

A GAF FIGHTER SOUNDS OFF

Hot Me-109 Pilot Tells All About US Planes and How He Fought them

GERMAN fighter tactics against US Strategic Air Forces in Europe bombers and fighters are described in some detail by a GAF fighter pilot captured recently in France.

This character, a very hot pilot and a very voluble talker, enjoys the dubious distinction of having come to grief while bouncing a Piper Cub. After a year of operational flying against big game and claims of 15 Allied planes to his credit (eight four-engine bombers included) he was shot down by Allied ack-ack while trying to line up his sights on the Cub.

A 1st lieutenant, 21 years old, he was assigned to 8/JG 27, and during his operational tour was engaged in the home defense of the Reich up until the time his unit was transferred to the French battle area. His plane was the Me-109G, which he considers the better of the two German single-engine fighters.

In the course of his combat experience, he had mixed it up with B-17s and B-24s, P-38s, P-47s, P-51s and Spitfires, and his description of his own tactics against our planes and his evaluation of their respective qualities and shortcomings are therefore of considerable value.

Attacks against Bombers: Attacks from the rear on B-17 and B-24 formations were directed against the planes flying in No. 5, 6 and 7 positions of the high and low squadrons. This type of attack was made by diving underneath and firing upward, so that the firepower of other bombers in the formation could not reach him effectively. After firing, he would break away and dive.

He says the tail gunner is feared most by German pilots because of the length of time he has to hold the attacking fighter in his sights and to shoot at it. But he claims that on occasions tail gunners have ceased firing and apparently sought protection behind the armor plate in the tail instead of taking it. He also regards the ball-turret gunner as very dangerous when he makes an attack from the rear and low.

In his opinion evasive action taken by heavy bombers under attack from the rear is almost useless.

In making a frontal attack, he starts at least three miles in front of the bombers, and the lead ships of each squadron are the targets. The top-turret gunner is regarded with considerable respect when approaching from this direction, but the chin turret and the navigator's flexible guns cause no great worry, because it appears to the Germans that the bombardier and navigator have considerable difficulty in lining up their sights on attacking planes during the few seconds available.

The reason frontal attacks are not made more frequently, he says, is that the high rate of closure does not give enough time for a good target and evasive action taken by bombers is very effective when they are under attack from the nose. In attacking from this angle, he does not turn after hitting the first formation, but flies from one combat wing to another, diving under each group after attacking and then flying for about a minute to approach the next combat wing in line. He tries to aim for the bomber pilot as his primary target, with the No. 3 engine as his secondary, since the hydraulic system is located in this engine.

If they have enough distance between themselves and the bomber formations, the GAF fighter formations will turn by flights and attack, he says, but after the distance has become too limited the German planes will turn and go in one after another, for a formation of fighters is too unwieldy to turn sharply.

Generally, this pilot did not attack a crippled or straggling B-17 on its way back to England alone because he did not want to make himself vulnerable to attack from escorting fighters. He also reasoned that crippled planes would probably not arrive back at base because of mechanical difficulties, or because they offer easy targets to flak.

As a footnote to his description of tactics against bombers, he added that after a fighter's fuel and ammunition run low, the pilot will proceed to the nearest base, refuel and reload ammunition and take off again for a second attack. This procedure, however, is never followed unless two or more aircraft are able to take off together from the same field, and to continue to operate together.

Fortresses vs. Liberators: Discussing the relative merits of these two bombers, the pilot stated that in general B-17s were much more feared than B-24s, although he could give no reason for this opinion. He thought the formations flown by the Fortresses were much better and more compact, giving better defensive protection, while Liberator formations appeared to be looser and more strung out, providing better targets for attack. He added that the B-24 seemed more vulnerable under attack than the B-17, and said that they appeared to burst into flames after receiving apparently superficial hits in the wings.

He volunteered his opinion on how to improve present types of formation, stating that he would change the current lead high and low group formation to a formation where the lead group is high, another group flies 1,000 feet lower and to the left (now the

normal position group flies 1,000 feet lower), in his opinion this gives a better view of the target and the firepower of the rear. He does not think this would expose the present formation.

Another comment was that it is easier to bail out of a formation if observed paratroopers have never seen any of the planes, this might be a good reason to delay opening an altitude of 2,000 feet. He has been why he has

Allied vs. German of a bomber formation sufficient number, although he himself, he believes German fighters distract them from the main formation.

From combat made when captured in Germany, he fighters and the techniques of the

He felt that at altitudes, but and not easily. Me-109 experienced fighters at very bolt was superior however, that if the Me-109 action consists of

HEAVY losses to a fighter group of US fighters are

This pilot is equipped with staffeln of 11/JG France immediately to Vannes, its put down at Le on the ground business; six of the three of the five transporting group. The pilots who Le Mans until the rest of the way is

FF

normal position with the low group) and the other group flies 1,000 feet lower and to the right. It is his opinion that such a formation would provide a better view of the lead group and allow more effective firepower when the formation was attacked from the rear. He does not consider that such a formation would expose the leader to attack more than he is in present formations.

Another conclusion he had drawn was that it is easier to bail out of a B-24 than a B-17, since he had observed parachutes leaving the former and had never seen any leaving the latter. When told that this might be due to the fact that men were briefed to delay opening their parachutes until they reached an altitude of 2-3,000 feet, he thought this must have been why he had not seen crews bailing out of B-17s.

Allied vs. German Fighters: He considered escort of a bomber formation to be very effective when a sufficient number of fighters were provided, and although he had never attacked escorting fighters himself, he believed that the practice for some German fighters was to engage Allied escort to distract them from their duties.

From combat experience and from observations made when captured Allied aircraft were displayed in Germany, he gave his opinions on several Allied fighters and discussed in general terms combat techniques of the Me-109 against these aircraft.

He felt that the P-47 was to be respected at high altitudes, but below 16,000 feet he found it slow and not easily maneuverable. He stated that the Me-109 experienced difficulty attacking escorting fighters at very high altitudes, and that the Thunderbolt was superior to the Me-109 in a dive. He added, however, that if the proper evasive action were taken, the Me-109 could easily escape the attack. This action consists of turning into the diving Thunderbolt

and immediately climbing steeply to regain advantageous position. This is based on the opinion that the Thunderbolt has a poorer rate of roll, and because of its weight, cannot pull out of a dive quickly.

His opinion of the P-38 was more general; he considered it one of the most difficult planes to fly, but felt that in the hands of an experienced twin-engine pilot, it would be the most effective of all fighters. He also stated that the Lightning presented a larger target, and was therefore more vulnerable to attack than single-engine fighter planes, and while he respects its heavy armament, he considers flying qualities more important.

Above all other Allied aircraft, this pilot feared the Spitfire, and stated that he would never engage one in a turning fight. He believed, however, that the Me-109 could dive away from the Spitfire due to the former's strong construction.

The P-51 is, in his opinion, the best of the American fighters; although his experience with this aircraft was limited, he appears to have made this observation from a comparison of its fighting qualities.

Me-109 vs. FW-190: He also had a word about the FW-190, which he considers inferior in flying characteristics to the Me-109, although he granted that the FW-190 was easier to fly in landing and takeoff than his own type of aircraft, which he considered more robustly constructed.

Motivated by his loyalty to the Me-109 or by a genuine dislike of the FW-190, he did not appear to have much respect for this fighter. When asked about the possibility of an inline engine being installed in the 190, he replied that the only good thing about it was the radial engine. "If that were taken away, the FW-190 would have no right to exist," he declared.



Another German Pilot Discusses Our Strafing

HEAVY losses sustained on the ground by a German fighter group as the result of strafing attacks by US fighters are reported by a captured fighter pilot.

This pilot belonged to 5/JG 53, which was equipped with Me-109Gs, and which, with other staffeln of 11/JG 53, was moved from Germany to France immediately after D-Day. While on its way to Vannes, its first French base, the 5th Staffel put down at Le Mans to refuel. P-47s found them on the ground there and proceeded to give them the business; six Me-109s were destroyed, along with three of the five Ju-52s in which the staffel was transporting ground personnel and equipment. The pilots who lost their planes had to wait over at Le Mans until the 6th Staffel arrived, and flew the rest of the way in this unit's Ju-52s.

From Vannes all of Gruppe II moved later to Tierce, near Angers, and early in August was transferred to the vicinity of Voves. Both at Vannes and Angers they were attacked by our planes, the prisoner reports, and at Angers a total of 35 aircraft were lost in one day—eight in a morning attack and 27 in the afternoon.

When the Gruppe left Ottingen, Bavaria, for France, each staffel was equipped with 20 to 25 Me-109G-6s and pilots. As the result of constant strafing attacks by P-47s and P-38s, the 5th Staffel alone was down to only two or three planes and eight to ten pilots at the time the prisoner was captured, 14 August. He says that the other two staffeln were in about the same position, and to make matters worse, no aircraft replacements or spare parts had

IRIS Public Record

Key Information

Main: UNITED STATES STRATEGIC AIR FORCES IN EUROPE

Document Type:

Roll Number: 519.607A-43

IS Number: 00217308

Accessions Notes:

Accession Nbr: 4555-25

Title:

Beginning Date: 1944/09/01

End Date: 1944/09/30

Publication Date:

Classification: UNCLAS

Media Roll #: 6751 First Frame: 1742 Last Frame: 1774 Linear Feet: 0

Old MFlm Roll # A5723

Audio Rec:

JMPAGE 0

File Extensions:

Abstract DOCUMENT SUMMARIZES ALLIED MILITARY ACTIVITIES, PROVIDES DATA ON VARIOUS FRONTS AND MISSIONS, AND PROVIDES INTERESTING ARTICLES ON RELATED TOPICS.

Descriptive Notes: SOME PAGES DIFFICULT TO READ. MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED.

Title: AIR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY NO. 43 FOR WEEK ENDING 3 SEP 44

Media

Media

Media

Media

Media

Administrative Markings

No Administrative Markings Listed

Security Review Information: