

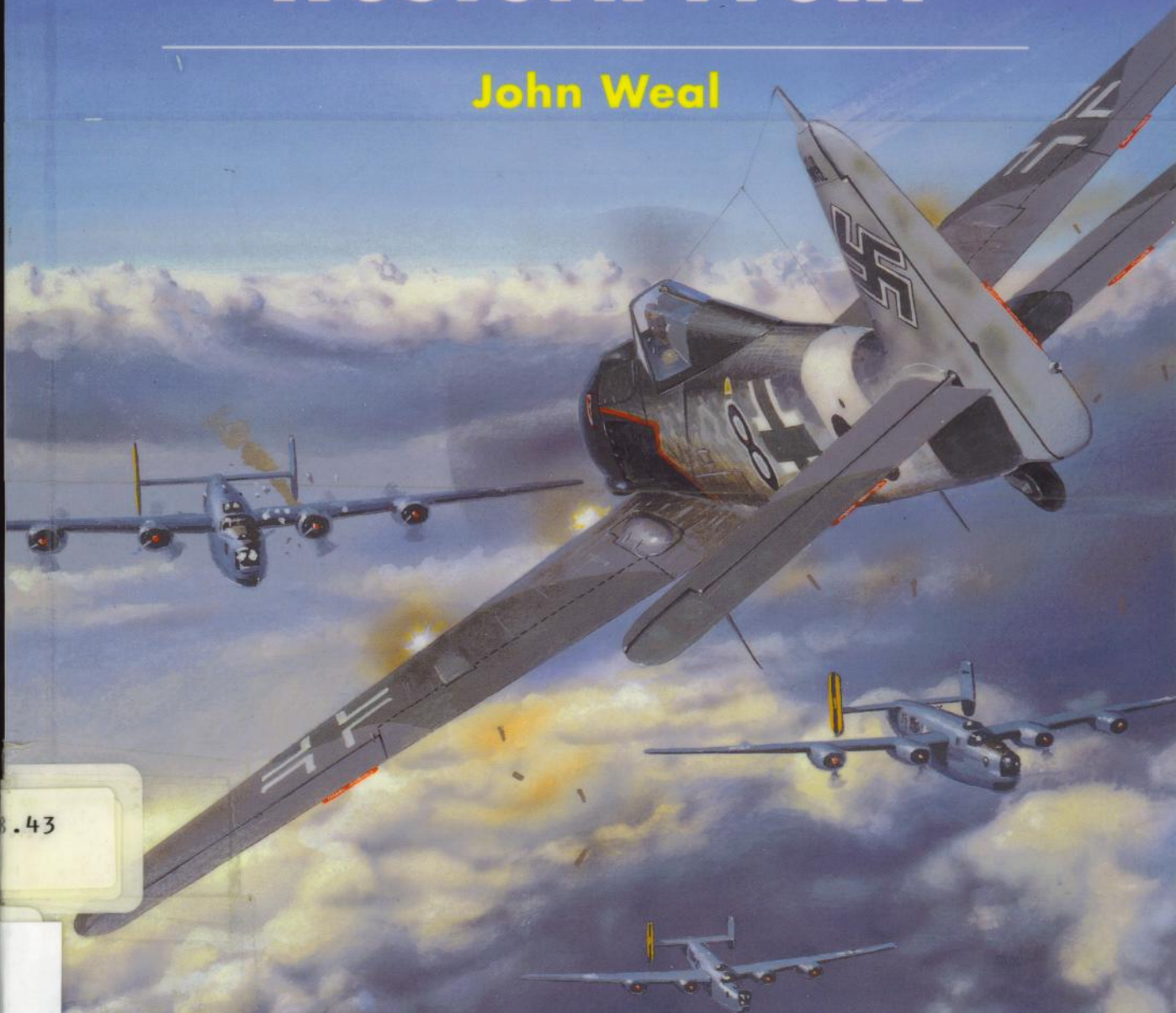


OSPREY AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES • 9



Focke-Wulf Fw 190 Aces of the Western Front

John Weal



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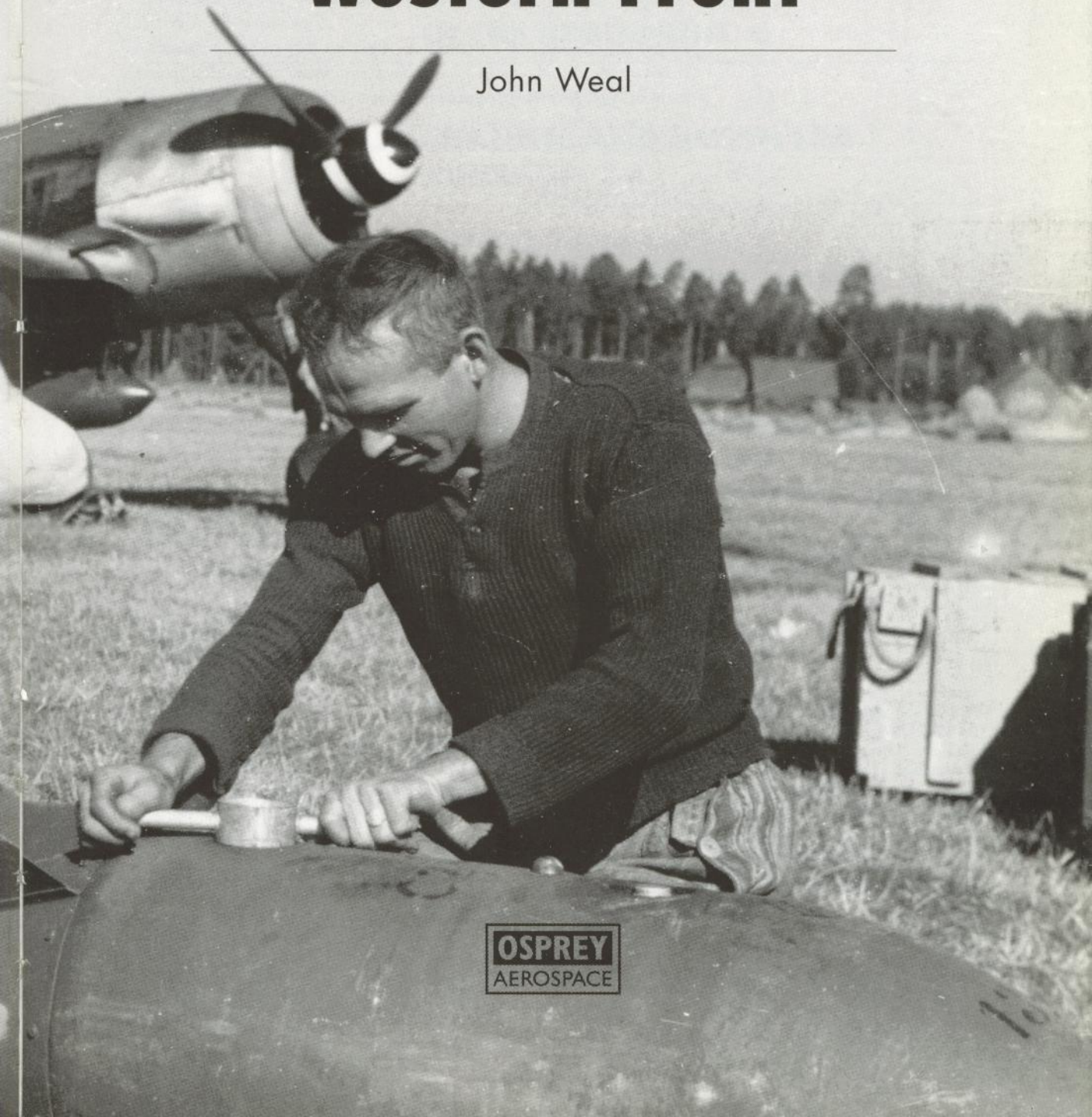


SERIES EDITOR: TONY HOLMES

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Fw 190 Aces of the Western Front

John Weal



OSPREY
AEROSPACE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

To make this new series as authoritative as possible, the editor would be extremely interested in hearing from any individual who may have relevant photographs, documentation or first-hand experiences relating to the elite pilots, and their aircraft, of the various theatres of war. Any material used will be fully credited to its original source. Please write to Tony Holmes at 1 Bradbourne Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 3PZ, Great Britain.

Front cover

With all four wing cannon of his Fw 190A-8/R-8 'Sturmbock' thumping away, Unteroffizier Willi Maximowitz of IV.(Sturm)/JG 3 carries out a classic 'twelve-o'clock high' frontal attack on a trio of B-24J Liberators of the Eighth AF's 93rd Bomb Group high over western Germany in the late summer of 1944
(Cover Painting by Iain Wyllie)

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IN THE BEGINNING

On the eve of the German invasion of Poland, Hermann Göring's Order of the Day to his air force read, in part, as follows; 'Soldiers of the Luftwaffe! Comrades! For weeks and months past, with clenched fists and gritted teeth, you have had to endure the outrages and unbelievable provocations which a so-called state, itself a product of the insanity of the Treaty of Versailles, has had the affrontery to offer the Greater German Reich. Now the cup is full. The German people can no longer tolerate the criminal activities to which hundreds and thousands of our fellow countrymen in the former German eastern provinces have already fallen victim. Any further hesitation would be tantamount to abandoning the holy rights of the German nation.

'The *Führer* has called. Your hour of greatness has arrived. The Luftwaffe – for many years past the most effective instrument in the *Führer's* political pursuance of peace – must now demonstrate its readiness, at this decisive moment, to fulfil the enormous tasks being asked of it. The trust which the *Führer* and the German people have placed in you knows no bounds. As your Commander-in-Chief I am both proud and happy, for I know with rock-like certainty that each and every one of you will be worthy of that trust in every way.

'Aircrew! With lightning-fast attacks you will destroy the enemy, wherever he stands to fight, or whether he be in full retreat. With your selfless devotion to duty you will wear down and crush all resistance.

'Comrades! I look each of you straight in the eye and charge every single one of you to give his all for *Volk* and Fatherland. At your head our beloved *Führer*, behind you the entire German nation united in national-socialism. For us there can be but one solution: Victory!

'Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe Hermann Göring,
Generalfeldmarschall.

With this somewhat florid exhortation ringing in their ears, the Luftwaffe duly went to war against Poland at 0445 hours on the morning of 1 September 1939. And in the first 12 months of the subsequent hostilities they delivered everything that their Commander-in-Chief had demanded of them. They annihilated the Polish air force long before the campaign to conquer that hapless country had run its 18-day course. By the year's end they had repulsed an all-out effort by RAF Bomber Command to breach Germany's northern seaboard defences by day (and in so doing had unwittingly set in train Britain's five-year nocturnal bomber offensive). In the spring of 1940 they helped deny Norway's fjords to units of the Royal Navy and harried the survivors back across the North Sea. They then spearheaded the invasions of the Low Countries and France, the former surrendering in a matter of days, the latter in just six short weeks.

It was not until September 1940 that the aura of seeming invincibility which had grown up around the Luftwaffe was finally shattered in the skies over southern England as first the Ju 87 Stuka, the very epitome of *Blitzkrieg*, and then the Bf 110 – Göring's own favoured and much-vaunted 'Ironsides' – were found wanting in the crucible of combat aris-

ing out of organised aerial opposition. The second year of the war in the west was to see a marked swing of the pendulum. Göring's bombers continued their attacks on the British Isles, but now it was they who were being forced to come under cover of darkness. In the spring of 1941 a significant part of the Luftwaffe's fighting strength decamped for the Balkans and the Mediterranean, to be followed eastwards only a few weeks later by the bulk of the remainder as the *Führer* gathered his forces for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

In the west there remained just two complete *Jagdgeschwader* (JG's 2 and 26, between them fielding exactly 140 serviceable Bf 109Es and Fs as of 28 June 1941) with which the Luftwaffe sought to contain the growing belligerence of the British. With the advent of the better spring weather the RAF was now beginning to 'lean' ever harder across the Channel, flexing its new-found muscle by staging a series of Rhubarbs and Circuses. These exotically-named operations – the first flown by small groups of fighters, the second consisting of larger numbers of fighters escorting a few bombers – were specifically designed to entice the defending German *Jagdgeschwader* up into combat and to inflict casualties upon them.

It was at this juncture, exactly two years into the war and with the RAF slowly gaining ascendancy in the west, that an unfamiliar shape appeared on the Channel Front – a new radial-engined fighter whose introduction was to 'completely alter the pattern of air fighting by day over France'.

The first intimations of the newcomer's presence were to be found in the combat reports of Fighter Command pilots. By September 1941, these had begun to describe encounters with radial-engined machines variously mis-identified as French Bloch 151s or American Curtiss Hawk 75s. With the benefit of hindsight, it may seem a little hard to believe that any credence would be given to accounts suggesting that the Luftwaffe was committing machines such as these to frontline combat against the

Although not the first time the Fw 190 was captured on film, this early shot shows a Focke-Wulf of JG 26 diving away from Bostons of No 226 Sqn during Circus No 116A to Comines power station on 24 March 1942. Seven of the Spitfire escort failed to return against the loss of 4. Staffel's Leutnant Georg Rosenblath on this date



best the RAF then had to offer. But at a time when the British were themselves operating, or had on order, a wide variety of American aircraft of all types (including several which had been flown by the French in 1940), such reports could not be dismissed out of hand.

It was not until 13 October, when the camera-gun of a No 129 Sqn Spitfire captured one of the mystery machines squarely on film during a Circus to Arques, that proof positive of its identity was obtained. As the RAF's Intelligence Branch had suspected for some time, the Luftwaffe had indeed developed and was now introducing into service a brand-new fighter – the Focke-Wulf Fw 190.

Dating back a full four years to the autumn of 1937, and in response to a requirement by the *Reichsluftfahrtministerium* (German Air Ministry) for a possible back-up, or future replacement, fighter for the Messerschmitt Bf 109 then entering service, Focke-Wulf's chief designer, Dipl-Ing Kurt Tank, had first submitted a number of orthodox designs powered by liquid-cooled, in-line engines. It was not until he then proposed a more radical concept featuring a powerful 14-cylinder, air-cooled, BMW radial engine – which was then very much at odds with contemporary fighter design philosophy – that the RLM began to evince real interest. The opportunity to procure a second fighter without adding to the already overburdened production and delivery schedules of Daimler-Benz's engine plants was perhaps the deciding factor. But if the Fw 190 owed its very existence to the BMW radial engine, then that self-same powerplant all but caused the fighter's early demise. Problems, particularly with overheating, were legion right from the start. After the maiden flight of the first prototype on 1 June 1939, when cockpit temperatures reached 55°C (131°F), Focke-Wulf's chief test pilot, Flugkapitän Hans Sander described it as 'like sitting with both feet in the fireplace'. Recrim-



Dipl-Ingenieur Dr Kurt Waldemar Tank, an accomplished pilot himself, poses proudly in the cockpit of arguably his most famous design, the Focke-Wulf Fw 190

An all too familiar scene at any early Fw 190 base as the station fire crew smother yet another overheating BMW in foam



inations followed, with Focke-Wulf blaming the engine manufacturers and BMW accusing Tank of not providing a proper cooling system.

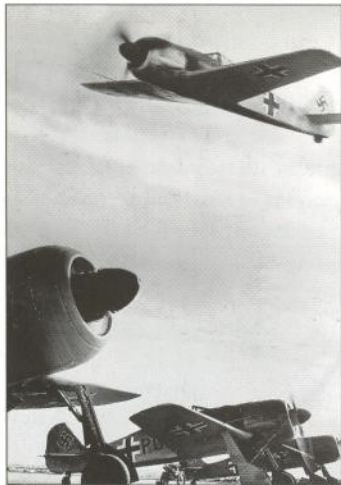
In the end, BMW engineers persuaded both Tank and the RLM to allow them to abandon work on the original BMW 139 engine in favour of the more promising and somewhat larger BMW 801. Although of roughly the same diameter as the 139, this new powerplant was appreciably heavier and longer, and the fifth prototype Fw 190 had to undergo significant redesign to accommodate it. But still the problems persisted. Despite the presence of a cooling fan, cylinder head temperatures in the rear row of the 801 engine soared alarmingly. When armament was introduced on the sixth prototype, the heat began to cook the ammunition of the fuselage MG 17 machine-guns! But Tank plodded doggedly on. After all, hadn't the *Generalfeldmarschall* himself, after witnessing an impressive flying display at Focke-Wulf's Bremen plant early in 1940, enthusiastically instructed him to start turning out his new fighters 'like hot cakes'. In the event, the salvation of the entire Fw 190 programme was brought about by a pair of relatively low-ranking Luftwaffe officers, both of whom had originally enlisted as mechanics.

In March 1941 25-year-old Oberleutnant Karl Borris, currently serving as Technical Officer of the second *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 26 'Schlageter' (II./JG 26), was ordered to report to the RLM's test centre at Rechlin with some 30 selected technicians. Awaiting them there were six pre-production Fw 190A-0 fighters. This little force was christened the *Erprobungsstaffel* (Operational Test Squadron) 190. The man chosen to command the *Staffel* was Oberleutnant Otto Behrens, a trained motor mechanic in civilian life who, like Borris, had risen through the ranks. It was thanks mainly to these two that the Fw 190 was finally to emerge from the traumas of the ensuing four months as a viable frontline fighter.

Although quickly convinced of the superb flying characteristics of the new machine (Rechlin possessed captured examples of many enemy aircraft types and the Fw 190 was regularly flown against the test-centre's tame Spitfire for purposes of comparison and evaluation), the BMW 801 continued to give nothing but trouble. The heavily armoured oil cooler ring fractured on innumerable occasions, the bottom cylinder of the rear row continuously overheated and seized, oil lines ruptured and fuel lines leaked dangerous petrol fumes into the cockpit. Very often the propeller mechanism failed to function properly. If they did succeed in getting airborne, Behrens' pilots scarcely dared to let the runway out of their sight, choosing instead to zoom back and forth across the field 'smoking and stinking like bees with their backsides on fire'. The resident RLM test-pilots could only look on in disbelief. In order to short-circuit bureau-



Oberleutnant, later Major, Karl Borris of JG 26 played an important part in the Fw 190 story from beginning to end. Although known as a strict disciplinarian, it would appear that on this occasion his red setter Franz, who was also the unit mascot, is very much in the driving seat!



'Like bees with their backsides on fire'. A photo, albeit retouched, of an Fw 190A-0 overflying the flightline at Rechlin. Note all engines running . . . and not a fire in sight

One of 6./JG 26's early A-1s, 'Brown 1' (Wk-Nr 033) seen at Wevelghem late in November 1941.

Oberfeldwebel Kurt Goerbig was killed in this aircraft four weeks later during 6. *Staffel*'s disastrous transfer flight from Wevelghem to Abbeville-Drucat



cratic channels and their attendant red tape as much as possible, Tank and his team were constantly shuttling backwards and forwards between Bremen and Rechlin in direct response to Behrens' urgent demands for one modification after another. Such frantic activity could not go unnoticed for long, however, and an RLM commission was set up to review the entire project. It was only in the face of vehement protests from both Behrens and Borris, whose ultimate faith in the Fw 190's outstanding qualities remained undiminished, that the commission's expressed recommendation to terminate the programme was overruled.

And slowly things began to come right. As spring gave way to summer, the *Staffel*'s working day commenced with the sunrise at 0400 (at which hour they took a fiendish delight in rousing the establishment from its slumbers by shattering the landscaped tranquility of the nearby married quarters complex with the crescendo bellow of a healthy BMW 801). With but a short midday break for a brief nap, or quick dip in the waters of Lake Müritz which lapped their dispersal area, they continued their intensive test regime until darkness fell. Finally, by the end of July, and with over 50 modifications successfully implemented, they had the makings of a fighter on their hands, and the Fw 190 was given clearance for frontline service.

In August 1941 *Erprobungsstaffel* 190 flew some of the earliest Fw 190A-1 production models to Le Bourget airfield outside Paris, where they were to begin conversion of II./JG 26, the initial *Gruppe* selected for re-equipment. Not unnaturally, the first pilot to relinquish his obsolescent Bf 109E-7 for a new Focke-Wulf was the *Gruppenkommandeur*, ex-Legion Condor veteran Hauptmann Walter Adolph. Oberleutnant Walter Schneider's 6. *Staffel* were next to re-equip, closely followed by the 4. and 5. *Staffeln* (Oberleutnants Kurt Ebersberger and Wolfgang Kosse) in quick succession. Because a number of technical difficulties had not yet been fully resolved, actual conversion was a slow process (for a brief description of the conversion course from Bf 109 to Fw 190 see *Aces 6 Focke-Wulf Fw 190 Aces of the Russian Front*, pages 9 to 11). Before the end of the month, however, the entire *Gruppe* was working up on the new fighter, whereupon *Erprobungsstaffel* 190 was disbanded and its personnel returned to their parent units.

By the beginning of September 1941 II./JG 26 had transferred back to Belgium, first to Maldeghem, and thence to Moorseele and Wevelghem – the latter's better hangarage and workshop facilities proved of great benefit in the maintenance and servicing of the *Gruppe's* still temperamental new mounts. Although delighted with the handling characteristics of the Focke-Wulf, particularly its incredible rate of roll and diving acceleration, the pilots were all too well

aware of its continuing teething troubles. Nor were they enamoured of the A-1's armament. The relative ineffectiveness of the quartet of MG 17 machine-guns (whose less than impressive penetrating power had led to their being somewhat disparagingly described in Luftwaffe circles as 'door-knockers'), combined with the low muzzle velocity and rate of fire of the brace of MG FF wing cannon, did not make for ideal fighter armament, the latter suffering particularly in comparison to the contemporary Bf 109F-4's engine-mounted MG 151.

It was perhaps a mixture of unfamiliarity with the Focke-Wulf on the part of II./JG 26's pilots, combined with a certain amount of caution engendered by the type's acknowledged – but, as yet, still unrectified – faults, which prompted them to handle it a trifle gingerly at first. In turn, this may have led their early opponents to identify this newcomer to the Channel Front as some foreign stop-gap deployed by the Luftwaffe, rather than the world-beater it would soon prove to be. The first operational sorties had already taken place before August was out, and the signs were, admittedly, not altogether auspicious.

The first frontline Fw 190 fatality suffered by the *Luftwaffe* was the loss of 6. *Staffel's* Leutnant Heinz Schenk on 29 August 1941 to 'friendly' anti-aircraft fire near Dunkirk – always an inherent danger when flying a new and unfamiliar shape over home territory. Three weeks later, on 18 September, there occurred the first combat loss when *Gruppenkommandeur* Walter Adolph was on shipping escort duty with eight of his Fw



Another of the first A-1s in service, Leutnant Horst Sternberg's 'Black 13' of 5. *Staffel* sits in readiness at Wevelghem that same November. Sternberg became *Kapitän* of 5./JG 26 early in 1943, only to fall victim to P-47s in February 1944 when his score was standing at 23 victories.

Not all Fw 190 accidents were caused by engine fires. This early III. *Gruppe* aircraft (Wk-Nr 403), still bearing evidence of its overpainted four-letter delivery code, suffered port undercarriage failure while the engine was apparently still turning, as witness the bent propeller blades



190's shepherding a large tanker along the Belgian coast. Off Blankenberge the vessel was attacked by a trio of Blenheims strongly escorted by Spitfire VBs of No 41 Sqn. In the ensuing mêlée two of the bombers were downed, but nobody witnessed Adolph's fate. Only after landing did his pilots learn of his disappearance. The British were still playing their cards close to their chest, as the official communiqué relating to the action simply referred to the



destruction of 'a Curtiss Hawk (or Fw 190)' – the victory was credited to seven-kill ace Flg Off Cyril Babbage, a Battle of Britain ace formerly with No 602 Sqn. Another three weeks were to pass before Hauptmann Adolph's body was washed ashore some dozen miles along the coast at Knokke. His place as *Kommandeur* of II./JG 26, meanwhile, had immediately been taken by Hauptmann Jochen Müncheberg, erstwhile *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 26, whose Bf 109Es had only recently returned from a highly successful sojourn in the Mediterranean (see *Aces 2 Bf 109 Aces of North Africa and the Mediterranean* by Jerry Scutts).

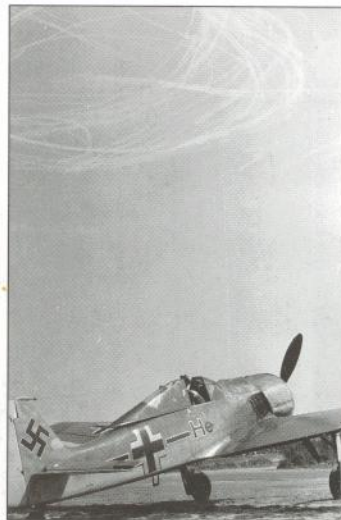
It was in the following month that the cat was finally let out of the bag when one of the defending fighter force sent up to intercept a Spitfire-escorted formation of Blenheims attacking the ship lift on the canal at Arques was caught on film. That same October Major Gerhard Schöpfel's III./JG 26 transferred up from Liegescourt to Coquelles, on the Channel coast west of Calais, as the second unit to begin conversion onto the Fw 190. And it was this *Gruppe's* Technical Officer, Oberleutnant Rolf Schroedter, who was finally to solve the persistent overheating problem with the lower rear cylinder of the BMW 801 by the simple expedient of rerouting part of the exhaust system – a modification which could quite easily be carried out in the *Gruppe's* own workshops!

8 November witnessed JG 26's greatest success to date on the Fw 190 when a mixed formation from the *Stab*, II. and III. *Gruppen* claimed no less than 14 Spitfires participating in an overly complex and ambitious 'Circus' operation – the last of the year – directed against the railway repair yards at Lille. In return they lost three Fw 190A-1s in forced landings, with one pilot killed and another seriously injured. Two days later Oberleutnant Karl Borris, who had done so much to ensure the Fw 190's acceptance into service, was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 26, which had been leaderless since the death of Hauptmann Johannes Schmid over the Channel on 6 November.

The following month II. *Gruppe* suffered a grievous blow. On 22 December, while leading his 6. *Staffel* south-westwards at low-level and in poor visibility on a transfer flight from Wevelghem to Abbeville-Drucat, Oberleutnant Walter Schneider became disorientated when heavy fog suddenly descended over the Artois hills. The formation quickly lost cohesion in the deteriorating conditions and five pilots, including the *Staffelkapitän* himself, were killed when they flew into rising ground. The

Major Johannes Seifert, seen here as a Hauptmann in the summer of 1942, commanded I./JG 26 from July 1941 until May 1943. In September 1943 he became *Kommandeur* of II. *Gruppe*, but was killed two months later in a mid-air collision with a P-38 Lightning. His final tally of 57 kills included 11 scored during I./JG 26's brief Eastern Front interlude

A *Geschwaderstab* A-2, sitting quietly at St Omer in 1942 as contrails scribe circles in the spring sky overhead, clearly illustrates *Stab* JG 26's unique practice of marking its aircraft with the pilot's initials. 'He' is the mount of Oberfeldwebel Bruno Hegenauer, long-time wingman in the *Kommodore's* own *Schwarm* ...

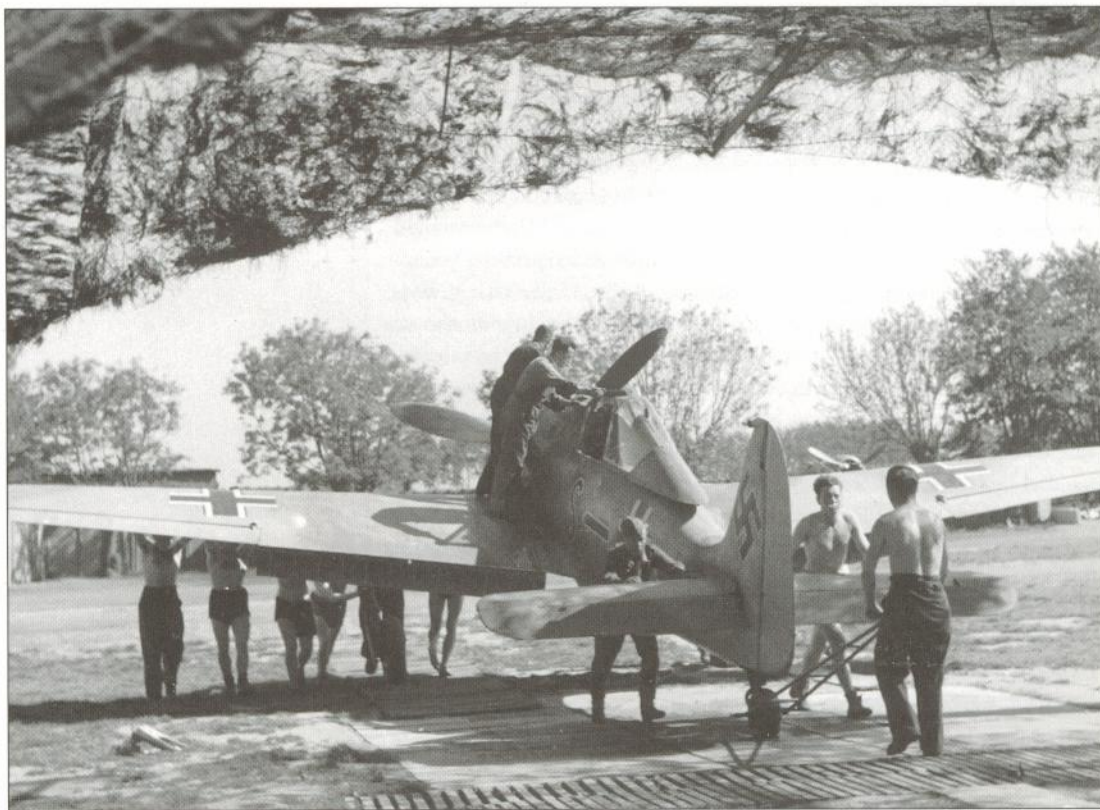


irrepressible 'Jap' Schneider was a popular and successful figure within the *Gruppe*. His 'party-pieces' had included piano playing, tap dancing and juggling with five or six empty wine bottles! But although his Fw 190A-1 was one of the first examples to display multiple kill bars on its rudder, it is believed that only the last two of the 20 such victory markings which adorned his machine had, in fact, been scored on the Focke-Wulf.

The officer selected to replace Schneider at the head of 6./JG 26 was that other stalwart of *Erprobungsstaffel* 190, and (after Tank himself) arguably the foremost champion of the Focke-Wulf fighter Oberleutnant Otto Behrens. After completing a six-month stint as *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 26, Behrens was posted back to Rechlin. He survived the war there, having latterly test-flown both the Me 262 and Ar 234, and thereafter continued his long-time association with Kurt Tank, whom he subsequently followed to South America. He was to lose his life in 1952 while demonstrating Tank's latest design, the Pulquí II jet fighter, in front of President Peron of Argentina.

Before 1941 was out the first of the new Fw 190A-2s had begun arriving on the Channel Front to re-equip the remainder of JG 26 – the *Geschwaderstab* under a newly-promoted Major Gerhard Schöpfel at Audembert and I. *Gruppe*, led by Major Johannes Seifert, which was based at St Omer. The A-2 featured a slightly improved BMW engine with many of the earlier models' failings rectified, and also had the inboard pair of wing-mounted MG 17 machine-guns replaced by harder-hitting MG 151/20 machine cannon. JG 26 was at long last in possession of a reliable and potent weapon of war.

... while close inspection of its stablemate being pushed into a camouflaged revetment reveals this to be 'S', the aircraft normally assigned to *Geschwader-Adjutant* Oberleutnant Wilfried Sieling. Luftwaffe records indicate, however, that Sieling was killed in combat with RAF fighters on 30 April 1942 while flying Wk-Nr 20 202, coded 'He'!



CHANNEL AND NORTH SEA BUILD-UP

The Fw 190's appearance at the fighting front could not have come at a less opportune time for the British, as the previous six months of cross-Channel operations had fallen far short of the RAF's expectations. The Luftwaffe had declined to be lured up into battle indiscriminately, despite the provocative coat-trailing of the Rhubarbs and Circuses, and it had certainly not suffered the swingeing attrition contemporary reports suggested. Figures of the time for the latter half of 1941 quote the RAF as admitting the loss of 411 of their own fighters over the Channel and northern Europe, while claiming the destruction of 731 German fighters. In fact, the true cost to the Luftwaffe's western-based *Jagdgeschwader* was just 103 fighters. This victory-to-loss ratio of some four to one in favour of the German defenders prompted the British Air Staff to warn Air Marshall Sholto Douglas, the man who had initiated the policy of 'leaning forward into France' upon succeeding Sir Hugh Dowding as AOC Fighter Command in November 1940, that a more defensive stance had now become 'a disagreeable necessity'.

The winter months of 1941-42 thus provided a welcome hiatus for Douglas' 100 fighter squadrons. But the situation was to worsen after the resumption of the RAF's offensive in the spring as more and more Fw 190s were slotted into the Channel and North Sea coastal belt defences (from just 60+ serviceable Fw 190s in January 1942, their numbers would rise to over 350 by mid-September). With their confidence in the Focke-Wulf's superiority over its principle fighter opponent, the Spitfire V, now becoming firmly established (the Fw 190 could outfly the latter on almost every count other than the turning circle), and backed up by an increasingly sophisticated and efficient chain of early-warning radar stations, the Luftwaffe's frontline defenders in the west were to prove formidable adversaries. For the RAF, until the advent of the Spitfire IX in July, the year 1942 was to be a testing and gruelling time. It was also a year of many 'firsts' as American air power – the ultimate nemesis not just of JG 26 but also of the greater part of the daylight *Jagdwaaffe* – took the first tentative steps on to the European stage. The constant grind of aerial skirmishing which marked 1942 was, however, highlighted by two major actions. And the first of these was not long in coming.

Between 22 January and 10 February Luftwaffe fighter units stationed in France and the Low Countries had carried out a series of eight separate and highly secret naval co-operation exercises – some 450 individual convoy escort sorties in all. The reason for all this activity was centered around the two 32,000-ton battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*



This aerial reconnaissance view of the French port at Brest, taken late in 1941, shows the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* securely in dock alongside each other less than two months before the historic Channel 'dash'

which, together with the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, had been holed up in the French port of Brest since March and June of the previous year. During their enforced stay there the trio had been the target of some 300 attacks by RAF Bomber and Coastal Commands. But with the western ramparts of his 'Fortress Europe' now seemingly secure, Adolf Hitler's mind was becoming increasingly concentrated on the imagined threat of a British landing on his more vulnerable northern flank in Norway. He therefore decreed that the capital-ships at Brest be brought back to home waters prior to despatch to the Norwegian fjords, where they were to form the basis of a 'fleet-in-being' to deter any enemy invasion attempt. He further determined that, rather than risk a lengthy and protracted voyage out into the Atlantic and around the northern coast of Scotland, the trio, covered by a strong destroyer screen, should make a high-speed 'dash' through the English Channel. His admirals protested as vociferously as they dared at the folly of such a move, but the *Führer* was not to be deterred.

The officer chosen to provide and organise the fighter cover for the whole enterprise – code-named *Cerberus-Donnerkeil* – was Oberst Adolf Galland, who had relinquished command of JG 26 to Gerhard Schöpfel only weeks previously upon his appointment to the post of *Inspekteur der Jagdflieger*. Utilising the full mixed force of 252 Bf 109s and Fw 190s available to JGs 1, 2 and 26, and the Luftwaffe fighter school at Villacoublay outside Paris – plus some 30 Bf 110 nightfighters to provide dawn and dusk cover – Galland's plan called for a string of overlapping command

sectors along the entire length of the intended route from Brest to Wilhelmshaven.

This would permit a continuous aerial umbrella of at least 16 fighters, split evenly between flights at high- and low-level (the former albeit still low enough to escape detection by British coastal radar). Each eight was further sub-divided into *Schwärme* of four aircraft apiece – one to seaward and one to landward of the flotilla. Each *Schwarm* was

ordered to fly back and forth along the line of ships in wide figures-of-eight, all the while maintaining strict radio silence. Every sortie was meticulously timed to allow the fighters exactly 30 minutes on station over the ships. The relieving sortie would, however, arrive after just 20 minutes and join them in circling their charges for the remaining 10. This meant, in practice, that for half of the 'dash' actual fighter cover would be increased to 32. In addition, reserve fighters were held at cockpit readiness at successive sectors along the route as the flotilla progressed eastwards.

At 2000 hours on 11 February the three capital-ships slipped their moorings in Brest harbour, but an air raid warning quickly sent them back to their berths. An attack by 18 Wellingtons was met by fierce flak, caused no damage to the ships, and the RAF crews noticed nothing untoward. Three hours later the trio again set sail. At 0850 hours the next morning, with the cloud base down to 500 metres, the first of the Bf 110s made rendezvous off Cherbourg. Incredibly, the force remained undetected for another two hours or more. It was not until shortly after 1100 hours, when the last of the nightfighters had been relieved by JG 2's Bf 109s, that the ships were spotted near the mouth of the Somme by a pair of Spitfires returning from an impromptu mid-morning Rhubarb over northern France. Despite their astonishment at such a sight, the two high-ranking RAF pilots (Kenley OC Grp Capt Victor Beamish, a 10-kill ace, and the base's Wing Commander Flying, 14-kill ace Finlay Boyd) chose not to break radio silence and waited until landing back at their Surrey base, some 30 minutes later, before reporting the fact that the Channel was 'stuffed full of the German fleet'!

By now the flotilla was only some 60 kilometres from the Straits of Dover. With the cloud down to 250 metres and visibility worsening, it approached this narrowest part of the whole journey at around 1230 hours. Even then, it was not until 1316 hours that the first British countermeasures arrived in the shape of a salvo of shells from the Dover shore batteries.

Eighteen minutes later, when just south of Cap Gris Nez, aircraft were reported approaching (Galland had now transmitted the code words 'Open visor', which lifted German R/T silence). The attacking force – six antiquated Swordfish torpedo-bombers of the Fleet Air Arm's No 825 Sqn – had taken off from Manston at 1325 hours and, covered by just one squadron of RAF Spitfires instead of the promised five, they crossed the



A *Rotte* of Fw 190A-2s of II./JG 26 warm up prior to taking off from Abbeville-Drucat in the spring of 1942. The machine in the foreground is that of the *Gruppen-Adjutant*. Unlike *Geschwaderstab* aircraft, those at *Gruppe* level wore standard staff markings, in this instance - hidden by the port wing - a single chevron ahead of the fuselage cross

Kent coast and set course for the ships. As the 16-strong British formation bore down on the flotilla from the north, an equal number of German fighters was approaching it from the south. With the ships now entering JG 26's defence sector, these newcomers were the first Fw 190 escort mission of the day, and comprised aircraft of 8. and 9./JG 26 led on this occasion by their erstwhile *Gruppenkommandeur*, Major Gerhard Schöpfel. They had taken off from Coquelles to relieve the last Bf 109s of JG 2.

The ten Spitfires of No 72 Sqn strove desperately to keep the German fighters away from the frail Swordfish, shooting three of 9. *Staffel*'s Fw 190s into the grey waters of the Channel. However, other Focke-Wulfs managed to break through the thin screen, their pilots frantically stabbing at cockpit buttons to lower undercarriages and dump flap in order not to overshoot the biplanes still doggedly straining towards their target. With nearly a dozen cannon-armed fighters sitting on their tails, and a solid wall of naval flak being thrown up in front of them, the flimsy Swordfish did not stand a chance. Reportedly, the first to go down was their leader, Lt Cdr Eugene Esmonde, his upper mainplane ripped off by a fusillade of 20 mm cannon fire from an Fw 190 shuddering on the stall little more than 60 metres behind him. The other five did not long survive their OC, and although several had managed to launch their torpedos, not one missile found its mark. The whole mission had been one of gallant self-sacrifice, doomed from the outset, and was recognised as such by the award to Esmonde of a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Despite the murk out to sea, the ships had been clearly visible to the ground personnel watching from III./JG 26's field at Coquelles. As the flotilla ploughed out of sight eastwards it was subjected to further sporadic British attacks both from the air and from light naval units. These penny-packet attacks would be continued in steadily deteriorating weather throughout the few remaining hours of daylight. But they were small in scale and uncoordinated. As darkness closed in and the first of the dusk patrol Bf 110s arrived, the ships were effectively out of immediate

Typical of the many victims of the 'happy months' of near total Focke-Wulf superiority, this Spitfire V of No 303 (Polish) Sqn (downed by I./JG 26 on 4 April 1942, and just one of 11 Spitfires lost on a Circus to St Omer on that date) is seen here being loaded onto a truck by a Luftwaffe recovery team



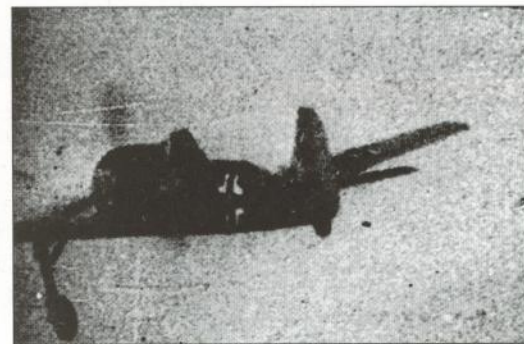
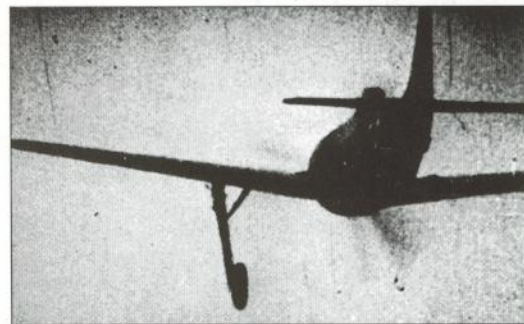
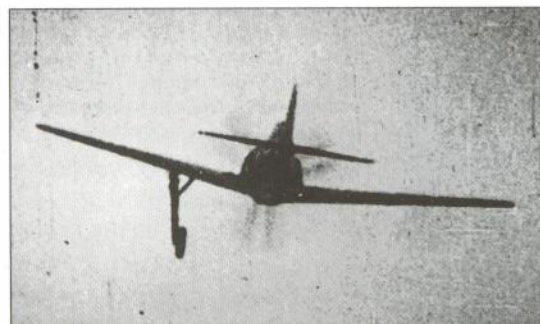
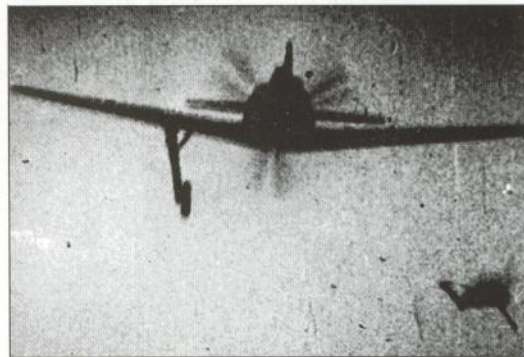
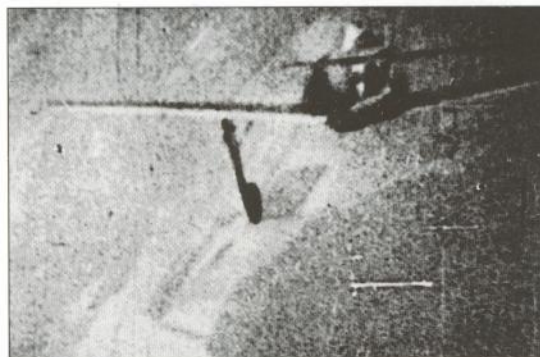
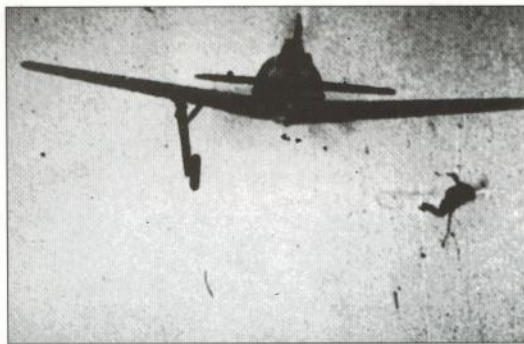


danger. The day's aerial activity had cost the Luftwaffe 17 fighters, including 9. *Staffel's* trio of Focke-Wulfs. Against that, and in addition to the FAA's six Swordfish, the RAF had also lost 17 fighters, plus 20 bombers. Of this total JG 26 was subsequently awarded seven confirmed kills and six probables. But history has not judged the operation in terms of aircraft claimed and lost. The real success of the 'Channel dash' lay in the ships' safe arrival in German home waters unscathed by bomb, shot or shell (the only damage suffered, in fact, was inflicted by mines laid in the flotilla's path). It was a bitter blow to British pride and prestige, but was to provide Adolf Galland with the 'greatest hour' of his career.

The following month the RAF resumed its offensive activity. To its existing repertoire of Circus and Rhubarb operations were now added Ramrods, Rangers and Rodeos (all upgraded versions of the former), plus Roadsteads, which were specifically aimed at German Channel shipping (see *Aces 5 Late-Marque Spitfire Aces 1942-45* by Dr Alfred Price for a more detailed analysis of these missions). But for the pilots of Fighter Command, who only the previous autumn had felt that they had got the measure of the Luftwaffe's latest Bf 109Fs, the increasing frequency of opposition by ably and aggressively flown Fw 190s came as a rude shock.

During that same March, just as the RAF was resuming its offensive stance, two further *Jagdgeschwader* began the conversion process to the Focke-Wulf. With JG 26 fully re-equipped, it was now the turn of their neighbours to receive their first Fw 190s. On JG 26's left flank was JG 2 'Richthofen', whose domain stretched westwards from the Somme to the Atlantic. Early in March Hauptmann Ignaz Prestele's I. *Gruppe* was ordered to send a small *Umrüstungskommando* (conversion detachment) to Le Bourget for retraining on the Fw 190A-2. While there the *Kommando* suffered a number of accidents, including JG 2's first Fw 190 fatality – Leutnant Fritz Maly was killed when his engine failed shortly after take-off. Thereafter the *Geschwader* completed conversion on an approximately *Gruppe*-per-month basis. By mid-March Hauptmann Hans 'Assi' Hahn's III./JG 2 was operational on interim A-1s at Théville and

Not all fell to fighters though – behind the front two Spitfires in this Luftwaffe 'graveyard' (AZ-B of No 234 Sqn and UZ-A of No 306 (Polish Sqn) lies a fuselage bearing the initials RS-T, and displaying 29 small white swastikas on its cowling. This was the aircraft of Biggin Hill Wing Leader, Wg Cdr R R 'Bob' Stanford-Tuck, DSO, DFC, who had been brought down by light flak near Bolougne on 28 January 1942

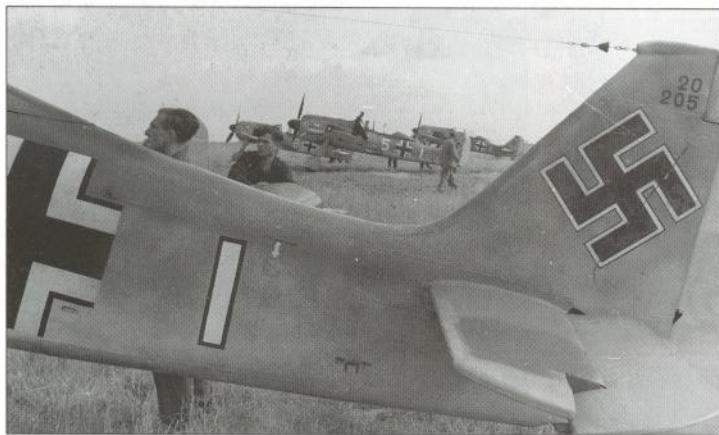


Nor were the losses completely one-sided, as is illustrated by this gun-camera sequence of an Fw 190 under attack by a No 485 (RNZAF) Sqn Spitfire VB near Ambleteuse, north of Boulogne, on 4 May 1942. With the port leg dangling and propeller starting to windmill, first the canopy is jettisoned (frame four, bottom left) and then the pilot's helmet is whipped off by the slipstream (frames five and six). Although almost certainly an aircraft of JG 26, Luftwaffe records are curiously reticent, no such incident being recorded on this date. Did the pilot manage to lower the starboard leg and land undamaged, albeit minus canopy and helmetless, after all?

Morlaix. At the end of April II. *Gruppe* (Hauptmann Karl-Heinz Greisert) deployed A-2s at Beaumont-le-Roger and Triqueville. A month later I./JG 2, now commanded by Hauptmann Erich Leie, also had A-2s at Maupertus, Morlaix and St.Brieuc. And before May was out the 'Richthofeners' had suffered two further fatalities – on the 29th Oberleutnant Werner Stöckelmann, *Staffelführer* of 9./JG 2, had crashed his brand



Three future Fw 190 aces pictured outside III./JG 2's HQ at Beaumont-le-Roger in 1941. In full flight-gear, including life-jacket and signals cartridges, Hauptmann Bruno Stolle, in the centre Oberleutnant Egon Mayer and in the light summer blouse Hauptmann Hans 'Assi' Hahn. Note the badges of the *Gruppe's* three component *Staffeln* displayed on the building behind them



Bearing one of those badges (the 'Thumb pressing a top hat' emblem of 7./JG 2), a *Schwarm* of early A-2s is being readied for flight at Théville when something off to their right grabs the groundcrews' attention



The pilots sprint over to their machines . . .



new A-2 at Théville, followed two days later by II. *Gruppe's* Unteroffizier Waldemar Kipnich, who became their first combat casualty when he was shot down by RAF fighters off Dieppe. It was not until August that the *Geschwaderstab*, under Oberstleutnant Walter Oesau, finally relinquished their Bf 109Fs for the Focke-Wulf.

Meanwhile, to JG 26's right, JG 1 was responsible for the defence of the Dutch and German North Sea coastlines up into Denmark, and at the beginning of March they too began converting on to the Fw 190. Rather than attending le Bourget, however, six pilots of Hauptmann Hans von Hahn's II. *Gruppe* (not to be confused with Hans 'Assi' Hahn, currently heading III./JG 2 some 800 km to the west in Brittany) were detached to Abbeville-Drucat for retraining on 'war-weary' A-1s by personnel of II./JG 26. Full conversion was then carried out at Rotenburg in Germany, and by May 1942 II./JG 1 was completely re-equipped and deployed at Woensdrecht and Katwyk in the Netherlands. As a safeguard each *Staffel* was assigned a BMW mechanic to look after the still sometimes troublesome powerplants.

On 1 June JG 1 opened its account with the Fw 190 when Unteroffizier Meisner of 6. *Staffel* downed a Spitfire. Eighteen days later they got



... and are strapped in, prior to being led off by the *Schwarmführer* in 'White 8'



One of II./JG 26's 'war-weary' A-1s was given this ferocious paint job while being used to train pilots of II./JG 1 on temporary detachment to Abbeville-Drucat in March 1942. Whether it was meant to encourage or terrify the fledglings is not clear!

III./JG 2's *Staffel* badges, which had adorned their Bf 109s since the days of the Battle of Britain and before, disappeared soon after their re-equipment with the Fw 190 to be replaced by the stylised 'Eagle's Head' motif seen here. This was not purely decorative as it also served to hide the unsightly exhaust stains caused by the BMW engine

another five RAF fighters, but on this occasion 6./JG 1 lost two of their own number. In July III. and IV./JG 1 (Hauptleute Herbert Kijewski and Fritz Losigkeit respectively) also converted on to the Fw 190. Thus, by the second half of the year, the three *Jagdgeschwader* in the west fielded an almost unbroken chain of Fw 190 *Gruppen* from the Atlantic to the German Bight. This build-up was timely, for July 1942 witnessed not only the introduction of the Spitfire IX into RAF squadron service – a move which substantially reduced, while not completely eliminating, the Fw 190's margin of superiority – but also the arrival of the American Eighth Air Force on the scene.

Prior to this the pilots of JG 26 had been enjoying three months of near total mastery of the skies. There were even reported instances of German pilots cheekily performing 'upward Charlies' (climbing rolls) alongside formations of Spitfire Vs, which did little to improve RAF morale! In many fighter messes along the south coast of England the Fw 190 became the main topic of conversation, and debate. If not exactly 'twitchy', many pilots conceded among themselves that 'they (i.e. the *Jagdwaaffe*) have definitely got the upper hand at the moment'. Official figures tend to support this view. By the end of March RAF Fighter Command had lost 32 Spitfires and their pilots at a cost to JG 26 of just five pilots killed. Experience was no guarantee of safety for the German pilots, however, for among the five losses in March was numbered not only 19-year-old Obergefreiter Albert Uebel of 2.*Staffel*, who failed to return from his very first mission after being sent up on the 8th to combat the opening Circus of 1942, but also 7.*Staffel's* Lieutenant Hans Johanssen, a proven veteran of earlier Channel Front and Mediterranean campaigning, who was killed exactly 20 days later. And in April British fighter losses were to increase more than threefold to 104.

Throughout May JG 26 continued to inflict heavy losses on the RAF. On 1 June Circus No 178 saw eight bomb-carrying Hurricanes over northern Belgium escorted and covered by no less than 168 Spitfires! Two *Gruppen* were scrambled to intercept them – Hauptmann Seifert's I./JG 26 from St Omer-Arques and Hauptmann Priller's III./JG 26 from Wevelghem. The



After completing re-equipment, II./JG 1 immediately applied their distinctive 'Tatzelwurm' ('Dragon') emblem to the cowlings of their new Fw 190A-2s. Carried in the respective *Staffel* colours of white, red and yellow, this device had long adorned the unit's earlier Bf 109s during its days as I./JG 3

Mindful of the powerplant's continuing teething troubles, many of the early operational *Staffeln* were provided with the services of civilian BMW mechanics to look after the engines of their new mounts





two *Gruppen* caught the four Spitfire squadrons of the Debden Wing over the coast east of Ostende. A classic 'feint-and-bounce' out of the sun resulted in the loss of the Wing's commander and eight of his Spitfires, with another five suffering damage. Seven of the eight victims fell to I. *Gruppe*, whilst the eighth was claimed by 'Pips' Priller. It was his 73rd kill to date, and his 15th on the Fw 190. Not a single machine of JG 26 suffered any reportable damage.



The following day it was the turn of Hauptmann Joachim Müncheberg's II./JG 26, up from Abbeville-Drucaat, to score heavily in another set-piece attack. They caught the inexperienced No 403 Sqn, RCAF, which was acting as top cover for the North Weald Wing during a sweep of the St Omer area. The Canadians were being led by their new CO, New Zealand Battle of Britain ace (17 kills), Sqn Ldr A C 'Al' Deere, who had recently returned from a six-month tour of duty in the USA. Deere chose not to heed warnings from friends about the superiority of the Fw 190, and when a *Staffel* of Focke-Wulfs was spotted closing fast on No 403's tail, he ordered the squadron to execute a pre-arranged three-way break of the kind which had so impressed him during the early days of the Battle of Britain. Halfway through this textbook manoeuvre, however, the Canadians were predictably bounced by Müncheberg's two other *Staffeln* which had been hiding in a thin layer of stratus cloud some 600 metres above them. The result was that Deere too lost eight of his twelve Spitfires. It was a salutary lesson on Focke-Wulf tactics and capabilities.

Such attrition could not be allowed to continue. Despite some nine months' cross-Channel sparring, technically the Focke-Wulf remained very much an unknown quantity to the RAF. They were desperate to get their hands on a captured example, but those which had been bested in combat had either crashed in German-held territory, or were at the bottom of the Channel. Some bizarre ideas were put forward to procure an airworthy specimen. One serving RAF pilot (believed to be Sqn Ldr Paul Richey of *Fighter Pilot* fame) even suggested that a captured Bf 109 be

Confident in their mastery of the skies in the early spring of 1942, Jagdwaffe units in France would often undertake routine pre-flight maintenance out in the open prior to take-off. These two photos show pristine early Fw 190A-2s or A-3s of what is believed to be Oberleutnant Wilhelm-Ferdinand 'Wutz' Galland's 5./JG 26 at Abbeville-Drucaat

returned to its original Luftwaffe markings, with spurious battle damage added for effect, and piloted by a German-speaking pilot (suitably attired in *Jagd* flying gear) to one of JG 26's bases under the cover of a massive RAF fighter sweep. Having landed his 'crippled' machine, the pilot would demand a replacement – if no Bf 109s were available an Fw 190 would have to suffice – in order to return to the fray! Once back in the air with his prize, the 'Luftwaffe' pilot would immediately head at top speed and zero altitude back across the Channel to the nearest RAF airfield.

A less fanciful scheme (purportedly devised by Jeffrey Quill and a Commando chum of his) was based on the successful Commando raid made on the German coastal radar station at Bruneval, north of Le Havre, on the night of February 27-28, 1942, when a technician accompanying the troop had dismantled part of the radar installation and brought it safely back to England. The new plan called for the technician to be replaced by a skilled pilot. The Commandos' task would be to get him undetected to within observation range of one of JG 26's fields near the coast - possibly Abbeville-Drucat - where he would go into hiding, study the base's routine and select the opportune moment to steal a Focke-Wulf being readied for flight.

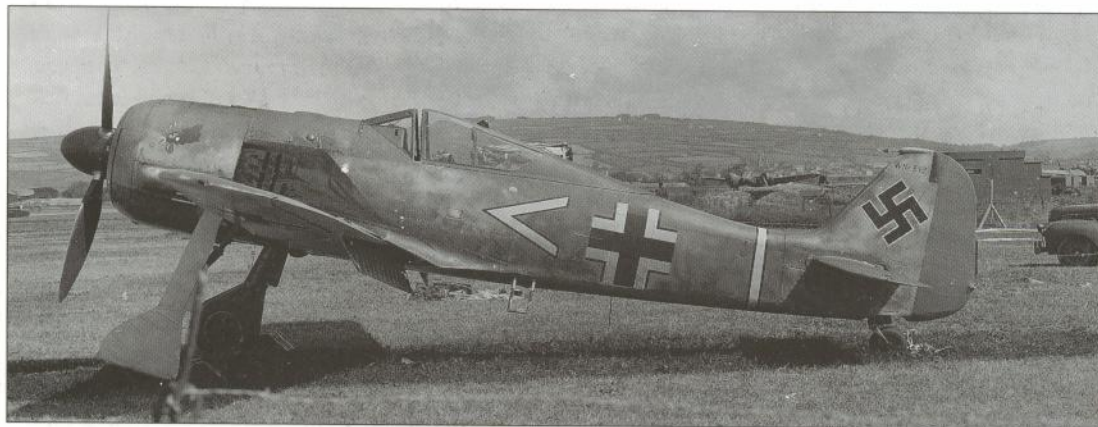
This latter scheme was given serious consideration, even being allocated the code-name *Airthief*. Fortunately, an extraordinary coincidence saw *Airthief* overtaken by events on the very day after it had been formally submitted in writing to Combined Operations. On the evening of 23 June two Spitfire wings were returning from a sweep over Brittany where they had clashed briefly with the Fw 190s of the recently converted III./JG 2. Shortly before reaching the Devon coast the unsuspecting Spitfires were again hit by elements of the *Gruppenstab* and 7./JG 2 which had been tailing them back from France. After a short, sharp engagement - both sides now being critically low on fuel - the Focke-Wulfs broke off and turned for home. But a lone German machine was reported heading north-eastwards towards Exeter, its pilot, Oberleutnant Arnim Faber, the *Gruppen-Adjutant* of III./JG 2, having become disorientated during the *melée* off Start Point. Having quickly despatched one of the Spitfires sent up to intercept him, Faber held his course, convinced that he too was flying south across the English Channel to France, and safety.

In fact, the stretch of water beneath his wings was the Bristol Channel, and the landfall looming ahead was South Wales. His fuel situation now



Hauptmann Josef 'Pips' Priller (right), archetypal Western Front Fw 190 ace, is seen here with his wingman, Feldwebel Walter Grünlinger, during his time as *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 26 at Wevelghem in September 1942

Wearing a slightly sheepish air, Oberleutnant Arnim Faber's Fw 190A-3 - one of the greatest intelligence 'gifts' of the war - sits disconsolately at RAF Pembrey, surrounded by assorted marks of Blenheim. Note that the *Stabs* aircraft of III./JG 2 have had the elaborate 'Eagle's Head' exhaust motif severely truncated to make way for the 'Cockerel's Head' badge favoured by *Gruppenkommandeur* 'Assi' Hahn, whose surname means 'Cockerel' in German





Under new ownership, Faber's 'Anton 3' has had its *Luftwaffe* Werk-Nummer (5)313 replaced by RAF serial MP499. It has also been given a coat of British camouflage, but whereas the fuselage cross has simply been crudely overpainted, Hahn's 'play-on-words' emblem has been carefully retained. Was the Station Commander at Pembrey a Wg Cdr Cockerill by any chance?! A total of 29 flights, totalling 12 hours and 15 minutes, were made by the RAF in MP499 between 3 July 1942 and 29 January 1943, before it was Struck off Charge on 18 September that same year. The Fw 190 was then pulled apart and its various main components shot at or tested to destruction

Meanwhile, back at III./JG 2 a replacement aircraft was quickly found for the errant '313'. Although its markings may appear identical - white Adjutant's chevron, wraparound rear fuselage *Gruppe* band and yellow rudder - note that the machine 'Assi' Hahn is here seen clambering out of has *no* black diagonal aft of the exhaust louvres



precarious, Faber made for the nearest airfield he could see, but could not resist performing a victory roll and cockily extending his undercarriage while inverted, before touching down . . . at RAF Pembrey! His intact Fw 190A-3 was one of the major intelligence prizes of the entire war. Little wonder that his tongue-in-cheek offer to take it

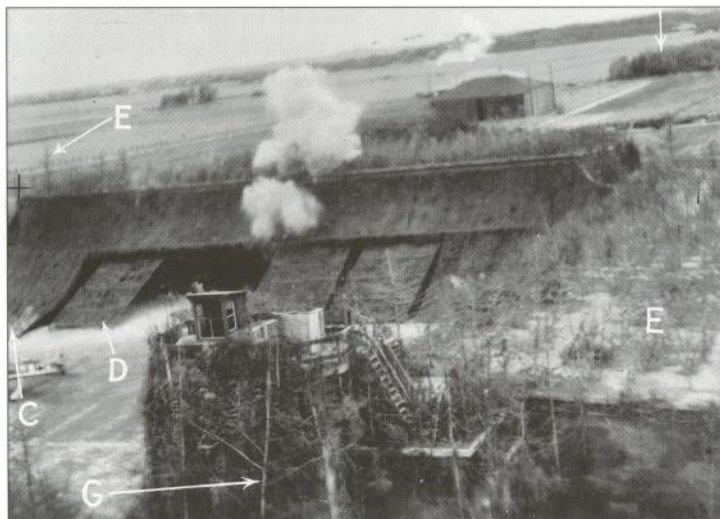
back up and demonstrate to the RAF what it could really do - if they would just refuel it for him, please - was turned down flat!

Despite their increased numbers, July 1942 marked a distinct turning point in the fortunes of the Fw 190 *Gruppen*. The 'happy time' months of the spring and early summer were now past. New adversaries were appearing and a more defensive posture was called for, even to the extent of some of the more forward coastal-based *Gruppen* being ordered to retire inland during the hours of darkness. With the *Luftwaffe* still oblivious as to the fate of Faber's machine, this measure was intended to thwart the very type of Commando raid which the British had been considering with *Airthief*. Although these dusk and dawn transfer flights were regarded as a nuisance by many, one unit found the precaution offered an added bonus - their overnight base was conveniently close to an all-female signals establishment!

In general, however, the second half of 1942 heralded the era of 'natural selection'. If a pilot survived his first few missions, there was every likelihood he would achieve success, for despite the increased opposition, individual scores were beginning to mount, and Fw 190 personalities were starting to emerge.

July was topped and tailed by two significant encounters. On the 4th - American Independence Day - 12 Boston bombers of the RAF, half of them crewed by US personnel, attacked JG 1's airfields in the Netherlands. It was the first American bombing raid on Northern Europe (discounting a single probing sortie made five days earlier). And although two of the US-crewed Bostons failed to return, it was an ominous portent of the whirlwind to come. Then, on 30 July there occurred the first encounter between the Fw 190 and the Spitfire IX when Circus No 200 sent six RAF Bostons, with a heavy fighter escort provided by the Hornchurch Wing, to attack JG 26's base at Abbeville-Drucat. Despite the Spitfire IX pilots of No 64 Sqn claiming five Focke-Wulfs destroyed, only one in fact was lost (which was credited to 21-kill ace Flt Lt Donald Kingaby), and the older Spitfire Vs continued to suffer. Fourteen failed to return, at least ten of them claimed by I. and III./JG 26.

On 19 August 1942 Operation *Jubilee*, the costly raid by the Canadians on Dieppe (since justified as a necessary 'reconnaissance in force' prior to any attempt at an invasion of northern Europe) provided the two veteran Channel *Jagdgeschwader*, JGs 2 and 26, with their second major action of the year. Although the Allied amphibious assault force reached the French coast without discovery by the *Luftwaffe*, once detected it was subjected to all-out, day-long attack. The first aircraft to be scrambled shortly after 0615 hours, was the duty *Schwarm* (of 5./JG 26) from



The 4 July raid by British- and American-flown Bostons on JG 1's bases in Holland. This is believed to be de Kooy (note the IV. *Gruppe* Fw 190 at lower left, marked with a 'C' on the original print by RAF photographic intelligence personnel). The smoke on the far side of the field is reportedly one of the Bostons going in, another may just be made out low over the horizon to the left of the explosion

Abbeville-Drucat. They were followed minutes later by ten Fw 190s of Oberleutnant Josef Haiböck's I./JG 26 up from St Omer-Arques, with 2. and 3./JG 26 close on their heels. These initial responses in *Staffel* strength were fended off into individual dogfights by the massive Spitfire air umbrella guarding the landing fleet, but more co-ordinated *Gruppe* attacks by III./JG 26 at 0700 hours, and by II./JG 26 some 50 minutes later, hit the Spitfire screen hard and made a number of penetrations. By 0930 hours JG 26 had an estimated 100 fighters over the beachhead, and they had accounted for 27 Spitfires before the first aircraft of JG 2, some escorting formations of bombers, arrived from Le Havre in mid-morning.

By the time the last Fw 190 of JG 26 landed at 2121 hours, the *Geschwader* had mounted a total of 377 sorties in 36 separate missions, most pilots having flown three or four trips during the day – coming from further afield, JG 2's figures were slightly lower. Whatever the controversy surrounding the actual landings, the RAF had paid a high price for maintaining aerial superiority over the strict confines of the Dieppe beaches and offshore waters – 106 aircraft lost, including 88 Spitfires. Against this JG 2 lost 14 fighters (with eight pilots killed) and JG 26 six fighters and their pilots. The Luftwaffe also lost 28 bombers, half of them Do 217s of KG 2.

The hardest hit *Gruppe* was Hauptmann Erich Leie's Tricqueville-based I./JG 2 with eight Fw 190s and five pilots lost. In contrast, 'Assi' Hahn's III./JG 2 from Maupertus had suffered only two pilots wounded, and III. *Gruppe*'s 'Experten' had achieved considerable success during the day, with *Staffelkapitäne* Oberleutnant Egon Mayer (7./JG 2) notching up his 50th kill in the west and Hauptmann Siegfried Schnell (9./JG 26) downing five Spitfires. Most successful of all was Leutnant Josef 'Sepp' Wurmheller, who shot down six Spitfires and a Blenheim – this despite flying with a broken leg from an earlier accident, compounded by concussion inflicted during a forced landing in a field following engine failure soon after taking off on his first sortie of the day!

JG 26 claimed 40 Allied aircraft destroyed (19 fewer than JG 2), among them *Gruppenkommandeur* Hauptmann Johannes Seifert's 40th victory. Almost as a side-show to the day's proceedings, and certainly not

The *Rottenführer* of the first pair of Fw 190s to be scrambled to verify reports of an Allied landing at Dieppe on 19 August 1942 was Oberleutnant Horst Sternberg. He is seen here as a Leutnant in November 1941, introducing his new 'Black 13', pictured earlier, to an apparently less-than-impressed war correspondent



affecting them greatly, was a raid by 22 B-17s of the Eighth AF on II./JG 26's field at Abbeville-Drucat. With only three minutes' elapsing between the initial warning and the first bombs actually detonating, there was hardly any time to get those Fw 190s which were being refuelled and rearmed into shelter – despite this, Luftwaffe records indicate surprisingly little damage was inflicted. This had been the second foray by Flying Fortresses over occupied Europe, and as an attempt at battlefield interdiction by heavy bombers it was not exactly a success. It was, however, one more irreversible step down the road towards America's ultimate goal of absolute daylight air superiority.

Before August was out the B-17s staged six further cross-Channel raids without loss, although that on the 21st against Rotterdam was opposed briefly by elements of II./JG 1 before being recalled due to the lack of a fighter escort, and in the process sustained the Eighth AF's first aircrew combat fatality. In return the gunners of the 97th Bomb Group (BG) had claimed two Fw 190s destroyed, five probables and six damaged, whereas Oberleutnant Detlev Rohwer's unit had, in fact, suffered just two machines damaged.

Rohwer had been made temporary acting CO of II./JG 1 after Hauptmann Hans von Hahn was relieved of command on 15 June and confined to quarters under somewhat mysterious circumstances revolving around the shooting of a sentry. However, if the B-17s remained for the moment inviolate, JG 1's Fw 190s were taking a steady toll of other daylight raiders, including that other new addition to the Allied armoury, the de Havilland Mosquito.

Fittingly, it fell to the premier Fw 190 *Gruppe*, II./JG 26, to bring down the first American Flying Fortress. Led now by Hauptmann Conny Meyer (destined for higher things, the irrepressible 'Jochen' Müncheberg had been transferred to JG 51 as an "apprentice *Kommodore*", to use his own self-deprecating phrase), II./JG 26 was scrambled on 6 September to intercept a formation of 30 B-17s attacking the Potez aircraft factory at Meaulte. Brushing aside a badly positioned escort of Spitfire IXs, almost the entire *Gruppe* – some fifty Fw 190s in all – hurled themselves against the bombers from every angle. Nearly every one of the Flying Fortresses sustained damage to some degree, but it was the *Gruppenkommandeur* himself who claimed the honour of the first American B-17 'kill' of the European war when a 97th BG machine went down over Flesselles, north-west of Amiens, at 1855 hours. Pursued back out over the coast, another B-17 was shot into the sea off Le Tréport 11 minutes later, after being attacked by some half-dozen Fw 190s of 4./JG 26 – the actual victory was credited to Oberfeldwebel Willi Roth.

The following day the B-17s returned to Rotterdam, and again JG 1 rose to give battle. This time two Focke-Wulfs failed to return, one falling victim to the Spitfire escort and one to the bombers' own defensive fire. Although this single loss was far from the 12 kills claimed by the B-17s' gunners (plus 10 probables and 12 damaged), JG 1's performance in its first two encounters with the Flying Fortresses – two fighters lost and two damaged for no successes – did not exactly inspire confidence.

Soon the B-17's attributes – its very size, its defensive armament and its ability to absorb punishment – were being discussed in Luftwaffe messes in tones of awe, mirroring, if not exceeding, those with which the RAF had greeted the advent of the Fw 190 some 12 months earlier. The German fighter pilots were struggling to come up with an effective answer to repel the American daylight raids.

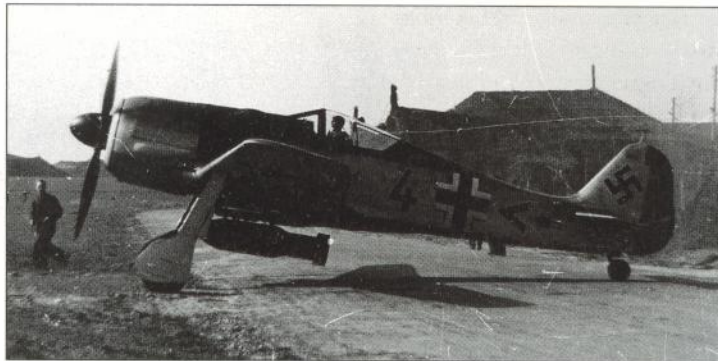
A classical stern approach would subject the attacking fighter to a hail of Browning .5-in machine gun fire for minutes on end as it slowly overhauled the bomber box to get within range to use its MG 17s, whose tracer rounds were indispensable to help sight the harder-hitting MG 151 cannon. Coned by enemy fire – an enemy whose vast bulk filled not just the *Revi* gunsight, but the whole windscreen, long before he was within effective range – it is little wonder that many an Fw 190 pilot opened fire and then broke away prematurely. And those who did hold their approach and got in among the bombers would then understandably seek whatever angle and direction through the box promised the best chance of personal escape and survival. Under such conditions co-ordinated formation attacks were rarely carried out exactly to plan, and formation leaders found it almost impossible to regroup their scattered fighters after each pass. In fact, if more than one attack was carried out, it was a fortunate leader indeed who could count on gathering together more than half the number of aircraft which had taken part in the preceding pass.

On 2 October JG 26 lost their first Fw 190 to B-17s during another raid on Meaulte, but exactly one week later, during the Eighth AF's heaviest raid of 1942 (over 100 bombers from five groups being despatched against industrial and airfield targets in northern France), JG 26 more than redressed the balance.

At 0900 hours Hauptmann Priller's III. *Gruppe* had just landed back at Wevelghem from their overnight sojourn further inland when they were ordered to scramble again. Climbing hard, the Fw 190s headed for the bombers which were flying in loose vics of three. It was 'Pips' Priller's first experience of the American heavies, and even this '*alter Hase*' – already victor over 77 western opponents – was misled by their huge bulk. Twice he positioned his pilots for the attack, only to realise he had misjudged the bombers' altitude and that they were still far above him. The third time he got it right. Ordering individual '*Rotten*' (pairs) of Fw 190s to attack the separate vics of bombers from the rear, Priller and his wingman bored in. The experienced *Kommandeur* soon claimed a success, his victim, a B-17 of the 306th BG (making its operational debut) crashing south of Lille. Leutnant Otto Stammberger of 9. *Staffel* here graphically describes the demise of a second Fortress of the 92nd BG;

'Approached from the rear. Full throttle. The things just grew bigger and bigger. Opened fire much too early and broke away for fear of ramming the "barn doors". I was puzzled not to have scored any hits until I remembered the size of the beasts – wingspan 40 metres! Right, get in much closer, things won't start to happen too soon. Concentrate on the engines of the left wing. Third pass and both port engines are burning. Then a good burst into the starboard outer as she starts to slide left, losing altitude in wide spirals. At about 2000 metres four or five men manage to bail out before the crate hits the ground east of Vendeville.'

Another group flying its maiden mission this day was the B-24-



An Fw 190A-5 fighter-bomber of the specialised 10.(Jabo)/JG 26 taxiing out with a 500 kg bomb on the centre-rack. Aircraft of this *Staffel* participated in the Canterbury raid of 31 October 1942. The *Jabostaffeln* of both JGs 2 and 26 wore their distinctive unit markings aft of the fuselage cross

be over two months before another raid of similar strength was mounted. But the increasing tenor of Allied daylight bombing raids of late prompted Hitler to order the Luftwaffe to carry out a retaliatory strike. It thus fell to the Fw 190s of JGs 2 and 26 to stage the largest daylight raid on the United Kingdom since 1940. On 31 October 19 aircraft of the *Geschwaders'* two specialised *Jabostaffeln*, accompanied by 49 bomb-carrying Focke-Wulfs of I. and II./JG 26 – the force was escorted by a further 62 Fw 190s of II./JG 2 and III./JG 26 – were despatched against Canterbury. Only two of the attackers were lost – 5./JG 2's Feldwebel Hell survived being brought down by light AA fire near Sandwich, but on the return flight Leutnant Paul Galland of 8./JG 26 was shot into the sea off Calais by a Spitfire. Youngest of the three Galland brothers to serve with JG 26, Paul's score was standing at 17 (the last, a Boston bomber claimed earlier that very afternoon) when he met his death going to the aid of a fellow pilot.

Meanwhile, further east along the coast, JG 1 was continuing to take its toll of RAF aircraft. Their October victims included a trio of Mosquitos, and on 25 November Oberfeldwebel Heesen of 5./JG 1 claimed a Lancaster some 60 kilometres north-west of Bergen-am-Zee. This had been part of a small experimental daylight cloud-cover raid on Essen, and other targets in north-western Germany. JG 1's immediate response was to send a group of pilots on a blind-flying course to improve their bad-weather flying abilities in case such a raid should recur.

However, it was events much further afield which dominated and dictated November's other movements. Operation *Torch*, the Allied landings in north-west Africa, posed an ominous threat to the underbelly of Hitler's 'Fortress Europe' (see *Aces 3 Wildcat Aces of World War 2* by Barrett Tillman for a full discussion on the Anglo-American invasion). And now, for the first time, the western-based *Jagdgeschwader* were to experience the sudden, and hurried, 'fire-fighting' type of transfer to a new area of danger which had long been familiar to their brethren on the thinly-stretched Eastern Front. In the second week of November Oberstleutnant Walter Oesau thus lost two of his three *Gruppen*, with Hauptmann Erich Leie's I./JG 2 being sent to Marseilles to support the German occupation of Vichy southern France, and Hauptmann Helmut-Felix Bolze's II./JG 2 preparing to stage across the Mediterranean into Tunisia. With Hauptmann Egon Mayer's III. *Gruppe* having already moved from Poix to Vannes-Meuçon to protect the *Kriegsmarine's* Atlantic coast U-boat bases, this effectively left just JG 26 as guardians of the Channel coast.

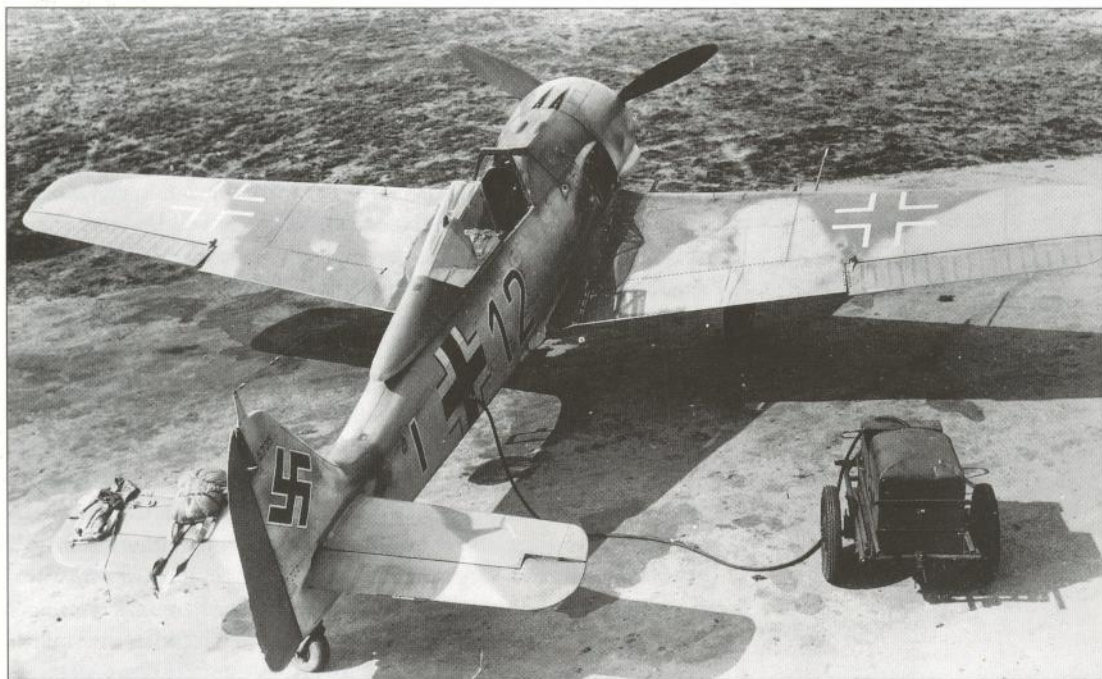
And with III./JG 26 beginning to convert back onto the Bf 109 before the year was out, the close of 1942 was to see the Luftwaffe's Fw 190 fighter presence across the straits from southern England reduced to just two *Jagdgruppen*.

Prior to this, however, an important step in the ongoing fight against the American 'heavies' had been formulated and put into practice. After weeks spent studying reports of stern, high- and low-quarter, and beam attacks, of analysing results and questioning pilots, Luftwaffe fighter leaders had finally come to the conclusion that frontal passes offered the best chance of crippling or destroying a four-engined bomber – the cockpit crew were vulnerable and the forward arc of defensive fire was the weakest. On 23 November Egon Mayer's III./JG 2 had the first opportunity to test the new tactics.

Bad weather on that day had caused many of the 'heavies' to abort their fifth visit to the St Nazaire U-boat base. The nine B-17s that made it to the target were bounced by the Focke-Wulfs attacking in groups of three from dead ahead. Four Fortresses were hacked out of the formation, marking the Fw 190s' most successful single pass against the Americans to date. After debriefing the shaken survivors, an Eighth AF HQ intelligence report commented, 'A change of enemy fighter tactics was observed in this operation, nearly all attacks being frontal and apparently aimed at the right side of the nose.'

Despite this initial *Jagdwaaffe* success, on 20 December, during a running battle fought between all three *Gruppen* of JG 26 (plus II./JG 2) and more than 100 B-17s and B-24s despatched against the Luftwaffe's major servicing depot at Romilly-sur-Seine, only five B-17s were brought down over France. It was a major disappointment for the defenders, and the frontal pass tactic was quickly re-assessed and refined. In contrast to the long run-in endured during a stern attack, the Luftwaffe's fighter pilots

Hauptmann Bruno Stolle's 8./JG 2 spent the autumn and winter months of 1942-43 at Brest-Guipavas flying Atlantic patrols to protect U-boats entering and leaving their French bases. 'Black 12', an A-4 W.Nr.5735, awaits one such operation, the pilot's life jacket and back parachute at the ready on the port tailplane . . .





... and here he is donning same. Note also the signal flares below his right knee and map case on the left thigh. The groundcrew's demeanour would seem to suggest that this is a routine patrol and not an emergency scramble

were now closing on their targets at a combined speed of nearly 900 kph. They were within effective firing range for only a split-second, and the flat angle of attack from dead ahead made accurate judgement of their distance from the target almost impossible. The urge to break away too soon, for fear of colliding with the bomber looming dizzily fast and terrifyingly large in the gunsight, was almost overwhelming. Further experimentation showed the optimum angle of attack from dead ahead in fact to be ten degrees above the horizontal – 'twelve-o'clock high'.

This greatly simplified the problem of estimating range and permitted a constant angle of fire almost in the manner of ground-strafting, the target being 'led' by keeping the gunsight firmly on the bomber's nose. In addition it was also decreed that fighter formations should be increased in size. When intercepting a bomber force they should first fly a parallel course off to one side of the box until about three miles ahead, then pull a 180-degree manoeuvre and attack head-on by '*Schwärme*' (four-plane elements) in rapid succession, opening fire at 1000 metres. Above all, they should try to maintain cohesion, or at least visual contact, throughout and after each pass in order to facilitate regrouping for repeated concentrated attacks. This last point was a forlorn hope, most pilots preferring to end their run through the bombers by 'split-essing' down and away from the formation's curtain of defensive fire as quickly as possible.

Thus, as 1942 gave way to 1943, the tactics had been honed and the battle lines had been drawn, or so the western-based *Jagdgeschwader* thought. But on 27 January 1943 the Americans hit Wilhelmshaven – the daylight air offensive had breached the German border. And the Channel coast, which for over two years had been the frontline of the air war in north-western Europe, now began more and more to assume the mantle simply of first line of defence as the Eighth AF paraded its growing strength ever deeper into the heart of Hitler's *Reich*, and attracted the bulk of the *Jagdwaaffe's* Fw 190 units to itself as it did so.

DIVERSIONS NORTH, SOUTH AND NOCTURNAL

The unbroken, albeit thin, forward fighter screen which the Luftwaffe had painstakingly built up from the Atlantic to Denmark in fact extended even further northwards across the Skagerak into Norway. In Scandinavia the widely dispersed JG 5 was so deployed as to have two *Gruppen* based in Finland for action against the Russians to the east, and two *Gruppen* stationed along the coast of Norway to combat Allied incursions across the North Sea from the west. Of the latter, it was Hauptmann Gerhard von Wehren's I./JG 5 which, in the summer of 1942, was selected to receive the *Geschwader's* first Fw 190A-3s.

Compared to the growing momentum of the air war on the Channel Front at this time, the western coast of Norway was very much an operational backwater. But if Allied air activity was minimal, the combination of a new aircraft (with a still temperamental powerplant), mountainous terrain and unpredictable weather was to prove hazardous enough. In their nine months of flying the Fw 190, I./JG 5 lost six pilots – all in accidents. Several others were injured, and a disproportionately large number of aircraft were written off or damaged.

The *Gruppe's* most noteworthy success came about almost by chance. On 25 September 1942 four Fw 190s were despatched from Stavanger-Sola to the capital Oslo to provide a Luftwaffe 'presence' during a rally to be held on that day by the Norwegian Nazi Party. About an hour after their arrival a report came in that twin-engined bombers, thought to be RAF Bostons, had been sighted approaching Oslo Fjord. As no suitable starter trolleys were available on the field, and with the self-starters on two of the aircraft found to be u/s, only a single pair of Focke-Wulfs managed to take off. Within a minute they had spotted the raiders hugging the water some ten kilometres south of Oslo. Catching them over the centre of the city, Unteroffizier Erich Klein sent a burst of fire into one, which subsequently crashed into a lake. His wingman hit a second, although this managed to limp home on one engine. It was not until later that Klein discovered that his victim had been no Boston, but one of four Mosquitos sent from Leuchars in Scotland to bomb Oslo Gestapo headquarters during the very rally he and his three fellow pilots had been scheduled to over-fly!

After this interlude the *Gruppe* reverted to the relative inactivity of guarding Norway's south-western seaboard. There were one or two brief skirmishes with RAF intruders early in 1943, but in April I./JG 5 began conversion back onto the Bf 109.

By this time IV. *Gruppe*, based further to the north at Trondheim

under Hauptmann Hans Kriegel, had also begun adding some Fw 190s to its establishment of Bf 109s. But they too experienced very little action, as is well illustrated by one pilot who managed to get himself transferred to one of the Finnish-based *Gruppen*. When quizzed about his number of kills by these Eastern Front veterans, the newcomer had to admit that in over 60 sorties he had never even *seen* an enemy aircraft, let alone shot one down!

There was a brief flurry of activity towards the end of 1943, with several RAF Beaufighters being intercepted and destroyed, and 12. *Staffel's* Unteroffizier Willi Sürth being caught at take-off and killed by a marauding Mosquito, but it was not until the spring of 1944 that the air war along the Norwegian coast began to escalate slowly. On 30 March, for example, IV./JG 5 claimed seven Beaufighters downed, followed in May by three FAA fighters from an offshore Royal Navy carrier task force participating in coastal strikes (see *Aces 10 Hellcat Aces of World War 2* by Barrett Tillman). At the end of August the *Gruppe* deployed briefly to northern Finland to assist in the German evacuation of that territory, but by October they were back in the west, bringing with them III./JG 5, now also partially converting on to the FW 190. And although Allied raids across the North Sea gathered momentum in the closing months of the war, significant success continued to elude the defending Focke-Wulfs. Not only that, the hostile environment kept their accident rate high right to the end – as witness Oberleutnant Werner Gayko who, to use his own words, ‘opened the 1945 bathing season’ on 25 March when his Fw 190 developed engine trouble and he had to ditch in the sea.

It is an undeniable fact that the Bf 109s of the eastern-based *Gruppen* gained by far the lion’s share of JG 5’s wartime kills, and the end in Norway, when it came, was attended by none of the chaos and confusion associated with the major fighting fronts. In May 1945, after undergoing a final bewildering round of internal re-designations, the Fw 190A-8s of III. and IV./JG 5’s component *Staffeln* were simply herded into three designated areas around Oslo, Stavanger and Trondheim to await the arrival of the victorious Allies.

In contrast to the Fw 190 fighter’s war in the far north, where its nearly three-year guardianship of the Norwegian coastline had passed relatively uneventfully, the type’s much briefer appearance in Africa – the most southerly of the Luftwaffe’s fronts – saw it embroiled in action almost daily.

With ‘Antek’ Bolz having recently been transferred to the command of I./JG 2, II. *Gruppe* of the *Jagdgeschwader* ‘Richthofen’ was in fact headed by Oberleutnant Adolf Dickfeld as it staged southwards to Tunisia, via San Pietro in Sicily, in mid-November 1942. A recipient of the Knight’s Cross with Oak Leaves, Dickfeld was an outstanding pilot with over 100 East-

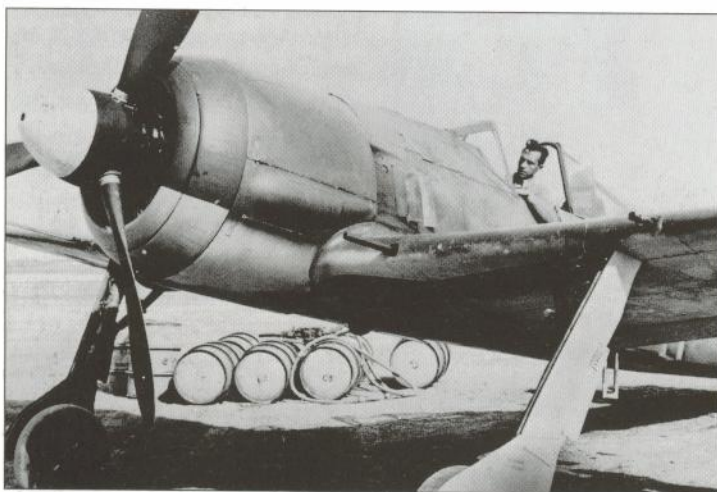
A trio of Knight’s Cross holders enjoy an alfresco lunch Tunisian style. From left, Oberleutnant Kurt Bühligen, Stabsarzt Krause, the *Gruppe’s* MO, Kommandeur Oberleutnant Adolf Dickfeld and Leutnant Erich Rudorffer. The presence of the two latter together at table would date the meal sometime around Christmas 1942





An Fw 190 of II./JG 2 hides behind some rudimentary camouflage at Tindja-South late in 1942. Note the dark appearance of the upper surfaces compared to the undersides. Witnesses have stated that the *Gruppe's* aircraft wore a fresh coat of unfaded tan overall at this period. Leutnant Gehr, standing beside the cockpit in tropical uniform, is camouflaged even more effectively against a background of cactus!

Pictured in the open at Kairouan early in the New Year with Leutnant Rudorffer in the cockpit, the dark tone of the upper surface camouflage on this Fw 190 is even more clearly apparent



ern Front kills already to his credit. Among his pilots were two other Knight's Cross holders – Oberleutnant Kurt Bühligen and Leutnant Erich Rudorffer, *Staffelkapitäne* of 4. and 6./JG 2 respectively, both with over 20 victories in the west (although at the time of the transfer Rudorffer was still in a Paris hospital recovering from wounds received earlier). Between them this trio alone would account for well over half of the 150+ Allied aircraft that the *Gruppe* was to claim in North Africa.

Upon arrival, II./JG 2 was subordinated to Oberleutnant Günther Freiherr von Maltzahn's JG 53. Based initially at Bizerta, prior to moving to Tindja-South in December, II./JG 2's Focke-Wulfs often flew in mixed formations with JG 53's Bf 109s. Their operations included '*Freie Jagd*' sweeps of the combat zones, the interception of incoming enemy bombers and flying escort to the Fw 190 fighter-bombers of III./ZG 2 (the later III./SKG 10). As the situation in Tunisia worsened, II./JG 2 would also be called upon to carry out ground-support missions themselves.

The *Gruppe's* scoreboard in Africa was opened by Kurt Bühligen, whose Spitfire V kill of 21 November was the first of ten claims made that day by II./JG 2. The sudden appearance of the *Gruppe's* Fw 190s came as an unwelcome surprise to Allied Spitfire pilots in north-west Africa. Before the invasion they had been briefed to expect only Bf 109 opposition, and many of the Spitfire V versus Focke-Wulf encounters in the weeks to come were an all too familiar replay of earlier Channel Front skirmishes, with the latter displaying an obvious superiority, especially when flown by the *Gruppe's* acknowledged '*Experten*'. In addition to the well-known forms of the Spitfire, Boston and B-17, II./JG 2 now faced a number of new opponents, most notably the P-38, P-39 and P-40. But

these too were to find the Fw 190 an equally – if not even more – formidable foe, and growing numbers of each were soon adding to the *Gruppe's* lengthening list of kills. For example, on 3 December the redoubtable Bühligen claimed a pair of the twin-tailed Lightnings and Feldwebel Kurt Goltzsch a third (the 30-year-old Goltzsch was one of the *Gruppe's* backbone NCO pilots, a typical '*Alter Hase*' – 'Old Hare' – or veteran, who would emerge as the fourth-ranking Fw 190 ace of the Tunisian campaign).

By mid-December Leutnant



Erich Rudorffer had been discharged from his Paris sickbed. Collecting his Fw 190 from Beaumont-le-Roger, he joined up with the *Gruppe* in Bizerta, before flying his first mission from Tindja-South on the 17th – ‘1020 hours: contact with 12 Bostons in Cape Serrat area’. The following day he scored his first Tunisian kill, bouncing a low-flying Spitfire near Mateur.

At the turn of the year II./JG 2 transferred to Kairouan, their main base for the remainder of their stay in Africa. It was here on 8 January 1943 that the now Hauptmann Alfred Dickfeld was injured when his Fw 190 somersaulted during take-off – this marked the end of Dickfeld’s Tunisian campaign, during which he had scored some 18 victories. After recovery, he was to re-appear briefly as the *Kommandeur* of II./JG 11 during the opening stages of the Defence of the Reich, before finally being posted to a staff position in the RLM.

The following day 4. *Staffel*’s Unteroffizier Heinz Schulze suffered a similar fate, also being injured in a somersault while taking off, and 48 hours later Unteroffizier Alfred Sonntag narrowly escaped death in a similar incident. Experiencing trouble at take-off, he nevertheless managed to haul his Fw 190 into the air, but was hurt baling out at low-level just before his aircraft crashed.

In the air, meanwhile, the ‘old firm’ of Bühligen and Rudorffer were back in full stride, each shooting down a brace of Allied fighters on 18 January. Then, on 3 February, the *Gruppe* claimed a dozen aircraft destroyed, including two P-39s and two P-40s caught by Kurt Bühligen while they were intent on

Operations tent at Kairouan. While II./JG 2’s pilots await briefing, a careful look-out is kept from the hillock behind for low-flying Allied fighters. Note the tripod-mounted light machine gun used for AA defence

Unlike II./JG 2’s Fw 190s, the fighter-bombers of III./ZG 2, with whom they shared Kairouan, wore standard mottled camouflage and a full set of Mediterranean theatre markings



ground-strafting German troop positions. Six days later it was Erich Rudorffer's turn. On 9 February he claimed eight of the *Gruppe's* 16 victories in just 15 minutes! Promoted to acting *Kommandeur* since Dickfeld's accident the previous month, Rudorffer had perfected the 'dive-and-zoom' attack technique – much favoured by the legendary Hans-Joachim Marseille earlier in the African Campaign, but even more suited to the Focke-Wulf's flying characteristics – into a fine art;

'You could come from above or below at speed, combining timing with marksmanship. The secret was to do the job in one pass. It could be from the side or behind, and I usually tried to open fire at about 50 metres. I practised swooping in and out of defensive formations with my comrades. In Africa Allied fighter pilots often used the "Lufbery" (a defensive circle with each machine protecting the tail of the one in front), and in this circle it was often possible to slip in and out and shoot many of them down.'

And on 9 February 1943 he proceeded to do just that;

'It was south of Tunis, about 180 kilometres. We got word – we were based at Kairouan – that bombers and fighters were on the way (B-17s of the 301st BG, escorted by P-38s of the 1st FG, had indeed been despatched to attack the Kairouan landing grounds). One *Staffel* was already sitting in their aircraft and I ordered them off. I was always last to take off and waited to get the latest information on the enemy's course and speed. Then I took off with my *Schwarm* of four and we assembled with the others in the air and headed for the "*dicke Autos und Indianer*" ("Fat Cars and Indians", i.e. heavy bombers and fighters). They were coming from the west, about 24 B-17s, 18 P-40s, 20 P-38s and a similar number of Spitfires – some of them may have been Hurricanes because when the dogfight began I thought I saw some Hurricanes also. We were at about 7000 metres and the bombers were below us, the P-40s above.

'When we started for the bombers the Curtiss fighters came down on

One of the earliest participants in single-engined, ground-controlled, nightfighting experiments was the 'Nachtjagdkommando Fw 190' operated by IV./JG 3 out of Aalborg in Denmark. The pilot of 'Red 8N' is seen returning from one such sortie in mid-1943



us and that's when the dogfight began. After a time the P-40s, which were not as fast as us, went into a "Luffbery" circle and I began to slip in from low and high and shoot them down. I managed to shoot down six in about seven minutes. As I recall the combat report, I got one at 1359 and the last at 1406. By that time the fight had broken up and everyone had scattered. Then I saw some P-38s strafing below us, and though I had only about four 190s with me at this time, I went down at them and surprised them. I got one coming from above and then went up again and came down on another and shot him down. That gave me eight for the day – I remember it because it was one of the best days I ever had.'

Kairouan may have escaped serious damage this time, but it continued to attract the attention of Allied bombers, and a heavy raid on 23 February cost the life of Oberleutnant Wolf von Bülow and wounded Hauptmann Hauenschild, whose III./ZG 2 was sharing the field with the 'Richthofen' *Gruppe*.

On 3 March Oberleutnant Bühligen downed another Spitfire, one of two-dozen escorting a formation of B-25s attacking targets around Mateur. On this occasion, however, his kill turned out to be the first Mk IX to be shot down by the Luftwaffe in North Africa. Re-equipment with the new fighter, for which the Spitfire V squadrons had long been clamouring, had at last begun, but its belated appearance had little effect on II./JG 2, who would themselves be departing the theatre before the month was out. A tragic counterpoint to Bühligen's victory of 3 March, incidentally, was the loss of Feldwebel Richard Ebelsbacher, whose Fw 190 was shot down in error by Bf 109s near Ferryville that same day.

Among the last claims made by the *Gruppe* in Africa were two B-17s, one each falling to Bühligen and Rudorffer during a raid on Sousse on 12 March. With the blunting of the German offensive at Kasserine, the end for the Axis forces in Tunisia was now in sight. II./JG 2 were spared the final debacle, however, the *Gruppe* returned to northern Europe in mid-March, where Erich Rudorffer was confirmed as *Kommandeur*, and they began re-equipping with the Bf 109G-6.

During their four month's service in North Africa II./JG 2 had claimed some 150 Allied aircraft destroyed, against which they had lost eight of their own in combat, a similar number in accidents, and two to 'friendly' fire – the unfortunate Ebelsbacher to Bf 109s and another to flak.

But this was not the final disappearance of JG 2's Fw 190s from the Mediterranean battleground. When Allied invasion forces stormed ashore at Anzio, some 45 kilometres south of Rome, on 22 January 1944, the German response was swift. Among the air units transferred into Italy in an effort to contain the beach-head was Major Erich Hohagen's I./JG 2, only recently arrived at Aix-en-Provence to combat heavy bomber incursions across southern Europe. The *Gruppe's* 26 Fw 190A-6s deployed first to Castiglione del Lago, and thence to Canino near Viterbo, where they were soon heavily involved above and around the Anzio perimeter. Central Italy in early 1944 was a far cry from Tunisia 12 months earlier, however, and Hohagen's pilots found themselves up against overwhelming numbers of Allied aircraft. On 17 February, for example, over 800 bombers were directly employed in close support of the beach-head. Opposed by such strength, much of it directed specifi-

cally against Luftwaffe airfields in the vicinity of the landings, and in the face of numerous standing RAF and American fighter patrols, I./JG 2 could achieve little.

Some pilots did manage to add to their individual scores during the brief deployment to Italy, Leutnant Siegfried 'Wumm' Lemke, *Staffelkapitän* of I./JG 2, being one such individual, but *Gruppe* losses far outweighed personal successes. A steady toll of Fw 190s was taken, not only over Anzio itself in combat with Spitfires at odds of 20-to-1 or more against, but also beyond the perimeter of the beach-head in action against fighter-escorted B-26 Marauders of the tactical Twelfth AF attacking German lines of supply, and even further afield against the 'heavies' of the strategic Fifteenth AF bombing the Luftwaffe's own bases.

Such attrition could not be sustained for long, and by the end of March 1944 I./JG 2 had received orders to return to France. In the first week of April they began the transfer back to Marignane. The second, and last, foray into the Mediterranean theatre by Fw 190s of the *Jagdgeschwader* 'Richthofen' was at an end.

The final 'diversion' of the Focke-Wulf from its mainstream western role of day fighter defence – initially along the Channel coast and then over the *Reich* itself – was its employment as a nightfighter. The first moves in this direction were made in the early summer of 1943 by the established *Nachtjagdgeschwadern* (nightfighter groups). Finding that their own twin-engined machines were too slow to catch the increasing number of RAF Mosquitos roaming Germany's night skies, several *Gruppen* experimented with one or two hastily-modified Fw 190s used in conjunction with the NJGs' existing 'Himmelbett' ('Four Poster Bed') method of ground control. II./NJG 1, for example, kept a pair of Fw 190s at readiness at Bonn-Hangelar to help protect nearby Cologne. Other units deploying these so-called 'Nachtjagdkommandos Fw 190' (Fw 190 nightfighter detachments) included *Stab* and III./NJG 1, at Arnhem-Deelen and Twente respectively, and IV./NJG 3 based at Aalborg in Denmark. But the undoubted advantage in performance which the Fw 190 offered over the *Gruppen's* own Bf 110s and Ju 88s was more than offset by the difficulties of operating by night and few, if any, confirmed victories can be attributed to these first makeshift endeavours.

Almost at the same time as these early experiments were taking place, however, a second – and rather more successful – utilisation of the Fw 190 as a nightfighter was being proposed. This was the 'Wilde Sau' ('Wild Boar') concept, which did away with the strictures of radar-directed ground control and allowed the Fw 190s to prowl at will over the target areas and search visually for the RAF bombers silhouetted against the ground fires below. But these 'Wilde Sau' operations, and the units involved, were such an integral part of the Defence of the

'Wilde Sau' nightfighter Fw 190A-6 of II./JG 300 runs up its engine at Rheine-Nord early in 1944. At first glance the use of spiral spinner markings on a nightfighter would seem to make little practical sense. Closer inspection, however, will reveal JG 1's 'Winged 1 in a circle' badge just visible on the engine cowling, indicating that II./JG 300 was initially 'twinned' with one of the Fw 190 *Gruppen* of this day-fighter *Geschwader*, before receiving its own aircraft





The basic idea of the 'Wilde Sau' concept - picking out the shapes of enemy bombers against the fires below - was taken one step further when cloud obscured the target area. Searchlight crews would then play their beams onto the underside of the clouds. The efficacy of this 'Mattscheibe' (opaque screen) tactic is amply demonstrated by this Lancaster, silhouetted over Berlin in December 1943 like a 'bug in a lampshade'

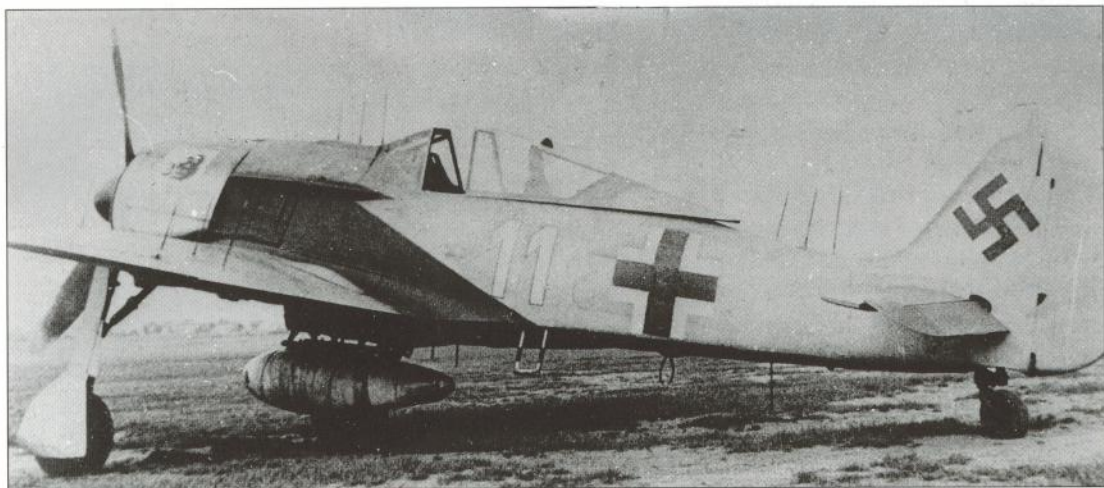
Final use of the Fw 190 as a night fighter revolved around trials carried out by aircraft such as this A-9/R11 of 1./NJGr.10 at Werneuchen later in 1944. Although equipped with airborne radar, Oberleutnant Krause's 'White 11' still carries the 'Wilde Sau' boar's head badge on the cowling. Note too the fairing above the exhaust louvres to cut down glare

Reich that they are best dealt with chronologically in the following chapter.

One final effort to develop the Fw 190 into a dedicated nightfighter, complete with airborne radar, was made on 1 January 1944 with the activation of *Nachtjagdgruppe* 10. Based at Werneuchen, near Berlin, and commanded by Major Rudolf Schönert (a highly experienced nightfighter pilot recently returned from the Eastern Front, where he had scored 35 kills as *Kommandeur* of I./NJG 100), this was an operational trials unit tasked with testing the latest devices being developed by the Luftwaffe's radar research establishment. The *Gruppe's* 1. *Staffel* was equipped with single-engined Fw 190s and Bf 109s flown by ex-'Wilde Sau' pilots. Various installations were test flown, one of the most successful being the FuG 217 'Neptun J1', which resulted in the Fw 190s being festooned with rod aerials fore and aft of the cockpit and above and below the wings.

'Neptun'-equipped Fw 190s of 1./NJGr.10 were used operationally in the summer of 1944 and some success was achieved. *Staffelkapitän* Hauptmann Friedrich-Karl Müller - universally known as 'Nasen-Müller' ('Nose-Müller'), not only on account of his prominent proboscis, but also to distinguish him from JG 3's equally famous Friedrich-Karl 'Tutti' Müller - was the foremost exponent of single-engined nightfighting. An old *Lufthansa* hand, the 32-year-old Müller had already scored 23 'Wilde Sau' night victories, three over Berlin on the night of 23/24 August 1943 alone, and it was he who claimed 1./NJGr.10's sole recorded Mosquito kill in May 1944.

However, the Focke-Wulf's year-long involvement in the defence of the *Reich* by night was now drawing to a close. 1./NJGr.10 still had some Fw 190s on strength when it provided a cadre for the activation of 2./NJG 11 in August, and the latter continued to operate the type in the ongoing hunt for the elusive Mosquitos for several weeks more. Long before the end of 1944, however, the last nightfighter Fw 190 had disappeared from the inventory. By that stage the aerial protection of the *Reich*, both nocturnal and diurnal, was well beyond the help of any small-scale specialist unit, no matter how dedicated and determined its pilots. And to discover just how the fortunes of the *Jagdwaaffe* in the air over Germany had come to such a pass, it is necessary to go back some two years.



DEFENCE OF THE REICH – THE BATTLE IS JOINED

6 December 1942 was the date of the famous raid by all the operational bomber squadrons of the RAF's No 2 Group against the Philips radio works at Eindhoven in Holland. Part of the attacking force overflew II./JG 1's Woensdrecht base at low level and lost a Ventura to the field's *Flak* defences. There was no response from the *Gruppe's* Fw 190s, for they had been lured westwards by a diversionary raid on Lille by B-17s of the Eighth AF. And it was one of the latter, downed by Oberleutnant Leonhardt's 6.*Staffel*, which provided JG 1's first four-engined kill. The *Geschwader's* duck against the 'heavies' had finally been broken, and it was not a moment too soon for in the coming months the pilots of JG 1, sitting astride the Americans' main route of approach across the North Sea into Germany, would find themselves acting as the first bulwark of defence against ever-increasing numbers of B-17s and B-24s. To their left, based in Belgium and north-eastern France, Major Gerhard Schöpfel's JG 26 was similarly guarding the approaches to the Ruhr. Further west still, along the Channel coast to the Atlantic, JG 2 under Oberstleutnant Walter Oesau continued to defend targets in occupied France.

It would be all too easy, if somewhat monotonous, to describe the events of 1943 and early 1944 in the form of an almost daily list of incursions, detailing the numbers of Allied attackers despatched, the strength of the German response, and the claims made and losses sustained by both. But against this background of near constant harassment and onslaught from across the Channel and North Sea, ranging from individual RAF fighter and fighter-bomber sweeps to raids by phalanxes of American heavy bombers, the 18-month period from January 1943 to June 1944 – like that of the year 1942 before it – was not only milestone by a sequence of significant events as first one side and then the other made move and counter-move to gain, or retain, aerial superiority, but was also highlighted by a number of major actions.

The first of these was of course the Wilhelmshaven raid of 27 January 1943, the initial Eighth AF raid against a target inside Germany's borders, and thus the very opening round of the near 30-month long daylight Bat-



Photographed in the summer of 1942 at Katwyk, this A-2 flown by Oberleutnant Max Buchholz of 5./JG 1 carries not only the *Staffel* badge but also Buchholz's personal emblem, a large white bird (partially visible just below the cockpit). The same motif was subsequently adopted by *Gruppenkommandeur* Hauptmann Dietrich Wickop, and it adorned the aircraft he was flying when shot down by P-47s on 16 May 1943 (see colour profile 6)



A close-up of 5./JG 1's red 'Tatzelwurm' on another of the Staffel's Fw 190s

The flamboyant 'Pips' Priller was obviously neither superstitious nor retiring. Here he poses in full Major's rig with his BMW open tourer in front of 'Black 13', an Fw 190A-5 (Wk-Nr 7298) at Lille-Vendeville in the early summer of 1943

tle of the *Reich*. Although the nine bombers claimed by JG 1 were exactly three times the number actually lost by the Americans (overclaiming in all good faith by both sides during the heat and confusion of battle would remain a constant throughout), this first major encounter with the massed ranks of the enemy was not unencouraging.

While JG 1 were finding their feet, changes had been taking place within neighbouring JG 26. The veterans of Major Johannes Seifert's I./JG 26 had been selected for transfer to the Eastern Front in the first stage of an ambitious scheme for the whole *Geschwader* to trade places with JG 54, but after the arrival in the west of the Bf 109-equipped III./JG 54 in their stead, the project was quietly shelved.

Of more immediate import was Major Gerhard Schöpfel's relinquishing command of JG 26 to Major Josef Priller. Schöpfel, who had taken over from Oberstleutnant Adolf Galland in December 1941 and had, in effect, overseen JG 26's transition onto the Fw 190, ended the war as *Kommodore* of JG 6, having scored 40 victories in the west, three of them four-engined bombers. 'Pips' Priller, who would remain at the head of JG 26 until January 1945, was one of the *Jagdwehaffè's* true 'characters', and perhaps *the* archetypal Western Front leader. Every one of his 101 victo-



Although of poor quality, this photo clearly shows another of Priller's mounts, the dot between the '13' and the fuselage cross having been substituted for a small rectangle. This is possibly A-6 Wk-Nr 530120, which he flew as an Oberstleutnant out of Lille-Nord during the winter of 1943-44

ries, including 11 'heavies', would be scored over north-western Europe.

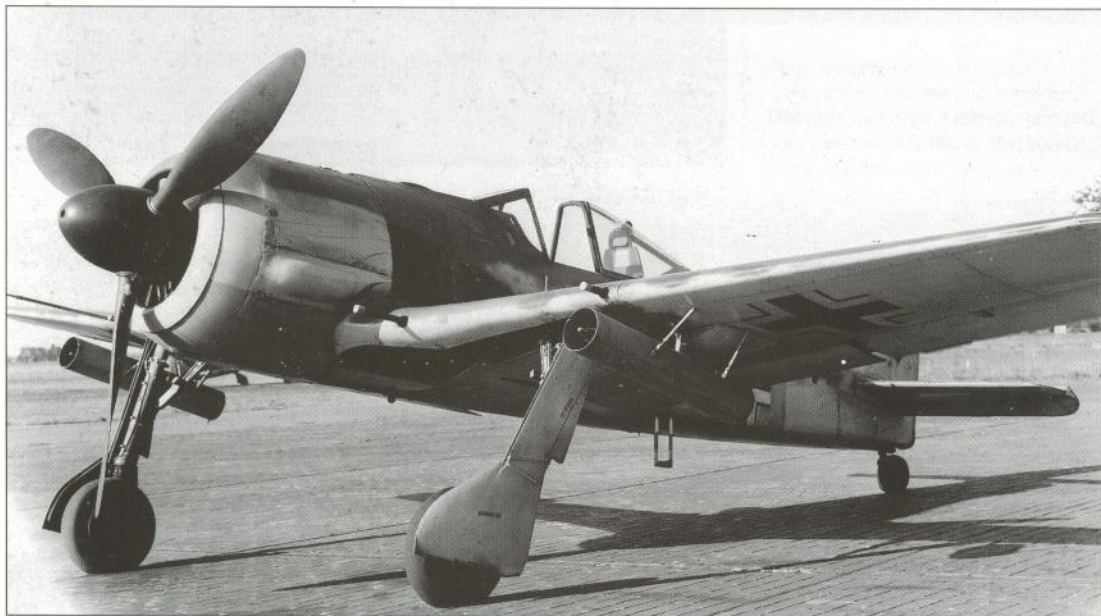
During the early weeks of Priller's command JG 26 spent some time evaluating new weapons, including underwing 21 cm mortar launchers adapted from the army's multiple '*Nebelwerfer*' – these were rejected as being too cumbersome, however. They also practised the frontal attack tactics now officially sanctioned as offering the best chance of success against enemy bomber formations. That they had not yet quite mastered the latter was perhaps demonstrated during the Eighth AF's first major incursion of the New Year into their territory. Although 10 of the 22 B-17s they attacked were damaged, only one was actually brought down. Ten days later, on 23 January, the originators of the head-on tactic, JG 2, showed just how it should be done by shooting down five out of thirty-five Fortresses attacking Lorient.

March witnessed two raids of particular interest. On the 4th 71 B-17s took off to bomb the marshalling yards at Hamm, but due to bad weather only 16 made it through to the objective, the remainder attacking targets of opportunity in Holland, notably the port of Rotterdam. The latter were engaged by elements from all four *Gruppen* of JG 1, reinforced by JG 26, and lost five of their number. The fighters claimed ten including, for the first time, two 'separations' and a 'final destruction', for the Luftwaffe High Command had by now come to recognise the difficulties their fighter pilots faced in tackling the tight, mutually defensive combat box formations being flown by the Americans, and had expanded their



A third 'Black 13'. This A-8 was used during the early days of the Normandy campaign, although it has not been confirmed as to whether this aircraft was the one used in Priller's immortal 'dash' along the beach-head on D-Day. Note the personal emblem (his wife's name *Jutta* on the ace-of-hearts), the different style of the '3' and the small rectangle now metamorphosed into a pointed bar more in line with regulation *Kommodore's* markings!

An Fw 190A-4/R6 fitted with underwing 21 cm mortar launchers as evaluated - and rejected - by JG 26 for anti-bomber operations early in 1943



'points' system – the criteria for most promotions and awards within the combat arm of the Luftwaffe – to reflect this.

Based upon the principle that shooting down an enemy single-engined fighter gained the victor one point (and, incidentally, the Iron Cross, Second Class), the downing of a four-engined bomber now scored three points (and the Iron Cross, First Class). In addition to this, two points were awarded for an '*Herausschuss*' – literally a 'shooting out' or, in other words, the damaging of a heavy bomber sufficiently to force it to leave the safety of its combat box, i.e. a 'separation'. Finally, just one point was achieved by the less hazardous task of the '*endgültige Vernichtung*', or 'final destruction', of one such separated, and presumably already damaged, straggler. The points for similarly engaging a twin-engined bomber formation were two, one and a half respectively.

Four days after the unscheduled raid on Rotterdam, 16 B-24s, covered by three squadrons of RAF Spitfires, were despatched against Rouen. JG 26 hit them hard. While III. *Gruppe*, led on the occasion by 'Pips' Priller himself, took on the escort, II./JG 26 under their new *Kommandeur* Major Wilhelm-Ferdinand 'Wutz' Galland (middle of the three Galland brothers, who had taken over from Conny Meyer, the first Luftwaffe pilot to down a four-engined bomber, on 3 May) tackled the B-24s head-on. The two lead Liberators burst into flames and the remainder broke away in confusion, seeking to escape Galland's fighters and scattering bombs over a wide swathe of the French countryside. This was purportedly the only instance of the Luftwaffe forcing Eighth AF bombers to turn back before reaching their target during the entire daylight offensive!

Of far greater significance was the appearance 48 hours later of the first P-47 Thunderbolt fighters (4th Fighter Group aircraft). Although initially possessing only a moderate range increase over the notoriously short-legged Spitfire, and thus at first limited to coastal sweeps, the



Sharp against the wintry landscape below, a Focke-Wulf curves in for an '*endgültige Vernichtung*'. If the German pilot is successful, this straggler, its port wing already ablaze, will be one of the five 91st BG B-17s failing to return from Oschersleben on this day, 11 January 1944

advent of long-range tanks would soon see the P-47 escorting bombers to the German border and beyond. And while the appearance of the superlative P-51 Mustang escort fighter was still some 11 months off, the writing was plainly on the wall. Incidentally, the pioneer P-47 group was joined by two more (56th and 78th FGs) in April, and on the 15th of that month the first clash with Luftwaffe fighters occurred when 59 P-47s from all three groups staged a sweep (Rodeo 204) of the St Omer area. Here, they encountered 15 Fw 190s of II./JG 1, the latter far to the west of their normal hunting grounds, and lost two of their number (both 334th FS P-47Cs from the 4th FG) to 5. *Staffel's* Oberfeldwebel Ernst Heesen. The 4th FG claimed to have downed a quartet of Fw 190s in return.

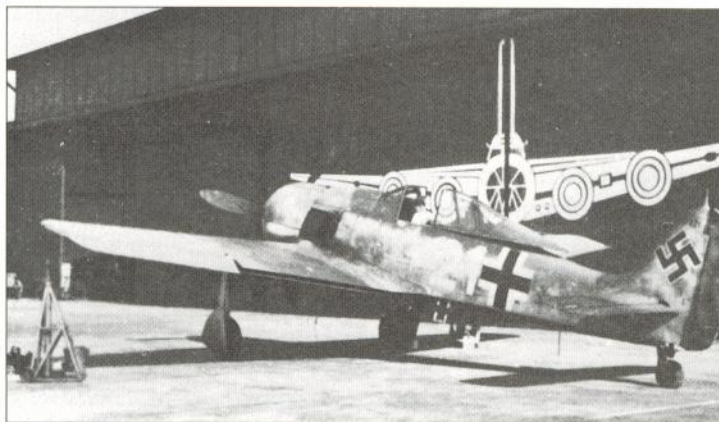
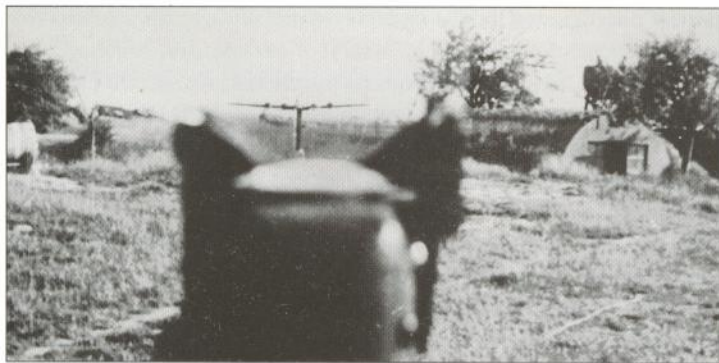
Conscious of the Americans' growing might, the Germans sought to increase their own numbers in response. The method they chose – or, more accurately, the method that was imposed upon them by circumstances – was to 'poach' units from other fronts. Although they could ill be spared, two Bf 109 *Gruppen* were thus returned to the *Reich* – one each from the Russian and Mediterranean fronts.

In addition, it was decided to 'split' JG 1 in order to create a completely new *Jagdgeschwader* (a process much employed by the Luftwaffe during its pre-war years of expansion). Consequently, at the beginning of April, the Bf 109s of I. and the Fw 190s of III./JG 1 became II. and I./JG 11 respectively. To them were added a new Bf 109-equipped III. *Gruppe* and a *Geschwaderstab* under Major Anton Mader, erstwhile *Kommandeur* of II./JG 77. The new unit thus formed, JG 11 was based in an arc across the north German plain between the Dutch and Danish borders.

Meanwhile JG 1, to the immediate left in occupied Holland, had redesignated its IV. *Gruppe* to fill the vacant I. *Gruppe* slot and had created another new (Bf 109-equipped) II. *Gruppe*. JG 1, too, had a new *Kom-*

Despite their earlier reservations, JG 26 found themselves equipped with the 21 cm mortar launcher by the late spring of 1944. This example is being loaded for an anti-bomber sortie from Lille-Vendeville in May. A month later the *Geschwader* would also be using them against ground targets in Normandy





Many and varied were the devices employed to familiarise the Luftwaffe's fighter pilots with the huge bulk of the B-17. JG 2 mounted a scale model of the bomber on a pole and ran it on tracks backwards and forwards in front of a dismantled *Revi* gunsight (foreground). JG 6 would opt for a full frontal view of a B-17 painted on the hangar doors at Königsberg/Neumark as an aid to judging range during their transition from Me 410s to Fw 190s in the summer of 1944

ple, piloted by an adventurous squadron leader, was trying to repeat the lone raid it had successfully carried out over Germany 12 days earlier! And on 17 April Hauptmann Fritz Losigkeit, long-time *Kommandeur* of IV./JG 1 (now I. *Gruppe*), got his first B-17, which was just one of seventeen claimed that day by the combined strengths of JGs 1 and 11.

To the west, JGs 2 and 26 were also facing growing pressure. And they were beginning to suffer the casualties to prove it. On 5 April Hauptmann Friedrich Geisshardt, *Kommandeur* of III./JG 26, was severely wounded during a frontal attack on B-17s raiding Antwerp. Although he managed to land his Fw 190A-4 safely at Ghent, Geisshardt succumbed to his injuries the following day. A month later, 15 May, 2./JG 2 lost their *Staffelkapitän* when Oberleutnant Horst Hannig, an Eastern Front 'veteran' at 21, was bested by Spitfires near Caen. He baled out injured, but failed to open his parachute. Hannig had managed to add just eight more victories – including one 'heavy' – to his 90 Russian kills since taking over 2./JG 2 in January. Several other '*alte Hasen*' were wounded at this time – experienced formation leaders the western-based *Jagdgeschwader* could not afford to lose, even temporarily, in their fight to stem the Anglo-American tide.

Aware that their earlier efforts to bolster the strength of the homeland defence units had been insufficient, the High Command began a new round of measures in the summer of 1943. Yet more Bf 109 *Jagdgruppen* were recalled from the Eastern and Southern fighting fronts, as were several *Zerstörergruppen*, whilst others were activated from scratch. The Focke-Wulfs of I./JG 26 were also brought back from Russia, returning

modore, with Oberstleutnant Dr Erich Mix being replaced by Major Hans Philipp. The latter, already wearing the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords, arrived from the Eastern Front fresh from commanding I./JG 54 where, just two weeks before, he had become only the second German fighter pilot to achieve 200 victories. Phillip was very much the 'new broom', even ordering a large tent to be erected at Arnhem-Deelen both to serve as his operational HQ, and 'to show these pilots spoiled by their comfortable quarters' what life on a proper forward landing ground, Russian style, was really like!

Despite these re-organisational activities, sorties were still being flown. Early on the morning of 1 April Oberfeldwebel Fritz Timm of 3./JG 1 claimed one of the few Lancasters ever shot down by the *Geschwader*. This particular exam-



The tails tell the tale. Hauptmann Siegfried Schnell, *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 2, was among the most successful 'Richthofeners' on the Channel coast. Here, at Théville in the early summer of 1942, his score already stands at 62 (Nos 58-61 having just been claimed on 3 June). Altogether Schnell would achieve 87 western victories, including three 'heavies'. After transfer to the Russian front he would down another seven in the three weeks before he himself fell victim to Soviet fighters on 25 February 1944

not to Priller's control, but being deployed initially in north-western Germany.

In addition, the idea of underwing mortars, initially rejected by Priller at the beginning of the year, was resurrected. A small unit of four Fw 190s from *Erprobungskommando* (Trials Detachment) 25 – established in 1942 to 'develop and test special weapons to combat four-engined bomber formations' – arrived at I./JG 1's Schiphol base to begin full operational trials with the 21 cm mortar launchers. On their first mission with the *Gruppe* on 13 June the unit claimed three B-17s destroyed by mortar over the German Bight, whilst nine days later they got another four – two definites and two 'separations'. Of the seven thus claimed, five had fallen to Oberfeldwebel Hans Laun alone which, if substantiated, would put him in the running as the first Fw 190 'mortar' ace! Whatever the results, the trials had been deemed sufficiently successful for the launchers to be accepted into service. In theory the mortar-equipped fighters were to break up the bomber formations to enable the waves of cannon-armed machines following in their wake to pick off individual heavy bombers. However, in practice Priller's earlier doubts were soon justified as the performance-robbing underwing launch tubes made their carriers easy prey for Allied escort fighters.

A more worthwhile addition to the *Jagdwaaffe's* armoury in the summer of 1943 was the new Fw 190A-6, which featured a battery of four 20 mm MG 151 cannon, plus the two MG 17 machine guns, as standard armament.

Another more inoffensive, but none the less valuable, aid to the Western Front fighter pilots in their fight against the 'heavies' was the chance to examine a Flying Fortress at close quarters. *Wulfhound*, a B-17F of the 303rd BG, had landed almost intact in a French field during a mission to Rouen on 12 December 1942. It was quickly restored to flying condition and repainted in Luftwaffe markings, after which it made a tour of *Jagdwaaffe* bases early in July, remaining for half a day at each to allow the bomber's hosts to cast an expert eye over its innermost secrets.

While all this was going on, the night Battle of the Ruhr was approaching its climax. RAF Bomber Command was proving as dangerous an adversary under the cover of darkness as the Eighth AF was by daylight. And the last major development in the summer of 1943 was the activation of the first of the three 'Wilde Sau' nightfighter units.

The brainchild of ex-bomber pilot Major Hajo Herrmann, and originally bearing his name, a Bf 109-equipped trials unit was established at Bonn-Hangelar on 26 June 1943. After gaining some success, this was expanded into the *Geschwaderstab* and I. *Gruppe* of JG 300. There were insufficient Bf 109s available to equip more than the one new *Gruppe*, however, and so II. and III./JG 300 were 'twinning' with II. and III./JG 11 at Rheine and Oldenburg respectively, JG 300 operating the Bf 109s by night and JG 11 by day. This was not altogether to the liking of the latter, as the 'Wilde Sau' pilots had a tendency to wipe off the Bf 109's flimsy undercarriages in heavy night landings – always assuming, of course, that they had first managed to return to the same base that they had taken off from! II./JG 300 subsequently received its own aircraft in the shape of Fw 190s, but by the end of 1943 'Wilde Sau' operations had become so costly that JG 300, together with JGs 301 and 302 (activated in October and

November), were soon remustered mainly as standard day fighter units.

The Allies' July response to this raft of German countermeasures was straightforward and effective – they simply piled on all the pressure at their command through sheer numerical superiority. And by this stage of the war what they indeed commanded was assuming awesome proportions. With the successful conclusion of the Battle of the Ruhr, the RAF's night bombing force next turned its attention to Hamburg, despatching over 3000 aircraft in four major raids – the resulting firestorm laid waste to large areas of the city. By day the Americans had just delivered 'Blitz Week', a devastating series of daily attacks comprising some 1250 individual heavy bomber sorties.

On 12 August 330 B-17s were despatched against targets in western Germany. Hampered by ten-tenths cloud and attacked by elements of ten *Jagdgruppen*, 25 'heavies' failed to return (the Luftwaffe claiming 37). For the first time, however, this raid was escorted by P-47s equipped with pressurised belly tanks, and although the Thunderbolts were credited with only four German fighters downed, II./JG 1, in particular, sustained heavy material losses. In addition to their one fatality, six Focke-Wulfs force-landed and a further six were seriously damaged. Four days later, when the Eighth AF struck at le Bourget, JG 2 suffered even greater losses with ten pilots killed and four wounded, 16 fighters lost and five damaged. But within 24 hours the *Jagdwaaffe* was to strike back . . . hard!

On 17 August 1943 (the anniversary of the first US heavy bomber raid on northern Europe) the Eighth AF's entire B-17 bomber strength set out to attack vital industrial targets deep in southern Germany – nine groups to Schweinfurt and seven to Regensburg. This raid was to be the culmination and vindication of the American commanders' hopes and plans of being able to send largely unescorted formations of daylight bombers to the farthest reaches of Hitler's *Reich*. It ended in disaster.

All seven Fw 190 *Gruppen* of JGs 1, 2, 11 and 26 were involved in the day's events, with two of them actually making the first Luftwaffe contact with the incoming Americans. Hauptmann Karl Borris' I./JG 26 had recently been deployed to Woensdrecht, which they now shared with the



'Wumm' Schnell's immediate successor at the head of 9./JG 2 was Oberleutnant Josef Wurmheller, another Channel Front ace. But his rudder tally, pictured at Beaumont-le-Roger some 12 months later, clearly indicates the arrival of the Eighth AF in the interim. Major 'Sepp' Wurmheller added another 28 kills to the 74 seen here, his final score including at least 13 heavy bombers at the time of his death over Normandy on 22 June 1944

And representative of the bombers falling to the guns of aces such as Schnell and Wurmheller in 1943 is this burnt-out and bullet-holed fuselage of a 384th BG B-17, one of five which failed to return from Villacoublay on 26 June 1943





Oberst Hajo Hermann, originator of the 'Wilde Sau' method of single-engined nightfighting, had served as a bomber pilot at the beginning of the war. He was to fly some 50 'Wilde Sau' sorties and claimed 9 RAF heavy bombers destroyed in the process. Subsequently promoted to the post of *Inspekteur der Luftverteidigung* (Inspector of Aerial Defence), another of his brainchildren was the *Rammkommando 'Elbe'*. Unlike the Fw 190 *Sturmgruppen*, this predominantly Bf 109-equipped last-ditch unit was specifically tasked with the destruction of enemy bombers by ramming.

resident II./JG-1, and as this Dutch field lay almost directly under the Regensburg force's flight path, practically all the two *Gruppen* had to do was to take off and await their arrival. While II./JG 1 engaged the P-47 escort, Karl Borris led his *Gruppe* in a classic frontal attack – up-sun, head-on and from slightly above. The *Gruppenkommandeur's* own target burst into flames and fell to earth north-west of Hasselt in Belgium – the day's first loss on either side. 59 more B-17s would go down before the epic battle was over, more than half being claimed by JGs 1 and 11 at the cost of just one pilot killed.

JG 26 suffered two Fw 190 fatalities, one of which was Oberleutnant Wilhelm-Ferdinand Galland. He had just led his *Gruppe* head-on against a formation of bombers returning from Schweinfurt, claiming two victims in so doing, and was reforming his *Stabschwarm* for a second pass when it was bounced by P-47s. Nobody witnessed the *Gruppenkommandeur's* end, his Fw 190A-6 supposedly exploding in mid-air. Oberleutnant Galland's body, still in the wreckage, was discovered buried deep in Dutch soil some four kilometres west of Maastricht two months later. He had scored 55 victories, including eight 'heavies', all in the west and nearly all on the Fw 190.

Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, his standing with the *Führer* in steep decline, was jubilant at his fighter pilots' success. He dismissed out of hand his *General der Jagdflieger's* dire warnings that American escort fighters had today crossed the German border and that from now on they would be ranging ever deeper into *Reich* airspace. He refused to believe that three Thunderbolts had been brought down near Aachen, and when invited to come and view the evidence for himself he terminated the one-sided 'discussion' with the insistent General Galland (whose younger brother had just been killed by P-47s from the self-same group as the trio downed) by screaming at him, 'I am giving you an official order that American fighters did not reach Aachen! Do you understand? The American fighters were *not* there! That's an order. Understood!' But Galland was to be proved right. Before the year was out six more P-47 groups, plus two of P-38s, would have entered service and would be escorting the 'heavies' well into Germany.

Two months after Schweinfurt/Regensburg the *Reichsmarschall* was even more incensed when, through a succession of mishaps, the Luftwaffe failed to prevent the Eighth AF's 4 October raid on Frankfurt-on-Main. The local party *Gauleiter* protested long and loud at the damage done to the town by waves of 'Terror-Bombers' parading overhead in perfect visibility with not a German fighter in sight. This resulted in the following furious order from Göring being sent to all *Reich's* defence units;

1. There are no weather conditions unfavourable enough to prevent fighter units from taking off!
2. Every fighter pilot who lands an undamaged machine without scoring a kill will be court-martialled!
3. If a fighter pilot is out of ammunition, or his guns are jammed, he is to ram the enemy bomber!

And when *Generalfeldmarschall* Erich Milch protested that this order was perhaps too harsh and would create a feeling of oppression among the pilots, Göring replied with ill-concealed petulance, 'They don't need to

feel oppressed. They just need to go in to 400 metres instead of 1000 metres. And they need to shoot down 80 bombers just for once, not 20. Then all feelings of oppression will disappear and I'll gladly take my hat off to them!

Such 'official' reaction from on high was a bitter pill for the *Jagdgruppen* to swallow, particularly I./JG 11, whose *Gruppenkommandeur*, Major Erwin Clausen, was killed on the day of the Frankfurt

raid after downing his 14th, and last, American 'heavy', a B-24 of the diversionary force over the North Sea.

But it was a theme Göring would return to during a tour of Western Front fighter bases later in October. A speech exhorting his pilots to even greater efforts concealed this none-too-thinly veiled threat, 'I don't wish to name any one individual *Gruppe* or *Staffel* as being particularly at fault. But I can promise you one thing: I will not have cowards in my *Luftwaffe* . . . these I will root out!' It was a far cry from his eve of war call-to-arms of four years earlier.

The actual feelings of the *Reich's* defence pilots – and an insight into their lives at the time – are perhaps most graphically illustrated by a letter written by Oberstleutnant Hans Philipp, *Kommodore* of JG 1 and he of the operations tent erected to give the feel of 'real' frontline campaigning. Penned to an old Eastern Front colleague on the very day of the Frankfurt debacle, it reflects the growing pressure being borne by units in the west, and reads in part;

'You cannot imagine how hard one has to crack the whip here. On the one hand we live very comfortably – plenty of girls, everything you could wish for. On the other, the fighting in the air is extraordinarily hard. Hard, not so much because the enemy is so numerous and the Boeings so well armed, but more because one is suddenly torn from the comfort of a deep armchair and the almost relaxed atmosphere of the field.

'Against 20 Russians trying to shoot you down, or even 20 Spitfires, it can be exciting, even fun. But curve in towards 40 Fortresses and all your past sins flash before your eyes. And when you yourself have reached this state of mind, it becomes that much more difficult to have to drive every pilot of the *Geschwader*, right down to the youngest and lowliest NCO, to do the same.'

Four days after writing these words 'Fips' Philipp was dead, killed over northern Germany by the ubiquitous P-47s after claiming his first, and only, four-engined bomber. During his six months leadership of JG 1 the 200+ Eastern Front ace had, in addition to this single B-17, shot down exactly one Spitfire and one P-47.

Despite the loss of their *Kommodore*, JG 1 were again in the air 48 hours later pitting themselves against the next major Eighth AF attack. The 10 October raid on Münster was arguably one of the most brutal, and concentrated, air battles ever fought over northern Europe. At its peak 30 bombers and 26 *Luftwaffe* fighters are reported to have gone



In the autumn of 1943 the HQ flight of Oberstleutnant Philipp's JG 1 were flying A-5s distinguished by the badge shown here. Depicting three Fw 190s chained together, it would seem to be another example of a 'word-play' emblem. The German for chain – '*Kette*' – is also the term for a formation of three aircraft. It may well, therefore, have been painted exclusively on Philipp's own aircraft, and those of his two wingmen

down in less than 25 minutes. The Fw 190 *Gruppen* of both JGs 1 and 26 claimed a number of kills at little cost to themselves, nearly half the *Luftwaffe's* losses being twin-engined day and nightfighters.

Four days later the Eighth's return to Schweinfurt provoked another fierce German response. Elements from no less than 34 single- and twin-engined *Gruppen*, plus several smaller formations, attacked nearly 300 B-17s, and their 196-strong P-47 escort, which together made up 'second Schweinfurt'. And again the Fw 190s of JGs



1 and 26 gave a good account of themselves. Of the 60 B-17s downed, the former claimed seven kills and eight 'separations' without loss to themselves, whilst the latter destroyed seven bombers and one P-47 against one fatality. Incidentally, although three P-47s were claimed by the *Luftwaffe* on 14 October, only one was in fact lost, and it seems likely to have been the one credited to II./JG 26's Oberfeldwebel Adolf Glunz. A stalwart member of the *Gruppe*, 'Addi' Glunz had been awarded the Knight's Cross two months earlier, the only JG 26 NCO pilot ever to be so honoured. After serving briefly with JG 52, Glunz had transferred to II./JG 26 in 1941, remaining with the *Gruppe* almost until the end (he spent the closing weeks of the war flying Me 262s with JG 7). Altogether he would amass 68 Western Front kills, including 20 'heavies' and three Mosquitos, but his proudest boast was that in an unbroken operational career, spanning four years and 574 operational sorties, he was never once shot down or wounded!

Unfortunately Adolf Glunz proved very much the exception rather than the rule. As 1943 began drawing to a close, increasing numbers of experienced Fw 190 formation leaders and veteran NCOs from all four western *Jagdgeschwadern* were falling victim to the growing might of the Allies. Many were wounded, some of whom would return, but the deaths of others were leaving gaps which were becoming progressively harder to fill – men like Hauptmann Kurt Ebersberger, *Staffelkapitän* of 4./JG 26 with 28 kills to his credit, bounced by Spitfires after attacking a formation of B-26s on 24 October, or Knight's Cross holder Major Johannes Seifert, a pre-war member of JG 26 and now *Kommandeur* of II. *Gruppe*, killed in a head-to-head collision with a P-38 on 25 November when his score in the west stood at 46.

Seifert's loss was further evidence of the inexorable Allied build-up, the long-range P-38 Lightning now having re-appeared on the northern European scene. The *Luftwaffe's* only 'build-up' in the autumn of 1943 was the addition of a fourth *Staffel* to each *Gruppe* of the westernmost-based JGs 2 and 26. However impressive this may have looked on paper – every *Gruppe* now having an official establishment of 68 aircraft and pilots – rarely could they put more than half this figure into the air at any one time.

Returning here from another mission, Oberfeldwebel Adolf 'Addi' Glunz was the only NCO pilot of JG 26 to be awarded the Knight's Cross (on 29 August 1943). Later commissioned, he subsequently received the Oak Leaves at the height of the Battle of Normandy, and ended the war flying the Me 262 with JG 7

Seen here as an Oberst wearing the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords, the legendary Walter Oesau had begun his combat career with the Condor Legion in Spain. After service with JGs 51, 3 and 2, he commanded JG 1 for six months until being killed in action against P-38s in May 1944. Thereafter, the unit bore the name 'Oesau' in his honour



To their right, reinforcement for JGs 1 and 11 came in the guise of two new *Kommodoren*, both of them officers and fighter pilots of the highest calibre. Major Hermann Graf, Eastern Front Bf 109 ace and the first man to top the 200 kill mark, had arrived at JG 1 in October, via EJGr.'Ost' and JG 50, temporarily to replace the fallen Hans Philipp. On 11 November he was then moved across to JG 11 to take over from Major Anton Mader; the latter being transferred to Russia to assume command of JG 54. And the man who now arrived at Deelen to head JG 1 was one of the most outstanding fighter leaders the Luftwaffe ever produced – none other than Oberstleutnant Walter Oesau who, for two long and arduous years, had been *Kommodore* of JG 2 on the Channel Coast. Having begun his combat career in Spain, where he had scored his first eight victories, 'Gulle' Oesau's tally of kills now stood at 105, over half of them achieved in the west. Like Philipp before him, he too wore the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Sword.

The same decoration adorned the neck of another newcomer to JG 1 in December, but he arrived under somewhat different circumstances. Major Heinz Bär was another of the *Jagdwaaffe's* most proficient and successful pilots; the first of his – to date – 178 victories having been scored over France as a Feldwebel in the opening month of the war. A dynamic leader, he expected, and got, the very best from those under him. In return he was fiercely protective, and forthright to the point of insubordination when it came to their well-being, a trait which had not endeared him to his own superiors, up to and including the *Reichsmarschall* himself. His transfer now from *Gruppenkommandeur* of JGr.'Süd' to the lowly position of *Staffelkapitän* within JG 1 was but the latest of many ups and downs in 'Pritzl' Bär's long, illustrious and bumpy career. He may well currently have been the highest ranking and most decorated *Staffelkapitän* within the entire *Jagdwaaffe*, but it speaks volumes for his character that he supported his relatively inexperienced, lower-ranking, *Gruppenkommandeur* to the full.

While the Luftwaffe's moves late in 1943 had been largely cosmetic – 'paper' reinforcements for JGs 2 and 26, and new formation leaders (admittedly among their best) for JGs 1 and 11 – the Americans had, almost unnoticed, played their trump card. On 5 December P-51B escort fighters of the 354th FG entered the arena. And while its combat debut may not have been an unparalleled success (these first machines, 'borrowed' from the tactically-optimised Ninth AF, suffered nine losses before the month was out), it was no longer a case of the 'writing being on the wall'. Nemesis was now at hand in the sleek shape of a four-gunned (later increased to six), 650+ kph, escort fighter which would soon be casting its shadow – both literally and figuratively – across the furthest corners of Hitler's *Reich* (see *Aces 1 Mustang Aces of the Eighth Air Force* and *Aces 7 Mustang Aces of the Ninth and Fifteenth Air Forces and the RAF*, both by Jerry Scutts).

Unaware of the dramatic turn their air war was to take in the early months of 1944, the pilots of the western *Jagdgeschwader* celebrated New Year's Eve in their traditional manner. For the majority this resulted in little more than a thick head and the urgent need for a lot of black coffee the following morning. Some, however, let their high spirits get the better of them – one worthy shied a smoke candle through his *Kommandeur's* win-

dow, staining the room, and its entire contents, a deep purple. The resulting 700 *Reichsmark* fine was almost worth it for the sight alone of the *Gruppenkommandeur* going about his daily duties in a cap slowly fading to a delicate shade of violet!

Two new Fw 190 units had been added to the *Reich's* Defence order of battle at the turn of the year. The first of these was Major Anton 'Toni' Hackl's III./JG 11 at Oldenburg, who began converting from their Bf 109Gs. The second was a completely new formation and represented the Luftwaffe's latest attempt to combat the American 'heavies'.

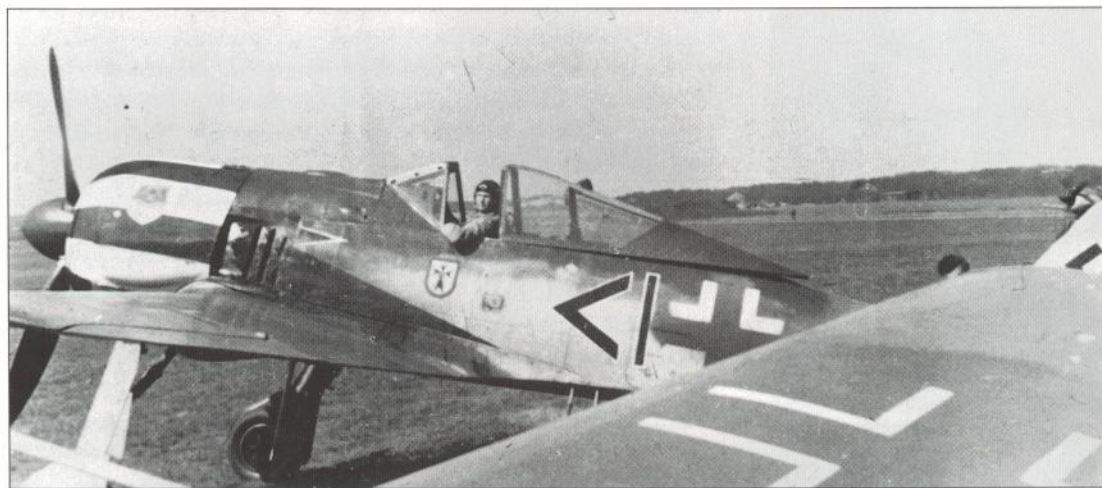
The *Reichsmarschall's* earlier heated orders about ramming had since been quietly let drop, but now Major Hans-Günther von Kornatzki had persuaded the powers-that-be to let him form an experimental unit, composed entirely of volunteers, to try a new method of attack. Contrary to long-held belief, *Sturmstaffel* 1 was neither a punishment nor a suicide unit, its concept being based upon the army's *Sturm* detachments, whose mission it was to close with the enemy and engage him in hand-to-hand, close-quarter, combat. In the air this translated into *Sturmstaffel* 1's heavily armed and armoured Fw 190s attacking the bombers from the rear in tight arrowhead formation, closing right in until a kill was assured. Only as a last resort, and in exceptional circumstances (if the fighter, despite its additional armour, was mortally damaged, for example) would a pilot be expected to ram the enemy, and then only if he had a chance to escape by parachute. Such instances were rare, however. If the pilot had done his job properly and had already got in that close, the bomber was usually as good as lost anyway.

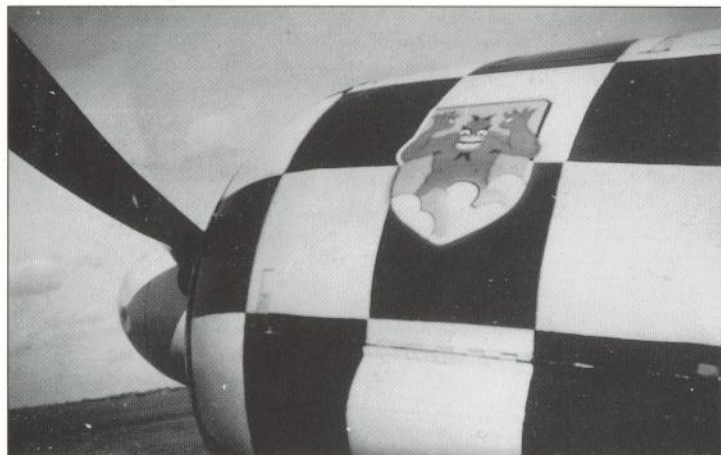
By the beginning of January 1944 the 18-strong *Staffel* (among whom were numbered future aces such as Leutnant Werner Gerth and a certain Unteroffizier Willi Maximowitz) had transferred to Dortmund, where they were based alongside, and subordinated to, Major Rudolf-Emil Schnoor's I./JG 1. It was at this time, incidentally, that JGs 1 and 11 had begun wearing colourful aft fuselage bands – red and yellow respectively – to differentiate between themselves in the air during combined missions, and to facilitate regrouping after any attack. To further distinguish the newcomers from the residents, each *Sturmstaffel* machine was painted with prominent black-white-black aft fuselage bands. This was the begin-



Another leading Luftwaffe ace, Major Anton Hackl began the war as an Unteroffizier with JG 77 and ended it as *Kommodore* of JG 11. In between he saw action on both Eastern and Western Fronts, was seriously wounded on several occasions, shot down eight times, was awarded the 'Swords' and numbered 32 heavy bombers among the 73 kills he claimed in the west

One of the earliest attempts to aid recognition in the air and facilitate regrouping after an attack on heavy bombers was JG 1's adoption of striking geometric cowling patterns. The horizontal black and white stripes seen here are being worn by the A-4 of Leutnant Eberhard Burath, Adjutant of I.*Gruppe*, at Arnhem-Deelen in the spring of 1943





ning of the colour-coding which would eventually encompass the entire *Reich's* Defence force.

It was not long before von Kornatzki's ideas were put to the test. On 11 January Oberleutnant Zehart downed a B-17 to score the *Staffel's* first success. Unteroffizier Maximowitz got his first near Hannover 19 days later, one of two B-24s claimed by *Sturmstaffel* 1 on that date. Although these early kills were encouraging, the trials had also shown that the unwieldy *Sturm* Fw 190, which weighed in some 25 per cent heavier than the standard fighter, was very vulnerable to stern attack from American escort fighters. Most of the extra armour it carried was, of necessity, frontal to protect it during the slow, long-haul approach to the bomber formations. To ensure success, *Sturm* machines would themselves require fighter protection.

In fact, the *Jagdwaaffe* had long been under orders to ignore Allied escort fighters and concentrate solely on the bombers. Initially, when such escort was weak, or non-existent, this had not been too hard to do. A favourite ploy of earlier months had been to wait until escorting fighters had reached the limit of their range, and had been forced to turn back through lack of fuel, before attacking the unprotected 'heavies' as they battled on alone. The advent of the long-range Mustang was changing all that. Most of the mixed-type *Jagdgeschwader* were now beginning to use their Fw 190 *Gruppen* as 'heavy' fighters against the bomber boxes, while employing their Bf 109s - whose performance at altitude was the superior

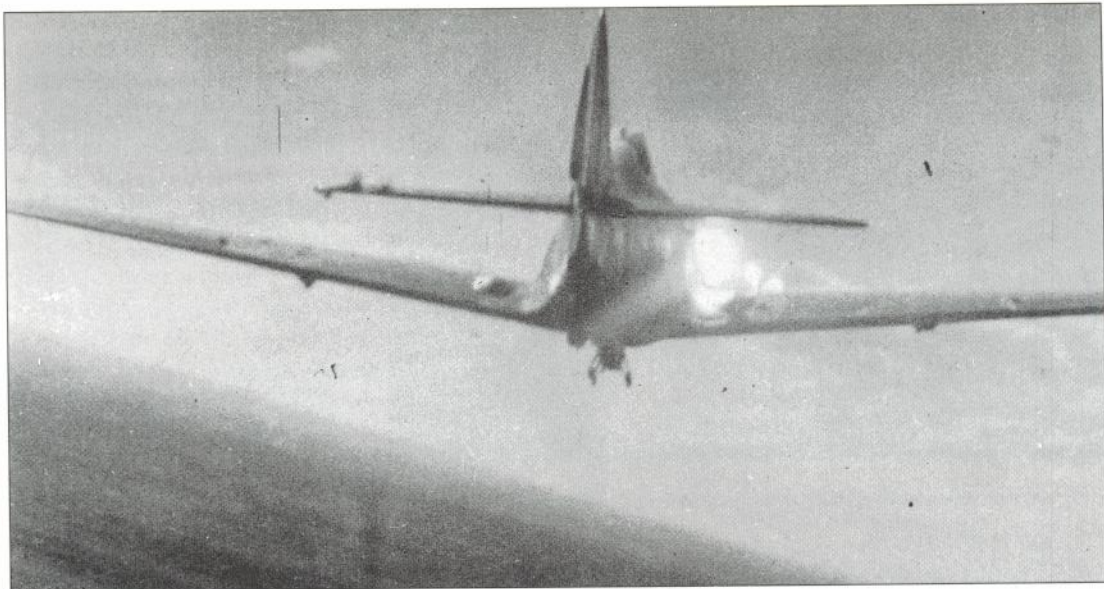
Other I./JG 1 aircraft featured checkerboard cowlings. Such designs were later augmented, and subsequently wholly replaced, by coloured aft fuselage bands which then became the norm for all *Reich's* Defence units. Note, incidentally, the *Gruppe* badge, first introduced on Bf 109s during its days as IV./JG 1

'Heavies' under fire. Taken from a 'Sturm' fighter on 29 April 1944, this gun-camera shot graphically illustrates the close-range nature of the *Jagdwaaffe's* new attack tactics - the distance recorded is 90 metres as the fighter bores in even closer to this doomed 447th BG B-17 . . .



. . . while an unidentified B-24, rear fuselage aflame, takes hits in and around the port inner engine





of the two Axis fighters – to engage the high-flying, far-ranging, escorts.

On 3 February 1944, in order to better co-ordinate all the measures involved in the aerial defence of the homeland, *Luftwaffenbefehlshaber Mitte* (Luftwaffe C-in-C Centre), which had first been established back in the spring of 1941 to control just the northernmost *Luftgau* (regional air districts), was redesignated as the *Luftflotte Reich*, and now became responsible for the whole of the Greater German *Reich*, including Austria. Unaware, or simply dismissive, of these organisational niceties, the Americans continued their unrelenting pressure. On 11 February the Eighth's first P-51 group entered the fray.

Nine days later over 1000 heavy bombers attacked German aircraft plants in central and eastern Germany to mark the opening of 'Big Week'. It also marked the end of the era of the Luftwaffe's trying to mount a maximum defensive effort against every single American bomber raid. The defending fighters were simply being swamped by weight of numbers. Largely prevented from carrying out their massed, set-piece head-on attacks against the bombers by the ever-growing strength of the American fighter escorts, many *Jagdgeschwader* now began to adopt the unofficial tactic of hit-and-run strikes, as these offered the best chance of success combined with personal survival.

The losses were not all one-sided, however. Many US bomber crews paid the price of the unremitting offensive – 41 failed to return on 22 February and 44 two days later. Of the former, five had been claimed by II./JG 26's 'Addi' Glunz alone, but although many such individual and unit scores continued to mount – JG 26 achieved its 2000th victory of the war during 'Big Week' when a B-24 was downed by 5. *Staffel*'s Oberleutnant Walter Matoni near Wetzlar on 24 February – the odds in the battle of attrition were firmly on the side of the numerically superior Americans. Nor were all the *Jagdstaffel*'s casualties inexperienced youngsters (many of whom were now falling victim on their first or second sorties). That same February JG 26 lost a quarter of their *Staffelkapitane*.

Certain American raids still provoked a massive and ferocious

The escorts strike back. Caught unawares by a P-47, an Fw 190 pays the penalty. Moments later this aircraft crashed into the ground below leaving a 'line of blazing parts' as it disintegrated. On his return to base the 353rd FG pilot rightly put in a claim for one Fw 190 destroyed



Three 'Experten' with 68 heavy bombers between them! From left to right, a bare-headed Oberleutnant Hugo Frey, *Kapitän* of 7./JG 11 (26), whilst facing the camera in his forage cap is Oberst Walter Oesau, *Kommodore* of JG 1 (10) and finally, with his back to the camera and wearing a peaked cap, is Major Anton Hackl, *Kommandeur* of III./JG 11 (32). This photo was taken in early 1944



Major Heinz Bär of II./JG 1, who scored his 200th kill on 22 April 1944, is seen here inspecting an earlier victim (No 184), a B-17 of the 91st BG downed near Rheine on 21 February. While Bär wears his favourite US leather flying jacket (with epaulettes and Iron Cross attachments!), his wingman, Oberfeldwebel Leo Schuhmacher, prefers the snugness of a 'liberated' sheepskin-lined model! The bomber's sobriquet, *MISS OUACHITA*, is the name of a tiny township in Arkansas, but in the vernacular of the period, it also meant something rather more rude to those in the know. Eighth AF aircrew delighted in getting such 'innocent' obscenities past the eagle eyes of staff officers whose task it was to vet aircraft names and artwork

response, however. The attack on Berlin on 6 March, for example, saw a total of 25 *Gruppen* – plus a number of smaller semi-autonomous formations – take to the air. No less than 69 'heavies' were brought down at a cost to the defenders of 36 pilots killed and 27 wounded. One of the outstanding performances of the day was undoubtedly that of Oberleutnant Hugo Frey, *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 11. He claimed the destruction of no less than four B-17s, each at short range, before return fire from a fifth sent his Fw 190 spiralling down to crash near the Dutch border.

And all the while the Luftwaffe was seeking desperately to add to its own numbers, particularly of anti-

bomber Fw 190 units. In addition to the 'Wilde Sau' *Gruppen* now converting to day operations, III./JG 54, the Russian Front *Gruppe* which had 'swopped' with I./JG 26 early the previous year and had been engaged in defence of the *Reich* duties ever since, also exchanged its Bf 109s for Focke-Wulfs in April. Moves were afoot, too, to expand *Sturmstaffel* 1 into a fully-fledged *Geschwader*.

However, in JG 1 that April most eyes were on Major Heinz Bär, who a month earlier had been 'allowed' to take over as *Kommandeur* of II./*Gruppe* after the death of the previous incumbent in action against B-24s south of Berlin. On 11 April Bär had scored his 199th kill, a B-17 near Fallersleben. It was a long, 11-day wait for the next. All three *Gruppen* of JG 1 were heavily involved against the Eighth's raid on Hamm on 22 April, and while the Bf 109s of III./JG 1 claimed the destruction of four P-51s of the escort screen (at a cost to themselves of seven pilots killed and two wounded), the Focke-Wulfs of I. and II. *Gruppen* accounted for seven 'heavies' (including one 'separation'), plus a further five fighters. It was shortly after the pilots of II./JG 1 had landed back at Störmede that a lone B-24, trailing smoke, was sighted to the north-west. Bär sprinted to his reserve machine – 'Red 23', an Fw 109A-7 which was fitted with a special large diameter wooden propeller – and quickly took off accompanied by his regular wingman, Oberfeldwebel Leo Schuhmacher. Fifteen minutes later the hapless Liberator had provided Major Heinz Bär with the 200th victory of his operational career.

Celebrations of the kind which attended Bär's return from this brief sortie were becoming an all too rare occurrence. More and more often units were instead having to come to terms with the loss of their leaders and long-serving members. The spring of 1944 saw the western *Jagdgeschwader* hit particularly hard in this respect. Oberstleutnant Egon Mayer, who as *Kommandeur* of III./JG 2 had carried out the first successful head-on attack against B-17s back in November 1942, had taken over from Walter Oesau as *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 2 the following June.

On 5 February 1944 he became the first fighter pilot to achieve 100 kills on the Channel Front. Less than a month later, on 2 March, he was killed in action against P-47s over the Franco-Belgian border. At the time of his death he was the *Jagdwaaffe's* most successful anti-bomber specialist, 25 of his final tally of 102 western victories consisting of American 'heavies'.

The officer brought in to replace Egon Mayer in command of JG 2 was Major Kurt Ubben, long-serving *Kommandeur* of III./JG 77 in Russia and the Mediterranean, but 'Kuddel' Ubben was also to die in combat with P-47s over France less than two months later. And on 28 April JG 2 welcomed their final *Kommodore* of the war. Oberstleutnant Kurt Böhlingen had been a member of the *Geschwader* since 1940, achieving his first kill at the height of the Battle of Britain. His 50th came during his successful partnership with Erich Rudorffer in Tunisia, and the 100th would be scored on 9 June 1944 north of Paris.

Meanwhile, at the head of neighbouring JG 26, the indestructible 'Pips' Priller was continuing to knock down the occasional heavy bomber. But he too was now sustaining losses he could ill afford, subordinates whose long experience was not only invaluable but well-nigh irreplaceable. Oberleutnant Artur Beese, for example, *Staffelkapitän* of I./JG



The third member of the trio, a less sartorially adventurous Feldwebel Max Sauer, Oberst Oesau's long-time wingman, takes a closer look at one of *MISS OUACHITA's* engines

Meanwhile, to the west another top bomber-killer, Major Egon Mayer, *Kommodore* of JG 2, poses atop 'one he downed earlier' – a 94th BG *Fortress* which bellied into a French cornfield near Antony-sur-Seine





With Mayer departed and his place taken by a Luftwaffe guard, this rear view of QE-W illustrates the damage inflicted on the rudder and tailplane by the *Kommodore's* attack

Pictured here before his appointment as the tenth, and final, *Kommodore* of the *Jagdgeschwader* 'Richthofen', Major Kurt Bülhigen looks none too pleased, but maybe it's just a problem with that starboard wing flap



26, who had fallen to the seemingly omnipresent P-47s near Paris back on 6 February, had been one of the last pilots whose service with the *Geschwader* dated back to pre-war days. And Oberleutnant Karl 'Charly' Willius, who had joined I. *Gruppe* at the end of 1941, and had since risen to command 2. *Staffel* with 11 'heavies' to his credit, before he also succumbed to P-47s on 8 April – shot down over the Zuider Zee. Karl Willius, still strapped in his Fw 190, was finally recovered from the drained polder by a Dutch recovery team in October 1967.

But undoubtedly the greatest loss of spring 1944 was that of Oberst Walter Oesau, *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 1, whose Bf 109G-6 went down over the Ardennes on 11 May after a 20-minute dogfight with P-38 Lightnings. Like the legendary Mölders before him, Oesau was commemorated by having the *Geschwader* he commanded named in his honour.

Exactly two weeks after Oesau's death yet another attempt was made to beef up the home defence units. The order went out to all *Jagdgruppen* on the eastern and southern fronts that each was to give up a complete *Staffel*. In this way, by robbing Peter to pay Paul yet again, every fighter *Gruppe* in the *Reich* was now to be brought up to four-*Staffel* strength in line with JGs 2 and 26 in the west. It was not always a simple process, particularly for those Fw 190 *Gruppen* whose 'new' fourth *Staffel* had hitherto flown the Bf 109. And while it was taking place a deceptive calm had descended over Germany during the first week of June 1944. The Eighth AF was focussing all its attention on targets in occupied France.

Bülhigen's neighbour, and counterpart, Oberstleutnant Josef Priller of JG 26, also seems somewhat preoccupied with a map of northern France



COLOUR PLATES

This 13-page section profiles many of the aircraft flown by the elite Fw 190/Ta 152 pilots of the *Jagdwaaffe* of the Western Front. All the artwork has been specially commissioned for this volume, and profile artist John Weal and figure artist Mike Chappell have gone to great pains to illustrate the

aircraft and their pilots as accurately as possible following much in-depth research. Many of the aces' machines featured in this section have never previously been illustrated in profile before, and are reproduced alongside accurate renditions of the more famous Fw 190s from World War 2.



1

Fw 190A-4 'Black Double Chevron' of Hauptmann Fritz Losigkeit, *Gruppenkommandeur I./JG 1*, Arnhem/Deelen, Holland, circa April-May 1943



2

Fw 190A-7 'White 9' of Hauptmann Alfred Grislawski, *Staffelkapitän 1./JG 1*, Lippspringe, April 1944



3

Fw 190A-7 'Red 13' (Wk-Nr 431007) of Major Heinz Bär, *Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 1*, Störmede, April 1944



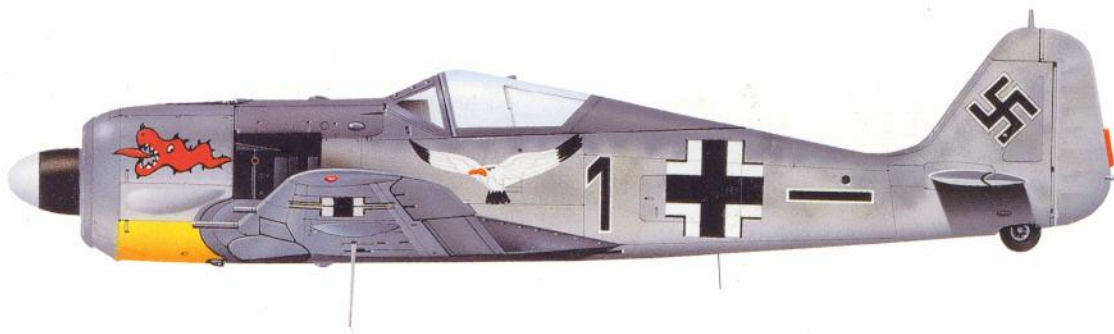
4

Fw 190A-7 'Red 23' of Major Heinz Bär, *Gruppenkommandeur* II./JG 1, Störmede, April 1944



5

Fw 190A-5 'Black Chevron Circle' of Leutnant Rüdiger von Kirchmayr, *Gruppen-TO* II./JG 1, Woensdrecht, June 1943



6

Fw 190A-5 'Black 1' (Wk-Nr 7328) of Hauptmann Fritz Dietrich Wickop, *Staffelkapitän* 5./JG 1, Woensdrecht, April 1943



7

Fw 190A-3 'Black 1' (Wk-Nr 432) of Oberleutnant Wilhelm Moritz, *Staffelkapitän* 11./JG 1, Mönchen-Gladbach, July 1942



8

Fw 190A-6 'White 1' of Major Hans-Georg von Kornatzki, *Staffelkapitän* of *Sturmstaffel 1*, Dortmund, January 1944



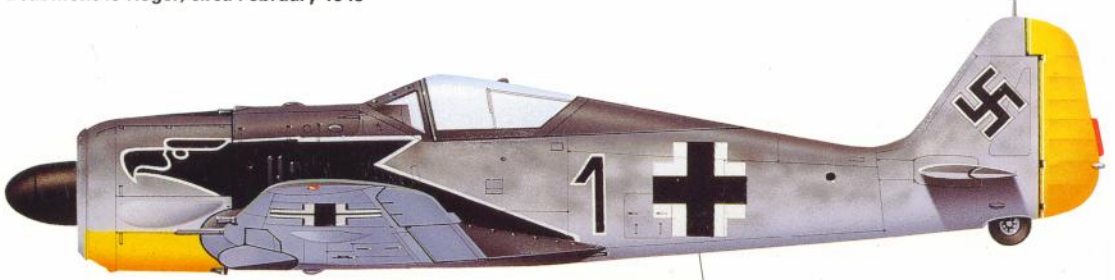
9

Fw 190A-5 (Wk-Nr 2594) of Major Hermann Graf, *Gruppenkommandeur* of *Jagdergänzungsgruppe Ost* (Operational Fighter Training Wing East), Bussac, southern France, summer 1943



10

Fw 190A-4 'Black Rectangle and Bars' of Oberstleutnant Walter Oesau, *Geschwaderkommodore* JG 2 'Richthofen', Beaumont-le-Roger, circa February 1943



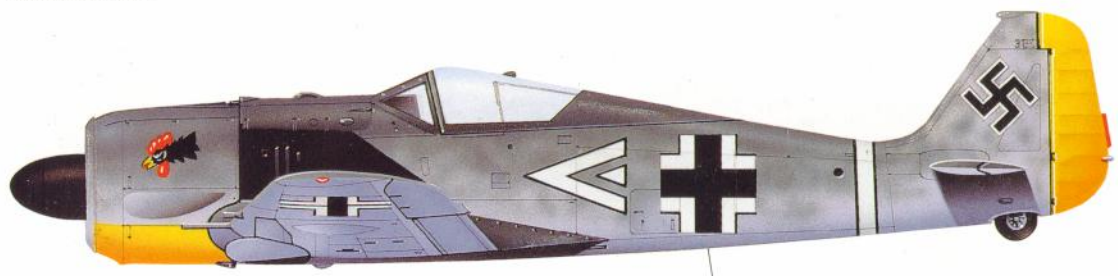
11

60 Fw 190A-4 'Black 1' (Wk-Nr 7134) of Oberleutnant Horst Hannig, *Staffelkapitän 2./JG 2*, Triqueville, May 1943



12

Fw 190A-4 'Black Double Chevron' of Oberleutnant Adolf Dickfeld, *Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 2*, Kairouan/Tunisia, December 1942



13

Fw 190A-3 'White Double Chevron' of Hauptmann Hans Hahn, *Gruppenkommandeur III./JG 2*, Poix, circa September 1942



14

Fw 190A-4 'Yellow 4' (Wk-Nr 746) of Hauptmann Siegfried Schnell, *Staffelkapitän 9./JG 2*, Vannes, February 1943



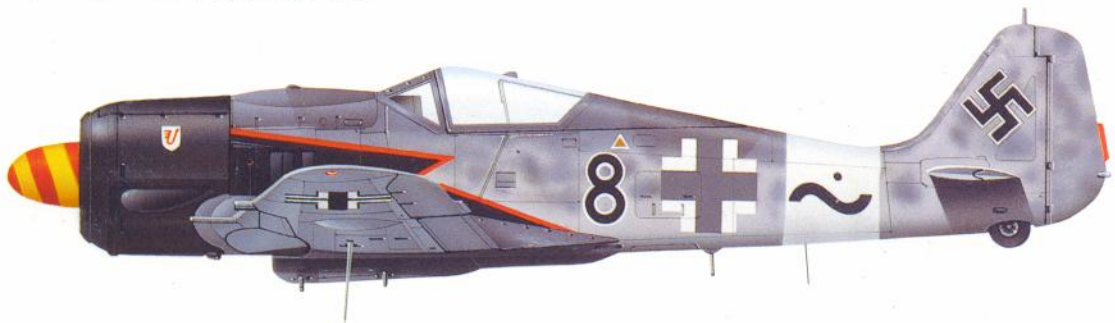
15

Fw 190A-6 'Yellow 2' (Wk-Nr 0314) of Oberleutnant Josef Wurmheller, *Staffelkapitän 9./JG 2*, Vannes, September 1943



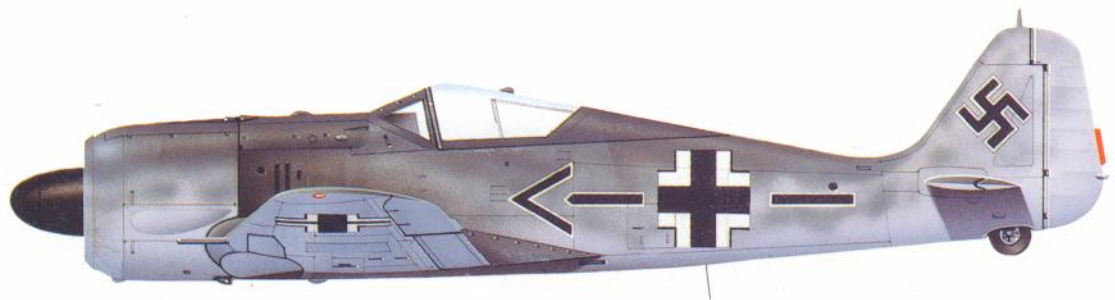
16

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Black Double Chevron' (Wk-Nr 681382) of Hauptmann Wilhelm Moritz, *Gruppenkommandeur* IV.(Sturm)/JG 3, Schongau, August 1944



17

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Black 8' of Unteroffizier Willi Maximowitz, IV.(Sturm)/JG 3, Salzwedel, circa June 1944



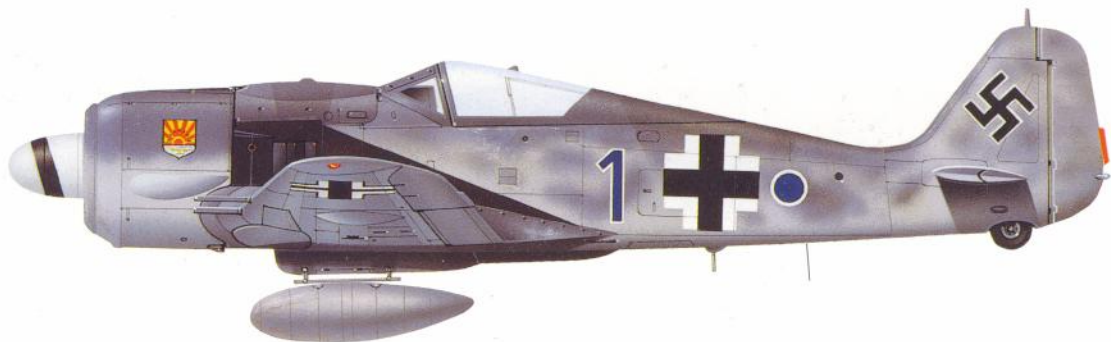
18

Fw 190A-4 'Black Chevron and Bars' of Major Gerhard Schöpfel, *Geschwaderkommodore* JG 4, Ansbach, circa June 1944



19

Fw 190A-4 'White 10' of Hauptmann Wolfgang Kosse, *Staffelkapitän* 1./JG 5, OsloFornebu, October 1942



20

Fw 190A-8 'Blue 1' of Leutnant August Schneider, *Staffelkapitän* 9./JG 5, Herdla, May 1945



21

Fw 190A-6 'White 9' of Oberfeldwebel Günther Migge, 1./NJGr.10, Werneuchen, circa March 1944



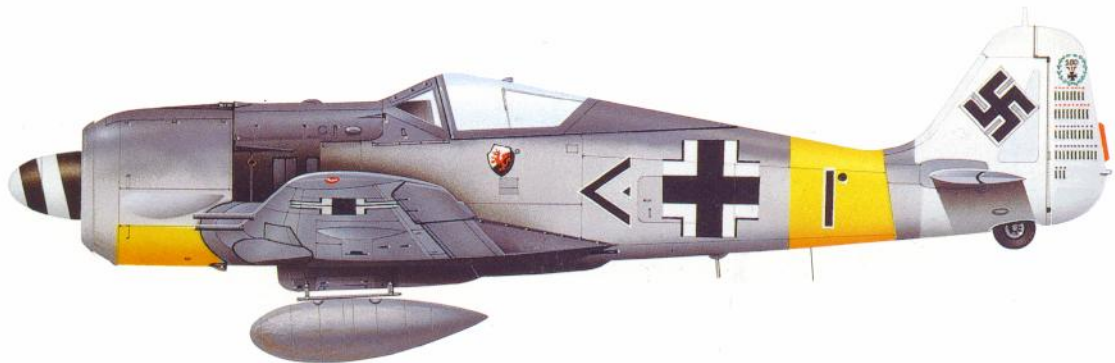
22

Fw 190A-5/U12 'Red 13' (Wk-Nr 410266) of Leutnant Erich Hondt, *Staffelkapitän* 2./JG 11, Husum, October 1943



23

Fw 190A-7 'Yellow 1' of Oberleutnant Hans-Heinrich König, *Staffelkapitän* 3./JG 11, Rotenburg, circa January/February 1944



24

Fw 190A-6 'Black Double Chevron' of Major Anton Hackl, *Gruppenkommandeur III./JG 11*, Oldenburg, April 1944



25

Fw 190A-2 'Black S and Bars' of Major Gerhard Schöpfel, *Geschwaderkommodore JG 26*, Audembert, circa February 1942



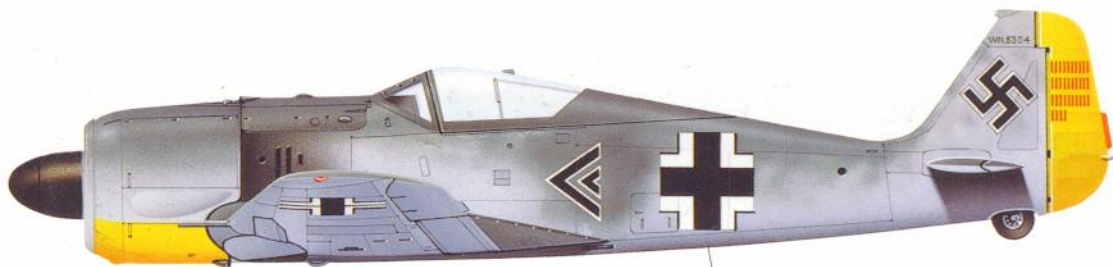
26

Fw 190A-5 'Black 13' (Wk-Nr 7298) of Major Josef Priller, *Geschwaderkommodore JG 26*, Lille-Vendeville, circa June 1943



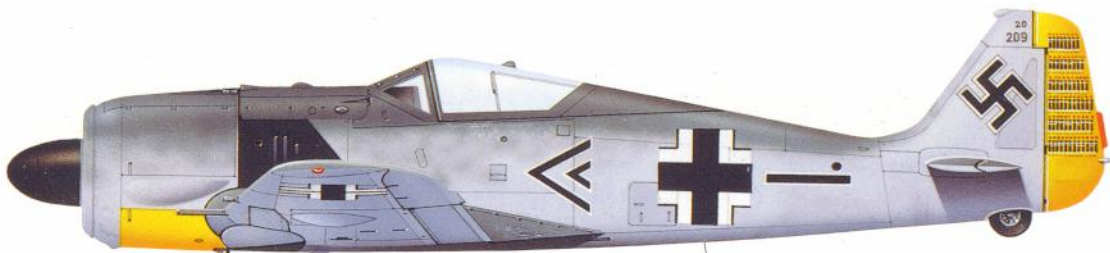
27

Fw 190D-13 'Yellow 10' (Wk-Nr 836017) of Major Franz Götz, *Geschwaderkommodore JG 26*, Flensburg, May 1945



28

Fw 190A-3 'Black Double Chevron' (Wk-Nr 5304) of Hauptmann Johannes Seifert, *Gruppenkommandeur I./JG 26*, St Omer-Arques, May 1942



29

Fw 190A-5 'Black Double Chevron' (W.Nr.20 209) of Hauptmann Joachim Müncheberg, *Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 26*, Coquelles, December 1941



30

Fw 190A-5 'White 1' (Wk-Nr 1197) of Oberleutnant Otto Stammberger, *Staffelkapitän 4./JG 26*, Vitry-en-Artois, circa March 1943



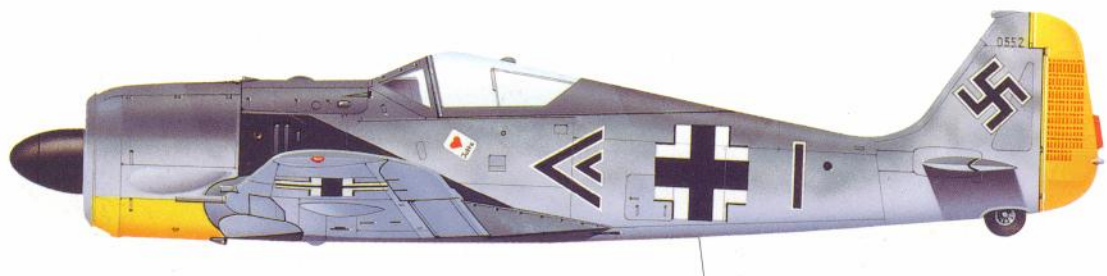
31

Fw 190A-3 'Black 8' of Oberleutnant Wilhelm-Ferdinand Galland, *Staffelkapitän 5./JG 26*, Abbeville-Drucat, circa June 1942



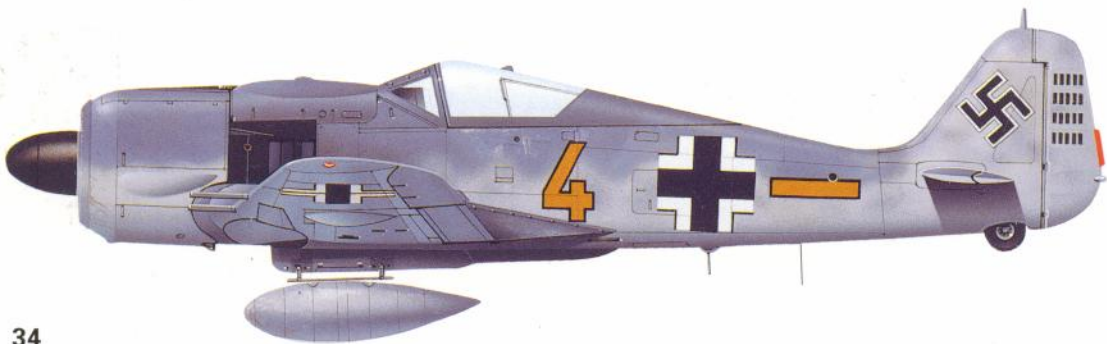
32

Fw 190A-7 'White 9' (Wk-Nr 642527) of Oberfeldwebel Adolf Glunz, 5./JG 26, Cambrai-Epinoy, February 1944



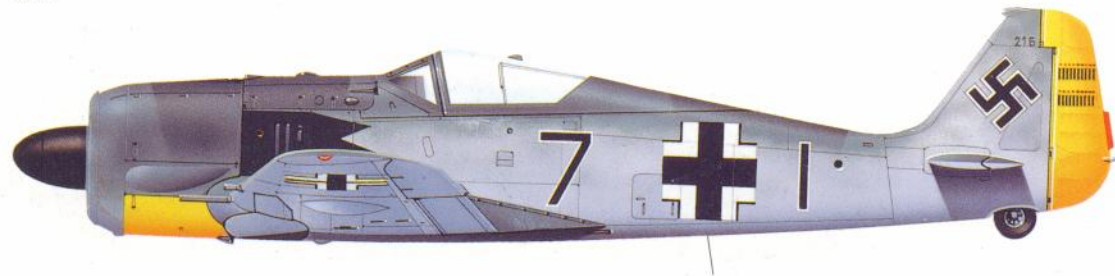
33

Fw 190A-3 'Black Double Chevron' (Wk-Nr 0552) of Hauptmann Josef Priller, *Gruppenkommandeur* III./JG 26, Wevelghem, August 1942



34

Fw 190A-8 'Brown 4' of Oberleutnant Waldemar Radener, *Staffelkapitän* 7./JG 26, Coesfeld-Stevede, circa September 1944



35

Fw 190A-3 'Black 7' (Wk-Nr 216) of Oberleutnant Karl Borris, *Staffelkapitän* 8./JG 26, Wevelghem, March 1942



36

Fw 190A-3 'Yellow 1' of Oberleutnant Kurt Ruppert, *Staffelkapitän 9./JG 26*, Moorseele, August 1942



37

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Blue 13' of Major Walther Dahl, *Geschwaderkommodore JG 300*, Illesheim, June 1944



38

Fw 190A-6 'Green 3' (Wk-Nr 350453) of Hauptmann Friedrich-Karl Müller, *Geschwader TO, JG 300*, Bonn-Hangelar, circa November 1943



39

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Red 1' (Wk-Nr 682204) of Leutnant Klaus Bretschneider, *Staffelkapitän 5./JG 300*, Löbnitz, circa November 1944



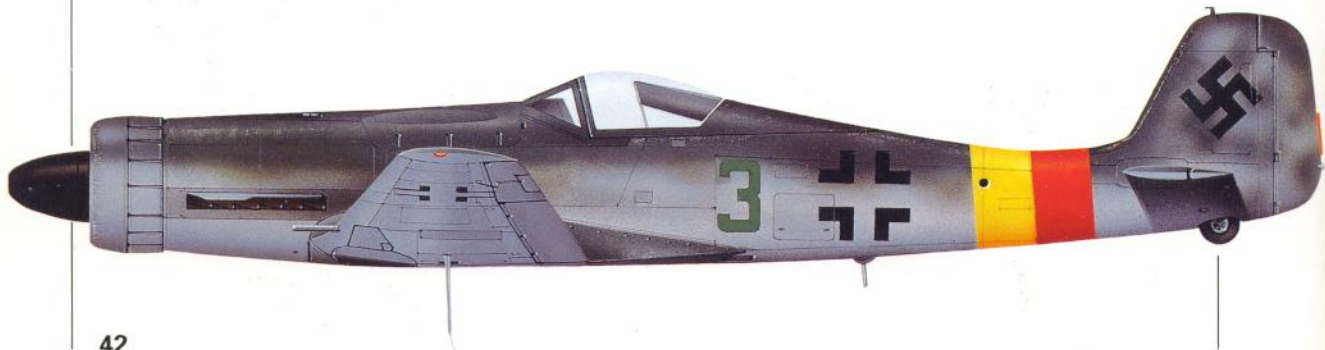
40

Fw 190-8 'Red 19' (Wk-Nr 172733) of Unteroffizier Ernst Schröder, 5./JG 300, Löbnitz, circa November 1944



41

Fw 190-8/R8 'Red 8' of Unteroffizier Matthäus Erhardt, 5./JG 300, Löbnitz, circa November 1944



42

Ta 152H-1 'Green 3' of Oberfeldwebel Josef Keil, Geschwaderstab JG 301, Alteno, April 1945



43

Fw 190A-8 'White 6' of Oberfeldwebel Willi Reschke, 12./JG 301, Stendal, November 1944



1
Oberst Walter Oesau,
Geschwaderkommodore of JG 1 in
the late spring of 1944



2
Sturmgruppe pilot of IV. (*Sturm*)/JG 3,
Homeland Defence, circa September
1944



3
Oberst Walter Dahl,
Geschwaderkommodore of JG 300,
autumn 1944



4
Jagdflieger in late-war two-piece black leather flying suit, Germany, winter 1944-45



5
Oberstleutnant Josef Priller, *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 26 on the Normandy Invasion Front, July 1944



6
Major Heinz Bär, *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 1, spring 1944

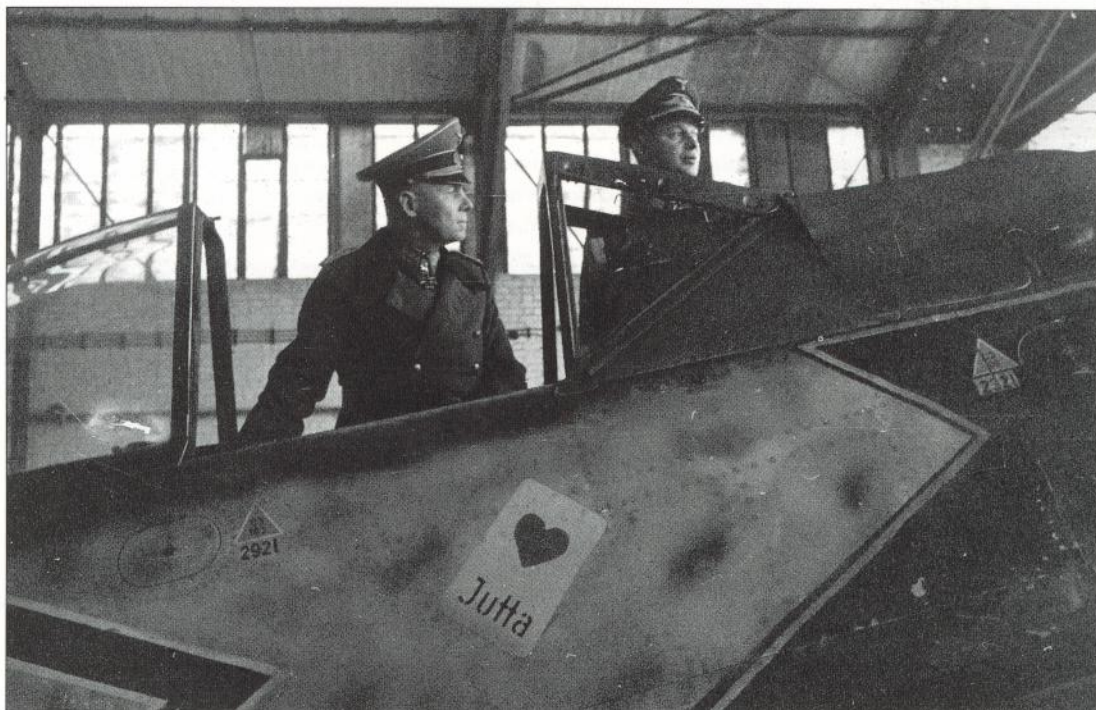
NORMANDY – THE KILLING GROUND

When Leutnant Adalbert Bärwolf, Bf 109 reconnaissance pilot with 3./NAGr.13, first sighted the Allied invasion fleet off the Normandy beaches shortly after first light on 6 June 1944, there were – incredible as it may seem – fewer Luftwaffe fighters available in the immediate area to engage the invaders than there had been at Dieppe two years earlier!

Major Kurt Bühligen's JG 2, in whose domain the Normandy blow fell, was widely dispersed. His unit nearest to the beach-head was I. *Gruppe* (commanded by Major Erich Hohagen), which had only recently returned from Anzio, and was based at Cormeilles-en-Vexin some 60 kilometres distant. Having just experienced one Allied invasion, they now found themselves in the forefront of another, for it was almost certainly Hohagen's pilots who were flying the 20+ Focke-Wulfs which engaged B-26s of the Ninth AF over the Pointe-du-Hoc, on the western flank of 'Bloody *Omaha*', during the initial phase of the landings.

Bühligen himself was at Creil, north of Paris, with the Bf 109s of II./JG 2, whilst Hauptmann Herbert Huppertz's III. *Gruppe* had vacated Cormeilles only days earlier, and was now in the process of transferring to Fontenay-le-Comte on the Atlantic coast north of La Rochelle.

Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel paid an inspection visit to JG 26 in the days immediately prior to the Normandy invasion. Here he is being shown Priller's aircraft. Although bearing the familiar *Jutta* badge, note that the number '13' has now been replaced by (presumably) regulation *Kommodore's* chevrons, making this Fw 190 yet another candidate for that famous beach-head strafing run?



According to 'Pips' Priller, his JG 26 was scattered even further afield. II./JG 26 was based at Mont-de-Marsan, also on the Atlantic coast midway between Bordeaux and the Spanish border, while I. and III. *Gruppen* were both under transit and currently somewhere in the Rheims and Metz areas respectively. Priller had tried to warn his superiors of the folly of such widespread dispersal at a time of imminent danger, only to be brusquely informed that as a lowly *Geschwaderkommodore*, he was not privy to the overall situation.

Thus it was that, on the the morning of the invasion, JG 26's entire available strength consisted of two Fw 190s (a third was unserviceable) of the *Stabsschwarm* at Lille-Nord – Priller's own machine and that of his '*Katschmarek*', or wingman, Unteroffizier Heinz Wodarczyk. The pair's subsequent sortie, a bravura low-level dash along *Sword* beach, eastern-most of the five designated landing zones, spraying British troops with machine gun fire, has since been popularised – if not immortalised – in print and on screen by the book and the film *The Longest Day*. What was not mentioned were the 170 other fighter sorties flown by the Luftwaffe on 6 June, although even these pale into insignificance against the Allies overall total of 14,000 operational sorties!

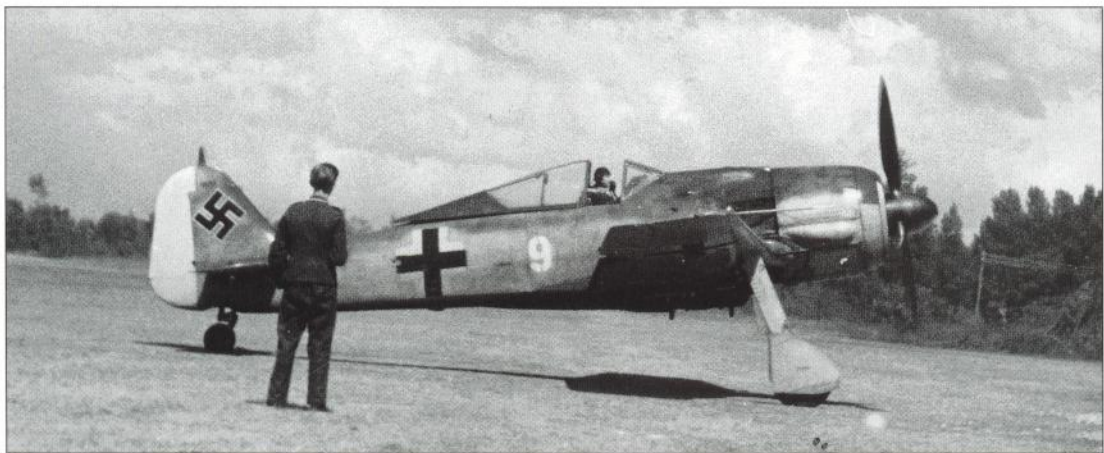
Before the day was out both I. and III./JG 26 had been in action, with Oberleutnant Franz Kunz, *Staffelkapitän* of 2./JG 26, claiming a P-51 Mustang east of Caen, and III. *Gruppe's* Bf 109s carrying out a hurried ground strafing mission. II./JG 26 at Mont-de-Marsan had been informed of the landings at 0500 hours and had taken off some two hours later. Little is known, however, of the progress of their flight north during this first day, when the bulk of the sorties flown had undoubtedly been mounted by JG 2 – the latter's Herbert Huppertz claimed five P-51s!

But once the code signal 'Dr Gustav Wilhelm' ('*Drohende Gefahr*



Kurt Bühligen claimed his 100th western kill over Normandy on D+3. Having landed back at Creil, he describes the action to a group of be-medalled visitors as the cluster of ground-crew beside the A-8 in the background prepare the placard and victory garland which always marked such occasions

This photo's original caption reads, 'Fw 190 on the invasion front, summer 1944'. In that case, the skies are remarkably empty, the aircraft dangerously out in the open, and the spectator peculiarly unconcerned! All that, plus the unusually small size of the white stencilled '9', leave a lot of questions to be answered – where, when and what, for starters!

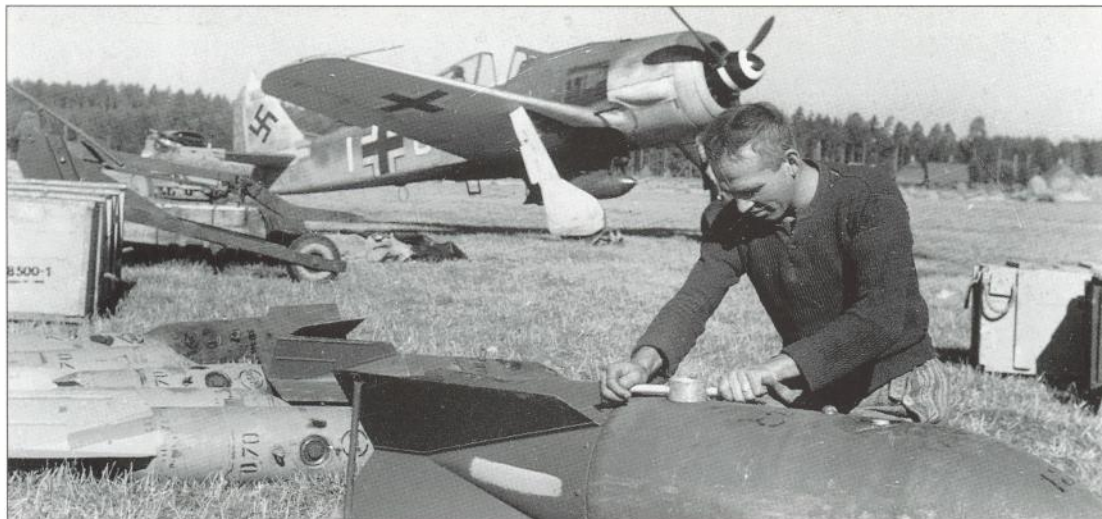




With much more of a Normandy 'feel' about them, these photos show what conditions were really like, with aircraft having to be serviced behind a screen of vegetation and engines run up under the cover of trees before immediate take-off straight across a rough grass field. Note that many of these Fw 190s, lacking outer wing armament, are in fact dedicated fighter-bombers and not fighters pressed into service as such

'West' = 'threatening danger west') had been transmitted, the Luftwaffe began to pour fighter units into the Normandy area. In the first 36 hours some 200 Fw 190s and Bf 109s had come in from Germany, leaving just six *Jagdgruppen* defending the *Reich* - so much for the frantic barrel-scraping of the previous weeks! By the end of June single-engined fighter reinforcements totalled just two short of 1000. These had been flown into France, of course, but many of the ground crews and much of the support equipment had to be brought in by road and rail, suffering substantial casualties from Allied air interdiction in the process. Most of the French bases were also in a bad state of repair after earlier raids, and many units perforce deployed to smaller, better camouflaged, forward landing strips where there was slightly less chance of their being attacked on the ground by the roving hordes of Allied fighter-bombers - by now the *Jagdwaaffe*, which translates literally from the German as the 'hunting arm', had become very much the hunted.

By 10 June the almost complete dearth of specialised ground attack aircraft in the west (just one understrength *Gruppe* of Fw 190s) had forced the Luftwaffe to equip 150 of its fighters with bomb-racks. The move was an expensive failure, as few pilots had experience of this kind of work. Losses were high, not only in the ranks of the bomb-carriers, but also among the large proportion of the remaining fighter force assigned to cover them. Nevertheless, the following day *Lufflotte 3* ordered that all single-engined fighters be fitted with bomb-racks as the destruction of enemy ground targets was considered a higher priority than the shooting down of aircraft. Twenty-four hours later OKW (Armed Forces High Command) instructed all *Jagdgruppen* engaged in ground-attack opera-



tions to revert to the fighter role, localised air superiority over areas of major ground action now being the primary objective!

Harried in the air, hunted on the ground and beset by conflicting orders from above, it is little wonder that German fighter casualties, already high, began to escalate even higher. By the end of June 230 pilots had been killed and 88 wounded, 551 aircraft shot down (plus 65 destroyed on the ground) and a further 290 damaged. But despite all their difficulties, the defending fighters claimed a staggering 526 Allied aircraft (including 203 P-47s!) downed during the same period. Four of them had fallen to 'Pips' Priller, a P-51 and a P-47, both on the second day of the invasion, and a P-38 on 11 June. Four days after that a B-24 provided the *Kommodore* with his 100th victory in the west. Several pilots had claimed multiple kills – 8./JG 26's *Staffelkapitän*, Leutnant Wilhelm Hofmann, downed three US fighters in the Caen area on 8 June, and 'Addi' Glunz, now commissioned and *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 26, dispatched three P-47s in the space of just two-and-a-half minutes north of Lisieux 48 hours later.

Having borne the brunt of the early fighting over the beachhead, JG 2 had suffered commensurately. III. *Gruppe* sustained two particularly severe blows, losing their *Kommandeur*, Hauptmann Herbert Huppertz, in a dogfight with P-47s during 8 June's heavy skirmishing around Caen. His successor was Major Josef Wurmheller, the man who had scored seven victories over Dieppe while convalescing, and more recently *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 2. Although one of the most successful Channel Front pilots, 'Sepp' Wurmheller's tenure of command lasted just 15 days, for he was shot down in a bitter struggle with P-51s near Alençon on 22 June, all but 9 of his 102 kills – including at least 13 'heavies' – having been scored in the west.

And if 'alte Hasen' such as

Sitting peacefully on the grass at Compiègne before the storm broke, this fighter-bomber is surrounded by the sort of ordnance, from 50 to 500 kg bombs, which the fighters were to use against the invading ground troops

Another 'Kette' of the rapidly dwindling *Jabo* strength is bombed-up and ready to go





The strain of the Normandy campaign is beginning to show, not so much on the faces of these JG 2 pilots as by the way they grab at every opportunity for a quick cigarette to calm the nerves

The route of retreat from Normandy back to the borders of the Reich was littered with wrecked and abandoned aircraft such as this sorry-looking A-8, 'White 7' (Wk-Nr 171568) of 5./JG 26, discovered at Melsbroek, outside Brussels, in September 1944



Wurmheller, with years of experience of cross-Channel sparring with Allied fighters under their belt, were falling victim, what chance had the newcomers from the Reich – specialists against the high-flying bombers – in the low-level maelstrom that was Normandy?

The three Fw 190 *Gruppen* of JGs 1 and 11 sent to France put up a spirited fight, claiming steadily against their four main adversaries, the P-47, P-51, Spitfire and

Typhoon. However, by the time of their withdrawal late in August they had lost close on 100 pilots and nearly double that number of aircraft destroyed – a loss rate of almost 150 per cent in both men and machines. By contrast III./JG 1, who had been deployed to the Eastern Front during the same period, suffered just one pilot killed in combat with Russian fighters!

Desperate efforts were staged to try to make good the appalling losses being suffered by the *Jagdwaaffe* in France, but attempts to fly in replacement aircraft, often piloted by only the most sketchily trained of raw young recruits, simply added to the growing list of casualties as they were either caught in the air en route or crashed on landing.

With the battle for Normandy finally lost, the survivors of the Reich's defence *Gruppen* – many numbered in only single figures – returned whence they came to re-form and be re-equipped in the homeland. The two 'western' *Jagdgeschwader*, however, were retained in their defensive frontal role and ordered to carry out a fighting retreat to the German border. This was not achieved without further casualties, JG 2 losing at least four more *Staffelkapitäne* during August and September. But one of the last significant losses in the withdrawal from France was that of an Eastern Front ace – Hauptmann Emil Lang had scored nearly 150 kills in Russia before coming to the leadership of II./JG 26 (via the subordinated III./JG 54) on 29 June. He had already made his mark in the west by adding a further 25 victories to his total, but not even this wealth of expertise could prevent 'Bully' Lang's name from joining the ever lengthening list of victims of the P-47 when he, too, finally succumbed during a clash with Thunderbolts near St Trond, in Belgium, on 3 September.

A few days before that date JGs 2 and 26 had reached the by now somewhat dubious sanctuary of German soil, the former grouped on fields around Frankfurt-on-Main, the latter further to the north in the region of the Ruhr. The long-time guardians of the Channel coast thus found themselves deployed in protection of their own western frontier as the air war in Europe ground towards its inevitable climax.

DEFENCE OF THE REICH - THE BATTLE IS LOST

The departure of the last of the homeland defence units earmarked for the reinforcement of the Normandy front had left only one operational Fw 190 *Jagdgruppe* in the whole of Germany. This was II./JG 300, one of the ex-'*Wilde Sau*' units which had been operating in the day fighter role since early 1944. Now, together with JG 300's two Bf 109 *Gruppen*, plus five equipped with twin-engined Me 410s, it provided the sole aerial defence of the *Reich* just as the Eighth AF began to focus its attention on the German oil industry. This return by the 'heavies' to the strategic bombing of German targets after their brief involvement over France posed the greatest threat yet to Hitler's war machine. Bereft of fighter units to oppose it, the Luftwaffe initially transferred large numbers of anti-aircraft guns in from other areas to protect the vital oil refineries, but help was at hand from an unexpected quarter.

Unlike the three Bf 109-equipped *Gruppen* of JG 3 which had been despatched immediately to Normandy, Hauptmann Wilhelm Moritz's IV./JG 3 had been held back. Recently converted to the Fw 190, it was this *Gruppe* which had been selected to take the experimental trials of Major von Kornatzki's earlier *Sturmstaffel* 1 one stage further by becoming the Luftwaffe's first fully operational *Sturmgruppe*. Based at Salzwedel, it had been equipped with the heavily-armed and

Hauptmann Wilhelm Moritz, *Kommandeur* of the first *Sturmgruppe*, IV. (*Sturm*)/JG 3, pictured on the cockpit sill of his armoured A-8 '*Sturmbock*', Wk-Nr 681382. The additional heavy-framed canopy side panels, known in the Luftwaffe as 'blinkers', are clearly visible



Among IV. (*Sturm*)/JG 3's most experienced pilots was Unteroffizier Willi Maximowitz, one of the original members of *Sturmstaffel* 1 first formed back in the winter of 1943-44. Unlike Moritz's aircraft, Maximowitz's '*Sturmbock*' carries JG 3's 'Winged U' badge on the cowling and a IV. *Gruppe* wavy bar on the aft fuselage band. And although it is not fitted with 'blinkers', the muzzle of the heavy 30 mm cannon may be seen outboard of the mainwheel leg



armoured 'Sturmbock' ('Battering Ram') version of the Fw 190A-8, which was fitted with additional armour-plating around the cockpit and the ammunition boxes, plus extra panels of laminated glass on the sides of the canopy. Its armament included 30 mm MK 108 cannon in the outer wing stations, this weapon's high-explosive shells proving extremely destructive at short range – experience would show that, on average, only three hits were needed to bring down a heavy bomber.

Training was nearing completion by the end of May 1944 and a small ceremony was held in the presence of GOC I. *Jagdkorps*, Generalleutnant Beppo Schmid. All 68 pilots of the *Gruppe* were drawn up outside one of the hangars to hear Hauptmann Moritz read aloud the *Sturmgruppe* oath;

'We swear to fight in Defence of the *Reich* true to the principles and rules of engagement of the *Sturmgruppe*. We know that, as pilots of the *Sturmgruppe*, we are called upon in a special way to protect and defend to the utmost of our ability the population of our Homeland.

'We undertake that, on every sortie resulting in contact with four-engined bombers, we shall press home the attack to the shortest range and – if unsuccessful in shooting down the enemy by gunfire – we will destroy him by ramming.'

In practice, relatively few pilots were forced to resort to this ultimate desperate measure, and of those who did, at least 50 per cent were reported to have escaped uninjured by parachute – one whose luck finally ran out, however, was Oberleutnant Werner Gerth, *Staffelkapitän* of 14. (*Sturm*)/JG 3, who, from his early days with *Sturmstaffel* 1, had survived being shot down on no fewer than 11 occasions! On 2 November 1944, after ramming a B-17 near Halle, he again took to his parachute, but this time it failed to open. All but five of Werner Gerth's final tally of 30 kills were four-engined bombers.

The *Gruppe's* favourite tactic was to attack from the rear, each *Staffel* in broad arrowhead formation – targeting a selected squadron of bombers and slowly overhauling it, holding fire until the very last moment when the signal to do so would be given by the *Staffelführer*. Occasionally,



Formation take-off from Schongau in the summer of 1944. Hauptmann Moritz's 'Double Chevron', on the right, kicks up dust as it taxis forward to lead IV. (*Sturm*)/JG 3 into action

The rate of loss of aircraft among the *Sturmgruppen* soon assumed such proportions that replacement machines often flew their first missions before there had been time or opportunity to apply any tactical markings. This anonymous, but fully operational, 'Sturmbock' of IV. (*Sturm*)/JG 3 is believed to have been the mount of Leutnant Oskar Romm, who accounted for eight heavy bombers while with the unit, including three B-24s in one single attack on 27 September 1944



Hans Schaefer's leather flying jacket displays the 'Whites of the Eyes' insignia (just visible bottom right) worn by many successful *Sturmgruppe* pilots. Representing the close-combat nature of their tactics, this decoration was not recognised officially, but was regarded by the pilots as the sign of an élite unit on a par with such as a parachutists's wings or commando's brevet. Eight of Schaefer's own 27 victories were heavy bombers

This photograph was long thought to portray Major Walther Dahl's 'Blue 13', although recent research has cast some doubt on this. Whoever the pilot, it does show a fully equipped and 'blinkered' *Sturmbock* of IV.(*Sturm*)/JG 3. Oberst Dahl's long and illustrious career, which included 25 earlier kills over Stalingrad, ended with 128 victories. The 36 'heavies' numbered among that total make him the Luftwaffe's most successful anti-bomber specialist (using 190's)



frontal attacks would also be mounted. These were less popular with *Sturmstaffel* pilots as only the leader, at the tip of the arrowhead, would have the opportunity to line up on a target with any accuracy in the split-second such head-on tactics allowed. The aircraft on either flank had very little time, or room, for any manoeuvring, and often had simply to fire at whatever happened to lay in their path – be it only a wingtip, or even, the cruellest of luck, nothing but the narrow channel of empty space separating two of the closely formed 'heavies'!

During either tactic, whether approaching slowly from the rear or while overtaking the bombers before turning in to make a head-on pass, the cumbersome '*Sturmbocke*' would be vulnerable to Allied fighters. It was therefore decided that the Fw 190s would need to be protected by two *Gruppen* of Bf 109s; the whole forming a *Gefechtsverband*, or battle formation.

IV.(*Sturm*)/JG 3 did not escape a brief transfer to France, but the few short days they spent at Dreux resulted – uniquely among the *Gruppen* involved over Normandy – in neither losses nor successes. Saner minds soon prevailed, however, and this newly-trained specialist anti-bomber unit was hastily recalled to serve as intended in defence of the *Reich*.

The first successful *Sturm* mission was carried out on 7 July when over 1100 heavy bombers of the Eighth AF, escorted by some 750 fighters, were despatched against oil plants and other industrial targets in central Germany. Hauptmann Moritz's IV.(*Sturm*)/JG 3, protected by two Bf 109 *Gruppen* of JG 300 under the command of Major Walther Dahl, attacked a group of B-24s which, as chance would have it, were temporarily devoid of fighter cover. The Americans lost 28 Liberators that day, many falling victim to Moritz's *Sturmgruppe* attack – 12 bombers of the 492nd BG alone failing to return. Nine Focke-Wulfs were shot down and five pilots killed.

By the standards of the time, this was judged a resounding success, and orders were immediately given for the activation of two further *Sturmgruppen*. The first of these was II./JG 300, which converted to the A-8 '*Sturmbock*' that same July. The following month II./JG 4 was created around a nucleus supplied by the original '*Sturmstaffel* 1', command being assumed by Major von Kornatzki, the 'father of the *Sturm* idea'.

The American response to these new tactics – as to so many of the Luftwaffe's countermeasures of the past two years – simply made use of

their growing numbers, this time of fighters sent to sweep the skies ahead and to the flanks of the bomber streams to catch and break up the unwieldy *Gefechtsverbände* (normally some 90 aircraft strong) before they could reach the bombers and inflict any damage. In general, this move proved successful. Figures for August 1944 indicate that the Luftwaffe lost a fighter pilot killed for each bomber shot down. And while the comparison may be crude (there being some ten men at risk in



The second 'Sturmgruppe' to be formed was II.(Sturm)/JG 300. Here an Fw 190A-8 of that unit is seen landing at Löbnitz towards the end of 1944. Note the red aft fuselage band which the unit's aircraft first wore prior to replacement by blue-white-blue in order to avoid confusion with JG 1

the demise of every heavy bomber), the merciless mathematics of attrition weighed heavily on the side of the Allies as the *Jagdwaaffe's* casualty lists grew ever longer. Among II./JG 300's first *Sturm* losses was that of Oberleutnant Ernst-Erich Hirschfeld, who had scored 8 night kills during the *Gruppe's* earlier operations as a 'Wilde Sau' unit. Since promoted to *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 300, and with a total of 24 victories, including a number of 'heavies', to his credit, Hirschfeld was killed in action near Erfurt on 28 July. Despite their increasing losses, *Sturmgruppe* attacks would continue to be carried out into the opening weeks of 1945.

By early September the three *Sturmgruppen* continued to represent the only Fw 190s committed to the aerial defence of the homeland, for despite their retreat from France, the three original home-based Fw 190 units had yet to return to *Reich's* defence duties – I. and II./JG 1 were still undergoing re-equipemnt in northern Germany, and I./JG 11 had been retained as a *Frontgeschwader* to protect the West Wall, in company with JG 2 in the Frankfurt area. New Focke-Wulf formations *were* being added to the order of battle, however. In August two *Gruppen* of Oberleutnant Johann Kogler's ZG 26, whose twin-engined Me 410 bomber-destroyers had been suffering even heavier casualties than their single-engined counterparts in the Defence of the *Reich*, were pulled out of action to re-equip with Fw 190s and be redesignated as JG 6. At the same time a second ex-'Wilde Sau' unit, I./JG 301, began converting from their Bf 109Gs onto Focke-Wulfs. In September, too, IV./JG 54 was transferred from the Eastern Front – via a brief stop-over for re-equipment – to the *Reich's* defence role. However, their previous opponents had ill-prepared this *Gruppe* for action against the might of the Eighth AF, and in just three weeks they lost 30 pilots and claimed only ten successes. Early in October IV./JG 54 was withdrawn to be re-equipped with new aircraft for the second time in the space of a month!

Despite the significance of this unit shuffling as the *Reich's* defences were shored up, perhaps the most important event of September 1944 was III./JG 54's acceptance of the first Fw 190D-9s - the 'Dora-9s', or 'Long Noses'. Hauptmann Robert 'Bazi' Weiss III./JG 54 had been the most successful *Jagdgruppe* in Normandy, claiming over 100 kills, but they had paid dearly for their



Safely landed, the 'Sturmbock' is approached by Leutnant Spenst (right), *Staffelkapitän* of 8.(Sturm)/JG 300, eager to hear the pilot's report

victories, losing 75 per cent of their own pilots in just two weeks campaigning. It was to make good these losses in men and machines that they had retired to Oldendorf for re-equipment, and found themselves exchanging their few remaining 'Anton-8s' for the brand-new 'Dora-9'.

Designer Kurt Tank regarded the D-9 very much as a compromise (he particularly disliked having to employ the Junkers Jumo 213A liquid-cooled engine) while work was completed on the definitive Ta 152, and, in fact, some pilots at first were a little dubious too. True, the 'Dora-9' did finally rectify the one abiding weakness of all earlier Focke-Wulfs' – their performance at altitude. It was also some 40-50 kph faster, but in achieving this it had sacrificed some of the 'Anton's' agility, particularly its phenomenal rate of roll. And with only two fuselage-mounted MG 131 machine-guns and a single pair of 20 mm MG 151 wing cannon, it was also more lightly armed. After becoming accustomed to it, however, many pilots came to regard the 'Dora-9' as the finest piston-engined fighter to enter Luftwaffe service, but then, few of them ever managed to get their hands on the Ta 152!

'Bazi' Weiss may have considered his latest aircraft to be an improvement on the old, but the same could not be said of his new pilots. These consisted, in the main, either of youngsters with less than 100 hours flying time – much of it spent mastering the technicalities of flight rather than learning fighter tactics and marksmanship – or retrained ex-bomber pilots, older and with a lot of flying hours in their log-books, but equally unversed in the art of fighter combat. This inexperience soon manifested itself in the heavy losses sustained by the two *Staffeln* of III./JG 54 which were transferred to Achmer and Hesepe in October to 'protect' the Me 262 jet fighters of the 'Kommando Nowotny' from Allied fighters during their vulnerable take-off and landing runs.

The second *Gruppe* to receive the D-9 was II./JG 26, the unit which had introduced the first A-1s into service back in August 1941. They flew their last full-scale mission on the Fw 190A from Kirchhellen on 19 November before retiring by road to Reinsehlen for re-equipment. Their first mission after conversion also brought them their first D-9 successes. Nineteen 'Long Noses' were scrambled from Nordhorn on 23 December to intercept an American bomber formation. Instead, they chanced upon a small force of 27 Lancasters and three Mosquitos heading for railway yards near Cologne. The RAF Mustang escort claimed the life of Feldwebel Werner Frass, but at the same time afforded *Gruppenkommandeur* Major Anton 'Toni' Hackl his 167th victory. The first pass at the bombers brought down the lead Lancaster, which was followed by three more four-engined bombers and one Mosquito.

By this time I./JG 26 too had converted on to the D-9. Unlike II. *Gruppe*, however, they did not enjoy the luxury of withdrawal from the frontline while so doing. Commanded by Major Karl Borris - the



Leutnant Klaus Bretschneider, *Staffelkapitän* of 5.(*Sturm*)/JG 300, was another highly successful member of the *Gruppe*. He had already downed 14 night bombers during II./JG 300's initial employment as a 'Wilde Sau' unit, before adding 17 more victories - including one by ramming - in just 26 'Sturm' sorties. Klaus Bretschneider was killed near Oberaula on 24 December 1944 when his unwieldy 'Sturmbock' fell victim to P-51s

An early Fw 190D-9, possibly of III./JG 54, pictured in its wooded dispersal area during the winter of 1944-45. Although the advent of the 'Dora-9' went some way towards restoring the qualitative balance between the *Jagdwaaffe* and its opponents, quantitatively the battle had long been lost



same Karl Borris of the original *Erprobungsstaffel* 190 – I./JG 26 had to familiarise themselves with their new ‘Long Noses’ while remaining operational at Fürstenau throughout.

It was in December that III./JG 54’s long-time association with JG 26 was formalised by their finally being incorporated into ‘Pips’ Priller’s *Geschwader* (although actual redesignation as IV./JG 26 did not take place until February 1945). The change of status brought bad luck, for four days later, on 29 December, the *Gruppe* suffered the ‘blackest day in its history’. Split up and misdirected by ground control, the individual *Staffeln* ran into several large groups of Spitfires each ten times their own number. In the ensuing dogfights, which were spread over wide areas of north-west Germany, Hauptmann Robert Weiss, who had scored some 30 victories in the west, was killed along with eight of his pilots.

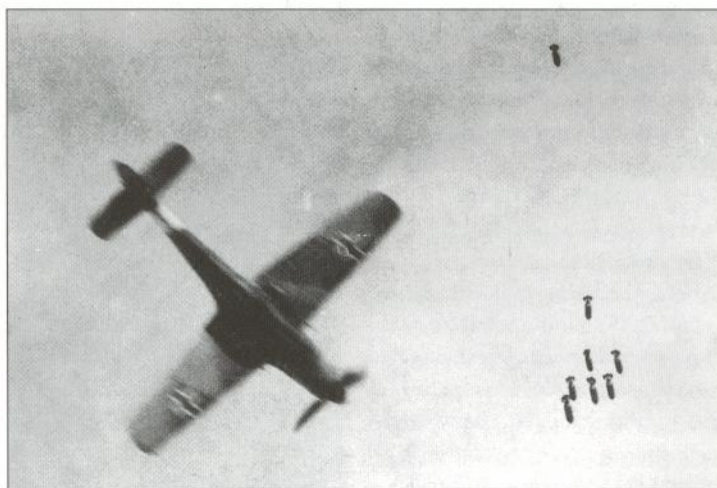
Before the year was out JG 2 had also begun re-equipment with ‘Dora-9s’, the first recipients being Oberstleutnant Bühligen’s *Geschwaderstab* and III. *Gruppe* commanded by Hauptmann Siegfried Lemke.

While the *Frontgeschwader* were thus converting to ‘Long Noses’, the internal Defence of the *Reich* had rested almost entirely on the shoulders of the ex-‘Wilde Sau’ units and the recently formed ‘*Sturmgruppen*’. JG 1’s two Fw 190 *Gruppen* would remain out of action for three months after their retirement from France and not return to combat until mid-November, while I. and III./JG 11 were still re-equipping after service on the Western and Eastern Fronts respectively.

By the autumn of 1944 all three *Gruppen* of JG 301 had re-equipped with Fw-190A-8s and A-9s. Unlike JG 300, however, this *Geschwader* did not comprise a specific ‘*Sturmgruppe*’ plus two escort *Gruppen*. As all three were flying the Fw 190, each of JG 301’s *Gruppen* took it in rotation, as events and circumstances dictated, to act in the role of bomber-destroyers while covered by the other two. On 26 November, for example, it was III./JG 301 who were detailed to attack the bomber stream reported to be approaching Hannover, as one participant still clearly recalls:

‘I. *Gruppe* and the greater part of II. were soon involved with the Mustangs. We in III./JG 301 who were flying this mission as the “heavy” *Gruppe*, managed to escape their attention at first and close in on the box of Liberators. We attacked from behind and some 500 metres above, approaching in our usual two-*Schwarm* arrowhead formations. Immediately prior to the attack itself these arrowheads would open up into line-abreast to allow the wingmen the chance of a clear shot.

‘As *Schwarmführer* of the leading arrowhead I selected my target. Flying through the enemy’s tracers was like standing under a shower. In all my previous attacks I had first tried to knock out the tail gunner who, in my opinion, presented the greatest danger. And when I opened fire with my MGs at a range of 400 metres I could see my own tracers



Diving away after carrying out a stern quarter attack, this ‘Long Nose’ was captured on film by B-26 Marauders of the 9th AF seconds after they had released their bombs during a mission over the Western Front in December 1944

disappearing into his tail turret and rear fuselage.

'Slowly I changed my aim to the left wing, between the fuselage and port inner engine, at the same time pressing the button of my 20 mm cannon. The effect was immediately apparent, with a growing trail of smoke pouring from the engine and panels flying off the wing. The closer in I got, the more effective my hits became until the Liberator slid out of formation, its left wing blazing. Moments later it exploded in mid-air.

'My comrades had been successful as well. The gaps in the Liberator box were clear to see, and after an immediate follow-up attack few bombers were left in the formation. The airspace all around was full of burning and falling aircraft from both sides, and the crash sites on the ground lay one next to the other.'

In fact, 21 Liberators were reported missing that day, but JG 301 had suffered heavily too. Out of an attack force of some 120 fighters, 26 pilots had been killed and half that number again wounded. Over 80 per cent of the casualties had been sustained by the two escort *Gruppen*.

Such was the scale of losses – as much as a third or more of the aircraft engaged – being suffered by the *Reich's* defence units as 1944 drew to a close. The *Frontgeschwader* in the west were also being hit hard both in the air and on the ground, but their numbers were being carefully husbanded, and – as far as the chaotic conditions permitted – their casualties quickly made good, in preparation for a massive counter-attack which, it was hoped, would eliminate the Allies' air superiority over the Western Front at a single stroke.

Originally intended to be an integral part of Hitler's last-throw Ardennes offensive of mid-December, Operation *Bodenplatte* ('Base Plate') – the attack by all available fighter units of the Luftwaffe's western-based II. *Jagdkorps* on forward Allied airfields in the Low Countries and eastern France – also fell victim to the atrocious weather conditions which restricted so much of the aerial activity of both sides during the opening phases of the 'Battle of the Bulge'. After several postponements it was finally scheduled for New Year's Day 1945.

For the great majority of the nearly 1000 pilots and aircrew taking part (a number of twin-engined aircraft were employed as 'pathfinders' to help guide the mass of green young flyers towards their assigned objectives), there were none of the



Dappled by the sunlight filtering through the trees, this 'unblinkered' 'Sturmbock' of II./JG 300 undergoes an engine test prior to its next mission. Some sources identify this machine as a 'Red 1', one of Klaus Bretschneider's 'Rauhbautz' aircraft (see profile No 39)

Pilots of III./JG 301 at Alperstedt offer congratulations upon the victor's safe return with another kill to his credit. Note the name *Emmi* under the cockpit and the decorative black lightning-flash panel used to disguise exhaust stains





This sequence of shots offers a telling illustration of the fate that was befalling so many Fw 190s as 1944 drew to a close

festivities which had seen in the New Year 12 months previously – although a hardy few did still manage to circumvent, either intentionally or otherwise, the strict ‘no alcohol and early to bed’ rules. But the abstinence of the many was to little avail, for the operation to wrest the aerial initiative from the Allied tactical air forces dealt instead a near mortal blow to the *Jagdwaaffe*’s own forces in the west.

Fourteen of the 33 *Jagdgruppen* which made up the *Bodenplatte* strike force were flying Focke-Wulfs (as were two ground-attack *Gruppen* and a single *Staffel* put up by a training unit), but whether Fw 190 or Bf 109, the Allied defences exacted a terrible toll of the attackers.

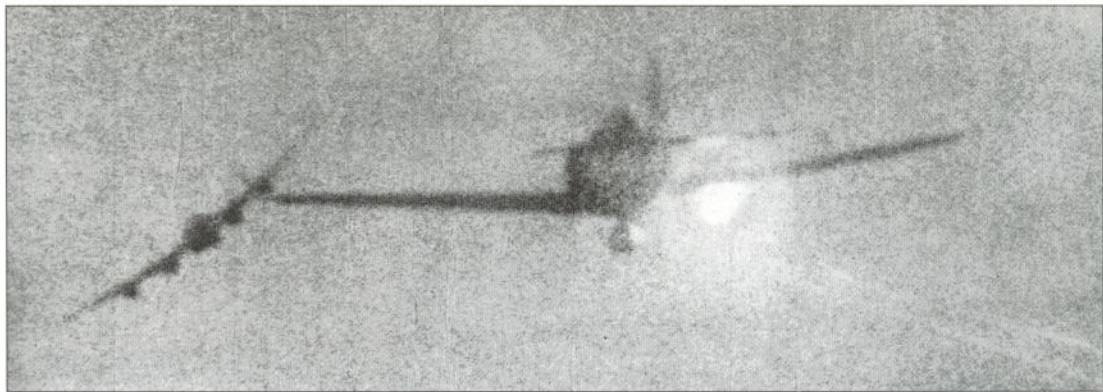
Numerically, JG 2 suffered by far the heaviest casualties. Picked up on their approach to St Trond airfield in Belgium by American ground radar (sited to track incoming V-1s bombarding Antwerp), they took nearly 40 per cent losses – 37 pilots killed, wounded or missing. JG 6, whose target was Volkel in Holland, sustained 14 fewer casualties overall, but among the 23 they did lose were the *Geschwaderkommodore*, Oberstleutnant Johann Kogler, shot down uninjured and captured, two of his three *Gruppenkommandeure* and a trio of *Staffelkapitäne*.

In fact, it was in the haemorrhaging of experienced formation leaders such as these that the true cost of ‘*Bodenplatte*’ would be felt. Two other *Geschwaderkommodore* were lost – JG 11’s Major Günther Specht, whose Fw 190A-9 went down in the Maastricht area, and Oberst Alfred Druschel of SG 4 (an Fw 190F-equipped ground-attack unit which was accompanying JG 2 to St Trond), who disappeared without trace somewhere over the Ardennes. JG 1’s Oberstleutnant Herbert Ihlefeld was lucky to escape the same fate. Shot down by ‘friendly’ flak, he managed a successful belly-landing behind German lines near Rotterdam.

In all, 19 leaders were numbered among the approximately 250 casualties suffered by the *Jagdwaaffe* on 1 January 1945, and although in return they claimed the destruction of some 500 British and American aircraft (including nearly 80 shot down in combat), Allied losses – which were mainly in machines – would be made good in less than two weeks. Not so on the German side. Few of the participating *Jagdgeschwader* had fully recovered from *Bodenplatte* before the majority were hurriedly transferred eastwards in mid-January, on Hitler’s express orders, to try to help stem the tide of the Russian army which was now approaching the River Oder, Germany’s last great natural barrier in the east.

But the perimeters of the once Greater German *Reich* had shrunk to such an extent by the closing weeks of the air war in Europe that the terms ‘east’ and ‘west’ held very little meaning any more. Remnants of *Jagdgruppen* would be ground-rafting Soviet troops and armour one day, and then find themselves intercepting Allied heavy bombers attacking in their rear the next. In March the first round of disbandments began. Units which had once dominated the skies of northern France, which had seen service in Africa, opposed the invasions of Anzio and Normandy and inflicted heavy losses on an embryonic Eighth AF, now simply disappeared one by one in the final Armageddon that was Germany in the spring of 1945.

‘Pips’ Priller did not witness the end of the *Geschwader* he had commanded for over two years. After claiming his 101st and last kill in the west – a P-51 shot down south of Wunstorf on 12 October 1944 – he was



promoted to the post of *'Inspekteur Jagdflieger West'* towards the end of January 1945. His successor, and final *Kommodore* of JG 26, was Major Franz Götz, long-serving member of JG 53. III./26 was the first *Gruppe* to be disbanded late in March, followed by IV./JG 26 in April. II./JG 26, the Luftwaffe's premier Fw 190 *Gruppe*, scored their last victory of the war – a Russian-flown P-39 over Berlin, on 25 April. And despite orders to fly to Prague the following month both they and I.*Gruppe*, commanded to the last by the redoubtable Major Karl Borris, surrendered instead to the British in Schleswig-Holstein.

Like JG 26, the other veteran Channel Front *Geschwader*, JG 2 *'Richthofen'*, also finished its war with all *Gruppen* flying the Fw 190D-9. After the mauling it had received during the *'Bodenplatte'* operation, JG 2 did not return to full combat status until mid-January 1945, only immediately to suffer more rough handling at the hands of Ninth AF P-47s. It remained a western *'Frontgeschwader'* until the very end, however, slowly giving ground from the Rhine back to Bavaria, until formally de-activated by Oberstleutnant Kurt Bühligen south-east of Munich on 7 May.

Of the two original *Reich's* defence units, both of which had been transferred to the east in January 1945, I. and II./JG 1 subsequently gave up their last Fw 190As to begin conversion onto the He 162 *Volksjäger* jet in March. I. and III./JG 11, on the other hand, were still flying Focke-Wulfs over Berlin late in April – one unfortunate pilot was listed as killed over Tempelhof on 24th following a dogfight with Spitfires, P-51s and Yaks! The immediate successor to Günther Specht, missing since 1 January, had been Major Jürgen Harder, ex-JG 53 Bf 109 ace, but he too died



Whether harried at low-level or caught at altitude, the result was the same. Intent on despatching this Lancaster during the 23 December daylight raid on railyards near Cologne, an Fw 190 pilot himself comes under fire from an escorting RAF Mustang III flown by Flg Off J Butler. If destroyed as claimed, this hazy silhouette - its starboard wing already ablaze - could well be depicting the final moments of the hapless Feldwebel Frass' first and last operational sortie on the Fw 190D-9

Previously identified as a *Bodenplatte* victim, this sorry-looking D-9, complete with Staff Major's *'Chevron and Bars'* markings and *Reich's* defence rear fuselage bands, was long thought to be the mount of Feldwebel Hohenberg of 4./JG 2. Unit members maintain, however, that JG 2 remained a *'Frontgeschwader'* right up until the very end of the war (a fact of which they are justifiably proud) and never applied the yellow-white-yellow *Reich's* Defence bands allocated to it – and that, besides, no D-9 of theirs carried *'Major beim Stab'* markings anyway. In fact, it has now been established that this photograph was taken postwar at Frankfurt's Rhein-Main airfield, and depicts a force-landed (note the shattered propeller blades) *'Dora-9'* of the *Stabsschwarm* JG 4, which came to grief in the final days of the conflict

No qualms about this one. Leutnant Theo Nibel's 'Black 12' - D-9 Wk-Nr 210079, of 10./JG 54 - must represent one of the most bizarre of all *Bodenplatte* losses. Nibel force-landed near Brussels after a bird-strike damaged his radiator during a low-level pass across Grimbergen airfield, although even here confusion reigns in some quarters. At least one German account, translated from the English, has changed the offending 'pheasant' into a 'peasant', claiming that Nibel fell victim to an irate Belgian farmer wielding a shotgun!

Unteroffizier Ernst Schroeder, *Schwarmführer* in 5.(*Sturm*)/JG 300, seen in the cockpit of his 'Red 19', Wk-Nr 172733. Schroeder's personal emblem, the city coat of arms and famous broad-dialect carnival cry of 'Up with Cologne', leave little doubt as to his home town. He scored seven kills, including two heavy bombers, as a '*Sturm*' pilot, this particular 'Red 19' being written-off in a belly landing after being damaged in a fight with P-51s on 27 November 1944



near Berlin in February (he is believed to have crashlanded due to oxygen failure). It therefore fell to JG 11's sixth and final *Kommodore*, Major Anton 'Toni' Hackl – who had previously served as *Gruppenkommandeur* in both JGs 11 and 26, and as *Kommodore* of JGs 76 and 300, to oversee the *Geschwader's* withdrawal to the west and surrender to the British early in May.

Of the erstwhile '*Sturmgruppen*', IV./JG 3 (on Fw 190A-8s) and II./JG 4 (on Fw 190D-9s) likewise fought their last battles against Soviet air and ground forces in the east before finally surrendering to the western Allies (as too did the *Geschwaderstab*, I. and II. *Gruppen* of JG 6). The third *Sturmgruppe*, the one-time '*Wilde Sau*' II./JG 300, had, by October 1944, taken up residence at Löbnitz. They were to remain at this field north of Leipzig until the beginning of April 1945, a remarkably sedentary existence at a period when most *Jagdgruppen* were being shuttled about like demented chess pieces.

During the autumn and winter battles with the Eighth AF, II.(*Sturm*)/JG 300 had exacted a steady toll of American bombers, but paid the inevitable price, many of the *Gruppe's* missions out of Löbnitz resulting in double figure casualty lists. The early operations were often led by the *Kommodore* in person, Oberstleutnant Walther Dahl's *Geschwaderstab* being the only other component of JG 300 equipped with Focke-Wulfs. It was also Dahl who introduced the unit's battle-cry 'Rabazanella' – reportedly a corruption of the German phrase 'to kick up a racket' – which signalled the start of every '*Sturm*' attack. Despite his promotion to '*Inspekteur der Tagjäger*' in January 1945, Oberst Walther Dahl continued to fly operationally, his last claims being a B-17 downed west of Munich on 24 April and a P-51 destroyed after a ferocious dog-fight north of Augsburg two days later. A final total of 36 heavy bombers downed made Walther Dahl the top-scoring Fw 190 bomber-destroyer of the entire *Jagdwaaffe*.

After Dahl's departure, JG 300 was commanded briefly by 'Toni' Hackl before JG 52's Major Günther Rall arrived – via II./JG 11 – to take over in March 1945. As an interesting footnote Rall, who was the Luftwaffe's third-ranking ace, achieved four kills during his two periods of service in the west prior to, and after, his time on the Eastern Front, where he netted the other 27! From mid-January 1945 JG 300 had also been waging a two-front war, attacking Soviet ground targets in the east before their final surrender to US forces in Austria in the closing weeks.

All of which leaves just JG 301 . . .

THE END OF THE LINE

Since their initial employment as Bf 109-equipped 'Wilde Sau' units late in 1943, the component *Gruppen* of JG 301 had undergone changes in both role and equipment, and had also been subject to a complex succession of redesignations. The four *Gruppen* which together comprised JG 301 early in 1945 thus bore little relationship to their nightfighting forebears. Their fate in the weeks to come, however, was all too familiar – thrown into action against the Russians along the Oder front before either early disbandment or eventual surrender to Allied forces in the west.

But in one respect JG 301 was not only different, but unique. Its *Stabschwarm* was the only Luftwaffe unit to fly the Focke-Wulf Ta 152 in combat.

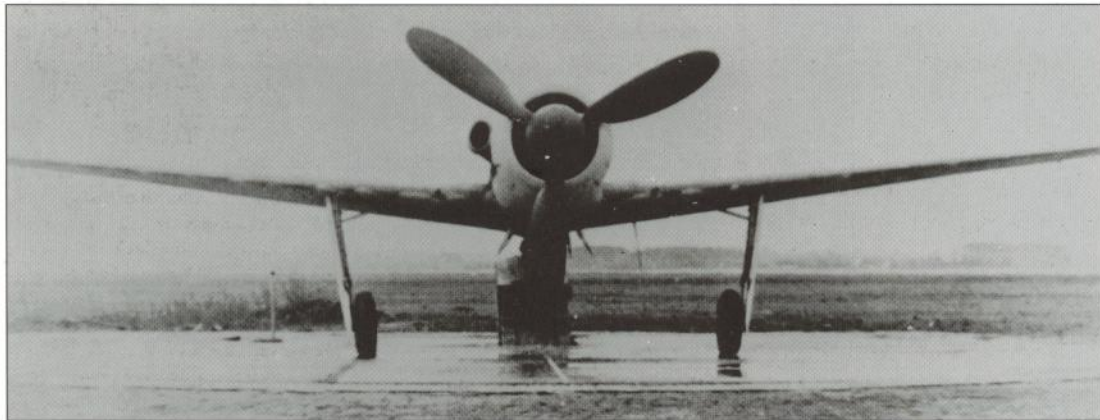
The definitive fighter development of the original Fw 190 design, the Ta 152, powered by the Junkers Jumo 213E liquid-cooled in-line engine, was distinguished by its 14 metre-plus wingspan designed for improved high-altitude performance. And with the D-9's pair of fuselage machine-guns replaced by a single 30 mm MK 108 cannon firing through the airscrew spinner, it was the only one of the entire Focke-Wulf line to feature centrally-mounted armament.

Late in 1944, in a replay of the events of nearly four years earlier, an operational test unit was set up at Rechlin. Command of the *Erprobungskommando* 152 was entrusted to Hauptmann Bruno Stolle, a 'Richthofen' veteran of Channel and Atlantic coast days who had since served as *Kommandeur* of both III./JG 2 and I./JG 11.

One pilot has recorded his impressions of flying the Ta 152;

'The flying characteristics of the Ta 152 put all previous German fighters completely in the shade. Although I never flew the Me 262 jet, I would venture to suggest that the Ta 152 was by far the superior when it came to dogfighting with the Allied fighters then in service.

The stretched wings of the Ta 152, the last of the Fw 190 line, are readily apparent in this head-on shot



'The 2500 hp engine gave the Ta 152 a top speed of some 750 kph. The three-bladed airscrew – each blade's being 60 cm wide – meant the Ta 152 could lift off in just 400 metres. The marked increase in span gave the aircraft a very tight turning circle and a fantastic climb capability – 15 metres a second and a ceiling of 14,000 metres.

'In my opinion there was no better fighter in operational service at the time.'

By the beginning of March 1945 the *Stabsschwarm* of JG 301, commanded by Oberstleutnant Aufhammer, had received the first of their Ta 152s. For the remaining eight weeks of the war their task would be to fly top cover for their *Geschwader* colleagues during operations on both Western and Eastern Fronts, and to provide airfield protection at times of take-off and landing. This resulted in a number of engagements with American, British and Russian fighters. And although the *Schwarm* usually flew its missions just six-strong (out of a total establishment averaging eight or nine), only two of its pilots were lost in combat. Against this they claimed at least nine victories before the end of hostilities. Five of these fell to Oberfeldwebel Josef Keil, making him the Luftwaffe's sole Ta 152 ace. Another three were achieved by Oberfeldwebel Willi Reschke – two of these were Yak-9s downed over Berlin on 24 April – while flying 'Green 9', the Ta 152 which was subsequently exhibited postwar at RAE Farnborough. His first Ta 152 kill had been scored during an encounter ten days earlier;

'At the beginning of April 1945 JG 301 was based at Hagenow, Ludwigslust and Neustadt-Glewe. The latter housed both II./JG 301 and the Ta 152H-1s of the *Stabsschwarm*. During the afternoon of 14 April 1945 the *Geschwader* had flown a mission over the Eastern Front, a low-level attack on Russian positions along the Oder south-east of Berlin.

'The *Stabsschwarm's* job was to provide fighter cover during the Fw 190s' approach and strafing runs, but as there wasn't a Russian fighter to be seen far and wide, the Ta-pilots returned to Neustadt-Glewe without firing a shot. The aircraft were immediately refuelled, taxied to their dispersals and camouflaged. The pilots were still busy attending to their machines when two enemy fighters were spotted some eight kilometres to the south-west of the field making low-level passes over Ludwigslust railway yards.

'Three Ta 152s were ordered to scramble at once – pilots Oberstleutnant Aufhammer, Oberfeldwebel Sattler and Oberfeldwebel Reschke.

'As the direction of take-off was in line with the railway tracks leading straight to Ludwigslust, we were almost immediately in contact with the enemy fighters, which turned out to be Tempests. Flying in No 3 position I witnessed Oberfeldwebel Sattler ahead of me dive into the ground seconds before we reached them. It was hardly possible for his crash to have been the result of enemy action, as the two Tempest pilots had clearly only just registered our presence.



The combat career of Oberfeldwebel Walter Loos, who joined *Stabsschwarm* JG 301 on Ta 152s in April 1945 after serving with JG 3 and JG 300, encompassed 38 kills in just 66 sorties. The 22 heavy bombers numbered among that total make him one of the most successful of the 'Sturm' pilots. Note here the 'victory stick', 'Jagdgeschwader Udet' cuff-band, and Knight's Cross, the latter awarded on 20 April 1945, less than three weeks before the end of hostilities



Oberfeldwebel Willi Reschke flew Bf 109s with I./JG 302 before his posting to III./JG 301 and transition onto the Fw 190A-8. Eighteen of Reschke's 26 victories were against 'heavies'. He too is pictured wearing the Knight's Cross, which he received on the same day as Walter Loos



Oberfeldwebel Josef Keil came to JG 301 in the autumn of 1944, joining the *Stabsschwarm* at the end of March 1945. Having already claimed five kills on the Fw 190, Keil went on to achieve the same number on his new mount, which feat earns him a place in military aviation history as the Luftwaffe's sole Ta 152 ace

'So now it was two against two as the ground-level dogfight began. We knew the Tempest to be a very fast fighter, used by the British to chase and shoot down our V-1s. But here, in a fight which was never to climb above 50 metres, speed would not play a big part. The machines' ability to turn would be all important. Both pilots realised from the start that it would be a fight to the finish and used every flying trick and tactical ploy possible to try to gain the upper hand. At this altitude neither could afford to make the slightest mistake. And for the first time since flying the Ta 152 I began fully to appreciate exactly what this aircraft could do.

'Pulling ever tighter turns I got closer and closer to the Tempest, never once feeling I was even approaching the limit of the Ta's capabilities. And in order to keep out of my sights, the Tempest pilot was being forced to take increasingly dangerous evasive action. When he flicked over onto the opposite wing I knew his last attempt to turn inside me had failed.

'The first burst of fire from my Ta 152 caught the Tempest in the tail and rear fuselage. The enemy aircraft shuddered noticeably and, probably as an instinctive reaction, the Tempest pilot immediately yoked into a starboard turn, giving me an even greater advantage.

'Now there was no escape for the Tempest. I pressed my gun buttons a second time, but after a few rounds my weapons fell silent, and despite all my efforts to clear them, refused to fire another shot. I can no longer remember just who and what I didn't curse. But fortunately the Tempest pilot didn't realise my predicament as he'd already taken hits.

'Instead he continued desperately to twist and turn and I positioned myself so that I was always just within his field of vision. Eventually – inevitably – he stalled. The Tempest's left wing dropped and he crashed into the woods immediately below us.

'It so happened that the site of Oberfeldwebel Sattler's crash, and that of the Tempest pilot, who proved to be New Zealander Wt Off O J Mitchell, were only about one kilometre apart. They were buried side-by-side in Neustadt-Glewe cemetery next day with full military honours.'

And perhaps it is fitting to end here by allowing these two relatively unknown pilots – each flying arguably the most advanced piston-engined fighter produced by their respective nations to see service in the air war over western Europe – to represent the many thousands on both sides, both tyro and ace alike, who had gone before.

This photo of Ta 152s at Alteno, some 100 kilometres due south of Berlin, in March 1945 has always previously been captioned as illustrating the *Stabsschwarm* JG 301. In fact it shows the flightline of III./JG 301, which was based at Alteno at this time, and was in the process of re-equipping with 35 Ta 152s. This total was never achieved, however, and III. Gruppe only received 16 of the new aircraft. Early in March III./JG 301 flew two missions using a mix of their Fw 190A-9s and Ta 152s, but the performance and flight characteristics of the two types were so different that effective operational compatibility proved impossible. The remaining serviceable Ta 152s were therefore handed over to the *Stabsschwarm*. Third in the line-up pictured here is 'Green 3', the machine normally assigned to Oberfeldwebel Josef Keil



APPENDICES

Fw 190 Western Front Aces (with 50 or more confirmed victories) 1941-45

Note: Without access to individual logbooks or unit diaries - many of which have been lost or destroyed - it is impossible to differentiate between Fw 190 and Bf 109 victories. In the following lists pilots known to have served solely with Bf 109 units have obviously been omitted, but even in the case of the major Fw 190 *Jagdgeschwader* it is extremely difficult to establish exact scores prior to, or after, conversion from one type to the other. The only 'pure' Fw 190 aces are those whose operational careers are on record as having begun and ended within the time-scale of their particular unit's sole equipment with the Focke-Wulf. But as the following tables attempt to deal only with those who scored at least 50 or more - and who flew the Focke-Wulf for some length of time while so doing - it may be assumed with a degree of confidence that all those named below did indeed achieve 'acedom' on the Fw 190. There are, of course, numerous others among the Luftwaffe's more than 5000 'official' aces (five kills and above) who would qualify for inclusion before such lists could lay claim to being anywhere near complete.

Confirmed Western Front

Name/Last Wartime Rank	JG	Victories [west]	Others	Awards	Killed, Missing or PoW
1 Bühligen, Oberstleutnant Kurt	2	112(T)	-	***	
2 Mayer, Oberstleutnant Egon	2	102	-	***	+
3 Priller, Oberst Josef	51/26	101	-	***	
4 Lemke, Hauptmann Siegfried	2	95	1	*	
5 Wurmheller, Hauptmann Josef	53/2	93	9	***	+
6 Schnell, Hauptmann Siegfried	2/54	87	6	**	+
7 Rudorffer, Major Erich	2/54/7	86(T)	136	***	
8 Hackl, Major Anton	77/11/76/26/300	73	119	***	
9 Oesau, Oberst Walter	51/3/2/1	71	52	***	+
10 Hahn, Major Hans	2/54	68	40	**	+
11 Eder, Major Georg-Peter	51/2/1/26/7	68	10	**	
12 Glunz, Oberleutnant Adolf	52/26/7	68	3	**	
13 Bär, Oberstleutnant Heinz	51/77/1/3/EJG 2/ JV 44	59	163(A)	***	
14 Müncheberg, Major Joachim	26/51/77	58	77(A)	***	+
15 Hermichen, Major Rolf	ZG 1/26/11/104	56	8	**	
16 Galland, Major Wilhelm-Ferdinand	26	55	-	*	+
17 Pflanz, Oberleutnant Rudolf	2	52	-	*	+
18 Ihlefeld, Oberst Herbert	LG 2/77/52/103/ 25/11/1	56	74	***	
19 Dahl, Oberst Walther	3/zbV/300	51	77	**	
20 Bauer, Oberleutnant Konrad	51/3/300	50	18	*	
21 Staiger, Major Hermann	51/26/1/7	50	13	*	

Key

(T) = including Tunisian Fw 190 victories (A) = including African Bf 109 victories

- * = Knight's Cross
- ** = Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves
- *** = Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves with Swords

Fw 190 Nightfighter Aces with 10 or more confirmed victories(1)

	Units	Night	Day	Awards
1 Welter, Oberleutnant Kurt	300/10/11	56 ⁽²⁾	6	**
2 Müller, Major Friedrich-Karl	300/10/11	30 ⁽³⁾	-	*
3 Wischniewski, Oberfähnrich Hermann	300	16	2	*
4 Bretschneider, Oberleutnant Klaus(+)	300	14	17	*
5 Dormann, Hauptmann Wilhelm	300	14	-	

(1) kills also on Bf 109 and Me 262

(2) including 25 Mosquitos

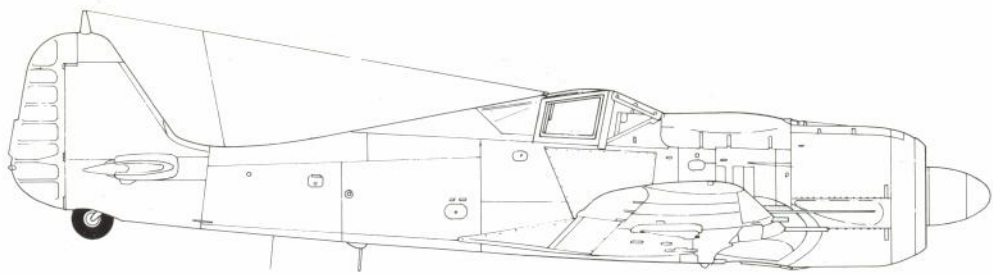
(3) including 23 as 'Wilde Sau'

Fw 190 Pilots with 25 or more Four-engined Bombers Destroyed

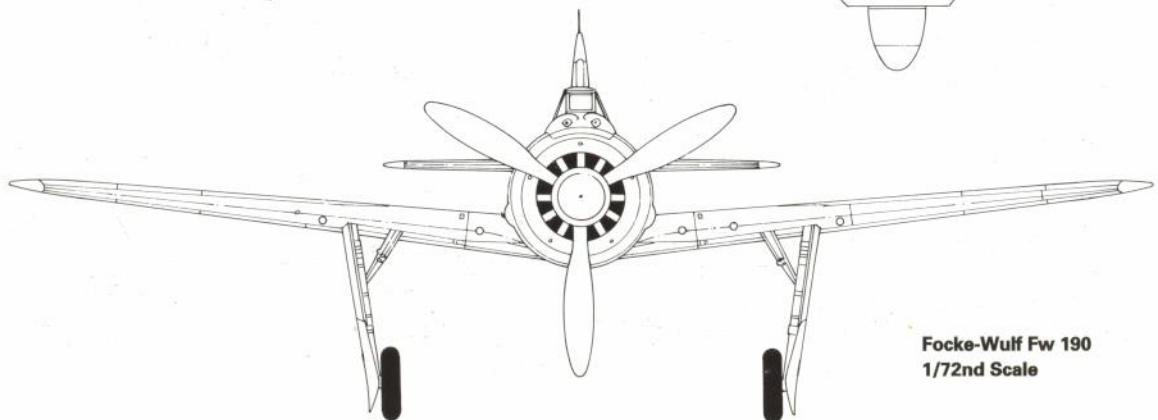
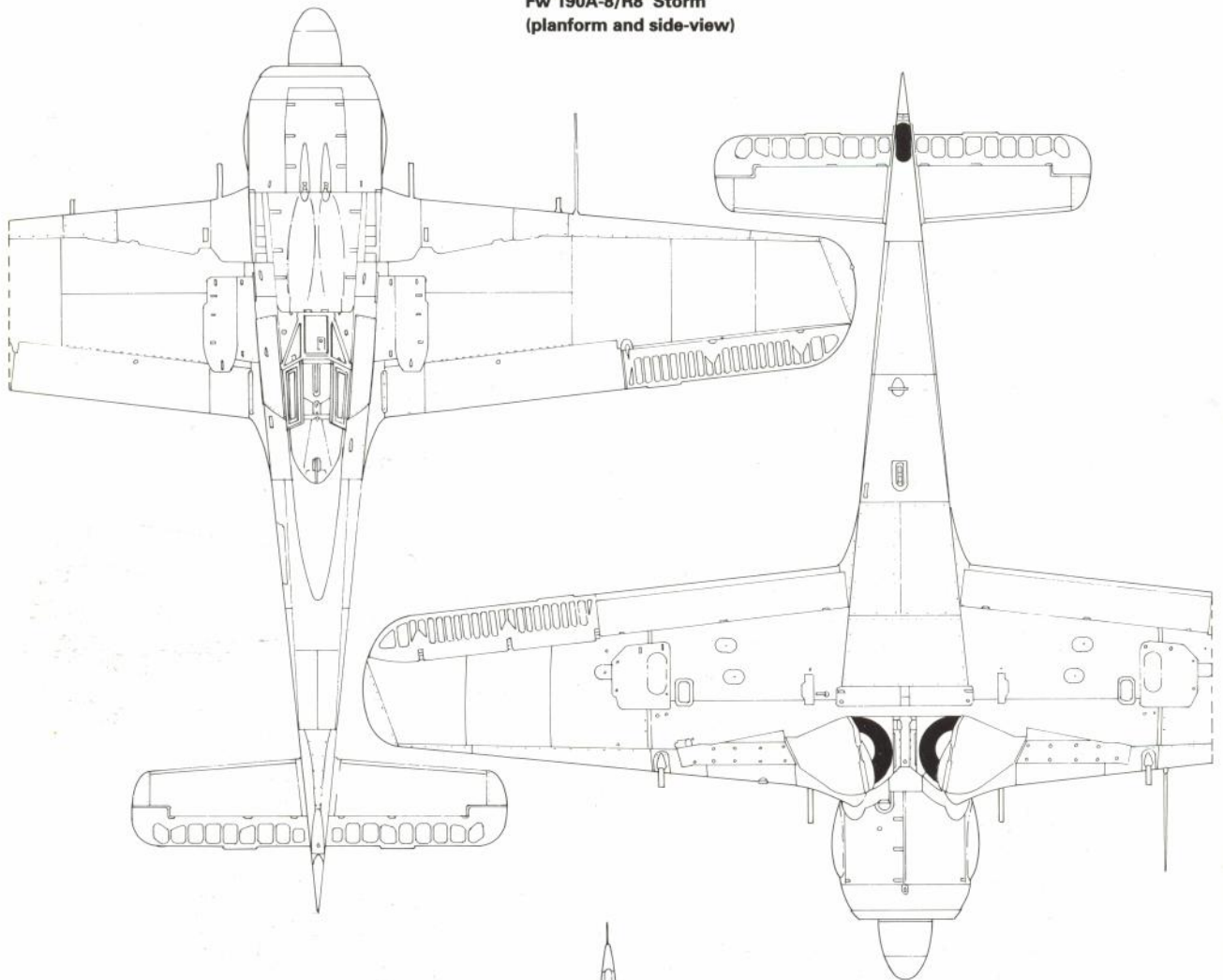
	Bombers	Total Score	JGs
1 Dahl, Oberst Walther	36	128	3/zbV/300
2 Eder, Major Georg-Peter	36	78	51/2/1/26/7
3 Hackl, Major Anton	32	192	77/11/76/26/300
4 Bauer, Oberleutnant Konrad	32	68	51/3/300
5 Hermichen, Major Rolf	26	64	ZG 1/26/11/104
6 Staiger, Major Hermann	26	63	51/26/1/7
7 Frey, Leutnant Hugo(+)	26	32	1/11
8 Mayer, Oberstleutnant Egon(+)	25	102	2
9 Gerth, Hauptmann Werner(+)	25	30	53/Sturmst.1/3/300

Fw 190 Tunisian Aces (II./JG 2)

	Campaign Total
1 Bühligen, Oberleutnant Kurt	40
2 Rudorffer, Leutnant Erich	27
3 Dickfeld, Oberleutnant Adolf	c.18
4 Goltzsch, Oberfeldwebel Kurt	14
5 Baensch, Leutnant Karl-Heinz	10
6 von Bülow, Leutnant Günther Rübelle	c.7

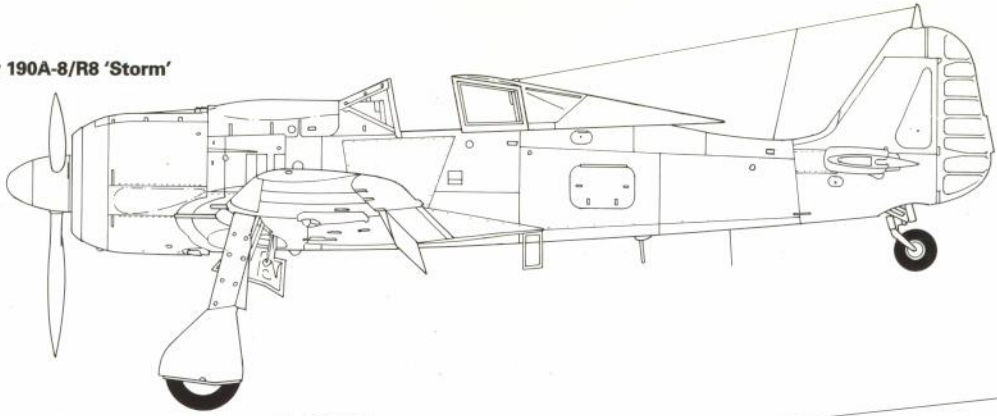


Fw 190A-8/R8 'Storm'
(planform and side-view)

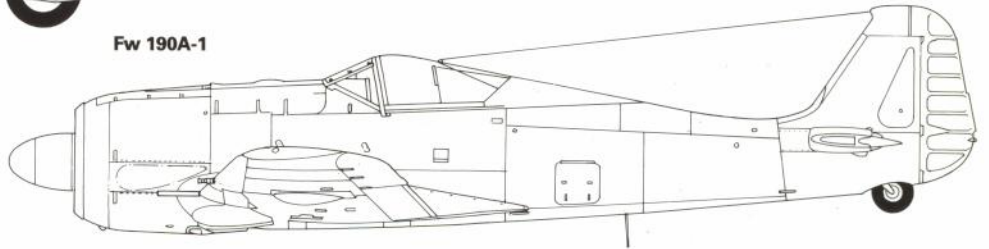


Focke-Wulf Fw 190
1/72nd Scale

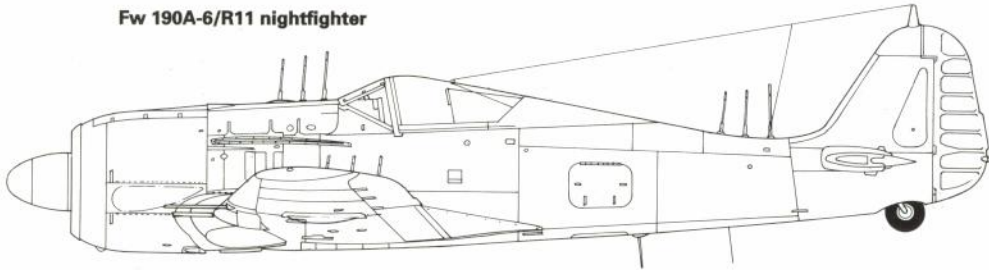
Fw 190A-8/R8 'Storm'



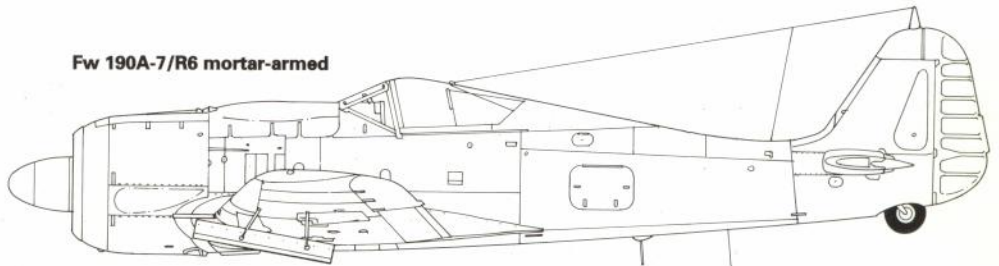
Fw 190A-1



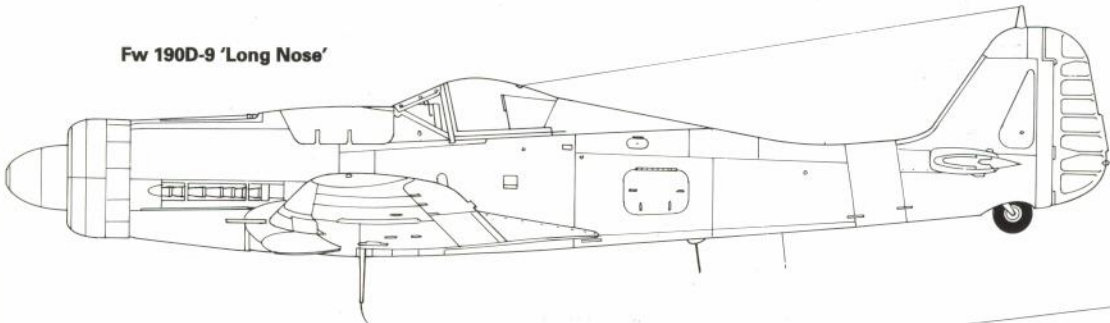
Fw 190A-6/R11 nightfighter



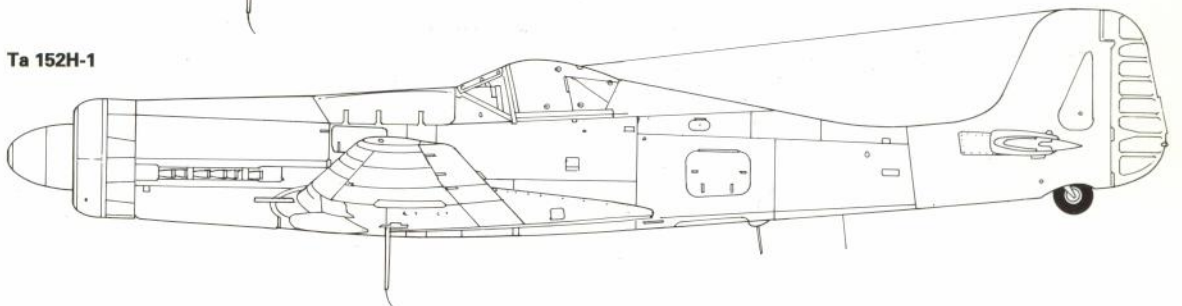
Fw 190A-7/R6 mortar-armed



Fw 190D-9 'Long Nose'



Ta 152H-1



COLOUR PLATES

1

Fw 190A-4 'Black Double Chevron' of Hauptmann Fritz Losigkeit, Gruppenkommandeur I./JG 1, Arnheim/Deelen, Holland, Spring 1943

Depicted shortly after JG 1's major reorganisation of 1 April 1943, Losigkeit's A-4 displays a wealth of markings above and beyond the standard set of national insignia and *Gruppenkommandeur's* chevrons. This particular aircraft was clearly on charge prior to the unit's redesignation. This deduction is supported not so much by the *Gruppe's* 'Devil in the Clouds' badge on the cowling (which survived the transition from IV./JG 1 to I./JG 1), but from the round patch just visible aft of the fuselage *Balkenkreuz* where the previous IV. *Gruppe's* circle symbol (see profile seven) has been neatly oversprayed. The cowling design – either all-white, black-and-white horizontal stripes as seen here, or black-and-white checkerboard – was introduced by the new I./JG 1 as a device to facilitate rapid reassembly in the air after the *Gruppe* had scythed its way through an American heavy bomber formation. The green spinner tip indicated a machine of the *Gruppenstab* and the yellow undercowling panel was carried over from the yellow tactical markings often worn by earlier Channel Front Bf 109s. The black-and-white zig-zag pattern aft of the exhaust slots was one of many similar designs intended primarily to hide the exhaust stains from the BMW radial. The redbordered shield beneath the windscreen, comprising silver fighter pilot's combat clasp wings superimposed on the black Maltese cross, was the *Geschwader* emblem of the period. Finally, the row of eight tiny flags below the cockpit sill illustrated Losigkeit's service career to date. From left to right, the first five depicted nations he had fought against (Spain, where he had been shot down and captured during the Civil War, Belgium, Netherlands, France and Great Britain), and the final three were countries in which he had since been stationed (Japan – as an attaché at the Tokyo embassy – Norway and Denmark). Given the current opposition, the stars and stripes are a curious omission! In June 1943 Losigkeit was posted to the Eastern Front to assume command of III./JG 51. He later rose to *Geschwaderkommodore*, first of JG 51 itself and then, in the closing weeks of the war, of JG 77. Of his 68 confirmed victories, about a dozen – including one four-engined bomber – had been scored in the west.

2

Fw 190A-7 'White 9' of Hauptmann Alfred Grislawski, Staffelführer 1./JG 1, Lippspringe, April 1944

Grislawski's A-7 illustrates the changes of the previous 12 months. Gone are the cowling stripes, replaced now by definitive *Reich's* Defence red band of JG 1 (at the time of transition – winter 1943-44 – many I./JG 1 aircraft sported both). Note too the new *Geschwader* badge, a winged 'Red 1' in a circle, introduced at the same time (reportedly by *Kommodore* Oesau). Most Fw 190s wore this badge on the port side of the cowling only. Grislawski, who had scored his first kill in Poland on the opening day of hostilities, survived the war, albeit severely wounded several times, with 133 kills. This tally included 24 in the west, all but six of which were 'heavies'.

3

Fw 190A-7 'Red 13' (Wk-Nr 431007) of Major Heinz Bär, Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 1, Störmede, April 1944

Wearing a similar finish to the aircraft above, but with the addition of a spiral spinner and II. *Gruppe* horizontal bar superimposed on the *Reich's* Defence band, 'Red 13' was Heinz Bär's regular aircraft at this time. His predilection for 'Lucky 13' began when he scored his first kill on 25 September 1939 while flying Bf 109E 'White 13' as a Feldwebel with I./JG 51. In April 1945 Oberstleutnant Heinz Bär, *Kommandeur* of III./EJG 2, was still trusting to his luck on Me 262 'Red 13'! Among his 59 western victories

were at least 21 heavy bombers. Note that it was the rudder of Bär's regular aircraft which was decorated to celebrate his 200th kill . . .

4

Fw 190A-7 'Red 23' of Major Heinz Bär, Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 1, Störmede, April 1944

. . . although he was actually flying his reserve machine, 'Red 23', when he downed the B-24 on 22 April 1944 to claim victory number 200. Modellers should note that both aircraft had the outboard wing cannon removed. This practice dated back to the early A-3s, when many pilots preferred increased manoeuvrability to the heavier weight of fire.

5

Fw 190A-5 'Black Chevron Circle' of Leutnant Rüdiger von Kirchmayr, Gruppen-TO II./JG 1, Woensdrecht, June 1943

This A-5 displays a textbook set of *Gruppe* Technical Officer markings, plus the *Tatzelwurm* badge and spinner tip in *Gruppenstab* green. Less obvious is the flame damper fairing above the exhaust slots which indicates that this machine was also used for 'Wilde Sau' nightfighting sorties (reportedly by II./JG 300). Von Kirchmayr was promoted to *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 1 late in June 1943, and subsequently served as *Kommandeur* of I./JG 11 before transitioning to Me 262 jets with JV 44 in the final weeks of the war. 21 of his 32 western victories were American 'heavies'.

6

Fw 190A-5 'Black 1' (Wk-Nr 7328) of Hauptmann Fritz Dietrich Wickop, Staffelführer 5./JG 1, Woensdrecht, April 1943

An earlier *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 1, Wickop's 'Anton-5' wears not only the *Gruppe's* dragon badge (in the *Staffel* colour of red), but also an individual emblem of a stylised seagull as first introduced by his predecessor Oberleutnant Max Buchholz. Wickop assumed command of II./JG 1 on 17 April 1943, only to be killed four weeks later in this Fw 190 when bounced by P-47s off Flushing on 16 May. 'Black 1' went into dive and exploded in the air before hitting the water. Over half of Wickop's 12+ kills were against Spitfires, but he also downed two B-17s confirmed and claimed a third.

7

Fw 190A-3 'Black 1' (Wk-Nr 432) of Oberleutnant Wilhelm Moritz, Staffelführer 11./JG 1, Mönchen-Gladbach, July 1942

Moritz's A-3 is typical of IV./JG 1's aircraft prior to the *Gruppe's* redesignation as I./JG 1. It carries both the IV. (later I.) *Gruppe* badge on the cowling and the earlier *Geschwader* emblem below the cockpit (both on the portside only). Note too IV. *Gruppe's* circular symbol aft of the fuselage cross which was overpainted on those aircraft in service during the change to I./JG 1. Moritz subsequently served a year on the Eastern Front at the head of 12./JG 51, before returning to the *Reich's* Defence and JG 3. In April 1944 he assumed command of IV./JG 3, the *Luftwaffe's* first 'Sturmgruppe'.

8

Fw 190A-6 'White 1' of Major Hans-Georg von Kornatzki, Staffelführer 1. Sturmgruppe, Dortmund, January 1944

This early A-6 'Sturmbock' carries additional armour around the cockpit and armoured glass canopy side panels associated with the definitive A-8, but retains the A-6's standard quartet of 20 mm wing cannon. Note the aft fuselage bands introduced to distinguish *Sturmstaffel* machines from those of I./JG 1 with whom it operated. In August 1944 *Sturmstaffel* 1 was used as the nucleus to form a full *Sturmgruppe* – II. (Sturm)/JG 4. Command was

given to Oberstleutnant von Kornatzki, the 'Father of the Sturm' idea, but he was killed, along with 11 of his pilots, on only the *Gruppe's* second mission when it intercepted B-17s of the 100th BG attacking oil targets deep in Germany on 11 September. Although the 100th lost 11 Fortresses on this occasion, von Kornatzki's own total score is not known.

9

Fw 190A-5 (Wk-Nr 2594) of Major Hermann Graf, Gruppenkommandeur of Jagdergänzungsgruppe Ost (Operational Fighter Training Wing East), Bussac, southern France, summer 1943

Hermann Graf's brief tenures of command of both JGs 1 and 11 is reason enough, if any were needed, to include what is arguably one of the most colourful Fw 190s ever flown by the Luftwaffe. The panel aft of the fuselage cross contains the badges of 9. and III./JG 52, momentos of his previous service on the Russian Front. On the starboard side this was replaced by the circular emblem of his current command, *JagdErg.Gr.Ost*. Note, incidentally, the special cowling intakes for the modified two-stage supercharger fitted to this aircraft. Graf returned east late in 1944 as *Kommodore* of his old unit, JG 52, which he then led until war's end. All but 10 of Oberst Graf's final tally of 212 victories were scored in the east, and of the former, most, if not all, were claimed while flying Bf 109s with Jgr.50 and Stab JG 11.

10

Fw 190A-4 'Black Rectangle and Bars' of Oberstleutnant Walter Oesau, Geschwaderkommodore JG 2 'Richthofen', Beaumont-le-Roger, circa February 1943

In stark contrast to the frivolity of Graf's markings immediately above, Walter Oesau's A-4 is very much a 'working' aircraft. And like so many pre-war regulars Oesau, an ex-artilleryman who had first joined the *Jagdgeschwader* 'Richthofen' back in 1936, elected to use early style markings to indicate his rank of *Kommodore*. Having scored his first eight victories in Spain during the Civil War, Oesau went on to add 115 more – 71 of them in the west, including 10 four-engined bombers. More than four years of almost continual frontline service took its toll, however, and when he was shot down by P-38s near St Vith, in Belgium, on 11 May 1944, he was, according to a pilot who witnessed his final dogfight, 'at the end of his physical and mental strength'.

11

Fw 190A-4 'Black 1' (Wk-Nr 7134) of Oberleutnant Horst Hannig, Staffelführer 2./JG 2, Triqueville, May 1943

Wearing one of the elaborate 'Eagle's Head' motifs more commonly associated with III. *Gruppe*, this is purportedly the aircraft in which Horst Hannig clashed with Spitfires near Caen on 15 May 1943. Seriously wounded, the 21-year-old Eastern Front veteran managed to bail out, but failed to open his parachute. In his four months at the head of 2./JG 2 in the west, Hannig added eight further kills, including one 'heavy', to the 90 he had earlier claimed with JG 54 in Russia. It is illuminating to compare this division of kills between east and west against the score of someone who made the transition the other way from west to east – see Hans Hahn, profile 13.

12

Fw 190A-4 'Black Double Chevron' of Oberleutnant Adolf Dickfeld, Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 2, Kairouan/Tunisia, December 1942

The *Gruppenkommandeur's* aircraft is representative of the freshly-painted unfaded desert tan finish initially worn by II./JG 2's Focke-Wulfs during their stay in Tunisia. It is not certain, however, if this is Wk-Nr 0750, the machine which was written off when Dickfeld hit an obstacle and somersaulted during take-off from Kairouan on 8 January 1943. After recovering from injuries received, Dickfeld served briefly as *Kommandeur* of II./JG 11 before being posted to the RLM. The bulk of Oberst Adolf Dickfeld's 136 vic-

tories had been scored on the Russian Front, but 11 of his 21 western and Tunisian kills were four-engined bombers.

13

Fw 190A-3 'White Double Chevron' of Hauptmann Hans Hahn, Gruppenkommandeur III./JG 2, Poix, circa September 1942

One of Hahn's regular aircraft with III./JG 2 during the late summer/early autumn of 1942 illustrates not only the *Kommandeur's* 'cockle's head' badge, but also the *Gruppenstab's* unusual style of tactical markings – white outlined in black, with the *Gruppe* vertical bar aft of the fuselage cross extended into a wrap-around band. 'Assi' Hahn's 68 confirmed western kills, including four 'heavies', made him one of the most successful of the Channel Front '*Experten*'. Subsequently posted to the command of II./JG 54 in Russia, he added 40 more victories in less than four months before engine-failure forced him down behind enemy lines, and led to his spending the next seven years in Soviet captivity.

14

Fw 190A-4 'Yellow 4' (Wk-Nr 746) of Hauptmann Siegfried Schnell, Staffelführer 9./JG 2, Vannes, February 1943

Schnell's pristine 'Anton-4' displays textbook Channel Front markings, including a meticulously-detailed rudder scoreboard combining his first 40 kills, superimposed on an RAF roundel behind the Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves, together with 35 further individual victory bars, the last four being American. His western victories totalled 87 (including three heavy bombers) when Schnell was transferred to the Eastern Front as *Kommandeur* of IV./JG 54. There he added six more in the three weeks before he himself fell victim to Soviet fighters on 25 February 1944.

15

Fw 190A-6 'Yellow 2' (Wk-Nr 0314) of Oberleutnant Josef Wurmheller, Staffelführer 9./JG 2, Vannes, September 1943

'Wumm' Schnell's immediate successor at the head of 9./JG 2 was Josef 'Sepp' Wurmheller. And apart from the individual number and rudder score-board (seen here standing at 60, plus 21), Wurmheller's A-6 wears similar markings to the machine above. It was in Wk-Nr 0314 that Wurmheller was seriously injured landing at Vannes during a bombing raid on 23 September. He returned to take over 9./JG 2 again in December, before promotion to command of III./JG 2 on 8 June 1944. He was killed two weeks later when his A-8 (Wk-Nr 171053) was downed over Normandy by P-51s. All but nine of his tally of 102 had been achieved in the west, including 13 'heavies'.

16

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Black Double Chevron' (Wk-Nr 681382) of Hauptmann Wilhelm Moritz, Gruppenkommandeur IV.(Sturm)/JG 3, Schongau, August 1944

The epitome of a fully-equipped and operational four-gun '*Sturmbock*', Moritz's A-8 has additional fuselage side armour, a 'blinker'd cockpit canopy, outboard wing 30 mm cannon and deleted (faired over) fuselage machine-guns. Since risen from the *Kapitän* of 11./JG 1 (see profile seven), Moritz led IV./JG 3, the Luftwaffe's first *Sturmgruppe*, for seven months from April to November 1944. At the end of that time, suffering complete physical and mental exhaustion, he was posted to the command of an OTU before returning to operations in the closing weeks of the war as *Kommandeur* of II./JG 4. His final score is not certain, but is believed to total at least 44 – both east and west – including a number of 'heavies'.

17

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Black 8' of Unteroffizier Willi Maximowicz, IV.(Sturm)/JG 3, Salzwedel, circa June 1944

In contrast to the anonymity of Moritz's A-8, many early '*Sturmbocke*'

retained JG 3's 'Winged U' badge and the IV. *Gruppe* wavy bar marking as seen here. 'Black 8' was reportedly one of the aircraft deployed briefly to Normandy. If this is the case, and in view of its gaudy paint scheme, both it – and Maximowicz – were lucky to survive! A member of the original *Sturmstaffel* 1, Maximowicz's final tally is uncertain, one source quoting 25 kills, some 15 of which were 'heavies', several destroyed by ramming. Maximowicz failed to return from an Eastern Front sortie on 20 April 1945.

18

Fw 190A-4 'Black Chevron and Bars' of Major Gerhard Schöpfel, *Geschwaderkommodore* JG 4, Ansbach, circa June 1944

The seeming anomaly of an elderly 'Anton-4' wearing pre-war *Kommodore*'s markings in mid-1944 is explained by this being the mount of Gerhard Schöpfel, caretaker *Kommodore* of JG 4 during the *Geschwaderstab*'s activation. Schöpfel, who had commanded JG 26 at the time of the Fw 190's entry into service (see profile 25), had since held various fighter staff positions, and would do so again after handing over JG 4 to Major Gerhard Michalski in August 1944. Major Schöpfel returned briefly to frontline service as the penultimate *Kommodore* of JG 6 in April 1945.

19

Fw 190A-4 'White 10' of Hauptmann Wolfgang Kosse, *Staffelkapitän* 1./JG 5, OsloFørnebu, October 1942

One of the under-employed and accident-prone Focke-Wulfs in service guarding Norway's south-western seaboard during the latter half of 1942, Kosse's 'White 10' carries his personal emblem, 'The monkey on a grindstone', on both sides of the engine cowling. From the inactivity of Norway, Kosse subsequently transferred to arguably the toughest of *Reich*'s Defence duties – that of *Sturm* pilot. As *Staffelkapitän* of 13./JG 3, Hauptmann Wolfgang Kosse was reported missing in action against US 'heavies' near Liège on 24 December 1944, his final score standing at 20.

20

Fw 190A-8 'Blue 1' of Leutnant August Schneider, *Staffelkapitän* 9./JG 5, Herdla, May 1945

By war's end personal insignia had given way to the midnight sun of the official 'Eismeer' (Arctic Ocean) *Geschwader* badge on most of JG 5's remaining Focke-Wulfs. Note too that 'Blue 8' is also still wearing the solid circle marking of IV. *Gruppe*, evidence of 9. *Staffel*'s recent redesignation from 13./JG 5. To confuse matters further, Leutnant August Schneider had assumed command of the then 13./JG 5 in March 1945 after the death in action of the previous *Staffelkapitän*, Oberleutnant Hans Schneider, and both Schneiders are believed to have scored 11 victories!

21

Fw 190A-6 'White 9' of Oberfeldwebel Günther Migge, 1./NJGr.10, Werneuchen, circa March 1944

In contrast to the forest of aeriels required by the FuG 217 'Neptun' radar installation, Günther Migge's nightfighting A-6 is equipped with the much cleaner wing-mounted FuG 218 'Neptun'. This aircraft displays evidence of its former use in the 'Wilde Sau' role by the retention of the 'Wild Boar' badge on the cowling. Migge, who had earlier served with JG 300, subsequently transferred to NJG 11, and ended the war with eight night kills.

22

Fw 190A-5/U12 'Red 13' (Wk-Nr 410266) of Leutnant Erich Hondt, *Staffelkapitän* 2./JG 11, Husum, October 1943

The A-5 of Erich Hondt displays a wealth of technical and marking detail, not least the underwing gondolas each containing a pair of 20 mm MG 151 cannon. As a *Staffelkapitän*'s aircraft, it has all-white vertical tail surfaces, plus a *Schwarmführer*'s diagonal red stripe on either side of the fuselage

(which from above appeared as a 'Vee'). Note too the *Staffel* badge, which shows a fighter pilot doing something unmentionable in 'Uncle Sam's' top-hat! Hondt was downed in this aircraft and seriously wounded on 8 October 1943. He subsequently returned to JG 11 as *Kapitän* of 3. *Staffel*, before transferring to JV 44 in the closing months of the war. His final score is believed to have included at least 10 'heavies'.

23

Fw 190A-7 'Yellow 1' of Oberleutnant Hans-Heinrich König, *Staffelkapitän* 3./JG 11, Rotenburg, circa January/February 1944

'King' König's A-7 shows what a difference three or four months can make. Gone are the colourful markings of Hondt's A-5, JG 11's aircraft now wearing yellow Defence of the *Reich* bands. More mysteriously, all I. *Gruppe* machines had their national markings oversprayed to the point of invisibility at this period. The reasons for this action are not known. Note 3. *Staffel*'s badge, a flintlock pistol on a heart surrounded by the words (in German), 'Who shoots first, gets more out of life!'. Promoted to *Kommandeur* of 1./JG 11 early in May Oberleutnant König was killed in a mid-air collision with a B-17 north of Hamburg on 24th of that month. Having lost an eye earlier in the war, a split-second frontal attack of the sort in which he perished was inestimably more difficult for König than for normally-sighted pilots. The Fortress was König's 20th, and last, 'heavy' – this tally included four B-24s downed in a single day on 29 April – out of a total score of 28.

24

Fw 190A-6 'Black Double Chevron' of Major Anton Hackl, *Gruppenkommandeur* III./JG 11, Oldenburg, April 1944

Major Hackl's III. *Gruppe* also wears the all-white vertical tail surfaces of a unit leader with 141 victories (100 in the oak wreath on top, plus 41 individual bars) displayed on the rudder. Note small *Gruppenstab* badge of a dragon on a divided shield below cockpit. Unusually, 'Toni' Hackl is reported to have used both a Bf 109 and an Fw 190 at this period, the former if his intention was to engage enemy fighters, the latter for attacking enemy bomber formations. Among the forefront of the Luftwaffe's long-serving 'Experten', Hackl ended the war as *Kommodore* of JG 11 with 192 victories. Numbered among his 73 western kills were 32 heavy bombers.

25

Fw 190A-2 'Black S and Bars' of Major Gerhard Schöpfel, *Geschwaderkommodore* JG 26, Audembert, circa February 1942

Illustrating *Geschwaderstab* JG 26's unique practice of marking its early Fw 190s with the member's initials in conjunction with a horizontal bar either side of the fuselage cross, 'Black S' was sometimes flown by *Kommodore* Gerhard Schöpfel, but the 'S', in fact, identifies it as the machine assigned to his Adjutant, Oberleutnant Wilfried Sieling. Schöpfel's regular A-2 wore standard pre-war style *Kommodore*'s markings identical to those already illustrated on one of his later mounts. After 13 months at the head of JG 26, Schöpfel spent the remainder of the war in fighter staff appointments, punctuated only by two brief operational stints as *Kommodore* of JGs 4 and 6. All 40 of his victories, including three 'heavies', were claimed in the west.

26

Fw 190A-5 'Black 13' (Wk-Nr 7298) of Major Josef Priller, *Geschwaderkommodore* JG 26, Lille-Vendeville, circa June 1943

Schöpfel's successor, longest-serving and – after Adolf Galland – arguably the most famous *Kommodore* of JG 26 was Josef 'Pips' Priller. During his two-year tenure of command, Priller flew a whole series of 'Black 13's' of which this is but one. It is surprising how many COs favoured the number '13', some attributing this to a form of reverse superstition. Others maintain it was a natural progression from the early Luftwaffe's regular establishment of 12 aircraft per *Staffel*, the numeral '13' thus immediately distin-

guishing its pilot as of higher rank and position. Whatever the reason, it certainly did 'Pips' Priller no harm, as he survived the war with 101 victories (including 11 'heavies') in north-west Europe, second only to Egon Mayer.

27

Fw 190D-13 'Yellow 10' (Wk-Nr 836017) of Major Franz Götz, Geschwaderkommodore JG 26, Flensburg, May 1945

Third, and final, of JG 26's Fw 190 *Kommodoren*, Franz Götz succeeded Oberst Priller in January 1945 after five years flying Bf 109s with III./JG 53. 'Altvater' ('Old father') Götz's 'Long Nose' reflects JG 26's changing fortunes by war's end. From its early dominance on the Channel Front, the *Geschwader* had since been forced back to help defend the homeland – witness the black-white Reich's Defence fuselage bands. And such was the Allies' superiority that even these had to be oversprayed to help camouflage the aircraft while hiding on the ground! Having left JG 53 with 56 victories, Götz added seven more during his three months at the head of JG 26.

28

Fw 190A-3 'Black Double Chevron' (Wk-Nr 5304) of Hauptmann Johannes Seifert, Gruppenkommandeur I./JG 26, St Omer-Arques, May 1942

Part of JG 26 since the start of the war, Seifert rose to command both I. and II. *Gruppen* of the *Geschwader*. His 'Anton-3' is seen at the height of JG 26's mastery of the Channel coast, its rudder decorated with 34 western victories. Seifert would add 22 more, including 11 achieved during I./JG 26's foray into Russia, before – as *Kommandeur* of II./JG 26 – he led his *Gruppe* into their first engagement with P-38s on 25 November 1943. In a head-on pass Seifert claimed his 57th, and last victory, but was himself killed when his starboard wing hit that of his victim, and both crashed near Béthune.

29

Fw 190A-2 'Black Double Chevron' (W.Nr.20 209) of Hauptmann Joachim Müncheberg, Gruppenkommandeur II./JG 26, Coquelles, December 1941

Recently returned from the Mediterranean, Müncheberg's rudder displays a record of his 62 kills to date, although as yet only the last half-dozen had been achieved on the Fw 190. He remained at the head of II./JG 26 until July 1942, then spent two months with JG 51 in the east before returning to the Med as *Kommodore* of JG 77. He was killed there on his 500th mission on 23 March 1943. 58 of his 135 victories had been achieved in the west.

30

Fw 190A-5 'White 1' (Wk-Nr 1197) of Oberleutnant Otto Stammberger, Staffelkapitän 4./JG 26, Vitry-en-Artois, circa March 1943

Otto 'Stotto' Stammberger had first joined III./JG 26 in February 1941, but he did not claim his first kill – a Spitfire – until the Dieppe raid 18 months later. It was the advent of the Eighth AF that revealed his true forte as a successful bomber destroyer when he brought down four 'heavies' in short order. Promoted to *Kapitän* of 4./JG 26 in February 1943, and with his tally since risen to seven, his combat career was cut short when he was seriously wounded in a skirmish with Spitfires near Dunkirk on 13 May 1943.

31

Fw 190A-3 'Black 8' of Oberleutnant Wilhelm-Ferdinand Galland, Staffelkapitän 5./JG 26, Abbeville-Druacat, circa June 1942

Middle of the three Galland brothers to serve with JG 26, 'Wutz' came to the Luftwaffe from the artillery, scoring his first kill on 23 July 1941. After eight months as *Kapitän* of 5. *Staffel* he was promoted to *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 2 in January 1943. All 55 of his victories, including eight heavy bombers, were scored with JG 26 in the west. He was killed in action during a tussle with P-47s near the Belgian-German border on 17 August 1943.

32

Fw 190A-7 'White 9' (Wk-Nr 642527) of Oberfeldwebel Adolf Glunz, 5./JG 26, Cambrai-Epinoy, February 1944

One of the Luftwaffe's most successful Western Front pilots, 'Addi' Glunz was also the only NCO in JG 26 to be awarded the Knight's Cross. He was subsequently commissioned and promoted *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 26, which he led for 12 hard months until March 1945 when he transitioned to the Me 262 jet with JG 7. His final score of 71 kills (68 in the west) included 20 'heavies' and three Mosquitos. Incidentally, the change in the *Staffel* colour from Galland's 'Black 8' above to Glunz's 'White 9' was brought about by the reorganisation from three to four *Staffeln* per *Gruppe* in the interim.

33

Fw 190A-3 'Black Double Chevron' (Wk-Nr 0552) of Hauptmann Josef Priller, Gruppenkommandeur III./JG 26, Wevelghem, August 1942

Prior to his two years service as *Kommodore* of JG 26, 'Pips' Priller had spent some 13 months at the head of III. *Gruppe*. His A-3 is seen here midway through that period as evidenced by the 77 red kill bars on the rudder (number 77 was a Spitfire downed off Cap Gris Nez on 29 August). Note that 0552 wears text-book *Kommandeur*'s markings – no sign yet of Priller's favourite '13', but his ace-of-hearts personal insignia is present as always.

34

Fw 190A-8 'Brown 4' of Oberleutnant Waldemar Radener, Staffelkapitän 7./JG 26, Coesfeld-Stevede, circa September 1944

'Waldi' Radener was a member of the 4. *Staffel* during the 'happy months' of 1942. A year later he was promoted to *Kapitän* of 6./JG 26 which, in October 1943, was redesignated 7. *Staffel*. His A-8 is wearing the brown markings of 7./JG 26. Of note are the 20 kill bars on its rudder, the practice of marking victories in this way having become rare by this date. On 30 January 1945 Radener was appointed *Kommandeur* of II. *Gruppe* in place of Hackl, who departed to take over JG 300. The following month, however, Hackl requested that Radener join him, and thus the latter ended the war as *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 300 with 36 kills, including 16 'heavies'.

35

Fw 190A-3 'Black 7' (Wk-Nr 216) of Oberleutnant Karl Borris, Staffelkapitän 8./JG 26, Wevelghem, March 1942

The only pre-war member of JG 26 still flying with the *Geschwader* at war's end, Borris headed 8. *Staffel* from November 1941 until mid-1943, when he assumed command of I./JG 26 for the final two years of hostilities. His career thus spanned the full history of the Fw 190 in the west, from the early 'Antons' such as that depicted here, until the last days with the 'Dora-9s'. In that time he scored 43 kills, including four 'heavies'. His contribution to JG 26, however, may be measured not so much in terms of his score, as in the leadership and guidance he provided for those under his command.

36

Fw 190A-3 'Yellow 1' of Oberleutnant Kurt Ruppert, Staffelkapitän 9./JG 26, Moorseele, August 1942

Kurt Ruppert's 'Anton-3' wears standard 1942-43 markings. The practice of the *Kapitän*'s flying aircraft number '1' in the *Staffel* dates back to pre-war regulations, but as the conflict progressed, this custom too became less common, although whether as a result of personal preference or in a deliberate attempt to disguise the unit leader's identity is unclear. After nearly two-and-a-half years at the head of 9./JG 26, Ruppert assumed command of the Bf 109-equipped III. *Gruppe* on 7 April 1943. He was killed two months later, with his final tally of 21 including three Spitfires downed over Dieppe.

37

Fw 190A-8/R8 'Blue 13' of Major Walther Dahl,

Geschwaderkommodore JG 300, Illsheim, June 1944

Based upon a well-known photo, this is purportedly the 'Sturmbock' flown by Dahl when first appointed *Kommodore* of JG 300 (initially known as the JG z.b.V. – 'special purpose fighter group'). From the fuselage markings it would appear to be an ex-IV.(Sturm)/JG 3 machine. Another likelier contender for Dahl's 'Blue 13', is an 'unblinkered' blown canopy A-8 without the zig-zag exhaust panel, but whatever the Fw 190 flown, there is no doubting Dahl's prowess in it – 51 kills in the west, including 36 'heavies'!

38**Fw 190A-6 'Green 3' (Wk-Nr 350453) of Hauptmann Friedrich-Karl Müller, Geschwader TO, JG 300, Bonn-Hangelar, November 1943**

The Luftwaffe's most successful single-engined nightfighter pilot, Friedrich-Karl Müller flew both the Fw 190 and the Bf 109 while serving with the *Geschwaderstab* JG 300 during the initial operations as a 'Wilde Sau' unit. Here, his A-6 already displays evidence of 16 victories. Müller subsequently went on to command both I./NJGr.10 and I./NJG 11, his final tally of kills at war's end standing at 30 – all but seven of these were achieved on 'Wilde Sau' sorties, including three over Berlin during the night of 24 August 1943.

39**Fw 190A-8/R8 'Red 1' (Wk-Nr 682204) of Leutnant Klaus Bretschneider, Staffelführer 5./JG 300, Löbnitz, circa November 1944**

Bretschneider's 'unblinkered' *Sturmbock* A-8 reflects II./JG 300's change of role – from the anonymity of individual 'Wilde Sau' nightfighting to the massed 'Sturm' attack – with its colourful spiral spinner, red aft fuselage band (later replaced by blue-white-blue to avoid confusion with JG 1) and individual name. Having achieved 14 night kills in just 20 'Wilde Sau' sorties, Bretschneider was equally successful by day with 17 victories in 26 missions, including three heavy bombers in one day – 7 October 1944 – one of them by ramming. He obviously got through a lot of aircraft in the process (this is *Rauhautz* ('Tough Guy') VIII), before himself being shot down and killed by P-51s near Oberaula on 24 December 1944.

40**Fw 190-8 'Red 19' (Wk-Nr 172733) of Unteroffizier Ernst Schröder, 5./JG 300, Löbnitz, circa November 1944**

Another colourful 5. *Staffel* aircraft, Ernst Schröder's standard A-8 (not a 'Sturmbock') carried the Cologne coat-of-arms and the city's carnival greeting on the port side and the name *Edelgard* to starboard. Schröder claimed a number of kills in this machine, including two B-24s on 27 September 1944, before a low-level dogfight with P-51s and subsequent forced-landing ended the association on 27 November. Schröder, however, survived both the landing and the war with a final score standing at seven.

41**Fw 190-8/R8 'Red 8' of Unteroffizier Matthäus Erhardt, 5./JG 300, Löbnitz, circa November 1944**

One of 5. *Staffel* youngest members, 19-year-old Matthäus Erhardt flew as Klaus Bretschneider's wingman in another 'unblinkered' 'Sturmbock' named 'Pimpf' ('Youngster'). Note, incidentally, the lack of a II. *Gruppe* horizontal bar on the red aft fuselage band. Despite his youth, Erhardt was also credited with seven kills, five of them 'heavies', before he too was finally bested in a dogfight on 14 January 1945 and had to bale out with a shattered knee.

42**Ta 152H-1 'Green 3' of Oberfeldwebel Josef Keil, Geschwaderstab JG 301, Altano, April 1945**

The only Luftwaffe unit to operate the last of the Focke-Wulf line – the Tank Ta 152 – was the *Geschwaderstab* JG 301, and the only pilot of the unit to achieve 'acedom' on the type was Josef Keil, exactly half of whose 10 kills

were claimed while flying the Ta 152 on both Western and Eastern Fronts during the final five weeks of hostilities.

43**Fw 190A-8 'White 6' of Oberfeldwebel Willi Reschke, 12./JG 301, Stendal, November 1944**

Prior to his posting to the *Stabschwarm* of JG 301, where he flew Ta 152 'Green 9' finished as Keil's machine above, Willi Reschke served with both I./JG 302 (equipped with Bf 109Gs) and III./JG 301. During those 12 months he was shot down eight times, and had to take to his parachute on four occasions! Against that he could claim a final total of 26 victories, the majority of them in the west, including 18 four-engined bombers.

FIGURE PLATES**1**

Oberst Walter 'Gulle' Oesau is pictured here as *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 1 in lightweight summer tunic, officer's breeches and standard issue flying boots. Note the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords at his neck, and rank tabs just visible beneath the FI 30154 inflatable life-jacket, with both mouth-piece (top) and compressed-air cylinder at waist.

2

Wearing a 1943-issue soft cap and non-regulation sweater beneath his leather flying jacket, this *Sturmgruppe* pilot offers a perfect example of the style of dress adopted by most fighter pilots by war's end. Note, however, the 'whites-of-the-eyes' insignia on the left breast of the jacket, a jealously-guarded insignia unofficially 'awarded' only to proven *Sturmflieger*.

3

Seen in uniform tunic and the same combination of officers' breeches and flying boots as Oesau, Oberst Walter Dahl, *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 300, tops the lot in terms of personal apparel with his trademark sheepskin-lined jacket and battered cap. Note the ribbon of the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, in the top button-hole of his tunic, plus the Knight's Cross at his throat.

4

Looking more 'Martian' than 'martial', this unidentified *Jagdflieger* of circa 1945 wears the final pattern, single cheekstrap oxygen mask, goggles and leather flying helmet with his two-piece zippered flying suit, the whole ensemble strikingly set off by the brilliant yellow of his life-jacket. Note, too, the yellow 'Deutsche Luftwaffe' armband intended to reassure the locals if and when he was shot down over home territory. If incapacitated, his name, rank and unit could be found stencilled inside this band.

5

'Pips' Priller, *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 26, in the summer of 1944. Multi-zippered leather overall trousers sit incongruously with the uniform tunic and full regalia, the latter including rank collar tabs and epaulettes, Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords (awarded 2 July 1944), Iron Cross 1st Class on breast pocket with 2nd Class ribbon in button-hole, mission clasp above pocket, and wound and pilot's badge below to left and right respectively. Priller's headgear is a battered 'campaign' cap.

6

Another devotee of breeches tucked into standard issue flying boots, Major Heinz Bär, *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 1, expressed his individuality by rarely being seen without his favourite 'liberated' US leather flying jacket, to which he had affixed his rank tabs and Iron Cross 1st Class. Note the data pad on his forearm, Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords around his neck and 'Schiffchen', or sidecap, on his head.



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