

= Walter Oesau =

Walter " Gulle " Oesau ( 28 June 1913 ? 11 May 1944 ) was a German World War II fighter ace who served in the Luftwaffe from 1934 until his death in 1944 . He rose to command Jagdgeschwader 1 , which was named in his honor after his death .

He served with the Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War , with 3 Staffel of Jagdgruppe 88 ( 3 . / J 88 ) , claiming 8 aircraft during the campaign , becoming one of only 28 people to earn the award of the Spanish Cross in Gold and Diamonds .

At the start of World War II , Oesau was given command of 2 Staffel , Jagdgeschwader 20 . The group was moved to the Eastern Front at the start of the Invasion of Poland , moving back to the Western Front later as the redesignated III Gruppe , Jagdgeschwader 51 ( III . / JG 51 ) . After his first victory of World War II in the Battle of France , Oesau operated on both the Western and Eastern Fronts , where he was wounded and received the Silver Wound Badge .

He returned to operations as Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 1 ( JG 1 ) . He was killed in action on 11 May 1944 aged 30 . JG 1 was given the suffix " Oesau " in his honor .

= = Early life = =

Walter " Gulle " Oesau was born to a bank director in Farnewinkel near Meldorf , Germany on 28 June 1913 . He joined the German Army ( Heer ) in October 1933 and served in the Second Artillery Regiment as an enlisted soldier . After being transferred to a Luftwaffe transport unit , he undertook flying training in 1934 as a cadet ( Fahnenjunker ) at the Luftwaffe Academy ( Deutsche Verkehrsfliegerschule ) in Hanover . Upon completion of his training he was assigned to Jagdgeschwader 132 , as a Leutnant . The unit was re ? designated as Jagdgeschwader 2 " Richthofen " in May 1939 .

= = Combat career = =

= = = Spanish Civil War = = =

Oesau started his operational career with the Condor Legion , along with future contemporary aces such as Werner Mölders and Adolf Galland . He was one of the first to join 3 . Jagdgruppe 88 in Spain in April 1938 . The Staffel , commanded by Werner Mölders , took part in the Spanish Civil War where Oesau claimed eight victories , flying 130 combat missions . For this he received the Spanish Cross ( Spanienkreuz ) in Gold with Diamonds . He was also wounded in this conflict which earned him the Spanish Wound Badge . He also received the Medalla de la Campaña and the Medalla Militar .

= = = Western Front 1939 ? 40 = = =

On 1 March 1939 Oesau joined the Headquarters Flight ( Stabsschwarm ) of I . / JG 2 . By 15 July 1939 Oesau was promoted to Oberleutnant and given command of 2 . / JG 20 . On 15 July 1939 , I . / JG 20 was activated in Döberitz initially consisting of two Staffeln drawn from JG 2 . Prior to the invasion of Poland I . / JG 20 was transferred to Strausberg on 26 August 1939 . From there , the group was transferred to Sprottau ( modern Szprotawa ) anticipating an attack from the Polish Air Force . A week later the group moved to Brandenburg . On 21 February 1940 , the unit was relocated to Bönninghardt under the control of JG 51 . It continued to operate in this fashion until the end of the Battle of France . On 4 July it was re ? designated III . / JG 51 . Oesau served as Staffelfkapitän of 7 . / JG 51 .

= = = = Battle of France = = = =

Oesau got his first World War II victory during the Battle of France on 13 May 1940 , when he claimed a French Curtiss P @-@ 36 Hawk over Halsteren in the Netherlands , earning him the Iron Cross 1st class ( Eisernes Kreuz 1 . Klasse ) . On 31 May , he claimed three Spitfires during a patrol North West of Dunkirk and next day he claimed a Bristol Blenheim . On 13 June 1940 , he shot down the last French aircraft kill claimed by JG 51 , a French Amiot bomber . By the end of hostilities in France on 25 June , his World War II tally stood at 5 ( 13 including Spanish kills ) .

Following the Battle of France , the Luftwaffe started its attacks on Channel convoys as a prelude to the Battle of Britain . The primary task of JG 51 during this time was to provide fighter escort to these bomber missions . The commander of JG 51 , Oberst Theo Osterkamp established a policy of unrestricted combat air patrol ( freie Jagd ) of fighter Staffeln providing loose protection rather than close escort to the bombers , actively seeking out Royal Air Force fighters . On 7 July 1940 Oesau claimed one Spitfire .

= = = Battle of Britain = = =

On 10 July 1940 , the first major clashes of the Battle of Britain occurred in a phase known as the Kanalkampf . 20 Bf 109s of III . / JG 51 led by Hauptmann Hannes Trautloft and 30 Bf 110 C of I . / Zerstörergeschwader 26 escorted 20 Dornier Do 17 bombers of II . / Kampfgeschwader 2 attacking a large convoy off Folkestone . Oberleutnant Oesau was leading 7 . / JG 51 .

Trautloft noticed three of a flight of six intercepting Hurricanes of No. 32 squadron higher than the escorts , attempting to intercept the bombers . Soon they were joined by four squadrons of British fighters : No. 56 Squadron , No. 111 Squadron , No. 64 Squadron and No. 74 Squadron . Oesau was able to claim three Spitfires . Two 7 . / JG 51 aircraft crash landed in France . British losses show that no Spitfire was lost or destroyed in the ensuing battle . Only one No. 32 Hurricane , piloted by Pilot Officer Higgs , was destroyed in a collision with one of the Do 17s and only one other Hurricane was damaged . It is possible Oesau was responsible for damaging Higgs ' Hurricane , causing him to lose control . Two Spitfires landed with light damage while a third was also slightly damaged and force @-@ landed at RAF Manston . Over claiming of enemy losses was rife on both sides during the battle .

On 19 July , III . / JG 51 were confronted by Defiants of No. 141 Squadron south of Folkestone . As the German pilots were now aware of Defiant 's lack of front armament , they soon gained the advantage in combat and claimed 11 Defiants shot down in 8 minutes . Oesau was credited with one Defiant , taking his score to 19 . He was the first one of JG 51 to reach double digits in World War II . RAF losses record six Defiants destroyed and two damaged .

On 18 August 1940 , III . / JG 51 escorted Dorniers attacking Hornchurch airfield . Intercepted by Hurricanes over Kent , Oesau claimed one Hurricane shot down as his 20th victory , earning him the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes ) two days later , the first pilot of JG 51 to be thus honored . On 23 August 1940 , Trautloft took over as Geschwaderkommodore of JG 54 , and Walter Oesau replaced him as Gruppenkommandeur of III . / JG 51 . By October 1940 , Oesau had a total score of 48 ( including 26 Spitfires ) .

On 10 November 1940 Oesau succeeded Wilhelm Balthasar as Gruppenkommandeur of III . / JG 3 . With 39 victories he was currently the 4th highest scoring Ace behind Helmut Wick , Werner Mölders and Adolf Galland . On 5 February 1941 he shot down a Hurricane over Desvres , France , his 40th victory . He was awarded the Oak Leaves ( mit Eichenlaub ) to his Knight 's Cross next day . It also earned him second entry in the Wehrmachtbericht . In early 1941 , JG 3 returned to Germany to replace their Bf 109 ' Emils ' with the new ' F ' variant ( Friedrich ) . However , Oesau disliked the Bf 109F and kept flying his ' Emils ' for some time . JG 3 returned to France in May 1941 and Oesau added two more kills on 16 May and 28 May bringing his total to 51 .

= = = Operation Barbarossa = = =

Oesau 's III . / JG 3 was then involved in Operation Barbarossa the invasion of Russia , launched on 22 June 1941 . Oesau shot down his first Soviet aircraft on 24 June 1941 , and by 30 June 1941

had reached his 60th victory , downing a Tupolev SB bomber . Next day he downed three more SB bombers near Lvov ( modern Lviv , Ukraine ) . This earned him his 3rd entry in the Wehrmachtbericht . On 10 July 1941 , Oesau claimed 5 more aircraft and two more kills by 11 July 1941 . On 12 July 1941 , he shot down 7 Soviet aircraft in one sortie . In the five weeks since moving to the Eastern Front , Oesau was credited with 44 Soviet aircraft downed . He became the third pilot to reach 80 victories , the 80th kill an Ilyushin DB @-@ 3 bomber . He was awarded the Swords to his Knight 's Cross with Oak Leaves ( Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern ) on same day . He was the third person to earn the Swords . He was again then wounded , receiving heavy splinter injuries in face and knee . A fortnight later he was transferred to the Western Front to take over JG 2 .

= = = Defence of the Reich 1941 ? 44 = = =

He succeeded Balthasar for the second time as JG 2 commander , who had died in combat with Spitfires over northern France when he pulled the tail off his Bf 109F in a dive . The Bf 109F @-@ 2 proved an excellent match to the Spitfire V , but Oesau disliked its reduced armament compared to the ' Emil ' , and continued to fly an E @-@ 4 model in preference to the Bf 109F , until lack of spares forced him to switch to the newer variant . Upon his appointment on 4 July 1941 , he addressed JG 2 with following words .

In the spirit of Manfred von Richthofen , and following the example set by my predecessors , Major Wick and Hauptmann Balthasar , constant readiness and devotion to duty will enable us to achieve yet further successes .

JG 2 was tasked with defending targets in occupied France against the RAF fighter offensive. For the next two years Oesau led JG 2 through the war of attrition waged by the RAF . On 10 August 1941 Oesau claimed a Spitfire for his first kill with JG 2 . Over the next two days , he claimed four more Spitfires . By the end of September 1941 , Oesau had claimed two more Spitfires .

JG 2 participated in the Luftwaffe air cover of the Channel Dash . Two B @-@ 17 C Flying fortresses of No. 90 Squadron attacked the German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau . In one of the highest altitude interceptions of World War II , the bombers were attacked by I. / JG 2 , resulting in the destruction of one . This aircraft put JG 2 's score past the 800 mark , matching the score of their Great War namesake . Kills No. 88 to 92 were all Spitfires claimed between Calais and Dungeness on 12 August 1941 . Oesau claimed his 100th kill on 26 October 1941 , the third pilot to do so . This earned him 4th entry in the Wehrmachtbericht .

He was then grounded from flying on operations , as his experience and leadership qualities were regarded as too valuable to risk further in front line combat . He did fly on occasional sorties , the most famous involving the shooting down of a Lancaster bomber of No. 44 Squadron RAF piloted by Warrant Officer G. T. Rhodes in April 1942 , during a rare RAF daylight raid on targets in Augsburg . It was his 101st kill . In August 1942 , the Geschwaderstab of JG 2 exchanged their Bf 109 F aircraft for the FW 190 A ? 2s .

From late 1942 onwards JG 2 was in the front line against the increasingly numerous United States Army Air Forces ( USAAF ) day bomber formations of B @-@ 17s and B @-@ 24s .

Oesau added four more to his tally by mid @-@ 1943 . Shortly before his 30th birthday , Oesau was elevated to a series of Luftwaffe staff and administration positions . On 1 July 1943 he was posted as Fighter Leader Brittany ( Jagdfliegerführer Bretagne ) , before being appointed as Geschwaderkommodore of JG 1 on 12 November 1943 , following the death of JG 1 's Hans Philipp in October 1943 . The ban on Oesau 's combat flying was lifted . While commanding JG 1 , Oesau became an expert ( Experten ) at shooting down 4 engine bombers , with 14 bomber kills claimed . He was awarded the Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge in gold and diamonds on 17 October 1943 . He was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 10 January 1944 .

For Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Luftwaffe Hermann Göring it was an ongoing concern that inadequate numbers of fighters were able to continually engage the bomber streams , at the very time that the USAAF 's 8th Air Force 's new commander , Maj. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle had instituted a new fighter strategy against the Luftwaffe . Hence on 23 February 1944 ? near the

midpoint of the USAAF 's Big Week bomber offensive against the Luftwaffe , also being carried out by the 15th Air Force flying out of Italian bases ? Generalmajor Joseph Schmid Commander of I. Jagdkorps established a new rule for the fighters returning to base . They were to arrive at the nearest designated fighter airfield for resupply instead of returning to their own base . They were to be commanded by the senior pilot landing on that airfield , irrespective of their unit . This was meant to turn around the fighters in time to intercept returning bombers .

On next day , B @-@ 24s of 2nd Bomb division of the Eighth Air Force bombed Gotha . JG 1 ( under Oesau ) , JG 11 and JG 3 was sent to intercept . Due to high winds , the bombers were ahead of the escorts unprotected . Two groups of JG 1 met them before Gotha and 9 B @-@ 24s were claimed as a result . Since B @-@ 17s of 1st Bomb division also bombed Schweinfurt , other fighter units also arrived to intercept , eventually involving almost all the Western day fighter units of the Luftwaffe . This caused for confusion in pilots landing on airfields other than their own . This tested the directive of Schmid . Oesau led one of two such improvised formations successfully , with the other led by Hauptmann Borris of I. / JG 26 Oesau added 4 fighters to his score between January and March 1944 , and his tally stood at 117 . On 8 May 1944 he claimed a Thunderbolt shot down over Hanover ; his last kill .

= = Death = =

While being the Geschwaderkommodore ( = equivalent of a RAF Group Captain or USAF Wing Commander ) of JG 1 Oesau frequently received his share of Hermann Göring 's deep anger and frustration over the failure to beat off the Allied bomber offensive . Göring questioned the commitment of Geschwaderkommodores who were not flying regularly and thus not really " leading " their respective units . In this context it should be stated that in order not to risk one of the Luftwaffe expert 's life [ German fighter aces were called Experten ] , there was an automatic ban on Oesau for further combat flying since his 100th kill . Perhaps the ban was lifted temporarily or bypassed when he was appointed Geschwaderkommodore of JG 1 . On the other hand , Oesau might simply have ignored the ban and continued to lead missions .

Oesau added several victories over American heavy bombers in the first five months of 1944 . On 11 May 1944 one thousand U.S. heavy bombers from Eighth Air Force attacked railway targets in Eastern France and North East Belgium . They were escorted by even more numbers of P @-@ 38 and P @-@ 51 fighters . Oesau was in bed with influenza . Upon hearing the news , Göring phoned Oesau 's staff :

Göring ? " Is the Kommodore flying ? " Staff ? " No , he is in bed with fever . " Göring ? " Yes , yes , I know that kind ! " , Göring said scornfully , Göring ? " He has also turned tired and coward ! "

Angered by this comment , Oesau took off in a Bf 109 G @-@ 6 / AS " Green 13 " ( Wing Number 20601 ) from Paderborn despite a high fever . Leading three aircraft of the Geschwaderstab , the schwarm broke formation over the Ardennes as it approached the bombers . In the dogfight Oesau 's wingman reported damage to his machine and he was ordered to break off . Left alone , Oesau faced P @-@ 38s and possibly P @-@ 51s as well . According to Major Hartmann Grasser , Gruppenkommandeur of III . / JG 1 , who was on the same mission , there were five P @-@ 38s facing Oesau .

What followed is unclear as there are several versions . Oesau was chased by 1st Lt. James Leslie Doyle , 1st Lt. Wilbur L. Jarvis III and 1st Lt. James C. Austin , of the 428th Fighter Squadron ( 474th FG , 9th AF ) . All three were experienced pilots and chased Oesau from 28 @,@ 000 feet to tree @-@ top level . In the ensuing 20 minute dogfight , Oesau defended skillfully , though his aircraft was damaged by gunfire . While attempting an emergency landing , his Gustav received a final burst of fire in the cockpit area and crashed into the ground 6 miles south west of St. Vith . His body was thrown clear of the aircraft some yards away .

According to the " Eighth Air Force Mission Folder for 11 May 1944 , Mission 351 " , Lt. Doyle engaged in a turning dogfight with a pair of Bf 109s , scoring hits on the leader . Doyle had then broken off combat without claiming a kill , unaware that his victim , Oesau , had been killed by a 20 mm shell . Doyle 's kill had been the first kill of the 474th Fighter Group in its first combat with the

Luftwaffe .

There is some dispute regarding who exactly shot down his fighter . Some sources claim that he was shot during the dogfight and while the aircraft was falling to the ground , he was shot at again a few feet above ground , possibly by the Mustangs of 354th FG . Lt Wilbur Jarvis , No. 2 in the flight led by Doyle received a Damaged credit ( not a kill ) for Oesau 's aircraft . Doyle noted bullet damage in the cockpit area and his gun camera footage showed that it was Oesau 's Green 13 . German records indicated that his death was caused by an explosive shell in the cockpit , his body having several bullet wounds . Later an image from the Gun camera was published ( without caption ) that purportedly showed Oesau 's aircraft from the right side .

Oesau was aged 30 at the time of his death . He had a total of 127 kills gained over 300 missions . 27 were Spitfires , 14 four @-@ engined bombers , 44 were scored on the Eastern Front and 9 in the Spanish Civil War . In recognition of his record , JG 1 received the title Oesau in honor of its fallen Geschwaderkommodore . Only Werner Mölders had a similar honor with JG 51 Mölders . Walter Oesau is buried in Meldorf , close to his birthplace and the town museum ( Dithmarscher Landesmuseum ) has documented his last journey in pictures .

= = Aftermath and historical importance = =

During his career , Oesau was mentioned five times in the Wehrmachtbericht . These were the daily propaganda reports by Oberkommando der Wehrmacht and even one mention is considered to be high military honor . The last one on 15 May 1944 was after his death .

Johannes Steinhoff , the high @-@ ranking Luftwaffe ace ( 176 Kills ) who went on to become the Chief of Staff for Allied Air Forces in Central Europe , once said : " Walter Gulle Oesau was the toughest fighter pilot in the Luftwaffe " .

In 1940 , frustrated with the perceived lack of success against RAF Fighter Command , Göring was keen on infusing the fighter force leadership with younger blood . He perceived a lack of aggressiveness in the Jagdgeschwader leadership . The likes of Theo Osterkamp were the first victim of this policy , handing over JG 51 to Werner Mölders . Oesau was considered to be one such rising star . However , being a star and staying in Göring 's favor required keeping up the kill rate and promotions were invariably linked to scores . According to Dr. Kurt Tank , the Focke ? Wulf designer , although many of the younger generation were good flyers , they were unable to cope with problems of overall planning and broader strategic aspects . However , Oesau was one of the outstanding leaders ever produced by Luftwaffe fighter wings with the likes of Werner Mölders and Adolf Galland .

The decision to continually retain or return gifted experts ( Experten ) to front line battle proved extremely costly , resulting in the death in combat of many of the earlier experts and aces . This , coupled with the acute shortage of well trained pilots and the fact that by 1943 they were facing a better equipped and well @-@ trained enemy , meant the life expectancy of even the most gifted was tragically short . Author John Weal says that , although other Geschwaderkommodore would end up dying in combat , nothing would showcase the changing fortunes of Luftwaffe fighter forces than the death of Walter Oesau .

= = Personality and personal life = =

German historian Hans Otto Böhm commented on Oesau as " One of my best professors " . There is little information available on the personal side of Walter Oesau . He had good sense of humor and liked to spend time with his friends . He was a simple man , who did not display any flamboyant personal emblems on his aircraft . His aircraft while commanding JG 2 did not have any special markings except for the unit 's normal yellow under ? cowling . While Oesau commanded , JG 2 , like many others , dropped the special symbols for Stab ( headquarters flight ) units in favor of numerals . This helped make the leader 's aircraft anonymous . Unlike other aces , Oesau reportedly never had markings on his rudder representing his personal tally , although this is contradicted by some photos displaying what may be his aircraft rudder painted with score of downed aircraft . The

authenticity of the photograph is questioned by some as there are also Ju 87 photos supposedly signed by Oesau ( he never flew a Stuka bomber ) .

= = = Date of Rank = = =

= = Awards = =

Spanish Medalla de la Campaña

Spanish Medalla Militar

Spanish Cross in Gold with Swords and Diamonds

Iron Cross ( 1939 )

2nd Class ( 15 May 1940 )

1st Class ( 20 May 1940 )

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe in Gold for fighter pilots with pennant " 300 "

Wound Badge ( 1939 ) in Black

German Cross in Gold on 17 October 1943 as Oberstleutnant and Jagdfliegerführer 4

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Sword

Knight 's Cross on 20 August 1940 as Hauptmann and Staffelkapitän of the 7 . / JG 51

9th Oak Leaves on 6 February 1941 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the III . / JG 3

3rd Swords on 15 July 1941 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the III . / JG 3