

Hans-Ulrich Rudel - Stuka Ace
The greatest tank destroyer in history has to be Hans-Ulrich Rudel of the Luftwaffe. He destroyed 519 Soviet tanks. Hans-Ulrich Rudel was born in Silesia in 1916, the son of a clergyman. He excelled in sports and, in 1936 he joined the Luftwaffe as a Cadet officer.

Poland
He served as a reconnaissance observer during the Polish campaign in September 1939. In 1940, he was admitted to the Stuka (Sturzkampfflugzeug-dive bomber) training course near Stuttgart.

Crete
Rudel took part in the airborne invasion of Crete, May 1941.

Russia
On 23 June 1941 at 3am, he flew his first combat dive-bombing mission into the Soviet Union as part of Operation Barbarossa. In the next 18 hours, he flew 4 combat missions.

Battleship Marat
On 23 September 1941, Rudel's Air Wing attacked the Soviet fleet in the Leningrad area. During this attack Rudel sunk the Soviet battleship Marat, with a single 1,000kg bomb hitting its ammunition store and breaking the ship in half.

Decorations
On Christmas, 1941 Rudel flew his 500th mission and on 30 December, 1941 he was awarded the German Cross in gold, by General Freiherr Wolfram von Richthofen (a cousin of the great WWI Air Ace).

Stalingrad
Hans Rudel was then sent to Graz to train new Stuka crews. On his own request he was returned to the Eastern front in June 1942, and received command of the 1st Staffel of the 1st Wing of Stukageschwader 2, operating in the Stalingrad area.

Sinking Ships
On 10 February 1943, Hans Rudel flew his 1,000th mission and was posted to the newly formed "Panzerjagdkommando Weiss". The modified Stukas were armed with two 37mm canons, one under each wing, with just 6 rounds of ammunition. In the space of three weeks, Rudel destroyed 70 Soviet boats in the Black Sea.

Destroying Tanks

helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 12pt;">In March 1943, during a tank battle at Belgorod, Rudel knocked out his first tank with the prototype tank-busting Stuka. "The tank exploded like a bomb bits of it crashing down behind us."</p> <p>
</p> <p>Tank Busting
These Ju-87 G-1s were nicknamed Panzerknacker (Tank Buster or Kanonenvogel - Cannon Bird). In April 1943, Hans Rudel was awarded Oak leaves to his Knights Cross and his squadron of tank busting Ju-87 G-1s were assigned to support the German Panzers during Operation Citadel in the battle of Kursk.</p> <p>
</p> <p>Kursk
On the first day of the battle, Rudel knocked out 4 Soviet tanks and by evening his score had grown to 12: "We were all seized with a kind of passion for the chase from the glorious feeling of having saved so much German blood with every Soviet tank destroyed."</p> <p>
</p> <p>Tactical Innovation
Rudel developed new tactics for Panzerstaffels, finding that the best way to knock out Russian T-34s was from the rear, as their mounted engine and cooling system did not permit the insulation of heavy armour plating at the back.</p> <p>
</p> <p>Behind Enemy Lines
In March 1944, he flew his 1,500th mission and was promoted to the rank of Major. During a mission behind the lines, one of his squadron was shot down and crash-landed. Rudel decided to land to rescue his comrades in enemy territory. But after landing, he realised that because of the soft ground they would be unable to take off. They were forced to escape on foot towards German lines while being pursued by Russians. Rudel had to swim 600m in ice-cold water of the Dniester River.</p> <p>
</p> <p>Highest Awards
On 29 March 1944, Major Hans-Ulrich Rudel was awarded Diamonds to his Knights Cross, with Oak leaves and Swords, the highest German Military award.</p> <p>
</p> <p>Wounded
In November 1944, while flying near Budapest, he was shot in the thigh, yet returned to service only a few days later with his leg in a plaster cast.</p> <p>
</p> <p>Unique
On 1 January 1945, Rudel was awarded the Knights Cross with Golden Oak leaves, Swords and Diamonds. He was the only recipient of this award which was especially created for him.</p> <p>
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Amputation

In February 1945, Rudel was seriously wounded and his right thigh was shattered by anti-aircraft fire near Lebus. He managed to land in German held territory and was quickly taken to a field hospital where his leg was amputated. In Berlin he had an artificial limb fitted and returned to his Squadron.

Captured

On 8 May 1945, when Germany surrendered, Colonel Hans Rudel flew his last mission from Bohemia to escape capture by the Soviets. He was interrogated first in England and then in France and eventually returned to Bavaria.

Unprecedented

During his career in the Luftwaffe, Rudel flew over 2,530 missions, shot down 11 enemy aircraft, destroyed 519 Soviet tanks, 150 artillery pieces, 70 boats, over 1,000 military vehicles, 2 LAGG-3 fighters, an Il-2 Stormovik and sunk a destroyer, 2 cruisers and the Soviet battleship Marat. Rudel was responsible for such huge losses to the Red Army that Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, placed a one hundred thousand Rubel price on his head.

Firepower

It is calculated that Hans Rudel flew over 600,000 km, using more than 5 million litres of fuel. He dropped over a million kilograms of bombs, fired over a million machine gun rounds, 150,000 20mm rounds and over 5,000 37mm rounds.

Outstanding Dedication

Rudel was described as an outstanding pilot who hated to take leave, even sick leave. Even after he lost his leg, he said that he was not depressed since he could still do what he loved, to fly and to destroy the enemy.

Extraordinary Courage

His personal bravery, toughness and unparalleled determination marks him out as one of the most extraordinary pilots in history. Rudel's famous quote was: "Verloren ist nur, wer sich selbst aufgibt" ("Lost are only those, who abandon themselves").

Author

Rudel published two books: We Frontline Soldiers and our Opinion to the Rearmament of Germany and Daggerthrust. In 1953, he published his War Diary entitled: Trotzden (Nevertheless). In 1985 his diary was published and two of the greatest Allied fighter pilots, Douglas Bader and Pierre Clostermann, wrote warm and positive Forewords to this edition.

Dr. Peter Hammond

The Reformation Society

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