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Above: Oberleutnant Fritz Schröter photographed at Sidi Ahmed airfield in Tunisia, early 1943, prior to being promoted to *Hauptmann* in April 1943. (PK Photo)

Soon after arriving in Tunisia in January 1943, Fritz Schröter brought his old comrade, Lt. Gerhard Limberg, from 10.(Jabo)/JG 2 to serve as the Technical Officer of III./SKG 10. Limberg had been with JG 2's fighter-bomber *Staffel* since its formation in early 1942, and had flown many operations.<sup>32</sup>

The *Staffelkapitän* of 9./SKG 10 was Lt. Bruno Schäfer. Schäfer was born on 6 December 1920, and after initial *Luftwaffe* training he became a flying instructor. He joined JG 77 in the spring of 1942, but contracted jaundice and was invalided to Germany. After recovering, he joined III./ZG 2 in Tunisia in December 1942, where he flew 121 sorties, including 35 in April 1943 alone. He succeeded *Oblt.* Bosselmann as commander of 9./SKG 10 in January 1943.<sup>33</sup>

Leading the 10. *Staffel* was Lt. Wolfgang Schreck, who joined the *Gruppe* on 21 September 1942 after completing his fighter-bomber training with the *Ergänzungszerstörergruppe* at Deblin-Irena in Poland. He assumed command of the 10. *Staffel* after his

predecessor was wounded in a bombing raid on 23 February 1943. Schreck flew 63 operations in Tunisia, and claimed a Spitfire shot down on 28 April.<sup>35</sup>

The *Staffelkapitän* of 11./SKG 10 was *Oblt.* Ottmar Simon, who was posted to 9./ZG 2 on the Eastern Front as a *Leutnant* on 1 June 1942. He was injured in a flying accident on 10 July, but soon returned to action. He assumed his leadership role with the 11. *Staffel* after his predecessor was killed on 30 April 1943.<sup>36</sup>

## War Diary

### 14 – 18 May 1943

The Fw 190-equipped units in the Mediterranean theatre reported no missions and no losses in the first few days after the Axis surrender in Tunisia.

### Wednesday 19 May 1943

II./Sch.G. 2 was ordered to prepare to commence missions against enemy shipping movements. The *Gruppe* was to operate from Castelvetro airfield in western Sicily, and fighter escort would be provided.<sup>37</sup> However, no operations were undertaken, presumably because German reconnaissance units did not find any suitable targets.

### Thursday 20 May 1943

*Luftwaffe* unit commanders in the Mediterranean were asked to instruct their pilots on economical flying to conserve fuel. This was an early indication of the fuel shortage that would become a critical problem for the entire *Luftwaffe* as the war progressed.

*Generalfeldmarschall* Kesselring raised serious concerns on this day about the increasing number of unserviceable *Luftflotte 2* aircraft, and ordered that repairs be completed as soon as possible. He was eager for all of his air units to rapidly improve their operational strength, including II./Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10.<sup>38</sup>

### Friday 21 May 1943

After a week of inactivity, the first Fw 190 mission was flown from Sicily on the morning of the 21st. II. *Fliegerkorps* had ordered an operation by III./SKG 10 and II./Sch.G. 2 against airfields on Malta, the intention being to carry out a massed attack with strong fighter escort, to cause as much damage as possible. This would be the first raid on the island since December 1942.

## San Pietro Airfield<sup>34</sup>

III./SKG 10 had been establishing a base at San Pietro as early as 31 March 1943, and over the next few weeks more elements of the *Gruppe* moved there from Tunisia. Fritz Schröter wrote about his unit's new airfield:

*"The advanced landing ground that I had chosen was called San Pietro. Actually, it was only a field on a kind of high plateau, surrounded by a bush area called the Macchia. It was situated approximately twenty kilometres north of the small harbour of Gela on the south-eastern coast of Sicily. ... Our new advanced landing ground was situated on this flat upland area, framed by the Macchia and surrounded by a hillside. Towards the sea in the south, was exactly the right place for us. The landscape was idyllic, but we had no leisure time to enjoy it. It was important that the enemy reconnaissance aircraft could not see the field. My men were given the task of building up the field with bushes, camouflage nets had to be used. We made them swear from time to time, but the labour paid off. ... There were no mission orders. Possible targets were beyond our reach but reasonably well-protected Gefechtsstand dug, where we also positioned our anti-aircraft guns. For our accommodation, I had someone explore a cork oak grove to the south of our airfield. It was quickly reachable on quite a decent road. Beneath those cork oaks, tents could easily be set up. With the warm Mediterranean climate, you could sleep very well there during the night time."*

San Pietro had been in use by the Axis since April 1942, and had been partly developed. There was one medium-sized hanger, several repair shops, and more than 50 blast bays, so it was well-equipped for the Fw 190 unit. San Pietro would serve as III./SKG 10's main base until the Allied invasion of Sicily, but the unit did not have the airfield entirely to itself. Italian fighter units were stationed at San Pietro in June and July 1943, and German Bf 109 fighter units were occasionally based there for short periods.

<sup>32</sup> Goss, *Luftwaffe Fighter-Bombers Over Britain*, p.69; Schröter, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, pp.204, 212-213

<sup>33</sup> BA-MA RL 10/361; NA AIR 40/2415; Arthy & Jessen, *Fw 190 in North Africa*, p.59

<sup>34</sup> NA AIR 23/5510; NA AIR 40/1996; NA AIR 40/2411; NA AIR 40/2412; Fischer, Logbook; Messer, Logbook; Arthy & Jessen, *Fw 190 in North Africa*, pp.17-18, 34, 146; Cull, *Spitfires Over Sicily*, pp.78, 105, 113; Schröter, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, pp.215, 218. The airfield is always referred to as San Pietro in this book.

<sup>35</sup> BA-MA RL 10/361; Arthy & Jessen, *Fw 190 in North Africa*, pp.126, 144

<sup>36</sup> BA-MA RL 10/357; Arthy & Jessen, *Fw 190 in North Africa*, p.145; WAST information

<sup>37</sup> NA HW 5/252

<sup>38</sup> NA HW 5/253

### Tuesday 1 June 1943

II./Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10 were at 30 minutes readiness from first light until 07:00, equipped with bombs and ready to fly anti-shipping operations, while from 14:00 to 16:30 they were at readiness to undertake fighter operations. III./SKG 10 aircraft transferred from San Pietro to Castelvetrano in the morning, but one pilot failed to make the flight. *Uffz.* Gerhard Krüger crash-landed at San Pietro with his 500 kg bomb still attached, and his Fw 190 suffered 30 per cent damage. The British Y-Service heard a report of a German aircraft crash-landing at San Pietro at 07:37 due to engine problems, and this was almost certainly *Uffz.* Krüger.<sup>63</sup>

III./SKG 10 informed the Operations Officer of Sch.G. 2 that five Fw 190s out of fifteen had suffered tyre damage, and that the *Gruppe* had no more new tyres. Tyre and undercarriage damage were to be major problems for III./SKG 10 over the next few weeks on airfields in southern Sicily. Up until the eighteenth, there were daily reports of undercarriage and tyre damage to one or more III./SKG 10 aircraft, due primarily to poor airfield conditions and bomb splinters on the ground. Helmut Wenk recalled this problem: "... these bombs created some pretty bad holes in the runway, which had to be filled up. This was often a problem on landing because the probability of getting a flat tyre became much higher, because there were still some sharp edges."<sup>64</sup>

*Fw.* Karl Golles of 10./SKG 10 had to bail out of his aircraft over the sea during an attack on British warships. He was fortunate to be rescued.



Right: Pilots of 3./Sch.G. 2 photographed at Brindisi airfield in May 1943. Standing: *Hpt.-Fw.* Brauer. Back row, left to right: *Lt.* König, *Lt.* Zirus, *Lt.* 'Molli' Eckart, unknown, unknown. Front row, left to right: *Fw.* Raach, *Fw.* Willi Reuter, unknown, unknown. (Zirus)

back on duty on 5 June. No other details are known about this operation.<sup>65</sup>

Along with new aircraft, Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10 were also taking on more pilots. Six fledgling Fw 190 pilots arrived at Munich on their way to the Mediterranean from the *Ergänzungsschlachtgruppe*, a ground-attack training unit based at Deblin-Irena. The pilots were: *Lt.* Zibilka; *Lt.* Kurt Reißman (who went to 9./SKG 10); *Obfhr.* Günther 'Uhu' Just (who went to I./Sch.G. 2); *Obfhr.* Werkmeister; *Obfhr.* Willi Buchner (who joined 6./Sch.G. 2); and *Obfhr.* Rieg. They were picked up in two Bf 108 D-1s at Munich, and were flown south to Italy.<sup>66</sup>

### Wednesday 2 June 1943

II./Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10 were ordered to be at readiness from the morning until 19:15. They were to mount an attack on shipping targets, and were warned that heavy defences could be expected. 7./Sch.G. 2 was already at Castelvetrano, but the rest of II./Sch.G. 2 was to transfer there from Gerbini, and was to be loaded with SC 250 bombs on arrival.<sup>67</sup>

The British reported that a small, escorted Axis fighter-bomber formation unsuccessfully attacked some of their naval vessels off the Tunisian coast. There are no German sources to confirm that this was an Fw 190 attack, but the British Y-Service on Malta reported German fighters and fighter-bombers from southern Sicily operating in the early evening.<sup>68</sup>

### Thursday 3 June 1943

II./Sch.G. 2, consisting of 190s of II./Sch.G. 2, escorted by 21 Bf 109s, mounted an attack on shipping in the evening against ships south of the tip of Cap Bon. The fighter-bombers attacked at 19:02, and claimed that one ship was hit twice astern and was sinking, and another was hit once in the bows, producing smoke. It seems that II./Sch.G. 2 had targeted some minesweepers. Two Spitfires of the 5th FS/52nd FG witnessed the attack while patrolling over the minesweepers, and although they saw many near misses, they reported no direct hits. The Spitfires were over the minesweepers for a further 30 minutes after the attack, but observed no damage to the vessels.<sup>69</sup>

### Friday 4 June 1943

II./Sch.G. 2 was at readiness for fighter operations from midday until 16:00, after which no operations were to be carried out because pilots were to receive

63 BA-MA RL 8/20; NA AIR 40/2262; NA HW 5/260; Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.

64 NA HW 5/259; Wenk, Interview 6 October 2006

65 BA-MA RL 8/20; Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.

66 BA-MA RL 8/20; Zirus, *Als Schlachtflieger im Einsatz*, p.81

67 BA-MA RL 8/19; NA HW 5/259

68 NA AIR 22/78; NA AIR 40/2262

69 BA-MA RL 8/19; NA AIR 22/78; NA AIR 40/2262; NARA RG 18, Box 2281; DGHg 3 32

training. For the next three days, II./Sch.G. 2 would be kept free from operations from 10:00 to 16:00 for the same reason, although it is not known what this training was.<sup>70</sup>

An Fw 190 A-5 of 7./Sch.G. 2 received 90 per cent damage in a bombing raid on Catania airfield. However, no other German aircraft were reported destroyed or seriously damaged in this raid.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion

It was a tentative beginning to Fw 190 operations in the three-week period following the end of the Tunisian campaign. The 21 May attack on Malta signalled a return to operations for II./Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10, but although they were at readiness on most days, few missions were actually flown, and Fw 190 operations are only known on seven, or possibly eight, of the 22 days covered in this chapter. The Fw 190s had been called on when convoys sailed between Cap Bon and Sicily, and also for occasional fighter operations.

The main focus of this period was re-building, with over 100 Fw 190s being assigned to Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10 in May 1943. There were also great efforts to make more aircraft serviceable. These efforts were successful, because in the first half of June, Sch.G. 2 and SKG 10 would return to full-scale operations, primarily in defence of the island of Pantelleria.



Above: Josef 'Sepp' Enzensberger of I./Sch.G. 2 sitting on an Fw 190 from either the *Stab* of his own *Gruppe*, or the *Geschwaderstab* of Sch.G. 2. (Petrick)

Below: Fw 190 A-5 ' < l + ' of Sch.G. 2, Brindisi, May 1943.



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70 BA-MA RL 8/19

71 Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.

## War Diary

### Saturday 5 June 1943

II./Sch.G. 2 was at readiness for fighter operations from 09:00 to 17:00, but did not have to scramble. III./JG 53 was assigned to escort III./SKG 10 to Pantelleria to attack shipping, and one such mission was flown, although it proved to be unsuccessful. A German reconnaissance aircraft spotted several warships off Pantelleria at 05:00, and this information was broadcast to German bomber units. As a result of this sighting, twenty Fw 190s from III./SKG 10, led by *Hptm.* Schröter, took off at 06:45 to attack cruisers and destroyers just south of Pantelleria. Six aircraft suffered problems of various kinds en route to the objective, and had to return to base. The others reached the target area, but the ships were not seen because of limited visibility. After an unsuccessful search for land or sea targets on or near Cap Bon, they turned for home with their bombs. *Lt.* Heinrich Andreas ran out of fuel shortly before reaching the runway at Castelvetro, and had to make an emergency landing, which destroyed his aircraft, while the pilot was badly injured. At 08:10 the remaining thirteen aircraft landed at Castelvetro.<sup>5</sup>

### Sunday 6 June 1943

The Allied bombing campaign against Pantelleria intensified on the sixth, with American heavy bombers taking part on a greater scale than before.<sup>6</sup> The day intended for an Allied landing was approaching, so the British and Americans were understandably keen to completely subdue the Italian and German defenders.

Twenty aircraft of III./SKG 10, led on this occasion by *Oblt.* Simon, took off at first light to search for shipping in the area between Cap Bon and Pantelleria, although four pilots returned home early due to undercarriage problems. The search for enemy ships was again unsuccessful, due to mist and low-hanging clouds, and the aircraft returned to base with their bombs still attached at 06:35. Although the Fw 190 mission was unsuccessful, the III./JG 53 fighter escort claimed to have shot down two Bostons near Pantelleria.<sup>7</sup>

The Allied Y-Service on Malta reported another German formation taking off at 07:54 and setting

course for Pantelleria, and a minute later five flights of fighters and fighter-bombers were heard airborne in the Sicily area. However, German records make no mention of this operation.<sup>8</sup>

At 17:50 a German reconnaissance aircraft reported enemy vessels 90 km south of Pantelleria, and an anti-shipping operation was flown later in the evening by five Fw 190s of II./Sch.G. 2, which took off at 19:30. However, the Fw 190 formation was intercepted before reaching its target by Spitfires of the American 4th FS/52nd FG, and the German pilots were forced to release their bombs harmlessly in the sea. The 4th FS/52nd FG claimed a bomb-carrying Bf 109 destroyed and another damaged at around 19:40, sixteen to 24 km west of Pantelleria. Despite the American victory claims, none of the Fw 190s were damaged.<sup>9</sup>

During the course of the day, II./Sch.G. 2 transferred from Gerbini to Castelvetro, while III./SKG 10 flew from San Pietro to Castelvetro.<sup>10</sup> These flights were part of the preparations for a large-scale attack to be carried out against a Tunisian airfield on the seventh. Werner Dörnbrack wrote about the use of advanced landing grounds like Castelvetro:

*"Sch.G. 2 was based in the Catania area on the east coast of Sicily. A small number of ground personnel was assigned to all of the airfields used by Sch.G. 2. If the whole Geschwader landed on one of these airfields in order to take-off from there for a mission, the ground party based there was too small to make the aircraft ready for action with the necessary speed. For this reason, each Fw 190 flew to the jump-off field with a mechanic stowed away in the fuselage, and sometimes the aircraft carried a 500 kg bomb, the landing being made with the bomb in place. After touchdown, the aircraft only had to be refuelled, and then they were ready to undertake the operation. This procedure was in many cases the only possible way of undertaking a mission, for instance an anti-shipping strike where the targets were just within the range of vision of our aircraft."<sup>11</sup>*

Another Fw 190 pilot reported that the 31st FG transferred to Castelvetro for several flights in June.

5 BA-MA RL 8/19; BA-MA RL 10/361; NA AIR 40/1864; NA AIR 40/2262; NA HW 5/262; DGHg 3 32; German records make no mention of this operation. Allies reported that an Fw 190 attacked *MTB-73* on this day, causing damage and killing the skipper and most of the crew. *Spirit*, p.131

6 Craven & Cate (eds), *TORCH to POINTBLANK*, p.426; Molony et al., *The Campaign in Sicily and Italy*, pp.100-101

7 BA-MA RL 10/361; NA AIR 22/78; NA AIR 40/2262; NARA RG 18, Box 2270; DGHg 3 32; Film C. 2027/I; Cull, *The War in the Air*, p.25; Olynyk, *Victory List No. 6*, p.32; Prien, *JG 53 1942-1944*, p.612

8 NA AIR 40/2262

9 NA AIR 40/2262; NARA RG 18, Box 2281; DGHg 3 32; Ivie & Ludwig, *Spitfires and Yellow Tail Mustangs*, p.50

10 BA-MA RL 10/627

11 Dörnbrack, Karlsruhe Collection

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“We would have needed additional fuel tanks to reach Pantelleria from our airfield, close to Gerbini. Therefore, we crossed the island to Chinisia, between Trapani and Marsala. It was only there that the machines got provided with ammunition, loaded with the bomb, and fuelled. That was why the first mechanic had to fly with us. They climbed through the hatch positioned on the side of the fuselage. They travelled stretched out, without being able to see anything, and it was not very comfortable.”<sup>12</sup>

Aside from being uncomfortable, this trip was also unpopular because it was very dangerous if the aircraft came under attack. Interestingly, mechanics being carried in the Fw 190s were told not to wear nailed shoes, because they would de-calibrate the compass.<sup>13</sup> Later in the summer, *Reichsmarschall* Göring agreed that mechanics should be carried in Fw 190s, especially in emergencies. However, by that time the Mediterranean Fw 190 units already had much unauthorized experience in this kind of ‘transport flight’.<sup>14</sup>

#### Monday 7 June 1943

A large and carefully planned operation was flown on this day by Fw 190s of II./Sch.G. 2 and III./SKG 10 against an airfield on Cap Bon peninsula. It had been decided that missions to Malta were too dangerous because of the island’s radar warning system and effective anti-aircraft and fighter defences. Therefore, an attack was ordered against Korba North airfield, near Menzel Temime, because it was reported that Korba North was lightly defended and tightly packed with aircraft.<sup>15</sup> Just a month previously, in the final days of the Tunisian campaign, II./Sch.G. 2 had been based at Menzel Temime, so the unit’s pilots knew the target area well. This would prove not to be the only occasion that Fw 190 pilots in the Mediterranean theatre found themselves attacking an airfield that had only recently been in their hands.

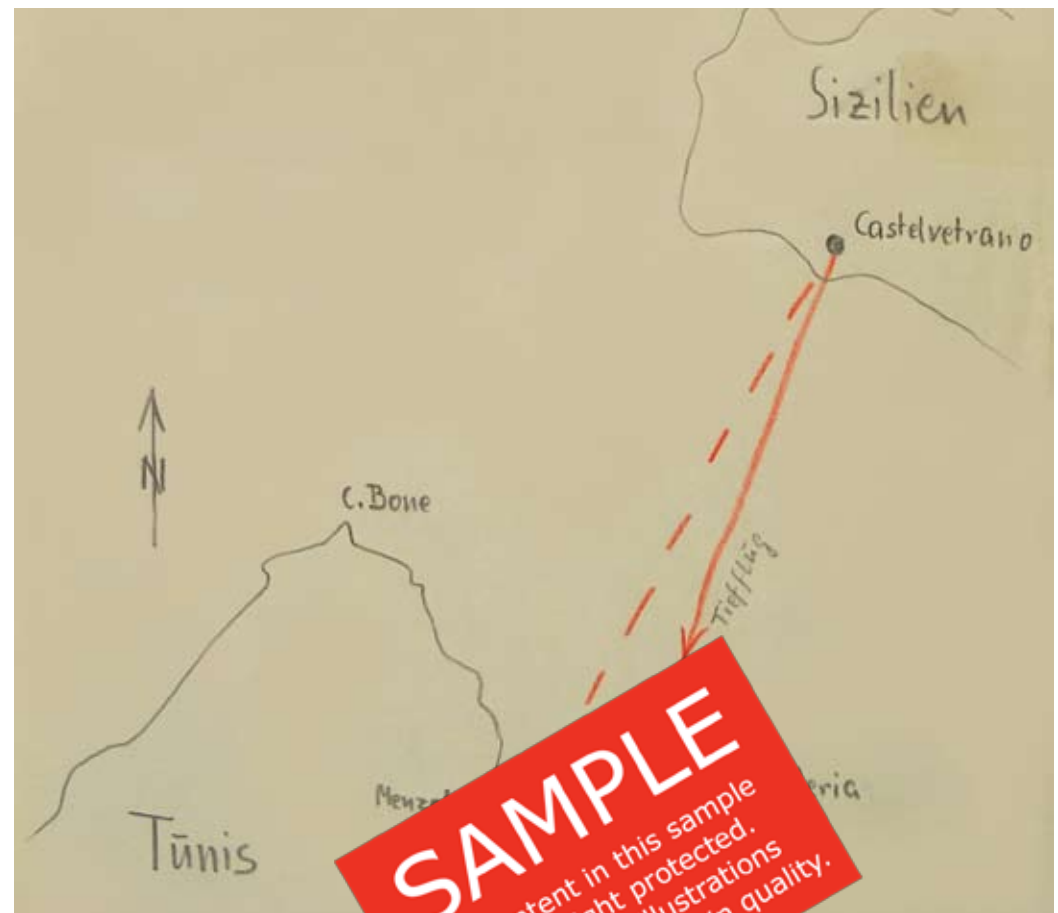
Korba North airfield was about 190 km from Castelvetrano. The approach flight was to take place at an altitude of just ten to twenty metres to avoid radar detection and achieve complete surprise, with the fighter-bombers climbing to their attack height at the last possible moment. There was to be no fighter escort on the approach flight, because the Bf 109s would have needed to fly higher, and therefore

would have been quickly detected by radar. The fighter-bombers would only have fighter cover on the return flight. This made the operation a very risky undertaking, with unprotected and bomb-laden Fw 190s relying entirely on the element of surprise. If they encountered Allied fighters, the results could be disastrous.

II. *Fliegerkorps* had 47 Fw 190s on strength in Sicily, and the ground personnel managed to make a good percentage of these aircraft serviceable for the raid. The day of the operation dawned clear, and the Fw 190s at Castelvetrano were readied for the attack on the airfield.

The fighter-bombers took-off just as the sun began to rise, at 05:15. *Lt.* Herbert Eißele led fifteen Fw 190s of III./SKG 10 on this mission, while *Hptm.* Dörnbrack led sixteen Fw 190s from his *Gruppe*, and provided overall command of the operation. The III./SKG 10 aircraft carried a mix of AB 250s and SD 250s, and this would be the first time that the *Gruppe* would use the bomblet containers. Four aircraft of III./SKG 10 broke off early due to undercarriage problems, and during the approach flight two more Fw 190s from the *Gruppe* jettisoned their bombs

Below: A map drawn after the war by Werner Dörnbrack, showing the attack he led on Korba North airfield.



12 Jost, *Der Junge – der zu den Fliegern ging*, pp.61-62

13 Wenk, Interview 6 October 2006

14 NA HW 5/293

15 III./SKG 10 called the targeted airfield Tafeloune, Italian records called it Feloune, south of Kelibia, and Dörnbrack referred to it only as Menzel Temime

due to engine problems and returned to base. One aircraft of II./Sch.G. 2 also broke off due to technical problems. Werner Dörnbrack recalled the initial stages of the operation:

*“The aircraft had been brought to their take-off positions in darkness by hand or tractor, to avoid damage while taxiing in the dawn twilight. On take-off, all aircraft had their navigation lights on, and they were only switched off once the whole formation had assembled and set course for the target. After taking off, the first Gruppe [II./Sch.G. 2] flew an assembly curve at an altitude of 100 m so that the other aircraft could join the formation, after which they set course.”*

The pilots initially flew south-west from Castelvetrano to Pantelleria, then turned westwards, and on reaching the Tunisian coastline they used the railway line near Menzel Temime for navigation to the target. The approach flight avoided detection, and everything seemed to be going according to plan:

*“The approach flight was made at an altitude of ten to twenty metres in as tight a formation as possible. There was absolute radio silence. Off the west coast of Pantelleria the unit undertook a right turn and began climbing at full throttle in the direction of*

*Menzel Temime. The sun had now risen and was at the formation’s back.”*

Nine of III./SKG 10’s aircraft reached Korba North, and accurately bombed the target. The pilots reported that six bombs fell on tents on the east side of the field, and two bombs fell on the edge of the east-west runway, while one bomb was jettisoned on Cap Bon for unknown reasons. The III./SKG 10 pilots observed no fires as they swiftly exited the target area. Meanwhile, II./Sch.G. 2 made its attack:

*“Three kilometres south of Menzel Temime the formation had reached an altitude of around 4.500 m. No anti-aircraft guns opened fire, and the airfield was completely quiet, with no fighters scrambling. The unit began its dive-attack on the airfield. Each Staffel had been given instructions on which part of the airfield to attack, based on aerial photographs taken before the operation. The bombs all fell accurately on the target, because the airfield’s anti-aircraft guns only opened fire at the last moment.*

*There were no losses. During the homeward flight we observed many fires and smoke columns. Because the target was at the limit of our range, we could not carry out a subsequent strafing attack. We set course for home at low altitude.”*

Below: Two Fw 190s of III./SKG 10 in the *Macchia* at San Pietro airfield. The aircraft in the foreground has been loaded with a 500 kg bomb, while the aircraft in the background is in the process of being bombed-up. Note the lack of markings on the fuselage. (Leproni)



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The *Gruppe* returned to base, but despite the many Spitfires, no Fw 190s were lost or damaged.<sup>68</sup>

#### Sunday 20 June 1943

Missions were obviously intended, but there is no evidence that any were carried out. *Lt.* Wenger of 13./SKG 10 transferred from Gerbini to the forward airfield at Chinisia in the afternoon, but he returned in the evening.<sup>69</sup>

The lack of spare parts for German aircraft was already beginning to be felt by the *Luftwaffe* at this time. An Fw 190 A-5/U8 from IV./SKG 10 required a new oil tank, but none were available in the *Luftflotte 2* area, so one had to be sent from Germany. This lack of oil tanks would be a recurring problem for the Fw 190 units in the Mediterranean. Later in the month, Sch.G. 2 on Sardinia asked for all spare oil coolers and oil containers from the air park at Capodichino.<sup>70</sup> Klaus Jost of II./SKG 10 also had problems with his aircraft's oil cooler during the initial transfer to Gerbini:

*"... when refuelling, the ground personnel discovered that my oil cooler had broken, so I had to stay back alone. It took three days until my machine was ready for take-off. Other machines of the Geschwader broke down in Grosseto (and also in Istres and Albenga), but not all of them suffered from a broken oil cooler."<sup>71</sup>*

Generalfeldmarschall von Richthofen noted in his diary that the *Luftwaffe* ground-attack units on Sicily "couldn't get off the ground in less than 45 minutes",

due to the bomb damage inflicted on their airfields by Allied bombers.<sup>72</sup> This situation would only worsen in coming weeks.

#### Monday 21 June 1943

As on the previous day, *Lt.* Wenger of 13./SKG 10 transferred to the forward airfield at Chinisia, but he was not called upon for missions. Undoubtedly his day would have been more eventful if reconnaissance aircraft had spotted any Allied shipping.<sup>73</sup>

An Fw 190 A-5 of III./SKG 10 crash-landed due to engine problems at San Pietro airfield after a combat mission, but further details are unknown.<sup>74</sup> This was possibly a fighter or reconnaissance mission.

#### Tuesday 22 June 1943

Gerhard Streicher, a member of the III./SKG 10 ground personnel, and formerly of 4./JG 27, went to Berlin on this day for a three-week course on radio equipment for his unit's Fw 190s. Streicher described the three months that he had spent on Sicily and at San Pietro:

*"After landing at Trapani [in March 1943] and exiting the 'Gigant' [Me 323], I was surprised to see the Bf 109s of my former Staffel. There was a joyful reunion with old comrades. The next day I had the opportunity to have a glass of wine with Staffelkapitän Hptm. Vögl [Ferdinand Vögl of 4./JG 27] and talk about my transfer back to the front. On 31 March we drove on to San Pietro via Vittoria. Still in search of a suitable Feldflugplatz, we visited the outskirts of Castelvetrano and Comiso*

Above: Fw 190 A-5 'Yellow B + I' of 11./SKG 10, San Pietro, May or June 1943.

<sup>68</sup> Wenk, Logbook; Wenk, Letter 10 July 2004; Wenk, Interview 10 April 2006

<sup>69</sup> Wenger, Logbook

<sup>70</sup> NA HW 5/270; NA HW 5/276

<sup>71</sup> Jost, *Der Junge – der zu den Fliegern ging*, p.59

<sup>72</sup> Corum, *Wolfram von Richthofen*, p.334

<sup>73</sup> Wenger, Logbook

<sup>74</sup> Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.



# Chapter 6: The Loss of Sicily

## 14 July – 17 August 1943

*"I am making you responsible to ensure the fighter-bombers now fully overcome difficulties experienced, and expel the warships from Catania."*

*Generalfeldmarschall von Richthofen to Oberst Weiß, 16 July 1943*

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have been reduced in quality.





*the bomb had detonated. The sizes of the other ships could not be estimated. Many large bombs detonated in the harbour area, and indications are that they had a devastating effect. There were probably very bloody losses.*"<sup>29</sup>

Oblt. Ernst Henkelmann of II./SKG 10 was ordered to Montecorvino without delay to take over 9./SKG 10, in place of the missing Lt. Schäfer.<sup>30</sup>



Above: 29 August mission map.

### Monday 30 August 1943

II./SKG 10 and 9./SKG 10 were both ordered to attack shipping off Sicily soon after dawn, as the Germans continued their attempt to disrupt the Allied build-up of invasion forces. Eleven Fw 190s of the II. Gruppe left Crotona at 06:21, but three soon returned due to various problems. The others dive-bombed shipping at Augusta with 250 kg bombs, and claimed a direct hit on a merchant vessel of an unknown size, along with two other ships set on fire. However, observation of bombing results was hindered by strong anti-aircraft fire, several Spitfires, and cloud at 1.000 m. The Spitfires engaged the Fw 190s, and forced two of the German pilots to jettison their bombs. *Hptm.* Hauenschild claimed a Spitfire shot down, and his victim was seen to hit the ground by three other II./SKG 10 pilots. There were no German losses, and they landed at 07:16.<sup>31</sup>

II./SKG 10's opponents were W/Cdr. Duncan Smith and his wingman, P/O. W.J. Steele of 417 Squadron, who were on a dawn patrol of Augusta and Catania. They were informed of Fw 190s approaching, and soon saw two sections of eight Fw 190s at 5.800 m sixteen kilometres south of Catania, flying towards Augusta. The Spitfires climbed to engage, and after Duncan Smith gave one a long-range burst, the enemy aircraft rolled over and dived into the clouds. P/O. Steele closed on another Fw 190 and fired two deflection bursts at long-range, after which it also dived to escape. Duncan Smith was then attacked by two Fw 190s, which fired from long-range in separate attacks, but quickly broke away.<sup>32</sup> W/Cdr. Duncan Smith later wrote of this mission, although his account differed somewhat from the contemporary reports:

*"There was much cloud along the coast and after following various changes of direction ordered by Operations, round the big banks of cloud, I suddenly caught a fleeting glimpse of an Fw 190 diving through a gap.*

*Opening up to full power, I chased after the enemy and was immediately shot at by a second Fw 190, which dived in over my left shoulder. Tracers streaked past my port wing, and it shot past very close. The pilot unwisely straightened up giving me an excellent opportunity to open fire on him from slightly below on a fine quarter. I saw strikes on his wing root and the bottom of the cockpit, and with smoke trailing he disappeared*

29 BA-MA RL 2 II/966

30 NA HW 5/335

31 BA-NA RL 2 II/966; NA AIR 40/2152; NA HW 5/331; NA HW 5/332

32 NA AIR 26/328; Cull, *Spitfires Over Sicily*, pp.201, 214. Cull says that the mission was on 29 August, but the Wing Operations Record Book says 30 August.

from east to west. Nothing was seen out to 50 km. Four Fw 190s of II./Sch.G. 2 also flew a sea rescue search, and another four flew escort for Ju 52s.

While the II. *Gruppe* flew operations, the *Stab* and I. *Gruppe* continued their transfer to Italy, and were now moving to Piacenza, where most parts of the units arrived over the next two days. By this time, I./Sch.G. 2 had given up most of its Fw 190s. However, the *Gruppe* was ordered to deploy a *Staffel* as an operations detachment at Ghisonaccia on Corsica. There was also a I./Sch.G. 2 detachment left at Ottana III, under the command of the very experienced *Major* Gerhard Weyert.<sup>15</sup>

Gerhard Weyert was born on 4 June 1913, and served with J/88 in Spain as a Ju 87 pilot. He flew with 11.(Stuka)/LG 1 between 1939 and 1941, and was then a member of SKG 210. He received the *Ehrenpokal* on 5 January 1942, and in April became *Kommandeur* of II./ZG 2, before taking over that role with II./ZG 1. He joined I./Sch.G. 2 at some point during the summer of 1943.<sup>16</sup>

#### Sunday 8 August 1943

A pair of Fw 190s from II./Sch.G. 2 took off at dawn on coastal reconnaissance, but one aircraft had to return shortly after take-off. The replacement aircraft took off at 06:10, but also returned early, so the *Rottenführer* carried out the mission by himself. He landed at 07:48, having seen no enemy shipping. II./Sch.G. 2 was to provide escort at 08:00 for a formation of Italian warships, including cruisers, moving at 25 knots and heading for La Maddalena in northern Sardinia. Late in the day, II./Sch.G. 2 sent eight Fw 190s on convoy escort.<sup>17</sup>

#### Monday 9 August 1943

As usual, II./Sch.G. 2 flew morning offshore reconnaissance, but the first mission was broken off when auxiliary tanks failed to feed on both aircraft. The replacement *Rotte* flew the mission between 07:20 and 08:48, but there were no sightings. Three Fw 190s of the 7. *Staffel* were involved in accidents at Ottana II, although none were related to missions. One pilot had a taxiing accident, causing 40 per cent damage, *Ofw.* Erich Schittenhelm was injured when his aircraft crashed due to engine problems, and finally, an Fw 190 was badly damaged by the rough airfield, and a replacement was needed.<sup>18</sup>



#### Tuesday 10 August 1943

II./Sch.G. 2 undertook a total of ten sorties during the day, including morning and evening offshore reconnaissance, and Ju 52 escort. There were no reconnaissance sightings, and no Fw 190s were damaged or lost.<sup>19</sup>

#### Wednesday 11 August 1943

As had become the norm, II./Sch.G. 2 flew a number of different missions on this day. Two Fw 190s flew early offshore reconnaissance from western to eastern Sardinia, and two others flew from the east to the north. In the evening, four Fw 190s flew reconnaissance from the south to the south-east. There were also Ju 52 and convoy escort missions. However, the *Gruppe* experienced more problems at Ottana II, as two aircraft were damaged after non-combat flights. An Fw 190 of the 5. *Staffel* had a taxiing accident and received 70 per cent damage, while an Fw 190 F-3 of the 7. *Staffel* suffered 50 per cent damage due to poor ground conditions.<sup>20</sup>

#### Thursday 12 August 1943

All serviceable aircraft of II./Sch.G. 2 were to be at 30 minutes readiness from 06:00, loaded with SC 500 bombs. Unserviceable aircraft were to be repaired as soon as possible, and reconnaissance was to be flown in the afternoon. In total, II./Sch.G. 2 flew eight sorties on the twelfth.

Between 17:55 and 20:00 two Fw 190s from the *Gruppe* flew reconnaissance, and it was reported that one aircraft was hit in the port wing by anti-

Above: An Fw 190 of II./Sch.G. 2 in the Mediterranean theatre. It carries the unit's well-known Mickey Mouse emblem on the engine cowling. Note that the forward half of the spinner is painted in the unit colour, and is yellow, green, or red. (Petrick)

<sup>15</sup> NA AIR 40/2152; NA HW 5/308; NA HW 5/309; NA HW 5/310; NA HW 5/311

<sup>16</sup> Information via deZeng. DeZeng says that Weyert transferred to Sch.G. 2 on 8 June 1943, but 9 August is the first time that he is mentioned with the unit.

<sup>17</sup> NA AIR 40/2152; NA HW 5/309; NA HW 5/311

<sup>18</sup> NA HW 5/311; Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.

<sup>19</sup> NA AIR 40/2152; NA HW 5/311

<sup>20</sup> NA AIR 40/2152; NA HW 5/312; Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.



edges and lower engine cowling darkened (see photo on page 68).<sup>3</sup>

After SKG 10 became based in the Mediterranean theatre, new Fw 190s arriving at the unit retained their standard, factory-applied RLM 74/75/76 camouflage schemes, without any known changes. In many cases, newly arrived aircraft were immediately committed to operations, and were quickly lost or recorded off strength, so SKG 10 personnel had little time to modify the existing camouflage schemes. There was also little need to do so, because the standard grey scheme was appropriate for units based in Sicily and Italy, and for the regular missions over the sea.

The Fw 190s of I. and II./Sch.G. 2 had standard, factory-applied RLM 74/75/76 camouflage schemes. One aircraft that received a variation to this scheme was Fw 190 'Yellow E + ' of I./Sch.G. 2, depicted in photographs and a colour profile on page 79. Parts of the undersides of the wings were overpainted with RLM 65 *Hellblau*, and RLM 70 *Schwarzgrün* was applied to parts of the forward fuselage.

### Theatre Markings

All Fw 190s in the Mediterranean theatre carried a white fuselage band. The standard width of the white band was 45 cm, although Fw 190s carried a variety of styles.<sup>4</sup> This fuselage band was applied before the aircraft was ferried to the theatre. Helmut Wenk said of this band: "This marking (fuselage band) served to improve friend-foe recognition from long distances. There were different ones for each theatre of war."<sup>5</sup>

An unusual markings feature was the yellow top of the tail in the Mediterranean theatre. This was seen on aircraft from I. and II./Sch.G. 2, and also on aircraft from III./SKG 10. The tail was painted yellow for recognition, but Lt Hermann Hoch's Fw 190 A-4 W.Nr 0142 409 'Black 2 + <-' of 10.(Jabo)/JG 26 fighter group also had the top of its tail painted yellow. This aircraft was shot down over England on 20 January 1943. Another Channel Front aircraft with this marking is shown on page 48.<sup>6</sup>

The rudders and lower engine cowlings on II. and IV./SKG 10 Fw 190s were generally painted RLM 04 yellow on the Channel Front, and yellow engine cowlings were also standard on Fw 190s in the Mediterranean theatre.

An Fw 190 labelled as that of the *Gruppenadjutant* of II./Sch.G. 2 had the standard white fuselage



Top: Crashed Fw 190 A-4 W.Nr 0142 409 'Black 2 + <-' of 10.(Jabo)/JG 26, which was shot down over England on 20 January 1943. This aircraft had the top of its tail painted yellow. The pilot, Lt. Hermann Hoch, was taken prisoner. (via Watkins and Goss)

Centre and bottom: Two Mediterranean examples of the tops of tails painted yellow. (Zirus and Crow)

3 Frappé & Lorant, *Le Focke Wulf 190*, p.176; Goss, *Luftwaffe Fighter-Bombers Over Britain*, p.290. A photograph of a second darkened Fw 190 from IV./SKG 10 appears in Frappé & Lorant, *Le Focke Wulf 190*, p.176

4 Information via Merrick

5 Wenk, Letter 18 August 2005

6 Genst.Gen.Qu.6.Abt.; Goss, *Luftwaffe Fighter-Bombers Over Britain*, p.179