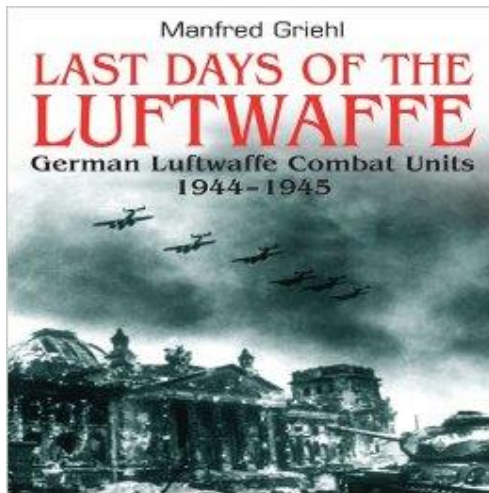


# Last Days of the Luftwaffe

## By Manfred Griehl

### Review by Rob Morgan

I was tempted to give this the subtitle "That's what you get for bombing our chip shop" (which is, in fact, true) but it is an interesting and remarkably well-illustrated volume, sold off lately by our local library for pennies. The photographs are not the usual stuff trotted out, and the plans and drawings are straightforward and fascinating, a bit like the pull-outs in *The Eagle* when I was a boy.



The book falls neatly into a number of sections, and not entirely concentrated on fighters. First, propeller aircraft such as the Bf 109 -- still very much upfront in the air defence of the Reich -- and the Fw 190, used from October 1943 as part of Goering's *Assault Gruppen* in which the 109s were protected by escort fighters as they attacked the bomber streams.

The Nazi *Kamikaze* plans crop up throughout the book: the original *Rammjager* plan on April 5<sup>th</sup> 1945, in which 184 suicide planes were escorted by 51 Me 262s and set upon an Eighth USAAF raid. In an amazing encounter, 23 US bombers were destroyed for the awesome cost of 133 *Luftwaffe* aircraft and 77

pilots. Not a success.

The second chapter on Jets is, as usual, largely an account of the Me262, the long-awaited "wonder weapon" in its true fighter variant, though the author does give some good account of the smaller and less well known jets, the Focke-Wulf 1T1, the *Flitzer* and the several never-to-fly Messerschmitt designs. The plans and drawings are intriguing, as they always have been, and the book from this point onwards is full of "what-if" scenarios involving last-ditch aircraft like the Focke-Wulf 2-seater night- and bad- weather jet fighter.

The chapter on the He 162 jet *Volksjager*, on which OKL placed so many hopes, from the Summer of 1944 is an interesting one, and as with so many of the tales in this volume the final indecisive acts of so many Luftwaffe commanders is amazing. As indeed is the short, and again remarkably well illustrated section on the *Jabo*'s and the so-called "BlitzBombers" which achieved some notable successes. Though, of course, elderly types such as the Ju 87 D were limited to night ops, several encounters are well described here for the wargamer, including the sorties at Prague; while the planned new jet bombers and use of the literally handful of Arado 234s are also well covered. One "what-if" I found intriguing was the planned Ju-88 G-7 "Mosquito-hunter." There's a wargame in that!

The section on "Cannon Fodder," the young pilots being trained during the last year or so of the war, has something more of the Kamikaze feel to it. There's a plan for what is undoubtedly a suicide aircraft "Special Machine with bomb-Torpedo 1400," probably destined to be used with the proposed Hitler Youth Staffel. The futuristic flying wings and plans to bomb America's East Coast are given some credible reporting and the designs again are amazing. This particular chapter is entitled "The Waffen-SS get involved" which perhaps

lends to incredulity, but the following section on midget aircraft and local fighters, such as the Me 163 and the *Natter* is almost the stuff of legend. I found the Sombold design, a model of which is shown on page 163, fascinating. It looks like a Japanese *Okha*, but designed to take out a bomber rather than a warship.

“Self sacrifice” is the title given to Griehl’s reports of Operations *Freiheit* and *Bienenstock*, with significantly less than a 50% chance of survival, as he states. Here the author accounts for the two serious suicide aircraft of the Reich, the Reichenberg piloted V-1 as it’s often called, and the Me 238 jet. The actual operations are briefly described, as before, but again one or two of them, such as the Metz attack of 27<sup>th</sup> April 1945, intended to destroy parked Allied heavy bombers, do have significant air and land wargame potential. Do take a look at the options on pages 183-188 of the book.

I have never really grasped the value of the *Mistel* piggyback bomber concept, but it seems to have resulted in some interesting attacks on large *Ostfront* targets, but an operation in which 5 *Mistel* require 24 fighters for protection, as well as two pathfinders, might have some table top interest, and there are a score of them briefly accounted for here. There was even a proposal to use an He 177 as a “monster” flying bomb in January 1945. The jet *Mistel* proposals might be of interest too. In addition, the author provides a photographically illustrated chapter on the Flak Rockets, plans and prototypes of which proliferated as the war drew to a close. The larger *Enzian*, *Fuerlilie*, the *Wasserfal* and others are shortly accounted for, as are the smaller and much more interesting field defence systems, like the *Fohn*, while the little *Fliegerfaust* is worthy of a wargame note elsewhere! The material covered in the chapter on Night Fighters has I suspect been dealt with more substantially in other works, but the book ends with a note on Miracle Weapons, in possession of which the Third Reich is all too frequently assumed to have been knee-deep at the end. Death-rays, giant rockets, they all crop up here, but the Luftwaffe simply didn’t have any strength left to defend the small areas left to protect.

Interestingly, and there’s surely a wargame scenario in this, at the beginning of 1945, the British army captured a few Ju 88s G-1 and G-6 variants “rigged to carry battlefield gas loads” and Manfred Griehl records a small number of He 177s, a-5s and A-7s as held in reserve to provide reprisal attacks with nerve gas at the end of the campaign.

In his final conclusions -- the book incidentally gives no bibliography, nor provenance for the photographs -- he rightly recognises that many of the operations, and indeed “super” designs were “hopeless from the outset.”

This is a very good book indeed, and the author himself provides so many “what-ifs,” but can’t avoid the final “When? Never.”

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