

Siegrunen



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— Siegrunen #80 —

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Title Page

The commander of an SS-Totenkopf Regiment with his adjutant on the street of an unknown European city, circa 1940. (Erik Rundkvist archives)

On the Covers

Front Cover

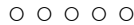
The front cover of this issue is by the incomparable military artist Ramiro Bujeiro (see his Osprey book work!) of SS-Obersturmbannführer Hans Dorr of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Wiking". Dorr was one of the few members of the Waffen-SS to receive the Swords and Oakleaves to the Knight's Cross. He received the Swords after his Regiment "Germania" helped to liberate the trapped garrison at Kowell in early 1944. Dorr spent the entire war with the SS Regiment "Germania", rising from platoon leader to regimental commander. He was wounded in action for the 13th time in Hungary on 21 January 1945 and seemed to be recovering when he took a turn for the worse in April 1945 and died. He had hoped to serve as the commandant of the SS-Junkerschule "Tölz."

Back Cover

Our back cover features, in color for the first time, an insignia chart of the non-German volunteers released by Amtsgruppe B of the SS Main Office on 1 February 1945. Is it accurate? Not necessarily, but these were apparently the intended insignia. It was provided to me by a former member of the French Foreign Legion who collected such things and was interested in the French Waffen-SS.

Preface

THIS is issue #80 of *Siegrunen*, a publishing venture which started off modestly enough in 1976. This will be our second “book format” edition; the first seemed to meet with the approval of everyone that could afford it! I hope this edition will be equally acceptable to the readership. It is possible that some of the next editions will be truly “books”, devoted to just one topic, but I also hope to continue the “mixed” article anthology type of publication. Anyway, my sincere thanks as always for your support of this endeavor!



I have noticed lately a “creeping” change of attitude by the general media in its presentation of material dealing with the Waffen-SS and other related matters. Many of you over the years have sent me videos of various television programs dealing with the Waffen-SS and after reviewing some of this material it is fair to say there was an increase in the general objectivity of the presentations up through the early 1990's at least. Why that was, I don't know; I guess the people who call the shots weren't really paying as much attention at the time. However that has now all changed dramatically. A recent Waffen-SS television documentary I partially watched (I couldn't get through all of it), is a case in point. It was one of these German/British/American television hybrids, that are extruded periodically to either public television or the “historical/non-fiction” type cable channels. The film clips were better than ever, mostly from excellent, original archival prints, but the narration was foul, inaccurate and malicious.

This particular program on the History Channel supposedly highlighted the history of the Waffen-SS using some of the material that appeared in the outdated book about the Waffen-SS written by George Stein and rehashed by many others combined with constant atrocity propaganda, some of which were derived from

old Soviet sources, was utterly slanderous and fictitious. A false description of Waffen-SS “killers” (they were always referred to as “killers” in this film), supposedly burning down a Red Army field hospital in Kharkov with the patients inside, comes to mind. Not only is there no validity to this story that I can find, it is something the Soviets did to the German side on several occasions later in the war. There were a lot of “eyewitness” talking heads giving either ridiculous quotations or presenting material clearly lifted out of context. One old German Army veteran was used time and again to tell why the “Army” people hated the Waffen-SS soldiers, etc., etc. Some accounts occasionally came from people whom I have had some contact with, and I’m fairly sure that they would not have wanted to have their statements used as they were. I only watched the program because of some of the film clips, but as one “atroc-ity” story after another rattled on, I had to quit.

Some of the other documentary programming is now even worse; these are ones that deal with more “generic Nazis” and their “crimes”, concentration camps, etc. In these things you can generally forget about any attempt to be truly factual and you will certainly not receive any objective commentary as to “how” and “why” things may have happened as they did. What you do get is pure, visceral hate, at a level I cannot even contemplate. The commentators are so filled with noxious bile, that it is hard to believe that human beings can exist like that. These supposedly “tolerant” people (that seems to be their favorite word!) crave vengeance in the most blood-thirsty, sickening manner possible and we must never forget the “stories” they are telling about the vile “Nazis”; even though no questions or discussions of said “stories” are permitted! It is all very politically correct, Marxist and Orwellian in presentation. Frankly I have never been able to hate anyone like these people hate; the best I can do is to dislike someone or something for awhile and that doesn’t last forever!

I guess the point I am trying to make is that we seem to be going through another bad spell of vicious media hate promotion and it gives me good reason to keep publishing material that gives another side of the story. After having read every “atroc-ity” work on the so-called “Nazis” in the 1960's basically, I started having some doubts when my questions couldn’t or wouldn’t be answered for

instance in college and I began running into people, including former concentration camp inmates, who totally contradicted the “party line” of what we were being brain-washed with. It took me a long time to fully appreciate that we were/are being manipulated. for what could be called sinister purposes and that not everything that appears in film or print is accurate!

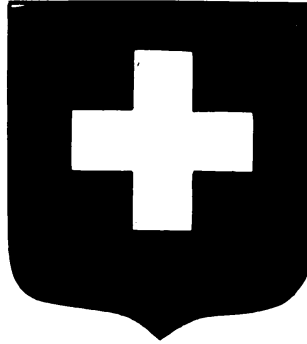
How did I finally come to this realization? Probably by looking more closely at the people who were (and continue to) promote fallacious hate propaganda. Most were “hard” leftists and Marxists, many were ethnic supremacists along with assorted loud mouths and deviates of various kinds. At best they were “liberal” fellow travelers with so-called academic “expertise”. But none of them tolerate any dissent whatsoever. In short they are not people I would ever want to associate with so why should I believe what they have to say to me? The bottom line is: who is behind what is being presented and who benefits? In this case the promoters demonstrate a general lack of character that I do not like and would not find appropriate in my friends and associates!

Unfortunately there are some “historians” out there (actually pretty good ones that I had admired!), who on the surface promoted objectivity and even made friends with Waffen-SS veterans, but in private offered their services to “Nazi hunters” and hate-mongers usually for some sort of reciprocity. I consider this to be among the lowest form of betrayal that there is and in some cases my trust has also been abused by people like this. As evidence about their behavior has been produced I have ceased contact with these people and removed them from mailing list. No, they will never be invited to subscribe to *Siegrunen* again! That’s the least I can do anyway. While I cannot control totally who gets this publication I can now afford to be more selective! Fortunately around 99% of the readership are good, trustworthy people whom I am more than pleased to deal with. I really have to thank the good many of you who have stuck with me from the start (or near to it). That is really appreciated. We will keep going not matter what, even though things are slowing down at times, particularly as I get older. But the ageing process plays favorites with no one!



A rally in support of the Estonian Waffen-SS Legion held in Tallinn, Estonia in 1943 with German and Estonian officers and members of the Estonian self-administration.

Swiss Volunteers of the Waffen-SS



Swiss armshield.

PANORAMASTRASSE Nr.11 was a nondescript “boarding house” in the city of Stuttgart, Germany. Throughout a goodly portion of the war it served as a sort of recruit depot for potential Swiss and Liechtensteiner volunteers for German military service. Soon after the beginning of WWII, citizens of Switzerland and Liechtenstein had begun crossing the German border, mostly illegally, seeking either to enlist in the German military services or to work in wartime industries. To deal with this situation, at least insofar as those seeking military service was concerned, The SS Main Office and the Waffen-SS decided to establish a collection station for these volunteers where they could be housed and evaluated. Thus the “Panorama Home” as it came to be called, was established in January 1941.

It initially came under the guidance of an early Swiss volunteer for the Waffen-SS, SS-Obersturmführer Alfred Nikles. He would be succeeded by a former Swiss 31-year old political activist and ardent nationalist, SS-Unterscharführer Benno Schaeppi, (who would later become a Waffen-SS officer), in October 1942. He would in turn be replaced by SS-Untersturmführer Sepp Naegle, one of the few Liechtensteiners to graduate from SS-Junkerschule “Tölz”, on 1 April 1944. Late in the war the “Panorama Home” moved from Stuttgart to the cities of Strassburg and Bregenz to

continue its operations.

In the course of its existence, more than 1500 Swiss and Liechtensteiner volunteers were processed at the “Home”. The greatest influx of recruits came in the summer and autumn of 1941 after the beginning of the war with the Soviet Union and again in early 1943 after the Stalingrad catastrophe, when the threat of a Soviet advance into Western Europe became more of a reality. The main job for the staff at the “Panorama Home” was simply to find appropriate military employment for the volunteers. In addition each potential recruit had to have an extensive and time consuming Gestapo background check. Since Switzerland and by extension Liechtenstein, were both neutral states with plenty of Allied “agents” crawling around, it was deemed necessary to make absolutely sure that no spies or saboteurs were being “planted” into Germany. Also, anyone found to have had an undisclosed criminal record was immediately sent home. The volunteers did not have to be “National Socialists”, (most of them weren’t), it was simply enough that they were anti-communists and believed in the European struggle against the Soviets Union. A few of the more idealistic young Swiss took umbrage at the Gestapo prying into their affairs and actually left for home or employment elsewhere. While the overwhelming majority of the recruits were sent to Waffen-SS units, some went to other branches of the Wehrmacht or were used for “specialty” work in high-tech industries and possibly for espionage purposes.

That was really what bothered the Swiss government, which learned about the “Panorama Home”, very early on. They thought that the volunteers could be used as “5th Columnists” in a potential German invasion or takeover of Switzerland, and while the German government never seriously considered this option, (barring an Allied grab of the country), contingency plans were drawn up. At least one Swiss SS officer in the SS Main Office was engaged to some extent in this sort of undertaking, for which he was punished rather severely after the war.

There was a very large Swiss business and working community in Germany, not to mention students in German schools of higher education, and while some of these people did volunteer for military service, others faithfully provided information to authorities

back home in Switzerland, although they were not “spies” per se. So just about anything that was happening in Germany during the war was known by the Swiss government. The two countries did retain cordial relations until the end of the war including massive mutual trade.

It is hard to say precisely how many Swiss volunteers actually went into the Waffen-SS. Quoted figures range from a low of 600 to a high of 2,000. The most accurate total is probably about 1360. After the war there was a strong Waffen-SS veteran’s group in the country that still remains active. Other figures state that there were at least 40 Swiss Waffen-SS officers (up to the rank of SS-Oberführer) and 300 or so Swiss volunteers killed or missing during the war. Some of the Swiss chose to become German citizens to avoid prosecution in their homeland after the war, so exact recruitment figures will never be precise.

Liechtenstein contributed 85 to 110 volunteers, thanks largely to a strong but closely contained National Socialist/Nationalist movement in the tiny principality. Around 40 of them were killed or missing in action. These are rather substantial figures for a country whose population was only 11,500 in total in 1940!

Swiss volunteers would not serve in any specific national contingent but throughout the Waffen-SS in general. There was however a concentration of them in the 6.SS Mountain Division “Nord”, including a largely Swiss company in the division’s reconnaissance detachment, (2./SS-Gebirgs Aufklärungs Abteilung 6). So someone in authority thought it was a good idea to match up people from mountainous Switzerland in a mountain formation, even though Division “Nord” served mostly in the swampland of Finnish Karelia! 5. SS Panzer Division “Wiking” also had a substantial Swiss contingent early on.

The most notable Swiss volunteer was SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Franz Riedwig, (see his biography that follows), he was in charge of the “Germanic Bureau” (or Germanic Suboffice) at the SS Main Office, which helped with the recruitment and welfare of Germanic European volunteers. Riedwig also employed other Swiss volunteers in his “office”. A medical doctor and surgeon, he would go on to take charge of the Field Hospital of the III. Germanic SS Panzer Corps.

Another prominent Swiss officer, was SS-Sturmbannführer (or possible Obersturmbannführer) Herrsche, who commanded the Training and Replacement Battalion of the French 33. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS “Charlemagne”. In the waning days of the war, he led some remnants of the division, about 1,200 in all, across Germany, first towards the other remnant of the “Charlemagne” Division in northern Germany and then later towards the Swiss border in what was called the SS March Regiment “Charlemagne”. Twelve members of his command were captured by the “Free French” and executed in a particularly nasty war crime on the direct orders of General LeClerc. Some other Swiss officers that spoke French were assigned to French Waffen-SS training and combat units. One of these in particular, was SS-Untersturmführer Dr. Alfred Zander, who became a Waffen-SS officer on 30 August 1943 and was assigned to the Germanic SS Training School at Sennheim, Alsace. He later became SS-Sturmbannführer Herrsche’s adjutant with the “Charlemagne” Division’s Training Battalion.

Another Swiss SS officer with pronounced National Socialist leanings was SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Heinrich Büeler who served at the Germanic Bureau of the SS Main Office from April 1942 until September 1943, when he decided to become a “front soldier”. He was then sent to the SS-Junkerschule “Tölz” and after graduating became a training officer with the French Waffen-SS. He was eventually made a “political officer” on the staff of the French Waffen-SS Inspectorate. His main message to the French volunteers was that they were part of a great united European confederation, fighting Bolshevism and predatory Capitalism.

During the deployment of the “Charlemagne” Division in Pomerania in February and March 1945, Büeler became a combat company commander. He particularly distinguished himself during the fighting for Kolberg, where he led a 200 man French SS battle-group from 4 March 1945 until 18 March 1945. This contingent fought alongside another 100 man French company and 3,000 some German troops who managed to stave off the attacking Red Army long enough to allow the successful evacuation of some 68,000 civilian refugees by sea by the German Navy. By the end of the battle, SS-Ostuf. Büeler’s command had been reduced to 30

men! Of the 300 French volunteers fighting in Kolberg, all but 50 had been killed or wounded.

SS-Untersturmführer Benno Schaeppi, who had overseen the “Panorama Home” in Stuttgart from October 1942 until the end of March 1944, had enlisted in the Waffen-SS on 15 March 1941, and had served as a war correspondent with the 2nd SS Panzer Division “Das Reich” during its first year in Russia. He then served as a press functionary at the Germanic Bureau of the SS Main Office for a short time before being posted to the “Panorama Home”. In April 1944, Schaeppi began an officer’s training course at the SS-Junkerschule “Tölz” and after graduating was placed in charge of the III. Germanic SS Panzer Corps’ War Reporter’s Company in November 1944. He would hold this position until the end of the war.

A senior Swiss military officer who had commanded a border guard battalion in his homeland, also enlisted in the Waffen-SS and eventually became the highest ranking Swiss volunteer with the rank of SS-Oberführer (Senior Colonel), although to this day his identity remains unknown or concealed. He certainly would have been an embarrassment for the Swiss authorities!

The most highly decorated Swiss volunteer of them all was SS-Untersturmführer Peter Renold. He was born on 6 June 1924 in Wollishofen in the Canton of Zurich. In 1939, when the war broke out, Renold was a 15 year old student in Germany and an ardent member of the Hitler Youth. In November 1941, at the age of 17, he eagerly enlisted in the Waffen-SS. In 1942 he was transferred to the Wehrmacht’s “Brandenburg” Commando Division for special training and in the course of 1942 and 1943, he would participate in no fewer than 16 “Brandenburger” operations behind enemy lines in the Soviet Union.

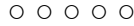
By 1944, Peter Renold was back serving in the Waffen-SS, this time with SS Paratroop Battalion 501. While serving with this unit, he took part in the airborne/ground attack on Tito’s HQ in Yugoslavia in May 1944, which came within a whisker of capturing the Red terrorist leader. Renold then completed an officer’s training course and afterwards was assigned to SS Panzergrenadier Rgt. 5 “Totenkopf” of the 3rd SS Panzer Division “Totenkopf”. In the last months of the war he was credited with destroying 9 enemy tanks

in close combat which brought him a nomination for the Knight's Cross. This was supposedly given to him on 6 May 1945, although documentary evidence seems to still be lacking. He was likely the most distinguished Swiss combatant in the Waffen-SS.

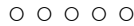
After World War II ended, the Swiss government went after its "German collaborators" with a vengeance. No fewer than 33 people in this category, including 1 Liechtensteiner, were condemned to death as "traitors" by Swiss courts. Swiss military volunteers also fared poorly. In late 1947 a "show trial" was conducted for 17 of the most prominent Swiss Waffen-SS members in Lucerne and all were given lengthy prison terms. SS-Stubaf. Dr. Franz Riedwig was given an 18 year term in absentia. Although held in British captivity at the time, they did not send him back to Switzerland as he had become a German citizen during the war.

Many others had returned to Switzerland, either voluntarily or forcibly, including Dr. Zander, Dr. Buehler and Benno Schaeppi. At the 1947 trial, Dr. Zander received an 11 year sentence at hard labor; his release date is unknown. Dr. Buehler, a voluntary returnee, was given an 8 year sentence at hard labor and was released on 10 February 1954 after having served a little over 6 years of his sentence. Benno Schaeppi received a 16 year sentence of confinement at hard labor, but he was released, (unrepentant!), on 1 August 1956, about 8 ½ years into his sentence. These men had really committed no crimes against the Swiss nation, but were purely anti-communist volunteers. However their government decided to "make an example" out of them.

The Liechtensteiner volunteers who served in the Waffen-SS and survived the war, fared much better. Their government treated them with respect and decency and none were ever held in confinement in their homeland. It should be noted that the Liechtenstein government also "faced down the world" in 1945 by giving political asylum to hundreds of members of Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army who had crossed into the country. Despite pressure from all sides to hand them over to either the Allies or Soviets, (to face almost certain death), Liechtenstein would not do so, and these Russian volunteers eventually were allowed to live free lives in exile!



Three known Swiss volunteers who served with elements of the “Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler” were the following: SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Frank (“LAH” Training and Replacement Battalion), SS-Mann Kurt Eberle (Panzer Technical School in Berlin under the aegis of the “LAH” detachment in that city), and SS-Mann Heinz Diriwächter, (on the staff of the “Main” Company/SS Training and Replacement Btl. “LSSAH”).



There were at least four different Swiss “medical missions” to the Eastern Front, in which Swiss doctors, medics and nurses volunteered their services at German Army and Waffen-SS field hospitals. They were stationed at the following locations (dates mostly unknown):

- 1) Gshatsk, Juchnow, Roslawl and Vjasma
- 2) Warsaw and L’viv (Lemberg), Ukraine
- 3) Riga, Dünaberg, Latvia and Pskov
- 4) Kharkov and Stalino (1942/1943)

To date very little information has emerged about these undertakings except that the “missions” were privately sponsored by people or groups unknown worried about the Soviet menace!

SS-HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER DR. KURT BRÜDERLIN

Kurt Brüderlin was born on 12 June 1914 in the town of Thun, Switzerland. His father was a career officer in the Swiss Army. Brüderlin was extensively educated; first in Thun and Bern and then at universities in Paris and London, obtaining a doctorate in economics in the process. He was also fluent in three languages: German, French and English.

An ardent Swiss nationalist and anti-communist, Brüderlin became an early member of a Swiss National Socialist movement which maintained cross border ties to German National Socialists. One of his most inspirational moments came when he attended a

graduation evening at the S.A. (Stormtrooper) Leadership School in Munich in 1934. In the meantime, he also served in the Swiss Army, becoming an Oberleutnant (1st Lt.) in an artillery unit.

When WWII broke out, Kurt Brüderlin closely watched developments. His greatest concern was the threat to Western Europe from Soviet communism and in 1943, when Stalingrad capitulated and the German military position began to falter, he decided it was time to act: he would join in the armed struggle against communism to help protect Europe and his homeland.

In March 1943, Brüderlin illegally crossed the border into Germany and reported into the nearest police outpost, stating that he wished to volunteer for service in the German Armed Forces. The police were able to direct him to a house at 11 Panorama Street in Stuttgart, the so-called “Panorama Home”, where all Swiss volunteers were being processed. Here he had to simply wait around until the completion of his Gestapo background investigation. When he was cleared, Brüderlin asked that he be allowed to serve in an Wehrmacht artillery unit, since that was his specialty in the Swiss Army. He was not expecting to serve in the Waffen-SS, but he soon learned otherwise. After three weeks at the “Panorama Home”, he was dispatched to the Munich-Freiman Barracks, the home of the Artillery Replacement Regiment of the Waffen-SS. On 6 May 1943 he was given the equivalent of his old Swiss rank, SS-Obersturmführer, and officially began his German military service.

Brüderlin was now given the opportunity to serve as an instructor at the 2nd Germanic Volunteer Officer’s Training Course at the SS Junkerschule Tölz, but he turned the assignment down, stating emphatically that he wanted to serve at the front. So on 17 August 1943 he was sent to the SS Main Office in Berlin to receive a combat assignment. Here he would meet his fellow countryman, SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Franz Riedwig, who headed up the Germanic Volunteer Bureau in the SS Main Office.

He soon received his marching instructions to join the Artillery Detachment of the 1st SS Motorized Infantry Brigade which was located at Orscha in Weissruthenia (now Belarus). He was named to command the Staff Battery, a position he would hold from late August 1943 until the end of January 1944.

On 25 September 1943, Kurt Brüderlin received his only Waffen-SS promotion to the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer (Captain). In the late autumn of 1943, during retrograde fighting back across the Beresina River, he was riding in a half-track vehicle used to pull field artillery pieces, when it struck a dormant aircraft bomb that had landed on the edge of the road without exploding. However it made up for that little oversight now, and with a thunderous roar, Brüderlin and the vehicle crewmen were all wounded. He would be out of action for the next few months.

In early 1944, Brüderlin returned to his unit which had now been withdrawn from the front. The 1st SS Motorized Infantry Brigade would now be expanded into the 18th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Horst Wessel" beginning in February 1944. SS-Hstuf. Brüderlin then expressed his desire to command the 10th (12cm Guns) Battery of the new SS Artillery Regiment 18, since it contained the same artillery pieces that he worked with in the Swiss Army. In order to do this however he had to attend an artillery battery commander's training course which was held at the SS Artillery School "Beneschau" near Prague. This commenced in late January 1944 and ended a few weeks later in February 1944. However, when Brüderlin finished the course he found himself unexpectedly assigned to the 6th SS Mountain Division "Nord" in Finland where he took charge of 9th Battery (Light Field Howitzers) of SS Mountain Artillery Regiment 6. The "Nord" Division was home to many other Swiss volunteers, including SS-Hstuf. Hans Bühlmann, as the Waffen-SS higher authorities seemed to favor sending them to this particular outfit.

In September 1944 when Finland abruptly switched sides to avoid Soviet occupation, the 6th SS Mountain Division "Nord" was in a perilous position; it had to immediately withdraw through Northern Finland to the Norwegian frontier to avoid encirclement. During this time a new Finnish Ski Brigade was deployed in the Kemi-Kuusamo sector with the direct intention of disrupting the German retreat. This led to serious clashes with the Finns. On 8 October 1944, when elements of the "Nord" Division were engaged in fighting their ex-Allies in the city of Tornio, some of the SS Mountain troops were cutoff and fell into the hands of the Finns. Among them was SS-Hstuf. Brüderlin, who from this point

on was officially listed as missing in action.

Actually though he was a POW and he was sent initially to a Finnish run detention camp at Oulu, but the Finns soon handed their captives over to the Soviets and Brüderlin found himself sent to a camp at Tambow to the southeast of Moscow in Russia. After nearly a year in Red captivity, the Soviets decided to release him on the basis of his “neutral” nationality in the autumn of 1945. He was then sent to a prisoner release facility near Feldkirch, Austria. From there he tried to make his way to Switzerland on his own but he was soon arrested by French occupation troops for having been a member of the Waffen-SS. These people held him in confinement until September 1946 when they turned him over to the Swiss police.

In 1947 he was placed before a Swiss Military Tribunal which decided he should serve two years at hard labor for having “deserted” his Swiss reserve military service to join the Waffen-SS. After his release, Brüderlin worked at various odd jobs, including clerking and cleaning-up duties at an Alpine resort, before resuming his studies in philosophy, psychology and history at the University of Basel. He matriculated as a Doctor of Philosophy in 1961 and then served as a business and psychology instructor for many years. In 1971 he authored a popular economics book which became a standard work of its kind in Switzerland.

All the while Kurt Brüderlin maintained contacts with his fellow Swiss Waffen-SS comrades and he even attended many veteran’s meetings in Germany. He also aided and supported young people who engaged in Swiss nationalist activities. In 2000, with the help of the Swiss Waffen-SS Veterans Comradeship, he was able to publish his wartime memoirs, entitled: “Insights and Views of a Swiss Volunteer of the Waffen-SS”. He died at his residence in Basel, Switzerland on 17 February 2005 at the age of 90. Kurt Brüderlin remained proud of his service in the Waffen-SS until the end!



The Swiss SS volunteer Hannes Martin Mettler from St.Gallen, Switzerland, was killed in action near Kiev on 14 September 1941.

He probably served in the 5th SS Division “Wiking”.



SS-OBERTURMBANNFÜHRER DR. FRANZ RIEDWIG

Franz Riedwig was born in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1907. After completing his basic schooling he studied medicine at Universities in Bern, Berlin and Rostock. Early on he developed an extreme dislike of communism and became a member of the “Swiss Action Against Communism” organization and began authoring anti-communist books. Among his achievements at this time was the production of a film attacking Bolshevism entitled “The Red Pest”.

This film in particular brought him to the attention of many people in the German government in the 1930's, including Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, who saw a potential place for him in the SS organization. In 1938, Dr. Riedwig moved permanently to Germany, married a German woman, became a German citizen and also joined the armed SS, or SS-Verfügungstruppe as it was then known. He was soon admitted to the SS-Standarte “Deutschland” as a medical officer with the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer (Captain), and he took part in the Western Campaign of 1940 with his regiment as part of the SS-VT Division.

In 1941, with the assistance of SS-Gruppenführer Felix Steiner,

the commander of SS Division “Wiking” and a great supporter of Pan-Germanic volunteers, Dr. Riedwig was able to establish a “Germanic” sub office or bureau within the SS Main Office in Berlin, to deal with the affairs of non-German volunteers from the various “Germanic” countries. The office registered and processed volunteers, helped them with any difficulties in their transition into the German military forces and helped arrange welfare and support for their families. It also published numerous periodicals and books for the volunteers along with political and recruiting propaganda.

In 1942, Dr. Riedwig was activated again for medical duties with the 5th SS Panzer Division “Wiking” on the Eastern Front, and in the following year he helped with the formation of the Germanic SS Panzer Corps (“Nordland” and “Nederland” Divisions). In between these assignments he continued working with the Germanic SS Office which was reorganized as “Amtsgruppe D” of the SS Main Office. In addition to Scandinavian and Lowland volunteers, Riedwig’s office arranged the processing of volunteers from abroad, including British and Swiss volunteers. The latter two nationalities were dealt with secretly through “safe houses” established in civilian neighborhoods. Eventually a British combat platoon (“Britisches Freikorps”) saw action with the 11th SS Panzer Grenadier Division “Nordland” and the Swiss volunteers were scattered throughout the Waffen-SS, with a fair sized concentration in the 6th SS Mountain Division “Nord”.

Sometime in 1944, the now SS-Obersturmbannführer (Lt.Col.) Dr. Riedwig took charge of the Military Hospital of the III. SS Germanic Panzer Corps and stayed at this post until the end of the war. In the spring of 1945, Riedwig went into British captivity and was held until 1948. In 1947 he was tried by the Swiss government in absentia for “treason”, found guilty and sentenced to 16 years captivity at hard labor. The sentence was never carried out however as Riedwig had become a German citizen and the British never turned him over to the Swiss.

Following his release from post-war confinement, Dr. Riedwig opened a medical practice in the town of Überlingen before later relocating to Munich. In 1968 he founded “The European League”, an organization devoted to the establishment of an ecumenical, Christian, united Europe and over the years the “League” issued

many of his articles and publications on the subject. Dr. Franz Riedwig died at the age of 97 in Munich on 22 January 2005.

THE SWISS COMPANY OF 6.SS MOUNTAIN DIVISION “NORD”

When the SS-Kampfgruppe “Nord”, which had been serving in Finland, was expanded into a full division in late 1941, it required an influx of new personnel. Among these were many Swiss volunteers who had been utilized to form a mountain reconnaissance company that had been training for many weeks at an SS training school in Ellwangen/Jagst. This predominately Swiss company, was used to constitute the 2nd Company of the new SS Mountain Reconnaissance Detachment 6 of the 6th SS Mountain Division “Nord”.

A former Captain on the Swiss General Staff, SS-Hauptsturmführer Graf was named to command the company. Like most of the Swiss volunteers, his motive for joining the Waffen-SS was an ardent desire to fight the menace of Soviet communism.

In January 1942, the “Swiss” Company was sent to the Wildflecken camp (later the home of the French 33rd SS Division “Charlemagne”), to train specifically for its eventual deployment in the Karelia region of Finland. In May 1942 the company was deemed “fit for action” and at the end of the month it began a boat journey from Danzig across the Baltic Sea to Finland. Upon arrival in that country it was then sent by motorized transport to the “Nord” Division deployment area around the towns of Oulukuu-jamo and Kiestinki in Karelia, arriving in the early part of June 1942.

The Swiss 2nd Company was initially deployed in the frontline “Gudrun” defensive positions next to some Wehrmacht elements, but in August and September 1942, the whole “Nord” Recce Detachment was shifted to the north to protect the “Nord” Division’s left wing. Since the warfare on this part of the Eastern Front was static, the Swiss volunteers were put to work building bunkers and guard outposts. Then on 23/24 September 1942, the SS Recce Detachment 6 guard post “Birkhahn” was attacked and overrun by a Soviet company. The 2nd Company was then ordered to retake the position; it did so in a very violent assault in the course of which

SS-Hstuf. Graf was killed in action by an explosive bullet to his chest.

In the summer of 1943, the “Swiss” Company, now led by SS-Hstuf. Rahn, was deployed in a large-scale anti-partisan operation to try and shut down the terrorists who had been plaguing the rear area support troops. SS-Hstuf. Rahn decided to lead one phase of the operation from above in a Fieseler Storch scout plane. His idea was to locate a partisan enclave and then direct the troops on the ground towards it.

The first thing that had to be done was for the ground troops to identify themselves to their commander in the sky. This was to be accomplished through the use of a signal flare which would designate the exact location of the soldiers, who were accompanied by a Finnish liaison officer. When the airplane was heard and seen overhead, the designated trooper shot off the bright, white flare which streaked directly towards the Fieseler Storch and managed to strike its engine mounting! The pilot subsequently lost control and the air plane went down in the thick woods! Nothing like this had ever happened before or probably since!

The Waffen-SS soldiers had shot down their own commander against all the odds! A platoon with an engineer squad was then sent out into the swampy terrain to find the plane. They took with them inflatable rubber boats to cross the numerous rivers and streams. It was a difficult and arduous undertaking for not only was the terrain difficult but there was the continuous threat of partisan ambush. Fortunately the enemy never appeared and by following a trail of downed tree branches the soldiers eventually located the wreck. Both of the occupants of the Fieseler Storch were found badly burned and SS-Hstuf. Rahn could only be identified by the decorations on his tunic. Ironically, on this same day, his son was born back in his homeland.

The combat engineers constructed litters from tree branches and the bodies were slowly hauled out of the swamps and back to the main divisional lines. It was truly a sad day for the “Swiss” Company of the “Nord” Division; it was a tragedy that could never have been accomplished deliberately no matter how hard they tried and was probably a unique incident in the history of World War II.



A group of newly decorated NCOs from the 6th SS Mountain Division “Nord” in Finland.

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Some 7,000 Norwegian Waffen-SS volunteers fought on the Eastern Front in WWII out of which number at least 980 were killed or missing. The highest per capita losses were suffered by the SS-Ski Battalion “Norge” of the 6th SS Mountain Division “Nord” in two days of heavy fighting in northern Finland on 25 and 26 July 1944 around Kaprolet and Hasselmann. In this engagement against superior Soviet forces, some 150 Norwegians were killed in action which amounted to roughly half the battalion strength!

350 Norwegian nurses also served on the Eastern Front, mostly in Waffen-SS field hospitals. Of this number at least 20 were killed, mostly due to enemy aerial bombardments.

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SS-Hauptsturmführer Ludwig Lieb ended the war as a battalion commander in SS Grenadier Regiment 96 of the 38th SS Grenadier Division “Nibelungen”. He had been a regimental adjutant with SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 10 “Westland” of the 5th SS Panzer

Division “Wiking” before commanding 1st Company/I.Btl./SS-PzGr.Rgt.10 “Westland”. After recovering from serious battle wounds he was posted to the SS Junkerschule “Tölz” as an instructor and “inspection leader” (chief). When the school was mobilized for combat duty in early 1945, Lieb went into the “Nibelungen” Division with most of the other “Tölz” personnel. He died after a long illness in 1992.

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More Waffen-SS Knight’s Cross recipients (39) were born in the year 1920 than any other. In second place was the “birth year” 1914 (35), followed by 1921 (29).

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SS-Sturmann Graf Knut Posse was born on 26 July 1926 and was the youngest Swedish volunteer for the Finnish Army during its “Continuation War” (1941-44) with the Soviet Union. In 1943/44 he served near Wiborg and Jamdeba on the Karelian Front. When Finland changed sides in September 1944, the anti-communist Posse sought release from Finnish military service to join the Waffen-SS. He was able to achieve his objective in December 1944 when he signed up at the Waffen-SS recruiting office in Oslo, Norway.

From here he was either sent for training with the SS Feldersatz Battalion 11 at Graz, Austria, which serviced Nordic volunteers, or was assigned to the SS-Jagdverbände (Commandos) at Friedenthal near Berlin. He was then supposedly designated for a special mission in the vicinity of the Swiss border. Information on him is sketchy at best and comes mostly from a Swedish “historian” who openly befriended Waffen-SS veterans while working all along secretly with the “Nazi hunters” and Swedish secret police. He turned out some articles for the Waffen-SS veteran’s magazine “Der Freiwillige” before the discovery of his sordid activities was made and a warning was issued about him.

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In March 1954, 21 Spanish Waffen-SS volunteers who had been captured during or after the Battle of Berlin in April/May 1945, were finally returned to their homeland after almost 9 years in Soviet captivity. They were among an estimated 200 Spaniards who fought in the battle with the Spanish SS Companies 101 and 102. Many, if not most of their comrades either died in action or later on the communist labor camps.



Latvian Waffen-SS sniper team, Volkhov Front, 1943/1944, 2nd SS Brigade.



Latvian Waffen-SS wedding. (Erik Rundkvist)

Letters From the Germanic Volunteers of the Waffen-SS



The Swedish SS-Mann Arne Johansson who was killed in action fighting with the “Nordland” Division on 20 March 1945 in the Stettin Bridgehead. He was the model for a memorial tablet/plaque that was designed for the Swedish Waffen-SS volunteers and that was placed a few years ago in a military cemetery in Narva, Estonia, mainly due to the efforts of the late Erik Rundkvist. (Rundkvist Archives)

SINCE a number of “establishment” media works, now mostly television documentaries, liberally garnish their hatchet jobs with negative commentary attributed to certain Waffen-SS and German Army veterans it is only fair that a more

accurate picture be made available whenever possible. I first published these letters in *Siegrunen* #33 (now long out of print), and thought it was about time that they appeared again, this time in a more permanent format.

The letters that follow originally appeared in an SS wartime publication entitled: *Aufbruch, Briefe Germanischer Kriegsfreiwilliger*, that was compiled with the help of family members of the volunteers who were urged to submit letters or other information by or about their relatives in the Waffen-SS to the Germanic SS Bureau of the SS Main Office. The result was a booklet that was translated into several different languages and circulated through different European countries at the time. The letters seem to accurately reflect the most widely held sentiments of the Germanic volunteers and provide an interesting glimpse into the motivating factors that made the Waffen-SS into a truly international army. These are just a few of many letters that exist and hopefully we can publish more of them in *Siegrunen* in the future.

LETTER FROM A SWISS VOLUNTEER

Dear Father,

I know that you will be disturbed when you learn that I have crossed over the border into Germany, but I have my course well set in place and my conscience to follow. Haven't we talked each evening about how Switzerland is virtually the only country that is foregoing its duty to the European lands by not taking part in the struggle against Bolshevism?

How could I stand aside when the leader of the common struggle against the enemies of Germany calls? We Swiss are of the same blood as the Germans, the same race as the Swabians and Carinthians. Immediately after crossing the border I reported into the Waffen-SS, was accepted and enlisted.

LETTER FROM A DANISH VOLUNTEER

We are the sons of a people who have conquered the sea since the days of the Vikings. We are the sons of a people that bear a Nordic heritage and have always fought to maintain their place among the Nordic nations. It is one of the greatest sins of democracy that our youth have not obtained a good knowledge of our Nordic back-



Dutch volunteers from the 4.SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Brigade “Nederland” on the Narva Front in early 1944 (Erik Rundkvist).

ground and culture. Now we must observe and learn the example of the life and work of our ancestors from Germany and we must prepare those of our blood to return back to that example.

LETTER FROM A DUTCH VOLUNTEER

(The father mentioned was a bridge attendant who was killed during the German advance into Holland in 1940).

On 26 April 1941, I went into the Waffen-SS. But don't think that I have forgotten about my father. No day passes that I don't think of him and often look at my picture of him. It is my conviction that he fell because of the actions of the financiers, led by the Jews, whose goals are not in the interest of the Dutch people. Thank God there are still other men in the world that think not just of money, but who are able to do things with their lives for the social betterment of the social conditions of their people.

There is much hostility in Holland, even from my family, over how we have been treated so offensively (i.e. by the big-money interests), so I feel that I must live for my people and not give up the fight, though one should understand that we are not fighting for



SS-Oberführer Jürgen Wagner, third from left, with members of his command in 1943. Wagner commanded the “Germania” Regiment of the 5th SS Panzer Division “Wiking” and the “Nederland” SS Brigade and Division from 1943 until the end of the war. In a shameful incident the British extradited him to communist Yugoslavia after the war where he was put to death although he had committed no war crimes.

our own particular advantage but for the higher ideals that we hold.

It is on the Eastern Front that a good many Dutchmen have fallen, and even if I were to die, my last thoughts will be for my father, my wife, my children and above all my people, with the firm conviction that our victory will be for the salvation of Europe, and yes, even for the exploited English and American workers.

LETTER FROM A SWEDISH VOLUNTEER

I hope to become an officer in the Regiment “Nordland”. I enlisted because I believe that our future will be made better by my doing so, and when the war is over we can get married if you will wait that long. As a German SS officer I will have many, many great



Previously unpublished photo of a Flemish Waffen-SS volunteer.

opportunities in life that I could not have in Sweden, where so many Jews and other ilk carry on with their mischief. It will be a hard school for me, though not impossible—an idealist can accomplish anything. I have signed on only for the duration of the war, however when it is finished I will remain in Germany and you must come to glorious Germany as my wife. When I become an SS officer it will be the happiest moment in my life.



Memorial stone to the memory of the unknown Flemish SS volunteers killed during the battle for Narva in July 1944. The text is in Estonian, Flemish and German. It was placed near the actual battle area.



Germanic volunteers in the field—Flemings from 27.SS-Pz.Gr.Division “Langemarck”.

**OBITUARY IN THE LIECHTENSTEIN NEWSPAPER
UMBRUCH (“REVOLUTION”), 26 JANUARY 1942:**

He Died For Us All!

SS-Mann Alois Hoop Killed Before Moscow

On this past Saturday the severely tested parents received the news of the heroic death of their son.

Alois Hoop, born 4 September 1923 in Ruggell, reported in as a volunteer to the Waffen-SS during the previous summer. He followed the idealistic urgings of his heart in leaving our homeland to place himself directly in the battle for our German people. During his training period he very quickly made an impression through his conduct and bearing and became a model for his comrades.

In numerous letters from the front, he showed that he had not lost his spirit or beliefs. Not a complainer, he never wrote about the difficulties or hardships. His vision was always directed forwards.



An unknown Flemish volunteer from the 27.SS-Volunteer Grenadier Division “Lange-marck” (Flemish Nr.1), wearing the “trifos” collar patch.

With the clear-seeing eyes of a young fighter he recognized the necessity of this European war for survival. He understood the dangers that threatened Europe from the East and he was prepared to enter the struggle, even if it meant that he must die.

Comrade Alois Hoop will become one of the immortal heroes of his people. He gave his life so that his nation would live and Europe would not go under. His sacrifice is not in vain.

Full of proud grief we gaze upwards towards him. His life and heroic death will be an example for us to emulate. We will walk to his hero's grave and hold up the bright shield of our comrade with devout hands so that the clear shine will strengthen our grieving souls with the uplifting thought of his heroic memory.

Comrade Hoop, you were one of the greatest men of our homeland.

While we must with difficulty take our leave from you, you will always live on in our hearts.

To your family, our most deep-felt sympathy.

LETTER FROM A FINNISH SS VOLUNTEER

In a few days we will meet the Russians for the first time with our forces. Our (“Wiking”) division commander (SS-Gruf.Felix Steiner), has visited us here and greeted each man with a handshake. We were quite surprised that during his inspection he did



Two Swedish volunteers who served alongside the Britons in the “Nordland” Division in 1945. On the left is SS-Rottenführer Erik Wallin and on the right is SS-Sturmann Markus Ledin.

not treat us as a superior does an inferior.

He made no fuss over the state of our equipment, but only wanted to make a friendly, get-acquainted visit with the battalion. We got a good impression of this man and he won the men over. Each man says that with this sort of leader to got with—an irreproachable fellow with sympathy for us Finns—we can all do well.

Here behind the front the factories are going again and coal and iron are being mined from deep in the earth. Ukraine produces much food that the railroads can take directly to Germany (for processing) and then ship to the front with much speed. And this is only the beginning. The new Europe has awakened and no man can prevent it. When the spring comes and the vehicles roll forward again, we must go too; then there will be no more secluded places for us behind the front.

This is now a difficult time in Finland, but if we are to win, all must make sacrifices. The Finnish people now bear a great burden, but even if it gets bigger, it can still be dealt with. After the war,

Finland will become strong and great but only after we have been hard on ourselves and remained the same against others. Man can only survive with his skill and wisdom. To all of Europe has come a new vision, and our generation will build this new Europe. In this struggle the importance of the individual counts for little; *many* must desire to fight so that our people can live in a decent future. We live in a great time and it is an honor to offer our assistance for the fulfillment of this great mission.

Everything is going well with me. I am happy that we will soon be allowed to demonstrate in the southern sector of the front how the Finns can fight...

LETTER FROM A WAFFEN-SS VOLUNTEER FROM LIECHTENSTEIN

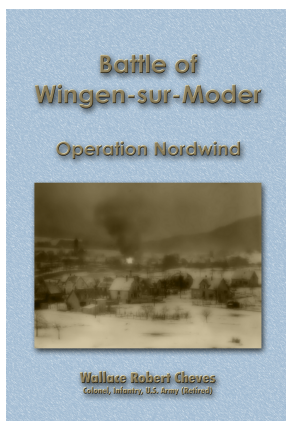
My recruit training time is now past and my ardent wish has been fulfilled: I serve as a soldier of the Greater German Reich in the struggle against Bolshevism.

About that, and what I have seen and lived through here, I cannot write very well in detail; the experiences you undergo are best described by our SS "PK" (Propaganda Kompanie) men. But I must tell you, that while I had not expected very much from this land (the Soviet Union) with its reign of terror, I have now seen and experienced things which I had only previously heard through hearsay and never really believed. I have often wished that the enemies of National Socialism in my Liechtenstein homeland could experience what we have learned about this great disaster and see our prisoners from the so-called "Red" Army, before their world revolutionary culture is brought to the west. I believe with all my might that no enemy can take Germany. I came to the realization that the German soldier in this gigantic struggle is fighting not only for the freedom of the Germanic nations, but also particularly for the culture of all the worthwhile people on this earth.

There is much hardship to bear here, but this incidental to me. Despite everything I have not the slightest regret over becoming an SS man. I am proud that I am able to make a contribution through the deeds of a German soldier, rather than just as a political fighter.



The Swedish SS-Untersturmführer Gosta Borg with the SS-Kriegsberichter Regiment "Kurt Eggers" (see sleeve title). (Erik Rundkvist Archives)



**Battle of Wingen-sur-Moder
Operation Nordwind**

**by Wallace Robert Cheves
Colonel, Infantry, Army United States, Retired**

**Revised Edition edited by
Steven K. Dixon**

Military Monograph 79

This is the story of the battle of Wingen-sur-Moder, an important village leading to the Alsatian Plain. If German forces had captured this town in the early days of Operation Nordwind, and had been able to release their reserve Panzer divisions into the plain, the war might have been lengthened. Operation Nordwind, launched December 31, 1944, was Hitler's last major offensive. Its objective—take Alsace Lorraine, split the U.S. Seventh and Third Armies, link up with the Germans in the Colmar Pocket and continue south, routing the French Army.

Colonel Cheves commanded the U.S. forces involved in the battle. The 2nd Battalion of the 274th, along with troops from the 276th and supporting elements, defeated two battalions of the battle-hardened 6th SS Mountain Division (Nord). This book, along with *Seven Days in January* by Wolf Zoeff (Aberjona Press), gives a complete picture of this important battle.

On December 31, 1944, 2nd Battalion of the elite 6th Mountain Division attacked Wingen-sur-Moder in Alsace Lorraine and took some 200 POWs, members of the 45th Division. At that time the 275th and 276th Inf. Regts., 70th Div., were committed to halt the German advance, re-take Wingen and free the American GIs. The 274th Inf. Regt. moved in to fill the gap between the 275th and 276th, on January 4th, 1945 and on January 6th began an attack on the German forces. On the evening of January 6th, the Germans launched a counterattack, which was repulsed by G Co., 274th. On the morning of January 7th, the 200+ American prisoners were freed and Wingen-sur-Moder cleared of all German soldiers, and the German offensive in that area brought to a halt.

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The Latvian Border Guard Regiments Attached to the Waffen-SS



An unknown Latvian Waffen-SS volunteer in a never before published photo. (Erik Rundkvist)

IN January 1944, with the Soviet Red Army making penetrations into both Estonia and Latvia, the Higher SS and Police Leader “Ostland” (covering the Baltic States), SS-Obergruppenführer Frederik Jeckeln asked the Latvian Self-Administration (local governing authorities), to begin calling up older men, (born from 1906 to 1914), to do military service in Border Guard Regiments, which would be utilized as a last line of defense for Latvia. Eventually there would be six regiments in all, containing some 16,000 troops, and although not technically part of the Waffen-SS, they were so in all but name. The Border Guard Regiments would all be trained and led by members of the Latvian Waffen-SS and most of their surviving members would be incorporated into the Waffen-SS.

It was one thing to issue a call-up for men to serve in these units, which was not a problem since Latvian patriotism was very high, but it was another altogether to properly supply and equip the regiments. Weaponry and training facilities, not to mention training personnel, were simply inadequate to the task and the regiments would suffer accordingly when they had to be rushed to the front lines on an emergency basis. The following list provides a brief summary of the regimental strengths, commanders and deployments:

1ST LATVIAN BORDER GUARD REGIMENT

Formed: Riga, Latvia in February 1944.

Commander: Waffen-Standartenführer der SS A. Liepins

Troop Strength (all ranks): 2,769

Deployment: Sent to the Ostrov-Pleskau Front on 31 March 1944.

Final Status: Disbanded after heavy losses on 12 July 1944 with survivors used as replacements for the 15th and 19th Latvian SS Divisions.

2ND LATVIAN BORDER GUARD REGIMENT

Formed: Riga, Latvia in February 1944.

Commander: Waffen-Obersturmbannführer der SS R. Ciemens

Troop Strength (all ranks): 2,823

Deployment: From 10 July to 31 July 1944 it served on the front in the Daugavpils (Dünaburg) area as part of SS Kampfgruppe

“Jeckeln” led by the Army General Gieseke.

Final Status: Disbanded at the beginning of August 1944 after sustaining heavy losses.

3RD LATVIAN BORDER GUARD REGIMENT

Formed: Riga, Latvia in February 1944.

Commanders: Waffen-Standartenführer Brenkis and Waffen-Obersturmbannführer Celle

Troop Strength (all ranks): 2,775

Deployment: Served with the 15th Latvian SS Division in the Latvian border regions and then near Riga.

Final Status: Disbanded in Riga in early September 1944 with the survivors going to the 15th Latvian SS Division.

4TH LATVIAN BORDER GUARD REGIMENT

Formed: Tuksum in February 1944.

Commander: Waffen-Obersturmbannführer Kikulis

Troop Strength (all ranks): 2,750

Deployment: Saw frontline duty from 10 July to 31 July 1944 in the vicinity of Daugavpils (Dünaburg).

Final Status: Disbanded on 17 August 1944 due to heavy losses and desertions. The most unreliable of the Border Guard Regiments. Part of it “mutinied” and went over to the other side.

5TH LATVIAN BORDER GUARD REGIMENT

Formed: Kuldiga, Kurland in February 1944.

Commander: Waffen-Obersturmbannführer Zvaigzne

Troop Strength (all ranks): 3,328

Deployment: First sent into action against partisans in early April 1944, then sent to the eastern Latvian Front from 29 June until 9 July 1944. In early August it participated in the defense of Riga. The largest and most capable of the Border Guard Regiments it was later converted into the independent Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 106 which fought with the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps and the 19th Latvian SS Division in Kurland. In that format it was commanded by Waffen-Obersturmbannführer der SS Jansons and Waffen-Sturmbannführer der SS Stipneks.



A photo of members of a Latvian SS formation; the extremely mixed uniforms show that they might have served in a Border Guard Regiment. They wear Waffen-SS sleeve insignia and cap badges but no collar patches. (Erik Rundkvist Archives)

6TH LATVIAN BORDER GUARD REGIMENT

Formed: Kandava, Sabile, Mtkule and Zemite in Kurland in early 1944.

Commander: Waffen-Standartenführer Brigge

Troop Strength (all ranks): 2,414

Deployment: Sent to the frontlines south of Daugavpils (Dünaburg) from 10 July 1944 until 14 August 1944. It was then sent to Riga and disbanded with its troops being used to supplement the two Latvian SS Divisions.

The uniforms for the Latvian Border Guard regiments were distinctly mixed with mostly surplus Latvian Army attire being used along with German or SS insignia. German Army and police uniforms were also used. The command staff and training cadres generally wore complete Waffen-SS uniforms. But basically it boiled down to what was available at the time of formation.

Although not immediately sent to the front, the first three Bor-



Studio portrait of a Latvian volunteer. He appears to be the kneeling soldier in the previous photo of a group of Latvian soldiers. (Erik Rundkvist Archives)

der Guard Regiments were sent to the 15th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS (Latvia Nr.1) in March 1944 to serve as reserves and replacements for the combat troops. The 2nd Border Guard Regiment suffered severe casualties on the first day that it reached its designated reserve positions when a Red Army force broke through the lines and hit it unawares with a massive attack. Of these three regiments however, only the 3rd Border Guard Regiment would actually serve in the frontlines with the 15th Latvian SS Division as an independent unit in the spring and summer of 1944.

The other three regiments stayed for a longer period of time in their formation areas undergoing training. On 16 April 1944, the 5th Border Guard Regiment was called up to help fight communist partisans behind the main front lines in Eastern Latvia, even though it had still not undergone any “live fire” exercises or had



Previously unpublished photo of a Latvian volunteer. (Courtesy of Erik Rundkvist)

any machine-guns or heavy weapons assigned to it. It would be deployed in frontline positions near Disna on 29 and 30 June 1944. On 4 July 1944, the regiment came under a massive Soviet tank and infantry onslaught which quickly shattered the unit. The survivors later regrouped in Kraslova.

On 8 July 1944, the Latvian Border Guard Regiments were assigned, at least on paper, to the SS Kampfgruppe “Jeckeln”, a task force that otherwise was made up of German and Estonian police troops that was generally deployed 12 to 20 kilometers behind the lines of the II. German Army Corps in Latvia. Basically this involved only four of the Border Guard Regiments, 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th, since the 3rd Regiment was still serving with the 15th Latvian SS Division and the 1st Regiment never reached combat readiness status; its troops were simply funneled into the two Latvian SS Di-

visions as replacements when needed.

Of the other regiments, the largest, the 5th, reached its new deployment area without sufficient weapons or ammunition and when the Red Army made a penetration through the lines of II. Army Corps, the unit was ordered to immediately retreat. It then retreated all the way back to Riga to await further developments. It then came under the control of the very efficient SS-Oberführer Dr. Gustav Krukenberg, the then “Inspector” of the Latvian Waffen-SS. He saw to it that the regiment was finally properly armed, equipped and reorganized. In early August 1944, it would become the centerpiece of an emergency task force entitled SS-Kampfgruppe “Krukenberg” to be used in defense of the Latvian capital. Krukenberg later became the inspector of the French Waffen-SS and briefly the commander of what was left of the “Charlemagne” and “Nordland” SS Divisions.

This left only the 2nd, 4th and 6th Latvian Border Guard Regiments still functioning with SS-Kampfgruppe “Jeckeln” and they were now deployed in the area to the south of the town of Dau-gavpils (or Dünaburg to the Germans). Between 7 and 10 July 1944, the troops from these units only now began to receive adequate weaponry while they were being rushed to front line positions! It would be a matter of too little, too late for the 4th Latvian Border Guard position. Lacking in morale due to chronic shortages of everything, the regiment lost most of its best officers and men in a lopsided combat action near Krawelle. With the leadership seriously depleted some of the troops then actually deserted to the other side, albeit on the advice of communist Latvian elements who had infiltrated into the regiment. After the war this action was termed a “mutiny”, but at the time it was generally ignored by the hard pressed German command, and the regiment continued to function.

On 9 July 1944, SS-Obergruppenführer Jeckeln relinquished command of his battle group to the Polizei Generalmajor Giesecke. Jeckeln then took over another emergency task force based on what was called the Latvian Field Recruit Brigade of the Waffen-SS, consisting mostly of new enlistees. Giesecke’s force now included the 2nd, 4th and 6th Latvian Border Guard Regiments along with battalions of Estonian and German police troops. It would be

used in support of the Wehrmacht Divisions of the II. Army Corps, including the 215th Infantry Division.

The 2nd and 4th Regiments were soon deployed to the west of Lake Drysviaty in the Latvia/Lithuania border area, however without any anti-tank weapons they were of little use in facing Soviet armored forces. Still, on 13 and 14 July 1944, one of the Latvian Border Guard Battalions fighting alongside the Estonian Police Battalion 40, managed to eliminate a serious Soviet penetration through the front near Karasino. Despite earlier problems, the Latvians now began fighting bravely on their own, even without contact with neighboring units. The temporary collapse of the 4th Regiment early on proved to be the exception rather than the rule!

As of 24 July 1944, the SS-Kampfgruppe “Jeckeln” had ceased to exist but the Latvians continued to fight on as part of SS-Kampfgruppe “Giesecke” in support of regular German Army formations. The 2nd Latvian Border Guard Regiment particularly distinguished itself when it was sent to Jacava to intercept an advancing Soviet armored force. In vicious close combat the Latvians not only stopped the Red Army but they destroyed 13 enemy tanks in the process. The downside was that heavy casualties, amounting to 207 killed or wounded, were sustained.

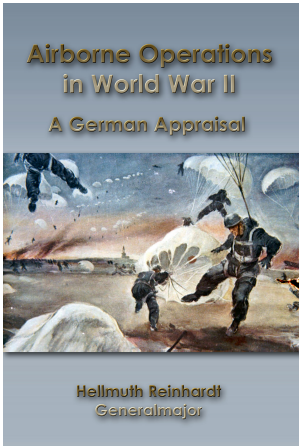
By the end of July, the II. German Army Corps was in a general fighting withdrawal. The Latvian Border Guard Regiments also fell back and many of their personnel were put to work building defensive fortifications in the vicinity of Kukuese. They now came under the direct authority of SS-Oberführer Krukenberg and the Inspectorate of the Latvian Waffen-SS into what became known as SS-Kampfgruppe “Krukenberg”, although they saw little or no further fighting, except for some of the Latvians who were still members of SS-Kampfgruppe “Giesecke” which was defending the left-wing of the 215th Infantry Division.

On 28 August 1944, the members of the Latvian Border Guard Regiments in SS-KGr. “Krukenberg” were officially subordinated to the VI. Waffen-Armee Korps der SS (Lettisches), or the VI. Latvian Army Corps of the SS. They were joined by the surviving Latvian soldiers from SS-KGr. “Giesecke” on 16 September 1944. At this time some of them were assigned to military construction units while those thought still militarily capable were combined

into the 5th Latvian Border Guard Regiment which now became the Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 106 of the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps.

This regiment would be well-equipped and fight on valiantly in Kurland alongside the 19th Latvian SS Division until January 1945, when it too was dissolved and its troops used to reinforce units of the 19th SS Division. In summary, the Latvian Border Guard Regiments were part of a desperate attempt to utilize older Latvian manpower in an effort to help impede the Soviet onslaught. For the most part they did the best they could under the circumstances, and the best soldiers from them continued to fight on effectively with the Waffen-SS until the end of the war.

The Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion “Klavines” was formed on the orders of SS-Oberfhr. Krukenberg from older aged survivors of the 2nd and 5th Latvian Border Guard Regiments in the late summer of 1944. The commander was Waffen-Hstuf. Klavins and the unit strength was listed at 467 men. What particular date that figure was valid for is unknown. The battalion was initially assigned to the Military Construction Staff in Rochow but in mid-January 1945 was subordinated directly to the 16th Army in Kurland.



**Airborne Operations in World War II
A German Appraisal**

**by Hellmuth Reinhardt
Generalmajor, Wehrmacht**

**A Merriam Press Original Reprint Publication
Military Monograph 30**

This study was written for the Historical Division, EU-COM, by a committee of former German officers. It follows an outline prepared by the Office of the Chief of Military History, Special Staff, United States Army: (1) A review of German airborne experience in World War II; (2) An appraisal of German successes and failures; (3)

Reasons for the apparent abandonment of large-scale German airborne operations after the Crete operation; (4) German experience in opposing Allied and Russian airborne operations; (5) An appraisal of the effectiveness of these operations; (6) The probable future of airborne operations.

This study is concerned only with the landing of airborne fighting forces in an area occupied or controlled by an enemy and with the subsequent tactical commitment of those forces in conventional ground combat. The employment of airborne units in commando operations, or in the supply and reinforcement of partisans and insurgents, is not included in this study, nor is the shifting of forces by troop carrier aircraft in the rear of the combat zone. Such movements, which attained large size and great strategic importance during World War II, should not be confused with tactical airborne operations.

After the original study was completed, Field Marshal Kesselring examined it and provided numerous insightful comments which were added to the text, sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing with the conclusions of the study. In addition, there is a section, Notes on German Airborne Operations, by Colonel Freiherr von der Heydte.

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Waffen-Untersturmführer der SS Janis Dzenis



JANIS Dzenis was born in Tichorzek, Russia in 1915 of Latvian heritage. He returned to live permanently in Latvia with his family in 1934 and found employment as a construction worker. In 1940 and 1941 he worked in the Riga Super Phosphate Factory, first in transportation and then as an electrician. In July 1941, after Latvia had been liberated from the Bolsheviks by the Germans, Dzenis volunteered for military duty with the Schutzmannschafts Bataillon 276, which initially was used to guard the waterworks at Kegums.

On 1 September 1941, Janis Dzenis transferred into the Latvian

Schutzmannschafts Bataillon 16 led by Hauptmann Kocins. Nearly all of the personnel in the so-called “Schuma” Battalions were Latvians, and the officers and NCOs had served in the former Latvian Army and Police. In October 1941, the battalion was sent to the front lines on an emergency basis and Dzenis participated in all of its combat actions under Hauptmann Mateass. “Schuma” Battalion 16 was deployed and fought at Lake Ilmen, Dno and Staraya Russa.

The battalion and Dzenis distinguished themselves particularly during hard defensive fighting around Jaswa on 9 and 10 February 1942, helping prevent a Red Army breakthrough. In August 1942 Janis Dzenis was decorated with the “Ostmedaille” (East Medal), given to all Eastern European volunteers who saw combat duty. Then on 10 October 1942 he was promoted to Gefreiter (PFC). On 4 February 1943 his battalion was sent to the Leningrad Front and incorporated into the 2nd SS Motorized Infantry Brigade. This formation was soon turned into an all Latvian volunteer unit and served as part of what would become to be known as the Latvian Legion. “Schuma” Battalion 16 was reformed as the III. Battalion of the 1. Latvian SS Volunteer Regiment, which later on would become the Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 42 of the 19. Latvian SS Division. Janis Dzenis then became a squad leader in 10th Company of the 1st Latvian SS Regiment receiving a promotion to Legion-Rottenführer on 1 September 1943. In the same month he was badly wounded in combat actions on the Volkhov River front. This brought about the award of the Wound Badge in Black, the Iron Cross, 2nd Class and the Infantry Assault Badge in Silver to Dzenis on 12 October 1943.

He now became a member of 2nd Company/Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 43 of the 19th Latvian SS Division and it was with this unit fighting against an enemy infantry and tank force near Ostrov on 16 March 1944 that he particularly distinguished himself. In the course of the action, Dzenis’ platoon was cut off and the platoon leader killed. Dzenis then took charge of the platoon. Under pressure from all sides and with five American model tanks advancing straight at them, Dzenis and two of his comrades made explosive packs out of land mines, and under intense enemy fire he was able to lay the mines in front of one of the advancing

tanks and when that hit it and exploded he went after another with the same results. All of the time shells and machine-gun bullets were tearing up the ground in his immediate vicinity but he was not hit. Latvian anti-tank guns then knocked out two of the other tanks. For his audacity and courage in eliminating the enemy tanks Janis Dzenis was became the first Latvian volunteer to receive the Tank Destruction Badge; he was also decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class.

He was however wounded twice on 19 March 1944 and 23 March 1944 near Kudewer and finally evacuated to a field hospital at Balvi. By June he was back with his comrades with a promotion to Waffen-Unterscharführer. During the summer fighting in Latvia and Kurland he would again be promoted to Waffen-Oberscharführer and become a platoon leader. For conspicuous bravery in combat action near Gut Skindeli, Latvia on 16 October 1944, he would receive mention in the prestigious Honor Roll of the German Army and receive the Honor Roll Clasp on 5 February 1945.

In the meantime, from December 1944 to January 1945, Dzenis attended an abbreviated platoon leader/officer's training course held by the VI. Waffen-Armee Korps der SS (Latvian) at Neu-Dondangen in Kurland, after which he was made a Waffen-Untersturmführer der SS. In a seven month period he gone up in rank from a Corporal to a 2nd Lieutenant! He now took charge of a bicycle recce platoon from the 19th Latvian SS Division and while serving in this capacity on 23 March 1945 he was badly wounded in action at the Pilsblidene railroad station.

At the end of the war, Dzenis went into Soviet captivity. He was first held at the Vorkuta Slave Labor Camp from 30 May 1945 until 11 November 1946. Surprisingly he was allowed to return to Riga where he worked for awhile as a plumber in a state construction firm, but on 10 April 1947 he was rearrested by the secret police. Charged as a "war criminal", Dzenis was sentenced to 25 years hard labor on 24 July 1947 by a military court. He then spent the next 16 years in slave labor camps in Kazakhstan and elsewhere before being released in 1963. He died on 20 January 1984 in Riga, Latvia, unable to see his country again obtain its freedom.



The 1st Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion had a strength of 4 companies on 14 November 1944; it was thought to have been attached to the German Army Engineer Battalion 53. By 14 January 1945, the battalion strength was listed as 144 men.

At the end of November 1944, the 2nd Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion was engaged in positional and road building around Prekuln (Priekule). In January 1945 its strength had dwindled to 115 men and it was attached directly to the HQ of 18th Army.

On 16 February 1944, the 3rd Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion was located about 27 kilometers from Windau and was subordinated to the 127th Engineer/Construction Battalion. By mid-January 1945 it had a strength of 262 men and was assigned to the Higher Engineer Command/Army Group Kurland.

VI. SS Army Corps (Latvian) and the Third Battle for Kurland



Insignia of the 19. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS (Latvia Nr. 2). On the right is the division's swastika (a traditional Latvian symbol) collar patch and on the left is the divisional identification sign, the letter "L" with two bars indicating the formation's status as the 2nd Latvian SS Division even though it had been formed and fought as a brigade before the 15th Latvian SS Division (Latvia Nr. 1) was created!

THE third battle for the Kurland Pocket in Latvia, which raged in December 1944 and January 1945, was probably the high point in the history of the 19th Latvian SS Division and the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps. The battle began on the morning of 21 December 1944 with a massive Soviet artillery barrage that lasted for several hours. This was followed by a ground attack on a 30 kilometer front that ran on both sides of the town of Frauenburg. The focal point of the assault lay to the south-southwest of Frauenburg which meant that the 19th Latvian SS Division was not initially engaged. However the division provided tactical support to some of its neighbors by readjusting some of its own positions and moving reinforcements by the evening of 21 December.



SS-Obergruppenführer Walter Krüger who commanded the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps during the 3rd Battle for Kurland. He had previously commanded 2nd SS Pz. Division "Das Reich".



SS-Gruppenführer Bruno Streckenbach, commander of 19th Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS (Latvian Nr.2). He had previously commanded the 8th SS Cavalry Division "Florian Geyer".

By 22 December 1944, the Latvian Waffen-SS sector had still not been attacked, although strong enemy reconnaissance parties had been reported in front of the lines. The 19th Latvian SS Division was now placed on maximum alert and deployed to the fullest. The divisional components were situated as follows:

On the divisional right wing or south flank was Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. der SS 44 (WGRdSS 44) led by Waffen-Obersturmbannführer der SS Kocins; in support of this regiment was the Waffen-Fusilier (Recce) Bataillon der SS 19 under Waffen-Sturmbannführer Laumanis. In the center of the divisional lines was the WGRdSS 43 led by Waffen-Ostufaf. Osis with its positions running between the forestry houses at Lutiki and Berzbeke. II.Btl./WGRdSS 43 was kept in divisional reserve in the Mezmalis-Priekule area. The left wing or northern flank of the division was held down by WGRdSS 42 under Waffen-Ostufaf.

Galdins, with its positions stretching from Berzbeke to Pecuri. To the right (south) of the 19th SS Division stood the German 93rd Infantry Division with the 21st Luftwaffe Field Division on the division's left (north).

Attached to the 21st Luftwaffe Field Division was the independent Latvian Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. der SS 106 led by Waffen-Stubaf. Stiepniks and comprised of the survivors of the Latvian Border Guard Regiments. It was stationed in the area between Krumiesi and Sudmali. The Latvian SS Artillery, (from both the 15th and 19th Latvian SS Divisions; the 15th Latvian SS Division had left behind its artillery regiment when it was withdrawn to Germany for refitting), was deployed as follows:

II. Detachment/Waffen-Artillery Rgt. der SS 19 under Waffen-Hstuf. Strauts, in the support of WGRdSS 44.

III./WARdSS 19 under Waffen-Hstuf. Linins, in support of WGRdSS 43.

I./WARdSS 15 under Waffen-Hstuf. Janusilis, in support of WGRdSS 42.

The light artillery detachments, (II.WARdSS 15 led by Waffen-Stubaf. Insbergs and III./WARdSS 15 led by Waffen-Stubaf. Ozols), were attached to the 21st Luftwaffe Field Division.

In the night of 23 December 1944, the 22nd Soviet Army began a major offensive in the Doblen area on the orders of General Yeremenko, commander-in-chief of the 2nd Baltic Front. Commencing at 03:00 hours on the 23rd, the Red artillery opened fire and didn't stop until it had expended 117,000 shells of all calibers on the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps sector. Then 12 Soviet divisions, a reinforced tank corps and many specialist units flooded towards the German-Latvian lines with Russian dive bombers striking right before them. It was an enormous effort and the "old foxes"—the front line veterans—had never seen anything like it before. Facing this onslaught were the three VI.Latvian SS Corps Divisions: 93rd Infantry, 19th Latvian SS and 21st Luftwaffe Field. Some 1,600 combat air missions were also carried out by the enemy side. It was clear that Yeremenko was out to drive all the way to the Baltic Sea!

The first deep enemy penetration in the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps lines was made in the sector of the 21st Luftwaffe Field Di-

vision on the Corps' left wing. Here strong Soviet tank and infantry forces began moving through to the west, threatening to out-flank the 19th Latvian SS Division. As the morning went along, the Russians began punch holes along the entire Corps' front. Battalion and regimental command posts along with static artillery positions were soon fighting for their survival in close combat. By mid-day, the Soviet advance elements had reached a line that ran from Priezusargi to Rumbinas to Kriumunas to Pienava to Irbes.

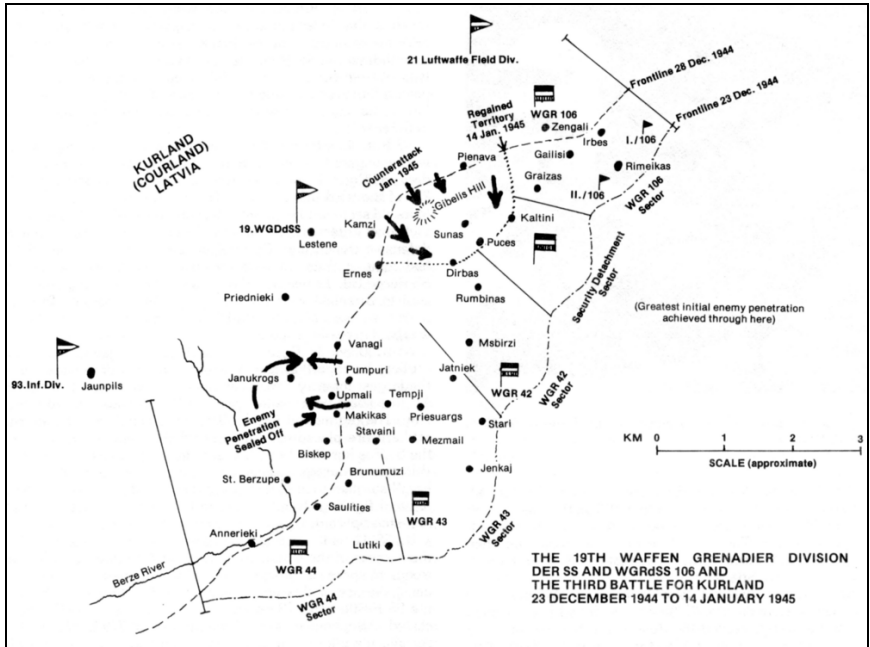
II./WGRdSS 43 under Waffen-Stubaf. Ruks, situated in Priezusargi, was ordered to stay in place and let the Soviets advance around them. The battalion's job was to form a threatening strong point behind the enemy lines while the WGRdSS 42 dealt with the penetrating forces. It was hoped that the regiment could eventually link-up with II./WGRdSS 43 and therefore create an encirclement of the forward enemy elements.

The sector held by the 21st Luftwaffe Division rapidly became the critical one as strong Soviet tank forces smashed their way through the infantry positions. Parts of the division had already taken 50% casualties in the preliminary artillery bombardment so they were not able to put up much of a fight. The partial collapse of the 21st Luftwaffe left open the route to the seaport of Windau (Ventspils), and its loss would have meant the quick end of Army Group "Kurland". But the Russian tanks soon ran into some unexpected resistance in the forested area from Berzi to Dirbas to Suans and Rumbinas.

In this area were the batteries of the II. and III. Artillery Detachments from WARdSS 15 led respectively by Waffen-Stubaf. Insberg and Waffen-Stubaf. Ozols. The Latvian SS gunners brought their pieces directly to bear on the enemy tanks and succeeded in bringing their advance to an abrupt halt. Some 14 of the Soviet armored vehicles were destroyed just in front of the Latvian positions. This was enough to cause the other Red tanks to turn tail, but the Soviet infantry was pushing forward with frantic intensity. At a point some 70 meters away they were driven to the ground, unable to advance further in the face of the lethal fire from the 15th Latvian Division's artillery batteries. Towards evening the survivors were thrown back in a brisk counterattack by the Latvian SS grenadiers.



Latvian and German officers attached to the staff of the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps.





Soldiers of the 19th Latvian SS Division in the field.

Although having taken considerable losses themselves, the Latvian artillery detachments, particularly III./SS-WARdSS 15 under Waf.-Stubaf. Ozols, had clearly saved the day. On 23 December 1944, they had literally shot to pieces two Russian tank brigades, comprising what was the better part of a Red Army armored corps!

Elsewhere the Soviet artillery bombardment in the early morning of 23 December had severed the links between the heavy weapons batteries and forward observation posts of the independent Latvian Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. der SS 106 (i.e. the “Border Guard” Regiment). This severely curtailed the effectiveness of the field pieces and enabled the Reds to make a deep penetration through the regiment’s positions and soon WGRdSS 106 found itself in a desperate fight for its existence. Both the I.Battalion command post at Irbes and the II.Battalion command post at Pinenava were almost overrun and had to be defended by all personnel in violent, hand-to-hand combat. The commander of I./WGRdSS 106, Waf.-Hstuf. Slamins was badly wounded and most of the battalion’s other young officers were also lost in short order. By the end of the day the regiment had taken 60% casualties.

In the afternoon it proved possible to set-up new observation posts for the heavy weapons and the resulting accurate artillery fire slowed down the enemy rate of advance and took some of the pressure off the Latvian grenadiers. Towards evening, the Soviets over-



Latvian Waffen-SS assault troops preparing to go into action. (Erik Rundkvist)

ran Riemelkas where the headquarters of II./WGRdSS 106 had been moved to. The battalion commander, Waf.-Hstuf. Kisis was able to mount an immediate counterattack that retook the town but in the process was badly wounded in both legs. Throughout the night to come the depleted units of WGRdSS 106 worked frantically to fortify new defensive positions.

On 24 December 1944 the front positions of the 19.WGDdSS looked like this: WGRdSS 44 on the right (south) wing, the I./WGRdSS 43 and I./WGRdSS 42 in their old positions (they had not been attacked on the previous day). Running from south to north the divisional lines now went through the following locations: Stragi - Jenkas - Audzi - Jatnieki - Rumbinas - Katini - Pienava - Irbes. In the Dirbas sector, defended by Waffen-Pionere-Bataillon der SS 19 under Waf.-Ostuf. Taures, the situation had not stabilized and remained unclear on the morning of 24 December. The Latvian combat engineers had fought valiantly and taken heavy losses but they had not been able to stop the Russian onslaught. To bolster the battalion, divisional headquarters sent up



A group of well-armed Latvian Waffen-SS men in their bunker position. (Erik Rundkvist)

what was known as the divisional “combat school”, 180 men undergoing special training in assault troop tactics with automatic weapons under Waf.-Ostuf. Roberts Ancans, who would later be awarded the Knight’s Cross on 25 January 1945 for his actions in the 3rd Battle for Kurland. In the course of day, Ancans and his troops counterattacked with the support of some small German units and managed to regain some lost ground. Also brought into the Dirbas area was a German unit, Btl. “Mohr”/93rd Infantry Division and the Latvian I./WGRdSS 43 under Waf.-Hstuf. Paulis Krasts.

Early in the morning of 24 December, the Soviets began making preparations for a major assault against the tautly stretched lines of WGRdSS 44. Following two hours of heavy artillery bombardment that reached deep behind the entire regimental front, the Red Army infantry charged forward at 10:30 hours. The main point of the attack was aimed at the II./WGRdSS 44 (Waf.-Stubaf. Zalitis) sector. Zalitis and his troops held firm and managed to repulse the enemy effort. Three further times the Russians came forward and three more times they were thrown back. A small inroad



One pattern of the Latvian Waffen-SS armshield designed to identify the troops and give them a sense of national pride. The second picture shows the armshield in actual use on a uniform sleeve.

was made in the sector held by Waffen-Fusilier Btl. der SS 19 (Recce Battalion), but this was cleared out by a rapid counterattack.

Elsewhere, the Soviets continued their assaults on Jatnieki, Tevini and Dirbas with seemingly undiminished force. On this day II./WGRdSS 43 was returned to regimental control along with the Battalion "Mohr" and I./WGRdSS 43. II. Battalion under Waf.-Stubaf. Ruks and Battalion "Mohr" were then sent on attack against enemy positions around Priezusargi, Pakuli and Anuzi; their efforts were successful and the Reds were driven back.

At Dirbas, Waf.-Ostuf. Ancans and his "combat school" troops along with some German elements, were brought to a halt by the enemy and soon found themselves isolated in a dangerous position and surrounded by the Soviets. In the meantime, reserve units from WGRdSS 42 led by Waf.-Ostuf. Videnieks liberated the troops at strong point Sari under Waf.-Ustuf. Gaigals who had held out for 24 hours while being encircled and continuously attacked by the Reds. In the sector between Jatnieki and the Berz forestry house, Waf.-Hstuf. Krasts held down the front with a newly improvised battalion created from the WGRdSS 43 engineer platoon, an emer-



Waffen-Obersturmführer der SS Roberts Ancans, the “hero of Dirbas” after receiving the Knight’s Cross in January 1945.

gency artillery commando, the WGRdSS bicycle recon platoon under Waf.-Ustuf. Gailits and the emergency company of Waf.-Hstuf. Striprais that had been assembled from divisional maintenance and support troops. The battle raged with ferocity in this sector, but thanks to good support from artillery and assault guns, Waf.-Hstuf. Krasts command drove back all attacks.

Further to the north the enemy was somewhat more successful. German units at Vanzi were pushed back and the town of Lestene was directly threatened. In the sector of WGRdSS 106 at Irbes and Remeikas, the Soviets continued to press their attack with tank assistance. The regiment had by now recovered from its failures on the previous day thanks to the vigorous leadership of the commander, Waf.-Stubaf. Stiepniks. He had regrouped his depleted forces and restored coordinated artillery support. The morale of the soldiers improved and they responded by fighting with renewed strength. All enemy attacks on WGRdSS 106 were repulsed on this day.

The Soviets continued to make progress in the sector of the 21st Luftwaffe Field Division on 24 December, and they captured



A contingent of veterans from the 19th Latvian SS Division wearing the “swastika” collar patch. These men needed no coercion to fight in the defense of their homeland; they were well motivated!

the town of Pienava. But major enemy setbacks occurred on the well-fortified front held by WGRdSS 44, where all Russian attacks were broken up with heavy losses. The Soviet command then decided against making any further attacks in that sector. On 25 December 1944, WGRdSS 44 reported that it had only lost 1 man killed and 8 others wounded in two days of fighting, and most of those casualties came from the artillery barrages.

The hotspot of the breakthrough front remained in the sector held by the makeshift battalion of Waf.-Hstuf. Krasts where the fighting continued at a feverish pace. Jatnieki was lost and then regained in a counterattack but by dusk, the battalion was nearly spent. Further counterattacks however were carried out by Waf.-Ustuf. Galitis' bicycle platoon. Possession of the forestry house at Berz kept changing over from one side to the other until Waf.-Hstuf. Dardzans and his emergency commando of artillerymen recaptured it and firmly held on to it.

Near Dirbas, Waf.-Ostuf.Ancans and his embattled “combat school” troop slugged it out with the enemy at close quarters, knocking out 12 Russian tanks in the process. Nearby, Waf.-Ostuf.

Eglajs' battery from Waffen-Artillery Rgt.der SS 19 was cutoff after having shot up 4 enemy tanks with one still functioning field piece. On Christmas Day in the sector of WGRdSS 106, the Reds punched their way forward around Irbes, Remeikas and Gailisi. At mid-day, Waf.-Hstuf. Lidums, who now commanded II./WGRdSS 106, was able to retake Irbes in a counterattack. In the afternoon, Waf.-Stubaf. Ozols, (III.WARdSS 15), led another successful counterattack that retook Gailisi. It was apparent that the heavy losses absorbed by the Soviets on this and previous days seriously weakened their assault forces, as their attacks became less intense and more sporadic. WGRdSS 106 was now able to stay in its positions until 29 December 1944, when it became fully subordinated to the 19th Latvian SS Division and afterwards served in that division's sector.

In the violent fighting to this point the Latvian Waffen-SS units overall had taken substantial casualties; the formations with the fewest losses were WGRdSS 44 and the Waffen-Fusilier Btl.der SS 19. In order to upgrade the front and assemble new reserves, VI. Latvian SS Corps HQ ordered the 19th Latvian SS Division to pull back its middle sector and right wing to new defensive-blocking positions during the night of 25/26 December. The new line of battle ran like this: Anneniki-Brunumuliza-Stepisis-Temji-Rumbas-Zvetjnieki. The regrouping was carried out without incident. Afterwards these were the regimental positions: WGRdSS 44 on the divisional right from Saulites to Bitskepi; WGRdSS 43 with part of Waf.Fus.Btl.der SS in the divisional center from Stavaini to the woods east of Birznieki; WGRdSS 42 on the divisional left with its left flank running along the swamp to the west of Vanagi. The special combined unit combat battalion led by Waf.-Hstuf. Krasts was now dissolved.

At Dirbas, Waffen-Ostuf. Ancans and his battle-group received orders to breakout of their encirclement and return to the main lines. Ancans then divided his command into two attack wedges and personally the assault through the enemy positions. Only 35 men of the 19th SS Division's 180 member "combat school" made it safely back to the Latvian lines, reaching the railroad station at Rumbas on 26 December 1944. The wounded and dead had to be left behind but they were later retrieved by armored assault gun



SS-Obergruppenführer Walter Krüger, the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps commander, consults with SS-Sturmbannführer Koop who served as the chief-of-staff of the 19th Latvian SS Division.

crews.

Roberts Ancans would be awarded the Knight's Cross on 25 January 1945 specifically for his deeds and the performance of his men at Dirbas. He was a true combat veteran, having seen action with the first Latvian volunteer battalion to be deployed on the Eastern Front in 1941. He then participated in major battles at Cholm, Lake Ilmen, before Leningrad and at Luga and Ostrov. After being wounded for the 8th time, Ancans would be evacuated to Germany from Kurland on 8 May 1945 and was spared from entering Soviet captivity.

On 26 December, the Latvian Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 was engaged in a hard battle for Rumajas, and this placed changed hands

several times before winding up in the possession of the Latvians towards the end of the day. The Russians now exerted their major efforts against both Waffen-Fusilier Btl. der SS 19 and the WGRdSS 42. A desperate fight raged for the hill at Janukrogs which the Soviets wanted to take at any price for the use as an artillery observations post. The soldiers from WGRdSS 42 were initially forced off the hill, but later on retook it in a valiant effort.

WGRdSS 43 held firm against a forceful Soviet attack along the Tempji-Janukrogs road. Towards 21:00 hours the Reds smashed through the sector held by I./WGRdSS 43, (now led by Waf.-Ostuf. Bumbers), in a surprise night attack. They were able to seize Hill 73 and the town of Stavaini before going on to reach Upmali and Tiltini. The situation here was particularly critical because the enemy force had made a 2 kilometer breach between the sectors of Waffen-Grenadier Regiments 42 and 43. This in turn exposed the left flank of Waffen-Grenadier Regiment 44 and its rear area positions had now become exposed. After the Soviets took the important crossroads near Janukrogs, the rear area of the entire 19th Latvian SS Division became threatened.

A unit from the right wing of WGRdSS 43, the company led by Waf.-Ustuf. Baumanis, reassembled at the command post of I./WGRdSS 44 after having lost its positions at Makikas. The commander of WGRdSS 43, Waf.-Oberfhr. Osis then informed the commander of WGRdSS 44, Waf.-Ostubaf. Kocins, of the negative developments in the sector of I./WGRdSS 43. At the same time the CO of I./WGRdSS 44, Waf.-Stubaf. Praudins reported the new battalion positions to the staff of Regiment 44 by field telephone. He was then ordered by Waf.-Ostubaf. Kocins to disrupt the enemy assembly area with an assault troop attack and then retake Hill 73. For this mission, the regimental reserves, 6th Company under Waf.-Hstuf. Adamsons and the Bicycle Platoon led by Waf.-Ustuf. Pikelis were assigned to I./WGRdSS 44.

Waf.-Ustuf. Baumanis and his 2nd Company from I./WGRdSS 43 and some other detached elements from the battalion that had turned up in the I./WGRdSS 44 sector were then ordered to reoccupy the lost villages of Upmali and Tiltini. Waf.-Oberfhr. Osis then notified Waf.-Ostubaf. Kocins that his Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 43 had already begun a counterattack.



Latvian Waffen-SS troops during a security exercise on the Zalenicha Front, 24 April 1944. (Erik Rundkvist)

The first successes were not long in coming; Waf.-Oberjunker Ancans led a platoon sized assault troop from 3./I./WGRdSS 44 which hit the Russians in the rear and completely broke up their preparations for a surprise attack. This enabled the main Latvian Waffen-SS counterattack to go off without a hitch and by 01:00 on 27 December, the old positions of I./WGRdSS 43 had been restored and 6./WGRdSS 44 and the bicycle platoon then went back into the regimental reserves.

At 06:00 on 27 December, the Soviets shifted their attention the 19th Division's right wing between Saulites and Stepisi. A weak, unsuccessful probing attack was made and some captured Red Army soldiers explained part of the reason for their failure. Although having lost their earlier jumping-off positions on the banks of the Berzupe River, the Red infantry had been ordered to proceed forward anyway. This meant that they had to be forced straight ahead through a Russian minefield without the benefit of having it cleared out first by combat engineers! Anyone who faltered in this task would be shot down by rear area commissars! This was, to be sure, a suicidal course of action, but the Soviets

never worried about sacrificing their abundant manpower to achieve their objectives. As a result the attacking Red Army force in this sector lost about 75% of its own personnel to their own land mines! One prisoner told the Latvian that of his 19-man platoon, only 5 had survived the trek through the minefield.

In the late morning of 27 December, the battle raged anew along the Janukrogs-Tempji road. The Russians concentrated their efforts on the positions of WGRdSS 43 and the Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19. Continuous enemy efforts were however all broken up by the steady fire of the Latvian defenders. WGRdSS 42 made a vain effort to retake Zvejnieki Hill on this day. With heavy weapons support, Waf.-Ostuf. Berzins and his company had led off the attack in the Vanagi-Zvenjeki sector. It got nowhere; it proved impossible to advance through the massive enemy fire.

The Russians in turn tried to attack in the Lestene area only to be repulsed by the German units there. The third battle for Kurland was developing into a costly standoff for both sides. The Soviet strength had clearly deteriorated as was demonstrated by a feeble assault on the positions of the weakened WGRdSS 106 that was driven off without difficulty.

The staff of the 19th Latvian SS Division now wanted to start conserving as much of the divisional strength as possible for future use. So after the reconquest of the Janukrogs positions it was proposed to withdraw the Waffen-Grenadier Regiments 42 and 43 along with the SS Fusilier Battalion 19 from the front lines while they still had adequate manpower. It proved possible only to place WGRdSS 43 in reserve and later in the day it was sent to the Priezu-Kundzini-Jaginti sector in the rear.

The WGRdSS 43 lines were now assumed by WGRdSS 44 and were elongated somewhat to take in Bitskepi on the right boundary; its old positions were then taken over by Infantry Rgt. 270 of the 93rd Infantry Division. The Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 remained in its old positions and was tactically subordinated to WGRdSS 44. On divisional orders, II./WGRdSS 44 was placed in a rear area secondary trench line. By 09:30 on 28 December, the 19th Latvian SS Division had completed its frontline readjustments. Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 44 and the SS Fusilier Btl. 19 manned the lines on the right wing from Bitskepi to Birznieki with Waffen-Grenadier



Two unknown Latvian Waffen-SS grenadiers. (Erik Rundkvist Archives)

Rgt. 42 on the divisional left wing from the slopes of Zvejnieki Hill on north to Pucis. Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 43 was held in ready-reserve.

At 01:30 on 28 December, the Soviets began an enormous artillery barrage that lasted a full hour. It was followed up by the largest infantry attack yet along the entire front of WGRdSS 44. In a short time the key point of Rumbas and Birznieki were lost to the enemy. The regimental CO, Waf.-Ostuf. Kocins, had concentrated heavy weapons fire placed on those two locations and then ordered Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 to retake them. With great courage and contempt for death the Latvian "Fusiliers" stormed their objectives and expelled the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting, although Rumbas would remain the object of two days of non-stop fighting. Losses were high on both sides.

II./WGRdSS 44 had to remain in reserve because it was clear that the success of the division might depend on having some fresh troops to spare. If the enemy attacks continued for many more days, the use of this unit would be critical to events. Even as the Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 reported its successes, the regimental HQ received a telephone message from the staff of 270th Infantry Rgt.

concerning the plight of its right hand neighbor: 1st Company/WGRdSS 44 led by Waf.-Ostuf. Suna. It had become fully engaged defending the Bitskepi farm from the onslaught of massive Russian attacks that came from the vicinity of Hill 73. It was putting up a desperate resistance, in close combat against what turned out to be two full-strength Red Army battalions.

Waf.-Ostuf. Suna soon fell with a bad chest wound and his successor, Waf.-Ustuf. Petersons quickly had an arm shattered. Both were evacuated along with nine other severely wounded men to the field dressing station of the 270th Infantry Regiment. The company had lost all of its communication links to battalion and regimental headquarters so it was unable to receive any artillery support. In the end, it was forced to give ground and the Reds captured the east part of Bitskepi.

Soon afterwards the Soviets crossed the railroad lines in force and seized West Bitskepi before moving on towards Hill 68.5. Here they were brought to a halt by automatic weapons fire from 3rd Company/WGRdSS 44. Further enemy attacks along the Tempji-Janukrogs road were then driven back by elements of the regiment's I. Battalion. In the afternoon of 28 December the Soviets did launch another assault on Rumbas only to be repelled once again.

Waf.-Ostuf. Kocins now began making new plans for a counterattack to regain the railroad lines and the ground lost around Bitskepi. A daytime effort would have had little chance for success due to good enemy observation posts on Hill 73, so the operation had to take place under the cover of darkness. Chosen to lead the attack were the members of the regimental bicycle platoon. This unit was composed of men from the "Aizsargi" Home Guard, which had directly come under the Latvian government in Riga, (now lost to the Reds). With the loss of the Latvian capital, the guardsmen then volunteered to served with Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 44. Well-trained and well-armed, these men were considered an "elite troop". From mid-November 1944 until this point in the third battle in Kurland, the platoon was led by Waf.-Ustuf. Pikelis.

The counterattack got underway at dusk (15:45) on 28 December after a brief artillery barrage. The Aizsargi men stormed forward across the railroad lines and swiftly threw the Russians out of West Bitskepi. It was hoped to keep the attack going into East Bit-

skepi with the help of soldiers from the German 270th Infantry Rgt. but it proved to be too difficult to coordinate movements and Waf.-Ostufaf. Kocins halted the advance. However, the principal objective had been secured. The railroad lines through the swamp between Janukrogs and Vanagi had been retaken and contact had been firmly restored with the 19th Latvian SS Division's right-hand neighbor, the 93rd Infantry Division.

At 18:00 on 28 December the Soviets renewed their attack on Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 and were able to reoccupy Rumbas. It was just one more chapter in what seemed like an interminable see-saw struggle. During the next two hours, a platoon of Latvian Fusiliers, acting on their own initiative, charged back into Rumbas and once more flung the enemy out in violent, close-combat. But the regimental HQ was getting a little tired of this costly and largely useless battle. Waf.-Ostufaf. Kocins now declared Rumbas to be a "forward outpost" to be manned only by one heavy-machine gun nest; it was no longer to be considered a part of the frontlines proper. Therefore the burden of defending it would not be so debilitating. Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 had become so depleted that the regimental CO assigned 8./WGRdSS 44 under Waf.-Ostuf. Vinklers to supplement it and fill in the gap between I./WGRdSS 44 in the south and two weakened Latvian Fusilier companies to the north. By 20:00, 8th Company had taken over its new positions.

During the night of 28/29 December further alterations were made in the lines of the 19th Latvian SS Division. The front was pulled back behind the railroad tracks and now ran along the following points: Brunumuiza - Stepisis - West Bitskepi - Upmali - Pumpuri - Vanagi - Silgaili - Hill 68.0 - Ernes - Vamzi. The division bordered on the Tempji-Janukrogs road on its right (south) wing and on Kraucas-Salinu Pupji on its left (north) wing. Specific unit locations looked like this: WGRdSS 44 was on the divisional right with its left wing running through the cemetery to the north of Vanagi; in the center of the divisional lines, between the cemetery and Mucenieki was WGRdSS 42; between Mucenieki and Ormani was the WGRdSS 106 and on the divisional left wing was WGRdSS 43. Its place in the divisional reserve had now been taken over by Waffen-Fusilier Btl. 19 which had been pulled back to Pastorat.



A pair of teenage Latvian “Flak Helpers”, who helped man air defense guns in Latvia and throughout Europe as well as serve as military auxiliaries. Many of these volunteers later went into the Waffen-SS. Latvia provided several thousand “Flak Helpers” during the war. (Erik Rundkvist)

In the morning hours of 29 December, the Reds shelled the entire width and depth of the Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 44 sector and then began a tank supported attack against the front of the regiment. Because of the narrow focus of the onslaught it was possible

for the Latvian and German forces to concentrate artillery and rocket fire on the enemy forces with great accuracy. In fact, all of the Soviet efforts on this day were broken up by well-placed artillery and automatic weapons fire.

Of the many Latvian heroes of the Kurland fighting, probably none was more swashbuckling than Waf.-Hstuf. Miervaldis Adamsons, the commander of 6./WGRdSS 44. Earlier in his life, after completing his schooling and motivated by the spirit of adventure, he had signed up for a six year stint in the French Foreign Legion, which he served in North Africa. By 1941 he was back in Latvia and he quickly volunteered his services to the German side in the war against Soviet communism. While serving in a Latvian “Police” Battalion in June 1942 he joined the later Knight’s Cross winner Zanis Butkus on a special undercover mission. Disguised as farmers, the two Latvians infiltrated a Red partisan band near Molodetschno by saying that they had been sent as couriers from Moscow. Their ruse worked and the information they sent back to their battalion caused the destruction of the entire communist terror band.

In September 1942, Adamsons and Butkus carried out another successful anti-partisan operation of a similar nature and in March 1943, Adamsons once again distinguished himself by leading a long-distance scouting party on a mission behind the enemy lines at Lake Ilmen. For his success with this assignment he was promoted directly from Untersturmführer to Hauptsturmführer, skipping the Obersturmführer rank in between, and received a mention in the prestigious Wehrmacht War Communiqué. He had already been awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class back in 1941. Due to his stay in the French Foreign Legion, the men in his command referred to Adamsons as the “strange Moroccan”.

From 28 to 31 December 1944, Adamson’s 6th Company/WGRdSS 44 defended the Vanagi strongpoint 12 kilometers northwest of Doblen. The regimental sector, laying between two swamps, was confronted by the entire 100th Soviet Army Corps, which consisted of three tank-supported Guards Divisions. Up until 29 December every enemy attack had been driven off with heavy losses. Then, on 29 December, the Reds laid down a heavy artillery barrage directly on Vanagi and attacked and seized the

spot with a strong infantry force. Miervaldis Adamsons then personally led a counterattack which threw the enemy out of Vanagi, but the fighting raged on for three more days non-stop and Vanagi changed hands no fewer than 17 times! In the night of 1 January 1945, Adamsons and his men recaptured Vanagi for the last time; the enemy was finally finished. The 100th Soviet Army Corps had fully squandered its manpower in suicidal attacks and now scarcely existed.

For his performance at Vanagi, Waf.-Hstuf. Adamsons was decorated with the Knight's Cross. After the capitulation, Adamsons was forced into slave labor at the Soviet nickel mines near Murmansk. He managed to eventually engineer a successful escape and made it as far as the Finnish frontier when he was caught by communist border guards. During his subsequent interrogation and torture, Adamsons remained stalwart and defiant. This time the Bolsheviks took no chances and executed him; he was one of many thousands of his countrymen to meet the same fate!

In six days of fighting the Soviets had absorbed enormous losses. Now, on 29 December 1944, they were ready to make their final push. To the north of the Janukrogs "angle", the Reds made a "reconnaissance in force" that managed to push part of Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 106 off of the hill to the north of Mucenieki, but by evening the Latvian soldiers of the regiment had managed to take it back. During this day, heavy fighting went on for the Vanagi farm which was ably defended by Waf.-Hstuf. Adamson's 6th Company from WGRdSS 44. Finally, after taking sizable casualties, Adamsons reported to the battalion command post that Vanagi could no longer be held with any certainty. All of the buildings belonging to the Vanagi farm had long since vanished under the destructive might of the enemy artillery.

Between the hours of 02:00 and 04:00 each morning, Waf.-Ostuf. Kocins had routinely sent out small raiding parties with instructions to bring back enemy prisoners for interrogation. Ideally the captives would give some clue as to what could be expected from the Soviet side on that particular day. Early on the morning of 30 December they brought in two Russian soldiers who had been serving as messengers for a Red Army battalion staff. Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 44 headquarters learned from them that an

enemy attack was planned the morning at 09:00 aimed at Pumpuri and Vanagi. The Soviets believed that those locations had been kept under such intense fire for so long a time that the defenses would have been weakened to the breaking point and they were not far wrong in that assumption!

Armed with this information, Waf.-Ostufaf. Kocins decided to play into the enemy hands by pulling out of the Vanagi outpost and letting the Reds make a small breakthrough. He would then have his 6th and 7th Companies close in on the enemy advance force from the right and left and wipe it out in an envelopment maneuver. However things rarely worked out as planned on a chaotic battlefield and this proved to be no exception to the rule.

The prisoner's information was a little bit premature. The preliminary Soviet artillery barrage did not begin until 09:30 and it was followed in kind by a Latvian/German reply at 10:00, directed towards the enemy jumping-off positions. The Russian infantry attack actually got underway at 10:15 against Pumpuri and Vanagi and an advance force soon was allowed to break into Vanagi as planned. At 10:45 the Latvian grenadiers counterattacked but 6th and 7th Companies were not able to fully coordinate their efforts. 6th Company regained Vanagi but the enemy unit had not been destroyed as hoped for. But the original plans had not been discarded. As in Rumbas, Waf.-Hstuf. Adamsons left just a heavy-machine post in Vanagi in an effort to lure the Reds back into an ambush. But the usual inconclusive sea-saw pattern soon developed. Here's how the rest of the day went:

13:00: The Russians were back in Vanagi.

14:00: 7./WGRdSS 44 under Waf.-Ustuf. Smits retakes Vanagi and expels the Soviets. The defense of Vanagi now becomes the responsibility of 2./WGRdSS 44 under Waf.-Ustuf. Biters and 3./WGRdSS 44 led by Waf.-Ustuf. Vanags both from the regiments I. Battalion.

17:00: The Soviets again retake Vanagi.

19:00: Waf.-Ustuf. Biters and the men of 2nd Company again throw the Reds out of Vanagi.

At midday on 30 December, the Soviets broke off their losing

effort to capture Pumpuri and shifted their attack towards Silgaili in the sector of WGRdSS 42 and they were soon able to occupy the town. In the afternoon, a battle-group from the regiment led by Waf.-Ostuf. Pauzers counterattacked Silgaili with the assistance of armored assault guns; the town was regained but Pauzers was badly wounded in the process.

All along the front of WGRdSS 44 prisoners had been taken and among them were representatives from six different infantry regiments attached to the 21st Red Guards Division and the 28th and 37th Rifle Divisions. Towards evening, a Soviet 1st Lieutenant was captured and he conceded that all of these units belonged to the 100th Red Army Corps led by a Major General Dimitrov, which was headquartered on the Zvejnieki Hill and lined up against only the front sector held by the Latvian Waffen-Grenadier Rgt. 44. Colonel General Yeremenko, commanding the 2nd Baltic Front had given the corps strict orders to breakthrough the Janukrogs “angle”. The Russian POW’s also noted that their casualties, particularly those inflicted by the German/Latvian artillery fire, had been extremely high. Although the enemy enjoyed a 6 to 1 regimental advantage over WGRdSS 44, they could now only muster a 3 to 1 personnel advantage. In the Red Army, regiments and divisions were allowed to bleed dry with replacements being used instead to form new units with higher numerical designations, thus puffing up the paper rosters that much more!

On 31 December at 09:30, the Russian artillery started up again and the usual attack on Vanagi followed. The Reds again captured the place at 11:00 and a short while later, as if on schedule, 2nd Company/WGRdSS 44 under Waf.-Ustuf. Biters took it back. At the same time the enemy charged across the marshland towards the 3./WGRdSS 44 positions under Waf.-Ustuf. Vanags in the Vanagi cemetery but were driven back in disarray.

In the afternoon, the Russians launched a renewed attack in regimental strength along the Zvejnieki-Vanagi road. This time they advanced without any artillery or tank support. About 400 meters from the Latvian lines they were driven to the ground by heavy fire. A general slaughter then commenced since the Soviets found themselves without any real protection and they were unable to move safely in any direction. Panic set in and detached groups

of Red soldiers desperately tried to escape into the swamps to the north. As evening fell, a Latvian patrol went out to round up prisoners from the battlefield. They discovered that their captives had come from the 91st Regiment of the 37th Soviet Rifle Division which had been virtually annihilated in the one-sided fighting. Also on 31 December 1944, the official Wehrmacht War Communiqué made mention of the 19th Latvian SS Division's performance at Kurland and in particular singled out the achievements of 6th Company/WGRdSS 44 at Vanagi. It was singular honor for the brave Latvian soldiers.

By the end of the day on 1 January 1945, Vanagi was firmly back in the control of the Latvian Waffen-SS troops and the enemy fighting spirit had clearly been broken. The next day saw some heavy skirmishing but it was evident that the Russians no longer wanted to continue their attacks. Then on 3 January 1945, the 19th Latvian SS Division struck back with a powerful offensive of its own. Divided into three assault groups, the soldiers of the division rolled over the enemy defenses. At times the Reds fought back with determination, but to no avail. The Latvians were fighting for their homeland and Europe itself and they would not be halted.

The hill at Gibelis, known during the fighting as "Panzer Hill, which was fortified by 20 Soviet tanks and assault guns, was taken in a fierce three day battle by 2nd Company/WGRdSS 42 "Voldermars Veiss" under the leadership of Waf.-Ostuf. Alfreds Berzins. For his achievement he would receive the Honor Roll Clasp of the German Army, which meant that his deeds would be recorded forever in the Wehrmacht Roll of Honor. The town of Gibelis itself, also defended by a strong enemy tank force, was a tougher nut to crack and it did not fall to the Latvians until 14 January 1945. On this day, the Third Battle for Kurland, more or less officially came to an end. At that time the badly battered Waffen-Grenadier Regiment der SS 106, comprised of the survivors of the Latvian Border Guard Regiments, was dissolved and its members incorporated directly into units of the 19th Latvian SS Division.

After three weeks of continuous fighting, the Soviet forces that besieged the province of Kurland had simply been battered into exhaustion. In the sector held by the VI. Latvian SS Army Corps they had lost 328 tanks, 17 airplanes and 830 prisoners of war.

Their exact battlefield casualties will probably never be known, but they had to have been astronomical as many of their former divisions and regiments had dwindled to company and platoon size!

Four Latvian grenadier regiments and two artillery regiments had participated in the battle along with numerous specialist and support troops and they did all that was required of them. An extraordinarily high number of decorations were awarded to individual Latvian soldiers, up to and including several Knight's Crosses to the Iron Cross. The 19th Latvian SS Division would participate in several more battles in Kurland until the end of the war and remained undefeated, only surrendering due to the general German collapse. It proved itself one of the truly superlative fighting forces of WWII and unfortunately its survivors would suffer greatly at the hands of the Soviet communists; spending years, and often decades, in slave labor camps in which many perished, or being executed outright. Those that were evacuated to Germany generally survived to help form a post-war veterans association, and in recent years their wartime achievements have received honor and recognition in their now free Latvian homeland.

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Waffen-SS Personalities

SS-ROTTENFÜHRER ARTHUR CHRISTIAN



SOME 60,000 ethnic Germans from Romania would eventually be incorporated into the Waffen-SS, serving in nearly every SS division. From June 1941 until May 1945, 15,000 of them would be killed or missing-in-action. One of the first of these Romanian German soldiers to really distinguish himself was SS-Rottenführer Arthur Christian who became the first one to receive the Close Combat Clasp in Gold in November 1943. Christian had been born in Ulmbach, the Banat (German) Region of Romania on 4 August 1922. After Germany made arrangements to have Romanian ethnic Germans (who were otherwise Romanian citizens) do their required military service in the German Armed

Forces (again almost all in the Waffen-SS), contingents of them began traveling to Germany in 1941.

Arthur Christian was among the first 600 Romanian ethnic-German volunteers. This group was given a festive send-off in the Banat and then sent to Vienna to begin basic military training. After completing this, Christian was assigned to the “Der Führer” SS Panzergrenadier Regiment of the 2nd SS Panzer Division “Das Reich” which was heavily engaged on the Russian Front. On 28 January 1942, he received his first battle wounds in the front lines near Rzhev when he received splinters from an exploding artillery shell in his face and also suffered burns from a fuel “flash” explosion. Despite this he refused to be evacuated from his machine-gun post until the combat situation stabilized.

For his deeds at this time, Arthur Christian would receive the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, the Wound Badge in Black, the Infantry Assault Badge in Bronze and later the “Ost” medal or “Eastern Front” medal given to everyone who survived the brutal winter of 1941/1942 in Russia. After having participated in 50 battlefield engagements, he was awarded the Close Combat Clasp in Gold on 25 November 1943, receiving it personally from the “DF” Regimental CO, SS-Obersturmbannführer Sylvester Stadler. He would soon also be decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class and receive a promotion to SS-Unterscharführer (Sgt.).

Later on, fighting on the Western Front with the “Das Reich” Division, Arthur Christian would again be severely wounded and was decorated with the Golden Wound Badge during his lengthy convalescence. In fact the war ended while he was still a patient at a Waffen-SS military hospital in Vienna. Following his release from post-war captivity, Christian remained in Austria and trained to become a master mechanic. He then lived and worked in the Upper Austrian town of Waizenkirchen where he died prematurely (probably due to effects from his war wounds), on 5 December 1966 at the age of 44.

Besides being one of the first Romanian ethnic-Germans to be highly decorated, Arthur Christian had served in and survived some of the most brutal battles in history on both the Eastern and Western Fronts. He would be remembered by surviving veterans as a “good comrade, who was always prepared to help out as needed”.

**SS-OBERSTURMFÜHRER UND
RITTERKREUZTRÄGER DER WAFFEN-SS
JAQUES LEROY**



Jacques Leroy, on the left of the photo, after having lost his right arm and right eye in the battle for the Cherkassy Pocket (he wears a glass eye). On the right is his younger brother Claude Leroy, then 17, who would also join the Waffen-SS “Wallonien” Division and be killed in action, along with hundreds of other European volunteers, in March 1945 in the fighting for the Oder River Bridgehead

Jacques Leroy was born on 10 September 1924 in Binden, Belgium. In 1943 he joined the 5.SS-Sturmbrigade “Wallonie” to battle communism on the Eastern Front. His two brothers would follow suit in the next year for the same reason. They saw the Soviet Red Terror as the greatest threat to Western Civilization. After

completing an officer's training course, SS-Untersturmführer Jacques Leroy arrived on the southern part of the Eastern Front with the "Wallonie" Assault Brigade in November 1944. During the difficult battle to escape from the encirclement around Cherkassy in February 1944, SS-Ustuf. Leroy was severely wounded, losing both his right arm and right eye. Fortunately his comrades were able to assist him out to safety.

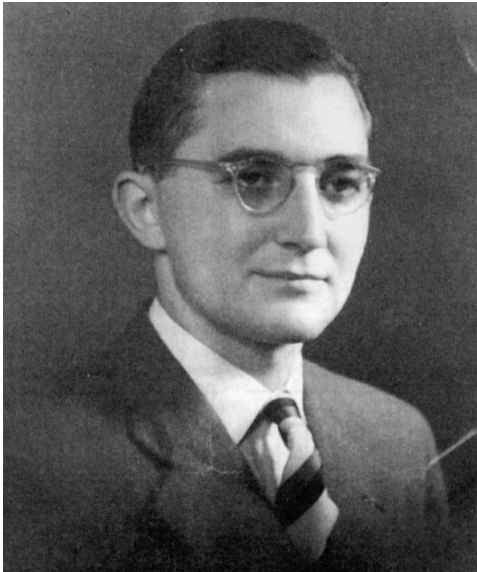
Following an extensive convalescence, Leroy returned to his old unit, which was now the 28th SS Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Division "Wallonien" and in early 1945 he accompanied the "Wallonien" battlegroup, (SS Regiments 69 and 70 and SS Artillery Detachment 28) to the Pomeranian front where he was to serve as a liaison officer between the headquarters staff and the combat elements and was not supposed to see action. However after the I. Battalion of SS Grenadier Rgt. 69 lost its commander and sustained heavy losses, the now SS-Obersturmführer Leroy assumed command of the unit and personally led it in several fierce close-combat engagements.

In March 1945, with a task force of 40 surviving members of the battalion, Jacques Leroy led them in the defense of Altdamm at the mouth of the Oder River. For three days and nights this band of Walloon volunteers held off sizable enemy assaults even turning back an attack by 19 Red tanks on 17 March 1945, destroying many of them in the process. When they were finally relieved, only 8 of the defenders were still alive; 32 of them had been killed in action, including Jacques Leroy's younger brother Claude. His other brother, a platoon leader, would fall in defense of the Finkenwalde railroad station, three days before the Soviet offensive on the Oder sector temporarily halted.

On 20 April 1945, SS-Ostuf. Jacques Leroy was decorated with the Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross for his personal heroism and the performance of his command at the Altdamm Bridgehead in March 1945. At the end of the war he went into British captivity and was soon transported back to Belgium to face a long imprisonment and much ill-treatment at the hands of the new leftist Belgian authorities. Deprived of his basic rights in Belgium, Leroy moved as soon as he could to Bavaria and became a German citizen.

The after effects of his severe war wounds would plague him for the rest of his life. In 1992 he had to seek the assistance of state provided medical care. It was soon obvious that the doctor sent to him was actually more interested in making a “political statement” than in helping him. This individual immediately accused him of “fighting against his country”, to which Leroy replied: “That was not the case, I only fought against Bolshevism!” The physician responded by saying: “I hope you are now as much an anti-Nazi as you were an anti-Bolshevik.” Jacques Leroy was too astounded to respond to this as he only sought medical help and not a political confrontation from an expert “care giver”. In any event he always remained true to his comrades and was always proud of his service in the Waffen-SS.

SS-UNTERSCHARFÜHRER CELESTIAN MATHEY



Celestian Mathey was born on 29 August 1921 in Lommel, Belgium. He joined the 5.SS-Sturmbrigade “Wallonie” in 1943 and became an NCO with the rank of SS-Unterscharführer. After suffering a severe leg wound, (possibly in Estonia), he was sent to an SS hospital in Lublin, Poland. He was last seen on 17 February 1945 and has not been heard from since.

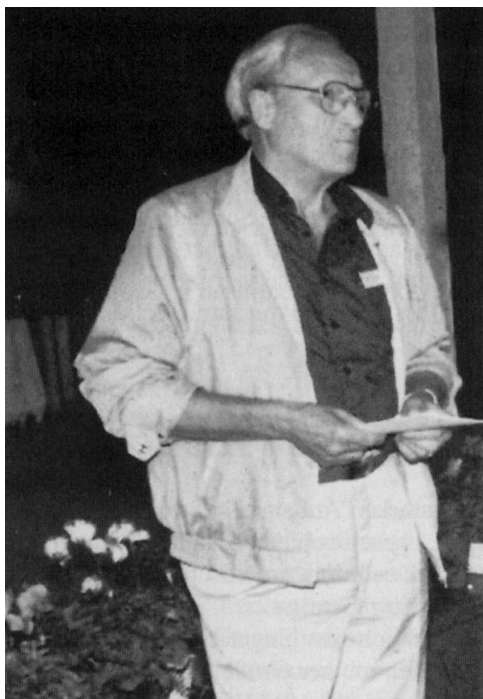
SS-HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER KARL WEYAND



Karl Weyand was born on 31 July 1914 in Dillengen, Saar. From November 1935 until March 1938 he served with the SS-VT Standarte “Deutschland” in Ellwangen. In May 1938 he became a company clerk in the SS-VT Standarte “Der Führer” at the Radetzky Barracks in Vienna. From the beginning of the war until at least January 1944 he participated in all of the combat actions of the “DF” Regiment on the Western and Eastern Fronts. The next few months are a blank but by November 1944 he was again stationed at the Radetzky Barracks in Vienna. On the 21st of February 1945, SS-Hstuf. Weyand was transferred to the 36th SS Grenadier Division, (formerly the “probationary” SS-Sturmbrigade “Dirlewanger”).

It is not known if this was a legitimate posting or done for “punishment” purposes, although at this time plenty of “normal” (i.e. not convict) personnel were now being added to strengthen the new division. Weyand’s last letter home was posted from Senftenberg/Niederlausitz on 23 March 1945. In April 1945, the 36th SS Division was caught up in fierce retrograde fighting and ended up in the so-called “Halbe” Pocket. It is presumed that SS-Hstuf. Weyand was killed during this time, although he remains missing-in-action.

SS-OBERSTURMFÜHRER HUGO JÖRG



Hugo Jörg, (exact birthdate unknown), joined the SS-Pioniersturmbann (SS-VT Engineer Battalion) in Leisnig in January 1935. He would later serve in the 3rd Company of the SS Engineer Battalion of the SS-VT until December 1940, seeing action in the French campaign of that year. He then became a combat engineer platoon leader with the Armored Recce Detachment of the 5.SS Panzer Division “Wiking” serving in this capacity until 1943 when he attended an officer’s training course at the SS Pioneer Schule “Hradischko” near Prague. Following completion of the course and promotion to SS-Untersturmführer he stayed on at the school as a platoon and company commander in an SS Engineer Training Battalion.

In January 1945, with the rank of SS-Obersturmführer, Jörg was sent to the 23. SS-Frewilligen Panzergrenadier Division “Nederland”, which had just returned to Germany from the Kurland Front in Latvia and had begun a hasty reformation process. Hugo

Jörg was assigned to command one of the combat engineer companies in SS-Engineer Battalion 54/23. SS-Frw. Pz.Gr.Div. “Nederland” He would remain at this post until the end of the war. During his wartime service he received many decorations including both classes of the Iron Cross.

After the war, Hugo Jörg became very active in the “search service” and “comradeship” of the Waffen-SS combat engineer veterans known as the “Pioneerkameradschaft Dresden”, since Dresden had been the site of the original SS engineer unit. He was also a prominent amateur athlete and he was awarded the German Federal Sports Badge more than 30 times. This was given to people who could pass a government certified “fitness”/sports test. It was after a long workout at a sports field on 8 May 1998, in an effort to get yet another Sports Badge, that Hugo Jörg died suddenly of a heart attack. Being one of the older vets in the “comradeship” he was certainly well in his 80's at the time!

SS-HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER RUDOLF ROTT



SS-Obersturmführer Rott (left) on the Oranienbaum Front near Leningrad probably just after the “Nordland” Division arrived in the sector in late 1943. With him is a Company Master Sergeant from a Luftwaffe Field Division.

Rudolf Rott was born in St.Pölten, Lower Austria on 21 January 1918, the son of a city employee. After completing his schooling in St.Pölten, (elementary, high and trade schools), he opted to volunteer for the Waffen-SS in May 1938, immediately after the Austrian annexation to Germany. He was sent to the Austrian SS-Standarte “Der Führer”, joining its III. Sturmbann (Battalion). He then participated in the regiment’s early wartime operations before being sent to the SS-Junkerschule “Tölz” in 1942 to become an officer. Following his promotion to SS-Untersturmführer, Rott was sent to the SS-Pz.Gr.Regiment 10 “Westland” of 5. SS Panzer Division “Wiking” on the southern part of the Russian front.

After sustaining a serious shoulder wound in fighting near the Caucasus Mountains, Rudolf Rott would be off duty until February 1943 when he was assigned this time to the armored detachment of

the “Wiking” Division which was shortly to be enlarged into a regiment. However in the spring of 1943 the new Germanic 11. SS-Freiwilligen Pz.Gr.Division “Nordland” began to form and many combat veteran officers from the “Wiking” Division, including Rott, were assigned to it.

The now SS-Ostuf. Rott’s first job with the “Nordland” Division was to serve as the adjutant to SS-Obersturmbannführer Paul Albert Kausch commander of SS Panzer Detachment 11 “Hermann von Salza”, which would serve as the armored complement of the “Nordland” Division. It would eventually be enlarged into a small two battalion regiment. In late 1943, the “Nordland” Division and “Nederland” Assault Brigade were sent by train to the Oranienbaum Front near Leningrad, where a “pocket”, “cauldron” or “bridgehead” of large Soviet forces was being contained. When the Red Army force inside the “pocket” grew to a manpower that was four times that of the German troops that were “containing” them, an all out winter offensive was launched on 14 January 1944. The Reds had kept themselves in strength and resupply from sources across the Gulf of Finland, which was their lifeline.

The outnumbered German/European volunteer forces on the Oranienbaum Front had to begin an immediate fighting withdrawal to the Narva River on the Estonian border. It was during this frantic time that the commander of 1st Company/SS-Pz.Abteilung “HvS” was killed in action and SS-Ostuf. Kausch named SS-Ostuf. Rott to take his place. Rudolf Rott would subsequently lead the company with consummate skill and courage during the withdrawal battles and the intense fight for Narva in the summer of 1944. His battlefield performance during this time would bring him the award of the German Cross in Gold.

In November 1944, when the “Nordland” Division was situated in the Kurland Pocket in Western Latvia, all of the “Hermann von Salza” Armored Detachment was recalled to Germany for refitting and expansion except for Rott’s 1st Company. His command which now consisted of 15 assault guns, was in constant action and managed to repulse one Soviet armored foray after another. At the end of January 1945, the company along with the rest of the III. Germanic SS Corps forces in Latvia, were all sent back to Germany. 1st Company would now assume its place with the same

designation in the SS Panzer Regiment 11 “HvS”/”Nordland” Division, although this unit would never actually reach full strength in men or equipment.

In February 1944, the “Hermann von Salza” Regiment was called upon to lead a counterattack in Pomerania aimed at regaining ground and restoring the front lines between Stargard and Reetz in the direction of Klein-Silber. Spearheading the undertaking were 3 of the unit’s original “Panther” tanks along with Rudolf Rott’s 15 assault guns. SS-Ostuf. Kausch led the attack from one of the “Panther” tanks. While standing in the turret directing the show an enemy shell exploded next to his command tank showering him with shell splinters, and while the tank was not damaged, Kausch was. One fragment lodged in his face below the right eye, and while not too serious, it caused a copious amount of bleeding. Kausch also sustained some loose teeth and possibly a concussion. He wanted to stay in charge, but the bleeding would not stop so he had to relinquish command to Rudolf Rott in order to secure medical treatment.

Rott promptly took over the command “Panther” tank and resumed the attack. With the small “HvS” armored force he was able to regain the town of Klein-Silber on 12 February 1945. But soon afterwards he was shot through the head by a Soviet sniper and fell dead on the back of the tank. It was a hard loss for his command. According to Paul Albert Kausch, Rott was “An outstanding officer, reliable comrade, brave and modest, who was always cheerful.”

On 28 February 1945, Rudolf Rott was paid the supreme tribute of the posthumous award of the Knight’s Cross to the Iron Cross, specifically for the decisive actions of his 1st Company/SS-Pz.Rgt. “HvS” in the Kurland Pocket from November 1944 to January 1945. But there is little doubt that had he lived he might have qualified for further high commendations as well!

SS-UNTERSTURMFÜHRER KARL BROMMANN



Karl Brommann was born on 20 July 1920 in Neumünster, Holstein. Before he was 17, Brommann volunteered for duty with 2.SS-Totenkopfverbände Standarte “Brandenburg” in Oranienburg on 15 June 1937. Apparently his exact date of birth was “overlooked” by all parties concerned. He would later transfer to the 3.SS-TV Standarte “Thüringia” in Weimar before joining the SS Totenkopf Artillery Regiment when it began forming at the Munich-Freimann Barracks in 1939.

He next served as a trainer with the SS Recruiting Regiment in Klagenfurt, Austria before being made a platoon leader, (although still an NCO), in the 7th Company of the independent SS Infantry Regiment 6. In 1941 the regiment was sent to Finland and along with SS IR 7 and some other odds and ends, much of it from the SS-TV, was assembled into SS-Kampfgruppe “Nord”, which would eventually become the 6. SS Mountain Division “Nord”.



SS-Ustuf. Karl Brommann (center, head bandaged), with his King Tiger tank crew in Pomerania in 1945.

In heavy fighting on the Finnish/Russian border, Karl Brommann was severely wounded on two separate occasions. The first time he received shell fragments to both legs and his hands. This was not enough to keep him out of action and after a short recovery he was back at the front. On the second time he was wounded he was shot through the lungs and the liver; now the situation was more serious, even life threatening. He would spend almost an entire year in the hospital recuperating from these injuries! Eventually, in late 1942 or early 1943, he was deemed “recovered” and was dispatched to “Nord” Division’s Training and Replacement Battalion 6 located in Trautenau and Hallein.

On 5 May 1943 Brommann was assigned to the newly established SS Panzer Abteilung 11 “Hermann von Salza” of the 11.SS-Frw.Pz.Gr.Div. “Nordland”. Later in October 1943, with the rank of SS-Oberscharführer, he was posted to SS Panzer Abteilung 103 (later renumbered 503), the independent tank battalion of the III. Germanic SS Panzer Korps. He would then serve with this formation until 27 March 1945 when he would be incapacitated by multiple battle wounds.

In early 1945, Brommann would command perhaps the most effective King Tiger Tank and crew of the detachment in the fight-

ing around Arneswalde and Gotenhafen in Pomerania. In fact on 10 April 1945, the official Wehrmacht Communique contained the following announcement: “In the battle area around Gotenhafen, SS-Untersturmführer Karl Brommann, company commander in the Heavy SS Panzer Detachment 503, prominently distinguished himself. He has, with his tank crew, in the time period from 2 February 1945 until 18 March 1945, despite being wounded 3 times, destroyed 66 enemy tanks, 44 artillery pieces and 15 trucks.”

By the time SS-Pz.Abt.503 was in action around Danzig in March/April 1945, it had been reduced to 21 operational “King Tiger” tanks in four deployment groups that were utilized in the support of infantry divisions threatened by Soviet forces. Karl Brommann received his final group of battle wounds that took him out of the war on 27 March 1945. After having suffered burn wounds to his hands and head shortly before, (he chose to stay in action with bandaged head and hands), he now absorbed shell fragments to his skull, right ear and right eye and that did it for him.

After receiving the German Army Wound Badge in Gold, Brommann was evacuated by the German Navy to Hela and thence over the Baltic Sea to Swinemünde. On 29 April 1945, he learned that he had been awarded the Knight’s Cross for his deeds in the previous months. He was on his way to Flensburg, Holstein when the German capitulation took place on 8 May 1945; after getting that piece of news, Karl Brommann changed course and simply went directly to his home in Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein. However he was arrested by the British Army on 21 May 1945 and sent to a POW camp, but he would be among the earliest to be released in November 1945, probably due to the effects of his bad war wounds. In the desperate fight to stave off the Red onslaught against the German homeland in 1945 in particular, Karl Brommann proved to be one of the most effective soldiers in the Waffen-SS. His entire wartime career was one of continuing perseverance and achievement.

SS-STANDARTENFÜHRER UND OBERST DER SCHUTZPOLIZEI HERBERT GOLZ



Herbert Golz was born on 9 April 1897 in Berlin to a family with a long military tradition. With the outbreak of WWI in 1914, Golz, who had just graduated from the Andreas Gymnasium (High School), immediately volunteered for military duty. After a brief basic training period, he participated in the battle of Ypern in October 1914 as a member of the 201st Reserve Regiment. In the course of the war he would serve 4 tours of duty on the Western Front and 2 on the Eastern Front. He would also be decorated with both classes of the Iron Cross, the Austrian Medal for Bravery and receive a field promotion to Leutnant (2nd Lt.) of the Reserves in August 1917.

Following the war, Golz served with the para-military Freikorps “Reinhold” from January 1919 until May 1919, fighting against the communist “Spartacist” terrorists in Berlin. He would then join the Schutzpolizei (Protective Police), serving as a Police

Captain in Cologne and Düsseldorf before being reassigned to Berlin with the rank of Major der Schutzpolizei.

When WWII started, Herbert Golz immediately sought a way to get back into military service. He promptly signed on with the new SS Polizei Division which began forming in the fall of 1939 and he was placed in command of I.Battalion/SS-Police Rifle Regiment 3. He would lead this unit with the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer und Major der Schutzpolizei throughout the French Campaign of 1940 and through the early part of the Russian Campaign.

In February 1942, Golz was assigned to the General Staff of the Schutzpolizei with the job of supervising police units that had been mobilized for military duties in the field. He would receive a promotion to SS-Obersturmbannführer in April 1943 but it was not until February 1944 that he was called back to combat service. He was placed in charge of a “defensive sector” of the besieged city of Kowell in Ukraine. Although the town was totally surrounded by strong Soviet forces he had been flown in along with SS-Obergruppenführer Herbert Otto Gille, the commander of the 5th SS Panzer Division “Wiking”, who had been assigned to direct the overall defense and relief of Kowell.

The “Wiking” Division, led by its SS Panzer Regiment 5 and its II./Battalion which had not been trapped in the Cherkassy Pocket, spearheaded the attempt to break through to Kowell from the outside. When the relief of the town was finally secured on 5 April 1944, the numbers of defenders had dwindled down to between 4,000 and 4,500, almost half of whom were wounded. With no anti-tank weapons and limited supplies and ammunition their defensive effort had been one of the more notable of the entire war. For his determined leadership during the siege of Kowell, Herbert Golz was decorated with the German Cross in Gold. He would be promoted to SS-Standartenführer und Oberst der Schutzpolizei in June 1944 and later on in October, the Hungarian government would award him the Knight’s Cross of Hungary.

Late in 1944, SS-Staf. Golz became the chief-of-staff of the XIV. SS Army Corps which was serving against the Americans on the Upper Rhine Front, where he would help organize one of the last German offensive operations in the west across the Strum

River. In January 1945, Golz was given the job of chief-of-staff of X.SS Army Corps in southern Pomerania. While the Corps had only limited Waffen-SS personnel, it directed the 163rd Army Infantry Division, the 8th Jäger Division and the 314th Army Infantry Division.

On 1 and 2 March 1945, a Soviet armored breakthrough succeeded in cutting-off and encircling the X.SS Army Corps. In the subsequent combat action the Corps commander, Lt.Gen. Krappe was killed and heavy losses were sustained. On his own initiative, SS-Staf. Golz formed a battle-group out of the most cohesive units left in control of the Corps, and for three weeks straight personally led this command in action behind the Soviet lines, before finally breaking through to the safety of the German lines on the Oder River Front.

For his incredible leadership and personal bravery during this time, Herbert Golz was awarded the Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross on 3 May 1945. Following the war he went into British captivity which lasted for three years. After his release he became a successful businessman and remained active in Waffen-SS veteran's affairs. He was a true heroic figure of World War II!

SS-HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER OTTO GÜNSCHE



SS-Hstuf. Otto Günse as a personal aide and bodyguard to Adolf Hitler.

Otto Günse was born on 24 September 1917 in Jena. He was an early volunteer in the “Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler”, joining the regiment in 1934 at the age of 17. By 1936 he was serving in the Führer’s personal escort commando in which he would stay until the war started. He would then participate in all of the military campaigns of the “LSSAH” until 1942 when he was sent to a war time officer’s training class at the SS-Junkerschule “Tölz”

After becoming an SS-Untersturmführer, Günse was posted to Adolf Hitler’s personal adjutant staff in January 1943, taking over the position of an adjutant who had fallen ill. He held that position for a few weeks before he was reassigned to the “Liebstandarte” and returned to front line service. After receiving, among other decorations, the Iron Cross, 1st Class, thus proving his “military” capabilities and courage, he returned to the Führer’s personal staff in February 1944. He would now remain Hitler’s personal adjutant until the end of the war.

Günsche became probably most noted for having to cremate the bodies of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun during the battle of Berlin. The now SS-Hauptsturmführer Günsche was captured by the Soviets in early May 1945 while trying to breakout of Berlin. He became a “prime” captive of the Reds and spent a number of years in the NKVD/KGB Lubyanka Prison in Moscow undergoing numerous rounds of torture and interrogation. In 1956 he was released from Soviet captivity and turned over to the tender mercies of the East German communists who promptly jailed him again. After much effort and some diplomacy, he was finally allowed to immigrate to West Germany.

Despite his horrible travails, Günsche was able to build a successful new life for himself. He remained active in Waffen-SS veteran’s affairs and due to his unique position as an “eyewitness to history” was constantly sought after by historians and history buffs, whom he graciously accomodated for the rest of his life. Otto Günsche recently passed on at around 90 years of age.



**Otto Günsche as personal adjutant to Adolf Hitler.
Note aiguillette draped over the shoulder.**



**Otto Günsche as personal adjutant to Adolf Hitler.
Note aiguillette draped over the shoulder.**



Otto Günsche as an SS-Obersturmführer.



Günsche as an SS-Hauptsturmführer with Adolf Hitler. All of the Otto Günsche photos were provided by Erik Rundkvist who had been in personal contact with him.

SS-UNTERSTURMFÜHRER JOHAN PETTER BALSTAD



Johan Balstad was born in Koppang, Norway on 25 September 1924. He volunteered for the Waffen-SS on 27 July 1941 at the age of 16 and was sent to the Germanic SS Training Camp at Sennheim, Alsace. After completing basic training he was not assigned to a combat unit because of his young age but instead remained at Sennheim for many months serving as an “assistant trainer”.

Somewhat after his 18th birthday, Balstad was selected to attend an officer’s training course (11th Wartime Class at SS-JS “Tölz), which lasted from 16 May 1943 until 10 March 1944. Then, as an SS-Standartenoberjunker (officer designate) he was posted to the SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.23 “Norge” (Norway Nr.1) of the 11.SS-Freiwilligen Pz.Gr.Division “Nordland” in the spring of 1944. He was placed in charge of the machine-pistol platoon on the regimental staff which acted as a combat reserve to be deployed at the most important hot spot of an offensive or defensive undertaking.

Balstad and his unit were soon heavily engaged on the Narva

River Front in Estonia and the young Norwegian quickly demonstrated his leadership ability and was soon decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class. He received his commission to SS-Untersturmführer (2nd Lt.) on 21 June 1944 and subsequently served as a platoon leader in both 6th and 7th Companies of SS Regiment “Norge”. He would particularly distinguish himself by personally destroying 3 Soviet tanks in close combat at the “Orphanage” and “Grenadier” Hills on the Narva Front and later near Baldovein in Kurland, Latvia. All of the tanks were knocked out with a “panzerfaust” bazooka weapon.

For these exploits, SS-Ustuf. Balstad received 3 tank destruction badges (which were worn on the upper right sleeve of the SS uniform), along with the Iron Cross, 1st Class. Following the destruction of his third tank in Kurland, Balstad was severely wounded by an exploding shell, receiving some 17 different fragments in his body. This would put him out of the war and he would never again be considered “fit for duty”. But he was the decorated with the Wound Badge in Silver.

Following post-war prosecution and imprisonment, Johan Balstad rebuilt his life in Norway, but died at an abbreviated age in 1988, possibly due to his war wounds. He was a true European hero and representative volunteer of the Waffen-SS!

SS-ROTTENFÜHRER CARLOS DEJAEGHERE



The camp band at Sennheim; Carlos Dejaeghere is behind the lyre.

Carlos Dejaeghere was a young Flemish political activist who fought in the ranks of the Waffen-SS. He was born in Brugge, Belgium on 8 April 1921. From 1935 until 1939 he worked as an apprentice pastry chef in Brussels and he joined Leon Degrelle's Rexist Party which he felt offered the best hope for his country. In 1940 he returned to Brugge and began working in a bakery that was contracted to provide goods to the German Army occupation forces in Belgium. It was then that he joined the Flemish National Movement (V.N.V.). In 1941 his brother volunteered to serve as a driver in the N.S.K.K. (National Socialist Transport Corps) on the Eastern Front. Carlos himself then became a member of the Vlaamische Wacht or Flemish Guard, which included members of all the different Flemish nationalist parties.

The Flemish Guardsmen were initially attired in navy blue uniforms and were given basic infantry training before being used by the Germans to guard important facilities, including harbors and supply depots. During this time, Carlos Dejaeghere shifted his po-

litical allegiance to the movement known as “De Vlag” (“The Flag”), which was allied with the Germanic SS in Flanders. His brother would return from the Eastern Front in July 1942 and he would be murdered by members of the Belgian “White Brigade” in Brugge in September 1944. This was a resistance group that utilized the tactics of terrorists.

In the meantime, Carlos had become oriented towards the SS and in October 1942 volunteered for the Waffen-SS. He was first sent to the SS School in Schoten (north of Antwerp), for preliminary instruction carried out by the Germanic SS in Flanders. In April 1943, he and his classmates were then sent to the Germanic SS Training School in Sennheim, Alsace. Because of his experience in the Flemish Guard, Dejaeghere was assigned to the school’s guard company, although at 5 feet 10 inches he was the smallest member of the contingent! He then became a personal messenger for SS-Obersturmführer Teichmann who commanded the company. Later, because of his musical skills, he was assigned to the Sennheim Musical Platoon or band led by SS-Untersturmführer Otto Giensch, where he played the lyre. Dejaeghere became a member of the school staff and among his duties for the next year was to go and meet arriving contingents of ethnic German volunteers from Romania at the railroad station and escort them to Sennheim for basic training.

In November 1944, with the Allies and the “1st French Army” rapidly approaching the Sennheim camp, the staff and trainees were organized into emergency battle-groups. Carlos Dejaeghere was assigned to 1st Squad/II.Platoon of SS-Kampfgruppe “Schleuter” led by an SS-Untersturmführer Schleuter. He would then fight against the Western Allies along the Rhine/Rhone canal near Belfort. On 20 December 1944, the battle-group was withdrawn across the Rhine River and sent to the Deggingen-Geislingen-Freiburg area where an attempt was being made to re-establish the Sennheim training camp, although now it would be known as the Germanic SS Training Camp “Nord Alp” (“Northern Alps”).

On 2 February 1945, Carlos Dejaeghere was assigned to the 27th SS Volunteer Grenadier Division “Langemarck” (Flemish Nr.1) and was sent to 1st Company/SS-Volunteer Grenadier Regiment 69 under the Flemish SS-Obersturmführer George Bruyn-

inckx. It was part of what was known as the Flemish Hitler Youth Battalion, since many of its members were youngsters that came from the Hitler Youth organization. Dejaeghere then participated in several hard combat actions against the Soviets in Pomerania and on the Oder Front. He saw action in particular at Seehausen, Potzlow, Sternhagen and Prenzlau.

At the end of the war the “Langemarck” Division surrendered to the British and most of its members, including Dejaeghere were soon turned over to the new leftist Belgian government. They were then deprived of their civil rights and suffered through long periods of cruel and inhumane treatment, imprisonment and continual persecution. Despite his post-war ordeal, Carlos Dejaeghere remained true to his ideals and loyal to his Flemish homeland. He was active in the Flemish Eastern Front Fighters veterans’s association up until his death on 11 April 2004 at the age of 83.

SS-STURMBANNFÜHRER SEPP LEITNER



Sepp Leitner was born in Upper Steyrmarch, Austria on 8 January 1912. In 1933 he joined the illegal Austrian SS Legion at Lechfeld and then went into the II. Sturmbann of the SS Standarte “Deutschland” in 1934. Following the German annexation of Austria in 1938, Leitner returned home to help organize the I. Battalion of the new Austrian SS Regiment “Der Führer”. By the outbreak of WWII, Sepp Leitner was an SS officer and served as a platoon leader in the “DF” Regiment during the Western Campaign of 1940 in which he was wounded for the first time.

In the autumn of 1940, Sepp Leitner was assigned to the newly formed SS Infantry Regiment 9, (later to be named SS Regiment “Thule”). He would then serve as a company commander during the regiment’s deployment in the northern capes of Norway and in the Kola Peninsula on the Finnish-Russian border. He was severely wounded in combat action in the latter area in September 1941.

After his convalescence, Sepp Leitner became an instructor with the 1st Company of the SS NCO School at Posen-Treskau. Then, following the completion of training courses at the Army

Infantry School at Doberitz, he became a chief instructor at the SS Panzergrenadier School at Kienschlag, Bohemia. In 1945 the members of the school were mobilized as part of the SS-Kampfgruppe Division “Bohemia-Moravia” and Leitner became a battalion commander in this formation, seeing action in the desperate fighting in southern Bohemia and Austria. He would end the war in Allied captivity and fortunately was not later turned over to the Soviets as were many of his comrades. He would be released to begin a new career in civilian life in 1948.

SS-OBERSCHARFÜHRER FRITZ “BELLO” HAUPT

A photograph of Fritz “Bello” Haupt appears in *Siegrunen* #79 on p.87 mistakenly identified as “Fritz Krupt”. He was born on 15 January 1920 and after his basic schooling, trained and worked as a bricklayer before joining the *Reicharbeitsdienst (RAD)* or Reich Labor Service. From there he joined the SS-Verfügungstruppe in 1939. Following his basic training he was assigned to the SS Motorcycle Replacement Company at Ellwangen which would become incorporated into the Reconnaissance Detachment of first the SS-VT Division and later the “Das Reich” Division. Haupt would serve with this company in the French, Yugoslav and Russian Campaigns until 1943.

In June 1943, “Bello” Haupt became a member, (later commander), of a tank crew in the 6th Company of SS Panzer Regiment 2 of the “Das Reich” Division. From now until the end of the war he would serve in some 75 separate armored engagements with his company; this was no mean feat as very few tank men ever survived that many battlefield encounters. He continually distinguished himself in action and was decorated with the German Cross in Gold.

After the war Haupt was an active member in the “Tychsen Comradeship” named after the long time regimental commander, SS-Obersturmbannführer Christian Tychsen, a Knight’s Cross holder who went missing in action in Normandy, (probably killed by partisans or in captivity).

SS-UNTERSCHARFÜHRER JEAN-PIERRE LEFEVRE

Jean-Pierre Lefevre was born in France on 7 April 1925. In early 1944 he joined the anti-communist “Milice” (“Militia”), that was used to combat the “resistance” terrorists and in that summer he volunteered for the Waffen-SS. He would then serve in the 8th and 10th Companies of SS Regiment 58 of the 33rd French SS Division “Charlemagne” with the rank of SS-Unterscharführer. He was a platoon leader in the desperate fighting in Pomerania in early 1945 and fell into Soviet captivity. Sometime after the end of the war he was repatriated to France where he was given a long term of imprisonment.

Following his release, in addition to re-establishing his own life and career, he went to work immediately to help other still imprisoned comrades and their families. For the rest of his life he never relented in his mission to assist all of the former French Waffen-SS volunteers and their families whenever he could and also help identify and honor the killed and missing. From the beginning he was active in the French Waffen-SS veteran’s groups. He died suddenly of a heart attack on 20 February 1994, and was honored by the surviving veterans for his accomplishments.

SS-OBERSTURMFÜHRER CHARLES GILBERT ROBBO

Charles Gilbert Robbo was born in France on 30 January 1914. In the early part of WWII he joined the N.S.K.K. (National Socialist Transport Corps), in Vilvorde, Belgium to serve as a volunteer truck driver on the Eastern Front. In 1943 he became the 3rd recorded French volunteer for the SS Sturmbrigade "Frankreich". After completing an NCO training course and then graduating from the SS Junkerschule "Tölz", Robbo became the commander of the 8th Company of 8.SS-Sturmbrigade "Frankreich" in 1944.

Late in the war he was assigned to the SS Main Office in Berlin as a liaison officer with the 33.SS Volunteer Grenadier Division "Charlemagne" (French Nr.1). During the battle of Berlin he took charge of an emergency battle-group in the center of the city and fell into Soviet captivity. The Reds eventually shipped him back to France, where he was tried for "treason". Found guilty, he was stripped of his citizenship and sentenced to 10 years at hard labor.

Three days following his release from prison, Robbo flew to Berlin to begin a new life and become a German citizen. He gradually regained contact with his surviving wartime comrades and he died at the age of 70 on 20 March 1993.

SS-HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER HERBERT KIENKE

Herbert Kienke joined the Hamburg Police in 1935 and went into the SS-Polizei Division when it was formed in October 1939. He trained as a combat engineer and served in engineer platoons attached to the 2nd and 3rd SS-Polizei Grenadier Regiments of the 4.SS-Polizei-Panzer Grenadier Division in the French and Russian Campaigns. After being badly wounded on the Eastern Front, he was assigned to the SS Engineer School Hradischko in the Bohemia-Moravia Protectorate. Here he served as an inspector or supervisor of specialized training courses for combat engineers.

In May 1945, with the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer, Kienke led a battle-group from the school during the Czech “underground” uprising in Prague. These terrorists promised to hang every German that they came across and began to do just that. Kienke and his soldiers helped many German civilians and soldiers in Prague escape from the terrorists and reach the American lines. Not that it helped him very much. He was one of tens of thousands of Waffen-SS soldiers that the Americans decided belonged to the Russians, and as such he was sent back under guard to the kindly hands of the Red Army.

Herbert Kienke then spent 10 ½ years in Soviet labor and prison camps; he would not return home until October 1955. During the war he was decorated with both classes of the Iron Cross, the Close Combat Clasp in Bronze, the Silver Wound Badge, the Silver Assault Badge and the “Ost” Medal for surviving the first winter in Russia. He became a successful businessman in civilian life as well as a philanthropist and civic leader. In 1988 he was honored by the West German Federal President for his achievements in these areas with the award of the Federal German Service Cross.

FATHER FRANZ NEUMANN

Franz Neumann served as an SS-Unterscharführer in the Staff Company of SS Volunteer Mountain Regiment 13 “Artur Phleps” of the 7. SS Volunteer Mountain Division “Prinz Eugen”. He was born into a large ethnic-German family in Ivanovo, Yugoslavia, (10 siblings), with 4 of his brothers becoming priests and 2 others joining the Waffen-SS. He ended up doing both.

Following a long, difficult and trying post-war imprisonment, he joined the Jesuit Order and studied for the priesthood in Linz and Kalksburg in Austria. Afterwards he was sent to England to do mission work. He then returned to Austria in the early 1960's, ministering to a youth congregation. He then taught in various Catholic High Schools in Austria before retiring in 1982. This was followed by a “spiritual sabbatical” to Canada.

In 1985, Father Neumann attended a reunion of veterans of the “Prinz Eugen” Division and gave the opening convocation of the meeting before conducting a memorial mass for the unit's many killed and missing. “Prinz Eugen” still suffers from a “bad press” in the establishment media, accused of sundry “war crimes” against the noble Yugoslav partisans. However nothing could be farther from the truth. In reality the division's soldiers were subjected to some of the most gruesome and horrible atrocities in history by Tito's communists with the aid and support of the western Allies! Only a very few survived the post-war “treatment” that was given to them.

Franz Neumann died at the age of 65 on 26 June 1986

SS-ROTTENFÜHRER EMIL SZAUER

Emil Szauer was born on 10 March 1925 in Budapest to a German speaking family. As a youth he was very athletic and did well in competitive swimming. He was also an enthusiastic coin collector. In early 1943, at the age of 17, he volunteered for service in the Waffen-SS in the category of a “Hungarian ethnic-German”, due more to his fluency in that language than his actual ethnicity.

Although he initially sought to join the German Army his recruiter thought that he belonged in the Waffen-SS due to his physique and athletic background. Thus he ended up being assigned to the newly forming 9. SS Panzer Division “Hohenstaufen”. Soon after the Allied landings in Normandy he was taken captive by the British and sent to a POW camp in England.

When Szauer was released from captivity after the war he was allowed to stay in England since his Hungarian homeland had fallen under Soviet communist occupation. He then married an Irish lady and moved to Dublin and from 1951 until 1959 he worked for different German companies in Ireland. Due to his life-long interest in coin collecting he eventually joined a numismatic firm named “Dublin Smelting”, becoming a partner with the firm’s owner, Keven O’Kelley. In 1972 he established his own coin business on Cathedral Street in Dublin which he ran successfully until his death on 18 February 1999.

SS-STURMBANNFÜHRER DR. RUDOLF STANDL

SS-Sturmbannführer Rudolf Standl was born in Bochum on 22 January 1912. Following the completion of his basic education he studied medicine at the University of Munich from 1932 until 1937, after which he passed his state exam to become a medical doctor. On 1 January 1938 he joined the medical detachment of the SS-Verfügungstruppe (Armed SS) and served as the “troop” doctor with II./SS-Standarte “Germania” from 1 February 1938 until 31 May 1942, and saw action in the Polish, French and Russian Campaigns. He was wounded in action in Russia on 27 September 1941.

From 1 June 1942 until 10 March 1943 Dr. Standl served as the chief medical officer of the SS Panzer Abteilung 5/5. SS-Panzer Grenadier (later Panzer) Division “Wiking”. From 12 March 1943 until the end of the war he was the medical officer for the SS High Mountain Warfare Training School at Predazzo in northern Italy. He was able to acquire the specialist “Bergführer” (“Mountain Leader”) Badge on 23 April 1944. This was a fairly rare accomplishment that required a good grasp of mountaineering and outdoor survival skills.

Following the German surrender, Dr. Standl went into Western Allied captivity and was not released until 8 October 1948. He eventually was able to resume his medical career in civilian life.



SS-Oberscharführer Jaak Jorssens was born on 9 August 1923 in Brussels, Belgium. He served in the Staff Company of SS-Pz.Gr. Replacement Btl. 18 before joining 8th or 9th Battery/SS Artillery Rgt. 27/27.SS Vol.Gr.Div. “Langemarck” (Flemish Nr.1). He fell wounded on the Oder River Front in April 1945 and had to have a leg amputated at an SS field hospital in Prenzlau. He died shortly afterwards. Many of the wounded soldiers at this facility would later be listed as “missing” after it fell into Soviet hands. It can be assumed that they were murdered in captivity.



SS-Grenadier Anton Schram was born on 28 December 1924 in Antwerp, Belgium. He served with the 6.SS-Sturmbrigade and 27.SS-Vol.Gr.Div. “Langemarck” seeing heavy action and suffering from multiple battle wounds. He convalesced at a reserve hospital in Wetzlar and was released late in 1944. On 7 January 1945 he was assigned to the SS-Panzer Training and Replacement Detachment 5 in Ellwangen before being sent on to the 5.SS-Pz.Div. “Wiking”. During the “Wiking” Division’s attempt to relieve the entrapped Budapest garrison which led from Komarom to Tata-banja, Schram was killed in action in either in late January or early February 1945.



SS-Grenadier Hendrik F.M. “Rik” Vets was born on 1 February 1924 in Borgerhout/Antwerp, Belgium. At the beginning of 1944 he served in the 7th Self-Propelled Gun Company of the 6th SS-Sturmbrigade “Langemarck” under SS-Hauptsturmführer Weingärtner in Ukraine. When the “Langemarck” Brigade was withdrawn from the front to be reconstituted in the spring of 1944, Vets was transferred to 1st Company/SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 5/ 5.SS Panzer Division “Wiking”. While with this unit, he became missing-in-action near Lublin, Poland in July 1944.



The Turkish Waffen-SS volunteer Otar Lordkibanidse was born in Istanbul in 1924. He joined the Waffen-SS in Northern Italy in October/November 1944 and apparently received training at the Waffen-SS High Mountain School at Predazzo. In the last months of the war he saw action with either the 24.Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division der SS or the Osttürkischer Waffen-Verband der SS, which were both operating in the Northern Italy area.



Two of the “Prinz Eugen” Division’s missing members, undoubtedly killed by Tito’s terrorists. On the left is Johann Band and on the right is Josef Dressler.

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SS-Oberscharführer Kurt Wagner, born on 6 October either 1917, 1918 or 1919, served with the staff of the SS Artillery Regiment 18\18.SS Frw.Pz.Gr.Div. “Horst Wessel”. He saw action in March 1945 around Ratibor/Leobschütz and Hirschberg in Silesia. He eventually went into Soviet captivity and was held until 1950 when he was turned over to the Czech communist regime. Nothing further was heard from him after that!

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On 24 September 1944, soldiers from II.Btl./SS-Freiwilligen Pz.Gr.Rgt.49 “DeRuyter” of the 4.SS-Sturmbrigade “Nederland”, knocked out 14 Soviet tanks in close combat near or on the coastal highway in northern Estonia. Two more tanks would be destroyed by infantry guns (close-support artillery). Two of the tanks were knocked out by SS-Sturmann Stefan Strapatin, an ethnic German

from Romania, using “Panzerfaust” bazookas. He would go on to receive the Knight’s Cross on 16 November 1944.

The Dutch SS-Rottenführer Schuur, from 5th Company/”DeRuyter”, destroyed 3 tanks on this day and SS-Rottenführer Kist was credited with one. They received tank destruction badges. The other “tank killers” on 24 September 1944 remain unknown. SS-Rttfhr. Schuur would later attend an abbreviated officer’s training course at the SS Junkerschule “Tölz” from either October or November 1944 until January 1945. He then would be assigned to the newly authorized 38.SS-Pz.Gr.Division “Nibelungen” as a junior officer. His ultimate fate is unknown.

SS-Obersturmführer Sophus Magdalon Buck Kahrs, born on 23 March 1918 in Norway, served as an officer in the SS Skijäger Bataillon “Norge” on the Finnish-Russian Front. After being imprisoned and losing his civil rights in Norway after the war he moved to Argentina. He died at the age of 68 on 18 November 1986.

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Jean-Marie Edgeworth was a volunteer in the 33rd French Volunteer Grenadier Division “Charlemagne”. He was also a holder of the Cross of the French Legion of Honor. After the war he resided in the Principality of Monaco where he died on 8 December 1986.

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SS-Untersturmführer Johan van Houtum, born on 4 March 1922 in Holland, was killed in action in February 1945 leading 4th Company/SS-Gr.Rgt.83/34.SS-Grenadier Div. “Landstorm Nederland”

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SS-Untersturmführer Michael Sulzer, born 19 September 1915 in Bildegg, Romania, was a translator on the staff of the IX.SS Mountain Corps in Budapest and served as an adjutant to the Corps’ Intelligence Officer. He was captured by the Soviets during the breakout effort from Budapest in February 1945, and forced to

work as a translator for them for a short time in Budakeszi. However they soon executed him. His body was later found by civilians in a cellar with a bullet in his head!

The 1st SS Panzer Division in the Battle of the Bulge



Steve Kane

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A Waffen-SS Marriage in Prague



Previous page: The marriage of SS-Unterscharführer Max Skütnick in Prague in 1943. On the left in both photos is SS-Uscha. Werner Hippe.



**Werner Hippe as an SS-Oberscharführer in Dublowitz, Bohemia, 1944.
(All from the Erik Rundkvist Archives)**

The Leather Jacket

An Incident in the History of the 24.Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division der SS



The actual 24th “Karstjäger” Divisional identification sign: a small salamander crawling across a large edelweiss! It was painted on vehicles and signposts.

ON 2 May 1945, a group of soldiers from the 24.Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division der SS, 4 officers and 16 NCOs, were making their way towards the Brenner Pass and Austria when they suddenly fell into the hands of a band of Italian partisans. They were then incarcerated in the city hall of the South Tyrolean town of Niederdorf, about 8 kilometers to the west of Innichen. In the course of the night an important partisan leader, (supposedly the son of the Italian traitor General Badoglio), arrived and after conferring with his confederates decided to have the Waffen-SS soldiers shot at 07:00 the next morning.

Somewhat after daybreak, the “Karstjäger” troopers were marched off to the main plaza after first being told to leave their packs and possessions behind as “they would not be needing them anymore”. After waiting around for awhile in the plaza, one of the

partisan “bosses” decided he wanted the leather jacket he had seen one of the Waffen-SS members wearing the previous day. Its owner had left it behind, as ordered, in the city hall with his other items. He was now instructed to retrieve the jacket, under guard of course, so it could be handed over to the “boss”.

That fortunate delay interrupted the schedule for the mass execution and during the time the jacket was being retrieved two American jeeps drove up into the town plaza; one carried two U.S. officers and the other two sergeants. One of the American officers, speaking broken German, asked the captives what was going on. They replied that they were about to be shot. Upon hearing that, the U.S. officer promptly informed the partisan “boss” that he was commandeering their prisoners. After a brief, somewhat heated discussion, the Italian partisans gave in and the two U.S. sergeants were assigned the task of escorting the “Karstjäger” troopers back to the American garrison force at Innichen. If it hadn’t been for the missing leather jacket all of the 20 Waffen-SS captives would have been shot!

On the way back to Innichen, some more American officers intercepted the POW column to see who they were and let them proceed. At Innichen, the Waffen-SS troops enjoyed a “relatively friendly” captivity in the U.S. Army quarters there. Soon afterwards they were sent to a nearby barracks which was being used to house mostly German Luftwaffe prisoners who had occupied the place during the war. They had the run of the facility, which had been a Luftwaffe supply depot of sorts. Since there was an extensive stock of Luftwaffe uniforms on hand and available the “Karstjäger” men decided it might be an opportune time to leave the SS and join the German Air Force, which they proceeded to do! It was a lucky maneuver which paid off in their later confinement. Fortunately the Americans GI’s were not really interested in paying close attention to them as long as they behaved themselves!

After the war, one of the lucky “Karstjäger” soldiers often passed through Niederdorf, either on business or vacation trips. He made a point of always staying in a guest house that overlooked the plaza wall that he was being lined up against on the morning of 3 May 1945, when the lost leather jacket interrupted the proceedings. It served as reminder to him of his own good fortune in life!



Officers and NCOs from the 24.Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division. Second from the left is SS-Obersturmführer Erich Kühbandner, the commander of I.Btl./Waffen-Gebirgs Regiment der SS 59 and one of the few holders of the Anti-Partisan (Bandit) Fighting Badge in Gold. According to the award document for this decoration issued to Kühbandner on 11 February 1945, he was the commander of the regiment's III. Battalion at that time.

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The Italian SS officer, Waffen-Obersturmführer der SS Odorico Borsatti, was the commander of the cavalry/mounted platoon of the 24.Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjäger) Division der SS, which was presumably used for reconnaissance purposes.



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Cherkassy Pocket

The Final Figures



A Walloon Waffen-SS volunteer wearing the officially authorized “Burgundy Cross” collar patch for the 5.SS-Sturmbrigade “Wallonie”/28.SS-Pz.Gr.Div. “Wallonien”. This insignia was apparently issued and appeared on famous publicity/insignia maps that were prepared at the time. However it was also quickly withdrawn from circulation possibly due to the fact that it resembled the crossed rifles and grenade collar patch issued to SS penal troops and the “Dirlewanger” Brigade, although no official reasons were ever forthcoming. The SS runic collar patch remained in use by the Walloons.

THE strength and casualty figures for the soldiers trapped in the Cherkassy Pocket in Ukraine in January/February 1944 have often been exaggerated, most notably by the Soviets. Somewhat before the breakout effort began on 17 February 1944, there were 49,000 entrapped German/European troops in 11 different formations belonging to 2 Army Corps. Roughly one-third of the personnel were members of the Waffen-SS serving with the 5.SS-Panzer Division “Wiking” and the 5.SS-Sturmbrigade “Walloonie”. In addition there were some Waffen-SS support troops, drivers and others who were assigned to the Corps’ staff contingents.

Just prior to the breakout from the encirclement, some 4,161 wounded soldiers were evacuated by air leaving the actual number of troops to make the effort at around 45,000. After the strenuous but successful breakout was concluded an official report was issued on 29 February 1944, stating that 27,703 soldiers along with 7,496 wounded men had made it safely to the German lines. Of the wounded, about half were in the “light” category, either frostbit or sick, with over a third listed as moderately wounded and the rest listed as severely wounded.

Therefore about 10,000 soldiers were actually lost in the breakout effort (a far cry from the tens of thousands that appeared in communist and Allied propaganda about the event!), and many of these had already been badly wounded. A lot of them had to be evacuated by pony sled which were no match for Soviet tanks, which crushed entire columns of them. The wounded soldiers who had to be left behind were victims of some of the most gruesome atrocities imaginable. But those are stories that don’t make the “historical” documentary films and television shows!

The final accounting also show that 7,600 soldiers of the “Wiking” Division came through to safety along with 653 Walloon volunteers. About 4,000 wounded from those two contingents had earlier been evacuated by air out of a total of 11,657 wounded from all units that had been taken out prior to the breakout. The “Wiking” Division had about 12,000 men in the pocket to begin with, not including 1,720 men of SS Panzer Regiment 5 who were still in formation at Wildflecken (HQ Staff and II.Battalion + others). Also not involved in this action was III./SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.9 “Germa-



The command Volkswagen (!) for the unidentified SS-Brigadeführer in the center. Possibly in Hungary, late in the war. The soldier on the left is certainly not German and wears a kepi not unlike that of the Hungarian gendarmerie of the era. (Courtesy Erik Rundkvist)

nia”, a total of several hundred men at least.

5.SS-Sturmbrigade “Wallonie” had arrived at the front in November 1943 with about 2,000 troops and after steady battlefield attrition was down to 1,260 when the Cherkassy breakout began on 17 February. Of that total 48% (607) were actually lost in the effort to get through the lines. Most, if not all could be counted as probably killed by the Reds, either in action or in captivity. It should be noted that the Walloons were also part of the rearguard forces staving off advancing Soviet troops and many were cutoff in that capacity before they could get through to safety.

In terms of vehicles, heavy weapons and equipment, the losses were 100%; and those were not easy make up! The human casualties were of course tragic, but except for the “Wallonie” Brigade, not on an overwhelming scale as has been reported for years elsewhere. It proved possible to immediately reassemble the “Wiking” Division and it was soon in action liberating the encirclement at

Kowell; although it then had its full Panzer Regiment on hand. It took many months to get the “Wallonie” Brigade back up to some semblance of strength and its next deployment would be in Estonia in August 1944 with a battalion-sized battle-group personally led by the charismatic Leon Degrelle.

Reassembly Area of the 33.SS-Volunteer Grenadier Division “Charlemagne”



French volunteers from the SS-Sturmbrigade “Frankreich” on 11 June 1944 at Neweklau, Waffen-SS Troop Training Grounds “Bohemia-Moravia” near Prague. On the left is SS-Standartenoberjunker Henri Kreis (Kreutzer), SS-Obersturmführer J. Pleyber, the French nurse “Nelly” and SS-Obersturmführer Dr. Pierre Bonnefoy, medical officer. SS-St.Oju. Kreis would be badly wounded at Radomysl in Galicia in August 1944. He held the “hand grenade” distance throw championship of Europe at the time!



Two “Charlemagne” Volunteers quartered at the civilian home of Frau Louise Krug in Bergfeld, late April 1945.

THE surviving members of the 33rd French SS Division “Charlemagne” that had gotten totally dismembered in Pomerania in February and March 1945 by the 2nd White Russian Front near the city of Belgard, began reassembling to the north of Berlin in the latter part of March 1945. The divisional staff was re-established in the town of Carpin on 24 March 1945 to being dealing with the French volunteers that soon began arriving. It was initially hoped to rebuild the whole division, but events and circumstances at this point in the war would not allow for that.

“Charlemagne” had no heavy weapons left and very few vehicles. Personnel losses in terms of killed, wounded, captured and missing over the previous few weeks amounted to between 70% and 80% of the old divisional strength. So it soon became clear that the outfit could only be reconstituted as a smaller formation of regimental or brigade size. On 10 April 1945, the acting divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Dr. Gustav Krukenberg, split his command into two main segments: those who wished to fight on and those who didn’t. Those few hundred in the latter category were then formed into a military construction battalion led by the French SS-Hauptsturmführer Roy. These men were to be put to work building anti-tank defenses around Carpin, Drewin and Lake Fürsten (Fürstensee). They no longer were allowed to carry weap-

ons.

The small formation was then to be further divided. Two weeks later when SS-Brigadefhr. Krukenberg was called to Berlin to assume command of the 11.SS-Volunteer Pz.Gr. Division “Nordland” he took with him an assault battalion of nearly 300 veteran French Waffen-SS volunteers. This left the rump divisional staff with one small combat battalion, designated SS Kampf Bataillon 58 (after the old French SS Grenadier Rgt. 58) and the construction battalion under SS-Hstuf. Roy. Clear across Germany in Bavaria another 1,200 French volunteers led by the Swiss SS-Obersturmbannführer Hersche, had left their training camp at Wildflecken on 30/31 March 1945 in an effort to reach the rest of the “Charlemagne” Division in northern Germany by foot. Needless to say they never made it.

As the Soviets began making inroads to the north of Berlin, the remnant “Charlemagne” troops soon began hurriedly relocating from one village to another in Mecklinburg. They stayed briefly in towns like Goldenbaum, Bergfeld and Georgendorf and as soon as they left these communities would be ravaged by the advancing Reds. Both civilians and captured soldiers would be murdered out of hand in those locales.

Today, located along the road from Neustrelitz to Wesenberg, are at least three mass graves of these victims of the Soviet onslaught. One of them, located next to the roadside contained the bodies of 86 people including 16 French volunteers from SS-Untersturmführer Sarraihle’s 2nd Company/SS-Kampf Btl. 58. It is thought that they had been probably killed in an enemy air attack.

To the north of that grave lay one containing the bodies of 15 murdered civilians and another grave nearby in the woods holds the bodies of a large number of unknown individuals who had been killed out of hand. The staff of the reconstituted “Charlemagne” formation also briefly occupied the post office and school building in the town of Wesenberg on 30 April 1945 but stayed for only a few hours before being pushed out by the Reds. In a nearby cemetery there are the bodies of 2 more French volunteers that served in the Military Construction Battalion and are thought to have been killed in captivity since they were unarmed. It should be noted that at least 133 members of the “Charlemagne” Division died in com-

bat north of Berlin in April 1945.

In early May 1945, the “Charlemagne” HQ staff made the decision to try and link up with the 28.SS-Volunteer Pz.Gr. Division “Wallonien” (or what was left of it), which was somewhere en route towards Denmark. It never happened. The French SS soldiers were soon released from further military obligations and those that could assumed civilian identities. Most ended up in British captivity but some were grabbed by the Russians. Those that survived were all eventually returned to France for trial and imprisonment (or in some cases execution) as “traitors”.

Waffen-SS Miscellany



The mess hall is decked out for a special celebration! (Eric Rundkvist)

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In late April 1945, parts of the 10th SS Panzer Division “Fruntsberg” and the 36th SS Grenadier Division (“Dirlewanger”) were deployed near Cottbus and Spremberg. When the Soviets broke through between those cities, many Waffen-SS soldiers were captured. At Greifenhain, at least 200 POW’s from the “Fruntsberg” Division were then beaten to death by the Reds with iron poles and wooden clubs according to both eyewitness testimony and later forensic examination of the exhumed remains. No charges were ever brought against those responsible!

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Waffen-SS half-track with mounted Flak gun. It appears to have belonged to the 12th SS Panzer Division “Hitler Jugend” in 1944. The photo was kindly provided by a veteran of the “HJ” Division.

In June 1940, the Reichsführer-SS ordered the establishment of a training camp at Debica in Poland that was based on the authorization of a Wehrmacht High Command order issued on 21 December 1939. Initially, the facility was known as the SS Troop Training Grounds “Ostpolen”, (East Poland) and was located near Krakow. Construction of the facility began on 26 June 1940 under the guidance of the “Household and Construction” branch of the SS Main Office in Berlin.

The camp construction was completed, apparently in a circular pattern, (or individual “rings”), by 1 October 1940 with four concentric roads that looped around each specific “ring” or area, and enough barracks space to accommodate two full armored infantry regiments. By the early part of 1941, the base, now officially designated SS Troop Training Grounds “Debica”, was ready to handle unit formation and training activities.

Among the first elements to be trained and assembled at “Debica”, was the 1,000 man strong SS Volunteer Legion “Flanders”

in the summer of 1941. Over the years to come, extensive improvements and renovations were made to the camp and on 15 March 1943, the upgraded facility was renamed SS Troop Training Grounds “Heidelager” and for the next year or so it would be used to house and train Ukrainian volunteers, including the entire 14. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS (Galicia/Ukraine Nr.1).

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The personnel strength of the Waffen-SS over the years ran as follows:

- 4 May 1940: 124,199
- 30 June 1941: 160,405
- (In these first two figures detached headquarters personnel and support service troops were not included. The June 1941 figures did include 12 U.S. citizens, 7 considered “ethnic” Germans and 5 others of German extraction. 2 were in the SS-VT Division, 9 in the SS “Totenkopf” Division and 1 in the SS “Polizei” Division. One Mexican ethnic German was also serving in the SS “Polizei” Division).
- 1 August 1942: 239,807
- 31 December 1942: 246,717
- 31 December 1943: 501,049
- 30 June 1944: 594,443

Later figures tended to be either incomplete or estimates.

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In the autumn of 1943, a Waffen-SS training camp was established in the Konitz District of West Prussia. The camp HQ was located in Kelm-Gut near Bruss. This facility was often referred to as the SS Troop Training Grounds “Konitz” but its official title was “Westpreussen” (West Prussia). It is now a part of Poland.

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Rudi Mühlenkamp in full camo uniform. At the time he was the leader of a motorcycle scout troop in a reconnaissance unit; probably with the 10th SS Panzer Division “Hohenstaufen”. (Erik Rundkvist)

From roughly 1935 until 1938, scores of SS officers who had graduated from the new SS Officer Training Schools at Bad Tölz and Braunschweig, along with many SS/Polizei officers, were “commandeered” to the German Army proper. The basic reason for this was to give these officers more extensive training and experience by serving with regular Army units. There was also some not so subtle pressure applied by the Army authorities to permanently secure the services of many of these people. In 1938 this amounted to some 200 SS officers and 100 police officers alone who were accorded this treatment.

Most of these SS and Polizei officers served from 3 months to 1 year with Army units before being returned to their old “SS” commands, and in many instances they had to assert themselves to do so. However by the time the war began, this did give the armed

SS units, notably the “Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler”, the SS-Verfügungs Division and the SS-Polizei Division, a hard nucleus of well trained officers who demonstrated very sound military deportment. It is not really known how many officers of the SS-Totenkopfverbände were similarly treated as above, since this was primarily a guard force until the war began and its personnel were very tightly protected by its commander, SS-Gruppenführer Theodor Eicke.

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Sometime in 1944, Waffen-SS troops returning from home leaves to rejoin units stationed in Ukraine were intercepted by Army field police and grouped together in something designated the “SS-Urlauber Kompanie” (Literally the “SS Leave-taking Company”). This was then attached to the Panzergrenadier Regiment 103 of the Army’s 14th Panzer Division. What happened to it after that is a mystery.

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SS-Kampfgruppe “Peters” was from the SS Engineer Training and Replacement Battalion 1 in Dresden and was deployed in early February 1945 around Neusalz on the Oder River. Many of the battle-group members went missing in the subsequent heavy fighting against the Soviets and the ultimate fate of the unit is unknown.

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On 28/29 March 1945, a battle-group known as SS-Kampfgruppe “Jatsch” (phonetic spelling!), was formed from members of the SS Motor Vehicle Technical School in Vienna. In April 1945 it saw action around Hainfeld, Austria. The commander was SS-Hauptsturmführer Jakob Jatsch (?) and their was also an SS-Obersturmführer Sommer in the unit. The fate of the battle-group is unknown.

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**An unknown member of the 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf".
(Rundkvist Archives)**



Finnish Waffen-SS volunteers from 5.SS-Panzer Division "Wiking" find a friend in Russia, i.e. a statue of the fine American ally "Uncle Joe" Stalin! (Erik Rundkvist)

Calogero Falletta, born on 30 June 1917 in Italy was a Sergeant in the Italian Army stationed in Yugoslavia. When his unit was disarmed by members of the 7th SS Mountain Division “Prinz Eugen” in September/October 1943, due to Italy “changing sides”, Falletta volunteered his services to the Waffen-SS rather than to go into captivity. He would then serve in one of the “Prinz Eugen” veterinary companies until the end of the war. His ultimate fate is unknown.



In 1945 the entrapped city of Posen in Warthegau, (now occupied by Poland), was defended by a mixed assortment of displaced Army troops, RAD (Labor Service) and OT (Construction) men along with SS Police troops and foreign volunteers including an Azerbaidjan Battalion led by Major Zaag. Among the most stalwart defenders of Posen was SS-Standartenführer Rudolf Lange, the head of the Security Police and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) in the city. His troops fought not only against the Soviets but also the Polish partisans who had infiltrated into this “fortified” fortress town.

In early February 1945, the main Security Police and SD building in Posen was seized by Red infantry and armored troops. SS-Staf. Lange personally led a counterattack by his men that regained the lost headquarters in hand-to-hand fighting. In the course of the fighting, 7 enemy tanks were destroyed at close range and SS-Staf. Lange was wounded. On 6 February 1945 he was decorated with the German Cross in Gold for his bravery and leadership in the battle; it was a rare distinction for a member of the Security Police, most of whom never saw front line combat.



As of 9 August 1943, the following numbers of Germanic volunteers had served (1st figure) and died (2nd figure) in the Waffen-SS: Norwegians: 1,930--303; Dutch: 9,583--1,046; Flemish: 3,517--336; Danes: 3,575--468. All of the figures would be significantly higher by the end of the war. For instance by the spring of 1945 at

least 1,837 Flemish volunteers were listed as killed or missing with over 6,000 still on duty with the “Langemarck” Division and many more served elsewhere in the “Wiking” Division and throughout the Waffen-SS.

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In the last weeks of the war, SS-Sturmbrigade “Von Allwörden” was formed at the SS Troop Training Ground “Bohemia-Moravia” for use on an emergency basis. All other details about it are missing.

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According to two wartime Dutch language newspapers, “Van Honk” (28 December 1944), a publication for Dutch workers in Germany and *De Zwarte Soldaat* (The Soldier of Black; April 1945), published for Dutch SS members, four well-decorated Dutch Waffen-SS combat veterans served in Adolf Hitler’s small personal escort commando in late 1944. This was significant since it reflected the role non-German volunteers played in the Waffen-SS. Earlier, the formation had been made up of all German members.

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SS-Untersturmführer Dirk Hoogendam served as a platoon leader in 1st Company/SS-Feldersatz Bataillon 34/34.SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division “Landstorm Nederland”. He was born in Ambacht, Holland on 18 May 1922 and died on 8 August 2003.

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From 18 June 1944 until 20 June 1944 in Normandy, 2nd Company/SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.2 of the 1st SS Panzer Division “Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler” was in position to the east of Caen along the water course of the Odon Creek. The company (under SS-Obersturmführer Gottfried Meir) and the entire battalion (I./SS-

Pz.Gr.2 led by the Knight's Cross holder SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Becker), had been brought up in support of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend" and was out of contact with the "LAH" supply and support services.

When the company ran out of medics, the seriously wounded were in trouble and they had to be transported immediately somewhere for first aid. It was left to a company messenger to haul them out of the combat zone in whatever vehicle was available. Fortunately he was able to locate a medical dressing station nearby run by a young French doctor that was treating civilians who had been injured in the severe Allied bombing of Caen. The doctor spoke German and he immediately volunteered his services to treat the badly wounded Waffen-SS soldiers. This arrangement lasted for three days until more medical help from the "Leibstandarte" arrived. The German Army and the Waffen-SS generally enjoyed good relations with the citizens of northern France throughout the war, and many local people were extremely upset by the Allied aerial destruction of Caen and other towns in Normandy.

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From 27 February 1940 until 7 March 1940, the newly forming SS-Verfügungstruppe Division was actually subordinated to the smaller "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" Regiment in Westphalia.

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The 4th Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion containing 3 companies, was first subordinated to the Light Construction/Engineer Battalion 502 of the Engineer Regiment 16 before coming under the Higher Engineer Command 3 for Kurland in mid-January 1945. Shortly before the capitulation the unit was disarmed by the Germans and the personnel treated as POW's. No reason was given but it is possible that the battalion had taken an independent course perhaps in conjunction with the provisional Latvian government that was established near the end of the war in Kurland. The listed battalion strength was given as 313 men.

The 5th Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion came under

the control of the 16th Army in Kurland in January 1945, although a part of the unit was at the disposal of the 221st Security Division. Its strength was listed at 201 men.

The 6th Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion was at work fortifying the banks of the Berta River in December 1944 as part of the 25th German Construction Battalion of Engineer-Construction Regiment 7. In mid-January 1945 it came under the jurisdiction of the Higher Engineer Command 3 in Kurland. Its strength was listed as 286 men.

The 7th Latvian SS Military Construction Battalion was deployed as follows on 28 October 1944: 1st Company attached to 5./Engineer-Construction Btl. 156; 2nd Company attached to 5./Engineer-Construction Btl. 100 and 3rd Company assigned to 5./Engineer-Construction Battalion 680. In mid-January 1945 the battalion was subordinated to the staff of the 16th Army in Kurland. The listed strength was 364 men.



A terrific photo of a combat ready Waffen-SS assault troop courtesy of Erik Rundkvist.



Unknown early war era Waffen-SS NCO and officer from the Erik Rundkvist archives.



Waffen-SS recruits during a training exercise, notable for their helmet camouflage! Their two supervising NCOs rest in the center of the photo (Erik Rundkvist).

SS Special Staff Rode



Waffen-SS officers during a river crossing exercise with a rubber boat.

ON 28 November 1944, Reichsführer-SS Himmler created the SS-Sonderstab (Special Staff) Rode, to be formed by SS-Brigadeführer Ernst Rode, (born on 9 August 1894/SS Nr.139528). Rode had served as the chief-of-staff for Himmler's own personal command staff and as the chief-of-staff for the SS Partisan Fighting Formations. His job was to assemble a staff that would oversee the construction of a defensive perimeter around the Neuenburger bridgehead on the upper Rhine River near Mühlheimer in Alsace (Elsass in German). The Neuenburger bridge was the last intact Rhine River bridge in Alsace until it was blown up in February 1945 and it was essential to the movement of troops and material in that area.

The SS Sonderstab Rode was established in the Teschner Barracks in the town of Mühlheimer and it came under the control of the XVIII. SS Army Corps "Upper Rhine". It was attached for op-

erational purposes to first the 48th and later the 716th Infantry Divisions, both of which came under the XVIII. SS Army Corps jurisdiction. After its deployment, the Special Staff came under the command of SS-Obersturmbannführer Bühnemann, who had also succeeded SS-Brigfhr. Rode as the chief-of-staff on the RF-SS Command Staff. At this point, Rode seems to have left the scene as far as the Special Staff created under his name is concerned.

Assigned to the Special Staff was what was called the Regimental Group “Berges”, a collection of what appears to be three Volkssturm (Home Guard) Battalions being formed in Mühlheimer at the time. The battalions were named after their commanders, Mill, Künstler and Tachilzik. For one week at least, 3 December to 10 December 1944, the SS Escort Battalion “RF-SS” was also assigned to the staff and stayed at the Teschner Barracks. Its job must have been either security duties or helping with the training of the Volkssturm units.

At some point in time also a battle-group from the SS NCO School at Radolfzell also arrived to come under control of the Special Staff and its job was to supply security for the bridgehead either during or after the construction work (or both). Details are hazy. The main enemy threat in the area came from rather inefficient French colonial troops, that suffered from bad morale and little or no battlefield incentive (other than to save themselves). While they were not a serious threat they did pose a menace to the military construction troops. Thus an attempt was made to neutralize them by sending out sharpshooter teams, (a marksman and a spotter with binoculars to locate targets and confirm kills). The specific orders for the sharpshooters were to pick off the French and/or white skinned officers wherever possible. It was felt that this would further demoralize the colonial troops who did not function at all well without strong leadership. The sharpshooters soon began doing their job and the intended effect was achieved; there was no significant harassment of the laborers.

To construct the bridgehead defensive perimeter, the Special Staff used some 800 soldiers, 870 “Eastern Workers” (paid contract laborers, not “slave laborers”, from Eastern Europe) and 120 Alsatian civilians. In the time period between 28 November and 15 December 1944, these people constructed 16 kilometers of trench

line, 2 kilometers of anti-tank ditches, 290 designated combat positions and 115 bunkers. An estimated 340,000 manpower hours went into the work project and the final defensive system had a depth of 4 kilometers and a breadth of 12 kilometers.

In addition, a radio communications system was installed and special positions for Flak (Air Defense) and artillery guns were prepared. The whole set-up was designed to house two battalions or roughly the strength of a small "1944" regiment. It can be presumed that the weak Regimental Group "Berges" was intended for that assignment. One of the problems at the time was the housing and care of the foreign workers, since the weather was very cold at the time and sickness was always a possibility. They had to be bedded down on clean straw in the unheated corridors of the Teschner Barracks, with the straw and rations provided by local farmers. It was not an ideal solution, but it worked out.

It is not known how long the SS Sonderstab Rode continued to exist after most of the defense work was completed on 15 December. What is known is that the fortified bridgehead prevented any efforts by the enemy to sabotage the Neuenburger bridge and that in January and February 1945, the troops of the 19th German Army were able to use it to safely withdraw from most of Alsace. So to that extent the construction work done by the SS Special Staff and its attached elements proved to be a great success!

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Photo Essay

SS-VT Armored Car Reconnaissance Troops in 1938



Crew members of an armored car belonging to the SS-Standarte "Deutschland" circa 1938.

THESE photos from Erik Rundkvist's archives show an armored car scouting platoon that was assigned to the SS-Standarte "Deutschland" in the late 1930s. I am assuming these date probably from the occupation of the Sudetenland and Bohemia-Moravia in 1938. Not many photos of troops wearing the

large beret with SS insignia and I assume, crash helmet insert used during this time period seem to have been published. This headgear was (fortunately I think!) discontinued sometime in 1941 or 1942 and replaced by black mountain caps, which at least looked a lot better.

For the most part I will not try and place captions on these photos, except to mention the following: the entire platoon seems to be depicted by the Kerschbaum sign; there is a small infantry squad attached to it wearing great coats and camouflage helmet covers. The photo showing the men at ease with a foreign soldier (nationality unknown to me), shows the uniforms to good effect along with SS-Standarte “Deutschland” collar patches, bearing the numeral ‘1’ next to the SS runic sign.

The photo of the individual soldier is that of SS-Unterscharführer Sepp Thaler, who may or may not have belonged to the “Deutschland” contingent (he could have served in another unit). His portrait shows a good close-up of the rather cumbersome headgear with an early variation SS death’s head. I have seldom seen many photos of Armed SS troops wearing the panzer beret, so from that stand point alone these are interesting historical photos from the pre-shooting war era, that I don’t believe have ever been published before!









More Dutch Knight's Cross Holders?



The Dutch SS-Obersturmführer Gerrit-Jan Pulles.

AT least three ethnic Dutch volunteers of the Waffen-SS were awarded the Knight's Cross in WWII. These being SS-Untersturmführer Gerardes Mooymann, (SS Volunteer Legion "Niederlande", 1943), SS-Oberscharführer Derk-Elsko Bruins, (4.SS-Sturmbrigade "Nederland", 1944) and SS-Unterscharführer Kaspar Sporck, (11.SS-Pz.Gr.Division "Nordland", 1944). Some other Holland born but ethnic German Waffen-SS members, such as SS-Hauptsturmführer Walter Seebach,

(11.SS-Pz.Gr.Division “Nordland”, 1944), were also decorated with the Knight’s Cross.

In recent years it was thought that at least two other ethnic Dutch volunteers were nominated for and possibly decorated with the Knight’s Cross at the end of the war. This is an area where proper documentation is lacking so they will probably never be “officially” recognized even if they deserved to be.

One of the individuals mentioned in this capacity is SS-Untersturmführer Hans Havik (“Hawk” in Dutch), born 5 May 1923, who joined the Waffen-SS at the age of 17 in 1940 soon after the cessation of hostilities between Holland and Germany. He was presumably nominated for the Knight’s Cross in April 1944 while serving as a platoon leader with the 4.SS-Polizei Panzer-grenadier Division along the Baltic Sea coast. The award was supposed to have been made on 6 May 1945. Hans Havik died in the Netherlands on 21 September 1997 at the age of 74 without the full certification for a Knight’s Cross award.

The other Dutch volunteer mentioned in regards to the receipt of the Knight’s Cross, also supposedly awarded in May 1945, was SS-Obersturmführer Gerrit-Jan Pulles. He was born on 7 January 1923 in Eindhoven to a veterinarian and the mayor of Eindhoven, Dr. H.A. Pulles. Gerrit Pulles joined the Waffen-SS in August 1940, serving first with the “Westland” Regiment of the SS “Wiking” Division. He would be decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class on 5 August 1941 in Russia and soon became an SS-Unterscharführer. In 1943, at the age of 20, Pulles graduated from the SS Junkerschule “Tölz” as an SS officer designate, becoming an SS-Untersturmführer on 1 September 1943.

SS-Ustuf. Pulles then distinguished himself greatly with the “De Ruyter” Regiment of the 4.SS-Sturmbrigade “Nederland” in Croatia, at the Oranienbaum Cauldron and on the Narva Front in 1944. He was decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class and the Wound Badge in Black in January 1944. He received special mention in the Brigade “Orders of the Day” issued by the commander, SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Wagner for his decisive role in repelling Soviet armored attacks on 8 and 9 March 1944 and received the tank combat badge in bronze. Later, for his personal bravery in battle on the Narva Front in the summer of 1944 while serving as

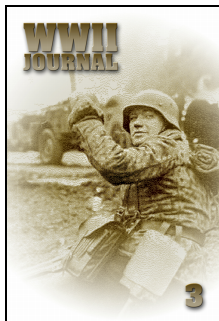
an acting company commander, Pulles was recommended for the German Cross in Gold which he finally received in December 1944, the first of two Dutch volunteers to get that decoration, the other being SS-Hauptscharführer Frans Veneman of the “Nederland” Brigade’s “General Seyffardt” Regiment, for his deeds on the Narva Front.

After being wounded again in August 1944, which would bring the award of the Wound Badge in Silver, Pulles was allowed to recover with a replacement unit and then was posted briefly to SS-Grenadier Regiment 83 of the 34.SS-Grenadier Division “Landstorm Nederland” (Dutch Nr.2) where he became an SS-Obersturmführer in November. In December 1944 he rejoined the SS-Pz.Gr.Regiment 49 “DeR” of the 23.SS-Pz.Gr.Division “Nederland” in Kurland, Latvia.

He would then command the “De Ruyter” Regiment’s 3rd Company with great success in Pomerania in early 1945. After again demonstrating his leadership and courage in several engagements against the Soviets he fell badly wounded one more time in March 1945 near Reetz. His friend and comrade, the Dutch Knight’s Cross Holder Gerardes Mooyman watched him being evacuated from the front on the back of an assault gun. But that was the last anyone ever saw of him. From that point on Gerrit-Jan Pulles would be listed as “missing-in-action”.

It does then appear however that some high-ranking officer in the division, either the “DeR” regimental CO or the divisional commander himself, put in an application for the award of the Knight’s Cross for SS-Ostuf. Pulles, which, according to some sources, was duly approved and awarded in May 1945. However without the proper documentation it could never be fully recognized, but Pulles’ deeds and conduct in combat speak for themselves!

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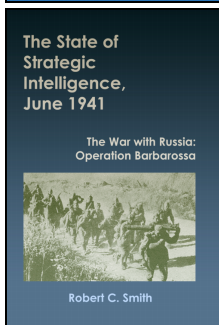
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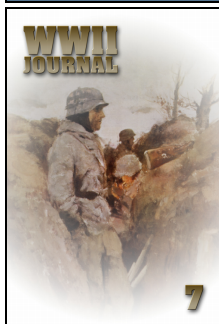
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A Bulgarian Volunteer in the Waffen-SS



S S-Sturmann Cristov Petrov was a Bulgarian volunteer in the Waffen-SS, born on 18 April 1910. The illustrations show his ID book and a special paper documenting his service in “Kampfgruppe Reinefarth” the task force personally led by SS-Gruf. Heinz Reinefarth in Warsaw. Petrov saw action during the entirety of this campaign from 5 August 1944 until 14 October 1944. He likely had been serving in the SS-Jagdverbände

“Südost”, which was one of SS-Standartenführer Otto Skorzeny’s special commando units that contained Bulgarian and Romanian volunteers.

Eventually there were some 800 Bulgarian volunteers in the Waffen-SS split mostly between the Bulgarian Volunteer Regiment of the Waffen-SS (586 members in November 1944) and the SS-Jagdverbände “Südost”.

The Oldest Swedish Volunteer in the Waffen-SS

BORN on 5 February 1897, Sven Oscar Amandus Ryden was the oldest Swede to volunteer for service in the Waffen-SS. He had served as an officer in the Swedish “Landstorm” (Home Guard/Reserves). He left Sweden for Germany on 24 August 1941, traveling via Finland. Once there he volunteered for the Waffen-SS at the age of 44. In October 1941 he was already on duty with a Waffen-SS combat anti-aircraft (Flak) detachment, but it is not known what unit this was attached to.

On 11 May 1942 Ryden was assigned to the SS Main Office in Berlin where he became involved in securing potential Swedish and Estonian Swedish volunteers for the Waffen-SS. British intelligence reported that Ryden also engaged in broadcasting radio commentaries on Eastern Front combat actions from the Baltic States for the propaganda section of the SS Main Office.

Sven Ryden was found dead in the streets of Berlin during the battle for that city in April 1945; however it was thought that he had been killed by another Swedish SS man that he had been feuding with!



A very rare photo of SS-Brigadeführer Bronislav Kaminski (right center) conferring with SS-Gruppenführer Heinz Reinefarth (left center) during the early stages of combating the Warsaw partisan rebellion in August 1944. Reinefarth's command post bus, from which he directed combat actions in the inner city, can be seen in the background. The other people in the photo are all Russian officers from Kaminski's anti-communist "Russian National Army of Liberation" or RONA for short. At the time this 20,000 man outfit was "transitioning" into the 29.Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS (Russia Nr.1), under the direction of SS-Brigadeführer Cristoph Diem.

This is possibly the only photo to show Kaminski (a Polish-German-Russian from Weissruthenia), in his SS General's uniform; note the Brigadeführer rank insignia. Some of the other officers wear the RONA armshield. While RONA had been very effective operating against Soviet partisans on its own territory near Bryansk in what is now Belarus, it proved to be less than useful once it was withdrawn to Germany. At the time this photo was taken, Kaminski had committed 1,700 of his men in two battalions to the suppression of the Warsaw rebellion, but Reinefarth who ran the day-to-day operations, soon lost complete control of them and sought to have them withdrawn from the city. This only happened a few weeks later when Kaminski was killed in what was termed a "Polish partisan ambush" and his soldiers voluntarily left Warsaw to attend a memorial for him. After that the "RONA" Division was broken up with its reliable soldiers being sent to the 30.Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS "Weissruthenien" (Russia Nr.2) and the divisional number "29" being transferred to the new Italian SS Division. (Photo provided by Dr. M.N.)