

Men-at-Arms

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The Waffen-SS (1)

1. to 5. Divisions



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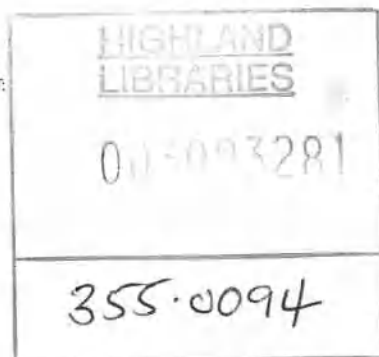
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SS-Sturmbannführer Herbert Schulze, commander of II/SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 4 *Der Führer*. In this photograph, taken in late 1943 or early 1944, Schulze still wears the pre-war Gothic script version of the regimental cuffband. (Josef Charita)

THE WAFFEN-SS (1) 1. to 5. Divisions

THE WAFFEN-SS STRUCTURE

THERE IS NO SPACE in these pages for even a simplified summary of the complex early history of the German NSDAP (National Socialist) movement in the 1920s and 1930s. For the purposes of this text it is sufficient to say that the combat units which had emerged by the outbreak of World War II from the overall SS political security organisation (the *Schutz Staffeln* or 'protection squads') traced their origins to the early 1920s, when a small bodyguard unit for Adolf Hitler was formed within the Nazi Party's mass uniformed organisation, the SA (*Sturmabteilungen* or 'Brownshirts').¹ In 1929 the whole SS numbered less than 300 men; by 1933 this figure had increased to some 30,000. Under the national command of Heinrich Himmler the SS, with three battalions of armed gendarmerie, provided the key personnel for the internal coup against the SA leadership carried out on 30 June 1934.

Thereafter the growth in the size and influence of the SS in most areas of German public life was massive, complicated, and virtually unchallenged. Nevertheless, at the outbreak of war in 1939 the armed units of what were mostly then termed the *SS-Verfügungstruppe* were still few and militarily insignificant. They were regarded by the armed forces with some suspicion, as a political gendarmerie with no true role to play on the battlefield. Early combat experience in the West, and particularly in the first year of the Russian campaign, changed that perception, leading to a number of different cycles of expansion of what was now the *Waffen-SS*. By late 1943 this battle-proven organisation was fielding several complete armoured and mechanised divisions and was enjoying priority for the best-quality manpower and equipment.

SS formations became the trusted spearhead of Germany's armies on the Eastern Front, and served on every other major front except North Africa. Between early 1943 and spring 1945 the ostensible order of battle of the *Waffen-SS* grew from eight to no less than 38 divisions 'on paper' – though many of the higher numbered (mostly foreign) formations fell far below the standards set by the early divisions. A number of corps-level formations, and even one or two nominal 'SS armies' containing both SS and Army units, would see action in 1943–45.

The *Waffen-SS* as a whole earned a dual reputation: for remarkable aggression and stamina in combat, and for murderous atrocity against civilians and prisoners. This series of *Men-at-Arms* titles will concern itself solely with brief organisation and campaign histories of the separate divisions, and the evolving uniforms, insignia and personal equipment of their officers and men.

¹ See MAA 220, *The SA 1921–45: Hitler's Stormtroopers*; and MAA 266, *The Allgemeine-SS*.

Although its divisions came under the tactical command of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht in the field, the Waffen-SS had its own unique internal command structure, at the pinnacle of which sat the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler. Operational command of the entire SS came under the auspices of the SS-Führungshauptamt, a new main office created in the summer of 1940 around the time that the Waffen-SS itself emerged from its forerunner, the SS-Verfügungstruppe.

Rank structure

The rank structure and rank titles of the Waffen-SS were directly adapted from those of the political Allgemeine-SS. Although the Allgemeine-SS method of displaying rank banding by single straps on the right shoulder only was eventually replaced by matched pairs of straps in the Army fashion; the old Allgemeine-SS style of left-hand collar patches showing specific rank was retained, with only minor changes, until May 1945.

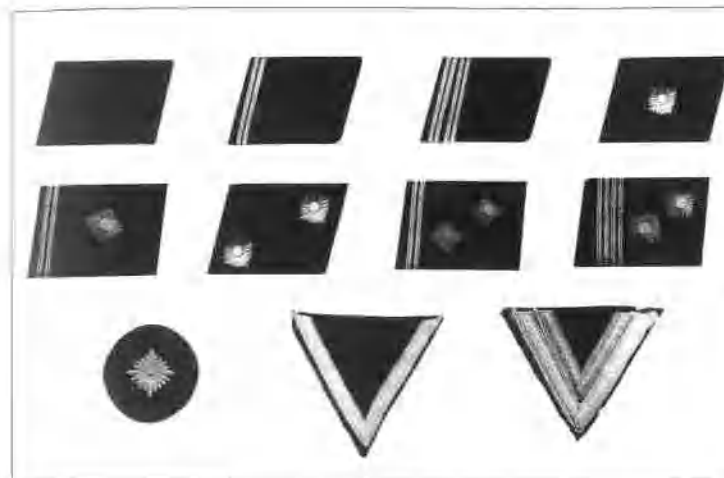
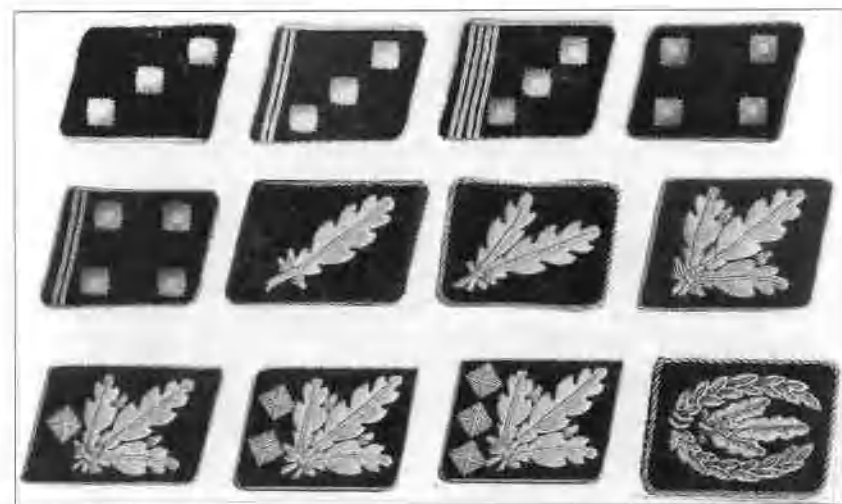
As well as the adoption of Army-style shoulder straps, a further move to emphasise the 'military' rather than 'political' nature of the Waffen-SS was marked when the original SS ranks equivalent to Army generals were given a suffix indicating the equivalent general's rank of the Waffen-SS. Thus, the original rank of SS-Brigadeführer became in the Waffen-SS *SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS*.

Generally speaking, in the Army and Waffen-SS similar positions were held by soldiers with equivalent ranks. Thus a Hauptmann (captain) commanding a company-sized unit in the Army would have as his equivalent in a Waffen-SS unit an officer with the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer; and an Oberst (colonel) in the Army, commanding a regiment, would have as his equivalent an SS-Standartenführer. The original SS ranks indicated precisely the size of the unit that the soldier would command, suffixed by the term Führer or leader: thus *Scharführer*, *Sturmführer*, *Sturmabteilungsführer*, *Standartenführer*, *Gruppenführer*, etc.



An extremely unusual and interesting photograph showing an SS-Untersturmführer undergoing training at an Army establishment. Whilst on attachment, he wears an Army breast eagle on his SS uniform. His collar patch bears the runes and '1' of the *Deutschland Standarte*. (Gary Wood)

Left collar rank insignia for commissioned ranks. (Top, left to right:) *Untersturmführer*, *Obersturmführer*, *Hauptsturmführer*, *Sturmabteilungsführer*, *Sturmabteilungsführer*. (Second row:) *Obersturmbannführer*, *Standartenführer*, *Oberführer*; *Brigadeführer* 1942-45/*Gruppenführer* to 1942. (Bottom row:) *Obergruppenführer* to 1942/*Gruppenführer* 1942-45; *Obergruppenführer* 1942-45; *Obergruppenführer* 1942-45; *Reichsführer-SS*.



Left collar and left sleeve rank insignia for enlisted men and NCOs, the former in pressed white metal and aluminium lace. (Top row, left to right:) *Schütze/Oberschütze*, *Sturmmann*, *Rottenführer*, *Unterscharführer*. (Second row:) *Scharführer*, *Oberscharführer*, *Hauptscharführer*, *Sturmscharführer* 1942-45. (Bottom row:) *Oberschütze pip*, *Sturmmann chevron*, *Rottenführer chevrons*.

Waffen-Hauptsturmführer. In the case of the various foreign volunteer national Legions, the prefix 'Legions-' was used, thus *Legions-Hauptsturmführer*. Most of this nonsensical and unnecessary complication was due to Himmler's bizarre racial beliefs and the insistence that those SS volunteers who were not considered racially 'Aryan' should not be permitted to use the 'SS' prefix. It was also primarily for this reason that many foreign volunteer units were forced to adopt special unit collar patches in place of the SS runes. German cadre staff in these units were entitled to wear the runes on the left breast pocket to indicate their status as true members of the SS.

Rank insignia

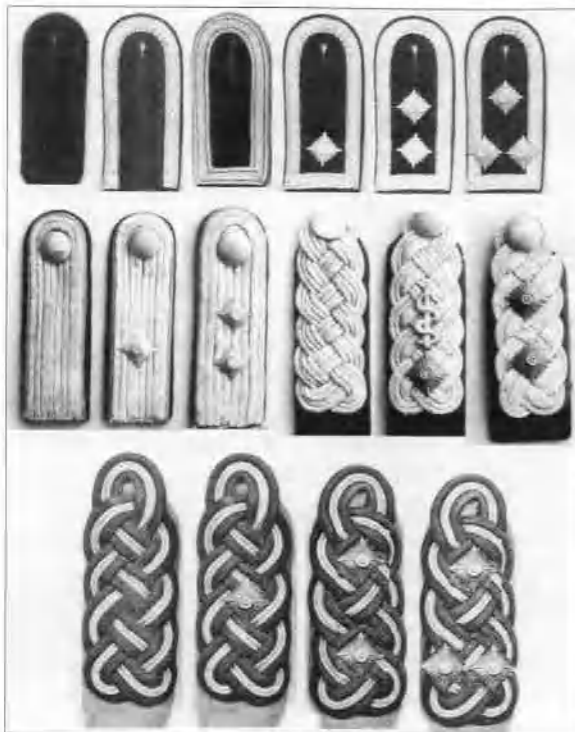
Junior NCO ranks, up to SS-Rottenführer, wore on the upper left sleeve chevrons manufactured with aluminium or subdued grey silk braid (*Tresse*) on a black wool triangular base. The sleeve rank pip for SS-Oberschütze (unlike the white metal collar patch pips) was machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread on a black wool circular patch.

The basic runic collar patch worn on the right side consisted of a rhomboid-shaped piece of buckram covered with black felt or badge-cloth, on which the runes were either machine-embroidered in silver-grey silk thread or hand-embroidered in aluminium wire. In the latter part of the war collar patches were machine-woven in black artificial silk with the runes in silver-grey or aluminium thread. Although the aluminium machine-woven and hand-embroidered forms are generally referred to as officer grade, they were in fact also worn by non-commissioned and enlisted ranks.

The usual indication of officer ranks was twisted silver cord piping edging the patches; however, officers were occasionally known to wear patches without cord edging, so the only absolute indication of officer rank is the grade indicated

Waffen-SS ranks & equivalents

Waffen-SS	Army	British equivalent
SS-Schütze	Schütze	Private
SS-Oberschütze	Oberschütze	—
SS-Sturmmann	Gefreiter	Lance Corporal
SS-Rottenführer	Obergefreiter	Corporal
SS-Unterscharführer	Unteroffizier	Sergeant
SS-Scharführer	Unterfeldwebel	Staff Sergeant
SS-Oberscharführer	Feldwebel	Warrant Officer II
SS-Hauptscharführer	Oberfeldwebel	—
SS-Sturmscharführer	Stabsfeldwebel	WO I
SS-Untersturmführer	Leutnant	2nd Lieutenant
SS-Obersturmführer	Oberleutnant	Lieutenant
SS-Hauptsturmführer	Hauptmann	Captain
SS-Sturmabteilungsführer	Major	Major
SS-Obersturmbannführer	Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant Colonel
SS-Standartenführer	Oberst	Colonel
SS-Oberführer	—	—
SS-Brigadeführer	Generalmajor	Brigadier
SS-Gruppenführer	Generalleutnant	Major General
SS-Obergruppenführer	General	Lieutenant General
SS-Oberstgruppenführer	Generaloberst	General
—	Generalfeldmarschall	Field Marshal
Reichsführer-SS	—	—



Shoulder straps. (Top row, left to right:) Schütze/Oberschütze, Unterscharführer, Scharführer, Oberscharführer, Hauptscharführer, Sturmcharführer. (Second row:) Untersturmführer, Obersturmführer, Hauptsturmführer, Sturmbannführer, Obersturmbannführer (medical), Standartenführer/Oberführer. (Bottom row:) Brigadeführer, Gruppenführer, Obergruppenführer, Oberstgruppenführer.

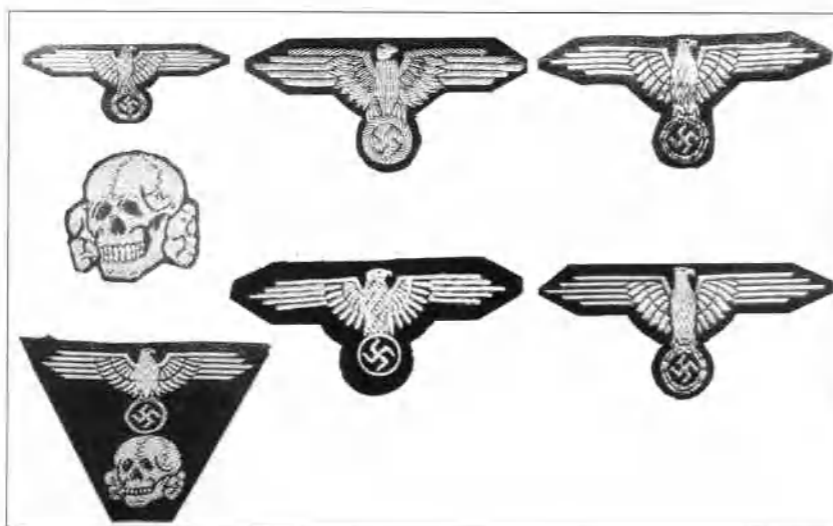
on the left-hand patch. Collar patches for general ranks were usually executed on black velvet base material.

Waffen-SS shoulder straps followed the same basic form as those of the Army. For lower ranks they were faced in black badge-cloth with either black or field-grey undersurfaces. The edge was piped in the appropriate *Waffenfarbe* (branch of service colour); and NCO-grade straps carried braid inner edging – initially in aluminium weave, but later in subdued grey silk. Aluminium pips indicated specific NCO ranks.

Officer candidates (enlisted ranks who had been earmarked for future officer training) carried the rank of SS-Junker, SS-Standartenjunker or SS-Standartenoberjunker, and wore the shoulder straps of SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Scharführer and SS-Hauptscharführer respectively, with the addition of two slides of aluminium braid for the first two. The appropriate NCO-rank collar patches were also worn – in the case of SS-Standartenoberjunker, those of SS-Hauptscharführer but with officer's silver twist cord edging. NCO candidates wore the shoulder straps of a

private with a single aluminium braid slide.

Officers' straps were made with the same matt grey straight or interwoven braid as their Army equivalents. Unlike Army straps, which were set on an underlay in the appropriate *Waffenfarbe*, all Waffen-SS straps were on a black underlay, the *Waffenfarbe* being displayed as an intermediate piping between the braid and the black underlay. Rank pips were originally bronze or gilt, but aluminium examples were also used. Waffen-SS generals' shoulder straps were made from the same interwoven silver/gold braid as those of the Army but set on pale grey rather than a bright red underlay.



The SS national emblem. (Top, left to right:) Machine-woven cap eagle and matching death's-head; hand-embroidered bullion sleeve eagle; machine-woven aluminium sleeve eagle. (Bottom:) One-piece eagle and death's-head for M1943 cap; machine-embroidered sleeve eagle; machine-woven rayon sleeve eagle.

THE WAFFEN-SS DIVISIONS: 1. SS-PANZER DIVISION LEIBSTANDARTE SS ADOLF HITLER

Designations

17 March 1933	SS-Stabswache Berlin
8 May	SS-Sonderkommando Berlin
10 May	SS-Sonderkommando Zossen
8 July	SS-Sonderkommando Jüterbog
3 September	Adolf Hitler Standarte
8 November	Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler
13 April 1934	Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler
12 June 1939	Infanterie Regiment (mot.) Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler
15 July 1942	SS-Division (mot.) Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler
24 November 1942	SS-Panzer Grenadier Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler
22 October 1943	1. SS-Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler

Commanders

March 1933–July 1943 SS-Gruppenführer Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich; July 1943–Aug 1944 SS-Brigadeführer Theodor Wisch; Aug 1944–Feb 1945 SS-Brigadeführer Wilhelm Mohnke; Feb–May 1945 SS-Brigadeführer Otto Kumm

Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 1; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 2; SS-Panzer Regiment 1; SS-Artillerie Regiment 1; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 1; SS-Flak Abteilung 1; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 1; SS-Panzer aufklärungs Abteilung 1; SS-Panzer Pionier Bataillon 1

Campaigns

The *Leibstandarte* traced its origins to the bodyguard known as the SS-Stabswache Berlin, formed in March 1933 to protect Hitler. Its official designation was changed several times before, in November 1933, becoming the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* ('Adolf Hitler Lifeguard Regiment'). Unlike most other units, which recruited in a specific home region, the regiment took its personnel from throughout Germany; only the best physical candidates were accepted for this high-profile unit. Special insignia – the SS runes collar patch rather than the unit number worn by Allgemeine-SS units, the distinctive cuffband bearing Hitler's signature, and white leather dress belts and accoutrements worn on parade – set the *Leibstandarte* apart from all others. The unit provided honour guards on many state occasions, as well as providing sentries for Hitler's new Reichskanzlei in Berlin. Their home was the former Imperial Prussian cadet barracks at Berlin-Lichterfelde. Their impeccable appearance and precision drill earned them the somewhat derogatory nickname of the 'Asphalt Soldiers' – good for parades, but unproven on the field of battle.



An SS-Unterscharführer from the *Leibstandarte*. His shoulder straps have the embroidered 'LAH' cypher, and the machine-embroidered pattern of cuffband is worn. Note the NCOs' silver-grey *Tresse* braid edging to his collar and shoulder straps. This combat veteran wears the ribbons for the Iron Cross and East Front 1941/42 medals as well as the Close Combat Clasp.

Reorganised into a motorised regiment in late 1934, the *Leibstandarte* took part in the re-occupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss with Austria, and the occupation of the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. In September 1939 the *Leibstandarte* was put to the ultimate test when it went into battle for the first time during the invasion of Poland, for which it was attached to the Army's Panzerdivision Kempf. In action at Lodz, Warsaw and Modlin, the regiment fought well, but sustained over 400 casualties fending off determined attacks by Polish cavalry and infantry, which sometimes came to hand-to-hand combat.

The West and Greece, 1940-41

In March 1940 an artillery battalion was added in the first of many moves to increase the strength and military effectiveness of Hitler's own 'personal' regiment, a unit of which he was intensely proud. During the campaign in the West the *Leibstandarte* acquitted itself well. It crossed the Yssel river near Zutphen, covering over 46 miles (75km) in a single day, and performing with a level of enthusiasm for battle that was to become its trademark. The *LSSAH* took part in

the encirclement and seizure of Amsterdam, the unit's satisfaction over this successful action being somewhat dampened when Luftwaffe General Kurt Student was shot and wounded by *Leibstandarte* soldiers who mistook him for one of the enemy. (Troops of the division are also believed to have murdered some 80 British prisoners at Wormhout on 28 May.) In recognition of its performance the *LSSAH* was given the honour of having the 'Führerstandarte', Hitler's personal banner, as its regimental flag.

In April 1941 the *Leibstandarte* excelled itself in the invasion of Greece, a high point being the daring capture of the Klidi and Klissura passes by Kurt Meyer's reconnaissance troops. In difficult terrain, Meyer's troops had become pinned down; he used the simple expedient of throwing hand grenades at the feet of his own men, giving them no option but to leap out from their cover and storm forwards.

Russia, 1941-42

It was, however, with the invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941 that the *Leibstandarte* was to be put to its greatest test; now a brigade just under 11,000 strong, it formed part of Heeresgruppe Süd. After advancing through Cherson it captured Taganrog, and in November, Rostov, where it took over 10,000 prisoners. Here, SS-Hauptsturmführer Heinrich Springer earned the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross for his daring seizure of the vital bridge over the River Don. As the end of the year drew near, however, the impetus of the advance faltered and Soviet resistance grew. Counter-attacks put the *Leibstandarte* in danger, but Hitler refused to countenance a general withdrawal. Nevertheless, the SS was forced back out of Rostov, and into

a number of grim winter defensive engagements in the area of the Donetz Basin as the Soviets counter-attacked in considerable strength.

The *Leibstandarte* had greatly enhanced its reputation as a first-class combat unit, drawing praise from Army generals who had formerly regarded the Waffen-SS with some disdain. The commander of III Panzerkorps is recorded as saying of the *LSSAH*, 'This truly is an elite unit.' This reputation was not achieved without cost, however: more than 5,200 of the brigade's soldiers had become casualties.

In June 1942 the *Leibstandarte* was pulled from its defensive positions along the Mius river and moved to France, where it was greatly reinforced and re-formed as a mechanised or Panzer-grenadier division. The new division spent some months forming up and training before moving to occupation duties in the southern (Vichy) part of France – occupied by Germany in retaliation for the surrender of the French Army in North Africa to the Anglo-American landings in November. During this period the *Leibstandarte* was given its own detachment of the new PzKpfw VI Tiger heavy tanks.

Kharkov and Kursk, 1943

In early 1943 the *Leibstandarte* was rushed back to the Eastern Front as Stalingrad fell and the whole military situation deteriorated. It formed part of I SS-Panzerkorps under Paul Hausser, tasked with preventing the city of Kharkov from falling to the Red Army. Outnumbered seven to one, Hausser refused to sacrifice his new corps just to satisfy another of Hitler's 'no-withdrawal' orders, and on 15 February the city was abandoned. The capture of Kharkov had left the enemy exhausted, however, while the Germans began to regroup. The German counter-attack was launched on 23 February, and after three weeks of bitter fighting the Soviets were once again thrown out of the city; over 20,000 enemy troops were killed or wounded and over 600 Soviet tanks destroyed. The ferocity of the fighting had cost the *LSSAH* about 4,500 killed; the former Red Square in the centre of Kharkov was renamed 'Platz der Leibstandarte' in honour of the division.

Battlefield casualties had to be made up by a draft of former Luftwaffe soldiers, much to the irritation of the divisional commander, 'Sepp' Dietrich. Just as many of his best officers and NCOs were being transferred to form the cadre for the new 12.SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend*, Dietrich was preparing to hand over command to Theodor 'Teddi' Wisch, as he himself took over from Hausser as corps commander.

Shortly thereafter the *Leibstandarte* took part in the summer offensive at Kursk, where it formed the spearpoint of 4. Panzerarmee. The division fielded 100 tanks, 12 of which were the impressive new Tigers. Launching its attack on 5 July, the *LSSAH* made good initial progress, reaching the second line of enemy defences by the early evening of the



SS-Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas, commander of I/SS-Panzer-grenadier Regiment 2, pins a decoration to the breast of fellow Knight's Cross winner SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Becker, chief of 2 Company of Kraas' battalion. Both received the Knight's Cross on the same day. (Josef Charita)



SS-Unterscharführer Bartmann wearing the 'LAH' slip-on shoulder strap cyphers. Although he is an infantryman he wears an enlisted grade peaked cap with black piping, borrowed from a friend in the Pioneers for the portrait photograph – such caps were private purchase items. On such occasions it was common to wear the tunic collar opened over a shirt and necktie. (Erwin Bartmann)

first day. The SS troops were involved in bitter hand-to-hand fighting as they cleared the enemy trenches. By 11 July the division had reached the River Psel, the last major obstacle before Kursk itself. On the 12th the tanks of the SS formations clashed with Soviet armour in a major action near Prokhorovka. It was the first of several engagements around this little Russian town which built up over a number of days into the biggest armoured battle in history. Over 300 German and 400 Soviet tanks were destroyed without either side gaining any decisive advantage; the battle for the Kursk salient was still in the balance.

However, news of the Allied landings in Sicily caused Hitler to cancel the offensive. The *Leibstandarte* was one of the units sent westwards to counter the Allied threat to Italy, handing over all its tanks to the remaining SS divisions before departing for warmer climes. It was a brief change of scene; following the overthrow of Mussolini and Italy's armistice with the Allies the *Leibstandarte* were involved in disarming Italian troops, but by October 1943 the division was heading east once again, by way of the Balkans.

By the end of the year the division was in fierce combat around Zhitomir; so furious was the defensive fighting that by the end of February the

Leibstandarte had just three operational tanks remaining on strength. The *LSSAH* narrowly escaped annihilation after being surrounded in the Kamenets-Podolsk Pocket, but the remnants were rescued by the timely intervention of the 9. and 10. SS-Panzer Divisions, the *Hohenstaufen* and *Frundsberg*. The *Leibstandarte* was in a woeful condition, and in April 1944 was withdrawn to France for rest and refitting.

Normandy and the Ardennes, 1944

Thousands of new troops had refreshed the worn-out shell of this premier division by June 1944, and as the Allied invasion troops began landing in Normandy it was virtually at full strength once again. However, Hitler's insistence that the Normandy landings were only a feint resulted in the *Leibstandarte* being held in reserve for fully 23 days after D-Day, 6 June. Although some elements went into action earlier, the division as a whole was not committed to battle until 6 July.

Inserted into the front lines around Caen, the *LSSAH* fought in many desperate defensive battles against overwhelming odds, in conditions of complete enemy dominance of the air, and often within reach of devastating Allied naval gunfire support. It took part in the attempted counter-offensive on Avranches, but was repulsed, losing large numbers of tanks to British Typhoon aircraft. By the end of August it had just managed to escape encirclement in the Falaise Pocket, but had lost all its tanks and artillery and suffered over 5,000 casualties. The division was then withdrawn to Germany for refitting; once again, the

replacements received were no longer of the quality of the troops with which it began the war.

The following months were spent in a frenzy of activity. In December 1944 the division was separated into Kampfgruppen (temporary battle groups). *Kampfgruppe Peiper* had the heavy (King Tiger) tank battalion, a mixed battalion of PzKpfw IVs and PzKpfw V Panthers, with one battalion of Panzergrenadiers and artillery support; *Kampfgruppe Sandig* had the rest of SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 2; *Kampfgruppe Hansen* consisted of SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 1 plus anti-tank and artillery support; and *Kampfgruppe Knittel* had the reconnaissance battalion with artillery and pioneer support. Their mission was to play a leading part in the Ardennes counter-offensive.

Advancing on 16 December as the spearhead on the route designated 'Rollbahn D', SS-Standartenführer Joachim Peiper's command almost immediately ran into problems. The terrain through which they were travelling was totally unsuitable for the enormous King Tiger tanks; narrow, snow-bound roads hampered progress, and Peiper's column found itself ensnared in traffic jams. Severe fuel shortages were temporarily alleviated by the capture of the US fuel dump at Büllingen on 17 December, and Peiper's Kampfgruppe made real progress through Ligneuville and Stavelot; however, that afternoon troops assigned to guard them shot 83 US prisoners at the Baugez crossroads near Malmédy. The spearhead of the column ran into trouble again on 18 December when two of three bridges over the Amblève at Trois Ponts were blown just as the SS troops arrived. Peiper was forced to divert via La Gleize and used an intact bridge at Cheneux; but a clearing of the heavy cloud cover brought Allied air attacks.

Joined now by Kampfgruppe Knittel, Peiper's advance began to falter once more; each time a potential route was identified and the Germans raced for a bridge to take them out of the Amblève valley, US resistance would stiffen. On the 19th Peiper captured Stoumont after bitter fighting, but attempts to push beyond the town were unsuccessful. Stavelot, in the German rear, was retaken by the Americans; now the Germans were forced to defend Stoumont and Cheneux against US counter-attacks, at heavy cost to both sides. By 24 December Peiper was almost out of fuel and ammunition; he had no hope of advancing and was in great danger of being cut off. Leaving a rearguard to hold off the enemy, he destroyed his heavy equipment and began to withdraw, reaching the Salm river and the main body of I SS-Panzerkorps the next day. On 29 December the various *Leibstandarte* Kampfgruppen were ordered to move from the northern flank of the Ardennes front to the southern. The fresh assault by the remains of *LSSAH* made little progress, however, and on 1 January 1945 the division was withdrawn to prepare for the next planned counter-offensive.



SS-Obersturmbannführer Richard Schulze, a veteran of the *Leibstandarte* who also served for a period as an SS adjutant on Hitler's staff, and was the commander of the officer training school at Bad Tölz in the late stages of the war. Here he wears the field-grey version of the special uniform for armoured vehicle crews, occasionally also worn by Panzergrenadiers. His M1943 field cap has a typical mixture of insignia: a woven Army eagle and a metal SS death's-head. Decorations and awards include both grades of the Iron Cross, the Close Combat Clasp, the Infantry Assault Badge and the Wound Badge in silver.



A lieutenant decorated with the Knight's Cross, SS-Obersturmführer Georg Karck of the *Leibstandarte* wears an officer's field blouse cut from coarse field-grey wool. His sleeve eagle is actually the insignia from the SS version of the Panzer beret or *Schutzmütze*. As was often the case, no 'LAH' monograms are worn on the shoulder straps. The Panzer Battle Badge is the bronze model awarded to Panzergrenadiers.

Hungary and Austria, 1945

In February 1945 the division moved to Hungary to take part in Operation 'Frühlingserwachen', whose objectives were both to recapture Budapest and retake the vital Hungarian oilfields. Here the *Leibstandarte* would operate as part of 6th SS-Panzer Army under its old divisional commander, 'Sepp' Dietrich.

The spring thaw had turned the roads east of Lake Balaton into a sea of mud, and off-road the marshy terrain was even worse. A preliminary artillery bombardment followed by a delay in launching the advance only served to forewarn the enemy. On the morning of the attack, 6 March, no artillery bombardment was provided; and in a vain attempt to maintain an element of surprise, some troops were dropped off as much as 11 miles (18km) from the start point of their attack, leaving them already exhausted by the time they got there. *Leibstandarte's* tanks began to bog down almost immediately, some sinking as deep as the turret ring. Despite all these difficulties the men of the division attacked with their customary aggression, but progress was painfully slow; only two miles (3km) were covered on the first day. By 11 March the SS had taken the towns of Simontornya and Azora and were holding off determined counter-attacks. Although exhausted, they pressed on and crossed the Sio Canal; and despite the slow movement of most of the German force, the

LSSAH reconnaissance battalion under Joachim Peiper actually penetrated 45 miles (72km) into enemy territory, almost two-thirds of the way to Budapest.

Any hope that the bulk of the German force could fight its way forward to support him was dashed by a massive Soviet counter-attack; although the Germans held fast, their Hungarian allies disintegrated on their flank. The SS troops were pulled back to regroup around Stuhlweissenburg on the main route to Vienna. Fortunately for the *Leibstandarte*, the same appalling conditions that had hampered the German advance now slowed the Red Army, allowing the remnants of the division to make a relatively orderly retreat covered by successful rearguard actions.

The failure of the offensive, and false rumours from senior Army commanders that the SS troops had showed a lack of determination, enraged Hitler. Accusing the Waffen-SS troops of cowardice, he ordered them to remove their distinctive unit cuffbands as a punishment. Despite apocryphal tales of Dietrich and his officers sending back their cuffbands to Hitler in a chamber pot, the truth is that Dietrich simply refused to pass on the order. (Though such an order would have been taken as a great insult, these units had in fact already been ordered to remove their cuffbands as a security measure to prevent Soviet intelligence identifying the units opposing them.)

During late March 1945 isolated Kampfgruppen from the division were still fighting determined rearguard actions while slowly retreating towards Wiener Neustadt. By the beginning of April the *Leibstandarte* had been reduced to two small combat groups holding the line between that city and Vienna, where they successfully held off several powerful attacks before disengaging. By now the entire division numbered less than 1,600 officers and men and just 16 tanks – less than ten per cent of its normal strength. Gradually forced back through Austria in the closing weeks of the war, by mid-April its remnants were in the area around Mariazell. When the war ended on 8 May, those who had survived immediately headed west to surrender to US forces and avoid the fate of less fortunate Waffen-SS troops who were captured by the vengeful Red Army.

The *Leibstandarte* had evolved from parade troops treated with some scorn by the armed forces, to one of the most highly regarded combat formations Germany possessed. Given its reputation for holding fast in even the most dire straits, it was said of it that 'Every unit wants to have the *Leibstandarte* by its side. Its self-discipline, eagerness and enthusiasm, unshakable calm in crisis situations and sheer toughness are examples to us all.' Despite the tarnishing of the reputations of many Waffen-SS units by atrocities, there can be no doubt that in terms of sheer combat effectiveness the *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* was one of the best German formations of the war. A total of 52 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patch

SS runes, 1935–45. The *LSSAH* was the first unit to wear the runes alone, with no unit number or other additional insignia.

Shoulder straps

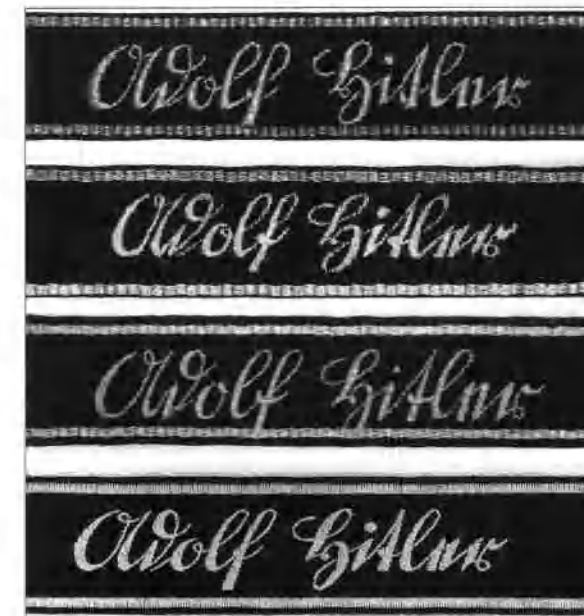
1935–39, large, flowing, curved monogram of intertwined letters 'LAH'. 1939–45, smaller, angular version of the above. These cyphers were machine-embroidered into the cloth for enlisted ranks, stamped in white metal for senior NCO ranks, and in gilt or bronzed metal for officers. From 1942, officers were to wear white metal cyphers as for NCOs. From May 1940, enlisted ranks also wore a separate removable cloth slide on the shoulder strap, embroidered with the angular form of cypher. The embroidered cypher on enlisted straps may be found in silver-grey or in the appropriate colour to match the Waffenfarbe piping.

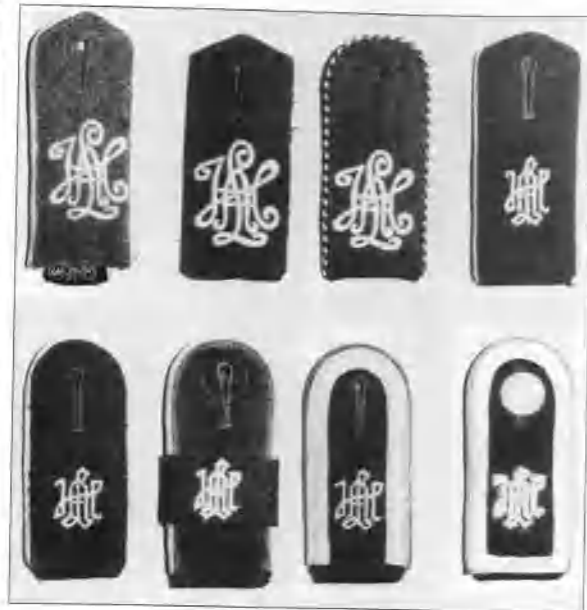
Cuffband

This bore the title 'Adolf Hitler' in two forms: (1) Gothic (Fraktur) script. First pattern, worn only for a few months in 1933–34. (2) Sütterlin script. Introduced shortly after the first pattern and worn until 1945.

Numerous styles of manufacture are known for the 'Adolf Hitler' cuffband, the most important being: (1) A woven 'RZM style' rayon band with

A selection of cuffbands worn by the *Leibstandarte*, in Sütterlin script. (Top to bottom:) Hand-embroidered aluminium wire, machine-woven aluminium wire, machine-embroidered, and BeVo woven rayon versions.





Leibstandarte shoulder straps. (Top, left to right:) White-piped, pointed-end version in field-grey with large monogram; unpiped pointed-end version in black with large monogram; rounded-end version piped with black/silver twist with large monogram; white-piped, pointed-end version with small monogram. (Bottom:) White-piped, rounded-end version with small monogram; wartime strap with monogram on removable slide; NCO strap with small embroidered monogram; and NCO strap with white metal monogram. (All courtesy of Gary Wood collection)

seven-strand metallic thread edging, the inscription machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread for enlisted ranks, and hand-embroidered in aluminium wire for officers; the thickness of the aluminium wire varied considerably. (2) A machine-woven band with the inscription woven in aluminium thread integrally with the band, generally referred to as the 'flat-wire' type. (3) From 1943, the title was machine-woven in pale grey artificial silk on a black rayon band for all ranks, by the firm of BeVo of Wuppertal.

References to machine-embroidered titles being for enlisted ranks and hand-embroidered or flat-wire woven examples being for officers are an over-simplification. It was far from uncommon for NCOs or even junior rankers to wear wire-embroidered titles and for officers to wear machine-embroidered versions, especially in the field. The divisional commander, 'Sepp' Dietrich, wore a special version of the cuffband with the lettering executed in gold wire. In fact this was a standard base band with gold wire sewn over the top of the original aluminium wire edging.

Helmet insignia

In late 1933 helmets worn by the *Leibstandarte* had decals added. On the right side was a black shield with white edging and white runes, and on the left a tricolour shield with black/white/red bands. These were worn until early 1935, when black runes on a silver shield replaced the original version. In August 1935 the *LSSAH* adopted the standard combination of black runes on a silver shield combined with a red shield bearing a white disc with a black swastika, as worn throughout the SS.

2. SS-PANZER DIVISION DAS REICH

Designations

10 September 1939	Panzerverband Ostpreussen
10 October 1939	SS-Verfügungs Division (mot.)
1 April 1940	SS-Division <i>Deutschland</i>
21 December 1940	SS-Division (mot.) <i>Reich</i>
May 1942	SS-Division (mot.) <i>Das Reich</i>
9 November 1942	SS-Panzer Grenadier Division <i>Das Reich</i>
22 October 1943	2. SS-Panzer Division <i>Das Reich</i>

Commanders

Oct 1939–Oct 1941 SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser; Oct–Dec 1941 SS-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich; Dec 1941–Apr 1942 SS-Obergruppenführer Matthias Kleinheisterkamp; Apr 1942–Feb 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer Georg Keppler; Feb–March 1943 SS-Brigadeführer Herbert-Ernst Vahl; March 1943 SS-Oberführer Kurt Brasack; March–Oct 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer Walter Krüger; Oct 1943–July 1944 SS-Oberführer Heinz Lammerding; July 1944 SS-Standartenführer Christian Tyschen; July–Oct 1944 SS-Brigadeführer Otto Baum; Oct

1944–Jan 1945 SS-Oberführer Heinz Lammerding; Jan 1945 SS-Standartenführer Karl Kreutz; Jan–March 1945 SS-Gruppenführer Werner Ostendorff; March–Apr 1945 SS-Standartenführer Rudolf Lehmann; Apr–May 1945 SS-Standartenführer Karl Kreutz

Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 3 *Deutschland*; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 4 *Der Führer*; SS-Panzer Regiment 2; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 2; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 2; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 2; SS-Flak Abteilung 2; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 2; SS-Panzer Pionier Bataillon 2.

Campaigns

This division originated from the combining of the existing SS-VT Regiments *Deutschland*, *Germania* and *Der Führer* with the sappers and signallers of the SS-Pioniersturmbann and the SS-Nachrichtensturmbann. The SS-VT or *SS-Verfügungstruppe* was created in March 1935 from previous units of SS-Politische Bereitschaften, and the first of the SS-VT regiments (designated *Standarten* at that time), *Deutschland*, was formed in Munich in September of that year. One year later a second regiment, *Germania*, was founded in Hamburg; and following the Anschluss with Austria a third, *Der Führer*, was created in Vienna.

The various SS-VT units, with the exception of *Der Führer*, which was still forming, served during the Polish campaign under Army command. The *Deutschland* regiment was attached to the Army's Panzer Division Kempf, part of Heeresgruppe A striking south into Poland from East Prussia, whilst *Germania* was allocated to Heeresgruppe B in the south. *Deutschland* acquitted itself well during attacks on the Polish defensive positions of the Mława Line, in particular the seizure of Höhe 192, which required attacks up-hill against fiercely defended enemy positions. The regiment also took part in the defeat of the Polish fortresses on the Modlin Line, the soldiers of *Deutschland* receiving glowing praise from General Kempf for their performance in battle.

Unlike its sister regiment, *Germania* was not used as a cohesive unit but split up and attached piecemeal as separate detachments to support various Army units. The decision not to group the various SS units that took part in the Polish campaign into a single force was deliberate: Hitler wished to appease senior elements of the Wehrmacht who opposed any growth in the power and influence of the armed SS in parallel with the traditional armed services. However, given the performance of these units in the field, in October 1939 Hitler ordered the formation of the *SS-Verfügungs Division* under SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, a highly experienced former professional Army officer. The new division would include, in addition to regiments *Deutschland*, *Germania* and *Der Führer*, the SS-Artillerie Regiment, SS-Pioniersturmbann, SS-Nachrichtensturmbann, reconnaissance and anti-tank detachments.

The West and Yugoslavia, 1940–41

The new formation attacked through Holland to link up with paratroopers who had dropped at Rotterdam. Although the various SS-VT units had been formed into a division, during this initial stage of the



An early pre-war photograph of a member of SS-Standarte *Der Führer*. Note the black/silver twist piping to the collar and shoulder straps, and the numeral '3' ahead of the runes on his right collar patch. (Josef Charita)



Collar patches worn within the SS-Verfügungsddivision, forerunner of *Das Reich*; all have black/silver twist cord edging. (Top:) SS-Pioniersturmbann, SS-Standarte *Der Führer*; (Bottom:) SS-Nachrichtensturmbann, SS-Standarte *Deutschland*. (Collar patches courtesy Gary Wood collection)

Members of the SS signals battalion; note the early SS-VT style field caps. Under magnification a lightning bolt ('Blitz') is visible right of the runes on the collar patch. The cuff title is 'SS-Nachrichtensturmbann'. Note that - unlike Army troops - they wear collar patches on the greatcoat. (Josef Charita)



Westfeldzug individual units were once again allocated to support various Army units. It was the *Der Führer* Regiment that led the invasion force, storming across the River Yssel despite the Dutch having blown the bridge, establishing a bridgehead and capturing the town of Westervoort. The regiment advanced more than 60 miles (100km) in just one day. Other units faced much tougher resistance, but although suffering serious casualties they still succeeded in overcoming enemy fortifications protecting the Meuse-Waal Canal. *Der Führer* continued to impress with its first-class performance, passing Utrecht and storming on through Amsterdam to Zandvoort on the coast. Subsequently, the separated SS-VT units came together at Marienbourg, and the division struck westwards to eliminate Dutch forces holding out in Walcheren. The Dutch were in excellent defensive positions and supported by artillery and naval units off-shore. Leading the attack, the *Deutschland* Regiment took heavy casualties, which only ended with a Dutch withdrawal rather than a successful German assault.

On 22 May the division struck out towards Calais. While bivouacked for the night en route the SS troops were attacked by French units attempting to break out of the encirclement at Dunkirk. The French were held, though the fighting was extremely tough, and once they had regained the initiative the SS-VT succeeded in destroying numerous tanks and took several hundred prisoners. The division crossed the La Bassée Canal the following day and held the bridgehead they established against British counter-attacks. The advance continued with *Der Führer* and *Germania* striking through the Nieppe forest and pushing the British back. At this time *Deutschland* was forcing a crossing over the Lys Canal, and holding against powerful British armoured attacks; the day was saved by the timely arrival of the *Totenkopf* Division.

On 1 June the division was pulled out of the line to regroup and prepare for the second stage of the assault on France that began four days later; the SS-VT struck southwards through Orleans and seized Angoulême. This second phase saw the division primarily engaged in mopping-up actions until the French capitulation on 25 June. It is estimated that SS troops took the surrender of over 30,000 prisoners during this period for the loss of less than 35 of their own men. Several members of the *SS-Verfügungs Division* were decorated with the Knight's Cross for their parts in this campaign. In July 1940 the division moved to

occupied Holland, where it spent several months before returning to France; it was originally earmarked to take part in the proposed invasion of Great Britain. During this period the division lost a number of its most experienced soldiers, transferred to provide a cadre for the new *Wiking* Division then being formed; in December 1940 the *Germania* Regiment was removed and replaced by SS-*Totenkopf* Infanterie Regiment 11. Late that month the division was officially renamed as SS-Division *Reich*.

The *Reich* Division remained in France until March 1941, when it was ordered to the Balkans. During the invasion of Yugoslavia a section of the motorcycle reconnaissance unit, with only ten men

under SS-Hauptsturmführer Fritz Klingenberg, mounted a patrol into Belgrade and, ferrying their motorcycles over the Danube in a commandeered motor boat, drove right into the centre of the Yugoslav capital. Along with the German military attaché in the city, Klingenberg bluffed the mayor into surrendering by claiming to be the commander of a huge military force awaiting his orders just outside the city, ready to call in an air bombardment before launching an attack. Captain Klingenberg was rewarded by Hitler with the Knight's Cross for this audacious achievement.

Russia, 1941-42

On 22 June 1941 the *Reich* Division formed part of Heeresgruppe Mitte, under Generalfeldmarschall von Bock, during the invasion of the Soviet Union. Not being in the first wave, when it finally moved it found the going slow on the heavily congested roads. The division saw its first action in Russia on 28 June when it ejected Soviet forces from the village of Starzyca, though only the timely arrival of reinforcements prevented the spearhead units being cut off during an enemy counter-attack. *Reich* advanced into the heart of central Russia, crossing the Beresina, skirting the notorious Pripet Marshes, to Mogilev and Smolensk, and captured and defended Yelnya against determined counter-attacks. On 8 August the division was temporarily relieved for a period of rest and refitting near Smolensk.

By September *Reich* was back in the forefront of the advance, taking Sosnitsa and assisting in the capture of Kiev and over 665,000 Soviet prisoners. After another brief rest and the arrival of replacements for casualties, by 19 October the division was heavily involved in Operation 'Typhoon', the advance on Moscow. After capturing Gshatsk and holding it against furious counter-attacks, *Reich* pushed on and took Mozhiask and Istra; by early December divisional elements had taken the Moscow suburb of Lenino and could actually see the domed roofs of the Kremlin. However, the onset of winter, heavy losses through combat attrition, and the fanatical defence of their capital by Soviet troops then drained the impetus out of the German advance. With Moscow tantalisingly just out of their grasp, the Germans were forced onto the defensive. *Reich* had ultimately reached a point just 10 miles (16km) from the centre of Moscow, but had suffered heavy casualties in the process: it is estimated that by this point only 40 per cent of its original personnel remained.

The weakened division then found itself battered by fierce Soviet attacks as the enemy began their winter counter-offensive. By January 1942 the *Der Führer* Regiment was down to a strength of less than 50 men as the exhausted formation clung on against Red Army pressure, and by the end of February the *Reich* Division was reclassified as a mere Kampfgruppe. It fought along the Volga river in March, holding until



SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Ullrich, wearing the collar patch and cuffband of the SS-Pioniersturmbann - see Plate D3. Ullrich went on to serve with distinction in the *Totenkopf* Division. (Josef Charita)

the enemy attacks finally began to ease. It was then allowed some much needed rest before, in June, being withdrawn from the front and returned to Germany for rebuilding as a Panzergrenadier division. From August 1942 until late January 1943 the division was posted to France on occupation duties, and took part in the occupation of Vichy France that winter.

The Eastern Front, 1943

In January 1943 the newly retitled *Das Reich* Division returned to the Eastern Front, where it was thrown into heavy fighting in the defence of Kharkov. Hausser's withdrawal from the city (see above under *LSSAH*) enraged Hitler; but just one week later the SS divisions *Das Reich*, *Leibstandarte* and *Totenkopf* smashed their way back into Kharkov and routed the Soviets. It was a momentous victory for the Waffen-SS, made even more satisfying by the additional recapture of Belgorod.

No sooner were *Das Reich*'s troops rested after their great victory than they were thrown into battle again in the attack on the Kursk salient in July. As part of II SS-Panzerkorps with General Hoth's 4th Panzer Army, *Das Reich* struck into the southern part of the salient covering the right flank of the corps. Torrential rain had turned the roads into impassable quagmires so that the *Das Reich* infantry were forced to advance without essential armoured support, and were soon involved in fierce hand-to-hand combat. Air support from Stuka dive-bombers helped them seize their first objective, the village of Beresov and the heights overlooking it. Resistance soon stiffened, however, and the SS grenadiers came under punishing artillery fire and attacks from enemy aircraft. Despite fierce opposition, *Das Reich* made excellent progress until checked by a determined Soviet counter-attack at Prokhorovka on 8 July. *Das Reich* held the enemy at bay, supported by General von Richthofen's tank-busting Stukas, and along with the other Waffen-SS divisions of II SS-Panzerkorps they knocked out over 300 enemy armoured vehicles. Having contained this counter-attack *Das Reich* pushed forwards once again, and on 12 July became involved in the historic tank battle in the hills around Prokhorovka. Over the next few days the two opposing sides fought virtually to a standstill, with horrendous losses in both men and tanks on both sides. Although Soviet numerical losses were greater than German, they were in a position to make good these losses, a luxury the Waffen-SS units did not possess.

With the transfer of troops to the West to face the Allied invasion of Sicily, *Das Reich* went over to the defensive. In the second half of 1943 they fought many bitter battles along the River Mius, and defended once again the cities they had recently captured – Kiev, Zhitomir and Kharkov. Over the next five months the division was inexorably pushed back, losing control of Kiev in

November. By the end of 1943 *Das Reich* had once more been reduced to Kampfgruppe status. Elements of the division were withdrawn to France for rest and refitting; and by late April 1944 the last units had arrived from the Eastern Front.

The Western Front, 1944

During this period the division's troops were sometimes used against French partisans. Brutalized by years of combat in the East, they were in no mood to take casualties from the *maquisards*, and reprisals for German deaths and the destruction of vehicles were often brutal. When the Allies landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944 the division was ordered to move to the front line from its positions near Bordeaux. Along the way it was delayed by frequent acts of sabotage and subjected to harassing attacks, and responded furiously, executing 99 civilians in Tulle in retaliation for the deaths of some 40 German soldiers. The capture by the Resistance of SS-Sturmbannführer Helmuth Kampfe, CO of the *Der Führer* Regiment's 3rd Battalion, was the ostensible excuse for the destruction on 10 June of the peaceful village of Oradour-sur-Glane near Limoges, and the murder of more than 640 civilian men, women and children, by 3rd Company of the regiment's 1st Battalion led by SS-Hauptsturmführer Kahn and the battalion commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Otto Dickmann.²

On reaching the invasion front, *Das Reich*, still awaiting the arrival of some units in transit from the south, was split up and attached to Army formations, seeing action predominantly against the British forces near Caen. It was in Normandy that one of the division's most famous soldiers scored a historic triumph. SS-Oberscharführer Ernst Barkmann, commander of a lone PzKpfw V Panther tank from SS-Panzer Regiment 2, was covering a crossroads near Le Lorey when a long column of at least 14 enemy tanks with supply trucks came into sight. In the action which ensued, despite the intervention of Allied fighter-bombers and his tank being damaged, Barkmann knocked out eight Sherman tanks and numerous trucks including fuel tankers, only withdrawing when his ammunition ran low.

The division suffered badly in the fighting against US forces around St Lô. In mid-August substantial numbers of German troops were caught in the Falaise Pocket, but *Das Reich* was one of the units that broke through the Canadian and Polish encirclement to provide their trapped

² SS-Stubaf Kampfe was executed by his captors, but that was not known on 10 June. It is also worth mentioning that 3rd Co contained a significant number of men from Alsace-Lorraine, not Germany. Dickmann was dead and Kahn and many others had disappeared by 1953, when a French tribunal tried 21 NCOs and men of 3rd Co – including 14 Alsacians – for their part in the massacre. The resulting sentences were lenient, and in some cases derisory, due to political pressure in Alsace.

Felix Steiner, later commander of the *Wiking* Division, seen here as an SS-Oberführer after the award of the Knight's Cross during the Westfeldzug, on 15 August 1940. At this time he was commander of SS-Infanterie-Regiment (mot.) *Deutschland*; note the pre-war style Gothic script cufftitle. (Josef Charita)



nach IV. Aktiver	
Im Kriege mitgemachte Gefechte, Schlachten, Unternehmungen	
Zeitpunkt	Ortsangabe, Topograph. u. a.
4.9.41 - 18.9.41	Verfolgungskämpfe in der Schlacht bei Kiev
20.9.41 - 24.9.41	Schlacht im Raume ostw. Kiev
2.10.41 - 4.10.41	Durchbruch durch die Desna-Stellung
8.10.41 - 13.10.41	Vorstoß über Gshatsk
14.10.41 - 26.10.41	Durchbruch durch die Moskauer Schutzstellung
27.10.41 - 16.11.41	Abwehrkämpfe westl. Moskau
17.11.41 - 4.12.41	Einnahme von Istra und SS-Instantschnogorsk
5.12.41 - 21.12.41	Abwehrschlacht von Moskau
22.12.41 - 31.12.41	Abwehrkämpfe in der Rusa- und Wolokolamsk-Stellung
1.1.42 - 21.2.42	Abwehrkämpfe in der Winterstellung der 9. Armee
22.2.42 - 11.3.42	Angriffskämpfe zwischen Bahn Rshew-Olenino u. Oesuga
15.3.42 - 4.4.1942	Abwehrkämpfe im Wolgabogen westlich Rshew
5.4.42 - 21.7.42	Verwendung im Heimatkriegsgebiet
22.7.42 - 6.1.1943	Besatzungstruppe in "Frankreich"
7.2.1943 - 1.5.1943	Russlandfeldzug

An extract from the Wehrpass of an SS-Oberscharführer from the Panzernachrichten Abteilung (armoured signals battalion) of the *Das Reich* Division, showing participation in the advance to Moscow via Kiev and Gschatsk, numerous defensive and offensive actions, followed by a spell on occupation duties in France before returning to the East.



Men from the *Germania* Regiment in transit on the Eastern Front; soldiers rarely enjoyed the comfort of passenger coaches, generally being transported in freight cars. Most of these soldiers wear the economy wartime version of the field blouse with field-grey collar. Note the M1942 camouflaged field cap worn by the Unterführer Anwärter at left, his candidate status being identified by the silver braid bar on his shoulder straps. (Josef Charita)

comrades with an escape route. *Das Reich* was subsequently withdrawn from the line for rebuilding, though many of the replacements were draftees from the Wehrmacht and a far cry from the quality of the division's original troops.

Das Reich was next committed to action during the ill-fated Ardennes offensive. Like other German units it suffered from lack of fuel and ammunition and the need to move heavy armour along totally unsuitable roads. The division captured key objectives at Manhay and Grandmesnil, but its success was short-lived and both towns were lost to American counter-attacks. Panzer ace Ernst Barkmann raised his already impressive score, however, adding 15 more Shermans to his victory tally (though nine of these were simply abandoned by their crews at the approach of his lone Panther). In early January 1945 *Das Reich* was sent into reserve.

Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia, 1945

Still not yet back up to full strength, the division was thrown into the last desperate attack in the East: Operation 'Spring Awakening', the thrust into Hungary in March 1945 in an attempt to save that country's vital oil fields. As described above under *LSSAH*, the attack stalled almost immediately in the deep mud of the spring thaw, and

was halted by Soviet counter-attacks within just ten days. *Das Reich* was forced onto the retreat, and by April was defending vital bridges over the Danube in Vienna. House-to-house fighting followed as the Red Army pressed into the suburbs of the Austrian capital, and by 9 April *Das Reich* units were concentrated around the Florisdorfer bridge. Over the next few days the remnants of the division withdrew towards Dresden, the few remaining tanks providing rearguard cover; on reaching that city, with fuel and ammunition all but exhausted, the Panzers were destroyed.

While elements of *Deutschland* succeeded in surrendering to US forces, part of the regiment was still in action around Prague, and most of this force were lost in action against Red Army units and Czech partisans while trying to fight their way westwards. *Der Führer* spent the last days of the war in a mission to rescue German civilians from Prague. Forcing his way into the city, the regimental commander, Otto Weidinger, gathered together a disparate group of civilians, female auxiliaries and wounded soldiers, and led them out again to the relative safety of US captivity at Rokicany in Bohemia. Most of those who went into US captivity survived, but those who fell into Soviet or Czech hands mostly died – either shot out of hand, or perishing during long years in Soviet labour camps.

A total of 72 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight's Cross, the largest number of such awards to any SS formation.

Special insignia

Collar patches

SS-Standarte *Deutschland*: SS runes and numeral '1'

SS-Standarte *Germania*: SS runes and numeral '2'

SS-Standarte *Der Führer*: SS runes and numeral '3'

These collar patches from the SS-VT were still in use as late as 1942 in some cases, although officially replaced by the basic SS runes patch also worn by all other units of the division.

Shoulder straps

SS-Standarte *Deutschland*: The original SS-VT Standarte wore a Gothic letter 'D' on the shoulder strap, machine-embroidered in silver-grey for enlisted ranks, in white metal for NCOs and bronze for officers. In 1939 this cypher was replaced by a Latin letter 'D'.

SS-Standarte *Germania*: Originally a Gothic letter 'G', replaced in 1939 by a Latin equivalent.

SS-Standarte *Der Führer*: The original SS-VT Standarte wore a cypher with intertwined, stylised, curved letters 'DF', replaced in 1939 by Latin letters.

These cyphers were ordered discontinued in 1943 but sporadic use of them continued throughout the war.

Cuffbands

Divisional troops (those without a regimental cuffband) wore a band with the title 'Das Reich'. Introduced in September 1942, this was manufactured in machine embroidery, hand-embroidered bullion, and flat-wire woven forms; and from 1943 also in the artificial silk BeVo woven format. Wartime photographs indicate the existence of a variant in Gothic script characters, but these are very rare, and by far the majority were in Latin script.

Regimental:

'*Deutschland*' Produced during the SS-VT period in Gothic script, in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered and flat-wire woven forms. In December 1939 the title changed to Latin script, and in this form was produced in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered and flat-wire woven forms but not, apparently, in BeVo woven form.

'*Germania*' First produced in Gothic script, in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered and flat-wire woven forms. In December 1939 the title changed to Latin script; this new form was manufactured in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered, flat-wire woven and, from 1943, in artificial silk BeVo woven formats.

'*Der Führer*' First produced in Gothic script, in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered and flat-wire woven forms. In December 1939 Latin script was introduced, and the new style was made in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered, flat-wire woven and BeVo woven forms. The latter was unique among SS cuff titles in featuring double quotation marks around the title – see the photograph on page 22.

SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Lammerding (left), commander of the *Das Reich* Division, in conversation with one of his regimental commanders, SS-Obersturmbannführer Christian Tychsen. Tychsen, who was killed in action in Normandy on 28 July 1944, wears the black armoured crew uniform with officer's silver collar piping, and the divisional cuffband. See Plate G1. (Josef Charita)





A selection of the many cuffband variants worn within the *Das Reich* Division. (Top to bottom:) Machine-woven in aluminium wire; BeVo-woven in rayon; Gothic script machine-embroidered, and Latin script aluminium wire-woven *Deutschland*; Gothic aluminium wire-woven, and Latin machine-embroidered *Germania*; Gothic aluminium wire-woven, and BeVo-woven Latin script "*Der Führer*"; machine-embroidered *Langemarck*.

'*Langemarck*' This regiment formed part of the division from April 1942 until its name was bestowed on the 27th SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division in May 1943. The cufftitle was manufactured in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered and flat-wire woven formats, all in basic Latin script.

3. SS-PANZER DIVISION *TOTENKOPF*

Designations

16 October 1939 SS-Totenkopf Division
 9 November 1942 SS-Panzer Grenadier Division *Totenkopf*
 22 November 1943 3. SS-Panzer Division *Totenkopf*

Commanders

Nov 1939–July 1941 SS-Obergruppenführer Theodor Eicke; July 1941 SS-Obergruppenführer Matthias Kleinheisterkamp; July–Sept 1941 SS-Obergruppenführer Georg Keppler; Sept 1941–Feb 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer Theodor Eicke; Feb–Apr 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer Hermann Priess; Apr 1943 SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Lammerding; May–Oct 1943 SS-Gruppenführer Max Simon; Oct 1943–June 1944 SS-Obergruppenführer Hermann Priess; June 1944–May 1945 SS-Brigadeführer Helmuth Becker

Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 5 *Thule*; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6 *Theodor Eicke*; SS-Panzer Regiment 3; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 3; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 3; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 3; SS-Flak Abteilung 3; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 3; SS-Panzer Pionier Bataillon 3. The unit *SS-Heimwehr Danzig* was also incorporated into the *Totenkopf* Division at the start of the war.

Campaigns

The *Totenkopf* Division had its origins in the highly unsavoury units formed to guard the concentration camps, the *SS-Totenkopfstandarten* ('SS Death's-Head Regiments'), after control of the camps passed from the SA to the SS in 1934. Head of the Concentration Camps Inspectorate was the equally unsavoury Theodor Eicke. Regiments were raised and located at several camps: Standarte I *Oberbayern* at Dachau, Standarte II *Brandenburg* at Oranienburg, Standarte III *Thüringen* at Buchenwald, and Standarte IV *Ostmark* at Mauthausen. The various *SS-Totenkopf* elements were collectively termed the *SS-Totenkopfverbände* or SS-TV.

The *SS-Totenkopfverbände* were considered inferior to the *SS-Verfügungstruppe*. Service in the latter counted towards an individual's liability for military service, whereas the former did not. Eicke had great ambitions for his *Totenkopf* troops, however; he gradually weeded out the poorest elements and improved their military capabilities, although their low priority as basically internal security personnel condemned them to second-rate equipment and obsolete or captured weapons.

On the outbreak of war Standarten *Oberbayern*, *Thüringen* and *Brandenburg* were sent into Poland to subjugate any resistance. This generally consisted of assisting the notorious SD Einsatzgruppen in



rounding up Jews and other 'undesirables' behind the lines. In the area around Bydgoszcz, elements of *Brandenburg* alone executed 800 'suspect' Poles over just two days. The appalling behaviour of *Totenkopf* units in Poland provoked vociferous complaints by the Army, all of which were brushed aside.

In November 1939 Hitler finally authorised combining the various *Totenkopf* regiments to form a third SS division. Problems with discipline were still rife, despite Eicke's brutal response to disobedience or insubordination. Training continued during the first months of 1940, although the new *SS-Totenkopf* Division was desperately short of vehicles and heavy equipment – so much so that Eicke had to beg, borrow and literally steal the necessary means to bring his units up to strength. The division was finally assigned to 2nd Army for the impending campaign in the West.

The West, 1940

On the opening of the offensive on 10 May, to Eicke's disgust, *Totenkopf* was held in reserve, only being committed to action one week later. It advanced through southern Holland, Belgium and into France where, in action north-east of Cambrai, the division took over 16,000 enemy prisoners. Its dubious reputation was worsened by the execution of captured French Moroccan troops, considered racially 'inferior'.

LEFT SS-Sturmmann from the pre-war *SS-Totenkopfstandarte 1 Oberbayern*. Note the black/silver twist piping to the collar and collar patches, and the single right shoulder strap in the same colours. The death's-head collar patch is the vertical type.

RIGHT An SS-Unterscharführer from the *Totenkopf* Division. Note the rearward-facing version of the horizontal death's-head patch. This NCO is a combat veteran as evidenced by the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class in his buttonhole.

Subsequently *Totenkopf* was ordered to reinforce the German units that had punched through to the coast, cutting off the British Expeditionary Force from the main body of the French army to the south. In fact a major Anglo-French force, intent on breaking out of the encirclement, smashed right into the division. The light anti-tank weapons available to *Totenkopf* were no match for the Allied tanks, and the SS troops suffered significant casualties. Eicke's men had to resort to using heavy artillery pieces firing at the enemy tanks over open sights, and only the timely arrival of Stuka dive-bombers saved the day; the division had come perilously close to panic.

The *Totenkopf* was then tasked with advancing to the La Bassée Canal and seeking out a suitable crossing point for the main body of the German advance. Eicke ignored his orders and pushed on across the canal against stiff resistance. At this point Hitler's notorious 'halt order' was issued and Eicke was obliged to give up his hard-won bridgehead and withdraw his troops. His clear disobedience of specific orders resulted in a furious reprimand from General Hoepner, who accused him of being a 'butcher' who showed disregard for the lives of his men.

Just two days later the advance resumed, and Eicke had to recapture the area he had just relinquished, taking heavy casualties in doing so. His division faced further stiff resistance at Bethune and La Paradis, where the British defenders made the SS pay dearly for every yard of ground. When the defenders at La Paradis eventually ran out of ammunition and surrendered on 27 May, a hundred prisoners of the 2nd Royal Norfolks were herded against a barn and machine-gunned. Despite SS troops going in with the bayonet to finish off any survivors, three escaped death and lived to see the company commander, SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Knöchlein, hanged for this atrocity in 1948.

In the final days of the campaign *Totenkopf* once again faced French forces that included Moroccan troops; significantly, here again the only surrenders that were accepted were from white French soldiers. Throughout the campaign in the West *Totenkopf* had suffered much higher casualties even than other SS units that were also gaining a reputation for reckless disregard for losses; Eicke's division lost over 300 officers in just ten days' fighting. The human material – former political police thugs and Allgemeine-SS reservists, with inadequate military training – was one explanation for both the high casualties and the brutality towards prisoners; another was Eicke's ruthless ambition for his division.

After the conclusion of the campaign the division remained in France on occupation duties for almost a full year; it is reported that in comparison to its aggression in combat, it was involved in assisting local farmers to gather in their harvests. It was also formally declared part of the Waffen-SS proper, and received considerable reinforcements, including new recruits untarnished by service as concentration camp guards. Artillery, Flak and Ersatz (replacement) battalions were added.

Russia, 1941–42: Leningrad and Demjansk

For the invasion of the USSR in June 1941 the division was allocated to Heeresgruppe Nord, and

(continued on page 33)

A group of *Totenkopf* NCOs relax in their barrack room; their accommodation is rather spartan, but includes a radio. (Gary Wood)



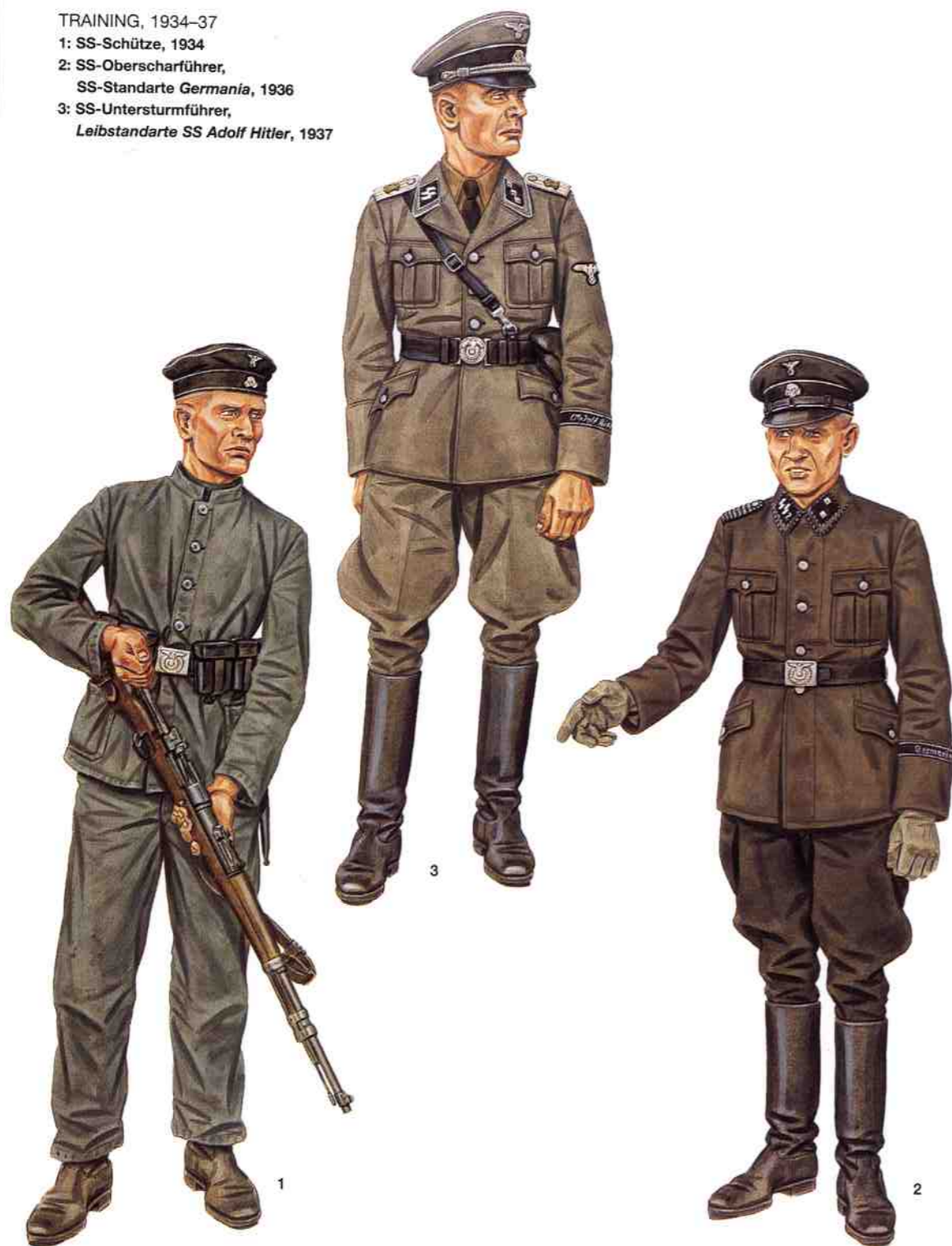
PRE-WAR BLACK SERVICE UNIFORMS

- 1: SS-Schütze, *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*, 1934
- 2: SS-Oberscharführer, *SS-Standarte Deutschland*, 1934
- 3: SS-Hauptsturmführer, *SS-Totenkopfstandarte Oberbayern*, 1936



TRAINING, 1934-37

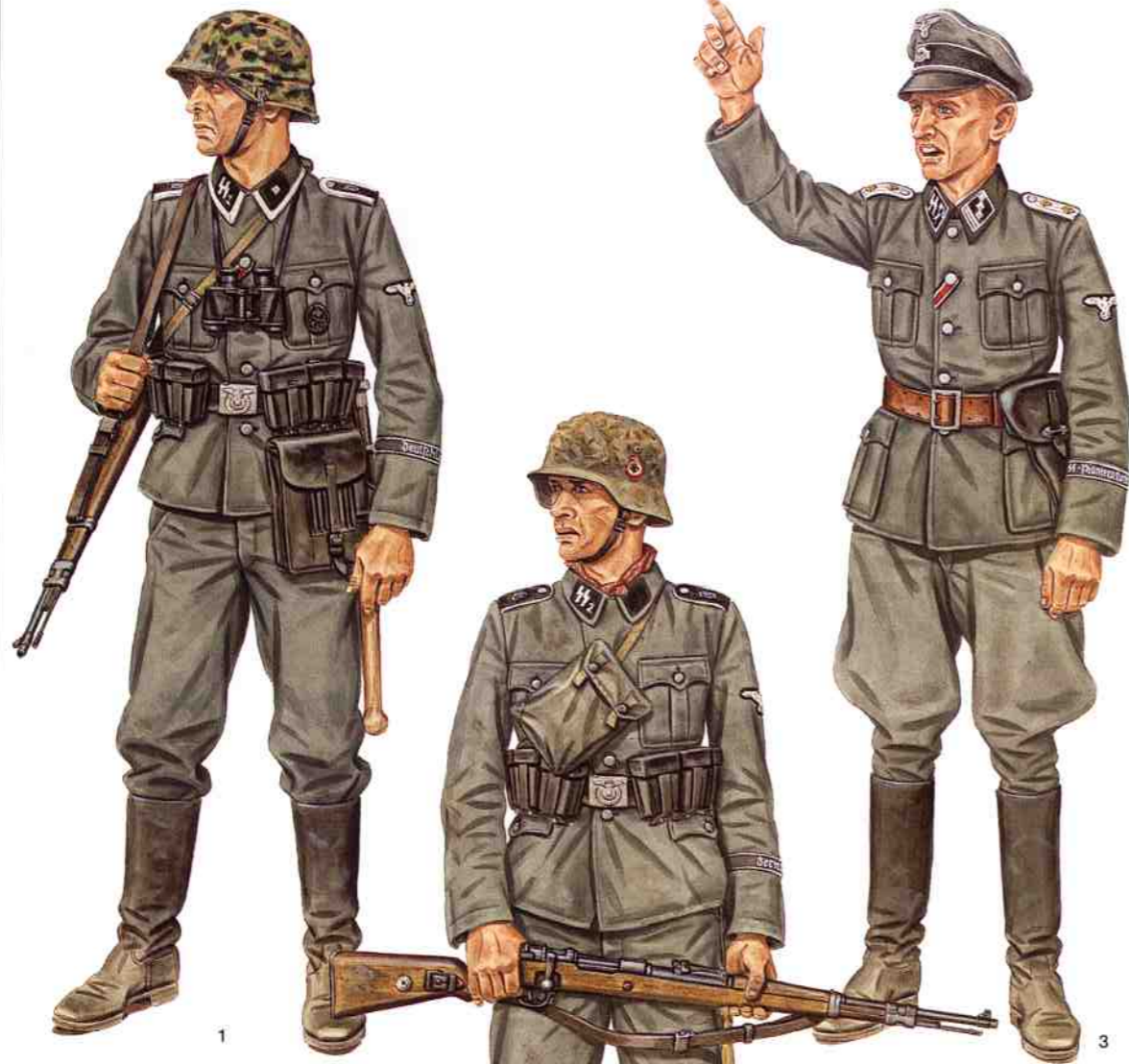
- 1: SS-Schütze, 1934
- 2: SS-Oberscharführer,
SS-Standarte Germania, 1936
- 3: SS-Untersturmführer,
Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1937



THE LEIBSTANDARTE AT WAR

- 1: SS-Schütze, 1940
- 2: SS-Schütze, Panzerspähzug, 1940
- 3: SS-Scharführer,
SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 1, 1943





SS-VERFÜGUNGSDIVISION, 1940

- 1: SS-Unterscharführer,
SS-Standarte Deutschland
- 2: SS-Schütze,
SS-Standarte Germania
- 3: SS-Hauptsturmführer,
SS-Pioniersturmbann



1



3

SS-TOTENKOPF DIVISION, 1940-43

- 1: SS-Oberscharführer,
Feldgendarmarie, 1940
- 2: SS-Sturmbannführer of infantry,
late 1941
- 3: SS-Sturmmann of infantry, 1942
- 4: SS-Rottenführer, SS-Panzergranadier
Regt 6, late 1943



2



4

POLIZEI DIVISION, 1940-44
 1: SS-Oberschütze of artillery, 1940
 2: SS-Brigadeführer, 1942-44
 3: SS-Rottenführer, Greece, 1943



1



2



3



1



2

ARMOURED PERSONNEL,
 1942-44

- 1: SS-Hauptsturmführer,
 SS-Panzer Regiment 2
- 2: SS-Hauptscharführer,
 SS-Panzer Regiment 5
- 3: SS-Unterscharführer,
 SS-Panzer Regiment 1,
 1944
- 4: SS-Sturmmann,
 SS-Panzer
 Regiment 3



3



4

WINTER UNIFORMS, 1943-45

- 1: SS-Untersturmführer, 5. SS-Panzer Division 'Wiking'
- 2: SS-Schütze, 3. SS-Panzer Grenadier Division 'Totenkopf'
- 3: SS-Sturmmann



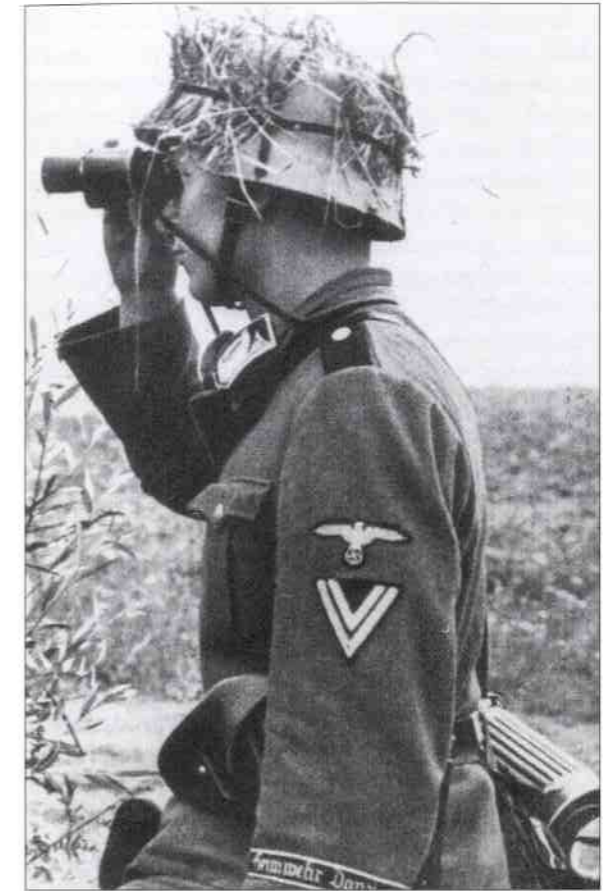
attached to IV Panzergruppe. It advanced in the second wave through Lithuania and Latvia, mopping up resistance; and was involved in heavy combat against the defences of the

Stalin Line, where Eicke was wounded when his field car went over a mine. *Totenkopf* met unexpectedly fierce resistance and suffered significant casualties. Despite this heavy fighting, however, the division's officer losses in over a month of fighting were 82, as opposed to 300 in just ten days in France. It had also taken a greater number of prisoners in this short period that it had in the whole of the Westfeldzug. Clearly *Totenkopf* had learned some lessons from its earlier mistakes. During August the division was involved in very heavy fighting on the approaches to Leningrad, and particularly along the Luga defence line. The Soviet 34th Army was annihilated, but *Totenkopf* suffered over 4,000 casualties.

In late September the division bore the brunt of a massive Soviet counter-attack at Lushno, where its forces were thinly spread over a 15-mile front; the attacks were eventually repulsed, leaving *Totenkopf* battered but victorious. During these actions SS-Sturmmann Fritz Christen earned himself one of the most richly deserved Knight's Crosses to be awarded to a soldier of the Waffen-SS. Christen's anti-tank unit was decimated by enemy attacks, and he manned his gun alone for three full days after the rest of his crew were killed. When relief troops arrived they found Christen alone, surrounded by about a hundred enemy corpses and 13 destroyed Soviet tanks. Christen received his award personally from Hitler, a rare honour for such a junior rank.

As the steam began to run out of the German advance the division, now severely weakened, was obliged to dig in and by the end of 1941 was fully on the defensive. During this period many of its troops were involved in anti-partisan operations during which no quarter was given or expected. Gradual combat attrition had now reduced *Totenkopf* to around 50 per cent strength.

In January 1942 *Totenkopf* came under attack when the Soviets launched a major counter-offensive that smashed its way through the Army units on the division's flanks. There followed one of the great battles of the Eastern Front, with which the division would thereafter always be connected. *Totenkopf* became encircled with a number of Army units around the town of Demjansk; greatly outnumbered, the German units held on tenaciously. The much-weakened *Totenkopf* was divided into two Kampfgruppen and, after Himmler's personal intervention, was reinforced by air with just 400 replacements; this assistance was as much for psychological as physical effect. By late March 1942 divisional casualties stood at just under 13,000, and 11 of its members had been awarded the Knight's Cross for gallantry.



An SS-Rottenführer from SS-Heimwehr Danzig. This home defence unit wore the death's-head collar patch, and served with the *Totenkopf* Division during the Polish campaign. It was subsequently absorbed into the division's *Totenkopf* Infanterie Regiment 3. (Josef Charita)

In April 1942 a German attack forced a narrow relief corridor through to the besieged troops in the Demjansk Pocket. The normal establishment of a full strength infantry division was around 17,000 men; the total combined strength of the six divisions then at Demjansk, under overall command of SS-Obergruppenführer Eicke, stood at just 14,000. Although the encirclement had been broken, the ferocity of the fighting was unabated, and by August *Totenkopf's* divisional strength was down to just over 2,700 men. In November 1942 the division was withdrawn and transferred to France for rest and refitting. During this period it was upgraded to the status of a Panzergrenadier division.



Two SS-Oberscharführer from the *Totenkopf* Division. As both wear 'mirror image' vertically set death's-heads collar patches, rank is only indicated by their shoulder straps. The NCO at right also wears the double sleeve rings of 'Der Spiess', the company sergeant major's appointment. Also of interest is his 'old style field cap', its peak covered with field-grey cloth and worn without a chinstrap – compare the regulation service cap of his comrade. (Paul Turner)

Russia, 1943: Kursk and the Donetz Basin

Totenkopf returned to the Eastern Front at the start of 1943, in time to join the newly formed I SS-Panzerkorps, and in February was involved in a ferocious battle alongside *Das Reich* in which the Soviet 6th Army was annihilated. On 26 February the morale of the division took a serious blow when Theodor Eicke was killed; the spotter plane in which he was travelling was shot down by concentrated small arms fire from nearby Soviet troops. SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 6 was given the commemorative honour title *Theodor Eicke*. Divisional morale was soon improved when in March the *Totenkopf* took part in the victorious recapture of Kharkov and the annihilation of the Soviet 25th Guards Rifle Division.

Totenkopf's next major engagement was in July 1943 when it was thrown into the offensive at Kursk. Part of a massive army of almost one million troops and just under 3,000 tanks, the division provided right flank cover to 4. Panzerarmee. *Totenkopf* made good initial progress, advancing some 12 miles (20km) into the southern part of the salient and smashing the Soviet 52nd Guards Division; and by the end of the second day the division had penetrated some 20 miles (32km) into enemy territory. By 12 July the German spearhead had reached Prokhorovka, where they ran into huge Soviet armoured forces – *Totenkopf* alone faced the equivalent of four full enemy divisions, and was forced onto the defensive. As the greatest tank battle in history raged around them, *Totenkopf* took heavy punishment but achieved their primary objective of securing the right flank of the attack. By the time the offensive was discontinued the division had lost almost half its armour and had suffered horrendous casualties.

It had originally been intended that all the divisions forming I SS-Panzerkorps should be transferred to Italy, but a Soviet attack in the Donetz Basin saw *Das Reich* and *Totenkopf* forced back into the line, only *Leibstandarte* being moved briefly to Italy. *Totenkopf* immediately moved south to the area around Stalino, where after heavy fighting the Soviet attack was halted. A new Soviet offensive was launched almost immediately around Kursk, however, and the division was rushed northwards. Thrown into the line on the approaches to Kharkov, the SS held on for a full week under immense pressure before it was decided that the city could not be saved. Nevertheless, *Totenkopf* and *Das Reich* launched



OPPOSITE ABOVE
SS-Obersturmbannführer Karl Ullrich photographed here as commander of SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 6 *Theodor Eicke*. Note the machine-woven cuffband bearing Eicke's name.



OPPOSITE SS-Obersturmführer Erwin Meierdress, commander of the Sturmgeschütz Batterie of SS-Artillerie Regiment 3. As well as the pre-war *Oberbayern* skull cuffband, he wears a pair of vertical death's-head collar patches, but instead of a 'mirror image' both skulls face left as viewed. Interestingly, another well-known photograph of this officer in the field-grey uniform for armoured vehicle crews shows him wearing similar patches, but with both skulls facing to the right. (Josef Charita)

localised counter-attacks to cover the withdrawal of German forces from the area. Throughout August and September 1943 the division, along with *Das Reich* and the Army's élite *Grossdeutschland* Division, were used as 'fire brigades', rushed from crisis point to crisis point. The arrival of such battle-hardened units often saved the day – if only temporarily.

In October *Totenkopf* was involved in a major counter-attack, bringing the Soviet advance near Krivoi-Rog to a halt. This was a vital communications, transport and supply centre for the Wehrmacht and its loss would have been catastrophic. In November the division was further upgraded to the status of a Panzer division, though it was still relatively weak. Nevertheless, during these battles the Soviets lost over 300 tanks and 5,000 prisoners. Renewed Soviet assaults saw *Totenkopf* once again thrown into the breach, and on 18 November the division began a three-day battle during which they destroyed almost 250 more tanks. After a few days of quiet yet another Soviet assault was launched and once again held. Despite losses of 20 to 25 per cent of its strength in these battles, *Totenkopf* once again blunted a further Soviet attack in the area in December 1943, before being moved to Kirovograd. Acting once again in concert with *Grossdeutschland*, the division was involved in many fiercely fought actions between Kirovograd and the River Bug, covering the withdrawal of other German forces.

1944: the collapse of Army Group Centre

In March 1944 *Totenkopf* was moved once again, this time to Balta, where it provided rearguard cover for the withdrawal of Heeresgruppe B into Romania. Further defensive actions in Romania saw the division's strength being worn down; but in May it received several thousand reinforcements transferred from 16. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Reichsführer-SS*, and in June, after a brief rest and refit, the division was again up to a strength in excess of 20,000 men.

On 23 June the Soviets launched their major 1944 summer offensive, Operation 'Bagration', which took *Totenkopf* to Grodno in Poland to defend the area against immense pressure from the Soviet 2nd Tank Army. At odds of ten to one against, the division could do little but delay the inevitable and was gradually pushed westwards. During August, *Totenkopf* teamed up with 5. SS-Panzer Division *Wiking* to defend the approaches to Warsaw. In early September they ejected Soviet units that had entered the city's eastern suburbs, and pushed the enemy back across the Vistula. The reprieve was only temporary, however, and in October *Totenkopf* was forced to withdraw towards Modlin, by now reduced to around 75 per cent of its June strength.

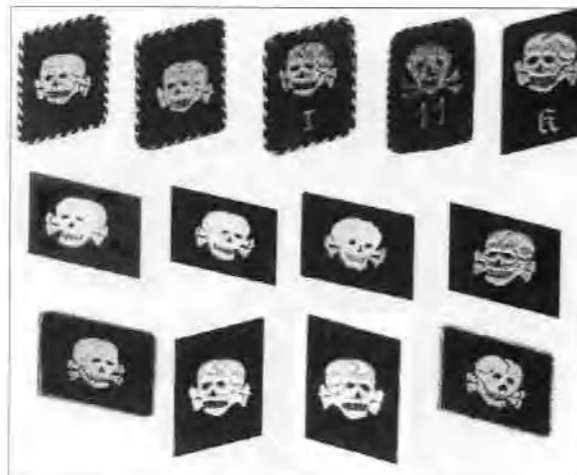
Hungary and Austria, 1945

Once again, the SS divisions held the line and the Soviet offensive gradually ran out of impetus. After a brief respite, on 1 January 1945 *Totenkopf*



ABOVE LEFT Selection of cuffbands worn in the *Totenkopf* Division. (Top to bottom:) Pre-war cuffband for SS-Totenkopfstandarte *Oberbayern*; machine-woven aluminium thread, machine-embroidered, and BeVo-woven rayon versions of the '*Totenkopf*' cuffband; BeVo-woven rayon '*Theodor Eicke*'; aluminium flat-wire-woven '*Thule*'.

ABOVE RIGHT A selection of the very varied *Totenkopf* collar patches. Those in the top row are all pre-war vertical patches from the SS-Totenkopfverbände. The middle row shows wartime horizontal patches – note that the skulls face either to left or right. The bottom row shows (left) an officer's hand-embroidered aluminium wire patch, (centre) a 'mirror image' pair, and (right) a machine-woven aluminium wire version.



was thrown into action, once again with *Wiking*, in an abortive attempt to break the enemy encirclement of Budapest. Fierce resistance halted the SS divisions after ten days; a renewed attack a week later initially made far better progress, but enemy resistance stiffened once again. Eventually major counter-attacks pushed the SS troops back to the forest of Bakony near Lake Balaton, where they dug in.

March 1945 saw *Totenkopf* take part in Operation '*Frühlingserwachsen*', the last major

German offensive on the Eastern Front in which *Leibstandarte*, *Das Reich*, *Totenkopf* and *Hohenstaufen* attempted to advance their heavy armour over hopelessly inappropriate terrain. After advancing around 18 miles (30km) the division ground to a halt, and the enraged Hitler called off the offensive. Enemy counter-attacks soon drove the weakened *Totenkopf* back to the very gates of Vienna. Through late March and into April the division fended off Soviet probing attacks, but no longer had the strength to resist the overwhelming enemy forces, and Vienna fell on 13 April. By the end of the month the division could count only about 1,000 combat-worthy troops and just six tanks. On 9 May it surrendered to elements of the US Army, who accepted *Totenkopf's* surrender on the condition that it disarmed the guards at nearby Mauthausen concentration camp. The division carried out this apt request, at which point the Americans reneged on the agreement and handed over the survivors to the Soviets. It is unsurprising that only a small number of these soldiers who wore the death's-head on their collar survived Soviet captivity.

A total of 46 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patches

Throughout the war the division's units wore the death's-head as their collar patch emblem. Several variants exist, with the death's-head placed either vertically or horizontally, the latter being introduced around May 1940. Initially, identical mirror image death's-heads were worn on both

collars, but in May 1940 the left-hand insignia were replaced by the standard rank patches.

Cuffbands

A divisional band with the title '*Totenkopf*' in Latin script was introduced in 1942, and manufactured in machine-embroidered, flat-wire woven and BeVo woven forms.

Regimental:

'*Thule*' SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 5 wore this title in Latin script, flat-woven in aluminium wire.

'*Theodor Eicke*' SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6 wore this title in Latin script, produced only in BeVo format; it was woven in silver-grey on black for enlisted ranks, and also in white on black, presumably for officer ranks.

In addition to these regulation items, a number of bands from the previous *Totenkopfstandarten* were worn within the division, the most prominent being that from SS-Totenkopfstandarte *Oberbayern*. This plain black band with woven silver thread edges bore a small death's-head emblem machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread, hand-embroidered in aluminium thread, or woven in flat aluminium wire. This band was so popular that many new recruits made efforts to obtain them, to give the impression of being 'old sweats'.

An SS-Unterscharführer from the Polizei Division. Note the Police cap and the Army-style *Litzen* collar patches. Only the visible wingtip of his SS sleeve eagle at bottom right indicates his membership of the division.

4. SS-POLIZEI PANZERGRENADIER DIVISION

Designations

1 October 1939	Polizei Division
10 February 1942	SS-Polizei Division
September 1943	4. SS-Polizei Panzer Grenadier Division

Commanders

Sept 1940 Generalleutnant Konrad Hitschler; *Sept–Nov 1940* SS-Gruppenführer Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch; *Nov 1940–Aug 1941* SS-Gruppenführer Arthur Mülverstedt; *Aug–Dec 1941* SS-Obergruppenführer Walter Krüger; *Dec 1941–Apr 1943* Generaloberst Alfred Wünnenberg; *Apr–June 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Freitag; *June–Aug 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Schmedes; *Aug–Oct 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Freitag; *Oct 1943–Apr 1944* SS-Oberführer Friedrich Bock; *Apr–May 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Wagner; *May–July 1944* SS-Oberführer Friedrich Bock; *July 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Herbert Ernst Vahl; *July–Aug 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Karl Schümers; *Aug 1944* SS-Oberführer Helmut Dörnder; *Aug–Nov 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Schmedes; *Nov 1944–March 1945* SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer; *March 1945* SS-Standartenführer Fritz Göhler; *March–May 1945* SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer



Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 7; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 8; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 4; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 4; SS-Artillerie Regiment 4; SS-Flak Abteilung 4; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 4; SS-Pionier Bataillon 4

Campaigns

The Polizei Division was formed in October 1939 by drafting approximately 15,000 members of the Ordnungspolizei and attaching Army artillery and signals units. It underwent intensive training near the Black Forest until the spring of 1940; and during this period some elements of the division performed occupation duties in Poland. While all German police forces came under the authority of the SS, the formation was not considered to be on a par with true armed SS divisions, and this was reflected in the quality of equipment issued.

The division saw its first combats during the invasion of France and the Low Countries in 1940. It was initially held in reserve with Heeresgruppe C in the Rhineland, going into action on 9 June when it crossed the River Aisne. It fought around the Argonne Forest against French rearguard units, capturing the small town of Les Islettes. The campaign was brief, however, as the division was taken out of the line on 20 June. Soon afterwards the Polizei Division was transferred to East Prussia where it continued its training. In January 1941 control of the division passed from the Police to the SS.

Russia, 1941-43

On 27 June 1941 the Polizei Division joined the German forces massing for the invasion of the Soviet Union, becoming part of the reserve of Heeresgruppe Nord. It went into action around Luga, losing over 2,000 dead and wounded in bloody fighting through difficult terrain of dense forests and mosquito-plagued swamps. By August the division, along with a number of Army divisions, had finally managed to complete an encirclement of the Soviet forces at Luga; the town was captured at the cost of significant casualties, the divisional commander SS-Gruppenführer Arthur Mülverstedt being one of those killed in action.

In January 1942 the division was deployed along the Wolchow river, and the following month it was officially made part of the Waffen-SS, changing its Polizei insignia for regulation Waffen-SS insignia thereafter. Between January and March the SS-Polizei Division saw fierce fighting that resulted in the defeat of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army. The remainder of 1942 was spent on the Leningrad front. The division was beginning to gain a reputation for reliability, though it had by no means achieved elite status; but combat attrition saw the formation's strength steadily whittled down. In January 1943 the division came under Soviet attacks around the south of Lake Ladoga; the enemy eventually broke through the German defence lines in February, and forced the SS troops to retreat westwards to new defence positions at Kolpino. These were successfully held, but losses had been severe; at this point elements of the division were withdrawn to Silesia as the nucleus for a re-formed Panzer Grenadier division, while the remainder were formed into a smaller Kampfgruppe. During the following month the Dutch volunteers of the Freiwilligen Legion Niederlande were assigned to



Another NCO from the Polizei Division; once again the only SS insignia visible is the distinctive sleeve eagle. The Police pattern field cap is worn.

A member of the division in the latter part of the war. All of the insignia now worn are regulation SS pattern. He wears the BeVo machine-woven 'SS-Polizei-Division' cufftitle; the Iron Cross ribbon and black Wound Badge indicate that he has seen combat service. (Steve Brindley)

RIGHT This member of the SS-Polizei Division is in full tropical issue field dress in a pale golden tan colour similar to that of Luftwaffe tropical dress; note, however, the Italian 'Sahariana' style of the jacket - see Plate F3. Full insignia are worn here, including collar patches and cuffband; it was more common on tropical tunics to see only the sleeve eagle and shoulder straps displayed. (Steve Brindley)



bolster its strength. This Kampfgruppe remained in constant action on the Eastern Front until May 1944, when it was finally disbanded.

The Balkans and the Eastern Front, 1943-45

In May 1943 the SS-Polizei Panzer Grenadier Division was sent to the Balkans, where elements took part in anti-partisan operations in northern Greece during the summer and autumn of that year. Troops from the division were recorded by witnesses from the Geheime Feld Polizei to have been involved in atrocities against civilians in the Klissura region during this period. The division remained in Greece until July/August 1944, before going back into the line to face the advancing Red Army.

The division joined other German units reinforcing the southern sector of the front around Belgrade, Yugoslavia. It once again suffered heavy losses, and by September 1944 was down to around half its strength. The division was pushed back into Slovakia in January 1945, from where it was transferred north into Pomerania and then on to Danzig. During these final defensive battles it did successfully hold back the Red Army at Turnu Severin, thus allowing the Army's 1. Gebirgs Division to escape destruction. Caught in the encirclement of Danzig, the division was fortunate to be evacuated by sea to Swinemünde. After a brief period of rest near Stettin, the remnants of the division fought their way over the Elbe to surrender to US forces at Wittenberg-Lenzen.

Members of the Polizei Division during the 1940 campaign in France; much of this division's transport remained horse drawn until it was upgraded to a Panzer Grenadier division. The SS-Oberscharführer at right wears the sleeve rings of 'Der Spiess'.



Cuffbands of the Polizei Division. (Top to bottom:) The first pattern with machine-woven Police emblem; machine-woven aluminium wire; machine-embroidered; BeVo machine-woven rayon.



Prior to 1942 the Polizei Division used Army-style *Litzen* collar patches in silver-grey artificial silk on a Police green backing with light green 'lights' down the centre of each bar of the lace. General officers also wore Army pattern collar insignia, but executed in gold wire on a green rather than Army red backing. In 1942 these Police insignia were replaced by the standard SS runes and rank insignia. In that year special collar insignia for general officers within the Polizei were introduced, based on those worn by generals of the SS but with the varying combinations of oakleaves and pips embroidered in gold wire on green, rather than silver on black. It is believed, however, that the use of such insignia within this division was minimal, and that general officers predominantly wore standard SS insignia.

Shoulder straps and sleeve eagles

The shoulder straps and left sleeve eagle used were of the regulation SS pattern, with the exception of general officers, whose straps were originally worked onto a green base, but later changed to the pale grey underlay of SS generals.

Cuffbands

A cuffband is reported to have been made and issued in limited numbers in the standard so-called 'RZM pattern', with the motif of the Polizei eagle contained within a wreath of oakleaves. From 1942 the title 'SS-Polizei-Division' was manufactured in three styles: machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread, machine-woven in flat aluminium wire, and machine-woven in BeVo format. All of these patterns were widely used within the division.

Other insignia

It was common in the early part of the war for Polizei pattern headgear to be worn, or SS headgear with Polizei pattern insignia. This included the use of the steel helmet with Polizei rather than SS decal insignia.

5. SS-PANZER DIVISION WIKING

Designations

?	Nordische Division Nr. 5
1 December 1940	SS-Division <i>Germania</i> (mot.)
20 December 1940	SS-Division <i>Wiking</i>
9 November 1942	SS-Panzer Grenadier Division <i>Wiking</i>
February 1944	5. SS-Panzer Division <i>Wiking</i>

The SS-Polizei Division was never an élite force; but from its origins as, effectively, a second-rate reserve unit, it matured into a reasonably effective fighting division. A total of 19 soldiers of the Police Division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patches



Gille photographed when an SS-Oberführer and commander of the artillery regiment of the *Wiking* Division. Note the unusual use of paired runic collar patches; this combination is only rarely seen in wartime photos. (Josef Charita)

This photo shows Gille with an SS-Untersturmführer of the divisional staff, and provides a good comparison between Gille's Gothic script cuffband and the regular Latin script version worn by the lieutenant. Note the fleece-lined parka worn by the officer behind them - see Plate H2. (Josef Charita).



Commanders

Dec 1940-May 1943 SS-Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner; May 1943-Aug 1944 SS-Obergruppenführer Herbert Gille; Aug 1944 SS-Oberführer Dr Eduard Deisenhofer; Aug-Oct 1944 SS-Standartenführer Johannes Mühlenkamp; Oct 1944-May 1945 SS-Oberführer Karl Ullrich.

Principal elements (1944)

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 9 *Germania*; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 10 *Westland*; SS-Panzer Regiment 5; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 5; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 5; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 5; SS-Flak Abteilung 5; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 5; SS-Panzer Pionier Bataillon 5.

The following units also served with the *Wiking* Division at various dates, but will be covered with their final parent units in future books in this series: SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment *Nordland*; Estnisches SS-Freiwilligen Panzer Grenadier Bataillon *Narwa*; Finnisches Freiwilligen Bataillon der SS; SS-Sturmbrigade *Wallonien*; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 23 *Norge*; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 24 *Danmark*.

Campaigns

The *Wiking* Division had its origins in an order issued by Heinrich Himmler in September 1940 founding a division of 'Germanic' volunteers from the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway and Belgian Walloons. In order to provide an experienced cadre for the new formation the *Germania* Regiment was transferred from the *Das Reich* Division, backed by Volunteer Regiments *Westland* and *Nordland*. It was initially named SS-Infanterie Division (mot.) *Germania*, but this instantly caused confusion with the regiment of the same name, and on 20 December the divisional title *Wiking* was formally bestowed.

Command of the new division was given to SS-Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner, a respected former Army officer. In February 1941 the newly raised Finnish volunteer unit Finnisches Freiwilligen Bataillon der Waffen-SS was attached to *Wiking*; and several weeks of intensive training followed at Heuberg before, in April 1941, the formation was declared ready for combat deployment. In mid-May the new division moved into western Poland in preparation for its part in the attack on Soviet Russia, for which it was allocated to III Panzerkorps as part of Heeresgruppe Süd.

The *Wiking* Division saw its first combat around Tarnopol. By August 1941 it had reached Uman, where it participated in the massive encirclement which netted the Germans over 100,000 prisoners. Operating with the *Hermann Göring* Division, *Wiking* saw action at Korsun, and by 21 August was across the River Dnieper. Transferred to XIV Panzerkorps, *Wiking* advanced towards Otkjabrisk; but by the end of November it had been halted by an enemy counter-attack and forced onto the defensive on the Mius river as the onset of winter stalled the German advance.

BELOW Herbert Otto Gille is seen here as an SS-Gruppenführer and commander of 5. SS-Panzer Division *Wiking*. Of particular interest is the Gothic script version of the divisional cuffband, long believed to be unique to Gille, but in fact worn by a few other individuals of various ranks. (Josef Charita)



1942-43: to the Caucasus and back

In the New Year the division advanced from its positions along the Mius as the German offensive began afresh. That summer it took part in the deepest penetrations of the Russian campaign, the drive on Rostov on the River Don and the attempt to secure the Caucasus oilfields. By the end of 1942 and the onset of another winter *Wiking* had proven itself in combat well enough to warrant upgrading to the status of Panzergrenadier division. It took up positions along the Terek river, deep in the Caucasus. However, after the disaster at Stalingrad in January 1943 and the launch of the Soviet counter-offensive on the southern front *Wiking* was pushed back towards Manych, and was involved in heavy defensive actions around Izym.

In March 1943 a battalion of Estonian volunteers joined the division as SS-Freiwilligen Panzergrenadier Bataillon *Narwa*. The division lost one of its older regiments in May 1943 when *Nordland* was removed to form the cadre for a new Panzergrenadier division of the same name. In October 1943 *Wiking* was upgraded to the status of Panzer division, the first 'non-German' formation to achieve this status. In fact, though it did contain significant numbers of foreign 'Germanic' volunteers, the division still fielded a very large German contingent.

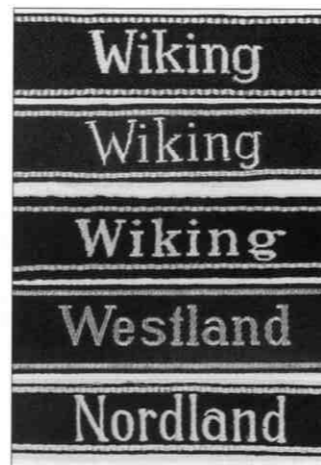


An SS-Obersturmführer wears the *Wiking* cuffband on his black Panzer jacket. At left is SS-Standartenführer Johannes Mühlenkamp, commander of SS-Panzer Regiment 5. (Josef Charita)

1944-45: Cherkassy, Warsaw and Hungary

The *Wiking* Division ended 1943 in the Ukraine; and in January 1944 the division was encircled in the pocket at Cherkassy along with five other German divisions, faced by fully 35 Soviet divisions. The pocket was gradually compressed until it measured barely 38 square miles (100 square km); and eventually Hitler, somewhat unusually, was persuaded to allow a break-out attempt. It was *Wiking*, the only armoured division in the pocket and still well equipped, which led the thrust to the south. Once the element of surprise had gone the Soviets launched powerful counter-attacks with heavy armour support. The onset of a snow-storm gave the Germans excellent cover and eventually the break-out force reached the last barrier to safety, a six-foot deep river at Gniloi-Tilkitsch. With no bridge and no ford, the Germans were forced to make a human chain to help non-swimmers across the fast-flowing river. Many were swept away by the icy waters, but many more escaped to safety, thanks to the determination of both the *Wiking* and the attached Walloon volunteers of Sturmbrigade *Wallonien*, who provided the rearguard. Of about 55,000 German troops trapped in the pocket, 34,000 escaped.

In March 1944 the *Wiking* Division took part in the advance through the Pripet Marshes towards Kowel, where it saw fierce combat during April. That month the division lost its Estonian volunteers, who transferred en masse to the newly formed 20. Waffen-Grenadier Division



This SS-Obersturmführer from *Wiking* wears the aiguillette of an adjutant with formal parade dress, complete with aluminium brocade belt and the SS sword. His shoulder straps bear the divisional number '5'.

OPPOSITE Cuffbands worn within the *Wiking* Division. (Top to bottom:) Machine-woven aluminium 'flat-wire'; machine-embroidered; 'BeVo-like' machine-woven rayon thread; BeVo-woven 'Westland'; machine-embroidered 'Nordland'.

der SS. In June 1944 the division was withdrawn from the front for rest and refitting in Germany; but it was soon sent eastwards again, joining the German forces around Warsaw in August and helping to drive the Red Army out of the city's eastern suburbs.

In December 1944 *Wiking* was sent south to attempt to break through to the encircled city of Budapest, but was thrown back by the Soviets and forced onto the defensive throughout January and February of 1945. March saw the division take part in the ill-fated offensive around Lake Balaton in the atrocious mud of the spring thaw; and by the second half of the month *Wiking* was on the retreat as the Red Army launched yet another counter-attack. The division was driven back into Austria, receiving a number of Hungarian troops to bolster its dwindling strength in mid-April. In May the remnants of the *Wiking* Division were forced to surrender to the Red Army in Czechoslovakia.

A total of 54 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

Special insignia

Collar patches

Standard SS runes. Within this division it was common, though unofficial practice for the collar patches as worn on the special uniform for armoured personnel to be edged with Waffenfarbe coloured piping. A special collar patch for this division showing the prow of a Viking longship was proposed but apparently never brought into use.

Cuffbands

A divisional band with the title 'Wiking' in Latin script was manufactured in flat-wire woven format, machine-embroidered in silver-grey

thread, and machine-woven in a version termed by collectors as 'BeVo-like' – resembling but not identical to the regular BeVo format. A variant was also produced in Gothic script; this was once believed to have been unique to the divisional commander, Herbert Otto Gille, but subsequent photographic evidence shows it worn by various ranks within the division, albeit in limited numbers.

Regimental:

'Germania' Older titles in Gothic script continued to be seen throughout the war, though a newer form in Latin script became more prevalent. In 1943 a BeVo-woven artificial silk variant was introduced.

'Westland' A Latin script title was produced in machine-embroidered, flat-wire woven and, from 1943, in BeVo woven formats.

'Nordland' A cuffband with Latin lettering was made in machine-embroidered, flat-wire woven and, from 1943, in BeVo formats.

THE PLATES

A: PRE-WAR BLACK SERVICE UNIFORMS

A1: SS-Schütze, Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1934

A private in pre-war parade and guard dress. He wears the basic black service uniform; both collar and collar patches were edged with black and aluminium twist cord for all enlisted ranks, and this was also used to make up the single shoulder strap. The SS armband or *Kampfbinde* differs from the standard Party armband in having black edging. Unique features of the *Leibstandarte* uniform are the right-hand collar patch bearing the SS runes without any other identifying feature or number; and the cuffband bearing the title 'Adolf Hitler' in Sütterlin script. On parade, he wears a white leather belt, pouches, single cross-strap and bayonet frog. His helmet is the old M1916 style carried over from World War I, painted black; his weapon the Mauser Gewehr 98.

A2: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Standarte Deutschland, 1934

He wears the black service dress with Gothic script 'Deutschland' cuffband, and the Standarte identifying number '1' alongside the runes on his right collar patch. His rank is indicated by the two alloy pips on his left-hand collar patch. Headgear is the first version of the NCO pattern peaked service cap, in black with white piping and leather chinstrap; the badges are the M1923 'chinless' death's-head and small size M1929 eagle and swastika. Note the M1933 SS service dagger, worn with service and walking-out dress; and the Party membership badge worn on his necktie.

A3: SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Totenkopfstandarte Oberbayern, 1936

This captain's officer-quality black service dress tunic has the collar and collar patches edged with silver twist cord and the single right shoulder strap made of straight silver cord. His right-hand patch bears a vertically placed death's-head, his left patch the standard SS insignia for his rank. For walking-out dress he wears straight-legged trousers instead of breeches and kneeboots. His cap has officer's double bullion chin cords; note that from 1936 the cap eagle became larger and the death's-head acquired a lower jaw. He carries the M1936 SS service dagger with its new, elaborate chain suspension. His cuffband identifies the Upper Bavaria regiment.

B: TRAINING, 1934-37

B1: SS-Schütze, 1934

His headgear is the Imperial-style field cap known as the *Krätschen*, in black with white piping, worn with the first pattern small eagle and chinless skull. He wears the single-breasted herringbone twill (*Drillich*) fatigue jacket with matching trousers; these were produced in a number of shades from off-white to 'cement grey'. The jacket has only skirt pockets and is worn without insignia. Undergoing weapons training with the Mauser Kar 98k, he wears only belt order with black leather pouches. Officers and NCOs wore drill tunics cut like their service uniform, with all insignia, and in conjunction with black caps and breeches.

B2: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Standarte Germania, 1936

The instructing NCO wears the SS-VT's new 'earth-grey' (*erdgrau*) service uniform, officially introduced from November 1935, in its early form. It still features the single right-hand



This young SS-Unterscharführer served with the Flak Abteilung of the *Das Reich* Division, although no unit insignia are visible here. A veteran of the Eastern Front, he wears the ribbons of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and Winter 1941 East Front Medal, the Iron Cross 1st Class, General Assault Badge, Army Flak Badge and Wound Badge in silver.

shoulder strap of mixed black and aluminium cord in Allgemeine-SS style; he no longer wears the SS armband but has not yet had the eagle sleeve insignia added. His cap shows a common mixture of insignia, the old-style small eagle but with the later full-chin skull. His Standarte number '2' is shown next to the runes on his right collar patch, and the regimental title is displayed on his cuffband in Gothic script.

B3: SS-Untersturmführer, Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1937

This second lieutenant wears the earliest style of field-grey (*feldgrau*) uniform, introduced in that year. It is of a light shade, of the same cut as the earth-grey tunic, with slanted lower pockets. A hand-embroidered aluminium wire eagle and swastika national emblem is now worn on the upper left sleeve. His rank is also now indicated by Army-style matt aluminium braid shoulder straps with bronzed 'LAH' regimental cyphers.

C: THE LEIBSTANDARTE AT WAR

C1: SS-Schütze, 1940

This infantry enlisted man serving with the *LSSAH* in Holland and France wears for field service an old 1937 field-grey SS tunic with slanted skirt pockets, still displaying the collar cord. By this date most of these tunics had been modified with dark green collar facing, making them closer in appearance to the regulation Army M1936 field blouse – which was itself already in widespread issue to SS troops. The M1935 steel helmet and the rifleman's belt equipment are standard issue, apart from the addition of SS decals.

C2: SS-Schütze, Panzerspähzug, 1940

This private of the regiment's armoured car reconnaissance troop wears an Army issue black *Panzerbekleidung*, the special uniform for members of armoured vehicle crews. Headgear is the *Panzerschutzmütze*, a wool beret fitted over a padded crash-helmet; the embroidered insignia in white on black are of unique pattern. His jacket collar and shoulder straps are piped in the rose-pink branch colour of the Panzertruppe; the 'LAH' cyphers are machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread. Note that he still wears old pattern collar patches edged with black and aluminium twist cord.

C3: SS-Scharführer, SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 1, 1943

This assault gun commander wears the field-grey version of the special uniform for crews of armoured vehicles, issued to armoured units other than tanks. One unique feature of the *Leibstandarte* was that NCOs of this unit were the only ones authorised to wear traditional NCO *Tresse* braid on the collar of this jacket. This fashion was later dropped, but may be seen in a number of wartime photographs. His shoulder straps are piped in the red of the artillery, and bear white metal regimental cyphers. His headgear is the M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze* or 'universal field cap', with one-piece machine-woven insignia.

(Inset) The 'LAH' shoulder strap cypher in bronzed metal.

D: SS-VERFÜGUNGS DIVISION, 1940

D1: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Standarte Deutschland

This seasoned NCO has seen combat during the 1939 Polish campaign and, having been wounded in action, wears the black Wound Badge on his left breast pocket and the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class in his buttonhole. The old style pre-war collar patch with regimental number '1' is still being worn, and his shoulder straps bear a machine-embroidered Gothic 'D'. Although a Latin script version of the cuffband was introduced in 1939, this old Gothic style continued in use long afterwards. His helmet features the first pattern camouflaged cover. As a squad leader he has added binoculars and a mapcase to his rifleman's equipment.

D2: SS-Schütze, SS-Standarte Germania

This rifleman typifies the appearance of soldiers from this unit during the *Westfeldzug*. His helmet has been daubed with mud, a simple and effective alternative to the camou-

An SS-Rottenführer in M1936 style field blouse with pleated patch pockets, but with a plain field-grey collar. His decorations and awards are the Close Combat Clasp, Wound Badge in silver and Infantry Assault Badge; he wears the machine-embroidered version of the 'Westland' regimental cuffband. (Steve Brindley)

flaged cover; note the left side decal peculiar to SS troops. The rolling up of the trouser legs over rather than tucked into the marching boots may be seen on many photographs of the period. His right collar patch bears the regiment's '2' beside the runes; his shoulder straps display an embroidered Gothic 'G', and he continues to wear the old-style Gothic script regimental cuffband.

D3: SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Pioniersturmbann

This engineer captain wears the typical M1936 field-grey, green-collared field blouse as used by his Army counterparts, as well as an Army issue officer's field belt. His unique collar patch bears a crossed pick and shovel alongside the SS runes; and on his left sleeve is the cufftitle 'SS-Pioniersturmbann'. His headgear, an 'old-style officer's field cap' (called by collectors a 'crush cap') has an unstiffened crown and a pliable leather peak rather than the stiff fibre peak of the regulation service cap; it is worn without chin cords but with the usual metal badges.

E: SS-TOTENKOPF DIVISION, 1940-43

E1: SS-Oberscharführer, Feldgendarmarie, 1940

This senior NCO of military police wears an Army issue M1936 field blouse with NCO's aluminium *Tresse* trim to the green-faced collar. He wears the old 'mirror image' collar patches, so his rank is only evident from his shoulder straps, piped in the orange *Waffenfarbe* of this branch. On his left sleeve is the Army issue machine-woven 'Feldgendarmarie' cuffband in silver-grey on brown. His field cap is the old style SS-VT version widely worn before the new *Waffen-SS* pattern





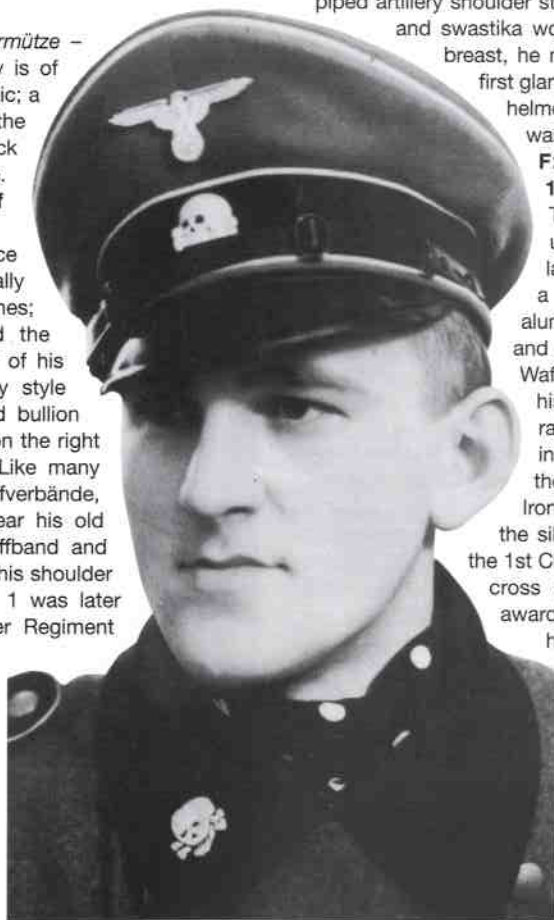
Two musicians from SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 10 Westland; note the 'swallows-nests' at the shoulders, in silver braid on black. The left man wears the old SS-VT sidecap, the other the new Waffen-SS 'Schiffchen'. (Josef Charita)

– cut like the Luftwaffe's *Fliegermütze* – became available. The field-grey is of a lighter shade than his Army tunic; a death's-head button is worn on the front, and an SS eagle on black triangular backing on the left side.

E2: SS-Sturmbannführer of infantry, late 1941

At this stage of the war the service cap – *Schirmmütze* – was normally still piped in white for all branches; for field use he has removed the stiffening wire. The green collar of his regulation officer's M1936 Army style tunic bears a hand-embroidered bullion skull patch in horizontal format on the right side and his rank on the left. Like many veterans of the pre-war *Totenkopfverbände*, this major has continued to wear his old *Oberbayern* regimental skull cuffband and the old *Standarte* number '1' on his shoulder straps; SS-*Totenkopf* *Standarte* 1 was later redesignated SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 5 'Thule'.

An enlisted man from the Totenkopf Division wearing greatcoat and peaked service cap; note the use of collar patches even on the greatcoat. He wears, unusually, a civilian polka-dot scarf.



E3: SS-Sturmann of infantry, 1942

This soldier is the 'number one' of a machine gun crew and carries the excellent MG34, with the accompanying tool-box on his belt as well as his personal weapon, the P38 semi-automatic pistol. He wears the reversible camouflaged smock with matching helmet cover, both in the original 'plane tree' pattern, spring/summer side outwards.

E4: SS-Rottenführer, SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6, late 1943

This junior NCO wears the M1943 field blouse with unpleated pockets and a plain field-grey collar. He displays the ribbons of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the Winter 1941 East Front medal in his buttonhole, the Iron Cross 1st Class pinned to his left pocket above the Infantry Assault Badge, and on his upper left sleeve the shield awarded to those who took part in the battles of the Demjansk Pocket.³ His regimental cuffband bears the name of his former divisional commander, Theodor Eicke, and was introduced after Eicke was killed in action. His headdress is the early single-button version of the M1943 field cap with two-piece insignia.

F: POLIZEI DIVISION, 1940-44

F1: SS-Oberschütze of artillery, 1940

This senior private of the divisional artillery shows the typical appearance of a Polizei Division soldier during the *Westfeldzug*. He wears the standard Army issue M1936 field blouse with the *Litzen* collar patches of the Police, and red-piped artillery shoulder straps. Were it not for the SS eagle and swastika worn on the sleeve rather than the breast, he might pass as an Army soldier at first glance. Note that the use of the Police helmet decal in place of the SS version was common during this period.

F2: SS-Brigadeführer, 1942-44

This general officer wears an unusual mix of insignia. His regulation general's service cap has a black velvet band and woven aluminium piping. The collar patches and shoulder straps are the regulation Waffen-SS pattern for this rank, but his sleeve eagle is of the Army rather than the distinctive SS type, in gold wire on green. He displays the buttonhole ribbon of the 1914 Iron Cross 2nd Class; on his pocket, the silver decoration showing award of the 1st Class during World War I, above the cross of a subsequent World War II award; the Knight's Cross hangs at his throat. His privately purchased breeches carry non-regulation general officer's *Lampassen* stripes in the pale grey of Waffen-SS general ranks.

F3: SS-Rottenführer, Greece, 1943

The Polizei Division was issued with tan tropical uniforms

³ See MAA 365, *World War II German Battle Insignia*

during its spell of duty in the Balkans. The tunic is the Italian 'Sahariana' style with a frontal yoke forming the flaps for the breast pockets. The extent of the use of insignia varied, but full insignia are worn here, including the divisional cuffband. Note that the cap insignia, sleeve eagle and rank chevrons are made in tan thread on black, while the collar patches and shoulder straps are standard issue. The tropical field cap, unlike the Army version, has no false side flaps.

G: ARMoured PERSONNEL, 1942-44

G1: SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Panzer Regiment 2

This captain of the *Das Reich* Division's tank regiment wears a service cap piped in the regulation white of all branches; piping in different *Waffenfarben* was only approved between May and November 1940 (though individuals continued to wear colour-piped caps thereafter). His regulation SS pattern *Panzerjacke* differs from the Army style (see C2) in that the front flap is cut vertically rather than angled; it also features a smaller collar, edged for officers with aluminium piping. His left sleeve bears a woven aluminium version of the 'Das Reich' cuffband. His shoulder straps have a double underlay of Panzer rose-pink over black and bear gilt rank pips.

G2: SS-Hauptscharführer, SS-Panzer Regiment 5

This senior NCO tank commander from the *Wiking* Division wears the SS pattern black *Panzerjacke*, with a non-regulation feature often found on jackets worn by this unit: the use of Panzer pink piping to the collar patches. He wears the black Panzer version of the Waffen-SS field cap, and has the machine-woven divisional cuffband on the lower left sleeve.

G3: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Panzer Regiment 1, 1944

The Waffen-SS produced its own camouflaged version of the Panzer uniform, cut in lightweight drill material and printed with the so-called 'pea pattern' camouflage colours; unlike the combat smocks it was not reversible. Generally the only insignia worn with this uniform were the shoulder straps, here seen with the removable slip-on 'LAH' cypher. To complete the outfit he wears the camouflaged SS field cap; although special subdued insignia were produced for this cap they were rarely worn.

G4: SS-Sturmann, SS-Panzer Regiment 3

As well as the black, field-grey and camouflaged versions, a lightweight grey drill work dress version of the Panzer uniform was also produced. This was often worn alone in hot weather, but could also be worn over the black uniform to protect it from dirt and wear. The extent to which insignia were worn on this uniform varied, but this SS-Sturmann from the *Totenkopf* Division's tank regiment wears a full set.

H: WINTER UNIFORMS, 1943-45

H1: SS-Untersturmführer, 5. SS-Panzer Division 'Wiking'

This second lieutenant of Panzer Grenadiers wears the SS reversible camouflage/white winter uniform with the white side outermost, and special winter felt boots. The winter cap lined with rabbit fur was widely worn in both the Army and Waffen-SS; this example has only the metal SS death's-head pinned to the front, but the eagle was occasionally worn also. To complete the outfit he also wears padded reversible winter mittens. A high-visibility cloth armband is buttoned to one sleeve showing the 'colour of the day' for quick recognition. He carries a slung MP 40 sub-machine



SS-Oberscharführer Ernst Barkmann, who as a Panther tank commander became one of the top Panzer 'aces' of the Waffen-SS. As well as an aluminium wire-woven *Das Reich* cuffband, he can just be seen to wear '2' (for SS-Panzer Regiment 2) on his shoulder strap.

gun, with a spare magazine tucked in his belt; his light field equipment is limited to a mapcase, holstered P38, and behind his hip a binocular case.

H2: SS-Schütze, 3. SS-Panzer Grenadier Division 'Totenkopf'

This machine gunner wears the fur- or fleece-lined field-grey parka. Particular to the Waffen-SS, this garment was of 'pullover' design with an integral fur-lined hood, and was provided with patch breast pockets and slash skirt pockets. This private carries the extremely potent MG 42, and has the usual spares and tool box and holstered sidearm on his belt. He wears the M1943 field cap with two-piece insignia, the death's-head worn at the front and the national emblem on the left side. The steel helmet at his feet is the M1943 with flared-out rather than crimped-over rim; by this stage of the war only the right side runes decal was normally seen.

H3: SS-Sturmann

Armed with the deadly '*Panzerschreck*' anti-tank rocket projector, he wears the heavy winter surcoat of extended length, with enlarged collar and slash hand-warmer pockets. Despite its appearance this clumsy garment was not particularly effective, being made of poor-quality material with a high shoddy content. It was as often as not worn without insignia, but photographs show that sleeve badges were occasionally applied.

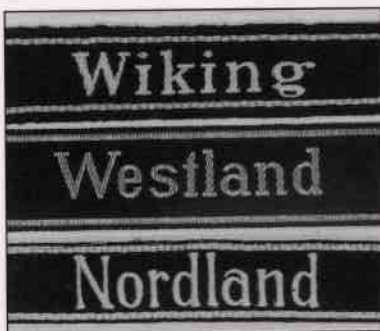
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1. to 5. Divisions

Despite being disdained by the German Army's professional officer corps, the military branch of the Nazi SS security organisation grew from an initial strength of only a handful of battalions at the outbreak of war in 1939 to hundreds of thousands of troops in dozens of divisions. The battlefield reputation of the premier armoured and mechanised divisions would become second to none; lavishly equipped and regarded as utterly reliable, they were thrown into many desperate battles on both Western and Eastern fronts, often achieving remarkable results. Illustrated with rare photographs, this is the first of four Men-at-Arms titles detailing the organisation, uniforms and insignia of the Waffen SS.

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