



Adolf Galland - Fighter General.

Written by [Dariusz Tyminski](#).

Above - Bf 109 E-4N - The deadly weapon of commander JG26, Lt. Col. Adolf Galland, on Audembert airfield, France, December 1940. In the text is a photo of Adolf Galland (left) and Werner Mölders (right) during an interview with war correspondent, Wissant airfield, September 1940.

Adolf Galland is probably the most known Luftwaffe pilot of WWII. Not because of number of his kills, but special kind of charisma, a characteristic for all great aces. He was the youngest general grade officer of either side in World War II, and at age 29, he was more competent in aerial combat, strategy and tactics than many of the experts nearly twice his age. As a fighter pilot he was credited with 104 aerial victories. He was also famous for making a lot of modifications to his Bf 109 fighters. He enhanced their fire power, installed better pilot armour and, a cockpit cigar lighter!

He was born in Westerholt, a small village in Westphalia on 19 March 1912. His father was an administrator of private lands and properties. Adolf was the second son, after Fritz. His younger brothers were Wilhelm and Paul. These two younger brothers followed Adolf into the Luftwaffe fighter forces. However they were not as lucky in combat. Paul (17 victories) was killed on 31 October 1943, mistakenly shot down by another pilot of JG26. Wilhelm (54 victories, Knight's Cross) was shot down a year later. Since childhood Adolf Galland was fascinated by aviation. He started building model aircraft when he was 12 years old. When he was 16, he began glider flights. In 1933

Galland realized a dream when he received his first pilot's license. During training in 1935, he crashed in a Focke-Wulf Fw-44 biplane and he was in a coma for three days. He had serious skull fractures, a broken nose, and a partially blinded left eye from glass fragments. His commander, Major Rheitel, an aviator from the First World War, assisted him during his recovery and getting back into flying. He returned to air duty, but a year later he crashed again, this time on Arado Ar-68. Galland again spent a lot of time in the hospital.

In 1937 he volunteered to go with a group of German pilots for service in the Spanish Civil War. In this group were other future aces like Hannes Trautloft, Wilhelm Balthasar, Günther Lützow, Eduard Neumann and Hajo Herrmann. They arrived in El Ferrol on 7 May 1937. Galland became a squadron leader in the Legion Fighter Group, equipped with Heinkel He-51 biplane fighters. Lützow led a squadron of the newest Messerschmitt Bf 109Bs. Galland entered action over Brunete in July 1937. He flew over 300 missions as a leader and he was awarded the Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds, only awarded 12 times in Spanish history. In 1938 he returned to Germany. Having great experience, was ordered to begin the organization of Luftwaffe ground attack units.

At the beginning of WW II, Galland flew in Poland in the Henschel Hs 123, until October 1, 1939, performing ground attack missions and proving the dive-bombing concept. For his efforts Galland was awarded by Iron Cross. Next, he was assigned to JG 27, commanded by Oberst Max Ibel. During the French campaign Adolf Galland scored his first kills on 12 May 1940, when he went with Gustav Rödel on a mission. Galland shot down two "Hurricanes" from 87th Squadron in two sorties. He had 12 victories by 9 June 1940.

When "Battle of Britain" started, Galland was assigned to JG26 Schlager as Gruppenkommandeur of III/JG26. His debut in that unit was very successful: he shot down two fighters on his first mission. On 18 July 1940, he was promoted to Major and a month later (on 22 August) he received the Ritterkreuz (Knights Cross) after his 17th victory. During the "Battle of Britain" his score increased rapidly, and on 25 September he was decorated with the Oak Leaves (for 40 kills) by Hitler. Galland also succeeded Gotthard Handrick as Kommodore of JG26. On 1 November 1940, he scored his 50th victory and was promoted to Oberstleutnant (lieutenant colonel). One month later he became a full colonel.

Galland experienced being shot down himself on 21 June 1941, when JG26 was stationed at Pas de Calais. The Germans attacked Bristol "Blenheim" bombers and



Galland downed two of them. However, some escorting "Spitfires" shot up his plane. He was forced to belly-land in a field. This same day, after lunch, he went on his next sortie. On that mission he shot down his number 70, but when following the burning "Spitfire", he was bounced and shot up badly. His plane caught fire, and he was wounded. He tried to bail out, but the canopy was jammed. After a dramatic struggle with the canopy, he was able to bail out at the last moment. His parachute opened just as he hit the ground. He was bleeding from his head and arm and he had damaged his ankle on landing. On 2 July 1941 Galland again was in trouble, but that is another story. Please check the text: [Adolf Galland and the dramatic air combat July of 1941](#). On 9 August 1941 Galland 'welcomed' the famous Douglas Bader, who was just shot down by JG26 fighters.

At the end of 1941 Galland became General der Jagdflieger ("commander of fighter forces"), and went to Berlin. Gerhard Schoepfel became Kommodore of Galland's beloved JG26. On 28 January 1942, Hitler awarded him again, this time with the Brillanten (Diamonds). Galland still was at the rank of Colonel, but in 1942 he was promoted to General, then General Leutnant. He was enthusiastic about the new jet fighter project, and he gave great support to the Me 262 program. However, the protracted development time and Hitler's idea to turn the aircraft into a bomber "Schwalbe" slowed the entrance of this revolutionary fighter by a year.

In January of 1945 Galland and other officers (Lützow, Johannes, Steinhoff) had a notorious confrontation with Göring over the performance and future of the Fighter Arm. Galland was removed from his position and even arrested and threatened with a court-martial. Eventually he was allowed to organize a special jet unit using the Me 262. He created Jagdverband 44 a unit with most experienced pilots. His 'recruiting' officer, Steinhoff, traveled to all of the major bases, selecting pilots who wanted join to new adventure. Some very famous pilots joined over a period of weeks: Gerhard Barkhorn, Walter Krupinski, [Heinz Bär](#), Erich Hohagen, Günther Lützow, Wilhelm Herget.

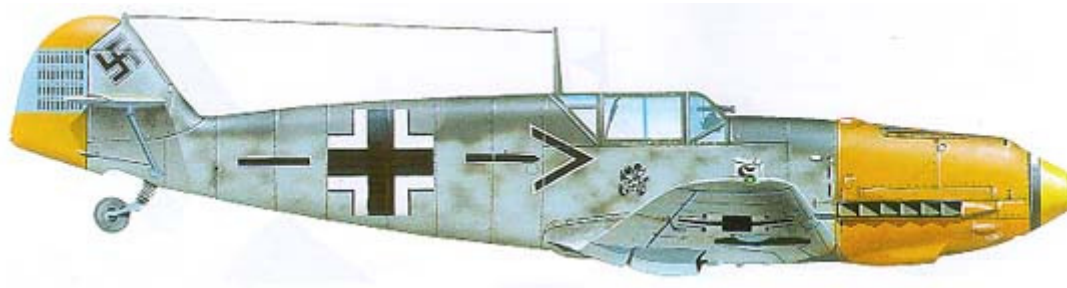
The newly organized unit flew several missions with varying success. Some aircraft used the anti-bomber R4M rockets. During his first attack with rockets Galland, with Walter Krupinski as a wingman, attacked a group of American B-26 "Marauders". Galland's rocket attack knocked down two of them.

In his last aerial combat in WWII, Adolf Galland took off on 26 April 1945. During an attack against Marauders his rockets would not fire, so he had use the 30 mm cannons. His Me 262 was hit by return fire from a rear gunner. The Allied bomber withstood Galland's fire. When Galland turned to finish the bomber, he was surprised by a P-47D flown by James Finnegan. Shells from the P-47's eight 12,7 mm guns destroyed Galland's instrument panel, shattered the jet's canopy, and struck his right knee. With his plane losing power and in great pain, Galland returned to his base, arriving just at the moment when a strafing attack by enemy fighters was underway. He successfully landed and escaped the wreck of his Me 262, avoiding the fire of the strafing attackers.

After war Galland was invited by Juan Perón to help build Argentinian Air Forces. Here he established a training and operations school, developed tactical training program. In 1955 he returned to Germany. Adolf Galland, a holder of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds, died in 1996.

Special thanks to John Beaman for English language support !

Here is a right profile of a Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-4N W.Nr. 5819, used by Galland in the period of September 1940 - April 1941. This view is dated 23 September 1940, when Galland claimed his 40th victory. Note - this plane was repainted and remarked many times. Please compare it with photo above.



Source: Robert Michulec, 'Messerschmitt Me 109', AJ-Press.

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