

= Operation Bodenplatte =

Operation Bodenplatte ( Baseplate ) , launched on 1 January 1945 , was an attempt by the Luftwaffe to cripple Allied air forces in the Low Countries during the Second World War . The goal of Bodenplatte was to gain air superiority during the stagnant stage of the Battle of the Bulge so that the German Army and Waffen @-@ SS forces could resume their advance . The operation was planned for 16 December 1944 , but was delayed repeatedly due to bad weather until New Year ? s Day , the first day that happened to be suitable .

Secrecy for the operation was so tight that not all German ground and naval forces had been informed of the operation and some units suffered casualties from friendly fire . British signals intelligence ( Ultra ) recorded the movement and buildup of German air forces in the region , but did not realise that an operation was imminent .

The operation achieved some surprise and tactical success , but was ultimately a failure . A great many Allied aircraft were destroyed on the ground but replaced within a week . Allied aircrew casualties were quite small , since the majority of Allied losses were empty planes sitting on the ground . The Germans , however , lost many pilots that they could not readily replace .

Post @-@ battle analysis suggests only 11 of the Luftwaffe 's 34 air combat Gruppen made attacks on time and with surprise . The operation failed to achieve air superiority , even temporarily , while the German ground forces continued to be exposed to Allied air attack . Bodenplatte was the last large @-@ scale strategic offensive operation mounted by the Luftwaffe during the war .

= = Background = =

The armies of the Western Allies were supported by the Allied Air Forces as they advanced across Western Europe in 1944 . The Royal Air Force ( RAF ) and its Second Tactical Air Force ? under the command of Air Marshal Arthur Coningham ? moved No. 2 Group RAF , No. 83 Group RAF , No. 84 Group RAF and No. 85 Group RAF to continental Europe in order to provide constant close air support . The RAF harassed the German air , sea and ground forces by hitting strong points and interdicting their supply lines while reconnaissance units apprised the Allies of German movements . With Allied air superiority , the German Army could not operate effectively . The Luftwaffe , however , found it difficult to provide effective air cover for the German Army . Although German aircraft production peaked in 1944 the Luftwaffe was critically short of pilots and fuel , and lacked experienced combat leaders .

The land battles moved towards the River Rhine , to the east of which lay the German heartland . Most of France had been liberated , as had the Belgian cities Brussels and Antwerp . Although Operation Market Garden had failed in 1944 , by 1945 the Allies had overrun most of the southern Netherlands and the Scheldt Estuary . As the ground forces moved across Europe , the Allied tactical air forces moved into new bases on the continent , to continue providing close support . The only limiting factor for the Allies was the weather . As winter came , the rains and mud turned airfields into quagmires , so large @-@ scale air and land operations came to a halt .

The situation might well have continued until the spring thaw had the German High Command ( Oberkommando der Wehrmacht ) not launched Unternehmen Wacht am Rhein ( Operation Watch on the Rhine ) on 16 December 1944 . The land offensive was to improve the German military position by capturing Antwerp and separating the British Army from United States Army forces . Part of the planning for the German land operation required the attack to be conducted under the cover of bad winter weather , which kept the main Allied asset , the Tactical Air Forces , on the ground . It initially succeeded , but the weather also grounded the Luftwaffe for the most part . Nevertheless , the Luftwaffe did manage to put 500 aircraft into the air on 16 December , more than had been achieved for a long time . This first day had been the originally planned date for the strike against Allied airfields , named Operation Bodenplatte . However , the weather proved particularly bad and operations were shut down .

The offensive achieved surprise and much initial success . To counter the attack from the air , the United States Army Air Forces ( USAAF ) handed operational control of its XXIX Tactical Air

Command and part of its Ninth Air Force , under the command of Major General Hoyt Vandenberg , to the RAF and Arthur Coningham . On 23 December , the RAF Second Tactical Air Force provided the American forces with much needed support , and helped prevent a German capture of Malmedy and Bastogne . This left the Germans with only the logistical bottleneck of St. Vith to support their operations . The German attack faltered .

The Luftwaffe had been far from absent over the front in December . It flew several thousand sorties over the theatre . Its encounters with the RAF and USAAF had meant heavy losses in matériel and pilots . On the eight days of operations between 17 and 27 December 1944 , 644 fighters were lost and 227 damaged . This resulted in 322 pilots killed , 23 captured and 133 wounded . On the three days of operations 23 ? 25 December , 363 fighters were destroyed . None of the Geschwaderkommodore ( Wing Commanders ) expected any large @-@ scale air operations by the end of the month .

= = Plan = =

In September 1944 , Adolf Hitler resolved to recover Germany ? s deteriorating fortunes by launching an offensive in the West . On 16 September , Hitler directed Generalleutnant Werner Kreipe ? Chief of the General Staff ? to prepare the necessary aircraft for the offensive . On 21 October , Kreipe ordered the air fleet defending the Greater German Reich ( Luftflotte Reich ) to hand over seven Jagdgeschwader and Schlachtgeschwader to Air Command West ( Luftwaffenkommando West ) for a future offensive .

On 14 November , Hermann Göring ? Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the Luftwaffe ? ordered the 2 . Jagddivision and the 3 . Jagddivision to prepare their units for a large @-@ scale ground attack operation in the Ardennes . Preparations were to be complete by 27 November . The attack was to be carried out on the first day of the offensive .

Generalmajor Dietrich Peltz was to plan the operation having been appointed C @-@ in @-@ C of II . Fliegerkorps on 8 December . Luftwaffenkommando West had ordered all units ? except Jagdgeschwader 300 and 301 ? to attend the main planning meeting in Flammersfeld on 5 December . On 14 December , Peltz officially initiated plans for a major blow against the Allies in northwest Europe . Peltz was not a fighter pilot ; his combat record was as a dive bomber pilot , flying the Junkers Ju 87 Stuka . His experiences in Poland , in France , and during the early campaigns on the Eastern Front had moulded him into an outstanding ground attack specialist , making him an ideal candidate for planning Bodenplatte .

On 15 December , this plan was worked out with the help of the Luftwaffe ? s Jagd @-@ Geschwaderkommodore , among them Gotthard Handrick ( Jagdabschnittsführer Mittelrhein ; Fighter Sector Leader Middle Rhein ) , Walter Grabmann and Karl Hentschel , commanders of 3 @-@ and 5 . Jagddivision respectively . It was originally scheduled to support the Battle of the Bulge , the German Army ? s offensive , which began 16 December 1944 . However , the same bad weather that prevented the RAF and USAAF from supporting their own ground forces also prevented the Luftwaffe from carrying out the operation . It was therefore not launched until 1 January 1945 . By this time , the German Army had lost momentum owing to Allied resistance and clearing weather , which allowed Allied Air Forces to operate . The German Army attempted to restart the attack by launching Operation Northwind ( Unternehmen Nordwind ) . The Luftwaffe was to support this offensive through Bodenplatte .

The plan of Bodenplatte called for a surprise attack against 16 Allied air bases in Belgium , the Netherlands and France . The object was to destroy or cripple as many Allied aircraft , hangars and airstrips as possible . Every fighter and fighter @-@ bomber Geschwader ( Wing ) currently occupied with air defence along the Western Front was redeployed . Additional night @-@ fighter units ( Nachtjagdgeschwader ) and medium bomber units ( Kampfgeschwader ) acted as pathfinders . The strike formations themselves were mostly single @-@ engine Messerschmitt Bf 109 and Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 190 fighters .

However , in a blunder , the planners had set flight paths that took many units over some of the most heavily defended areas on the continent , namely the V2 launch sites around The Hague .

These sites were protected by large numbers of German anti @-@ aircraft artillery ( AAA ) units . At the turn of 1944 / 45 Air Command West had 267 heavy and 277 medium or light AAA batteries , and in addition to this there were 100 Kriegsmarine AAA batteries along the Dutch coast . Most of these lay in the sector of the 16th AAA Division , with its control station at Doetinchem , 15 mi ( 24 km ) northeast of Arnhem . Some of the AAA units been warned about the air operation but were not kept up to date with developments about changing timetables and the flight plan of German formations . As a result , many of the German fighter units lost aircraft to " friendly fire " before the attacks could be initiated .

After five years of war and heavy attrition many of the Luftwaffe 's pilots were inexperienced and poorly trained , deficient in marksmanship and flight skills . There was a shortage of experienced instructors , and many of the training units were forced to fly front @-@ line operations in order to bolster the front @-@ line Jagdgeschwader . Long @-@ range Allied fighters exacerbated this situation by shooting down many training aircraft . By late 1944 there were no safe areas in which pilots could be trained without the possibility of air attack . Allied personnel who witnessed the attacks frequently remarked on the poor aim of the strafing aircraft , and many of the Luftwaffe aircraft shot down by Allied anti @-@ aircraft fire were caught because they were flying too slowly and too high . Aviation fuel supplies were also at a premium .

The plan called for the units to maintain strict radio silence and secrecy in order to maintain surprise . Maps were also only half complete , identified only enemy installations , and left out flight paths , lest the document fall into Allied hands enabling them to trace the whereabouts of German fighter bases . Most commanders were also refused permission to brief their pilots until moments before take @-@ off . This created operational confusion . Commanders only managed to get across the bare essentials of the plan . When the operation got under way , many German pilots still did not understand what the operation was about , or what exactly was required of them . They were convinced it was just a reconnaissance in force over the front , and were happy to follow their flight leaders on this basis .

= = = Targets and order of battle = = =

It is unclear whether all of the following were deliberately targeted . Evidence suggests that Grimbergen , Knocke and Ophoven were targeted in error , as was Heesch . In all , the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe ( OKL ) deployed 1 @, @ 035 aircraft from several Jagdgeschwader ( JG ? fighter wings ) Kampfgeschwader ( KG ? bomber wings ) , Nachtjaggeschwader ( NJG ? night fighter wings ) and Schlachtgeschwader ( SG ? ground attack wings ) ; of these , 38 @. @ 5 % were Bf 109s , 38 @. @ 5 % Fw 190As , and 23 % Fw 190Ds .

Below is the German target list :

= = = Codenames = = =

Following the Unternehmen Bodenplatte raids , the Allies retrieved several log @-@ books from crashed German aircraft . In several of these , the entry " Auftrag Hermann 1 @. @ 1 . 1945 , Zeit : 9 @. @ 20 Uhr " was translated as " Operation Hermann to commence on 1 January 1945 , at 9 : 20am . " This led the Allies to believe the operation itself was named Hermann for Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring . Four further different codes were used for the attack :

Varus : Indicating that the operation was " a go " and that it would take place within 24 hours of the Varus order being given .

Teutonicus : Authority to brief the pilots and to arrange for the aircraft to be armed and ready at the edge of the airfield .

Hermann : Giving the exact date and time of the attack .

Dorothea : Indicating a delay in the attack .

Spätlese : Cancelling of the attack after formations are airborne .

= = = Allied intelligence = = =

Allied intelligence failed to detect the German intention . In Ultra transcripts , there are only a few indications of what was happening on the other side of the front . On 4 December 1944 , II Jagdkorps had ordered stockpiling for navigational aids , such as " golden @-@ rain " flares and smoke bombs . Allied intelligence made no written observations of this communication . They also disregarded communications to Junkers Ju 88 groups regarding the use of flares when leading formations . Intelligence concluded that these instructions were designed for a ground support mission rather than an interception operation . This was reasonable , but no indications of possible ground targets were given .

On 20 December , a 3 . Jagddivision message was intercepted confirming that the locations for emergency landing grounds during a " special undertaking " had remained unchanged . This was a clear indication that something was amiss , but Allied intelligence did not comment on it . It also ignored more messages indicating that low @-@ level attacks were being practised . Allied intelligence , by 16 December , had monitored the reshuffling of both German Army and Luftwaffe formations opposite the American @-@ held front at the Ardennes . Yet nothing major was suspected .

= = Battle = =

= = = Maldegem , Ursel and St. Denijs Westrem = = =

Jagdgeschwader 1 ( JG 1 ) was responsible for the attack on the Ursel and Maldegem airfields . Oberstleutnant Herbert Ihlefeld led the Geschwader . The formation was mixed ; Stab . , ( headquarters flight or Stabschwarm , attached to every Geschwader ) , I. and II . / JG 1 operated the Fw 190 while the III . / JG 1 flew the Bf 109 . I. / JG 1 lost four of their number to friendly anti @-@ aircraft fire . Three of the four pilots were killed .

The attacks at Maldegem and Ursel began at 08 : 30 . Both I and II . / JG 1 became involved in intense dogfights . III . / JG 1 had lost only one aircraft over the target ( and not to enemy fire ) . I. / JG lost a further Fw 190 to friendly anti @-@ aircraft fire as it made its way to Ursel . III . / JG 1 lost at least two further Fw 190s to friendly anti @-@ aircraft fire . Casualties could have been heavier , had the British anti @-@ aircraft defences of Maldegem airfield not been removed in December .

Stab. and I. / JG 1 lost 13 Fw 190s and nine pilots were missing ; five were killed and four were captured . Thus the loss rates in personnel and matériel were 39 and 56 % , respectively . III . / JG 1 lost only three Bf 109s with one pilot dead and two captured . I. / JG 1 claimed 30 British Spitfires on the ground and two shot down over Maldegem . At Maldegem , 16 aircraft were destroyed , and at Ursel only six were lost . The claims of I. / JG 1 were actually more in line with British total losses at both Maldegem and Ursel . No. 131 Wing RAF / Polish Wing lost 13 Spitfires plus two damaged beyond repair , a total of 15 lost . At Ursel , six aircraft were destroyed , including , a B @-@ 17 , two Lancasters and a Mosquito . I. and III . / JG 1 lost a total of 16 aircraft and 12 pilots ? not a good return .

II . / JG 1 attacked the airfield at St. Denis Westrem . Of the 36 II . / JG 1 Fw 190s that took off , 17 were shot down , a staggering 47 % loss rate . Among the pilots lost were several experienced fliers . In exchange , the Germans shot down two Spitfires , and seven forced @-@ landed . At St. Denis 18 Spitfires were destroyed on the ground .

Altogether JG 1 lost 25 pilots and 29 aircraft . This return for around 60 enemy aircraft ( 54 on the ground ) cannot be considered a complete success , although the damage at St. Denijs Westrem and Maldegem had been significant . Just nine of the fighters lost by JG 1 are confirmed to have been shot down in combat with Spitfires . It is possible a further three more were shot down by Spitfires , or perhaps ground fire . Two Spitfires were shot down and destroyed , with two more damaged . One pilot of each Squadron ( 308 and 317 ) was killed . The total Spitfire losses were perhaps 32 .

== = Sint @-@ Truiden == =

Schlachtgeschwader 4 and Jagdgeschwader 2 ( SG 4 and JG 2 ) were to strike at Sint @-@ Truiden airfield . JG 2 was commanded by Kurt Bühligen . I. / JG 2 's ground crews managed to make ready 35 of 46 Fw 190s , 29 of which were Fw 190D . Only 33 pilots were fit for operations . So the Gruppe reported only 33 Fw 190s ready . II . / JG 2 could field 20 of 29 Bf 109s . Stab . / JG 2 had three Fw 190s ready for the mission . It is not clear whether Bühligen took part in the mission . III . / JG 2 reported 40 Fw 190s operational , 34 of them Fw 190Ds . However , only 28 of the 43 pilots in the unit were fit for operations and the formation fielded only 28 fighters . In total , 84 aircraft were ready on 31 December , including 28 Fw 190D @-@ 9s .

SG 4 was led by Alfred Druschel . It had 152 machines on strength , of which just 60 were operational , yet the 129 pilots were fit for action . Stab . / SG 4 had three Fw 190s and two pilots . I. / SG 4 had 21 Fw 190s operational and 27 pilots ready . II . / SG reported 27 Fw 190s ready , but pilot strength is unknown . III . / SG reported 24 Fw 190s , but only 16 were available at the forward airfields . Pilot strength is unknown . Best estimations make it around 60 Fw 190s operational , of which 55 took part .

At 09 : 12 , JG 2 crossed the front line at Malmedy and was greeted by an enormous volume of Allied ground fire . The entire area was heavily defended by anti @-@ aircraft artillery , since the area had been the scene of heavy fighting , but also had been attacked by V @-@ 1 and V @-@ 2 missiles . I. / JG 2 lost at least seven fighters to ground fire alone . III . / JG 2 lost 10 fighters . A possible seven Bf 109s from II . / JG 2 were also lost to ground fire . JG 2 attacked Asch and Ophoven airfields by mistake .

JG 2 ? s mission was a disaster . I. / JG 2 lost 18 Fw 190s and six more were damaged by ground fire and enemy aircraft . This represented 73 % of their force . Of the 15 pilots missing , six would survive as POWs . II . / JG 2 lost five Bf 109s and three were damaged a loss rate of 40 % . Pilot losses were three missing , one dead and one wounded . III . / JG 2 lost 19 Fw 190s and three were damaged , a loss rate of 79 % . Nine pilots were killed , two were wounded and four were captured . JG 2 losses , according to another source , amounted to 40 % of its force . Pilot losses were 24 killed or posted missing , 10 captured and four wounded . Another source asserts that pilot losses stood at 23 killed or missing .

SG 4 ? s mission was also a disaster . During the assembly phase , they flew across JG 11 ? s flight path , and the formation was broken up . Some of the pilots joined JG 11 in the confusion . Unable to recover the formation , I and II . / SG 4 then decided to head home . The Kommodore , Druschel , had continued with five other pilots from III . / SG 4 who had lost contact with their Gruppe . They crossed the front near Hürtgenwald around 09 : 10 . As they did so , American anti @-@ aircraft batteries opened fire , claiming seven aircraft in the next 30 minutes . Only six of the 50 Fw 190s of SG 4 carried out an attack , against airfields near Aachen and the Asch aerodrome . Of these six , four did not return . Druschel himself was reported missing .

== = Volkel and Heesch == =

The target of Jagdgeschwader 6 ( JG 6 ) was Volkel . I and III . / JG 6 were to attack while II . / JG 6 was to provide cover against Allied fighters . I. / JG 6 managed to get 29 of its 34 Fw 190s ready , while 25 of II . / JG 6 ? s fighters took part . Overall , most of the 99 Fw 190s were made available for the operation . III . / JG 6 received orders to target petrol installations on the airfield only . Only 78 Fw 190s took off .

While on course , JG 6 approached the airfield of Heesch and some of its pilots assumed it to be Volkel airfield . It is unlikely that the Heesch strip , built in October 1944 , was known to the Luftwaffe . No. 126 Wing RCAF was based there and had dispatched its 411 and 442 Squadrons on recce missions early that morning so the majority of its units were airborne . Its 401 Squadron was readying for takeoff when JG 6 appeared at 09 : 15 . Most of the German pilots had failed to notice the airfield , concentrating on keeping formation at low altitude . 401 Squadron scrambled . Some of the German fighters were authorised to engage , while the main body continued to search for Volkel

. Stab . , and II . / JG 6 stumbled on another strip at Helmond , which contained no aircraft . Several German pilots believed it to be Volkel and attacked , losing several of their number to ground fire . II . / JG 6 suffered severely from Spitfire and Tempests based at Helmond . Very little damage was done at Heesch or Helmond .

In the event , all four Gruppen failed to find Volkel and its Hawker Tempests remained untouched . The only success JG 6 had was I . / JG ? s erroneous attack on Eindhoven , which claimed 33 fighters and six medium bombers . Like Volkel , Helmond and Heesch had escaped damage . In the dogfights over Helmond , JG 6 claimed six kills . In fact , only two Spitfires were shot down and one badly damaged . Only one further fighter , a Hawker Typhoon , was shot down . Stab . / JG 6 lost the Kommodore , Kogler , as a POW . Of I . / JG ? s 29 Fw 190s , seven were lost and two damaged ; of II . / JG 6 ? s 25 Fw 190s , eight were destroyed and two damaged ; III . / JG 6 lost 12 out 20 Bf 109s . In total , JG 6 lost 43 % of its strength and suffered 16 pilots killed or missing and seven captured . As well as Kogler , one other commanding officer was lost ? Gruppenkommandeure Helmut Kühle . Three Staffelkapitane were lost : Hauptmann Ewald Trost was captured , Hauptmann Norbert Katz was killed and Lothar Gerlach was posted missing presumed killed .

= = = Antwerp @-@ Deurne and Woensdrecht = = =

Deurne airfield was to be destroyed by Jagdgeschwader 77 ( JG 77 ) . Antwerp housed the largest Allied contingent of nine Squadrons . It had been incessantly attacked by V1 and V2 flying bombs and had been given a strong anti @-@ aircraft defence .

At 08 : 00 , two formations 18 Bf 109s of I and III . / JG 77 took off with their pathfinders . At the same time 23 Bf 109s of II . / JG 77 took off . Around the Bocholt area they formed up with the other two Gruppen . Heading south and still north of Antwerp , JG 77 passed Woensdrecht airfield . It was home to No. 132 Wing RAF and its five Spitfire squadrons ; No. 331 Squadron RAF , No. 332 Squadron RAF ( Norwegian ) , No. 66 Squadron RAF and No. 127 Squadron RAF , and No. 322 Squadron RAF ( Dutch ) . Some pilots from II . / JG 77 either mistakenly believed it to be Antwerp , or thought the opportunity was too good to pass up . Two German fighters were claimed shot down , and one pilot captured . However , none of the JG 77 casualties fit this description .

The main body continued to Antwerp . Some 12 ? 30 German fighters attacked the airfield from 09 : 25 to 09 : 40 . The ground defences were alert and the German formations attacked in a disorganised manner . 145 Wing RAF was missed completely and considering the large number of targets the destruction was light ; just 12 Spitfires were destroyed .

In total , 14 Allied aircraft were destroyed and nine damaged . JG 77 lost 11 Bf 109s and their pilots were lost . Six were killed and five captured according to Allied sources . However , German records show the loss of only 10 pilots . Four are listed as captured .

= = = Metz @-@ Frescaty = = =

Jagdgeschwader 53 ( JG 53 ) was tasked with the operation against the USAAF airfield at Metz @-@ Frescaty Air Base . Stab . , II . , III . , and IV . / JG 53 were available . III . / JG 53 was to destroy anti @-@ aircraft installations in the Metz area , while the other Gruppen knocked out the airfields .

The USAAF XIX Tactical Air Command had established a strong presence in northeast France and was supporting the U.S. 3rd Army . JG 53 was to knock out its airfields . Some 26 Bf 109s took off but were intercepted by 12 P @-@ 47s of the 367th Fighter Squadron , 358th Fighter Group . The P @-@ 47s claimed 13 destroyed , one probable and six damaged for no losses . On the way home at 09 : 20 , III . / JG 53 were intercepted by 366th Fighter Squadron . Altogether , III . / JG 53 lost 10 Bf 109s and one damaged to the 358th Fighter Group . Of the 25 III . / JG 53 Bf 109s that took part , 11 were shot down representing 40 % of the attacking force . The 358th Fighter Group received the Distinguished Unit citation for preventing the attack on the 362nd Fighter Groups airfield .

Although III . / JG 53 failed , the main attack was a success by comparison . Stab , . II. and IV . / JG 53 encountered no difficulties on the outward leg . The Germans caused significant damage among

the parked USAAF fighters on the field . When the attack against the Metz airfield was over , the three JG 53 Gruppen reported the loss of 20 Bf 109s and seven damaged . This represented more than 50 percent of the attacking 52 fighters . Some 13 pilots were missing ; three were killed , six remain missing as of today , and four were captured . A further three were wounded . JG 53 claimed 27 USAAF fighters on the ground and eight damaged . Added to this total is four aerial victories . In total JG 53 lost 30 Bf 109s and eight damaged in the two operations . This was a total loss of 48 % . The losses of the USAAF were 22 destroyed , 11 damaged ( all P @-@ 47ts ) . However , the negative effects of Bodenplatte on JG 53 outweighed any advantages gained .

= = = Le Culot and Ophoven = = =

Le Culot airfield ( later known as Beauvechain ) was 45 km ( 28 mi ) northeast of Charleroi and was the target of Jagdgeschwader 4 ( JG 4 ) target . The main strip ( A @-@ 89 ) was known locally as Beauvechain , and an auxiliary field known as Le Culot East ( Y @-@ 10 ) , known to the locals as Burettes , was nearby . It was known to the Luftwaffe because several of its units had operated there .

Geschwaderkommodore Major Gerhard Michalski commanded the force . Five pilots were shot down by ground fire . Another pilot got lost during the flight and ended up near Eindhoven where he was shot down and killed . Reduced in number , 8 ? 10 fighters of IV . / JG 4 continued to their target . After 10 minutes , they located a fairly large airfield and attacked , believing it to be Le Culot . It was in fact Sint @-@ Truiden .

The mistake was easy to make , Le Culot was located nearby . Sint @-@ Truiden housed the 48th Fighter Group and 404th Fighter Group . The 492nd Fighter Squadron was readying to take off at 09 : 20 . JG 4 hit the airfield at 09 : 15 . Several P @-@ 47s taxiing out were abandoned by pilots and strafed to destruction . The small @-@ scale attack by JG had achieved considerable damage . Total American losses were 10 destroyed and 31 damaged . The Germans lost eight fighters , including seven Bf 109s , and three damaged . No damage was done at Le Culot airfield .

II ( Sturm ) . / JG 4 took off for Le Culot at 08 : 08 . Getting lost , they stumbled upon Asch airfield and claimed one P @-@ 47 destroyed and two twin @-@ engine aircraft damaged , as well as two trains and trucks destroyed . The unit claimed an Auster reconnaissance aircraft shot down . The machine was probably a Stinson L @-@ 1 Vigilant of the 125th Liaison Squadron , U.S. Army . However , virtually the entire Gruppe of 17 Fw 190s was wiped out .

I. and III . / JG 4 were to strike Le Culot together . Taking off at 08 : 20 and heading northwest , they comprised a force of 35 Bf 109s ( nine from III . / JG 4 ) . Two Ju 88G @-@ 1s of II . / NJG 101 lead as pathfinders . Some of I. / JG 4 attacked No. 125 Wing RAF Spitfires at Ophoven airfield . Spitfire losses are unclear . Two P @-@ 47s and a B @-@ 17 were destroyed . I. / JG 4 reported two Bf 109s missing , one damaged and one destroyed . Just a hangar , one P @-@ 47 and several vehicles were claimed , and the anti @-@ aircraft battery was silenced . The attack on the Spitfires at Ophoven and the mentioned B @-@ 17 and two P @-@ 47s are not included in the total . Another source suggests two Spitfires destroyed and 10 damaged at Ophoven .

According to one source , JG 4 ? s losses were 25 fighters of the 55 that took part . With 17 pilots killed or missing and seven captured , JG 4 suffered a 42 % loss rate . A more recent source claims a total of 75 aircraft of JG 4 took part , with only 12 attacking ground targets . Two Ju 88 pathfinders were lost , as well as 26 fighters with six more damaged .

= = = Asch = = =

The Asch Airfield had been constructed in November 1944 and was home to the 352nd Fighter Group , 8th Air Force , and the 366th Fighter Group , Ninth Air Force . Jagdgeschwader 11 ( JG 11 ) was to destroy the airfield . I. / JG 11 had only 16 Fw 190s on strength and only six fit and operational pilots . Only six of I. / JG 1 ? s pilots took part , and just four of Stab . / JG 1 ? s pilots participated . III . / JG 11 had more aircraft than pilots , and so other Staffel made up the numbers . Just 41 Fw 190s of JG 11 took part in Bodenplatte ; four from the Stab . , six from I Gruppe and 31

of III Gruppe . The 20 fighters from II . Gruppe were Bf 109s .

The plan called for a low @-@ level strike by I and III . / JG 11 , while II . / JG 11 flew as top cover against USAAF fighters . The pilots were shown maps and photographs of the airfield , but were not told the targets ' identity until the morning of the attack . After crossing Allied lines , four fighters were lost to AAA fire . The course of JG 11 took it directly over Ophoven . Large formations of JG 11 attacked , in the mistaken belief it was Asch . The other half continued to Asch . Ophoven housed No. 125 Wing RAF , just 5 km ( 3 @-@ 1 mi ) north of Asch . About half , or some 30 Fw 190s and Bf 109s attacked the airfield .

Asch was notable for a chance event . The 390th Squadron of the 366th Fighter Group had launched two fighter sweeps that morning , which played a crucial role in the failure of JG 11 ' s attack . The leader of the 487th squadron , 352nd Fighter Group , John Charles Meyer , anticipated German activity and had a flight of 12 P @-@ 51s about to take off on a combat patrol when the attack began . They took off under fire .

Several pilots made " Ace " status that day . No P @-@ 51s were lost ; two were damaged and one was damaged on the ground . The 336th Fighter Group lost one P @-@ 47 . The 366th was credited with eight kills , and AAA claimed seven more . However , overclaiming is likely . Luftwaffe records indicate JG 11 lost 28 fighters . Four German pilots ( two wounded ) made it back to German @-@ held territory , while four were captured and the remaining twenty were killed . Some 24 of the Bf 109s and Fw 190s lost were lost over enemy lines . German ace Günther Specht was among those German pilots killed .

Little is known about the claims of JG 11 . According to one German document , 13 fighters , two twin @-@ engine and one four @-@ engine aircraft were claimed destroyed . Five fighters were claimed damaged on " Glabbeek airfield " ? in reality it was Ophoven . Ten aerial victories and one probable were also claimed . But U.S. Fighter Group losses indicate these claims are excessive .

The Americans claimed 35 kills . Only 14 can be judged with a degree of certainty to have been shot down by USAAF fighters , and possibly two more . Four are confirmed to have been shot down by AAA fire . Total JG 11 losses were 28 . The air battle over Asch had lasted 45 minutes .

= = = Brussels @-@ Evere / Grimbergen = = =

Jagdgeschwader 26 ( JG 26 ) and the III . Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 54 ( JG 54 ) were to strike at Brussels @-@ Evere . At the end of December , II . / JG 26 had 39 D @-@ 9s and III . / JG 26 had 45 Bf 109s . Records of available aircraft indicate 110 aircraft of JG 26 flew that day ; all but 29 were Fw 190s , the remainder were Bf 109s . 17 Fw 190s from III . / JG 54 took part with JG 26 .

Unknown to the Luftwaffe the Grimbergen Airfield was almost completely abandoned . The Evere airfield was located to the south . It was one of the most densely populated airfields in Belgium and had plenty of targets . The main force consisted of 60 Spitfire XVIIs of No. 127 Wing RAF . Also present were B @-@ 17s and B @-@ 24s of the Eighth Air Force . Overall , well over 100 aircraft were on the field .

At 08 : 13 , the first formations took off . In total , 64 Fw 190D @-@ 9s participated . Before the target was reached , some 14 D @-@ 9s were forced to turn back due to AAA damage or mechanical difficulties . Three Fw 190s were lost to German AAA fire . At 09 : 10 , when the front was reached , Allied heavy AAA units began to engage the formation and another five were shot down . Most of the fire was from British Naval AAA defences defending the Scheldt Estuary . As the formation crossed the Dutch and Belgian border , I . / JG 26 and III . / JG 54 were intercepted by Spitfires . Five of the Fw 190s were shot down . I . / JG 26 destroyed or damaged the few aircraft at the airfield . AAA defences claimed five kills and I . / JG 26 reported two Fw 190s lost to Spitfires . Several others were lost over the airfield . Other losses occurred against friendly fire again on the return flight .

The raid was a disaster . Just six machines were destroyed at Grimbergen for the loss of 21 Fw 190s and two damaged . Another eight sustained minor damage . Some 17 pilots were missing , eight of whom would survive as prisoners .

Only II. and III . / JG 26 hit Evere . Between 44 and 52 Fw 190s from these units took off . II. and III



. / JG 26 knocked out the flak towers and destroyed anything combustible : hangars , trucks , fuel dumps and aircraft . 127 Wing RCAF lost one Spitfire in the air and 11 on the ground ; 11 vehicles were damaged and one was destroyed . A total of 60 ? 61 Allied aircraft were destroyed at Evere . A large number of transports were located there and attracted the attention of German pilots , which left many more Spitfires undamaged . Given the number of Spitfires on the field , the Canadian wing suffered " low " losses . The Canadian Wing Commander ? Johnnie Johnson ? blamed the poor marksmanship of German pilots for failing to achieve further success .

Allied losses are given at Evere as 32 fighters , 22 twin @-@ engine aircraft and 13 four @-@ engine aircraft destroyed , plus another nine single , six twin and one four @-@ engine aircraft damaged . In total , II . / JG 26 losses included 13 Fw 190s destroyed and two damaged . Nine of its pilots were missing ; five were killed and four captured . III . / JG 26 lost six Bf 109s and four pilots . Only one of them was captured , the remainder were killed . The amount of damage the Germans inflicted made up for the losses ; the Evere strike was a success .

= = = Brussels @-@ Melsbroek = = =

Jagdgeschwader 27 and IV . / Jagdgeschwader 54 ( JG 27 and JG 54 ) targeted Melsbroek airfield . On 31 December , JG 27 could only muster the following operational pilots and aircraft : 22 ( 22 ) from I . , 19 ( 13 ) from II . , 13 ( 15 ) from III . , and 16 ( 17 ) from IV . Gruppe . Geschwaderkommandore Wolfgang Späte had rebuilt IV . / JG 54 . It had only 21 pilots and 15 of its 23 Fw 190s were operational . Altogether 28 Bf 109s of JG 27 and 15 Fw 190s of JG 54 took off . Seven fighters were lost to enemy aircraft and friendly AAA fire before they reached the target .

The Germans hit Melsbroek hard . According to Emil Clade ( leading III . / JG 27 ) , the AAA positions were not manned , and aircraft were bunched together or in lines , which made perfect targets . The attack caused considerable damage among the units based there and was a great success . The Recce Wings had lost two entire squadrons worth of machines . No. 69 Squadron RAF lost 11 Vickers Wellingtons and two damaged . No. 140 Squadron RAF lost four Mosquitoes , the losses being made good the same day . At least five Spitfires from No. 16 Squadron RAF were destroyed . No. 271 Squadron RAF lost at least seven Harrow transports " out of action " . A further 15 other aircraft were destroyed . 139 Wing reported five B @-@ 25s destroyed and five damaged . Some 15 to 20 USAAF bombers were also destroyed . Another source states that 13 Wellingtons were destroyed , as were five Mosquitoes , four Auster and five Avro Ansons from the Tactical Air Forces 2nd Communications Squadron . Three Spitfires were also lost and two damaged . At least one RAF Transport Command Douglas Dakota was destroyed .

The pilots of JG 27 and 54 claimed 85 kills and 40 damaged . German reconnaissance was able to confirm 49 kills . JG 27 suffered unacceptable losses ; 17 Bf 109s , 11 pilots killed , one wounded and three captured . IV . / JG 54 lost two killed and one captured . Three Fw 190s were lost and one damaged .

= = = Gilze @-@ Rijen and Eindhoven = = =

Jagdgeschwader 3 ( JG 3 ) and Kampfgeschwader 51 ( KG 51 ) were tasked with eliminating the Allied units at the Eindhoven base and Gilze @-@ Rijen airfield . The field contained three Spitfire Squadrons and eight Typhoon units of the RAF and RCAF . Some 22 Bf 109s of I . / JG 3 took off , along with four from Stab . / JG 3 , 15 from III . / JG 3 and 19 Fw 190s from IV . / JG 3 . KG 51 contributed some 21 of their 30 Messerschmitt Me 262 jets to the action . Some histories mistakenly include Kampfgeschwader 76 ( KG 76 ) on the order of battle , but KG 76 did not take part in the mission .

Each staffel was expected to make at least three firing passes . I . / JG 3 took off and joined the lead Gruppe , IV Sturm . / JG 3 , with III . / JG 3 following in the rear . The Bf 109s and Fw 190s of the Geschwader reached the area at about 09 : 20 . Geschwaderkommodore Heinrich Bär led the attack . Some pilots made four passes , destroying AAA emplacements , fuel storage stations and vehicles . Nearly 300 aircraft were on the field , along with huge stores of equipment and fuel . The

attack caused fires all over the airfield .

JG 3 claimed 53 single @-@ engine and 11 twin @-@ engine aircraft destroyed . Five fighters and one four @-@ engine bomber were also claimed damaged . Four Typhoons , three Spitfires , one Tempest and another unidentified aircraft were claimed shot down . All in all , JG 3 managed to destroy 43 aircraft according to British records , and damage a further 60 , some seriously . The Geschwader believed it had destroyed 116 . JG 3 did not come away unscathed . I. / JG 3 lost nine of its aircraft and pilots , a 50 % loss rate . Damage to the returning Gruppe aircraft meant the entire unit was unserviceable . RAF AAA were credited with shooting down five . JG 3 lost , altogether , 15 of the 60 fighters sent , a 25 % loss rate . Some 15 pilots were missing ; nine were killed and five captured , and another pilot was posting as missing in action and his fate remains unknown . Another source says 16 pilots ; ten killed or missing and six captured .

The damage done to Eindhoven was significant and can be considered a victory for JG 3 . It was also assisted by elements of JG 6 which had misidentified Eindhoven as one their targets . The greatest losses were amongst the Recce Wing and the Canadian 124 Wing RCAF , which suffered 24 aircraft destroyed or damaged . The visiting 39 Wing RAF lost 30 aircraft destroyed or damaged . 143 Wing RCAF lost 29 damaged or destroyed . It is likely that I. / JG 3 was responsible for about 2 / 3 of the damage . Another source gives 47 aircraft destroyed and 43 damaged .

= = = Possible V @-@ 2 missile launch attempts = = =

At least one V @-@ 2 missile on a mobile Meillerwagen launch trailer was observed being elevated to launch position by a USAAF 4th Fighter Group pilot over the northern German attack route near the town of Lochem on 1 January 1945 . Possibly , from the potential sighting of the American fighter by the missile 's launch crew , the rocket was quickly lowered from a near launch @-@ ready 85 ° elevation to 30 ° .

= = Results of raid = =

The results of the raid are difficult to judge given the confusion over loss records . It is likely more aircraft were destroyed than listed . The Americans failed to keep a proper record of their losses and it appears the U.S. 8th Air Force losses were not included in loss totals . When these estimates and figures are added to the losses listed in the table below , it is likely that the correct figures are 232 destroyed ( 143 single @-@ engine , 74 twin @-@ engine and 15 four @-@ engine ) and 156 damaged ( 139 single @-@ engine , 12 twin @-@ engine and five four @-@ engine ) . Researching individual squadron records confirms the destruction of even more USAAF aircraft . This suggests at least a further 16 B @-@ 17s , 14 B @-@ 24s , eight P @-@ 51s , and at least two P @-@ 47s were destroyed on top of that total . A total of 290 destroyed and 180 damaged seems a more realistic summation than the conservative figures given by the USAAF , RAF , and RCAF . Including the 15 Allied aircraft shot down and 10 damaged in aerial combat , 305 destroyed and 190 damaged is the sum total of the attack .

Number can 't hide the fact that it was a disaster for Germans . Both sides had many backup planes so the main limiting factor for air forces was the number of trained pilots . The Allies lost , most of the time , empty fighters on the ground while the Germans lost crewed fighters . As a consequence pilot losses were completely different . Allies : 12 pilots KIA in planes and 12 KIA or wounded on the ground Germans : 238 pilots KIA or POW . This total does not include wounded .

The results of the attacks are listed : little to no damage light damage medium damage heavy damage

= = Aftermath and casualties = =

The operation achieved tactical surprise , but it was undone by poor execution and low pilot skill ( owing to poor training ) . The operation failed to achieve its aim and that failure was very costly to German air power . Some of the units of the RAF , RCAF and USAAF on the receiving end of

Bodenplatte had been badly hit , others not so badly , but most had sustained some losses . The Germans , however , launched Bodenplatte under a set of conditions , such as poor planning and low pilot skill , which clearly indicated any advantage gained would be outweighed by possible losses . Bodenplatte weakened the Jagdwaffe past any hope of rebuilding . General der Jagdflieger Adolf Galland said , " We sacrificed our last substance " .

The Luftwaffe lost 143 pilots killed and missing , while 70 were captured and 21 wounded including three Geschwaderkommodore , five Gruppenkommandeure , and 14 Staffelp kapitäne ? the largest single @-@ day loss for the Luftwaffe . Many of the formation leaders lost were experienced veterans , which placed even more pressure on those who were left . Thus , Bodenplatte was a very short @-@ term success but a long @-@ term failure . Allied losses were soon made up , while lost Luftwaffe aircraft and especially pilots were irreplaceable . German historian Gerhard Weinberg wrote that it left the Germans " weaker than ever and incapable of mounting any major attack again " .

In the remaining 17 weeks of war the Jagdwaffe struggled to recover sufficiently from the 1 January operation to remain an effective force . In strategic terms , German historian Werner Girbig wrote , " Operation Bodenplatte amounted to a total defeat " . The exhausted German units were no longer able to mount an effective defence of German air space during Operation Plunder and Operation Varsity , the Allied crossing of the Rhine River , or the overall Western Allied invasion of Germany . Subsequent operations were insignificant as a whole , and could not challenge Allied air supremacy . The only service in the Luftwaffe capable of profitable sorties was the night fighter force . In the last six weeks of the war the Luftwaffe was to lose another 200 pilots killed . Girbig wrote , " it was not until the autumn of 1944 that the German fighter forces set foot down the sacrificial path ; and it was the controversial Operation Bodenplatte that dealt this force a mortal blow and sealed its fate . What happened from then on was no more than a dying flicker " .