



Right up to the Surrender, the Luftwaffe fought on. Here is a Schwärm (unit of 4) Fw 190s taking off to fight desperately against the overwhelming power of the Allied Forces.

As the year 1944 progressed, Germany's position became increasingly grave: as autumn gave way to winter, the prospect of stemming the Allied advances daily became more hopeless.

Hitler had thought to change the fortunes of war by the use of his secret 'reprisal weapons'—the *Vergeltungswaffe Eins* (V1 flying-bomb) and *Vergeltungswaffe Zwei* (V2 long-range rocket). In the event (despite an enormous amount of energy) they had little effect on the final result, and the newly-developed rocket and jet-powered fighters were equally ineffective in delaying for long the final collapse.

The Me 262 jet-fighter might have had considerable success if it had been deployed against the huge bomber fleets bent on the destruction of industrial targets and communications; but the Me 163 rocket-powered fighters had their greatest success in killing or injuring German, rather than Allied, pilots.

Time after time a 'Kraft Ei' (power-egg), as the Me 163 was nicknamed, exploded—resulting in death or injury to the pilot. One of the *Luftwaffe's* leading aces, Capt. (now Colonel) Steinhoff, still carries scars inflicted when his aircraft exploded on landing.

Since the power units of these aircraft were in an early stage of development, it was necessary to cut the engine and glide in to a landing, and thus at this stage of a flight they were particularly vulnerable to attack, for there was no means of re-starting the engine in this, or any other, sort of emergency. Allied fighter pilots were quick to realise this weakness and kept watch on rocket- and jet-fighter bases, sweeping in to attack as they saw the Me 163s coming in to land. The German pilots received radio warnings *Indianer am Gartenzaun* (Indians in the Garden), but usually they came too late to be of any help.

The III Group of JG 54 had been transferred to Varrelbusch between Achmer and Oldenburg and now came

under the Command of JG 26. Lt. Col. Priller was Commodore of this *Geschwader*, and he extended a cordial welcome to 'Bazi' Weiss and his men.

On December 25th, 1944, this whole Group was in action over Osnabrück, with 68 Fw 190D-9s, to protect the Me 262s during landing and take-off. Allied fighters surprised the Group as they broke cloud, and they suffered severe losses. The first combined action between propeller- and jet-driven aircraft had been a failure! But worse was to come.

On December 29th, 1944, the Chief of 3 Fighter Division had ordered III/JG 54 to patrol at a height of 5–6,000 feet to attack enemy low-level sorties in the Osnabrück, Münster and Rheine areas, maintaining continuity of action by overlapping the sorties of single *Staffeln*. Operations were to be directed by 'Primadonna' with FuG 16 (radio

In this photograph Hitler (accompanied by Göring in light suit) is presenting oak-leaves to the Knights-Cross (left to right) to Hptm. Grislawski, Hptm. Lang, Hptm. Schack, Oblt. Kittel and Lt. Hafner. Only Hptm. Schack now survives.



Fw 190A-8/R1s were used for ground support as well as interception. Here is seen an aircraft of 9 Staffel of Jagdgeschwader 2 'Richtshofen' being prepared for a sortie. The racks show that the aircraft could be used with an external tank and/or bombs. The white area outside the straight white edging to the black cross is interesting.



control device for fighter aircraft), which meant that the whole action was to be controlled from the ground!

The *Staffeln* took off at intervals of one hour, with Oblt. Dortenmann away with 12/JG 54 at noon. As he waited his turn for take off he followed the progress of the operation on his radio, 9/JG 54 under Oblt. Heilmann and 10/JG 54 under Lt. Crump already in action, with 11/JG 54 waiting its turn to take over. He gathered that the whole air space to 16,000 feet was full of enemy fighters, mostly Spitfires, and anticipated the return of 9 and 10 Staffel before he took off. But only single aircraft came in to land, their pilots so tense they could hardly speak a word. Of Oblt. Heilmann's Staffel four pilots were dead, the leader and two others had been forced to bale out and another had made a belly landing. Not a single aircraft was undamaged. Dortenmann's pilots and the ground crews were shaken to the core. It now remained to be seen whether Dortenmann would obey the instructions of Genmaj. Grabmann of 3 Fighter Division, and patrol at 5-6,000 feet with dozens of enemy fighters above him.

Feldmarschall von Greim was one of the old school of officers. He was always loyal to the oath he had sworn, firstly to the Kaiser and later to Hitler, and when the surrender came he ended his life by suicide.



Dortenmann took off in company with 11 other aircraft, and immediately led them to an altitude of 19,500 feet. He immediately received an order from 'Primadonna' to come down to 6,000 feet and attack enemy Thunderbolts and Fortresses over Münster. Dortenmann chose to ignore this order and maintained his altitude, and sighting 22 Spitfires west of Osnabrück, some 3,000 feet below his Staffel, led them down in a furious attack, losing only a single aircraft and inflicting severe losses on the enemy. The eleven Fw 190s returned safely to base.

Meanwhile, when 'Bazi' Weiss saw that Oblt. Heilmann and most of his men of 9/JG 54 had failed to return, he decided to take off with four aircraft of his Staffel to even the score with the enemy. All were shot down!

According to the reports of surviving members of III/JG 54, no Staffel leader or pilot was informed by 'Primadonna' that such masses of enemy fighters were patrolling the area at higher altitudes.

Lt. Prager now took over the lead of II/JG 54, and was the next Staffel to take off, and he, too, elected to climb to 19,500 feet. They encountered a squadron of Spitfires and were immediately engaged in combat. The younger pilots tried to out-turn the 'Spits', and learnt their error too late: three German aircraft were destroyed within moments for the loss of a single Spitfire.

Although Lt. Dortenmann's experience had shown that his method of attack was the right one for the situation that existed, on his return to base Lt. Col. Priller told him that the Chief of the 3 Fighter Division wanted him court-martialled for disobeying orders. The pilots of 12/JG 54 were ready to mutiny against such a decision, but Priller managed to make reason prevail on both sides, and the next day he promoted Dortenmann to lead III/JG 54 until a successor for Hptm. 'Bazi' Weiss was found.

In February 1945, Hptm. Klemm was promoted Commander of III/JG 54, but according to reports from surviving members of the Group they never really recovered from this hard blow, which cost the life of Robert Weiss, an ace of 121 victories, and eight other fighter pilots, and



The last officer to be Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe, Feldmarschall von Greim (a fighter 'Ace' in the 1914-1918 War) is here seen addressing a group of fighter pilots. As he is in a forward position so he is wearing the camouflage-patterned jacket of a Lieutenant.

on February 25th, 1945, the remainder of III/JG 54 was combined with JG 26 at the 13, 14 and 15 *Staffel* of this *Geschwader*.

The final phase of the *Luftwaffe's* hopeless fight against the overwhelming power of the invading air forces started with the Allies' massive bombing offensive on the synthetic fuel plants in Silesia, Saxonia and the Saar Protectorate, while crippling low-level attacks on German rail communications continued. How effective were these attacks can be clearly illustrated from the author's own experience. For example, the transport of a single wing for a Ju 88 from the Junkers plant at Halberstadt to the Junkers repair centre at Leipzig, a distance of about 74 miles, normally occupied a day. The disruption of rail services as the result of enemy attacks extended this to a week or more, the journey becoming a succession of short stages as locomotive after locomotive was put out of action by low-flying Thunderbolts and Mustangs.

Even in the face of all these events, however, Hitler would not accept the fact that defeat was inevitable. Calling a conference on October 24th, 1944, he told those assembled that the situation on the Eastern Front had been stabilised again, and that Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt had built up a new front in the West. He now proposed a new offensive action in the direction of Antwerp, with the intention of driving a wedge between the American and British forces. Göring had reported the *Luftwaffe* to have 3,000 fighters available for this action, but Hitler said that he believed only half of this number to be more accurate, of which perhaps only 700-900 would be available for action. However, this number included about 100 jet-fighters, against which it was thought that no Allied aircraft had a chance. Hitler also announced that Feldmarschall Keitel, Chief of the German Supreme Command, had reported to him that adequate supplies of fuel and ammunition were held in readiness for this action. This fact was true; but what Keitel had forgotten was to ensure its safe transit from the home area to the fighting units! The offensive was planned to start on December 16th, 1944, in

spite of the most strenuous protests from Feldmarschall Model against this plan.

As a prelude to this counter-offensive, it was planned that *Luftwaffe* fighters would launch a massive attack against the Allied air forces, under the code-name *Bodenplatte* (ground plate). Because of adverse weather conditions, however, it was not possible to start this offensive until January 1st, 1945.

Meanwhile, Genlt. Galland, General of the fighter units, who had not been included in those invited to hear Hitler's plans for the counter-attack, and was thus completely unaware of it, had been busily engaged in collecting reserves of fighter aircraft in preparation for an action of his own conception, which, under the code-name '*Grosser Schlag*' (big blow), was intended to strike a devastating blow at the Allied bombers. His plan was to lead massed fighters against the four-engined bomber fleets, anticipating the destruction of 400-500 for the loss of a similar number of fighters and costing 100 to 150 of his pilots. In preparation for this operation he made careful plans, assembling all commodores and commanders at HQ I Fighter Corps at Treuenbrietzen, and rehearsed them in every detail.

From time to time leading 'Aces' visited Kurt Tank. Here he is with Major Walter Nowotny, who claimed many of his 258 victories whilst flying Fw 190 aircraft. Nowotny died, as Commodore of Jagdgeschwader 7, when landing an Me 262 jet fighter at Achmer on November 8th, 1944.



One of the top scoring German 'Aces' on the Eastern Front was Hptm. Rall, who claimed 275 victories. Here he is seen reporting to the Jafü Col. Bormann, a fighter 'Ace' of the famous Jasta Boelcke of the 1914-1918 war, (centre) and the Commodore of his Jagdgeschwader JG 52 (right), Maj. Hrabák.



One can imagine his feelings when, in the middle of November, he was ordered to make available for the *Bodenplatte* operation all reserves of aircraft and, in addition, to prepare all home defence fighter units to take part in this offensive.

On the morning of January 1st, 1945, about 800 German fighters, led by Ju 88 night-fighters and bombers, started from their airfields and made low-level attacks on Allied airfields in Belgium, Northern France and the Netherlands. Although this action had been very carefully prepared, it so happened that some anti-aircraft units were not advised of the operation because of the *Führer's* strict orders to maintain complete secrecy. This mistake was to prove disastrous to the *Luftwaffe*.

The official German report claimed that about 400 Allied aircraft were destroyed on the ground and 100 or more damaged, and that 79 were destroyed in aerial combat. Particularly successful was the raid against the Brussels-Evère airfield, where 123 aircraft, which included bombers, transports, together with Spitfires and Typhoons, were claimed destroyed on the ground. At Eindhoven a complete group of Typhoons and a Polish Spitfire squadron

were believed to have been eliminated. After the German action, Allied reports claimed 36 German aircraft destroyed by Allied fighters and 57 by anti-aircraft guns.

But for the German fighters disaster struck on the return flight, when about 200 fighter aircraft were shot down by their own ack-ack batteries, who had been given no prior information of the operation. They had to pass over an area used for the launching of V2 missiles which was, consequently, heavily defended. In all, some 300 German pilots lost their lives in this action, 59 of them leaders of fighter units! Seen as a whole '*Bodenplatte*' was more than a failure; it struck a devastating blow at the remaining strength of the *Luftwaffe*.

In this action, shared between Me 109Ks and Fw 190D-9s, of which the latter aircraft were in the majority, the Fw 190D-9s of JG 26 were particularly successful, although a large group of this *Jagdgeschwader* found the airfield allocated as its target completely devoid of Allied aircraft. The II and III Groups of JG 26 made the highly successful attack upon the Brussels-Evère airfield. Major Hackl, commander of II Group, attacked the airfield seven times, while Oblt. Glunz, leader of the 6 *Staffel*, made nine low-level attacks, destroying one Spitfire V which was taking off to counter-attack.

This was the last sortie of Oblt. Glunz with JG 26, for he was afterwards transferred to JG 7 and sent to Lechfeld for training on the Me 262. He survived World War II with a score of 71 victories, three of which were scored on the Eastern front, 68 in the West. Of the 68 aircraft destroyed in the West, twenty-one were four-engined bombers, and he was awarded the Knights Cross with Oak-leaves for his gallantry.

After *Bodenplatte* followed a desperate, but useless fight against the overwhelming power of the Allied forces. From January 1st until April 26th, Allied bomber forces made 404 heavy raids against the German home area. Of these, 267 were in daylight, the remainder at night. To give some idea of the effect of these raids on the German civilian population, it may be mentioned that, according to Ameri-



Tank himself sometimes visited fighter units. Here, with some pilots, he is seen inspecting the trimming tab on the rudder of an Fw 190. It is said that Tank was the only fighter-aircraft designer who sought to make direct contact with the pilots and discuss their problems with them.



The 'end of the chase'. Destroyed hangars, damaged aircraft,—devastated airfields, a few serviceable aircraft without fuel—these were the scenes encountered by the Allied Forces as they advanced through Germany. These Fw 190F-8s stand forsaken, their pilots taken prisoners-of-war.



A rather pathetic view of an Fw 190A-6, burnt out after a low-level attack by Allied fighters. Many similar scenes were to be seen over many parts of Europe that had been occupied by the Germans.



An historic photograph indeed! An Fw 190 which had crashed in the centre of Berlin. To the left are the bombed and burnt out ruins of the German 'Houses of Parliament'—the Reichstag—a fitting symbol of the complete collapse of the Luftwaffe and, indeed, of the whole German 'war-effort'.

can information, as a result of the raid made by the 8th U.S.A.A.F. on Berlin on February 3rd, 1945, about 25,000 people were killed. Still worse was the combined British and American raid from February 13th to 15th on Dresden. The true figure of German civilian losses during this raid was impossible to estimate, for thousands of refugees, who had fled from those areas overrun by the Red Army, swelled the normal population.

Then followed the Allied action 'Clarion', in which the complete network of rail connections throughout Germany were destroyed in preparation for the Allied general offensive, which started on February 23rd, and caused the newly started German counter-attack in the East to break down. The remaining German propeller-driven fighters had no chance against the masses of the Allied bomber and fighter fleets, only a few jet-fighters demonstrating that if they had been available in quantity they would have proved a formidable weapon. As a single example of this, Me 262s of JG 7 destroyed 25 Fortresses during a big air battle over Berlin on March 18th, 1945. The propeller fighters were only able to help the army units in their desperate fight against the relentless advance of the Allied armies. The *Butcherbirds*, mostly Fw 190Ds and Ta 152s proved that in quality they were equal to the Mustangs and Tempests they met in combat, but their numerical inferiority prevented any effectual success.

On March 21st the Allied Air Forces started an all-out offensive against *Luftwaffe* airfields, causing large-scale withdrawals and congestion on the airfields in Central Germany. It was then that the full effect of the Allied bombing campaign against the fuel industry was felt and the total tactical effort of German aircraft was reduced to a mere 150 sorties per day, or even less.

The Fw 190 production plants in the East had been overrun by the Russians and the ancillary repair facilities in occupied France were in American or British hands. Those plants which remained, such as at Berlin and Bremen, were already badly damaged and under imminent danger of further attacks. A hasty re-grouping of units and a revision of the whole structure of the chain of command in the *Luftwaffe*, had no effect on the final result.

The last reliable report of the strength of the German fighter force was given in the first half of April 1945. These figures give only the number of fighters still available for service, they do not tell if they were ready for action; in all probability the majority of them stood impotent, with empty fuel tanks.

In the closing stages of the war, the limited number of German fighters that could be brought into action had their work cut out to fulfil limited sorties in the rôle of fighter-bombers, whilst endeavouring at the same time to defend the German army units, who were continually harassed from the air by masses of fighters.

As a result, the Allied bomber fleets could roam the air at will, dropping their bomb loads on civil and military targets with the ease and precision of peacetime manoeuvres. The shortage of pilots was even more acute, and frequently a *Staffel* was unable to take the air because there was no experienced pilot to lead. In spite of all these difficulties, however, the 'old ones' who remained, continued to fight gallantly to the last.

BATTLE ORDER OF THE GERMAN FIGHTER FORCE APRIL 1945

Although 'Focke-Wulf 190—the Story of a Famous Fighter', is basically that of the Fw 190 and the Ta 152, it is well worth listing here the strength of all German fighter units as in early April 1945, in order to see clearly the position of these two types in relation to the overall picture.

AIRFLEET GERMANY

15 Fl. Div.	JG 2	Staff	Fw 190D	—
"	2	I Gr.	"	2
"	2	II Gr.	"	10
"	2	III Gr.	"	9
IX Fl. Corps.	JG 4	Staff	"	7
"	4	II Gr.	"	50
"	4	III Gr.	Bf 109G/K	62
"	JG 7	Staff	Me 262	4
"	7	I Gr.	"	36
"	7	III Gr.	"	31
"	KG(J) 54	I Gr.	"	25
14 Fl. Div.	JG 26	Staff	Fw 190D	4
"	26	I Gr.	"	40
"	26	II Gr.	"	51
"	26	IV Gr.	"	22
15 Fl. Div.	JG 27	Staff	Bf 109G/K	—
"	27	I Gr.	"	25
"	27	II Gr.	"	25
"	27	III Gr.	"	19
IX Fl. Corps.	J.Gr. 10		Fw 190A/D	13
"	JG 301	Staff	Ta 152	2
"	301	I Gr.	Fw 190D-9	36
"	301	II Gr.	Fw 190D, Bf 109G	36
"	JG 400	I Gr.	Me 163B	38
"	NJG 1	Staff	He 219, Bf 110G	29
"	1	Staffel	He 219	22
"	1	4 Staffel	Bf 110G	16
"	1	7 Staffel	"	16
"	1	10 Staffel	"	15
"	NJG 2	Staff	Ju 88G	2
"	2	I Gr.	"	26
"	2	III Gr.	"	27
"	NJG 3	Staff	"	2
"	3	1 Staffel	"	18
"	3	7 Staffel	"	19
"	3	10 Staffel	"	21
"	NJG 4	Staff	Ju 88, Bf 110G	3
"	4	1 Staffel	"	17
"	4	4 Staffel	"	10
"	4	7 Staffel	"	15
"	NJG 5	Staff	"	4
"	5	1 Staffel	Ju 88G	12
"	5	4 Staffel	Ju 88G, Bf 110	16
"	5	7 Staffel	Ju 88G, He 219	16
"	5	10 Staffel	Ju 88G	7
"	NJG 11	4 Staffel	Bf 109G	16
"	11	7 Staffel	"	21
"	11	10 Staffel	Me 262	4
"	NJG 100	1 Staffel	Ju 88G	16

LUFTWAFFEN-KOMMANDO WEST	16 Fl. Div.	JG 53	Staff	Bf 109G/K	4
	"	53	II Gr.	"	46
	"	53	III Gr.	"	39
	"	53	IV Gr.	Fw 190A	39
	17 Jagd-Div.	NJG 2	II Gr.	Ju 88G	18
	"	NJG 6	Staff	Ju, 88G, Bf 110	9
	"	6	1 Staffel	"	28
	"	6	4 Staffel	"	17
	"	6	7 Staffel	Bf 110G	13
	"	6	10 Staffel	Ju 88G	17
	"	NJG 11	1 Staffel	Bf 109G	13
AIRFLEET 1		JG 54	Staff	Fw 190A	5
		54	I Gr.	"	38
		54	II Gr.	"	41
LUFTWAFFE GROUP (EAST PRUSSIA)		JG 51	Staff	"	20
		51	I Gr.	Bf 109G	10
		51	III Gr.	"	23
AIRFLEET 4		51	2 Staffel	"	7
		JG 52	2 Staffel	"	43
		JG 53	1 Staffel	"	27
		JG 76	Staff	"	1
102 ROYAL HUNGARIAN FL. DIVISION FIGHTER GROUP				Bf 109G	48
AIRFLEET 6		JG 3	Staff	Fw 190A	4
		3	II Gr.	Bf 109G	51
		3	III Gr.	"	47
		3	IV Gr.	Fw 190A	61
		JG 6	Staff	Fw 190, Bf 109	4
		6	I Gr.	Fw 190A	72
		6	II Gr.	"	48
		6	III Gr.	Bf 109G	21
		JG 11	Staff	Fw 190A	4
		11	I Gr.	"	55
		11	III Gr.	"	54
		JG 52	Staff	Bf 109G	8
		52	I Gr.	"	40
		52	III Gr.	"	32
		JG 77	Staff	"	1
		77	I Gr.	"	30
		77	II Gr.	"	36
		77	III Gr.	"	34
		EJG I	Eins. Gr. II	"	57
		I	" IV	"	52
AIRFLEET 5		JG 5	IV Gr.	Bf 109G, Fw 190A	45
NIGHT-FIGHTER UNIT (NORWAY)				Ju 88G, Bf 110G, He 219	10

Notes:

JG = Jagdgeschwader.
 NJG = Nachtjagdgeschwader (night-fighter formation).
 KG(J) = originally bomber squadrons, equipped with Me 262 converted for the fighter rôle.

J.Gr. 10 = Jagdgruppe 10: special unit for testing guided missiles.
 EJG = Einsatz-Jagd-Geschwader: these were units comprised from the remnants of disbanded fighter units, divided into groups (Eins. Gr. = Einsatz-Gruppe) available for service at danger points on request.