

DAS

EISERNE KREUZ

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT THE SS & WAFFEN-SS - ISSUE #4



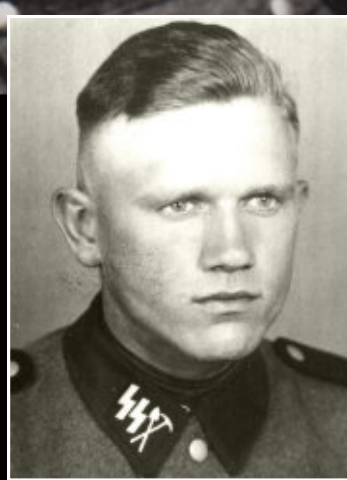
- Alfrēds Riekstiņš
- Operation Rösselsprung
- Frenchmen at Bad Tölz



Henk Feldmeijer



Dogs of the
6. SS-Geb.Div.Nord



SS-Pl.Sturmabn



Uniform of
Gerhard Lotze



Editorial

Mythology or historical reality? This is the core question that constantly drives us in our work with *Eiserne Kreuz*. Publishing a journal dedicated exclusively to the SS and Waffen-SS demands source-critical precision, countless hours in the archives, and an unyielding commitment to presenting history exactly as it was—without embellishment or sanitization.

Following the strong reception of Issue #3, many wondered whether we could maintain that same high standard moving forward. The answer is now in your hands. With Issue #4, we are raising the bar even further, both in terms of research and unique photographic material.

In this issue, we take you behind the scenes of Operation Rösselsprung—the daring attempt by German SS paratroopers to capture the Yugoslav partisan leader Tito. While the text itself is an outstanding piece of military history, the article is elevated to an entirely new level thanks to Paul Turner and Rüdiger Warnicke, who granted us access to previously unpublished photographs. We also shed light on more obscure and rarely covered aspects of the war. For instance, did you know that the 6. SS-Geb.Div. "Nord" had its very own Hundestaffel (dog squad)? It is precisely for these types of unique special units that *Eiserne Kreuz* exists. Where else would you find coverage of such an uncommon unit? Furthermore, we examine the French cadets at the SS-Junkerschule Bad Tölz, as well as the Dutch SS-officer Feldmeijer. Additionally, Petter Kjellander has managed to unearth brand-new details and photos regarding Alfreds Riekstins, providing a rare insight into one of the more anonymous Latvian Knight's Cross recipients. For my own part, I continue my series on the early formations of the SS-Verfügungstruppe, while also addressing the darker side of the SS: the concentration camps. Our editorial principle remains absolute—we do not shy away from the somber reality, but rather present the complete picture. We promised an extra-thick summer issue, and with 109 pages before you, we trust we have fully delivered on that promise.

A brief note on logistics to conclude: As our publication grows and evolves, we are phasing out our manual email notifications for new releases. To ensure you don't miss future issues, please keep an eye on our website at www.eisernekreuz.com or follow our social media channels.

Thank you for your continued support, and enjoy the issue!

Georg Schwab
Editor-in-Chief, *Eiserne Kreuz*

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ALFRĒDS RIEKSTIŅŠ

FROM THE LATVIAN LEGION TO THE CIA

Throughout history Latvia has repeatedly found itself in extreme circumstances and World War II was no exception. Squeezed between two ruthless occupying powers, the young men of the nation were forced to choose a side. Alfreds Riekstiņš was one of them. After fighting as a platoon commander (Zugführer) in the 19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS and being decorated with the prestigious Ritterkreuz he fled to Sweden at the end of the war—only to soon be recruited by the CIA for a covert operation against the Soviet Union.

On a chilly May morning in 1945, three landing craft anchored in Kalmar, Sweden. Onboard was a diverse crowd of Latvian and German soldiers—refugees from the Kurland Peninsula. For seven months they had fought a desperate campaign against the Red Army in what was known as the ‘Kurland Pocket’. They had fled across a stormy Baltic Sea, hunted by Soviet airstrikes that claimed 15 lives and wounded another 75. Among them were 22 Latvian soldiers—men branded as traitors by the Soviet Union because Latvia, after being incorporated into the USSR in 1940 through rigged elections, was viewed by Moscow as part of its territory.

One of these men stood out in particular. His impressive array of decorations spoke for itself, clearly distinguishing him from the others. Around his neck hung the Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes (Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross), the highest award for bravery. His chest bore the scars of countless battles, alongside the Verwundetenabzeichen in Schwarz (Wound Badge in black), the Infanterie-Sturmabzeichen in Silber (Infantry Assault Badge in silver), and the Eisernes Kreuz I. Klasse (Iron Cross 1st Class), while the ribbon for the Eisernes Kreuz II. Klasse (Iron Cross 2nd Class) was fastened to his tunic buttonhole. A cuff title with the inscription "Kurland" bore witness to the German defense against the overwhelming Red Army in Kurland.

This seasoned Latvian non-commissioned officer named Alfreds Riekstiņš, was one of 12 Latvians awarded the Ritterkreuz during World War II for their actions in combat. He was likely one of the most highly decorated soldiers of the war to successfully escape to Sweden and settle there, but his story was far from over. Sweden was only a temporary sanctuary. He would soon resume the struggle against the very enemy that had occupied his homeland in 1940 and returned as occupiers in 1944–45. This is the story of a man who refused to give up the fight against the Soviet Union. But before we go any further, let us begin at the beginning. Who was this highly decorated Latvian warrior who had arrived in Sweden?

Early Years

Alfreds Riekstiņš was born in 1913 in a small village near Tukums and grew up in modest circumstances, in a Latvia where nationalism was strong and mem-

ories of the War of Independence were still vivid. The struggle for independence had shaped the young generation and strengthened its national identity, which deeply influenced Alfreds as well. The family's limited resources meant he had to leave school early to enter the workforce. After elementary school, he completed his formal education and at the age of twenty, he began his military service with the 7. Sigulda Infanterieregiment in Gulbene. There he was trained as a machine gunner, but his routine service was soon shattered by an event that changed everything—both for his own life and his homeland. In 1940, Red Army troops rolled into Latvia. The occupation, a direct consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, struck a brutal blow to the young nation's freedom. Riekstiņš witnessed the occupation with his own eyes and the sight of the marching Soviet soldiers was etched into his memory forever.

The Soviet Occupation

Stalin quickly demonstrated his ambitions to expand the Soviet Union. Latvia was occupied by Soviet troops, a puppet government was installed and through rigged elections, the country was annexed into the USSR. A wave of terror soon followed—deportations, executions, torture and persecutions—spreading fear and understandably fueling a profound hatred among the population. For Riekstiņš the situation rapidly became critical; his open criticism of the Soviet regime made him a target and he was forced to flee into the forests after learning his name was on an execution list.

In the summer of 1941, everything changed. When the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa and marched into Latvia, Riekstiņš saw his chance to return home. He made his way back to Talsi, where he and local home guardsmen formed a self-defense unit to maintain order and protect the town from the remaining Soviet troops. Once the heaviest fighting subsided and a semblance of stability returned, Riekstiņš joined the local auxiliary police in Talsi.

Under German Occupation

Many Latvians, deeply scarred by Soviet atrocities, initially viewed Germany as a liberator. However, their brutal occupation soon proved to be anything but a salvation. Germany's goal was not Latvian



freedom, but colonization and Germanization. Despite this, there remained a strong will among Latvians to fight the Soviet Union. Self-defense units were formed and as the partisan threat grew, the SS established Latvian auxiliary police battalions known as 'Schutzmannschaften.'

Riekstiņš enlisted on 2 March 1942, for service in the *Schutzmannschaft-Bataillon 24*. After three months of training in Liepāja, the battalion was sent to Belarus to combat Soviet partisans. In November 1942, it was redeployed to the Leningrad Front where Riekstiņš served as a machine-gun squad leader. The Latvians hoped that these auxiliary battalions would be consolidated into a larger Latvian force under Latvian command, but their hopes were dashed when the Germans scattered them across the Eastern Front. Attempts by Latvian leaders to negotiate autonomy in exchange for 100,000 soldiers were rejected by the German command.

In January 1943, Hitler approved Heinrich Himmler's proposal to create a Latvian SS Legion. The Latvian Schutzmannschaft battalions became the core of this new force, but Himmler had larger plans. In the spring of 1943, the legion was expanded into the *15. SS-Freiwilligen-Division* and the

2. *Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Brigade*, collectively known as the Lettische Legion.

These units were composed primarily of conscripted Latvians. Riekstiņš, like many other Latvian soldiers in the legion, viewed it as an opportunity to fight for a free Latvia and defend their homeland against the return of the Red Army. Some hoped for a repetition of the 1918–1920 scenario: that both Germany and the Soviet Union would emerge so weakened that, with Western Allied support, Latvians could restore their independence. In such a scenario, having combat-ready forces would be an essential prerequisite for establishing an autonomous state, while in the short term, these units could delay the Soviet return. Others believed that Latvia could only be saved and resurrected as an independent nation with German assistance, particularly given the Soviet Union's alliance with Great Britain. Although some in this group stubbornly clung to Germany for lack of other alternatives, their loyalty was conditional. Had a scenario like 1918–1920 repeated itself, or had the Western Allies intervened, they would have undoubtedly abandoned the collaboration and attempted to recreate an independent state. In addition, there were soldiers who had

no other goal than to protect their loved ones from the return of the Red Army.

In the spring of 1943, *Schutzmannschaft-Bataillon 24*, in which Riekstiņš was serving, was reorganized into the *I. Bataillon / SS-Grenadier-Regiment 40* of the *2. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Brigade* and deployed to defensive positions on the Volkhov Front in the swamps, north of Lake Ilmen. From here Riekstiņš was sent in mid-June 1943 on a training course in Kingisepp, Estonia which lasted six weeks and from which he graduated as a platoon commander. He then returned to his unit in Volkhov and served as a machine-gun platoon commander.

In mid-January 1944, the Red Army launched a major offensive on the northern sector of the front. Leningrad was relieved and the German Heeresgruppe Nord (Army Group North) was forced back to the so-called Panther Line near the Baltic borders during violent rearguard actions. Whilst participating in these battles Riekstiņš, serving as an assault group leader, was severely wounded for the first time when demolishing a Soviet bunker and was sent to the military hospital in Jelgava. He remained there until the summer of 1944 when he returned alongside newly conscripted and trained soldiers to the field replacement battalion of the *19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr. 2)*, into which the *2. Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Brigade* had been reorganized earlier that spring. The division was now deployed near Opočka, east of the Latvian border.

In late June 1944, the Red Army launched its massive summer offensive (Operation Bagration), which shattered the German Army Group Center and paved the way for large-scale Soviet assaults on the Baltic states. Outnumbered in infantry, armor, artillery and air support, German forces were pushed back across the Latvian border during the summer. The *19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS*, which was reorganized into a divisional combat group (*SS-Divisionsgruppe "Streckenbach"*) after retreating into Latvian territory, was deployed in late July 1944 to slow the Red Army's advance near Lake Lubāns, near Latvia's eastern border. In a series of incredibly fierce engagements the combat group managed to halt the Soviet assaults with companies from the Field Replacement Battalion helping rescue the combat group from being cut off. For his actions in these battles Riekstiņš, serving in the battalion's 5. Kompanie, was awarded the *Eisernes Kreuz II. Klasse* on August 14, 1944.

Shortly thereafter, the field replacement battalion, under the command of *Waffen-Hauptsturmführer* Ernests Laumanis, was reorganized into the division's Fusilier Battalion. This unit unofficially known as "Laumanis' Assault Battalion" (*Laumaņa triecienbataljons*), was tasked with serving as a reconnaissance unit and divisional reserve, ready to intervene wherever the front line was most threatened and was regarded as an elite unit.





IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS
VERLEIHE ICH
DEM

Waffen-Unterscharführer

Alfreds Riekstiņš
5./4-Feld-Ersatz-Bataillon 19

DAS
EISERNE KREUZ
2. KLASSE

Div.Gef.Stb., den 14.8. 1944

Der Kommandeur
der 19. Waffen-Gren-Div. der 4
(gett.Nr.2)

Streckenbach

4-Brigadeführer
und Generalmajor der Waffen-4

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)



For his actions during the fighting at Lubāna, Alfreds Riekstiņš was awarded the Iron Cross, Second Class, on 14 August 1944. (NARA)

Latvian SS-grenadiers of SS-Divisionsgruppe Streckenbach. At the end of July 1944, the unit was deployed near Lake Lubāns to slow the Soviet offensive toward Madona. It was during these fierce battles that Alfreds Riekstiņš distinguished himself while serving in the battle group's Field Replacement Battalion, which later formed the nucleus of the legendary "Lau-manis Assault Battalion." (Andrew Found)

The Retreat and the Battles for Kurland

The Soviet offensive, which had slowed in late August, resumed with renewed strength in mid-September. The numerical disparity was immense: 1.5 million Soviet troops against 500,000 Germans. To save Army Group North, its commander, Generaloberst Ferdinand Schörner, ordered the evacuation of Estonia and large parts of Latvia, pulling forces back to bridgeheads around Riga and Kurland. The 19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, re-established as a full division, was ordered to move toward Kurland. On 10 October 1944 Soviet mechanized units reached Memel, cutting off Army Group North. To meet this critical threat Schörner's army group estab-

BESITZZEUGNIS

DEM Waffen-Unterscharführer
(DIENSTGRAD)

Alfreds Riekstiņš
(VOR- UND ZUNAME)

W-Füsiliers Bataillon 19
(TRUPPENTEIL)

VERLEIHE ICH DAS

INFANTERIE-STURMABZEICHEN

IN SILBER

0. U. den 17. November 1944
(ORT UND DATUM)

Laumanis
(UNTERSCHRIFT)

W-Helf. u. Btl. K-deur.
(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)



IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS

VERLEIHE ICH
DEM

Waffen-Unterscharführer

Alfreds Riekstiņš

Waffen-Füs.Btl.d.W. 19

DAS

EISERNE KREUZ

1. KLASSE

Div.Gef.Std. 16. Februar 1945



Der Kommandeur
19. Waffen-Gren.Div. der W.
(N. Nr. 2)

Meichenbach

W-Gruppenführer
und Generalleutnant der Waffen-W.

(DIENSTGRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)

317/45

For his actions during the fierce fighting in the Courland Pocket in the winter of 1944–1945, Alfreds Riekstiņš was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class, on 16 February 1945, having previously been decorated with the Infantry Assault Badge in Silver (Infanterie-Sturmabzeichen in Silber) on 17 November 1944. (NARA)

lished a 240-kilometer defensive line across the Kurland Peninsula.

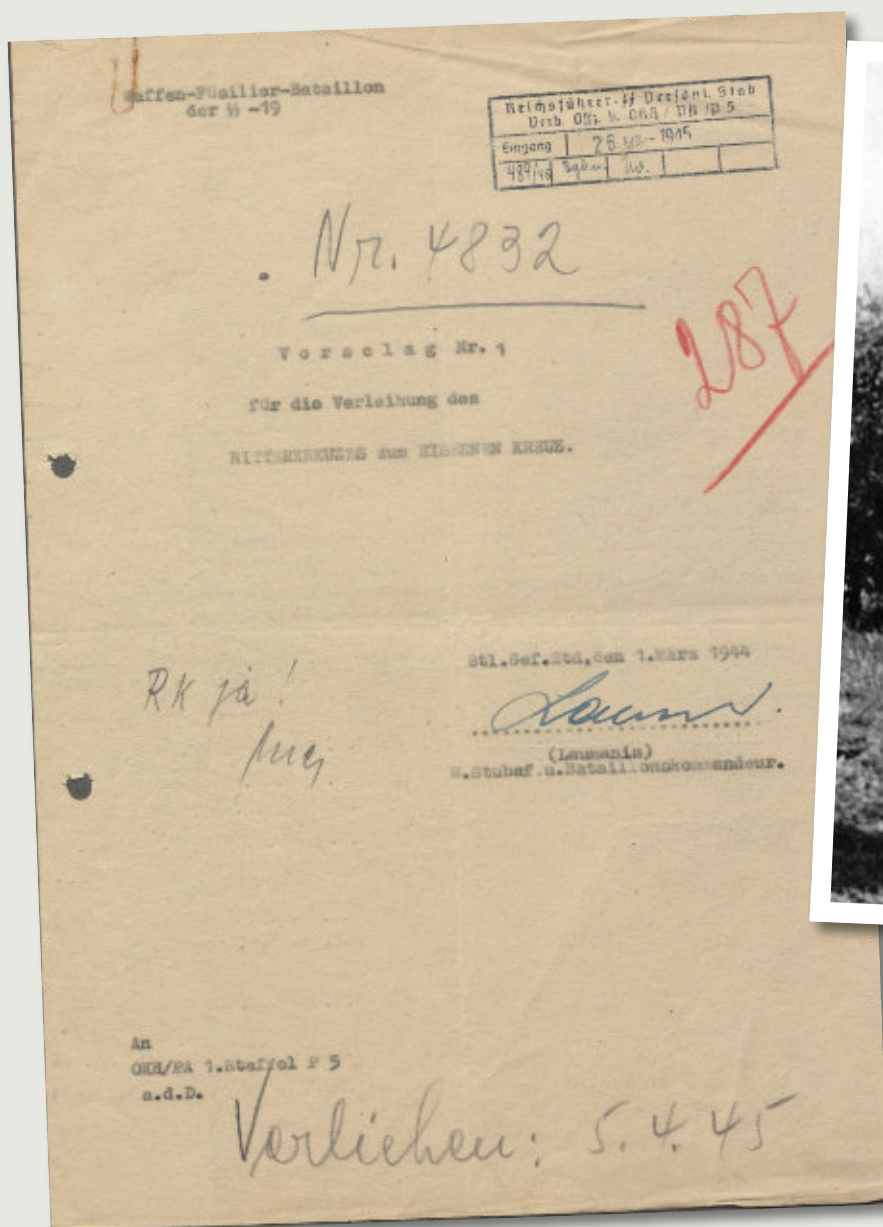
The 19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS dug in near Lestene establishing a deep, multi-layered defense. The Red Army would attempt to crush the "Kurland Fortress" (Festung Kurland) in six major battles but without success—the pocket would hold out intact until the end of the war.

The fiercest fighting occurred during the Third Battle of Kurland, which raged from 23–31 December. The Red Army concentrated an entire rifle corps with three rifle divisions against the sector held by the 19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS. The rifle corps repeatedly came close to breaking through but was successfully repulsed each time in violent clashes. During these engagements, Laumanis' Assault Battalion, where Riekstiņš served as a platoon commander in the 1. Kompanie, distinguished itself. Riekstiņš and his platoon actively participated

in the battalion's counterattacks, throwing back Soviet infantry forces that had broken through the defenses near the settlement of Rumbas. Their determination and skill were decisive in keeping the front line intact during the most critical phases of the battle. For his achievements during the heavy fighting in Kurland, Riekstiņš was decorated with the *Eisernes Kreuz I. Klasse* on February 16, 1945.

Riekstiņš is Awarded the Ritterkreuz

In mid-February 1945, the Red Army launched a major assault near Džūkste to straighten the front line and capture the strategically vital town of Tukums. The attack broke through the 12. Luftwaffe-Felddivision on the left wing of the 19. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, threatening the division's left flank. The division reacted immediately by throwing in its last reserves, saving the front from



Recommendation for the Knight's Cross for Alfreds Riekstiņš, signed by Waffens-Sturmabführer Laumanis on 1 March 1945. The document bears the endorsement of approval and the date the decoration was awarded: 5 April 1945. (BA)

collapse by halting the Soviet advance just east of Lestene. To reinforce the strained left flank at Lestene, the division redeployed Laumanis' battalion to the area.

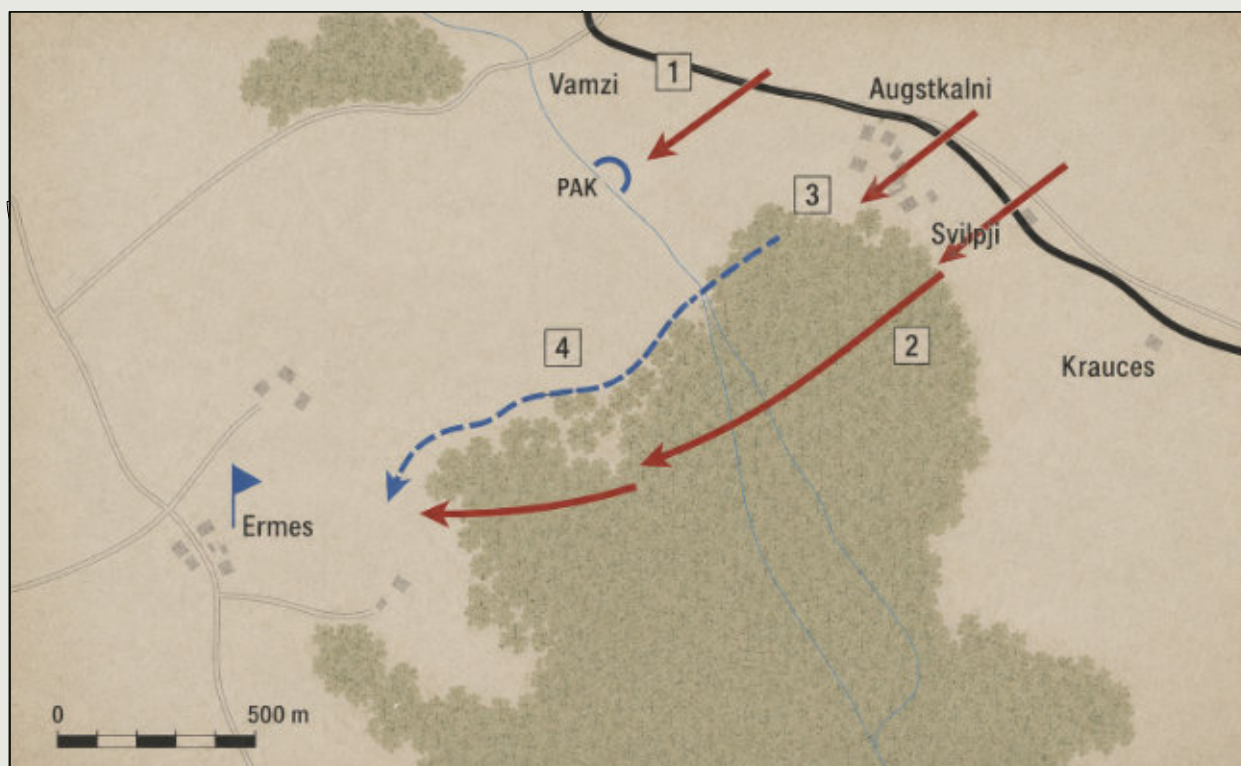
The battalion's companies had barely occupied their positions when the Red Army attacked again on February 17, this time hitting Laumanis' new defensive line at Vamzi, Svilpi, and Augstkalni. The Soviet assault broke through the positions at all three locations. Through swift counter-measures however, further Soviet advances at Vamzi and Augstkalni were halted. Riekstiņš's platoon, holding positions at Augstkalni, repelled the Soviet waves with heavy machine-gun fire, supported by artillery. The field in front of the platoon's positions was quickly littered with fallen Soviet soldiers.

Despite this the platoon soon exhausted most of the ammunition for its three machine guns and re-

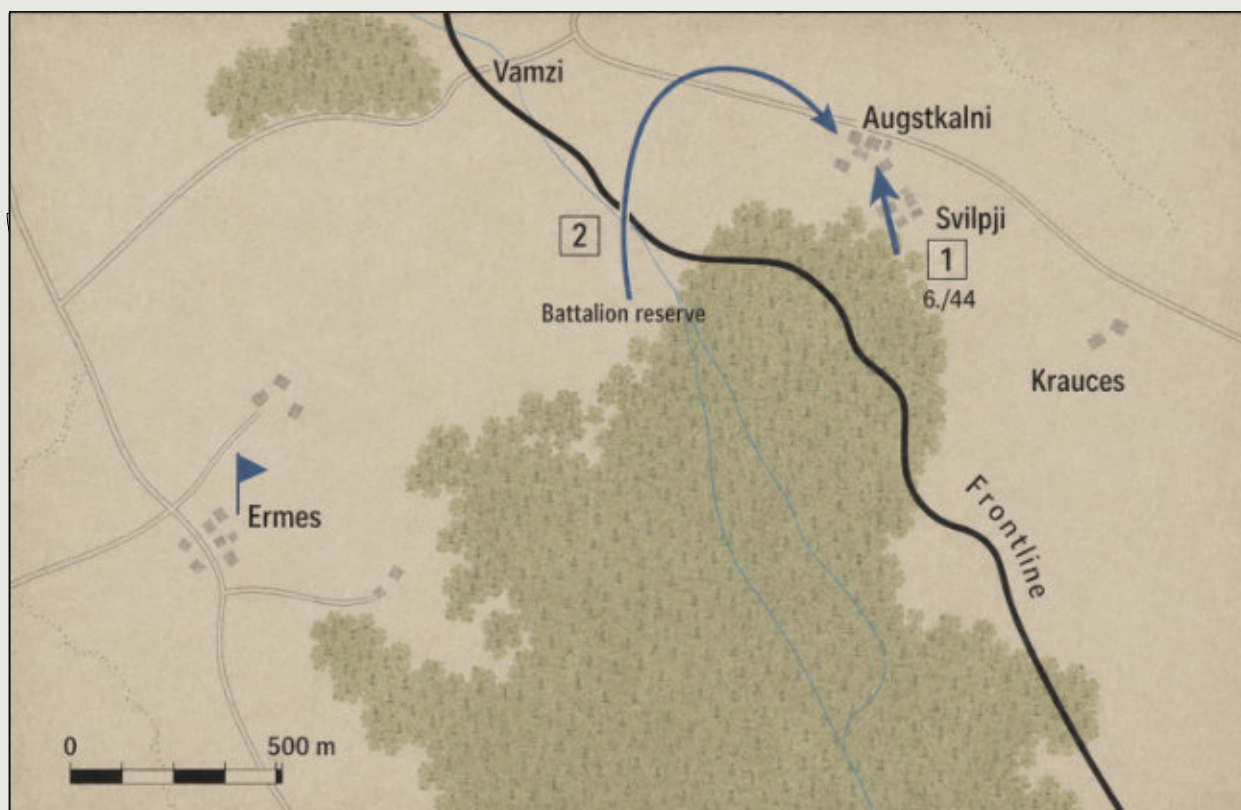
quired immediate resupply to hold their ground. Due to constant artillery bombardment targeting the rear lines, bringing forward ammunition was extremely difficult, forcing the platoon to ration the small amount they had left. Riekstiņš contacted battalion headquarters requesting reserves to clear the Soviet breakthrough at Augstkalni, but was told that no reserves were available.

As the Soviet attacks intensified, Riekstiņš's platoon suddenly found itself in a critical situation, threatened with encirclement. Making a split-second decision, he ordered his men to form a semi-circular defensive perimeter and narrowly managed to beat back the repeated assaults.

Meanwhile Soviet forces had broken through the defenses at Svilpi and were advancing toward Ermes, where Laumanis' battalion headquarters was located. To salvage the precarious situation, Riek-



1. Soviet infantry and armor penetrate the front line but are checked by anti-tank defenses.
2. Soviet infantry breaks through and advances through the forest toward Ermes.
3. Riekstins' platoon repels enemy attacks at Augstkalni but is forced to abandon its positions.
4. 1./W.-Füs.Btl.19 withdraws along the edge of the forest toward the battalion headquarters at Ermes. It engages in close-quarters combat with Soviet infantry, which is driven back.



1. During the night of 17–18 February, the 6./W.-Gren-Rgt.-SS 44 attempts to recapture Augstkalni in two major assaults, but becomes pinned down by heavy barrage fire.
2. Realizing that further frontal assaults are futile, Riekstins takes the initiative and recaptures Augstkalni with a flanking attack.

stiņš was ordered to abandon the positions at Augstkalni and move rapidly westward through the forest toward Ermes to rescue the battalion staff and stop the Soviet advance. During the movement through the woods the company collided with the advancing Soviets. In violent close-quarters combat, they managed to throw the Soviets back and plug the gap at Svīlpji, but the cost was high: the company commander, *Waffen-Untersturmführer* Osvalds Pētersons, was severely wounded, as were several other soldiers. Riekstiņš took command in the ensuing chaos and with the help of an anti-tank team, managed to hold the positions until reinforcements arrived from *Waffen-Grenadier-Regiment der SS 44*.

Laumanis' battalion then established a new defensive line west of Vamzi, Augstkalni, and Svīlpji, but Augstkalni remained in enemy hands. During the night of February 17–18, a company from *Waffen-Grenadier-Regiment der SS 44*, supported by an assault gun (*Sturmgeschütz*) platoon, attempted to retake the settlement. Despite two heavy attacks, they were pinned down by heavy fire from Soviet rifle units in Augstkalni. A frontal assault was impossible.

Riekstiņš knew a different approach was required. Gathering the remaining 45 men of his company, he devised a plan: a flank attack under the cover of darkness. Silently slipping through the

night, they took the Soviet positions at Augstkalni by surprise. In wild, hand-to-hand combat they drove the Soviet soldiers out and secured the village. Riekstiņš reported that Augstkalni was once again in the division's hands. Three captured tanks and several anti-tank guns stood as proof of their success on the battlefield. For this daring coup, Riekstiņš was awarded the Ritterkreuz on April 5, 1945.

Escape to Sweden

During the final months of the war, Riekstiņš attended a heavy weapons training course at a school in Dundaga. On 8 May 1945—the day of Germany's capitulation—the entire school, consisting of 1,600 personnel (including 22 Latvian soldiers), chose to flee the advancing Red Army. They set sail for Sweden from Pāvilosta aboard three landing craft.

As the vessels departed Pāvilosta, Riekstiņš stood silent and alone on the south side of the boat. He had only the clothes on his back. Around his neck hung his Ritterkreuz and in his pockets, he carried a sandwich, a hand grenade, a pistol, and a map he had found during the escape. On his worn coat sleeve was the small Latvian flag.

Once the vessels reached the open sea, Soviet aircraft suddenly appeared. Before anyone could react,

The end of the war in Courland, May 1945: abandoned German equipment and vehicles, here an anti-aircraft half-track (Sd.Kfz. 251/17), after Army Group Courland had capitulated. By then, the Red Army had been held at bay on the Courland Peninsula since October 1944. While tens of thousands of Germans and Latvians went into Soviet captivity, groups of soldiers—including Alfreds Riekstiņš—managed to escape to Sweden and Germany, thereby avoiding that fate. (LKM)



they opened fire with machine guns and bombs began to fall shortly after. The explosions rocked the vessels and panic broke out onboard. 15 people were killed instantly and 75 were wounded. Despite the damage, the vessels continued their desperate flight, reaching Gotland the following morning. The wounded were brought ashore and the ships were escorted by a Swedish warship toward the mainland.

Upon arrival in Kalmar, where a Swedish Army guard detail was waiting, two larger groups of Latvian civilian refugees from Liepāja also arrived at the harbor. Some of the Latvian soldiers managed to speak to the Swedish officers, informing them that there were 22 Latvians aboard the vessels. That evening, the Latvian soldiers were separated from the German military personnel and grouped with the Latvian civilian refugees. In this way, they escaped forced repatriation in the event known as the *Baltutlämningen* (the Baltic extradition).

Three days later, Riekstiņš and a group of civilians arrived at the Läckeby transit camp. After six weeks there, he traveled on to Stockholm. From the Kymmenbö camp, he and nine other former legionnaires took forestry work in Värmland, near Filipstad in central Sweden. Here he worked as a logger, road worker and log driver for four years.

Later Riekstiņš moved to Hallstahammar, where he found employment as a screw machine operator at the local metalworks. About 60 Latvians lived and worked in the town, mostly former officers of the Latvian Army and the Legion. Riekstiņš gave lectures about the Legion's battles in both Hallstahammar and Köping, and became active in *Daugavas Vanagi*, the Legion's veteran organization. In November 1950, he left Hallstahammar and moved to Gothenburg, working first in a textile factory and later in an oil refinery. In the summer of 1951, he founded a local chapter of the veterans' association.

However, the tranquil Swedish landscape could not bring Alfreds Riekstiņš the peace he sought. His thoughts constantly drifted back to his homeland and his fellow countrymen suffering under Soviet occupation. He could not abandon the idea of resuming the fight against the Soviet Union.

With the outbreak of the Cold War, new opportunities for resistance emerged. In the late 1940s, MI6 initiated agent operations in the Baltic states, and the Swedish intelligence service, T-kontoret, chose to cooperate with the British. The security situation in Europe was deteriorating, and a conflict

between the superpowers—in which Sweden risked being dragged—seemed increasingly likely. Through this cooperation, Sweden sought early warning of a potential attack. MI6 was responsible for the operations, while the Swedes managed the staging bases and security.

In early 1949, MI6 assumed full control of the Baltic agent infiltration, relocating "Operation Jungle"—the codename for the operation—to Hamburg. At the same time, agent training was moved from Stockholm to London. The agents were infiltrated using a modified German S-Boat under the command of Captain Hans-Helmut Klose.

By the early 1950s, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began playing an increasingly prominent role in intelligence operations against the USSR. The goal was both to gather intelligence and to support armed resistance movements, the so-called "Forest Brothers" (*Mežabrāļi*), behind the Iron Curtain. With CIA support the Forest Brothers were to establish communication channels, build underground contacts in the Soviet Union, distribute propaganda, carry out sabotage and economic warfare and prepare for guerrilla campaigns.

The Swedes and British, already active in the Baltics, were skeptical of the CIA's presence but agreed to facilitate certain operations. The CIA launched the REDSOX program, a series of infiltration missions into the Soviet Union. In Latvia, the operation was codenamed AECOB, with the sub-project ZRLYNCH aimed at supporting the Forest Brothers. Through these CIA operations, Alfreds Riekstiņš would soon find a new opportunity to continue his struggle.

In the Service of American Intelligence

The CIA was seeking agents for operations in Latvia and, through Arturs Blombergs, a former officer in the Latvian Legion, made contact with Riekstiņš. Seeing his chance to resume the fight against the Soviet Union, Riekstiņš volunteered.

During recruitment the CIA conducted a thorough background check. Surviving CIA documents describe Riekstiņš—168 cm tall, 64 kg, blond—as a fierce Latvian patriot. He harbored a burning hatred for Bolshevism and took great pride in his military background. The CIA noted that he had been attempting to return to Latvia since 1945 and looked forward to fighting alongside the Forest Brothers,



Снимки сфотографировали
инспектор уголовного розыска

Ст. судебного медицинского эксперта
г.г. Рига

15.9.52г.

Г. Гаузин

Г. Гаузин

Выписка верна: А. Кегуля

MGB documentation of the operation's conclusion. The photograph shows Alfreds Riekstiņš after he bit into his cyanide capsule to avoid capture, seconds after realizing Edvīns Ozoliņš ("Pilot") had betrayed him.

whom he regarded as brothers-in-arms in the crusade against communism. Despite his weather-beaten appearance, the CIA found him to be in remarkably good physical shape—a result of years of forestry work and heavy combat on the Eastern Front.

The CIA recruited him and during 1951–52, he underwent extensive training in Bavaria, where he was trained in parachuting, cryptography, and survival skills. His endurance impressed his instructors and the CIA deemed him highly suited for his mission. Because Riekstiņš was born and raised in Kurland and possessed excellent local knowledge, the CIA decided to deploy him there. His mission was to establish contact with and assist the Forest Brothers, and to gather intelligence on the Baltic coast for maritime operations. Before deployment, he signed an agreement clearly stating that he undertook the mission out of conviction, not for material gain. He

viewed the struggle against communism as a step toward Latvia's liberation, believing that the United States, as the leader of the free world, was best positioned to support this goal.

Agent Mission in Latvia

By the summer of 1952, the CIA was ready to execute its plan. Riekstiņš, using the codename CAMUSO1, was to be deployed to Latvia alongside two other Latvian agents—Edvīns Ozoliņš (CAMUSO2) and Nikolajs Balodis (CAMUSO3). Ozoliņš (born 1914) had served as a mechanic in the German Luftwaffe during the war. Balodis (born 1913) had served in the German auxiliary police and a German sabotage unit during World War II.

On the night of August 26–27, 1952, the trio was flown from Wiesbaden in a C-47 transport aircraft. In the pitch-black night, they parachuted into



On 12 September 1992, a memorial was erected at the Dreimani farm by the Latvian veterans' organization Daugavas Vanagi. The inscription reads: "Knight's Cross recipient Alfreds Riekstiņš, 1913–1952, fell for Latvia."

an area southeast of Liepāja.

However, the MGB (Ministry for State Security, the predecessor to the KGB) was waiting for them. Ozoliņš was their asset—codename "Pilot." Soviet border troops launched a search operation, but either the force was too small, or the agents had landed in a different location than planned and managed to evade capture.

Following the drop only Riekstiņš and Ozoliņš remained; Balodis had vanished without a trace. Had he experienced technical issues? Or had he deliberately slipped away? Did he suspect one of his comrades? Riekstiņš accustomed to rapid action, ordered Ozoliņš to hide the parachutes and most of the equipment while he went to reconnoiter the surroundings. Ozoliņš hid submachine guns, explosives and other gear under some bushes, knowing they would soon be found.

The following day, while scouting, Riekstiņš and

Ozoliņš ran into a Soviet patrol. Gunfire echoed through the trees. In the ensuing confusion, they managed to escape, but the manhunt was underway. Soon Soviet soldiers located their cache: parachutes, submachine guns, radio transmitters, medical supplies and Minox cameras. A pencil notation on a map caught their attention: "Dreimani." This was Ozoliņš's clue—and now a trap.

Soviet reinforcements were brought in. Because several farms in Kurland shared the same name, a meticulous search was required. It was now only a matter of time before they were caught.

On 11 September 1952, near Kandava, in a barn at the former Dreimani farms in the Matkule district, they were finally cornered. Riekstiņš immediately put up armed resistance, emptying two magazines from his pistol at the MGB soldiers. With the MGB troops just yards away and as Riekstiņš feverishly reloaded his weapon, Ozoliņš suddenly lunged at him from behind, attempting to wrest the gun from his hands.

In a final moment of despair and realization of the ultimate betrayal, Riekstiņš bit down on the suicide capsule concealed in his shirt collar. Death was instantaneous.

Ozoliņš stepped out of the barn with his hands raised, shouting his codename: "Pilot."

Riekstiņš's remains were taken to the MGB headquarters in Kandava. His father Paulis, was forced to identify him. His son looked as though he were merely sleeping after a hard day's work. When the grieving father asked to bury his son, he received a chilling reply: "Silence! We do not hand over bandits. Not even dead ones. They remain under our control. You are not to tell anyone where you have been or what you have seen!"

It would be forty years before Alfreds Riekstiņš received a headstone. On 12 September 1992, a memorial was erected at the Dreimani farm by the Latvian veterans' organization Daugavas Vanagi. The inscription reads:

"Knight's Cross Recipient Alfreds Riekstiņš, 1913–1952, fallen for Latvia."

Petter Kjellander

FELDMEIJER

CAREER PATH OF A COLLABORATOR

As the leader of the Nederlandsche SS, Henk Feldmeijer acted as a crucial bridge between the German occupation authorities and the Dutch National Socialists. His path was defined by a ruthless ideological conviction, a continuous power struggle against NSB leader Anton Mussert, and an instrumental role in recruiting thousands of Dutch volunteers to the Waffen-SS for service on the Eastern Front.

Born in Assen, the Netherlands, on November 30, 1910, Johannes Hendrik Veldmeijer saw his family name change to Feldmeijer on September 21, 1915. He used only his middle name and was most often known informally as Henk Feldmeijer. A brilliant student, he graduated from high school in 1928 with top grades in all subjects, then went on to study mathematics and physics at the university. However, he had to interrupt his studies to perform his national service in 1931. During this period, he met a leader of the Assault Units of the recently formed Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB, or National Socialist Movement). He was inspired by the ideas of this movement and became its 479th member in 1932. As one of the first thousand members, he had direct access to the movement's leader, Anton Mussert. Despite his talent for mathematics, Feldmeijer was also a romantic. This was another reason why National Socialism appealed to him at the time:

because of ideas such as masculinity, struggle, and heroism. He devoted himself entirely to the party starting in 1935, becoming increasingly radicalized. Thanks to his zeal, he quickly rose through the ranks of the NSB, where he was among the hardliners. He was a fanatical believer in the SS doctrine of "Blut und Orden." He became a talented orator, first speaking in backrooms in Stadskanaal, Assen, Zoutkamp, and Leeuwarden. Later, he also took to the podium in other parts of the country. In 1939, he described Jews as "multi-headed monsters" and "parasitic fungi." He also gave numerous speeches on the need for a strong leader and denounced democracy. His oratory skills were quickly recognized, and he secured a paid position in the propaganda department. He made numerous trips to Nazi Germany, during which he met with members of the SS; he also visited Scandinavia and Mussolini's Italy. After failing his exams in 1935—likely because he spent

more time writing speeches than studying—he interrupted his studies and became a full-time employee at the NSB office in Utrecht. Because of his membership in the party, he was dismissed as a reserve officer in the army in 1935.

Within the NSB

Feldmeijer belonged to the NSB Völkisch group, as did Rost van Tonningen. This group sought to emphasize the Germanic aspect of Dutch history and promoted a racist and, above all, anti-Semitic worldview. Feldmeijer had numerous secret contacts within German SS circles, a fact of which his superiors in the NSB were unaware. The NSB's Völkisch group was responsible for a profound radicalization of the party's ideological foundations. They idealized the lives of the Dutch people's Germanic ancestors, and proponents of these theories conduct extensive research on the subject. In 1937, Feldmeijer became a key member of the organization "Der Vaderen Erfdeel" (The Heritage of Our Ancestors), renamed "Volksche Werkgemeenschap" (People's Work Community) in 1940; this group conducted research on behalf of the NSB's Völkisch group. His ambition was for the Dutch to begin to realize that their culture was a Germanic one—a significant step toward the SS way of thinking. Feldmeijer was strongly drawn to SS ideology, but had to keep his ties to that organization secret, as the NSB did not espouse that political line. In the fall of 1937, he was forced to leave the NSB headquarters in Utrecht due to a conflict with Anton Mussert, and became the district leader of Salland. In August 1939, however, Rost van Tonningen appointed him commander of Mussert's personal guard. To organize this paramilitary group of several hundred men, Feldmeijer drew inspiration from the structure of the SS in Germany. In 1939, he traveled to Berlin on several occasions to advise the Germans on Radio Bremen's Dutch-language broadcasts. On May 3, 1940, he was imprisoned along with twenty other "subversives" at Fort Ooltgensplaat on the island of Overflakkee, where he shared a cell with Rost van Tonningen. When the Wehrmacht invaded the Netherlands four days later, he was taken out of the country and transferred to France via Belgium. However, he was released on May 30, 1940, by German troops who had just occupied Calais, where he was being held. On June 2, 1940, Feldmeijer and Rost van Tonningen were back



Portrait of Anton Mussert, leader of the NSB. Originally, his party was not anti-Semitic; it even had Jewish members. It was under the influence of people like Rost van Tonningen and Feldmeijer that this shift occurred in the late 1930s. (Wikipedia)

in The Hague. That very evening, Rost van Tonningen was invited to a meeting with Heinrich Himmler and Artur Seyss-Inquart to discuss the Nazification of the Netherlands and the creation of a Dutch SS. A few days later, Rost van Tonningen introduced Feldmeijer to Hanns Albin Rauter, the German police chief for the occupied Dutch territories, who was immediately impressed by the Dutchman's vigor and charisma.

Creation of the Dutch SS

On September 11, 1940, Feldmeijer was tasked with establishing and leading the Nederlandsche SS. Mussert gave his approval only reluctantly, under heavy German pressure, having previously opposed the formation of such an organization. Indeed, he saw it as the beginning of a German takeover of his sphere of influence. The Nederlandsche SS would

eventually number about 7,000 members in total, and its name was changed to “Germaansche SS in Nederland” on November 1, 1942; formally, its status was ambiguous, with ties to the NSB on the one hand and subordination to Heinrich Himmler’s German SS on the other. In practice, however, Feldmeijer was not accountable to Mussert, but solely to the Reichsführer-SS and his representative in the Netherlands, Hanns Albin Rauter. Feldmeijer strongly encouraged his supporters to join the German war effort and, in doing so, led by example by serving twice on the front lines as a non-commissioned officer: in April–May 1941 with the Leibstandarte SS “Adolf Hitler” during the campaigns in Yugoslavia and Greece, and then from June 1942 to March 1943 with the SS Division “Wiking” on the Eastern Front. In March 1943, he was promoted to the rank of *SS-Standartenführer* (colonel) in the Allgemeine SS, and then in March 1944—after completing officer training that of *SS-Hauptsturmführer* (captain) in the Waffen-SS.

The importance of establishing an extension of the SS in the Netherlands was based on four considerations. First, due to Himmler’s expansionist ambitions, the SS wished to occupy a prominent, even

dominant, position in the conquered Nordic or Germanic countries. Second, the SS considered—rightly so—that the creation of the Nederlandsche SS was of great importance for recruiting volunteers for the Waffen-SS. The Nederlandsche SS was not only a recruitment pool in itself but also played a major role in establishing a foundation from which future recruitment would take place. Third, the Nederlandsche SS served to push Mussert in the desired direction, namely “Greater Germanism.” Finally, the creation of the Nederlandsche SS was of significant propaganda value: during a meeting on June 9, 1940, between Anton Mussert and Gottlob Berger, commander of the SS-Hauptamt, Mussert was informed of an order from Hitler directing the recruitment of Dutchmen for the SS Division “Wiking.” The Dutch volunteers were to serve in the “Westland” regiment, alongside their Flemish neighbors. Furious, Mussert refused to cooperate and urged his members not to enlist in the SS under any circumstances. But it was too late; the process was already underway. In fact, the Germans had grown tired of his lukewarm attitude and threatened to rely on Rost van Tonningen instead of Mussert. To save his position, Mussert was therefore forced to

WA parade in The Hague, whose black uniforms were inspired by the Italian fascists. (All rights reserved)

WA parade in The Hague, whose black uniforms were inspired by the Italian fascists. (All rights reserved)



**ARBEIDERS
VERBREEKT UW
KETENEN!**



SLUIT U AAN BIJ DE NSB

NSB poster with a clear message: "Workers, break your chains! Join the NSB." (Weiss Collection)

June 2, 1940: Feldmeijer is liberated by German troops in Calais. Here he is carried in triumph by his supporters upon his return to the Netherlands. (All rights reserved)





give his full approval for the creation of the Nederlandsche SS. Thus, on September 11, 1940, the Nederlandsche SS was established by Mussert, officially as a subsection (Section XI) of the NSB. Henk Feldmeijer served as its “Voorman” (foreman), but in practice, he showed little concern for accountability to Mussert. Instead, Feldmeijer increasingly sought to affiliate with the Allgemeine-SS. In the spring of 1941, a training school for the Dutch SS was opened on the Avegoor estate in Ellecom. On May 17, 1942, 800 Dutch SS members took an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler in The Hague. Then, on November 1, 1942, as we saw earlier, the Nederlandsche SS became the “Germaansche SS in Nederland.” This name change underscored that it was no longer the Dutch aspect that was most important, but the “Germanic” aspect. It was first and foremost a political organization and served as a recruitment pool for the Waffen-SS. The Dutch SS wore a black uniform modeled after that of the German SS. By the end



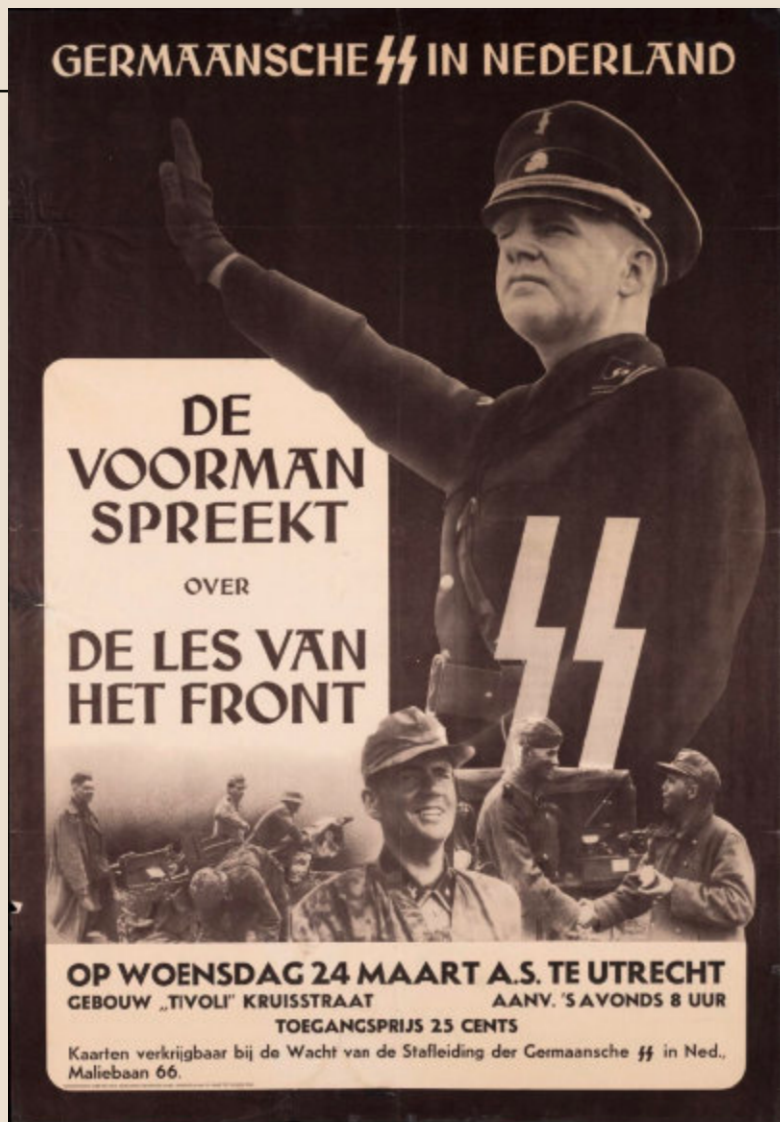
Feldmeijer was no cowardly politician; when he advocated for an alliance with the SS and the fight against Bolshevism, he put his money where his mouth was. Thus, he enlisted in the Waffen-SS, where he first served in the Leibstandarte and then in the anti-aircraft group of the “Wiking” Division as a junior officer. He was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class on the Eastern Front. In these two photographs, he is seen serving as a gun crew leader in SS-Flak-Abt. 5. (Der Freiwillige)

of 1944, the Germaansche SS in Nederland existed only on paper due to the turn of events. In fact, most of its members had been transferred to the 23rd SS Volunteer Panzer Grenadier Division "Nederland" or to the "Landstorm Nederland" Brigade. As for recruitment, since the Dutch SS was supposed to be an elite corps, not everyone could become a member. Selection was based on racial criteria, political views, personality, and physical fitness. To become a provisional member of the Nederlandsche SS, candidates had to meet the following requirements:

- Aryan ancestry dating back to at least 1800 (for officers: 1750), which may need to be proven. The

These photographs were used for a poster announcing a speech by Feldmeijer ("The Foreman Speaks") on his experiences on the Eastern Front. The event was aimed at Germanic SS members and took place at the Tivoli Hall in Utrecht. Note that there was an admission fee of 25 cents! (Weiss Collection)

Feldmeijer was the right-hand man of Hanns Albin Rauter, the HSSuPF "Nordwest" leader within the NSB. Rauter relied on him to promote the SS's pan-Germanic ideas, in contrast to Mussert, who was first and foremost a nationalist. (All rights reserved)





Portrait of Henk Feldmeijer in the uniform of the Germaansche SS in the Netherlands, closely modeled after that of the Allgemeine-SS. The ranks are also the same as those of their German counterparts. (All rights reserved)

candidate must swear on his honor that he has no non-Aryan ancestry.

- No criminal convictions that would bring dishonor.
- Must be at least 1.72 m tall.
- Must be physically healthy, as demonstrated by a medical examination.
- Must be between 18 and 30 years of age. Exception for proven National Socialists prior to May 9, 1940.

After that, the prospective SS-Maat (the lowest rank, a translation of the German "SS-Mann") underwent another series of physical and genealogical examinations and screenings. Only after passing these tests did the candidate officially become an SS member. Organizationally, the Dutch SS was divided into five territorial regiments:

- Standard I (Friesland, Groningen, and Drenthe), headquartered in Groningen
- Standard II (Overijssel and Gelderland), headquartered in Arnhem
- Standard III (North Holland and Utrecht), headquartered in Amsterdam
- Standard IV (South Holland and Zeeland), headquartered in The Hague
- Standard V (North Brabant and Limburg), head-



Members of the Germaansche SS in the Netherlands. The rune adorning their caps is the wolf rune. (All rights reserved)



Feldmeijer increasingly presented himself as a supporter of the Third Reich. Here he is seen delivering a speech beneath a portrait of Adolf Hitler. (NIOD)



On December 31, 1941, he visited the Legioen Nederland, which was then undergoing training at the Arys camp in East Prussia. Here he is seen on the left, while the unit's commander, SS-Standartenführer Otto Reich, is speaking. On the right are Anton Mussert, SS-Brigadeführer Kurt Knoblauch (chief of staff of the "RF-SS" Kommandostab), and, partially obscured, SS-Obergruppenführer Hanns-Albin Rauter. It should be noted that Knoblauch had previously served as commander-in-chief of the Waffen-SS in the Netherlands. (US NARA)



The Germaansche SS in the Netherlands organizes an increasing number of marches and parades—veritable displays of force—which resonate to some extent with the Dutch population. As usual, some sympathizers would switch sides upon the liberation of the Netherlands. (NIOD)

Henk Feldmeijer accompanies Germaansche SS volunteers—who have enlisted in the Waffen-SS—to the Utrecht train station as they depart for a training camp in Germany. (NIOD)

quartered in Eindhoven.

In addition, there was a police regiment separated from this organization. The various regiments were divided into squads (4 men), sections (40 men + leader), companies (123 men + commander + deputy), and three battalions (500 men + staff personnel). However, this organization exists only on paper. In practice, the regiments were organized into a number of autonomous companies, which have relatively small personnel strength. On average, the regiments numbered only a few hundred men. A major reason for this low number is the constant flow of men to the Waffen-SS. In this regard, the letter that Feldmeijer sent on November 26, 1944, as an SS-Hauptsturmführer of the Waffen-SS and not as an SS-Standartenführer of the Germaansche SS, to Heinrich Himmler, is particularly interesting for more than one reason:

“Dear Reichsführer! In Düsseldorf, I took charge of 300 Dutch SS men who were performing police duties there, in order to incorporate them into the SS Battalion of the Kampfbrigade ‘Niederland’. Thus, 1,100 men of the German SS have so far been called up from Germany. In addition, 200 SS men have also enlisted in the SS Battalion in the Netherlands. The battalion is thus assured of sufficient manpower, as is its future replacement personnel. My dearest wish is to lead this





Feldmeijer traveled to Berlin on several occasions, where he was received by Gottlob Berger, the head of the SS-Hauptamt. On one occasion, he met his former unit commander there, SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich. (US NARA)

battalion into battle. Before returning to Holland, I humbly ask you, Reichsführer, to allow me to speak to you about a personal matter. While I was in Berlin, I realized, unfortunately too late, that I had played a trick on myself by sending my wife a fur coat without first inquiring about its previous owner. Please spare me any explanation; I can assure you that this is not a case of theft, as is being claimed in Berlin. It also goes without saying that I did not denounce SS-Untersturmführer Ten Cate so that he might be punished by an SS field court with the aim of taking possession of his house. I know, Reichsführer, that an innate carelessness sometimes leads me to do things that would be better left undone, given the responsibilities and tasks entrusted to me. The new mission with the men I have trained over many years of work must not only be an opportunity to prove our resolve, but also the mission upon which the National Socialists in Holland can continue to build and train the men with whom you, Reichsführer, can carry out your policy for the Greater German Reich. I remain, Reichsführer, your most loyal. Heil Hitler!"

The end

During the occupation, Feldmeijer's political significance lay in the fact that he served within the NSB as the SS leadership's chief spokesperson, working behind the scenes to achieve the complete integration of the Netherlands into a Greater Germanic Empire—unlike Mussert, who did not wish to go beyond a League of Germanic States. The German authorities used Feldmeijer as a stick to keep Mussert in line, and in 1943, Rauter even considered replacing Mussert with Feldmeijer as head of the NSB. In May 1943, there was an open clash between the NSB leadership and the Germaansche SS in Nederland. Under German pressure, this conflict was officially resolved by having Mussert and Feldmeijer appear side by side at a rally at The Hague Zoo on June 22, 1943, but from that date on, all real ties between the NSB and the Germanic SS were severed. The full extent of Feldmeijer's violent nature became clear in 1943, when he returned to the Netherlands after serving on the Eastern Front. By that time, the conflict between the underground re-

Feldmeijer gives a hero's welcome to the first Dutchman to be awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, SS-Obermann Gerardus Mooyman. Both are pictured here leaving a restaurant. (All rights reserved)



44 Standartenführer Feldmeijer
Lebenslauf.
Geb. 30-11-30 in Assen, Niederlande
an der niederl. Wehrmacht. Vorseh.
Abteil. 1928-1935 Universität G.
1930-1931 Dienstpflicht. 1931-1935 Wehrmacht.
Mit 1932 Heibel mit 33 Parteiredner. Aktiv in der P.O. 8
1935 aus der Wehrmacht entlassen
1939 Musseibgarte - Vorläufer der 44
mit der Regierung. 5. Mai 1940, Voltem Einmarsch
in Niederlande, verhaftet. Nach Nord-Frankreich
verschleppt. In Calais von den Deutschen befreit.
16 Sept. 1940 Auftrag zur Gründung und Führung einer
niederländischen 44. Frühling 1941 als Kommandier
bei der L. A. H. auf dem Balkan. Von 10/6/42 - 1/3/43
als Unterscharführer bei 44 Div. Wiking. E.K. II, Sturmab.
zeichen, Verwundetenabzeichen. Mit Wiking von 1/3/43
zum Reichsführer 44 zum 44 Standartenführer und
Unterscharführer der Waffen 44 befördert. Verheiratet
seit 1/11-37 mit Yvelje Annemie Lickes. Ein Sohn, geb. 27/12/38

Haag 9/4 43

Feldmeijer

In October 1943, Feldmeijer supported the transfer of the Landwacht Nederland—a territorial unit under the command of the German police—to the Waffen-SS, where it was re-named Landstorm Nederland. On this occasion, he is seen here at a dinner with SS-Standartenführer Adolf Ax, chief of staff of the Befehlshaber der Waffen-SS "Nordwest." Note that Ax is still wearing the armband of the "Das Reich" division, where he had served, in particular, as commander of its anti-tank battalion. (NIOD)

A document handwritten by Johannes Hendrik Feldmeijer, in which he summarizes his life (Lebenslauf), from his birth to the present day, April 9, 1943. (US NARA)



Feldmeijer was often seen in working-class neighborhoods, where the Germaansche SS enjoyed some success in its recruitment efforts. It is estimated that approximately twenty thousand Dutchmen fought in the ranks of the Waffen-SS. Most of them came from the ranks of the Germaansche SS in Nederland. (NIOD)

sistance and the German occupation forces had intensified. After three attacks in southeastern Drenthe against SS officers, Rauter decided that their deaths must be avenged through reprisals. Rauter ordered Feldmeijer to select men from his own ranks who would not shy away from extreme measures. Under the code name “Aktion Silbertanne,” the men of the Sonderkommando-Feldmeijer executed 45 civilians. In this regard, “the lesson of the front” played a decisive role. It hardened him and reinforced his belief that the struggle for a great Germanic empire had become a “do-or-die” struggle. By early 1945, Feldmeijer had once again become primarily a soldier. At that time, many men from the NSB and the SS had deserted. Feldmeijer did not do so and did not even consider it; quite the contrary. He asked Rauter if he could form a battalion to fight the Canadians. He thus took command of a battalion of the Landstorm Nederland, after undergoing adequate but abbreviated training in Berlin in January 1945. The Feldmeijer Battalion was stationed in Ruinen and numbered only 140 soldiers at the time. But as Feldmeijer was traveling there to assume effective command, his car was strafed by an Allied

fighter plane. Seriously wounded, he died on February 22 at the hospital in Raalte, not far from the front. Rauter spoke at the state funeral at Het Loo Palace. The entire NSB leadership was present, as was Rost van Tonningen. Feldmeijer was buried in the presence of a small group of SS officers from Groningen at the Esserveld Cemetery in Haren. Here is the account of that funeral, written by Hanns Albin Rauter in a telex sent on February 27, 1945, to Himmler, who was then in Styria aboard his special train:

“The farewell ceremony for SS-Staf. Feldmeijer took place yesterday in the grounds of Het Loo Palace. In attendance were, among others, the Commander-in-Chief, all the generals of the Wehrmacht, Mussert, Rost, van Geelkerken, and all the prominent leaders of the NSB. The coffin was placed in the woods, which provided a magnificent setting. The ceremony was ideologically flawless and contained no lapses in taste. All participants were particularly impressed by the ceremony. His wife, with their six-year-old son, and his parents—who are very well-organized and came from Groningen with other family members—were present. I liked them

very much. They were particularly pleased with the ceremony and the arrangements and thank you warmly and sincerely for your participation. Last night, the coffin was transported to Groningen, where it was quietly buried by the Germaansche-SS in the Heroes' Cemetery. Groningen was Feldmeijer's hometown. It is also the base of operations for the Germaansche-SS. I propose, Reichsführer, that we name the 1st SS-Standarte of the Germaansche-SS after "Henk Feldmeijer." I await your approval. Mussert spoke of our Führer. His speech was good and could not be contested in any way; he even praised Feldmeijer to the skies. The latter was his best propagandist and his best orator within the party. The Dutch National Socialists should, now more than ever, unite and stand behind the Führer. But the day before, Mussert dismissed van Geelkerken from the party because he did not resign from his position as Inspector General of the Landwacht. The K.R. now demands the suspension of van Geelkerken as Inspector General, because the Landwacht is composed solely of party members, respectively of the W.A. and the SS, and a member excluded from the NSB cannot be its commander. I tasked the head of organization within the Landwacht, SS-Ostuf. Stroink, who acted very calmly in this conflict, with handling the matter and trying once again to find a balance between Mussert and Van Geelkerken through the K.R. Van Geelkerken is willing to remain faithful and loyal to Mussert for the duration of the war. However, the latter is subject to an unprecedented witch hunt. But the real reason why van Geelkerken must leave is because, last year, he joined the SS and therefore moved away from his duties. Heil Hitler! Your most loyal subordinate, Rauter, HSSuPF Nord-west."

Today, Henk Feldmeijer's grave is still adorned with flowers, a sign that he has not been forgotten. Had he not been killed, he would in any case have been tried and likely executed after the war, both for high treason and for the reprisals taken against the civilian population. Indeed, take the example of Mussert, who was opposed to retaliatory measures; he was sentenced to death and executed in May 1946. Feldmeijer played a major role in recruiting the twenty thousand or so Dutchmen who served in the Waffen-SS during the war. Whatever their motivations—whether ideological or "romantic," or simply a desire for a challenge—there is no doubt that in most cases they were influenced by the rhetoric of Feldmeijer, who was both a staunch Nazi and an adventurer at heart. In this respect, his responsibility—even if only indirect—for the war crimes is immense. Historian Evertjan van Roekel studied the diaries of Dutchmen who fought in the SS Division "Wiking." In three of them, he found shocking descriptions of massacres of Jews. In the city of Tarnopol and its surroundings, Dutch soldiers participated in the torture, execution, and burial of Jews on July 4 and 5, 1941. For many Dutch SS members, these massacres were a matter of course. One of them wrote in his diary: "It will be clear to everyone that we, the SS, are acting without mercy against the Jews." Another recalled: "In Tarnopol, it was exquisite to hang a rabbi from the tower of his synagogue and then set it on fire." Another writes: "Mariupol fell into our hands, and the best spoils we could have dreamed of were the 13,000 Jews who fell alive into our hands, but who, of course, did not come out alive."

Charles Trang

SYLVESTER STADLER

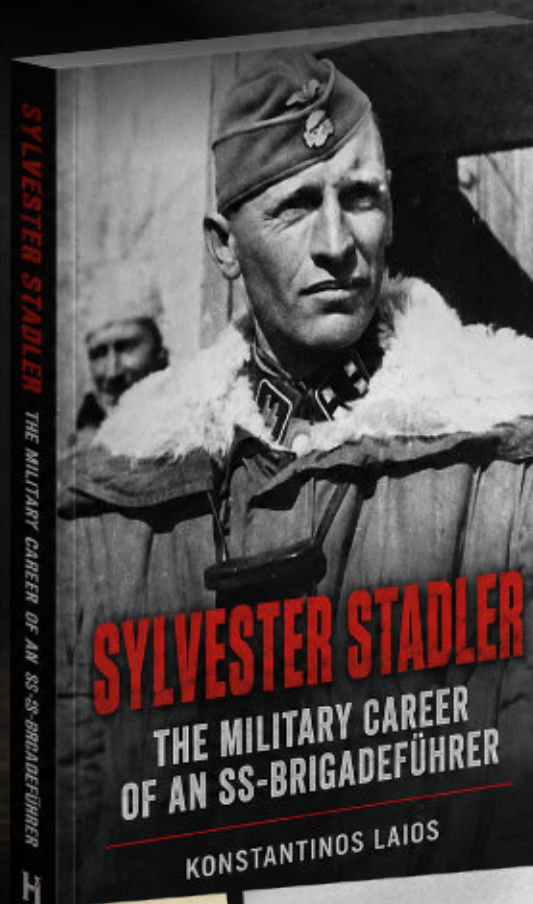
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Operation Rösselsprung

German Airborne Commando Raid Against Tito's Headquarters, 1944
By Lennart Westberg

During the summer of 1943, two events occurred that would indirectly shape German plans for a surprise attack—Operation Rösselsprung—aimed at neutralizing the headquarters of the Yugoslav partisan leader, Josip Broz Tito, in Bosnia. The larger event was Fascist Italy's withdrawal from the war following the overthrow of Prime Minister Benito Mussolini in July 1943 and the Western Allies' invasion of southern Italy. Around the same time, Heinrich Himmler decided to form a paratrooper battalion within the Waffen-SS. Within less than a year, this unit—SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500—would serve as the spearhead of the airborne assault on Tito's headquarters.

For a long time, Western military historians viewed

Unternehmen Rösselsprung as a peripheral pseudo-event, largely because the operation failed. Modern research, however, demonstrates how a more thorough analysis of this spectacular and compelling undertaking yields valuable insights for contemporary special operations—particularly the surgical strikes launched by the United States since September 11, 2001, to eliminate high-value targets of irregular terrorist groups operating in rugged terrain surrounded by a hostile civilian population.

Because Italian forces made up the majority of the Axis occupation troops in Yugoslavia and Greece, Italy's exit from the war in 1943 created a problematic vacuum of military units for Nazi Germany in the

Balkans. The German-Italian occupation of the region had already been rocked by traditionally brutal ethnic conflicts between Serbs and Croats, Greeks and Italians, as well as Serbs and Bulgarians. Furthermore, the Fascist puppet state of Croatia, through its Ustaše units, carried out massacres against the country's Jewish and Serb populations. The royalist partisan formations (Chetniks) under the Serbian General Draža Mihailović shared only a mutual hostility toward the Germans with Tito's communist partisan army; just as easily, they might turn on one another the very next day in a cruel, bloody internal civil war. From time to time, the Chetniks even aligned themselves with the Germans.

Over time, Tito's well-organized communist troops became the dominant armed force resisting the Axis occupiers in the region. Italy's capitulation forced the Germans to evacuate large swathes of Istria and Dalmatia, which were swiftly seized by Tito's expanding partisan brigades. Vast quantities of Italian war material—not least tactically vital communications equipment—were captured or purchased by Tito's forces. Combined with the Balkans' treacherous terrain of mountain ranges and abysmal roads, as well as extensive British weapon deliveries, Tito's war effort evolved throughout 1943–44 into an increasingly severe threat to the Wehrmacht's critical southeastern supply lines along the Balkans. Following Allied successes in North Africa in 1943, Hitler could no longer rule out an Anglo-American invasion along the Croatian coast.

The High Command in Berlin and Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, who served as Commander-in-Chief Southeast (Oberbefehlshaber Südost) for German forces in both Yugoslavia-Albania and Greece, began forging plans for a combined ground and airborne commando raid against Tito's Bosnian headquarters: Operation Rösselsprung (Knight's Move). Weichs and his staff were painfully aware of their Army Group's insufficient military resources to defeat the partisans across the board. Their hopes rested instead on a bold assault—literally out of the blue—to "decapitate" the high partisan leadership by eliminating its charismatic leader, Marshal Tito, and his supreme staff. Weichs hoped that the resistance movement would thereby be severely crippled, if not entirely collapsed. Hitler concurred with Weichs' assessment.

Heinrich Himmler, for his part, was eager to deploy a newly raised SS unit to the Balkan theater. Ever since 1937, the Reichsführer-SS had demanded that his



Josip Broz "Tito" distinguished himself already in World War I as the youngest Sergeant Major in the Austro-Hungarian Army. On this photo he is the Supreme Commander of the Yugoslav Partisans in World War II. After 1945 Tito was the dictator of Yugoslavia until his death in 1980.

steadily expanding Waffen-SS be allowed to set up its own paratrooper battalion. However, this demand met with bitter resistance from the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring. Nevertheless, the staggering German losses during the first half of 1943—suffered by the 6th Army at Stalingrad and the Panzerarmee Afrika in Tunisia—resulted in a radicalized mobilization, effectively scraping the bottom of the barrel of shrinking German manpower.

With Göring's influence on the wane, Himmler seized the opportunity. Backed by Hitler, and working through Waffen-SS court-martial lawyers and his command staff (SS-Führungshauptamt), he realized his long-held airborne ambitions. The combat personnel of the unit—officially designated SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500 on September 6, 1943—eventually numbered roughly one thousand men. A large portion of this force consisted of soldiers transferred from the central Waffen-SS penal camp in Danzig-

Photos taken at the Luftwaffe's Fallschirmjägerschule III in Kraljevo near Belgrade, with personell from the SS-Fallschirmjäger-Batallion 500 and Luftwaffe instructors.



Matzkau and the SS penal battalion at Chlum in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, having been convicted of various disciplinary offenses. Himmler's plan was to deploy his paratrooper battalion primarily in anti-partisan operations in the Balkans (Südost-Raum), after which surviving SS paratroopers could be rehabilitated and restored to their former ranks. This marked a departure from the traditional, draconian principle where penal companies and battalions were expected to be used up to the last man as a *verlorene Haufen* (forlorn hope) on suicide missions. The new concept offered a chance at rehabilitation (*Bewährung*) through combat, rather than guaranteed death.

After basic training, the battalion was sent to Serbia in November 1943 for practical jump training from Junkers Ju 52 aircraft at the Luftwaffe's standard Fallschirmjägerschule III in the city of Kraljevo, sixty miles south of Belgrade. The diary of SS signalman Leonard Schaaps contains an account of the journey from the Waffen-SS signals training battalion in Nuremberg, via Bohemia, to Kraljevo on November 7-9, 1943:



SS-Hauptsturmführer Kurt Rybka was since 20 April 1944 commander of the Waffen-SS airborne unit, SS-Fallschirmjäger-Batallion 500, during its daring but unsuccessful parachute and glider-borne assault on Tito's Headquarters at Drvar on 25 May 1944.

We forty signalmen in Nuremberg (radio and wire) are to form the signals platoon of the new SS para-trooper battalion. Appointed as our platoon leader is SS-Oberscharführer Schniedermann, an experienced and personable signals NCO with whom we get along famously. Our train journey toward Kraljevo takes us through Tabor and Budweis in Bohemia, and at midnight our train rolls into the Franz-Joseph station in Vienna, where we spend the night at the soldiers' hostel, sleeping the sleep of the just.

The following morning, our journey continues toward the Balkans. After crossing the Croatian border, we notice that the forests on both sides of this vital rail line have been cleared to guard against partisan sabotage. Small bunkers serve the same purpose. The burnt-out wrecks of railcars beside the tracks are a clear sign that this is a troubled area. At regular intervals, we pass telegraph poles with hanged partisans.

At Semlin, we cross the Croat-Serbian border, and in Belgrade we gain an unexpected traveling companion. Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs' pri-





vate saloon car is attached to our train; von Weichs selected us as an armed escort since our Commander-in-Chief is also heading to the Luftwaffe paratrooper school in Kraljevo."

In Kraljevo, the battalion was built up with its various combat and support platoons. The unit's cohesion—and consequently its combat quality—was uneven, largely due to the diverse military backgrounds of the demoted personnel drawn from various branches of the Waffen-SS. The draconian, spirit-crushing treatment at the SS penal units in Danzig-Matzkau and Chlum had naturally taken a toll on morale and motivation. On the other hand, accounts confirm that the high standards of the Luftwaffe instructional staff in Kraljevo, combined with the traditional care shown by German company commanders for their subordinates, provided a noticeable boost in morale for the SS paratrooper battalion.

Apart from top-tier paratrooper training, the Luftwaffe also loyally and generously provided weapons, clothing, and motorized equipment to the prospective SS paratroopers in Kraljevo—despite the chronic shortages of personnel, material, and fuel during this fifth year of the war. However, jump training from aircraft was frequently disrupted by the unpredictable weather of the Serbian mountain massifs, where heavy fog and high winds restricted practice jumps.

With 600 men and forty Junkers Ju 52s, the SS paratrooper battalion participated in Operation Margarethe I in March 1944—the bloodless German intervention in Hungary aimed at preventing the country's surrender to the Allies. The battalion gained further combat experience against Tito's partisans in April 1944 during Operation Maibaum in Bosnia, though the unit was deployed strictly as conventional infantry without an airborne drop. This lack of practical experience in combined airborne combat likely contributed to the heavy casualties suffered by the battalion during Operation Rösselsprung.

By this time, plans formulated by the German High Command and Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs to capture or kill Tito in a surprise attack on his headquarters in Drvar, western Bosnia, had fully matured. On May 6, 1944, Weichs signed the overall order, entrusting execution to the 2nd Panzer Army under Colonel General Lothar Rendulic. For Operation Rösselsprung, Rendulic assigned the 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division Prinz Eugen and elements of the

373rd (Croatian) Infantry Division. Operationally, these forces were placed under the German XV Mountain Corps led by Lieutenant General Ernst von Leyser, who was named tactical commander for Rösselsprung.

As additional ground units from his Army Group reserve, von Weichs allocated Panzer-Abteilung 202, two battalions from the Brandenburg Regiment (Abwehr), and the German 92nd Grenadier Regiment, among other units. Himmler with some reluctance contributed the Waffen-SS's newly formed paratrooper battalion, as he had originally intended to use it for anti-partisan operations in Slovenia. By May 21, 1944, the staff plans of Lothar Rendulic and the 2nd Panzer Army were fully finalized after Hitler approved the preliminary operational order at his Führer Headquarters, the Wolf's Lair (Wolfsschanze) in Rastenburg.

As early as the summer of 1943, German signals intelligence (Funkaufklärung) in Belgrade had begun systematically monitoring and routinely deciphering large volumes of Tito's partisan radio traffic. However, the rugged mountain terrain of the Balkans and the fluid nature of guerrilla warfare made it difficult to pinpoint Tito's stationary headquarters. By early 1944, Abwehr signals intelligence noted that frequent radio transmissions from Drvar strongly indicated that the partisan army's supreme command was located there. Luftwaffe aerial reconnaissance over Drvar and its surroundings also spotted newly constructed airfields used for Allied supply drops to Tito, as well as for foreign military missions from the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union co-located with his tactical headquarters.

In 1944, Drvar was a small town in western Bosnia with 4,000 inhabitants, situated along the railway line between Banja Luka and Split. Nestled in a river basin that forms an elongated valley, Drvar is surrounded by fields, mountains, and dense forests. The surrounding mountain gorges consist of porous limestone containing extensive cave systems. These provided shelter for the local population during air raids, but also served as ideally camouflaged hideouts for Tito and his immediate staff.

German intelligence services in the Balkans were a fragmented bunch, where habits of cooperation—driven by both petty rivalries and organizational friction—were poorly developed. In addition to von Weichs' own intelligence assets, Otto Skorzeny's commando units (SS-Jagdverbände) participated in the search for Tito's headquarters on Hitler's personal or-



ders. The High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) also deployed the operational arm of the Abwehr, the so-called Brandenburgers. Signals intelligence could only indicate where the supreme command's radio transmitter was operating, revealing nothing about Tito's personal movements. Consequently, German (and allied Croatian) intelligence services relied on inserted agents to determine exactly where Tito worked, slept, and traveled between the two, as well as the strength of his personal security detail.

The Germans never managed to obtain concrete answers to these vital questions—getting nothing beyond rumors—before Rösselsprung was launched. Aerial reconnaissance noted, among other things, that the local cemetery (Šobića Glavica) in Drvar was enclosed by a wall; they promptly dubbed this object "The Citadel" and mistakenly identified it as Tito's headquarters (which was actually located in a cave system in the northern part of the town). Furthermore, reconnaissance failed to spot 6 to 7 heavy anti-aircraft machine guns and 3 to 4 captured Italian light tanks operated by the partisans. Finally, the Germans vastly underestimated the reaction speed of the 6,000 to 7,000 elite partisan troops stationed in and around Drvar. This remarkably poor intelligence gathering contributed significantly to heavy losses among the SS paratroopers and the ultimate failure of the primary objective: capturing or killing Tito.

According to entries in the OKW war diary, when

von Weichs and Rendulic briefed Hitler on Operation Rösselsprung in May 1944, the Führer was skeptical about whether the designated assault force—just under 900 men from SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500—was large enough for the job. Reports also indicate that the commander of the SS-Jagdverbände, Otto Skorzeny, refused for various reasons to participate in Rösselsprung with his units.

Meanwhile, partisan observations of frequent low-flying German reconnaissance planes over Drvar in mid-May raised suspicions among Tito's staff regarding an impending air raid. Captured Croatian documents confirmed that an operation was imminent, likely in the form of aerial bombardment. Tito consequently moved his staff headquarters to a cave in the mountains near Bastasi, four miles away. What Tito and his staff had no inkling of, however, was that the initial phase of the attack would involve airborne troops (paratroopers and gliders)—a surprise that caught the partisans completely off guard and gave the Germans an initial advantage.

The overarching concept behind Operation Rösselsprung was to "pacify" a 750-square-kilometer partisan pocket between the Una and Vrbas rivers, with Drvar sitting squarely in the middle of this pocket. This was to be accomplished through a concentric ground assault from all directions toward Drvar. The vital element of surprise, however, was the coup-de-main airborne assault on Drvar by SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500, following a German dawn bombing raid on

partisan positions in and around the town. The timetable dictated that the first ground units were to reach Drvar later that same day—cutting off Tito's retreat and relieving the airborne forces.

On May 21, 1944, Colonel General Rendulic issued the operational order for Rösselsprung to the commanders involved. Secrecy was paramount due to fears of leaks to Tito from allied Croatian forces. Consequently, within the 373rd Croatian Infantry Division, only German cadre staff were briefed on the operational plan. The 40-man task force under Major Benesch (comprising local Chetnik soldiers and interpreters) from the Abwehr's elite Brandenburg commando unit was informed of their mission only after they were airborne, en route to the target.

To reinforce Rösselsprung, the Luftwaffe High Command staged various air units to the Balkans from across Europe—including Strasbourg, Nancy, and Mannheim. These included DFS 230 assault gliders and tow planes such as the Junkers Ju 52, Stuka Ju 87, and Henschel Hs 126. Although aircrews arrived in Croatia as early as March 1944, they were strictly isolated at various airfields until the day of the operation, May 25.

A consequence of this strict operational security was that subordinate staffs were given just three days to detailed-plan their missions. German weather forecasters in Belgrade predicted clear skies for May 25, prompting command to set that date for the launch of the coordinated ground and airborne assault.

During training in Kraljevo on April 20, 1944, SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500 received a new commander: 27-year-old SS-Hauptsturmführer Kurt Rybka. Born in Darmstadt in 1917 and a decorated veteran infantry officer from the Eastern Front, Rybka quickly earned the respect of both NCOs and enlisted men for his approachable and sensible leadership. Upon reading the operational order on May 21, Rybka realized that available transport planes and gliders were insufficient to land the entire battalion at once. He modified the plan so that 654 paratroopers would land via parachute and glider in a single wave around 07:00 on May 25, with an additional 220 men dropped as reinforcements five hours later. Rybka's operational order stated:

"The primary target for all participating elements of the battalion is Tito's supreme staff. Once located, it is the duty of every unit to ruthlessly eliminate this staff immediately by all available means. High-

ranking partisans are to be taken alive whenever possible. Written material of intelligence value must be secured. Fires must be strictly prevented within staff quarters to assist intelligence personnel in securing vital enemy documents."

An SS paratrooper from the battalion's first assault wave recalled:

"At 05:00 on May 25, we were briefed by our team leader, SS-Untersturmführer Hugo Witzemann, on the upcoming mission. Using special two-tone glasses, we studied aerial photographs of Drvar and its surroundings. They were remarkably sharp for their time. On the photos, our assault targets, staging areas, and axes of attack were clearly marked. Tito was explicitly named during Witzemann's briefing as the primary objective. Tito was to be captured under all circumstances—dead or alive. To help us identify him, a photograph of Tito in his Marshal's uniform was passed around the group. Our small arms were not quite on par with the Luftwaffe paratroopers (who were equipped with the FG 42); ours consisted of the MG 42 machine gun, MP 40 submachine gun, the cumbersome Mauser Kar 98k bolt-action rifle, hand grenades, and the Walther P38 pistol."

The Assault

For the surprise attack on May 25, 1944, the initial airborne force of just over 650 men from the Waffen-SS and Brandenburg was divided into small assault groups (Kampfgruppen) assigned to specific targets. For example, Kampfgruppe Panther, comprising 110 paratroopers, was handed what Rybka assumed was the toughest assignment: storming "The Citadel" (the walled cemetery in Drvar), which had been misidentified as Tito's headquarters. Other groups were tasked with capturing Allied military missions and neutralizing Tito's communications center. A second wave of 220 SS paratroopers was scheduled to drop over Drvar later in the morning.

A heavy aerial bombardment launched the attack at 06:30. First, two Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighters swept in, strafing ground targets in Drvar with cannon and machine-gun fire. Immediately following, fifteen Junkers Ju 87 "Stuka" dive-bombers dropped bombs on high-priority targets in town, including identified anti-air-



Waffen-SS paratroopers entering a Junkers Ju 52 transport aircraft en route for Drvar on 25 May 1944.



craft emplacements. Aircraft from the Croatian Air Force also participated in the strike. While this bombardment was underway, transport aircraft began dropping 314 paratroopers from Rybka's battalion. Within 5 to 10 minutes, an additional 340 paratroopers arrived via DFS 230 gliders. These gliders also carried essential heavy equipment, including mortars, flamethrowers, ammunition, and radio gear, where these had not been dropped in supply canisters.

While the parachute-dropped force landed with relatively few casualties, the glider-borne groups suffered heavily. Smoke from the air raid and resulting fires choked the narrow valley, severely degrading visibility. Furthermore, partisan anti-aircraft gunners recovered quickly, pouring heavy fire into the slow-moving gliders as they came in to land. Fearing intervention from Western Allied air forces—which could easily reach the Balkans from airfields in southern and central Italy—the German command assigned two groups of Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters flying at 2,500 meters to provide top-cover against Allied fighters.

An SS paratrooper recalled that initial morning assault:

"On the night of May 25 at 03:00, we were awakened and trucked to the airfield. By 05:00, each group stood in front of its assigned glider. Only then were we briefed on our target. Shortly before 06:00, I boarded our glider alongside our team leader, SS-Oberscharführer Herbert Müller, our pilot Batschauer, Bastian, Streckfuss, Öhm, and Fresdorf. A Ju 87 Stuka served as

our tow plane.

At 06:00, a roaring din went up as all forty gliders, tow planes, and escort fighters took off. Soon we were soaring at 3,000 meters over the Dalmatian mountains. Drafts howled through our glider, and the cramped interior left no room to move. Escort fighters continuously circled our glider armada.

After an hour, the Stukas released our tow lines roughly seven kilometers from Drvar. Looking down, we could see burning houses. Our battalion landed over Drvar in waves. At 07:00, the parachute force dropped, followed at 07:05 by gliders carrying my group—just over 650 men in total. Another 220

men were scheduled to drop at 12:00.

Our pilot, Batschauer—a calm Swabian—called out to us without a trace of panic: 'Going down now!' Our glider banked hard, then pitched straight down. One second the surrounding mountains were upright; the next, they were sideways or upside down! In an 80-degree dive, we plummeted from 3,000 meters down to just 150 meters above the deck. Suddenly, Batschauer deployed the drag chute, pulling the glider up into a 20-degree glide slope.

Suddenly, we heard a loud bang followed by a sickening crunch. What happened? Partisan anti-air-

FACT BOX : DFS 230 GLIDER

The assault groups of the SS paratrooper battalion not designated to drop by parachute over Drvar were to be transported in DFS 230 gliders. During the 1930s, the Luftwaffe prioritized tactics and logistical solutions for its new airborne forces: die Fallschirmjäger. A key requirement for a successful surprise air attack was silent flight. The Luftwaffe turned its attention to existing civilian glider designs. To transport airborne troops, the German Research Institute for Sailplane Flight in Darmstadt (Deutsche Forschungsanstalt für Segelflug, DFS) developed a multi-role glider. The result was the DFS 230 troop transport glider. The DFS 230 saw its famous baptism of fire on May 10, 1940, when German airborne engineers executed a precision assault to capture the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael.

Length: 11.24 m

Wingspan: 22.30 m

Speed: 210 km/h

Role: Troop transport glider capable of carrying nine armed soldiers and one pilot. The fuselage consisted of a tubular steel frame covered with wood and fabric.

Takeoff: Towed by a mother aircraft (usually a Ju 52 or He 111) via a steel cable or rigid tow-bar. Wheels were jettisoned after takeoff.

Gliding: Released from tow aircraft at a maximum altitude of 4,000 meters and a distance of 12–20 km from the target.

Landing: Landed on central skids. To allow landings in tight spaces, drogue parachutes—and later braking rockets—were built into the fuselage. Skids were also wrapped in barbed wire to increase ground friction upon landing.

Armament: Armed with a 7.92 mm MG 34 machine gun. Gear could be stored in the tail section, which often led to tail-heaviness and handling difficulties while under tow.





Landing waves of Waffen-SS paratroopers from Junkers Ju 52 transport aircrafts on 25 May 1944 over Drvar. German Intelligence failure to locate masses of existing elite Partisan troops near the landing grounds at Drvar contributed to heavy SS-paratrooper losses.

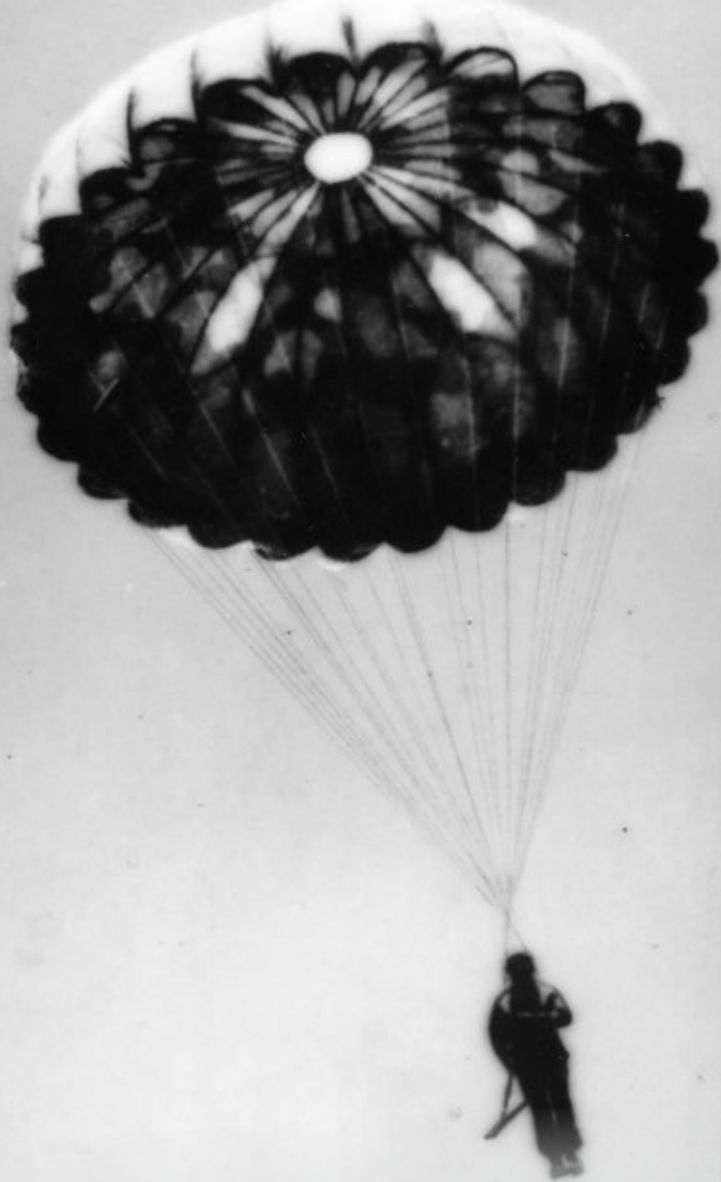
craft fire had clipped our tail section. Batschauer briefly lost control; our left wing caught a tree, and the glider slammed to the ground from a height of eight meters. My comrades Öhm and Streckfuss had to be evacuated to the field dressing station, but the rest of us were unhurt and immediately joined the battle."

One major surprise for the Germans was that the partisans in Drvar possessed 3 to 4 captured Italian light tanks, taken when Italy abandoned the Axis alliance in 1943. During the planning for Rösselsprung, staff officers of the 2nd Panzer Army and XV Mountain Corps had failed to account for enemy armor on-site. Consequently, no dedicated anti-tank weapons like the Panzerfaust or Panzerschreck (Raketenpanzerbüchse 54)

had been flown in with Rybka's battalion. Nineteen-year-old SS-Sturmmann Hermann Wabersich described encountering one of these tanks:

During the fighting around the factory complex in Drvar, a tank crewed by partisans suddenly appeared and engaged us at point-blank range. Some of our men yelled for flamethrowers, but when we tried to assemble them, we found they had been damaged during landing and were useless. Our group took heavy casualties under intense fire from the tank. Suspecting Tito might be inside trying to escape, I decided to single-handedly put it out of action. I stripped off my jump smock, scrambled onto the tank, and wrapped the smock tightly around the driver's vision slot. Blinded, the driver began ram-

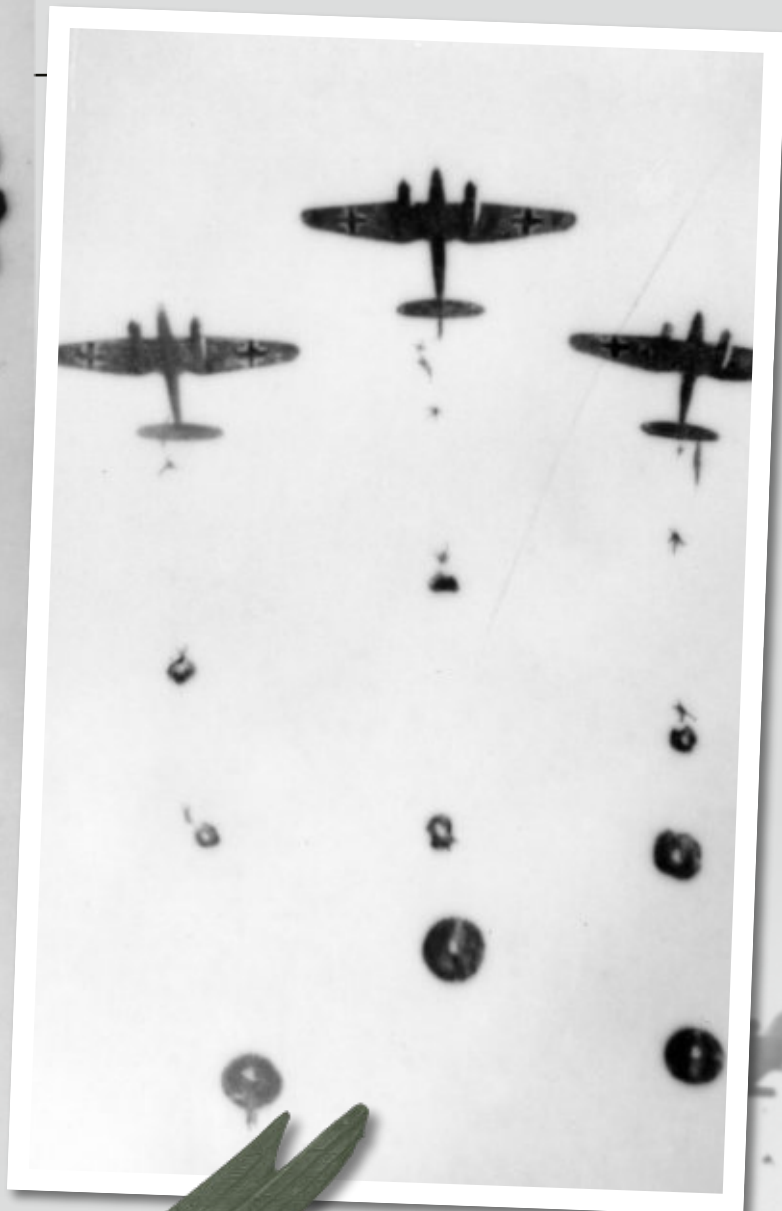




ming into house walls and support pillars. My plan to trick the driver into steering down a deep shell crater failed, however; I was severely wounded atop the tank by a shot near my carotid artery and another through my upper left arm, after which I was carried off to the battalion aid station."

Throughout the morning's intense close-quarters combat in Drvar, paratroopers reported coming under fire from female and youth partisan fighters. By 09:00, the paratroopers had secured central Drvar as well as "The Citadel"—which proved to be a dead end rather than Tito's command post. During the sweep of central Drvar, 400 prisoners were captured and turned over to the Brandenburgers for interrogation regarding Tito's whereabouts. But the interrogations yielded no useful information, leaving Rybka and his staff completely in the dark.

In reality, Tito was close by. He had been abruptly awakened just before 07:00 by the opening German bombing raid and the first landing waves of SS paratroopers. Throughout the morn-







Debris of war: a crashed DFS 230 troop transport glider at Drvar.



Hermann Wabersich (b. April 23, 1925) joined the SS in 1942, earning two Iron Crosses and two Tank Destruction Badges with SS-Kradschützen-Regiment "Thule". Commissioned as an SS-Untersturmführer in March 1944 after attending SS-Junkerschule Braunschweig, he served with SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500 (later 600) until the end of the war.

ing's battle for "The Citadel" and central Drvar, Tito and his personal staff were hiding inside a limestone cave system on the northern outskirts of town. May 25, 1944, happened to be Tito's 52nd birthday—which under different circumstances might have been his last. Due to a celebration held the evening of May 24, Tito had decided to stay at his primary headquarters cave in Drvar. Only twenty people were in the cave with him: his mistress Zdenka, members of his immediate staff, secretaries, and his Alsatian dog, "Tiger."

Around 09:00, German patrols began probing the area near Tito's cave, meeting fierce resistance from his personal security detail. As partisan reinforcements arrived to cover the cave's entrance and flank the paratroopers, the Germans were forced to pull back slightly and lay down mortar and machine-gun fire. Recognizing the heavy firing coming from the cave, battalion commander Rybka dispatched reinforcements at 10:30, correctly realizing that his men had finally found Tito's position.

However, arriving partisan reinforcements and the cave's formidable defensive layout allowed Tito and twenty members of his inner circle to slip away unnoticed at 11:15. They escaped through a hidden rear hatch, using ropes to abseil down into a dry, brush-covered stream bed. Even during their subse-





quent trek across the Šator mountain range, Tito's group repeatedly came within a hair's breadth of being spotted and wiped out by Brandenburg patrols, German infantry, and pro-German Chetniks. Finally, on June 3, they reached safety at the Kupreško Polje plateau, where Tito and his staff were airlifted by an Allied Douglas C-47 transport to Bari, Italy, on the night of June 3–4, 1944.

Following Tito's escape around noon on May 25, fighting intensified between the SS paratroopers and partisan forces in and around Drvar. The second airborne drop at 12:00 suffered heavy losses from partisan anti-aircraft and machine-gun fire. Although the battalion had landed several recoil-less 10.5 cm artillery pieces (10.5 cm Fallschirmjäger-Leichtgeschütz 40), the dropped ammunition landed in open ground under intense crossfire; paratroopers sent to retrieve the shells were cut down immediately. Later that afternoon, the battalion commander, Rybka—who was highly respected by his officers and men—was severely wounded by a hand grenade and evacuated by a Fieseler Storch light aircraft.

Facing overwhelming numbers, the remnants of the SS paratrooper battalion retreated to the Drvar cemetery ("The Citadel")—an area measuring roughly 50 by 80 meters enclosed by a stone wall that offered modest cover. Surrounded by superior enemy

forces, running dangerously low on ammunition, and desperately digging shallow trench scrapes under machine-gun and mortar fire, the battered paratroopers received demoralizing news that afternoon: ground forces from XV Mountain Corps advancing from various directions would not reach Drvar to relieve SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500 until the following day.

At nightfall, Luftwaffe close-support sorties were forced to cease. The night turned into a living hell of repeated mass partisan assaults, some of which had to be repulsed in hand-to-hand combat with bayonets and entrenching tools. A final concentric assault launched at 03:30 by elements of Tito's 9th Dalmatian Division and 1st Proletarian Brigade was barely repulsed by the paratroopers summoning their last remaining strength.

On May 26 at 07:00, the German 92nd Grenadier Regiment radioed that it was fighting its way toward Drvar. By 12:00, elements of the 92nd and the Brandenburg Regiment broke through the partisan ring, reaching the cemetery and relieving the paratroopers. This prompted a general retreat by partisan formations, as first light brought renewed attacks from the Luftwaffe, which also dropped resupply canisters containing ammunition, water, and medical supplies over the paratroopers' final defensive perimeter.



Paratroopers from the Luftwaffe hold up Tito's marshal uniform, that was found in the limestone cave system that served as Tito's provisional HQ on 25 May 1944.

Casualty estimates for SS-Fallschirmjäger-Bataillon 500 during Rösselsprung vary significantly. One source states that while the battalion entered combat the previous day with 874 men, only 250 effectives remained standing at the cemetery by the morning of May 26, the rest being killed or wounded. The battalion's official report to XV Mountain Corps on June 7, 1944, listed total casualties as 50 killed, 132 wounded,

and 6 missing. War crimes were evidently committed by both sides. The dead German soldiers were buried in a mass grave in Drvar, while the numerous DFS 230 gliders scattered across the terrain were burned to prevent them from becoming enemy war trophies.

Although the Germans failed to capture or kill Tito, his supreme staff headquarters and communications center were destroyed, and Tito himself was forced to



flee to Italy, temporarily losing direct operational contact with his partisan brigades. The fact that the Germans placed such immense importance on Tito's person—dead or alive—only served to elevate his stature to legendary status among both the partisans and the Western Allies. Operation Rösselsprung thus had profound short- and long-term consequences.

Operational Conclusions

A 2012 study conducted by the U.S. Marine Corps highlighted that the weakest link in Operation Rösselsprung was intelligence failure—specifically, the inability to pinpoint Tito's exact location. As noted, the Germans held a significant advantage in that the initial morning airborne strike caught Tito and his forces completely by surprise. However, the attack targeted the wrong primary objective—the cemetery misidentified as "The Citadel." When Tito's actual command post was finally identified hours later, only one of the six assault groups was initially committed to attack it.

The U.S. Marine Corps study noted that had Tito's headquarters been correctly located beforehand, the assault plan likely would have tasked glider-borne paratroopers from the first wave to immediately secure the mountain plateau directly above Tito's cave—a position that commanded the town of Drvar and offered an easily defensible base for supporting fire—in conjunction with a frontal assault on the cave entrance. Had this been done, Tito's escape route would have been severed early on, virtually guaranteeing his capture or death.

The study also criticized the battalion commander, Kurt Rybka, for a lack of operational flexibility in planning the second airborne wave. A key improvement would have been for the Luftwaffe air commander for Croatia (Fliegerführer Kroatien), Lieutenant General

Hagen, together with Lieutenant General von Leyser (XV Mountain Corps tactical commander) and SS-Hauptsturmführer Rybka, to pre-assign one or two specially equipped communications and reconnaissance aircraft to act as airborne pathfinders. With airborne command assets available, Rybka could have redirected the second wave—in light of the drastically changed ground situation—to drop on designated alternative drop zones near Tito's actual headquarters, effectively coordinating the actions of the first and second assault waves.

Instead, Rybka remained tethered to a rigid, obsolete operational plan. Consequently, the second wave dropped at 12:00 onto flat, open terrain of no tactical value under heavy, direct machine-gun fire from partisan positions—resulting in severe German casualties. Regardless of the intelligence failures regarding Tito's headquarters, greater tactical adaptability during the second wave might well have saved the day for the Germans:

"The level of flexibility in a plan should be in direct proportion to the level of uncertainty and fluidity in the situation. Thus, through good planning, the unexpected is not the unforeseen."

Lennart Westberg

Member of the Swedish Military History Commission.

We would like to thank Rüdiger Warnicke and Paul Turner for providing the photos for this article.

SS-Pi.Sturmbann

Mother of all SS-pioneer units

Formed in early 1935 to provide the young SS-VT with crucial combat engineering capabilities, SS-Pi.Sturmbann was far more than a single Dresden-based unit. From bridging rivers and clearing minefields to taking part in the heavy fighting for Warsaw, this pioneer force served as the master template and ultimate embryo from which every subsequent Waffen-SS pioneer battalion was born.

On January 29, 1935, the SS-FHA and *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler decided to establish a pioneer battalion (*Pionier-Bataillon*) for the SS-VT. It was also decreed that the enlisted personnel for this unit would be drawn from the various *SS-Oberabschnitte* in existence at the time. Regarding the officer corps, it was determined that the battalion would require 5 *SS-Hauptsturmführer*, 10 *SS-Obersturmführer*, and 15 *SS-Untersturmführer*.

Enlisted men were required to be at least 170 cm

tall, and all had to hold both the SA Sports Badge and the German Sports Badge (*Reichssportabzeichen*). Those who volunteered agreed to serve a minimum term of four years. All candidates were subjected to a screening process to determine their suitability for service. During one such selection drive, 250 men began the process; following the medical examination, only 150 remained. A veteran who was present from the beginning recalled that most of these 150 men came from the disbanded SA Sports



The distinctive collar tab of the SS-Pi-Sturmbann, featuring a pickaxe and shovel.

Karl Ulrich as Kp.Fhr. of 3./SS-Pi.-Sturmbann during an exercise.





Karl Ulrich and Fritz Bunse, both of whom would later in the war receive higher decorations and advance to senior positions. By the end of the war, Bunse was Korps-Pi.-Führer of V. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Korps.

Schools, *SS-Abschnitt Elbe*, and the *Politische Bereitschaft* units in Reutlingen and Ellwangen. Dresden was chosen as the main garrison town. Construction work began feverishly to accommodate the newly formed battalion, which was initially quartered in Leisnig. By April 1937, the new barracks were completed, and the battalion moved into an exceptionally modern facility equipped with state-of-the-art technical equipment for its time.

The first commander of *SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT* was *SS-Stubaf* Karl Demme, with Fritz Launer appointed as adjutant. On April 28, 1935, the first recruits arrived at the barracks. The 1st and 2nd Companies were filled first, followed by the 3rd Company. Early SS units all wore dedicated collar tabs denoting their specific unit; for *SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT*, it was decided that a crossed pick and shovel would be displayed alongside the SS runes. They were also issued a cuff title bearing the inscription "*SS-Pionier*

Sturmbann".

Initially, no weapons training could take place as the battalion had not yet received any firearms. Martin Stange, the officer responsible for weapons and equipment, recounted how he had to attempt to requisition arms from *SS-Oberabschnitt Mitte*, which held over 1,100 K98 rifles. However, *SS-Oberabschnitt Mitte* resisted this request. In the end, Stange arranged for the Army (*Heer*) to supply the battalion with weapons. Although they were initially issued worn-out arms, protests eventually secured 550 factory-new K98 rifles, allowing weapons training to commence.

Over the following year, the battalion was expanded into a fully fledged unit with all necessary capabilities. In June, a signal platoon arrived from *SS-Na.Stuba*, stationed at Adlershorst in Berlin. Rigorous training then began, covering bridge building, mine clearance, and other field engineering tasks.



August Heißmeyer conducting a review of the SS-Pionier-Sturmbann



The training was demanding and placed heavy strains on the soldiers. Remarkably, many members of this unit would later receive high decorations: 4 were awarded the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, 22 received the Knight's Cross, and 7 were awarded the Honor Roll Clasp of the German Army (*Ehrenblatt des Deutschen Heeres*). A total of 51 soldiers would later earn the German Cross in Gold, while only two were awarded the German Cross in Silver.

In the summer of 1936, a change of command took place, with Karl Blumberg—dubbed "the Old Man" by the young recruits—taking over as battalion commander. The adjutant position had already changed in November 1935, when Ferdinand Tietz assumed the role. The 1st Company was led by Edmund Frosch until December 1935, when he was replaced by Heinz Lammerding. The 2nd Company was commanded by Franz Blase until December 1936, after which he was succeeded by the former adjutant, Ferdinand Tietz. The 3rd Company was initially led by SS-Ostuf Wawczyk; he was replaced sometime during 1935 by Emil Klein, who was in turn succeeded by Walter Zimmermann in the summer of 1936.

Ahead of the 1935 Nuremberg Rally (*Reichsparteitag*), the battalion was tasked with constructing a footbridge at the grounds. Previous footbridges had been erected by the Army, but this time SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT was given the assignment, exe-

cuting it to perfection.

For SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT, the subsequent years brought continuous drills, training, and further exercises. It was not until March 1938 that they participated in another major operation, taking part in the *Anschluss* of Austria into the German Reich. In his diary, Rudolf Enseling described how German units were greeted by cheering crowds wherever they went.

The next major operation was the annexation of the Sudetenland in the autumn of 1938. Enseling described this operation as well; however, it was not as warmly received as the one in Austria six months earlier. While joy was widespread among the Sudeten Germans, the Czech inhabitants were markedly hostile. By mid-November 1938, the battalion had returned to its barracks in Dresden.

Yet their respite lasted only a few months—or, as Karl Ullrich, then commander of the 3rd Company, noted in his diary: "*In truth, we had no quiet moment after March 1938.*" In the spring of 1939, Germany annexed the remainder of Czechoslovakia following an agreement between British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and German leader Adolf Hitler. This time, SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT met no cheering crowds, encountering instead sullen, hostile faces and weeping Czech citizens.

In the summer of 1939, training for SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT intensified, taking place in sectors across Sile-



Personnel of the SS-Pionier-Sturmabteilung during the unit's early years.



Max Seela, who would later be awarded the RK and DKiG, began his service with the SS-Pi.-Sturmabteilung.



Karl Ulrich began his wartime service with the SS-Pi.-Sturmabteilung and ended the war as Div.Kdr SS-Pz.Div. "Wiking".

sia and Brandenburg. Rumors spread among the men: *"Will there be war between Poland and Germany?"* In mid-August, the battalion was ordered to prepare for deployment, and by August 21, 1939, it stood ready to march. On August 24, the battalion reached Blechhammer (South). On August 28, an alarm was sounded, and the unit prepared for combat. All leaves were canceled, and the soldiers were kept on high alert for whatever was to come. That same evening, *SS-Pi.Stuba* was ordered to march once more, reaching its destination on the 29th and taking up fully prepared positions. Among other duties, they guarded a bridge connecting Germany and Poland, aware that Polish forces had booby-trapped it. August 30 brought nothing new—only tense anticipation. On August 31, *3./SS-Pi.Stuba* was attached to the Army's *Pi.Btl. 58* for its first opera-

tional assignment.

On August 26, *RFSS* Himmler dispatched a message to the soldiers of *SS-Pi.Stuba SS-VT*: *"SS men. I expect you to do more than your duty! God bless you and Heil Hitler."* The battalion was then positioned on the German side of the border, level with the Polish town of Tarnowitz.

On August 31, 1939, the Polish side remained quiet as the battalion waited. Then, at 17:55 hours, the code word *"Herbstanfang"* (Beginning of Autumn) arrived, signaling them to prepare. By 20:00 hours, the battalion occupied its prepared positions and waited. At 02:00 hours, an assault detachment (*Stormtrupp*) under Fritz Bunse advanced and prepared to cross the border, with the main body of the battalion following shortly behind. At 04:30 hours, under the first rays of the morning sun, the battalion



Karl Demme, the second commander of the SS-Pi.-Sturmabteilung, finished the war with the rank of SS-Standartenführer.

crossed the border alongside numerous other German units, and World War II was underway. *SS-Pi. Stuba* encountered heavy road barricades made of felled trees set up by the Polish Army, but these caused little delay, and they continued their advance. *SS-Pi. Stuba* was subsequently involved in the heavy fighting for Warsaw and Modlin between September 20 and September 28.

Following the conclusion of campaign in Poland, *SS-Pi. Stuba SS-VT* returned to its garrison in Dresden. Once again, feverish activity ensued as the gaps left by casualties in Poland were filled and new recruits were trained. The declaration of war by Britain and France on September 3 mattered little to them at the time.

However, the days of *SS-Pi. Stuba SS-VT* as an independent entity were numbered. During the winter of 1939 and the spring of 1940, the *SS-Führungshauptamt* and the *RFSS* began reorganizing the SS and the SS-VT. As a result, on April 12, 1940, the SS-VT and its former designations ceased to exist, adopting the new title *Waffen-SS*. For the former *SS-Pi. Stuba*, this meant integration into the

newly formed *SS-V.-Division* (which later became *SS-Division "Das Reich"*), where it was redesignated *SS-Pi. Btl. 2 "Das Reich"*. *SS-Pi. Sturmabteilung* is notable for being the parent unit from which all subsequent pioneer battalions (*SS-Pi. Btl.*) within the *Waffen-SS* originated. The Dresden garrison continued to serve as the home base for *SS-Pi. AuE. Btl. 1* until the end of the war.

As demonstrated as early as the Polish campaign, the SS Pioneer Battalion suffered severe combat losses—a trend that persisted throughout the remainder of the war. During the formation of *SS-Totenkopf Pi. Btl.*, the SS introduced a penal assignment known as "*Verlorener Haufen*" ("Forlorn Hope"). Many officers and soldiers convicted of various offenses who received this sentence served it exclusively within pioneer battalions, with the *SS-Totenkopf Division* being the first to implement it. A notable case was Markus Habben, who had previously served on the headquarters staff at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Once a soldier was killed in action while serving in a "*Verlorener Haufen*", his former rank and status within the SS were restored, his offense deemed expiated.

Georg Schwab







DER FRANZÖSISCHE LEHRGANG: FRENCHMEN AT BAD TÖLZ

The project to establish a French division within the Waffen-SS emerged during 1942 and received the Führers endorsement in December of that year. Initially, the French war effort in service of the Black Order; was intended to facilitate the formation of two or three divisions. However, faced with a shortage of volunteers, Hans Jüttner abandoned this ambitious objective, establishing only a single regiment instead. On September 16, 1943, the SS-Führungshauptamt informed the SS-Hauptamt of the need to recruit 90 French officers and 300 non-commissioned officers (NCOs) by October 15. Yet, between March and October 1943, Gottlob Berger's services managed to mobilize only a handful of officers and a few dozen NCOs. To address this manpower deficit, a portion of these cadres underwent SS-Werber training to become recruiters or propagandists for the French Waffen-SS. Furthermore, some of the enlisted higher-ranking personnel proved too old for front-line service and were declared unfit. To resolve

this issue, two Lehrgangs; (training courses) were created: one for officer candidates and another for NCO candidates. Faced with this lack of leadership personnel, Berger turned toward French collaborationist movements, notably Joseph Darnand's Milice and Jacques Doriot's Parti populaire français (PPF). In this study, we will analyze the trajectories of these cadres (officers and NCOs) through their biographies and the examination of period documents. We will also shed light on their daily lives as well as the hardships they endured during their engagement.

In December 1943, Sturmbannführer Karl Betzwieser traveled from Tölz to the Sennheim camp to review the instruction of the French officer platoon. He conferred with Oberführer Fick to determine when the French could be sent to Bad Tölz, their numbers, and the planned duration of their training at the facility. Despite various pressures, the commander of Sennheim specified that he planned to send the French during the first fortnight of January

1944, noting that he was acting directly upon Himmler's ordinances. Additionally, Betzwieser requested that Untersturmführer Reiche also be sent to the Junkerschule to help mitigate the significant linguistic difficulties faced by the French officers.

On January 7, 1944, at 10:00 PM, *SS-Sturmбанführer* Wellbrock sent a telegram to Bad Tölz announcing that 24 French officer candidates were en route. *SS-Frw.-Hauptsturmführer* Gamory-Dubourdeau was dissatisfied with the insufficient number of officers. Consequently, he did his utmost to bring in more recruits capable of attending the refresher course for French officers. On January 10 and 11, 1944, he sent numerous telegrams to Sennheim and the Ersatzkommando Frankreich, while holding meetings with the inspector of the upcoming officer course, Erich Kostenbader. He also requested that the PPF (Parti Populaire Français) send cadres who had received their rank prior to the war in June 1940. He noted that three young recruits from the Unterführer-Lehrgang were performing above average and were fit for the officer course: Delsart, Fayard, and Hayes.

However, Delsart and Hayes were facing disciplinary measures following an incident involving a bar robbery during their leave in France. These men would not join the Sturmbrigade until later, directly at Neweklau. The only one to join the special French officer-cadet course was *SS-Frw.-Rottenführer* René Fayard, a former student-aspirant of the transport corps (le train) in the French army who had joined the NSKK before transferring to the Waffen-SS in the summer of 1943. He arrived at Bad Tölz on January 19, 1944. On January 24, *SS-Frw.-Schütze* Dominique Scapula arrived, also incorporated following Gamory-Dubourdeau's requests and his own wishes. This former second lieutenant of the LVF (Légion des Volontaires Français) came directly from the Ersatzkommando Frankreich in Paris, where he had worked in the recruitment service and acted as a liaison between the PPF and French military organizations.

On January 26, the final recruit of the French Lehrgang from east of the Rhine arrived: *SS-Oberscharführer* Valentin Patzak, serving as an interpreter but also participating in the course as a student. Patzak came from the Waffen-SS personnel department within the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA). Also in January, the Flemish *SS-Unterscharführer* Marcel Eeckhout was assigned to the

Lehrgang as an interpreter and participant. In total, the course consisted of 28 participants: 26 Frenchmen, one German, and one Fleming. This was far from the 60 to 90 participants expected by the SS-Führungshauptamt to staff a regiment, let alone a French SS division. On Friday, January 7, 1944, the French recruits arrived at the school to undergo medical examinations, outfitting, and room assignments over the weekend. On Monday, January 10, 1944, the course began in earnest, scheduled to last until March 11, 1944, ending concurrently with the 3rd course for Germanic officers. The start date of January 10 appeared to be late, as the SS-Führungshauptamt had notified the Sennheim camp as early as December 15 to request their arrival at Bad Tölz as soon as possible.

The participants arrived without paybooks (Soldbucher); after consultation with Reiche, it was discovered they had not yet received them. The ordinance officer of the SS-Junkerschule did his best to regularize this situation as quickly as possible.

What did the course for these former officers and officer candidates consist of? What was its goal, its progression, and its results? Since November 1943, *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Erich Kostenbader had been preparing the refresher course for the French candidates. He submitted the basic program, which was approved by the SS-Junkerschule Tölz on December 29, 1943. The permanent staff of the "1. Sonderlehrgang für ehem. Französische Offiziere" (*1st Special Course for Former French Officers*) was organized as follows: the head of the Inspection, coming from the SS-Untersführerschule Posen-Treskau, was *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Kostenbader; *SS-Obersturmführer* Bender from the SS-Junkerschule Klagenfurt handled political instruction; and *SS-Untersturmführer* Reiche served as Kostenbader's adjutant and translator. Also acting as translators within the Lehrgang were *SS-Oberscharführer* Patzak and *SS-Unterscharführer* Eeckhout, while remaining active participants.

The course aimed to answer specific questions:

- With what rank and function can the participant be accepted into the Waffen-SS, based on their behavior, performance, and racial background?
- From captain to aspirant, in which branch and position can they be utilized within the French

Ifd. Nr.:	Name:	Vorname:	Dienstgrad:	Waffengattung:
1.	Artus	Jean	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
2.	Bartolomei	Ivan	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
3.	Brocard	Pierre	Frw.-Oscha.	Luftwaffe
4.	Cance	Pierre	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
5.	Chapys	Abel	Frw.-Oscha.	Kavallerie
6.	Croisille	Jean	Frw.-Oscha.	Kavallerie
7.	Eeckhout	Marcel	SS-Uscha.	Infanterie
8.	Fenet	Henri	Frw.-Oscha.	Artillerie
9.	Fayard	René	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
10.	de la Faye	Jacques	Frw.-Oscha.	Kavallerie
11.	Flühr	Edmond	Frw.-Oscha.	Artillerie
12.	Gamory-Dubourdeau	Paul	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
13.	Gaultier	Leon	Frw.-Hstur.	Infanterie
14.	Hug	Pierre	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
15.	Kreis	Henri	Frw.-Uscha.	nicht gedient
16.	Lambert	Robert	Frw.-Oscha.	Kavallerie
17.	Laschett	Charles	Frw.-Schtz.	Kavallerie
18.	de Mandiargues	Alfred	Frw.-Oscha.	Artillerie
19.	Mauthuit	Henri	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
20.	Peyron	Joseph	Frw.-Oscha.	Artillerie
21.	Patzak	Valentin	SS-Oscha.	Pak
22.	Pignard-Borthet	Paul	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
23.	Pleyber	Josef	Frw.-Oscha.	Artillerie
24.	Fougot	Albert	Frw.-Oscha.	Infanterie
25.	Pruvost	Paul	Frw.-Oscha.	Panzer
26.	Scapula	Dominiques	Frw.-Schtz.	Infanterie
27.	de Fissot	Noel	Frw.-Oscha.	Artillerie
28.	Wable	Pierre	Frw.-Oscha.	Nachschub

We find the following distribution of the participants in the Sonderlehrgang according to their original branch of service: six artillerymen, one from the Air Force, one from the transport corps, one from the armoured forces, five cavalrymen, eleven infantrymen, and Kreis, who had never performed military service. An examination of the backgrounds and careers of the twenty-six French officer cadets reveals the mediocre quality of the personnel sent to the SS Junker School at Bad Tölz. These men were generally young and possessed only limited military training. Ten of them had never served as officers in the French Army, holding ranks ranging from private second class to warrant officer, while Jacques de Lafaye and Gaultier had attained only the rank of officer cadet (aspirant). Although fourteen others did hold officer commissions, all were reserve officers; not a single one came from the regular army. They included six second lieutenants, six lieutenants, one 49-year-old captain, and one 59-year-old lieutenant colonel. It is clear that their selection was based more on their political influence than on their tactical competence. This finding refutes the accounts of Jean Mabire, who, relying on veterans' testimonies, presents a romanticised and embellished version that is far removed from historical reality. What emerges instead is an internal power struggle between the principal movements of the French Collaboration. The Milice and the PPF competed for control of the French unit of the Waffen-SS, while the other collaborationist parties lacked the manpower to challenge them. The Waffen-SS thus became little more than an instrument serving the ambitions of Darnand and Doriot. For the latter, the objective was to present himself as the sole genuine champion of the struggle against Bolshevism, in continuity with the LVF. For Darnand, the strategy was equally clear: to train a cadre of officers capable of arming his Milice and ensuring its control over the maintenance of order in France.

volunteer unit of the Waffen-SS?

- The rank proposal following the course was closely tied to the volunteers' leadership abilities and was classified as follows:
- Battalion Commander = Hauptsturmführer
- Company Commander = Obersturmführer
- Section Leader = Untersturmführer (Standarten-Oberjunker depending on the score and the





volunteer's original rank)

Those who did not achieve a sufficient score during the course remained at the rank of Oberscharführer but could receive special assignments based on their qualifications. Officers and candidates were graded in the following areas: ideological training, tactics, armed service (military administration and organization), service attitude, terrain mastery, and physical performance. Each volunteer was scored out of 10 for each domain. However, a 10/10 represented "textbook" tactics; 9/10 was the professor's level; 8/10 the assistant's. Thus, 7/10 was the max-

imum a student could realistically achieve in their evaluation. Generally, scores varied between 4 and 6 out of 10. Only twice did volunteers receive a 7/10, and only one reached an 8/10 in ideological training. With the score multiplied by a fixed coefficient for each domain, volunteers finished with totals ranging from 123 to 198 points for the top performer. The passing score to become an officer or aspirant in the Waffen-SS was 165 points.

The distribution of the participants' original branches and services in the Sonderlehrgang was as follows: 6 from the artillery, 1 from the air force, 1 from the transport corps (train des équipages), 1



Fernschreiben

An das Rassenamt i.
RuS-Hauptamt
Paris
Postkassette

Aus der Rassenkartei des RuS-Führers i. Paris sind folgende Angaben zu entnehmen:

Arthur Jean, 5 c/d A III-RuS-II-Bildungsprüfer Ratzburg—
Bartolomei Iwan, 4 c/d. B I-RuS-II - E.Pr. Rödel —
Cance Pierre, 5 d A III-RuS-II - E.Pr. Ratzburg —
Chapy Abel, 5 c A III-RuS-II - E.Pr. Rödel — Ozeille Jean,
5 c A III-RuS-II - E.Pr. Ratzburg — de La Faye Jacques,
5 c A III-RuS-II - E.Pr. Ratzburg — Fenet Henri, 5 c/d B I-
RuS-III E.Pr. Ratzburg — Fluhr Edmund, 6 7 c A III - RuS-II
E.Pr. SS-Stabsf. Zwickler — Gaultier Leon, 5 c/d A III-RuS-II
E.Pr. Ratzburg — Hug Pierre, 6 b AII - RuS-I - E.Pr. Ratzburg
— Kreis Henry, 6 b AII-RuS-I - E.Pr. Ratzburg — Lambert
Robert, 4 d BII - RuS-IV - E.Pr. Ratzburg — Nauduit Henri,
5 c/d A III -RuS-II - E.Pr. Rödel — Peyron Joseph, 4 d BII
RuS-IV - E.Pr. Ratzburg — Playber Paul, 5 c AIII - RuS-II
E.Pr. Ratzburg — Pieyre de Mandiargues Alfred, 5 c AIII -
RuS-II - E.Pr. Ratzburg — Pignard-Berthet Jean, 5 c A III
RuS-II - E.Pr. Ratzburg — Pouget Albert, 4 c/d BI - RuS-III
E.Pr. Ratzburg — de Tisset Noel, 5 c/d BI - RuS-III - E.Pr.
Ratzburg — Wable Pierre, 5 c AIII - RuS-II - E.Pr. Ratzburg
Laschett Charles, 5 c/d AIII - RuS-II E.Pr. Ratzburg
Die R-Karten der:
Brocard Pierre 15.8.16 — Gamory Dubourdeau Paul-Marie, 29.1.85
— Provost Paul, 9.1.01 — sind in der hiesigen Kartei nicht
aufzufinden. Es wurde mit bei Übernahme der Dienststelle mitge-
teilt, daß ein Teil der R-Karten vor längerer Zeit nach Berlin
gebracht wurde.
Die oben angeführten Männer sind Freiwillige des französischen
Waffen-SS-Regiment.

ges. RuS-Führer Zwickler
SS-Sturmbannführer

The racial investigation reports for the volunteers at Bad Tölz were returned by SS-Sturmbannführer Zwickler of the Race Office in France, based in Paris. His office was closely involved in the recruitment of French volunteers, as it reviewed the racial eligibility of applicants to the Waffen-SS during the recruitment board examinations.

from the tank corps, 5 from the cavalry, 11 from the infantry, and Kreis, who had no prior military service. An examination of the origins and backgrounds of the twenty-six French student-officers reveals the mediocrity of the cadres sent to the school at Bad Tölz. These men were generally young and possessed a fragmented military education. Ten of them had never served as officers in the French army, holding ranks ranging from private (2e classe) to warrant officer (adjutant), while Jacques de Lafaye and Gaultier were merely aspirants.

While fourteen others did indeed possess an officer's commission, they all came from the reserves; not a single one came from the active-duty army. Among them were six second lieutenants, six lieutenants, a 49-year-old captain, and a 59-year-old lieutenant-colonel. It is clear that their selection was based more on political influence than on tactical competence. This observation invalidates the accounts of Jean Mabire, who, relying on veteran testimonies, delivered a romanticized and embellished version far removed from historical reality. Instead, what occurred was an "internecine war" between the main movements of the French Collaboration: the Milice and the PPF (Parti Populaire Français) vied

for control over the French Waffen-SS unit, while other parties lacked the necessary numbers to assert themselves. The Waffen-SS thus became a mere instrument serving the ambitions of Darnand and Doriot. For the latter, the objective was to present himself as the only true actor in the struggle against Bolshevism, in the continuity of the LVF. For Darnand, the strategy was clear: to train cadres to arm his Milice and ensure control over the maintenance of order in France.

The results of the racial investigation of the volunteers at Bad Tölz were returned by Sturmbannführer Zwickler from the Race Office in France, based in Paris. His service was intimately linked to the recruitment of French volunteers, as he reviewed the racial background of candidates for the Waffen-SS during the review boards.

SS-Frw.-Oberscharführer Alfred Pieyre de Mandiargues recalls his arrival at the SS-Junkerschule Bad Tölz:

In January 1944, I arrived at the officer school in Bad Tölz. From a material standpoint—the building, comfort, cleanliness, and layout—it was truly very good. Only one thing was detest-

I.S.-Lehrgang f. ehem. Fr. Offz.

	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerst.	Freitag	Sonnabend
7 ³⁰ – 8 ⁵⁵	T	Gel.Besprechung	T	T	T	Gef.D
8 ²⁵ – 9 ¹⁰	T		T	T	T	
9 ²⁰ – 10 ⁵⁵	D		WE	He	D	
10 ²⁰ – 11 ¹⁵	LE		WE	D	LE	
11 ²⁵ – 12 ¹⁰	LE		D	A	D	
13 ³⁰ – 14 ¹⁵	Gef.D	A	A	Gef.D	Tr.D	
14 ²⁰ – 15 ¹⁵		He	Tr.D			
15 ³⁰ – 16 ¹⁵		He				
16 ²⁰ – 17 ¹⁵		WE	A			
17 ²⁰ – 18 ¹⁵		WE	He		A	

Detailed Weekly
Training Schedule

WE – Wehrmacht-Erziehung
T – Taktik
He – Heerwesen
LE – Leibes-Erziehung
D – Deutsch-Unterricht
Gel.D – Geländebesprechung
Tr.D – Truppendienst
Gef.D – Gefechtsdienst
A – Arbeitsstunde

able: the food, both in quality and quantity, but it seems that this is part of the program in all military schools in Germany. It was a large square building, two stories high, about two hundred meters on each side, with a large interior courtyard. On each floor, there was a wide corridor with a rubber carpet onto which the rooms opened. These rooms, designed for six men, were

adjacent to a study room where each person had their own private locker to store books and notebooks, complete with a table and chair. There was a radio in every room, as well as washbasins, showers, and bathtubs with hot and cold water. Classrooms were located in the basement. There was a large refectory seating 1,000, and a large amphitheater used for cinema as well as for lec-

Terrain briefing in daily
training; theory and practice
were closely integrated.



FRENCHMEN AT BAD TÖLZ

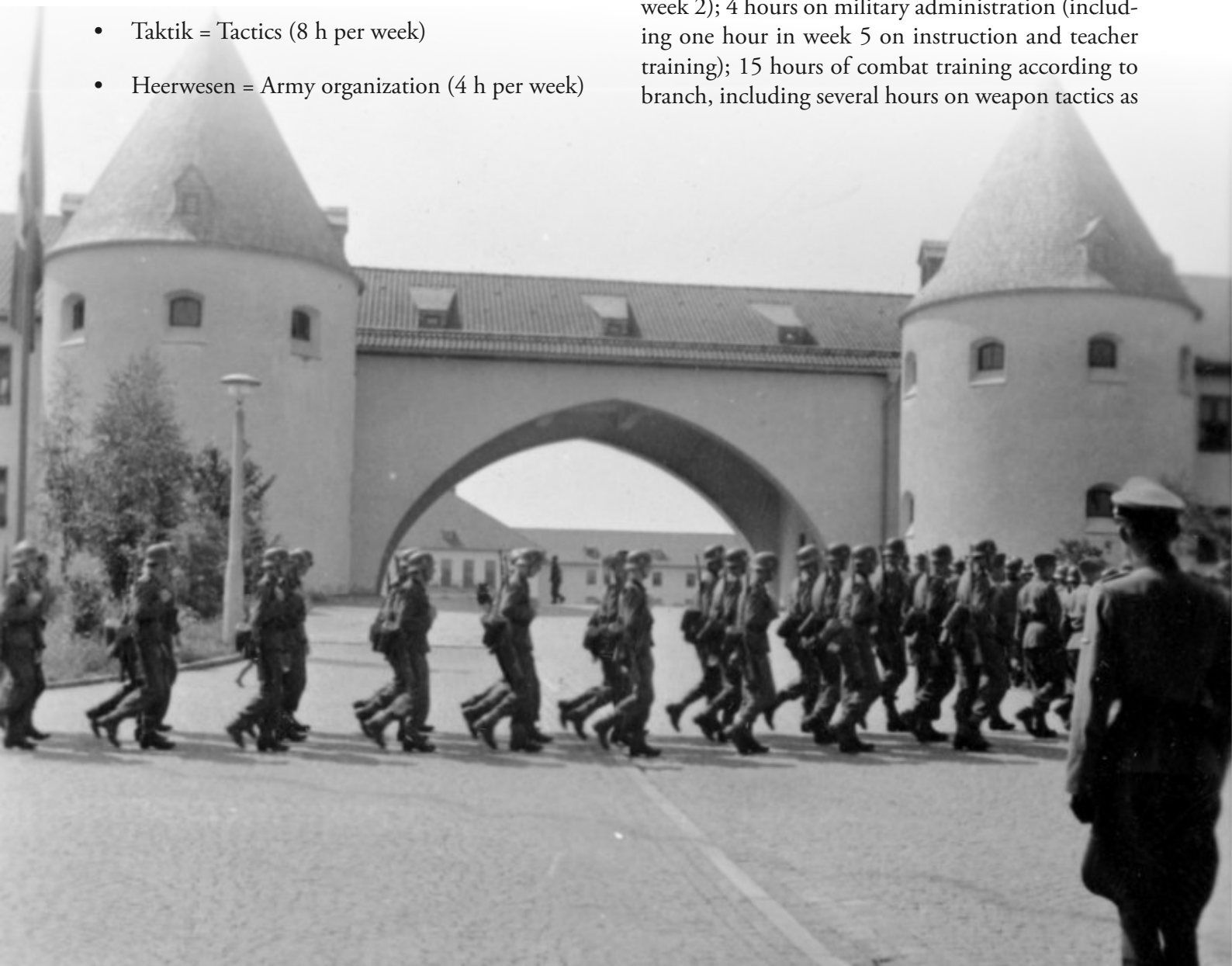
tures or concerts, also equipped with an electric organ. The medical service was very comprehensive: a large infirmary with X-ray, radio, dentist, ENT specialists, and other experts. In the attics were the clothing stores, shoemaking workshops, and a photography room. In the basement were the armory and ammunition. In the annex buildings, there was a swimming pool, rooms for boxing, fencing, and ping-pong, and an open sports hall large enough for football, with a store below containing all sports accessories: skis, weights, hammers, etc. There was a riding school with stables, a garage, a repair workshop, and a hangar containing all the latest models of weapons in service.”

The French Schedule at Bad Tölz: January 10 to March 11, 1944

- Weltansch.-Erziehung = Ideological instruction (4 h per week)
- Taktik = Tactics (8 h per week)
- Heerwesen = Army organization (4 h per week)

- Leibes-Erziehung = Physical education (3 h per week)
- Deutsch-Unterricht = German lessons (4 h per week)
- Geländebesprechung = Cadre exercises in the field (one morning per week)
- Truppendienst = ... Command? Field service? (6 h per week)
- Gefechtsdienst = Combat exercise (3 half-days per week)
- Arbeitsstunde = Study (5 h per week)

The weeks were demanding, divided into 50 working hours for the French volunteers, consisting of: 4 hours of ideological education; 13 hours of tactics, map analysis, and field studies (including 5 hours of preparatory field meetings starting from week 2); 4 hours on military administration (including one hour in week 5 on instruction and teacher training); 15 hours of combat training according to branch, including several hours on weapon tactics as



needed; 6 hours of formal training, drill, and marksmanship; 3 hours of physical education and 5 hours of German lessons. From the very first days of the course, the volunteers' schedule was altered to make more room for German lessons; out of the 3 hours of physical education, one was removed, and the time allocated to German lessons increased from 5 to 6 hours per week.

The French began a condensed 8-week course covering both the National Socialist worldview and the organization of their troops and combat tactics. They quickly moved into various courses on the fundamental laws of race, a paramount subject for a future officer of the Waffen-SS. The French also continued their physical preparation, including swimming, running, throwing, horseback riding, jumping, etc.

Under the watchful eye of various tactics professors and German supervisors, the French were also required to submit written assignments on specific themes. Once assigned, participants had one week to write and submit their work before presenting it to the group in the amphitheater of the SS-Junkerschule. There were five such assignments. For example, the second assignment had the following theme: Establishing a defensive position for a battalion based on both sides of a regiment formation with a long preparation time. (Discussion of the defensive battle of forces deployed ahead of the position, the advanced position, the battle outpost, and the main battlefield). This work was supervised by SS-Hauptsturmführer Anlauff and directed by SS-Hauptsturmführer Wulf. The task was presented on January 15 to be submitted on the 21st of the same month and presented to the Sonderlehrgang and its professors between January 27 and February 2, 1944.

De Mandiargues reports:

Twice a week, an assignment covering the various phases of attack and defense, with a critique of the situation and the terrain. After the assignment, an outing to the actual terrain of the attack to judge the mistakes made, or else, a sand table that we prepared ourselves according to the map (...) the main subjects taught were tactics, army organization, and politics. (We did) map reading, compass marches by day and night, and firing the machine gun, rifle, and revolver. Field reconnaissance with discussions, critiques of the situation



Photograph of the volunteer Jacques de Lafaye, officially demobilized on 6 March 1944 after a brief return to Sennheim.

and terrain, (and) overall maneuvers where sections were represented by colored flags

Discipline was also paramount within all the armies, and the regulations regarding punishments were very important in the SS; each week, the volunteers had to establish a punishment sheet based on a case study and decide on the appropriate sentence. In addition to being trained on all weapons in the German military arsenal, the French students had to learn to lead formations ranging from a combat section up to a battalion. Indeed, the course on battalion maneuvers took place on February 14, 1944, just one week before the final practical examination of the Lehrgang.

Rapidly, two volunteers would distinguish themselves through their difficulties and would leave the school without completing the curriculum. From the beginning of the courses, Jacques Flavien de Lafaye did not make a good impression on the instructors or among his comrades. On January 28, Kostenbader issued a lackluster appraisal of the participant, requesting his dismissal from the course and the Waffen-SS. This was justified by blindness in one eye, difficulty with subordination, and weak theoretical knowledge, despite being physically

strong and efficient in sports. Also highly opinionated in ideological instruction classes, he often caused disagreements with his instructors, and his performance had been only average thus far. He was removed from the course and the SS on February 14 (or 15), 1944. He had also requested to be demobilized, wishing to be present for the evacuation of his elderly parents residing in Nice.

On the left: Photo of volunteer De Lafaye, officially demobilized on March 6, 1944, after a brief return to Sennheim.

The second, Pierre Wable, was already suffering from pneumonia upon his arrival and had to be admitted to the infirmary directly from the station. After his release, Wable was so physically weak that he could not perform field work and participated only partially in office duties. He was also dismissed from the officer course because he could no longer reach the course objectives due to his failures, and was sent back to Sennheim on February 15, 1944. Wable was to be granted leave from the Sennheim camp but was expected to participate in a new officer course once his health stabilized.

Regarding a typical day at Bad Tölz, the testimony of Pieyre de Mandiargues provides more detail on the demanding schedule: wake-up was at 5:00 AM for washing, bed-making, and sweeping the communal room. Roll call was at 5:30 AM, and breakfast began at 6:00 AM. Four consecutive course sessions followed until lunch at 11:45 AM. These were followed by another four diverse training sessions of one hour each before dinner at 6:00 PM. Afterward, there was free time, but the activity of a future SS officer did not end there. He recalls:

In general, we did a bit of sport around 7:00 PM; as the meals were never substantial, it was not a hindrance. Around 8:30 PM, we set to work: doing homework, transcribing courses, preparing for the next day, until 11:30 PM—the time when, in turn, we presented the room for evening roll call. The room had to be swept, everyone in uniform at the foot of the bed, shoes polished

The final practical examination was held from February 21 to 23, 1944. Léon Gaultier recalls:

Physical effort had decreased in recent days. Then it resumed with a fury never before reached. For forty-eight hours, a combined exercise led us



Charles Laschett at the Sennheim camp, before his transfer to Bad Tölz.

from the approaches of the school to the shores of Tegernsee. Simulated combat, weapons testing, anti-tank warfare, barely a few hours of sleep, and an almost complete lack of food were our lot. There was a crescendo in seeking our limits and an analysis of our behavior and reactions. It was no longer men in possession of their full means that the command observed, but men driven to the extremes of physical exhaustion. A sort of vertigo from hunger and fatigue acted like a drug. An exaltation was born from the relentlessly strained will and invaded the mind and heart. If there was a challenge from the command, we had met it

Each participant had to lead the maneuver of a fictitious battalion. While concrete results for this specific task are unavailable, it is likely that some former French officers found this ordeal easier. Paul-Marie Gamory-Dubourdeau had already commanded a battalion in the 1920s. Pierre Cance, a former French lieutenant who graduated with the highest score of the promotion, must have demonstrated competence, though he was recommended as a company commander only. "Rittmeister" Croisile, who had successfully led a force of a thousand men

W-Junkerschule Pölz
1.Sonderlehrg.f.ehem.
französ. Offz.

Bad Tölz, 2.3.1944

Schlußprüfung im 1.Sonderlehrg.f.ehem.französ.Offz.
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Verzeichnis aller Lehrgangsteilnehmer, die an der Schluß-
prüfung teilgenommen haben in der Reihenfolge der erreich-
ten Gesamtpunktzahlen.

lfd.	Name:	Vorname:	Dienstgrad:	Truppenteil:	Punktzahl:
1.	Cance	Pierre	SS-Frw.-Hscha.	W-Ausb.Lager Sennheim	198
2.	Pignard-Berthet	Paul	SS-Frw.-Oscha.		195
3.	Peyron	Joseph	SS-Frw.-Uscha.	"	191
4.	Artus	Jean	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	190
5.	Pleyber	Joseph	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	187
6.	de Fissot	Noel	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	178
7.	Lambert	Robert	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	178
8.	Laschett	Charles	SS-Frw.-Schtz.	"	178
9.	Mauthuit	Henri	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	176
10.	Gaultier	Leon	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	175
11.	Brocard	Pierre	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	175
12.	Fenet	Henri	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	175
13.	Croisile	Jean	SS-Frw.-Hscha.	"	170
14.	Scapula	Dominik	SS-Frw.-Schtz.	SS-Ers.Kdo. Frankreich	167
15.	Hug	Pierre	SS-Frw.-Uscha.	W-Ausb.Lager Sennheim	165
16.	Kreis	Henri	SS-Frw.-Uscha.		165
17.	Bartolomei	Ivan	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	164 + 1
18.	Fayard	Rene	SS-Frw.-Rott.	"	162 + 3
19.	Chapy	Abel	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	159 + 6
20.	Mandiarques	Alfred	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	156
21.	Eeckhout	Marcel	SS-Uscha.	"	149
22.	Pouget	Albert	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	144
23.	Pruvost	Paul	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	137
24.	Flühr	Edmond	SS-Frw.-Oscha.	"	123

Upon completing their training, approximately twenty French officers were sent to the Alps for ski training, while the four who had failed the course were returned to Sennheim. Following the skiing course, the French officers were transferred to SS Artillery School II (SS-Artillerieschule II) at Beneschau to attend an Umschulung-Lehrgang (conversion course), under the command of SS-Obersturmführer Greissler. The course was scheduled to run from 14 March to 13 June 1944.



during the defense of Calais in May 1940 and was described as having a very good, disciplined spirit, made a good impression on his colonel. Having served in various positions between 1919–1939—successively as an armored car platoon leader, motorized squadron commander, and then regimental adjutant—he successfully completed the Bad Tölz course. Albert Pouget had served as a battalion adjutant during the 1939–40 war; however, he did not finish the course as successfully as his elder.

Following this exam, the volunteers enjoyed a day of normal activity before moving to the written theoretical exam, divided into three sections: a 5-hour section on tactics (study of a situation, attack orders, defense, etc.); a 4-hour section on army organization (judging a committed fault, verdict, and establishment of punishment); and a final 4-hour section on a very broad and general political subject.

Under the observation of *SS-Brigadeführer* Dörffler-Schuband, the final meeting took place on February 28, 1944. The instructors announced the evaluations and grades for each participant. Those present included *SS-Sturmabführer* Rothe and Gwosdz, Inspector Kostenbader, *SS-Obersturmführer* Schneider, and instructors Bender and Reiche. They agreed on the cases of three participants who had not obtained the 165-point passing mark but were granted the missing points due to their overall abilities. Thus, Bartholomei received 1

point, Fayard received 3, and Chapy received 6, thanks to Kostenbader's support.

Four participants did not achieve the grades necessary to regain their officer ranks or be named aspirants. For Pouget and Pruvost, it was with bitterness that they remained at the rank of *Oberscharführer*. These former French Army lieutenants owed their failure mainly to the frantic pace of training, which their age and old injuries did not allow them to excel in. They were, however, of certain military value. Pouget was recommended as an *SS-Fachführer* (specialist officer), while Pruvost was to go to Munich for a technical course to become the head of a vehicle repair unit. Flühr did not show diligence and finished last; he was transferred on May 1, 1944, as an *SS-Werber* (recruiter) in Germany. Finally, Pieyre de Mandiargue simply did not meet the requirements of a *Waffen-SS* officer and was recommended for return to the ranks. They were sent back to Sennheim, except for Pieyre de Mandiargue, who, coming from the artillery, would follow the new officers to Beneschau.

Of the two non-French participants, Eeckhout also failed the course due to an insufficient score and was sent to the *SS-Sturmbrigade* "Langemarck" on March 6, 1944. Patzak left the promotion for a special mission in Salzburg but was later sent to the 4th course for Germanic officers (April 1 to August 31, 1944), from which he attained the rank of

Standarten-Oberjunker. For the 20 remaining Frenchmen, the laurels awaited:

- SS-Frw.-Hauptsturmführer (Battalion Cmdr): Paul-Marie Gamory-Dubourdeau
- SS-Frw.-Obersturmführer (Company/Battery Cmdr): Pierre Cance*, Paul Pleyber, Jean Croisile, Henri Fenet, Henri Maudhuit, and Noël de Tissot
- SS-Frw.-Untersturmführer (Section Leader): Jean Artus, Yvan Bartholomei, Pierre Brocard, Léon Gaultier, Robert Lambert, Paul Pignard-Berthet, and Dominique Scapula
- SS-Frw.-Standarten-Oberjunker: Abel Chapy, René Fayard, Pierre Hug, Henri Kreis, Charles



Abel Chapy, born on 1 July 1920 in Rochecorbon, enlisted in the French Army at the age of eighteen and served for three years with the 3rd Régiment de Spahis Marocains in French North Africa. He joined the Waffen-SS in August 1943.



Photograph of the French contingent upon its official admission to the SS Junker School, where approximately twenty French officer candidates attended a refresher course. Several men were excluded from the programme, including Crespin, Mésleard, Picareff, and de Lareinty-Tholozan. Born in 1898, Foulques Louis Marc Ernest de Lareinty-Tholozan was among the oldest members of the preparatory platoon. Pierre Crespin, aged 53, was likewise one of its senior participants. A former captain in the French Army and a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, Crespin had completed his military service in the infantry before being assigned to the railway service as a stationmaster. In 1938 he also participated in military exercises dealing with logistics and communications. Eugène Picareff came from the Milice in the Ardèche. Born on 4 September 1900, this White Russian held the rank of second lieutenant in the engineers. Neither he nor Crespin was sent to Bad Tölz for reasons that remain unknown, possibly because of Picareff's origins or Crespin's age. Lucien Mésleard, a former company commander in the LVF, was likewise not selected and returned to France shortly after the course had begun. Finally, Captain Foulques Louis Marc Ernest de Lareinty-Tholozan, an officer in the French Air Force and a member of the French nobility, was also rejected. According to officer cadet Pieyre de Mandiargues, he was apparently too ill to take part in the course.

FRENCHMEN AT BAD TÖLZ

Laschett, and Joseph Peyron

- SS-Frw.-Oberscharführer: Edmond Flühr, Alfred Pieyre de Mandiargue, Albert Pouget, Paul Pruvost

A few notes on these rankings: Peyron was the only one to obtain an 8/10 in ideological instruction; he was passionate about National Socialism and assisted Merlen with political instruction at Sennheim. Artus received a 7/10 in military organization, and Kreis did the same for physical education. Fenet was the only one to initially receive his French Army equivalent (Second Lieutenant). For Maudhuit and De Tissot, this was a genuine promotion as they had previously only been NCOs. Gaultier had never been confirmed as an officer in the French Army, so this represented an advancement for him as well.

It appears they were not confirmed in the higher rank of *SS-Frw.-Obersturmführer* until April 1, 1944. After the March 4 verification of appraisals, Gamory-Dubourdeau's evaluations were missing—they were with Kostenbader, who was on leave until March 7.



Assessment of Pierre Hug, March 1944:

Pierre is tall and of medium build. His conduct is polite, modest, and courteous. Physically, he appears to meet the required standards; he is resilient and persistent, and performed well in physical training. Open-minded and of a religious disposition, he is highly conscientious, hard-working, and eager to serve, while displaying an exceptionally calm demeanour. He proved himself in service and earned the respect and appreciation of his comrades.

His general knowledge is extensive, and he is intellectually alert with a quick grasp of new concepts. By the end of the course, he had significantly improved his performance, which had initially lagged because of his limited military experience. He is capable of logical reasoning, although he still tends to be somewhat careless at times. In the classroom he worked with great diligence and attention. His limited military knowledge caused him some difficulties. During field exercises, he made every effort to overcome the deficiencies that were still evident in almost every area of instruction.

His bearing in front of the men demonstrates good leadership potential. His command voice and weapons handling still require further development. Pierre is a conscientious and enthusiastic soldier who will meet the required standards if given further training. His lack of military experience will soon be overcome through service with the troops.





By roughly March 13, Captain Roth reported that promotion to the rank of *Sturmabführer* was suspended until the completion of the course at Beneschau. In early April 1944, during the formation of the *Sturmbrigade*, Gamory-Dubourdeau was finally promoted to *SS-Frw.-Sturmabführer*, backdated to March 10, 1944. The ex-Milice member Cance was designated only as a company commander, but he obtained a higher rank, being promoted to *SS-Frw.-Hauptsturmführer*. He was also the highest-ranked in the promotion with 198 points. Finally, Pleyber and De Tissot, coming from the Artillery, were qualified to command a company or battery. Similarly, Fenet was the only one in his promotion to receive a recommendation to serve as either a company commander or a battalion adjutant-major.

Once their training was complete, the twenty or so French officers were sent to the Alps for skiing, while the four others who had failed the course were sent back to Sennheim. Following their ski course, the group of French officers was sent to the *SS-Artillerieschule II* in Beneschau for an "Umschulungs-Lehrgang" (conversion course) under the authority of *SS-Obersturmführer* Greissler, scheduled to take place from March 14 to June 13, 1944.

Among the appraisals, one can read: "Charles Laschett is of medium height and strong; he wears glasses. Disciplined, courteous, and polite in both attitude and bearing. Physically, he seems to meet the demands and likes to get involved. In character, he is open and honest, somewhat reserved and calm, with a controlled and balanced nature. He can assert himself in service, is modest, and is popular among his comrades. His general knowledge is versatile and easily understood. He has accepted the required material. Despite some process difficulties, he can logically follow lines of thought, though he lacks pronounced eloquence. He works with diligence and attention in class and meets the requirements imposed on him. His combat performance met the expectations; he made clear decisions and showed confident behavior in front of the line. Weapon training and command language still require further development. Laschett is a calm and determined man who will be able to meet the requirements of a platoon leader through his good example and ability. One can read: "Chapy is of medium height and somewhat weak; his performance is limited. His behavior is not resolutely military, though his conduct is correct and courteous. Open-minded and of a religious character,

somewhat timid, he is of a calm and polite nature. He is popular among his comrades. His general knowledge is average. His intellectual capacities are still capable of being trained, though the gift of speech does not yet seem pronounced. He works assiduously in class, but the infantry basics are lacking. His preparation for service was good. He strove to process the material offered. In combat service, he showed sensitive achievements. His appearance in front of the line, his command language and handling training still require support. Chapy is a conscientious and hardworking man who seems suitable as a platoon leader with additional support and once existing gaps have been filled."

Several men were sidelined, including Crespin, Mésleard, Picareff, and De Lareinty-Tholozan. Born in 1898, the latter was among the elders of the preparatory platoon. Pierre Crespin was also one of the seniors of the platoon at 53 years of age. A former captain in the French army and Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, he had performed his military service in the infantry. He was later assigned to the railway service as a station master. In 1938, he also participated in exercises concerning supply and communications.

As for Eugène Picareff, he came from the Milice of Ardèche. Born on September 4, 1900, this White Russian held the rank of second lieutenant in the engineers. He and Crespin were not sent to Tölz for unknown reasons, possibly linked to the former's origins or the latter's age. Lucien Mésleard, a former company commander within the LVE, was not selected and returned to France shortly after the start of the course. Finally, Captain Foulques Louis Marc Ernest De Lareinty-Tholozan, a captain in the Air Force and a French nobleman, was also not accepted; officer aspirant Pieyre de Mandiargues suggested that he was not in a fit state to participate due to illness.

Appraisal of Pierre Hug, March 1944: "Pierre is tall and of average strength; his behavior is polite, humble, and courteous. Physically, he seems to meet the requirements, is tough and persistent, and performed well in sports. Open-minded and of a religious character, very conscientious, hardworking, and eager to serve, he demonstrated extremely calm behavior. He was able to assert himself in service and was respected and liked by his comrades. His general knowledge is extensive; he is mentally very active and quick to comprehend. By the end of the course, he was able to improve his performance, which initially



Ivan Bartolomei

lagged due to insufficient military experience. He is capable of advancing thoughts logically, but still lacks decisiveness. He works very diligently and attentively in class. His weak military knowledge caused him some difficulties. In combat, he strove to fill the gaps that still existed in almost all branches. His appearance at the front of the men shows good talent. Command language and weapon technology still require support. Pierre is a conscientious and enthusiastic soldier who will satisfy requirements if he is promoted further. His lack of military service experience will soon be remedied through the troops "

"Old Barto" regained his rank of second lieutenant at the age of 45. Kostenbader described him as follows: "He is small and of average strength, somewhat negligent in his behavior, not very energetic, and still lacks confidence. An average sportsman, he nonetheless makes an effort. Balanced and reserved in character, he is of a humble and calm nature. Popular among his comrades. His general education is average. In his mental disposition, he is somewhat slow and lacks flexibility. His speaking talent is not pronounced. In class, he works with diligence and was occupied with processing the material. He showed further zeal in preparation. In combat ser-



Pierre Cance

vice, his mastery of weapons did not fully satisfy requirements, but he makes an effort to fill existing gaps. Training in weapons and command language still requires support. Bartolomei is a conscientious and hardworking man who will conscientiously solve the tasks entrusted to him, but still shows gaps in his knowledge and achievements due to his one-sided previous training]."

Finally, one of the two battalion commanders certified by the course and future head of the 1st Battalion of the Sturmbrigade: Pierre Cance. His appraisal reflects his aptitude for leading a large unit: "Cance served three years as a reservist in the infantry. As a lieutenant of the final rank, he attended the war school at St-Maixent. Participation in the 1939-1940 campaign against Germany as a company leader. Holder of the Croix de Guerre 1939/40. Entered the Waffen-SS on October 18, 1943. Participation in the preparatory course at the SS training camp in Sennheim. Cance is tall and strong, physically capable, and persistent. His behavior is at times decidedly casual, but not undisciplined. His physical performance is good. Open-minded and of an honest character, he is confident and self-assured in nature. He is respected and liked

by his comrades. His general education is complete. He possesses extensive experience as a political leader. Mentally, he is very active and versatile. He has a good capacity for oral and persuasive presentation. In class, he worked attentively and with interest and was able to handle the material easily. In combat service, he performed well and demonstrated experience in troop service. Training on weapons, as well as the German command language, still require support. Cance is a mature person with life and military experience, and shows good disposition for leadership. His personality will undoubtedly prevail. He has successfully passed the course and is suitable as an officer."

Posen-Treskau

While the officer aspirants of the Lehrgang left the Sennheim camp on January 10, 1944, the men of the Unterführerlehrgang (NCO candidate course) departed on the 18th of the month bound for Posen-Treskau. Among them was Jacques Charles Pieyre de Mandiargues (born March 16, 1924), brother of the Bad Tölz participant, who was chosen to depart with the full 4th section of the 5th Company under *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Sommer]. These 42 men had been selected in November to begin their military instruction and were equipped with rifles. In his group, he was chosen for his diligence in training, along with Henri Levoix, due to their knowledge of German. A total of approximately 200 Frenchmen would go on to attend the NCO course.

From January 18 to 24, 1944, they traveled across Germany by train via Mulhouse – Strasbourg – Worms – Fulda – Erfurt – Cottbus – Griben, and finally Posen. The French arrived at the school, located 30 kilometers from the city of Posen. Emilien Boyer, a garage mechanic and milicien from Carcassonne, recalls:

"We arrived at Treskau around one in the morning and received a hot soup that was excellent and very welcome. We also received our bedding with white sheets; we were divided twenty to a room in large, admirably furnished and heated rooms. The first day was devoted to washing and settling in; that day, we also received our equipment and the full kit of an SS-Mann."

The French were divided into two companies, the 3rd and 6th, commanded respectively by *SS-Untersturmführer* Enl and Enrngel. De Mandiargues was

part of the 1st section of the 6th Company, commanded by *SS-Oberscharführer* Omlor and supported by group leaders *SS-Unterscharführer* Kowalesky and *SS-Rottenführer* Alfred Henschel. His company was formed by cadres drawn from the 3rd, 4th, and 5th companies of the school and had an approximate strength of 120–130 men.

Wake-up for the volunteers took place at 5:00 AM, with assembly at 6:30 AM in the school courtyard, where the soldiers were exposed to freezing winds. The company commander welcomed them, his words translated by an Alsatian serving as an interpreter. For this three-month course, the volunteers faced very severe discipline, where the slightest mistake resulted in being ordered to keep watch while lying in the snow. Graver offenses merited prison time or summary dismissal from the course. *Unterführer-Bewerber* (NCO candidate) Emilien Boyer notes:

Indeed, his words proved accurate, as we spent that first day on our bellies crawling through mud, snow, and sometimes ice. The reason: we marched poorly or did not sing properly (...) It happened frequently—and it happened to me personally—that after performing the best shooting with my group on Saturday and receiving congratulations from my company commander, I was forced to spend Sunday afternoon lying in the snow despite my sharp protests. This was simply because the range clerk had mistaken the name or the group in the records.

NCO candidate Pieyre de Mandiargues describes the training:

For four weeks, we underwent accelerated infantry training. the day included close-order and open-order drill, generally 5–6 kilometers, moving from long-distance approach marches to the assault, deploying and then regrouping. Entrenching, taking positions, and finally weapon instruction: light and heavy machine guns, rifles, 08 and 93 pistols, the Belgian 9mm Herstal, grenade launchers (Tromblon), and other light infantry gear. Every week, blank-fire and live-fire exercises were held. In theory, we studied squad and section tactics. In practice: squad and courier service, orientation exercises, mapping, and two night exercises per week. All of this took place on



Charles Dangremont, the roommate and fellow student of Pierre Chicoineau, a member of the 2nd Company at Cernay, attended the Posen-Treskau training course in January 1944. Born on 18 August 1925, this eighteen-year-old had already completed the preparatory course at Sennheim, which ran from 21 October to the end of December 1943. He later joined the Sturmbrigade as an Oberschütze and Unterführer-Bewerber, serving as the leader of a combat squad. He was killed on 11 August 1944 at Wolika while holding the rank of Sturmmann and was buried at Hill 384 (Höhe 384).

grounds 16 kilometers from Posen, in the villages of Miluchowo and Taichingen. One fact that made the work difficult was that the courses were conducted in German, and we were assigned—one per squad—Alsatian and Flemish interpreters. The latter fiercely detested the French. Morale was low because a ruthless censorship prevented almost all mail from reaching us. For all military, political, diplomatic, or intellectual news, we had only a political summary on Sunday mornings given by a Walloon sergeant: Rettyen. This individual translated German communiqués and made a frightful mess of them, to such an extent that if one listened to him, one would believe about 800 tanks were destroyed a day...

Beyond infantry combat, every non-commissioned officer (NCO) must be prepared to handle the various weapons found within his service. Thus, the French students, much like the officers, attended heavy weapons school. Although not all were French, we see students at the Posen-Treskau school handling the heavy weaponry typically found within an infantry regiment: anti-tank guns and infantry support guns.

Not all volunteers managed to endure these exercises and complete the course. Some reported sick, deserted, were expelled, or left of their own accord. Serge Potier, a former sergeant in the LVF, decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the Eastern Front Medal (*Medaille Winterschlacht im Osten*), was dis-

missed from Posen-Treskau for selling blankets to Polish civilians in exchange for food. Having enlisted in August 1943, he was only 19 years old. His departure must have been bitter, given that he had previously attended the officer-candidate platoon at Sennheim without being selected. He returned to Sennheim with the rank of SS-Frw.-Oberschütze.

Who were the men sent to the Unterführerschule Posen-Treskau to become cadres for the French unit of the Waffen-SS?

They were the most promising recruits from Ausbildungslager Sennheim, as well as former French Army NCOs. As we have seen, the Germans had planned to send between 300 and 440 former French NCOs to requalification courses. The actual result was quite different: only 200 men were sent, and only a portion of them already held a rank. The miliciens were well represented in the course, including Boyer and Lefèvre from Carcassonne; Yves Jahan, a former caporal-chef of the Chasseurs Alpins; Louis Tapié de Celeyran, a 1ère classe in the motorized cavalry; Pierre Albert, a student-officer at Saint-Cyr; Jacques Sarailhé, an artillery observer sergeant in 1939–40; and Robert Cazes, an NCO candidate and aviation mechanic. The course also included some of the first to arrive at Sennheim in the summer of 1943, such as André Bayle, Henri Simon, and Christian Martres.

Others came from Germany, where they had been workers or prisoners of war. Born on September 9, 1913, in Buc (Seine-et-Oise), Albert Emile

Poignant joined the Waffen-SS while working in Germany. After leaving school in 1926, he began working as a well-digger/miner, a trade he paused for his military service between 1934 and 1935 with the 150th Infantry Regiment in Verdun. He joined the International Brigades in 1936 to fight in Spain. During the 1939–40 war, he served with the 332nd Infantry Regiment and was taken prisoner, then transferred to Germany to Stalag IIC. He became a "free worker" in July 1943 as a laborer at the Stettin-Odenwerk submarine base. He went to the Stettin Waffen-SS office on January 7, 1944, and enlisted, influenced by propaganda and a thirst for adventure. He was sent to the Sennheim camp on January 15 but stayed only three days before joining the Unterführerschule Posen-Treskau].

Coming from a factory, Claudius Pierre Truchet, one of the oldest volunteers sent for training at the Unterführerschule, was characterized by chronic instability and a singular longevity under the colors. His service began on October 26, 1920, but his rebellious temperament manifested the following year: reported as a deserter in 1921, he was quickly reincorporated, marking the start of a frantic cycle that saw him serve in five different regiments within two years. This tendency toward insubordination culminated on August 21, 1922, with another escape, though he was returned to his corps by August 27. In 1924, seeking a fresh start, he went to Marseille to join the Foreign Legion. Posing as a Belgian national, he joined the 1st Foreign Infantry Regiment, spending most of his contract in Morocco. By the end of this period, Truchet could boast fifteen years

of military service, twelve of which were spent under the "white kepi." When conflict broke out in September 1939, he was mobilized as a simple *soldat de 2e classe* at the 172nd Infantry Depot, but saw no active service until the defeat in June 1940. He joined the Waffen-SS in October 1943 and was sent to Sennheim. He was assigned to the 2nd Company before being selected, despite his advanced age, for the NCO training course. After completing the initial curriculum between October and December 1943, he was sent to Posen-Treskau to complete his transformation and obtain the rank of *Unterscharführer*.

The last volunteer from Germany was a prisoner of war who enlisted directly from his Stalag. The Norman James Royer, born October 29, 1918, enlisted on September 2, 1938. He fought in the 1939–40 war with the 23rd Fortress Infantry Regiment and earned the *Croix de Guerre*. He was reportedly promoted to sergeant in May 1940 after courses on heavy weapons in bunkers, though a note regarding his internment in Germany suggests he was held as a *2e classe*. Although he enlisted in the Waffen-SS on June 1, 1943, he was not called up until January 2, 1944, and was sent to Sennheim and then Posen-Treskau. He joined the SS either to marry a German woman or because he was in an intimate relationship with a German woman and was forced to enlist by the German police.

Nicolas Montignac, born around 1907 and enlisted out of idealism in August 1943, recalls his training at Posen-Treskau:

"The training of non-commissioned officers at



The last volunteer to arrive from Germany was a French prisoner of war who enlisted directly from his Stalag. James Royer, a native of Normandy, was born on 29 October 1918 and enlisted in the French Army on 2 September 1938. He served in the 1939–40 campaign with the 23rd Fortress Infantry Regiment and was awarded the *Croix de Guerre*. He is said to have been promoted to sergeant in May 1940 after completing training on heavy weapons for fortress casemates. However, a document concerning his internment in Germany indicates that he was registered as a private second class. Although Royer volunteered for the Waffen-SS on 1 June 1943, he was not called up until 2 January 1944, when he was sent first to Sennheim and then to Posen-Treskau. He appears to have enlisted in the SS either in order to marry a German woman or because he was involved in an intimate relationship with one and was compelled by the German police to enlist.

FRENCHMEN AT BAD TÖLZ

the Posen-Treskau military school is even harder than at Sennheim: we see one death per week due to military exercises or sporting activities. The tactical courses are fastidious and precise."

The former second lieutenant of the engineers and Oberscharführer Eugène Picareff, from the officer-candidate platoon at Sennheim, was also among the "elders" of the French NCO student promotion.

One Sunday in February, about a hundred Frenchmen (including Boyer, Cossard, and Lefèvre) traveled to Posen to attend a Hitler Youth congress. The French remained somewhat perplexed by this demonstration despite all its pageantry. The Polish population also remained indifferent to the event.

The French volunteers left before the end and took a tour of the city of Posen; some took the opportunity to fill their stomachs during this break from training. Boyer and his two companions were among these, going to the "Deutsche Rote Kreuz" (German Red Cross) canteen to consume several bowls of soup. That same day, two French volunteers deserted but were recaptured two days later. Boyer describes the remainder of February:

"The days followed one another, filled with the-

ory embellished by night maneuvers, with meals taken in the field under the theme: 'service in the field.' In terrible cold, we had to remain in position most of the time. The soup, which left the school hot, reached us frozen and sometimes solidified. It was forbidden to build fires, and we had to eat our pittance as it was. As a result, many comrades and I suffered from colic."

After approximately five weeks of Panzergrenadier training, the French were designated as artillerymen. They subsequently ceased their current training and departed Treskau on February 25, 1944, bound for the SS-Artillerieschule in Beneschau. The French had left Poland and now found themselves in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia, nearly 60 kilometers from Prague. After a long journey, the group of NCO students arrived during the night of March 1st. Well-received, they were quartered in the "Praha" barracks. The following day, the French-speaking group was introduced to their new instructor, SS-Obersturmführer Greissler, and their journey as artillerymen began—despite themselves.

Dominique Berrardelli





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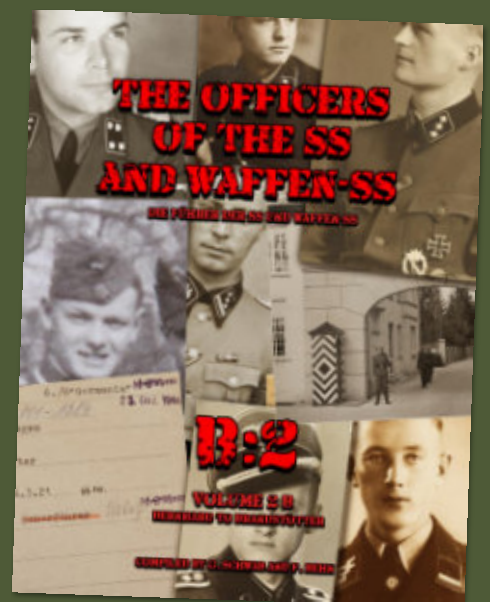
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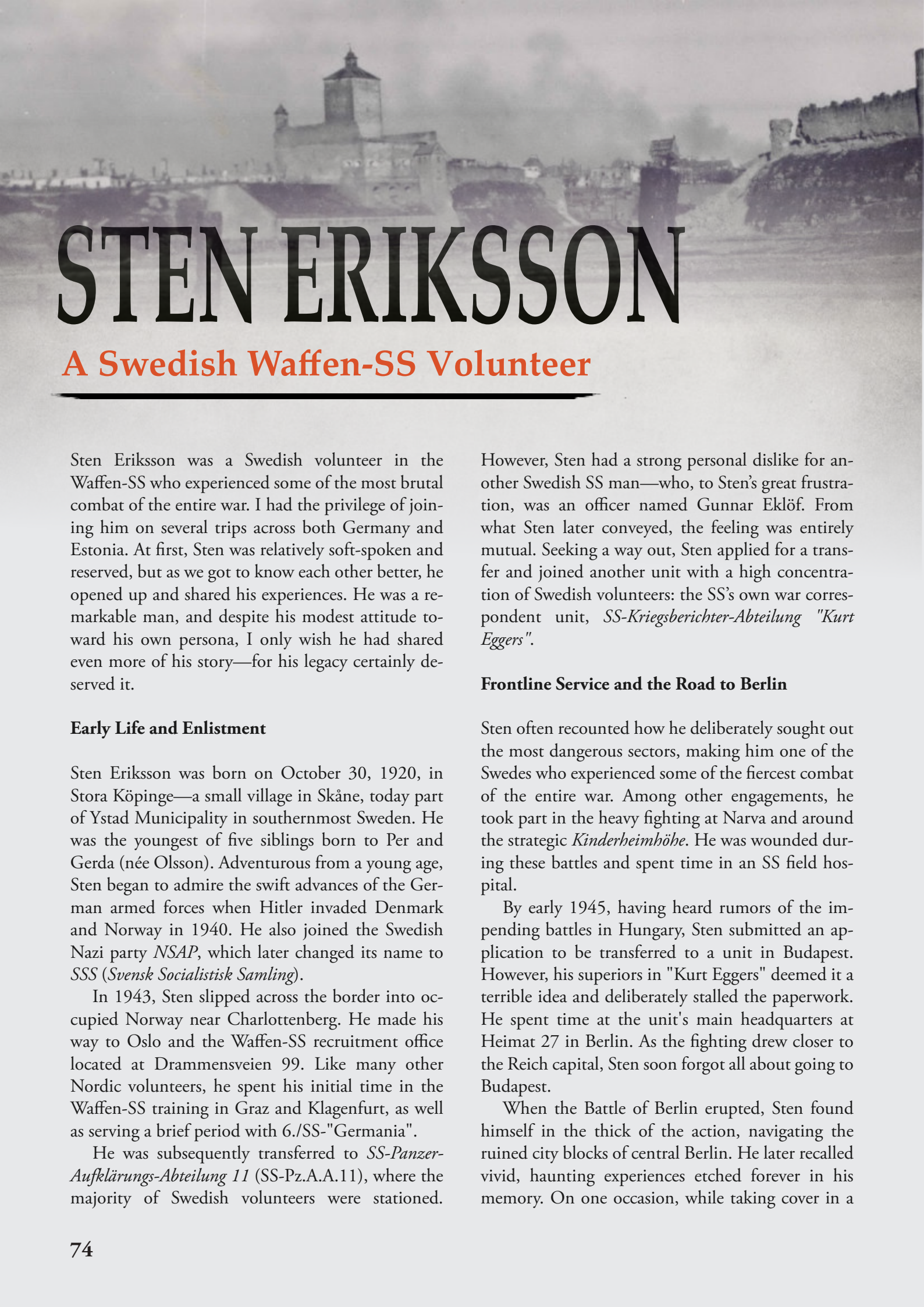
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STEN ERIKSSON

A Swedish Waffen-SS Volunteer

Sten Eriksson was a Swedish volunteer in the Waffen-SS who experienced some of the most brutal combat of the entire war. I had the privilege of joining him on several trips across both Germany and Estonia. At first, Sten was relatively soft-spoken and reserved, but as we got to know each other better, he opened up and shared his experiences. He was a remarkable man, and despite his modest attitude toward his own persona, I only wish he had shared even more of his story—for his legacy certainly deserved it.

Early Life and Enlistment

Sten Eriksson was born on October 30, 1920, in Stora Köpinge—a small village in Skåne, today part of Ystad Municipality in southernmost Sweden. He was the youngest of five siblings born to Per and Gerda (née Olsson). Adventurous from a young age, Sten began to admire the swift advances of the German armed forces when Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway in 1940. He also joined the Swedish Nazi party *NSAP*, which later changed its name to *SSS* (*Svensk Socialistisk Samling*).

In 1943, Sten slipped across the border into occupied Norway near Charlottenberg. He made his way to Oslo and the Waffen-SS recruitment office located at Drammensveien 99. Like many other Nordic volunteers, he spent his initial time in the Waffen-SS training in Graz and Klagenfurt, as well as serving a brief period with 6./SS-"Germania".

He was subsequently transferred to *SS-Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 11* (SS-Pz.A.A.11), where the majority of Swedish volunteers were stationed.

However, Sten had a strong personal dislike for another Swedish SS man—who, to Sten's great frustration, was an officer named Gunnar Eklöf. From what Sten later conveyed, the feeling was entirely mutual. Seeking a way out, Sten applied for a transfer and joined another unit with a high concentration of Swedish volunteers: the SS's own war correspondent unit, *SS-Kriegsberichter-Abteilung "Kurt Eggers"*.

Frontline Service and the Road to Berlin

Sten often recounted how he deliberately sought out the most dangerous sectors, making him one of the Swedes who experienced some of the fiercest combat of the entire war. Among other engagements, he took part in the heavy fighting at Narva and around the strategic *Kinderheimhöhe*. He was wounded during these battles and spent time in an SS field hospital.

By early 1945, having heard rumors of the impending battles in Hungary, Sten submitted an application to be transferred to a unit in Budapest. However, his superiors in "Kurt Eggers" deemed it a terrible idea and deliberately stalled the paperwork. He spent time at the unit's main headquarters at Heimat 27 in Berlin. As the fighting drew closer to the Reich capital, Sten soon forgot all about going to Budapest.

When the Battle of Berlin erupted, Sten found himself in the thick of the action, navigating the ruined city blocks of central Berlin. He later recalled vivid, haunting experiences etched forever in his memory. On one occasion, while taking cover in a



deep archway alongside two other SS men, they discussed their next move. As they talked, the two soldiers loaded their weapons and shared a cigarette. After finishing their smoke, they gave Sten a brief nod, charged out into the street with guns blazing, and were cut down almost instantly. Sten managed to escape through cellars and stairwells to a quieter sector.

He also described seeing women who had dressed up lavishly with heavy makeup. He later realized they were forced laborers who believed they were about to be liberated by the Soviets. When these women whistled and shouted to the incoming Red Army troops—pointing out where German soldiers were hiding—the German troops made short work of them as they inexplicably made no attempt to take cover.

Wounded in Berlin and Seeking Refuge

A day or two later, Sten was wounded again—fortunately, a relatively minor injury. Realizing he needed medical attention, he took a circuitous route to the Swedish Legation. Upon arrival, however, he was informed that he was not welcome, despite his Swedish citizenship. (He only learned much later that another Swedish volunteer, Erik Wallin, had

suffered a similar rejection). Eventually, a doctor at the legation bandaged Sten's wounds, but once finished, Sten was promptly asked to leave.

Returning to the city center, Sten realized his chances of survival were shrinking by the hour. After April 30, the overwhelming roar of gunfire began to subside; while sporadic fighting continued, it was nothing like the deafening artillery barrage of previous days.

Taking shelter in a cellar, Sten knew he had to discard his uniform—he was well aware of how Soviet troops treated captured SS personnel. He frantically searched the cellar for civilian clothes, but the only thing he could find was a set of tennis gear: shorts and a polo shirt. Having no alternative, he stripped off his uniform, hid it thoroughly in the cellar, and put on the tennis outfit.

Capture and Interrogation

A few days passed with only sporadic shots fired. Soviet troops soon began calling down into the buildings, promising safety to anyone hiding. Sten didn't believe a word of it, but when soldiers began a systematic search of the houses, discovery became inevitable. He stepped forward to surrender.

The Soviet soldiers stared at him in utter disbelief



and suspicion. When asked the standard question—whether he was "SS"—Sten flatly denied it, knowing that an admission would likely result in execution on the spot. He stuck firmly to his cover story: that he was a Swedish foreign correspondent trapped in Berlin.

He was brought before an officer who had set up a field office in a nearby building. Asked why he was in Berlin in tennis clothes but wearing heavy German military boots, Sten realized he had forgotten to swap his footwear. Thinking quickly, he adopted an angry, indignant tone, explaining that he had been caught in the middle of a tennis match when the Soviet artillery barrage hit weeks earlier, forcing him into a cellar. The military boots were the only footwear he could find among the rubble to protect his feet.

Unimpressed and deeply suspicious, the Soviets placed Sten in a room under armed guard. He was repeatedly brought out for interrogation, facing the exact same questions every time. Sten held firm to his story. Eventually, the interrogators relented and informed him that he would soon be evacuated from Berlin.

Imprisonment at Sachsenhausen

A day or two later, Sten was ordered onto a truck and driven north of Berlin to a camp. At the time, he did not know its identity, but during our later conversations—when discussing *KL Sachsenhausen*—we both agreed that this must have been where he was taken.

Upon arrival, Sten discovered he was by no means free, finding himself behind perimeter walls and barbed wire. He protested vehemently, demanding to speak to the officer in command. After persistent badgering, he was brought before a Soviet officer who asked in broken German what the problem was. Sten insisted that as a Swedish foreign correspondent, his treatment as a criminal was unacceptable. The officer maintained that he was being kept

there purely for his own safety, as German pockets of resistance still needed to be cleared. Sten kept up his daily complaints, demanding his release. Over time, the Soviet soldiers and their officer grew somewhat fond of the stubborn Swede, finding his persistent demands rather amusing.

One memory from the camp remained particularly vivid. One day, the Soviet officer called Sten over and told him to follow him to an open-bed truck that had just entered the camp. The officer gestured for Sten to climb up and look inside. Still confused, Sten climbed up to inspect the cargo, at which point the officer grinned broadly and shouted, "*Göpel, Göpel!*"

Looking down, Sten saw several charred corpses on the truck bed. It took him a moment to realize what the officer meant—these were supposedly the remains of Joseph Goebbels and his wife. Sten noted that while he could never verify it with absolute certainty, it was highly plausible, as the Soviets had indeed recovered the bodies and were displaying them as trophies to senior officers.

Return to Sweden and Later Years

A few days after this incident, the officer summoned Sten once more and announced that he was being released. Shortly thereafter, he left the camp, made his way back into Berlin, and—after numerous hardships—eventually secured passage back to Sweden.

After the war, Sten Eriksson continued his career as a journalist. He visited Germany regularly and was a frequent guest at the veteran reunions of the *III. (germanisches) SS-Panzerkorps*. He also served as an informal spokesman for the Swedish Waffen-SS volunteers.

Sten Eriksson passed away in Skövde in August 3rd, 2007.

Georg Schwab



Dogs of the 6. SS-Geb.Div. "Nord"

High in the North, on the Finnish front, the 6th SS Mountain Division "Nord"—alongside their comrades of the Army (Heer)—is locked in brutal combat against Soviet troops. Unlike on other fronts, no tank battles take place here, and no large-scale formations clash. Following the initial successes of 1941 and 1942, the front has transitioned into a form of trench and static warfare. Jagdkommandos (hunting commandos) and reconnaissance patrols are constantly on the move; ambushes and perpetual skir-

mishes with the Soviets and their partisan units are the daily bread of the soldiers on the Karelian front.

The peculiarities of the country and the difficult terrain conditions are omnipresent here: primeval forests and marshy plains, lakes and rivers, intense heat and mosquitoes in the summer, severe frost and heavy snow in the winter, the midnight sun, and the polar night. These circumstances demand everything from the men on the Karelian front. The supply of the troops is carried out via improvised "roads" and



tracks. The guerrilla-style warfare in the wilderness rages on. Time and again, friendly reconnaissance patrols fall into Soviet ambushes and suffer heavy casualties. The constant reports from the troops force the command to act. Once again, the dog—man's best friend—is designated for a special role.

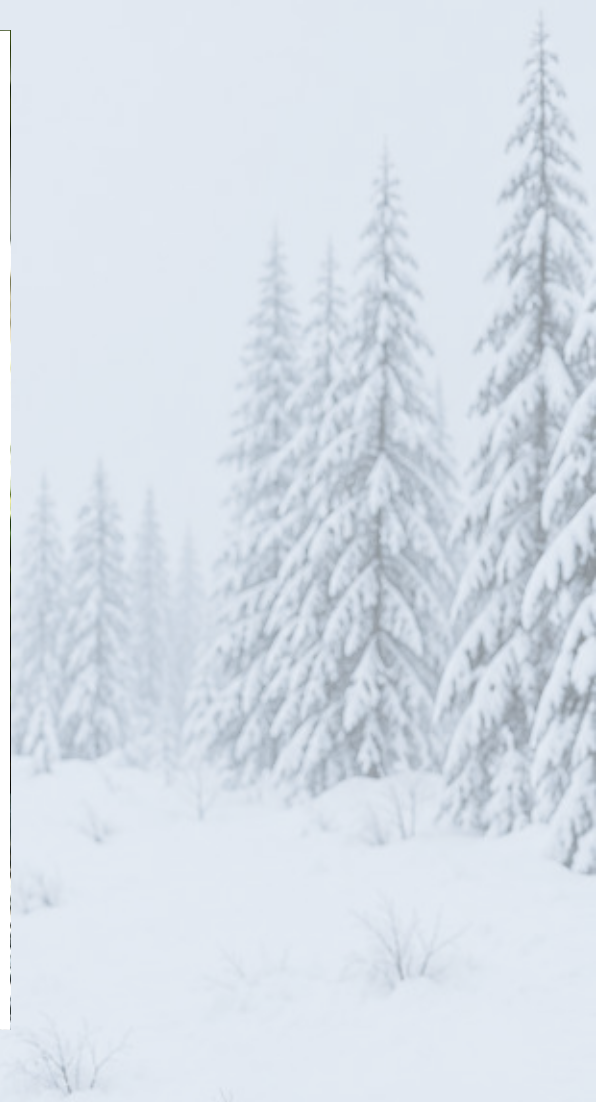
In the "Training and Experimental Department for the Service Dog System of the Waffen-SS" (Lehr- und Versuchsabteilung für das Diensthundewesen der Waffen-SS), under Franz Mueller-Darß, work was underway to find ways to help the men on these unique fronts. It was decided to train guard dogs (Schutzhunde), messenger dogs (Meldehunde), and draft dogs (Ziehhunde). Before these dogs could be sent into action, they had to be made "gun-shy proof" (schussfest). The animals had to be accustomed to the noise of war piece by piece. This was best done during feeding, as the dogs were focused on their food. This noise became their constant companion, gradually increasing until it included small explosions.

The guard dogs, also referred to as escort dogs (Begleithunde), were trained to recognize the scent of Soviet uniforms. Their task was to roam through the dense forest terrain ahead of the reconnaissance patrol and report hidden enemy forces. This had to be done silently so as not to warn the enemy by barking. The guard dog was equipped with a leather rectangle called a Bringsel attached to its collar. If the dog detected the enemy, it silently took the Bringsel into its mouth and returned to the dog handler. The unit was thus forewarned and could re-act.

The messenger dog had the vital task of carrying messages to the rear. To guarantee the arrival of the message, the messenger dog was accustomed to two handlers. One handler went with the dog and the reconnaissance patrol, while the second handler remained in the position. The handler accompanying the patrol carried a drip can and used it to leave an invisible trail of fish brine across the terrain for the dog to follow. The dog carried a small metal tube on its collar, inside of which the message was placed. Upon the command "Message!" (Meldung), the dog raced along the laid trail back to the second handler in the position.

Another field of activity for the deployment of these dogs was to be the pulling of small carts. It was intended to use these teams to transport ammunition, supplies, and the wounded. A great deal of





work went into designing a suitable trailer capable of handling the difficult terrain conditions. Ultimately, a type of Akja (boat-shaped sled) proved successful, fitted with wheels in the summer, though the infantry cart If.8 (Infanteriekarren If.8) was also utilized. The draft dogs were assembled into teams of 3 or 6 dogs. The most intelligent animal functioned as the lead dog. These teams had a small silhouette and offered a much smaller target than a squad of stretcher-bearers consisting of at least 4 soldiers. In the transport of the wounded, the dog teams achieved great things!

The training of the dog squad (Hundestaffel) for "Nord" took place in March 1943 in Oranienburg. The men came for the most part from various convalescent units and were combat-experienced. The dogs came partly from the ranks of the police and from private dog clubs. The dogs were trained specifically for their intended tasks. In May 1943, the field dog squad (Feldhundestaffel) embarked at Danzig on the motor vessel Kolberg. From Danzig,

the voyage went across the Baltic Sea to Oulu.

The strength of Feldhundestaffel 6 totaled 2/4/37 (2 officers, 4 NCOs, 37 enlisted men) and approximately 50 field dogs. The leaders of the squad were Ustuf. Wilhelm Jaensch, who served as the squad commander (Staffelführer), and Ustuf. Arno Völkening, who functioned as the training officer. The field dog squad was subordinated to Nachrichtenabteilung 6 (Signals Battalion 6). The field post number (Feldpostnummer) of the squad was that of the staff of NA.6 (FpN: 06041). The quarters were located at Kilometer 6 on the "Road of the SS" (Straße der SS). Later, the field dog squad was also subordinated to Aufklärungsabteilung 6 (Reconnaissance Battalion 6). Veterinary care was provided by the division's veterinary company.

The initial skepticism toward the field dogs vanished very quickly. Work on the training of both dogs and men was continuous, including ski training for the men and endurance training for the dogs. Following Finland's change of sides, the evacuation



of the country took place, and the dog squad ended up in Alsace. There, too, man and beast performed the duties ordered of them. Mostly deployed in the transport of the wounded, the dog teams saved many soldiers, including those of the former enemy.

On April 3, 1945, by order, SS-Kampfgruppe Nord was established as an independent combat group, formed from the elements of the division gathered during the withdrawal movements in the Palatinate (Pfalz). Obersturmführer Völkening took command of the 2nd Company, in whose ranks stood the remnants of Feldhundestaffel 6. The strength of the company was 1/14/132 and 37 dogs. The men of Feldhundestaffel 6 experienced the end of the war in Nuremberg. Dogs were no longer with them. Those who survived walked the bitter path into captivity. The surviving men of the field dog squad maintained contact with one another after the war, meeting regularly in Austria.

And even today, specially trained dogs still perform their service in the armed forces of several countries.

Recommended Reading:

- Wolfgang Frank – "Verklungen Horn und Geläut" (The Chronicle of Master Forester Franz Mueller-Darß)
- Gerd Knabe – "Kamerad Bello" (The Story of a Field Dog)

Charli Peng



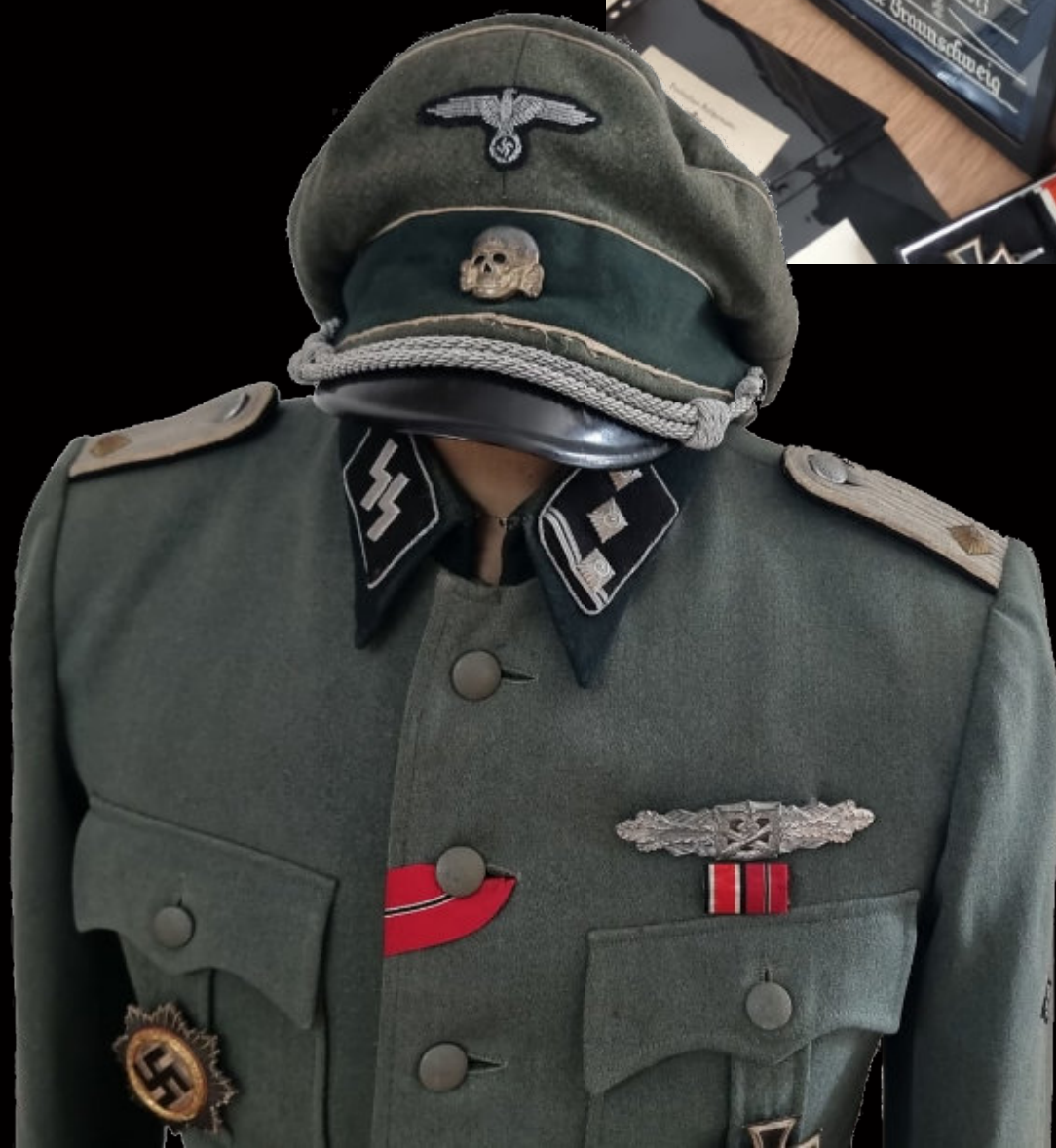
Uniform of SS-Hauptsturmführer Gerhard Lotze 5. SS-Panzer-Division “Wiking”

Collection J.B. & A.K.



Gerhard Lotze was born on May 21, 1922, in Biberbach. He enlisted in the SS (SS No. 400107) in 1939 and was initially assigned to SS-Regiment "Deutschland". Shortly thereafter, he attended SS-Junkerschule Braunschweig (1940–1941) and was commissioned as an SS-Untersturmführer on April 20, 1941.

As an officer, he was posted to SS-Infanterie-Regiment "Westland", where he served until 1944. Following a brief assignment at SS-Junkerschule Tölz, he soon returned to "Westland". Having been promoted to SS-Obersturmführer in November 1943, Gerhard Lotze was killed in action on October 13, 1944. By the time of his death, he had already been awarded the German Cross in Gold. He was posthumously promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer and awarded the Knight's Cross.



VORLÄUFIGES BESITZZEUGNIS



DER FÜHRER

HAT DEM

SS-Ostuf. Gerhard L o t z e
Komp.-Chef im 11./SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1o

DAS RITTERKREUZ

DES EISERNEN KREUZES

AM 1.2.1945 VERLIEHEN

HQu OKH, DEN 2. Februar 1945

OBERKOMMANDO DES HEERES
I.A.

Kunze
GENERALLEUTNANT



Im Namen des Führers
und Obersten Befehlshabers
der Wehrmacht
verleihe ich

dem
SS-Unterschlaf. L o t z e
III./ SS-Verband

das
Eiserne Kreuz 2. Klasse

In Feld den 24. April 1945



SS-Br.
Generalmajor der
Panzer



Vorläufiges Besitzzeugnis



Im Namen des Führers
und Obersten Befehlshabers
der Wehrmacht
verleihe ich

dem
SS-Unterschlaf. L o t z e
Kp.Fhr. 8./SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt."B"

das
Deutsche Kreuz in Gold

HQu OKH, den 24. April 1945

Oberkommando des Heeres

Kunze
Generalstabschef



VORLÄUFIGES BESITZZEUGNIS



DER FÜHRER

HAT DEM

SS-Ostuf. Gerhard L o t z e
Komp.-Chef im 11./SS-Pz.Gren.Rgt. 1o

DAS RITTERKREUZ
DES EISERNEN KREUZES

AM 1.2.1945 VERLIEHEN

HQu OKH, DEN 2. Februar 1945

OBERKOMMANDO DES HEERES
I.A.



Kunze
GENERALLEUTNANT



Vorläufiges Besitzzeugnis



Im Namen des Führers
und Obersten Befehlshabers
der Wehrmacht

verleihe ich
dem

SS-Untersturmführer Lotze
Kp.Fhr. 8./SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt."W"

das

Deutsche Kreuz in Gold



HQ OAH, den 24. April 1943

Oberkommando des Heeres

Kessel

Generalfeldmarschall



Im Namen des Führers
und Obersten Befehlshabers
der Wehrmacht

verleihe ich
dem

Untersturmführer
Lotze
III./ # Westland

das

Eiserne Kreuz 2.Klasse

Im Felde, den 20. Juli 1941.



Thier

Brigadeführer
Generalmajor der Waffen-# u. Div.-K
(Dienstgrad und Dienststellung)

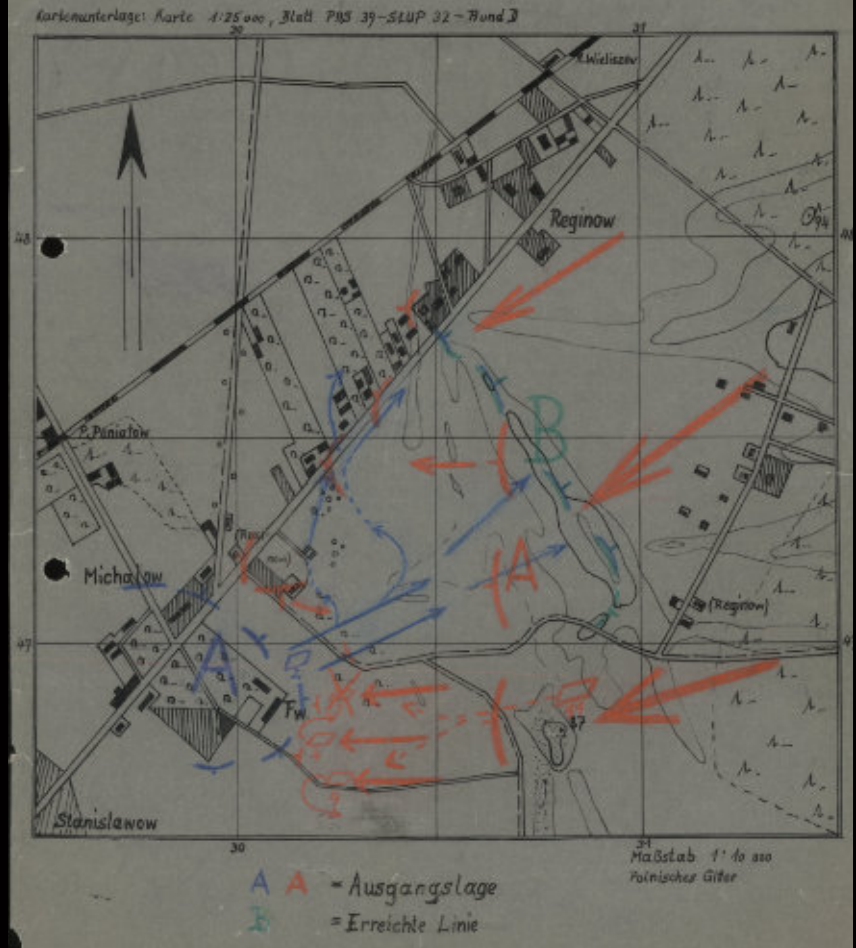


The dark stains visible on the inside lining of the tunic are believed to be blood from Lotze's fatal wounds. After being seriously wounded in 1943, he was assigned as an instructor at the SS-Junkerschule in Bad Tölz, where he was considered safe from front-line combat.

During a period of leave, however, Lotze chose not to remain with his family in Germany. Instead, he returned to the Eastern Front near Warsaw to visit the men of his former company, who were engaged in heavy fighting against Soviet forces. When the Soviets launched an attack on the positions of the Regiment Westland, Lotze assumed command of his old company and personally led a counterattack.

During the fighting, which included a Soviet air attack, he was struck by shrapnel in the abdomen. Mortally wounded, he died shortly afterwards among the very men he had voluntarily returned to lead.

Following the war, the tunic and its associated items remained in the possession of Lotze's brother, who carefully preserved the group within the family for more than sixty years.



“SS-Obersturmführer Lotze, who was visiting the Bataillon at the beginning of Oktober 1944, was compelled to suddenly take over command of 5. Kompanie (which he had previously led in 1942/43) due to the absence of a Kompanie commander.

During the afternoon of the 12.10.1944 the Bataillon was attacked by the enemy and thrown back, suffering 66% casualties through the extremely strong enemy drumfire and the subsequent combat. The survivors formed a hedgehog position around Michalow. On the following night a force of 11 enemy tanks with mounted infantry drove in front of the strongpoint in the direction of the Stanislawow—Reginow road. SS-Obersturmführer Lotze personally destroyed 2 enemy tanks that were guarded by hostile infantry with Panzerfausts. As a result the enemy tanks pulled back during the nighttime hours.

In the morning hours of the next day SS-Obersturmführer Lotze realized that he would not be able to hold the positions north of Michalow in the event of an enemy attack due to the enemy’s control of the high ground in front of the defenses and the absence of contact with friendly forces to the left. Thus he decided to attack the Bohnenhöhe (located east of Michalow) with his Kompanie along with the support of 2 Panthers. In a boldly led attack, the Kompanie succeeded in taking the hill with Lotze at its head. When his unit came under fire from the main road located to the rear, Lotze rolled up the enemy positions along it with 5 men. His Kompanie ultimately managed to occupy a line from the Bohnenhöhe up to the main road. During the counterthrust he captured 25 prisoners. The enemy suffered losses of 80-100 dead and 6 MGs knocked out.

Through this counterthrust (launched on his own initiative) SS-Obersturmführer Lotze laid the groundwork for the restoration of contact with the left neighbour. It also enabled the friendly elements on the right to push the frontline forward to Hill 87 and the high ground to the south of it shortly afterwards. Through this a new main line of defense was created, and the intention of the enemy to seize the Stanislawow—Reginow road and use it as a jump-off position for a breakthrough towards Jablonna-Legionowa was thwarted.

During this fighting SS-Obersturmführer Lotze died a heroes’ death. He is completely worthy of being awarded the Knight’s Cross to the Iron Cross”

KOMMENDANTUR

INSIDE THE CAMP COMMAND

A structural analysis of the SS Kommandantur, its key departments, and the personnel behind the terror from 1933 to 1945.

KOMMENDANTUR

Abt. I: Headquarters & Adjutants

Abt. II: Political Dept. (Gestapo)

Abt. III: Camp Operations
(Schutzhaft)

Abt. IV: Administration & Finance

Abt. V: Medical Dept. (Sanitätswesen)

Abt. VI: Ideological Indoctrination





From left: Artur Rödl, Hans Entress, Hans Loritz, Hermann Michl, Herbert Lauer, and Anton Thumann at the Gross-Rosen concentration camp.

The *Kommandantur* - a word that most people do not truly understand. Often, when authors write about "Totenkopf" soldiers in a concentration camp, they are actually referring to the *Kommandantur* (the camp command). It is unfortunate that many historians fail to distinguish between these concepts. But how was the *Kommandantur* actually structured?

Initially, it was headed by the Camp Commandant, but the camp itself was managed by a *Schutzhaftlagerführer* (Abteilung III), who was the leader of the specific camp in question. Under the *Schutzhaftlagerführer*, there were several roles, such as the *Blockführer*. This was the person in daily contact with the prisoners; he was responsible for ensuring prisoners attended the roll call (*Appelplatz*) and for assigning prisoners to their daily work details. The *Blockführer* was usually a lower-ranking soldier, ranging from *SS-Rottenführer* to *SS-Oberscharführer*. These men were feared by the prisoners as they frequently used batons or whips to enforce orders. Some well-known *Blockführers* include Gustav Sorge, Hubert Schubert, and Martin Sommer. However, research shows that creating a complete roster

of *Blockführers* at KL Sachsenhausen is near impossible, as thousands of men cycled through these positions from the camp's founding until May 1945. One author attempted to list everyone who served in the *Kommandantur* at KL Sachsenhausen and reached a figure of around 260 soldiers—which is likely, at best, only 10% of all those who actually served there.

In the next tier, we find the *Rapportführer*, who oversaw a number of different "Blocks" (prisoner barracks). In KL Sachsenhausen, there were approximately 6–7 *Rapportführers* constantly on duty. They ensured that the numbers during roll call were accurate and issued daily orders to the various *Blockführers*. Again, it is impossible to determine the exact number of people who served as *Rapportführer* from 1933–1945. One of the more famous early *Rapportführers* was Heinrich Forster, who would later rise through the ranks to become a *Schutzhaftlagerführer*.

All of these positions were subordinate to the *Schutzhaftlagerführer*, the camp's actual manager, who ruled over the prisoners once they were inside his walls. The lists of those who served as *Schutzhaft-*



Franz Ziereis



Gustav Sorge



Hans Hüttig

lagerführer are more accurate for most camps, although there are gaps regarding later camps, especially in the Baltics. However, for camps like Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, Stutthof, and Gross-Rosen, the lists are precise to the smallest detail. The Schutzhaftlagerführer (Abt III) was assisted by an Arbeitseinsatzführer (Abt IIIe), who was responsible for all labor commandos sent outside the camp walls during the day. He ensured these units had proper guards and provisions to carry out their tasks. The architect of this system was Theodor Eicke (see *Eiserne Kreuz* No. 1), and this system remained in place until the camps were liberated in 1944 and 1945. All commanders of the smaller "Aussenlager" (sub-camps) were under the command of the main camp's Schutzhaftlagerführer. These sub-camps ranged from a few prisoners to thousands. Some became so large they were established as permanent camps; one even became a part of the main camp—Gusen, which is later mentioned alongside its original main camp as KL Mauthausen-Gusen.

Abteilung I was the Commandant's office and his adjutants. They handled most matters concerning the camp, from administration to camp size. As you know, most commandants were captured after the war, if they did not fall in battle. As far as I know, only one commandant escaped: Anton Burger, commandant of the SD camp in Theresienstadt. His true

identity was only revealed after his death; he had managed to change his identity several times after the war but lived under a single name from 1960 until he died in the early 1990s. Some committed suicide to escape justice, such as Hans Loritz. Others have been missing since the final days of the war, like Adolf Haas. Albert Sauer died while attempting to flee as American troops arrived. Franz Ziereis was fatally shot during a confrontation with US soldiers. Surprisingly few were executed after the war for their crimes, though examples exist: Josef Kramer, Rudolf Höss, Alex Piorkowski, Martin Weiss, and Max Pauly. One was executed by the SS at the end of the war: Karl Koch, former commandant of Sachsenburg, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Majdanek. Some were "lucky" and received only prison sentences, soon walking free—such as Fritz Hartjenstein, Paul Werner Hoppe, Wilhelm Gideon, and Johannes Hassebroek. Adjutants often fared even better, usually serving only a few years in prison. It should be noted that there is a difference between commandants who served before and after 1942. Those before 1942 were often more brutal, trained by Theodor Eicke. When Oswald Pohl and the SS-WVHA took over the IKL (Inspectorate of Concentration Camps), he replaced almost every commandant. Most were given new assignments; many left the concentration camp system while others were moved within it (like Max Pauly). Only one com-



SS-T-Stuba. KL Gusen

mandant kept his position: Franz Ziereis at KL Mauthausen, who had the longest tenure of any commandant (1939–1945). Pohl sought men with a more "business-like" view of the camps, a role for which men like Hans Loritz were deemed unfit.

Abteilung II was what became known as the camp's Gestapo; its correct title was the Politische Abteilung (Political Department). This department was staffed by an officer from the RSHA. Contrary to the errors of many historians, it was actually this department that approved prisoner punishments. There are several examples of NCOs and enlisted men punishing prisoners without approval from Abteilung II, only to find themselves soon transported to the front as a result. If a prisoner was to be punished, the SS applied to Abteilung II, which then sent a request to the RSHA and IKL. This could range from corporal punishment to the death penalty. Surprisingly few officers from Abteilung II were punished after the war, and those who were usually received only prison sentences.

Abteilung IV was the camp administration. They were in constant contact with the SS-WVHA. Their tasks included sending everything of value taken from prisoners to the treasury of the German Reich. They were also responsible for invoicing companies that used camp prisoners for production. German companies paid a few Reichsmarks per day per prisoner; for the SS, this was a significant income used to pay salaries to their soldiers. Beyond this, it functioned like any administration: handling wages, uniforms, and supplies. Many leaders of Abteilung IV were captured after the war; some were sentenced to death, but in most cases, these were commuted to prison, and nearly all were released by the mid-

1950s. A well-known officer from this department is Otto Barnewald, leader of Abteilung IV in Buchenwald and Neuengamme.

Abteilung V consisted of the camp doctors. One could write an entire book about them; they ranged from sadists to genuine physicians. Regardless, Abteilung V was responsible for both prisoner and SS medical care—though the latter received significantly more attention. In many cases, prisoners were actually treated by doctors who were prisoners themselves, but with a severe lack of medicine and equipment, the chances of survival were slim. Many camp doctors saw an opportunity to exploit prisoners as "lab animals" for various experiments. The post-war fate of these doctors varied: some were executed, some committed suicide, and others disappeared abroad. Some faced no punishment at all and returned to their medical practices. Josef Mengele and Aribert Heim are two about whom volumes have been written. Another well-known doctor was Erwin (Ding) Schuler, made famous by Eugen Kogon's book *The SS State*; he committed suicide in captivity. Heinz Baumkötter spent 11 years as a prisoner in Vorkuta; he was tried again upon his return for crimes at KL Sachsenhausen, but since he had already served 11 years in a labor camp, he walked out of the courtroom a free man. We even know of instances where prisoners defended doctors during their trials—the most famous being Hans Münch, a doctor at KL Auschwitz who was acquitted. Today, with the current German legal view of "accessory to murder," he would likely not have escaped punishment. Another acquitted doctor was Karl Kahr of KL Buchenwald, for whom a large number of prisoners testified. He lived to an old age in his native



Heinz Baumkötter – physician at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.



Hscha. Gerhard Palitzsch – Rapportführer (report leader) at the Auschwitz concentration camp.



Oscha. Wilhelm Schubert – Blockführer at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, also known as "Pistol Schubert."

Austria.

An obscure department was Abteilung VI, which dealt entirely with the political training of the SS personnel, including both the guards and the camp staff. To our knowledge, no one from Abteilung VI has ever been convicted.

We have now covered the major departments within the Kommendantur and those who ran the camps, but within these departments, there were other vital posts. One important role under Abteilung III was the leader of the crematorium.

Most who held this post were convicted after the war, usually to a few years in prison. A well-known crematorium leader was Martin Roth at KL Mauthausen. After serving his sentence, he often returned to Mauthausen, as his wife—whom he met during his time at the camp—was from the village. He was a regular guest at the local pubs not far from his old workplace. Another notable crematorium leader was Georg Maier at KL Sachsenhausen. In 1942, when camps were ordered to "treat" (kill) a large portion of the Russian prisoners of war cap-

Photo of unidentified block leaders (Blockführers) at the Mauthausen concentration camp.



tured in the first six months of the war against the Soviet Union, this was carried out in various ways. At KL Sachsenhausen, they prepared a room disguised as a doctor's office. Prisoners were to be weighed and measured; when they stood against the measuring gauge, a small hatch opened behind them through which an SS man shot them in the neck. To prevent waiting prisoners from hearing, a truck engine was revved nearby. Several SS men were ordered to this duty. Georg Maier refused, stating he did not join the SS to become a murderer. One might expect he would be punished, but he was not; he was excused from that duty and continued to lead the crematorium. Others, however, volunteered for this service, such as Gustav Sorge (aka "Iron Gustav") and Hubert Schubert (aka "Pistol Schubert"). In Dachau, they solved this by having SS men shoot the Soviet prisoners at their shooting range in Herbertshausen.

Other positions within the Kommandantur included the head of mail and the leaders of prisoner clothing and belongings, which were stored in large

warehouses within the camp area. A fact many may not know is that many prisoners were actually released—mostly so-called "asocials" and professional criminals. After a time, usually years, they were deemed "rehabilitated" and typically faced military service in units with high numbers. Jews, however, were never released. They also had a radio room led by an NCO. The remains of the radio room for KL Sachsenhausen can still be seen behind the first building at the Sachsenhausen Memorial—one of the few Kommandantur buildings still standing. The other remaining building is the Commandant's office, which today houses an exhibition about the SS at the camp.

In conclusion, the soldiers and officers who served in the Kommandantur are an interesting area of study, and I hope this article has provided knowledge showing the difference between them and the "Totenkopf" units that many authors lazily conflate in their works.

Georg Schwab

Archive Research!

N. u. S.-Fragebogen

(Von Frauen sinngemäß auszufüllen.)

Name u. des H.-Angehörigen, der für sich
oder sein...

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Part 2

SS-Pz.Aufkl.Abt.2

“Das Reich”

We continue with the account of 2./SS-Pz.A.A.2 and its final battles of the Second World War. I received an email from one of our readers who greatly appreciated this eyewitness testimony, primarily because it is exceedingly rare to find material of this nature. Unfortunately, it appears that Hans Kirste remembered certain details incorrectly, but as one of you was kind enough to point out, the structure of SS-Pz.A.A.2 actually looked as follows: Stab, Stabskompanie, 1. SS-Pz.Sp.Kp. (gp), 2. Leichte SS-Pz.Aufkl.Kp. (gp), 3. SS-Pz.Aufkl.Kp., and 4. Schwere Kp. (gp)—which included a Sch.Kan.Zug (7.5cm), an 8cm Gr.Wf.Zug (gp), and a pioneer platoon. Finally, there was also a Versorgungskompanie.

The 4th Company was commanded by Karl Wagner, and not the 5th as stated in the previous issue. The Sch.Kan.Zug was led by SS-Oscha Hans Hett, not Herbert as previously indicated. Lastly, the 8cm Granatwerfer-Zug was led by SS-Oscha Wilhelm Hett, not Karl as stated in the last issue. According

to this reader, it is also uncertain whether SS-Pz.A.A.2 had a Pak-Zug at this point in time, as it is not listed in the Kriegsgliederung dated February 1, 1945; a question mark was also raised regarding Franz Buchmann.

It should be emphasized that the account we have read—and the next part that now follows—was written long after the war, and memory can sometimes play tricks on us. Regardless, this is how SS-Ostuf Hans Kirste remembered the final months of the war.

We now continue with Part Two—

Company Kirste was ordered to attack eastwards from the southern sector of Kaloz, cross the canal, and likewise establish a bridgehead. The distance between the 3rd and 2nd Companies was approximately 2 kilometers. No heavy weapons were available for the assault, and it was unknown whether the canal was occupied by the enemy.

The 2nd Company moved mounted into the as-



SS-Hstuf. Otto Resch, Kp.Fhr 1./SS-Pz.A.A.2

sembly area in the southern part of Kaloz, deploying from there for the attack: Platoon Buchwald on the right flank, the Company Commander in the center of the company on the front line. At the edge of Kaloz, we saw before us an open plain of nearly 1,000 meters, bordered to the east by the embankment of the canal, which stood out clearly. A bridge spanning the canal was also distinctly visible, at least from the center of the attacking company. About 300 meters ahead of the canal lay a small, rectangularly arranged farmstead.

Moving in a broad and deep formation, the company initially reached the area near the farmstead without encountering enemy action. Suddenly, infantry fire erupted from the far bank of the canal, followed by mortar fire. The farmstead provided initial cover for parts of the company. The objective now was to cross the open space up to the canal embankment to reach the attack goal and find cover behind the levee.

The advance succeeded under the cover of the fire-wings and with mortar support. The enemy on the far bank abandoned their positions, allowing the canal to be crossed via the bridge and the enemy positions to be occupied. Meanwhile, Platoon Buch-

wald on the right flank had also managed to reach the canal, despite coming under fire as well. With the help of two inflatable boats from the engineer platoon.

The company had reached its objective and crossed the canal at two points. Yet before all elements of the company could make the crossing, orders arrived to abort the attack and link up with Company Auer to the north. This company had likewise succeeded in crossing the canal and establishing a foothold on the east bank.

As the battalion evidently intended to form a main effort (Schwerpunkt) at one location, both companies were consolidated. The road leading towards Sarkeresztur offered a suitable axis. By evening, the new positions were reached. A reorganization took place: Company Auer took up positions across the canal to the left of the road, while Company Kirste positioned itself across the canal to the right of the bridge. The 2nd Company's sector extended roughly 350 meters; the men occupied earthworks that had been built by the Russians to defend the canal. The earthworks constructed further along the embankment offered a good view into the approach terrain and were protected by a wetland area lying in front of the levee.

The following day brought an attack by both companies towards Sarkeresztur, aiming to threaten the road running south toward Sarbogard—a crucial supply route for the Russians fighting in Sarkeresztur. Simultaneously, the main body of our division attacked Sarkeresztur from the north. Our attack, which was evidently a surprise to the Russians, made good initial progress with significant gains of ground. Vehicle traffic on the road to Sarkeresztur was clearly visible, falling almost within the firing range of our infantry weapons. However, our attack was heavily hindered by wetlands and at times treacherous, deep ground. When the enemy recognized the danger threatening his flank, he directed heavy fire from heavy weapons into our sector of attack; infantry went into staging positions. It became clear that the objective could not be reached due to massed enemy forces, and heavy fire forced us to halt the attack.

Because the wet ground made digging in impossible, the companies were withdrawn to the canal: 2nd Company once again to the right of the bridge, 3rd Company to the left. The 2nd Company dispatched a security group that remained in a patch



SS-Ostuf. Ignatz Auer, Kp.Fhr 3./SS-Pz.Aufkl.Abt.2



SS-Ustuf. Alfred Siegling

of trees and bushes about 300 meters ahead of the Main Line of Resistance (HKL). In the 2nd Company's sector, the observation post (B-Stelle) for the Infantry Gun (IG) Platoon was established, and a forward observer from the artillery made contact, though nothing was yet known about the available artillery strength.

Special attention was given to protecting the company's right flank, as an attack by the Russians along the otherwise unoccupied canal had to be anticipated. On this side of the canal, the Engineer Platoon's "Fehr" group took up position, securing the right flank with tripwire anti-personnel mines and setting up a machine-gun nest. Behind our well-prepared positions on the opposite bank—offering excellent visibility from the embankment crown over the wetlands and water ahead, backed by artillery to our rear—we felt reasonably secure against a frontal assault. Our concern remained the right flank on both sides of the canal.

Our position was spared enemy artillery fire, though the Russians shelled the small wood containing our security group, which was forced to withdraw due to the heavy fire. About one or two days after our attack towards Sarkeresztur, the first enemy assault on our position took place.

Sector of Company Kirste. The night leading into March 13 seemed to pass quietly. Extreme vigilance had been ordered, though nothing pointed to an impending attack. The sky was overcast, and it was so dark you could barely see your hand before your eyes.

Long past midnight, the company was jolted





awake by a piercing, prolonged scream. Soon, many men were shouting at the top of their lungs: "Ala-larm!" [Alarm!]. Flashing infantry fire intermingled with the initial screams, rapidly intensifying into a raging hail of all infantry weapons. Screams and muzzle flashes from defenders and attackers merged into one. Heavy weapons joined the fray, and a deafening din hung over the battlefield. The attack sector in front of the 2nd Company became a zone of destruction. For a long time, the infantry weapons continued to spew their lethal fire into the night until it was certain the attack had been decisively repulsed.

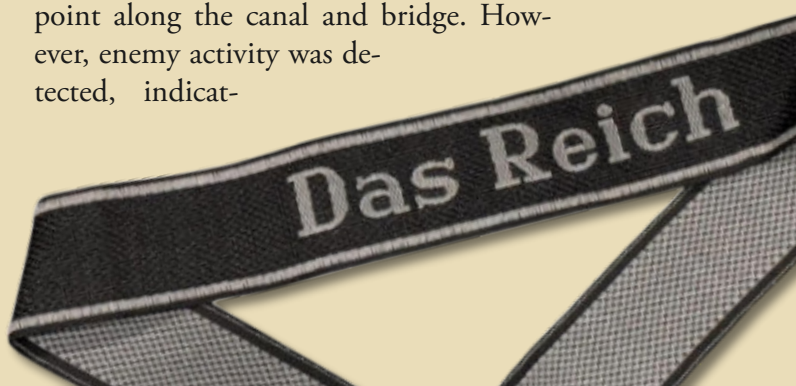
As dawn broke, it became clear that the approaches in front of the 2nd Company were littered with attackers. The lead element of the assault force had reached the crest of the embankment unnoticed through the wetlands. There, the first bloodcurdling scream was triggered by a defender who suddenly found himself face-to-face with an attacker with a fixed bayonet, seemingly grown out of the ground.

The initial thrust hit the Meier Section of the heavy MG platoon. This was also where the defenders suffered their first casualties. The Meier Section was the first to open fire with automatic weapons. Within moments, even the last man was torn from his dreams, as concentrated infantry fire cut down

the attackers. The fire was exceptionally devastating because the defenders were concentrated in a tight space with high combat strength, while the enemy had evidently attacked in a dense, tightly packed formation. On the crest of the embankment lay several dead attackers; immediately in front of the embankment crown and extending deep into the water-covered approach area lay countless enemy dead, many partially or completely submerged in water. A considerable amount of personal identification documents could be recovered and forwarded to the battalion headquarters.

The attack had been repulsed, though harassing fire continued to land on our positions. Combat outposts were occasionally able to push forward again.

The next night attack came two days later, on March 15. After the crushing defeat of the attackers during the night attack of March 13, no one initially expected another Russian assault at this specific point along the canal and bridge. However, enemy activity was detected, indicat-



ing that larger operations were imminent. Reconnaissance patrols pushed along the canal against the 2nd Company's right flank, prompting us to reinforce the engineer assets assigned to Group Fehr.

The Russians shifted artillery fire into the Kaloz area, disrupting traffic passing through the town toward the front further south. We could not clearly discern whether more vehicles were moving toward or away from the front.

In the early morning hours of March 15, under cover of pitch darkness, another attack erupted in the 2nd Company's sector. This time, the men were not caught off-guard. At the first signs of the assault, furious infantry fire broke out immediately, preventing the attackers from penetrating the positions. The artillery had ranged in with precision based on the first night attack, creating an inferno of heavy shell impacts. Positioned behind us was a battery of 21 cm howitzers with four barrels, raining down their deadly shells upon the attackers, flickering flashes illuminating the infernal noise of the bursting shells. There seemed to be no end to it. The infantry laid down an impenetrable curtain of fire over the attackers. Field guns and mortars fired at maximum rate. When day broke, it was revealed that the enemy had attacked again with strong forces, only to get trapped under the defensive fire of the attackers [defenders]. The battle area was strewn with the fallen; the attack was repulsed without any gains for the enemy.

What would the next day bring? We could not explain why the second Russian night attack had been launched at the exact same location as the first, especially given that the canal was undefended for many kilometers further south. It is certainly a proven tactic to strike the enemy at his main point of defense to break his backbone, but attacking in such a hopeless situation sacrificed huge numbers of troops to the enemy fire.

The Russians continued to intensify their activity. Heavy artillery fire fell on the wood containing our combat outpost, and on the road from Kaloz. On our right flank, a new development occurred: after the Russians had established the previous day through patrols that the canal in this sector was unoccupied, infantry infiltrated across the bridge located there. From far off over the bridge, single figures moved across the field toward the road—at times one man, then 100 meters later another, then 300 meters another. Thus it continued for hours. The en-

emy crossed the bridge individually, some carrying heavy infantry weapons, gradually reaching the southern part of Kaloz. A single field gun tried in vain to disrupt the movement, but the distance was too great for infantry weapons. The connecting road through Kaloz—the lifeline for the units fighting to the south—was threatened. Traffic flowing north on this road intensified. Eventually, resistance developed in the threatened area, and infantry fire prevented further advances by the Russians.

Our situation at the bridge grew increasingly critical. Would we be cut off? Would a thrust from the south hit our rear? What will the coming night bring? News from the battalion: None. Once again, the hours of the night dragged on, slow and full of tension. The combat zone was observed intently; special orders were unnecessary after the events of previous nights. Our primary fear was for our right flank.

Yet once again, the 2nd Company bore the brunt of a third night attack from the front. In the early morning hours of March 16, the Russians struck again. Once more, concentrated defensive fire from light and heavy infantry weapons slammed into them, while heavy howitzers spewed fire onto the attackers. It was incomprehensible to us that the enemy would attack at the exact spot where he had already been bloodily repulsed twice. When morning broke, it became clear that death had once again reaped a bountiful harvest.

Based on the situation visible to us, matters were coming to a head. Kaloz was under heavy fire. Russian infantry in front of the town was reinforcing. Will anyone even make it through Kaloz? What is the battalion doing? Over in the Sarkeresztur area, the din of battle indicated growing Russian pressure. Why are we receiving no further news?

Finally, in the early evening, the order arrived: Abandon the bridge. Both companies withdraw to the vehicles in the area north of Kaloz.

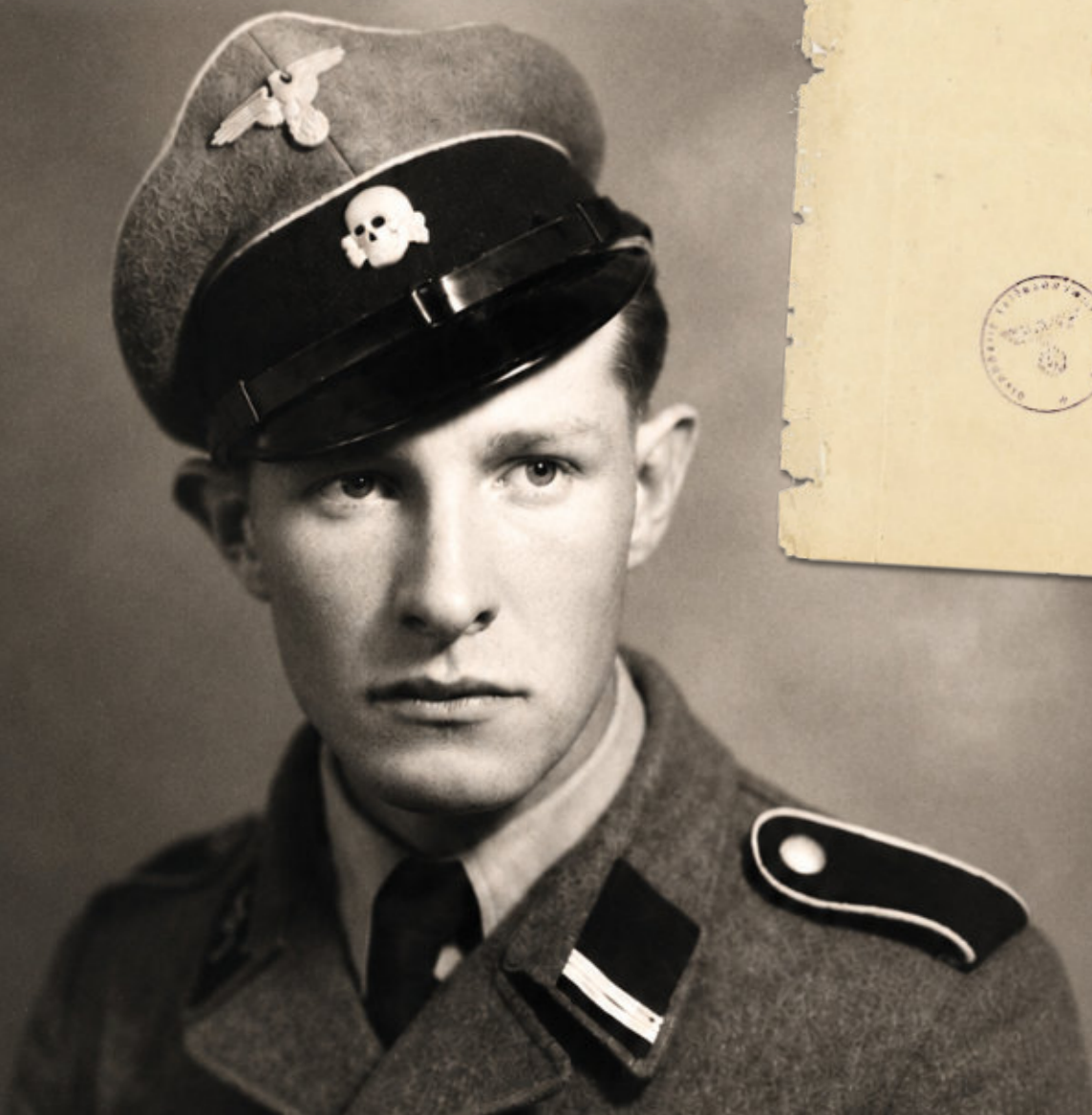
Georg Schwab



KNIGHT'S CROSS

PROPOSALS FOR FINNS

Documentation regarding German awards bestowed upon Finnish SS volunteers is riddled with gaps. Yet in the shadows of these incomplete archives hide extraordinary stories. Following a fierce battle at Chikola in December 1942, two Finns came close to making history as the first foreign volunteers to be awarded the Knight's Cross. Although the proposal was deemed premature, their actions ultimately earned them the Ehrenblattsspange des Deutschen Heeres.



Oberleutnant Wilhelm,
Chef einer Stoßtrupp-Kompanie
Leutnant Blenkner,
Zugführer in einem Divisions-Bataillon
Leutnant Juritz,
Kompanie-Führer in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment
Leutnant Mertel,
Abteilungs-Adjutant in einem Artillerie-Regiment
Oberfeldwebel Erdmann,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment
Oberfeldwebel Giesecke,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment
Oberfeldwebel Hoffmann,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment
Oberfeldwebel Junker †,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment
Feldwebel Rupp,
Zugführer in einer Panzerjäger-Abteilung
Unteroffizier Mews † mit seiner Gruppe
in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment
Fahnenjunker-Unteroffizier Schröter,
Gruppenführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment
Sanitäts-Obergefreiter Aigner
in einem Gebirgsjäger-Regiment
Obergefreiter Bleidorn †,
Gruppenführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment
#-Rottenführer Könönen
in einem #-Grenadier-Regiment
#-Schütze Pyhtä
in einem #-Grenadier-Regiment

27. August 1943

Der Führer



[Handwritten signature]
H. R.
[Handwritten signature]
Befehlshaber d. Heeres-Def.

Numerous German decorations were awarded to Finnish volunteers for their service during 1941–43. However, information regarding these awards is very scattered. While the units granting the decorations compiled lists of the awards, these records are incomplete. For example, the list in the German Federal Archives covering 2nd Class Iron Cross awards for various units of the Wiking Division contains several thousand names, yet only 65 Iron Crosses 2nd Class awarded to Finns are mentioned. Since it is known with certainty that significantly more Finns received this decoration, it can be concluded that the list is highly deficient. In addition to frontline military units, decorations were awarded in replacement companies, hospitals, and in significant numbers in Finland as well. Archival sources for all awards may not have survived at all. The partial information on decorations published in the matriculations by Veljesapu is mainly based on Finnish military service cards, notifications by the men themselves and their relatives, or other sources, such as veteran registers, which are also very incomplete as historical sources.

Some of the decorations awarded to Finns were earned through participation in combat operations, such as various assault badges. Participation in the combat actions of the winter of 1941–42, being wounded, or presence in the operational area entitled many Finns to wear the Eastern Front Medal (Winterschlacht im Osten). The wounded almost always received the Wound Badge (Verwundetenabzeichen), the class of which was determined by the severity or number of wounds. The Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz) 2nd Class was awarded to an estimated 400 volunteers, representing nearly one-third of the total volunteer contingent. The Iron Cross 1st Class was awarded to only about 20 volunteers, of whom Kalevi Könönen and Yrjö Pyyhtiä received it immediately for the bravery they displayed in their very first battle at Chikola on December 4, 1942. The War Merit Cross (Kriegsverdienstkreuz) was awarded to Finns far less frequently: its second class was received by about 50 Finns, and the first class by only one, Kalervo Kurkiala, who served as a liaison officer and field chaplain. Individual awards to Finns also include the Life Saving Medal (Retungsmedaille) and Tank Destruction Badges (Panzervernichtungsabzeichen).



Kalevi Könönen photographed in the summer of 1943 after returning from Germany. He continued serving in the Finnish Army and was killed in action on the Karelian Isthmus after the Red Army launched its major summer offensive in 1944.

Knight's Cross Proposal for Finns

While the events of the Battle of Chikola have been described in literature, what has remained unknown is the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross proposal—or at least its consideration—made for Könönen and Pyyhtiä. A document in the German Federal Archives, however, still leaves several question marks surrounding the matter.

hssz. 12.12.42 1530

To the Reichsführer's Adjutant Hauptsturmführer Grothmann, Hochwald

Dear Werner,

I also received a telegram from SS-Pz.Gr.Div



Above: Yrjö Pyyhtiä in the yard of his family home in Hankasalmi. He spent his entire career as a timber inspector and passed away in 2011 at the age of 88.



Left: SS-Schütze Yrjö Pyyhtiä.

"Wiking" regarding both Finns. Both men were in combat for the first time and received the EK I for their exemplary action ("I" is written out in the telegram as "roem.1", i.e., "Roman 1" abbreviated). The proposal for the Knight's Cross is, in the division's view, premature. Please do inform the Reichsführer about the matter.

Heil Hitler!

Yours, Siegfried

The message was sent 8 days after the Battle of Chikola, on Friday, December 12, 1942, to Heinrich Himmler's adjutant, Hauptsturmführer Werner Grothmann (1915–2002), at the Hochwald bunker complex near the Wolf's Lair (Wolfsschanze). The sender of the message was Hans Jüttner's adjutant, Hauptsturmführer Siegfried Grässler (1913–1988).



ICH SPRECHE DEM
//SCHÜTZE
YRJÖ PYYHTIÄ
FÜR SEINE HERVORRAGENDEN
LEISTUNGEN
AUF DEM SCHLACHTFELDE
BEI TSCHIKOLA AM 7.12.1942
MEINE
BESONDERE ANERKENNUNG AUS.

HAUPTQUARTIER-DEN 27.AUGUST 1943

DER FÜHRER

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'H. Himmler', is written below the printed text.

Thus, highly influential men were discussing the case of the Finns through their adjutants holding the rank of captain.

Had the proposal been approved, Könönen and Pyyhtiä would have been the first foreign volunteers serving in the SS to be awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. Nevertheless, the heroic deed of Könönen and Pyyhtiä was recognized when, in addition to receiving the Iron Cross 1st Class, their names were mentioned on August 27, 1943, in the Honor Roll of the German Army (*Ehrenblatt des Deutschen Heeres*). They received notification of this in November 1943, when the SS Volunteer Office (*SS-Freiwilligenstelle*) sent them the Honor Roll along with the certificate of citation. In the certificate, however, the date of the Battle of Chikola is incorrect—listed as December 7, 1942, whereas the correct date was December 4, 1942.

They received the actual clasp itself (*Ehrenblattspange des Deutschen Heeres*) in 1944 at an event held in Helsinki. They thus became the most highly decorated Finnish volunteers for their service during 1941–43, as well as the only Finnish recipi-

ents of this particular honor.

The Honor Roll Clasp was a rarely bestowed honor for a foreign volunteer. Prior to Könönen and Pyyhtiä, the clasp had been awarded to only one foreigner serving in the SS: Danish *Untersturmführer* Johannes Just Nielsen (1920–1942) had received it on July 15, 1942, while serving in the Danish Volunteer Corps (*Freikorps Danmark*). Even after them, the number of awards to foreign volunteers remained low; according to research by Patrick Agte, following the Finns, the Honor Roll Clasp was awarded to five foreign SS volunteers in 1944 and to ten in 1945.

Sources:

- German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv)
- Author's collections
- Patrick Agte, *Europas Freiwillige der Waffen-SS*, Munin-Verlag 2000

Mika Hakanpää

Oberleutnant Wilhelm,
Chef einer Stoßtrupp-Kompanie

Leutnant Blenkner,
Zugführer in einem Divisions-Bataillon

Leutnant Juritz,
Kompanie-Führer in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Leutnant Mertel,
Abteilungs-Adjutant in einem Artillerie-Regiment

Oberfeldwebel Erdmann,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment

Oberfeldwebel Giesecke,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment

Oberfeldwebel Hoffmann,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment

Oberfeldwebel Junker †,
Zugführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment

Feldwebel Rupp,
Zugführer in einer Panzerjäger-Abteilung

Unteroffizier Mews † mit seiner Gruppe
in einem Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment

Fahnenjunker-Unteroffizier Schröter,
Gruppenführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment

Sanitäts-Obergefreiter Aigner
in einem Gebirgsjäger-Regiment

Obergefreiter Bleidorn †,
Gruppenführer in einem Grenadier-Regiment

⚡-Rottenführer Könönen
in einem ⚡-Grenadier-Regiment

⚡-Schütze Pyyhtiä
in einem ⚡-Grenadier-Regiment

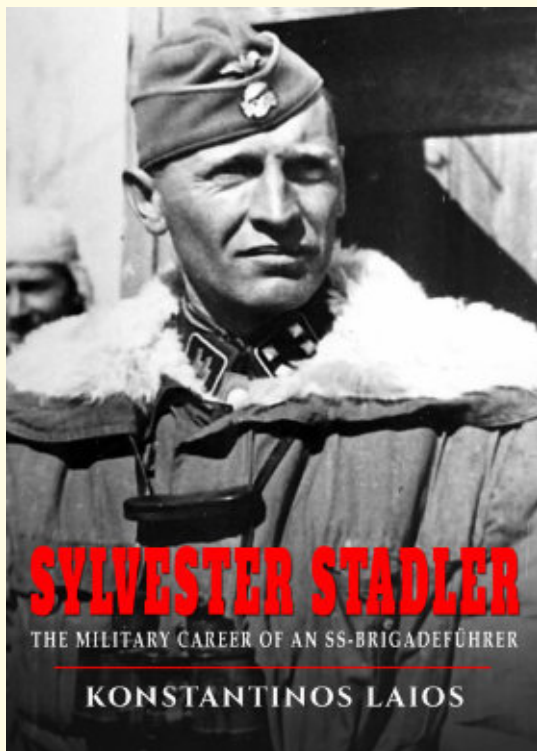
27. August 1943

Der Führer



[Handwritten signature]

*70. R.
Schüen
Oberleutnant i. d. Reserve - Gef.*



Sylvester Stadler – Knight's Cross Holder of the Waffen-SS

Author: Konstantinos Laios
ISBN: ISBN-13 979-8198293502

Reviewed by: Georg Schwab

Rating: 4 out of 5 Iron Crosses

(Had the early SS-VT years received a bit more coverage, this would have been an absolute 5/5.)

Konstantinos Laios continues his ambitious series on Waffen-SS Knight's Cross recipients, this time turning his focus to the career and life of Sylvester Stadler. For those already familiar with Laios's work, the meticulously detailed approach will come as no surprise. However, this volume managed to bring several unexpected highlights to the table.

What truly sets this volume apart—and what will undoubtedly excite our community—is the wealth of previously unpublished photographs. Seeing entirely new visual material of this caliber is increasingly rare, making the book a valuable addition to any collector's or researcher's bookshelf.

Content-wise, the book thoroughly covers Stadler's major wartime engagements from Poland in 1939 to Kharkov in March 1943, to the desperate fighting to defend Stuhlweissenberg in 1945, describing how his leadership style developed over the war. Furthermore, space is devoted to the tragic events in and around Oradour-sur-Glane, where elements of SS-Regiment Der Führer destroyed the village and

murdered the inhabitants following the abduction of SS-Stubaf Helmut Kämpfe. The author provides a detailed account of the events, including Stadler's opposition to the atrocity and his subsequent demands to court-martial the responsible officer—a critical chapter that adds necessary depth to Stadler's biography.

If there is any room for criticism, it lies in the brief treatment of Stadler's early period with SS-Nachrichtensturmbann (SS-VT). As someone with a well-known weakness for the early, pre-war SS formations, I would have loved to see a deeper dive into this phase of his career. However, this is admittedly a matter of personal preference rather than a flaw in the author's overall scope.

A highly recommended read for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of Waffen-SS commanders and their operational history. You will not be disappointed.

Are you an author looking to get your book reviewed?

Send your review copy or contact the editorial team at info@eisernekreuz.com



CLASSIFIED ADS

SEARCHING HELP

I am currently conducting historical research on the NSKK (National Socialist Motor Corps), with a specific focus on its activities, organization, and presence in the Netherlands and Belgium during the Second World War.

I am seeking any form of archival material or historical documentation, including (but not limited to):

I am seeking any form of archival material or historical documentation, including (but not limited to):

- Photographs
- Personal documents or letters
- Official records
- Membership information
- Diaries or testimonies
- Publications or memorabilia related to the NSKK in these regions

If you possess any relevant information or materials, or know someone who might, I would greatly appreciate it if you could get in touch.

Please feel free to contact me or send any materials to: hansknappen@outlook.com

WANTED

For a project where all of those who got the German Cross in Gold we are searching Fotos, Soldbooks, Dokumenten etc

Contact: info@axishistory.com

Estonians & Latvians in the Waffen-SS

For a long-term book project, I am seeking information, photographs, and copies of documents related to Estonians and Latvians who served in the Waffen-SS.

Any contributions to help document their history would be greatly appreciated.

Contact: petter.kjellander@gmail.com

Collector/Historian looking to purchase /trade scans of Waffen ss Panzer officers. Wanting portrait, field and group shots. Top top prices paid.
Contact Tim Willemsen at willemsen.timothy@gmail.com

Waffen-SS Knight Cross holders.

Looking for images and personal documents of SS Knight Cross holders for my future articles and possible book project. Always able to support other historians and exchange scans. Please mail me: guntir@ukr.net (Andrii Zubkov)



