

"GUSTAVs over SOLA-STAVANGER"

by BARRY SPICER



Zwei Bf-109G-14 der vierten Gruppe des 16/JG5 suchen in einem ruhigen Moment über der norwegischen Winterlandschaft ein Loch in dem beständigen Boden-
nebel.

World War II came to Scandinavia on the 30th November 1939 when the Soviets invaded Finland.

This Soviet move was a direct result of a non-interference pact between Stalin and Hitler signed in August, 1939. This so called Winter War was to last 4 months, and ended with a peace treaty in which Finland was forced to cede territory to increase the buffer zone around the Soviets' second city of Leningrad.

In this background, Hitler launched Operation *Weserübung*, the invasion of Norway, on the 9th April, 1940.

Strategically, the occupation of Norway enabled him to block threats against the German Baltic coast, secure a route for high grade Swedish iron ore and Finnish nickel, obtain access to Norwegian natural resources and to counter against British control of Scandinavia and the North Atlantic.

Having so secured his northern flank, Hitler launched Operation *Gelb*, the invasion of France, Belgium and the Netherlands on the 10th May, 1940. For a while, the German success in the Low Countries and in France lessened the strategic importance of Norway, but with the commencement of Operation *Barbarossa* - the German invasion of Soviet Russia on the 22nd June, 1941, Scandinavia assumed a greater strategic importance. The Finns joined the Germans and launched their own offensive against Russia in July, 1941 to re-capture ceded territory in Karelia. For the next 4 years, Norway was the base of operations by the Luftwaffe and the Kriegsmarine against the all-important supply convoys to Murmansk, which the Germans failed to capture or to isolate.

Against this background, Jagdgeschwader 5 (JG-5) *Eismeer* (Ice Sea) was formed in January, 1942 to carry out aerial operations in this northern region: *Gruppe* was based in Sola-Stavanger to defend against Allied attacks on German shipping. II & III *Gruppen* were based in Petsamo in northern Finland in support of operations over Murmansk and Karelia. IV *Gruppe* was created later in 1942, based at Trondheim as air activities increased against the Arctic convoys to Murmansk.

By January, 1943, I & IV *Gruppen* were in southern Norway, at the airbases at *Lista*, *Sola*, *Kjevik* and *Herdla*, with June, 1943

seeing JG-5 at its maximum strength with 14 *Staffeln*, comprising 12 *Staffeln* of singled-engined fighters equipped with Bf-109s and Fw-190s, one Bf-110 *Zerstörerstaffel* and an armoured-up Fw-190A *Jabo* unit. In late 1943, however, I & III *Gruppen* left Norway and Finland for good, fighting the rest of the war elsewhere.

By the end of the war, JG-5 had amassed over 3,000 victories at a cost of 300 pilots lost over the 3 years of operations. Well known aces include Heinrich Ehrler (208 victories) and Walter Schuck (206 victories), both of whom flew Me-262 jets with JG-7 at war's end.

In this, is Barry Spicer's superbly picturesque depiction showing in the reflected late Winter light, a *rotte* of *Gustavs* circling over *Sola -Stavanger* looking for a break in the persistent ground fog, in late 1944.

The lead aircraft is a Bf-109 G-14 flown by Ofw Heinz Halstrick of 16/JG-5 of IV *Gruppe*. Ofw Halstrick's aircraft carries his personal emblem comprising "*Kolle alaaf*, a traditional Cologne greeting, below the city emblem of *Köln*, his home town, and the *Jagerpfeil*.

Ofw Halstrick flew with IV JG-5 from the summer of 1943 until the end of the war acquiring an impressive tally of 13 victory claims and the destruction of one ship.

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