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On the airfields of Corsica there were a large number of two-engine bombers and Allied fighter-bombers stationed. They made runs on the supply lines in mid-Italy and did considerable damage. The chief of the 2nd German Air Force, General Field Marshal von Richthofen, had, after much effort, received permission from Hitler to attack the airbases on Corsica.

In the first half of the evening all of the combat crews in the 1st and 2nd groups of Lehrgeschwader 1 along with another 53 [JU 88's](#) flew a successful sortie against the Airbase Borgo Poretta near Bastia on Corsica. The crew of Lt. Gert Winterfeld was on the mission from 20:35 hours to 23:36 hours. They served to mark the target and to illuminate it. The destination lay southwest of the Mediterranean coast and could not be mistaken. They dropped a [500 capacity ABB](#) canister with firebombs to mark the bomb run and lit it with 10 LC 50 flares. There was only moderate anti-aircraft fire. Due to the good illumination, the majority of bombs AB500 canisters with 37 [SD10](#) and SD50's fell on the intended target area. Some of the bombs were set to tumble and they set off big fires. Flak of all calibers hindered the mission. After the attack 16 to 18 fires were counted. Gert Winterfeld recalled:

“The attack on the airfield at Borgo Poretta on Corsica on the evening of May 12, 1944 is still fresh in my memory. It was my crew and I who had the responsibility for the entire combat group to find the target and to illuminate it. Radio navigation and radar was not available to us. So we used dead-reckoning and landmarks to reach our destination. In this case it wasn't too difficult since our documentation indicated that the Borgo Poretta airbase lay about 4 – 5 km west southwest of the southern point of lake Biguglia, a long lagoon near the coast not far from Bastia. An earlier lone sortie over Bastia gave us information about the area.

The course of the attack was planned in advance by Helbig's combat team. After our take-off from Ghedi around 20:35 hours we flew to Modena where the group would assemble. About five minutes before the major assembly departure time, we left the group, flying over the Apennines toward Florence and from there in the direction of the jumping-off point on the coast south of Livorno. The weather south of the Apennines was good and the astronomical twilight was not quite ended so we still had good visibility. Over the hilly country that runs from Florence to the coast we could fly quite low, perhaps 100 to 150 meters above the ground in order to avoid giving the radar on Corsica a target. At the coastline we dropped to 20 meters altitude and followed a direct course to our target. Just off the coast of Corsica we came up to 50 meters. Suddenly the coast of Corsica was in sight with its white beaches, and we were already over our destination, Lake Buguglia, which was very easy to spot. Then we made a right-turn in the direction of Bastia so as not to arrive at the target too soon and in order to gain our attack altitude. Our timing was perfect.

During our climb we made circles so that we kept our 'pond' under us. Near Bastia we saw sporadic

heavy flak. Finally, after about 12 minutes we reached our attack altitude of 3,000 meters. Now back to the south of the lagoon and – about four minutes prior to X-hour – with course 250 degrees to the target. After about a half-minute we let loose the first flare. We made a full circle to get ourselves 'behind' the flare and to figure out where it stood. It stood over the northern edge of the base and the base was well lighted and to the left under us. We could see the parked aircraft. Now it was high time to deploy the rest of the flares in a curve to the left, west and south, around the base. In the meantime light flack began to fire at the flares. After the last flare drifted off to the left it was exactly X-hour and the first wave of the formation took aim on the center of the airbase. At 2,000 meters we dropped the ABB 500 firebomb canister to mark the target. On our climb we saw that it was burning in the center of the field.

Now below us the dance began; when we turned into our climb we could see flashes everywhere. At 2,500 meters we saw the second wave who went for the parked aircraft with AB 500 fragmentation bombs at about 1,200 meters. As we flew away toward the south we could still see in the light of the flares smoke and fires. We continued on to about 3,000 meters and from the northwest we crossed the mountains whose peaks we could see on our left in the wan night light. After that we dropped down to the sea under us and headed directly toward Genoa. Around 23:30 we landed in Ghedi. We felt really good. The attack had certainly come together well. It was too bad that for the second sortie of the night, to the airfield at Alistro [Alesani], we had to give our L1+AK [their airplane] to a young flight crew.”

Sargent Piechottka's crew was in Group II. In the crew was Sgt. Klaus Lompa who wrote in his diary:

“Today we have a 'ricochet' night before us. We will fly two sorties. At 20:45 hours we will begin our first attack. We have 2 AB500 bombs and 10 SD50's loaded. We are flying over the Apennines and then go to low-altitude to avoid the English radar. We are now flying over the sea and have just passed Elba. Now we are nearing Corsica and begin, with sharp defensive movements, to climb high. We must watch out for night fighters because our target airfield, Borgo-Poretta, could be home to them. We have reached our attack altitude, it is X-hour and the illumination of the target is beginning. The target can be made out clearly. “Prepare for bombing run!” “Bomb bay open!” We are bouncing about in the light flack that whizzes by us. Dieter hits it, bombs away! There go our strikes. Under us now it is burning like wild, and 200 to 300 meter high columns of fire tell us that the fuel dump has been hit. We continue flying away and around 23:35 hours we land at our home field. We give our combat report, get something to eat and get back to our machines. In that time they had been refueled and reloaded”

In the same night, between 02:15 hours and 06:12 hours, groups 1 and 2 of the Lehrgeschwader along with more bombers from Kriegsgeschwader 76 repeated the attack against the air bases on the east coast of Corsica. Altogether 59 JU 88's were in the raid. This time the target was the airfield at Alistro [Alesani], far to the south of Bastia. The JU 88's were provisioned with two AB 500's and ten SD 50 or ten [AB 70](#) bombs that were dropped from about 1,000 meters. The crews reported numerous fires and many aircraft destroyed.

The two sorties were a total success and inflicted major damage to the Allied bombers and fighter bombers stationed there. Out of the parked aircraft 23 were totally destroyed and roughly 90 were damaged. For some time after the attack the diminished flight activity out of Corsica was very

noticeable.

Because of these sorties the squadron commander, Joachim Helbig, was, for the second time, named in the German Armed Forces Report [broadcast to the nation]. In his memoirs Helbig wrote about these two raids:

“It was a matter of two night attacks that, by German standards of the time, must be considered as large-scale operations. There were nearly 90 JU 88's involved. First wave over the target at 22:00 hours, second wave using the same aircraft at 04:10 hours. The targets were first the airbase at Borgo-Poretta, and in the second part of the night, Alistro [Alesani]. Both places were over-staffed by the Allies.

The outbound journey on the first mission followed the usual low-altitude flight over the Apennines near Florence, then down to the water for a low-altitude flight over the sea to the coast. Then a short climb approaching the target with a final glide attack. Due to the flight path over the mountains and the low-altitude flight over the sea the enemy radar system had considerable difficulty. The surprise was totally on the German side. Not a single loss over the target, devastating hits on more than 200 parked aircraft and material stores. All during a crystal clear night. The bomb selection for the JU 88's was optimal. It was mixed like a cocktail, made up of fragmentation bombs, both normal and incendiary, 500 kg and 1,000 kg bombs together. It was about two tons per JU 88. After releasing the bombs at about 1,300 meters altitude a flyover at about 350 meters over the aircraft mooring areas revealed optimal destruction.

We flew out along the east coast of Corsica toward the south at full throttle and climbing as fast as possible. Then we went to the west coast and over the Corsican mountains, dropping finally to sea-level headed toward Genoa. This terminated with the flight over the Apennines and our landing in Italy. For the second sortie the course was simply reversed. The fires started during the first attack were still visible during the second attack.”



Junker 88, Medium Bomber