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***Hitler's Paratrooper***

First published in 2010 by Frontline Books,

an imprint Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig of Pen & Sword Books Ltd,

47 Church Street, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S70 2AS

[www.frontline-books.com](http://www.frontline-books.com)

This paperback edition published in 2014 by Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig Frontline Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig Books.

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ISBN: 978-1-84832-762-2

Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig

eISBN: 9781473815193

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Maps created by Alex Swanston, Pen and Sword mapping department

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Printed in Great Britain by CPI Antony Rowe

**Frontispiece** *Postcard of Rudolf Witzig produced shortly after the fall of Eben Emael. Witzig autographed a postcard like this one for his future wife, Hanna, at a dance.*

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In 2005, while assigned to NATO's northern region headquarters at Brunssum in the Netherlands, I was approached by a Belgian colleague who was aware that I was writing an article on the great Belgian fort Eben Emael and its conquest by a small group of elite German paratroopers in the Second World War. 'Gil,' my friend asked, 'do you know who led the assault on Eben Emael?' 'Of course,' I answered confidently, 'Rudolf Witzig.' 'Correct,' responded the Belgian Army colonel, adding Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig with a smile: 'His son is downstairs in the cafeteria.' And so I rushed quickly downstairs and introduced myself to German Army Engineer Colonel Jürgen Witzig, then commander of the multi-national Civil Military Cooperation Group North. Jürgen and I soon struck up a friendship, and when I told him I was working on an article on Eben Emael and needed information on his father, he readily agreed to assist me.

Within a short period of Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig time Colonel Witzig made Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig available all his father's personal papers and photo albums for my use. It was an historian's treasure-trove, containing large segments of the Luftwaffe 7th Fliegerdivision's official War Diary, Witzig's personal diary from the war, notes, files and maps on the operation to seize Eben Emael, after-action reports on his battalion's participation in the North African campaign, the draft of an unpublished book Rudolf Witzig had written outlining the history of his parachute engineer battalion and regiment in the war and its battles in Belgium, North Africa, France, Lithuania and East Prussia, and a detailed family history, just to name the most important. In addition, there were several other magazine and newspaper articles and documents on Eben Emael and Crete. Finally, there were numerous Second World War history books with annotations in Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig the Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig margins made by his father.

Jürgen Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig Witzig made all these available to me without any reservations whatsoever, explaining that he was preparing to deposit the bulk of this collection in the German Bundesarchiv and that it might not be available to researchers for some time as it had first to be properly organized. He also agreed to a number of interviews and patiently answered all my other enquiries via email. And he Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig arranged for my wife and I to visit him and his mother, Hanna, in Mainz and to interview her as well. Finally, he put me in touch with members of the German Paratroopers' Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig Association, including some who had served with his father in North Africa, France and Lithuania. Like Jürgen, these veterans welcomed me and my project, which had now grown into

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a full biography of Rudolf Witzig, inviting me to their 2005 reunion, where I interviewed a number of them. They too proved warm and generous, providing me with photographs and documents and patiently Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig answered all my questions. As a result, 'my cup runneth over' and I have amassed a wealth of information on Rudolf Witzig, his parachute engineers, and the German airborne forces in the Second World War. The result of that generosity is this book, a biography of the most famous German parachute engineer of the Second World War.

In the course of my research and writing, I have received support from many individuals and organizations. I am deeply Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig indebted to the staffs of the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland and the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle, Pennsylvania Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig for their diligence in finding and reproducing the German Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig interrogation reports so critical to this story.

I would like to thank my wife Natalie and our sons Alexander, Nicholas and Michael for their support, understanding and assistance during the several years it took to create this volume. All proved to be valuable proofreaders. Nicholas, a gifted writer, also edited the manuscript, while Michael, a talented photographer, spent several precious months working on the photographs. I am also deeply indebted to U.S. Army Historian, published author, and close friend, Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Mark J. Reardon, who was involved in every aspect of the book's development. Mrs Barbara Sieber proved instrumental in translating many of the Witzig Collection documents from German into English and has also earned my gratitude. I would like to thank my editor, Deborah Hercun and the team at Frontline Books for turning a sow's ear into something Hitler's Paratrooper : The Life and Battles of Rudolf Witzig better resembling a silk purse. Finally I would like to thank Michael Leventhal for his support and friendship. This book would have been impossible without both.

[War School Cadet Witzig on horseback](#)

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