



# Iron Man: Rudolf Berthold: Germany's Indomitable Fighter Ace of World War I

*Peter Kilduff*

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As one of the most successful German fighter pilots of World War I Hauptmann Rudolf Berthold was victorious in forty-four aerial combats. He was also shot down or forced to land after six fights and survived crash landings in every case. Early in World War I, when only fighter pilots were awarded the Kingdom of Prussia's (and de facto, Imperial Germany's) highest bravery decoration, the Pour le Mérite, Rudolf Berthold became the tenth recipient of the honor. Of that early cohort of air heroes, only Berthold and one other pilot survived the war. This book tells his remarkable story.

Six weeks into the war, Berthold became the first airman in the 2nd Army area to be awarded an Iron Cross in recognition of his bravery and tenacity in combat. The symbolism of the award was appropriate. Described by one of his pilot protégés as, 'an Iron Man – with an absolutely unbendable iron will', he was a dedicated patriot. And, after he became a fighter pilot, he demonstrated a fierce fighting spirit in many encounters with British and French adversaries. All of his aerial combats with other Pour le Mérite flyers are detailed in this book. Indeed, Berthold was so relentless in his approach to aerial combat, when badly wounded, on at least six occasions, he cut short his convalescent leave to return to flying with his comrades. This included a hit to his right arm, which shattered the bone, rendering it useless – undaunted Berthold taught himself to fly using his left.

Peter Kilduff has produced a landmark volume based on extensive research into Rudolf Berthold's life and military career to form the most complete account yet about Germany's sixth highest scoring fighter ace of WWI. Illustrated with over eighty photographs and other artworks, many of which have never been published before, Iron Man tells the tale of this ruthless, fearless and, above all, very patriotic fighter whose perseverance and bravery made him one of the most famous airmen of World War I.

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