Men-at-Arms

The Waffen-SS (1)

1. to 5. Divisions

Gordon Williamson • Illustrated by Stephen Andrew
THE WAFFEN-SS STRUCTURE

There is no space in these pages for even a simplified summary of the complex early history of the German NSDAP (National Socialist) movement in the 1920s and 1930s. For the purposes of this text, it is sufficient to say that the combat units which had emerged by the outbreak of World War II from the overall SS political security organisation (the Schutzstaffel or ‘protection squads’) traced their origins to the early 1920s, when a small bodyguard unit for Adolf Hitler was formed within the Nazi Party’s mass uniformed organisation, the SA (Sturmabteilungen or “Brownshirts”).

In 1929 the whole SS numbered less than 500 men; by 1933 this figure had increased to some 30,000. Under the national command of Heinrich Himmler the SS, with three battalions of armed gendarmerie, provided the key personnel for the internal coup against the SA leadership carried out on 30 June 1934.

Thereafter the growth in the size and influence of the SS in most areas of German public life was massive, complicated, and virtually unchallenged. Nevertheless, at the outbreak of war in 1939 the armed units of what were mostly then termed the SS-Verfügungstruppe were still few and militarily insignificant. They were regarded by the armed forces with some suspicion, as a political gendarmerie with no true role to play on the battlefield. Early combat experience in the West, and particularly in the first year of the Russian campaign, changed that perception, leading to a number of different cycles of expansion of what was now the Waffen-SS.

By late 1943 this battle-proven organisation was fielding several complete armoured and mechanised divisions and was enjoying priority for the best-quality manpower and equipment. SS formations became the trusted spearhead of Germany’s armies on the Eastern Front, and served on every other major front except North Africa. Between early 1943 and spring 1945 the ostensible order of battle of the Waffen-SS grew from eight to no less than 38 divisions ‘on paper’ – though many of the higher numbered (mostly foreign) formations fell far below the standards set by the early divisions. A number of corps-level formations, and even one or two nominal ‘SS armies’ containing both SS and Army units, would see action in 1943–45.

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

1 See MAA 220, The SA 1927–45: Hitler’s Stormtroopers; and MAA 296, The Allgemeine-SS.
Rank structure

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

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

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

Rank insignia

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

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

The usual indication of officer ranks was twisted silver cord piping edging the patches; however, officers were occasionally known to wear patches without cord edging, so the only absolute indication of officer rank is the grade indicated.
Waffen-SS shoulder straps followed the same basic form as those of the Army. For lower ranks they were faced in black braid with either black or field-grey undersurfaces. The edge was piped in the appropriate Waffenfarbe (branch of service colour); and NCO-grade straps carried braid inner edging – initially in aluminium weave, but later in subdued grey silk. Aluminium pips indicated specific NCO ranks.

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

Officers’ straps were made with the same matt grey straight or interwoven braid as their Army equivalents. Unlike Army straps, which were set on an underlay in the appropriate Waffenfarbe, all Waffen-SS straps were on a black underlay, the Waffenfarbe being displayed as an intermediate piping between the braid and the black underlay. Rank pips were originally bronze or gilt, but aluminium examples were also used. Waffen-SS generals’ shoulder straps were made from the same interwoven silver/gold braid as those of the Army but set on pale grey rather than a bright red underlay.
Reorganised into a motorised regiment in late 1934, the Leibstandarte took part in the re-occupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss with Austria, and the occupation of the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia. In September 1939 the Leibstandarte was put to the ultimate test when it went into battle for the first time during the invasion of Poland, for which it was attached to the Army’s Panzerdivision Kempf. In action at Lodz, Warsaw and Modlin, the regiment fought well, but sustained over 400 casualties fleeing off determined attacks by Polish cavalry and infantry, which sometimes came to hand-to-hand combat.

**The West and Greece, 1940-41**

In March 1940 an artillery battalion was added in the first of many moves to increase the strength and military effectiveness of Hitler’s own ‘personal’ regiment, a unit of which he was intensely proud. During the campaign in the West the Leibstandarte acquitted itself well. It crossed the Yssel river near Zutphen, covering over 46 miles (75km) in a single day, and performing with a level of enthusiasm for battle that was to become its trademark. The Leibstandarte took part in the encirclement and seizure of Amsterdam, the unit’s satisfaction over this successful action being somewhat dampened when Luftwaffe General Kurt Student was shot and wounded by Leibstandarte soldiers who mistook him for one of the enemy. (Troops of the division are also believed to have murdered some 80 British prisoners at Wormhout on 28 May.) In recognition of its performance the Leibstandarte was given the ‘Führerstandarte’, Hitler’s personal banner, as its regimental flag.

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

**Russia, 1941-42**

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

The Leibstandarte had greatly enhanced its reputation as a first-class combat unit, drawing praise from Army generals who had formerly regarded the Waffen-SS with some disdain. The commander of III Panzerkorps is recorded as saying of the LSSAH, ‘This truly is an elite unit.’ This reputation was not achieved without cost; however, more than 5,500 of the brigade’s soldiers had become casualties.

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

**Kharkov and Kursk, 1943**

In early 1943 the Leibstandarte rushed back to the Eastern Front as Stalingrad fell and the whole military situation deteriorated. It formed part of 1 SS-Panzerkorps under Paul Hausser, tasked with preventing the city of Kharkov from falling to the Red Army. Outnumbered seven to one, Hausser refused to sacrifice his new corps just to satisfy another of Hitler’s ‘no-withdrawal’ orders, and on 15 February the city was abandoned. The capture of Kharkov had left the enemy exhausted, however, while the Germans began to regroup. The German counter-attack was launched on 25 February, and after three weeks of bitter fighting the Soviets were once again thrown out of the city; over 20,000 enemy troops were killed or wounded and over 600 Soviet tanks destroyed. The ferocity of the fighting had cost the Leibstandarte about 4,500 killed; the former Red Square in the centre of the city was renamed ‘Platz der Leibstandarte’ in honour of the division.

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

Shortly thereafter the Leibstandarte took part in the summer offensive at Kursk, where it formed the spearpoint of 4. Panzerarmee. The division fielded 100 tanks, 12 of which were the impressive new Tigers. Launching its attack on 5 July, the LSSAH made good initial progress, reaching the second line of enemy defences by the early evening of the
first day. The SS troops were involved in bitter hand-to-hand fighting as they cleared the enemy trenches. By 11 July the division had reached the River Seel, the last major obstacle before Kursk itself. On the 12th the tanks of the SS formations clashed with Soviet armour in a major action near Prokhorovka. It was the first of several engagements around this little Russian town which built up over a number of days into the biggest armoured battle in history. Over 300 German and 400 Soviet tanks were destroyed without either side gaining any decisive advantage; the battle for the Kursk salient was still in the balance.

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

By the end of the year the division was in fierce combat around Zhitomir, so furious was the fighting that by the end of February the Leibstandarte had just three operational tanks remaining on strength. The LSSAH narrowly escaped annihilation after being surrounded in the Kamencos-Podolski Pocket, but the remnants were rescued by the timely intervention of the 9. and 10. SS-Panzer Divisions, the Hohenstaufen and Freundsberg. The Leibstandarte was in a woeful condition, and in April 1944 was withdrawn to France for rest and refitting.

Normandy and the Ardennes, 1944

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

Inserted into the front lines around Caen, the LSSAH fought in many desperate defensive battles against overwhelming odds, in conditions of complete enemy dominance of the air, and often within reach of devastating Allied naval gunfire support. It took part in the attempted counter-offensive on Avranches, but was repulsed, losing large numbers of tanks to British Typhoon aircraft. By the end of August it had just managed to escape encirclement in the Falaise Pocket, but had lost all its tanks and artillery and suffered over 5,000 casualties. The division was then withdrawn to Germany for refitting, once again, the replacements received were no longer of the quality of the troops with which it began the war.

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

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

Joined now by Kampfgruppe Knittel, Peiper's advance began to falter once more; each time a potential route was identified and the Germans raced for a bridge to take them out of the Amblève valley, US resistance would suffer. On the 19th Peiper captured Stoumont after bitter fighting, but attempts to push beyond the town were unsuccessful. Stavelot, in the German rear, was retaken by the Americans; now the Germans were forced to defend Stoumont and Cheneux against US counter-attacks, at heavy cost to both sides. By 24 December Peiper was almost out of fuel and ammunition; he had no hope of advancing and was in great danger of being cut off. Leaving a rearguard to hold off the enemy, he destroyed his heavy equipment and began to withdraw, reaching the Salm river and the main body of SS-Panzerkorps the next day. On 29 December the various Leibstandarte Kampfgruppen were ordered to move from the northern flank of the Ardennes front to the southern. The fresh assault by the remains of LSSAH made little progress, however, and on 1 January 1945 the division was withdrawn to prepare for the next planned counter-offensive.
During late March 1945 isolated Kampfgruppen from the division were still fighting determined rearguard actions while slowly retreating towards Wiener Neustadt. By the beginning of April the Leibstandarte had been reduced to two small combat groups holding the line between that city and Vienna, where they successfully held off several powerful attacks before disengaging. By now the entire division numbered less than 1,600 officers and men and just 16 tanks — less than ten per cent of its normal strength. Gradually forced back through Austria in the closing weeks of the war, by mid-April its remnants were in the area around Marazlitz. When the war ended on 8 May, those who had survived immediately headed west to surrender to US forces and avoid the fate of less fortunate Waffen-SS troops who were captured by the vengeful Red Army.

The Leibstandarte had evolved from parade troops treated with some scorn by the armed forces, to one of the most highly regarded combat formations Germany possessed. Given its reputation for holding fast in even the most dire straits, it was said of it that ‘Every unit wants to have the Leibstandarte by its side. Its self-discipline, eagerness and enthusiasm, unshakable calm in crisis situations and sheer toughness are examples to us all.’ Despite the tarnishing of the reputations of many Waffen-SS units by atrocities, there can be no doubt that in terms of sheer combat effectiveness the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler was one of the best German formations of the war. A total of 32 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight’s Cross.

**Special insignia**

**Collar patch**

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

**Shoulder straps**

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

**Cuff band**

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

Numerous styles of manufacture are known for the ‘Adolf Hitler’ cuffband, the most important being: (1) A woven ‘RZM style’ rayon band with...
#### 2. SS-PANZER DIVISION DAS REICH

**Designations**
- 10 September 1939: Panzerverband Ostpreussen
- 10 October 1939: SS-Verfügungs Division (mot.)
- 1 April 1940: SS-Division Deutschland
- 21 December 1940: SS-Division (mot.) Reich
- May 1942: SS-Division (mot.) Das Reich
- 9 November 1942: SS-Panzerbrigade Division Das Reich
- 22 October 1943: 2. SS-Panzer Division Das Reich

**Commanders**

**Principal elements (1944)**
- SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 3 Deutschland; SS-Panzergranadier Regiment 4 Der Führer; SS-Panzer Regiment 2; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 2; SS-Flak Abteilung 2; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 2; SS-Panzer Pioneer Batallion 2.

**Campaigns**

This division originated from the combining of the existing SSVT Regiments Deutschland, Germania and Der Führer with the sappers and signallers of the SS-Pioniersturmbann and the SS-Nachrichtensturmbann. The SS-VT or SS-Verfügungstruppe was created in March 1939 from previous units of SS-Politische Bereitschaften, and the first of the SSVT units (designated Standarten at that time), Deutschland, was formed in Munich in September of that year. One year later a second regiment, Germania, was founded in Hamburg and following the Anschluss with Austria a third, Der Führer, was created in Vienna.

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

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

**The West and Yugoslavia, 1940-41**

The new formation attacked through Holland to link up with paras-troopers who had dropped at Rotterdam. Although the various SSVT units had been formed into a division, during this initial stage of the
Westfrontzsg individual units were once again allocated to support various Army units. It was the Der Führer Regiment that led the invasion force, storming across the River Yssel despite the Dutch having blown the bridge, establishing a bridgehead and capturing the town of Westervoor. The division advanced more than 60 miles (100km) in just one day. Other units faced much tougher resistance, but although suffering serious casualties they still succeeded in overcoming enemy fortifications protecting the Meuse-Waal Canal. Der Führer continued to impress with its first-class performance, passing Utrecht and storming on through Amsterdam to Zandvoort on the coast. Subsequently, the separated SS-VT units came together at Marienburg, and the division struck westwards to eliminate Dutch forces holding out in Walcheren.

The Dutch were in excellent defensive positions and supported by artillery and naval units offshore. Leading the attack, the Deutschland Regiment took heavy casualties, which only ended with a Dutch withdrawal rather than a successful German assault.

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

On 1 June the division was pulled out of the line to regroup and prepare for the second stage of the assault on France that began four days later; the SS-VT struck southwards through Orleans and seized Angoulême. This second phase saw the division primarily engaged in mopping-up actions until the French capitulation on 25 June. It is estimated that SS troops took the surrender of over 30,000 prisoners during this period for the loss of less than 50 of their own men. Several members of the SS-Verfügungs Division were decorated with the Knight’s Cross for their parts in this campaign. In July 1940 the division moved to occupied Holland, where it spent several months impressed with its first-class performance, passing Utrecht and storming on through Amsterdam to Zandvoort on the coast. Subsequently, the temporarily relieved for a period of rest and refitting near Smolensk.

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

The weakened division then found itself battered by fierce Soviet attacks as the enemy began their winter counter-offensive. By January 1942 the Der Führer Regiment was down to a strength of less than 50 men as the exhausted formation clung on against Red Army pressure, and by the end of February the Reich Division was reclassified as a mere Kampfgruppe. It fought along the Volga river in March, holding until
the enemy attacks finally began to ease. It was then allowed some much needed rest before, in June, being withdrawn from the front and returned to Germany for rebuilding as a Panzergrndgendarmerie division. From August 1942 until late January 1943 the division was posted to France on occupation duties, and took part in the occupation of Vichy France that winter.

The Eastern Front, 1943

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

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

With the transfer of troops to the West to face the Allied invasion of Sicily, Das Reich went over to the defensive. In the second half of 1943 they fought many bitter battles along the River Mius, and defended once again the cities they had recently captured - Kiev, Zhitomir and Kharkov. Over the next five months the division was inexorably pushed back, losing control of Kiev in November. By the end of 1943 Das Reich had once more been reduced to Kampfgruppe status. Elements of the division were withdrawn to France for rest and refitting; and by late April 1944 the last units had arrived from the Eastern Front.

The Western Front, 1944

During this period the division's troops were sometimes used against French partisans. Brutalized by years of combat in the East, they were in no mood to take warnings from the magistrates, and reprisals for German deaths and the destruction of vehicles were often brutal. When the Allies landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944 the division was ordered to move to the front line from its positions near Bordeaux. Along the way it was delayed by frequent acts of sabotage and subjected to harassing attacks, and responded furiously, executing 59 civilians in Tulle in retaliation for the deaths of some 40 German soldiers. The capture by the Resistance of SS-Sturmbannführer Helmuth Kampe, CO of the Der Führer Regiment's 3rd Battalion, was the ostensible excuse for the division being taken in on 10 June of the peaceful village of Oradour-sur-Glane near Limoges, and the murder of more than 600 civilian men, women and children, by 3rd Company of the regiment's 1st Battalion led by SS-Hauptssturmführer Kahn and the battalion commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Otto Dickmann. On reaching the invasion front, Das Reich, still awaiting the arrival of some units in transit from the south, was split up and attached to Army formations, seeing action predominantly on the British forces near Caen. It was in Normandy that one of the division's most famous soldiers scored a historic triumph. SS-Oberscharführer Ernst Barkmann, commander of a lone PzKpfw V Panther tank from SS-Panzer Regiment 2, was covering a crossing area near Le Lorcy when a long column of at least 14 enemy tanks with supply trucks came into sight. In the action which ensued, despite the intervention of Allied fighter-bombers and his tank being damaged, Barkmann knocked out eight Sherman tanks and numerous trucks including fuel tanks, only withdrawing when his ammunition ran low.

The division suffered badly in the fighting against US forces around St Lô. In mid-August substantial numbers of German troops were caught in the Falaise Pocket, but Das Reich was one of the units that broke through the Canadian and Polish encirclement to provide their trapped...
comrades with an escape route. Das Reich was subsequently withdrawn from the line for rebuilding, though many of the replacements were drafted from the Wehrmacht and a far cry from the quality of the division’s original troops.

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

Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia, 1945

Still not yet back up to full strength, the division was thrown into the last desperate attack in the East. Operation ‘Spring Awakening’, the thrust into Hungary in March 1945 in an attempt to save that country’s vital oil fields. As described above under LSSAH, the attack stalled almost immedia¬
tely in the deep mud of the spring thaw, and was halted by Soviet counter-attacks within just ten days. Das Reich was forced onto the retreat, and by April was defending vital bridges over the Danube in Vienna. House-to-house fighting followed as the Red Army pressed into the suburbs of the Austrian capital, and by 9 April Das Reich units were concentrated around the Florisdorfer bridge. Over the next few days the remnants of the division withdrew towards Dresden, the few remaining tanks providing rearguard cover; on reaching that city, with fuel and ammunition all but exhausted, the Panzers were destroyed.

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

A total of 72 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight’s Cross, the largest number of such awards to any SS formation.
'Langemarck' This regiment formed part of the division from April 1942 until its name was bestowed on the 27th SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier Division in May 1943. The cufftitle was manufactured in machine-embroidered, hand-embroidered and flat-wire woven formats, all in basic Latin script.

3. SS-PANZER DIVISION TOTENKOPF

Designations
- 16 October 1939: SS-Totenkopf Division
- 9 November 1942: SS-Panzer Grenadier Division Totenkopf
- 22 November 1943: SS-Panzer Division Totenkopf

Commanders

Principal elements (1944)
- SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 5 Thule; SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6 Thule; SS-Panzer Regiment 3; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 3; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 3; SS-Panzer Artillerie Regiment 3; SS-Flak Abteilung 3; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 3; SS-Panzer Pionier Battalion 3

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

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

On the outbreak of war Standarten Oberbayern, Thüringen and Brandenburg were sent into Poland to subjugate any resistance. This generally consisted of assisting the notorious SD Einsatzgruppen in rounding up Jews and other ‘undesirables’ behind the lines. In the area around Bydgoszcz, elements of Brandenburg alone executed 800 ‘suspect’ Poles over just two days. The appalling behaviour of Totenkopf units in Poland provoked vociferous complaints by the Army, all of which were brushed aside.

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

The West, 1940
On the opening of the offensive on 10 May, to Eicke’s disgust, Totenkopf was held in reserve, only being committed to action one week later. It advanced through southern Holland, Belgium and into France where, in action north-east of Cambrai, the division took over 16,000 enemy prisoners. Its dubious reputation was worsened by the execution of captured French Moroccan troops, considered racially ‘inferior’.

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

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

RIGHT An SS-Unterscharführer from the Totenkopf Division. Note the rearward-facing version of the horizontal death’s-head patch. This NCO is a combat veteran as evidenced by the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class in his buttonhole.
Subsequently Totenkopf was ordered to reinforce the German units that had punched through to the coast, cutting off the British Expeditionary Force from the main body of the French army to the south. In fact a major Anglo-French force, intent on breaking out of the encirclement, smashed right into the division. The light anti-tank weapons available to Totenkopf were no match for the Allied tanks, and the SS troops suffered significant casualties. Eicke’s men had to resort to using heavy artillery pieces firing at the enemy tanks over open sights, and only the timely arrival of Stuka dive-bombers saved the day; the division had come perilously close to panic.

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

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

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

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

Russia, 1941-42: Leningrad and Demjansk

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

(continued on page 31)
1: SS-Oberschütze of artillery, 1940
2: SS-Brigadeführer, 1942-44
3: SS-Rottenführer, Greece, 1943

1: SS-Hauptsturmführer,
SS-Panzer Regiment 2
2: SS-Hauptscharführer,
SS-Panzer Regiment 5
3: SS-Unterscharführer,
SS-Panzer Regiment 1,
1944
4: SS-Sturmmann,
SS-Panzer Regiment 3
An SS-Rottenführer from SS-Heimwehr Danzig. This home defence unit wore the death's-head collar patch, and served with the Totenkopf Division during the Polish campaign. It was subsequently absorbed into the division's Totenkopf Infanterie Regiment 3.

Josef Charita

attached to IV Panzergruppe. It advanced in the second wave through Lithuania and Latvia, mopping up resistance; and was involved in heavy combat against the defences of the Stalin Line, where Eicke was wounded when his field car went over a mine. Totenkopf met unexpectedly fierce resistance and suffered significant casualties. Despite this heavy fighting, however, the division's officer losses in over a month of fighting were 82, as opposed to 300 in just ten days in France. It had also taken a greater number of prisoners in this short period that it had in the whole of the Westfeldzug. Clearly Totenkopf had learned some lessons from its earlier mistakes. During August the division was involved in very heavy fighting on the approaches to Leningrad, and particularly along the Luga defence line. The Soviet 64th Army was annihilated, but Totenkopf suffered over 4,000 casualties.

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

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

In January 1942 Totenkopf came under attack when the Soviets launched a major counter-offensive that smashed its way through the Army units on the division's flanks. There followed one of the great battles of the Eastern Front, with which the division would thereafter always be connected. Totenkopf became encircled with a number of Army units around the town of Demjansk; greatly outnumbered, the German units held on tenaciously. The much-weakened Totenkopf was divided into two Kampfgruppen and, after Himmler's personal intervention, was reinforced by air with just 400 replacements; this assistance was as much for psychological as physical effect. By late March 1942 divisional casualties stood at just under 13,000, and 11 of its members had been awarded the Knight's Cross for gallantry.
In April 1942 a German attack forced a narrow relief corridor to the besieged troops in the Demjanski Pocket. The normal establishment of a full strength infantry division was around 17,000 men; the total combined strength of the six divisions then at Demjansk, under overall command of SS-Obergruppenführer Eicke, stood at just 14,000. Although the encirclement had been broken, the ferocity of the fighting was unabated, and by August Totenkopf’s divisional strength had been reduced to just over 2,700 men. In November 1942 the division was withdrawn and transferred to France for rest and refitting. During this period it was upgraded to the status of a Panzerjägerdivision.

Russia, 1943: Kursk and the Donetz Basin
Totenkopf returned to the Eastern Front at the start of 1943, in time to join the newly formed 1 SS-Panzerkorps, and in February was involved in a ferocious battle alongside Das Reich in which the Soviet 6th Army was annihilated. On 26 February the morale of the division took a serious blow when Theodor Eicke was killed; the spotter plane in which he was travelling was shot down by concentrated small arms fire from nearby Soviet troops. SS-Panzerjägerdivision 6 was given the commemorative honour title Leibstandarte Eicke. Divisional morale was soon improved when in March the Totenkopf took part in the victorious recapture of Kharkov and the annihilation of the Soviet 25th Guards Rifle Division.

Totenkopf’s next major engagement was in July 1943 when it was thrown into the offensive at Kursk. Part of a massive army of almost one million troops and just under 3,000 tanks, the division provided right flank cover to 4. Panzerarmee. Totenkopf made good initial progress, advancing some 12 miles (20km) into the southern part of the salient and smashing the Soviet 92nd Guards Division; and by the end of the second day the division had penetrated some 20 miles (32km) into enemy territory. By 12 July the German spearhead had reached Prokhorovka, where they ran into huge Soviet armoured forces – Totenkopf alone faced the equivalent of four full enemy divisions, and was forced onto the defensive. As the greatest tank battle in history raged around them, Totenkopf took heavy punishment but achieved its primary objective of securing the right flank of the attack. By the time the offensive was discontinued the division had lost almost half its armour and had suffered horrendous casualties.

It had originally been intended that all the divisions forming 1 SS-Panzerkorps should be transferred to Italy, but a Soviet attack in the Donetz Basin saw Das Reich and Totenkopf forced back into the line, only Leibstandarte being moved briefly to Italy. Totenkopf immediately moved south to the area around Stalinogorsk, where after heavy fighting the Soviet attack was halted. A new Soviet offensive was launched almost immediately around Kursk, however, and the division was rushed northwards. Thrown into the line on the approaches to Kharkov, the SS held on for a full week under immense pressure before it was decided that the city could not be saved. Nevertheless, Totenkopf and Das Reich launched localised counter-attacks to cover the withdrawal of German forces from the area. Throughout August and September 1943 the division, along with Das Reich and the Army’s elite Grossdeutschland Division, were used as ‘fire brigades’, rushed from crisis point to crisis point. The arrival of such battle-hardened units often saved the day – if only temporarily.

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

1944: the collapse of Army Group Centre
In March 1944 Totenkopf was moved once again, this time to Baltia, where it provided rearguard cover for the withdrawal of Heeresgruppe B into Romania. Further defensive actions in Romania saw the division’s strength being worn down; but in May it received several thousand reinforcements transferred in from 16. SS-Panzer Division Das Reich and SS-Panzerjägerdivision 6, and in June, after a brief rest and refit, the division was again up to a strength in excess of 20,000 men.

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

Hungary and Austria, 1945
Once again, the SS divisions held the line and the Soviet offensive gradually ran out of impetus. After a brief respite, on 1 January 1945 Totenkopf
was thrown into action, once again with Wiking, in an abortive attempt to break the enemy encirclement of Budapest. Fierce resistance halted the SS divisions after ten days; a renewed attack a week later initially made far better progress, but enemy resistance stiffened once again. Eventually major counter-attacks pushed the SS troops back to the forest of Bakony near Lake Balaton, where they dug in.

March 1945 saw Totenkopf take part in Operation 'Frühlingswachen', the last major German offensive on the Eastern Front in which Leibstandarte, Das Reich, Totenkopf and Hohenstaufen attempted to advance their heavy armour over hopelessly inappropriate terrain. After advancing around 18 miles (30km) the division ground to a halt, and the enraged Hitler called off the offensive. Enemy counter-attacks soon drove the weakened Totenkopf back to the very gates of Vienna. Through late March and into April the division fended off Soviet probing attacks, but no longer had the strength to resist the overwhelming enemy forces, and Vienna fell on 15 April. By the end of the month the division could count only about 1,000 combat-worthy troops and just six tanks. On 9 May it surrendered to elements of the US Army, who accepted Totenkopf's surrender on the condition that it disarmed the guards at nearby Mauthausen concentration camp. The division carried out this apt request, at which point the Americans reneged on the agreement and handed over the survivors to the Soviets. It is unsurprising that only a small number of these soldiers who wore the death's-head on their collar survived Soviet captivity.

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

**Special insignia**

**Collar patches**

Throughout the war the division's units wore the death's-head as their collar patch emblem. Several variants exist, with the death's-head placed either vertically or horizontally, the latter being introduced around May 1940. Initially, identical mirror image death's-heads were worn on both collars, but in May 1940 the left-hand insignia were replaced by the standard rank patches.

**Cuffbands**

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

**Regimental**

'Theodor Eicke' SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 5 wore this title in Latin script, flat-woven in aluminium wire.

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

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

**4. SS-POLIZEI PANZERGRENADIER DIVISION**

**Designations**

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

**Commanders**

| Sept 1940 | Generalleutnant Conrad Hitzler |
| Nov—Nov 1940 | SS-Gruppenführer Karl Pfeffer-Wildenbruch |
| Nov 1940—Aug 1941 | SS-Gruppenführer Arthur Müberstedt |
| Aug—Dec 1941 | SS-Oberruppenführer Walter Krüger |
| Aug 1944 | SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Schmedes |
| May—Oct 1944 | SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Freitag |
| Oct 1944—Apr 1944 | SS-Oberführer Friedrich Beck |
| Apr—May 1944 | SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Wagner |
| May—July 1944 | SS-Oberruppenführer Friedrich Beck |
| July 1944 | SS-Brigadeführer Herbert Ernst Vahl |
| July—Aug 1944 | SS-Brigadeführer Karl Schönem |
| Aug 1944 | SS-Oberführer Helmut Dörndor |
| Aug—Nov 1944 | SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Schmedes |
| Nov 1944—March 1945 | SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer |
| March 1945 | SS-Standartenführer Fritz Göehler |
| March—May 1945 | SS-Standartenführer Walter Harzer |
Principal elements (1944)
SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 7; SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 8; SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 4; SS-Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 4; SS-Artillerie Regiment 4; SS-Flak Abteilung 4; SS-Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 4; SS-Pionier Bataillon 4

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

The division saw its first combat during the invasion of France and the Low Countries in 1940. It was initially held in reserve with Heeresgruppe Nord. It went into action around Luga, losing over 2,000 dead and wounded in bloody fighting through difficult terrain of dense forests and mosquito-plagued swamps. By August the division, along with a number of Army divisions, had finally managed to complete an encirclement of the Soviet forces at Luga; the town was captured at the cost of significant casualties, the divisional commander SS-Gruppenführer Arthur Mühlerstedt being one of those killed in action.

In January 1942 the division was deployed along the Wolchow river, and the following month it was officially made part of the Waffen-SS, changing its Polizei insignia for regulation Waffen-SS insignia thereafter. Between January and March the SS-Polizei Division saw fierce fighting that resulted in the defeat of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army. The remainder of 1942 was spent on the Leningrad front. The division was beginning to gain a reputation for reliability, though it had no means achieved elite status; but combat attrition saw the formation's strength steadily whittled down. In January 1943 the division came under Soviet attacks around the Lake Ladoga; the enemy eventually broke through the German defence lines in February, and forced the SS troops to retreat westwards to new defence positions at Kolpino. These were successfully held, but losses had been severe; at this point elements of the division were withdrawn to Silesia as the nucleus for a re-formed Panzergrenadier division, while the remainder were formed into a smaller Kampfgruppe. During the following month the Dutch volunteers of the Freiwiligen Legion Niederlande were assigned to bolster its strength. This Kampfgruppe remained in constant action on the Eastern Front until May 1944, when it was finally disbanded.

Russia, 1941-43
On 27 June 1941 the Polizei Division joined the German forces massing for the invasion of the Soviet Union, becoming part of the reserve of Heeresgruppe Nord. It went into action around Luga, losing over 2,000 dead and wounded in bloody fighting through difficult terrain of dense forests and mosquito-plagued swamps. By August the division, along with a number of Army divisions, had finally managed to complete an encirclement of the Soviet forces at Luga; the town was captured at the cost of significant casualties, the divisional commander SS-Gruppenführer Arthur Mühlerstedt being one of those killed in action.

In January 1942 the division was deployed along the Wolchow river, and the following month it was officially made part of the Waffen-SS, changing its Polizei insignia for regulation Waffen-SS insignia thereafter. Between January and March the SS-Polizei Division saw fierce fighting that resulted in the defeat of the Soviet 2nd Shock Army. The remainder of 1942 was spent on the Leningrad front. The division was beginning to gain a reputation for reliability, though it had no means achieved elite status; but combat attrition saw the formation's strength steadily whittled down. In January 1943 the division came under Soviet attacks around the Lake Ladoga; the enemy eventually broke through the German defence lines in February, and forced the SS troops to retreat westwards to new defence positions at Kolpino. These were successfully held, but losses had been severe; at this point elements of the division were withdrawn to Silesia as the nucleus for a re-formed Panzergrenadier division, while the remainder were formed into a smaller Kampfgruppe. During the following month the Dutch volunteers of the Freiwiligen Legion Niederlande were assigned to bolster its strength. This Kampfgruppe remained in constant action on the Eastern Front until May 1944, when it was finally disbanded.

The Balkans and the Eastern Front, 1943-45
In May 1943 the SS-Polizei Panzergrenadier Division was sent to the Balkans, where elements took part in anti-partisan operations in northern Greece during the summer and autumn of that year. Troops from the division were recorded by witnesses from the Geheime Feld Polizei to have been involved in atrocities against civilians in the Klassur region during this period. The division remained in Greece until July/August 1944, before going back into the line to face the advancing Red Army.

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

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

Special insignia

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

Shoulder straps and sleeve eagles

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

Cuffbands

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

Other insignia

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

5. SS-PANZER DIVISION WIKING

Designations

7
1 December 1940 SS-Division Germania (mot.)
20 December 1940 SS-Division Wiking
9 November 1942 SS-Panzergrenadier Division Wiking
February 1944 5. SS-Panzer Division Wiking

Principal elements (1944)

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

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

Campaigns

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

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

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

Commanders

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

Below: Herbert Otto Gille is seen here as an SS-Gruppenführer and commander of 5. SS-Panzer Division Wiking. Of particular interest is the Gothic script version of the divisional cuffband, long believed to be unique to Gille, but in fact worn by a few other individuals of various ranks. (Josef Charrita)
1942-43: to the Caucasus and back
In the New Year the division advanced from its positions along the Mius as the German offensive began afresh. That summer it took part in the deepest penetrations of the Russian campaign, the drive on Rostov on the River Don and the attempt to secure the Caucasus oilfields. By the end of 1942 and the onset of another winter Wiking had proven itself in combat well enough to warrant upgrading to the status of Panzergrenadier division. It took up positions along the Terek river, deep in the Caucasus. However, after the disaster at Stalingrad in January 1943 and the launch of the Soviet counter-offensive on the southern front Wiking was pushed back towards Manych, and was involved in heavy defensive actions around Izyum.

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

1944-45: Cherkassy, Warsaw and Hungary
The Wiking Division ended 1943 in the Ukraine; and in January 1944 the division was encircled in the pocket at Cherkassy along with five other German divisions, faced by fully 55 Soviet divisions. The pocket was gradually compressed until it measured barely 38 square miles (100 square km); and eventually Hitler, somewhat unusually, was persuaded to allow a break-out attempt. It was Wiking, the only armoured division in the pocket and still well equipped, which led the thrust to the south. Once the element of surprise had gone the Soviets launched powerful counter-attacks with heavy armour support. The onset of a snow-storm gave the Germans excellent cover and eventually the break-out force reached the last barrier to safety, a six-foot deep river at Guilio-Tilitsch. With no bridge and no ford, the Germans were forced to make a human chain to help non-swimmers across the fast-flowing river. Many were swept away by the icy waters, but many more escaped to safety, thanks to the determination of both the Wiking and the attached Walloon volunteers of Sturmbrigade Wallonien, who provided the rearguard. Of about 55,000 German troops trapped in the pocket, 34,000 escaped.

In March 1944 the Wiking Division took part in the advance through the Pripet Marshes towards Kowel, where it saw fierce combat during April. That month the division lost its Estonian volunteers, who transferred en masse to the newly formed 20. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS. In June 1944 the division was withdrawn from the front for rest and refitting in Germany; but it was soon sent eastwards again, joining the German forces around Warsaw in August and helping to drive the Red Army out of the city's eastern suburbs.

In December 1944 Wiking was sent south to attempt to break through to the encircled city of Budapest, but was thrown back by the Soviets and forced onto the defensive throughout January and February of 1945. March saw the division take part in the ill-fated offensive around Lake Balaton in the atrocious mud of the spring thaw; and by the second half of the month Wiking was on the retreat as the Red Army launched yet another counter-attack. The division was driven back into Austria, receiving a number of Hungarian troops to bolster its dwindling strength in mid-April. In May the remnants of the Wiking Division were forced to surrender to the Red Army in Czechoslovakia. A total of 54 soldiers from this division were decorated with the Knight's Cross.

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

Cuffbands
A divisional band with the title ‘Wiking’ in Latin script was manufactured in flat-woven woolen format, machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread, and machine-woven in a version termed by collectors as ‘BeVo-like’ – resembling but not identical to the regular BeVo format. A variant was also produced in Gothic script; this was once believed to have been unique to the divisional commander, Herbert Otto Gille, but subsequent photographic evidence shows it worn by various ranks within the division, albeit in limited numbers.

Regimental:
‘Germania’ Older titles in Gothic script continued to be seen throughout the war, though a newer form in Latin script became more prevalent. In 1945 a BeVo-woven artificial silk variant was introduced.

‘Wallonien’ A Latin script title was produced in machine-embroidered, flat-woven wool and, from 1943, in BeVo woven formats.

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

A divisional band with the title ‘Wiking’ in Latin script was manufactured in flat-woven woolen format, machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread, and machine-woven in a version termed by collectors as ‘BeVo-like’ – resembling but not identical to the regular BeVo format. A variant was also produced in Gothic script; this was once believed to have been unique to the divisional commander, Herbert Otto Gille, but subsequent photographic evidence shows it worn by various ranks within the division, albeit in limited numbers.
THE PLATES

A: PRE-WAR BLACK SERVICE UNIFORMS

1: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1934
A private in pre-war parade and guard dress. He wears the basic black service uniform; both collar and collar patches were edged with black and aluminium twist cord for all enlisted ranks, and this was also used to make up the single shoulder strap. The SS armband or Kampfbinde differs from the standard Party armband in having black edging. Unique features of the Leibstandarte uniform are the right-hand collar patch bearing the SS runes without any other identifying feature or number; and the cuffband bearing the title 'Adolf Hitler' in Sütterlin script. On parade, he wears a white leather belt, pockets, single cross-strap and bayonet frog. His helmet is the old M1916 style carried over from World War I, painted black with the weapon the Mauser Gewehr 98.

A2: SS-Oberscharführer, SS-Standarte Deutschland, 1934
He wears the black service dress with Gothic script 'Deutschland' cuffband, and the Standarte identifying number 1 alongside the runes on his right collar patch. His rank is indicated by the two alloy pipes on his left-hand collar patch. Headgear is the first version of the NCO pattern peaked service cap, in black with white piping and leather chinstrap; the badges are the M1923 'chiores' death's-head and small size M1929 eagle and swastika. Note the M1933 SS service dagger, worn with service and walking-cut dress, and the Party membership badge worn on his necktie.

A3: SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Totenkopfstandarte Oberbayern, 1936
This captain's officer-quality black service dress tunic has the collar and collar patches edged with silver twist cord and the single right shoulder strap made of straight silver cord. His right-hand patch bears a vertically placed death's-head, his left patch the standard SS insignia for this rank. For walking-out dress he wears straight-legged trousers instead of breeches and kneeboots. His cap has officer's double bullion chin cords; note that from 1936 the cap eagle became larger and the death's-head acquired a lower jaw. He carries the M1936 SS service dagger with its new, elaborate chain suspension. His cuffband identifies the Upper Bavaria regiment.

B: TRAINING, 1934-37
B1: SS-Schütze, 1934
His headgear is the Imperial-style field cap known as the Kiihtschen, in black with white piping, worn with the first pattern small eagle and chinskin. He wears the single-breasted herringbone twill (Drillich) fatigue jacket with KrStschen, in black with white piping, and bearing the Standarte of the 'Leibstandarte' SS, his single right-hand shoulder strap made of mixed black and aluminium cord in Aligemeine-SS style; he no longer wears the SS armband but has not yet had the eagle sleeve insignia added. His cap shows a common mixture of insignia, the old-style small eagle but with the later full-chin skull. His Standarte number '2' is shown next to the runes on his right collar patch, and the regimental title is displayed on his cuffband in Gothic script.

B3: SS-Untersturmführer, Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1937
This second lieutenant wears the earliest style of field-grey (feldgrau) uniform, introduced in that year. It is of a light shade, of the same cut as the earth-grey tunic, with slanted lower pockets. A hand-embroidered aluminium wire eagle and swastika national emblem is now worn on the upper left sleeve. His rank is also now indicated by Army-style matt aluminium braid shoulder straps with bronzed 'LAH' regimental cyphers.

C: THE LEIBSTANDARTE AT WAR
C1: SS-Schütze, 1940
This infantry enlistee serving with the SS-Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1940, is wearing the new single-breasted steel helmet with KrStschen, in black with black leather chinstrap; the badges are the M1943 'chinless peaked service cap, in black with white piping and leather patch. Headgear is the first version of the NGO pattern 'Deutschland' cuffband, and the Standarte identifying number 1 next to the runes on his right collar patch. His right-hand patch bears a vertically placed death's-head, the collar and collar patches edged with black and aluminium twist cord.

C2: SS-Schütze, Panzerspähzugs, 1940
This private of the regiment's armoured reconnaissance troop wears an Army issue black Panzerbeskledung, the special uniform for members of armoured vehicle crews. Headgear is the Panzernachschütz, a wool beret fitted over a padded crash-helmet; the embroidered insignia in white on black are of uniform pattern. His jacket collar and shoulder straps are piped in the rose-pink branch colour of the Panzergrenztruppe; the 'LAH' cyphers are machine-embroidered in silver-grey thread. Note that he still wears old pattern collar patches edged black and aluminium twist cord.

C3: SS-Scharführer, SS-Sturmgioschgütz
Abteilung 1, 1943
This assault gun commander wears the field-grey version of the special uniform for crews of armoured vehicles, issued to armoured units other than tanks. One unique feature of the Leibstandarte was that NOCs of this unit were the only ones authorised to wear traditional NCO Tresse braid on the collar of this jacket. This fashion was later dropped, but may be seen in a number of wartime photographs. His shoulder straps are piped black and aluminium in the red of the artillery, and bear metal regimental cyphers. His headgear is the M1943 Einheitsfeldmütze or 'universal field cap', with one-piece machine-woven insignia. (Inset) The 'LAH' shoulder strap cypher in bronzed metal.

D: SS-VERFÜGUNGS DIVISION, 1940
D1: SS-Scharführer, SS-Standarte Deutschland
This seasoned NCO has seen combat during the 1939 Polish campaign and, having been wounded in action, wears the black Wound Badge on his left breast pocket and the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class in his buttonhole. On his jacket collar and shoulder straps, the Luftwaffe design of the Iron Cross 2nd Class under the runes; his shoulder straps display an embroidered Gothic 'D'. Although a Latin script version of the cuffband was introduced in 1939, this old Gothic style continued in use long afterwards. His helmet features the first pattern camouflage cover. As a squad leader he has added binoculars and a mapcase to his rifleman's equipment.

D2: SS-Schütze, SS-Standarte Deutschland
This officer type shows the appearance of soldiers from this unit during the Westfeldzug. His helmet has been daubed with mud, a simple and effective alternative to the camouflage cover; note the left side decal peculiar to SS troops. The rolling up of the trouser legs over rather than tucked into the marching boots may be seen on many photographs of the period. His right collar patch bears the regiment's '2' beside the runes; his shoulder straps display an embroidered Gothic 'G', and he continues to wear the old-style Gothic script regimental cuffband.

D3: SS-Hauptssturmführer, SS-Pioniersturmabn
This engineer captain wears the typical M1936 field-grey, green-collared field blouse as used by his Army counterparts, as well as an Army issue officer's field belt. His unique collar patch bears a crossed pick and shovel over the SS runes; on his left sleeve is the cufftitle 'SS-Pioniersturmabn'. His headgear, an 'old-style officer's field cap' (called by collectors a 'crush cap') has an unstiffened crown and a pliable leather peak rather than the stiff fibre peak of the regulation service cap; it is worn without chin cords but with the usual metal badges.

E: SS-TOtenkopf DIVISION, 1940-43
E1: SS-Oberscharführer, Feldgendarmerie, 1940
This senior NCO of military police wears an Army issue M1936 field blouse with NCO's aluminium Tresse trim to the green-faced collar. He wears the old 'mirror image' collar patches, so his rank is only evident from his shoulder straps, piped in the orange Waffenfarbe of this branch. On his left sleeve is the Army issue machine-woven 'Feldgendarmerie' cuffband in silver-grey on black. His helmet is the old style SS-VT version widely worn before the new Waffen-SS pattern
E3: SS-Sturmmann of infantry, 1942
This soldier is the 'number one' of a machine gun crew and carries the excellent MG 42, with the accompanying tool-box on his belt as well as his panzer-steel helmet, the P38 semi-automatic pistol. He wears the reversible camouflage smock with matching helmet cover, both in the original 'plane tree' pattern. His side-outwards
E4: SS-Rottenführer, SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 6, late 1943
This junior NCO wears the M1943 field blouse with unpainted pockets and a plain field-grey collar. He displays the ribbons of the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the Winter 1941 East Front medal in his buttonhole, the Iron Cross 1st Class pinned to his left pocket above the infantry Assault Badge, and on his upper left sleeve the shield awarded to those who took part in the battles of the Demjansk Pocket. His regimental cuffband bears the name of his former divisional commander, Theodor Eicke, who introduced the Totenkopf. The eagle on his sleeve was killed in action. His haddress is the early single-button version of the M1943 field cap with two-piece insignia.
F: POLIZEI DIVISION, 1940-44
F1: SS-Oberschütze of artillery, 1940
This senior private of the divisional artillery shows the typical appearance of a Police Division soldier during the Westfeldzug. He wears the standard Army issue M1936 field blouse with the Litzen collar patches of the Police, and red-piped artillery shoulder straps. Were it not for the SS eagle and swastika worn on the sleeve rather than the breast, he might pass as an Army soldier at first glance. Note that the use of the Police helmet decal in place of the SS version was common during this period.
F2: SS-Brigadeführer, 1942-44
This general officer wears an unusual mix of insignia. His regulation general's service cap has a black velvet band and woven aluminium piping. The collar patches and shoulder straps are the regulation Waffen-SS pattern for this rank, but his sleeve eagle is of the Army rather than the distinctive SS type, in gold wire on green. He displays the buttonhole-ribbon of the 1914 Iron Cross 2nd Class; on his pocket, the silver decoration showing award of the 1st Class during World War I, above the cross of a subsequent World War II award; the Knight's Cross hangs at his throat. His privately purchased breeches carry non-regulation general officer's Lamsa cann designations, and his panzer-steel helmet was of the 1st Class during World War I. He was a member of the Demjansk Pocket. The silver eagle on his shoulder was killed in action. His haddress is the early single-button version of the M1943 field cap with two-piece insignia.
G: ARMOURTE PERSONNEL, 1942-44
G1: SS-Hauptsturmführer, SS-Panzer Regiment 2
This captain of the Das Reich Division's tank regiment wears a service cap piped in the regulation white of all branches; piping in different Waffenfarben was only approved between May and November 1940 (though individuals continued to wear colour-capped caps thereafter). His regulation SS pattern Panzerjacket differs from the Army style (see C2) in that the front flap is cut vertically rather than angled; it also features a smaller collar, edged for officers with aluminium piping. His left sleeve bears a woven aluminium version of the 'Das Reich' cuffband. His shoulder straps have a double underlay of Panzer rose-pink over black and bear flag rank pips.
G2: SS-Hauptscharführer, SS-Panzer Regiment 5
This senior NCO tank commander from the Wiking Division wears the SS pattern black Panzerjacket, with a non-regulation feature often found on jackets worn by this unit: the use of Panzer pink piping to the collar patches. He wears the black Panzer version of the Waffen-SS field cap, and has the machine-woven divisional cuffband on the lower left sleeve.
G3: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Panzer Regiment 1, 1944
The Waffen-SS produced its own camouflage version of the Panzerjacket, cut in lightweight drill material and printed with the so-called 'pea pattern' camouflage colours; unlike the combat smocks it was not reversible. Generally the only insignia worn with this uniform were the shoulder straps, here seen with the removable slip-on 'LAH' cypher. To complete the outfit he wears the camouflage SS field cap, although special subdued insignia were produced for this cap they were rarely worn.
G4: SS-Sturmmann, SS-Panzer Regiment 3
As well as the black, field-grey and camouflage versions, a lightweight grey drill work dress version of the Panzerjacket uniform was also produced. This was often worn alone in hot weather, but could also be worn over the black uniform to protect it from dirt and wear. The eagle to which insignia were worn on this uniform varied, but this SS-Sturmmann from the Totenkopf Division's tank regiment wears a full set.
H: WINTER UNIFORMS, 1943-45
H1: SS-Untersturmführer, 5. SS-Panzer Division "Wiking"
This second lieutenant of Panzergrenadiers wears the SS reversible camouflage/winter uniform with the white side outermost, and special winter felt boots. The winter cap lined with rabbit fur was widely worn in both the Army and Waffen-SS; this example has only the metal SS death's-head pinned to the front, but the eagle was occasionally worn also. To complete the outfit he also wears padded reversible winter mittens. A high-visibility cloth armband is buttoned to one sleeve showing the 'colour of the day' for quick recognition. He carries a sling MP 40 sub-machine gun, with a spare magazine tucked in his belt; his light field equipment is limited to a mapcase, holstered P38, and behind his hip a binoocular case.
H2: SS-Schütze, 3. SS-Panzergrenadier Division 'Totenkopf'
This machine gunner wears the fur- or fleece-lined field-grey parka. Particular to the Waffen-SS, this garment was of 'pullover' design with an integral fur-lined hood, and was provided with patch breast pockets and slash skirt pockets. This private carries the extremely potent MG 42, and has the usual spares and tool box and holstered sidearm on his belt. He wears the M1943 field cap with two-piece insignia, the death's-head worn at the front and the national emblem on the left side. The steel helmet at his feet is the M1943 with flared-out rather than crimped-over rim; by this stage of the war only the right side runes decal was normally seen.
H3: SS-Sturmmann
Armed with the deadly 'Panzerschreck' anti-tank rocket projector, he wears the heavy winter surcoat of extended length, with enlarged collar and epaulets. He is a typical example of the scavenger, with little regard for rank or branch of service. Despite its appearance this clumsy garment was not particularly effective, being made of poor-quality material with a high shoddy content. It was as often as not worn without insignia, but photographs show that sleeve badges were occasionally applied.
The uniforms, equipment, history and organisation of the world's military forces, past and present.

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