

Germany's Indomitable Fighter Ace Of World War II

Erich Alfred Hartmann was born on April 19, 1922, in Weissach, Germany. He was the son of a doctor and grew up in a middle-class family. Hartmann was a bright and athletic child, and he excelled in school. He also had a passion for flying, and he built model airplanes as a child. In 1940, Hartmann joined the Luftwaffe, the German air force. He was assigned to Jagdgeschwader 52 (JG 52), one of the most successful fighter wings in the Luftwaffe. Hartmann quickly proved to be a skilled pilot, and he soon began to rack up aerial victories. By the end of the war, Hartmann had claimed 352 aerial victories, making him the most successful fighter pilot in the history of aerial warfare.



Iron Man: Rudolf Berthold: Germany's Indomitable Fighter Ace of World War I by Peter Kilduff

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 30868 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 224 pages
Lending	: Enabled



Hartmann's success as a fighter pilot was due to a combination of factors. He was a skilled marksman, and he had a natural instinct for aerial combat.

He was also a cool and collected pilot, and he was able to remain calm under pressure. Hartmann also benefited from the excellent training and equipment provided by the Luftwaffe. The Messerschmitt Bf 109, the aircraft that Hartmann flew, was one of the best fighter planes of World War II. Hartmann also had the support of a skilled ground crew, which kept his aircraft in top condition.

Hartmann's aerial victories were achieved against a variety of Allied aircraft, including the Supermarine Spitfire, the North American P-51 Mustang, and the Soviet Yakovlev Yak-3. Hartmann was also credited with destroying several Il-2 Sturmoviks, heavily armored ground-attack aircraft that were feared by German pilots. Hartmann's most famous aerial victory was against a Soviet ace, Major Ivan Kozhedub. Kozhedub was one of the most successful Soviet fighter pilots of World War II, and he claimed 64 aerial victories. In April 1944, Hartmann and Kozhedub engaged in a dogfight over the Kuban region of southern Russia. Hartmann shot down Kozhedub's aircraft, and Kozhedub was forced to bail out. Hartmann's victory over Kozhedub was a major propaganda coup for the Germans, and it helped to boost morale among German pilots.

Hartmann's success as a fighter pilot came at a price. He was shot down 14 times during the war, and he was wounded several times. In 1944, Hartmann was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds, the highest military decoration in Nazi Germany. Hartmann was also promoted to the rank of major, and he was given command of JG 52. Hartmann continued to fly combat missions until the end of the war, and he claimed his last aerial victory on May 8, 1945, the day that Germany surrendered.

After the war, Hartmann was captured by the Americans. He was held as a prisoner of war for ten years, and he was not released until 1955. After his release, Hartmann returned to Germany, where he worked as a flight instructor. He also wrote a book about his experiences as a fighter pilot, titled "The Blond Knight of Germany." Hartmann died in 1993 at the age of 71. He is buried in the Waldfriedhof Cemetery in Stuttgart, Germany.

Erich Hartmann was one of the most successful fighter pilots in the history of aerial warfare. His courage, skill, and determination made him a legend among German pilots. Hartmann's story is an inspiration to all who dare to dream big and strive for greatness.

Legacy

Erich Hartmann's legacy as a fighter pilot is secure. He is considered to be one of the greatest fighter pilots of all time, and his record of 352 aerial victories is unlikely to ever be broken. Hartmann's skill as a pilot was matched by his courage and determination. He was a fearless fighter who never hesitated to engage the enemy, even when outnumbered.

Hartmann's legacy is also one of sportsmanship and fair play. He was known for his chivalry towards his opponents, and he always refused to fire on a pilot who had bailed out of his aircraft.

Hartmann's legacy extends beyond his aerial victories. He was also a gifted teacher and mentor, and he helped to train a new generation of German fighter pilots. Hartmann's book, "The Blond Knight of Germany," is still considered to be one of the best books ever written about aerial warfare. Hartmann's legacy is one of courage, skill, determination, and sportsmanship. He is an inspiration to all who dare to dream big and strive for greatness.

Awards and decorations

* Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds
* German Cross in Gold * Iron Cross (1st and 2nd class) * Wound Badge (Gold) * Front Flying Clasp of the Luftwaffe in Gold with Diamonds * Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe * Mentioned three times in the Wehrmachtbericht

Books

* Hartmann, Erich. *The Blond Knight of Germany*. London: Pan Books, 1980. * Toliver, Raymond F., and Constable, Trevor J. *The Blond Knight of Germany: The Life and Career of Erich Hartmann*. Nashville: Battery Press, 1985.

External links

* Erich Hartmann's website * Erich Hartmann's obituary in the New York Times



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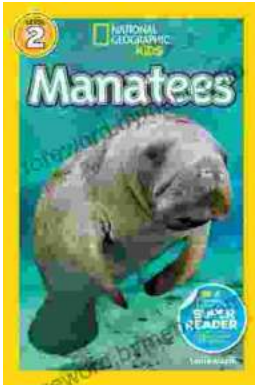
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