Karl-Heinz Langer

Appearance hide
Text
Small
Standard
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Contents hide

(Top)
Career
War against the Soviet Union
Squadron leader
Defense of the Reich
Later life
Summary of career
Aerial victory claims
Awards
Notes
References
Citations
Bibliography

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Karl-Heinz Langer	
Born	19 April 1914 Görlitz, German Empire
Died	6 May 1955 (aged 41) Remscheid, West Germany
Allegiance	Nazi Germany
Service / branch	Luftwaffe
Rank	*Major* (major)
Unit	JG 3
Commands	III./JG 3
Battles / wars	World War II • Eastern Front • Defense of the Reich • Operation Bodenplatte
Awards	Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross

Karl-Heinz Langer (19 April 1914 – 6 May 1955) was a Luftwaffe ace and recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross during World War II. The Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross was awarded to recognise extreme battlefield bravery or successful military leadership. During his career he was credited with 30 aerial victories in 486 missions, 10 on the Western Front and 20 on the Eastern Front.

Career [edit]

War against the Soviet Union [edit]

The *Gruppe* relocated to an airfield at Moderówka on 18 June where the *Gruppe* concluded their last preparations for Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. At the start of the campaign, JG 3 was subordinated to the V. *Fliegerkorps* (5th Air Corps), under command of *General der Flieger* Robert Ritter von Greim, which was part of *Luftflotte* 4 (4th Air Fleet), under command of *Generaloberst* Alexander Löhr. These air elements supported *Generalfeldmarschall* Gerd von Rundstedt's *Heeresgruppe Süd* (Army Group South), with the objective of capturing Ukraine and its capital Kiev.[1]

In December 1942, III. *Gruppe*'s primary task was providing fighter escort to Junkers Ju 52 transport aircraft and Heinkel He 111 bombers shuttling supplies for the encircled German forces fighting in the Battle of Stalingrad. On 17 December, Langer and the *Geschwaderkommodore* (wing commander) of JG 3, *Major* Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke, escorted 16 Ju 52 transport aircraft to the Pitomnik Airfield which was located within the Stalingrad pocket. While taking off at Pitomnik Airfield, his Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 (*Werknummer* 13739—factory number) ran over unexploded ordnance which then exploded, destroying his aircraft and significantly injuring Langer. He was later flown out of the pocket on a Ju 52.[2]

Squadron leader [edit]

Langer was appointed *Staffelkapitän* (squadron leader) of 7. *Staffel* (7th squadron) of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 (JG 3—3rd Fighter Wing) on 1 June 1943. He succeeded *Oberleutnant* Eberhard von Boremski who was wounded in combat the day before.[3]

On 14 July 1943 during the Battle of Kursk, Langer was temporarily given command of III. *Gruppe* (3rd group) of JG 3 after its former commander *Hauptmann* Wolfgang Ewald was shot down behind enemy lines and taken prisoner of war. In consequence, command of 7. *Staffel* was briefly given to *Leutnant* Hans Schleef. When on 20 July, *Hauptmann* Walther Dahl took command of the *Gruppe*, Langer returned to his 7. *Staffel*.[4][5]

III. *Gruppe* flew its last combat missions on the Eastern Front on 1 August 1943. The next day, the *Gruppe* was ordered to Chasiv Yar and then back to Germany where it was based at Münster-Handorf Airfield.[6]

Defense of the Reich [edit]

III. *Gruppe* arrived in Münster-Handorf on 3 August where Dahl took over command of the unit.[7] The *Gruppe* immediately began preparations for Defense of the Reich (*Reichsverteidigung*) missions and was subordinated to Fighter Leader for the Holland area (*Jagdfliegerführer Holland*).[7]

On 14 October, during the Second Raid on Schweinfurt, Langer claimed the destruction of Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber shot down 8 kilometers (5.0 miles) east of Hammelburg.[8] In this engagement, his Bf 109 G-6 (*Werknummer* 26924) was shot down by defensive fire. Langer was forced to bail out near Hammelburg.[9] Due to the injuries sustained, he was replaced by *Leutnant* Erwin Stahlberg as leader of 7. *Staffel*.[10] Following his convalescence, Langer served with *Ergänzungs-Jagdgruppe Ost*, a fighter pilot training unit.[11]

On 21 May 1944, Langer was appointed *Gruppenkommandeur* (group commander) of III. *Gruppe* of JG 3 based at Ansbach Airfield. He thus succeeded Dahl who was transferred.[12] On 27 May, the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) Eighth Air Force sent 1,126 heavy bombers, escorted by 1,135 fighter aircraft, to railroad infrastructure and Luftwaffe airfields in southwest Germany and northeast France. III. *Gruppe* led by Langer were scrambled at 11:26 and vectored to Karlsruhe where they began their pursuit of an escorted B-17 bomber formation heading for Strasbourg. III. *Gruppe* attacked the bombers south of Strasbourg and before the escorting fighters broke off the attack, III. *Gruppe* claimed two B-17 bombers shot down, including one by Langer. The claim filed by Langer was in fact an *Herausschuss* (separation shot)—a severely damaged heavy bomber forced to separate from its combat box which was counted as an aerial victory. In this engagement, III. *Gruppe* lost six fighters to the escorting USAAF fighters.[13]

On 20 April 1945, Langer was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross (*Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes*).[14]

Later life [edit]

Langer died on 6 May 1955 at the age of 41 in Fischbach, West Germany.[15]

Summary of career [edit]

Aerial victory claims [edit]

Langer was credited with 30 aerial victories claimed in 486 combat missions.[16] Mathews and Foreman, authors of *Luftwaffe Aces — Biographies and Victory Claims*, researched the German Federal Archives and found documentation for 29 aerial victory claims, plus one further unconfirmed claim. This number includes ten on the Western Front, including four four-engined bombers, and 19 on the Eastern Front.[17]

Victory claims were logged to a map-reference (PQ = *Planquadrat*), for example "PQ 4056". The Luftwaffe grid map (*Jägermeldenetz*) covered all of Europe, western Russia and North Africa and was composed of rectangles measuring 15 minutes of latitude by 30 minutes of longitude, an area of about 360 square miles (930 km²). These sectors were then subdivided into 36 smaller units to give a location area 3 km × 4 km (1.9 mi × 2.5 mi) in size.[18]

Chronicle of aerial victories [hide]

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.
This and the ? (question mark) indicates information discrepancies listed by Prien, Stemmer, Rodeike, Bock, Mathews and Foreman.

Claim	Date	Time	Type	Location	Claim	Date	Time	Type	Location
– 7. *Staffel* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 –[17] Operation Barbarossa — 22 June – 6 November 1941									
1	14 July 1941	07:10	I-153[19]		2	5 October 1941	14:55	DB-3[20]	
– 7. *Staffel* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Eastern Front – 10 February 1942 – 14 April 1942									
3	9 March 1942	11:08	I-61 (MiG-3)	12 km (7.5 mi) southwest of Salustsche[22]	4	18 March 1942	10:15	Pe-2[23]	
– *Stab* III. *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Eastern Front – 19 May 1942 – 3 February 1943									
5	24 August 1942	13:50	R-5	Zarjew[24]	9	17 October 1942	06:23	Il-2	PQ 4056, west of Rulew[25]
6	24 August 1942	13:56	MiG-1	east of Leninsk[24]	10	26 October 1942	14:15	Il-2	PQ 49357, Bassargino railway station[25]
7	3 September 1942	15:53	LaGG-3	Akelin[26]	11	28 December 1942	—	Yak-1	Stalingrad[27]
8	1 October 1942	06:57	LaGG-3	PQ 40793, northeast Gratschi[28] vicinity of Spartak					
– 7. *Staffel* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Eastern Front – 1 June – 1 August 1943									
12	5 July 1943	11:16	La-5	southeast of Kobenaja[29] southeast of Rakitnoye	14	21 July 1943	09:45	Il-2	14 km (8.7 mi) northeast of Dworeznaja[30] 9 km (5.6 mi) northwest of Bogoroditskoye
13	7 July 1943	04:07	Il-5	northwest of Vovchansk[31]	15	31 July 1943	11:15	Il-2	Kuybyshevo[30]
– 7. *Staffel* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Defense of the Reich — 8 August – 14 October 1943									
16	14 October 1943	14:40	B-17	8 km (5.0 mi) east of Hammelburg[32]					
– *Stab* III. *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Defense of the Reich — 1 January – 5 June 1944									
17	27 May 1944	12:17	B-17*	PQ 04 Ost S/DO, southwest of Strasbourg[33]	19	30 May 1944	11:17	B-17	Dessau[33]
18	30 May 1944	11:12	B-17	Dessau[33]					
– *Stab* III. *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Normandy Invasion — 6 June – 22 September 1944									
20	21 June 1944	19:10	P-47	PQ 04 Ost N/AD-7[34] vicinity of Houdan	22	26 July 1944	14:50	P-38	PQ 14 West BU-2/3[34] east of Briouze
21	21 June 1944	19:25	P-51	PQ 04 Ost N/AC-2[34] vicinity of Dreux	23	19 August 1944	09:10	P-47	PQ 05 Ost UB-6/1[34] vicinity of Bernay
– *Stab* III. *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Defense of the Reich — 24 November – 31 December 1944									
24?[Note 1]	23 December 1944	—	B-26[34]		25	27 December 1944	—	P-47[35]	
– *Stab* III. *Gruppe* of *Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet" –[21] Eastern Front — 1 January – May 1945									
26	19 February 1945	08:55	Boston[36]		29	19 April 1945	—	Il-2[36]	
27	6 March 1945	15:24	Il-2[36]		30	23 April 1945	—	Yak-3[36]	
28	18 March 1945	—	Il-2[36]						

Awards [edit]

- Iron Cross (1939) 2nd and 1st Class[15]
- Honor Goblet of the Luftwaffe (12 August 1944)[16]
- German Cross in Gold on 26 July 1944 as *Hauptmann* in the III./*Jagdgeschwader* 3[37]
- Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 20 April 1945 as *Major* and Gruppenkommandeur of the III./*Jagdgeschwader* 3 "Udet"[38][39]

Notes [edit]

1. ^ According to Mathews and Foreman, this claim is unconfirmed.[21]

References [edit]

Citations [edit]

1. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 105.
2. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, pp. 199–200, 454.
3. ^ Prien et al. 2012, p. 124.
4. ^ Prien et al. 2012, pp. 124, 137.
5. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 212.
6. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 214.
7. ^ a b Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 265.
8. ^ Prien et al. 2008, pp. 321, 329.
9. ^ Prien et al. 2008, p. 330.
10. ^ Prien et al. 2008, p. 326.
11. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 308.
12. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 442.
13. ^ Prien & Stemmer 1996, pp. 309, 503.
14. ^ Weal 2013, p. 70.
15. ^ a b Dixon 2023, p. 222.
16. ^ a b Obermaier 1989, p. 153.
17. ^ a b Mathews & Foreman 2015, pp. 720–721.
18. ^ *Planquadrat*.
19. ^ Prien et al. 2003, p. 142.
20. ^ Prien et al. 2003, p. 148.
21. ^ a b c d e f g h i Mathews & Foreman 2015, p. 721.
22. ^ Prien et al. 2005, p. 34.
23. ^ Prien et al. 2005, p. 35.
24. ^ a b Prien et al. 2006, p. 221.
25. ^ a b Prien et al. 2006, p. 226.
26. ^ Prien et al. 2006, p. 223.
27. ^ Prien et al. 2006, p. 228.
28. ^ Prien et al. 2006, p. 225.
29. ^ Prien et al. 2012, p. 131.
30. ^ a b Prien et al. 2012, p. 133.
31. ^ Prien et al. 2012, p. 132.
32. ^ Prien et al. 2008, p. 329.
33. ^ a b c Prien, Stemmer & Bock 2018, p. 343.
34. ^ a b c d e Prien, Stemmer & Bock 2018, p. 344.
35. ^ Prien, Stemmer & Bock 2018, p. 345.
36. ^ a b c d e Prien & Stemmer 1996, p. 505.
37. ^ Patzwall & Scherzer 2001, p. 269.
38. ^ Fellgiebel 2000, p. 284.
39. ^ Scherzer 2007, p. 493.

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Military offices		
Preceded by **Major Walther Dahl**	**Commander of III. Jagdgeschwader 3** 21 May 1944 – 8 May 1945	Succeeded by **None**

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