

= Günther Specht =

Günther Specht ( 13 November 1914 ? 1 January 1945 ) was a German Luftwaffe fighter ace during World War II .

Having joined the Luftwaffe in 1935 and completed his pilot training , at the start of the war Specht was a Leutnant in 3 . / ZG 26 " Horst Wessel " ( the 3rd squadron of the 26th Heavy Fighter Wing ) . In 1939 he was wounded by an RAF tail gunner and blinded in one eye . He returned to active duty and was shot down six times during the war . After his recovery in 1939 , he chose to return to active service but was shot down again in France and was seriously injured . These injuries kept him grounded for the next two years . In 1942 he returned to active duty with 1st Fighter Wing ( Jagdgeschwader 1 Oesau ; JG 1 ) ) . He was then made Group Commander ( Gruppenkommandeur ) of II Group of JG 11 ( II . / JG 11 ) and promoted to Major . He was appointed as Wing Commander ( Geschwaderkommodore ) of JG 11 and was listed as missing in action during the attack on the Allied bases at Asch and Ophoven as part of Operation Bodenplatte . He was posthumously promoted to lieutenant colonel ( German : Oberstleutnant ) and was recommended for the Oak Leaves ( German : Eichenlaub ) to the Knight 's Cross , which was never actioned amongst all the confusion in the last months of the war .

Specht was considered as one of the best fighter leaders during the war and was a recipient of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross ( German : Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes ) . During his combat career he was credited with 34 enemy aircraft destroyed , all downed on the Western Front .

= = Personality = =

Specht was born on 13 November 1914 in Frankenstein ( modern Żbikowice ?l?skie ) of Prussia ( modern Poland ) . Specht was short in stature but full of energy . He had a distinguishing patch of gray in his hair just above his forehead . He was a perfectionist with a high sense of duty , and expected his men to follow his high standards . Although he lost his left eye in late 1939 , according to Squadron Leader ( German : Staffelfkapitän ) Heinz Knoke of 5 . / JG 11 , he could see like a vulture and was an excellent marksman . Specht also had an eye for detail , and he wrote detailed mission log reports for future use .

Specht 's personal emblems adorning his aircraft included a design by Specht of a pencil superimposed on a chevron ( termed a winged pencil ) as a wry comment on being deskbound following his injuries . His single @-@ engine aircraft with JG 11 sported a green spinner and a Knight 's Cross painted on the cowling after he was awarded the honour in April 1944 .

Specht would not allow women on the group base , considering them an unnecessary diversion . According to Knoke , one time Specht 's wife came to visit him on the II . / JG 11 base but was held at the guard room on Specht 's orders and refused to receive calls from the guard . Instead he asked Knoke to pass a message to her to ' put herself on ice ' , saying that he would only have time for her after the war . Specht however did not survive , dying five months before the war in Europe came to an end .

= = Formation leadership = =

After taking command of II . / JG 11 , Specht led the group on every mission in which it participated . Following each mission , he wrote detailed and analytical mission reports . He soon gained a reputation as one of the most reliable formation leaders , with II . / JG 11 reputed to be one of the best units among the fighter force ( German : jagdwaffe ) on Reich air defense ( German : Reichsluftverteidigung ) .

On 17 August 1943 Specht led the group from Gilze en Rijen on an intercept and sighted the B @-@ 17 Flying Fortresses of 381 Bombing Group near Antwerp . He waited for 30 minutes until the escorts turned back at Eupen before attacking . Within the next half hour , sixty percent of the bombers went down . Specht himself was credited with downing two as his 16th and 17th victories .

On 11 September 1944 Specht and the JG 11 Headquarters @-@ flight ( German : Stabsschwarm

) led a combined formation of II . / JG 4 ( Sturm ) ( German : Sturmgruppen ) and III . / JG 4 . Due to Specht 's skills , they positioned themselves against thirty @-@ four B @-@ 17s of the " Bloody 100th " and fifteen B @-@ 17s were downed before the escorting P @-@ 51s arrived . Specht was credited with one P @-@ 51 .

= = Military career = =

Having joined the Luftwaffe in 1935 and completed his pilot training , when war started in September 1939 Specht was a Leutnant in 3 . / ZG 26 " Horst Wessel " ( the 3rd squadron of the 26th Heavy Fighter Wing ) . Supposedly equipped with the new , twin @-@ engine , Bf 110 heavy fighter , its production was so far behind schedule that 7 of the 10 Zerstörergruppen ( including Specht ? s I. / ZG 26 ) had to be equipped with old Messerschmitt Bf 109C and D single @-@ engined fighters . They thus took no role in the Polish campaign , instead based on the North Sea coast near Wilhelmshaven .

This was virtually the only part of the Western Front , during the Phoney War , where there was significant aerial activity in the early months of the war , as RAF bombers flew unescorted raids on the German naval bases . So it did not take long for Specht to score his first victories : two Handley Page Hampden medium bombers in a squadron conducting an armed reconnaissance operation near Heligoland , shot down on 29 September . Needing a long @-@ range fighter to better intercept the British bombers at distance , I. / ZG 26 was thus the next Gruppe selected for re @-@ equipping onto the Bf 110 .

On 3 December 1939 , 24 RAF Vickers Wellington bombers from Marham and Mildenhall bases attacked Heligoland . These were intercepted by I. / ZG 26 along with other Messerschmitt Bf 109 units . Specht scored his third victory , shooting down a bomber over the North Sea . But he was also seriously injured by return fire from the Wellington 's tail gunner , seriously wounding him in the face . Ditching into the sea , he was picked up by rescue craft . Losing the sight in his left eye , he spent the next six months in recovery . He was shot down by Corporal Copley of No. 38 Squadron RAF .

However , he returned to active service , as Gruppe Adjutant of I. / ZG 26 . Still able to fly combat missions , his aircraft sported a pencil under his Adjutant ? s chevron ? bemoaning the combat pilot ? s universal loathing of paperwork ! During the French campaign , on 23 May 1940 , Spitfires were encountered by Bf 110s and Bf 109s for the first time . The engagement resulted in the loss of two Bf 110s and two Bf 109s . However , Specht would claim three RAF Supermarine Spitfire fighters shot down . The British No. 92 Squadron RAF involved lost three Spitfires in the entire engagement . Squadron Leader Roger J Bushell became a prisoner of war while Paul H. Klipsch and Patrick Alexander George Learmond were killed in action . During the course of this battle , Specht and his rear gunner / radio operator were wounded , force land near Calais and Boulogne @-@ sur @-@ Mer with a damaged aircraft . Again he was badly injured and spent further time in hospital .

After recovering he took up staff duties for a year , until 16 September 1941 , when he was made Staffelfkapitän ( Squadron leader ) of a newly formed night @-@ fighter training unit , 2 . / Nachtjagdschule 1 ( coming out of 2 . / Zerstörerschule 1 ) . Soon after , on 31 October , Hauptmann ( Captain ) Specht was promoted to Kommandeur of III . / NJS 1 . Located at Ingolstadt @-@ Manching , Specht instructed pilots in conversion to night fighting . Paul Zorner , a future night fighter expert , was one of his students . Leading the Gruppe for exactly one year , this was the last time Specht flew a twin engine aircraft , whereupon he returned to combat duties .

Initially reassigned to 10 . / JG 1 based in the Ruhr , he shot down his first Viermot ( four @-@ engined bomber ) , his 7th victory , on 26 February 1943 . This was the beginning of a new war for Specht ? the 8th USAAF was starting its bombing offensive on the Reich ? s industrial complex . Soon afterward , on 27 March , he was appointed StaKa of the newly reformed 7 . / JG 1 , then in May 1943 he was promoted to Kommandeur of II / JG 11 . Jagdgeschwader 11 was a new fighter wing , created in April 1943 by dividing Jagdgeschwader 1 ( flying Fw 190s ) in half and filling it out into a full wing with new Gruppen flying Me 109G @-@ 6 ' gunboats ' , to increase the homeland protection . He was based back near his original airfields on the North Sea coast , his unit the first

line of defense against the bomber streams and their fighter escorts .

Throughout 1943 , as the Luftwaffe took the fight to the bombers flying unescorted over the Reich , Specht scored regularly . Leading by example , he soon became one of the top Viernot aces shooting down 14 bombers out of his 18 victories that year . This included his 13th victory on 26 July , during Blitz Week , when bombers targeted the Blohm & Voss U Boat yards in Hamburg and the synthetic rubber factories of Continental AG and Nordhafen in Hanover . ; as well a pair on 17 August on the infamous Schweinfurt raid . He was awarded the Ehrenpokal ( Goblet of Honour ) on 23 August , and the German Cross in Gold on 25 November . Specht became increasingly critical of the relatively weak armament of the Bf 109 during this time . Towards the end of 1943 , with longer @-@ ranged fighter @-@ escorts accompanying the Allied bombers , tactics had to change : The single @-@ engined fighters would engage the fighter screen while a Zerstörergruppe would take on the bombers . Coincidentally , for a while Specht ? s II . / JG 11 was paired up with his old unit , I . / ZG 26 .

He continued his success into 1944 : On 11 February 1944 II . / JG 11 engaged escort fighters returning from a raid on Frankfurt with Specht downing 2nd Lieutenant Richard McDonald of the 354th Fighter Group , who crashed his P @-@ 51 Mustang " Plane Jane " near Oberalben . Nine days later , ( the opening of the 8th USAAF 's " Big Week " ) Specht had to crash land on the Ærø Island as a result of technical problems with his Bf 109G . Despite that , he was back in the air the next day claiming a P @-@ 47 fighter , and a bomber and a fighter the day after , to take his tally to 30 . On 15 March II . / JG 11 lost six killed in action , two wounded , and eight aircraft lost , resulting in Specht declaring the unit non @-@ operational for six weeks to rest and replace losses .

On 8 April 1944 Specht was awarded the Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes for his 30 victories on the Western Front . On 15 April after his commander , Hermann Graf was injured , he gave up his command of II . / JG 11 , and moved to the Geschwaderstab ( Wing Command flight ) as Kommodore @-@ in @-@ training , under Herbert Ihlefeld . Promoted to Major on 1 May , he was given full command of JG 11 on 15 May , replacing Ihlefeld who was himself transferred to command JG 1 . But little could be done as the Allied bombing offensive stepped up a gear . His units were decimated over the skies of Normandy in June and July . He himself was injured in July , suffering head injuries in yet another crash @-@ landing . Despite severe pain from his injuries Specht remained on combat duty . His wing was retired to the Rhineland to be rebuilt , but they were crushed again in the latter half of 1944 . The Allies were now sending overwhelming numbers of bombers to destroy the German industrial and military factories and now protected by the advent of the P @-@ 51 Mustang , providing fighter cover right into the heart of the Reich and back .

During Operation Market Garden , the Allied parachute landings in the Netherlands , JG 11 was credited with 22 aircraft downed on 22 September , with two credited to Specht . Four days later , Specht claimed two RAF Hawker Typhoons near Deventer . According to RAF records only three Typhoons were shot down on 26 September ; two to flak and one in aerial combat against Jagdgeschwader 53 Bf 109s near Apeldoorn . No fighters were recorded lost near Deventer . However , it may be the case that loss records were lost or not well kept , meaning Specht 's claims cannot be traced and may well be accurate .

= = = Operation Bodenplatte = = =

In December , Hitler ordered his final , desperate attack in the west - through the snow @-@ covered forests of the Ardennes . Poor weather kept the promised air support grounded , but early on the morning of New Year 's Day , long after it was tactically useful or relevant , the Luftwaffe launched Operation Bodenplatte ( ' Baseplate ' ) - not against the devastating strategic bombers , but on the frontline fighter airbases .

Virtually all available fighter groups in the west were allocated to this mission , JG 11 was assigned the USAAF airfield at Asch ( Code Name Y ? 29 ) and the RAF airfield at Ophoven north of Asch . The 366th Fighter Group ( 366th FG , Ninth Air Force ) and the 352nd Fighter Group ( 352 FG , Eighth Air Force ) were based at Asch . No. 41 , No. 130 , 350 and No. 610 Squadrons of the 2nd Tactical Wing were based at Ophoven .

For this mission Specht wore his full dress uniform with medals instead of his flight suit . JG 11 was based at Darmstadt @-@ Griesheim , Zellhausen , and Gross @-@ Ostheim . I. / JG 11 , III . / JG 11 ( Fw 190 A ? 9 ) , and II . / JG 11 ( Bf 109G ) mustered sixty @-@ five aircraft for this mission . Specht flew Fw 190 A @-@ 9 ( Wk . Nr. 205033 ) " Black 4 " . Overall the operation was a major failure . With the large proportion of inexperienced , green pilots , flight coordination was extremely difficult and due to the extreme secrecy many pilots were shot down by their own FlaK anti-aircraft , who were not pre @-@ warned of the operation . It also resulted in the loss of a number of irreplaceable combat leaders .

As regards JG 11 specifically , at 8 : 08 am the aircraft took off and assembled over Aschaffenburg with two Junkers Ju 188 ' Pathfinders ' to navigate . After assembling , Specht ordered all aircraft to fly at 400 feet ( 120 m ) to the target area , climbing to 1 @, @ 500 feet ( 460 m ) prior to commencing the attack . Some P @-@ 47 Thunderbolts of the 390th Fighter Squadron , 366th FG , were already airborne and Mustangs of the 487th Fighter Squadron , 352nd FG , were on the runway . The formation was disrupted by flak , and several German aircraft were shot down .

The P @-@ 47 and P @-@ 51s took a heavy toll of JG 11 ; some 25 pilots were lost , including Specht , who was posted as Missing In Action , along with other senior officers of JG 11 .

= = = Death and subsequent confusion = = =

There was some confusion over the circumstance of Specht 's death . Lt. Melvin Paisley and his wingman Flight Officer Dave Johnson were flying 366th FG P @-@ 47s ; Johnson shot down two German fighters before his aircraft was heavily damaged from return fire . Bailing out , he landed in a field near Asch . A Bf 109 he had shot down had belly landed close by and Johnson rode a borrowed bicycle over to inspect it . The aircraft was intact but the pilot was dead . Johnson took the pilot 's identification card and gun and rode back to base . The identification card identified the pilot as an Oberstleutnant ( Lt Colonel ) ; however , the card actually belonged to Oberleutnant ( German : Oberleutnant ) August Engel of 8 Staffel .

Further research has revealed more detail . German records confirmed Specht flew a Fw 190 , not a Bf 109 , and that he was a Major at the time , confirming Johnson 's victim was most likely to have been Engel . Johnson 's claim form revealed he had claimed a Bf 109 , not an Fw 190 . The ID card of Johnson 's victim was passed on to a member of the ground crew who spoke German . This individual stated that the rank was given as Lieutenant Colonel . The incorrect identification was most likely a language error and misunderstanding of German ranks . This may have caused the belief that Johnson had killed Specht . Johnson died in October 1976 , and aviation historians were unable to secure his version of events .

Specht was officially listed as Missing In Action over Maastricht , but he has recently been confirmed dead . He crashed his plane after taking heavy fire . Specht was promoted posthumously to Oberstleutnant and nominated for the Eichenlaub ( Oak Leaves to the Knight 's Cross ) though this was never awarded in the bedlam of the final weeks of the war . Shot down six times in his career , he preferred to ride the plane to a landing rather than taking to his parachute . Specht was credited with 34 aerial victories , which included 15 Viermots , all achieved over the Western Front .

= = Summary of career = =

= = = Awards = = =

Iron Cross in 1939 2nd and 1st Class .

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe on 23 August 1943 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of II . / JG 11 .

German Cross in Gold on 25 November 1943 while serving in the II . / JG 11 .

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 8 April 1944 as Major and Gruppenkommandeur of the II . / JG 11 .

== Dates of rank ==

== Victories ==

== Military Offices held ==