

## Erich Hartmann

### "The Blonde Knight Of Germany" or "The Black Devil Of Ukraine" for the Russians



Name: Erich "Bubi" Hartmann...aka "Karaya one"

Victories: 352 total, seven P-51s over Rumania( Ploesti), all others Eastern Front, all in Bf 109.

Sorties: 1,400 total, 850 aerial combats

Units Flown With: JG52, a brief stay at JG53 and Me-262 "Erprobungs" unit

Shot Down: 16 times, never wounded

### The world's top ace of all the time

*"Of all my accomplishments I may have achieved during the war, I am proudest of the fact that I never lost a wingman"*

ERICH HARTMANN, the world's top-scoring fighter pilot, shot down the equivalent of almost 15 Allied squadrons in aerial combat. The Russian pilots both feared and hated him, and called him the "Black Devil of Ukraine". Flying 1,425 missions over the Caucasus, southern Russia, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Hartmann engaged in over 800 dogfights and suffered 16 accidents or equipment failures.

Hartmann was only 17 when the war began. He was born in Weissach, Wurtemberg on April 19, 1922. He was the son of a physician and his mother, a brilliant sportswoman was a pilot and an aviation enthusiast.

Erich's life was quite adventurous already in his early childhood. A cousin of his father, while on a visit to his homeland - at the time he was Germany's consul in Shanghai - advised the young doctor to leave the hyperinflation, food shortages and political and economic chaos of Germany behind him and come to China. Wanderlust took over the young doctor, he went to China and remained there.

Erich's father opened his practice in the city of Changsha on the Xiang, a tributary of the mighty Yangtsee Kiang river. He was the only white doctor in the city and was held in high regard and

was well paid by the Chinese. This allowed his wife and two boys Erich and Alfred to later follow him.

There was a beautiful island in the middle of the Xiang river, which his father bought to himself, and built a house there. For the boys the island was a little paradise, that imposed no limits to childhood fantasies. Erich has told that the good memories of that place haunted him for decades. The boys learned to speak Chinese during those years.

But the idyllic life in the far east was not to last. Revolutionary slogans and attacks against the "foreign Devil" became stronger and stronger. Germans anyway remained unmolested, because their government was not involved in the disputes.

One morning Dr. Hartmann made his way into the town and found the severed heads of many of his English friends stuffed to the fenceposts along the road. He took the only logical step available, and sent his wife and boys back to Germany via the Trans Siberian Railroad. Dr. Hartmann returned to Germany about a year later, and made his home and practice in the vicinity of Weil im Schönburg. His house had a roof that looked like a Chinese pagoda.

Erich's mother taught him to fly, and at the ripe age of 14 he had earned his glider pilot "C" license. He flew powered plane two years later. Erich's real goal in the life was becoming a doctor like his father, but the currents of the world politics decided otherwise. Upon graduating from college in late 1940, after already passing the university entrance examinations, he joined the army, transferring to the Luftwaffe six months later. All the time he loathed the military drill, and could only bear it because of his love to flying.

An adept pupil, he soloed in less than one month, but experienced three crash landings during the training course.

Hartmann reached the front at the age of 20 in late 1942 and didn't fly during the easy years of 41' and 42' in the East.

By October, 1942, he was assigned to 7/JG 52 based in Soldatskaya in the Caucasus. Erich was assigned as Rottenflieger (wingman) for major Walter Krupinski.

His early missions were severely lacking compared to what Hartmann was to become. Hartmann's first battle was, to say the least, disastrous. Flying as wingman to feldvebel Rossmann he first spoiled his leader's attack by going for the kill himself, and then mistook his leader's Bf 109 for a Russian fighter and fled in panic. At the end of the flight he ran out of fuel and crash landed, totaling his 109. (see separate story further in this document)

If it wasn't for his instructor, and leader Krupinski, Hartmann might very well have quit being a fighter pilot. Hartmann actually volunteered to be sent to the infantry due to his bad performance. Luckily for the Luftwaffe (and unluckily for the Russians) Krupinski believed in Hartmann and his abilities.

Krupinski took the youngster in tow with a relaxed combat attitude. He taught Erich to get so close to his adversary that a hit was guaranteed before firing. This lesson, coupled with the fact that Hartmann was a crack shot, enabled Erich to score most of his hits with very little ammunition use. "Bubi" Hartmann scored his first victory, a Shturmovik, on November 5, 1942, but lost his plane as the Il-2's rear gunner's 12.7mm Brezin hit his oil-cooler.



A kill, but with a cost...

By September 18, 1943, Hartmann had completed 300 missions with 95 victories to his credit. On October 29, he was awarded the Ritterkreuz (Knight's Cross Of the Iron Cross) for his 148th victory. He was now Staffelkapitan of 7/JG 52, and recipient of the Eichenlaub (Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves) on March 2, 1944, for his 200th victory. With his combat style fully developed, Erich Hartmann rode the crest of success in the summer of 1944. After receiving the Schwertern (Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords) on July 4 for his 239th kill, he scored 59 victories in 16 missions, and downed 78 Soviet aircraft in four weeks. He shot down 8 adversaries on August 23, and eleven more the following day for a total of 301 victories! Oblt. Hartmann was awarded the Brillanten (Diamonds) to his Ritterkreuz on August 25, 1944. By that time 7/JG 52 had shot down 1,200 Soviet aircraft, more than any other Staffel in the Luftwaffe.



After 300<sup>th</sup> victory

Before the decoration ceremony for his diamonds, he was demanded to hand away his sidearm before the meeting with Hitler. Hartmann told the generals, that if Hitler could not trust his front line officers, he could as well stuff his diamonds into... After a brief confusion he was allowed to carry his pistol.

Hartmann was transferred to the leadership of 4/JG 52 in October, 1944, and advanced to Gruppenkommandeur of I/JG 52 on February 1, 1945. His score continued to mount, despite the fact that most Russian pilots turned and ran when they saw Hartmann's "Black Tulip" Messerschmitt approaching. Erich's tactic was to strike quickly, getting as close as possible before firing, and then "hit and run", using the Messerschmitt's excellent climbing ability to advantage. Then he would repeat the process, taking advantage of his plane's good acceleration in dive. Unlike Hans Joachim Marseille, Hartmann hardly ever scored multiple victories in a

single pass. Bubi generally looked for a high cloud behind which to hide between attacks. His tactics were not unlike those of Manfred von Richthofen, the top scorer of the First World War.

During his combat career on the Russian front, Hartmann met U.S. planes over Romania, shooting down seven P-51 Mustangs during these engagements. One of the U.S. units engaged was the 334th Fighter Squadron and it is thought that U.S. Ace Lt. Ralph K. Hoffer (16.5 victories), might have been one of Hartmann's victims. (see the separate story at the end)

In the late morning of May 8, 1945, Hptm. Hartmann led the Schwarm (flight) over Czechoslovakia to spot the advancing Russian troops. He saw a Soviet Yak fighter performing aerobatics over the town of Brunn, apparently in celebration of the pending Russian victory. Erich struck quickly and the hapless aerobat became his 352nd victory.

After surrendering to the Americans at Pisek, Hartmann was turned over to the Russians by the U.S. authorities. Once the Soviets realized that they had the Black Devil as a prisoner, he was singled out for especially brutal treatment, including long periods of solitary confinement in total darkness. Using every persuasive device known, the Russians could not convert Hartmann to Communism, and get him to join the airforce of DDR.

After a mock-up war-crime trial Hartmann was held in prison for ten years, far longer than the other POW's. While he was illegally detained in Russia, Hartmann's 3 1/2-year-old-son, whom he had never seen, died. It was only after Chancellor Adenauer personally visited Moscow in 1955 and arranged for his release that a gaunt and haggard Erich Hartmann was released by his captors, broken in body but not in spirit.

Hartmann quickly regained his health and joined the new West German Air Force in 1959, becoming Kommodore of JG 71, the new Richthofen Geschwader based at Fliegerhorst Ahlhorn in Oldenburg. JG 71 was the first of the new Geschwadern formed by the Federal Republic's air force.



Hartmann's F-86 Sabre, the last "Black Tulip"

After his negative recommendation to the German Air Force about the F-104 Starfighter and his dispute with General Kamhuber Obstlt. Erich Hartmann fell from favor. Unfortunately for him, he gave direct answers to people who asked him direct questions and he backed his opinions. Through the grapevine, his views about the F-104 made their way up to the high political circles and fueled the already wide-spread belief that he was not the man to be considered for special positions of leadership. That the F-104's fell from the sky, and in surprising numbers, did not change things for him. He had been tripped up. Even though he was acquitted of investigations and hearings which resulted from bureaucratic trivialities, he was sent to a staff position near Cologne. In 1968 at the energetic recommendation of his old friend General

Gunther Rall, he was finally promoted to Oberst(Colonel).On September 30, 1970, Erich Hartmann voluntarily retired from active service.

On a grey day in 1993, Oberst(ret) Erich Hartmann lost the ultimate battle of his life.An illness that had troubled him before in late 70's, and originated back to his 10 1/2 years of hard labour imprisonment in Russia, finally beat him.

## **Hartmann's first combat flight, not a brilliant start...**

This is how Hartmann tells it:

"Rossmann called out some enemy aircraft over the radio, and started to dive. I followed. I myself could not recognize any enemy aircraft at first. As we leveled out at high speed, I discovered two dark green airplanes about 2000 meters in front of me and slightly higher.

My first thought was: I'm going to get one of them! I gave full throttle and shot past my rotte leader to get into firing position. I approached quickly, and opened fire at about 300 meters. I noticed how my shots went past the target, high and to the left. The target in front of me became bigger so quickly, that I had to pull back on the stick and climb.

I was immediately surrounded by dark green airplanes, which were turning in behind me. Now I was getting nervous. I had lost visual contact with my rotte leader, climbed up through a cloud layer, and was suddenly alone. Then Rossmann's voice came over the radio: "Never fear, I was watching you; I've lost you now. Come down through the cloud deck so I can see you again!" I emerged from the cloud and saw an airplane at a range of about 1200 to 1500 meters coming directly toward me. I stared in fright and initiated a fast descent toward the west. I called my leader and reported that there was an unidentified aircraft on my tail. Rossmann's voice came back: "Turn right so that I can come closer to you". I turned to the right, but the plane cut inside my turn . I banked as hard as possible. Full throttle, descend to low-level flight and then off in a westerly direction. I could no longer hear Rossmann's words, pulled my head in behind the armor plating and waited for the crashing impact of enemy bullets in my airplane. The other airplane was still behind me. After a while I heard Rossmann's voice again, saying me that there was no longer an airplane behind me.

I climbed to altitude to determine my position. To my left I saw the Elbrus river and could now find my way. Then I saw the red warning light for fuel light up. Five minutes later the engine went bong-bong-bong and stopped. I had no more fuel.

Below me there were huge sunflower fields and a road on which a couple of trucks were driving. The ground came up quickly. I made a belly landing in a violent cloud of dust, opened the canopy and took my personal gear out of the cockpit. Some army chums drove me the 30 kilometers back to Soldatskaya airfield.

That evening, I received a loud bawling out by the Gruppenkommandeur, Major von Bonin, and then a lecture by Rossmann about Rotten(a flight of two aircraft) tactics, who presented me my sins one by one:

1. Breaking from the wing leader without being ordered to.
2. Flying into the firing line of the wing leader.
3. Climbing through the cloud deck.

4. Confusing the wing leader with an enemy aircraft. (The "enemy" from which I dove away after descending through the clouds was Rossmann).
5. Failure to follow the order to assemble.
6. Lost orientation
7. Loss of my aircraft without having inflicted damage upon the enemy.

I was grounded and subordinated to the ground personnel for three days. I felt awful. "

## **Lawrence Thompson meets Hartmann's G-14**

".... this was my first major dogfight I had in the war, in January 1945. I was flying a P-51D and we were supposed to meet with bombers over Romania. Well, the bombers never showed up! And we kept circling and wasting our fuel. When we were low on fuel the squadron leader orders us back to base, with the top group at 24,000 feet and the four bait Mustangs ordered to 15,000 feet. Now you might not really think about it, but the difference in altitude, 9,000 feet, is almost two miles, and assuming that the top flight could dive and rescue the 'bait' airplanes, it might take a full sixty seconds or more for the top group to come to the rescue. A heck of a lot can happen in sixty seconds. Earlier, I requested to fly in the bait section believing that I'd have a better chance to get some scores (at that time I had no victories either) and this was my seventh mission. I have to say now that I grew up in Kansas City, Kansas, and my older brother flew a Jenny biplane in the late 1930s, so I learned the basics of flying even before joining the Army.

So we're all heading back to Italy when, all of a sudden, a dozen or so Me109's bounce us. From one moment it's a clear blue sky, next moment there are dozens' of tracers passing my cockpit. I'm hit several times and I roll over to the right, and below me is an P-51, heading for the deck, with an Me109 chasing him. I begin to chase the Me109. All this time I believe there was another Me109 chasing me! It was a racetrack, all four of us were racing for the finish line! Eventually I caught up with the first Me109 and I fired a long burst at about 1,000 yards, to no effect. Then I waited until about 600 yards, I fired two very long bursts, probably five seconds each (P-51 has ammo for about 18 seconds of continuous bursts for four machine guns, the remaining two machine guns will shoot for about 24 seconds). I noticed that part of his engine cowling flew off and he immediately broke off his attack on the lead P-51. I check my rear view mirrors and there's nothing behind me now; somehow, I have managed to lose the Me109 following me, probably because the diving speed of the P-51 is sixty mph faster than the Me109. So I pull up on the yoke and level out; suddenly a Me109 looms about as large as a barn door right in front of me! And he fires his guns at me, and he rolls to the right, in a Lufberry circle. I peel off, following this Me109. I can see silver P-51s and black nosed camouflaged painted Me109s everywhere I look, there's Me109 or P-51 everywhere! At this time I cannot get on the transmitter and talk, everyone else in the squadron is yelling and talking, and there's nothing but yelling, screaming, and incoherent interference as everyone presses their mike buttons at the same time. I can smell something in the cockpit. Hydraulic fluid! I knew I got hit earlier.

.... I'm still following this Me109. I just got my first confirmed kill of my tour, and now I'm really hot. I believe that I am the hottest pilot in the USAAF! And now I'm thinking to myself: am I going to shoot this Me109 down too?! He rolls and we turn, and turn; somehow, I cannot catch up with him in the Lufberry circle, we just keep circling. About the third 360 degree turn he and I must have spotted two Mustangs flying below us, about 2,000 feet below, and he dives for the two P-51s.

Now I'm about 150 yards from him, and I get my gunsight on his tail, but I cannot shoot, because if I shoot wide, or my bullets pass through him, I might shoot down one or both P-51s, so I get a front seat, watching, fearful that this guy will shoot down a P-51 we're approaching at about 390 mph. There's so much interference on the R/T I cannot warn the two Mustangs, I fire one very long burst of about seven or eight seconds purposely wide, so it misses the Mustangs, and the Me109 pilot can see the tracers. None of the Mustang pilots see the tracers either! I was half hoping expecting that they'd see my tracers and turn out of the way of the diving Me109. But no such luck. I quit firing. The Me109 still dives, and as he approaches the two P-51s he holds his fire, and as the gap closes, two hundred yards, one hundred yards, fifty yards the Hun does not fire a shot. No tracers, nothing! At less than ten yards, it looks like he's going to ram the lead P-51 and the Hun fires one single shot from his 20mm cannon! And Bang! Engine parts, white smoke, glycol, whatnot from the lead P-51 is everywhere, and that unfortunate Mustang begins a gentle roll to the right.



Wrong 109, but the picture fits the text so well.

I try to watch the Mustang down, but cannot, Now my full attention is on the Hun! Zoom. We fly through the two Mustangs (he was taken POW). Now the advantage of the P-51 is really apparent, as in a dive I am catching up to the Me109 faster than a runaway freight train. I press the trigger for only a second then I let up on the trigger, I believe at that time I was about 250 yards distant, but the Hun was really pulling lots' of negative and positive g's and pulling up to the horizon. He levels out and then does a vertical tail stand! And next thing I know, he's using his built up velocity from the dive to make a vertical ninety degree climb. This guy is really an experienced pilot. I'm in a vertical climb, and my P-51 begins to roll clockwise violently, only by pushing my left rudder almost through the floor can I stop my P-51 from turning. We climb for altitude; in the straight climb that Me109 begins to out distance me, though my built up diving speed makes us about equal in the climb. We climb one thousand fifteen hundred feet, and at eighteen hundred feet, the hun levels his aircraft out. A vertical climb of 1,800 feet! I've never heard of a piston aircraft climbing more than 1,000 feet in a tail stand. At this time we're both down to stall speed, and he levels out. My airspeed indicator reads less than 90 mph! So we level out. I'm really close now to the Me109, less than twenty five yards! Now if I can get my guns on him.....

At this range, the gunsight is more of nuisance than a help. Next thing, he dumps his flaps fast and I begin to overshoot him! That's not what I want to do, because then he can bear his guns on me. The P-51 has good armor, but not good enough to stop 20mm cannon hits. This Luftwaffe pilot must be one heck of a marksman, I just witnessed him shooting down a P-51 with a single 20mm cannon shot! So I do the same thing, I dump my flaps, and as I start to overshoot him, I pull my nose up, this really slows me down; S-T-A-L-L warning comes on! and I can't see

anything ahead of me nor in the rear view mirror. Now I'm sweating everywhere. My eyes are burning because salty sweat keeps blinding me: "Where is He!?! I shout to myself. I level out to prevent from stalling. And there he is. Flying on my right side. We are flying side to side, less than twenty feet separates our wingtips. He's smiling and laughing at himself. I notice that he has a red heart painted on his aircraft, just below the cockpit. The nose and spinner are painted black. It's my guess that he's a very experienced ace from the Russian front. His tail has a number painted on it: "200". I wonder: what the "two hundred" means!?! Now I began to examine his airplane for any bullet hits, afterall, I estimate that I just fired 1,600 rounds at the hun. I cannot see a single bullet hole in his aircraft! I could swear that I must have gotten at least a dozen hits! I keep inspecting his aircraft for any damage. One time, he even lifts his left wing about 15 degrees, to let me see the underside, still no hits! That's impossible I tell myself. Totally impossible. Then I turn my attention back to the "200" which is painted on the tail rudder. German aces normally paint a marker for each victory on their tail. It dawns on me that quick: TWO HUNDRED KILLS !! We fly side by side for five minutes. Those five minutes take centuries to pass. Less than twenty five feet away from me is a Luftwaffe ace, with over two hundred kills. We had been in a slow gradual dive now, and my altitude indicates 8,000 feet. I'm panicking now, even my socks are soaked in sweat. The German pilot points at his tail, obviously meaning the "200" victories, and then very slowly and dramatically makes a knife-cutting motion across his throat, and points at me. He's telling me in sign language that I'm going to be his 201 kill! Panic! I'm breathing so hard, it sounds like a wind tunnel with my mask on. My heart rate must have doubled to 170 beats per minute; I can feel my chest, thump-thump and so.

This goes on for centuries, and centuries. The two of us flying at stall speed, wingtip to wingtip. I think more than once of simply ramming him. He keeps watching my ailerons, maybe that's what he expects me to do. We had heard of desperate pilots who, after running out of ammunition, would commit suicide by ramming an enemy plane. Then I decide that I can Immelmann out of the situation, and I began to climb, but because my flaps are down, my Mustang only climbs about one hundred feet, pitches over violently to the right and stalls. The next instant I'm dangerously spinning, heading ninety degrees vertically down! And the IAS reads 300 mph! My P-51 just falls like a rock to the earth! I hold the yoke in the lower left corner and sit on the left rudder, flaps up, and apply FULL POWER! I pull out of the dive at about 500 feet, level out, (I began to black out so with my left hand I pinch my veins in my neck to stop blackout). I scan the sky for anything! There's not a plane in the sky, I dive to about fifty feet elevation, heading towards Italy. I fly at maximum power for about ten minutes, and then reduce my rpm (to save gasoline), otherwise the P-51 has very limited range at full power. I fly like this for maybe an hour, no planes in the vicinity; all the time I scan the sky, check my rear view mirrors.

I never saw the Me109 with the red heart again. At the mess I mention the Me109 with the red heart and "200" written on the tail. That's when the whole room, I mean everybody, gets instantly quiet. Like you could hear a pin drop. Two weeks later the base commander shows me a telex: "...according to intelligence, the German pilot with a red heart is Eric Hartmann who has downed 250 aircraft and there is a reward of fifty thousand dollars offered by Stalin for shooting him down. I've never before heard of a cash reward for shooting down an enemy ace ... "