

The Top Scoring Luftwaffe Gruppen of the Battle

Geschwader	Gruppe	All Claims*	Unconfirmed
JG26	III	146	5
JG2	Stab and I	134	1
JG51	III	130	
JG51	Stab and I	122	1
ZG76**	II	117	2
JG51	II	105	
LG2	I	91	7
ZG26**	III	88	1
JG53	III	83	1
JG52	I	77	3
JG54	II	75	
JG54	III	71	
JG2	II	69	
JG27	II	65	3
JG27	III	64	1
JG77	I	62	1
LG1**	V	62	2
JG3	Stab and I	61	
JG53	II	60	
JG53	Stab and I	59	
JG26	Stab and I	58	
JG26	II	58	1
JG2	III	52	1
JG3	III	52	
JG3	II	49	1
ZG76**	III	47	1
ZG2**	II	45	2
JG27	Stab and I	33	
ZG2**	Stab and I	31	
JG54	Stab and I	28	
ZG76**	Stab and I	17	
ZG26**	I	16	
JG52	II	14	
JG52	III	10	4
Erpr.Gr.210	3 Staffel	4	
NJG1	II	2	
ZG26**	II	1	1
Total		2258	39

* All Claims column includes unconfirmed
 ** Zerstörer unit claims are to this day, incomplete.

This chart lists the top scoring Luftwaffe Gruppen during the Battle of Britain. When comparing the claims of individual Gruppen it is hardly surprising that those with the most claims included a number of high-scoring Experten (experts) – the term used by the Luftwaffe to describe the leading fighter aces*. III/JG26, the highest-scoring Gruppe with 146 Battle of Britain claims, included Maj Adolf Galland, who made 30 of his claims when flying as Gruppenkommandeur; Hptm Gerhard Schöpfel, who succeeded Galland as Kommandeur of III Gruppe, made 20 claims; followed by Oblt Gustav Sprick with 15 claims, plus Oblt Heinz Ebeling and Joachim Müncheberg with 13 claims each. The last three pilots were all Staffelkapitäne, the RAF equivalent of Squadron Leaders.

Other leading Gruppen with high-scoring Experten were Stab and I/JG2, which included Maj Helmut Wick, who flew as a Staffelkapitän, Gruppenkommandeur, and Kommodore, claiming 25 of his 31 ‘kills’ with Stab and I/JG2. But the most successful Geschwader was JG51, with all three Gruppen listed in the top five highest claiming units. Experten included Hptm Walter Oesau Kommandeur of III Gruppe with 32 claims; Maj Werner Mölders, JG51’s Kommodore, with 29 claims; and Hptm Horst Tietzen, a Staffelkapitän in II Gruppe, with 16 claims.

But there are some surprising listings among the top scoring Gruppen. II/ZG76, a Me110 unit, made 117 claims, one of only six Gruppen to make 100 or more Battle of Britain claims. This total is a surprise, considering that the Me110 is generally regarded to have been a failure in the Zerstörer (destroyer) role during the Battle of Britain, being less manoeuvrable, and slower than the RAF’s Spitfires and Hurricanes. All of the Me110 Gruppen suffered heavy losses, and most of the units were withdrawn to Germany by late September. However, II/ZG76’s claims can be explained by the high incidence of overclaiming by its pilots. For example, on 15 August during the raid on Middle Wallop II/ZG76 made 26 claims for Spitfires and Hurricanes, two of which were unconfirmed. III/JG53, which flew on the same operation, made just one claim. Total RAF losses during this combat were four Spitfires destroyed, plus one Hurricane destroyed and two damaged – a total of seven losses versus 26 claims, an overclaim ratio of over 3.7:1.

It should be noted that although many of the Me110 claim records for some Geschwader did not survive the war, the combat described above is included in the Luftflotte 3 Einzelmeldung (Air Fleet 3 Daily Report, see page 64), which lists the unit claims – which totalled 38 for all Gruppen of ZG76 on this date.

Clearly, the claims of II/ZG76 and other Me110 units were inflated, but the leading Me109 Gruppen’s claims were probably fairly accurate, given the need to document the claims made by the Experten, with each one added as a claim bar to the rudder of the pilot’s aircraft – the importance of which is clearly shown by the number of photographs of the rudders of the Experten’s aircraft.

*Luftwaffe aces followed in the tradition of the First World War, during which pilots such as Baron Manfred von Richthofen achieved high individual scores – shooting down 80 aircraft in his case – and became feted by the media and the public. The leading Battle of Britain aces, including Galland, Mölders, and Wick, became media celebrities, with their exploits and increasing scores reported in newspapers and magazines. By contrast, the RAF avoided the ‘cult of the personality’ and did not highlight the exploits of individual pilots, although some, such as Douglas Bader, and ‘Sailor’ Malan, did become known to the public.

The Luftwaffe claim procedure in 1940

Like their RAF counterparts, Luftwaffe fighter pilots submitted a written report for aircraft that they claimed to have shot down, but unlike the RAF system of claims for destroyed, probably destroyed, and damaged, the Luftwaffe only had two claim levels: destroyed, and destroyed (unconfirmed). A ‘destroyed’ claim had to be witnessed by another pilot, while the unconfirmed claim was not witnessed. The claim also had to include a time, location, the range to the target, and ammunition used. The combat reports of RAF pilots had similar details, but their claim was scrutinised by the squadron’s Intelligence Officer, who might revise it, for example, reducing a claim from a probably destroyed to damaged, but would rarely deny it.

Given the need for a witness for each Luftwaffe ‘destroyed’ claim it would suggest that these claims were much more accurate than those of the RAF. The total number of Luftwaffe claims during the Battle of Britain was approximately 2,250, just 39 of which were unconfirmed. RAF losses in combat with fighters during this period totalled approximately 830 aircraft destroyed and 510 damaged. When assessing just the destroyed claims, the Luftwaffe pilots overclaimed by a ratio of 2.77:1. If the damaged aircraft – all of which flew again – are included, the overclaim ratio was 1.7:1. This compares to an overclaim ratio of 2.4:1 by RAF pilots when comparing the total for all claim categories versus all Luftwaffe aircraft (fighters and bombers) destroyed or damaged by RAF fighters.

It should be stated that most claims by Luftwaffe and RAF pilots were made in good faith, but in the hectic environment of aerial battle it would have been understandable that having attacked an enemy aircraft, the resulting splash into the sea or explosion on land, could be witnessed by several different pilots, all of whom could assume that the aircraft that had just claimed to have shot down was their victim.

Existing Luftwaffe Battle of Britain combat reports are very rare. The following translation is from the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) copy of a combat report (seen right) for a pilot of Jagdgeschwader 3. The Hurricane that Ofw Erwin Kortlepel shot down was probably one of the five aircraft of 46 Squadron that were destroyed or damaged during this combat.

Kortlepel, Ofw. Geschwader posting 8.9.40 Combat report

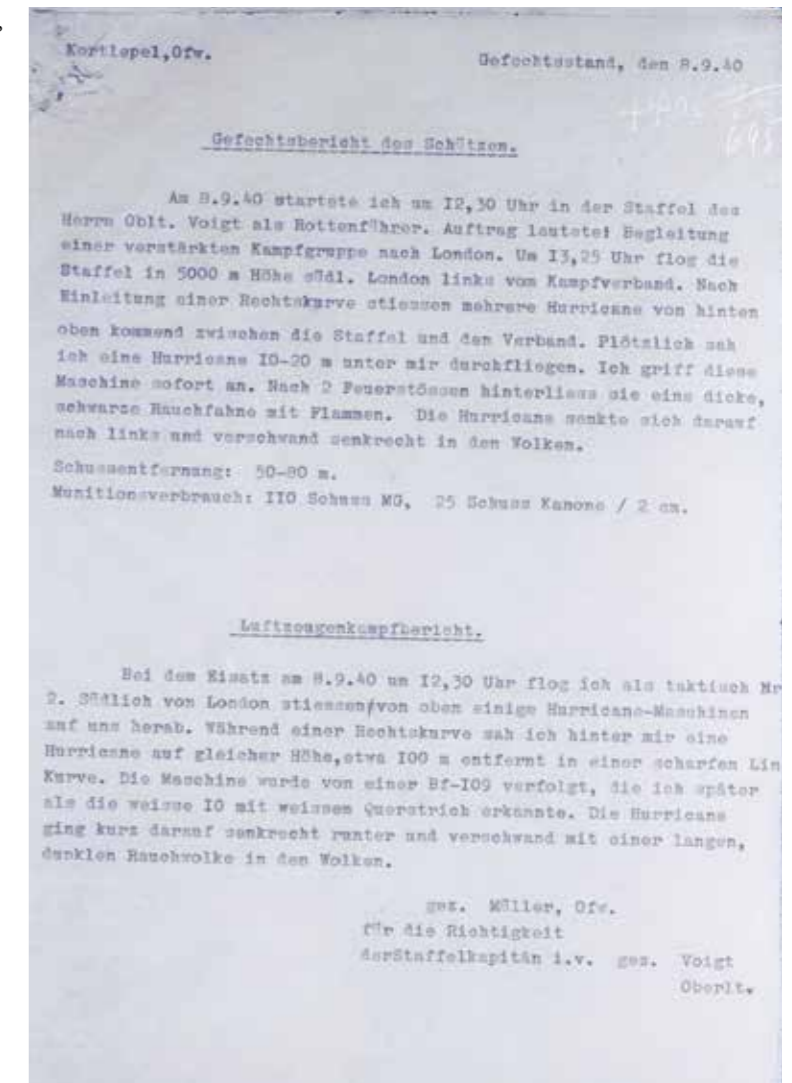
On 8.9.40 I started at 12.30 hrs in the Staffel of Oblt. Voigt as section leader. The order was: escort a bomber Gruppe to London. At 13.25 hrs [12.25 BST] the squadron flew at 5,000 m south of London to the left of the bomber formation. After initiating a right turn, several Hurricanes coming from behind and above dived between the Staffel and the bomber formation. Suddenly I saw a Hurricane fly through 10-20 m below me. I immediately attacked this machine. After 2 bursts of fire it left behind a thick, black smoke trail with flames. The Hurricane then dived to the left and disappeared vertically into the clouds.

*Shooting distance: 50-80 m.
 Ammunition consumption: 110 rounds MG,
 25 rounds cannon / 20 mm.*

Air witness combat report.

During the mission on 8.9.40 at 12.30 hrs I flew as tactical Nr 2. South of London, some Hurricane machines dived down on us from above. During a right turn I saw a Hurricane behind me at the same height, about 100 m away in a sharp left turn. The machine was pursued by a Bf 109, which I later recognised as white 10 with white crossbar. The Hurricane shortly afterwards went vertically down and disappeared with a long, dark smoke cloud into the clouds.

Signed, Müller, Ofw.



JG2

The first two Gruppen of JG2 'Richthofen' flew throughout the Battle with the Third Gruppe joining at the end of July.

Perhaps the most famous JG2 pilot was Helmut Wick who rose spectacularly through the ranks commanding a Staffel and Gruppe before becoming Geschwaderkommodore on 20 October. He was killed in action on 28 November 1940 after claiming his 56th aerial victory.

JG2 Me109s were very quickly 'toned down' in the Battle, with heavy mottle on the fuselage sides and even thinner white outlines to the fuselage crosses, both can be seen in the photo below of I/JG2 aircraft.

The three black and white photos show Wick's 109 at various stages of the Battle of Britain;

A) Staffelkapitän of 3/JG2, August 1940

B) Gruppenkommandeur I/JG2, September 1940

C) Geschwaderkommodore JG2, October 1940

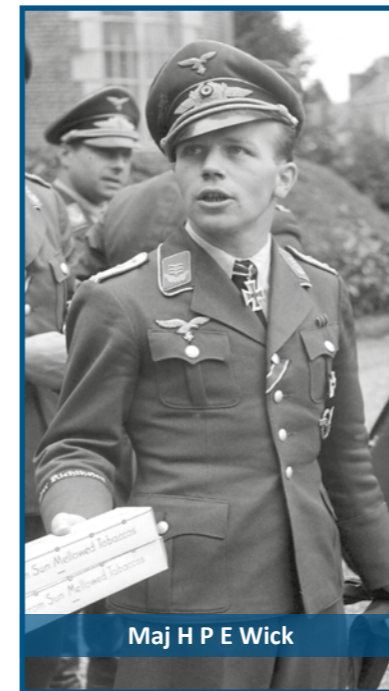
Note the overpainting of the markings and the ever increasing victory bars on the rudder.



I/JG2 Including Geschwader Stab



AIRFIELDS				DESTROYED CLAIMS		TOTAL COMBAT LOSSES			
ARRIVED	DEPARTED	AIRFIELD	LUFTFLOTTE			PILOTS		AIRCRAFT	
27/06/40	28/08/40	Beaumont-le-Roger	3	July	2	Killed	2	Lost	12
28/08/40	10/09/40	Mardyck	2	August	41	Injured	5	Damaged	2
10/09/40	20/10/40	Beaumont-le-Roger	3	September	54	POW	5		
20/10/40	26/10/40	Mont-de-Marsan	3	October	37				
26/10/40	01/03/41	Beaumont-le-Roger	3	Total	134				
				unconfirmed	1				



Maj H P E Wick

TOP TEN SCORING GRUPE PILOTS

PILOT	DESTROYED WITH GRUPPE	UNCONFIRMED	TOTAL IN BofB	STAFFEL	POSITION
Maj H.P.E. Wick	25		31		Kommandeur
Oblt W. Machold	11		16	1	
Lt E. Rudorffer	10			2	
Ofr R. Täschner	8			1	
Hptm K.H. Krahl	8			1, 3, Stab	Gruppenkommandeur
Lt K. Votel	6			3	
Gfr E. Richey	5			3	
Oblt S. Bethke	5			2	Staffelkapitän
Oblt R. Pflanz	5			3	
Hptm O. Bertram	4		9	1	Staffelkapitän



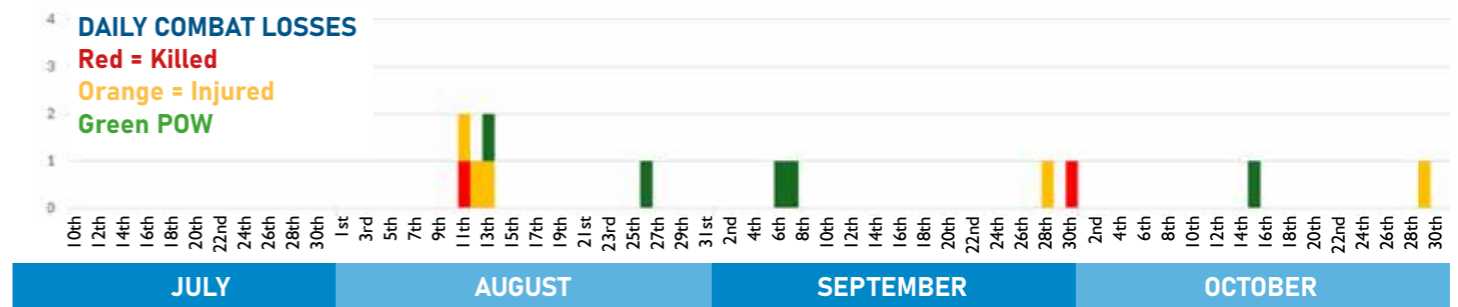
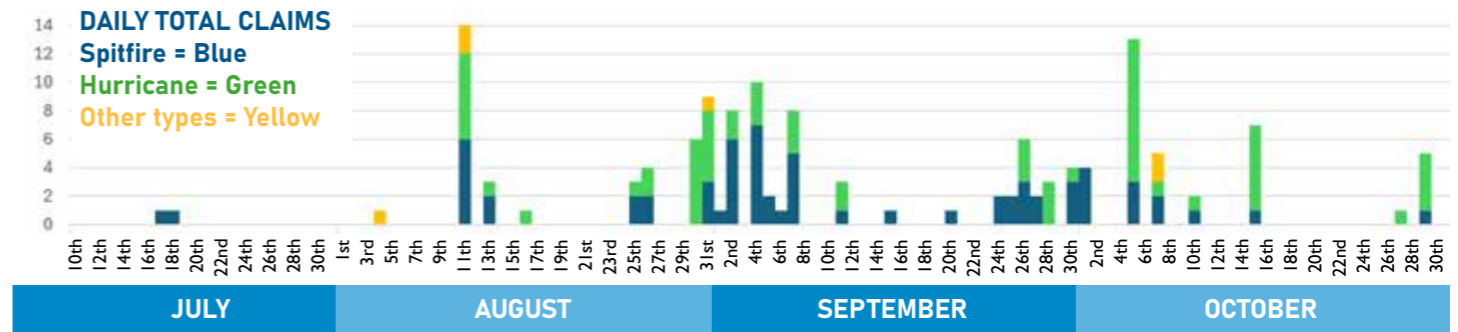
JG2 EMBLEM



I/JG2 EMBLEM



3/JG2 EMBLEM



II/JG2



AIRFIELDS				DESTROYED CLAIMS		TOTAL COMBAT LOSSES			
ARRIVED	DEPARTED	AIRFIELD	LUFTFLOTTE	July	2	PILOTS		AIRCRAFT	
27/06/40	28/08/40	Beaumont-le-Roger	3	August	16	Killed	8	Lost	22
28/08/40	23/09/40	Mardyck	2	September	39	Injured	4	Damaged	2
23/09/40	20/10/40	Beaumont-le-Roger	3	October	12	POW	7		
20/10/40	26/10/40	Mont-de-Marsan	3	Total	69				
26/10/40	29/03/41	Beaumont-le-Roger	3						

III/JG2



AIRFIELDS				DESTROYED CLAIMS		TOTAL COMBAT LOSSES			
ARRIVED	DEPARTED	AIRFIELD	LUFTFLOTTE	July	0	PILOTS		AIRCRAFT	
29/06/40	28/07/40	Frankfurt-Rebstock	3	August	21	Killed	7	Lost	14
28/07/40	04/08/40	Evreux	3	September	26	Injured	2	Damaged	3
04/08/40	28/08/40	Le Havre-Octeville	3	October	5	POW	2		
28/08/40	14/09/40	Oye-Plage	3	Total	52				
14/09/40	20/10/40	Le Havre-Octeville	3	unconfirmed	1				
20/10/40	26/10/40	Mont-de-Marsan	3						
26/10/40	23/04/41	Bernay	3						



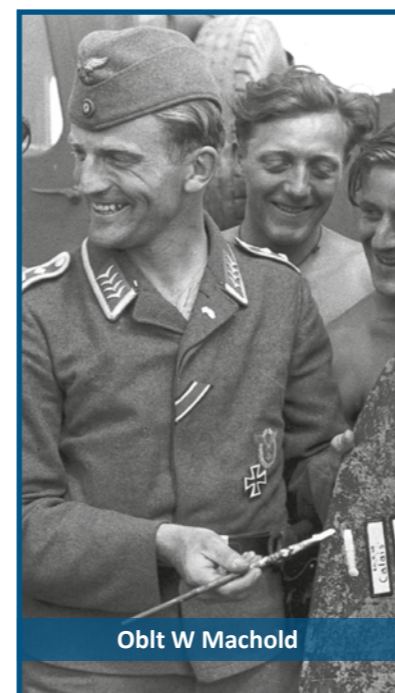
Oblt H Hahn

TOP TEN SCORING GRUPPE PILOTS

PILOT	DESTROYED WITH GRUPPE	UNCONFIRMED	TOTAL IN BofB	STAFFEL	POSITION
Oblt H. Hahn	16			4	Staffelkapitän
Lt S. Schnell	11			4	
Hptm H.P.E. Wick	6		31		Staffelkapitän
Uffz K. Bühligen	6		7	6	
Hptm K.H. Greisert	6		7	Stab	Gruppenkommandeur
Maj W. Schellmann	5			Stab	Gruppenkommandeur
Lt J. Meimberg	4			4	
Lt H. Bolze	2			4	
Oblt H.F. Bolz	2			5	Staffelkapitän
Fw K.H. Harbauer	1			4	



Lt S Schnell



Oblt W Machold

TOP TEN SCORING GRUPPE PILOTS

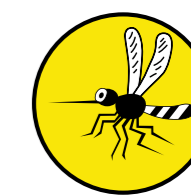
PILOT	DESTROYED WITH GRUPPE	UNCONFIRMED	TOTAL IN BofB	STAFFEL	POSITION
Oblt C.H. Röders	5			9	Staffelkapitän
Oblt W. Machold	5		16	9	
Hptm O. Bertram	5		9	Stab	Gruppenkommandeur
Ofw H. Klee	4			7	
Oblt B. Stolle	3			8	Staffelkapitän
Ofw F. Willinger	3			8	
Uffz W.K. Ebert	3	1		8	
Uffz K. Goltzsch	3			7, 8	
Hptm A. Ettlting	2			7	Staffelkapitän
Oblt E. Leie	2			Stab	



7/JG2 EMBLEM



8/JG2 EMBLEM



9/JG2 EMBLEM

