

= Hermann Graf =

Hermann Graf (24 October 1912 ? 4 November 1988) was a German Luftwaffe World War II fighter ace . A flying ace or fighter ace is a military aviator credited with shooting down five or more enemy aircraft during aerial combat . He served on both the Eastern and Western Fronts . He became the first pilot in aviation history to claim 200 aerial victories ? that is , 200 aerial combat encounters resulting in the destruction of the enemy aircraft . He claimed 212 aerial victories in over 830 combat missions , 202 of which were on the Eastern Front .

Graf , a pre @-@ war football player and glider pilot , joined the Luftwaffe in 1935 . He was initially selected for transport aviation and was posted to Jagdgeschwader 51 (JG 51 ? 51st Fighter Wing) in May 1939 . At the outbreak of war he was stationed on the German ? Franco border flying uneventful patrols . Serving as a flight instructor , he was stationed in Romania as part of a German military mission training Romanian pilots . Graf flew a few ground support missions in the closing days of the German invasion of Crete .

Following the start of Operation Barbarossa , the German invasion of the Soviet Union , Graf claimed his first aerial victory on 4 August 1941 . He was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross (German : Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) after 45 Eastern Front victories on 24 January 1942 . By 16 September 1942 his number of victories had increased to 172 for which he was honored with the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub , Schwertern und Brillanten) . At the time of its presentation to Graf it was Germany 's highest military decoration . On 26 September 1942 he became the first fighter pilot in aviation history to claim 200 enemy aircraft shot down .

By then a national hero , Graf was taken off combat operations and posted to a fighter pilot training school in France before being tasked with leadership of a high flying de Havilland Mosquito intercept unit called Jagdgeschwader 50 (JG 50 ? Fighter Wing 50) . In November 1943 Graf returned to combat operations . He was appointed Geschwaderkommodore (Wing Commander) of Jagdgeschwader 11 (JG 11 ? 11th Fighter Wing) and claimed his last aerial victory on 29 March 1944 . He was severely injured during this encounter and , after a period of convalescence , became Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52 ? 52nd Fighter Wing) . He and the remainder of JG 52 surrendered to units of the United States Army on 8 May 1945 , and were turned over to the Red Army . Graf was held in Soviet captivity until 1949 . After the war he worked as an electronic sales manager and died of Parkinson 's disease in his home town of Engen on 4 November 1988 .

= = Early life = =

Hermann Anton Graf was born on 24 October 1912 in Engen in the Grand Duchy of Baden not far from the Swiss border , the son of Wilhelm Graf (1878 ? 1937) , a farmer , and his wife Maria , née Sailer (1877 ? 1953) . He was the third of three children , with two older brothers , Wilhelm Wilhelm (1904 ? 1981) and Josef Wilhelm (1909 ? 1981) . His father had fought in World War I as an artillery soldier and was awarded the Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz) . He did not return home until Hermann was six years old . The young Hermann 's main reference point in his life was his mother , and the bond he formed with her lasted the remainder of her life . Inflation in the Weimar Republic in 1923 wiped out all the family savings , as a result , from a very early age , Hermann learned to work hard to make a living .

= = = Childhood = = =

As a young boy , Graf was fascinated by football . He started with the football club DJK Engen (Deutsche Jugendkraft ? Literally " German Youthful Strength " , a Catholic sports organization dating back to 1920) and later became a goalkeeper in FC Höhen . In his teens , he had been selected to join a group of talented young football players who were trained by Sepp Herberger , a former forward (1921 ? 1925) of the German national football team and later head coach of the

German team winning the 1954 FIFA World Cup . A broken thumb ended all of Graf 's early hopes for a career on the national football team .

Graf graduated from the Volksschule (primary school) in 1926 at the age of thirteen . Since the savings for Graf 's higher education had been lost in the 1923 inflation crisis , he had no option but to apply for a vocational education . For the next three years , Graf worked as a locksmith apprentice at a local factory . A locksmith had a low income and when he received an offer to work as an apprentice clerk , he gladly accepted a change in careers . In this position , Graf helped Jewish families escape to Switzerland at a time when the " J " stamp in German Jews ' passport had been demanded by Germany 's neighboring countries . He took a great personal risk and came close to getting caught . Graf was assisted by Gruppenführer (Group Leader) Albert Keller of the Nazi Glider Club NSFK in Engen , who later erased all the bureaucratic traces that Graf had left .

= = = Amateur pilot and joining the Luftwaffe = = =

Graf saw his first aircraft when he was twelve years old and this sight caused an emotional conflict between his old passion for football and a new obsession with aviation . He worked at the Engen town hall in 1930 , saving all his money to buy a glider . Before his 20th birthday he contributed a homemade glider to the newly founded Engen Glider Club . Every Sunday he would go out to the nearby Ballenberg mountain until an almost fatal crash destroyed his glider in the fall of 1932 . In 1935 when Adolf Hitler nullified the Treaty of Versailles , Hermann Graf applied for flight training in the newly created Luftwaffe .

Graf was accepted for the Luftwaffe 's A @-@ level pilot training school in Karlsruhe on 2 June 1936 . Following basic training , flight training progressed through the levels A1 , A2 and B1 , B2 , referred to as A / B flight training . Graf 's A training included theoretical and practical training in aerobatics , navigation , long @-@ distance flights and deadstick landings , graduating from A2 on 25 September 1936 . Graf joined the B1 school in Ulm @-@ Dornstadt on 4 October 1937 . The B courses included high @-@ altitude flights , instrument flights , night landings and training to handle the aircraft in difficult situations . He completed his B1 training on 23 December 1937 and progressed to B2 training in Karlsruhe on 19 January 1938 , completing on 31 May 1938 .

After the B2 course the pilots were either selected for fighter pilot training and transferred to a Jagdfliegerschule (fighter pilot school) or chosen for bomber or transport pilot training at a C flight school . Graf , at the age of 26 , was initially thought to be too old for fighter pilot training and selected for the transport pilot C school . Largely due to the fact that the fighter force was in dire need for new officers , Unteroffizier (non @-@ commissioned officer) Graf , without training on modern fighter aircraft , was transferred to 2 . Staffel (2nd squadron) of I. / Jagdgeschwader 51 (I. / JG 51 ? 1st group of the 51st fighter wing) at Bad Aibling on 31 May 1939 after he had completed his officers candidate training at Neubiberg . I. / JG 51 was equipped with the most modern German fighter aircraft at the time , the Messerschmitt Bf 109 E1 . Graf , who had never flown a modern fighter aircraft before , ended his first flight on the Bf 109 with a crash . In July 1939 , I. / JG 51 was briefly reequipped with the Czechoslovakian built Avia B @-@ 534 biplane , giving Graf an opportunity to show his flying skills as well as to reestablish his self @-@ confidence .

= = World War II = =

World War II in Europe began on 1 September 1939 when German forces invaded Poland . On this day , I. / JG 51 was stationed at the French border at Speyer and Graf was promoted to Feldwebel (staff sergeant) . I. / JG 51 exchanged the Avia B @-@ 534 biplanes for the Bf 109 and was charged with protection of Germany 's Western border during the Phoney War ? the phase in the months following Britain and France 's declaration of war on Germany in September 1939 and preceding the Battle of France in May 1940 . During the Phoney War , Graf flew 21 combat sorties without firing his guns and was still considered an unreliable pilot . On 20 January 1940 , his Gruppenkommandeur (Group Commander) Hans @-@ Heinrich Brustellin had Graf transferred to Ergänzungs @-@ Jagdgruppe Merseburg (a supplementary training unit stationed at Merseburg)

where newly trained fighter pilots received instruction from pilots with combat experience . Graf 's completion of the program resulted in his promotion to Leutnant (second lieutenant) on 1 May 1940 . At Merseburg Graf met and befriended two other fighter pilot trainees , Alfred Grislawski and Heinrich Füllgrabe . Ergänzungs @-@ Jagdgruppe Merseburg at the time was under the command of Major (Major) Gotthard Handrick , the 1936 Olympic gold medalist and former commander of Jagdgruppe 88 of the " Condor Legion " during the Spanish Civil War . On 6 October 1940 , Major Handrick was appointed Gruppenkommandeur of III . / Jagdgeschwader 52 (III . / JG 52 ? 3rd group of the 52nd fighter wing) . Handrick had some influence on the personnel rotation within the Luftwaffe and had Graf , Füllgrabe and Grislawski transferred to 9 . / JG 52 (9th Squadron of the 52nd Fighter Wing) on 6 October 1940 as well .

= = = Service in Romania and invasion of Greece = = =

Romania , isolated and threatened following the non @-@ aggression pact signed by Germany and the Soviet Union , sought to uphold its neutrality . The Soviet occupation of Romania 's regions , Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina , consented to by the King Carol II of Romania , caused Carol 's popularity to fall . This gave Ion Antonescu an opportunity to rise to power and he soon established a dictatorship in Romania .

Under Antonescu , Romania 's armed forces were reorganized , supported by a military mission from Germany called Luftwaffenmission Rumänien (Luftwaffe Mission Romania) under the command of Generalleutnant (Lieutenant General) Wilhelm Speidel . Stationed in Bucharest , III . / JG 52 was temporarily renamed I . / Jagdgeschwader 28 (I . / JG 28 ? 1st group of the 28th fighter wing) until 27 December 1940 . Its primary task was to train Romanian Air Force personnel . Here the trio of Füllgrabe , Graf and Grislawski was joined by Ernst Süß , and later by Leopold Steinbatz and Edmund Roßmann .

The German airmen of 9 . / JG 52 spent a number of very relaxing days in Bucharest . Graf even managed to play football when a team of the Deutsche Luftwaffe played against Cyclope Bucharest at the Bucharest Sport 's Arena before thirty thousand spectators . The relaxed life continued until late 1940 when the Romanian internal political situation deteriorated . Ion Antonescu , mainly a nationalist and the Iron Guard , led by Horia Sima , formed a tense alliance climaxing in the brief but bloody civil war from 21 ? 24 January 1941 . The three @-@ day civil war was eventually won by Antonescu with support from the German Army . In May 1941 III . / JG 52 was transferred to Greece to support Operation Merkur , the invasion of Crete . The unit flew mostly ground attack missions during this time .

= = = War against the Soviet Union = = =

In early June the unit transferred back to Romania , and from 22 June the unit supported Army Group South in Operation Barbarossa from bases in the country . On 1 August JG 52 transferred to forward airfields in Ukraine , and on 4 August Graf claimed his first aerial victory against a Polikarpov I @-@ 16 while escorting a Junkers Ju 87 strike . Graf recorded the victory at 06 : 20 . His second victory fell the next day . Graf became an official ace upon achieving his fifth victory on 6 September 1941 . The victory was achieved at night , 18 : 23 local time , in the vicinity of Kremenchug .

JG 52 moved forward into the Soviet Union as the German advance quickened in the late summer and autumn . Flying air superiority missions during the First Battle of Kharkov in September and October 1941 he accounted for 12 victories (nos . 8 ? 20) which included five Mikoyan @-@ Gurevich MiG @-@ 3s . Graf was finding his stride and accounted for 10 enemy aircraft in November and 12 in December 1941 , increasing his personal success to 42 aerial victories by the end of 1941 .

This period had witnessed some bitter aerial combat as Graf experienced the Battle of Rostov and opening phases of the Siege of Sevastopol . Graf remained with his unit as operations ground to a halt , and stalemate . On 24 January , with his tally now 45 victories , he was awarded the Knight 's

Cross of the Iron Cross (German : Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes) . On 3 February 1942 he accounted for his 47th victim , a Sukhoi Su @-@ 2 ground attack aircraft . It was to be his last victory for several weeks . After seven months of ceaseless combat operations he was withdrawn from the frontline and sent on leave to Germany .

On 23 March Graf was appointed Staffelführer (squadron leader) of 9 . / JG 52 . That same day , Graf accounted for four enemy aircraft and by the end of March 1942 had reached 58 aerial victories . 9 . / JG 52 moved to the Crimea in April to support Erich von Manstein 's 11th Army . The Battle of the Kerch Peninsula (Unternehmen Trappenjagd) was designed to eject Red Army forces that had conducted an amphibious landing in the region on 26 December 1941 . Tasked with clearing the skies above Manstein 's limited forces , Graf achieved substantial success . On 30 April 1942 he became an " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " after shooting down six enemy aircraft in the region followed by seven on 2 May and again seven on 8 May . By 11 May the Kerch campaign was reaching its climax ; it ended in complete victory for the Germans and their allies eight days later . On this day Hermann Graf reached a tally of 89 aerial victories . Graf was ordered north immediately to assist German air forces near Kharkov . The Soviets had launched a surprise offensive beginning the Second Battle of Kharkov . Graf recorded 19 air victories in the heavy air fighting . On 14 May 1942 , Graf was credited with his 100th aerial victory . He was the 7th Luftwaffe pilot to achieve the century mark . He was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub) on 17 May 1942 for 100 air victories . Only two days later , his score had increased to 105 , he also received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub und Schwertern) on 19 May 1942 . The 39 claims submitted in May 1942 brought his personal tally to 108 by the time the battle was over . On 24 May 1942 , Graf , together with Leutnant Adolf Dickfeld , flew to the Wolf 's Lair , Hitler 's headquarters in Rastenburg , present @-@ day K?trzyn in Poland , for the official Oak Leaves and Swords presentation the next day . Following the presentation , he was sent on home leave , where he made a number of public appearances .

= = = Towards Stalingrad = = =

Upon return to his post , Graf claimed his next victory on 30 June 1942 . From August onwards , JG 52 supported Army Group South advances towards Stalingrad . Graf had volunteered for service in the Gefechtsverband Stalingrad (Combat Detachment Stalingrad) , which was under the leadership of Hauptmann Wolf @-@ Dietrich Wilcke ; Graf increased his number of aerial victories to 140 by the end of August . In September alone he shot down 62 enemy aircraft , including 5 on 2 September and 10 on 23 September . The aerial fighting was fierce . On 4 September 1942 , he claimed his 150th victory , a Yakovlev Yak @-@ 1 ; he was the second pilot , after Gordon Gollob , to achieve this mark . Graf 's aircraft suffered over 100 hits during the engagement with the Yak @-@ 1 . He barely escaped being killed on several occasions . On 15 September his aircraft cabin was hit by a cannon shell . On 16 September his plane was again hit , this time suffering 30 bullet holes and on 19 September the anti @-@ aircraft artillery shot away half the rudder . His Gruppe was then relocated to the Pitomnik Airfield in Stalingrad .

Flying from Pitomnik Airfield , Graf achieved his 172nd aerial victory on 9 September 1942 for which he was awarded the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves , Swords and Diamonds (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Goldenem Eichenlaub , Schwertern und Brillanten) on 16 September , the fifth member of the Wehrmacht to receive this distinction . Within a time @-@ frame of 235 days he had received every grade of the Knight 's Cross available at the time . The next day , on 17 September , he claimed three more victories and on 23 September , victories 188 to 197 . On 26 September , he became the first pilot in aviation history to claim 200 enemy aircraft shot down . He claimed three victories that day taking his total to an unprecedented 202 . Following this he received a promotion to Major on 1 October 1942 . Some time after this Graf was ordered not to fly operationally anymore , as the High Command was concerned about the potential morale loss if he was to be shot down .

= = = Fighter pilot instructor ? Jagdgruppe Ost = = =

On 28 January 1943 Graf , now a Major , was sent to southern France to command Ergänzungs Jagdgruppe Ost (Supplementary Fighter Group East) , a fighter pilot school . Here newly trained fighter pilots destined for the Eastern Front received their final training from experienced Eastern Front pilots . The main base was at St. Jean d 'Angély 70 miles (110 kilometers) north of Bordeaux on the Atlantic coast . However , he spent most of his time at the Toulouse Blagnac Airport , where he nursed his passion for football . Peter Düttmann , whom Graf would later send to JG 52 , was one of the pilots at the time at Jagdgruppe Ost . Graf selected a Focke Wulf Fw 190 A 5 aircraft for his personal use .

On 11 March Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring was summoned to the Wolf 's Lair by Hitler . Following the Allied aerial bombings of Nuremberg and Paderborn , Hitler blamed Göring for the Luftwaffe 's inability to protect the German cities against the intensified Allied bomber offensive . In particular , German cities were vulnerable to the speedy , multi use de Havilland Mosquito fighter bombers , which had all returned home without having been intercepted by German defenses . Two days after the attack on Paderborn , Göring met with Germany 's leading aircraft manufacturers , Willy Messerschmitt , Ernst Heinkel and Claude Dornier on 18 March 1943 . Göring berated them for their inability to produce a German aircraft capable of competing with the Mosquito . He then withdrew to Berchtesgaden , where he came up with the idea to create a Mosquito intercept task force led by Graf and Herbert Ihlefeld . Graf was ordered to Berchtesgaden , where he received his instructions from Göring personally . In the project , Graf was directly subordinated to Göring and , when asked what he required , responded that he wanted to appoint his own team . Göring approved this request and subsequently Graf was able to call upon his old friends Grislawski , Süß and Füllgrabe , as well as a number of good football players , who had served as administrators , drivers and mechanics in southern France .

Following the meeting with Göring at Berchtesgaden , Graf traveled to Berlin to organize the necessary personnel authorizations at the Luftwaffenpersonalamt (Luftwaffe personnel office) . In Berlin , he took the opportunity to watch a football match at the Olympic Stadium . Here Graf was introduced to the young film actress Jola Jobst . Graf flew back to Toulouse from Berlin , where he learned that his Mosquito assignment had been delayed . Hitler , who had assisted Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War , made repeated efforts to convince Franco to join the war on Germany 's side . Since 1941 Spanish fighter squadrons had operated together with the Luftwaffe in the East and German propaganda had employed images of Graf interacting with the Spaniards . In this role , under Graf 's supervision , the 4ta Escadrilla Azul (4th Blue Squadron) , one of five Spanish voluntary fighter squadrons , received three weeks of specialized fighter pilot training for the Eastern Front from 18 May to 6 June 1943 .

= = = Defense of the Reich = = =

On 11 June 1943 , Graf arrived at the Wiesbaden airfield , where he began the creation of the high altitude fighter unit . Organizationally , it was based on Jagdgruppe Süd . The unit was to be equipped with the Messerschmitt Bf 109 G 5 , a high altitude variant of the Bf 109 equipped with a pressurized cockpit , but arrival of the aircraft was delayed and , in the meantime , Graf 's focus was on football . He invited Sepp Herberger to Wiesbaden to train Graf 's team for one day . During this visit , Herberger encouraged Graf to use his influence to save Germany 's best football players from frontline duty . Subsequently , Graf brought to his unit players like Hermann Eppenhoff , Hermann Koch , Alfons Moog , Franz Hanreiter and Walter Bammes . Graf also requested Fritz Walter , who later captained the West German World Cup team of 1954 , to be transferred to his unit . Walter 's transfer was more difficult to achieve . Graf had to submit his request directly to Generaloberst (Colonel General) Friedrich Fromm , the commander of the Ersatzheer (Reserve Army) . Along with playing football , recruiting his pilots and staff , Graf again encountered the actress Jobst .

His unit received the first 12 Bf 109 G 5 in July 1943 . With one of these aircraft he managed

to reach an altitude of 14 @, @ 300 meters (46 @, @ 900 feet) . Military success came quickly when the unit achieved its first aerial victory over an intruding Mosquito . However , aircraft shortage still prevented him to declare full operational status . In parallel to these events the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) based in England escalated its daylight offensive over Europe . The heavy four @-@ engined Boeing B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress and Consolidated B @-@ 24 Liberator bombers they had first appeared over northern Germany on 27 January 1943 in daytime attacks against the port of Wilhelmshaven . The number of heavy bombers of the USAAF Eighth Air Force surpassed the 800 mark and tight flying combat box formations struck deeply into German airspace by July 1943 . Graf ordered all his available Bf 109s to intercept the American bombers targeted for Kassel on 28 and 30 July 1943 . He was credited with the destruction of his first B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress during one of these attacks .

The unit , consisting of 19 aircraft , was declared combat ready on 31 July 1943 . Graf 's football team , the Rote Jäger (Red Hunters) , was also ready and played its first game on 4 August 1943 , with Graf as goalkeeper . This football team followed Graf in his assignments for the remainder of the war . On 15 August 1943 Graf 's unit was renamed to Jagdgeschwader 50 (JG 50 ? 50th Fighter Wing) . It was expected that JG 50 would be equipped with the Messerschmitt Me 163 rocket fighter . The Me 163 was being tested by Major Wolfgang Späte 's test unit Erprobungskommando 16 (16th Test Commando) at Peenemünde and Rechlin in the summer of 1943 . Following a visit of this test unit , Graf also learned about the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter , and he returned to JG 50 full of optimism . During this assignment Graf shot down three enemy aircraft , including two B @-@ 17 Flying Fortress bombers and a Mosquito in June 1943 .

= = = Wing commander of JG 1 and JG 11 = = =

Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) Hans Philipp , Geschwaderkommodore (Wing Commander) of Jagdgeschwader 1 (JG 1 ? 1st Fighter Wing) , was killed in action on 8 October 1943 . The next day , Graf , officially remaining in command of JG 50 , was appointed acting Geschwaderkommodore of JG 1 and transferred to Jever . Graf subsequently appointed Grislawski as acting @-@ commander of JG 50 . The Eighth Air Force flew their Second Raid on Schweinfurt on 14 October 1943 . Although costly to the attackers ? 77 heavy bombers were destroyed by either German fighters or by the anti @-@ aircraft fire at the price of 46 German fighters lost ? Göring was not satisfied . On 23 October , Graf and Major Anton Mader , Geschwaderkommodore of Jagdgeschwader 11 (JG 11 ? 11th Fighter Wing) were summoned to a meeting with Göring at Deelen Air Base near Arnhem . Graf , Mader and Unteroffizier Karl Blaha as a rear observer , made the journey from Jever in a Messerschmitt Bf 108 Taifun . During this flight they were nearly shot down by a flight of two Mosquitos over the North Sea Coast .

Despite their successes , after the October meeting , Göring disbanded the unit , and it was absorbed into I. / Jagdgeschwader 301 ; Graf was promoted to Oberst (Colonel) and appointed Geschwaderkommodore (Wing Commander) of JG 11 on 11 November . JG 11 was tasked with Reichsverteidigung (Defense of the Reich) , and despite officially being banned from flying operational missions Graf managed to down six more aircraft over the next four months . On 29 March 1944 Graf shot down one P @-@ 51 Mustang and in the confusion of the dog fight collided with another . He managed to bail out , but was injured and had to spend some time in a hospital . While on convalescence leave Graf married the German actress Jobst on 24 June 1944 .

= = = Wing commander of JG 52 = = =

Following his convalescence , Graf was appointed Geschwaderkommodore of his old unit JG 52 by the General der Jagdflieger (General of Fighters) , Generalleutnant Adolf Galland . The Geschwaderstab and I. / JG 52 were based at Kraków in southern Poland at the time and the men of JG 52 gave Graf a welcome celebration on 20 September 1944 . With German forces in retreat by this time , Graf did not have any opportunity for further air combat . Graf disobeyed an order from General Hans Seidemann , who had ordered him and Erich Hartmann to fly to the British sector to

avoid capture by the Russians when the rest of the wing surrendered to the Soviets . Together with his fellow pilots and ground personnel he marched through Bohemia toward Bavaria , where he surrendered his unit to the 90th US Infantry Division near Písek on 8 May 1945 and became a prisoner of war (POW) .

= = Prisoner of war = =

Along with most of the JG 52 personnel , Graf was handed over by the Americans to the Soviets shortly after his surrender on 15 May 1945 . Having become famous via the Nazi propaganda machine and as the Commander of JG 52 , Graf was singled out for attention by the Soviets . On 8 December 1945 he was moved from the prisoner of war camp Nr. 150 in Gryazovets to the prisoner of war camp Nr. 27 in Krasnogorsk . He was then moved to the war camp Nr. 69 (Heimkehrerlager Gronenfelde) near Frankfurt (Oder) in East Germany . There he was released from captivity on 25 December 1949 .

This relatively early release was perceived by many to be caused by co @-@ operation with his Soviet captors , something for which his fellow pilots criticized him , especially following a 1950s book by fellow fighter ace and Soviet POW Hans " Assi " Hahn entitled " I Speak the Truth " (Ich spreche die Wahrheit) . This led to Graf 's exclusion from post @-@ war Luftwaffe comrade associations .

= = Later life = =

Initially , Graf had a hard time obtaining work , but his relationships in the football community helped him . Sepp Herberger introduced Graf to Roland Endler , an electronics manufacturer (" Elektro @-@ Schweiss @-@ Industrie GmbH ") from Neuss , who also was president of the FC Bayern Munich football club between 1958 and 1962 . Endler employed Graf as a salesman in his company , and Graf eventually advanced to branch leader in Baden @-@ Württemberg and Chief of Sales .

Graf 's marriage with Jobst collapsed and they divorced . He remarried twice thereafter . His third marriage in May 1959 with Helga Schröck resulted in the birth of his son , Hermann @-@ Ulrich , in 1959 , and his daughter Birgit , in 1961 . In 1965 , Graf was diagnosed with Parkinson 's disease , a condition that affected many of the high @-@ altitude flyers , which had a slow deteriorating effect on his health . Graf died in his hometown Engen on 4 November 1988 .

= = Aerial victory credits = =

Graf was credited with 212 aerial victories , claimed in over 830 combat missions , 10 on the Western Front which included six four @-@ engined @-@ bombers and one Mosquito , and 212 on the Eastern Front .

This and the ? (Ace of spades) indicates those aerial victories which made Graf an " ace @-@ in @-@ a @-@ day " , a term which designates a fighter pilot who has shot down five or more airplanes in a single day . This along with the * (asterisk) indicates an Herausschuss (separation shot) ? a severely damaged heavy bomber forced to separate from his combat box which was counted as an aerial victory .

= = Awards = =

Wound Badge in Silver

Ehrenpokal der Luftwaffe (9 December 1941)

Combined Pilots @-@ Observation Badge in Gold with Diamonds

Romanian Pilots Badge

Crimea Shield

Romanian Knight of Order of the Crown (23 May 1941)

Iron Cross (1939)

2nd Class (9 August 1941)

1st Class (31 August 1941)

Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe for Fighter Pilots in Gold

in Bronze (15 May 1941)

in Silver (25 August 1941)

in Gold (10 November 1941)

German Cross in Gold in April 1942

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

Knight 's Cross on 24 January 1942 as Leutnant of the Reserves and pilot in the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

93rd Oak Leaves on 17 May 1942 as Leutnant of the Reserves and Staffelführer of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

11th Swords on 19 May 1942 as Leutnant of the Reserves and Staffelkapitän of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

5th Diamonds on 16 September 1942 as Oberleutnant of the Reserves and Staffelkapitän of the 9 . / Jagdgeschwader 52

Mentioned five times in the Wehrmachtbericht

= = = Dates of rank = = =

= = = Biography = = =