

Below: Fw. Hugo Füttscher of 11./NJG3 flew Ju88 C-6 D5+HW during late 1943-early 1944; he achieved both his confirmed daylight kills (on 13 December 1943 and 11 January 1944) in this aircraft (Coll. Thorsten Wübber).

Right: Fw. Füttscher at the controls of his Ju88 C-6, winter 1943-44 (Coll. Thorsten Wübber).



13 December 1943 USAAF BREMEN AND KIEL

Due to fog prevailing over much of Northern Germany, the I. Jagdkorps was only able to commit 47 fighter aircraft of 2. and 3. JD against two American bomber formations, totalling 649 Fortresses and Liberators, that were dispatched to bomb Bremen and Kiel. The I. Jagdkorps war diarist commented: “Only towards noon, it was possible to scramble day fighters in the area of Volkel-Schiphol. Otherwise only local take offs of night fighters, some of which took off on instruments”. As a result, just four B-17s and a B-24, all from the Kiel raid, failed to return. Three of the American losses were due to Ju88 Nachtjäger of NJG3 that chased the ‘heavies’ on their return flight over Schleswig-Holstein and out over the North Sea. ‘Shack Bunny’, a Fort of the 385th BG was damaged by Fw. Meissner of the 2. Staffel, causing a fire that could not be controlled: the aircraft crashed NE of Schleswig. The next heavy bomber to go down at the hands of a night fighter -Uffz. Füttscher of the 11. Staffel, who flew a sortie from Westerland in his usual mount, Ju88 C-6 D5+HW- was a B-24 of the 392nd BG, the aircraft crashing into the North Sea off Heligoland. Both Meissner’s and Füttscher’s claims were officially *anerkannt* by the *Abschusskommission* on 19 May 1944. The final bomber kill that was credited to a night fighter was ‘Dry Run IV’, a 96th BG Fortress. Lt. Stock (of 12./NJG3, flying Ju88 C-6 D5+FX on his 29th *Feindflug*) and Lt. Briegleb (of 10./NJG3, piloting Ju88 C-6 D5+EV) chased this aircraft down over the Dutch Frisian island chain, Stock hitting the aircraft first and Briegleb giving the Fort a final burst of gunfire before the aircraft crash-landed at Kloosterburen on the Northern Dutch coast. Both Nachtjäger claimed the kill, but the victory was later credited to Lt. Stock alone, also on 19 May 1944. Interestingly, in a memorandum dated 31 May 1944, Hptm. Buschmann, *Gruppenkommandeur* of IV./NJG3 mentioned the incident: “.. requested that Lt. Walter Briegleb, pilot with 10./NJG3, be granted the EK First Class. Lt. Briegleb has made 45 night sorties and 6 day sorties, with corresponding successes of four 4-engined aircraft and one Fortress. He received the EK Second Class on 22/2/44. Was responsible, along with Lt. Stock for shooting down a Boeing by day on 13/12/43”.

The price that the Nachtjäger paid for these daylight successes, however, was once again high: three Ju88 C-6s (of 4., 5. and 12./NJG3) and a Bf110 G-4 of 9./NJG3 were lost in the air battle, four other fighters returning with severe battle damage. The 4. and 5. Staffel Ju88s were lost, respectively, near Itzehoe and over the North Sea, whilst the 12. Staffel Junkers went down near Bremervörde in combat with five Lightnings of the 55th FG and the 9. Staffel Messerschmitt was also shot down by Lightnings to crash in the mouth of the River Elbe near Balke. Just two crew members baled out safely, all 10 other airmen were injured or killed, four of them are still missing to this day.

Fw. Hans Meissner: 6	2./NJG3	B-17	Nottfeld, Schleswig-Holstein: 6.200 m.	13.30	B-17F 42-3551 ‘Shack Bunny’ 385 BG/551BS
Uffz. Hugo Füttscher: 2	11./NJG3	B-24	S. Heligoland: 4.000-2.500 m.	13.55	B-24 H 42-7626 ‘Liberty Belle’ 392 BG/578 BS
Lt. Hermann Stock: 2	12./NJG3	B-17	Metslawier area (CN 4): 6.700-4.000 m.	14.05	B-17F 42-30602 ‘Dry Run IV’ 96 BG/338 BS

15-16 December 1943

According to the OKL/RLM Confirmed *Abschussübersicht* for Stab IV./NJG3, an (unidentified) crew scored a confirmed victory at 21.10 hrs. The *Abschuss* has not been identified, as there was no Bomber Command activity throughout the night (apart from two minor Mosquito nuisance raids against Leverkusen and Bochum, totalling 8 sorties, during the early evening), nor were there any Coastal Command losses.

unknown crew	Stab IV./NJG3	u/k	unknown location	21.10
<i>Note: victory confirmed by OKL/RLM on 19.6.1944</i>				

16-17 December 1943 BERLIN

Bomber Command raided Berlin in force with 483 Lancasters and 15 Mosquitoes, between 19.55 and 20.34 hrs. The I. Jagdkorps HQ closely monitored the assembly of the Main Force in the area north of London, and, from 17.25 hrs on, began receiving plots of the bombers’ outward-bound flight. As on so many nights during the winter of 1943-44, extensive low cloud with icing and fog at operational height considerably restricted the scale of the Nachtjagd effort in response to the approaching raid. Due to the adverse weather, the I. Jagdkorps was only able to commit 92 twin-engined aircraft, out of a frontline strength of 229, to battle, predominantly from the area of 3. JD. 30 of these fighters were scrambled to take up patrols in the *Himmelbette* on the Dutch coast, and four crews of NJG3 were sent up on close-controlled sorties in the Southern sector of 2. JD (NW Germany). The latter included the *Geschwaderkommodore* Maj. Lent and his *Funker* Ofw. Kubisch, who were scrambled from Stade in their regular mount Bf110 G-4 D5+AA at 18.35 hrs. A relatively small force of 28 experienced SN-2 equipped Nachtjäger of NJG1 and II./NJG2 (3. JD) were dispatched on *Zahme Sau* duties, and, finally, 30 selected crews of NJG5 (1. JD) were sent up on *Wilde Sau* night fighting. The weather claimed the life of one of the latter *Wilde Säue*, Oblt. Wulff, St.Kpt. of 8./NJG5 and ace with five confirmed and one rejected *Abschüsse*. Wulff and his crew crashed immediately after taking off in low cloud and fog from Königsberg in Bf110 G-4 C9+IS. Another experienced *Staffelkapitän*, Hptm. Alfred Heldt flying Bf110 G-4 D5+GR of 7./NJG3 and his crew were shot down and killed by ‘friendly’ Flak at 18.25 hrs, probably near the German coast.

At 17.59 hrs, when the spearhead of the force had advanced into the area of the IJsselmeer, the *Laufende Reportage* controls at Deelen (3. JD) and Stade (2. JD) began passing accurate plots of the bombers' H2S transmissions to the airborne Nachtjäger. Despite low cloud and severe icing conditions, over the next one-and-a-half hours, the Tame Boar Bf110s of NJG1 and II./NJG2 that were based in the Netherlands were successfully infiltrated into the stream over the IJsselmeer, a handful of *Zahme Sau* Ju88s of NJG3 (2. JD) were assembled over FF *Ludwig* (east of Enschede) and made contact with the stream in the area east of Zwolle, and, finally, the Ju88-equipped I./NJG2 (operating from Kassel-Rothwesten) was led into the outward-bound stream via FFs *Philipp* (near Paderborn) and *Zebra* (at Pröbsten, north of Hannover). This process was made easier for the defenders by the fact that, apart from a slight right-hand turn after Stendal, the bombers' route led direct to the target. Furthermore, strings of fighter flares were dropped at regular intervals all along the route from Egmond on the Dutch coast to Hannover, by Ju88 As of III./KG3. (At least 16 *Beleuchter* of this Gruppe were active against the Berlin raid, their radio traffic being monitored by British listening stations from around 18.15 hrs). The running commentators of 3 and 2. JD ordered their freelance fighters to Osnabrück at 18.10 hrs, to Oldenburg at 18.40 hrs and to Hannover at 19.14 hrs, after yellow routemarkers had been dropped by the bombers north of this town.

17 combats took place from the Dutch coast to beyond Hannover, resulting in the loss of 13 bombers, three more outward-bound Berlin raiders falling foul of Flak:

-115 Sqn Lancaster DS835: hit by Flak and exploded over the Kruisberg nr Heemskerk 19.00 hrs.

-426 Sqn Lancaster DS846: hit by 1. & 5./schw. Flak Abt. 611, 2, 3. & 5./schw. Flak Abt. 231 and 3./schw. Flak Abt. 185 and crashed nr. Hoyerhagen/Hoya at 19.05 hrs. Note: claimed destroyed 'in co-operation with Nachtjagd', Flak claim confirmed by OKL on 8.7.1944; 'in co-operation with Nachtjagd' deleted from OKL Flak Abschussmeldung.

-408 Sqn Lancaster LL676: hit by 1./schw. Flak Abt. 495, 1./schw. Flak Abt. 434 and schw. Hei. Flak Batt. 207/IV, crashed nr. brickworks at Heyrothsberge on road leading to Biederitz at 19.38 hrs. Note: crash report filed (KE-7259), but no burial details found after the war and therefore aircraft and crew officially posted as 'missing without a trace'.

10 of the Nachtjagd Abschlüsse were achieved under *Himmelbett*-control by five highly experienced *Experten* crews. The first Nachtjäger to engage the incoming bomber stream over the Netherlands, Oblt. Schnauffer, St.Kpt. of 12./NJG1 destroyed four Lancasters in a classic *Himmelbett* sortie under the guidance of Lt. Lübke, JLO of GCI station *Eisbär* (Polar Bear, in Friesland Province), for Lübke's 46th-49th *Abschussbeteiligungen*. Schnauffer used the two 20 mm upward-firing *Schräge Musik* cannon to down his adversaries; this top-secret new weapons system had been installed in his Bf110 G-4 G9+DZ during the second half of November 1943. All four claims were officially *anerkannt* by the OKL/RLM on 18 August 1944. FhnjFw. Rumpelhardt, Schnauffer's *Bordfunker*, recounts: "The sortie that we flew on 16 December 1943 was notable on more than one count. Our IV. Gruppe had in the interim moved to Leeuwarden and some while previously the British had launched an all-out effort against the capital of the Reich, Berlin. That night the entire country lay shrouded under a thick low-lying blanket of cloud so that take offs and especially landings for the entire night fighter arm had already been ruled out by those responsible for flight operations at the highest levels. Resigned to a night's inactivity, the crews lounged around the readiness room and listened helplessly as the Tommy bombers droned overhead en route to Berlin. At around 17:15, however, Heinz Schnauffer suddenly burst into the room. He urged us to complete our final pre-flight checks since we'd be flying a sortie after all; in the course of a phone call with the Divisionskommandeur he had been granted special dispensation to get airborne with his crew. There was an initial moment of embarrassed silence in the room, and then a murmuring of discontent that it was impossible not to overhear. The initiative taken by Heinz had failed to instill any feelings of goodwill from his comrades. Wilhelm and I gathered up our flying suits, and followed our 'driver' outside, not exactly overjoyed at the thought of what might be about to befall us. To put it starkly, we were scared witless at the prospect. As we drove out to our machine at dispersal we could see that the cloud ceiling was barely 35-40 metres. It was just possible to discern the runway beacons glowing weakly through the veil of murk.

In the event our take off was normal, although seconds after leaving the ground we were enveloped in fog. Heinz was obliged to navigate exclusively on instruments. Our engines purred effortlessly as we maintained an excellent rate of climb. With our nerves stretched taut we could only wonder what the sortie might bring. I had soon radioed-in to the controller of the Leeuwarden box, Hauptmann Ruppel, and, as instructed, established excellent radio communications with the controller operating the box code-named 'Eisbär'. As we climbed higher we soon realised that we were likely to encounter an icing zone; the aircraft would become heavier and an accumulation of ice on the surfaces of the wing would adversely affect their lifting capacity and the manoeuvrability of the aircraft. Heinz would have to take the decision whether to carry on climbing until he reached a layer of warmer air. As always in such critical situations, Wilhelm was the calming influence, urging that we should maintain our ascent.

After what seemed like a never-ending climb we finally emerged from the last layer of clouds. At around an altitude of 5,000 metres the star-spangled sky was as clear as glass and we quickly forgot our earlier anxiety. We soon received an instruction from 'Eisbär' to swing onto a northerly heading. With the van of the bomber stream encroaching on the north-Western limits of our patrol zone we were just in time. Eyes peeled, Heinz and Wilhelm quartered the night sky while I stared intently at the screen of the radar set. After a short while I acquired a return, a jagged-edged blip on the tube, which I estimated at a range of around 4,000 metres. After several changes of course, which I relayed to Heinz via the intercom (the 'EiV', or 'Eigenverständigung'), Wilhelm spotted our prey, a barely perceptible shadow ahead of us. As was usual in such circumstances, Heinz aimed a burst from close range with the 'Schräge Musik' and in moments a large tongue of flame had erupted from the wing. Throwing the machine into his well-practised evasive dive we quickly escaped the zone of greatest danger. We looked on as the mortally stricken bird went down trailing a banner of flame, banking over one wing just before entering the heavily banked clouds. This was a RAF Lancaster, which came down at 18:01 near Follega in the 'Friesian channel'. We dispatched a second Lancaster at 18:12 in the vicinity of Easterga, a few kilometres north of Lemmer. Those bomber crews that had witnessed the death throes of their comrades were now of course alerted to our presence. They sought to evade the night

fighter's attack with their wild defensive manoeuvres, the so-called 'corkscrew', but Heinz was a seasoned hunter and couldn't be easily shaken off. Our next victim went down at 18:23 in the region of Oudetrijne. This bomber flew straight and level for a number of minutes before plunging down vertically. It was later discovered that the crew had gone down with their machine and we were at a loss to understand why they had not taken the opportunity to bale out. As the last groups of bombers left 'Eisbär' I directed another successful radar interception. Given the daringly flown evasive manoeuvres - which were quite amazing in view of the heavy bomb load - several firing passes were necessary to down this Lancaster, which hit the ground at 18:41 just five kilometres south of the airfield at Leeuwarden.

Four victories in forty minutes was an impressive performance. There was another no less outstanding feat that Heinz had still to accomplish. How was it ever going to prove possible to land our Me110 back on terra firma in these impossible weather conditions? There was no possibility of seeking out a diversionary airfield since the whole of Western Europe lay under the clag. As a last resort we would have to bale out. There was one other possibility to consider. In the first instance we had to navigate back to the vicinity of our airfield, arriving quickly over the base thanks to radio direction finding. Now all Heinz had to do was find a way through the layers of cloud. Our nerves were on edge. Wilhelm was totally unflappable; 'Well if we can't get down after three attempts, we'll perhaps make it after seven.' After several attempts to find a way down the unbelievable happened. All of a sudden a hole in the clouds opened up. We caught sight of the glimmer of red from the airfield beacons. It was in difficult situations like these that Heinz's mastery of the aircraft and his extraordinary flying skills came to the fore. Side-slipping and fish-tailing, he was able to lose a great deal of height in as short a distance as possible until we were able to discern the airfield beacons and the illuminated landing strip. The landing itself was routine. As we taxied in and shut down we sat a moment hunched at our stations, alone with our thoughts. I was probably the only one to offer up a silent prayer of thanks. This experience was proof that 'Lady Luck' must have been looking out for us. How else had it been possible to overcome the extreme dangers we had faced during the sortie without incident. Of course it has to be noted that very few pilots could pull off that last manoeuvre in the Me110 in such accomplished fashion and in darkness. Neither had we run into a marauding Mosquito - the nemesis of many a crew - with the aircraft critically configured (low airspeed, undercarriage and flaps deployed) in the landing phase".

One minute after Schnauffer's first victory, his Staffel comrade Lt. Rolland and his crew of Uffz. Krüger (BF) and Ogefr. Berger (BS) dispatched a 7 Squadron Lancaster in box *Salzhering* (based at Den Helder), which was also *anerkannt* on 18 August 1944. Another experienced ace crew to score a kill on the bomber's inward flight were Oblt. Schmidt, St.Kpt. of 8./NJG1 in Bf110 G-4 G9+AS and his regular crew of Fw's. Schönfeld, *Bordfunker* and Schlosser, *Bordschütze*. Just like Schnauffer, Schmidt operated under *Himmelbett*-control, in box *Fox* (JLO Lt. Harig). In his diary, Fw. Kurt Schönfeld commented on this Abschuss, which was *anerkannt* on 19 August 1944: "The enemy's port wing was burning brightly after an attack from behind and below. The Halifax (which, in fact, was a 7 Squadron Lancaster, author's note) dived steeply and we followed. Our cabin was lit up by the glare. Then began the rattle as the enemy's 7.7mm bullets struck. So nothing but away from him, ever lower close to the four-engined one. The speed increased, the altimeter wound down. I called to the driver but he didn't reply. Was he hit? "Dieter!" Then the cockpit lighting flickered in a Morse rhythm. Too quickly at first, the eyes are unable to follow. He is Morsing too fast. "What do you mean", I ask, "note down or open up?" Our third man thinks it's 'bale out' and wants to do so at once. But the driver only meant to note down the time of the crash. Then homeward: bearing from Twente. Airfield, radio contact and in. The port engine stinks. We taxi in, disembark. The port engine is smoking: coolant! The driver is bleeding below the right eye - glass splinter! We count the hits: two in the spinner, in the SN 2 radar. Radar aerial damaged, hits in the cabin. The cabin heating duct shot through, the reason for the leak of coolant in the port engine. Dents in the wings, entry hole in the



On 16-17 December 1943, 25 year-old Major Egmont Prinz zur Lippe-Weissenfeld, Kommandeur of III./NJG1, achieved two Lancaster kills for his 46th-47th and his final confirmed victories (two further claims remained unconfirmed) (Coll. Wim Govaerts).

starboard sliding window, exit hole in the port sliding window near the driver just in front of his nose. A strike just above the driver's head, going just in front of me, then past Wilhelm's left leg into the fuselage side. Pilot's microphone lead shot through. That's why he had remained silent. Then three more hits in the fuselage near the tail. Twelve hits in all. We never got so many again. In spite of that we flew again right away, but without success".

The fourth ace who was successful during a *Himmelbett* sortie on the bombers' outward-bound flight was Major Egmont Prinz zur Lippe-Weissenfeld, *Kommandeur* of III./NJG1, and his crew of Ofw. Renette (BF) and Uffz. Röder (BS). The crew downed two Lancasters during a sortie in box *Kröte* (formerly *Raum 4 C*, SSW of Goor), under control of JLO Oblt. Freudenberg, which were *anerkannt* on 19 August 1944 for zur Lippe's final two victories. Oblt. Augenstein and his crew of Uffz. Steins (*Funker*) and Gefr. Schmidt (BS) shot down a Lancaster of 106 Squadron in box *Rheinsalm* (at Saerbeck near Rheine, JLO Oblt. Ehlers); their claim was *anerkannt* on 19.8.1944. Under control of an unidentified GCI station the *Kommodore* of NJG3 Major Lent and his *Funker* Ofw. Kubisch achieved a victory over a 625 Squadron Lancaster that impacted at Wetschen at 19.07 hrs, before they returned to Stade at 20.05 hrs. Finally, Fw. Frank and his crew of BF Uffz. Schierholz and BS Fw. Schneider, who had left Wittmundhafen at 18.20 hrs in Ju88 C-6 D5+IK of 6./NJG3, dispatched a 166 Squadron Lancaster in *Raum 3 C*; they landed at Münster-Handorf at 22.30 hrs.

In turn, the MUG of 44 Squadron Lancaster R5669 sent down an (unidentified) Ju88 in flames near Amsterdam at 18.08 hrs, both gunners on board this Lancaster dispatching a second Ju88 almost half an hour later to the NE of Meppel. The latter *Nachtjäger* has been identified as probably Ju88 R-2 R4+SH of Stab I./NJG2, which was shot down near Aurich with the loss of Oblt. Karl Perino and his crew. A third twin-engined *Nachtjäger*, identified as a 'Ju88', was completely taken by surprise from point blank range by the gunners on board 626 Squadron Lancaster DV171 to the west of Hannover at 19.03 hrs; this was probably a Bf110 G-4 of 3./NJG3 that hit the ground near Quakenbrück airfield after Oblt. Hans-Werner Linnemann and his *Funker* had baled out wounded. (A Ju88 C-6 of I./NJG3 bellied in at Rheine airfield with 50% damage following air combat, the crew escaping without injury). On the outward-bound route, one bomber crew scored a single-engined fighter kill, an (unidentified) attacking 'Fw190' that was sent down in flames north of Braunschweig at 19.19 hrs by the gunners on board 7 Squadron Lancaster JB652.

Following the first string of combats and *Abschüsse* over Holland and NW Germany, the air battle quietened down somewhat after 19.15 hrs. In part, this was caused by the fact that 15 *Zahme Sau* Bf110s of NJG1 and NJG2 had to break off their hunt after only a short while when running low on fuel. Only 13 Ju88 *Zahme Säue* with long fuel endurance were able to stay with the bomber stream all the way to Berlin, but this small force was unable to inflict major damage to the large bomber stream. There was another major factor though, as General Schmid commented upon shortly after the war: "The control of the night fighter operations was adversely affected by the British interference with the Korps and Divisional command frequency. The short-frequency radio voice and keying communication was obstructed by counter-transmissions of citations from speeches delivered by the Führer or by telegraph jamming and thus almost unfeasible. Bell sounds disturbed the ultra short wave communication. The radio voice communication of the frequency of the Reich's transmitting station Stuttgart (Armed Forces radio network station 'Annemarie') which had been used by the Headquarters of the I. Jagdkorps for fighter control purposes since the end of November 1943, was all of a sudden jammed by a strong British jamming station". Actually, the 'ghost voices' of *Corona* were active between 18.26 and 20.42 hrs, passing false instructions to the airborne *Nachtjäger* concerned with landing and bad weather.



At 19.55 hrs, five minutes before zero hour, the controllers of 3 and 2. JD ordered all freelance fighters of NJG1 and 3 to Brandenburg, a few minutes flying time from the capital, whilst advising the crews that the firing ceiling for the Berlin Flak of the 1. Flak Division was at 7.500 metres. The assembled *Wilde Sau* force of 1. JD (NJG5, which had been scrambled at around 19.30 hrs) was not sent to Berlin immediately though, as their control was worried that the approaching bomber force might be a feint, just like the Mosquito feint on the 3-4 December Leipzig raid. Only towards the end of the attack were the twin-engined fighters and

106 Squadron Lancaster JB638 was shot down by Oblt. Augenstein of 7./NJG1 on 16-17 December 1943. The aircraft was completely destroyed in the crash at Ösede and its crew all killed, but on the morning of the 17th December, a virtually intact talisman was found in the smoking wreckage (Coll. Stadtarchiv Osnabrück, via Jörg Helbig).

an estimated 20 single-engined Wild Boars of JG300 and JG302 released for battle over Berlin, aided by flare-dropping aircraft of III./KG3. As a result of the delay, only a meagre 11 night fighter attacks were reported over Berlin, which resulted in the destruction of five bombers. (When approaching the target, a sixth 'heavy', 619 Squadron Lancaster EE150 was severely damaged in a *Nachtjäger* attack at 19.57 hrs and crash-landed on return to Woodhall Spa). The *Kommandeur* of III./NJG3 Hptm. Barte attacked 97 Squadron Lancaster JA963, which exploded over Berlin-Reinickendorf and crashed near the Schiller Park at 20.05 hrs. Four minutes later, Ofw. Altner of 8./NJG5 (who had become airborne from Königsberg at 19.34 hrs in Bf110 G-4 G9+ES) destroyed another Lancaster. His quarry, 103 Squadron JB658 impacted on the edge of the Teufelssee at Berlin-Grunewald. Another experienced ace, *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./NJG5 Hptm. Borchers engaged a Lancaster of either 9 or 619 Squadron NE of the city, near the first turning point of the bomber stream out of the target; both aircraft collided and crashed near Eberswalde, some 30 km NE of Berlin. Single-engined *Wilde Säue* claimed five Lancaster kills, but only two (by Fw. Herre of 3./JG302) can be found in the official OKL/RLM claims listings, and just one was *anerkannt*, on 1 September 1944. Herre first dispatched a 576 Squadron Lancaster over Berlin-Lichtenberg, which crashed into the Rittergutstrasse, and then engaged a 207 Squadron Lancaster over Berlin-Hermsdorf. The latter bomber was also claimed hit by the *Flakgruppe Berlin-Nord* and went down at Am Buchenberg nr. 18, reportedly at around 20.20 hrs. In turn, a Fw190 A of 5./JG300 was shot down by a Lancaster at Oranienburg (the pilot sustaining injuries) either by Lancaster ED999 of 44 Squadron or Lancaster JB714 of 49 Squadron, which each claimed a 'Bf109' destroyed over Berlin at 20.05 and 20.08 hrs, the former as a 'probable'.

At 20.37 hrs, just three minutes after the last wave of Berlin raiders had turned westwards for home again, the controllers of NJG1, 2 and 3 issued landing instructions. Many aircraft of these Geschwader landed in the Rheine area, whereas the crews of NJG5 were diverted to land at airfields in the area of 7. JD (Southern Germany) and in Eastern Prussia, where the weather conditions were better; Ofw. Altner of the 8. Staffel, for example, landed at Heiligenbeil at 22.15 hrs. On returning to Stendal airfield the *Kommandeur* of I./NJG5 Hptm. Hoffmann wrecked his Bf110 G-4 C9+AB in a crash-landing due to the prevailing bad weather (his *Bordschütze* sustaining severe injuries), and a Ju88 C-6 of I./NJG2 landed at Achmer airfield with severe 'friendly' Flak damage.

Apart from a handful of *Himmelbett* patrols, no attempt was made to commit fresh freelance *Nachtjäger* forces against the returning bombers due to –again– the prevailing atrocious weather conditions. As a result, fighter opposition quickly petered out on the bombers' homeward route, which lay across the Baltic and central Denmark, and no more aircraft were lost to the *Nachtjagd*. Two more bombers were lost to Flak, the *Flakgruppe Lübeck* (8. Flak Brigade) receiving confirmation of their *Abschluss* off Graal-Müritz on 8 July 1944:

-101 Sqn Lancaster DV299 or 156 Sqn Lancaster JB216: hit by 1./schw. Flak Abt. 275 (o), crashed in the Baltic N. of Graal-Müritz at 20.45 hrs.

-101 Sqn Lancaster DV299 or 156 Sqn Lancaster JB216: hit by the *Flakgruppe Stettin* and crashed in the Baltic at 21.30 hrs.

Just like their *Nachtjagd* adversaries over the Reich, the weary bomber crews encountered very low cloud and fog at their bases on return, causing another 32 Lancasters to be wrecked in crash-landings, 127 aircrew perishing and 34 being injured. These were the worst bad-weather landing casualties suffered by Bomber Command during the entire war.

25 Lancasters, or 5.2% of the force, were lost over the Continent; another five returned with battle damage from encounters with night fighters and 17 damaged by Flak. (The I. Jagdkorps reported 21 *Feindberührungen*, which resulted in 18 'certain' victories). After official evaluation by the *Abschluss Kommission*, the *Nachtjagd* was credited with 17 confirmed kills plus one undecided claim and the Flak arm with five victories. In return, the *Nachtjagd* lost five twin-engined and three single-engined aircraft.

Oblt. Heinz-Wolfgang Schnaufer: 36	12./NJG1	Lancaster	nr Follega, 4 km N. Lemmer (<i>Eisbär</i>): 5.800 m.	18.00	7 Sqn Lancaster JA853
Lt. Heinz Rolland: 4	12./NJG1	Lancaster	Oterleek, nr Alkmaar (<i>Salzhering</i>): 5.000 m.	18.02	7 Sqn Lancaster JB656
Oblt. Heinz-Wolfgang Schnaufer: 37	12./NJG1	Lancaster	2 km. N. Lemmer (<i>Eisbär</i>): 5.800 m.	18.11	101 Sqn Lancaster DV300
Oblt. Heinz-Wolfgang Schnaufer: 38	12./NJG1	Lancaster	nr Oudtrijne, SW Wolvega (<i>Eisbär</i>): 6.000 m.	18.23	49 Sqn Lancaster JB545
Oblt. Heinz-Wolfgang Schnaufer: 39	12./NJG1	Lancaster	2 km. SW Wirdum (<i>Eisbär</i>): 6.000 m.	18.45	432 Sqn Lancaster DS831
Oblt. Dietrich Schmidt: 7	8./NJG1	Lancaster	S. Wertle, W. Cloppenburg (<i>Fox</i>): 5.100 m	18.45	7 Sqn Lancaster JB552
Fw. Johannes Gajewski: 1	8./NJG2	Lancaster	Vechta: 6.400 m.	18.45	44 Sqn Lancaster DV238
Maj. Egmont Prinz z. Lippe-Weissenfeld: 46	Stab III./NJG1	Lancaster	N. Ahlhorn (<i>Kröte</i>): 5.500 m.	18.50	9 Sqn Lancaster EE188
Maj. Egmont Prinz z. Lippe-Weissenfeld: 47	Stab III./NJG1	Lancaster	Wilsum, NW Nordhorn (<i>Kröte</i>): 5.000 m.	19.00	7 Sqn Lancaster JB543
Oblt. Hans-Heinz Augenstein: 21	7./NJG1	Lancaster	Ösede, 10 km. S. Osnabrück (<i>Rheinsalm</i>): 5.300 m.	19.00	106 Sqn Lancaster JB638
Oblt. Friedrich Berger: 1	Stab I./NJG3	Lancaster	N. Münster	19.05	unidentified, Berlin raid.
Note: victory confirmed by OKL on 21.7.1944					
Maj. Helmut Lent: 79	Stab NJG3	Lancaster	Quakenbrück area (<i>Himmelbett</i>)	19.07	625 Sqn Lancaster LM424
Fw. Rudolf Frank: 20	6./NJG3	Lancaster	Klein-Lessen, 3 km SW Sulingen (3 C): 6.300 m.	19.15	166 Sqn Lancaster ED411
Hptm. Walter Barte: 13	Stab III./NJG3	Lancaster	W. Berlin-Reinickendorf	20.05	97 Sqn Lancaster JA963