

= Joachim Müncheberg =

Joachim Müncheberg ( 31 December 1918 ? 23 March 1943 ) was a German Luftwaffe military aviator during World War II , a fighter ace credited with 135 enemy aircraft shot down in over 500 combat missions . The majority of his victories were claimed over the Western Front , with 33 claims over the Eastern Front . Of his 102 aerial victories achieved over the Western Allies , 46 were against Supermarine Spitfire fighters .

Born in Friedrichsdorf , Müncheberg , who had strong ambitions as a track and field athlete , volunteered for military service in the Wehrmacht of the Third Reich in 1936 . Initially serving in the Heer ( Army ) , he transferred to the Luftwaffe ( Air Force ) in 1938 . Following flight training , he was posted to Jagdgeschwader 234 ( JG 234 ? 234th Fighter Wing ) in October 1938 . He was transferred to Jagdgeschwader 26 " Schlageter " ( JG 26 ? 26th Fighter Wing ) a year later and was appointed adjutant of the III . Gruppe ( 3rd Group ) . He fought in the Battle of France and received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross following his 20th aerial victory and during the Battle of Britain . Serving as a Staffelführer ( Squadron Leader ) he fought in the aerial battles during the siege of Malta and Balkans Campaign . He received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Italian Gold Medal of Military Valor ( Italian : Medaglia d 'oro al Valore Militare ) after 43 aerial victories .

Müncheberg then briefly served in North Africa in support of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel 's Afrika Korps before transferring to France . He was given command of JG 26 's II . Gruppe ( 2nd Group ) in September 1941 and was then posted to Jagdgeschwader 51 ( JG 51 ? 51st Fighter Wing ) , operating on the Eastern Front , in July 1942 . Serving as a Geschwaderkommodore ( Wing Commander ) in training under JG 51 wing commander Karl @-@ Gottfried Nordmann , he claimed his 100th aerial victory on 5 September 1942 for which he was awarded the Swords ( Schwerter ) to his Knight 's Cross on 9 September , his score then at 103 aerial victories . On 1 October 1942 Müncheberg was given command of Jagdgeschwader 77 ( JG 77 ? 77th Fighter Wing ) , operating in the Mediterranean Theatre . He died of wounds following a mid @-@ air collision during combat near Meknassy , Tunisia on 23 March 1943 .

= = Childhood , education and early career = =

Joachim " Jochen " Müncheberg was born on 31 December 1918 in Friedrichsdorf near Dramburg in the Province of Pomerania , at the time a province of the Free State of Prussia . Today it is Darskowo in the administrative district of Gmina Z?oceniec , within Drawsko County , Poland . He was the second child of Paul Müncheberg , a farmer , and his wife Erika , née Ulrich . His sister Eva @-@ Brigitte was one and a half years older . His father had served as a cavalry officer of the reserves during World War I. The hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic forced his father to sell their farm Friedrichshof in 1923 ; they resettled in Königsberg , where Müncheberg started his elementary schooling ( Grundschule ) . His father was able to repurchase their old farm in 1927 and the family moved back to Friedrichshof . Müncheberg completed his elementary school in Falkenburg , Pomerania . He walked or rode on a horse @-@ drawn wagon 24 kilometres ( 15 mi ) each way to school . In 1928 he transferred to the Realgymnasium ( a type of secondary school ) in Dramburg and graduated with his Abitur ( diploma ) in 1936 .

Müncheberg , who was talented in sports and athletics , played football for the T.V. Falkenburg youth team in the early 1930s . He attended the Sturmabteilung @-@ sports school in Hammerstein for a few weeks in 1934 and in 1935 spent his summer vacation in Bulgaria where he , among other places , stayed at the Rila Monastery . In early 1936 he attended a National Socialism course in Lauenburg , Pomerania . He completed his compulsory labour service ( Reichsarbeitsdienst ) in October 1936 with Abteilung ( department ) 5 / 50 in Lüttmannshagen , district of Cammin . As an athlete , he especially excelled in the decathlon ; almost daily he practised the ten different disciplines . Aged 17 , he attended a summer camp held in conjunction with the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin .

In his youth he was keenly interested in flying and other technical things . His interest in flying was

kindled by his cousin Hermann Hackbusch , a pilot during World War I , who often took Müncheberg to the Berlin @-@ Staaken airfield for sightseeing flights . He volunteered for service in the then newly emerging Luftwaffe and started his recruit training on 4 December 1936 in the Heer of the Wehrmacht . Müncheberg spent his 1936 / 37 winter vacation in Altenberg in the Erzgebirge . He then attended the III . Lehrgang ( 3rd training course ) in the 4 . Schülerkompanie ( 4th student company ) at the Luftkriegsschule 1 ( 1st Air War School ) in Dresden as a Fahnenjunker ( Officer Applicant ) from 1 April to 30 June 1937 . A year later he completed his flight training there and was promoted to Fähnrich ( Officer Cadet ) on 16 December 1937 . He transferred to the Luftwaffe in 1938 and attended the Jagdfliegerschule ( Fighter Pilot School ) in Werneuchen , under the command of Oberst ( Colonel ) Theodor Osterkamp . He was then posted to I. Gruppe ( 1st group ) of Jagdgeschwader 234 ( JG 234 ? 234th Fighter Wing ) stationed at Cologne on 23 September 1938 . He was promoted to Leutnant ( Second Lieutenant ) on 8 November 1938 .

While stationed in Cologne , Müncheberg trained for the decathlon at the ASV Köln ( sports club in Cologne ) during his spare time and competed in various national and international track and field events . He even had a training field built on the family estate at Friedrichshof in Pomerania and at the time had strong ambitions to compete in the 1940 Summer Olympics . His commanding officers supported him in this athletic vision and gave him additional time off to practice for the Olympics . Müncheberg owned a dachshund ( Dackel ) , which his mother had bred , named Seppl . The dog accompanied him from the start of World War II until his death on 23 March 1943 .

I. / JG 234 was equipped with the Messerschmitt Bf 109 E @-@ 3 in December 1938 and re @-@ designated as I. Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 26 " Schlageter " ( JG 26 ? 26th Fighter Wing ) , named after Albert Leo Schlageter , on 1 May 1939 . Müncheberg was transferred to 11 . Staffel of Lehrgeschwader 2 ( 11 . / LG 2 ? 11th squadron of the 2nd Demonstration Wing ) in mid @-@ 1939 . 11 . ( Nacht ) / LG 2 was formed on 1 August 1939 and experimented with night fighting techniques . Only pilots with excellent flying abilities , especially blind flying , were chosen .

= = World War II = =

World War II in Europe began on Friday 1 September 1939 when German forces invaded Poland . 11 . ( Nacht ) / LG 2 was re @-@ designated to 10 . ( Nachtjagd ) Staffel of Jagdgeschwader 26 which was led by Oberleutnant ( First Lieutenant ) Johannes Steinhoff . III . Gruppe was formed on 23 September 1939 in Werl and Müncheberg was appointed its adjutant . III . Gruppe relocated to Essen @-@ Mülheim in early November 1939 during the Phoney War period ( October 1939 ? April 1940 ) . From this airfield , he claimed his first victory on 7 November 1939 , a Royal Air Force ( RAF ) Bristol Blenheim Mk . I bomber L1325 of No. 57 Squadron RAF , piloted by Pilot Officer H.R. Bewlay . This achievement earned him the Iron Cross 2nd Class on 9 November 1939 .

= = = Battle of France = = =

The Battle of France , the German invasion of France and the Low Countries , began on 10 May 1940 . II. and III . Gruppe flew close air support missions in support of German airborne landings by the Fallschirmjäger ( paratroopers ) in the Netherlands . Müncheberg filed claim for his second victory on 11 May 1940 when he shot down a Armée de l'Air ( French Air Force ) Curtiss P @-@ 36 Hawk northwest of Antwerp . On 13 May 1940 , III . Gruppe was moved to München Gladbach , present @-@ day Mönchengladbach , closer to the border with the Netherlands and Belgium . After the surrender of the Netherlands on 17 May 1940 , III . Gruppe moved to Peer in Belgium and again moved on 19 May , this time to Beauvechain near Brussels .

Operating from Chièvres Air Base from 27 May 1940 , Müncheberg claimed his fifth aerial victory over a Supermarine Spitfire on 29 May 1940 . This achievement earned him the Iron Cross 1st Class . At the time , III . Gruppe was providing fighter escort for Junkers Ju 87 " Stuka " dive bombers and Messerschmitt Bf 110 heavy fighters operating against the beachhead held by British Expeditionary Force ( BEF ) in the Battle of Dunkirk . On 4 June 1940 , III . Gruppe relocated to La Capelle near Boulogne . The second and decisive phase , Fall Rot ( Case Red ) , of the Battle of

France began on 5 June . Major ( Major ) Adolf Galland was appointed Gruppenkommandeur ( group commander ) of the III . Gruppe on 6 June and Müncheberg became his first adjutant . The Gruppe was again relocated on 13 June , this time to Les Thilliers @-@ en @-@ Vexin and on 17 June to Villacoublay near Paris . Müncheberg flew ground support missions against the retreating French forces at the time . France surrendered on 22 June 1940 and III . Gruppe of JG 26 " Schlageter " moved back to München Gladbach in Germany . In total , Müncheberg claimed eight Allied aircraft shot down during the invasion of France , including four on 31 May 1940 , bringing his total to nine . The Gruppe then moved to Döberitz on 1 July to provide fighter protection for Berlin . The time was also used to repair and upgrade the Bf 109 E @-@ 3s to Bf 109 E @-@ 4s .

= = = Battle of Britain = = =

On 21 July 1940 , JG 26 " Schlageter " received orders to relocate to Caffiers in the Nord @-@ Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais in preparation for actions against Britain in what would become the Battle of Britain . Adolf Hitler had issued Führer Directive no . 17 ( Weisung Nr. 17 ) on 1 August 1940 ; the strategic objective was to engage and defeat the RAF to achieve air supremacy , or at least air superiority , in preparation for Operation Sea Lion ( Unternehmen Seelöwe ) , the proposed amphibious invasion of Great Britain . III . Gruppe flew fighter protection for bomber formations attacking allied shipping in the English Channel on 24 July . These missions were referred to as Kanalkampf ( channel combat ) by the Germans . The unit flew its next mission one day later , providing fighter protection for Stuka 's again targeting shipping . Müncheberg , who had been promoted to Oberleutnant on 19 July 1940 , claimed his 10th aerial victory on 28 July when he shot down a No. 257 Squadron Hawker Hurricane 15 kilometres ( 9 @.@ 3 mi ) northeast of Dover . The claim was made at 15 : 15 . No other German pilot from JG 26 claimed a Hurricane at that time . The only loss suffered by 257 Squadron was Sergeant R.V Forward who bailed out wounded . However , RAF records show he was shot down at 18 : 40 over three hours after Müncheberg 's claim . Müncheberg was credited with his 11th victory on 8 August , claiming a No. 65 Squadron Spitfire piloted by Flight Sergeant Norman T. Phillips shot down . The claim would seem unlikely . The war diary for JG 26 " Schlageter " shows that Müncheberg made his claim at 12 : 55 in the afternoon as did three other pilots . No. 65 Squadron lost only two Spitfires that day , one flown by Phillips . British records show Phillips was killed in action at 10 : 45 in No. 65 Squadron 's first mission of the morning , some three hours earlier . On this day , both the Germans lost 22 aircraft shot down and 23 damaged ; the British lost 16 aircraft shot down and four damaged . Only one III . Gruppe Bf 109 was lost . The only RAF losses occurring at the time of Müncheberg 's claim were two Hurricanes belonging to No. 238 Squadron ? Flight Lieutenant D.E Turner and Flying Officer D.C. McCaw were killed in action at roughly 12 : 30 .

III . Gruppe continued to fly combat air patrols over the English Channel on 11 and 12 August , however Müncheberg did not claim any aircraft shot down on these days . The fighting reached a climax on 13 August when Eagle Day was launched ( code name Adlertag ) . Müncheberg claimed a Hurricane shot down from either No. 32 Squadron or No. 615 . Squadron on 14 August . The following day he filed claim for a Spitfire from No. 64 Squadron on 15 August on a fighter escort mission for Kampfgeschwader 1 " Hindenburg " ( 1st Bomber Wing ) and Kampfgeschwader 2 " Holzhammer " ( 2nd Bomber Wing ) . Galland was appointed Geschwaderkommodore ( Wing Commander ) of JG 26 " Schlageter " on 22 August 1940 . In consequence , Hauptmann Gerhard Schöpfel , who had led 9 . Staffel , was appointed Gruppenkommandeur of the III . Gruppe and Müncheberg was given command of the 7 . Staffel as Staffelf kapitän ( Squadron Leader ) , replacing Oberleutnant Georg Beyer who had been prisoner of war after being shot down .

Flying another fighter escort mission on 24 August in an attack south of London , Müncheberg claimed a victory over a Hurricane from No. 151 Squadron and another Hurricane on 31 August . This brought his total to 15 aerial victories , which increased to 16 the next day . On 14 September 1940 , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross the same day he achieved his 20th aerial victory . This achievement earned Müncheberg a reference in the Wehrmachtbericht ( his first of five in total ) , an information bulletin issued by the headquarters of the Wehrmacht . Following the

award presentation Müncheberg was sent on three weeks home leave . He returned in early October , after the third phase of the Battle of Britain where the Luftwaffe had targeted the British airfields , had come to an end . He claimed his first victory following his vacation on 17 October over a Free French Air Force Bloch MB.150 and a Spitfire on 25 October . The Gruppe then relocated to Abbeville @-@ Drucat on 10 November . He claimed his last victory in the Battle of Britain , and the and his last of 1940 , on 14 November , when Galland and Müncheberg each claimed a Spitfire in combat with No. 66 . Squadron and No. 74 . Squadron . This was Müncheberg 's 23rd victory , and was claimed southeast of Dover . The weather then deteriorated , and fog and heavy rain prevented further flight operations . Hitler visited JG 26 " Schlageter " at Christmas 1940 . Hitler dined with a selected group of pilots , among them Oberleutnant Gustav Sprick , Hauptmann Walter Adolph , Hauptmann Rolf Pingel , Galland , Schöpfel and Müncheberg . The war of attrition against the RAF had cost JG 26 " Schlageter " dearly , 7 . Staffel alone lost 13 pilots , and the entire Geschwader had to be moved back to Germany to reform and re @-@ equip in early 1941 . III . Gruppe was stationed at Bonn @-@ Hangelar , in Sankt Augustin . Before the Gruppe received new aircraft , the men were sent on a skiing vacation at Sankt Anton am Arlberg .

= = = Malta , Balkans and North Africa in 1941 = = =

On 4 February 1941 , Müncheberg was informed by Gruppenkommandeur Schöpfel that the 7 . Staffel had to relocate to Sicily in support of X. Fliegerkorps , under the command of General der Flieger ( General of the Flyers ) Hans Geisler , for actions against the strategically important island of Malta . With the opening of a new front in North Africa in mid @-@ 1940 , British air and sea forces based on the island could attack Axis ships transporting vital supplies and reinforcements from Europe to North Africa . To counter this threat the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica ( Italian Royal Air Force ) were tasked with bombing raids in an effort to neutralise the RAF defences and the ports .

Following a brief stopover in Rome , 7 . Staffel arrived in Gela on Sicily on 9 February 1941 . Here Müncheberg received a factory new Bf 109 E @-@ 7 / N with the Werknummer ( factory number ) 3826 and marked as " White 12 " . He claimed his first victory in the Siege of Malta on 12 February over a No. 261 Squadron Hurricane south of Si??iewi , Malta . On 16 February Müncheberg claimed his 26th victory over No. 261 Squadron Hurricane of ace Flight Lieutenant James MacLachlan , who baled out severely wounded . MacLachlan lost his arm , but returned to combat in late 1941 . Müncheberg claimed a slow flying Hurricane ? he assumed that the Hurricane had engine trouble ? on 25 February . Flying fighter protection for the Stukas , which were targeting the airfield at Luqa , he claimed another Hurricane at 14 : 06 and a second one the very next day . Müncheberg claimed his 33rd victory on 28 March 1941 . This was also his 200th combat mission which was celebrated by the entire Staffel .

The 7 . Staffel , and elements of the support ground personnel , were relocated to Grottaglie airfield near Taranto in Apulia on 5 April 1941 . Here the pilots learned that the Wehrmacht would invade Yugoslavia and Greece on 6 April . In support of this invasion , the pilots attacked the airfield at Podgorica . Müncheberg claimed a Yugoslav Hawker Fury biplane of Independent Fighter Eskadrila , 81 ( Bomber ) Grupa , Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo ( JKRV ? Yugoslav Royal Air Force ) on 6 April 1941 . Its pilot Porucnik ( First Lieutenant ) Milenko Milivojevic was killed . He claimed another Fury and a Breguet 19 destroyed on the ground , but he was only given credit for the first aircraft destroyed in aerial combat . The two Furys were in fact Avia BH @-@ 33 biplanes .

The Balkan intermezzo was short and the detachment relocated back to Gela beginning on 8 April . Müncheberg claimed two Hurricanes of No. 261 Squadron on 11 April and another one on 23 April . A reconnaissance Bf 109 detected a four @-@ engine Short Sunderland at RAF Kalafrana on 27 April . Müncheberg led his 7 . Staffel in the attack , destroying the Sunderland . The victory was not credited to any individual pilot but was considered teamwork of the 7 . Staffel . On 29 April , 7 . Staffel provided fighter protection for Junkers Ju 88 bombers attacking Malta . 7 . Staffel claimed two Hurricanes shot down , one by Münchberg , for the loss of one Ju 88 . The German actress and Ufa star , Carola Höhn , wife of bomber pilot Arved Crüger , on a mission to provide entertainment to the

troops , visited the pilots at Gela . According to Röhl , Müncheberg was especially attracted to the actress and personally accompanied her during her visit .

Müncheberg surpassed 40 aerial victories on 1 May 1941 after downing two aircraft on an early morning mission . This feat earned him his second honourable mention the Wehrmachtbericht . In the afternoon , 7 . Staffel flew fighter cover for Italian Savoia @-@ Marchetti SM.79 bombers . In aerial combat with six Hurricanes over the airfields at Hal Far and Luqa he shot down his third opponent of the day . In total , 7 . Staffel was credited with six victories on this day , three by Müncheberg . The entire 7 . Staffel at the time was anxiously awaiting the announcement that Müncheberg had been awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves . Following two more Hurricanes shot down on 6 May , his total now at 43 victories , Müncheberg received the news of his award on the early morning of 7 May . Müncheberg became the 12th member of the Wehrmacht to be honoured with the Oak Leaves and two hours later received news that Duce Benito Mussolini had awarded him the Gold Medal of Military Valor ( Medaglia d 'Oro ) , the first German to receive this award . Hitler sent him a teleprinter message on 7 May 1941 congratulating him on his 40th aerial victory .

7 . Staffel then began a series of relocations which eventually took them to the North African theatre of operations . The Staffel first relocated to Greece at the end of May . The ground personnel were shipped from Catania to Piraeus and then to the airfield at Molaoi on the southern tip of the Peloponnese region . The original intent was to participate in the Battle of Crete . The relatively quick but costly victory made these plans obsolete . The Staffel was then given two weeks of rest at Catania before moving on to Molaoi . Here the pilots were initially tasked with long range combat air patrols before Operation Battleaxe , a British Army operation with the goal of clearing eastern Cyrenaica of German and Italian forces , was initiated on 15 June . 7 Staffel was immediately ordered to relocate to North Africa where they were subordinated to I. Gruppe of Jagdgeschwader 27 ( I. / JG 27 ? 1st group of the 27th Fighter Wing ) , then under the command of Hauptmann Eduard Neumann .

In North Africa , Müncheberg just barely escaped being killed when one of his headphone speakers was shot off by small arms fire during a low level strafing attack . In total , Müncheberg claimed five victories in this theatre . His first three victories were over Hurricanes . The one on 20 June was claimed against pilots from either No. 1 Squadron or No. 2 Squadron of the South African Air Force ( SAAF ) . His victory on 24 June was over Pilot Officer James Alan Frederick Sowrey of No. 6 Squadron who was killed in the engagement . His opponent on 15 July was either a No. 73 Squadron or No. 229 Squadron RAF pilot . The final two victories in North Africa of 1941 were over Curtiss P @-@ 40 Warhawks , both on 29 July 1941 , from No. 2 Squadron SAAF . This took his total to 48 aerial victories .

= = = Channel operations = = =

Fliegerführer Afrika received orders on 4 August 1941 to downsize the 7 . Staffel in Africa to four aircraft . The remaining aircraft and aircrews were to relocate to France back to Jagdgeschwader 26 . Before Müncheberg arrived in France , he stopped in Rome where he received the Gold Medal of Military Valour from Mussolini . He then travelled to the Wolf 's Lair , Hitler 's headquarters in Rastenburg , present @-@ day K?trzyn in Poland , for the Oak Leaves presentation . Following the presentation Müncheberg went on two weeks of vacation . Following their return from North Africa to France the pilots of 7 . Staffel were given newer Bf 109 F @-@ 4 aircraft in replacement for the older Bf 109 E @-@ 7 type . Müncheberg claimed his first victory here on 28 August over a Spitfire and another one , his 50th overall , on 29 August . He claimed two Spitfires on 4 September and one more from No. 71 Squadron three days later .

On 19 September 1941 , Müncheberg was promoted to the rank of Hauptmann and became Gruppenkommandeur of II . / JG 26 " Schlageter " following the death of Hauptmann Walter Adolph the day before , in aerial combat with RAF Spitfire fighters . Müncheberg 's position of Staffelführer of the 7 . Staffel was passed on to Oberleutnant Klaus Mietusch . II . Gruppe had already been equipped with the new Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 190 A @-@ 1 . It was the first Gruppe in the Luftwaffe

completely equipped with the Fw 190 . Müncheberg 's number of victories continued to increase ; all but his 55th on 18 September , which was over a No. 607 Squadron Hurricane , were claimed against Spitfires . Galland was replaced by Schöpfel on 5 December as Geschwaderkommodore of JG 26 " Schlageter " . Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring had appointed Galland as General der Jagdflieger ( General of Fighters ) following the death of Oberst Werner Mölders . On 8 December Müncheberg achieved his 60th aerial victory which was announced in the Wehrmachtbericht , his third such mention . He claimed his 62nd overall victory and the last of the year 1941 on 16 December 1941 . Müncheberg went on a lengthy vacation in early 1942 , not returning before March 1942 . He therefore did not participate in Operation Donnerkeil ( 11 ? 12 February 1942 ) , the air superiority operation to support the Kriegsmarine 's ( German Navy ) Operation Cerberus .

Müncheberg claimed the first victory following his vacation on 13 March 1942 , a Spitfire of No. 124 Squadron . During his absence the Fw 190 A @-@ 1 and A @-@ 2 had been replaced with the newer A @-@ 3 variant . Two Spitfires of No. 412 Squadron fell to his guns on 24 March which brought his score to 65 . Müncheberg claimed his 70th and 71st victory on 26 April within two minutes of combat . II . Gruppe at the time was referred to as the " Abbeville Boys " by the RAF pilots based on the Abbeville airfield where they were stationed . On 29 April 1942 he probably shot down and killed No. 131 Wing RAF leader and Polish ace Wing Commander Marian Pisarek . On 2 June , II . Gruppe intercepted No. 403 Squadron on a fighter @-@ bomber mission . Müncheberg was credited with the destruction of two Spitfires taking his total to 81 aerial victories . This achievement was announced on 4 June 1942 in the Wehrmachtbericht and was followed by the presentation of the German Cross in Gold on 5 June . He claimed his final two victories ( 82 ? 83 ) with II . Gruppe on 20 June 1942 in combat with Spitfires of No. 118 and No. 501 Squadron . II . Gruppe was credited with the destruction of five enemy aircraft destroyed without suffering any losses .

= = = Eastern Front = = =

Following his 83rd aerial victory , Müncheberg was summoned to his commanding officer , Geschwaderkommodore Schöpfel , who informed him of his transfer to Jagdgeschwader 51 ( JG 51 ? 51st Fighter Wing ) on the Eastern Front . Müncheberg was destined to become a Geschwaderkommodore but prior to receiving his own command he would have to serve as a Kommodore in training . He went on a three weeks home leave , staying at his parents home , before he received his orders to head east on 21 July 1942 .

On his way to the Eastern Front , Müncheberg travelled to Berlin where he briefly served on the staff of the General der Jagdflieger Galland discussing air combat tactics and how to lead a fighter wing . On 26 July 1942 he participated in the German track and field championships , starting for the ASV Köln in the decathlon . Müncheberg finally arrived on the Eastern Front in early August 1942 where he was welcomed by the Geschwaderkommodore of JG 51 , Major Karl @-@ Gottfried Nordmann . Initially Müncheberg believed that combat on the Eastern Front was child 's play in comparison to the Western Front . In the first four weeks his aircraft was twice severely damaged in combat . His first major task was re @-@ equipping JG 51 with the Fw 190 . Under his leadership JG 51 became the first fighter wing on the Eastern Front to equip with this type . He claimed his first victories in the east on 3 August 1942 , shooting down two Petlyakov Pe @-@ 2 dive bomber near Rzhev .

He quickly achieved further victories , reaching 90 victories on 22 August and surpassing the 100 victories on 5 September . He was the 19th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . On 9 September , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords following his 103rd victory . Müncheberg was the 19th member of the Wehrmacht and the 13th fighter pilot who had received this award . Müncheberg claimed his last victory in this theatre on 22 September 1942 , claiming 33 victories in total over Russian aircraft , this took his overall score to 116 aerial victories . He was then ordered to the Wolf 's Lair where Hitler presented him the Swords to his Knight 's Cross with Oak Leaves . Following the award ceremony he was granted home leave before being appointed Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 77 ( JG 77 ? 77th Fighter Wing

) , replacing Gordon Gollob in this role .

= = = North Africa and death = = =

Müncheberg took over command of Jagdgeschwader 77 on 1 October 1942 . Jagdgeschwader 77 at the time was deployed on the southern sector of the Eastern Front and was scheduled to relocate to North Africa where I. Gruppe under the command of Heinz Bär arrived in Ain el Gazala on 27 October . Under the leadership of Müncheberg , the Geschwaderstab ( headquarters unit ) which was equipped with new Bf 109 G @-@ 2s , arrived on 29 October . He scored over a No. 92 Squadron Spitfire piloted by Flight Sergeant Blades on 9 November , his 117th overall . Promoted to Major on 30 November 1942 , he claimed his 119th victory on 10 December and made a forced landing in his Bf 109 G @-@ 2 ( Werknummer 10 725 ? factory number ; 35 % damage ) following combat with a P @-@ 40 of the 66th Fighter @-@ Interceptor Squadron , 57th Fighter Group , United States Army Air Forces ( USAAF ) . On 13 March 1943 Müncheberg became the second German fighter pilot after Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille to achieve 100 aerial victories over Anglo @-@ American adversaries .

Müncheberg was killed in action in his Bf 109 G @-@ 2 ( Werknummer 16 381 ) on 23 March 1943 over Tunisia when his 135th victim , a USAAF 52nd Fighter Group Spitfire exploded in front of him after a close burst of cannon fire . The Spitfire was piloted by Captain Theodore Sweetman . Müncheberg managed to bail out and landed severely wounded . Although the search team quickly recovered him , Müncheberg died on the way to a field hospital . Captain Hugh L. Williamson , who was also shot down in the engagement , later stated that Sweetmann had deliberately rammed Müncheberg with his burning Spitfire . Müncheberg was buried originally at El Aouina ; his remains were moved to the Heroes Cemetery at Tunis and later reinterred in the 1950s at the German Military Cemetery at Bordj @-@ Cedria . The Wehrmachtbericht announced his death on 25 March 1943 .

= = Aerial victory credits = =

Müncheberg was credited with 135 aerial victories , claimed in more than 500 combat missions , 102 on the Western Front ? including 19 over Malta , one in Yugoslavia and 24 in North Africa ? and 33 on the Eastern Front . His tally includes at least 46 Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft shot down .

This and the ? ( dash ) indicates unwitnessed aerial victory claims for which Müncheberg did not receive credit .

= = Awards and honours = =

Iron Cross ( 1939 )

2nd Class ( 17 September 1939 )

1st Class ( 10 May 1940 )

German Cross in Gold on 5 June 1942 as Hauptmann in the II . / Jagdgeschwader 26

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe for Fighter Pilots in Gold with Pennant " 400 "

Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge

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

Knight 's Cross on 14 September 1940 as Oberleutnant and Staffelkapitän of the 7 . / Jagdgeschwader 26 " Schlageter "

12th Oak Leaves on 7 May 1941 as Oberleutnant and Staffelkapitän of the 7 . / Jagdgeschwader 26 " Schlageter "

19th Swords on 9 September 1942 as Hauptmann and deputy Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 51 " Mölders "

Mentioned five times in the Wehrmachtbericht

Medaglia d 'oro al Valore Militare ( 7 May 1941 )

== Dates of rank ==