

= Erich Hartmann =

Erich Alfred Hartmann (19 April 1922 ? 20 September 1993) , nicknamed " Bubi " by his German comrades and " The Black Devil " by his Soviet adversaries , was a German fighter pilot during World War II and is the most successful fighter ace in the history of aerial warfare . He flew 1 @,@ 404 combat missions and participated in aerial combat on 825 separate occasions . He claimed , and was credited with , shooting down 352 Allied aircraft ? 345 Soviet and 7 American ? while serving with the Luftwaffe . During the course of his career , Hartmann was forced to crash @-@ land his fighter 14 times due to damage received from parts of enemy aircraft he had just shot down or mechanical failure . Hartmann was never shot down or forced to land due to enemy fire .

Hartmann , a pre @-@ war glider pilot , joined the Luftwaffe in 1940 and completed his fighter pilot training in 1942 . He was posted to Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52) on the Eastern Front and was fortunate to be placed under the supervision of some of the Luftwaffe 's most experienced fighter pilots . Under their guidance , Hartmann steadily developed his tactics , which earned him the coveted Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub , Schwertern und Brillanten (Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds) on 25 August 1944 for claiming 301 aerial victories . At the time of its presentation to Hartmann , this was Germany 's highest military decoration .

Hartmann scored his 352nd and last aerial victory at midday on 8 May 1945 , only hours before the war ended . Along with the remainder of JG 52 , he surrendered to United States Army forces and was turned over to the Red Army . In an attempt to pressure him into service with the Soviet @-@ friendly East German Volksarmee , he was tried on fabricated charges of war crimes and convicted , his conviction being posthumously voided by a Russian court as a malicious prosecution . Hartmann was sentenced to 25 years of hard labour and spent 10 years in various Soviet prison camps and gulags until he was released in 1955 .

In 1956 , Hartmann joined the newly established West German Luftwaffe in the Bundeswehr , and became the first Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 71 " Richthofen " . Hartmann resigned early from the Bundeswehr in 1970 , largely due to his opposition to the F @-@ 104 Starfighter deployment in the Luftwaffe and the resulting clashes with his superiors over this issue . In his later years , after his military career had ended , he became a civilian flight instructor . He died of natural causes on 20 September 1993 .

= = Early life = =

Erich Hartmann was born on 19 April 1922 in Weissach , Württemberg , to Doctor Alfred Erich Hartmann and his wife , Elisabeth Wilhelmine Machtholf . The economic depression that followed World War I in Germany prompted Doctor Hartmann to find work in Changsha , China , and Erich spent his early childhood there . The family was forced to return to Germany in 1928 , when the Chinese Civil War broke out . During World War II , Hartmann 's younger brother , Alfred , also joined the Luftwaffe , serving as a gunner on a Junkers Ju 87 in North Africa . He was captured by the British and spent four years as a prisoner of war .

Hartmann was educated at the Volksschule in Weil im Schönbuch (April 1928 ? April 1932) , the Gymnasium in Böblingen (April 1932 ? April 1936) , the National Political Institutes of Education in Rottweil (April 1936 ? April 1937) , and the Gymnasium in Korntal (April 1937 ? April 1940) , from which he received his Abitur . It was at Korntal that he met his wife @-@ to @-@ be , Ursula " Usch " Paetsch .

Hartmann 's flying career began when he joined the glider training program of the fledgling Luftwaffe and was taught to fly by his mother , one of the first female glider pilots in Germany . The Hartmanns also owned a light aircraft but were forced to sell it in 1932 as the German economy collapsed . The rise to power of the Nazi Party in 1933 resulted in government support for gliding , and , in 1937 , Elisabeth Hartmann helped set up a flying school at Weil im Schönbuch , where 14 @-@ year @-@ old Hartmann became an instructor . In 1939 , he gained his pilot 's license , allowing him to fly powered aircraft .

= = Entry into the Luftwaffe = =

Hartmann began his military training on 1 October 1940 at the 10th Flying Regiment in Neukuhren . On 1 March 1941 , he progressed to the Luftkriegsschule 2 in Berlin @-@ Gatow , making his first flight with an instructor four days later , followed in just under three weeks by his first solo flight . He completed his basic flying training in October 1941 and began advanced flight training at pre @-@ fighter school 2 in Lachen @-@ Speyerdorf on 1 November 1941 . There , Hartmann learned combat techniques and gunnery skills . His advanced pilot training was completed on 31 January 1942 , and , between 1 March 1942 and 20 August 1942 , he learned to fly the Messerschmitt Bf 109 at the Jagdfliegerschule 2 in Zerbst / Anhalt .

Hartmann 's time as a trainee pilot did not always go smoothly . On 31 March 1942 , during a gunnery training flight , he ignored regulations and performed some aerobatics in his Bf 109 over the Zerbst airfield . His punishment was a three @-@ month period of confinement to quarters with the loss of ? of his pay in fines . Hartmann later recalled that the incident saved his life :

That week confined to my room actually saved my life . I had been scheduled to go up on a gunnery flight the afternoon that I was confined . My roommate took the flight instead of me , in an aircraft I had been scheduled to fly . Shortly after he took off , while on his way to the gunnery range , he developed engine trouble and had to crash @-@ land near the Hindenburg @-@ Kattowitz railroad . He was killed in the crash .

Afterward , Hartmann practised diligently and adopted a new credo which he passed on to other young pilots : " Fly with your head , not with your muscles . " During a gunnery practice session in June 1942 , he hit a target drogue with 24 of the allotted 50 rounds of machine @-@ gun fire , a feat that was considered difficult to achieve . His training had qualified him to fly 17 different types of powered aircraft , and , following his graduation , he was posted on 21 August 1942 to Ergänzungs @-@ Jagdgruppe Ost (Supplementary Fighter Group , East) in Gleiwitz , Upper Silesia , where he remained until 10 October 1942 .

= = World War II = =

In October 1942 , Hartmann was assigned to fighter wing Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52) , based at Maykop on the Eastern Front in the Soviet Union . The wing was equipped with the Messerschmitt Bf 109G , but Hartmann and several other pilots were initially given the task of ferrying Junkers Ju 87 Stukas down to Mariupol . His first flight ended with brake failure , causing the Stuka to crash into and destroy the controller 's hut . Hartmann was assigned to III . / JG 52 , led by Gruppenkommandeur Major Hubertus von Bonin , and placed under the experienced Oberfeldwebel Edmund " Paule " Roßmann , although he also flew with such experienced pilots as Alfred Grislawski , Hans Dammers and Josef Zwernemann . After a few days of intensive mock combats and practice flights , Grislawski conceded that , although Hartmann had much to learn regarding combat tactics , he was quite a talented pilot . Paule Roßmann taught Hartmann the fundamentals of the surprise attack , a tactic that led to his " See ? Decide ? Attack ? Break " style of aerial combat .

= = = Early aerial combat = = =

Hartmann flew his first combat mission on 14 October 1942 as Roßmann 's wingman . When they encountered 10 enemy aircraft below , Hartmann , obsessed by the idea of scoring his first success , opened full throttle and became separated from Roßmann . He engaged an enemy fighter , but failed to score any hits and nearly collided with it instead . He then ran for cover in low cloud , and his mission subsequently ended with a crash landing after his aircraft ran out of fuel . Hartmann had violated almost every rule of air @-@ to @-@ air combat , and von Bonin sentenced him to three days of working with the ground crew . Twenty @-@ two days later , Hartmann claimed his first kill , an Ilyushin Il @-@ 2 Sturmovik of the 7th Guards Ground Attack Aviation Regiment , but by the end of 1942 , he had added only one more victory to his tally . As with many high @-@ scoring aces , it

took him some time to establish himself as a consistently successful fighter pilot .

Hartmann 's youthful appearance earned him the nickname " Bubi " , (the hypocoristic form of " young boy " in the German language) , and the ace Walter Krupinski , to whom Hartmann was assigned as wingman , would constantly urge him : " Hey , Bubi , get in closer " . On 25 May 1943 , he shot down a Lavochkin La @-@ 5 , before colliding with another Soviet fighter . However , he retained control of his damaged aircraft . On 7 July , during the large dogfights that took place during the Battle of Kursk , he shot down seven enemy aircraft . At the start of August 1943 , his tally stood at 50 , and by the end of the month , he had added 48 more enemy aircraft . The next month , he was appointed Staffelkapitän of 9 . / JG 52 .

In his first year of operational service , Hartmann felt a distinct lack of respect towards Soviet pilots . Most Soviet fighters did not even have proper gunsights , their pilots having to draw them on the windscreen by hand . " In the early days , incredible as it may seem , there was no reason for you to feel fear if the Russian fighter was behind you , " he later recalled . " With their hand @-@ painted " gunsights " they couldn 't pull the lead properly or hit you . " Hartmann also considered the P @-@ 39 , the P @-@ 40 , and the Hurricane to be inferior to the Fw 190 and Bf 109 , although they did provide the Soviets with valuable gunsight technology .

The German pilots themselves learned a few tricks from their enemy . Oil freezing in the DB 605 engines of the Bf 109G @-@ 6s made them difficult to start in the extreme cold of the Russian winter . A captured Soviet airman showed them how pouring fuel into the aircraft 's oil sump would thaw the oil and enable the engine to start on the first try . Another solution , also learned from the Soviets , was to ignite fuel under the engine .

= = = Fighting techniques = = =

Unlike Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille , who was a marksman and expert in the art of deflection shooting , Hartmann was a master of stalk @-@ and @-@ ambush tactics . By his own account , he was convinced that 80 % of the pilots he downed did not even realise what hit them . He relied on the powerful engine of his Bf 109 for high @-@ power sweeps and quick approaches , occasionally diving through entire enemy formations to take advantage of the confusion that followed in order to disengage .

When the decorated British test pilot Captain Eric Brown asked Hartmann how he had amassed 352 air victories , he revealed :

Well you can 't believe it , but the Sturmovik , which was their main ground @-@ attack aircraft , flew like B @-@ 17s in formation and didn 't attempt to make any evasive manoeuvres . And all they had was one peashooter in the back of each plane . Also , some of the pilots were women . Their peashooter was no threat unless they had a very lucky hit on you . I didn 't open fire til the aircraft filled my whole windscreen . If I did this , I would get one every time .

His favourite method of attack was to hold fire until extremely close (20 m (66 ft) or less) , then unleash a short burst at point @-@ blank range ? a technique he learned while flying as wingman of his former commander , Walter Krupinski , who favoured this approach . This technique , as opposed to long @-@ range shooting , allowed him to :

Reveal his position only at the last possible moment

Compensate for the low muzzle velocity of the slower @-@ firing 30 mm MK 108 equipping some of the later Bf 109 models (though most of his victories were claimed with Messerschmitts equipped with the high @-@ velocity 20mm MG 151 cannon)

Place his shots accurately with minimum waste of ammunition

Prevent the adversary from taking evasive actions

However , firing at close range ran the risk of having to fly through the debris of a damaged or exploding aircraft , thereby damaging his own fighter in the process (much of the damage Hartmann sustained in combat was caused by collision with flying debris) . If it was dangerous to dog @-@ fight further he would break off and content himself with one victory . His careful approach was described by himself by the motto : " See @-@ Decide @-@ Attack @-@ Reverse " ; observe the enemy , decide how to proceed with the attack , make the attack , and then disengage to re @-@

evaluate the situation .

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

By late August 1943 , Hartmann had 90 aerial victories . On 19 August , in combat with II @-@ 2s , his aircraft was damaged by debris , and he was forced to land behind Soviet lines . Hartmann 's Geschwaderkommodore , Dietrich Hrabak , had given orders to Hartmann 's unit to support the dive bombers of Sturzkampfgeschwader 2 , led by the famous Stuka pilot Hans @-@ Ulrich Rudel in a counter @-@ attack . The situation had changed , and the flight of eight German fighters engaged a mass of Soviet Yakovlev Yak @-@ 9 and Lavochkin La @-@ 5 fighter aircraft that were protecting II @-@ 2 Sturmoviks on a ground @-@ attack mission . Hartmann shot down two enemy aircraft before his fighter was hit by debris and he was forced to make an emergency landing . He then , in accordance with Luftwaffe regulations , attempted to recover the precision board clock . As he was doing so , Soviet ground troops approached . Realising that capture was unavoidable , he faked internal injuries . Hartmann 's acting so convinced the Soviets that they put him on a stretcher and placed him on a truck . When Hartmann 's Crew Chief , Heinz " Bimmel " Mertens , heard what had happened , he took a rifle and went to search for Hartmann .

Hartmann patiently waited for the right moment to escape , then , using the distraction of the Stukas attack , he attacked the single guard . Hartmann jumped out of the back of the truck and ran into a large field of giant sunflowers . Evading the pursuing soldiers , Hartmann hid and waited for nightfall . In the dark , Hartmann followed a Soviet patrol heading west to the front . As he approached the German position , he was challenged by a sentry who fired a shot which passed through his trousers .

On 20 September 1943 , Hartmann was credited with his 100th aerial victory . He was the 54th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . In October 1943 , Hartmann claimed another 33 aerial victories , and , on 29 October , he was awarded the Ritterkreuz , at which point his tally stood at 148 . By the end of the year , this had risen to 159 . In the first two months of 1944 , Hartmann claimed another 50 kills . Hartmann continued scoring at an even greater pace . His spectacular rate of kills raised a few eyebrows even in the Luftwaffe High Command ; his claims were double and triple @-@ checked , and his performance closely monitored by an observer flying in his formation . On 2 March , he reached 202 . By this time , the Soviet pilots were familiar with Hartmann 's radio call sign of Karaya 1 , and the Soviet Command had put a price of 10 @,@ 000 rubles on the German pilot 's head . Hartmann , for a time , used a black tulip design around the engine cowling near the spinner of his aircraft , so Soviet personnel consequently nicknamed him Cherniy Chort (" Black Devil ") . However , Hartmann 's opponents were often reluctant to stay and fight if they noticed his personal design . As a result , this aircraft was often allocated to novices , who could fly it in relative safety . On 21 March , it was Hartmann who scored JG 52 's 3,500th victory of the war . Adversely , the reluctance of the Soviet airmen to fight caused Hartmann 's kill rate to drop . Hartmann then had the tulip design removed , and his aircraft painted just like the rest of his unit . Consequently , in the following two months , Hartmann amassed over 50 victories .

In March 1944 , Hartmann , Gerhard Barkhorn , Walter Krupinski and Johannes Wiese were summoned to Adolf Hitler 's Berghof in Berchtesgaden . Barkhorn was to be honoured with the Swords , while Hartmann , Krupinski and Wiese were to receive the Oak Leaves to the Knight 's Cross . On the train , all four of them got drunk on cognac and champagne . Supporting each other and unable to stand , they arrived at Berchtesgaden . Major Nicolaus von Below , Hitler 's Luftwaffe adjutant , was shocked . After some sobering up , Hartmann was still intoxicated . Hartmann took a German officer 's hat from a stand and put it on , but it was too large . Von Below became upset , told Hartmann it was Hitler 's and ordered him to put it back .

= = = Mustangs over Romania = = =

On 21 May 1944 , Hartmann engaged United States Army Air Forces aircraft in Reichsverteidigung for the first time in defence of the Ploie?ti oilfields . While flying " top cover " for another Schwarm ,

Hartmann attacked a flight of four P @-@ 51s over Bucharest , Romania , downing two , while the other two P @-@ 51s fell victim to his fellow pilots . On 1 June 1944 , Hartmann shot down four P @-@ 51s in a single mission over the Ploie?ti oil fields . Later that month , during his fifth combat with American pilots , he shot down two more P @-@ 51s before being forced to bail out , when eight other P @-@ 51s ran his Messerschmitt out of fuel . During the intense manoeuvring , Hartmann managed to line up one of the P @-@ 51s at close range , but heard only a " clank " when he fired , as he had run out of ammunition . While he was hanging in his parachute , the P @-@ 51s circled above him , and Hartmann wondered if they would take this opportunity to kill him . One of the P @-@ 51Bs flown by Lt. Robert J. Goebel of the 308th Squadron , 31st Fighter Group , broke away and headed straight for him . Goebel was making a camera pass to record the bailout and banked away from him only at the last moment , waving at Hartmann as he went by . On 17 August , Hartmann became the top scoring fighter ace , surpassing fellow JG 52 pilot Gerhard Barkhorn , with his 274th victory .

= = = The Diamonds to the Knight 's Cross = = =

On 23 August , Hartmann claimed eight victories in three combat missions , an ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day achievement , bringing his score to 290 victories . He passed the 300 @-@ mark on 24 August 1944 , a day on which he shot down 11 aircraft in two combat missions , representing his greatest ever victories @-@ per @-@ day ratio (a double @-@ ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day) and bringing the number of aerial victories to an unprecedented 301 . He was immediately grounded by Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring , who was fearful of the effect on German morale should such a hero be lost . Hartmann , however , later successfully lobbied to be reinstated as a combat pilot .

Hartmann became one of only 27 German soldiers in World War II to receive the Diamonds to his Knight 's Cross . Hartmann was summoned to the Führerhauptquartier Wolfsschanze , Adolf Hitler 's military headquarters near Rastenburg , to receive the coveted award from Hitler personally . On arrival , he was asked to surrender his side arm ? a security measure caused by the aftermath of the failed assassination attempt on 20 July 1944 . Hartmann refused and threatened to decline the Diamonds if he were not trusted to carry his pistol . After consulting Oberst Nicolaus von Below , Hitler 's Luftwaffe adjutant , Hartmann was allowed to keep his side arm and accepted the Diamonds . During Hartmann 's meeting with Hitler , Hartmann discussed at length the shortcomings of fighter pilot training . Allegedly , Hitler revealed to Hartmann that he believed that , " militarily , the war is lost , " and that he wished the Luftwaffe had " more like him and Rudel . "

The Diamonds to the Knight 's Cross also earned Hartmann a 10 @-@ day leave . On his way to his vacation , he was ordered by General der Jagdflieger Adolf Galland to attend a meeting in Berlin @-@ Gatow . Galland wanted to transfer Hartmann to the Messerschmitt Me 262 test program . Hartmann requested that the transfer be cancelled on the grounds of his deep attachment to JG 52 . Galland , valuing comradeship and seeing the merit in Hartmann 's request , cancelled the transfer to the jet squadron and rescinded the order that had taken him off combat operations . Galland then ordered Hartmann to the Jagdfliegerheim (vacation resort for fighter pilots) in Bad Wiessee , where , on 10 September , Hartmann married his long @-@ time teenage love , Ursula " Usch " Paetsch . Witnesses to the wedding included his friends Gerhard Barkhorn and Wilhelm Batz .

= = = Last combat missions = = =

From 1 ? 14 February 1945 , Hartmann briefly led I. Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 53 as acting Gruppenkommandeur until he was replaced by Helmut Lipfert . In March 1945 , Hartmann , his score now standing at 336 aerial victories , was asked a second time by General Adolf Galland to join the Me 262 units forming to fly the new jet fighter . Hartmann attended the jet conversion program led by Heinrich Bär . Galland also intended Hartmann to fly with Jagdverband 44 . Hartmann declined the offer , preferring to remain with JG 52 . Some sources report that Hartmann 's decision to stay with his unit was due to a request via telegram made by Oberstleutnant Hermann Graf . Now Gruppenkommandeur of I. / JG 52 , Erich Hartmann claimed his 350th aerial victory on

17 April , in the vicinity of Chrudim . The last wartime photograph of Hartmann known was taken in connection with this victory .

At the end of the war , Erich Hartmann disobeyed General Hans Seidemann 's order to Hartmann and Hermann Graf to fly to the British sector to avoid capture by Soviet forces . Hartmann later explained :

I must say that during the war I never disobeyed an order , but when General Seidemann ordered Graf and me to fly to the British sector and surrender to avoid the Soviets , with the rest of the wing to surrender to the Soviets , I could not leave my men . That would have been bad leadership .

Hartmann 's last kill occurred over Brno , Czechoslovakia , on 8 May , the last day of the war in Europe . Early that morning , he was ordered to fly a reconnaissance mission and report the position of Soviet forces . Hartmann took off with his wingman at 08 : 30 and spotted the first Soviet units just 40 kilometres (25 miles) away . Passing over the area , Hartmann saw two Yak @-@ 9s performing aerobatics for the Soviet columns . Determined to " spoil the party " , Hartmann dove upon the fighters from his vantage point at 12 @,@ 000 ft (3 @,@ 700 m) and shot one down from a range of 200 ft (61 m) . As he lined up the second fighter , Hartmann noticed a flicker of shiny dots above him coming from the West ; they were P @-@ 51s . Rather than make a stand and be caught between the Soviets and the Americans , Hartmann and his wingman fled at low level into the pall of smoke that covered Brno . When he landed , Hartmann learned that the Soviet forces were within artillery range of the airfield , so JG 52 destroyed Karaya One , 24 other Bf 109s , and large quantities of ammunition . Hartmann later recalled his final violent action of the war :

We destroyed the aircraft and all munitions , everything . I sat in my fighter and fired the guns into the woods where all the fuel had been dropped , and then jumped out . We destroyed twenty @-@ five perfectly good fighters . They would be nice to have in museums now .

As Gruppenkommandeur of I. / JG 52 , Hartmann chose to surrender his unit to members of the US 90th Infantry Division .

= = Prisoner of war = =

After his capture , the U.S. Army handed Hartmann , his pilots , and ground crew over to the Soviet Union on 24 May , where he was imprisoned in accordance with the Yalta Agreements , which stated that airmen and soldiers fighting Soviet forces had to surrender directly to them . Hartmann and his unit were led by the Americans to a large open @-@ air compound to await the transfer . The number of prisoners grew to 50 @,@ 000 . Living conditions deteriorated , and some American guards turned a blind eye to escapes . In some cases they assisted by providing food and maps .

Soon after being handed over to the Soviet armed forces , Hartmann experienced the following :

The first thing the Russians did was to separate the German women and girls from the men . What followed was a brutal orgy of rape and debauchery by Red Army soldiers . When the greatly outnumbered Americans tried to intervene , the Russians charged towards them firing into the air and threatening to kill them if they interfered . The raping continued throughout the night . The next day a Russian General arrived at the encampment and immediately ordered a cessation ... Later when a few Russians violated the order again and assaulted a German girl , she was asked to identify them from a lineup . There were no formalities , no court martial . The guilty parties were immediately hanged in front of all their comrades . The point was made .

Initially , the Soviets tried to convince Hartmann to cooperate with them . He was asked to spy on fellow officers and become a stukatch , or " stool pigeon " . He refused and was given 10 days ' solitary confinement in a four @-@ by @-@ nine @-@ by @-@ six @-@ foot chamber . He slept on a concrete floor and was given only bread and water . On another occasion , the Soviets threatened to kidnap and murder his wife (the death of his son was kept from Hartmann) . During similar interrogations about his knowledge of the Me 262 , Hartmann was struck by a Soviet officer using a cane , prompting Hartmann to slam his chair down on the head of the assailant , knocking him out . Expecting to be shot , he was transferred back to the small bunker .

Hartmann , not ashamed of his war service , opted to go on a hunger strike and starve rather than fold to " Soviet will " , as he called it . The Soviets allowed the hunger strike to go on for four days

before force @-@ feeding him . More subtle efforts by the Soviet authorities to convert Hartmann to communism also failed . He was offered a post in the East German Air Force , which he refused :

If , after I am home in the West , you make me a normal contract offer , a business deal such as people sign every day all over the world , and I like your offer , then I will come back and work with you in accordance with the contract . But if you try to put me to work under coercion of any kind , then I will resist to my dying gasp .

= = = War crimes charges = = =

During his captivity Hartmann was first arrested on 24 December 1949 , and three days later , he was sentenced to 20 years in prison .

In June 1951 he was sentenced as an alleged member of an anti @-@ Soviet group .

After continuous failed attempts by the Soviets to break him , Hartmann was falsely charged with war crimes , specifically the " deliberate shooting of 780 Soviet civilians " in the village of Briansk , attacking a " bread factory " on 23 May 1943 , and destroying 345 " expensive " Soviet aircraft . He refused to confess to these charges and conducted his own defence , which the presiding judge denounced as a " waste of time " .

Sentenced to 25 years of hard labor , Hartmann refused to work . He was eventually put into solitary confinement , which enraged his fellow prisoners . They began a revolt , overpowered the guards , and freed him . Hartmann made a complaint to the Kommandant 's office , asking for a representative from Moscow and an international inspection , as well as a tribunal , to acquit him of his unlawful conviction . This was refused , and he was transferred to a camp in Novochoerkassk , where he spent five more months in solitary confinement . Eventually , Hartmann was granted a tribunal , but it upheld his original sentence . He was subsequently sent to another camp , this time at Diaterka in the Ural Mountains .

In 1955 , Hartmann 's mother wrote to the new West German Chancellor , Konrad Adenauer , to whom she appealed to secure his freedom . A trade agreement between West Germany and the Soviet Union was reached , and Hartmann was released along with 16 @,@ 000 German military personnel as one of the last Heimkehrer . After spending 10 and a half years in Soviet POW camps , he was among the last batch of prisoners to be turned over . Returning to West Germany , he was reunited with his wife Ursula , to whom he had written every day of the war .

In January 1997 , the government of the Russian Federation , acting as the legal successor to the Soviet Union , exonerated Hartmann by admitting that his conviction for war crimes was unlawful .

= = Post @-@ war years = =

= = = In the Luftwaffe of the Bundeswehr = = =

When Hartmann returned to West Germany , he reentered military service in the Bundeswehr and became an officer in the West German Air Force (Luftwaffe) , where he commanded West Germany 's first all @-@ jet unit , Jagdgeschwader 71 " Richthofen " , which was equipped initially with Canadair Sabres and later with Lockheed F @-@ 104 Starfighters . He also made several trips to the United States , where he was trained on U.S. Air Force equipment . He had the JG 71 aircraft painted with the same spreading black tulip pattern used by Karaya 1 on the Eastern Front .

Hartmann considered the F @-@ 104 a fundamentally flawed and unsafe aircraft and strongly opposed its adoption by the Luftwaffe . Although events subsequently validated his low opinion of the aircraft (282 crashes and 115 German pilots killed on the F @-@ 104 in non @-@ combat missions , along with allegations of bribes culminating in the Lockheed scandal) , Hartmann 's outspoken criticism proved unpopular with his superiors . General Werner Panitzki , successor to General Josef Kammhuber as Inspekteur der Luftwaffe , said , " Erich is a good pilot , but not a good officer . " Hartmann was forced into early retirement in 1970 .

= = = Civilian life = = =

During his long imprisonment , Hartmann 's son , Erich @-@ Peter , was born in 1945 and died as a three @-@ year @-@ old in 1948 , without his father ever having seen him . Hartmann later had a daughter , Ursula Isabel , born on 23 February 1957 .

After his military retirement , from 1971 ? 74 , Hartmann worked as a flight instructor in Hangelar , near Bonn , and also flew in an aerobatics team with Adolf Galland . In 1980 he caught a cold that developed into angina pectoris ? the condition that had killed his father at the age of 58 . He recovered and , by 1983 , was medically cleared to fly , after which he resumed instructing at the various flying schools . However , fearing a second attack , he became cautious and limited his appearances at public events . He stated : " I am retired and I am a civilian , and now I like to have my rest and peace . I do not live for exhibitions . " Hartmann was a member of the Gemeinschaft der Jagdflieger (Association of German Armed Forces Airmen) .

Hartmann died on 20 September 1993 , at the age of 71 in Weil im Schönbuch .

= = Summary of career = =

= = = Combat record = = =

Hartmann flew 1 @,@ 404 combat missions during World War II , resulting in 825 engagements and 352 claimed and credited aerial victories against Allied aircraft . One Russian historian , Dimitri Khazanov , has attempted to prove that Hartmann did not score anywhere near 352 victories . Khazanov quoted Hartmann having shot down 70 @-@ 80 Soviet aircraft . However , Khazanov has been heavily criticised by aviation historians such as Jean @-@ Yves Lorant and Hans Ring for faulty research . Ring and Lorant both point out that the missions that Khazanov tried to use to prove Hartmann 's claims false were riddled with false and misleading information . For example , Khazanov claimed that on a mission on 20 August 1943 , Hartmann claimed two victories west of Millerovo but not a single Soviet aircraft was lost . German records show not a single claim was made in that area . Hartmann 's victories were recorded east of Kuteinikowo , some 160 kilometres (99 mi) away . On 29 May 1944 , Khazanov claimed Hartmann reported three La @-@ 5s shot down over Roman , Romania . This was also false . Hartmann claimed a single P @-@ 39 over Ia?i . Hans Ring said the mistakes in Khazanov 's work " serve to expose the superficial nature of Khazanov 's assertions and confirm that his only goal in compiling his article was to discredit Hartmann and his record . " Even Khazanov points out in his article that during Hartmann 's show trial , one of the Soviet charges was the destruction of 352 (the actual number was 345) Soviet aircraft .

It is often said that Hartmann was more proud of the fact that he had never lost a wingman in combat than he was about his number of kills ; however , he did have at least one shot down . Major Günther Capito had joined the unit in the spring of 1943 . Capito was a former bomber pilot who had retrained on fighters . After scoring his fifth victory , Capito asked to be Hartmann 's wingman . Hartmann refused initially , believing Capito was insufficiently trained on Messerschmitts . On their first mission together , they were engaged by P @-@ 39 Airacobras :

I called to him to turn hard opposite , so I could sandwich the Red fighters , but in his standard @-@ rate bomber turn he got hit . I saw the whole thing and ordered him to dive and bail out immediately . To my intense relief I saw him leave the aircraft and his parachute blossom . I was happy to get this Airacobra , but I was mad at myself for not harkening to my intuition not to fly with Günther Capito .

= = = Decorations = = =

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe in Gold with Pennant " 1300 "
Pilot / Observer Badge in Gold with Diamonds (25 August 1944)

Iron Cross (1939)

2nd Class (17 December 1942)

1st Class (7 March 1943)

Honour Goblet of the Luftwaffe (Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe) on 13 September 1943 as Leutnant and pilot

German Cross in Gold on 17 October 1943 as Leutnant in the III . / Jagdgeschwader 52

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

Knight 's Cross on 29 October 1943 as Leutnant and pilot in the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

420th Oak Leaves on 2 March 1944 as Leutnant and Staffelführer of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

75th Swords on 2 July 1944 as Oberleutnant and Staffelkapitän of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

18th Diamonds on 25 August 1944 as Oberleutnant and Staffelkapitän of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

Mentioned twice in the Wehrmachtbericht

Hartmann had kept the whereabouts of his Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross secret from his captors during his time as a prisoner of war , claiming that he had thrown it away . The hiding place was in a small stream . His comrade Hans " Assi " Hahn managed to hide the Knight 's Cross in a double bottom cigar box and smuggled it back to Germany when he was released from captivity .

= = = Dates of rank = = =

Hartmann joined the military service in Wehrmacht on 1 October 1940 . His first station was Neukuhren in East Prussia , where he received his military basic training as a Luftwaffe recruit .