

= Joachim Helbig =

Oberst Joachim Helbig (10 September 1915 ? 5 October 1985) was an officer and pilot in the German Luftwaffe bomber arm during World War II . He was credited with the destruction of 182 @, @ 000 gross register tons (GRT) of Allied shipping accomplished in 480 missions during World War II .

Joachim Helbig was born in 1915 and joined the Luftwaffe in 1936 . At the outbreak of World War II he served as an observer in Lehrgeschwader 1 (LG 1) and participated in the invasion of Poland . He saw further action in the Norwegian Campaign and the Battles of the Netherlands , Belgium and France . For his contribution and military success in these campaigns Helbig received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) on 9 November 1940 . He was then transferred to the Mediterranean theater of operations where he operated against Malta , the British Mediterranean Fleet and in support of the Deutsches Afrikakorps (DAK) . Helbig became the 20th recipient of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern) on 28 September 1942 for the support of Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel 's 1942 summer offensive and the sinking of 182 @, @ 000 GRT of enemy shipping .

Initially Helbig was banned from further combat flying and became an inspector on the staff of the General der Kampfflieger , the senior officer responsible for the Luftwaffe 's bomber force . In August 1943 he was made Geschwaderkommodore of Lehrgeschwader 1 operating against the Allied invasion forces in Italy . In the last weeks of the war in Europe , Helbig commanded a combat unit on the Eastern Front consisting of elements of Lehrgeschwader 1 and Kampfgeschwader 200 (KG 200) . After the war he worked as a manager for a brewery in Berlin . Joachim Helbing died in Malente on 5 October 1985 following a car accident on vacation in Spain .

= = Military career = =

Joachim Helbig was born on 10 September 1915 on the estate called Börln , which is located in Dahlen , Saxony . He grew up in the countryside and was very fond of horse back riding . He volunteered for military service on 1 April 1935 and initially served one year with the Artillerieregiment 4 (4th Artillery Regiment) in Dresden . In the fall of 1936 , he transferred to the Kampffliegerschule (Combat or Bomber Flying School) in Lechfeld . After completing his training as an observer and aerial gunner on 20 April 1937 , he was posted with III . Gruppe (3rd Group) Kampfgeschwader (Bomber Wing) 152 " Hindenburg " in Schwerin . III . / KG 152 " Hindenburg " became II . Group of Lehrgeschwader 1 (1st Demonstration Wing) on 1 November 1938 , where he started his informal pilot training .

His two friends , Oberleutnant Fritz Sohler and Oberleutnant Gerhard Schröder , taught " Observer " Helbig to fly and he earned his Luftwaffe Advanced Pilot 's Certificate (Erweiterter Luftwaffen @-@ Flugzeugführerschein) , also known as ' C ' -Certificate , confirming proficiency on multi @-@ engine aircraft . Helbig 's informal training was unique in the entire Luftwaffe bomber force .

= = = Invasions of Poland , Norway and France = = =

Leutnant Helbig was still an observer in a He 111 Kampffliegeraufklärung (Bomber Reconnaissance) at the outbreak of World War II . On the third day of the Polish campaign , while on a recon mission over Poland , Helbig shot down a Polish reconnaissance aircraft . Although the next day he was injured in a motorcycle accident , which prevented him from seeing further combat in this campaign , he was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd class (Eisernes Kreuz 2 . Klasse) . In October 1939 , he participated in a number of uneventful missions against the British Home Fleet in the North Sea .

By 9 April 1940 , when Operation Weserübung began in Norway , Helbig had completed his pilot training . He flew missions supporting the German ground forces , particularly in the Narvik area . For these missions , the He 111s took off from Aalborg for low @-@ altitude strikes against British positions . In one such sortie , Helbig 's flight engineer was severely wounded , and the left engine

of his aircraft was shot out by flak . Helbig received the Narvik Shield for his participation in the battle for Norway .

When the campaign against the Netherlands , Belgium , and France began in May 1940 , Helbig was appointed Staffelkapitän (Squadron Leader) of 4 . / LG 1 , a position he held until 5 November 1941 . 4 . / LG 1 was equipped with the Ju 88 . On one mission over Dunkirk , Helbig 's aircraft was intercepted by enemy fighters . One engine was shot out and three crew members , including Helbig , suffered various degrees of injuries . For his actions in the French campaign , he was awarded the Iron Cross 1st class (Eisernes Kreuz 1 . Klasse) . Following the defeat of France , he received an early promotion to Hauptmann (Captain) on 19 July 1940 .

= = = Battle of Britain = = =

On 15 August 1940 , Helbig and his Staffel (Squadron) , consisting of nine Ju 88s , took off from Orléans at 4 : 45 pm , with the primary target RAF Worthy Down . Over the English coast the German formation consisting of Ju 88s from LG 1 , Ju 87s from Sturzkampfgeschwader 1 (StG 1 ; 1st Dive Bomber Wing) escorted by elements of Zerstörergeschwader 2 (ZG 2 ; 2nd Heavy Fighter Wing) , Jagdgeschwader 27 (JG 27 ; 27th Fighter Wing) and Jagdgeschwader 53 (JG 53 ; 53rd Fighter Wing) , were intercepted by British fighters from No. 10 Group RAF and No. 11 Group RAF . The combined attacking force of more than 200 German aircraft were intercepted by 14 British fighter squadrons totaling 170 fighter aircraft . This mission turned out to be disastrous for 4th Staffel . Only Helbig and his crew returned their heavily damaged aircraft back to friendly territory . The majority of his men , 32 members of the 4th Staffel , were taken prisoner by the British .

As the Battle of Britain progressed , Helbig developed into an industrial target specialist . As a result of his success during more than 100 combat missions , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross . By the time Helbig received the coveted decoration , he had flown 122 combat missions .

Helbig 's success in surviving seemingly hopeless situations was due to his excellent crew , which included Oberfeldwebel Franz Schlund who , on 30 August 1941 , became the first Luftwaffe radio operator to be awarded the Knight 's Cross . Manning one of the machine guns , Schlund drove off the attacking fighter force on a mission against the Warrington Propeller Works located north of Liverpool . He also contributed to the success of other missions , including the attack and destruction of the lock entrance to the Manchester Ship Canal at Eastham and the attack on the pilot training airfield at Penrose . In more than 200 combat missions , Schlund successfully fought off 13 attacks by enemy fighters .

= = = North African and Mediterranean campaign = = =

The Fourth Staffel of LG 1 was ordered to attack the British ships in the port of Piraeus on the night of Good Friday 1941 . During this moonlight mission , Helbig dive @-@ bombed and sank a troop transport ship , most likely the Ellenis , which was also used as a hospital ship by Greek forces . On 5 November 1941 Helbig took command as Gruppenkommandeur (Group Commander) of I. (Kampf) / LG 1 (1st Bomber Group of the 1st Demonstration Wing) , succeeding Hauptmann Kuno Hoffmann . With 220 combat missions flown , he was one of the youngest Gruppenkommandeure in the Luftwaffe . On 16 January 1942 Helbig became the 64th recipient of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub) after having completed 300 combat missions . During the German assault on Tobruk in 1942 , Helbig , flying two missions per night , bombed the heavily defended fortress on ten consecutive nights . Taking off from Heraklion , each mission lasted 4 to 4 @.@ 5 hours .

Five Ju 88s from I. (Kampf) / LG 1 took off on an armed reconnaissance patrol in the sea area south of Crete on 11 May 1942 . The crew of Oberfeldwebel Otto Leupert was searching the area of quadrant 5574 / 23 East ? roughly 100 kilometres (62 mi) south of Crete ? and detected the four British destroyers HMS Jervis , HMS Kipling , HMS Jackal and HMS Lively before noon . Joachim Helbig was immediately informed by radio communications . The destroyers approached the sea

between Crete and Tobruk at around noon and were again spotted by a German reconnaissance aircraft at 12 : 35 pm . At 2 : 30 pm 14 Ju 88s from I. (Kampf) / LG 1 headed for quadrant 6450 / 23 East . The aircraft were armed with two 500 @-@ kilogram (1 @,@ 100 lb) and two 250 @-@ kilogram (550 lb) bombs . Despite the protection of accompanying Bristol Beaufort torpedo bombers from No. 272 Squadron RAF , operating as long @-@ range fighters , the Ju 88s attacked . The HMS Lively was struck by Oberfeldwebel Leupert and sank at about 3 : 30 pm . After refueling and rearming , a second wave led by Leupert failed to reach the destroyers .

The third wave led by Hauptmann Helbig took off from Heraklion with seven aircraft of I. Gruppe / LG 1 . His flight included the experienced veterans Oberleutnant Iro Ilk , Oberleutnant Backhaus , Leutnant Gerhard Brenner and Oberfeldwebel Otto Leupert . The seven Ju 88s attacked the destroyers with the already setting sun behind them . In the space of ten minutes , they sank two of the three vessels . Helbig had selected the Kipling as his target . His four bombs struck the destroyer amidships , sinking her at 32 @.@ 39 ° N 26 @.@ 19 ° E ? / 32 @.@ 39 ; 26 @.@ 19 . The Jackal was hit several times . The British attempted to tow the crippled vessel to a friendly port ; however , the next day , it sank , scuttled by Jervis . This achievement earned Helbig his first of two references in the Wehrmachtbericht on 13 May 1942 . The Wehrmachtbericht was a daily propaganda radio report made by the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces) reporting on the military situation on all fronts . He also developed a reputation among his opponents : The British called his squadron " The Helbig Flyers " . In June 1942 , British commandos targeted his unit at their base in Heraklion , and succeeded in blowing up seven of his Ju 88s .

Helbig flew numerous missions in support of the Siege of Malta . On 28 September 1942 he was awarded the 20th Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern) . He had sunk 182 @,@ 000 GRT of enemy shipping . In defense of the Allied landings in Algeria and Tunisia (Operation Torch) in November 1942 he sank a 10 @,@ 000 GRT munitions transport , USS Leedstown , off the coast of Algeria .

= = = High command = = =

In January 1943 , Helbig was transferred to the staff of the General der Kampfflieger (Commander of Bombers) , as an inspector . In March 1943 he was often tasked with the duties of the General der Kampfflieger and in this role he received a preferential promotion to Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) on 1 September 1943 . After numerous difficulties and clashes with his superiors , including Generalfeldmarschall (Field Marshal) Albert Kesselring , who lacked his operational expertise , he transferred to an operational unit and was made Geschwaderkommodore (Wing Commander) of Lehrgeschwader 1 on 14 August 1943 in Wiener Neustadt .

Helbig led his Geschwader against the Allied beachheads at Anzio and Nettuno in Italy with the beginning of Operation Shingle on 22 January 1944 . On 23 January 1944 LG 1 sank the HMS Janus with a Henschel Hs 293 glider bomb and again damaged the Jervis severely for the loss of 11 aircraft . In Italy on 30 January 1944 , his Ju 88 L1 + AM was destroyed in an aerial attack by American bombers . This aircraft , which was solely piloted by Helbig himself , was the only Ju 88 to survive more than 1 @,@ 000 hours of combat operations . After successful operations against Allied airfields on the isle of Corsica , he was mentioned a second time in the Wehrmachtbericht on 28 May 1944 .

= = = In defense of the Reich = = =

On 6 June 1944 LG 1 was ordered to transfer to Belgium for air defence during the Allied invasion of France . Helbig ordered the transfer postponed due to unfavourable weather conditions over Southern France and fearing that the intensive Allied fighter operations in the area would render any movement impossible without sustaining high losses . Helbig was accused of disobeying orders by Luftflotte 2 (2nd Air Fleet) . Helbig relocated the Geschwader as soon as the low @-@ pressure area dissipated , arriving in Belgium at dusk without losing a single aircraft .

The court martial proceedings against Helbig , which had already begun , were dropped , because he was able to prove that his actions had been of decisive importance in preserving the Geschwader and its operational readiness . It was at this time that Helbig received the promotion to Oberst (Colonel) on 1 July 1944 which Generalfeldmarschall Wolfram von Richthofen had proposed some time earlier . Helbig then led his Geschwader with some success in the battles against the invasion fleet . However the ever present Allied fighter aircraft over the invasion front inflicted heavy losses on LG 1 .

He formed a combined ground support and reconnaissance battle group in defense of the Reich on 10 September 1944 . Visiting one of the ground support squadrons at Vogelsang in the Eifel , he was severely wounded by strafing enemy aircraft . Due to his injuries Helbig had to surrender command of the Gefechtsverband Helbig , as the battle group was referred to , to the commander and Geschwaderkommodore of Kampfgeschwader 2 (KG 2) Oberstleutnant Rudolf Hallensleben . Shortly before the end of World War II , he led a small battle group made up of LG 1 and Kampfgeschwader 200 . He was ordered by Generalmajor Franz Reuß , commanding general of the 4 . Flieger @-@ Division (4th Air Division) , on 30 April 1945 to lead a small formation of Fieseler Fi 156 Storch . The unit was to fly into Berlin @-@ Wannsee and evacuate at least ten high @-@ ranking officials , people from Adolf Hitler 's inner circle , of the Reich . Nine aircraft headed for Berlin , but were forced to abandon the mission due to strong defensive anti @-@ aircraft fire .

The city of Hamburg was declared an open city on 3 May 1945 and I. / LG 1 abandoned their positions in southern Hamburg and relocated to Barmstedt near Elmshorn , roughly 30 kilometres (19 mi) north of Hamburg , on 4 May 1945 . Helbig received the order to leave his Geschwader to serve as a courier , flying vital documents and secret orders from the Flensburg government to the senior command staff of Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner , the new Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief of the German Army (Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres) , in Czechoslovakia . After delivering his reports , he departed early on the evening of 8 May 1945 . Flying west , he avoided capture by the Red Army and escaped from Czechoslovakia . He was taken prisoner of war (POW) by the Americans and was taken to the Sennelager POW camp from which he escaped on 9 June .

After the war Helbig built a civilian life and became a manager of the Schultheiss Brewery on the Kreuzberg in Berlin . He died on 5 October 1985 in Malente , following a road accident on his way to vacation in Spain two days earlier .

= = Awards = =

Narvik Shield

Wound Badge in Silver

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

Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge in Gold with Diamonds

" Afrika " and " Kreta " Cuffband

Medaglia d 'Argento al Valor Militare

Iron Cross (1939)

2nd class (16 September 1939)

1st class (20 June 1940)

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe (6 October 1940)

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

Knight 's Cross on 24 November 1940 as Hauptmann and Staffelführer of the 4 . (K) / Lehrgeschwader 1

64th Oak Leaves on 16 January 1942 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the I. (K) / Lehrgeschwader 1

20th Swords on 28 September 1942 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur of the I. (K) / Lehrgeschwader 1

Mentioned twice in the Wehrmachtbericht

= = = Wehrmachtbericht references = = =

