

= Hans Waldmann (fighter pilot) =

Hans Peter Waldmann (24 September 1922 ? 18 March 1945) was a German Luftwaffe (Air Force) fighter ace and recipient of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross (German : Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) , an honour that recognised extreme bravery on the battlefield or outstanding military leadership . Waldmann received the award after he had shot down 85 enemy aircraft . In total , he was credited with 134 aerial victories accumulated in 527 combat missions .

Born in Braunschweig , Waldmann volunteered for service in the Luftwaffe of Nazi Germany in 1940 . After training at various pilot and fighter @-@ pilot schools , he was posted to Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52 ? 52nd Fighter Wing) , operating on the Eastern Front , in August 1942 . Here Waldmann fought in the aerial battles over Stalingrad , the Caucasus , the Black Sea , and the Crimea . He was credited with 84 aerial victories before briefly being transferred to the Western Front , where he was credited with one aerial victory . Back on the Eastern Front , Waldmann accumulated further victories , bringing his score to 125 victories by end of May 1944 . He then fought in the skies over France after the Western Allied Invasion of Normandy , claiming seven aerial victories , before converting to the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter in late 1944 . Flying the Me 262 , Waldmann shot down two North American P @-@ 51 Mustangs on 22 February 1945 before being killed in a mid @-@ air collision with one of his squadron members on 18 March 1945 near Schwarzenbek , Holstein .

= = Childhood , education and early career = =

Waldmann was born in Braunschweig in the Free State of Brunswick on 24 September 1922 . He was the second son of Ludwig Waldmann , a bank manager , and his wife Maria . Waldmann had an older brother Paul . In 1928 he attended the Volksschule , a primary school , in the Comenius @-@ Street . Over Easter in 1932 he transferred to the humanities @-@ oriented secondary school Wilhelm @-@ Gymnasium .

In 1938 , Waldmann applied for a career as an officer in the Luftwaffe for the first time . Travelling to Berlin , he was deemed suitable but at the age of 16 was too young to volunteer for military service . After the outbreak of World War II , while still at school , Waldmann and his fellow students were forced into compulsory labour service (Reichsarbeitsdienst) . Waldmann was assigned to the Brunswick Mechanical Engineering Institute . Since Waldmann had intended to study aircraft construction after his military service , he was reassigned to the Institute of Aeronautical Metrology and Flight Meteorology at the Braunschweig @-@ Waggum airfield under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Heinrich Koppe .

At the end of March 1940 , Waldmann graduated from school with his Abitur (diploma) . After this he was accepted into the Luftwaffe , two years after his initial application . Commencing in July 1940 , he undertook 12 weeks of basic military training with Fliegerausbildungsregiment 72 (72nd Flight Training Regiment) at Fels am Wagram in Austria . Upon completion , Waldmann was transferred to the Flugzeugführerschule A / B 72 (flight school for the pilot license) at Markersdorf near Sankt Pölten in early October 1940 . Eight days later his training group returned to Fels am Wagram because Markersdorf was overcrowded with other flight courses . Thus flight training started on the improvised airfield without hangars at Fels am Wagram . His first familiarisation flight was on 16 October 1940 , in a Bücker Bü 131 " Jungmann " biplane marked " VTAF " . Waldmann logged his first solo flight on 13 November 1940 at 09 : 17 in a Bü 131 " CGNL " , landing again after six minutes of flight time . His training group returned to Markersdorf in February 1941 . From here , he conducted his first cross @-@ country flights on the Bü 131 " Jungmann " as well as the Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 44 " Stieglitz " . The majority of the cross @-@ country flights were flown on the Gotha Go 145 . From 4 April to 28 April 1941 he made the round trip from Markersdorf to Pocking , Nürnberg , Ettingshausen , Ingolstadt , Zwickau , Hildesheim , Braunschweig , Mannheim , Karlsruhe , Delmenhorst , Halberstadt and Fürth . At Ettingshausen he received instruction in formation flying and aerobatics .

By August 1941 Operation Barbarossa , the German invasion of the Soviet Union , had been

underway for two months , and after completing his A / B flight training at Markersdorf Waldmann was transferred to the Jagdfliegerschule 6 (6th Fighter Pilot School) at Lachen @-@ Speyerdorf near Neustadt an der Weinstraße . He completed the final phase of his fighter pilot training in Gleiwitz , Upper Silesia , from 3 June to 17 August 1942 , before transferring to the front .

= = World War II = =

Holding the rank of unteroffizier , a non @-@ commissioned officer similar in rank to sergeant , on 20 August 1942 Waldmann was tasked with shuttling new Messerschmitt Bf @-@ 109Gs from a factory at Krakau to units on the Eastern Front . Along with six other newly trained pilots , he reached Lemberg where the group was scheduled for a stop over . Bad weather closed in and Waldmann was the only one to take off before the group was grounded . Getting away at 17 : 55 , he headed for Proskuriv . The next day he continued his journey to Uman , 230 kilometres (140 mi) south of Kiev in Ukraine . For the next few days , he was sent back and forth until he finally reached the II . Gruppe (2nd group) of Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52 ? 52nd Fighter Wing) at Tusow , operating in the combat area of Stalingrad .

On arrival , Waldmann was approached by Hauptmann (Captain) Johannes Steinhoff and asked whether he would like to fly as his wingman . Waldmann then conducted six familiarisation flights on the " Gustav " , as the Bf @-@ 109G @-@ 2 was referred to , on 30 August 1942 . Flying a Bf @-@ 109 marked with a black " Chevron @-@ 2 " , indicating an aircraft of the Stab , he flew his first combat mission on 31 August 1942 in the vicinity of Stalingrad . Steinhoff was impressed by his first performance . At the time , Waldmann was still officially assigned to a transfer squadron , but Steinhoff decided to keep him in his Stabs @-@ Schwarm , flight of four . Here his comrades nicknamed Waldmann " Dackel " , an allusion to his last name . In German , a " Dackel " , or Dachshund , is often named Waldi , a hypocoristic form of Waldmann .

= = = War against the Soviet Union = = =

On 9 September 1942 Waldmann scored his first aerial victory , and thereafter scored rapidly . After 84 victories on 1 September 1943 , Waldmann was promoted to Leutnant (second lieutenant) and assigned to Ergänzungs @-@ Jagdgruppe Ost (Supplementary Fighter Group East) . Here he was credited with the destruction of a B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress on 5 January 1944 . This victory , his 85th , was actually a separation @-@ shot ? a severely damaged heavy bomber forced to separate from his combat box ? which counted as an aerial victory . Waldmann had attacked a 28 @-@ aircraft bomber formation and severely damaged the B @-@ 17 . The aerial @-@ victory commission of Luftflotte 3 also credited the Flak @-@ Regiment 45 of 12 . Flak @-@ Brigade with this victory . Following this aerial victory , he received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 5 February 1944 . The presentation of the award was announced by the Greater German Radio ? the official radio station of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda ? on the evening of 20 February 1944 .

In late February 1944 Waldmann was sent back to the Crimean peninsula on the Eastern Front , where he took command of 4 . / JG 52 (4th Squadron of the 52nd Fighter Wing) as its Staffelf kapitän (squadron leader) . He continued his success , claiming eight aerial victories in March , and 16 in April of which eight were claimed from 5 ? 12 April . On 11 April 1944 he claimed two Yakovlev Yak @-@ 7s as his 99th and 100th opponents shot down . He was the 70th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . By 31 May 1944 his score stood at 125 aerial victories . Two Staffeln (squadrons) of the II . / JG 52 were transferred to Hu?i at the Prut River on 27 May 1944 . Here Waldmann claimed his final four victories on the Eastern Front before Gruppenkommandeur (group commander) Major Gerhard Barkhorn was ordered to transfer one Staffel to the west in Defence of the Reich . Barkhorn selected Waldmann 's 4th Staffel which was officially assigned to the II . / Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet " (JG 3 ? 3rd Fighter Wing) , at the time under the command of Hauptmann Hans @-@ Ekkehard Bob .

== = Invasion of Normandy = = =

The Invasion of Normandy , which started on the early morning of 6 June 1944 , was in full swing by the time Waldmann 's Staffel arrived in France . The Western Allies were already breaking out of Normandy in what was codenamed Operation Cobra . II . / JG 3 " Udet " (2nd Group of the 3rd Fighter Wing) was stationed at Nogent @-@ le @-@ Roi , roughly 50 kilometres (31 mi) southwest of Paris . The Gruppe was tasked with ground support missions . In one of these missions against the Allied invasion forces , Waldmann claimed to have damaged a P @-@ 51 Mustang on 31 July 1944 . He was credited with the destruction of numerous trucks during ground support missions over the period of 2 ? 5 August 1944 .

Waldmann 's claimed his first aerial victory in the west , his 126th in total , over a B @-@ 24 Liberator on 6 August 1944 . Waldmann had taken off at 11 : 43 on a free @-@ fighter sweep mission against heavy bombers . His unit spotted a formation of B @-@ 24s after 45 minutes flying time . Waldmann attacked and with his first pass at an altitude of 5 @,@ 000 metres (16 @,@ 000 ft) had hit one of the B @-@ 24 between the two starboard engines , which immediately set the bomber on fire . The B @-@ 24 was observed to crash 3 kilometres (1 @.@ 9 mi) southeast of Méry . His final tally for August was seven Allied planes , including the B @-@ 24 , one Auster on 7 August , and five P @-@ 47 Thunderbolts (two on 14 August , two on 18 August and one on 19 August) .

== = Flying the Messerschmitt Me 262 and death = = =

Waldmann learned to fly the Messerschmitt Me 262 " Stormbird " , the first operational jet fighter , at Landsberg am Lech and Kaltenkirchen in December 1944 . He was then transferred to 3 . / Jagdgeschwader 7 (JG 7 ? 7th Fighter Wing) , now flying the " Stormbird " , as its Staffelführer (squadron leader on probation) .

Together with his wingman ? Oberfähnrich Günter Schrey , Waldmann took off at 11 : 39 on 22 February 1945 from Oranienburg on an offensive counter @-@ air mission against inbound Allied heavy bombers . The Anglo @-@ American attack was codenamed Operation Clarion . About 20 minutes into the flight , roughly 30 kilometres (19 mi) west of Berlin , they spotted an American P @-@ 51 Mustang flying at 7 @,@ 000 metres (23 @,@ 000 ft) . Closing fast , Waldmann shot down the Mustang at 12 : 02 before proceeding west for Magdeburg . Near Oschersleben they spotted another Mustang at 3 @,@ 800 metres (12 @,@ 500 ft) . Waldmann shot it down at 12 : 17 , achieving his 134th and final aerial victory . The Mustang was observed crashing into a forest 25 kilometres (16 mi) northeast of the Brocken , the highest peak of the Harz mountain range .

On Sunday , 18 March 1945 , the lower cloud ceiling at Kaltenkirchen was less than 600 metres (2 @,@ 000 ft) and most of the time between 80 ? 100 metres (260 ? 330 ft) , while the upper cloud ceiling was at 6 @,@ 000 metres (20 @,@ 000 ft) , rendering flight conditions outside the official operational specification for the Me 262 . The jet was not fully cleared for instrument flight , mandating a lower cloud ceiling of more than 800 metres (2 @,@ 600 ft) . Major Erich Rudorffer , Gruppenkommandeur of the I. / JG 7 , was attending a meeting at the Luftgaukommando in Hamburg @-@ Blankensee , when Oberleutnant Hans Grünberg , the most senior officer on duty and Staffelf kapitän of the 1st Staffel , received the order from Major Richter , the Ia (operations officer) , to engage inbound heavy bombers . Grünberg initially argued that weather conditions prohibited a safe takeoff but Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring intervened and ordered the jets to engage the enemy .

The order resulted in the death of both Waldmann and his wingman Schrey on the following mission . Waldmann was killed following a mid @-@ air collision with Leutnant Hans @-@ Dieter Weihs shortly after takeoff , and Schrey was killed in combat with US fighters . Mindful of the direct order of the Reichsmarschall , Oberleutnant Grünberg (1st Staffel) , Oberleutnant Fritz Stehle (2nd Staffel) and Waldmann (3rd Staffel) had decided that each of them would lead a flight of four Me 262s , taking off and flying around for an hour before returning without trying to engage the enemy . Grünberg 's Schwarm took off first followed by Stehle 's Schwarm . Waldmann chose Weihs , as the

most experienced pilot trained in instrument flight , to lead the Schwarm , while Schrey once again served as Waldmann 's wingman . Waldmann 's Me 262 A @-@ 1 " Yellow 3 " (Werknummer 117097 ? factory number) took off at 12 : 24 and Weihs ordered the Schwarm to form a close formation , flying wing tip to wing tip .

Only three Me 262s took off ; Flieger Gerhard Reiher 's Me 262 had experienced engine failure . Four minutes into the flight , having travelled roughly 50 kilometres (31 mi) and flying at less than 800 metres (2 @,@ 600 ft) above the ground , Weihs ' aircraft experienced a heavy blow from below after Waldmann collided with him . His jet in an unrecoverable spin , Weihs bailed out and came down near the Hamburg @-@ Berlin railroad tracks . The airfield at Kaltenkirchen was immediately informed . Waldmann and Schrey were initially believed missing . Waldmann 's body was recovered the next day near Schwarzenbek , roughly 1 kilometre (0 @.@ 62 mi) away from the crash site of his Me 262 . Apparently he had managed to bail out but failed to deploy his parachute in time , although the injuries sustained during the crash with Weihs ' aircraft may have already been fatal as the recovery party found Waldmann with his upper forehead smashed . Schrey was also found dead . He had bailed out with his parachute , but his body was found riddled by machine @-@ gun bullets .

The fallen airmen were buried with full military honours , including a Me 262 flypast , at the cemetery in Kaltenkirchen . Waldmann 's successor as Staffelkapitän , Oberleutnant Walter Wagner , accompanied Waldmann 's mother from Braunschweig to Kaltenkirchen for the funeral . A number of wreaths were laid on his grave , the largest sent by the Reichsmarschall . Waldmann was recommended for the Oak Leaves to the Knight 's Cross , but the recommendation was either not approved or not finalized before the end of the war .

= = Aerial victory credits = =

Hans Waldmann was credited with 134 aerial victories , claimed in 527 combat missions , 10 on the Western Front and 124 on the Eastern Front . His tally on the Eastern Front includes five bombers , 86 fighters and 33 Il @-@ 2 Sturmovik ground @-@ attack aircraft . On the Western Front he claimed seven fighters , two four @-@ engined bombers and one observation aircraft . He also flew a number of ground attack missions , destroying 33 various vehicles and eight heavy transports .

This and the ? (Ace of spades) indicates those aerial victories which made Waldmann an ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day , a term which designates a fighter pilot who has shot down five or more airplanes in a single day . This along with the * (asterisk) indicates an Herausschuss (separation shot) ? a severely damaged heavy bomber forced to separate from his combat box which was counted as an aerial victory .

= = Awards = =

Iron Cross (1939)

2nd Class (25 September 1942)

1st Class (11 November 1942)

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe for Fighter Pilots in Gold (1 February 1943)

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe on 15 March 1943 as Unteroffizier and pilot

German Cross in Gold on 17 April 1943 as Unteroffizier in the 6 . / JG 52

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 5 February 1944 as Feldwebel and pilot in the 6 . / JG 52

Hans Waldmann may have been awarded a posthumous Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves . Oberst Nicolaus von Below processed such a request between 20 April 1945 and 2 May 1945 , although no official proof exists .

= = Translation notes = =