

Two such mortar howitzers were built into each wing of the '110' for instance, making four mortars in all, the fuse was at 1000M or 1200M it kept changing during this experimental stage. Some very good successes were actually scored with it; my predecessor shot down two four engine aircraft with one round from it. Their fuselages simply broke in half and the two huge things plunged earthwards. But, taking it all round, one had to say that successes due to the 'mortar shell' were infinitesimal, in fact so few that it was withdrawn again. I had no instrument in the aircraft for calculating exactly how far away I was from the enemy aircraft. The only means I had was that so called 'Reflex' sight. That's an illuminated circle with a reticule in it, there's a target in it, rather similar to a telescopic sight, and I know that when the Boeing takes up a third of the diameter I am 1000M away from it. But it's impossible to say whether it's exactly 1000M or 1100M or 900M. That's why it kept occurring that people fired at too great a range; especially the inexperienced crews were always afraid of those huge aircraft which already had so many victories to their credit, so they didn't wait to open fire at 1000M but fired at 1500M, 2000M in and 2500M. The 'mortar shell' also had a bad effect on the pilots; they wouldn't close in any more but remained at a distance at which it was impossible to engage in combat. That's why, having introduced that 'mortar shell' in the Autumn of 1943, they started to remove the thing again at the beginning of 1944, and rightly so, as I had to admit afterwards also, although I was all for it in the beginning.

After that lack of success a strongly worded order was received from the Reichsmarschall in which he again reminded fighter pilots of their duty to protect the Fatherland, to get to close grips with and shoot down the enemy, and ordered that the attack be delivered from behind and that fire must not be opened until the range had closed to 400M. If one can get to within that distance, there's a lot of point in what he said, but we have already seen that the probability of attaining that range was extremely small. That was because it's also harder to shoot down an aircraft from the front. Naturally, the inexperienced crews had little success when they started attacking from the front and only after half a dozen operations did they find out how it should be done and really record some successes. For these reasons, there were the strictest orders that the attack must come from the rear and anyone who didn't comply was court marshaled.

The result: our fighter forces which was already sickening under a shortage of experienced pilots, obstinately pressed home its attacks from the rear and were equally obstinately shot down. It was dreadful to see; they approached from the rear, flying in closest formation, and doing a slightly greater speed than the enemy and 50,60, 70% or even greater percentage of them were shot down.

To the existing dilemma there was added, at the end of 1943 or beginning of 1944, the Allied fighter escort, the American long distance fighter, the Thunderbolt and then the Mustang. The first time the Thunderbolts escorted them as far as the RHINE everyone was horrified and utterly confounded what ever next? Then they got auxiliary tanks and flew as far as Hanover. The troops reported this but they were laughed at and were told they were seeing things; "It's impossible for a fighter to fly that far," said our GOC Fighters and said the Reichsmarschall nobody dared tell the Fuhrer that it was possible for enemy fighters to fly so far into Reich territory. The GOC fighter himself took off with his inspector in order to have a look and see how his fighters pressed home

their attack. He was fortunate enough to meet four Mustangs and the Mustangs took him in charge and chased him all the way to Berlin, so then he knew how far the things could fly and believed it; but despite that no one dared report the air situation to the Fuhrer. Orders to our fighter pilots remained the same, to avoid air battles with enemy fighters and go solely for the bombers. I should like to add here that by the beginning of 1944 no one was attacking from the rear anymore, despite the 'Reichsmarschall's' orders and despite the fact that this order is still in force today,, it was just impossible. I have several times requested, even in writing, that order be rescinded, but it was in vain. That order which I mentioned earlier, to attack only the four engine bombers, is, of course, understandable insofar as it was only the bombers which were a nuisance to us, because it was they that dropped the bombs. The order was however, psychologically wrong. When talking with one of the Reichsmarschall's staff officers in January or February of 1944, I said: "It's absolutely essential that one day in one of those penetrations we attack only the fighters, to take them down a peg, make them lose their feeling of superiority and make them suffer losses for a change." This desire on the part of the men, which wasn't only my own wish, was passed on; it went up to the 'Division, 'the Corps' and to the GOC Fighters; it was turned down with the remark: 'We must shoot down the bombers, those are the ones we don't like, the ones which are dangerous to us.' What was the result of that?

The flight of an American fighter over Germany was the safest flying in existence. Not a soul attacked him. The pilot had no need to look around to see whether there was anything coming up from behind which would try to shoot him down. It never happened, he merely had to look ahead, What is down there ahead of me that I can shoot down without endangering myself?" There again we felt the effect of this factor. To start with, the Americans were rather apprehensive and attacked very unwillingly. But once they noticed that nothing happened to them they grew increasingly cockier and more daredevilish. Then they had successes and got a taste of how wonderful it is to be able to shoot down an aircraft; until finally it got to the stage when our fighter formations were no longer able to reach their bomber formations because they were shot down first by the fighters, which always had the advantage of coming from a higher altitude. The moral effect of that on us was that all our pilots, whether rightly or wrongly, I'll leave open, felt inferior to those enemy aircraft, and the collapse of our fighters' morale dates from then.

The inferior aircraft at those heights was the FW-190 which, although it had shown excellent performances at low level, was inferior to the enemy aircraft at altitudes of 8000 in. Equal to the Mustang and superior to the Thunderbolt was our '109'. In addition to all that, on account of the losses suffered in those air battles, the ground control made the greatest effort to direct their own fighter formations so as to avoid the enemy fighters and bring them on to a bomber formation which had no fighter escort or only a small one. As a result, this feeling of inferiority increased still more, and you ran into fighters again any way, for it's impossible to get such a clear air picture as to be able to say: "There are fighters there, there are no fighters there." In the end they were all over the place. This difficult situation for us was complicated still further in the spring of 1944 by the attacks of the enemy air force on our fighter industry, Augsburg, and the large aircraft factory at Weiner-Neustadt which produced 600 fighters a month was destroyed. Also destroyed