



Alfred Jobst, III./KG 27 the Luftwaffe Pilot
Shot down by
WOs Butler and Graham tells his story
1st of October 1944

Report Alfred Jobst, III./KG 27:

Report on the Crete mission with the 1G+MR on 10.01.1944:

The following story of the crash of my He 111, call number 1G+MR, in the Aegean had quite a strange beginning, which seems to me to be worth telling. My squadron, 3rd Group combat-squadron Boelcke, 7th Squadron, had already been withdrawn from the eastern front at the beginning of August 1944 because of lack of fuel (field-airfields Mielec and Biala Podlaska) and transferred to eastern Prussia, where the occupants were sleeping in the straw-filled barn of a manor by Schippenbeil, 60 km south of Koenigsberg. Our remaining airplanes were surrounded with protective banks of earth and covered with camouflage nets at the edge of the nearby airfield.

On 9/27/1944, five air crews were unexpectedly chosen with the command to be ready for a special-assignment beginning in the morning on the next day, without any information about the goal and order of the mission. Takeoff was set for 6 o'clock in the morning with the temporary destination of Wiener-Neustadt. I remember a hazy sky covered with low scraps of clouds, in plane-lingo a "laundry room", and takeoff under blind-flight conditions. After a few hundred meters of ascent, however, the morning heavens opened to show the horizon and the rising sun.

A strange ritual at takeoff left me feeling conflicted. Beside the start-block, some one had posted a standard bearer, framed from two soldiers, who saluted each of the planes as they took off by sinking the squadron-standard, the existence of which I had never known until that moment. Since we didn't yet have any real idea about our actual destination, the deeper sense of such an emotional gesture was lost on me – honorary tribute or writing on the wall (or both) - puzzling. The only thing that counted was to finally be sitting back behind the wheel of my Heinkel after so many long weeks of aeronautical "abstinence" ready to prove myself in the "service of the fatherland," an attitude, that I myself can scarcely understand today, but is an example of the abused idealism of a youth trimmed on heroism and martyrdom according to the Latin motto that I learned in high school:

Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori: "How sweet and honorable it is to die for the fatherland."

In Wiener- Neustadt other than a succinct statement of our destination Belgrade, we didn't get any information about our forthcoming mission. The confusion was complete the next morning when we received our orders to fly to Athens with a stopover in Salonika. Hellas! This prospect made me almost forget the war and the coming mission, as it promised the fulfillment of a long-tended dream of my youth.

Since reading the sagas of the Greek gods and heroes as a child I had felt magically drawn to this country. However it was only much later, as student of philology, that I found an adequate expression for it in Iphigenia's words: "Seek the land of the Greeks with your soul." I would get to see Athens with my own eyes, the acropolis, for me the quintessence of Greece, the Aegean, the fateful sea of Odysseus, and maybe even Mount Olympus, the mysterious seat of the antique gods, if only from the cockpit of a German bomber: already quite an outlandish educational-trip.

In Salonika, however we were first received by a swarm of British Mosquitoes, that in a demonstration of strength and superiority greeted us by thundering over the runway in low-flight, tearing us mercilessly from our untimely daydream and chasing us into foxholes and trenches on the edges of the airfield for our own safety. I was deeply impressed with the beauty and speed of this new type of plane classified in the class with our Messerschmitt Me 110 as "destroyers". So that's what our prospective opponents looked like!

The flight from Salonika to Athens on the afternoon of September 29th has remained in my memory as the emotional and aesthetic high point of my life as a pilot. It was a sunny autumn day. For safety reasons we flew low over the Golf of Saloniki, smooth as glass and gleaming in emerald tones, with an occasional view of the almost 3000 meter high Mount Olympus on the starboard, then over the virtually uninhabited island Euboea, whose scant mountain landscape, covered in mild pastels and peacefully grazing sheep brought to view for me the imaginary, poetically fixed concept of Arcadia and for a moment made me forget that this idyll only actually existed in the eye of the beholder. And then Athens lay at our feet, the acropolis illuminated by the mild late-afternoon sunlight. And against all commands and instructions, we circled twice at an altitude of approximately 150 meters.

After landing on the airfield in Athens-Kalamaki and being shown our quarters, the comfortable villa of the former Finnish ambassador in Athens, now only spartanly furnished with cots protected by mosquito nets, we were finally filled in on the orders for our forthcoming mission: the evacuation of German soldiers from the island of Crete. At first glance a business that appeared rather harmless. The reality meanwhile, was quite something else. The evacuation process had been going on for several weeks under extremely dramatic circumstances. British, mainly with "Beaufighter" type airplanes were in almost continual deployment against the transport formations of the German air force from Peloponnese and Crete's east by day, but primarily by night. The Germans, with the placid Junker Ju 52 had no chance against the superior night hunters, who were armed with four 20 mm cannons and six 7.7 mm MGs and a speed of approximately 500 km per hour. After disastrous losses the Germans had finally been withdrawn. Now we, as clueless as we were, with the admittedly faster, but still far inferior He 111 were supposed to close the gap and bring this hopeless business to a different conclusion.

At our disposal was the Heinkel, a specially built model originally made for an invasion of England, with two bench seats opposite each other for eight to ten people instead of the bomb bay. Moreover, the airplane was equipped with a rubber dingy that was placed as a package behind the bow cockpit under the sheet metal of the fuselage. In an emergency, the pilot could operate a mechanism from his seat that opened a compressed bottle of air, whereby the rubber dingy was inflated within a few seconds; the cover separated in the fuselage at the predetermined breaking point and fell out of the hatch that had been created. The dingy was connected to the fuselage with a security rope that would prevent the boat from drifting away at sea and could be cut easily. On the floor of the boat were four constructible paddles, a rudder, a compass, a receptacle with emergency food: cookies, chocolate, some packets of "Dextro-Energen" (glucose), a few cans with beverages (including can openers) and a first aid kit. Hardly conceivable, the scenes that might play out and actually did play out during the free-for-all over one of the five places in the rubber dingy after an emergency splashdown on the return flight with a full airplane.

October 1, 1944 began with a surprise for me: my promotion to sergeant. Still under the impression of this honor, we took off at 19:35 from Athens-Kalamaki into the great adventure with a target of Heraklion harbor and airfield at Crete's North-coast and the antique harbor of Knossos situated only 5 km to the southeast, the sovereign seat of the legendary King Minos, setting of the stories of Theseus and Ariadne – the one with the famous thread - and thus the second treasure trove of childlike fantasies, that was admittedly now largely subdued by bitterly serious reality.

A beautiful Mediterranean autumn day extended an almost abstract picture of flawless beauty with a cloudless sky, a grand mountain-panorama dipped in pastel-like ocher and, before us, a sea wide in the shine of the evening sun, gleaming indefinitely. The reality was quite something different! We had no binding strategy in expectation of the British night-hunters that were lying in wait, neither for the flight-course, nor for the cruising altitude. Each pilot had to decide in for himself, whether to fly in an arc east of Rhodes, an obviously extended duration of flight, over the islands of the Cyclades, with Syros, Paros and Santorini. Thus the decision was between flying for the longest possible amount of time in close proximity to the islands, or the direct route over the island Milos. Since the British Beaufighters were equipped already with radar, flying low, at about 5 to 10 meters altitude with calm sea conditions seemed hardly any risk, in order to remain below the radar. There were only strict instructions respecting the formation of the airplanes. We were supposed to stay as far from each other as possible, preferably avoiding visibility, in order to exclude accidental friendly fire.

I decided on the course over the Cyclades and a low altitude after the flight over the island of Santorini. At first, it appeared that we had a splendid flight in store for us, over a peaceful dreamy island panorama in the dusk over Odysseus' wide sea. After approximately one hour of flight time, the clock showed 20:40. This corresponds to a distance of approximately 320 km. I suddenly noticed the silhouette of an airplane against the moon as it rose out of

the sea. It was slowly passing mine at a close distance on the starboard side, twin-engine, but evidently smaller and fast than our Heinkel and was clearly recognizable, equipped with its star motors instead of row-motors. It quickly became clear to me that we were not dealing with a He 111 here, although the radio operator, the one delegated for a few missions with the squadron and among other things the lieutenant responsible for the airplane-recognition-service of the air-news-troop, believed that that was "unequivocally" what he had identified. In response to my pressing question of the further behavior of the object that had meanwhile disappeared from my view came the ominous answer: "Now it's right behind us!" At the same moment, the first streak of light swept over the right wing on the level of the fuel-tank, which immediately caught fire. A second followed which accurately ripped open the left wing at nearly same place and also began to burn. Then, the spook was gone. The Beaufighter had turned away under fire from our aircraft's weapons, even though we were much too late. Whether he was hit or not we could not tell.

Now both wings were ablaze behind the motors with eerie red-black flames. The airplane, so it seemed, could explode at any moment, but I was still able to steer. And the motors were still performing sufficiently to climb 80 to 100 meters so that we could get our bearings and to keep the machine in the air for as long as possible because every minute in flight shortened the distance to Heraklion's harbor, whose blinking beacons we had already seen from afar.

All of this lasted only few moments and then the dream of flying was all over. I could only concentrate on "starving" out my airplane in the descent to get to the border, i.e. to reduce the landing and touchdown-speed, and attempt a gentle belly landing on the water. With the splash of the fuselage, the air-screws and the disks of the bow-cockpit burst. The fire suddenly had gone out, but immediately the water began to come through the hole into the wreck gurgling and gargling and quickly rose into the entire fuselage. The rubber dingy mechanism had worked perfectly, and the men were able to leave the wreck through the opening however possible and escape into the rubber dingy. I was the last one standing on the left wing, already up to my stomach in water and my comrades, not without effort pulled me into the boat. The stern of the airplane with its pitch and yaw rudders stood up steeply and sank almost vertically in the sea, leaving no trace.

We tried to arrange ourselves in the "nutshell" as well as the circumstances would allow. Four people sat, two on each side, astride the sides of the boat, with one leg almost up to the knee in the water. The fifth sat as helmsman on the stern, trading places in the coming hours lying before us with a rower to get a breather. Meanwhile, the moon stood over the horizon as a gigantic disk and brilliantly poured forth its silvery light over the still virtually smooth as glass, infinitely wide sea. Our odyssey had begun!!

According to the last position-reckoning, the crash site lay about 35 km north of Heraklion, (at a depth of 200 to 300 meters). So we steered in a southerly direction. After some hours, it may have been around 3:00 in the night, the distant outlines of rocky land rose before us. With fresh courage, we paddled on, until after approximately 12 hours (it must have about 9:30) we reached the Heraklion offshore island of Dias under a sunny sky. Just before that we had I had a traumatic experience. We recognized a British airplane, brilliantly silver in the blue of the sky, and feared that we would be shot in the rubber dinghy. However, the airplane didn't take any note of us. With effort, we found a place to camp on the jagged slope, which crashed steeply into the sea. We tried to catch our breath a little bit after we had spread our still moist shirts and shorts (the pilot's summer-uniform in the tropical south) to dry in the sun. Meanwhile I climbed the rocky slope to a flat plateau, overgrown with all sorts of foliage. From there I saw the harbor and airfield of Heraklion lying in almost tangible proximity before me. The actual distance from the South coast of Dias to Heraklion is somewhat more than 3 kilometers.

Shortly after returning to camp, the story took an unexpected turn for us all. To our left in close proximity to the coast, a Greek fish-cutter with its chugging support-motor appeared, heading out to the open sea. Shouting, signaling and wildly gesticulating, we succeeded in getting the fisherman's attention. He stopped his boat and steered it as near to us as the cliffs would allow. We tried to make the fisherman understand With all sorts of signs and imaginative expressions like "Germanski", airplane broken, etc., and by making sounds that were supposed to sound like machine gun fire and trying to show two airplanes flying one behind the other with our hands, that the five strange figures he had found perched on the cliffs of a god-forsaken isle was a shipwrecked German air crew. The sight of us on the ledge of the beached rubber dingy finally made a comprehensible story out of all the confusing details.

There was also a 15 or 16 year old boy on board with the fisherman, apparently his son. The fisherman was a man of about 60 with a full beard and a badly creased, suntanned face. The boy eyed us, intimidated, as though we had appeared from another world. With great respect and spontaneous helpfulness, the five of us, for the captain actually nothing more than hostile occupying forces, were heaved on board, and the cutter headed toward the Heraklion's har-

bor with its strange load. There we had already been routinely written off, and so the mystification and joy were all the greater as we entered the port like the erstwhile Odysseus and his men on a Greek barque. That was it, *our odyssey*, even if it was pretty modest: without Polyphemus, Circe, Calypso and the sirens and without Scylla and Charybdis, thank God without Poseidon, the cruel God of the storms.

Of the five He 111 fighters shot down by British night-hunters over the Aegean north of Create on October 1 and 2, 1944 my personnel alone survived thanks to the happy circumstances that have just been told. I remember at this time the remaining four planes, that found their graves in the Aegean on those two nights.

We thanked the Greek fisherman, our captain, by compensating him for not having brought in catch with a box with food, cans, cigarettes and all sorts of spirits. I will never forget, how the old man, a bit helpless and sheepish, but obviously delighted and thankful accepted the gift, humble compared to his unselfish effort. This report is dedicated to the old Greek fisherman from the distant country of the Minoans, who has long since gone to join the "round dance of blissful spirits" in the Elysium, as a late memory of a noble gesture of humanity in the middle of a merciless, dark war.

Nienwohlde, April 15, 2006

Alfred Jobst

10/01/1944						
Prototype He 111	Echelon or Group	ID	Work- num- ber	Break in %	Total- loss	Crash Site
Type:	7.	1G+MR			x	35 km from Heraklion
Flight Number	Purpose of Flight	Flight				
		Take off	Land-			
		place	time	place	time	
	Mission	Athen- Kalamaki	19.35			
<u>Target, Defense, Specifics, Reason:</u> Evacuation of Crete. Report!						
Function	Rank	Last Name, First name	Wounded, fallen, missing	Date of birth		
FF	Fw.	Jobst, Alfred				
BO		Fischer				
BF	Lt.	Gombert				