

**Crash of German fighter pilot  
Joseph Bürschgens  
28th September 1939, Mettlach**

**The Geschwader's first victory**

*Caldwell, Donald L., JG 26, Top Guns of the Luftwaffe, p. 11 - 12*

On 28 September, Lt. Joseph "Jupp" Buerschgens, a 22-year-old career officer whose home was in nearby Duesseldorf, was ordered to escort a Henschel Hs 126 on a spotting mission over the Saar, far to the south of the Geschwader's usual patrol area. The 2nd Staffel pilot accompanied the reconnaissance plane as far as the border and prepared to turn back, in accordance with his orders. Just then he sighted eight French Curtiss Hawk 75As below him; beyond them were three more. They were above Germany, and thus fair game. Furthermore, they had spotted the slow Henschel and were circling for an attack. Buerschgens flipped his Messerschmidt into a quick split-S, burst past the eight circling fighters, and opened fire on the Curtiss closest to the Henschel. The French fighter shuddered and spun out, smoking.

It was reported later to have crashed near Tuensdorf, but Buerschgens was much too busy to watch it fall. He recovered from his power dive at 6,500 feet and zoomed to regain altitude and a position to attack the other fighters. He broke up an attack on the Henschel, which was able to make its escape after taking only seven hits. Buerschgens now faced odds of one to ten. He utilized his Messerschmidt's superiority in vertical maneuvering to stay out of range, almost ramming one plane. His aircraft was then struck several times by French fire. His throttle was shot from his hand; his radiator was holed and began to leak; bullets from behind him hissed past his head and into his instrument panel. A bullet then slammed into his right shoulder. In severe pain, Buerschgens leaned forward, pressed the stick against his body with his left hand, and dove away. He made his escape and sought to find a place to land, his visibility to the right obscured by spurting blood. He sighted a meadow in front of him, a small stream, and beyond these a German wire entanglement. He bellied his plane in smoothly; the barbed wire brought it to a halt. Buerschgens had landed in a minefield in front of the German West Wall defenses, and an army patrol had to be sent out to rescue him. His smashed shoulder required eight months to heal. While in the hospital, Jupp Buerschgens, the first pilot of the Geschwader to score an air victory, was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class.