

## APPENDIX - The GERMAN LUFTWAFFE

This Appendix deals *in outline* with

- 1) Luftwaffe 'Kill' Claims
- 2) Luftwaffe Structure
- 3) Luftwaffe Ranks

For more detailed treatments see, for example –

- Alfred Price, *Luftwaffe Handbook*, Allan, '77.
- W. Ramsey (ed.), *The Blitz: Then and Now, Vol I, After the Battle*, '87.
- Len Deighton, *Fighter*, Cape, '77.

### 1) LUFTWAFFE 'KILL' CLAIMS

The most disconcerting item that a British reader meets when first encountering the Luftwaffe is the astonishing number of claimed 'kills' in contrast to those made by the R.A.F.

Look at these top scores -

- The top **British fighter Ace scores** in the Second World War were:
  - 1st - 63
  - 2nd - 47
  - = 3rd - 41
  - = 3rd - 41
  - 5th - 34
  - 6th - 33
  
- The top **German fighter Ace scores** were:
  - 1st - 352
  - 2nd - 301
  - Between 300 and 200 - 12 pilots
  - Between 200 and 100 – 84 pilots

[A similar discrepancy is shown by the three fighter Aces mentioned in the text.

#### **British**

Stanford Tuck – 29

Douglas Bader – 24

#### **German**

Adolf Galland – 86 (This included 30 Hurricanes and 33 Spitfires)]

Since German propaganda was frequently untrue, the Allies long assumed that the German fighter claims were also false, and that it was impossible for 35 pilots to have scored over 150 'kills'.

But, as Len Deighton points out<sup>a</sup>, the Luftwaffe's confirmation procedure was meticulous and Teutonic in its accuracy, and is confirmed by post-war research.

This apparent indication of German superiority is difficult for the Allies to believe or understand. There were, however, fundamental differences between the structures, procedures, attitudes and opportunities of the R.A.F. and the Luftwaffe, which do much to explain them.

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<sup>a</sup> In his Preface to Alfred Price's *Pictorial History of the Luftwaffe*, (Allan,'70)

Below are eleven contributory factors - and I am grateful in particular to the late Raymond Baxter for his help in compiling them.

1 An aggressor-nation spends the years of peace preparing for War. Non-aggressive countries are invariably very slow to do so – and, indeed, may not prepare for war at all! Aerial victories by aggressors in such situations can be comparatively easy.

2. The Air Force of an aggressor – in particular one that starts fighting without first declaring war – fights only when fully prepared against the unprepared. The aggressor has all the advantages, in training, equipment and numbers.

3. The tendency of the British to play things *down* meant that the R.A.F. did not cultivate 'heroes' – although the press sometimes tried to. If, for example, two R.A.F. fighter pilots caused a 'kill' by downing an enemy aircraft, the 'score' in the R.A.F. would be shared - 'half' to each - regardless of rank.

4. The Luftwaffe, in contrast, cultivated its Ace-heroes.

Fellow-pilots tended to 'protect' their Aces – because the Ace's glory reflected well on their unit.

Luftwaffe Aces could be granted a complete 'kill' (not a 'half') even if only partially responsible for it. (The junior pilot's contribution would be 'given' to the Ace.)

5. In the R.A.F. once pilots were promoted to Wing Commanders their operational flying was severely curtailed. They 'flew desks' as it was said. This considerably shortened a pilot's opportunity for fighting – and for possible victories – in the air.

6. In the Luftwaffe, high-ranking pilots could still fly in action.

Galland's last seven 'kills' were gained while flying jets in 1945 with the rank of Generalmajor. Such continued opportunities for operational flying meant that combat opportunities could be extended for *years* in comparison to those of similar rank in the R.A.F.

7. In the R.A.F. the squadrons were 'rotated'. This means that they were withdrawn from the front line when it was appropriate to rest, recuperate and re-equip. They were then replaced by fresher forces. This very much limited operational flying and the opportunity to increase 'kills'.

8. The Luftwaffe units were not 'rotated', so their pilots just kept fighting.

9. R.A.F. pilots were limited to 100 hours operational flying after which they had six months' rest. This was a substantial limit to their operational flying.

10. R.A.F. fighter-pilots could be assigned tasks that provided little or no opportunities for gaining 'kills', e.g. escorting, strafing, dive-bombing, skip-bombing, air-sea rescue and reconnaissance. (Raymond Baxter's famous leading of some of 602 Squadron in a low-level fighter-bomber attack on the VI and V2 Operations Centre in the Hague is a fine example of Spitfire activity where shooting down enemy fighters had no place.)

11. It was mainly on their Eastern Front that the German pilots scored so highly.

## 2. LUFTWAFFE RANKS

Here are the Luftwaffe ranks and their approximate RAF equivalents.

Flieger	Aircraftsman Second Class
Gefreiter	Aircraftsman First Class
Obergefreiter	Leading Aircraftsman
Hauptgefreiter	-
Unteroffizier	Corporal
Unterfeldwebel	-
Feldwebel	Sergeant
Oberfeldwebel	Flight Sergeant
Stabsfeldwebel	Warrant Officer
Leutnant	Pilot Officer
Oberleutnant	Flying Officer
Hauptman	Flight Lieutenant
Major	Squadron Leader
Oberstleutnant	Wing Commander
Oberst	Group Captain
Generalmajor	Air Commodore
Generalleutnant	Air Vice Marshal
Generaloberst	Air Chief Marshal
Generalfeldmarshall	Marshal of the Royal Air Force

### 3. LUFTWAFFE OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

Since the text of *Dunkirk Revisited* refers mainly to **fighter pilots**, the outline here is given from a fighter pilot's viewpoint, and the details reflect 1940 rather than later in the War.

NOTE – Because this is for the general reader, and to avoid confusion, I have used only the *singular* of German terms as their plurals are so unlike English. (I share the pain this must cause some readers!)

#### LEVEL 1

A **fighter pilot** belonged to a nine-aircraft group called a **STAFFEL**. ('Squadron')  
His leader – regardless of rank – was his **Staffelkapitän**. ('Squadron Leader')  
The **aircraft** in each **Staffel** ('Squadron') were numbered **1-9**.

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#### LEVEL 2

His **Staffel** ('Squadron') was one of **three** which together formed a **GRUPPE**. ('Wing')  
This meant that the **Gruppe** consisted of 9+9+9 aircraft, i.e. 27.  
To this number was added the three aircraft of the **Gruppe's Stab**. ('Staff Flight')  
A **Fighter Gruppe** consisted, therefore, of 30 aircraft.

To make the aircraft numbering easy and to avoid double figures, each of the three **Staffel** designated its fighters 1-9, but used a different colour.

The **1st. Staffel** used *White*, the **2nd. Red or Black**, and the **3rd. Yellow**.

Example: Fighter **Black 5** = the 5th. Fighter of the 2nd. **Staffel**. ('Squadron')

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#### LEVEL 3

It took nine **Staffel**, ('Squadrons')  
organised into three **Gruppe**, ('Wings')  
to make a **GESCHWADER**. ('Group')

The **Staffel** were numbered consecutively thus **Staffel 1-3 = I Gruppe** ('I Wing')  
**Staffel 4-6 = II Gruppe** ('II Wing')  
**Staffel 7-9 = III Gruppe** ('III Wing')

To avoid the markings of **Staffel 1-3, 4-6** and **7-9** being identical, two different symbols (e.g. a horizontal bar or a vertical bar) were added to the number to indicate if an aircraft belonged to **II Gruppe** or **III Gruppe**.

A **Geschwader** consisted of 94 aircraft.

These were the 30 aircraft of each of the three **Gruppe**,  
plus its own 4-plane **Stab**. ('Headquarter's Flight')

A **Geschwader's** abbreviation was '**G**'. They were numbered, e.g. **G26**.

All the aircraft in a **Geschwader** ('Group') flew the same role. The main roles were:

<i>fighter</i> (J)	Jagd-geschwader
<i>night-fighter</i> (NJ)	Nachtjagd-geschwader
<i>heavy fighter</i> (Z)	Zerstorer-geschwader
<i>bomber</i> (K)	Kampf-geschawader
<i>dive bomber</i> (St.)	Stuka-geschwader
<i>ground attack</i> (S)	Schlacht-geschwader

Each **Geschwader** ('Group'), therefore, took as a prefix the appropriate initial letter, as listed above.

Example: JG27 = Jagdgeschwader 27 = 27th. Fighter Group  
K1 = Kampfgeschwader 1 = 1st. Bomber Group

#### LEVEL 4

Two or more **Geschwader** ('Groups') formed a **FLIEGERKORPS**. ('Air Corps')  
A **Fliegerkorps** could have between 300 and 750 aircraft.

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#### LEVEL 5

Two or more **Fliegerkorps** ('Air Corps') formed a **LUFTFLOTTE**. ('Air Fleet')  
A **Luftflotte** could have over 1,000 aircraft.

**Luftflotte** were self-contained units, designed for mobility and expansion.  
(The RAF abroad, but not in the UK, operated in this way.)

Before 1939 the Luftwaffe was divided into four of these **Luftflotte**. ('Air Fleets')  
Germany was 'quartered', with **Luftflotte 1** and **4** serving the NE and the SE, and **Luftflotte 2** and **3** serving the NW and SW of Germany respectively.  
(Later, to keep Norway and Finland under German control, **Luftflotte 5** was created.)

When Germany broke through to the West, in May 1940, (into Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France) the two **Luftflotte** ('Air Fleets') on the *western* side of Germany (i.e. **Luftflotte 2** and **3**) expanded accordingly.

At Dunkirk, therefore, the Luftwaffe aircraft came from both **Luftflotte 2** and **3**.

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#### LEVEL 6

Overseeing Levels 1-5 was the **OBERKOMMANDO DER LUFTWAFFE**. ('High Command')

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#### LEVELS 7-8

Finally, the Luftwaffe High Command came under the High Command of all German Forces (**OBERKOMMANDO DER WEHRMACHT**).

This came under **HITLER** himself.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Because this Bibliography is large, it is divided into seven sections.

The reason it is large is that so many sources – especially biographies – deal only *in part* with the Dunkirk Evacuation.

This Bibliography provides the *full reference* for each source.

The listings of authors and their books in the Endnotes (after each chapter) are much abbreviated, but sufficient for you to find the full reference here.

To save repetition and undue length, sources are only listed under *one* heading.

The headings are -

1. **Operation Dynamo**
2. **Little Ships and related topics**
3. **Biographies**
4. **In the Air**
5. **Kent and Kent at War**
6. **Shipping, Channels and Charts**
7. **General**

\* = a source that mentions Samuel Palmer and/or *Naiad Errant*.  
IWM = Imperial War Museum  
NMM = National Maritime Museum.  
PRO = Public Record Office (now The National Archives)

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