

= Helmut Wick =

Major Helmut Paul Emil Wick ( 5 August 1915 ? 28 November 1940 ) was a German Luftwaffe ace and the fourth recipient of the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves . The Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross and its higher grade , the Oak Leaves , was awarded by the Third Reich to recognise extreme bravery in battle or successful military leadership . It was Germany 's highest military decoration at the time of its presentation to Helmut Wick .

Born in Mannheim , Wick joined the Luftwaffe in 1936 and was trained as a fighter pilot . He was assigned to Jagdgeschwader 2 " Richthofen " ( JG 2 ? 2nd Fighter Wing ) , and saw combat in the Battles of France and Britain . Promoted to Major in October 1940 , he was given the position of Geschwaderkommodore ( wing commander ) of JG 2 ? the youngest in the Luftwaffe to hold this rank and position . He was shot down in the vicinity of the Isle of Wight on 28 November 1940 , very likely by the British ace John Dundas , who was subsequently shot down by Wick 's wingman . Helmut Wick was posted as missing in action , presumed dead . By then he had been credited with destroying 56 enemy aircraft in aerial combat , making him the leading German fighter pilot at the time . Flying the Messerschmitt Bf 109 , he claimed all of his victories against the Western Allies .

= = Early life and pre @-@ war service = =

Helmut Paul Emil Wick was born on 5 August 1915 in Mannheim , Germany , the youngest of three children of a civil engineer , Karl Wick and Berta Wick , née Schenck . Helmut 's eldest brother Walter was born in Swakopmund , at the time in the German protectorate in South @-@ West Africa . The outbreak of World War I forced the family to return to Germany and Helmut 's sister , Doris , was born in Rohrbach , near Heidelberg . Owing to the demand for his father 's skills and expertise building roads and bridges , Helmut spent most of his childhood traveling throughout the German Reich . The Wick family moved to Hanover in 1919 ; Helmut 's mother died there in February 1922 . His father then took the family to Oliva , near Danzig and Königsberg in East Prussia , finally settling in Berlin in 1935 .

Upon graduating from Gymnasium ( high school ) in 1935 , Wick , who initially considered a career as a forester , applied to the officer candidate course of the new German Air Force . Scoring well on the suitability tests , he was accepted into the German military on 6 April 1936 at the Luftwaffe officer candidate school in Dresden , after completing compulsory Reichsarbeitsdienst ( Reich Labour Service ) . He swore the oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler on 16 April . After passing officer training courses , Wick was assessed as " well suited to become an officer " on 13 July . He then started flight training and shortly later soloed in a Focke @-@ Wulf Fw 44 " Stieglitz " . Wick was considered an average pilot and had difficulties with his theoretical training , especially those topics that were of little or no interest to him . In early May 1937 , he was briefly transferred to the 6 . Staffel ( 6th squadron ) of Kampfgeschwader 254 ( 254th Bomber Wing ) . A month later he returned to Dresden to complete his officer training .

Wick failed to pass the third course of his training but was given a second chance and on 1 April 1938 reported to the officer candidate school at the Luftkriegsschule III ( 3rd air war school ) , Wildpark @-@ West near Werder . He successfully completed the course and in mid @-@ 1938 started special pilot training at the Fighter Training facility at Werneuchen . Upon graduation , he was assigned to II.Gruppe Jagdgeschwader 135 ( 135th Fighter Wing ) which on 1 November 1938 became Jagdgeschwader 333 ( 333rd Fighter Wing ) under Oberstleutnant ( Lieutenant Colonel ) Max Ibel at Herzogenaurach , flying obsolete Arado Ar 68 biplane fighters . On 8 November 1938 , Oberfähnrich ( senior ensign ) Wick was promoted to Leutnant ( second lieutenant ) and on 1 January 1939 was transferred to 1 . Staffel of Jagdgeschwader 133 ( 133rd Fighter Wing ) , which was later renamed Jagdgeschwader 53 ( JG 53 ? 53rd Fighter Wing ) . It was there that Wick began flying the Messerschmitt Bf 109 monoplane fighter under the tutelage of Werner Mölders , a Spanish Civil War flying ace credited with 14 aerial victories . Under Mölders ' guidance , Wick became a Schwarmführer ( flight leader ) .

= = World War II = =

= = = Phoney War and Battle of France = = =

On 31 August 1939 Wick was given orders to transfer to " Jagdgeschwader Richthofen Nr. I " . At the time there was no such unit ; the intention was to send him to Jagdgeschwader 1 ( JG 1 ? 1st Fighter Wing ) , based in Döberitz , near Berlin . During World War I the " Richthofen Geschwader " name had been attached to the World War I era Jagdgeschwader 1 . The " Richthofen " name had been incorrectly put on Wick 's order . Only Wick noticed the mistake , realizing that he could now choose between JG 1 or the famous Jagdgeschwader 2 ( JG 2 ? 2nd Fighter Wing ) which currently bore the " Richthofen " name . He chose the Richthofen Geschwader , commanded by Oberst ( Colonel ) Gerd von Massow , the unit was equipped with the Bf 109 E @-@ 3 and used the tactical code Yellow 3 . On 1 September , Wick joined its 3 . Staffel , serving in the air defence of Berlin during the Polish Campaign . Following the German victory in Poland , JG 2 was transferred to Frankfurt @-@ Rebstock and tasked with protection of Germany 's Western border during the Phoney War ? the phase between Britain and France 's declaration of war on Germany in September 1939 , and the Battle of France in May 1940 . Flying his sixth combat mission , Leutnant Wick claimed his first , and the Geschwader 's second victory on 22 November 1939 . Near Nancy , he shot down a French Curtiss Hawk 75 fighter piloted by Sergeant Saillard of the Groupe de Chasse II / 4 Armée de l ' Air , who was killed . For this feat , Wick received the Iron Cross 2nd Class ( Eisernes Kreuz 2 . Klasse ) . Wick was allowed to take home leave from his Geschwader and spent Christmas with his wife Ursel , his baby son Walter , and his parents , before returning to his Gruppe at Frankfurt @-@ Rebstock . From 10 to 17 February 1940 , Wick and six other members from JG 2 spent a week in the Black Forest on the Feldberg , skiing and relaxing .

On 10 May 1940 , German forces launched an offensive in Western Europe , but Wick remained on the ground while his aircraft , Bf 109 Yellow 2 , underwent an engine change . Seven days later , he was back in the air , recording three victories over French LeO 45 bombers in one mission . By 6 June , Wick had 10 confirmed and two unconfirmed victories , including four French Bloch 151 / 152 fighters that he shot down on 5 June to record his fifth through eighth victories . The two unconfirmed victories were Royal Navy Fairey Swordfish biplane torpedo bombers claimed on 19 May and for which he had no witnesses . On 6 June , Wick became the first pilot of the I. Gruppe to complete 100 combat missions , claiming his ninth and tenth victory the same day . For this achievement he was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class ( Eisernes Kreuz 1 . Klasse ) by Oberstleutnant Harry von Bülow @-@ Bothkamp . By the end of the French Campaign , Wick 's total stood at 14 confirmed victories , trailing only Hauptmann ( Captain ) Mölders of JG 53 with 25 victories and Hauptmann Wilhelm Balthasar of JG 27 with 23 victories as the Luftwaffe 's top scorer . At the end of the French campaign , 3 . Staffel headquarters moved into the house of Louis Aston Knight , an artist who had fled a few days before the Germans arrived .

= = = Battle of Britain = = =

During the Battle of Britain against the Royal Air Force ( RAF ) in mid @-@ 1940 , Wick rose quickly in rank and in profile , both in the battle zone and as a public figure back in Germany . On 21 July 1940 , the just promoted Oberleutnant ( first lieutenant ) also became leader of 3 . Staffel , succeeding Major Henning Stümpell . Although the fighting in the air grew increasingly difficult , Wick kept adding victories to his tally . He recorded his 20th victory on 24 August and added two more fighters a day later . This achievement earned Wick a reference in the Wehrmachtbericht ( his first of five 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 a soldier 's Service Record Book . Twenty aerial victories also made Wick eligible for the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes ) , a higher grade of the Iron Cross . Wick was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 27 August 1940

at Karinhall by Reichsmarschall ( Empire 's Marshal ) Hermann Göring . He was also interviewed by an Adler ( Eagle ? the Luftwaffe weekly magazine ) journalist prior to the presentation . Several articles about Wick appeared at the time . Wick was granted four days of leave , which he spent with his family in Berlin .

Upon his return to France Wick was promoted to Hauptmann and on 9 September was named Gruppenkommandeur ( group commander ) of I. Gruppe JG 2 . During September he continued adding to his score , and on 5 October gained his 41st combat victory on his way to overtake his two closest rivals , Major Adolf Galland and Oberstleutnant Mölders . The 41st victory earned him his second reference in the Wehrmachtbericht on 6 October 1940 . He also became the fourth member of the armed forces to receive the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves ( Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub ) directly from Hitler at Berghof in Bavaria on 8 September 1940 .

Wick received orders in the late afternoon of 6 October to report to Reichsmarschall Göring in Berlin by 3 p.m. the following day . Due to bad weather , he chose to drive from Normandy to Berlin by car . Together with his wingman and friend , Rudolf Pflanz , Wick travelled all night and arrived at the Reich Air Ministry right on time to meet with Göring , Generalfeldmarschall ( Field Marshal ) Erhard Milch , Generaloberst ( Colonel General ) Ernst Udet , General der Flieger ( General of the Flyers ) Kurt Student and General der Flieger Karl Bodenschatz . After the meeting in Berlin , Wick and Göring drove to Berchtesgaden in the Reichsmarschall 's personal train , where they arrived at 5 p.m. on 8 October for the official Oak Leaves presentation . Wick was then exposed by Otto Dietrich , the Third Reich 's Press Chief , to the international public at a press conference and presented as a " hero " . His performance left a predominantly negative impression , since Wick presented himself as a " busybody " ( Life Magazine ) , and made fun of his victims .

On 19 October 1940 , Wick was promoted to Major and appointed Geschwaderkommodore ( wing commander ) of Jagdgeschwader 27 ( JG 27 ? 27th Fighter Wing ) . He had no ambition to leave his Gruppe in JG 2 " Richthofen " and , after giving the matter some thought , asked Göring to let him remain with his Gruppe instead . The next day Göring revoked his decision and gave Wick command of JG 2 " Richthofen " . At 25 years of age , he thus became the youngest Major and Geschwaderkommodore in the Luftwaffe . Major Wolfgang Schellmann , who had commanded JG 2 since the beginning of September 1940 , was placed in command of JG 27 instead of Wick .

JG 2 " Richthofen " claimed its 500th aerial victory on 16 November 1940 , earning Wick another reference in the Wehrmachtbericht . To celebrate the 500th victory , Wick , the Gruppenkommandeure , all of the headquarters personnel , and the Staffelf kapitäne went to Paris on 22 November ? exactly one year after JG 2 's first aerial victory . They visited the show at " Casino de Paris " and dined at the " Hôtel Salomon de Rothschild " .

== = Death == =

Helmut Wick , accompanied by his Stabsschwarm ? including Oberleutnant Rudolf Pflanz , Leutnant Franz Fiby and Oberleutnant Erich Leie ? claimed his 55th aerial victory when he shot down a Spitfire on the afternoon of 28 November 1940 . His opponent could have been No. 602 Squadron 's Pilot Officer Archibald Lyall , who was reported killed in the engagement . This made Wick the highest @-@ scoring fighter pilot in the Luftwaffe , surpassing Mölders , whose score at the time stood at 54 victories . Returning from this mission to Cherbourg- Querqueville , Wick ordered the aircraft refueled and re @-@ armed . Together with Erich Leie as his wingman , Wick took off at 4 : 10 p.m. and returned to the vicinity of the Isle of Wight . Spotting a flight of Spitfires he climbed to intercept from a more favourable attack position . In a diving attack Wick shot down and killed Pilot Officer Paul A. Baillon , of No. 609 Squadron , flying Spitfire R6631 .

Shortly afterwards , around 5 p.m. , Wick 's Bf 109 E @-@ 4 ( Werknummer 5344 ? factory number ) was shot down , probably by twelve ? victory ace Flight Lieutenant John Dundas of No. 609 Squadron , though it is also possible that Wick fell victim to Pilot Officer Eric Marrs ; Polish pilot Zygmunt Klein of 234 Squadron may have also scored hits on Wick 's aircraft ; he was also shot down and killed during the battle .

Rudolf Pflanz saw a Spitfire shoot down a Bf 109 , whose pilot bailed out . Pflanz then shot down the Spitfire , which he observed to crash in the sea with its pilot still inside .

Only later did Pflanz find out that it was Wick he saw bailing out . Göring had ordered Kriegsmarine torpedo boats on a night @-@ long search @-@ and @-@ rescue mission for Wick . The next day , other naval vessels and the Seenotdienst ( air @-@ sea rescue ) service , escorted by fighters of JG 2 , continued in vain to search for him . He was never found , however , and the Luftwaffe declared him missing in action , presumed dead , on 4 December 1940 , earning him his last reference in the daily Wehrmachtbericht . Wick , on his 168th combat mission , was the first Oak Leaves recipient to lose his life in combat .

= = Family = =

On 5 August 1939 , Wick married Ursel Rolfs ( 1916 ? 1968 ) in Berlin . The marriage produced two children , Walter ( born in October 1939 ) and a girl , Sabine , born after Wick 's death , in February 1941 . On 23 January 1941 , Wick 's father received a telephone call from Karl Bodenschatz at the Führer Headquarters that Helmut Wick had been rescued and taken prisoner of war . Apparently an official Reuters report had indicated that a 25 @-@ year @-@ old Luftwaffe Major , credited with 56 aerial victories , had been interned in a prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camp in Canada . Both Hitler and Göring initiated steps to get confirmation of the report . On 5 February 1941 , a telegram from Ottawa informed Ursel that Wick was not interned in Canada . Ursel married the military doctor , Stabsarzt ( equivalent to captain ) Dr. Gerhard Tausch , later in the war .

= = Awards = =

Iron Cross ( 1939 )

2nd Class ( 21 December 1939 )

1st Class ( 6 June 1940 )

Pilot / Observer Badge in Gold with Diamonds

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves

Knight 's Cross on 27 August 1940 as Oberleutnant and Staffelkapitän of the 3 . / Jagdgeschwader 2 " Richthofen "

4th Oak Leaves on 6 October 1940 as Major and Gruppenkommandeur of the I. / Jagdgeschwader 2 " Richthofen "