

THE BUD NOWLIN - GUNTHER SCHACK CONNECTION

The recent 357th reunion at Marietta, GA provided a unique guest, a man from "the other side". Gunther Schack, a former Luftwaffe pilot attended the reunion as a guest of Bud and Mrytle Nowlin. The connection between the two men was outlined in the October 1991 issue of the N/L which detailed the Nowlin's visit to Germany along with Historian Bill Graham who had brought them together.

Many of our members were quite interested in Gunther and Bud's story and since the reunion, there have been several requests for more details on the incident in which the two first met.

Merle Olmsted has recently completed an article on the 357th and the shuttle mission to Russia, which is due to appear in THE FRIENDS BULLETIN, a magazine published by the Air Force Museum. In this article, he covered the Nowlin - Schack story and has extracted that portion of the article which follows. He also included some brief biographical material on Schack.

Although Gunther does not speak English, he had memorized a short speech in English which was very well received by the members. His visit added considerable spice and interest to an already outstanding reunion.

Hauptmann Gunther Schack: Gunther Schack joined JG 51 after his training as a fighter pilot and won his first victory in the summer of 1941. A year later, he had completed 250 combat missions. Flying an FW 190 on 17 Dec. 1942, he scored 5 victories in one mission which set him on course to become one of the Luftwaffe's high scoring aces. In the summer of 1943, he became Deputy Commander of JG 51 achieving his 100th victory soon afterwards. By the end of 1944, he was commanding I/JG 51 (1st Gruppe of the wing), his personal tally having risen to 150 victories. Gunther Schack, having been shot down and bailed out 5 times, ended the war with 174 victories and was awarded the Knights Cross with Oak Leaves.

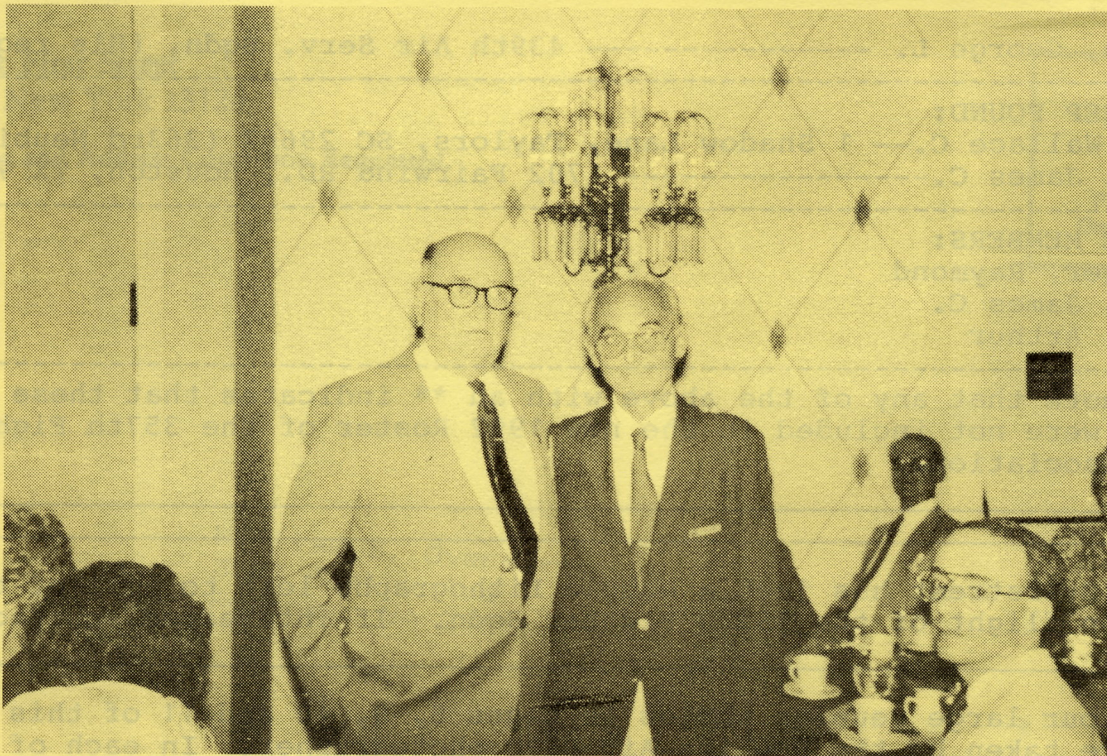


Photo by Wally Baldwin:
Left to right, Bud Nowlin, Gunther Schack & bottom right hand corner, Bill Graham at Marietta Reunion banquet.

EXTRACT FROM SHUTTLE MISSION REPORT, DATE, 6 AUGUST 1944
LOCATION, NE OF WARSAW

Leading Greenhouse White flight was Lt. Robert Shaw with Horace "Pete" Howell on his wing. Shaw reported he saw the 109s starting a pass on the last box of bombers. "I made an attack on the e/a from stern and got several hits as the e/a broke right. The 109 split "S"ed and I followed the attack with several long bursts. At approximately 12,000 feet, the e/a broke into smoke, and very short flame came from under the cowlings. I pulled up as the e/a continued to spin down. I claim one Me 109 destroyed".

Lt. Hollis Nowlin was element leader in Shaw's white flight with Louis Fecher on his wing and Nowlin was to deal with the other 109. Looking back on that day 4½ decades later, Nowlin recalls: "I wasn't properly prepared for combat, I had too much loose stuff in my plane. On the left side of the windshield above the panel were two oranges which I had taken from the breakfast table that morning, on the right side of the windshield, were 6 or 8 navigation charts covering half of Europe, along with a canteen of water from which I took a sip every hour or so. Under the seat was a set of spark plugs which Dennis Green (his crew chief) had suggested I take, also a ditty bag under the seat containing a change of underwear, maybe a candy bar or two and a couple of packs of smokes, with these things not tied down." Ready or not, Nowlin took on the other 109.

The two 109s were from Luftwaffe fighter unit JG51, and the leader was a man named Gunther Schack, one of the stars of JG51 with over 100 victories over Russian aircraft. He was Staffelfkapitan of the 9th Staffel (squadron) of the III Gruppe, of JG51. His wingman was Lt. Besekau.

Schack still has vivid memories of that summer day: "The 3rd Gruppe of Fighter Wing Molders (JG51) was stationed at Lyck, East Prussia, on the 6th of August, 1944. We were greatly astounded at the report that a hundred American "Furniture vans" (German slang for 4 engined bombers) were flying from Danzig eastwards. Every available plane must intercept, all nine of us! The Gruppe commander was elsewhere (Hauptman Deithelm Eichel-Streiber), so I had to take command. We met the reported "big herd" at the (for us) unusual height of 18,000 feet, seemingly very close to the front line."

"It was reported to us by ground control that no escort fighters were with the bombers. It took a seemingly long time for us to overtake the bombers, which flew in many different heights, and attack from the front, head on. But before we could begin our attack, Mustangs came out of the sun. In a turn my Me 109 received a hit in the cooler, and I had nothing more in my thoughts then to continue west to make a belly landing in German territory. In a dive I thought to escape "the boys" and somewhat cool my engine. As I was concentrating on a place to belly land a mustang flew very close to me, and turned to the east. After I was on the ground I received artillery fire and was hustled to safety in a bunker by infantrymen. Almost on the front line I had landed. There was a small salient still held by our side, surrounded on three sides by the Russians."

We are fortunate in this case to have the view from both sides of the gunsight. Nowlin's encounter report lists the time as 1345 hours and location as NE of Warsaw.

"I encountered the e/a at about 23,000 feet where the e/a split "S"ed and went down several thousand feet and leveled out. I gave the e/a a long burst in a steep turn and observed strikes. A stream of coolant or gas poured from the e/a on the left side of fuselage forward of the cockpit.

Chuck Yeager and Gunther Schack at the 1991 MacArthur Memorial, New Orleans, Louisiana
Photo by Wally Balwin