

= Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille =

Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille (13 December 1919 ? 30 September 1942 ; German pronunciation : [hants jo?a??m m?r?se?]) was a Luftwaffe fighter pilot and flying ace during World War II . He is noted for his aerial battles during the North African Campaign and his Bohemian lifestyle . One of the most successful fighter pilots , he was nicknamed the " Star of Africa " . Marseille claimed all but seven of his " official " 158 victories against the British Commonwealth 's Desert Air Force over North Africa , flying the Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter for his entire combat career . No other pilot claimed as many Western Allied aircraft as Marseille .

Marseille , of French Huguenot ancestry , joined the Luftwaffe in 1938 . At the age of 20 he graduated from one of the Luftwaffe 's fighter pilot schools just in time to participate in the Battle of Britain , without notable success . A charming person , he had such a busy night life that sometimes he was too tired to be allowed to fly the next morning . As a result , he was transferred to another unit , which relocated to North Africa in April 1941 .

Under the guidance of his new commander , who recognised the latent potential in the young officer , Marseille quickly developed his abilities as a fighter pilot . He reached the zenith of his fighter pilot career on 1 September 1942 , when during the course of three combat sorties he claimed 17 enemy fighters shot down , earning him the Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub , Schwertern und Brillanten (Knight 's Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords , and Diamonds) . Only 29 days later , Marseille was killed in a flying accident , when he was forced to abandon his fighter due to engine failure . After he exited the smoke @-@ filled cockpit , Marseille 's chest struck the vertical stabiliser of his aircraft . The blow either killed him instantly or incapacitated him so that he was unable to open his parachute .

= = Early life = =

Hans @-@ Joachim " Jochen " Walter Rudolf Siegfried Marseille was born to Charlotte (maiden name : Charlotte Marie Johanna Pauline Gertrud Riemer) and Hauptmann Siegfried Georg Martin Marseille , a family with paternal Huguenot ancestry , in Berlin @-@ Charlottenburg Berliner Strasse 164 on 13 December 1919 at 11 : 45 pm . As a child , he was physically weak , and he nearly died from a serious case of Influenza . His father Siegfried was an Army officer during World War I , and later left the armed forces to join the Berlin Police force . Siegfried later rejoined the Army in 1933 , and was promoted to General in 1935 . Promoted again he attained the rank of Generalmajor on 1 July 1941 . He served on the Eastern Front from the beginning of Operation Barbarossa . Siegfried Marseille was killed by partisans near Pyetrikaw on 29 January 1944 . He was buried in the cemetery of Selasje . Hans @-@ Joachim also had a younger sister , Ingeborg " Inge " . While on sick leave in Athens at the end of December 1941 , he was summoned to Berlin by a telegram from his mother . Upon arriving home , he learned his sister had been " slain by a jealous lover " ; Hans @-@ Joachim never recovered emotionally from this blow .

When Marseille was still a young child his parents divorced and his mother subsequently married a police official named Reuter . Marseille initially assumed the name of his stepfather at school (a matter he had a difficult time accepting) but he reverted to his father 's name of Marseille in adulthood . He acquired the reputation of being a rebel from a lack of discipline , a characteristic that would plague him early on in his Luftwaffe career . Marseille also had a difficult relationship with his natural father whom he refused to visit in Hamburg for some time after the divorce . Eventually he attempted a reconciliation with his father , who subsequently introduced him to the nightlife that was to initially hamper his military career during his early years in the Luftwaffe . However , the rapprochement with his father did not last and he did not see him again thereafter .

Marseille attended the 12th Volksschule Berlin (1926 ? 1930) , and from the age of 10 , the Prinz Heinrich Gymnasium in Berlin @-@ Schöneberg (1930 ? 1938) . He was considered to be a lazy student at first , and was constantly playing pranks and getting into trouble . Toward the end of his school years he started to take his education more seriously and qualified as one of the youngest (at 17 years , six months) to achieve his Abitur , graduating in early 1938 . Marseille then expressed his desire to become a " flying officer . "

= = = Entry into the Luftwaffe = = =

Although not athletic in physique , Marseille received a good report for a term with the Reichsarbeitsdienst (" State Labour Service ") Abtlg . 1 / 177 in Osterholz @-@ Scharmbeck near Bremen , between 4 April and 24 September 1938 .

He joined Luftwaffe on 7 November 1938 , as a Fahnenjunker (officer candidate) and received his military basic training in Quedlinburg in the Harz region . On 1 March 1939 Marseille was transferred to the Luftkriegsschule 4 (LKS 4 ? air war school) near Fürstenfeldbruck . Among his classmates was Werner Schröer . Schröer reports that Marseille was often in breach of military discipline . Consequently Marseille was ordered to stay on base while his class mates were on weekend leave . Quite frequently Marseille ignored this and left Schröer a note : " Went out ! Please take my chores . " On one occasion , while performing a slow circuit , Marseille broke away and performed an imaginary weaving dogfight . He was reprimanded by his commanding officer , Hauptmann Mueller @-@ Rohmoser , and taken off flying duties and his promotion to Gefreiter postponed . Soon after , during a cross @-@ country flight , he landed on a quiet stretch of Autobahn (between Magdeburg and Braunschweig) and ran behind a tree to relieve himself . Some farmers came to enquire if he needed assistance , but by the time they arrived Marseille was on his way , and they were blown back by his slipstream . Infuriated , the farmers reported the matter and Marseille was again suspended from flying . Those he graduated with had been made full officers by early 1940 , while Marseille 's indiscipline left him with the rank of Oberfähnrich at the end of 1941 .

Marseille completed his training at Jagdfliegerschule 5 (5th fighter pilot school) in Wien @-@ Schwechat to which he was posted on 1 November 1939 . Jagdfliegerschule 5 at the time was under the command of the World War I flying ace and recipient of the Pour le Mérite Eduard Ritter von Schleich . One of his teachers at the Jagdfliegerschule 5 was the Austro @-@ Hungarian World War I ace Julius Arigi . Marseille graduated from Jagdfliegerschule 5 with an outstanding evaluation on 18 July 1940 and was assigned to Ergänzungsjagdgruppe Merseburg . Marseille 's unit was assigned to air defence duty over the Leuna plant from the outbreak of war until the fall of France .

On 10 August 1940 he was assigned to I. Jagd / Lehrgeschwader 2 , based in Calais @-@ Marck , to begin operations over Britain and again received an outstanding evaluation this time by his Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur , Herbert Ihlefeld .

= = World War II = =

= = = Battle of Britain = = =

In his first dogfight over England on 24 August 1940 , Marseille was involved in a four @-@ minute battle with a skilled opponent . He defeated his opponent by pulling up into a tight chandelle , to gain an altitude advantage before diving and firing . The British fighter was struck in the engine , pitching over and diving into the English Channel ; this was Marseille 's first victory . Marseille was then engaged from above by more enemy fighters . By pushing his aircraft into a steep dive then pulling up metres above the water , Marseille escaped from the machine gun fire of his opponents : " skipping away over the waves , I made a clean break . No one followed me and I returned to Leeuwarden [sic ? Marseille was based near Calais , not Leeuwarden] . "

Marseille did not take any pleasure in this victory and found it difficult to accept the realities of aerial combat .

On his second sortie , he scored another victory , and by the 15 September 1940 , had claimed his fourth victory . Marseille became an ace on 18 September after claiming a fifth enemy aircraft . While returning from a bomber @-@ escort mission on 23 September 1940 flying Werk Nummer (W.Nr) 5094 , his engine failed 10 miles off Cap Gris Nez after combat damage sustained over Dover . Pilot Officer George Bennions from 41 Squadron may have shot Marseille down . According to another source , W.Nr 5094 was destroyed in this engagement by Robert Stanford Tuck , who

had pursued a Bf 109 to that location and whose pilot was rescued by a He 59 naval aircraft . Marseille is the only German airman known to have been rescued by a He 59 on that day and in that location . Tuck 's official claim was for a Bf 109 destroyed off Griz Nez at 09 : 45 ? the only pilot to submit a claim in that location .

Marseille tried to radio his position but was forced to bail out over the sea . He paddled around in the water for three hours before being rescued by a Heinkel He 59 float plane based at Schellingwoude . Severely worn out and suffering from exposure , he was sent to a field hospital . I. (Jagd) / LG 2 claimed three aerial victories for the loss of four Bf 109s that day . Marseille was in serious trouble when arriving back at the airfield . He had abandoned his leader Staffelfkapitän Adolf Buhl , who was shot down and killed . He received a stern rebuke and final warning from Herbert Ihlefeld , during which he tore up his flight evaluations with a visibly upset Marseille looking on . Other pilots were voicing their dissent concerning Marseille . Because of his alienation of other pilots , his arrogance and unapologetic nature , Ihlefeld would eventually dismiss Marseille from LG 2 .

Another account recalled how Marseille once ignored an order to turn back from a fight when outnumbered by two to one , but seeing an enemy aircraft closing on his wing leader , Marseille broke formation and shot the attacking aircraft down . Expecting nothing but " a well done Jochen " when he landed , he was thoroughly criticised for his actions , receiving three days of confinement for failing to carry out an order . Days later , Marseille was passed over for promotion and was now the sole Fähnrich in the Geschwader . This was a humiliation for him , suspecting that his abilities were being suppressed so the squadron leaders could take all the glory in the air .

Shortly afterwards , in early October 1940 , after having claimed seven aerial victories all them flying with I. (Jagd) / LG 2 Marseille was transferred to 4 . / Jagdgeschwader 52 , flying alongside the likes of Johannes Steinhoff and Gerhard Barkhorn . He wrote off four aircraft as a result of operations during this period . Steinhoff , later recalled :

" Marseille was extremely handsome . He was a very gifted pilot , but he was unreliable . He had girl friends everywhere , and they kept him so busy that he was sometimes so worn out that he had to be grounded . His sometime irresponsible way of conducting his duties was the main reason I fired him . But he had irresistible charm . "

As punishment for " insubordination " ? rumoured to be his penchant for American jazz music , womanising and an overt " playboy " lifestyle ? and inability to fly as a wingman , Steinhoff transferred Marseille to Jagdgeschwader 27 on 24 December 1940 . When he joined his new unit , it was difficult to foresee his outstanding career . His new Gruppenkommandeur , Eduard Neumann , later recalled , " His hair was too long and he brought with him a list of disciplinary punishments as long as your arm . He was tempestuous , temperamental and unruly . Thirty years later , he would have been called a playboy . " Nevertheless , Neumann quickly recognised Marseille 's potential as a pilot . He stated in an interview : " Marseille could only be one of two , either a disciplinary problem or a great fighter pilot . " Jagdgeschwader 27 was soon relocated to North Africa .

= = = Arrival in North Africa = = =

Marseille 's unit briefly saw action during the invasion of Yugoslavia , deployed to Zagreb on 10 April 1941 , before transferring to Africa . On 20 April on his flight from Tripoli to his front airstrip Marseille 's Bf 109 developed engine trouble and he had to make a forced landing in the desert short of his destination . His squadron departed the scene after they had ensured that he had got down safely . Marseille continued his journey , first hitchhiking on an Italian truck , then , finding this too slow ; he tried his luck at an airstrip in vain . Finally he made his way to the general in charge of a supply depot on the main route to the front , and convinced him that he should be available for operations next day . Marseille 's character appealed to the general and he put at his disposal his own Opel Admiral , complete with chauffeur . " You can pay me back by getting fifty victories , Marseille ! " were his parting words . Nevertheless he caught up with his squadron and arrived on 21 April .

He scored two more victories on 23 and 28 April , his first in the North African Campaign . However , on 23 April , Marseille himself was shot down during his third sortie of that day by Sous @-@

Lieutenant James Denis , a Free French pilot with No. 73 Squadron RAF (8 @.@ 5 victories) , flying a Hawker Hurricane . Marseille 's Bf 109 received almost 30 hits in the cockpit area , and three or four shattered the canopy . As Marseille was leaning forward the rounds missed him by inches . Marseille managed to crash @-@ land his fighter . Just a month later , records show that James Denis shot down Marseille again on 21 May 1941 . Marseille engaged Denis , but overshot his target . A turning dogfight ensued , in which Denis once again bested Marseille .

Neumann (a Geschwaderkommodore as of 10 June 1942) encouraged Marseille to self @-@ train to improve his abilities . By this time , he had crashed or damaged another four Bf 109E aircraft , including a tropicalised aircraft he was ferrying on 23 April 1941 . Marseille 's kill rate was low , and he went from June to August without a victory . He was further frustrated after damage forced him to land on two occasions : once on 14 June 1941 and again after he was hit by ground fire over Tobruk and was forced to land blind .

His tactic of diving into enemy formations often found him under fire from all directions , resulting in his aircraft being damaged beyond repair ; consequently , Eduard Neumann was losing his patience . Marseille persisted , and created a unique self @-@ training programme for himself , both physical and tactical , which resulted not just in outstanding situational awareness , marksmanship and confident control of the aircraft , but also in a unique attack tactic that preferred a high angle deflection shooting attack and shooting at the target 's front from the side , instead of the common method of chasing an aircraft and shooting at it directly from behind . Marseille often practiced these tactics on the way back from missions with his comrades . Marseille became known as a master of deflection shooting .

As Marseille began to claim enemy aircraft regularly , on occasion he would organise the welfare of the downed pilot personally , driving out to remote crash sites to rescue downed Allied airmen . On 13 September 1941 Marseille shot down Pat Byers of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) No. 451 Squadron . Marseille flew to Byers ' airfield and dropped a note informing the Australians of his condition and treatment . He returned several days later to second the first note with news of Byers ' death . Marseille repeated these sorties after being warned by Neumann that Göring had forbade any more flights of this kind . After the war , Marseille 's JG 27 comrade Werner Schröer stated that Marseille attempted these gestures as " penance " for a group that " loved shooting down aircraft " but not killing a man ; " we tried to separate the two . Marseille allowed us that escape , our penance I suppose . "

Finally on 24 September 1941 , his practice came to fruition , with his first multiple victory sortie , claiming four Hurricanes of No. 1 Squadron , South African Air Force (SAAF) . By mid December , he had reached 25 victories and was duly awarded the German Cross in Gold . His Staffel was rotated to Germany in November / December 1941 to convert to the Bf 109F @-@ 4 / trop , the variant that was described as the Experten (experts) " mount . " These victories represented his 19 ? 23rd victory .

= = = The " Star of Africa " = = =

Marseille always strove to improve his abilities . He worked to strengthen his legs and abdominal muscles , to help him tolerate the extreme g forces of air combat . Marseille also drank an abnormal amount of milk and shunned sunglasses , to improve his eyesight .

To counter German fighter attacks , the Allied pilots flew " Lufbery circles " (in which each aircraft 's tail was covered by the friendly aircraft behind) . The tactic was effective and dangerous as a pilot attacking this formation could find himself constantly in the sights of enemy pilots . Marseille often dived at high speed into the middle of these enemy defensive formations from either above or below , executing a tight turn and firing a two @-@ second deflection shot to destroy an enemy aircraft . The successes Marseille had begun to become readily apparent in early 1942 . He claimed his 37 ? 40th victories on 8 February 1942 and 41 ? 44th victories four days later which earned him the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) that same month for 46 victories .

Marseille attacked under conditions many considered unfavourable , but his marksmanship allowed

him to make an approach fast enough to escape the return fire of the two aircraft flying on either flank of the target . Marseille 's excellent eyesight made it possible for him to spot the enemy before he was spotted , allowing him to take the appropriate action and manoeuvre into position for an attack .

In combat , Marseille 's unorthodox methods led him to operate in a small leader / wingman unit , which he believed to be the safest and most effective way of fighting in the high @-@ visibility conditions of the North African skies . Marseille " worked " alone in combat keeping his wingman at a safe distance so he would not collide or fire on him in error .

In a dogfight , particularly when attacking Allied aircraft in a Lufbery circle , Marseille would often favour dramatically reducing the throttle and even lowering the flaps to reduce speed and shorten his turn radius , rather than the standard procedure of using full throttle throughout . Emil Clade said that none of the other pilots could do this effectively , preferring instead to dive on single opponents at speed so as to escape if anything went wrong . Clade said of Marseille 's tactics :

Marseille developed his own special tactics , which differed significantly from the methods of most other pilots . (When attacking a Lufbery circle) he had to fly very slowly . He even took it to the point where he had to operate his landing flaps as not to fall down , because , of course he had to fly his curve (turns) more tightly than the upper defensive circle . He and his fighter were one unit , and he was in command of that aircraft like no @-@ one else .

Friedrich Körner (36 victories) also recognised this as unique : " Shooting in a curve (deflection shooting) is the most difficult thing a pilot can do . The enemy flies in a defensive circle , that means they are already lying in a curve and the attacking fighter has to fly into this defensive circle . By pulling his aircraft right around , his curve radius must be smaller , but if he does that , his target disappears in most cases below his wings . So he cannot see it anymore and has to proceed simply by instinct . "

His success as a fighter pilot also led to promotions and more responsibility as an officer . 1 May 1942 saw him receive an unusually early promotion to Oberleutnant followed by appointment to Staffelfkapitän of 3 . / JG 27 on 8 June 1942 , thus succeeding Oberleutnant Gerhard Homuth who took command of I. / JG 27 .

In a conversation with his friend Hans @-@ Arnold Stahlschmidt , Marseille commented on his style , and his idea of air @-@ to @-@ air combat :

I often experience combat as it should be . I see myself in the middle of a British [sic] swarm , firing from every position and never getting caught . Our aircraft are basic elements , Stahlschmidt , which have got to be mastered . You 've got to be able to shoot from any position . From left or right turns , out of a roll , on your back , whenever . Only this way can you develop your own particular tactics . Attack tactics , that the enemy simply cannot anticipate during the course of the battle ? a series of unpredictable movements and actions , never the same , always stemming from the situation at hand . Only then can you plunge into the middle of an enemy swarm and blow it up from the inside .

Marseille had a narrow escape on 13 May 1942 , when his Bf 109 was damaged during a dogfight with 12 Kittyhawks (Mk I) from No. 3 Squadron RAAF , southeast of Gazala and over the Gulf of Bomba (" Gazala Bay ") . With a wingman , Marseille bounced the Kittyhawks . After he downed one of the Australian pilots , Flying Officer Graham Pace in AL172 , Marseille 's Bf 109 took hits in the oil tank and propeller , likely from Flying Officer Geoff Chinchin (1919 ? 2005) , who reported damaging one of the Messerschmitts . Marseille nevertheless managed to shoot down another Kittyhawk (Sergeant Colin McDiarmid ; AK855) , before nursing his overheating aircraft back to base . The repairs to Marseille 's Bf 109 took two days . The aerial victories were recorded as numbers 57 ? 58 .

Weeks later , on 30 May , Marseille performed another mercy mission after witnessing his 65th victory ? Pilot Officer Graham George Buckland of No. 250 Squadron RAF ? strike the tail plane of his fighter and fall to his death when the parachute did not open . After landing he drove out to the crash site . The P @-@ 40 had landed over Allied lines but they found the dead pilot within German territory . Marseille marked his grave , collected his papers and verified his identity , then flew to Buckland 's airfield to deliver a letter of regret . Buckland died two days before his 21st birthday .

His attack method to break up formations , which he perfected , resulted in a high proportion of kills , and in rapid , multiple victories per attack . On 3 June 1942 , Marseille attacked alone a formation of 16 Curtiss P @-@ 40 fighters and shot down six aircraft of No. 5 Squadron SAAF , five of them in six minutes , including three aces : Robin Pare (six victories) , Cecil Golding (6 @.@ 5 victories) and Andre Botha (five victories) . This success inflated his score further , recording his 70 ? 75th victories . Marseille was awarded the Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub on 6 June 1942 . His wingman Rainer Pöttgen , nicknamed Fliegendes Zählwerk the (" Flying Counting Machine ") , said of this fight :

All the enemy were shot down by Marseille in a turning dogfight . As soon as he shot , he needed only to glance at the enemy plane . His pattern [of gunfire] began at the front , the engine 's nose , and consistently ended in the cockpit . How he was able to do this not even he could explain . With every dogfight he would throttle back as far as possible ; this enabled him to fly tighter turns . His expenditure of ammunition in this air battle was 360 rounds (60 per aircraft shot down) .

Schröer , did however , place Marseille 's methods into context :

He was the most amazing and ingenious combat pilot I ever saw . He was also very lucky on many occasions . He thought nothing of jumping into a fight outnumbered ten to one , often alone , with us trying to catch up to him . He violated every cardinal rule of fighter combat . He abandoned all the rules .

On 17 June 1942 , Marseille claimed his 100th aerial victory . He was the 11th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . Marseille then returned to Germany for two months leave and the following day was awarded the Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern . On 6 August , he began his journey back to North Africa accompanied by his fiancée Hanne @-@ Lies Küpper . On 13 August , he met Benito Mussolini in Rome and was presented with the highest Italian military award for bravery , the Medaglia d 'Oro al Valor Militare . While in Italy Marseille disappeared for some time prompting the German authorities to compile a missing persons report , submitted by the Gestapo head in Rome , Herbert Kappler . He was finally located . According to rumours he had run off with an Italian girl and was eventually persuaded to return to his unit . Unusually , nothing was ever said about the incident and no repercussions were visited upon Marseille for this indiscretion .

Leaving his fiancée in Rome , Marseille returned to combat duties on 23 August . 1 September 1942 was Marseille 's most successful day , destroying 17 enemy aircraft (nos . 105 ? 121) , and September would see him claim 54 victories , his most productive month . The 17 enemy aircraft shot down included eight in 10 minutes ; as a result of this feat , he was presented with a Volkswagen Kübelwagen by a Regia Aeronautica squadron , on which his Italian comrades had painted " Otto " (Italian language : Otto = eight) . This was the most aircraft from Western Allied air forces shot down by a single pilot in one day . Only one pilot , Emil " Bully " Lang , on 4 November 1943 , would better this score , against the Soviet Air Force on the Eastern Front . On 3 September 1942 Marseille claimed six victories (nos . 127 ? 132) but was hit by fire from the British @-@ Canadian ace James Francis Edwards . Der Adler , a biweekly Nazi propaganda magazine published by the Luftwaffe , also reported his actions in volume 14 of 1942 .

Three days later Edwards likely killed Günter Steinhausen , a friend of Marseille . The next day , 7 September 1942 , another close friend Hans @-@ Arnold Stahlschmidt was posted missing in action . These personal losses weighed heavily on Marseille 's mind along with his family tragedy . It was noted he barely spoke and became more morose in the last weeks of his life . The strain of combat also induced consistent sleepwalking at night and other symptoms that could be construed as posttraumatic stress disorder . Marseille never remembered these events .

Marseille continued scoring multiple victories throughout September , including seven on 15 September (nos . 145 ? 151) . Between 16 and 25 September , Marseille failed to increase his score due to a fractured arm , sustained in a force landing soon after the 15 September mission . As a result , he had been forbidden to fly by Eduard Neumann . But the same day , Marseille borrowed the Macchi C.202 ' 96 ? 10 ' of the Italian ace Tenente Emanuele Annoni , from 96a Squadriglia , 9 ° Gruppo , 4 ° Stormo , based at Fuka , for a test flight . But the one @-@ off flight ended in a wheels @-@ up landing , when the German ace accidentally switched the engine off , as the throttle control in Italian aircraft was opposite to that of the German aircraft .

Marseille had nearly surpassed his friend Hans @-@ Arnold Stahlschmidt 's score of 59 victories in just five weeks . However , the massive material superiority of the Allies meant the strain placed on the outnumbered German pilots was now severe . At this time , the strength of German fighter units was 112 (65 serviceable) aircraft against the British muster of some 800 machines . Marseille was becoming physically exhausted by the frenetic pace of combat . After his last combat on 26 September , Marseille was reportedly on the verge of collapse after a 15 @-@ minute battle with a formation of Spitfires , during which he scored his seventh victory of that day .

Of particular note was Marseille 's 158th claim . After landing in the afternoon of the 26 September 1942 , he was physically exhausted . Several accounts allude to his Squadron members being visibly shocked at Marseille 's physical state . Marseille , according to his own post @-@ battle accounts , had been engaged by a Spitfire pilot in an intense dogfight that began at high altitude and descended to low @-@ level . Marseille recounted how both he and his opponent strove to get onto the tail of the other . Both succeeded and fired but each time the pursued managed to turn the table on his attacker . Finally , with only 15 minutes of fuel remaining , he climbed into the sun . The RAF fighter followed and was caught in the glare . Marseille executed a tight turn and roll , fired from 100 metres range . The Spitfire caught fire and shed a wing . It crashed into the ground with the pilot still inside . Marseille wrote , " That was the toughest adversary I have ever had . His turns were fabulous ... I thought it would be my last fight " . Unfortunately the pilot and his unit remain unidentified .

= = = Aircraft = = =

The following Bf 109 E @-@ 7 aircraft are among those that Marseille flew :

Werk Nummer (W.Nr) 3579 , sustained 50 % damage on 2 September 1940 in aerial combat and crash landed near Calais @-@ Marck .

W.Nr 5597 , sustained 75 % damage on 11 September 1940 in aerial combat and made an emergency landing near Wissant .

W.Nr 5094 , sustained 100 % damage on 23 September 1940 Marseille bailed out after aerial combat near Dover .

W.Nr 4091 , sustained 35 % damage on 28 September 1940 Marseille made an emergency landing after engine failure near Théville .

W.Nr 1259 , sustained 80 % damage on 20 April 1941 Marseille made an emergency landing after engine failure near Cahela .

W.Nr 5160 , sustained 100 % damage on 23 April 1941 Marseille made an emergency landing after combat and belly landing near Tobruk .

W.Nr 1567 , sustained 40 % damage on 21 May 1941 in aerial combat and made an emergency landing near Tobruk .

Marseille flew four different Bf 109F @-@ 4 / Z aircraft :

Werk Nummer (W.Nr) 12593 , in which his score rose to 50 on 23 February 1942

W.Nr. 10059 , with 68 victory bars on the rudder . On 15 September 1942 this aircraft lost a wing in a midair collision when its pilot Leutnant Friedrich Hoffmann of 3 . / JG 27 collided with a Bf 109 piloted by Unteroffizier Heinrich Pein of 5 . / JG 27 . Unteroffizier Pein was killed in the resulting crash . Leutnant Hoffmann bailed out only to succumb to his injuries five weeks later .

W.Nr. 10137 , with the number " 70 " within an open @-@ topped wreath and 31 victory bars on the rudder

His final F @-@ 4 / trop , W.Nr. 8673 with the early @-@ F Variant rear @-@ fuselage horizontal support bars welded along the lower rear fuselage seam joining the fin / rudder and the stabiliser / elevators to the next forward fuselage section , a black @-@ outlined yellow 14 , and , on the rudder , " 100 " enclosed within a wreath , atop 51 victory bars .

= = = Death = = =

The two missions of 26 September 1942 had been flown in Bf 109G @-@ 2 / trop , in one of which

Marseille had shot down seven enemy aircraft . The first six of these machines were to replace the Gruppe 's Bf 109Fs . All had been allocated to Marseille 's 3 Staffel . Marseille had previously ignored orders to use these new aircraft because of its high engine failure rate , but on the orders of Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring , Marseille reluctantly obeyed . One of these machines , WK @-@ Nr. 14256 (Engine : Daimler @-@ Benz DB 605 A @-@ 1 , W.Nr. 77 411) , was to be the final aircraft Marseille flew .

Over the next three days Marseille 's Staffel was rested and taken off flying duties . On 28 September Marseille received a telephone call from Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel asking to return with him to Berlin . Hitler was to make a speech at the Berlin Sportpalast on 30 September and Rommel and Marseille were to attend . Marseille rejected this offer , citing that he was needed at the front and had already taken three months ' vacation that year . Marseille also revealed he wanted to take leave at Christmas , to marry his fiancée Hanne @-@ Lies Küpper .

On 30 September 1942 , Hauptmann Marseille was leading his Staffel on a Stuka escort mission , covering the withdrawal of the group and relieving the outward escort , III . / Jagdgeschwader 53 (JG 53) , which had been deployed to support JG 27 in Africa . Marseille 's flight was vectored onto enemy aircraft in the vicinity but the enemy withdrew and did not take up combat . Marseille vectored the heading and height of the formation to Neumann who directed III . / JG 27 to engage . Marseille heard 8 . / JG 27 leader Werner Schröer claim a Spitfire over the radio at 10 : 30 . While returning to base , his new Messerschmitt Bf 109G @-@ 2 / trop 's cockpit began to fill with smoke ; blinded and half asphyxiated , he was guided back to German lines by his wingmen , Jost Schlang and Lt Rainer Pöttgen . Upon reaching friendly lines , " Yellow 14 " had lost power and was drifting lower and lower . Pöttgen called out after about 10 minutes that they had reached the White Mosque of Sidi Abdel Rahman , and were thus within friendly lines . At this point , Marseille deemed his aircraft no longer flyable and decided to bail out , his last words to his comrades being " I 've got to get out now , I can 't stand it any longer " .

Eduard Neumann was personally directing the mission from the command post :

I was at the command post and listening to the radio communication between the pilots . I realised immediately something serious had happened ; I knew they were still in flight and that they were trying to bring Marseille over the lines into our territory and that his aircraft was emitting a lot of smoke .

His Staffel , which had been flying a tight formation around him , peeled away to give him the necessary room to manoeuvre . Marseille rolled his aircraft onto its back , the standard procedure for bail out , but due to the smoke and slight disorientation , he failed to notice that the aircraft had entered a steep dive (at an angle of 70 ? 80 degrees) and was now travelling at a considerably faster speed (about 640 km / h (400 mph)) . He worked his way out of the cockpit and into the rushing air only to be carried backwards by the slipstream , the left side of his chest striking the vertical stabiliser of his fighter , either killing him instantly or rendering him unconscious to the point that he could not deploy his parachute . He fell almost vertically , hitting the desert floor 7 kilometres (4 @.@ 3 mi) south of Sidi Abdel Rahman . As it transpired , a gaping 40 cm (16 in) hole had been made in his parachute and the canopy had spilled out , but after recovering the body , the parachute release handle was still on " safe , " revealing Marseille had not even attempted to open it . Whilst checking the body , Oberarzt Dr Bick , the regimental doctor for the 115th Panzergrenadier @-@ Regiment , noted Marseille 's wristwatch had stopped at exactly 11 : 42 am . Dr. Bick had been the first to reach the crash site , having been stationed just to the rear of the forward mine defences , he had also witnessed Marseille 's fatal fall .

In his autopsy report , Dr. Bick stated :

" The pilot lay on his stomach as if asleep . His arms were hidden beneath his body . As I came closer , I saw a pool of blood that had issued from the side of his crushed skull ; brain matter was exposed . I turned the dead pilot over onto his back and opened the zipper of his flight jacket , saw the Knight 's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords (Marseille never actually received the Diamonds personally) and I knew immediately who this was . The paybook also told me . "

Oberleutnant Ludwig Franzisket collected the body from the desert . Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille lay in state in the Staffel sick bay , his comrades coming to pay their respects throughout the day .

As a tribute they put on the record " Rhumba Azul " that he had enjoyed listening to ; it played over and over until the close of day . Marseille 's funeral took place on 1 October 1942 at the Heroes Cemetery in Derna with Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring and Eduard Neumann delivering a eulogy .

The last entry in his flight book by Eduard Neumann read : " Flight duration 54 minutes , time of landing " black cross " . Took to parachute 7 kilometres (4 @. @ 3 mi) south of Sidi Abdel Rahman . Remarks : Engine damage . Flights 1 ? 482 , 388 combat flights and a total of 158 kills : Certified in the field 30 September 1942 " .

An enquiry into the crash was hastily set up . The commission 's report (Aktenzeichen 52 , Br.B.Nr. 270 / 42) concluded that the crash was caused by damage to the differential gear , which caused an oil leak . Then a number of teeth broke off the spur wheel and ignited the oil . Sabotage or human error was ruled out . The aircraft , W. Nr. 14256 , was ferried to the unit via Bari , Italy . The mission that ended in its destruction was its first mission .

= = = Impact of Marseille 's death = = =

JG 27 was moved out of Africa for about a month because of the impact Marseille 's death had on morale . The deaths of two other German aces , Günter Steinhausen and Marseille 's friend Hans @-@ Arnold Stahlschmidt , just three weeks earlier reduced spirits to an all @-@ time low . One biographer suggests these consequences were instigated by a failure in the command style of Marseille , although it was not entirely within his control . The more success Marseille had , the more his staffel relied on him to carry the greater share of aerial victories claimed by the unit . So his death , when it came , was something which JG 27 had seemingly not prepared for .

Historians Hans Ring and Christopher Shores also point to the fact that Marseille 's promotions were based on personal success rates more than any other reason , and other pilots did not get to score air victories , let alone become Experten themselves . They flew support as the " maestro showed them how it was done " , and often " held back from attacking enemy aircraft to build his score still higher " . As a result there was no other Experten to step into Marseille 's shoes if he was killed . Eduard Neumann explained :

" This handicap [that very few pilots scored] was partially overcome by the morale effect on the whole Geschwader of the success of pilots like Marseille . In fact most of the pilots in Marseille 's staffel acted in secondary role as escort to the " master " . "

Still Neumann , who was himself one of the Luftwaffe 's most able operational leaders , in the assessment of his subordinate commander 's quality was not necessarily easily imitable :

" As a fighter pilot Marseille was absolutely supreme ... Above all , he possessed lightning reflexes and could make a quicker judgment in a bigger orbit than anyone else ... Marseille was unique ... "

Marseille 's impact on enemy fighter pilots and their morale is unclear . Andrew Thomas quoted Pilot Officer Bert Houle of No. 213 Squadron RAF ; " He was an extremely skilled pilot and a deadly shot . It was a helpless feeling to be continually bounced , and to do so little about it . " Robert Tate on the other hand is sceptical that enemy pilots would have been familiar with each other , " How well was Marseille known to DAF personnel in the Desert ? Apparently not so well . Although there is little indication that some Allied pilots may have heard of Marseille , this information did not readily make its way down to Allied Squadrons . Fanciful stories abound of how pilots knew of one another and hoped to duel with each other in the skies . This was more than likely not the case . "

= = Memorials = =

Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille appeared four times in the Deutsche Wochenschau . The first time on Wednesday 17 February 1942 when Oberst Galland , the General der Jagdflieger , visited an airport in the desert . The second time on Wednesday 1 July 1942 when Marseille travelled to Rastenburg to receive the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords from Adolf Hitler . The third time on Wednesday 9 September 1942 announcing Marseille 's 17 aerial victories from 1 September 1942 and that he had been awarded the Diamonds to his Knight 's Cross . His

last appearance dates from Wednesday 30 September 1942 showing Hauptmann Marseille visiting Erwin Rommel .

A wartime pyramid was constructed by Italian engineers at the site of Marseille 's fall but over time it decayed . On 22 October 1989 , Eduard Neumann and other JG 27 survivors in co @-@ operation with the Egyptian government , erected a new pyramid that stands there to this day .

In the weeks following Marseille 's death morale was low . In an attempt to improve morale Oberleutnant Fritz Dettmann persuaded Eduard Neumann to rename 3 . / JG 27 the " Marseille Staffel " (seen in photographs as " Staffel Marseille ") .

His grave bears a one @-@ word epitaph : Undeclared . It is understood that after the war , Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille 's remains were brought from Derna and reinterred in the memorial gardens at Tobruk ; it was there that his mother visited his grave in 1954 . His remains are now in a small clay coffin (sarcophagus) bearing the number 4133 .

In 1957 , a German film , Der Stern von Afrika (The Star of Africa) directed by Alfred Weidenmann , was made starring Joachim Hansen as Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille .

On 24 October 1975 , the Bundesluftwaffe 's Uetersen @-@ Appen Barracks was renamed the " Marseille Barracks " .

The Memorial of the Reuter @-@ Marseille family can be found in the graveyard in Berlin , Alt @-@ Schöneberg . The left side bears the insignia .

The tail rudder of his second to last Messerschmitt Bf 109F @-@ 4 / trop (Werknummer 8673) now bearing 158 victory marks is on display at Luftwaffenmuseum der Bundeswehr in Berlin Gatow . It had initially been given to his family as a gift by Hermann Göring and was donated to the museum in the 1970s .

Twenty @-@ five years after Marseille 's death , fighter pilot veterans of World War II gathered to honour Marseille at an " International Fighter Pilots Meeting " on 7 ? 8 October 1967 at Fürstenfeldbruck . Attending this meeting were fighter pilots from six different countries , including Erich Hartmann , Robert Stanford Tuck , Adolf Galland , Günther Rall and Mike Martin , who was shot down by Marseille on 3 June 1942 . The guests of honour at this meeting were Marseille 's mother , Frau Charlotte Reuter @-@ Marseille and his ex @-@ fiancée Hanne @-@ Lies .

The 16th Deutsches Afrikakorps reunion took place on 1 ? 2 September 1984 in Stuttgart . The German Bundesregierung invited as guest of honour Corporal Mathew P. Letuku from South Africa . Mathew , alias Mathias to everyone in JG 27 , was a black South African soldier taken prisoner of war by German troops on the morning of 21 June 1941 at fortress Tobruk . Mathias initially worked as a volunteer driver with 3 . Staffel then befriended Marseille and became his domestic helper in Africa .

= = Victory claims and notable actions = =

Fähnrich Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille was transferred to his first combat assignment with the I. (Jagd) / Lehrgeschwader 2 at the time stationed at Calais @-@ Marck on Sunday 10 August 1940 . Two days later he arrived at this unit on 12 August 1940 .

He was assigned to the 1 . Staffel of this Gruppe . Staffelkapitän was Oberleutnant Adolf Buhl . One of the Schwarmführer was Oberfeldwebel Helmut Goedert , to whom Marseille was assigned as wingman . Marseille already flew his very first combat mission on the next day , Wednesday 13 August 1940 and claimed his first aerial victory on 24 August 1940 . In over little more than two years he would amass another 157 aerial victories . His 158 aerial victories were claimed in 382 combat missions .

This and the ? (Ace of spades) indicates those days which made Marseille an ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day , a term which designates a fighter pilot who has shot down five or more airplanes in a single day . This indicates that the aerial combat report is missing from the German Federal Archives . This indicates that Australian historian Russell Brown has expressed doubt regarding the veracity of Marseille 's claims .

Marseille 's 151 claims in North Africa included :

101 Curtiss P @-@ 40 Tomahawk / Kittyhawk fighters ;

30 Hawker Hurricane fighters ;
16 Supermarine Spitfire fighters ;
Two Martin A @-@ 30 Baltimore bombers ;
One Bristol Blenheim bomber ; and
One Martin Maryland bomber .

The German Federal Archives still hold records for 109 of Marseille aerial victories . A further biographer of Marseille , Walter Wübbe , has made an attempt to link these records to Allied units , squadrons and when possible even to individual pilots , in order to verify the claims as much as possible .

= = = Dispute over claims = = =

Some serious discrepancies between Allied squadron records and German claims have caused some historians and Allied veterans to question the accuracy of Marseille 's official victories , in addition to those of JG 27 as a whole . Attention is often focused on the 26 claims made by JG 27 on 1 September 1942 , of which 17 were claimed by Marseille alone . Another biographer , Franz Kurowski , claims that 24 of the 26 victories were verified through Allied records after the war . A USAF historian , Major Robert Tate states : " [f] or years , many British historians and militarists refused to admit that they had lost any aircraft that day in North Africa . Careful review of records however do show that the British [and South Africans] did lose more than 17 aircraft that day , and in the area that Marseille operated . " Tate also reveals 20 RAF single @-@ engined fighters and one twin engined fighter were destroyed and several others severely damaged , as well as a further USAAF P @-@ 40 shot down . However , overall Tate reveals that Marseille 's kill total comes close to 65 ? 70 percent corroboration , indicating as many as 50 of his claims may not have been actually kills . Tate also compares Marseilles rate of corroboration with the top six P @-@ 40 pilots . While only the Canadian James Francis Edwards ' records shows a verification of 100 percent other aces like Clive Caldwell (50 % to 60 % corroboration) , Billy Drake (70 % to 80 % corroboration) , John Lloyd Waddy (70 % to 80 % corroboration) and Andrew Barr (60 % to 70 % corroboration) are at the same order of magnitude as Marseille 's claims . Christopher Shores and Hans Ring also support Tate 's conclusions . British historian Stephen Bungay gives a figure of 20 Allied losses that day .

However , the claims for 15 September 1942 are in serious doubt , following the first detailed scrutiny of the records of individual Allied squadrons by Australian historian Russell Brown . Moreover , Brown lists three occasions on which Marseille could not have downed as many aircraft as claimed .

Stephan Bungay has pointed out the low military value of shooting down DAF fighters , rather than the bombers that , by mid @-@ 1942 , were having a highly damaging effect on Axis ground units and convoy routes . Referring to 1 September 1942 , Bungay points out that even if Marseille shot down 15 of the 17 he claimed that day , " the rest of the 100 or so German fighter pilots between them only got five . The British [sic] lost no bombers at all ... During this period the DAF lost only a few bombers , but all fell to anti @-@ aircraft defences and evidence shows that Rommel was forced onto the defensive because of the losses inflicted by bombers .

= = Summary of career = =

= = = Decorations = = =

Sometime in the early 1990s , one of Marseille 's biographers , Robert Tate , visited the former Marseille @-@ Kaserne base and Museum to see and photograph Marseille 's medals . When he arrived , Tate was informed the Knights Cross , Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds belonging to Marseille had already been stolen .

= = = Wehrmachtbericht references = = =

= = = Dates of rank = = =

Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille joined the military service in Wehrmacht on 7 November 1938 . His first station was Quedlinburg in the Harz region where he received his military basic training as a Luftwaffe recruit .

= = = Stations of operation = = =

Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille , after he had completed his training at the Jagdfliegerschule 5 , was assigned to the Ergänzungsjagdgruppe Merseburg stationed at the airport in Merseburg @-@ West

Ergänzungsjagdgruppe Merseburg

I. (Jagd) / LG 2

II . / JG 52

I. / JG 27

= = = Absence from the Geschwader = = =

= = Marseille and his environment = =

Several biographers of Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille have written about his distain for authority and for the National Socialist movement in general . This first came to the fore in the movie , The Star of Africa , the fictionalised 1957 movie about his life , which described an incident that occurred shortly after Marseille was presented the Swords to the Knight 's Cross . The young Oberleutnant , while on visit in Germany , was presented with evidence of the Final Solution (Holocaust) . Shocked by this information , he did not return to North Africa but went into hiding in Italy instead . Only after the Gestapo established his whereabouts and pressured him did he return to his Geschwader .

Further research by other biographers has unearthed some truth to this story and his attitude to the ruling Nazi movement . Marseille demonstrated his lack of respect for the Nazi elite during his visit to Germany in June ? August 1942 . Marseille was a gifted pianist and was invited to play a piece at the home of Willy Messerschmitt , an industrialist and designer of the Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter Marseille had achieved so much success in . Guests at the party included Adolf Hitler , party chairman Martin Borman , Hitler 's deputy and Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Luftwaffe , Hermann Göring , head of the SS , Heinrich Himmler and Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels . After impressing with a display of piano play for over an hour , including Ludwig van Beethoven 's Für Elise , Marseille proceeded to play American Jazz , which was considered degenerate in Nazi ideology . Hitler stood , raised his hand , and said " I think we 've heard enough " and left the room . Magda Goebbels found the prank amusing and Artur Axmann recalled how his " blood froze " when he heard this " Ragtime " music being played in front of the Führer .

Later that month Marseille was invited to another function , despite his stunt . Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff , Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer @-@ SS to the Reichsführer @-@ SS Heinrich Himmler , confirmed that during his visit Marseille overheard a conversation which mentioned the mistreatment of Jews . He stated :

Globocnik and I were talking about Operation Reinhard , which was in full effect following Heydrich 's murder , and also the construction of Sobibor and Treblinka . I know I asked him about Höss , who was also standing there and had been summoned by Himmler regarding logistics or something regarding the new camp (Auschwitz) . Then Globocnik mentioned to me and Kaltenbrunner that Lidice had been cleared , and all the Jews and Czechs had been dealt with . I noticed that this

young pilot , who I later learned was Marseille , must have overheard , and I debated whether I should go over and say something to him . I decided against it .

When Marseille returned to his unit he asked his friends Franzisket , Clade and Schröer , whether they had heard what was happening to Jews and if perhaps something was underway that they did not know about . Franzisket recalled that he had heard Jews were being relocated to territory gained in the East but no more . Marseille recounted how he had attempted to ask questions about Jews who had vanished from his neighbourhood , including the family doctor that had delivered him at birth . Regardless of his hero status , when he attempted to bring the subject into any conversation with people who approached him , his enquiries were either met with awkward silences , or people changed the subject or even turned away . Franzisket noticed a change in Marseille 's attitude toward his nation 's cause . He never spoke of this with his comrades again .