

= Wilhelm Lemke =

Wilhelm Lemke (27 September 1920 ? 4 December 1943) was a Luftwaffe flying ace of World War II . Lemke was credited with 131 aerial victories ? that is , 131 aerial combat encounters resulting in the destruction of the enemy aircraft . All but six of his victories were claimed over the Soviet Air Forces in 617 combat missions .

Born in Arnswalde , Lemke joined the military service in the Luftwaffe of the Third Reich in 1939 . Following flight training , he was posted to 9 . Staffel (squadron) of Jagdgeschwader 3 (JG 3 ? 3rd Fighter Wing) . He flew his first combat missions in Operation Barbarossa , the German invasion of the Soviet Union , and claimed his first aerial victory on 26 June 1941 . There , after 59 aerial victories , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 12 September 1942 . He was given command as Staffelkapitän (squadron leader) of 9 . Staffel on 11 August 1942 . On 16 March 1943 , he was credited with his 100th aerial victory . Four months later , on 28 July 1943 , he claimed his 125th and last victory on the Eastern Front .

Lemke was subsequently relocated to the Western Front , where he flew in the Defense of the Reich and claimed six further victories . In mid @-@ November 1943 , he was appointed Gruppenkommandeur (group commander) of the II . Gruppe (2nd group) of JG 3 " Udet " ; he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves on 25 November . Lemke was killed in action on 4 December 1943 northwest of Nijmegen in combat with United States Army Air Forces fighters .

= = Early life and career = =

Lemke , the son of a civil servant , was born on 27 September 1920 in Gundelsdorf near Arnswalde , in what was then the Free State of Prussia of the Weimar Republic (today Choszczno in Poland) . He joined the military service of the Luftwaffe as a Fahnenjunker (cadet) on 15 November 1939 . Following fighter pilot training , he was promoted to Leutnant (second lieutenant) on 1 April 1941 .

= = World War II = =

= = = Eastern Front = = =

Lemke was posted to a front @-@ line unit in 1941 , almost two years after the start of World War II . His unit was 9 . Staffel (squadron) of Jagdgeschwader 3 (JG 3 ? 3rd Fighter Wing) . In preparation for Operation Barbarossa , the German invasion of the Soviet Union , JG 3 under the command of Major (major) Günther Lützow was relocated east . Lemke claimed two Soviet Tupolev SB @-@ 2 bombers shot down on 26 June 1941 ? his first aerial victories . He was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class (Eisernes Kreuz zweiter Klasse) on 4 July 1941 and Iron Cross 1st Class (Eisernes Kreuz erster Klasse) on 20 July .

By 26 August 1941 , Lemke had accumulated 15 aerial victories . On this day , flying Messerschmitt Bf 109 F @-@ 2 (Werknummner 8245 ? factory number) , he was hit and wounded in the abdomen during combat with Soviet bombers but managed to make an emergency landing . On 3 November 1941 , while convalescing , he was awarded the Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe (Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe) . He returned to active service on 17 February 1942 and was posted to 8 . Staffel of JG 3 " Udet " . On 31 March 1942 , Lemke claimed his 20th aerial victory . He claimed three Lavochkin @-@ Gorbunov @-@ Gudkov LaGG @-@ 3 fighters shot down in combat with 6 UAG (6th Soviet strike aviation group ? Udarnaya Aviatsionnaya Gruppa) on 4 April . He was credited with his 30th victory on 24 June 1942 , and aerial victories 39 to 42 on 29 July . Subsequently , he was nominated for the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) by his 8 . Staffel . He was given command as Staffelkapitän (squadron leader) of his former 9 . Staffel on 11 August 1942 , leading this unit until 5 November 1943 .

Lemke claimed his 57th victory on 7 September 1942 , his 58th one day later , and his 59th victory

on 11 September . The next day , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross . On 27 December , he involuntarily rammed a LaGG @-@ 3 in combat . By 31 December 1942 his score had increased to 90 victories . As well as his aerial victories , he was credited with the destruction of aircraft on the ground , as well as three tanks , three fuel trucks , eleven other trucks , three Katyusha rocket launchers , one anti @-@ tank gun , and two mortars . On 16 March 1943 , he claimed his 100th aerial victory , a Lavochkin La @-@ 5 fighter . Lemke was the 35th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . He was promoted to Oberleutnant (first lieutenant) on 1 April 1943 and to Hauptmann (captain) on 1 June . He was credited with his last victory on the Eastern Front on 28 July 1943 , taking his total to 125 .

= = = Western Front and death = = =

On 2 August 1943 , JG 3 " Udet " began transferring to Western Front and flew in Defense of the Reich . Lemke claimed two United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) Republic P @-@ 47 Thunderbolt fighters shot down on 17 August during the Schweinfurt ? Regensburg mission , his first on the Western Front . By 14 October 1943 , he was credited with one victory and two Herausschüsse (separation shots) ? a severely damaged heavy bomber forced to separate from his combat box , which was counted as an aerial victory ? over Boeing B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress bombers . On that day , he claimed his 129th and 130th victory , one of which was a Herausschuss , over B @-@ 17s on their second Raid on Schweinfurt .

In mid @-@ November 1943 , Lemke was appointed Gruppenkommandeur (group commander) of the II . Gruppe (2nd group) of JG 3 " Udet " . He succeeded Major Kurt Brändle , who had been killed in action on 3 November . Lemke surrendered command of 9 . Staffel to Leutnant Ekkehard Tichy and took command of the Gruppe a few days later at the Schiphol airfield , near Amsterdam in the Netherlands . He was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub) on 25 November , the 338th officer or soldier of the Wehrmacht so honored . On 30 November 1943 at 11 : 25 am , he achieved his 131st and final aerial victory over a P @-@ 47 .

Lemke was killed in action in his Bf 109 G @-@ 6 (Werknummner 410558) on 4 December 1943 near Dodewaard , 12 kilometers (7 @.@ 5 mi) northwest Nijmegen . His mission was to lead an attack of 55 aircraft on a fighter intercept mission against USAAF fighters escorting Eighth Air Force bombers . He was shot down by P @-@ 47 Thunderbolts of the 352nd Fighter Group . Lemke was buried at the German war cemetery Ysselsteyn in the Netherlands .

= = Aerial victory credits = =

Lemke was credited with 131 aerial victories claimed in 617 combat missions , 125 of which were on the Eastern Front and included 28 Ilyushin Il @-@ 2 ground @-@ attack aircraft .

This and the ? (dash) indicates unwitnessed aerial victory claims for which Lemke did not receive credit . 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 (4 July 1941)

1st Class (20 July 1941)

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe (Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe) on 3 November 1941 as Leutnant and pilot

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves

Knight 's Cross on 12 September 1942 as Leutnant and Staffelführer of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet "

338th Oak Leaves on 25 November 1943 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the II . / Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet "