

**GERMAN FIGHTER ACE**  
**HANS-JOACHIM**  
**MARSEILLE**

---

**THE LIFE STORY OF THE STAR OF AFRICA**

---

**FRANZ KUROWSKI**



GERMAN FIGHTER ACE • HANS-JOACHIM MARSEILLE





# GERMAN FIGHTER ACE HANS-JOACHIM MARSEILLE

The Life Story of the  
"Star of Africa"

FRANZ KUROWSKI

*Translated from the German by Don Cox*



Dust Jacket Artwork by Jerry Crandall, Sedona, AZ

Artwork courtesy of Eagle Editions Ltd.  
Prints available through Eagle Editions Ltd., P.O. Box 1830, Sedona, AZ 86339

**THE STAR OF AFRICA - Hans-Joachim Marseille Bf 109 F-2 Trop**

"Jochen" Marseille was considered by some of his contemporaries to be the most talented pilot in the Luftwaffe. General Adolf Galland even referred to him as the "unequaled virtuoso of all fighter pilots." After a shaky beginning, enlisting at the age of eighteen and with discipline problems, he achieved seven victories in the Battle of Britain but was in turn shot down four times. In April 1941, he was sent to Africa to fly with I./JG 27. Marseille soon developed his shooting ability and in conjunction with his fearless flying, became the "Star of Africa." With a reputation of being a rebel to military discipline and a ladies' man, plus his uncanny exploits as a fighter pilot, he became a national hero to the German people. His accomplishments have become legend. On 1 September 1942, he shot down seventeen British fighters on three missions, eight aircraft in ten minutes. Many times he had multiple victories, eventually to become the most successful Luftwaffe pilot to fly against Western opponents. He was then awarded Germany's highest honor, the Diamonds to the Knight's Cross with Swords and Oak Leaves. Flying a new Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 on 30 September 1942, the engine developed serious problems and the cockpit began to fill with smoke. After struggling, Marseille jettisoned the canopy and managed to get out but was struck by the tail section and his parachute never opened.

Book Design by Robert Biondi  
Translated from the German by Don Cox.

Published by Schiffer Publishing Ltd.  
77 Lower Valley Road  
Atglen, PA 19310  
Please write for a free catalog.  
This book may be purchased from the publisher.  
Please include \$2.95 postage.  
Try your bookstore first.

# Contents

Preface 7

<i>Chapter I</i>	Early Years 9
<i>Chapter II</i>	The North African Theater 23
<i>Chapter III</i>	With JG 27 to Africa 29
<i>Chapter IV</i>	JG 27 in Africa 47
<i>Chapter V</i>	Luftwaffe Operations in the Summer of 1941 61
<i>Chapter VI</i>	Desert Interval 97
<i>Chapter VII</i>	JG 27 During the Winter of 1941/1942 105
<i>Chapter VIII</i>	Rommel's New Offensive 123
<i>Chapter IX</i>	The Star of Africa 165
<i>Chapter X</i>	At Home 175
<i>Chapter XI</i>	A Star Rises - & Falls 189

Afterword 216

## Appendixes:

Appendix I: Hans-Joachim Marseille, Life Chronology	220
Appendix II: Holders of the Knight's Cross of JG 27 in Africa	222
Appendix III: JG 27, Duty Positions from April 1941 to May 1943	223
Appendix IV: JG 27 Pilots with 10 or More Victories	224
Appendix V: Brief Data for Aircraft in Africa	225
Appendix VI: The Thirty Top British Fighter Pilots in Africa	226
Appendix VII: Luftwaffe in Africa, Air Order of Battle as of 1 October 1942	227
Appendix VIII: Italian Air Force in Africa, Air Order of Battle as of 1 October 1942	228
Appendix IX: Western Desert Air Force, Air Order of Battle as of 1 October 1942	229
Appendix X: Abbreviations	230

Sources & Acknowledgements 231





# PREFACE

The British Middle Eastern Army had gone on the counteroffensive prior to the end of 1940. Cyrenaica was torn from Italy after heavy fighting. By the beginning of March 1941 Englishmen, both black and white, had pushed beyond the El Agheila oasis at the edge of the Great Sirte and stood on the soil of Tripolitania. Their goal was the capital of Libya, Tripoli; their dream was Italy's eradication from the African continent. But it was not to be.

Catching the British by surprise, on March 24th a small band of German-Italian troops began to check the advances of the British Middle Eastern Army. Units of the recently landed Deutsches Afrikakorps carried out the first counterattacks.

Three weeks later Cyrenaica was free of enemy forces, a large concentration of enemy troops found themselves isolated in Tobruk, and both German and Italian troops were in Egypt.

This engagement will forever remain a page of honor in the annals of Germany's military history. For with vastly inferior forces an enemy was beaten back, an enemy justifiably proud of its experiences and decades-long tradition of desert warfare.

To be sure, England made an attempt to reestablish her prestige as 1941 turned into 1942. However, she was not able to overshadow the victory of the Deutsches Afrikakorps. Beginning in March and with nearly a half million men - Australians, New Zealanders, Indians, Africans, Czechs, Poles and Englishmen - she threw everything the Empire could muster in the way of people, material, weapons and pilots in a relentless struggle against the standing German and Italian units.

In this hour the German soldier showed that he had not only learned to fight on the offensive, but to fight with the highest sense of soldierly duty while on the defensive as well. Striking with a dogged tenacity, his trusted Italian brother-at-arms stood at his side.

The last word on the African Front has yet to be spoken. Therefore, the final verdict is still not in. Nor is a military-historical perspective of the events in this secondary combat theater on the African continent possible at this time. It remains a matter for the future.

Rommel  
1944





# CHAPTER I

## EARLY YEARS

### Foundations

**P**olitical chaos reigned in Berlin on the 13th of December 1919, a year following Germany's defeat in the First World War. Nevertheless, both Frau Charlotte Marseille and her husband, Major Siegfried Marseille, were happy. A son had been born to them, whom they named Hans-Joachim. Hans-Joachim was a weak child at first; at one point he nearly died from a severe case of influenza.

As a result of the reduction of the Reichsheer to 100,000 men, Siegfried Marseille left the army and began service with the Berliner Polizei starting on March 27, 1920, thus ensuring that his family would have no worries. With one exception: both parents were filled with consternation over the fact that Hans-Joachim was three years old before he was able to walk properly.

An hour before Hans-Joachim would be delivered into the world at home a wall hook came loose in the next room. A glass case tipped over, bringing a crystal vase, bowls and glasses crashing to the floor.

The expectant mother saw it as a good omen, for as they say "broken dishes bring luck." Frau Charlotte comments on Hans-Joachim as an infant and baby: "The boy already possessed an independent spirit, even before he could walk. He screamed to make the walls shudder. One time, when we were moving into a larger and prettier apartment, I was carrying him in my arms. I stood in the entry way in order to oversee the movers and give them instructions on where to put each piece. Jochen was screaming like a stuck pig."

"One of the strong movers, carrying a dresser on his back, mentioned as he passed by/The little one has the mouth of Fritz Ebert. He, too, will someday be a great man." (Friedrich Ebert was given the Reich chancellorship by Reichskanzler



Prince Max von Baden on 9 November 1918 following the collapse of the Kaiserreich. On February 2nd, 1919 he was elected Reichspräsident pro tern).

### **Family History**

Those who came into the world in 1919 Berlin were meant to carry the shadow of a lost war with hunger and misfortune. The general view was that children born during these troubled times would be weak in body and possibly even in spirit.

December 1919. Berlin was in the midst of a cold and snowy winter. Strikes brought everything to a standstill and threatened the supply of the Reich's capital city. Berlin's streetcars stood silently in their depots. Those Berliners who still desired to work drove through the city in horse-drawn carriages, giving the feeling of being transported back in time 100 years. The following headlines were carried in the papers:

"Hotel Trade Also Threatens Strike"

"Mass Poisoning by Carbide Lamps at Friedrichstrasse Cafe"

"Negotiations With Poincaré"

"Another Serious Crime Solved!"

"Westerplatte Sea Resort Sold to Poland for Two-and-a-half Million."

The Marseilles' stemmed from an old Huguenot family. Originally from France, these Protestants were hounded for their "false" religion as early as during the reign of Francis I and, later, Henry II, and were slaughtered in several Huguenot wars.

It was during the tenth merciless war of religion that their safe havens were robbed from them by Richelieu. The Edict of Fontainebleau on 18 October 1685 stripped them of all their remaining rights.

There followed a wave of emigration involving over 200,000 Huguenots, the majority finding refuge in the reformed areas of Germany. They had a particularly significant impact in Brandenburg-Prussia, where the Great Elector, Friedrich Wilhelm, provided for their acceptance and establishment with the Edict of Potsdam on 8 November 1685. By around 1700 every third citizen of Berlin was a Huguenot. The men of this faith were involved in economics, art and science, but primarily became active in the

officer's corps. It was into one of these officer's families that Hans-Joachim Marseille was born.

When compared with his other classmates, Jochen was at a disadvantage during his early schooling. His mother had divorced his father early on due to the fact that his duties kept him away from home for long periods at a time. She married a police official by the name of Reuter. Hans-Joachim therefore initially carried the name of his stepfather on the school rosters, a matter which affected him deeply and which he had a very difficult time accepting. It was a miracle that in spite of this he soon was able to find an inner balance once more, particularly since his mother later took upon herself the name of Marseille again.

### **Childhood and School Years**

Jochen Marseille was always a happy child, constantly ready for a good practical joke. Naturally everyone knew the little Jochen. The milk lady on the corner could talk about him of him, just as the coal dealer three streets over. The girl at the bakery was always giving out pieces of cake to make the little one happy. The barber cut his hair to the style of the day, which Jochen immediately changed to suit himself.

Later, as the star of the Eagle of Africa climbed, the Berliner Illustrierte wrote: "All Berlin is proud of him!"

After entering the Prinz Heinrich Gymnasium in Berlin's Schöneberg district at the age of 10, Jochen (as he was called by his friends) could always be found in some kind of mischief. His teachers felt that he had a great potential and was capable of being a model student if he weren't so lazy. But Jochen was neither overly ambitious nor one to sit around the house. He made up for his weaker build with a streak of dare-devilishness.

His teacher of many years, Studienrat Dr. Paetzold, could spend hours recalling these pranks. For six years this cheerful slender lad was his student, and came to his attention when Hans-Joachim was in his third year of school. Horrified at his behavior, his teachers' complaints had preceded him. Dr. Paetzold, however, knew how to deal with such young "rebels" - youth who were not blessed by nature to be leaders of the other boys and instead relied on all types of dares and tests of courage to stand in the limelight. He took Jochen Marseille aside and explained to him: "Listen to me, young man. Just as you can find everywhere else in life, there are decent people and good-for-nothings at school as well. A good-for-nothing is a person who is only prevented



from getting into trouble by the stick or other types of disciplinary action. On the other hand, a decent boy can be made into a real young man by recognition and rewards. It's up to you to prove to us what you are - a decent person or a good-for-nothing. I've heard a lot of complaints about you and your behavior. In the future I expect to hear only words of praise about you and even then only when asked for them."

Jochen Marseille certainly didn't change into a model student after this dressing-down, but from this point onward the complaints ceased. Jochen jumped into his schoolwork with both feet and was on his best behavior until the end of his school years.

He worked his way quickly to the top as a student in the Realgymnasium department and at 17 1/2 years old was one of the youngest to complete his graduation requirements.

As he stood before his mother with his diploma in hand on Easter Sunday 1937, he told her: "Now I can fulfill my greatest dream. I'll become a flying officer!"

Marseille's father had been promoted to Oberst on 1 August 1935. Two months later he was made commander of Wehrbezirkskommando II, Bremen, and was forced to move to Bremen. Because of this Jochen was not able to personally tell his father of his desires. Nevertheless, the elder Marseille gave his approval, for he was a soldier through and through.

In spite of his push to the top and eagerness for learning, Jochen was well-liked by his school friends. All the teachers warmed to him once they recognized the qualities in this slender young man of only average height.

Professor Paetzold adds his comments: "When Jochen came to us from the 12th Volkshochschule in Berlin, he was a noticeably tender and pale young boy. Because of his interest in physical training he developed in build and soon belonged to that group who were always the center of focus - even though he was still one of the smallest and physically weakest in the class. This was one of his characteristics which I very quickly noticed: he only felt comfortable when he was at the center of things; he wanted the attention and praise of his schoolmates."

"Jochen learned rapidly and within a quarter of a year easily made up what he had missed the preceding year. The older he grew the more noticeable his good development became. The most remarkable thing about him was his straight and dignified bearing. His social graces were skilled, his manners courteous and winning. In addition to this, he manifested a composed, controlled demeanor and a bright and cheery temperament."

"In his graduation certificate I wrote: 'His character, which of course is still in development, promised to be good. Particularly noticeable is his refined sense of honor.' I'm pleased to note that I didn't err with Jochen."

### **Labor Service and Entry into the Luftwaffe**

Prior to reporting for duty with the Luftwaffe and the beginning of his flight training there was still the matter of completing his labor service. The spring and summer of 1938 saw Hans-Joachim in northern Germany where he and his work companions drained marshes and cleared trails. He constantly worked diligently, never becoming discouraged with the hard work at hand. It appeared predestined that he would be one of the major players in all the merry pranks his group was involved with.

His comrades liked him because of his brash, yet humorous style. Jochen was one of them; he joined in and was a friend among friends. He never expected special treatment at the hands of his coworkers.

Once, when it looked as though he was going to be dismissed from a particularly difficult assignment (because he was too "small and frail"), he took this as a personal insult and didn't let the matter drop until he had been reinstated on the job. There he showed the foreman that he was able to do anything the others could do.

In October 1938 Hans-Joachim Marseille took leave in Berlin, where along with his sister and various female companions he went to concerts and cinemas, among other shows (such as with a girlfriend to a festival in the Grunewald, where he demonstrated his abilities as a magician at "Barras").

Basic training, where every soldier learns of customs and courtesies, didn't prove to be a particularly difficult hurdle for him despite the early morning athletics and "rifle at arms length" exercised designed to strengthen the muscles. His superiors wrote him a good report in his documents, which he took with him to the Luftwaffe on 7 November 1938.

On this date he entered the Luftwaffe as a Fahnenjunker (officer candidate) in training. He completed his first stage of training at the Jagdfliegerschule 5. Here he demonstrated that he had brought along all prerequisites for the makings of a good flyer. After only a few short weeks he was already handling his "bird" like one with experience. One of his compatriots mentioned:

"Give Jochen wings and he takes off and flies away!"

On the 13th of March he was promoted to Fahnenjunker.

In the early summer of 1939 he was assigned to the Luftkriegsschule (Air Combat School) Flirstenfeldbruck. The course director for these prospective fighter pilots was Hptm. Schultz-Heyn. Marseille's company commander was Hptm. Mueller-Rohrmoser.

As Marseille soloed for the first time in the "Stieglitz", he performed an airfield circuit with the other students. In doing so, and while at low altitude, he performed an imaginary weaving dogfight.

This was a serious violation of all flying rules. Marseille was given a warning; his promotion to Gefreiter was postponed.

Gerd Stamp, one of his comrades at the combat school, verbalized what the majority thought of Marseille: "His watch officer had serious problems with him. Behind an upheld hand gestures were made hinting that it was something in his family background."

These "extravagances" were held against him for a long time. In the winter of 1941 he was still an Oberfähnrich while those he had graduated with had been wearing officer shoulderboards since April 1940. That he was able to remain at the combat school at all was probably due to his father, who was in line for promotion to General. (see Stomp, Gerd: "Hans-Joachim Marseille" in: Jägerblatt Nr. 12/1960)

In this graduating class was Werner Schroer, who was transferred along with Marseille to an Ergänzungs-Jagdgruppe in Merseburg and flew fighter protection over the Leuna plant in the early summer of 1940 prior to being shipped out to the English channel. Schroer reported: "He was not the military type. He always seemed a somewhat shady character to us all. When he was noticed, it was always in a negative way. He was therefore often pegged for duty officer on the weekends and made to stay on post. Then I would often find a scrap of paper: "Went out! Would you mind pulling duty for me?"

Following his completion of flight training- and still with the rank of Fahnenjunker - he was initially assigned the role of flying fighter protection in the homeland with his Bf 109 for the Leuna chemical plant. Promotion to Fahnenjunker Gefreiter followed on 1 May on the Tag der Deutschen Arbeit. Two months later, on 1 July 1939, he was made Fahnenjunker Unteroffizier. His promotion to Fähnrich went into effect on 1 November 1939, the same day he was transferred to Jagdfliegerschule 5.



In Vienna-Schwechat he was once again given specialized fighter pilot training and, after receiving an outstanding evaluation (attributable to his flying qualities and his desire for combat), on 10 August 1940 was assigned to the I. (Jagd)/Lehrgeschwader 2. Along with this fighter Gruppe he was sent to the Channel for operations against England.

### **Operations on the Channel**

On the Channel Hans-Joachim Marseille set out for England on his first combat mission. On the very first day he found himself in a dogfight with an experienced British pilot, one who was not as easily shot down as were the towed targets of his training days.

Both pilots scissored in and out, looking for that split-second advantage that would put them in a favorable position for a clear shot.

In this, his first dogfight in a two-year combat career, it became evident that Marseille was just as good as his experienced foe - thanks to his flying abilities and his remarkably quick reaction times. What he lacked in experience he made up for with an almost supernatural confidence in the way he operated his aircraft and fired at the same time.

The struggle lasted a total of four minutes. Then Marseille pulled up into a tight chandelle above his opponent and dove down on him.

As his guns roared and the Bf 109 bucked under the recoil, Marseille's opponent took a dozen hits from the engine, working their way back to the cockpit. The Hurricane caught fire as it flipped over onto its back and plunged into the sea, disappearing into its depths. Marseille had bested his first enemy.

A minute later, as several Hurricanes dove from the sun to attack him, Marseille pushed his plane into an ever steeper dive toward the ocean. He pulled his aircraft up a few meters above the water and escaped the machine-gun bullets fired at him long-range by the enemy.

"Skipping away over the waves, I made a clean break. No one followed me and I safely returned to the base at Leuwarden."

During the evening, when Jochen was talking with his fellow pilots about his first kill, he said that he felt sorry for his foe. His colleagues made fun of him and one of his oldest friends (his name unfortunately forgotten) warned him: "If you don't shoot quickly enough and just as quickly fail to get out of your opponent's gunsight, then you're the vic-

tim! There's no other choice - if you're a fighter pilot you've got to be faster than your foe. You've always got to remember that, Jochen, if you want to be an old fighter pilot. Those who have scruples die young, no matter how good they might be."

"You'll soon lose all sympathy," added another, "When they fill your throat full. And not with cherry pits, but with bullets."

The next morning he wrote his mother and sister: "Now I'm a fighter pilot. A harsh wind blows here on the Channel, but I'll survive. -Your Jochen."

When Marseille took off on his second sortie, he shot down yet another aircraft. He received the Iron Cross Second Class. It was his first award. On his fifth day of combat he shot down his third and fourth opponents and was duly awarded the Iron Cross First Class.

His career was off to a meteoric start matched by few other pilots. Nevertheless, his superiors didn't have a high opinion of Jochen for several reasons, of which some were his own doing and some not.

The young Marseille was a truly gifted flyer in his Staffel, full of daring and the spirit of attack, and was not afraid of a numerically superior enemy. This spirit of attack also carried with it some negative consequences, for he returned from nearly every mission with a fuselage riddled with bullet holes. Once he was shot up so badly he was forced to make a belly landing on the coast.

Another time, while returning home from an escort mission for He 111 bombers against England, his engine suddenly began to sputter. Dropping lower and lower, he tried to radio the airfield before falling into the "drink."

He paddled around in the water for three hours before an He 59 from the air-sea rescue service at Schellingwoude sighted him and picked him up. He was brought back to his own base, severely worn out and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Due to his low body temperature he was placed in the field hospital, but returned to his Staffel a few days later. He had an unbending desire to continue fighting.

As the sole Fähnrich in the entire Geschwader he was not promoted on the expected day of promotion. The reasons for this were that he had committed several breaches of conduct and his passover for promotion was considered a disciplinary measure. Here is one of many examples:

When Marseille received the order from the Staffelpkapitän to fly as a wingman, he answered "Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant!" He knew, as did the Staffelpkapitän, that the British fighters waited over their native soil for the Germans

to appear - giving them the opportunity for a shorter mission time and a greater loiter time in the air, not to mention the security in knowing that, if needed, they could make an emergency landing on their own land. The German pilot, on the other hand, if shot down was either lost over enemy territory or crashed into the North Sea - neither one was an enjoyable prospect.

Marseille, as with every other wingman or wing leader, was expected to protect his fellow comrades. When approximately 40 enemy aircraft suddenly appeared heading towards the 18 German planes, Marseille found himself facing this superior force. Nevertheless, he was puzzled when his wing leader, to whom he was attached and was expected to protect, gave the order, "Turn back and get out of here!"

Marseille knew that they still had sufficient fuel and certainly enough ammunition, so why should he turn tail and run? The enemy hadn't yet been beaten and they had an opportunity to do this here and now.

As he was turning, he saw a lone Hurricane stalking his wing leader's airplane with the intent of shooting down the unsuspecting pilot. Marseille didn't have time to give warning; he broke formation, flew past his wing leader and pulled into a tight turn to intercept the enemy aircraft. He was in a good position, saw the airplane flitter just for a moment in his gunsight, and pressed the fire button. His Bf 109 shuddered under the recoil. The Hurricane's engine was hit by several rounds. Flames shot out and soon engulfed the airplane completely, which flipped onto its back and plummeted nearly vertically into the Channel below.

Marseille achieved another kill and in doing so saved the life of his wing leader. In actuality, he expected no great praise for this deed. Maybe a simple "Well done, Jochen!" would be nice. Instead of this, however, he was called to attention by the Staffel commander immediately after landing and given a thorough dressing down:

"I sentence you to three days confinement for failing to carry out an order."

"I don't know what I've done wrong!", was Marseille's answer. But that didn't interest the Oberleutnant. "You were expected to continue flying and were ordered not to fire, weren't you? Why did you shoot the Hurricane down then? Someone else could have taken care of it."

"I was the closest one and besides, it was my wing leader, Herr Oberleutnant", said Marseille in an attempt to defend himself.

But the punishment stood. Marseille was justifiably upset over this blatant injustice. He, who was keenly sensitive

to any type of unfair treatment, not only found his punishment to be unfair, but a deliberate effort to humiliate him.

What had he done? He had shot down a foe who would most certainly have pounced on his unwitting wing leader had Marseille not attacked.

A few days later it was announced that a general would be visiting. The Staffelfkapitän had plans for a special attraction. Marseille would demonstrate his unique flying abilities. This is what the commander told him:

"Now you can show us your stuff, Marseille. Take off and show us a thing or two that will blow the General's hat off."

Marseille was famous for his aerobatics. He was a gifted flyer and mastered his airplane like no other. The general and his entourage were amazed to know that here was a young Fähnrich - a new recruit of the Luftwaffe - showing them aerobatic maneuvers that even an Ernst Udet would be hard pressed to perform. There was enthusiastic applause for Marseille. Then the Staffelfkapitän informed the general that the next performance would be a "sensation."

Marseille throttled back his plane and flew slowly over the field, dropping lower and lower. When he was barely two meters high, he dropped lower still and - with the tip of his wing - caught a handkerchief fixed to the end of a one-meter high bamboo pole. He then pulled up and roared away over the heads of the breathless spectators, landing at the designated place on the airfield.

As he stepped from his crate laughing, the Staffelfkapitän was already there. This time he sentenced Marseille to five days confinement for failing to observe the minimum permissible altitude of five meters and not only risked his aircraft, but also placed human lives in danger. Whether this was at the direction of the general, no one was certain.

"I was only carrying out orders, Herr Oberleutnant, answered Marseille defensively. "Besides, it was an aerobatic demonstration." But it was of no concern to the Staffel commander. Justifiably, Hans-Joachim Marseille felt "dumped on."

Once, when he was forced to ditch his plane off Cap Gris Nez, the senior staff doctor at the air-sea rescue site (who had already treated him under similar circumstances at the same facility three times previously) asked him to call ahead when he wanted to drop into the water. Marseille was beside himself with anger. He washed up, returned home, downed a few schnapps, borrowed the motorcycle of his Staffelfkapitän and roared off. Last stop was a tree. The motorcycle was destroyed and the next entry for him in the discipline log was due.



Prior to his transfer to Africa he was allowed to travel home, and he told his mother of the dilemma which prevented him from being promoted.

"You know, Mother, they only think of their own successes and victories. They arrange it so that others cover them while they themselves do the shooting down and get all the glory. In their eyes I was nothing more than a pitiful little nobody: the Fähnrich Marseille, someone they could push around."

It's no wonder that he constantly rebelled and got deeper and deeper into trouble. It was only his new Gruppenkommandeur, Hauptmann Eduard Neumann, who understood this young man and developed from him a true officer and pilot - one who demonstrated the greatest abilities a pilot could offer. What was not apparent to Oberleutnant Steinhoff, that this young man was a genius and a talented flyer and what drove this oddball Marseille to shoot down the enemy as quickly as possible, was seen by Eduard Neumann as something else. This young rebel, intent on introducing a new type of fighting tactic, was taken under his wing.

The words of Frau Charlotte Marseille following the death of her son were as follows: "His motto was: 'Don't turn back, always look ahead.' And this best exemplifies his character. I was and continue to be proud of my boy, who so thoroughly fits the ideal of an officer I had pictured as I held the tiny human bundle in my arms shortly after his birth."

"Brave, honest and true, that was my Jochen!"

Marseille was committing "extravagances" even during his flight school days. He later told his friend Arnold Stahlschmidt of his landing on the autobahn between Magdeburg and Braunschweig:

It was his second cross-country flight. A beautiful summer's day with not a cloud in the sky. No traffic could be seen on the autobahn Marseille was overflying. This endless stretch of highway below him appeared empty and inviting. He pushed downward, throttled back, dropped the landing flaps and gear and suddenly found himself rolling along the autobahn between the fields.

A couple of farmers working a short distance away came running up to him. Marseille jumped from his aircraft and hurried behind a tree in order to relieve himself.

By the time the men ran up, ready to offer assistance, they were blown back by the prop wash. Marseille waved to them and started to roll. His silver bird lifted off the autobahn and climbed skyward, back into its own element.

The next morning the story was out. Even the commander of the school heard of it. This was a serious violation of flight

discipline. Marseille was punished accordingly and a comment was entered into his personal records.

### **Staffelkapitän Steinhoff and Marseille**

During the Battle of Britain Steinhoff, as Staffelkapitän, was Marseille's superior. The young Berliner was a serious problem for him, one that he desired to be rid of as soon as possible.

Steinhoff says himself: "Marseille was remarkably handsome. He was a gifted pilot and fighter, but he was unreliable. He had girlfriends everywhere, who took up so much of his time that he was often too tired to be allowed to fly."

"His often irresponsible understanding of duty was the primary reason why I sent him packing. But he had an irresistible charm."

Steinhoff, who simply wanted to be rid of the problems with the young pilot, thereby became responsible for his transfer to North Africa - leading to Marseille's subsequent attainment of the pinnacle of a fighter pilot's life over the desert and its greatest honors.

It was no feather in Steinhoff's cap, however, not to have recognized what was hidden within this pilot and the reasons behind his unreliability. Had he done so, as a superior he could have steered the young pilot away from these tendencies and directed him in the proper paths.

Steinhoff chose the easy route and it was fortunate that the Luftwaffe still possessed men such as Eduard Neumann, who knew how to harness these youthful predispositions and channel them. In doing so, Neumann brought to light all those qualities found in the outstanding person, friend and pilot that was Marseille:

"In any country on Earth - save Germany - Hans-Joachim Marseille would be numbered among the eternally unforgettable heroes of his day." (see Toliver/Constable: *Fighter Aces of the Luftwaffe*)

Whenever the name of Marseille was heard abroad, sparks would fly. Everywhere it was known who this slender man of only average height was and what he could do.

Coming from an old military family, Jochen grew up with military traditions - but without hiding his distaste for basic military drills. His aversion to the military sprang from the fact that his father, called to duty, lived away from home. What inspired Jochen, however, was the flying. In order to become a pilot, he accepted the military drill and the soldier's existence. This was the only way to fulfill his greatest ambition.

In the West, Marseille shot down no fewer than seven enemy airplanes, but only had three witnesses to these victories -evidence of his tendency to operate as a loner.

His inclination was such that it constantly led to breaches of flying discipline. Six times he was forced to bail out - three times at the same place on the coast near Cap Griz Nez. There he was always treated by the same senior staff doctor, who once asked him when the next time he was planning to show up so that he could receive him properly.

It's already been illustrated how he was often pressured and provoked into deeds which went against duty principles. Apparently the older soldiers had their fun when a young troop got tangled up and ran afoul of the Staffelfkapitans and Gruppenkommandeure.

Marseille never broke under this extremely trying pressure, thanks to his Bohemian background. It kept him buoyant. There was nothing formal about him. He flaunted his civilian tastes by wearing neckerchiefs and other things. At first, this caused him no end of ridicule, but later, after he had become a national hero, became acceptable for him to be seen wearing such accoutrements. Generally, once Marseille was accepted by his comrades, he went out of his way to become a comrade, friend and helper in many situations. But primarily in combat.

High ranking German and Italian officers paid him visits. His abode exuded a certain type of coffee house atmosphere. This was the balance that he, his Staffel comrades and the entire Geschwader needed at the time. It was fortuitous that Eduard Neumann recognized this at the right time.





## CHAPTER II

# THE NORTH AFRICAN THEATRE

### Introduction

**W**hat is known as the history of the African Campaign began as a skirmish on 24 February 1941 between German and British reconnaissance troops in the desert of Libya and ended on 12 May 1943 with the capitulation of the Heeresgruppe Afrika.

This dramatic story of the two years and three months in Africa has gone down in history as a struggle between foes, whose greatest commandment was fairness - the respect for those on the other side of the fence.

It was there, in the sunny hell of the desert, in the sweltering heat of the sandstorms, where battles assumed a special place in the history of the Second World War, and that the life, combat operations, victories and death of one of the best pilots in the world were played out.

Alongside the great personalities of the senior command in this desert struggle - whose combat prowess and strategic decision-making were exemplary - there stands the silhouette of a fighter pilot. He soon earned the type of legendary reputation which continues even today and made him into the STAR OF AFRICA: Hans-Joachim Marseille.

All of those who rolled through the desert in their tanks and scout cars and who left their mark as eagles in the African sky went through their baptism of fire here. They performed such accomplishments in this nightmare of desert warfare, whose battlefield stretched from horizon to horizon, that even in spite of recognition by the enemy could still not be accepted as truth. So much so were these successes separated from the realm of possibility that they were raised to a plane which defied any type of logical or rational explanation.

In the following pages of this book the reader will discover how it came to be that one of the bravest names went down in history, called up from the murky depths of past memories and brought to light for our generations.

There was a period of time between the first Wehrmacht report of 26 February 1942 until the final report on 13 May 1943 which the survivors of the African Campaign can only look back on with horror: the unbearable heat, thick dust, filth and cold, floods and sandstorms, brackish water and mud, mosquitoes and malaria, scorpions and flies, enemy bombs and shell, victory and defeat, survival or death.



*Rommel in Africa.*

### **The Deutsches Afrikakorps Arrives**

The offensive which Italy launched from Libya against Egypt on 13 September 1940 stalled after gaining only 80 kilometers of territory.

The British counterattack, which mushroomed into a major offensive in its own right, began on 9 December 1940 and pushed all the way through. By 16 December 1940 Italy's entire 10th Army had either been destroyed or captured.

On the same day Sollum and the Halfaya Pass fell into British hands. Capuzzo and Sidi Omar were also lost. The Italians assured the Germans that Bardia would be held at any cost.

On 19 December the Duce called Adolf Hitler and begged for help in Africa. At the end of December Hitler directed the transfer of the X Fliegerkorps to Sicily under Generalleutnant Geisler, with approximately 100 bombers and Stukas, 20 fighters and 30 Ju-52 transports.

The Italians lost Bardia, then El Adem at the beginning of January 1941. Tobruk was in danger of being encircled. All of Libya appeared to be lost.

Hitler's decision was now final: "Italy must be helped. It's critical that a German Sperrverband (lit. "protective unit") be sent to Libya to stop the British advance and carry out local counterstrikes against the enemy's weak spots."

The 5th Leichte Afrika Division was to be formed under Oberstleutnant Graf von Schwerin, commander of Panzer-Regiment 5, from diverse units of the 3rd Panzer Division - including the Panzer-Regiment 5, Panzerjagerabteilung 39 and the Aufklarungsabteilung 3. The first chief of the general staff for this new division was Oberstleutnant i.G. von dem Borne.

When Hitler and Mussolini once again met in Berchtesgaden, Generalfeldmarschall Keitel had an opportunity to speak with General Guzzoni. The latter gratefully

accepted the recommendation of the Chief of the OKW to send a protective unit in division strength to Africa. He explained that the German troops could be shipped out to Africa on 15 February.

On 20 January 1941 the aircraft of the Western Desert Force initiated the attack on the fortress of Tobruk. From the ocean side the British fleet opened fire. Once the naval bombardment had ceased the divisions of the British Desert Forces began their attack. By the morning of the 23rd of January the "impregnable fortress" was in British hands. 27,000 Italians found themselves marching into POW camps. Now the Western Desert Forces were free to push westward. The city of Derna, 150 km west of Tobruk, fell on 30 January.

In North Africa, Cirene was taken on 3 February. The next targets for the Desert Forces were the cities of Barce and Bengazi. It was now only a question of time before Italy would be swept away from the North African theater entirely.

On 6 February 1941, immediately after he had given the final go-ahead for Operation "Sonnenblume" - the codename for the African operation - and the first transports had been despatched as quickly as possible, Generalfeldmarschall Keitel announced that the task force would be under the direction of a German command.

While on vacation, Generalmajor Erwin Rommel received a message from the Führer's headquarters to report to Berchtesgaden without delay.

Upon arrival the Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres, Generalfeldmarschall von Brauchitsch, informed him that he would be assuming command of an Armeekorps which would be comprised of a protective unit and later include a Panzer Division.

On 11 February Rommel (who had been promoted to Generalleutnant in the meantime) and his staff flew to Rome. Following a conference with Mussolini and Guzzoni they continued on to Catania that very afternoon, accompanied by General Roatta, where Rommel discussed the situation with Generalleutnant Geisler. Here Rommel learned that Bengazi had been taken by the British in the interim. He requested that Geisler attack the harbor of Bengazi that same night and at the crack of dawn the following day bomb the British columns at the front.

The first operations of the German Luftwaffe against British troops in Africa had begun. Prior to this there had been an unsuccessful attack against Allied shipping in the Suez Canal.

The first German troops landed on 14 February in the harbor of Tripoli. From this point on the first German flying

units began arriving at the Italian air bases at Castel Benito, Sirte and Arco Philenorum.

The first unit to arrive was III Gruppe of Zerstörergeschwader 26 with its twin-engine Bf 110C aircraft under the command of Major Karl Kaschka.

Along with the first Zerstörers came the first dive bombers, the Ju 87 B Stukas of II Gruppe Stukageschwader 3. Landing at Birdufan, they were in support of the DAK (Deutsches Afrikakorps) which was expected to arrive in Africa shortly.

On 15 February the first aerial engagement took place, between a German Ju 88 flown by Lt. Grotz of III./Kampflehrgeschwader 1 and Flight Officer Saunders, during which Lt. Grotz was shot down.

When 12 Ju 87s from I./Stukageschwader 1 attacked British positions near Marsa el Brega three days later, the 3rd Squadron of the RAAF succeeded in shooting down no less than 8 of the Stukas. The absence of German escort fighters was sorely felt even at this early juncture. This awareness was heightened in the coming days.

The general command of the DAK was established by mid-February 1941, and on 18 February was officially given the title of Deutsches Afrikakorps by FHQ. Oberstleutnant Martin Harlinghausen was called to be the liaison officer between X Fliegerkorps and DAK and at the same time was made operations leader for all aircraft of this Fliegerkorps in Africa. The day following he requested fighter pilots as escort for the slow-flying Stukas.

Harlinghausen only served a few days in this position due to the fact that the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe created the title of Fliegerführer Afrika on 20 February, naming Generalmajor Stefan Fröhlich as the first Fliegerführer Afrika. His adjutant was Oberstleutnant i.G. Ernst Knapp. Oberleutnant Blöss was provided to assist in the capacity of Ia, whereas Oberstleutnant Ritter von Voigtländer became the Ic.

After just a short time in his new position, Stefan Fröhlich - as Oberstleutnant Harlinghausen before him - urgently pressed for the deployment of fighters to Africa.

On 26 February first blood was drawn by the DAK when they engaged British recon vehicles; three of the enemy scouts were destroyed. This engagement was covered in the first Wehrmacht report out of Africa on 26 February.

The 5th Leichte Afrika Division (AD) under Generalmajor Johannes Streich arrived in Africa within a few days of the initial fighting. General Streich stepped onto African soil on the 25th of February.

The 5th Leichte AD began its advance on 15 March. El Agheila was taken on 24 March. The attack on Marsa el Brega



on the morning of March 30th initially stalled, but after a night attack by the MG-Bataillon 2 under Major Voigtsberger the enemy fell back. Marsa el Brega was taken by the 5th Leichte AD. Tanks in the division commanded by Oberst Olbrich met the armored vehicles of the 2nd British Tank Division here for the first time and beat them back.

Derna was the next critical target. Mechili would have to be taken first, however, and this was accomplished on 6 April. The next morning the road to Derna was reached and two days later Derna was in German hands.

Further advances bogged down at this point. On Maundy Thursday April 10th, 1941, the remainder of the 5th Leichte along with Kampfgruppe Ponath halted before Tobruk at the kilometer marker 31. Here Rommel personally ordered his troops to take Tobruk at all costs.

The first attacks against Tobruk began on 12 April and ended a day later. Tobruk fought off all German attacks. German bombers and Stukas, diving onto the fortress, took a severe pounding at the hands of the British Western Desert Air Force.

At this time the German Luftwaffe in Africa did not possess a single fighter aircraft. Meaning that British bombers could safely drop their bombs wherever they wanted.

General Stefan Fröhlich feverishly tried to obtain fighters. On 18 April his great wish was fulfilled with the arrival of 1 Staffel of I./JG 27 under Oberstleutnant Karl-Heinz Redlich in Africa. 2 Staffel under the command of Hauptmann Erich Gerlitz followed shortly thereafter; 3 Staffel under Oberleutnant Gerhard Homuth was the last to arrive from that unit.

Within the first few hours of the pilots' arrival two Oberfähnriche very quickly began to establish a reputation for themselves: Oberfähnrich Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt and Oberfähnrich Hans-Joachim Marseille.

As early as the 19th of April the Western Desert Air Force made their acquaintance with the Bf 109s when Oberleutnant Redlich shot down two Hurricanes and Leutnant Schroer scored one kill.

In his second sortie of the day Leutnant Schroer was shot down by a British pilot. He succeeded in making a belly landing and was able to walk away from his airplane unharmed.

Thus began the duel between German and British pilots in the skies over the desert. We now turn to the story of that Oberfähnrich whose combat operations are portrayed in this work: Hans-Joachim Marseille.



*Karl-Heinz Redlich, awarded the Knight's Cross on 9 July 1941.*



## CHAPTER III

# WITH JG 27 TO AFRICA

### **Via Döberitz and Italy to the Desert**

**O**n 3 November 1940 Major Schellmann assumed command of JG 27 as its Kommodore while the unit was still based at the English Channel. At this time preparations were at an advanced stage for the unit's transfer back to Germany, the Geschwader already having completed its operations over the Channel and England proper. Its record to date stood at 147 aerial victories and, since 10 May 1940, 19 of its pilots had been killed, 29 were prisoners of war and a further 14 were missing in action.

On the Channel front Oberleutnant Rödel topped the list of victories with ten kills to his credit, followed by Oberleutnant Graf von Kagenack with nine, Hauptmann Dobislav with 7 and Hauptmann Neumann with six victories. Oberleutnant Homuth had a total score of 14 at this time. With six, five and four victories there followed Hauptmann Lippert, Oberleutnants Düllberg, Franzisket and Wiesinger and Unteroffizier Born.

During the month of November all components of the Geschwader arrived in Detmold (Geschwader HQ unit and II Gruppe), Diepholz (III Gruppe) and on 27 November I Gruppe in Döberitz. From here its members were given leave time.

At the beginning of March I/JG 27 was the first to be transferred, moving to the airfield of Ghedi near Brescia in northern Italy. From here it was planned that they would continue on to Forlì, but these plans were canceled. The situation in the southeastern sector was becoming more and more critical and the Luftwaffe leadership determined to hold these aircraft back for operations in the Balkans.

The unit's transfer to Graz indicated that this would soon become actuality. 3 Staffel under the command of



*Tents of 3 Staffel in the desert.*

Oberleutnant Homuth received their operations orders on the morning of 6 March - the first day of the Yugoslavian campaign.

The first target was the airfield of Laibach. There the unit was greeted by a thick barrage of flak and broke up into two Schwarms. While Leutnant Schmidt circled above the airbase at an altitude of approximately 4000 meters with the second Schwarm, the first Schwarm under Oberleutnant Homuth attacked the flak batteries at low level in an attempt to silence them.

One member of the Schwarm providing top cover was Oberfähnrich Marseille (transferred to I Gruppe a few weeks previously), flying as wing leader to his Rottenflieger, Unteroffizier Pöttgen.

During this mission Marseille's aircraft was struck by flak on the left side of the fuselage. Marseille felt the hit, but was able to make a smooth landing with his Bf 109 back in Graz.

The Gruppe left Graz on 10 April and was transferred to Agram. From there they returned via Graz back to Munich-Riem. And it was from here that the unit was to be transferred to Africa.

The Gruppe's 1 Staffel had been stationed on Sicily since the first few days in March of 1941 and had already flown the first escort missions for bomber strikes against Malta. This unit was scheduled to be the first to reach North Af-

rica. They arrived at the airfield of Ain el Gazala on 18 April 1941.

I Gruppe of JG 27 used as its unit symbol a circle painted on the engine cover. The outline of Africa was often superimposed with a native African's head and the head of a panther. This type of symbol, which was so fitting for the first Gruppe to arrive in Africa, was rather surprisingly not created after the Gruppe learned of its new operating site. The Gruppenkommandeur at the time, Hauptmann Riegel, was an enthusiastic supporter of the colonial movement and had come up with the markings back in the spring of 1940. Nevertheless, no symbol could be more appropriate for I Gruppe, which fought over the desert as the first fighter unit in the African theater.

Kommandeur of the Gruppe, elements of which first arrived in Africa on 18 April, was Hauptmann Eduard Neumann. A man with a leadership personality such as possessed by few others in the entire flying cadre. His special talent for operating in the desert would soon be manifested.

"Edu" Neumann had already scored his first two victories while flying with the Legion Condor.

Along with his belongings, he brought along a circus wagon to Africa which had been acquired while in France, and in which he lived. The wagon soon grew to be so familiar to all Africans that its name soon became synonymous with the entire Gruppe: "Neumann's Colorful Theater."

The Staffelfkapitäne of I/JG 27 were:

- 1 Staffel: Oberleutnant Karl-Heinz Redlich (10 kills)
- 2 Staffel: Hauptmann Erich Gerlitz (3 kills)
- 3 Staffel: Oberleutnant Gerhard Homuth (15 kills)
- Staffeladjutant: Oberleutnant Ludwig Franzisket (14 kills)

### The Course of Events

II Gruppe of JG 27 went from Detmold to Vienna-Schwechat at the beginning of January 1941. Jochen Marseille was able to renew old friendships while stationed here. From Vienna some components of the unit were shipped by rail to Hermannstadt. Bucharest was reached using transport vehicles.

III Gruppe and the Geschwader HQ unit arrived at Bucharest-Baneasa on February 2nd. From there the entire Geschwader - minus I Gruppe - shipped out to Bulgaria to an area near Radomir southwest of Sofia. The next stage was Belica, where the unit was sheltered in tents.



*"Edu" Neumann's famed wagon.*



*Command post of JG 27 with the coat of arms of I Gruppe.*





*Signpost in the desert: to Gruppe Braune and to Königsberg in Prussia - 2,999.9 km.*

On April 6th these aircraft flew their first sorties in the Greek theater against the bunker line of the Rupel Pass.

The Russian theater followed. Here Oberleutnant Erbo Graf Kageneck and Feldwebel Riepe compiled a rather impressive record for themselves. On 14 August 1941 Oberleutnant Kageneck succeeded in shooting down no less than five aircraft in a single day and with a score of 47 was one of the most successful pilots in the Geschwader.

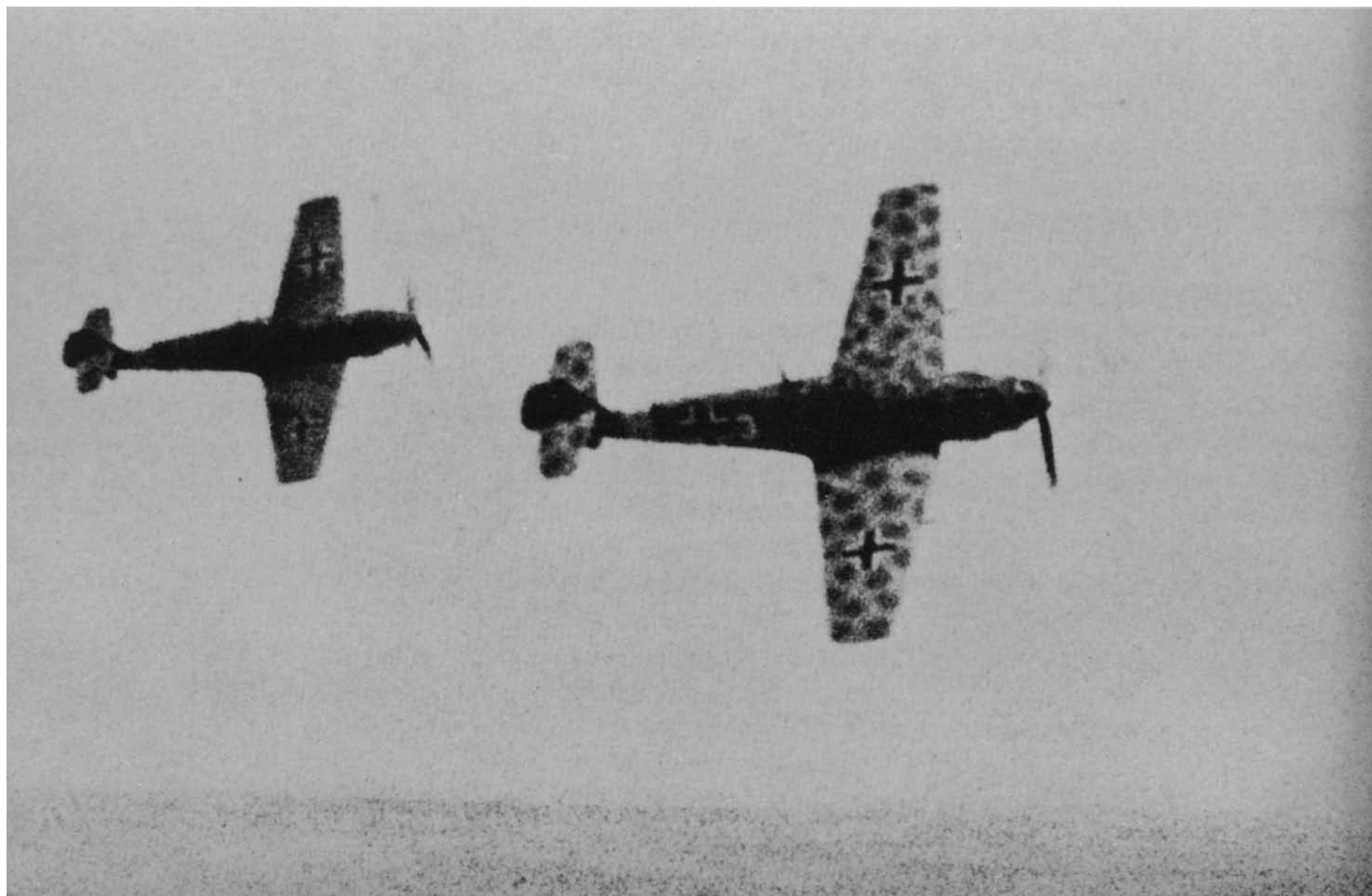
At the beginning of July II Gruppe received orders to give up their Bf 109 E models and return to Germany to re-equip with the new Bf 109 F after taking leave. The older aircraft were to be handed over to III/JG 27 which was the sole unit of this Geschwader left operating in Russia.

How and when these two units arrived in Africa will be covered in the section on combat operations. We now return to I Gruppe and their first operations in Africa.

### **Flight of I/JG 27 to Africa - With Troubles**

On the 26th of February several transport aircraft of the Hauptkommando Berlin took off, carrying on board ground

*A Rotte of Bf 109 E-4/trop on a "freie Jagd."*



crew, transportation and administration personnel of JG 27 along with all materials necessary for the setting up of the first support base in the desert. Their destination was initially Naples. In the harbor there the command personnel and material were loaded onto the freighter "Reichenfels." The last items loaded on board were a few disassembled Fieseler Storch aircraft packed into crates, to be used for reconnaissance in the desert.

During the evening of 20 March the "Reichenfels" weighed anchor. Aside from this ship there were four other steamers transferring material for the DAK. This "flotilla" was given escort by four Italian torpedo boats.

The group arrived in Africa without incident. In the harbor at Tripoli the ships were unloaded of their personnel and material. The Geschwader's African Command took up residence in the Fatma camp between Tripoli and Castel Benito. In the following days the men of the Geschwader began arriving in Tripoli. As mentioned earlier, elements of the Geschwader continued to fight in the Balkans during this time.

It became clear where the operating base for I/JG 27 would be established after elements of this command were transferred to Benghazi and, following the lightning advances of Rommel, a short time later followed behind the DAK into Ain el Gazala. They continued on via Derna, which was reached on 11 April, and on 15 April the first of the Geschwader's men set up quarters at the Gazala airfield. I/JG 27 stayed for seven months at the nearby Bomba Bay.

As the first flying unit, 1 Staffel under Oberleutnant Redlich arrived on 18 April in Gazala. The next day they took off from African soil for the first time. That day saw the Staffelf kapitän, Oberleutnant Redlich, shoot down two Hurricanes, while Leutnant Schroer claimed a further one. The fourth kill was made by Unteroffizier Sippel. It was Sippel again, who the next day brought down a Wellington bomber over Gazala.

Oberleutnant Albert Espenlaub, the brother of the famous sailplane pilot Espenlaub, continued the shooting match on 21 April. The Hurricane he shot down was piloted by Sergeant Castelnau of 73 Squadron. Unteroffizier Sippel was killed in a dogfight with an experienced foe and Lt. Schroer was shot down as well, being slightly wounded.

On 21 April the Gruppenkommandeur, Hauptmann Eduard Neumann, arrived in Gazala. Immediately behind him was 2/JG 27. But where was Oberleutnant Homuth's 3 Staffel?

This unit had made an interim landing at the 7/JG 26 base under Oberleutnant Müncheberg in Gela on Sicily. From



*Tent camp of I/JG 27.*



*Major Gerhard Homuth, Knight's Cross on 14 July 1941, was Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 27, and Marseille's direct supervisor. He later went on to lead I/JG*

there they continued on their flight over the Mediterranean Sea, destination Castel Benito. They reached the airfield, but as the Staffel was on the final leg into the "Scorpion Airfield" (where a refueling team was to have been waiting for them) they noticed that the place seemed to be deserted.

Even a few machine-gun rounds fired into the ground just beyond the tents there didn't flush anyone out. The Staffel landed anyway and found the airfield vacant. There was not a trace to be found of the refuelling team. A pilot would have to be sent back to Sirte for help.

Oblt. Homuth selected Oberfähnrich Marseille. While the remaining seven pilots settled down into the uncomfortable tents, Marseille headed off.

When the next day dawned with still no sign of life, the seven Bf 109s returned back 35 kilometers westward to En Nofilia. From here Oberfeldwebel Kowalski was sent with the last bit of fuel to Sirte.

Shortly after noon a twin engine airplane arrived and dropped a message capsule. This was brought to Oberleutnant Homuth, who read that Oberfeldwebel Kowalski made a belly landing just short of Sirte when his

*"Gazala" I/JG 27. In the foreground is the aircraft of Oblt. Homuth with his kill markings on the rudder.*



plane ran out of fuel. The note also mentioned that Marseille, too, was forced to land his plane alongside the highway due to engine trouble.

A few hours later Marseille appeared as a passenger in a cargo truck, which was carrying water containers and a good supply of provisions. He reported to his *Staffelkapitän* that a fuel truck would shortly follow.

When this arrived, all aircraft were refuelled from the fuel containers using hand pumps. A short time later the planes took off, bound for their final destination. But without Marseille. When he asked what he should do, Homuth answered him:

"You wrecked your plane, now figure out a way to get to the front."

The *Staffel* arrived at Gazala at midday on the 22nd of April. But what was happening with Marseille?

#### In the General' Car

As mentioned before, *Oberfähnrich* Marseille had set out for Sirte. He was flying an aircraft with a yellow 13 painted on its side - a number which didn't cause him any consternation, at least not at first.

Suddenly he noticed that his oil pressure was sinking. The rpm needle dropped and the Bf 109 began losing altitude. The aircraft appeared to be an "engine eater." The motor spit and coughed. Smoke filled the cockpit. Marseille pushed the joystick down and tightened his parachute harness. The desolate sandy ground of the earth came rushing up to meet him. A few dozen meters above the ground Marseille cut the throttle and shut off the ignition. Actions that every pilot must instinctively know in order to increase his chances of survival in such situations. The engine cut out.

Ten meters to impact. The road wasn't suitable, but just next to it Marseille spied a narrow space of flat ground. Not enough for a normal landing, though. Five more meters, then the jarring shock. Steel groaned and crunched against stone and pebbles.

The Bf 109's nose bored into a small undulation in the ground and caved in. The plane became engulfed in a sandy cloud, then the bird gradually slowed, bounced once more and came to a rest.

Jochen Marseille lifted the canopy and released his belt. He climbed out of the plane and, pausing only for a fraction of a second on the wing, jumped down. His feet sank deeply into the sandy earth.

He had reached African soil, even if it was a crash landing. He walked over to one of the low bushes which grew sporadically alongside the roadway.

The motor appeared to still be running. Marseille sank down beneath the shadow of the bush, removed a cigarette from its pack and lit it. Although he couldn't help it, he had wrecked another airplane. With four crash landings after being shot up by British machine-gun fire, this, the fifth, gnawed at him; particularly since he knew that the Staffelpilot would see it as Marseille's own fault.

Once he had finished the cigarette, Marseille trudged back through the sand to his plane, removed the parachute, took the most important items (including the logbook), and set out for the highway.

Its tires squealing, An Italian cargo truck bound for Sirte stopped to pick him up. The driver gave him a friendly grin and made hand gestures to indicate the seat next to him.

Marseille was greeted by the searing heat inside the driver's cab. Nevertheless, they soon reached Sirte and Marseille explained to the driver that he was to be taken directly to the Kommandeur and dropped off there.

A few minutes later Marseille stood in front of the Quartermaster and reported that his Staffel was on its way to Bengazi when they landed at the Scorpion Airfield where the fuel that they had been expecting failed to materialize. Now they were in desperate need of fuel.

"You can have the fuel, but the next tanker is only now being filled", answered the Quartermaster.

As the truck was just leaving, Ofw. Kowalski arrived in Sirte and reported that the Staffel had continued on to En Nofilia and that all supplies should be rerouted there.

Kowalski had been forced to make an emergency landing as well.

While Marseille set out in the first truck carrying drinking water and supplies, Kowalski would follow directly behind in the second truck with the fuel.

### **Solo by Car**

Marseille was therefore left behind without his aircraft in En Nofilia, while the Staffel set out for Gazala - which they reached on April 22nd after another interim landing.

In the meantime Marseille had learned that an Italian transport convoy would be making its way along the road in about an hour. Picking up his belongings, he started for the highway and braced himself for what was to come.

As the head of the column emerged from the swirling dust, Marseille saw that the vehicles were indeed Italian.



The first vehicle swerved to the right and came to a halt. Before Marseille could utter a word the small driver left his seat behind the wheel, grabbed Marseille's bags and tossed them into the truck.

Marseille climbed aboard and discovered a young Italian Lieutenant who spoke poor German, but at least well enough so that they could understand each other.

When Marseille asked how long it would take to get to Gazala, mentioning that he was expected there by noon tomorrow, the Italian broke into laughter.

"Doppo domani - the day after tomorrow", he said. "At the earliest."

"But I've got to be in Gazala tomorrow!"

At this point even the driver permitted himself a hesitant arm movement, which Marseille took to mean that the young German pilot with the Iron Cross on his field blouse was asking the impossible.

As dusk settled an imposing sight met their gaze. Marseille looked at his traveling companion with questioning eyes, and he explained:

"The Arco Philenorum - The Victory Arch!"

"What's it supposed to be?", asked the German, surprised by such a monumental structure in the middle of this desolate place. Marseille learned the following:

"The Arco dei Fileni, as we call it, is a memorial to the two Fileni brothers, which you can see in the upper part of the monument above the arch. This memorial was constructed in their memory. The Carthaginians had built a harbor near the Greco-Sirtan town of Antomala - now called Mugtáa el Chebrit. A long, bloody war between Greece and Carthage over ownership of the harbor followed. Only about 350 BC were the two enemies able to come to an agreement."

"Carthage and Cirene were to send out two runners each. The future border was to be where the two pair met each other."

"Carthage selected as its runners the brothers Fileni, who were known as outstanding athletes. But the Cirenes had also chosen excellent contenders. Their athletes, however, were slowed by storms and rain. They were overtaken and this spot was established as the border."

"As the losers, the Cirenes told the Carthaginians that they would only recognize this border if the two Fileni brothers would allow themselves to be buried alive."

"The Fileni brothers said they were willing to do this. They were sacrificed in order to keep this favorable border. There where they died the Arco Philaenorum was erected - the Arco dei Fileni of the Italians. This was to stand for all time as the border between Carthage and Cirene."

Jochen Marseille listened with growing interest to this explanation. As the Tenente ended his story Marseille exclaimed:

"But the arch looks almost new!"

"You're right", answered the lieutenant. "Air Marshal Balbo had it rebuilt on the alleged gravesite of the two brothers. This arch now separates Tripolitania from Cyrenaica.

It was already dark when they reached one of the airstrips along the Via Balbia. Marseille said goodbye to his Italian comrades, took his belongings and walked over to flight operations. There he learned from the Feldwebel on duty that he couldn't count on a flight to Derna the next day.

"I have no orders for such and am afraid that you could be stuck here for days, my friend. Best thing to do is catch a cargo truck."

"If I do that, I'll be in Gazala the day after tomorrow. I've got to be there tomorrow around noontime."

"Maybe you can get a car", offered the Feldwebel. "Go on over to the quartermaster's and ask for the duty officer."

Marseille grabbed his baggage and made his way along the wrecks littering the edge of the airfield in the direction shown to him.

It had become dark very quickly, but a guard showed him the quartermaster's tent. Marseille entered, and after exchanging formalities asked that a vehicle be given him for a trip to Derna.

"I'm a Schwarm leader and tomorrow we've got to take off from Gazala", he explained in a rush.

"I understand", said the kindly older Hauptmann, who wore the clasps of both Iron Crosses. "But I can't help you out. Maybe the General will loan you his car."

The wide grin on the Hauptmann's face showed that he was only jesting. But Marseille asked him if he could speak with the general.

Ten minutes later Oberfähnrich Marseille reported to General Hellman and told him of his misfortune. In closing, he said: "I've got to be back at my Staffel tomorrow. If I don't show up my Schwarm won't be able to take off."

The Schwarm he was leading was made up of two Roten of two aircraft each.

A strange thing happened here, as often would happen later at other times in other places. Instead of showing the cocky and impertinent Oberfähnrich to the door, General Hellmann seemed to be amused and glad to see this bold young soldier. He didn't fail to notice the Iron Cross 1st Class either, meaning that here was a pilot of some skill.

"Then tell me of your experiences over the Channel", the general asked the Oberfähnrich and invited him to sit down.

In his refreshing style Marseille told him of his kills and also how he nearly ditched three times and actually did once.

When he ended, the general nodded. "You'll get the car, but first you must have dinner with me." He called for the Hauptmann and asked him which cars were available. Two Volkswagens and the general's "Admiral", which the general needed for himself.

General Hellmann turned back to Marseille. "Tomorrow morning at daybreak you can leave with my car. Or would you prefer to leave now? There's a new moon and after 2300 hrs its nearly as bright as day."

"If possible, I would like to leave right away, Herr General!", said Marseille.

"Good then! Drive the car up. Check to see if it's been filled", Hellman asked the Hauptmann.

"And you, Marseille, break a leg! I hope you know that you now have to get fifty more kills to make up for this favor. I hope to hear back from you on this matter."

"Jawohl, Herr General!", said Marseille with relief.

Once inside the spacious car they nearly flew over the now paved Via Balbia. The driver was Unteroffizier Schultze from Berlin and a bond immediately developed between the two young Berliners.

The driver talked of the bitter cold during the first few weeks in Africa, of Rommel and of a Major Irnfried von Wechmar, who led an Aufklärungsabteilung (AA 3) and who is now called by everyone the Lord of the Tarmac. He told of the first sandstorms and the flies, of the salt coffee and of other things, summing his thoughts up with:

"You guys flying around up in the air have it good. Always fresh air and everything free of dirt."

"Yes, but now and again the air is filled with lead", replied Jochen.

"That's right! That's why I like it better down here in my car."

Agedabia had been passed a long ways back. A few houses whizzed by on either side of the road. Once they got lost when they followed the tracks of a convoy which had turned off, but the driver soon realized his mistake and corrected.

They turned and arrived in Bengazi on April 22nd at 2 am. The street which passed through the town was reminiscent of those in Europe, with trees lining the boulevard. But the Unteroffizier saw as little of the street as he did of Bengazi

itself, for he was fast asleep. Jochen Marseille was at the wheel of the general's car.

Beyond Tocrá the Littoranea (Italian for coastal highway) began to climb and led them along the side of Djebel Achcar. Uffz. Schultze resumed driving again since he was familiar with this difficult terrain. Now it was Marseille's turn to sleep.

When the Oberfähnrich woke up again, it was already 7 am. The coastal highway cut through limestone mountains here. They passed landscapes of wild romantic beauty, driving through villages of Italian settlers with carob trees and other plants growing. Here were the fertile settlements of Cyrenaica - developed through the Italian irrigation projects: Gasr el Elua, Sidi Agd el Uahed, Zauia el Beda and Beda Littoria. Near Luigi Raza they traveled past a large grove of oak trees. Most of the settlements were now abandoned. The settlers and their families had left when the Italian troops were on the retreat in December of 1940.

It was noon when they reached the airfield at Derna. Here they paused to refuel, a time Jochen Marseille used to collect his pay from the payment clerk at the airbase.

As he went to make an entry in Marseille's pay book, he opened it to the page which had the entry for the Iron Cross.

"Please, not on that page", pleaded the Oberfähnrich of the payment clerk.

"Do you really think you can get anything more than the Iron Cross First here?", he asked.

"Of course", Marseille answered. The pay clerk conceded and made the payout entry on another page.

They now set out for the high plateau of Cyrenaica. Long serpentine road, obscured by dusty clouds, led up to the Halfaya Pass. Burnt out and rotting shells of vehicles, some of them tanks, littered the edges of the steep slopes. A good number of them lay in the ravines and gullies where they had been deposited by cleanup crews in order to keep the road clear.

Work crews repaired the road, patching up the holes caused by shelling. As they reached one of the turns and could look back on Derna, they saw 12 Ju 87s of StG 3 just taking off on a combat mission. Trailing 12 rust red clouds behind them, they lifted into the air and disappeared from Marseille's view.

"They're flying to Tobruk. Rommel wants to take this fortress at any price. It's the vital point for the entire front", explained Unteroffizier Schultze.

It was 1700 hrs when Marseille turned into the Gazala airfield and drove to his Staffel in the general's "Admiral."

He took leave of Uffz. Schultze and reported to Oberleutnant Homuth.

Marseille had arrived here just two hours after his Staffel. Homuth was actually quite pleased with the Oberfähnrich's performance. But no words of praise escaped his lips.

Marseille learned from his comrades that 2 Staffel had arrived yesterday and along with 3 Staffel the entire I Gruppe was now at the Gazala airfield.

### **The Flying Units - Fliegerführer Afrika**

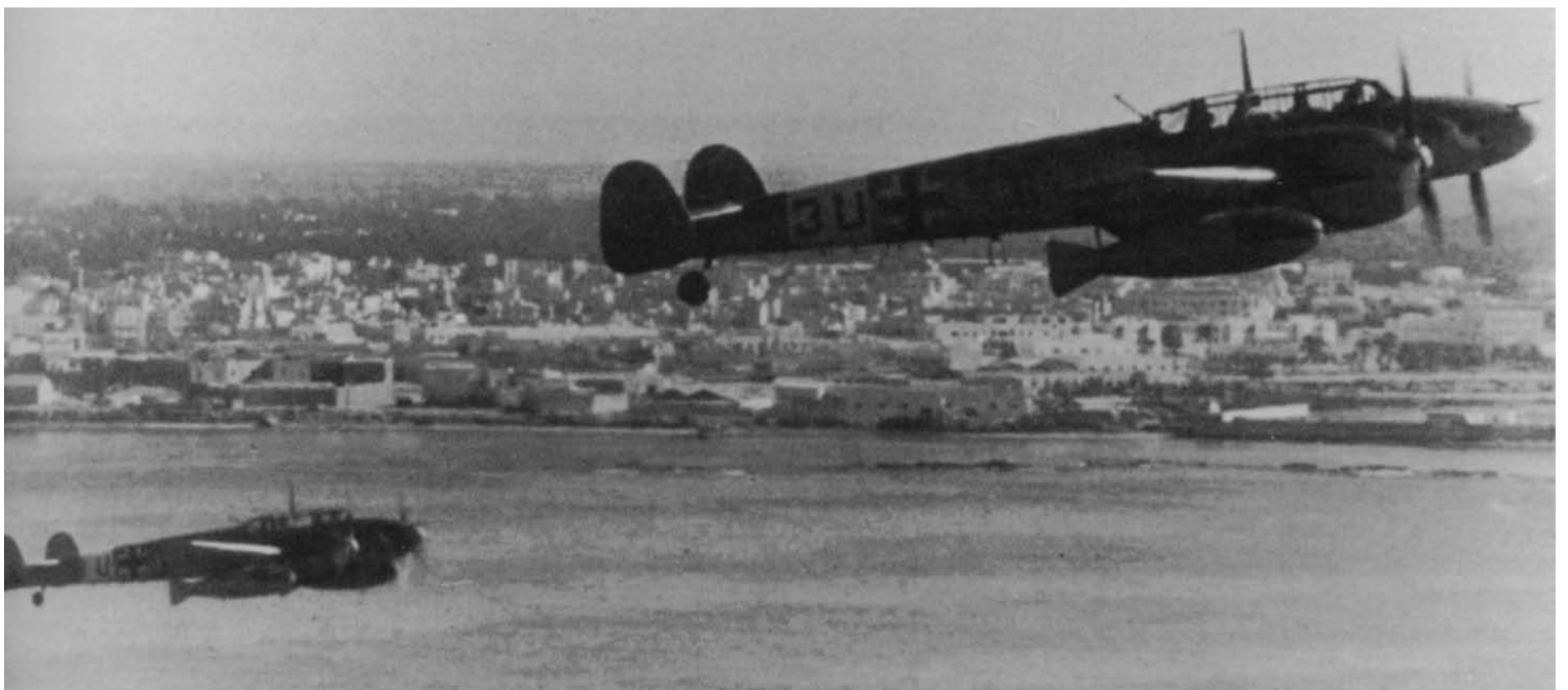
Now that the fighters had arrived the Stukas could fly against Rommel's declared target of Tobruk.

In addition to the first Staffeln of III/ZG 26 under Major Kaschka, several Stukas of StG 3 and 2/Heeresaufklärerstaffel 14, there were now the first fighter Staffeln which were operational. Back in January of 1941 elements of Kampfgeschwader 26 had been sent to Africa with their He 111s. The Geschwader was formed from the units of the X Fliegerkorps which had been so meticulously been sent to Sicily in the Mediterranean in December of 1940.

The orders for X Fliegerkorps were as follows: "Conduct strikes against escorted British convoys in the Mediterranean, the British access through the Suez Canal, and prevent the advance of the British Army in Libya." Later they were also tasked with: "Protection of the sea transport routes from Italy to Tripoli for the Deutsches Afrikakorps."

It was expected that more flying units would be arriving in Africa - not only to offset the strong pressure of the Brit-

*Zerstörer Bf 110s over the Mediterranean coast.*



ish air units but also to preclude the danger presented by these units to the DAK. Accordingly, Oberstleutnant i.G. Harlinghausen was initially made operations officer for the units of X Fliegerkorps in North Africa and at the same time was temporary Fliegerführer Afrika.

It quickly became evident that a command structure was lacking and - given that there was to be a future "beefing up" of the German Luftwaffe in Africa - it would be necessary to establish a permanent Fliegerführer Afrika complete with HQ and staff. Without such a staff it wouldn't be possible to carry out coordinated operations with the planned air strength.

When the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe created the new title of "Fliegerführer Afrika" on 20 February 1941, then Generalmajor Stefan Fröhlich was named to this post on the same day.

By mid-March Stefan Fröhlich had the following units available to him:

- 1) One Stukagruppe at the airfield of Castel Benito/Tripoli and one Gruppe south of Sirte.
- 2) a Staffel of III/Zerstörergeschwader 26 at the airfield near Sirte. (The majority of the Geschwader was still in Sicily)
- 3) Portions of Stukageschwader 3 (II/StG 3 from Jan 1941 and I/StG 3 from Feb 1941)

Using this handful of aircraft all operations would have to be undertaken when deemed necessary in support of Rommel's enthusiastic push into the eastern desert.

For the aerial transport from Sicily to Africa transport Gruppen were used. Equipped with Ju 52s, these units were primarily called upon to transport fuel.

At the end of March 1941 Stuka and Zerstörer units of Fliegerführer Afrika took part in the conquest of El Agheila. Generally, however, flights consisted of recon missions for the DAK.

The Fliegerführer Afrika was tasked to provide support for the DAK's advance on 31 March using his two available Stukagruppen and the Zerstörerstaffel in the ground attack role.

Up until this time enemy air activity had been negligible. German reconnaissance flights were seldom, if ever, interfered with in the air. It was only after the DAK began its advance across Cyrenaica that the British air units stepped up their activity.

Over the next few days the Stukas and Bf 110s participated in the ground battle. All recognizable ground targets





were either bombed or strafed. Occupied enemy positions were dive-bombed by Ju 87s. Assembly points were blown up.

The airplanes returning to El Nofilia reported successes. But they had suffered severe losses at the hands of enemy fighters which were appearing in larger numbers than before.

As General Fröhlich moved his command post further and further east he asked Rommel almost every day to work with FHQ so that fighters could be sent to Africa as soon as possible in order to prevent - or at least cut back on - the losses being suffered by the bombers and Zerstörers from the British Western Desert Air Force.

The pilots moved into Derna, and with the advance of the DAK finally reached Bengazi.

As the battle wavered around Tobruk, the time had finally come. The first German fighter pilots, based in the Balkans, in Italy and on Sicily prepared themselves for the move to Africa. It was - as discussed earlier - I Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 27.

*Zerstörer Bf 110s over a desert fort.*



A collage from the Kommodore's "Colorful Theatre", presented by former members of JG27 to the Bundeswehr's Jagdbombergeschwader 36.

This brought an end to the "holidays" of the British bombers. One British bomber pilot who had been shot down shared his opinion when being interrogated by Stefan Fröhlich:

"Any day without German fighters was a happy day for us."

From now on the happy days were over for the British bomber pilots, as well as for the other members of the Western Desert Air Force.

During the shuffle of their own flying strength I/JG 53 and I/JG 27 were added to the roster beginning on 1 May 1941. A short time later a Staffel of JG 11 appeared, albeit for a brief period only. The main body of this unit had been

---

preparing for the Russian offensive, where they fought beginning 22 June 1941.

While the Stukas and Zerstörers were located at Derna, the fighters were based at the airfield at Ain el Gazala. A Ju 88 Gruppe flew from the base at Benina near Benghazi.

Now let's turn our attention to JG 27 operations in Africa.





## CHAPTER IV

# JG 27 IN AFRICA

### Escort Over Tobruk

After arriving in Africa, I/JG 27 assumed escort duties for Stukas flying to Tobruk beginning from the very first day Generalleutnant Rommel still wanted possession of this important fortress and harbor and did not hesitate - despite critical losses suffered during the first attack - to renew his attempts at taking harbor and fortress.

At least now there was a Jagdfliegergruppe available for accompanying the bombers and Stukas.

3 Staffel of I/JG 27 had landed in Ain el Gazala without Oberfähnrich Marseille. While the pilots freshened up the ground crew fussed with the planes. Ammunition was belted. Staffelfkapitän Oberleutnant Homuth called his men together and briefed them on the situation. Above them a few Stukas droned on in the direction of Tobruk. They were escorted by two Bf 110s of III/ZG 26.

Afterwards the tents were set up and the pilots moved into their new abodes. The heat had met them like a wall of fire. They lay on their life vests, sweating and panting, when one of the pilots standing in front of the tent let out a cry of surprise.

Uffz. Pöttgen thought he heard the word "Marseille." He ran into the open and saw Hans-Joachim Marseille just as he was reporting in to Oberleutnant Homuth. When he returned to his comrades he was surrounded instantly.

"How did you get here? No airplane landed", called out Pöttgen, not a little confused.

"In the supply general's car, naturally", responded Marseille, something the others didn't find natural at all. Marseille related the story of his stroke of luck, including the part where as a return favor he had promised the general to knock 50 Tommies or more out of the sky.



*A Schwarm of Bf 109 F-2/trop of I/JG 27 takes off on a combat mission.*

"Well, you'd better keep your promise", said one of the other pilots. "The Herr General will be expecting a full report."

"You can count on it", replied the Oberfähnrich.

"Man thinks and God guides, Jochen." Oberfähnrich Stahlschmidt, Marseille's friend, jumped into the conversation.

"You've got to do something for yourself as well", and with these words Marseille ended the dialogue.

A few minutes later Marseille stood in front of his new plane, which was presented to him by the two ground crewmen Meyer and Schulze. It wore a Yellow 14 on the side of its fuselage. Although no one could have guessed at the time, this would become one of the most famous aircraft in Africa.

On the morning of April 23rd the first Bf 109s took off at 1000 hrs as escort for 20 Stukas with orders to strike Tobruk. 10 Bf 110s provided additional cover. Marseille had no luck this sortie.

But shortly before midday they were ordered into the air again. As one of the last, the Rotte Pöttgen-Marseille was ready to take off. Hans-Joachim Marseille glanced left. There sat Pöttgen in the aircraft next to his. He raised his hand and signaled that he was ready.

Along the airfield perimeter Marseille saw a line of comrades. Among them the unmistakable shape of the Gruppenkommandeur, Hauptmann Eduard Neumann; next to him was his friend Stahlschmidt.

The start flag was raised for Yellow 14. Marseille pushed the throttle forward. Daimler's DB 601 engine roared to life and the plane began to move. The stabilizers responded to



the control stick and lifted to the horizontal. Rolling faster and faster over the sandy runway the Bf 109 lifted off into the curtain of sand caused by the planes taking off before it.

Marseille pressed the black knob to the right of the throttle and heard the landing gear retract into their wells. Landing flaps also closed and in a gradual climb the Bf 109 turned northeast, where somewhere on the sea's edge lay Tobruk.

A short time later Pöttgen joined up with him. Marseille nodded to him and raised a black-gloved hand. Pöttgen returned the gesture. They soon formed up with the lead aircraft. Below them the Stukas flew in the direction of their target.

Scanning to the front, Marseille tried to spot the foe a bit sooner, but he saw nothing. No trace of an enemy plane could be seen. On the left the Mediterranean glittered and shone like a mirror. A glance at the altimeter showed that he had reached the proscribed altitude of 4000 meters, and Jochen nosed the plane over into level flight.

A short time later the Bay of Tobruk appeared in front of them. Enemy AA was firing at the Ju 87s, which were already in their screaming dives. A few hundred meters above ground they pulled up and tossed their bombs.

Sharp explosions and thick columns of smoke revealed to the escort fighters that the Stukas had released their deadly cargo and were now climbing for altitude, turning in a slow left bank to bring them out over the sea and out of the range of the enemy's anti-aircraft guns. The Bf 109s also turned away, climbing out over the sea.

Suddenly, Marseille saw a tiny speck which grew rapidly. "Indians from the east, 1000 meters below!", he reported the approaching enemy. They were Hurricanes of 73 Squadron; Marseille counted seven of them.

The first Rotte with Oberleutnant Franzisket, the Gruppenadjutant, and Leutnant von Moller were already diving to attack.

Marseille and his Rottenflieger also plunged into the Hurricanes. Marseille made a smooth banking turn. In turning he saw that Pöttgen's aircraft was performing the same maneuver, remaining close behind him. Ahead Marseille watched the bizarre chaos of the battle. Both groups of aircraft had already made contact. The first Hurricane was diving almost vertically earthward. It then spotted a Bf 109, which attempted to shake him by diving towards the Mediterranean, suddenly nosedived into the water and broke up.

Marseille now sighted two Hurricanes a few hundred meters below him and just a little bit ahead. He pushed the stick forward and turned the aircraft onto its back. With the

wind whistling along the length of the fuselage, the propeller spinner pointed toward the rudder of the first Hurricane. Soon the upper part of the fuselage wandered into his sights, followed by the midsection. A quick adjustment and then the bone-jarring firing of the cannon shook the whole airframe.

Working their way back from the engine toward the cockpit, the shells cut their way into the forward part of the Hurricane. Within seconds tongues of flame were licking at the stricken aircraft and Marseille's Bf 109 rapidly shot past the doomed enemy plane.

"Congratulations, Jochen", came Pöttgen's voice over the air-to-air intercom. Marseille set the Bf 109 into a steep turn and saw how the Hurricane spiralled uncontrollably earthward until it impacted and was consumed in a ball of flame.

As Marseille pulled up again to engage his next opponent, four of these tough aircraft suddenly materialized on his tail. With a clear advantage in speed he was able to climb away and avoid the bullets sent in his direction.

Marseille reached his own airfield, wagging his wings in a show of victory before setting down. Afterwards he was congratulated by his comrades for making the first kill of his Staffel in Africa.

As dusk fell Marseille took off on his third sortie for the 23rd of April. Together, they totaled 20 aircraft and were to provide cover for an additional 20 Stukas making another attack on Tobruk.

Marseille hoped for another kill. As the enemy drew nearer, he pushed his plane over and dove directly on them

*Bf 109E, June 1941 in Gazala.*



with the intent of shooting one down as he flew through. This time, however, he wasn't so fortunate. Before Marseille even noticed he was caught on three sides by machine gun fire. He heard as the bullets ripped into the fuselage. When the engine took a hit, the only thought through his head was "goodbye dear Homeland." Three or four rounds shattered through the canopy as he was leaning forward. This movement probably saved his life, for two other bullets whizzed past not five centimeters in front of his eyes. His plane lost speed, then the engine began to smell.

Marseille put the plane into a nose-dive. With his last bit of strength he was able to bring the aircraft back to the airfield before setting it down with gear still raised for a belly landing. He threw the canopy back and sprang free of the plane, running off to the side. Luckily it didn't explode.

When his ground crewmen later inspected the wreck of his machine, they counted no less than thirty hits. It was the French pilot Sous-lieutenant Denis who, in this air duel, had nearly bested that pilot who would later become known as the Eagle of Africa to both friend and foe alike.

### **Neumann's Colorful Theater**

On the morning of 28 April, while an element of 3 Staffel was made ready to take off, a Bristol Blenheim of 45 Squadron was at the same time landing in Tobruk. The pilot had orders to fly five men out from the besieged fortress. They were: a wing commander, a squadron leader, a priest and two staff officers.

By the time the Blenheim took off again, Marseille and Pöttgen had already reached the periphery of Tobruk. Once again Marseille demonstrated his uncanny vision. He spotted this prey while still several kilometers away and from a much higher altitude.

"Looks like a bomber, I've got him, Pöttgen", called Marseille to his wingman. Then he went into a bank to cut the Blenheim off, which was now turning over the sea heading eastward. From his vantage point Marseille dove down on his victim, pushing his craft to within nearly ramming distance, before opening fire from this short distance. His burst from the guns lasted less than two seconds; the bomber plummeted into the sea and sank like a rock. Marseille banked his plane left and turned away from the withering AA fire.

I/JG 27 also took part in Rommel's second attempt at conquering Tobruk on 30 April. But it was only Oblt. Redlich who succeeded in downing a Hurricane that day. Then day

two of the battle dawned, the 1st of May 1941. Early in the morning Oblt Homuth gave the Staffel's mission briefing: "escort for a Stuka unit."

Eight Bf 109s were prepared for takeoff. While Oberleutnant Homuth led the lower Schwarm, Oberfähnrich Marseille was put in control of the Schwarm at higher altitude.

At first it appeared that it would be a day like any other for the Staffel. Then someone reported a scout plane over Fort Arcoma to the Staffelfkapitän. Using air-to-air comms, Homuth ordered the Staffel to make a gradual turn to the south.

When they had approached to within visual distance of the fort, Marseille was the first to spot a flight of six enemy planes flying over the fort at roughly their same altitude of 4000 meters.

"Climb", ordered Homuth. Pulling back on their sticks they climbed upward, then corrected their course so that they would be in a position to attack from out of the sun. When they recognized the cockade insignia, Homuth broke off to the side to give Marseille's Schwarm first chance at shooting.

Marseille's plane was the first to dive onto the enemy. The enemy's wingman banked away to the left, but Marseille concentrated his dive on sighting on the primary target. In the fraction of the second that the enemy was within the line of fire, Marseille hit the button. With the first rounds the British plane tipped over to one side and fell behind his own lines.

These were the aircraft of 274 Squadron. Marseille now gave chase to the wingman, attempting to escape in the direction of Tobruk. He rapidly overtook his fleeing quarry and shot him down as well.

During this time Oberleutnant Homuth had positioned himself behind the four remaining Hurricanes 20 km south of Tobruk. Homuth succeeded in shooting down an additional two of the enemy's planes.

Gefreiter Köhne's Yellow 4 had been hit by the enemy during this aerial engagement. Critically injured, Köhne nonetheless succeeded in reaching his own airbase and landing safely.

The Staffel returned back to base at low level. Two of the Bf 109s each wagged their wings twice: that of Marseille and Homuth.

The Gruppenkommandeur stood along the taxiway and offered his congratulations to the two successful pilots. As he turned to the Oberfähnrich he casually mentioned "You can be made into a regular pilot yet. But be careful, I don't

want to see any more of this nonsense where you plunge right into the middle of a British pack and come back with your plane riddled like a sieve." (see Ring, Hans and Girbig, Werner: *Jagdgeschwader 27 - Die Dokumentation über seinen Einsatz an allen Fronten 1939-1945*)

By that evening 11 kill markings could be seen on Yellow 14's rudder, while Oberleutnant Homuth had shot down his 16th and 17th opponent.

### **The "Staffeldorfer" - a Visit to the Past**

In the days of the first dogfights in the air over the desert, "Staffeldörfer", or Staffel villages, sprang up in Gazala, connected by a network of paths. A road led to the airfield, the maximum allowable speed on which was only 25 kmh. This was the "Via Neumann."

According to Fritz Dettmann, the chronicler of I/JG 27 and war correspondent, Hauptmann Eduard Neumann "had to fight a two-front war. On the one side against the enemy in the air, and on the other side against the ever-increasing lethargy brought about by the African climate and the pilots' isolation."

Here Eduard Neumann proved himself to be a truly outstanding commander and psychologist. Since there was no "Wehrbetreuung", or German equivalent of the USO in Africa, he was responsible for providing amusement and entertainment. During the break periods the men would have to be kept busy and given diversions. Neumann's general knowledge of behavior, his understanding of young soldiers and his great aeronautical ability assisted him in this task.

Through his studies at the Technische Hochschule in Berlin Neumann, who was born in Bukovina, came to learn and love aeronautics. Very soon he became a member of the academic flying club and learned the basics of flying at Johannisthal and Berlin Staaken.

All this helped him considerably, along with his special quality of presenting a fresh, youthful image while at the same time having a fatherly style - something which the young flyers found to be a source of support.

It was he, thanks to his technical knowledge, who set things in motion. The showers, made from old fuel containers and a few pipes, were his invention. He also initiated the repairs to the engine of an old fishing boat that had washed ashore, which was then used by the pilots in their spare time to go out fishing.

From the viewpoint of the flyers, however, his greatest accomplishment was the cave bear which was kept near the



airfield, the arrival of which attracted a large crowd - even drawing men from the HQ of the Fliegerführer Afrika. And thus "Edu" Neumann became something of a symbol for the pilots of JG 27 fighting in Africa. It was he, too, that stimulated interest in visiting the ancient ruined Roman cities.

It was in this manner that Jochen Marseille learned of the city of Cyrene, the ancient capital of Cyrenaica, which according to Kyra, was founded by Therans in about 630 BC 15 km from the coast.

The young pilot was just as impressed with the Apollo temple as he was by the temple of Artemis, from the 4th century BC.

"Who would have thought when we were learning world history as schoolboys that we would one day see everything with our own eyes", said Marseille to his friend Stahlschmidt.

"Simply astounding", he agreed. "Here was Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I. Maybe we're standing on the same spot that one of them did in 331 and 332 BC."

"Slow down a bit. We don't want to exaggerate things", said Marseille with a grin.

"How did the Italians get here, then?", Marseille asked the "Studienrat", the nickname everyone called the armorer Unteroffizier Stöcker. On several occasions Stöcker had already proven himself to be somewhat of an expert on the history of Cyrenaica.

"Please, just the short version", added Stahlschmidt, and Stöcker began:

"After the Ptolemies, who ruled the land until 96 BC, the Romans came and in 74 BC made it a Roman province. This was occupied between 641 and 643 BC by the Arabs, who called the land Barka, and from here launched their conquest of the Maghreb. The Bedouins reached their pinnacle in 1051 with the arrival here of the Arabian tribes of the Hilal and Sulaim."

"In 1517 Cyrenaica, together with Egypt, was subjugated by the Turks, who made it a Turkish province in 1551. Under the Turk Beys small independent states began springing up starting in 1711, which maintained their connection to the Turkish throne until 1885. At this time the territory, formally under the control of Tripoli, was influenced by the Senussi."

"In 1912 Italy conquered Tripolitania. In the First World War a large portion of Cyrenaica fell under the control of the Senussi and could only be won back by Italy after a twelve year struggle from 1923 to 1931."

"The last serious threat to the Italian forces was the Senussi leader Omar el Mukhtar. He was captured and executed in Bengazi on 16 September 1931."

"In 1934 Italy united its colonies of Cyrenaica and Tripoli to form the colony of Libya. That's the history - in short form."

"And what can we see later?", asked Stahlschmidt of the "Professor."

"I'd suggest the Roman colonial towns of Oea, Sabratha and Leptis Magna; these are the best preserved and most interesting."

"If you'll come along with us, Professor", invited Marseille, "We'll risk it."

Leptis Magna was the destination for the next outing for a few of the Gruppe's men, Marseille being among them. They learned from the knowledgeable lips of the "Professor" that it was from here that the African animals were loaded during the time of the Caesars for shipment to Rome to fight in the arena. Under Diocletian Leptis Magna was made the capital city of the smaller province of Tripolitania. It was overrun by the Vandals, won back by Justinian and then taken over by the Arabs.

Hans-Joachim Marseille was amazed to see that here, in the middle of a war, Italian excavation work was proceeding at full steam.

For Marseille, these excursions were a welcome addition to his school knowledge, and there was at least one occasion when on one of his extended leaves that he was able to impress a girlfriend with his newly acquired knowledge.

As always, it was Hauptmann Eduard Neumann who understood the way to maintain the highest level of combat readiness for his Gruppe without the threat of punishment looming overhead. He attacked everything with enthusiasm -and was quite successful in his approach. Stefan Fröhlich, later General der Flieger, expressed it in this manner during a conversation with the author:

"Neumann truly towered over the battlefield. He flew only on rare occasions, but was a role model for everyone. His personality stood out above all others. He was a born leader, both in battle and during times of rest."

Neumann also saw to it that his men were indoctrinated in the causes of intestinal problems, which cropped up quite frequently during the first few months, as well as other diseases. For him and his troops the trips to the outhouse were a serious matter, and disposing of the waste was handled carefully in order to prevent epidemics.

There was hardly any enemy air activity during the first few days in May. In the interim 7/JG 26 with six Bf 109s under the command of their Staffelkapitän, Joachim Müncheberg, arrived in Africa from Sicily. With 43 kills, Müncheberg was at that time one of the most successful

German fighter pilots. He already wore the Oak Leaves.

The Staffel was put under the jurisdiction of I/JG 27. But Edu Neumann didn't maintain strict control and allowed Müncheberg to direct and control his own operations.

When the enemy began targeting the German airfields in the area of Ain el Gazala with their first attacks during this time, I/JG 27 was forced to pitch their tents between the dunes on the beach.

With regards to beefing up its forces the enemy didn't remain standing still either. The British established the 250 Fighter Squadron near Alexandria, equipped with the new Curtiss Tomahawk.

These aircraft were an improvement on the Hurricane.

They were a bit faster, but more so they carried a heavier armament (see Appendix V covering aircraft used on both sides in Africa).

As this aircraft was generally comparable to the Bf 109, the front clamored for delivery of the new Bf 109 F.

When I/JG 27 celebrated their commander's birthday on the 4th of June, they presented him with a donkey by the name of Ivan. Ivan and his "girlfriend", a female donkey from 2 Staffel, soon turned into a demon for all the cooks in the unit. Until one day they both "disappeared without a trace into the desert."

On 12 June the 2nd South African Squadron began their operations in Africa.

British preparations for Operation "Battleaxe" were completed by the evening of 14 June. There were a total of 10 fighter squadrons available to the British at that time (see Appendix: British Fighter Strength on 14 June 1941), giving them a total of 100 operationally ready aircraft. Their bomber forces also amounted to roughly 100 planes.

At the same time the Axis air forces had I/JG 27, 7/JG 26, 8/ZG 26, I/StG 1 and II/StG 2, KLG 1 and 2 (Heeresfliegergruppe) 14.

This was a total of 60 operational fighters and Zerstörers, 60 Stukas and approximately 10 to 12 scout planes. 70 Italian fighters and 25 bombers were added to this total.

### **A Short Overview of Operation Battleaxe - The Summer Battle of Sollum**

With Operation Tigercub, 295 British tanks made it through to Alexandria on five large-capacity transports, thus providing the British High Command in Cairo with the additional armor needed for the big strike. Their senior commander, General Wavell, reported the plan to the Empire's general

staff on 10 June. The area of Halfaya-Capuzzo was to be taken by forces swinging southward around Sidi Omar to fall upon the enemy's rear while the 4th Tank Brigade and the 22nd Guards would drive directly for Fort Capuzzo.

He ended the report with "If the movement south leads to contact with the enemy's armored forces, they will be destroyed."

Thanks to the German Funkhorstdienst Südost, this enemy activity did not go unnoticed. Rommel placed his own forces in the most advantageous positions for defense.

When the British attack began in the early morning hours of 15 June 1941, the enemy forces attacking the Halfaya Pass were shot to pieces by troops under the command of Hauptmann Wilhelm Bach - a flak battalion of Schützen-regiment 104. A part of the attacking force rolled into the German minefield and remained standing.

Early on the morning of 16 June, rapid-moving British forces, with elements of the 7th Tank Division at their head, made a thrust to the north past the Halfaya Pass. The 300 tanks reached Capuzzo and Musaid. Both positions fell into their hands. Then the lead tanks ran into the positions manned by the 5th Leichte Afrika Division. The British 7th Tank Division succeeded in breaking through. The only obstacle ahead of them was Hill 208. This, however, was held

*Rommel (in the vehicle at right) with his command staff.*



by a German flak battery under the command of Oberleutnant Paulewicz.

As the British tanks began their attack here, they were beaten back by the four 88 mm anti-aircraft guns.

After an artillery barrage the British tank attack resumed their advance upon the hill. They were 70 in number. Eleven of these Mark II tanks were knocked out.

The third attempt began in the afternoon with 40 tanks initially, an additional 20 following later. The tank versus flak duel began anew. Again, more than ten tanks were put out of commission.

A fourth attack using 85 enemy tanks followed soon afterward, but was thwarted by the flak guns and tanks of the 5th Panzer Division which had arrived at the last minute.

This was the decisive point in the Summer Battle of Sollum. The British General Staff Paper of Her Majesty's Stationary Office, which appeared in 1956, reported:

"Operation Battleaxe, which had begun with such hope, failed, due to the fact that the critical Halfaya position was not taken and it was not possible to advance beyond the German position of Hill 208. The bravery and firepower of the defenders were too great. The German 88 proved to be a deadly weapon against all British tank types. The combination of tanks with 8.8 cm anti-aircraft batteries placed well to the front was a surprise for the British Command. Rommel's victory was a victory for his leadership, his superior fighting troops and his better weapons."

Aside from the guns of 3 Batterie, Flakregiment 33 under Oberleutnant Paulewicz and the two other batteries at the Halfaya Pass under the command of Abteilungskommandeur Hptm. Fromm, it was also the tanks of Panzerregiment 8 commanded by Oberstleutnant Hans Cramer which sounded the death knell for the British offensive. Major Fenski, Abteilungskommandeur of I/PR 8 and his company commanders, Hptm. Johannes Kümmel and Oblt. Stiefelmeyer, brought the enemy tanks of the 7th Tank Division to a halt as they tried to swing toward Bardia with 50 vehicles after storming Capuzzo and Sollum.

While everything still hung in the balance, Rommel shifted the main thrust of his attack. PR 8 had only 30 of its tanks remaining from a total of 80 and had ground to a halt, while PR 5 continued to press its attack against Sidi Suleiman from the area west of Sidi Azeiz.

Rommel made his way to the 5th Leichte, put himself at the head of the tanks and drove the division at a rapid pace, fighting along the way, until it had reached an area northeast of Sidi Omar. From there it continued the attack on Sidi Suleiman.



This was the turning point in the Battle of Sollum. Sidi Suleiman was reached, further advance was attained by a German counteroffensive which began at the enemy's rear on 17 June. Both Panzer divisions fell upon the enemy. A massive tank battle ensued, which inflicted such serious losses on the British forces that at 0925 hrs Generalmajor Creagh radioed the commander of the Desert Forces that he was not sure what to do next and to please send General Beresford-Peirse to sort out the confusing situation.

A short time later tanks of PR 5 reached the command post of Brigade General Masservy and overran it. The 4th British Tank Brigade was without a leader.

Once General Wavell and General Beresford-Peirse reached the command center of the 7th Tank Division shortly afterward, the latter - after being apprised of the situation - was forced to call for a general retreat. Afterwards General Wavell, who had demanded this order, flew back to Cairo and reported by radio to London:

"I have the misfortune of reporting that Battleaxe has failed."

When the German units had reached the Halfaya Pass and began attacking the enemy's rear echelons, the British managed to flee eastward through a gap between Sidi Omar and Halfaya. Only once they reached Sidi Barani did they stop. The British Desert Forces had lost 220 tanks altogether; German losses amounted to 25 tanks total.

Along with Gefreiter Arnold Huebner, Uffz. Erich Heintze of 3/Flakregiment 33 was also awarded the Knight's Cross. Hauptmann Walter Fromm had already been given this prestigious honor on July 5th.

Of the tankers it was Hauptmann Johannes Kümmel who was presented this award by Rommel himself. Hauptmann Curt Ehle, leader of 1/Kradschützen-Batallion 15 was awarded the Knight's Cross on 15 July for his actions in the battle.

"Battleaxe", the largest tank battle in the desert up to that point, was a disaster for the enemy. The front lines became static. The African summer appeared to freeze all movements.

What about the air forces on both sides? What role did they play in this summer offensive in 1941?



## CHAPTER V

# LUFTWAFFE OPERATIONS IN THE SUMMER OF 1941

### British Bombers on the Offensive

**O**n 14 June, at the break of dawn, the British Western Desert Air Force began their operations with high altitude bombing by their bomber forces and low altitude attacks by fighters. The first target was the airfield at Ain el Gazala and, in doing so, the paralysis of the German fighter arm.

The facilities of 3 Staffel was one of their targets. When the attack was over, a Rotte took off from the western side of the field and followed the Hurricanes flying away in the direction of Tobruk. What follows is the report on the events by Oberleutnant Ludwig Franzisket:

"In the few minutes between the first and second wave of bombers I jumped out of bed and, in my Bf 109, started off from the southern edge of the field. As I was about to close the canopy, my crew chief shouted to me:

"There, a twin-engine, Herr Oberleutnant!", and pointed to the eastern sky, where a single aircraft was bound directly for the airfield."

"I climbed upward and in a slow turn headed toward this aircraft -and came under withering fire by our own flak in the process. Climbing, I reached an altitude of approximately 1500 meters when I spied a Hurricane heading toward me at about the same altitude. Since my Bf 109 climbed very slowly I had only one chance, and I pointed my nose at the nose of the oncoming Hurricane."

"I shot! My opponent fired also, but his aim was too high -as I could tell from his tracers. We fired continuously until the last moment. Our aircraft touched, but just prior to contact I had placed a bullet in the Hurricane's engine, as its pilot, Captain Driver, later confirmed to me. My propeller



*Major Ludwig Franzisket was awarded the Knight's Cross on 20 July 1941. Along with Kommodore Neumann, he also looked after Marseille.*

clipped the right wingtip of the Hurricane. Driver's propeller, on the other hand, struck the forward edge of my Bf 109's right wing."

"I saw my burning foe go into a steep dive and observed the pilot bailing out. The Hurricane impacted few hundred meters south of our airfield and Driver landed not far away."

"As I turned back in the direction of Gazala I saw a Martin Maryland a few hundred meters north of the field and at an altitude of 1500 meters. Although my aircraft was difficult to fly due to its damaged wing I attacked the bomber. I fired, the Maryland began gradually turning to the right, and I fired again. My second salvo worked its way back from the right engine and along the entire fuselage to the empennage."

"The engine caught fire and the Maryland went into a flat spin towards earth. A parachute separated from the light bomber, which continued its spinning until crashing a couple of hundred meters north of the Via Balbia." (see Bericht von Ludwig Franzisket)

Captain Driver was taken prisoner. He asked that his squadron be informed and Franzisket promised that he would drop a message over Sidi Barani stating that he was all right.

This day also brought victories for other pilots of JG 27: Oblt. Redlich, Oblt. Schneider and Lt. Hoffmann.

In June of 1941 Oblt. Franzisket led 3 Staffel in place of Oblt. Homuth, who had taken ill. During this time Marseille was "molded" by this experienced flyer and psychologist. Franzisket not only recognized the qualities inherent in the pilot Marseille, but also his efforts to prove himself as pilot, comrade and fighter within the unit.

In these weeks Marseille received special recognitions and grew considerably. He considered himself included in the great brotherhood of the desert pilots.

With full justification, it can be claimed that during this time Franzisket, along with Eduard Neumann, gave Marseille the wings to rise above his inner self-doubts and develop his natural personality.

This also helped Marseille in that he was able to perfect his combat tactics and become the Star of Africa, the brightness of which eclipsed everything else.

### **Stahlschmidt and Marseille, a Pilot's Friendship**

In Hauptmann Neumann's Gruppe there were pilots who had already proved their abilities in France and Yugoslavia.

But there were also a few "young eagles" among them who were to attain their greatness while in Africa. Two

Oberfähnriche, for example: Hans-Joachim Marseille and Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt.

Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt was born on 15 September 1920 in the town of Kreuztal in Westphalia as the son of the manufacturer Arno Stahlschmidt. He attended the Volksschule Kreuztal, completed the Oberschule in Weidenau/Sieg and finished in April of 1939.

His civil work time he fulfilled in Eichelsachsen bei Gleiwitz. Following that, he began his career in the military in Salzwedel. It was here that he completed fighter pilot basic training. The pilot's school in Breslau and the war school in Vienna-Schwechat were the next levels in his military progression. He then was posted to JG 27 and there found an exemplary officer and superior in Eduard Neumann, then with the rank of Hauptmann.

Along with his group, Stahlschmidt went to Africa in the spring of 1941. He and Jochen Marseille soon became friends.

A wisp of wind blew through the wadi on the extreme outer edge of the airfield, carrying with it the scent of the sea. The meter-tall camelthorn bushes rustled slightly, and the massive, dark canopy of the night sky sparkled and glittered. The two Oberfähnriche in front of their tent saw a couple of shooting stars pass overhead on their way earthward.

"Soldier's luck", said Marseille quietly. He drew another puff on his cigarette. To his right, he saw the silhouettes of the airplanes. Carefully, he made his way over to 2 Staffel. Light still glowed in the tent of his comrade.

"Stahlschmidt?", called Marseille in a half-whisper.

"Who's creeping around out there?", came a voice from inside the tent.

"Marseille, the oldest Oberfähnrich in the Luftwaffe!", answered Marseille and entered the tent.

Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt pushed back the box on which he was writing a letter and screwed the cap back onto his fountain pen.

"I was writing to my mother", he explained.

The tent was confining. It was only possible to stand hunched over. On the left was a field cot, at the head of which were two crates. The second bed, on the right, had been vacant for the last 24 hours. The previous occupant, an Unteroffizier, had been shot down somewhere over the desert. The two Oberfähnriche sat down on the beds. They were roughly the same height. Stahlschmidt was more stocky, stronger. His broad shoulders hinted at power. The brown eyes were unwavering and determined. The hair, parted to the right, was dark blond, and when he spoke it was in the somewhat sing-song dialect of the Siegerlands.



*Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt, best friend of Marseille. Both were the "Eternal Oberfähnriche."*





*Major Ernst Börngen, Staffelführer of 5./JG 27, awarded the Knight's Cross on 3 August 1944.*

Marseille, a Berliner from birth, appeared more lively, more agile when compared with Stahlschmidt. They talked of Africa and flying. Stahlschmidt asked his friend:

"You have plans to become a great ace here in Africa, don't you?"

Marseille's response was immediate: "A great one indeed", he responded seriously. Then he clapped Stahlschmidt on the shoulder. "Haven't you ever had day-dreams about the future? Everyone does! Someone sees himself as an Olympic winner, someone else is awarded a poet's prize, and a third wants to be the owner of a giant factory. When I lie awake", continued Marseille. "I often experience air combat as I think it should be. I see myself in the middle of a British swarm, firing from every position, hitting from all sides and never getting caught."

"So, something like a flying Siegfried. Only vulnerable in one spot", interrupted Stahlschmidt. "Man, Jochen!"

Over the next few minutes Marseille told his comrade of his idea of fighter combat:

"Our aircraft are the basic elements, Stahlschmidt, which have got to be mastered. You've got to be able to shoot from any position. From left or right turns, out of a roll, on your back, whenever. Only this way can you develop your own particular tactics. Attack tactics, that the enemy simply cannot anticipate during the course of the battle - a series of unpredictable movements and actions. Never the same, always stemming from the situation at hand. Only then can you plunge into the middle of an enemy swarm and blow it up from the inside."

Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt was not to forget these words of his friend and would witness their realization in the skies over Africa. This night he lay awake for a long time after Marseille had left. He thought of the words spoken to him and the other seven senior graduates, on their way to becoming officers, by his history teacher:

"You are to become officers. Where does that word come from? From the Latin "officium" - duty! In good German you can also be called bound. Bound to your honor, your job, your homeland. Be careful that there's no talk of your "rights"! These come naturally from fulfilling your responsibilities, and therefore we can say that your greatest right is in fulfilling your duty."



*Major Ernst Düllberg, awarded the Knight's Cross on 20 July 1944, was also Kapitan of 5. Staffel.*



*Generalmajor Max Ibel, awarded the Knight's Cross on 22 August 1940, was the first Kommodore of JG27.*

Many months later, when Stahlschmidt would wear the Knight's Cross and have been shot down twice, the two had another of their conversations in which they drew together almost as brothers. This time Stahlschmidt talked about himself, and said lost in thought:

"You know, Jochen, sometimes it's been very difficult for me, but just in the last four weeks there's been a change in me. Once again I'd been shot down while making a low level attack, but was able to land back behind our lines. The care-free attitude has left me. Superiority, I feel, grows with careful consideration. And a good fighter pilot - even in the most bitter dogfight - shouldn't go charging after the waving red cape, but should seize his chance in a cold and calculating manner."

Marseille now saw his friend in a more serious light than before, more reserved. The pair spent the evening with the Kommodore. As they were returning to their tents, Stahlschmidt said:

"Our Kommodore, Jochen, is one of those people who can still be happy. He likes us, in spite of all the trouble we sometimes cause. He understands us."

"Yes", agreed Marseille. "The Kommodore has even set me straight a few times, and now I know that everything he told me was right."

"We always hope to be the victor, but sometimes I think that this simply can't be the case. One day our number will come up. When it comes to that, I hope that for me it will be over in an instant."

"I'm certain that we've still got a long time - until then we'll have a good time and fly!" Both fell silent. The desert sky was like a black cape filled with swimming stars.

On 14 June 3 Staffel was again in the skies over Tobruk, flying top cover for the attacking Stukas. Marseille turned to engage a flight of Hurricanes, but before he was in position, he noticed that Pöttgen, his wingman, who had been flying on his left, was headed for a Hurricane. At the same moment he saw that another Hurricane was stalking Pöttgen and would soon be in a good position to fire.

"Watch out, Pöttgen, Indians behind you!", warned his comrade. At the same time he whipped his plane around, made a wide arc and was soon sitting on this Hurricane's tail, which was still flying doggedly closer towards Pöttgen.

*Oberst Bernhard Woldenga, awarded the Knight's Cross on 5 July 1941, photographed while Kommodore of JG27.*





*Lt. Armin Köhler.*



*Karl-Wolfgang Redlich, Staffelkapitän in I/JG 27.*

Pöttgen pulled away sharply to the right. Marseille boldly pressed home the attack, waiting for the distance to close within a favorable gun range. As he was now only 100 meters behind his prey and preparing to hit the gun button, several bullets tore through the cockpit. A sharp, whistling sound could be heard, followed by a strong blast of wind over his face. He pulled the stick back to climb, but noticed immediately that the engine couldn't give him the power he needed. Marseille hung in the sky like a ripe plum.

An acrid, smoky smell filtered into the cockpit, then fine streams of oil began spraying the windscreen. His radiator spewed a long cloud of coolant behind him.

"My engine's hit", reported Marseille to his Staffelkapitän.

"Hopefully the crate's not burning", he thought. As it would turn out, there were four machine-gun hits, of which two had just passed behind his head as he was leaning forward. The other two rounds had whizzed across in front of his face.

"Adler, come in please! Come in, Adler!", Marseille heard his wingman calling.

The sound of his engine became weaker and more hoarse. The instruments showed that he was losing speed and altitude. The oil temperature gauge read 100 degrees, and has even set me st locked up at 1,200 meters.

What to do? He wouldn't make it past Tobruk to the west. Marseille recognized that he would have to fly in a south-westerly direction in the hope of making it to friendly troops.

Flaps were set to 20 degrees: the ignition was alternatively shut off and then on again to prevent the oil temperature from climbing. But he still couldn't stop it from reaching 150 degrees.

The Bf 109 dropped lower and lower. When Marseille had reached 300 meters, he saw below him a terrain pock-marked with bomb craters. He was still in the fortress "belt", which ringed Tobruk out to a distance of about 40 kilometers.

The plane continued to drop. Thick smoke now rose up from the rudder pedals into the cockpit and made it painful to breathe.

Marseille fastened the clasp for the parachute harness. In a split second he saw a smooth piece of ground, pushed the plane down to a grinding belly landing. He swung himself out of the aircraft and ran off to one side in case of explosion or fire. 90 minutes had passed since takeoff. The fight over Tobruk alone had lasted nearly 40 minutes.

As he lit a cigarette, Marseille noticed that his hands were shaking.

He took the most important papers from his plane and headed south, where somewhere he could find the first German positions. When he had been walking about 15 minutes, he suddenly heard sounds. Ahead of him he spotted several men who had their carbines pointed at him.

They must be the enemy. Marseille stumbled toward the men; he was walking into the glaring sun, and all he could make out were silhouettes and the shape of a British tropical hat. They must be Australians, or maybe New Zealanders, he thought to himself.

When he addressed the men in his school English, the lead man in the group responded in the best Swabian that it would probably be better for him if he would revert to using his native language.

Two days later Marseille ran into trouble once more when he once again took a hit to his engine while diving to engage three Hurricanes. It was still roughly 50 km to his own airfield. Pöttgen took control and guided him, for his front windscreen was completely smeared with motor oil and Marseille couldn't see ten meters in front of him.

Pöttgen pulled alongside him and directed him to the airfield. Then he talked him down meter by meter and the accomplished pilot Marseille made a totally blind landing, taxiing safely off the runway.

Within two weeks Marseille had been shot down once and forced to make an emergency landing twice. On several occasions his plane was so perforated with holes that by the time it made it back to the airfield it was nothing more than a flying wreck.

As Marseille walked over to his friend Stahlschmidt he wasn't feeling very good about himself. Once again he had done something wrong, even though he thought that he'd found the right style of attack.

During the conversation, Stahlschmidt once again mentioned it was still possible that he could drive one of his planes straight into the sand. But Marseille shook his head.

"You know, you still want to hold that against me, and I'm afraid the commander's right when he reprimands me. But I can't help it. When I'm in the air and see the Tommies in their Lufbery circle, I've just got to jump in."

"And every time they pump you full of lead", finished Stahlschmidt.

"But I know that it can be done and that I can still do it. I've got my own theories."

A motorcycle courier came roaring up at that point and stopped before Stahlschmidt's tent. He climbed off his bike and turned to Marseille.



*Lt. Friedrich Körner, Staffel leader of 2/JG 27, earned the Knight's Cross on 6 September 1942.*



*From left: Braune (III./JG 27), Rödel, Neumann, Homuth.*

"Herr Oberfähnrich, the Kommandeur wishes to see you."

"Now be careful what you say, Jochen", pleaded Stahlschmidt with his friend.

The commander's trailer, a circus wagon confiscated in France, had been painted in large letters by the Gruppe painter with "Neumanns Bunte Bühne" and stood at the edge of the field. Marseille knocked and entered. The Kommandeur was sitting at his desk, talking into the telephone. When he laid the receiver down he stood up, walked around the desk and remained standing a good meter in front of Marseille.

"So, you're Marseille", he said, pronouncing the French name as it was spelled.

"In the vast majority of our air battles the enemy has a numerically superior advantage, Marseille. It's therefore desired that a pilot would use a double dose of prudence and thought. Only when you have come to the point to where you aren't frothing at the mouth and seeing only red, to where you not only see your opponent but you've com-



pletely mastered your aircraft - then maybe it would be possible to use your tactics and plunge into an enemy's defensive circle and score kills from any position."

"There's no shame whatsoever in going four weeks without getting a kill, Marseille. But it's simply punishable antics, the way you behave, risking yourself as well as valuable material. You'll only be a good pilot with many victories when you understand all this and keep your nerve in check with clear and calm thinking."

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann", replied the pilot.

"So, when I consider what you've done on the latest missions then I must say that you've got more luck than sense. I know what you're going to say", Neumann checked the Oberfähnrich's response. "And it's also possible that at some point this goal can be reached. But in order for that to happen God needs to give this pilot a longer life than is his normal lot."

"Herr Hauptmann, I ask . . ." Again Edu Neumann interrupted the response of the young pilot standing across from him.

"What you do is pure craziness! You basically are doing nothing more than cheating Death. And as a bonus you're running our planes one after another into the sand."

"But it can be done, Herr Hauptmann, and then ..."

"You are a very good flyer, Marseille, I'm aware of that. From your file I know of your numerous daring displays. But this is no air show, we're on the front and the Tommies can shoot too. You can't play around with them as you like."

"I'll get it right, Herr Hauptmann."

"You'll do nothing of the sort! I'm ordering you to stop these neck-breaking aerobatics. It's better that you shoot down one enemy in four days than bringing us back a shot-



*Oblt. Schulz (in flying helmet) after a mission, conversing with fellow pilots.*

up plane every two days that we have a hard time replacing. You'll be in some serious trouble if you do just one more of your crazy attacks, understand?"

"Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann", answered the Oberfähnrich.

Afterward, Edu Neumann asked his cleaning man to fetch a bottle of Marsala used for guests. He poured a drink for himself and Marseille and offered him a toast.

"To your success, but hurry with patience!"

Marseille added one of his last responses:

"I always believed that flying is worth every sacrifice, Herr Hauptmann."

"Yes, of course, but not your foolish attack tactics! You've got to learn to clearly discern between right and wrong. And one more thing, you must obey and are restricted from flying for three days."

When Marseille left the trailer in a rather shocked state Oberleutnant Redlich and Oberleutnant Homuth arrived at the Gruppenkommandeur's. Following the briefing on the next day's operations, Hauptmann Neumann mentioned casually, "I had to lay down the law with Marseille. But I'm convinced that he'll soon get control of himself and that his decisive breakthrough is not far off. The lad wants to be taken seriously. He asks that people believe in his good intentions. Don't make it easy for him, but at the same time take him seriously."

The Gruppenkommandeur quickly ascertained that Marseille had a tendency to brag, but he liked him nonetheless. He was able to see through this: "With his bragging he desperately tried to compensate for his complex. He wanted to become a big man in our group right away, he needed that. On his way to a better image he didn't hesitate in emphasizing that he not only had a number of young women, but had also won over a famous actress."



*The water wagon of the Wasserdienst Afrika: indispensable in the desert!*



"This was purely a boast. When telling these stories he couldn't check himself. He was too temperamental and unbridled. He was what one would nowadays call a playboy."

During the first weeks in Africa Marseille was viewed with mistrust and reservations by his superiors. In addition, his file contained a large stack of reprimands, such as violations of flying and military discipline. He had been a black sheep in the Staffel, which eventually cast him aside. However, his Berliner swaggering and his youthful ambition, which was always treading new ground, never stepped over the boundaries of established authority or cause him to disregard his role in the military organization.

A scarf was an indispensable part of his flying garb. His passion for jazz, too, didn't exactly correspond to the general ideas of what the German leadership would have considered wholesome music.

Upon being transferred to 3 Staffel of JG 27, he had the misfortune of finding in Oberleutnant Homuth a strict duty-bound Prussian officer, who had very little tolerance for the escapades of the young Oberfähnrich.

It soon came to light that Joachim Marseille's habits stemmed from an inferiority complex. He felt betrayed, a victim who was constantly being shot out of the skies by his enemies, just as had happened three times already on the English Channel.

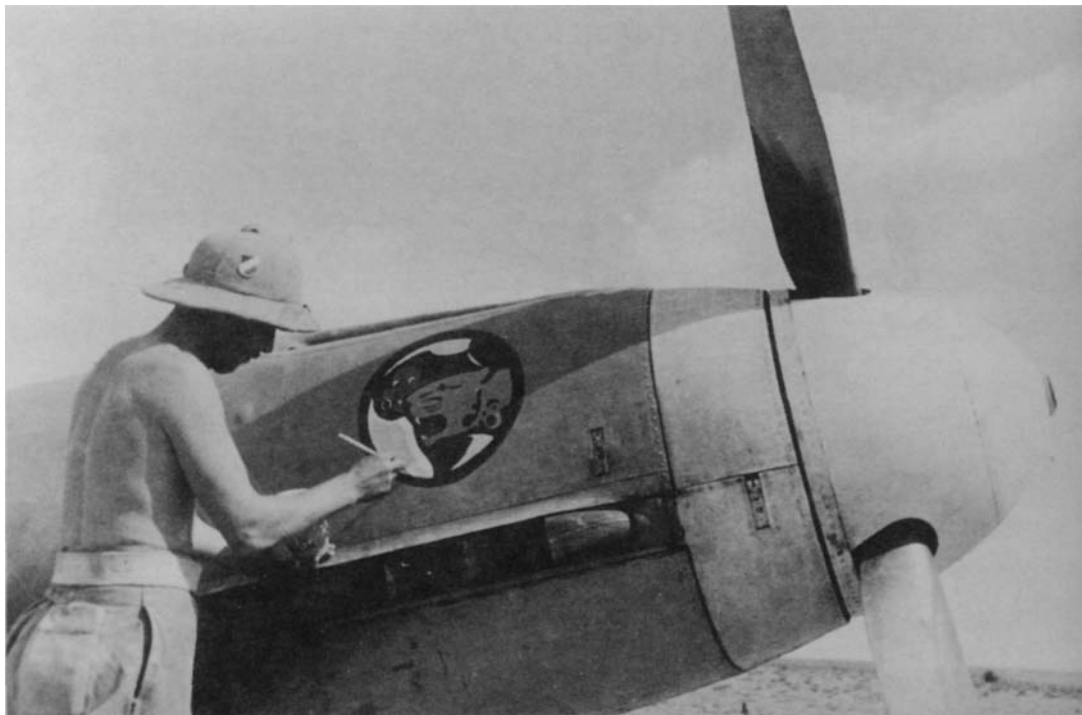
Even back in JG 52 he had been something of a disciplinary problem. Just as at flying school, in France he was unorthodox in all his actions. He seldom followed the proscribed general rules. His uniform didn't correspond to Luftwaffe clothing regulations.

Hauptmann Eduard Neumann, who recognized Marseille's ambitious streak and extravagances and who understood the way to rein them in, comments on this:



*With the repair company. Here is where lunch was served.*

*The Staffel painter working on a I./JG 27 emblem.*



"Marseille could only turn out to be one thing: either a disciplinary problem or a great fighter pilot. At the beginning his stubbornness and lack of discipline kept his comrades away from him. Once they recognized his sincerity and camaraderie, his talent and abilities as a fighter, and saw the victories he was racking up, they too became convinced of his leadership abilities and were drawn by his magnetic charm. In the end they looked up to him like no other fighter pilot."

"I didn't allow non-stop disciplinary action against him, because I was certain that once I had Marseille's trust and attention that I could mold him and do something with him."

"Even in the first dogfights his combat style was truly daring. He attacked under conditions that were generally considered too unfavorable."

"When enemy pilots would form themselves into a defensive circle - as often happened in Africa at the time of Marseille's arrival - it became dangerous to attack these formations, due to the fact that each fighter pilot attacking one of the circling aircraft would be shot down by the enemy aircraft following him, since that plane would be in an unshakable position behind the pilot."

"But Marseille was such an outstanding marksman that he would begin his attack in a dive or from below, coming out of a dive with a massive speed advantage, and often knock his foe out of the circle with the first burst lasting only two seconds."

"On a few occasions he even flew as part of the Lufbery circle, or joined up with an enemy formation, where he would fly along unrecognized for up to five minutes."

"Against the enemy's wedge formations he would attack from behind, not firing at the aircraft formed up on either side in order to flush out the lead aircraft in the center."

He made a fast enough approach to escape the avenging fire of the two planes flying on the flanks and scored his kills with lightning-like accurate bursts."

"The key to Marseille's success was a shooting accuracy that bordered on absolute perfection. He scored his victories with a minimum expenditure of ammunition. His specialty was deflection shooting from a turn while either making a diving attack or pulling up from below. He was constantly practicing and, due to this, was so accurate in shooting from a turn that he worked out a system in which he would push the fire button at the moment when the enemy aircraft flying ahead of him disappeared under his nose."

"After his short burst he no longer bothered with his victim, but concentrated on the next aircraft in the circle in front of him."

"Along with that natut against me, and I'm afraid the commandy. During his last year of operations he tallied over 150 kills and became the German pilot with the greatest number of victories scored against western pilots for the entire Second World War."

"He possessed outstanding eyesight, so that he was able to spot his enemy long before he was spotted and take the appropriate actions."

With a superior airplane and an unshakable self-confidence under the leadership of a man such as was Eduard Neumann, Marseille was able to cultivate his talent to the fullest measure, playing an important role in the Luftwaffe's operations in support of Rommel's Afrikakorps.

As we now know, he didn't begin his career in the desert as an outstanding marksman, but attained this mastery in shooting and flying later during the summer and autumn of 1941.

With regards to the desert war, Dr. Ludwig Franzisket made this statement following the war: "In North Africa no residential areas were bombed, nor were civilians killed. Only soldiers were shot at who could shoot back, who weren't defenseless. The faster one was the one who survived."

Relating to Marseille, Dr. Franzisket learned what drove this young man of slight build: "Marseille was the type who would constantly have taken a beating in school if he hadn't fought against it with everything he had. He was one of those rare people who was always having to prove things the hard way. He was also like this in Jagdgeschwader 27. That he was able to succeed in the end says quite a bit about his personality, which to a certain extent consumed him."

The 15th of June 1941 was the run-up to several wild days and saw the Gruppe being used to its fullest, during

which Hauptmann Neumann also flew once and shot down his obligatory Hurricane. Oblt. Franzisket, Leutnant Hoffmann and Lt. Kothmann were also successful as well. Unteroffizier Stückler, who shot down a Bristol Blenheim, was himself shot down a short time later.

On 16 June it was Feldwebel Elles who shot Captain Kok of 1 SAAF Squadron down. Leutnant Hoffmann, who was providing escort with his colleagues for a Staffel of Stukas and Ju 88s - during which two Ju 87s were lost - was able to score two victories. Later investigation showed that he had brought down Major Theron and Captain Quirk.

### Further Victories

It was on the 17th of June that Hans-Joachim Marseille scored his next kill. For the past few days he had been wearing the shoulder boards of a Leutnant, thereby bringing to a close the eternity of his Oberfähnrich existence. The entire 3 Staffel was given orders to accompany Ju 87s of II/StG 2, which were to attack Tobruk for yet another time.

*9 July 1941 in Derna: from left, General Fröhlich, Fliegerführer Afrika, Redlich, and Oblt. Borchert.*



Along with the Stukas, the Bf 109s banked and dove earthward toward the bunkers. The AA guns opened fire and Marseille saw the glowing tracers from a light anti-aircraft gun whiz by his plane. An exploding shell to his right scattered its deadly fragments throughout the sky. A Ju 87 was caught by direct hits, caught fire and exploded in the air.

With a glance below and to the right, Marseille saw how a part of the Ju 87's tail assembly flew throughout the air like a giant dragon, followed by the canopy piece. Then a body dropped out of the cockpit and both Marseille and Pöttgen saw the white blossom of survival - the parachute - open and the crewman drift toward the ground.

"Indians ahead", called Marseille suddenly, who once again espied the enemy long before his comrades had seen it. This was his first air contact with the enemy. Nothing had come of his three days' grounding. Every plane was needed and Marseille had been given another chance. Like a dart he dove from their higher altitude down onto the enemy. His first salvo shredded the enemy's cockpit. The Hurricane flipped over and plunged toward earth.

Pöttgen congratulated him, then seconds later called out a warning: "On your right, Jochen!"

Instinctively Marseille whipped his aircraft into a hard left turn. The machine gun burst whistled past him on his right. Attentiveness and readiness. He turned away from the enemy. His left hand rested on the knobby grip of the throttle. Eyes behind darkly tinted sunglass lenses scanned the instrument panel. Everything in order. He continued turning, saw his opponent following him and paid little attention to the voices of his comrades cutting through the ether. All his attention was focused on not making any more mistakes.

He must beat this enemy. He lightly pushed the joystick forward, causing the nose of his Bf 109 to drop slightly. The enemy attempted to get onto his tail, but Marseille answered every movement with a counter movement; his plane was faster than that of the enemy and his flying abilities were flawless.

Once again, a burst from the enemy's guns sent a yellowish parabola toward Marseille. He flipped the machine onto its back, continued downward in a reverse turn and brought the plane back to horizontal flight.

As Marseille saw his chance, he put his plane into a tight turn. With his plane now in a 90 degree bank he pulled the Bf 109's nose over to the proper deflection angle. In the split second when the enemy plane crossed his gunsight he fired. The staccato burst from his guns lasted only seconds. The



Lt. Günther Steinhausen, awarded the Knight's Cross on 3 November 1942.

Hurricane's fabric-covered rudder controls were shredded to tatters. The enemy fighter spun out, arcing toward the desert floor trailing a long plume of smoke behind it. The plane exploded in a ball of fire on impact.

Marseille felt his heart pounding. Sweat ran in rivulets along the upper edge of his oxygen mask. Seconds later he pushed the throttle to maximum to get to the aid of one of his colleagues who was fighting it out with a couple of Hurricanes. But the two "Hurrys" suddenly gave up and broke off, speeding away to disappear.

"You got 'em, Jochen", called Pöttgen to his comrade. "I saw them both."

On this memorable day of June 17th I/JG 27 destroyed eight Hurricanes. Aside from Marseille with his two kills there was Leutnant Heinz Schmidt with four, Feldwebel Mentnich with one and Oberfeldwebel Förster with another.

The next day, too, brought new dogfights over the desert between the two foes. On this day victories went to Oblt. Redlich, Uffz. Steinhausen and Lt. Remmer, all three scoring one kill each.

A total of 32 British fighter planes were shot down between 14 and 18 June. Of these, the German fighter pilots accounted for 25. Generalmajor Playfair said of these losses:

"The heavy loss in fighters was attributed by Marshall Tedder to inadequate training and a lack of experience, in addition to the fact that, due to their orders of providing an uninterrupted umbrella over the ground troops, the fighter patrols were overtaxed and too weak." (see: Playfair, *History of the Second World War - The Mediterranean and Middle East*, London 1956)

During the days following the 20th of June it was Hptm. Joachim Müncheberg who primarily improved his tally with a series of kills. But I/JG 27 also enjoyed further successes, such as with Lt. Schroer on 25 June, Hptm. Neumann on 8 July and Lt. Schroer again on the same day. 15 July was Müncheberg's great day. He scored his 47th victory.

When 7/JG 26 under Hptm. Müncheberg returned to Sicily on 31 July 1941, the Staffel had scored 10 kills during its two month deployment to Africa. Five of these were accounted for by Hptm. Müncheberg, two enemy planes were brought down by Lt. Mietusch and one each by Lt. Lindemann, Fw. Johannsen and Uffz. Mondry.

Marseille had developed his technique to perfection in the interim. He was able to fire from all attitudes, as if in a dream. He related his theory of this neck-breaking attack method to Pöttgen:

"I'll pass one or two times through the circle from above, then move in behind the aircraft I've chosen. On the third



pass, however, when the enemy expects something totally different, I dive from my higher altitude past the defensive circle, build up more and more speed and pull up again into a half loop, then do a half roll and shoot down the closest one while on my back."

Although this sounded quite simple, no one else was able to perform this. Not to mention his technique of shooting - and hitting - while in a turning dogfight. In doing this, a pilot would have to shoot before even seeing his foe in order to reach the correct intercept point. This type of calculation was an art, one that only Marseille could master.

In a dogfight he would push his machine to its limits. He dove with such speed that the g-forces pushing on him built up to six times that of normal gravity; his body weighed not 120, but 850 pounds.

The inherent danger in this, which was treated by Marseille as a game, was illustrated by Rolf Schroer:

"These powerful g-forces could cause any pilot to black out for short periods of time. It happened to me one time, where I lost consciousness while in a dive, coming to only when my Bf 109 was climbing again. I was shaking like a leaf."

All of this Marseille was able to continue without any apparent adverse effects - at least that's what his comrades thought who saw him jump from his plane with a smile.

Along with many of his compatriots, Marseille was able to fly home on leave.

During this time replacements began arriving in Africa from the fighter schools in Germany. The primary concern was to integrate them into the Gruppe and explain to them the effects of improper eating. Due to the change in climate in conjunction with a fatty diet, jaundice and other diseases had broken out.

It was Oblt. Homuth, who was always urging caution. The new pilots assigned to 3 Staffel were Leutnant Hoffmann, Leutnant Körner, Oberfähnrich Kugelbauer and Uffz. Mroska. The other two Staffeln also were given new pilots. Lt. Körner had already made an introduction when he shot down his first enemy on the transfer flight.

Marseille, who had taken a short leave following his 15th kill, came back to Africa from Berlin refreshed and relaxed. With his colleague Wildau he played several practical jokes and showed that he was still the youthful high-spirited flyer esteemed by his comrades.

The Staffelkapitän, for his part, would have preferred a more subdued Marseille. Marseille wasn't overly popular with the Prussian Homuth, but there was nevertheless a sort of truce reigning between them. The initiator of this peace

*This pile of scrap will be turned into an operational Bf 109 once again.*



was - as often - Edu Neumann, the Gruppenkommandeur.

During this period British bombers attempted to strike the airfield of 3 Staffel in a night raid. Instead, they hit a dummy airfield which had been constructed by Werkmeister Fw. Helmich.

The Staffel moved to the most forward airfield a few nights later. Following a return flight from a combat mission, the pilots learned that the airfield which they had just occupied the night before had been completely bombed out by the British.

One Sunday morning, as Marseille's Schwarm had been sitting airfield strip alert since the crack of dawn, the alarm was suddenly given.

A short time later nine Martin 167 bombers were reported approaching from the southeast. These planes had bombed Gambut and were now on their return leg.



*After being sewn on the sewing machine at left, sailcloth is stretched across the stabilizer.*



*Weapons being cleaned.*

The Schwarm scrambled into the air immediately. Marseille flew at the head, climbing rapidly to 6000 meters, and then attempted to cut the enemy off from their escape route. Over Bardia he sighted two of the bombers - which turned out to be two Douglas Bostons. They spotted him as well and attempted to lose him by turning away and pressing down low over the sea.

Marseille quickly closed the gap between them by diving and set himself up for the attack with an altitude advantage of 300 meters. This first approach targeted the bomber flying to the right and slightly ahead of the other one. Marseille broke through the criss-cross fire of the two crews who were attempting to cover each other with their guns. Only a 120 meters behind the right bomber, he pushed the fire button and immediately broke off to the right, out of the range of the left bomber's guns.



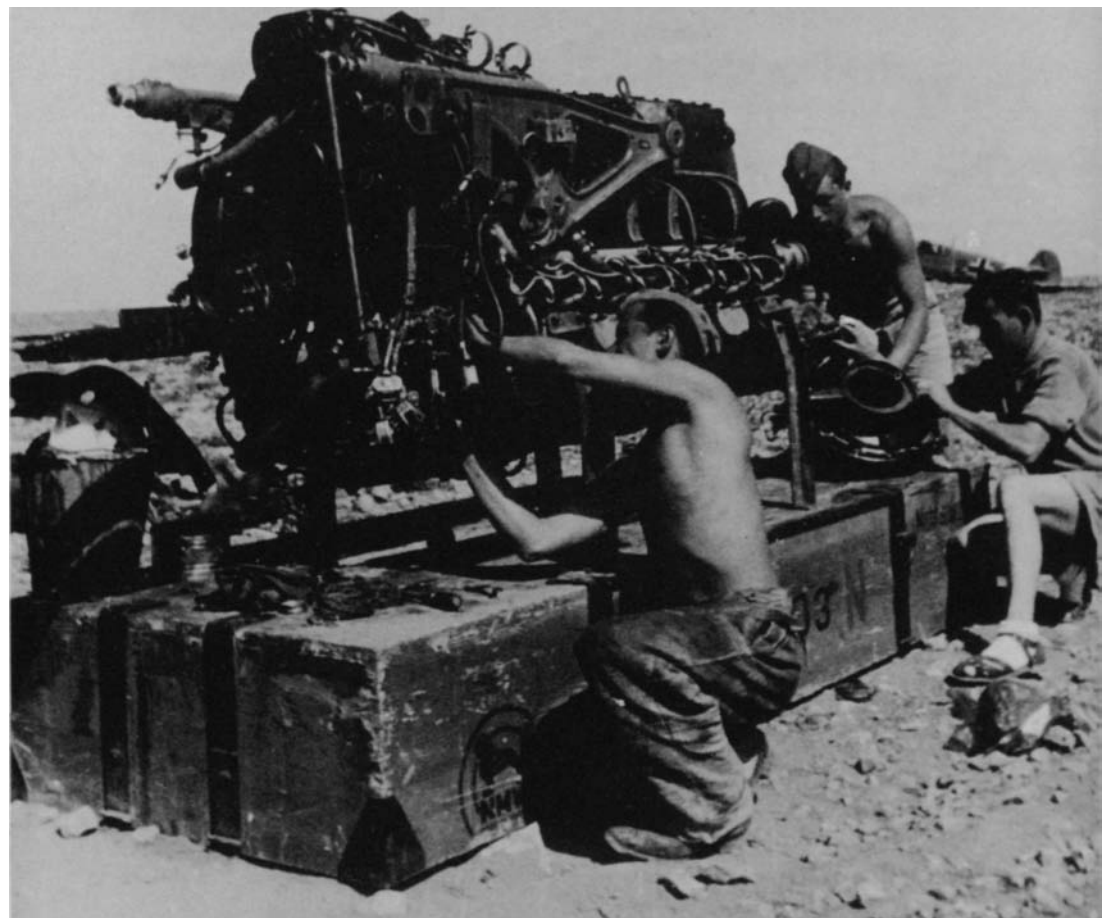
*A wing is put back together.*

*An engine gets a going-over.*



Marseille clearly saw pieces of the enemy's right engine cowling fly off. Again swinging in, he pushed to within 80 meters, shot the engine into flames and cut the right wing with a burst that tore it away from the machine. The bomber flipped onto its back and plunged toward the sea, where it impacted with such force that it broke up. A giant oil slick spread slowly out and wreckage of the aircraft floated on the water's surface, which was gradually calming again. The second Boston was able to make its escape.

Around noon there were three additional scrambles, but since the enemy retreated 3 Staffel was given permission to



*Another engine is repaired.*

perform "freie Jagd", or a free-ranging fighter sweep, which included the other two Staffeln.

On the other side of the Halfaya Pass, near Buq Buq, they finally encounter opposition in the form of 15 to 20 Hurricanes. This engagement would give Marseille the chance to show that he was capable of using his tactics without being shot at or even scratched. Marseille had told Stahlschmidt that, since returning from leave, he felt he was now in the position to put those intentions which they had so often discussed to the test.

Marseille the pilot had reached his zenith. He was now the master of his aircraft, as if it were a natural extension of his arm. Because he knew how to spot the enemy even when the others - even the enemy himself - were still scanning an empty sky, he had an even greater advantage in setting himself up for a favorable attack position.

Marseille spied the silver points in the sky at a distance of 30 to 40 kilometers and prepared his attack. Up to this point he had accumulated 18 kills.

### Marseille Begins His Climb

During the Battle of Sollum Marseille's wingman Pöttgen had scored his first kills, as had another of the Gruppe's pilots: Marseille's friend Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt.

It was during the first half of August of 1941 that there occurred an event which had a deep influence on Hans-Joachim Marseille, as he later told Stahlschmidt. At the beginning of the month Marseille was given orders to transfer an aircraft from Ain el Gazala to Tripoli via Bengazi.

A light southerly breeze had been blowing since morning. As Marseille took off he noticed several gray clouds in the sky. A thick fog bank nestled in the gorges of the Derna Mountains.

At first, everything went smoothly. Marseille landed in Bengazi to refuel. The sun could be seen peeking from behind a layer of clouds; the air was sticky and humid, and Marseille felt like he was in a greenhouse. As he saw the wind pick up, gusting across the airfield and forming sand clouds, he began to think that they might be in for bad weather - thoughts which were reinforced by the ground crew.

"Be careful, Herr Leutnant", he said. "It looks like a nasty ghibli."

"The weatherman said the same thing, but he felt that the storm would only brush Bengazi and the flight route to Tripoli."



*The propeller is installed...*



*...and tightened.*





*A Bf 109 again ready for combat.*

"I wouldn't count on it, Herr Leutnant."

"I'm flying west, in the other direction. I'll be alright."

The crewman helped Marseille on with his chute, clapped him lightly on the shoulder and jumped down. Marseille took off. As he left Bengazi he left in a northwesterly direction, turned westward over the sea on course for Tripoli; he was flying roughly along the coast, cutting across the wide bays.

Everything appeared to be going well until Marseille suddenly noticed that the wind had changed. The weather front had shifted to the west and now lay in a thick mass, with its offshoots already half-blocking his flight route to the west.

One minute later his visibility was reduced to 200 meters to the south. Windy gusts rattled his aircraft as he gripped tighter on the joystick. Ahead of him could be seen only a thick gray curtain. The desert below him had disappeared into an impenetrable sandstorm. This ghibli came from the depths of the Sahara, shrouding everything, pushing everywhere and bringing furnace-like heat along with it.

Marseille tried to keep the seashore visible to his left. He no longer knew whether his compass was working prop-



erly. The storm had overtaken him, engulfed him and blinded him. A glance at the altimeter showed 650 meters. The new compass heading indicated a southwesterly direction, so that was working ok. But the sand clouds became thicker. He was apparently flying in the center of the ghibli, which had now swallowed him completely.

He must do something. He couldn't permit himself to continue flying into this mess and risk damaging the plane. How would he explain it to Oblt. Homuth? He would be labeled a reckless pilot, for no one would have personally experienced this horrible nightmare. A thought jarred him: "You've got to fly ten minutes to the north, over the sea! It will be better there."

The Leutnant turned the Bf 109 in this direction. Shaken and bounced around, he headed for ten minutes out over the water, but the desert and the sandstorm seemed to follow him. When he once again resumed his original heading, his aircraft was once again buffeted by the winds. It sounded as though hundreds of cattail reeds were beating against his canopy and fuselage. A glance at his fuel gauge indicated that he only had a half an hour before he would simply fall from the sky. Should he again turn back over the sea? There, no one would ever find him.

Would he - as always - have luck on his side? What would happen if it had run out? What if Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt turns out to be right when he once told Marseille - who never forgot them - that "You can have luck, Jochen, but never talk about it."

He must simply trust to that luck. At first he tried to climb out of it, but even at 1000 meters he still found himself in the same gray-brown soup. Time was passing far too quickly.

Five more minutes left, then four. He would have to do something now. Jochen pushed the stick forward, the aircraft's nose dropped down. He kept his eyes focused directly ahead, constantly checking the altimeter, the compass and the fuel gauge and suddenly he saw a massive perpendicular shadow in front of him emerge from the grayness of the sand. He remained fixed on it. The Arco dei Fileni sprang from the dust like a fata morgana. But it was real. Marseille overflew it, made a turn, and found the Arco airfield. With a visibility of barely 100 meters he made a smooth wheeled landing. As he climbed out of his machine, the men from the flight control came rushing up.

"Where did you come from", asked the first runner to arrive.

"From the sky, as you can see", retorted Marseille and, despite the tension from this murderous flight, a boyish grin crossed his sweat-covered face.

"Man, how did you get here? You can't see anything out here", called the officer, out of breath from running.

"I came from Bengazi", explained Marseille.

"Everything's socked in there, too!"

"When I left it wasn't."

"Then you can celebrate your birthday tonight in Tripoli", said the Hauptmann and grinned at Marseille.

### **The Breakthrough**

The Afrikakorps advanced steadily across the desert in August of 1941, and the fighter pilots found themselves being moved further and further east to keep up with this forward push. Enemy fighters seldom crossed over their own front lines and the Staffeln of JG 27 often penetrated enemy territory to Sidi Barani and beyond.

The first American Curtiss P-40 fighters had made their appearance. In comparison with the Bf 109, they looked stockier and more compact, and could turn better than the Hurricanes, but the Bf 109 was faster and could climb better.

Nonetheless, there was some nervousness when these aircraft first showed themselves. But Redlich, Homuth, Franzisket and finally Marseille dispensed with the notion that these planes were better than their own.

The first great German successes in the desert against the British Desert Air Force were recognized by the presentation of the Knight's Cross by Reichsmarschall Göring himself, first Oberleutnant Gerhard Homuth on 14 June, then to Oberleutnant Karl-Wolfgang Redlich on 9 July.

As proof of his abilities, Hauptmann Redlich shot down a Maryland near Sidi Barani on 21 August. Oblt Schneider and Ofw. Espenlaub were also victorious this day. Hptm. Gerlitz and Lt. Kothmann each shot down a P-40 Tomahawk, and Ofw. Förster and Lt. Schroer managed to bring down a Hurricane apiece. The Marylands were from 24 Squadron SAAF and were striking the supply depot at Menastir near Gambut. They were stopped by nine Bf 109s before they could release their bombs. The Messerschmitts dove onto the approaching bombers, which were protected by a handful of fighters from 299 Squadron, from an altitude approximately 300 meters higher than the enemy formation.

Lt Schroer was successful during the evening of 29 August, shooting a Tomahawk which was providing rear cover for 250 Squadron. After Schroer had already broken off and reported his victory, the fire in the enemy's plane went out and its pilot, Pilot Officer Caldwell, was able to continue flying and even score a kill on a Bf 109. On the same day Oblt. Homuth notched up a Bristol Blenheim.



The final two days of August passed without incident, and the first week in September brought no further dramatic air battles.

Only on 9 September were Lt. Hoffmann and Lt. Marseille, flying a reconnaissance patrol, able to flush out two Hurricanes over the Bay of Sollum. In bringing down his quarry Marseille fired a total of 22 rounds from his cannon, confirmed by his armorer a short time afterwards.

During the next mission immediately following this kill, several of the 12 aircraft which JG 27 had launched came across seven Hurricanes of 33 Squadron providing an umbrella against Stuka attacks for a convoy.

In the air battle which developed, during which planes were turning wildly in and out of each other, Oblt. Franzisket and Fw. Wessely each managed to destroy one of the enemy.

From his higher vantage point, Lt. Marseille dove onto another Hurricane. As he roared by he fired a short burst which struck the plane and caused it to crash.

Three days later, during a reconnaissance-in-force advance by Rommel in the direction of Sidi Barani, the pilots also enjoyed lively combat activity. Near Sidi Barani, eight out of 12 Ju 87s being flown by Italian pilots were forced to make emergency landings in the desert due to lack of fuel; these planes fell into British hands.

*Oberfähnrich Marseille points to the hits his airplane received.*

Several Marylands of 24 SAAF Squadron, escorted by a few fighters, took off that afternoon to destroy advancing German armor. They were pounced on by 12 Bf 109s and six Italian G-50 fighters.

It was Oblt. Homuth who began the string of kills that day with the destruction of a Maryland. Lt. Hoffmann succeeded in bringing a second bomber down before it could drop its bombs. The third was the target of Jochen Marseille. As always, he needed only a short burst, fired at just the right moment, to send his victim plunging earthward.

45 minutes later Oblt. Redlich was forced to scramble several aircraft of his Staffel in order to stop a low level raid by five Tomahawks diving onto Gambut with small bombs and strafing attacks. Oblt. Redlich and Fw. Steinhausen each claimed a Tomahawk.

This, however, wasn't the end of the day's combat, for half an hour later six Bf 109s of 2 Staffel ran into two Hurricanes flying recce. Lt. Schroer and Fw. Oswald shot both of these opponents down. All in all a most successful day.

Beginning the following day the individual Staffeln of JG 27 were sent back to Germany to exchange their old mounts for the new Bf 109 F model. This model offered a significant improvement over their older "E" models. Its engine was more powerful, and could reach a maximum speed of 627 kmh at low altitude (see Appendix V on aircraft of the African campaign).

The new "Fritz" was armed with either a 15 mm or a 20 mm cannon firing through the propeller hub and two 7.9 cm machine guns mounted above the engine. With this plane, the German pilots enjoyed an even greater advantage over the Allied types. For the next nine months, until the advent of the Spitfire over Africa, the Bf 109 F was the absolute ruler of the skies.

2/JG 27 was in Germany for the entire month of September. The first Staffel fully equipped with the new "F" to arrive in Africa was 4/JG 27 under Oblt. Rödel, with 13 of the new type.

The British, for their part, began modifying their combat tactics for the first time in September. Where they had previously attacked in squadron strength only, they now began flying operations in wing strength.

To counter the Afrikakorps, the Western Desert Air Force began receiving several new bomber squadrons, equipped with the Blenheim and stationed at the airfield at Fuka. A percentage of the old Marylands was replaced by newer Bristol Beauforts.

The Desert Forces were given a new commander and a new designation. From now on they would be the 8th Army

and their commander-in-chief was General Bernard Montgomery.

By the end of September the entire II/JG 27, wearing the symbol of Berlin, the Berliner Bear, had arrived in the African theater. The three Staffeln were equipped with the new Bf 109 F-4 and came directly from Russia, where the Gruppe had accounted for 141 enemy planes shot down. The Gruppenkommandeur was Hptm. Lippert, who had been awarded the Knight's Cross on 24 September 1940. He would remain in Africa forever, as will be shown later.

When Lippert arrived in Africa his tally was already at 25, four of these kills being scored in the Spanish Civil War with the Legion Condor. A few of the more victorious pilots of this Gruppe, who would continue their successes in Africa, were Obfw. Otto Schulz with nine kills, followed by Oblt. Düllberg with seven. Oblt. Rolf Strössner and Ofw. Erwin Sawallisch were also aces, as were Oblt. Karl-Heinz Bendert and Oblt. Emmerich Fluder, among others.

Otto Schulz would become one of the greatest aces in Africa. And in African soil he would also be laid to rest.

Rather surprisingly, the Gruppe brought two young lions with them to Africa. They were gifts from the Berlin Zoo and were named Simba and Caesar. After only a few months they were flown back to Germany, as there were fears that the shortage of meat would lead them to make a snack out of one of the pilots.

The days passed, and as the 24th of September arrived, which would turn out to be Marseille's great day, II Gruppe of the Geschwader was still not operationally ready. On this day Marseille would receive the affirmation over Sidi Omar that his tactics were sound, that he possessed the flying ability and character to plunge into the enemy's defensive circle and inflict serious damage.

### **September 24th, 1941: Marseille at his Best**

After Marseille had shot down a Maryland bomber on the morning of the 24th, he became embroiled later in the afternoon in a dogfight involving roughly 20 enemy aircraft. They were sighted by I/JG 27 which had been on a freie Jagd. The first planes spotted were from 3 Squadron, RAAF, which were making a reconnaissance-in-force in the area of Sidi Omar. Two of these planes caught sight of two Ju 88s. They broke from their formation and turned toward the bombers to shoot them down. Flight Lieutenant Saunders and Sergeant Hiller attacked. Saunders shot one of the Ju 88s down, while Hiller was beaten off. This was what saved him, for

immediately following their attack six Bf 109s arrived on the scene. They shot Saunders down, who was able to bail out with a slight wound.

It was 1700 hrs when the battle began which would turn out to be Marseille's breakthrough. Nine Hurricanes from 1 Squadron, SAAF, were patrolling the front. Not far off flew an additional nine aircraft of another unit.

As these 18 aircraft approached the Halfaya Pass in loose formation and began searching for targets of opportunity, the bulk of I/JG 27 swung into action. They pounced from out of the sun. Marseille and his wingman, Oberfähnrich Kugelbauer today, swooped down on the British, which by this time had scattered to all sides in order to form a Lufbery circle, which was still the best type of defense in air combat. Flying in such a formation, one fighter was able to protect the tail of another.

The entire Staffel struck from an altitude of 6000 meters above the Halfaya Pass. Marseille was all eyes and thought. Within a few seconds he went over the moves of his attack in his mind. He repeatedly tested this tactic on his own Staffel as they would return from a mission. His drive to master this attack profile and to use it successfully bordered on possession and the unquenchable desire to do what no pilot before him had been able to do. Violating every rule of the air, he would have to show that the attack could be successfully carried out from all flight attitudes.

Again and again he would bring the illuminated ring of his gunsight to the proper deflection and - only in theory, of course - fire his weapons at just the right moment.

Since his comrades being "attacked" never shot back, he was able to perfect his style.

Following his shoot-down of the Maryland, Marseille had 19 kills to his credit. This day would see more.

Via the air-to-air link Marseille heard the faintly rasping sound of his Staffelfkapitän calling out a warning. He glanced forward. There they were! He counted several glinting specks. With a single reflexive movement he loosened his parachute harness. A flick of a lever and the weapons indicator light began glowing.

Marseille dove onto the first enemy - still with Oberfähnrich Kugelbauer flying behind him as his wingman. The quarry tried to pull up to the left to get away, but with a clearly superior advantage in speed, built up from his steep dive, Marseille rapidly closed the distance.

Pulling up into a tight left turn, Marseille opened fire. The enemy's left wing was already burning as Marseille shot steeply past.



As Kugelbauer was observing Marseille's kill, a Hurricane got in behind him and began firing. Only when tracers began whizzing by just in front of his windscreen did Kugelbauer recognize the precariousness of his situation. He kicked the rudder pedal and saw Marseille whip around to the left below him and fire a short burst into the enemy on Kugelbauer's tail.

Seconds after being hit the Hurricane burst into flames and plunged toward the desert.

The British had now finished forming their defensive circle. Marseille once again pulled into a steep climb in order to gain the necessary altitude for the maneuver to follow. Kugelbauer made a sharp turn and joined up with him again.

Now Marseille began his daredevil attack. He flipped his Bf 109 almost completely over, bearing down on the circle, spotted a gap and dove through. Racing through, he sensed rather than saw the most favorable firing position and punched the trigger. The dull thumping of the burst, shells puncturing the fuselage and engine of his prey, and this second enemy was sent down.

Marseille pulled up again. He heard Kugelbauer's voice over the intercom. "Man, Jochen, you've done it!"

Marseille was already climbing upward. With a maneuver resembling a half barrel roll, his nose pointed directly at the sky, he continued climbing. The defensive circle had closed up even tighter. He got his third opponent in his sights, shot, and saw the enemy spiral earthward trailing a banner of fire and smoke behind. Then a blood red fireball and within a fraction of a second the plane had been reduced to its individual components.

Marseille maneuvered his own plane into a split S. Forces pushed him back into his seat. The straps began to hurt and a few hundred meters below him the remnants of the enemy plane drifted toward the ground.

Again Marseille pulled up into a zoom climb. Kugelbauer pulled his stick back to follow him. A massive weight seemed to be pressing down on the stabilizers. With a whistling sound the two machines screamed upward. The voices in the intercom had now become louder. Concerned warnings and calls were shouted.

"Yellow 1, over", called the Staffelfkapitän to Marseille. But there was no time to answer, for he was now plunging into the enemy's defensive circle once again. He fired at the point where he knew he had the right deflection; the target this time was a plane that had drifted a few dozen meters outside the flying carousel. Stricken, this victim fell away in the direction of Sidi Barani.

Kugelbauer followed the diving aircraft and saw it impact near Buq Buq. A mushroom cloud shot up and in seconds metamorphosed into a tremendous column of smoke hanging over a thick mass of dust.

"Keep your eye on your fuel", called the Staffelkapitän, and Marseille saw that it was time to head back to base.

The return flight to Ain el Gazala turned into a triumphal journey for Marseille. He had shot down four of the enemy, three of them from out of their defensive circle. In doing so, he had scored kills number 20 to 23.

Congratulations flowed in Marseille's direction over the intercom.

The young Leutnant flew in his Yellow 14 alongside his Rottenflieger. Kugelbauer could see him clearly. He saw the face, frozen like a mask, gradually change into a smile as the messages were transmitted. But Kugelbauer knew what price he had paid in carrying out three attacks through the hell of the enemy's formation.

Flying at low level, the Staffel followed the Via Balbia along the desert floor. Their home base drew closer with every kilometer behind them. Behind the departing German planes a few fires still glowed from the wrecks of the enemy's aircraft.

I/JG 27 could report six kills, for both Oblt. Homuth and Ofw. Kowalski had each destroyed a Hurricane.

A short time later the airplanes reached the edge of the airfield, with its small huts, tents and revetments built from sand-filled fuel tanks. All the planes broke off left and right. Leutnant Marseille's Yellow 14 took center stage.

The plane roared across the field at low altitude and waggled once. Then it climbed, did a chandelle, wiggled its wings again, flew once more across the airfield and waggled for the third time. Upon reaching the edge of the field the plane pulled up and, giving a final shake, Marseille brought his machine in for a landing. The landing gear extended and the Bf 109 touched down, leaving a long cloud of dust behind it. Kugelbauer's aircraft was next, followed by the others of the Staffel.

Marseille gave it a bit of throttle and taxied toward his parking spot. Arriving, he shut the engine off and lifted the canopy. His two ground crewmen were already up on the wings and lifted him out after he released the safety harness.

The men carried their hero on their shoulders, not setting Marseille down until they stood in front of the Gruppenkommandeur, who stood near the edge of the field. Marseille walked over to his commander and reported his return from a combat flight.

Hauptmann Neumann extended his hand to Marseille. His gaze fell onto the sweat-covered face of the happy flyer, still full of strain, yet already betraying the beginnings of a smile.

"Marseille", again Neumann pronounced his name as it was spelled, "I congratulate you on your success."

"Kugelbauer, did you see them all?", asked Neumann of Marseille's wingman. The Oberfähnrich nodded.

"All of them, Herr Hauptmann. But I still can't believe it."

The enemy's viewpoint of the battle is given in the history of 1 SAAF Squadron, and reads as follows:

"Our Hurricanes had reached an altitude of 4000 meters as the cliffs of the Halfaya Pass slid beneath them. In this moment two groups of Bf 109s were sighted ahead and approximately 1000 meters higher. Estimates put their number at 24 aircraft."

"In the next breath the Messerschmitts fell upon us. There was a wild chaotic fight."

"The British fighters turned and jinked to defend themselves against this strong enemy. But they were hopelessly outclassed by the Messerschmitts, which were faster, climbed better, had more powerful armament and also had an altitude advantage. Again and again the Bf 109s, in groups of six or eight machines, pounced on individual Hurricanes, firing short bursts before climbing away from view."

This was a unique view of the situation, since the British fighters were not flying in the air separated from each other but were in a large group. And they had formed up into a defensive circle.

For the first time JG 27 appeared in the German Wehrmacht report, which mentioned them on 25 September with the following words:

"In North Africa German fighters shot down seven British fighter planes and one bomber without loss to themselves east of Sollum."

The seventh fighter mentioned was the Tomahawk flown by the Australian Saunders. His plane had been shot down by Oberleutnant Homuth.

With regards to his operations as a fighter pilot, Marseille said around this time that "there is nothing better than the freie Jagd. But we don't know how long this freedom in combat will remain to us. The development of communications and the reporting offices keeps us more tightly on the leash day by day. I'm afraid that the hour will soon come when Manfred von Richtofen's theory will no longer be applicable:

'Fighter pilots should be allowed to operate in their assigned areas as they see fit. When they spot an enemy, then

they attack and shoot him down. Everything else is nonsense.'

"But Richtofen will always be right in one thing: the only person who is an effective pilot is the man who attacks the enemy whenever he sees him, who is willing and able at all times to jump into combat without wondering whether it might not be himself this time who will be lying on the ground with shattered limbs at the end of the fight."

Day after day Marseille hunted with his Schwarm, mostly flying reconnaissance with his Rotte above a battlefield which now appeared to have become stagnant.

One evening, as the men of 3 Staffel were relaxing and talking with one another in front of their tents, shots suddenly rang out across the airfield. Everyone scattered, the pilots to their planes and others in the direction of the command post.

It turned out that the Long Range Desert Group under Lt.Col. Keyes had focused their attention on the airfield with plans to destroy the aircraft parked there.

This group of soldiers was a British elite unit. The group had set up operations in the caves of the Siva oasis. Later, when the Afrikakorps took Siva, they reestablished themselves in Kufra. Their raids, often hundreds of kilometers behind German lines, were masterpieces of guerilla warfare, cleverly planned and logically executed. Keyes' unit had been successful on many occasions.

But in their attack on the facilities of JG 27, one particular team ran into considerable trouble, for the next morning, at the break of day, three of the Geschwader's best pilots took off in pursuit. They were Oberleutnants Homuth and Redlich and Leutnant Marseille.

They were guided by a few direction posts which had monitored the group's escape route, caught up with them in the desert and dove in to attack from low level. The British fled their vehicles, which after two passes were completely destroyed.

## **II/JG 27**

On October 3rd, II/JG 27 began its initial operations in Africa, having been brought up to full readiness in the interim. Seven aircraft of 5 Staffel spotted six Hurricanes near Buq Buq escorting a recce flight. They attacked immediately. Uffz. Reuter scored the first kill, sending a Hurricane to earth. The pilot of the craft, Sergeant Lowty, was able to bail out. Lt. Lacey of 25 Squadron, Western Desert Air Force, shot down a Bf 109 attacking Sidi Barani.

A few hours later there was a second aerial engagement, during which Oblt. Rödel and Lt. Schacht each scored victories.

Three days later Ofw. Otto Schulz's name was entered for the first time into II/JG 27's African victory roster. 14 Bf 109s had taken off on a fighter sweep. Near Sidi Omar they jumped 12 Tomahawks, one of them falling to Schulz. From this point on his name would appear more frequently in connection with the victory reports and spectacular events of the unit. Schulz became the idol of II Gruppe, even though there were other great pilots among their number, such as Rödel and Schroer. His next kill was a Tomahawk of 2 SAAF Squadron. Oblt. Rödel matched him. When they ran into a squadron of Hurricanes a short time later, they attacked once again. Rödel was the first to fire, and the enemy plane in his gunsights exploded in the air.

Otto Schulz heard the warning of his Staffelkapitän a short time later. He turned and found himself on the tail of his opponent. His guns hammering away, Schulz's plane bucked under the recoil. This Hurricane fell to earth in tight spirals. Schulz attacked another. He pulled sharply up and away, sat the plane onto its back in a half roll, dove down again and, after making another half roll, pointed his nose at the enemy and fired again.

Part of the Hurricane's wingtip tore off. The Hurricane returned fire and Schulz felt a jarring hit in his fuselage. A glance at the instruments, however, showed that everything was working properly.

Approximately 200 meters directly behind his opponent he checked his dive, turned again and climbed with the enemy plane. Schulz made a few refined moves which the Hurricane couldn't follow, suddenly saw the enemy's nose pop up in front of his sight, and hit the fire button. The Hurricane broke up under the hail of cannon fire. Burning, it crashed into the sea.

"Watch out, Schulz, behind you", called his wingman. Otto Schulz reacted instinctively, shoving his plane into a dive, letting the 109 drop faster and faster so that he could then make a turn and see that his opponent had already disappeared in an easterly direction.

Once 6 Staffel of II/JG 27 was deemed combat ready, the entire Gruppe was able to fly for the first time as a unit on 11 October.

Under the direction of their Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm. Lippert, II Gruppe flew over the landscape for an hour without finding the enemy. They returned to their base without making contact with the foe.



For their part, on the following day I/JG 27 ran into Tomahawks on two separate occasions. From 0845 to 0915 hrs on this date, the 12th of October, the skies over Bir Sheferzen became a frenzy of activity. No less than 24 Tomahawks of 2 SAAF and 3 RAAF Squadrons were in the air. Lt. Lacey reported the probable downing of a Bf 109. The Australian 3 RAAF was in the center of this dogfight. Lt. Sinner shot down a Tomahawk, which oil tank caught fire. Engulfed in flames, it crashed. Its pilot, Sergeant Parker, was able to get out in time.

During the course of the battle Oblt. Sinner was shot at from within the British defensive circle. His plane took several hits and spiraled down out of the circle. However, Sinner was able to glide his plane to Gambut.

The Australians' defensive circle held. Only when elements of I Gruppe appeared, with 3/JG 27 in the lead, did the situation change. Marseille once again succeeded in punching through the circle twice, firing at the right moment despite the hair-raising speed and knocking down two Curtiss planes in the process.

A third plane was shot down by Oblt. Franzisket, who simply "couldn't be kept home today."

Marseille had scored his 24th and 25th kill. With these, however, the victory tally of the "Star of Africa" - as he was now called - was by no means over. Just the opposite: it was only beginning.

A few months later, after he had been awarded the Oak Leaves, an order of the day from the British High Command made a reference to this flyer:

"Marseille is the best the Germans have here. Like the others, he flies a Bf 109, but he flies it better than all the rest. He can only be attacked by several planes at the same time. You must make sure to attack him from the front or flanks before he is in a position to maneuver."

In the following weeks operations fell more and more upon the shoulders of I/JG 27. There were special reasons for this. On 17 October the facilities of 3 Staffel of JG 27 were struck by a series of bombs. The Staffel escaped without a scratch, since they had been in Gambut since the afternoon previous. However, the following night saw the destruction of two of 2 Staffel's aircraft in bombing attacks. The expansive tent camp was hit and burned brightly.

The British attacks on the facilities of II Gruppe met with less success, but did interfere with flight operations. It was expected that the British command was preparing for a new offensive with the purpose of driving the Germans back.

Coming from Palestine and other areas in the Near East, several new squadrons were transferred to Africa to beef up the Western Desert Air Force.

Both German fighter Gruppen scored victories on 20 October. The air battle of October 23rd over the Halfaya Pass -still held by the soldiers of SR 104 under Hptm. Bach, also resulted in scattered kills. Hptm. Lippert was able to score here. Three Bf 109s were reported being shot down by the South Africans.

"Apparently they thought the falling Hurricanes were Bf 109s", reported Hans Ring and Christopher Shores in their excellent work "Air Combat Between the Sand and Sun."

On 30 October it was Ofw. Schulz who once again scored, this time destroying three British fighters over the area of Bardia-Sollum-Sidi Omar. Lt. Schacht brought down an additional enemy plane.

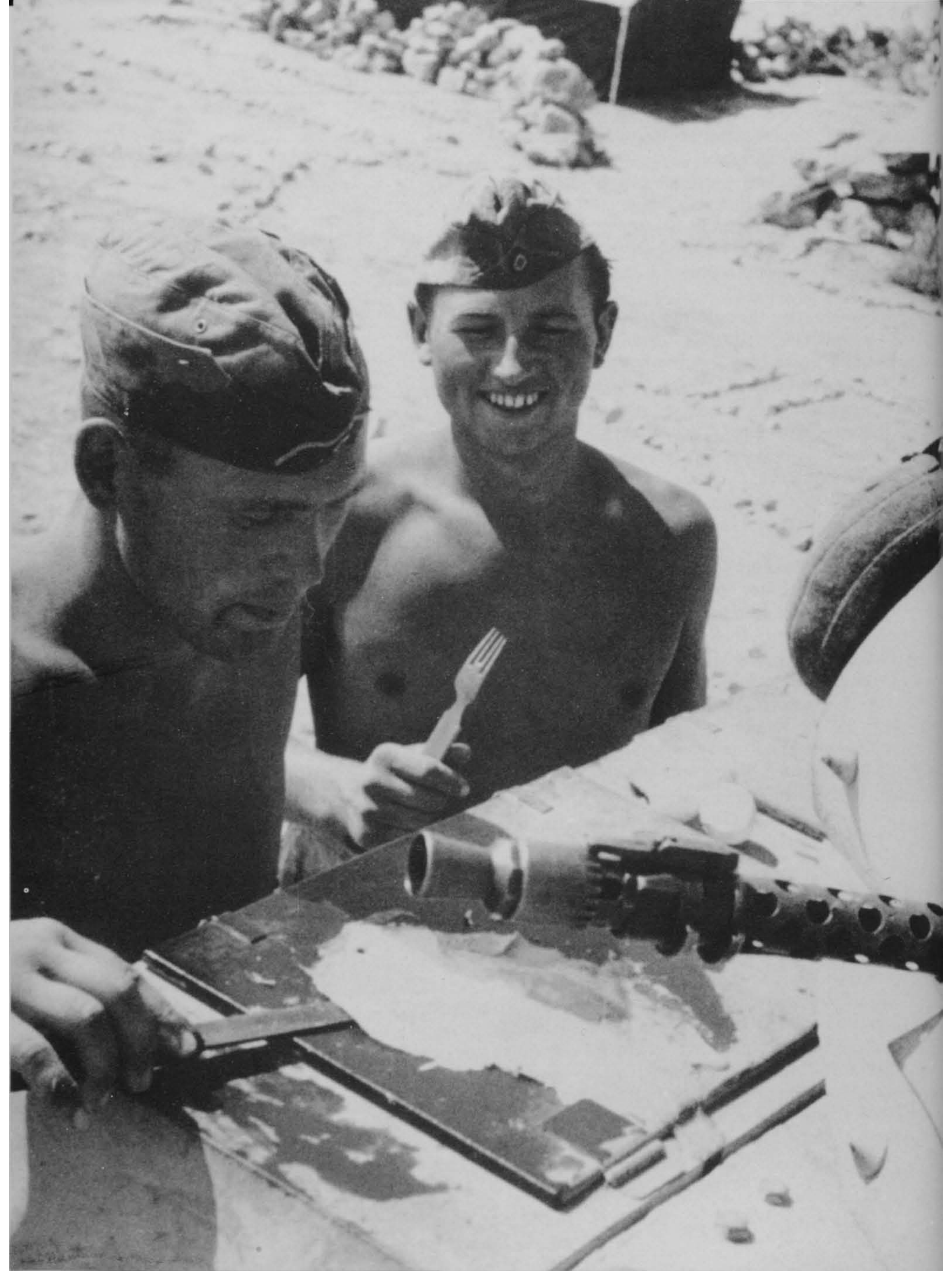
### Marseille is Honored

On 3 November 1941 Hans-Joachim Marseille was given the Ehrenpokal, or honorary cup, of the Luftwaffe. For the first time the activities of this young flyer were brought to the attention of Reichsmarschall Hermann Goring, who would constantly be apprised of Marseille's actions from now on.

On 1 December Marseille was awarded the German Cross in Gold, the first pilot in Africa to be so honored. This award was given for six missions or events which of themselves would each merit the Iron Cross 1st Class. This decoration had only been created 14 days previously.



*Marseille receives the German Cross in gold from "Edu" Neumann. At center is General der Flieger Geisler.*



## CHAPTER VI

# DESERT INTERVAL

### **Both Sides Make Ready for Operation Crusader**

**T**he war had become bogged down around Tobruk and Sollum. The soldiers of the Deutsches Afrikakorps, who had been thrown into the environment of desert warfare with no experience whatsoever, had encountered many unpleasant surprises in the preceding months. They had learned how to survive the massive dust clouds of the ghibli, how to find cover in a desert devoid of vegetation, and how to hide vehicles and weapons deep in the sand without becoming buried with them alive.

However, the most important thing they had learned was the fact that they could beat the enemy - that despite the old British colonial troops' advantage in bodies and weapons they were at least their equals and had the better leaders.

From the very beginning, this gave them an incomparably high combat morale. Every soldier who came as a replacement to Africa was caught up in this spirit.

The main problem in the desert was just beginning to make itself felt by the DAK at this time - that of supply. A daily supply of 1500 tons of material were needed, including water and provisions. Such a high quantity could simply not be maintained by shipping across the Mediterranean alone. The transportation route for shipping that made it safely across the Med was endlessly long. From Tripoli to Halfaya Pass alone the route was 2000 kilometers.

During the summer and fall air battles already discussed the DAK had made significant advances eastward.

By the end of October the British side had managed to ship to North Africa 300 Crusader tanks, three hundred tanks in the Stuart class, 170 Matilda Infantry tanks, 34000 cargo transport, 600 field guns, 80 heavy and 160 light anti-aircraft guns, 200 anti-tank guns and 900 mortars.

General Cunningham gave the go-ahead for Operation Crusader. The start of this offensive, with the goal of sweeping the Deutsches Afrikakorps off the face of the African continent, was planned for 15 November, but was postponed until 18 November. The reason for this change was due to the fact that the delivery of supplies to the 2nd South African Division, which had been moved from Abyssinia to Marsa Matruk, had been held up and Major General Brink, its commander, refused to attack without being fully ready.

Erwin Rommel, General der Panzertruppe since 1 July 1941, would have to keep one step ahead of this offensive. He would have to take Tobruk to prevent a second front from developing.

This was the reason that the German ring around Tobruk was drawn even tighter during the months of September and October.

Rommel was bitterly disappointed to receive the newly-formed 90th Leichte Afrika Division under Generalmajor Max Sümmermann in place of a third tank division he had requested, and which would have given him the needed striking power.

The new Panzergruppe Afrika was divided into two elements. On the one side was the DAK under GenLt. Crüwell with the 15th and 21st Panzer Division as well as the 90th Leichte AD and the "Savona" Division, while the XXI Italian Afrikakorps under Corps General Navarrini was operating with the "Trento", "Bologna", "Brescia" and "Pavia" Divisions.

With these troops Rommel planned three operations:

1. Fending off any British attack.
2. Expansion of border fortifications with massive minefields between Sidi Omar and Sollum.
3. Using the DAK to launch an attack from the area between Tobruk and Tobruk's eastern flank on the coast.

These plans, which he worked out with his Ia, Oberstleutnant i.G. Siegfried Westphal, Rommel put to paper on two hand sketches.

### **Deluge in the Desert**

During the evening of the 17th of November 1941 it began to rain. For the first time in 60 years a cloud mass of gigantic proportions took shape between Tobruk and the Halfaya Pass. A massive thunderstorm formed into a ball. Lightning flashed across the dark skies. Near Gambut and the Halfaya

Pass tents, trucks and guns were caught up in a true flash flood. Suddenly, across the comms lines, there crackled the codeword for the expected British attack, "Hochwasser! - Hochwasser! - Hochwasser!"

"Hochwasser" was the German word for "Flood", and by the time the codeword had been given this night a British armada of approximately 1000 tanks was rolling through the desert toward German positions, protected from sight by torrential rains.

When the first reports of three widely separate enemy advances began coming in to Rommel, GenLt. Crüwell expressed concern over these latest developments. Rommel countered, "These can only be reconnaissance-in-force probes."

For the first time he was mistaken, for on the evening of this day, the 18th of November 1941, as General von Ravenstein reported enemy tanks advancing on his troops, it became clear that the British had gone on the offensive.

1000 tanks, 100,000 men and 1000 aircraft made up the attack. In a series of turbulent events the British 7th Tank Division continued their advance, swallowing the airfield at Sidi Rezegh. Other combat units assaulted Italian defensive positions near Bir el Gobi. Here, however, they were brought to a halt, for the "Giovani Fascisti" - "Young Fascist" - Divisions, fought bitterly and beat back all attacking forces. The "Ariete" Division, the best Italian tank unit, plunged into the battle here and knocked out five British tanks.

On 19 November the 21st Panzer Division's Panzerkampfgruppe under Oberst Stephan attacked enemy forces suspected lurking between Sidi Omar and Gabr Saleh and established themselves in a defensive posture inside Gabr Saleh.

The 15th Panzer Division occupied the area southwest of Gambut in order to be accessible at any time to any action which might flare up.

At 1530 hrs, eight kilometers northeast of Gabr Saleh, Panzerkampfgruppe Stephan struck the enemy with 120 tanks from PR 5, 12 light field howitzers and four 88 mm anti-aircraft guns. Their foe was the 4th British Tank Brigade minus the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment.

Oberst Stephan raced to the front with his tanks, pushing the weakened enemy back as far as Trigh el Abd. 23 Stuarts which had attempted to check his advance were knocked out. Only three German tanks were lost.

The 21st and 15th Panzer Divisionen entered the fray the next day from their positions in Sidi Azeiz and from the area 13 km southwest of Gasr el Arid. The 15th PD fell upon the





*Rommel and Generalmajor von Bismarck at the 21st Panzerdivision.*

4th Tank Brigade northeast of Gabr Saleh. During a long, drawn-out battle the British lost 55 of their 143 tanks.

The tank battle of Sidi Rezegh which developed, reaching its climax on the Sunday before Advent, or "Totensonntag" 1941, turned into one of the biggest actions in the desert.

On the evening of the first day's actions the airfield at Sidi Rezegh was still in enemy hands. During one of their attacks the British 7th Tank Division had lost 30 combat vehicles. The battle continued until late in the evening, then the two German tank divisions broke off from the enemy and set up hedgehog positions outside of Sidi Muftah (15th PD) and in the area south of Hill 175 (21st PD).

The next day there were additional exchanges with the 4th Tank Brigade, which lasted until sunset.

Oberst Hans Cramer, hot on the enemy's heels, ordered the attack to continue despite the falling darkness and instructed I/PR 8 under Major Fenski to take the lead.

During the night the unit ran into a large concentration of enemy tanks in hedgehog formation and, following a brief exchange of fire, took them in a surprise attack. These were

elements of the 4th Tank Brigade and supply trucks of the 8th Hussars. A few minutes later Fenski reported to his regiment commander, "One Brigadier General, 17 officers and 150 men captured. 35 tanks, a number of guns and several communications vans confiscated."

"That's the Knight's Cross for you, Fenski", said Cramer. But Günter Fenski was killed the next day during Sunday's battle. He was awarded the Knight's Cross posthumously on 31 December 1941.

On the same day Rommel succeeded in initiating a surprise attack, the bulk of which was spearheaded by grenadiers of the 21st PD and PR 5 under Oberst Stephan.

In a breathtaking duel the airfield of Sidi Rezegh was retaken after three days in enemy hands. General Bott, commander of the 7th Tank Division holding Sidi Rezegh, ordered the unit to fall back to the positions occupied by the South African Division. The 7th Division's 22nd Tank Brigade lost 45 of its total strength of 79 tanks in this battle alone.

The Sidi Rezegh airfield was in German hands once again. A breakout of British troops from Tobruk was checked. By the evening of November 22nd the Panzergruppe Afrika had knocked 207 British tanks out of commission. III Korps under Gambarra had accounted for the destruction of an additional 50 tanks and 200 armored vehicles.

The Battle of Totensonntag, the 23rd of November 1941, swayed back and forth. By midday link-up had been established with "Ariete." The intended destruction of the South African Division in the area of Sgifet-Adeimat was not successful, as the tanks of PR 5 had been diverted too far to the right and were no longer able to reach the center of fighting. PR 8's flak battery - the 3/Flak 33 under Hptm. Fromm - provided cover as the German tanks disengaged from the enemy.

Hptm. Kümmel, commander of I/PR 8, broke through to the airfield at Sidi Rezegh and there joined up with the advancing 21st Panzer Division. This action was the deciding factor.

Rommel outlined his plans to the OKW for the 24th of November:

- "a) finish the destruction of the enemy's 7th Tank Division.
- b) advance on Sidi Omar with elements of my own forces with the intention of attacking the enemy along the Sollum front."

Following a meeting with the Kommandeur of the 15th PD, GenMaj. Neumann-Silkow, Rommel arrived at General-

leutnant Crüwell's command post two hours later and learned from him that, "The enemy has been destroyed at Sidi Rezegh and was only able to escape in scattered numbers!"

Rommel gave the following instructions to Crüwell, "After the majority Tobruk's attacking forces are destroyed we will attack the enemy on the eastern front again and destroy the New Zealanders and Indians. Speed is of the utmost importance. We must exploit the shock effect of the enemy's loss and immediately move all our units at the fastest pace against Sidi Omar."

During the following tank battle between Sidi Omar and Sidi Azeiz on 25 November Oberst Stephan was killed in a tank duel. Major Mildebrath took over command of PR 5.

The battle ended with Rommel not being able to attain his goal. He had been able to reach the Trigh Capuzzo west of Sidi Azeiz and had won back a section of territory 30 km deep, but Sidi Omar was still held by the enemy

### **The Retreat Makes the Headlines**

On 27 and 28 November the major battle in and around Sidi Rezegh had determined the outcome of events. Rommel still felt there was a good chance to beat the British. The 28th of November would have to be the decisive day. Generalmajor Böttcher had assumed command of the 21st PD in place of GenLt. von Ravenstein, who had been taken prisoner by the British, (for more information on these battles see: *Rommel in the Desert*)

The varying combat operations of 29 November didn't bring any conclusive victories. Just the opposite: El Duda fell during a night attack.

On 30 November no further territorial advances were made. Sidi Rezegh was stormed again, but El Duda remained in possession of the enemy. The strength of the DAK was broken. The 21st Panzer Division still had 15 medium and six light tanks available, while the 15th PD could field 28 medium and eleven light tanks. The 7th Tank Division alone still had 120 tanks to oppose these few numbers.

In view of the heavy losses in personnel and material, Erwin Rommel was forced to make the decision to break off combat and retreat back to the Gazala positions, later giving up Cyrenaica.

On 7 December the battle continued. GenMaj. Neumann-Silkow, who had attempted to push his tanks forward once more, was caught in an artillery barrage and killed when his personal tank took a direct hit. Oberst Erwin Menny took over command of the division on the field of battle, until GenLt. Gustav von Vaerst became the new Divisionskommandeur on December 9th.

In discussions with Rommel GenLt. Crüwell succeeded in persuading the commander-in-chief to sound the retreat. This action alone saved the DAK from complete annihilation.

The DAK fell back and on 15 December Erwin Rommel reported to the OKW that "the Army intends to hold the area of Gazala up until 16 December. The retreat through El Mechili and Derna must be accomplished by no later than the night of 17 December in order to preclude being overtaken and destroyed by the enemy's superior forces."

Agedabia was reached by the Christmas holidays. But even here the situation was tenuous for the Panzergruppe Afrika, and Rommel continued on to the Marsa-el-Brega positions. Fighting was limited to skirmishes, as the enemy no longer was advancing as strongly as before. There, in Marsa-el-Brega, it was at least possible to defend Tripolitania.



## CHAPTER VII

# JG 27 DURING THE WINTER OF 1941/1942

### **Battling the Deluge**

Following on the heels of the sandstorms, which had limited the effectiveness of selected aircraft despite the installation of sand filters and had caused no end of problems for JG 27, a completely incomprehensible bit of information reached the ears of the Geschwader's men.

It was during the course of one of those lively afternoons in the pilot's tent, which by now had become celebrated events, that the portable gramophone gave out when its batteries expired. The tent's orderly, "Antonchen", wasn't able to offer any more alcoholic drinks because none had been delivered from the mainland. This situation gave rise to a heated discussion among the veterans of innumerable dog-fights. Lt. Körner and Lt. Wildau bickered over the importance of alcohol at such improvised functions as this, which celebrated the fact that the enemy allowed them this free time, since he had only been making sporadic appearances over the front during the last two days - and even then these appearances were more akin to courtesy calls.

Hans-Joachim Marseille was imitating the mumbling speech of Austrian actor Hans Moser, whose films "Anton the Last" and "The Horror" they'd already seen in their field theater. Hans Moser had been a big hit with his latest film "Vienna Blood."

Everyone clapped at Marseille's excellent rendition of the actor's style and Viennese mannerisms, but the applause was cut short by the field radio. It was Lt. Stahlschmidt, who was now "vegetating" (as he himself put it) in the role of Gruppenadjutant of I Gruppe.

"Herr Leutnant." The orderly turned to Marseille.

"Leutnant Stahlschmidt will be here in ten minutes."

"Since when does Hans-Arnold need the special an-





*One of the few photos of Stahl Schmidt, seen here in a relaxed pose.*



nouncement?", asked Lt. Körner jokingly. "The poor fellow is going to choke to death on red tape here soon. He's hardly got a free minute anymore."

"He'll survive it", added Pöttgen.

Stahlschmidt arrived five minutes later and was greeted with enthusiastic hellos. He told them the things he'd been hearing as Gruppenadjutant. "Yeah, transport ships are expected with provisions", he said. "A few didn't make it through, including a couple of tankers. Strict fuel conservation measures have been set up by higher authority."

"Then it's going to get serious here soon", said Pöttgen.

"It's already serious enough. We've got a pile of wrecks lying on the airfield even now, and no replacement parts. The mechanics are already so overtaxed that they can no longer make repairs. Instead, they're making improvisations which can hardly be believed. Werkmeister Wullrich even patched up the holes in a vertical stabilizer by using cloth and a sewing machine. Airplanes are resurrected from ruins. It's amazing what they're doing."

"I agree! Our blackmen (a nickname derived from the ground crewmen's black overalls) have earned special praise", added Marseille. "But even their magic has its limits if they can't get any more spare parts."

"And then there's lots of rain on the way!", interjected Stahlschmidt.

"I'm always hearing about rain!", cried Pöttgen. "Rain in the desert!"

"Well, your eavesdroppers have heard right this time. Our weatherman was with the commander earlier. He says to expect massive amounts of rainfall over the course of the next few hours or days." Everyone began laughing uncontrollably. "How's your tent sitting?", said Stahlschmidt, turning to his comrades.

"Our tent isn't sitting, it's standing", Marseille teased his friend.

"That's not only stupid, that's idiotic, Jochen", said Stahlschmidt. "The rains can become dangerous for us all if the wadis fill up and our tents aren't on high enough ground. By the way, I'm not just making this up. I think our weather doctor knows a thing or two and we shouldn't be taking his warning so lightly."

"The doctor's being too much of a pessimist", added Körner.

"The commander doesn't think so. The machine shop is to be pulled out of its wadi by this afternoon and moved to

*Oblt. Otto Schulz, awarded the Knight's Cross on 22 February 1942, is seen here as an Oberfeldwebel. He was the famous "One-Two-Three Schulz."*

higher ground. The Staffel commanders have orders to move many of the tents out of the hollows."

The radiotelephone jingled again, calling Lt. Stahlschmidt back to the Gruppenkommandeur.

"Listen, Hans-Arnold! Let us know if snow is in the forecast so we can clean the rust off the runners of our sleds."

"Dimwits!", retorted Stahlschmidt angrily and regretted not being able to slam the tent flap on his way out.

Despite their laid-back attitude some of the men became concerned. They went outside the tent. From far out over the sea they could see the lightning bolts of a distant thunderstorm. The wind had died out.

"Funny temperature", said one of them.

They looked up as Oblt. Homuth came up with the Staffel's Hauptfeldwebel. Apparently they'd been inspecting the tents.

"Gentlemen, you are to post watch on the airfield every two hours."

This certainly wasn't because of the rain, but due to the lurking danger of another attack by the Long Range Desert Group.

By and by the pilots gradually made their way to their own tents to catch some sleep.

It was around 2 o'clock in the morning when suddenly gusts of wind began tearing at the tents and anchor ropes. The sky was clear above the airfield; a few stars were winking. From the southwest a gigantic black cloud was being driven ahead of the wind. The first thick raindrops began smacking against the tents. It was really raining! A few sleepers awoke and, surprised by the change in climate, listened quietly to the drumming.

One hour later the alarm "Water! Water!" was echoed throughout the airfield.

As the remaining men awoke and stumbled into the open, it was nearly upon them. A wave of water tore right through the center of 3 Staffel's camp, carrying along on its surface a conglomeration of items; shoes and socks, suitcases and other things swirled past. Fed from the mountains, the river became wider and wider. It bore down, uprooting everything in its way.

The first crewmen fled to the nearest dunes from their flooded tents, where they stood holding their coats over their arms and wearing their fur or leather jackets over their pajamas and stared in wonder at the sea inexorably spreading out around them.

*Karl-Heinz Bendert was a pilot in 5./JG 27. He was awarded the Knight's Cross on 30 December 1942.*



*Redlich as a Hauptmann. He was KIA on 29 May 1944 with the rank of Major in a dogfight over St. Pölten, Austria.*





*Gustav Rödel (left) and Werner Schroer. Both were two of the most successful JG 27 pilots next to Marseille.*

Lights blinked from all sides, men called out warnings or directions to each other or shoveled sandy embankments around their tents.

It continued to rain. Rather, it poured in buckets. Within the current of the water's vortex, which now had split off into two rivers before reaching the dunes, more and more things could be seen bobbing along: jungle hats and mess kits, car tires and cooking pots, canteens and bottles.

The Hauptfeldwebel had organized a contingent of sand shovelers from among the mechanics, who had dug out a moat around the valuable supply area and channeled the water away.

The deluge lasted three hours. When it finally stopped, everything which wasn't anchored down was being carried away. Telephone lines and poles were damaged; several poles had even been torn up. The commander made use of runners to pass orders.

One hour after the downpour had let up the rivers, which had nearly been brought under control, all of the sudden began swelling rapidly. This was the flash flood, which tore through the now dried out wadis. It ripped straight through the line of tents and, carrying several things in its grasp, became lost in the sea.

All in all, however, the damage wasn't so bad if one discounted the two "drowned" field workshops, which now rested in trenches with their engine hoods well below water level.



After an initial assessment, Inspector Köster gave the Gruppenkommandeur his damage report. He was given orders to have everything repaired.

I Gruppe survived relatively well compared with Hptm. Lippert's II Gruppe. Their tents stood up to their tips in water.

One thing was certain: JG 27 had not drowned in the desert. There were, however, many "homeless", which wandered around in varying states of dress trying to save that which was beyond saving.

Over the next two days air traffic, primarily to and from Fliegerführer Afrika, was only possible with the Fieseler Storch planes. None of the aircraft had been damaged. Yet taking off from the wet and soggy airfield was out of the question for the time being.

The mess kitchen had been seriously damaged and the office of II Gruppe looked like a wet cat. The thoroughly soaked files were hung out to dry on clotheslines.

In Tmimi a few tents had been carried away with their occupants. They sailed toward the sea "accompanied by a cargo truck, floating along with them", but were rescued from the flood in time. I Gruppe's water wagon in Derna was also flushed away.

In Gambut they waited in vain on the morning of the 18th for the Messerschmitt Staffeln, which made their ap-

*Marseille with his "Yellow 14."*



pearances every day Not a single raindrop had fallen there.

During the course of the situational briefing on the morning of November 18th it was reported that an enemy bomber unit had been spotted over the Med headed directly toward their own airfield. From their vantage points inside the bomb trenches the men watched helplessly as the British attack rolled over them. During the following night as well both fighter airfields were subject to attack by enemy bomber strikes.

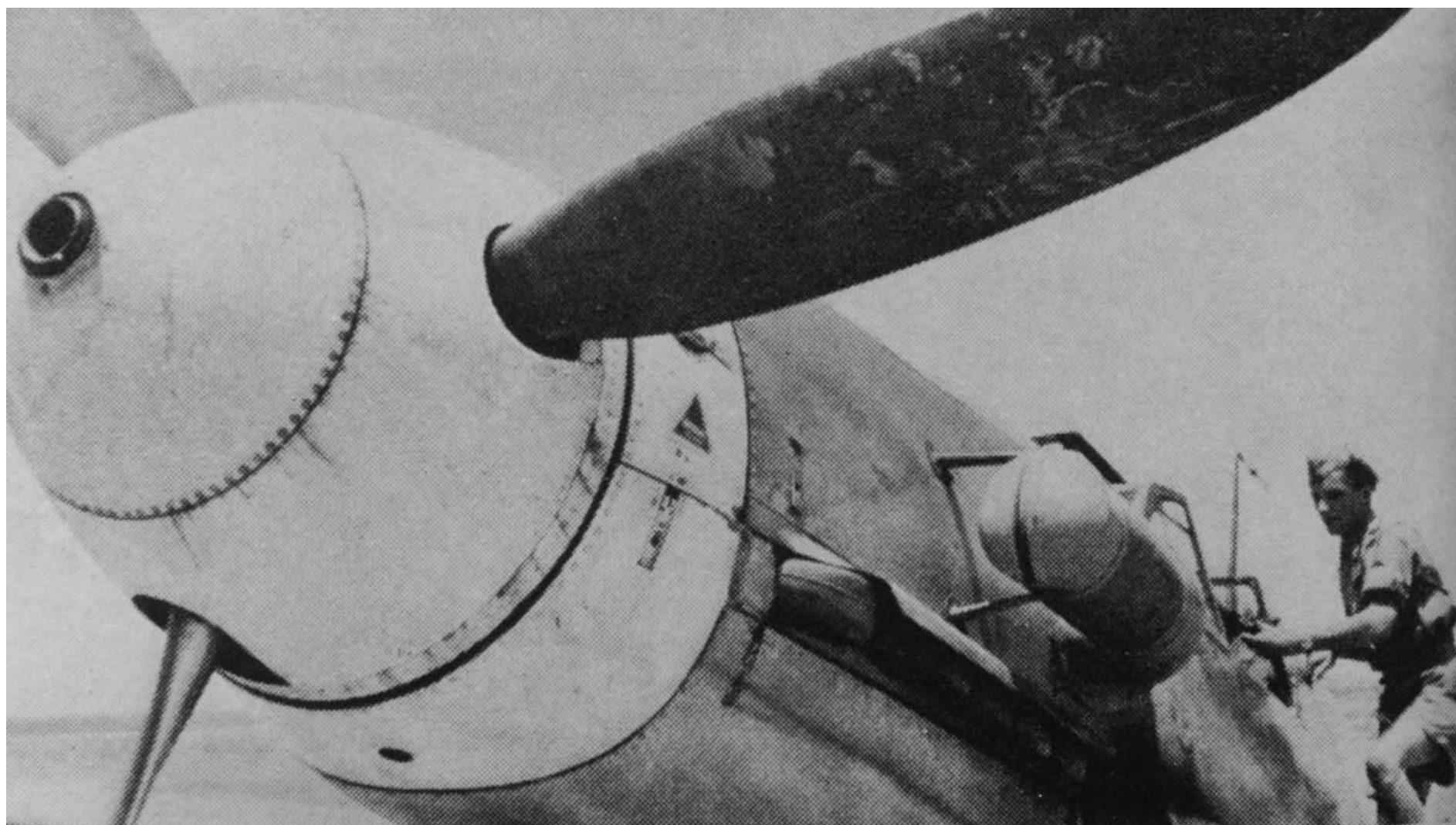
By the afternoon of the 18th the runways had dried out to where 1/JG 27 could launch two Schwärme against the nine attacking Marylands of 21 SAAF Squadron. Hptm. Redlich and Ofw. Espenlaub each shot down a bomber. These bombers had not been carrying bombs, but were dropping leaflets. Upon the leaflets were written:

"German fighter pilots, you are beaten! Give up your struggle!"

Only a few planes got airborne on the 19th as well. During the following days Redlich and Espenlaub, Lt. Remmer and Ofw. were successful on several occasions. On 21 November Gefr. Paskowski was killed when he rammed a Bf 109 which had just taken off. The pilot of the latter plane, Fw. Kaiser, was injured.

Again it was the aircraft of 1 Staffel which took part in the air battles on 22 November. The most successful marks-

*Scramble by Marseille (photograph from "Signal" magazine).*





*Marseille reports to his comrades on the latest mission.*

men this day were Redlich with two kills and Oblt. Schneider, Uffz. Grimm and Ofw. Espenlaub with one apiece.

Hauptmann Lippert, Kommandeur of II/JG 27, bore the brunt of the attack during on this date, as I Gruppe had few aircraft still fit for combat. He added two enemy aircraft to his tally. Oblt. Rödel also scored twice. Aircraft of II/JG 27 were airborne throughout the day. Three planes of this Gruppe were shot down. Their pilots, Uffz. Reuter, Lt. Scheppa and Uffz. Tanier, were able to bail out in time and return back to their Gruppe. Fw. Hiller was forced to belly in northwest of Bir el Gobi. Oberfähnrich Waskott jumped out with his parachute south of Tobruk. Hptm. Düllberg was wounded in a dogfight, but managed to reach the Gazala airfield and make a belly landing. The German fighter pilots scored 21 kills that day, 13 of them fighters, but five of their own planes had been lost.

On 23 November the men of II Gruppe were scrambled several times, during which they shot down a total of nine



*The desert cinema "Marabu." A new film is being shown.*





*Erbo Graf Kageneck, Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 27 with his crew chief prior to takeoff.*



*The Staffel painter gets ready for more work - Marseille will be landing shortly.*

British fighters and a Boston bomber. Three Hurricanes fell to Hptm. Redlich, while Ofw. Espenlaub brought down two. Hptm. Lippert was able to shoot down a Hurricane before he himself was hit in the engine while dogfighting with Curtiss P-40s and Blenheim bombers. He bailed out over British lines, but broke both his legs when he struck the vertical stabilizer. He was found by British troops and, after being administered first aid, was taken to General Hospital 119 in Egypt. There both legs became infected, necessitating an immediate amputation.

Lippert defended himself in a futile attempt to save his legs. "Don't cut off my legs", he called out repeatedly, in a voice punctuated by fever. When it became clear that there was no alternative, he agreed to the amputation. He died from an embolism ten minutes after the operation without ever regaining consciousness.

Hauptmann Lippert was buried with full military honors in a ceremony attended by British and Italian officers.

This information was relayed by radio to the Fliegerführer Afrika. Up to that time Wolfgang Lippert's score stood at 29 kills.

Otto Schulz of II/JG 27 continued his string of victories over the next few days. Hptm. Redlich also scored several more kills.

On 5 December I Gruppe was able to once again participate fully in operations. Along with II/Gruppe they provided escort for 40 Ju 87s. 25 km south of El Adem the British succeeded in shooting down 18 of the Ju 87s. Flight Lieutenant Caldwell was the most fortuitous with five kills. Five Tomahawks were shot down. In addition to Hptm Redlich, Oblt. Rödel also had a good day.

3/JG 27, which had not been mentioned in the past weeks, had been rotated back to Germany to be retrained on the new Bf 109 F, the "Fritz." On 5 December they were once again in the thick of the fight. With their new, faster airplanes, Oblt. Homuth and Lt. Marseille jumped aircraft of 274 Squadron and each claimed one of the enemy's number. This was Marseille's debut with the new type. From now on he would repeatedly rack up new victories despite the retreat and redeployment of his own airfield. This kill of his on the 5th of December was his 35th victory, the first after being awarded the German Cross in Gold. Actually, he should have been decorated with the Knight's Cross much earlier than now, as it was being awarded at this time after 20 kills.

With 12 kills in the space of 14 days Marseille had brought his tally to 33. A few hours before the airfield of Ain el Gazala was to be vacated in the face of the enemy advance, Marseille



was ordered to the Gruppe's command post. He had just returned from a combat mission where he had brought down another enemy plane, his 34th, when he was given the order.

Arriving at the command post, he reported to the Gruppenkommandeur, then was received by Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring.

"Smiling Max", as he was called by the British, extended his hand to the young pilot and held Marseille's right for a long time in his own.

"Leutnant Marseille, by orders of the Führer and as the first German pilot in Africa to receive such an honor, I award you the German Cross in Gold. I would personally like to thank you for your bravery in combat. You are unfortunate, my dear Marseille, for just a few days ago the number of kills as a prerequisite for the Knight's Cross was raised from 20 to 40, otherwise I would have gladly presented you with this prestigious award. For my part, I have no doubt whatsoever that you will soon attain this number. In doing so, I wish you the best of success and a soldier's good fortune."

"Thank you, Herr Feldmarschall", replied the pilot and permitted the "Fried Egg", as this decoration had been known since its inception, to be pinned onto his field blouse.

*Post-mission greeting for Marseille.*





*Oblt. Gustav Siegfried Rödel, Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 27.*



*Erbo Graf Kageneck, awarded the Knight's Cross on 30 July 1941 and Oak Leaves on 26 October 1941 (the 39th recipient). He died of wounds on 12 January 1942 in a Naples military hospital*

The Gruppenkommandeur added his congratulations: "Continue on, Marseille, and I wish you pilot's luck, for you're going to need it on those risky sorties you fly."

Finally, it was time to celebrate with his colleagues. Several bottles of Marsala wine and a bottle of French cognac donated by Feldmarschall Kesselring formed the basis for a jovial time, during which Marseille was one of the more "relaxed" pilots.

Another special event occurred on this date, the 5th of December 1941, as the DAK was forced to vacate the land west of Sidi Rezegh and began the retreat already mentioned previously:

21 Bf 109 F aircraft of III/JG 53 - the "Pik-As" (Ace of Spades) Geschwader - arrived in Africa under the command of Gruppenkommandeur Hptm. Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke and landed at the Tmimi airfield.

7, 8, and 9 Staffeln of this Geschwader were led by Oblt Altendorf, Oblt. Hans-Joachim Hennecke and Oblt. Franz Götz, respectively. Hptm. Wilcke and Lt. Herbert Schramm already wore the Knight's Cross. Schramm and Lt. Hermann Neuhoff had already tallied 37 victories. Wilcke with 33, Götz with 30 and Stumpf with 24 were the next in line for this award.

### **Hans-Joachim Marseille on the Path to Success**

With his new machine, which had received the yellow paint and number 14 as before, Marseille took off on December 6th to intercept 24 Hurricanes over Bir el Gobi. The British fighters were flying cover for a group of attacking bombers whose intention it was to soften up the Italians bravely holding the fort.

These Hurricanes pounced on nine Ju 87s who were also throwing themselves into the fray. Another of the enemy's squadrons, the 274th, also became involved in the fight. The battle lasted half an hour, during which time the three British squadrons suffered grievous losses. Once again, Marseille scored with two kills. In addition to him, Ofw. Otto Schulz of II Gruppe also achieved two victories. Uffz. Reuter and Uffz. Schulz also made their contributions to the day's tally with a kill each.

The next day saw Ofw. Schulz once again score the first kills. Early in the morning he shot down one of two Boston bombers flying a reconnaissance mission. When Lt. Kingon, the pilot of the mortally wounded bomber, gave the order to bail out, neither the bombardier nor the gunner were able to do so because both had been seriously wounded. Lt. Kingon,



who was about to jump out himself, turned back, threw himself into the pilot's seat once again, and made a smooth belly landing. He succeeded in pulling both his compatriots from the burning aircraft before it was blown into the air.

The second Boston was sighted over El Adem by Lt. Remmer and shot down in flames. One of the crew members saved himself by bailing out. Other enemy activity was countered by Lt. Marseille and his Schwarm, flying together with the aircraft of I/JG 27 under Oblt. Homuth as top cover for II/StG 2. They were able to make a timely interception of a squadron of Hurricanes. But not before the enemy had already shot two Ju 87s and an Italian G-50 out of the sky.

In addition to Marseille, Ofw. Espenlaub and Uffz. Grimm also pounced on the Hurricanes. All three shot down one opponent each. Marseille's tally now stood at 37.

While the Panzergruppe Afrika began falling back to Ain el Gazala, the pilots prepared for their withdrawal to the airfield at Derna.

The German-Italian retreat to Gazala began in earnest when the enemy was able to make a small breakthrough in their fortifications for the second time. A British attack on the Italian airfield at Agedabia resulted in the loss of five CR 42s and a twin engine plane, which were either destroyed completely on the ground or were so severely damaged that they had to be blown up later.

94 and 260 Squadron encountered no German fighter opposition over Bir el Gobi and El Adem in their attempt to support friendly troops taking these Italian-held positions. It was another matter altogether, however, when aircraft of 274 Squadron ran into approximately 30 German and Italian fighters a half hour later. Among their number were MC 22 and MC 202, as well as roughly 12 Bf 109s of 3 Staffel.

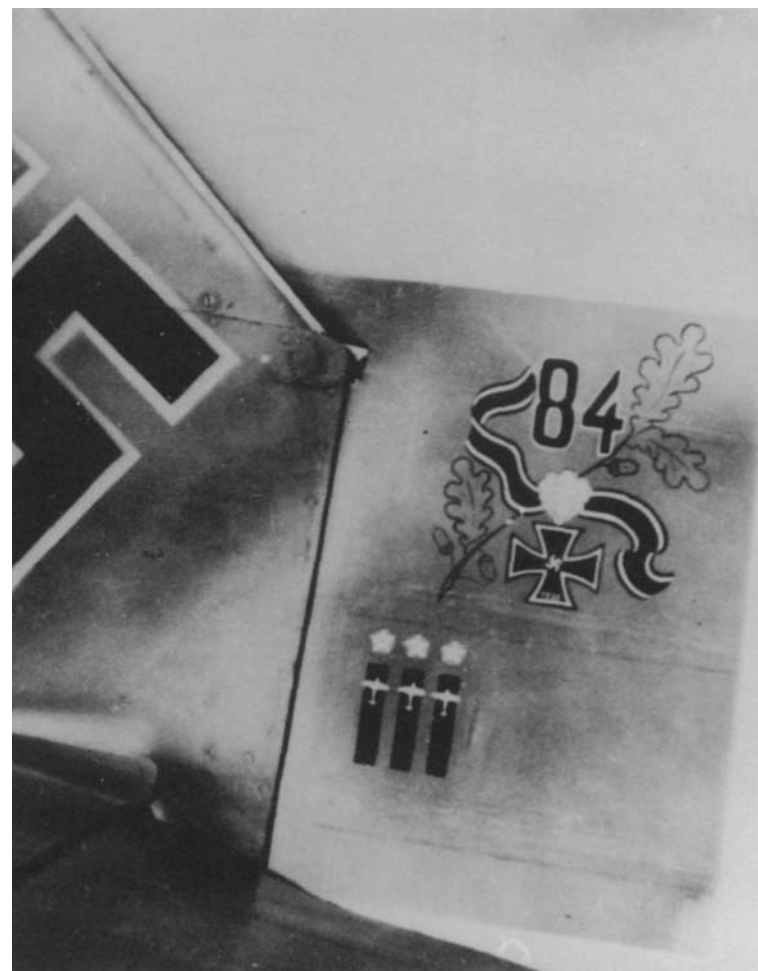
Oblt. Homuth was at the helm once more. Sergeant Heyes, one of the pilots whose Hurricane was attacked by Marseille, was forced to concede defeat within a few seconds of the start of the dogfight.

II/JG 27 took off that afternoon. Once again it was Ofw. Schulz who shot down a Boston near Ridotto Rhegima. Two pilots from 4 Staffel of JG 27 were forced down south of El Adem and taken prisoner. They were Uffz. Kleinert and Lt. Fritz Rockel.

The British Desert Forces conducted bombing attacks against the retreating Panzergruppe Afrika on 9 December. Tomahawks and Hurricanes strafed the German columns of westward rolling vehicles. A fighter advance by 19 Tomahawks of 3 RAAF Squadron and 112 Squadron in the direction of Tobruk-El Adem was stopped by German Bf 109s. It was six Messerschmitts under the control of Oblt. Homuth.



*Werner Schroer, here as a Major with Swords to the Knight's Cross (awarded on 19 April 1945). He was the highest-scoring pilot next to Marseille. Below: After his 87th kill, the stabilizer of Schroer's plane gets the Oak Leaves.*



He, along with Oblt. Schneider and Uffz. Grimm, jumped the enemy from an altitude advantage of 1000 meters. In a lightning-quick strike the three German flyers overpowered one enemy aircraft apiece. Another British plane was so badly damaged that it curved away toward Tobruk and there made a crash landing. An additional Tomahawk was also severely crippled and returned back to base. One of this day's fallen pilots was Sergeant Wilson. With a score of eight victories, he was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

During the afternoon an Italian fighter made a low level attack on two Ju 52s arriving at the Tmimi airfield from their base in Crete. He shot one down in flames and, after a series of stunts and aerobatic maneuvers, sent the other one crashing into the airfield from an altitude of 50 meters.

Ofw. Otto Schulz was returning from a recce flight just at that time. Seeing the tragedy before him, and expecting further tragedies, he set himself behind the Italian plane and shot the kamikaze pilot down.

The 10th of December was a black day for the South African squadron, which suffered grievous losses on this date.

During the early morning Lt. Marseille and his Schwarm, along with several other colleagues - altogether 12 planes - took off in the direction of El Adem.

Flying above the clouds they fell upon several fighters of 4 and 2 SAAF Squadron, which were flying cover against Stuka attacks over their own positions around Tobruk.

Hans-Joachim Marseille had spotted their prey early through a hole in the clouds. In a dive, he plunged through the clouds and rolled in behind the first enemy plane with a half-turn. Continuing to dive past, the bullets spat from his guns. The Tomahawk tumbled out of the sky in short, burning spirals toward the ground.

Flying as escort for Stukas during the afternoon, 2/JG 27 intercepted a formation of six unescorted Boston bombers bound for an attack on the German rear guard.

Fw. Elles spotted this small group, and the German Bf 109s rapidly closed the distance between them. Overtaking the bombers from behind, they attacked with all guns firing and pulled up over the Bostons. Lt. Kothmann shot one of them down, but was hit by the stricken bomber's gunner in the belly. Despite this, he was able to make a safe landing in Tmimi. Fw. Elles sighted in on the Boston flying on the left flank. After the second burst the bomber caught fire and fell from the sky a burning wreck. Hptm. Gerlitz, the Staffelkapitän, placed another Boston in his reticle and, following several bursts, watched as it disintegrated in a horrific fireball. Ofw. Förster shot down the aircraft flying next



to it, which blew apart in the thunder of its exploding bombs. Finally, Lt. Sinner approached to within a few meters of his bomber. It was piloted by the leader of 24 SAAF Squadron, Major Donnelly. The rear gunner's position was taken out with the first burst. Then Sinner's guns gave out and the Boston was able to make its escape and return to its home base, albeit with heavy damage. It was the only Boston on this mission to make it back to its base at LG 76, where it crash landed. This went down into the unit's history as the "Boston Tea Party." From this point on Boston bombers were only used in night operations.

As Oblt. Rödel of II Gruppe was strafing British tanks following a Stuka escort mission, his rudder was torn away when Uffz. Heidel pulled up from below him. Rödel made a belly landing and Heidel, bailing out at an altitude of only 50 meters, was fortunate to survive with only a sprained ankle when his parachute opened just before hitting the ground.

On 11 December III/JG 53 scored its first victories in Africa. During their retreat they were forced to vacate Tmimi and pull back to Derna-West. Three of their Bf 109s which

*Marseille in his "Otto" ("eight" in Italian), named because Marseille shot down eight planes in one day.*





*A relaxing siesta follows a tough day of air combat.*

were unfit for flight were blown up.

In the interim the first airplanes of III/JG 27 began arriving in Africa, followed shortly thereafter by the Geschwader HQ unit and Kommodore Major Woldenga. For the first time since the Battle of Britain JG 27 was united in full strength.

This Gruppe already had an impressive record with 54 kills during the Battle of Britain, five more over Malta, and 220 planes shot down over Russia.

The Kommandeur of the Gruppe was Hptm. Erhard Braune.

Staffelkapitän of 7 was Oblt. Hermann Tangerding, of 8 Oblt. Hans Lass, and of 9 Staffel Oblt. Erbo Graf von Kageneck. The latter was the most successful of the pilots and had already tallied up the impressive score of 65 kills, making him at this time the tenth ranking German fighter pilot.

Within the space of three months Graf Kageneck had received the Knight's Cross (on 30 July 1941) and was the 39th recipient of the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross (on 26 October 1941).

Although the Geschwaderkommodore, Bernhard Woldenga, had only three kills to his credit, he had proven to be an outstanding leader while in Russia and had been wearing the Knight's Cross since 5 July 1941.

Numerous dogfights took place over the front lines on 13 December. During the course of these engagements Marseille succeeded in once again scoring a double when he brought down a Hurricane at 1600 hrs and another at 1610 hrs in the airspace over Martuba and near Tmimi.

The day was overshadowed by a deeply felt loss. During the early morning hours Ofw. Albert Espenlaub of I/JG 27 became involved in a dogfight with an experienced British pilot by the name of Captain Walker, during which he took several hits in his radiator. When the engine gave out due to overheating, he was forced to make an emergency landing in enemy territory near El Adem. He was taken prisoner by a British patrol. While attempting to escape he was shot by the guards. Espenlaub was numbered among the most successful of the desert pilots. Within the short space of a few months he had scored 14 kills in Africa.

Over the course of the next few days Ofw. Schulz scored again. On 17 December Marseille was able to claim two more kills, one at 1110 hrs and another at 1128 hrs, when he pounced upon eight Hurricanes escorting eight Blenheims on a bombing mission against the German airbase in Derna. Oblt. Franzisket was just as successful with two kills at 1112 hrs and 1120 hrs. These new victories brought Marseille's score to 43.

### The Retreat

During this series of retreat battles JG 27 also began the long journey westward. The circus wagon of Edu Neumann was the sign that the Gruppe had changed locales once more. On 18 December Rommel abandoned the Gazala positions. The following day saw JG 27 dismantle their facilities in Derna and head west after both Gazala and Tmimi airfields fell into enemy hands. Unservicable planes and all other material which could not be carried away in the limited number of available trucks were blown up. The convoy made its way through paths marked out through newly laid minefields, paths which were mined again by the Gruppe as it passed.

The last of the technical personnel left Derna as the first British recon vehicles curved around toward the airfield. Next stop was Maraua.

As they were leaving Derna and the last planes were preparing to take off, Fw. Pöttgen rushed back to the flight operations shack and scribbled a message on it's entry way frame: "We come back! Merry Christmas!"

When the threat of the fighter arm's total destruction increased significantly due to RAF attacks against Maraua airfield and the Magrim auxiliary field, I/JG 27 was moved to Got el Bersis. About noon, as the pilots were sitting around the airfield perimeter, there suddenly appeared a number of enemy bombers. They flew at a rather low altitude over the airfield, then continued on.

Marseille, Pöttgen and the other pilots on airstrip alert ran to their machines. As the ground crew were cranking up the Bf 109s Pöttgen saw the British turn and head back in the direction of the field.

"Get out, Jochen!", he called to his comrade.

They jumped from their planes and ran perpendicular to the flight path of the approaching bombers, not stopping until they had thrown themselves into a nearby trench. Bombs howled anew toward the airfield. One of them exploded near Yellow 14, scattering fragments in a wide circle.

After the enemy had disappeared they returned to their aircraft. The crew chief showed Marseille a giant fragment of a bomb which had punctured the cockpit of his Yellow 14.

"Looks like Herr Leutnant can celebrate his birthday tonight", he said. Marseille nodded thoughtfully and a short time later shook Pöttgen's hand without saying a word. As so often had happened in the air, Pöttgen had now saved his life here on the ground.

By Christmas Eve 1941 the entire Geschwader had assembled in an area near Sirte.

The three Gruppen and the Geschwader HQ had been set up along the base of a rocky plateau. Here in the cliffs there were several caves which offered protection against bombing raids. The command post and communications center were set up inside two barracks. A few hundred meters to the south, on the even ground of the plateau, lay the runway. The Geschwader was to remain here until well into the spring of 1942.

"Neumann's Colorful Circus" wagon had been given by Edu Neumann to the Geschwaderkommodore, Major Woldenga. Oblt. Homuth now was in possession of a trailer, too, which had been "appropriated" from the British. The organizers and perfectionists made themselves known in short order. II Gruppe opened a desert cinema with the imposing name of the "Gloriapalast." During an alarm theatergoers had only to make a slight detour to the shelter of the cave next door.

In Apollonia, the Roman city of Sozusa, I Gruppe established a resort. It was always busy in this ancient coastal town, since pilots from other Gruppen also paid many visits here to relax. Friends met here, new friendships were formed here. They would talk shop or play practical jokes, anything to take their minds off the certainty that sooner or later each of them could meet his match.

*Ahead - another successful mission.*



Every 12 days one of the Geschwader's trucks would arrive carrying 20 of the unit's men. Afterwards the men would return back to Martuba refreshed and ready for combat.

On December 24th the Geschwader once again suffered a painful loss. All three Gruppen together could only muster six planes fit for combat. There was no fuel and during their retreat westward a portion of the ground crew had either been killed or taken prisoner.

Four British squadrons attacked this day. Twenty Hurricanes advanced on Agedabia, but met up with the six German aircraft. Oblt. Graf von Kageneck was one of the attackers which fell upon the Hurricanes. Approaching, he opened fire on the defensive circle they had formed, but was shot at by two or three opponents and was critically wounded in his lower abdomen. Graf Kageneck was forced to break off, managed to reach Martuba and even make a safe landing. He was lifted out of his machine, placed into an ambulance and brought directly to the unit infirmary.

Following first aid treatment, he was transferred to the military hospital in Naples. There Erbo Graf von Kageneck, a victor in 67 air engagements, succumbed to his wounds.

Since two Staffeln of I Gruppe still had not converted over to the Bf 109 F model, the battle could only be taken up in full strength starting in January of 1942.

When I/JG 27 was once again able to report all units operational at the beginning of that month, the Gruppe began logging more kills starting on January 3rd.

Oblt. Homuth began the string of January victories on 3 January when he shot down his 34th British plane. Over the next few days there were several encounters over Agedabia, during which time Ofw. Schulz, Oblt. Homuth, Lt. Stahlschmidt and Lt. Körner were actively involved. On 13 January Schulz was reported missing in action after a sortie over Agedabia, but was able to crash land in the desert and returned home the next day.

By mid January JG 27 had over 70 aircraft, of which only 18 were actually combat ready.

On the other side, the British Desert Air Force had 97 operationally ready fighters and was able to add another 25 fighters to that number just 48 hours later.

The fighter units of the Regia Aeronautica had eight Gruppi, which for the most part were based at the airfield near the Arco Philenorum.

During the early morning of January 21st the impossible happened. Panzergruppe Afrika, under the command of the General der Panzertruppe Rommel, launched a new surprise offensive.



## CHAPTER VIII

# ROMMEL'S NEW OFFENSIVE

### Overview

The first German convoy made its way through to Tripoli on 5 January 1942, bringing with it 50 tanks and 20 reconnaissance vehicles, as well as several dozen anti-tank guns. In addition, it carried much-needed supplies and provisions.

This induced Rommel to formulate new plans of attack which were mulled over with his Ia, Oberstleutnant Siegfried Westphal. The theme of these dialogues could be summed up in Westphal's sentence:

"We have to be one step ahead of the enemy!"

On 13 January Rommel's decision had been made. He announced to his staff: "We're attacking again!"

During the evening of 20 January ammunition dumps could be seen burning. In the harbor ship hulls were blown up and British agents radioed to Cairo: "Rommel is leaving. The German retreat is imminent!"

But on the morning of the 21st the "retreat" took on a completely different appearance. The men of the Panzergruppe Afrika were able to read Rommel's orders of the day:

"German and Italian Soldiers!

The days of fighting against a markedly superior enemy are behind you. Yet your fighting spirit remains unbroken. At the present time we are numerically superior to the enemy at our front. Today, with the intent of destroying this enemy, the Army will attack!

I expect that every soldier will give his all during these critical days.

Long live Italy - Long live the Greater German Reich!  
Long live the Führer!

- Rommel"

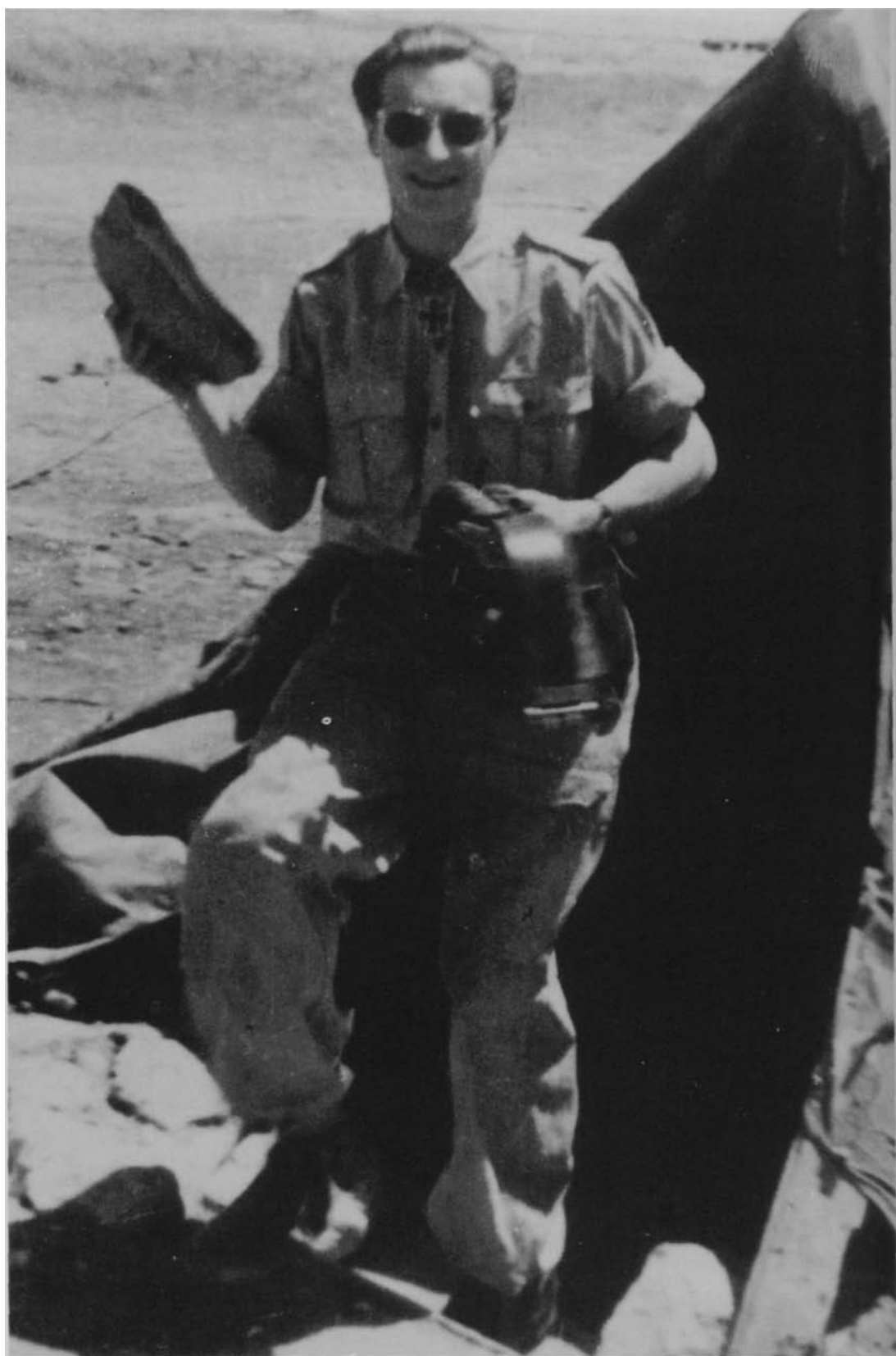




*Back from a combat mission. The first cigarette!*

On this cold winter morning, the 21st of January 1942, several Kampfgruppen struck out at the same time. Kampfgruppe Marcks, as the lead group, overran Agedabia, stormed ahead to Antelat and closed the escape route for the 1st British Tank Division between Agedabia and Gfof el Mater.

For their part, Kampfgruppe Warrelmann raced past Agedabia toward Antelat, which they conquered and held fast. Their route continued through to Msus. 26 enemy tanks were destroyed by this Kampfgruppe during the course of action. With Schützenregiment 115 as its nucleus, Kampfgruppe Geissler also rolled over Agedabia toward Msus. Their target was Benghazi. Msus fell, followed by Barce and Tobra.



*Marseille leaving the tent for another sortie.*



*Left: Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring talks to pilots of I/JG 27. Marseille is seventh from the left.*

*Below: Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring, together with General Geisler (far left), greets Marseille. In the center is Hptm. Neumann, while Arnold Stahlschmidt is far left. Hptm. Gerlitz is in front.*



Marck's Panzergrenadiere pushed through and captured Cyrene. Kampfgruppe Geissler took Maraua. Enemy resistance in Martuba was crushed, Er-Rzem bypassed, Tmimi attacked and defeated. Within the span of 17 days all of Cyrenaica had been torn from the enemy.

The soldiers of the DAK dug in along the enemy-occupied Gazala Line. Another Panzer Division was to be released for duty in Africa by the FHQ. But everything was focused on Russia; North Africa had turned into a sideshow of the war. It had been forgotten that England could only be defeated here. The British prime minister, Churchill, placed all his bets on the African card - unlike his opponent Hitler.

The war in Africa became mired down. Both sides armed themselves for a major offensive. On May 8th, 1942 Churchill requested General Auchinleck, the commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean theater, to "attack the enemy in May if at all possible."

Auchinleck accelerated the accumulation of large amounts of supplies in the Tobruk area and behind the Gazala Line. This line stretched from Ain el Gazala on the coast over 60 kilometers to the south to the fortress at Bir Hacheim. In between these two points was a thick chain of fortified positions, called pillboxes.

On May 20th, while General Alexander was still inquiring General Ritchie (the commander of the 8th Army) as to Rommel's intentions, Rommel issued his attack orders for the Afrikakorps:

"Start of the Offensive: frontal attack by Italian infantry divisions in place along the Gazala positions. Masking of armor preparations.



*Marseille reports to JG 27 Kommodore, "Edu" Neumann.*



*Marseille in camp.*



With nightfall of the first day of attack: advance by the motorized Gruppen into their jump-off positions. These consist of the DAK with the 15th and 21st Panzer Division, the XXX Italian Motorized Corps with the "Trieste" and "Arieste" units, as well as the 90th Leichte Afrika Division subordinate to this corps. These units will be assisted by the three reconnaissance units of the DAK.

Start of the Advance 2200 hrs. —

Along with the quick disposal of the 8th Army in Marmarica, we are planning the rapid conquest of Tobruk."

The frontal attack began on the morning of May 26th, and with it began the offensive. During the night the attack by the motorized Gruppen rolled southeastward, skirting around Bir Hacheim and making a half circle to the north-east.

The tank duels began. Several of the pillboxes in the Gazala Line stood strong. Got el Ualeb was taken by storm following several attacks. Knightsbridge was the scene of some of the hardest fighting.

In the south, however, Bir Hacheim continued to stand. To soften up the defenses it became necessary to use the Stukas, and with them the planes of JG 27 flying protection.

Following this brief overview, we now turn our attention to the desert Geschwader.



*Gruppenkommandeur Neumann (left) conversing with Marseille (center) and a fellow Italian pilot.*

## JG 27, "Wüstengeschwader", in Combat Marseille's Victory Parade Begins

Hans-Joachim Marseille had been transferred from the Staffel to the Athens military hospital on sick leave at the end of December 1941. He burned with a desire to return to his Staffel, for he knew that Rommel's next attack would not wait long for him.

While convalescing, Marseille received a telegram from his mother in Berlin. Its contents, limited to a single line, plunged him into deep depression.

"Your sister is dead. Please come to Berlin!"

Upon arriving at home, he learned that his sister had been slain by a jealous lover - something that for Marseille was totally incomprehensible.

He became transfixed in his grief. Marseille no longer was himself, even if he continued to play the role. This incident changed everything.

Hans-Joachim Marseille had an abiding brotherly love for his sister, and her death made him inconsolable. He returned to Africa from Berlin, arriving in Benghazi at the end of January 1942. His colleagues noticed that Marseille still carried the marks of his illness. Unusually tight-lipped and

*Marseille's plane is inspected prior to the next sortie.*





*Marseille (second from left) here with his Staffel companions.*



serious, he rejoined his Staffel. To be sure, he took pains to present an unconcerned and jovial appearance so as not to disturb the peace and harmony within the Staffel. But all those who knew him saw that this was only forced cheerfulness. They stood close to him, buoying his spirits.

Always, during the evening, one of his comrades would detach himself from the circle, follow him into the open and begin talking about whatever popped into his head. By and by, Marseille opened up to his friends and they began to feel the anguish which continued to gnaw at him.

This heartache was compounded by the fact that a few of Marseille's friends were no longer among them. Espenlaub, with his 14 kills, was gone. Feldwebel Förster had fallen during the last few days of the long exodus. Feldwebel Elles had been shot down over enemy territory and been captured by the British.



*Marseille here among the company of his fellow pilots. Schroer is to the far left.*





*Gearing up for the next mission.*

Marseille also learned of the brash stunt performed by Otto Schulz. He was sitting on airfield alert when he suddenly spotted a British bomber. Scrambling into the air at 0701 hrs, he shot the intruder down at 0702 hrs and landed back at his airfield at 0703 hrs.

This was truly a feat of derring-do. Aboard the bomber had been a group of saboteurs, who were to have been dropped behind German lines.

Martuba was reached on 7 February via Benina and Barce. From there Marseille began flying missions again.

Aside from I Gruppe, II Gruppe under the command of Hptm. Lippert was also stationed there. III/Gruppe, led by Hptm. Braune, had finally made its way to Africa as well.

Marseille, at the head of his Staffel, had taken off in the early dawn hours of 8 February after a squadron of Hurricanes struck their base at 0745 hrs. Jochen, who had been escorting a recce plane, was just attempting to land when a warning came across the intercom:

"Seven Curtiss' behind you!", echoed in Marseille's ears.

Thinking quickly, he retracted his landing gear back into



*Spectators at a magic show: from left is Marseille, Schroer, Stahlschmidt, Kugelbauer.*



*Four German aces of JG 27, seen here relaxing in Apollonia: from left is Kugelbauer, Marseille, Schroer and Stahlschmidt.*

its wells and pushed his plane down until he was racing along just a few meters above the ground. He made a left turn and, catching the enemy fully by surprise, pulled sharply upward into a steep climb. In the blink of an eye the Bf 109 had climbed up and well past the startled enemy. From his perch, Marseille pounced on the confused enemy.

While the ground personnel stared transfixed at the scene unfolding before them, Marseille first ignited the enemy plane flying to the right with a single burst of cannon and machine gun fire. Turning to the right, he knocked down yet another opponent.

Flight Sergeant Hargreaves, the pilot of the first plane to be shot down, bellied his plane in and was taken prisoner by the Germans.

The following is an eyewitness account of the engagement as seen from the ground.

The sirens began wailing as the seven fighters were seen approaching the airfield. Hptm. Neumann rushed to the radio shack and, just before entering, turned around once more only to see a lone Me 109 coming in for a landing with its gear extended. It was Marseille's Yellow 14 on final approach. Marseille had not yet seen the attacking enemy, who were approaching in a lateral staggered formation with the sun at their backs.

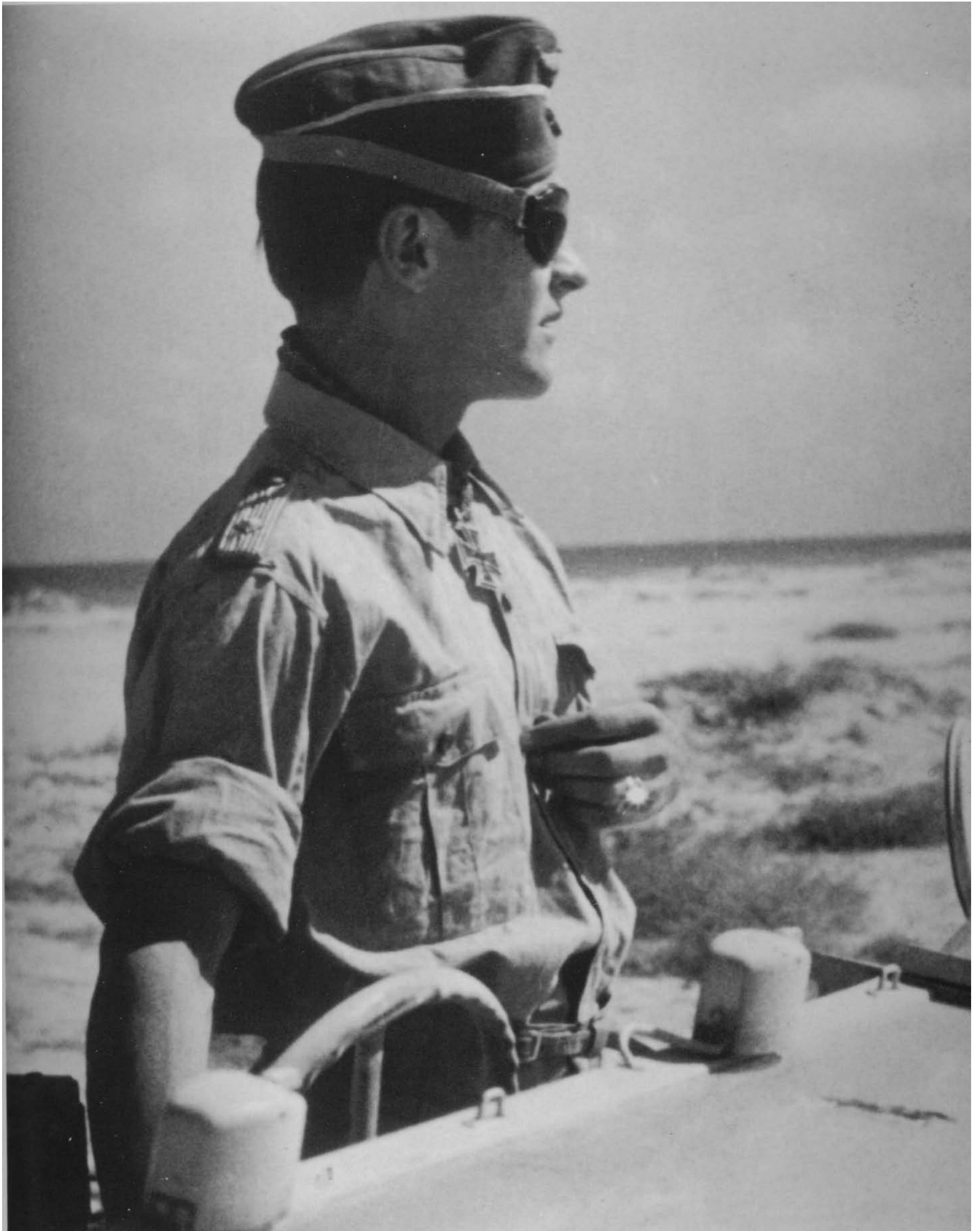
When the lead aircraft was still approximately 200 meters behind Marseille's plane, the pilot pushed the stick down slightly so that the nose of his Curtiss dropped and pointed directly at Marseille's Bf 109. Seconds later his guns spat fire.

The first tracers just brushed past Marseille's canopy. Marseille put his plane into a lazy turn to the right, causing the Curtiss to overshoot.

Then the men staring into the sky watched as Marseille yanked back on the joystick and pointed his nose to the heavens. At the same time landing flaps and gear disappeared into their recesses. The mouths of his guns coughed forth a fusillade of lead and seconds later the British plane was wrapped in flames. The stricken Curtiss hit the earth near the perimeter of the airfield. Yellow 14 was already passing at low level over the drifting column of smoke and dust, then disappeared shortly afterward on the horizon.

Edu Neumann continued to stare at the remaining Curtiss planes when Marseille reappeared, pulling up sharply from a low altitude and firing on another Curtiss onto which he had brought his sights to bear. The cannon rounds knifed through the left wing root, severing it from the fuselage. Marseille banked at an altitude that was becoming lower and lower. Three of the British fighters attacked simultaneously.

*OPPOSITE: Marseille at the wheel of his "Otto" on a gazelle hunt.*





*Marseille preparing for another mission. His two ground crewmen assist him.*

Already travelling at a dangerously slow speed and low altitude, Marseille whipped his plane around on a reciprocal course right in front of his enemies' noses. This maneuver nearly caused him to stall out, but Marseille the aerobat was able to use it to achieve a decisive advantage over his foes, who were forced to make a significantly wider banking turn.

His plane suddenly picked up speed. The Bf 109 made a whistling sound as it raced over the airfield, passing directly over Neumann's command trailer before turning into a third Curtiss. With a short burst from all guns the enemy plane dove straight into the ground and exploded into a massive fireball, scattering its debris over a wide area.

Hptm. Neumann had stormed into the command post. He tore the receiver from its mount. 1 Staffel answered on the other end.

"Are you asleep!?", bellowed Neumann. "How long is 'Seille expected to go it alone up there?"

"They're already in their planes", responded the duty officer on the other end.

Neumann tossed the receiver back into its cradle and rushed back out into the open. Four Curtiss planes were still in the fight. From different directions they fell upon



Marseille's plane. At this moment three Bf 109s from 1 Staffel roared down the field. Marseille saw them as well:

"It's about time you showed up, you bastards!", he called. Turning his plane, he dove at a right angle to the aircraft taking off until he was just a few meters off the ground. Three aircraft were still on his tail, the fourth having broken off. Marseille was in his element. He pulled his craft up into a steep climb, made a tight chandelle, and dropped once again toward the airfield, pulling up a hair's breadth from the runway. Then he raced toward the sky again, flipped his Bf 109 onto its back, did a half twist and continued the fight.

The four Curtiss planes broke sharply away, and in light of the three Messerschmitts now on their way to the rescue, fled the scene.

A short time afterward Marseille came into view once again. Landing gear and flaps had already been extended. With the engine slowly turning over, the airplane set down for a landing.

All the men, including the Kommandeur, ran over to where Yellow 14 had come to rest.

Covered in sweat, Edu Neumann reached the plane only to be greeted by the smiling, albeit stressed and haggard face of his apprentice Marseille. The ground crewmen pulled the pilot out of the cockpit after releasing the parachute harness. They carried him up to the Gruppenkommandeur and set him on his feet directly in front of Neumann.

*Pilots of 3 Staffel. From left is Kugelbauer, unknown, Mentnich, Pfeffer, Pöttgen and Marseille.*







*Marseille enjoyed being among the men of his Staffel. They were his family in the desert.*

Marseille reported back from a combat mission. Neumann embraced the young flyer and clopped him on his sweat-stained back. Words were not appropriate following this dramatic duel over the airfield, a duel which everyone had experienced from front-row seats.

The enemy launched another large-scale mission again that afternoon - eleven bomb-laden Blenheims bound for Derna, protected by no less than three British squadrons.

When four Kittyhawks from the Australian squadron circling above El Adem were forced to break off and turn back due to engine difficulties, they were pounced upon by three German fighters from their vantage point at a much higher altitude. Oblt. Keller of I/JG 27 damaged one of the enemy planes, but his victim was able to continue on to Gambut where he bellied in. During the same dogfight Keller was able to knock down another plane from the sky.

Arriving over the target of Derna, four additional Kittyhawks were obliged to break off because of engine troubles, meaning that of the nine aircraft from 3 RAAF Squadron which started out, only the plane flown by Flight Officer Gibbes was left to provide cover.

The high altitude cover for the Blenheims was now virtually nonexistent, a detail which had not gone unnoticed to the Bf 109s waiting and circling above Derna. They scattered 73 Squadron, which had been tasked to fill the escort role vacated by the eight Kittyhawks. 112 Squadron continued to defend the Blenheims, losing four of their number in the process.

At 1420 hrs Lt. Marseille had started his scoring for the afternoon. Ten minutes later he shot down yet another enemy plane. In doing so, he brought his personal tally for the day to four, making him the most successful pilot in the African theater with 40 kills to his credit. Oblt. Homuth was hot on his heels with 39, followed by Ofw. Otto Schulz with 37 aerial victories.

The next day Oblt. Homuth was able to catch up to Marseille again when he shot down a Hurricane just south of El Adem, bringing his score to 40 as well. But from this point on Hans-Joachim Marseille would spring ahead unchecked.

The 13th of February was for Marseille another first class combat day. Along with his Staffel he assumed escort duty for a Ju 87 unit on its way to Tobruk. Swords were crossed when the enemy appeared with two squadrons over the fortress; one of their number, a Hurricane, dove down to intercept two Bf 109s flying below.

Marseille spotted this attack and in the same split second whipped his plane around and fell upon the enemy



*Marseille with his wingman Pöttgen at left, and his groundcrew.*

Hurricane. With his aircraft now in a steep dive he drew closer and closer to the Hurricane. Before the enemy could open fire on his intended Bf 109 quarry, Marseille's guns barked. Marseille had now approached so close to his opponent that the Hurricane came apart with the first burst. Pieces of the enemy plane flew off and damaged the radiator on Marseille's craft.

The stricken enemy went into a steep dive and landed 15 km east of Tobruk. During the rough landing the plane's canopy became jammed shut. With exploding ammunition cracking about him, the pilot was able to pry it open and escape from his burning machine before it was consumed in a fiery explosion.

Seconds after being damaged by the flying debris, Marseille reported that his engine had given out.

"I've got enough altitude to reach my own lines", he responded to the concerned queries by the ground station controller.

Marseille was flying toward friendly territory when his phenomenal eyes spied an enemy plane beneath him, struggling to gain altitude as rapidly as possible. Jochen was faster. A nudge on the rudder pedals and the Bf 109 turned into this new foe. With a classy split S, which gave his plane enough speed for the attack, Marseille dove onto the oblivious pilot.

Marseille's guns fired only brief seconds before the enemy flipped over onto his back and plummeted toward the earth, where it impacted and immediately caught fire.

Marseille had attacked despite his damaged engine.

Following this kill, he trimmed the plane again and landed a short time later at the airfield in Martuba. His tally had been increased by two yet again.

### Bomber Escort

Several of I/JG 27's planes took off around 1300 hrs on an escort mission for Ju 88s attacking Gambut. Before any of the other pilots flying top cover for the bombers could see the enemy, Marseille spotted two fighters being scrambled from the British base in Gambut, watching as they rolled down the field and pulled up steeply into a turning climb to intercept the Ju 88s.

Marseille's Schwarm escorted the Ju 88s safely back to friendly airspace, then Marseille called the ground station. "Spotted two Kittys, heading back with my Rottenflieger!"

"Watch out for other enemy planes", called Oblt. Homuth back.



*The mission is acted out with Pöttgen and others.*



*Marseille with Pöttgen.*



*Marseille explains the situation to "Fiffi" Stahlschmidt.*

They flew at 4000 meters altitude toward the enemy. Before his Rottenflieger, Pöttgen, had caught sight of the enemy planes, Marseille called out two of the "Indians."

He dove down on the enemy pair. Pöttgen shadowed him, providing cover in case any further enemy planes appeared and tried to get on their tail.

Marseille turned into the first aircraft, which had not yet gained significant height. He pounced and in the fraction of the second as his plane flew past where he had the correct deflection, Marseille fired his guns. The pilot, Sergeant Reid, was still too low to bail out, and fought to regain control of the Kittyhawk. To no avail, however, as the plane struck the ground and exploded.

The second Kittyhawk had continued flying. It, too, caught fire after the first burst and crashed. But its pilot, Flight Officer Briggs, was able to save himself by bailing out.

One individual was involved in a dramatic battle that same afternoon when British planes, in an attempt to knock the Martuba airfield out of commission, began strafing any and all aircraft on the field. It was Ofw. Otto Schulz, who reached his machine by running through the intense hail of bullets. Aided by his ground crew, who cranked the engine alive and heaved the pilot into the cockpit, Otto was able to get airborne within 30 seconds. He swung in behind the first enemy plane and shot it down. The second, flown by Squadron Leader Mason, fell burning to earth. A third, fourth and fifth plane fell victim to his guns. The sixth, flown by Sergeant McQueen, managed to reach its home base despite being seriously damaged and did not count as a kill.

Thanks to an eyewitness, a lieutenant in the Panzertruppe by the name of Joachim Schorn, all kills could be confirmed. Even the enemy acknowledged the downed planes and their pilots. One-Two-Three Schulz had shot down no less than five planes - and damaged another - in the space of ten minutes. That was a new record for this excellent flyer.

Otto Schulz, at 31 years old considered one of the "Old Rabbits", had now brought his score to 44. As this made him eligible for the Knight's Cross, the ground crew in his Staffel fashioned a large Knight's Cross out of tin which was hung around his neck when he landed.

During this air battle the Desert Air Force lost one of their most successful pilots and squadron leaders with the death of Mason, who had shot down a total of 17 German and Italian planes in the Mediterranean theater.

The mission of February 21, 1942 came within a hair's breadth of being the last one for Stahlschmidt. Up to that day thick sandstorms and rainfall had continuously interrupted air operations, enabling only a handful of planes to

get into the air. Now, however, things could get back to normal.

I/JG 27 took off under the control of their Staffelkapitän, Oblt. Homuth, who led the first Rotte. The second Rotte was led by Lt. Stahlschmidt and the third by Marseille.

These six aircraft were bound for a free ranging fighter sweep over Gambut. As Stahlschmidt and his wingman, Fw. Keppler, reached their assigned area, they saw a squadron of eleven Curtiss planes of 112 Squadron approaching them from over Acroma.

Oblt. Homuth yanked his plane into a left bank and pulled up steeply, his wingman in tow. With this maneuver, he succeeded in outclimbing the enemy. However, Stahlschmidt, flying his slower machine, had fallen back a bit with his wingman. Here is his report, sent to his mother and made available to the author:

"I saw the Curtiss planes approximately 300 meters below us and falling away below. These aircraft were therefore no threat to us whatsoever! Now I just wanted to level out of my turning bank, since my colleagues were already at a substantially higher altitude. Keppler, in his significantly faster plane, overshot me. Once again, I saw the Curtiss planes 300 meters directly below me and counted eleven aircraft."

"Not suspecting anything untoward, I continued my level climb. All of the sudden there was a loud noise in my cockpit - I'd taken cannon fire.

"The crate immediately flipped uncontrollably onto its back. Fuel gushed into the cockpit from above; it began smoking and then I completely lost control of the Bf 109, spiraling down on my back through the Curtisses."

"Over the intercom I heard the angry voice of Oblt. Homuth:"

"Which of you idiots just let himself get shot down?"

"Trailing a long column from my radiator I fell earthward. The water temperature climbed to 140 degrees. At an altitude of 1000 meters I again regained control of the crate. With a bit of flair and fortune I managed to fly the 100 km back to our own lines, during which I would only switch the engine on for short periods of time so as to gain a bit of altitude for the long glide home."

"In Martuba I was told by my comrades that one of the Kittyhawks which had been flying directly beneath me suddenly pulled up sharply and fired."

"Homuth and Marseille were of the opinion that it was only the purest chance that the Curtiss hit me at all. Homuth, who normally metes out the strictest measures, didn't hold me guilty for this misadventure."

Stahlschmidt didn't make it back to his own airfield, but was forced to make a belly landing in no-mans land between the front lines. With his cockpit filled with smoke he overflew some British transport trucks and threw the plane into the sand. As the plane touched down it began to burn. Stahlschmidt, his eyebrows singed, succeeded in escaping from the burning wreck.

A British reconnaissance vehicle which had been traveling in the transport convoy, turned toward the crash site and began firing on the burning airplane.

Stahlschmidt ran to the west and came upon some German advance troops who had set out toward the crashed plane. After a two kilometer march they reached their own lines. From there he was driven to Martuba, once again escaping with his life.

Stahlschmidt was only permitted to fly after three days of recuperation. His first mission was escort for a recce flight. At his side, as always, was his trusted Rottenflieger Fw. Keppler.

Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt was the first African pilot to reach 200 combat sorties. He had been wearing the Iron Cross now for a long time, and now wore the Goldene Frontflugspange, or the Combat Pilot's Badge in Gold.



*Marseille with the Knight's Cross and German Cross in gold.*

### **The Knight's Cross for Marseille**

On the evening of February 22nd Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring suddenly made an unannounced call via the field telephone of I/JG 27. He insisted on speaking with Leutnant Marseille. When Marseille reported in, Kesselring informed him:

"Leutnant Marseille, the Führer has awarded you the Knight's Cross. I congratulate you and hope your soldier's luck continues."

"Thank you, Herr Feldmarschall", answered Marseille somewhat astonished. He must have known that he would be receiving this coveted award sometime in the next few days, for he had already tallied a score of 50 enemy planes downed. Yet this call nevertheless caught him off guard.

When Jochen Marseille was given the Knight's Cross on 24 February 1942, it was the first time in a long while that he smiled as he had done before. That evening he wrote a short message home:

"Dear Parents!

A brief note: received the Knight's Cross yesterday. Very proud. With Love, Your Jochen."



His father had just returned from Bremen on a well deserved leave trip. He had been promoted to Generalmajor on 1 July 1941.

On the morning of February 27th II/JG 27 was the first to begin operations, during which Hptm. Gerlitz, the Gruppenkommandeur, shot down two Kittyhawks within five minutes.

The third Gruppe was able to engage twelve Australian Kittys of 450 and 3 Squadrons over Tobruk around 1100 hrs. A few of I Gruppe's Bf 109s also joined the fray, including those planes flown by Hptm. Homuth, Uffz. Forbger and Leutnant Marseille.

Marseille brought down two enemy planes in two separate actions lasting no more than the blink of an eye each. These were his 51st and 52nd kills.

During the afternoon of the same day Lt. Stahlschmidt and Fw. Keppler took off on a reconnaissance escort mission to Bir Hacheim. Just outside of Bir el Gobi they attacked a column of vehicles. Stahlschmidt's engine suddenly quit and, buzzing just over the heads of the column's troops and clipping a transport truck on the way down, Stahlschmidt made a crash landing. Stahlschmidt had landed smack dab in the middle of a column of the Polish Brigade. He was beaten, kicked and spat upon, and his decorations were stolen from him.

Interrogated by British and Polish officers, he was able to make his escape the following night. He managed to reach his own lines after a 60 km hike through the desert and was returned to his own nest 16 hours later, where he was received with loud hurrahs.

A few days later Marseille and Stahlschmidt together went on leave back to Germany. In February alone Marseille had claimed 18 kills.

## A Year in Africa

During Marseille's absence the British Desert Air Force was reorganized into three wings. 239 Wing was now comprised of 3 RAAF, 112, 250 and 450 Squadrons, all of these being equipped with Kittyhawks. 33, 73, 80 and 274 Squadrons made up the 243 Wing. These units all continued to fly the Hurricane.

233 Wing united 2 SAAF, 4 SAAF, 94 and 260 Squadrons. They flew a combination of Kittyhawks and Tomahawks.

It was during this time that Ofw. Otto Schulz accumulated the majority of kills. With his latest victory on 15 March he, too, left the Geschwader for Germany on leave. There he



*Marseille talking with his "black men" (ground crewmen were called this because of their black overalls) about his 50th kill.*



enrolled in an officer's instructional course and returned as freshly "baked" Oberleutnant (he bypassed the rank of Leutnant) back to Africa at the end of May. He had been wearing the Knight's Cross since 22 February, the same day Marseille had received this distinguished award.

During the "Battle for Martuba" one of the British motorized combat groups reached the airfield and, in the middle of the day, began attacking by lobbing shells onto the German planes. Initially it was thought that friendly troops had accidentally opened fire on the airfield. The airstrip alert was scrambled and reported that it was an enemy unit of approximately 50 vehicles, including tanks. The distance from the airfield was only about 5 kilometers.

All available German and Italian fighters were scrambled to intercept this threat. For six long hours the British column came under fire from fighters, Stukas and towards the end also from 88 mm anti-aircraft guns. The remnants of this column, which had escaped into the desert, were sighted the next morning and set alight by air attacks. This conflict, which had threatened the airfields of JG 27, was entered into the unit history as the "Battle for Martuba."

On the 18th of April, while Marseille was still in Germany, JG 27 celebrated its one-year anniversary of its arrival in the African theater. Hptm. Neumann had decreed that it would be a wild celebration. In addition to Neumann, Stabsfeldwebel Geserick also took control of the party's organization.

Honored guests were invited from all Luftwaffe units stationed in Africa. The infantry and armored troops were not left out either.

All arriving guests were welcomed at the entrance to the tent compound with a sign, which read: "With Beer and Bowling Pins to Neumann's Desert Rumble!"

The music platoon of the Panzerarmee Afrika was detached to provide the background atmosphere for the festivities. From out of the individual "Staffel villages", which had sprung up in and around Martuba, came the "Bullerwagen." It was so named after a certain Unteroffizier Buller, one of the ground mechanics, who had succeeded in taking an ancient car and resurrecting it so that it now rolled at a "blinding" pedestrian speed through the desert.

The "top brass" of 3 Staffel rode in the car, followed by the "common folk" of the Staffel, dressed in colorful garb. Baby blue sleepers could be seen alongside bamboo grass skirts. Fur jackets were set off by aluminium cooking pot hats.

The Gruppenkommandeur greeted his guests and his men and said:

*OPPOSITE: In the doorway of the Geschwader's command post following his award of the Knight's Cross.*



*11 February 1942: Marseille after his 49th and 50th kills. With these he attained the number one score position in Africa, and never relinquished it.*

"One year ago the first Messerschmitts landed in Tripoli. Soldiers, who since that time have been performing their duties under the most difficult situations, have earned the right to put aside everything associated with these 12 months of fighting for one night."

"This Gruppe's successes are great. It has bested a number of the enemy and kept the airspace over its own troops clear, has safely fulfilled the escort role for reconnaissance flights and Stukas, and has proven itself in the desert's sweltering heat."

"The entire Gruppe has shared a portion of this. Not only the pilots, but also - and above all - our brave ground crewmen, the mechanics and radiomen, the armorers, drivers and communications personnel, even down to the lowliest cook."

"Nowhere has it been demonstrated so plainly that no one person can survive without the other, as it has here in the desert. Nowhere is the esprit de corps more important than here."

Today is therefore declared a day of merriment. Today you can - and should - all paint the town red!"

Following the opening speech, a committee from the Gruppe came to the front and presented their commander



Marseille's "Yellow 14" gets its 50th kill marking.

with a staff made from the joystick of a shot-down Hurricane.

At 1600 hrs the festivities began in earnest. It was a merry carnival mood and the guests felt just as at home here as anywhere else. The "Knock Lukas Down" event proved extremely popular and Uffz. Berger, a ground crewman from 2 Staffel, was "knighted" as the strongest man in the Gruppe.

To warm things up a bit there was hot rotwein punch. Ball throwing booths, wheels of fortune and sausage stands were scattered throughout the grounds. Events became turbulent when the Italians arrived. At their front was the commander of the fighter group, which operated in close conjunction with JG 27.

Hauptmann Neumann gave the major a welcoming embrace and escorted him over to a booth on the "fairgrounds."

The tug-of-war was the biggest event of the day. All Staffeln took part in it, as they had been challenged to participate by the festival committee chairman, Ofw. Geserick.

First prize, a bottle of real French cognac, drove all teams to give their all. But the prize could not be wrested from the musclemen of the repair company. Music and singers, comedians and vaudevillians provided a kaleidoscope of of-

The Staffel painter after Marseille's 50th victory. Marseille is third from the left.







ferings. Thanks to the "broadcast director" of the desert radio station, Leutnant Schroer, all the saucy talk, clean and dirty jokes, all the bantering, was broadcast to each and every abode within a radius of 30 kilometers.

Neumann's Colorful Theater had once again turned the tables on the fatal effects of lethargy. Everyone felt grateful that they had, for one evening, been able to shake off the biting fury of this desert war. All these hundreds of men, who for 12 months had borne the dust and heat and fended off the forces of a markedly superior enemy, felt jubilant and fully motivated as the party wound down.

The anniversary became an unforgettable experience for each of them and gave them the requisite inner drive to attack the second year with a renewed vigor.

*OPPOSITE: Marseille acts out the last attack during a discussion with Hptm. Homuth (right).*

### **The Missions of Hans-Joachim Marseille**

Hans-Joachim Marseille returned to the unit and was ready for action on April 25th. Fully rested and in his usual happy mood he had rejoined his Staffel and the brotherhood of pilots.

On this day the aircraft of JG 27 took off for a total of 97 sorties. At first it was to provide escort for 12 Ju 87s, which had orders to sink one of the tankers lying at rest just off of Tobruk. I/StG 3 was given eight aircraft from 6/JG 27 as escort, while 14 Bf 109s of I Gruppe would provide top cover. An additional 17 airplanes of II/JG 27 flew a type of extended escort, while 13 more planes of this Gruppe were made available for direct escort. 15 Italian fighters flew a holding orbit to pick up the Stukas on their return leg. For the first time in many weeks practically the entire strength of JG 27 was working together.

When the enemy noticed this air operation going into effect, it sent up 10 Kittyhawks and 23 Tomahawks. The first Kittyhawks managed to catch the Ju 87s as they were on their bomb run. Squadron Leader Hanbury shot down a Ju 87 and an Italian MC 202 before being seriously damaged himself. His aircraft's condition forced him to turn back toward Tobruk and there make an emergency landing.

During the following turbulent air battle the German escort and top cover fighters knocked down eight planes and seriously damaged another two.

Once again, it was Marseille who had first spotted the enemy. From an altitude advantage of 1000 meters he reported sighting the enemy, then, with Pöttgen as his wingman, dove on the first Kittyhawk and shot it down. Pöttgen, Marseille's "abacus", noted the kill at 1006 hrs.

*Marseille with Hptm. Homuth.*



Marseille flew a chandelle, then in a surprising move whipped his plane back around in a tight turn and climbed upward again, then dove onto the next Kittyhawk which he despatched with a second burst at 1008 hrs.

The next eight aircraft were Curtiss planes. By 0955 hrs Oblt. Rödel, Fw. Reuter (two), Fw. Fink and Lt. Scheiter had each shot down enemy aircraft, while it was the turn of Lt. von Lieres at 1002 hrs, Hptm. Maak at 1005 hrs and Fw. Steinhausen at 1010 hrs to score kills.

Following this day's outstanding feat Marseille outdid himself almost daily for the next five months.

On 1 May he was promoted to Oberleutnant. A week later he took over the role of 3 Staffel Kapitän, since Hptm. Homuth would now be leading I Gruppe as a replacement for Eduard Neumann. Neumann had been promoted to Major and was now in command of the Geschwader.

With his 45 victories, Hans-Joachim Marseille was now at the pinnacle of African pilots. From this point on his success curve would climb so high on the chart that it gave his colleagues a fright. Marseille was and continued to remain the old man, the comrade and the friend to all. He was relaxed and boisterous as always. He was now firmly entrenched in the circle of his compatriots, and had grown significantly in psychological stature. One thing, which the attentive reader may have noticed, he was not. He was not the ice cold killer and shooter who could think of nothing else but the next fight. He was also the Kapitän, who took care of all his men in 3 Staffel. He didn't sever the bonds which tied him to his circle of friends to enthrone himself at the lonely top. He remained simply Jochen.

The greater his success the more casual he became, and therefore naturally became more and more part of the group. He never thought of sacrificing his friendship for the sake of enemy kills. He cultivated these friendships because he understood the importance of dealing with people.

Despite his youthful 22 years he was well mannered and caring at the same time. His general bearing was such that it radiated so much of the military that it was unnecessary the external manifestations of drill or uniform were superfluous. He needed but few words to direct matters and keep things in check.

Marseille very soon developed a refined sixth sense in distinguishing a troublemaker from a decent fellow. Whenever a troublemaker would appear in his domain, this man would not remain long.

The Staffelfkapitän had a good word for everyone. There were ground crewmen in his Staffel who were older than him by one or two decades. They had taken their Jochen to heart as if he were their own son. He was Jochen and only officially the 'boss', (see Dettmann, Fritz: *Mein Freund Marseille*, Berlin 1944)

Once in a while he would talk about those things he valued most. Such as what his plans were following the war. In a conversation with his later Rottenflieger, Leutnant Schlang, Marseille sat on a sofa in the Staffel tent. Schlang brought the discussion around to life after the war. In Marseille's answer can be found the longing of any young pilot for world adventure and desire to fly:

"You know, Schlang, when the war is over, you've got to have an airplane, a fast machine, then go out and see the world."

"You want to continue flying, then?", asked Schlang.

"Of course!", answered Marseille. "Flying is the way to overcome the limitless expanse of the world."

During this conversation Marseille told Schlang of a dream he had recently had:

"I'm flying, then suddenly it gets dark all around me. I know I'm falling, but I don't feel anything. And before I hit the ground, it's already all over for me."

This macabre dream would someday become a reality for Marseille.

In the 31 days in May Marseille shot down a total of 14 enemy aircraft. Here is a summary of the operations: On 10 May during a *freie Jagd* over Tmimi, Marseille received a message that two Hurricanes were over his home airfield. He turned back immediately and flew home, hoping to catch the two intruders. A few minutes later he jumped the two enemy *recce* planes, attacking the first one directly. It caught fire after two short bursts and dove earthward to be belled in by its pilot 15 km southeast of Martuba. After that, Marseille flew to the second plane and shot its engine out almost immediately. It crashed into the ground and disappeared in a fiery explosion.

During a scramble on 13 May, the Marseille-Pöttgen Rotte intercepted the enemy. Marseille attacked immediately. Flying through the first enemy plane's fire, he was struck in the oil tank and propeller. Nevertheless, he was not to be put off his attack course. With two rapid course corrections he was then in a firing position. As he pushed the trigger button, the second enemy also caught fire a moment later.

The pilot was able to successfully bail out from the second aircraft, while the first plane impacted the ground and broke up.

On the evening of the 16th of May, again on a free ranging fighter sweep, Marseille spotted several Australian planes from 3 RAAF Squadron at 1905 hrs approaching Gazala. But as Marseille dove down on his quarry he found himself to be the prey of six Kittyhawks attacking him at the same time. He whipped around behind these newly-discovered opponents in a steep climb, and setting his plane into a sharp left bank he shot down one of their number as he screamed by.

This aircraft caught fire, but was brought in for a belly landing west of El Adem by its pilot, Sergeant Teade.

Marseille pulled up again, catching sight of an additional six "Kittys" opposite him. He circled around these adversaries in one of the tightest turns his colleagues had ever seen him do - and at an altitude of only 300 meters. At 1915 hrs he was in yet another left banking turn when he raced past a small group of four Kittyhawks. With an instinctive confidence he hit the trigger and shot down a plane from 450 Squadron. Its pilot, Lieutenant Parker, bailed out, but



the pilotless plane plummeted down and collided with a Kittyhawk flown by Sergeant Metherall, sending both crashing to the desert floor below.

Marseille had already pulled up into a tight chandelle by this time and was heading back to base, so he didn't see this additional "kill" and only reported two shoot-downs.

The 19th of May was the day in which III/JG 53 arrived in Martuba from Sicily and Crete. This unit had already paid a short visit to the African continent in December of 1941. Major Gerlitz, who had commanded II/JG 27 up to that time, took over as the new unit's commander, while his Gruppe was now under the command of Hptm. Rödel. Oblt. Düllberg assumed the position of Geschwaderadjutant.

The Staffelkapitäne of III/JG 53 were Oblt. Pufal, Hptm. Belser (who already had 32 kills to his credit), and Oblt. Götz (whose record stood at 33 aerial victories).

On May 19th Marseille and Pöttgen, once again on a freie Jagd patrol, spotted seven planes of 450 Squadron in the early morning hours. The enemy aircraft were split into two flights.

It was 0820 hrs when Marseille and his Rottenflieger dove onto the flights. Marseille caught the first victim in the wing and rudder and sent him plunging out of formation to crash land near Gambut. As one of the enemy attempted to follow Marseille in his climb to 6000 meters, one of the Bf 109s turned back into him. It was Marseille.

The Brit was hit with the first burst and knew that he was dealing with an experienced opponent here. Putting his plane into a dive, he attempted to head for the cloud mass below him and hide - but Marseille caught up with him too soon. The burst shattered the Kittyhawk's engine. With his engine now in pieces Sergeant Young, its pilot, set his plane down for a belly landing in the desert. Both Messerschmitts strafed the Kittyhawk until it caught fire. Wounded, Sergeant Young was able to make it back to his own troops.

When enemy forces attacked Martuba on 22 May, eight Bf 109s from I Gruppe and three aircraft of III/JG 27 were scrambled in quick succession.

After a brief respite Oblt. Franzisket was back in the action again. He shot one Curtiss down and damaged another. In the airspace between Martuba and Tmimi Lt. von Lieres, Lt. Stahlschmidt and Fw. Steinhausen were also victorious.

Marseille was again active the following day, when with seven other Bf 109s he was vectored to a British unit. It was a flight of Baltimore bombers (erroneously reported initially as Douglas DB 7 Bostons) from 223 Squadron on their first mission. Four of these beasts were to attack the German airfield at Derna. One of the bombers lagging behind was fired upon in a head-on attack by Hptm. Homuth north of Acroma.

The pilot managed to bring his plane back to his home base and make a belly landing.

The three remaining bombers bound for Derna came under attack several times. The German fighters, led by Marseille, approached to within nearly ramming distance when they noticed that the rear guns of the Baltimores were not functioning.

Marseille shot down the first bomber with three bursts. Three minutes later the second bomber's life came to an abrupt end with a longer burst. Ofw. Mentnich was able to mortally wound the third bomber, thus sparing Derna from a bombing raid that day.

After this disaster with the Baltimore's rear guns, the American Browning machine guns were removed from the rear position and replaced by British 7.62 mm machine guns.

After the begin of Rommel's attack in a skirting maneuver around the area of Bir Hacheim there came a time of some of the most intense aerial fighting in the campaign. Lt. Stahlschmidt scored a single on 27 May. Otto Schulz, having returned to his troops as an Oberleutnant, claimed two kills the following day.

On May 29th Ofw. Schulze was forced to make an emergency landing southeast of Tmimi due to engine damage. Oblt. Otto Schulz flew off in a Fieseler Storch and rescued his colleague from the desert.

The planes of III/JG 53 also scored during this time and on 30 May Marseille shot down Sergeant Buckland, who was able to take to his chute and save himself.

Oblt. Sinner, Lt. Schroer, Oblt. Belser, Ofw. Stumpf and Lt. Quaritsch also added to the day's tally with one kill apiece. Fw. Kaiser brought down two planes himself.

During the afternoon II/JG 27 and III/JG 53 flew another mission as escort for six Bf 110s on a strafing mission against a British transport column moving along the Via Balbia.

The 31st of May was another successful day for Jochen Marseille. I/JG 27 and III/JG 53, with a combined total of 12 fighters, was providing cover for 12 Stukas on a mission to bomb Bir Harmat. The formation ran into 12 Tomahawks under the command of the South African Major Moodie, which had taken off to intercept the raid. Major Moodie was able to shoot down a Ju 87 before the German fighters could intervene. In the following dogfight he managed to inflict critical damage upon another Bf 109, but this kill couldn't be confirmed. Then the aircraft of I/JG 27 plunged into the brawl from their higher altitude.

In a lightning-fast attack Marseille shot down one plane from a straight dive, pulled up and shot down another and, following a turn, scored another kill against a Tomahawk of

4 SAAF Fw. Steinhausen was successful with two kills, while Lt. von Lieres and Ofw. Mentnich each knocked an enemy plane out of the sky

Altogether Marseille added 14 kills to his tally for the month of May, which in the official records were entered as victories 55 to 68. In doing so, he made his debut as an Oberleutnant.

1 June began with a kill for Marseille. During this dogfight, which took place in the evening over Gadd el Ahmar, Marseille's wingman Pöttgen also got in a good shot and brought down an enemy plane. The time which his Rottenflieger scored was at 2005 hrs, confirmed by Marseille. This was the first time Pöttgen had actively attacked in a course of over 100 combat missions. He had flown as Rottenflieger for Hptm. Homuth and Oblt. Marseille, and had faithfully protected their tails while voluntarily foregoing opportunities to score himself.

Ten minutes later Marseille scored his 69th victory when he shot down a second Curtiss southwest of Mteifel. This plane, too, burst asunder in a blazing fireball.

### **The 3rd of June 1942 - The 11 Minute Dogfight.**

3 Staffel of JG 27 had airstrip alert this day. Once again, the air situation was critical, for Rommel was itching to go on the advance again. Since his sidestep around Bir Hacheim during the night of 26 May, it became more important than ever to provide the Stukas with safe escort to their targets. One of these targets that day was Bir Hacheim, the most southern of the British "boxes" on the Gazala Line, defended by the Free French Brigade under Colonel König.

Hans-Joachim Marseille walked over to his machine. The crew chief reported everything was ready, and gave his Staffelkapitän a light as Marseille reached for a cigarette. Pöttgen was already beside his plane. Marseille nodded to him, Pöttgen raised his hand as a signal that he was ready.

Five additional pilots from the HQ unit were ready and waiting. Their mission was to escort the Stukas of StG 3 under Oberstleutnant Sigl, which had already roared away across 3 Staffel's field and were now flying toward Bir Hacheim in a southeasterly direction.

"Away we go!", quipped Marseille, then shouted to Pöttgen, "Break a leg!"

"Break a leg yourself!", Pöttgen grinned back.

With a fluid motion Marseille leapt over the chock onto the wing, slid past the crew chief with an impish grin and hopped into the cockpit. The assistant crew chief was al-

ready waiting on the other wing. While the crew chief helped Marseille buckle up his parachute harness, the other crew member held the crank for the engine loosely in his hand. Then Marseille was strapped in, the cockpit canopy closed, and Marseille raised his right hand. The assistant crew chief turned the crank and the starter flywheel began to sing.

Seconds later the 1500 hp Daimler-Benz coughed to life. Popping and sputtering sounds echoed across the airfield and muffled the sounds from the other planes until all that could be heard was a static droning.

A glance at the other Bf 109s told Marseille that all were ready. He gave another sign which meant "follow", and with his engine droning smoothly, rolled Yellow 14 along the compressed sand of the airstrip. The plane picked up speed rapidly as it moved along, then shortly lifted into the air. The others followed behind. Pöttgen directly behind his Staffelkapitän. Six planes from 3 Staffel had taken off to catch up to the Stukas in time to offer them the needed protection. The flight to Bir Hacheim had begun.

Aside from Marseille's Gruppe other Schwarme from different Gruppen and Staffeln of JG 27 were also airborne. The six aircraft of Marseille's unit, which had assumed the top cover role, flew at a higher altitude. They reached the Stukas on time, moved in over them and began a weaving pattern to either maintain the same altitude and speed over their charges or fly a bit ahead of them.

Marseille called to the Stuka formation's Staffelkapitän upon reaching the formation and received an immediate response. Bound for Bir Hacheim, the Ju 87s looked like a flock of giant gull-winged predator birds, the huge bombs slung between their covered landing gear, which looked for all the world like talons.

Making a wide detour Marseille led his six planes around the great birds. Sometimes the fighters buzzed right over the canopies of the Stuka crew, waving to the radioman sitting behind the pilot. They knew they were in good company with 3 Staffel.

Far in the distance could be seen the most southerly of the Gazala Line's forts. Its concrete fortifications were easily recognizable. On all sides of the fort were the confusing criss-cross pattern of the trenches. The surrounding landscape was pockmarked with a myriad bomb craters. Many more would shortly be added. From the ramparts the anti-aircraft barrels now lifted upward and began firing.

High over this brewing thunderstorm the first Stukas began their dive onto the target. The Jericho sirens howled as the aircraft dropped at an angle of 70 to 80 degrees. Then the bombs fell.

The planes which had already dropped their loads pulled up into a steep turning climb to the right, out of the zone of fire. The exploding flak bursts could be seen among the Stukas still diving.

The fighters were making wide circles over the target area at about 2000 meters. Suddenly the radio crackled to life:

"Watch out! Indians from the south, 1000 meters higher!"

Marseille, who was in a wide left hand turn, rolled his machine over and turning, caught sight of his foe, which was rapidly closing the distance between them. Within the space of a second he had the first plane in his clutches. It was a Curtiss fighter.

The propeller hub of Yellow 14 pointed skyward as Marseille strove to gain more altitude. The remaining planes in his group flew next to him in a loose combat formation. Pöttgen attempted to remain tucked in behind him and keep his tail clear. There was a separation of about 100 meters between the individual machines.

The 20 mm cannon (MG 151) and the twin machine guns were already armed.

When the first Tomahawks, just a few hundred meters below Marseille and on an opposite heading, had approached close enough, they suddenly turned in and formed up in a Lufbery circle.

To the left of Marseille and a few dozen meters behind him, Pöttgen saw how Yellow 14 suddenly whipped over on one wingtip and plunged toward the defensive circle. Each aircraft in the circle was separated by approximately 70 meters, and all of them were flying in a left banking turn with their left wingtips pointed toward the ground.

In a steep dive, Marseille's Bf 109 fell upon the circle. His plane was almost vertical now as he plunged past the two higher flying Curtiss planes, curved upward slightly and suddenly fell into an opening within the circle itself.

Violating every orthodox rule of flying, Marseille was now in the middle of the enemy's defensive circle and, before his "tail man" realized he was behind a German plane, opened fire on the Tomahawk in front of him. A single burst sealed the British plane's fate.

The first hail of ten cannon rounds found its mark. Those from the machine guns ripped into the Curtiss fighter's engine and stitched their way back through the cockpit and along the fuselage.

Flames shot from the stricken Curtiss. Seconds later it fell out of the defensive ring toward the ground.

Marseille had broken off immediately after firing. A few hundred meters in front of his fellow pilots he pulled up on



the stick, the plane's nose pointed sharply upward and Yellow 14 climbed skyward again, pulling away from the defensive circle of approximately 15 planes, which by now was closing up again.

While the first kill burned on the ground, Marseille's left wing dipped once more and again his Bf 109 howled down upon the fire-spitting circle. Again he forced his way into the ring, suddenly pulled in just 50 meters behind the next Tomahawk and fired both machine guns.

As Marseille's plane fell away for the second time, a second Curtiss tumbled out of control above him, plunging down to impact the ground and explode.

The Stukas were flying back home toward the west, protected by the fighters who were fencing it out in a dramatic dogfight. While this scene played out, Marseille set himself up for the third attack. Once again he plunged, like a falcon swooping down on its prey, found a gap between two of the enemy planes, fired a short, accurate salvo and with a fluid motion dropped away to prevent the remaining aircraft from returning fire.

The other Bf 109s had now joined the fight, into which the enemy had thrown nearly 35 planes. But they only scored twice. For Marseille, on the other hand, the battle was far from over. While the other planes formed a safety net for him, allowing him to operate unmolested and unhindered by concerns of being shot at or shot down, he continued the fight.

Despite the misfortune that his cannon had jammed just following the first attack, Marseille dove into the foray again and again. His two machine guns were enough to successfully bring down planes. He hit yet another aircraft, his fourth, and sent it spiraling earthward. Numbers five and six followed a minute later.

Up until this point Marseille had remained silent during the 12 minute battle, had remained focused on the attacks and had concentrated all his senses on the diving maneuvers. Now his comrades finally heard his voice over the intercom:

"Elbe One to Elbe Two, did you get a count?"

"Elbe Two to Elbe One! Saw them all and notated the times, Jochen", answered Pöttgen.

They headed back towards base. The other planes swarmed around their Staffelkapitän. Everyone was congratulating him at once, their voices becoming a jumble in his headphones.

A few other planes from I Gruppe were seen approaching from the southwest. In one of them sat Edu Neumann, the Geschwaderkommodore.

Once the medley of voices had died out somewhat, he also called over: "Bravo, Seille!"

On a northwesterly course they reached the Martuba airbase. The reddish yellow sand raced along below them. In the center of the crowd of six planes - none had been shot down - Marseille flew toward his base. When the field came into view the other planes broke off, allowing Marseille to continue in alone. Marseille flew down, his wings wagging over the ground crewmen who had assembled on the edge of the field. Once, twice, three times the Staffelkapitän's plane wagged, then it passed over the airfield's edge. After a sharp turn the aircraft returned to pass over the field again, and again his plane wagged three times.

Below him hundreds of men raised their arms high. Six kills! Six victories in an afternoon. Marseille turned in for a landing. The landing gear and landing flaps had already been extended.

Yellow 14 touched down at 1352 hrs, trailing a long cloud of dust behind it, rolled to the edge of the field and taxied over to the parking area.

The other planes followed. Crewman Uffz. Meyer climbed up onto the left wing of Yellow 14. "Herr Oberleutnant, I congratulate you!"

Marseille nodded. He released his shoulder harness and slowly lifted himself up. Off the right wing appeared the faces of his other two ground crewmen. He nodded to them. Slowly the fixed mask of his face relaxed. He climbed onto the wing once his parachute harness had been released and Meyer had taken the chute from him.

Dozens of hands reached out toward him. Marseille suddenly found himself sitting on the shoulders of his two crewmen, who carried him a couple of meters before setting him down on his own tennis-shoe clad feet again.

Pöttgen had also landed in the meantime and came over to Marseille, looking a bit worn out. He added his congratulations.

"Did you see everything, Rainer?", asked Marseille of his trusted Rottenflieger.

"Yes, Jochen, all six of them!"

Schulte, the armorer, opened the gun covers on Marseille's plane and took a look at the magazines. Then he got a rather puzzled expression as he saw the cannon magazine.

"What's wrong, Schulte?", asked the crew chief.

"Have a look! There's only ten shells missing from the cannon magazine. From each machine gun only a few hundred rounds." The armorer counted the missing ammunition.

"No wonder", said Pöttgen, hearing this. "He made those six kills in under 12 minutes and only fired a few seconds each time. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I'd never believe it." And with that, Pöttgen ended the discussion of the matter.

During this air battle Marseille had come in contact with 14 to 15 enemy planes. But the scenario could not be reconstructed more accurately since the whole thing, from first to last shot, had lasted only eleven minutes, and was broken up by his other attacks as well.

Hans-Joachim Marseille had turned in a phenomenal performance, one which - so everyone felt - could not be repeated. But they were to be mistaken, as the future would prove.

For the first time during his pilot's career Hans-Joachim Marseille had shot down six enemy planes in one day and during a single action. In doing so, he had become an undisputed ace and air combat expert. A letter written by Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt to his mother sums up the sentiments felt by many of Marseille's fellow pilots:

"Marseille can shoot like a young god. He can do what only a select few are capable of: accurately and flawlessly shoot while in a turn. Our sort are constantly overshooting in such situations."

Rainer Pöttgen's voice is not to be overlooked either. As Marseille's wingman, he had experienced the same dogfight side by side with his Staffelkapitän. His report from this 3rd of June 1942 follows:

"All the enemy were shot down by Marseille that day in a turning dogfight. Marseille displayed an unmistakable talent for deflection shooting. As soon as he shot, he needed only to glance at the enemy plane. His pattern began at the front, at the engine's nose, and consistently ended in the cockpit."

"How he was able to do this, hitting his mark so precisely in a hundredth of a second, he himself couldn't even explain, and as a result, can't relay this secret to his comrades at arms."

"With every dogfight, however, I was able to notice that during a turning duel he would throttle his plane's speed back as far as possible. This enabled him to fly a tighter turn and be a little bit lower than his opponent. Then, with a sudden burst of fire, the enemy would be splattered across the sky."

"His ammunition expenditure in this dramatic air battle came to a total of 360 rounds."

This calculates to approximately 60 machine gun rounds used for every kill.

The next morning Oberleutnant Hans-Joachim Marseille was called to the Gruppe command post. When he arrived, he saw the entire Gruppe had arrived before him, with the exception of those on airstrip alert. Hauptmann Homuth appeared from within the command post, followed closely by Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring.

Marseille was invited to step to the front, where he was presented by the Generalfeldmarschall with the 97th Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross approved by the Führer for his 75th victory.

It was understandable that there would be a big celebration in both the Gruppe tent and, primarily, in the tent of 3 Staffel that evening. Just as the corks from the bottles of sekt began popping, everyone stopped for a moment to listen. The evening Wehrmacht broadcast was being transmitted. This time there was a segment on the pilots in Africa:

"Hauptmann Müncheberg scored his 80th kill on 2 June."

Then the next item. "Oberleutnant Marseille, on 3 June, his 70th to 75th aerial victory."

When Kommodore Neumann asked Marseille to now take a few days off for rest and relaxation, all his colleagues knew that Jochen wouldn't accept the offer, even though he could certainly have used it. They weren't wrong about their comrade, either.

Marseille continued flying and over the course of his next three missions shot down an additional eight Curtiss planes. His tally continued even higher, however, for over the next four sorties he brought down 18 British flyers from the skies of Africa, four planes on each of three missions and once more six in one, the combat times of each varying between ten and fifteen minutes.

His flying accuracy grew with each day, although in actuality nothing more was missing. With it increased his ability to predict the intentions of his enemy, be one step ahead and almost immediately after recognizing the course of action to take, to accurately fire. This he could do from any flight attitude and any firing angle born out of the developing combat situation. He always hit his mark with an accuracy that bordered on the supernatural.

Nevertheless, it should be made clear that with Marseille there was none of the atmosphere which surrounded those individuals who daily flirted with death. He appeared to play with his foes, and in playing, make short work of them, although these were no beginners which he was up against.

Only seldom did anyone notice in him the massive strain required of those involved in air combat. This was multiplied when a pilot such as this one often was asked to go up against an opponent with ten times superior strength.



*Marseille as Staffelkapitän, seen with all of his red tape.*

Marseille was honored in his Staffel, and was one whose accomplishments people were proud of.

When the Staffel would return from a combat mission and Marseille had shot down three, four, or even six of the enemy, it was understandable that the others would break off shortly before reaching the airfield and allow their Kapitän plenty of room to waggle.

Even such well known flyers as Stahlschmidt, Schroer, von Lieres, Sinner, Schulz and Remmer saw in Jochen Marseille their role model and consistently tried to incorporate his tactics into their flying. As a rule, this soon resulted in a spate of new kills, despite the fact that none of them ever perfected Marseille's method of diving into a defensive circle from a higher altitude, shooting and scoring-and disregarding the danger inherent in such a maneuver.

But it wasn't only the victorious dogfighters of the air who felt this way. Even those, who despite their courageous acts, were denied the greater glory were inspired by Marseille.

### **Between Acroma and Bir Hacheim**

The British, also recognizing the strategic value of the Gazala Line's cornerstone, immediately began concentrating their air operations around Bir Hacheim when Rommel launched his offensive against this site.

Everything the Western Desert Air Force could muster was flying toward Bir Hacheim in a strike against Rommel's jump-off points. Their target was primarily the 90th Leichte Afrika Division, and they saturated Aufklarungsabteilungen 33 and 3 as well as the Italian "Trieste" Division, now just in front of the town, with bombs and strafing gunfire.

The anti-aircraft defenses of Bir Hacheim, which had been strengthened a few days before the German offensive, fired from every gun whenever the Staffeln of Stukageschwader 3 under Oberstleutnant Sigl would launch an attack. Generalleutnant Hoffmann von Waldau, the new Fliegerführer Afrika, had been given instructions from Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring to bomb Bir Hacheim into submission.

Escort operations against Bir Hacheim were beefed up, since by 8 June the Stukas had lost 14 machines in the space of a week.

On 8 June Hans-Joachim Marseille was officially named Staffelpkapitän of 3/JG 27. This was a proud day for him, and he thanked his Geschwaderkommodore, Eduard Neumann, that he was able to experience it. For it was



Neumann who molded the young flyer, who removed his complex and who made him into the hero he became.

On the day prior to this 8th of June Marseille was able to bail his former Staffelkapitän and current Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm. Homuth out of a sticky situation.

During that afternoon a total of 30 German fighters had been assigned escort. I/JG 27 was to escort a Stuka unit to Acroma, still occupied by the enemy, where they would bomb it out.

After finishing their escort mission, the fighters came upon 2 SAAF Squadron over the target area, who were escorting their own bombers. Catching sight of the German planes, the South Africans prepared to do battle.

Marseille, who this time had taken off without his wingman (Pöttgen was flying wing for Homuth), saw two Kittyhawks move in behind the Homuth-Pöttgen team and begin lining up for the kills.

Marseille was faster this time as well. Making his inimitable steep angle attack, he dove from above onto the "Kittys." With the crump of the cannon and the first short burst from his machine guns, the first enemy plane plunged into the desert floor and was consumed by fire.

A right turn brought Marseille into a good firing position almost immediately again. This time, too, the Kittyhawk fell burning after just a short burst from Marseille's guns. The first pilot was able to escape from his burning plane before it exploded. The second, however, died in the fiery inferno of his aircraft. Later information revealed that it was Lt. Bernage who met his death there, while Lt. Frewen was the one who survived.

This day was, for the most part, a successful day for III/JG 53. The Italians, who had supported the escort mission with several planes of their own, also reported six kills.

The next day was a good one for II/JG 27. Eight of their planes, having taken off that morning on a freie Jagd over Bir Hacheim, became caught up in a bitter air battle with 25 to 30 British fighters. Ofw. Schulze and Oblt. Bendert brought down one and two planes, respectively. The number of German victories grew by the hour. Around noontime an additional 39 Bf 109s were in the air, escorting Stukas to Bir Hacheim. They ran into Hurricanes of 145 Squadron on a fighter sweep over the town. This British Group had just arrived in Africa and now experienced their first dogfight

against the German fighters in this theater.

As mentioned earlier, Major Eduard Neumann was officially named as Geschwaderkommodore on this date, while Hptm. Homuth was given the post of Gruppenkommandeur and Oblt. Marseille took over officially as Staffelkapitän.

After a long interlude Hptm. Franzisket scored again on 9 June while flying escort for Stukas with a few other fighters. Uffz. Pfeffer was shot down during this attack. The second mission of the day also saw II/JG 27 as a participant. Ofw. Schulze and Lt. Bendert each shot down an enemy plane.

During the afternoon of the same day III/JG 27 and III/JG 53 took part in an escort mission. There were a total of 16 planes from the former and 10 from the latter Gruppe, escorting 40 Stukas. This action had personally been requested by Rommel for the final destruction of Bir Hacheim and was promptly implemented by GFM Kesselring.

Although the British 216 Squadron had flown in supplies to Bir Hacheim during the night of 10 June, the situation had become hopeless for the Free French Brigade commanded by Colonel König. The experts gave the French, whose ranks included a volunteer Jewish battalion, a reprieve period of no more than 24 hours.

On this 10th of June, which was to decide the fate of Bir Hacheim, everything the Germans had which was flyable was thrown into the air. In addition, there was the high-speed MC 202s of the Italians, which performed bravely. As the end of the town appeared imminent under the daily onslaught of newly formed Kampfgruppen, British and German air armadas clashed in the skies overhead.

The airspace between Tobruk and Bir Hacheim was filled with the tumbling shapes of 51 German planes. There II/JG 27 struck approximately 40 enemy planes, while I Gruppe ran into a phalanx of 20 opposing aircraft. III/JG 53 found themselves flying against an additional ten Spitfires.

The Spitfires had only recently landed on the African continent. During air combat it was discovered that they were an equal match for the Bf 109.

A total of eight enemy planes were shot down by the German fighter pilots. Once again, Jochen Marseille stood at the peak of the victory list. In a space of about 15 minutes, in roughly ten engagements with the enemy, he succeeded in shooting down four of their number, some of them while making a high-speed pass with one or two short bursts from his machine guns.

It was another Marseille-Day, as they were called when this pilot scored multiple kills. Along with him, Lt. Schroer, Lt. von Lieres, Ofw. Mentnich and Fw. Gromotka, with one kill, were also entered into the victory log.

During the night of 10 June the last 2000 French defenders of Bir Hacheim broke out. They had been flushed out by the soldiers of Schützenregiment 115 under Oberstleutnant Ernst Günther Baade, which, during the course of 10 June

had taken bunker by bunker, pillbox by pillbox, and had penetrated deep into the defensive fortifications.

This same night, the Kampfgruppe under Major Georg Briel had taken prisoner a man who revealed that the French would attempt an escape during the coming night through a path cleared from a minefield.

Bitter hand-to-hand fighting ensued between Kampfgruppe Briel and the Foreign Legionnaires of Colonel König's unit fighting their way out. Man against man, bayonet against bayonet, hand grenade against hand grenade. Only about half of the French still capable of fighting were able to break out of the ring and with their commander fight their way back to the 7th British Brigade.

For Rommel, the fall of Bir Hacheim was an impetus for a DAK push to the northeast toward the coast. His goal was Tobruk. During the early morning hours of 15 June the lead groups from the 15th Panzer Division reached the sea east of Tobruk. The fortress had been effectively cut off from its rear supply lines. By the 16th of June the 21st PD had taken El Duda and Belhamed. By the evening of the 17th this unit had pushed as far as Gambut, which fell to them the next morning.

The entire space lying between Tobruk in the west and Gambut 450 km further to the east was mopped up on 18 June. On the 19th of June the 90th Leichte Afrika Division reached Bardia.

The artillery barrage against Tobruk opened up on the morning of 20 June. One hour later the planes attacked. Their target was the breakthrough point to the southeast.

Both Panzerdivisionen of the Afrikakorps began rolling immediately following the air attack. Fort Gabr Gasem was taken, as was Fort Plastrino. Grenadierregiment 361 under Oberstleutnant Panzenhagen poured right through to the airfield there. Hptm. Klärman, commander of II Battalion from this regiment, took the field in a surprise attack. By the evening of the 20th the entire harbor was in German hands.

The next morning the commanding officer of Tobruk, General Kloppe, capitulated. 33,000 men of the Empire's troops marched their way into POW camps. The great battle in the Marmarica had ended victoriously within 24 hours with the storming of Tobruk. In Rommel's own words:

"We can now completely crush the enemy! We will not rest until we have beaten the last remnants of the 8th Army, Rommel."

The push continued on toward the east. Bardia fell on 22 June. Rommel challenged all to give their last bit of strength, then, according to his words "Seize the initiative! - Seize the initiative!"

Marsa Matruk was taken in a battle in which the enemy defended themselves courageously. There Rommel gave orders to his Stosstrupp (lit. Shock Troops) commander, Major Briel, to press on through in the direction of Alexandria. Kampfgruppe Briel forced their way as far as the area south of Ras Abu Girab. After a fight El Daba was taken and finally Briel's men were standing in Sidi Agd el Rahman, just a few kilometers from El Alamein. They had pushed 120 km into enemy-occupied territory.

Here they received the orders to return back to the main body of troops. The July battles of Miteirya Ridge, Deir el Shein, El Mreir, Deir el Munassib and Quarte el Himeimat had proven costly. On 20 July there were indications that the British were making preparations for an attack. The British launched their counteroffensive against the central defenses with over 100 tanks from the 1st Tank Division, the 2nd New Zealand Division and the 5th Indian Division. They overran the German lines south of Deir el Shein.

Stukas, escorted by their fighters, were continually taking off from Tobruk to strike British troop concentrations and pockets of resistance. JG 27, too, took part in the success of the Rommel offensive.

Thus it was that this time, too, the enemy advance - spearheaded by the 23rd Army Tank Brigade. It was here where Lt. Skubowius, an anti-tank platoon leader, and his gunner Gefr. Halm monitored the progress of 30 enemy tanks. The

platoon opened fire. Firing his cannon, Halm destroyed no less than nine of the 23rd Brigade's tanks by himself when he continued firing despite his crew being wounded.

Panzerregiment 5, which under Oberst Gerhard Müller punched into the main thrust of the attack, subdued the remaining forces. 96 tanks lay knocked out on the battlefield. Rommel's Panzerarmee Afrika (so called after the fall of Tobruk) had taken over 60,000 prisoners from 26 May to 30 July.

During this time frame approximately 2000 enemy tanks and armored vehicles were either destroyed or captured. However, the DAK had also suffered critical losses - losses which could not be replaced.

Following a one-month pause in the fighting, on 30 August began the great "six-day race" which saw considerable losses suffered by the Germans - at first in the British mine fields and then at Alam Haifa, which became known as the Stalingrad of the Desert. General Bernard Montgomery, who had taken over command of the 8th Army, began rearming and reequipping himself for the great counterthrust.

Up until this time JG 27 had constantly been flying operations. Its pilots, ground crewmen and assistants, the "black men of the ground crew", had performed admirably. We now turn to those few months of the Star of Africa's most intense and bitter fighting, which took him to the highest climes and, in the end, brought him a pilot's death.





## CHAPTER IX

# THE STAR OF AFRICA

### Marseille Reaches the Magic 100th

**G**FM Kesselring ordered the Ju 88s of Lehrgeschwader 1 from Greece and Crete to Africa on the morning of 10 June 1942, at the height of the Battle for Bir Hacheim. The same day saw three major air attacks launched, totalling 12 waves of 124 Stuka sorties and 76 attacks by the Ju 88s.

Marseille had shot down four of the enemy on this date. He had been wearing the Oak Leaves since the 4th of July and by the evening of this memorable day the Staffel painter had painted kill markings number 78 to 81 on the Yellow 14.

Above the battlefield stretching from Tobruk to El Daba the fighters of the desert Geschwader flew a total of 182 sorties on 11 June. During that afternoon a Schwarm from Marseille's 3 Staffel came in contact with the enemy north of Sidi Rezegh. After that encounter all operational machines in the Geschwader flew escort on three separate occasions for the Stukas.

During the second escort mission, 38 Bf 109s were providing the cover when 33 and 274 Squadrons pounced on the Stuka unit. Southwest of El Adem Hans-Joachim Marseille logged two kills for himself. They were Kittyhawks of 112 Squadron. One of the pilots from the downed aircraft, Sergeant Greaves, was able to take to his chute in time. He was rescued by a British patrol.

The evening of the 12th of June saw the high point of the air battle. Furious dogfights ensued in which III/JG 53 repeatedly became embroiled. During these clashes Hptm. Franzisket shot down one plane, while Fw. Steinhausen succeeded in bringing down two.

In the Battle of El Adem, which was spearheaded by the 90th Leichte Afrika Division, I/JG 27 participated with all its combat ready planes. As early as the morning recce pa-

trol Lt. Körner and Lt. Stahlschmidt each shot down an enemy aircraft while protecting a reconnaissance Bf 110. That evening Lt. Körner was able to overcome two additional opponents.

It was between 1810 hrs and 1815 hrs that Marseille again demonstrated his inimitable flying ability. He shot down three Kittyhawks within the space of three minutes, then jumped a fourth, which tried to escape by flying at low level.

Marseille rapidly closed the gap between them and, while the quarry was flying at an altitude of only two meters above the ground, Marseille cut loose with a burst. The salvo of shells tore through the Curtiss. Its left wing dipped sharply downward, caught the ground, and the plane instantaneously became transformed into a chaotic tumbling wreck.

Yanking back on the joystick, Marseille roared over the destroyed remains of his latest kill, twisted skyward again, and at the close of this day still managed to fly a fighter-bomber mission as a Rotte with Pöttgen, during which he set fire to several trucks.

Both pilots turned back only when their cannon ammunition gave out, arriving safely back at their own base.

Lt. Körner and Lt. von Lieres were victorious on 14 June. Lt. Stahlschmidt also earned a well-deserved kill. Altogether Körner managed to score three times on this date.

As the DAK turned toward Sidi Rezegh on 15 June, several run-ins took place between British and German pilots. That evening 12 Bf 109s were escorting reconnaissance Bf 110s when they encountered 12 Curtiss planes north of El Adem.

Again, Marseille dove into the defensive circle which these planes had formed. In four daring passes, with the enemy's fire whistling about him, he scored four times from



*Marseille was often visited by his Italian comrades.*

1901 to 1905 hrs. Lt. Schroer also brought down two planes during this engagement.

An armorer made the following report from a ground crewman's viewpoint on the day's air battle.

That morning the weapons armorers had already fed the ammunition belts into the magazines for the machine guns when Marseille and Pöttgen came walking up. Marseille's crew chief, Fw. Meyer, reported to the Staffelkapitän. "Meyer, this is what I'm going to do. For every kill I make today, you'll get a bonus of 50 lira for keeping my crate in such good condition."

"I don't know if that's such a good idea, Herr Oberleutnant", said Meyer thoughtfully. "I'd forget about it, otherwise you're going to go broke."

Laughing, Marseille clapped his crewman on the shoulder. As was his custom, he gave Meyer a cigarette before the two pilots continued walking. Marseille and Pöttgen hadn't yet been called to duty.

Schulte, the assistant crew chief, shook his head and pointed his chin at the shapes of the two men now disappearing. "What do you think of him?", he asked.

"I've given up wondering about Jochen. You'll never get anywhere doing so."

They went back to work on Marseille's machine just as the Oberwerkmeister came walking over to them.

"How's it looking?", he inquired.

"We're just about done here", reported Meyer. All eyes turned toward the sky as engine sounds were suddenly heard. They were Stukas, tucked in close formation and flying away over the airfield on a combat mission.

"Soon it will be that time again", quipped Schulte.

Marseille came over again. He was already wearing his long pants and brown leather jacket. His flying helmet still swung freely in his hand. As hot as it was down here on the ground, at an altitude of 4000 meters it was freezing - and to climb into a Bf 109 wearing shorts for such a mission would simply be inviting the onset of a miserable cold.

Marseille climbed up onto the wing of Yellow 14 next to Meyer. A disconcerted grin rested on his face.

"Anything special going on?", asked Meyer.

"No, just the usual. An escort mission, then a freie Jagd over the entire airspace to the east of El Adem. Everything OK?", asked the Oberleutnant finally.

"Of course, Herr Oberleutnant!"

Marseille nodded to his two ground crewmen, then clambered into the cockpit. His gaze was already scanning the sky far ahead of him as the cockpit canopy closed over him and Marseille locked it. From another part of the airfield

came the sounds of the first engines starting up. The assistant crew chief cranked the starter to life, then it was time to go-

The engine sprang alive with a coughing, thumping gasp. From within the cockpit Marseille raised his hand. Meyer pulled the wheel chocks away and the Bf 109 spun lightly around on its tailwheel, stirring up the first sandy cloud. The incessant noise of airplane engines howled louder and louder over the airfield.

The first planes were already taking off by now. A short time later Marseille's Yellow 14 formed up as a Rotte and disappeared into the sun's glare. The singing of the engines became lost in the distance, then the tiny black flecks were lost to view.

The Staffel painter strolled over to Marseille's two ground crewmen. "Want to make a bet to see when the Oberleutnant will bring down his 100th plane?", he asked.

"I'd say in a week", retorted Schulte. But Meyer shook his head in disagreement.

"He won't need nearly that much time."

They disappeared into the shadows of the tent and dealt out cards for a game of skat. As the droning of the returning planes rapidly became a dull throbbing sound, they jumped up and ran out to the airfield perimeter. They watched as the Bf 109s broke off to the right and left, giving their Kapitän a wide, free area. Marseille's nose tipped down toward the field and his wings began to waggle. The crewmen counted aloud together: "One, two, three, four!"

Meyer tore his cap off his head and threw it enthusiastically into the air. They ran out onto the dirt strip, taking care not to get in the path of the remaining planes now landing. Marseille's Yellow 14 had just turned off the main strip onto the taxiway, followed by the long line of the other aircraft.

Schulte and Meyer sprinted over to Yellow 14 and climbed onto the two wings. They saw the sweat-covered face of their Oberleutnant. Together they helped the Kapitän lift the canopy up. The parachute's shoulder harness was released then Marseille was lifted out of his plane.

Marseille laid a hand on Meyer's shoulder. "A fine crate. You've done another great job. You'll get the 200 lira tonight."

"But you can't do that, Herr Oberleutnant. We were only joking with each other!"

Marseille jumped down off the wing into the hot sand. Then, with his back resting on the fuselage next to the number 14, he waited as his colleagues came running up.

Late that evening the Staffel painter drew the next four marks on the rudder.





"Ninety one", he said as he finished. A Fieseler Storch buzzed over the airfield, landed, and its passengers disappeared into the Gruppenkommandeur's tent. As Marseille and Pöttgen made their way over to Yellow 14 to appraise the work of the Staffel painter, they were intercepted by the Oberwerkmeister.

"Let's move", he said, speaking to everyone within earshot. "Get your things together. We're going back to El Gazala. Form up in a half an hour over there by the tents." Then, turning to the two pilots, he was more precise. "Tomorrow at first light we're taking off, Herr Oberleutnant."

"See, I was right", said Pöttgen casually.

"About what?", asked Marseille, even though he knew fully well what his Rottenflieger was getting at.

"I wrote a message on the door at our other address, telling the chaps we'd be back."

Marseille and Pöttgen ran into Stahlschmidt in front of the Oberleutnant's tent entrance. "Did you hear about it already? We're going back to Gazala."

"What?", asked an astounded Stahlschmidt. Marseille

*Summer 1942: Marseille with his friendly father-figure and comrade, Kommodore Major Neumann.*

only nodded and lit up a cigarette. He took two quick puffs and let his gaze wander skyward. The grin which had been on his face a moment before was now gone. His face took on a very gaunt appearance.

"What are you thinking about, Jochen?", asked Stahlschmidt quietly."

"About that last Tommy I shot down today", answered Marseille, his voice sounding completely unnatural. "I was just thinking how it feels when you're plummeting down in your crate, maybe still conscious, knowing that it will soon be all over."

Stahlschmidt laid a hand on his colleague's shoulder. Both knew what Marseille had meant.

The following day there was a massive air battle. It was the last before the move to Ain el Gazala, which originally had been scheduled for the 16th, but was now postponed by a day. That evening Marseille once again jumped into battle, shooting down a Hurricane at 1902 hrs southwest of El Adem. Eight minutes later he broke into a "merry-go-round" of South African planes. Three times he whistled through the circle like a meteor, and three times he knocked down one of their number. One at 1910 hrs, 1911 hrs and one at 1913 hrs. An additional four kills, scored with an uncanny shooting accuracy. His Schwarm had covered him against any other foe so that he could concentrate entirely on his attacks.

The second Schwarm saw Fw. Steinhausen in action. Three enemy planes fell prey to his guns. At 1920 hrs this Feldwebel scored his fourth victory of the day. The last enemy was sent from the skies by Lt. Körner at 1950 hrs.

During this operation the British Major Frost was shot down, either by Marseille or Steinhausen. Now Marseille was only five kills shy of the legendary 100 mark.

17 June saw the transfer of JG 27 to Gazala. Despite the move, there were successes this day as well. Lt. von Lieres and Lt. Körner each shot down a Kittyhawk of 450 RAAF Squadron.

When Oblt. Otto Schulz pounced on Flight Lieutenant Conrad of 274 Squadron, he was able to shoot him down. Conrad made a belly landing near Bou Amud, but Schulz dove down and began strafing the British plane until it caught fire. As he came in for a second pass on the burning wreck, a Kittyhawk got in behind him and opened fire from a distance of 100 meters. Schulz's Bf 109 hit the ground and instantly exploded. With 51 victories Oblt. Schulz had met a fighter pilot's death.

Around midday four Bf 109s ran into ten Hurricanes and approximately 20 Curtiss planes in the air between Gambut



*Marseille next to a 213 Squadron Hurricane he shot down.*



and Ras Azeiz. Oblt. Marseille was the first to dive into a thick crowd of enemy fighters and shot one of them down on his first pass. As he was breaking off to shake an enemy on his tail, another plane flitted across his gunsight. Marseille fired immediately and this opponent, too, fell burning to earth. He then sighted four fighters flying a defensive circle over a parachute drifting down, protecting their fellow pilot hanging in the chute harnesses.

In a twisting dogfight, from positions where none of his foes could get in an accurate shot, Marseille shot two more planes down out of the Luftberg.

"And now your hundredth, Jochen!", came the cries over the intercom. And "Jochen" pounced down upon an enemy plane just taking off from the airfield at Gambut which had only reached an altitude of 100 m. In the first pass he shot it down. Between 1302 hrs and 1309 hrs Marseille had sent no less than five enemy planes to the desert floor.

Only two minutes later he caught sight of two rapid moving Spitfires overhead, flying a reconnaissance mission. Marseille pulled up into a steep climb and seconds later found himself on the tail of the first one, sending it down. By defeating this enemy Marseille had scored his 101st air victory.

As he made his way homeward he caught up with a squadron of Hurricanes. He was able to fly in their midst for five minutes without being detected, but finally, as he attempted to fire, his guns became inoperable. He was spotted and pounced on by two Hurricanes. Here Marseille demonstrated his outstanding flying abilities. Racing away only a few meters above the desert ground, always breaking off to the side whenever the two hunters attempted to sandwich his Bf 109 between them, Marseille suddenly gave Yellow 14 full throttle and broke free, effortlessly leaving his pursuers lagging behind.

An atmosphere jubilation of reigned over the Gazala airfield. All eyes were fixed on Marseille's approaching plane, which waggled five times before finally settling down for a landing. The men ran over as Marseille slipped along to his own parking area.

As they reached the aircraft, Marseille shut off his engine. However, he remained motionless, still strapped tightly in the safety harness. His two ground crew, having reached him first, saw an entirely different face on their Jochen. The jovial, youthful laugh was missing. The tension and stress of this mission had replaced it with a haggard, gaunt face, looking almost like a mask. His view remained fixed on the instrument gauge, the arms hung lifeless by his side.

Finally, as if removing a great burden, he took off his helmet and turned to his crew. Slowly the mask-like gaze

disappeared. Meyer lifted the canopy back. In that moment Marseille took in the hundreds of voices of his comrades, who had by now all run up and were now shouting out their congratulations on his 100th victory. He lifted himself over the cockpit sill, his legs in front, and grabbed the proffered right hand of Meyer, pressing it briefly.

Suddenly life came back into him. Still standing on the wing, he waved to his colleagues. Marseille's face began recovering its relaxed appearance. Happiness, and relief, began to radiate from his countenance. He had survived another brush with death, and even cut the tail feathers of those last two enemy fighters.

He was lifted onto the ground. Finally he was able to break free and headed in the direction of the Geschwader command post to make his report.

From out of the hut came the Kommodore toward him in pilot's garb. He pushed his way through the crowd to Marseille and grasped the young pilot's hand in his, the hand of a pilot who had more than lived up to Neumann's expectations. A single glance told him: this young body is at the end of its rope, it only keeps going because of its unquenchable will to continue fighting.

"Thanks, Seille! That was great. But tomorrow I don't want to see you here anymore. Tomorrow you're flying back to Germany. No contradictions!", broke in the Kommodore as the young officer tried to interrupt. "I have orders which state you are to be give the Oak Leaves with Swords in Rastenburg by Hitler himself."

"Now, with all this fighting in Tobruk, Herr Major? When every plane is needed?" A deciding movement of the hand told Marseille that the matter was closed.





## CHAPTER X

# ATHOME

### Reception and Honors

**O**n that day, the 18th of June, as Marseille set out on his flight back to Germany, he became the 12th soldier in the German Wehrmacht to be awarded the Swords with Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross.

He had left Benghazi early that morning for Naples, resting in a recliner which the crewmen of the Ju 52 had set up for him as a bit of comfort for the long flight over water.

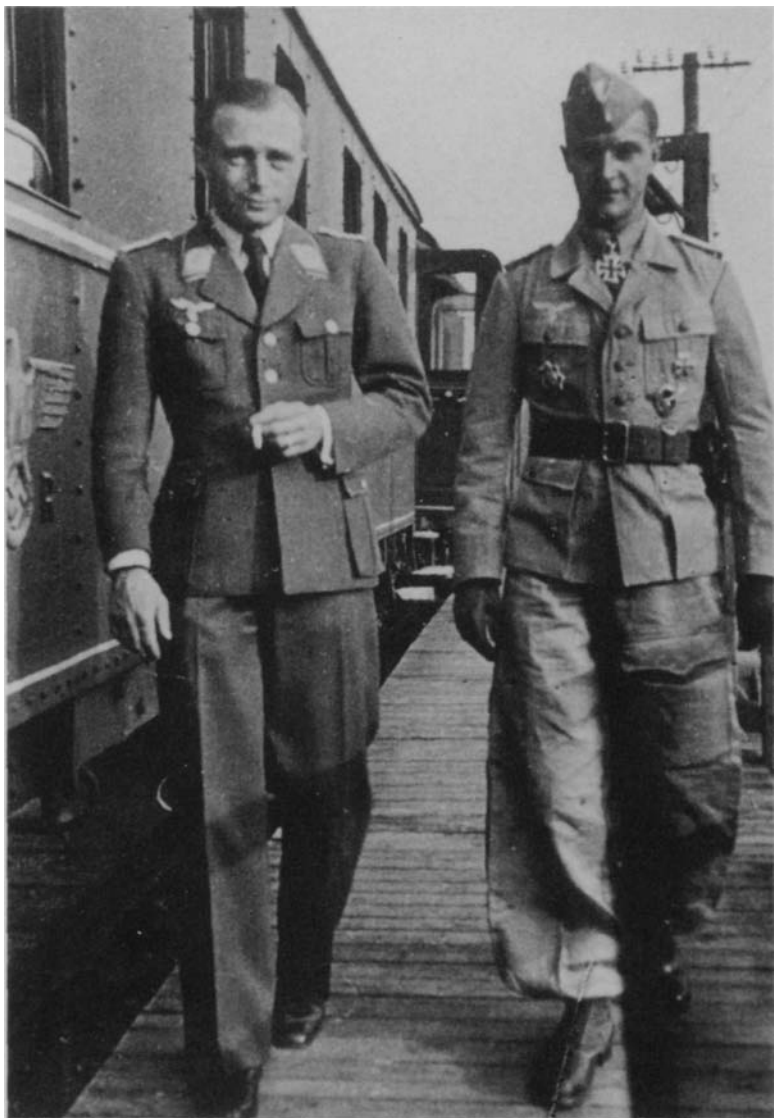
From Naples, his journey continued to Rome, and from there the next stop was Berlin, where the airplane landed on schedule at 1600 hrs at the Tempelhof Airport, touched down and taxied out across the smooth asphalt of the runway. It stopped in front of the barricade over which could be read in large letters: BERLIN - TEMPELHOF

As he later related to his friend Stahlschmidt, Marseille felt truly moved. He was home again. Slender and light on his feet he jumped out of the plane. A suitcase in the right hand, wearing a yellow tropical uniform, the white cap cocked defiantly to one side of his head. He didn't feel at all like a great hero as he was welcomed - despite the newspaper article he was shown by the men at the Benghazi airfield, where he had been forced to wait nearly 48 hours for a flight to Naples. He found the headlines in the paper more amusing than anything else. They read:

"Marseille the Hero - Victor in 100 Dogfights."

He had laughed about it. "I'm supposed to be a hero?", he had asked. "Me, a hero?" This was, according to him, nothing more than a joke.

The Weekly News stood ready as he stepped down onto Berlin soil. A film was made, showing Marseille's face radiate his usual youthful cheer. He greeted the reception committee and took a look at the title page of the magazines,



*On the way to Rastenburg to receive the Oak Leaves.*



which carried a full-length picture of him on the front. He preferred this caption over the one in the newspaper. It stated the following: **BERLIN IS PROUD OF HIM!**

And then he was once again in Berlin, in the city of his birth. People waved to him, calling out his name. And even the taxi driver who drove him home recognized him from the Weekly News broadcast. When Marseille tried to pay the man, he simply refused. So Marseille passed a pack of cigarettes to him.

That he was well-known in his own district was manifestly apparent by the hundreds of friends and acquaintances awaiting him along with his mother and fiancée. His mother was happier than all the others, for now she had her Jochen back - if only for a few weeks. People approached and asked him for autographs. It was a colorful festive atmosphere and Hans-Joachim Marseille relished it, knowing that he had not disappointed these many people.

### **Hitler, Göring and Goebbels**

Oberleutnant Marseille left Berlin for a few days and travelled to Rastenburg. There he stood opposite Hitler and received the high honor of the Swords from the Führer's hand.

Even he succumbed to the charisma of this man. He learned that Hitler, more than he had expected, was abreast on the events in the African combat theater.

Marseille was asked to tell about Africa, about his Geschwader and his missions. He made reference to the low numbers of their own fighters and the overabundance of the enemy planes. Hitler answered hesitantly. He indicated Russia, where the Wehrmacht had just launched another offensive. Every plane available is needed there, he explained, but he had plans for new planes in Africa in order to carry out the next offensive which would drive on to Cairo.

During dinner, which was spartan as usual for Hitler, the Führer chatted about Africa and mostly about Rommel, the Desert Fox, who had led his own Führer-Begleitbataillon during the Polish campaign. Marseille was amazed at the knowledge of this man, which seemed to penetrate down into the last detail of a subject.

Following the meal, Hitler excused himself from the young officer. For a long time he held Marseille's right hand in his own and held his gaze, almost studiously and as if saying a final goodbye.

Later Hans-Joachim Marseille related to his friend Stahlschmidt how this gaze told him that, despite reaching this achievement of 100 victories, he was not to stop per-



*In the Führer's headquarters in Rastenburg receiving the Oak Leaves from Hitler.*

forming his duty. This was what Marseille wanted, as did all the men of JG 27, the Desert Geschwader.

Then it was off to Karinhall in the Schorfheide, the hunting lodge of Reichsmarschall Goring. Marseille was astounded at the reception ceremony in his honor displayed by the Watch of the "General Goring" Regiment, and was accordingly impressed.

Those who had seen Hermann Goring sitting at Karinhall in the company of his pilots felt of the sincere and friendly nature exuding from his personality, yet not distracting from his sovereignty. Hermann Goring, the last commander of the famous Jagdgeschwader I "Freiherr von Richthofen", Pour-le-Merite pilot and a victor of 22 dogfights, was one of their own. His deep, strong voice carried with it tones of warmth and affection as he greeted Marseille. He took the arm of the young officer, who looked like a child next to the Reichsmarschall, and began walking with him through the park.

"We have a half an hour, Marseille, and we should make use of it", he said mischievously, like a schoolboy playing hookey. "It will surely do you some good to see something green again after all that desert sand."

He walked with the young flyer to the coach house and had his small hunting coach hitched up, in which the two pilots, side by side, rode through the beautiful and spacious park.

Marseille was very much impressed with his supreme commander, and felt from him a mutual sense of respect and warmth. He talked with that openness which so endeared him to everyone, yet which had caused him so many problems at the beginning of his career. Marseille discussed the problems of fighting in Africa and of life in this strange

combat theater: of ghiblis and mosquitoes, of flies and malaria and the jaundice affecting many of his colleagues. The salty water and the shortage of aircraft came up in conversation.

"I'll see to it", promised the Reichsmarschall "that the African theater will get all the needed supplies. Now, when Rommel is on the brink of taking Alexandria and Cairo, he needs to be getting all the help he can."

Then Marseille was asked to explain to his supreme commander what was involved in his unique tactic. He described the dive into the enemy's defensive circle and the lightning-fast reflexive shooting, underscoring everything with hand movements and gestures. He confessed to the Reichsmarschall that everything had been one fiasco after another at first.

"But you didn't give up, Marseille, and I like that about you."

Marseille accepted this compliment, for if Hermann Goring said that he had succeeded, then it was so.

The 30 minutes went by far too quickly. As he took leave of the Reichsmarschall, Goring took the young officer by both shoulders and said "Do well! And: Break a leg!"

Late that evening Hans-Joachim Marseille returned back to Berlin. The remainder of his leave time he spent traveling continually, so that neither his mother nor his bride-to-be saw much of him. Toward the end of his time in Berlin, he was also a guest of Dr. Josef Goebbels, the Reichspropagandaminister. Hans-Joachim Marseille drank coffee with the entire Goebbels family, then conversed with Goebbels until late into the evening. Goebbels soon discovered that the young Oberleutnant was an equal match, balancing out Goebbels' deeper knowledge and experience with an unflinching and natural sense of direct humor.

Goebbels later commented to his adjutant that Marseille had radiated everything a soldier could possess in terms of self-confidence and determination.

As Marseille departed, Dr. Goebbels said to him "You are a man of exceptional abilities and a soldier of the highest rank. See to it that you save yourself as a teacher for us and future generations."

"I'll try", responded Marseille, but he wasn't thinking of a teaching post for something like air combat tactics. Rather, his mind was on his continued flying operations as a pilot.

A short time later he found himself standing in the Berlin Rathaus, or city hall, directly across from the Oberbürgermeister. He entered his name into the Golden Book of the city and talked with several of the citizens who

were thronging about him. On the journey home he took the streetcar. The conductor naturally recognized him right away and paid for his fare out of his own pocket.

That evening he went with his mother to the cinema. This time he was wearing civilian clothes and wasn't stopped everywhere. The Weekly News showed a German fighter flying against a British enemy over the Channel. When the German, after a long duelling battle, finally managed to get on the enemy plane's tail and open fire, his tracers zipped past him harmlessly.

Forgetting his surroundings, Marseille suddenly jumped up.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire!", he shouted angrily.

One of the moviegoers in front of him turned around and, in a typically Berliner dialect, said: "What do you know about it, young man? You're certainly no Marseille."

Hans-Joachim Marseille fell back into his seat, smiling. His mother cast a mischievous glance in his direction and pressed his hand.

Oberleutnant Marseille very soon tired of the celebrations and the masses of people, and once in a while would disappear to one of the Berliner lakes. Twice he went hunting with his friends. That the young women hovered about him didn't disturb him in the least, just the opposite: he enjoyed it.

As he later told Stahlschmidt upon returning to Africa, one of the most pleasant experiences in Berlin was when he was with the Berliner Flieger-HJ, the Hitler Jugend group for budding pilots in Berlin. All the youth had appeared in their uniforms and listened as Hans-Joachim Marseille told of the situation in Africa, of his colleagues and his enemies. He talked about the rising sun and the beginnings of the ghiblis, the ancient cities on the coast and the cold nights, about the time that they had nearly drowned in the desert, and about the scrambles and Stuka escort missions against Bir Hacheim or Tobruk. It was natural for him to mention the effectiveness of the British defenses and pay the British pilots the respect they deserved. He told of his friend Stahlschmidt and their father figure Edu Neumann. Nor did he neglect "One-Two-Three" Schulz, either.

The youth wouldn't let him go until Marseille had given each of them a picture of himself with a personal autograph. Fortunately, "Presse-Hoffmann" had printed up several of these and all Marseille had to do was sign his name to each.

At the lower edge of the photo was the sentence which had become the young pilot's life motto: NEVER TURN BACK AND ALWAYS KEEP YOUR EYES FORWARD



### A Visit With Willy Messerschmitt

Shortly afterward Hans-Joachim Marseille was sitting across the desk from the famous aircraft designer Professor Willy Messerschmitt. The man who, in the form of the Bf 109, had provided the German Jagdwaffe, or fighter branch, with one of the most outstanding fighter planes in the world. One version of this plane held the world's piston engine speed record until 1969, reaching a top speed of 755.13 kmh.

In the bright, tall room with large windows overlooking the massive complex of buildings and warehouses that made up the Messerschmitt Werke, there developed a most in-depth discussion.

There, where everything was pushed to its outermost limits and the end of the road was the runway, where some of the most varied test models were constantly taking off to be put through their paces, Marseille was given the opportunity to inspect the elite Werke-HJ. Now, however, he found himself seated across from the all-powerful Professor

*Marseille after being awarded the Swords, seen relating the progress of the air war in Africa to a group of Hitlerjugend Flieger. He had formerly been a member of this organization.*



Messerschmitt. Marseille related his experiences with the various Bf 109 models up to and including the "Fritz", which he now flew in Africa as "Yellow 14."

The professor listened intently, several times interrupting him with questions pertaining to the flying characteristics of the Bf 109. Brief, precise and to the point, these questions were answered with responses just as precise, for they were matters which concerned the "bird" Marseille flew.

Both men sensed the mutual bond of flyers. The one, as an engineer and designer, worked to create the best aircraft possible, while the other, as a pilot, strove to fly it to the best of his ability.

Separated by their ages and a generation apart, they nevertheless had the same goal in mind. Willy Messerschmitt had been building the Bf 109 since 1934.

Marseille told the designer how he operated the aircraft in war, pushing it to its limits with his own original combat tactics. He explained the problems and suggested improvements, which Messerschmitt noted down.

When Willy Messerschmitt asked if Marseille ever came close to giving up this tactic - in light of the extreme challenge it presented - and fly his plane like all the others, Marseille nodded in agreement.

"More so, when my crate had been shot to pieces and I'd be forced to belly it in into the sand. My superiors warned me to cease this crazy flying. But then I said to myself that one day it would all come together if I didn't spare any resource necessary which would enable me to suddenly turn from a weaving dogfight into a diving attack. Then the most important thing was to ensure that the aircraft didn't become overstressed and come apart in the air."

The effects of airflow, the gun installation and the wind were additional themes which were discussed in-depth. Willy Messerschmitt realized that here sat a professional opposite him, a man who noted everything, who oversaw every tiny movement of his airplane and had those movements completely under control. This was an officer who knew the design of the Bf 109 and, accordingly, could pass judgement on and exploit its flying capabilities to the fullest.

In closing, the professor asked "Are you certain now, that you have everything under control?"

Marseille nodded, "I've fully integrated all the motions in air combat and with difficult maneuvers. It begins as I close with the enemy. I've now come so far that I can keep control of the Bf 109 in any situation, even in the tightest turns and at the lowest possible speeds. In combat I make all my motions unconsciously. This lets me concentrate fully



*Flugkapitän Wendel, Oblt. Josef Pöhs of 5./JG 27, and Marseille during a visit to Messerschmitt/Augsburg in July 1942.*





*Reception committee at Messerschmitt/Augsburg.*



*Marseille before his flight at Messerschmitt/Augsburg.*

on the attack and fly my plane as though I had wings."

Following the discussion, the professor and his guest took a tour of the plant. Marseille saw the many hands at their work. He went into the final assembly hall, where the Bf 109's sub-assemblies were put together, shook a foreman's hand here, an apprentice's hand there, and finally concluded in the design offices.

At that moment a plane was coming in to land at the airfield.

"That's Wendel, Oberleutnant Marseille. We should go outside. If you like, you can fly the latest model of the Bf 109."

They hurried out, were driven over to the airfield and there met Flugkapitän Fritz Wendel, who held the world's absolute record for a piston engine aircraft when he flew the Me 209 V-1 on 26 April 1939 to a speed of 755.138 kmh. (This record, by the way, is still registered in the FAI list for piston engine aircraft.)

"Hello, Marseille", Wendel greeted his fellow pilot. "I'm happy to see you here. If you'd like to fly my plane, there she stands."

Fritz Wendel pointed to the new prototype of the Bf 109 G-10. Marseille hadn't flown for several weeks, but he had been waiting for this moment and, in addition to autographed photos to be handed out his briefcase also contained his flying scarf - a commodity without which he never climbed into a plane.

"May I?", Marseille asked, turning to the professor.

"But of course, we'd be delighted."

Marseille was already tying the scarf around his neck, then with the assistance of the ground crewman climbed into the aircraft and taxied out for takeoff. The starter flag dropped and the men at the edge of the field watched as Marseille launched himself into the air, how he climbed and dove, making barrel rolls and turns and chandelles. Dropping to within a few meters of the ground, he pulled up again and with a roll transferred to horizontal flight.

As Marseille confidently brought his plane down and landed, loud cheering broke out across the airfield, which was joined by the voices of Willy Messerschmitt and Fritz Wendel. They had witnessed here a performance by one of the truly great masters.

"Now I know who I'm giving this plane to", said Wendel. "Thank you, Marseille, that was a masterpiece of flying."

Marseille spent the last few days of his leave with his fiancée, Hanneliese Küppers, a teacher. He managed to procure a ticket for her to accompany him on a portion of his journey back to Africa - as far as the Italian capital.

On August 6th Marseille had received a message which filled him with elation. It came from the Italian Headquarters in Rome and stated:

"This day the Duce has awarded you the Medaglia d'Oro."

In the accompanying certificate, Marseille was praised with the following words:

"He is a pilot of great abilities and incomparable experience, of ice-cold, admirable and distinct courage and a keen desire for combat in the skies over the Mediterranean and Africa."

Marseille and his bride-to-be were received by the Duce in Rome where Italy's highest honor was bestowed on the young German pilot on 13 August 1942 by Mussolini.

The following is an impression the Duce left with Marseille:

"He kissed me on both cheeks. Something I didn't like, since he'd shaved poorly."

### General Overview

During the time Hans-Joachim Marseille spent at home, the men of JG 27 continued to fight their crucial battles. Rommel's push in the direction of El Alamein meant that the fighter units were constantly in operation, either as escort fighters or operating as top cover. III/JG 53 weathered a British bombing raid on their field during the night of 20 June, losing seven Bf 109s destroyed on the ground.

Air battles took place at various times over Gambut, during which Lt. Schroer scored a single.

On the 24th of this month the Squadrigli of the Regia Aeronautica were transferred from Martuba to Gambut. One squadron of Gruppo 159 was moved to El Adem to be closer to events. On 26 June Lt. Schroer was twice successful in bringing down enemy planes. Lt. Stahlschmidt scored three times in the space of ten minutes on this date.

Marsa Matruk was bombed into submission by Stukas. 23 Bf 109s of JG 27 flew escort on this mission, during which Lt. Körner shot down three planes and Lt. Stahlschmidt flamed another.

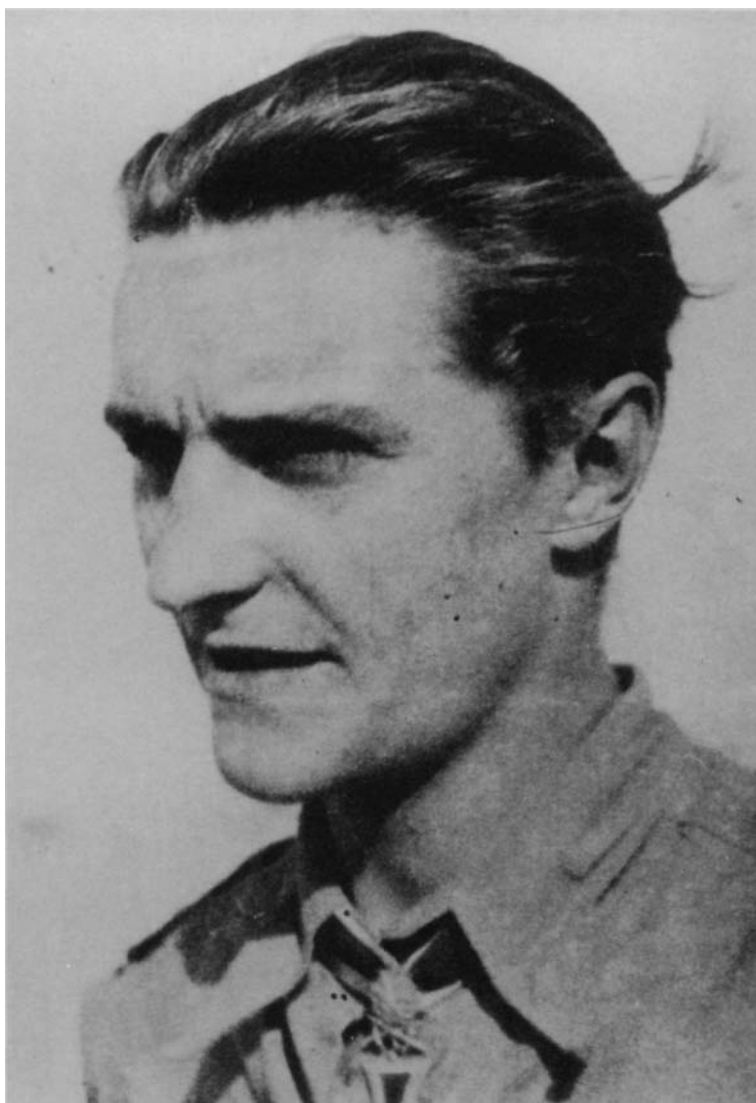
The next day saw Stahlschmidt continue with his string of victories. Hptm. Franzisket also was involved in the day's events, scoring a single kill. On the 28th of June Fw. Steinhausen scored four victories in a single day, a first for this budding pilot.

July brought relentless air battles against their powerful enemy. The unit's kill ratio was improved by Lt. Körner, Lt.



*Marseille playing tennis with his bride-to-be, Hanneliese Küppers.*





*Marseille upon return to Africa.*

Stahlschmidt, Lt. von Lieres, Steinhausen, Schroer and Franzisket.

Oblt. Sinner was also entered into the victor's list with multiple kills, and finally there was Oblt. Rödel with two credits to round out the scoring in July. He was also the one who logged no less than four of the kills on the 19th of July.

On 31 July the first American fighter units showed up in theater, with the arrival of the 57th Fighter Group in Palestine. Up to this point in time Lt. Stahlschmidt had succeeded in bringing down 25 enemy planes in July alone. He wrote to his mother:

"We've given a good accounting of ourselves against the enemy's aircraft lately. I've often been able to neatly slide in among them unnoticed. I understand that one of these times I can get caught. But I can also get caught even if I'm not so keen to push it home." (see Stahlschmidt, Hilde: *Briefe meines Sohnes Hans-Arnold*.)

On 1 August Stahlschmidt continued his scoring with two kills. On that day Flight Lieutenant Marshall left his 250 Squadron to return to England. He had 16 kills to his credit in Africa.

Oblt. Bendert and Ofw. Sawallisch each scored a kill on the morning of 8 August, then continued their tallies that afternoon with yet another kill apiece. Two days later Oblt. Bendert claimed two more enemy planes. On the following day Oblt. Homuth, now the Gruppenkommandeur of I/JG 27, shot down two of the enemy's number. Lt. Stahlschmidt survived two dogfights on the 16th of August, besting both of his opponents.

On August 19th Ofw. Erwin Sawallisch set out on a routine maintenance flight from which he never returned. His body was discovered on the 20th of August washed up on the beach. Uffz. Just was taken prisoner by the British on 29 August near El Alamein when he was forced to bail out of his stricken plane.

The most successful pilots in August were Oblt. Bendert with 23 and Ofw. Sawallisch with 18 victories, followed by Fw. Stiegler with 12 and Oblt. Wögl with 10 kills.

### **Marseille's Return**

When Oblt. Marseille returned to Africa on the 23rd of August, he found that 3 Staffel had completely changed. His former sometime wingman, Kugelbauer, had been laid to rest in the desert earth near El Daba. Pfeffer and Berben had perished even before him. But his assistant, Lt. Hoffmann, also had good news to report. Including the fact that

Stahlschmidt, with his 25 kills in July, was just shy of being the next Knight's Cross recipient and that Schroer was also nearing this mark-

Marseille also found that his tent had changed, too. It had become more homey and was now furnished with a bar. A music cabinet rounded out the additions. Along the tent's left side were three tables, already laid out for a meal. At the rear of the tent there was a man-sized opening leading into the adjoining sleeping tent of the pilot.

"This is the best! Only one thing's missing - a Negro should be standing behind the bar in a snow-white jacket."

After a bit of searching a barkeeper was found by chance in the person of Corporal Mathew Letulu. The story that he was a factotum for a missionary from the Transvaal is simply not true. What is true is that on the morning of 21 June 1942 he was taken by the Germans from Tobruk as a prisoner of war. He was a member of the South African contingent in the fortress, which was to have been defended by General Klopper.

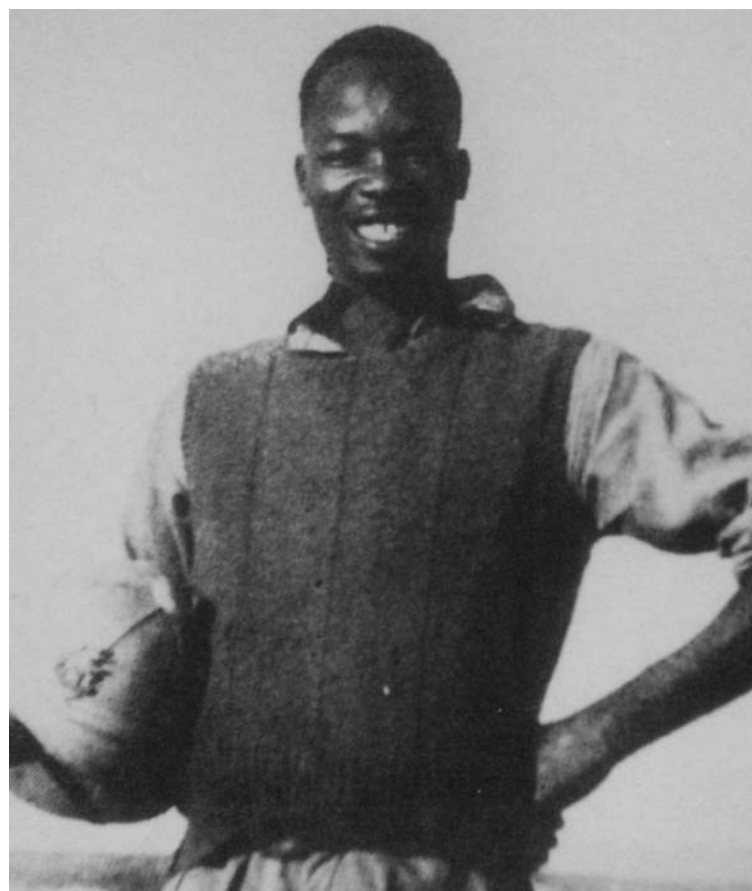
At first Mathias, as he was called, was a volunteer driver in 3 Staffel. Then he advanced to a helper in 3 Staffel's club-casino, where he took a particular liking to Marseille and became his servant.

After Marseille's death Hauptmann Ludwig Franzisket took the loyal African in, and Mathias in turn became his domestic helper. Mathias remained with the Gruppe even after Franzisket was forced to bail out whereby he, too, struck the vertical stabilizer, shattering a leg in the process. After Franzisket's return he continued serving this pilot in Tunisia, Sicily, and finally in Greece.

By the summer of 1944 the situation there had grown critical, with a British invasion of the Greek continent imminent. The chance had come to "smuggle" Mathias into one of the hastily established POW camps, where he could then be "liberated" by the British.

Franzisket planned this coup together with Hptm. Buchholz. Mathias became Mathew again and was a corporal in the South African Division. Everything went off without a hitch. He was set free by British troops in September of 1944 and allowed to return home at the end of hostilities.

By coincidence, former members of JG 27 learned that Mathias was still alive. They immediately sent him an invitation, paid for the journey and other expenses, and finally, at the tenth reunion of the Deutsches Afrikakorps in the fall of 1984, were once again reunited with their old comrade. The former pilots were elated to see him and invitations rained from all around. The following words, spoken in German as a tribute to Hans-Joachim Marseille by the cor-



*Mathias, as he was known to everyone in JG 27.*



*Marseille and Mathias.*





*Prior to takeoff in September 1942, which turned out to be the most successful month for Marseille.*

poral at the happy conclusion of his odyssey, give some insight into the bond which had united Letulu with his German friend:

"Hauptmann Marseille was a great man and a person always willing to lend a helping hand. He was always full of humor and friendly. And: he was very good to me."

Back in the Staffel's tent, Marseille selected a record from the suitcase that had survived the journey from Rome and laid it on the turntable. The "Rhumba Azul" rang out, first heard by the men a long time ago in the Italian officer's club in Treviso. Now it would be played more and more often, becoming the favorite of Marseille and his Staffel.

Marseille reported his return to Kommodore Neumann, dropped in and greeted his friend Stahlschmidt, then all three dined together that evening. The Turbiya airfield, which was now their temporary home and a good location for attacks on El Alamein, was left in peace from enemy attacks over the next few days.

Late in the evening of this festive day Stahlschmidt, Franzisket, Remmer and von Lieres met together in the tent of 3 Staffel. Marseille learned in conversation with Remmer

that he and his Schwarm had put in an appearance over Cairo the previous day.

The next morning Marseille drove out to his Staffel to meet with his two ground crewmen and Fw. Hennig in the dispersal area. Hennig reported that Yellow 14 was ready for operations. Gefr. Neumann, his clerk responsible for writing down the combat reports, was given the laconic instructions to prepare himself for a lot of work in the near future.

Lt. Hoffmann, who had been at work in the bunker, came out into the open and officially turned the Staffel back over to Marseille. There had been absolutely no activity to report in the last few days, to which Marseille responded humorously:

"If nothing happens over the next few days I'll just have to shoot myself down!"

But this concern would very soon prove to be baseless. Nevertheless, the last few days of August played quietly out until leading into that month which would become the high point in the career of Hans-Joachim Marseille.

On 20 August JG 27 had occupied the following airfields:

HQ JG 27 with 2 Bf 109s - Sanyet Quotaifiya  
 II/JG 27 with 24 Bf 109s - Sanyet Quotaifiya  
 I/JG 27 with 23 Bf 109s - Turbiya  
 III/JG 27 with 10 Bf 109s - Haggag Quasaba  
 (as fighter-bombers)

JG 27 had a total of 83 aircraft at its disposal during this time. In addition there were:

III/JG 53 with 24 Bf 109s - Haggag Quasaba  
 Jagdkommando Kreta with 3 Bf 109s - Crete  
 III/ZG 26 with 46 Bf 110 Cs - Castelli  
 10/ZG 26 with 7 Do 17s and Ju 88s - Barce

This meant that there was a total of 165 aircraft in Africa.

On the 20th of August a total of 97 were operationally fit.

Stahlschmidt and Hptm. Homuth, the latter having just returned off of leave, each shot down a single plane on 29 August. On the 30th of that month Uffz. Ferdinand was himself shot down and made a prisoner of war.



*September 1942: with the Swords still as an Oberleutnant.*



## CHAPTER XI

# A STAR RISES - & FALLS

### Marseille's Series

**O**n the 31st of August 1942 the desert war began anew. At the first crack of dawn Rommel's offensive, the advance preparations of which had begun during the night, began its mighty roll. At 1020 hrs the first Stuka missions took place, escorted by several aircraft from I/JG 27 and Italian MC 202 fighters. Three others of the Gruppe's aircraft also were added to the escort mission. This meant that the Germans had an easy advantage over the eight Hurricanes which suddenly made their appearance.

Marseille's victory series began. He flew directly to the circling enemies and dove on them in his old familiar style. His first victim fell within a few seconds and showed Marseille that, despite the months of forced inactivity, he had lost nothing of his expertise.

While the stricken aircraft plunged to the ground, Marseille pulled back on the stick and raced upward, hardly paying attention to the congratulations of his comrades over the intercom. He pushed directly into the whirlwind of the enemy and, a minute after the first Hurricane fell, Marseille sent another one to join it.

When Marseille flew his last mission of the month on the evening of August 31st, he came across one of the newly-arrived Spitfires and shot the outstanding fighter down after a short weaving dogfight. He had announced his presence back on the front lines with three kills in a single day.

The 1st of September dawned, a day which would see Marseille become a true legend. Generalfeldmarschall Rommel was in trouble. The Panzerarmee Afrika had become bogged down in a heavily-sown mine field and was under constant bombardment.



Around 0800 hrs Marseille and Hptm. Franzisket, the Kapitän of 1 Staffel, were standing together near Yellow 14. Marseille was explaining to his older colleague about the previous day's duel with the Spitfire. The Kommodore came over and joined in, and a lively discussion soon ensued. During all this, the ground crewmen of Yellow 14 got the plane ready for takeoff. Marseille excused himself from the conversation and went over to his aircraft, which was reported to him as being ready for operations.

The first planes were already taxiing out for takeoff and, beginning at 0856 hrs the 15 combat ready aircraft of I Gruppe started their takeoff rolls. The mission for the day was Stuka escort and as indirect fighter protection ten Bf 109s from III/JG 53 were also provided. Ten additional planes from III/JG 27 were added to the number of German planes in the air that morning. This meant that all the fighter planes which Fliegerführer Afrika had at its disposal were airborne.

As had so often happened before, Marseille was the first to sight the enemy. He counted a total of 16 enemy planes. On this mission his wingman was a pilot new to 3 Staffel, Oblt. Schlang.

*High-class "coffee circle." From left: Kōnnecke, Schroer, Neumann, Rodel, Vollmer.*



At 0926 hrs Marseille had already moved into attack position. This time he jumped the enemy fighter from below and behind, pulling up into a steep climb and firing from close quarters. The only thing left for Oblt. Schlang to do was notate the time of Marseille's first kill.

Marseille immediately fell upon a second enemy plane, which exploded in the air at 0928 hrs.

As the Stukas finished dropping their bombs, one of the fast Spitfires slipped from below, attempting to come in from underneath Yellow 14. Marseille spotted it immediately and dropped steeply downward, firing as he passed by. This foe, too, fell like a rock toward the desert sand below.

Only a few minutes later six Spitfires bounced Marseille and Schlang from a higher altitude. Marseille let them approach to within 150 meters, then broke his plane off sharply to the left, out of their line of fire. As the Spitfires raced past the two Germans, Marseille made another sharp turn in behind them and shot down one of their number at 0939 hrs.

As was later determined by his armorer during reloading, with this kill Marseille had used 80 rounds from his cannon and 240 machine gun rounds for the entire morning's combat action.

Marseille approached the airfield by wagging his wings four times. Oblt. Schlang, who was expected to learn from Marseille's experience, had been given his first unforgettable lesson by this pilot.

With utmost speed the planes were turned around again, refueled and rearmed, ready for another mission. The next operation was Stuka escort to Alam Haifa, where the enemy had turned a ridge into a fortress bristling with guns. The DAK had ground to a halt before its massive fortifications.

Even before reaching the target a bomber unit was seen coming toward the Germans, escorted by 30 enemy fighters. A squadron of eight Curtiss planes threw themselves at the German pilots.

Marseille and two of his Staffel mates pressed on toward the enemy and cut off their escape route. The Curtisses formed up into a Lufbery circle. This, of course, didn't prevent Marseille from attacking. Making his approach from above, he fired from short range and in the split second when he was at the proper deflection angle, destroying another unlucky enemy plane.

Before the defensive circle could return fire, Marseille had struck again. This Curtiss, too, fell away burning. These two kills took place at 1054 hrs and 1055 hrs.

The circle then broke up into individual two-plane elements, which then attempted to escape in a northerly direction. The Bf 109s gave chase and Marseille succeeded in





*This page and opposite: three formal views of Marseille with Swords.*



catching up to the trailing aircraft and shooting it down. In doing so, he spotted his next quarry and corrected his flight path to intercept. It only took another short minute before this Curtiss was dropping out of the sky, shot to pieces. A short cannon salvo and the fifth plane was torn apart.

Marseille saw one of the enemy planes attempting to get on the tail of a German, and in a neck-breaking sharp turn pounced upon the British plane and shot it off the tail of his comrade.

It was beyond Oblt. Schlang's abilities to accurately follow the individual actions of this dramatic air battle. All he saw were the phenomenal dives, the sharp turns and rolls and the blinding flash from the guns - followed by the enemy planes as they fell burning from the sky.

After the sixth Curtiss had been shot down, Marseille directed his Schwarm back up to altitude. Not a minute had gone by before he spied another group of Curtiss fighters flying away on an easterly heading.

Like an eagle diving onto its prey, Marseille pounced on the enemy formation and with a burst from all his guns sent yet another Curtiss spinning earthward. As Oblt. Schlang unsuccessfully attacked a straggler, Marseille made a steep split S and set himself up behind the plane, finishing off Schlang's aborted attack. In doing so, he had bested eight enemy planes in the time frame from 1055 hrs to 1105 hrs. Lt. Remmer was also successful with a single credit.

That Marseille was able to carry out this and other attacks without himself being shot down is attributable to the protection given him by his Schwarm. Without this cover, he would not have been able to survive an attack by enemies pressing in from all sides as he plunged and twisted in their midst. This should be brought to light at this time in order to give credit to all those who were not as high-scoring, yet who nevertheless assisted greatly in the victories of pilots such as Marseille.

The cheering was deafening as Marseille flew two passes over his airfield to ensure he could waggle his wings the full eight times. The shouting suddenly stopped, however, and everyone held their breath as Yellow 14's left tire blew out when landing. Marseille was nevertheless able to bring the crate, skidding and sliding, to a smooth rolling stop.

But he was forced to sit out the next mission. Kommodore was speechless as everyone else offered their congratulations. He embraced the young flyer, and as his eyes looked probing into Marseille's face he saw how much the fighting was beginning to take its toll. Marseille was totally exhausted. What kept him going was his unbending desire to continue flying and continue winning.

"Now you've got to take a break, Seille", said Neumann finally, when he could speak. Marseille nodded and walked over to his command bunker. There he collapsed into a chair and sat for a long time with eyes closed.

After dinner he crawled onto his field cot. Stahlschmidt, who had wanted to pay him a visit, silently crept away again. Mathias, the young black who worshipped his boss, now guarded his sleep and shooed any additional visitors off.

During this time Marseille's Italian brothers-at-arms were not inactive. They temporarily "stole" the Staffelfkapitän's command car and painted on it "OTTO" - eight, in large letters in recognition of the eight kills Marseille had scored on the day's second mission.

Early in the afternoon Marseille awoke again, feeling relaxed and ready for a practical joke, which he now set into motion. He walked over to the telephone, picked up the receiver and was connected with Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt, who had watch that day.

"Servus, Herr Leitnant", he said in a perfect Austrian dialect. "This is Pilot Finkelhuber. I've been transferred to Eahna. Are you gonna pick me up or send a car?"

At the other end of the line there was a few seconds of speechless amazement. Then Stahlschmidt's voice droned loudly through the receiver:

"Man, Finkelhuber, have you gone nuts? I'll help you on your way!", he answered, boiling with rage. Finkelhuber, who apparently missed the veiled threat, answered:

"That'd be right nice, Herr Leitnant. I've got a lot of baggage with me."

That was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Stahlschmidt's entire body became red with anger.

"Where are you at, Finkelhuber. I'll light your way home for you."

"Thanks a lot, Herr Leitnant. I'm in Africa!", answered Finkelhuber and hung up.

The guffaws of laughter from the men of 3 Staffel were unfortunately out of Stahlschmidt's earshot. But when he came into the Staffel tent a short time later and saw all the grinning faces, Stahlschmidt knew he'd fallen for another of his friend's pranks.

"Pilot Finkelhuber", he said, turning to his friend. "That was a good job. Dismissed!"

"Danke, Herr Leitnant", responded Marseille, and ended the intermezzo.

In the meantime the Staffel painter had added the additional kill markings to Yellow 14's rudder. Now, beneath the oak wreath indicating 100 victories there were an additional 16 vertical stripes.



When Marseille's Staffel returned after escorting 50 Stukas, Marseille could be seen standing at the edge of the airfield. His mechanics had repaired Yellow 14 during the interlude, enabling Marseille to participate in the day's fourth mission. Ten Bf 109s from II Gruppe and an additional eleven from I Gruppe began rolling down the field at 1706 hrs. Marseille took off at the head of his Schwarm, which formed up on either side of him once airborne. This mission involved escorting Ju 88s of KLG 1 to their target at Imayid.

While II Gruppe had run into enemy opposition as early as over Deir el Raghaf, I Gruppe found themselves up against 15 Curtiss and Hurricane fighters by 1747 hrs. At low altitude the two opposing formations raced head on toward each other. At 1745 hrs the men monitoring the radio communications at Marseille's home airfield had heard his voice report: "Elbe 1 to all: keep alert!"

Once again, Marseille was the first to spot the enemy. Two minutes later he was attacking. It was at 1747 hrs when the first enemy plane was sent down in flames. From this point onward Marseille's kills occurred at a steady one-minute pace: 1748 hrs, 1749 hrs, 1750 hrs and then another at 1753 hrs. Within six minutes Marseille - protected by his Schwarm - had shot down five British fighters.

During this wild tumult in the skies Steinhausen and Stahlschmidt both scored twice and von Lieres brought down a single enemy plane. The latter shot down the last plane of the engagement at 1754 hrs, meaning that the entire dog-fight had lasted a total of seven minutes.

Hans-Joachim Marseille had shot down 17 enemy planes in three missions on this date.

One of the "black men", a member of the ground personnel, related how the battle was followed by these men huddled in a group around the radio vehicle.

"We had gathered in a group around the open door of the radio vehicle. At 1744 hrs the Kommodore showed up. His cap was pushed way back on his head and waved Hptm. Gerserick away when he tried to report to him. He leaned against the doorframe in the entryway to the comms vehicle."

"Have you got a report from them yet?"

"They reported Curtiss planes approaching, Herr Major!"

"Suddenly the loudspeaker crackled alive, then Marseille's voice could be made out: 'Keep alert!' he called to his companions. It was 1747 hrs when an excited voice called out: 'Congratulations, Elbe 1!'"

"'He's at it again!' called a voice from the crowd. Major Neumann took his cap off and wiped it across his brow. He

knew that this was Marseille's 13th kill of the day."

"A furious confusion of voices echoed in the receiver. Warnings, claims of kills, orders and shouts became all jumbled together. Exactly one minute after the first report, another call by his Rottenflieger."

"A hit, Jochen, he's going down!"

"In between was Marseille's cool and collected voice: 'Look out, Elbe 4!'

"Again, a minute later there was another set of congratulations, indicating the 15th kill of the day for Marseille."

"At 1750 hrs the next kill. Major Neumann lit a cigarette and then, three minutes later-which seemed like three hours - Schlang's next call:"

"Five, Jochen, the fifth one is down!"

"The Kommodore shook his head and disappeared into the comms van. He probably had the same fears as we did, that this couldn't go on forever and that our Jochen's number would soon be up."

"'They're coming back!' called out the radioman. The Staffel painter grabbed for his stencil, ready to paint on the next kills onto the rudder of Marseille's plane."

"Thirty minutes later the first planes came into view. Just before the airfield they all peeled off to give Jochen room."

"Yellow 14 flew low over the field. Its wings wagged three times as it passed, turned back and waggled twice more. Now we had it officially."

Shortly afterward the wheels touched down onto the desert soil. The plane taxied out and from all sides we ran over to where it had come to rest. Major Neumann ran the foot race with us. He pushed his way through the fastest ones. His face was beaming as he wordlessly took Marseille's hand and shook it.

"That will get you the Diamonds, Seille", he said with feeling. And he wasn't wrong, for on 2 September Hans-Joachim Marseille was awarded the Diamonds to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords - the fourth to receive this award, after Mölders, Galland and Gollob. The fifth recipient would also be a pilot, Hermann Graf, before the Desert Fox, Erwin Rommel, would receive the highest German decoration for bravery.

That evening Marseille went with his colleagues to the Marabu desert cinema. The film being shown was "Dance With the Kaiser", but Marseille would not be seeing much of it. Hardly having sat down, he was summoned to the command post, where a long distance call awaited him.

"Marseille picked up the receiver and reported. On the other end of the line was Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring:



*Marseille relaxed and smiling.*

"Oberleutnant Marseille, I would like to personally congratulate you on your 17 victories. How many enemy were shot down altogether today?"

"26, Herr Feldmarschall", Marseille answered.

"Take good care of yourself. You'll be hearing from the top here very shortly."

Kesselring was referring to the presentation of the Diamonds by Hitler. He himself had already seen the recommendation by Major Neumann, approved it and forwarded it on to Berlin.

On 4 September the Wehrmacht news report carried the following:

"Oberleutnant Marseille, Staffelkapitän in a Jagdgeschwader, scored his 125th kill on 2 September after beating 16 opponents during fighting the previous day." (The tally would later be corrected to 17.)

Since a few experts and enemy fighter pilots doubted the veracity of these claims, maintaining that there wasn't even 26 aircraft in the air, here is the tally sheet from 1 September, which was verified by the enemy:

Oblt. Sinner 0659 hrs, a Curtiss, near El Taqua.

" 0701 hrs, a Curtiss, near El Taqua.

Hptm. Rödel 07-hrs, an unknown make.

Oblt. Marseille 0826 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

0828 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

" 0835 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

" 0839 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

" 1055 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

" 1056 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

" 1058 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

1059 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

" 1101 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

1103 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

" 1105 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Alam Haifa.

Lt. Remmer 1112 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of El Alamein.

Ofw. Steinhausen 1746 hrs, a Hurricane, SE of Imayid.

Lt. Stahlschmidt 1748 hrs, a Hurricane, SE of Imayid.

Oblt. Marseille 1747 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

" 1748 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

1749 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

" 1750 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

Lt. Stahlschmidt 1750 hrs, a Hurricane, SE of Imayid.

Oblt. Marseille 1753 hrs, a Curtiss, SE of Imayid.

Lt. von Lieres 1754 hrs, a Hurricane, SE of Imayid.

Unfortunately, a look at the official records of this day was not available to the German side at the time. Nevertheless,

it can be stated with certainty that the claims made by Marseille and the entire JG 27 were correct. No one was given credit for a kill without at least one eyewitness confirming it.

The 2nd of September saw Marseille's Staffel once again in operation. It was a Stuka escort mission into the area of Imayid for both I and II Gruppe, while III Gruppe was assigned a free ranging fighter patrol mission.

At 0916 hrs both Schwärme of I Gruppe engaged British fighters escorting a formation of 18 bombers. Marseille, as usual, was the first to attack, shooting down the first enemy at 0917 hrs in a direct attack. One minute later he sent a second plane plummeting to earth. At 1024 hrs he succeeded in snuffing out yet a third victim following several brief duels. It was a Lieutenant Stuart, who was able to take to his parachute in time.

As Marseille flew recce escort with two planes from his HQ's Schwarm, they came upon a large formation of roughly 40 Kittyhawks. Marseille, protected at his rear by his two comrades, flew directly at this group. Cutting like a knife through the formation, he shot down a Kittyhawk on his first pass. Marseille then pulled up, while on his tail three or four enemy planes made a futile attempt to follow him. But they weren't fast enough and were stopped by the bullets of Marseille's two guardian angels. Continuing his climb, Marseille went over into a tight chandelle and shot down a second Kittyhawk. It was 1621 hrs on that day as the fifth enemy plane fell to Marseille's guns.

On 3 September the 8th Army launched a counteroffensive of its own, pushing out of Alam Haifa and forcing the troops of the DAK back. Fortunately for the DAK the 2nd New Zealand Division became bogged down in deep sand and couldn't cut Rommel off as had been planned.

By using freie Jagd tactics, the Fliegerführer Afrika attempted to carry out GFM Kesselring's directive for "stopping the enemy bomber force."

Beginning at 0808 hrs the bombing campaign of the Royal Air Force began with an attack by 18 Bostons and three B-25s, escorted by 15 Kittyhawks and eight P-40 F models. Eight of the fast-moving Spitfires flew top cover while an additional 24 Hurricanes conducted a free ranging fighter sweep of their own.

With 14 aircraft I/JG 27 flew out to engage these formations. During the following dogfight of the aces Stahlschmidt was able to score three times, as did Marseille. Marseille's kills came at 0820 hrs, 0823 hrs and 0829 hrs.

But this was not to be the end of the day's successes, for at 1548 hrs two Schwärme of I/JG 27 took off again on an-



other fighter sweep. Four minutes later this group was in pursuit of two two-ship British fighter elements.

The first contest of wills with the enemy took place south of Imayid, during which Marseille was twice victorious, at 1610 hrs and 1608 hrs. A third foe was shot down by Stahlschmidt at 1612 hrs, and four minutes later this pilot scored again.

While this battle was raging, a flight of Hurricanes took to the air. When Marseille sighted these new adversaries, he, Steinhausen and Remmer flew high over the formation, circled once and pounced from out of the sun onto the planes of 7 Squadron. During the first attack four of the enemy aircraft were shot down, of which Steinhausen accounted for two. Remmer and Marseille were successful with one apiece.

Marseille had once again sent down six enemy planes in one day.

On 4 September, as Panzerarmee Afrika was disengaging from the enemy forces, Marseille stood down. The next day, however, saw I Gruppe take off at 1000 hrs, a few hours after II Gruppe, which was flying a freie Jagd. I Gruppe's mission was to escort Stuka dive bombers. There were a total of 39 fighters in the air, of which 14 were from I Gruppe and another 19 from II Gruppe.

During this mission Hans-Joachim Marseille scored four kills between 1048 hrs and 1100 hrs, all of them being Curtiss

*Marseille paying a visit to the Italians. His Italian friends show him a new aircraft prior to its test flight.*



fighter-bombers. Lt. Stahlschmidt added two more victories to his own account.

The next day saw Marseille again operating at his finest. The first day's scoring, however, went to Lt. von Lieres, who overpowered four enemy planes early in the morning. Ofw. Steinhausen, Uffz. Becker, Fw. Keppler and Uffz. Winkler each shot down one of the enemy.

It was namely the 40th kill for Ofw. Steinhausen. However, the young flyer was not to return from this successful mission alive.

Around noontime 28 Bf 109s from JG 27 flew another escort mission for the Stukas. I Gruppe assumed the direct escort role, using nine of their planes. 14 additional aircraft of II Gruppe flew extended escort and the III/JG 53 flew an advance fighter sweep with two Schwärme ahead of the main formation to ward off any enemy fighters before reaching the Stukas.

When 20 Curtiss fighters were reported southwest of El Alamein, the nine Bf 109s of I Gruppe immediately began an attack. Marseille was in the lead and scored his first kill at 1803 hrs. Eleven minutes later he bounced an enemy swarm from above and shot down two more planes, one at 1814 hrs and the other at 1816 hrs. Another four minutes went by before he scored again, this time following a lengthy dogfight. As his burning opponent fell tumbling toward the earth, one of its wings broke away. Four kills were the result of the day's activity.

At 1825 hrs Stahlschmidt also scored, beating his 59th enemy south of Hammam.

The 7th of September dawned as any other. A Schwarm including Lt. von Lieres and Lt. Stahlschmidt had taken off on a freie Jagd that morning. Southeast of El Alamein they were discovered by Spitfires and came under attack. As one of the planes from the Schwarm landed in Quotaifiya at 1540 hrs, the pilot reported that he was involved with the others in combat with Spitfires. Where the other pilots had gone to, he had no idea. A few minutes later news was received that Lt. von Lieres had made a crash landing in friendly territory and was not injured. Now only Stahlschmidt was missing. He was missing in action and continued to remain so. His fate remains unknown to this day.

After over 400 combat missions in Africa and 59 victories, he had crashed somewhere in the African desert. On 3 January 1944 he posthumously became the 365th recipient of the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross. He was also promoted to Oberleutnant on that date.

That afternoon Oblt. Marseille scored two kills southeast of El Alamein, while Hptm. Homuth destroyed a third.

Marseille had just reached his command post when the field telephone rang. He picked up the receiver and learned that Leutnant Stahlschmidt was missing.

"I'm coming right away", he called. Then, as he rushed for the door, he said to his comrades: "Stahlschmidt is still out there!"

When he reached the Geschwader command post, the two pilots who had been flying with Stahlschmidt and von Lieres were already sitting there. One of them said that Stahlschmidt had been shot up and apparently had attempted a belly landing approximately 50 km behind enemy lines.

"Let me take the Staffel, or at least the HQ Schwarm, Herr Major", asked Marseille. "We've still got an hour of daylight left."

"You're staying here, Marseille", determined the Kommodore after taking a quick glance at the haggard face of the Oberleutnant, who had just returned from a combat mission. "I and II Staffel will take off on a search."

Marseille returned back to his own command post with the Kommodore's assurance that he would let him know immediately if there was any more news.

It had already grown dark when the last planes returned from their search. No one had seen anything.

Marseille chewed his evening meal in silence. A little while later the radio operator brought a radio-telegram from Reichsmarschall Goring, addressed to Oblt. Marseille:

"I never cease to be proud of your outstanding successes. With an unbending fighting spirit and will to victory you've beaten the British foe in the air wherever you have encountered him."

"With gratitude and total admiration I congratulate you on your award from the Führer of the highest German award for bravery."

"Rest assured, my dear Marseille, that along with me the entire German people see in you one of the greatest heroes of this war."

"Continue fighting, blessed by eternal soldier's good fortune, in this spirit for the final victory of our forces. -

Your Goring."

Telegrams arrived in bundles. One was from Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels, another from Reichsaussenminister von Ribbentrop and Generalfeldmarschall Milch. However, one in particular brought Marseille the greatest joy. It came from just down the road - from the headquarters of Panzerarmee Afrika, from Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel.

Oberstleutnant Sigel, the Kommodore of Stuka-geschwader 3, who had also received the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross on 2 September, wrote Marseille:

"The best wishes of my Geschwader are that much more sincere, my dear Marseille, because you achieved many of your victories while flying protection for my Stukas. Without the shield provided by Jagdgeschwader 27 a successful Stuka operation would have been out of the question. May all our joys be added to that of yours concerning your well-deserved award and the awareness of having reached the pinnacle of a fighter pilot's accomplishments."

"As your escort flights have always safely and reliably protected us, so may our best wishes escort you on your path to fame and glory! - Your Sigel."

Hans-Joachim Marseille was at the zenith of his glory. But these battles over the last few months had taken their toll on his features. His face had become more gaunt. The two creases running from the corners of his mouth to his nostrils, where before they had been only slightly visible, were now much deeper furrows.

Marseille, who was always filled with a burning desire to fly before every engagement and willing to give his all, was being consumed by this everlasting task. It was only seldom anymore that his stern countenance was illuminated by a smile - and only once did any of his enemies ever see him grin during this phase of his combat career.

The British pilot saw his adversary, just a few meters next to his own plane struggling downward with its engine missing after being crippled by a burst from Marseille's guns. One more burst and it would have been all over for him. But Marseille just waved to him and indicated that he should crashland in German territory.

Then, as he turned in, he saw the fixed mask of his enemy break into a smile. He landed as directed and thus escaped the last fatal burst from Marseille.

On the 8th of September I Gruppe enjoyed a break from operations, which was used to repair their aircraft worn out from flying. II and III Gruppe flew missions, during which Lt. Schroer managed to bring down two Spitfires near El Tarfa. Altogether, 24 planes from JG 27 flew as Stuka escort, despite a powerful ghibli that day.

During a follow-on Stuka escort mission on 11 September, Marseille flew close cover with his Staffel. When they came upon 20 British fighter-bombers west of Imayid, Marseille broke off from his Schwarm and attacked the formation together with his Rottenflieger. At 0840 hrs and 0842 hrs two of the enemy planes were noted plunging mortally wounded to the desert floor, where they exploded.



*Marseille with his comrade Hptm. Redlich.*

September 15th was another great day for combat. Marseille took off with his HQ Schwarm for another Stuka mission. Prior to that, III/JG 27 had fought a difficult battle with Curtiss and Spitfire planes, which had attempted to halt the first Stuka attack of the day. Lt. Schroer shot down three of the enemy, while Oblt. Althoff brought down the fourth.

At 1715 hrs 18 Bf 109s of I Gruppe, 15 of II, and 10 of III Gruppe finally took to the air on the second mission. 36 Kittyhawks intercepted them. There ensued a series of aerial battles of such proportions not hitherto seen in the skies over the African desert. I Gruppe accounted for eleven kills during several engagements lasting well into the evening. II Gruppe scored one and III Gruppe brought home seven claims, four of which were scored by Uffz. Krainik alone and another three by Lt. Schroer.

During the engagements fought by I Gruppe, which lasted a total of only six minutes, Marseille was once again able to score against seven of the enemy. Hptm. Homuth and Oblt. Börngen each shot down one plane apiece. After this outstanding victory Marseille had brought his account

up to 151 kills, meaning that he had reached third place in the absolute record list -behind Hermann Graf and Gordon Gollob.

During this mission the Bf 109 flown by Lt. Hoffmann, second-in-command of Marseille's Staffel, collided with a Messerschmitt flown by Uffz. Prien. Hoffmann's plane lost a wing, but the Leutnant succeeded in bailing out. In doing so, however, he struck the rudder and broke both legs. With eleven victories Lt. Hoffmann was now out of the running. Uffz. Prien fell to his death with his plane.

Marseille immediately went to the field hospital to visit Lt. Hoffmann and see how he was doing. He found his colleague in a large hospital tent with approximately 20 other wounded soldiers. It was sticky hot in the tent as Marseille lifted the mosquito netting over Hoffmann's bed. He looked into the deathly pale face of his assistant and noticed that Hoffmann was unconscious.

The Staffelkapitän slowly let the net drop back down again and left. The doctors gave the Leutnant no hope. He was not to recover from the heavy blow he had suffered, which apparently had also caused internal injuries.

### **With Generalfeldmarschall Rommel**

With an invitation from Feldmarschall Erwin Rommel, over the next few days Marseille drove to the Army Command Post of Panzerarmee Afrika. He had asked to bring a few comrades along, to which Rommel had spontaneously agreed.

He arrived at the headquarters in his yellow "Otto." From out of the wagon spilled a half dozen pilots from his Staffel, who formed up outside Rommel's 'Mammut.' As Rommel came out and walked over to the pilots, Marseille reported in. Rommel thanked him and extended his hand to the Staffelkapitän.

"I congratulate you on your success. I admire you, Marseille, and am happy to have you here with me. Thanks be primarily to you and your comrades for the effective military aid you've given and will certainly continue to give to the Panzerarmee Afrika."

Marseille thanked him for the invitation and introduced his fellow pilots, all of whom wore the Iron Cross. Rommel shook each of their hands, asked about each one and their families and appeared more open than was usual for the field marshal.

When Rommel was finally called back into the command post, the officer of the mess - who invited all the men to



*Marseille in front of Rommel's HQ talking with comrades that arrived with him.*



dinner -explained that the field marshal had only returned from the front lines just a few minutes prior.

"In honor of you, Marseille, he put on his good military blouse. That's only happened once before with such visits, when he received a highly decorated Panzeroberleutnant who insisted on returning to Africa after having suffered serious injuries."

### **To the Bitter End**

On Wednesday, the 16th of September the Wehrmacht report carried the following news item: "Oberleutnant Marseille scored his 145th to 151st aerial victories on the Egyptian front."



*Marseille with GFM Rommel. Rommel said of this, "I'm putting on my good jacket for this occasion."*

That evening in I Gruppe there was a considerable amount of activity done in secrecy. Uffz. Hermann, from the Geschwader's Kraftfahrtabteilung, or motor pool, greeted Marseille with the following words:

"I request permission to offer my congratulations, Herr Oberleutnant!"

Marseille stumbled. "For what, Hermann?", he asked.

"That I'm not permitted to tell you, Herr Hauptmann."

And with these words the cat was out of the bag. Half an hour later Major Neumann read out the early promotion of Marseille to Hauptmann. A few guests had appeared around 1400 hrs for lunch. Mentnich laid Marseille's favorite record, the "rhumba azul", on the turntable. For dinner Marseille invited approximately 20 friend, among them being several Italian pilots with whom he got along well. Mathias from Transvaal, Marseille's factotum, stood behind the bar.

Aside from the Kommodore, all Gruppenkommandeure and Staffelkapitäne were invited as well. In addition there were the men of 3 Staffel, including the ground crewmen of the newly promoted Hauptmann.

After Mathias had demonstrated a new step dance, a magician in the form of the Kommodore stepped into action.

Since Marseille had suffered a fractured arm after his latest belly landing, he had been prohibited from flying for a time. The next morning he was constantly seen in the presence of the Kommodore. Around noontime, when he returned back to his Staffel, he had weaseled permission to fly again from Neumann. He had been given consent to fly on a trial basis beginning the following morning.

But that evening Marseille went up for a short test flight. Everything went smoothly.

"Get to bed early, Jost", he called out to Schlang. "Tomorrow's another day for scoring and you, too, will bring your first one down tomorrow as well."

That evening, however, there was still time for a trip to the soldier's cinema between the dunes. The movie "We're Asking to Dance" flickered across the screen.

On the morning of 26 September Hans-Joachim Marseille took off with five Bf 109s on a scramble mission. Ten enemy planes had been sighted - eight Hurricanes and two Spitfires.

The main enemy group had formed up over El Daba. During the initial pass through the enemy's defensive circle Marseille shot down the first Spitfire at 0910 hrs. In a wild menagerie of turns, rolls and chandelles he succeeded in scoring twice more during the next few minutes. The times were 0913 hrs and 0915 hrs.



*General der Jagdflieger Adolf Galland inspecting JG 27 with Edu Neumann. Photo taken 22 September 1942.*

"Schlang, now you're up", Marseille challenged his Rottenflieger. The Staffelkapitän assumed the position of flying protection for Schlang, who pounced on the next enemy plane and opened fire. He saw the right wingtip spin away from the enemy and flutter downward. A slight adjustment, then the cannon belched fire. This time the Spitfire's engine was shot to pieces and the enemy plane went down.

"Well done, Jost!", extolled Marseille. "That was your first! Many others should follow."

"Thanks, Jochen!"

Marseille didn't hear the acknowledgement, for he was already diving on the enemy plane attempting to maneuver in behind Schlang. He shot it off Schlang's tail with a short burst.

As they overflowed the airfield, Marseille wagged three times. Schlang was able to show his single victory for the first time.

Around midday all was quiet in 3 Staffel. It was only around 1600 hrs that 33 Bf 109s were seen taking off on a Stuka escort mission, which had the goal of stopping the enemy's rapid advances.

Among those 33 planes were nine of I Gruppe. The Stukas were safely seen to Hammam, but six Spitfires appeared once their bombs had been dropped on enemy troop concentrations. The enemy planes were at a considerably lower height and were attempting to climb to altitude as rapidly as possible. The Spitfires paid no notice whatsoever to the Stukas. They were after the German fighters.

It was Marseille again who not only spotted the enemy first, but also registered the formation's intentions almost as quickly. He dove so rapidly and at such a steep angle into the bulk of the enemy formation that the others weren't able to follow him.

The first enemy was hit with the initial cannon salvo and came apart in the air. Schlang made a note of the time: 1656 hrs.

The battle continued. Marseille once again demonstrated his entire repertoire of aerobatic talent unmatched by anyone else. The Spitfire which attempted to shoot him down suddenly became the hunted quarry. Marseille's weapons spat out their fatal venom and at 1659 hrs the second Spitfire fell mortally wounded. Then Marseille saw a third Spitfire coming toward him. This was a foe which demanded all he could muster. The way this opponent attacked clearly indicated that here was an expert. He matched Marseille step for step, opening fire upon the German again and again. Marseille was only able to escape being hit by making the neck-breaking maneuvers he was so famous for. They curved

and twisted around one another, racing at full speed toward each other, waiting until the last millisecond before firing and breaking off. The dogfight took the two eagles to within 100 meters of the desert floor. Curving and turning, the two pilots paralleled each other equally matched.

The red light came on and Marseille knew that he only had 15 minutes' worth of fuel left. He must now end the duel as quickly as possible or not be able to return to base.

An additional eleven minutes passed, with neither opponent showing any sign of weakening. Several times both German and Brit had only escaped by a hair's breadth. Suddenly, Marseille turned directly into the evening sun. The Spitfire followed and presented Marseille with his opportunity. As the enemy became caught in the sun's bright rays, Marseille suddenly whipped his plane around, executed a roll and found himself heading toward an enemy only 100 meters away.

Both his machine guns and his cannon belched lead. The burst cut through the Spitfire and the engine immediately caught fire. A wing separated and the Spitfire plunged into the ground. The pilot, a brave and worthy opponent, was not able to escape in time.

This was the 158th kill for Hans-Joachim Marseille. When Yellow 14 landed in Quotaifiya, Marseille didn't waggle in advance. He let the aircraft roll out to the dispersal area. As he climbed out, his two crewmen were horrified. They had never seen their Jochen looking like this. He appeared to be a ghost of their Staffelfkapitän. Trembling hands grabbed for a cigarette which Meyer passed to him. He took one, two deep drags. His face looked like that of an old man.

He went to the flight debriefing in a trance. There he confessed: "a masterful adversary. Never before had an enemy fought like he did. I don't know how things will turn out next time."

The next day 3 Staffel didn't fly any missions. But on the 28th of September II/JG 27 and III/JG 53 were operational and the following day II and III/JG 27, as well as III/JG 53 flew Stuka escorts.



*Marseille after his 158th air victory.*

### To His Death Unvanquished

On September 28th Hans-Joachim Marseille received a call from the headquarters of the Panzerarmee Afrika. It was Feldmarschall Erwin Rommel wanting to speak to the Hauptmann. In his light Swabian style Rommel said:

"Listen, Marseille, I want to kidnap you - to Berlin! On the 30th of September the Führer is speaking in the Berliner



*Marseille on the evening prior to his death.*

Sportpalast. You are to be sitting on his right and I will be sitting on his left. This is a great honor for both of us, which even you can't pass up."

"But Herr Feldmarschall", came back Marseille's answer. "I can't go on leave again so soon. The others sit here and slave away while I take more vacations than the entire Geschwader put together."

"That's pure nonsense, Marseille! Give yourself some credit and come back with me in my plane."

"There's also another reason why I can't, Herr Feldmarschall. I'd like to go back to Berlin for Christmas. I got engaged the last time I was on leave. We want to get married at Christmastime."

Marseille wasn't able to see the smile that crept across Rommel's mouth. A young officer who would rather go to his bride than be with the Führer - he not only found amusing, but admirable. There was nothing conventional about this young Hauptmann. Here was a soldier making decisions with his heart, and that Rommel had always respected.

"Nevertheless, you should at least consider it", continued Rommel.

"I ask the Herr Feldmarschall to not insist on this invitation", said Marseille with determination. "Besides, I'm desperately needed here."

Rommel knew he had been beaten. He chuckled quietly to himself.

"In my opinion, Marseille, if you think more of marriage than of the Führer, may God bless you both."

Further attacks were carried out early in the morning on the 30th of September. German Stukas, bombarding British positions and transport convoys, were protected under the umbrella of III/JG 53's aircraft.

At 1047 hrs 3 Staffel finally took off, led by Hptm. Marseille. They were eight altogether and were providing top cover for the Stukas. Three minutes later 15 aircraft from III Gruppe followed suite, offering extended protection in advance of the main formations.

At 1055 hrs an additional 10 Bf 109s from III/JG 53 took off to provide direct escort.

Kommodore Neumann directed this mission from the command post and guided Marseille's Staffel via the ground-to-air link in an interception of a British fighter group which had been sighted south of Imayid on a westerly course.

As Marseille's Staffel caught sight of this enemy, the British planes turned northward a short time later and refused to take up combat. Near Abu Dweis III/JG 27 came in contact with the enemy and Lt. Schroer shot one of their number down.

During this mission Hptm. Marseille was flying a completely new aircraft. It was a Bf 109 G model. His Staffel had made no enemy contact and turned back after the Stukas had dropped their bombs. At 1130 hrs the receiver in the Geschwader command post crackled alive. Then a clear voice rang out:

"My engine's burning!"

"Who's engine is on fire?", asked the radio operator.

"What's wrong, over?"

It was Marseille who had reported in: "from Elbe 1 - have considerable smoke in the cockpit, can't see anything."

A glance at the map told Eduard Neumann that the Staffel still had about another five minutes to German lines.

The returning pilots saw as the smoke grew thicker and thicker from the engine of Marseille's new plane.

"Three more minutes, Jochen", called Schlang to his comrade. "We'll get you over."

They flew around Marseille in a tight formation, sealing him off from any kind of intrusion. Schlang and Pöttgen guided him by voice as Marseille made the necessary corrections to his flight path. It appeared to be a perfectly harmless ritual directing a colleague and friend safely home.

It was 1135 hrs. Schlang and Pöttgen continued their efforts. Marseille's voice called out "Are we over our own lines yet?" There was a hint of urgency in its tone.

"Just two more minutes, Jochen", came Pöttgen's response.

From a distance of just a few meters they saw the pale white face of their comrade through the billowing smoke. Schlang called out:

"Elbe 1, keep a bit more to the right. Marseille banked, straightening himself onto the correct course. Then the voice of the Geschwaderkommodore rang out; he could no longer keep to himself: "Will you make it, Elbe 1? Get out now!" No answer came back.

Marseille's plane was drifting lower and lower. Then the group reached the white mosque of Didi Abd el Rahman. They had made it to the German lines.

"I've got to get out now", called Marseille, "I can't stand it anymore."

These were the last words his colleagues heard from him. As the two planes escorting him pulled out further to the left and right, Marseille put his new plane into a half roll on its back, in order to be in a more favorable position for jumping. Then the canopy flew off and as Schlang and Pöttgen watched, as a figure emerged from the smoke. Marseille was instantly carried away by the slipstream, buckling slightly - as if he'd been punched. The two pilots began a tight cir-



*September 30, 1942.*



cling to monitor and protect their comrade as he drifted down.

"Jochen is out", called Pöttgen with relief. Then a sharp voice barked:

"The chute!", called out Schlang with horror.

The body of their colleague plummeted to earth, but the white bloom of the parachute never unfolded. It was 1136 hrs when a series of cries emanated from the receiver. They were so full of shock that all who were present held their breath.

Then a broken voice sounded: "Jochen is dead!"

Within the command post, the headphones fell from Kommodore Neumann's hand. He looked into the unbelieving eyes of his men and only could nod. Then he walked stiffly out.

Marseille had bailed out as his plane dropped steeply down by about 200 meters. His parachute had not opened. He fell in an almost horizontal position and struck the desert earth face down.

The lifeless, shattered body of the Eagle of Africa lay prostrate upon the sand. In such a manner he had beaten 158 enemies and now he himself, unvanquished by the foe, was victim.

Oberarzt Dr. Bick, the regimental doctor for Panzer-grenadierregiment 115, saw the fall of a German fighter pilot on that morning. He threw himself into his staff car and raced to the crash site. He was the first to find the dead pilot a few hundred meters from the aircraft wreckage. What follows is his report to the Panzerarmee Afrika:

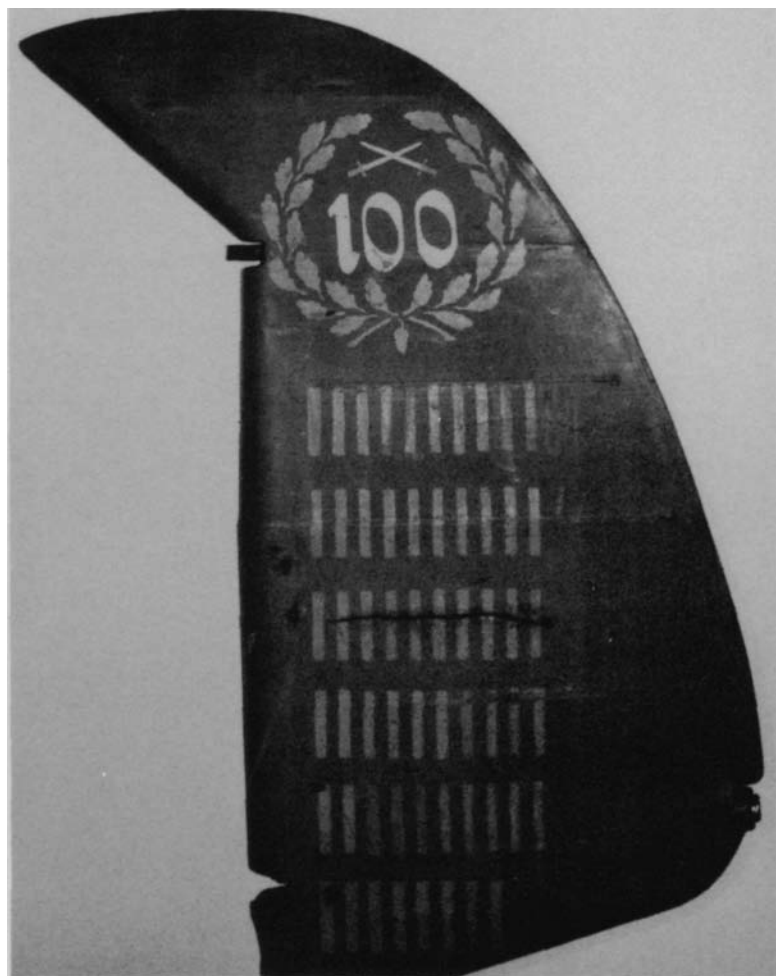
"The pilot lay on his stomach as if asleep. His arms were hidden beneath his body. As I came closer, I saw a pool of







*Marseille's record after receiving Swords to the Knight's Cross (above), and at the time of his death (below).*



blood which had issued from the side of his crushed skull; brain matter was exposed. I then noticed the awful wound above the hip. With a certainty, this could not have come from the fall. The pilot must have been slammed into the airplane when bailing out."

"The parachute rested a few meters next to the dead man. The pack which still contained it was torn about 40 centimeters along its side. White parachute silk spilled out like intestines. The release handle for the parachute had buried itself deep into the sand right next to the dead man. It was still on 'safe'."

"I carefully turned the young pilot over onto his back. The finely cut features of his face below a high forehead were nearly undisturbed. It was the countenance of a tired child."

"I opened the zipper of his flight jacket, saw the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords and immediately knew who this was. The paybook also told me: in front of me lay Hauptmann Marseille."

"I glanced at the dead man's watch. It had stopped at 1142 hrs."

"I left to get help in order to recover the body. When I returned with some Italian engineers, two of the dead pilot's comrades were already on the scene." (It was Italian engineers who later erected a stone pyramid to Hans-Joachim Marseille at the site of his fall.)

The Stabsarzt Dr. Winkelmann and Hptm. Franzisket had raced as quickly as possible in the VW to the site. They found their dead friend and pilot and noticed that the release handle for the parachute had not been pulled.

Crosswise across the left part of the chest there was a gaping wound which could not have come from striking the ground.

Marseille had struck the rudder of his aircraft and must have instantaneously been rendered unconscious by the impact, or else he would have pulled the cord.

He struck the tail as a result of his plane already having nosed over from its inverted position into a dive. Marseille hadn't noticed this because of the smoke obstructing his vision, otherwise he would have easily corrected the angle and avoided striking the aircraft.

Resting on the lap of Hptm. Ludwig Franzisket, the mortal remains of what had been Hans-Joachim Marseille were brought back to the Geschwader command post.

The last entry into his logbook read:

"388 combat flights with 158 kills.

Number of this flight: 482

Flight time: 54 minutes.



Time of landing -

Took to parachute 7 km south of Sidi Abd el Rahman.

Remarks:

Fighter sweep, scramble, engine damage

Flights 1 through 482, 388 combat flights and a total of 158 kills certified: in the field, 30 September 1942."

Hans-Joachim Marseille lay in state in the Staffel sick bay.

Unteroffiziere and crewmen paid their last respects to their "Jochen." And Mathias said goodbye forever to his friend and helper. All held vigil over the body at different times.

Back in the Staffel tent, Jost Schlang - Marseille's last Rottenflieger and his friend - put on the record that Marseille enjoyed listening to so much: the "rhumba azul."

Oberleutnant der Propagandatruppe Fritz Dettmann and Mathias, Marseille's trusty servant, were seen crying. All the others had become, in the words of Major Franzisket, "so unbelievably hardened that they accepted the death of Marseille without any external signs of mourning. Nevertheless, all of us had the feeling that our lives were over."

The next morning Hans-Joachim Marseille was brought to the Panzerarmee Afrika's memorial cemetery in Derna. At the same time his Staffel took off from the airfield, since Feldmarschall Albert Kesselring was to give the eulogy.

They climbed into the blue expanse of the sky, to bank away over the cemetery in a steep turn and fly over the gravesite.

They formed up, flying wingtip to wingtip above the memorial cemetery, then once again dove steeply toward the grave to honor their fallen comrade.

Albert Kesselring talked of the young pilot Marseille. His parting words touched everyone's heart and they all knew that the promise he made never to forget him was an oath given to Marseille by all present.

The focus of the Generalfeldmarschall's eulogy was this:

"Hauptmann Marseille is fallen. Unbeaten. With his passing, a heroic individual, a marvelous colleague, an artist in the air and the best fighter pilot in the world is gone from our ranks forever."

Hans-Joachim Marseille was brought from Derna and reinterred in the memorial at Tobruk once this monument had been completed. It was there that his mother visited the grave of her son in 1954.

Aside from the memorial site in Tobruk, men of JG 27 were also laid to rest in the memorial hall of the monument in Alexandria. They were: Werner Boden, Wolfgang Burger, Cay Carstensen, Friedrich Hoffmann, Karl Kugelbauer,



*Above: Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring gives the eulogy at Marseille's gravesite. Below: Marseille's awards pillow during the funeral in Derna.*



G 2

## Sterbeurkunde

(Standesamt Fürstenfeldbruck \_\_\_\_\_ Nr. 199/1942 \_\_\_\_\_)

Der Hauptmann der 3. Staffel Jagdgeschwader 27 \_\_\_\_\_

Hans Joachim M a r s e i l l e , evangelischer Religion,

wohnhaft zuletzt in Fürstenfeldbruck, Fliegerhorst \_\_\_\_\_,

ist am 30. September 1942 \_\_\_\_\_ um \_\_\_\_\_ Uhr \_\_\_\_\_ Minuten

in 8 km südlich Sidi el Aman - Nordafrika - gefallen. ~~verstorben~~

Der Verstorbene war geboren am 13. Dezember 1919 in Berlin - \_\_\_\_\_

Charlottenburg. \_\_\_\_\_

Der Verstorbene — war — nicht verheiratet. \_\_\_\_\_

Fürstenfeldbruck, den 31. Dezember 1942

Der Standesbeamte



In Vertretung: \_\_\_\_\_

*F. Müller*

Heinrich Müller, Heinrich Prien, Erwin Sawallisch, Eberhard Schmidt, Hans Schirmer, Hermann Tangerding, Hans Würschinger and Günther Zahn.

Major Eduard Neumann, Geschwaderkommodore of the Desert Geschwader, memorialized this pilot in a special way:

#### Order of the Day

On 30 Sep 1942 Hauptmann Marseille died a pilot's death, unvanquished by the enemy.

It is difficult for us to accept that this bright, cheerful and brave fighter pilot of our Geschwader will no longer be with us.

His victories against our most bitter enemies - the English - are one of a kind. We should be both happy and proud to have counted him among us.

These beautiful words cannot express what this loss means to us.

He leaves behind for us our duty to emulate him as a person and a soldier. His spirit will forever be a model for this Geschwader.

The Geschwaderkommodore,  
Neumann, Major

On the 1st of October the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht announced:

"Thursday, the 1st of October 1942:

Hauptmann Hans-Joachim Marseille, wearer of the highest German decoration for bravery, met a pilot's death in the North African theater unbeaten by the enemy. Filled with an insatiable spirit of attack, this young officer had vanquished 158 British enemies in air combat. The Wehrmacht mourns the loss of such a truly heroic warrior."



*Marseille's grave at the memorial cemetery in Derna.*



# AFTERWORD

## **Marseille is Honored by the Bundesluftwaffe**

**O**n the 24th of October, 1975, the Bundesluftwaffe's Uetersen Barracks was turned over to the young pilots there with a new name: Marseille Barracks. The recommendation for this action came from the Bundeswehr. Oberst(ret) Eduard Neumann, the former Kommodore of Desert Geschwader 27 gave the acceptance speech there in the presence of Generalleutnant E. D. Bernhard. In naming the barracks, he explained that all former fighter pilots of JG 27, personified by Hans-Joachim Marseille, would gratefully acknowledge this positive viewpoint taken by the Bundeswehr in upholding a healthy tradition.

The following is an excerpt from his speech:

"We feel honored by this christening.

"Hans-Joachim Marseille came to I Gruppe of the Geschwader at the beginning of 1941, shortly before we transferred to Africa.

"As a new person in the Gruppe, he didn't have an easy time of it, and didn't make it easy for his superiors to gauge him, either.

"The first missions on the Tobruk front gave an indication that there was something to him. But the breakthrough only came when then-Oberleutnant Ludwig Franzisket, temporarily assumed command of 3 Staffel (in which Marseille flew) and gave this blessed flyer more free rein and more possibilities for development.

"Marseille not only became an exceptional fighter pilot, but more importantly grew to become a superb comrade-in-arms.

"It was a puzzle for us all where Marseille got his strength from in battle. He was almost tender, thin and very light-



weight. Nevertheless, he flew at a rapid speed in air battles, which places tremendous loads on a body during turning maneuvers.

"As opposed to the majority of other pilots, Marseille was easily recognized in the confusion of battle by the white condensation trails coming off the end of his wingtips as he flew at rapid speeds through his turns.

"His successes did not turn him into an arrogant person or a braggart. He continued to remain a friend to all and would gladly tell anyone who wanted to know how to accomplish the same things.

"The pilots of the Staffel he later commanded and the entire ground personnel swore by him. He never was required to dole out disciplinary measures.

"His empathy with people was a particularly notable trait. His sentiment for the soldiers of the Afrika-Korps and his active assistance he gave them, independent of their rank, are well known.

"It was therefore no wonder that Marseille was not only a hero for the pilots, but also for the men of the entire Afrika-Korps as well.

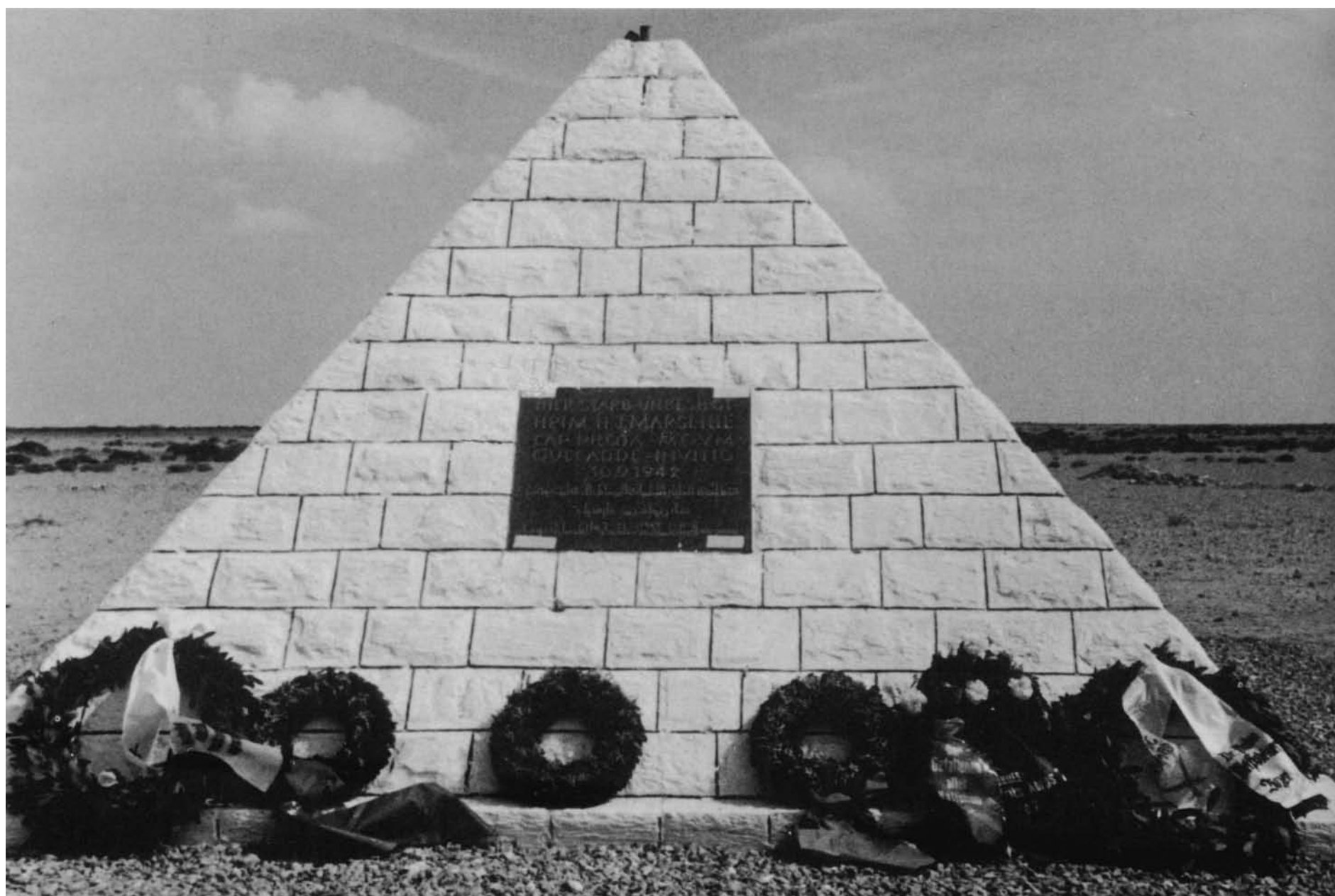
*Comrades from JG27 and the brotherhood of fighter pilots at the new pyramid.*

"Undefeated, Marseille died on the front lines where we and the Italians served. He scored 151 aerial victories over the African desert. As recipient of the highest Italian honor, the Medaglia d' Oro, Marseille was also felt by the Italians to be one of their own as well. Numerous Italian fighter pilots have honored him by their presence at the naming ceremony in Uetersen." (See Neumann, Eduard: *Gedenkrede anlässlich der Namensgebung der Kaserne in Uetersen am 24. Oktober 1975*).

### **The Marseille Pyramid at El Alamein: A Memorial in the Desert**

On October 21st, 1989 several former members of Jagdgeschwader 27 flew to Egypt, led by the former Kommodore of the Geschwader, Oberst(ret) Eduard Neumann. They were all the members still alive from the Desert Geschwader. Along with them were Horst Amberg, publisher of the Jägerblatt, and the president of the Gemeinschaft der Jagdflieger (Fighter Pilots' Society), Anton Weiler.

*The new Marseille pyramid on the day of its dedication.*



Aside from Emil Clade, Fritz Keller, Friedrich Körner, Franz Elles, Günter Bode, Sighart Dinkel, Gustav Holderle, George Rauwolf and Willi Risse from JG 27, there was also Wolfgang Ewald from JG 53 and Ulrich Walk from JG 77 there, too. Both of these Geschwader had also operated in the African theater.

There followed memorial services at the German Memorial Cemetery in El Alamein, which had been dedicated back in 1959, during which Major General Kamal Soliman Manour, of the Egyptian government, and Major General Ibrahim Said Atwa, representing the Egyptian armed forces, participated. The German and Italian delegation then made its way to the Marseille Pyramid.

The dedication of this monument to Hans-Joachim Marseille was truly a solemn occasion. Anton Weiler conducted the memorial speech. After respects had been paid to this unfulfilled fighter pilot the newly-rebuilt pyramid was dedicated.

Aside from Neumann in Germany, the German Embassy in Cairo and the General Consulate in Alexandria both contributed their support to this project.

It was Eduard Neumann who unveiled the memorial plaque.

Retired Ambassador Franz Elles talked of the traditional brotherhood of JG 27. He, too, had been one of those pilots who had fought side-by-side with Marseille in the skies over the desert.

The "Fliegermarsch" (Pilot's March) ended this solemn event. Former Oberleutnant Friedrich Körner, a Leutnant and Staffel leader with 2/JG 27 and recipient of the Knight's Cross after 36 victories in Africa, was particularly touched by this tribute. He, along with Clade and Keller, had often been witness as Hans-Joachim Marseille flew his unique air attacks. On 4 July 1942 Körner had been shot down one kilometer east of this pyramid and taken by the British as a prisoner of war.

There was another, too, who sat in the background during this memorial service even though he had been the driving force behind it - then, as today: The Oberst a.D. Eduard Neumann. (See Anton Weiler: "Ein würdiges Mahnmal in der Wüste", Jägerblatt Nr. 5/1989).



*The memorial to Hans-Joachim Marseille and his parents in the Berlin Cemetery.*

# APPENDIX I

## Hans-Joachim Marseille, Life Chronology

Born on 13 December 1919 in Berlin-Charlottenburg.	17 Dec 1941	Shoots down two Curtiss fighters north of Martuba.
March 1938 Reich Work Service until August 1938.	Dec 1941	Hospitalized due to illness. From there flight home to Germany due to death of sister.
Oct 1938 Infantry Basic Training in Quedlinburg.	8 Feb 1942	Shoots down four Curtiss fighters over home airfield at Martuba.
7 Nov 1938 Entry into the Luftwaffe.	12 Feb 1942	Four kills over Tobruk airspace.
13 Mar 1939 Advancement to Fahnenjunker.	15 Feb 1942	Shoots down two Hurricanes with damaged radiator, then while gliding in for landing, shoots down third enemy plane.
1 May 1939 Promotion to Fahnenjunker-Gefreiter.	21 Feb 1942	Shoots down two Curtiss fighter over Acroma (50th kill).
1 July 1939 Promotion to Fahnenjunker-Unteroffizier.	22 Feb 1942	Awarded Knight's Cross to Iron Cross.
1 Nov 1939 Assignment to Jagdfliegerschule 5 in Vienna-Schwechat, promoted to Fahnrich.	22 Feb 1942	Promotion to Leutnant.
10 Aug 1940 Assignment to I(Jagd)/Lehrgeschwader 2 as Oberfähnrich with outstanding credentials.	27 Feb 1942	Shoots down two Curtiss fighters near Bir el Gobi, for a total of 18 in Feb.
Transfer to Leuwarden in Holland. From there operations against England (bomber escort duties).	March-April 1942	Leave in Germany.
Sept 1940 Presentation of the Iron Cross Second Class following first two air victories.	25 April 1942	First mission after leave. Two Kittyhawks shot down in two minutes.
Fall 1940 Awarded Iron Cross First Class after fourth kill. Total of seven kills in the West. Shot down three times, including one emergency ditching in the English Channel - rescued by German Luftwaffe air-sea rescue. Three days confinement for failure to obey orders.	1 May 1942	Early promotion to Oberleutnant.
24 Dec 1940 Transfer to 4/JG 52, Oblt. Steinhoff, who had him transferred out for breach of discipline.	10 May 1942	Shoots down two Hurricanes near Martuba.
21 Feb 1941 Transfer to I/JG 27 in Döberitz.	13 May 1942	Shoots down two Kittyhawks near Gazala.
6 April 1941 Balkans deployment. Attack on Laibach Airfield.	16 May 1942	Shoots down two enemy planes over Gazala. Third plane destroyed by debris.
10 April 1941 Deployment to Agram.	19 May 1942	Shoots down two Curtiss fighters over Gazala.
21 April 1941 Deployment to Africa.	22 May 1942	Shoots down two Boston bombers over Bir Hacheim.
23 April 1941 First kill in Africa and subsequent crash landing with 30 hits in cockpit.	30 May 1942	Defeats Sergeant Buckland in battle between Tobruk and El Adem.
28 April 1941 Shoots down Bristol Blenheim near Tobruk.	31 May 1942	Three Tomahawks shot down between Harmat and Acroma.
1 May 1941 Shoots down two Hurricanes over Tobruk.	1 June 1942	Shoots down a Curtiss fighter SW of Mteifel.
14 June 1941 Engine shot out, emergency landing in friendly territory.	3 June 1942	Six Curtiss fighters shot down within six minutes.
16 June 1941 Damaged by fire over Tobruk. Return and blind landing at home airfield.	6 June 1942	97th recipient of Oak Leaves to Knight's Cross.
1 June 1941 Promotion to Unterleutnant.	7 June 1942	Two enemy planes destroyed in two minutes near Gazala-Acroma.
17 June 1941 Shoots down two Hurricanes near Halfaya Pass.	8 June 1942	Named as Staffelkapitän of 3/JG 27.
9 Sep 1941 Shoots down two Hurricanes over Sollum.	10 June 1942	Four kills in 15 minutes over Bir Hacheim.
13 Sep 1941 Shoots down a Hurricane reconnaissance aircraft over friendly territory.	11 June 1942	Two kills near El Adem.
24 Sep 1941 Shoots down two Marylands and two Hurricanes. First time for four kills in one day.	13 June 1942	Four kills in Tobruk area.
12 Oct 1941 Shoots down two Curtiss fighters over Bir Sheferzen.	15 June 1942	Four kills in five minutes(nos 88-91).
3 Nov 1941 Honorary trophy cup of the Luftwaffe.	16 June 1942	Four kills over El Adem.
Nov-Dec 1941 Transfer of 3/JG 27 to Germany for rearming on the new Bf 109 F-4.	17 June 1942	Six Kills in seven minutes over Gambut (11th German pilot to score 101st kill).
1 Dec 1941 Awarded the German Cross in Gold, first pilot in Africa to receive this award.	18 June 1942	12th recipient of Swords to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves (presented by Hitler in FHQ Rastenburg).
4 Dec 1941 Returns to Africa.	June-Aug 1942	Leave in Germany. Meetings with Hitler, Göring, Goebbels and Prof. Willy Messerschmitt.
6 Dec 1941 Shoots down two Hurricanes over Bir el Gobi.	Aug 1942	Awarded Golden Pilot's Cross with Diamonds, presented by Reichsmarschall Hermann Goring.
8 Dec 1941 Shoots down a Curtiss fighter near Agedabia.	6 Aug 1942	Awarded highest Italian decoration for bravery, the Medaglia d' Oro.
10 Dec 1941 Shoots down a Curtiss fighter near El Adem.		

13 Aug 1942	Presented Medaglia d' Oro by Benito Mussolini in Rome.	16 Sep 1942	Early promotion to Hauptmann.
22 Aug 1942	Returns to Africa.	26 Sep 1942	Seven kills near El Daba and south of Hammam (nos 152-158).
31 Aug 1942	First takeoff - shoots down three planes while escorting Stukas to El Alamein.	30 Sep 1942	Fatal fall at 1136 hrs 7 km south of Sidi Abd el Rahman, following failure of his parachute to open after striking rudder of his aircraft.
1 Sep 1942	A total of 17 kills made in three sorties over El Taqua, Alam Haifa and Deir el Raghat.	1 Oct 1942	Burial in the Heroes' Cemetery in Derna.
2 Sep 1942	After five more victories, becomes the fourth German soldier to be awarded the Diamonds to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords.		
3 Sep 1942	During two missions seven kills scored, including two Spitfires in Imayid area.	Total number of combat missions	382
5 Sep 1942	Four kills during fighter sweep despite cannon malfunction, near Ruweisat and El Taqua.	Total number of victories	158
6 Sep 1942	Four kills, three Curtiss fighters and a Spitfire.	Victories in Africa alone	151
7 Sep 1942	Three kills SE of El Alamein.	Enemy planes shot down	4 bombers
11 Sep 1942	Two kills west of Imayid.		154 fighters
15 Sep 1942	Seven Kittyhawks destroyed in seven separate dogfights within 11 minutes west of El Alamein.	Awarded Knight's Cross on 22 February 1942.	
		97th recipient of Oak Leaves on 6 June 1942.	
		12th recipient of Swords on 18 June 1942.	
		4th recipient of Diamonds on 2 September 1942.	



APPENDIX II

Holders of the Knight's Cross of JG 27 in Africa

(The number in parentheses following the name refers to the order of receipt, i.e. a "4" indicates the pilot was the fourth German soldier to be awarded the decoration in its history)

**Diamonds to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords:**  
Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille (4) on 2 September 1942

**Swords to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves:**  
Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille (12) on 18 June 1942  
Major Werner Schroer (144) on 19 April 1945

**Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross:**  
Hptm. Wilhelm Balthasar (17) on 2 July 1941  
Hptm. Erbo Graf von Kageneck (39) on 26 Oct 1941  
Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille (97) on 6 June 1942  
Major Heinrich Setz (102) on 23 June 1942  
Major Gustav Rödel (255) on 20 June 1943  
Hptm. Joachim Kirschner (267) on 2 August 1943  
Oblt. Wolf-Udo Ettel (289) on 31 August 1943  
Oblt. Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt (365) on 3 January 1943  
Oblt. Willy Kientsch (527) on 20 July 1944

**The Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross:**  
Hptm. Wilhelm Balthasar on 14 June 1940  
Ofw. Heinrich Bartels on 13 November 1942  
Oblt. Karl-Heinz Bendert on 30 December 1942  
Major Ernst Börngen on 3 August 1944  
Major Ernst Düllberg on 20 July 1944  
Major Ludwig Franzisket on 20 July 1941  
Lt. Fritz Gromotka on 28 January 1945  
Major Gerhard Homuth on 14 June 1941  
Generalmajor Max Ibel on 22 August 1940  
Hptm. Erbo Graf von Kageneck on 30 July 1941  
Oblt. Willy Kientsch on 6 September 1942

Oblt. Friedrich Körner on 6 September 1941  
Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille on 22 February 1942  
Major Karl-Wolfgang Redlich on 9 July 1941  
Hptm. Hans Remmer on 30 June 1944  
Oberst Gustav Rödel on 22 June 1941  
Hptm. Joachim Schlichting on 14 December 1940  
Hptm. Herbert Schramm on 11 February 1945  
Major Werner Schroer on 20 October 1942  
Oblt. Otto Schulz on 22 February 1942  
Oblt. Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt on 20 August 1942  
Major Dr. Peter Werfft on 22 February 1945

Pilots who belonged to the Geschwader, who were awarded this decoration either before or after their tenure in the unit:

Hptm. Walter Adolph (with JG 26) on 13 November 1940  
Ofw. Heinrich Bartels (with JG 5) on 13 December 1942  
Major Diethelm von Eichel-Streiber (with JG 51) on 5 May 1944  
Oblt. Wolf-Udo Ettel (with JG 3) on 1 June 1943  
GenLt. Adolf Galland (with JG 26) on 29 July 1940  
Hptm. Günther Hannak (with JG 77) on 1 July 1942  
Major Erich Hohagen (with JG 2) on 5 October 1941  
Hptm. Joachim Kirschner (with JG 3) on 23 December 1942  
Hptm. Herbert Kutscha (with SKG 210) on 24 September 1942  
Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert (with JG 27) on 24 September 1940  
Hptm. Walter Matoni (with JG 2) on 2 January 1945  
Oblt. Ernst-Wilhelm Reinert (with JG 77) on 1 July 1942  
Maj. Wolfgang Schellmann (with JG 2) on 18 September 1940  
Hptm. Heinrich Setz (with JG 77) on 31 December 1941  
Major Wilhelm Steinmann (with JG 4) on 28 March 1945  
Lt. Franz Woidich (with JG 52) on 9 June 1944  
Major Bernhard Woldenga (with JG 77) on 5 July 1941

(the ranks given are the last held, not those at the time of the award)

APPENDIX III

Jagdgeschwader 27

Duty Positions from April 1941 to May 1943

Kommodore:	Maj. Wolfgang Schellmann Maj. Bernhard Woldenga Oberstlt. Eduard Neumann Oberst Gustav Rödel	to 22 June 1941 to 7 June 1942 to 22 April 1943 to 29 Dec 1944	4 Staffel:	Oblt. Gustav Rödel Oblt. Ferdinand Vögl	to 20 May 1942 to 20 July 1943
			5 Staffel:	Hptm. Ernst Düllberg Hptm. Ernst Börngen	to 26 May 1942 to 16 July 1943
I Gruppe:	Maj. Eduard Neumann Hptm. Gerhard Homuth Hptm. Heinrich Setz Hptm. Hans-Joachim Heinecke Hptm. Erich Hohagen	to 7 June 1942 to 11 Nov 1942 to 13 Mar 1943 to 7 April 1943 to 15 July 1943	6 Staffel:	Oblt. Rolf Stössner Oblt. Emmerich Fluder Oblt. Rolf Sinner	to - Jan 1942 to 31 May 1942 to 31 May 1943
1 Staffel:	Hptm. Karl-Wolfgang Redlich Hptm. Ludwig Franzisket Hptm. Hans Remmer	to 1 Dec 1941 to 31 Oct 1942 to 2 April 1944	III Gruppe:	Hptm. Max Dobislav Hptm. Erhard Braune Hptm. Ernst Düllberg	to - Oct 1942 to - Oct 1943 to 30 Sep 1944
2 Staffel:	Hptm. Erich Gerlitz Hptm. Fritz Keller Hptm. Ernst Maack Lt. Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt Hptm. Josef Janssen	to 25 Dec 1941 to 30 Mar 1942 to 15 July 1942 to 7 Sep 1942 to 30 June 1944	7 Staffel:	Oblt. Erhard Braune Oblt. Erich Gerlitz Oblt. Hermann Tangerding Lt. Erich Schöffbeck Oblt. Willi Althof Oblt. Günther Hannak	to - Oct 1941 to - Dec 1941 to 31 Aug 1942 to 13 Oct 1942 to 24 Oct 1942 to 5 May 1942
3 Staffel:	Oblt. Gerhard Homuth Oblt. Ludwig Franzisket (temp) Hptm. Gerhard Homuth Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille Oblt. Josef Schlang Oblt. Karl von Lieres	to 1 June 1941 to 15 Aug 1941 to 8 June 1942 to 30 Sep 1942 to 6 Jan 1943 to 11 June 1943	8 Staffel:	Oblt. Hans Lass Hptm. Werner Schroer	to - June 1942 to 19 Apr 1943
			9 Staffel:	Oblt. Erbo Graf von Kageneck Lt. Klaus Faber Hptm. Hans-Joachim Heinecke Hptm. Franz-Werner Rott	to 24 Dec 1941 to 30 Jan 1942 to - Mar 1943 to - June 1943
II Gruppe:	Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert Oblt. Gustav Rödel Hptm. Erich Gerlitz Hptm. Gustav Rödel Hptm. Werner Schroer	to 23 Nov 1941 to 25 Dec 1941 to 20 May 1942 to 20 Apr 1943 to 13 Mar 1944	IV Gruppe: This Gruppe was not utilized in Africa. It was established in May of 1943 in Greece and fought in the Balkans until March of 1944. The last operational areas for the Gruppe were in Steinamanger in Hungary and on the Western Front. The unit was disbanded in March 1945.		

# APPENDIX IV

## JG 27 Pilots with Ten or More Victories

Hptm. Erhard Braune	14	Ofw. Alfred Müller	15 (KIA)
Oblt. Emil Clade	26	Ofw. Hermann Müller	10
Lt. Hans-Gunnar Culeman	14 (MIA)	Oberstlt. Eduard Neumann	11
Hptm. Max Dobislav	15	Ofw. Hans Niederhofer	12
Major Ernst Düllberg	33	Lt. Alexander Ottnad	13 (POW)
Ofw. Albert Espenlaub	14 (KIA)	Major Karl-Wolfgang Redlich	37 (total 43, KIA)
Oblt. Gert Framm	10	Hptm. Hans Remmer	26 (KIA)
Major Ludwig Franzisket	43	Lt. Horst Reuter	21
GenLt. Adolf Galland	12 (total 104)	Lt. Hans Richter	21 (KIA)
Hptm. Erich Gerlitz	15 (KIA)	Oberst Gustav Rödel	98
Lt. Fritz Gromotka	27	Oblt. Heinrich Rosenberg	11
Fw. Viktor Gruber	10	Ofw. Erwin Sawallisch	24 (total 38, KIA)
Hptm. Hans-Joachim Heinecke	10	Oblt. Eberhard Schade	11 (MIA)
Lt. Friedrich Hoffmann	10 (KIA)	Fw. Georg Schanz	10
Hptm. Gerhard Homuth	61 (KIA)	Lt. Hans Schliedermann	14 (KIA)
Fw. Hans Jürgens	11 (KIA)	Lt. Bernd Schneider	23 (MIA)
Oblt. Erbo Graf von Kageneck	67 (KIA)	Lt. Erich Schofbeck	12 (MIA)
Oblt. Emil Kaiser	13	Major Werner Schroer	26 (total 95)
Oblt. Karl-Heinz Kapp	10 (KIA)	Oblt. Otto Schulz	51 (MIA)
Hptm. Friedrich Keller	13	Ofw. Schulze	10
Lt. Gerhard Keppler	12	Major Rudolf Sinner	32 (total 39)
Oblt. Willi Kientsch	52 (KIA)	Oblt. Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt	59 (MIA)
Hptm. Joachim Kirschner	13 (total 188)	Lt. Günther Steinhausen	40 (MIA)
Oblt. Friedrich Korner	36 (POW)	Lt. Heinrich Steis	21 (KIA)
Lt. Willi Kothmann	13 (MIA)	Oblt. Franz Stiegler	28
Uffz. Erich Krainik	12 (KIA)	Lt. Gustav Sturm	16
Ofw. Herbert Krenz	11 (MIA)	Oblt. Hermann Tangerding	11 (KIA)
Oblt. Hans Lass	14	Hptm. Ferdinand Vögl	31 (total 33)
Oblt. Karl von Lieres	31 (KIA)	Hptm. Peter Werfft (Wesely)	26
Hptm. Wolfgang Lippert	14 (KIA)	Oblt. Wilhelm Wiesinger	10 (KIA)
Lt. Hans Löffler	11 (MIA)	Lt. Franz Woidich	2 (total 110)
Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille	151 (total 158, KIA)	Lt. Karl Wunsch	22 (MIA)
Hptm. Otto Meyer	15 (KIA)		

# APPENDIX V

## Brief Data for Aircraft in Africa

Type:	Armament:	Speed:	Ceiling:	Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4	
Hurricane IIc	4 x 20 mm	507 kmh	9150 m	The F model, also known as the "Fritz", was the most commonly used of the Messerschmitt series in Africa and the aircraft in which Marseille scored the overwhelming majority of his kills. Because of its reduced armament, when this type reached the front lines it was initially looked upon with disfavor by the fighter pilots. Nevertheless, all pilots in Africa achieved their greatest successes with this model, a fact attributable to the aircraft's official top speed of 635 kmh (rarely attained by the type in Africa, however, due to modifications for tropical climate).	
Ju 88 C-6	3 x 20 mm	500 kmh	9900 m		
Bf 109 F-4(Trop)	3 x 7.9 mm	544 kmh	11000 m		
	1 x 20 mm				
Spitfire V	2 x 7.9 mm	579 kmh	11300 m		
Curtiss P-40F (Warhawk)	2 x 20 mm	586 kmh	10500 m		
	4 x 7.7 mm				
Curtiss Kittyhawk III	6 x 12.7 mm	583 kmh	8600 m	Here follows the technical data for this aircraft, applicable to Marseille's "Yellow 14" as well:	
Hurricane IIc	2 x 37 mm	460 kmh	7800m		
	2 x 7.7 mm	600 kmh			
Bf 109 G-1(Trop)	1 x 20 mm				
	2 x 12.7 mm				
				Engine:	Daimler-Benz DB 601 E at 1350 hp
				Maximum speed:	635 kmh
				Cruising speed:	530 kmh
				Landing speed:	130 kmh
				Climb rate:	6000 meters in six minutes
				Range:	650 km
				Ceiling:	11600 m
				Armament:	1 x MG 151 20 mm cannon firing thru hub
					2 x MG 17 machine guns in engine cowl
				Communications:	FuG Z, FuG 25a

APPENDIX VI

The Thirty Top British Fighter Pilots in Africa

Name	Squadron	Africa	Total Victories	Name	Squadron	Africa	Total Victories
C.R. Caldwell	250,112	20.5	28.5	D.W. Golding	4 SAAF	9.12	9.12
A.E. Marshall	73, 250	16	19.5	P.H. Dunn	80, 274	9	9
J.L. Waddy	250, 260, 92, 4 SAAF	15.5	15.5	E.L. Joyce	73	9	10
E.M. Mason	80, 274	15.5	17.4	J.H. Wedgwood	92	9	13
L.C. Wade	33	15	25	N. Bowker	112	8.33	10.33
J. Dodds	274	14	14	J.S. Denis	73	8.5	8.5
B. Drake	112	14	24.5	D.G.S. Honor	274	8(9?)	9.5
P.G. Wykeham-Barnes	80, 274, 73	13	15	E.C. Saville	2 SAAF, 112	8	8
A.W. Barr	3 RAAF	12.5	12.5	A. Watson	252, 272	8	12
V.C. Woodward	33	12.5	21.83	J.H. Curry	601	7.33	7.33
J.H. Lapsley	80, 274	11	11	J.E. Frost	5 SAAF	7.33	15
A.C. Bosman	4 SAAF, 2 SAAF	10.5	10.5	A.C. Cameron	3 RAAF	7	7
R.H.M. Gibbes	3 RAAF	10.25	10.25	W.L. Chisholm	92	7	8
R.H. Talbot	274, 1 SAAF	10	10	C.H. Dyson	33	7	7
				S. Godden	274	7	7
				M.S. Hards	250	7	10



# APPENDIX VII

## Luftwaffe in Africa

### Air Order of Battle as of 1 October 1942

Unit	Location	Aircraft Type	Unit	Location	Aircraft Type
<b>Fighters:</b>			<b>Long-range Reconnaissance:</b>		
HQ JG 27	Turbiya	Bf 109 F, G	1(F)/121	Fuka-Nord	Ju 88
I/JG 27	Sicily	Bf 109 F, G	2(F)/123	Castelli	Ju 88
II/JG 27	enroute to Africa	Bf 109 F, G			
III/JG 27	Quotaifiya	Bf 109 F, G	<b>Bombers:</b>		
I/JG 77	Bir el Abd	Bf 109 F, G	Korpskette 10 FIK.	Castelli	He 111, Fi 156
Jagdkommando	Kreta    Castelli	Bf 109 F, G	HQ/LG 1	Heraklion	Ju 88
Jagdkommando	Berca    Berca	Bf 109 F, G	I/LG 1	Heraklion	Ju 88
Jagdkommando	Tobruk   Tobruk	Bf 109 F, G	II/LG 1	Heraklion	Ju 88
III/ZG 26	Castelli	Bf 110 C	III/KG 77	enroute to Africa	Ju 88
	(8 Staffel in Derna)				
10/ZG 26	Castelli	Ju 88	<b>Dive Bombers:</b>		
			HQ StG 3	Quasaba	Ju 87
<b>Fighter-Bombers:</b>			I/StG 3	Quasaba	Ju 87
I/StG 2	Bir el Abd	Bf 109 E	III/StG 3	Quasaba	Ju 87
<b>Tactical Reconnaissance:</b>			<b>Seaplanes:</b>		
4(H)/12	Bir el Abd	Bf109 E, F	2/125	Suda Bay	Ar 196

APPENDIX VIII

Italian Air Force in Africa

Air Order of Battle as of 1 October 1942

Unit	Aircraft Type	Unit	Aircraft Type
<b>Fighters:</b>		<b>Bombers:</b>	
2 Stormo (8 and 13 Gruppi)	MC 200	5 Stormo (101 Gruppo)	Ju 87
3 Stormo (13 and 23 Gruppi)	MC 202	35 Stormo (86 and 95 Gruppi)	Z 1007
4 Stormo (9 and 10 Gruppi)	MC 202	131 Gruppo	SM 79
150 Gruppo	MC 202	133 Gruppo	SM 79
160 Gruppo	CR 42 (attack)		
15 Stormo	CR 42 (attack)		
50 Stormo	CR 42 (attack)		

# APPENDIX IX

## Western Desert Air Force

### Air Order of Battle as of 1 October 1942

#### Fighter and Bomber Units:

Unit	Primary Mission	Aircraft Types	Unit	Primary Mission	Aircraft Types
6 and 7 SAAF Sq.	Anti-tank	Hurricane IId	285 Wing 60 SAAF Sq.	Bomber	Baltimore
233 Wing 2 Sq., 4 SAAF Sq., 260 Sq., 5 SAAF Sq.	Fighter	Kittyhawk and Tomahawk	3 SAAF Wing 12 Sq., 24 Sq., 21 SAAF Sq.	Bomber	Boston Baltimore
239 Wing 3 RAAF Sq., 112 Sq., 250 Sq., 240 Sq.	Fighter	Kittyhawk	232 Wing 55 Sq., 223 Sq.	Bomber	Baltimore
244 Wing 92 Sq., 145 Sq., 601 Sq., 73 Sq.	Fighter Hurricane	Spitfire V and	12th Bomber Gp. 81st, 82nd, 83rd and 434th Squadrons	Bomber	B-25 Mitchell
57th Fighter Gp. 64th, 65th, 66th Sq.	Fighter	P-40F Warhawk	205th Bomber Gp.	Heavy Bomber	B-24 Liberator
7 SAAF Wing 80 Sq., 127 Sq., 335 Sq., 274 Sq.	Fighter	Hurricane IIb	Units in Egypt: 234 Wing with 889 FAA 889 FAA Sq.	Fighter	Hurricane IIc Beaufighter
243 Wing 1 SAAF Sq., 33 Sq., 213 Sq., 238 Sq.	Fighter	Hurricane IIc	250 Wing 89 Sq.	Fighter	Hurricane IIb Spitfire and Beaufighter
40 Sq., 4 SAAF Sq.,	Tactical	Hurricane IIb	252 Wing 46 Sq., 417 Sq.	Fighter	Hurricane IIb Spitfire
208 Sq.	Reconnaissance				

# APPENDIX X

## Abbreviations

A selection of abbreviations and terms used in the text (ranks in parentheses are closest corresponding American equivalent)

AD	Afrika Division	Maj.	Major (Major)
Ar	Arado (aircraft manufacturer)	Mc	Macchi (Italian aircraft manufacturer)
Bf	Bayerische Flugzeugwerke (aircraft manufacturer)	Me	Messerschmitt (aircraft manufacturer)
DAK	Deutsches Afrikakorps	Oblt.	Oberleutnant (1st Lieutenant)
FHQ	Führerhauptquartier (Hitler's Headquarters)	Ofw.	Oberfeldwebel (Master Sgt., Warrant Officer)
Fi	Fieseler (aircraft manufacturer)	OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (Army High Command)
Flak	Flugabwehrkanone (anti-aircraft gun)	OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces)
FIK	Fliegerkorps	Panzer	tank or armored
freie Jagd	free-ranging fighter sweep or patrol	PR	Panzer-Regiment
Fw.	Feldwebel (Sergeant)	PzBrig.	Panzer-Brigade
Gefr.	Gefreiter (Private 1st Class)	PzGr.	Panzergruppe
Gen.d.Fl.	General der Flieger (General)	RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
GenLt.	Generalleutnant (Lieutenant General)	RAF	Royal Air Force
GenMaj.	Generalmajor (Major General)	Rotte	two-plane element, basic unit of Luftwaffe formations
Geschwader	Wing (organizational, equivalent)	Rottenflieger	wingman
GFM	Generalfeldmarschall (5 star General)	Rottenführer	wing leader
Hptm.	Hauptmann (Captain)	SAAF	South African Air Force
la	Erster Generalstabsoffizier (first officer of the General Staff)	Schwarm	two-Rotten flying unit
Ic	Dritter Generalstabsoffizier (third officer of the General Staff)	Stab	Headquarters
i.G.	im Generalstab (member of the General Staff)	Staffel	squadron (equivalent)
JG	Jagdgeschwader (fighter Geschwader)	StG	Sturzkampfgeschwader (dive-bomber Geschwader)
Ju	Junkers (aircraft manufacturer)	Uffz.	Unteroffizier
KLK	Kampflehrgeschwader (bomber training Geschwader, operational)	ZG	Zerstörergeschwader (long-range fighter/attack Geschwader)
LG	Lehrgeschwader (operational training Geschwader)		
Lt.	Leutnant (2nd Lieutenant)		

# SOURCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Alman, Karl: *Ritterkreuzträger des Afrikakorps*, Rastatt 1987 (7th ed.)  
—, *Panzerschlacht bei Sidi Rezegh*, Rastatt 1966
- Altmann, Jost: *Ein Flieger, Freund und Kamerad: Hans-Joachim Marseille* (private materials)
- Bartz, Karl: *Als der Himmel brannte*, Hannover 1955
- Bharucha, PC: *The North African Campaign, 1940-1943*, London, 1948
- Constable, Trevor, and Toliver, R.F.: *Das waren die deutschen Fliegerasse*, Stuttgart 1975
- Dettmann, Fritz: *Mein Freund Marseille*, Berlin 1944  
Deutsches Soldatenjahrbuch: 1978 to 1990, Munich  
—, 1977: *Die Marseille-Kaserne in Uetersen*
- Fraschka, Günther: *Mit Schwertern und Brillanten*, Wiesbaden, 1977
- Fröhlich, Stefan: *Als Fliegerführerin Afrika* (private materials given to publisher)
- Galland, Adolf: *Die Ersten und die Letzten*, Munich 1953  
"Gemeinschaft der Jagdflieger": *Jägerblatt*, 1970-1983
- Girbig, Werner, and Ring, Hans: *Jagdgeschwader 27*, Stuttgart 1991 (7th ed.)
- Haase, O.: *Vom Wesen des Jagdfliegers* (see Skawran) (private materials)
- Gollob, Gordon: *Fliegernachwuchs-Auslese*, ZS 1962  
—, *Gespräch mit dem Autor über Jägerei* (private materials)
- Harlinghausen, Martin: *Mein Einsatz in Afrika* (private materials, made available to the author)
- Herington, John: *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1945*, Canberra 1954
- Jagdgeschwader 27*: Tagesbefehl of 2 October 1942  
—, *An den Fliegerführer Afrika*: Meldung eines Flugunfalles
- Kühn, Volkmar: *Mit Rommel in der Wüste*, Stuttgart 1991 (9th ed.)  
—, *Rommel in the Desert*, West Chester PA 1991
- Kurowski, Franz: *Das Afrikakorps*, Munich 1978  
—, Reports in: *Die Oase* 1968-1978  
—, *Luftwaffe am Feind 1939-1945*, Dülmen 1988
- Lange, Herbert: *Wie wir Marseille am Himmel über uns sahen* (author's correspondence)
- Meier, Horst: "Elbe 1" unvergessen (author's correspondence)
- Müller, Gerhard: *Das Panzerregiment 5 in Afrika* (private materials)
- Murphy, W.E.: *Point 175, the Battle of Sunday of the Dead 1941*, Wellington 1954
- Neumann, Eduard: "Über Hans-Joachim Marseille in: Geschichte eines deutschen Jagdfliegers", History Films Number G 013  
—, Speech at the naming of the Marseille-Kaserne in Uetersen  
—, *Das Jagdgeschwader 27 in Afrika*, Report in: "Luftkampf zwischen Sand und Sonne"

- Oberbefehlshaber Süd: Bericht der Flugunfalluntersuchungsstelle zum Tode von Hptm. Hans-Joachim Marseille from 8 October 1942 (private materials)
- Overy, R.J.: *The Air War 1939-1945*, New York 1980
- Panzenhagen, Albert: Legionäre sehen Marseille über sich im Kampf um Marsa Matruk (author's correspondence)
- Richter, Franz: Marseille und sein Rottenflieger Pöttgen: Ein dauerhaftes Gespann des Erfolges (author's correspondence)
- Rieckhoff, H.J.: *Trumpfoder Bluff?*, Geneva 1945
- Ring, Hans, and Shores, Christopher: *Luftkampf zwischen Sand und Sonne*, Stuttgart 1969
- Rommel, Erwin: *Krieg ohne Hass*, Heidenheim 1950
- Schulz, Johann: *Sofiel Bir Hacheim*, Munich 1961  
—, *Oberst Ernst-Günther Baade, der Sieger von Bir Hacheim*, Munich 1962
- Schulze, Robert: Wir nannten ihn Jochen (private materials)
- Seemen, Gerhard v.: *Die Ritterkreuzträger 1939-1945*, (2nd ed.) Dorheim 1979
- Skawran, Prof.Dr. Paul: *Ikaros, Persönlichkeit und Wesen des deutschen Jagdfliegers im 2. Weltkrieg, Steinebach am Wörthsee* (no year given)
- , "Alter und Leistung in der Jagdfliegerei", *Jägerblatt* 7-8 1954
- , "Das Hochleistungsalter der Jagdfliegerei", *Jägerblatt* 10-11 1962
- Stahlschmidt, Hans-Arnold: *Briefe in die Heimat* (private materials)
- Stahlschmidt, Hilde: Mein Sohn, Hans-Arnold, Briefe, Berichte und Einsatzschilderungen (author's correspondence)
- Westphal, Siegfried: *Schicksal Nordafrika*, 1954
- Wirsing, Gieselher: *Das Zeitalter des Ikaros*, Jena 1944
- Witte, Helmut: Marseille im Luftkampf von der Erde aus gesehen (aus dem Panzer) (private materials)
- Wolz, Alwin: Rommelnde Luftwaffenflak in Afrika (author's correspondence)
- Yindrich, I.J. *Fortress Tobruk*, London 1951
- Young, Desmond: *Rommel*, Wiesbaden 1959
- Zimmermann, K.: "Junge Jäger", in: *Das Reich* 1942
- Zink, J.: *Hat der Flieger Angst?*, ZS 1943



## Acknowledgments:

Special gratitude goes out from the author to all those former Africans who assisted in compiling information for the book *Luftkrieg über dem Mittelmeer - Adler über der Wüste*.

Thanks also to all former members of the DAK for additional help with the outline of this work, in which the fighter aces in the desert are particularly memorialized.

From the aviation collection of Walter Matthiesen, Minden, valuable photographs and other documents were made available to me. For this Herr Walter Matthiesen deserves particular recognition.

Deutsche Aerospace, Munich

Royal Aeronautical Society, London, for providing the study "The Life and Work of Sir Sydney Camm"

Finally, Herr Walter Wübbe, Haltern, provided a number of additional photos and gathered many interesting facts about Hans-Joachim Marseille for the author from the following sources:

Fraschka, Günther: *Mit Schzvertern und Brillanten*, Munich 1977

Dettmann, Fritz: *Mein Freund Marseille*, Berlin 1944  
Hagen, Hans Peter: *Husaren des Himmels*, Rastatt 1964

Holl Hans: *Der Stern von Afrika*, Rastatt 1975

Just, Günther: *Die ruhmreichen Vier*, Hannover 1972

Musciano, Walter A.: *Die berühmte Me 109 und ihre Piloten*, Stuttgart 1989

Nowarra, Heinz Joachim: *Marseille, Star of Africa*, California, 1968.

Obermaier, Ernst: *Asse der Luftwaffe*, Munich 1981  
—, *Die deutsche Luftwaffe im Afrika-Feldzug*, Stuttgart 1979

Stiller, Günter: *Der Playboy mit dem Ritterkreuz*, Series in Bild am Sonntag, Hamburg 1979

Wehrmacht, Die: 1942, Berlin 1942

Winter, Franz Florian: *Die verlorenen Adler*, Munich 1987

Wübbe, Walter: *Marseille in Afrika* (private material)

With this assistance Herr Wübbe has done much to assist in completing this book. To him, too, I owe a particular debt of gratitude.

Dortmund-Oespel  
January 1994  
Franz Kurowski