

# A.D.Royster, Militaria

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There are no known photographs of Otto Skorzeny wearing the Honorary Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds awarded to him by Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring after the rescue of Benito Mussolini from Gran Sasso in September 1943. However, the badge and document pictured above are fakes. But this has not prevented three major auction houses in the US and Europe from selling this ensemble to gullible buyers for high sums, the most recent price being around

\$120,000.

As the Hermann Göring Grand Cross of the Iron Cross 1939 award recently sold to a Chinese collector or the Keßelring baton reportedly sold to a Russian collector show, the emerging markets in Russia, China and, soon, India have tempted top dealers in the United States and Europe, where the bottom has dropped out of the Nazi relics market thanks not just to factors like the economy but to buyer confidence in a market over-salted with high end fakes by increasingly cunning dealers who have moved on from promoting fakes through nicely-produced hard-bound reference books to gulling journalists on papers like the New York Times and The New York Post into stories on such treasures as the Adolf Hitler desk set, oil paintings by Hitler, who was known never to have worked in oils and, just recently, portraits of Hitler's parents that are said to have hung in the Führer's office.





Skorzeny was certainly awarded the badge, as this page from his SS personnel file shows, allowing for the clerical error giving the year as 1944. Some sources suggest that recipients had to have held a pilot's licence. A private pilot's licence was sufficient. However, some recipients of the badge are not likely to have been qualified pilots. Otto Skorzeny had initially volunteered for the Luftwaffe, where he trained as a pilot and earned a military pilot's permit. But he was too big to fly fighters so he transferred to the Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler in February 1940. Otto Skorzeny's Honorary Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds and certificate was sold by the American auction house Manion's in 2004 for \$54,000, the year before it was acquired from Ron Manion by Jody Tucker. This ensemble was then sold in 2007 by the German auctioneers Hermann Historica for the equivalent of around \$70,000. The Hermann Historica catalog stated:

Otto Skorzeny (1908 - 1975)

a Combined Pilot and Observer's Badge in gold with diamonds

The oak leaves and laurel wreath is of "585" yellow gold, the curved eagle and the swastika are of platinum. open in back with a thin gold overlay and attached with two headed nuts and soldered threaded pins. The swastika is riveted below in the loop of the wreath. The pin has a rotating hinge (hallmark "585") and a safety clasp. The back of the wreath is engraved "SS-Ostuf. O. Skorzeny". 43 g. (OEK 4011).

This comes with the extremely rare citation for the honorary award of the combined pilot and observer's badge for 16 September 1943 with Göring's facsimile signature and Loezer's in ink. Folded once.

Concerning the award of the double badge in gold and diamonds, there is a letter from Hermann Göring dated 26 October 1944 with the letterhead, "Der Reichsmarschall des Großdeutschen Reiches" in which Göring declares, "for your tireless activity in the struggle for Greater Germany's victory over her enemies and your outstanding contributions to the joint completion of the difficult task given our two branches of service, the Waffen-SS as well as the Luftwaffe...". As at this time the letter is in the possession of the Office of the District Attorney for Stuttgart, we can only include a copy with this lot.

Skorzeny's curriculum vitae, written in ink in his own hand is included. It is signed and dated, "Wien 15 Dez. 1938 - Otto Skorzeny", and in it, he describes among other things his entrance into the NSDAP in 1932 (No. 1083671) and his entrance into the SS in 1934 (No. 295,979).

Skorzeny received the Knight's Cross for his most spectacular operation during World War 2, the liberation of Mussolini from Gran Sasso in a Fieseler Storch in September 1943. He was awarded the Oak Leaves in April 1945 for his defense of the Oder bridgehead with the Schwedt Division. The award of the Combined Pilot and Observer's Badge in Gold with Diamonds must certainly be in connection with Operation "Panzerfaust", the kidnapping of Nicolas Horthy, which forced his father to step down. Skorzeny also received the German Cross in Gold at the end of 1944 for that operation.

Condition: I- Limit: 50000 EURO 50000 EURO

Name	Rufname	Geburts Tag	Geburts Ort	Dienstgrad	Dienststellung	Truppenteil	Heimatanschrift
Skorzeny	Otto	12.6.08	Wien	SS-Ostuf.	Führer der SS-Jagdverbände		W i e n Peter-Jordan-Str. 37
Bisher verliehene Kriegsauszeichnungen mit Angabe der Verleihungsdaten		Bereits genannt im Ehrenblatt des deutschen Heeres?		Anerkennungsschreiben des OKW erhalten?		Bisherige Kriegsverwendung seit 1939	
EK II	am 26. 8.41						1.9.39 Flg.1.Lfw. Nachr.Ers. Hgt.Wien
Ostmedaille	" 2. 9.42						
EK I	" 12. 9.43		nein		nein		
Verw.Abz. (sch.)	" 18. 8.43						1.2.40 SS-Be 1.E-Regt LSSAH
Ritterkreuz	" 12. 9.43						1.5.40 Ueche 1. SS-FA
Flg.Abz.in Gold	" 1.12.44						6.5.40 schw.Abt. SS-Art.-Regt SS-Totenk.
				Hat bereits ein Vorschlag zur Verleihung des Ritterkreuzes vorgelegen?			
				ja			
						1.9.40 Oscha SS-Art.- Regt.Reich	
						31.1.41 SS-Untstuf. II/SS-AR. Reich	
						2.2.42 SS-Kraf.1. E.A.Lichterf.	
						Sept.42 SS-Ostuf. Pr.Regt. SS-FK.	
						Apr.43 SS-Untstuf. RSIHA/VI Führ.d.S. Lehrz.Obg.	
						12.9.43 SS-Stubaf. 1.SS-Ig. Btl.502	
						16.10.44 SS-Ostuf. brf. u. Führer d. SS-Jagd- verbände.	

Otto Skorzeny himself stated on a number of occasions after the war that Göring awarded him the badge for Gran Sasso. However, as readers of my website have seen, Otto Skorzeny was not a very reliable source of information regarding his awards, especially when he was selling them to gullible American collectors. And German documents can also contain errors. The certificate presented to Benito Mussolini in 1937 was for "Das Goldene Flugzeugführer und Beobachterabzeichen. Mussolini received the badge with diamonds on September 28th 1937.

This might explain the manner in which the SS clerk described the badge when typing up this page for Skorzeny's personnel file.

Some sources, including Andrew Mollo in a letter in the December 1981 issue of *Guns, Weapons & Militaria*, refer to the creation by Hermann Göring of a third class of the Combined Pilot-Observer Badge, this being a gold version of the basic badge awarded by Göring to foreign monarchs and heads-of-state like King Boris of Bulgaria and Benito Mussolini. But we know that Mussolini received a diamond-studded badge and we know that the first award of the Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds was to Generalleutnant Walter Wever on November 11th 1935.

In his own memoirs, Skorzeny stated quite clearly that "The next day, September 16, 1943, Hermann Göring arrived in a special train and asked me a multitude of question. He awarded me the Flying Badge in Gold, but remarked that I had assumed a great responsibility when I went along with the Duce in Gerlach's machine". In fact, Skorzeny's insistence upon joining Hauptmann Gerlach and Mussolini in the tiny Fieseler Storch had almost killed all three men when the overloaded aircraft, unable to lift off properly, went into a dive as it rolled off the edge of the plateau,

While Operation Panzerfaust was a successful operation, it had nothing to do with the Luftwaffe whereas Operation Oak, the Gran Sasso mission, was entirely planned by the Luftwaffe, hence Göring's arrival at Hitler's Headquarters to claim some of the kudos. Skorzeny's reward for Operation Panzerfaust was his promotion to SS-Obersturmbannführer. The SS-Personalakte is therefore wrong. The date should be December 1st 1943, which might have been the date inscribed on the award document Skorzeny would have received from Göring's office.

The document sold by several top auctioneers gives the date as September 16th 1943 and is made out to Skorzeny as SS-Sturmbannführer. Yet the badge is engraved to SS-Obersturmbannführer Skorzeny, a promotion he received on December 10th 1944. Yet none of the sellers and buyers of this extraordinary ensemble, the Honorary Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds awarded by Hermann Göring to Otto Skorzeny for the rescue of Benito Mussolini, depending on which auctioneer's patter you prefer to believe, managed to spot these glaring discrepancies.



Michael Dick, head of Hermann Historica's German Orders and Collectibles department, did not respond to my emails about the Otto Skorzeny Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds and the discrepancy between the award document of September 1943, the letter of October 1944 and the rank on the reverse of the badge.



This is Hermann Göring's badge, formerly in the Eric Campion Collection. This is an indisputably original Honorary Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds.



Although not as clear as the photograph of the Göring badge, this detail from an early 1980s photograph of Hans-Ulrich Rudel's awards when they were in the Paul Raymond Collection is clear enough to show that the Rudel badge is identical to the Göring badge.



The Combined Pilot's and Observer's Badge in gold with diamonds (larger than scale). The gold wreath is composed of oak leaves on the right (viewer's right), and laurel leaves on the left. The entire Luftwaffe eagle to include the swastika is studded with varying sizes of sapphires or diamonds. The pattern of the Luftwaffe eagle is different than that of the basic pattern in that the wings are wider, with less silhouette detail, and the legs of the eagle are silhouetted. In inspecting the award made to GFM Sperrle, I was able to determine that the eagle is affixed to the wreath by very large screws. The clasp is the needle type in gold with the designation 585 at the top point of juncture. The presentation case is white simulated leather with a gold border about the top as on the German Cross. The inside top is lined with cream-colored satin, and the lower portion is light blue velvet. The inside lid of the  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$  case is marked Perchermeier (jeweler's trade name) in gold. (Badge courtesy of Eric Campion, photo provided by Fred Stephens)

Another original badge previously in the Eric Campion Collection: the badge awarded to Hugo Sperrle. It is identical to the other known, original badges. The badge was photographed by the noted British collector and author Fred Stephens, who noted the dimensions of the case in which it was contained as well as the Perchermeier. The Perchermeier family have been jewelers for several generations in the Munich and Salzburg area in southern Germany, not far from Berchtesgaden.



Another original badge, awarded to Erich Hartmann. It is identical to the Göring, Rudel and Sperrle badges.



This side-by-side comparison of the Hartmann badge on the left and the Skorzeny badge on the right tell the sad story immediately. The alleged Otto Skorzeny badge has just surfaced again, this time offered for sale by the German dealer André Huesken.

www.muenzauktion.com/huesken/item.php?id=21698&la Google

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**Verkoper:** Galerie d' Histoire André Huesken

**Prijs:** 90000,00 EUR

**Bestellen:** Aantal

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Ihr André Hüsken

**Omschrijving**  
Deutsches Reich 1933 - 1945  
aus dem Nachlaß des SS-Standartenführers Otto Skorzeny. Das Abzeichen ist aus Gold und Platin gefertigt und mit echten Brillanten besetzt. Auf der Rückseite des Kranzes die Gravur "SS-Ostufaf. / O.Skorzeny". Dazugehörig die Verleihungsurkunde vom 16. September 1943 in brauner Ledermappe mit goldgeprägtem Einband und orig. Karton. Beiliegend ein kleines orig Porträtphoto Skorzenys in Uniform mit Ritterkreuz und ein Brief des Reichsmarschalls Hermann Göring mit eigh. Unterschrift vom 26. Oktober 1944 "Lieber Skorzeny ! Für Ihren unermüdlichen Einsatz im Ringen um Großdeutschlands Sieg über seine Feinde und Ihre hervorragenden Leistungen bei der gemeinsamen Bewältigung der schweren Aufgabe unserer beider Waffengattungen, der Waffen-SS sowie der Luftwaffe, verleihe ich Ihnen ehrenhalber das gemeinsame Flugzeugführer- und Beobachterabzeichen in Gold mit Brillanten. Die dazugehörige große Urkunde wird Ihnen zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt überreicht. Lieber Skorzeny, ohne Soldaten wie Sie gäbe es heute keine Wehrmacht mehr, so wenig wie es eine deutsche Ehre und eine deutsche Freiheit gäbe.....".  
\* Otto Skorzeny (1908-1975) war die legendäre Gestalt unter den Offizieren der Waffen-SS und war durch seine Sonderunternehmungen weltweit bekannt. Ab April 1943 begann Skorzeny mit den Aufstellungen verschiedener SS-Sonderverbände wie "Sonderverband Friedenthal", Jäger-Bataillon 502 und Panzerbrigade 150. Am 12. September 1943 gelang Skorzeny die sensationelle Befreiung des Duce Benito Mussolini, der nach dem Abfall Italiens vom Dreimächtepakt von bündnisuntreuen Truppen am Gran Sasso gefangengehalten wurde. Vier Tage später erhielt Skorzeny das hier angebotene Abzeichen durch Hermann Göring in Berlin verliehen.

The award certificate now seems to have gained a brown leather case or mappe complete with an outer carton. So someone has improved the ensemble. The price has also risen from €50,000 to €90,000, which is around \$120,000 at current exchange rates. But at least Herr Huesken manages to state correctly that the badge was awarded for the Gran Sasso rescue mission. The text refers to a letter from Göring to Skorzeny on October 26th 1944, in which Göring informs Skorzeny that he has been awarded the "gemeinsame Flugzeugführer - und Beobachterabzeichen in Gold mit Brillanten". So who awarded Skorzeny the badge on September 16 1943 at FHQ? A Göring impersonator?





Whatever the case, none of the glut of Combined Pilot-Observer Badges in Gold with Diamonds on the market recently look like the indisputably original badges shown in this article. But they are being sold as originals by top dealers and auctioneers to a new market of gullible Chinese and Russian millionaire collectors and there is no excuse for this because access to original badges and documents for study purposes is possible. Like Herr Dick of Hermann Historica, André Huesken did not respond to my emails about the Otto Skorzeny Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds and the discrepancy between the award document of September 1943, the letter of October 1944 and the rank on the reverse of the badge. As the photos show, the badge offered by Herr Huesken is the same badge that passed through Manion's in 2004 and Hermann Historica in 2009. The question is: who made it and when?

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