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Knight's Cross and Oak-Leaves Recipients 1941–45



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Author's Note

While the introductory text and Plate A are devoted to the Oak-Leaves clasp, the biographical accounts in this book are chosen from among recipients of either the Knight's Cross, or the Oak-Leaves, in the period from 1941 to early 1945. The rank under which each recipient is listed is that held at the time of the award.

Linear measurements

Measurements in this volume are provided in metric units; conversions to imperial measurements are as follows:

1 millimetre (mm)	= 0.0394 inches (in)
1 centimetre (cm)	= 0.3937in
1 metre (m)	= 3.2808 feet/1.0936 yards
1 kilogram (kg)	= 2.2046lb
1 tonne	= 0.9842 long ton (UK)/1.12 short ton (US)

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KNIGHT'S CROSS AND OAK-LEAVES RECIPIENTS 1941-45

INTRODUCTION

The re-institution on the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 of the series of awards constituting the Order of the Iron Cross included as the senior award the Knight's Cross (*Ritterkreuz*). The Knight's Cross might be awarded to any rank in the armed forces, either for individual or cumulative acts of gallantry or for distinguished leadership in command.¹

After the first nine months of World War II it was decided that additional grades of the Order should be instituted, to further distinguish those who had already won the Knight's Cross and who continued to demonstrate exemplary courage on the battlefield or success in command. On 3 June 1940, Hitler signed a new foundation decree introducing the Oak-Leaves to the Knight's Cross (*Eichenlaub zum Ritterkreuz*). The concept itself was not new; the addition of an oak-leaf clasp to indicate a higher grade of an award had been relatively common with Imperial German decorations, most significantly with the old Pour le Mérite or 'Blue Max' for which the Knight's Cross was the direct equivalent during World War II.

Description

The decoration consisted of a cluster of three oak-leaves with the centre leaf superimposed on two lower leaves. The clasp – at least in its official award version – was die-struck from genuine silver of 900 grade (i.e. 900/1000 parts pure silver). The clasp had an attractive pebbled matt finish, with the edges and central ribs of the leaves burnished.

The reverse was solid, early pieces having a distinct concave effect and later pieces being flatter. In the centre reverse was soldered a replacement ribbon suspension loop, allowing the clasp to be clipped directly to the eyelet on the top arm of the Knight's Cross. The silver content of the official award, '900', was stamped on the reverse at the nine o'clock position. Official award pieces were manufactured only by the firm of J. Godet und Sohn in Berlin. Early pieces carried at the three o'clock position the official mark allocated to that firm by the Leistungsgemeinschaft Deutscher Ordenshersteller (LDO) or Association of German Orders Manufacturers, this *Herstellermarke* being 'L/50'. Above this was stamped the word 'SILBER' in this upper/lower case format. These early awards, which measure 21.5mm x 20mm, can be identified by the central raised rib of the right lower leaf being extremely close to the right-hand edge of the top central leaf.

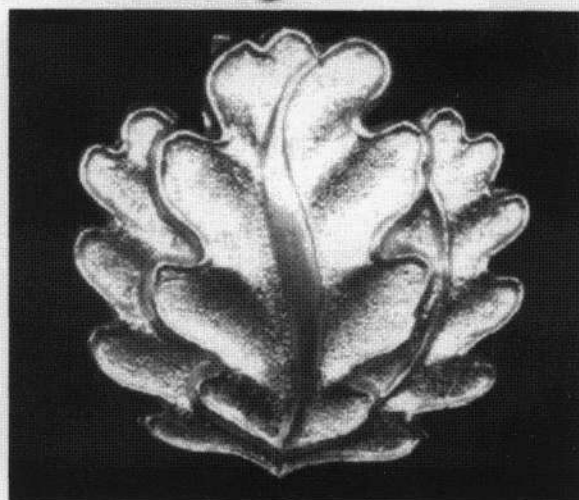
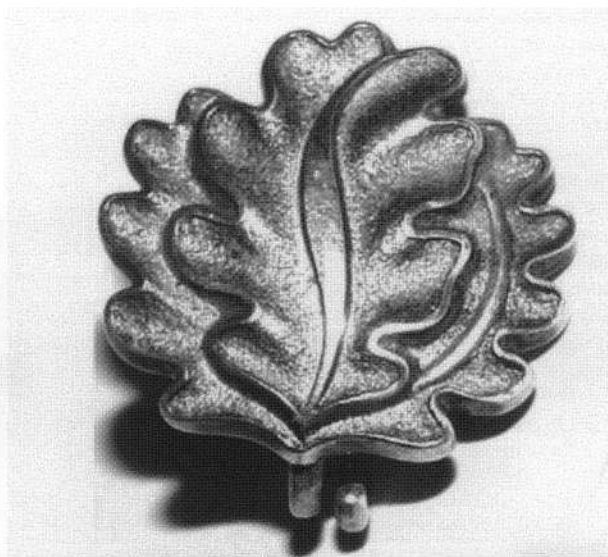
¹ See the first title in this sequence, Elite 114 *Knight's Cross and Oak-Leaves Recipients 1939-40*, for a full description of the basic decoration, and the award process and documentation.

The Oak-Leaves clasp. These images are of a standard second pattern award piece, by Godet u.Sohn of Berlin, marked with the '900' silver content mark and the manufacturer's contract code number or *Lieferantnummer*, '21'. (Detlev Niemann)



At some time in 1941 a second version was introduced, almost identical to the first but with the central rib of the right lower leaf more regularly curved and set a greater distance from the edge of the central leaf. This type lacks the concave effect to the reverse which is found on the early pattern, and is fractionally smaller at 20.3mm × 19.4mm. This second type is most often found with the manufacturer's official contract code number or *Lieferantnummer*, '21'.

To confuse matters further, although only Godet u.Sohn were officially contracted to supply the government with the formal award pieces, other firms did manufacture them for the private retail market; it was permissible for soldiers entitled to awards to purchase additional examples at their own expense from authorized outlets. In mid-1941, however, the retail sale of such pieces was prohibited and stocks held by manufacturers and retailers for private sale were handed over to the authorities and added to official stocks. Thus the retail sale of Oak-Leaf clasps only occurred for a relatively short period. Among the firms known to have manufactured these are Steinhauer und Lück of Lüdenscheid (usually marked only with the '800' silver content code at the nine o'clock position); C.E.Juncker of Berlin (usually bearing the *Herstellermarke* 'L/12' over '800' at the seven o'clock position); and Paul Meybauer of Berlin, marked '900' at the nine o'clock position and 'L/13' at the three o'clock position.



Steinhauer und Lück also manufactured Oak-Leaf clasps post-war, to be worn with the 'de-Nazified' version of the Knight's Cross authorized under the Ordens Gesetz of 1957. As the original clasp did not feature a swastika or other prohibited symbol, these new clasps were manufactured from the original tooling. Initial production was of high quality, making it difficult now to determine whether such pieces are of wartime or post-war origin. Indeed, it has been suggested that all such Steinhauer-made clasps were post-war and that the firm did not manufacture them during wartime; but this has been disproven by the appearance of the clasp in original wartime illustrated retail catalogues for this firm.

There are other examples which appear to be of wartime manufacture but for which no maker has yet been identified. Not all of the pieces made for retail sale (or for supply as display pieces to museums, military outfitters, etc.) were in real silver, some being in silver-plated finish. In addition to these, field-made examples exist, manufactured from beaten-down silver coins, or cast from moulds made using an original as a master.

This shows the first (top left) and second pattern (top right) official award pieces; note the difference in the shape and placing of the central rib of the right-hand leaf. (Below) are commercially produced pieces, made by the still extant firm of Steinhauer u. Lück of Lüdenscheid, and available from their 1940 sales catalogue for the sum of RM 13.80. Minor differences in die characteristics can be seen.

The Oak-Leaves as worn, clipped to the eyelet on the top of the Knight's Cross frame in place of the regular ribbon suspension loop. The Oak-Leaves were only ever presented on their own, not with an additional Knight's Cross. Given that there might often be a lengthy period between the award of the Cross and the Oak-Leaves, it would be normal to find the Cross showing more wear than the Oak-Leaves.



Award case and documents

When awarded, the Oak-Leaves came in a small case measuring some 105mm × 80mm × 27mm deep, covered in black leather-effect paper. The lid interior was lined in white satin, and the base covered in black velvet with a slot to accept the ribbon loop on the reverse of the clasp, below a recessed section to take a folded length of neck ribbon.

When the award was first approved, the recipient would be presented with a small printed document of approximately A5 size, with his personal details typewritten into blank spaces in the text. At the top was printed *Vorläufiges Besitzezeugnis* ('Preliminary Certificate') over a small Iron Cross. Then followed the text *Der Führer/ und Oberste Befehlshaber/ der Wehrmacht/ hat dem* [recipient's name typed in] */ Das Eichenlaub/ zum Ritterkreuz des/ Eisernen Kreuzes/ am* [date of the award] *verliehen.* ('The Führer and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces has awarded [name] the Oak-leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on [date].') The place and date of signature of the certificate followed, the latter often being some time after the actual award date; and the certificate was signed and stamped by the relevant Wehrmacht authority.

This certificate was intended to be followed at some later date by the presentation to the recipient – often by Hitler in person at a special ceremony – of a large formal award document or *Urkunde*. This second document was made from a single sheet of hand-made vellum-effect parchment, folded in half to give four ‘sides’ each measuring 43–44cm × 35.5–36cm. On what would be ‘page 3’ a large gold-tooled eagle and swastika was applied, above the text *Im Namen/ des Deutschen Volkes/ verleihe ich/ dem [rank]/ [name]/ Das Eichenlaub/ zum Ritterkreuz/ des Eisernen Kreuzes/ Führerhauptquartier/ den [date]/ Der Führer/ und Oberste Befehlshaber/ der Wehrmacht/* [Hitler’s signature]. (‘In the name of the German People, I award to [name] the Oak-Leaves to the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross. Führer Headquarters [date]; The Führer and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces’ [signed, Adolf Hitler].)

The text was meticulously executed by hand in dark red-brown ink, the recipient’s name, like the eagle, being gold-tooled. The penmanship of the lettering was so perfect as to give the impression of being printed. This magnificent document was contained in a large white leather-covered folder with a large gilt metal eagle and swastika mounted on the outer face. These documents are of extreme rarity, and surviving examples actually command far higher prices than the decoration itself. These award documents, for all grades of the Order, were painstakingly produced by a highly skilled team led by Professor Gerdy Troost and Frieda Thiersch. It was an extremely time-consuming process, and the team were unable to keep up with demand; many recipients, particularly of late-war awards of the Oak-Leaves, received only the preliminary certificate, the war ending before the formal *Urkunde* could be produced. While the preliminary certificate was generally forwarded to the soldier at his unit, often accompanied by numerous congratulatory telegrams, the extremely valuable formal document was sent direct to the individual’s home, wrapped in protective tissue and contained in a stout cardboard box.

Awards

Like the Knight’s Cross to which it was added, the Oak-Leaf clasp could be awarded for leadership, distinguished service or personal gallantry. In some cases, such as those awards to Luftwaffe fighter pilots, the Oak-Leaves would be awarded on a ‘points’ basis for a certain number of confirmed aerial victories, the exact number of ‘kills’ required varying at various dates during the war. Likewise, awards to U-boat captains might be made on the basis of accumulated tonnage sunk.

An example of the preliminary certificate of award for the Oak-Leaves to the Knight’s Cross. This simple printed document of roughly A5 size had the recipient’s name and rank, and the date of award, typewritten into blank spaces provided. The awarding authority then signed the document and the ink stamp was applied to the lower left corner. The signature on this particular certificate, documenting the award of the Oak-Leaves to Kapitänleutnant Erich Topp of U-552, is that of Kapitän zur See Ehrhardt on the staff of the Naval Personnel Department in Berlin.

VORLÄUFIGES BESITZZEUGNIS



DER FÜHRER
UND OBERSTE BEFEHLSHABER
DER WEHRMACHT

HAT DEM

Kapitänleutnant
Erich Topp

DAS EICHENLAUB
ZUM RITTERKREUZ DES
EISERNEN KREUZES

AM 11. April 1942 VERLIEHEN.

BERLIN, DEN 30. November 1942.

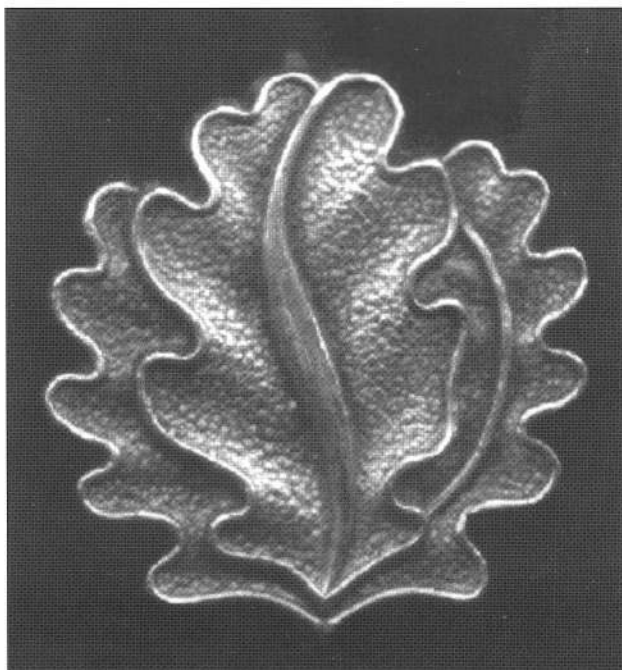



Kapitän zur See
und Abt. Chef im MPA.
(Dienstgrad und Dienststellung)



ABOVE LEFT **The Oak-Leaves** as permitted to be worn after World War II, basically unchanged since there was no illegal Nazi symbolism in their design. They are attached here to a 'new form' Knight's Cross with a triple spray of oak-leaves replacing the central swastika. The overall quality of post-war manufactured pieces, even those with official status as here, is greatly inferior to that of wartime pieces.

ABOVE RIGHT **Due to the** extremely high value of original Oak-Leaves they are widely faked. This post-war copy set bears a general resemblance to the original, but when closely examined it reveals a quality nowhere near that of the real thing. This particular piece originated in Eastern Europe, currently a major producer of counterfeit Third Reich decorations.



A total of seven awards were made in 1940; 47 in 1941; 110 in 1942; 187 in 1943; 326 in 1944, and 192 in 1945, giving a grand total of 862 awards. Due to the chaotic situation in the last months of the war, a number of recommendations for the Oak-Leaves were never fully processed and the individuals were not informed of whether or not they had been granted this decoration. A handful of additional awards were confirmed after the war by careful trawling of archival documents, but by now it is probably safe to assume that it is unlikely that any confirmation of further awards will be discovered – though the possibility, however remote, must remain. With a peak strength of somewhere around 10 million men under arms in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS during World War II, the total number of 862 Oak-Leaves awarded places this clasp in the category of one of the rarest of military decorations. Certainly the *Eichenlaubträger* ('Oak-Leaf bearers') were accorded enormous respect and feted as national heroes.

KNIGHT'S CROSS AND OAK-LEAVES RECIPIENTS

Kapitänleutnant Diederich Freiherr von Tiesenhausen

Born in Riga, Latvia, on 22 February 1913, Hans Diederich Baron von Tiesenhausen joined the Kriegsmarine as a cadet in 1934. In July 1935 he was promoted to Fähnrich and in January 1937 to Oberfähnrich zur See; finally, on 1 April 1937, he was commissioned as Leutnant zur See. He began his career on surface ships, and his experience during this period included service aboard the light cruisers *Karlsruhe* and *Nürnberg*, as well as spells with the Marine Artillery. He was promoted to Oberleutnant zur See on 1 April 1939, and reported for a training course at the Unterseebootschule in October that year. His career as a U-boat

officer began in December 1939 when he joined U-23, a small Type IIB boat, as Second Officer of the Watch, serving under the legendary Kapitänleutnant Otto Kretschmer. Four successful patrols were carried out on U-23, in which five merchant ships were sunk, totalling 27,000 tons, as well as one destroyer. For his part in these successes Tiesenhausen was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class and also qualified for the U-Boat War Badge (which was issued after the completion of two war patrols).

Thereafter, Tiesenhausen transferred to U-93, serving as First Officer. After attending a course for U-boat commanders, and having proven himself as a watch officer under experienced skippers, he was given his own Type VIIC boat, U-331, in April 1941. Tiesenhausen's first war patrol began in July 1941. Although he made approaches to Allied shipping off the Azores he was detected by the convoy escorts and driven off. After making the difficult passage through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean to operate from the Italian base of La Spezia, his second patrol began in September 1941. Once again, although he made efforts to attack Allied shipping, including an exchange of surface gunfire, he was unable to achieve any sinkings.

His third patrol, in November 1941, saw Tiesenhausen tasked with landing a group of raiders behind British lines. On completing his mission he headed out to sea, and his luck took a dramatic turn for the better when he spotted a squadron of three Royal Navy battleships with a heavy destroyer escort; he was able to identify HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, *Barham* and *Valiant*. Tiesenhausen immediately began to track the British force, looking for an opportunity to slip through the protecting destroyer screen. It is known that the British did detect the presence of U-331, but believed the contact to be a shoal of fish. With considerable nerve, Tiesenhausen manoeuvred U-331 at periscope depth between two destroyers and inside the screen. From a range of just over 1,000 metres he fired a spread of four torpedoes at the middle battleship in the line of three. As the torpedoes left their tubes the sudden loss of weight forward caused the bows to rise – always a dangerous moment for a submarine. As the trim was adjusted to bring the bow down again, U-331's conning tower broke the surface just ahead of the third battleship, HMS *Valiant*. The U-boat was spotted and *Valiant* immediately moved to ram, but her wide turning circle narrowly allowed Tiesenhausen the time to escape.

The detonation of the torpedoes as they found their target could be heard clearly, but Tiesenhausen was concentrating on saving his boat. He crash-dived to avoid the inevitable attack from the destroyer escorts; but the



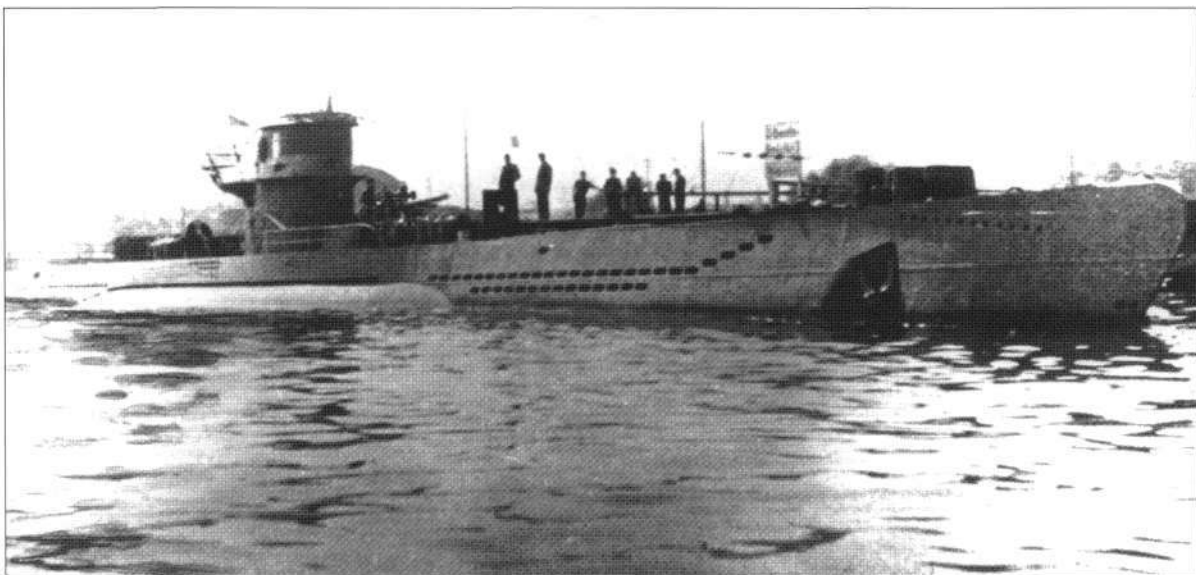
A formal portrait of Kapitänleutnant Hans-Diederich Freiherr von Tiesenhausen, taken some time after the award of the Knight's Cross for his sinking of the British battleship HMS *Barham* in the Mediterranean in November 1941.

In striking contrast to his clean-shaven and smartly turned-out appearance in the later portrait, this shows Baron von Tiesenhausen on his return to port from a war cruise in late January 1942, when he was belatedly awarded the Knight's Cross for sinking the *Barham* – see also Plate H. Typically he wears a beard, a comfortable checked shirt and a sweater under his uniform jacket, and the white-topped cap – the mark of a boat commander – in this case bearing the unofficial snake boat badge of U-331. The Knight's Cross was hung around Tiesenhausen's neck only minutes before this photograph was taken as he posed with a congratulatory bouquet of flowers.



depth gauge in the control room seized at 80m, leaving the crew uncertain of their depth. The boat continued to dive, its hull creaking ominously with the pressure of the water, until the auxiliary depth gauge in the forward compartment registered over 250 metres – the official maximum safe depth for a Type VIIC hull. The crew began a long, tense wait until the enemy warships eventually gave up trying to locate them. Once the waters above were clear, U-331 surfaced and a message was sent to BdU (C-in-C Submarines) reporting that they had torpedoed a battleship.

The actual sinking was not reported, since Tiesenhausen had not witnessed *Barham*'s destruction, only heard the detonation of the torpedo. He could not be sure whether she had sunk, or had merely been damaged and left the scene by the time he had surfaced. It was not until several weeks later, once the British had admitted her loss, that Tiesenhausen could finally confirm that his victim was indeed



the *Barham*. For this success he was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 27 January 1942.

U-331 remained in the Mediterranean, but without achieving anything spectacular; her next six patrols, operating out of La Spezia and Salamis, brought no successes. On 8 August 1942, U-331 was caught on the surface by an enemy bomber; the crew put up a hail of machine gun and cannon fire, and the enemy aircraft dropped its bombs too far away to cause any damage, although two members of the crew were injured by its strafing.

On U-331's tenth war patrol, sailing out of La Spezia on 7 November 1942, Tiesenhausen attacked a convoy supporting the Allied 'Torch' landings in North Africa, and sank the USS *Leedstown*. On 17 November, in the waters north of Algiers, U-331 was attacked by a Hudson bomber and seriously damaged by depth charges. With her forward hatch jammed open, the diesels and one bank of batteries damaged, U-331 was unable to dive. Two more enemy aircraft then arrived and further attacks put U-331's steering out of action. Tiesenhausen ordered all but a skeleton crew to put on their life jackets and gather on deck ready to abandon ship, but several were killed in further attacks by enemy aircraft. Some tried to swim away from the crippled U-boat and were killed by bombs dropped into the water. Tiesenhausen hoisted the white flag, signalling his willingness to surrender in an attempt to prevent any more of his crew from being killed. The enemy aircraft, by now in need of refuelling and re-arming, departed, signalling for a destroyer to come and take over.

The crippled U-331, down at the bows, was then steered, in reverse, towards the coast some 12 miles away, while her secret documents were destroyed and the boat prepared for scuttling. The Hudson eventually re-appeared and kept watch over U-331 while awaiting the arrival of the destroyer. A number of aircraft from the carrier HMS *Formidable* arrived on the scene and, despite the fact that U-331 was flying the white flag and being guarded by the Hudson, proceeded to machine-gun the crew members still on deck. A torpedo was then dropped which hit U-331, the

Tiesenhausen's boat, U-331. She was a Type VIII C, the backbone of the U-Bootwaffe throughout the war, of which more than 600 were built – the largest submarine class ever built by any country. With a submerged displacement of 1,040 metric tonnes, she was 66.5m long with a beam of 6.2m, and had a maximum radius of action of up to 9,500 nautical miles, with maximum surface and submerged speeds of 17 and 7.5 knots. She carried 12 to 14 torpedoes and had four bow and one stern tubes; external armament was an 8.8cm deck gun and a 2cm AA cannon. U-331 was destroyed on the surface on 17 November 1942, only Tiesenhausen and 16 of his crew surviving to be captured.

ensuing explosion also coming near to destroying the low-flying Hudson. U-331 was sent to the bottom, taking 32 crew with her; Kapitänleutnant von Tiesenhausen and 16 others survived. The pilot of the torpedo-bomber that destroyed U-331 despite her white flag was later court-martialled.

Tiesenhausen was taken first to England and then transferred to a POW camp in Canada. He was released in 1947 and returned to Germany, where he lived for four years before returning to settle in Canada permanently. He died in Vancouver on 17 August 2000.

Kapitänleutnant Friedrich Guggenberger

Friedrich Guggenberger joined the Navy in September 1934 as an officer cadet. Shortly after the outbreak of war, in October 1939 he transferred to the U-boat branch, by then with the rank of Oberleutnant zur See. After training he joined U-28, commanded by Günther Kuhnke, as a watch officer. Having proven himself in this position he was posted, on 16 November 1940, to a U-boat instruction flotilla to train as a commander; and in February 1941 he was given his own Type VIIC boat, U-81. Like the great majority of commanders Guggenberger experienced something of a slow start. He first set sail on 21 June 1941 from Kiel, on a brief patrol in northern waters which took him into Trondheim a week later. From there, he set off again on another patrol which took him to Kirkenes on 7 August, and U-81 finally returned to

Trondheim after another week. None of these short patrols was eventful.

On 13 August, however, Guggenberger took U-81 to 1.U-Flotille's new base in Brest on the Atlantic coast of France, and en route he successfully intercepted an Allied convoy, sinking the *Empire Springbuck* and the *Sally Maersk* – two small merchantmen with a modest total of just under 9,000 tons. After three weeks at sea he arrived at Brest on 19 September; and that month he was promoted to Kapitänleutnant. After a further uneventful patrol from the French base, Guggenberger was ordered to move to the Mediterranean, departing on 4 November; he successfully negotiated the Straits of Gibraltar and arrived at La Spezia in Italy after 36 days at sea – during which he had made a notable addition to U-81's war record.

On the night of 11/12 November 1941, Guggenberger took his boat through the Straits of Gibraltar on the surface. Shortly after entering the Mediterranean he was directed towards a group of British warships which had been spotted by Italian reconnaissance aircraft. This was Force H, which included the battleship HMS *Malaya* and the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal*, together with a smaller carrier, a cruiser and destroyer

A portrait study of Kapitänleutnant Friedrich Guggenberger, taken after the award of the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross. One of several U-boat commanders who returned to naval service in peacetime, Guggenberger reached the rank of Konteradmiral in the Bundesmarine in the post-war years.



escorts. On 13 November, Guggenberger approached the enemy force, which was steaming westwards, from the north; he set up a torpedo attack, and at 1541hrs the *Ark Royal* was hit on her starboard side close to the boiler room. The carrier immediately took on a list and began flooding; counter-flooding on the port side brought her back on to an even keel, but the damage was so severe that a destroyer was brought alongside to disembark her crew – amazingly, only one crewman was killed, the remainder being evacuated safely before the carrier sank the following day. In recognition of this feat (which had already been falsely claimed by German propagandists on more than one occasion), Guggenberger was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 10 December 1941.

Kapitänleutnant Guggenberger remained in the Mediterranean for six further war cruises. A five-week patrol commencing in January 1942 was uneventful; but his next, beginning on 4 April, was highly successful, adding six more ships to his tally: two small Egyptian freighters, the *Fatouh el Kher* and *Bab el Farag*, the French *Viking* and the British *Caspia*, followed by another two small Egyptian ships, the *Hefz el Rahman* and *El Saadiah*. His next patrol, out of Salamis, Greece, on 6 May, was unfruitful; and only one victim, the British *Brambleleaf*, was added on the following cruise. On 5 October, U-81 left La Spezia on her eleventh patrol, sinking the British freighters *Garlinge* and *Maron* during a

The award ceremony in January 1943 during which Friedrich Guggenberger, together with a number of other U-boat commanders, received his Oak-Leaves directly from Hitler. Admiral Dönitz, C-in-C Submarines (BdU), is at far right. Although highly decorated, it would not be correct to call Guggenberger or Tiesenhausen 'U-boat aces'; they did not figure in that exclusive list of about 2 per cent of U-boat commanders who between them sank some 30 per cent of all Allied shipping lost to submarine attack.





This photograph of Günther Halm was taken in North Africa at the ceremony when he received his Knight's Cross from the hands of Rommel himself (his main memory of the occasion was his embarrassment when a fly kept trying to land on his face). A brand new Iron Cross First Class, awarded at the same time, is pinned to his left breast pocket. The 19-year-old Halm was one of the two youngest soldiers ever to win the Knight's Cross. (Josef Charita)

six-week voyage. Guggenberger's next patrol saw him leave La Spezia to move to Pola, a four-week patrol which brought no new successes.

On 8 January 1943, Guggenberger was awarded the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross; he briefly took command of the Type IXD-2 boat U-847, before joining the staff of the C-in-C Submarines, Admiral Dönitz. In May 1943 he was given command of U-513, a Type IXC/40. She left Lorient on 18 May, and during his first war cruise in his new command Guggenberger sailed as far as the Brazilian coast. On 21 June he sank the Swedish *Venezia*; four days later the American *Eagle* was hit and damaged; on 1 July he sank the Brazilian *Tutóia*, and two days later the American *Elihu B. Washburne*. On 16 July Guggenberger added the American *Richard Caswell* to his tally, but his luck ran out three days later. On 19 July 1943 his boat was caught on the surface by a US aircraft and sunk; seriously wounded, Guggenberger took to a life raft with six other survivors, being picked up the following day by the cruiser USS *Barnegate*.

Following lengthy hospital treatment for his wounds, in January 1944 Guggenberger was sent to a POW camp in Arizona. On 23 December 1944 Guggenberger and 24 other U-boat men succeeded in escaping, but he was recaptured on 6 January 1945 after getting to within just 4½ miles of the Mexican border. In August 1946

he was finally released and returned to Germany.

Guggenberger was involved in the rebuilding of the German Navy after the war, and reached the rank of Konteradmiral and chief-of-staff in the NATO headquarters AFNORTH before finally retiring in October 1972. Friedrich Guggenberger was killed in a holiday accident on 13 May 1988, his body lying undiscovered in a forest for two years.

Gefreiter Günther Halm

Günter Halm was born on 27 August 1922 at Elze, Lower Saxony, as the son of an official of the German railways. He was conscripted into the Army in 1941; and by summer 1942, at the age of just 19 years, he was serving as a gunlayer in the anti-tank platoon of the HQ Company of Panzergrenadier Regiment 104, part of 21. Panzer Division, with Rommel's Afrikakorps.

In July 1942 the Axis forces in North Africa reached the high water mark of their advance towards the Suez Canal, being checked at the British defensive line created south of El Alamein, Egypt, by General Auchinleck in the so-called 'First Battle of Alamein'. On the night of 21/22 July, Auchinleck unleashed his 13 Corps in Operation 'Splendour' against German positions on Ruweisat Ridge, where elements of 21. Pz Div came under heavy attack. Pz Gren Regt 104's platoon of two 7.62cm PaK 36(r) anti-tank guns, commanded by Leutnant Skubovius, was in a defensive position covering a 300-metre-long *wadi* (dried watercourse)

a few kilometres from the regiment's tactical HQ; No.1 gun was commanded by Unteroffizier Jabeck, with Gefreiter Halm as his gunlayer.

After prolonged British shelling during the morning of the 22nd, dust and smoke blinded the gun crews to the approach of the British 23rd Armoured Brigade, and they only spotted the Valentine tanks of 40th Royal Tank Regt when they were little more than 100 metres away. Halm and his comrades reacted to their commander's orders instantly, and a furious duel broke out. Serving their guns at frantic speed and under continuous fire, Halm's crew knocked out nine enemy tanks and disabled a further six within just a few minutes. Several 2-pdr shells struck their gun position, damaging the shield and wounding the crew, particularly the loader, and one passed right between Halm's legs without touching him. The Valentines were forced to withdraw, but continued to fire, and a shell eventually finally destroyed the sights of Halm's gun before Luftwaffe dive-bombers and PzKw IV tanks of 21.Pz Div arrived in support. 23rd Armd Bde was effectively wiped out, losing about 93 of its 104 tanks.

Normally only those who already wore both the Second and First Classes of the Iron Cross could be considered for the higher grades. However, such was his colonel's delight at the calm performance under fire of this very young private soldier that, on 29 July 1942, Günther

An example – captured later, in Tunisia – of the weapon with which Halm won his Knight's Cross on Ruweisat Ridge in July 1942. The shortage of anti-tank guns prompted Germany to press into service large numbers of captured weapons, including this Russian 7.62cm gun which they designated PaK 36(r). The sights have been removed from this abandoned gun. (Private collection)



Halm became the youngest serviceman yet to receive the coveted Knight's Cross, being decorated simultaneously with both grades of the Iron Cross. The awards were presented personally by Generalfeldmarschall Rommel.

Promoted corporal, Halm continued to serve in North Africa until evacuated after contracting an illness. On his recovery he was posted to 104.Inf Div, and was later commissioned as Leutnant. He later rejoined 21.Pz Div and saw fierce action in Normandy following the Allied landings in June 1944. On 24 August 1944 Leutnant Halm was captured by US troops during the fighting in the Falaise Pocket. He was eventually released from captivity in 1946; in the years following the war he lived in Brunswick, where he married and had four daughters. He worked in a number of fields, including a successful coal merchant's business and local government, and with the German war graves organization. In 1995 he was decorated with the Bundesverdienstkreuz of the Federal German Republic for his service to the community.

Generalmajor Walter Nehring

Walter Nehring – born on 15 August 1892 at Stretzin, West Prussia – was an example of an officer who received the higher decorations for a consistently competent record in senior commands rather than for acts of gallantry. His military career began on 16 September 1911 when he joined Infanterie Regt 152, from whose ranks he was commissioned Leutnant on 18 December 1913. Nehring saw action during World War I; he was promoted to Oberleutnant on 6 June 1916, earned both classes of the Iron Cross, and received the Wound Badge in Black in 1918.

Nehring remained with the 100,000-man army of the Weimar Republic and enjoyed a steady rise through its ranks. As a Hauptmann from March 1923 he took command of 13 (Maschinengewehr) Kompanie, Inf Regt 2. He was later selected for general staff training; this was done under the guise of attachment to the Truppenamt (T1) of the Reichswehr Ministerium, the German General Staff being a proscribed organization under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Between October 1934 and March 1937 he was promoted through the ranks of Major and Oberstleutnant to Oberst; as a full colonel he was given command of his own Pz Regt 5 in October 1937. He remained with this unit until July 1939 when he was posted as a general staff officer to XIX Armeekorps.

On the outbreak of war Oberst Nehring was serving as chief-of-staff with XIX Panzerkorps under General Guderian, a post he filled during the Polish campaign and the 1940 campaign in the West. Promoted Generalmajor on 1 August 1940, he was given command of 18.Pz Div shortly thereafter. He led his armoured division through the opening phases of Operation 'Barbarossa' in Russia, and on 24 July 1941 was decorated with the Knight's Cross for his leadership.

On 26 January 1942 Nehring relinquished command of his division and was moved to North Africa, being promoted to Generalleutnant on 1 February. He took command of the Deutsches Afrikakorps (Rommel now held a superior army command), with promotion to General der Panzertruppe on 1 July 1942. On 31 August he was wounded in action while crossing a British minefield during the advance towards El Alamein. In November 1942, Nehring was

appointed by Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring as commander of V Panzerarmee in Tunisia, his performance earning him his first recommendation for the Oak-Leaves from Rommel. At the end of 1942, Generaloberst von Arnim took over command of all German forces in Tunisia and shortly afterwards Nehring left to take command of XXIV Panzerkorps.

General Nehring remained in this command from 9 February 1943 to 19 March 1945, apart from a brief break during June–August 1944. His corps fought on the southern sector of the Russian Front, retreating into southern Poland in summer 1944. Nehring was decorated with the Oak-Leaves on 8 February 1944, and the Swords on 22 January 1945. By March 1945 his greatly weakened corps, whose main elements were the remnants of 16. and 17.Pz Divs, had fallen back into Silesia under the designation 'Gruppe Nehring'. Nehring's final posting was as Oberbefehlshaber 1.Panzerarmee Oberkommando, an appointment he held only from 20 March until 3 April 1945. Leading his troops westwards during the closing days of the war, Nehring surrendered to the Americans and spent the next three years in captivity. Eventually released in May 1948, he died in retirement in Dusseldorf on 20 April 1983 at the age of 91.



A typical example of a senior officer awarded the superior decorations for leadership in command rather than acts of valour: a smiling General der Panzertruppe Walter Nehring poses in his service dress uniform, displaying the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross, awarded when he was commander of XXIV Panzer Korps in 1944. Just visible on his left sleeve is the 'Afrika' cuffband marking participation in the desert campaign. On his left breast pocket can be seen his Iron Cross First Class, won during World War I, together with the 1939 Clasp for a second, World War II award; the Panzer Battle Badge; and the Wound Badge first awarded in 1918 – he was wounded a second time by a mine in North Africa. (Josef Charita)

A fine portrait of Hauptmann Johannes Kümmel, the former tank sergeant who rose to command a regiment, shown here in a dress version of the tropical service tunic, cut from fine quality olive-coloured cloth and with the wire-embroidered officer's insignia used with the field-grey continental uniform. In this photo he wears the Oak-Leaves which were added to his Knight's Cross on 11 October 1942. The *Litzen* collar patches bear the rose-pink 'lights' of the tank branch, whose death's-head collar patch badges are, typically, pinned directly to the lower lapels of the tropical tunic. (Josef Charita)



Hauptmann Johannes Kümmel

Johannes Kümmel was born at Coswig in Saxony on 21 July 1909. In 1928 he enlisted in the Reichswehr, and rose steadily through the non-commissioned ranks. In 1939 he was serving with Panzer Regt 8, part of 10.Pz Div, which was based at Boblingen near Stuttgart, where Oberfeldwebel Kümmel led a tank platoon in 1 Kompanie. During the campaign in Poland he was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class on 27 September, adding the First Class on 20 October shortly after the successful conclusion of the campaign. These awards recognized the considerable flair he had exhibited in action, including his personal destruction of several enemy tanks. Not long afterwards Kümmel was commissioned as a Leutnant; by the eve of the campaign in the West he had already been advanced to the rank of Hauptmann, and given command of his company.

Serving with General Guderian's XIX Panzerkorps, Kümmel's unit took part in the armoured breakthrough at Sedan and the advance to the Channel coast, during which he was wounded when his vehicle ran over an anti-tank mine. On 18 January 1941, Pz Regt 8 was transferred to 15.Pz Div, a relatively new formation which had been created at the beginning of 1940. This, with 5.leichte Div (which later became 21.Pz Div), was to form the nucleus of the Deutsches Afrikakorps under the command of General Rommel. This force was shipped to Tripoli as the Germans came to the aid of their Italian allies, whose adventures in North Africa had led them to catastrophic defeats at the hands of the British. The bulk of 15.Pz Div had arrived by early May 1941.

Hauptmann Kümmel's regiment was equipped with some 150 tanks, a mixture of the light PzKw I and II, a few of the heavy PzKw IV, but mainly the PzKw III medium tank. During June his unit was part of the German reserve during the early battles with British and Commonwealth forces in Cyrenaica, when General Wavell launched his Operation 'Battleaxe' to lift the siege of Tobruk. Located between Bardia and Capuzzo, Pz Regt 8 were called into action on 16 June to intercept a northwards thrust past Sollum and Capuzzo by the British 7th Armoured Brigade. A determined defence offered by Leutnant Tocki of the division's Panzerjäger Abteilung 33, with a lone 8.8cm gun (an unwelcome novelty for the British), delayed their over-cautious advance long enough for I Btl/Pz Regt 8 to arrive and immediately engage the enemy; a furious tank-vs-tank battle then ensued.

Kümmel gave covering fire to aid the escape of a crew whose Panzer had been hit, and succeeded in driving off two tanks who

had been intent on finishing off the damaged German vehicle. Having secured the escape of his comrades, Kümmel turned his attention to the British 2-pdr anti-tank guns, wiping out several before a further large force of British tanks arrived to threaten the German flank. Detaching part of his company, Kümmel turned aggressively on the approaching enemy and had soon destroyed eight of them – almost half their number; in this action the heavy 7.5cm guns of the two PzKw IVs of his company HQ element were decisive. The British move on Capuzzo/Sollum had been defeated, though at some cost. The commander of 15.Pz Div, Generalleutnant Neumann-Silkow, was extremely impressed by Kümmel's cool handling of a critical situation in which the division's flank might easily have been turned. He recommended Kümmel for the award of the Knight's Cross, which was bestowed on 9 July 1941. His fearless aggression in facing the enemy brought Johannes Kümmel the sobriquet 'the Lion of Capuzzo'.

Subsequently, in May 1942, Kümmel was given temporary command of I/Pz Regt 8, and led the battalion in the major battles around the British Gazala line positions, which brought Pz Regt 8 into action against the new US M3 Grant tanks supplied to the British. In mid-June his tanks seized Port Piastrino; Kümmel saw much fierce combat in the weeks which followed, as Tobruk fell and the British retreated into Egypt and held the El Alamein line. On 11 October 1942, Hauptmann Kümmel received the Oak-Leaves and was confirmed in command of his battalion. He survived the destruction of the DAK's armour at El Alamein at the end of that month; promotion to Major followed on 1 December 1942, and shortly afterwards Kümmel was posted away from North Africa, thus escaping capture upon the final defeat of the Afrikakorps the following May.

Kümmel was subsequently promoted to Oberstleutnant and posted to the staff of XIV Panzerkorps under the command of General der Panzertruppe Hans-Valentin Hube in southern Italy. As a lieutenant-colonel he was given his own command in October 1943 when he took over Pz Regt 26 in 26.Pz Div, seeing action at Salerno. Kümmel's regiment was part of the counter-attack force committed to the destruction of the Allied beachhead at Anzio-Nettuno the following winter. The initial counter-attack was unsuccessful; a second was planned for 27 February 1944, but Kümmel was killed in an automobile accident near Cisterna the day before. As a final tribute, on 20 May 1944 he was posthumously promoted to the rank of Oberst.



This shot shows Kümmel, the 'Lion of Capuzzo', in the turret of a PzKw III of I/Pz Regt 8 with 15.Pz Div; just visible to the right of the driver's visor at lower centre is the black stencilled palm-and-swastika badge of the Deutsches Afrikakorps. The cumbersome sun-helmet was a short-lived fashion, soon replaced by most soldiers with the peaked tropical field cap.

Arnold Hübner is shown here shortly after the announcement of the award of his Knight's Cross. While serving with I/Flak Regt 33 in North Africa, he played a crucial role in the destruction of more than 90 tanks by his battalion in fighting around Halfaya Pass in June 1942. Photographed in shirtsleeve order, he wears pale tan-khaki Luftwaffe tropical clothing and field cap. On his left breast below the Iron Cross is the Luftwaffe's Flak War Badge, awarded to gun crews on a points basis dependent on the number of enemy aircraft destroyed. (Josef Charita)



Gefreiter Arnold Hübner

Born on 14 July 1919 at Szubin, Posen, Arnold Hübner was the son of a schoolteacher who had served as a Leutnant during World War I and had earned the Iron Cross in both classes. After completing his education at the Hindenburg-Schule, Arnold began his compulsory service with the Reichsarbeitsdienst in April 1939. Five months later he was drafted into the Luftwaffe, joining Luftwaffe-Bau Kompanie 13/1. He served with this and other air force construction units throughout the campaign in Poland and into the spring of 1940. On 12 April 1940, Hübner transferred to the Flakartillerie; promoted to Gefreiter (senior private) in September 1940, he was posted to 3 Batterie, I/Flak Regiment 33. He spent the remainder of 1940 and the early part of 1941 stationed in Holland. After a brief spell away from his unit on a training course at the Waffenmeisterschule at Halle, Hübner returned just in time to join the regiment as a gunlayer before its transfer to North Africa.

During the campaigns in Poland and the West it had been discovered that the 8.8cm anti-aircraft gun was just as effective against ground targets, and in North Africa Hübner was to help prove once again how deadly it could be in this role. Not long after his arrival Hübner took

part in successful artillery attacks on British positions at Mersa el Brega. Artillerymen were often rewarded for their collective efforts, and for his part in his unit's successes around Agedabia, Hübner was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class on 25 May 1941.

On 16 June, during the British 'Battle-axe' offensive against which Hauptmann Kümmel had distinguished himself (see above), Hübner and his comrades were nearby, occupying the pivotal Point 208. This remote rocky hillock far out in the desert was held by Leutnant Ziemer's battery from Flak Regt 33, together with a 3.7cm anti-tank battery, a machine gun section and an 'oasis company' of infantry. They came under heavy artillery fire, and shortly after the barrage ended more than 20 British Matilda II infantry tanks from 4th Armd Bde attacked the German positions. At ranges of only 1,000 metres a furious exchange of fire continued for at least half an hour, at the end of which eight tanks – whose heavy armour had previously made them almost invulnerable to Axis weapons – had been knocked out and the remainder had withdrawn. This was only one of several actions in the general area of Halfaya ('Hellfire') Pass during which the battalion knocked out more than 90 tanks. The battalion commander received the Knight's Cross for these actions, and Arnold Hübner

was among those recommended for the Iron Cross First Class, subsequently approved and awarded on 5 July. He received the Flak Kampfabzeichen (Anti-Aircraft Battle Badge) on 20 August; eligibility for this award was calculated on a cumulative 'points' basis after a number of successful actions.²

By late December 1941, Hübner's Flak battalion was attached to 21. Panzer Division. The British Operation 'Crusader' found them in defensive action around Bardia, where once again Hübner distinguished himself by coolness under fire, his accurate shooting adding a further eight kills to bring his personal score of tanks knocked out to a total of 24. Reports of the outstanding performance of this young gunner reached the ears of Generaloberst Rommel, who recommended both Hübner and his equally successful comrade Erich Heintze for the award of the Knight's Cross. In February 1942 the battalion returned to Germany for rest and refitting; meanwhile the recommendation was approved, and on 7 March 1942, at the unit's barracks in Leipzig, Hübner was formally decorated with the coveted award – the first private soldier in the Afrikakorps to receive the Knight's Cross. Hübner was promoted to Obergefreiter on 1 June 1942, and shortly thereafter he was sent on a training course for NCOs at the Flakartillerieschule.

On completion of his course Hübner rejoined his battalion, now retitled as I/Flak Regt 33 (mot.) – 'motorized'; he was not to remain for long, however, as he was forced to undergo several months of hospital treatment for a tropical infection he had picked up in North Africa. Hübner was promoted to Unteroffizier on 1 February 1943, and after his recuperation he was posted as an instructor to a training unit, I/Flak Ausbildungs Abteilung 697. Further promoted to Wachtmeister (a rank broadly equivalent to sergeant) on 1 April 1944, he saw action again on the Western Front after the Allied landings in Normandy. In October 1944 he was detached once again for further technical training followed by an officer candidate's course at the Kriegsschule at Kitzingen. On completion of this he joined a replacement unit, Flak Ersatz Abt 39 in Koblenz. Arnold Hübner was commissioned as Leutnant on 1 May 1945, just a week before the end of the war. He was briefly a POW in US captivity but was released in June of that year. After the war he took up employment as an electrician; at the age of 61 he died on 1 February 1981 in Gelsenkirchen.

In this more formal shot Uffz Hübner wears blue/grey Luftwaffe service dress, with the enlisted man's version of the peaked service cap; all piping and the collar patches are in the red of the Luftwaffe Flakartillerie branch. (Josef Charita)



² See Men-at-Arm 365, *World War II German Battle Insignia*.

Hauptmann Roland von Hösslin

In 1933 the 17-year-old Roland von Hösslin enlisted in the Reichswehr, joining Reiter Regt 17 – then the only Bavarian cavalry unit – based at Bamberg. By the outbreak of war he had been commissioned Leutnant, and took part in the Polish campaign; thereafter he was posted as an instructor to the Panzer school at Krampnitz, near Potsdam. In March 1941 he was appointed as an orderly officer to the staff of General Rommel's Deutsches Afrikakorps.

As the result of combat losses, Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 33 with 15.Pz Div had been left short of a company commander, and in August 1941 Oberleutnant von Hösslin was reluctantly released by Rommel, who greatly valued his abilities as a member of his staff. These armoured reconnaissance units were used primarily as a mobile reserve to be deployed on the flanks as corps assets when danger threatened. In January 1942, Hösslin was in command of 3/Pz Aufkl Abt 33 when the Afrikakorps went on to the offensive once more, pushing the British eastwards to the Gazala line. In February, Hösslin took command of a Kampfgruppe tasked with holding the high ground west of Ain el Gazala, later taking part in the advance towards El Adem. Hösslin was decorated with both classes of the Iron Cross for his actions during fierce and costly fighting around Capuzzo, and in February was promoted to Hauptmann and took over command of his battalion. He

distinguished himself as an officer who led from the front, earning the total respect of his men.

The German thrust into Egypt began to run out of steam on the approaches to El Alamein, and at the start of July 1942 the British counter-attacked. Hösslin and his men were instrumental in preventing the corps flank from being turned during an attack by the 5th Indian Div; he was seriously wounded while leading an attack near Bir Abu Zugheib on 15 July, and spent some time in hospital at Mersa Matruh. While recovering from his wounds he learned that he had been decorated with the Knight's Cross. The recommendation or *Vorschlag* states that the award was for actions between 7 and 15 July, when Hösslin's battalion, working in close co-operation with Luftwaffe elements, forced the withdrawal of powerful British units that had penetrated deep into the German southern flank. Further, on 15 July he had personally led a determined counter-attack which recaptured an Italian bunker complex whose loss had put the entire Panzerarmee under threat. It was during this latter action that Hösslin was seriously wounded in the right arm.

BELOW AND OPPOSITE **Roland von Hösslin, a young officer who served his country with distinguished gallantry but suffered a grisly fate at the hands of the Third Reich itself. These portraits were taken after Hösslin had returned to Germany from North Africa to recover from serious wounds received at the head of his armoured reconnaissance battalion. He wears the Knight's Cross awarded for this action in July 1942.**



Complications set in during his treatment which required Hauptmann von Hösslin's evacuation to Germany. While recovering in Berlin he was visited by several of his former cavalry comrades, including Oberst Claus von Stauffenberg, who had also been badly wounded in North Africa and who had been relegated to non-combatant duties as chief-of-staff to Generaloberst Fromm, head of the Replacement Army. Stauffenberg had already formed his own views on the futility and immorality of continuing the war, and was deeply involved in a conspiracy against Hitler. Shortly thereafter, Hösslin participated in a commanding officers' training course at which the two senior officers present made no attempt to conceal their antipathy towards the Nazi leadership. Here he heard first-hand reports from other soldiers of the barbarous nature of the war on the Eastern Front; one even challenged him, 'Do you really believe we still *deserve* to win this war, fighting for such a regime?'

Stauffenberg's influence coupled with his own disillusionment saw Hösslin gradually being drawn towards, but not deeply into, the circle of conspirators. The need for absolute secrecy meant that Stauffenberg only attempted to recruit those whose positions in the Army made them particularly useful, and Hösslin was probably unaware that a specific plot existed. However, his recruitment was recommended by a conspirator named Sauerbruch, whose posting to the Eastern Front prevented his playing a continued part. Stauffenberg sounded out Hösslin; it is believed that the latter was concerned lest a revolt against the regime plunge Germany into anarchy, as had happened in 1918. He was therefore agreeable to the idea that a coup d'état by the Replacement Army would ensure a smooth transition in leadership following the 'removal' of Hitler, but was probably unaware of the intent actually to assassinate the Führer. Arrangements were made to assign Hösslin, now promoted Major, to command an armoured reconnaissance reserve unit at Königsberg, there to await the call to action.

It therefore came as a surprise to Hösslin and many others outside the inner circle of conspirators to learn of the assassination attempt on 20 July 1944. By the time news reached him it was too late to act, since it was confirmed that Hitler had survived the attempt on his life. At first Hösslin does not seem to have been a suspect, as he was subsequently posted to a replacement reconnaissance company at Meiningen. As Gestapo arrests continued and the suspects were questioned under torture, he could do little but wait in an agony of suspense. Hösslin's turn came on 24 August; arrested at his barracks, he was taken to Berlin, where he was dragged before the notorious *Volksgericht* or 'People's Court' presided over by the foul-mouthed and brutal Judge Roland Freisler. Forced to stand in the dock in unfastened civilian clothing with no tie, in order to make him appear as unsoldierly as possible, Major von Hösslin heard his bare military record read out, omitting his courageous combat exploits and decorations and concentrating on his home service, as if to show him as a shirker. The





Roland von Hösslin during his trial by the so-called 'People's Court' presided over by the notorious Judge Roland Freisler, after Hösslin was implicated in the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. The accused were not permitted to wear uniform, and had their shoelaces and belts removed to humiliate them further.

findings of the court were inevitable, and Freisler pronounced on him and his co-defendants:

'In the name of the German people: Georg Schulze Büttger, Hans Jürgen Count Blumenthal, Roland von Hösslin and Friedrich Scholz Babisch, knew well beforehand of the planned betrayal of 20 July. They revealed nothing and thus allowed the plot to come to maturity. Thus they are forever without honour, jointly guilty of the heaviest betrayal known to history. They stand together as traitors with the assassin Count von Stauffenberg. With him they betrayed everything that we are, and for which we fight. They betrayed the sacrifices of our soldiers, betrayed the People, the Führer and the Reich. They had a part in a betrayal which would have delivered us, defenceless, to our mortal enemies. For this they are sentenced to death.'

On the afternoon of 13 October 1944, Roland von Hösslin was executed by hanging at the Plötzensee prison in Berlin. His sacrifice is commemorated today by a tablet in the Cathedral at Bamberg.

Oberleutnant Erhard Jähnert

Born at Panitzsch, a small town near Leipzig, in August 1917, Erhard Jähnert was already a fully qualified glider pilot by the time he

enlisted in the Luftwaffe in 1936. On completing his pilot training he was assigned to dive-bombers, and flew the Junkers Ju87B with Stukageschwader 76 during the Polish campaign, and with StG 3 during the *Westfeldzug*.

Jähnert was transferred to the Mediterranean theatre in December 1940, and while based on Sicily took part in numerous attacks on the island of Malta. Stukageschwader 3 later took Jähnert to North Africa, where he saw heavy combat flying support missions for the Afrikakorps. He was decorated with the German Cross in Gold on 1 December 1942. Bomber and dive-bomber pilots tended to be decorated for certain numbers of missions flown (rather than for enemy aircraft shot down, as was the case for fighter pilots); and on 8 May 1943, in the very last stages of the struggle in Tunisia, Jähnert was decorated with the Knight's Cross in recognition of his having flown his 300th combat mission. Surviving such a large number of missions in the Ju87 was no mean feat; the type was already obsolescent by the outbreak of war, and although an excellent dive-bomber it was slow, lightly armed, and lacked the manoeuvrability to escape attacks by much faster Allied fighters such as the Hurricanes and Spitfires of the RAF's Desert Air Force.

Transferred to the Eastern Front and retitled as a Schlachtgeschwader ('Battle Wing'), StG 3 was re-equipped with the ground-attack version of the superb Focke-Wulf Fw190 single-seat fighter. Flying this much faster and more versatile mount, Jähnert continued to rack up large numbers of sorties; it was doubly satisfying that he took part in an attack which successfully destroyed three Soviet Navy destroyers while flying his 500th mission. Like a number of highly decorated pilots, Jähnert was – unusually – rotated off combat duties and assigned as an instructor, in his case at the ground-attack school at Deutsche Brod in Czechoslovakia. He served there for the first six months of 1944 before returning to combat duties, being promoted to Hauptmann and given command of III Gruppe/StG 3, which was then operating in the Kurland region of north-west Latvia on the far north of the Eastern Front.

By February 1945 he had flown his 600th mission; and the desperate tempo of the fighting on this front can be gauged by the fact that in the last 12 weeks of combat Jähnert flew more than one hundred additional sorties. During this period Jähnert destroyed more than 25 enemy tanks with his rocket-firing Fw190. On 30 April 1945 he became one

This photograph shows Leutnant Erhard Jähnert some time after his award of the Knight's Cross in May 1943 for completing 300 Stuka missions. He wears the typical zip-fastened pale blue/grey K So/41 flying jacket favoured by many pilots – see Plate D. As well as the Knight's Cross, and the Oak-Leaves in April 1945, Jähnert had also been awarded the Luftwaffe Goblet of Honour; this distinction was instituted by Göring in February 1940 for flying personnel who already held the Iron Cross First Class but were not yet judged to have merited the Knight's Cross. This *Ehrenpokal* was to be discontinued in December 1944, its place in the awards sequence having been taken by the Roll of Honour Clasp instituted that July. (Josef Charita)





A formal studio portrait of Leutnant Jähnert. As well as his Knight's Cross and Iron Cross, he displays the German Cross in Gold (the so-called 'Fried Egg') on his right breast, and above the medal ribbons the Front Flight Clasp for bomber and dive-bomber aircrew, in the Gold class awarded for 110 missions. By the end of the war Major Jähnert had flown more than 700 missions, most of them in ground-attack Fw190s in Russia.

of the last recipients of the Oak-Leaves to the Knight's Cross. Major Jähnert was fortunate enough to escape to the south and west in the closing hours of the war, and entered British rather than Soviet captivity.

Hauptmann Josef Rettemeier

Josef Wilhelm Rettemeier was born on 17 September 1914 at Niederdollendorf near Bonn. He joined the Army in 1934 and initially served with a Prussian transport unit, Kraftfahr Abteilung 6. He was commissioned Leutnant in 1936 after attending the Kriegsschule in Dresden, and transferred from transport to anti-tank duties, serving as a platoon commander with Panzerabwehr Abteilung 22. Rettemeier remained with the anti-tank forces in the years leading up to the outbreak of war, serving at various dates with Pz Abw Abt 30 and an Austrian unit, Pz Abw Abt 46 based in Vienna. Promotion to Oberleutnant followed, and by September 1939 he was serving with a motorized infantry unit, Schutzen Regt 82, as adjutant. During the campaign against France and the Low Countries, Rettemeier served with 9.Pz Div in Guderian's armoured corps. He subsequently transferred to the anti-tank battalion of 111.Infanterie Division.

Rettemeier later served with 5.leichte Div (which became 21.Pz Div) as part of Rommel's Afrikakorps. During the course of the campaign Rettemeier, promoted to Hauptmann on 1 February 1942, became a tank officer, serving as a company commander with Pz Regt 5. He remained in North Africa until 1943, earning the 'Afrika' campaign cuffband which is seen proudly worn on the sleeve of his black tank uniform in later photos. His regiment was decimated during the final battles in Tunisia, though Rettemeier was one of those fortunate enough to escape captivity, being evacuated before the final collapse in May 1943.

Moving to the Eastern Front, Rettemeier's unit – now redesignated as Pz Abt 5, assigned to 25.PzGren Div – was heavily involved in fierce fighting in the area around Vitebsk and Rogashev; for his command of the battalion during these testing battles he was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 5 December 1943. The Oak-Leaves were added on 13 March 1944, and he was promoted to Major shortly thereafter. Major Rettemeier was a true front line soldier, always in the thick of the action, as attested by his award of the Wound Badge in Gold for five or more wounds.

During the Normandy campaign following the Allied landings of June 1944, Rettemeier served with the elite Panzer Lehr Division. Despite the relatively high quality of both men and equipment allocated to this formation, combat attrition, Allied naval gunfire support and overwhelming air superiority saw Panzer Lehr suffer dreadful losses, and by July 1944 it had been all but wiped out. Rettemeier was subsequently posted to the staff of the Officer Training School at Erlangen, remaining in that post until the end of the war.



Major Josef Rettemeier, the former anti-tank officer turned tank commander, photographed some time after the award of the Oak-Leaves in March 1944, when he was leading the tank battalion of 25.PzGren Div in Russia. Just visible on the left sleeve of the black 'special clothing' issued to tank personnel is the campaign cuffband 'Afrika'. Three months after his Oak-Leaves award Rettemeier would be fighting in Normandy with the Panzer Lehr Division.

When the German armed forces were reconstituted in the 1950s, Rettemeier joined the Bundeswehr; he rose to the command of Panzerbrigade 6, and eventually to deputy divisional commander of 2.Panzergranadier Division. He finally retired from German military service in 1972, but spent some time as an advisor with the Nationalist Chinese forces on Taiwan. Oberst Josef Wilhelm Rettemeier died on 19 December 1997 at the age of 83, and was buried at Bad Nauheim with full military honours.

Oberstleutnant Maximilian von Herff

This officer had one of the more unusual career paths among those who won the Knight's Cross in the Mediterranean theatre. Herff was born in Hanover on 17 April 1893, the son of a doctor. On completing his schooling he joined the Army as an officer candidate not long before the outbreak of



A smiling Major August Seidensticker wears the Knight's Cross awarded for a highly successful action by his Tiger tank unit in Tunisia in March 1943.

On 12 March the first elements of the HQ, 1 Kompanie, and a workshop from the Tiger battalion schwere Panzer Abteilung 504 under Seidensticker's command began to arrive at Bizerta. (2/sPzAbt 504 was later sent to Sicily, where it operated under the control of the Division 'Hermann Göring'.) Seidensticker, a veteran of 10.Pz Div, already held the German Cross in Gold for his service on the Eastern Front. Two companies of Major Hans Georg Lüder's sPzAbt 501 had been operating Tigers in Tunisia since December 1942, with great success at Hamra and Kasserine in January and February. However, in late February at Hunt's Gap, sPzAbt 501 had suffered heavy losses (including their commander) at British hands during an advance on Beja. On Seidensticker's arrival with his first three Tigers – five more followed by 23 March – he took over the combined units, which had only a dozen serviceable Tigers in mixed companies with 75mm PzKw III Ausf Ns. Seidensticker's 501/504 command was committed to the battle to hold the Maknassy heights, in support of a greatly outnumbered Afrikakorps Kampfgruppe under Oberst Rudolf Lang. On 24 March the Tigers played a leading part in defeating attacks by the US 1st Armd Div, destroying 44 US tanks on that day alone. (Josef Charita)



Tiger '141' of 1/sPzAbt 501 in Tunisia, winter 1942/43. Although more than a match for Allied tanks in Africa, these early Tigers suffered continual technical problems. While the two companies of sPzAbt 501 had 20 Tigers and 25 PzKw IIIs in Tunisia, the last Tigers did not arrive until late January 1943, and they usually fought at much less than full strength. After Maknassy the combined unit, reduced to eight Tigers, went on to fight in the Medjerda Valley in April/May, the last survivors surrendering on 12 May. (Private collection)

the Great War. By August 1914 he had been commissioned as a Leutnant with Liebgarde Inf Regt 115, and subsequently earned both classes of the Iron Cross. During the Weimar period, Herff served with the Reichsheer first as an Oberleutnant with Kav Regt 18, and later as a Hauptmann with Inf Regt 15. In August 1937 he was promoted to Oberstleutnant, and in January 1939 was appointed an adjutant with XVII Armeekorps, based in Vienna.

During the campaign in North Africa, Oberstleutnant von Herff commanded Schützen (later Panzergrenadier) Regt 115 with 15. Panzer Division. He saw fairly intensive action during the first campaign of spring 1941, including combat at the battle for Halfaya Pass, where his regiment fought alongside 5. leichte Division. After beating off British attacks he went on to counter-attack and drive his adversaries back to Capuzzo and Sollum, capturing several strongpoints along the way. His distinguished leadership during these actions earned him a recommendation for the Knight's Cross by General Rommel; the award was approved, and bestowed on 13 June 1941. Herff continued to lead a number of reconnaissance units until he was recalled to Germany.

At this point in his career, Oberst von Herff transferred from the Army to the Waffen-SS, in which service he served at the SS Personnel Head Office in Berlin. In November 1944 he was promoted to SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS, but he remained with the personnel department of the SS until May 1945. Taken into captivity by the British at the end of the war, he was held in a POW camp in Scotland, where he died of natural causes on 6 September 1945.

BELOW LEFT Maximilian von Herff, shown here as an Oberst in the Army, wearing tropical service dress and the Knight's Cross awarded on 13 June 1941 for actions in North Africa as commander of a Kampfgruppe. (Josef Charita)

BELOW RIGHT Herff after his transfer to the SS-Personalhauptamt, in the uniform of an SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS. Herff died in British captivity in 1946 and is buried in the cemetery at Cannock Chase. (Josef Charita)



Hauptfeldwebel Wilhelm Wendt

Born on 11 October 1911, Wilhelm Wendt was one of the original founding members of Pz Regt 5, later part of 21.Pz Div, and even before the outbreak of the war he had seen service with the Condor Legion in Spain. He gained combat experience in the early World War II campaigns before his posting to North Africa in spring 1941. There he held the appointment of 'Der Spiess' or company sergeant-major in his regiment's 5 Kompanie. Despite the administrative nature of this post, Wendt earned a reputation for always being in the thick of the fighting, and was warned on several occasions by his superiors against his tendency to lead from the front. The early actions around El Agheila, Mersa el Brega and Mechili earned him the Iron Cross First Class.

Hauptfeldwebel Wilhelm Wendt, awarded the Knight's Cross for his courage and leadership at Sidi Omar on 16 June 1941, is seen here in tropical service dress with the death's-head lapel badges indicating a Panzer unit. Note on his right breast pocket the Spanish Cross marking him as a tank veteran of the Condor Legion. His cap is not white, as it appears in this photo, but is simply older than his fresh tunic, with the original olive colour bleached out by the North African sun and frequent laundering. Recent arrivals tried to bleach their newly issued tropical gear in order to achieve the appearance of true veterans like Wendt. (Josef Charita)



On 16 June 1941, Pz Regt 5 was involved in the battle for Sollum during the British Operation 'Battleaxe' (see also Hauptmann Kümmler, above), and was committed to an attack on Sidi Omar. When the platoon commander of 5 Kompanie's 1 Zug was wounded, Wendt took over temporary command. Leading from the front as always, Wendt's Panzer engaged and destroyed several British tanks; but by the time the company were approaching the British positions Wendt's tank was the only one from his platoon still in action. It was hit twice by enemy fire, but despite this Wendt continued to advance and broke through the defensive positions. Wendt's determination was responsible for the success of this attack, and on 30 June 1941 he was decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Wendt survived the campaign in Africa, subsequently seeing further action on the Eastern Front before being assigned to a training post in the Army's administration school. In the 1950s Wendt joined the new Bundeswehr. He died in retirement in February 1984 at the age of 73.

Major Helmut Hudel

Helmut Hudel, born in July 1915 at Raunheim, joined the Wehrmacht in 1934 and initially served with Kraftfahr Abteilung 5, ostensibly a transport unit. It should be remembered, however, that at this time many such units were being used for the surreptitious training of Germany's future tank crews. Identified at an early stage as a potential officer, Hudel subsequently underwent training at military academy and was commissioned Leutnant in 1936, being posted to Pz Regt 7, part of 10. Panzer Division.

Two years later he was appointed to the staff of the Kriegsschule at Potsdam, remaining in that post until 1940 and missing the campaign in the West. On completion of his posting he rejoined Pz Regt 7 in time to take part in the opening phases of Operation 'Barbarossa' on the central sector of the Russian Front, seeing particularly heavy combat around Minsk and Smolensk. In early 1942 Hudel's division was badly battered in heavy fighting against the Soviet winter counter-offensive. Hudel, by now a company commander with the rank of Hauptmann, was temporarily attached to a Kampfgruppe from 20. Panzer Division. He showed such determination, skilled leadership and gallantry in heavy fighting around Viazma that he was recommended for the Knight's Cross, and the award was made on 27 May 1942.

That month the mauled 10. Pz Div was withdrawn from Russia for rest and rebuilding near Amiens in France. It remained there until December 1942, when it was shipped to North Africa to bolster Rommel's forces in Tunisia after the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria. Now the battalion commander of I/Pz Regt 7, Hudel once again showed



Wendt in shirtsleeve order, before the award of his Knight's Cross. As 'Der Spiess' of 5 Kompanie, Pz Regt 5, his administrative duties were equivalent to those of a British company sergeant-major or US first sergeant, but he had a reputation for boldness in combat.



Major Helmut Hudel in black Panzer uniform, displaying the Oak-Leaves awarded to him in April 1943 for actions in North Africa as commander of I Btl/Pz Regt 7 with 10.Panzer Division. He went on to command the Tiger battalion sPzAbt 508 in Italy in 1944, and served with both the 'Grossdeutschland' and Panzer Lehr divisions in the last six months of the war – postings which are testimony to his fine reputation as a tank officer.

considerable skill and leadership in difficult defensive fighting under heavy enemy pressure. He was rewarded with the addition of the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross on 2 April 1943. By 21 April his division's armoured strength had been worn down to just 25 tanks; Hudel himself was transferred back to Europe in the closing days of the campaign, and avoided the captivity into which the remnants of 10.Pz Div passed when they surrendered to US troops.

Hudel subsequently served in Italy, where he was promoted to Major and commanded schwere Panzer Abteilung 508, a battalion equipped with the PzKw VI Tiger. In late 1944 he was transferred to command the tank training and replacement battalion of the elite 'Grossdeutschland' Division. In February 1945, Hudel took command of Pz Lehr Regt 130, the tank unit of the crack Panzer Lehr Division. He saw action in Holland and later against the Allied bridgehead at Remagen. By the closing weeks of the war Pz Lehr Regt 130 had been reduced to just 15 tanks; it finally surrendered to US forces in the Ruhr Pocket.

Helmut Hudel died in retirement in 1985 at the age of 69 years.

Oberstabsarzt Heinrich Neumann

This officer, whose career was probably literally unique, was born in Berlin on 17 February 1908. Neumann joined the Army in 1933 at the age of 24; his first unit was Inf Regt 9, with which he trained to become a member of the Army medical corps. While continuing his military training Neumann studied for his degree in medicine at the University of Münster. He transferred from the Army to the Luftwaffe in March 1934, and in June of that year graduated as an MD; his degree also brought him a commission as Oberarzt (equivalent to Oberleutnant).

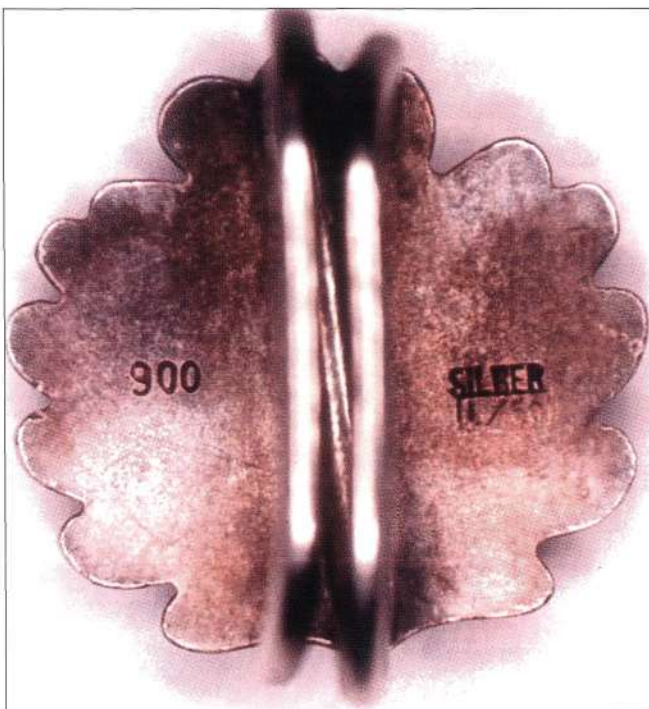
Later in 1934, Neumann also underwent aircrew training, before being posted as a Fliegerstandortarzt (the air force equivalent of a garrison doctor) in early 1935, and was promoted to Stabsarzt (Hauptmann) in August that year. Neumann saw active service with the Condor Legion in Spain, including flying missions as an observer in Heinkel bombers and earning the Spanish Cross in Silver. In 1938 he was assigned as divisional physician to the staff of 7.Flieger Division, and subsequently undertook full paratrooper training, gaining his jump badge. In May 1939, Dr Neumann was promoted to Oberstabsarzt (Major).

(continued on page 41)

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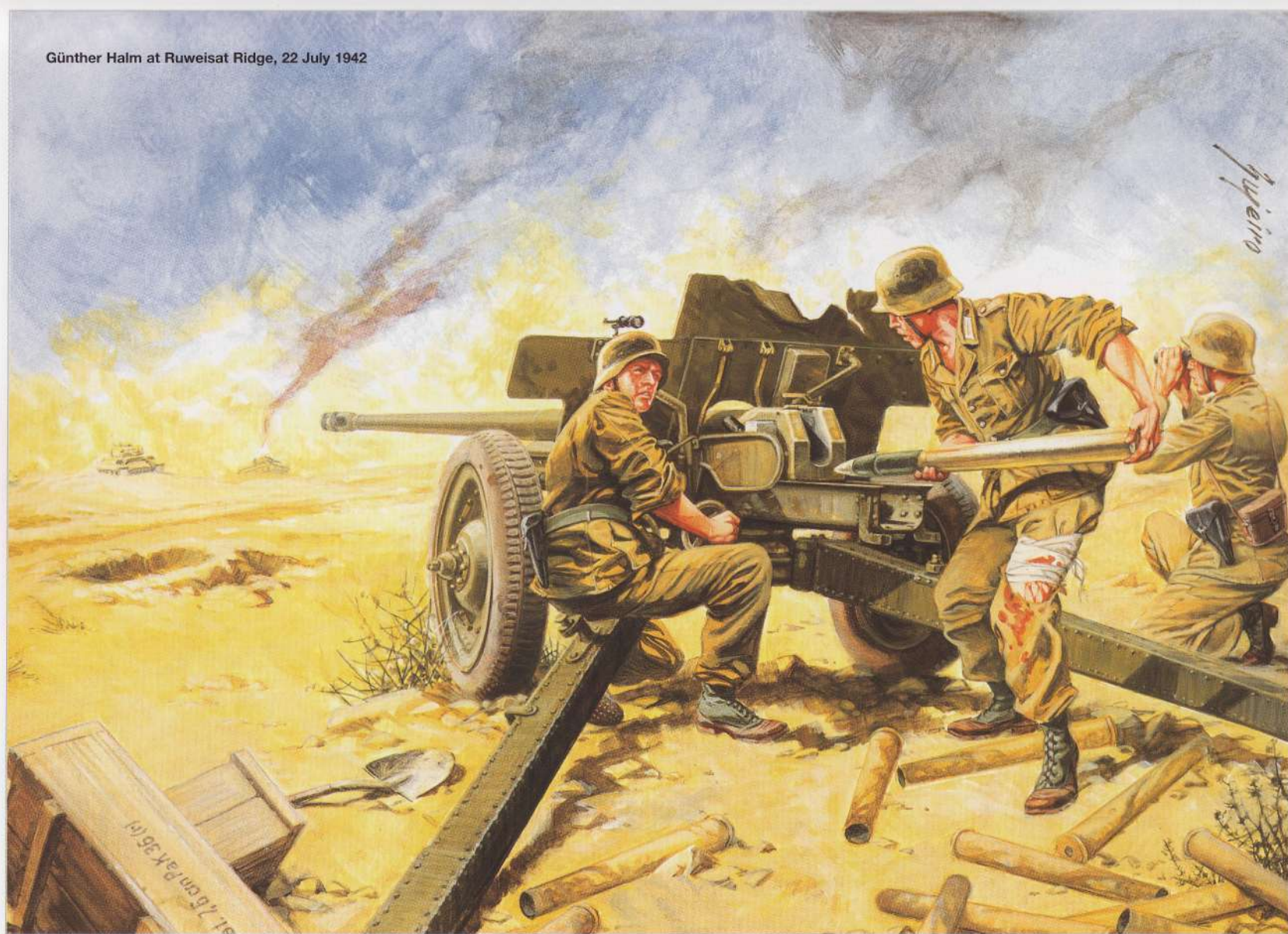
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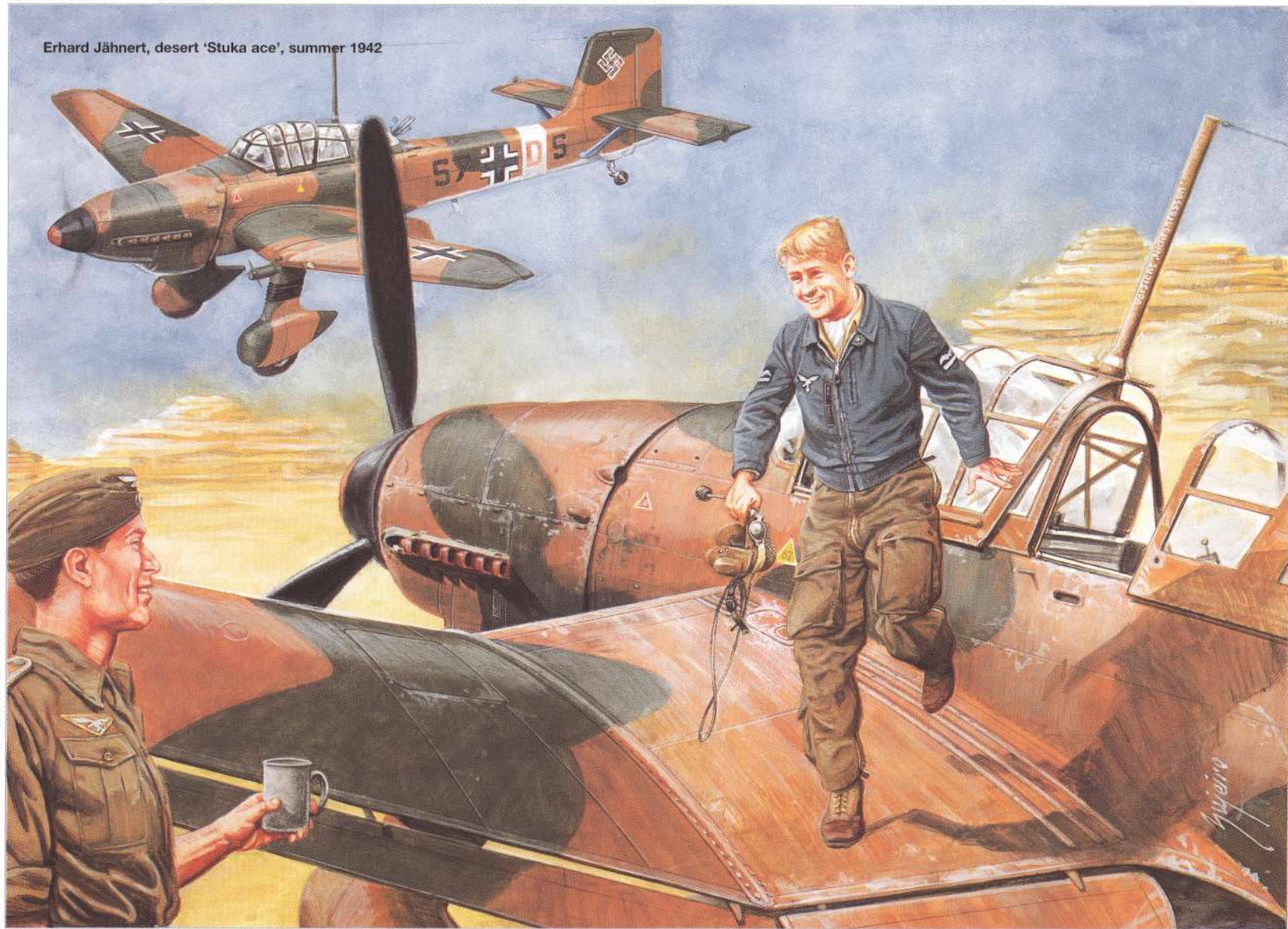
Friedrich Guggenberger docks at La Spezia, 10 December 1941



Günther Halm at Ruweisat Ridge, 22 July 1942



Erhard Jähnert, desert 'Stuka ace', summer 1942



Dr Heinrich Neumann at Hill 107, 20 May 1941



Siegfried Jamrowski in Cassino town, March 1944



'Macki' Steinhoff in Sicily, June 1943



Baron von Tiesenhausen at the 'sky periscope', November 1941



Neumann saw action with the Fallschirmjäger during the campaign against the Low Countries in May 1940. During the operation in Holland his men succeeded in capturing the Süder military hospital without bloodshed, and subsequently neutralized the nearby Dutch sniper training school. For these achievements Major Neumann was awarded the Iron Cross in both classes on 20 May 1940.

On 20 May 1941, assigned to Generalmajor Eugen Meindl's Luftlande Sturm Regiment ('Air Landing Assault Regiment'), Neumann took part in the first wave of the airborne invasion of Crete, where his regiment was given the spearhead task of capturing the airfield at Maleme. Although the initial glider landing by a company of I/LLSt Regt south of the airstrip was successful, part of the follow-up landings by the rest of the battalion and a parachute drop by III/LLSt Regt came down in the middle of Commonwealth positions; casualties were very heavy and included several key officers. The airborne troops came under sustained heavy fire from a vital position on Hill 107, where anti-aircraft guns were emplaced.

Major Neumann was with I Btl during their attempt to seize Hill 107; and when every other officer present became a casualty, this regimental medical officer took command, rallied the remaining troops, and pushed ahead up the slopes with the utmost determination. Despite his best efforts he was unable to reach the British positions, and his men were forced to take what cover they could find for the night – which was sleepless, in the expectation of counter-attacks which never in fact occurred. What Neumann did not realize was that the defenders had been so shaken by the ferocity of his attack that they feared being overrun at any moment, and under the cover of darkness began to withdraw from the position. When Neumann launched his next attack in the early hours of 21 May he was faced only by a rearguard, and his men took Hill 107 successfully. Two AA guns were then turned on their former owners, and this vital fire support allowed the first plane-loads of reinforcements and munitions to land, turning the tide of the battle.

Major Neumann was immediately recommended for the Knight's Cross. In the words of the recommendation by Oberst Bernhard Ramcke: '... The determination of Oberstabsarzt Neumann, with only limited forces, to attack the north-west face of Hill 107, which threatened Maleme airfield with its well-sited anti-aircraft guns, proved decisive to the battle. Misled by the violence of his assault, the enemy withdrew from the hill during the night. At dawn the rearguard was



Although serving with paratroop units for much of the war, Heinrich Neumann wears the dark blue collar patches of a medical officer, with the insignia of his equivalent rank of Major. One of only a handful of non-combatant officers to be decorated with the Knight's Cross, Dr Neumann had already shown his mettle before the outbreak of World War II by flying on bomber missions with the Condor Legion.



Fallschirmjäger with German infantry outside Rotterdam on 10 May 1940, where III/FJ Regt 1 captured Waalhaven airfield (note the signpost, right) so that troops of 22.Luftlande Div could be flown in. Dr Neumann, who served on the staff of 7.Flieger Div, was awarded both classes of the Iron Cross for his behaviour in this campaign, where his paratroopers showed more aggression than normally expected of medics. (Private collection)

thrown from the hill in an assault led by Neumann. As an outstanding individual combatant, he fulfilled his role as Regimental Physician in gallant actions.' The award was approved, and Neumann joined the ranks of the Ritterkreuzträger on 21 August 1941 – one of only a very few medical personnel to be so decorated.

Neumann subsequently saw action on the Eastern Front in early 1942 as the divisional doctor of 'Division Meindl', the hastily assembled formation of Luftwaffe Field Regiments that fought on the northern sector in the Kholm-Demjansk area. In June 1944 he joined the newly formed 6.Fallschirmjäger Division in France with the rank of Oberstarzt (Oberst). The division was very heavily committed to the battles for Normandy; thereafter Neumann rejoined the staff of his old CO, Generalleutnant Meindl, becoming in August 1944 the Korpsarzt or senior medical officer of Meindl's II Fallschirm Korps. The corps fought stubbornly during the long retreat through Holland and over the Rhine crossings, eventually surrendering to British forces in April 1945.

In the 1950s Dr Neumann joined the air force of the newly formed Federal German Armed Forces, and once again qualified for his paratrooper jump wings. He retained his old rank of Oberstabsarzt, eventually retiring in 1964. At the time of writing (2004) this extraordinary officer is still alive.

Hauptmann Siegfried Jamrowski

Siegfried Jamrowski was born on 1 November 1917 at Angerapp, East Prussia. In 1936 he was drafted into the Army and served in the ranks of the Jäger (light infantry) battalion of Inf Regt 2, reaching the rank of Feldwebel before completing his obligatory two-year national service. He then returned to civilian life to study forestry, but was recalled when the Army was mobilized in 1939. Identified as a potential officer, Jamrowski was sent to the Infanterieschule at Döberitz. On 1 June 1940 he volunteered for transfer to the paratroops and thus moved from the Army to the Luftwaffe. He was commissioned Leutnant in September 1940, and subsequently appointed a platoon commander with 8 (MG) Kompanie, II Bataillon, Fallschirmjäger Regiment 3.

Jamrowski took part in extremely bitter fighting on the Eastern Front when his regiment, as part of the weakened 7.Flieger Div committed piecemeal to the Leningrad sector, was thrown into the path of heavy Soviet assaults in September 1941 – these sought to take advantage of the transfer of many German troops from the northern sector to join the central thrust on Moscow. Jamrowski earned the Iron Cross Second Class during these actions, and was promoted to Oberleutnant in April 1942. His regiment continued to serve in Russia with 7.Flieger Div (redesignated 1.Fallschirmjäger Div in October 1942) throughout the next year, earning the Iron Cross First Class in December 1942.

Withdrawn to France in early 1943, the new 1.FJ Div completed its forming-up, and in July was sent to Sicily, where it took part in the brief but fierce defence of the island against the Allied landings. At one point Jamrowski's unit became completely encircled at Carlentini, and had to break out as much by stealth as by force; in another incident the Fallschirmjäger were withdrawing underneath a bridge at Malati as British tanks were actually rolling across the bridge above them.

Withdrawn to the Italian mainland, FJ Regt 3 saw action in September 1943 against the Allied landings at Salerno; and at the end of the year Generalleutnant Richard Heidrich's 1.FJ Div were committed to the defence of that sector of the Gustav Line which blocked the Liri Valley at Cassino, overlooked by the Benedictine monastery. A formidable fortress was created in the town and in the hills around it, and was stubbornly defended by the paratroopers against repeated Allied attacks between mid-January and mid-May 1944.

On 15 March, while the town was held by Hauptmann Folin's II Btl of Oberst Heilmann's FJ Regt 3, the Fallschirmjäger were subjected to a devastating aerial bombardment by the USAAF. Jamrowski (now the captain commanding 6 Kompanie) and his men were trapped in a buried cellar for 12 hours when the house above them collapsed. Pulling back into deep shelters at the bottom of the hill slopes, 6 Kompanie then had to react to repeated Allied infantry and tank attacks on the ruins, since Hauptmann Jamrowski's men had suffered the lowest casualties – 7 Kompanie had been more or less wiped out, and 5 & 8 Kompanie were each reduced to about 30 men. However, the smashed houses,



Dr Neumann wearing the *Fliegerbluse* normally used by Luftwaffe personnel for combat service. Interestingly, on this tunic both the Paratrooper Badge and the Iron Cross First Class are of the embroidered cloth versions. While the former is relatively common, the latter is extremely rare.



Hauptmann Siegfried Jamrowski in tropical field service dress, wearing the Knight's Cross awarded for his spirited command of a company of II/FJ Regt 3 during the 'Third Battle of Cassino' in March 1944. He also displays the German Cross in Gold, Paratrooper Badge, Iron Cross First Class, Wound Badge, and Luftwaffe Ground Combat Badge. After the war this paratroop officer worked for the forestry service, and became a keen ornithologist. (Josef Charita)

hidden cellars and chaotic rubble created by the bombing were to provide excellent defensive positions, and the determined paratroopers drove back a series of attacks by Commonwealth troops with heavy losses, launching aggressive counter-attacks of their own. For FJ Regt 3 this 'Third Battle of Cassino' lasted from 14 to 23 March, and cost some 435 casualties out of about 700 men. Jamrowski himself was wounded and evacuated on 19 March.

The remnants of I & II/FJ Regt 3 were still fighting in mid-May, when they counter-attacked the Poles who had taken Point 593 above the valley; but sheer weight of numbers forced the defenders of Cassino to withdraw soon afterwards, as General Alexander's offensive turned their flank and burst into the Liri Valley. For his gallantry and inspired leadership during the fighting at Cassino, Siegfried 'Jambo' Jamrowski was awarded the Knight's Cross on 6 June 1944. Jamrowski and his paratroopers took part in many subsequent defensive battles as the Germans stubbornly withdrew up the length of Italy, finally surrendering to British troops on 2 May 1945.

Major Jamrowski was released from captivity in 1946, and later returned to his pre-war career in the German forestry service, reaching a senior position.

Hauptmann Heinz Meyer

Born in Magdeburg on 9 April 1916, Heinz Meyer volunteered for service in the Luftwaffe's elite Regiment 'General Göring' in 1937, serving in 14 Kompanie. Under the command of Major Bruno Brauer, the regiment's I Jäger Bataillon formed the nucleus for the Luftwaffe's new paratroop branch, becoming I Btl/Fallschirmjäger Regiment 1 in March/April 1938. While Meyer was still a private his potential was noted; he was sent on an NCO training course and promoted to Unteroffizier in October 1939, and in April 1940 he was selected for future officer training. The following month Meyer was promoted to Feldwebel and shortly afterwards made his first combat jump during the attack on Holland. Serving with Hauptmann Prager's II/FJ Regt 1, on 10 May Meyer took part in the capture of the vital Moerdyk and Dordrecht bridges, which the paratroopers then held for three days until relieved by the arrival of 9. Panzer Division. Meyer received the Iron Cross Second Class for his participation in this action.

In August 1940 he was commissioned as Leutnant and given command of a platoon in 11 Kompanie, FJ Regt 3, newly raised within the expanded 7. Flieger Division. He subsequently saw action during the attack on Greece, and was temporarily attached to FJ Regt 2 for the drop which seized the Corinth Canal on 25 April 1941. The following month he earned the Iron Cross First Class for his behaviour during the



invasion of Crete, where Oberst Richard Heidrich's FJ Regt 3 saw confused fighting after scattered drops in the Galatas–Canea sector.

From the heat of the Mediterranean, Meyer then moved to the Leningrad sector of the northern Russian Front, where 7.Flieger Div (redesignated 1.Fallschirmjäger Div in October 1942) served until March 1943. While in Russia, Meyer transferred to FJ Regt 4 and in July 1942 was promoted to Oberleutnant. After recuperating in France during spring 1943, part of the division was rushed to Sicily, where Meyer's regiment saw action against their British opposite numbers at Primasole Ridge in August. Withdrawing successfully to the Italian mainland, FJ Regts 3 and 4 were soon fighting against the Allied landings at Salerno.

On 29 February 1944, Generalleutnant Richard Heidrich's 1.FJ Div relieved the Army's 90.PzGren Div in the defences around Monte Cassino. There, during the 'Third Battle' in March, Meyer's unit were defending features which they called 'Calvary Hill' north-west of the monastery. In support of the major southwards attacks on the town and on Monastery and Hangman's Hills by 2nd New Zealand and 4th Indian Divs, a track had been driven by Allied engineers from the northern slopes of the Colle Maiola along ridge tops leading to the major German strongpoints at Albaneta Farm and Point 593.

On 19 March an armoured force advanced along this 'Cavendish Road'; Sherman tanks of 20th NZ Armd Regt and Stuarts of the US

Fallschirmjäger in the ruins of Cassino town. On 15 March an air raid by more than 200 B-17 Flying Fortresses dropped some 600 tons of bombs; this was followed by an equally harrowing eight-hour artillery barrage during which more than 200,000 shells were fired. Before they could prepare to resist the infantry attacks which followed, Jamrowski and his company headquarters had to dig their way out of the rubble burying their cellar. (Bundesarchiv)



Hauptmann Heinz Meyer, another paratroop officer Knight's Cross winner during the 'Third Battle of Cassino'. Meyer's award was for halting a dangerous surprise tank attack along a high ridge towards the rear of Monastery Hill on 19 March 1944. Already a veteran of Greece, Crete, Leningrad and Sicily, Meyer was subsequently decorated with the Oak-Leaves in November 1944 for his leadership of a battalion in Normandy and Holland. (Josef Charita)

760th Tk Bn captured Albaneta Farm and Point 593 and got within 1,000 yards of the rear of the monastery. However, their advance along the narrow, rocky track, with very few supporting infantry, was frustrated by Meyer's lightly armed paratroopers. Armed with nothing heavier than Panzerschreck 'bazookas' and Teller mines, they managed to destroy six tanks and disable a further 16, forcing the rest to withdraw. For defeating this dangerous surprise attack, which had represented a serious threat to the German hold on Monte Cassino, Meyer was awarded the Knight's Cross on 8 April 1944.

During the following month Meyer was elevated to battalion commander, taking over III/FJ Regt 15 in the new 5.FJ Div then forming in France. In June 1944 the division was heavily committed to the fighting in Normandy as part of General Meindl's II Fallschirm Korps; after heavy losses on the St Lô front the survivors narrowly escaped from the Falaise Pocket. With their losses replaced by a fairly motley collection of Luftwaffe personnel, Major Meyer's paratroops fought in Holland and, at the end of the year, on the southern flank of the ill-fated Ardennes offensive. On 18 November 1944, Meyer was decorated with the Oak-Leaves in recognition of his continued skilled leadership. He ended the war fighting against US forces in the Harz Mountains, surrendering on 8 May 1945.

Oberfeldwebel Rudolf Donth

Born at Schreiberhau, Silesia, on 16 February 1920, Rudolf Donth was drafted for Luftwaffe service on 1 October 1939, and after six months was assigned to the Fallschirmjäger. After basic training at Wittstock he joined FJ Regt 3 and completed his instruction, gaining his jump badge and being promoted to Gefreiter in November 1940. Thereafter his travels would to some extent parallel those of Heinz Meyer (above).

Donth participated in the airborne assault on Crete in 1941, seeing action at Galatas, Canea and Suda Bay against New Zealand infantry. Subsequently transferred to the Leningrad front, he earned both classes of the Iron Cross within a few days during fighting around Rzhev and the Mius river. Promoted to Oberjäger in October 1942, Donth served with the Fallschirmjäger Schi-Bataillon as a section leader until April 1943. He saw combat with 1.FJ Div in Sicily that August, and in Italy in September/October, taking part in further heavy fighting at Foggia against the British 8th Army's advance following the Taranto landings. In February 1944 his regiment arrived in the Gustav Line to take part in the historic defence of the Cassino position. He was promoted to Feldwebel on 1 April 1944.

Paratroopers are by definition lightly equipped and generally weak in artillery or anti-tank support. When faced with enemy armour they often had recourse to hand-held weapons such as hand-placed charges, mines, or, at best, effective but short-range weapons like the Panzerschreck bazooka and Panzerfaust single-shot anti-tank projectile. The extremely dangerous nature of such tactics was recognized by the Germans with the institution of a 'Special Badge for Single-Handed Destruction of an Enemy Tank', and Rudolf Donth was awarded such a badge during the fighting at Monte Cassino.

Eventually outflanked and forced out of their positions at Cassino, I.FJ Div made a successful withdrawal northwards. By mid-September, Donth's regiment was in the so-called Gothic Line defences north of Florence, where it held the Futa Pass in the Apennine Mountains tenaciously against attacks by troops from both US II Corps and British XIII Corps before being compelled to fall back once more. By October the paratroopers had been shifted eastwards and were holding positions south of the Savio river.

By this stage Donth, though only a sergeant-major, was leading a company – a considerable mark of the respect and trust in which he was held by his officers, even at a time when platoon commands were often held by NCOs. He was tasked with defending a critical supply route. Coming under heavy attack by Allied infantry with both artillery and tank support, Donth led a surprise counter-attack just as the enemy were about to overrun his positions. Such was the ferocity of his attack that six out of the ten tanks were destroyed; their infantry were driven back with heavy losses, and Donth even succeeded in freeing some of his own paratroopers who had previously been taken prisoner. A few weeks later Donth led an assault on Allied positions, without heavy fire support, and captured three officers and 78 other ranks together with all their weapons. Towards the end of 1944 he again led an attack, by night and in only platoon strength, which reportedly persuaded an entire Allied battalion to withdraw from its positions.

Rudolf Donth once again showed himself to be the epitome of the resourceful, fearless paratrooper in an incident near Orsogna when, during a reconnaissance mission with just one other soldier, he gained access to the roof of a building housing a British headquarters, and calmly monitored and fed back vital information for a period of 38 hours before making good his escape. On 14 January 1945, Donth



The paratrooper Rudolf Donth, seen here as a Leutnant, was decorated with the Knight's Cross in January 1945 after performing several acts of conspicuous bravery while serving as a Feldwebel with FJ Regt 1 during defensive actions as the Germans retreated up the Italian mainland.

Donth serving as a Hauptmann of paratroops in the post-war Bundeswehr, in a photograph taken in 1958. He wears all his wartime medal ribbons on his left breast, surmounted by a miniature Knight's Cross on a ribbon worn in first place. The wings of his parachute requalification are pinned above his right pocket.



was decorated with the Knight's Cross and was granted a battlefield commission to Leutnant. In the closing stages of the war Donth was assigned to the leadership school of I Fallschirm Korps and was promoted to Oberleutnant. He went into captivity in May 1945 and was released in April 1946.

Donth joined the Bundeswehr in 1956, retaining his rank and soon requalifying for his jump wings (and subsequently for the US and French equivalents). He was soon promoted to Hauptmann and given command of a paratroop company. He undertook special forces training with the French and psychological warfare training with the Americans, being promoted Major in 1963 and Oberstleutnant in 1971. Donth finally retired in 1977, and became the archivist of the Bund Deutscher Fallschirmjäger (Association of German Paratroopers).

Oberleutnant zur See Siegfried Koitschka

Born in Bautzen on 6 August 1917, Koitschka joined the Kriegsmarine in 1937. After following the usual career path of serving as a watch officer under an experienced captain – in his case the renowned Kapitänleutnant Erich Topp in U-552 – he eventually achieved command of his own boat in January 1942. Koitschka's first command was the elderly, cramped Type IIB coastal boat U-7; but that October he graduated to an ocean-going Type VIIC, U-616.

By winter 1942/43 the Battle of the Atlantic was at its height, and November was a high point of German success due to the large numbers of Allied vessels crossing the Atlantic for the North Africa landings. However, this was in fact a 'blip' in a steadily declining record of success; although about 70 U-boats were at sea at any one time, the increased strength and competence of Allied anti-submarine escorts was limiting



A snapshot of Oberleutnant zur See Siegfried Koitschka of U-616 on his return from the mission for which he was awarded the Knight's Cross, during which he torpedoed and sank the American destroyer USS *Buck*. He holds the traditional bouquet of flowers presented to U-boat captains – preferably by the prettiest female auxiliary in the port – on their return from a successful patrol.

the number of sinkings, and Koitschka's first two attacks against Allied convoys in Atlantic waters were both driven off.

In May 1943 Koitschka took U-616 into the Mediterranean to operate out of the port of La Spezia. Penetrating the heavily guarded Straits of Gibraltar was a perilous undertaking at any date; by now, with the final Allied victory in Tunisia and consequently increased Allied naval dominance of the western Mediterranean, Admiral Dönitz was against sending more boats into this theatre, but was overruled by Hitler's wish to be seen to continue supporting his Italian allies.

Koitschka's first patrol in these new waters was just as fruitless as his Atlantic patrols, and U-616 was extremely fortunate to survive a furious depth charge attack. He finally achieved success in October 1943 during a cruise against the Allied forces which were landing at Salerno. As well as sinking the destroyer USS *Buck*, he torpedoed and damaged a merchantman and a tank landing ship. Over the following two months, however, his tally rose by only one ship torpedoed and damaged. Even so, on 27 January 1944, Koitschka was decorated with the Knight's Cross.



A more formal portrait of Koitschka shows him cleaned up, shaven, and wearing the regulation officer's reefer jacket with the two gold cuff rings of his rank. The white top to the cap was normally worn only when at sea, but is occasionally seen in such portraits of boat commanders; normally the standard all-blue cap was worn when ashore.

While this award may seem strange with such a meagre record of sinkings, it must be remembered that by this stage in the war the tide had turned decisively against the U-boats. Since May 1943 a combination of greatly increased Allied strength in escorts, small aircraft carriers and aircraft, the introduction of new centimetric radar which robbed the U-boats of their concealment on the surface by night, and growing tactical expertise, had largely reduced the hunters to the hunted. Very few captains had the nerve to tackle a destroyer, and even fewer survived the encounter. Koitschka had struck a blow for the morale of the U-boat arm, and shown that the Allies could not afford complacency – the U-boats were still an enemy to be reckoned with.

In May 1944, Koitschka added two more victims to his tally, the tanker *G.S. Walden* and the freighter *Ford Fiedler*, totalling between them some 17,600 tons. On his next patrol, however, U-616's luck ran out: off Cartagena, Spain, she was detected and attacked by a force of eight US destroyers backed by aircraft. The lone submarine had no chance, and Koitschka and his crew were extremely lucky to be able to abandon the stricken boat successfully. Taken prisoner, they sat out the remainder of the war in POW camps.

Oberleutnant Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt

'Fiffi' Stahlschmidt was born on 15 September 1920 at Kreuztal in Westphalia. He underwent basic flying training at Salzwedel, later attending the pilots' school in Breslau and the war school in Vienna. On completion of training he was posted to 2.Staffel of the fighter wing Jagdgeschwader 27 in the rank of Oberfähnrich; and in spring 1941 the Geschwader, equipped with Messerschmitt Bf109 fighters, was transferred to North Africa.

Stahlschmidt's first victory, an RAF Hurricane fighter, was claimed over Tobruk on 15 June 1941 after a lengthy dogfight. After several unsuccessful months, on 20 November of that year he shot down three South African Air Force Maryland bombers, bringing his score to four kills. Stahlschmidt himself was shot down on 21 February 1942 by Clive Caldwell, the Australian fighter ace, and was forced to crash-land his Bf109F in the desert; luckily he was picked up by a German reconnaissance patrol. Six days later, Stahlschmidt once again had to make a forced landing after being hit while strafing a vehicle column.

This time he came down behind Allied lines; he was captured, and was badly beaten and robbed by Polish troops. Sent back to Tobruk for interrogation, he succeeded in escaping and made it safely back to German lines over 40 miles away. For this achievement he was decorated with the German Cross in Gold on 20 April 1942.

On 7 May 1942 Stahlschmidt engaged a formation of RAF P-40 Kittyhawk fighters. Working his way into a perfect position behind them, he pushed the firing button on his joystick only to have one of his guns explode. The unfortunate pilot was forced to crash-land once again, though this time safely behind German lines. Continuing his odd pattern of fits and starts, Leutnant Stahlschmidt scored no fewer than four more kills on 26 June 1942, bringing his total to 17 aircraft shot down. He was appointed Staffelfkapitän of 2/JG 27 at the beginning of July 1942, a dazzling month during which he added no fewer than 25 victories to his score. Stahlschmidt was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 20 August 1942 after his tally reached 47 victories. He was also the first German fighter pilot in the Mediterranean theatre to be decorated with the Front Flight Clasp (Frontflugspange) in Gold.

On 7 September 1942, Stahlschmidt and three other pilots of his squadron took off on a combat patrol over the area south-east of El Alamein. Attacking a formation of Hurricanes, they were 'bounced' out of the sun by Spitfires of No.601 Sqn, and two of the four were shot down. The other pilot survived a crash-landing, but Stahlschmidt was never seen again. Officially posted as missing in action, Stahlschmidt was posthumously awarded the Oak-Leaves and promoted to Oberleutnant on 3 January 1943. When he died he had a total of 59 aerial victories gained during more than 400 combat missions.

Hauptmann Johannes Steinhoff

Johannes 'Macki' Steinhoff was born on 15 September 1913 at Bottendorf. He excelled during his education, showing a keen interest in foreign languages, and studied at the University of Jena until 1934. Intent on seeing the world and putting his linguistic abilities into practice, he saw a career in the Navy as his best option, and on leaving university he was accepted as a naval officer candidate. However, Steinhoff was also fascinated by aviation; and in 1935, deciding that his passion for flight outweighed the travel opportunities offered by the Navy, he transferred to the Luftwaffe and trained as a fighter pilot. By the outbreak of war, as a Leutnant and Staffelfkapitän of 10/JG



The desert fighter ace Leutnant Hans-Arnold Stahlschmidt of JG 27, awarded the Knight's Cross on 20 August 1942 after reaching a score of 47 aerial victories, but posted as missing in action a month later after a dogfight with RAF Spitfires south of El Alamein – by which time he had raised his tally to 59 kills. The popular 'Fiffi' Stahlschmidt, a close friend of the North African theatre's leading ace Hans-Joachim Marseille, was much mourned by his comrades. (Josef Charita)



Hauptmann Johannes Steinhoff of JG 52 in a formal portrait taken following the award of his Knight's Cross after achieving his 35th victory at the end of August 1941. Already a veteran of the Battle of Britain and the Eastern Front, he would go on to command JG 77 in Tunisia and Sicily in 1943, describing his experiences in his book *The Straits of Messina*. (Josef Charita)

26 'Schlageter', he was allocated to the fledgling night fighter unit NJG 1 to help develop tactics for this type of operation.

Steinhoff was never a keen exponent of night fighting, and although he applied himself to his task he was permitted to return to day fighters in 1940, serving first with JG 26 and then with JG 52 during the Battle of Britain. Victories were not easily come by; the Messerschmitt Bf109E was a good aircraft, but its limited fuel capacity gave it little time over England on any one sortie, and the pilots were often ordered to stick close to the bombers in the escort role rather than using their capabilities to engage the RAF to best advantage.

In June 1941, JG 52 was on the Eastern Front for the opening of the invasion of Russia. Against a less skilled enemy equipped with swarms of obsolete aircraft, Oberleutnant Steinhoff began to run up a considerable tally; and on 30 August 1941 he was awarded the Knight's Cross after scoring his 35th kill. Promoted to Hauptmann, he became Gruppen-kommandeur of II/JG 52 in early 1942; by August of that year he had recorded his 100th aerial victory, and on 2 September he was awarded the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross. By the beginning of February 1943 he had reached a score of 150 victories, having achieved well over 100 of these in just 18 months.

Steinhoff would stay in Russia until late March 1943 when, following the death in action of Major Müncheberg (see below), he was transferred to North Africa to take over as Geschwader Kommodore of JG 77 with the rank of Major. He led his wing during the final battles in Tunisia and the subsequent all-out effort to cover the Axis withdrawals to Sicily and Italy. In the Mediterranean, Steinhoff once again found himself up against Western aircraft and pilots of high calibre, and this time at a considerable numerical disadvantage. He was himself shot down on more than one occasion. The Geschwader was pulled out of Sicily at the end of July 1943 following the Allied invasion, redeploying to the Foggia area of southern Italy. Oberstleutnant Steinhoff remained with JG 77 on this front until the autumn of 1944; he was awarded the Swords to his Oak-Leaves on 28 July 1944, by which time he had achieved 167 victories.

In November 1944, Steinhoff was appointed to command the new JG 7, flying the revolutionary Messerschmitt Me262 jet fighter from Lager-Lechfeld in Bavaria. The arrival of men and machines, and the necessary training programme, were slow; Hitler's mania for attack rather than defence had resulted in an order in May 1944 that this superb single-seat aircraft, whose speed and firepower quite outclassed all Allied fighter types, should be deployed only as a 'bomber'. It was only by something like subterfuge that a small fighter trials unit survived until Hitler grudgingly eased his order late in September. Under the leadership

of Major Walter Nowotny the trials unit achieved its first successes in October/November, and during the following month Steinhoff began to weld the first available jets and trained pilots into the beginnings of an operational wing.

Political interference was continual, however; Hitler, Göring, and the bomber officers who now surrounded him could not grasp the enormous technical and tactical difficulties preventing an immediate dramatic slaughter of USAAF heavy bombers, and Steinhoff was a fearlessly outspoken officer. At the New Year he was replaced as Kommodore; but his days of flying the Me262 were not over. In January the Inspector of Fighters, Generalleutnant Adolf Galland, was himself dismissed, and a number of other fighter aces were also in disgrace as 'mutineers' for their open criticism of Göring's incompetence. On Hitler's personal orders, Galland was spared arrest and permitted to set up a new Me262 unit, Jagdverband 44, based at Brandenburg-Briest west of Berlin.

To this 'aces' squadron Galland attracted – officially or unofficially – a remarkable number of senior, vastly experienced and highly decorated fighter veterans. Steinhoff, appointed head of training, led JV 44's first operational sortie in late March 1945, shooting down a Soviet Il-2 'Stormovik' in the first of the squadron's estimated 56 jet kills. By 18 April, with the squadron now based at Munich-Riem, Steinhoff's tally of jet victories had risen to six. On that date he was taking off for a mission at a speed of about 125mph when his port landing gear ran into a shallow bomb crater and was ripped off; the Me262 crashed into the perimeter embankment, and its full load of jet fuel exploded. Miraculously, Steinhoff escaped from the inferno, but he was so badly burned that he spent the next two years in hospital; plastic surgery and skin grafts had their limitations, and he would bear terrible scars for the rest of his life.

Oberst Steinhoff had flown 993 combat missions, and was credited with 176 victories; he himself had been shot down 12 times, but never baled out, crash-landing his aircraft successfully on each occasion.

Finally released from Allied hospitals in 1947, he made a new career in the advertising business, before joining the reborn Luftwaffe in 1952. By 1956 he was Deputy Chief-of-Staff/Operations; two years later he was



'Macki' Steinhoff portrayed after adding the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross in September 1942, on scoring over 100 kills. Note that he also displays the Front Flight Clasp in Gold with the pendant added on completing 500 missions. Before his combat career ended in a blazing Me262 jet in April 1945, Steinhoff had logged 993 combat missions and 176 kills – six of them gained while flying the world's first operational jet fighter. (Josef Charita)

General Steinhoff, visibly scarred by his horrific accident in 1945, is seen here in the uniform of the post-war Luftwaffe, in which service he rose to the highest rank and held senior NATO appointments. Few German servicemen served their country for so long and with such distinction, and Steinhoff earned the respect and admiration of all who knew him. (Josef Charita)



promoted to Brigadegeneral, and in 1962 to Generalmajor. For several years he held the post of German Military Representative to NATO, and in 1965 was promoted to Generalleutnant and appointed Chief-of-Staff NATO Air Forces Europe. From 1966 to 1971 he served as Inspektor der Bundesluftwaffe, thereafter rising to full General and the chairmanship of the NATO Military Committee. General Steinhoff insisted on keeping his flying qualifications current and piloted all the latest jet fighters being brought into service. He finally retired in 1972, with the respect and admiration of all who had ever served with him.

Johannes Steinhoff died on 21 February 1994; his name is perpetuated on the cuff bands worn by JG 73, now known as 'Geschwader Steinhoff' in his honour.

Leutnant Karl-Heinz Bendert

Karl-Heinz Bendert was born on 9 September 1914 at Schwiebus in Mark Brandenburg. He joined the Luftwaffe in 1937, and on completing his flying training was posted to JG 27 as an NCO pilot. His first victory came on 12 May 1940 when he shot down an RAF Blenheim over Rotterdam, and by September of that year his total had risen to six.

Bendert's tally of aerial victories rose only slowly thereafter. His squadron moved to North Africa in November 1941, and it was 22 May 1942 before his score reached ten kills. Thereafter, however, his success rate rose dramatically; having taken two years to achieve ten victories, he doubled this score in just over two months. Only eight days after making his 20th kill, Bendert's tally had risen to 30, and only ten days after that, to 40 aircraft shot down. By now commissioned as a Leutnant, Bendert was awarded the Knight's Cross on 30 December 1942 after achieving 42 victories.

By the time the award was made, Bendert had been re-assigned to non-combatant duties as a flying instructor. In September 1943 he returned to JG 27, becoming Staffelfkapitän of 5/JG 27 on 2 December. Apart from a detachment to Greece in 1943, and a brief but desperate spell in France after D-Day, the 'Afrika Geschwader' spent the rest of the war based in southern Germany on home defence (Reichsverteidigung) duties. Bendert earned a considerable reputation as a destroyer of Allied four-engined heavy bombers, being credited with shooting down ten of these 'Viermots'. Such sorties demanded high levels of skill and nerve, given the very heavy armament carried by the tight formations of USAAF B-17 and B-24 bombers, and the numerous fighters which usually escorted them. By the end of hostilities, Karl-Heinz Bendert had been credited with a total of 55 victories in 610 missions.

Bendert survived the war and died in retirement on 16 July 1983 in Oldenburg, at the age of 69.

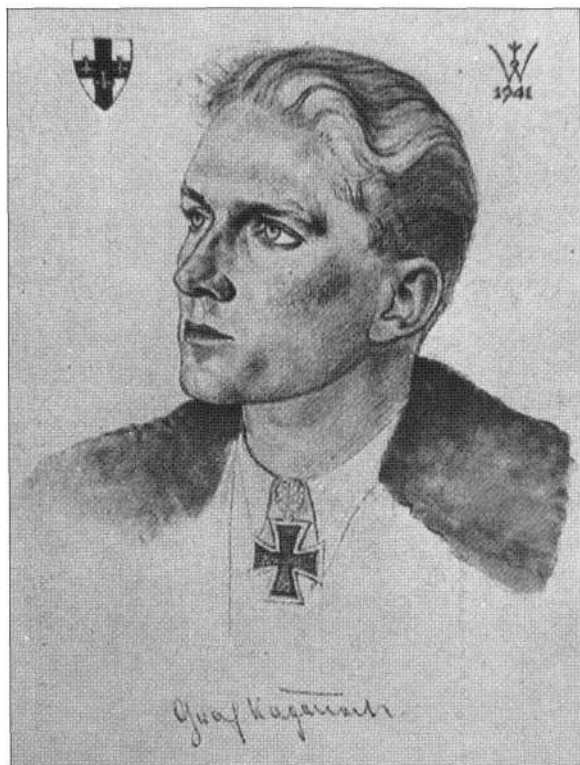
Hauptmann Arbogast 'Erbo' von Kageneck

Kageneck was born on 2 April 1918 on the estate of his grandfather Baron Clemens Schorlemer, the Prussian Minister of Agriculture. He was usually known by the nickname 'Erbo' instead of his unusual baptismal name, which commemorated one of his ancestors, a 10th century knight. His father, Graf Karl von Kageneck, a general in the Imperial Army and aide-de-camp to the Kaiser, had been taken prisoner by Canadian troops during World War I and spent a relatively comfortable captivity in a British camp for enemy staff officers.

Like many sons of the aristocracy, Erbo von Kageneck was sent to a Jesuit school. Strong-minded and academically bright, he rebelled against the strict disciplinary regime, and was expelled in 1936; things were little more peaceful when he was moved to the Kaiser-Wilhelm high school in Trier. It was natural for him to choose a military career, and Kageneck joined the Luftwaffe in 1937. By the outbreak of war he had completed officer and flight training and was commissioned as a Leutnant, serving with Jagdgeschwader 27 and flying Messerschmitt Bf109 fighters.



Leutnant Karl-Heinz Bendert achieved considerable success as an NCO fighter pilot with JG 27 in North Africa, where he shot down a further 36 aircraft to add to the six already in his log book before moving to that theatre, and earned a commission and the Knight's Cross on 30 December 1942. Flying with the Reichs Defence command, he went on to raise his total tally to 55, including ten heavy bombers; JG 27 was based in southern Germany to counter raids by the US Fifteenth Air Force from Italian airfields.



Oberleutnant 'Erbo' von Kageneck, in a sketchy portrait by the war artist Wolfgang Willrich. The insignia at top left is the Gruppe badge of Kageneck's unit, III/JG 27. He was posthumously promoted to Hauptmann after his death from wounds in January 1942. (Josef Charita)

Although he flew during the Polish campaign he found little aerial opposition; but his thirst for action was satisfied in May 1940 over France and the Low Countries. Within the six weeks that the campaign lasted Kageneck succeeded in downing five enemy aircraft, bringing him promotion to Oberleutnant. The Battle of Britain followed, and by the end of August he was credited with 13 victories and was given command of 9 Staffel, III Gruppe of his Geschwader. In spring 1941 JG 27 fought briefly in the Balkans and the Mediterranean where, in the skies over Malta, Kageneck shot down two RAF Hurricane fighters.

In June 1941 III/JG 27 was transferred to the Eastern Front for Operation 'Barbarossa'; and on 20 August, Oberleutnant von Kageneck achieved his 50th victory, qualifying for the Knight's Cross. His success was somewhat marred by being shot down himself, although he did manage to bring his stricken Bf109 down without injury and not too far from his own lines. General Wolfram von Richthofen travelled to his airfield to formally announce Kageneck's award. By 4 October 1941 his score had reached 60, and on the 26th of that month he was awarded the Oak-Leaves.

In December 1941 Kageneck's Gruppe was transferred south once more to join the rest of JG 27 in North Africa; he was offered the command of his Gruppe by Göring, but reportedly on the truly extraordinary condition that he give up flying combat missions – which he naturally declined. The Gruppe arrived at its new base near Tobruk just in time to evacuate again in the face of the British 'Crusader' offensive, finally relocating further west at Martuba. Kageneck scored his 66th and 67th victories on 14 December.

On 24 December 1941, III Gruppe encountered a large force of RAF fighters and during the ensuing dog-fight Kageneck was attacked from below by an Australian Hurricane pilot. He suffered serious stomach wounds, but managed to make an emergency landing. He was evacuated to Italy for treatment; but his kidneys had been irrevocably damaged by chemicals from fragments of a tracer bullet, and he died in a coma in a Naples hospital on 12 January 1942.

Major Günther Freiherr von Maltzahn

Another fighter pilot of aristocratic background, Günther von Maltzahn was born on 20 October 1910 at Wodarg, Pomerania. He was accepted into the Reichswehr and began his pilot training at a time when Germany was still not permitted an air force by the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. Nevertheless, many pilots were surreptitiously trained abroad, and as civilians under the guise of sports flying and civil aviation companies. After ostensibly training as a Lufthansa airline pilot Maltzahn returned to the Army until the Luftwaffe was officially unveiled in March 1935, whereupon he was commissioned as a Leutnant and posted as a flying instructor to the Fighter Pilot's School.



There he remained until 1936, when he was posted as Adjutant of I Gruppe/Jagdgeschwader 234, a fighter unit based at Cologne with Heinkel He51 biplanes. A year later he was given command of 6/JG 234 as Staffelfkapitän. His Geschwader was later renumbered to become JG 53, the famous 'Pik-As' or 'Ace of Spades' fighter wing. Another of its pilots at this date was Werner Mölders, a close personal friend of Maltzahn. Like Mölders, Maltzahn gained invaluable experience during the Spanish Civil War while flying with the Condor Legion.

In summer 1939, Maltzahn was appointed Gruppenkommandeur of II/JG 53, in which command he saw active service in the Polish campaign in 1939, over France and in the Battle of Britain in spring/summer 1940. On 10 October 1940 he was appointed Geschwader Kommodore of JG 53; and on 30 December of that year Major Maltzahn was decorated with the Knight's Cross. At that time his personal score of aerial victories was just 12 – the award was in recognition of his skilled leadership.

In June 1941 the 'Ace of Spades' wing was in action on the newly opened Eastern Front in Operation 'Barbarossa'; the Geschwader was divided, I and III Gruppen operating in the southern sector and II Gruppe allocated to the north, where it worked in support of JG 54. Under the 'target rich' conditions of the first campaign in Russia, Maltzahn's personal score began to rise appreciably; and on 24 July 1941 he was awarded the Oak-Leaves after reaching a tally of 43 kills.

Jagdgeschwader 53 was withdrawn from Russia in September 1941 and, after a brief rest in Holland, it moved in November to the Mediterranean theatre. Based in Sicily during 1942, the Geschwader periodically rotated Gruppen to airfields in Libya and later Tunisia. Flying Bf109Fs and later Gs, Maltzahn's wing took part in almost

The Bf109E flown by Oberleutnant von Kageneck as Staffelfkapitän of 9/JG 27, photographed on Sicily in May 1941; note the white tin swallow-tail pennant of squadron command fixed to the radio aerial mast. The whole nose was yellow, with a yellow '5' on a disc of the original mottled light grey. There were no fuselage markings apart from the national cross and a white belly band, but the white rudder bore two rows of seven black victory bars.

continual fierce fighting over Malta, the Western Desert and Tunisia during 1942 and spring 1943. On 23 December 1942, Maltzahn was decorated with the German Cross in Gold. During the summer and autumn of 1943 his wing continued to fight over Sicily and southern Italy, with a Gruppe withdrawn to Austria. In autumn 1943, Oberstleutnant von Maltzahn contracted malaria and had to be grounded; at this point he had 68 confirmed kills, gained during a total of 497 combat missions on all three major fronts.

On recovery from his illness he was posted on 4 October 1943 to the staff of the Luftwaffenbefehlshabers Mitte – the Luftwaffe Chief-of-Staff Mediterranean, General Wolfram von Richthofen – as Jagdfliegerführer Oberitalien (Fighter Leader Upper Italy) with command of all fighter units in that country. In late August 1944, Maltzahn was promoted to the rank of Oberst and appointed to the staff of General der Jagdflieger



A more finished portrait by Willrich of Major Günther von Maltzahn, Geschwader Kommodore of JG 53 in Russia and the Mediterranean; he displays the Oak-Leaves awarded in July 1941. Note the inflatable life vest and the K So/41 flying jacket – compare with Plates D and G; and, at top left, the Ace of Spades badge of the 'Pik As' Geschwader. (Josef Charita)

Adolf Galland. He subsequently joined the staff of 9.Flieger Div in February 1945, and was still in this post when the war ended three months later.

Released after only a short spell of captivity, Baron von Maltzahn was unable to return to his home which now lay in the Soviet zone. He settled in Dusseldorf; but he still suffered recurring bouts of malaria, and his health declined steadily until he died in Dusseldorf on 24 June 1953, at just 42 years of age.

Oberleutnant Joachim Müncheberg

Joachim Müncheberg was born on 18 December 1918 at Friedrichsdorf in Pomerania. In October 1938, after two years in the ranks of the infantry, his potential was recognized and, as a senior officer cadet (Oberfähnrich) he transferred to the Luftwaffe. On completion of flight training Müncheberg was posted to the fighter wing JG 234. Subsequently commissioned as a Leutnant, he joined III Gruppe/JG 26 'Schlageter' in October 1939. He took part in experiments in night flying with the Messerschmitt Bf109, assigned to a Staffel which was briefly designated 10(N)/JG26. He scored his first aerial victory on 7 November 1939, over an RAF Blenheim light bomber which he shot down near Opladen.

During the invasion of France and the Low Countries in May/June 1940, Müncheberg began to run up a creditable tally, claiming eight more victories over French and British aircraft. By late July he was credited with ten kills, and during the Battle of Britain steady success continued under the leadership of his charismatic Gruppe commander Adolf Galland. In late August he was appointed Staffelkapitän of 7/JG 26; and on 14 September a score of 20 enemy aircraft shot down brought Müncheberg the award of the Knight's Cross. He was one of the leading aces of the Battle of Britain, achieving 14 of his victories during that hectic period.



Oberleutnant Joachim Müncheberg, Staffelkapitän of 7/JG 26, returns to Gela airfield in Sicily from a mission over Malta in spring 1941, when his handful of Bf109Es were dominating the skies over that beleaguered island.



Joachim Müncheberg is photographed here as a Major following the award of the Swords to the Oak-Leaves of his Knight's Cross, on 9 September 1942. The self-deprecating Luftwaffe slang for this triple decoration (in fact, greatly coveted) was 'the cabbage, knife and fork'. As Geschwader Kommodore of JG 77, Müncheberg was killed in a mid-air collision between his Bf109G and his last victim, an American-flown Spitfire, during a dogfight over Tunisia on 23 March 1943. (Josef Charita)

In February 1941, with just 14 Messerschmitts, 7/JG 26 were moved to the Mediterranean, and flew from bases in Sicily – the squadron were the first Luftwaffe fighters in the theatre. In the early battles over Malta Müncheberg's Staffel, identified by its 'Red Heart' cowlings badge, performed impressively against the small and outclassed defending force of Hurricanes and Gladiators, achieving over 50 kills without losing a single German pilot, and subjecting Malta's airfields to regular strafing attacks. In the second week of April the Staffel was deployed to Italy to fly missions in support of the German invasion of Yugoslavia, but it was soon back over Malta. Müncheberg was personally responsible for fully half of his squadron's victories, including a Sunderland flying boat on 27 April. By 7 May 1941, Müncheberg had taken his score up to 43 aircraft shot down, and was awarded the Oak-Leaves to his Knight's Cross as only the 12th recipient of that award.

Müncheberg saw action over Greece in June, and later added five more kills to his tally in the skies over Libya in the summer of 1941 during British attempts to raise the siege of the port of Tobruk. However, since two Gruppen of JG 27 had now arrived in Sicily and North Africa, in August 1941 his

Staffel was transferred back to rejoin Galland's JG 26 in the Pas de Calais where, at the end of that month, an RAF Spitfire shot down near Dunkirk became Müncheberg's 50th victory. He continued to fly Bf109Fs over the Channel coast, rising to command II Gruppe/JG 26; by the end of 1941 his total had passed 60 kills, and on 2 June 1942 he recorded his 80th victory.

On 22 July 1942, Müncheberg was posted to the Eastern Front to join JG 54, whose aircraft carried a distinctive 'Green Heart' badge under the cockpits. On 5 September 1942 he shot down his 100th enemy aircraft, and four days later was awarded the Swords to his Oak-Leaves, as the 19th recipient (by which time the now Hauptmann Müncheberg had claimed three more victories). In all he was credited with 33 kills in Russia before being transferred back to the North African theatre; he also survived being shot down himself on more than one occasion.

On 1 October 1942, Müncheberg, promoted to Major, returned to North Africa as Geschwader Kommodore of JG 77, which was intended to replace the war-weary JG 27. He flew many more combat missions during the Axis retreat westwards along the Mediterranean coast following the British victory at El Alamein in October, and added 24 more kills to his

tally, although again being shot down himself on at least one occasion. The opposition the desert Luftwaffe now faced was very much more formidable than in spring 1941. In December the Bf109Gs of JG 77 and 53 were penned into Tunisia, fighting against heavy odds, although these were somewhat reduced by the inexperience of the first USAAF units to arrive in North Africa.

During a mission on 23 March 1943, Major Müncheberg encountered Spitfires of the USAAF's 52nd Fighter Group. In the dogfight that followed he succeeded in shooting down one, but then collided fatally with a second. Joachim Müncheberg was credited with a final total of 135 aerial victories, achieved during more than 500 combat sorties. Of this total, some 102 kills were achieved in the West, and about 46 of them were Spitfires.

THE PLATES

A: THE OAK-LEAVES, AWARD CASE & AWARD DOCUMENT

- 1 The Oak-Leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, instituted on 3 June 1940, shown as presented, in their own small black leather-effect case with a section of neck ribbon.
- 2 Enlarged view of the reverse of a typical Oak-Leaves clasp, showing the replacement ribbon suspension loop soldered to the clasp; this was employed in place of the original suspension loop, engaging with the eyelet on the top of the frame of the Knight's Cross itself. Note the silver content number '900', and 'SILBER' above the manufacturer's *Herstellermarke*. (Original clasps courtesy Jason Burmeister and Chris Jenkins)
- 3 A fine example of a formal award document or *Urkunde* of the Knight's Cross, in this case to Generalmajor Gerhard Graf von Schwerin. A single large sheet of hand-made parchment is folded to produce effectively a four-sided document. On what would be 'page 3' the text is beautifully lettered by hand in dark brown ink, with the national emblem at the top and the recipient's name and rank executed in gold leaf. This example is unsigned; some award documents bear a genuine pen signature, others a facsimile. The folder is made from stiff board covered with white leather and lined on the inside with parchment. The face of the folder bears a large embossed gilt metal eagle and swastika. At the bottom of the inside rear cover the name of the artist responsible for the binding, Frieda Thiersch, is generally to be found in impressed gold letters. (Original document courtesy Jason Burmeister)

B: FRIEDRICH GUGGENBERGER DOCKS AT LA SPEZIA, 10 DECEMBER 1941

Traditionally, U-boats returning from a war cruise would be met at the dockside with some ceremony. Bands would play, attractive female auxiliaries would be on hand to greet the commander with garlands of flowers, and a senior officer – sometimes Admiral Dönitz himself – would personally welcome the boat home. When a particular

success had been achieved, the celebrations were even more intense and included the presentation of decorations. Such ceremonies usually took place while the officers and men of the crew were still in their old, dirty and malodorous seagoing uniforms.

Here we see Kapitänleutnant Friedrich Guggenberger, commander of U-81, being greeted by German and Italian staff officers on his arrival at the Italian naval base of La Spezia on 10 December 1941, after sinking the British aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* in the course of his hazardous voyage from Brest through the Straits of Gibraltar to Italy. For this feat Guggenberger was awarded the Knight's Cross, a distinction celebrated by his crew while still at sea by the manufacture of an oversized replica, which Guggenberger cheerfully wore until his arrival in port. Illustrated immediately after the presentation of the real Knight's Cross, he still has it hanging round his neck from its full-length ribbon; later a shorter length will be cut, just long enough to allow the Cross to be suspended neatly at the throat.

C: GÜNTHER HALM AT RUWEISAT RIDGE, 22 JULY 1942

At the time of his award, the 19-year-old Gefreiter Halm was the youngest soldier in the German Army, and only the second private, to receive the Knight's Cross; in order to qualify him for the award, he was also decorated on the same day with both classes of the Iron Cross. On 22 July 1942, at Ruweisat Ridge facing the then British defence lines south of El Alamein, Egypt, Halm was a gunlayer with the Panzerjäger Zug, Stabs Kompanie, Panzergrenadier Regiment 104 from 21. Panzer Division of the Deutsches Afrikakorps. Manning one of the platoon's two Russian 7.62cm PaK 36(r) anti-tank guns, his crew successfully held off a close attack by Valentine tanks of the British 23rd Armoured Brigade, destroying nine tanks and disabling a further six. In this reconstruction Uffz Jabeck's gun crew are shown in standard issue faded olive DAK tropical uniform with sand-painted helmets; the coloured *Waffenfarbe* piping on the collar patches and shoulder straps would have been in the rose pink of anti-tank personnel. Halm's position (left)



The teenaged Günther Halm's exploits received considerable press coverage. Here he is being interviewed by a *Kriegsbericht*, relating his version of the events that earned him the immediate award of both classes of Iron Cross and the Knight's Cross. From this angle he appears a good deal less 'baby-faced' than in the better known portrait reproduced on page 14. (Josef Charita)

obscures his left sleeve here, but this would have borne the single chevron of his rank, in copper-brown on an olive triangular backing.

D: ERHARD JÄHNERT, DESERT 'STUKA ACE', SUMMER 1942

While the term 'ace' does not strictly apply to pilots other than high-scoring *Jagdflyger*, merely to survive several hundred missions in the Junkers Ju87 'Stuka' dive bomber – especially against Western enemies – was a remarkable achievement. The almost vertical dive of the Stuka, with its howling engine note made more unnerving by the fitting of sirens to the undercarriage legs and others to the bombs, became a symbol of the terrors of Blitzkrieg ('Lightning War') in 1939–41. But although it was both a terrifying and an effective weapon against troops on the ground, even at the outbreak of the war it was already very vulnerable to interception by modern fighter aircraft. Slow, unmanoeuvrable, and with only light defensive armament, the Ju87 fell easy prey to RAF fighters in the early stage of

the Battle of Britain, and was at just as much risk in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, repeated improvements to the basic design kept the later models in service until the end of the war – though as tank-busters rather than true dive-bombers – and several Luftwaffe pilots achieved impressive success with this aircraft.

Leutnant Erhard Jähnert is illustrated as he might have appeared when returning from a mission in summer 1942, when III Gruppe/Stukageschwader 3 was based at the desert airstrip of Bir el Hania, Libya. His newly arrived Ju87D-1, an improvement over his old Ju87B-2, is finished in sand yellow overpainted with irregular streaks of green, and has the white belly-band used by the Luftwaffe in Africa as a quick identification marking. The code 'S7' identifies StG 3; the letter 'D' is the individual aircraft callsign, painted in the red of the second Staffel in each Gruppe; and 'S' identifies 8 Staffel, the second of the three Staffeln of III Gruppe. We have reconstructed Jähnert's flying clothing as the hot weather LKp N101 flying helmet, with mesh scalp, and tinted sun-goggles; and a mismatched two-part K So/41 summer flying suit, which was issued in both pale blue/grey and tan khaki. The Luftwaffe national emblem was sewn to the left breast at factory stage, and the rank patch of Leutnant is sewn to both upper sleeves in white on dark blue. Many aircrew in Africa wore canvas and leather general issue tropical boots.

E: DR HEINRICH NEUMANN AT HILL 107, 20 MAY 1941

It is extremely rare to find in the rolls of Knight's Cross recipients officers and men of non-combatant branches of service who nevertheless rose to the occasion in battle and displayed courage above and beyond the call of duty. One notable example was Oberstabsarzt Neumann, the regimental medical officer of the Luftlande Sturm Regiment during the German airborne invasion of Crete on 20 May 1941. He had already shown unusual qualities for a doctor when serving both with the Condor Legion in Spain, and in the invasion of Holland in May 1940.

On 20 May 1941 all the other officers present had become casualties during attempts to capture the vital Hill 107 overlooking Maleme airfield; but Dr Neumann rallied the paratroopers of I Btl and led them in a renewed attack on the New Zealand defenders and the 40mm AA guns which they were protecting. The attack was pinned down on the slopes; but such was its ferocity that the New Zealanders withdrew under cover of darkness, leaving only a small rearguard to be overcome by Neumann and his men when they resumed the assault early the following morning. The capture of Hill 107 was central to the success of the Maleme operation, and arguably to that of the whole invasion.

We reconstruct Neumann wearing the plain green Fallschirmjäger helmet cover and jump smock; photographs of the Crete operation suggest that only a minority of 7.Flieger Div had yet received the camouflaged models. Dr Neumann's rank was equivalent to Major, and he wore that insignia on the dark blue collar patches of the Luftwaffe medical branch on his flight blouse under the smock.

F: SIEGFRIED JAMROWSKI IN CASSINO TOWN, MARCH 1944

This plate shows Hauptmann Siegfried 'Jambo' Jamrowski as he might have appeared during the fighting in the ruins of

Cassino town on 15 March 1944. For the next five days Jamrowski led his 6 Kompanie, II Btl/Fallschirmjäger Regt 3 in almost constant street fighting in the rubble, rushing from one danger point to the next during a series of heavy attacks by Commonwealth infantry with tank support. His successful leadership and personal example in this crucial battle were marked by the award of the Knight's Cross.

We reconstruct the captain wearing the 'splinter'-camouflaged helmet cover and jump smock, with typical belt order equipment; photographs taken at Cassino show a mixture of clothing being worn, including both the regular Luftwaffe blue/grey trousers and the tan lightweight tropical trousers, and a portrait of Jamrowski taken at around this time shows him in tropical uniform.

G: 'MACKI' STEINHOFF IN SICILY, JUNE 1943

One of Germany's most respected fighter pilots and commanders, Johannes Steinhoff served on all fronts from the Battle of Britain to the last battles over the Reich, when he became one of the world's first jet fighter aces. He is illustrated as he might have appeared in June 1943, based at Trapani in Sicily with the Stabsschwarm (HQ flight) of Jagdgeschwader 77, of which Major Steinhoff was the commanding officer; at that date he had recorded more than 150 aerial victories. Just before the Allied Operation 'Husky' the Staff, I and II Gruppen of JG 77 were based on Sicily and III Gruppe on Sardinia. Greatly outnumbered by the Allied air forces following the Axis collapse in Tunisia the previous month, the Luftwaffe on Sicily were subjected to regular attacks on their airfields.

Steinhoff's tropicalized Bf109G fighter is finished in dark sand colour with a soft, random overspray of green blotches. The spinner is in the green of HQ flights; the wingtips and belly-band are white, as normal in the Mediterranean theatre. Although extra yellow-painted areas for quick identification were more common in Russia, a number of JG 77 and JG 53 aircraft in Tunisia, Sicily and southern Italy displayed yellow undersides to the cowlings. The JG 77 badge commemorated the 'Red Heart' sported by its old commander, Major Müncheberg, since his earliest days in Sicily with 7/JG 26. Steinhoff's personal fuselage marking as Kommodore is believed to have been 'black chevron, pointed bar (cross) straight bar'.

We reconstruct his costume as the Luftwaffe all-ranks tropical issue *Fliegermütze* sidecap and shirt, and the trousers of the pale blue/grey K So/41 flight suit with blackened sheepskin and leather flying boots. At his throat he displays the Knight's Cross with the Oak-Leaves awarded in September 1942, but the shoulder boards of rank applied to his shirt are hidden by the SWp 734 10-30 B-1 life vest; it was common to strap the large black wrist compass to the mouth tube of the life jacket.

H: BARON VON TIESENHAUSEN AT THE 'SKY PERISCOPE', NOVEMBER 1941

The sinking of the British battleship HMS *Barham* in November 1941 by U-331 under the command of Kapitänleutnant Freiherr von Tiesenhausen was a double blow to Royal Navy morale. Between them, Tiesenhausen and Guggenberger (Plate B) had destroyed two of the most powerful warships in the Mediterranean Fleet in a single month, and German propaganda was quick to exploit these successes.

Baron von Tiesenhausen is illustrated at the 'sky' or navigation periscope in U-331's control room (*Zentral*); the second or 'attack periscope' was accessed from the commander's battle station in the upper confines of the conning tower. The bearded commander is making a 360° sweep of the horizon, and at the moment the periscope is pointing roughly to starboard; beyond him is the hydroplane operators' station at the starboard side of the control room, forward. The forward (left) and aft (right) operators manned control wheels, below a large depth gauge and two smaller dials indicating the angle of the planes.

Tiesenhausen has the usual white-topped cap of a boat commander, with the regulation peak decoration of his rank, and also with U-331's small non-regulation boat badge on the left side – a serpent cut out of light metal. He wears typical seagoing dress: the blouse of the grey/green U-boat overalls (which were copied from the British Army's battledress-cut 'Overalls, Denim'), with added Kriegsmarine buttons and the shoulder boards of his rank; grey leather U-boat trousers; and a neck towel hiding here a grubby civilian shirt – Tiesenhausen was one of many officers who favoured checked shirts.



On a Tunisian airfield shortly before the Axis surrender in May 1943, a Bf109G-2 (Trop) of Major Steinhoff's JG 77, apparently abandoned among wrecked fighters and transports. (Weal)

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The remarkable early successes of the armed forces of the Third Reich prompted the decision that the supreme decoration for personal valour or outstanding leadership – the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross – was insufficient. To mark further acts of gallantry a new distinction was created in June 1940: the Oak-Leaves clasp. Further decorations in the form of the Swords and, finally, the Diamonds were added. This book, the second in a four-book series, describes and illustrates a selection of recipients of the Knight's Cross and Oak-Leaves between 1941 and early 1945, when the Wehrmacht was engaged on all fronts, as well as at sea and in the air.

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