

**AN OUTSTANDING AND RARE WW1 GERMAN FIGHTER PILOTS PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM BELONGING TO LEUTNANT JOSEF KELLER OF JASTA 43 WHO ORIGINALLY SAW SERVICE IN THE INFANTRY BEFORE BECOMING A PILOT SERVING WITH JASTA 43 FROM MAY 1918 SHOOTING DOWN AN SE5A IN AUGUST, HE WAS INJURED IN A CRASH OF HIS FOKKER DVII IN OCTOBER 1918. MENTIONED MULTIPLE TIMES IN LEUTNANT JOSEF RAESCH'S DIARY, POST WAR FOUGHT WITH FREIKORPS SELBSTSCHUTZ OBERSCHLESIEEN DURING THE SILESIA UPRISING OF 1921**



**LEUTNANT DER RESERVE JOSEF KELLER**

Leutnant der Reserve Josef Keller originally served as a Private in Infanterie-Regiment Kaiser Wilhelm (2. Grossherzoglich Hessisches) Nr. 116. A group photo, which includes Keller, of men from this regiment, all wearing pickelhaubes suggest it was taken circa 1914. Other photos of Keller, show him as an NCO, wearing Ribbons for the Iron Cross 2nd Class and a State gallantry award ribbon. Another taken of him in hospital, suggests he was wounded at least once during his army service.

By the time he joined the air service, it seems Keller had been promoted Leutnant der Reserve as no aviation service pictures show him with NCO insignia. The date of him actually taking flight training is unknown but its probably early 1918. After qualifying as a pilot, he joined Flieger-Abteilung 236(a). He may only have served with this unit a short time because there are very few photos from this unit in the album. The two photos of him next to his Hannover CL date from April 1918 plus, this is apparent due to the 1st type Balkenkreuz on his aircraft, this only being authorised in late March 1918.

Most books have Keller joining Jagdstaffel 43 (Jasta 43) on 5 June 1918 but he may have joined a little earlier. In his diary, Leutnant der Reserve Josef Raesch, tells how he joined Jasta 43 on 6 June 1918 and Keller was one of the pilots who greeted him on arrival. A photo in the album is of the funeral of Ofsv Julius Trosky who was killed in action on 17 May 1918, this also suggesting Keller arrived sometime in May 1918. Regardless, Keller would service with Jasta 43 until he was injured during a test flight of a new Fokker DVII on 11 October 1918 (more details of this in Raesch's diary). Keller's injuries were such that he did not return to Jasta 43 before the end of the War but Raesch tells how he, Keller and Schmidt were

awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class on 1st November 1918. By then he already wore the Silver wound badge. Notable dates for Keller's service were;

8 August 1918, Keller was confirmed with having shot down an S.E. 5a at 17.25 South West of Bray. 4 October 1918, Keller was forced to land near Rosselin, his aircraft having been severely damaged in combat. 11 October 1918, Keller was severely injured during a test flight of a new Fokker DVII and spent the rest of the war in hospital



Post War, Keller was one of the many who carried on the fight. A superb and extremely rare photo of him and two others in uniform, shows him wearing his awards and an armband for Selbstschutz Oberschlesien (S.S.O.S.), a Freikorps unit that served in the Silesian Uprising of 1921:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesian\\_Uprisings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silesian_Uprisings)

Keller's subsequent life and death is at this point unknown, as is if he served in any other Freikorps unit's 1919-20.

### **ROYAL PRUSSIAN JAGDSTAFFEL 43**

Jasta 43 was founded on 6 December 1917 at *Flieger-Abteilung 4* at Posen and was operational by 18 December 1917, under the Command of Leutnant Wilhelm Flecken. Serving with *Armee Abteilung 'A'*, Jasta 43 began flying combat sorties on 21 January 1918 and scored its first aerial victory on 11 February 1918. Having transferred to 19 Armee on 2 February 1918, on 3 April 1918, it was reassigned to 6 Armee. Oblt Adolf Gutknecht of Jasta 23 assumed command in May that year, the Jasta also having become part of Jagdgruppe 7, along with Jastas 29,30,41 and 52. On 6 June, the Jasta joined Jagdgruppe 3, along with Jastas 14, 29, 30 and 52, before rejoining Jagdgruppe 7 on 11 October, remaining with which until

the end of the war. During the war, Jasta 43 operated with Albatros D's, Fokker DVII and later, Pfalz DXII's. During its service, 36 victories were accredited to pilots of Jasta 43, for the loss of 6 pilots killed, 5 wounded, 1 prisoner and 2 killed in flying accidents. The Squadron produced 3 Aces and a 4th Ace served with the squadron.





## THE ALBUM AND JOSEF RAESCH'S DIARY

The album itself measures 32cm x 24.5cm and contains 95 photos, the majority 14cm x 8.5cm, though some a little bigger and some smaller; the latter mainly Army service or family shots.

From captions on some of the pages of the album, it looks like at some point after it was originally put together, some of the photos have been replaced with spares as clearly some of the captions don't match or are half under photos and there are glue marks from where the original photos were. Most likely some of the photos have come loose and been lost or others may well have been stuck back in the wrong places. However its 100% clear anything added is from Keller's service, with all the military and aviation photos being to the same units and family ones being the same people.

Jasta 43 Pilots who appear in photos in the album:

Ltn d R Simons – in a number of photos  
Ltn d R Josef Keller – 1 Victory – in a large number of photos  
Oblt Adolf Gutknecht – 8 Victories – in a number of photos  
Ltn d R Josef Raesch -7 Victories – in a number of photos  
Vfw Ernst Wiehle – 6 Victories  
Ltn d R Karl Wernicke – and photos of his destroyed Fokker and funeral  
Ofsv Julius Trosky – 2 Victories - funeral only  
Ltn d R Friedrich Jakobs – 1 Victory  
Ltn d R Robert Schmidt – 1 Victory  
Ltn Guido Schobinger – 1 Victory  
Ltn d R Karl Haake  
Ltn d R Otto Kreuzmann – 8 Victories  
Additionally lots of others Jasta 43 pilots I've not identified

Non Jasta 43  
Funeral of Lt d R Karl Ahrens FA236a  
LVG crash of Ltn Gunther  
Keller and pilots/Observers of FA236a in Officers mess

Jasta 43 photos – 40 – a few others possible  
Keller portraits as pilot not including above - 4 mainly

Aviation service related all – 64 photos  
Inf Regt 116 related – soldiers, battlefields – 18 photos; 1 or 2 of these may be aviation  
Family/friends/scenic/others - 13

Fokker DVII – 11 photos, including 2 crashed, couple of duplicates  
Albatros DV – 6 photos, couple of duplicates  
Hannover CLII/III – 2 photos both with Keller  
DFW CV – 1 photo  
Other/crashes, various aircraft types – 7 photos  
Also a photo of ground crew with Josef Raesch's parachute with rip that saved him when he bailed out of his burning aircraft (as described in his diary).



Included with the album is 'Cross Cockade Journal' Volume 8 Number 4 Winter 1967 contains a transcript of Ltnd R Josef Raesch diary for his time at Jasta 43, entitled 'Raesch of Jasta 43; Diary Of A Fighter Pilot' This superb diary, which is 29 pages long and includes photographs of Jasta 43, covers the day to day record of Raesch's time at Jasta 43 from 5 June and 31 November 1918. Raesch describes in detail; flights, combats, opinions on training etc etc with many of the pilots in Keller's album being mentioned. Keller himself is mentioned multiple times; describing combats they took part in, damage to aircraft, Keller missing during combat a couple of times, the award of his pilot badge and Iron Cross 1st Class, days out. etc etc. On the day Keller was injured, Raesch and Keller had just returned in the Jasta's 2 seater, after looking for new quarters. In the afternoon, Raesch recounts the following:

*"..After our afternoon coffee, the weather cleared and Keller used the opportunity to try his new Fokker. While doing stunts at a low altitude, he suddenly went into a spin from which he was unable to recover. His left wing smashed hard into the ground and we thought he must be dead. When we arrived on the spot, we found Keller alive but badly injured, With great difficulty we were able to pull him from the wreck and take him to hospital. There the doctor confirmed lighter injuries than we had feared early. The wrecked plane looked a real mess."*

On 27 October, Raesch notes receiving a letter from Keller, telling him the doctors had found bone splinters in his foot and he must undergo an operation.

#### **CONDITION OF ALBUM**

Album is in very good condition, photos in the main are extremely clear; I have taken a few pictures of photos and then another zoomed in to show just how much detail can be seen. This is most apparent on almost all of the aircraft and most of the pilot shots. Indeed the aviation photos as a whole are extremely clear and its only really some of the army service and family photos that are at times a little faded, with a few of the photos with cracks from where they have bent. There is a little light brown staining on some of the pages themselves which appears to be from the glue used on the reverse of each page to stick down the photos but the pages are undamaged. Only one photograph appears to be missing, this with a caption 'Flugplatz in Buckarest'



Medals Militaria Jager Medals Militaria Jager Medals Militaria Jager Medals Militaria Jager Medals Militaria





This is an outstanding album, not only due to the rarity of some of the photos and subject matter but because so often it is impossible to work out who the owner of the album was. Here not only do we know the owner of the album but all his military service appears to be pictured, especially the most interesting part as a fighter pilot. To add to this, we have a very good idea of Keller's combat service with Jasta 43 from Raesch's superb diary

