



APALI company will shortly publish a book, written by a veteran fighter pilot Jaakko Hyvönen, telling about the history of night fighters in the first and second World Wars. The emphasis is on the British and German operations. As an addition there is also a short review of the Finnish night fighter course in Germany in 1944. This is now presented at the Fighter Tactics Academy web site.

## **FINNISH NIGHT FIGHTER COURSE IN GERMANY IN 1944**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The Finnish Air Force was founded as an independent service of arms on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 1918. The first aircraft was donated by a Swedish count, Erik von Rosen. On the wings of the airplane was painted his personal lucky insignia, the blue swastikas. This was the origin of the first official Finnish Air Force marking.

The Winter War of 1939 / 1940 was the baptism of fire for the Finnish Air Force. The Soviet

Union and Nazi Germany had formed a pact in 1939 which resulted in the German attack on Poland, in September of that year. Subsequent to that assault, was the Soviet Union's attack on Finland, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, of the same year.

The small nation of Finland had not taken good care of the materiel for her Defense Forces. For example, the number of fighter aircraft was alarmingly small. However, their training and their combat readiness was high. The Finnish Air Force had, as the first in the world, begun to train in the loose, broad section and finger four formations as early as 1935. Furthermore, training in aerial gunnery had been heavily emphasized.

The Soviet order of battle enjoyed a tenfold superiority over the Finnish Defense Forces. However, the Defense Force was able to stop the Soviet offensive while inflicting heavy losses on their enemy. The ineffectiveness of the Soviet offensive became an embarrassment to the Soviet superpower and they considered suing for a temporary peace agreement. On the other hand, Germany being hostile, official Sweden strictly neutral and the support plans of France and Great Britain proving to be inadequate, Finland had not resources enough to continue the fight alone. The temporary peace treaty was thus signed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1940. Finland yielded certain areas in Karelia but achieved the most important goal by saving her independence. The main Finnish fighter during that time, the Fokker DXXI, achieved a kill ratio of 16 :1.

Finland's strategic position remained difficult. Stalin told his commanders before the Winter War, that the Finns must be moved out of Finland. Foreign Minister Molotov, on a trip to Germany in November of 1940, demanded that the "problem of Finland", be resolved for good. Finland's

supporters, France and Great Britain, were themselves involved in the war, so it became quite hard for Finland to find ways to improve its defense and commercial activities.

Finland had begun the acquisition of fighters during the Winter War and these began, now, to arrive in greater numbers. The Finnish Air Force (FAF) was finally reinforced with fighter aircraft from the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, some of its own domestic designs and even some captured Soviet airplanes.

The strategic situation in the northern theater changed gradually during 1940 and early 1941. The Soviet-German pact began to fade, as Germany started preparations for its eastern offensive. Principally as a consequence of the surprising result of the Winter War, Germany's hostile attitude towards Finland changed to one of sudden interest in cooperation. In an ironic twist, Finland found that the only nearby country with whom they could trade and enjoy an economic relationship to improve the defense status, was the Soviet's former ally, Germany.

When Germany opened their eastern offensive against the Soviet Union in June of 1941, Finland had already given Germany permission to stage their units through Lapland. After Soviet bombers had attacked various targets in Finland on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1941, the Finns officially began military cooperation with Germany and so began the Continuation War.

From a political point of view, Finland didn't want to be in an allied relationship with Nazi Germany. However, from a military standpoint cooperation was the only solution possible to repulse the Soviet threat. But, Finland drew the line despite numerous requests by Germany to advance their forces for an attack on Leningrad and beyond a demarcation line drawn at Eastern Carelia.

In the beginning of the Continuation War, Soviet forces in the theater enjoyed only a two to one superiority over the Finns. This permitted the Finnish forces to advance rather quickly to establish a defensive line where a trench warfare network was ultimately located. When the tide of war changed and the German forces began to retreat westward, Soviet pressure on the Finnish defense increased. In the spring of 1944, the Soviets made the decision to try to take Finland before the race to Berlin.

They amassed a tenfold superiority in troops and aircraft on the Karelian Isthmus and began their strategic offensive on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, 1944. The Soviet advance achieved an initial success, forcing the withdrawal of the Finnish forces along the isthmus. However, in July of 1944, the Finns were able to stabilize the front on the Vuoksi River and further attempts by the Soviet forces to advance past this line, were turned back. The miracle of the Winter War had been repeated.

The peace agreement was made on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, 1944, and according to that Finland retired to the 1940 border. Nevertheless, the results of both the Winter War and the Continuation War were considered major victories for Finland. From the opening shots of the Winter War to the end of the Continuation War, the Finnish objective was to save Finland and to guarantee her independence. This was done and also one interesting point was made: of all the countries in the European theater participating the Second World War, there were only two, which never were occupied: Finland and Great Britain.

There are three basic factors that made the Finnish fighter force successful:

- v The philosophy of loose and broad section and finger four formations which the FAF adopted already in 1935.
- v The emphasis on individual accuracy in air-to-air gunnery which was trained for systematically. The Finnish fighter pilots didn't just shoot at the target airplane, they shot at certain parts of the target airplane.
- v The principle to always attack regardless of numbers which gives the advantage of initiative.

A supporting factor was the individual freedom of action inside the formation. The principle of "first see, first shoot" applied to every pilot from the squadron commander to the last wingman. This increased the effectiveness of the entire formation cutting delays and making every pilot an efficient shooter in a revolutionary way.

The main Finnish fighter in the beginning of the Continuation War, Brewster 239, achieved a kill ratio of 32 : 1, and later Messerschmitt 109 G achieved a kill ratio of 25 : 1.

## **NEED OF NIGHT FIGHTERS DISCOVERED**

The city of Helsinki, being located on the coast, was a difficult place to protect, especially during night air raids. Before the advent of radar, the enemy, approaching from the sea, had a good possibility of surprising the anti aircraft artillery. The "Triple A" operated on the seacoast, and didn't have depth for an effective defense.

Surveillance radars would have made it possible to detect approaching bombers in time, and radar equipped night fighters would have been able to attack them while they were still over the sea, and then continue the attacks during the bombers' return flights.

However, the Finnish Air Force didn't have night fighters, and the first surveillance radars and anti aircraft artillery tracking radars weren't available until April of 1943.

The idea of night fighter operations had been under consideration for some time, because an increase in Soviet night air raids, had been expected.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, 1943, the Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force, Lieutenant General Lundquist, gave the Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Wing an order to begin training night fighter pilots. The plan was to use the Brewster day fighters for night fighter operations. The Brewster was easy to fly and had long endurance, so, it was better suited than the other fighters for the night fighter mission.

The training was started in autumn but it didn't lead to the establishment of a night fighter system.

The Chief of the Air Force Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Pajari and the Commander of 26. Fighter Squadron, Major Carlson, visited Germany in the spring of 1943, to familiarize themselves with the German night fighter system and its special arrangements.

On 4<sup>th</sup> of June, 1943, the Air Force Commander sent a letter to Finland's Supreme Commander, Marshal Mannerheim, requesting a decision to be made on the establishment of a night fighter force, and the approval of a list of fighters and radars to be ordered from Germany.

Soviet bombers flew night air raids on Helsinki, on the 7th, 17th and 27th of February, 1944. There had been some initial negotiations about a temporary peace between Finland and the Soviet Union, but the Soviet's terms had been totally unreasonable, and the Finns rejected them. Soviet reaction to this rejection came by those air raids.

On the 12th of February, five days after the first Soviet night air raid, a strengthened night fighter flight 1./ JG 302 from Germany, commanded by Hauptmann Lewens, landed at Malmi air base, with a mission to protect Helsinki.

The German pilots flew Messerschmitt 109 G-6 fighters, and used the Wilde Sau tactics which demanded either bright moonlight or the support of searchlights.

The unit flew interception sorties against the next two Soviet air raids and achieved some night victories. But, the main burden for the defense remained with the anti aircraft artillery which used effective barrage tactics, enforced by special phosphorus artillery rounds. Fortunately, the majority of the Soviet's bombs fell outside of the city. Later, Finnish bomber squadrons secretly joined the Soviet

bomber formations flying over the Gulf of Finland and then bombed the illuminated Soviet air bases while their bombers were landing.

Anyway, the Soviet air raids against Helsinki caused the final go ahead for the establishment of night fighters.

## **DECISION OF ESTABLISHMENT OF NIGHT FIGHTER SQUADRON**

When the paper work was done and the negotiations with the Germans successful, the final decision for the establishment of a Finnish night fighter squadron was made. The first pilots would be trained in Germany.

It was estimated that the squadron would be operational by the autumn of the same year, before the year's next dark season. The plan was that the pilots trained there, would fly the newly purchased night fighters home.

## **PILOT SELECTION**

The pilot group was collected in a hurry. Every squadron commander was told to use his judgment in selecting pilots who were willing and capable, and send the information to the Air Staff. Also, those pilots should be given a psycho-physiological examination.

There was no special demands placed on the selectee, but, of course, at least a satisfactory proficiency in the German language was recommended since it was the training language that would be used. Anyway, no proof of proficiency in German was demanded. So as luck would have it, one of the chosen pilots couldn't speak a word of German, but he managed to do well, with help from his fellow pilots.

No one was ordered to go to the training program; all were volunteers.

Every candidate had good eye-sight which was regularly examined in the psycho-physiological department of the Tilkka military hospital, in Helsinki.

The normal test at that time, covered the sharpness of vision, stereo eye sight, straightness of eyes (no tendency to cross), and color blindness. Now, every candidate was given an additional exam using a new Nyktometer, specially bought from Germany. It was used to test hemeralopia. The candidate's eyes were blinded by a powerful light and the time to recover was measured. If the time was too long, the pilots way to Germany was cut. Some of the candidates were cancelled by the Nyktometer.

About 50 pilots were tested, and then returned to their squadrons for a week or two, to await the results.

The Air Staff's selection of pilots was evenly distributed among the various squadrons.

## **SELECTED PILOTS**

The following twenty pilots were selected:

Captains:

KALIMA, Martti Johannes

RUUSKANEN, Kaarlo Juhani

Lieutenants:

EHANTI, Per Erik

HELLE, Juha

HYVÄRINEN, Esko

LAAKSO, Lauri Rafael

LEMSTRÖM, Jarl Enock

LOUHIJA, Leo

NYSTEN, Mauri

SAARVE, Erkki

1st Lieutenants:

HELPPI, Onni Aulis

LILJA, Risto Aksel

MATTSSON, Kaarlo Erik

MATTSSON, Lauri Eelis

SARANTOLA, Olli Antero

TARKKANEN, Olavi Richard

TERVO, Matti Johannes

Senior Sergeant:

HAKULINEN, Yrjö Ilmari

Sergeants:

BÄCKMAN, Mauno Fredrik

RINGBOM, Bengt Raoul

The selected pilots received their orders to report to the Air Staff in Helsinki, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, at 0900 hours. Before that everyone got a short leave.

## TRIP TO GERMANY

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, Major Haaki addressed the group and told them that the Commander of the Air Force had nominated Captain Kalima as their leader. They would depart on two transport airplanes, the next day.

The first group of ten, led by Captain Kalima, took off for Germany on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, at 0600 hours, by Finnish Air Force Douglas DC-2. The flight route was via Tallinn and Riga to Königsberg. Bad weather caused them to fly at low level (150 - 300 feet / 50 - 100 m) from Helsinki to Riga. Then the weather began to improve and by the time they landed in Königsberg, at 0950 hours, the weather was fine and sunny.

The checking of passports and travel permissions, "ausweises", was done quickly, and in Königsberg, the local komendant gave them their German papers and tickets for the train to Berlin. Travel by train

was obviously a safety measure, because German air space was full of combat action and they wanted to avoid unnecessary risks for the Finnish transport aircraft.

The second group, led by Captain Ruuskanen, departed Malmi air base at 1400 hours which gave the first group time to look around Königsberg before they met them at the airfield.

## **BY TRAIN TO BERLIN**

At 2000 hours that evening they started their trip to Berlin in a train that was so full, there were no possibilities to sit down. Next morning, on 14 June at 0700 hours, the pilots arrived at the Anhalterbahnhof in Berlin, wondering how to contact Major Ervi, a Messerschmitt pilot assigned the duty of military attache. The telephone number they had been given, didn't work and there was no answer at his home phone.

The address for the military attache's office led them to a pile of ruins (Berlin at that time was already very much destroyed by the war, just three months earlier they had experienced the last of sixteen massive air strikes that had utilized 9,000 heavy British bombers).

However, in front of the neighboring house, there were a couple of cars with CD plates, so, something like an embassy had to be nearby.

Just then, a window opened and a female voice asked in plain Finnish: "What are the pilot gentlemen looking for?"

The next night was spent in Berlin and all slept in peace without air raid alarms.

## **TO ALTENBURG**

On the 15th of June at 0732 hours, the train left for Altenburg, 25 miles (40 km) south of Leipzig. They arrived in Altenburg at 1030 and switched to bus for the short 5 mile (8 km) trip to Leinawald air base east of Altenburg. Jagdgeschwader 110 and the instrument flying school, Blindflugschule, for single-engine pilots was located in Leinawald Fliegerhorst.

The Commander of Leinawald Fliegerhorst was Hauptmann Falderbaum. Before the war, then Oberfeldwebel Falderbaum, won the European championship in aerobatics flying a Bücker Jungmeister acrobatic biplane. (Falderbaum lost his life after the war in a flight accident. The ultra light experimental he was test flying broke apart at an altitude that was too low for his parachute to open).

The Geschwader operated from three air bases around Altenburg. Falderbaum's I. Gruppe used Leinawald, II. Gruppe was in Pomssen and III. Gruppe at Gethein. The first two gruppes were equipped with Messerschmitt Me 109 and Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighters, and the third gruppe was a training unit operating out of a temporary base, using light primary and advanced trainers.

Pomssen and Gethein air bases were 19 - 30 miles (30 - 50 km) from Leinawald.

The first day, the Finnish pilots were familiarized with local personnel and places. The course housed the "Finnengruppe" in groups of two or three students to an apartment that included a bedroom and a living room. The food was good and just like in Finland, they received special "pilot food" consisting of biscuits, butter, marmalade and chocolate.

## **THEORETICAL PROGRAM**

The ground school portion of the program, containing about a hundred lessons with tests, started on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, and continued daily until the middle of July. In the beginning of each phase, the instructors asked how much the students already knew about the subject.

The most important subjects were:

- Navigation (36 hours): the theoretical basis for navigation, navigation planning using the wind triangle and calculus, calculations for instrument approach and landing, and using radio navigation,
- N.V.W. (19 hours): the ground organization and radio traffic for night fighters, the air control systems, the air surveillance map system, the control system for night flights and Dunkel Nachtjagd, and the special radio equipment use by the allied forces,
- Funken (14 hours): receiving morse code, at least 30 letters or numbers per minute. In addition, 3 hours of receiving flashing light code, in groups of 2 - 3 letters or in short words,
- Technik (7 hours): the most important technical information about airplanes, equipment and instruments, and
- Wetterkunde (6 hours): a short review of meteorology, especially the weather conditions in Germany.

Other subjects were:

- Praktische Einweisung Technik: cockpit familiarization,
- Waffenlehre: familiarization of fighter weapons and armament,
- Schiesslehre: air gunnery by educational films,
- Flugzeug Erkennungsdienst: identification of airplane types,
- Gruppenlehre: air base and air traffic information,
- Schwarmführer: division leader's information about the characteristics of various aircraft types.

## **TRAINERS**

Along with ground school theory, came the practical flying program. First there were training flights in the Gotha Go 145 and then the Arado Ar 96 B airplanes, followed by instrument flying.

In addition to the flying, an intensive 60 sorties' program in German Blindflug- und Übungsgerät (reminding one of the familiar Link Trainer), was accomplished.

The Gotha Go 145 was an open cockpit bi-plane with a fixed undercarriage; very much like the Finnish "Tuisku" (Blizzard) used in the FAF Air Academy.

The Arado Ar 96 B had an air cooled Argus AS 410 engine, adjustable-pitch propeller, landing flaps, and retractable landing gear. It was an all metal monoplane where the student sat in front of the instructor, under a single canopy. It had about the same performance as the Finnish fighter trainer "Pyry" (Whirlwind) but with more equipment.

## **AIR BASE ARRANGEMENT**

Because the training took place on an active night fighter base, every student had to know, in detail, the regulations and arrangements which had to be followed (in all German night fighter air bases).

The illumination of the air-base was as follows:

- the obstacles outside of the base were marked by red lights,
- the borders of the base were marked by groups of red lamps, arranged with their tip pointing to the base,

- the landing direction was shown by accumulator lamps placed in a line at 50 m intervals,
- the arrangement of lamps in the landing direction was: three red lamps, followed by white lamps for the entire length of the landing area, then at the end 4 to 5 more red lamps. At a safe distance in from the border, a line of red lamps was located at the end of, and perpendicular (crosswise) to the main line of landing lights. On the left side of the first white lamp of the line, and about 20 m away, was another white lamp showing that the landings should be made on the right side of the line. If that lamp was located on the right side, the landings then had to be made on the left side of the line. The earliest point of touch down was to be made abeam the first white lamp and the latest, abeam the fourth white lamp. All taxiing was done on the opposite side of the line than the take offs and landings. The last 4 - 5 red lamps marked the end of the runway, and it was not permitted to taxi over the line of red lights that crossed the end.
- the take off controller's position was located left of the first white lamp, and circled by red lights,
- located on the border of the airbase, on the left side of the light line, was a searchlight,
- the place for refueling, all obstacles, parked aircraft and aprons were marked by three red lamps,
- outside of the airbase, on the approach line, was a searchlight transmitting the light code (changed from time to time) of the airbase,
- most of the airbases had a horizontal line of 10 to 15 lamps, located 1 to 10 km outside of the base, on both ends of the main runway (depending on terrain), pointing to the base. The objective was to create an artificial horizon to make the landings and take offs easier.

The border lights of the airbase were on from the take off of the first plane to the landing of the last one. They were switched off, only if an enemy airplane came directly toward the base.

The other lights were switched on only after one of their own airplanes dropped a confirmed flare or made a proper request by radio.

When enemy bombers approached, all of the airbase's airplanes were ordered to land by radio contact or signalling with green flares. At the same time, all of the searchlights in the area pointed their cones vertically for 30 seconds, and then started to rotate them around in a 45 degree angle. Everybody had to obey the signals immediately so that their aircraft would not disturb the tracking of the enemy bombers and their own night fighters.

The ground organization for the airbase consisted of following personnel and units:

- a permanent and specially trained air traffic control officer who was responsible for the entire airbase organization,
- a meteorological officer and weather personnel,
- base air controllers,
- communication personnel,
- maintenance personnel,
- fuel, armament and supply personnel,
- a radio station,
- a direction finder station,
- a meteorological station,



- a fire brigade.

## **INSTRUMENT AND NIGHT FLYING TRAINING**

All of the Finnish students had received instrument training, and training in flying at night and in clouds, which had been conducted at home, but especially the younger pilots in the fighter squadrons had not flown many instrument sorties after their basic and advanced flying courses, so this type of training was quite welcome.

The Germans considered the complete skill of instrument flying, as the most important virtue of a night fighter pilot. The instructors stated that the night fighter pilot had to learn instrument flying so well, that he was able to “fly by instruments without instruments” and concentrate all of his attention on the search for the enemy.

The German program was effective and its objective was to make the student rely completely on his instruments and use only them, in all situations, to control his plane.

Especially in bad weather and in the heat of combat, even the most experienced pilot could begin to doubt his instruments, and become confused.

The instructors, all having night air combat experience, had a positive and objective attitude and were quick to recognize the rapid advances made by the talented Finnish pilots.

New things, like the latest radio navigation methods and familiarization with the night terrain, were learned during many night navigation flights.

The flight program in Altenburg consisted of about 38 flight hours per student, divided between the Arado Ar 96 (27 to 28 hours) and the Gotha G 145 (6 to 7 hours). In addition, every student flew instrument approach sorties (3 to 4 hours) in a twin engined Siebel Si 204 plane.

## **VISITS BY ALLIED FORCES**

In that phase of the war, allied air operations extended to every part of Germany. This included Leinawald air base, and even though it was located over 310 miles (500 km) from the coast, it got its share of the visits.

In the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> of June, class was interrupted because of an air raid alarm. It was a so called carpet bomb alarm, “bombenteppichalarm”, which was given when a big enemy formation was approaching the base. Everyone had to leave the base by foot (to a distance of 2 - 3 km away), or by car (5 - 7 km away). However, the bomber formation, which was being attacked by fighters and fired upon by anti aircraft artillery, flew over the base without dropping its bombs.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, the night training flights were interrupted for a couple of hours. The reason was that part of a formation of 50 Mosquitos coming from Leipzig, returned via Altenburg.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the allied bomber formations again flew over Altenburg.

Two Mustang escort fighters attacked a landing Do 217 and shot it down, they also fired at a parked He 111 which started to burn. After damaging a parked Me 410, the Mustangs were in-turn, attacked by four Me 109 fighters which were on a low level interception sortie.

The spectators on the ground saw an interesting air combat raging over the base at 150 to 1,500 feet (50 to 500 m). During the air battle, both of the Mustangs were shot down, but the Germans lost one of their fighters too.

On 18 July, a British offensive counterair night fighter suddenly attacked the base. The lights of the base were still on, regardless of the alarm, because two Gothas of the German night fighter pilot course were still airborne with their navigation lights on.

The, obviously very professional, British night fighter pilot saw them, and shot both down; one started to burn and crashed in a forested area, while the wounded pilot of the other aircraft was able to make an emergency landing at the airbase.

## **TRANSFER TO LUDWIGSLUST**

After instrument flying training in Altenburg, their course moved more north to Ludwigslust air base, about 60 miles (100 km) south-east of Hamburg, where they were to get night fighter training in an actual combat plane.

They left Altenburg on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, by train, and after traveling via Leipzig, Wittenberg and Stendal, the main group was in Ludwigslust at 1000 hours next morning. Captains Kalima and Ruuskanen made a detour through Berlin to give a status report to Major Ervi, and arrived the next day.

At the Fliegerhorst of Ludwigslust there was a training squadron, ergänzungsgruppe, and an operational night fighter unit.

The latter's Me 110, Me 109 and Fw 190 fighters could be seen during daylight hours, on the opposite side of the base. Often, during the night, the fighters took off for interception sorties, and sometimes, fighters from other units would land at the base.

So, the students had an opportunity to discuss air combat with German night fighter pilots, and others too, even Generalleutnant Adolf Galland.

The Commander of the Fliegerhorst was Major, soon to be Oberstleutnant Lorenz, who when meeting a Finnish pilot, always remembered to ask if everything was all right and were there any wishes.

The accommodations were arranged in guest rooms and all daily details were handled by Germans. This was very helpful because their daily schedule was tight and long.

## **TRAINING IN LUDWIGSLUST**

The training in Ludwigslust was more flying oriented than it was at Altenburg, and it started immediately.

For familiarization of the area, everybody flew a local flight in an Arado, which covered an area between Schwerin about 19 miles (30 km) north of Ludwigslust, and to the Elbe river about the same distance south. So, each pilot had an opportunity to store in his memory, the most important terrain characteristics to be used while flying the faster aircraft.

When all the students had made a couple of landings in a four seater Messerschmitt Me 108 Taifun, and an hours instrument check flight in an Arado, they were ready to start type training in the Me 109.

For this, a two seater version, the Me 109 G-12 was available. The student, who sat in front, had a normal Me 109 cockpit, but the instructor behind him, sat in a narrow cockpit equipped with only the most important instruments. The original canopy was extended back over the instructors head. This arrangement gave the student very much a feeling of solo flight.

By using the two seater, the Germans tried to decrease the disproportionate number of accidents caused by the exceptionally strong torque generated by the Me 109's propeller at take off power.

Obviously, everywhere the Me 109 was used a couple of two seaters, if available, paid for themselves in a big way.

About an hour's flight with ten landings was enough time in the two seater, and then the student was ready to move to the single seat, Me 109 G-6. At first, there were three flight hours in daylight which included about thirty landings, a high altitude flight at 33,300 feet (10,000 m) and two gunnery sorties at ground targets.

After that, they started the night flying training, which consisted of about ten flight hours with emphasis on the landings. In addition, during daylight, instrument flights were flown in the clouds. Although it was night fighter training, all in all only 30 % of the Ludwigslust program was flown at night.

The night flight portion included navigation sorties, instrument sorties flown in cloudy conditions, a high altitude flight at 28,300 feet (8,500 m), and an interception sortie. The target for the interception training was an illuminated Do 217 bomber flown over Berlin. After the interception, they made an intermediate landing at Werneuchen then returned to Ludwigslust.

In the Me 109 G-6 program, the students got about 27 hours of flight time with 80 landings. The night sorties generated 10 flight hours and 35 landings.

Each student's total flight training in Germany included, on average, 68 flight hours and 200 landings, with 44 of the flight hours and 70 landings being performed at night.

## TRAINING LOSSES

Pilot losses in the German night fighter courses were high; anywhere between 20 and 75 % of the students died during the course. One of the major reasons was the need to train more and more inexperienced pilots.

Germany was only prepared for a short war, and now in its prolonged state, the training of a pilot reserve became a real bottleneck for the Luftwaffe. For example, in the beginning of 1944, the Germans had to send new pilots, with only 160 hours of flight time, to the frontline squadrons. While at the same time, their British and American colleagues already had at least double that amount.

In the first half of 1944, the German's home air defense, lost 2,000 of its pilots as killed, lost or wounded. Replacing such a big number was possible only by reducing the number of hours in the training programs, which also became mandatory due to the shortage of fuel. So, by the summer of 1944, the new German pilots received no more than 112 hours of flight training. By February of 1945, Luftwaffe's entire flying training program came to a complete halt, because of the lack of fuel.

The Finns managed to complete their night fighter course with only 10 % losses. They suffered two fatalities which were caused by external factors.

Sergeant Ringbom took off on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, for a routine night training flight. Soon after take off, there was an air raid alarm and the order to land was given. However, Ringbom never acknowledged the order.

His airplane was found later, not far from the base and it had been hit by several 20 mm cannon rounds. Obviously, he was shot down by a British night fighter which had been seen flying over the base, soon after the alarm.

The other accident happened only three days later at 0300 hours in the early morning. Sub-Lieutenant Tervo had started his approach to the airfield, when the engine of his airplane stopped due to a failure in the fuel system. In an attempt at an emergency landing, his plane crashed short of the field and Tervo was killed.

## END OF TRAINING

The accidents happened during the last remaining flights, for already on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August the night flying program had been completed.

There was no precise information about the situation in Finland. The students knew that the Soviets had began their strategic offensive, just before they left, but after that the news had been sparse. The most reliable information came by way of Major Ervi.

The students considered their next move would be to go to Wiener-Neustadt to fetch the new fighters and fly them back to Finland. The discussions about the fighter type for the new squadron revolved around the Me 109 G-6 or, as hoped for by the most optimistic pilots, the latest modification K, "Kurfürst". There were also rumors circulating, about Me 110 twin-engine training in Germany, for some of the students.

## TO JÜTERBOG AND BERLIN

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, there was a big farewell party for the Finnish pilots at the Fliegerhorst, which was celebrated in style.

On the next day, the group traveled by train via Berlin to Jüterbog-Waldlager air base. This large night fighter base was located about 37 miles (60 km) south-west from the city's center. There in the operational environment, during the last four days of August, the students were familiarized with night fighter operations and its special details.

Then all the others, except for Captain Kalima and Lieutenants Ehanti, Helle, Laakso and Lemström, traveled to Berlin to wait for their return to Finland. The plan was, that on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, the remaining pilots would receive five new Me 109 fighters, and fly them to Finland.

While there, the Finnish pilots belonged to 1./ JG 300, which had as its mission, the hunting of the Mosquitos and the protection of Berlin. The fighters of the staffel were fast Me 109 G-6 aircraft, "Moskito-jägers", with 1,800 to 2,000 hp methanol/water injection Daimler-Benz DB 605 ASD engines.

## FINNS INTERNED

The main group, which had returned to Berlin, was accommodated in the Excelsior and Norrland hotels. Lieutenant Hyvärinen with two sub-lieutenants, was slated for travel to Poland on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, where they were to receive three Me 109 night fighter modifications, from the local factory. The plan, was to fly from there to Hyvinkää air base, in Finland. This airbase had been readied for the future night fighter operations. The tickets for the train trip were already in their pockets.

In a Berlin evening newspaper of 3 September, there had been something about the negotiations between Finland and Soviet Union (Finland had repulsed the Soviet main offensive in the Karelian isthmus in the middle of July, and by the beginning of August the situation had stabilized along the entire Finnish eastern front. The Soviet Union needed its troops in the central European theater and started to remove them from the Finnish front. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September an agreement was made for a temporary peace between Finland and the Soviet Union).

That evening, the group had a meeting about the possible consequences of that action, and it seemed probable that they would be interned. Major Ervi couldn't be contacted, and all the Finnish Embassy knew, was that the negotiations were on going.

At 2330 hours a Wehrmacht major along with a hefty feldwebel, arrived at the hotel where they were told in strict but polite way, that it would be better for the gentlemen to move to a Wehrmacht hotel. In the Hermes hotel at Friedrichsstrasse, the pilots were required to give up all their papers, and guards were posted at the front doors. Inside the hotel, they were allowed to move about freely and their treatment was impeccable.

Their internment time wasn't long, by noontime of 6 September, it was cancelled. The next day, they rode the train to Stettin and then to Odermünde harbor, where the Åland's ship S/S Parma was waiting. It had just brought a timber load to Germany.

Senior Sergeant Hakulinen was no longer with the group because he had suffered a bad ache in his back, the end of August, and had already been flown to Finland.

The five men in the Jüterbog group had a similar experience. They were also interned on the German airbase. As a consolation, each had been given a bottle of wine, special food and cigarettes.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, the papers for their release were sent by Major Ervi and the group left the Germans at the airbase, with good mutual understanding, and an abundant box lunch for their travel too. On the next day, they joined the main group at the ship.

## BACK HOME

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September at 1700 hours, the ship left the harbor and by 2000, it was already at sea and sailing for home. After being one day at anchor in Kalmar harbor, Sweden, the ship arrived at Maarianhamina, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September at 1700 hours. Not until the next day, while onboard a passenger vessel traveling to Turku, did the group get the confirmation of the repulse of the Soviet offensive. This break in the information vacuum was a giant relief.

There was only the train trip to Helsinki and their multiphase, experience rich trip of 95 days would be behind them.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, 1944, at 0900 hours, the group reported to Lieutenant Colonel Ilanko and Major Karu at Air Staff Headquarters. From there, they were transferred to Hyvinkää, their prepared night fighter airbase.

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