

= Wolf @-@ Dietrich Wilcke =

Wolf @-@ Dietrich Wilcke (11 March 1913 ? 23 March 1944) was a German Luftwaffe pilot during World War II , a fighter ace credited with 162 enemy aircraft shot down in 732 combat missions . He claimed the majority of his victories over the Eastern Front , and 25 over the Western Front , including four four @-@ engined bombers .

Born in Schrimm in the Province of Posen , Wilcke volunteered for military service in the Reichswehr of the Third Reich in 1934 . Initially serving in the Heer (Army) , he transferred to the Luftwaffe (Air Force) in 1935 . Following flight training , he was posted to Jagdgeschwader " Richthofen " (Fighter Wing " Richthofen ") in April 1936 . After an assignment as fighter pilot instructor he volunteered for service with the Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War in early 1939 . After his return from Spain , he was appointed Staffelkapitän (squadron leader) of the 7 . Staffel (7th squadron) of Jagdgeschwader 53 (JG 53 ? 53rd Fighter Wing) . Following the outbreak of World War II , he claimed his first aerial victory on 7 November 1939 . On 18 May 1940 , during the Battle of France , he was shot down and taken prisoner of war . After the armistice with France , he returned from captivity and was appointed Gruppenkommandeur (group commander) of the III . Gruppe (3rd group) of JG 53 during the Battle of Britain , claiming 10 victories over England .

Wilcke then fought in the aerial battles of Operation Barbarossa , the German invasion of the Soviet Union . There , after 25 aerial victories , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 6 August 1941 . In September 1941 , he relocated with his group to the Mediterranean Theater , where he was able to claim further victories . At the end of May 1942 , he was transferred to the Stab (headquarters unit) of Jagdgeschwader 3 (JG 3 ? 3rd Fighter Wing) " Udet " , and that August he was appointed as its Geschwaderkommodore (wing commander) . Following his 100th aerial victory on 6 September , he received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves . During the Battle of Stalingrad , on 17 December , he claimed his 150th aerial victory . On 23 December 1942 , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords , his total now 155 aerial victories .

Subsequent to the presentation of the Swords to his Knight 's Cross , he was officially banned from operational flying . Occasionally he still flew combat missions and on 23 March 1944 , flying in defense of the Reich , he claimed his 162nd and last aerial victory and was killed in action by United States Army Air Forces long @-@ range P @-@ 51 Mustang fighters near Schöppenstedt , in Lower Saxony .

= = Early life and career = =

Wilcke was born on 11 March 1913 at Schrimm in the Province of Posen , part of the Kingdom of Prussia at the time , now ?rem in the Greater Poland Voivodeship , Poland . He was the son of a Hauptmann (captain) of Infanterie @-@ Regiment 47 (47th Infantry Regiment) , Hans Wilcke , who died of pneumonia when Wilcke was just four weeks of age . His mother , Hertha von Schuckmann , married again on 14 June 1919 . In 1931 , Wilcke was arrested for attending a then @-@ illegal demonstration of the Nazi Party . Although his loyalty to the Nazi cause is emphasized multiple times in his personal military files , according to biographers Prien and Stemmer , he was a firm opponent of the National Socialist regime ; later in his career , for a time after taking command of III . Gruppe (3rd group) of Jagdgeschwader 53 (JG 53 ? 53rd Fighter Wing) , he had the Swastikas on his unit 's aircraft painted over . He volunteered for military service in the Reichswehr after receiving his Abitur (diploma) . He joined Artillerie @-@ Regiment 6 (6th Artillery Regiment) in Minden as a Fahnenjunker (officer cadet) on 1 April 1934 . His legal guardian and stepfather , Friedrich von Scotti , also served in this regiment .

As a Fähnrich (officer candidate) , Wilcke was posted to the Kriegsschule (war school) in Dresden on 1 October 1934 . On 1 November 1935 , he was transferred to the newly emerging Luftwaffe holding the rank of Oberfähnrich (senior officer candidate) . On 20 April 1936 , while serving at the flight school in Perleberg , he was promoted to Leutnant (second lieutenant) . On 15

October he was transferred to Jagdgeschwader " Richthofen " (Fighter Wing " Richthofen ") , also known as Jagdgeschwader 132 (JG 132 ? 132nd Fighter Wing) , named after the World War I fighter ace Manfred von Richthofen and forerunner of Jagdgeschwader 2 (JG 2 ? 2nd Fighter Wing) " Richthofen " . There he excelled as a pilot and showed exceptional leadership ability and was sent as fighter pilot instructor to the Jagdfliegerschule (fighter pilot school) in Werneuchen in the second half of 1937 .

In March 1939 , Wilcke volunteered for service with the Condor Legion during the Spanish Civil War . For a few weeks , he flew with 1 . Staffel (1st squadron) of Jagdgruppe 88 (J / 88 ? 88th Fighter Group) without claiming any aerial victories . He was awarded the Spanish Cross in Bronze with Swords for his service in Spain . In Spain he became friends with Werner Mölders and when Mölders was appointed Gruppenkommandeur (group commander) of the newly created III . Gruppe of JG 53 , he selected Wilcke as Staffelkapitän (squadron leader) of the 7 . Staffel (7th squadron) of JG 53 .

= = World War II = =

World War II in Europe began on Friday , 1 September 1939 , when German forces invaded Poland . Wilcke , who at the time was still a member of 3 . Staffel (3rd squadron) of JG 53 , flew missions over Poland . He claimed his first aerial victory on 7 November 1939 over the Western Front when he shot down an Armée de l 'Air (French Air Force) Potez 630 , a twin @-@ engined fighter , near Völklingen during the Phoney War . For this achievement he was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class on 25 November 1939 .

From 2 ? 16 January 1940 , Wilcke and other pilots from III . Gruppe went on a ski vacation to the Vorarlberg . On 11 March 1940 , he shot down another Potez at an altitude of 7 @ , @ 000 meters (23 @ , @ 000 feet) near the " three @-@ nations @-@ corner " north of Metz . He claimed his third victory at 2 : 55 pm on 25 March . 7 . Staffel engaged a flight of Morane @-@ Saulnier M.S.406 at 4 @ , @ 000 m (13 @ , @ 000 ft) . In the resulting aerial battle , Wilcke shot down one of the Moranes over Diedenhofen .

= = = Battle of France and Britain = = =

The Battle of France , the German invasion of France and the Low Countries , began on 10 May 1940 . On 18 May 1940 , he engaged in aerial combat with eight French Curtiss P @-@ 36 Hawk fighter aircraft and was shot down west of Rethel . His victor may have been sous lieutenant Camille Plubeau . Wilcke bailed out and was taken prisoner of war . Following the armistice with France , he and Mölders , who had also been a prisoner of war , returned to the unit on 30 June 1940 . Wilcke was promoted to Hauptmann the next day and again took command of 7 . Staffel . On 11 July 1940 , he was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class .

On 13 August 1940 , during the Battle of Britain , Wilcke replaced Hauptmann Harro Harder as Gruppenkommandeur of the III . Gruppe . Harder had been last seen at 1 : 35 pm on 12 August and was reported as missing in action following combat east of the Isle of Wight . The day of his appointment , Wilcke almost lost his life as well , when he was forced to bail out after engine failure over the English Channel . He was rescued that night by a Dornier Do 18 flying boat . III . Gruppe flew a bomber escort mission targeting London on 30 August . Wilcke destroyed a barrage balloon on the morning mission and claimed his fourth victory , a Supermarine Spitfire in the vicinity of Dover during his second mission of the day . On 1 September 1940 , on another bomber escort mission that started at 11 : 20 am , Wilcke claimed his fifth victory , a Hawker Hurricane , south of London . He claimed his sixth victory , probably a Fairey Swordfish biplane , on 11 September over the Channel between Dover and Calais .

On 15 September 1940 , III . Gruppe engaged 20 to 30 Royal Air Force (RAF) fighters south of London . In the resulting combat , Wilcke claimed the destruction of his second Hurricane . Two days later , on a mission that began at 4 : 35 pm , Wilcke achieved his ninth victory , another Hurricane . He claimed his tenth victory , again a Hurricane , on a mission targeting the London area

that took off at 11 : 15 am on 20 September . On the last day of September 1940 , he claimed two more victories to bring his total to 12 ; the action took place during his second mission of the day , which began at 1 : 45 pm , escorting Dornier Do 17s to London . In combat with RAF Spitfires , Wilcke claimed his 13th victory at 11 : 45 am on 10 October 1940 , his final of the Battle of Britain . In recognition of these achievements he was awarded the Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe (Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe) on 1 April 1941 .

= = = Operation Barbarossa = = =

On 8 June 1941 , the bulk of JG 53 's air elements moved via Jever , in northern Germany , to Mannheim @-@ Sandhofen . There the aircraft were given a maintenance overhaul prior to moving east . On 12 June , III . Gruppe was ordered to transfer to a forward airfield at Sobolewo . On 21 June , the Geschwaderkommodore (wing commander) of JG 53 and its Gruppenkommandeure were summoned to nearby Suwa?ki , where Generalfeldmarschall (field marshal) Albert Kesselring gave the final instructions for the upcoming attack . Wilcke briefed his pilots that evening .

On 22 June , the Geschwader crossed into Soviet airspace in support of Operation Barbarossa , the invasion of the Soviet Union , which opened the Eastern Front . III . Gruppe took off on its first mission at 3 : 20 am with the Gruppenstab (headquarters unit) and 7 . Staffel targeting Soviet airfields at Alytus and Oranji . Wilcke shot down three Polikarpov I @-@ 15 biplane fighter aircraft . The second mission of the day by III . Gruppe was a Stuka escort mission to Grodno at 6 : 00 am , during which Wilcke claimed another victory . He led another attack at 4 : 10 pm ; while strafing airfields , he claimed his fifth aerial victory of the day , an " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " achievement , taking his total to 18 .

On 25 June 1941 , JG 53 was relocated with III . Gruppe arriving at Vilnius at 8 : 30 am . The same day , Wilcke was slightly injured when he collided with another aircraft during takeoff . He claimed his 19th victory on the evening of 30 June 1941 , flying a combat air patrol into the Barysaw area . Wilcke was ordered to form " Gefechtsverband Wilcke " (" Battle Group Wilcke ") on 1 July 1941 . He commanded his III . Gruppe and II . Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52 ? 52nd Fighter Wing) to counter @-@ attack Soviet bombers . On 9 July , Wilcke destroyed a Petlyakov Pe @-@ 2 ground attack aircraft . He claimed a victory on 25 July during fighter escort missions in the Vyazma area . On 29 July 1941 , III . Gruppe provided fighter cover for the German armored spearheads in the Dukhovshchina area . During this mission , Wilcke claimed another victory . The next day , over the spearheads at Yartsevo @-@ Bely , Wilcke shot down a Polikarpov I @-@ 180 fighter . He was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 6 August 1941 for 25 victories . Both Wilcke and Leutnant Herbert Schramm were decorated by Kesselring on 9 August 1941 .

On 23 August 1941 , the 9th Army began its assault on the Soviet forces in the Velikiye Luki area . Wilcke claimed two aerial victories while supporting these operations . III . Gruppe began returning to Germany in early October 1941 . The air elements left the Soviet Union on 4 October , while the ground units were transported back by train to Mannheim on 13 October . Since 22 June 1941 , III . Gruppe had claimed 769 aerial victories for the loss of 6 pilots killed , 7 missing in action , 2 captured and 12 wounded .

= = = North Africa and Malta = = =

After its return to Germany , III . Gruppe was deployed to the Mediterranean Theater . The ground elements of III . Gruppe arrived in Catania in Sicily on 28 November 1941 . Wilcke and his adjutant Jürgen Harder arrived on 2 December , with the rest of the Gruppe arriving the next day . On 6 December 1941 , III . Gruppe was ordered to move to Timimi in Libya . Wilcke claimed his 34th aerial victory on 11 December , during a fighter escort mission for Junkers Ju 88 bombers attacking Bir Hakeim .

III . Gruppe relocated back to Sicily on 17 December 1941 for operations in the Siege of Malta . The island of Malta had a strategically important position in the Mediterranean Sea . With the opening of a new front in North Africa in mid @-@ 1940 , British air and sea forces based on the island could

attack Axis ships transporting vital supplies and reinforcements from Europe to North Africa . To counter this threat , the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica (Italian Royal Air Force) conducted bombing raids to neutralize the RAF defenses and the ports . During the siege , Wilcke claimed four victories over RAF fighters in April ? May 1942 . He claimed his first victory during the siege , and 35th overall , over a Spitfire fighter on 2 April 1942 . His 36th aerial victory on 22 April may have been Hurricane (Z4011) " B " of No. 185 Squadron flown by Pilot Officer " Sonny " Ormrod , who was killed in the engagement . On 12 May 1942 , III . Gruppe destroyed nine Spitfires , among them one by Wilcke .

= = = Wing commander of JG 3 = = =

On 18 May 1942 , Wilcke was transferred to Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet " (JG 3 ? 3rd Fighter Wing) , named after the World War I fighter ace Ernst Udet . Operating on the Eastern Front , Wilcke became a Geschwaderkommodore of JG 3 " Udet " on 11 August , replacing Oberst (Colonel) Günther Lützow , who was posted to the staff of the General der Jagdflieger (General of Fighters) as Inspector of the Day Fighters on the Eastern Front . Operating from the Chuguyev Airfield , JG 3 " Udet " saw combat in the Kharkov area , present @-@ day Kharkiv , during the Second Battle of Kharkov . On 26 June 1942 , JG 3 " Udet " was assembled at Schtschigry on the southern sector of the Eastern Front for the upcoming summer offensive , supporting the Wehrmacht 's advance towards Stalingrad . In the following months , JG 3 " Udet " was based at airfields at Gorshechnoye , Olkhovatka , Millerovo , Nowy @-@ Cholan , Frolovo , Tuzov and Pitomnik .

On 13 June 1942 , Wilcke claimed his first victory with JG 3 " Udet " , shooting down a Lavochkin @-@ Gorbunov @-@ Gudkov LaGG @-@ 3 fighter for his 39th victory . He followed this with another LaGG @-@ 3 on 22 June , and a LaGG @-@ 3 and a Polikarpov R @-@ 5 reconnaissance bomber on 24 June 1942 . On 3 July 1942 , he claimed three Douglas Boston medium bombers , followed by two LaGG @-@ 3s and another Boston the next day . He became an " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " again on 6 July , shooting down a Bell P @-@ 39 Airacobra , a LaGG @-@ 3 , an R @-@ 5 and three Hurricanes . Three days later , he shot down two Ilyushin Il @-@ 2 Sturmovik ground @-@ attack aircraft and , on 10 July , four more Bostons . The next day , he claimed another R @-@ 5 and two Mikoyan @-@ Gurevich MiG @-@ 1 fighters . On 12 July , he again claimed an R @-@ 5 and two LaGG @-@ 3s before he shot down another LaGG @-@ 3 on 18 July . On 24 July he was credited with a Polikarpov I @-@ 153 biplane fighter and two days later two Hurricanes and two Pe @-@ 2s . On both 27 and 28 July he claimed victory over a LaGG @-@ 3 , his last victories in July 1942 .

Wilcke 's first victories in August 1942 , a Sukhoi Su @-@ 2 light bomber followed by two LaGG @-@ 3s , occurred on 5 and 6 August . On 9 August he filed a victory claim for an unknown aircraft type , bringing his " score " to 79 aerial victories . He took command of JG 3 " Udet " and achieved his first victory as Geschwaderkommodore on 12 August , again over an unknown type of aircraft . He claimed eight further victories of unknown types , two on 13 August , one on 17 August , three on 20 August , and two on 23 August . His first victory on 26 August was identified as a Yakovlev Yak @-@ 7 fighter , the other two that day were again unknown types . Another series of unidentified aircraft shot down followed . He claimed one aircraft destroyed on 28 August , one more on 30 August and four on 31 August , taking his total to 96 aerial victories by the end of August 1942 . Wilcke claimed his next two victories on 3 September and two more on 6 September , all four of unknown types of aircraft . This brought his total to 100 aerial victories . Wilcke was the 20th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . On 9 September 1942 , he became the 122nd officer or soldier of the Wehrmacht honored with the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves .

= = = Battle of Stalingrad = = =

From 10 ? 19 September 1942 , Wilcke claimed another series of victories over aircraft of unknown type , which included one on 10 September , one on 12 September , four on 18 September and two on 19 September . On 16 September 1942 , the Soviets launched an offensive north of Stalingrad .

Wilcke led about 40 serviceable German fighters against the Soviet 8 Vozdyshnaya Armiya (8 VA ? 8th Air Army) , 16 Vozdyshnaya Armiya (16 VA ? 16th Air Army) , and 102 Istrebitel 'naya Aviatsionnaya Diviziya Protivo @-@ Vozdushnaya Oborona (102 IAD PVO ? Fighter Aviation Division of the Home Air Defense) over Stalingrad . At the time , Wilcke often flew with Hauptmann Walther Dahl as his wingman . On 20 September 1942 , Wilcke shot down two LaGG @-@ 3s . Two days later , he shot down six Yakovlev Yak @-@ 1 fighters over Stalingrad , his third " ace @-@ in @-@ day " feat , taking his total to 116 aerial victories . It is possible that one of his opponents was Leytenant (Second Lieutenant) Nikolai Karnachyonok of 434 Istrebitel 'nyy Aviatsionny Polk (434 IAP ? 434th Fighter Aviation Regiment) , who was killed in action that day and was posthumously made a Hero of the Soviet Union .

The Geschwaderstab (headquarters unit) was based at the Pitomnik Airfield from 23 September to 21 November 1942 . There Wilcke directed fighter operations for the Battle of Stalingrad . During the previous offensive towards Stalingrad , the Geschwaderstab of JG 3 " Udet " had claimed 137 victories , of which 97 victories were credited to Wilcke . While based at Pitomnik , Wilcke claimed four victories on 24 September , one on 25 September , three on 28 September , four on 29 September , one on 3 October and two more on 24 October . On 25 and 26 October he claimed one victory on each day and his final two while based at Pitomnik on 1 November 1942 , taking his personal total to 135 victories . For these achievements he received the German Cross in Gold , awarded on 3 November 1942 .

In the aftermath of the encirclement of the 6th Army on 23 November 1942 , the Geschwaderstab was moved to Morozovskaya @-@ West , outside the Stalingrad pocket . Wilcke organized fighter escort missions for the transport aircraft delivering supplies for the 6th Army . Pressed by the advancing Soviet armored spearheads , Morozovskaya @-@ West had to be abandoned by the Geschwaderstab on 23 December , and the aircraft were moved to Morozovskaya @-@ South , which was not yet threatened by the Soviet Army . On 3 January 1943 , this airfield had to be abandoned as well and the Geschwaderstab was relocated to Tazinskaya , there it remained until the fighting over the Stalingrad pocket ended . During this period the Geschwaderstab claimed 25 victories , 21 by Wilcke and 4 by Dahl , for the loss in action of two pilots .

Wilcke claimed two victories on 24 November 1942 , an Il @-@ 2 Sturmovik and a Yak @-@ 1 , his first victories in support of the Stalingrad pocket . On 30 November he claimed the destruction of three aircraft of unknown type , one more on 2 December , and three more on 8 December . Four victories claimed on 12 December , one Lavochkin La @-@ 5 and three Yak @-@ 1s , took his total to 148 aerial victories . Wilcke became the fourth German fighter pilot to achieve 150 aerial victories in combat . He achieved this mark on 17 December 1942 , claiming victories 149 ? 151 . The next day he claimed victory over three more aircraft . Following this 154th victory , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords on 23 December 1943 , the 23rd member of the Wehrmacht to be so honored . Along with the Swords came the ban from flying further operational combat missions . Although banned from flying , he was credited with two more victories on the Eastern Front , a Yak @-@ 1 on 28 December and an aircraft of unknown type on 5 January 1943 .

In March 1943 , Wilcke led Geschwaderstab and II. and III . Gruppe during operations against the Kuban bridgehead as part of the IV . Fliegerkorps (4th Air Corps) . In early May 1943 , the Geschwaderstab was ordered out of actions and returned to München @-@ Gladbach , present @-@ day Mönchengladbach . Wilcke had only the Geschwaderstab and I. Gruppe under his effective command and no further combat missions were flown until October 1943 .

= = = Defense of the Reich and death = = =

Wilcke was promoted to Oberst on 1 December 1943 and requested permission to fly operationally and lead his Geschwader from the air . In February 1944 , although still officially banned from flying operations , Wilcke ignored the order and flew several missions leading his Stabsschwarm against the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) in Defense of the Reich missions . He claimed his 157th victory , over a Lockheed P @-@ 38 Lightning , on 10 February and his 158th , over a

Consolidated B @-@ 24 Liberator , on 24 February . He shot down two Boeing B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress bombers on 4 March 1944 , his 159th and 160th aerial victories . On 6 March , his Bf 109G @-@ 6 was crippled in aerial combat and he made an emergency landing at Neuruppin . Combat on 6 March cost both sides heavy losses . The Eighth Air Force lost 75 four @-@ engined bombers and 14 escort fighters , the Luftwaffe lost 65 aircraft ; 36 German pilots were killed and 27 wounded .

On 23 March 1944 , Wilcke led JG 3 " Udet " against a USAAF bomber formation near Braunschweig . On this day , the USAAF was attacking aircraft factories at Braunschweig and other targets of opportunity in Münster , Osnabrück and Achmer . In total , the Eighth Air Force had committed 768 B @-@ 17s and B @-@ 24s bombers to this attack , supported by 841 long @-@ range fighters . The Luftwaffe countered this attack with 13 day fighter Gruppen , mustering 259 fighters on this day . Following combat , the Luftwaffe claimed the destruction of 51 enemy aircraft , including 44 four @-@ engined bombers . The Luftwaffe suffered 16 pilots killed and six wounded as well as 33 aircraft lost . The USAAF admitted the loss of 29 bombers and 5 escort fighters while claiming 62 German aircraft shot down and another 2 destroyed on the ground .

During this engagement , Wilcke shot down a B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress bomber and a North American P @-@ 51 Mustang fighter , but was then shot down in his Bf 109G @-@ 6 (Werknummer 160 613 ? factory number) near Schöppenstedt . It is assumed that the victors were Captain Don Gentile and Captain John Trevor Godfrey of the 4th Fighter Group . By this date , Wilcke had claimed 162 enemy aircraft in 732 combat missions . His death was announced in the Wehrmachtbericht , an information bulletin issued by the headquarters of the Wehrmacht , on 30 March .

Wilcke had been nicknamed " Fürst " (prince) by his comrades on account of his attitude towards his men and paternal sense of responsibility . He had also been very conscious of his style and appearance and wore a very expensive and custom tailored leather coat , a trade which also added to his perception and fostered the nickname . His funeral ceremony was held at the airfield in München @-@ Gladbach . Among others , the funeral ceremony was attended by his stepfather . Wilcke was buried in the honor section of the cemetery in Mönchengladbach @-@ Holt .

= = Awards = =

Spanish Cross in Bronze with Swords

Wound Badge in Black

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe in Gold with Pennant " 700 "

Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge

Iron Cross (1939)

2nd Class (25 November 1939)

1st Class (11 July 1940)

Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe (1 April 1941)

German Cross in Gold on 3 November 1942 as Major in Jagdgeschwader 3

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords

Knight 's Cross on 6 August 1941 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the III . / Jagdgeschwader 53

122nd Oak Leaves on 9 September 1942 as Hauptmann and Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet "

23rd Swords on 23 December 1942 as Major and Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet "

Mentioned in the Wehrmachtbericht