

JAGDGESCHWADER 3.

A Unit History compiled & written by
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One of the important factors for the forthcoming battle in France, planned by the German General Staff in the Spring of 1918, was the formation of two new Jagdgeschwaders...Jagd. 2 & 3...

Jagd.3.was established by Imperial Order on 1st Feb., 1918, Oberleutnant Bruno Loerzer being promoted from Jasta 26 as the new unit's first Commanding Officer. The fate of this remarkable man, a fine pilot and excellent leader, is closely twined with that of his closest friend, Hermann Goering. During his entire life, it is doubtful if he realised that his ambitious friend was only using him for his own nefarious ends.

Bruno Loerzer was born on 22 Jan., 1891 in Berlin. Reaching military service age, he joined the Badische Infantry Regt. Nr.112 in Mulhausen/Elsas as an Officer Trainee, passing through the Potsdam Military School and being promoted to Lieutenant in his old Regiment in the opening months of 1913.

During this period, he made his first flight as passenger to the famous long-distance pilot Victor Stoeffler. (Stoeffler achieved fame for his flight of 15 Oct., 1913, when he flew a 2078 kilometre course in 24 hours, at that time an outstanding feat.) Loerzer was so enthusiastic over this flight that he applied for a flying post with the Prussian Army. Soon after, he was ordered to the Flying School of the Aviatik-works at Habsheim where he trained under another famous pilot, Karl Mohns.

During his flight training, W.W.1 broke out and the School was transferred to Freiburg, where Goering was currently in hospital recovering from a severe bout of rheumatism. He visited Loerzer frequently, and eventually persuaded Loerzer to engage him as observer. They flew together for Fliegerabteilung 25, and in spite of all protests from commanders and surgeons, remained together as a crew. By the summer of 1915, Loerzer was weary of 2-seaters, and attended the fighter-school of Fokker in Schwerin-Gorries, from whence he graduated and returned to the Western Front a fighter pilot.

At this time there were no fighter squadrons, the pilots of the single-seaters flying individual patrols in defence of their own reconnaissance machines, often switching to offensive activity as the occasion warranted.

In March 1916, he scored his first victory, and at the end of 1916 was promoted Oberleutnant. Meanwhile, the German Flying Corps had undergone complete re-organisation with the establishment of the office of "Commanding General of the Flying Forces" on 8th October, 1916. During the winter of 1916/17, a further 28 Jastas were formed, the command of Jasta 26 going to Loerzer. Jasta 26 was formed on 18th Jan., 1917 at Mulhausen/Elsas, and Goering once more joined his friend as executive officer of the new unit.

The Jasta at this time was composed as follows; Lt. Fritz Loerzer, Bruno's brother, and a student of Theology, nicknamed by his fellow pilots the "Flying Pastor"; Vfw. Erich Buder; Lt. Franz Brandt; Vfw. Fritz Glassen; Lt. Xavier Dannhuber; Acting-Officer Otto Esswein; Vfw. Otto Fruhner; and finally Lt. Walter Blume, who was later awarded the Pour le Merite.

In April 1917, the Jasta was transferred to the St. Quentin area, operating till the end of May from the airfields of Guise and Bohain. At this time Goering was promoted leader of Jasta 27. Blume

meanwhile had scored a victory over a Bristol Fighter on 10 May, scoring again 18 days later over a single-seater. The Jasta was transferred on 4 June, 1917 to an airfield in Flandern.

The Battle of Flandern, planned by Haig, was possibly the worst battle in the history of the entire war, as the point seemed not to win any particular objective, but to kill or maim as many of the enemy as possible. Between 4th and 6th June, it became apparent from the increasing intensity of the artillery barrage that the British were planning a massive attack, and Jasta 26 was joined by Jasta 27. The two neighbouring units immediately began a scoring race. Already the Albatros's of Goering's Jasta 27 were decorated with the characteristic black and white fuselage and ring markings, which later earned them their nick-name to the British as the "Black-&-White Squadron".



Bruno Loerzer and his strikingly painted Albatros DVa. At the time he was Staffelführer of Jasta 26.

Lt. Blume during this period scored a further 4 victories and was awarded the Iron Cross. On 19th Nov., he was badly wounded in a fight over the Houthoult Forest, and left Jasta 26. On his recovery he took over command of Jasta 9.

Loerzer meanwhile, had racked up 20 victories, and on 3rd Feb., 1918, was promoted to Kapitan, and given command of Jagd.3. The new Jagdgeschwader consisted of Jasta 26, now commanded by his brother Fritz; Jasta 27 under Goering, Jasta Boelcke under Lt. Carl Bolle, and Jasta 36 under Lt. Heinrich Bongartz.

Jasta 36 had been drawn up in January, 1917, under the command of Lt. Dossenbach, who led it till the end of April 1917. He then took over command of Jasta 10, which later became part of the Richthofen Circus. He was followed by Lt. Walter von Bulow, who transferred to Jasta Boelcke on 13 Dec., 1917. He fell over St. Julien, north of Ypren, on 6th Jan., 1918. It may be remarked that, after 1935, Harry von Bulow, who had flown during this part of the Great War with his brother Walter, became the first leader of the new Jagdgeschwader Richthofen Nr.2, of the Luftwaffe. He is still alive and resides in Western Germany.

Bongartz had scored his first victory on 6 Apr., 1917 while serving with Dossenbach, and by November had achieved 20 acknowledged victories. On his return to the unit after being wounded, he succeeded von Bulow as its leader. On 2 Dec., he attained victory no.27. During the Kaiser's visit to

the Western Front, the Imperial Leader personally awarded Bongartz the Pour le Merite (23 Dec., 1917).

Loerzer had proved himself an excellent leader, not, because of the unit's high victory rate, but rather because of its minimal rate of losses. Most of his men survived the War and are alive today.

Although the German successes had been good between March 21 and 27, it soon became apparent that the German aim of separating the English and French armies was unattainable, & 15 days after the assault between Arras and La Fere, the German advance ground to a halt.

On April 9, the German 4th and 6th Armies opened the Battle of Armentieres. Target of this battle was the conquest of Mount Kemmel. The Kommandeur der Flieger of the 4th Army, Kapt. Wilberg, gave the 14 Jastas of his command area to Loerzer. This tactical move of affiliating all units under one command, according to General Hoepfner, gave the German airmen complete mastery of the air on the entire 15-kilometre front of the battlefield.



Oblt. Hermann Goering, Staffelfuhrer of Jasta 27, briefing his pilots before a sortie.

On April 25, Kemmel was taken by the German troops. The Battle of Armentieres was over. On April 21, after the fall of von Richthofen, Kapt. Reinhard had taken over command of JG.1. During the following Battle of Chemin des Dames, JG.1 and JG.3 fought side by side.

JG.1 was by now equipped with the new Fokker triplanes and the better Fokker DVII's. JG.3 had only triplanes. On April 27, Lt. Bongartz was seriously wounded in the left eye, but was able to bring his triplane to a crash landing on his own airfield. This was his 6th wounding. Unfit for further service, he later became Leader of the Aircraft Test Centre at Aldershof.

Vfw. Erich Buder was also wounded about this time, and was also forced to leave Jasta 26. On his recovery he was transferred to Kamfeinsitzerstaffel 3b (KEST 3b). Buder's total score was 12. At

this time the Jasta also lost Acting Officer Otto Esswein, and ace of 12 victories.

During the Battle of Chemin des Dames, Loerzer's brother Fritz became a casualty and failed to return. Later it was found out that Fritz Loerzer had force landed in the British lines and had been taken prisoner. Jasta 26 was thereupon taken over by Lt. F. Brandt.

Successor to the wounded Lt. Bongartz of Jasta 36 had been Lt. Hilmar von Bulow. Leading ace of Jasta 36 was Lt. Theodor Quandt with 35 victories; other high scorers being Lt. Ernst Hess with 17, and Lt. Hans Bohning with 16.

On 3 July, 1918, Kapt. Reinhardt of JG.1 crashed and was killed, and by using his connection with the German Crown Prince, Goering had himself elected Reinhardt's successor. He left JG.3 on July 5, 1918, and was succeeded by Lt. Hermann Frommherz, and ace of Jasta Boelke.

On July 18, the French Army began its big assault out of the forests of Villers Cotterets. It was a black day for the German Army. From this moment, the Germans began to break down.

On Sept., 2, 1918, memorial day of the famous Battle of the Sedan of 1870, came the "Big Day" for JG.3 and its commander. Here is Loerzer's own report of the occasion.

"On Sedan Day, 1918, we made 3 big sorties; in the forenoon between 9 and 10, again between 11.0 and 1.0 pm, and then between 5 and 7 pm. The weather was poor, with clouds down to 500 metres. Rain prevented a good view. The Geschwader flew in closed formation of 30 aeroplanes to the battlefield. Whilst at an altitude of about 500 or 600 metres, we sighted an enemy formation of about 20 machines in loose array. We took care to await the opportunity of attacking them with the advantage of surprise on our side. Seconds later, I gave the signal to attack, and we immediately immersed in a wild, whirling, dogfight. More than 50 aircraft were twisting, diving and turning madly in the sky. Squally wind made the task difficult and heightened the constant danger of a mid-air collision. In a fight of this type, discipline, co-operation, and cool self-control are the deciding factors. Our better discipline and co-operation on this occasion netted us 12 enemy machines in this first fight of the day. During the afternoon flight however, we found the element of surprise had switched to the enemy, who suddenly dived down on us in a well-closed formation. It was now imperative that we remain together. We flew as close as we dared, and set up a shield of machine-gun fire against them.

Their formation wavered, and was overtaken by a moment of indecision. This was it. We turned and pushed into their ranks, & in the ensuing fight, the enemy lost a further 14 machines shot down.

On our third flight of the day we found ourselves alone in the heavens. So we used our freshly replenished guns against available ground targets. We dived onto advancing reserves, on marching columns, and many other formations. From an altitude of 20 metres we on enemy tanks, bringing about considerable confusion in the rear area of the enemy, and giving relief to our own troops."

The appreciation of the German High Command for the efforts of Loerzer's and his men's day of continuous fighting came the following day in a telegram from von Hindenburg: Addressed to Loerzer, it read;

"May I express my full appreciation to JG.3 for the outstanding performances of Sept., 2, as shown by the loss to the enemy of 26 aircraft without any loss to ourselves. The behaviour of the commander, Oberleutnant B. Loerzer, who, finding no aerial activity over the battle area, joined the battle against enemy tanks and ground forces, remains an example to all Geschwader Commanders."

Loerzer was now appointed Kapitan by Imperial decree. At the end of the war, his personal score was 44. That he and every one of his Jasta leaders survived the holocaust is possibly the best proof of

his qualities as a military leader.

After the Armistice, he elected to join many of his comrades and flew against the Russians. With the "Iron Division", he fought in the Baltic area, later retiring and joining the Sablatnig Air Company. The life did not appeal to him however, and he resigned altogether from flying and went into partnership with an old comrade in Hamburg. The comrade was a Jewish ex-pilot, who in spite of his 44 years, had been a good flyer. Together the two men ran a small but profitable Cigar business, and Loerzer would have probably seen his last days out in this work had it not been for the reappearance of Hermann Goering.

Goering undertook to entice Loerzer into the Nazi Party, and in spite of his Jewish partner (Jacob Wolff) and his Jewish girlfriend, the ex-Jagdgeschwader leader was accepted as a Party member. His career during the Second World War is well known, and so will not be further dealt with here. He died near Hamburg only recently.

Of the other JG.3 aces, the fates of the following are of topical interest.

WALTER BLUME...survived the war, studied aircraft engineering, became designer at the Albatros works, later chief designer of the Arado Factory. Under his guidance, the first fighter aircraft for the newly formed Luftwaffe (Arado 64) and the world's first jet bomber (Arado 234) were constructed. After 1945 he founded his own design office, which he runs today.

CARL BOLLE...became a businessman. He died after W.W.2.

HERMANN FROMMHERZ...became a Generalmajor of the Luftwaffe, after spending some years as a flight instructor in China. He lives (retired) in south west Germany.

HEINRICH BONGARTZ...worked as an aviation writer and businessman. His book "Luftmacht Deutschland" was a best-seller in 1939.

HARRY VON BULOW...lives as a Colonel (retired) in western Germany.

ORGANIZATION OF JAGDGESCHWADER 3.

Commander	Oberleutnant Bruno Loerzer.
Off.z.b.V. (Adjutant)	" Dahlmann.
Jasta Boelke	Leader Leut. Carl Bolle Off.z.b.V. Leut. Frhr. Von Grudenberg.
Jasta 26	Leader Leut. Franz Brandt. Off.z.b.V. Leut. Hupfer.
Jasta 27	Leader Leut. Hermann Frommherz. Off.z.b.V. Leut. Riehm.
Jasta 36	Leader Leut. Hilmar von Bulow. Off.z.b.V. Leut. Aristides Muller.

Note: The official designation for Jasta 2, after the death of Oswald Boelcke, was "Jasta Boelcke". In all Battle Orders it was abbreviated Jasta B, and never as Jasta 2.

ACES OF JG.3

		Score.	
Haupt. Bruno Loerzer	Commander JG.3	44	*
Leut. Heinrich Bongartz	C.O. Jasta 36	33	*
Rittm. Carl Bolle	C.O. Jasta Boelcke	31	*
Leut. Hermann Frommherz	C.O. Jasta 27	29	
Leut. Walter von Bulow	C.O. Jastas 36, Boelcke	28	*
Leut. Walter Blume	Jasta 26	28	*
Vfw. Otto Fruhner	Jasta 26	27	GMC
Oblt. Hermann Goering	Jasta 27	22	*
Leut. Ernst Hess	Jasta 36	17	
Leut. Rudolf Klimke	Jasta 27	16	
Leut. Hans Bohning	Jasta 36	16	
Leut. Theodor Quandt	Jasta 36	15	
Leut. Otto Loeffler	Jasta Boelcke	15	
Leut. Ernst Bormann	Jasta Boelcke	14	
Vfw. Erich Buder	Jasta 26	12	GMC
Leut. Franz Brandt	Jasta 26	12	
Offstv. Otto Esswein	Jasta 26	12	GMC
Leut. Xavier dannhuber	Jasta 26	11	
Leut. Alfred Lindenberger	Jasta Boelcke	11	
Leut. Fritz Loerzer	C.O. Jasta 26	11	
Vfw. Fritz Classen	Jasta 26	10	
Leut. Wilhelm Neuenhofen	Jasta 36	10	
Leut. Hans Hoyer	Jasta 36	8	
Vfw. Willi Kampe	Jasta 27	8	
Leut. Gerhard Bassange	Jasta Boelcke	7	
Leut. Hans von Haebler	Jasta 36	7	
Leut. Richard Plange	Jasta 36	7	
Leut. Fritz Reimer	Jasta 26	7	
Leut. Helmuth Lange	Jasta 27	7	
Vfw. Albert Lux	Jasta 27	7	
Leut. Harry von Bulow	Jasta 36	6	
Oblt. Hermann Dahlmann	JG.3	6	
Leut. Ludwig Seur	Jasta Boelcke	6	
Leut. Hermann Vallendor	Jasta Boelcke	5	

Note: * indicates that this ace was awarded the Pour le Merite.

GMC indicates that the ace was awarded the Golden Military Cross (nicknamed the Pour le Merite of the Corporals.)



Three aces of Jagdgeschwader 3.

From left to right are:

Leutnant Walter Blume

Rittmeister Carl Bolle

Leutnant Heinrich Bongartz