

# *Jagdgeschwader 27* *'Afrika'*



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John Weal  
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# ORIGINS AND *SITZKRIEG*

In the history of aerial warfare, few units are as indelibly linked with the name of one man and with one theatre of operations as is JG 27 with Hans-Joachim Marseille and the Western Desert. Yet this unlikely, although admittedly explosive, combination of a jazz-loving young Berliner and the arid wastes of North Africa lasted a scant 17 months. It thus accounts for just one quarter of the *Geschwader's* overall wartime career – a career which spanned the entire conflict from the first day of hostilities until the last, and which saw the unit's Bf 109s represented on every major fighting front, with the sole exception of Scandinavia, contested by the *Jagdwaaffe*.

Although, strictly speaking, *Jagdgeschwader 27* was a wartime creation, its roots can be traced back to the spring of 1937. This was the period of greatest expansion within the pre-war Luftwaffe, and resulted in the doubling of its existing strength. As far as the fighter arm was concerned, it meant increasing the number of *Jagdgruppen* from six to twelve (plus the activation of a further twelve initially autonomous *Jagdstaffeln*).

The majority of the new *Gruppen* were to be formed by the so-called *Mutter-Tochterverband* (mother-daughter unit) method. This entailed detaching a cadre of experienced personnel – sometimes a whole *Staffel* – from an existing *Gruppe* and using it as the nucleus around which to create a completely new formation. One of the *Jagdgruppen* selected to play the part of a 'mother' unit in the expansion programme of spring 1937 was II./JG 132 'Richtofen', then based at Jüterbog-Damm to the south of Berlin. And the new *Gruppe* it was instrumental in bringing into being was to be designated I./JG 131.

As the final digit of its three-figure designation indicates, I./JG 131 was scheduled to come under the control of *Luftkreiskommando I*. At that time Germany was divided into seven of these 'territorial air commands', with *Luftkreis I* being the command covering all of East Prussia. This easternmost German province was physically cut off from the rest of the Reich by the intervening Polish 'corridor', a strip of land which afforded the Poles their only access to the Baltic Sea.

On 15 March 1937 Hauptmann Bernhard Woldenga was appointed *Kommandeur* of the as-yet incomplete *Gruppe*. The 36-year-old Woldenga, a former merchant marine officer with the Hamburg-Amerika Line, had transferred his allegiance to maritime aviation in 1929. Serving first with the Reichsmarine, and then the Luftwaffe, he had spent the last year as *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 134.

Towards the end of March the *Gruppe's* complement of aircraft, at first comprising a mix of obsolescent Ar 65s and He 50s, began to fly in to East Prussia. Although a stretch of railway track (once part of the busy Berlin-Königsberg main line) connected the isolated territory of East Prussia to the



The 35-year-old ex-merchant marine officer Hauptmann Bernhard Woldenga – pictured here later in the war as an Oberstleutnant – was entrusted with forming I./JG 131 in the spring of 1937

Reich proper, all the *Gruppe's* heavy equipment and stores were shipped in by sea along the Baltic coast. This was deemed more advisable than subjecting wagon loads of military freight to scrutiny by Polish border guards at either end of the 70-mile (115 km) rail route across the 'corridor'.

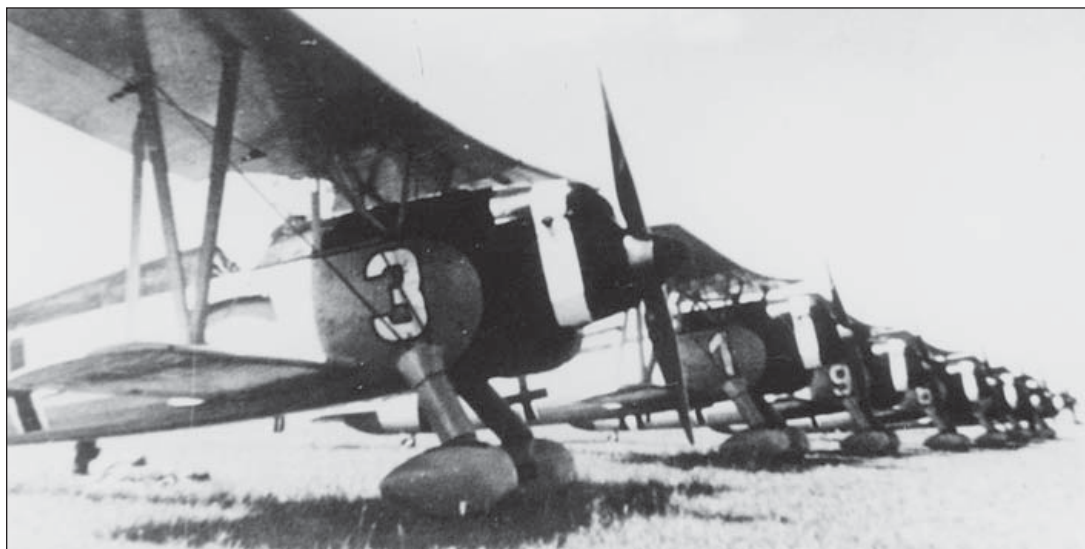
I./JG 131 was officially activated on 1 April 1937. The *Gruppe* took up residence at Jesau, a new airfield situated some 14 miles (22 km) south south-east of the provincial capital Königsberg. Despite an 'undeniable sense of separation' from the main body of the Luftwaffe (the only other flying units on permanent station in East Prussia at this time were a couple of reconnaissance *Gruppen*), Woldenga was determined that I./JG 131 would be the equal of – if not better than – 'any home-based *Jagdgruppe*'.

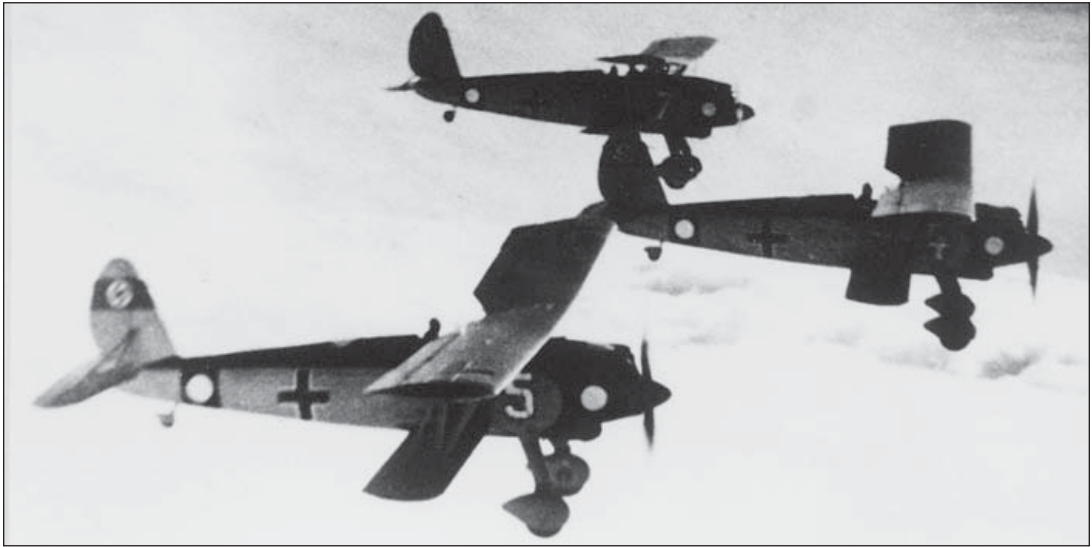
Ably assisted by his three *Staffelkapitäne*, Woldenga set about bringing I./JG 131 up to a peak of operational efficiency. His task was made that much easier when, after just six months, the ageing Ar 65s and He 50s were replaced by more modern Arado Ar 68Fs. These elegant pale-grey biplanes were soon resplendent in the *Gruppe's* gloss-black trim, which showed up their new white tactical markings to perfection.

A Luftwaffe directive of September 1936 had allowed the fighter arm to dispense with the cumbersome five-digit alphanumeric code system which was the standard marking then worn by all operational aircraft. In its place, the *Jagdwaffe* was allocated a simplified combination of white numbers and geometric symbols. While these new high-visibility markings did have the desired effect of facilitating rapid air-to-air recognition, they also had one drawback – fighters were now the only operational machines in the Luftwaffe not to carry some form of unit identification.

To solve this problem, from late 1936 until early 1938 – the swansong years of the biplane fighter in Luftwaffe service – every *Jagdgeschwader*, or part thereof, was given its own individual colour code. This was usually applied to the engine cowling, and often extended back along the fuselage spine. The most famous of these colour codes was perhaps the red trim worn by the He 51s of JG 132 'Richtshofen' in honour, it is commonly believed, of the famous 'Red Baron' himself. Other colours in use included green, orange, tan and light blue.

The *Gruppe's* Ar 68F fighters wore distinctive black trim. Aircraft of 1. *Staffel* carried no other distinguishing unit markings, whereas those of 2. *Staffel*, as here, featured a white band around the nose and rear fuselage (the latter just visible on 'White 9', the third machine in this line-up)





**3. *Staffel* was identified by a white disc on the nose and aft fuselage. The efficacy of this simple air-to-air recognition system is well illustrated by this tidy *Kette* of 3./JG 131 machines patrolling the skies of East Prussia**

And whereas the ‘SA Brownshirt’ tan trim applied to JG 134’s Ar 68s was an overtly political statement – as was the unit’s name, ‘Horst Wessel’, in commemoration of a much-lauded Nazi ‘martyr’ – the choice of black for JG 131, as far as is known, in no way implied any association or affiliation with the black-uniformed members of Himmler’s notorious SS.

At the end of October 1937, just as the Ar 68Fs were coming into service, Hauptmann Woldenga lost his most experienced *Staffelkapitän* when 3./JG 131’s Oberleutnant Eberhard von Trützschler-d’Elsa – who, like the *Kommandeur* himself had received his fighter training at the Luftwaffe’s secret Lipezk establishment in the Soviet Union – departed for Spain to command the *Legion Condor*’s 4.J/88. Woldenga was fortunate in that d’Elsa’s replacement was of equally high calibre. Oberleutnant Max Dobislav would later rise to become *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 27.

In the event, the Ar 68Fs lasted little longer than the original complement of Ar 65s and He 50s, for in May 1938 the *Gruppe* was scheduled to begin re-equipment with the Bf 109. Selected pilots were ordered back to the Reich where their new mounts – a somewhat motley assortment of Bf 109Bs, Cs and Ds – awaited collection at a Luftwaffe depot.

With military aircraft forbidden to overfly the Polish corridor, the return flight to East Prussia involved a dogleg course out over the Baltic, with each pilot being careful to recognise the international three-mile (5-km) limit. Unknown to them, however, the Poles had unilaterally declared a six-mile (10-km) exclusion zone, and their coastal anti-aircraft batteries opened fire on several of the passing Bf 109s! For the *Gruppe*, it was an unexpected and unwelcome baptism of fire, which fortunately caused no damage.

Looking purposeful and warlike in its dark green camouflage, the advent of the Bf 109 heralded the end of the fighter arm’s short-lived colourful unit identity trim. For the remaining seven years of its existence, the *Jagdwaaffe* would lack any form of standard marking system which would allow an individual fighter’s parent unit to be identified (although those *Jagdgeschwader* which later flew as part of the Defence of the Reich organisation did revert to a style of colour coding with their distinctive aft fuselage bands).

The only way a Luftwaffe fighter could disclose its identity was by wearing a unit badge. But such emblems were not compulsory. Their display, or otherwise, was entirely at the discretion of the commanding officer. And whereas badges of all shapes, sizes and subjects proliferated during the pre- and early war years, they gradually became less common as hostilities continued (on the eastern front they were officially banned early in 1943 in an attempt to deny intelligence to the enemy).

Bernhard Woldenga lost little time in devising a *Gruppe* badge for his new Bf 109s. Although of Friesian (North Sea coastal) descent himself, he was greatly impressed by the influence exerted by the Teutonic knights of old on the Baltic territories, which included the very area over which I./JG 131 was now operating. Consequently, he chose their ancient symbol of the Crusaders' Cross, black on a white shield, and brought it up to date by superimposing three small Bf 109 silhouettes in yellow.

If the pilots of the *Gruppe* needed any proof of the increasing political tension in Europe in 1938, the itchy trigger fingers of the Polish anti-aircraft gunners had provided it. Isolated in their East Prussian enclave, I./JG 131 had played no part in Hitler's annexation of Austria in March. But when the Führer upped the pressure later in the year by demanding that the Sudeten regions of Czechoslovakia be ceded to the Greater German Reich, it led to the *Gruppe*'s only operational foray beyond the borders of its home province prior to the outbreak of World War 2.

Early in August 1938, as part of the build-up of military forces being amassed close to the Czech frontier, 2. and 3./JG 131 were transferred south to Liegnitz, in Silesia (no doubt giving the 'corridor' a wide berth en route!), to add their strength to the fighter patrol activity being mounted along the disputed zone.

Hitler's blatant display of military muscle, which ultimately included some 12 Luftwaffe bomber and fighter *Geschwader*, had the desired effect. Deciding that a policy of appeasement was their only option, the British and French governments signed the Munich Agreement, delivering the Sudetenland into the hands of a grateful Führer on 1 October 1938.

Nine days later, the Bf 109s of I./JG 131 moved some 110 miles (160 km) further south into the newly acquired territory, taking up residence at Mährisch-Trübau (Moravska Trebova), a base recently vacated by the Czech Air Force. Their stay was to be of short duration. By the third week of October the *Gruppe* was back at Jesau. Here, a change of designation awaited them.

On 1 August 1938 *Luftkreis* 1 (ex-I), the area command which controlled all of East Prussia, had been replaced by *Luftwaffenkommando Ostpreussen* (AF Command East Prussia). This was but part of a major reorganisation at higher command levels, which had seen the dissolution of the seven original *Luftkreise* and the activation of three larger *Luftwaffengruppenkommandos* (AF Group Commands) in their stead.

The disappearance of the *Luftkreise* had rendered meaningless the final figure of the flying units' three-digit designations. The necessary changes had been postponed, however, to avoid complications during the period of the Sudeten crisis. But on 1 November wholesale redesignations took place. All units coming under the control of *Lw.Gp.Kdo. 1* (HQ Berlin) were given the number '1' as the third digit of their designator. Thus the 'Richthofen' *Geschwader* based in the Berlin area (hitherto JG 132) now

became JG 131, while Bernhard Woldenga's 'original' I./JG 131 – part of the semi-autonomous *Lw.Kdo. Ostpreussen* – suddenly found itself operating as I./JG 130.

But this method of nomenclature was still clumsy, and on 1 May 1939 one last effort was made to simplify command titles and unit designations. The *Luftwaffengruppenkommandos* (now numbering four) were renamed *Luftflotten* (Air Fleets), and the flying units controlled by each air fleet were renumbered in sequential blocks of 25 (thus *Luftflotte 1*'s units fell within block 1 to 25, with *Luftflotte 2* being allocated 26 to 50, and so on).

At the same time *Lw.Kdo Ostpreussen* was incorporated into *Luftflotte 1*. For some reason Woldenga's obscure and little-known Jesau-based *Gruppe* was given numerical pride of place within the new system. They now emerged as I./JG 1, leaving the Luftwaffe's premier fighter unit, the highly-publicised *Jagdgeschwader* 'Richthofen', in decidedly second place as JG 2.

Little more than a month after assuming their new identity, I./JG 1 began re-equipping with the Bf 109E. And a month later still, in mid-July 1939, it was their turn to play the part of a 'mother' unit in the final emergency expansion programme implemented just before the commencement of hostilities.

Having recently completed conversion on to the Bf 109E, I./JG 1 was able not only to provide a cadre of experienced personnel for the *Gruppe* being formed, but was also in a position to furnish it with a full complement of their 'cast-off' Bf 109Ds. Designated I./JG 21, the new unit spent the first few days of its existence alongside I./JG 1 at Jesau, before moving to Gutenfeld, some ten miles (16 km) closer to Königsberg, on 24 July. Perhaps to cement the 'mother-daughter' relationship between the two *Gruppen*, I./JG 21's *Kommandeur*, Major Martin Mettig, opted for a unit badge very similar to that of I./JG 1, but in different colours (see *Osprey Aviation Elite 6 - Jagdgeschwader 54 'Grünherz'*).

The concessions made at the time of the Munich Agreement may have appeased Hitler temporarily, but they had far from satisfied his craving for further territorial expansion. In March 1939 he had gained control of the rest of Czechoslovakia. Now he had his sights on Poland, and this time he was determined to use force of arms. During August all three branches of the Wehrmacht began to position their units in readiness for the coming confrontation with the Poles.

**The advent of the Bf 109 ushered in a new era of anonymity for Luftwaffe fighters. Basking in the midday sun at Jesau in the early summer of 1939, Hauptmann Woldenga's Bf 109E identifies itself only by the *Gruppe* badge below the windscreen. The white disc on the rear of the fuselage is believed to be a temporary war-games marking. And with the canopy open and starting-handle in place (projecting from the engine cowling ahead of the badge), the next practice scramble cannot be far off**





Groundcrew of I./JG 1 (as the *Gruppe* became on 1 May 1939) display a large-scale replica of the unit badge designed by Bernhard Woldenga and based upon the Crusaders' Cross shield of the Teutonic Knights

By mid-August 1939 the time for practising was over. Deployed at Seerappen, these machines of the *Gruppenstab*, with the Adjutant's in the foreground, are very much on a war footing as hostilities with Poland are only a matter of days away



The accepted Luftwaffe policy of the period was that the Bf 109 units would be retained on home soil for purely defensive purposes, leaving the new, twin-engined Bf 110 *Zerstörer* – on which great hopes were being pinned – to undertake offensive missions in the field and carry the fight to the enemy.

Consequently, in mid-August 1939, Hauptmann Woldenga was ordered to vacate Jesau and deploy his three *Staffeln* slightly further to the south in a defensive line stretching across the width of East Prussia, from Heiligenbeil, close to the Baltic coast,

via Schippenbeil in the centre, to Arys-Rostken, which was only some 18 miles (30 km) from the Polish frontier.

It was from these three fields that I./JG 1's 46 Bf 109Es awaited the Polish response to the German invasion, launched in the early hours of 1 September. But the expected enemy counter-attacks failed to materialise, and the Polish air force made few incursions into East Prussian airspace. Its aircraft were almost wholly committed in combating the Wehrmacht's armoured spearheads which, within a matter of hours, were already biting deep into Poland. When Polish bomber crews pleaded for permission to bomb Königsberg on the third day of hostilities, their superiors' denial of the request reportedly brought them 'very near to mutiny'!

The *Gruppe's* part in, and impact upon, the Polish campaign was therefore minimal. It made no claims for enemy aircraft destroyed, and its only casualty was a 2. *Staffel* pilot slightly wounded by 'friendly' flak. Its participation was also to be short-lived. After brief deployment to more forward fields closer to the border with Poland, and to one just across the frontier in newly-occupied enemy territory, I./JG 1 began to move back to Jesau on 5 September.

Its defensive capabilities may not have been stretched when it came to the protection of East Prussia, but the declaration of war against Germany

by Great Britain and France on 3 September 1939 obviously posed a potentially far greater aerial threat to the Reich – at least in the minds of the Luftwaffe High Command (Ob.d.L.) back in Berlin. For hardly had the now Major Woldenga's three *Staffeln* returned to Jesau before orders were received transferring them to north-west Germany.

By the late summer of 1939 the Luftwaffe's preparations and readiness for war were nowhere near as advanced as the Western Allies had been led to believe. Skilful German propaganda had portrayed the air arm of the Third Reich as an all-powerful force. The reality was somewhat different. *Luftflotte 2*, for example, the air fleet which controlled all operational flying units in the north-west quadrant of Germany – a vast area fronted by land and sea borders together stretching some 620 miles (1000 km) in length – had just one resident *Jagdgeschwader* (JG 26).

Upon the outbreak of hostilities steps were quickly taken to increase the Luftwaffe's fighter presence in north-western Germany. On 21 September an order marked 'Most Urgent' was issued by the Braunschweig (Brunswick) HQ of *Luftflotte 2*. This called for the immediate activation of a second *Jagdgeschwader*, which was to be based at Neumünster in Schleswig-Holstein.

In the event, and before mobilisation of the *Geschwaderstab* was even fully completed, countermanding instructions arrived from the Ob.d.L. directing that the skeleton organisation – already officially referred to as JG 27 – was to be renumbered as *Stab* JG 77.

Ten days later a totally fresh start was made with the cutting of a second set of orders. And on 1 October 1939 both the *Geschwaderstab* and the I. *Gruppe* of a new *Jagdgeschwader 27* were formally activated at Münster-Handorf.

The man chosen to be JG 27's first *Kommodore* was Oberstleutnant Max Ibel. Born in 1896, Ibel had volunteered for military service in World War 1, seeing action on the Somme as an officer with a Bavarian sapper battalion, before transferring to the special flamethrower detachment of a guards regiment (Garde Res.Pi.Rgt.1). He too was a later alumnus of the secret Lipezk training establishment in the USSR, an experience which no doubt stood him in good stead when, in 1934, he was tasked with setting up the Luftwaffe's first fighter pilots' school at Schleissheim. Prior to assuming command of JG 27, Oberstleutnant Ibel had been serving as *Kommodore* of JG 3.

Sharing the Handorf base on the north-eastern outskirts of Münster with Ibel's *Stab* was his sole *Gruppe*, I./JG 27. This was placed in the capable hands of Hauptmann Helmut Riegel, who had previously been a member of staff of the air warfare academy at Werder/Havel.

Another indication of the Luftwaffe's unpreparedness for war was the relatively large number of individual *Jagdgruppen* (and *Jagdstaffel*) which had been activated, but which did not yet have a parent *Geschwaderstab* and were still operating on a semi-autonomous basis. Once war had been declared an attempt was made to introduce some measure of uniformity into the *Jagdwaaffe's* order of battle by apportioning these hitherto 'orphan' *Gruppen* among the existing *Jagdgeschwaderstäbe* – not one of which, incidentally, had yet been raised to full three-*Gruppe* establishment!

Ibel's *Stab* JG 27, with its single component *Gruppe*, was an obvious candidate for such an infusion of outside strength, and the two *Jagdgrup-*



The first *Kommodore* of JG 27 was 43-year-old Oberstleutnant Max Ibel, a veteran of the trenches of World War 1. He is seen here, second from the right, after promotion to Oberst – and wearing the Knight's Cross awarded at the height of the Battle of Britain – in somewhat earnest discussion with members of his staff. *Brigadegeneral* (retd) Max Ibel died in March 1981, aged 85

*pen* now assigned to his command were the pair previously stationed in far-off East Prussia, I./JG 1 and I./JG 21.

After a ten-day stop-over at Lübeck-Blankensee, the Bf 109Es of Major Woldenga's I./JG 1 had flown in to Vörden, north of Osnabrück, by 15 September. I./JG 21's Bf 109Ds, led by Major Martin Mettig, arrived at Plantlünne, close to the Dortmund-Ems canal, a month later. This meant that by mid-October, the three *Gruppen* of Oberstleutnant Ibel's '*Geschwader*' were ranged in a tight defensive arc, the border with neutral Holland in front of them and the flat expanse of the north German hinterland at their backs.

Although this sector of the western front did not witness the periodic fighter skirmishes which flared up during the autumn months along Germany's common frontier with France further to the south, it did experience the occasional RAF reconnaissance intruder. These were usually Blenheim bombers, whose crews displayed a punctilious regard for Dutch neutrality by either approaching from across the North Sea or, less frequently, by circumnavigating the southernmost tip of neutral Luxembourg.

The first of these had already fallen victim to I./JG 1 within a fortnight of the *Gruppe's* arrival at Vörden. On 28 September Feldwebel Klaus Faber of 3./JG 1 had shot down a Blenheim IV of UK-based No 110 Sqn that had been sent to reconnoitre the Osnabrück area. Seventy-two hours later, on 1 October (the day the *Gruppe* was placed under the command of *Stab* JG 27), Oberleutnant Walter Adolph, the *Staffelkapitän* of 2./JG 1, claimed a second Blenheim IV (of No 139 Sqn, also stationed in England) which he brought down east of Paderborn.

Before the month was out two further Blenheims, both French-based Mk Is, would be credited to the ex-East Prussian *Gruppen*. On 16 October 3./JG 1's Leutnant Hans-Volkert Rosenboom destroyed a No 57 Sqn machine attempting a reconnaissance of the Wesel-Bocholt railway.

After surviving the 'rigours' of the Polish campaign, Unteroffizier Ernst Schulz is the very epitome of *Sitzkrieg* as he sits patiently on the wing of his 'Yellow 6' at Vörden in November 1939, awaiting developments. Not to be confused with namesake, and future desert 'Experte' Otto Schulz, 3./JG 1's Ernst Schulz would be shot down over Kent on 18 September 1940



A reporter sought out Rosenboom, and his description of the action appeared in several local newspapers two days later. After recounting how he had taken off to pursue the intruder, which passed overhead at an altitude of some 3000 m (10,000 ft), Rosenboom explained that the enemy machine tried to escape by diving into a cloud bank;

'I dived even more steeply, and as I came out of the layer of cloud I saw him emerge from the cloud above me. He immediately dived lower still, and there then began a wild pursuit which almost defies description. The *Engländer* was a very capable, clever and resourceful pilot. He made use of every undulation in the terrain, every hedge, every ditch, every building as cover. He dodged between trees. Close on his tail, I could see smashed treetops silhouetted against the sky and bits of foliage flying through the air (in fact, the British pilot had momentarily misjudged his height, and clipping the treetops had smashed the perspex nose of the Blenheim and caused the port engine to stall).

'I half expected him to take one or two rooftops with him, for at times we were both only some two metres (six feet) above the ground. But whenever he had to gain a little height to clear an obstruction, I sent another burst into his crate (one of the Blenheim's crew likened this to the noise of 'someone shaking rusty nails in a metal can!').

'Escape was out of the question', Rosenboom concluded his account, 'at last, one final volley, and I saw the pilot put his machine down on its belly in a potato field. All three occupants jumped out as the smoking Blenheim burst into flames.'

Exactly two weeks later it was I./JG 21's turn to score when Leutnant Heinz Lange brought down a Blenheim of No 18 Sqn near Meppen. As with the other three pilots mentioned above, it was the first kill for future Knight's Cross recipient Lange, who would end the war as *Kommodore* of JG 51 'Mölders'.

This quartet of hapless Blenheims would prove to be the only victories achieved by Ibel's units during the opening eight months of hostilities (the period of relative inactivity which has since come to be known as the 'Phoney War' or *Sitzkrieg*). The rapidly worsening weather conditions – the winter of 1939/40 was the harshest the region had known for many years – soon began to have a noticeable effect, both on the scale of operations and on serviceability figures.

The coming months were therefore marked instead by a higher than usual proportion of accidents, four of them fatal, and a succession of temporary deployments to other fields within JG 27's area of control.

In the very depths of the winter, between November 1939 and January 1940, Oberstleutnant Ibel's command was temporarily enlarged by the addition of two further *Gruppen*. I.(J)/LG 2, originally part of a trials and evaluation unit, but now serving as a standard *Jagdgruppe* flying Bf 109Es, took up short-term residence on several airfields near Cologne, including Gymnich and Butzweilerhof. *Jagdgruppe* 126, which was the current *nom de guerre* of III./ZG 26, a *Zerstörer* unit still awaiting delivery of its Bf 110s, and having to operate Bf 109Ds in the interim, occupied first Bönninghardt and then Lippstadt. Neither *Gruppe* achieved any victories or suffered any known losses during their brief periods of secondment to JG 27.

In February 1940 – by which time *Stab*, I./JG 27 and I./JG 1 were congregated at Krefeld, with I./JG 21 at nearby München-Gladbach – several changes of command took place. Both the ex-East Prussian *Gruppen* lost their long-serving *Kommandeure*. I./JG 21's Major Mettig departed to head the newly activated *Geschwaderstab* JG 54, and his place was in turn taken by Hauptmann Fritz Ultsch, previously the *Staffelkapitän* of I./JG 77. Major Bernhard Woldenga of I./JG 1 was promoted to a staff position in the office of Inspectorate of Fighters. He in turn was replaced by Hauptmann Joachim Schlichting, the erstwhile *Geschwader-Adjutant* of JG 27.

This meant that Oberstleutnant Ibel required the services of a new adjutant. The officer who arrived to fill this position was a certain Hauptmann Adolf Galland. A passionate fighter pilot, Galland had served with the *Legion Condor* in Spain. There, however, he had been appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 3.(J)/88. This was not at all to his liking, for while the *Legion's* other fighter units were busy converting on to the Bf 109, 3. *Staffel* had been ordered to retain their Heinkel He 51s (an obsolescent biplane type that was by then completely outclassed by contemporary Republican fighter opposition) for use in support of the Nationalist ground armies.

By early 1940 JG 27's fighters were beginning to appear in the new *hellblau* 'air superiority' finish. This particular machine, flown by the *Gruppenkommandeur* of I./JG 27, Hauptmann Helmut Riegel, who would also fall victim to RAF fighters during the Battle of Britain, still displays the small, pre-war style fuselage cross, which perhaps suggests that it previously wore dark-green camouflage before being re-painted in the new scheme

