

afternoons they stood-to each evening, awaiting the executive order to launch the operation. On each day the weather was unfavourable, then, without explanation, the operation was cancelled. The *Mistel*n would be used against the bridges after all.

Short of fuel and pilots and, increasingly, of munitions and aircraft also, the surviving *Luftwaffe* combat units battled to give whatever support they could to the beleaguered German Army as the land battle entered its final phase. In the next chapter we shall observe the final collapse of the force that, such a short time earlier, had made Europe tremble.

TOTALS OF SERVICEABLE AIRCRAFT, 9 APRIL 1945

Note: In several cases the figures given are approximate.

Luftflotte	Reich	LF 4	LF 6	LK West	LK E.Pr.	LFG Den	LK Cour.	LFG Italy	LFG Nor.	Total
Fighters (day)	389	62	641	76	26	-	76	-	40	1,310
Fighters (night)	480	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	480
Bombers	-	-	20	17	-	-	-	-	-	37
Ground- attack	21	93	533	-	24	-	41	-	-	712
Night ground- attack	17	61	86	-	-	-	16	35	-	215
Strategic recce	-	44	59	8	-	8	-	14	20	153
Tactical recce	16	68	185	26	17	-	18	14	-	344
Transports	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	10
KG 200	70	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	70
Totals	993	328	1,524	127	67	8	151	63	70	3,331

DEPLOYMENT OF COMBAT FLYING UNITS, 9 APRIL 1945

On this date *Luftwaffe* combat units possessed a total of about 3,330 serviceable combat aircraft, more than one-quarter less than in January. The rundown of parts of the force had by now been completed, and its once-mighty bomber arm was reduced to a mere 37 aircraft; there were few transport and heavy fighter (*Zerstörer*) units, and all the anti-shipping units had been disbanded. Only the ground-attack arm had expanded significantly since the previous May, and now stood at 712 aircraft.

Given the rapidly deteriorating position within the *Luftwaffe*, with several aircraft production centres and storage parks having been overrun by enemy ground forces and others now under threat and being hastily evacuated, it is perhaps remarkable that the strength of its combat units had not fallen even further. Two factors contributed to the maintenance of their strength, on paper at least. First, there was the huge number of aircraft held in storage parks and available for immediate issue to replace losses as they occurred; second, the fuel shortage confined units equipped with piston-engined aircraft to the ground for much of the time, and these machines sat out the

war in relative safety in camouflaged and dispersed blast pens some distance from their airfields and defended with light flak.

Luftflotte Reich

With some 389 serviceable fighters, of which just over a hundred were jet-propelled, *Luftflotte Reich* was poorly prepared to meet the almost daily incursions by American heavy bombers. During any one action the American escort forces might outnumber the defending fighters by as many as five to one. Against this background, it is not surprising that even the Me 262 units made scarcely any impression on the enemy. Its night fighter units possessed 480 serviceable aircraft, but the fuel shortage had severely curtailed flying and the number of aircraft suggested an operational capability far greater than was the case.

Luftflotte 4

Luftflotte 4, based in the south-east of Germany and in Hungary and Yugoslavia, had transferred several units to *Luftflotte 6* and was now down to only 328 serviceable aircraft.

Luftflotte 6

Since January there had been a large-scale transfer of fighting units from the Western Front and elsewhere, to bolster *Luftflotte 6* in readiness to meet the anticipated Soviet offensive against Berlin. With 1,524 serviceable aircraft, that moderately powerful formation was now the strongest in the *Luftwaffe*.

Other fighting formations

Elsewhere, revisions to the *Luftwaffe* command structure provided evidence aplenty of the collapse in fighting strength in several areas. Four once-mighty *Luftflotten* had been downgraded to minor formations. *Luftwaffenkommando West*, previously *Luftflotte 3*, was reduced to just 127 serviceable aircraft – less than one-tenth the number it had in January. *Lufwaffenkommando Courland*, previously *Luftflotte 1* and now bypassed in Lithuania by the Soviet advance, was down to 151 serviceable aircraft. *Luftwaffe General Norway*, previously *Luftflotte 5*, possessed only about 70 serviceable aircraft, while *Luftwaffe General Italy*, previously *Luftflotte 2*, had a paltry 63.

LUFTFLOTTE REICH

Geschwader	Unit	Aircraft	Total Serviceable	
Day fighter units				
JG 2	I. Gruppe	Fw 190	5	3
	II. Gruppe	Fw 190	8	4
	III. Gruppe	Fw 190	12	9
JG 4	Stab	Fw 190	6	4
	II. Gruppe	Fw 190	50	34
	III. Gruppe	Bf 109	61	56
JG 7	Stab	Me 262	5	4
	I. Gruppe	Me 262	41	26
	II. Gruppe	Me 262	30	23
JG 26	Stab	Fw 190	4	3
	I. Gruppe	Fw 190	44	16
	II. Gruppe	Fw 190	57	29
	III. Gruppe	Fw 190	35	15
JG 27	I. Gruppe	Bf 109	29	13
	II. Gruppe	Bf 109	48	27
	III. Gruppe	Bf 109	19	15
KG(J) 54	I. Gruppe	Me 262	37	21
JG 301	Stab	Ta 152	3	2