

= Heinrich Bär =

Oskar @-@ Heinz (Heinrich) " Pritzl " Bär (pronounced [?ha?n??ç b??? ?] ; 25 May 1913 ? 28 April 1957) was a German Luftwaffe flying ace who served throughout World War II in Europe . Bär flew more than one thousand combat missions , and fought in all major German theaters of the war , including the Western , Eastern and Mediterranean fronts . On 18 occasions he survived being shot down , and he was credited with 220 or 221 aerial victories , around 16 of which were in a Messerschmitt Me @-@ 262 jet fighter .

Bär , a Saxon with a strong accent , joined the Reichswehr in 1934 and transferred to the Luftwaffe in 1935 . Serving first as a mechanic , then as a pilot on transport aircraft , he was informally trained as a fighter pilot . He claimed his first aerial victory in September 1939 on the French border . By the end of the Battle of Britain , his tally of victories had increased to 17 . Transferred to the Eastern Front to participate in Operation Barbarossa , he quickly accumulated further kills , a feat that earned him the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords for 90 aerial victories in February 1942 .

During the remainder of World War II , Bär was credited with 130 other aerial victories , including 16 while flying one of the first jet fighters , the Me 262 , an achievement which would normally have earned him the coveted Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds . Hermann Göring 's personal dislike of Bär , coupled with Bär 's insubordinate character and lack of military discipline , deprived him of this award . After World War II , Bär continued his career as an aviator . He was killed in a flying accident on 28 April 1957 near Braunschweig .

= = Early life = =

Bär was born on 25 May 1913 in Sommerfeld near Leipzig in the Kingdom of Saxony , a federated state of the German Empire . His parents were farmers , and in 1916 , his father was killed in action on the Western Front of World War I. Bär attended the Volksschule , a combined primary and lower secondary school , in Sommerfeld . Initially , he planned on taking over the family farm in Engelsdorf and following graduation attended the agriculture school in Wurzen . Aged 15 , he became a glider pilot , joining the glider club on the " Schwarzer Berg " (Black Mountain) at Taucha . Bär then wanted to become a forester , for everything associated with wildlife and forests interested him . His first sight of a Junkers transport aircraft changed his mind and convinced him that he should become an aviator . As a teenager , he had ambitions to become an airline pilot with Deutsche Luft Hansa .

The Great Depression prevented Bär from gaining a civil pilot license . In 1934 , he joined the Reichswehr and was assigned to the 3 . Kompanie of Kraftfahrabteilung 4 (3rd Company of the 4th Motor Vehicle Battalion) as a mechanic . He served in this position until the following year , when he was transferred to a combat wing of the Luftwaffe . A few months later , he was accepted for pilot training , receiving his transport aircraft pilot 's training . From 1 November 1937 to 31 March 1938 , Bär attended the flight school at Oldenburg and was then transferred to the flight school at Hildesheim . He was transferred again , attending the flight school at Ludwigslust where he attained his Luftwaffe Advanced Pilot 's Certificate (Erweiterter Luftwaffen @-@ Flugzeugführerschein) , also known as ' C ' -Certificate , confirming proficiency on multi @-@ engine aircraft , on 16 May 1938 . Bär then attended the blind flying school Blindflugschule 2 (BFS 2 ? 2nd blind flying school) at Neuburg an der Donau from 7 July to 14 August 1938 . He was transferred to I. / Jagdgeschwader 135 , the core of the future Jagdgeschwader 51 (JG 51) , on 1 September 1938 , usually flying the Junkers Ju 86 . The Squadron Leader (Staffelführer) Douglas Pitcairn noticed Bär 's flying talents and tried to convince Bär to become a fighter pilot . Initially Bär refused , but after he illegally conducted some aerobatics in the Ju 86 leading to an engine failure , he reluctantly accepted and became a fighter pilot .

= = World War II = =

Stationed on the border with France , Bär achieved his first victory ? a Curtiss P @-@ 36 Hawk ?

on 25 September 1939 during the Phoney War air skirmishes with the Armée de l'Air (French air force) , earning him the Iron Cross 2nd Class on 27 September 1939 . During the Battle of France , he was credited with two more aerial victories before adding a further 10 during the Battle of Britain . During this time , he had several emergency landings with badly damaged planes and was shot down over the English Channel on 2 September 1940 by a Spitfire . Bär was summoned to appear before Hermann Göring and report on this battle . When Göring asked him what he was thinking about while in the water , Bär immediately replied , " Your speech , Herr Reichsmarschall , in which you said that England is no longer an island ! " , alluding to an address that Göring had made before the German fighter pilots . Incidents like this are testimony to his often blatant disregard for higher authority , a trait that frequently landed him in trouble . In early 1941 , he was credited with an additional four aerial victories against the Royal Air Force (RAF) , bringing his total to 17 .

= = = Eastern Front = = =

In June 1941 , JG 51 was transferred East to take part in Operation Barbarossa . JG 51 at the time was part of the 2nd Air Corps , operating in the central sector of the Eastern Front . Bär claimed five aerial victories on 30 June 1941 , bringing his total to 22 . On this day JG 51 was credited with 113 aerial victories in total , among them their 1,000th aerial victory ? the first unit to reach this figure ? and Oberst Werner Mölders , with 82 aerial victories , surpassed Manfred von Richthofen in number of victories . Within two weeks of combat against the Soviet Air Force , Bär 's tally rose to 27 , which earned him the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 2 July , followed by his promotion to Oberleutnant on 1 August 1941 . On 14 August , he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves for 60 victories , and on 30 August he became an " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " by shooting down six Soviet aircraft . On 31 August , Bär was shot down by an Ilyushin Il @-@ 2 some 50 kilometers (31 mi) behind Soviet lines , near Novgorod @-@ Seversky . He suffered injuries to his back and feet while bailing out , but was able to walk back to the German lines ; his wounds necessitated a lengthy hospital treatment .

Bär was promoted to Hauptmann in late 1941 and appointed Squadron Leader of 12 . / JG 51 in early 1942 . His longtime wingman at the time was Heinrich Hoffmann . He received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords on 16 February as his tally rose to 90 . This achievement was mentioned in the daily Wehrmachtbericht (the propaganda report by the OKW) on 12 February 1942 , his first of three references during the course of the war . On 11 May , Bär was transferred from IV . / JG 51 on the Moscow front to take command of I. Gruppe of Gordon Gollob 's Jagdgeschwader 77 (JG 77) flying wing . Bär replaced Herbert Ihlefeld who had been transferred . JG 77 was tasked with supporting the hard fighting in the Crimean Campaign over the Kerch Strait on the Crimean Peninsula . Led by the flying aces (Experten) Gollob and Bär , JG 77 took over the air space above Kerch @-@ Taman as Gollob and Bär shot down two and three LaGG @-@ 3s respectively , raising Bär 's victory total to 93 . Mutual animosity between the two men , Gollob , a disciplinarian pro @-@ Nazi , and Bär , an anti @-@ authoritarian , ensured an intense rivalry . On 19 May 1942 , Bär claimed five further aerial victories ; his victory total now stood at 103 . He was the 9th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . That same day , Inspector of Fighters (General der Jagdflieger) Adolf Galland arrived to inspect Bär 's I. / JG 77 and JG 77 surpassed 2 @,@ 000 victories . This flying achievement earned Bär a second mention in the daily Wehrmachtbericht on 20 May 1942 .

= = = Mediterranean theater = = =

In June 1942 , JG 77 was moved to the Mediterranean theater and took part in the air battles over Malta before relocating to Tunisia and participating in the North African Campaign . On 25 January 1943 , Bär claimed two Curtiss P @-@ 40 Warhawk fighters shot down , taking his total to 149 aerial victories . After Bär achieved his 149th aerial victory , General Hans @-@ Jürgen von Arnim submitted him for the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds . Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring ignored this request , denying Bär the " Diamonds " . The reason

for this remains uncertain , but it is believed that Göring disliked Bär for his insubordinate character and strong Saxon dialect , which Göring was known to detest . On 27 January 1943 , Bär surpassed the 150 aerial victory mark after he claimed three more P @-@ 40s shot down .

Bär and his I. Gruppe of JG 77 operated from Fatnassa , Tunisia , in early March 1943 . On 1 March , Bär claimed a Spitfire shot down , then in the evening met Galland , who was making a surprise visit to I. / JG 77 . Galland was greeted by Major Joachim Müncheberg , who introduced Bär to Galland . Thus began a comradeship which outlasted World War II .

Over North Africa and the Mediterranean theater , Bär had increased his tally to 179 , but , fighting a losing battle against ever @-@ increasing Allied air superiority , Bär lost his fighting spirit , and suffered severe mental and physical exhaustion . After several arguments with JG 77 's new Commander Colonel Johannes Steinhoff and Hermann Göring , in mid @-@ 1943 Bär was transferred to France " for cowardice before the enemy " and demoted to Squadron Leader . He took over command of an operational training unit , Jagdgruppe Süd .

= = = Defense of the Reich = = =

His combat skills were hard to overlook and hence Bär was transferred to II . / Jagdgeschwader 1 (JG 1) on 21 January 1944 as an ordinary pilot . He was assigned to 6 . / JG 1 . Jagdgeschwader 1 (JG 1) Wing Commander (Geschwaderkommodore) Colonel Walter Oesau welcomed him with a reminder that he had promised Oberkommando der Luftwaffe (OKL) Göring that Bär would not be given any command responsibilities . Although Bär accepted this with humor , he later commented to others that in the air he was the " Kommodore of his own crate " .

On 15 March 1944 , Bär , now a Major and rehabilitated from the demotion , was given command of II . / Jagdgeschwader 1 (JG 1) . This was after the death of Hauptmann Hermann Segatz on 8 March 1944 . JG 1 was tasked with Reichsverteidigung (Defense of the Reich) and equipped with the Focke Wulf 190 A @-@ 7 fighter . Morale of the group soared following his appointment . He was considered the unofficial leader of the group and the best officer in the entire Geschwader . On 11 April 1944 , Bär achieved his 199th aerial victory over a B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress near Fallersleben . His 200th aerial victory , a B @-@ 24 Liberator , was claimed on 22 April accompanied by his regular wingman Warrant Officer (Oberfeldwebel) Leo Schuhmacher , who would be awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 1 March 1945 as a fighter pilot in II . / JG 1 . Bär had just landed at Störmede airfield from a II . / JG 1 intercept when a smoking United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) B @-@ 24 of the 458th Bombardment Group passed overhead . Bär and his wingman quickly got into their aircraft and intercepted the B @-@ 24 . The bomber 's gunners had already bailed out of the aircraft , making it an easy aerial victory . Bär returned to Störmede airfield to the congratulations of his men . This double century victory earned Bär his third and final reference in the Wehrmachtbericht on 24 April 1944 . After Oesau 's death on 11 May 1944 , Bär was made acting Wing Commander of JG 1 . In June , he was appointed Wing Commander of Jagdgeschwader 3 (JG 3) following the death of Friedrich @-@ Karl Müller . By the end of 1944 , Bär 's score had risen to 203 .

Bär 's 204th and 205th victories , against two Hawker Typhoons , were achieved on 1 January 1945 during Unternehmen Bodenplatte , a Luftwaffe mass attack against Allied airfields in the Benelux area . The operation resulted in hundreds of aircraft losses on both sides . Bär 's JG 3 contributed by raiding Eindhoven in the Netherlands , shooting down about six RAF fighters and destroying many aircraft on the ground . One of Bär 's ' aerial kills ' may not have been airborne . Historian Norman Franks states both aircraft , from No. 438 Squadron RAF , were taxiing when hit . Flight Lieutenant Pete Wilson was wounded and later died from his injuries after Bär 's strafing attack . The second Typhoon did get airborne . Its pilot , Flight Officer Ross Keller was killed . This version of events is contradicted by a witness , Pilot Officer ' Bill ' Harle , who thought both aircraft were airborne .

= = = Combat in the Me 262 = = =

In February , Bär was transferred to command the jet fighter training unit III . / Ergänzungs @-@ Jagdgeschwader 2 (EJG 2) . In March , the unit was equipped with the Messerschmitt Me 262 fighter and sent into battle . Bär shot down 13 enemy aircraft , many of them heavy bombers like the B @-@ 17 and the B @-@ 24 , bringing his score to 217 . On 23 April , Bär transferred to the elite Jet Experten unit Jagdverband 44 (JV 44) , led by Adolf Galland . On 26 April , he assumed command of the unit when Galland was wounded . Bär possibly flew his first operational sortie with JV 44 on 27 April 1945 . Flying the Me 262 A @-@ 1 / U5 , a six MK 108 cannon prototype , he was accompanied by Major Wilhelm Herget and the non @-@ commissioned officer NCO (Unteroffizier) Franz Köster when the trio engaged American fighters over Riem ; Bär claimed one aerial victory . While not flying operationally , Bär spent most of his time giving hasty instruction to the new pilots still being assigned to JV 44 . With JV 44 , he achieved his final four aerial victories (3 P @-@ 47s and 1 Mosquito) on 28 April , bringing his total to 220 . All told , he had achieved 16 victories in the Me 262 , making him the second most successful Jet Expert of the war , which he finished as a Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant) .

During the final days of the Second World War in Europe , Lieutenant General (Generalleutnant) Adolf Galland attempted to surrender JV 44 to American forces from his hospital bed . At the same time Air General (General der Flieger) Karl Koller had ordered JV 44 to relocate to Prague and continue fighting . Bär , as a Galland loyalist , attempted to ignore the order . Bär was further pressured to relocate JV 44 when Major General (Generalmajor) Dietrich Peltz , commander of IX . Fliegerkorps , and Colonel Hajo Herrmann , commander of 9 . Flieger @-@ Division (J) , unexpectedly emerged at the control room in Maxglan on 2 May 1945 . A heated and violent dispute erupted between Bär , Peltz and Herrmann , witnessed by Walter Krupinski . He later recalled that Bär responded with " Yes , sir , but we are under the command of Generalleutnant Galland , and I will only follow orders of Generalleutnant Galland ! " ? a final act of disobedience that Krupinski believed could have led to Bär being shot for insubordination .

In the early morning hours of 4 May 1945 , Bär gathered the pilots of JV 44 for a final briefing . Bär ordered the remaining Me 262 destroyed before going into captivity and interrogation by US Intelligence officers of the 1st Tactical Air Force 's Air Prisoner of War Interrogation Unit , based at Heidelberg .

= = After the war = =

Bär did not return to his home in Sommerfeld after World War II . He settled in Braunschweig , where he continued his career in aviation , including a lead position for motor @-@ powered flight with the Deutscher Aero Club . He also worked as a consultant and test pilot in the field of sport aviation , testing aircraft before they went on the market . On 28 April 1957 , while conducting a routine flight @-@ check in a light aircraft , a LF @-@ 1 Zaunkönig , Bär put the aircraft into a flat spin , the final manoeuvre in the test process . The aircraft spun down to 50 meters (160 ft) then , unable to regain control , Bär was killed in the resulting crash at Braunschweig @-@ Waggum .

= = Summary of career = =

Heinrich Bär , call sign " Bussard 1 " , flew more than 1 @, @ 000 combat missions . His 220 confirmed aerial victories place him eighth on the overall list of Experten . His claim of 124 aerial victories over Western @-@ flown aircraft is second only to Hans @-@ Joachim Marseille 's total of 158 ; almost all of the latter 's victories occurred in Africa . He achieved four victories during the Battle of France , 13 during the Battle of Britain and 61 over Libya and Tunisia . On the Eastern Front he had claimed 96 aerial victories . At least 75 of his victories had been claimed against British- and American @-@ flown aircraft over Europe , 16 of these while flying the Me 262 jet fighter . Also among these 75 aerial victories are 21 US heavy bombers and one Mosquito . Bär crash @-@ landed or bailed out 18 times and was wounded three times in combat .

= = = Awards = = =

Wound Badge (1939) in Silver in Black (26 November 1941)
German Cross in Gold on 27 May 1942 as Hauptmann in the I. / JG 77
Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe in Gold with Pennant " 1000 " in Gold (25 May 1942)
Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge
Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe on 8 June 1942 as Hauptmann and Gruppenkommandeur
Eastern Front Medal (23 August 1943)
" Africa " Cuffband
Iron Cross (1939)
2nd Class (29 September 1939)
1st Class (6 July 1940)
Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords
Knight 's Cross on 2 July 1941 as pilot and Leutnant in the 1 . / JG 51 after 27 aerial victories
31st Oak Leaves on 14 August 1941 as Leutnant and pilot in the 1 . / JG 51 after 60 aerial victories
7th Swords on 16 February 1942 as Hauptmann and Staffelkapitän of the 1 . / JG 51 after 90 aerial victories
Mentioned three times in the Wehrmachtbericht
Three times Heinz Bär was recommended for the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds . All three commendations were denied by Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring . Bär shot down a further 130 enemy aircraft after he had received the Swords .

= = = Dates of rank = = =