

= Wolfgang Lüth =

Kapitän zur See (Captain) Wolfgang August Eugen Lüth (15 October 1913 ? 14 May 1945) , was the second most successful German U @-@ boat ace of World War II . His career record of 46 merchant ships plus the French submarine Doris sunk during 15 war patrols , with a total displacement of 230 @,@ 781 gross register tons (GRT) , was second only to that of Korvettenkapitän (Lieutenant Commander) Otto Kretschmer , whose 47 sinkings totaled 274 @.@ 333 GRT .

Lüth joined the Reichsmarine in 1933 . After a period of training on surface vessels , he transferred to the U @-@ boat service in 1936 . In December 1939 he received command of U @-@ 9 , which he took on six war @-@ patrols . In June 1940 he took command of U @-@ 138 for two patrols . In October 1940 he transferred again , this time to the ocean @-@ going submarine U @-@ 43 for five war @-@ patrols . After two patrols on U @-@ 181 , the second being his longest of the war , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds . He was the first of two U @-@ boat commanders to be so honored during World War II , the other recipient being Albrecht Brandi .

Lüth 's last service position was commander of the naval academy at Mürwik a part of Flensburg . He was accidentally shot and killed by a German sentry on the night of 13 / 14 May 1945 . Lüth was given the last state funeral in the Third Reich , the only U @-@ boat commander to be so commemorated .

= = Early life and career = =

Lüth was a Baltic German born in Riga in the Russian Empire . He went to the Naturwissenschaftliches Gymnasium there and after he had received his Abitur (school leaving certificate) , he studied Law for three semesters at the Herder @-@ Institut . With his parents approval he joined the Reichsmarine on 1 April 1933 as an Offiziersanwärter (Officer Candidate) . After he underwent basic military training in the 2nd department (II . Abteilung) of the standing ship division (Schiffsstammdivision) of the Baltic Sea in Stralsund (1 April 1933 ? 29 June 1933) , he was transferred to the training ship Gorch Fock (30 June 1933 ? 23 September 1933) attaining the rank of Seekadett (Naval Cadet) on 23 September 1933 . He initially served with the surface fleet , going on a nine @-@ month training tour around the world in the light cruiser Karlsruhe from 24 September 1933 to 27 June 1934 . He advanced in rank to Fähnrich zur See (Midshipman) on 1 July 1934 and served for a year aboard the light cruiser Königsberg (22 March 1936 ? 31 January 1937) , attaining the rank of Oberfähnrich zur See (Senior midshipman) on 1 April 1936 and Leutnant zur See (Ensign) on 1 October 1936 .

In February 1937 he transferred to the U @-@ boat arm and was promoted to Oberleutnant zur See (Lieutenant [junior grade]) on 1 June 1938 . In July he was appointed 2nd Watch Officer of U @-@ 27 (3 July 1938 ? 23 October 1938) . He sailed on a patrol in Spanish waters during the civil war in that country on the U @-@ boat tender Erwin Wassner (13 April 1939 ? 18 May 1939) . In October he was appointed the 1st Watch Officer of U @-@ 38 under the command of Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant) Heinrich Liebe , who during the course of World War II would earn the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves . Lüth was on patrol with U @-@ 38 from 19 August 1939 until 18 September , (the war started on 1 September) .

= = Boats under his command = =

= = = U @-@ 9 = = =

On 30 December 1939 Lüth took command of U @-@ 9 , a Type IIB U @-@ boat . He went on six patrols with this boat , achieving steady success . His first victim , following the premature ignition of a smoke float , was the Swedish merchantman Flandria , which he sank in January 1940 . This

surface attack was carried out while U @-@ 9 's bridge was filled with onlooking crew members . Other sinkings included the surfaced French submarine Doris on 9 May 1940 and seven merchant ships with a total of 16 @,@ 669 gross register tons (GRT) . Two of Lüth 's officers on U @-@ 9 would be awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross . His chief engineer Oberleutnant zur See Karl @-@ Heinz Wiebe was decorated in 1944 when he was chief engineer of U @-@ 178 . Oberleutnant zur See Heinrich Schonder , 1st Watch Officer on U @-@ 9 between January and April 1940 , received the award in 1942 by which time he had become commander of U @-@ 77 .

== = U @-@ 138 == =

On 27 June 1940 Lüth took command of U @-@ 138 , a Type IID , with which he sank four ships on his first patrol , totalling 34 @,@ 644 GRT . In October , after having returned from his second patrol , on which he fired a torpedo at (but missed) the Norwegian merchant steamer SS Dagrund (4 @,@ 562 GRT) , sank the British merchant steamer SS Bonheur (5 @,@ 327 GRT) and damaged the British motor tanker British Glory (6 @,@ 993 GRT) . Lüth was mentioned for the first time in the Wehrmachtbericht , (the daily report by the High Command of the German Armed Forces regarding the military situation on all fronts) , on 23 September 1940 and received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross for his achievements on 24 October 1940 .

== = U @-@ 43 == =

On 21 October 1940 Lüth took command of U @-@ 43 , a long range Type IX U @-@ boat . He carried out five patrols with this boat , totaling 204 days at sea , sinking 12 ships adding up to 64 @,@ 852 GRT . On 1 January 1941 he was promoted to Kapitänleutnant . Lüth , because of his experience ? like many other top commanders ? was tasked with training future U @-@ boat commanders . These trainees often came along on single war @-@ patrols , which would be their last exercise before they received their own command . Kapitänleutnant Erich Würdemann was one such trainee and sailed onboard U @-@ 43 from April to July 1941 . Würdemann would be awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross as commander of U @-@ 506 in 1943 before he was killed in action on 14 July 1943 .

== = The sinking of U @-@ 43 == =

U @-@ 43 was due to depart Lorient on a war patrol to an area off Freetown , west Africa , but early on 4 February 1941 , she sank while tied to the Ysere , an old sailing ship which was used as a floating pier . Valves and vents had been tampered @-@ with the previous day , but no one had noticed the slow , but steady ingress of water into the bilges . To make matters worse and contrary to a Befehlshaber der U @-@ Boote (BdU ? U @-@ boat command headquarters) directive , a hatch had been left open , allowing water to pour into the after torpedo room . Two petty officers were found to be most at fault ; but Lüth , as captain , was ultimately responsible . However , no record of punishment seems to have survived and Lüth 's career does not appear to have been affected .

== = U @-@ 181 == =

On 9 May 1942 Lüth was given command of a long @-@ range Type IXD @-@ 2 U @-@ boat , U @-@ 181 . He left on his first patrol in September 1942 , departing from Kiel for the Indian Ocean and waters off South Africa . In October he reached the sea lanes outside Cape Town and spent a month patrolling the area , sinking 12 ships for 58 @,@ 381 GRT before returning to Bordeaux in France , in January 1943 . On 13 November 1942 he received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves . On 31 January 1943 , Lüth other Kriegsmarine officers traveled to the Wolf 's Lair , Hitler 's headquarters in Rastenburg , present @-@ day K?trzyn in Poland , for the Oak Leaves presentation . Following the presentation , Hitler met with Dönitz and Vizeadmiral Theodor Krancke

in private . In this meeting , Hitler appointed Dönitz as Oberbefehlshaber der Marine (Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief) of the Kriegsmarine following Raeder 's resignation on 30 January 1943 . On the return flight to Berlin , Dönitz informed Lüth and the other officers present of this change in command .

In March 1943 Lüth set out for a second patrol off South Africa and in the Indian Ocean , in particular the waters around Mauritius . This patrol lasted 205 days (23 March 1943 ? 14 October 1943) making it the second longest of the war . (The longest combat patrol of World War II was 225 days in length , this was achieved by Eitel @-@ Friedrich Kentrat as commander of the U @-@ 196 .) Lüth sank 10 ships totaling 45 @,@ 331 GRT on this patrol , which turned out to be his last . While at sea he was promoted to Korvettenkapitän on 1 April 1943 , and on 15 April received news that he had been awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords .

U @-@ 181 rendezvoused with the supply ship Charlotte Schliemann east of Mauritius to refuel on 21 June . Also present were U @-@ 177 , under the command of Robert Gysae , U @-@ 178 (Wilhelm Dommers) , U @-@ 196 (Eitel @-@ Friedrich Kentrat) , U @-@ 197 (Robert Bartels) and U @-@ 198 (Werner Hartmann) . The commanders exchanged experiences and discussed the problem of torpedo failures . On 9 August of the same year and while still on patrol , Lüth was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds . On 15 July 1943 , Lüth sunk the British collier Empire Lake and noted in his logbook . " Five men have been left floating on a piece of wreckage . Due to the high sea and 180 @-@ mile distance from land they will probably not be saved . "

Lüth nominated two crew members of U @-@ 181 for the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross after this patrol . The chief engineer Kapitänleutnant Carl @-@ August Landfermann and 2nd Watch Officer Johannes Limbach both received the Knight 's Cross for their achievements .

= = Ashore = =

After five years of operational U @-@ boat service , including 15 war @-@ patrols and over 600 days at sea , Lüth took command of 22nd U @-@ boat Flotilla stationed at Gotenhafen in January 1944 . This was a training unit for U @-@ boat commanders . In July 1944 he took command of the 1st Department of the Marineschule Mürwik (Mürwik Naval Academy) in Flensburg . He was promoted to Fregattenkapitän (Commander) on 1 August 1944 and became the commander of the entire Marineschule in September . He was promoted to Kapitän zur See (Commander) on 1 September 1944 .

= = = Death = = =

British Forces had occupied Flensburg on 5 May 1945 ; initially nothing changed in the daily routine at the Mürwik Naval Academy . Returning drunk in the night of 13 / 14 May 1945 , Lüth failed to respond to the sentry 's challenge and was shot in the head by 18 @-@ year @-@ old seaman Mathias Gottlob , a German guard . The password of the day was " Tannenberg . " The officer in charge immediately informed Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz , whose adjutant , Fregattenkapitän Walter Lüdde @-@ Neurath , who had accepted the call , initially thought that it was a bad joke . Lüdde @-@ Neurath then informed Lüth 's brother , Joachim Lüth , as the two siblings were staying together . It was he who informed Lüth 's wife and their four children that Lüth had died .

Dönitz contacted the British city commander of Flensburg , Colonel Roberts , asking him for permission to conduct a formal state funeral , which Roberts approved . That funeral , (the last such of the Third Reich) , was held for Lüth on 16 May 1945 with Adolf Hitler 's successor as Head of State , Reichspräsident and Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz , delivering the eulogy .

Dönitz ordered a board of inquiry and court martial to clarify the circumstances of the shooting . Four officers under the command of a Navy Judge conducted the court martial . Mathias Gottlob stated that , in accordance with his orders , he had asked for the password three times without response from the person , whom he could not visually identify in the darkness . Without aiming he had fired his rifle from the hip . The chain of events was confirmed by Maschinenmaat Karl Franz ,

who was leading the watch at the time . The court ruled that Gottlob was not guilty and he was cleared of any fault .

= = In popular culture = =

Lüth was a subject of a hagiographic account by the German author Franz Kurowski , under the pen name Karl Alman , commemorating " the most successful U @-@ boat commandant of the Second World War " (according to the subtitle) . By his own admission , the author used his given name , Kurowski , for " more serious work " , and typically reserved his pseudonyms for works of fiction . In his 1995 book Count Not the Dead : The Popular Image of the German Submarine , Canadian historian Michael Hadley panned Kurowski 's works as " hackwork " and " pulp @-@ trade yarn " focused on hero making .

= = Summary of career = =

= = = Awards = = =

Spanish Cross in Bronze (6 June 1939)

The Return of Sudetenland Commemorative Medal of 1 October 1938 (16 September 1939)

U @-@ boat Front Clasp (12 October 1944)

U @-@ boat War Badge with Diamonds (26 January 1943)

Croce di Guerra Italiana al valor militare (1 November 1941)

Iron Cross (1939) 2nd Class (25 January 1940)

1st Class (15 May 1940)

Gauehrenabzeichen des Reichgaues Wartheland (24 October 1943)

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

Knight 's Cross (24 October 1940) as Oberleutnant zur See and commander of U @-@ 138

142nd Oak Leaves (13 November 1942) as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U @-@ 181

29th Swords (15 April 1943) as Kapitänleutnant and commander of U @-@ 181

7th Diamonds (9 August 1943) as Korvettenkapitän and commander of U @-@ 181

Mentioned twice in the Wehrmachtbericht

= = = Ships Attacked = = =

During his career Lüth sank 46 commercial ships for 225 @,@ 204 GRT , one warship of 552 GRT , and damaged two ships for 17 @,@ 343 GRT . His last patrol saw U @-@ 181 at sea for 206 days , patrolling the waters between Cape Town and Madagascar , making it the second @-@ longest patrol of the war .

= = = Promotions = = =