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Luftwaffe Airborne and Field Units

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Fallschirmjäger



That forces with a nominal strength of more than twenty divisions should have served in all major theatres of the Second World War, as infantry, artillery, tank crews, and service troops, while wearing the blue uniform of the German *Luftwaffe*, may seem paradoxical. In part this situation came about through the bizarre conditions under which the Nazi Party came to power. All the major personalities of that ungodly hierarchy were dedicated to the advancement of their personal and departmental empires. When occupied territory was being looted, they strove to acquire privileges and priorities; they vied with one another for Hitler's ear, and for the influence which came with his especial favour; and when his flame was finally seen to be guttering out, they indulged in schemes of Byzantine intrigue for personal survival and aggrandizement. In many cases they worked ceaselessly to extend their personal pre-war 'power-bases' into autonomous formations of combat troops, both as a measure of insurance in a chancy world, and in order that their personal spheres of influence should be seen by the German people and the world to be participating actively in Germany's conquests.

In this squalid contest Hermann Göring was an enthusiastic competitor. Before the emergence of the young *Luftwaffe* in 1935 his power-base centred upon his office as Secretary of the Interior, and his control of the Prussian police apparatus. Under his orders he assembled an armed force of

several police battalions, entitled *Landespolizei-gruppe 'General Göring'*. Subsequent to the official birth of the Air Force in October 1935, this unit was incorporated with the title *Regiment 'General Göring'*. It became an élite formation and was held up as an example of smartness and efficiency. In November 1935 some 600 volunteers from the regiment formed the nucleus of Germany's first airborne unit. In 1938 the battalion was severed from its parent regiment to become *I. Bataillon/Fallschirmjäger Regiment 1* (1st Bn., Paratrooper Regiment 1).



Cover of the June 1941 issue of the German forces magazine *Signal* – here, a Dutch language edition – with an article on the Cretan campaign. Note details of parachute harness and exit position

For the reasons already mentioned, Göring lobbied ceaselessly to gain control of all airborne troops; in January 1939 his efforts bore fruit. Not long after the raising of the paratroop battalion in his own personal regiment the Army High Command, appreciating the obvious potential of such troops, had brought into being an experimental *Fallschirm Infanterie Kompanie*, which was soon expanded to battalion strength and attracted great attention through its spectacular participation in public displays. In 1939 this unit was handed over to the Air Force to become *II*.



Luftwaffe officer's service cap (*Schirmmütze*) piped in silver, with silver thread woven badges and silver cords. (Author's collection)

Bataillon/FJR 1. (This abbreviation of *Fallschirmjäger Regiment* will be used henceforward.) The regiment was placed under the command of the very able Generalmajor Kurt Student in the Air Force's *Flieger (Fallschirm) Division 7*.

The training of the élite paratroop units was thorough and carefully planned. First were instilled the basic techniques of landing – the positioning of the body to transmit the shock of landing into a rolling impact, spreading the blow over a large and relatively invulnerable area. Familiarity with and correct handling of the parachute harness came next, and at an early stage the recruit began training in parachute packing. By the time air training commenced he was required to have mastered this fairly simple but vital skill, and thereafter he only jumped rigs that he had packed himself – psychologically, an extremely sound practice. Having undergone sessions suspended in a captive harness and having mastered exit procedures from a static fuselage, the recruit made his first actual jump. The

characteristic dive from the door seen in many wartime photographs was not an example of over-dramatic posing, but a necessary tactic. Illustrations indicate that the type of chute used by the *Fallschirmjäger*, in puzzling contrast to that issued to *Luftwaffe* aircrew, did not have lift webs – the straps connected the lower ends of the shroud lines to the body harness. The shroud lines seem to terminate in the pack itself, rather than in attachment points on the shoulders. The centre of gravity was thus rather high, and if the canopy had deployed when the man was falling in the usual 'standing' posture the shock would have jerked his legs back and up, with considerable danger of fouling the whipping shroud lines. By exiting in a semi-'face down' posture he could withstand the shock of opening with greater stability. Nevertheless, from personal experience the author believes that landing in this type of rig must have been a severe test of skill and nerve – both technically tricky and psychologically unnerving.

The air phase of training consisted of six jumps, of which the first was made alone, from a height of about 600 feet; this would give a falling time of about half a minute. Subsequent jumps were made in groups and in conditions of varying light, culminating in the sixth jump, which involved nine plane-loads of troopers jumping under simulated battle conditions. The altitude was lowered progressively, and this final 'combat' drop was from less than 400 feet. In common with paratroopers of other nations at that time (and for many years thereafter) no emergency chute was



Luftwaffe officer's sidecap (*Feldmütze*) piped in silver around the 'turn-up'. (Author's collection)



Service tunic of a *Luftwaffe* Hauptmann or captain. The collar is piped in silver to indicate commissioned rank; the silver thread breast eagle is an early pattern with a short, down-turned tail. The War Service Cross with Swords is worn on the right breast, the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class in the buttonhole, and the Iron Cross 1st Class and the Silver Wound Badge on the left breast. (Battle of Britain Museum, Langley)



Detail of Hauptmann's tunic, showing rank distinctions on shoulder and collar. The silver 'Russia braid' shoulder straps have an underlay of yellow *Waffenfarbe*, indicating service in either the flying or paratroop branches. Two yellow-metal pips indicate rank. The collar patches in yellow *Waffenfarbe* are outlined in silver cord, and bear the three stylized silver wings and small oak spray of captain's rank. (Battle of Britain Museum, Langley)

carried. Conventionally, the main back-pack was deployed by the pull of a static line, anchored to a rail by the aircraft door. On completing his six jumps the soldier was awarded his qualification badge; to retain it, he had thereafter to make at least six jumps a year.

Parachute training ensures merely the soldier's arrival on the battlefield; of more obvious importance is his effectiveness once on the ground. The *Fallschirmjäger* were exhaustively trained in light infantry techniques designed to exploit their advantages (surprise and mobility) and to minimize their handicaps (isolation and lack of heavy weapons). Demolition under fire, fast movement over enemy terrain, maximum disruption of the enemy's lines of communication, the use of enemy weapons – all these were emphasized. The armament of the paratroop rifle squad was precariously weak. Each man jumped with only a P.08

Parabellum (Luger) 9 mm automatic pistol, a few grenades in his smock pockets, and his gravity-knife; this last was a large flat jack-knife, which could double as a fighting knife, and was primarily intended for cutting free fouled harness and shroud lines. One source states that about one man in four carried the folding-stock MP.38 (later, MP.40) Schmeisser 9 mm sub-machine-gun on the drop, but whether this practice was followed from the beginning of the war is not certain. All other weapons were dropped in supply canisters, which had to be located and opened on the drop-zone before the unit could be fully effective. These weapons were the standard Mauser K.98 rifle, the MP.38 and .40, and the MG.34 (later, MG.42) machine-gun. The proportion of rifles to Schmeissers seems to have been about two to one; a small number in each platoon were equipped with telescopic sniper sights, to improve



Formation of Junkers Ju 52/3m transport aircraft over the Mediterranean; the sturdy Junkers was invariably used when the *Luftwaffe* mounted an airborne operation. (U.S. National Archives)

the weak long-range firepower of the squad.

As early as 1940 an effective airborne artillery piece had been developed, but it is not thought that these were available in quantities greater than about two per paratroop rifle battalion. The 75 mm recoil-less gun, rather resembling a large 'bazooka' on a light wheeled carriage, could be dropped in two supply canisters. In 1943 a 105 mm piece appeared, and there was an airborne version of the standard tapered-bore 28/20 mm anti-tank gun. Each battalion also had thirteen 81 mm mortars. The functions of both rifle and sub-machine-gun were to some extent taken over in the mid-war years by the ingenious FG.42 – the forerunner of the modern assault rifle. Based on the Lewis action, this gas-operated weapon weighed only 10½ lb (compared with the K.98 rifle at 9 lb 12 oz, and the Schmeisser at 9 lb 6 oz) and was fed by a side-mounted box magazine holding twenty rounds. Effective range and rate of

fire were too limited for the FG.42 to replace the conventional belt-fed light machine-guns, and certain features of the design were not perfected until the 1944 version appeared.

The paratrooper was carried into action by the venerable but reliable Junkers Ju 52/3m trimotor transport aircraft. Eighteen men could be accommodated in its slab-sided fuselage; it was a robust machine which stood up well to battle damage and rough landings on front-line airstrips, and its three engines were an important safety factor. It was also employed as the towing craft for the world's first assault glider, the D.F.S.230; this carried nine fully equipped soldiers, and was used both in the West and in the Mediterranean theatre by the Air Landing regiments.

OPERATIONS

The paratroopers played no part in the Polish campaign, beyond taking up defensive positions on captured airfields. Their first major campaign was Operation *Weserübung* in April 1940 – the seizure of Norway and Denmark.

On 9 April elements of FJR 1 seized the vital Aalborg airfield in Denmark and the long bridge connecting Fünen with Falster island. In Norway a company of paratroopers took part in the capture of Stavanger-Sola airfield and the occupation of Oslo. On 14 April a company landed at Dombås north-east of Oslo to prepare a blocking position across the British line of retreat. Göring stepped in at this point and refused to reinforce the company, on the grounds that the Air Force was already bearing too heavy a burden in the campaign; as a result the company, after five days of bitter fighting, was captured. In late May and early June paratroopers to company strength were dropped into Narvik; led by Oberleutnant Fritz Becker, they earned a good name for steadiness under difficult circumstances.

Meanwhile, in the West, the opening of the blitzkrieg was marked by a brilliant operation mounted by a small force from *Sturmabteilung Koch*, a special services unit led by an officer of that name. Major Witzig and his para-sappers (*Fallschirm-Pioniere*) landed on Fort Eben Emael in D.F.S.230 gliders early on the morning of 11 May. So secret had been their training that the gliders, flown perforce by civilian volunteers, had been transferred from the training field at Hildesheim to Köln-Butzweilerhof, disassembled, in furniture vans! While Witzig and his fifty-four men blasted their way into the nine fortifications of Eben Emael with 50 kg satchel charges, paratroopers of 1. *Kompanie*/FJR 1 jumped near by and captured the three bridges at Veldwezelt, Vroenhoven and Briedgen, supported by dive-bombers. By mid-morning the forts and bridges were firmly occupied, the Albert Canal had ceased to pose an obstacle to the German advance, and the 6th Army had an open door to the Belgian plains. In penetrating Eben Emael, and clearing the galleries with grenades and Schmeissers, Witzig's little group had suffered only five casualties, an incredibly light price for such a great prize.

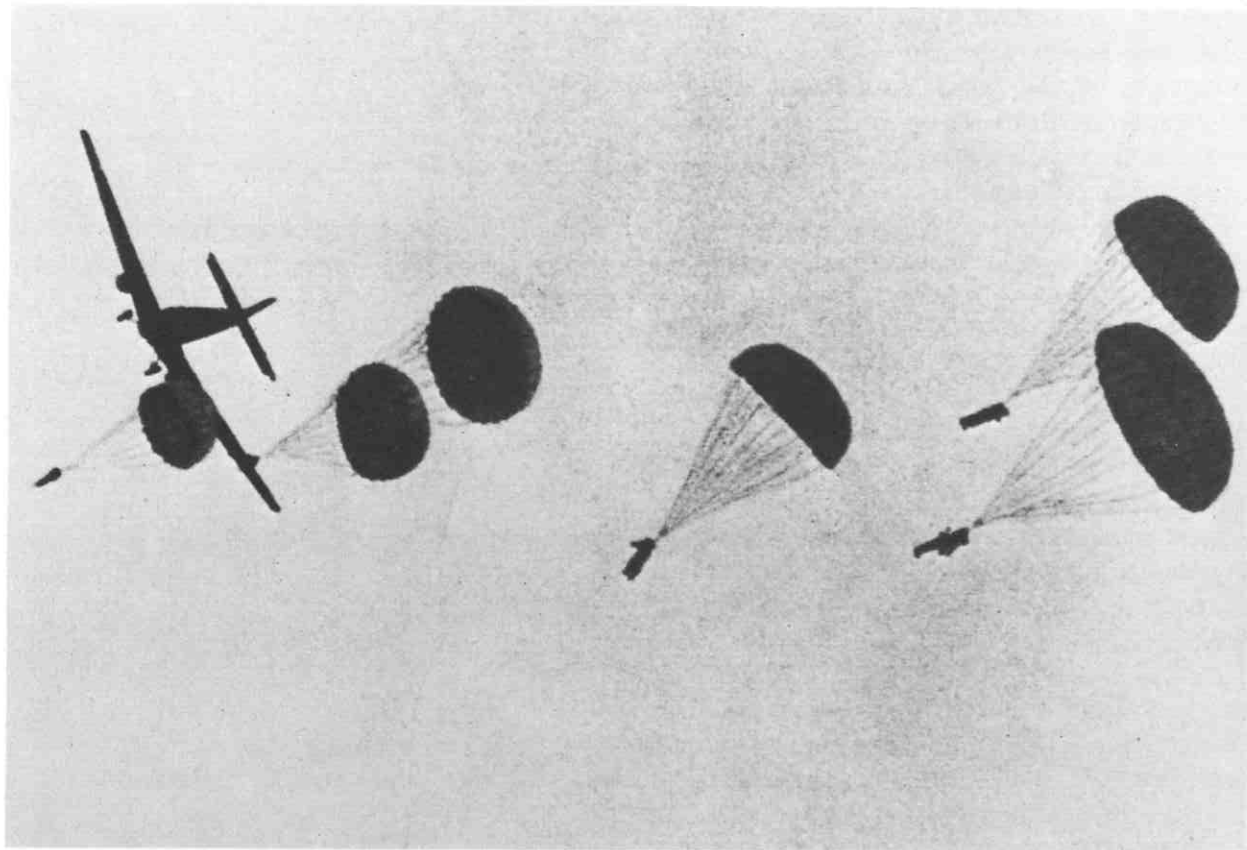


Jumping from only some 200 feet above the Dutch countryside, a *Fallschirmjäger* drops clear of the aircraft; note face-down position, and fully extended static line strap. (Imperial War Museum)

In Holland the paratroopers also played their part in the steam-roller advance of the *Wehrmacht*; the whole of FJR 1 was eventually committed, seizing bridges and airfields as well as the cities of The Hague and, in company with other units, Rotterdam. The paratroopers were supported and reinforced, as soon as they had seized a landing ground, by plane-loads of men from the Army's 22nd Air Landing Division.

In the aftermath of the victories in the West the paratroop units were expanded into the XI. *Fliieger Korps* (*Luftlande-Korps*) under General Student. This included FJR 1 and FJR 2, the newly raised FJR 3, the *Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment* and various service and support units such as artillery, engineers, para-medics, and so forth.

In late 1940 the *Fallschirmjäger* had been in training for the invasion of England, and seven main drop-zones had been selected along the South Coast, stretching between Portland and



A stick of paratroopers dropping from a Junkers; it is just possible to distinguish the single junction of the shrouds in the pack on each man's back, and their arms hanging free. (Imperial War Museum)

Ramsgate. But in actual fact their next campaign was the bitter fighting in Greece.

In March 1941 Oberst Sturm's FJR 2 was sent to Bulgaria to prepare for an operation against the Greek island of Lemnos. Army formations forestalled this operation, however, and the paratroopers were employed in the seizure of the bridge over the Corinth Canal, a vital bottleneck on the British escape route from the terrible fighting in the mountains to the north. The drop involved two battalions of FJR 2 and an engineer detachment; taking off from Larisa soon after dawn on 26 April, the Ju 52s approached the target at low altitude from the east, then climbed to 400 feet for the drop. Gliders landed at both ends of the bridge, and paratroopers managed to capture it and a sizeable number of its defenders. Charges had already been laid by the British troops, but the fuses were successfully cut by the *Fallschirm-Pioniere* sappers. Minutes later, however,

the charges suddenly went up, apparently set off by a stray shot, and the bridge and many of the paratroopers were destroyed. Total German losses were around 60 dead and 150 wounded, approximately one-tenth of the British and Greek losses.

The fortress island of Crete, garrisoned by the British and held as a supply base and jumping-off place in the eastern Mediterranean, was the greatest battle-honour – and the graveyard – of the classic *Fallschirm* units. The island, roughly 150 by 35 miles at its widest point, mountainous, stony, with few roads and little water, is cruel country to fight over. The British and Greek defenders numbered some 40,000 men; all but 5,000 of whom were exhausted survivors of the fighting in Greece, having lost most of their arms and equipment. There were twenty-four tanks and some thirty-six aircraft; but Crete was totally unsuitable country for the former, and few of the

latter were serviceable at any one time. It was a desperately tired and badly mauled garrison, whose performance when they faced the ultimate test was truly heroic. Their commander was the determined and energetic General Freyberg, leader of the New Zealand contingent.

Both Malta and Crete were threats to Hitler's plans in the Mediterranean; but it was decided that Crete, potentially the most dangerous in that it was close to Hitler's precious oil resources in Romania, should be the first target; for the invasion of Russia was imminent and oil was uppermost in the mind of the German staff. The force selected comprised Student's XI. *Flieger Korps* with Army reinforcements. The total invasion force of 22,000 men was made up of *Flieger Division 7*, with FJR 1, 2 and 3 and the *Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment*; the 5th Mountain Division and elements of the 6th; and a large

number of supporting troops. The airborne units were allocated more than 600 transports and a similar number of gliders, and the *Gebirgsjäger* force was prepared for a seaborne attack in locally commandeered vessels with Italian naval escorts. Wolfram von Richthofen's famous VIII. *Flieger Korps*, with two medium bomber, one Stuka, one Bf 109 and one Bf 110 *Geschwader*, would provide heavy air cover. The other obvious choice for this operation was the Army's 22nd Air Landing Division, but this could not be spared as it was actually in Romania covering the Ploesti oil complex.

The major centres of resistance were correctly forecast as being around Maleme, Retimo, Heraklion and Canea on the north coast of the island; the first three were the sites of hurried British airfield construction, and Heraklion was operational, while Canea was a sizeable town and



Assembly on the drop-zone; the weapons canisters have been secured, and a tripod-mounted MG.34 is being set up. (Imperial War Museum)

headquarters. In the south the anchorage of Suda Bay was also covered by a strong Allied force.

German tactics at this time involved dropping paratroopers and landing gliders directly on their objectives. This practice, which inevitably carried a heavy penalty in casualties, was largely forced on the *Luftwaffe* by the light armament of the *Fallschirmjäger*. They had to make the maximum use of surprise to seize airfields almost immediately, so that reinforcements and heavy weapons could be flown in and the bridgehead expanded. British and American theories envisaged landing troops some distance from the objective, giving them time to 'sort themselves out' of the almost inevitable confusion on the drop-zone, prepare their weapons, and move on the target in several columns. The drawbacks of the German system were evident during the Cretan campaign; those of the Allied, at Arnhem three years later.

Operation *Merkur* was planned in characteristic German fashion. Early on the morning of 20 May 1941 Maleme and Canea were to be attacked simultaneously by both glider troops and paratroopers. The airfield and town were to be seized, and elements of the Mountain Divisions were to fly in by Junkers almost at once to consolidate the foothold. In the afternoon another mixed force was to drop on Retimo and Heraklion, and the two waves would link up while more reinforcements and supplies were flown in. The following day the balance of the Mountain Divisions would land at the eastern end of the island from the sea.

Early-morning attacks by the air support forces



Paratroop helmet, with double chin-strap. Wartime photos reveal several patterns differing in details of shape; this example is probably a post-war reproduction cut down from a conventional steel helmet, but as the early issue of paratroop helmets were produced in just this fashion it may possibly be a genuine piece. (Author's collection)

on Maleme, Canea and Suda Bay were followed by the planned drops over the two former objectives – led, it is said, by one Staff Bugler Ernst Springer, blowing his bugle as he fell. The paratroopers were met by a hail of fire from the New Zealand and Australian defenders, and many died while still in the air, or as they struggled to free themselves from their parachutes. There were several instances of gliders and sticks of paratroopers drifting helplessly out to sea. Other gliders smashed themselves on rough ground, or were riddled as they came in to land. Several surviving photographs capture the scene vividly: blazing Ju 52s careering across the sky, paratroopers falling in scattered and ineffective patterns, corpses strewn in the rocks amid the splintered remains of gliders. Almost immediately the commander of the Maleme force, General Meindl, was badly wounded, and General Suess-



The Parabellum ('Luger') P.08 9 mm automatic pistol and holster; initially this was the only weapon carried by the paratroopers on the drop

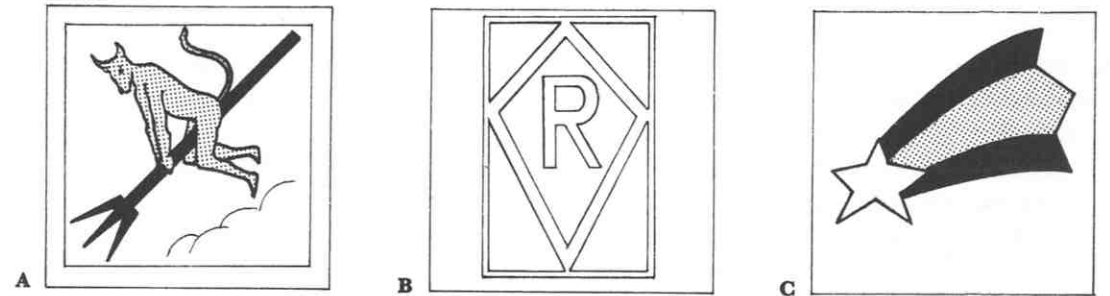
mann, commanding the Canea force, was killed in a glider crash. The airfield at Maleme was partially captured but was still under heavy British fire when night fell, and no immediate reinforcements could be landed. The Canea force was virtually wiped out. By vigorously pressing home their counter-attacks before the paratroopers could assemble and reach their main weapons on the drop-zones, the defenders were reaping considerable success. The afternoon landings at Retimo and Heraklion were decimated, and by nightfall *Fallschirmjäger Regiment 3*, in particular, had almost ceased to exist; the defenders directed their firepower at the supply canisters, and many scores of paratroopers died without reaching their weapons. An attempt to land troops from the sea that night was foiled by the Royal Navy, who intercepted the convoy some distance from the coast and sank many of the small vessels; the Italian escort did not distinguish itself.

The following morning several plane-loads of supplies and ammunition were salvaged from wrecked Ju 52s by the desperate paratroopers, who renewed their efforts. At last, around noon on the 21st, the redoubtable Oberst Hermann Bernhard Ramcke led a reserve battalion of paratroopers in another drop west of Maleme. Despite heavy casualties they eventually secured the airfield, and at once the Ju 52s began to land reinforcements, supplies and heavy weapons. The defenders were

doomed. The British, New Zealand, Australian and Greek troops began to fight their way south through the mountains to Sphakia. Some 15,000 were successfully evacuated to Egypt. Intense activity by the *Luftwaffe* over the island and the surrounding waters caused severe losses to the Royal Navy, the destroyer flotillas suffering particularly heavily. By 27 May the island was firmly occupied, although sporadic fighting by isolated groups of survivors who joined up with Cretan partisans in the hills continued for some months.

The cost of Hitler's new island in the sun had been sobering; so sobering, indeed, that no further major airborne assaults were mounted for the remainder of the war. Widely varying figures have been quoted, but the facts appear to be that the paratroopers and other assault units lost 3,250 men killed and missing, and 3,400 wounded. Aircraft losses were also heavy – about 100 Ju 52s were destroyed and as many seriously damaged. Although they were to play a considerable part in the land operations of the *Wehrmacht* over the next four years, the *Fallschirmjäger* actually jumped into action on only three further occasions. There were limited drops at Catania, Sicily, in July 1943; at Leros in the Aegean later that year; and in the Ardennes during the 'Battle of the Bulge' in December 1944. The first two drops were successful, the last a failure.

In addition to these operations, an obscure and rather sinister battalion of disgraced *Waffen-SS*



Luftwaffe airborne divisional insignia, used on vehicles, tactical signs, etc. (A) A green devil riding a red pitchfork on a white background: 1. *Fallschirmjäger Division*. (B) A black solid or outline kite-shaped motif and letter 'R' (for Ramcke, divisional commander) on white background: 2. *Fallschirmjäger Division*. (C) A white comet with a blue-red-blue tail: 4. *Fallschirmjäger Division*



The origin of this photograph is unknown, as is the significance of the shaved heads – probably simply a ferocious ‘fashion’ among personnel of a parachute unit.

The early olive-green smocks, the baggy trousers and the high jump-boots are all well illustrated here. (Imperial War Museum)

men, designated *SS-Fallschirmjäger Bataillon 500* (later, 600) dropped around Drvar in Yugoslavia later in 1944 in an attempt to trap the partisan leader Tito. The attempt failed, but Himmler was apparently impressed with the fighting qualities displayed by the unit and removed the stigma of a penal battalion.

The men of *Flieger Division 7* were obviously not ready to take part in the initial attack on Russia in June 1941; after suffering 30 per cent casualties and losing much of their equipment they were entitled to enjoy the beaches of Crete for a while. But their respite did not last long. Replacements were constantly drafted into the thinned ranks, and in September the first unit of paratroopers – *II. Bataillon/Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment* – was transferred to the Eastern Front. The need for reliable and self-sufficient infantry was pressing, as the German advance on Moscow and Leningrad

began to show signs of bogging down. By the time the winter, the worst in 140 years, clamped down on the exhausted armies, the entire combat strength of the division was committed to infantry fighting at the northern end of the front, around stubborn Leningrad. The casualties, and the sufferings, of the paratroopers were severe.

1942 was a year of piecemeal expansion of the airborne forces. While strong elements of the *Flieger-Division* continued to fight in Russia, Ramcke, now a General, led a brigade mustering three rifle battalions and supporting units to Egypt, to bolster Rommel’s thin-stretched lines before El Alamein. Arriving in August 1942, the Ramcke Brigade, which, like all units of the *Panzerarmee Afrika*, suffered from a shortage of vehicles and fuel, went into position on the coast road north of Ruweisat Ridge, attached to the famous 164th Light Africa Division. At the battle

of Alam Halfa the brigade carried out a limited attack but was basically static. They played an honourable part in the fighting at Alamein in October, and during the first desperate days of the retreat pulled off an impressive *coup*. After fighting a holding action on 4 November, in company with the Italian *Trento* Division at the southern end of the line, they were, to all intents and purposes, written off by the German staff: the retreat had speeded up, and without vehicles they were thought to be doomed to British captivity. Ramcke somehow led his 600 surviving paratroopers back to Fûka, capturing British vehicles and supplies on the way. He is said to have been extremely bitter that his unit had been abandoned to its fate; but it must be acknowledged that his was by no means the only command crippled by lack of vehicles, and it was a *saute qui peut* situation. Prominent among the officers of the brigade was Major Burckhardt, who commanded the rearguard with great dash during the retreat.

By November 1942 the remains of the *Afrika Korps* were being reinforced with a number of units of varying quality (from the famous 10th Panzer Division, to a penal division of infantry) in preparation for the last great battles in Tunisia. Among the troops flown into El Aouina airport that month was the crack *Fallschirmjäger Regiment 5*, a unit of keen young volunteers built around the surviving hard core, and many of the officers and NCOs, of Meindl’s *Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment*; it was now commanded by Oberstleutnant Koch. Another paratroop unit thrown into the Tunisian fighting was the ad hoc *Barenthin Regiment*, led by

Oberst Walther Barenthin and made up of drafts from many units of the airborne corps. Yet another name from the past appeared with the *Fallschirm-Pionier-Abteilung*, now commanded by the hero of Eben Emael, Oberstleutnant Witzig. Barenthin’s three battalions took up screening positions at Mateur, before Bizerta. The main centres of fighting for the paratroopers were Medjez-el-Bab and Tébourba, and all units won the ungrudging respect of their British and American enemies. But the Tunisian campaign, though bloody, had an inevitable conclusion; the paratroopers’ last stand came on 7 May 1943, on the Miliane River.



Sidecap of *Luftwaffe* non-commissioned personnel. (Author’s collection)

The spring of 1943 saw the first great expansion of the airborne arm, which was to dilute its special qualities over the next two years. While a large enough number of veterans remained in the *Fallschirm* regiments to ensure their continued excellence in the Italian campaigns, a policy of unselective expansion was increasingly followed, and many divisions of men went into the line as ‘paratroopers’ in name only. Their unique uniforms and equipment remained, to be worn by tens of thousands of soldiers who had never made a single parachute jump. There was no logic in this, merely desperation; as the Third Reich’s resources of manpower became more and more limited, so the political leaders wilfully blinded themselves to reality by bringing into existence ‘divisions’ of weak brigade strength, with grandiose titles quite out of keeping with the actual combat potential of the units. The men who had followed Meindl and Ramcke out into the scorching sunlight above Crete were a genuine élite; there were



Service cap of a *Luftwaffe* NCO; the piping is yellow *Waffenfarbe*, and the badges are pressed in grey alloy. (Author’s collection)



The 'flying blouse' worn by *Luftwaffe* personnel of all ranks, much in the manner of British battledress, as an everyday working garment. This example bears the rank distinctions of a *Feldwebel*, an NCO grade roughly equivalent to Flight Sergeant. (Battle of Britain Museum, Langley)

to be precious few of them left in the ranks of the *Fallschirmjäger* by the close of 1943.

The old *Flieger-Division* 7 was renamed 1. *Fallschirmjäger Division* at the turn of 1942/43; in March 1943 it was withdrawn from the East and rebuilt in southern France. Its main combat units were FJR 1, 3 and 4. At the same time the 2. *Fallschirmjäger Division* was also formed in France, around a nucleus of the old FJR 2; the new FJR 6 was formed from elements of a *Luftwaffe* Field Battalion and the 4th Battalion of the *Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment*; FJR 7 was raised from training units.

From this point on the pattern would be consistent. A nucleus would be taken from an established division which could ill afford to lose experienced soldiers, usually in the form of one battalion from each of two or three regiments; this would be fleshed out with youngsters straight from basic training, odds and ends of *Luftwaffe* field troops or Flak regiments who had lost their, guns, bomber crews for whom there were no bombers, fighter pilots for whom there was no fuel, ground crews for whom there was no work, even foreign troops lost in the maze of defeat and political contradiction – and the resulting mess

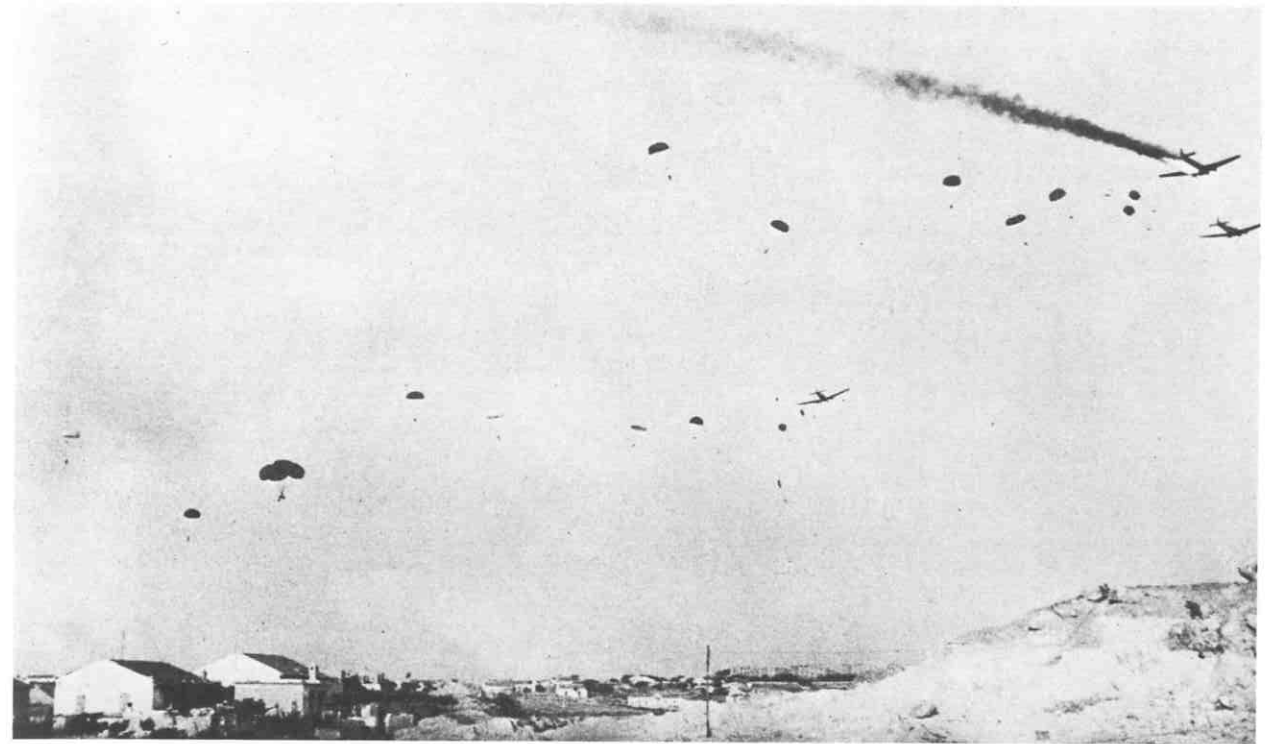
would be called a Paratroop Division. The extraordinary thing is that some of these *ad hoc* units fought so well.

The 1st Paratroop Division, commanded by General Richard Heidrich who had led the old *Fallschirm-Infanterie-Bataillon* as an Army officer in the pre-war years, fought in Sicily in August 1943, then slowly moved back up the Adriatic coast of Italy, winning itself an increasing reputation which culminated, in the winter of 1943 and the spring of 1944, in the epic defence of Cassino. This classic defensive battle shares with Crete the place of honour in the record of the *Fallschirmjäger*. To discuss the participants, course and significance of the battle in any but the baldest outline would take far more space than is available here.

Very briefly, the Cassino sector lay on the Ger-



Detail of the blouse, showing rank distinctions at shoulder and collar, and the white-on-blue breast eagle worn by non-commissioned ranks. The yellow *Waffenfarbe* collar patches bear three stylized metal wings, and the *Waffenfarbe* is repeated in the edging of collar and shoulder-straps. The 9 mm-wide silver braid or *Tresse* around the collar was worn by all senior NCOs; that on the shoulder-strap, combined with the single grey metal pip, identifies the exact rank. (Battle of Britain Museum, Langley)



Crete – the first drop over Heraklion fills the sky with scattered parachutes and burning transports. The three linked parachutes at the left probably support a light 75 mm gun. (Imperial War Museum)

man defensive line across Italy stretching from the Gulf of Gaeta on the west coast to Ortona on the Adriatic – the 'Gustav Line'. It also marked the junction between the 'Gustav Line' and a secondary system, the 'Hitler-Senger Line', which passed from Terracina, on the west coast some ten miles behind Gaeta, through the Aurunci Mountains and across the Liri Valley to the shoulders of the Mt Cassino–Mt Cairo massif. Before Cassino the Gustav Line followed the course of the aptly named Rapido River. The main highway from the south ran through Cassino town, around the shoulder of the mountain, and back via Valmontone to Rome itself. This road, R6, was the prize for which the armies fought. In mountainous country apparently created expressly for the convenience of defending armies, four great battles were fought for the Cassino sector. The monastery on the mountain and the ruined town were battered again and again by the Allied artillery and bombers; the cruel mazes of rubble, punishing hillsides, razor-back ridges and concealed sangars were probed and rushed again and again by British, Indian,

Canadian, New Zealand and Polish infantry; yet always the paratroopers of FJR 1, 3 and 4 would emerge from their shelters and drive the attackers back. Not until May 1944 did the Allies finally turn the flanks of the Cassino position, and most of Heidrich's men managed to slip away under the very guns of the victorious but exhausted Polish Corps, retreating in good order to positions further back.

The expansion of the airborne arm had continued in the meantime. The 2nd Paratroop Division had been based around Rome in the second half of 1943, and was transferred to the East in December, but left certain elements around which the new 4. *Fallschirmjäger Division* was formed in the Perugia area. Among the components of this division were former members of the Italian *Nembo* and *Folgore* Airborne Divisions. The main combat units were FJR 10, 11 and 12. The 3. *Fallschirmjäger Division* had been formed in France in October 1943, comprising FJR 5, 8, and 9; it remained in France, while the 4th Division played a prominent part in penning the Allies inside the Anzio beachhead.



Dapper under fire, Colonel Bräuer, the one-time commander of Germany's first parachute battalion, issues orders on Crete to a paratroop Unteroffizier. (Imperial War Museum)

The paratroopers of the swollen *Luftwaffe* ground forces fought with tenacity on the Normandy Front and in the Low Countries during the Allied advances of 1944; British troops who encountered them in Holland speak well of them. Less is known about the quality and exploits of the higher-numbered divisions which fought in the East during the final stages of the war; certainly those who held a sector of the Vistula Front during the last Russian assault on Berlin were not equal to their task, being largely drafts from now useless *Luftwaffe* service and rear area echelons – but they were so heavily outnumbered that their quality is probably irrelevant. The complex story of the last year of the *Fallschirmjäger* is best conveyed by adopting a tabular form:

1. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

FJR 1, 3, and 4 continued to fight in Italy after the fall of Cassino, as part of the German 10th Army. In the autumn of 1944 they were at

Rimini, and finally surrendered in April 1945 around Imola.

2. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

FJR 2, 6 and 7 fought in Russia between December 1943 and April 1944. At one time or another they operated under 4th Panzer, 6th and 8th Armies, and saw action at Zhitomir, Krivoi Rog, Korsun, and Kishinev in the southern Ukraine. They returned to Germany and refitted at Wahn, moving to Brittany in May 1944. FJR 6 was attached to the *91. Luftlande-Division* during the Normandy fighting of June 1944, and the other two regiments were encircled in Brest. They were finally overcome in mid-September 1944. The division was re-formed in Holland in December 1944 with a new FJR 2 and 7 and FJR 21. It was destroyed in the Ruhr early in 1945.

3. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

FJR 5, 8 and 9 were destroyed in Normandy and

at Falaise. Late in 1944 the division was re-formed in Belgium with personnel from various *Luftwaffe* Field Regiments, and fought in the Ardennes in January 1945 as part of 15th Army. It was overcome finally in the Ruhr in April 1945.

4. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

FJR 10, 11 and 12 continued to fight in Italy after the Anzio break-out. In 1944 they saw action around Nettuno, Florence, Rimini and Bologna, and surrendered in April 1945 near Vicenza.

5. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

This division was formed near Rheims in France in March 1944, from a parachute training unit and strong drafts from FJR 3 and 4 of the 1st Division. It comprised FJR 13, 14 and 15; heavy fighting with 7th Army in Normandy was followed by a period of reorganization, some surviving units being drafted out as a nucleus for the new 7th Division (q.v.) and others being reconstituted from various Air Force personnel in France and the Low Countries. It went into American captivity in March 1945, near Nürburgring.

6. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

Formed in France in June 1944, and never larger than a scratch *Kampfgruppe* in strength, this division effectively comprised FJR 17 and 18. It was wiped out in Normandy as an independent unit, and the remnants were drafted into the 7th Division. A second '6th Division' was formed in Holland, and was captured by British forces near Zutphen in 1945.

7. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

This formation was brought into being, as a 'going concern', in October 1944. Various odds and ends of the *Luftwaffe's* ground forces were re-designated as parts of the division while actually at the front and fighting. These included parts of the short-lived 6th Division, training unit personnel from Germany, and various of the *ad hoc* combat groups, known only by their commanders' names, which represented the disintegration of the *Wehrmacht* at that time. In this case the units concerned – of very uncertain strength and composition – were the Battle Groups Menzel,

Grossmehl, Laytved-Hardegg, Greve, Schaefer, Schluckebier and Grunwald. The division fought around Arnhem, and finally went into British captivity near Oldenburg.

8. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

Formed in early 1945 around FJR 22 and 24, this formation operated in the Ems–Weser area until the collapse of April 1945.



A paratroop Obergefreiter uses a field telephone. (Imperial War Museum)

9. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

Units of all branches of the Air Force were 'combed out' to form this division in December 1944. The main regiments were named FJR 25, 26, and 27; they fought exclusively on the Eastern Front, in Breslau, Stargard, and on the Oder line, and the last survivors disappeared in the final defence of Berlin.

10. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

Units from the 1st and 4th Divisions were pulled back from Italy to the Krems–Melk area of Austria in March 1945, and re-designated as FJR 28, 29 and 30. They fought in Moravia against the Red Army, and most of the division was captured.

11. FALLSCHIRMJÄGER DIVISION

Probably never existed except as a 'paper' re-designation of various dispersed forces which never operated together.

Flakartillerie



The appearance of *Luftwaffe* anti-aircraft units on the battlefields of Europe and Africa in a conventional artillery role was not due to any personal ambition of the *Reichsmarschall*, but rather to a sound and admirable flexibility of thought on the part of the German staff. So often ignorantly criticized for rigidity, the Germans, in their willingness to experiment with combat techniques, compare very favourably with certain episodes in the record of the Allied command.

The superb 8.8 cm anti-aircraft gun developed by Krupps in the early 1930s first appeared at the front line in Spain during 1936, equipping Flak batteries of the German expeditionary force. (It was entirely logical that anti-aircraft artillery should fall under *Luftwaffe* control, not least because of the importance of close technical liaison.) 'Flak' has come into common English usage, and will be used throughout this text; it is a contraction of *Flieger-Abwehr-Kanone*, 'anti-aircraft cannon'. The version used in Spain, properly termed the 8.8 cm Flak 18, was followed in 1937 by the improved Flak 36 model, which had provision for the speedy changing of barrels, and a new and significant wheeled carriage designated *Sonderanhänger 201*. The normal ground mounting was of cruciform design; for travelling the side arms were folded upwards and wheeled bogies fitted to the long arms. The *201* mounting allowed the gun to fire on ground targets without being freed from the bogies and winched down to ground level; the brakes were applied, the wheels chocked, the side arms of the cruciform mounting folded down and the 'feet' at their extremities winched down to brace against the ground – and the gun was ready for action. It is not known who first suggested that the gun was too versatile to be

confined to flying targets, but he was certainly a soldier of some vision; that battlefield use of the gun played a part in staff thinking from an early stage is confirmed by the fact that from 1940 onwards armoured shields to protect the crew during ground combat were fitted to new guns, and fitted retrospectively to many Flak 18s.

The *Luftwaffe* Flak regiments and batteries operated in great numbers throughout the war, and with enormous success. To detail all these units is frankly beyond the author's competence and would serve little purpose; but perhaps it is valid to consider one isolated campaign – that in North Africa.

In the mobile desert warfare of which the Germans of Rommel's *Panzerarmee* soon showed themselves to be masters, the Flak played a vital part. Supply and replacement problems haunted Rommel almost from the first – his uniquely vulnerable lines of communication lay across a Mediterranean ranged by Allied aircraft from



The yellow and white 'KRETA' cuff-titule, awarded to personnel of units which took part in the invasion of Crete. (Author's collection)

Malta and submarines from Malta and Gibraltar – and although his precious tanks were superior in quality to all Allied equipment until the very end of the campaign, their numbers were never as high as he could have wished. To conserve the PzKpfw IIIs and IVs of 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions, he evolved a deadly technique.

It has been said that despite the glamorous image of the tank columns which churned across the Western Desert, the real kings of the African battlefields were the landmine and the anti-tank gun. The greatest of these was the 'eighty-eight'; it was extremely mobile and could operate well



Early version of the *Fallschirmgewehr* FG.42/44 light automatic. (Imperial War Museum)

forward with the advanced armoured squadrons. It was normally towed by the heavy SdKfz 7 half-track; this powerful vehicle could accommodate the entire crew of eleven (layer, trainer, breechworker, fuse-setter, five ammunition numbers, commander and driver) and their personal equipment, a good supply of ammunition for immediate use, and reserves of fuel. Thus, once a target was sighted, the gun could be got into action very quickly. Its impressive rate of fire – between fifteen and twenty rounds a minute – was combined with great range and accuracy. Maximum low-trajectory range was 16,500 yards, and the 21-lb armour-piercing round could kill a tank at up to 3,000 yards – three times the range of the best Allied equipment. Its air-burst high-explosive round was notably effective against infantry. In the 'eighty-eight', Rommel had a deadly anti-tank weapon, a fine anti-aircraft gun, and a field-piece capable of augmenting conventional barrages with great speed and accuracy, all rolled into one supremely functional piece of metal.

The most frightening and effective use of the gun was in Rommel's famous 'Flak front'. In the face of advancing enemy armour the *Luftwaffe* regiments would be sent right forward and dug in to ground level; the gun was easy to conceal, as is any relatively small piece of equipment at ground level under the peculiar light conditions of the desert, and its rounds used a flashless propellant. A few troops of tanks would probe forward, making contact with the British armour and then withdrawing, luring the Grants and Crusaders

within range of the trap. Once they were comfortably lined up the Flak would methodically decimate them; their own short-range guns were useless, their attackers were virtually invisible, and their casualties were frequently appalling. At its anti-tank debut in the Battle of Sollum in June 1941 the 'eighty-eight' is claimed to have destroyed 123 out of 238 British tanks attacking the *Afrika Korps* position in Halfaya ('Hellfire') Pass); according to German sources this represented one 'brewed' tank for every twenty rounds fired by the Flak batteries.

Another battle in which the 'eighty-eights' distinguished themselves and their *Luftwaffe* crews was the series of actions near Agedabia in January 1942. Prominent was a crack Air Force unit, Major Hecht's *Flak Regiment 135*; the 18th, 33rd and 35th Regiments also did well, as did Major Hartmann's Reserve Flak *Abteilung 114*. The 135th, now led by Oberst Wolz, also figures



This group of paratroopers studying a map display clear details of the angular camouflage pattern on the jumpsmock, and the rimless helmet. There appears to be snow in the left foreground and on the muzzle of the left-hand man's MP.40, so this photograph could have been taken in Russia, where the *Fallschirmjäger* operated as infantry at the turn of 1941/42. (Imperial War Museum)

honourably in the records of Bir Hakeim in June 1942; in this hard-fought action he also had under command various detached battalions, notably II./Flak 25, I./Flak 18, I./Flak 6 and I./Flak 43. The last-named unit won no fewer than three awards of the *Ritterkreuz* (Knight's Cross) during the desert fighting; they were awarded to Oberleutnant Gellert, Major Gürcke (the commanding officer) and Oberfeldwebel Bösel. At El Alamein the 102nd and 135th Regiments were organized



Italy 1943 – a *Fallschirmjäger* poses in helmet, smock and jump-boots. The painted pastoral scene on the backdrop suggests that this picture was taken in some provincial Italian photographer's studio. (Imperial War Museum)

as the main fighting units of the 19th Flak Division, under direct army command and led by Generalleutnant Burckhardt; these units, together with the 109th Flak Battalion attached to Graf von Sponeck's famous 90th Light Division, and various army Flak battalions, had a total strength of eighty-six 8.8 cm guns at the opening of the battle. So seriously did the British take these weapons that Montgomery issued explicit instructions to his armoured brigade commanders concerning the absolute necessity of avoiding the 'Flak front' and saving their strength for the final battle with the panzers. Even so, it is said that the 'eighty-eights' were largely responsible for the massacre of the first wave of British armour at Alamein.

The Flak fought their way back along the coast with the other survivors of the *Panzerarmee*, and were still scourging Allied armour as the last stores were burned in Tunis in May 1943. The remains of the 19th Flak Division took up their last firing positions along the Miliane line, in company with the survivors of the 'Hermann Göring' Division and Koch's and Ramcke's paratroopers. The 20th Flak Division, or what was left of it, was at Tébourba; the 3/52 Battery distinguished itself in the last few days of the fighting when Leutnant Happach and Oberfeldwebel Wilhelm Voight turned their 'eighty-eights' on the American 2nd Armoured Battalion, and killed twenty tanks in as many minutes.

Division "Hermann Göring"



After the removal of the paratroop battalion from the Regiment 'General Göring' (formed from the regiment's I. *Jägerbataillon*) the unit continued as



Captured paratroopers, probably men of the 4th Division taken prisoner on the Anzio front, are marched past a Sherman tank. The tank may be identified by the white

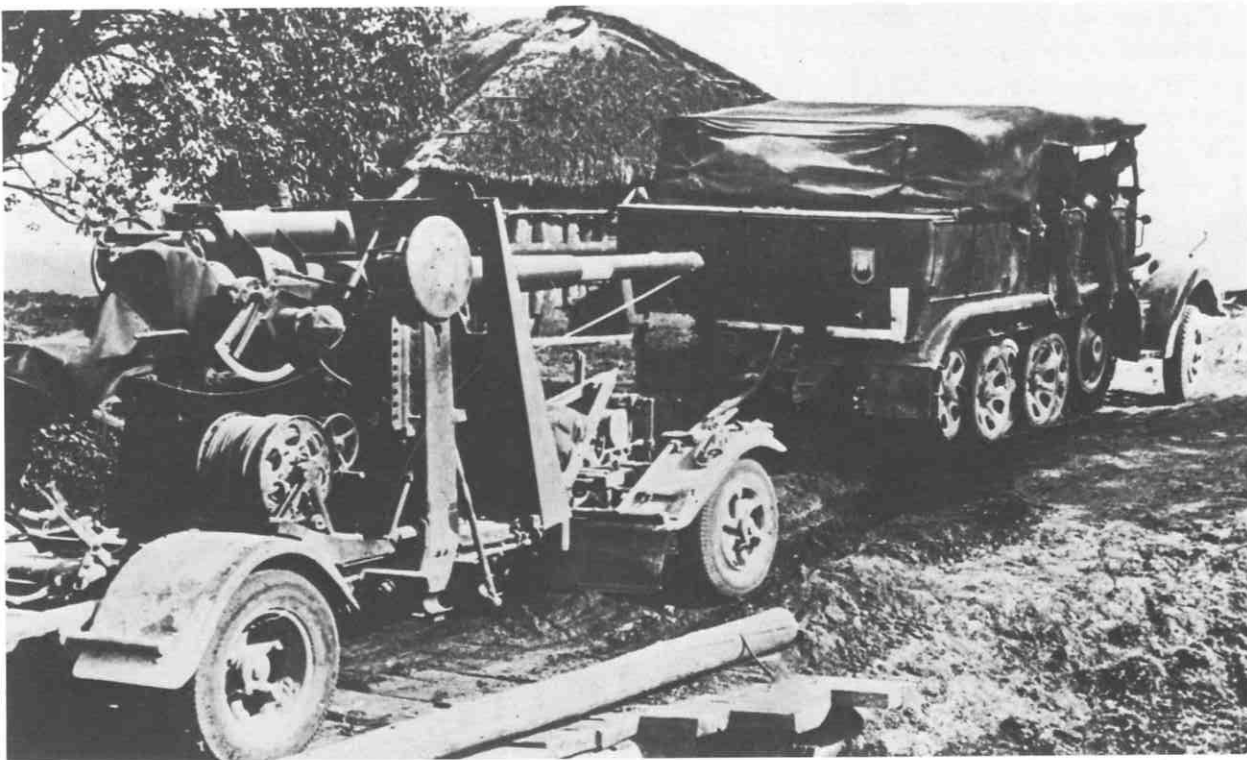
fernleaf insignia on the rear hull as belonging to the 2nd New Zealand Division. Note netting and hessian helmet covers. (Imperial War Museum)

the premier Air Force formation; it took part in the parade in Vienna for Adolf Hitler following the *Anschluss* of 1938, in the occupation of the Sudetenland and of Prague, and in many ceremonial occasions in the Reich itself. Paul Conrath took over command in 1939; the regiment played no part in the Polish campaign, but in 1940 advanced westwards with the rest of the *Wehrmacht*, and finished up outside Paris in an anti-aircraft role – it had a strong Flak element under command.

In 1941 this Flak unit – Flak Detachment 103 'General Göring' – again saw action under army command, distinguishing itself in the early months of the Russian campaign, as did the infantry units of the regiment. They were aided by their high priority rating, and the *Reichsmarschall* saw to it that their equipment and replacement require-

ments were filled. It is stated that by October 1941 the regiment had accounted for '161 aircraft, 324 tanks, 167 artillery pieces, 45 bunkers, 530 machine-gun emplacements, and had taken 11,000 prisoners'.

In the summer of 1942 the regiment was redesignated and expanded, becoming the *Brigade 'Hermann Göring'*; it then comprised a Grenadier Regiment, a *Jäger* Regiment, a Flak Regiment, and strong supporting units. Conrath, now an Air Force Generalmajor, continued in command. After a few months it was further enlarged to divisional strength. Göring's ambitions demanded that he increase his influence 'at court' *vis-à-vis* his arch-rival Himmler. The latter had improved his own position owing to the remarkable fighting qualities of his *Waffen-SS* divisions in Russia, combined with a mood of disenchantment with the

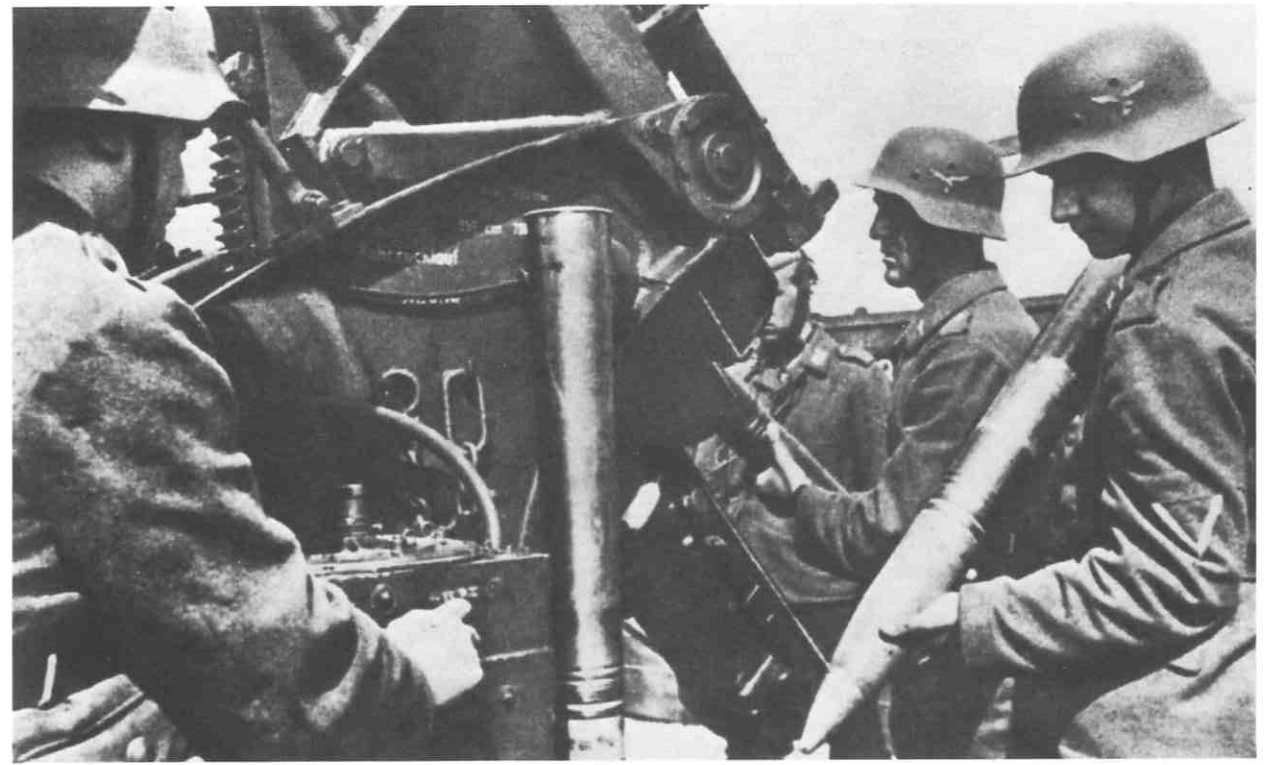


The deadly 8.8 cm gun, rigged for towing by its heavy half-track SdKfz 7 prime mover. (Imperial War Museum)

professional army command which was sweeping Hitler's 'Wolf's Lair' H.Q. at Rastenburg. In view of the threatening military position in which Germany found itself as 1942 drew to a close, the best way for a 'courtier' to secure favour was to make available to the hard-pressed Oberkommando Wehrmacht (OKW) substantial numbers of battlefield troops; and in January 1943 the *Panzer Grenadier Division 'Hermann Göring'* was born. Shortly thereafter it was re-designated as a *Panzer Division*. Based in Belgium initially, the unit was later transferred to the south of France, and 'worked up' with its new personnel and equipment until the early spring. Although not all the units were ready for service, the bulk of the division was shipped to Tunisia to take part in the last desperate attempt to maintain a foothold on the African continent.

The division was commanded from November 1942 until May 1943 by Generalleutnant Josef 'Beppo' Schmid, a *Luftwaffe* staff officer whose previous career had been rather undistinguished. Indeed, his main contribution to the early war

years seems to have been the preparation of a wildly inaccurate intelligence report on the strength, structure, capabilities and weaknesses of the Royal Air Force, which played a not inconsiderable part in the British victory in the Battle of Britain. This *Studie Blau* was accepted by Göring, who planned his tactics accordingly; when events belied the predictions of the intelligence appreciation, the preposterous Schmid calmed his *Reichsmarschall* by regular doses of unconfirmed reports of massive air victories, thereby luring the *Luftwaffe* command on to further disaster. At least one high-ranking combat officer of the *Luftwaffe* has published the opinion that Schmid's true métier was that of court jester and yes-man in chief. How he handled the responsible command of the *Luftwaffe's* premier ground combat unit when he found himself involved in the merciless arena of Tunis is not known in any great detail; his troops fought well in a series of difficult actions against great odds, and casualties, though very high, were not particularly surprising under the circumstances. All German units in Tunis suffered



'Ammunition numbers' of an 8.8 cm gun crew - note *Luftwaffe* decals on helmets

high casualties. It may be significant, however, that following the virtual annihilation of the division in May 1943 Schmid was given a Knight's Cross and removed from command. His return to the calmer atmosphere of the staff does not suggest that a taste of the actual battlefield had called forth in him any latent Wagnerian talents.

As early as the last week of February 1943 the *Panzer Division 'Hermann Göring'* was reported to be in a bad way. On that day it took part, under the command of 5. *Panzerarmee*, in Operation 'Ox-head'; this was a limited offensive intended to improve the German dispositions in Tunisia, strengthening their hand in preparation for the battles to come - battles which were inevitable in view of the inexorable advance of the British 8th Army from the east and the British 1st Army and American forces from the west. The division's objectives, certain features of high ground to the south of the German perimeter, proved beyond their compass; already worn out, they were unable to gain any significant ground despite genuinely impressive spirit. After three days they were forced

to withdraw nearly all the way back to their previous dispositions, shattered and weakened even further, and with very little to show for their exertions. This was the last general offensive mounted by von Arnim's *Panzerarmee*, and the battles which followed were bitter, fundamentally defensive - and doomed. When the end came in Tunisia the survivors of the '*Hermann Göring*' went into the bag with the rest of the German armies in Africa. On 7 May the division - by now, in effect, a weak regiment - was on the Miliane River line with the remnants of Koch's and Ramcke's paratroopers and General Franz's 19th Flak Division. On the night of 11/12 May the '*Hermann Göring*' provided covering forces at Jebel Zaghouan; in almost the last actual clash of infantry in the African campaigns, these were wiped out by a Free French force in bitter hand-to-hand fighting.

While the last shots of the Tunisian campaign were still being fired, and for two months thereafter, an extremely rapid revival of the '*Hermann Göring*' Division was carried out in southern Italy and Sicily, based on those divisional units which



'Eighty-eight' in action, firing from its wheeled carriage; note ammunition baskets in foreground. (Imperial War Museum)

had not been shipped to Africa in February. By the time the Allies mounted their invasion of Sicily in early July two strong units of the division were deployed in the eastern part of the island, under *XVI. Korps*: the *Panzerregiment 'Hermann Göring'*, with about 100 (mainly PzKpfw IV) tanks, and a regimental combat group commanded by, and named after, Oberst Wilhelm Schmalz. Together with parts of the *15. Panzergranadier Division* and 4th and 54th (*Livorno* and *Napoli*) Italian Infantry Divisions, the *Luftwaffe* tank crews and infantry were deployed along a line between Catania and Caltanissetta, directly in the path of the British 8th Army, and well placed to strike west and south at the American beachheads. Elements of the tank regiment made rather unco-ordinated attacks on the Americans east of Gela within hours of the first landings on 10 July; one squadron of PzKpfw VI 'Tiger' tanks is believed to have been among the units committed. The attacks achieved little, and for the first day or so of the fighting the mainly inexperienced troops of the 'Hermann Göring' displayed signs of panic; a vigorous lead, however, by the divisional com-

mander, General Paul Conrath, soon steadied them down, and for the rest of the brief Sicilian campaign they fought well.

Late on 10 July another, better planned attack was mounted, but was halted after some initial successes by naval gunfire. A determined attack on the American 1st Division followed on 11 July, and some Tigers got within 500 yards of the sea and actually exchanged shots with U.S. destroyers lying offshore; but again, in the end, Conrath was forced to withdraw, leaving about one-third of his tank strength smoking and gutted on the coastal plain.

By 15 July OKW had accepted that the island could not be held, but intended to exact a heavy price in time and men for the inevitable Allied victory. 'Hermann Göring', flanked by reinforcements from the *1. Fallschirmjäger Division*, positioned itself on the commanding heights of the Etna massif, and fought tenaciously as the 8th Army slowly dragged its way up the east coast of the island. They withdrew in good order, making the Allies pay for every bridge and crest, and when the German forces finally retreated across the



1



2



3

- 1 Oberleutnant of parachute troops, 1940
- 2 Paratrooper in jump kit, 1939
- 3 Feldwebel of parachute troops, 1940



1 Gefreiter of parachute troops, 1941
 2 Unteroffizier of parachute troops, Narvik, 1940
 3 Paratrooper, Crete, 1941

MICHAEL ROFFE



1 Major of parachute troops, Ramcke Brigade, Egypt, 1942
 2 Paratrooper, Ramcke Brigade, Tunisia, 1943
 3 Paratrooper, Italy, 1944

MICHAEL ROFFE



1 Generalmajor of parachute troops, 1944
 2 Unterfeldwebel standard-bearer of
 Flakartillerie troops
 3 Hauptmann of Flakartillerie troops, 1943

MICHAEL ROFFE



1 Unteroffizier bandsman of
 Flakartillerie troops
 2 Leutnant of Flakartillerie
 troops, evening mess dress
 3 Obergefreiter of Flakartillerie
 troops, 1943

MICHAEL ROFFE



I



2



3

- 1 Kanonier, Flakartillerie troops, Libya, 1942
- 2 Schütze, Jäger Regiment, Brigade 'Hermann Göring', 1942
- 3 Hauptmann of Panzergrenadier troops, Division 'Hermann Göring', Sicily, 1943

- 1 Leutnant of Panzer troops, Division 'Hermann Göring', Italy, 1944
- 2 Feldwebel of Panzerjäger troops, Luftwaffen Feld-Division
- 3 Schütze, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, 1943



I



2



3



1 Funker, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, 1944
 2 Leutnant, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, winter dress
 3 Schütze, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, 1945

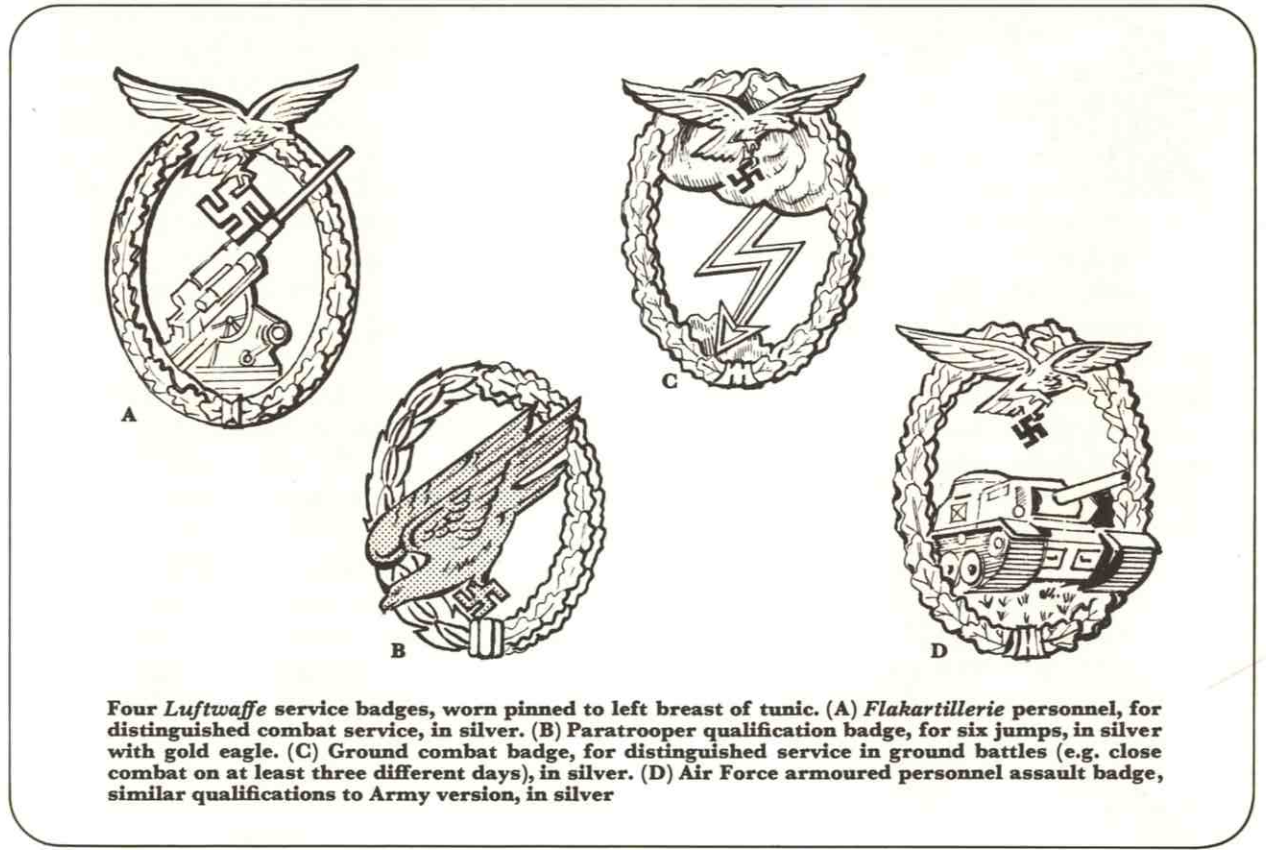
MICHAEL ROFFE

Straits of Messina in the third week of August, Conrath's men went calmly, and with confidence based solidly on achievement, towards their next battlefield. The division crossed to the mainland virtually intact, with most of its vehicles and heavy equipment.

The Salerno landings followed in September, but the 'Hermann Göring' was not heavily committed to action until the Anzio landings of January 1944, designed to 'get the invasion moving' again. The German forces, under the Air Force General Kesselring, were carrying out a masterly delaying action, penning the Allies as far south as possible behind a series of well-sited defensive lines. The Anzio landings were successfully contained until the spring; conditions inside the tiny beachhead rapidly deteriorated into a fair imitation of the Flanders trench warfare of the First World War, with the added refinement of large areas of swamp. The OKW planning staff were well aware that the invasion of France was coming, and wished to maintain the stalemate in

Italy; 'Hermann Göring', now commanded by the able General Wilhelm Schmalz, was based, in the early spring of 1944, at Livorno (Leghorn) on the west coast to guard against any further Allied landing which might seek to 'leapfrog' the Caesar Line, the most northerly section of the defence system. The division was also earmarked as a reserve in case of landings in France, and could not be used by Kesselring without OKW sanction.

Between 19 and 25 May 1944 Field-Marshal Alexander launched his masterly 'Operation Diadem' – the combined break-out from the Anzio beachhead and final assault on the Gustav Line around Cassino. The 'Hermann Göring', since January honoured with the pointless, in fact totally meaningless, title of 'Paratroop Armoured Division', was released to Kesselring by the OKW on 23 May. The Canadians had battered the first breach in the Gustav Line, the Anzio break-out by Truscott's Americans was making fast progress, and Kesselring's available reserves had dwindled to the *Luftwaffe* unit and the veteran



Four *Luftwaffe* service badges, worn pinned to left breast of tunic. (A) *Flakartillerie* personnel, for distinguished combat service, in silver. (B) Paratrooper qualification badge, for six jumps, in silver with gold eagle. (C) Ground combat badge, for distinguished service in ground battles (e.g. close combat on at least three different days), in silver. (D) Air Force armoured personnel assault badge, similar qualifications to Army version, in silver

29. *Panzergrenadier Division* of General Walter Fries from Civitavecchia. By 24 May his reserves had dwindled still further – the 29th, thrown in at Terracina to prevent a link-up between the forces advancing from the south and the Anzio perimeter, had been massacred by Keyes's II (U.S.) Corps. Schmalz was ordered south to Valmontone, to form, with von Mackensen's divisions, a strong blocking position in the Alban Hills while von Vietinghoff's battered 10th Army withdrew to the Caesar Line. So fast were events moving, and so urgent was the need for reinforcements, that the division was ordered to move by daylight. The inevitable happened: on the 25th the 'Hermann Göring' was caught on the road between the Alban



Tropical pattern *Luftwaffe* sidecap, the badge woven in pale blue-grey on a tan background. (Author's collection)

and Lepini Hills by roving Allied fighter-bombers. Enjoying complete command of the air, the Thunderbolts worked the column over at their leisure, and by the time Schmalz led his command into Valmontone on the 26th it was in a badly weakened condition.

Gaps were appearing in the German lines, one of them a two-mile hiatus around Mt Artemisio, south-west of Valmontone, where 76. *Panzer Korps* and I. *Fallschirm Korps* had failed to meet up. Schmalz, holding Valmontone for 76. *Korps*, saw the danger but had no reserves to guard against it. His force was much reduced by hard fighting, and the best he could do was place a few small units on the plateau as 'watchmen'. On the night of 30/31 May two American infantry regiments managed to infiltrate the gap and were well established on the plateau before the move was reported to Schmalz. He committed his last reserve to an assault – a single battalion of the

Panzergrenadier Regiment 'Hermann Göring'. On 31 May the attack was beaten back, with bloody emphasis. The division's military potential was for the time being exhausted.

In July 1944 the division, rebuilt to some extent but still weaker than its official establishment might indicate, was moved via Germany to the central sector of the Eastern Front, and thrown into the line to help counter the Soviet summer offensive. The attempt failed, and in the following month the division is known to have been fighting around Warsaw.

In October 1944 the surviving elements were pulled back to East Prussia, where an expansion and reorganization took place. A second division, designated a *Panzergrenadier* formation, was raised, and together with the existing unit formed the *Fallschirm-Panzer-Korps 'Hermann Göring'*. General-leutnant Schmalz commanded the corps, with Generalmajor von Necker and Generalmajor Walther as his divisional commanders. The corps returned to the front line – which was in any case moving back into East Prussia with alarming speed – and disappeared into the chaos of the dying Third Reich. It is known to have been encircled near Elbing; some elements managed to break out of the trap and fight their way west, but losses are known to have been astronomical. It cannot be stated with certainty exactly which units preserved some sort of identity or cohesion; in any practical sense, the 'Hermann Göring' ceased to exist.

Order of Battle, 1944

FALLSCHIRM-PANZERDIVISION 'HERMANN GÖRING'

DIVISIONAL STAFF including HQ Defence Company, map section, band, provost court, etc.

PANZERREGIMENT 'HERMANN GÖRING'

I. *Abteilung* with four companies each with 22 PzKpfw V 'Panther' tanks.

II. *Abteilung* with four companies each with 22 PzKpfw IV tanks; one armoured flamethrower section; and one tank workshop.

III. *Abteilung* with staff company (including two armoured assault guns); two armoured assault gun companies; and one heavy anti-tank company.

PANZERGRENADIERREGIMENT 'HERMANN GÖRING' 1 Staff company, signals section, motor-cycle messenger section, medium anti-tank company, combat engineer section.

I. *Bataillon* with three *Panzergrenadier* companies and one Heavy *Panzergrenadier* company, all with armoured half-track transporters; and one light anti-tank company.

II. *Bataillon* with three *Panzergrenadier* and one Heavy *Panzergrenadier* companies, all motorized; combat engineer section; heavy anti-tank company; two light infantry howitzer companies.

Infantry Howitzer Company

Heavy Anti-Tank Company

PANZERGRENADIERREGIMENT 'HERMANN GÖRING' 2 Establishment exactly as 1st Regiment above.

PANZER-AUFKLÄRUNGS-ABTEILUNG 'HERMANN GÖRING'

Reconnaissance detachment, with light and heavy armoured recce companies, light and heavy recce companies, heavy weapons company, and combat engineer, heavy anti-tank and light infantry howitzer platoons.

PANZERARTILLERIEREGIMENT 'HERMANN GÖRING' Staff battery and armoured observation battery.

I. *Abteilung* with staff battery, and three motorized batteries each with four light field howitzers.

II. *Abteilung* with staff battery, one battery of four 10 cm guns and two batteries each with four heavy field howitzers, all motorized.

III. *Abteilung* exactly as II. *Abt.* above.

IV. *Abteilung* with staff battery, two batteries each with six light field howitzers, and one battery of six heavy field howitzers.

FLAKREGIMENT 'HERMANN GÖRING'

Staff, signals platoon, data computing platoon, sound ranging section, and one light Flak column. Three heavy Flak batteries, each with four 8.8 cm guns and three 20 mm guns, motorized throughout.

Two medium Flak batteries each with nine 37 mm guns, and three quadruple 20 mm mountings.

PANZERPIONIERBATAILLON 'HERMANN GÖRING'

Combat engineer battalion with two motorized and one armoured engineer companies, one light and one heavy bridging columns.

PANZER-NACHRICHTEN-ABTEILUNG 'HERMANN GÖRING'

Signals detachment with one armoured telephone

company, one armoured radio company, and one light signals column.

Supporting echelons within the divisional establishment also included eight motor vehicle companies and one supply company; three workshop companies; one ordnance and one replacement transport companies; A-A repair, A-A special equipment workshop, and equipment platoons; administration, bakery and butcher companies; three medical companies, three ambulance platoons and one decontamination platoon; a motorized military police unit, and a field post office.

Luftwaffen Feld-Divisionen



In 1942 the first of the numbered *Luftwaffe* Field Divisions is believed to have gone into the line. These rather obscure formations owed their existence to Göring's determination to increase his influence by making field troops available to OKW. They were not a happy conception, and failed to earn a high reputation for reliability. Their personnel were drawn from a number of different sources, and were united only in their inexperience of and lack of aptitude for battlefield duties. They can hardly be blamed for this – for the most part they had joined up to service Heinkels, not to shoot Russians. As the war progressed, and the *Luftwaffe's* primary role as the national air arm was increasingly curtailed by shortage of most types of aircraft (though not fighters, which retained a high priority as the German air operations took on an increasingly defensive posture) and by the want of fuel which was eventually to cripple it entirely, its under-employed personnel were made available for other



Flakartillerie personnel posing with seven 'kill' rings painted on the barrel of their gun. Note the Flak arm patch worn on the left forearm by the NCO in the centre, denoting nine months' service with an operational unit.

tasks. By mid-1944 many thousands of airmen without planes and sailors without ships were carrying rifles on the shrinking frontiers of the Reich. The Air Force field units also embraced men from airfield construction units, service police battalions, training establishments, the bureaux of the vast aviation administration service, the civilian air traffic departments, and even such arcana as the *Luftwaffe* Forestry Service. The bomber arm had virtually ceased to exist by mid-1944, and its personnel were, in many cases, remustered as infantry.

The first major action involving the Field Divisions is believed to have been the attempt by von Mannstein's forces to support a break-out from Stalingrad by striking towards the perimeter from the Eastern Donets Basin in the winter of 1942-3. For a number of reasons the attempt was unsuccessful; and it is reported that the *Luftwaffe* Field Divisions broke and retreated under the pressure. This is hardly surprising, considering the

class of opposition against which they were thrown, the appalling conditions of winter fighting in Russia, and the sketchy training they had received.

In all, twenty-two Field Divisions were raised, numbered in sequence from 1 to 22. The 21st is believed to have carried the title 'Adler Division' ('Eagle Division'). They served in *Luftwaffen Feld-Korps* numbered from I to IV, and in addition the 9th and 10th *Feld-Divisionen* are known to have served in Steiner's *III. Germanisches SS Panzer Korps* on the Baltic Coast in 1944. It is unlikely that the majority of the divisions served under higher *Luftwaffe* command; they were probably used under local Army or *Waffen-SS* command as stop-gap formations.

The size of the divisions varied considerably, between 4,000 and 12,000 men; and the surviving establishment details imply that a low figure was the more common. For instance, the 17. *Luftwaffen Feld-Division* comprised the 33. *Lw. Feld-Regt.*; 34. *Lw. Feld-Regt.*; 17. *Lw. Artillerie-Regt.*; and 'detachments' of Flak, reconnaissance and anti-tank troops. The main fighting strength was thus only two rifle regiments, and the 'division' probably represented, realistically speaking, no more than a brigade. All the infantry regiments seem to have been numbered consecutively without reference to their divisional allocation, in the manner of *Waffen-SS* regiments late in the war. It also seems that all were classed as *Jäger*, or Rifle, regiments.

The Plates



A1. Oberleutnant of parachute troops, 1940

This young first lieutenant is in full parade dress, with sword at the 'present arms' position. He wears the standard German steel helmet painted a dark Air Force blue, with a national tricolour shield decal on the right side; this is balanced on the left side by a silver decal in the shape of a reversed *Luftwaffe* eagle - reversed, so that it should not appear to be 'flying backwards'! The tunic collar is worn open, with a white shirt and black tie. The silver cord around the upper lapels and collar indicates commissioned rank. The collar patches are in his branch of service colour, or *Waffenfarbe* - in this case the yellow of the flying branch and the paratroops. They are also edged in silver cord to indicate officer's rank, and bear an oak spray and two stylized wings in silver thread to indicate Oberleutnant's rank. The silver cord shoulder-straps have an underlay of yellow *Waffenfarbe*, and bear the single gold pip of Oberleutnant.

The massive silver aiguillettes are worn on parade by all officers. The silver Air Force pattern eagle and swastika badge is worn above the right breast pocket; the medal on the left breast is the four years' service medal of the *Luftwaffe*. Below it is worn the silver wreath and gold diving eagle of the paratrooper's qualification badge. The brocade parade belt with decorated silver and gold buckle was worn less frequently as the war progressed. The cuff-title, in grass green with (for officers) silver lettering and edges, bears the words *Fallschirm-Jäger Rgt. 1*; the second regiment wore a similar cuff-title. Grey kid gloves and black top-boots were worn by officers of all the services.

The *Luftwaffe* officer's sword was of unique

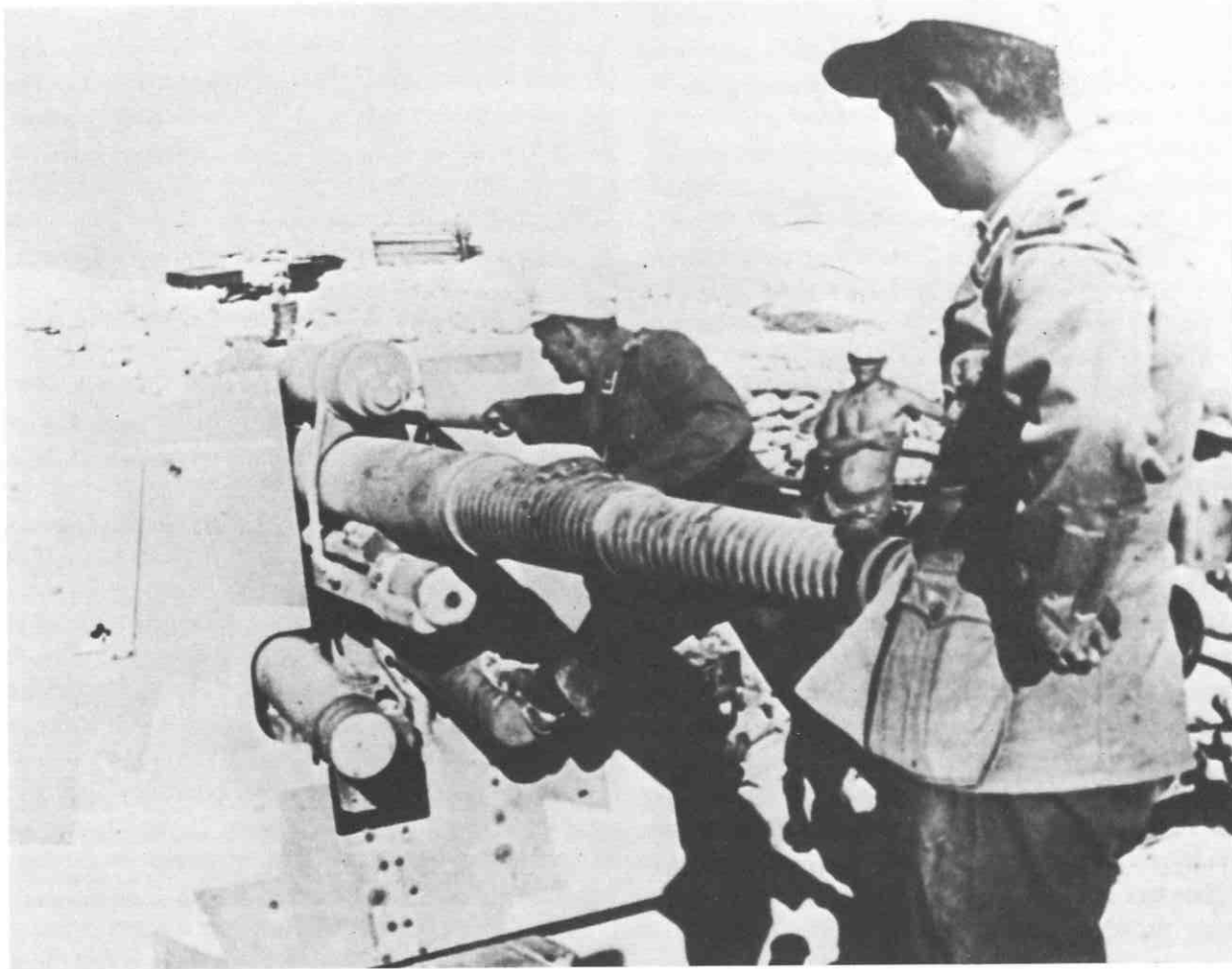
design, with curved quillons and no knucklebow, rather in the style of a broadsword. Quillons and pommel were silver, with a gold swastika set in the pommel; the grip was of *Luftwaffe* blue leather, bound with silver wire. The scabbard, invisible here as this drill movement involved holding it tight to the left side, was covered with blue leather, with silver furniture at mouth and chape.

A2 Paratrooper in jump kit, 1939

This soldier, equipped as he might be immediately before entering the aircraft, wears the rather subtly shaped helmet issued only to paratroopers; painted *Luftwaffe* blue-grey and bearing the same decals as the helmet in plate A1, it is held firmly in place by forked leather chin-straps. The step-in smock is an Army item, and still bears the Army eagle badge on the right breast; large numbers of these smocks were passed over to the *Luftwaffe* when that service gained control of all airborne troops, and photographs taken in combat in 1940 show that the Army badge was frequently left as it was. The smock fastens with two long diagonal zips from thigh to throat, rather in the manner of a modern commercial jump-suit; this is in contrast to the Air Force pattern smock.

The *Luftwaffe* blue trousers are a special paratrooper issue; their unique thigh-pocket is not clear here but is illustrated in a later plate. They are tucked into a pair of the excellent black leather jump-boots issued to the *Fallschirmjäger*; fitted with heavy cleated rubber soles, these lace up the outside of the ankle, in a 'three-quarter front' position. The rubber pads on arm and knee were mainly used in training, but occasional photographs of paratroopers in combat show them being worn as late as the Cretan campaign of 1941.

The bulky appearance of the paratrooper is due not only to the extremely tight grip of the harness itself, but also to the fact that his personal equipment - belt, shoulder braces, holster, waterbottle, bread-bag, pouches, etc. - is worn *under* the smock during the jump. On landing he removes the harness and the smock, and puts the equipment on again over the smock. (This practice, though time-wasting, was sound in theory; projections which might snag the parachute shroud lines should be reduced to a minimum, and for the same



In blinding desert sunlight, a *Flakartillerie* crew clean their gun, which is dug in and protected by a dry-stone sangar. Note dazzle camouflage on the gunshield, 'kill'

rings, and the variety of the crew's clothing. (Imperial War Museum)

reason it has even become usual since the war for jump-boots to be manufactured without a separate heel.) In his hand the paratrooper holds his long black leather gauntlets with elasticated wrists.

A3 *Feldwebel* of parachute troops, 1940

This NCO is in walking-out dress. His service cap is smaller in the crown than that worn by officers. In place of silver, the crown seam and the top and bottom of the black ribbed band are piped in *Waffenfarbe* yellow. The two badges on the cap are pressed in silver-grey alloy, while those on an officer's cap were woven in silver thread. The tunic, very similar to the officer's model except in quality of cloth, is worn with a white shirt and

black tie. The collar patches are in *Waffenfarbe* yellow, and bear the three silver-grey metal stylized wings of his rank. The edge of the upper lapel is piped in yellow, and inside this is a 9 mm-wide strip of silver braid or *Tresse*; this was worn on the collars of all non-commissioned personnel from the rank of *Unteroffizier* upward. The shoulder-straps are basically of the same blue as the uniform; they have an outer piping of *Waffenfarbe* yellow, an inner trim of silver *Tresse* and a single grey metal pip, the last two features indicating exact rank.

The tunic buttons are silver-grey metal with a dimpled finish. A white eagle and swastika badge is sewn above the right breast pocket, a narrow edge of the dark blue backing patch being visible

all round it. The paratrooper's qualification badge in silver and gold finish metal is worn on the left breast. The belt is the normal black leather service model with a dull silver buckle plate embossed with a wreath and the *Luftwaffe* eagle. In action these were often painted over with a blue-grey finish. For walking-out order the trousers hang loose over black laced shoes. The Air Force second model sidearm (the first, superseded in 1938, resembled the *Luftwaffe* officer's sword in design) hangs on decorative suspender straps which pass under the tunic to an internal attachment. The ranks of *Unteroffizier* and *Unterfeldwebel* wore the sidearm without the silver *porte-épée* or hanging knot.

B1 *Gefreiter* of parachute troops, 1941

A lance-corporal or private first class, as he might appear during his free time on his home base. He wears the sidecap or '*Schiff*' of the *Luftwaffe*'s non-commissioned personnel; a white woven *Luftwaffe* eagle and swastika badge surmounts the black-white-red national cockade on the front of the cap. Normal field service wear for all ranks was the 'flying blouse', a short, shaped garment with a fly front, which paralleled British battle-dress in function. The upper lapel is piped in the yellow *Waffenfarbe* of the paratroops, and the yellow collar patches carry the two silver metal stylized wings of his rank. His plain blue shoulder-straps are also piped in *Waffenfarbe* yellow.

The usual Air Force eagle badge is sewn to the right breast, in white thread on a dark-blue ground. A woven version of his paratrooper's qualification badge, in white and yellow thread, is sewn low on the left breast, and he wears the black wound badge awarded for either one or two wounds in action. The green and white cuff-title of the 2nd Paratroop Regiment is worn on the right forearm. His jump-trousers have a vertically buttoned pocket in the seam of the right thigh, in which the gravity-knife is carried. The single silver-braid chevron on the left upper arm indicates his rank. He is reading a copy of the German armed forces magazine, *Signal*; one may assume that the generously proportioned U.F.A. starlets are attracting more of his attention than the pawkily worded exhortations of Dr Goebbels.

B2 *Unteroffizier* of parachute troops, Narvik, 1940

This NCO has removed his harness and replaced his equipment over his smock; armed with one of the sniper-scope Mauser K.98 rifles from the provision canister, he is now rallying his squad to move off the drop-zone. His helmet bears the reversed eagle decal on the right side. He wears an old civilian scarf against the cold of Norway in the very early spring, and has had to take off his right glove to get his hand comfortably into the trigger-guard of the rifle – later models had an enlarged 'winter' trigger-guard. His smock is the *Luftwaffe* first pattern; it has a central fastening concealed in a fly front, two zipped pockets in the thighs, and permanently tailored legs. Trousers, boots and gloves are standard issue. His leather belt and shoulder braces – the latter concealed here by the bandoliers – are pre-war dark-brown items. The stiff leather holster holds his P.08 automatic, with two magazines. The cloth bandolier holds 105 rounds for the rifle; it hangs loose round the neck, and the ends were sometimes tucked under the belt. The only insignia on the smock are the *Luftwaffe* eagle on the right breast, here invisible, and the rank patch on the left upper arm. The normal *Luftwaffe* belt buckle is painted blue-grey. As a squad leader this NCO has a pair of field-glasses.

B3 *Paratrooper*, Crete, 1941

This soldier is armed with the 9 mm Schmeisser MP.40 and a *Stielhandgranate 24* – the famous 'potato-masher grenade'. His blue-grey helmet has been roughly camouflaged 'on the site', as it were, by rubbing with earth. The smock is a new pattern; the legs are no longer permanently tailored in, but formed by buttoning the long skirts of the smock between the thighs. Photographs show that many of the *Fallschirmjäger* preferred to wear the smock loose, for ease of movement, once they had landed and arranged their equipment. The camouflage pattern is a fairly short-lived and transitional one, consisting of rounded splotches and elongated streaks. It was used by some troops in Crete; but that campaign saw early slate-green smocks, transitional camouflage and the later segment camouflage all in use together. The *Luftwaffe* eagle is sewn on the right

breast, and is the only insignia worn; note also the four pockets in the smock, two across the thighs and two diagonally arranged on the chest, their zips covered by cloth flaps.

Trousers and jump-boots are standard issue, as are the belt and shoulder braces and the webbing pouches for the Schmeisser magazines. This item appeared in many different styles throughout the war – webbing with individual covers, leather with individual covers, webbing and leather with single-piece covers – and there seems to be no significance in the use of one or another by any particular unit or at any particular time. These are army pouches; blue-grey canvas Air Force versions were also issued.



Luftwaffe peaked field cap (Einheitsfeldmütze) which replaced the sidecap from 1943 onwards. Several versions existed of both officers' and other ranks' patterns, differing slightly in details of piping and buttons. (Author's collection)

C1 Major of parachute troops, Ramcke Brigade, Egypt, 1942

The officer shown here, apparently the successful party in some transaction involving one of his Italian allies, wears the standard *Luftwaffe* tropical issue uniform. The tunic, with four pleated pockets, and the loose, baggy trousers with a deep pocket in the left thigh, were issued to officers and other ranks alike. The outfit was widely used not only in the desert, but also in Sicily, Italy, the Balkans and southern Russia in the summer months, and by all branches of the Air Force. Its colour, a light tan which quickly washed and bleached to an almost off-white shade, differed from the usually green-tinged tropical dress of the Army.

No collar insignia were worn with this uniform, but the shoulder-straps indicating rank and

branch of service were looped and buttoned to the tunic. The usual breast badge is sewn above the right pocket, in this case an 'other ranks' pattern in white on dark blue – no real distinction seems to have been made with this uniform, and officers wore the 'other ranks' badge as often as their own silver pattern. The ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class is worn in the buttonhole. On the breast are pinned the major's paratrooper qualification badge, and the *Luftwaffe* Ground Combat badge, awarded from March 1942 onwards to Air Force personnel who distinguished themselves in close combat on the battlefield. The boots are of a late pattern – brown rather than black, and lacing up the front.

The unusual cap, so reminiscent of a British Army officer's hat, was worn by paratroop officers – and presumably by other Air Force ground troops – in the tropical theatre of operations. The whole hat, including the peak, is covered with brown cloth. The peak is rather larger than on the conventional Air Force peaked caps. The badges are metal pin-on items identical with those worn on the normal blue peaked cap of the non-commissioned ranks. Alternative wear was the conventional blue officer's cap with a white cloth cover over the crown.

C2 Paratrooper, Ramcke Brigade, Tunisia, 1943

The sidecap worn by this soldier is a lightweight tropical issue, manufactured in a thin sandy twill material and lacking the separate 'turn-up' of the normal sidecap. A woven badge in the form of the *Luftwaffe* eagle on a triangular patch of tan cloth is sewn to the front of the cap, the eagle being woven in pale blue thread. A woven cockade is fixed below it. White scarves or sweat rags were popular in the Mediterranean theatre of operations. The smock, worn here with the skirt buttoned into legs, is of a cut identical with the smock worn by the figure B3, but is in the later camouflage pattern – a scheme of angular segments or splinters in three colours, identical with that used by the Army for camouflaged shelter-quarters, smocks and helmet covers. It has the four pockets with concealed zips, and the *Luftwaffe* eagle is sewn to the right breast.

This soldier wears the baggy pale sand-coloured



An 'eighty-eight' firing during a desert battle. (Imperial War Museum)

twill trousers of the standard tropical Air Force uniform. They are gathered by buttons and tapes at the ankle; and in place of jump-boots, he wears the canvas and leather 'desert creepers', rather like hockey boots without cleats, which were popular with all branches of the forces in the desert and Mediterranean theatre. His paratroop helmet is slung from his belt, and is painted in a pale stone shade. He wears the normal leather ammunition pouches for rifle rounds, three pouches on each side of the belt, and additional ammunition is carried in the cloth bandolier, manufactured in sand-coloured canvas for tropical use. The K.98 rifle was often carried in the manner illustrated; unlike British and American rifles, which had the sling-swivels mounted on the bottom face of the weapon, the K.98 had sling

fittings on the left side of the butt and barrel housing, allowing it to be carried in this way for immediate access.

The paratrooper is carrying ammunition boxes with belts for the squad's MG.42 light machine-gun. Field equipment is reduced to the minimum; on the back of his belt he would be carrying his canvas bread-bag, with rations and immediate personal necessities, his water canteen, his bayonet and perhaps an entrenching tool.

C3 Paratrooper, Italy, 1944

One of Heidrich's men from 1. Fallschirmjäger Division, making use of a short spell out of the line in Cassino town to clean the bore of his FG.42/44 assault gun; this is the second pattern weapon,



'Beppo' Schmid, briefly the commander of the 'Hermann Göring' Division in the Mediterranean theatre of operations. (*Gemeinschaft der Jagdflieger E.V.*)

with telescope sight, wooden butt and improved action. Bipod and bayonet are folded beneath the barrel. The trooper has locked the receiver back and passed the weighted chain of his *Reinigungsgerät* 34 kit down the barrel from chamber to muzzle before pulling through with a brass-wire brush. The provision of comprehensive kits of spares and tools with all types of equipment was characteristic of the German forces.

The helmet has a cloth cover in the same camouflage material as the smock, with a looped fabric band around it for the attachment of foliage. The smock is the same pattern as illustrated in the previous figure; field equipment has been removed, and it is worn hanging half-open – an unsoldierly and sloppy appearance confirmed by wartime photographs. For winter fighting in the miserable conditions of the Italian mountains the heavy serge trousers of *Luftwaffe* blue are worn;

again, photographs confirm that they were often allowed to hang loose over the tops of the boots. Now fighting exclusively as élite infantry, the paratroopers were often issued with the Army boot of the period in place of the jump-boot; this was the 'high shoe', a conventional front-lacing ankle boot very similar to the British Army boot, though of inferior material.

D1 Generalmajor of parachute troops, 1944

One of the relatively youthful generals who three years before jumped over Crete as colonels commanding paratroop regiments, in the uniform he might wear for a parade or review; it may be presumed that he would wait until the last minute before exchanging his peaked cap for the steel helmet usually worn on such occasions.

The general wears normal service dress – open-collared tunic and pegged breeches in *Luftwaffe* blue, with peaked cap. The piping, cords, and insignia on the cap are in gold rather than silver as an indication of his rank. His collar is piped with gold cord, and his breast eagle is woven in gold metallic thread, for the same reason. Under his shirt collar is passed the ribbon of his *Ritterkreuz* – the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. His collar patches feature small gold eagles within a gold wreath on a white ground, and his shoulder-straps are of triple-twist gold/silver/gold cord on a white underlay; the *Waffenfarbe* gives way to white from the rank of Generalmajor upwards. The brocade parade belt, in silver with shot threads of black and red, has a gold general officer's buckle with a silver eagle motif. The sword illustrated is the general officer's pattern, its scabbard hooked through a ring on a suspension strap which passes under the tunic pocket flap, through a slit in the lining of the tunic, to an interior belt. On his left cuff the general wears the 'KRETA' cuff-title, proud mark of the men who fought during the invasion of Crete in 1941; the band was authorized in October 1942. His breeches bear general's stripes.

His insignia include the 1939 Bar to the 1914–18 Iron Cross – the small silver eagle high on the pocket – and below it the 1939 Iron Cross 1st Class. Pinned clockwise beneath these are the silver wound badge, for three or four wounds, or

for the loss of one eye, one hand, one foot, or deafness; the paratrooper's qualification badge; and the Air Force Ground Combat badge. Other campaign and service medals appear as ribbons, with applied swords and other motifs, above the breast pocket.

D2 Unterfeldwebel standard-bearer of Flakartillerie troops

This NCO carries the *Fahne* or standard of a *Flakartillerie* regiment. The red ground of the standard reflects the *Waffenfarbe* of the Flak troops; a paratroop regiment's standard, for instance, would be of identical design but with a golden yellow ground. The obverse bears a *Luftwaffe* eagle and swastika within a laurel wreath, both in silver, on a white circle. Four rays taper in to this central design from the corners, white stripes outlined with broad black trim. In each corner, on the white central stripe of the ray, is a black static swastika. On the reverse the design differs only in that a black Iron Cross with a silver border replaces the eagle, and the laurel wreath gives place to one of oak leaves. The metal capital on the pole is in the form of a silver eagle with outstretched wings, the fringe is silver, and the hanging cords and knots are silver, the former with a black edge.

The standard-bearer wears the normal *Luftwaffe* open-necked tunic with a black tie and white shirt. His shoulder-straps are edged all round with the silver braid of his rank, with an outer piping in red *Waffenfarbe*. The tunic collar is similarly edged with the 9 mm-wide silver *Tresse* worn by all ranks from Unteroffizier upwards, and with an outer piping of red. The red collar patches bear the two stylized wings of his rank. A standard-bearer's arm patch, in the form of a shield in *Luftwaffe* blue charged with two crossed banners, one showing the obverse and one the reverse, is worn just above the elbow on the right arm of the tunic. Other insignia, and the trousers and field boots, are standard. The metal gorget, which was worn throughout the German forces as a distinguishing mark of standard-bearers (and military police when on duty), hangs around the neck on a chain of square, masked links; this passes under the collar and emerges in the notch between the



Luftwaffe field troops in Italy; they wear the sandy yellow tropical uniform, with conventional insignia and equipment, and light-painted helmets. (Imperial War Museum)

lapels. The gorget itself is in white metal, with a yellow-metal motif in high relief, showing a *Luftwaffe* eagle above a wreathed swastika and a trophy of banners.

D3 Hauptmann of Flakartillerie troops, 1943

A captain commanding a gun-site somewhere in Germany or the occupied territories, blinded in one eye in some rearguard action in Tunisia and perhaps relegated to second-line duties. He wears normal field service dress, with the sidecap piped in silver around the turn-up to indicate commissioned rank. The 'flying blouse' is his usual everyday working dress, with pegged breeches and top-boots. The plain leather belt with a double-claw buckle was the prescribed field service wear for officers of all services. The blouse bears the usual silver breast eagle; the shoulder straps, with



Two Luftwaffe Oberleutnante pass through a London station on their way to the 'cage', July 1943. Both wear the tropical uniform, and one the cuff-title of the 'Hermann

Göring' Division. The same officer wears, on his field cap, the pin-back reversed metal badge from a Luftwaffe sun helmet

red *Flakartillerie* underlay, have the two yellow-metal pips of captain's rank, and the red collar patches with silver cord officer's edging bear the three stylized wings and oak spray which identify this rank. A touch of neatness is added by the collar and tie.

The fly-fronted blouse has been specially pierced in the normal position to accommodate the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class. On the left breast are the Iron Cross 1st Class, the silver wound badge appropriate to his handicap, the Flak badge and the Ground Combat badge. The ribbon of the Winter 1941/42 medal indicates service in the first winter campaign in Russia. Around the left forearm is sewn the Air Force version of the 'AFRIKA' cuff-title, awarded for six months' service in that area. Blue replaced the Army's brown, and in further contrast, only

officers wore the band with silver-grey edges and palm-heads; other ranks had a title with simply the word 'AFRIKA'.

E1 Unteroffizier bandsman of Flakartillerie troops

The basic uniform is the standard open-necked four-pocket tunic, standard trousers and field boots; as remarked above, helmets were normally worn on parade occasions. The shoulder-straps and collar patches indicate rank in the conventional way with silver-braid *Tresse* and stylized wings, and red Flak *Waffenfarbe* appears as piping round straps and collar and backing for the rank devices. It is also used, alternated with silver, in the bandsman's 'wings' on the shoulders; buglers wore wings with a hanging fringe of silver tassels. The drum hangings bear the *Luftwaffe* eagle on a

single panel of *Waffenfarbe*, the other four panels being in Air Force blue. The medals are the First World War Iron Cross, the *Luftwaffe* twelve years' service medal, and the Austrian *Anschluss* medal.

Bandsmen of the rank of Oberfeldwebel (*Musikleiter*) and upwards wore special rank insignia on *Waffenfarbe* collar patches; a lyre device replaced the wings, and was used in conjunction with wings on officers' patches. It also appeared on the shoulder-straps, which for commissioned ranks were of alternated silver and *Waffenfarbe* cord.

E2 Leutnant of Flakartillerie troops, evening mess dress
This uniform is self-explanatory.

E3. Obergefreiter of Flakartillerie troops, 1943

The range-finder operator in a light Flak battery. His working uniform is simple. The standard helmet is weathered to the point at which it gives no real indication of his service. The fly-fronted 'flying blouse' is the preferred working dress, with standard issue trousers and field boots. No pouches or braces are worn with the belt; a bayonet, canteen and bread bag slung on the back would probably be the only items of equipment worn. The blouse collar is piped in red *Waffenfarbe*, and the patches bearing the three wings of his rank are red; plain blue shoulder-straps are edged with the same colour. The rank chevrons are worn on the left arm only, and below them is a white thread trade badge identifying the soldier as a range-finder operator. The Flak badge, awarded from February 1941 for outstanding service in action, is worn on the left breast, and above it are the ribbons of the War Service Cross with swords, and the medal awarded for service on the *Westwall* in 1939/40.

F1 Kanonier, Flakartillerie troops, Libya, 1942

This gunner, 'taking five' for a smoke on the march, is interesting mainly for the mixture of insignia he wears. The plate was prepared from a photograph showing a group of these soldiers, all wearing the same type of uniform. Presumably owing to local shortages, the unit had been issued

with Army tropical uniforms instead of *Luftwaffe* dress.

The Army tunic and trousers are in the normal pale olive drab shade used by the troops of the *Afrika Korps*. The *Luftwaffe* helmet has been painted sand yellow, rather roughly, and a narrow edge of the original colour shows around the edges of the decal. The scarf is a civilian item. The long desert boots, of mixed canvas and leather construction and lacing from instep to knee, are identical, except in length, with the desert 'creepers' illustrated in an earlier figure. Their tight lacing gives the loose trousers rather the effect of pegged breeches. The blue-on-tan Army breast eagle insignia has been retained, but *Luftwaffe* shoulder-straps (blue with red *Waffenfarbe* piping) and collar patches (red, with rank insignia) have been applied. The Flak badge is worn on the left breast, and standard issue dust goggles hang round the neck.

F2 Schütze, Jäger Regiment, Brigade 'Hermann Göring', 1942

A private soldier in parade dress, in the 'present arms' drill position. His helmet, shirt, tie, tunic, trousers and boots are all standard issue, as are the belt and black ammunition pouches. The rifle is the Mauser K.98. The main interest in this plate centres on the collar patches. The *Regiment 'General Göring'* originally wore collar patches with a white backing and a red piping edge, the rank devices being applied in the normal way. The piping and underlay of the shoulder-straps was in white. The enlargement of the unit to include both *Jäger* and *Grenadier* regiments led to the adoption of green-edged patches in the former unit – green being the traditional colour for rifle regiments. It is believed that after February 1943 the convention was changed, coinciding with the expansion of the unit to divisional establishment. Thereafter all branches within the unit wore shoulder-straps piped with the appropriate *Waffenfarbe*. Officers wore white patches with the normal silver rank devices and silver cord edging, and shoulder-straps with the relevant underlying *Waffenfarbe*.

The unit cuff-title is an intermediate pattern. The original title was dark blue with a silver-grey edge and the words 'General Göring' in Gothic

lettering. This type has no edge for non-commissioned ranks, and carries the name 'Hermann Göring' in Gothic letters. The final pattern, which soon superseded this, carried the legend 'Hermann Göring' in block capitals, edged, in the case of officers, with strips of silver braid. The shoulder cord is a marksmanship award; this was issued in twelve different grades, each being indicated by a specific combination of colouring in the weave of the cord and the design of the eagle-and-wreath plaque, and in the number of 'acorns'. This is the seventh grade.

F3 Hauptmann of Panzergrenadier troops, Division 'Hermann Göring', Sicily, 1943

This trim and much-decorated captain wears one of the many combinations of uniform items observed in the rather relaxed atmosphere of the Mediterranean theatre. His pale sand-yellow field cap, of the type immortalized by the *Afrika Korps*, has woven insignia applied – the usual *Luftwaffe* eagle and cockade, of the size and pattern used on sidecaps. His shirt is buttoned to the throat, and he wears the Knight's Cross. The standard Air Force pale sandy twill tunic carries no collar patches – they seem to have been omitted from this tunic almost without exception – but the white-underlaid shoulder-straps of his branch and rank are looped and buttoned to the shoulders. The breast eagle insignia is conventional; the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class is worn in the button-hole, and the Iron Cross 1st Class is pinned to the pocket. (Only holders of both lower grades were eligible for awards of the Knight's Cross.) A wound badge and the *Luftwaffe* Ground Combat badge are pinned below it. A divisional cuff-title with silver officer's edging is sewn to the right sleeve. Plain leather belt with double-claw buckle, map case, and stiffened Luger holster are conventional. This officer wears, for comfort, a pair of Army-issue shorts, grey-green Army socks, and desert 'creepers'.

G1 Leutnant of Panzer troops, Division 'Hermann Göring', Italy, 1944

This tank troop commander wears the standard issue Army armoured vehicle uniform of black *Feldjacke* and *Feldhosen*. The field boots have long

given place to the standard front-lacing 'high shoe'. A variety of headgear was worn by the tank troops of the division; this officer follows a popular practice in wearing his ordinary blue peaked service cap, piped in silver around crown seam and both edges of the band to indicate commissioned rank. Other hats worn with this uniform included the Army-pattern black sidecap, with or without *Luftwaffe* eagles replacing the Army insignia; and, increasingly in the last year of the war, the black M43 field cap, with silver crown-seam piping in the case of officers, and *Luftwaffe* insignia.

The black double-breasted jacket is piped in Panzer rose-pink *Waffenfarbe* around the collar and upper lapel, in accordance with Army practice for all ranks, although this piping was less often seen in the last two years of the war. His shoulder-straps are identical with those of an Army tank lieutenant, and have normal rose-pink underlay. The collar patches worn by Air Force tank crews are in some dispute. One respected source holds that these were white, following the practice in the rest of the Division, with the normal silver death's-head insignia for all ranks; officers' patches were edged with silver cord, and those of other ranks with rose-pink. This source states that ordinary Army patches – black with rose piping for all ranks – were worn only when the correct pattern was unavailable. However, another expert in the field is of the opinion that the black Army patches were worn by all ranks, and that white Panzer patches were never issued. The author has been shown some dozen photographs of tank personnel of the Division, drawn from different wartime sources, and all wear the standard black Army patches; although in one case no patch at all was worn, and the silver death's-head badges were pinned directly to the collar itself.

The breast eagle is the Air Force pattern, in silver on black; for other ranks it was woven in white on black. A divisional cuff-title is worn, as is the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and an Air Force Tank Assault badge.

G2 Feldwebel of Panzerjäger troops, Luftwaffen Feld-Division

A senior NCO in the uniform of the commander of a self-propelled 'tank destroyer' in one of the

Luftwaffe Field Divisions; the contradictions of his position are reflected in the weird mixture of insignia features. The cap is the standard Army M43, with *Luftwaffe* insignia. Like the cap, the short jacket and loose trousers are in Army field grey; no example is known of a special *Luftwaffe* armoured vehicle uniform, and the crews of self-propelled guns in the Air Force battlefield units therefore had to wear the uniform prescribed for Army artillery personnel in self-propelled units. The breast eagle is standard *Luftwaffe* pattern. The shoulder-straps are ordinary *Luftwaffe* items with conventional rank distinctions, but are piped in Panzer pink *Waffenfarbe*. The collar patches are particularly interesting. Field Division personnel, whatever their branch of service, wore patches in Jäger green with conventional rank devices added. Non-commissioned ranks had the edges of the patches piped in the appropriate *Waffenfarbe* – in this case, Panzer rose-pink. Earphones, throat microphones, flashlight and Walther automatic are all standard issue items.

G3 Schütze, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, 1943

As the Air Force infantry regiments were classed as Jäger, or Rifle, units the private soldiers carried the rank of 'Rifleman'. This soldier, carrying an anti-vehicle device made by taping the heads of a cluster of stick grenades around one complete grenade, is armed with the usual K.98 rifle and Mauser bayonet. He wears the issue steel helmet with a foliage framework of canvas straps hooked to it, and the *Luftwaffe* greatcoat; the shoulder-straps of this are piped in Jäger green. His leather belt and shoulder braces are black, and the D-rings on the backs of his shoulders are used to attach a grey-blue canvas carrying frame (here, perforce, almost invisible) for the reduced equipment of his 'assault pack'. The mess-tins are strapped across the top, and below them the rolled shelter-quarter in camouflage material. On the belt are his grey-blue canvas bread bag, for rations and small personal effects, a water canteen, and his gas-mask canister. The leather carrying case for the entrenching spade, and the bayonet scabbard, are slung beneath this. Invisible here, but attached to the carrying frame under the rolled camouflage quarter, would be a cloth bag of tent-pegs.



An exhausted *Luftwaffe* soldier sleeps in a hedgerow on the way to a prison camp – North-West Europe, 1945. He wears the camouflaged field jacket peculiar to Air Force troops, ankle boots, and blue-grey canvas gaiters. (Imperial War Museum)

H1 Funker, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, 1944

This less than martial figure is a signaller, and is illustrated with line-laying pole and cable reel. His *Luftwaffe* blue M43 cap, with eagle and cockade badges sewn to the front on a single triangle of cloth, was worn increasingly from 1943 onwards by all ranks, as stocks of the sidecap were allowed to run down. His scarf is a civilian item. He wears the normal *Fliegerbluse* (flying blouse), the upper lapels piped in the brown *Waffenfarbe* of the signals units, and the dark-green collar patch bearing the single wing of his rank is outlined in the same shade. His trousers are tucked into the blue-grey canvas anklets, with leather straps, which were issued in conjunction with lace-up ankle boots from 1943 onwards; this was an economy measure, as the amounts of leather required to make the high marching boots were causing serious concern.

The reversible reinforced jacket, an item worn by both Army and Air Force troops, had white snow-camouflage material on one side and either

plain grey or camouflaged material on the other. Both the splinter pattern, and the 'water' pattern illustrated here, were used. The jacket had an attached hood. It was double-breasted, with a flap to cover the front join and drawstrings at neck, waist and bottom. Another over-garment which would be consistent with this period was the long camouflaged field-jacket, non-reversible and of lighter material, illustrated in some of the photographs in this book.

H2 Leutnant, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, winter dress

The fleece-flapped and fleece-lined version of the peaked field cap was worn mainly (but obviously not exclusively) by officers. This company commander has replaced shirt and tie with a privately owned roll-neck sweater under his flying blouse. He is pulling on the white, fleece-lined officer's parka, and wears the thick Army reversible over-trousers turned white side out. Rather short in the leg, these are fastened at the bottom with drawstrings. The boots are covered with overshoes of waterproofed material, also fastened with drawstrings.

The collar of the blouse is piped in silver, and the green collar patches with silver woven rank devices are outlined in silver; green underlay on the shoulder-straps identifies an infantry officer.

For recognition purposes, strips of coloured cloth, the colour changed frequently in the manner of a password, were often buttoned around the upper arms of white winter clothing.

H3 Schütze, Luftwaffen Feld-Division, 1945

A rather forlorn soldier, perhaps an aircraft mechanic drafted into a hastily raised field formation at short notice, and thrown into the line with only the sketchiest training or equipment. His helmet has been fitted with a cover for the attachment of camouflage, roughly fashioned from chicken-wire and a strip of rubber cut from an old inner tube. Over his uniform he wears the *Zeltbahn* or camouflaged shelter-quarter, common to both Army and Air Force troops. It could be arranged in various ways to offer protection from rain and the enemy's sight. He is armed only with a pair of *Panzerfaust* anti-tank projectiles – one-shot weapons of simple design, uncertain aim and only occasional effectiveness. They were mass-produced in the last months of the war and issued to troops and Home Guard units in tens of thousands; they had the advantage of being relatively cheap, and so simple to use that ten minutes' training gave an old-age pensioner as good a chance as a veteran soldier of 'brewing up' a T-34.

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