

G A F TRAINING UNITS

Prisoners Describe Operational and Transition Training in Me-109s, Me-163s, and Other Types

INTERROGATION of prisoners continues to be a fruitful source of information on numerous phases of Luftwaffe activities, plans and organizations. Two recent reports by ADI(K), Air Ministry and US Air Interrogation Unit, have provided a good deal of fairly reliable intelligence on training procedures and curricula during recent months. In one case, the prisoner furnishing the details was a flyer who deserted by flying across the lines, while in another the informant was a former line mechanic captured as a Volksgrenadier only one month after his transfer to the ground forces.

Bomber-to-Fighter Transition : The deserting pilot was a member of Ergänzungskampfgruppe (J), which he described as a fighter conversion Gruppe with four Staffeln, based at Ansbach and devoted to the retraining of bomber pilots in fighter aircraft. The prisoner had been assigned to Staffel 3. It is interesting to note that the whole unit is reported to have been told in a lecture, about 1 March, that the Staffel was to become Gruppe III of Ergänzungskampfgeschwader (J). This would seem an indication that an OTU of Geschwader proportions was being formed around that time.

As an explanation for the "(J)" following the title of the unit, the prisoner said that it stood for "jet," signifying that if and when the GAF bomber force was revived, this particular Geschwader was to be equipped with jet-propelled bombers and would function as a bomber unit.

In the meantime, the unit was training for fighter transition, but the prisoner did not know whether the pilots thus converted were to become operational within the Geschwader, or whether the Geschwader was to function as a replacement training unit for fighter pilots who were to be reassigned elsewhere on completion of training.

Pilots at Ansbach were told that for a while, anyway, they would be flying Me-109s as high cover for FW-190 attacks on Flying Fortress formations.

Fliegerkorps IX : The prisoner said that Fliegerkorps IX, of which Erg.KGr(J) was a component, was established at the beginning of January, 1945, with headquarters in Czechoslovakia. Composed of remnants of KG 6, KG 30, KG 54 and several other bomb Geschwader, the pilots were sent immediately to fighter conversion courses at Ergänzungskampfgruppe (J) while the remainder of the flying personnel and the ground crews were given technical maintenance jobs in the new Fliegerkorps. It was expected that most of these men would ultimately be assigned to ground forces units in the line.

Some of the most experienced pilots from Fliegerkorps IX were trained by fighter pilots in conversion courses at Prosnitz and Pilsen. After this, the trainees were themselves assigned as fighter conversion instructors in Training Gruppe (J) at Budweis, Pilsen, and Ansbach.

Training : All the pilots of III/Erg.KG(J), which was the prisoner's unit, had at least Blind Flying Certificate No. 2, and some of them had long experience as instructors in instrument flying schools. Nearly 20 of the approximate total of 50 pilots in the Gruppe had previously belonged to KG 30, but only one or two of these pilots had any operational experience. They had been transferred to III/Erg.KG(J) with varying degrees of operational training, some having completed their course with KG 30, and others having not yet started.

The new Gruppe III was said by the prisoner to have 38 Me-109s, six Ar-96s, six Bücher 81s and two FW-44s available as of 19 March, 1945. However, since the parent Staffel 3 was set up at Ansbach, there was a daily average of two or three training crashes. Arado aircraft replacements were said to be received from Staffeln 3 and 4 at Pilsen, and Büchers came from the A-School at Dresden.

Training began about the middle of February with circuits and touch landings, along with some short cross-country flights and elementary aerobatics. Five flying hours in the "Stieglitz" (FW-44), Bücher, and Ar-96 was all that was required for this type of training.

Training then shifted to the Me-109G-12 in which six or seven starts were practiced with an instructor before passing on to the Me-109G-6 and G-14, in which an increased number of circuits and touch landings were undertaken. Half-hour flights, including mild aerobatics, and four formation flights in Rotten (pairs) of about 40 minutes' duration followed.

The prisoner missed the final stage of training, which was to consist of flights in four-plane Schwarm formation combined with practice firing at ground targets, because 19 March, when this phase was to begin, was the day he took off and didn't go home again.

Tactics Training : Although conversion training included no lecture on tactics alone, the pilots had some instruction in procedure for attacking Fortress formations. FW-190s were to attack the Fortresses from above and behind in two arrow-shaped formations, each consisting of 30 to 50 aircraft, one formation following close behind the other. Me-109s

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were to provide high and low cover for the 190s against escorting Allied fighters. The German aircraft were not intended to penetrate the bomber stream unless absence of Allied fighters or favorable cloud conditions made it safe to do so.

Throughout their schooling at Ansbach, pilots were told that in combat they should make sharp right-hand turns and at the same time gain altitude, if it looked as though Allied aircraft were getting on their tails. Bomber pilots who were used to sitting on the left in a twin-engine plane had a tendency toward making left-hand turns, since their vision to the right was partially obscured by the co-pilot. It was said that Allied fighter pilots knew of this tendency and would try to take advantage of it.

Trainees were told that their morale as bomber pilots was higher than that of fighter pilots, and that it was up to them to re-instill the proper military spirit into the GAF fighter forces. They were warned not to affect the eccentricities of dress and manner common to fighter pilots, but to stand on their own merit with customary bomber esprit de corps.

Possible Jet Training : Around the middle of February, 1945, seven or eight pilots of III/Erg.KG(J) were sent to Neuburg Airfield. One of these pilots had returned to Ansbach a few days before the prisoner deserted, and told his former classmates that at Neuburg they were trained to FW-190s in preparation for eventual conversion to the Me-262. The current rumor was that these pilots were to form the nucleus of a light-bomber unit equipped with jets, probably the Me-262 and the Ar-234. The prisoner believed that the principal center for Me-262 conversion was at Unterschlaersbach.

Me-163 Training : The second report from ADI(K), Air Ministry and US Air Interrogation Unit, confirms and enlarges upon present knowledge of Me-163 training.

The Volksgrenadier prisoner had formerly served with Erg.JG 2 as a mechanic from November, 1944, to February, 1945.

A prisoner previously questioned by ADI(K) had mentioned what was probably this training unit in a report summarized in SUMMARY No. 65 (page 11). Thought to have been attached to JG 2, at least a part of Erg.JG 2 was reputed to have been stationed at Udetfeld last Fall.

Although the prisoner confirmed the existence of I, II and III/Erg.JG 2, he knew nothing of their activities or whereabouts. On his own unit, however, Gruppe IV, he was quite well-informed.

IV Erg. JG 2 : Composed of three Staffeln (13, 14 and 15), the function of IV/Erg.JG 2 was to train pilots in the Me-163B to provide replacements in operational jet units.

Staffel 13 was stationed at Shendek (Udetfeld), the airbase mentioned in SUMMARY No. 70 (page 13)

as the station for an Me-163 Ergänzungsstaffel assigned to JG 400. But because of the threat of a Russian drive, it was intended that 13/Erg.JG 2 should evacuate to Sagan. However, rumors had been circulating to the effect that due to the unexpected speed of the Russian advance, the Staffel's complement of some 25 Me-163Bs and nearly all personnel had been captured. Only one officer and two men were said to have escaped in an Me-110.

About 19 January, Staffeln 14 and 15 moved from their base at Sprottau to Esperstedt. It took about eight days to move both squadrons, and the prisoner estimated that 14 Me-163Bs were left behind. In the meantime, a fighter unit with a designation unknown to the informant replaced the training Staffel at Sprottau.

When the prisoner left Esperstedt for the last time on 2 February, the new base for 14 and 15/Erg.JG 2 was water-logged. The Staffeln continued to unload their aircraft and equipment, although it was thought that training would have to be postponed until the end of the month because of the condition of the field.

The 14th and 15th Staffeln of Erg.JG 2 had about 20 Me-163s apiece, although the 14th had, in addition, four "Me-263s" (a reported new version of the Me-163 of which more is written below). There were 15 or 20 instructors in each Staffel for about 30 students. Aircraft from Gruppe IV were camouflaged light blue on the underside of the wings with fuselages painted gray-green. Only distinctive marking on these planes was the vari-colored Gruppe emblem showing the likeness of Baron Münchhausen seated on a globe of the world.

Training Curriculum : Although not himself associated with the training of Me-163B pilots, the prisoner had seen the training syllabus, and knew something of the operational jet course.

The trainees, whose ages varied between 19 and 23, had had no flying experience other than a course in glider school. The instruction given by IV/Erg.JG 2 lasted from six to eight weeks, and might not have been that long had the Gruppe not been forced to migrate, with consequent interruption of training.

This prisoner's information on training procedure tends to confirm a previous and less detailed report on the Ergänzungsstaffel of I/JG 400 (SUMMARY No. 70, page 13).

First, students made five takeoffs and subsequent gliding flights in the Me-163A without use of propellant. An Me-110 acted as tow plane, taking the Me-163A up to about 4,900 feet where it was released. The trainee was left on his own to make a successful landing.

Next followed four or five short powered flights in the Me-163A, each lasting about five minutes.

Then came one half-endurance flight in the Me-163A, followed by one full-endurance flight in

the same aircraft. Training in the Me-163A was followed by an exact repetition of the course, using the Me-163B, which preceded 12 to 18 hours' general flying practice in the Me-163B, performed without supervision. There was no special test that the informant knew of to be passed before the trainee left Gruppe IV to join an operational unit.

According to the prisoner, losses were high during training, and in the four months that he was with IV/Erg.JG 2, as many as 20 aircraft had crash landed, killing the pilot in every case.

Me-163B Bugs: The ground crewman made several interesting statements regarding the shortcomings of the Me-163B. He said that the slightest bump on landing was often enough to cause the remaining fuel in the tanks to explode. As a result of this lethal tendency on the part of the aircraft, an order was issued that pilots were to land only after fuel had been exhausted.

The retractable skid of the Me-163B was said to have caused some trouble, in addition to other disadvantages inherent in the plane: short flight endurance and landing difficulties due to absence of elevators.

Duration of flight was being increased up to 23 minutes at the time the informant left Esperstedt. Because of the danger of fire and explosion in the rocket-jet aircraft, the prisoner said that each plane was sprayed with compressed air to remove every trace of fuel on exposed surfaces after tanking up.

Possible Me-263: The prisoner believed that an improved model of the Me-163B with this designation was being assembled at Esperstedt before he left the training unit.

Crates containing parts for four of the supposed Me-263s had arrived at the base on trucks from Brandis, with the words "Glass: with Care" and "Chocolate" printed on the outside. They were unloaded in a 14th Staffel hangar and were still in the assembling stage at the beginning of February.

The prisoner stated that the new aircraft had a roomier cockpit than the Me-163, and improved visibility. The skid, which was a source of trouble in the 163, was said to be of the fixed type, faired into the fuselage. It was the prisoner's understanding that the aircraft mounted two 30-mm. cannon in the wing roots. The flight of the new jet was said to have been lengthened about 10 minutes, and landing speed was thought to be slower than that of the Me-163B.

Italians in 163s: An interesting sidelight on personnel of the 14th and 15th training Staffeln was that during January, 1945, twenty Italian Fascist officers who had taken part in the Spanish Civil War were said to have joined the Me-163 unit. Since the prisoner was captured before the course was completed, he could not say what was in store for them, but he had heard that they would be assigned to German fighter units along with other GAF jet-fighter trainees.



Leutnant Raborg's Busy Day

A CAPTURED document described by G-2, SHAEF, makes a US Army "blitz" course look like the long road to a Ph.D. degree. It was apparently prepared by a GAF unit for the signatures of all enlisted personnel, and started with the statement:

"I hereby declare that on 5 February, 1945, I was thoroughly instructed by Leutnant Raborg in the following subjects: . . ."

The list that followed included about everything from "security" to "behavior towards females in public conveyances," and, if correct as the curriculum for the day stated, stamps the Leutnant as a military genius and the all-time world's champion indoctrinator. Working on a 24-hour schedule, it would seem that he was to teach a new subject every 20 minutes with no breaks for smokes.

In all, no less than 67 topics were listed, including military law, desertion and AWOL, conduct during air attack, duties of mail orderlies, handling explosives, use of gas mask, traffic discipline, use of military channels, blackouts, disposal of captured equipment, behavior towards foreign workers, and numerous other subjects touching on about every phase of military life.

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