
THE SECOND WORLD WAR BY NIGHT

GERMAN NIGHT FIGHTERS VERSUS BOMBER COMMAND 1943-1945



MARTIN W. BOWMAN

German Night Fighters Versus Bomber Command 1943-1945

Martin W. Bowman



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Prologue

The German night fighters were just as clever, if not cleverer than ours. They had the aircraft to do it in and they were very good, the way they used to come in, particularly the various types of approaches. Even now you can get nightmares reading about some of the raids where they operated the 'Wild Sows' and the offset guns and all the rest of it. You don't stand much chance in the Lancaster with pea-shooters which couldn't knock anything down. We were using those things from the Western Front in the First World War, the .303s. They had got a range of next to nothing.

With the German night fighters, they'd come in - some used to operate down below, some to one side - and position themselves with the upward-firing guns. They were a menace because they'd get on the blind side underneath the aircraft where no one could see them. They'd wait for their moment, pull the throttles back, pull the nose up slightly and take a Lancaster from the nose right down to the tail with the cannon. Some of them didn't even do that. They'd go for the wings and get the tanks first. Once you'd got a twenty-mill cannon shell in the tanks; that was it. Oh, it was a very dicey business! It was a good thing half the people didn't know what was happening. I'm sure they wouldn't have gone if they had!

Flying to Berlin some pilots took the view they should get in and out of the target as quickly as possible. Be the first one home, that way there'd be less chance of getting hit. They'd charge into the target, getting all they could out of the engines and to hell with whoever used the aircraft after them. They also knew that with lots of planes being damaged and others running out of petrol there'd be hardly any airfields to land on. We always knew who they were because they'd get home about an hour before anyone else.

'Sensible and reasonable pilots, and I regarded myself as one, would be careful how they used the engines and would take indirect routes, so they arrived back later. I always tried to fly so that there would be about two hours of petrol left when I got back to England. I flew around for twenty minutes and then came in. An experienced pilot would bide his time: he was safe while he was up there.

War In The Air compiled by Edward Smithies

Chapter 1

The Prinz Of The Darkness

'...he was boundlessly disillusioned and boundlessly disappointed. In 1943 he contemplated the thought of shooting Hitler. It was only out of sense of honour and duty that Heinrich went on fighting, carried along by the ambition to overtake Major Lent in his score of enemy aircraft shot down'. In her memoirs, Tatiana von Metternich reported that Wittgenstein planned to kill Hitler after the ceremony at which he received his Knight's Cross in 1943. He said, 'I am not married, I have no children - I am expendable. He will receive me personally. Who else among us can ever get as near to him?'

Princess Walburga, Baroness von Friesen (1885-1970) mother of Heinrich Alexander Ludwig Peter Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein who at the time of his death was the highest scoring night fighter pilot in the Luftwaffe and still the third highest by the end of World War II, with 83 aerial victories.

Slimly built, with a slender face and high forehead his bearing was that of a confident, well-educated man of good family. He was ambitious, intelligent and forthright, highly strung, too intense. Deep, abiding patriotism was the foundation of his character. Service as an officer in the armed forces was his family tradition and his youthful goal.

Little else in life meant anything to him but service to his nation.¹ Heinrich Alexander Ludwig Peter Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein was born on 14 August 1916 in Copenhagen, Denmark as a member of the aristocratic family Sayn-Wittgenstein. He was the second of three sons of Gustav Alexander Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein (1880-1953), a diplomat at the German embassy in Copenhagen and his wife, Walburga. His brother Ludwig was older and Alexander younger. In April 1937 Sayn-Wittgenstein decided on a military career and joined the 17th Kavallerie- Regiment (17th Cavalry Regiment) in Bamberg. He transferred to the Luftwaffe in the summer of 1937 and in October he was accepted at the flight training school in Braunschweig. He received his officer's commission and was promoted to Leutnant in June 1938. Sayn-Wittgenstein served on various airfields from where he flew the Junkers Ju 88 and the Heinkel He 111. In the winter of 1938-39 he served as a Kampfbeobachter (combat observer or navigator) in Kampfgeschwader (KG) 54 at Fritslar. On 1 September 1939 Sayn-Wittgenstein experienced his first combat action on the Western Front in the Battle of France. Initially he served as an observer on the He 111H-3 from KG1 'Hindenburg' piloted by Gerhard Baeker, with whom he flew high-altitude sorties against RAF Biggin Hill. In the winter of 1940-41 Sayn-

Wittgenstein returned to pilot school and took his Luftwaffe Advanced Pilot's Certificate 2, confirming proficiency for blind-flying, a pre-requisite for night duty and returned to a combat unit in March 1941. In preparation for Operation 'Barbarossa', the German invasion of the Soviet Union, his unit moved to Eichwalde in East Prussia. In support of Heeresgruppe Nord (Army Group North), KG1 flew its first sorties against Liepāja and then Jelgava and Riga, targeting the heavily-occupied enemy airfields. In August 1941 Sayn-Wittgenstein transferred to the night fighter force. By this time, he had flown 150 combat sorties and was awarded both classes of the Iron Cross, Honour Goblet of the Luftwaffe and the Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe for Bomber crews in Gold.

Sayn-Wittgenstein volunteered for the night fighter force and was appointed Staffelfkapitän of 9./NJG2 on 1 November 1941. He claimed his first night Abschuss (victory); a Bristol Blenheim forty kilometres (25 miles) west of Walcheren on the night of 6 May 1942. He shot down three aircraft in both the nights of 31 July (victories 15-17) and 10 September (victories 19-21), receiving the Knight's Cross (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) on 7 October after 22 Abschüsse. The award was presented by General Josef Kammhuber, after which they both inspected the personnel of 9./NJG2. Appointed Gruppenkommandeur of IV./NJG5 on 1 December, Hauptmann Sayn-Wittgenstein was moved to the Eastern Front in February 1943. Unteroffizier Herbert Kümmeritz, who had six months of operational Bf 110 experience with II./NJG3 at Stade, joined Sayn-Wittgenstein's crew as his bordfunger. Kümmeritz had studied high frequency technology at the Telefunken Company in Berlin before the war. Prior to Kümmeritz, Sayn-Wittgenstein had rejected all his previous radio operators after only a few sorties.

In late spring 1943 Kammhuber ordered IV./NJG5 to relocate to Rennes, France in defence of the German U-boat bases. At Gilze-Rijen the order was issued to convert to the Bf 110 night fighter. Sayn-Wittgenstein flew the Bf 110 for one short flight only, but on the night of 24 June, the aircraft had technical problems and was considered unserviceable. Kümmeritz and Sayn-Wittgenstein took off in their usual Ju 88C and shot down four Lancasters (victories 32-35). Sayn-Wittgenstein never flew another Bf 110 again, preferring his Ju 88 to the Bf 110. The gruppe was relocated to the Eastern Front again and re-designated as I./NJG100 on 1 August 1943. While stationed at Insterburg, East Prussia, Sayn-Wittgenstein shot down seven aircraft in one sortie; six of them within 47 minutes (victories 36-41), in the area north-east of Oryol on 20 July. He claimed three more victories on 1 August (victories 44-46) and three more on the night of 3 August (victories 48-50). He was appointed Gruppenkommandeur of II./NJG3 on 15 August. Sayn-Wittgenstein became the 290th recipient of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub) after 54 aerial victories on 31 August. The award was presented at the Führerhauptquartier in East Prussia on 22 September. For these achievements he also received a letter from the commanding general of 4 Jagddivision Generalleutnant Joachim-Friedrich Huth. On 1 December Sayn-Wittgenstein was ordered to take command of II./NJG2.

Wilhelm Johnen commented on the arrival of Sayn-Wittgenstein at his unit: '... A madman, I thought, as I took my leave. Once outside I got into conversation with the Prinz's crew. Among other things they told me that their princely coachman had recently made his radio operator stand to attention in the plane and confined him to his quarters for three days because he (the radio operator) had lost his screen [radar contact with the enemy] during a mission.' Herbert Kümmeritz recalled that Sayn-Wittgenstein often used his seniority and rank to ensure that he would get the best initial contact with the incoming bombers. He would often wait on the ground until the best contact was established. If another fighter had already engaged the enemy before Wittgenstein arrived, the Prinz would announce on the radio 'Hier Wittgenstein - geh weg!' (Wittgenstein here, clear off!). Wolfgang Falck felt that Sayn-Wittgenstein was not officer-material, describing him as: 'a most capable pilot and extremely ambitious, as well as an individualist [but] he was definitely not the type to be the leader of a unit. He was not a teacher, educator, or instructor. But he was an outstanding personality, a magnificent fighter and a great operational pilot. He had an astonishing sixth sense - an intuition that permitted him to see and even to feel where other aircraft were. It was like a personal radar system. He was also an excellent air-to-air shot. 'During the time that he was under my command, I was ordered one night to Berlin to the Ministry. So was Wittgenstein, unbeknown to me. He was to receive the Knight's Cross the following morning from Göring. By an amazing coincidence we got the same train, the same sleeping car and the same compartment.

'I was happy to discuss problems with him free from distractions and interruptions and I was determined to make the most of our lucky encounter. I was keen to know his opinion on several operational problems. He was very nervous, with fidgeting hands and an obvious air of anxiety about him. He was anxious because the other night aces might be successful while he was 'sitting in a train doing nothing' - as he put it. He was at this time in rivalry with Streib or Lent, I forget which and they were within a kill or two of each other. It made him nervous to think he was giving his rival a scoring chance while he went to get his Knight's Cross. I also had a devil of a time getting him to go on vacation for the same reason.' In late 1942 Wittgenstein was sent to Russia by Falck to help devise tactics countering Soviet night air operations. The Prinz took command of one of the first 'Dark Night Trains' or rail borne self-contained night fighter bases consisting of perhaps eighteen wagons and ready to move in two hours or less. He scored 29 Abschüsse in Russia. When Falck visited the Prinz during a tour of Russian Front night fighter airfields, Wittgenstein was again anxiety personified: 'I saw personally that in one night he made three kills in fifteen minutes. That was not enough for him. It excited his deepest anxieties that on the Western Front they were scoring more kills than he in the East. He was downright envious. It was not always easy for us to cooperate with him as a subordinate because of this tremendous ambition.'²

Sayn-Wittgenstein was appointed Geschwaderkommodore of NJG2 on

1 January 1944; he had already reached 68 aerial victories. He claimed shooting down six Viermots on the same night (victories 69-74). In late 1943 his bordfunker Kümmeritz went on study leave and was replaced by Feldwebel Friedrich Ostheimer, who flew with Sayn-Wittgenstein from October 1943 until January 1944. Ostheimer recalled: 'At Arnheim-Deelen Prinz Wittgenstein spent his time either in his bungalow or at the command post. We, the flight engineer, the first mechanic and I were on standby in a small hut beside the hangar, which housed our Ju 88. We only saw the Prinz when he came to fly. After landing he returned immediately to his quarters. Once, a few nights before we were shot down, he invited us to his bungalow for an evening meal before stand-by commenced. Prinz Wittgenstein was a tall, good-looking officer with a fine, reserved and disciplined personality. As a night-fighter he did his utmost, shunned no danger and never considered his own life.'

On the night of 29/30 December Berlin was again the target for RAF Bomber Command and 712 aircraft were despatched. Twenty aircraft (eleven Lancasters and nine Halifaxes) failed to return. A long approach route from the south, passing south of the Ruhr and then within twenty miles of Leipzig together with Mosquito diversions at Düsseldorf, Leipzig and Magdeburg, caused the German controller great difficulties and there were few fighters over Berlin. Bad weather on the outward route also kept down the number of German fighters finding the bomber stream. 182 people were killed; more than 600 were injured and over 10,000 were bombed out. Altogether, twenty bombers were lost. DS718 on 408 Squadron captained by 24-year old Flight Lieutenant Walter Wilton RCAF was one of the eleven Lancasters that failed to return. All seven crew were killed after an attack by Major Heinz-Wolfgang Schnauffer who claimed the aircraft as his 42nd Abschuss.

With his score standing at 68 victories, 27-year-old Major Wittgenstein became Kommodore of NJG2 on 1 January 1944. That night Bomber Command went to Berlin with a force of 421 Lancasters. One of the crews on the Order of Battle was captained by Flying Officer James Gilmour 'Gil' Bryson on 550 Squadron, who had joined the squadron on its formation at Waltham, Grimsby on 25 November 1943, having transferred from 12 Squadron at Wickenby where they had begun operations on 3 September. The crew's last two trips had been to the 'Big City' before they had received two days of rest. The Lancaster's starboard wing and the incendiary bombs in the front of the bomb bay were set on fire by a surprise 'Schräge Musik' attack.³ Most probably Bryson's Lancaster was one of the six shot down in quick succession by Wittgenstein (his 69-74th victories) at the controls of a Ju 88C-6 equipped with SN-2 radar and 'Schräge Musik' and his third kill of the night. Wittgenstein and Feldwebel Fritz Ostheimer had succeeded in penetrating the bomber stream bound for Berlin. Most of these Viermots were Path Finders flying at the front of the bomber stream. Lancaster III JA711 'A-Apple' on 9 Squadron skippered by 23-year old Flying Officer Geoffrey Ward is believed to have been shot down by Wittgenstein on approach to Berlin at 0310 hours. All seven crew were killed. Ward had

flown his first op, on Hamburg, over five months earlier. Since then he had been on six Berlins, thirteen other ops and now a final Berlin, with the same crew throughout except for one trip when his bomb aimer had been replaced by the Bombing Leader.⁴

On the outward journey Lancaster III LM377 QR-F captained by 23-year old Flying Officer George E. Sharpe RCAF on 61 Squadron is thought to have been shot down by Wittgenstein and Ostheimer at around 0200 hours. All seven crew were killed. Twenty minutes later Lancaster III LM372 PO-K captained by 30-year old Australian Flight Lieutenant Leo Braham Patkin on 467 Squadron was claimed shot down by Wittgenstein, the aircraft losing a wing which caused it to spin in. All seven crew and 21-year old Flight Sergeant James Mudie RAAF the 'second dickie' flying as second pilot for experience were killed, the aircraft crashing near the village of Altmerdingsen where the explosion on impact was so violent that it shattered roofs and windows of nearby houses. Mudie, of Claremont, Western Australia had been born in Dundee, Scotland on 20 May 1922 and had enlisted in the RAAF at Perth. Patkin, who was from Melbourne, left a widow, Claire, of South Tarra, Victoria.

'A-Apple' flown by 33-year old Wing Commander William 'Jock' Abercromby DFC* who had recently moved to command 83 Squadron in 8 Group after his ops on 619 Squadron, which included flying Ed Murrow to Berlin the previous December, took off at 2300 hours. The son of David Grewar and Euphemia Abercromby of Brechin, Angus, prior to the Second World War he was an apprentice at RAF Halton. Following the completion of his training as a pilot, his first operational tour was on 50 Squadron where he eventually received the DFC in November 1942. Abercromby took part in the daylight raid on Le Creusot and one of the night raids on Genoa. In October 1942 he flew one of the aircraft detailed to attack Milan in daylight. Although faced with serious opposition he descended to within 100 feet before releasing his incendiaries on the target. His aircraft was hit many times and the rear gunner was mortally wounded. A Bar to his DFC came in December 1943. The citation reads: 'Since being awarded the DFC this officer has completed many sorties. In December 1943 he took part in an attack on Berlin. Whilst over the outskirts of the city his aircraft was illuminated by a large concentration of searchlights. By good tactics, Wing Commander Abercromby manoeuvred his aircraft from the cone and then completed a successful attack. Throughout his tour, this officer's efforts have been featured by great determination and good judgment.'

On taking command of 83 Squadron Abercromby had confronted an officer he had heard was one of the leading exponents of the theory of 'weaving' in order to avoid attacks by enemy fighters and in front of several other officers had inferred that such flying was cowardly and said that it had to cease. Henceforth all pilots on 83 Squadron were to fly straight and level so as to provide a stable platform for their gunners to fire from. The young officer said that he had 'weaved' for over forty ops and wasn't going to change his tactics now and further that their job was to mark targets, not to shoot down enemy fighters. He became so angry with Abercromby that

he told him he could fly straight and level if he wished but that he would give him only three weeks on the squadron if he did so. He had to be restrained from striking the new commander and was escorted from the room.⁵

ND354 'A-Apple' was a brand new Lancaster, one of thirteen aircraft to leave Wyton that first night of 1944 after bad weather had delayed take-off for several hours. At the Dutch coast Abercromby asked Sergeant Lionel H. Lewis the 19-year old flight engineer to go into the bomb aimer's position to push 'Window' out, which he did, taking his parachute with him. 'By now we had reached our operational height of 21,000 feet and Wing Commander Abercromby engaged the auto pilot and we were flying straight and level on a very predictable course. In quite a short time we saw the whole sky lit up like a cauldron; twice this happened and the pilot requested the navigator to log that it was an aircraft blowing up. We had no warning when the aircraft gave a lurch and went into a steep dive and I could see a glow coming from the bomb bay area, and the order came to abandon aircraft. I grabbed my parachute and put it on, removed my helmet and oxygen mask and remember putting my hands on the cushion to get at the escape hatch, but did not make it. There were vivid colours and an explosion. When I came to, I was falling through the air, on my back, spinning round and round. I pulled the parachute release and the handle and cable just came away and nothing happened. I got my fingers under the flap and pulled at the press studs, and the parachute opened with such a jerk that I passed out again. I came to and felt very cold and found that my flying boots had gone. I came down amongst fir trees and the parachute caught up and I was swinging six feet off the ground. I released the harness and fell to the ground. The feeling of utter loneliness and wondering what to do next is something I will never forget. I was not injured, only superficial wounds to my head and hands, and very heavy bruising down my left side.'⁶

'A-Apple' exploded over Holland at Lutten in the province of Overijssel, five kilometres northeast of Vechta at 0300 hours. Lewis was the sole survivor. It may have been the Scot's order banning weaving or banking gently over enemy territory and instead flying straight and level at all times that resulted in an unseen night-fighter shooting 'A-Apple' down. (Abercromby's attacker was Leutnant Wendelin Breukel of 5./NJG2 flying a Ju 88C-6; his third Abschuss).

On 1 January also Oberleutnant Ludwig 'Luc' Meister, Staffelpkapitän I/NGJ4 at Florennes, who had eight victories was promoted to Hauptmann and that night he and his bordfunker Feldwebel Hannes Forke claimed four Lancasters and a Halifax in a period of an hour. It is believed that Lancaster III JA925 on 156 Squadron skippered by 26-year old Squadron Leader Rowland Eden Fawcett DFC was shot down by Meister shortly after they had crossed the French coast at Le Tréport. The 'Lanki' came down eventually four kilometres northwest of Ste-Pol-sur-Mer in the English Channel. All seven of the crew were lost without trace. Squadron Leader Fawcett, from Duncan, British Columbia was a Canadian by birth who had

joined the RAF in the 1930s and was on his third tour having flown 69 operations. In 1941 he had been shot down near Tobruk, in a Lysander, with the Army Co-Operation unit, managing to find his way back to Allied lines.⁷ In all, twenty-eight bombers failed to return, 21 of which were destroyed by 'Tame Boars'; two Gruppen of JG 302 that operated over the target claimed another four Viermots, two of which, were later officially confirmed to the single-engined claimants.

On 7 January 'Luc' Meister claimed his first and only day victory when he shot down a B-17 Flying Fortress, which crashed into the Channel. A few days later his Gruppe were moved to Werneuchen to help to defend Berlin. On 20 January Meister and Forke were joined by a third crewmember, Toni Werzinski the bordmechaniker and bordshütze and the crew shot down two Halifaxes near Celle. Two months later, on 23 March, Meister and Toni Werzinski were badly wounded returning from a sortie in their Bf 110G-4. After shooting down Lancaster DS815 on 514 Squadron near Ste-Omer, Werzinski, who had been working on the aircraft throughout the previous night, fell asleep and failed to spot a P-47 flown by Captain Edward H. Spietsma of the 367th Fighter Squadron, 358th Fighter Group who attacked from behind and sent the 110 down. Werzinski was shot in the head but subsequently survived. Meister managed to crash land at Nannine near Namur, but the three crew were injured and trapped in the aircraft. They crashed near a railway line where two German members of the Reichsbahn, working nearby, saw the crash. They arrived at the crash site quickly and ordered the Belgian workforce to remove the crew to safety. The Bf 110 exploded and the crew were put on a train and taken to Namer Lazarett. Meister was hospitalized until August 1944. When he recovered he returned to Florennes to receive the Ritterkreuz for his victories but was still not fit for flying duties, so he organised the evacuation of the airfield in August 1944. At the end of 1944 Meister was promoted to Kommandeur and took command of III./NJG4. He scored his final Abschuss when he shot down a Lancaster on 7 March 1945 near Kassel.⁸

On the night of Sunday 2nd/Monday 3rd January 1944 383 Lancasters went to Berlin again and 27 bombers were shot down, mainly over the target. Twenty Nachtjäger claimed 23 Lancaster victories this night. Among the claimants were Leutnant Wendelin Breukel of 5./NJG 2 who claimed two destroyed for his 6th and 7th Abschüsse. He was killed on 1 March 1944 when he crashed into the Harrenstedter Forest during a low level transit flight. He had fourteen victories. Oberleutnant Wilhelm Johnen of 5./NJG5 also claimed two, one twenty kilometres southwest of Berlin and the other, seventy kilometres southwest of the capital for his eighth and ninth victories. Leutnant Heinz Oloff of 2./NJG1 claimed his seventh Abschüsse. Oberfeldwebel Heinz Vinke of 11./NJG1 claimed his 38th Abschüsse and Oberleutnant Paul Zorner of 8./NJG3, his 21st, a 'Lanki' near Lückenwalde. Other claimants included 24-year old Unteroffizier Walter Rohlfing of 9./NJG3, a Lancaster ten kilometres NNE of Rheinsburg, for the fifth of his seven Abschüsse. He would survive the war with claims

for eleven Abschüsse. Twenty-three year old Feldwebel Herbert Hubatsch of 5./NJG5 flying a Bf 110G-4 was wounded in action claiming his fifth Abschüsse near Glückstadt. His funker, Unteroffizier Christian Ulrich was killed. Leutnant Robert Wolf claimed his second victory and Oberleutnant Robert Hans Leickhardt of 2./NJG5 claimed his third Abschuss. Leickhardt was killed in action on 5/6 March 1945 when his score had reached thirty Abschüsse. Leutnant Wilhelm Seuss of 11./NJG5 claimed his first Abschuss. Several other claimants did not survive beyond the spring. Unteroffizier Herbert Ter-Steegen of 10./NJG5 who claimed a victory was killed in a crash on 24 May. Oberfeldwebel Lorenz Gerstmayr who claimed his third victory was killed in action on 29 May 1944. Oberleutnant Manfred Tischtau of Stab (staff flight) III/NJG5 who claimed his fourth victory died in action on 20/21 April at Altenkirchen probably by a Mosquito on 169 Squadron flown by Flight Lieutenant Gordon Cremer and Flying Officer 'Dick' O'Farrell. Feldwebel Gerhardt Doh of 6./NJG2 who claimed his first and only victory was shot down and killed in his Bf 110G-4 on 15/16 March. Oberleutnant Albert Walter of 1./NJG6 claimed a Lancaster ten kilometres south of Potsdam for his sixth and final victory. He was killed on 24/25 February during aerial combat with Halifax LW427 on 420 'Snowy Owl' Squadron RCAF near Egenhausen.⁹ Oberst 'Hajo' Herrmann, Kommodore JG300 claimed two victories. Oberfeldwebel Richard Tripke of 1/NJG5 flying a Bf 110 was killed during aerial combat, crashing twenty kilometres northwest of Goritz near Prachenau. He had one victory.

In London on the Monday the Air Ministry announced: 'On Saturday night through to Sunday morning, strong formations of British and Canadian Lancaster bombers carried out an air raid on Berlin, releasing around 1,200 tons of bombs onto the German capital. The operation was shifted to the early morning hours so as to avoid raiding by moonlight. Only isolated German night fighters appeared over Berlin itself during the raid and during the outbound and return flights the bombers were attacked by only a few enemy aircraft, two of which positively were shot down. A German 'aerial defensive rocket' was observed for the first time on this operation. The crews report that the rocket, a horizontal flying missile, appeared suddenly and then exploded in all directions. Only 28 bombers were lost on the night operations, an exceptionally low figure.'

On the night of Wednesday 5th/Thursday 6th January 358 bombers raided Stettin with the loss of sixteen heavies (fifteen of which were destroyed by the Nachtjagd, including at least nine in the greater Stettin area). On the night of 13/14 January when 25 Mosquitoes went to Essen, Duisburg, Aachen and Koblenz, one Mosquito IV (DZ440 HS-F on 109 Squadron) crashed at 0535 hours at Landwehr. Oberleutnant Dietrich 'Dieter' Schmidt, Staffelfkapitän, 8./NJG1 and his Bf 110 crew claimed the Abschuss at 0535. It was Schmidt's eleventh victim. Flying Officer P. Y. Stead DFC survived and was taken into captivity. His navigator, Warrant Officer Adam Herd Flett DFM died in the crash. Both men were on their second tour. 'We were delighted' reported Schmidt. 'The 'Mosquito-hunt' had paid off after all. We phoned right away and were informed that our

adversary crashed northwest of Kleve. As far as I knew, this was the fourth fighter *Abschuss* of a Mosquito at night.' Dietrich Schmidt scored his twelfth *Abschüsse* on 14/15 January when 498 bombers hit Brunswick and 38 heavies failed to return. He destroyed Lancaster III ND357 on 156 Squadron - which lost five aircraft this night - at 2035 hours. ND357 crashed into farmland near Kolhorn seven kilometres ENE of Schagen in the Netherlands killing the skipper, 31-year old Wing Commander Nelson Reuben Mansfield DFC and seven crew. Thirty-year old Warrant Officer Charles Henry Lawrance DFM was on his second tour having flown more than 46 operations. Twenty-four year old Squadron Leader Edward Sudbury Alexander the Canadian navigator was twice decorated. On the night of 28 April 1942 his Wellington on 419 Squadron of which he was the observer, was attacked and crippled by a night fighter. The rear turret on the aircraft was badly damaged trapping the wounded air gunner inside. Alexander, although wounded himself, picked up an axe, smashed open the turret doors and dragged his rear gunner to safety within the fuselage. For this act of courage he was awarded a DFM. Two years later after completing over fifty operations, many as a Path Finder, he was awarded a DFC. He had carried out 51 sorties against heavily defended targets in Germany and enemy occupied territories, 35 of these since the award of the DFM, eighteen of these on Path Finder Force duties.

On the night of 20/21 January 35 bombers were shot down by the German defences (*Nachtjagd* claimed 35 victories), which operated the 'Zahme Sau' tactics to excellent advantage and who seemed to have rendered 'Window' counterproductive. But despite all *Nachtjagd*'s continued efforts, the Mosquito continued to fly practically unchallenged over the Reich to the end of the war, by which time *Nachtjagd* had destroyed only about fifty Mosquitoes, mainly by He 219 and Me 262 jet crews. One of the Mosquito intruder pilots at this time was American 1st Lieutenant James Forrest 'Lou' Luma on 418 Squadron RCAF stationed at Ford, Sussex. Luma carried out his most memorable flight on the night of 21/22 January when 648 bombers attacked Magdeburg. His 17th sortie was the one that entitled him and his navigator Flight Lieutenant Al Eckert to have their first swastika painted on the side of their Mosquito FB.VI when they destroyed a Me 210. There followed an article in the Air Ministry Weekly Intelligence Summary about a Luftwaffe ace by the name of Major Prinz Heinrich zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, a highly decorated Luftwaffe night-fighter pilot who was killed in air combat on the night of 21/22 January. The Intelligence Summary went on to say that he had shot down 83 aircraft. It also said he had shot down five RAF aircraft within a few hours of meeting his death. Luma found it interesting that he was the only RAF/RCAF pilot who had shot down an enemy over the Continent that night.

On the night of 20 January Wittgenstein claimed three enemy aircraft shot down in the Berlin area (victories 76- 78). He almost collided with the third burning Lancaster which went into a dive and came very close to his own Ju 88. Feldwebel Friedrich Ostheimer takes up the story: '...I already

had the next aircraft on my screen; almost as a matter of routine we flew up to the target. Prinz Wittgenstein came pretty close to the Lancaster, which was being flown very erratically. On this occasion, too, a burst from 'Schräge Musik' blew a big hole in the wing and started a blazing fire. This time the British pilot reacted unusually: he remained at the controls of his burning machine and dived down on top of us. Our Prinz, too, whipped the Ju 88 into a dive, but the blazing monster came closer and closer and hung in visual contact over our cabin. I had only one thought: 'We've had it!' A heavy blow staggered our aircraft, Prinz Wittgenstein lost control of the machine and we went into a spin, plunging down into the night.'

Wittgenstein recovered control 3000 metres lower and headed for the nearest airfield. Ostheimer established contact with Erfurt. Since the aircraft began stalling after the wheels and flaps went down the crew decided to belly-land the aircraft, which ripped the floor away, sending chopped-up pieces of turf hurtling through the cabin. They discovered that about two metres (6.6 feet) of the wing had been cut off by the Lancaster's propeller and there was a large hole in the rear fuselage. The next night German night-fighter defences destroyed 57 bombers when 648 aircraft of RAF Bomber Command were detailed to bomb Magdeburg. Major Wittgenstein and Ostheimer and bordmechaniker Unteroffizier Kurt Matzuleit took off on a 'Zahme Sau' sortie in Ju 88 R4+XM, which normally was assigned to the Technical Officer of NJG2. In less than forty minutes Wittgenstein shot down three Lancasters and two Halifaxes. At 2200 he made contact with a Lancaster and he shot it down. It was observed to explode at 2205. Between 2210 and 2215 the second Lancaster was shot down.

Observers reported the third Lancaster exploded at approximately 2230, followed shortly by number four, which hit the ground at 2240. During the fifth and final attack, the Viermot was burning when their Ju 88 came under attack, presumably from RAF Mosquitoes. In the attack, their left wing caught fire. Wittgenstein ordered his crew to jump and Ostheimer and Matzuleit parachuted to safety from the damaged aircraft. Next day Wittgenstein's body was found near the wreckage of the Ju 88 in a forest area belonging to the municipality of Lübars by Stendal. Wittgenstein's parachute was discovered unopened and it was deduced that he may have hit his head on the vertical stabiliser of his aircraft when trying to escape. The death certificate listed 'closed fracture of the skull and facial bone' as his cause of death. He was posthumously awarded the 44th Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern) on 23 January. Wittgenstein had flown 320 combat sorties, 150 of which as a bomber pilot or observer. At the time of his death he was the leading night fighter pilot with 83 aerial victories (one more than Major Helmut 'Bubi' 'Boy' Lent); 23 of them claimed on the Eastern and sixty on the Western Front. After his death, only Oberst Lent and Major Heinz-Wolfgang Schnauffer were to overtake him with a higher score. On 25 January Heinrich zu Sayn-Wittgenstein's death was announced in the Wehrmachtbericht, an information bulletin issued by the headquarters of the Wehrmacht. He was buried on 29 January in the Geschwader cemetery at the Deelen Air Base. His remains were re-interred

in 1948. He is now resting next to Prinz Egmont zur Lippe-Weissenfeld at Ysselsteyn in the Netherlands.

The question of who shot Wittgenstein down remains unanswered. Friedrich Ostheimer remained convinced that they were shot down by a long range Mosquito night fighter. However, no Mosquito pilot claimed an aerial victory that night. Two 'Serrate' homer-equipped Mosquitoes on 141 Squadron and one on 239 Squadron were on patrol that night. 'Serrate' was designed to home in on the enemy's Lichtenstein radar. It got its name from the picture on the CRT (Cathode Ray Tube), which when within range of a German night-fighter, displayed a herring-bone pattern either side of the time trace, which had a serrated edge. Only Mosquito II DZ303 on 141 Squadron piloted by Pilot Officer Desmond Snape with Flying Officer L. Fowler as his radar operator reported radar contact at 2315 south of Brandenburg. After three to four minutes of pursuit they encountered a Ju 88 with its position lights on. They attacked and believed to have damaged it behind its cockpit, but they did not claim a victory. This encounter exactly matches the time and area in which Sayn-Wittgenstein was killed.

Another leading Experten, 24-year old Eichenlaubträger Hauptmann Manfred Meurer, Kommandeur I./NJG1 and his Funker, Ritterkreuzträger Oberfeldwebel Gerhard Scheibe in He 219A-0 'Owl' G9+BB most probably collided with W4852 LS-B flown by Flight Sergeant Robert Butler; one of the 22 Lancasters that failed to return. Meurer and Schiebe had just shot down a Halifax and a Lancaster to take the Experten's score to 65 Nachtagschüsse (including forty Viermots and two Mosquitoes) in less than two years in 130 sorties. When Robert Butler had come under attack and if the rear gunner saw their attacker, in all probability he followed his brother's advice. Sydney Butler was a Halifax flight engineer and during leave together the previous Christmas when asked by his brother what was the best way to shake off a fighter on his tail, he had told him to cut the throttles on his port wing, descend 2,000 feet weaving as he went and then pull up again before the Lancaster plummeted, so it is entirely possible that 'B-Baker' collided with the fighter and they came down locked together. Meurer and his funkler and Bob Butler's crew crashed to their deaths twenty kilometres east of Magdeburg. Meurer was succeeded by 42-year old Hauptmann Paul Förster, who had six night victories prior to being named Kommandeur of I./NJG1, with which he added two more victories while flying the He 219. On the evening of 1 October 1944 Major Förster, Stab NJG1 and his bordfunkler Oberleutnant Fritz Apel who were testing a new instrument landing system, were killed in He 219A-0 G9+CL in a landing accident at Münster/Handorf airfield.

On the night of 27/28 January Werner Baake, recently appointed Staffelfkapitän of 2./NJG1, shot down a Lancaster over the Urft Dam to record his 24th victory. However, Baake's Bf 110 G-4 (G9+ML) had been hit by return fire in this engagement. He and his crew bailed out before the aircraft crashed at Uftalsperre, near Gemünd. Baake survived unharmed (and was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 27 July for 33 victories) but his bordfunkler Unteroffizier Waldbauer was killed.

A maximum effort had been ordered on Berlin by 677 bombers on the night of 28/29 January and a full range of diversionary operations was put into operation. Eighteen 'Oboe' Mosquitoes raided four of the most significant Nachtjagd airfields in Holland and 63 Stirlings and four Path Finder Halifaxes dropped mines in Kiel Bay five hours before the Main Force raid on the 'Big City'. Six more Mosquitoes bombed Berlin four hours before the main attack went in and another four Mosquitoes made a diversionary raid on Hannover. Part of the German night fighter force was drawn up by the early diversions and the bomber approach route over Northern Denmark proved too distant for some of the other German fighters. The JLO however, was able to concentrate his fighters over the target and many aircraft were shot down there. Two Lancaster III's on 83 Squadron failed to return to Wyton. 'S- Sugar' flown by Flight Lieutenant Horace Robert Hyde was involved in a fatal collision with a 463 Squadron RAAF Lancaster outbound and crashed on the Danish border. Both crews were buried in Aabenraa Cemetery on 2 February. While outbound 'B-Baker' flown by Pilot Officer William Simpson was attacked by a Ju 88G-6 night fighter of II./NJG3 crewed by 23-year old Hauptmann Gerhard Raht, his funkler Feldwebel Anton Heinemann and bordmechaniker Unteroffizier Werner Hesse and controlled by the radar station 'Stern' ('Star') at Lütjehorn in Northern Germany. At 0237 the Lancaster exploded in the air and the wreckage was spread over a radius of 2½ kilometres just north of the village of Varnæs. During the morning the surviving flyers began to show up. There were reports of parachutes found at Tråsbøl, Brobøl, Ullerup and Bovrup. Sergeant Thomas K. McCash the flight engineer and Flight Sergeant John J. Martin, navigator, were found dead in fields near Bovrup. One was not wearing a parachute. McCash and Martin were both laid to rest in Aabenraa cemetery on 2 February. Pilot Officer Ronald Pilgrim the air bomber landed near Ullerup and hid in a shack belonging to the Vicarage before he was picked up. Air gunner Flight Sergeant John R. Tree RAAF had landed in the sea off Alssund and drowned. He was found on 19 June and was laid to rest on 22 June. Pilgrim and Simpson and the W/Op, Sergeant W. Livesey and the air gunner, Flight Sergeant J. A. Fell, were sent to Dulag Luft and on to PoW camps. In all, 46 aircraft were lost on Berlin.

On 30/31 January Berlin was attacked again, this time by a force of 534 aircraft. Thirty-three bombers were shot down, all of them by twin-engined 'Tame Boars'. Lancaster I DV303 on 101 Squadron at Ludford Magna skippered by 23-year old Flight Sergeant Douglas William Froggatt is thought to have probably been shot down by Oberleutnant Josef Kraft of 4./NJG5 with the aircraft crashing at around 2000 hours in the Alexanderhof area of Berlin. Froggatt and four of the crew, including Flying Officer Moie Marder RCAF the special operator born in Regina, were laid to rest at the Berlin War Cemetery.¹⁰ The three others were taken into captivity.

Pilot Officer Edgar Jones RCAF the skipper of one of several Lancasters on 103 Squadron on the crew's fourth journey to the 'Big City'. On its way to Berlin a hail of bullets suddenly erupted through the floor of the fuselage

close behind the tail turret. The mid-upper gunner saw the dark shape of an FW 190 streak away upwards as it passed by. There had been no warning of an approaching night-fighter nor had they been caught by searchlights. The damage suffered was extensive. The starboard tail fin and tail plane were riddled with holes and effectively useless. The tail turret was jammed solid and one of the bomb bay doors had been shot away. As the mid-upper gunner watched, the German fighter turned gracefully and came diving down to attack again. Jones threw the heavy bomber into a turning dive, but the German managed to hit the starboard wing and put one engine out of action. A third attack took place a few minutes later, but this time the German missed the bomber and dived away to be seen no more. Realising that the bomber would be unable to reach Berlin and return, Jones coolly flew his aircraft towards the known location of some heavy flak batteries and bombed them instead. He then turned for home, nursing the aircraft through the skies across the North Sea to return to base. He was awarded a DFC for his actions and on 24 February he and his crew were back over Germany, this time attacking Schweinfurt. Jones and his crew continued to bomb Germany until they had completed 27 raids, when they were taken off operational duties and sent to training stations. All of them survived the war.¹¹

The Bf 110 of Oberfeldwebel Hallenbruch of I/NJG1 took off from Venlo. His bordfunker, Unteroffizier Hermann Vollert described what happened to them near beacon 'Quelle' ['Spring']. 'We thought that we were off too late to catch the bombers but we picked up a contact on radar; it was ten to thirteen kilometres away. I guided the pilot on to it. We thought it was a bomber but we were surprised to see that it only had two engines when we came into visual contact. We had strict orders not to attack any twin-engined aircraft unless we were absolutely sure that it was an enemy. We argued about it. I thought it was a Beaufighter because it had a thicker fuselage than a Junkers 88, but the pilot thought it was a Junkers 88. He said it's another arme Sau - another 'poor devil' - like us.

'We were behind it for about two minutes, discussing all this. We decided to turn away and leave it alone. We did so and were flying back to Venlo when, a few minutes later, possibly five minutes, we were suddenly attacked. He hit us in the right wing, between the engine and the fuselage; the whole wing broke off. I tried to get rid of the cockpit cover at my end and managed to do so. The plane was spinning and I kept being pushed into the back end of the cabin. I could hardly get my arm over the edge of the cabin but I knew that I mustn't give up. I tried again and again and got out in the end. I opened the parachute at once because I believed we were over the sea and that the strong west wind that was blowing would carry me nearer to the coast, but I came down in the water about two kilometres off shore. I was lucky; the water was so shallow that I could stand up. The aircraft came down about ten kilometres out at sea. I don't know what happened to the pilot; they only found a hand and part of his body.'¹²

Flight Lieutenant Graham James Rice and his 'Serrate' operator, Flying Officer James Gibson Rogerson on 141 Squadron claimed a Bf 110

destroyed. Rogerson, born in Leeds in 1922 and educated at Ingledew College, Roundhay and Worksop College, recalled: 'Our aircraft obtained a visual at 600 feet and opened fire in a 5-6 second burst. The enemy aircraft's port engine burst into flames and it reared up and blew up, parts of it flying past our aircraft, which pulled out of the way. We watched it spiral down in flames with thick black smoke pouring out and crew saw a dull reflection through cloud where it had crashed. It is claimed as one Me 110 destroyed.'

Two Mosquitoes were put up by 169 Squadron, including 'P-Pluto' flown by 'B' Flight Commander Squadron Leader Joe Cooper and Flight Lieutenant Ralph Connolly. Cooper recalls: 'I had to orbit fifty miles from Berlin on one of the German beacons. We tootled along and just got into position when I picked up a blip in front of me. He was orbiting slowly. Turning down the gunsight I could see the shape. There was no moon and it was very, very, dark. I got into position, slightly below and astern, went up to him and gave him the treatment; cannon - a lot of cannon. We were at about 25,000 feet. He was a complete flamer. Actually I gave him a bit more. 'That's for Coventry', I said. But I got in too close. I was mesmerized by it all. Rafe said, 'Look out Joe, you're going to hit the bastard.' I pulled the 'pole' back hard and the result was I stalled and went into a spin. We were not allowed to spin or acrobat the Mosquito because of our long-range belly tanks, which moved the centre of gravity of the aircraft. I put on the usual drill: full opposite rudder, stick forward. I'd done this before but never in a Mossie. Went straight into a spin the other way! I went into the spin about five times, heading for the ground all the while. During the spins I could see this 110 out of the corner of my eye; most extraordinary!

'One's thoughts were; what a bloody shame. This is going to be the first Hun the Squadron's got and I won't be there to tell the boys. I wonder who's going to hit the ground first, him or me? What a bloody shame the boys aren't going to know I told Rafe, 'Bail out. We've had it!' He had an observer-type parachute under his seat. In the spin he couldn't bend down to pick it up! He took his helmet off and put it on again. I said, 'Get out!'

'Rafe replied, 'If you can get us out of this spin, I could!'

'I thought, 'I'll try something else.' I centralized the pole and the rudder and eased it out of the dive. At 7,000 feet I straightened up. I had not been frightened but boy was I frightened now. Our radar blew up in the spin. I said to Ralph 'You can kneel and look backwards and keep an eye out for the Huns!' We had light flak all the way back to the coast. Approaching Snoring I called up the tower 'Is Squadron Leader Ted Thorne in the tower?' I asked. 'Yes,' they said. I said, 'Tell him he owes me ten bob.' (I had bet Ted ten shillings I would get a Hun before him!) Ted took the camp Tannoy - it was one in the morning - and announced, 'For your information everybody Squadron Leader Cooper is coming into land and he's got the first Hun!' When I landed there were 300 airmen and WAAFs around 'P-Pluto'! Most extraordinary! I gave them a little talk and off we went.' Cooper and Connolly's victim was Bf 110G-4 D5+LB of Stab III/NJG3, which crashed at Werneuchen, twenty kilometres East of Berlin.

Oberleutnant Karl Loeffelmann, pilot (with one night kill) was killed. Feldwebel Karl Bareiss, bordfunker and Oberfeldwebel Oscar Bickert, bordschütze (both wounded in action) bailed out.

The month ended with the Nachtjagd scoring an all-time monthly record of 308 Bomber Command aircraft shot down. I Jagdkorps claimed at least 223 victories (including 114 during the three Berlin raids 29 January - 1 February) but lost 55 aircraft and crews during January 1944. Losses had reduced the front-line strength to 179 operational aircraft and crews by 31 January. It was clear that new British tactics and new countermeasures would be necessary before a resumption of raids deep into Germany and the Reich defences too, were in need of an overhaul.

On 30 January the first move to effect closer liaison between Luftwaffenbefehlshaber Mitte and the operational side of the Air Defence of the Reich saw the creation of Luftflotte Reich. Generaloberst Hubert Weise was relieved from his flak command of Air Defence of the Reich and replaced by Generaloberst Hans-Jurgen Stumpff who had previously commanded Luftflotte 5 in Norway and Finland. His new command was now responsible for all day and night fighter aircraft and all anti-aircraft regiments. These changes were part of a belated attempt to reverse the decline of the defence of the Reich, which, after the situation created at the end of 1943 by the Bomber Commands of the RAF and USAAF, could no longer be ignored. Göring had opposed improvement but the Allied air forces had forced a number of changes to be adopted. Changes too were made in the flak units and the Aircraft Reporting Service, the former being considerably strengthened by increasing armament and bigger batteries. The entire direction of Air Defence rested, as far as command was concerned, with Luftflotte Kommando Reich.¹³ I Jagdkorps directed the operations of day and night fighter formations, as well as the establishment and training of fighter units and their technical equipment. The night fighter control was improved by the extension of the 'Y' system. The day fighter formations were appreciably strengthened numerically and improved types of aircraft were introduced.

Endnotes Chapter 1

- 1 *Horrido!* by Colonel Raymond F. Toliver and Trevor J. Constable (Bantam 1968).
- 2 Quoted in *Horrido!* by Colonel Raymond F. Toliver and Trevor J. Constable (Bantam 1968). In July 1943 Falck was promoted to Oberst and transferred to the Generalstab as Kammhuber's representative at the Luftwaffenführungsstab. Falck was then sent to Berlin and appointed within the Luftwaffenbefehlshaber Mitte, as overall responsible for the day and night fighter defence of the Reich.
- 3 Oberfeldwebel Paul Mahle, an armourer attached to II./NJG5 at Parchim, had built his own working prototype of 'Schräge Musik', which was soon fitted to all of the Gruppe's aircraft. 'Schräge Musik' comprised two 20mm MG FF or a twin 30mm MK 108 cannon installation mounted behind the rear cockpit bulkhead of the Bf 110 and Ju 88 night fighters and was arranged to fire forwards and upwards at an angle of between 70° and 80°. Fighter pilots whose aircraft were fitted with 'Schräge Musik' did not need to attack 'von unten hinten' ('underneath, behind'). They could attack from the blind spot underneath the bomber with cannon raked at 15°, fired by the pilot using a Revi C/12D reflector sight. An attack by a 'Schräge Musik'-equipped night fighter typically came as a complete surprise to the bomber crew, who only realised a night-fighter was close by when they came under fire.
- 4 *Bombers First and Last* by Gordon Thorburn.
- 5 *Lancaster To Berlin* by Walter Thompson DFC and Bar.(Goodhall 1985).
- 6 Quoted in *83 Squadron 1917-1969* by Ron Low and Frank Harper (Compaid Graphics, 1992).
- 7 Pilot Officer Robert Lyford DFC, the 21-year old navigator, had joined up on the same day as his twin brother Francis. Flight Sergeant Francis Phillip Lyford was killed on Trossy on 3 August 1944. Kracker Archive.
- 8 Ludwig Meister maintained contact with his two crew members. Werzinski had recovered from the bullet wound to the head and Hannes Forke, whilst on a holiday at Alkmaar on the coast of the Netherlands in the 1960s, tried to save his daughter and nephew from drowning, but died with them.
- 9 The Halifax was skippered by Flying Officer Henry Maynard Long RCAF. All seven crew were killed.
- 10 His brother, Flying Officer Ben Marder RCAF was killed in action 30 January 1944 on Lancaster I DV303 SR-U over Berlin at Teltow, 16 kilometres southwest of Berlin.
- 11 *Heroes of Bomber Command: Lincolnshire* by Rupert Matthews (Countryside Books 2005).
- 12 Quoted in *The Berlin Raids* by Martin Middlebrook. (Cassell 1988)
- 13 At the beginning of April 1944 the staff of Luftflotten-Kommando moved to Berlin-Wannsee to the newly extended Battle HQ (formerly the Reichsluftschuttschule).

Chapter 2

Viktor! Viktor!

For the first time since war began, several press representatives have been admitted to the great Hall of Operations where strategic planning of the air offensive against German industrial targets is carried on. The walls are covered with the giant maps of 50 German industrial cities which now are targets or will be targets during the coming weeks; these are cities which the Allied commanders believe are of special significance in the present stage of the air offensive. Every map includes a table listing the tonnage of bombs already dropped on the city and the total weight of blast and incendiary bombs thought to be necessary permanently to destroy the target. Special maps are also provided for each city which give precise aerial-photographic data about the destroyed zones and the progress of German clean-up operations.

Reuters News Agency report, 31 January 1944, London

‘Night-fighting’ recalled 29-year old Oberleutnant Helmuth Schulte, Technical Officer of II./NJG5, ‘was not enjoyable’. It was a most bitter experience that broke many nerves and had few survivors. We had to withstand much anxiety. This was due less to the fighting itself, which took place in the dark and in which we had a better chance, than to the need to fly in bad weather in conditions under which normally no man would set foot in an aircraft. Night-fighting was nerve-wracking; and the few who survived it had, above all things, flying skill and occasional luck. Night-fighting in anger, inspired by a feeling of hate or because a comrade had been killed in a bombing raid was not possible. In order to have any success and to stay alive it was essential that experience and concentration should be the first qualities in the flying, though it is true that the swashbuckling touch was often necessary as well. What was most important was to find the in-flying bomber stream - and in this the carefully-worked-out flight plan was vital. But very often it could only be worked out after take-off and even then it had to be altered. Also the business of getting the bomber into one’s sights was often tedious. We sat well down under the bomber and then climbed slowly until we were within fifty to a hundred metres of it. Then I lined up and aimed between the two starboard engines. At the instant that I fired I would bank away to the left. Thus all the shots went from below into the fuel tanks of the bomber, which usually burst into flames immediately. Because we usually came from low down and from astern, we were rarely spotted by the British air-gunners and attracted no defensive fire. Being lower than the bomber, we could keep with it and observe it against the background of the night sky. If we managed to catch the head of the bomber stream, we used to hold back in order to more easily shoot down the waves of aircraft following.’

Schulte, a former Wehrmacht observation pilot, who had scored his 21st victory, a B-17 in the Magdeburg- Fallersleben area on 11 January - destroyed three Viermots in the greater Berlin area for his 5th-7th confirmed kills on the night of the 15/16th February 1944. Nachtjagd, which deployed 143 crews against a raid on Berlin by 891 aircraft, claimed 39 victories, mainly over the Reich capital for the loss of eleven night fighters. Three kilometres southeast of Ribnitz Oberleutnant Paul Zorner of 8./NJG3 shot down Lancaster I ME636 on 166 Squadron piloted by Warrant Officer George Arthur Woodcock-Stevens for his 26th Abschuss. The 'Lanki' crashed near Jabel with the loss of all seven crew. Zorner survived the crash of his Bf 110G-4 on 25 July 1944 after an engine fire and he emerged unscathed after being shot down during combat near Cloppenburg on 17 April. He rapidly increased his score and on 11 June shot down four '4-mots' in the Dreux area. He would finish the war with 59 Abschüsse.

On 20 February 1944 the Americans launched 'Big Week'. Bomber Command and the USAAF dropped 19,000 tons of bombs on the Reich in a true round the clock offensive but losses were high with 224 American and 157 British bombers failing to return in just one week of sustained operations. The Leipzig raid of 19/20 February cost Bomber Command 82 Lancasters and Halifaxes and one Mosquito on 692 Squadron; its worst casualties so far. The majority was destroyed by a very efficiently deployed 'Tame Boar' operation involving 2,941 Jagdkorps sorties (seventeen of which were lost). Feldwebel Rudolf Frank of 3./NJG3 destroyed five Lancasters to take his score to 34 kills. Most, if not all of Frank's victories, were with Hans-Georg Schierholz. Oberleutnant Martin 'Tino' Becker, Staffelpapitän, 2./NJG6 aided by his bordfunker Unteroffizier Karl-Ludwig Johanssen claimed two Halifaxes and two Lancasters to take his score to ten victories. Becker's Gruppe, I./NJG6 claimed eight victories.

Lancaster III JB526 'D-Dog' on 57 Squadron flown by Johnny Ludford had a close encounter with a Ju 88, which 18-year old Pilot Officer Maurice Stoneman, flight engineer, describes: 'The skipper and I used to go out to our aircraft and, blindfolded, we would identify each control switch button, etc. Still blindfolded we would practice such things as closing down an engine and feathering the airscrew and other routines. This paid dividends on more than one occasion, in particular on this Leipzig raid. We were attacked by a Ju 88, our mid-upper Frank Fox saw him at the last minute and shouted 'Dive starboard GO.' We did just that. As I was standing up with my seat retracted I was thrown to the side but managed to recover by grabbing the small 'Window' handle. We were however, hit in the starboard engine and also lost three inches of a propeller blade. This of course caused great vibration but unfortunately I was looking at the engine at the time of impact and the flash of the impact temporarily blinded me. The skipper ordered me to 'Feather starboard inner'. I did and the 'blindfold practice' paid off. I also pressed the fire extinguisher button. I was still unable to see properly but was beginning to recover my eyesight and vision. The fire was put out but the feathering mechanism was damaged and the propeller had

to 'windmill'. This was a good thing as the engine drove the mid-upper turret hydraulics and one of the two generators. We also lost certain hydraulics and collected a large gash on the starboard side just above the main wing, which at 20,000 feet and in that temperature were more than uncomfortable. We went into a dive and lost 10,000 feet and only managed to pull out of it by the skipper and me with our feet on the instrument panel and hauling like hell on the stick. We got back to East Kirkby with difficulty. During thirty ops I only had to feather an engine once through malfunction and during many a ten hour trip the engines did not miss a beat. You just have to love the Merlin and also the rugged build of the Lancaster.'

Also on 19/20 February Allied countermeasures gained new impetus when a 'Spoof' attack was carried out over the North Sea by a OTU force while 816 bombers attacked Leipzig. The main disadvantage of the 'Spoof' was that the aircraft had to turn back before reaching the enemy coast, thus reducing the period during which they appeared a threat to the enemy. (On 23 July the addition of a small force of special 'Window' aircraft, which flew with the OTU aircraft but carried on when the Spoof Force turned back, solved this weakness). The 'spoof raids met with limited success, while the Germans reported that about '100' (RAF figures are 19) Intruder attacks on airfields at Gilze Rijen, Deelen and Venlo caused only minor damage. A Mosquito 'Spoof' attack on Berlin kept German fighters back but another on Dresden, failed. Pursuit Night fighting procedure by SN-2 was an essential factor in the heavy losses meted out by I Jagdkorps this night. They were also helped significantly by plotting accurately the H₂S bearings and gauging correctly the significance of a turn in the sea area north-west of Terschelling by the main force while 49 minelayers continued the original course due east (they dropped their mines in Kiel Bay). Altogether, 294 twin-engined and single-engined fighters were sent against the bomber stream. The RAF lost 44 Lancasters and 34 Halifaxes, with approximately twenty of the 78 bombers shot down by flak and four aircraft destroyed in collisions while the Nachtjagd lost just seventeen fighters. Leutnant Otto Keller of 9./NJG5 claimed his first kills when he shot down three Halifaxes. The first, at 0312 hours, was Halifax V LK993 on 429 'Bison' Squadron flown by 25-year old Flight Lieutenant Jack Bowen RAFVR, shot down 6000 metres over Gardelegen with the loss of his crew. Pilot Officer Clifford Murray RCAF the 26-year old 'second dickie' was killed also. Keller ended the war with fifteen Abschüsse.

An attack on Stuttgart on 20/21 February by 598 bombers was outstandingly successful. This was due mainly to the North Sea sweep and a diversionary feint towards Munich, which successfully drew the German fighters up two hours before the main force flew inland. Nine bombers only were lost (All were shot down by night fighters. Four other Lancasters and a Halifax crashed in England on their return). Two further effective 'Tame Boar' operations were directed against Bomber Command raids before February 1944 was out. On the 24/25th 209 First Jagdkorps 'Tame Boar' crews destroyed 31 Lancasters and Halifaxes of a 734 strong force raiding Schweinfurt (Bomber Command lost 33 aircraft). I./NJG6 claimed a

Lancaster and a Halifax destroyed but NJG6 lost five Bf 110s and four crewmen in air combat. Oberfeldwebel Fritz Schellwat of 6./NJG1 downed a Lancaster south-east of Saverne at 2222 hours for his seventeenth victory and Hauptmann Eckart-Wilhelm 'Hugo' von Bonin, Ritterkreuzträger and Kommandeur of II./NJG1 destroyed two Viermots for his 28th-29th kills. One of his victims was Lancaster III JB721 GT-F on 156 Squadron at Warboys over Briey, eastern France with the loss of five crew. The skipper, Flight Lieutenant J. A. Day DFC and his flight engineer, survived to be taken prisoner. Three 'Lanki's' on 156 Squadron failed to return from Schweinfurt.

The next night, 25/26 February, 165 twin-engined 'Tame Boars' claimed nineteen heavies during an outstandingly accurate and successful raid in clear weather conditions and very light flak defences on the M.A.N. works at Augsburg. The Path Finders ground marking was very accurate and 2,000 tons of bombs were dropped on the target area. 2,920 houses were destroyed and another 5,000 were damaged resulting in over 85,000 bombed out of their homes. Much of the city was destroyed including sixteen churches and eleven hospitals. Over 700 people were killed on the ground and another 2,500 people were injured in what the Germans described as 'extreme example of terror bombing'. Damage on the second wave caused considerable damage to an important aircraft component factory and also to some former paper and cotton mills that had been taken over by the M.A.N, engineering company. Seven crews of I./NJG6 operating from Mainz-Finthen claimed eight kills; four other bombers were lost in collisions and three were probably lost to flak.

Halifax III LV794 on 78 Squadron skippered by Flight Lieutenant William Maurice Carruthers was among the missing as the navigator, Flight Sergeant Arthur Collins, recalled: 'We were returning to RAF Brighton from a successful op when suddenly we were fired upon by a German night fighter [at 6500 metres at 0020 hours]. Our aircraft took a direct hit and the aircraft exploded I was blown out the aircraft and about 300 yards above a small wooded area I regained my conscious and pulled the rip cord and heavily landed in tree hanging just above the ground. My leg was badly wounded with shrapnel. The rear gunner cut the chute down and lifted me to the ground and then carried me to a road on the outskirts of a small village. At dawn I was found by a farmer who placed me in a wheelbarrow and took me to a convent hospital nearby where I underwent surgery on my leg. The following day I was visited in hospital by the pilot of the night fighter. It transpired he was the pilot of a Ju 88 and his name was Major Günther Radusch of Stab/NJG2. To my surprise he spoke perfect English and explained he had studied at Oxford University before the war. He expressed his regrets at the loss of my aircraft and crew and left me with a supply of cigarettes and chocolate. When I was fully recovered I was transferred to a PoW camp. I was returned to the UK on the *Arundel Castle*, a hospital ship, from Marseille in March 1945. I discovered that my aircraft was shot down near the village of Fischbach bei Dahn, Rheinland-Pfalz.¹⁴ Oberst Radusch would survive the war with 64 Nachtjagd

victories (including 57 Viermots). Total Nachtjagd claims for February were 183 bombers destroyed. I Jagdkorps casualties amounted to fourteen aircraft and crews during the 24/25 and 25/26 February operations.

February 1944 had been an auspicious month for 418 Squadron RCAF, which scored nine confirmed victories, two of them by 1st Lieutenant 'Lou' Luma, pilot of Mosquito FB.VI *Sweet Moonbeam McSwine*. On 13 February Luma scored his second victory when he and Flying Officer Colin 'Fin' Finlayson destroyed a He 177 over Bordeaux, France. On 6 March Luma and Finlayson got a FW 190 over Pau, France and achieved ace status on 20 March. Luma and Finlayson and Flight Lieutenant Donald Aikins MacFadyen a native of Montreal and 'Pinky' Wright flew a long-range Ranger¹⁵ over France. Luma and Finlayson attacked Luxeuil airfield, where they shot down a Ju W34 liaison aircraft and a Ju 52/3m transport and damaged two Gotha Go 242 glider transports and two Bf 109s on the ground, while MacFadyen and Wright shot down a Bü 141, which was coming into land. Moving on to Hagenau airfield, MacFadyen proceeded to destroy nine Go 242s and a Do 217 on the ground.

Luma flew his final RCAF sortie on 418 Squadron on the night of 30 April 1944. He then transferred to the 8th Air Force and flew a Mosquito weather plane until in November 1944 he rotated to the USA. Finlayson was killed on 18 October 1944 when he and his pilot, 24-year old Flight Lieutenant Stanley Herbert Ross Cotterill DFC RCAF were returning to England from Italy after landing there at the end of a 'Day Ranger' to the Vienna area on the 17th.

In RAF Main Force meanwhile, the first half of March 1944 was relatively quiet. Bomber Command's first heavy raid of the month was directed against Stuttgart on 15/16 March. In an attempt to avoid contact with night-fighters the 863 bombers that were dispatched split into two parts, flying a roundabout route over France nearly as far as the Swiss frontier before turning north-east to approach Stuttgart.¹⁶ This deception worked until just before the force reached the target when 93 1 Jagddivision crews were fed into the bomber stream and they returned with claims for thirty kills for the loss of nine aircraft and crews. An hour before reaching Stuttgart Lancaster 'F for Freddie' on 57 Squadron at East Kirkby was attacked by 26-year old Leutnant Herbert Koch of 11./NJG3. He set all four engines on fire and Pilot Officer Sam Atcheson DFC ordered all his crew to bail out once they had crossed into Switzerland but only one of the gunners made it before the Lancaster crashed at Saignelegier. It was Koch's ninth Abschüsse.

Homebound and flying at 20,000 feet south-west of Strasbourg Halifax 'D-Dog' on 466 Squadron RAAF at Leconfield was attacked by Hauptmann Heinz Reschke Staffelkapitän III/NJG6 who set a fuel tank and some oxygen supply bottles on fire. Despite the imminent risk of an explosion, Pilot Officer Harold Callaway Wills RAAF of Strathfield, NSW held the blazing Halifax steady while his crew bailed out and by the time he made his own exit, the flames had burnt him about the face and hands. Upon being captured he was taken to hospital in Strasbourg for treatment. Reschke and Unteroffizier Josef Fischer were killed on 24/25 April when

their Bf 110G-4 collided with another Bf 110G-4 whilst returning to Illesheim from an operational sortie. Gefreiter Werner Hohn the air gunner was injured. Reschke had six confirmed night Abschüsse. Halifax 'S-Sugar' on 578 Squadron was shot down by 23-year old Leutnant Helmut Bunje and his funkler, Unteroffizier Alfred Weimann of 4./NJG6 flying a Bf 110G-4 which took the Squadron's losses on the night to three. The Abschuss was the first of Bunje's twelve wartime victories. Flight Sergeant John Douglas Lyon and three of the crew were killed. Sergeant D. J. Salt was gravely wounded and would most likely have died but for three young German girls who found him lying in deep snow and insisted that he was given first aid.¹⁷

Fifty kilometres southwest of Strasbourg 23-year old Oberleutnant Heinz Rökker, since 15 December 1942 Staffelfkapitän of I./NJG2, peered out of the cockpit windscreen of his heavily armed Ju 88R-2 night fighter, scanning the sky for the sight of a Viermot. Born on 20 October 1920 in Oldenburg, Rökker joined the Luftwaffe in October 1939 and completed flight training with Flieger Ausbildungs Regiment 22 at Güstrow, Blindflugschule 5 at Belgrade-Semlin and Nachtjagdschule 1 at Neubiberg near München before being joining 1./NJG2 in the Mediterranean. He shot down a Bristol Beaufort on 20 June 1942 while transiting from Catania to Kalamaki in Greece. His aircraft received 25 hits from return fire during the action, but he landed safely at Kalamaki. From airfields in Libya, Rökker flew deep penetration 'intruder' sorties over Egypt, claiming four Wellington bombers destroyed. Although in August 1942 1./NJG2 was briefly relocated to Belgium, the Staffel relocated to the Mediterranean theatre, to Sicily, on 16 February 1943. Rökker undertook night fighter sorties over Sicily and Tunisia, claiming a Wellington near Marsalla on the night of 19/20 April to record his sixth victory. On 2 July I./NJG2 were back in Europe to undertake Reichsverteidigung duties. This keen exponent of 'Fernnachtjagd' operations destroyed his first '4-mot' on 23/24 August 1943 when he shot down a Lancaster twenty kilometres southwest of Berlin for his seventh victory. Having served in I./NJG2 for almost two years, he was hungry for more victories.

Endnotes Chapter 2

14 Carruthers and Flight Sergeants Ian Bell the flight engineer and Clive Warren Sisley RAAF, one of the air gunners, were killed. The air bomber and two other gunners were also taken into captivity.

15 Operation to engage air and ground targets within a wide but specified area.

16 *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational reference book 1939-1945* Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt (Midland 1985).

17 *RAF Bomber Command Losses of the Second World War Vol 5 1944*, by W R Chorley (Midland Publishing 1997). Salt was later repatriated aboard the *Arundel Castle*, reaching Liverpool on 6 February 1945.

Chapter 3

Pauke-Pauke!

*Ist die Lufischlacht in der Steige
Und die Nacht, die drohnt und lamt wie dumm.
Pauke! Pauke! Rums die Geige!*

Das Lied von der, 'Wilden Sau' by Peter Holm

Oberleutnant Heinz Rökker listened impatiently but attentively to the long litany of instructions from his 23-year old bordfunker Carlos Nugent crouched in the cockpit of their Junkers as they continued their night chase across the countryside to their designated 'Himmelbett' Räume or 'four poster bed' box near Aschaffenburg. The clock was approaching 2230 hours on the night of 15/16 March 1944. Flying Ju 88 R4+BB they had taken off from Ste-Dizier at around 2115 hours before heading for Bietigheim 30-50 kilometres west of Stuttgart. Rökker scurried into action, Nugent making sure that the FuG 217 'Neptun R' tail warning radar was clear. The last thing they wanted was a dreaded Moskito on their tail. Telefunken FuG 350 'Naxos Z' passive radar equipment, which some of the Ju 88R-1s and 2s carried, homing onto H₂S equipment and Siemens FuG 227 'Flensburg' homing onto the 'Monica' tail-warning device might have identified Rökker's victim. Or the plot could have come from the Jägerleitoffizier in his 'Battle Opera House' who would announce 'Kuriere in sight'. Suddenly, in the earphones of Rökker's bordfunker was sounded the Jägerleitoffizier's announcement.

'Have Kurier for you, Kirchturm [Church Tower'] 8 (8000 metres), course 300°, Kurier flying from East to West.'

Rökker and his bordfunker reacted with excitement and enthusiasm. According to the information from the Jägerleitoffizier they were only a few kilometres behind a 'Dicke Auto' ('Fat Car'), which had been picked up on Würzburg ground radar, fixed on the plotting table and transmitted to the Oberleutnant and his crew stalking the bomber. It was a Lancaster. Rökker's bordfunker picked up contact on his Lichtenstein radar set and he transmitted 'Emil-Emil' to alert his Jägerleitoffizier (JLO, or GCI-controller). The Oberleutnant throttled back the two 1,700hp BMW 801D engines, approached stealthily from below and behind and then he opened fire. His guns recoiled. The Lancaster never stood a chance. 'Horrido!' exclaimed Rökker over R/T to ground control to announce his first success of the night. Five minutes later the Jägerleitoffizier alerted Rökker's bordfunker that he had another Kuriere west of Hagenau. It was another Lancaster. 'Pauke! Pauke!' ('Kettledrums! Kettledrums!') Rökker announced. He was going into the attack.

'1000 metres, 800 metres, 500, 400, 300 metres!' Power off and minimum speed in order not to overtake him, Rökker once again attacked 'von hinten unten'. Small, bluish exhaust flames made it easier to keep the target in sight. Four engines, twin tail, were recorded almost subconsciously. No sudden movement that might attract the tail gunner's attention. Calm now! Guns armed? Night sight switched on? Rökker could see that it was a Lancaster. He applied a little more power to the two BMW engines, approached cautiously and in the classic 'von hinten unten' tactic, blew the bomber to pieces at about 100 metres' range.

Cries of 'Horrido!' filled the airwaves once again.

Rökker had not yet finished his night's sortie. Thirty-five to forty kilometres west of Stuttgart he obtained visual contact of what he thought was a Halifax but it was a Lancaster, a 9 Squadron aircraft piloted by Squadron Leader R. Backwell-Smith. Carlos Nugent immediately transmitted 'Ich beruhe'. Then they closed in rapidly from behind and below for the kill. The equipment was checked and the machine guns and MG-151 2cm cannon were loaded and cocked. At the funker's feet were ammunition drums with 75 rounds each for the pair of deadly cannon but Rökker again decided to use his front guns and approach 'von hinten unten' once more. If he had been out of ammunition, he would have given his bordschütze free range with his two MG-151 cannon. Changing ammunition drums in a twisting and turning night fighter would have made his task almost impossible but not if he pulled alongside to allow the bordschütze to blaze away.

'250, 200, 150 metres'. A slipstream shook the Junkers. They were close! At 100 metres Rökker pressed the gun button on the stick and the cannons rattled. He saw hits but the Lancaster did not catch fire. Backwell-Smith pushed the bomber into a nose-dive and then climbed before turning sharply to port losing height, as he knew the RAF pilots were trained to do in the aptly named corkscrew, which was a successful defensive tactic. In pursuit of him Rökker attacked the fuselage with and hit the aircraft again but he could not see any flames. Flight Sergeant Eric Birrell the 21-year old Australian rear gunner did not shoot back, so either he had been killed in the first attack or he or his hydraulics had been disabled and he could no longer turn the heavy guns. Before he too was killed, Sergeant Brian Glover the 19-year old mid-upper gunner gave defensive fire but it went wide. Sergeant Ronald West the 21-year old wireless operator and the gunners were dead. Flying Officer Herbert Keith Sheasby the 31-year old navigator and Pilot Officer Douglas Raymond Eley the 20-year old Canadian bomb aimer did not survive their parachute jumps. Backwell-Smith and Sergeant N. V. Sirman the engineer landed safely and they were taken prisoner. Finally, Rökker lost sight of the enemy. It was the only time he failed to see his attack through to the end and confirm its success visually; therefore the kill was only provisionally awarded. Carlos Nugent flew almost 150 sorties with Rökker, participating in 62 of his 64 victories which Rökker achieved in 161 sorties.

First Jagdkorps returned with claims for thirty kills for the loss of nine