

In reaction, at 19.24 hrs, II./NJG4 was directed south west of Münster, well situated for approach *Verfolgungsnachtjagd* interception of the Mosquitoes and *Window* force had the Nachtjäger arrived in time. This, however, they failed to do. Osnabrück was not announced as being a target until 19.38 hrs, six minutes after the last of the Mosquitoes had left; two minutes later the first plots on Allied aircraft leaving Osnabrück were passed. A Radar interception unit at Groningen began passing bearings on H2S on the return route of the Osnabrück raiders at 20.05 hrs, starting east of Zwolle and following the bombers during their flight over the Netherlands.

Another Gruppe, I./NJG4, wasted valuable time and fuel waiting for the bombers over FFs *Gemse* and *Rattler* in the Dortmund area. When it was already much too late for a successful target area or return route interception, this Gruppe was finally given the correct target at 19.39 hrs, 15 minutes after the opening of the raid on Essen, and ordered to fly there with 'express speed'. At 19.44 hrs, II./NJG4 was also told that 'Essen is a target'. Two other airborne Gruppen, including IV./NJG1, reported serious interference with their airborne Radar. Combined with the adverse weather conditions, the 100 Group jamming effort made it impossible for the large majority of the Nachtjäger to contact the bombers. Returning bomber crews reported just one encounter with a fighter on the outward journey, one in the target area and four on the first leg of the homeward run between Düsseldorf and Aachen.

Six Main Force Lancasters failed to return, four of which were claimed shot down by Nachtjäger and four by the Flakgruppe Essen (4. Flak Division), two of the latter being contested by night fighters. Ten Essen raiders sustained Flak damage:

-150 Sqn Lancaster NN743: hit by Flak of Flakgruppe Essen and crashed in Essen, time unknown.

-460 Sqn Lancaster PB542: hit by Flak of Flakgruppe Essen and crashed in Schürmannstraße in Essen-Bergerhausen, time unknown.

-635 Sqn Lancaster PB453: hit by Flak of Flakgruppe Essen and exploded over Essen-Borbeck, time unknown. Note: either of these three bombers was also claimed by Hptm. Tham flying in a Ju88 of 3./NJG10.

-582 Sqn Lancaster PB554: hit by Flak of Flakgruppe Essen and exploded over Mülheim, time unknown. Note: also claimed shot down by the Kommodore of NJG4 Maj. Schnauer flying in Bf110 G-4 G9+EF, who reported a Lancaster *Abschuss* in Grid Squares MO-L0, or the area of Düsseldorf-Mülheim.

Flying straight and level over Essen just after bombing, 12 Squadron Lancaster ND342 was hit by a burst of gunfire from a 'FW190' (actually Bf109 G-6 'Red 4' in the hands of Lt. Mohr of 2./NJG11) and blew up on impact with the ground at Düsseldorf-Grafenberg at 19.48 hrs. Lt. Mohr was injured by return fire and, attempting to limp back to his home base Biblis, was forced to bale out of his Bf109 at Grünberg, east of Giessen. The five-victory ace did not return to operational duties before the end of the war. He subsequently recorded in his *Flugbuch* about his 34<sup>th</sup> and final *Einsatz*: 'Wilde Sau Essen-Duisburg. *Abschuss* 4-mot, engine fire, baled out by parachute at Garbenteich near Giessen 20.20'. II./NJG4 received plots on the returning Essen raiders from 19.45 hrs onwards. One of its crews destroyed the last Main Force Lancaster to go down: 103 Squadron ME649 was attacked by what the bomber crew identified

Below: Lancaster ME649 pictured when serving with 460 Squadron. It was subsequently passed onto 103 Squadron and was shot down on this night by Ofw. Erich Matt (Coll ww2images.com)



as a 'jet'; after a running battle, ME649 broke up in mid-air and crashed in a field opposite Kölnerstraße 63 at Jüchen at approximately 20.00 hrs.

Uffz. Scherl of 9./NJG1 submitted a claim for a Mosquito shot down to the south east of Duisburg. His quarry has not been identified, as none of the Mosquitoes operating with the Main Force, Bomber Support and diversions were lost.

By 20.11 hrs, those fighters of II./NJG4 'not in contact with the bombers' were told to return and landing instructions were given from 20.15 hrs. Upon their return to Gütersloh, two Ju88 G-1s of 4. and 6./NJG4 were shot down by 85 Squadron Mosquitoes 'A' and 'Z' lurking in the airfield's circuit, one crew being killed. Half an hour after their first victory, S/Ldr. Burbridge and his Radar Op. F/Lt. Skelton, the RAF's top-scoring night fighter crew flying Mosquito 'Z', sent Bf110 G-4 G9+OT of 9./NJG1 spinning down a mass of flame at Dorsten, the Dutch *Bordschütze* Gefr. Klaas Visser being killed. F/Lt. Hedgecoe and F/Sgt. Whitham in 85 Squadron Mosquito 'O' claimed two Me110s shot down at Wipperfürth (at 19.30 hrs) and 10 km NE of Bergisch Gladbach (at 20.02 hrs). One of their victims has been identified as Bf110 G-4 G9+RT of 9./NJG1, which was abandoned by Uffz. Wilsch and his crew over Kaiserswerth near Düsseldorf after being set on fire by the intruder, two of the crew receiving injuries.

Lt. Kurt Matzak, a nine-victory ace of Stab IV./NJG1, had a close encounter with death. Returning to Düsseldorf from his 69<sup>th</sup> *Einsatz*, during which he had suffered total failure of his homing equipment, Matzak's Bf110 G-4 G9+SY collided with another Bf110 on landing at 20.36 hrs. His *Bordfunker* Uffz. Hans Paubel was killed instantly on being hit by the wing of the second Bf110 and their fighter was classified as 80% damaged in the ensuing crash on the airfield. Just six nights later, Lt. Matzak flew his next operational sortie with a replacement *Funker*, Uffz. Gallert. Another Bf110 G-4, G9+AY of 11./NJG1, somersaulted on landing at Werl, the crew's *Bordschütze* being injured.

In return for the meagre *Abschuss* tally, the Nachtjagd lost 11 twin-engined aircraft. Oblt. Fenger in Bf110 G-4 G9+FY of 11./NJG1, who landed at Dortmund at 20.18 hrs, summed it all up when he noted in his *Flugbuch*: 'Essen - too late'.



Silhouetted against the setting sun, and before taking off on yet another mission in Bf110 G G9+AS in the autumn of 1944, First Mechanic Uffz. Hahne (on left) is chatting with Ofw. Schönfeld (Radar Operator to Oblt. Schmidt of 8./NJG1) (Coll. Dr. Rolf Ebhardt).





Ritterkreuzträger Oblt. Dieter Schmidt, St.Kpt. of 8./NJG1 (in middle) and his crew playing a card game called 'Skat' in the Readiness Room in hangar number 5 at Fritzlar airfield in October 1944. Ofw. Kurt Schönfeld (Bordfunke, on left) participated in all 40 night Abschüsse achieved by his 'driver' in 8. and 7./NJG1 between 1943 and 1945. On right is Fw. Willi Schlosser, air gunner, who joined the crew in November 1943, and contributed to 32 Abschüsse. Note the RAF aircraft recognition cards pinned to the wall behind the crew (Compilation of three photos, coll. Dr. Dieter Schmidt-Barbo).

Hptm. Gustav Tham: 11	3./NJGr.10	Lancaster	Essen/Bochum	19.50	150 Sqn Lancaster NN743, 460 Sqn Lancaster PB542 or 635 Sqn Lancaster PB453
Lt. Gustav Mohr: 5	2./NJG11	Lancaster	Essen-Duisburg	+/- 19.50	12 Sqn Lancaster ND342
Uffz. Scherl: 1	9./NJG1	Mosquito	Kettwig, 10 km SE Duisburg (LO 6)	19.59	unidentified
Maj. H.-Wolfgang Schnauer: 105	Stab NJG4	Lancaster	Düsseldorf-Mülheim (MO-LO): 4.000 m.	20.00	582 Sqn Lancaster PB554
Ofw. Erich Matt: 3	5./NJG4	Lancaster	-	-	103 Sqn Lancaster ME649.

Note: claim not listed by OKL/RLM

### 15-16 December 1944

An attack by 320 Lancasters and 14 Mosquitoes against Ludwigshafen in the early evening met no fighter opposition, even though the bombers' track was accurately plotted. This was mainly due to fog and cloud covering the Nachtjagd bases, which effectively grounded the fighters. Only three Nachtjäger are known to have been active against the Main Force, probably all on reconnaissance patrols in the southern part of 2. JD (Osnabrück/Hannover, the Ruhr and the Frankfurt area), these crews being sent up soon after the *Mandrel* jamming started at 17.20 hrs. One Main Force aircraft failed to return. Probably a victim of Flak, 625 Squadron Lancaster NG294 exploded and crashed in the Priesberg Forest near Bosen. Eight Main Force aircraft sustained minor Flak damage.

A second force of 23 aircraft was dispatched, in two waves, to lay magnetic mines in the Baltic off north-eastern Denmark. A few locally-based Nachtjäger engaged the second wave of 15 Lancasters, which dropped their 'vegetables' between 05.01 and 05.41 hrs. Flying from Grove in a Ju88 G, the St.Kpt. of 3./NJG3 Hptm. Schröder shot down an outward-bound Lancaster of 106 Squadron over the sea to the south of Anholt Island. Also operating from Grove, Lt. Götze in Bf110 G-4 D5+IL of 3./NJG3 flew two successive *Himmelbett* sorties in boxes *Adler* and *Ringelnatter*, between 02.45-05.09 hrs and 06.24-08.00 hrs, without achieving *Feindberührung*. One *Gardener* returned with slight fighter damage.

A Reich *Luftlagemeldung* reports that 32 Nachtjäger were employed during the course of the night, scoring one certain victory, for no own losses. A number of these fighters may have been engaged in *Nachtschlacht* duties, but confirmatory evidence on this is lacking.

Hptm. Eduard Schröder: 15	3./NJG3	Lancaster	Kattegat 45 km E. Fornæs (LD 19): 2.300 m.	03.53	106 Sqn Lancaster ND682
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F/O Fred Shorney and crew posing for the camera in front of 12 Squadron Lancaster PD201 E for Easy at Wickenby. The crew flew in PD201 on 28 operational sorties during their Tour of Ops between July and October 1944. Returning from Ludwigshafen on 15-16 December 1944, the Lancaster was lost in a crash near Holbeach Drove with the loss of all onboard (Coll. Jonathan Shorney).

### 17-18 December 1944

#### Reichsverteidigung

During the course of the night, three German cities (Ulm, München and Duisburg) were attacked by Bomber Command. The first raid of the night, 330 aircraft, including 317 Lancasters, were dispatched to attack Ulm, the bombing taking place between 19.23 and 19.49 hrs. The Main Force crossed the French coast in the region of Dieppe and made straight for the target via Verdun and Metz. It was not concealed by *Mandrel* jamming but was supported by a nine aircraft strong *Window* spoof aiming to represent a heavy bomber force in the Frankfurt-Mannheim-Karlsruhe area, strengthened in character by minor attacks on Hanau (44 Mosquitoes) and Mannheim.

A German Radar interception unit south east of Freiburg began passing the first H2S plots on the Ulm raid flying in the Verdun area at 18.32 hrs. In an immediate reaction, the JLO of 7. JD decided to scramble four Ju88s of II. and IV./NJG6 from Schwäbisch Hall and Kitzingen on reconnaissance duties, plus 23 Bf110s and 12 Ju88s of I. and IV./NJG6 from Gross-Sachsenheim, Hailfingen, Kitzingen and Gerolzhofen. Whilst these Nachtjäger were still busy taking off, at 18.49 hrs - four minutes after the special *Window* force came into position, the Nachtjagd controllers took the *Window* bait: it was wrongly recognised by the German Radar plotters as 'the spearhead of a force of heavy bombers NW of Mannheim', and later assessed as '200 aircraft strong'. The *Window* spoof was more extensively plotted than the big southerly raid on Ulm and thus succeeded in the real threat not being appreciated by the German fighter controllers, which effectively kept most of the Nachtjäger away from the real raid on Ulm. The 7. JD fighter controller decided to hold the 14 Bf110s and seven Ju88s of IV./NJG6 over *FF Epp* (NW of Stuttgart) as a cover against the *Window* threat, whilst giving one of the reconnaissance Ju88s of II./NJG6 a plot on the outward-bound Ulm raiders south west of Karlsruhe at 19.14 hrs.

In addition to the effort of NJG6, an unknown number of aircraft from NJG5, at least six Ju88 crews of I./NJG4 (from Rhein-Main and Biblis) and probably elements of 2./NJG11 were scrambled at around 18.30-19.00 hrs to intercept the *Window* diversion. Simultaneously, II. and III./NJG4 were directed to a position south east of Düsseldorf, in a precautionary move to a possible threat on the Ruhr; none of these fighters subsequently reported *Feindberührung*. The controller of 3. JD scrambled elements of III./NJG1 from Fritzlar and 14 He219s of I./NJG1 from Münster-Handorf at around 18.50-19.00 hrs, the latter Gruppe heading for a position north of Frankfurt to intercept the *Window* aircraft. Due to their late hour of take-off, they failed to make contact. Finally, Major Schnauer,

Kommodore of NJG4, became airborne from Gütersloh for his 148<sup>th</sup> *Feindflug* in Bf110 G-4 G9+EF rather late at 19.01 hrs; he landed again within the hour after a fruitless sortie.

It appears that only nine minutes before the opening of the attack on Ulm (at 19.14 hrs) plots on this real raid were finally passed to the airborne Nachtjäger, when the 'heavies' of the Ulm force were between 90 and 60 km west of the target. It was not until 19.25 hrs that the 7. JD controller finally decided that the *Window* feint was only a diversionary raid and sent two dozen crews of II./NJG5, I./NJG6 and IV./NJG6 directly to Ulm. Even by that time, the JLO of 3. JD was still not convinced of the real threat on Ulm and sent his fighters to the Heilbronn area on the route of the *Window* aircraft. At 19.37 hrs, he told his fighters to 'wait' and another three minutes later finally announced that 'the target is in the Ulm area'.

Although IV./NJG6 arrived over the target too late, a few crews of II./NJG5 and I./NJG6 gave slight opposition on the last leg into the target (where two Lancasters were subjected to fighter attacks), over Ulm itself (two combats), and on the first 50 km of the withdrawal flight, where two combats were reported. Two twin-engined Nachtjäger filed a 'certain' Abschluss, the first of which actually concerned a 626 Squadron Lancaster that sustained severe battle damage, the only 'heavy' of the Ulm raid to return with fighter scars. Another Main Force Lancaster was lost in a collision over France on the return flight.

In turn, a Bf110 G-4 of 10./NJG6 fell to Mosquito 'J' of 85 Squadron, which claimed an Me110 shot down in flames 65 km NW of Ulm at 19.59 hrs. Ofw. Tiedemann and his crew managed to bale out before their aircraft crashed in flames at 20.00 hrs. 157 Squadron Mosquito MM653 was responsible for the demise of a second Bf110 G-4, of 4./NJG5, to the north of Ulm. The fighter crashed at the Vorder Steineberg near Gaildorf at 20.12 hrs, the pilot perishing. A second Bf110 G-4 of II./NJG5 plus its crew were lost at Schwäbisch Hall; according to the loss report, it 'crashed after hitting the ground'.

Plots of the returning Ulm raiders continued to be passed to the Nachtjäger from 19.47 hrs, until the first landing orders were issued by 3. JD at 20.13 hrs, 'land if you are not in contact with the enemy'. The JLO of 7. JD gave his fighters landing instructions between 20.22 and 20.47 hrs.

The second Main Force raid of the night to a target in southern Germany, 288 Lancasters and eight Mosquitoes of 5 Group that were detailed to attack München between 21.50 and 22.35 hrs, also escaped relatively lightly. On their long southerly approach over southern France and Switzerland, not a single fighter was seen. 57 Squadron Lancaster SW245 crashed in the Channel off Dieppe to an unknown cause and two bombers were lost in a collision near Rouen at about 20.30 hrs, 57 Squadron LM626 exploding at altitude and crashed near La Haye-du-Theil and 463 Squadron LL847 exploding on impact at Le Gros-Theil (Eure); there were no survivors from either crews. When the German H2S plotters suddenly detected the spearhead of the force flying into the Reich's airspace between Bludenz and Landeck, the 7. JD fighter controller assessed this as a force of '30 Fortresses', but this was soon revised as 'a force of 200 heavy bombers'. H2S plots were passed to unidentified Nachtjagd units between 21.40 and 22.25 hrs, all over and near München, and at 22.03 hrs - one minute after the announcement of bombs falling on München - the 7. JD controller ordered, 'all aircraft to fly to München'. Some 8% of the Main Force bombers reported Nachtjäger present over the target, but none of these made an attempt to engage the 'heavies'. The Reich *Luftlagemeldung* report for the night makes no mention of any Nachtjagd success against the München raid; it merely states that München-based Flak claimed two certain and two probable Abschüsse over the city. 7. JD intended to employ IV./NJG6 in *Verfolgungsnachtjagd* return route interception, but since the Divisional orders only came through when the first waves of bombers had already turned homewards on a westerly course, it was decided, instead, to send up three Bf110s of I./NJG6 on *Himmelbett* patrols in the *Räume Hecht* and *Hornisse*. This went entirely without success. The last fix on the homeward-bound bomber stream was given at 22.09 hrs 60 km SW of München. In all, seven München raiders were lost, including two to Flak over the target. Nine Main Force aircraft sustained minor Flak damage and one slight fighter scars:

**-50 Sqn Lancaster LM676: hit by München-based Flak, blew up and crashed near Freimann military barracks in northern part of München at 22.00 hrs.**

**-61 Sqn Lancaster LM729: hit by München-based Flak and crashed near Degerndorf SW of München at 22.15 hrs.**

At 21.50 hrs, as they commenced their bombing run, 467 Squadron Lancaster PD215 and 50 Squadron Lancaster PD346 were involved in a collision over Lake Starnberg. The former bomber was extensively damaged, losing 12 feet of its starboard wing and one tailplane and was abandoned in the vicinity of Châlons-sur-Marne two hours later. PD346 suffered a dented top of the fuselage, had all upper aeriels torn off and its outer propeller damaged, which started vibrating violently. Almost one hour later the propeller came off and the aircraft returned to base safely. One Lancaster, which probably made an early return and strayed well off track, fell to 'friendly' ack-ack nearing the Dutch coast:

**-50 Sqn Lancaster NG302: hit by ack-ack of 76 AA Royal Artillery, crashed at the Lange Postweg at Lewedorp near Middelburg at 22.15 hrs.**

When both the Ulm and München raids had already returned to the UK, 523 aircraft took off for yet another heavy raid on Germany, this time on Duisburg. The force, which mainly consisted of 4 and 6 Group Halifaxes, was scheduled to bomb this city in the Ruhr between 06.08 and 06.42 hrs. At the time of this penetration, at least five Gruppen of twin-engined Nachtjäger were up, including III./NJG1 (elements of which left Krefeld after 04.00 hrs) and IV./NJG1, a number of crews of this unit being scrambled from Dortmund at around 06.00 hrs.

Thanks to the *Mandrel* screen over central Belgium and northern France and bomber crews' observance of signals and Radar silence, however, no early warning of the bomber stream approaching Duisburg was given to the airborne Nachtjäger. Only by 05.45 hrs, 'many aircraft' were reported flying east, with the spearhead of the force in the Roermond area. 20 minutes later, II. and III./NJG4 began taking off from Gütersloh and Kassel-Rothwesten, whilst at least two He219s of I./NJG1 left Münster-Handorf and seven Bf110 G-4s of II./

NJG1 were scrambled at around 05.50-06.00 hrs from Düsseldorf and Essen-Mülheim for *ungeführte Verfolgungsnachtjagd*, the latter crews first gathering over *FF Bruno* (near Viersen). Duisburg was not announced as the main objective until 06.14 hrs, six minutes into the bombing attack. The controller of NJG1 passed plots of the raid in the area of Venlo-Mönchengladbach to a few fighters, which succeeded in making contact with the bomber stream over the target, and on the north west return leg, from the Ruhr, where 20 sharp encounters were reported and at least one bomber casualty occurred. Uffz. Betteaque, *Funker* to Hptm. Baake, *Kommandeur* of I./NJG1 in He219 A-2 G9+AB noted in his *Flugbuch*, 'Attack on Duisburg. Visual contact with bombers, shot at by rearward-firing weapons'. The most successful unit was 4./NJG1, aided by plots on the return route on a north westerly course from the target. This Staffel claimed three Halifax Abschüsse on the first leg of the return flight, but, as no crashes could be observed due to all three flaming 'heavies' disappearing from the Nachtjägers' view when they plunged into a heavy layer of cloud. The claims were all recorded as 'probables'. Actually, two Duisburg raiders returned with damage sustained in fighter attacks and 18 with Flak scars.

Typical of II./NJG1's experiences, Hptm. Schmidt, who was accompanied by Fw. Koch (*Bordfunker*) and Gefr. Kühn (*Bordschütze*) in Bf110 G-4 G9+NM, wrote in his *Gefechtsbericht*, 'I flew to radio beacon BRUNO. When I had reached an altitude of 5,500 m, I saw indicator flares falling to the east and immediately flew to the target. I saw numerous four-engine bombers flying above the tops of the cloud layer, which was lit up by the fires at the target. I positioned myself behind an enemy aircraft and fired from a range of about 100 m and slightly above into the fuselage. Immediately thereafter I saw clearly that there were explosions in the middle of the fuselage. After briefly flying straight on, the enemy bomber tipped over to the left and recovered about 1,000 metres lower. I dived after him and got myself below into attacking position (with *Schräge Musik*, author's note) and fired from a range of about 100 m at the fuselage and the starboard wing. The enemy aircraft then keeled over to starboard and disappeared, diving into the cloud layer. I was unable to identify any signs of a crash, as I was close to the western edge of the target and bombs were falling everywhere. He went down from about 5,000 m, the first burst having been fired at 06.33 hrs on the western edge of the target'.

The last claimant for the night, Ofhr. Ramsauer of 4./NJG1 intercepted a Halifax in Grid Square LN 2 (NE of Venlo), and after his first attack saw that the Halifax started burning in the cockpit area. Ramsauer then made the mistake of creeping up very close to his stricken opponent, and his Bf110, coded G9+DM, was promptly shot down by the Halifax's vigilant rear gunner. Both the Halifax and the Messerschmitt crashed close to each other in the Dutch-German border area, the bomber crew only having one survivor, but the German crew baling out safely. Ramsauer's claim fits the loss of 51 Squadron Halifax NR248, which exploded in mid-air and crashed at Broekhuizenvorst, north of Venlo.

A fourth claim by 4./NJG1, Uffz. Reinecke (*Bordschütze* to Hptm. Lau) in Bf110 G-4 G9+AM relates to a 'probable' Mosquito kill to the west of Duisburg. Reinecke noted in his *Abschussmeldung* that he shot down the Mosquito with two bursts of gunfire from his rear-facing machine gun, from a position 30-40 metres below and in front of his adversary. The marksman and his crew (Hptm. Lau and *Bordfunker* Fw. Backhaus) all saw the aircraft descending in flames before it disappeared from view into a bank of cloud. Probably, their quarry was 464 Squadron Mosquito NT143 (2nd TAF), which crashed in the middle of the Siegfried Line near the village of Kesfeld during a sortie to bomb rail and road junctions in the Ruhr area. In turn, the 4. Staffel suffered the loss of Uffz. Brack, who was shot down in Bf110 G-4 G9+GM by an intruder (possibly a 422 NFS Black Widow); the aircraft crashed in the Dreherstraße in Düsseldorf-Gerresheim at 06.54 hrs. NJG1 received landing instructions between 06.51 and 07.20 hrs.

In all, eight Main Force Halifaxes of the Duisburg raid failed to return. One, 426 Squadron LW209, was hit Flak and exploded in mid air over Sterkrade. Four losses were due to collisions - 10 Squadron LV818, 51 Squadron NP934, 432 Squadron NP699 and 434 Squadron NR118, only two of the 28 crew members surviving. In turn, two Halifaxes of 640 and 434 Squadron each claimed an 'Me109' destroyed over Venlo, at 06.29 and 06.30 hrs, respectively. One of these claims may concern the loss of Ju88 G-1 1L+VL of 3./NJG10, which fell at Venray with the loss of its four-man crew. In addition, an *Uhu* crew of 3./NJG1 was lost to 157 Squadron Mosquito MM627, which returned with a claim for an 'Me110' shot down at Mönchengladbach at 07.00 hrs. Lt. Prietze, an up-and-coming replacement pilot and his *Bordfunker* Uffz. Haake, with a tally of three Abschüsse, both perished when their He219 A-2 G9+WL exploded near Sonsbeck, reportedly at 06.50 hrs. It must also be noted that a Bf109 G-6 of 2./NJG11 crashed near Pfungstadt, south of Darmstadt, due to *Feindbeschuss*.

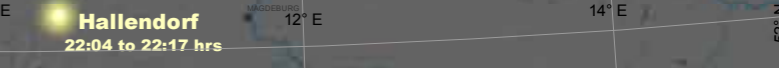
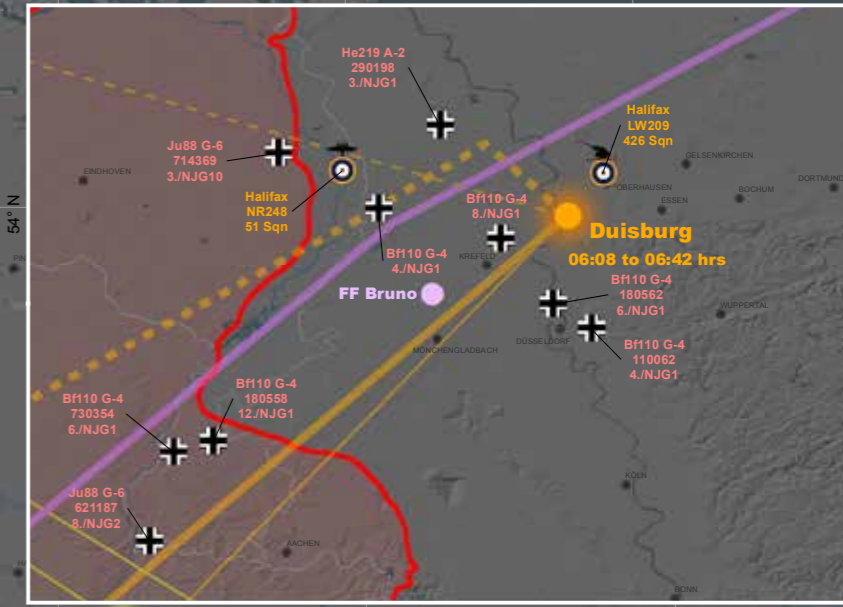
It was another bleak night for the Nachtjagd. For a very meagre defensive success, six twin-engined and one single-engined Nachtjäger failed to return from the night's *Reichsverteidigung* effort.

#### *Western Front*

At least seven Nachtjagd Gruppen were engaged in ground strafing missions in the Aachen-Maastricht-Liège-Venlo area in support of the von Rundstedt-offensive, the last German offensive thrust in the west, which had begun on 16 December. During the course of the night of 17-18 December, Luftwaffe units flew a total of 243 *Nachtschlachteinsätze*, an estimated 90 of which were contributed by the Nachtjagd.

Some 30 Bf110 G-4s of NJG1 took part in the operation, the crews being briefed to shoot up traffic on the roads between Sittard, Maastricht and Liège. The *Nachtschlachter* were supported by *Beleuchter* ('illuminators') of a specialist Pathfinder Gruppe, the Ju88 S-3-equipped I./KG66, which acted as illuminators for the ground-attacking Nachtjäger throughout the Ardennes offensive. Five aircraft of 8./NJG1, including Bf110 G-4 G9+DS of the *Staffelkapitän* Hptm. Schmidt and his regular crew of Fw's Schönfeld and Schlosser, took off from Krefeld at 19.40 hrs. They assembled over Sittard with four or five Bf110s each of II. and IV./NJG1. Bf110 G-4 G9+CS of 8./NJG1 was hit by ack-ack over Sittard, one of the engines stopped and the fighter got into a spin. The pilot, Ofhr. Stöcker, ordered his crew to bale out near Maaseik but then managed to regain control and returned to base without a crew, both of whom were taken prisoner. At 20.40 hrs, a second wave of some 15 Bf110s of II, III. and IV./NJG1 repeated the operation, the III. Gruppe dispatching two or three further aircraft in a third wave later in the night.





# 17th/18th DECEMBER 1944

**Legend**

**Targets**

- Ulm
- Hanau (Deception)
- München
- Duisburg
- Münster (Deception)
- Hallendorf (Secondary target)

**Routes**

**Ulm Raid**

- Entry (Bombers)
- Return (Bombers)
- Entry (Mosquitos)
- Return (Mosquitos)

**Hanau Raid (Deception)**

- Entry
- Return

**München Raid**

- Entry (Bombers)
- Return (Bombers)
- Entry (Mosquitos)
- Return (Mosquitos)

**Duisburg Raid**

- Entry (Bombers)
- Return (Bombers)
- Entry (Mosquitos)
- Return (Mosquitos)

**Münster Raid (Deception)**

- Entry (Bombers)
- Return (Bombers)

**Losses**

- Luftwaffe loss
- RAF loss by other causes
- RAF loss by Nachtjäger
- RAF loss by Flak

**Military units and bases**

- Himmelbett station/radio beacon
- Bomber Command Airfields
- Frontline on 17-18 December 1944
- Mandrel Screen

**Base cartography**

- Cities
- Rivers

**Controlled zones**

- Allies
- Axis

Target	Group	Type of Aircraft	Number of Aircraft	number of aircraft that attacked the target	Aircraft Lost	Time Over From	Time Over To
Early Phase							
Ulm	1	Lancaster	263	261	1	19:29	19:46
	8	Lancaster	54	49	1	19:24	19:40
		Mosquito	13	6	-	19:23	19:49
Hanau (Deception)	8	Mosquito	44	38	-	19:04	19:27
München	5	Lancaster	280	259	-	21:57	22:13
		Mosquito	8	7	-	-	-
Hallendorf	8	Mosquito	5	3	-	22:04	22:17
Late Phase							
Duisburg	4	Halifax	228	206	1	6:17	6:35
	6	Halifax	190	175	2	6:15	6:42
		Lancaster	42	40	-	-	-
		Lancaster	39	38	-	6:11	6:38
Münster	8	Mosquito	24	13	-	6:08	6:22
		Mosquito	26	24	-	6:10	6:27
Photo Recce	5	Mosquito	1	1	-	-	-
Bomber Support	100	Various	87	66	-	-	-
Signal Patrols	100	Mosquito & Halifax	7	7	-	-	-
Meteorological Recce	8	Mosquito	2	2	-	-	-





Twente airfield was used as an operating base for I., II. and III./NJG2. In the late afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup> December, four or five crews of 8. and 9./NJG2 transferred from Marx to Twente, where they were joined by a number of crews of the 7. Staffel from Jever. The whole of II./NJG2 was also concentrated at Twente. From about 19.30 hrs onwards, these aircraft, carrying two AB250 containers filled with SD2 anti-personnel bombs, took off in waves at intervals of about one hour to bomb and strafe Allied forces in the Maastricht area. Some crews flew two, or even three, sorties that night. Oblt. Karl Bühler of 2./NJG2, for example, lifted off from Twente in Ju88 G-6 4R+BK at 20.30 hrs, and later noted in his *Flugbuch*, 'Special mission. Target road traffic near Sittard with two 250 AB bombs. 80% damage on landing at 21.45 hrs due to collision with aircraft of our Kommodore'.

At 01.30 hrs on the 18<sup>th</sup> December, the JLO of 7. JD sent an urgent message to NJG6, 'Tonight, the Gruppe's serviceable aircraft are again to be committed to attacking ground targets in the Luxembourg-Diedenhofen (Thionville) area. As far as possible, Bf110s are to be fitted with ETC (bomb racks)'. In response to the order, between 02.14 and 08.11 hrs, Stab, I., II. and IV./NJG6 employed 21 Bf110s and seven Ju88s in the *Nachtschlacht* role, for the loss of one of their number. The war diarist of Stab NJG6 recorded:

'Munitions consumption:

I./NJG6: 8 x AB 500/SD 10; 4637 rounds of 2 cm (ammunition) and 220 rounds of 3 cm.

II./NJG6: 300 rounds of 2 cm.

IV./NJG6: 4 x AB 250/SD 10; 2320 rounds of 2 cm and 300 rounds of 3 cm.

Results: attacks on recognised vehicle columns and illuminated installations. Attacks on lit-up barracks, Flak site and loading station. Numerous vehicles set on fire, intense fires in the barracks, high jets of flame (probably ammunition dump).

Defence: Flak of all calibres at all altitudes, especially in the Luxembourg area. No night fighters. Oblt. Spoden, 6./NJG6, reports enemy territory beyond Strasbourg not blacked out, vehicle columns travelling with undimmed lights. Very heavy traffic'.

Nachtjagd's first ground attack mission in the von Rundstedt offensive was accomplished at the cost of five Nachtjäger, all 12 crew members of the four Bf110 *Nachtschlachter* that were lost being killed. 6./NJG1 lost two Bf110 G-4s, one of which (G9+IP) was shot down in air combat at Elsloo. Another 6. Staffel crew suffered a particularly violent death; at 04.58 hrs, immediately after take-off from Düsseldorf, their bombed-up Bf110 G-4 G9+OP crashed into a villa in the Klaus von Papenstraße in Lohausen-Stockum, instantly killing the crew and two inhabitants of the house, which burned down completely. Bf110 G-4 G9+RZ of 12./NJG1 went down just south of Sittard after taking a direct ack-ack hit, and Ju88 G-6 4R+HS of 8./NJG2 suffered the same fate over Eysden at 05.00 hrs. All four of the Junkers' crew baled out safely; the 21-year old *Bordmechaniker* was subsequently described by his Allied interrogators as '... a nervous wreck; he had already been shot down three times'. Finally, Bf110 G-4 2Z+XK of 2./NJG6 was shot down by the 204th American Field Artillery Battalion near Felsberg, Überherrn.

During the von Rundstedt-offensive, 17 Gruppen of NJG1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 were used in the ground attack role of the roads and railways used by the Allies in bringing up their reinforcements. This was a role for which the night hunters had been insufficiently trained, and the low-level operations brought very heavy losses of irreplaceable, highly trained night fighting crews due to the deadly light Allied ack-ack. During interdiction sorties between 26 and 31 December, at least 55 Nachtjagd crew members were killed. Another 59 Nachtjagd aircrew were shot down and captured during the second half of December and brought to England for interrogation by the Air Directorate of Intelligence, Section K (or 'ADI (K)'). This provided the Allies with a wealth of information on recent tactical developments in the Nachtjagd, such as on innovations in night fighter navigation, on signals traffic and IFF, on (Allied jamming of) the running commentaries and airborne interception equipment, on the night defence of the Ruhr, and, last but not least, on the tactics used in the *Nachtschlacht* campaign. In turn, this enabled the Allies to refine their countermeasures against the Nachtjagd even further. Fw. Schönfeld, *Bordfunker* to Hptm. Schmidt, St.Kpt. of 8./NJG1 reflects, 'The von Rundstedt offensive, which should have brought about the breakthrough to Antwerpen, began on 16 December 1944. German fighter-bombers swarmed for ten days to the west, day after day. We ourselves operated as 'night-butchers' beyond the front line from Krefeld-Uerdingen. The slender twig of hope grew and bloomed. A battle sortie over Maastricht, on the night of 17 December; provided the Tommies' Flak with rapid fire practice and clipped some of our precious feathers. On landing at Krefeld (at 20.45 hrs, author's note) we collided with a Ju 87, standing at the take-off point and loaded with bombs, as a result of an error by traffic control. The crew of the 87, (of 1./Nachtschlachtgruppe 1, author's note), was killed instantly when our starboard engine smashed into their cabin. We spun around, the undercarriage was torn off. Both engines were on fire, as was the 87. We got out and ran, bleeding. Bombs went off behind us. I was running with my parachute still strapped on and did not notice it. An aircraft passed over us and landed beyond the fire. We were patched up in hospital. After seven days, on 24 December, my pilot came for me. We had to go to Störmede. The boss was to take over the 7. Staffel. The von Rundstedt offensive had failed. It had all turned out as in a drama: conflict, catastrophe, the end'.

Uffz. Walter Ludwig: 1	3./NJG6	Lancaster	E. outskirts of Ulm (CA 4): 4.000 m.	19.40	626 Sqn Lancaster LM530 (Cat. AC damaged).
Note: flying at 11,000 ft over target Ulm just prior to release of bombs attacked twice by Ju88 at 19.39-19.40 hrs. Flap jack damaged, port fin and elevators damaged, starboard elevators and trimmers shot away, starboard side of fuselage near mid-upper turret badly torn by cannon shells					
Unknown crew	4./NJG5	4-mot	S. outskirts of Ulm (CU 63): 3.300 m.	19.45	101 Sqn Lancaster NG131
Hptm. Günther Schmidt: 1	4./NJG1	Halifax	5-10 km W. target Duisburg: 5.300 m.	06.33-36	claimed as probable victory, 426 Sqn Halifax NP737 (Cat. AC damaged).
Note: flying at 17,500 ft over target Duisburg attacked twice by Me110 starting at 06.28 hrs, five feet of starboard flaps shot away, starboard tail plane and wing damaged					

Lt. Peter-Heinz Walcher: 1	4./NJG1	Halifax	30-40 km NW target Duisburg: 4.600 m.	06.37	prob. victory, Duisburg raid, unidentified
Uffz. Egon Reinecke (BS to Hptm. Lau): 2	4./NJG1	Mosquito	40-50 km W. target Duisburg: 5.000 m.	06.48	prob. victory, prob. 464 Sqn Mosquito NT143
Ofhr. Rolf Ramsauer: 2	4./NJG1	Halifax	5-40 km NE Venlo (LN 2): 5.200 m.	06.57	prob. victory, 51 Sqn Halifax NR248

## 18-19 December 1944

### Reichsverteidigung

Between 21.53 and 22.16 hrs, 236 Lancasters attacked the distant port of Gotenhafen (Gdynia) on the Baltic coast, with the aim of destroying the remains of the German fleet that was assembled there. A few RCM aircraft of 100 Group accompanied the 'heavies'. The outward journey was accomplished without opposition, because the Germans were only able to take a few plots on the bombers as they crossed the north west coast of Denmark (at 19.22 hrs), and possibly also because frontal conditions over Denmark and north west Germany made fighter interception difficult.

One Ju88 Gruppe was sent up against the threat, 19 crews of I./NJG5 becoming airborne from Jesau under *Jafü Ostpreussen* control between 20.33 and 21.30 hrs. The fighters received plots of the progress of the bomber stream on its final leg into the target and effected interception in the greater target area. Co-operating with searchlights and using basic *Helle Nachtjagd* tactics, they claimed all four Main Force Lancasters that failed to return, for no own losses. Two further bombers sustained damage in fighter attacks and seven returned with Flak scars. During the raid, the Gotenhafen Flak defences fired 9,611 shells at the bombers, claiming eight 'heavies' destroyed. No particulars have been found on these Flak Abschüsse in modern research.

207 Squadron LM671 was seriously shot up by a night fighter over the target and struggled on for another 90 km before crashing in the sea near Leba; the whole crew was very lucky to be picked up from the sea by a boat from Grossendorf (Władysławowo). Returning Lancaster crews reported one 'heavy' exploding over the target when coned; this was, in all probability, 227 Squadron PB723, which was heading out from the target when it was hit. A wing fuel tank exploded and the aircraft crashed at Koln (Kielno). 207 Squadron NG144 crashed into the sea 100 metres off Holzkathen (Smoldziński Las) and, finally, 106 Squadron NN726 was shot down at Połczyno near Putzig (Puck) at 22.12 hrs. Although return plots of the 'heavies' were passed to the Nachtjäger of NJG5 between 22.49 and 23.28 hrs as far as North Seeland, only one attack by a 'Do217' was reported on the return route over the Danish Western coast.

In the absence of any heavy bomber attack in western Germany, 100 Group staged a diversion towards the Münster area, using a protective *Mandel* screen (between Gent and the Florennes area), a *Window* spoof (between 21.19 and 23.02 hrs which affected the Ruhr-Münster area), a wide range of jamming equipment (*Jostle*, *Piperack* and *Carpet*), plus high and low-level intruders. All this was designed to cause fighter reaction and disturbance in western Germany. Simultaneously, between 21.34 and 21.41 hrs 16 Mosquitoes bombed Münster; because this force was recognised as 'many Mosquitoes' at an early stage, the Nachtjagd made no effort to intercept this raid with twin-engined fighters. Six single-engined Nachtjäger of 3./NJG11, however, were sent up from Bonn-Hangelar between 21.43 and 22.06 hrs to combat the 'Wooden Wonders', the pilots being briefed to fly to *Leuchtgranate* Duisburg. Among them was the *Staffelkapitän* Oblt. Fritz E. Krause in Bf109 G No. 9. He and his Staffel comrades all returned to their home base by 23.18 hrs, without having achieved *Feindberührung*.

It was a different story with the 100 Group diversion, which was first plotted off Orfordness, at 20.13 hrs. When it had penetrated into the Roermond area on the Dutch-German border, it was assessed as a 'force of 150 heavy bombers'. This threat triggered considerable twin-engined Nachtjagd activity, 79 crews from six Gruppen being ordered up. These included elements of III./NJG2 and Stab NJG4, I./NJG1 left Münster-Handorf at around 21.40-45 hrs, two Bf110s II./NJG1 took off from Düsseldorf at 21.50 and 21.53 hrs, IV./NJG1 was scrambled from Dortmund at around 21.45 hrs with orders to fly to *FF Drossel* in Duisburg, II./NJG4 was sent up from Gütersloh at around 21.50 hrs and, finally, elements of III./NJG4 left Gütersloh at around 22.10 hrs. Major Hoppe in Ju88 G-1 3C+DR of this Gruppe made a crash-landing at Gütersloh at 22.38 hrs, just 26 minutes after take-off. II./NJG4 was sent to Duisburg at 21.52 hrs and was fed with plots on, 'aircraft in the Venlo area flying east' over the next ten minutes. The fighters of NJG1 were also given plots in the Venlo area by the *Varus* control.

None of the Nachtjäger subsequently achieved *Feindberührung* with the 100 Group 'heavies', mainly because the fighter reaction was delayed by ground fog and also because they were soon ordered to land again (at 22.18-22.21 hrs) when the German fighter



In the early hours of 19 December 1944, *Bordschütze* Uffz. Alfred Ofers (on right) is looking through the wreckage of 85 Squadron Mosquito MV549 that collided with his Bf110 G-4 during the previous night (Coll. Walter Telsnig, via Ales Kaplan).





The Kommandeur of II./NJG1 Hptm. Breves posing with the tail unit of his Bf110 G-4 after achieving his 13<sup>th</sup> Abschuss on 18-19 December 1944 (Coll. Horst Münter via Andreas Wachtel).



Damage to the wing of Hptm. Breves' Bf110 G-4 G9+CC, photographed in a hangar at Düsseldorf airfield, 19 December 1944 (Coll. Walter Telsnig, via Ales Kaplan).

controllers realised their mistake about the *Window* force, which had reached the Brussels area on its return by this time. From 22.22 to 22.41 hrs, the 3. JD controller gave warning of 'intruders in the Münster area'. One of the dreaded Mosquito intruders, MM640 of 157 Squadron, engaged in a high-level patrol, shot down He219 A-0 G9+GH of 1./NJG1 at Südlohn at 22.20 hrs. The pilot Uffz. Scheuerlein ejected safely, but his *Bordfunker* Uffz. Heinze was found dead the next day with his parachute unopened. Another *Nachtjäger* employed against the 100 Group diversion, Ju88 G-1 3C+LM of 4./NJG4, was lost too, the aircraft crashing near Aschaffenburg due to an unknown cause. Uffz. Bruns and his crew baled out, two with slight injuries.

In turn, a Bomber Support Mosquito of 85 Squadron was brought down in unique fashion by Hptm. Breves, *Kommandeur* of II./NJG1 since 26 October, and his crew of Fw. Telsnig (*Bordfunker*) and Ogefr. Ofers (*Bordschütze*), who flew in Bf110 G-4 G9+CC. Breves recorded in his *Gefechtsbericht*, 'After the order to land, I arrived at Düsseldorf at around 22.30 hrs. As my radio had failed, I flashed my landing lights twice before turning in to land, in order to make myself known to our other aircraft, then I made my approach. As I was on approach at about 80 m altitude, gear and flaps down and at a speed of about 220 km/h, I was fired on from behind and below with horizontal weapons. After a short burst the port external tank fell away on fire. At the same instant the port wing was struck hard, and an aircraft which I recognised as a Mosquito flew past me at great speed. The Mosquito rose up directly in front of my aircraft, went into a roll to starboard and went down almost vertically at 22.39 (aircraft behaved as if it were going into a spin). There was no fire. My Me110 remained controllable and was landed smoothly at 22.40 hrs. The Mosquito crashed 2-3 km north of the airfield at Düsseldorf, and was examined by Major Huchel of II./NJG1. The enemy crew was dead at the crash site. The Mosquito was equipped with four horizontally-mounted 20 mm cannon. Damage to own aircraft: about half of the port aileron was ripped away (measured from the edge, 163 cm are missing), port wing cut through from behind to the spar at about the same point. The impact must have been from the Mosquito's tail fin. One propeller blade was shortened by several centimetres, antennae ripped away'.

#### Western Front

During the course of the night, Luftwaffe aircraft flew 86 ground interdiction sorties in



Bf110 G-4 G9+CC, Hptm. Breves' mount during the winter of 1944-45, depicted at snow-covered Düsseldorf airfield (Coll. Walter Telsnig via Ales Kaplan, and Horst Münter via Andreas Wachtel).

the area of Aachen-Geilenkirchen-Brussels-Liège. It remains unknown how many *Nachtjagd* aircraft participated in the *Nachtschlacht* effort; there were no losses among the *Nachtjagd Nachtschlachter*. Fw. Kirschnek, *Bordfunker* to Ofw. Winn of 1./NJG2, recorded in his *Leistungsbuch*: '00.56 hours - 03.35 hours, 159 min. Low-level sortie against roads in the area around Löwen, Lüttich, Maastricht. Attacks on vehicles and ground lights. Six attacks, certain destruction of one truck, strikes on numerous other trucks'.

Oblt. Peter Ehrhardt: 18	2./NJG5	Lancaster	NE Gotenhafen	21.58	207 Sqn Lancaster LM671
Uffz. Hengstbach: 4	2./NJG5	Lancaster	SE Danzig	22.05	227 Sqn Lancaster PB723
Hptm. Walter Engel: 2	3./NJG5	Lancaster	20 km W. Danzig	22.10	207 Sqn Lancaster NG144
Oblt. Peter Ehrhardt: 19	2./NJG5	Lancaster	N. Gotenhafen	22.10	106 Sqn Lancaster NN726
Hptm. Adolf Breves: 12	Stab II./NJG1	Mosquito	2-3 km N. Düsseldorf airfield: 80 m.	22.39	85 Sqn Mosquito MV549

### 21-22 December 1944

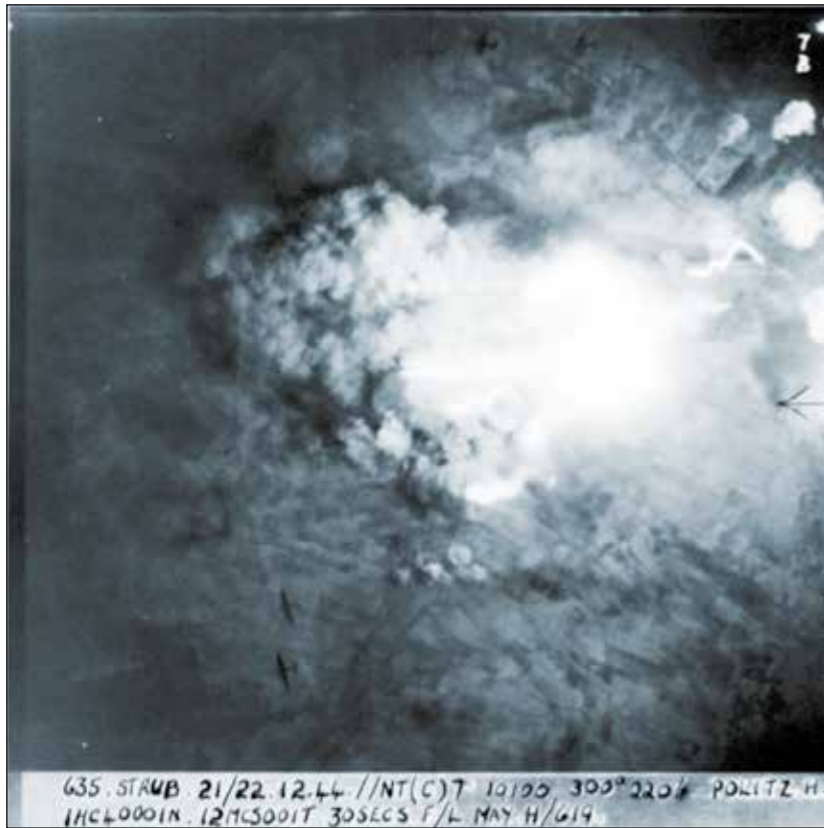
#### Reichsverteidigung

Two relatively small forces of just over 100 'heavies' each were sent out to bomb transportation targets at Bonn and Köln in the early evening. Both forces crossing France were devoid of concealment, owing to poor weather preventing *Mandel* aircraft from taking off. In reaction, at around 18.00 hrs, a quarter of an hour before the attacks began, 13 Ju88s of I./NJG4 were sent up, shortly followed by 16 Bf110s and 11 Ju88s of I. and IV./NJG6 and four Bf109s of I./NJG11. The German controllers, however, were unable to obtain a good track of the streams in time and only two *Nachtjäger* managed to make contact with the Köln force, however without opening fire. Nine Köln raiders returned to the UK with minor Flak damage.

A third Main Force raid of 208 aircraft attacking the Pölitz oil plant near Stettin in the mid-evening went completely unopposed by the *Nachtjagd*. IV./NJG3 (based at Marx and Varel) became active at 20.53 hrs in response to the approach of this threat, whilst small elements of III./NJG5 were scrambled from Königsberg at 21.40 hrs to, 'hunt for bombers in the Stettin-Pölitz area', as Lt. Wolf of the 9. Staffel later recorded in his *Flugbuch*. Plots on the outward-bound and return routes of the bombers were given between 21.05 and 23.20 hrs, but no encounters with *Nachtjäger* were reported by returning Pölitz raiders and the *Nachtjäger* returned to their bases by midnight. Nine Pölitz raiders sustained Flak damage, one of these being written off in a crash-landing on return to the UK.

The approach of four small forces of mine-layers which targeted Swinemünde, Aalborg, the Kattegat and Oslo stirred up a *Nachtjagd* reaction in the form of elements of I., II. and III./NJG5, which were scrambled between around 19.00-19.40 hrs from their bases in northern Germany. One Gruppe was directed to FF 14 on the island of Bornholm after receiving a plot on the mine-layers near Ystad (Sweden) at 19.07 hrs. When the bombers were reported flying in the direction of Stettin, the *Jafü Ostpreussen* probably expected a threat on the Reich capital and ordered his *Zahme Säue* to FF 13 at Stralsund at 19.28-19.30 hrs, thus covering the approach to Berlin. None of these night fighters achieved *Feindberührung*. By 19.52 hrs, returning *Gardeners* were plotted flying west and the fighters of NJG5 received orders to land at 20.23-42 hrs. Two of their number, Ju88 G-1 C9+EH of 1./NJG5 and Bf110 G-4 C9+CM of 4./NJG5, probably crashed into the icy Baltic Sea all seven crew members being posted missing. At 22.34 hrs, II./NJG3 from Schleswig became active under 2. JD control, possibly attempting return route interception of the *Gardening* forces, but entirely without success.





The 21-22 December 1944 Pölitz raid went completely unopposed by the Nachtjagd. Two Main Force Lancasters are seen in this target photo (Coll. Carsten Petersen).

#### Western Front

Shortly after 21.00 hrs, 15 Bf110 G-4s of IV./NJG6 became airborne from Kitzingen and Gerolzhofen for *Nachtschlacht* in the area of Metz-Luxemburg-Longwy. Each aircraft carried two AB250 containers of anti-personnel bombs, the crews being briefed to release the bomb containers before attacking any suitable ground targets with machine gun and cannon fire. Interestingly, the crews were told to tune in to the Gruppen *Befehlswelle* throughout the operation, so that in the event of an RAF bomber penetration in their area, they could quickly switch to the role of *Verfolgungsnachtjagd*. The crews, however, once airborne found that the Gruppen R/T was heavily jammed and could distinguish nothing through the jamming. Returning crews reported fires in fuel depots near Longuyon and in several armoured columns. The cost for IV./NJG6 was Bf110 G-4 2Z+HU of the 10. Staffel that crashed near Grossostheim due to an engine fire, the *Bordfunker* being killed. Another aircraft of the Gruppe, 2Z+QV belonging to the 11. Staffel, was hit by ack-ack north east of Longwy at 22.30 hrs, two of the crew baling out near Esch-sur-Alzette to be taken prisoners of war. The pilot, however, managed to fly his crippled Nachtjäger back

to base where he performed a smooth landing.

I./NJG4 contributed four Ju88s (coded 3C+DJ, EJ, HJ and NJ) to the ground interdiction effort, the aircraft taking off from Langendiebach between 17.58 and 18.12 hrs. One of their number, 3C+NJ in the hands of Oblt. Ruppert Kess, was shot down in flames by 157 Squadron Mosquito TA401 near Ruppertshain at 19.35 hrs. Oblt. Kess and his *Bordschütze* were killed. Oblt. Kess, a former test pilot, had only days before been posted to I./NJG4 and was probably engaged on his very first operational sortie when he was killed.

### 22-23 December 1944

#### Reichsverteidigung

The marshalling yards at Bingen and at Koblenz, which were of vital importance to the Germans in supporting their Ardennes offensive, were selected by Bomber Command HQ for attacks by 106 and 168 aircraft respectively. In support of these raids, 14 Mosquitoes of 100 Group flew high-level intruder sorties. The bombers that attacked Bingen (between 18.31 and 18.48 hrs) crossed the coast of France between Abbeville and Dieppe and flew direct to the target, and were followed shortly after by the Koblenz raid, which flew on a parallel track and opened their attack at 18.50 hrs. No *Window* spoof was available, but both routes passed through a *Mandrel* screen that came into position at 17.10 hrs over an area extending roughly from Brussels to Montmédy. The protective screen and Radar silence to a position 05.00E on the outward route prevented any plotting until 17.50 hrs, when the use of H2S was finally permitted.

The first Nachtjagd controller that became active in response to this double approach - a full 25 minutes before the Germans began passing the first plots on the incoming raids - was that of IV./NJG6, which sent up the first of 12 Bf110s and seven Ju88s from Kitzingen and Gerolzhofen at 17.25 hrs. These were followed by two Ju88s of II./NJG6, which left Schwäbisch Hall at 17.37 hrs. A German Radar interception unit to the north east of Bonn reported H2S transmissions on bearings passing through the Florennes-Bastogne area 13 minutes later, assessing these as 'a single force of 1,000 aircraft'! Later, according to an entry in the War Diaries of Stab NJG6, the assessment was scaled down to a 'small bomber formation with a strong Mosquito shield'. In reaction, four more Bf110s and five Ju88s of I./NJG6 were sent up from Gross Sachsenheim and Hailfingen at 18.01 hrs. In addition to the 7. JD effort, the *Jafü Mittelrhein* ordered five Ju88s of I./NJG4 at Grossostheim and Zellhausen to cockpit readiness at 17.26 hrs, scrambling them between 17.35 and 18.03 hrs and first sent the Junkers to *FF Dachs*.

At 17.54 hrs, II./NJG6 was ordered to fly for 28 minutes on a course of 283 degrees (WNW) at 3,500 metres for *FF Bergziege*, south of Koblenz/Bingen. At the same time, the 19 fighters of IV./NJG6 were told to fly on a course of 279 degrees to radio beacon *Graf*, a

position right on the bombers' track to Bingen some 60 km short of the target, to attempt approach route interception. They were then warned of intruders west of Mainz. Simultaneously, I./NJG4 was being fed with plots on the Bingen raiders south of Florennes flying east. A fifth Gruppe, II./NJG5 became active at around 18.15 hrs; it was told to gather over *FF Otto* and fed with plots on both incoming raids, but was ordered to return to base by 18.44 hrs. The unit suffered the loss of two Bf110 G-4s, one of which (of the 4. Staffel) fell to 85 Squadron Mosquito 'B' near Homburg an der Saar at 18.19 hrs, whilst a third Bf110 G-4 (of the 6. Staffel) crashed on landing at Schwäbisch Hall. Four crew members were killed and three posted missing.

At 18.07 hrs, II./NJG6 was sent from beacon *Bergziege* to *FF Graf*, 'fly on course of 322 degrees (NW) for 18 minutes' and just four minutes later was told that there was a 'strong formation at *Graf*'. I./NJG6 was, inexplicably, ordered away from these plots on the Bingen force and told to fly to *FF Möwe* (at 18.29 hrs) and *Epp* (18.31 hrs), south east of the bombers' targets; five minutes later the Gruppe was ordered to, 'fly on a course of 330 degrees (NNW) for 30 minutes' to the Mainz area.

This left II. and IV./NJG6 suitably placed over beacon *Graf* at an early moment for *Verfolgungsnachtjagd* interception of the Bingen raid. They were fed with plots from H2S transmissions of both forces flying to Bingen and Koblenz that were intercepted by three German Radar intercept units (located NE of Strasbourg, NE of Bonn and in the Mainz/Mannheim area) from 18.15 to 18.50 hrs, and received instructions on the situation in the air by a *Laufende Reportage* from 7. JD. Still, in spite of these favourable tactical circumstances for the defenders, due to heavy jamming of the Nachtjägers' SN-2, not a single fighter managed to find any 'heavies' of either force on their outward-bound route. Only a few crews of NJG6 made contact with the Bingen raid, and then only after this force had accurately dropped their bomb loads into the railway yards at Bingen, which effectively stopped all movement of German supplies by train through Bingen to the battle front in the Ardennes. At 18.38 hrs, seven minutes into the raid, and at 18.44 hrs, Bingen was announced as the target to I. and IV./NJG6, respectively. Koblenz was reported as the target to II./NJG6 at 18.53 hrs, whilst I./NJG6 received the same information six minutes later.

Three Ju88 crews of NJG6 were responsible for the demise of all three heavy bombers that were reported missing from the Bingen raid. The first to go down was Lancaster PA977 of 405 Squadron that crashed at Wiersdorf, followed by 466 Squadron Halifax NP975 that was attacked by Ju88 2Z+SH of I./NJG6 in the hands of Ofw. Launer and his crew of Uffz. Füllborn (*Bordfunker*) and Fw. Suttrop (*Bordschütze*) in the Prüm area. NP975 was the penultimate 'heavy' over the target as it was slowed up due to a feathered engine, and was taken totally by surprise by a well-aimed burst of *Schräge Musik* cannon fire. It flew on for another four minutes with its port wing in flames before it exploded hitting the ground near Steinebrück. Finally, 578 Squadron Halifax NA501 crashed at Bengel following an attack by Hptm. Weigel. Weigel had an interesting career in WWII; he was shot down and taken prisoner serving as a bomber pilot in 6./KG26 in April 1940 and spent the next four years in captivity in Canada. Successfully faking a serious mental illness, he was repatriated to Germany in May 1944, where he was trained as a night fighter pilot and joined IV./NJG6 in early September 1944. By late December 1944, he was promoted to St.Kpt. of I./NJG6 and achieved four Abschüsse before he was killed in action on 5-6 March 1945.

On the debit side, NJG6 suffered the loss of three Ju88 G-6s and a Bf110 G-4 in Mosquito attacks. F/O's Owen and McAllister DFM in 85 Squadron Mosquito 'B' scored their second and third kills for the night, shooting down two Ju88 G-6s at 18.28 and 18.54 hrs, 2Z+HK of 2./NJG6 near Landstuhl and 2Z+DC of Stab II./NJG6 near Lebach. Ju88 G-6 2Z+EW of 12./NJG6, flown by Hptm. Gnass, was destroyed by 157 Squadron Mosquito TA404 at Dachsenhausen at 19.35 hrs, and, finally, Bf110 G-4 2Z+FL of 3./NJG6 (in the hands of Ofw. Pflieger) was shot down near Darmstadt by 85 Squadron Mosquito 'P' at 19.37 hrs. 11 crew members were killed or injured.

The Nachtjäger were given plots of the bombers' return tracks until 19.30 hrs, when they were located some 30 km west of Malmédy. II. and IV./NJG6 were told to land a few minutes later. The I./NJG4 Ops Report for the night mentions that a Ju88 piloted by Ofw. von Hoegen was attacked by a Mosquito and shot down at 20.07 hrs; no further particulars on this loss have surfaced to date.

#### Western Front

NJG6 suffered the loss of a fifth aircraft, Bf110 G-4 2Z+VK of the 2. Staffel, later that night, when 23 Bf110s and two Ju88s of I. and IV./NJG6 were dispatched on ground interdiction sorties to the area of Metz-Diedenhofen. It was shot down by ack-ack north of Metz at 23.00 hrs. Aided by good visibility in their allotted target areas, returning crews reported that they had bombed and strafed an estimated 30 motorised vehicles, plus several railroad trains to the north of Metz.

During the course of the night, I./NJG4 flew seven *Nachtschlacht* sorties from Rhein-Main without loss, two of these crews having already been in action earlier against the Bingen raid. One of these two was Uffz. Ullmann of the 2. Staffel, who flew his 71<sup>st</sup> *Einsatz*, in Ju88 G-1 3C+KK, making a 'Tiefangriff' or low-level ground strafing attack, during a sortie that lasted between 22.10 and 00.40 hrs. In the face of strong light and medium ack ack, the I./NJG4 crews destroyed one locomotive, two lorries, one goods truck, one material dump and one motor vehicle, and 'effectively shot up' one locomotive, six motor transport columns and five single vehicles.

Oblt. Peter Spoden: 16	6./NJG6	Halifax	Kylburg area, N. Trier (QO 7): 4.000 m.	18.59	405 Sqn Lancaster PA977
Ofw. Richard Launer: 7	1./NJG6	Liberator	40-75 km W. Koblenz (PO): 3.600 m.	19.05	466 Sqn Halifax NP975
Hptm. Kurt-Heinz Weigel: 1	IV./NJG6	Halifax	SW Bingen: 4.700 m.	19.05	578 Sqn Halifax NA501