

Figuring out Luftwaffe fighter codes and unit designations.

(or, what's all that stuff on the fuselage of my 109???)

If you are relatively new to the wonderful world of trying to figure out all these different Luftwaffe unit names or the various odd markings on the sides of fighters, then this is the page that will help you.

First of all, how the units are arranged, and I'll start from the top.

For purpose of this info sheet, we'll assume that the unit is *Jagdgeschwader* (fighter wing) 99. As with everything Luftwaffe, there will be differences in markings from one unit to the next.

The main unit is the wing or *geschwader*

Each *geschwader* has a *Kommodor*, Adjutant, Operations Officer, Technical Officer and Chief of Staff.

Their aircraft are marked as such: <-+, <I+, <-O, <IO+, and <II+ (the + is the fuselage insignia).

Not all staff personnel were pilots though often they had planes assigned that were flown by others.

These are the aircraft of the wing staff or *geschwaderstab*. Seeing this written it would be "*geschwaderstab*(or just *stab*)/JG 99"

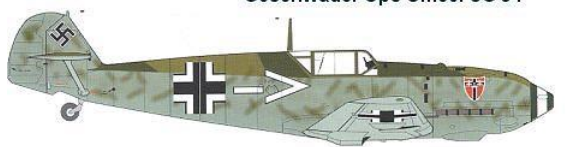
Geschwader Kommodor JG 26



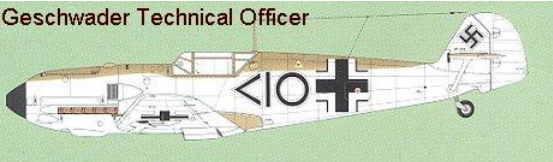
Geschwader Adjutant JG 54



Geschwader Ops Officer JG 54



Geschwader Technical Officer



Geschwader Chief of Staff JG 54



Each *geschwader* has three or four *gruppen*, or groups.

For this example we'll assume four *gruppen*.

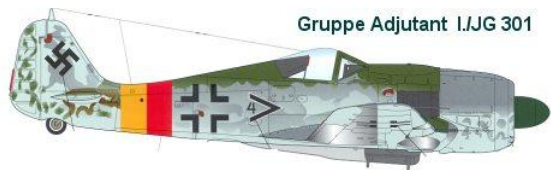
Each *gruppe* has a staff consisting of a

- *kommandeur*, with '<<+' markings
- adjutant, with '<+ ' markings
- technical officer, with '<O+' markings
- chief of staff, with '<I+' markings

The markings on their plane forward of the fuselage cross are: <<, <, <O, and <I

If we are talking about the second *gruppe* of JG 99, it would be written as II/JG 99. Note that we use Roman numerals when referring to the *gruppe*. Aircraft from the staff or *stab* of II *gruppe* would be listed as "*gruppenstab* (or just *stab*) II/JG 99". Sometimes the 'stab' is left off and when written as II/JG 99 it is assumed you are referring to the *gruppenstab*. \





Gruppe Adjutant I./JG 301



Gruppe Technical Officer, stab I./JG 3



Gruppe Chief of Staff III./JG 53

Each *gruppe* can consist of up to five *staffeln* or squadrons. However, three is more the norm. These would be listed from 1 to 12.

I *gruppe* would include *staffeln* 1, 2 and 3

II *gruppe* would include *staffeln* 4, 5 and 6

III *gruppe* would include *staffeln* 7, 8, and 9

IV *gruppe* would include *staffeln* 10, 11, and 12

Referring to individual *staffeln*, you'd write it as 4./JG 99 or 10./JG 99

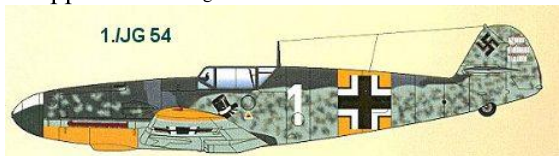
Regardless of the number of *staffeln* in a *gruppe*, ideally, they would be evenly spread out with each *gruppe* getting an equal number.

Each *gruppe* can have an identifying marking aft of the fuselage national insignia.

- I Gruppe would have nothing
- II Gruppe would have a horizontal bar
- III Gruppe would have a double wavy line or vertical bar
- IV Gruppe would have a single wavy line, a small cross or a dot

Here are examples:

Gruppe I - no markings



1./JG 54

Gruppe II - horizontal bar



Black 1 5./JG 54

Gruppe III - double wavy line or vertical bar



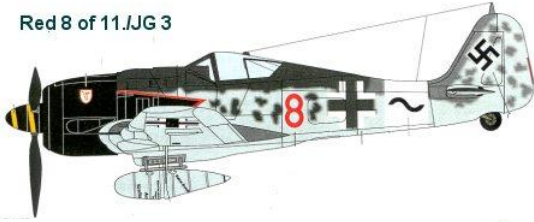
Black 13 8./JG 52



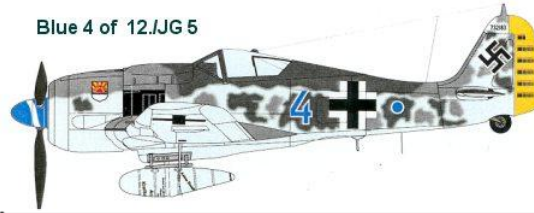
White 9 7./JG 27

Gruppe IV - single wavy line, dot, or small cross

Red 8 of 11.JG 3



Blue 4 of 12.JG 5



Within each *gruppe*, the individual *staffeln* would be color coded. The first *staffel* being white, second red or black, and third yellow. If a fourth was used it would be blue though there were exceptions. Same for the fifth *staffel*, which could be brown, though brown was sometimes used to replace the red in some *staffeln*. You can see why deciphering Luftwaffe colors and markings can be tricky. Using the examples of 12 *staffeln* in a 4 *gruppe* *geschwader*, the 3rd *staffel* would be yellow as would the 6th and 9th and 12th, the 8th would be red and so forth. These colors were often in the aircraft number and perhaps spinner color as well. There were MANY instances of these colors not being slavishly adhered to.

Each *staffel* could be further broken down into smaller units, such as *rotte* or *schwarm* but there was no specific markings for these sub-units so they will not be discussed.

Well, this is really about as good as it gets. Just to help a bit in case you are a bit confused, *gruppe* is singular, *gruppen* is plural; *staffel* is singular, *staffeln* is plural.

As a final note, night fighter units generally did not use these markings as they were considered 'heavy' units such as the bomber, recon and transport units. These units used four letter/number code combinations. Of course, sometimes you would find that they used the day fighter markings *in addition* to the normal codes. Aren't Luftwaffe markings fun!?