addition,

Groundcrew use a mobile generator to charge batteries on Hptm. Dieter Lukesch's Ar 234 prior to a flight from Münster-Handorf in December 1944. (Eddie Creek)



No. 2736 Squadron reported three wounded.<sup>26</sup>

After the attack on Gilze-Rijen the Arados continued in the direction of Antwerp and Brussels to evaluate the attacks of the Jagdgeschwader. Three fires were reported at Antwerp-Deurne and over 20 fires at Brussels-Melsbroek. At Brussels-Evere the number of fires could not be counted and a smoke pillar was rising up to 6,500 metres. Eight fires were reported at the northern part of Eindhoven airfield, the rest being obscured by thick smoke. No fires were seen at Florennes and Chievres. It is not clear why the last two airfields were covered, as neither were targeted by any of the Jagdgeschwader. Especially in the Brussels area, strong AAA and also Spitfires were encountered. Nonetheless all six Arados returned, with only Uffz. Harry Thimm landing at Twente instead of Münster-Handorf.

Back at Münster-Handorf there appears to have been some discussion about the results of the attack on Gilze-Rijen. Lt. Walter Schmitz, the operations officer (Ia) of the Einsatzstaffel, wrote a comment in the unit's war diary:

*"Investigations showed that several pilots did not attack Gilze-Rijen, but instead had attacked a smaller airfield in the same area which was believed to be Gilze-Rijen. The pilots had assumed this, based on the information available to the pilots before the attack. Before the attack, the Staffel had asked several times for aerial pictures of Gilze-Rijen, but did not receive any. Because there were numerous airfields in the area, a mistake was inevitable."*<sup>27</sup>

According to Diether Lukesch, the pictures of Gilze-Rijen had arrived too late.<sup>28</sup> From a map in the war diary it appears that the Staffel thought that an airfield near Nistelrode (B-88 Heesch) had been attacked. However, no details are known of an attack on Heesch by jet aircraft and it seems that indeed most Arados did attack Gilze-Rijen. One thing however is certain; the damage at Gilze-Rijen was negligible.

## Kampfgeschwader 51s operations on New Year's Day 1945

The groundcrews of I./KG 51 had been working throughout the night to get as many Messerschmitts operational as possible. According to Hptm. Georg Csurusky, Staffelkapitän of I./KG 51, it was ordered that: "...everything that had wings would have to attack enemy airfields."<sup>29</sup> The Staffel Technical Officers such as Lt. Albert Maser of 3./KG 51, joined the groundcrew until late in the night.<sup>30</sup> At 06.00 hrs, the pilots of I./KG 51 were awakened and some time later they were gathered at the Gefechtsstand to be briefed.<sup>31</sup> About an hour before take-off Maj. Unrau held a briefing and the pilots received maps with details of the targets, enemy AAA positions and other necessary information. Every pilot was briefed on his reconnaissance assignments by his Staffelkapitän together with Oblt. Ludwig Albersmeyer, the Ia of I./KG 51.<sup>32</sup> The Me 262s were to attack at least the airfields of Eindhoven and Gilze-Rijen and it is known that at least Volkel was to be photographed.<sup>33</sup> Each Me 262 carried a pair of 250

Above right and below: Groundcrew of I./KG 51 struggle to keep warm as they work on the unit's Me 262s amidst the harsh winter conditions of the Western Front in late 1944/early 1945. The Gruppe was assigned to reconnoitre Allied airfields on January 1st 1945. (Eddie Creek)





kg bombs and robot cameras were either installed or were to be operated by hand. Most Messerschmitts were to take off individually, and some in Rotten.<sup>34</sup>

The following pilots are believed to have been detailed to take part in Operation Bodenplatte:<sup>35</sup>

Hptm. Hans Gutzmer (Ia)	Stab KG 51
Maj. Heinz Unrau (Kommandeur)	Stabl./KG51
Lt. Wilhelm Batel (TO)	Stab I./KG 51
Hptm. Georg Csurusky (Staffelkapitän)	1./KG51
Lt. Anton Schimmel	1./KG 51
Uffz. Alfred Färber	1./KG 51
Hptm. Rudolf Abrahamczik (Staffelkapitän)	2./KG51
Oblt. Heinz Strothmann	2./KG 51
Lt. Heinrich Haeffner	2./KG 51
Lt. Dr. Oswald v. Ritter	2./KG 51
Lt. Kurt Piel	2./KG 51
Uffz. Eberhard Pölling	2./KG 51
Uffz. Ernst Altenheimer	2./KG 51
Uffz. Helmut Kroll	2./KG 51
Hptm. Eberhard Winkel (Staffelkapitän)	3./KG51
Oblt. Gustav Stephan	3./KG 51
Lt. Albert Maser	3./KG 51
Lt. Erwin Dickmann	3./KG 51
Ofw. Gerd Gittmann	3./KG 51
Ofw. Ernst Wiese	3./KG 51
Uffz. Helmut Seidel	3./KG 51

Around 08.45 hrs the pilots prepared for take-off and immediately the first problems occurred. The Me 262s of Maj. Heinz Unrau, Lt. Wilhelm Batel and Hptm. Rudolf Abrahamczik suffered engine failure and they had to abandon take-off. Only Major Unrau managed to find another Messerschmitt, '9K+AB', and took-off when the other pilots were already out of sight.<sup>36</sup> Take-off, according to the logbook of Lt. Heinrich Haeffner,

was at 08.55 hrs. He took over 2. Staffel as Hptm. Abrahamczik was unable to take part in the mission and remembered: "Wake up call was at 06.00 hrs and soon we gathered in the Operations Room. Here, we heard that the Luftwaffe was to attack all Dutch and Belgian airfields at the same time. It was also hoped that the Tommies had been celebrating and would not be ready that early. Our target was Gilze-Rijen. We received aerial pictures and studied them thoroughly and waited for take-off. We already saw several fighter formations led by Ju 88s flying over Hopsten. We were not allowed to use our R/T. We took off at 08.55 hrs. Unfortunately, the jet engines of Gruppen-kommandeur Major Unrau and our Staffelkapitän Hptm. Abrahamczik did not start. I led the 2. Staffel to our target."<sup>37</sup>

One of the last pilots to take off was probably Hptm. Hans Gutzmer, the Ia of Stab KG 51. Flying '9K+KK', a 2. Staffel aircraft, he took off at 09.32 hrs from Hopsten to attack Eindhoven airfield. The Messerschmitts headed south-west and after a few minutes neared the front line. Near

Maj. Unrau (centre), Kommandeur of I./KG 51 in discussion with Hptm. Eberhard Winkel (right), Staffelkapitän of 3./KG 51 at Rheine in early 1945. Winkel had incurred head injuries following an encounter with Allied fighters. Note the model of an Me 262 in his hand. Winkel was detailed to fly in Operation Bodenplatte and was KIA over Giebelstadt on March 21st 1945. (Eddie Creek)



Groundcrew use a hydraulic bomb-lift to fit a pair of 500 kg SC 500 bombs to the 'Wikingerschiff' bomb racks below an Me 262 – this an A-1a used for bomb-dropping trials. (Eddie Creek)



Pilots of I./KG 51 gathered outside their Gefechtsstand at Rheine in the winter of 1944. From left: Lt. Wilhelm Batel, Lt. Heinrich Haefner, Lt. Ritter von Rittersheim, Hptm. Rudolf Abrahamczik, Hptm Rudolf Rösch and Lt. Albert Maser. (Eddie Creek)

Arnhem, Lt. Haefner and his Staffel were attacked by 15 enemy fighters. However, the Me 262s evaded them easily using their superior speed and continued their mission.<sup>38</sup>

Without doubt these enemy fighters were Spitfires from No. 442 Squadron. Thirteen Spitfires had taken off from Heesch at 08.57 hrs for an armed recce in the Osnabrück-Münster area. Soon afterwards Green Section, led by F/Lt. R.K. Trumley, was attacked head on by an Me 262 just east of Zutphen. All four pilots in the Section had a shot at the German jet but none of them saw strikes. However, the jet appeared to stream smoke from the port side. The whole Section chased the Me 262 and apparently it was not able to pull away from the Spitfires. Before the Spitfire pilots could make any further attacks, they were recalled to base (Heesch) as there were

enemy fighters reported. The four Spitfire pilots claimed an Me 262 damaged.<sup>39</sup> Some time later F/Lt. J.P. Lumsden flying number one in Red section spotted an Me 262 south of the Reichswald. The jet was flying east towards Wesel. F/Lt. Lumsden took a shot at 400-500 yards range and saw a single strike on the tail assembly. He claimed one Me 262 damaged.<sup>40</sup> No reports of damage to the Me 262s of I./KG 51 are known however. Lt. Haefner continues: "In a steady glide from 9,000 metres to 1,000 metres, we attacked Gilze-Rijen airfield and dropped our bombs. Afterwards, we attacked parked aircraft with our cannon. I flew over the airfield a second time and took pictures of the burning wreckage and the destroyed hangars with the robot camera. On the return flight I overflew Volkel. Here too, everything was burning, I could clearly see 16 destroyed aircraft and I took several pictures."<sup>41</sup>

Lt. Haefner's observations cannot be explained. Damage to Gilze-Rijen was minimal and at Volkel there was no damage at all! It is possible that Lt. Haefner may have overflown Eindhoven airfield instead of Volkel.

Hptm. Hans Gutzmer attacked Eindhoven and reported that he destroyed four aircraft on the field.<sup>42</sup> He probably took pictures of the same airfield too.



There are several reports of Me 262s attacking Allied airfields. As mentioned, Gilze-Rijen reported attacks by Me 262s, undoubtedly those belonging to 2./KG 51. Eindhoven reported that jets were among the first aircraft to attack Eindhoven and bombs were dropped.<sup>43</sup> Around 11.30 hrs, a Dutch eyewitness spotted a silver coloured Me 262 flying over Eindhoven airfield, but this can not be confirmed by any documents. It could have been on a recce mission.<sup>44</sup> At Volkel several individual Me 262s were reported. At 09.25 hrs an Me 262 flew across the field from south to north at 5,000 feet. No. 3 Gun of No. 2874 Squadron fired 15 rounds. The aircraft flew away to the north, no bombs were dropped and no hits were claimed. At 10.20 hrs another Me 262 flew over the airfield from south to north at approximately 10,000-12,000 feet. No. 3 Gun opened up again, but the shells burst short. Helmond was attacked by several Me 262s at 09.15 hrs. Finally two Me 262s were spotted at 10.20 hrs and the 40 mm guns of No. 2881 Squadron opened up, but with no results. At Ophoven in Belgium one Me 262 attacked the field at 09.15 hrs.<sup>45</sup> No further reports of attacks by Me 262s are known.

All Me 262s returned safely to Hopsten. Lt. Heinrich Haefner landed at 09.51 hrs and Hptm. Hans Gutzmer returned at 10.43 hrs.<sup>46</sup> During the afternoon of January 1st, I./KG 51 departed Hopsten and transferred to Giebelstadt. Eighteen Me 262s took off at approximately 15.40 hrs.<sup>47</sup> The next day missions in the Saarbrücken area were to be flown. I./KG 51 would return to the Rheine area at the end of February.

Unfortunately no documentary evidence exists to confirm if II./KG 51 participated in the attack of January 1st. There are however indications that at least a few pilots from the Gruppe took off from Hesepe and attacked airfields in the south of Holland. It is very likely that at least the three Me 262s which were reported operational on December 31st took part in the mission.

## Conclusion

The effect of the attack by the Me 262s of KG 51 and the Ar 234s of KG 76 can only be described as minimal. The bombing of Gilze-Rijen by both units had virtually no results. The extent of the damage on Eindhoven caused by the Me 262s is unknown, but could have been substantial. The presence of the jet aircraft in the area had no effect on the dogfights between the Allied fighters and the German piston-engined fighters. The retreat of the units in the area, such as JG 3 and JG 6, was not sufficiently protected by I./KG 51. When these units encountered Allied fighters, losses could not be prevented. Helpful indeed, were the jets in

taking aerial pictures of the targets and this gave II. Jagdkorps a better understanding of the damage at the numerous Allied airfields. This however cannot be enough to rate the missions by the jets a success.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 252, dated 13.09.1944.

<sup>2</sup> War Diary Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51, and letter Deutsche Dienststelle dated 17.07.1991. The 30 year old Ofw. Kaiser had been awarded the DKIG on 27.07.1942.

<sup>3</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung II./KG 51, R.A.F. Crashed Enemy Aircraft Report No. 265, Operations record Book No. 126 Wing.

<sup>4</sup> PRO AIR40/2046.

<sup>5</sup> Einsatzstatistik Einsatzstaffel III./KG 76, 10.14-11.48 hrs.

<sup>6</sup> Namentliche Verlustmeldung III./KG 76 and letter Diether Lukesch dated 20.11.1999.

<sup>7</sup> Einsatzbefehl für I./K.G. 51, dated 9.12.1944.

<sup>8</sup> Einsatzbefehl für I./K.G. 51, dated 9.12.1944.

<sup>9</sup> Einsatzbefehl für I./K.G. 51, dated 9.12.1944.

<sup>10</sup> War Diary Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51.

<sup>11</sup> RL2-III-734.

<sup>12</sup> Based on info Jan Horn, dated 15.06.2001.

<sup>13</sup> Fernschreiben 1a/45 g.Kdos. vom 31.12.1944, KTB Einsatzstaffel III./K.G. 76.

<sup>14</sup> RL2-III-734.

<sup>15</sup> The details of the operations of Einsatzstaffel III./KG 76 are primarily based on the surviving Kriegstagebuch of the unit.

<sup>16</sup> Flugbuch Fj.Fw. Wolfgang Staus. Details forwarded by Jan Horn, dated 28.09.2000. Apparently Fj.Fw. Staus only flew a bombing mission. No mention of weather reconnaissance in his Flugbuch.

<sup>17</sup> Erfolgsmeldung Nr. 1, E.-Staffel III./K.G. 76, Kdo-Hptm. Lukesch, Abt. Ia.

<sup>18</sup> Letter Diether Lukesch, dated 20.11.1999.

<sup>19</sup> Letter Diether Lukesch, dated 20.11.1999.

<sup>20</sup> Flugbuch Fw Adolf Hachmann and Flugweg-Anlage KTB III./KG 76.

<sup>21</sup> According to Flugbuch Fw Adolf Hachmann he released his bombs from 2000 metres at 09.32 hrs.

<sup>22</sup> AIR 16/1035, No. 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 144.

<sup>23</sup> Vijf jaar luchtfront, het vliegveld Gilze-Rijen in de 2e WO, page 185.

<sup>24</sup> AIR 16/1035, No. 84 Group Intelligence Summary No. 144 lists 4 Me 262, 3 Me 109, 1 Fw 190 and a Me 410.

<sup>25</sup> Operations Record Books No. 83 and No. 84 Group Communications Squadron.

<sup>26</sup> 'Battle of the Airfields' by Norman Franks, page 43.

<sup>27</sup> KTB Einsatzstaffel III./K.G. 76.

<sup>28</sup> Letter Diether Lukesch, dated 20.11.1999.

<sup>29</sup> Letter Jan Horn, dated 22.01.2000.

<sup>30</sup> Kampfgeschwader 51 'Edelweiss' by Wolfgang Dierich, page 237.

<sup>31</sup> War Diary Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51.

<sup>32</sup> Info Jan Horn, dated 21.03.2000, based on letter Heinz Unrau.

<sup>33</sup> Flugbuch Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51, and Flugbuch Hptm. Hans Gutzmer, Stab KG 51.

<sup>34</sup> Info Jan Horn, dated 21.03.2000, based on letter Heinz Unrau.

<sup>35</sup> Research by Jan Horn, dated 22.01.2000.

<sup>36</sup> Info Jan Horn, dated 21.03.2000, based on letter Heinz Unrau.

<sup>37</sup> War Diary Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51.

<sup>38</sup> War Diary Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51.

<sup>39</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. R.K. Trumley, F/Lt. W.H. Dunne, F/Lt. J.N.G. Dick and P/O E.C. Baker, No. 442 Squadron.

<sup>40</sup> Personal Combat Report F/Lt. J.P. Lumsden, No. 442 Squadron.

<sup>41</sup> War Diary Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51.

<sup>42</sup> Flugbuch Hptm. Hans Gutzmer, Stab KG 51.

<sup>43</sup> Operational Record Book No. 247 Squadron.

<sup>44</sup> Letter Ad van Lingen, dated 09.02.2000.

<sup>45</sup> Operations Record Book No. 2873, 2874, 2876 and 2881 Squadron R.A.F. Regiment.

<sup>46</sup> Flugbuch Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51, and Flugbuch Hptm. Hans Gutzmer, Stab KG 51.

<sup>47</sup> Flugbuch Lt. Heinrich Haefner, 2./KG 51.

# Aftermath

## An assessment and evaluation of the attack

### Losses on the Allied airfields

**I**N most cases details regarding the destruction of Allied aircraft claimed by each of the Jagdgeschwader – let alone each Gruppe – are unfortunately unknown. Only a few sources exist, which give an indication of the number of aircraft destroyed and/or damaged. One primary document is a report made by the Luftwaffenführungsstab on February 25th 1945. This document gives the following details:

1. Destroyed on eight airfields (Eindhoven, Gent, Gilze-Rijen, Grimbergen, Maldegem, Melsbroek, Ophoven, Ussel), confirmed by aerial reconnaissance:  
239 single-engined aircraft  
21 twin-engined aircraft  
19 four-engined aircraft
2. Destroyed on seven airfields (Asch, Deurne, Evere, Le Culot, Metz, St.Trond, Volkel), based on reports by the attacking units:  
113 single-engined aircraft  
7 twin-engined aircraft  
3 four-engined aircraft
3. Damaged on all 15 airfields, based on the reports by attacking units:  
106 single-engined aircraft  
6 twin-engined aircraft  
2 four-engined aircraft
4. Reported were also the following aerial combat claims:  
65 destroyed, 12 probably destroyed

Based on this document, the Luftwaffe claimed 479 aircraft destroyed and a further 114 damaged. Added to this should be the claims for other equipment destroyed. A II. Jagdkorps document of provides more information on this aspect:

1. 2 Tanks, 89 M/T, 1 Locomotive, 1 freight train, 5 petrol bowlers, 1 oil depot, 1 tent, 1 repair hangar, 2 barracks, 2 hangars and 3 AAA positions destroyed.
2. 54 M/T, 9 locomotives, 2 petrol bowlers, 1 fire truck, 1 tracking station, 5 barracks and 1 small transport damaged.
3. 23 AAA positions attacked with good results.

What were the actual losses on the Allied airfields? Several attempts have been made to calculate this, but regrettably until this day no exact numbers are known. However, a reasonably accurate assumption

can be made based on detailed research undertaken in the past on which the authors have continued. A report made by Headquarters of the 2nd TAF on January 8th listed the losses as follows:

#### Operational aircraft 2nd TAF

75 Cat. E 50 damaged

#### Non-operational 2nd TAF

15 Cat. E 10 damaged

#### Operational USAAF

22 Cat. E 30 damaged

#### Non-operational USAAF

3 Cat. E

#### Operational other commands on 2nd TAF airfields

25 (some only damaged)

#### Non-operational other commands on 2nd TAF airfields

9 (some only damaged)

This results in a total figure of 115 aircraft destroyed, 90 damaged and an additional 34 destroyed or damaged. However, subsequent research has showed that these figures are relatively conservative. More aircraft of the US Ninth AF were destroyed and none of the Eighth AF aircraft present on the airfields seem to have been included. A detailed analysis of all known aircraft losses on the airfields has been made and this results in the following figures:

Type	Destroyed	Damaged
Single-engined a/c	143	139
Twin-engined a/c	74	12
Four-engined	15	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>156</b>

This number is already considerable higher than the number listed in the HQ 2nd TAF report. As these figures are based on known individual aircraft losses, it seems logical that even these figures are conservative. For instance in these figures only 16 B-17s/B-24s and three P-51s of the Eighth AF are included and it is known that some 16 B-17s, 14 B-24s, eight P-51s and two P-47s of the Eighth AF were destroyed in the attack. Including these figures and assuming that the actual losses were some 15 per cent higher than the conservative losses listed above, a total of some 290 aircraft destroyed and a further 180 damaged is achieved. This leaves the aerial claims by the German pilots and there is detailed information on only some 50 of the reported 79 aerial victories. On the other

hand, relatively accurate details are available on the number of Allied aircraft destroyed in aerial combat. In fact, only 15 Allied aircraft were actually shot down by German fighters and around ten more were damaged in aerial combat. This leads to the conclusion that there was an over-claiming by the German attackers of approximately 1:3.

Combining all the figures known on the actual Allied losses incurred during Bodenplatte leads to the conclusion that around 305 aircraft were destroyed and a further 190 damaged. A total number not far off the actual claims by the German pilots.

### Luftwaffe losses as a result of Bodenplatte

In contrast with the Allied ground losses on the airfields, Luftwaffe losses are quite clear from the existing records. Subsequent research by the authors has made it possible to add and sometimes correct the numbers in these files. The total number of aircraft losses were:

271 Bf 109s/Fw 190s destroyed  
65 Bf 109s/Fw 190s damaged

Based on a total number of approximately 850 fighters or fighter-bombers participating, this results in a 32 per cent loss based on destroyed aircraft only. If we add the damaged aircraft, this results in a staggering 40 per cent of the total force. Added to this total, should be the Lotse losses:

9 Ju 88 destroyed  
4 Ju 88 damaged

It is assumed that approximately 44 Ju 88 Lotsen participated, meaning that 30 per cent of the Lotse were either destroyed or damaged.

Worse however, were the personnel losses. If we look again at the single-engine aircraft losses, the following numbers are known:

143 pilots killed or missing  
70 pilots taken prisoner  
21 pilots wounded

These figures show that no fewer than 213 pilots were lost during the operation, almost 25 per cent of the total attacking force. Some of the wounded pilots should in fact be added as several of them did not return to operations before the end of the war. If we concentrate on the number of 213 pilots we see that included are

3 Kommandore  
5 Kommandeure  
14 Staffelführer  
Approximately 45 experienced pilots

The remainder of the losses – some 145 pilots – were all relatively inexperienced with no more than 5-10 missions on their credit. The loss of 22 unit commanders was a terrible blow for the Luftwaffe. These men were almost irreplaceable. Commanding officers such as Obst. Alfred Druschel, Maj. Günther Specht, Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong, to name a few, with their vast experience in combat were rare anyway. The loss of successful Staffelführer or Schwarmführer like Oblt. Eberhard Fischler Graf von Treuberg, Lt. Hans-Ulrich Jung, Lt. Alwin Doppler, Lt. Heinrich Hackler, Ofw. Kurt Niedereichholz, Ofw. Franz Meindl, Fj. Ofw. Fritz Schuler, Fj. Ofw. Kurt Opitz or Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber represented a severe blow to their individual units. These men were irreplaceable within a Staffel. They guided the younger pilots and had served as an example to them. If they did not return, morale in the Staffel dropped almost immediately. If even they could not survive, who else could?

### Reasons for the failure

What were the reasons for such staggering losses? Based on 292 individual losses listed in Appendix C the following statistical analysis can be made:

47 per cent by Allied AAA  
23 per cent by Allied fighters  
5 per cent by German Flak  
5 per cent in accidents  
5 per cent by either Allied AAA or fighters  
3 per cent from technical failures  
1 per cent from fuel starvation  
11 per cent to unknown causes

Based on these figures a few important conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the myth that one third or even two-thirds of the German losses were caused by 'friendly' Flak can now be eliminated. Evidence exists that 15 fighters were indeed shot down by their own Flak. Also, two Ju 88 Lotsen were shot down by German Flak. Even if we add half of the losses of which the cause is unknown, this would be no more than approximately 30-35 aircraft shot down by 'friendly' Flak.

Of the 292 losses listed in Appendix C, some 221 are attributed to Allied AAA and/or Allied fighters. These numbers correspond well with the 2nd TAF headquarters report, which divided the Allied claims as follows:

Aerial claims 2nd TAF	57
Aerial claims 9th AF	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>

AAA claims HM ships Scheldt	2
AAA claims British Army	44
AAA claims RAF Regiments	43
AAA claims US 9th Army	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>



The figures clearly indicate that the Allied AAA had been the real menace for the German attack force. Almost half of the total losses can be directly attributed to Allied AAA. The other major factor was Allied fighter aircraft, which in several cases were already in the air or in the process of taking off. No less than 75 per cent of all losses were caused either by Allied AAA or fighters.

Why were loss rates attributable to Allied AAA and fighters so high? Some major causes can be explained:

1. Fixing the time of attack at 09.20 hrs. for all units simultaneously resulted in the fact that several Allied fighter units were already airborne. Furthermore, when these Allied units were able to engage the attackers, they were in better position than the German attackers flying low on the deck. Added to this should be the general poor training standard of the young inexperienced German fighter pilots, which gave them literally no chance. This resulted in particularly heavy losses among JG 1, JG 3, JG 6, JG 11 and JG 53. In some cases Allied units had taken off at 08.00 hrs. This was approximately 20 minutes earlier than their German attackers, although their airfields were further east so daybreak would have been earlier. It is believed that several Jagdgeschwader were in position to take off 45 to 60 minutes earlier than they actually did.

2. In some cases the course to the target was made over the front line area where heavy battles had been fought in the past weeks. Consequently, numerous Allied AAA units were concentrated in these areas. JG 11 and SG 4's route to the target crossed the heavily fought-over area of the Hurtgen forest. JG 2, and to a lesser extent JG 4, flew over the strongly defended area between Monschau and Malmedy. Consequently these units suffered from concentrated AAA fire over the frontline. In all cases less-defended frontline areas seem to have been possible for the outward course.

3. In other cases the course to the target was set in such a manner that it was not until 09.00 hrs, that the front line was crossed; for example, JG 1's and JG 26's crossing of the Scheldt estuary. By that time, Allied AAA crews were fully combat-ready and combined with the clear weather, the attacking German units were a welcome target.

4. The pilots of the Jagdgeschwader, especially the young inexperienced ones, lacked training in low-level strafing attacks. A few units flew some training missions in the second half of December, but this was surely not enough to make up for the lack of experience. Consequently basic principles for strafing were not kept and several losses occurred

over the targets. The clearest picture came from men of the 404th FG witnessing JG 4's attack on St. Trond. The German pilots were seen to turn over the airfield when they had completed their strafing run. This was not done as tightly or at as low altitude as necessary during a strafing attack and all AAA claims were made using hits inflicted during turns.

5. The order to commit the pilots to carry out several strafing attacks on the target was disastrous as well. As the first attack was in almost all cases a total surprise, the following continuous strafing gave the Allied defenders sufficient time to aim and shoot down many of the attackers. A 'hit-and-run' tactic would have been more advisable.

However, the most important question is what could be expected of this mission, even if all the points listed above had been followed? The best possible gain would have been the destruction of some 500-700 aircraft on the ground. The pilots of the aircraft however, would not have received a scratch. The allies could easily replace aircraft; but the loss of pilots was, at least on the short term, a different story. Every German loss over enemy territory would inevitably lead to loss of aircraft and pilot. This was something the Jagdwaffe could not afford and several of its Gruppen never really recovered from the blow they had received on January 1st 1945.

Finally, the tactical value of the mission should be seen in a broader picture. The attack was planned to coincide with the offensive in the Ardennes. On January 1st 1945 this offensive had clearly come to a halt and, within the commands of Heeresgruppe B and Oberfeldmarschall West a more defensive roll in the Ardennes was already foreseen. An attack on the enemy tactical air forces with the objective of supporting the ground offensive came too late and should have been cancelled.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Luftwaffenführungsstab Ic, Fremde Luftwaffen West, Nr. 1160/45 g.Kdos. vom 25.2.1945.

<sup>2</sup> Fernschreiben II, Jako. Ic Nr. 140/44 geh. vom 3.1.1945.

<sup>3</sup> Headquarters 2nd Tactical Air Force, attack on airfields by the G.A.F. on 1st January 1945, of 3.1.1945 and 8.1.1945.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>5</sup> Battle of the Airfields by Norman Franks, page 168.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix H.

<sup>8</sup> Personnel loss records at Deutsche Dienststelle (WASt) and material loss records at Militärarchiv Freiburg.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix E.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix C and E.

<sup>12</sup> Headquarters Second Tactical Air Force, attack on airfields by the G.A.F. on 1st January 1945, of 3.1.1945 and 8.1.1945.

<sup>13</sup> Take-off 365th Fighter Squadron at A-90 Toul at 08.00 hrs., take-off 314th FS/324th FG at Y-7 Dole at 08.00 hrs. and No. 308 Squadron at B.61 St. Denis-Westrem at 08.15 hrs.

<sup>14</sup> Monatsbericht des Jagdgeschwaders 4 (Januar 1945) von Obstlt. Michalski, dated 1.2.1945.

<sup>15</sup> Unit History Headquarters 404th Fighter Group, January 1945.

<sup>16</sup> H.Gru.B Ia Nr. 11918/44 g.Kdos. vom 31.12.1944 and KTB OB.West, 31.12.1944.

# Appendix 1: Luftwaffe Order of Battle: December 31st 1944

Unit	Commanding officer	Location	Target
<b>Luftwaffenkommando West</b>	Gen.Lt. Joseph Schmid	Dehrn/Limburg	
<b>Gen.Kdo. II. Jagdkorps</b>	Gen.Maj. Dietrich Peltz	Flammersfeld	
<i>3. Jagddivision</i>	Gen.Maj. Walter Grabmann	Wiedenbrück	
Stab JG 1	Obstlt. Herbert Ihlefeld	Twenthe	Maldegem
I./JG 1	Hptm. Georg Hackbarth (acting)	Twenthe	Maldegem/Ursel
II./JG 1	Oblt. Fritz Wegner (acting)	Drope	St.Denis-Westrem
III./JG 1	Hptm. Harald Moldenhauer	Rheine	Maldegem
Stab JG 3	Maj. Heinz Bär	Sennelager	Eindhoven
I./JG 3	Oblt. Alfred Seidl	Paderborn	Eindhoven
III./JG 3	Maj. Karl-Heinz Langer	Bad Lippspringe	Eindhoven
IV./JG 3	Lt. Siegfried Müller (acting)	Gütersloh	Eindhoven
Stab JG 6	Obstlt. Johann Kogler	Quackenbrück	Volkel
I./JG 6	Hptm. Willi Elstermann	Delmenhorst	Volkel
II./JG 6	Hptm. Johannes Naumann	Quackenbrück/Vechta	Volkel
III./JG 6	Maj. Helmut Kühle	Bissel	Volkel
Stab JG 26	Obstlt. Josef Priller	Fürstenau	Grimbergen
I./JG 26	Maj. Karl Borris	Fürstenau	Grimbergen
II./JG 26	Maj. Anton Hackl	Nordhorn	Brussels-Evere
III./JG 26	Hptm. Walter Krupinski	Plantlünne	Brussels-Evere
Stab JG 27	Maj. Ludwig Franzisket	Rheine	Brussels-Melsbroek
I./JG 27	Oblt. Eberhard Schade	Rheine	Brussels-Melsbroek
II./JG 27	Hptm. Herbert Kutscha	Hopsten	Brussels-Melsbroek
III./JG 27	Oblt. Emil Clade (acting)	Hesepe	Brussels-Melsbroek
IV./JG 27	Hptm. Hans-Heinz Dudeck	Achmer	Brussels-Melsbroek
III./JG 54	Oblt. Hans Dortenmann (acting)	Fürstenau	Grimbergen
IV./JG 54	Maj. Rudolf Klemm	Vörden	Brussels-Melsbroek
Stab JG 77	Maj. Siegfried Freytag (acting)	Dortmund	Antwerp-Deurne
I./JG 77	Lt. Karl Kühdorf (acting)	Dortmund	Antwerp-Deurne
II./JG 77	Maj. Siegfried Freytag	Bönninghardt	Antwerp-Deurne
III./JG 77	Maj. Armin Köhler	Düsseldorf	Antwerp-Deurne
<i>Jagdabschnittsführer Mittelrhein</i>	Obstlt. Gotthardt Handrick	Darmstadt	
Stab JG 2	Obstlt. Kurt Bühlig	Nidda	St.Trond
I./JG 2	Hptm. Franz Hrdlicka	Merzhausen	St.Trond
II./JG 2	Hptm. Georg Schröder	Nidda	St.Trond
III./JG 2	Oblt. Siegfried Lemke	Altenstadt/Ettinghausen	St.Trond
Stab SG 4	Obst. Alfred Druschel	Bonn-Hangelar	St.Trond
I./SG 4	Maj. Werner Dörnbrack	Bonn-Hangelar	St.Trond
II./SG 4	Hptm. Hans Stollnberger	Köln-Butzweilerhof	St.Trond
III./SG 4	Maj. Gerhard Weyert	Köln-Wahn	St.Trond
Stab JG 4	Maj. Gerhard Michalski	Rhein-Main	Le Culot
I./JG 4	Maj. Wilhelm Steinmann	Darmstadt-Griesheim	Le Culot
II./JG 4	Maj. Gerhard Schröder	Babenhhausen	Le Culot
III./JG 4	Hptm. Friedrich Eberle	Darmstadt-Griesheim	Le Culot
IV./JG 4	Hptm. Ernst Laube	Rhein-Main	Le Culot
Stab JG 11	Maj. Günther Specht	Biblis	Asch
I./JG 11	Hptm. Rüdiger Kirchmayr	Biblis	Asch
II./JG 11	Hptm. Karl Leonhard	Zellhausen	Asch
III./JG 11	Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong	Gross-Ostheim	Asch
<i>5. Jagddivision</i>	Gen.Maj. Karl Hentschell	Durlach/Karlsruhe	
Stab JG 53	Obstlt. Helmut Bennemann	Stuttgart-Echterdingen	Metz-Frescaty
II./JG 53	Maj. Julius Meimberg	Malmsheim	Metz-Frescaty
III./JG 53	Maj. Franz Götz	Kirrlach	Etain
IV./JG 53	Hptm. Friedrich Mürer	Stuttgart-Echterdingen	Metz-Frescaty
<i>3. Fliegerdivision</i>			
Stab KG 51	Obstlt. Wolfgang Schenck	Rheine	Not flown
I./KG 51	Maj. Heinz Unrau	Hopsten	Gilze-Volkel-Eindh.
II./KG 51	Hptm. Hans-Joachim Grundmann	Hesepe	Unknown
E.-Staffel III./KG 76	Hptm. Diether Lukesch	Münster-Handorf	Gilze-Rijen
<i>Aufklärer</i>			
NAGr 1	Maj. Werner Wilke	Bayreuth-Bindlach	Several
NAGr 13	Hptm. Gerhard Dickenbrock	Oedheim	Several

## Appendix 2: Luftwaffe Strength Report December 31st 1944

Mission 1.1.1945

Unit	Aircraft Authorized	Aircraft On strength	Aircraft Serviceable	Pilots Authorized	Pilots Present	Pilots Ready	Pilots Part. ready	Pilots Not ready	Aircraft Ready	Aircraft Flown
Stab JG 1	4	1 Fw 190A-9	1 Fw 190A-9	4	4	2	2	0	2	1
I./JG 1	68	25 Fw 190A-8 2 Fw 190A-9	20 Fw 190A-8 2 Fw 190A-9	68	53	31	22	0	22	22
II./JG 1	68	50 Fw 190A-8	36 Fw 190A-8	68	42	25	17	0	36	36
III./JG 1	68	1 Bf 109G-6 2 Bf 109G-10 15 Bf 109G-14	1 Bf 109G-6 1 Bf 109G-10 10 Bf 109G-14	68	68	25	41	2	12	12
Stab JG 2	4	1 Fw 190A-8/R6 4 Fw 190D-9	1 Fw 190A-8/R6 3 Fw 190D-9	4	3	3	0	0	3	3
I./JG 2	68	8 Fw 190A-8/R6 38 Fw 190D-9	6 Fw 190A-8/R6 29 Fw 190D-9	68	42	33	7	2	33	33
II./JG 2	68	20 Bf 109G-14 9 Bf 109K-4	13 Bf 109G-14 7 Bf 109K-4	68	40	26	4	10	20	20
III./JG 2	68	7 Fw 190A-8 1 Fw 190A-9 35 Fw 190D-9	5 Fw 190A-8 1 Fw 190A-9 34 Fw 190D-9	68	43	28	10	5	28	28
Stab JG 3	4	5 Fw 190A-9	3 Fw 190A-9	4	4	2	0	2	4	4
I./JG 3	68	16 Bf 109G-10 14 Bf 109G-14/AS	10 Bf 109G-10 12 Bf 109G-14/AS	68	35	18	14	3	22	22
III./JG 3	68	16 Bf 109G-14 8 Bf 109K-4	12 Bf 109G-14 5 Bf 109K-4	68	44	26	18	0	17	15
IV./JG 3	68	30 Fw 190A-8/R2	19 Fw 190A-8/R2	68	46	33	13	0	19	19
Stab JG 4	4	1 Fw 190D-9 1 Bf 109G-10	1 Fw 190D-9 1 Bf 109G-10	4	1	1	0	0	1	1
I./JG 4	68	5 Bf 109G-10 19 Bf 109G-14 2 Bf 109K-4	3 Bf 109G-10 18 Bf 109G-14 2 Bf 109K-4	68	35	16	13	6	23	26
II./JG 4	68	28 Fw 190A-8/R2	24 Fw 190A-8/R2	68	53	32	17	4	24	17
III./JG 4	68	2 Bf 109G-14 26 Bf 109K-4	0 Bf 109G-14 10 Bf 109K-4	68	34	9	24	1	9	9
IV./JG 4	68	10 Bf 109G-10 15 Bf 109G-14 7 Bf 109K-4	6 Bf 109G-10 11 Bf 109G-14 2 Bf 109K-4	68	36	16	20	0	16	16
Stab JG 6	4	4 Fw 190A-9	3 Fw 190A-9	4	4	0	4	0	3	3
I./JG 6	68	34 Fw 190A-8	29 Fw 190A-8	68	35	35	0	0	29	29
II./JG 6	68	52 Fw 190A-8 3 Fw 190A-9	43 Fw 190A-8 3 Fw 190A-9	68	57	52	3	2	46	25
III./JG 6	68	7 Bf 109G-10 33 Bf 109G-14/AS	3 Bf 109G-10 18 Bf 109G-14/AS	68	43	28	14	1	21	21
Stab JG 11	4	2 Fw 190A-8 4 Fw 190A-9	1 Fw 190A-8 3 Fw 190A-9	4	4	4	0	0	4	4
I./JG 11	68	17 Fw 190A-8	16 Fw 190A-8	68	66	6	60	0	2	6
II./JG 11	68	1 Bf 109G-6/U2 38 Bf 109G-14/AS 11 Bf 109K-4	1 Bf 109G-6/U2 26 Bf 109G-14/AS 4 Bf 109K-4	68	62	50	11	1	20	20
III./JG 11	68	62 Fw 190A-8 1 Fw 190A-9	47 Fw 190A-8 0 Fw 190A-9	68	46	30	13	3	31	31
Stab JG 26	4	1 Fw 190A-8 2 Fw 190D-9	0 Fw 190A-8 1 Fw 190D-9	4	4	1	3	0	1	1
I./JG 26	68	3 Fw 190A-8 49 Fw 190D-9	0 Fw 190A-8 32 Fw 190D-9	68	52	41	11	0	51	46
II./JG 26	68	39 Fw 190D-9	32 Fw 190D-9	68	50	41	6	3	32	44
III./JG 26	68	14 Bf 109G-14 29 Bf 109K-4 1 Fw 190D-9	7 Bf 109G-14 13 Bf 109K-4 1 Fw 190D-9	68	40	29	6	5	29	29



## Mission 1.1.1945

Unit	Aircraft Authorized	Aircraft On strength	Aircraft Serviceable	Pilots Authorized	Pilots Present	Pilots Ready	Pilots Part. ready	Pilots Not ready	Aircraft Ready	Aircraft Flown
Stab JG 27	4	1 Bf 109G-10 2 Fw 190D-9	1 Bf 109G-10 2 Fw 190D-9	4	1	0	1	0	0	0
I./JG 27	68	1 Bf 109G-10 8 Bf 109G-14 14 Bf 109K-4	1 Bf 109G-10 7 Bf 109G-14 14 Bf 109K-4	68	36	22	14	0	22	16
II./JG 27	68	7 Bf 109G-10 14 Bf 109G-14/AS	3 Bf 109G-10 10 Bf 109G-14/AS	68	30	19	11	0	13	12
III./JG 27	68	26 Bf 109K-4	15 Bf 109K-4	68	31	13	10	8	15	15
IV./JG 27	68	22 Bf 109G-10 10 Bf 109G-14	12 Bf 109G-10 5 Bf 109G-14	68	29	19	10	0	17	17
Stab JG 53	4	4 Bf 109G-14/AS 2 Bf 109K-4	3 Bf 109G-14/AS 1 Bf 109K-4	4	4	3	1	0	3	4
II./JG 53	68	34 Bf 109G-14/AS 3 Bf 109G-14/U4 5 Bf 109K-4	22 Bf 109G-14/AS 0 Bf 109K-4	68	31	23	7	1	22	22
III./JG 53	68	35 Bf 109G-14/AS	26 Bf 109G-14/AS	68	41	28	13	0	26	26
IV./JG 53	68	36 Bf 109G-14	28 Bf 109G-14	68	38	34	2	2	28	28
III./JG 54	68	49 Fw 190D-9	32 Fw 190D-9	68	51	44	7	0	16	17
IV./JG 54	68	17 Fw 190A-8 6 Fw 190A-9	11 Fw 190A-8 4 Fw 190A-9	68	37	21	13	3	15	15
Stab JG 77	4	2 Bf 109G-10	1 Bf 109G-10	4	3	0	3	0	0	0
I./JG 77	68	24 Bf 109G-14/U4 1 Bf 109K-4	17 Bf 109G-14/U4 1 Bf 109K-4	68	56	22	26	8	18	18
II./JG 77	68	15 Bf 109G-10 12 Bf 109G-14	10 Bf 109G-10 10 Bf 109G-14	68	68	52	14	2	23	23
III./JG 77	68	27 Bf 109K-4	18 Bf 109K-4	68	58	5	53	0	18	18
Stab SG 4	6	3 Fw 190F-8	3 Fw 190F-8	6	3	2	1	0	2	2
I./SG 4	42	29 Fw 190F-8	21 Fw 190F-8	42	42	27	15	0	21	21
II./SG 4	42	36 Fw 190F-8	27 Fw 190F-8	42	42	35	7	0	16	15
III./SG 4	42	36 Fw 190F-8	24 Fw 190F-8	42	42	42	0	0	16	12
Stab KG 51	1	1 Me 262A-2	0 Me 262A-2	1	4	1	3	0	0	0
I./KG 51	40	30 Me 262A-2	21 Me 262A-2	40	40	33	7	0	21	19
II./KG 51	40	13 Me 262A-2	3 Me 262A-2	40	20	0	20	0	3	3
Est./KG 76	16	13 Ar 234B-2	6 Ar 234B-2	16	19	12	4	3	10	6
2./NAGr 1	16	13 Bf 109G	9 Bf 109G	16	12	9	3	0	9	9
3./NAGr 1	16	15 Bf 109G	10 Bf 109G	16	11	10	1	0	10	10
Stab NAGr 13	4	3 Fw 190F-8	0 Fw 190F-8	4	2	2	0	0	0	0
1./NAGr 13	16	10 Bf 109G	6 Bf 109G	16	10	8	2	0	6	6
2./NAGr 13	16	6 Bf 109G	3 Bf 109G	16	9	5	3	1	3	3
3./NAGr 13	16	13 Bf 109G	7 Bf 109G	16	9	5	4	0	5	5
Lotsen		Ju 88G-1/G-6							72	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>2665</b>	<b>1446 (incl. NAGr)</b>	<b>986 (incl. NAGr)</b>	<b>2665</b>	<b>1825</b>	<b>1139</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>990</b>	<b>929</b>



# Appendix 3: German losses on January 1st 1945

Type	WNr.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
<b>Jagdgeschwader 1</b>								
Fw 190A-9?	?		Stab JG 1	Obstlt. Herbert Ihlefeld (Kdre)	OK	Near Rotterdam	Emergency landing	Flak
Fw 190A-9	980166	weisse 23	Stab I./JG 1	Hptm. Georg Hackbarth (Kdr)	KIA	Gent, near station	Lommel, grave 40-358	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	960729	weisse 3	1./JG 1	Uffz. Egon Comtesse	KIA	Nthsea, W of Hoek van Holland	Ysselsteyn, grave AI-1-21	Flak
Fw 190A-8	960553?	schwarze 3	2./JG 1	Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade	OK	Near Baarn	Belly-landing	Fuel starvation
Fw 190A-8	960709	schwarze 9	2./JG 1	Gefr. Karl-Heinz Bauch	POW	SE Stadse Dijk, NW Fijnaart	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190A-8	739228	schwarze 6	2./JG 1	Uffz. Paul Wunderlich	POW	Oudlandsedijk, E Oudenbosch	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190A-8	173929	gelbe 15	3./JG 1	Uffz. Heinz Böhmer	KIA	Hollands Diep near Strijensas	Ysselsteyn, grave AJ-8-199	Flak?
Fw 190A-8	175044	<1	3./JG 1	Fw. Fritz Hofmann	POW	Near Gent	Baled out	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	738159	gelbe 6	3./JG 1	Fw. Heinz-Jürgen Kilian	KIA	Vreeland, W Hilversum	Ysselsteyn, grave CT-8-198	Flak
Fw 190A-8	961052	rote 8	4./JG 1	Oblt. Hans-Gottfried Meinhof (Stkp)	MIA	Near Breda	No known grave	AAA
Fw 190A-8	739269	rote 1	4./JG 1	Uffz. Alfred Fritzsche	POW	De Pinte, Gent	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190A-8	739429	weisse 1	5./JG 1	Lt. Ernst von Johannides (Stkp)	KIA	Prob. Kreevillie, N Kloosterzande	Ysselsteyn, grave CS-7-168	Coastal AAA
Fw 190A-8	171513	schwarze 4	5./JG 1	Uffz. Edgar Ardner	POW	Kerkbrugge, N Evergem	Baled out	Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	352518	weisse 8	5./JG 1	Fw. Karl Hahn	MIA	St.Denis Airfield	No known grave	Light AAA
Fw 190A-8	739230	weisse 6	5./JG 1	Lt. Walter Holick	MIA	Gent area	No known grave	AAA/Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	960679	weisse 4	5./JG 1	Uffz. Otto Kuntzsch	MIA	Sinaai area	No known grave	Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	960473	weisse 15	5./JG 1	Uffz. Erich Wenniges	KIA	Desteldonk, N Gent	Lommel, grave 38-354	Spitfire, 317 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	960659	gelbe 4	7./JG 1	Ofhr. Hilmar Krieb	MIA	Gent area	No known grave	AAA/Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	173932	gelbe 14	7./JG 1	Ofw. Kurt Niedereichholz	MIA	Gent area	No known grave	AAA/Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	173813	gelbe 16	7./JG 1	Uffz. Oskar Vetter	WIA	Near Almelo	Baled out	Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	960677	blaue 14	8./JG 1	Uffz. Gerhard Behrens	KIA	SE Gent	Lommel, grave 40-257	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	739235	blaue 5	8./JG 1	Fw. Harijs Klints	KIA	Zwijnaarde, S Gent	Lommel, grave 37-470	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	960547	blaue 10	8./JG 1	Fw. Paul Mayr	KIA	Zeedorp, NE Terneuzen	Ysselsteyn, grave CS-7-165	Coastal AAA?
Fw 190A-8	733978	blaue 15	8./JG 1	Uffz. Reinhold Schober	POW	Gent area	Baled out	Spitfires
Bf 109G-14/AS	782402	weisse 19	9./JG 1	Fj.Fw. Wilhelm Wichardt	POW	W Goes	Belly-landing	Light AAA
Bf 109G-14	780375	graue 22	10./JG 1	Lt. Anton Guha	POW	NE Biervliet, W Terneuzen	Belly-landing	Engine failure
Bf 109G-14/AS	784090	graue 23	10./JG 1	Fw. Wilhelm Kräuter	KIA	Dirksland, Overflakkee	Ysselsteyn, grave BW-6-134	Flak
<b>Jagdgeschwader 2</b>								
Fw 190D-9	600382	<	Stab JG 2	Lt. Werner Edelhoff	POW	Ardennes area	No info	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	210194	<II	Stab I./JG 2	Fw. Werner Hohenberg	POW	Stolberg-Dorff, SE Aachen	Emergency landing	AAA
Fw 190A-8	173188	schwarze 11	1./JG 2	Uffz. Helmut Breitweg	POW	Near Eupen	Baled out	Light AAA
Fw 190A-8	737371	weisse 9	1./JG 2	Uffz. Otto Dost	KIA	2 km E Eupen	Lommel, grave 24-61	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210288	weisse 8	1./JG 2	Fhr. Richard Storkan	MIA	Elsenborn, NE Malmedy?	No known grave	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210214	schwarze 9	2./JG 2	Ogfr. Hubert Schyma	POW	Near Verviers	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	500385	blaue 9	2./JG 2	Fw. Karl Tscheliesnig	POW	E Verviers	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210244	schwarze 8	2./JG 2	Uffz. Hans Wyssola	POW	Near Eupen	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210250	gelbe 6	3./JG 2	Gefr. Fritz Büsscher	KIA	Lückerath, SW Mechernich	Grave in Lemgo-Laubke	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	500394	gelbe 10	3./JG 2	Ogfr. Albert Büttner	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190D-9	210117	gelbe 1	3./JG 2	Ogfr. Franz Dworak	KIA	Kermeter, N Gemünd	Mariawald, grave 432	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	500111	?	3./JG 2	Uffz. Herbert Körber	WIA	Landed at Merzhausen A/F	Returned with 10% damage a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	?	?	4./JG 2	Lt. Hans Eisen (Stfhr)	OK	Landed at Merzhausen A/F	Returned with damaged a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210277	blaue 11	4./JG 2	Fj.Uffz. Wilhelm Eggert	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	500387	blaue 7	4./JG 2	Uffz. Erwin Katzer	MIA	Mariawald, Gmünd	Probably Mariawald, grave 337	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	500390	blaue 5	4./JG 2	Uffz. Friedrich Optenhostert	KIA	S Asch	Ysselsteyn, grave I-2-42	P-51/P-47
Fw 190D-9	500116	schwarze 15	4./JG 2	Gefr. Werner Piesker	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	500124	blaue 8	4./JG 2	Uffz. Georg Wilkens	POW	S Aachen	Baled out	AAA
Bf 109G-14	510885	<<	Stab II./JG 2	Hptm. Georg Schröder (Kdr)	POW	Near Verviers	Baled out	AAA



Type	WNR.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
<b>Jagdgeschwader 2 continued</b>								
Bf 109	?	?	5./JG 2	Lt. Paul Müngersdorff (Stfhr)	OK	Godorf, S Köln	Belly-landing	P-51's
Bf 109G-14	462781	weisse 14	5./JG 2	Uffz. Helmut Bollwerk	MIA	Malmedy	No known grave	AAA
Bf 109G-14	461328	?	5./JG 2	Lt. Helmut Wagner	WIA	Landed at Nidda A/F	10% damage	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330412	gelbe 13	7./JG 2	Ofhr. Rudolf Aickelin	KIA	Verviers area?	Lommel, 24-55	AAA
Bf 109	?	blaue 13	8./JG 2	Lt. Lothar Kabbe (Stfhr)	OK	Near Laacher lake, W Andernach	Probably bellylanding	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330431	blaue 15	8./JG 2	Fw. Fritz Keppler	KIA	Near Sourbrodt, NE Malmedy	Grave in Vienna	AAA?
Bf 109K-4	?	blaue 8	8./JG 2	Fj.Fw. Gerhard Querengässer	OK	Landed at Nidda A/F	Returned with damaged a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210211	weisse 1	9./JG 2	Uffz. Werner Hilbert	WIA	Bonames, NNW Frankfurt	Baled out	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	210290	schwarze 1	10./JG 2	Uffz. Siegfried Binger	POW	Kalterherberg, S Monschau	Baled out	Light AAA
Fw 190D-9	600380	?	10./JG 2	Lt. Christfried Clemens	KIA	Millen, NE Sittard	Ysselsteyn, grave T-5-110	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	400223	schwarze 9	10./JG 2	Fhr. Martin Enge	KIA	SW Wisskirchen, Euskirchen	Münstereifel, grave XII-5	Unknown
Fw 190D-9	600372	schwarze 3	10./JG 2	Uffz. Ernst Klein	MIA	Eupen-Binster	No known grave	AAA
Fw 190D-9	400222	schwarze 2	10./JG 2	Fw. Josef Peschak	POW	Ardennes area	No info	AAA/Fighters
Fw 190D-9	?	rote 15?	10./JG 2	Ofw. Otto Wylezich	WIA	Altenstadt A/F	Take-off accident	Accident
Fw 190D-9	600145	gelbe 4	11./JG 2	Uffz. Fritz Altpeter	KIA	Kausen, S Dierdorf	Dierdorf, grave 1591	Engine failure
Fw 190D-9	600407	gelbe 3	11./JG 2	Uffz. Richard Ruppel	KIA	W Mützenich, NWW Monschau	Vossenack, grave E.1536	Unknown
Fw 190D-9	210132	gelbe 8	11./JG 2	Ogfr. Wilhelm Scherwadt	POW	Near Eupen	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210205	blaue 16	12./JG 2	Lt. Fritz Swoboda (Stfhr)	KIA	Eulenbusch, W Wassenberg	Wassenberg, grave 105	Spitfire, 610 Sqn
Fw 190D-9	600361	weisse 2	12./JG 2	Uffz. Johann Jäger	KIA	Lontzen, SW Aachen	Lommel, grave 9-424	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210145	blaue 1	12./JG 2	Uffz. Adolf Redlich	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190D-9	210122	blaue 7	12./JG 2	Fj.Ofw. Fritz Schuler	MIA	Baelen, W Eupen	No known grave	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	210162	blaue 12	12./JG 2	Uffz. Michael Spiess	POW	Near Malmedy	Probably baled out	Light AAA
Fw 190D-9	600371	?	III./JG 2	Uffz. Jasper von Schlieffen	OK	Unknown	50% damage	Unknown
Fw 190D-9	600131	?	III./JG 2	Unknown	OK	Unknown	100% loss	Unknown
Fw 190D-9?	736485?	?	III./JG 2	Unknown	WIA	Unknown	100% loss	Unknown
<b>Jagdgeschwader 3</b>								
Fw 190A-9	?	?	Stab JG 3	Ofw. Leo Schuhmacher	OK	Unknown	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	783846	gelbe 7	1./JG 3	Uffz. Helmut Reineke	POW	NE Batenburg, WSW Nijmegen	Crash-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14	783898	grüne 6	1./JG 3	Fhr. Friedrich Tazreiter	POW	Near Eindhoven A/F	Baled out	Light AAA
Bf 109G-14	780744	schwarze 18	2./JG 3	Fw. Paul Fischer	POW	5 km NW Venlo	Baled out	AAA
Bf 109G-10	490674	gelbe 1	3./JG 3	Ogfr. Siegfried Reuther	OK	Unknown	No more info, but returned OK	Unknown
Bf 109G-10	490751	gelbe 20	3./JG 3	Fw. Theodor Schmitt	KIA	Möhler, NE Oelde	Gütersloh, grave 123 (afternoon)	Spitfire, 412 Sqn
Bf 109G-14/AS	782380	gelbe 9	3./JG 3	Uffz. Horst Schöne	MIA	Eindhoven A/F	No known grave	AAA?
Bf 109G-14	785986	grüne 7	4./JG 3	Ofw. Friedrich Hameister	POW	Vredepeel, NW Venray	Belly-landing	Spitfires
Bf 109G-10	490195	grüne 5	4./JG 3	Fw. Walter Rutkowski	POW	Eindhoven	Baled out	Spitfires
Bf 109G-14/AS	785944	grüne 16	4./JG 3	Gefr. Rudolf Wieschhoff	KIA	1 km S Sevenum, NW Venlo	Ysselsteyn, grave N-10-249	AAA
Bf 109G-14	464162	schwarze 3	10./JG 3	Lt. Hans-Ulrich Jung (Stfhr)	KIA	NNW Helmond	Ysselsteyn, grave Z-6-141	Hit power lines
Bf 109G-14	464076	schwarze 1	10./JG 3	Ofw. Robert Reiser	WIA	Münster	Shot down during afternoon	Spitfire, 401 Sqn
Bf 109G-14	462809	schwarze 15	10./JG 3	Uffz. Alfred Dors	WIA	Münster	Shot down during afternoon	Spitfire, 401 Sqn
Bf 109K-4	?	?	10./JG 3	Uffz. Michael Vogl	OK	S Kalkar, SE Kleve	Belly-landing	Engine failure
Bf 109K-4	330469	gelbe 1	11./JG 3	Ofhr. Uwe Naumann	KIA	E Heesch, SE Oss	Ysselsteyn, grave AK-11-262	AAA
Bf 109G-14	464297	gelbe 6	12./JG 3	Oblt. Eberhard F. von Treuberg (Stkp)	MIA	NE Eindhoven?	No known grave	AAA/Fighters
Fw 190A-8/R2	682253	schwarze 16	14./JG 3	Fw. Gerhard Leipholz	KIA	Eindhoven A/F	Ysselsteyn, Z-6-138	Prob. Typhoon
Fw 190A-8/R2	682312	schwarze 12	14./JG 3	Uffz. Erich Pusch	KIA	De Rips, NW Venray	Ysselsteyn, grave TD-4-44	Fighters
Fw 190A-8/R2	682751	gelbe 10	15./JG 3	Fj.Uffz. Hans-Joachim Grell	MIA	W Mill, E Uden	No known grave	Tempest, 486 Sqn





Type	WNr.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
Fw 190A-8/R2	960320	gelbe 12	15./JG 3	Uffz. Gerhard Schmidt	POW	Heidschepeel, SW Venray	Belly-landing	Spitfire
Fw 190A-8/R2	682769	rote 9	16./JG 3	Uffz. Alois Schmidt	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	AAA/Fighters
Fw 190A-8/R2	?	?	16./JG 3	Uffz. Ulrich Töllner	OK	Unknown	Belly-landing	AAA
<b>Jagdgeschwader 4</b>								
Bf 109K-4	332401	gelbe 1	Stab I./JG 4	Uffz. Oskar Fromberg	WIA	Kleinseelheim, SW Kirchhain	Baled out	Flak
Bf 109G-14	786303	?	1./JG 4	Oblt. Alfred Neumayer (Stkp)	OK	Hundheim, NE Morbach	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330367	schwarze 1	3./JG 4	Gefr. Kurt Lack	KIA	Frohnhausen, N Dillenburg	Herborn, grave 230	31.12.1944?
Bf 109G-10	490388	blaue 8	4./JG 4	Fw. Franz Schneider	MIA	Unknown, presumed Liege area	No known grave	Unknown
Bf 109G-14	781173	blaue 3	4./JG 4	Uffz. Werner Zetzschke	KIA	Kleindorp, SW Sittard	Ysselsteyn, grave A1-8-191	AAA
Fw 190A-8/R2	682676	weisse 18	5./JG 4	Ofhr. Franz Schaar (Stfhr)	KIA	Vosberg, N Panningen	Ysselsteyn, grave D-8-184	Light AAA
Fw 190A-8/R2	681870	weisse 7	5./JG 4	Uffz. Hans-Gustav Dierks	KIA	Hausen, S Pressart	Hamm, grave 17-8-3	Accident?
Fw 190A-8/R2	682276	weisse 4	5./JG 4	Uffz. Erich Keller	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8/R2	682738	weisse 14	5./JG 4	Ogfr. Hans Peschel	POW	St.Trond A/F	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190A-8	?	?	5./JG 4	Uffz. Heinz Richter	OK?	Unknown	Returned, no further info	AAA?
Fw 190A-8/R2	681497	weisse 11	5./JG 4	Gefr. Walter Wagner	POW	SSW St.Trond A/F	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190A-8/R2	?	?	6./JG 4	Lt. Wolfgang Hankner	WIA	Unknown	No more info	Unknown
Fw 190A-8/R2	?	?	7./JG 4	Oblt. Erhard Niese (Stkp)	OK	Unknown	Damaged, 5 hits	AAA
Fw 190A-8	175292	gelbe 6	7./JG 4	Uffz. Willi Breves	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8/R2	682296	gelbe 2	7./JG 4	Fw. Erich Güldenpfennig	WIA	Alsdorf, NE Aachen	+ 3.1.45, Ysselsteyn, gr. I-2-45	AAA
Fw 190A-8/R2	682673	gelbe 14	7./JG 4	Uffz. Walter Hübner	WIA	Babenhäusen A/F	+ 12.1.45, Bad Nauheim, gr. 84	Take-off accident
Fw 190A-8/R2	682657	gelbe 8	7./JG 4	Lt. Gottfried Morio	WIA	Near Wesel	Belly-landing, 65% damage	AAA
Fw 190A-8/R2	?	?	8./JG 4	Fhr. Winfried Brähler	OK	Erfurt area?	Belly-landing	Hit trees
Fw 190A-8/R2	682763	blaue 15	8./JG 4	Uffz. Günther Schwarzenau	POW	Palenberg, NE Aachen	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190A-8	960324	blaue 3	8./JG 4	Uffz. Horst Tharann	POW	NW Geilenkirchen	Belly-landing	Light AAA
Bf 109K-4	331504	rote 2	9./JG 4	Uffz. Georg Bartels	KIA	S Niveze, E Spa	Lommel, grave 11-1	Actually 31.12.1944
Bf 109	?	weisse 18	3./JG 4	Lt. Josef Kunz (Stfhr)	OK	Idar-Oberstein	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	785786	weisse 2	3./JG 4	Uffz. Werner Anetzhuber	KIA	Groot Bruggen, E Helmond	Lommel, grave 24-379	Tempest, 56 Sqn
Bf 109G-14/AS	785819	weisse 5	3./JG 4	Ofw. Hermann Holtkötter	KIA	Wibrin, NW Houffalize	Recognize, grave 2-397	Prob. AAA
Bf 109K-4	331447	schwarze 1	3./JG 4	Gefr. Karl Noppeney	KIA	N Wilderen, NW St.Trond	Lommel, grave 57-276	AAA
Bf 109K-4	331418	gelbe 3	5./JG 4	Fw. Karl Berg	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Bf 109K-4	331473	schwarze 5	5./JG 4	Ofhr. Horst Grüner	MIA	St.Trond A/F	No known grave	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	461200	gelbe 13	5./JG 4	Ofhr. Arnolf Russow	POW	Ulbeek, NE St.Trond	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	331455	schwarze 4	5./JG 4	Uffz. Lothar Schmidt	POW	Bütgenbach, E Malmedy	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	461533	blaue 12	6./JG 4	Lt. Elmar Ecker	KIA	Kaisersesch, SW Mayen	Kruff Krs. Mayen, grave 5	Unknown
<b>Jagdgeschwader 6</b>								
Fw 190A-9	980543	<- + -	Stab JG 6	Obstlt. Johann Kogler (Kdre)	POW	W Sevenum, NW Venlo	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190A-9	980551	?	Stab JG 6	Unknown	Unknown	Belly-landing,	70% damage	Fighters
Fw 190A-8	380349	weisse 12	1./JG 6	Uffz. Willi Voss	KIA	Mittellohne, W Lingen	Lingen, grave R32	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	960322	weisse 5	1./JG 6	Uffz. Josef Zangerle	MIA	Eindhoven area?	No known grave	AAA/Fighters
Fw 190A-8	737414	rote 12	2./JG 6	Hptm. Ewald Trost (Stkp)	POW	SSE Oirschot, NW Eindhoven	Crash-landing, wounded	Light AAA
Fw 190A-8	737385	rote 10	2./JG 6	Ofw. Walter Jung	KIA	Eindhoven A/F	Ysselsteyn, grave Z-6-140	AAA?
Fw 190A-8	960542	gelbe 1	3./JG 6	Oblt. Eberhard Pfeleiderer (Stfhr)	KIA	W Delmenhorst A/F	Esslingen, grave 97	Engine failure t/o
Fw 190A-8	737405	blaue 13	4./JG 6	Uffz. Karl Fries	KIA	Vinkenpeel, NW Venray	Ysselsteyn, grave TD-4-45	Spitfire, 412 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	960221	weisse 1	5./JG 6	Hptm. Norbert Katz (Stkp)	KIA	W Buurse, E Haaksbergen	Ysselsteyn, grave Q-1-21	Spitfire, 411 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	175049	weisse 7	5./JG 6	Lt. Karl Grabmair	KIA	SE Zijtaart, SE Veghel	Ysselsteyn, grave L-6-139	Spitfire, 442 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	738173	weisse 16	5./JG 6	Fw. Helmut Grislawski	POW	NE Oostrum, E Venray	Crash-landing, wounded	Spitfire, 442 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	738167	gelbe 16	7./JG 6	Uffz. Karl-Heinz Riedel	KIA	E Westerbeek, S Oploo	Ysselsteyn, grave TD-4-43	Tempest, 486 Sqn

Type	WNr.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
<b>Jagdgeschwader 6 continued</b>								
Fw 190A-8	171605	gelbe 12	7./JG 6	Uffz. Paul Schneider	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Probably Spitfires
Fw 190A-8	171557	blaue 13	8./JG 6	Uffz. Franz Schröttle	KIA	Kirchhellen A/F	Wending, grave V-91	Fighters
Fw 190A-8	960224	blaue 4	8./JG 6	Lt. Hans Wulff	POW	Deurneseweg, SW Venray	Baled out	Spitfire, 412 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	173839	?	11./JG 6	Unknown	OK	Unknown	Belly-landing, 10% damage	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	380354	?	11./JG 6	Unknown	OK	Unknown	Baled out	Fighters
Fw 190A-8	620204	?	11./JG 6	Unknown	OK	Unknown	Belly-landing, 10% damage	Engine failure
Bf 109G-14/AS	460339	<<	Stab III./JG 6	Maj. Helmut Kühle (Kdr)	KIA	NNW Helmond	Ysselsteyn, grave Z-6-142	AAA
Bf 109G-10	491282	<-	Stab III./JG 6	Hptm. Wilhelm Kindler	POW	Hunsel, SE Weert	Baled out	AAA/Fighters
Bf 109G-14/AS	784778	weisse 10	9./JG 6	Oblt. Lothar Gerlach (Stkp)	MIA	Venray area	No known grave	Tempest, 486 Sqn?
Bf 109G-14/AS	785763	weisse 4	9./JG 6	Uffz. Hans-Joachim Rose	POW	't Hersfeld, W Groeningen	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-10	490704	weisse 14	9./JG 6	Uffz. Rudolf Schlossborn	POW	't Broek, W Gemert	Baled out	Tempest, 3 Sqn
Bf 109G-14	784932	weisse 7	9./JG 6	Fw. Bruno Thoms	OK	Landed at Twenthe A/F	Returned, no further info	Unknown
Bf 109G-10	490719	schwarze 12	10./JG 6	Uffz. Karl Betz	KIA	Dorshout, NW Veghel	Ysselsteyn, grave AV-2-30	Spitfire, 401 Sqn
Bf 109G-14/AS	784968	schwarze 5	10./JG 6	Uffz. Hans Schaupp	KIA	Vredepeel, NW Venray	Ysselsteyn, grave TD-4-42	Tempest, 3 Sqn
Bf 109G-14/AS	784986	gelbe 19	11./JG 6	Ofw. Paul Schwerdtfeger	KIA	Near Groesbeek, SE Nijmegen	Ysselsteyn, grave Y-2-29	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	784946	grüne 8	12./JG 6	Ofr. Johann Krumm	KIA	NE Berghem, E Oss	Ysselsteyn, grave AK-11-261	Spitfire, 401 Sqn
<b>Jagdgeschwader 11</b>								
Fw 190A-9	205033	schwarze 4	Stab JG 11	Maj. Günther Specht (Kdre)	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	737946	?	Stab JG 11	Uffz. Sophus Schmidt	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	680728	schwarze 8	2./JG 11	Lt. Alwin Doppler (Stfhr)	KIA	Opoeteren, SW Maaseik	Lommel, grave 25-165	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	171742	weisse 10	3./JG 11	Fhr. Heinrich Wiethoff	MIA	Opglabbeek, NE Genk	No known grave	P-51/P-47
Bf 109K-4	331510	<	Stab II./JG 11	Fj.Uffz. Günther Hoffmann	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Probably P-51/P-47
Bf 109K-4	330474	schwarze 3	6./JG 11	Fj.Uffz. Herbert Huss	POW	Maastricht area	Baled out	AAA
Bf 109G-14	785119	schwarze 5	6./JG 11	Fw. Peter Reschke	KIA	Near Aachen	Ysselsteyn, grave G-10-243	AAA/Fighters
Bf 109G-14/AS	785787	gelbe 3	7./JG 11	Fw. Herbert Kraschinski	KIA	S Eupen	Lommel, grave 29-54	Unknown
Bf 109G-14	785751	gelbe 5	7./JG 11	Fw. Harald Schwartz	KIA	Unknown	Lommel, grave 24-64	Hit trees
Bf 109G-14	784958	blaue 14	8./JG 11	Oblt. August Engel	KIA	Niel-bij-Asch, NE Genk	Ysselsteyn, I-2-41	P-47, 366 FG
Bf 109G-14	784765	blaue 11	8./JG 11	Ofw. Franz Meindl	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	AAA/Fighters
Bf 109G-14	785770	blaue 3	8./JG 11	Fw. Alfred Tempel	POW	Near Maastricht	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190A-8	682792	<<8	Stab III./JG 11	Hptm. Horst-Günther von Fassong (Kdr)	MIA	Opglabbeek, NE Genk	No known grave	P-47, 366 FG
Fw 190A-8	960552	<4	Stab III./JG 11	Maj. Günther Vowinkel	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	739250	gelbe 9	Stab III./JG 11	Oblt. Hans Fiedler	POW	Heerlen, N Maastricht	Crash-landing, wounded	AAA
Fw 190A-8	737932	<2	Stab III./JG 11	Lt. Gerhard Neumann (2./JG 11)	WIA	Aachen area?	Belly-landing	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	?	?	Stab III./JG 11	Uffz. Armin Mehling	OK	Gross-Ostheim A/F	Turned over during landing	P-47, 366 FG
Fw 190A-8	172663	weisse 3	9./JG 11	Gefr. Gerhard Böhm	MIA	Probably Asch A/F	No known grave	P-51, 352 FG?
Fw 190A-8	734007	weisse 13	9./JG 11	Uffz. Kurt Nüsse	KIA	NE Asch, NE Genk	Lommel, grave 57-13	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	732208	schwarze 3	10./JG 11	Uffz. Walter Gattner	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	733970	schwarze 11	10./JG 11	Ofw. Xaver Giese	MIA	W Opglabbeek, NE Genk	No known grave	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	961063	schwarze 10	10./JG 11	Uffz. Ernst Noreisch	KIA	Near Maastricht	Ysselsteyn, grave G-11-271	AAA/Fighters
Fw 190A-8	738231	gelbe 6	11./JG 11	Ogfr. Karl-Heinz Sistenich (1./JG 11)	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Fw 190A-8	?	?	11./JG 11	Ofw. Robert Spreckels	WIA	Near Aachen	Baled out, minor injuries	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	?	?	12./JG 11	Oblt. Paul-Heinrich Dähne (Stkp)	OK	Unknown	Baled out	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	738271	<6	12./JG 11	Uffz. Hermann Barion	KIA	Near Margraten, E Maastricht	Ysselsteyn, G-10-244	AAA
Fw 190A-8	960298	blaue 11	12./JG 11	Ofw. Karl Hiller	POW	Maastricht area	Crash-landing, wounded	P-51/P-47
Fw 190A-8	732210	blaue 15	12./JG 11	Uffz. Max Milkreiter	MIA	Presumed Maastricht area	No known grave	P-51/P-47



Type	WNr.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
<b>Jagdgeschwader 26</b>								
Fw 190D-9	?	?	1./JG 26	Uffz. Günther Kaehler	OK	Returned	Minor damage to a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	?	?	1./JG 26	Uffz. Gerhard Reichow	OK	Near Almelo	Belly-landing	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	?	?	1./JG 26	Fw. Harald Wülfsen	OK	Returned	Minor damage to a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210953	schwarze 1	2./JG 26	Oblt. Franz Kunz (Stkp)	WIA	Polsbroek, E Gouda	Probably crashlanding	Flak
Fw 190D-9	?	?	2./JG 26	Fw. Walter Kerber	OK	Returned	Minor damage to a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	?	?	2./JG 26	Fw. Heinz Haeger	OK	Returned	Minor damage to a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	?	schwarze 8	2./JG 26	Lt. Karl-Heinz Ossenkop	OK	Landed at Twenthe A/F	Damaged by collision	Collision
Fw 190D-9	400234	schwarze 11	2./JG 26	Uffz. Heinz Schulz	MIA	Sinaai, W St.Niklaas	No known grave	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190D-9	600147	schwarze 6	2./JG 26	Uffz. Willy Sydow	KIA	NW Eindhoven	Ysselsteyn, grave Z-6-139	AAA
Fw 190D-9	400237	schwarze 3	2./JG 26	Ogfr. Bodo Vogel	KIA	Vrouwenpolder, Walcheren	Ysselsteyn, grave W-12-276	AAA
Fw 190D-9	?	?	3./JG 26	Oblt. Alfred Heckmann (Stkp)	OK	Returned	Minor damage to a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	?	?	3./JG 26	Ofhr. Wolfgang Franz	OK	Returned	Minor damage to a/c	AAA
Fw 190D-9	500093	gelbe 13	3./JG 26	Ogfr. Dieter Krägeloh	POW	Waasmunster, SW St.Niklaas	Crash-landing, wounded	AAA
Fw 190D-9	400233	gelbe 5	3./JG 26	Ogfr. Manfred Niessen	OK	Blokland, SW Utrecht	Belly-landing	Flak
Fw 190D-9	600168	gelbe 8	3./JG 26	Fhr. Hans-Joachim Werner	POW	Grimbergen A/F	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210955	blaue 10	4./JG 26	Ogfr. Karl-Heinz Braunert	KIA	Vremde, SE Antwerpen	Lommel, grave 51-300	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210126	blaue 3	4./JG 26	Fw. Karl-Heinz Hartmann	POW	Wolvertem, NW Grimbergen A/F	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210936	?	4./JG 26	Uffz. Heinz Wodarczyk	KIA	E Wijhe, SSE Zwolle	Ysselsteyn, AN-6-135	AAA?
Fw 190D-9	600170	blaue 2	4./JG 26	Uffz. Karl-Erich Zeidler	WIA	Lengerich, E Lingen	Crash-landing, 80% damage	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210193	weisse 7	5./JG 26	Uffz. Ernst Lampferhoff	POW	S Goes, Zuid-Beveland	Baled out	Light AAA
Fw 190D-9	500162	weisse 11	5./JG 26	Ogfr. Hubert Lott	MIA	Probably NE Terneuzen	No known grave	AAA
Fw 190D-9	500034	schwarze 16	6./JG 26	Ofhr. Helmut Heuser	POW	SW Poortvliet, Tholen	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190D-9	400207	schwarze 2	6./JG 26	Fw. Karl Hött	WIA	Stenenbaak, NW Brielle	Baled out	Flak
Fw 190D-9	?	schwarze 12	6./JG 26	Uffz. Norbert Risky	OK	Near Zwolle	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210274	schwarze 14	6./JG 26	Uffz. Wilhelm Schmitz	KIA	SE Wieze, NE Aalst	Lommel, grave 39-501	AAA/Spitfire
Fw 190D-9	210086	braune 6	7./JG 26	Fw. Erich Ahrens	POW	SW Goes, Zuid-Beveland	Belly-landing	AAA
Fw 190D-9	210087	braune 15	7./JG 26	Uffz. Rudolf Altendorf (4./Flüg 1)	KIA	Kruisdorp, E Kloosterzande	Ysselsteyn, grave CS-7-164	AAA
Fw 190D-9	600161	blaue 2	7./JG 26	Gefr. Hans-Karl Götz	POW	Molenschot, SE Breda	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190D-9	500105	blaue 1	7./JG 26	Gefr. Willy Kunz	KIA	Bronneger, NE Borger	Ysselsteyn, grave AX-11-272	Unknown
Fw 190D-9	210165	braune 5	7./JG 26	Uffz. Leo Speer	KIA	Harderwijk	Ysselsteyn, grave AF-2-42	Flak
Bf 109K-4	330404	weisse 15	9./JG 26	Lt. Gottfried Meier	KIA	Vrasene, NE St.Niklaas	Lommel, grave 39-273	AAA?
Bf 109K-4	330354	schwarze 18	11./JG 26	Lt. Rudolf Leinberger	WIA	Kirchhellen A/F	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330385	gelbe 18	11./JG 26	Oblt. Harald Lenz	KIA	Nijkerk, SW Harderwijk	Ysselsteyn, grave AF-1-3	Flak
Bf 109G-14	413550	schwarze 8	11./JG 26	Uffz. Walter Tepperis	OK	Schouwen-Duiveland	Belly-landing	Flak
Bf 109K-4	330426	blaue 30	12./JG 26	Uffz. Karl-Heinz Berndt	POW	St.Maartensdijk, Tholen	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330379	schwarze 15	12./JG 26	Gefr. Horst Sengpiel	MIA	Scheldt Estuary	No known grave	Unknown
<b>Jagdgeschwader 27</b>								
Bf 109	?	?	Stab I./JG 27	Oblt. Eberhard Schade (Kdr)	OK	Landed at Rheine A/F	Damaged a/c	Collision
Bf 109G-14	462677	weisse 17	1./JG 27	Fj.Uffz. Ferdinand Fink	KIA	N Beringe, W Venlo	Ysselsteyn, grave CH-7-151	AAA?
Bf 109K-4	330285	rote 1	2./JG 27	Lt. Heinrich Wiese (Stfhr)	KIA	Riverbank Waal, Werkendam	Ysselsteyn, grave AL-3-66	Flak?
Bf 109K-4	331344	blaue 4	2./JG 27	Uffz. Heinrich Braun	KIA	De Bilt, E Utrecht	Ysselsteyn, grave BX-7-151	Spitfire, 2 Sqn
Bf 109K-4	331493	rote 8	2./JG 27	Fhr. Otto Theisen	POW	E St.Hubert, W Haps	Crash-landing, severely wounded	AAA
Bf 109K-4	331401	rote 5	2./JG 27	Lt. Joachim von Stechow	KIA	NW 't Zandt, E Sleenwijk	Ysselsteyn, CS-9-216	Flak?
Bf 109K-4	331502	gelbe 1	3./JG 27	Fw. Gert Gäbel	KIA	SE Kerkwijk, SW Zaltbommel	Bad Brückenau, family plot	AAA?
Bf 109K-4	331395	blaue 16	4./JG 27	Gefr. Arno Diesing	MIA	Brussels area	No known grave	Spitfire, 403 Sqn
Bf 109G-14/AS	785882	weisse 1	7./JG 27	Uffz. Petermichel Gisevius	MIA	Brussels area	No known grave	Spitfire, 403 Sqn
Bf 109G-14/AS	780319	weisse 7	7./JG 27	Uffz. Johannes Härtlein	POW	Tielen, SSW Turnhout	Baled out	AAA
Bf 109K-4	331377	rote 4	10./JG 27	Ogfr. Erich Heymann	MIA	Near Brussels	No known grave	Spitfires/AAA
Bf 109K-4	332314	gelbe 4	11./JG 27	Uffz. Heinz Frickmann	KIA	Hooge Biezen, S Utrecht	Wassenberg, grave 266	Hit ground



Type	WNr.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
<b>Jagdgeschwader 27</b> continued								
Bf 109K-4	?	?	12./JG 27	Uffz. Heinrich Maus	WIA	Near Wesel?	Probably bellylanding	AAA
Bf 109G-10	490644	<3	Stab IV./JG 27	Hptm. Hans-Heinz Dudeck	POW	Smakt, NE Venray	Baled out	Light AAA
Bf 109G-10	490702	weisse 10	13./JG 27	Fj.Uffz. Karl Rehak	KIA	NE Panningen, W Venlo	Ysselsteyn, grave CH-6-137	AAA?
Bf 109G-10	130361	blaue 2	16./JG 27	Fw. Alfred Mannchen	KIA	Near Utrecht	Ysselsteyn, grave BX-7-152	Unknown
<b>Jagdgeschwader 53</b>								
Bf 109G-14/AS	?	?	Stab JG 53	Obstlt. Hemut Benneemann (Kdre)	WIA	Landed at Echterdingen A/F	Returned with damaged a/c	AAA
Bf 109K-4	331328	?	Stab JG 53	Fw. Friedrich Meyer	OK	Near Koblenz	Belly-landing	Out of fuel
Bf 109G-14/AS	166288	schwarze <3	Stab JG 53	Oblt. Rudolf Schummer	OK	Landed at Echterdingen A/F	Returned with damaged a/c	AAA
Bf 109G-14	461384	schwarze 5	5./JG 53?	Lt. Dieter Hartel	OK	Probably returned	No further info	Unknown
Bf 109G-14/AS	783900	schwarze 12	5./JG 53	Uffz. Rudolf Könitzer	POW	Metz-Frescaty A/F	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	785813	schwarze 3	5./JG 53	Fj.Ofw. Kurt Opitz	POW	Metz-Frescaty A/F	Baled out	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	?	?	6./JG 53	Uffz. Erich Ernst	OK	Landed at Huchenfeld A/F	Belly-landing	Unknown
Bf 109G-14/AS	785922	gelbe 9	6./JG 53	Fw. Ernst Nachotzky	KIA	Metz-Frescaty A/F	Sandweiler, grave C-7-152	AAA
Bf 109G-14	785830	gelbe 3	6./JG 53	Fw. Sack	OK	Unknown	No further info	Unknown
Bf 109G-14/AS	785952	weisse 11	7./JG 53	Uffz. Florian Juszak	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	Unknown
Bf 109G-14/AS	785939	weisse 14	7./JG 53	Fw. Johannes Müller	KIA	Dickweiler, NW Trier	Sandweiler, grave C-7-154	AAA?
Bf 109G-14/AS	784928	weisse 17	7./JG 53	Gefr. Franz Reichert	OK	SE Pellingen, S Trier	Belly-landing	AAA?
Bf 109G-14	785817	weisse 6	7./JG 53?	Uffz. Helmut Schneider	OK	Probably returned	No further info	Unknown
Bf 109K-4	332362	blaue 8	8./JG 53	Fw. August Bermpohl	WIA	Near Speyer, S Heidelberg	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	785086	blaue 9	8./JG 53	Fw. Ernst Off	KIA	Ste. Ruffine, S Metz	Niederbronn, grave 39/2/45	AAA
Bf 109G-14	?	gelbe 9	9./JG 53	Uffz. Hermann Heck	OK	Kirrborg, SE Homburg	Baled out	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	?	gelbe 7	9./JG 53	Uffz. Wilhelm Holtfreter	OK	Pirmasens area	Belly-landing	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	?	?	9./JG 53	Fw. Stein	OK	Pirmasens area	Baled out	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	?	?	10./JG 53	Lt. Wilhelm Manz	OK	Pirmasens area	Belly-landing	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	462797	schwarze 3	11./JG 53	Fw. Heinz Plettner	WIA	Near Pirmasens	Baled out	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	?	?	11./JG 53	Ofw. Friedrich Scheer	OK	Pirmasens area	Baled out	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	?	?	12./JG 53	Hptm. Siegfried Luckenbach (Stkp)	OK	Near Pirmasens	Baled out	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	464112	blaue 7	12./JG 53	Uffz. Karl Göller	WIA	Kaiserslautern	Baled out	P-47, 358 FG
Bf 109G-14	461516	weisse 3	13./JG 53	Oblt. Otto Benz	MIA	St.Remy, N Metz	No known grave	AAA
Bf 109G-14	461340	weisse 11	13./JG 53	Ofw. Stefan Kohl	POW	Marly, SW Metz-Frescaty A/F	Baled out	AAA
Bf 109G-14/AS	784993	weisse 13	13./JG 53	Uffz. Herbert Maxis	MIA	E Ittersdorf, SW Saarlouis	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14	464137	schwarze 6	14./JG 53	Fhr. Siegfried Leese	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	AAA?
Bf 109G-14	464099	gelbe 2	15./JG 53	Fj.Fw. Werner Jaschek	MIA	Unknown	No known grave	AAA?
Bf 109G-14	462828	gelbe 12	15./JG 53	Fhr. Wolfgang Rosenberger	MIA	Waldwisse, NE Thionville?	No known grave	AAA
Bf 109G-14	?	?	16./JG 53	Oblt. Georg Schwidtal (Stkp)	OK	Near Saarbrücken	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14	462892	blaue 2	16./JG 53	Gefr. Alfred Michel	POW	Waldweistroff, SW Merzig	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109G-14	464186	gelbe 9	16./JG 53	Uffz. Horst Pechardscheck	WIA	Landed at Echterdingen A/F	Bellylanded, 5% damage	AAA
<b>Jagdgeschwader 54</b>								
Fw 190D-9	210102	weisse 3	9./JG 54	Fw. Paul Drutschmann	POW	W Waasmunster, SW Antwerpen	Baled out	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190D-9	210960	blaue 19	9./JG 54	Uffz. Gerhard Kroll	WIA	W Rotterdam	Belly-landing	Flak
Fw 190D-9	210079	schwarze 12	10./JG 54	Lt. Theo Nibel	POW	Wemmel, NW Brussels	Belly-landing	Birdhit cooler
Fw 190D-9	210045	gelbe 2	11./JG 54	Hptm. Willi Bottländer	MIA	Sinaai, W St.Niklaas	No known grave	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190D-9	210071	gelbe 7	11./JG 54	Ofw. Walter Eckert	KIA	Sinaai, W St.Niklaas	Ysselsteyn, grave CS-7-162	Spitfire, 308 Sqn
Fw 190D-9	210084	gelbe 14	11./JG 54	Fw. Günther Egli	POW	Grimbergen A/F	Baled out	AAA/Spitfires
Fw 190D-9	210120	gelbe 15	11./JG 54	Uffz. Gerhard Thoss	POW	Brussels area	Baled out	AAA/Spitfires?



Type	WNr.	Kennz.	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Remark/Grave	Cause
<b>Jagdgeschwader 54 continued</b>								
Fw 190D-9	?	gelbe 8	11./JG 54	Ofw. Werner Zech	OK	Landed at Twenthe A/F	Damaged a/c	Hit tree
Fw 190D-9	210957	blaue 18	12./JG 54	Uffz. Aloysius van Hooven	KIA	Buurserveen, E Haaksbergen	Ysselsteyn, grave AL-8-199	Spitfire, 411 Sqn
Fw 190D-9	?	?	12./JG 54	Fhr. Klaus Meixner	OK	15 km SE Kirchhellen A/F	Belly-landing	Fuel starvation
Fw 190D-9	600346	gelbe 6	12./JG 54	Lt. Jürgen Ratzlaff	MIA	Kloosterzande, NE Terneuzen	No known grave	Coastal AAA
Fw 190D-9	210028	rote 2	12./JG 54	Fw. Hans-Joachim Steinkamp	POW	Near Hulst	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190A-8	734038	?	13./JG 54	Uffz. Werner Köpp	KIA	E Alverna, SE Nijmegen	Ysselsteyn, grave THH-6-62	Spitfire, 401 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	750093	<<	15./JG 54	Fw. Fridolin Bachhuber (Stfhr i.V)	MIA	Brussels	No known grave	Spitfire, 403 Sqn
Fw 190A-8	732088	schwarze 16	15./JG 54	Uffz. Gerhard Ohlenschläger	POW	Near Brussels	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190A-8	?	?	15./JG 54	Uffz. Rudolf Walter	OK	Kirchhellen A/F	Crash-landing	Collision with tree
<b>Jagdgeschwader 77</b>								
Bf 109G-14	511893	gelbe 1	3./JG 77	Obt. Karl-Heinz Bartels	MIA	Antwerpen area?	No known grave	Unknown
Bf 109G-14	512314	gelbe 5	3./JG 77	Gefr. Helmut Kofler	KIA	NE Hoevenen, N Antwerpen	Lommel, grave 2-58	AAA
Bf 109G-14	512426	blaue 17	4./JG 77	Gefr. Erwin Mannweiler	POW	E Oosterhout, NE Breda	Crash-landing	Hit tree
Bf 109G-14	785062	rote 5	6./JG 77	Gefr. Alfred Hoffschmidt	POW	Eschweiler, NE Aachen	Belly-landing	Engine failure
Bf 109G-10	490392	?	8./JG 77	Fw. Paul Tanck	MIA	Antwerpen area?	No known grave	Unknown
Bf 109K-4	330204	weisse 13	9./JG 77	Lt. Herbert Abendroth	POW	E Kalmhout, N Antwerpen	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330119	rote 12	10./JG 77	Lt. Hans-Jürgen Schumacher (Stfhr)	KIA	E Wychen, SW Nijmegen	Ysselsteyn, grave THH-7-79	Spitfire, 401 Sqn
Bf 109K-4	?	?	10./JG 77	Uffz. Hans Gömmel	OK	Dutch-German border	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330230	weisse 17	10./JG 77	Uffz. Heinrich Munninger	KIA	NE St. Lenaarts, NE Antwerpen	Lommel, grave 59-506	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330168	rote 7	10./JG 77	Uffz. Johann Twietmeyer	POW	NW Galder, 4 km E Rijsbergen	Belly-landing	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330196	gelbe 1	11./JG 77	Lt. Heinrich Hackler (Stfhr)	KIA	De Raamberg, NW Zundert	Ysselsteyn, grave X-11-260	AAA
Bf 109K-4	330174	weisse 12	11./JG 77	Fhr. Rolf Braband	POW	Stampersgat, N Roosendaal	Belly-landing	AAA
<b>Schlachtgeschwader 4</b>								
Fw 190F-8	584400	?	Stab SG 4	Obst. Alfred Druschel	MIA	Aachen area	No known grave	AAA
Fw 190F-8	586450	weisse 3	7./SG 4	Fw. Richard Heinz	KIA	Near Aachen	Ysselsteyn, grave I-1-15	AAA
Fw 190F-8	?	schwarze 11	8./SG 4	Uffz. Hermann Gottschalk	OK	Köln-Wahn A/F	Belly-landing, early return	Engine failure
Fw 190F-8	?	?	8./SG 4	Fj.Fw. Georg Rischbieter	OK	Landed at Köln-Wahn A/F	Returned with damaged a/c	AAA
Fw 190F-8	933433	gelbe 14	8./SG 4	Ofw. Hans Schmieder	POW	W Aachen	Baled out	AAA
Fw 190F-8	584233	braune 12	9./SG 4	Fw. Rudolf Fye	KIA	SE Asch, NW Maasmechelen	Lommel, grave 3-621	P-47, 366 FG

#### Appendix 4: Ju 88 Losses on January 1st 1945

**Ju 88G-1 WNr. 714277**      **G9+AC**      **5./NJG 1**  
 Uffz. Wilhelm Fischer (FF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Heinz Böhle (BF)      KIA  
 Ogfr. Simon Dagn (BW)      KIA  
 Ogfr. Alois Stocklów (BS)      KIA

Shot down by F/Lt. A.D.Mercer and F/Lt. J.B.Lyke of No. 268 Squadron and crashed north-east of Barneveld. Probably Lotse for I. & II./JG 27.

**Ju 88G-6 WNr. 620404**      **G9+KT**      **9./NJG 1**  
 Lt. Josef Hettlich (FF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Karl Meinert (BF)      WIA  
 Gefr. Georg Steinhäuser (BS)      WIA

Shot down by own Flak at Gerverskop, west of Utrecht. Lotse for III./JG 1.

**Ju 88G-6 WNr. 620582**      **G9+??**      **9./NJG 1**  
 Uffz. Ingomar Mayr (FF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Wilhelm Ehret (BF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Hartmut Woll (BS)      KIA

Shot down by own Flak south of Hoek van Holland. Reserve Lotse for III./JG 1.

**Ju 88G-1 WNr. 714107**      **3C+FL**      **3./NJG 4**  
 Lt. Erhard Düttmann (FF)      KIA  
 Ogfr. Fritz Renke (BF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Friedrich Berberich (BM)      KIA

Shot down by 1./Lt. John W. Ginder, 10th FS/50th FG, and crashed near Hengstbach, South-west Zweibrücken. Lotse for III./JG 2.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**      **4./NJG 6**  
 Ofhr. Helmut Bunje (FF)      OK  
 Fw. Karl-Otto Bergmann (BF)      OK  
 Uffz. Fred Weimann (BF)      WIA  
 Ogfr. Willi Ambis (BS)      OK

Hit by Flak on outward course. Returned to Nordhorn. Lotse for II./JG 26.

**Ju 88G-6 WNr. 621364**      **2Z+CP**      **5./NJG 6**  
 Oblt. Hans Steffen (FF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Josef Knon (BF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Helmut Uttler (BMF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Friedrich Krebber (BS)      KIA

Shot down by F/Lt. W.J.Banks of No. 412 Squadron near Dortmund airfield. Had flown earlier on the day as Lotse for II./JG 77.

**Crew:**      **5./NJG 6**  
 Fw. Stuhler (FF)      OK  
 Uffz. Adalbert Unglert (BF)      KIA  
 Uffz. Josef Rieder (BMF)      KIA  
 Gefr. Werner Peters (BS)      KIA

Crew killed in bombing of Essen-Mühlheim airfield on 24.12.1944. Pilot survived. Crew was to be Lotse for II./JG 77.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**      **5./NJG 6**  
 Aircraft damaged (70%) in bombing of Essen-Mühlheim on 24.12.1944. Belonged to crew of Fw. Stuhler or Oblt. Steffen. Possibly 2Z+FN. Lotse for II./JG 77.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**      **5./NJG 6**  
 Aircraft damaged (20%) in bombing of Essen-Mühlheim on 24.12.1944. Belonged to crew of Fw. Stuhler or Oblt. Steffen. Possibly 2Z+FN. Lotse for II./JG 77.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**      **II./NJG 6**  
 Lt. Lothar Hemmerich (FF)      OK  
 Uffz. Schönfelder? (BF)      OK

Hit by Flak on outward course. Returned to Nordhorn. Reserve Lotse for II./JG 26.

**Ju 88G-6 WNr. 620411**      **???**      **6./NJG 100**  
 Fw. Wilhelm Gössele (FF)      MIA  
 Fw. Walter Vollmer (BF)      MIA  
 Fw. Herbert Weberschinke (BM)      MIA

Shot down by AAA near Hochfelden, north-west of Strasbourg. Lotse for II./JG 53.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**      **II./NJG 100**  
 Shot down by 2./Lt. Donald S. Flowers, 365th FS/358th FG, and crash-landed near Annweiler. Crew escaped unhurt, aircraft burned and destroyed. Lotse for III./JG 53.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**      **I./NJG 101(?)**  
 Elevator seriously damaged by AAA, but returned to Zellhausen. Lotse for II./JG 11.

**Ju 88G-1 WNr. ???**      **9W+BN**      **5./NJG 101**  
 Fw. Günther Kotschote (FF)      POW  
 Ogfr. Karl Walter (BF)      POW  
 Ogfr. Herbert Ludwig (BM)      POW

Shot down by AAA near Aywaille, southeast of Liège. Lotse for II.(Sturm)/JG 4.

**Ju 88G-1 WNr. 714830**      **9W+QO**      **6./NJG 101**  
 Uffz. Günter Fengler (FF)      MIA  
 Ogfr. Karl Zechner (BF)      MIA  
 Ogfr. Kurt Stolle (BM)      MIA

Probably shot down by AAA near Vielsalm. Lotse for I./JG 4 and III./JG 4.

**Ju 88G WNr. ???**      **???**  
**II./NJG 101**  
 Damaged by AAA. but returned to Rhein-Main. Lotse for IV./JG 4.



## Appendix 5: Luftwaffe material /personnel losses on January 1st 1945 (excluding Lotsen)

Unit	Missing	Destr AAA fire	Destr Ground fire	Destr by E/A in combat	Destr by E/A no combat	Destr not by enemy action	Damaged AAA fire	Damaged by E/A in combat	Damaged by E/A no combat	Damaged not by enemy action	Damaged not on mission	Total Destr 60-100%	Total Dam 0-59%	MIA	KIA	POW	WIA	OK
Stab JG 1						1						1						1
I./JG 1	8	2		1		1						12		1	4	4		3
II./JG 1	12			1				1	1	2		13	4	5	5	2	1	4
III./JG 1	3											3			1	2		
Stab JG 2	1											1					1	
I./JG 2	15			3			2		3	1		18	6	5	4	6	1	8
II./JG 2	4	1					2			1		5	3	1	2	1	1	3
III./JG 2	12			3	1	3			3			19	3	3	6	4	2	7
Stab JG 3							1						1					1
I./JG 3	7			[1]								7		1	1	5		
III./JG 3	2			[2]		1				1		3	1	1	2			1
IV./JG 3	4			1		[1]			1			5	1	2	2	1		1
I./JG 4	2			1			1					3	1	1	1			2
II./JG 4	11			1		1				1		13	1	2	3	4	3	2
III./JG 4				1	1				1			2	1					3
IV./JG 4	7			1				1		2		8	3	2	4	2		3
Stab JG 6	1			1								2				1		1
I./JG 6	5				1	1				2		7	2	1	4	1		3
II./JG 6	6			2						2		8	2	1	4	2		3
III./JG 6	10								1	1		10	2	1	5	3		3
Stab JG 11	2											2		2				
I./JG 11	2								1		[1]	2	1	1	1			1
II./JG 11	8								3	1	[1]	8	4	2	4	2		4
III./JG 11	13								1	2		13	3	7	3	2	2	2
I./JG 26	11			2		1	6			2		14	8	1	4	3	2	9
II./JG 26	7	1			2	3			1	1		13	2	1	4	4	1	5
III./JG 26	3		1			2						6		1	2	1	1	1
FlÜG 1*					[1]							[1]			[1]			
I./JG 27	7			2						1		9	1	1	5	1		3
II./JG 27	2											2		1		1		
III./JG 27	1			1			1					2	1	1	1		1	
IV./JG 27	3			1								4			2	1		1
Stab JG 53	1						2					1	2				1	2
II./JG 53	8	1		1					1	1		10	2	1	3	2	1	5
III./JG 53	1			8	1				1			10	1				2	9
IV./JG 53	7			1		1		2	1			9	3	5		2	1	4
III./JG 54**	7						1			1		7	2	2	2	5	1	2
IV./JG 54	2			1			1					3	1	1	1	1		1
I./JG 77	3											3		1	1	1		
II./JG 77	2											2		1		1		
III./JG 77	5			1					2			6	2			3	3	2
Stab SG 4	1											1		1				
III./SG 4	2	1				1	1					4	1		2	1		2
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>102</b>

Primarily based on material loss lists, individual loss reports and further research by authors.

Numbers between brackets not related with Bodenplatte and not incorporated in total figures.

\* FlÜG losses with JG 26 are included in JG 26 losses.

\*\* Aircraft on loan from JG 26 included in JG 26 losses.

# Appendix 6: Luftwaffe aerial combat claims January 1st 1945 related to Bodenplatte

Pilot:	Unit:	Vic:	Type:	Opponent:	Time:	Area:
Ofhr. Wilhelm Ade	2./JG 1	1st	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Lt. Hans Berger	3./JG 1	8th	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Fw. Fritz Hofmann	3./JG 1	3rd	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Lt. Hans Rechenberg	5./JG 1	1st	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Uffz. Erwin Kurz	5./JG 1	1st	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Fw. Herbert Dosch	5./JG 1	3rd?	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Oblt. Fritz Wegner	6./JG 1	6th	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Uffz. Heinz Henn	8./JG 1	1st	Spitfire	135 Wing	unknown	Gent
Obstlt. Heinz Bär	Stab JG 3	204th	'Tempest'	438 Sqdn	09.23	Eindhoven A/F
Obstlt. Heinz Bär	Stab JG 3	205th	'Tempest'	438 Sqdn	09.25	Eindhoven A/F
Ofw. Friedrich Hameister	4./JG 3	1st	Spitfire	?	unknown	Eindhoven
Lt. Oskar Zimmermann	9./JG 3	30th	'Tempest'	168 Sqdn	unknown	Eindhoven A/F
Fw. Strebel	9./JG 3	2nd	unknown	?	unknown	unknown
Ofw. Robert Reiser	10./JG 3	7th	Spitfire	401 Sqdn	~15.30	Münster
Uffz. Peter Bechthold	11./JG 3	?	Spitfire	?	unknown	Eindhoven
Fw. Oskar Bösch	14./JG 3	10th	Spitfire	412 Sqdn	16.15	Gütersloh
Uffz. Gerhard Schmidt	15./JG 3	1st	Spitfire	?	unknown	Eindhoven
Lt. Siegfried Müller	16./JG 3	14th	Typhoon	?	unknown	Eindhoven A/F
Fw. Harry Wald	16./JG 3	14th	Typhoon	?	unknown	Eindhoven
Oblt. Hans-Martin Markhoff	8./JG 4	17th?	Auster	125 Sqdn?	~09.00	unknown
Fw. Karl Schubert	2./JG 6	4th	Typhoon	439 Sqdn?	unknown	N Venlo
Hptm. Norbert Katz	5./JG 6	2nd	Spitfire	442 Sqdn	unknown	Volkel
Lt. Hans Wulff	8./JG 6	1st?	Spitfire	442 Sqdn	unknown	S.Volkel
Unknown	III./JG 6	?	Spitfire	?	unknown	unknown
Unknown	III./JG 6	?	Tempest	?	unknown	unknown
Unknown	III./JG 6	?	Tempest	?	unknown	unknown
Uffz. Karl Krentz	Stab JG 11	2nd	P-51	352 FG	unknown	Asch
Fj.Ofw. Alfred Neuberger	Stab JG 11	7th	P-51	352 FG	unknown	Asch
Ofw. Frank	4./JG 11	2nd	P-51	352 FG	unknown	Asch
Lt. Heinz Hackstein	5./JG 11	1st	P-51	352 FG	unknown	Asch
Lt. Walter Köhne	6./JG 11	30th	P-47	366 FG	unknown	Asch
Lt. Oskar Wimmers	6./JG 11	2nd	P-47	366 FG	unknown	Asch
Fhr. Theo Nau	7./JG 11	2nd	P-47	366 FG	unknown	Asch
Lt. Richard Franz	7./JG 11	8th	Typhoon	?	unknown	Aachen
Fw. Alois Job	10./JG 11	5th	P-47	366 FG	unknown	Asch
Fw. Alois Job	10./JG 11	6th	P-47	366 FG	unknown	Asch
Fw. Alois Job	10./JG 11	7th	1-mot	?	unknown	N Maastricht
Maj. Anton Hackl	II./JG 26	173rd	Spitfire	416 Sqdn	09.25	Over Brussel
Uffz. Edwin Kalbus	5./JG 26	1st	P-47	366 FG?	10.04	Hasselt area
Oblt. Adolf Glunz	6./JG 26	71st?	Spitfire	416 Sqdn	09.25	S Evere
Lt. Siegfried Sy	7./JG 26	1st	Spitfire	416 Sqdn	09.25	S Evere
Uffz. Gottfried Burckhardt	8./JG 26	1st	Spitfire	416 Sqdn	09.26	Over Brussel
Uffz. Heinz Gehrke	11./JG 26	1st?	Spitfire	416 Sqdn	unknown	Brussel
Ofw. Reinhold Kühl	5./JG 27	2nd	Spitfire	403 Sqdn?	09.30	S Brussel
Uffz. Fritz Krüger	13./JG 27	2nd	Auster	A.D.L.S.	09.30	W Brussel
Fw. Franz Wellmann	14./JG 27	3rd	Spitfire	403 Sqdn?	09.30	Brussel
Lt. Karl Broo	8./JG 53	5th	Spitfire	?	unknown	Kaiserslautern
Oblt. Martin von Vacano	9./JG 53	6th?	P-47(prob)	358 FG	unknown	unknown
Fw. Stein	9./JG 53	1st	P-47	358 FG	unknown	Pirmasens
Uffz. Karl Göller	12./JG 53	1st	P-47	358 FG	unknown	Kaiserslautern
Ofw. Eduard Isken	13./JG 53	50th	Auster	270th FAB	unknown	E Metz/Saar
Maj. Siegfried Freytag	II./JG 77	102nd	Spitfire	?	unknown	unknown

Other sources give the following numbers as aerial claims on 1.1.1945 for Bodenplatte:

## Fernschreiben II.Jako.Ic Nr.140/44 geh. vom 3.1.1945:

Spitfire	19 destroyed
Thunderbolt	15 destroyed
Auster	7 destroyed
Typhoon	6 destroyed
Tempest	5 destroyed
Mustang	2 destroyed
Lysander	1 destroyed
Spitfire	7 probably destroyed
Thunderbolt	2 probably destroyed
Typhoon	2 probably destroyed
Spitfire	1 destroyed (in afternoon)

Total: 55 destroyed and 11 probably destroyed.

## Luftwaffenführungsstab Ic, Fremde Luftwaffen West, Nr. 1160/45 g.Kdos. vom 25.2.1945:

According to reports of units: 65 claimed destroyed.  
12 claimed probably destroyed.

## Appendix 7: Allied Order of Battle 31st December 1944

### No. 83 Group

121 Wing	Volkel	B-80 174 Squadron 175 Squadron 184 Squadron	Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B	W/Cdr. W. Pitt-Brown DFC S/Ldr. D.T.N. Kelly S/Ldr. R.W. Campbell S/Ldr. W. Smith DFC
122 Wing	Volkel	B-80 3 Squadron 56 Squadron 80 Squadron 274 Squadron 486 Squadron	Tempest V Tempest V Tempest V Tempest V Tempest V	W/Cdr. B. Wray DFC S/Ldr. K.F. Thiele DSO, DFC S/Ldr. D.V.C. Cotes-Preedy GM, DFC S/Ldr. R. L. Spurdle DFC S/Ldr. A.H. Baird DFC S/Ldr. A. E. Umbers DFC
124 Wing	Eindhoven	B-78 137 Squadron 181 Squadron 182 Squadron 247 Squadron	Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B	W/Cdr. C. D. North-Lewis, DFC S/Ldr. R.G.V. Barraclough S/Ldr. D. R. Crawford S/Ldr. G.J. Gray DFC S/Ldr. H. Bryant DFC
125 Wing	Ophoven	Y-32 41 Squadron 130 Squadron 350 Squadron 610 Squadron	Spitfire XIV Spitfire XIV Spitfire XIV Spitfire XIV	W/Cdr. F. D.S. Scott-Malden DSO, DFC S/Ldr. D.L. Benham DFC, AFC S/Ldr. P. V. K. Tripe F/Lt. J. Lavigne (Acting) S/Ldr. R.A. Newbury DFC
126 Wing	Heesch	B-88 401 Squadron 402 Squadron 411 Squadron 412 Squadron 442 Squadron	Spitfire IX Spitfire XIV Spitfire IX Spitfire IX Spitfire IX	W/Cdr. B.D. Russel DSO, DFC F/Lt. MacKay (Acting) S/Ldr. B. Lawrence S/Ldr. N. Newell S/Ldr. D.H. Dover DFC S/Ldr. M.E. Jowsey DFC
127 Wing	Evere	B-56 403 Squadron 416 Squadron	Spitfire XVI Spitfire XVI	W/Cdr. J.E. Johnson DSO, DFC S/Ldr. E. Collier S/Ldr. D. Mitchener DFC
143 Wing	Eindhoven	B-78 168 Squadron 438 Squadron 439 Squadron 440 Squadron	Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B Typhoon 1B	W/Cdr. F.G. Grant DSO, DFC S/Ldr. L.H. Lambert DFC F/Lt. P. Wilson S/Ldr. R.G. Crosby S/Ldr. H.O. Gooding
39 Recce Wing	Eindhoven	B-78 400 Squadron 414 Squadron 430 Squadron	Spitfire IX Spitfire IX Spitfire XIV	S/Ldr. M.G. Brown S/Ldr. G. Wonnacott DFC S/Ldr. Watts

### No. 84 Group1

131 Wing	St. Denis Westrem	B-61 302 Squadron 308 Squadron 317 Squadron	Spitfire IX/XVI Spitfire IX Spitfire IX	W/Cdr. T. Sawicz DFC (acting) S/Ldr. M. Duryasz KW, DFC S/Ldr. K. Pniak, VM, KW, DFC S/Ldr. M. Chelmecki KW
132 Wing	Woensdrecht	B-79 66 Squadron 127 Squadron 322 Squadron 331 Squadron 332 Squadron	Spitfire XVI Spitfire XVI Spitfire IX Spitfire IX Spitfire IX	W/Cdr. R.A. Berg DFC S/Ldr. R. Easby S/Ldr. S. F. Sampson DFC S/Ldr. H.F. O'Neill DFC Maj. M. Gran DFC Maj. J. Tvedte
135 Wing	Maldegem	B-65 349 Squadron 485 Squadron	Spitfire IX Spitfire IX	S/Ldr. A.A. van der Velde S/Ldr. J.G. Pattison
145 Wing	Deurne	B-70 341 Squadron 74 Squadron 329 Squadron 345 Squadron	Spitfire IX Spitfire IX Spitfire IX Spitfire IX	W/Cdr. W.V. Crawford-Compton DSO, DFC Capt. Schloesing DFC S/Ldr. A.J. Reeves DFC Cdt. Guizard Cdt. J. Ozanne
146 Wing	Deurne	B-70 193 Squadron 197 Squadron 257 Squadron 263 Squadron 266 Squadron	Typhoon 1 B Typhoon 1 B Typhoon 1 B Typhoon 1 B Typhoon 1 B	W/Cdr. D.E. Gillam DSO, DFC, AFC S/Ldr. C.D. Erasmus S/Ldr. A.H. Smith DFC S/Ldr. A. G. Todd DFC F/Lt. R. E. G. Sheward (Acting) S/Ldr. H. Deall



35 Recce Wing	Gilze Rijen	B-77 2 Squadron 4 Squadron 268 Squadron	Mustang II/Spitfire XIV Spitfire IX Mustang IA/II	S/Ldr. C. E. Maitland DFC S/Ldr. C.D.H. St. John DFC S/Ldr. C.T.P. Stephenson DFC
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## No. 2 Group

139 Wing	Melsbroek	B-58 98 Squadron 180 Squadron 320 Squadron	Mitchell II Mitchell II Mitchell II	W/Cdr. Hamer AFC W/Cdr. K.J. Powell W/Cdr. A.W. Witholt
34 Recce Wing	Melsbroek	B-58 16 Squadron 69 Squadron 140 Squadron	Spitfire XI Wellington XIII Mosquito XVJ	S/Ldr. A. N. Davis DFC W/Cdr. M.J.A. Shaw DSO W/Cdr. F.O.S. Dobell

## Ninth Air Force

366th FG	Asch	Y-29 389 Sqdn. 390 Sqdn. 391 Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Col. H. Norman Holt</b> Maj. Joe C. Earley Maj. Maurice L. Martin Maj. Sheldon Brinson
352nd FG <sup>2</sup>	Asch	Y-29 486 Sqdn. 487 Sqdn. 328 Sqdn.	P-51 Mustang P-51 Mustang P-51 Mustang	<b>Col. James D. Mayden</b> Maj. Willie O. Jackson Lt.Col. William T. Halton Maj. Earl A. Abbott
48th FG	St. Trond	A-92 492 Sqdn. 493 Sqdn. 494 Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Col. James K. Johnson</b> Capt. J.M. Updike Maj. S. Paul Latiolais Maj. Victor N. Cabas
404th FG	St. Trond	A-92 506 Sqdn. 507 Sqdn. 508 Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Lt. Col. Leo C. Moon</b> Maj. Joseph H. Sherwood, Jr Maj. James A. Mullins Maj. Robert J. Garrigan
36th FG	Le Culot	A-89 22nd Sqdn. 23rd Sqdn. 53rd Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Lt. Col. Van H. Slayden</b> Maj. Ray S. McClung Maj. Albert E. Miles Maj. John L. Wright
363rd TRG	Le Culot	A-89 33rd PRS	F-5 Lightning	<b>Col. James M. Smelley</b>
373rd FG	Le Culot East	Y-10 410th Sqdn. 411th Sqdn. 412th Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Col. James C. McGehee</b> Maj. K.L. Garrett Maj. J.C. Lemmon Maj. J.F. McCarthy
365th FG	Metz-Frescaty	Y-34 386th Sqdn. 387th Sqdn. 388th Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Col. Ray J. Stecker</b> Maj. George R. Brooking Maj. John W. Motzenbecker Maj. James E. Hill
362nd FG	Rouvres	A-82 377th Sqdn. 378th Sqdn. 379th Sqdn.	P-51 Mustang P-51 Mustang P-51 Mustang	<b>Col. Joseph L. Laughlin</b> Capt. Loren W. Herway Capt. V.A. Boehle Capt. Carroll A. Peterson
50th FG	Toul-Ochey	A-96 10th Sqdn. 81st Sqdn. 313th Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Col. Harvey L. Case Jr.</b> Maj. Francis D. Riggin Maj. Robert D. Johnston Capt. Thomas A. Personett
358th FG	Toul-Croix de Metz	A-90 365th Sqdn. 366th Sqdn. 367th Sqdn.	P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt P-47 Thunderbolt	<b>Col. James B- Tipton</b> Capt. John H. Buckner Capt. James F. Hackler Capt. Robert P. Fishel

<sup>1</sup>123 Wing moving from Gilze Rijen to Chievres

<sup>2</sup>352nd FG temporarily detached from Eighth AF Fighter Command

## Appendix 8: Allied aerial losses 1.1.1945 related to Bodenplatte

Type	Serial	Code	Unit	Pilot	Fate	Crash location	Category	Remark	Cause
Typhoon	MN486	QC-D	168 Sqdn.	F/Lt. Howard P. Gibbons	KIA	Eindhoven A/F	Cat. E	Shot down over airfield	JG 3
Typhoon	EK497	?	183 Sqdn.	F/O Don Webber	KIA	Asch	Cat. E	Shot down in error	352 FG
Spitfire	MJ281	ZF-P	308 Sqdn.	F/Lt. Wacław Chojnacki	KIA	Baarle, W Gent	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 1
Spitfire	MK756	ZF-?	308 Sqdn.	W/O Stanisław Bednarczyk	OK	St. Denis-Westrem A/F	Cat. Ac	Unknown, probably combat	JG 1
Spitfire	MJ888	ZF-?	308 Sqdn.	F/Sgt. Josef Stanowski	OK	NE Gent	Cat. B	Belly-landed after combat	Lack of fuel
Spitfire	MK346	ZF-?	308 Sqdn.	F/O Tadeusz Szlenkier	OK	Gent area	Cat. B/E?	Belly-landed after combat	Lack of fuel
Spitfire	MJ467	ZF-K	308 Sqdn.	Sgt. Stanisław Breyner	OK	Gent area	Cat. E	Belly-landed after combat	Lack of fuel
Spitfire	MK190	JH-P	317 Sqdn.	F/Lt. Tadeusz Powierza	KIA	Deurle	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 1
Spitfire	MJ883	JH-R	317 Sqdn.	W/O Zenobeusz Wdowczyński	OK	St. Denis Westrem A/F	Cat. B	Belly-landed after combat	Lack of fuel?
Spitfire	MK948	JH-Y	317 Sqdn.	F/Lt. Czesław Mroczyk	OK	St. Denis Westrem A/F	Cat. B	Damaged by e/a	JG 1
Spitfire	NH541	?	329 Sqdn.	Sgt. Rose	OK	Borsbeek, Antwerpen	Cat. B	Scramble after Bodenplatte	Engine trouble
Spitfire	SM304	DN-?	416 Sqdn.	F/Lt. David W.A. Harling	KIA	Brussels-St. Gilles	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 26
Typhoon	PD556	F3-Q	438 Sqdn.	F/Lt. Pete Wilson	KIA	On Eindhoven A/F	Cat. E	Strafed during take-off	JG 3
Typhoon	PD503	F3-R	438 Sqdn.	F/O Ross W. Keller	KIA	Near Eindhoven A/F	Cat. E	Strafed during take-off	JG 3
Typhoon	RB281	??-X	439 Sqdn.	F/O Hugh Fraser	OK	Landed at Volkel A/F	?	Minor damage by e/a	JG 6
Typhoon	MN589	?	439 Sqdn.	F/O Samuel Angelini	KIA	2 km SE of De Rips	Cat. E	Shot down in combat	JG 6
Spitfire	NH369	Y2-F	442 Sqdn.	F/O Len H. Wilson	OK	Landed at Heesch A/F	Cat. Ac	Damaged by e/a	JG 6
Spitfire	MH728	?	442 Sqdn.	F/Lt. Don C. Gordon	WIA	Near Uden	Cat. B	Crash-landed after combat	JG 6
Spitfire	MK420	?	442 Sqdn.	F/O Donald A. Brigden	KIA	SW of Venray	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 6
P-51D	44-14237	HO-W	487 FS/352 FG	Capt. William T. Whisner	OK	Landed at Asch A/F	?	Damaged by 20 mm fire	JG 11
P-51D	44-14801	HO-L	487 FS/352 FG	1./Lt. Dean M. Huston	OK	Landed at Asch A/F	Cat. Ac	Minor damage by AAA	US AAA
P-47D	?	?	366 FS/358 FG	2./Lt. James O. Hall	OK	Landed at Toul (A-90)	Cat. 2?	Damaged by 20 mm	JG 53
P-47D	42-28565	?	366 FS/358 FG	2./Lt. Dofel J. Brunetti	POW	2 km ENE of Wiesbach	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 53
P-47D	?	?	367 FS/358 FG	1./Lt. William H. Schubert	OK	Landed at Toul (A-90)	?	Damaged by one 20mm	JG 53
P-47D	42-76176	?	390 FS/366 FG	F/O David C. Johnson Jr.	OK	Opglabbeek	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 11
P-47D	?	?	390 FS/366 FG	1./Lt. John W. Feeney	OK	Bellylanded at Asch	Cat. Ac	Damaged by e/a	JG 11
P-47D	?	?	390 FS/366 FG	2./Lt. John J. Kennedy	OK	Landed at Asch	Cat. Ac	Damaged by e/a	JG 11
L-1 Vigilant	?	?	125th Liaison Sqdn	Lt. D.K. Neil	OK	Maastricht-Liege area		Attacked by two "Me 109's"	Probably JG 4
				S/Sgt. Owen Stafford	WIA				
				S/Sgt. William D. Fletcher	KIA				
Art. spotter	?	?	270th Field Art. Bn	Pilot and observer killed	KIA	Saar river	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 53
Art. spotter	?	?	XX Art. Corps	Pilot and observer believed killed	KIA?	Unknown	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	JG 53
Auster	?	?	A.D.L.S. Flight	F/O Harvey	OK	Leopoldsborg area	Cat. E	Shot down by e/a	Fighters



# Appendix 9: Allied Material Losses: January 1st 1945

A/f	Unit	Serial	Codes	Type of aircraft	Damage	Notes
Asch	487 FS/352 FG 366th FG	44-14061	PE-B	Mustang Thunderbolt C-47 B-17G Flying Fortress	§Damaged Cat A Cat A Destroyed	Little One III  Was already derelict hulk before attack
Bourg Leopold	ADLS Flight			Auster	Destroyed	Strafed on the ground while landing; pilot safe
Deurne	No. 146 Wing 193 Sqn			Typhoon Typhoon IB		5 destroyed A few a/c destroyed or damaged (3 destroyed)
	197 Sqn			Typhoon		3 destroyed/damaged
	257 Sqn			Typhoon IB		2 damaged (2 destroyed)
	257 Sqn	MN698		Typhoon	Cat B	
	263 Sqn			Typhoon IB		2 damaged
	266 Sqn	MN364		Typhoon	Cat B	
	266 Sqn			Typhoon IB	Destroyed	1 lost
	575 Sqn	KG355		Dakota III	Destroyed	
	575 Sqn			Dakota III		5 damaged
	94 BG			B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	Uninvited
Eindhoven	137 Sqn			Typhoon IB		2 damaged, 1 Cat B, 1 Cat Ac, 11 serviceable
	137 Sqn	JR261		Typhoon	Cat B/E	
	137 Sqn	V7752		Hurricane	Cat E	Hack aircraft for mail and beer
	181 Sqn	EK172		Typhoon IB	Cat E	
	182 Sqn			Typhoon IB		All aircraft more or less damaged
	182 Sqn	RB256		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	RB254		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	RB193		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	PD450		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	MN693		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	MN422		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	JP736		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	182 Sqn	MN823		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
	182 Sqn	MN768		Typhoon IB	Cat E	
	182 Sqn	JP397		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
	182 Sqn	JR328		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
	182 Sqn	JP654		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
	182 Sqn	MN340		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	247 Sqn			Typhoon IB		5 aircraft serviceable 2 badly damaged
	247 Sqn	JR129		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	247 Sqn	RB225		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	247 Sqn	JP437		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	247 Sqn	EK371		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	247 Sqn	PD495		Typhoon IB	Damaged	minor damage
	168 Sqn			Typhoon IB		1 ac shot down 1 damaged on the ground
	168 Sqn	RB209		Typhoon IB	Cat A	
	438 Sqn			Typhoon IB		3 ac burned 1 crashed and broke up 1 Cat Ac
	438 Sqn	MN607	-G	Typhoon IB	Cat E	F/O Lord
	438 Sqn	MN816	-Y	Typhoon IB	Cat E	F/Lt Regan
	438 Sqn	MP177	-F	Typhoon IB	Cat E	P/O Harle
	439 Sqn			Typhoon IB		1 lost on recce 1 destroyed & 1 slightly damaged on ground
	439 Sqn	MN869	-A	Typhoon IB	Cat E	
	439 Sqn	RB257		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
	439 Sqn	PD554		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
	439 Sqn	MN144		Typhoon IB	Cat Ac	
	439 Sqn	PD461		Typhoon IB	Cat Ac	
	439 Sqn	PD608		Typhoon IB	Cat Ac	
	440 Sqn			Typhoon IB		8 destroyed 4 damaged
	440 Sqn	JR530		Typhoon	Cat B/E	
	440 Sqn	RB205		Typhoon	Destroyed	
	440 Sqn	MN569		Typhoon	Cat E	
	440 Sqn	RB305		Typhoon IB	Cat Ac	



A/f	Unit	Serial	Codes	Type of aircraft	Damage	Notes
440 Sqdn		RB192		Typhoon IB	Cat E	
440 Sqdn		PD621		Typhoon IB	Cat E	
440 Sqdn		PD595	-X	Typhoon IB	Cat E	
440 Sqdn		MP139	-W	Typhoon IB	Cat E	
440 Sqdn		MN940	-M	Typhoon IB	Cat E	
440 Sqdn		MN984		Typhoon IB	Cat E	
440 Sqdn		MN380		Typhoon IB	Cat Ac	
440 Sqdn		PD589		Typhoon IB	Cat B/E	
39 Wing						3 Mustangs destroyed 1 damaged; 2 Spitfire XIV destroyed, 7 damaged; 5 Spitfire XI destroyed, 7 damaged; 5 Spitfire IX damaged 5 destroyed, 4 Cat B, 1 Cat Ac
400 Sqdn				Spitfire XI		
400 Sqdn		PL828		Spitfire XI	Cat Ac/E	
400 Sqdn		MB942		Spitfire XI	Cat B/E	
400 Sqdn		PM128		Spitfire XI	Cat B/E	
400 Sqdn		PL989		Spitfire XI	Cat E	
400 Sqdn		PL950		Spitfire XI	Cat B	
400 Sqdn		PL911		Spitfire XI	Cat E	
400 Sqdn		PL883		Spitfire XI	Cat E	
400 Sqdn		PL786		Spitfire XI	Cat E	
400 Sqdn		PA894		Spitfire XI	Cat E	
400 Sqdn		PA887		Spitfire XI	Cat B	
414 Sqdn				Spitfire FR IX		4 Cat B 1 Cat Ac
414 Sqdn		MJ633		Spitfire FR IX	Cat B	
414 Sqdn		MJ910		Spitfire FR IX	Cat B	
414 Sqdn		MK290	-U	Spitfire FR IX	Cat B/E	
414 Sqdn		MK374		Spitfire FR IX	Cat B/E	
430 Sqdn				Spitfire FR XIV & Mustang I		4 Cat E and 3 Cat B
430 Sqdn		RM856		Spitfire FR XIV	Cat B	
430 Sqdn		RM883		Spitfire FR XIV	Cat E	
430 Sqdn		RM833		Spitfire XIV	Cat E	
430 Sqdn		AG628		Mustang Mk I	Cat B/E	
430 Sqdn		AL966		Mustang Mk I	Cat E	
430 Sqdn		AP178		Mustang Mk I	Damaged	
430 Sqdn		RM857		Spitfire FR XIV	Cat B	
430 Sqdn		RM848		Spitfire FR XIV	Cat E	
430 Sqdn		AG544		Mustang Mk I	Cat E	
83GCS						3 Spitfires Cat E; 1 Spitfire Cat B; 2 Ansons Cat E; 2 Austers Cat B
83GCS		NK998		Anson XI	Cat E	
83GCS		NK990		Anson XI	Cat E	
83GCS		MK240		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
83GCS		ML133		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
83GSU		SM368		Spitfire XVI	Cat E	
83GSU		MK953		Spitfire IX Destroyed		
2 TAFCS		MS937		Auster Mk IV	Cat E	
416 Sqdn				Spitfire XVI	Destroyed	Gordon M. Hill's a/c
other				other		B17, 3 Bostons and Hudson under repair (also destroyed)
Evere						
127 Wing						1 shot down, 11 Cat E & 12 cat B on the ground
403 Sqdn		SM258		Spitfire XVI	Cat B/E	
403 Sqdn		SM336	KH	Spitfire XVI	Cat E	
403 Sqdn		SM206		Spitfire XVI	Cat E	
416 Sqdn				Spitfire XVI		1 shot down 3 shot up taxiing
416 Sqdn		SM369	DN	Spitfire XVI	Cat E	
416 Sqdn		SM349	DN	Spitfire XVI	Cat B/E	
416 Sqdn		SM274	DN	Spitfire XVI	Cat B/E	
416 Sqdn		SM387	DN	Spitfire XVI	Cat E	soc 23.5.45
416 Sqdn		SM403	DN	Spitfire XVI	Cat E	
416 Sqdn		SM310	DN	Spitfire XVI	Cat E	
416 Sqdn		SM423	DN	Spitfire XVI	Destroyed	
421 Sqdn				Spitfire		5 a/c damaged
443 Sqdn		ML153		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
443 Sqdn		MK730		Spitfire IX	Cat E	

A/f	Unit	Serial	Codes	Type of aircraft	Damage	Notes
	2 TAFCS					8 Cat E; 8 Cat B.; 6 Cat Ac
	2 TAFCS	NJ622		Auster Mk V	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	KG736		Dakota III	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NL194		Anson XI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NL193		Anson XI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NL195		Anson XI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NK986		Anson XI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	RT639		Auster Mk V	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NL201		Anson XI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NK988		Anson XI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NJ869		Auster MK III	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	NL196		Anson XI	Cat E	
	83GCS	NL129		Anson XI	Cat E	
	85GCS	NK875		Anson XI	Cat E	
	85GCS	NK608		Anson I	Cat E	
	85GCS	NK544		Anson I	Cat E	
	85GCS	NL190		Anson XI	Cat E	
	AFDU	MG184		Anson I	Cat E	
	ATA	NK905		Anson I	Cat E	
	ATA	NK809		Anson I	Cat E	
	ATA	NK970		Anson I	Cat E	
	MCS	NL188		Anson XI	Destroyed	
	147 Sqdn	KG800		Dakota III	Cat E	
	147 Sqdn	KJ803		Dakota III	Cat E	
	147 Sqdn	KG796		Dakota III	Cat E	
	542 Sqdn	MD198		Spitfire PR X	Cat E	
	575 Sqdn	NK493		Anson X	Cat E	
				Dakota	Destroyed	AM Coningham's second Dakota
				Dakota	Destroyed	AM Coningham's new Dakota
	361 FG	FR880 PB-2		Beechcraft B185 Navigator	Cat E	Prince Bernhard's aircraft
	15F/358FS	44-11367 B7-P		Mustang	Cat Ac	minor damage
		44-14375 SE-K		Mustang	Destroyed	Arrived for repair on 15/12; destroyed 1/1/45
<b>Gilze-Rijen</b>						
	2 Sqdn RM803			Spitfire FR XIV	Destroyed	crash-landed and SOC
	164 Sqdn RB969			Typhoon	Cat B	
<b>Grimbergen</b>						
	Unknown			other		4 B17; 1 P-51; one twin-engined
	326 BS/92 BG	43-38684 JW-L		B-17G Flying Fortress	Not established	
<b>Knokke</b>						
	256 ASR Sqdn					several Spitfires damaged
<b>Maastricht St.Pietersberg</b>						
	50th MR & R Sqdn			L-4 Piper Cub	Cat E	6 L-4s strafed and destroyed
<b>Maldegem</b>						
	349 Sqdn	PT830	GE	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn			Spitfire IX		12 destroyed inc. WCF's 2 damaged beyond repair
	485 Sqdn	NH421		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	NH432	OU-D	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	NH530	OU-F	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	NH321		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	PT890		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	PT885		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	PT857		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	ML361		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	PV156		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	PT525		Spitfire IX	Cat B	
	485 Sqdn	PL251		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	MK722		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	485 Sqdn	ML368		Spitfire IX	Cat B	
	485 Sqdn	MK921		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
<b>Melsbroek</b>						
	98 Sqdn	AS737	VO	Oxford II	Not established	
	98 Sqdn	FW255		Mitchell II	Destroyed	

A/f	Unit	Serial	Codes	Type of aircraft	Damage	Notes
	98 Sqdn	FW252		Mitchell II	Destroyed	
	98 Sqdn	FV982		Mitchell II	Destroyed	
	98 Sqdn	HD363		Mitchell III	Destroyed	
	180 Sqdn	FW199		Mitchell II	Cat E	
	180 Sqdn	FV945		Mitchell II	Cat E	
	180 Sqdn	FV903		Mitchell II	Cat E	
	180 Sqdn	FW202		Mitchell II	Cat E	
	180 Sqdn	FW206		Mitchell II	Cat E	
	320 Sqdn			Mitchell II		2 damaged
	16 Sqdn					Spitfire XI 3 destroyed, 3 damaged, 2 on loan from 106 Group destroyed
	16 Sqdn	PL976		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	16 Sqdn	PL765		Spitfire XI	Cat E	
	16 Sqdn	PL978		Spitfire XI	Cat Ac	
	16 Sqdn	PL905		Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	16 Sqdn	PL912		Spitfire XI	Cat Ac	
	69 Sqdn			Wellington XIII		11 destroyed, 2 severely damaged
	69 Sqdn	HZ794	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	HZ723	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	HZ769	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	HZ885	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	ME950	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	MF128	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	JA584	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	MF129	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat B	
	69 Sqdn	JA629	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	69 Sqdn	HZ862	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	SU 69 Sqdn/34 Wing	NC534	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat B	
	SU 69 Sqdn/34 Wing	NC540	WI	Wellington XIII	Cat E	
	140 Sqdn	NS746		Mosquito XVI	Cat E	
	140 Sqdn	NS567		Mosquito XVI	Cat E	
	140 Sqdn	MM284	ZW	Mosquito XVI	Cat E	
	140 Sqdn	MM349	ZW	Mosquito XVI	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	MT114		Auster	Cat E	
	2 TAFCS	P6232		Proctor I	Cat E	
	85GCS	R6147		Oxford	Cat E	
	85GCS	NK725		Anson X	Cat E	
	196 Sqdn	LJ954		Stirling	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	KG488		Dakota III	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K6993	BJ-S	Harrow II	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K6973		Harrow II	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K6998		Harrow II	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K6943		Harrow II	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K6986		Harrow II	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K6994		Harrow II	Cat E	
	271 Sqdn	K7024		Harrow II	Cat E	
	416 ARF	HD382		Mitchell III	Cat E	
	416 ARF	BZ444		Boston IV	Cat E	
	416 ARF	FV961		Mitchell II	Cat E	
				Mosquito	Cat Ac	AM Coningham's
	391 BS/34 BG	43-38406	3L-S	B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	
	457 BG	43-37828		B-17G Flying Fortress	Damaged	
	467 BG	42-95054		B-24H Liberator	Destroyed	
	506 BS/44 BG	42-50894		B-24J Liberator	Destroyed	
	615 BS/401 BG	44-8258		B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	
	731 BS/452 BG	43-37726		B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	
<b>Metz-Frescaty</b>						
	365 FG			Thunderbolt	22 destroyed 11 damaged	
	386 FS/365 FG			Thunderbolt	12 destroyed; 7 damaged	
	387 FS/365 FG			Thunderbolt	9 destroyed; 1 damaged	
	388 FS/365 FG			Thunderbolt	1 destroyed; 3 damaged	
<b>Nivelles</b>						
	48 Sqdn	KG331	ZS	Dakota III	Cat E	



A/f	Unit	Serial	Codes	Type of aircraft	Damage	Notes
<b>Not determined</b>						
	168 Sqdn	AP194		Mustang Mk I	Not established	
	392 BG	41-29560	GC-H	B-24H Liberator	Not established	
	658 Sqdn	MT158		Auster	Destroyed	
	ATA	AW928		Anson I	Cat E	
<b>Ophoven</b>						
	130 Sqdn			Spitfire XIV	3 damaged	
	350 Sqdn	RM728		Spitfire XIV	Cat B	
	350 Sqdn	NH710		Spitfire XIV	Cat B	
				C-47	Cat A	probably some damaged
	350 Sqdn RM622	MN		Spitfire XIV	Cat E	
<b>Schaffen-Diest</b>						
	409 R & SU					No attack. Culmination of repairs: 19 Cat E, 18 Cat B, 6 Cat Ac
	410 R & SU					No attack: 10 Cat E, 11 Cat B, 4 Cat Ac
<b>St. Denis Westrem</b>						
	302 Sqdn	MA645	WX-H	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	NH463	WX-N	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	MH712	WX-D	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	ML136	WX-L	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	NH410	WX-X	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	MH938	WX-I	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	MH883	WX-O	Spitfire IX	Cat B	friendly fire?
	302 Sqdn	PL267	SZ-K	Spitfire IX	Cat E	131 Wing Commander
	302 Sqdn	MK200	WX-T	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	302 Sqdn	MJ801		Spitfire IX	Cat Ac	
	308 Sqdn	MK247	ZF	Spitfire IX	Cat Ac	
	308 Sqdn	MK256	ZF	Spitfire IX	Cat Ac	
	308 Sqdn	MK984	ZF-R	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	308 Sqdn	ML112	ZF-Z	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	317 Sqdn	PL284	JH	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	317 Sqdn	MK264	JH	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	317 Sqdn	MK610	JH	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	317 Sqdn	MJ797	JH	Spitfire IX	Cat E	
	317 Sqdn	MK948		Spitfire IX	Cat B	
	85GCS	RT481		Auster Mk V	Cat E	
	85GCS	HK365		Mosquito	Cat E	
	85GCS	BM178		Spitfire Vb	Cat E	
	295 Sqdn LJ986	8Z-Y		Stirling V Cat E		
	533 BS/381 BG	42-97059		B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	Marsha Sue
	93 BG			B-24 Liberator	Destroyed	
<b>St.Trond</b>						
	48FG + 404 FG			Thunderbolt		10 destroyed; 31 damaged also several lame B-24/B17 bombers
	492 FS/ 48 FG			P-47		3 destroyed and 10 damaged
	493 FS/ 48 FG			P-47		no damage reported
	493 FS/ 48 FG			P-47		6 damaged
	506 FS/ 404 FG			P-47		1 destroyed and 4 damaged
	507 FS/ 404 FG			P-47		5 damaged
	508 FS/ 404 FG			P-47		no damage reported
				B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	5+ aircraft perhaps already wrecked before attack
	2TAFCS			Avro Anson	Damaged	On detachment
<b>Ursel</b>						
	417 R & SU	HX965		Mosquito XIII	Cat E	
	61 Sqdn LL777			Lancaster	Cat E	
	835BS/486BG	43-37966		B-17G Flying Fortress	Destroyed	
<b>Volkel</b>						
						1 Typhoon destroyed

# Appendix 10: Allied aerial combat claims: January 1st 1945'

Pilot:	Unit:	Type:	Claim:	Opponent:	Time:	Area:
<b>83 Group</b>						
F/O D.J. Butcher	3 Sqn	Fw 190A	damaged	JG 6?	09.35	6 miles E Gemert
F/O D.J. Butcher	3 Sqn	0.5 Me 109	destroyed	JG 6	09.35	3 miles N Helmond
W/O D.R. Worley	3 Sqn	0.5 Me 109	destroyed	JG 6	09.35	3 miles N Helmond
W/O D.R. Worley	3 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 6?	09.35	6 miles E Gemert
F/Sgt. M.J.A. Rose	3 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 6	09.35	Near Lieshout
F/O D.E. Ness	56 Sqn	Me 109G	destroyed	JG 4	10.05	6 miles ESE Helmond
P/O H. Shaw	56 Sqn	Me 109G	destroyed	JG 4	10.05	6 miles ESE Helmond
F/Lt. H.P. Gibbons	168 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3	09.30	Eindhoven A/F
F/Lt. J.D. Stubbs	168 Sqn	Me 109	damaged	unknown	10.00	N of Euskirchen
F/Lt. J. MacKay	401 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	unknown	09.16-10.34	Reichswald area
F/Lt. J. MacKay	401 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 77	09.16-10.34	Grave-Nijmegen
F/Lt. J. MacKay	401 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.16-10.34	East of Grave
F/Lt. W.E. Foster	401 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	unknown	09.16-10.34	NE Nijmegen
F/O G. Cameron	401 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.15-09.30	2-3 miles Heesch A/F
F/O G. Cameron	401 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.15-09.30	2-3 miles Heesch A/F
F/O G. Cameron	401 Sqn	Me 109	prob. destr.	JG 6	09.15-09.30	2 miles N of Heesch A/F
P/O S. Butte	403 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 27	09.40-09.50	Evere
P/O S. Butte	403 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 27	09.40-09.50	Evere
P/O S. Butte	403 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.40-09.50	Evere
F/Sgt. G.K. Lindsay	403 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 26/54	09.40-09.50	Evere
F/Sgt. G.K. Lindsay	403 Sqn	Me 109	dam (unc)	JG 27	09.40-09.50	Evere
P/O M. Reeves	403 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 26/54	09.40-09.50	Evere
P/O M. Reeves	403 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 26/54	09.40-09.50	Evere
F/Lt. R.J. Audet	411 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	09.55	E Haaksbergen
F/Lt. R.J. Audet	411 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.55	12 miles SW Enschede
S/Ldr. D.H. Dover	412 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	09.31-10.36	NE Helmond
F/O E.D. Kelly	412 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	09.31-10.36	NE Helmond
F/O V. Smith	412 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	09.31-10.36	NE Venlo
F/Lt. J.B. Doak	412 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3?	09.31-10.36	NE Helmond
F/Lt. B.E. MacPherson	412 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	09.31-10.36	NW Venlo
S/Ldr. G. Wonnacott	414 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	08.59-10.05	Eindhoven A/F
S/Ldr. G. Wonnacott	414 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	08.59-10.05	Eindhoven A/F
S/Ldr. G. Wonnacott	414 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 3/6?	08.59-10.05	NE Helmond
F/O L. Woloschuk	414 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	10.00	W Roermond
F/O L. Woloschuk	414 Sqn	Me 109	damaged	JG 6	10.00	NW Roermond
F/Lt. D.W.A. Harling	416 Sqn	Me 109	no claim <sup>2</sup>	JG 26?	09.20	Brussels
F/Lt. P. Wilson	438 Sqn	Fw 190	no claim <sup>3</sup>	JG 3?	09.20	Eindhoven A/F
F/O A.H. Fraser	439 Sqn	Fw 190D	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.45-09.50	Deurne area
F/O A.H. Fraser	439 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.45-09.50	SE Deurne
F/O R.H. Laurence	439 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.45-09.50	Deurne area
F/O R.H. Laurence	439 Sqn	Fw 190	prob. destr.	JG 3/6	09.45-09.50	Deurne area
F/Lt. D.M. Pieri	442 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3/6	08.57-10.01	W of Venlo
F/Lt. D.M. Pieri	442 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3/6	08.57-10.01	W of Venlo
F/Lt. D.M. Pieri	442 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 3/6	08.57-10.01	W of Venlo
F/Lt. D.M. Pieri	442 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 3/6	08.57-10.01	W of Venlo
F/Lt. D.C. Gordon	442 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	08.57-10.01	3 miles S Heesch
F/Lt. D.C. Gordon	442 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	08.57-10.01	3 miles S Heesch
F/Lt. D.C. Gordon	442 Sqn	Me 109	destr(aband.)	JG 3/6	08.57-10.01	unknown
F/Lt. D.C. Gordon	442 Sqn	Me 109	destr(aband.)	JG 3/6	08.57-10.01	unknown
F/Lt. N.A. Keene	442 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	08.57-10.01	NW Venlo
F/Lt. R.C. Smith	442 Sqn	Me 109	destr(aband.)	JG 3	08.57-10.01	Over Eindhoven
F/Lt. R.C. Smith	442 Sqn	Me 109	dam (aband.)	JG 3	08.57-10.01	Over Eindhoven
F/Lt. R.K. Trumley	442 Sqn	0.25 Me 262	dam (unc) <sup>4</sup>	KG 51	08.57-10.01	East of Zutphen
F/Lt. W.H. Dunne	442 Sqn	0.25 Me 262	dam (unc)	KG 51	08.57-10.01	East of Zutphen
F/Lt. J.N.G. Dick	442 Sqn	0.25 Me 262	dam (unc)	KG 51	08.57-10.01	East of Zutphen
P/O E.C. Baker	442 Sqn	0.25 Me 262	dam (unc)	KG 51	08.57-10.01	East of Zutphen
F/Lt. J.P. Lumsden	442 Sqn	Me 262	damaged	KG 51	08.57-10.01	S Reichswald
F/Lt. J.P. Lumsden	442 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	damaged	unknown	08.57-10.01	S Reichswald
F/O J.A. Cousineau	442 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	damaged	unknown	8.57-10.01	S Reichswald
S/Ldr. A. Umbers	486 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.15-10.25	Helmond
S/Ldr. A. Umbers	486 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3/6	09.15-10.25	Helmond
F/O W.A.L. Trott	486 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 3	09.15-10.25	E Volkel
F/O W.A.L. Trott	486 Sqn	Me 109	damaged	JG 4?	09.15-10.25	S Volkel
P/O C.J. Steadman	486 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 3/6	09.15-10.25	Helmond
P/O C.J. Sheddan	486 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.15-10.25	NE Volkel-Nijmegen
P/O J.G. Hooper	486 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 6	09.15-10.25	Helmond area
P/O J.G. Hooper	486 Sqn	Me 109	damaged	JG 3/6	09.15-10.25	Helmond area
F/Lt. A.F.O. Gaze	610 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 2	10.14	E Maaseyk

Pilot:	Unit:	Type:	Claim:	Opponent:	Time:	Area:
<b>84 Group</b>						
F/Lt. L.J.Packwood	2 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 27	09.05	W Amersfoort
F/Lt. J.B.Lawless	198 Sqn	Fw 190	no claim <sup>s</sup>	-	09.20	NW Trier
F/Lt. A.D.Mercer	268 Sqn	0.5 Ju 188	destroyed	NJG 1	09.15	N Driebergen
F/Lt. J.B.Lyke	268 Sqn	0.5 Ju 188	destroyed	NJG 1	09.15	N Driebergen
F/Lt. J.B.Lyke	268 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 3/6	10.00	E Eindhoven
F/Lt. B.Mach	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.40-10.20	Near Termonde
F/Lt. B.Mach	308 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	W Terneuzen
F/Lt. B.Mach	308 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Gent area
F/Lt. W.Chojnacki	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	St.Denis-Westrem A/F
F/Lt. I.Olszewski	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	East of Gent
P/O A.Dromlewicz	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Over Gent
F/O T.K.Szlenkier	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	SW Gent
W/O B.Bednarczyk	308 Sqn	0.5 Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	SW St.Denis-Westrem
F/Sgt. J.Stanowski	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Into town Gent
F/Sgt. J.Stanowski	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	W of Gent
F/Sgt. Z.Soszynski	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 26	09.40-10.20	Lokeren area
Sgt. J.Glowczewski	308 Sqn	Fw 190	prob.destr	JG 1	09.40-10.20	N of Gent
Sgt.S.Breyner	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.40-10.20	Lokeren area
Sgt.S.Breyner	308 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 54	09.40-10.20	Lokeren area
S/Ldr. M.Chelmecki	317 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	St.Denis-Westrem
F/Lt. Z.Zmigrodzki	317 Sqn	Fw 190	prob.destr	JG 1	09.40-10.20	St.Denis-Westrem
F/Lt. Z.Zmigrodzki	317 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 1	09.40-10.20	E of St.Denis-Westrem
F/Lt. R.Hrycak	317 Sqn	Fw 190	prob.destr	JG 1	09.40-10.20	E of St.Denis-Westrem
F/Lt. C.Mroczyk	317 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	St.Denis-Westrem
W/O S.Piesik	317 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Over Gent
W/O S.Piesik	317 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Over Gent
W/O Z.Wdowczynski	317 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	NE Gent
F/Sgt. S.Iwanowski	317 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Over Gent
Sgt. K.Hubert	317 Sqn	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 1	09.40-10.20	Gent city
Sgt. K.Hubert	317 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 1	09.40-10.20	St.Denis-Westrem
<b>US Ninth Air Force</b>						
2/Lt. C.R.Wright	111/ProvRG	Me 109	prob.destr	JG 2/4/11	09.20	M-3315
1/Lt. J.W.Ginder	10/50 FG	Ju 88	destroyed	NJG 4	09.15	Eschringen
1/Lt. D.E.Cummings	107/67 TRG	Me 109	prob.destr	JG 2/4/11	09.50	NE Verviers
Lt.Col. J.C.Meyer	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Asch A/F
Lt.Col. J.C.Meyer	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	NW Liege
Maj. W.T.Halton	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	NE Asch
Capt. H.M.Stewart II	487/352 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	E Asch
Capt. H.M.Stewart II	487/352 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	E Asch
Capt. H.M.Stewart II	487/352 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch A/F
Cap. W.T.Whisner	487/352 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	E Asch A/F
Cap. W.T.Whisner	487/352 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
Cap. W.T.Whisner	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
Cap. W.T.Whisner	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	E of Asch
1/Lt. A.P.Rigby	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
1/Lt. A.P.Rigby	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	5 miles E Asch
1/Lt. A.P.Rigby	487/352 FG	0.5 Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch A/F
1/Lt. A.P.Rigby	487/352 FG	0.5 Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch A/F
1/Lt. S.K.Moats	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
1/Lt. S.K.Moats	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
1/Lt. S.K.Moats	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	N of Asch
1/Lt. S.K.Moats	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	E of Maastricht
1/Lt. R.H.Littge	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	NW Asch
1/Lt. R.H.Littge	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	SW Liege-Paris
1/Lt. W.G.Diamond	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
1/Lt. W.G.Diamond	487/352 FG	Fw 190	damaged	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
1/Lt. A.F.Sears	487/352 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	N of Liege
1/Lt. D.M.Huston	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	Near Asch
1/Lt. N.R.Jesup	487/352 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.30	East of Asch
2/Lt. D.S.Flowers	365/358 FG	Me 210	destroyed	NJG 100	09.00	NE Bitche
2/Lt. D.S.Flowers	365/358 FG	Me 210	damaged	NJG 100	09.00	NE Bitche
Cap. F.L.Hillis	366/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.20	NE Homburg
Cap. F.L.Hillis	366/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.20	NE Homburg
Cap. F.L.Hillis	366/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.20	NE Homburg
2/Lt. J.O.Hall	366/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.20	NE Homburg
2/Lt. D.J.Brunetti	366/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.20	NE Homburg
Capt. A.W.Perry	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg



Pilot:	Unit:	Type:	Claim:	Opponent:	Time:	Area:
Capt. A.W.Perry	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.E.Owens	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.E.Owens	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.E.Owens	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.E.Owens	367/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.E.Owens	367/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.H.Schubert	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.H.Schubert	367/358 FG	Me 109	prob.destr	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
1./Lt. W.H.Schubert	367/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. R.R.Ueck	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. J.J.Usiatynski	367/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. J.J.Usiatynski	367/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. D.E.O'Riordan	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. D.E.O'Riordan	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. G..R.Freifeld	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
2./Lt. G..R.Freifeld	367/358 FG	0.5 Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
F/O C.W.Cassidy	367/358 FG	0.5 Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
F/O J.P.Evoritt	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
F/O J.P.Evoritt	367/358 FG	Me 109	damaged	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
F/O J.J.Rosenfeldt	367/358 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 53	09.15	N Homburg
Capt. L.B.Smith	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
Capt. L.B.Smith	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destr (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
1./Lt. R.V.Brulle	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
1./Lt. R.V.Brulle	390/366 FG	Fw 190	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
1./Lt. J.W.Feeney	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
1./Lt. J.W.Feeney	390/366 FG	Fw 190	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Fw 190	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Fw 190	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Me 109	destr (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Me 109	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. M.R.Paisley	390/366 FG	Me 109	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. J.J.Kennedy	390/366 FG	Fw 190	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
F/O J.F.Lackey	390/366 FG	Me 109	destr (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
F/O J.F.Lackey	390/366 FG	Me 109	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
F/O J.F.Lackey	390/366 FG	Fw 190	dam (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
F/O D.C.Johnson Jr.	390/366 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
F/O D.C.Johnson Jr.	390/366 FG	Me 109	destr (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
2./Lt. C.B.Davis	391/366 FG	Fw 190	destr (unc)	JG 11	09.25	Asch A/F
1./Lt. D.G.Holt	391/366 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 2/4/11	09.40	SE Malmedy
1./Lt. J.F.Bathurst	391/366 FG	Me 109	destroyed	JG 2/4/11	10.00	SW Malmedy
1./Lt. P.J.Walsh	412/373 FG	Me 109	destr (unc)	JG 2/4/11	10.00	St.Vith area
<b>Claims not directly related to Bodenplatte</b>						
F/O J.W.Garland	80 Sqn	Fw 190D	destroyed	FlÜG?	11.30	16 miles W Osnabrück
F/O J.W.Garland	80 Sqn	Fw 190D	destroyed	FlÜG	11.30	8 miles SE Rheine
F/Lt. G.Clubley	137 Sqn	0.5 He 111	damaged	unknown	09.40	10 miles W Hameln
F/O D.E.G.Martyn	137 Sqn	0.5 He 111	damaged	unknown	09.40	10 miles W Hameln
F/Lt. J.C.Lee	401 Sqn	Me 109	damaged	JG 3	14.36-16.16	East of Münster
F/Lt. J.C.Lee	401 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	14.36-16.16	East of Münster
P/O D.M.Horsburgh	401 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	14.36-16.16	Rheine A/F
F/O D.F.Church	401 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	14.36-16.16	Near Rheine A/F
F/O D.F.Church	401 Sqn	Fw 190	damaged	JG 3	14.36-16.16	Over Rheine A/F
F/Lt. J.Mackay	401 Sqn	0.5 Me 262	damaged	KG 51?	14.36-16.16	NE Rheine
F/Sgt. A.K.Woodill	401 Sqn	0.5 Me 262	damaged	KG 51?	14.36-16.16	NE Rheine
F/Lt. W.J.Banks	412 Sqn	Ju 88	destroyed	NJG 6	12.00-13.45	Dortmund
S/Ldr. D.H.Dover	412 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	15.15-16.35	8 miles W Gütersloh
F/Lt. J.A.Swan	412 Sqn	Me 109	destroyed	JG 3	15.15-16.35	E Dortmund

<sup>1</sup> All claims based on final assessment at end of WW2.

<sup>2</sup> No claim put forward.

<sup>3</sup> Claim not confirmed, no evidence available.

<sup>4</sup> Unc. = Unconfirmed.

<sup>5</sup> No claim, aircraft crashed before shots were fired.

## Appendix 11: Claims of AAA units on Allied airfields: January 1st 1945

### Volkel

2809 Squadron 1 Me 109 Cat. I.  
2834 Squadron 3 e/a destroyed and 2 damaged.  
2874 Squadron 1 Me 109 Cat. I and 2 aircraft Cat. II.

### Eindhoven

2703 Squadron Claimed 5 destroyed and 19 damaged  
Confirmed as 5 e/a destroyed  
(shared with other squadrons)  
5 destroyed and several damaged.  
2773 Squadron Claimed 10 aircraft destroyed and  
2817 Squadron 31 hits.  
2806 Squadron "Several hits were observed".

### Ophoven

2876 Squadron 2 Me 109s & 1 Fw 190 destroyed.  
7 Me 109s & 4 Fw 190's damaged  
2794 Squadron 1 Fw 190 destroyed.

### Heesch

2734 Squadron 1 destroyed, 5 damaged.  
2819 Squadron 3 Cat. I.

### Evere

2742 Squadron "Hits were made on several aircraft".  
2800 Squadron 350 rds. 40 mm expended,  
3 destroyed and 10 damaged.

### Grimbergen

2719 Squadron 3 Fw 190s destroyed and 2 damaged  
(shared 2719 & 2777 Sqn).  
2777 Squadron

### St. Denis Westrem

No AAA

### Woensdrecht

2872 Squadron 12 guns, 44 rounds expended.  
1 Me 109 & 1 Fw 190 destroyed.  
1 Fw 190 damaged.

### Maldegem

No AAA

### Deurne

2880 Squadron 48 rounds expended,  
1 Me 109 damaged.

### Gilze Rijen

2736 Squadron 3 destroyed and 5 damaged  
(shared with 2845 Sqn).  
2845 Squadron

### Melsbroek

2701 Squadron 4 destroyed and 2 damaged.  
2717 Squadron No claim.  
2871 Squadron No claim.

### Helmond

2873 Squadron 3 destroyed and several damaged.  
2875 Squadron 3 destroyed.  
2881 Squadron 1/4 Cat. 1 and 4 Cat. 2.

### Asch

784th AAA AW Battalion

Battery B: 4 Cat. I, 1 Cat. II  
Battery D: 3 Cat. I, 3 Cat. II

### St. Trond

4 destroyed.  
1 probably destroyed.  
1 damaged.

### Metz-Frescaty

386th AAA AW Battalion

Battery A: 4.5 Cat. I, 1 Cat. II (all Me 109) confirmed  
Battery C: 3.5 Cat. I (all Me 109) confirmed

## Appendix 12: Known Personal casualties on the airfields

### Asch

#### 366th FG:

2 enlisted men slightly injured and 1 seriously.  
S/Sgt. Widmeier, 390th FS, Wounded.

### Deurne

Cpl. Ford, No. 2 Flight HQ 2880 Sqn, Wounded.

### Eindhoven

#### 124 Wing:

2 killed, 6 seriously wounded, 9 slightly wounded.  
Cpl. Bradley, 124 Wing HQ, Dangerously wounded.  
137 Sqn: 2 killed and 9 wounded.  
F/Sgt L.A.V. Burrows, 137 Sqn, Killed.  
F/Sgt R. Bazley, 6137 SE, Killed.  
AC1 R.A. Norris, 6137 SE, Died of Wounds.  
LAC Hockway, 6137 SE, Wounded.  
LAC Dughan, 6137 SE, Wounded.  
Cpl. Wattecamps, 6137 SE, Wounded.  
Cpl. C.A. Rabbitt, 6182 SE, Died of Wounds.  
LAC Hodges, 6182 SE, Wounded.

#### 143 Wing:

Sgt J.R. Gosney, 6168 SE, Killed.  
LAC G.W. Nicholson, 6168 SE, Killed.  
LAC E. Davies, 6168 SE, Killed.  
Corp. A.R.O. Eardley, 6168 SE, Killed.  
P/O P.G. Macklon, 438 Sqn, Wounded.  
P/O A.B. Harle, 438 Sqn, Injured.  
Sgt. R.H. Cappleman, 439 Sqn, Injured.  
Cpl. M. Singerman, 439 Sqn, Injured.  
LAC J.T. Bewes, 439 Sqn, Injured.  
LAC Crinklaw, 6439 SE, Injured.  
F/Lt. H.P.V. Massey, 439 Sqn, Wounded.  
P/O E.T. Flanagan, 440, Sqn, Wounded.  
3 airmen of 6440 SE Injured.

#### 39 Wing:

Cpl. K.J. Boyd, 39 Wing, Wounded.  
AC1 L.G. Richardson, 39 Wing, Wounded.  
Cpl. Trevelyan, 400 Sqn, Wounded.  
LAC J.L.B. Williams, 6414 SE, Killed.  
LAC G.R. Bell, 6414 SE, Killed.  
LAC H.J. Frayne, 6414 SE, Wounded.  
LAC A.T. Firth, 6414 SE, Wounded.  
LAC G.C. Butler, 6414 SE, Wounded.  
F/O D.L. Fuller, 414 Sqn, Wounded.  
F/O F.R. Loveless, 414 Sqn, Injured.  
LAC J. H. Harding, 414 Sqn, Wounded.  
F/Lt. R.F. Gill, 430 Sqn, Wounded.  
F/O W.P. Golden, 430 Sqn, Wounded.  
Sgt. J.L.A. Smith, 6430 SE, Wounded.  
Cpl. J.L.G. Cook, 6430 SE, Wounded.  
AC1 T.M. Robinson, 6430 SE, Wounded.  
Capt. Shepard, A.L.O., Injured.

#### Other:

LAC C.B. Vessey, HQ 2806 Sqn, Killed.  
LAC W. Crooks, 2817 Sqn, Killed.  
LAC R.W. McCristal, 5022 Airfield Constr. Sqn, Killed.  
LAC F. Boughey, 5022 Airfield Constr. Sqn, Killed.  
LAC W.L.V. Grist, unknown, Killed.  
LAC H.E. Osborne, unknown, Killed.  
Cpl. Wills, 2703 Sqn, Wounded.  
Cpl. Kacs Thomas, 2703 Sqn, Wounded.  
Cpl. Brown, 2703 Sqn, Wounded.  
LAC Saint, 2703 Sqn, Wounded.  
LAC Varley, 2703 Sqn, Wounded.  
1 airman of 83 Grp Communications Sqn wounded.

### Evere

#### 127 Wing:

1 killed, 9 airmen wounded, one mortally.  
LAC R.C. Medforth, 127 Wing, Killed.

### Grimbergen

1 airman killed and two wounded.  
LAC T. Wilson, 5406 G Mobile Signal Unit, Killed.  
Sgt. Sutherland, 75 Road Construction Company, Seriously wounded.

### Melsbroek

#### 34 Recce Wing:

3 airmen killed, 2 mortally wounded and 22 wounded.  
69 Squadron: 5 airmen of 6069 SE killed and 25 airmen wounded.  
LAC J. Hymans, 271 Sqn, Killed.  
2701 Sqn: 2 minor casualties.

### Brussels

LAC C. Cuncliffe, Killed.  
Cpl. D.C. Gregory, Killed.  
AC1 J.E. Johnson, Killed.  
LAC B. Jones, Killed.  
LAC H. Williamson, 5009 Airfield Constr. Sqn., Killed.

### Metz

S/Sgt R.A. Gabarine, 386th FS, Wounded.  
S/Sgt K. Garner, 386th FS, Wounded.  
Pfc F. Williams, 386th FS, Wounded.  
Lt R.S. Maney, 386th FS, Wounded.  
Cpl. L.F. Weldon, 388th FS, Wounded.  
2/Lt. C.D. Riggs, 388th FS, Injured.

### Ophoven

2 airmen wounded in total.  
1 airman of 6130 SE wounded.

### St. Denis-Westrem

#### 85 GCS

LAC J. Barlow, 85 GCS, injured  
Cpl. R.R.N. Burgess, 85 GCS, injured  
F/O D.B. Griffin, 85 GCS, injured  
F/Lt. T.A. Johnston, 85 GCS, injured  
LAC J. Sager, 85 GCS, killed  
LAC H. Spencer, 85 GCS, injured  
Cpl. F.K. Winter, 85 GCS, dangerously injured

#### 131 Wing

F/O K. Chan, 131 Wing, seriously wounded  
Cpl. W. Firman, 131 Wing, slightly wounded  
LAC K. Gromadowski, 6302 SE, slightly wounded  
F/O Gwozoz, 131 Wing, seriously wounded  
AC1 J. Koczwar-Bielka, 131 Wing, killed  
Cpl. A. Komorowski, 131 Wing, Killed.  
LAC S.N. Kozub, 6302 SE, wounded  
LAC H.F.M. Mielaszewicz, 6302 SE, slightly wounded  
Cpl. F. Polok, 6302 SE, slightly wounded  
LAC S. Salajczyk, 131 Wing, seriously wounded  
LAC J. Sikora, 6302 SE, killed  
LAC F. Stankiewicz, 6302 SE, slightly wounded  
LAC R.F.V. Stephen, 6302 SE, seriously wounded  
Cpl. T. Strzeszkowski, 308 Sqn, slightly wounded  
F/Sgt. Z. Sulinski, 6302 SE, slightly wounded  
LAC K. Surma, MSU, slightly wounded  
Cpl. J. Tomaszewicz, 5090 C MSU, slightly wounded

#### Other

LAC S.R. Smith, 5013 Sqn, slightly injured  
LAC T. Wilson, killed.

### St. Trond

Sgt. DeLeuw, 492nd FS, slightly wounded.  
494th FS: 3 enlisted men wounded, one seriously.







Three photographs of the Fw 190 D-9 W.Nr. 210079, 'Black 12' of Lt. Theo Nibel of 10/JG 54. The photograph at the top was taken soon after belly-landing near Wemmel. The other two were taken in early February 1945 when the aircraft was at the RAE Farnborough in England. Note the 'famous' hole in the radiator, visible on the left picture. (Evans)

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*"We took off at 08.00 hrs in the early morning light, formatted as 1 first leg of the course to the target at low altitude. Directly behind was Major Anton Hackl. I could clearly see his face. Behind us, closely packed, like a flight of hungry seagulls flying behind a ship, followed the impressive Gruppe of 'long-noses'. It should have been 49 Focke-Wulf Fw 190 D-9s; I could not count them. I repeatedly turned to watch this impressive view. This seemingly endless formation of strong, shining metal machines in the early morning sun has always remained in my memories. We were not flying too long when Fred Weimann, the radio operator, called in that a fighter had crashed. It was later, that we learned it had been shot down by our own Flak..."*

Ofw. Helmut Bunje of II./NJG 6, flying a Ju 88 G-6 nightfighter as pathfinder to the Fw 190 D-9s of II./JG 26 attacking Brussels-Evere airfield, January 1st 1945

