

## **Diary Horst Petzschler JG 3 and JG 51**

### **My military units**

From 01.05.41 - 01.08.41 2. / Pilots Training Reg. 21 at Deblin - Irena - Reims – Paris

02.08.41 - 03.10.41 I. Flight Candidate Bat. 10 – Neisse

04.10.41 - 05.11.42 Pilots Training School A/B 9 Grottkau O/S.

06.11.42 - 20.11.42 Pilots Training School C 22 Oels at Silesia

21.11.42 - 06.03.43 JG 105 1. Staffel - Paris – Villacoublay

06.07.43 - 22.08.43 Fighter Replacement Group - East Toulouse Colomiers

23.08.43 - 01.04.44 JG Mölders (51) Smolensk - Terespol Staff Staffel

02.04.44 - 22.06.44 JG Udet (3) Burg near Magdeburg

23.06.44 - 22.09.44 JG Mölders (51) Minsk - Warsaw - Okecie - Jürgenfelde near Insterburg - Lobellen - Tilsit - Ezere in Courland - Libau – Memel

23.09.44 - 12.02.45 3. / Fighter Replacement Group - North Liegnitz - Berlin - Straussberg - Flensburg - Hadersleben in Denmark.

13.02.45 - 24.04.45 I. / JG Mölders (51) Danzig - Langfuhr - Pillau - Brüsterort - Littausdorf - Junkertroylhof at the Wisla march

25.03.45 - 04.05.45 3.? / JG Mölders (51) Junkertroylhof

On 4.5.45 our group commander gave the order for the transfer from here to Copenhagen. Our group commander, during all flown missions a shining example for the crews, spoke with short, harsh words to us. We, that mean's all pilots of the Staffel, which were still at Junker - troylhof, wrote our names into the book of Hptm. Brendel. We all knew, the war is over. It was a hard farewell, for this last flight get into the uncertainty. Fifteen pilots drove with a truck to the airfield, everyone was in a hurry, for the Ivan flew once again reconnaissance. Nobody would allow shooting at his aircraft in the last minute. The take-off was at 1pm, more or less criminal, for the airfield was heavily bombed and soaking wet by two days of rain. Passing Hela, the course is 295 degrees. My auxiliary fuel tank does not deliver, and I reached barely with the last drop of fuel the airfield Malmö-Bulltofa. Here I was interned. One hour after my landing I learned about the surrender of the parts of the Wehrmacht in Denmark.

This book should report back about the time when I got a soldier, and at the same time describe my war experiences, as obituary for my fallen comrades and be once a memory for my children.

It is very hard to describe the time behind me, for all the worst you forget too quickly, only the beautiful stays in eternal remembrance. Nevertheless I will try to describe the time as, she really was, with all of her sufferings and also joys, as far as I can remember.

Today I sit in the internment camp at Backamo in Sweden and let the past war years passing by in spirit. The eternal rush of the war did not gave me nearly no time to make any makeshift records. In younger years I was enthusiastic about gliding, my goal was set, I would become a commercial pilot. After leaving the secondary school I learned aircraft metal worker at the Henschel aircraft factory at Schönefeld near Berlin. I hoped, from here I could reach the commercial aviation. But it turned out differently, on 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939 the war broke out. I just reached the age of 18 and I signed up voluntarily for the air force. After I finished learning, I got on 1.5.1941 to the air force. At the "Silesian railway station" was our gathering point. The transport was made with French railroad wagon. The drive went through Posen-Kutno-Warsaw to Deblin-Irena. The first travel across the German border, was a great experience for me. Crossing destroyed villages and cities it went towards my first training facility. Arrived at Deblin-Irena, the glider pilots were separated from the others. So I came with my comrades into the bridgehead barracks at the Vistula. My comrades Kurt Kopitz and Günther Buvin came from Lubartow.

Barely arrived at the bridgehead barracks, we met scolding soldiers with silly shoulder straps and stars, as we learned a little later, our instructors. I had that differently imagined, still in civil suit and then execute commands? Lie down, jump on, march-march, etc., no this was a little too much for the beginning. So it's looks, the Prussian drill! One screamed at us, that you touch at your head, to realize, who is actually still there. On the evening of the first day, as we were at the barracks, we had to line up and the company leader gave us a telling-off. It was Obltn. Franck, the first pleasant human I met there. He told us, that we should become soldiers, but at first we were recruits.

He himself trained at the airbase Deblin-Irena and had only now and then time, to supervise our education. This smart officer was my great idol, he was more airmen than soldier. Now the drill started, in addition teaching. The drill lasted for a minimum five hours. Study of weaponry and shooting were the most fun for me, this were the hours were we found recreation. The infamous track triangle was our drill ground. Here a lot of sweat was spilled, more than ones assumed. Our platoon leader, Fw. Ernst, lets us, with rifle at hand, let us crawl the railway embankment up and down, until we remained lying on the face. Sometimes I had to hold my gun tighter, I had to control myself, not to hit him with this over the skull. This costs me a lot of control, here I learned this too. As we sat at the evening in peace at our room and looked out of the window, we observed a lot of troop transport in the direction of Lublin. But none of us did think anything of it. The impossible rumors appeared, none of us got a clear idea. Me interested during this days only the only question: How can I get as fast as possible to the flying personnel - how long will my training for a pilot will last, when will it be ready? From air base Irena the aircrafts took-off over our heads, my heart always flew with them. It came for us once more an airworthiness inspection at air base Irena, which turned out very well for me. Who shows here only a small defect, dropped out from the candidates for the flying Personnel.

Around the 18<sup>th</sup> of June we had to pack our bags and they were loaded into freight wagons. What should happen to us, no one knew. Our drive went through Krakow-Breslau-Leipzig-Paderborn-Köln-Brussels to Reims. Now I already crossed the German border the second time, this time to the west. These were unforgettable moments, which will be easily not forgotten, for they were just unique. The first was, as we arrived at Reims, to test the offered to buy wine - and the sparkling wine amounts. How long did we lack this delicious things. Hence it came, that no one could keep the measure, and quite a few comrades already at their first day in France had an alcohol poisoning. Our trucks were unloaded, with a fast ride we crossed the beautiful Reims. At the "Caserne-Garde-mobil" barracks we got an accommo - dation. Other companies got into the former "Negro" barracks.

Our company made it well, our accommodation left nothing to be desired. - The service continued and with him the eternal drill. Variety offered Reims itself with his beautiful buildings, specially the cathedral. Not to forget also the nice little cafés, which were in sufficient numbers available. All this has essentially facilitated the service at the blazing heat of the Champagne. If the service was over, the whole platoon first went completely into the café "Strassburg".

Then it was time to say good-bye to Reims, now it went to Paris, here we should experience the end of our recruit training. At a magnificent chateau near Juvisy we found about one week recreation. Afterwards the final inspection by a colonel took place. They did a lot about this visit, what we had learned, in long, heavy drill days, was tested in a few hours. The colonel expressed his satisfaction and told us, that from now on we are no longer recruits and look forward to our flying education. The instructors broke their habit with their sharp tone and we enjoyed at very low service the vicinity of the chateau. During several official travels to Paris I became familiar with this beautiful city. But unfortunately with my little pay I could not make there great leaps, but had to pass the different big world-famous locations, without having a look inside.

The day of my transfer to the flight candidate battalion arrived, and with me, Heinz Brun, Eugen Hettler, Günther Borrusch, Bubi Buvin and others were transferred. It was already a small bunch. We reached on 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1941 Neisse/Stephansdorf. Here we were assigned to the I. / flight candidate battalion IO. Our thoughts were now always at the standing aircrafts there, but for flying we had not to think about. In contrary, the final selection started now once more for the flying personnel. This weeks here were worse, as during the time at the training regiment. Drill, shooting with the machine gun, navigation, geography, radioing and other things were requested. There were days when I already gave it up to become a pilot. A nice, young maid (*Madel*) from Neisse cheered me up again and again and let me forget the heavy duty. Her name was Eva Adamczyk. Our colonel, (*Karl-Heinz?*) Oblt. Bührig, detached everyone who was noticed by him. Now I was willing to survive this last cliff, to get a pilot.

Only a few from our bunch came with me to Grottkau O/S. On 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1941 some few moved, with proudly raised heads, into the air base Grottkau O/S. So now the long-awaited airmen training should start. At that time no one suspected about the trouble in front of us, anyone saw only the ideal of flying. Only here we noticed, why so much energy was requested from us. We had to complete so many lessons, at nice weather was flown. Now

during October was bad weather, we sat very often in the barrack classes and eat the grey theory into ourselves, which also belongs to. The first flight service started, it went to the outside airfield Woisselsdorf. My first flight became a fiasco, Obltn. Leber, my first teacher, would already discharge me after my first half an hour flight. I forgot to buckle up at boarding, so I was continually forced to hold myself at the control stick. But my teacher believed I had no feeling for flying. Back then was the glider flying for me an experience, so now the motor flying was the real pleasure. Soon I got over my first inhibitions, my next flight teacher, Fw. Holland, taught me everything very easy, and did not let me trot too much rounds around the airfield. To trot around the airfield was not very beloved, for a good two kilometres with combination and parachute on the back was no small matter. Now the time came where we were realized alone to the elements, I had about 70 take-offs with teacher at the "Stieglitz" and I had to go alone now. It went better as I first assumed, in any case it went home at the evening with proud. Then under all possible conditions was flown, like e.g. final spot landings, emergency landing exercises, high altitude flights and not at least cross-country flights. This cross-country flights were the most beautiful in all my flying education. Requested were about 5000 kilometres with A-2 and B-1 types, and 8 to 10 000 kilometres with B-2 types. From Grottkau I flew to: Dresden, Bautzen, Görlitz, Königsberg i/N, Graudenz, Königsberg i/Ostpr., to Warsaw and Brünn. To describe every single flight would lead too far, but one was perhaps the most interesting, this one I will mention. I had the order to fly with an Ar-96 to Brünn. After a detailed map study the flight started, everything went fine. In my mind I was already at Brünn, but my Arado was only at 800 metres above Neisse. In front of me were the Altvater Mountains with their 1400 metres. The "good mill" would not get really come to height. At the area of Ziegenhals the engine did no longer participate. There was a hard blow, and the batten (*propeller*) stopped. Now it's time to act quickly: I searched for a favorable emergency landing field and sailed sliding towards it. A steep turn back, a giant slip, and my Arado stood safe at the field. I did not cause any damage.

After the cross-country flying started aerobatics, which gave to me great fun and inspired me for the fighter pilots flying. Not to forget there the instrument flight. My review at instrument flying was for a minimum as good as the review at aerobatics. This brought the advantage to me at the night flight, to fly very often as second leader. The night flight itself was the most interesting at the whole education. Here the most crashes were made. Until then I was blameless in this regard. Our education came to an end, my comrade Karl Obel had still to perform a night flight. I flew with him as second leader. He had nearly flown his circuit of the aerodrome to an end, I was fallen asleep. Suddenly a crack, a sudden awakening, and we could get out at ground level. My Karl was pale, but I could not say anything. With a "bawling-out" from our group flying teacher, OFw. Jarosch, we finished this last night flight. My comrade had to pay for this crash two times two-thirds of his flight pay. The non-flying comrades during this night, Peter Köster, Franz Thies, Heigl, Hannay, Pollak, Knoll and Fritze Drews laughed really hard. Was there only a few fuel, so it was vigorously drilling. What, by the way, made a lot of annoyance to us, for we only wanted to fly. The 1<sup>st</sup> of September, my birthday, was the most beautiful day for me. I got my pilots license, got Sergeant and to that my vacation ticket for two weeks relaxing vacation. This time I spent with my parents at Berlin. As a new pilot and Sergeant I walked indeed around two weeks with my uniform. The vacation passed, we all returned to Grottkau /OS. and waited for the transfer to further

schools. Our service consisted only, from time to time, to do a functional check flight. This flights often degenerated to “delight-flights”. Every week on Friday we went already on short vacation. Our destinations were: The reservoir at Ottmachau and Ziegenhals in the Sudetes. Here I often drove with my comrade , Uffz. Jüntgen. into the mountain forests of the Sudetes, we forgot the service of the week and recovered us well. Helmut Jüntgen wanted to be C-flyer, but he wasn't a soldier and could never combine aviation with soldiery. Already back then he did not like it. Nevertheless I didn't share his opinion, we got along well. On 5<sup>th</sup> November 1942 our paths split. He came to the C- School to Ohlau, and I to the C- School at Oels. This was completely against my will. I had this already promised my last flight teacher, if I was send to the C- School, I am detached within two weeks. It is clear to me, to become a fighter pilot, and therefore I was ready to do everything to get away from the C- School. I managed this, whilst I told the boss at a report about my ignorance about navigation. He let me test by the master navigator Schulz. For me the result was certain from the start, it should mean my replacement. I had achieved so, what I wanted. My comrades, who also wanted to be fighter pilots asked me, how I did that. I pushed off into the direction Prenzlau to the pilot verification school, not without having two days vacations at Berlin. Arrived at Prenzlau, I came to the about 500 pilots already waiting, it was a great “rotten” - bunch. Combat pilots with decorations, pilots from fighter -, destroyer - and C- Schools waited for their review. Mostly was antipathy of their supervisors the reason for replacement. Everywhere was a shortage of pilots, and here they can afford it, to send this people to the infantry and to air force storm battalions. I got at once to the fighter group. Here I met the comrades Homfeld, Zacher (*Hans?*), Rudnitzki, Slomski (*Alexander?*), Bepperling, Besendorfer and others. They all had committed to the fighter aviation and came later with me to the fighter school at Paris - Villacoublay. The fighter group had been a great bunch, no teacher dared it to give lessons for us. The navigations teacher only said short: “Navigation is poison for fighters” and left the classroom. So we had once more time to play “Doppelkopf”. The other half of the day, which was not provided for classes, was reserved for the flight service. Our flight teachers, all old “front rabbits”, OFw. Heinrich and OFw. Sawall, got us hard going. Here you were really in your element. There is nothing more, what could be nicer as the fighter flying. As trainer airplanes we had the “Arado 69”, “Arado 96” and the main thing, the Bf 109A. The biggest jump was, from the “Arado 96” to the Bf 109. There were more than 1000 h.p. still to be tamed. After a last lesson I climbed into the “109”, not without a beating of the heart, and shifted the throttle hesitantly to the front. After some meter of rolling distance she broke out a little to the left, however I just could pull her up to avoid a controlled crash. At about 500 meter above Prenzlau I found myself again for the first time. This was after all a little bit too fast for the beginning. After several over - shootings I made finally a successful landing. At this speed you have to be used to. After several Schwarm missions was our program at this school completed. There was Christmas vacation and afterwards a flight order, to fly a Fieseler “Stork” to Smolensk.

With Fw. Joe Stempin, Uffz. Herbolzheimer and Uffz. Vogel it went first of all to Berlin. After the vacation we met again at Erfurt - Cölleda. Like so often, the aircraft was clear, but the weather left a lot to be desired. We must, which was not entirely uncomfortable for us, spent New Year's Eve 1942 / 43 at Sömmerda. Here I got to know OFw. Günther Schön. Mid of January stopped there the fog, and the take-off started. Near Leipzig I made an emergency

landing during a snow shower, at the next days it went until Grottkau, my old school. Here I still met comrades from my old group, which got in the meantime teachers. The brother of Peter Köster, a Hptm. Köster, I had from here on as my companion. The flight was over Warsaw - Baranovice - Minsk - Orscha to Smolensk - South. Here I delivered the "Stork" to a paramedic unit. One wanted to keep me there, for operational flying for this unit. As I had the fighter pilots school in my mind, I waived this. End of January a "Ju" took me over Witebsk - Minsk - Warsaw to Berlin. A short visit at my parents, and it went again to Prenzlau. Small courier flights filled the time until my transfer on March. My comrades Herbolzheimer and Vogel, who had to bring a "Stork" to Finland, were reported as missing. We all were amazed, when they, short before my transfer, appeared at the beginning of March. They were named as "Model drop-outs", no one had accomplished this up till now. According to their stories they had a wonderful life at Helsinki and were afterwards some weeks at a small operating strip. What they did here, we don't want to get to the bottom. Ahead of us lies the fighter school, the so long desired school, who should apply to us the final touch. Like so often, also this transfer went over Berlin.

Here I had two weeks recreation vacation. This vacation came fast to the end and it is said: to leave to Paris - Villacoublay.

It was a wonderful ride with a second class wagon. This took a little longer than twenty hours. Arrived at Gare de L'Est, changed into the "Metro" and drove to Porte de Orleans. A bus brought us to the airfield. I never believed, to see the beautiful Paris so fast. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 1943 I was assigned to the first Staffel of the JG 105. Our Staffel commander was Oblt. (*Herbert*) Thurz, Group Commander Hptm. Hack and Commodore Major (*Richard*) Leppla. To our great horror fuel shortage prevailed also here, so we could not start with the training. Now it is, to shift guard every second day. The rest of the time we were free. Monetary we were in a better position as during recruit time, for we were entitled for a flight pay. We could afford quite a lot in Paris. Although in Berlin my little sister sat with 100 wishes: clothing fabric, shoes, perfume, etc., her wish list had no end. I spent my money always completely. There was a nice café at Petit Clamart, the name was "Chez Susi". Here most of the Francs were relocated for champagne and cognac. Also the military home at the Place de Rondell was not to be despised. Here you could eat very well, what was of course used by us, for the troop catering was not enough for our hungry stomachs. After a one month guard shifting, the flying started. My teacher was Fw. Niessmann, he made a real effort with us and he taught us a lot. It started here with the "Arado 96", lot of air-shooting, target approach and air combat exercises were besides Schwarm missions the main program. Here were only some items of the Bf 109. We got the French fighter aircrafts of the type "Dewoitine 520" for the further training. Our group enjoyed the glory, to kill all 40 "Dewoitine 520" within a single month. I was here also involved with a belly landing. Uffz. Besendorf made his first take-off by this and didn't get down to the airfield "Villa-Süd", in spite of several landing attempts. An out-landing with 80% damage got him the replacement and a court-martial. Later he was a courier pilot in Italy, if he had survived this war?

Our training at "Villa-Süd" was completed, we got to "Nord", to fly there the "Fw 190". This was the most majestic "bird", I ever had in my hands. With his massive double-row radial-engine gained this our respect from the very first beginning.

Uffz. Bauhuber, Uffz. Förster and OFw. Hollmann trained me on it. There were moments, I will never forget: The massive engine, which took my sight, only keeping the view to the side, the Fw 190 pushed away with me. This way of taking-off with the tail down was new to all of us. The aircraft literally hung at the "Latte" (*propeller*). Flying and climbing so fast, we never had flown a "mill" (*Mühle, aircraft*) like this. The first landing was difficult, to come in to land with 220 kph, that was a lot. You could ever sing: "The landing cross is fast passing by ...". After several landing attempts I managed then my first landing. Schwarm missions and shooting flights followed. Flieger Mehling, already punished for § 92 (*against flying discipline and order*), took the target with him, for he absolutely would reach 100% at air-shooting. We had nearly flown about four hours on the Fw 190, there came a scrambling order against approaching American four-engine bomber units. We took-off with eight aircrafts, OFw. Immerl, the only trainer at this mission, leaded us. With some heart beating it went with a hectic pace up to 7000 meters. We sighted this "flying fortresses" for the first time, a gigantic sight. It may have been about 200 items. Our old "Front rabbit" shoot one of them out. Seven unskilled "Young rabbits" rushed on them from all sides and hammered with two 2 cm canons and two MG 13,1 mm onto the "Boeing Fortresses". The attacks were from all sides, we nearly rammed each other. We counted seven parachutes. Near an airfield the Boeing crashed down and burnt out. It was, as it turned out later, the airfield Etampes, south of Paris (26<sup>th</sup> June 1943, 18.44 hrs, OFw. Alois Immerl, 2. / JG 105). We lost in the excitement all orientation and found only one airfield, where we landed at once. It was Orleans - Briecy. Shortly thereafter returning to Paris, we reported back. The victory was confirmed for OFw. Immerl, for he attacked at first and eliminated the tail gunner. This first air combat was so exiting, although harmless, that I could not close my eyes during the following night. So it looked about, when you got shot down. Back then you thought about, although a human being could lose his life? Who of us thought at this time about the coming air battles over central Germany? Where we often fought with 80 aircrafts against 1000 "Boeings" and "Liberators" and their fighter cover. The training went on more seriously on the matter, now we got a little foretaste, how it looks at the air battles. Now it meant to observe the air space and look for enemy fighters. Individual comrades out of my group were shot down during their training flight by American low flying aircrafts. After the completion of the training it went to Berlin for recreation vacation. I spent here beautiful summer days, however also some bombing attacks, they were less beautiful and emphasized the seriousness of the damn war. Why was this necessary? These two weeks passed by quickly. Returned to Paris, my transfer was present. It went to the fighter replacement group east to Toulouse. Because of temporarily fuel shortage they could not use us and send us once more into vacation. From Toulouse the ride went to Narbonne, Carcassonne, Arcachon, Montpellier along the Mediterranean Sea, Nimes, up the Rhône valley, Lyon and Strasbourg and again to Berlin. My parents were quite astonished to see me yet again. The joy was of course great. But this time the vacation couldn't be over fast enough, for I wanted quite soon to the front. Arrived at Toulouse, an eager training started. Here my teachers were OFw. Rappel, OFw. Schönfelder, OFw. Simon, OFw. Lange and Uffz. Gerells. Major Graf leaded the group then, but got then again to the eastern front. Here was the flying sharp and without regard to losses. Fw. Rudnitzki was replaced, for he flew too soft. The Staffel captain was here Hptm. Ständel and longed for the last.

At a shooting flight I got into a thunderstorm and didn't find the airfield no more. The rain pulled always lower and obstructed my view. I had to decide for an emergency landing near L'Isle Jourdain. My landing gear was fallen out by a fault in the electric system and did not retract. So I could not do a belly landing. Across a high voltage line, I slipped across a vineyard of about 200 m length and touched down hard at a meadow of 200m. The brakes had to give the last one. The left wheel of my Fw 190 became independent. That was my luck. Ten meter in front of deep ditch stood my "mill". It poured in rivers, the thunderstorm was not over, there came an old French "Mütterchen" (*slang for an elder lady*) and asked me about my state. For I understood a little bit French, the communication was not difficult. It was touching, how she worried about me, brought me something to eat and pulled an old coat over me, which I kept dressed until my flying jacket was dry. I saw in this old lady my mother again. Here was nothing to feel about hate and hostility. Here I became aware, that hate was only a preached thing. The woman didn't ask long, who am I, but helped me out of human compassion. Uffz. Würfel took-off the aircraft. He was a great fellow and made this. Hptm. Stendl took me back to the airfield with his sidecar bike. He said to me: "This Würfel gets to the front and shoot within a short time for the Knights Cross". He got to the front and shot continuously down. End of 1943 he got the Knights Cross for 78 victories, was rammed during aerial combat by a comrade and crashed down deadly near Rogatschew. (*The aerial combat was on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1944, parachute jump, died 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1944 in a soviet prison camp near Stalino, KC 4.5.44*) At the southern French area I made the most beautiful cross-country flights. It went until Bordeaux, to the Spanish border until Andorra, further to Perpignan, along the Mediterranean Sea, with low level flight to Marseille and Toulon. This wonderful, colorful area, I cannot describe, with sober words this would only reduce the value. Our last Schwarm missions on Focke-Wulf were flown along the Garonne valley. They were hard and requested our full ability. This ability we should proof soon at the front. We really enjoyed the last days at Toulouse, grapes and peaches were eaten in huge amounts. The beautiful swimming pool at Toulouse gave to us the right cooling after the hot flight service. The departure started. Uffz. (*Helmut*) Bauhuber, Franz Kindler and my humble self we were transferred to JG Mölders at Briansk. The trip went of course to Berlin, everyone visited once more the home, to say good bye. An at all corners burning Berlin, received me. A heavy bombing raid happened prior to our arrival. It was the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1943. It looked terrible at the streets. Nothing kept me here for long. After a short visit at my parents, I left out here in the direction Krakow. Arrived there, I again met my comrades, who already waited for me. With a Ju 52 it went until Kiev. We wanted to continue to Briansk, but from here started the retreat. We reached shortly before Konotop, but must back to Neshin. At Neshin we got a Ju 52, which flew through Gomel, Minsk to Smolensk. Obstlt. (*Karl-Gottfried*) Nordmann welcomed us with admonishing words and allocated us to the staff Staffel. We three unseparable reported us at Hptm. (*von, Diethelm*) Eichel - Streiber, Staffel captain of the staff Staffel. The z.b.V., Oblt. (*Adolf?*) Noll showed us the quarters and served us good. We were not used to that. At the schools we were always an "ass in the last link". At once we just get properly into the front operations. Fw. (*Hans Wolfgang*) Krahnke, OFw. (*Alfred*) Rauch and OFw. (*Helmut*) Schönfelder, who returned in the meantime, instructed us. My first operational flight in the east was on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1943. As Kaczmarek (*wingman*) of KC owner OFw. (*Anton*) Hafner I just felt very safe. We flew free hunt in the area of Dutschowtschina, Jarzewo and Briansk. **Just** when we arrived at the main battle line northeast of Smolensk, we



got air combat with eight Russian fighters. Toni Hafner “cranked sharp” and shot down two of them. I did not get to shoot and was always a “behind man”. At first, for just a stunning “cranking”, I wasn’t up to it. It took all my skills, not to lose my foreman. There were more and more “Rednoses” and we flew continuously full throttle, not to get into an inferior situation. Now it was high time, to think about the return flight. Toni dived to the west across the main battle line, I with a distance of 800 m behind. The light and medium flak fired with all their barrels, something like that I had never seen. I had possibly 700 km/h during the dive. Suddenly “rang the bell” at the motor and in the cockpit, smoke got into the cockpit. I realized, the flak had hit me into the motor. I pulled up the Focke Wulf, shot the cabin roof away and left, the now starting to burn aircraft. Barely as the suction pulled me out, I pulled the rip cord of the parachute. There was a strong jolt, I lost my consciousness. When I woke up, I laid at a Russian farmer house amongst armored infantrymen, which called me back to life with cognac, who recovered me shortly before out of no man’s land. I was brought back with a car to Smolensk - north. I was welcomed with a big hello by my comrades and they congratulated me to my “birthday”. My Staffel captain predicted not a long life to me, if I further flew careless into flak zones. On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1943 was strongly celebrated. At only one aircraft loss at our Staffel, we had shot down 12 Russians. Toni Hafner had at another mission further three, a total of five, Krahnke (*Hans Wolfgang*) four, and Willi Hübner, Schönfelder (*Helmuth*), Rauch (*Alfred*) brought one victory each, home. The transfer to Roslawl - Seschinskaja followed, from here were low level attacks to Briansk flown, here Fw. Krahnke was killed, after 46 victories, by an infantry hit (10.9.43). Great sadness was within the Staffel, this was a strong loss for us. Our retreat continued. We three young pilots within the Staffel never got to know gaining ground. It’s said all the time, relocation backwards. To endure this hard air battles, were not easy for us beginners. The Ivan was always in the majority, also his “mills” were better. By itself, his pilots had a shorter training than we. In this single point we were in advance. Now it was also said, to leave Smolensk, our nice casino within the war school was blown up including the other buildings at the airfield.

We had transferred to Stara - Bychow and flew free hunt in the area of Gomel and cover for fighter bombers. We flew missions against bridges, flak positions and deployments of the enemy. Here I learned about the heroic death of my comrade (*Hans*) Bepperling (14.10. 1943) who was shot down near Witebsk.

After a mission east of Orscha I landed at Stara - Bychow and rolled back fast to our site. Here my Focke Wulf made a headstand. Unfortunately this saw my Squadron Commodore Obstltn. Nordmann (*Karl - Gottfried*), I got a mighty ticking-off and afterward a strict reprimand. Transfer was ordered, this time to Witebsk. Our missions went to Gorodok and Newel. Toni Hafner chased after a Pe-2, I hoped he will shoot wide, but no, at the first burst of fire he hit the recon plane deadly. It was his 105<sup>th</sup> victory. On the 5<sup>th</sup> November “Diana” was kind to me. A Yak-7 was, after a violent “cranking”, my prey. She crashed down south of Newel and smashed. Here, south of Newel, constantly approached Il-2 formations, coming across the Jeseritsche (*Ezerische*) - sea. On 10<sup>th</sup> November 1943 two times the luck was on my side. At this day two Il-2 felt victims to my weapons. At this mission I had quite a few hits at the Focke Wulf. Uffz. Bauhuber had here his seventh victory, while Franz Kindler stood at

number one. From Witebsk it went to Korosten for operations at the Dnjepr-Pripjet-delta. Here had the Staffel some success, without own losses. A little bit later we were again at Stara-Bychow, to transfer soon to Bobruisk. The operational area now was Rogatschew, Schlobin, Mosyr, Kalynkowitschi. It does not work for me, to perform a victory, I had a lot of bad-luck with my weapons and got often instead a lot of hits on my own aircraft. Quite a few belly-landings run always smoothly on own territory. In the majority we now flew fighter bomber missions, were we achieved good success. Quite a few direct hits on bridges and railway lines, just like the railway station Ostankowitschi we were able to show. Peter Bauer and Hptm. Eichel - Streiber with Toni Hafner and two young crews, shot down 25 Russians within a day (15<sup>th</sup> 12. 1943). The boss and Uffz. Bauer (*Konrad*) by itself, eight and seven, Uffz. Heinz Stoy shot an Il-2 down, but was shot down at the same moment by a Russian fighter (22<sup>nd</sup> 2. 1944). His burning impact was about 50 m behind the Il-2. Fw. Lingenau performed his first victory south of Bobruisk and OFw. Fritz Lüddecke his 35<sup>th</sup> victory (2.7.1944!?). The winter of 43/44 brought a lot of fog and let rest our aircrafts from the hot air battles of the autumn.

On 15<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1943 it went to Berlin for Christmas vacation. OFw. König, our loyal “Stork flyer”, took me to Minsk, to pick up spare parts there. Our Superior Foreman, OFw. Kärcher, was already waiting for them. My first mechanic, OGefr. Jetschina and my armorer, OGefr. Zucht had to work at my “mills”, to get them clear until my vacation ended. From Minsk on flew a courier Ju-52 to Berlin, this suits me, this saved the long rail travel for me and I got therefore two days more vacation. The vacation was clouded by bombing attacks. My thoughts were only at my comrades at the front, with them I felt inseparably connected for the common experienced hours spent together. My parents were not happy with me, they noticed the change in me. The experience at the front had us reshaped and made hard. How often passed us the reaper during the last month, one could see it at the marks he left. Hits at the engine, cockpit, fuselage and wings, this bullets should not yet hit the pilots seat, that was just fate.

During this Christmas vacation I met my old class mate, with her I spent some beautiful vacation hours. Ruth Koschinski, my dance partner at some nice balls during peace time, back then we were happily together, now we nearly found a word, to remember that. She lost a brother near Stalingrad and now she stands on her own. On 5<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1944 I left Berlin with the aim, to get fairly quick to the front. From Warsaw I flew back with a new Fw 190 through Baranowicze to Bobruisk. A big hello welcomed me at the Staffel. The next missions were flown to Kalynkowitschi and brought great success. I flew as Kaczmarek of Hptm. Eichel - Streiber, air battles with 200 enemy airplanes were here no rarity, we ourselves flew most with Staffel size of twelve aircrafts. My chief shot down two Pe-2 (12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1944), I myself one Pe-2, who crashed into the city and burnt. Here also the young crews became successful, Uffz. (*Fridolin*) Soiderer, Fw. (*Kurt*) Walz and Uffz. (*Hans*) Maier shot down one enemy each, most an Il-2. A rapid transfer to Terespol near Brest - Litowsk followed. Here we flew during February - March the Kowel missions. Kowel was enclosed by the Russians and should be relieved. We flew here six to eight missions a day, could support effectively our infantry and could achieve good success. Cover for transport gliders and transport was not a pleasant order, but was accomplished. Here in the area of Kowel were good Russian flak

units, which brought us painful losses. With bullet riddled aircrafts we had more often to belly-land. My best comrades, Uffz. Franz Kindler (*3<sup>rd</sup> April 1944*) then Fw. Walz (*3<sup>rd</sup> April 1944*) and Uffz. Soiderer (*5<sup>th</sup> April 1944*) were shot down. Franz Kindler could rescue himself with the parachute, but got into Russian captivity. Also our, for a long time suspicious for the oak leaves, Toni Hafner had to emergency land near Lubomel, within partisan territory. I had seen the place of his belly-landing and flew at once, returned from my mission, with the "Fieseler Stork" and got him out. About the loss of Franz Kindler I did not get over fast. We always shared joy and sorrow with each other. All enemy missions we flew together. Now we were torn apart. From Bobruisk on, Heinz Haberland left as test pilot to Central Germany. Uffz. (*Helmut*) Bauhuber was transferred to another group, and later shot down near Riga (*12<sup>th</sup> July 1944*). As Schwarm leader I came to home defense and had to say "farewell" to my beloved staff Staffel. The travel went to Berlin to Burg near Magdeburg. At Berlin we first reported to the General of the fighter pilots. Here told us Oberst (*Hannes*) Trautloft about the seriousness of the situation. One talked about new aircrafts, to relieve the situation at the home defense units. Arrived at Burg, they handed to us the good old "109" which made us soon sick to death. Together with Fw. Schneider, Uffz. Hoyer, Uffz. Ihle, Lt. (*Wolfgang*) Tornow and Oblt. Enkelmann. I came to the II. Group (*Staffel!*) of the J.G. "Udet". Within the Staffel itself we found nobody but young pilots without any front-line experience. They had already the "Mustang" shock in their limbs, before they had ever seen this aircraft at all. With the old Bf 109 and in the majority totally inexperienced pilots we should stand against a 20 times superiority. Wasn't this insanity? But, we were soldiers, this meant only, execute commands. The hope about new aircrafts let us forgot the bad situation. They talked about jet - and rocket fighters, which made us widely enthusiastic. The first mission above central Germany started for me. Except the Staffel captain, Obltn. (*Walter*) Bohatsch, I was the only one, who had experience in air battle. The J. G. 3 gathered over the Müritz - Lake at about 10 000 m. We had to fly with the "109" high altitude cover for the heavy fighters. This was an ungrateful task. Our battle group was about 80 - 100 aircraft strong. We started with an attack course 190° into the direction Brandenburg. From ground control "Horizont" were here the "Dicke Autos" reported. Major (*Friedrich-Karl*) Müller, the successor of Oberst (*Wolf-Dietrich*) Wilcke, led the formation. We flew closer, as we saw at the horizon the formations of "Flying Fortresses". His voice on the radio was a reassurance for all "young rabbits". It was a gigantic sight. Around the bomber formations the fighter cover whizzed in big crowds, consisting of "Mustangs" and "Lightnings" and "Thunderbolts". We frontally got into the bomber stream for an attack, a terrible massacre started. Bursting, burning "Flying Fortresses", shot down "Me's" and "Focke - Wulf's" resulted in a hot mess. Waiting calmly above, the enemy cover-fighters. Major Müller gathered them together for to fly a second attack. Out of the bomber formation of 50 bombers, already 35 had fallen. Also our ranks were thinning strongly. The sky was filled with smoke and flames. In between, German and American parachutes. Our battle group tried to recollect, but was continuously attacked and fragmented by "Mustangs". I was beaten by this air battle at 8000 m altitude. My aircraft didn't had the same speed like the others. I hung back and was chased by six "Lightnings", who gave me a full broadside (*German: "Volle Ladung"*). Like a miracle, I could escape from them, and landed at Schwerin. Up till now, this aerial combat was my hardest one. After hours I climbed into my aircraft and returned to Burg. I could report the "effective fire" on a "Boeing". The reason was: I started too early with my firing and could, when I was near, not

give the death blow to the Flying Fortress for lack of ammunition. The group had quite a few losses. Nearly every aircraft had got hits. - On the next morning we again had readiness. 2 - 4 bomber divisions collected over Norwich and in the area of London, reported our message radio. There was no clouds on the sky for our great regret. It was to despair. Everyone sighted, when the 30 minute readiness was changed to a one hour readiness. The bomber units flew with south course into France. This couldn't interest us then. Then the day passed quietly. It was done "Schonflüge" (about "preserving flights", flights with reduced power) with brand new aircrafts. I swung myself on a new "bird" and visited Berlin. I crossed the Wannsee at low level, even though, it was strictly forbidden. For a week I had not received any mail and I had to check at home, what's up. Over Steglitz it went down from 500 m to 50 m over my house and up with a vertical spiral. As my mother wrote me later, this resulted in a crowd. This felt under §§ 92 "Flying discipline and order" (against!). Nevertheless, I can't help. This was the only relaxation to the heavy missions. To fly over the Märkisches Land was wonderful. You could forget the war. Only the weapons button at the stick and the reflex sight in front of your eyes remembered you again and again, that you were not sitting in a sport plane.

The nice city of Burg impressed me. After some hard missions it went into town, which spent us a lot of recreation. On one of the first days in May I met Gerda Gresch, a dear and kind young girl (*Mädel*), who was more for me, as every other girl I met before. We forged plans for the future, but it was only a dream, we knew both. She was working at the hospital and saw, how many pilots have been hospitalized after every mission. How many hearts of the girls were flying with us, when our group took-off at Burg? And how many were disappointed, when quite a few did not return. All of them feared for us, when they could see the contrails at the sky. - Could we during the last time just master the overwhelming power in the east, here in the empire we stood simply hopeless against the units of Flying Fortresses. The general of fighters, (*Adolf*) Galland, came to visit us. We told him about our concerns and he had to take note of the bitter truth we daily felt on our own body. He comforted us: Within a few weeks new aircraft are here! We smiled bitterly, we took-off with 30 aircrafts, then seven did not return at all, further seven had to jump with the parachute, some reported back from the mission out of the hospital and the rest returned with totally shot aircraft at an airfield anywhere.

The 12<sup>th</sup> May 1944 was again a main battle day. Bomber units were approaching to South - west-Germany. Our unit gathered at 10 000 m over Kassel, with 100 aircrafts we flew to Frankfurt/M. Arrived there, at 12 000 m the enemy cover fighters were buzzing around in heavy formations. We got in well from the front into the second bomber group. I caught a Boeing with my three cm cannon, which immediately pulled out of the formation, dropped the bombs in emergency and went down uncontrolled in a spin. She crashed down about 35 km northwest of Frankfurt/M. and shattered. For a second time it went into the bomber formation. Of about 70 "Boeings" 50 were shot down. The rest dropped the bombs in emergency and closed in to the first bomber group. I flew away to southwest and was frontally attacked by six "Mustangs". I fired like mad and got one, which burning exploded. This was at 9000m. Now they chased me like wild, I saw the tracers whistling around my aircraft just like that. Three "Me's" approached to me and took the "Mustangs" from my neck. Totally soaked in sweat I

landed at Frittlar with my destroyed aircraft. Here landed also Uffz. Einkenel, he had got a nervous shock and could not fly again. I returned to Burg with his aircraft. Over the airfield I waggled two times. After the landing my comrades lifted me with a "Horridoh" out of the aircraft. One "Boeing" and one "Mustang" were confirmed to me as my 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> victory. My built-in Leica had filmed the victories. The movie went to the RLM. On 14.5. (24.5.44!) I could win my 6<sup>th</sup> victory, it was a "Liberator", which went burning down to earth, north of Braunschweig. Then the air battle north of the Müritz Lake followed. I was, before we reached the bomber units, hit by a "Mustang". With eight hits in the engine and the cooler I belly-landed near Malschin at Mecklenburg (19.5.44). With parachute and radio under my arm, I reported back at Burg from my mission. We had become less again. Some of the younger pilots did not survive their first mission. The 28.5.44 was a black day for our Staffel; over Magdeburg collected the battle group "Udet" at 7000 m. Right into our assembly got the enemy cover fighters. A heavy dogfight started. I could shoot down a "Mustang", as my Kaczmarek exploded in flames. It was Uffz. (Hans) Herdy, I could not help him, the superiority was too big. Chased by six "Mustangs", with hits in the engine and cooler I had to spin away. At about 5000 m I could regain the aircraft, the cabin was totally iced. For a belly-landing was due, I dropped the cabin roof. A look backwards, a "Mustang" sat behind me and gave me the rest. I unbuckled and left the rudderless aircraft. From about 4500 m I let myself drop down to 500 m and pulled the rip-cord of the parachute. Apart from me Magdeburg, under me the Elbe River, I was floating down to earth. Above me a hell was going on, the air battle was at full swing. Barely landed, a bomb carpet covered a tank factory south of Magdeburg. At Burg, arrived at the Staffel, I learned, that Fw. (Otto) Büssow (30.5.44!) and Uffz. Herdy were killed. Also some of the younger pilots did not return. Of eight aircrafts who took-off: Three total loss, three serious wounds and two parachute jumps. The Staffel captain allocated me a new aircraft, as to be ready for missions of the next days. I've had enough of my last mission, it was my second parachute jump. How should this go on? Further air battles followed, it was getting worse and worse. Every morning, before we moved to the airfield, we looked to the sky. There were often no clouds, which could be our federate. When we got short term readiness, we dress with our combination, apply the life jacket, a last stay in front of the aircraft. Still once had the ground under the feet. This ground one could have kiss, perhaps today it was for the last time. Who knew of us, who is the next today? Perhaps it's me. Everyone could be next in line. A jump onto the wing, applying the parachute, and into the old Messerschmitt. The first mechanic is helping lovingly with the harness, a grip into the right pocket of the combination, yes also my small teddy bear, I did not forgot my talisman. Ursula Förster, a girl friend from school, gave it once to me. "He should bring you luck", she said. And he brought me luck. - The start command came. Four bomber divisions were approaching to South-West-Germany. Thirty aircraft of the JG 3 took-off from Burg with course 210°. So air battle after air battle followed. Our IV. Group, the "Totenkopf-Jäger" (named by the Americans "the death-head-fighters") hit hard in between and had good success. - The invasion followed. We transferred to Lippspringe near Paderborn and then to Hannover - Wunsdorf. Fw. Bauer, an old comrade from the staff Staffel, had shot down at the "Totenkopf-Jäger" 12 Boeings and was approaching to the Knights Cross. Many of my comrades went for refreshing to the invasion front. Oberst (Hans-Joachim, "Hajo") Herrmann made a sharp speech. He reminded them, to fight like teutons. Succeeded the enemy to take ground in France, the war is lost.

My comrades gave there their last, they nearly all felt in France. I myself returned to the eastern front. I flew with a new aircraft from Warsaw to Minsk. My comrades, who saw me as already dead, were quite astonished about my return. - Here started the huge retreat of the German troops. Near Beresino we flew cover for the bridges. From Minsk to Molodetschno was the road of death. The Russians were broken through and shot into our columns and into the Russian refugee columns and destroyed everything. We transferred to Lida and got into a bombing attack. Several missions flown here, were without any success. Kobryn and Pruznana were our next operational airfields. I constantly leaded a Schwarm and got so better to attack and victory. At Baranowicze it was a Pe-2 and a Yak-7, my 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> victory. Our Staffel captain, Hptm. Thiel felt at a low level attack by flak near Wirballen (*Thiel, Edwin, Stst. 14.7.44*) Again we lost an expert. He had 70 (76) victories. Oblt. Busse (*Heinz*) is now leading the Staffel. He and Oblt. Kraft (*Erwin*) had good success during the last time. They got for me serious competitors. Oblt. Busse passed me quickly, while Oblt. Kraft stopped at five victories. Schönfelder (*Helmut, KC, 56 victories*) and Lüdecke, as well as Willi Hübner (*Wilhelm Hübner, KC, 62 victories*) approached to 50 victories. The staff Staffel was the best one within the squadron. She had the far most victories. It was further transferred to the west and backwards. Mydziercec, Krewica and Warsaw-Okezie were our next operational airfields. From here we could fly some successful missions. Some days it was quite in Modlin, it went then to Jürgenfelde in East Prussia. We finally had now the satisfaction to have German ground under one's feet, but here it was mandatory, no step backwards. It was something different, as to fly over Russia. We had good success in hard air battles near Wilkowischken. OFw. Lüdecke (*Fritz Lüdecke, KC, 50 victories*) shot down his 50<sup>th</sup> enemy and felt then at the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1944 near Eydkau in East Prussia. I myself could shot down near W. a Yak-9, a Mig-3 and an Il-2. Near Schaken a Yak-5 (*Mig-3*) was my 13<sup>th</sup> victory. On 14.8.44 we transferred to Lobellen near Tilsit. From here we jumped off to Ezere in Courland. We had good success near Autz, Doblen and around Riga. OFw. Lingnau felt on 20.8.44 (*9 victories*) in an air battle. He was followed by Oblt. Busse (*25.8.44, SW Auen, 22 victories*) and Oblt. Kraft on 25.8.44 (*East of Ezere, 4 victories*). - Near Autz they had their first encounter with the La-7 (*La-5?*), this they could not withstand. Oblt. Busse had just downed short time before his "21<sup>st</sup>". The Staffel paid now his heaviest blood toll since a long time. Lt. Sturm (*Gustav Sturm, 22 victories*) came from home defense and was leading now our Staffel. Toni Hafner got in the meantime Oblt. and leaded another Staffel. He moved towards the 200 victory mark. For all of us he was a shining example related to dedication and excellent skills. At the channel, in Africa and Russia was no enemy who could put an end to him.

The staff Staffel transferred to Memel for cover of the harbor and ship escort. I myself made a lot of "seat readiness" with my wingmen, Uffz. (*August*) Bach and OGefr. (*Willy*)Weber. We were always after Pe-2 reconnaissance planes. The seat readiness was worth it. Two scrambles were ending with a Pe-2 victory each. This were my victories No. 14 and 15. The one Pe-2 dropped about 40 km west of Memel into the Baltic Sea, the other about 30 km northeast of Memel into a swamp. An Il-2, a Lak-5 (*La-5*) and a Boston were here confirmed to me as 18<sup>th</sup> victory. I could help the both, Uffz. Bach and Uffz. Weber, to a victory.

On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1944 I came as fighter trainer to the Replacement Group North to Liegnitz in Silesia. I didn't quite agree, for now I was reasonably fit for the air battle. Order is order, so I became fighter trainer.

Arrived at Liegnitz, the other comrades of J.G. Mölders were already present. - The leading of the staff Staffel at Liebau was continued by the newly made Lt. Hübner, from success to success. My wingman, Uffz. Bach (14.12.44) felt during a fighter bomber mission near Polangen into the Baltic Sea. - A group was allocated to me at Liegnitz, and the training started; fuel was available in huge amounts, what we could not notice during the last time at the front. Five missions, that meant 5 - 6 flying hours per day was the average for us flying trainers, to this came two lessons, you had to give. Aerial combat tactics and aircraft detection service were my main teaching subjects, besides aerial combat experience reports.

This was a responsible and nice task, to educate young fellows for fighter pilots. The efforts here were quickly forgotten. The small town Liegnitz offered us much variety, for it was completely intact. A lot of effort gave me a group of NCO's, senior ensigns and officers, who came from bomber units and wanted to get fighters. But within a 25 - hour flying program they got the necessary experience on their way. Oblt. Ballasus (*Ballasus, Waldemar*, \* 16.5.20), Oblt. Mielcke (*Mielke, Udo*, \* 21.8.21), Oblt. Müller (?) and Hptm. Post (?) were enthusiastic and stayed concentrated. All of them counted already more than 30 "springs".

It went often at low level to Neisse, the Ottmachauer reservoir, to Breslau and above the anti-tank ditch, who were dug by girls and woman, back to Liegnitz. Most of our aerobatics we did over the anti-tank ditches. Uffz. Saalman, OFw. Rappel, OFw. Hollmann, Uffz. Mager, Gefr. Messmer, Uffz. Martin, OFw. Pflingst, Uffz. Lindinger, Uffz. Hoppe, OFw. Mink, OFw. Mildner and me, took-off, each with a Schwarm, for aerial combat training above Haynau and Liegnitz at 500 m altitude. A "wild circus" started. Final success: One dead, one seriously wounded, two aircraft collided. The commander blocked any of our sutler-rations for three month. Oblt. (*Anton*) Lindner was here Staffel captain, he promised me, as soon as he gets to the front, to catch me up. Several times came "four engine units" from the south. At one mission I could shoot effectively at a "Boeing". I got an order, together with six students, to drive to Wiesbaden, to pick up aircrafts.

The reception at Wiesbaden - Erbenheim was great. As they learned, that I am from JG Mölders, they asked me, if we will return. Unfortunately I had to disappoint this people. The squadron fought in the east. Here was the front only 80 km away, the air force of the Americans steamrolled our frontlines with bomb carpets. I experienced an attack on Mainz - Kastel. It was terrible. I flew back to Liegnitz with a Bf 109, got over Frankfurt/M. aerial combat with four "Thunderbolts", who fortunately unharmed me. My students followed me during the next six weeks. They amused themselves at Kassel, where they stopped-over. Bad weather or inoperable aircrafts was simulated by them. In the meantime Ivan reached the Oder River. We transferred with our fighter group to Haldersleben in Denmark. The stop-over was at Berlin - Straussberg. Bad weather for a longer time, gave the possibility to me, to drive at home. Berlin was heavily destroyed and offered a sad picture. I then flew to Wittstock, where I knew that my sister was in the meantime at the air force, to Flensburg. Returning with the railway to Berlin, I collected my second Messerschmitt at Straussberg. This time at the stop-over at Perleberg, I saw the Messerschmitt 262, our turbine fighter, my heart stood still, as I saw this bird flying. At this moment you forgot the bad situation at the front. This was a miracle. Returned to Haldersleben, I heard, that three of my students were shot down. Hptm. Post, Oblt. Ballasus and Oblt. Müller had made their first acquaintance with 40 "Mustangs"

over Hamburg, and all three were shot down. My request for JG Mölders to Danzig was present. It went to Berlin, the situation here was more sinister than ever. Russian tanks had advanced across the Oder River. With my optimism I didn't realized the seriousness of the situation. The good-bye from my mother was very difficult. She apparently felt better than me, that this was a good-bye for a long time, perhaps forever. I flew with a Fw 190 from Schönwalde to Stettin and Danzig. Oblt. Lindner took me at once into his Staffel. The hope, to come into the glorious staff Staffel, I had to give up. The group commander, Hptm. (*Günther*) Schack, had got the "Oak leaves" for 165 victories. Besides this, nearly no one of the "old people" where at the Staffel. Oblt. Hafner (*17.10.44*), decorated with the "Oak leaves" for 204 victories as 8<sup>th</sup> highest scoring pilot, was fallen over East Prussia. Uffz. (*Paul*) Messmer (*16.1.45*) was shot down by an Il-2 during a scramble. I succeeded more often, to get a victory.

My 19<sup>th</sup> victory, a Lak-5 (*La-5*) felt during February near Graudenz. Then I could bring down an Il-2 during the fighting near Zinthen. A Yak-9 and an Il-2 near Danzig and Prussian Stargard were my 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> victory. Out of the Il-2 the pilot could save himself with the parachute. He was the Staffel captain at the 324. Battle Fighter Regiment, captain Puschkow. I could be present at his interrogation. As he attacked with four Il-2 the railway line near Prussian Stargard, I caught him at 100 m altitude. At the first burst he caught fire. The next Il-2 I attacked, I nearly had rammed them. Hptm. Post, Fhr. Koltermann, Uffz Neuner and Uffz. (*Helmut*) Wieland were my wingmen.

Axel Bodey, OFhr. Pickert and Uffz. (*Helmut*) Driesen leaded the Rotten, when we flew Schwarm missions. During this mission's we saw again and again the terrible picture of the refugees. They marched in columns of three over the lagoon, a never ending stream of misery. It was a single funeral march.

During a ship escort cover Gefr. Maderthaner (*Franz Maderthanner*) dropped during his first mission north of Hela into the sea. At an attack of 40 Tu-2 OFhr. Bodey shot down his first one.

During March felt a Lak-7 (*La-7?*) and two Yak-3, as my 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> fighter near Danzig and Gotenhafen. It was difficult, to come to an attack near Gotenhafen. The own flak fired reckless and complicated our attack. Fhr. Koltermann opened the swimming season near Zoppot. He was shot down and dropped into the Baltic Sea. Artillery and bombing units covered daily the airfield Langfuhr and we nearly got no start commando. The losses at the ground were higher than in the air. Now everyone hoped, to get out soon of this pocket. On 24<sup>th</sup> of March we took-off under heavy fire from the airfield Langfuhr and transferred to Pillau - Neutief. Also here we were badly tormented by bombs and artillery. We transferred to Brüsterort. I met here again the comrades of the staff Staffel. Lt. Hübner (*KC 28.2.45*) and OFw. Schönfelder (*KC 31.3.45*) got from General Uebe (*General Major, chief of the air force command East Prussia*) the Knights Cross. During the next day smashed Il-2, Pe-2 and Aira-Cobra-fighter bombers (*P-39*) the airfield to pieces. The bomb craters were filled again and we flew missions the next day. During a bombing attack we took-off. Lt. Hübner felt near Königsberg (*7.4.45, near Neukuhren, flak hit*), Uffz. Weber, my former wingman, was badly wounded and bailed out with the parachute. Uffz. Hans Merbeler (*26.3.45*) did not return



from a mission. Uffz. Driesen felt during a scramble. I had a dogfight of about one hour over the airfield with eight and more "Airacobras". There was nothing more to be done. You get only "den Laden voll" (verbally "the shop filled", full package), and don't get yourself to a victory. The group commander, Hpt. Schack, suffered heavy burns at the face and bailed out with the parachute (12.4.45). He got with a Ju 52 to Rügen. At every evening of a survived day we stood on the cliffs of Brüsterort and looked to the west, whether we could escape this hell?

No, it was clear. No one gets out of here. Uffz. Gärtner (*Bruno*, 1.4.45) and Uffz. Will (*Wilhelm*, 24.3.45) felt at the cliffs. On 13<sup>th</sup> April some T-34 stood at the airfield border. We could just take-off from the bombed field. Transfer order to the Vistula flats, to Junker - Troylhof. Quite a few first landed at Littausdorf near Fischhausen. Here smashed the Ivan the aircrafts to pieces. At the Vistula flats we experienced the most terrible days of the war. We got 60 new aircraft from the empire. On 27.4.45, a mission to Pillau, with ten Me 109 we flew an attack against 60 Pe-2, covered by 40 Yak-3. Above Pillau we could shot down five Pe-2. One of the Pe-2 was my 26<sup>th</sup> victory. We were afterwards chased by the Yak-3. Arrived at the airfield, with no more drop of fuel, waited already the Aira-Cobra-fighter-bombers. A rapid landing, pulling the "quick-stop", that the propeller stopped, and headfirst into the next splinter trench. Twenty Aira-Cobra-fighter-bomber raked the airfield. Then further twenty Pe-2 and twenty Il-2 came. Some pilots and technical personal felt there. Our aircrafts were smashed up. During the next days we could not expect for a mission. Now nothing mattered for us. We waited for things to come with grim anger. During "sitting readiness" felt my best former student, Uffz. Helmuth Wieland by a fighter bomber attack. We laid him to rest at the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May near the airfield border into a small forest. Within his short combat service he already gained four victories.

The staff Staffel transferred with the rest of the aircraft to Rügen. Uffz. (*Helmut*) Glöckner packed his girl, which he met in East Prussia, in the fuselage of his Fw 190 and took-off for a flight across the Baltic Sea. He also arrived there with his sweet load. Oblt. Lindner, Hptm. Post, Uffz. Schmidt and many other pilots were brought by ship. On 25.4.45 one group was made out of I. and III. Group "Mölders". We had to stay in this cauldron. No one of us expected to see the homeland again.

The new group commander, Hptm. (*Joachim*) Brendel, owner of the Knights Cross with Oak Leaves, encouraged us again and again. On 4.5.45, we had learned about the death of the Führer, and knew the situation at Berlin, the transfer order came for us to Copenhagen. From the debris our technicians patched 15 aircrafts together. Fifteen pilots could choose the way to Germany by air.

Hptm. Brendel determined me to the Schwarm leader, and gave me the "Yellow 5". My old aircraft had got a direct bomb hit. At the estate we said good bye to each other. Men, who fought together, who had suffered and did this not only for their welfare, had to part from each other. Hptm. (*Hans*) von Doye, Oblt. von Moller, OFw. Gabel, OFw. (*Paul*) Hollmann, OFw. Slomski, Uffz. Saalman, some younger pilots and my humble self were driven out to the airfield. Everything was made quickly ready to go. The Ivan flew already reconnaissance over the field. We didn't want that our brave Me's who were left, got shot up in the last

minute. The totally soaked and bombed field did not allow a closed take-off. We took-off single on 13.00 hrs for the flight to west. I was fine, as I left this “hot ground”. It went along the ship graveyard Hela with course Copenhagen. My auxiliary fuel tank didn’t supply. I also executed this order and tried to get to Copenhagen. My course went across Swedish territory. In the distance I saw already Copenhagen. The fuel meter was already at zero. Below me was Malmö. My engine “moaned”, out with the landing gear and landed. At Malmo - Bultofa they fetched me out of the aircraft at the center of the field and told me, I am interned. The welcome at the casino of the Fighter Staffel F-10 was very good. From 4.5. to 8.5. I enjoyed the hospitality of the Swedish fighter pilots. Then it went into the internment camp Bökeberg, then to Gunnebro and finally to Backamo.

The war was over!

The greatest disappointment was behind us,  
when will we return to our beloved homeland?

**Source:**

Typed report of Horst W. Petzschler, translated as accurate as possible Corrections Johannes Matthews

**Amendments:**

In brackets, italic, data from Matti Salonen, Ernst Obermaier, Gebhard Aders, Internet and me

**Explanations:**

Dicke Autos	Thick cars	slang for bombers
Doppelkopf		A card game for normally four players
Fhr. Fähnrich		Ensign
Fighter	Actually the German word is Jäger	that means hunter
Flieger		Airmen
Fw. Feldwebel		Sergeant
Gefreiter		Private
Geschwader		Squadron
Hptm. Hauptmann		Captain
i/N In der Neumark		within the Neumark
Jagdergänzungsgruppe		Fighter replacement group
JG Jagdgeschwader		Fighter squadron
KC Knights Cross		Ritterkreuz
Madel		Southgerman word for girl, about maid
Maschine		Machine, German word for aircraft

Oberfähnrich	Senior Ensign
Oberst	Colonel
Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant Colonel
Obltn. Oberleutnant	First Lieutenant
OFw. Oberfeldwebel	Master Sergeant
OGefr. Obergefreiter	Corporal
O/S Oberschlesien	Upper Silesia
i/Ostpr. In Ostpreussen	in East Prussia
RLM Reichsluftfahrtministerium	Empire aviation ministry
Rotte	A unit of two aircraft, plural Rotten
Schwarm	A unit of four aircrafts, swarm
Sitzbereitschaft	sitting readiness
Staffel A	unit of 12 to 16 aircrafts
Uffz. Unteroffizier	NCO
z.b.V. Zur besonderen Verwendung	for special use