

= Helmut Lent =

Oberst Helmut Lent (13 June 1918 ? 7 October 1944) was a German night @-@ fighter ace in World War II . Lent shot down 110 aircraft , 102 of them at night , far more than the minimum of five enemy aircraft required for the title of " ace " . Born into a devoutly religious family , he showed an early passion for glider flying ; against his father 's wishes , he joined the Luftwaffe in 1936 . After completing his training , he was assigned to the 1 . Squadron , or Staffel , of Zerstörergeschwader 76 (ZG 76) , a wing flying the Messerschmitt Bf 110 twin @-@ engine heavy fighter . Lent claimed his first aerial victories at the outset of World War II in the invasion of Poland and over the North Sea . During the invasion of Norway he flew ground support missions before he was transferred to the newly established Nachtjagdgeschwader 1 (NJG 1) , a night @-@ fighter wing .

Lent claimed his first nocturnal victory on 12 May 1941 and on 30 August 1941 was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross for 22 victories . His steady accumulation of aerial victories resulted in regular promotions and awards . On the night of 15 June 1944 , Major Lent was the first night fighter pilot to claim 100 nocturnal aerial victories , a feat which earned him the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds on 31 July 1944 .

On 5 October 1944 , Lent flew a Junkers Ju 88 on a routine transit flight from Stade to Nordborchen , 5 kilometres (3 mi) south of Paderborn . On the landing approach one of the engines cut out and the aircraft collided with power lines . All four members of the crew were mortally injured . Three men died shortly after the crash and Lent succumbed to his injuries two days later on 7 October 1944 .

= = Childhood , education and early career = =

Helmut Lent was born on 13 June 1918 in Pyrehne , district of Landsberg an der Warthe , Province of Brandenburg , Germany (now Pyrzany , Lubusz Province , western Poland) and christened Helmut Johannes Siegfried Lent . He was the fifth child of Johannes Lent , a Lutheran minister and Marie Elisabeth , née Braune . Helmut Lent had two older brothers , Werner and Joachim , and two older sisters , Käthe and Ursula . His family was deeply religious ; in addition to his father , both of his brothers and both grandfathers were also Lutheran ministers .

From Easter 1924 until Easter 1928 , Lent attended the local public primary school at Pyrehne . His father and oldest brother Werner then tutored him at home in preparation for the entrance examination at the public secondary school at Landsberg . In February 1933 , Helmut joined the Jungvolk , the junior branch of the Hitler Youth . From March 1933 , he acted as a youth platoon leader , or Jungzugführer (1 March 1933 ? 1 April 1935) and flag @-@ bearer , or Fähnleinführer (1 April 1935 ? 9 November 1935) until he left the Jungvolk to prepare for his diploma examination . Helmut passed his graduation examinations at the age of seventeen on 12 December 1935 . On 2 February 1936 , he began the eight @-@ week compulsory National Labor Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst) at Mohrin . He joined the military service in the Luftwaffe as a Fahnenjunker on 1 April 1936 , against the wishes of his father .

His military training began on 6 April 1936 at the 2nd Air Warfare School (Luftkriegsschule 2) at Gatow , on the south @-@ western outskirts of Berlin . He swore the National Socialist oath of allegiance on 21 April 1936 . Flight training began on Monday , 7 August 1936 at Gatow . His first flight was in a Heinkel He 72 Kadet D @-@ EYZA single engine biplane . Lent logged his first solo flight on 15 September 1936 in a Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 44 Stieglitz . By this time , Lent had accumulated 63 flights in his logbook . In conjunction with flight training , the students also learned to drive motorcycles and cars and during one of these training exercises , Lent was involved in a road accident , breaking his upper leg badly enough to prevent him from flying for five months . This did not adversely affect his classroom training and on 1 April 1937 , after taking his commission examination , he was promoted to Fähnrich . On 19 October 1937 Lent completed his flight training and was awarded the A / B License . He earned his wings on 15 November 1937 . On 1 February 1938 , he was promoted to Oberfähnrich (first ensign) , and on 1 March 1938 to Leutnant . By this time , he had made 434 flights in eight different types of aircraft and had accumulated 112 hours

and 48 minutes flying time , mostly in daylight flights , in single engine training aircraft .

After leaving Gatow , Helmut Lent was posted to the Heavy Bomber Crew School , or Große Kampffliegerschule at Tutow , in northeast Germany . He spent three months training as an observer (1 March 1938 ? 30 May 1938) . Prior to completing this course , Lent was run over by a car , resulting in a broken lower jaw , concussion , and internal bleeding . On 1 July 1938 , Lent was posted to the 3rd Group of Jagdgeschwader 132 " Richthofen " (III . / JG 132) , flying on 19 July 1938 for the first time after his injuries .

At the beginning of September , Lent 's squadron , 7 . / JG 132 , relocated to Großenhain near Dresden , in preparation and support of the annexation of Czechoslovakia . Lent flew a number of operational patrols in this conflict until his Staffel relocated again to Rangsdorf on 29 September 1938 . After the tension over the occupation of the Sudeten territories eased , Lent 's unit began a conversion to the Messerschmitt Bf 108 Taifun . On 1 November 1938 III . / JG 132 moved to Fürstenwalde , between Berlin and Frankfurt an der Oder , and was renamed II . / JG 141 , and Lent was posted to the 6th Squadron .

II . / JG 141 changed its designation to I. / Zerstörergeschwader 76 (I. / ZG 76) on 1 May 1939 at the same time relocating to an airfield at Olmütz , Czechoslovakia . The group was being re @-@ equipped with the Messerschmitt Bf 110 , and Lent made his first flight in the Bf 110 on 7 June 1939 . Lent was granted his Luftwaffe Advanced Pilot 's Certificate (Erweiterter Luftwaffen @-@ Flugzeugführerschein) , also known as ' C ' -Certificate , confirming proficiency on multi @-@ engine aircraft , on 12 May 1939 . While converting to the Bf 110 , Lent did not have a regular wireless operator (Funker) in the rear gunner 's seat , but on 14 August 1939 he was accompanied in M8 + AH for the first time by Gefreiter Walter Kubisch . During the prelude of World War II on 25 August 1939 I. / ZG 76 deployed to an airfield at Ohlau to the southeast of Breslau .

= = World War II = =

World War II began at 04 : 45 on Friday 1 September 1939 when German forces crossed the Polish border . Helmut Lent , flying a Bf 110 marked M8 @-@ DH , took off from Ohlau , at 04 : 44 to escort Heinkel He 111 bombers on a mission over Krakow .

= = Invasion of Poland = =

The German plans for the invasion of Poland were conceived under the codename Fall Weiss (Case White) . This operation called for simultaneous attacks on Poland from three directions , the north , the west and the south , beginning at 04 : 45 on the early morning of 1 September 1939 . On this morning Helmut Lent , with Kubisch as his wireless operator and rear gunner , escorted a formation of Heinkel 111 bombers of I. and III . / Kampfgeschwader 4 (KG 4) attacking the airfields at Krakow in support of the southern prong of the German attack . At 16 : 30 on 2 September 1939 , the second day of the German attack , Lent took off in the direction of ?ód? and claimed his first aerial @-@ victory of the war , shooting down a PZL P.11.

At this point of the campaign the Bf 110s switched from bomber escort to ground @-@ attack since the Polish Air Force was all but defeated . In this capacity Lent and Kubisch destroyed a twin @-@ engined monoplane on the ground on 5 September and another aircraft , a PZL P.24 , on 9 September . On 12 September 1939 he was attacked by a Polish aircraft which shot out his starboard engine . Lent made a forced landing behind German lines . He flew five more missions during the Polish campaign , destroying one anti @-@ aircraft battery . For his actions in the Polish campaign Lent was awarded one of the first Iron Cross 2nd class of World War II on 21 September 1939 . I. / ZG 76 relocated to the Stuttgart area on 29 September 1939 to defend the western border against the French and British , who had been at war with Germany since 3 September 1939 . From early October to middle December I. / ZG 76 operated from a number of airfields in the Stuttgart and Ruhr areas before relocating north to Jever on 16 December 1939 .

= = Battle of the Heligoland Bight = =

During the first month of the war the Royal Air Force (RAF) mostly focused its bomber attacks against anti shipping operations on the German Bight . RAF bombers mounted a heavy attack against shipping off Wilhelmshaven on 18 December 1939 in what became to be known as the Battle of the Heligoland Bight . Twenty four twin engine Vickers Wellington from No. 9 Squadron , No. 37 Squadron and No. 149 Squadron formed up over Norfolk heading for the island of Heligoland . Two aircraft aborted the mission due to mechanical defects , but the remaining 22 pursued the attack and were spotted by a Freya radar on the East Frisian Islands .

Helmut Lent was ordered to intercept and engage the attacking bomber force and after refuelling ? Lent had just landed at Jever from an armed patrol ? claimed three Wellingtons , two of which , shot down at 14 : 30 and 14 : 45 , were later confirmed . The two aircraft were both from No. 37 Squadron , captained by Flying Officer P.A. Wimberley and Flying Officer O.J.T. Lewis respectively , and both crashed in the shallow sea off Borkum . It is likely that his third claim may have been No. 37 Squadron Wellington 1A N2396 , LF @-@ J , piloted by Sergeant H. Ruse , which crash @-@ landed on the sand dunes of Borkum . Lent was refused the victory over Wimberley , as the Wellington was attacked by Lent after it had already been badly damaged and was about to crash . The Wellington was credited to pilot Carl @-@ August Schumacher .

His success as a fighter pilot over the North Sea had made him a minor national hero . Exploits such as those at Heligoland made good news stories for German propaganda machine . Consequently , he attracted fan mail ? mainly from young girls and women ? among them Elisabeth Petersen . Lent replied to her letter , and he and Elisabeth met on a blind date at the Reichshof hotel in Hamburg , after which they enjoyed a skiing holiday in Hirschegg in February 1940 .

= = = Norwegian Campaign and Battle of Britain = = =

On 8 April 1940 eight aircraft of 1 . / ZG 76 , under the command of Staffelkapitän Werner Hansen , deployed northward from Jever to Westerland on Sylt in preparation for operation Weserübung , the invasion of Norway . The German plan for the attack called for an amphibious assault on the Norwegian capital , Oslo , and six major ports from Kristiansand in the south to Narvik in the north . Simultaneously , Junkers 52 (Ju 52) transport aircraft would drop parachute troops to secure Oslo 's Fornebu airport . Additional Ju 52s were scheduled to arrive at Fornebu twenty minutes after the parachute drop , by which time the airfield had to be in German hands . 1 . / ZG 76 was to provide air cover and ground @-@ attack support for both waves . Eight Bf 110 Zerstörer of 1 . / JG 76 took off at 7 : 00 in the morning , planning to synchronize their arrival at Fornebu with the parachute drop at 8 : 45 . The distance from Westerland to Fornebu meant that this was a one @-@ way operation ; the Bf 110s could not hold enough fuel for the return trip . Their fuel was calculated to provide them 20 minutes flying time over Fornebu , and the pilots would have to land at Fornebu once the airfield had been seized .

On the early morning flight to Fornebu , Lent engaged and shot down a Norwegian Gloster Gladiator . While the Ju 52s transporting the German paratroops came under heavy fire , Lent 's Rotte engaged the enemy ground positions . Lent 's starboard engine caught fire , forcing him to land immediately . With Kubisch manning the movable machine gun , Lent negotiated the capitulation with the Norwegian ground forces and the airfield was in German hands .

At 18 : 50 the same day , Lent and his Staffelkapitän Werner Hansen took off again from Fornebu in undamaged Bf 110s . During the 40 @-@ minute flight , they came across a RAF Short Sunderland flying boat , serial number L2167 , from No. 210 Squadron RAF which they shot down together ; Hansen received credit for the " kill " . Helmut Lent was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class on 13 May 1940 before he was transferred to Trondheim on 18 May . He claimed his second aerial victory of the Norwegian campaign on 27 May over a RAF Gloster Gladiator from No. 263 Squadron RAF , piloted by Flight Lieutenant Caesar Hull . On 2 June 1940 Lent and his wingman Thönes claimed a Gladiator each . The flight lasted 5 hours and 46 minutes and their opponents were again from No. 263 Squadron , aircraft serial number N5893 piloted by Pilot Officer J.L. Wilkie , and N5681 piloted by Pilot Officer L.R. Jacobsen . He claimed his seventh victory overall and final of the Norwegian

theatre of operations on 15 June 1940 over a No. 254 Squadron RAF Bristol Blenheim , piloted by Pilot Officer P.C. Gaylord . On 1 July 1940 Lent was promoted to Oberleutnant and on 13 July 1 . / ZG 76 was relocated to Stavanger / Forus .

Helmut Lent briefly participated in the Battle of Britain when on 15 August 1940 twenty @-@ one Bf 110s from I. / ZG 76 escorted He 111 bombers from Kampfgeschwader 26 (KG 26) on their attack on Yorkshire and the Newcastle / Sunderland area . I. / ZG 76 lost seven aircraft on this mission and it was Helmut Lent 's 98th and final mission as a Zerstörer pilot .

= = = Night fighter career = = =

By June 1940 RAF Bomber Command penetrations of German airspace had increased to the level that Hermann Göring decreed that a night @-@ fighter force should be formed . The officer tasked with its creation was Wolfgang Falck , Gruppenkommandeur of the I. / Zerstörergeschwader 1 (ZG 1) . The night @-@ fighter force began to expand rapidly , with existing units being divided to form the nucleus of new units . By October 1940 Nachtjagdgeschwader 1 (NJG 1) comprised three Gruppen , while Nachtjagdgeschwader 2 (NJG 2) and Nachtjagdgeschwader 3 (NJG 3) , were still forming . It was during this period that Helmut Lent reluctantly became a member of the night @-@ fighter force . At the end of August Lent wrote home , " We are currently converting to night fighting . We are not very enthusiastic . We would sooner head directly for England . "

Lent completed night fighter training at Ingolstadt in south @-@ western Germany , and was appointed squadron leader , or Staffelführer , of the newly formed 6 . / NJG 1 on 1 October 1940 . The squadron was based at Fliegerhorst Deelen , located 12 @.@ 5 kilometres (8 mi) north of Arnhem in the Netherlands . On the night 11 ? 12 May 1941 , Lent claimed his first nocturnal aerial victories against two Wellington IC bombers from No. 40 Squadron RAF on a mission against Hamburg . BL @-@ H (serial number R1330) was shot down at 01 : 40 near Süderstapel and BL @-@ Z (R1461) at 02 : 49 near Nordstrand .

On 1 July 1941 , he took command of 4 . / NJG 1 , stationed in the Netherlands at Fliegerhorst (airfield) Leeuwarden , 161 kilometres (100 mi) north of Arnhem , on the Friesland coast , where he remained until his death . From this position in the so @-@ called German Bight , the squadron patrolled the North Sea coast , and could intercept Allied night @-@ time bombing missions , what the Luftwaffe called terror attacks , based out of England . By the end of the war , the 4 . / NJG 1 was one of the most successful Nachtjagdstaffel ? a squadron of a night fighter wing ? of the Luftwaffe . Other members included such night fighter pilots as Oberleutnant Helmut Woltersdorf , Leutnant Ludwig Becker (44 victories , KIA February 1943) , Leutnant Egmont Prinz zur Lippe @-@ Weißenfeld (51 victories , killed in a flying accident in the Netherlands in March 1944) , Leutnant Leopold Fellerer (41 victories) , Oberfeldwebel Paul Gildner (46 victories , killed in a flying accident at Fliegerhorst Gilze @-@ Rijen in the Netherlands in February 1943) , and Unteroffizier Siegfried Ney (12 victories , KIA February 1943) . On 30 August 1941 , Lent received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross for seven daytime and 14 night victories .

On 1 November 1941 , Lent became acting Group Commander Gruppenkommandeur of the newly formed II . / NJG 2 . Lent 's first aerial victory as a Gruppenkommandeur , his 20th night @-@ time , and his last in 1941 , came during the night of Friday 7 November to Saturday 8 November . He shot down a Wellington 1C heading for Berlin , which came down near Akkrum . The six @-@ man crew of the bomber , X9976 of No. 75 (New Zealand) Squadron , was killed in action . This achievement earned Lent a reference in the Wehrmachtbericht (his first of six in total) , an information bulletin issued by the headquarters of the Wehrmacht . To be singled out individually in the Wehrmachtbericht was an honour and was entered in the Orders and Decorations ' section of one 's Service Record Book .

He was promoted to Hauptmann on 1 January 1942 . Later that year , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves on 6 June 1942 , at which time his total stood at 34 nocturnal victories plus seven day @-@ time victories . The award was presented at the Führerhauptquartier on 28 and 29 June , his tally standing then at 39 nocturnal and seven day @-@ time victories . Lent also held the distinction of achieving the first Lichtenstein radar @-@ assisted

air victory in a Dornier Do 215B @-@ 5 night fighter .

By the end of 1942 , Lent had 56 victories and was the top German night @-@ fighter ace . He was promoted to Major on 1 January 1943 and appointed Geschwaderkommodore of Nachtjagdgeschwader 3 (NJG 3) on 1 August 1943 . After 73 kills , of which 65 were claimed at night , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords on 2 August 1943 and notified by telegram on 4 August . The Swords were presented to him at the Führerhauptquartier at Rastenburg on 10 / 11 August 1943 .

In January 1944 , Lent downed three so @-@ called " heavies " ? four @-@ engined strategic bombers ? in one night , but his aircraft was damaged by return fire , requiring a forced landing . He used only 22 cannon shells to down two bombers on the night of the 22 ? 23 March 1944 , and fired only 57 rounds in seven minutes against three Avro Lancasters on 15 ? 16 June . Promoted to Oberstleutnant , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds in recognition of his 110 confirmed air kills , the first of two night @-@ fighter pilots to be awarded the decoration . The second was Heinz @-@ Wolfgang Schnauffer , who , with 121 aerial victories , became aviation history 's leading night @-@ fighter pilot .

= = = Personal life = = =

All German officers were required to obtain official permission to marry ; however , this was usually a bureaucratic formality . When Lent decided to marry Elizabeth Petersen , his admirer from Hamburg whom he had met on a blind date , his case was more complicated . ' Elisabeth Petersen ' was in fact Helene (Lena) Senokosnikova , born in Moscow in April 1914 . She had been afraid to reveal her true identity , since Russians were not popular in the Third Reich , but after a thorough investigation into her background and racial ancestry , she received her German citizenship on 15 March 1941 . They were married on 10 September 1941 in Wellingsbüttel , Hamburg . The marriage produced two daughters . Christina was born on 6 June 1942 ; the second , Helma , was born on 6 October 1944 , shortly after her father 's fatal crash .

Both of Helmut 's older brothers , Joachim and Werner , as members of the Confessing Church (German : Bekennende Kirche) , encountered trouble with the Nazi party . The Confessing Church , led by Pastor Martin Niemöller , was a schismatic Protestant church which opposed the Reich 's efforts to " Nazify " Germany 's Protestant churches . It stood in outspoken opposition to National Socialist principles , particularly those embodied in the Aryan Paragraph . Through the Barmen Declaration , the church condemned the national German Evangelical Church as heretical . Werner Lent , an adherent to the Confessing church , was arrested for the first time in 1937 after preaching an anti @-@ Nazi sermon . In June 1942 , his brother Joachim was arrested by the Gestapo after reading the so @-@ called Mölders letter from the pulpit . The Mölders letter was a propaganda piece conceived by Sefton Delmer , the chief of the British black propaganda in the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) to capitalize on the death of Germany 's fighter ace Werner Mölders ; this letter , ostensibly written by Mölders , attested to the supreme importance of his Catholic faith in his life ? by implication , placing faith above his allegiance to the National Socialist Party .

= = = Death = = =

On 5 October 1944 , Lent flew his Junkers Ju @-@ 88 G ? 6 , coded D5 + AA , from Stade to Paderborn . His crew included his long @-@ time radio operator Oberfeldwebel Walter Kubisch , the member of a Propagandakompanie (propaganda company) Leutnant Werner Kark in the aerial gunner position , and Oberleutnant Hermann Klöss , second radio operator . Lent was on his way to visit the Geschwaderkommodore of the Nachtjagdgeschwader 1 , Oberstleutnant Hans @-@ Joachim Jabs , to discuss operational matters . During the landing approach , the left engine of the plane failed , causing the wing to dip . Lent was unable to keep the plane steady and it struck high @-@ voltage cables and crashed . All four members of the crew sustained serious injuries but were rescued alive . Kubisch and Klöss succumbed to their injuries on the same day , Kark on the next morning and Lent himself died two days later on 7 October 1944 .

Helmut Lent 's state funeral was held in the Reich Chancellery , Berlin , on Wednesday 11 October 1944 . Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring took the salute at Lent 's coffin , which was draped in the national flag of the Third Reich . Ahead of the coffin , carrying Lent 's honours and decorations on a velvet cushion , marched Oberstleutnant Werner Streib , the Inspector of Night Fighters . Six steel @-@ helmeted officers , all recipients of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross , escorted the coffin on its caisson and stood as guard of honour during the ceremony : Oberstleutnant Günther Radusch , Oberstleutnant Hans @-@ Joachim Jabs , Major Rudolf Schoenert , Hauptmann Heinz Strüning , Hauptmann Karl Hadeball and Hauptmann Paul Zorner . On 12 October 1944 Lent and his crew were interred in a single grave in the military cemetery at Stade .

= = Legacy = =

On 18 July 1964 , a German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) Army Aviation Corps (Heeresflieger) installation in Rotenburg (Wümme) (Lower Saxony) was renamed the Lent Barracks , or Lent @-@ Kaserne , in his honour . In 2014 , the German Armed Forces have decided to rename the Lent Barracks . Although Lent was not a war criminal , he was a Nazi and is therefore no longer considered an appropriate namesake within the German Armed Forces . The process , which is expected to finalize in end 2015 , involves 1 @,@ 500 soldiers and 250 civil employees of the site and was initiated by the commander Oberstleutnant Edmund Vogel in early 2015 .

A number of Helmut Lent 's awards were auctioned at Sotheby 's , London , on 18 July 1966 . The items were bought in one lot by an anonymous bidder for the total sum of £ 500 . The purchaser was Adolf Galland , the former General der Jagdflieger , acting on behalf of the Federal German Ministry of Defence . The awards were sold by Helmut Lent 's elder daughter Christina after consultation with her mother , Lena , who was in urgent need for money to pay for an operation . The Federal Ministry of Defence presented the collection to the Museum of Defence History (Wehrgeschichtliches Museum) in Rastatt , Germany .

= = Summary of career = =

Helmut Lent is officially credited with 110 victories in 507 flights . The total includes 103 victories at night , during which he destroyed 59 four @-@ engine bombers and one Mosquito , among other types . Lent received a posthumous promotion to Oberst (Colonel) .

= = = Awards = = =

Pilot 's Badge (15 November 1937)

Sudetenland Medal

Narvik Shield (30 January 1941)

Wound Badge (1939)

in Black (14 July 1941)

in Silver (22 December 1943)

Iron Cross (1939)

2nd class (21 September 1939)

1st class (11 May 1940)

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe (26 June 1941)

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe for Destroyer Pilots in Gold

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe for Nightfighter Pilots in Gold with Pennant " 300 "

Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge in Gold with Diamonds

German Cross in Gold on 9 April 1942 as Hauptmann in the II . / NJG 2

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

Knight 's Cross on 30 August 1941 as Oberleutnant and as Staffelkapitän of the 4 . / NJG 1

98th Oak Leaves on 6 June 1942 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the II . / NJG 2

32nd Swords on 2 August 1943 as Major and Gruppenkommandeur of the IV . / NJG 1

15th Diamonds on 31 July 1944 as Oberstleutnant and Geschwaderkommodore of the NJG 3
Mentioned six times in the Wehrmachtbericht (see below)

= = = Promotions = = =