

September 2009

Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 33

A monthly publication of the Dr. Alexander M. Lippisch Chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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Read Back - My Logbook

By Jim Meade

Guenther Rall is the third highest scoring ace of all time with 275 aerial victories. He autographed his autobiography, My Logbook, Reminiscences of 1938 - 2006 for me at Oshkosh in 2009. Born March 18, 1918, General Rall was a sprightly and lively 91 years of age when we shook hands and exchanged a few words in German and English at the book signing. He is now the highest scoring living ace.

Ralls writes in an unassuming, natural style. His story tells of his early commitment to become a professional soldier and decision to transfer from the army to the Luftwaffe. His first flight on 7 July 1938 is in a Focke-Wulf Fw44 Stieglitz trainer. 27 days later, after 59 take-offs and 6 hours and 35 minutes of flying time logged, Ralls solos. The Stieglitz is followed by a Heinkel He 72 Kadett and a Buecker 131 Jungmann. A lieutenant in 1939, he is flying a 660 hp Henschel Hs 123 biplane ground attack fighter before the war.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-2004-0010
Foto: o.Ang. | August 1943

Ralls points out that the development of the Messerschmitt Me 109 brought speed, high rate of climb and firepower to air war. The speed demanded greater room for maneuverability and led to the abandonment of the three ship formation in favor of the two ship group. The concept of a leader who engaged in combat and was covered by a wingman was pioneered by the German pilots who studied lessons learned from secret participation in the Spanish Civil War.

Throughout the book, Rall takes time to address tactics, structure, personnel and other features of aerial combat. His victories almost seem like footnotes or sidebars to a broader discussion of aerial warfare at the group and national level. One never gets the feeling he is boastful or proud of killing other pilots. Rather, he takes care at several points to comment on the natural camaraderie of aviators, the bravery of his opponents and their increasing skill as their equipment and tactics improve. Some of the descriptions of dog fights are riveting. Most attacks are short and a surprise. Some are savage.

A good deal of the World War II portion of the book talks about the challenges and rewards of command. He is gracious in acknowledging the contributions of his fellow aviators. He is not shy about pointing out a few people he feels failed to live up to their responsibilities, but doesn't make a production out of his disagreement. One person he doesn't agree with is Erich Hartmann, the top ace of all time with 352 victories.

Rall starts the war in the West and shoots down a Curtiss P-36 over Metz in May, 1940. After the phony war, he is transferred to the Eastern Front and spends most of the conflict fighting Russian pilots flying Russian planes plus a few Lend-Lease P-39 Airacobras and Spitfires. Rall says his scariest kill was number 254, in which he closed to within ramming distance of a P-39 before opening fire. The P-39 was infamous for burning rapidly and he flew through the resulting fireball that was so hot it blistered the paint on his fabric rudder.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-J16509
Foto: Eisner, Heinz | November 1943

In the spring of 1944, he is transferred to the West once again and shoots down a P-38 followed by a P-47 Thunderbolt. He is then shot down in turn by a P-47 and suffers such damage to his left thumb that it must be amputated. During convalescence, prolonged by failure of the wound to heal properly, he is assigned as commander of a fighter school. Following his recovery, he gets a chance to fly allied aircraft that have been captured, including P-51's, P-38's, P-47's and Spitfires. He comments on the strengths and weaknesses of each. He concludes that only two German fighters can hold their own, the Focke-Wulf Fw 109 D-11 with a 2,000 hp engine and the new Me 262 jet. He flies the jet but not in combat. Given an operational command posting in February, 1945, he is never able to get his command into combat before the war ends.

Throughout the book, Rall reinforces many aviation tactics we are all familiar with, including aggressiveness and watching for attacks from the rear. Rall feels one of his attributes was exceptional eyesight that let him see and maneuver on the opponent before they could see him or react to him.

During a lengthy hospital stay after a serious crash in Russia, Rall meets his future wife, Dr. Hertha Schoen. They are married for 42 years until her death of ALS. They had several children including two surviving daughters.

A man with a lifespan of 90 some years has more to say than recount five years of war. After a period as a prisoner of war, Rall begins a successful civilian career with Siemens and Halske. Flying is still in his blood, so when West Germany is allowed to form a military, he rejoins the Luftwaffe as a major on 1 January, 1956.

After the civilian interlude, it is obvious that Rall is at home back in the air. The rest of the book focuses on the rebirth of the German Air Force and Rall's rise to eventual commander. Along the way, he is a key player in the decision to acquire the F-104 fighter, a move that in retrospect is controversial and becomes a political hot potato.

I liked this book. It covers times and events that can be viewed as the combats of the gods but the tone is natural and understated. Rall always comes across as a real person with real strengths and a few real weaknesses. Although Rall speaks excellent English, he was assisted in this book by a translator, John Weal and editor, Kurt Braatz. The book was published in 2006 by NeunundzwanzigSechs Verlag, Moosburg, Germany. Recommended.



Beginnings of the Jet Engine Age

By Dave Miles

Like many young men his age at the time of WWII, my grandfather Roy Miles went down to his local army recruitment center and tried to volunteer. He was turned away mostly because of the secret project he was working on at the time, a prototype jet engine at General Electric. My grandfather passed away in 2001 so most of this information came from my grandmother's memory.

Actually, my grandmother did not know about his involvement at the time and only learned about it after WWII and the project was declassified. Some time after the war, Life Magazine had a story on it and my grandfather showed it to her and said that was what he did during the war. Grandpa worked in the large turbine and generator building at GE in Schenectady, NY and worked in the department that did grinding, polishing and buffing. He and some men from his department were sent to another building where they were under round-the-lock guard. It was there that they worked with the engineers to polish the blades that made up the jet engine. They were trying to find a way to make the fire-proof - the jet blades had to take a lot of heat. They had struggled a while to get the formula right but they finally got the right formula. The year was 1943.

According to my grandmother, late in 1944, the powers-that-be captured a German ME-262 jet engine and brought into the plant. Grandpa indicated that the level of machining quality was superior to anything GE had achieved up to that point. GE's jet engines were ultimately used in the first US jet fighter ever produced: Bell P-59B Airacomet. Grandpa continued working at GE in Schenectady until his retirement in 1977.

Last Meeting - Amelia Earhart search

Rod Blocksome came to our August meeting to talk about the research and the search he and his team of engineers have done and continue to do to locate Amelia Earhart airplane.

His involvement has covered the last 9 years and was part of two deep ocean search expeditions in the water of Howland Island. Yet despite this extensive effort the final resting place remains a mystery.

Many thanks to Rod for coming out and sharing all his research and stories.



Next Meeting – Young Eagles and Cook out

Sat. Sept. 19th Young Eagle Rally Marion Airport from 9 AM till noon. Please let Connie White know if you can volunteer to help. As always we need ground crew as well as pilots.

CHAPTER MEETING AND POT LUCK will follow the YE Rally. Chapter will furnish the meat, drink and table service. Please bring a dish to share.

We also have two more Young Eagle Rallies planned. If you can help out at the other 2 YE Rallies please let me know. Oct. 3rd Washington (AWG) no rain date and Oct. 17 Maquoketa (OQW) rain date Oct. 18th.

October Meeting

October 9 Friday, 6:30pm - 9pm Mission Aviation Fellowship with Roger Kolb, CID Airport Administration building, Cedar Rapids, IA. Pizza/drinks provided starting at 6:30

Vice President Moves West

Long time Chapter member Mark Navratil has accepted a new position with Garmin International in Olathe, KS and is moving the whole Navratil clan to Kansas. We will miss you all and wish you the best of luck in your new position.



Chapter 33 Calendar

Sept. 19 9am-12pm Young Eagles Rally
Marion Airport , Chapter meeting and Cook-
out to follow.

Sept 19 Flight Breakfast, Knoxville Municipal
Airport

Sept 19 Fly-In Breakfast, Osceola Municipal
Airport

Sept 19 Fly-In Breakfast, Chan Gurney Air-
port Yankton, SD

Oct. 3 Young Eagles rally, Washington
(AWG) no rain date and

Oct. 17 Young Eagles Rally, Maquoketa
(OQW) rain date Oct. 18th.

Oct 3 6pm 20th Annual Iowa Aviation Hall of
Fame Banquet, Iowa Aviation Museum
Greenfield Municipal Airport,



In The September 2009 Issue...

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