

= Theodor Weissenberger =

Theodor Weissenberger ( 21 December 1914 ? 11 June 1950 ) was a German Luftwaffe military aviator during World War II and a fighter ace credited with 208 enemy aircraft shot down in 375 combat missions . The majority of his victories were claimed near the Arctic Ocean in the northern sector of the Eastern Front , but he also claimed 33 victories over the Western Front . He claimed eight of these victories over the Western Allies while flying the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter .

Born in Mühlheim am Main in the German Empire , Weissenberger , who had been a glider pilot in his youth , volunteered for service in the Luftwaffe of the Third Reich in 1936 . Following flight training , he was posted to the heavy fighter squadron of Jagdgeschwader 77 ( JG 77 ? 77th Fighter Wing ) in 1941 . He claimed his first aerial victory over Norway on 24 October 1941 . After 23 aerial victories as heavy fighter pilot , he received the German Cross in Gold and was then posted to Jagdgeschwader 5 ( JG 5 ? 5th Fighter Wing ) in September 1942 . There he received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 13 November 1942 after 38 aerial victories .

In June 1943 , Weissenberger was appointed Staffelkapitän of 7 . Staffel of JG 5 . Following his 112th aerial victory , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves on 2 August 1943 . He was appointed Staffelkapitän of 6 . Staffel in September 1943 and in March 1944 he was given command of II . Gruppe of JG 5 which was operating in Defense of the Reich missions . In June 1944 he took command of I. Gruppe of JG 5 which defended against the Invasion of Normandy . Weissenberger claimed 25 aerial victories in this theater , which included his 200th victory on 25 July 1944 . After conversion training to the Me 262 jet fighter , he was appointed commander of I. Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 7 " Nowotny " ( JG 7 ? 7th Fighter Wing ) , the first operational jet fighter wing in the world , in November 1944 . Promoted to Major ( major ) , he took command of JG 7 " Nowotny " as a Geschwaderkommodore in January 1945 , a position he held until the end of hostilities . He was killed in a car racing accident on 11 June 1950 at the Nürburgring .

= = Early life and career = =

Weissenberger , the son of a plant nursery owner , was born on 21 December 1914 in Mühlheim am Main in the Grand Duchy of Hesse of the German Empire . He had a brother Otto who also served as a pilot in Luftwaffe . As a glider pilot with the German Air Sports Association ( Deutscher Luftsportverband ) , he made his maiden flight on 16 November 1935 . On 20 July 1941 he logged his 645th flight as a glider pilot , in total 196 hours and 46 minutes of powerless flight . Most of these flights were made as an instructor over the Rhön Mountains , Silesia and Bavaria .

He joined the military service of the Luftwaffe with 2 . / Flieger @-@ Ersatz @-@ Abteilung 14 ( 2nd Company of Flier Replacement Unit 14 ) in Detmold on 19 October 1936 . There he was promoted to Feldwebel of the Reserves on 1 December 1940 .

= = World War II = =

Weissenberger was posted to a front @-@ line unit on 27 August 1941 , almost two years after the start of World War II . His unit , 1 . ( Z ) / Jagdgeschwader 77 ( JG 77 ? 77th Fighter Wing ) was a Zerstörer ( Z ? heavy fighter or destroyer ) Staffel ( squadron ) flying the twin @-@ engine , up to three @-@ seat , Messerschmitt Bf 110 . The unit was stationed in Norway , operating in the Murmansk area in support of Finnish operations against the Soviet Union during the Continuation War . Germany regarded its operations in the region as part of its overall war efforts on the Eastern Front , and it provided Finland with critical material support and military cooperation . There he flew his first combat mission of the war on 13 September 1941 .

= = = War on the Arctic Front = = =

Weissenberger claimed his first aerial victory , a Polikarpov I @-@ 153 biplane fighter , on 24

October 1941 and was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class ( Eisernes Kreuz zweiter Klasse ) on 6 November 1941 . He was promoted to Oberfeldwebel of the Reserves on 1 February 1942 . During this phase of his military career , he often got into trouble with his superiors regarding his lack of discipline . A few times his comrades had to intervene to save him from punishment . On 24 January 1942 , Weissenberger and Oberleutnant Max Franzisket flew on a ground attack mission against the Kirov Railway line . Weissenberger claimed a Polikarpov I @-@ 18 shot down at 13 : 35 , roughly 4 kilometers ( 2 @.@ 5 miles ) northwest of the railway station of Bojaskoje . At 13 : 40 , he claimed a Hawker Hurricane shot down , his third aerial victory .

In February 1942 he mostly flew escort fighter missions for Junkers Ju 87 and Ju 88 bombers attacking the harbors at Ferosero , Polyarnoye , present @-@ day Polyarny , and Murmansk . Weissenberger received the Iron Cross 1st Class ( Eisernes Kreuz erster Klasse ) on 17 February 1942 . On 25 February he claimed two more Hurricanes shot down at 11 : 15 and 11 : 22 , his fourth and fifth victories . His Staffel was redesignated as 10 . ( Z ) of Jagdgeschwader 5 ( JG 5 ? 5th Fighter Wing ) on 16 March 1942 and subordinated to JG 5 . In April 1942 he claimed eight victories , three of which were shot down on 15 April during two combat missions west of Murmansk . On 25 April at 7 : 20 Weissenberger took off at Kirkenes for an emergency intercept mission against 20 Soviet Petlyakov Pe @-@ 2 bombers . He shot down two bombers before his aircraft was hit by the defensive fire . The right engine started burning and he was forced to disengage from the enemy . Returning to the German lines , he made a safe belly landing .

Weissenberger became an " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " for the first time on 10 May 1942 when he shot down five enemy aircraft , aerial victories 14 ? 18 , between 16 : 45 and 16 : 57 while on a Ju 87 escort mission . These victories were claimed over aircraft of 2 Gvardeyskiy Smeshannyy Aviatсионny Polk ( 2 GSAP ? 2nd Soviet Guards Composite Aviation Division ) , which lost ten Hurricanes destroyed and three damaged . He claimed his 20th victory on 15 May when he shot down a Hurricane 4 km ( 2 @.@ 5 mi ) west of Murmansk . In June 1942 , JG 5 was augmented by another group , VI . Gruppe ( 4th Group ) under the command of Hauptmann Hans Kriegel . This led to a number of Staffel redesignations . Weissenberger 's 10 . ( Z ) Staffel was renamed as 13 . ( Z ) Staffel and remained subordinated to JG 5 . He transferred from the reserve force to active service and was promoted to Leutnant ( second lieutenant ) on 1 July 1942 . In early September he was transferred to 6 . Staffel of JG 5 , now flying the single @-@ engine , single @-@ seat , Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter . By this date , Weissenberger , as a Zerstörer pilot , had claimed 23 aerial victories in addition to 15 locomotives , 2 FLAK installations , a radio station , a railway station and other ground targets destroyed and was awarded the German Cross in Gold ( Deutsches Kreuz in Gold ) on 8 September 1942 .

= = = Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross = = =

At the time , 6 . Staffel at the time was based in Petsamo , present @-@ day Pechenga in Murmansk Oblast , Russia . Weissenberger took off on his first Bf 109 combat mission at 14 : 00 on 15 September 1942 after he had spent a few days familiarizing himself with the single @-@ engine fighter aircraft . The mission , flown by 10 Bf 109 fighters from 6 . Staffel , was a combat air patrol in the vicinity of Murmashi . The flight encountered enemy aircraft and Weissenberger filed claims over two Curtiss P @-@ 40 Warhawk Lend @-@ Lease fighters shot down at 14 : 31 and 14 : 33 . These were his first victories claimed on the Bf 109 , taking his total to 25 victories . A week later , on 22 September , Weissenberger and 6 . Staffel were again patrolling the airspace near the Soviet airfield at Murmashi . During this mission , he claimed three more aerial victories , over Hurricanes shot down between 14 : 59 and 15 : 05 .

On 27 September 1942 , Weissenberger claimed five victories during the course of two combat missions . During the first mission , he shot down a Bell P @-@ 39 Airacobra at 11 : 36 . On his second mission , which began at 15 : 00 , he encountered a formation of roughly 30 aircraft , claiming four Hurricanes shot down from 15 : 49 to 15 : 56 , a time space of seven minutes . This " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " achievement took his total to 33 aerial victories . On 22 October 1942 , Weissenberger was tasked with fighter protection for a reconnaissance aircraft . The engine

of his Focke Wulf Fw 190 F @-@ 4 seized up just west of Murmansk . He managed to nurse his aircraft back to the German lines before bailing out . He was picked up eight hours later by a Gebirgsjäger ( mountain infantry ) patrol and brought back to his Staffel . Following this event he was given one week of rest . He returned to combat on 30 October 1942 , and during two combat missions again achieved " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " status . He claimed three victories on his first mission and two P @-@ 40s at 15 : 00 and 15 : 06 on his second mission of the day . This took his total to 38 aerial victories and he was honored with the presentation of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes ) on 13 November 1942 .

Following the winter break , Weissenberger claimed 33 further victories between 6 ? 28 March 1943 . Often he achieved multiple victories per day ; six claims on 10 March , victories 43 to 48 on 10 March , victories 49 to 53 on 12 March , and numbers 54 to 57 on 13 March . A ground attack mission against the airfield at Salmiyarvi on 28 March was his last action of the month . Weissenberger claimed three P @-@ 39s shot down during this mission , but was himself hit by anti @-@ aircraft fire and had to make a forced landing . He was picked up and returned by a Fiesler Fi 156 " Storch " . On 13 April 1943 , a flight of five aircraft from 6 . Staffel claimed 18 Soviet aircraft destroyed without loss . Six of the enemy aircraft were credited to Weissenberger , shot down between 17 : 05 and 17 : 16 . This took his score to 77 aerial victories . On 13 May , he claimed four P @-@ 39s destroyed , representing victories 83 to 86 , and he was promoted to Oberleutnant on 1 June 1943 .

= = = Oak Leaves to the Knight 's Cross = = =

Weissenberger claimed another five victories on 8 June 1943 north of Murmansk between 17 : 15 and 17 : 23 . This brought his score to 91 aerial victories and on 15 June he was appointed Staffelkapitän ( squadron leader ) of 7 . Staffel of JG 5 . In the period 15 June to 4 July , 7 . Staffel claimed 122 aerial victories under his leadership . The heaviest fighting occurred on 22 June over the Karelia Front , during which his Staffel claimed 13 victories , of which three were Hurricanes shot down by Weissenberger . A day later , he again claimed three aircraft shot down , comprising victories 95 to 97 .

On 4 July 1943 , Weissenberger led 7 . Staffel to 16 aerial victories , while providing fighter cover for a departing German naval task force . First , Weissenberger claimed a Pe @-@ 2 reconnaissance aircraft shot down at 21 : 07 . A flight of 25 to 30 enemy bombers and torpedo bombers was then spotted at 21 : 50 . Weissenberger claimed an Ilyushin Il @-@ 2 " Sturmovik " at 21 : 54 , his 100th aerial victory . He was the 43rd Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . The Staffel returned to its airfield at 22 : 19 without having sustained any losses during the encounter . Weissenberger alone had claimed seven victories during this mission , taking his total to 104 victories . On 10 July 1943 , this achievement earned him his first mention in the Wehrmachtbericht , an information bulletin issued by the headquarters of the Wehrmacht .

He achieved " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " status for the fourth time on 25 July 1943 , claiming aerial victories numbers 108 to 112 . Following his 112th victory , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub ) on 2 August 1943 , the 266th member of the Wehrmacht to be so honored . The presentation was made by Adolf Hitler at the Wolf 's Lair , Hitler 's headquarters in Rastenburg , present @-@ day K?trzyn in Poland . Five other Luftwaffe officers were presented with awards that day by Hitler , Hauptmann Egmont Prinz zur Lippe @-@ Weißenfeld , Hauptmann Manfred Meurer , Hauptmann Heinrich Ehrler , Oberleutnant Joachim Kirschner , Hauptmann Werner Schröer were also awarded the Oak Leaves , and Major Helmut Lent received the Swords to his Knight 's Cross with Oak Leaves .

Weissenberger was placed in command of 6 . Staffel on 14 September 1943 and in October and November added five more victories to his score , four of which were achieved on 3 November over the Rybachy Peninsula . At the end of 1943 , II . Gruppe ( 2nd Group ) was ordered to relocate further south to the front near Nevel , Leningrad and Lake Ilmen . Relocating from Pskov , 6 . Staffel arrived at their new airfield at Idritsa on 11 November 1943 and was in action again on 17 November . In January 1944 , II . Gruppe was subordinated to Luftflotte 2 ( 2nd Air Fleet ) in the middle sector

of the Eastern Front in support of the defensive battles at Vitebsk . The Staffel flew combat missions from Orsha and Polotsk . Between 10 : 50 to 10 : 58 on 1 February 1944 , Weissenberger achieved his fifth " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " , taking his total to 124 . On 28 February , he claimed his 140th aerial victory .

At the end of February 1944 , II . Gruppe relocated again to Polotsk and then to Jakobstadt , present @-@ day J?kabpils in Latvia , and on 16 March Weissenberger claimed his 141st victory . Among his four victories claimed on 20 March were three II @-@ 2 ground attack aircraft . On 25 March 1944 , another " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " achievement saw his total increase to 153 aerial victories . In late March 1944 , II . Gruppe was transferred to the far north again , and was based at Alakurtti . Here they defended against the Vyborg ? Petrozavodsk Offensive .

Weissenberger was appointed Gruppenkommandeur ( group commander ) of II . Gruppe of JG 5 on 26 March 1944 . He claimed three aircraft shot down on 4 April , and four more on 9 April , taking his victories from 159 to 162 . At the end of April 1944 , II . Gruppe relocated to Jakobstadt , withdrawing from the Arctic Front for the last time . On 17 May he claimed victories 169 to 172 , and the next day shot down three Yakovlev Yak @-@ 9s , taking his total to 175 . These were his last victories on the Eastern Front . At the end of May 1944 , II . Gruppe was transferred to Defense of the Reich duties and was relocated to Gardelegen Airfield in Germany .

= = = Combat on the Western Front = = =

Weissenberger was promoted to Hauptmann on 1 June 1944 . On 3 June he arrived in Herzogenaurach to take over command of I. Gruppe ( 1st Group ) of JG 5 . The former Gruppenkommandeur Major Horst Carganico had been killed in a flying accident on 27 May 1944 . Three days after Weissenberger took command , the Allied invasion of Normandy began . To counter the invasion , elements of I. / JG 5 were transported to France by train that afternoon . The ground personnel were flown on Junkers Ju 52s to their airfield at Montdidier , 35 km ( 22 mi ) south of Amiens . The following day , Weissenberger took I. Gruppe into combat , achieving " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " status once again on his first day of combat on the Western Front . His 176th victory was over a Republic P @-@ 47 Thunderbolt shot down at 09 : 05 . He claimed two further P @-@ 47s shot down 20 minutes later . I. Gruppe was scrambled again in the afternoon which resulted in aerial combat with roughly 12 P @-@ 47s near Beauvais . During the course of this encounter , which ended at 17 : 39 , Weissenberger claimed two P @-@ 47s shot down .

On 8 June the final elements of I. Gruppe arrived in Montdidier , making the unit complete . In the evening Weissenberger again claimed two P @-@ 47s shot down , his 181st and 182nd aerial victories . The airfield at Montdidier came under heavy fighter bomber attack on 11 June followed by another attack on 12 June resulting in significant damage to the airfield . On 12 June Weissenberger filed a claim for three aerial victories . Together with his wingman , Unteroffizier ( Sergeant ) Alfred Tichy , he took off at 06 : 00 and during the course of 12 minutes shot down three P @-@ 47s . After his first victory , Tichy was killed in action , crashing near Évreux . At 07 : 02 Weissenberger shot down his third P @-@ 47 of the day but his Bf 109 G @-@ 5 was hit in the engine forcing him to bail out near Saint André . The airfield in Montdidier was rendered unserviceable and I. Gruppe was forced to relocate . It was first moved to Péronne , then to Chauny , a makeshift airfield between Noyon and Tergnier . The constant attacks against German airfields forced another move in July 1944 , this time to Frières in the vicinity of Laon .

II . Gruppe flew a combat air patrol on 6 July 1944 , resulting in the claim of three Lockheed P @-@ 38 Lightnings destroyed . Weissenberger was credited with two of these victories , the first at 08 : 48 and the second at 08 : 49 , both shot down south of Cambrai . The next day , the Gruppe took off heading for the airspace south of Rosières where they engaged a formation of 15 to 20 P @-@ 47s . During this encounter , Weissenberger claimed three victories , numbers 188 to 190 . The Gruppe was given a few days of rest and on 13 July were ordered to operate against enemy fighter bombers attacking German positions in the area Rouen ? Bernay ? Évreux . During this mission , he shot down a Hawker Typhoon at 18 : 24 near Trouville and another one two minutes later . They were then tasked with a fighter bomber mission on 14 July , attacking enemy positions near Caen . After a

number of ground strafing attacks they themselves came under attack of numerous Supermarine Spitfires and P @-@ 47s . Flying at a height of 10 meters ( 33 feet ) , Weissenberger managed to shoot down one Spitfire 5 km ( 3 @. @ 1 mi ) south of Bayeux .

The commanding general of II . Jagdkorps ( 2nd Fighter Corps ) , Generalleutnant Alfred Bülowius , accompanied by Oberstleutnant Herbert Ihlefeld inspected II . Gruppe at their airfield in Frières on 15 July 1944 . On 17 July , Weissenberger led his Gruppe on a number of missions in the combat area near Caen without encountering any enemy aircraft . On their last mission of the day , having taken off at 19 : 00 , they encountered enemy fighter bombers near Caen ? Le Mesnil . During aerial combat , the Gruppe lost three pilots without any success for themselves . On 19 July 1944 , I. Gruppe was tasked with flying top cover for Jagdgeschwader 2 " Richthofen " and Jagdgeschwader 26 " Schlageter " . During this mission , Weissenberger claimed four aerial victories . At 20 : 22 he shot down his first Typhoon of the mission north of Lisieux , another Typhoon one minute later and his third at 20 : 25 northwest of Cormeilles . His fourth victory was over a North American P @-@ 51 Mustang , shot down at 20 : 35 near Charleval .

On 25 July 1944 , the Gruppe was again tasked with a combat air patrol mission in the greater Caen area . Weissenberger received the order to take off at 10 : 30 and at 11 : 00 they spotted Spitfires in the vicinity of Rouen . In the ensuing aerial encounter at an altitude of 3 @, @ 800 m ( 12 @, @ 500 ft ) , Weissenberger shot down a Spitfire 15 km ( 9 @. @ 3 mi ) south of Rouen . This was his 199th aerial victory . Two minutes later , at 11 : 02 , he shot down his 200th opponent . This achievement earned him his second mention in the Wehrmachtbericht on 26 July 1944 . Weissenberger left the Gruppe on 30 July 1944 and went on vacation to Bad Wiessee .

His I. Gruppe was withdrawn from combat and moved to Wunstorf for a period of rest and conversion training to the Bf 109 G @-@ 14 . The ground personnel were transferred to II . Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 6 ( JG 6 ? 6th Fighter Wing ) . Conversion training ended in October 1944 and I. Gruppe was disbanded shortly after and became III . Gruppe ( 3rd Group ) of JG 6 on 14 October . On 24 October 1944 Weissenberger was ordered to Königsberg in der Neumark , present @-@ day Chojna in Poland . At Königsberg , he was given command of the newly forming I. Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 7 " Nowotny " ( JG 7 ? 7th Fighter Wing ) .

= = = Flying the Messerschmitt Me 262 = = =

JG 7 " Nowotny " was the first operational jet fighter wing in the world and was named after Walter Nowotny , who was killed in action on 8 November 1944 . Nowotny , a fighter pilot credited with 258 aerial victories and recipient of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub , Schwertern und Brillanten ) , had been assessing the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet aircraft under operational conditions . JG 7 " Nowotny " was equipped with the Me 262 , an aircraft which was heavily armed and faster than any Allied fighter . General der Jagdflieger ( General of the Fighter Force ) Adolf Galland hoped that the Me 262 would compensate for the Allies ' numerical superiority . On 12 November 1944 , the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe ( OKL ? Air Force High Command ) ordered JG 7 " Nowotny " to be equipped with the Me 262 . Galland appointed Oberst Johannes Steinhoff as its first Geschwaderkommodore ( wing commander ) .

JG 7 " Nowotny " was initially formed with the Stab ( headquarters unit ) and III . Gruppe at Brandenburg @-@ Briest from the remnants of Kommando Nowotny . I. Gruppe was created on 27 November from pilots and personnel from II . Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 3 " Udet " ( JG 3 ? 3rd Fighter Wing ) and placed under the command of Weissenberger . Weissenberger ? s appointed Staffelkapitäne in I. Gruppe were Oberleutnant Hans Grünberg , Oberleutnant Fritz Stehle , and Oberleutnant Hans Waldmann , commanding 1 . ? 3 . Staffel respectively .

On New Year 's Day 1945 , Weissenberger married his teenage @-@ love Cilly Vogel in Langenselbold near Hanau . Best man at his wedding was his former JG 5 comrade and friend Walter Schuck . Schuck succeeded Waldmann as Staffelkapitän of the 3 . Staffel following the latter 's death in a flying accident on 18 March 1945 .

Weissenberger was promoted to Major on 1 January 1945 and replaced Steinhoff as

Geschwaderkommodore of JG 7 " Nowotny " shortly after . Both Galland and Steinhoff , among others , were relieved of their commands in the aftermath of the Fighter Pilots ' Revolt in early 1945 .

Under his command , JG 7 " Nowotny " achieved some success before the end of World War II in Europe on 8 May 1945 . On 18 March 1945 , JG 7 " Nowotny " claimed 25 aerial victories over Berlin , among them three Boeing B @-@ 17 Flying Fortresses shot down by Weissenberger . Over all , he achieved eight confirmed victories , seven B @-@ 17 bombers and a P @-@ 51 fighter , while flying the Me 262 . Weissenberger survived the war and was credited with a total of 208 aerial victories , including 33 over the Western Front , claimed in 375 combat missions .

= = Later life = =

Weissenberger became a motor racing driver after the war , and was killed at the Nürburgring circuit on 11 June 1950 , when his modified BMW 328 single seater ( Veritas ) , start number 15 , crashed on the first lap of the XV Eifelrennen , a Formula Two motor race .

= = Awards = =

Weissenberger received the following awards :

Iron Cross ( 1939 variant )

2nd Class ( 6 November 1941 )

1st Class ( 17 February 1942 )

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe on 1 July 1942 as Oberfeldwebel and pilot

German Cross in Gold on 8 September 1942 as Oberfeldwebel in the 10 . ( ZS ) / JG 5

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves

Knight 's Cross on 13 November 1942 as Leutnant ( war officer ) and pilot in the 6 . / JG 5

266th Oak Leaves on 2 August 1943 as Oberleutnant ( war officer ) and Staffelkapitän of the 7 . / JG 5

Mentioned twice in the Wehrmachtbericht

In addition , Weissenberger was also recommended for the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern ) by Steinhoff after his 200th aerial victory . The recommendation was received by the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe / Luftwaffenpersonalamt ( OKL / LP ? Air Force High Command / Air Force Staff Office ) on 29 January 1945 , but was declined on 20 February 1945 . At the time , 240 aerial victories were required for the Swords to be awarded .

= = = Dates of rank = = =