

EISERNE KREUZ

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT THE SS & WAFFEN-SS NR 1 - 2025



SS-Totenkopfverbände



SS-Ostuf
Fritz Ehrath



SS-Ogruf
Theodor Eicke



SS-Stuf
Erich Olboeter



SS-Hstuf
Hans Drexel



Editorial

Welcome to our first issue of "Eiserne Kreuz", a digital magazine dedicated to the study of the SS and Waffen-SS within the context of the Third Reich.

In order to advance our knowledge of the subject, future issues will focus predominantly on articles about lesser-known aspects of the SS/Waffen-SS for example obscure units like the SS-Röntgensturmbann along with coverage of Knight's Cross holders.

The editor actively encourages contributions from readers, in the form of comments and suggestions about any particular topics or aspects you would like to see covered. Full accreditation will be given to any material submitted. In order to raise the profile of the publication the first issue will be shared freely on a number of forums and webpages, however future issues will only be available on a subscription basis via our mailing list.

At this stage no firm commitment can be made as yet to firm publication dates for future issues however work on the next issue has already begun and provided there is sufficient interest and the quality of the content can be maintained it should be possible to get issue two out relatively quickly. We welcome you all, and look forward to our contributions and reading your comments and we hope you will appreciate our efforts.

Don't forget to sign up for future issues of "Eiserne Kreuz" - to do so send an email to info@axishistory.com, write - Eiserne Kreuz in the subject line. Issue Nr. 2 will not be shared and will only be available by email. It is my intention to ensure that the publication always remains free of charge.

Georg Schwab,

Responsible publisher and editor
Uppsala / Sweden

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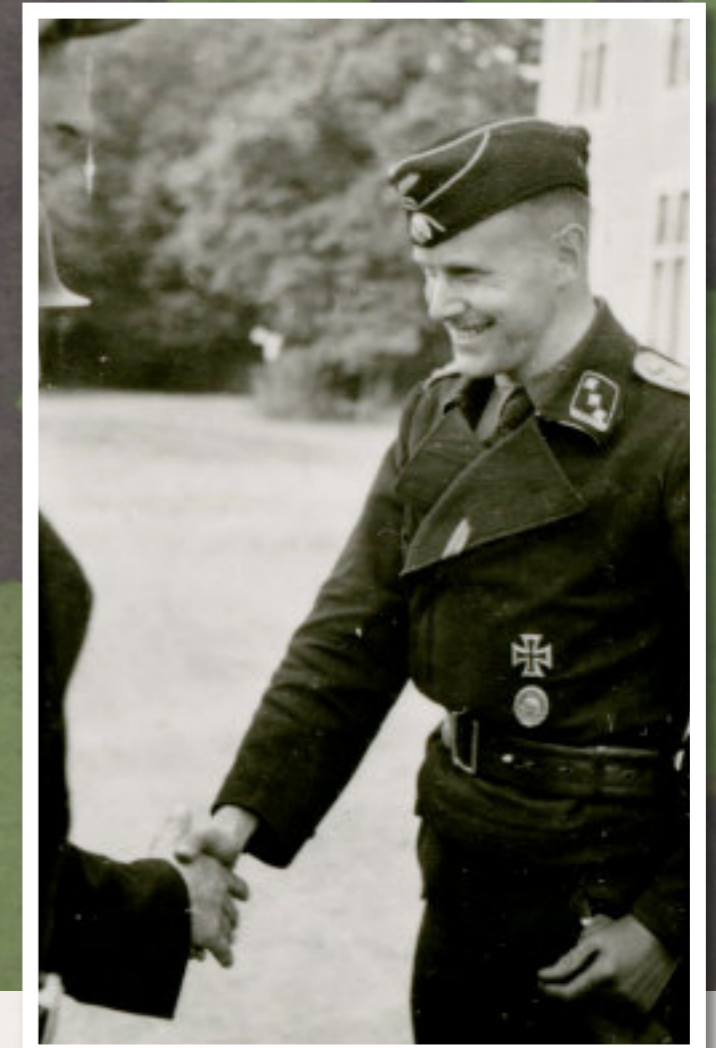
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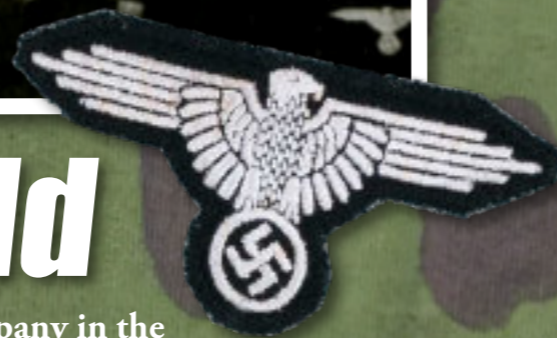
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Waffen-SS in Bild



SS-Ostuf Fritz Streipart present awards to soldiers in his Company in the SS-Pz.Rgt.1 "LSSAH"



Fritz Streipart was one of the original members of the LSSAH back in march 1933. After some time in the SS-"Das Reich" he eventually got back to LAH, and there as Kp.Fhr of the 5./SS-Pz.Rgt.1. He was born 8.7.1907 and had the SS-Nr. 43880. His last rank was SS-Hauptsturmführer.

Fritz Streipart passed away on 13.10.1989 in Aschaffenburg.





SS-Unterscharführer Eduard Janke

Eduard Janke was born in Bromberg, - West Prussia in the early 1920s. He later said that he had had to study in a Polish school, but unbeknown to him the language skills that he acquired would be useful during the war, as he learned to speak Polish and some Russian. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Eduard enlisted in the 14.SS-Totenkopfstandarte which at that time was stationed at SS-Standort Weimar Buchenwald. He told me among other things, how hard the training was but that he made comrades here with whom he would remain close for many years to come. At this time like all other recruits, Eduard also had to stand in the guard towers of KL Buchenwald, something which he found problematic. When I enquired about this aspect of his service Eduard's only comment was that 'it was boring, really boring.' In the spring of 1940 his training continued and he was not transferred to

a front unit until the campaign in the west over when he was posted to 2./SS-A.A.2 in the then SS-V.-Division. He related how he had reported to the staff with all his equipment and was told that he should go to the second company and report there. When he marched towards the place where the second company was, he met an officer who made him stand to attention after which he told Eduard to relax. Eduard noticed the Knight Cross hanging around the officer's neck and at this point he realised that Fritz Vogt was standing front of him. Vogt explained that he was now Eduard's company commander and that he should find his place at the company and make himself at home.

Eduard Janke was to remain with SS-Pz.A.A.2 until 1943 when after having attended an SS-Unterführerschule he was transferred to 4./SS-Pz.-A.A.11

SS-Unterscharführer Eduard Janke

"Nordland", with which he would continue to serve until the end of the war.

One anecdote Eduard recounted was when he was about to surrender to the British troops. During his hospital stay he had discovered that SS men were a hot target for the Western Allies. Having been wounded, he managed to avoid following his company into Berlin where they were basically annihilated and had managed to acquire the insignia of a feldwebel in the Panzer troops. As he was standing in the long line of surrendered German soldiers who had been disarmed and were waiting to provide information about their military service, a comrade of Eduard's noticed that he had changed uniform, but was still wearing his SS camouflage trousers. He joked with him saying 'I see you have changed your branch of service.' Eduard quickly explained why . to which his comrade replied 'You chose the wrong branch!' Eduard was puzzled and asked him why? to which his comrade replied 'the English will just notice the skulls on your collar and think that you are from the SS Totenkopf who are being hunted even more by the Allies!' Janke spluttered but they must

know that the armoured troops also wore skulls on their collars? However, realising his mistake he removed his insignia and looked for a regular army jacket that could not reveal his real affiliation.

Despite his attempts to disguise his former SS membership, Eduard was finally discovered by the tell-tale blood group tattoo that all SS personnel had under the left armpit, after which he was automatically arrested and spent two years in Allied captivity. After the war he met his future wife Ursula and they decided to leave the chaos of post-war Germany and emigrate to Canada where he quickly got to know many former SS men, many of whom were from the Baltic states. In mid-1950's Eduard and his family returned to Germany and settled near Bonn whereupon he joined the SS Veterans Organisation HIAG. He sought out his old comrades from both Das Reich and Nordland, he founded the comrades' association for A.A.11 "Panzergruppe Saalbach" which later became an annual gathering in connection with Korp Steiner's annual meeting near Walsrode.

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SS-Totenkopfverbände

The history of one of the most misunderstood units

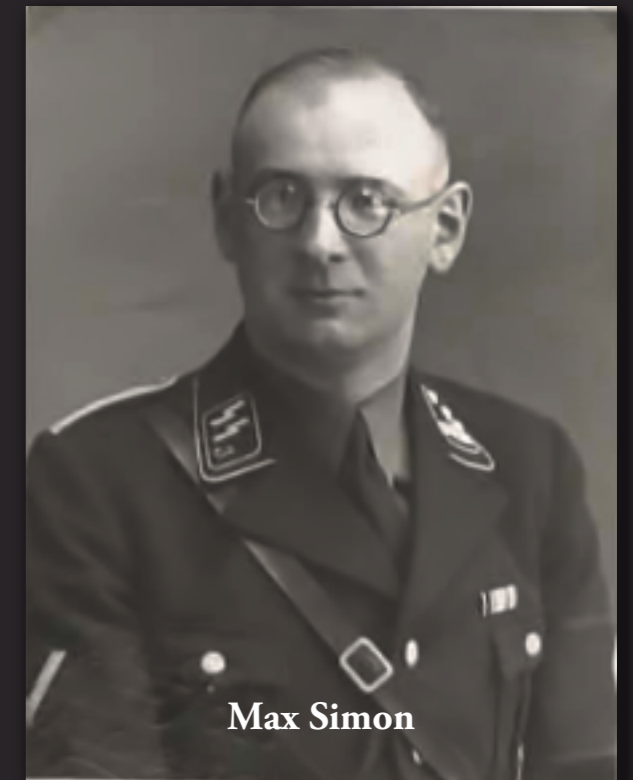
Rarely has a unit aroused such hostility, disgust, and curiosity as the SS-Totenkopfverbände (SS-T.V.). What was it and what did it do? Our subtitle says part of how we feel about this organization of the SS that existed for only a little over four years. Concurrent with Hitler assumption Rarely has a unit aroused such hostility, disgust, and curiosity as the SS-Totenkopfverbände (SS-T.V.). What was it and what did it do? Our subtitle says part of how we feel about this organization of the SS that existed for only a little over four years. Concurrent with Hitler assumption of power in Germany January 1933, the first official concentration camp opened at Dachau near Munich. Prior to its opening there had been a number of so-called 'wild camps', which were overseen by local SA and SS units. However following the establishment of the concentration camps themselves the German authorities recognized it was necessary to introduce some order. Initially this was not possible because after only a month Himmler was forced to transfer the first commandant of KL Dachau . Hilmar Wäckerle because the Bavarian police wanted to investigate the sudden death of a prisoner. He was replaced by Theodor Eicke, the SS officer who would create the organization of the Concentration Camps which would later be divided into 5 part; Abteilung I, was the Kommandanturen.

Abteilung II was the Political Department (also known as the Camp Gestapo): Abteilung III was the camp itself (Schützhaftlager) and was led by a Schützhaftlagerführer who often also acted as deputy Kommandant. Abteilung IV which was the administration, Abteilung V which was the camp doctor, and finally an SS-Totenkopfverbände was added. The official date for the creation of the SS-Totenkopfverbände is March 1936, before that the guard crew in Dachau and other camps were known as 'Wachsturmbann'. The early Wachsturmbann were Dachau, Elbe, Sachsen and Ostfriesland however in connection with the creation of the SS-Totenkopfverbände, these ceased to exist and the new names were now Oberbayern, Brandenburg and Thüringen. "Oberbayern" became 1.SS-Totenkopfverbände "Oberbayern" and was stationed in and responsible for guarding KL Dachau. Brandenburg became 2.SS-Totenkopfverbände "Brandenburg" and was stationed in Oranienburg and was responsible for guarding KL Sachsenhausen. Thüringen was first created in 1937 and replaced Wachsturmbann Sachsen, this unit became 3.SS-Totenkopfverbände Thüringen and was stationed in Weimar-Buchenwald and was responsible for guarding KL Buchenwald. In 1938 a fourth Totenkopfverbände was created which became 4.SS-Totenkopfverbände "Ost-

mark" which was to be responsible for guarding KL Mauthausen.

But what did an SS-Totenkopfverbände do?

Many serious researchers and historians incorrectly equate the personnel in the various SS-Totenkopfverbände with those who served inside the camp itself, i.e. blockführers, rapportführers etc. However this common assumption could not be further from the truth. The soldiers in an SS-Totenkopfverbände were forbidden by Eicke to even enter the camp itself, while those who served inside the camp were attached to one of the 5 previous Abteilungen. Of course, officers in any of the various SS-Totenkopfverbände could be invited into the camp or could serve as liaison officers between the Kommandanturen and the SS-Totenkopfverbände unit, but they had no authority over what happened inside the camp. Quite how recognized historians such as Charles W. Sydnor etc. have failed to noticed this critical difference remains a mystery.



Max Simon

The function of an SS-T.V. unit was not limited to standing in the camp towers or patrolling the barbed wire. They all had a rolling schedule which meant that they had guard duty for a week and then three weeks of military training. Eicke was very careful



4.SS-T.V. "Ostmark" on a visit at the SS-Compound in Berlin Adlershof

that they would receive a solid training to be a soldier. Eicke saw his Totenkopf soldiers as an extension of the NSDAP and the protection of this ideology. As I have previously stated, several soldiers have told me that guarding the camp fence itself was not something they looked forward to, even Eicke noticed that many tried to escape this tedious duty. Hence the political training of the SS-T.V. the soldiers even more important, they had constant courses and classes where the soldiers were informed that those they guarded were 'enemies of the Reich' whose goal was to overthrow the world order that Hitler and his ilk had created. Within the SS this instruction was known as 'Weltanschauung'-World Perception -which was introduced in all schools and units within the SS-T.V but also in the SS-Verfügungstruppe. At the various SS-Junkerschulen great importance.

The official date for the creation of the SS-Totenkopfverbände is March 1936, before that the guard

crew in Dachau and other camps were known as 'Wachsturmbann'. The early Wachsturmbann were Dachau, Elbe, Sachsen and Ostfriesland however in connection with the creation of the SS-Totenkopfverbände, these ceased to exist and the new names were now Oberbayern, Brandenburg and Thuringia. "Oberbayern" became 1.SS-Totenkopfverbände "Oberbayern" and was stationed in and responsible for guarding KL Dachau. officer passed these courses. Especially during the earlier years, Eicke had difficulty filling his gaps in the various Wachsturmbannen, mostly because the guard was considered an easier job and that the soldiers within these units were not paid as well as others within the SS-V.T. Eventually the soldiers within the SS-T.V. received the same salary system as the German police after which it immediately became much easier to recruit soldiers for the various SS-T.V. units.

If RFSS Himmler was the great founder of the SS who created an empire within the state, then Eicke was not far behind with his SS-Totenkopfstandarten. In total he created 18 of them. Himmler and others within the SS were somewhat surprised by the development since Eicke had not received much help in equipping his soldiers, nevertheless he had managed to always ensure that they received the equipment they needed through a variety of circuitous means.

It has not yet been possible to determine which Totenkopf unit was responsible for guarding the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp, which was newly opened in 1938 and any information in this respect would be greatly appreciated by the author.

In addition to guarding the Concentration Camps, Eicke's SS-Totenkopf units were involved in the annexation of Austria in March 1938 and the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia later that year. We have lists of soldiers in the various SS-Totenkopfverbände when they were awarded the commemorative medals for the aforementioned events.

As more was required of the various SS-T.V. units, their military training took precedence and fewer soldiers were needed for duty in the watchtowers and guarding the barbed wire.

In connection with the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, parts of the SS-Totenkopfverbände were also included, the most famous being the SS-Heimwehr Danzig which participated in the

battles around Danzig, and the 2.SS-T.V. Brandenburg, which was incidentally the unit that committed one of the first war crimes of World War II when they raised Polish villages to the ground. Regardless, these units were praised by other German commanders and they showed great appreciation for having these units at their disposal.

After the Polish campaign ended, Himmler and others realized that they could now set up a division of Death's Head soldiers. In October and November 1939, KL Dachau was emptied of prisoners who were sent to KL Mauthausen, Flossenbürg and Buchenwald. In their place the camp was filled with SS-T.V. soldiers from the 1st SS-T.V. Oberbayern, the 2nd SS-T.V. Brandenburg, the 3rd SS-T.V. Thüringen and the SS-Heimwehr Danzig. This is another contentious point for many historians and researchers who have written that the SS-Totenkopf Division was built up by concentration camp personnel, which is actually incorrect. As we have previously seen the SS-Totenkopfverbände was not part of the camp itself, they stood next to it. Of the SS-Totenkopf Division, it is estimated that approximately 6-7,000 men came from the SS-T.V. the units that we mentioned, the remaining 23-24,000 soldiers came from the SS-V.T., Allgemeine SS and new recruits. These are historical facts that unfortunately many historians ignore, we can only hope that in the future they can give a more correct description. Cer-



tainly the Concentration Camps were well associated with the SS-Totenkopf Division and later an exchange would take place with a standard procedure, but that is another story.

During the winter of 1939 and the early part of 1940 the soldiers were trained and welded together, the former SS-T.V. units would now change their

names; 1.SS-T.V. Oberbayern now became SS-Totenkopf Infantry Regiment 1 (SS-T.I.R.1), 2.SS-T.V. Brandenburg became SS-Totenkopf Infantry Regiment 2 (SS-T.I.R.2) 3.SS-T.V. Thüringen became SS-Totenkopf Regiment 3 (SS-T.I.R.3) SS-Heimwehr Danzig was spread out into the three regiments and other battalions of the now established SS-Totenkopf Division. Shortly before the attack in the west, both SS-Totenkopfverbände and SS-Verfügungstruppe ceased to exist as or-





Members of the 2.SS-T.V. "Brandenburg"

ganizations and their new collective name was from April 1940 – Waffen-SS.

Did they have any Guilt?

Firstly to our knowledge, no soldier in any of the SS-Totenkopfverbände was convicted after the war for his role as a soldier in these units. It is true that several of them were convicted after the war, but for events that occurred after the existence of the SS-T.V. It is also true that several soldiers and officers would later go on to serve in the camps, both in the already established units that handled the guarding after the SS-T.V. ceased but also in the Commandant of the camps. Several received varying sentences after the war. More on this shortly. But to clarify membership of the SS-T.V. units did not automatically make them war criminals. Although in 1962 a public prosecutor in Cologne published a pamphlet which included categories of wanted soldiers and officers, those from the 2.SS-T.V. Brandenburg were only wanted as witnesses who could potentially provide information about the people and camp staff camp staff who worked inside KL Sachsenhausen. We have tried countless times to explain this to family members etc, however, they are so indoctrinated by post-war history that they cannot tell the difference between those who guarded the barbed wire and those who worked INSIDE the camp. It's a huge difference!

Who took over the guarding?

The guarding of the Concentration Camps had to continue even after the SS-T.V. was disbanded, for a

time many personnel were called in from various Allgemeine SS units and it is duly noted in their files with the endorsement "KL Verstärkung" but it was not a sustainable situation as they often lacked military training and experience. Instead various SS-Totenkopf Sturmabteilungen were set up which from April 1940 were to handle the guarding. These units were filled with many older Waffen-SS soldiers and later also those who had been rehabilitated from injuries they had sustained during the wars and SS soldiers who for other reasons were not considered fit for frontline service. These units should absolutely not be confused with the former SS-T.V. units, which we now know were at the front.

What happened to the other units?

Now that four of the former SS-T.V. units made up the SS-Totenkopf Division, what happened to the other SS-Totenkopf Standarten They were divided between a lot of different units during the spring and summer of 1940, SS-T.V. Ostmark became SS-Infantry Regiment 4 and ultimately ended up in the SS-Verfügungs Division (Das Reich) and became better known as SS-Inf.Rgt. "Langemarck", 5.SS-Totenkopf Standarte, 6.SS-Totenkopf Standarte and 7.SS-Totenkopfstandarte became the basis for the future 6.SS-Geb.Division "Nord". The various SS-Totenkopf Reiter [Cavalry] Standarten went on to become the future SS-Cavalry Division "Florian Geyer", 8 and 10.SS-Totenkopf Standarte later evolved into the 1.SS-Inf.Brigade and so on. For Eicke it was a mixed blessing to see his units become both such a large and integral part of the now estab-

lished Waffen-SS, and also to see his creation dismembered placed beyond his control.

Aftermath

What happened to the former soldiers in the various SS-T.V. units? For many of those who would be part of the SS-Totenkopf Division, the battle in Demjansk would mean the end for them. Countless fell and were replaced with new recruits who had no experience of the previous Totenkopf units. The SS-Totenkopf Division would suffer such devastating losses that when the survivors were eventually recalled from the Demjansk pocket, the division had to be basically completely rebuilt. This happened in France in the summer of 1942 and the newly reformed SS-Totenkopf Division had very few soldiers left from its previous incarnation. A significant number of the survivors of Demjansk became non-commissioned officers or were sent to one of the SS-Junkerschulen to become officers. Their experience and knowledge were considered invaluable and the Waffen-SS made sure to take advantage of it. Many former Totenkopf soldiers and officers later became the foundation of 10.SS-Pz.Div. "Fruntsberg", while others were dispersed throughout all the divisions that were set up or ended up in the various training units. I personally knew some who ended up in the SS-Unterführerschule Laibach, as an SS-Ostuf and trainer. At the same time others remained in the SS-Totenkopf Division to be the foundation for the continued fight.



Philipp Reich



3.SS-Totenkopfverbände "Thüringen" with Heino Hierthes in front

SS-Totenkopfverbände

As we have previously mentioned, the SS-Totenkopf Division was also closely connected to the Concentration Camps after the SS-T.V. units, and we have countless documents showing transfers between different SS-Totenkopfsturmbanne at different camps and the SS-Totenkopf Division. Soldiers and officers even ended up in the various Commandant's offices, although this was a more unusual posting. Some famous names sent to the latter were Paul Werner Hoppe, who in 1942 was transferred from the SS-Totenkopf Division to KL Stutthof to become the camp's Commandant. Richard Baer was first transferred to the IKL (Inspection Concentration Camp) to later went on to become Commandant at KL Auschwitz and finally KL Mittelbau Dora. Johannes Hassebroek was transferred from the Division after injuries and became Commandant of KL Gross Rosen, and Otto Förchner who was transferred from SS-Div. Wiking eventually became the commander of the SS-Totenkopfsturmbann Mittelbau-Dora.

Some had previously been members of one of the SS-T.V. units and were later transferred to become camp personnel such as Franz Ziereis who became Kommandant at KL Mauthausen, Egon Zill who initially became Schützhafthagerführer at KL Dachau, Hans Hüttig who became Schützhafthagerführer at KL Buchenwald.

Other well-known names from various SS-T.V. Units are Otto Reich, Paul Bertling, Heino Hierthes, Matthias Kleinheisterkamp, Rudolf Saalbach, Otto Weidinger, Karl Launer, Georg Bochmann, Friedrich Christoph, Ernst Deutsch, Max Simon, Hellmuth Becker to name but a few. Many of these would achieve fame and honor as Knight's Cross bearers or go on to receive other high awards or hold senior positions.

At the end of the war, the SS-Totenkopf Division would have to endure cruel treatment by the American Army when they were handed over to Soviet troops a few days after their surrender. Many of



them would never return from this captivity and they feature heavily in advertisements for missing soldiers from the SS-Totenkopf Division that were published in the DRK's Vermisbildlisten or the Waffen-SS veterans' own newspaper "Der Freiwillige".

In the early 1950s, in connection with the creation of HIAG, survivors of the SS-Totenkopf Division also created their own comrades' association, however, they suffered from their connection to the Concentration



SS-Mann Nommensen
18./2.SS-T.V. Brandenburg



Hans Hüttig



Eugen Holzapfel



Thüringen

Camps as many of its members had served at a camp at some point during the war. This created a split within the comrades' association which among other things resulted in those who had served in the SS-Pz. Rgt.3 breaking away from the comrades' association and creating their own, as they considered that they had nothing to do with the SS-Totenkopf Division and its early history.

There was also a schism after the American publisher Federowitz approached the comrades' association with a proposal to publish their unit's history "Soldaten Kämpfer Kameraden". Some wanted it to be published in English while another section were adamant this should not happen. With this, the comrades' association was divided into two parts and Federowitz has still not been able to publish these books in English. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that these volumes of "Soldaten Kämpfer Kameraden" are the absolute best German divisional histories that exist, and are significantly better than



Ernst Pflugmacher

those published about the LSSAH and Das Reich divisions.

Some notable errors in the history of the SS-T.V.

In countless books and writings, Fritz Knöchlein is identified as having been a former camp guard, which is completely incorrect. He joined the SS-Totenkopf Division when it was set up in the winter of 1939/1940, having previously served in the SS-Verfügungstruppe and had no connection whatsoever in the SS-T.V. The crime he committed in Le Paradis in 1940 was recognized early on by the veterans of the Waffen-SS and they are of the opinion that for this Knöchlein was tried and received the punishment he deserved.

Max Simon who had a past in the 1.SS-TV Oberbayern and Sachsen, was later tried on 4 different occasions for alleged war crimes by the German authorities, none of which had been committed during his time as an officer in the SS-T.V. He was acquitted on each occasion on all counts.

That the SS-Totenkopf Division should bear any collective responsibility for what happened before the war in the camps, or later, is also incorrect. Criminal acts committed by individual soldiers and officers should not be attributed to the division per se. Not-



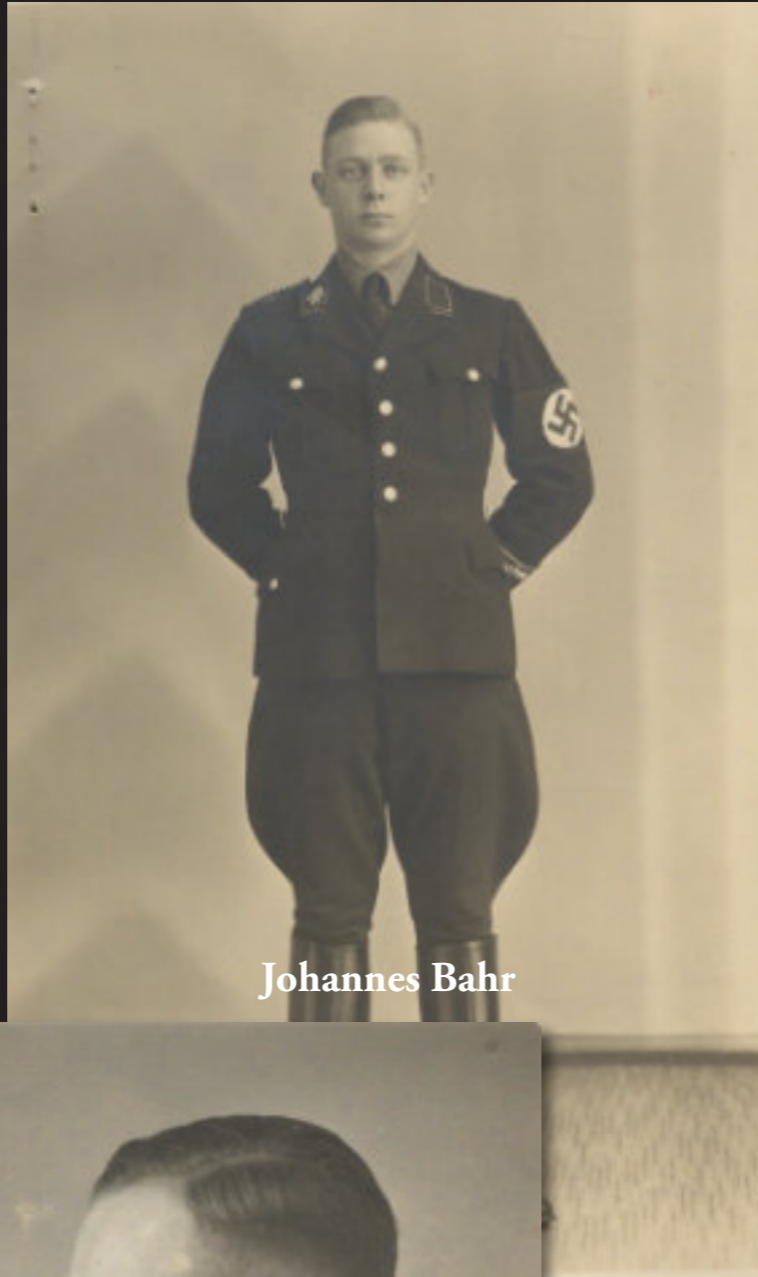
Unknown member of "Oberbayern"

SS-Totenkopfverbände

ably while it should be acknowledged that the SS-Totenkopf Division certainly committed crimes against civilians and prisoners of war, it is erroneous to associate them with the Concentration Camps. The only common denominator between the two was the name "Totenkopf."

After the war, many former members suffered cruel treatment, as the Allies were unable to differentiate between them, and countless innocent soldiers and officers who had simply worn the deathshhead on their collar tabs were murdered or summarily executed by Allied troops.

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Johannes Bahr



Hans Bartholomä



Fritz Knöchlein



Staffelanwärter Walter Uebe-Emden 10./1.SS-T.V. Oberbayern



Theodor Eicke



Theodor Eicke

SS-Ogruf Theodor Eicke who served in both the SS and Waffen-SS, was a man who was well associated with the pre-war Concentration Camps and was responsible for their structure. Despite this, he was a very popular commander among his soldiers in the SS-Totenkopf Division as is evidenced by the fact that he was the first of all SS Generals to receive the epithet "Papa" from his soldiers. Theodor Eicke was born on 17 October 1892 in Hampont in Elsass (today Alsace). When he was 17 years old, he enlisted in the army to become a soldier. He served until 1919 and left the army as Unterzahlmeister. At that time, he had served on the Western Front throughout the First World War. In the period of great uncertainty which arose in Germany after the First World War, Eicke had obvious problems reestablishing himself as a civilian as the NSDAP and its Stormtroopers (SA) became an integral part of his life. He joined the SA in 1927. A year later, in 1928, he joined the NSDAP receiving the number 114901. When the RFSS Himmler took over the SS and began to ensure that this organization grew, Eicke left the SA and transferred to the SS, where he received the number 2921. The first years for Eicke in the SS were far from calm. He came into conflict

with several other high-ranking figures within the party, where his verbal and spiteful attacks against Gauleiter Brückel would result in Eicke being briefly expelled from the SS and also placed in a mental hospital. These measures were to appease the Bavarian police but also other party members with whom Eicke was at odds. When Eicke returned to favor after a couple of months, he returned to his previous way of dealing with what he considered problems with the party and the revolution that he now considered was being carried out in Germany. After Hitler came to power in January 1933, the first real concentration camp in Germany was opened at Dachau and Hilmar Wäckerle was appointed as commandant. His regime in the camp was anything but peaceful. It all culminated when the Bavarian police wanted to investigate a murder of a prisoner who was placed in Dachau. Himmler quickly saw that something had to be done, and transferred Wäckerle out of the



RFSS on a visit to KL Dachau, Eicke far right



Fr.L.t.R: R.Glücks, T.Eicke, M.Lippert, RFSS, A.Heissmyer, W.Schmitt

camp and appointed Eicke as the new commandant. Formally, Eicke served in the SS-Abschnitt Süd with the designation z.b.V (at special disposal) first in March 1934 when he was formally appointed as Commandant over KL Dachau. His rank at this time was SS-Brigadeführer. In connection with what came to be known as the Night of the Long Knives, when the SS broke away from the SA organization and executed a large number of high-ranking SA leaders, Theodor Eicke was ordered to go to Stadelheim prison and offer SA leader Ernst Röhm the option to commit suicide. Accounts of what actually happened differ and it is not entirely certain who fired the actual shots at Röhm, but one version is that Eicke shot him in the chest while another states Michael Lippert, who was one of those who accompanied Eicke, fired the actual shot. For most of those who had participated in these events on June 30, 1934, it meant many promotions and new positions, as it did for Eicke who now became the head of all concentration camps and their personnel – SS-Totenkopfverbände. A short time later he was also promoted to SS-Gruppenführer. During Eicke's tenure as head of the Inspection of the K.L., new camps were created all over Germany, at Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg and Buchenwald, and his SS-Totenkopf Standarten grew in number so that by the

end they were so large that they had become a completely separate part of the SS. In total he created 18 different SS-Totenkopfstandarten. However, it was not until the Autumn of 1939 that he was able to return to where he had always wanted to be, back in command of a fighting unit. During the autumn and winter of 1939, KL Dachau was emptied of prisoners and SS-Totenkopf soldiers poured in from near and far. These were primarily soldiers from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd SS-Totenkopfverbände (Oberbayern, Brandenburg and Thüringen), together with the SS-Heimwehr Danzig who formed the very foundation of the SS-Totenkopf Division that was now being established. It is usually said that these three and the Heimwehr Danzig constituted about 6,000 men, out of a total of 30,000 men that the division would achieve when it was ready for combat in late winter 1940. The remaining soldiers were taken from the SS-Verfügungstruppe, the Allgemeine-SS and new recruits.

For Eicke and the SS-T.-Division, the baptism of fire which he had long awaited came in the west. The SS-Totenkopf-Division was involved from almost the first moment. They achieved some successes, but these were achieved with costly and unnecessary casualties and little regard for the preservation of life. After the battle in the west, the SS-T.-Division

had a relatively calm period for what was to come later.

In June 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union and the Second World War entered a new phase for Eicke who hated Communists above all else. This was a crusade and his troops were to be relentless and brutal against their enemies. In the winter of 1941 they reached an area called Demjansk which would become synonymous with Eicke and the SS-Totenkopf-Division. After Eicke was wounded and transferred under protest to the Führerhauptquartier, SS-Brigadeführer Max Simon took over command of the SS-Totenkopf Division, but his absence from the front did not stop Eicke from bombarding Simon with telegrams with all sorts of questions. Eicke constantly sent new requests to Himmler and OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) to be reinstated as Division Commander of the SS-Totenkopf Division until eventually later in 1942 he was flown into the so-called 'Demjansk Pocket' to rejoin his "Totenkopfler". Shortly after the last remaining elements of the SS-Totenkopf Division had successfully broken out of the Demjansk Pocket and had been transferred to the front near Kharkiv, Theodor Eicke met his death.

The day SS-Ogruf Eicke died

Theodor Eicke was married with two children. His son was killed as a lieutenant in an army unit in December 1941. His daughter was married to one of his officers in the SS-Totenkopf Division – SS-Stubaf Karl Leiner. He eventually met his fate in a country for which he had a profound hatred – the Soviet Union. On 26 February 1943 together with his adjutant SS-Hstuf Otto Friedrich, Eicke was carrying out a reconnaissance flight in the division's Fiesler Storch light aircraft, piloted by Michael Werner. As they flew over the Russian lines at ARTELNOJE at an altitude of about 100 meters, the plane came under fire and was hit causing it to crash in no man's land, and burst into flames. All three on



board died. The fact that their plane had been shot down created a frenzy of activity in the SS-Totenkopf Division whose men quickly decided that a unit would immediately make its way to the crash site and rescue the remains of SS-Ogruf Eicke and



Theodor Eicke

the other passengers. According to the press release his men had to fight their way forward with furious courage and beat back the enemy in order to bring their division commander back where the entire division was assembled.

What really happened was that SS-Hstuf Lino Masarie gathered two Kradschutz.Kp. and a company of Panzer IVs. They noted as they began to approach Artelnoja that about 1.5kms south of the village when they came up on a height they saw the burning wreckage of the aircraft. They made their way to the wreck and were determined to save what they could. Suddenly the Russians began to approach and a battle broke out. Under heavy smoke the Kradschützen were able to retreat while the Panzers ended up in a fierce fire-fight which resulted in one of the tanks being hit three times by a Russian Pak 4.7 cm and forcing them to withdraw without being able to recover Eicke's remains. SS-Hstuf Masarie then proposed to the SS-Staf. Hellmuth Becker to a further attempt be made to reach the wreck early on 27/2 and to recover the remains of their dead divisional commander. His proposal was approved by Becker and they made their way forward now armed with 2 STuG, 3 Pz.Spähwagen and 2 Kradschützen groups. With the support of artillery, they drove the enemy out of Artelnoje and were finally able to recover the bodies of SS-Ogruf Eicke, SS-Hstuf Friedrich and Oberfeldwebel Werner. Of Theodor Eicke's awards, they were only able to salvage his EK I, the Party Badge in gold and his Verwundetabzeichen in Silver.

The remains were then taken to the headquarters at Orelka. Masarie returned to Artelnoya with the entire SS-T.-A.A. and they occupied the town. When they then searched the village they found at the guard of the Russian 4.7 PAK Theodor Eicke's Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves. Next to the awards they also found a flask with petrol and a hand grenade and they were convinced that the Russians had the goal of destroying the awards. Masarie later handed over the awards to the headquarters of the SS-Totenkopfdivision. On March 1, 1943, Theodor Eicke was buried along with the other two, but the soldiers of the SS-Totenkopf Division knew how much Eicke hated the Russians and when they later

withdrew from the Demjansk Pocket they dug up Eicke's remains and then reburied him in a place further south, where he still lies to this day in the soil of the country he so despised. In Germany news of Eicke's heroic death appeared in all the newspapers and many condolences were received by RFSS Himmler.

Eicke's widow, Irma Eicke, was allowed to continue living in the "Villa Eicke" which was located a few hundred meters from the SS-Standartort Oranienburg and KL Sachsenhausen, where she had her daughter and her children as company.

Had Theodor Eicke survived he would probably have either been convicted in one of the Nuremberg trials that were held after the war, or worse still, he would very likely have been handed over to the Russians for a show trial. So it is perhaps fitting that he died in the fields outside the insignificant Russian village of Artelnoje. A few days after his death the SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6 was renamed SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6 "Theodor Eicke"

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Radr.-Code		St.	Zeit		Art	Welle
44 - Führungshauptamt - Funkverkehr		0613	20.2.43	1200		
Betreiber: G. E. I. C. K. E.			20.2.43 1200		ABTEILUNG 84	
Angriffswort: G. E. I. C. K. E.			20.2.43 1200		I II III IV V	
Ziel: SS - FÜHRUNGSHAUPTAMT			20.2.43 1200		VERWUNDETENABZEICHEN	

20-OSTGRUPPENFÜHRER E I C K E, G.
 (20 BUCHSTABEN FEHLER) 43. GEDEN 1600 UHR
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 BEI DER LÄNDE: SS-OSTGRUPPENFÜHRER E I C K E
 SS-HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER F R I E D R I C H U N D
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 LEICHEN WURDEN AM 27.2.43 FRÜH ANGRIFFEISER AUS DER
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 LEICHEN JEDOCH ANSICHT ZAST UNBERSCHIEDL. ---
 BEI DER BEIHALTUNG ERGABT VORHANDENLICH AN 1.3.43. ---
 BEI DER BEIHALTUNG ERGABT VORHANDENLICH AN 1.3.43. ---





Part I

Erich Olboeter

In early 2005, I came into contact with Dieter Brenne, a veteran of the Aufklärungsabteilung of the 12.SS.Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend. It was the beginning of a long and special friendship that lasted until his death in 2019. Through Dieter, I came into contact with many veterans of the Aufklärungsabteilung of the 12. SS-Panzerdivision, and it was the start of still ongoing research on this unit. Meanwhile, I started working on a book, and during all conversations and contacts, the name of the first commander, Erich Olboeter, was often mentioned. It was sometimes an almost canonization of the person, and that for many he was not only a father figure but was seen as such. Only information on Olboeter was and is very scarce, and the personnel file is also very limited. Let alone many photographs, and I once asked his former battalion Schreiber the question about this, and his answer was short but clear: Erich did not want to be a propaganda figure and did little to nothing about his own public relations. But touched by the stories, in retrospect I should and could have asked for much more; Erich Olboeter's life has become an additional research topic for me. In particular, I hope to find out more about his childhood and, of course, photographs. By sheer luck, I was able to get in touch with distant relatives of Erich and was able to get some additional information,

small but special fact is that he spoke several languages. Of course if there is anyone among the readers who might know something about the life of Erich Olboeter and or about the Aufklärungsabteilung of the Hitlerjugend Division I hope you will contact me. History not shared is lost history.

Part one: Erich Olboeter's family history begins in Angermünde, a small town in the Uckermark district of Brandenburg, about eighty kilometers north-east of Berlin in the kingdom of Prussia. In 1817 it became the district town of the Angermünde district. His grandfather, Carl Friedrich Olboeter (b. 10 January 1840), was a locksmith. There he met his first wife, Sophie Josette Helene (née Schobelt). Her date of birth could not be verified, but she died at the age of thirty-one years, seven months and ten days, so it must have been around 13 July 1851. They married on 16 September 1875, lived at Klosterstrasse 34 in Angermünde and were members of the Evangelical Church. Angermünde was now a town of over 6,600 inhabitants and Prussia was now part of the German Empire, which had been founded on 18 January 1871. The couple welcomed the arrival their first child and Erich's father, Wilhelm Ludwig Ernst on 23 July 1876. The couple had three more sons. Emil Otto Fritz was born on 20 February

1879. He died on 4 July 1883 at the age of four. Willy Albert Paul, born on 2 March 1881, was a stoker on a steam locomotive and the date of his death is unknown. Emil Max Richard who was born on Friday 13 April 1883. This may have been an omen, as mother Sophie died in childbirth on 23 April 1883, at the age of thirty-one. The family was struck by another tragedy when Emil sadly passed away shortly afterwards, on 31 May 1883. This must have been a bitter time for Carl and his sons. However, he seems to have found happiness again, as he married, on 29 March 1884, his neighbour Ida Emilie Wilhelmine (b. Nürnberg on 8 August 1858, in Angermünde-died 29 November 1945 in Angermünde). With the family continuing to live in Klosterstrasse 34 and they had two more sons together. Max Wilhelm Fritz Olboeter, born 8 September 1886, became a locksmith like his father and died on 12 May 1964. Johannes Fritz Emil, born on 25 December 1888, became a carpenter and died on 1 September 1954. About 60 kilometres southeast of Angermünde lies the town of Mohrin, a small farming community of roughly 1,500 people in Brandenburg's Königsberg/Neumark district. Here, Erich Olboeter's mother, Emma Auguste Marie, was born on 25 January 1885, the daughter of farmer Hermann Emil Manteuffel (b. 9 October 1863, in Schönfließ) and his wife Minna Henriette (b. Krenzke on 11 November 1863, in Mohrin). Married three years after their daughter's birth at the Evangelical Church in the Kirchstraße (Church street) on 23 May 1888. Emma was followed by two brothers, Otto, born on 23 February 1891 in Klempin, died on 11 November 1951 in Berlin. Wilhelm Karl, was born in Mohrin on 24 November 1893 and died in Russia on 10 April 1946.

The Manteuffel's made their living not only through farming but also had fish and shellfish picking rights for the nearby Mohriner See and 7 smaller lakes in the area. Wilhelm followed in his father's footsteps, he became farmer and lived in the Breitewisenweg (now Świerkowa Street) just outside the city walls of Mohrin and married Marta Helene (née Krenzke) on 11 July 1927. He was also one of the nine member of the cooperative Mohrin e.G.m.b.H. Foundation, this distillery was acquired on 1 August 1936 by the owner of the Rittergutes Mohrin (Manor house), Baron Friedrich Karl von Rohr from Guhden near Mohrin. This date was also the foundation



day of the distillery cooperative and it was bought for RM.30.000,-, the annual production volume was 940 hectolitres. Wilhelm Manteuffel owned 12 shares of distilling rights, 1 share was 500 litres of wine spirit and had a value of 100 Reichsmark.

Erich Olboeter his parents married on 8 October 1906 in Mohrin and his mother was pregnant with their first child. Being pregnant before you married was not uncommon in Germany at that time, and neither was living with your parents at the countryside. It was mostly for economic reasons, as often there was a need for money and, when you also had the expense of paying for a marriage, then this was a useful method of saving money. The couple moved from Mohrin to Eberswalde, with a population over 25,000 the expanding city was district town of the district Oberbarnim. The city then left the district of Oberbarnim on the 1 April 1911 to form its own city district. With the accelerating industrialisation, the city became also an import railway junction.



Three months after their marriage, the Olboeter's welcomed the arrival of their first child, Walter Ernst Johannes, who was born seven o'clock in the evening on 5 January 1907. The Olboeter family lived with their first-born at Wilhelmstraße 26 and father worked as an Eisenbahn-Bureaugehilfe at the "Königlich Preußische und Großherzoglich Hessische Staatseisenbahn". A nationwide population count was carried out in Germany on 1 December 1910 and on the list of Zählbezirk 123 (census district 123) the Olboeter family is also listed, 2 male and 1 female present, except that Olboeter had been spelled Olböter, a commonly used spelling for the family name Olboeter.

They were living at Wilhelmstraße 26 until 1912, it seems they moved during 1913 to Eisenbahnstrasse 76 also in Eberswalde. Meanwhile, the First World War had begun in the summer of 1914 and it was on 26 July 1917 that their second son, Erich Fritz Hermann Olboeter was born. Whether it was because of Erich's birth, but by 1919 the Olboeter family was now living in Schicklerstrasse 31, his brother Walter Ernst Johannes was well over 10 years old at the

time. By 1922, Wilhelm Ludwig Ernst was now a Materialaufseher (material supervisor)

After attending the Volksschule (primary schools) Erich moved to the Oberrealschule (secondary school) which he left with the Mittlere Reife (Secondary school leaving certificate), following on from this he received agricultural training as a student on a teaching farm and then attended an agricultural school, this was the Forstliche Hochschule in Eberswalde. Erich's father had already died in 1931 at the age of fifty-five. On the 27 July 1932, the day after Erich celebrated his eighteenth birthday, on 2 September 1934, and was registered with SS number 257 547. Receiving his military training in the "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" Regiment in Berlin-Lichterfelde, Kaserne der Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler.

His brother Walter lived at the Adolf Hitler Damm 50 in Eberswalde, like his grandfather he became locksmith, there he met Irmgard Hertha Ilse Emma (Née Bien). She was a post office assistant and was born in Berlin on 22 April 1912, and lived in the Brunnenstraße 19. Walter and Irmgard married on

the on the 6 October 1934, they had two children together, a son born in November of 1936 and a daughter in March of 1938. Although the exact date cannot be confirmed with certainty, Erich Olboeter joined the NSDAP in 1935. According to the American researcher and writer Michael D. Miller, he joined the Party on 1 March. It was often merely a formality for members of the SS to also join the Nazi party and he was enrolled with party number 3 601 994.

Erich's mother returned to Mohrin in the period between 1931 and 1936; her husband had died in 1931 and her father in 1936. Walter was married while Erich had joined the SS and was now serving in Berlin. From Erich's personnel file from Berlin, it shows Mohrin was used as a Heimatanschrift (home address) for Erich. According to Karl Münter, Olboeter was his Kompaniechef in Russia and later his Abteilungskommandeur (Aufklärungsabteilung of the Hitlerjugend Division), he sent young soldiers to his family in Mohrin during their leave. These were soldiers who had lost their parents and relatives by allied bombings. Erich Olboeter had his own sober almost spartan bedroom on this farm, it was similar

to his bedroom in the barracks in Turnhout, wenn he was the Kommandeur of the Aufklärungsabteilung of the 12.SS-Panzerdivision, as we will read later. The farm of the Manteuffel family in Mohrin still exists and after the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, it became part of Poland, the Germans who remained were expelled and Mohrin (now Moryń) was repopulated with Poles. As a result, many traces and testimonies have unfortunately been lost.

The spring of 1937 marked the next step of his career, Olboeter had been admitted into the fourth "Friedens-Junker-Lehrgang" (Peacetime Officers Course) at the SS Junker School in the Lower Saxon city of Braunschweig (Brunswick), which started on 1 April 1937. The school commander was SS-Standartenführer Friedemann Götze (SS-No.261 405). At that same day, after arriving in Braunschweig, Erich Olboeter and the other candidates were appointed SS-Junker, the official rank of SS officer candidates. After successfully passing his intermediate examination, Olboeter and the other students were promoted to SS-Standartenjunker on 1 October 1937. After completing the officer's course in Braunschweig on 31 January 1938 Erich Olboeter



Erich Olboeter (wearing an helmet) among fellow officers

was sent on a Zugführer-Lehrgang (platoon leader course) in Dachau, a small Bavarian town which, started on 1 February 1938. In the late pre-war/early war years, SS officer school graduates assigned to the Waffen-SS attended their platoon leader course at Dachau. The SS-Übungslager (SS-Trainings camp) Dachau, the SS-Übungslager was located next to the Dachau concentration camp and were formally two separate areas on the grounds of the camp complex. Most of the prisoners were employed as forced labourers, and Erich undoubtedly must have seen something of their horror that took place in the camp. Then on 26 February 1938 Olboeter and the other students of the Junkerschule Braunschweig were promoted to SS-Standartenoberjunker. His first promotions within the SS cannot be fully traced because Olboeter's personal file which is in the Bundesarchive is, most likely, incomplete. But he attended the Junkerschule at the same time as Hugo Kraas and Albert Frey did, whose personal files are still complete, and through there it has been possible to determine these promotions.

On 12 March 1938, after completing the Zugführerlehrgang in Dachau, Erich Olboeter and the other graduates of the fourth "Friedens-Junker-Lehrgang" Braunschweig were inducted SS-Untersturmführer. He returned to the "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" on 1 April 1938, accompanied by other graduates from Braunschweig and who were also transferred to the LSSAH, the SS-Untersturmführer Frey (SS-No. 111 913), Kraas (SS-No. 289 633), Mauer (SS-No. 92 510), Heinze (SS-No. 47 979) and Wangelin (SS-No. 278 977). Meanwhile, the "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" was renamed Infanterie-Regiment Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (mot.) on 15 September 1938.

Erich Olboeter served with the III./LSSAH led by SS-Obersturmführer Wilhelm Trabandt (SS-No. 218 852) and assigned to the 12.(MG) Kompanie, his Kompaniechef was SS-Hauptsturmführer Herbert Garthe (SS-No. 12 327). On 28 August 1939 he is listed in the Stellenbesetzungsliste of the Leibstandarte as Zugführer together with Max Hansen and Werner and took part in the Polish campaign, was awarded the Eisernes Kreuz II. Klasse (Iron Cross 2nd class) on 3 November 1939.

On the early morning of 10 May 1940, the 12.Kompanie including Erich Olboeter among the Zugführer crossed the German Dutch border and this

marked the start of the Westfeldzug. There are unfortunately no written reports about either him or the 12.Kompanie from this campaign. On 20 June 1940, the Kriegstagebuch of the Leibstandarte notes that Olboeter was transferred as Zugführer directly to the 15.(Krad) Kompanie, probably to replace SS-Obersturmführer Gustav Knittel who had been wounded by a bullet in his left thigh. But on 22 June 1940, this order was changed and SS-Untersturmführer Gilles, also III./LSSAH, was ordered to the 15.(Krad) Kompanie instead. It is therefore also not certain that Erich was actually with the Kompanie to replace Knittel.

After the Westfeldzug, on 2 October 1940, Erich Olboeter was awarded the recently instituted Infanterie-Sturmabzeichen in Bronze (Infantry Assault Badge bronze class (instituted on 1 June 1940 and it was awarded to motorized/Mechanized Infantry troops). After the conclusion of the of the Western campaign the Leibstandarte was sent to Metz, in the northeast of France. On 13 August 1940, the order was issued to increase the Leibstandarte to brigade level, which now had a strength of around 6,500 men. It is not clear whether Olboeter was still Zugführer of the 12.Kompanie at that moment or had already been transferred to the newly formed 15.Kompanie in Metz during the reorganisation of the LSSAH.

From 5 to 8 of March 1941, the Infantry Regiment (mot) Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler was transported by train from Metz France to Romania, with the transports arriving north of Bucharest between 12 and 17 of March 1941. On 16 March, the III./LSSAH, including Olboeter, commemorates the fallen comrades in the town of Campulung during a memorial service. The LSSAH was sent to Romania for the upcoming invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece and the attack commenced on 6 April 1941. The LSSAH fought as a strong brigade group during the German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece. The LSSAH played a very important role, it was perhaps the most important unit, during the successful campaign. Initially, it managed to penetrate the Yugoslav defences (along with the other units of the XXXX and XVIII Corps) and later penetrated the Greek-British lines in western Macedonia itself.

On 27 March 1941, Erich Olboeter was assigned as commander of the 15.(s.) Kompanie as he took over command from SS-Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Weidenhaupt (SS-Nr. 45 947) who had been appointed Kommandeur of the III./LSSAH. On 6 April 1941 Olboeter is also listed in the Stellenbesetzungsliste of the Leibstandarte as Kompaniechef of the 15.(s.) Kompanie. From 6 April until 8 April, the LSSAH followed behind the advancing 9th Panzer Division Yugoslavia towards Skopje. Then from 9 until 11 April the LSSAH turns south towards Greece. It crosses the Crna river, captures the Javat pass from the defending "Vardar" Yugoslav division and makes contact with the Italians in the Struga area. and Olboeter leads his Kompanie into Greece and the LSSAH captures the Greek city of Florina. During 12 and the 13 April, after handing over its sector to the 73rd Infantry Division, the LSSAH attacks southwards towards the Greek town of Amarynion. It captures the Kirli Derven the LSSAH attacks southwards towards the Greek town of Amarynion. It captures the Kirli Derven pass (also known as Kleidi pass) from the British "Mackay" forces, after intense fighting. The 9th and 5th Panzer divisions continue the southward advance against the British, while the LSSAH turns right, westward against the Greeks.

On 14 April the LSSAH overpowers the Greek force defending the Kleisura Pass (elements of the Greek 20th Infantry Division) and advances towards the city of Kastoria, a city in northern Greece. On 15 of April the LSSAH meets the forward elements of the Greek 13th Infantry Division retreating from Albania in open terrain and defeats them after a days-long battle. The LSSAH makes contact with the German 73rd infantry division that has advanced from the north. On the night of 15 to 16 April the elements of the Greek 13th division move further south, aware of the LSSAH's presence, and then by the morning of the 16 April, about 12,000 Greeks and 36 guns (the entire 13th division) have been captured by the LSSAH. Between 16 and 23 April the LSSAH advances to the Katara Pass (also known as Metsovo Pass), which it captures from the retreating Greeks on 18 April. On 21 April, the LSSAH reaches Ioannina and accepts the surrender of the retreating Greek armies (Army Division Epirus and Army Division Western Macedonia). The 73rd Infantry Division is tasked with collecting prisoners.

Some 140,000 Greeks are captured and disarmed. The LSSAH moves south, between the 24 and 29 April, towards the Peloponnese peninsula.

However, to get there, the LSSAH had to cross the Gulf of Patras, and at dawn on 27 April they started crossing the III./LSSAH, around 1000 Olboeter's 15.Kompanie also landed in the town of Patras. Meanwhile, the commander of III./LSSAH, unable to find enough vehicles, ordered the commanders of 14.Kompanie (Hansen) and 15.Kompanie (Olboeter) to each assemble a rail train to steam to Psathopyrgos where the companies would be loaded. Around mid-afternoon, both the trains arrived in Psathopyrgos, on the northernmost point of the Peloponnese peninsula, with both the 12.Kompanie and the 13.Kompanie being loaded. They then head to Corinth, a journey of over 120 kilometres, where they reach in the late afternoon. There Olboeter stays with his 15.Kompanie over night and on 28 April they proceed by rail towards Pyrgos, city in the northwestern Peloponnese, which they reach at midnight. There they are quartered in schools and, on 30 April, fighting has come to an end in Greece.

The LSSAH was transported to the Brünn-Wischau area, then the "Reichsprotektorat Böhmen und Mähren" (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia), in what is now the Czech Republic, where it arrived during the first week of June 1941. Following LSSAH's outstanding performance during Marita, Himmler ordered that it should be upgraded to divisional status.

End Part I

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SS-Ostufaf Fritz Ehrath



Fritz Ehrath was born on 9 August 1909 in Karlsruhe, the son of Karl Ehrath whose was a Küchenmeisters [chef] by profession. After regular Volksschule Fritz Ehrath continued his education at the Universities of Heidelberg, Kiel and Munich, where he studied Rechtswissenschaft [Jurisprudence]. In 1930 Fritz Ehrath joined the NSDAP and the Sturmabteilung (SA), however his service was brief as in November of the same year he transferred to the SS, hence his low SS-Nr 6505. This meant that Fritz Ehrath was considered a so-called "Alte Kämpfer" [Old Fighter], which later proved to be advantageous in furthering his career. At the time of his move he belonged to SA-Sturm 4 which was based in Mannheim, but when the SS established itself in Mannheim in November 1930 he chose to transfer to this organization, which was incidentally a subdivision of the SA. Initially Fritz Ehrath belonged to the SS unit 2./I./1.SS-Standarte in Munich, but a year later he was transferred to 3./I./32. SS-Standarte. A little less than a year later, in August 1933, he was entrusted with leading this Sturm, but soon transferred this time to the SS-Oberabschnitt Süd. This was to be yet another short appointment as in May 1934 he was transferred to I./2.SS-Standarte, shortly before which on 20 April 1934 he was promoted to the rank of SS-Untersturmführer. In 1935 Fritz Ehrath elected to switch from the Allgemeine-SS to the SS-Vefügungstruppe. Initially this was known as Politische Bereitschaft and was spread throughout Germany, however this designation was soon dropped and was referred to only as the SS-VT.

Fritz Ehrath was assigned to the 11 Company of SS-Standarte Deutschland which was stationed in Ellwangen. He held this position for less than a year and now having been promoted to the rank of SS-Obersturmführer, he was appointed Adjutant of the III./SS-Sta. "Deutschland". Two months later he was transferred to the 11th Company in the SS-Standarte "Deutschland" initially as Zugführer, [platoon commander] but later becoming the Company

Commander, this position which would prove to be the longest tenure he would hold. This service lasted until February 1940, but before it ended he participated with his company in the attack on Poland and was the first in the entire SS-Regiment "Deutschland" to receive the Iron Cross, first class. For a short period, he was then posted to the Staff of the Leibstandarte SS

Adolf Hitler. Some sources incorrectly claim that appointment was merely a paper exercise designed to get that unit to pay his salary, however a document in his SS Officer file shows that it was a genuine appointment. He arrived in February 1940 and left in September when he was again given a new task. This time he was posted to the SS-Führungshaupt (SS-FHA) Amt Waffen-SS. This department within the SS-FHA, developed guidelines, regulations, etc. for the relatively new organization that was the Waffen-SS. A further document shows that the RFSS Himmler expressed his complete satisfaction with his work. Establishing exactly how long he remained in this post is difficult since his SS file also contains information that shows that he participated in the attack on the West in the spring and summer of 1940, but according to his file this was concurrent with his posting to the SS-FHA. While participating in the attack in the West Ehrath is said to have been wounded in combat while fighting in the Netherlands. No indication is given as to the length of his convalescence, but by the time of the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 he had been transferred to SS-Inf.Rgt. "Der Führer" and promoted to the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer. Here he served as the commander of the first battalion in which capacity





he received the German Cross in Gold on 10 January 1943. The recommendation for receiving this high award states: 'During the eastern campaign, SS-Stubaf Ehrath, as commander of I./SS-Rgt. DF, demonstrated his outstanding leadership qualities, personal commitment and exceptional bravery in many battles. The I./SS-Rgt. "Der Führer" owes its combat successes to his intrepid daring and proven combat leadership. Of the many successful battles in the east, the following are particularly worthy of mention: The defensive battle in the Yelnya bend 1.) After successful breakthrough battles southeast of Smolensk, the SS-Division "Reich" was facing an enemy in the bend around Yelnya who wanted to force a breakthrough in the sector with 7 divisions and especially at this point, with extremely strong support from heavy artillery. Here, the I./SS-Rgt- "DF" fought off the strongest enemy attacks in the focal point of the defense for two weeks with outstanding conduct. The soul of the resistance was the SS-Sturmbannführer Ehrath, who mastered all crises with unshakable bravery and destroyed all the enemy's preparations for an



Fritz Ehrath to the right with Franz Grohmann to the left



attack through constant reconnaissance and assault troop operations. Despite continuous attacks, the battalion's fighting power did not wane. In addition to considerable material losses, the enemy lost around 1,500 dead in the battalion's sector.

2.) The conduct and leadership of SS-Stufaf Ehrath in October deserves special recognition, as it was characterized by much greater demands caused by the weather, the high losses and the reinforcement of the enemy's resistance. During the breakthrough of the Moscow defensive position on the highway near Yelnija on 14 October 1941, SS-Stufaf Ehrath once again demonstrated his utmost bravery. During the night, he and his battalion penetrated deep into the enemy position and personally led the companies to the breakthrough at daybreak. Despite the toughest enemy resistance, the entire position was broken through by the evening. In the subsequent pursuit, the enemy suffered heavy losses. This success of the battalion is also due to the brave and determined commander SS-Stufaf Ehrath. The battalion played a special role in the further attacks on the highway up to the Ostkreuz south of Moshaisk.

3.) These successes are not yet overshadowed by the achievements of the battalion in November and December. The battalion's first task was to secure the right flank of the division in Gegand Fetchina, following the 10th Panzer Division. The enemy had inserted a Siberian rifle division at this point. In 14 days of fighting, despite snow and cold, the battalion withstood physical attacks in the dense forest. Despite high losses, the battalion held every meter of ground. The enemy suffered very high losses here. Here too, SS-Stufaf Ehrath was tireless in setting up resistance. With ruthless use of his own person, he thwarted the enemy's intentions. In the attack that followed, the 1st SS Regiment "DF" together with the 2nd SS Regiment "DF" destroyed the bulk of this division in extremely hard fighting. In the attacks that followed across Istra to Lenino, 20 km from Moscow, the battalion achieved unheard of feats. Despite the bitter cold, low combat strength and the troops' severe exhaustion, the battalion achieved successes every day in its attacks against extremely strong enemies. The battalion owes its successes to the tough personality of its commander and his brave intervention in the difficult situation.

4.) The following defensive battles particularly affected the defence in the area west of Rzhev.

The SS Regiment "Der Führer" was deployed here as part of the VI Army Corps to close the gap on both sides of the Volga and to defend this sector. The regiment's sector was the subject of the strongest enemy attacks over a period of four weeks, with heavy artillery fire and the support of numerous tanks. During this time, four enemy rifle divisions and two tank brigades tried in vain to break through the regiment's sector to free its 29th Army, which was surrounded further south. The I SS Regiment "DF" was tasked with defending the sector west of the Volga. SS-Stufaf Ehrath committed his entire force here day and night. His unwavering bravery succeeded in thwarting all attempts by the enemy to break through here and repelling all attacks. Even though he was constantly exposed to enemy artillery fire, he never spared himself from intervening in heavy local battles and upholding his troops' will to fight until the very end.

Particularly tough fighting took place here between 9-14 February 1942. With the support of heavy tanks, the enemy managed to break through their own HKL in several places.

To prevent a deeper break-in, SS-Stufaf Ehrath organized a new HKL overnight at the level of his command post and held it against all further enemy attacks. Even though the enemy tanks were behind his brave men, the HKL was held unconditionally under his brave leadership. 24 enemy tanks and countless fallen Russians covered the battlefield of Lepsino. The enemy did not succeed in breaking through.

The often proven personal bravery and outstanding attitude of SS-Stufaf Ehrath as well as the great achievements of his brave battalion deserve the highest recognition.

Signed Otto Kumm, SS-Obersturmbannführer and Regiment Commander

In connection with receiving the German Cross in Gold, he was also sent on a course for regimental commanders held at the Panzertrupp übungplatz Wünsdorf. Fritz Ehrath remained with the SS-Reg. "Der Führer" until the summer of 1943, and before his departure he was promoted for the last time, to



Fritz Ehrath after battle

the rank of SS-Obersturmbannführer on 20 April 1943.

From 1 June 1943, he was transferred to the SS-Pz. Gr.Div. "Wiking", where he was given command of the SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.9 "Germania" and the battles he would now undergo were even harder. In a review written by SS-Gruf. Gille he was described as an open, but determined person who took on the task assigned to him with sincerity and determination. Gille also emphasized that Ehrath was a very good trainer, was very popular with his soldiers and towards his colleagues in the officer corps he is open and frank.

Thereafter Ehrath was involved in all the battles that the SS-"Wiking" participated in and proved himself to be such a capable officer that at the beginning of 1944 he was recommended for the Knight's Cross. His divisional commander SS-Gruf Otto Gille, wrote the following in his recommendation: SS Obersturmbannführer Ehrath led a combat group in the pocket around Korsun, consisting of SS Panzer Gr. Regiment "Germania", parts of SS Panzer

Abt. "Wiking" and parts of SS Artillery Regiment "Wiking". Due to the previous heavy fighting and the impassable, muddy terrain, the protective position of the pocket to the south had to be taken up without heavy weapons on 15 February 1944, south of Schenderowka. Only 1 assault gun and 4 Panzer IVs supported his defensive mission of holding the position until all the encircled parts of the XXXXII and XI A.K. had broken through to the southwest in the direction of Lissjanks.

The enemy began to attack the position of the Ehrath combat group again on 15 February 1944 with superior infantry and tank forces from the southern part of Novo-Buda and along the Morenzy - Schenderowka road. Enemy troops and tanks that had broken through were repelled with a tenacious will to defend themselves and tanks were destroyed with close combat weapons and handgun cartridges. SS-Stuf Ehrath was the soul of this decisive battle and led counterattacks in the front line to clear the front. The enemy's aim of splitting the pocket from the south was clear. The combat group's tenacious hold made it impossible for the enemy to break through, which continued to attack until early on 17 February 1944. However this gave the encircled troops the opportunity to prepare and carry out the breakout to the west. This began on 16 February 1944 at 23.00hrs and was to have been completed by dawn. This date was delayed due to difficult terrain and enemy action. SS-Ostuf Ehrath however, held the position until all troops and the wounded had begun the march and only then gave the order to disengage from the enemy and fought his way with his combat group to the head of the relief force. Through this perseverance and brave defense of all enemy attacks, during which 24 tanks were destroyed by close combat means, it was possible to close the mass of the encircled units on the ordered route of the march. Shortly afterwards, RFSS Himmler endorsed his support for the recommendation for SS-Ostuf Ehrath to receive this high award.

A few months after receiving the Knight's Cross, he received a new assignment, this time as Regimental Commander of SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt. 10 "Westland" a position he held until September 1944 when he is once again transferred, this time to become Führerreserve at the SS-FHA .

Unfortunately no further information is available about this last stage of his career at the SS-FHA, as a Führer reserve, where he ended his active front service. This is very surprising as he was clearly a very competent and brave soldier, as is evidenced by the testimony of his former commanders and his high combat awards. Despite his good conduct, unusually he did not attain any further promotions after 20 April 1944.

It was not until November 1944 that His SS file reveals that he in November 1944 he was intended for a period as Regimental Commander in the 18.SS-Pz.Gr.Div "Horst Wessel", however, this assignment was withdrawn after only one day and he remained a Führer reserve at the SS-FHA. It was not until January 1945 that he received a new assignment, this time as Regimental Commander of SS-Pz.Gr.AuE. Btl.2 which was stationed in Prague. With this assignment, all traces of what happened to SS-Ostuf Fritz Ehrath in the last months that remained of the Second World War end.

Fritz Ehrath was married to Annelise Jelke, who was born on 8.7.1910 in Saxdorf. She joined the NS-DAP on 8 April 1936 and had the party no 556106. Their marriage was childless which is somewhat remarkable as RFSS Himmler constantly pointed out to his officers the importance of having as many children as possible. This may be one of the reasons why he was not promoted, but as nothing in his SS Officer file indicates this, it remains speculation. Fritz Ehrath died on 20 August 1972 in Neckargemünd. No mention of his passing appeared in the newspaper "Der Freiwillige", which was normal when a Knight's Cross bearer and also Regimental Commander died, therefore we can assume that he did not maintain contact with any of his old comrades from his time in the Waffen-SS.

Thanks to Paul Turner for sharing his photos from one soldier who was close to Ehrth. This story is from an upcoming book about all the officers of the 2.SS-Pz.Div. "Das Reich"(Part I).

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Hans Drexler

The Military Career and Fate of SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Drexler

Hans-Karl Drexler was born on 22.11.1919, as the third son of Gendarmerie-Obermeister Ludwig Drexler and his wife Rosa in Dettenhausen, Tübingen district. From 1926 to 1930, he attended elementary school in Vaihingen and then entered high school in Leonberg. On 01.03.1933, he joined the Hitler Youth and in 1936 was accepted into the leadership training program, receiving his Mittlere Reife (secondary school diploma) in the same year. Then he attended the National Political Education Institute (Napola) in Backnang near Stuttgart, where he completed his Abitur (higher education entrance qualification) in 1938. After leaving the Hitler Youth on 31.03.1938, undertaking his obligatory RAD (Reich Labor Service) service from April to 25.10.1938, before volunteering the SS-Verfügungstruppe with SS-Regiment "Deutschland" on 01.11.1938.

He completed his basic training in the SS-Standarte "Deutschland" and participated in the Polish campaign as a dispatch rider in the field operations. After its conclusion, he attended the SS-Junkerschule Bad Tölz on 01.11.1939. On 24.02.1940, he was assigned to 2./SS-Inf. Rgt. "Westland" within the newly forming SS-Division "Wiking". Hans Drexler was promoted to SS-Ustuf. on 09.11.1940 and moved to 14./"Westland" as a Zugführer. His next action was on the Eastern Front during Operation "Barbarossa" in 1941, where he was awarded the Second Class Iron Cross on the 7th of July, and the Iron

Cross 1st Class on 20.11.1941.

During Operation Barbarossa, he first served as a Schützen-Zugführer (rifle platoon leader) and later as an anti-tank platoon leader in the 14./SS-Inf. Rgt. "Westland", where he distinguished himself in numerous battles. For example, in the battles near Husyatyn (Ukraine) on 10.07. 1941 where he destroyed two enemy tanks in close combat. From August 1941 to September 1942, Drexler served as an Adjutant in II./SS-Inf. Rgt. "Westland" and was promoted to SS-Ostuf. on 30.01.1942. Drexler next moved to the 8./"Westland" of SS-Hstuf. Wilhelm Körbel as a Zugführer and Deputy Commander. He temporarily substituted for Körbel after he was wounded on 14.08.1942. During a surprise night attack by enemy forces in Simowniki on 30.12.1942, he demonstrated exceptional bravery. He was ordered to counter the attack but, due to the sudden enemy penetration into their main defensive line, was forced to deploy for defensive action. In the face of the strongest enemy resistance, SS-Ostuf. Drexler positioned an anti-tank gun and light machine gun at the last line of defense, securing the rear of the main defensive line. At dawn, he personally led a counterattack, taking out the final enemy resistance with an unheard-of level of brutality. Thanks to his actions, the enemy's breakthrough in this sector was completely thwarted. In the following intense defensive battles at Simowniki, SS-Ostuf. Drexler once

again demonstrated his extraordinary courage. On 02.01.1943, as the enemy attacked the II./SS-Pz. Gren. Rgt. "Westland" with tanks, Drexler positioned a reserve Pak (anti-tank) gun at a critical defensive point. He personally operated it alongside his men, firing immediately as soon as the target was within range. Drexler himself took on the role of gunner, personally sighting and firing at an enemy tank. Again, on January 8, 1943, he displayed exceptional bravery. Facing an enemy force composed of two battle-ready brigades, which attacked the positions of the II. Battalion near Staraja-Ladin, he quickly reorganized his company and positioned his infantry gun and engineer platoon to prevent an enemy breakthrough. He personally engaged in combat, moving from position to position, manning different weapons, and fighting alongside his men.

During the same month in January 1943 Drexler was permanently leading the 10. Kompanie. In the following combat near Nogajewskoi-Rebritschanskij, the enemy launched an assault on January 14, 1943, at 14:30, following an intense artillery bombardment supported by mortar batteries. The attack, consisting of two battalions and five tanks, advanced from the east and northeast towards the town. Despite extreme cold of over -30 degrees Celsius, the enemy managed to break through on the northeastern edge of the town. In the western section of Rjabitschamatschki, approximately 1.5 km south of the enemy breakthrough, defensive positions had been established by the II Battalion, Artillery Regiment 5. However, due to heavy losses, the defensive line could not be maintained, as artillery positions had been damaged, fuel reserves were running low, and resupply was impossible.

The eastern exit road was ultimately controlled by parts of the division engaged in bitter defensive fighting against strong infantry and armored units. In recognition of the dangerous situation and the potential consequences of further enemy advances, SS-Ostuf. Drexler immediately moved to the defensive positions of the Pioneer and Grenadier Companies during a night-time enemy breakthrough in heavy field fighting. He quickly reorganized the retreating elements of the combat engineer company into a de-

fensive formation and, fighting at the forefront with a pistol and hand grenades, stopped the breakthrough of the enemy at the railway embankment. Although one of his self-propelled anti-tank guns was destroyed by direct fire, Drexler moved from position to position, inspiring his men and leading them into battle.

During the battles west of Barwenkowo on February 24, 1943, Drexler again demonstrated outstanding bravery. Thanks to his leadership the enemy attack on the threatened left flank of the division was repelled. Drexler led his 3rd Infantry Gun Platoon and two anti-tank guns into the village of Iwanowka, surprising the enemy and forcing them to retreat.



A subsequent successful counterattack was made possible by Drexler's leadership and bravery, preventing a breakthrough and ultimately leading to the enemy's retreat.

In April 1943, Drexler's heavy 10./Westland command was renumbered the 8. Kompanie, and he was also the designated deputy battalion commander. For his numerous acts of exceptional leadership, SS-Ostuf. Drexler was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer on 09.03.1943, by the commander of the II. Bataillon, SS-Hstuf. Walter Schmidt. He was recommended for the German Cross in Gold, which was awarded to him on August 6, 1943. In April 1943, Drexler's heavy 10./Westland command was renu-



Hans Drexler, prior he received the RK and DKIG

bered the 8. Company, and he was also the designated deputy battalion commander. From August 15 to 27.09.1943, while only an SS-Ostuf, he took temporary command of the II./"Westland", substituting for SS-Stubaf. Walter Schmidt until he was succeeded by Hauptsturmführer Heinz Horstmann later that month.

During the defensive battles east of the Dnieper River, while leading the II. Bataillon, he successfully led his troops in repelling the enemy offensive and crossed the Chorol sector northward, launching a bold attack on Kremenchug. Utilizing only his strongest forces, he took the shortest route to break through the enemy defenses at Kremenchug. Later, in September 1943, Drexel and II./"Westland" were tasked with preventing enemy advances southeast of Chorol. As the enemy prepared strong assault forces, including tanks, in the Werbin/Missaki/Mal. Popowka area, SS-Ostuf. Drexel recognized the imminent danger of a potential enemy breakthrough. Acting swiftly, he gathered available parts of a battal-

ion and, with the support of several tanks and artillery batteries, launched an immediate and unexpected counterattack against the enemy. Leading his men from the front, he broke through the enemy lines, causing initial confusion within their ranks. Capitalizing on this moment of disorder, he and his men overran the enemy forces and pushed them northward. The enemy suffered heavy losses, including the capture or destruction of:

- 18 anti-tank guns,
- one 12.5 cm gun,
- one light infantry gun,
- two mortars,
- four grenade launchers,
- four anti-tank rifles,



The wedding ceremony took place during summer or early fall 1944, He marries Anni Obermayr, born 8.2.1920 in Steyr. It is unknown whether they had any children. In the background we probably see Ludwig Lieb with his German cross in gold.

- and ten heavy machine guns.

Through his independent and decisive action, he managed to repel all enemy assaults that day. This allowed time to bring in reinforcements and establish a strong defensive line. The rapid and courageous decision-making of SS-Ostuf. Drexel played a key role in preventing an enemy breakthrough near Kremenchug, effectively halting a large enemy force from crossing the Dnieper River. His personal bravery and skilled leadership were instrumental in this success.

Due to his outstanding performance, SS-Ostuf. Drexel was recommended by his Regiment commander SS-Ostuf. August Dieckmann for the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 22.09.1943. This recommendation arrived at the Army Main Headquarters on the 7th of October and was approved one week later on 14.10.1943. By the time he recovered Drexel was temporarily moved to succeed SS-Ostuf. Fritz von Boeckmann as a Company Chef of 11. Company, being in turn substituted for in command of the 8. Company by SS-Standardenoberjunker d.R. Günther Adolph. Fritz Hahl recalls in his memories how Drexel returned to the Company and invited him and other comrades for lunch. He wrote in his letter to his comrade: "Do you know what Drexel had? Spätzle with potato salad and pork..." time of its approval, August Dieckmann had been killed in action. This document was backed up by one from Gille, who endorsed the recommendation and made mention of Drexel's repeated bravery. Just days later, on 28.09.1943, during battles along the Dnieper River, he sustained a severe head injury. He was transferred to the hospital where SS-Brif. Gille paid him a visit and awarded him personally with the Knight Cross. On 30.01.1944, he was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer and later deployed west of Tscherkassy as a tactical advisor and liaison officer to the commander of 5.SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade "Wallonien", SS-Stuf. Lucien Lippert, and then to his successor SS-Hstuf. Leon Degrelle. Peter Strassner mentioned some moments when Drexel helped Lippert in the planning of the brigade's operations. During the breakthrough from the pocket he probably was seriously wounded because he spent a lot of time recovering in a hospital in Tübingen (Baden-Württemberg).

Then he returned to the 8./"Westland" and remained 8.Kompanie Chef into mid-August 1944

when succeeded by then SS-Ostuf. d.R. Günther Adolph. Unfortunately we didn't find any additional information about his life between fall 1944 -1945.

We definitely know that he survived the war and was sent to Officer's POW Camp No. 205 ("Harro Camp") in Baccarat, France and was mentioned there in 1947. Unfortunately, we do not have any notes when he was released and returned to his homeland. The author has not encountered any pictures or information about Drexel's postwar life, from which we can conclude that he had a reserved and quiet life, as many other veterans did. Hans-Karl Drexel was only 42 when he died of pancreatic cancer on April 12, 1962, in Stuttgart.

His Regiment commander Oakleaves winner Walter Schmidt considered him one of the two best officers to serve under him with *Regiment "Westland".

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Pictures credit to: Personal archive, NARA, Marc Rickmenspoel, Paul Turner and Pierre Tiquet.

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Hans Drexler

Height: 182 cm

Education:

- elementary school 4 years

- Abitur (university entrance qualification)

Born: 22.11.1919 in Dettenhausen/Oberamt Tübingen/Schwarzwaldkreis/Württemberg.

Died: 12.04.1962 in Stuttgart/Regierungsbezirk Nordwürttemberg/Baden-Württemberg

SS# 372 377 (Joined 01.11.1938)

SS-Hauptsturmführer der Reserve Hans Drexel received the following awards

193_ German National Sports Badge in Bronze

193_ SA Sports Badge in Bronze

1940 Ehrendegen des Reichsführers-SS

07.07.1941 Iron Cross 2nd Class (EK II)

10.07.1941 Two Single Handed Tank Destruction Strips (for individual combat against enemy tanks)

20.11.1941 Iron Cross 1st Class (EK I)

20.04.1942 Infantry Assault Badge in Bronze (Inf. St.Abz)

08.09.1942 Eastern Front Medal (Winter Campaign Medal 1941/42)

1943 Wound Badge in Black

- German Cross in Gold (DKiG) as SS-Obersturmführer d. R. and company commander of 10 Kp./ **II./SS-Pz. Gren. Rgt. "Westland"**, **SS-Pz. Gren. Div. "Wiking"** / XXIV. Panzer Corps / 1st Panzer Army / Army Group South
 - Recommendation No. 6/43, dated 12.05. 1943, signed by Battalion Commander Walter Schmidt.
 - Countersigned 12.07.1943, by Regiment Commander August Dieckmann.
 - Final approval 29.07.1943, by Division Commander Herbert Otto Gille.

- Knight Cross of the Iron Cross (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes): 14.10.1943 as **SS-Obersturmführer** d.R. and deputy commander of **II./SS-Pz. Gren. Rgt. "Westland"**, **SS-Pz. Gren. Div. "Wiking"**, 8th Army, Army Group South
 - Recommendation No. 2224, dated 22.09.1943, signed by Regiment Commander August Dieckmann.
 - Approved on 3.10. 1943, by Division Commander Herbert-Otto Gille.
 - Final approval by Generalleutnant Wilhelm Burgdorf, Chief of the Army Personnel Office, Führer Headquarters, 13.10.1943.

February (or Mach) 1944 Close Combat Clasp in Silver (Nahkampfspange in Silber) (according to his own letter to Hitler Youth member Knauth on 02.03.1944)

Ranks:

November 1, 1938 SS-Staffelbewerber (?) (by M.Miller)

1938 SS-Staffelmann (by M.Milelr)

November 1, 1939 (?) SS-Junker d. R. (by M.Miller)

1940 SS-Standartenjunker d. R.

November 9, 1940 SS-Untersturmführer d.R.

January 30, 1942 SS-Obersturmführer d.R.

January 30, 1944 SS-Hauptsturmführer d.R

Anybody who can support with additional information, documents or photos of Hans Drexel please feel free to contact Andrii at - guntir@ukr.net



Hans Drexler



TIGER!



The Tiger I is probably the best known German army tank of WWII that arouses many emotions. Among the Allies they had a fearsome reputation and they even had a syndrome for them known as 'Tiger fear' which in itself created many problems since as soon as an Allied soldier saw any kind of German armor it suddenly became a 'Tiger'.

But how did the story of the Tiger or Panzerkampfwagen VI as it was officially known, begin? We have to go back to 1937 when the German Army submitted a request for a heavy tank. The companies that were commissioned to produce prototypes were Henschel and Porsche, the same Porsche you associate with luxury cars today. However the road to final production was fraught with difficulties and they encountered many problems with the prototypes themselves which were difficult to handle. Porsche developed his prototype powered by a petrol engine however this proved to be too weak for the heavy Tiger tank which weighed around 57 tonnes.

During a demonstration the Porsche prototype caught fire and it was subsequently rejected.

Ultimately the Henschel variant was chosen and they set about producing and developing the tank which mounted the famous 8.8cm gun. Henschel had cleverly reused several parts from previous models, which would later prove to be a smart move, ensuring as it did slightly cheaper production. The factory that built the Tiger I, which was established only after the Tiger II had already started production, was located in Kassel and the first Tiger tank was delivered in August 1942. The production run continued for two years until August 1944, when it was phased out in favour of the Tiger II, or Königstiger (King Tiger) as it was known.

The Tiger I is most often associated with various SS-Panzer regiments. When they were assigned to the Waffen-SS they formed a regiment's heavy company the designation being s.SS-Pz.Kp.

where the small 's' stood for 'Schwere' (Heavy). Later these heavy companies became the foundation of the s.SS-Pz.Abt. that would be established, the most famous of which is probably s.SS-Pz.Abt 501 commanded by tank ace Michael Wittmann. s.SS-Pz.Abt.502 and 503 were also developed. These units were attached to an SS-Pz. Korps and not a Division, so Wittmann's battalion was attached to I.SS-Pz.Korps LSSAH, s.SS-Pz. Abt.502 was attached to II.SS-Pz.Korps and finally s.SS-Pz.Abt.503 which was attached to SS-(Germ.)Pz.Korps.

Were they any good? Of course, they were appreciated by the troops who had them at their disposal however they suffered from several shortcomings. For example among other things, there were problems with track failure when they froze in the Russian cold in the east and were vulnerable to immobilization when mud, ice and snow froze between the overlapping and interleaved road wheels which prevented them



Kurt Ebeling



Michael Wittmann



Fr.L.t.R SS-Ustuf Karl Baral, SS-Ostuf Alois Kalls and SS-Oscha Paul Egger

Photo: R. Warnicke

from being driven, they were expensive to maintain and required regular maintenance and servicing, but otherwise they were good tanks that performed well. They had a very thick 100mm amour protecting the front which made it very difficult for the Allies to knock them out. According to reports a Tiger could take out a T-34 at 3900 meters with its 8.8cm gun whereas to knock out a Tiger, the Allies needed to get very close to it. The American troops developed a tactic whereby three Shermans would attack a Tiger simultaneously, two obliquely from the front while the third tried to get up from behind and fire at the it from the sides where the armor was not as thick. The Tiger tanks were also vulnerable to air attacks as in order to save weight, the upper armor was thinner.

It is often thought that the Allies managed to destroy the Tiger tanks, but the fact is that most were destroyed mainly by their own crews when they became immobile for various reasons as it was strictly forbidden to allow the enemy to capture a working Tiger and crew was under strict instructions to destroy the tank themselves. One

tank that the Allies did manage to take out was Michael Wittmann's. After his legendary successes on the Normandy front, he was a hunted prey, which the Allies sought to neutralise. They finally succeeded in doing so with the better armed Sherman 'Firefly's' which surrounded Wittmann and basically blew his tank to pieces. It would be well into the 1980s before the remains of Wittmann and his crew would be found. Today they are buried together in the La Cambe war cemetery.

But even among the soldiers who had driven these tanks themselves, the fascination remained, well into the 1990s when I had the pleasure of getting to know an SS-Ostuf. from s.SS-Pz.Abt.,502. His name was Kurt Ebeling and after serving with the LSSAH, came to SS-A.A.2. Upon completing officer training at SS-Junkerschule Braunschweig he later joined s.SS.Pz.Kompanie in SS-Pz.Rgt.3 'Totenkopf'. After being wounded and rehabilitated he finally joined s.SS-Pz.Abt.502. His keen interest in the tank stayed with him and he eagerly read everything he could get his hands on about the Tiger. I sent him a book all about the Tiger, but it was more of a record of the actual

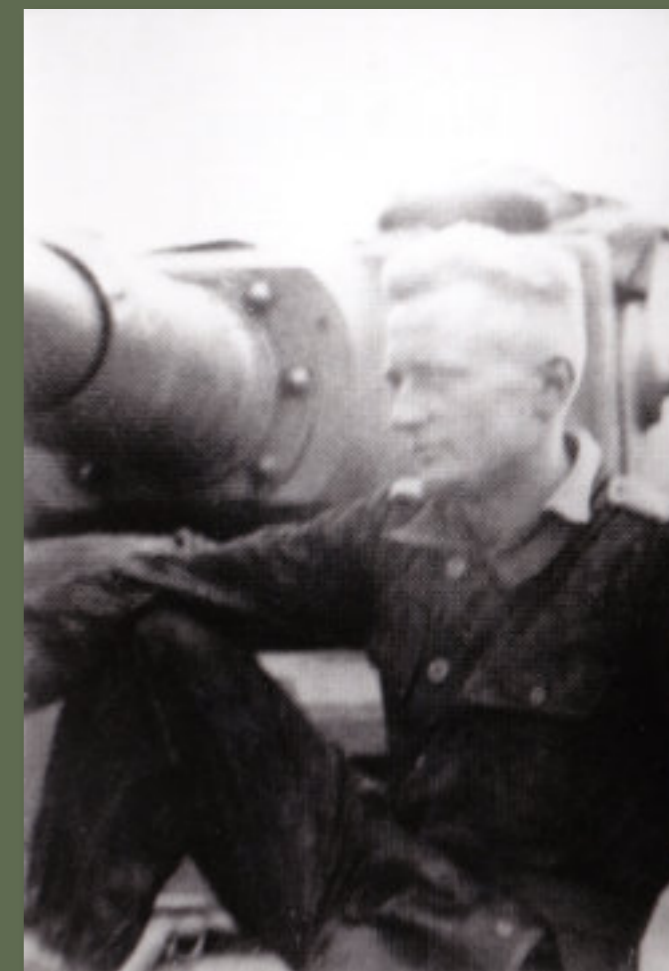


development of the tank and he preferred to read more about the battles and its crews. Other veterans I got to know were e.g. SS-Ustuf. Rolf Schamp who gladly told me that in 1943 he had been Wittmann's driver, because Wittmann's legend was strong even among veterans long after the end of the war. Among all these officers and crews of the Tiger companies it was not unusual to see Knights' Crosses or German Crosses in gold. Many of them had high honours as is evident in the lists of awards you can find.

During its two year production life span just over 1500 tanks were produced, which equated to a total of 59 tanks per month.

Arguably no other German tank attained such a mythical reputation as that of the Tiger, the fascination for which remains extremely strong to this day.

© Georg Schwab



SS-Ostuf Helmut Wendorff



Norwegians in the SS-Regiment "Nordland"

On 26 March 1940, Himmler issued an order to Chef des Ergänzungsamtes der Waffen-SS in Berlin, SS-Brigadeführer Gottlob Berger, to draw up a list of SS personnel. The aforementioned list of personnel from 1 May 1940 contains figures for Reich Germans, Folk Germans and "volunteers of Germanic blood". The latter group includes, among others at this time, 1 Dane, 8 Englishmen, 1 Finn, 4 Dutchmen, 8 Frenchmen, 4 Belgians, 3 Swedes, 5 Americans, 1 Russian, 3 Greeks, 1 Palestinian, 1 Ukrainian and 44 Swiss. There are no Norwegians in the list. In the middle of the campaign in Norway on 30 April 1940, an order was issued by the SSFührungshauptamt for the creation of Standarte Nordland. Standarte Nordland was to consist of Reich Germans and half Danish and half Norwegian volunteers. In May 1940, the first Danish volunteers travelled to Germany to join Standarte Nordland. At the same time, recruitment to Standarte Westland began in the Netherlands and Belgium. In Norway, this enlistment was not put into practice because of the state that existed between it and Germany. Den-

mark had surrendered after two hours of hostilities against Germany on 9 April 1940. As early as 6 September 1940, NS party leader Vidkun Quisling sent a letter to Hitler requesting that Norwegians be given the opportunity to join the Wehrmacht as volunteers. At the end of September 1940, the remnants of the Norwegian armed forces are disbanded in occupied Norway. The only Norwegian military units at this time are located in England, where the Norwegian Brigade under the leadership of General Carl August Fleischer was set up with British assistance. In a letter from Ergänzungsamt der Waffen-SS dated 3 December 1940, SSBrigadeführer Gottlob Berger writes: "The pressure on Norway has been successful and I have been promised at least 500 men by mid-January. With these volunteers and those from Finland and some Swedes, the replacement battalion for Standarte Nordland will thus be filled up". On 12 December 1940, SS-Hauptsturmführer Paul Dahm writes in his report, I received a telephone order at the Dutch border station Vaals from the Ergänzungsamt Berlin that I had to report to Reich-

skommisar Terboven and Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Rediess in Berlin at Tempelhof Airport the following day at 10:00 am. Together we were to fly to Norway and prepare for the enlistment of Norwegian volunteers. Dahm explains that the admission conditions for volunteers were very strict, so only 25 per cent of those registered at the session would be selected for service in the Waffen-SS. The rejection rate was as high as 75 per cent, so volunteers who had a lot of acne, were flat-footed or had a lot of cavities in their teeth were rejected.

On 12 January 1941, NS party leader Vidkun Quisling gave a radio speech on NRK where he called nationally conscious Norwegians under arms...". In his speech, Quisling said: "...

" NORWEGIANS!

Germany's struggle against England, Europe's eternal instigator of unrest and war, is coming to a decisive and victorious end. England, which also dragged our country into the war, is displaced from the European Mainland, and the new Germany has become the centre of a reorganisation of Europe under Germanic leadership. Germany's struggle for the unification and liberation of the Germans has, through the war imposed on Germany by England, developed into a general European struggle for freedom and independence against the English world despotism, a struggle which must end with England's defeat. We, who have clearly foreseen the future development, will now do our part, of our own free will, to fight on the side of Hitler and Germany for the common cause of the Germanic peoples and for the new Europe. Germany will be victorious in this war without our help. But it is contrary to the sense of honour and desire for equality that resides in every Nordic person that we ourselves do not make an effort when it comes to our own safety and our own destiny. We will inevitably be downgraded as a nation if we do not take part and, with weapons in hand, dare to do something when the fate of Europe and Norway is decided under the steel helmet. I therefore urge all young Norwegians who feel responsible for the future to join the Nordland Regiment as volunteers, in order to stand shoulder to shoulder with their German comrades and openly and actively in favour of the new order in Europe and the Germanic Confederation. Let us not shame our fathers, who in their time conquered England and intervened innovatively in so many places in Europe. Germany has not asked us. We ourselves



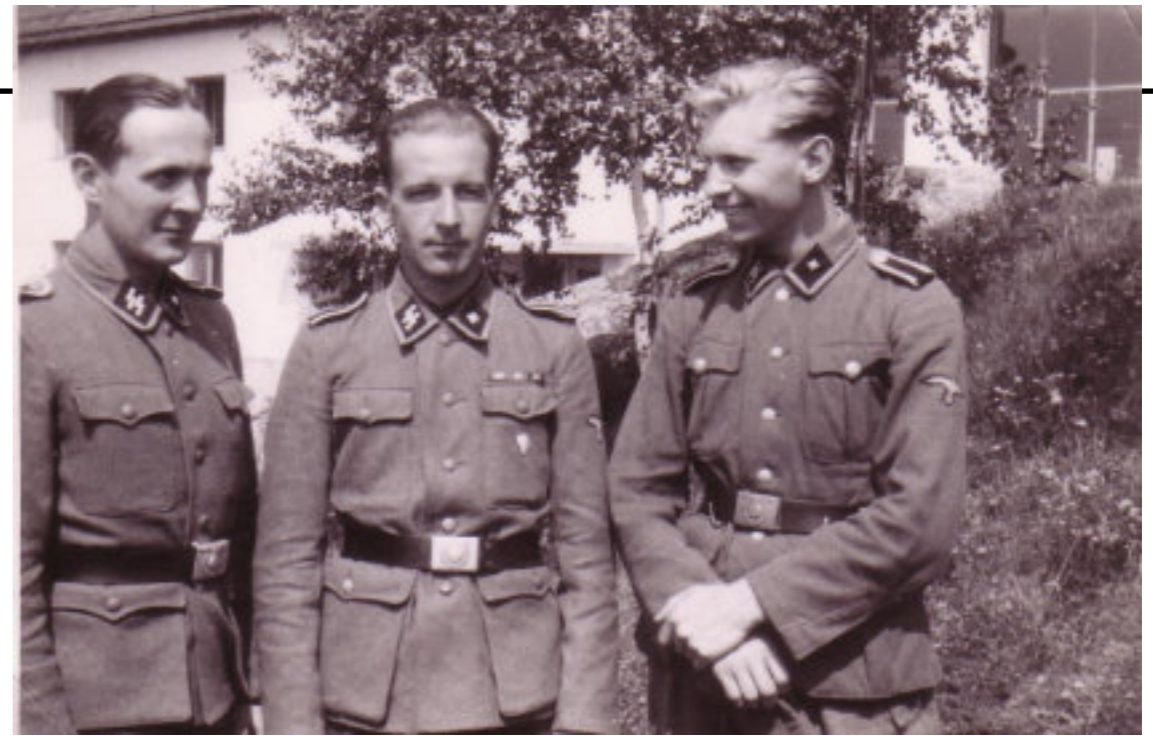
Kåre Brynestad



Torbjörn Holmen



Fritjhof Rosnaes



The future swedish SS-Ostuf Bengt Hassler (in middle) with two norwegians at SS-Junkerschule Tölz

feel obliged voluntarily to follow to the end the path that fate has marked out for our people. Norway's and Germany's interests have become solidary. Germany's struggle is Norway's struggle. Germany's victory is Norway's victory! Therefore, I call upon the nationally conscious Norwegians to fight under the victorious banners of our German brothers. And the Norman power is not yet dead in Norwegian hearts!.. " The verbal outbursts of Quisling, in his speech, are aimed at England. The motivation for his voluntary entry was different. One of the first to sign up on 13 January 1941, incidentally an NS member from 1934, wrote the following in a letter after the war about his motivation for Volunteering for the Nordland Regiment. "... Quisling's appeal to Norwegian youth to volunteer for the Nordland Regiment on 12 January 1941 can undoubtedly be interpreted in many ways. It was probably also interpreted differently by the first volunteers, depending on what they perceived as the centre of gravity of the call. What we, the first volunteers, generally perceived as fateful were two things: 1. Germany had, whether you liked it or not, been victorious on all fronts and its war against England was entering its final phase. Thus, Germany became the decisive factor in the future. 2. Norway was occupied by the Germans. Although the war in Norway was over, our future freedom was threatened and Germany actually represented this threat. A fairly large proportion of these volunteers were not members of Nasjonal Samling. Certainly there were convinced National Socialists among us, and there were NS men with strong nationalist views, as well as former

members of the Young Conservatives, AUF, or of no political organisations. Most of us had no objection to going into action against England or any other country it might ally itself with, as long as the war was shortened, but most of us feared for a time that it would all be over before we had finished our education. We probably all regarded England as the cause of Norway's unhappy position. One factor that should not be forgotten was of a psychological nature, not least for the NS men: Among large numbers of fellow countrymen (as well as massively from London), NS supporters and those who strongly criticised the Nygaardsvold government and England's policies were labelled as insurrectionists and cowards who risklessly wanted to bake their own cake, i.e. their national arguments were pure nonsense.... There can be no doubt that it was important for the volunteers to disprove these propaganda claims...".

The volunteers travelled in groups from Oslo to Germany. The very first travelled by plane from Fornebu airport on 7 February 1941 to Aarhus in Denmark and from there by train. All the later groups travelled by train. Some travelled by boat to Denmark and then by train to Sennheim, located in Alsace-Lorraine on the border between France and Switzerland at Mühlhose. Others travelled by train through Sweden and by boat across to Germany and from there by train to Senheim. Still others travelled by boat from Oslo to Germany and then by train to Senheim.

Norwegians in the SS-Regiment "Nordland"

During the spring of 1941, few Norwegian officers joined the Nordland Regiment. Lieutenant Thorvald Thronsdén and infantry captain Felix Andersen were among the officers trained at the war college. Upon joining the Waffen-SS, they all received a corresponding degree from the Norwegian army. An unknown number of Norwegian non-commissioned officers with officer training also found their way to Regiment Nordland in the spring of 1941. Among others, Jan Schneider, Petter Pedersen, Roy Rosseland, Yngvar Kofoed, Egil Strømsøe, Bertel Brun, Kristoffer Dahl, Arne Hassel, Thoralf Gjølborg, Knut Erichsen, Ivar Grønnerød, Einar Vassbø, Knut Rosnæss, Per Sunde, Olaf Wahlmann, Hans Christian Knudsen, Dagfin Gjertsen, Otto Pay and Hans Oppen.

At the time the first Norwegian volunteers signed up in January 1941, the world war was not yet a fact - it was a purely European matter. The USA and Japan

had not yet joined the war. Germany had attacked and occupied Poland in September 1939 together with the Soviet Union and divided Poland, as a result of the non-aggression pact of August 1939. The Soviet Union attacked Finland in November 1939 and a number of nations sent volunteers to help Finland. This ended with Finland capitulating in March 1940 and having to cede large areas of land to the Soviet Union. Then, in April 1940, Germany occupied Denmark and Norway. In May 1940, the Netherlands, Belgium and France were attacked by the Germans, which ended with the English being driven back to their island. When France surrendered on 25 June 1940, Germany was bordered to the west by the English Channel and to the east by the Vistula River in Poland towards the Soviet Union. The longest campaign had taken place in Norway in two months.

The volunteers who joined the Nordland regiment in

the spring of 1941 signed a contract that obliged them to serve for 1, 2 or 4 years, or Kriegsdauer - for the duration of the war. It later proved difficult to leave the service after the agreed contract period, and this gave rise to a great deal of conflict between the individual volunteers, their military department, SS-Hauptamt and NS.

In the period from May 1940 to June 1941, before Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, recruitment to Standarte Nordland and Westland had not achieved the desired result expected by the SS. In a strength overview from SS Division Wiking dated 19 September 1941, there were 1831 "Germanic" volunteers in the entire division at this time. A breakdown by nationality shows that there were 415 Finns, 8 Swedes, 291 Norwegians, 251 Danes, 821 Dutch and 45 Flemings. In the same list of forces, it is reported that 148 Germanic volunteers had fallen

and 337 had been wounded.

On 1 May 1942, the Reichsführer SS set up SS-Ersatzkommando Norwegen, based in Oslo, to deal with the task of recruitment; similar offices were set up at the same time in Denmark, the Netherlands, Flanders and Vienna; "to monitor, call up the ethnic German and Germanic volunteers who volunteer for the Waffen-SS outside the German Reich (Reichsgebiet)". The first head of the Ergänzungsstelle Norwegen was SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Leib. He took up this position on 1 April 1942, having previously held a similar position in the Netherlands. Leib would remain in Norway in the same position, with a short break in the summer of 1944 until May 1945.

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This text is an excerpt from the recently published book about the Norwegian SS Officers who attended the SS-Junkerschule Bad Tölz. It is available for purchase on all platforms that Amazon has, titled "The Viking Legacy - The Norwegian Officers of the Waffen-SS"

All photos etc. come from this book, which contains 144 different biographies, over 250 photos, 339 pages, A4 format



Titel: Fritz Witt - Decisions and fate
Författare: Peter Mooney & Martin Stiles
Publishing Co.: LAH Publishing
Total Number of pages: 305
Rating: Five EK I of Five possible

We had the pleasure of receiving a new book by Peter Mooney and Martin Stiles, a book that at first glance is exclusively about SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Witt, and of course 85% of the book is about him, but there is also much else that may interest you who appreciate reading about such a well-decorated officer in the SS and Waffen-SS.

In the book we get a well-crafted story about Fritz Witt that seriously started when he, as one of the first 117 SS men, met at Finckensteinallé 63 in Berlin, the former Prussian Cadet School, which would now become the residence of Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler. We get to follow him through the years, when he became an officer, and then follow him when he is transferred to SS-VT and SS-Rgt. "Deutschland" to later return to LSSAH and finally 12.SS-Pz. Div. "Hitlerjugend".

The book has a lot of photos, a large number of which are completely new to us readers and come directly from Fritz Witt's family, in my opinion completely UNIQUE photos. I myself am very interested in wedding photos, and there too I got my fill. I must admit that on my computer I have

a manuscript in progress called "SS & Love", more about that another time.

For those of you who enjoy reading about Knight's Cross bearers, this book is a MUST! But also for those of you who want to know more about this, within the Waffen-SS, rather mythical soldier. For anyone who has read one or two books about the Waffen-SS must have come across the name Fritz Witt, if not then I am actually starting to wonder which books you have read about the Waffen-SS?

To give a final comment about the book, it is well made, glossy paper, A4 format, 307 pages packed with photos and documents. Many photos of awards etc. For those of you familiar with other publications from LAH publishing, you know what I'm talking about. So, go ahead, buy the book!

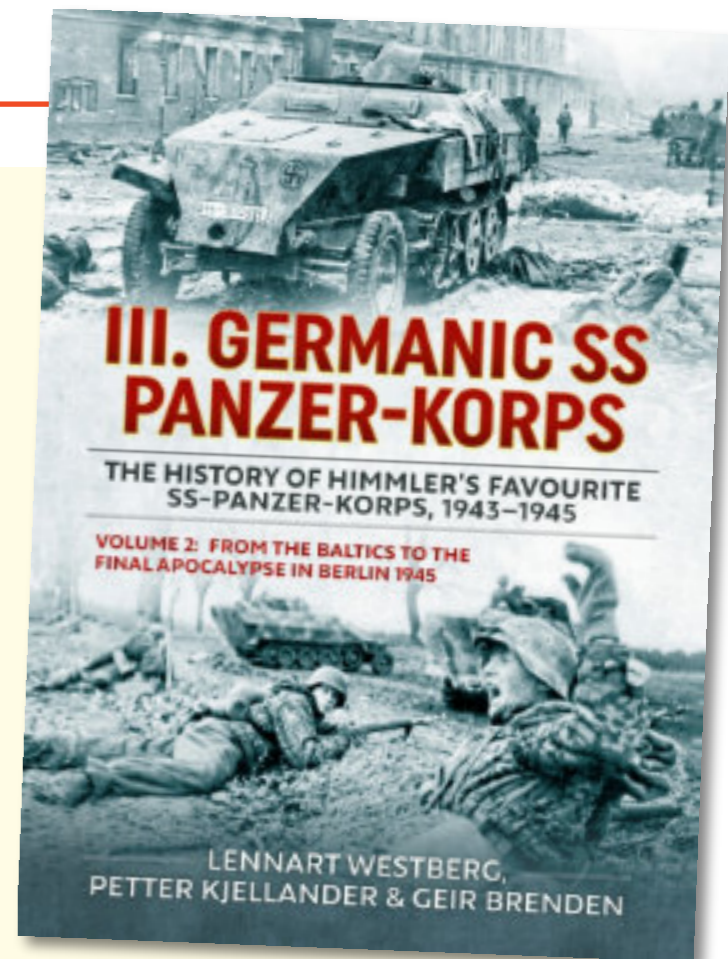
To order the book, visit www.lahpublishing.com

Titel: III.Germanic Panzer Korps Vol.2
Author: Lennart Westberg, Petter Kjellander & Geir Brenden
Format : A4
Publishing Co.: Helion Publishing
Total Number of pages: 413
Rating: Five EK I of of Five possible

Finally! As we have been waiting for it !! Volume No. 2 of Lennart Westberg, Petter Kjellander and Geir Brenden's book about III.(Germ.) SS-Pz. Korps is finally here. For those who have seen volume 1, you know that the book is well-crafted and thoroughly researched. Even in this book we have had a very small hand in the construction, what we have been able to offer is some information and a photo.

To see the content of the book, now we come to some of the most fierce and intense battles that existed during the Second World War, to finally come to the legendary battle in Berlin in 1945 where "Korp Steiner" perished. Few survived and those who did, either managed to get out of the city or had to spend many years in Soviet prisoner of war camps. There too we get first-hand testimonies, unique in their kind. The book contains many pictures and documents, which makes the book a must-have for those interested in the Waffen-SS, or perhaps just the battle of Narva or Berlin.

As Helion writes "an addition to previously unpublished photographs, this volume contains

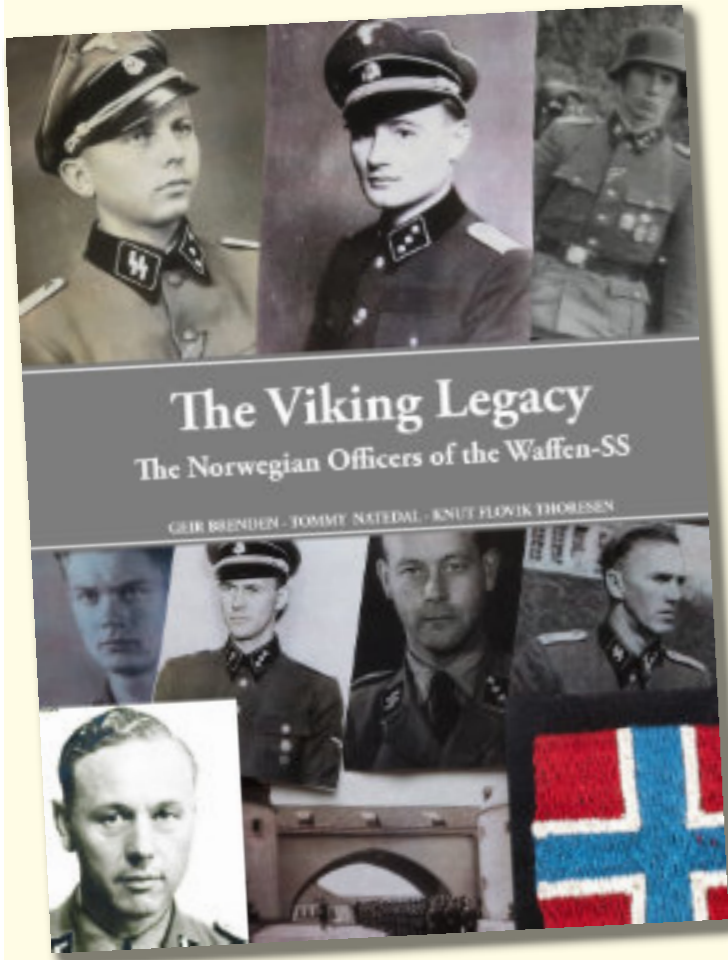


a wealth of unique eyewitness accounts culled from decades of interviews and correspondence with Waffen-SS veterans, as well as detailed summaries of armoured corps operations, short biographies of important personalities, statistics and information about German and Soviet tanks and weaponry, in addition to coverage of lesser-known SS units, such as SS-Panzer-Abteilung 11 "Hermann von Salza" and schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 503."

As I have been in contact with the three authors for a long time, I know the work they have put into the book.

You can either order the book from Helion Company or any other of the major book sites around the world.

www.helion.co.uk



Titel: The Viking Legacy
Author: Geir Brenden, Tommy Natedal & Knut Flovik
Publishing Co.: Selfpublishing, Kindl
Total Number of pages: 339
Rating: Five EK I of of Five possible

The next book to be studied is a book written by those who I consider to be number 1 among the researchers who research the Norwegians who enlisted in the Waffen-SS. I am of course talking about Geir Brenden, Tommy Natedal and Knut Flovik Thoresen. What they don't know about the Norwegian volunteers is not worth knowing.

Now I am not completely objective in the description of this book as we were involved in translating this book from Norwegian to English. But still, I will try to be as objective as I can. One of the reasons why I persuaded Geir and his friends that the book deserved a translation was precisely the quality of the biographies that the book contains.

Now the book focuses entirely on the Norwegian volunteers, although other officers and nationalities are mentioned in the book, it also contains stories about battles and other experiences the Norwegian officers experienced from 1940 to 1945. For those of you who want to gain a deeper knowledge of

Norwegian volunteers, this book is a must, to our knowledge, a book of this magnitude has not been published in English.

The book contains photos of almost all the Norwegian officers who enlisted, a few are missing, but we can dryly state that after so many years that the authors have searched for photos of these, we must accept that finding pictures of them is almost impossible. I would still say that about 90% are covered with a photo.

The book has 339 pages, is in A4 format, over 250 photos, 144 individual biographies of officers, and it is available for purchase on all platforms that Amazon provides.

www.amazon.com

Georg Schwab / 2025



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Email us on info@axishistory.com

- ✠ x 5 - Its a must in you library
- ✠ x 4 - Buy! Will suit your library well
- ✠ x 3 - Will be useful for you
- ✠ x 2 - Buy only if you must
- ✠ x 1 - Garbage! Don't buy!

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Date March 2025

**Next planned issue?
As soon as possible!**

