

The Waffen-SS (2)

6. to 10. Divisions





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Series editor Martin Windrow

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THE WAFFEN-SS (2)

6. to 10. Divisions

INTRODUCTION

THERE IS NO SPACE in these pages to attempt a summary of the complex early history of the German NSDAP (National Socialist) movement in the 1920s and 1930s; nor of the emergence from the Nazi Party's mass uniformed organisation, the SA (*Sturmabteilungen* or 'Brownshirts') of the SS political security organisation (*Schutz Staffeln* or 'protection squads') headed by Heinrich Himmler.¹ The first title in this sequence, MAA 401, *The Waffen-SS (1): 1. to 5. Divisions*, gives brief introductory notes up to 1939, by which time the original few battalions of armed gendarmerie which had carried out Hitler's 1934 purge of the SA were poised to play a role on the battlefield. The armed units of what were then termed the *SS-Verfügungstruppe* were still few and militarily insignificant, and regarded by the Wehrmacht (Armed Forces) with some suspicion, even disdain. Early combat experience in the West, and particularly in the first year of the Russian campaign, changed that perception, leading to a number of different cycles of expansion of what was now the *Waffen-SS*.

By 1943 the battle-proven premier divisions, converted to the armoured and mechanized role, would have earned the *Waffen-SS* priority for the best quality manpower and equipment; but initially Himmler was not allowed to compete openly with the Wehrmacht for conscripted recruits. For the first expansion of 1939–42 he was obliged to create new units by conversion of other sources of SS manpower, some of them of poor quality (see notes on the *SS-Totenkopfstandarten* in MAA 401). This was soon followed by the first admissions of foreign volunteers of suitably 'Aryan' racial background, and by experiments with recruitment from among 'Volksdeutsche' – ethnic Germans living outside Germany. Himmler's mystical obsession with imagined racial purity would soon give way in the face of the ever increasing demand for manpower to replace the mounting casualties on the Eastern Front.

By 1943 Hitler's relationship with the traditional leadership of the Wehrmacht had deteriorated sharply, and the unquestioningly loyal SS was in the ascendant. The previous limitations on recruitment were abandoned, and between early 1943 and spring 1945 the ostensible order of battle of the *Waffen-SS* grew from eight to no fewer than 38 divisions 'on paper' – although many of the higher numbered (mostly foreign) formations fell far below the standards set by the early divisions. A number of corps-level formations, and even one or two nominal

¹ See MAA 220, *The SA 1921–45*; and MAA 266, *The Allgemeine-SS*.



The 'Florian Geyer' cufftitle can be seen on the left forearm of this SS-Hauptsturmführer. The honour title was not bestowed on the 8. SS-Kavallerie Division until March 1944; since the division was annihilated in Budapest eleven months later, original examples of the cuffband are relatively scarce. This captain's field-grey service dress is finely tailored in the style of the M1936 Army officer's uniform; the dark green collar is cut with fashionably long points, and the left sleeve eagle is embroidered in heavy aluminium bullion thread. Just visible on the original print, to the right and below his Iron Cross, is the Expert Horseman's Badge.

'SS armies' containing both SS and Army units, would see action in 1944–45. The divisions covered in this present title span the period from the 1941–42 conversions and experiments, to the formation of the 'second generation' of élite armoured divisions in early 1943.

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

General explanations of Waffen-SS rank structure and titles, and of universal uniform and insignia practice, are given in MAA 401, and are not repeated here.

THE DIVISIONS:

6. SS-GEBIRGS DIVISION *NORD*

Designations

February 1941	SS-Kampfgruppe <i>Nord</i>
September 1941	SS-Division <i>Nord</i> (mot.)
May 1942	SS-Gebirgs Division <i>Nord</i>
October 1943	6. SS-Gebirgs Division <i>Nord</i>

Commanders²

Feb–May 1941 SS-Brigadeführer Richard Herrmann; *May 41–Apr 1942* SS-Brigadeführer Karl-Maria Demelhuber; *Apr 1942, & June 1942–Oct 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Matthias Kleinheisterkamp; *Apr–Jun 1942* SS-Oberführer Hans Scheider; *Oct 1943* SS-Gruppenführer Lothar Debes; *Oct 1943–Aug 1944* SS-Obergruppenführer Friedrich Wilhelm Kruger; *Aug 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Gustav Lombard; *Sept 1944–Apr 1945* SS-Gruppenführer Karl Brenner; *Apr–May 1945* SS-Standartenführer Franz Schreiber

Principal elements (1944)³

SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 11 *Reinhard Heydrich*; SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 12 *Michael Gaissmair*; SS-Schützen Abteilung (mot) 6; SS-Gebirgs Panzerjäger Abteilung 6; SS-Sturmgeschütz Batterie 6; SS-Gebirgs-Artillerie Regiment 6; SS-Flak Abteilung 6; SS-Gebirgs Aufklärungs Abteilung (mot) 6; SS-Gebirgs Pionier Abteilung 6. *Also attached* SS-Polizei Gebirgsjäger Regiment 18; SS-Schijäger Bataillon 502 *Norge*, SS- og Politikompani (Norwegian Police Companies – Nr 2 in 1943, Nr 3 in 1944 – served alongside Schijr Btl)

² Conventionally, a division was a command for a major-general (SS-Brigadeführer) or occasionally a lieutenant-general (SS-Gruppenführer). In some cases higher subsequent ranks attained by individuals are quoted in these lists of commanders. Discontinuous dates usually indicate periods when a subordinate officer took temporary command in the absence of the commanding general. Conflicting versions are not unusual in various wartime and postwar sources, and the commanders' sequence for *Nord* is no exception – see Bender & Taylor, *Uniforms, Organization & History of the Waffen-SS*, Vol.4, p.195.

³ Under each division, only main combat units are listed here, plus any unusually noteworthy smaller units; all divisions included a range of additional support and service units identified by the divisional number. From October 1943 a rationalisation of regimental numbering throughout the Waffen-SS was ordered, with sequential numbers – e.g. SS-PzGren Regts 9 & 10 in 5. SS-Pz Div *Wiking*, SS-GebJr Regts 11 & 12 in 6.SS-Geb Div *Nord*, SS-Frw GebJr Regts 13 & 14 in 7.SS-Frw Geb Div *Prinz Eugen*, etc. The regimental numbers cited at the head of chapters throughout this book are those of the 1943–45 sequence.

Campaigns

This division had its origins in February 1941, when a number of *SS-Totenkopf* regiments were transferred to Norway for garrison duty. These were mostly *Allgemeine-SS* reservists of military service age. Subsequently, *SS-Kampfgruppe Nord* (mot.) was formed, from *SS-Totenkopfstandarten* (redesignated as *SS-Totenkopf Infanterie Regimenter*) 6 and 7 and a number of other units. This new battle group was attached to XXXVI Korps of Heeresgruppe Nord, to participate in Unternehmen 'Silberfuchs' (Operation 'Silver Fox'), intended to secure the liberation of Karelia – a region of Finland occupied by Soviet forces – and subsequently to take part in the invasion of the northern USSR. However, the 'battlegroup' had woefully inadequate training and preparation for combat, and would consequently suffer heavy casualties. Many of its gunners had had no opportunity to practise live firing; there had been no combined training of the infantry and artillery units; the strength and quality of the transport was low, and there were insufficient infantry support weapons. The brigade was not a cohesive force but rather a collection of disparate and inadequately equipped units, many of its officers and men hardly trained even in basic military skills.

On 6 June 1941 it was ordered to the Rovaniemi area of Finland. The Kampfgruppe had only recently concentrated near Kirkenes, and had to march the length of the Arctic Ocean Highway from Kirkenes on the Arctic Ocean to Rovaniemi not far from the Baltic coast. By 10 June its forward elements had reached their destination, but other units straggled in over a period of a week or so. Elements began moving towards the Soviet frontier near Salla on 17 June. On 24 June the order to advance finally arrived, the attack itself being further delayed until 1 July.

Nord was tasked with making a frontal attack on heavily defended enemy positions in front of Salla, as part of an attempt to cut a main railway line and isolate Soviet troops in the Kola Peninsula. The brigade would be supported by an assault by 169. Infanterie Division on the northern flank, while Finnish infantry drove deep behind enemy lines towards Allakurtti from *Nord's* southern flank. The SS troops were reinforced by the addition of the Army tank battalion Panzer Abteilung 40, and both Army artillery units and Stuka dive-bombers provided suppressive bombardment of Soviet positions prior to the assault. This softening-up barrage had only limited success; it did cause some damage to the enemy, but also started forest fires which severely hampered visibility and thus the subsequent artillery and air attacks. The advancing SS infantry were met by stubborn resistance and extremely heavy defensive fire; they were unable to advance far, and on 2 July the attack was called off. *Nord* had become badly scattered (although it should be mentioned that Army units on their northern flank fared little better).

Nord spent the next two days regrouping in preparation for a resumption of the attack; but in the early hours of 4 July the Red Army launched a counter-attack with armoured support. Although this was eventually beaten off by the Army and Finnish units on *Nord's* flanks,



SS-Obergruppenführer Karl-Maria Demelhuber, who as an SS-Brigadeführer commanded the *Nord* Division from May 1941 to April 1942, the period during which its unfitnes for combat led to its being entrusted to Finnish instructors. The decoration at his throat is the Finnish Order of the Cross of Liberty. Below this can be seen the 1939 bar to his 1914 Iron Cross 2nd Class.

reports that enemy tanks had broken through caused several companies of SS infantry to flee their positions. About a kilometre behind the line they met the Kradschutzen platoon on its way forward to check out the reports of enemy tanks. The motorcyclists were infected by the panic and, without checking further, reported that enemy armour had indeed broken through; as a result an entire regiment abandoned their positions, only being rallied when they reached the corps headquarters at Kelloselka.

It was intended to put the badly shaken troops into defensive positions while renewing the attack with other elements of both the *SS-Totenkopf* infantry regiments. Many of the latter simply got lost and failed to rendezvous; and the attack soon ran into heavy fire from enemy bunkers in the forest edge. The SS troops returned fire and eventually the enemy positions fell silent; but patrols sent out to confirm that they had been eliminated were unable to locate the concealed bunkers. Mistakenly assuming that they had been destroyed, the SS troops continued their advance, only to be brought under heavy fire while crossing open ground in front of the treeline. They were pinned down for several hours before being given authority to pull back. Over a period of nine days the battlegroup had lost 261 dead and 307 wounded (though they had taken over 250 enemy prisoners).

Reconstruction: Finland, 1942-44

The lamentable performance of *Kampfgruppe Nord* was a direct result of their lack of training and inadequate leadership; the brigade had been thrown into battle to learn its craft the hard way, under fire, and against an extremely tough enemy. It was subsequently broken up into smaller sub-units which were subordinated to Finnish forces attacking Soviet positions at Kestenga. The battle-hardened Finns were aware of *Nord's* inexperience at all levels, and took direct control of the SS regiments. This was to be the first and only time that Waffen-SS troops were placed under command of an allied army. By 20 August the units of *Kampfgruppe Nord* had lost a total of 1,085 men to a combination of enemy action and dysentery.

After retraining under the tutelage of Finnish infantry, the brigade was rebuilt with younger, fitter soldiers from the Waffen-SS replacement system, and *SS-Totenkopf* Infantry Regiment 9 was added. In September 1941 the *Kampfgruppe* was upgraded to divisional status, and all its fragmented sub-units were brought back under German command. While the original units remained in the line in Finland, January 1942 saw the formation of new elements at Wildflecken, which were trained as mountain infantry; they joined the former battlegroup – redesignated on 15 May as a mountain division – in Finland in August 1942.



SS-Standartenführer Maack is shown here wearing what appears to be the flat-wire woven version of the 'Reinhard Heydrich' cuffband. The award worn below the Iron Cross on the colonel's left breast is the *Baltenkreuz*, instituted in 1919 for the Baltic campaign of that year by German Freikorps units. (Josef Charita)



FAR LEFT This SS-Unterscharführer wears the machine-embroidered version of the 'Reinhard Heydrich' cuffband granted to the 11th SS Mountain Rifles Regiment in June 1942, after the assassination in Prague of Himmler's deputy, and governor of occupied Bohemia-Moravia, by Czech patriots. Although the sergeant wears a short-visored Bergmütze rather than the M1943 'universal field cap', it does not bear the mountain troops' Edelweiss badge. (Josef Charita)

LEFT An enlisted man from SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 12 'Michael Gaissmair' taken prisoner in the Ardennes during Operation 'North Wind'. The mountain troops' Edelweiss insignia is clear on his upper right sleeve; under magnification the regimental cufftitle can just be seen on his left forearm.

In February 1943 the volunteer Norwegian ski battalion 'Norge' was attached to the division. This ski troop element was eventually expanded on paper to brigade status; it suffered heavily in action against Soviet forces around Kaprolat, losing around 50 per cent of its strength before its remnants were redesignated as SS-Panzer-grenadier Bataillon (mot.) 506.

From mid-1942 to autumn 1944 the division remained on the virtually static Finnish front as part of 20. Gebirgs-Armee, and was involved in numerous defensive actions while holding the line between Kiestinki and Louhi. In summer 1944 the situation on the Eastern Front deteriorated sharply, and Soviet advances along the Baltic coast cut Finland's vital supply lines from Germany. In September the Finnish government concluded a separate armistice with the USSR, and German troops were given two weeks' notice to leave the country. *Nord* provided rearguard cover as the 20th Mountain Army withdrew from Karelia, becoming engaged in skirmishes with the Finnish troops who had long been their allies. This withdrawal into Norway, Operation 'Birke', saw men of the division marching nearly 1,000 miles between September and November 1944, before being transported south to Oslo by rail. The *Nord* Division had fought for 1,214 consecutive days in the northern sector of the Eastern Front between July 1941 and September 1944, in extremely difficult forest and swamp terrain; in the process it had matured, if not into one of the true élites, then certainly into a far more dependable force than had originally been the case.

The Western Front, 1944-45

The division was subsequently ordered to Denmark. The advance party reached Kolbing in December, although the remainder were still scattered along the length of Norway making their way south. It had been intended that *Nord* be allowed a period of rest and refitting, but

RIGHT **SS-Gruppenführer Matthias Kleinheisterkamp**, commander of *Nord* from June 1942 to October 1943. Kleinheisterkamp was also a bearer of the Finnish Order of the Cross of Liberty, as well as the Knight's Cross and later the Oakleaves. He also served with both the *Das Reich* and *Totenkopf* Divisions.

FAR RIGHT **SS-Obergruppenführer Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger**, shown here as divisional commander of *Nord* in 1944. Once again, note the correct mountain cap, but lacking the Edelweiss badge from the left side. Prior to taking command of the division Krüger had held the position of Higher SS & Police Leader in occupied Poland. He was decorated with the Knight's Cross for his command of the division, on 30 September 1944. (Josef Charita)



almost as soon as the first elements arrived they were ordered to form a new Kampfgruppe *Nord* for commitment to Unternehmen 'Nordwind', the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes.

The new battlegroup consisted of the bulk of SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 12 *Michael Gaissmair*, along with signals, anti-tank, artillery and pioneer elements. The Kampfgruppe was attached to 361. Volksgrenadier Division in XXXIV Korps; it first went into action on 31 December 1944, surprising US units near Pirmasens before advancing on the town of Wingen. The SS troops broke through the lines held by the US VI Corps and took the town, where they awaited armoured reinforcements from Heeresgruppe G. These were diverted elsewhere, however, and the lack of progress made by German forces flanking the Kampfgruppe left them dangerously exposed. The SS mountain troopers were forced to fight their way back out of Wingen, losing two-thirds of their strength in the process (nevertheless, they did take 400 American prisoners back with them). Operation 'North Wind' was rapidly running out of steam and American forces were going over to the offensive; attacks on *Nord's* positions were only repulsed with difficulty.

Nord was then transferred to XV Korps near Melch, and tasked with regaining ground that had been lost by 256. Volksgrenadier Division. The wooded terrain was very similar to that in which the division had operated on the Eastern Front, and the SS troops were expert in infiltration techniques and the use of snipers. The Americans suffered heavy casualties and called in armoured support, but the Sherman tanks were also at a severe disadvantage in the snowbound woodland and were easily picked off. *Nord* cut off an entire US unit and eventually forced it to surrender; over 200 US troops were killed and 450 taken prisoner, for a claimed loss of just 26 men by the division. Such victories at this stage in the war were few and far between. *Nord* was then ordered to attack US forces around the Zinsweiler and Rothbach forests. Again infiltrating under cover of darkness

without a preparatory artillery barrage, the men of the division made excellent initial progress; but the gradually stiffening resistance slowed their advance and eventually forced the Germans to adopt defensive positions.

In February 1945 *Nord* was transferred once again, returning to XXXIV Korps to be used in an attempt to recapture Trier on the Moselle river. In this case the opposition was the US 10th Armored Division, and the weakened SS units found the going impossibly hard. At the beginning of March a mixture of SS mountain troopers and Volksgrenadiers were tenaciously resisting the US advance after having failed to retake Trier. On 3 March, the division was allocated to LXXXII Korps under Generalmajor Hahn and committed to an attack on positions held by the US 302nd Infantry (94th Infantry Division) near Lampaden. Just before midnight elements of SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 12 infiltrated on the northern flank of the attack and SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 11 on the southern flank. In heavy and confused fighting they took a number of positions, but the Americans were able to bring up sufficient reserves to hold the line. So confused did the situation become that the *Reinhard Heydrich* (11th) and *Michael Gaissmair* (12th) regiments attacked each other during the night of 6 March, each believing the other to be the enemy.

Nord was thereafter ordered to form defensive positions along the River Moselle, behind which the other battered German divisions in the area could withdraw. However, the immediate American follow-up, in overwhelming superiority, forced the division gradually back along the Moselle towards the Rhine. The *Michael Gaissmair* regiment was fragmented into small groups which withdrew towards the River Nahe; one group crossed successfully after finding a bridge whose American guards were reportedly drunk on liberated wine, but the majority were intercepted and taken prisoner before reaching the river. Other elements of the division even managed to halt the American advance near Koblenz; but the remnants of *Nord* – by now reduced to about 25 per cent of its former strength – were then ordered to withdraw over the Rhine, and were safely on the east bank by 18 March. The survivors were thrown into the line again along the River Lahn, but were almost immediately shattered by a major US armoured attack on 27 March. The original *Nord* Division had effectively ceased to exist, but reinforcements from the divisional replacement battalion were still being sent from its base in Austria to join units at the front. Several of these groups of soldiers were in action until the very end of the war, while retreating ever deeper into Germany; most were destroyed or surrendered piecemeal to US units in the closing days of the war.

That the division had long put behind it the poor performance of its original soldiers four years before is illustrated by the fact that five of its members were decorated with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.



Insignia worn by 6. SS-Gebirgs Division *Nord*. Top left & right, SS Mountain Troops' machine-embroidered Edelweiss cap and sleeve badges. Cuffbands top to bottom: Machine-woven BeVo style 'Michael Gaissmair' and 'Reinhard Heydrich'; and 'Reinhard Heydrich' in flat-wire machine-woven and machine-embroidered formats.

Special insignia

Mountain Troops insignia

These consisted of an arm patch and a cap badge. The former was an oval cut from black badge cloth, onto which was machine-embroidered a silver-grey Edelweiss flower with yellow stamens, the whole being enclosed within a silver-grey oval border; this was worn on the upper right sleeve.

The cap insignia was similar to that worn on the side of the Bergmütze by Army mountain troops, but was embroidered rather than in stamped metal. Once again the embroidery was executed in silver-grey yarn on a black base with the stamens in yellow. It was worn on the left side flap of the Bergmütze or M1943 Einheitsfeldmütze.

Cuffbands

The division itself was not authorised to wear a cuffband; however, photos suggest that some personnel used the 'Nord' title as worn by the Allgemeine-SS Oberabschnitt 'Nord'. This practice was completely unofficial; the two principal regiments of the division were, however, authorised honour titles.

Regimental:

'Reinhard Heydrich' In June 1942 the 6. SS-Infanterie Regiment (later SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 11) was authorised this title, to commemorate the assassinated head of the Sicherheitsdienst. The band was manufactured in machine-embroidered, flat-wire machine-woven and artificial silk (rayon) BeVo machine-woven formats.

'Michael Gaissmair' In June 1944, SS-Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 12 was authorised an honour title commemorating this Tyrolean rebel leader during the Peasant Wars of the early 16th century.⁴ This rare cuffband was manufactured only in BeVo form, of machine-woven artificial silk, the script incorporating the German double-s character.

7. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GEBIRGS DIVISION PRINZ EUGEN

Designations

March 1942	SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division
April 1942	SS-Freiwilligen Division <i>Prinz Eugen</i>
October 1942	SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division <i>Prinz Eugen</i>
October 1943	7. SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division <i>Prinz Eugen</i>

Commanders

Jan 1942–May 1943 SS-Gruppenführer Artur Phleps; *June 1943–Jan 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Karl, Reichsritter von Oberkamp; *Jan 1944–Jan 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Otto Kumm; *Jan–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer August Schmidhuber

Principal elements

SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 13 *Artur Phleps*; SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 14; SS-Panzer Abteilung 7; SS-Panzerjäger

⁴ Gaissmair was the son of a rich farmer in Tschöfs, near Sterzing, who became the secretary of the Prince-Bishop of Brixen. He led the Austrian farmers in the Bauernkrieg of 1526, with much initial success, but was eventually driven over the Alps into exile in Italy by Austrian, Bavarian and Swabian League forces. In 1532 he was murdered in Padua. See MAA 384, *The German Peasants' War 1524–26*.

Abteilung 7; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 7; SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Artillerie Regiment; SS-Flak Abteilung 7; SS-Gebirgs Aufklärungs Abteilung 7; SS-Pionier Bataillon 7. Also 1. & 2. SS-Kavallerie Schwadron

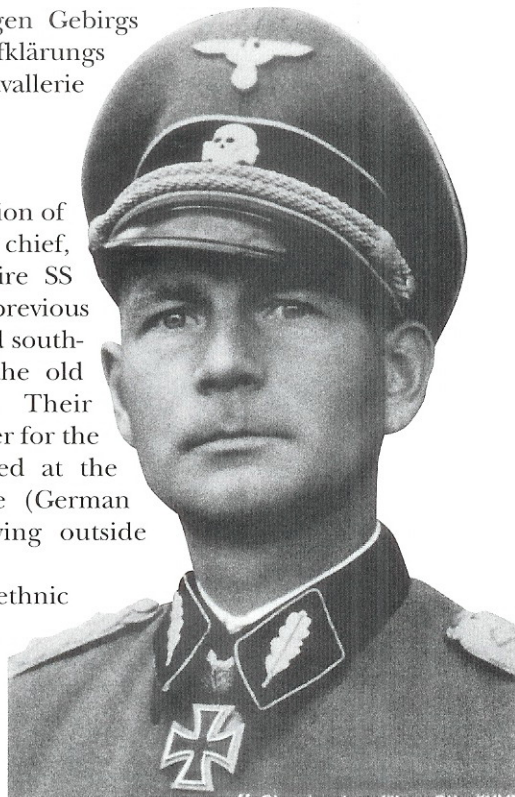
Formation

The formation of the *Prinz Eugen* Division was the culmination of the hopes long held by the recruitment department chief, SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger, to form an entire SS division from ethnic Germans living outside the Reich. In previous centuries many German-speaking emigrants to the east and south-east had founded communities along the borders of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and even further afield. Their descendants were seen as a rich seam of potential manpower for the SS, since earlier restrictions on SS recruitment imposed at the insistence of the Army applied only to Reichsdeutsche (German citizens), and not Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans living outside Germany's borders).

This new division was to be raised primarily from ethnic Germans living in Yugoslavia, mainly in the Serbian Banat, a frontier region heavily colonised by ethnic Germans since the Middle Ages; later the net would be widened, and Romanians and Hungarians of German background were taken in. The division was officially formed in March 1942; although attempts were made to recruit it entirely from volunteers (Freiwillige), and the divisional title⁵ specifically identified it as a volunteer formation, the response was disappointing and conscription was quickly introduced – all the region's Volksdeutsche males between 17 and 54 years were made liable for service with the division. An initial strength of around 15,000 was reached, though there were still shortages in trained and experienced officers and NCOs.

The senior leadership cadre were almost exclusively German and Austrian, but the shortage of junior leaders was resolved to some degree by transferring ethnic Germans who had been conscripted into the Yugoslavian Army and were at that point still being held in POW camps by the Germans. Ultimately the division reached a full strength of just over 21,000 men. The first divisional commander, Artur Phleps, was an ethnic German from the Transylvanian borderland of Romania, who had previously served in the Austro-Hungarian Army, had commanded Romanian mountain troops, and had also gained more recent experience as a regimental commander in the SS *Wiking* Division.

The division's mission was planned as the suppression of guerrilla activity in occupied Yugoslavia, where both Communist 'Partisan' and Royalist 'Chetnik' resistance movements – led by Tito and Mihailovic respectively – were active against the Italian and German occupation forces in the wooded mountain terrain.⁶ For such 'police' duties it was not necessary to equip the formation to the standards demanded on the Russian Front, and for this reason much of *Prinz Eugen's* equipment was



The last commander of the *Prinz Eugen* Division was SS-Brigadeführer Otto Kumm, bearer of the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and Swords. Photographed here as an SS-Standartenführer, Kumm was a veteran of the earliest days of the SS-Verfügungstruppe, and had commanded the *Der Führer* regiment within the *Das Reich* Division. Under Kumm's command the Volksdeutsche of the *Prinz Eugen* Division performed well in the role of 'fire brigade', rushed from one crisis point to another on the collapsing Balkan front in 1944–45 to ensure the safe evacuation of major German forces.

⁵ The honour title *Prinz Eugen* commemorated Prince Francois Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), one of Austria's greatest commanders, and the ally of England's Gen John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, in the Grand Alliance against Louis XIV's France in the first decade of the 18th century. His greatest victories were in fact won in Eastern Europe fighting against the Ottoman Empire.

⁶ See Warrior 73, *Tito's Partisans 1941–45*.

obsolescent captured French or Czech material. It did have the addition – unusual for a mountain division – of an armoured element. Even though this one-company ‘battalion’ had predominantly old French Renault light tanks, given that the opposition were lightly armed partisans this augmentation of its mobile firepower was a definite advantage.

Campaigns: Yugoslavia 1942-44

After just over six months of training the division was considered ready for action, and its first operation was against Chetniks on the Serbia/Montenegro borders in October 1942. These first actions were judged successful, and within two months *Prinz Eugen* was declared to have reached a sufficient level of combat efficiency to be allocated to the order of battle of 12. Armee. It was headquartered in the Zagreb-Karlovac area, and its first major engagement was as part of the German forces committed to Unternehmen ‘Weiss’, an ambitious German-Italian operation which aimed to trap and destroy Tito’s forces in Bosnia. The operation was unsuccessful, and the bulk of the partisans escaped destruction by slipping away to the south-east between the sectors of *Prinz Eugen* and the Italian 6th Army. Nevertheless, the division captured Bihac from the partisans in mid-January 1943, operating in conjunction with other German, Italian and Croatian units; and in late February/early March *Prinz Eugen* took part in further actions around Lapac and Dvar. The division then provided forces to protect the important bauxite mines at Mostar.

In April 1943 the division received an influx of personnel from the disbanded so-called ‘Einsatzstaffeln’, SS-controlled ethnic German ‘self defence’ battalions from Croatia (one of which was coincidentally named ‘Prinz Eugen’).

In May 1943, *Prinz Eugen* was attached to Heeresgruppe E for operations in western Montenegro, taking part in another major anti-partisan sweep by German, Italian and Bulgarian forces, code-named Unternehmen ‘Schwarz’.

During operations along the Dalmatian coast near Dubrovnik bitter fighting against Tito’s Communist partisans cost the division over 500 killed and wounded. During this period the divisional commander Artur Phleps was promoted, eventually taking over as commander of V SS-Gebirgskorps on 21 April, and command of *Prinz Eugen* passed in June to SS-Brigadeführer Ritter von Oberkamp. After the completion of Operation ‘Black’ the division was given a brief period of rest,

BELOW This photograph of SS-Sturmbannführer Josef Schwörer shows the ‘Prinz Eugen’ cuffband worn in conjunction with the standard SS-runes collar patch – an uncommon and non-regulation combination of insignia. (Josef Charita)

RIGHT SS-Sturmbannführer Bernhard Dietsche wears the regulation Odal-rune collar patch, but both patches lack the regulation silver cord officer’s piping; this was not very unusual on uniforms worn in the field. (Josef Charita)



taking over occupation duties around Mostar from Italian forces.

When the Italians concluded their separate armistice with the Allies in September 1943 some units of the Italian 2nd Army in Yugoslavia simply abandoned their equipment to the guerrillas and took ship for Italy, while others actually deserted to the partisans. The latter moved swiftly to seize large quantities of abandoned Italian equipment, which gave their strength a substantial boost. *Prinz Eugen* was then serving under XXV Gebirgskorps of 2. Panzerarmee, and was involved both in the disarming of remaining Italian troops on the Dalmatian coast and in resisting partisan exploitation of the Italian collapse. Not all Italian units surrendered their arms peacefully; the division captured more than 30,000 Italians at Dubrovnik on 10 September, and took Split only on the 27th, after two weeks of fierce fighting. *Prinz Eugen* then took part in anti-partisan operations on the Peljesac Peninsula and surrounding islands, occupying these for some weeks before returning to anti-partisan duties north-east of Sarajevo and Gorazde in eastern Bosnia in December.

In early January 1944, *Prinz Eugen* operated along with the Army's 1. Gebirgs Division in Unternehmen 'Waldrusch'; it suffered serious casualties, and was beginning to show the symptoms of a drop in morale. There were almost 1,500 cases of trench foot in the division at this time. From mid-January 1944 the division was in reserve around Split for refitting and further training before returning to the field in March. Shortly after returning to active operations under V SS-Gebirgskorps the division was reportedly involved in atrocities in Dalmatia which took over 800 civilian lives during anti-partisan actions.

In May 1944 the division took part, alongside Army units and SS paratroopers, in Unternehmen 'Rösselsprung', the operation which attempted to capture Tito in his headquarters at Drvar. The task of *Prinz Eugen* was to seal the area, seizing partisan supply dumps, railway stations and road crossings to prevent the escape of any partisan forces.

Forewarned of the attacks, the partisans had prepared strong defensive positions; *Prinz Eugen* ran into bitter resistance almost immediately, and Tito's units even succeeded in mounting local counter-attacks against the SS troops. The partisans also had the advantage of being able to call on Allied air support from Italy, and German units were subjected to constant harrying attacks.

The division captured Ribnik on 27 May; but although the partisans were surrounded, the forest and mountain terrain prevented the German cordons from achieving a real entrapment. The strong and confident partisan forces were liable to appear almost anywhere to mount concerted attacks on German positions – even *Prinz Eugen's* divisional headquarters came under heavy attack for a while. Several of the basic objectives of the operation were met – considerable casualties were inflicted, supply dumps were captured and the enemy were driven out of the area (albeit temporarily); but Tito himself had escaped just before the operation commenced, and all the Germans found was one of his discarded uniforms.



Major Dietsche was presented with his Knight's Cross while still recuperating from wounds in a military hospital. Here he is flanked by two nurses while an officer behind him fastens the ribbon of the decoration under his collar. Dietsche was commander of II Bataillon, SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 14. (Josef Charita)

A portrait drawing of Franz-Josef Krombholz, SS-Hauptsturmführer of III Btl/ SS-Frw GebJr Regt 14, who was awarded the Knight's Cross on 28 March 1945.





An SS-Unterscharführer from *Prinz Eugen* clearly shows the Odal-rune collar patch and Edelweiss sleeve badge. As a Reichsdeutsche member of the divisional cadre, he is entitled to wear the SS-runes on his left breast pocket to indicate his 'full' membership of the SS.

Prinz Eugen performed effectively during this period, relentlessly pursuing Tito's élite 1st Proletarian Division through Croatia and into Serbia despite significant casualties, and destroying its ability to undertake any further offensive actions. This series of operations ended in no distinct final battle, but rather in a gradual petering out of confrontations with the partisans in the first week of August.

Collapse in the East, 1944-45

In the autumn of 1944, as the situation on the Eastern Front became increasingly critical, Bulgaria and Romania deserted the Axis cause and transferred their allegiance, declaring war on Germany. In September 1944, General Phleps flew from Montenegro to his home country of Transylvania on the Romanian/Hungarian frontier in hopes of organising resistance; he was killed, reportedly when his light aircraft was shot down on 21 September, but alternative accounts have since been published (see page 45).

With Soviet and Bulgarian forces approaching from the east and Tito's partisans threatening to join up with them, *Prinz Eugen* was committed to Unternehmen '*Rubezahl*', smashing its way into partisan forces moving eastwards. The division surrounded and completely destroyed one large force, although Allied air forces again played a part, landing in the surrounded pocket and evacuating partisan wounded.

Enemy attention now turned towards the capture of the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade. *Prinz Eugen* was initially given the task of intercepting lead enemy units approaching Belgrade; but then was almost immediately transferred to the area around Nisch, where it was to play an important role in covering the retreat of over 300,000 German troops of Heeresgruppe E under General-Field Marshal Löhr, who were falling back through Yugoslavia from occupation duty in the Aegean. The division was strung out along a 90-mile front, in an area of Macedonia infested with partisans, threatened on its right by the Bulgarian 2nd Army and on its left by the Soviet 57th Army. Despite the enemy's overwhelming numerical superiority, *Prinz Eugen* held on to its positions in this 'Vardar Corridor' under repeated attacks over a number of weeks. Once again the division suffered significant casualties, and this time it reported numbers of its troops deserting. Under attacks by very strong partisan forces *Prinz Eugen's* units became fragmented and cut off. In late November the divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Kumm, was forced to order his troops to break out; but *Prinz Eugen* had succeeded in its mission of holding back the enemy long enough to allow Löhr's troops to escape. After breaking out, the remnants of the division – now less than 4,000 strong – had to carry out a forced march over four days to reach their designated 'rest' area.

In November 1944 the German cadre remnants of the Albanian 21. SS Division *Skanderbeg* were ordered incorporated into the division; and one source states that SS-Frw GebJr Regt 14 was authorised to take the title 'Skanderbeg', though the incorporation seems never in fact to have taken place.

Thereafter *Prinz Eugen* fought numerous rearguard actions against both partisans and Soviet units, as the Germans retreated from Yugoslavia and the partisans tried to delay them long enough for the Red Army to overtake and destroy them. In mid-January 1945 the

Germans attempted to drive off the partisan forces which were harrying them by launching Unternehmen 'Frühlingssturm'. Operating under XXXIV Korps, *Prinz Eugen* seized the town of Nemeci and formed a bridgehead at Buzot; a second phase, 'Wehrwolf', lasted from 4 February until the end of that month, after which the division was transferred to Heeresgruppe E reserve. It was soon in action again, against powerful partisan forces encircling German units in the town of Zenica north of Sarajevo; before long *Prinz Eugen* pushed the enemy back and relieved the town.

The tempo of operations now became desperate as the enemy pressed in all around the retreating German forces, and *Prinz Eugen* fought with notable determination. No sooner had the division relieved Zenica when elements were detached and sent to the south of Sarajevo to relieve a Croatian infantry division which had been trapped by partisans. There then followed a remarkable episode when, in order to relieve yet another cut-off German Army unit, the entire division scaled Mount Igman, moving through deep snow drifts. *Prinz Eugen* emerged behind the partisan units, not only relieving their Army comrades but pursuing the enemy into the mountains. When the partisans regrouped on a high peak a vicious battle ensued, with the summit changing hands several times before the rate of casualties on both sides persuaded them that this exposed peak – lacking any sort of cover, and where every shell burst caused many casualties – was no longer worth contesting. The Army unit relieved in Sarajevo ran into yet another partisan ambush, and once more *Prinz Eugen* came to the rescue.

Over the following days the division provided rearguard cover for withdrawing German units making their way north-west towards Austria. At Brod the bridge over the River Sava had already been captured by strong partisan forces; but *Prinz Eugen* pioneers successfully ferried the entire mixed Army/Waffen-SS force across the river in assault boats, though at the cost of abandoning all heavy equipment. As the Third Reich finally collapsed in April/May 1945 German units were determined not to fall into the hands of the vengeful partisans, and for this reason fighting continued in this area even after the German surrender on 8 May.

Eventually, an agreement was reached with the enemy that *Prinz Eugen* would surrender its arms in return for safe passage to the Austrian border. Unsurprisingly, this agreement was not honoured, and the division was forced to put in a counter-attack four days after the war had officially ended.

On 12 May the division discharged its troops, leaving each man to try to make his own way to safety, and some groups succeeded in reaching Austrian soil. Those still in enemy territory finally surrendered at Cilli in Slovenia on 16 May, fully eight days after the war in Europe had ended. The treatment meted out to them by the partisans was predictably brutal, and not many survived.

The form of warfare in which the *Prinz Eugen* Division was involved was perhaps uniquely ugly, and the formation was reportedly guilty of many atrocities. Occupied Yugoslavia was the arena for merciless guerrilla warfare, but not simply between the Germans and their allies on one hand and unified

The photo page of a *Soldbuch* (paybook) to an SS-Unterscharführer of the *Prinz Eugen* Division, clearly showing the Odal-rune collar patch. Surviving examples of such documents are extremely rare. (Barry Smith)





Insignia worn by 7. SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division *Prinz Eugen*. Top to bottom: the Odal-rune collar patch worn by all ranks and units; divisional cuffbands in machine-woven, flat-wire woven and machine-embroidered formats; and the machine-woven BeVo format 'Artur Phleps' cuffband for SS Volunteer Mountain Rifles Regt 13, manufactured but apparently unissued.

described above for 6. SS Gebirgs Division *Nord*.

Collar patches

Being primarily composed of non-German personnel, the division was not permitted to wear the SS runes right collar patch. This was replaced by the so-called 'Odal-rune', machine-embroidered for lower ranks and hand-embroidered in aluminium thread for officers. Normal rank patches were worn on the left collar; and officers patches were edged with the usual aluminium twist cord.

Breast runes

Full members of the SS (i.e. Reichsdeutsche cadre personnel within the division), unable to wear the *Sig-runen* collar patch, were permitted to wear an embroidered equivalent badge just below the left breast pocket.

Cuffbands

The division was authorised a cuffband with the title '*Prinz Eugen*'. It was manufactured in machine-embroidered, flat-wire woven and machine-woven forms.

Regimental:

'*Artur Phleps*' Following the death of Gen Phleps, in November 1944 SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 13 was named in his honour and permitted a cuffband bearing the former divisional commander's name. This band was certainly manufactured, in machine-woven artificial silk BeVo format, but no photographic evidence of its actual issue or wear has yet emerged.

patriots on the other.⁷ The Communist and Chetnik resistance movements were divided by mutual hatreds; the Communists devoted great energy to fighting the Royalists, and there were instances of Chetniks joining forces with the occupiers to fight the partisans. This internal war was often pursued as ruthlessly as SS anti-guerrilla operations (a fact that should not surprise us, in the aftermath of the Balkan wars of the 1990s), and claimed perhaps as many lives as Axis security operations. Nevertheless, there can be no denying that the SS-led anti-partisan sweeps nearly always involved barbarous reprisals against local civilians in areas of anti-German activity. In this kind of warfare neither side expected or offered any quarter, and all the participant forces committed atrocities. In the last months of the war *Prinz Eugen* units showed themselves capable of courageous fighting against odds, and six members of the division were decorated with the Knight's Cross; but the stain of its atrocities against civilians cannot be avoided.

Special insignia

Mountain Troops insignia

This division wore the special SS pattern mountain troops insignia on the cap and the right sleeve, as

⁷ See MAA 282, *Axis Forces in Yugoslavia 1941-45*

8. SS-KAVALLERIE DIVISION FLORIAN GEYER

Designations

June 1942	SS-Kavallerie Division
October 1943	8. SS-Kavallerie Division
March 1944	8. SS-Kavallerie Division <i>Florian Geyer</i>

Commanders

SS-Kavallerie Brigade, & June–Aug 1942 SS-Standartenführer Hermann Fegelein; *Aug 1942–Feb 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Willi Bittrich; *Feb–Apr 1943* SS-Standartenführer Fritz Freitag; *Apr–Nov 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Hermann Fegelein; *Jan–Apr 1944* SS-Brigadeführer Bruno Streckenbach; *July 1944–Feb 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Joachim Rumohr

Principal elements

SS-Kavallerie Regiment 15; SS-Kavallerie Regiment 16; SS-Kavallerie Regiment 17 (until Apr 1943); SS-Kavallerie Regiment 18 (from autumn 1943); SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 8; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 8; SS-Artillerie Regiment (mot.) 8; SS-Flak Abteilung 8; SS-(Panzer) Aufklärungs Abteilung 8; SS-Pionier Battalion 8. *Also* SS-Ski Bataillon

Campaigns

In September 1939 the first *SS-Totenkopf* horsed cavalry regiment was formed under the designation *SS-Totenkopf Reiterstandarte 1*, consisting of a staff element and four *Reiterschwadron*. Commanded

by SS-Standartenführer Hermann Fegelein, the regiment was despatched to Poland for 'security' duties following the cease-fire. Further squadrons followed progressively as the regiment was rapidly enlarged, to no fewer than 14 squadrons by May 1940, including specialist support elements and a horse gun battery.⁸ (In 1940–41 various types of organisation were tried, involving splitting the regiment in two, reuniting it, and finally dividing it once more; Fegelein remained in command of what was in effect a brigade at each stage.)

Well-known photograph of SS cavalry troopers on the Eastern Front in 1941. In many areas horses were far more practical than vehicles, especially in wooded country or the wetlands of the huge Pripet Marshes, where the SS-Kavallerie Brigade operated. See also Plate C1.



⁸ See MAA 361, *Axis Cavalry in World War II*

The first commander of the SS-Kavallerie Division after its expansion from the mauled remnant of the former brigade, between August 1942 and February 1943, was one of the most able Waffen-SS general officers, SS-Brigadeführer Wilhelm Bittrich. Portrayed here in the rank of SS-Gruppenführer, 'Willi' Bittrich would later command II SS-Panzerkorps, consisting of the *Hohenstaufen* and *Fruntsberg* Divisions, and was thus closely involved with the battle of Arnhem in September 1944. (Josef Charita)



Headquartered in Warsaw and Lublin and operating in dispersed squadrons among the Polish population, these *SS-Totenkopf* troops soon demonstrated their familiar character: the 4th Sqn was involved in the execution of Jewish civilians at Kutno as early as October 1939. At the start of 1940 the brigade was put under the command of the Higher SS and Police Leader/East, SS-Gruppenführer Krüger, himself a former inspector of the mounted units of the Allgemeine-SS.

During this period the brigade encountered a train of cattle cars carrying deported Jews. The filthy state of the wagons caused officers to worry about the risk of an outbreak of dysentery, a problem that they decided to solve by simply shooting all the Jews. Having insufficient stocks of ammunition they sought to obtain some from nearby Army units, who refused outright to supply them. The executions went ahead anyway, carried out by a mixture of SS troopers and German police working under SS orders.

Apart from their participation in such atrocities, the brigade was also suspected of serious looting, to the extent that an investigation was instigated against Fegelein by the Gestapo. The colonel was a personal favourite of Reichsführer Himmler, however, and the investigation came to nothing.

Russia, 1941–43

By March 1941 the retitled *SS-Kavallerie Regiment 1 & 2* each had three sabre and five support and service squadrons, with a total strength of about 3,500 men. The two units were formally designated the SS-Kavallerie Brigade only in August 1941, by which time they were already in action on 'mopping-up' duties behind the advancing front of Army Group Centre in Russia. On the opening of Operation 'Barbarossa' in June the cavalry were among a number of former *Totenkopf* units brought together under the authority of the Kommandostab RFSS (rather than the Wehrmacht) to serve behind the front lines, hunting down Red Army stragglers and taking punitive action against partisans and the civilians suspected of aiding them. In one sweep through the Pripet Marshes the SS troops killed just over 250 enemy combatants but more than 6,500 civilians – a disproportion which would continue to be a feature of the brigade's combat reports. After another operation in early August it was reported that 1,000 partisans and 700 Red Army stragglers had been killed, but the civilian death toll came to well over 14,000, most of them apparently Jewish.

The SS Cavalry Brigade came up against rather more serious opposition during the great Soviet counter-attacks of the following winter. In January 1942 it suffered heavy casualties near Rzhev and Gusevo, where around 60 per cent of its personnel were killed in action or died in the harsh conditions. By the end of March the brigade had been reduced to a 700-man battlegroup; the remnants were withdrawn into Poland during April–August 1942, but it was decided to expand this core into a division. A third cavalry regiment was added, and in June 1942 around 9,000 Romanian Volksdeutsche were drafted in.

On returning to the front in August 1942 the new SS-Kavallerie Division, now commanded by SS-Brigadeführer 'Willi' Bittrich, was used for more conventional combat duties, operating at first under LIX Korps of 9. Armee of Heeresgruppe Mitte in the Rzhev area, around the Don basin, Golaia and Orel. After a brief rest in November 1942 it came under XXX Korps; in January 1943 it passed to XXXXI Panzerkorps; and in February to 2. Panzer Armee's XXXXVII Panzerkorps, 'Korps Lemelsen'. Horsed



cavalry still had a useful part to play in the vast expanses of Russia, where their high mobility over varied terrain made them valuable for work on the flanks. Withdrawn to 2. Panzer Armee reserve for refitting in March 1943, in June–August the division reverted to anti-partisan operations between the Dniepr and the Pripet Marshes. One of its regiments was detached in April (eventually forming the nucleus for the new 22. SS-Kavallerie Division), but this unit was ordered replaced in August by local recruitment of Volksdeutsche, which eventually brought total strength up to about 15,000 men.

In July 1943 the division was attached to Heeresgruppe Süd, and from August saw heavy defensive combat during retreats to the Dniepr and Kirovograd as part of 8. Armee and then 1. Panzer Armee; elements remained in the south until early 1944. In October 1943 the formation received the divisional number 8, and its regiments were renumbered. The following March it received the honour title 'Florian Geyer', commemorating a Franconian knight (1490–1525) who came to fame during the early 16th century Peasants' War and was a noted supporter of Martin Luther.

The division was transferred to Croatia in December 1943, fighting partisans until March 1944. During 1944 the record of the movements of dispersed elements of *Florian Geyer* is confused, but at least part of the division saw fierce defensive fighting against the great Soviet offensive of that summer and the collapse of Army Group Centre. At the end of the year the division was deployed to Hungary under IX SS Korps as part of the Budapest garrison, alongside the new 22. SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division *Maria Theresia*. In early November 1944 they took part in a successful counter-attack against Soviet forces advancing on the capital, and recaptured Vescses and Ullo. December found them facing the Soviet 4th Guards Mechanised Corps; by Christmas Eve they were in defensive positions on the west bank of the Danube, the 50,000-strong garrison now being surrounded by at least 250,000 Soviet troops.

LEFT The commander of the SS-Kavallerie Brigade in 1941–42 and later, from spring 1943, returning to command the expanded Division, Hermann Fegelein is shown here as an SS-Oberführer, wearing the Knight's Cross with the Oakleaves which he was awarded in December 1942. He eventually reached the rank of SS-Gruppenführer and gained the Swords.

ABOVE During the Soviet advance through Hungary in winter 1944–45, 6 Kompanie of SS-Kavallerie Regiment 15 from the *Florian Geyer* Division was cut off behind Soviet lines. Despite its precarious situation, it continued to attack advancing Soviet units; and for his leadership SS-Hauptsturmführer Anton Vandieken was awarded the Knight's Cross on 26 December 1944.

SS-Hauptsturmführer Joachim Boosfeld was awarded the Knight's Cross on 21 February 1945 as commander of 4 Kompanie, SS-Kavallerie Regiment 16 for his part in the heavy defensive fighting in Hungary. Relatively few of those who gained the award at such a late stage in the war had the opportunity to have such portrait photographs taken. The divisional cuffband is clearly visible here. (Josef Charita)



RIGHT SS-Brigadeführer Gustav Lombard – portrayed here as an SS-Standartenführer – was one of the most influential figures in the establishment of the Waffen-SS cavalry units. He was a bearer of both the German Cross in Gold and the Knight's Cross, the latter awarded in March 1943 for his leadership of SS-Kavallerie Regiment 1 (renumbered as 15 that October). After the war he spent more than ten years in Soviet captivity.

Cut off and with dwindling supplies, the garrison fought on in an ever shrinking perimeter; the area occupied by *Florian Geyer* by the final stages of the defence of Budapest was barely one kilometre square. The remnants staged a desperate break-out attempt on 11/12 February 1945, but were caught by the Soviets and annihilated. Barely 800 German survivors, including just 170 men from the two SS cavalry divisions, reached the safety of German lines, and were subsequently absorbed into the 37. SS Kavallerie Division. The *Florian Geyer*'s last commander, Joachim Rumohr, committed suicide after being wounded during the break-out attempt.

Although the division did see considerable front-line combat against regular Soviet forces, and 23 of its members were decorated with the Knight's Cross, much of its career was spent on operations against partisans, and there is no doubt that it was responsible for the deaths of many thousands of civilians.

Special insignia

Cuffband

The only special insignia worn was the divisional title as a cuffband. Intended for wear by all ranks, this was manufactured in rayon in BeVo machine-woven form, with the title in Latin script. Examples with the name hand-embroidered in aluminium wire on a black 'RZM'-style band with aluminium wire edging are known, and are presumed to be unofficial private purchase pieces. It is also known that some officers furnished themselves with privately made cuffbands bearing the title hand-embroidered in Gothic script.



As a Reichsdeutsche unit the *Florian Geyer* Division was entitled to wear the SS-runes on the right collar patch. Shown here is the machine-woven BeVo divisional cuffband authorised in March 1944.

9. SS-PANZER DIVISION HOHENSTAUFEN

Designations

February 1943

9. SS-Panzer Grenadier Division

March 1943

SS-Panzer Grenadier Division *Hohenstaufen*

October 1943

9. SS-Panzer Division *Hohenstaufen*

Commanders

Feb 1943–July 1944 SS-Gruppenführer Wilhelm Bittrich; *July 1944* SS-Oberführer Thomas Müller, & SS-Oberführer Sylvester Stadler; *Aug–Oct 1944* SS-Oberführer Friedrich-Wilhelm Bock; *Oct 1944–May 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Sylvester Stadler

Principal elements

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 19; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 20; SS-Panzer Regiment 9; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 9; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 9; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 9; SS-Flak Abteilung 9; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 9; SS-Panzer Pionier Abteilung 9

Campaigns

The raising of this division was authorised in late 1942, and it was built from drafts of 18-year-old former Hitler Youth members, up to 70 per cent being conscripts rather than volunteers. These boys were led and trained by a cadre of experienced combat veterans from 1. SS Panzer Division *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*, the latter initially based at Berlin Lichterfelde. Its first commander was SS-Gruppenführer 'Willi' Bittrich, one of the most able senior combat commanders in the Waffen-SS. Originally designated as a Panzer Grenadier (mechanized) division, it was up-graded to full armoured (Panzer) status in October 1943 during the process of formation and training; this brought it a battalion of excellent PzKpw V Panther tanks in addition to one of PzKw IVs. In March 1943 it was given the honour title 'Hohenstaufen', commemorating the renowned dynastic family which had provided German kings and Holy Roman Emperors in the 12th–13th centuries (notably the great Emperor Friedrich II 'Barbarossa', r.1212–50).

The division spent most of 1943 training and working up in France, initially at Mailly le Camp, the vast, windswept French Army training area east of Paris, where it fell under the operational control of Heeresgruppe D. The new division was to be grouped, as IV SS-Panzerkorps, with another new formation, 16. SS-Panzer Grenadier Division *Reichsführer-SS*, and was required to surrender some personnel as cadre for the latter. After

SS-Brigadeführer Sylvester Stadler, the second commander of the *Hohenstaufen* Division, was wounded in Normandy in late July 1944 shortly after being promoted to command from a distinguished career with the *Das Reich* Division. Stadler returned to the *Hohenstaufen* in October 1944 and led the division until the last day of the war, earning the Swords to his Knight's Cross and Oakleaves as late as 6 May 1945.





ABOVE A young SS-Unterscharführer from SS-Panzer Regiment 9, wearing the regulation black vehicle uniform for members of tank units. It is interesting that even at this late stage of the war this sergeant's jacket has pink piping to both the collar and the collar patches – the latter a strictly non-regulation feature, and usually associated only with the tank crews of the *Wiking* Division's SS-Pz Regt 5. (Josef Charita)



RIGHT SS-Sturmmann Ewald Krassmann, who served with SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 9 during the campaign in Normandy. Although not apparent in a black-and-white photo, the piping to the shoulder straps of his black Panzer jacket is in the cavalry golden-yellow proper for this armoured reconnaissance unit, rather than the normal pink for tank personnel.

various moves around France, in late 1943 *Hohenstaufen* was based in the south near the Mediterranean coast; and in the event it did not serve with *Reichsführer-SS*. Once considered fit for combat service, it would be grouped with its sister formation, 10. SS-Panzer Division *Frundsberg*, to become II SS-Panzerkorps commanded by the veteran armoured general SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hauser.

On the Eastern Front, 1. Panzerarmee had become encircled by the Soviets in the area around Tarnopol and the Red Army was

threatening the Polish border. Hitler decided to commit four fresh divisions to the area in an attempt to break through, two of these being the new II SS-Panzerkorps. With a strength of just under 20,000 men, *Hohenstaufen* moved to Poland in March 1944 to serve under 4. Panzerarmee. From Lvov, it went into action at Tarnopol in the appalling conditions of the Russian spring thaw, which made movement of heavy equipment difficult, and the division suffered heavy casualties. On 5 April, *Hohenstaufen* and *Frundsberg* attacked on the flank of 4. Panzerarmee; the teenage soldiers followed their veteran officers and NCOs in a break-through that smashed a path through the Soviet 1st Tank Army, and *Hohenstaufen* linked up with the encircled 1. Panzerarmee on 9 April.

Normandy, 1944

The division's initial visit to the Eastern Front was to be short-lived; the landings by the Allied forces in Normandy on 6 June 1944 prompted Hitler to pull II SS-Panzerkorps out of the Ukraine, where it was preparing for a German counter-offensive at Kovel, and send it west. Entraining in Poland on 12 June, the division was joined en route by part of the Panzer regiment which had still been forming up at Mailly-le-Camp. However, *Hohenstaufen* suffered so badly from the attentions of Allied fighter-bombers while in transit to the front that its tanks had to off-load from the rail trucks and move overland, travelling only in the hours of darkness.

The arrival in Normandy of a more or less fresh SS armoured corps led by a general of the calibre of Paul Hauser might have had a significant impact on the campaign if they had gone into the line sooner. However, by the time they were operational on 25 June the Allies, with the advantage of overwhelming air power, already had a strong foothold in Normandy. *Hohenstaufen* was sent into action against British forces involved in the 'Epsom' offensive along the River Odon and south-west of Caen on 28 June. On the 29th, while forming up

near Noyers, divisional units came under a ferocious combination of heavy artillery fire and shelling from major warships lying offshore. So intense was the fire that the Germans were convinced that they had come under a carpet bombing attack by RAF Lancaster bombers which had been operating in the area. Significant damage was caused, and up to 20 per cent of *Hohenstaufen's* vehicles were estimated destroyed. (At the end of June, Gen Bittrich succeeded Hausser in command of II SS-Panzerkorps; the new divisional commander, SS-Oberführer Stadler, would be wounded in late July, and SS-Oberführer Bock would hold temporary command until he returned in October.)

In the fighting which followed the division destroyed some 62 enemy armoured vehicles for the loss of 31 of its own; but replacements would be far easier for the Allies to obtain. As the momentum of the British attack slowed, the Germans went on to the offensive, and after a concentrated artillery and mortar barrage by both 9. and 10. Divisions one of the key objectives was taken – Hill 112, of which General Hausser had said that 'he who holds Hill 112 holds Normandy'. The arrival of II SS-Panzerkorps in the sector was sufficient to bring the British offensive to a halt, but the Allies' massive firepower prevented the German counter-offensive from fully exploiting this success. By 2 July it is estimated that *Hohenstaufen* had lost 81 tanks and 22 self-propelled guns since arriving in the sector (though some of these were lost to mechanical breakdowns rather than enemy action, and were later recovered).

The first week of July was relatively quiet for the division, but on 11 July it was once again thrown into the battle to retain Hill 112. This feature would be fought over so often – lost, retaken and lost again by each side – that it became a desolate no-man's-land, stripped of much of its natural cover. By mid-July the division was located around Bully, between Caen and Evrecy, and went into action again on the 16th against British armoured forces attacking near Gavrus. In fighting around Hill 113 and at Bougy, *Hohenstaufen* knocked out 48 Allied tanks in a day's fighting, for the loss of just five of its own. Casualties overall had been heavy, however, and by the end of this series of actions the division had lost around 50 per cent of its grenadiers and was down to just 38 tanks. *Hohenstaufen* was then fortunate enough to be relieved, and allowed a brief period of respite as part of Panzergruppe West reserve, leaving its sister division *Frundsberg* to hold the line and await reinforcements.

On 18 July a battlegroup from the division was formed to contribute – along with Army infantry and elements of *Frundsberg* – to a counter-attack intended to recapture a number of villages south of Caen which had been lost to a new British offensive codenamed 'Greenline'. One platoon of *Hohenstaufen* tanks, sent out on a night reconnaissance, found themselves right in the middle of British positions. Taking advantage of the element of surprise, the German tanks blazed away at the startled enemy until their ammunition was almost gone before withdrawing under cover of a smokescreen.

At the beginning of August a breakthrough by Gen Patton's US 3rd Army at Avranches and Mortain on the western tip of the beachhead was coupled with a new British offensive, Operation 'Bluecoat', which drove south from Villers-Bocage towards Vire. The British aim was to engage



An SS-Hauptsturmführer from the division's signal battalion, SS-Nachrichten Abteilung 9. The standard machine-woven 'Hohenstaufen' cuffband seen here was worn by all ranks of the division.

SS-Obersturmführer Johann Sailer, commander of 3 Kompanie, SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 9. This lieutenant of the divisional tank-destroyer battalion was awarded the Knight's Cross on 4 May 1945 for his performance during the defensive battles of the closing days of the war. Note, once again, that neither his collar nor his collar patches are edged in the regulation officer's silver cord.



the still powerful German armoured divisions and prevent them from interfering with the American break-out. The weakened units of II SS-Panzerkorps launched yet another counter-attack; on its way to the start line *Hohenstaufen* was once again harried by the Allied fighter-bombers which were now claiming more German tanks destroyed than the ground forces. Despite its losses the division's 72 medium tanks, backed by some 30 heavy PzKw VI Tigers, held up the advancing British VIII Corps with over 500 tanks.

As the Germans battled to eliminate the British salient, on 4 August *Hohenstaufen* troops retook the town of Chênedollé with the aid of a battalion of Nebelwerfer multi-barrel rocket launchers. Although 39 British tanks were destroyed, fighting continued to rage; by nightfall the town was in British hands once more, and despite renewed attacks they held on to it. During ten days' fighting in this area the division is reckoned to have cost the British over 5,000 casualties and over 130 tanks; but numbers and firepower told in the end, and on the night of 13/14 August *Hohenstaufen* was forced to begin a withdrawal over the River Orne.

The division withdrew to the north-east, moving from the Argentan area through Trun to Vimoutiers to avoid the closing of the Falaise Pocket. It arrived there on 18 August, but by now at only about one-third of its original establishment – about 5,500 all ranks. The infantry had suffered proportionately far worse, and the two Panzergrenadier regiments were down to a combined strength of just under 500 men. Total divisional casualties in just over eight weeks of combat in Normandy included 5,000 men killed.

In the Falaise Pocket about 60,000 German troops of 19 divisions were trapped between the closing jaws of US 3rd Army pushing northwards from Argentan, and 1st Canadian Army driving south from Falaise. When the jaws finally snapped shut at Chambois on 21 August, II SS-Panzerkorps were ordered to strike back towards Falaise and cut a path to allow the trapped German formations to escape. The *Hohenstaufen* units allocated to this attack were by now too weak to penetrate the Allied lines, although some other Waffen-SS units did succeed in making contact with German troops attempting to escape the cauldron.

II SS-Panzerkorps then continued to withdraw to the north-east; while providing the rearguard *Hohenstaufen* saw fierce fighting. The combined tank strength of both *Hohenstaufen* and *Fruntsberg* by this point was fewer than 20. The bulk of the division crossed the Seine safely at Duclair, although a few of its personnel were killed by strafing aircraft. The effective survivors of the division were formed into a new Kampfgruppe, moving on to Amiens and from there to Cambrai. Here the battlegroup fought a furious action against US armour, claiming over 40 tanks

(continued on page 33)

6. SS-GEBIRGS DIVISION NORD

- 1: SS-Hauptsturmführer,
SS-Gebirgsjäger Regt 6
Reinhard Heydrich, c1943
3: SS-Gebirgsjäger, c1944



1

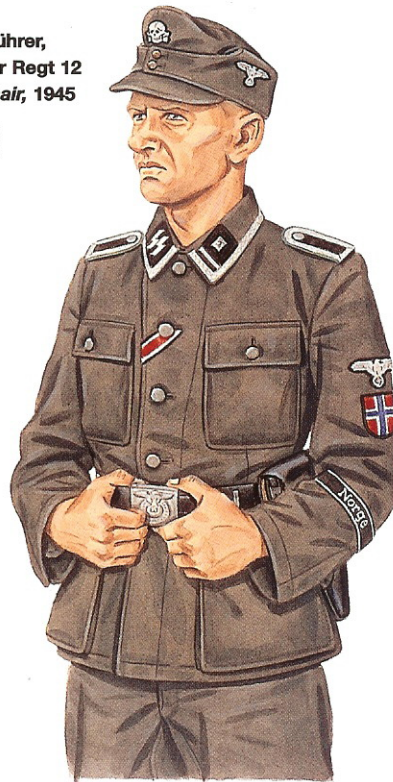


3

- 2: SS-Unterscharführer,
SS-Gebirgsjäger Regt 12
Michael Gaissmair, 1945
4: SS-Scharführer,
SS-Schi Btl 502
Norge, 1943



2



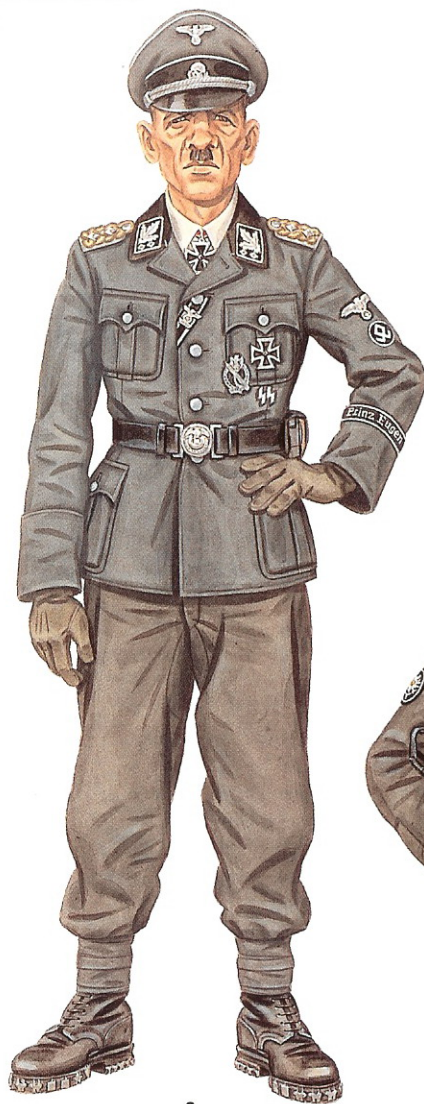
4

7. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GEBIRGS DIVISION *PRINZ EUGEN*

1: SS-Gebirgsjäger, SS-Frw Gebirgsjäger Regt 13, 1943

2: SS-Obergruppenführer Artur Phleps,
summer 1943

3: SS-Oberscharführer,
SS-Frw Gebirgsjäger Regt 13
Artur Phleps, 1945

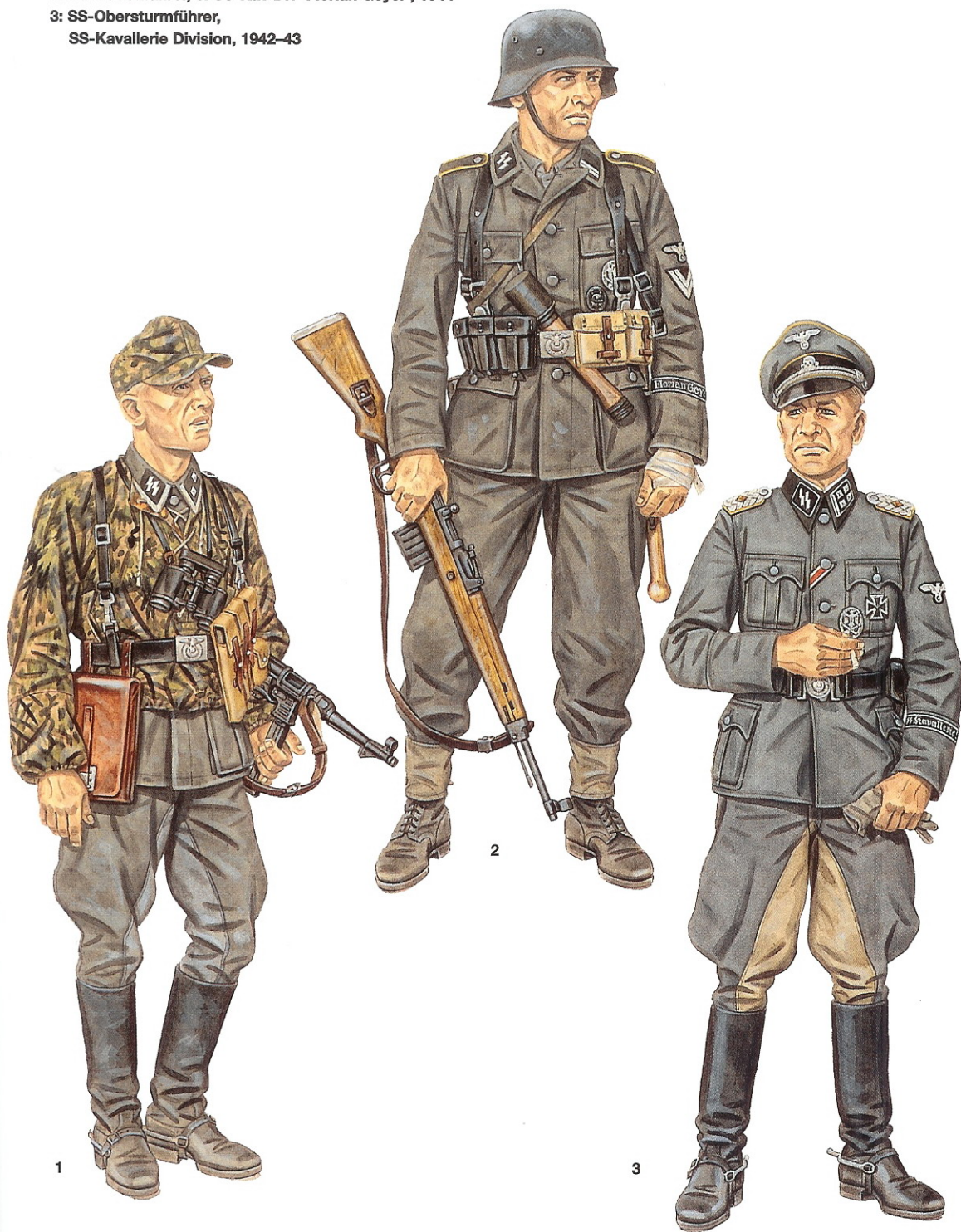


SS CAVALRY

1: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Kavallerie Division, 1943

2: SS-Rottenführer, 8. SS-Kav Div 'Florian Geyer', 1944

3: SS-Obersturmführer,
SS-Kavallerie Division, 1942-43



9. SS-PANZER DIVISION HOHENSTAUFEN

1: SS-Sturmbannführer, 1943-44

2: SS-Scharführer,

SS-Panzergrenadier Regt 19, 1944

3: SS-Rottenführer, 1943-44



10. SS-PANZER DIVISION *FRUNDSBERG*

1: SS-Brigadeführer of Armoured Troops, 1944

2: SS-Grenadier, 1943-44

3: SS-Untersturmführer,
SS-Sturmgeschütz Abt 10, 1944



EASTERN FRONT, 1941-43

1: SS-Unterscharführer despatch rider, 1941

2: SS-Obersturmbannführer,
winter surcoat, 1942-43

3: SS-Hauptscharführer Kriegsberichter, c1944





1

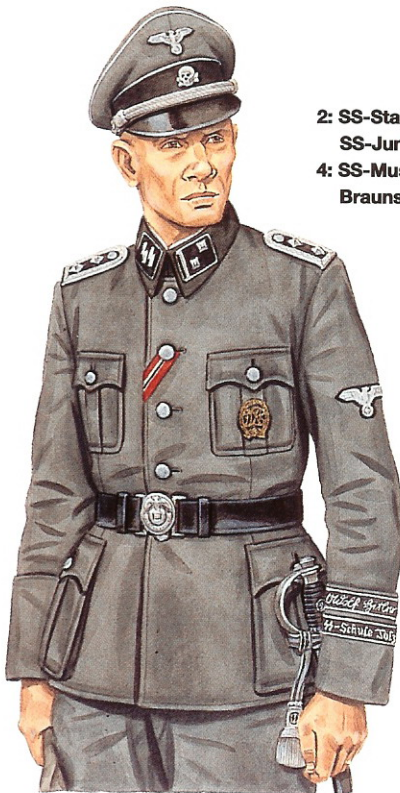
TRAINING SCHOOLS

1: SS-Oberscharführer,
SS-Junkerschule Tölz,
c1941

3: SS-Unterscharführer,
SS-Unterführerschule
Radolfzell, c1942



3



2

2: SS-Standartenoberjunker,
SS-Junkerschule Tölz, c1942

4: SS-Musiker, SS-Musikschule
Braunschweig, c1941



4

EASTERN FRONT, 1944-45

1: SS-Hauptsturmführer, winter clothing

2: SS-Flak Kanonier, winter clothing

3: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Fallschirmjäger Btl 500;
Lithuania, summer 1944



destroyed before being forced to withdraw northwards (they avoided the attention of enemy fighter-bombers by displaying Allied flags). With the enemy hard on their heels the remnants of *Hohenstaufen* continued northwards through Belgium, passing Mons and Brussels before crossing into Holland, where they arrived in the area north of Arnhem on 7–9 September. Here the division came under Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model's 6. Panzerarmee in Heeresgruppe B.

Arnhem, 1944

This was intended to be simply a stop-off point from which the division – perhaps reduced to fewer than 3,000 men – would entrain for Germany for total refitting, after handing over its remaining armour and artillery to the *Fruntsberg* Division. However, on 17 September, just as the division was about to depart, the Allies launched Operation 'Market Garden' into Holland. This combined a cross-country attack by elements of the British 2nd and US 1st armies ('Market') with an airborne assault by the 1st Allied Airborne Army ('Garden'), with the intention of seizing the bridges over the Waal at Nijmegen and the Lower Rhine at Arnhem.

If the Germans were surprised by the Allied airborne landings, then the Allies were equally surprised to find that they had been dropped into an area occupied by elements of two Waffen-SS armoured divisions; even in their depleted state, together they were still a powerful force with which to oppose lightly armed airborne troops. *Hohenstaufen* vehicles which had been loaded onto rail cars for shipping to Germany were frantically off-loaded again. Most of the division's survivors were brought together in a battlegroup designated Kampfgruppe Harzer, led by SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer.

Around 9,000 British airborne troops had been landed in the area around Wolfheze, around 7 miles west of Arnhem on the north bank of the river. The paratroopers who made the dash to seize the north end of the bridge (2nd and part of 3rd Parachute Bns) numbered around 700 men. An attempt was made to cross the bridge, but heavy German fire forced the paratroopers to concentrate on consolidating their hold on the northern end while awaiting reinforcement, and the southern end remained in German hands. General Bittrich's orders to *Hohenstaufen* were to seize and hold the town and the bridge, and to block the advance of any additional paratroopers from west of the town.

During the battle around Arnhem the division's troops were divided into several smaller Kampfgruppen acting as blocking forces, various elements being spread out from Arnhem itself as far as Neerpelt to the south-west. Some of these included experienced Waffen-SS troops mixed with soldiers pulled in from other commands – some still under training – and even some Kriegsmarine personnel.

While the bulk of the British 1st Airborne Division were trying to make their way along the north bank to Arnhem and the bridge from their dropping zones to the west, stiff German resistance held them up at Oosterbeek just outside the town. The original intention was that the airborne troops would only have to hold the bridge for a day or two before the heavy ground forces punched their way up from the south to relieve them. However, the contested advance of British XXX Corps along the narrow corridor, led by Guards Armoured Division and 43rd

(Wessex) Division, became bogged down; and the lightly armed airborne troops came under increasing pressure from the Waffen-SS. Model steadily sent reinforcements to join the encircling German units over the next few days, and in desperate fighting the British perimeters around Oosterbeek and at the bridge itself were continuously constricted.

The force at the bridge finally surrendered on 21 September. On the 24th, through the intervention of *Hohenstaufen's* medical officer SS-Sturmbannführer Egon Skalka, a truce was arranged which led to the evacuation of over 700 seriously wounded paratroopers; the following day a further 500 were handed over. The Germans had been impressed by the bravery and tenacity shown by the British airborne troops, and British survivors reported their treatment by the Waffen-SS troops as being correct, even 'kind'. The arrival of a battalion of King Tiger heavy tanks – the Army's schwere Panzer Abteilung 503 – finally put paid to any hope of a relief force being able to fight its way through. On 25 September the order was given for the survivors of 1st Airborne Division to withdraw, and those who could made their way back across the Rhine in assault boats crewed by British and Canadian engineers; the evacuation was completed the following day. The British had landed some 9,000 troops at Arnhem, with an additional 3,000 Polish paratroops subsequently dropped in support. It is estimated that about 8,000 of these 12,000 men were either killed or taken prisoner; German casualties numbered just over 3,000.

On 30 September, *Hohenstaufen* was finally withdrawn to Germany for the long delayed refitting. SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer was decorated with the Knight's Cross in recognition of the performance of his troops – one of 12 awarded to members of the division during the war.

The Ardennes, 1944–45

By the next time it was committed to action *Hohenstaufen* had been rebuilt to just under 20,000 men, but not all of these were of impressive quality – the replacements included a large draft of Luftwaffe personnel. The division was still woefully short of armour, vehicles and equipment, with some units recording shortfalls of up to 50 per cent.

On 12 December 1944 the division was moved to the Eifel region in preparation for the ill-fated Ardennes offensive. *Hohenstaufen* would form part of VI SS-Panzerarmee, along with the *Leibstandarte*, *Das Reich*, and *Hitlerjugend* Panzer Divisions, all under command of SS-Obergruppenführer 'Sepp' Dietrich. The task of the SS-Panzerarmee was to advance on the northern flank to seize Antwerp, the most critical of the Allied supply ports.

Hohenstaufen did not move up to Blankenheim until the offensive opened on 16 December, and was eventually committed to action in the early afternoon of 19 December, as part of II SS-Panzerkorps along with 2. SS-Panzer Division *Das Reich*. It was forced to spend four full days pushing its way along heavily congested roads before reaching the front line. Advancing on the right flank of *Das Reich* towards Poteau, it saw heavy combat when it ran into elements of the US 82nd Airborne Division which succeeded in halting *Hohenstaufen* at Bra. From here it turned south, and moved into the attack at Grand Lalleux, pursuing the Americans as they retreated from the salient at St Vith. On 22 December, at Vielsalm, US troops succeeded in crossing the bridge

over the River Salm and partially destroying it to prevent *Hohenstaufen* following. The division finally crossed the Salm on 24 December, and advanced towards Vaux-Chavanne, where it was involved in further heavy combat.

On 3 January 1945, *Hohenstaufen* attacked through Rastadt in an attempt to push the defenders of Bastogne back into an even smaller perimeter. Operating alongside 1. and 12. SS-Panzer Divisions *Leibstandarte* and *Hitlerjugend*, the division made good initial progress; but the Germans were now so seriously weakened that they no longer had the strength, ammunition or fuel to exploit such penetrations. The division gradually retreated towards Dochamps-Lon, fighting several rearguard actions around Salmchateau. By late December, *Hohenstaufen* had only 30 tanks left and some of its Panzergrenadier battalions were reduced to barely company strength. As the offensive crumbled Hitler ordered the withdrawal of his élite Waffen-SS units, which he planned to use for his next insane project: a final offensive in the East. *Hohenstaufen* was withdrawn from the line on 24 January 1945.

Hungary, 1945

After the briefest rest the division moved to Hungary at the beginning of March, serving under II SS-Panzerkorps of Dietrich's VI SS-Panzerarmee in Operation *Frühlingswachsen*, a counter-offensive around Lake Balaton with the objective of retaking Budapest and vital Hungarian oilfields, lost to the Red Army the previous month. By now *Hohenstaufen*'s personnel losses had largely been made up, in numbers at least (drafts of replacements now even included Ukrainian conscripts who were unable to speak German); but it was still well understrength in armour and artillery. The spring thaw came early in 1945, and the ground, expected to be iron-hard for the SS heavy armour, was a slushy bog. As the date of the offensive approached, Hitler's paranoid fear that the Soviets would discover his plans had forbidden reconnaissance patrols being sent out lest this forewarn the enemy. He had also forbidden the approach of large numbers of vehicles towards the start lines, thus leaving huge numbers of men to march up to 11 miles through boggy terrain to reach their jumping-off points. The troops were cold, wet and exhausted before the battle even began; and in fact Soviet intelligence had been aware of German intentions long before the attack opened on 6 March.

Almost immediately the advance began to bog down in the unseasonally soft ground. The equipment, leadership and professionalism of the Red Army had improved exponentially since the heady days of the German advance into Russia in 1941; now the weakened Waffen-SS divisions struggled to make headway against a very powerful and determined enemy. The Soviets launched a massive counter-attack on 16 March, and in little more than a week the German front lines had been torn apart, with the Red Army punching through gaps up to 60 miles wide. Abandoning hundreds of tanks and heavy vehicles that had bogged down in the mud, the Germans were forced onto the retreat into Austria, to the very gates of Vienna.



This major is SS-Sturmbannführer Egon Skalka, divisional medical officer of the *Hohenstaufen* Division. Skalka was instrumental in arranging the truce during the battle for Arnhem, which resulted in the lives of many wounded British paratroopers being saved. (Josef Charita)

It was during this offensive that an incident occurred which was to be the breaking point for the loyalty of many Waffen-SS soldiers. On his way to visit the headquarters of *Hohenstaufen*, Gen Hermann Balck, commander of VI. Armee, spotted soldiers whom he took to be Waffen-SS fleeing. On reaching the division's field headquarters, he raged at SS-Brigadeführer Stadler for this supposed cowardice by Waffen-SS soldiers. The divisional commander convinced Balck that the men he had seen could not have been from *Hohenstaufen*, so Balck simply blamed the *Leibstandarte* instead. The rumour got back to Hitler himself via the commander of Heeresgruppe Süd, Gen Wöhler, who was happy to imply that the Waffen-SS was no longer reliable. Hitler, predictably, flew into one of his famous rages, and demanded that these élite units were to be stripped of their distinctive cuffbands.

There is a well-known but apocryphal story that Hitler was subsequently sent a chamber pot filled with the hard-won decorations of the Waffen-SS troops, and tied with the cuffband of the 17. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Götz von Berlichingen* (Berlichingen was a medieval knight famed for telling a German bishop to 'kiss my arse'). Although there is no real evidence that this episode ever happened, it is perhaps indicative of the insulted fury felt by these troops that such stories arose.

By now *Hohenstaufen* had almost ceased to exist as a cohesive entity, being reduced to a number of small independent battlegroups fighting rearguard actions as they slowly retreated into Austria. Remarkably, however, despite having been torn to pieces in the disastrous Lake Balaton offensive, by late April the division had once again received sufficient replacements to bring it almost up to strength – though largely with virtually untrained personnel, including 17-year-olds barely out of school.

Although Hitler committed suicide on 30 April, and Berlin surrendered on 2 May, the beginning of that month found the division in new positions on the River Elbe, intent on preventing US troops from crossing it eastwards. This river was in fact the agreed demarcation line between Soviet troops advancing from the east and US troops approaching from the west. Not surprisingly, *Hohenstaufen's* commander was intent on getting his men onto the western bank when hostilities ceased; their future if they were taken prisoner by the Soviets would be extremely bleak. Tentative contact was established with the approaching Americans; on 7 May the German surrender document was signed, including among its conditions that the surrender would only be accepted of German units that were on the western side of the demarcation line on 8 May – any attempting to cross after that date would be handed over to the Soviets.

SS-Brigadeführer Stadler was determined that his men would go into captivity as a disciplined military unit; accordingly, after Stadler had reported to the American HQ his divisional units marched past in review – much to the astonishment of GIs accustomed to disheartened and bedraggled prisoners only too happy that their war was over. Along



The cuffband of 9. SS-Panzer Division *Hohenstaufen* was manufactured only in machine-woven BeVo style, but subtle variations in manufacture may be found, including one rare example in which the bottom of the letter 's' joins to the preceding 'n'. All original 'Hohenstaufen' cufftitles are sought-after collectors' items.

OPPOSITE This excellent study shows an SS-Hauptsturmführer in typical service dress, with the machine-woven 'Fruntsberg' cuffband. Interestingly, this infantry captain wears an Army rather than an SS-pattern sleeve eagle. (Steve Brindley)



ABOVE This SS-Sturmmann or lance-corporal of armoured troops wears a field-grey Army issue M1943 cap with one-piece Army insignia; and the upper badge from a pre-war SS 'Schutzmütze' Panzer beret as a sleeve eagle on his black vehicle uniform. The 'Frundsberg' cufftitle is just visible. (Josef Charita)



with its sister formation, *Frundsberg*, the *Hohenstaufen* division had truly earned its first class combat reputation.

Special insignia

Cuffband

The only special insignia worn by this division was the cuffband with the title '*Hohenstaufen*', manufactured only in BeVo style in machine-woven rayon. However, at least three minor variants are known to exist, relating to subtle differences in the exact characteristics of the lettering.

10. SS-PANZER DIVISION *FRUNDSBERG*

Designations

February 1943	10. SS-Division
April 1943	SS-Panzergranadier Division <i>Karl der Grosse</i>
November 1943	10. SS-Panzer Division <i>Frundsberg</i>

Commanders

Jan-? 1943 SS-Standartenführer Lucian Lippert; *May-Nov 1943* SS-Brigadeführer Lothar Debes; *Nov 1943-Apr 1944* SS-Gruppenführer Karl Fischer von Treuenfeld; *May 1944-Apr 1945* SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel; *May 1945* SS-Obersturmbannführer Franz Roestel

Principal elements

SS-Panzergranadier Regiment 21; SS-Panzergranadier Regiment 22; SS-Panzer Regiment 10 *Langemark*; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 10; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 10; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 10; SS-Flak Abteilung 10; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 10; SS-Panzer Pionier Bataillon 10

Campaigns

The order authorising the creation of this division was signed in December 1942, and the new formation was raised from February 1943, formed from drafts of 18-year-old Reichsdeutsche conscripts around a core of experienced leaders. During its six months' training and working up in France it was initially given the title *Karl der Grosse* (i.e. commemorating the 9th century Emperor Charlemagne); but in October 1943, Hitler signed orders up-grading it to a Panzer division and renaming it *Frundsberg*, the change becoming effective on 20 November. The honour title commemorated Georg von Frundsberg (1473-1528), a famous German commander of Landsknecht mercenaries in the service of Holy Roman Emperors Maximilian I and Charles V.⁹

The division's first year closely paralleled that of the *Hohenstaufen* Division, mostly being taken up by formation and training in various

⁹ The order of the day of 4 Nov 1943 paid fulsome tribute to Frundsberg in the name of the Führer, expressing the intention to raise this almost forgotten commander from oblivion. As with so many historical figures, Frundsberg's claim to heroic status does not stand up to much examination. He finally died of a stroke while trying to quell a mutiny by his unpaid mercenaries.



IM NAMEN DES FÜHRERS

VERLEIHE ICH
DEM

44-Sturmmann
Werner P l a t h
3./44-Pz.Aufkl.Abt.10

DAS EISERNE KREUZ 2. KLASSE

Div.Gef.St. , 9. 9. 19 44



Harmel

44-Brigadeführer und
Generalmajor der Waffen-44

(DIENSTRAD UND DIENSTSTELLUNG)

Award document for the Iron Cross 2nd Class to an SS-Sturmmann from SS-Panzer Aukklärungs Abteilung 10. Note the ink stamp at bottom left - '10. SS-Panz. Div. Frundsberg'; and the signature of the divisional commander, Heinz Harmel.

locations in southern and western France under Heeresgruppe D. In October 1943 the formation of a new VII SS-Panzerkorps was ordered, grouping *Frundsberg* together with another new formation, 17. SS-Panzergrenadier Division *Götz von Berlichingen*, for whose nucleus the 10. Division had to surrender part of its artillery and the motorcycle companies from its Panzer-grenadier regiments.

In March 1944, as part of II SS-Panzerkorps, the incomplete *Frundsberg* was sent with *Hohenstaufen* to the Eastern Front to counter the great Soviet advance which had steam-rolled over Army Group Centre and threatened the Polish frontier, trapping German forces - including 1. SS-Panzer Division *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* and a battlegroup from 2. SS-Pz Div *Das Reich* - in the area around Tarnopol. Still without the PzKw V Panthers of its Panzer regiment's I Abteilung, the division assembled with the rest of II SS-Panzerkorps under Armeegruppe Nordukraine, and went into action for the first time in early April. Fierce fighting achieved a breakthrough at Buczacz on 6 April, and *Frundsberg* linked up with their beleaguered Waffen-SS comrades of 1. Panzerarmee. *Frundsberg* remained in the line, seeing heavy combat on the Seret (Strypa)

river and in the Tarnopol-Kovel region. Halted by units of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the division then spent some weeks in static defensive actions on the Bug river. On 12 June, II SS-Panzerkorps was withdrawn from the Russian Front and rushed west to respond to the Normandy landings, its personnel and equipment filling 67 trains.

Normandy, 1944

The division arrived in France on 18 June, but the difficulties of daylight movement under skies ruled by the Allied tactical air forces delayed its arrival at the Normandy front - with a strength of around 13,500 men - until 25 June. Five days later *Frundsberg* was thrown into action to halt the British 2nd Army's Operation 'Epsom'; the division saw intense combat around the strategic Hill 112, suffering heavy casualties.

A British operation codenamed 'Jupiter', tasked with the recapture of high ground around Hill 112, was launched on 10 July and made some initial progress before being driven back by Tigers from the II SS-Panzerkorps heavy tank battalion (schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 102). The British threw in a further attack and took the summit once again; but at nightfall the British tanks withdrew, leaving the infantry unsupported, to be thrown back yet again by a German counter-attack under cover of darkness. So great was the confusion over which side controlled what ground that at one point the British came under heavy attack by Allied aircraft.

On 15 July, as *Hohenstaufen* was withdrawn into reserve, *Fruntsberg* was left to cover the entire sector, and was driven off part of Hill 113, just north of Evrecy, by units of 15th (Scottish) Division. They were brought under heavy fire from Tiger tanks on Hill 112, and the reappearance of *Hohenstaufen* made the British position even more tenuous. Nevertheless, they hung on to the area they had seized on Hill 113 while the Tigers of sSS-Pz Abt 102 and a battalion from SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 21 remained firmly in control of Hill 112, until finally relieved by the Army's 271. Infanterie Division. *Fruntsberg*, having now lost well over 2,000 men since the beginning of July, was then withdrawn for a brief period of rest.

On 2 August the division was back in action, when a Kampfgruppe successfully held most of Hill 188 against a British attack and destroyed 20 tanks in the process. The next day the remainder of the division arrived, threw back the British units that had established a foothold on Hill 188, and took nearby Hill 301 to form a defence line between the two high points. *Fruntsberg* was almost immediately ordered to disengage, and on 6 August the division was committed to an attack on British units north of Chênedollé. They seized two prominent high points, Hills 242 and 224, only to be driven back by shellfire and air attacks.

Moving thereafter to Mortain on the American front, *Fruntsberg* was to become the corps reserve for XLVII Panzerkorps. Elements had to be committed to action near Barenton almost immediately, however, to block American probing attacks. Instead of being committed to a counter-offensive, *Fruntsberg* found itself being pushed eastwards via Domfront and Fromental as the Germans pulled back to defend Argentan. By 19 August the division was right in the middle of the Falaise Pocket. It was comparatively fortunate in being one of the formations which did manage to escape over the River Dives before the rapidly narrowing gap at Chambois was finally closed by the US, Canadian and Free Polish armour. The division then retreated north-east to the River Seine, crossing at Oissel between 25 and 27 August by means of two bridges it had seized, fending off attempts by other retreating units to use them until all its own troops had crossed to safety.

Arnhem, 1944

From the Seine crossings *Fruntsberg* moved on to the Somme and took up positions between Bray and Peronne. After defensive fighting against the advancing British the division pulled back towards Cambrai, and ultimately into Holland to a rest area between Arnhem and Nijmegen. It had been intended that *Hohenstaufen* be returned to Germany for a full refit, handing over its heavy equipment to *Fruntsberg* to make up some of the latter's combat losses; but the arrival of the British 1st Airborne Division on 17 September quickly sent the division back into action. While *Hohenstaufen* was tasked with holding Arnhem town and blocking the advance of the British airborne troops from the west, *Fruntsberg* was given the mission of defending the Waal bridge at Nijmegen and blocking the Allied overland attack from the south.

One of the most spectacular incidents at Arnhem bridge involved a *Hohenstaufen* unit temporarily under the command of

SS-Obersturmführer Erwin Bachmann, who as a first lieutenant commanded I Abteilung, SS-Panzer Regiment 10 *Fruntsberg* – the divisional tank regiment's Panther battalion. Bachmann was awarded the Knight's Cross on 10 February 1945 for his leadership of the battalion on the Western Front.



the *Fruntsberg* Division. The armoured reconnaissance battalion SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 9, under SS-Hauptsturmführer Gräbner, had already crossed the Arnhem bridge southwards when news of the Allied attacks arrived, and raced to secure the road through Nijmegen. On finding the defence of the Nijmegen bridge well organised, it had returned to Arnhem, and on 18 September it attempted to cross the bridge northwards again and seize the northern end, now held by LtCol John Frost's 2nd Parachute Battalion. With a mixture of armoured cars, armoured personnel carriers and other light vehicles, Gräbner rushed the bridge, only to be met with a hail of fire from the British paratroopers. Many light armoured vehicles were knocked out by PIATs, and Gräbner himself, leading from the front as always, was among those killed.

SS troops ensconced on the southern bank and in brickworks near the southern end of the bridge were able to keep up suppressing fire on British movements on the northern bank. Cut off from reinforcements and running out of ammunition, the survivors of Frost's few hundred paratroopers were forced to surrender on 21 September after three days and four nights of bitter fighting. *Fruntsberg* units then moved to their allotted task of supporting the German defences at Nijmegen, and later slowing the advance of the British XXX Corps armour after it crossed the Waal. Considerable casualties were inflicted on both sides during stubborn German defensive fighting. The Free Polish paratroop brigade dropped just south-west of Arnhem on the south bank, and the XXX Corps units who eventually linked up with them, were unable to reach the survivors of 1st Airborne Division at Oosterbeek; these were eventually forced to withdraw over the river by night, leaving their wounded to surrender on 29 September.

The Rhineland and the East, 1945

On 18 November the *Fruntsberg* Division, by this time reduced to a battlegroup after its losses in Normandy and at Arnhem, was withdrawn to Aachen in Germany for rest and refit. During December its strength was built up once again to around 15,500 men – about 75 per cent of establishment. In December 1944/January 1945 it saw action around Linnich and Geilenkirchen, and Jülich north-east of Aachen. In January it was committed along the upper reaches of the Rhine as part of Heeresgruppe Niederrhein, and was earmarked for use in the reserve forces for Unternehmen 'Nordwind'. Mid-January saw *Fruntsberg* cross the Rhine and attack in the direction of Gambenheim. Anticipating stiff resistance, the division moved very cautiously, not realising that the US units facing them had made a tactical withdrawal. On 24 January *Fruntsberg* crossed the Moder River and captured the high ground commanding the area between Hagenau and Kaltenhaus. Despite being at near full strength after its

SS-Oberschütze Rudi Splinter poses proudly in his walking-out uniform as a member of the *Fruntsberg* Division. The use of the enlisted man's service cap and the tunic collar pressed open over a shirt and necktie are typical of soldiers on leave. Despite his very junior rank Splinter was awarded the German Cross in Gold during the fighting in Normandy. Taken prisoner there, he settled in England after the war and turned his hand to farming.





FAR LEFT SS-Obersturmführer Erwin Heck, who served with the Frundsberg Division. Assigned as an instructor to the SS-Unterführerschule at Arnhem in Holland, he saw fierce combat during Operation 'Market Garden' in September 1944. Note the officer's aluminium thread crown piping to his M1943 cap.

LEFT SS-Schütze Gerd Rommel was the driver of SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel's personnel carrier. The divisional commander was known for his continuing interest in his former soldiers' welfare. Long after the war Rommel received a phone call from Gen Harmel, who had heard through the grapevine that Rommel had been hospitalised and wanted to know how he was faring.

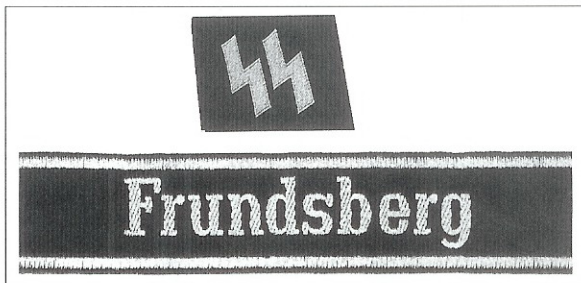
recent refit, the division met such fierce resistance that its advance faltered, and the following day orders arrived withdrawing it from the line for immediate transfer to the Eastern Front. Luckily, it had not suffered any significant level of casualties during its brief participation in 'Nordwind'.

On 10 February 1945 the division arrived at the front as the situation became ever more critical. It was committed to a German counter-offensive codenamed Unternehmen 'Sonnenwende' on 16 February as part of III SS-Panzerkorps, and for a month saw heavy combat around Stargard and Furstenwalde, before being pulled back across the Oder into Stettin for a brief respite. It then joined Heeresgruppe 'Weichsel' as part of the Army Group reserve.

At the end of March the divisional commander, Gen Heinz Harmel, was recalled from the front for hospital treatment in Berlin. Around this time *Frundsberg* was ordered to move to the Dresden area, but while still en route was diverted back to the front to counter a Soviet breakthrough on the Oder front.

In mid-April *Frundsberg* was encircled by Soviet forces near Spremberg. The division was fragmented, but despite its perilous position, orders were received from the Führerhauptquartier for *Frundsberg* to close the gap in the German lines by immediately attacking. Harmel realised that carrying out these orders would be suicidal; he decided instead to break out of the encirclement and move towards German forces massed to the south of Berlin. The break-out was achieved, but only at the cost of further fragmentation of the remnants of the division. Some did manage to re-form and take up defensive positions north-west of Dresden. Harmel's refusal to obey the insane order to attack at Spremberg led to his being ordered to report to Generalfeldmarschall Schörner, a fanatical Nazi, who relieved Harmel of his command. (In the circumstances this was a light punishment – at that stage of the war others had been executed for lesser 'crimes'.)

Under 4. Panzerarmee of Army Group Centre, the remnants of the division were led by SS-Obersturmbannführer Franz Roestel in the last few vain fights against the advancing Russians, but to no avail. They fell



One of the rarest and most sought-after Waffen-SS cuffbands, the 'Frundsberg' title was officially manufactured only in machine-woven rayon, BeVo style; but at least one original privately-made example is known with the inscription hand-embroidered in aluminium wire Gothic script.

back to the Elbe, crossing near Dresden and heading south. After claiming a few Soviet T-34 tanks on 7 May the last few Panzers of the *Frundsberg* Division were blown up by their crews, who then attempted to head west and avoid capture by the Soviets. Only a handful reached the relative safety of US captivity, the majority of the survivors surrendering to the Red Army at Teplitz-Schonau.

Thirteen soldiers from *Frundsberg* were decorated with the Knight's Cross. Despite its relatively brief combat career, it earned its reputation as one of the best of the Waffen-SS Divisions, fighting with great élan in the attack and stubborn fortitude in defence. The bonds forged during war have survived to this day; a thriving Old Comrades association still meets regularly, and until his death in 2000 Heinz Harmel remained a father-figure to his men, taking an intense interest in the welfare of every surviving soldier of his division.

Special insignia

Cuffband

The only special insignia worn was the cuffband bearing the divisional title. The official band was in BeVo form, machine-woven in rayon thread, and had standard Latin script lettering. A unique original example is known with the inscription executed in hand-embroidered aluminium wire Gothic script on a black wool band with aluminium braid edging; this is assumed to have been a privately commissioned piece.

* * *

By the time the first ten Waffen-SS divisions had been raised in 1943 it was clear that there had already been a watering-down of the élite quality of the Waffen-SS combat units. Of the first five divisions, only 4. SS-Polizei-Division was of relatively low quality, the others being generally regarded as first rate combat formations, and accorded the grudging respect (for their fighting qualities, at least) of not only the Wehrmacht but even their opponents. Of the next five formations, only *Hohenstaufen* and *Frundsberg* could be considered as first class. Not only did these two Panzer divisions fight with considerable skill and determination against often overwhelming enemy forces; on occasions, such as the battle of Arnhem, they even showed themselves capable of a degree of chivalry towards their enemies.

Nord, an extremely poor quality organisation in its earliest days, did improve substantially, but never reached the levels of combat efficiency attained by the premier Waffen-SS divisions. Both *Prinz Eugen* and *Florian Geyer* spent much of their short careers on brutal 'anti-partisan' operations, and were implicated in appalling atrocities. Both suffered crippling losses when faced by hardened Red Army combat units; their remnants fought hard at the end, but they had little alternative, given their predictable fate if captured.

This was a pattern set to continue and deteriorate as Himmler strove to expand his SS empire. Of the remaining Waffen-SS divisions still to be covered in this series, the truly élite units were to be the exception rather than the rule. Many were mediocre at best, and several were utterly without merit.

THE PLATES

A: 6. SS-GEBIGRGS DIVISION NORD

A1: SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 6 Reinhard Heydrich, c1943

This captain of mountain infantry wears normal service dress consisting of the field-grey M1936 Army-style field blouse in officer quality, and an officer's *Schirmmütze* service cap with silver (aluminium) twist double chin cords. The vast majority of examples of this form of headdress were piped in white for all branches of service, but a few, as here, carried piping in appropriate *Waffenfarbe* colour, in this case the green of the mountain troops, which also appears, over black, in the double underlay of his shoulder boards. The tunic collar, with Army-style dark green facing, bears the standard SS-rune patch on the right and his rank on the left, both edged with silver twist cord. On his left sleeve is the universal SS-style eagle and swastika national insignia in officer quality, and on the forearm is a cuffband with the regimental title machine-woven in flat wire thread (note that the regimental number did not change from 6 to 12 until after October 1943). The Mountain Troops' badge on his upper right sleeve is obscured here – see A2. He wears a black leather belt with the SS pattern officer's buckle clasp, and a hard-shell P38 Walther pistol holster. His decorations are both grades of the Iron Cross, and the Infantry Assault Badge.¹⁰

A2: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 12 Michael Gaissmair, 1945

This sergeant, carrying an MP40 sub-machine gun and its canvas triple magazine pouches, wears the M1944 field blouse, close in appearance to the British battledress blouse, and manufactured in shoddy material giving an odd brownish-grey appearance. The headgear is a one-button M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze* ('universal field cap') with the late war one-piece insignia, bearing the eagle and death's-head on a single trapezoidal patch. All of his tunic insignia are machine woven, including the regimental cuffband 'Michael Gaissmair'. Note the Mountain Troops' Edelweiss badge on his right sleeve; see A3 for the equivalent cap badge.

A3: SS-Gebirgsjäger, c1944

This private wears the white/camouflage reversible, padded winter combat dress of parka, overtrousers and mittens over his M1943 field-grey service uniform (see text under H1). On the left side of his two-button M1943 cap can be seen the embroidered Edelweiss tradition insignia of the SS mountain troops. His slung weapon is the standard Mauser Kar98k rifle, and he has an M1939 'egg' grenade hooked to an

Hermann Fegelein, commander of the SS-Kavallerie Brigade in 1941–42 and of the Division in 1943, is seen here as an SS-Brigadeführer, displaying the 'Florian Geyer' cuffband. Amongst his other decorations can be seen the German Cross in Gold and the Close Combat Clasp in Silver. Fegelein married Gretl, a sister of Hitler's mistress Eva Braun; but this did not prevent his execution by SS guards in the yard of the Reichs Chancellory in Berlin on 29 April 1945. As Heinrich Himmler's liaison officer in the Führerbunker, he was doomed by Hitler's discovery of 'Loyal Heinrich's' attempts to conduct secret surrender negotiations with the western Allies. (Josef Charita)

ammunition pouch of his standard black leather rifle equipment. He carries a regulation issue set of skis and ski sticks.

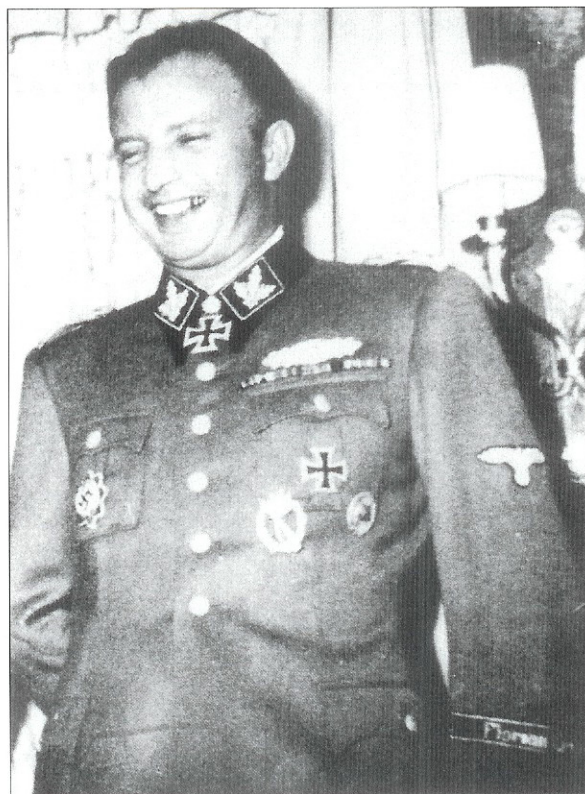
A4: SS-Scharführer, SS-Schi Bataillon 502 Norge, 1943

Also serving with the *Nord* Division was a battalion of Norwegian volunteer ski troops; this unit remained in Norway when *Nord* was transferred to the Western Front. This staff sergeant wears the all-field-grey M1943 field blouse, displaying the usual shoulder straps of rank with branch of service piping, the SS sleeve eagle above a shield-shaped Norwegian flag insignia, and the machine-woven unit cufftitle 'Norge'. Note the *Tresse* collar braid, worn by all senior NCO ranks from SS-Unterscharführer up. His headgear is the traditional mountain troops' *Bergmütze*, easily distinguished from the *Einheitsfeldmütze* by its shorter peak; he wears two-piece insignia, with the eagle on the left side as often seen.

B: 7. SS-FREIWILLIGEN GEBIRGS DIVISION PRINZ EUGEN

B1: SS-Gebirgsjäger, SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 13, 1943

This private in combat dress wears the M1940 reversible SS camouflage smock in its distinctive 'plane tree' pattern, the 'spring/summer' side outwards (all such 'pattern' names are postwar collectors' terms); and a matching first type helmet cover. The visible collar of his M1943 field blouse displays the Odal-rune patch unique to this division. Mountain trousers are worn with puttees, and mountain boots with their distinctive thick, cleated soles. Armament is the basic



¹⁰ For all such distinctions, see MAA 365, *World War II German Battle Insignia*



SS-Obersturmbannführer Waldemar Fegelein, brother of the divisional commander, also received the Knight's Cross while serving with Florian Geyer, in his case in December 1943 as commander of SS-Kavallerie Regiment 2. The younger Fegelein also wears above his left breast pocket the *Nahkampfspange*, awarded for close quarter combat.

Kar98k rifle and a couple of egg grenades. On his back is slung the canvas M1931 mountain troops' rucksack, its shoulder straps hooked to his ammunition pouches at the front; behind his right hip the 'bread bag' haversack and M1931 water canteen are just visible.

B2: SS-Obergruppenführer Artur Phleps, summer 1943

The former commander of the *Prinz Eugen*, portrayed shortly after his promotion from SS-Gruppenführer to full general's rank and command of V SS Mountain Corps. The insignia of his new rank are displayed on the pressed-open dark green collar of his M1936 Army officer's style tunic, flanking the Knight's Cross worn at the throat of his shirt. Standard Waffen-SS general officer's shoulder boards of interwoven silver and gold cord on pale grey underlay display the two silver 'pips' of this rank. In place of the Odal-rune right collar patch worn by all ranks of the division below SS-Standartenführer (the colonel's grade, at and above which paired patches with oakleaf motifs were worn), Phleps displayed the rune – uniquely – in silver on a silver-edged

black disc on his left sleeve just below the national insignia; he retained this after relinquishing his divisional command. Note also the divisional cuffband bearing the title 'Prinz Eugen' machine-woven in flat wire thread; and the SS-runes badge worn on the left breast, a privilege of all members of the division's German and Austrian cadre. His decorations include the buttonhole ribbon and clasp showing award of both 1914 and 1939 Iron Cross 2nd Class. Phleps wears standard mountain trousers, puttees and boots and – though often seen wearing a *Bergmütze* – is portrayed here in the general officer's *Schirmmütze* with black velvet band and aluminium thread piping.

B3: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Freiwilligen Gebirgsjäger Regiment 13 Artur Phleps, 1945

A senior NCO wearing regulation M1943 service dress, with the M1943 'universal field cap' that eventually replaced the *Bergmütze* even in mountain units – note the Edelweiss badge. We illustrate, speculatively, the 'Artur Phleps' cufftitle awarded to this regiment in November 1944 after the former divisional commander's death. This cuffband was certainly manufactured, but no wartime photographs of it in use have yet surfaced.

C: SS CAVALRY

C1: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Kavallerie Division, 1943

This typical SS cavalryman wears the M1940 SS camouflage smock in the so-called 'palm tree' pattern which appears in a number of photographs of this formation; the skirt and wrists have been tucked up inside the elasticated bands for convenience. His camouflaged M1942 field cap shows the 'spring/summer' side of the 'plane tree' pattern; although subdued insignia were produced for this cap they are seldom seen in photographs. As a squad or platoon leader he has 6x30 field binoculars, and an MP40 sub-machine gun, the single set of pouches balanced on his belt by a map case. The belt is supported by pre-war cavalry-type Y-straps of SS issue.

C2: SS-Rottenführer, 8. SS-Kavallerie Division 'Florian Geyer', 1944

This junior NCO equipped for foot combat is indistinguishable from an infantryman except by the yellow piping on his shoulder straps. He wears an M1942 steel helmet (without insignia decals); M1943 service dress, and late war ankle boots with canvas gaiters. His cuffband bears the divisional title 'Florian Geyer', authorised in 1944 and officially manufactured in BeVo machine-woven style. His weapon is the Gewehr G43 semi-automatic rifle, but he has only acquired two of the special canvas magazine pouches; a late war 'stick' grenade is thrust into his belt. He wears infantry Y-straps; just visible behind his left hip are the standard infantry entrenching tool and bayonet, and a canvas sling across his chest shows that he still carries the standard gasmask canister.

C3: SS-Obersturmführer, SS-Kavallerie Division, 1942-43

This captain's *Schirmmütze*, Army-style M1936 service dress and shoulder straps all show the golden-yellow *Waffenfarbe* of the cavalry branch. He wears riding breeches with leather-reinforced inner legs and seat, and officer's riding boots with strapped spurs. The cuffband has the hand-embroidered aluminium wire inscription

'SS-Kavallerie-Division' in Gothic script. Such bands are known but were unauthorised private order items of local manufacture, perhaps in occupied Czechoslovakia. Even in such an ostensibly disciplined organisation as the Waffen-SS such personal affectations were known, particularly on walking-out uniforms.

D: 9. SS-PANZER DIVISION HOHENSTAUFEN

D1: SS-Sturmbannführer, 1943-44

For his duties in barracks this major on the divisional staff wears the M1936 style tunic in conjunction with long straight-legged trousers, the outer seams of which are piped in infantry white, and black shoes. Headgear is the regulation white-piped officer's *Schirmmütze*. The newly authorised divisional cufftitle 'Hohenstaufen' was machine-woven in BeVo style for all ranks. When the straight trousers were worn the belt was discarded. Although he displays the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and a Wound Badge, his main decoration is the War Merit Cross with Swords, awarded for merit in military but non-combat service.

D2: SS-Scharführer, SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 19, 1944

A combination of clothing known from period photographs, worn here by one of the veteran NCOs drafted in as cadre for the teenage soldiers who formed the bulk of this division. He retains his old *Feldmütze* or '*Schiffchen*' despite its official replacement with the peaked M1943 cap. His M1942 field blouse, with field-grey collar but retaining the scallop-cut pocket flaps, is worn with 'pea pattern' camouflage trousers from the M1944 *getarnter Drilllichanzug*. This non-reversible two-piece uniform was supposed to replace not only the earlier pullover camouflage smocks but also various types of fatigue dress, and was produced in herringbone till to a single pattern, instead of different 'seasonal' shades.

D3: SS-Rottenführer, 1943-44

Perhaps on sentry duty in winter 1943-44 not long before the division was sent east, this junior NCO of Panzergrenadiers wears the field-grey greatcoat, worn on this occasion with full insignia comprising collar patches, shoulder straps, sleeve eagle, chevrons and cuffband. This was one extreme; at the other was a complete absence of insignia on late war greatcoats, and almost any combination in between can be found in wartime photographs. The steel helmet still bears the right side decal.

The divisional commander of *Prinz Eugen*, SS-Gruppenführer Artur Phleps – see Plate B2. Phleps was born in Siebenburgen, part of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, and had served with distinction during World War I. After this part of Transylvania was ceded to Romania he served with the Romanian mountain troops, achieving general rank. His death was announced as having taken place when his aircraft was shot down on 21 September 1944. It later transpired that in fact, while on a forward reconnaissance with his adjutant and a driver, Phleps ran into a Soviet armoured column and was captured. When the column came under attack by German aircraft, Phleps and his companions were executed and buried in a shallow grave. Their bodies were discovered later, identified by the general's rank insignia and Knight's Cross. In this portrait he wears a Croatian award at the throat, and the *Bergmütze* which he habitually wore in the field.

E: 10. SS-PANZER DIVISION FRUNDSBERG

E1: SS-Brigadeführer of Armoured Troops, 1944

Based on photographs of the divisional commander, MajGen Heinz Harmel, this SS-Brigadeführer wears full Waffen-SS Panzer black vehicle uniform, with the same general officers' service cap as worn by B2. The SS Panzer jacket, with its vertical front edge, has the collar piped in aluminium twist cord, and displays regulation general officers' collar patches and shoulder straps of this rank. A hand-embroidered bullion sleeve eagle is worn, but the divisional cufftitle 'Frundsberg' is the all-ranks' machine-woven rayon type. Decorations are the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves worn over a black necktie at the throat, a silver Close Combat Clasp and the Iron Cross 1st Class on the left breast, and the German Cross in Gold on the right. Black Panzer trousers are worn, buttoned and tied over ankle boots; and he carries 10x50 binoculars.

E2: SS-Grenadier, 1943-44

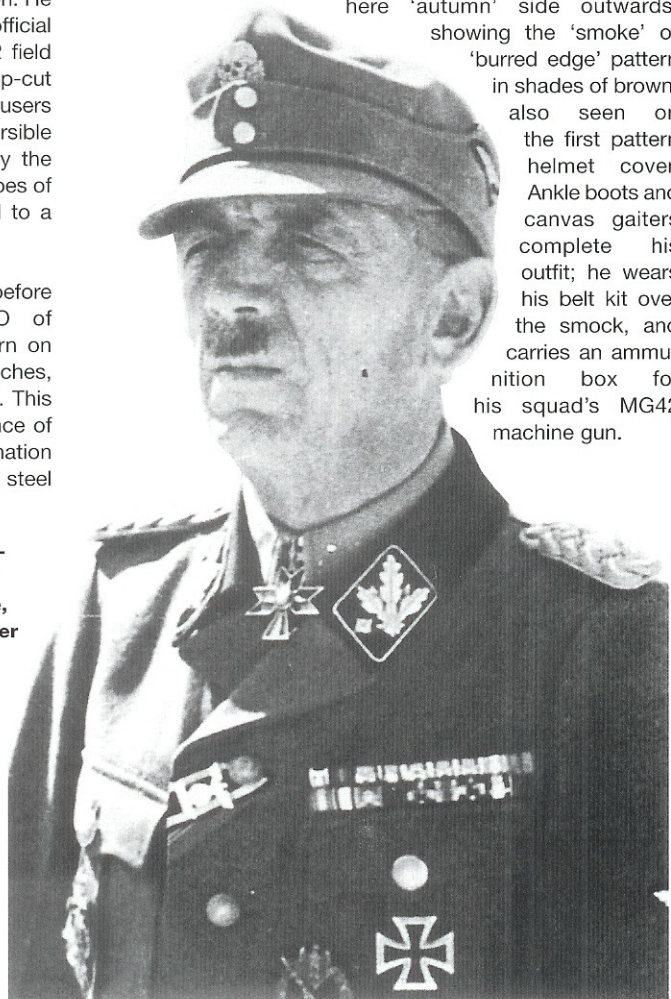
This enlisted man from one of the division's Panzergrenadier regiments wears a combination frequently seen in colder months. The field-grey greatcoat (here without insignia) is worn underneath a camouflage smock – in this case, the first version of the M1942 smock, with horizontal skirt pockets and foliage attachment loops at the shoulders and upper

sleeves; the reversible smock is worn here 'autumn' side outwards, showing the 'smoke' or 'burred edge' pattern

in shades of brown,

also seen on the first pattern helmet cover.

Ankle boots and canvas gaiters complete his outfit; he wears his belt kit over the smock, and carries an ammunition box for his squad's MG42 machine gun.





An early photograph of Heinz Harmel as an SS-Sturmbannführer; note the use of collar patches without the usual officer's silver twist edging. (Gary Wood)

E3: SS-Untersturmführer, SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 10, 1944

This second lieutenant of the armoured assault gun battalion of the *Fruntsberg* Division wears the field-grey version of the 'special clothing for armoured troops', cut identically to E1's black tank troops' version. His shoulder straps have artillery red *Waffenfarbe* over black underlay; the collar patches of service and rank are conventional, as are the General Assault Badge proper to this branch, the sleeve eagle and divisional cuffband. Perhaps for convenience in the confines of an assault gun's fighting compartment he still wears, rather than the regulation peaked M1943 cap, the officer's silver-piped M1939 version of the old '*Schiffchen*' field cap. An Army pattern officer's leather belt with double claw buckle supports the holster for his P38 pistol.

F: EASTERN FRONT, 1941-43

F1: SS-Unterscharführer despatch rider, 1941

This illustration shows a despatch rider, perhaps of the *Nord* Division, c1941. He wears the rubberised motorcyclist's coat, with the flaps buttoned between the legs for convenience when mounted on his machine. Only the shoulder straps reveal his rank. His goggles are pushed up on his M1935 steel helmet – the left hand decal, with its red background shield, is just visible. He carries heavy motorcyclist's gauntlets. Due to its compact size, the MP40 was popular with motorcycle troops.

F2: SS-Obersturmbannführer, winter surcoat, 1942-43

One of the least elegant items of clothing worn by the German military was the surcoat, distinguishable from the greatcoat by its deeper collar, ankle length, and slash 'hand-warmer' pockets over the ribs. Late war examples of this large, baggy overcoat were made of inferior material which tended to lose its shape once it became wet. This lieutenant-



A fine study of Harmel in black Panzer uniform and wearing the insignia of an SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der *Waffen-SS*; see Plate E1. After his dismissal from command of the *Fruntsberg* Division for disobeying one of Hitler's insane 'no retreat' orders, from 29 April 1945 he led a mixed *Kampfgruppe* comprising remnants of 24. SS-Division, elements of an SS mountain troops training battalion, and personnel from the SS-Junkerschule at Klagenfurt. With these troops he held open a mountain route between Yugoslavia and Austria, allowing thousands of German troops to escape the vengeance of Tito's partisans. Harmel finally surrendered to British troops on 8 May.

colonel wears a better quality earlier example, however, complete with contrasting dark green collar and both shoulder straps and arm eagle (but no collar patches). The regulation white-piped *Schirmmütze* is worn, as is the black leather belt with circular SS officer's clasp, and a P08 pistol holster; he has a pair of 10x50 binoculars slung on his chest.

F3: SS-Hauptscharführer Kriegsbericht, c1944

It is thanks to the efforts of the prolific photographers of the SS war correspondents' branch that so many wartime photos of the *Waffen-SS* in action are available to us today. The parent SS-Kriegsbericht Abteilung, later *Standarte*, was awarded the honour title 'Kurt Eggers' after an SS-Panzer lieutenant, a former editor of the SS magazine *Das Schwarze Korps*, who was killed in Russia in 1941. A separate SS-KB (or Propaganda) Kompanie was attached

to each SS corps, and a platoon to each division (e.g. SS-KB Kp (mot) 105, with V SS-Gebirgskorps; and SS-KB Zug 10 with 10.SS-Pz Div *Fruntsberg*).

Photographs normally show senior NCO/warrant officer ranks. This warrant officer, sightseeing behind the lines with his Leica at the ready, wears M1942 service dress, with the lemon-yellow signals branch *Waffenfarbe* authorised for this department. The cufftitle bears the name 'Kurt Eggers'; two photographs ascribed to January and August 1943 show earlier types, respectively 'SS-KB-Abtl.' and 'SS-Kriegsberichter'. He wears 'Kielhose' trousers with marching boots, and sports a jaunty enlisted ranks' *Schirmmütze* with the chinstrap removed.

G: TRAINING SCHOOLS

G1: SS-Oberscharführer instructor, SS-Junkerschule Tölz, c1941

This NCO instructor at the *Waffen-SS* officer's training school wears a fine quality M1936 style field blouse and a regulation white-piped enlisted ranks' service cap. His shoulder straps, piped in infantry white, bear the white metal letters 'JS' over 'T' – the initials of the academy at Bad Tölz; and his cuffband displays its name in Gothic script, 'SS-Schule Tölz'.

G2: SS-Standartenoberjunker, SS-Junkerschule Tölz, c1942

Although his appearance is more impressive than that of the instructor, this veteran senior NCO is in fact an officer candidate undergoing instruction. His uniform and insignia show a mixture of officer and NCO features. He wears an officer quality M1936 style tunic with dark green collar, his particular status being displayed by the silver twist cord officer edging to his SS-Hauptscharführer collar patches; the officer's peaked cap with aluminium braid chin cords; and the officer's belt. His veteran status is indicated by the ribbon of the Russian winter 1941/42 campaign medal; his former division, by the 1.SS-Pz Div *LSSAH* cufftitle 'Adolf Hitler', beneath which he also wears the cuffband of the Bad Tölz school, but the 'JS/T' cyphers are not worn on the shoulder straps. The bronze badge on his left pocket is a non-military sports badge. Note that he also carries the M1935 officer's sword (*SS-Führerdegen*) with its silver and black braid knot (*Portepe*), slung from an internal belt; the sword was presented to officer candidates at the passing-out ceremony.

G3: SS-Unterscharführer instructor, SS-Unterführerschule Radolfzell, c1942

The uniform of this sergeant on the staff of one of the NCO training schools is differentiated from G1 by the shoulder strap letters 'US' over 'R', and the cuffband with the Gothic script title 'SS-Unterführerschule'.

G4: SS-Musiker, SS-Musikschule Braunschweig, c1941

Still wearing his Hitlerjugend brassard – a practice confirmed by photographs – this young bandsman undergoing training at the Brunswick music school wears an enlisted quality M1936 field blouse and M1940 field cap. Both collar patches show a lyre motif, and the shoulder straps are embroidered with the monogram 'MS'. The cuffband with the title 'Musikschule Braunschweig' is unusual in lacking the 'SS-' prefix.

H: EASTERN FRONT, 1944-45

H1: SS-Hauptsturmführer, winter clothing

This captain is shown wearing a fairly typical set of late war winter clothing. Over his M1936 style tunic and M1943 trousers, worn with canvas gaiters and ankle boots, he has an early example of the jacket of the M1943 reversible, padded winter clothing. This set replaced the M1942 suit of pullover fur-lined parka and overtrousers reversible from white to field-grey (see MAA 401, Plate H2). The 1943 suit was reversible from white to a number of the standard SS camouflage patterns including the so-called 'oakleaf', 'smoke' or 'burred edge' variations; this early example has an (illogical) 'spring/summer' pattern. The buttoned, double-fronted jacket had an unlined hood with a draw-cord, slanting buttoned skirt pockets, and a draw-tape at the waist. His headgear is a common form of winter cap, the body in field-grey cloth having a quilted interior and exterior flaps trimmed in rabbit fur. Insignia worn on the front flap varied; sometimes both the metal eagle and death's-head from the service cap were pinned on, but often only the latter.

H2: SS-Flak Kanonier, winter clothing

This enlisted man serves with a divisional self-propelled Flak unit, in the crew of a quadruple 2cm Flakvierling cannon mounted on an SdKfz7 halftrack, during the cold autumn months on the Eastern Front. He wears the reversible, padded winter suit, complete with mittens, with the 'autumn' camouflage pattern showing. This was more logical than making the suit reversible from white to a 'spring/summer' pattern; another feature of later manufacture suits were the large doubled reinforcement patches at the elbows and knees. The jacket's hood made it unnecessary to issue a separate helmet cover. He carries a magazine of 2cm cannon shells, and has a P38 pistol as a personal sidearm.

H3: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Fallschirmjäger Bataillon 500; Lithuania, summer 1944

Little is known about this parachute battalion, reportedly a penal unit for SS personnel who had committed disciplinary offences. A number of photographs have been published showing men of the unit during the 25 May 1944 operation against Tito's headquarters at Drvar, Yugoslavia, in which the *Prinz Eugen* Division also took part; apparently two companies were parachuted and two landed in DFS230 gliders, and the 6 June issue of *Wehrmachtbericht* reported the battalion's involvement under command of an SS-Hauptsturmführer Rybka. Other photos dated to later that summer apparently show SS paratroopers on the Baltic front near Kaunas. Although jump smocks manufactured in SS camouflage pattern were found in store at the end of the war, all photos seem to show troops wearing this standard Luftwaffe pattern complete with Luftwaffe breast eagle, and the Luftwaffe paratroopers' steel helmet. In this case the helmet bears no decals. Field-grey Fallschirmjäger trousers are worn with front-lacing jump boots; a photo from Kaunas also seems to show clefted mountain boots. This warrant officer is armed with the new selective fire Sturmgewehr 44, and has spare magazines in the large smock pockets. Since shoulder weapons could not be carried on the jump the paratroopers were still issued a holstered P38 pistol as a personal sidearm. He also carries two M1924 'stick' grenades, and the very potent Panzerfaust 60 anti-tank weapon.

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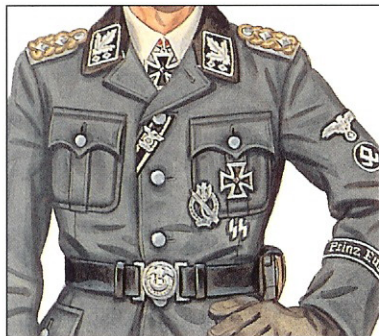
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