

# Luftwaffe Field Divisions 1941–45



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# Luftwaffe Field Divisions 1941-45

## Introduction

The Luftwaffe Field Divisions first raised by Nazi Germany in 1942 were directly linked to the rôle of 'private armies' in the Third Reich. Personal and party rivalries and resentment of the nation's regular army and its officer corps created these 'private armies' in Nazi Germany. (The foremost example of these forces, the Waffen-SS, grew from Adolf Hitler's personal bodyguard in the early 1930s to a nominal strength of 38 divisions of over 800,000 men by 1945, a sizeable proportion of Germany's land forces. More importantly, the Waffen-SS made up a quarter of Germany's tank troops and one-third of her mechanized infantry.) The position of Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring as air minister and commander of the Luftwaffe allowed him to consolidate many functions—e.g. naval air support, anti-aircraft defence, and airborne operations—under the auspices of the air force. Not content with air operations alone, Göring, as the Prussian Minister of the Interior, organized an élite force in 1933, which eventually grew from the 'General Göring' Police Regiment to the so-called Fallschirmpanzerkorps 'Herman Göring'. Thus, even before the outbreak of the war in 1939, Göring had become active in a variety of military affairs.

At the time of the invasion of Poland in September 1939 foreign observers considered the Luftwaffe as the military branch with the closest ties to the Nazi party. Göring assembled an Air Force of 400,000 men and 4,000 aircraft, which played a major role in the success of the Blitzkrieg. The

Luftwaffe participated in all theatres of the war, and by 1941 its strength had grown to nearly 1,700,000 personnel, most of whom served in non-flying capacities. In fact the anti-aircraft artillery branch had 35 per cent (571,000 men) of the Luftwaffe's strength in 1941, while signal troops formed another 18 per cent. The number of men serving in flying units totalled 588,000 in late 1941



Knights' Cross winner Dr Heinrich Neumann saved hundreds of wounded and sick German troops at Yuhnov in early 1942 while on the staff of 'Luftwaffe-Gruppe Meindl'. Neumann is shown here as a Stabsarzt and wears the cloth version of the Iron Cross 1st Class and the Fallschirmschützen-Abzeichen sewn on his *Fliegerbluse*; this is rarely seen in wartime photographs. (*Der Deutsche Fallschirmjäger*)



Typical uniform and equipment worn by Luftwaffe personnel engaged in anti-partisan operations in Russia, 1942. These men wear the *Fliegerbluse* although some do not display any rank or national insignia. The airman in the centre has been awarded the Wound Badge.

(approximately 36 per cent of the Luftwaffe), but most of these men were ground support personnel or paratroopers. Altogether, the Luftwaffe amounted to 20 per cent of Germany's total manpower under arms that year, a considerable reservoir of trained men and women.

Despite the notable success of the German forces in the early days of Operation 'Barbarossa', victory was not realized in the East in 1941. The Army ground to a halt outside the gates of Moscow and Leningrad as a ferocious winter and a reinforced Red Army overwhelmed the extended German front. In the few months from June 1941 until the onset of winter the Wehrmacht lost over 700,000 soldiers on the Eastern Front from death, wounds, and capture. The Army alone witnessed casualty rates of 25 per cent on the Russian steppes. Losses continued to mount as the three army groups in the East suffered an additional 336,000 casualties in the first three months of 1942. Less than half of these losses were replaced among the hard-pressed front-line units.

Göring raised the Luftwaffe Field Divisions (LwFD) during 1942, when Nazi Germany was still making spectacular gains but was first feeling the pinch of its losses on the Eastern Front. By the middle of that year Army leaders were turning to previously untapped manpower resources for troop replacements. The Army proposed to transfer 10-20,000 Naval and up to 50,000 Luftwaffe personnel to Army control. Göring, however, refused to permit the loss of his good National

Socialist airmen to the reactionary Army, which still had chaplains and officers imbued with the traditions of the old Imperial Army. The Reichsmarschall instead decided to raise his own divisions for ground service under the command of Luftwaffe officers. Hitler accepted Göring's solution to the manpower shortage, and directed that the number of Air Force personnel for these new units be doubled from the original figure of 50,000. Prominent Army figures, with some notable exceptions, made little attempt to prevent the creation of yet another private army and, in the words of one Army officer, 'so the bells rang for the birth of the unlucky 'Luftwaffe Field Divisions'.

This was the immediate background to Göring's call on 17 September 1942 for volunteers from throughout the Luftwaffe for combat duty in the East. Even before that date, however, some Luftwaffe troops were heavily engaged against the enemy in Russia in a ground rôle.

## *Luftwaffe Ground Service in Russia, 1941-1942*

When the German Army moved across the Polish partition line to attack the Soviet Union, they were accompanied by a number of Luftwaffe ground support units. Air force *Flugzeugabwehrkanone* ('Flak') units moved with the main armies to provide anti-aircraft defence. The enemy posed little aerial threat to the German armies, since the Luftwaffe destroyed a large part of the Russian fighter and bomber force on the ground: but flak units quickly became valuable in the anti-tank rôle. Luftwaffe batteries, particularly those equipped with the powerful 88 mm gun, proved to be the best defence against the Soviet T-34. By 1943 two Luftwaffe flak corps and eight divisions provided support for Army units in Russia.

Flak was not the only Luftwaffe element involved in ground combat in the East. The *Fallschirmjäger* veterans of Crete countered Soviet attacks along the Newa River near Leningrad, where the Russians had crossed at Petruschino and Wyborgskaya in the autumn of 1941. The para-

troopers of the 7.Fliegerdivision, under Generalleutnant Petersen, fought in this sector as infantry and, despite severe casualties, forced the Russians back. This action marked the first commitment of German paratroopers in the purely infantry rôle, which would soon overtake nominally airborne units.

As the Germans drove across Russia during 1941 the Luftwaffe established airbases, signal stations, and supply posts in the rear area. The German offensive isolated many Soviet soldiers behind the lines, and these united with civilians to form partisan groups to harass German lines of communication. The shortage of regular troops to police the occupied regions of Russia forced the Luftwaffe to form emergency units from airbase personnel and other rear echelon elements to defend Air Force installations. These *Alarmeinheiten* were initially organized in late 1941 on an *ad hoc* basis, and were employed throughout the war against partisan groups.

The Soviet counteroffensive in December 1941 created an extremely dangerous situation in the East. In one of the worst winters on record the attack of 18 fresh Soviet armies, aimed at isolating Army Group Centre near Moscow, created an immediate crisis. The Germans were forced back in what could easily have become a rout similar to that of Napoleon's Grande Armée in 1812; but Hitler refused to allow his commanders to withdraw and instead ordered the Army to stand and fight in Russia with 'fanatical resistance'. On 19 December Hitler assumed command, and directed that all available military units throughout Germany and the occupied countries be sent to Russia to reinforce the Army.

As the fighting continued along the length of the Eastern Front, the Luftwaffe struggled to survive. Airbases were snowed in, and aircraft engines refused to start in the  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperature. Partisans joined the struggle and struck isolated Air Force units and lines of communication throughout the combat zone. To make matters worse, the main Soviet offensive attempted to seize Army Group Centre's main supply depots and airfields. The breakthrough of the Soviet 50th Army in mid-December near Kaluga threatened to capture Yukhnov, an important logistical base and the headquarters of Jagdgeschwader 51 'Mölders'.



Troops of a Luftwaffe field battalion enjoying a break from cold weather, 1942.

Mechanics, pilots, cooks, and other Luftwaffe ground personnel, in conjunction with units of 19.Panzer Division and SS infantry, managed to defend the town against the Russians.

Soviet pressure did not abate after the initial repulse at Yukhnov. In early January 1942 the Germans took measures to strengthen the fragile defences of this important airbase when Generalmajor Eugen Meindl arrived at Yukhnov to take command of the right flank of LVII Army Corps. Meindl brought with him the headquarters company of the Luftlande Sturmregiment under the command of Major Walter Koch, a decorated veteran of Eben Emael and Crete. At Yukhnov the general formed 'Luftwaffe Kampfverband (mot.) Meindl' with newly arrived elements of 7.Fliegerdivision and various Luftwaffe ground units already stationed at the airfield.

Eugen Meindl was a newcomer to the Luftwaffe, having joined the service only in August 1940. Born in 1892 in southern Germany, Meindl served in the artillery during the First World War. He later joined the Reichswehr in 1921 and commanded a mountain artillery regiment in 1938. As a colonel, Meindl parachuted into Norway without any prior training and fought throughout the campaign. Following his transfer to the Luftwaffe he commanded the air-landing assault regiment in Crete, where he received a severe wound in May 1941.

Meindl's appearance at Yukhnov brought renewed vigour to the German defence. By 21 January he commanded a hodge-podge of Luftwaffe, Army, and SS troops which amounted to a weak division, dubbed 'Luftwaffe-Gruppe Meindl'. Meindl and his chief medical officer, Dr. Heinrich Neumann, also took vigorous and imaginative steps to ensure the evacuation, by aircraft or truck, of hundreds of neglected German wounded from Yukhnov.

In addition to simply defending Yukhnov, Meindl needed to clear the Yukhnov-Gzhatsk road of Soviet troops and to keep the vital airfield and supply base open for German use. He launched several local attacks north of Yukhnov with his SS troops and Luftlande Sturmregiment and, by 30 January, the path was clear for the evacuation of Dr. Neumann's patients. This, however, was only a temporary measure as the Soviet breakthrough between the German Fourth Army and Second Panzer Army threatened to cut the Smolensk-Moscow highway and isolate Army Group Centre. The Russians surrounded a small German garrison at Sukhinichi, and Yukhnov once again became a combat zone. Luftwaffe-Gruppe Meindl fought in the region north of Yukhnov with Army and police units through March, when Gen. Meindl and his staff assumed

command of the newly formed Luftwaffenfeldregimenter in Army Group North's sector. Meindl's departure closed the first chapter in the history of the Luftwaffe field units.

A number of other Luftwaffe units fought in Russia in late 1941 and early 1942. Luftwaffen-Feldbrigade Schlemm, another emergency formation, operated in Army Group Centre. Likewise, Luftwaffe Lehr-Infanterie-Regiment 'Moskau' fought as a battalion of the 6. Infanterie Division near the Soviet capital.

## *The Luftwaffe Field Regiments*

Hitler's frantic search for reinforcements in December 1941 revealed that Germany lacked available manpower for total war; as late as October 1941 Hitler had planned to partially demobilize the Wehrmacht following the successful conquest of Russia. To raise new divisions the Army scoured Germany and occupied Europe for extra troops and spare vehicles to replace the dreadful losses in Russia.

The Luftwaffe was also involved in this search, and personnel from all branches of the Luftwaffe volunteered for ground service in Russia during

**A patrol using the waterproof *Zeltbahn* cape as camouflage in the area of Staraya Russa, 1942.**





early 1942. These Luftwaffe replacements assembled in East Prussia and, after hasty infantry training conducted by paratroop instructors, were formed into battalions and regiments and sent by rail, bus or air to Russia. Altogether, seven Luftwaffe field regiments—*Feldregimenter der Luftwaffe* (FR der Lw.) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14, and 21—were organized in the first two months of the year. Each regiment had a paper strength of four battalions and each battalion had, in turn, three light companies and one heavy company. The heavy company officially included 12 20 mm cannon and four 88 mm dual-purpose guns.

The field regiments rarely served together as a single body and were scattered throughout the front wherever they were needed. For instance, IV./FR der Lw. 4 arrived in Russia in mid-February and, after a short period of anti-partisan duty, was heavily engaged with 58. Infanterie Division in the Volkhov Pocket. FR der Lw. 21 (later consolidated with FR der Lw. 2) served with 5. Jäger Division and 18. ID (Mot.) during Operation 'Bruckenschlag', the relief of Demyansk, a German-held 'fortress' that had been cut off by the Russians since 9 February. Six divisions with 95,000 men were trapped in the city and relied almost exclusively upon supplies brought in by Luftwaffe transport planes. Generalmajor Walter von Seydlitz-Kurzbach commanded the German relief force which would infiltrate Soviet lines from Staraya Russa to the Lovat River. Upon reaching that point, German troops inside Demyansk would break out to meet the relief force.

**A reconnaissance patrol of Division Meindl cheerfully returns to camp, 1942. This photograph provides a glimpse of the flat, swampy terrain where the first Luftwaffe field regiments served. These men wear a mixture of uniforms designed to traverse the muddy ground and provide some protection against mosquitoes.**

Seydlitz began his advance toward Demyansk on 21 March and, within four days, had reached the half-way mark to the Lovat River line. Russian opposition stiffened at this point and melting snow impeded the German drive through thickly wooded terrain. Seydlitz's men soon bogged down; and the Germans finally united II. Armeekorps in Demyansk with the main line at the end of April. The operation eventually drew several different units of the newly organized Luftwaffe field regiments, including battalions of FR der Lw. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 21. Demyansk, a risky victory at best, established a poor precedent for the next German fortress in Russia: Stalingrad.

A smaller German garrison was also trapped by Russian forces on 22 January at the town of Kholm, south-west of Demyansk and Staraya Russa on the Lovat River. Generalmajor Theodor Scherer commanded the Kholm pocket with 3,500 troops, and could only maintain his position with continual air support; the Luftwaffe, however, could barely supply Kholm because of poor weather, terrible landing conditions, demands for equipment elsewhere on the front, and enemy resistance. Conditions inside Kholm quickly deteriorated in the face of freezing temperatures and enormous Soviet pressure.

Reinforcements slowly arrived to break the siege





**Members of 9.FR der Lw.1 (later JR43 of 21.LwFD) at a ration point in the spring of 1942. The unit has been issued a variety of headgear, including the *Fliegermütze*, *Einheitsfeldmütze*, and tight fitting white hoods to provide protection to the head and neck from extreme cold weather.**

of Kholm in the weeks following the isolation of the town. III./FR der Lw. 1 under Major Thoms arrived by train at Staraya Russa on the evening of 20 February 1942. Experiencing a Russian bombardment for the first time while still at the railway station, the unit moved to Nagowo to protect the north-western approach to Staraya Russa. The battalion was soon involved in combat, mostly through patrol encounters and coming under fire from Russian 'Stalin Organs'. The bitter cold tore through the ill-equipped Luftwaffe troops, who lacked proper winter clothing; and the battalion's 9.Kompanie suffered heavy losses in its first pitched fight with the Soviets.

The headquarters of FR der Lw. 1 was meanwhile set up near Kholm to support the drive to relieve the town and to protect the Kholm-Staraya Russa 'rollbahn' (highway) from partisans. German efforts to liberate Kholm failed repeatedly, and the Russians tightened their grip. To boost the garrison elements of Maj. Thoms' battalion flew into Kholm, as did two battalions from FR der Lw. 5. After horrendous fighting the Germans pushed through to Kholm and freed Scherer's troops on 5 May, over three and a half months after the siege had begun.

Following his mission at Yukhnov, Gen. Meindl went to Staraya Russa to take command of the scattered Luftwaffe field regiments. His staff arrived at Morilinza, some 20 km from the town, in late February and began preparations to form a new division. Meindl, still recovering from typhoid

fever, joined his staff at his new headquarters at Bory, south of Morilinza, in March. With heavy fighting along the entire front, Meindl was unable to fully organize his units until the early summer of 1942. 'Division Meindl' had four Field Regiments (1st to 4th) in June, covering a sector of nearly 90 km from Kholm to the opening of the Demyansk pocket in a weak line bolstered with occasional strongpoints. The enemy was within easy striking range (usually less than a kilometre) separated by flat, swampy terrain.

Division Meindl lacked the normal complement of artillery or support units of an Army infantry division. Apart from the heavy companies of the battalions, Meindl had only a battery of captured 7.62 cm Russian field pieces under divisional control. These guns, known to the Germans as 'Ratsch-Bumm' for their distinctive sound, were manned by former paratroopers with no artillery training. Division Meindl did not receive trained artillerymen until October 1942, and these were older flak personnel with no experience in field artillery. The division's regular artillery regiment did not arrive until March 1943.

Despite the obvious limitations of his command, Meindl imbued the division with the same spirit that he had shown at Yukhnov. His men fought in numerous actions along the front lines and cleared the rear areas of partisans throughout the summer of 1942. The division was cited in a dispatch issued by the German high command on 23 June 1942, which stated: 'In the terrible winter battles on the Eastern Front, Luftwaffe field battalions in ground combat bravely defended the seriously threatened front lines. With units of the Army, these units are now involved in other operations. The Division Meindl has particularly distinguished itself in battle in the impassable swamps.'

As autumn 1942 approached German commanders once again became worried about the Demyansk 'fortress'. Hitler refused to withdraw II.Armeekorps from the isolated pocket although it was still vulnerable to encirclement. To widen the approach to Demyansk and lessen the chance of Russian tanks slicing through its narrow neck, four German divisions launched Operation 'Winkelried' in late September. In a multi-pronged advance, two German divisions pushed the Soviet 1st Guards Rifle Division westward and trapped

the Russians at the Lovat River. Division Meindl and the remnants of SS Division 'Totenkopf' crossed the Redya River and moved eastward, forcing the surrender of the Russians between the two pincers by 10 October.

## *The Luftwaffe Field Divisions*

Even as Division Meindl was mopping up Russian resistance during Operation 'Winkelried', the Luftwaffe was busy organizing ten complete new divisions for ground service on the Eastern Front. The heavy losses of the winter and further losses incurred during the summer campaign in southern Russia forced Germany to step up the search for fresh manpower. One general earned his nickname of 'Hero Snatcher' for his ruthless purging of supply depots and hospital areas in Germany for fit soldiers. Under these circumstances, Göring was forced to either use his surplus Air Force personnel or lose them to the Army. Given his sense of self-aggrandizement, pride in his Luftwaffe, and jealousy for his rivals, Göring refused to allow the transfer of Air Force personnel to the Army. His decision to form his own divisions under air force commanders was a great mistake, although it had some basis in the satisfactory performance of Division Meindl.

Göring issued his call for volunteers to serve in the new divisions on 17 September, to all officers from lieutenant to colonel, without regard to branch or previous duty. His appeal to enlisted men followed two days later and had the same general message, stating that 'whoever voluntarily joins this corps has to do it with a strong heart and without hesitation. But if courage is shown in combat the soldier can expect special consideration regarding promotion and decoration.'

To oversee the raising of the Luftwaffe field divisions Gen. Meindl returned from Russia in October and organized XIII. Fliegerkorps in Germany; promoted lieutenant-general, he was assigned the task of supervising the formation of a total of 22 new divisions. Generalmajor Petersen, former commander of 7. Fliegerdivision in Russia,

was similarly appointed as the first Inspector of Luftwaffe Field Divisions. Meindl set up his headquarters at Gross-Born training camp in northern Germany where 2., 3., 4., 5., and 6. LwFD were already in the process of formation; 7., 8., 9., and 10. LwFD assembled at Miellau training camp in East Prussia, while 1. LwFD organized at Staraya Russa on the Russian front from elements of Division Meindl and FR der Lw. 5. Division Meindl, now under the command of Generalleutnant Job Odebrecht, remained as previously organized and was not given a numerical designation until early 1943 when it became 21. LwFD.

XIII. Fliegerkorps directed on 28 September that 2., 3., and 4. LwFD complete training by 10 October while the remaining divisions (1., and 5. to 10. LwFD) would have until 1 November. This barely gave any of the divisions time to sort out their personnel, draw equipment, or train as new units. One member of 7. LwFD recalled his arrival at Miellau in the summer of 1942: 'It took a long

**An MG34 crew of 9.FR der Lw.1 engaging enemy aircraft in early 1942.**





**A patrol of 9.FR der Lw.1 prepares to move out during the winter of 1942–43. They are well equipped with reversible winter uniforms and felt boots. Most wear tight fitting hoods under the hood of the reversible jacket while the patrol leader (on left) has a fur-covered cap. The wearing of hoods was normally prohibited on the front because it restricted hearing and peripheral vision. Several LwFD, including 3. and 13., later formed ski companies in 1943 and 1944 to perform long-range patrolling during the winter.**

time until I found my unit. As I came from a heavy company I was assigned to an 88 mm section. But what horror! My comrades had no idea about weapons; even some of the officers didn't . . . All these people were from different assignments—cooks, armourers, barbers, drivers, supply and administrative clerks, also men from the staff of the Luftgaukommandos. Some of them immediately requested to be returned to their original units. My commander told me "Please take over the training on the machine gun, because I have no idea about it!" I was able to train for just three days—then we were shipped to Russia.'

On 12 October Goring issued Basic Order Number 3 which stipulated that the new Luftwaffe units be employed in Russia with 'only defensive missions on quiet fronts.' The Reichsmarschall also called on the Army to accept the field divisions in a 'comradely' manner and to assist with training, particularly in close combat skills and support weapons. The Luftwaffe divisions were supposed to be committed to combat as a single body and not be separated without the approval of Army headquarters. The divisions fell under the tactical command of the Army while in the field but remained under Luftwaffe control for personnel and administrative purposes.

The German air minister also established four Luftwaffe field corps as the higher headquarters for the divisions in Russia. Each corps operated under the jurisdiction of the general air force headquar-

ters in conjunction with various Army commands. Luftflotte 1 supported Army Group North with the III.Luftwaffe Feldkorps, while Luftwaffe Kommando Ost had the II.Luftwaffe Feldkorps in Army Group Centre's sector. Luftflotte 4, operating in southern Russia, had two field corps, the I and IV to work with Army Groups A and B. Each corps had its own units—e.g. military police, pioneers, and signals, etc.—to provide further support to the field divisions under its command and to provide some rear area security. General der Flieger Schlemm, a veteran of Luftwaffe ground combat during the previous winter, was assigned to command the II.LwFK. Generalleutnant Odebrecht left his position as commander of Division Meindl and assumed command of the III.LwFK in Army Group North. The commander of the I.Luftwaffe Feldkorps remains unknown; while Generalleutnant Hoffmann commanded the IV.LwFK.

The tables of organization and equipment for the Luftwaffe units emphasized the limited rôle of the divisions as specified by Basic Order Number 3. The strength of a field division was about half that of an Army infantry division. While most Army infantry divisions in 1942 still had three infantry regiments of three battalions each and a full artillery regiment, the Luftwaffe field division was given only four infantry battalions. Each field battalion, in turn, had three rifle companies, one heavy infantry weapons company, a headquarters company, and a signal platoon. Each infantry ('Jäger') company was equipped with 20 machine pistols, eight light machine guns, 12 heavy machine guns, nine light mortars, and two heavy mortars. The field divisions received the MG 34 and, as it became available, the new MG 42, both of which could be used in a light or heavy mode. Some field battalions initially utilized the MG 15, an aircraft machine gun converted for infantry use. The heavy weapons company had 24 machine pistols, four light and eight heavy machine guns, three light mortars, and four 20 mm Flak 38 guns which could be used for both air and ground targets.

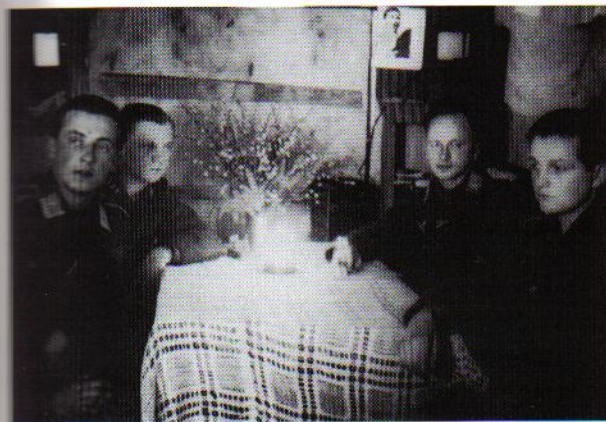
The Luftwaffe field division also possessed an anti-tank battalion with two companies of nine 50 mm Pak 38 each, and one company of nine captured Russian 7.62 cm guns. The mixed flak

battalion of the division had one heavy battery with three 20 mm flak pieces and four 88 mm guns. The two light batteries were each provided with 12 20 mm flak guns. The flak battalion, as a whole, had four 88 mm guns and 27 20 mm anti-aircraft weapons as well as other small arms, machine pistols and light machine guns. Both the Panzer-jäger Abteilung and the Flak Abteilung had a headquarters staff and signal support.

The artillery battalion was the last substantial combat element of the Luftwaffe field division, and its composition varied. 1, 2, 7, and 8.LwFD were initially issued with two batteries of four 75 mm Geb K15 guns. These mountain weapons, of Czech origin, could be easily broken down and transported by horse or mule. The two light artillery batteries of 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10.LwFD received six 105 mm Nebelwerfer 40 mortars each. These mortars could fire smoke, chemical, or high explosive ammunition at a rate of eight to ten rounds per minute with a maximum range of 6,800 yards. Five Sturmgeschütz 75 mm assault guns, on the chassis of the PzKpfw III tank, completed the third battery in the Luftwaffe Field Divisions. A headquarters battery provided staff, medical, forward observation, ammunition, and maintenance support for the firing batteries of the artillery battalion.

The Luftwaffe field divisions had a minimum of administrative or logistical support personnel. Pioneer, medical, and supply companies formed the backbone of the division's rear echelon, while

**A cozy scene with Leutnant Fuchs (right rear) and Unteroffizier Kessler (left front) and two soldiers of 9.FR der Lw. 1 in 1942. The unit has decorated its quarters with dried flowers, a tablecloth, calendar, and a German pin-up poster.**



maintenance teams and veterinarians took care of unit vehicles and animals. Each division was authorized 616 wheeled or tracked vehicles, although few divisions, if any, ever received this much organic transportation: most divisions depended on horses, mules, and the ever-important Russian *panje* wagon. Likewise, while the firepower of the Luftwaffe field division appeared significant on paper, it too was often reduced by shortages and was never at full strength. The Luftwaffe field division was better equated to the strength of an Army brigade, as shown in a report of 1.LwFD on 28 October 1943. The division had an effective strength of 6,429 officers, NCOs and enlisted men, while the 'fighting' strength of the unit totalled only 2,779. Even with attached Army units and Eastern volunteers, 1.LwFD could only muster a combined effective strength of 8,000.

## *The Eastern Front*

### *1942-1943*

No sooner had the first ten field divisions commenced organization and training during autumn 1942 than they were needed in Russia. 5.LwFD moved in December from Groß-Born to its new area of operations along the Kuban River near the Black Sea. 1.LwFD continued to organize at the front near the city of Novgorod, just north of Lake Illmen, while Division Meindl operated south of the lake in the vicinity of Staraya Russa. 9.LwFD was also dispatched to fight in the sector of Army Group North. II.LwFK, with 3 and 4.LwFD, moved to the critical region around Vitebsk in Army Group Centre. 2.LwFD similarly transferred to this Army command to serve with elements of 7. Fliegerdivision. As can be readily seen, the Field Divisions were immediately scattered throughout the Russian front with little regard to Basic Order Number 3.

The Soviet encirclement of the German Sixth Army and part of the Fourth Panzer Army at Stalingrad in mid-November posed a great risk to the entire southern half of the German front. Once again, Hitler ordered all German troops to remain steadfast and fight to the death. The Führer



**Troops of 11.Kompanie, 8.LwFD at the front, 23 December 1942. (Photo courtesy of Walter Neuhaus via Georg Jagolski)**

refused to permit the evacuation of the Sixth Army and organized a relief expedition under the command of Generalfeldmarschall Fritz-Erich von Manstein. The newly-arrived 7 and 8.LwFD from Mielau were among the miscellaneous troops under Manstein's new command, Army Group Don. Both were under the command of I.LwFK, although they did not serve together. 8.LwFD was destined to make the first effort to relieve the Sixth Army at Stalingrad.

With that city's isolation, 8.LwFD disembarked at Morozovsk on 25 November and moved as a unit through the town of Nizhne Chirskaya. With the anti-tank battalion in advance, 8.LwFD marched across the snow-swept steppes towards Stalingrad. Unfamiliar with the terrain, the division had little intelligence regarding the extent of the Russian breakthrough. Expecting to find retreating German troops, 8.LwFD ran headlong into the Soviet pincers and was scattered in a matter of hours. The division established a collection point at Nizhne Chirskaya near the confluence of the Don and Chir rivers, where the survivors of the bloody battle gathered. When only 12 men returned from the advance elements of the division, the commander of the division's anti-tank battalion committed suicide.

7.LwFD deployed to serve as a part of Operation 'Wintergewitter' with XLVIII.Panzerkorps. The corps tried to relieve Stalingrad, but failed due to lack of resources and Hitler's own obstinacy. With the news of the disasters which crippled 7 and 8.LwFD, the German Army high command ordered Manstein to utilize the divisions in purely defensive capacities. Manstein, in turn, consolidated both divisions with Army units. 7.LwFD fought most of the winter campaign with

336.ID while 8.LwFD served with 294.ID. Army Group Don, with its subordinate *Armeeabteilung* Hollidt, was soon forced to fight for its own survival, and Stalingrad was left to its fate.

On the same day as 8.LwFD marched into the trap near Nizhne Chirskaya, 2.LwFD was crushed by a massive Soviet offensive of six armies against the German Ninth Army in the Rzhev salient. Once again, heavy snows combined with strong frontal attacks and partisan raids crippled the novice 2.LwFD at the town of Bely. The Germans quickly rallied with reinforcements of veteran units, including Panzer Grenadier Division 'Grossdeutschland', and the threat to Army Group Centre diminished by mid-December. Much of the blame for the initial *débâcle* at Bely was placed on 2.LwFD, which, no doubt, was totally unsuited for its new rôle. The division was soon removed from the salient and transferred to II.LwFK at Vitebsk.

At the beginning of 1943 the Luftwaffe field divisions and corps were posted throughout the Eastern Front and already heavily engaged against the Soviets. Four divisions were committed to Army Group North, which remained mostly quiet with the exception of fighting around Leningrad. 9 and 10.LwFD, under III.LwFK, were assigned the task of maintaining a defensive watch on the Soviet troops isolated at Oranienbaum, along the Gulf of Finland. 1.LwFD continued to fight at Novgorod, a critical rail junction and the bulwark of the southern flank of the German Eighteenth Army. 21.LwFD, the former Division Meindl, likewise defended the southern approach to Staraya Russa. This division covered the withdrawal of German troops from the Demyansk pocket between late February and mid-March. Behind the front lines of 21.LwFD a *Kampfgruppe* of regimental strength under Oberstleutnant Neudorffer battled partisans. By early spring 12 and 13.LwFD arrived in Army Group North and took up positions near the central portion of the Eighteenth Army's sector around Leningrad.

II.LwFK, now composed of 2, 3, 4, and 6.LwFD, were the only air force ground units serving with Army Group Centre. The corps held the German line in the vicinity of Vitebsk and Nevel, a region heavily infested with Russian partisans. In late February the Luftwaffe troops

conducted a joint operation with Army security units to eliminate the partisan stronghold at Surazh Rayon, which lay between the front line of the Third Panzer Army and the supply centre at Vitebsk. Operation 'Kugelblitz' was moderately successful, claiming the lives of some 3,700 partisans by early March; but it also revealed the immense difficulties that regular German units faced in actually engaging guerrillas in open combat. The partisans generally avoided clashing with the air force and Army units and disappeared into the wooded landscape.

The situation continued to look grim for the Field Divisions in southern Russia during the first months of 1943. 7 and 8.LwFD had been effectively destroyed during the Chir River fighting in late 1942 and early 1943 with their remnants absorbed by the Army. This left only two Luftwaffe divisions still serving in either Army Group Don or Army Group A. The surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in late January permitted the Soviets to turn their full attention to the destruction of Manstein's troops. By mid-February Manstein withdrew to the Mius River line, which shortened his front and permitted him to utilise his armoured units to retake Kharkov and close the Soviet winter offensive.

The newly-formed 15.LwFD took up a position along the Mius River front in early 1943. This division, also known as Division Sudost, was organized at the front from Air Force personnel already stationed in southern Russia and from remnants of 7.LwFD. To command the new division Generalleutnant Sprang, the former chief of the Luftwaffe Weather Service in Berlin, arrived in early 1943. With only a minimum of training, the division fought around the Rostov area in early January and suffered heavily under Russian assaults. The division received special commendation for its defensive efforts from the Fourth Panzer Army in its daily report on 12 February; and three days later pulled back to the Mius River, north of Taganrog.

5.LwFD, meanwhile, had gone into action in the Caucasus in early January. Russian pressure soon whittled away Army Group A's hold as the Soviets drove German troops back towards Rostov, in the north, and to the Kertch Strait. The army group's primary force, the Seventeenth



Members of the same company as above in a Russian village, 15 December 1942. (Photo courtesy of Walter Neuhaus via Georg Jagolski)

Army, held a diminishing front along the Kuban River which shrank daily. 5.LwFD suffered heavy losses throughout this withdrawal.

### The Field Division Controversy

The high casualty rates and poor performance of the Field Divisions during the first months of combat service forced both Luftwaffe and Army authorities to question their combat value. The Army remained unconvinced that they served any good purpose at all, and considered these units a waste of personnel and equipment. At least two major Army figures, Generalfeldmarschall Manstein and General der Infanterie Walter Warlimont of Army headquarters, had opposed the formation of the divisions from the beginning but were overruled by Hitler. The fact that the organization of the Luftwaffe units postponed the refitting of four or five panzer divisions with new vehicles also vexed Army leaders. Their frustration spread among the lower Army ranks, who labelled the air force units 'Luftwaffen-Fehlkonstruktions-Divisionen'—'mistakenly constructed air force divisions'.

The members of the new Luftwaffe field units suffered from low esteem. Thrown into combat without proper training or leadership, they could truly remark that 'they were neither fliers nor soldiers'. The Luftwaffe divisions were completely unprepared for the shock of combat in Russia or for the rigours of its climate. Despite this unsuccessful baptism of fire, however, several Luftwaffe officers hoped to rectify the problem of the field divisions during the spring and summer of 1943.

Generalleutnant Meindl wrote a lengthy report in May 1943 in which he noted the difficulties that

the units had experienced. The commander of XIII.Fliegerkorps, which oversaw the organization of the divisions, was gravely concerned about both replacements for his divisions and the soldiers' morale. Meindl demonstrated that the original purpose of the divisions—to briefly relieve worn-out Army units so as to allow them to recuperate and then return to combat—had clearly not been carried out. Luftwaffe divisions were now responsible for sectors normally covered by regular Army infantry divisions, though with fewer personnel or resources. Meindl recognized that most members of the field divisions were young volunteers who originally joined the Luftwaffe to serve as pilots or paratroopers. If these men felt that they were merely sacrificial pawns, Meindl foresaw that they would soon leave the Luftwaffe and transfer to the Waffen-SS, Army Panzer units, or Navy.

Meindl proposed to convert the Luftwaffe field divisions into 'Luftlande' or 'Sturm' divisions, to work with Panzer units to surprise the enemy and accomplish the breakthrough of German forces.



With regular replacements and thorough training, four to five Luftwaffe field divisions could form two assault divisions, serving in both airborne and glider assault rôles. Meindl felt that this would be a more effective use of Luftwaffe personnel and that the assault divisions would become a valuable offensive tool. His idea was supported by Generalmajor Hermann Ramcke, the paratroop commander of 2.FJD in France. Ramcke wanted to build up Germany's airborne capabilities, and the field divisions were an obvious source of manpower. The Inspector of Luftwaffe Field Divisions, General der Flieger Petersen, wanted to consolidate the 22 field divisions into 15 and fill up the remaining units with surplus personnel. Petersen felt that with minimal losses and fresh replacements the use of these divisions as Meindl wanted could wait until the spring of 1944.

The future of the Luftwaffe field units was a much discussed issue during the summer of 1943 among the Luftwaffe's highest commanders. Generaloberst Hans Jeschonnek, the Luftwaffe chief of staff, brought up Meindl's proposal to Göring just prior to Jeschonnek's suicide. The chief of staff approved of the idea of establishing the new Luftlande/Sturm divisions because he wanted to keep air force personnel in the ranks of the Luftwaffe: he did not want to transfer these units to the Army, where the 'excellent manpower' of the field divisions would be dissipated. He, too, worried about the effect on morale of Luftwaffe personnel if they were forced from the service for which they had originally volunteered. Göring stated to Jeschonnek in late June that he would think about the Luftwaffe field divisions and raise the topic with Hitler.

In late September Erhard Milch, the

Commissioned by Generalmajor Meindl and drafted by Gefreiter Schroder of IV.FR der Lw.1, each element of the plaque had special symbolism. The shield was based on a 12th-century Gothic design while the diving eagle represented both the Luftwaffe origins of the division and the background of its original members, mostly paratroopers. The handgrenade carried by the eagle denoted the division's rôle as infantry. The building at the lower portion of the shield was the ruined domes of the church at Dretino, southwest of Staraya Russa, where the division had its headquarters in 1942. The divisional pennant and an oakleaf cluster is seen at the top of the shield. The inscription reads 'In Recognition of Special Achievement of the Commander of the 21.LwFD 1942' and is bordered by 80 swastikas. The plaque and a certificate signed by the divisional commander were awarded to members of Division Meindl and 21.LwFD. The shield was later adopted as the unit's tactical emblem and the 21.LwFD became known as the 'Adler', or Eagle Division.



Two members of 3.Sturmgeschütz-Batterie, 5.LwFD, January 1943. Oberleutnant Wolfgang Bach, battery commander (left), and Hauptwachtmeister Herman Christ (right) wear the newly-issued Luftwaffe splinter camouflage smock. They both have *Totenkopf* insignia pinned on the

collars of the *Fliegerbluse* and on the left collar of Bach's camouflage smock. Oberleutnant Bach has pink piping on the collar of the flying jacket and wears a civilian sweater, a popular, if unauthorized, article of clothing on the Eastern Front. (Wolfgang Bach)

Luftwaffe's chief of air supply, affirmed that XI.Fliegerkorps (the headquarters for the paratroop divisions in France) could draw on personnel from the Luftwaffe field divisions for replacements. Milch stated that it was 'desirable' that all field divisions eventually regroup into Luftlande divisions. He further noted that a proposal had been made to dissolve five divisions and to strengthen the remaining formations to 12,000 men each. Any decision to convert all field divisions into other Luftwaffe organizations and pull them out of present deployment, Milch wrote, would require the approval of the Armed Forces High Command (OKW).

### Soviet offensives, summer—autumn 1943

Even as Milch wrote about the future of the field divisions, Hitler authorized OKW on 20 September to transfer them to the Army with an effective

date of 1 November 1943. While the generals argued, renewed Soviet attacks in the summer and autumn of 1943 once again demonstrated the overall deficiencies of these divisions. The German failure at Kursk during Operation 'Zitadelle' in July (in which no Luftwaffe field divisions were involved) gave the Russians the psychological edge to take the offensive, and they aimed at destroying Army Group South. The Russians smashed across the Mius River line on 17 July, even before the end of the fighting around Kursk, although the Sixth Army rallied and held. 15.LwFD had prepared fortifications throughout the spring along the heights overlooking the river but was handicapped by the lack of construction material. This forced the division to send details behind the front to gather wood, as well as units to protect these parties from partisans. While preparing their positions the soldiers of the division



received their Christmas 1942 gifts in May 1943, and were issued their first rations of German beer in ten months. Seven officers from one regiment of 15.LwFD were relieved from duty during this quiet period, their nerves shattered from the hard fighting during the winter.

The division was overstretched and lacked secondary fighting positions when the Soviets struck in July. II. Kompanie of Jäger Regiment 29 for example, held a front of 1,500 metres with only 91 men, armed with nine MG15s, four MG42s, one heavy and three light mortars, and one 20 mm flak cannon. The German line swayed during the first days of the fighting in July, and the battle see-sawed into early August. The Sixth Army restored the main line of resistance along the Mius River by mid-August, but at great cost. The Russians soon recovered and nearly trapped 15.LwFD and its corps at the mouth of the river near Taganrog on 29 August. The division managed to break out and withdrew with the main army to the Dnepr River. The survivors of 15.LwFD were siphoned off by Army units, and the division essentially ceased to exist after September 1943.

A similar fate befell 5.LwFD of Army Group A. After evacuating the Kuban bridgehead the divi-

**A group of Luftwaffe officers wear a variety of caps. Note that four of the men do not have ranks on the collar although they do have pipping.**



sion struggled at Kertch in the Crimea. The division then joined the Sixth Army on the Nogai Steppe in October, where the division's staff consolidated with the staff of the remnants of 15.LwFD. The Soviet attack in late October sliced through the Sixth Army and isolated the Crimean peninsula. Although units of 5.LwFD lingered until the spring of 1944 as a Kampfgruppe, the heart of the division was destroyed in the fall of 1943.

The greatest disaster to the Luftwaffe field divisions occurred in the sector of II.LwFK near Vitebsk. The Russians exploited the weak boundary between the Army Groups North and Central at Nevel on 6 October. Catching the Germans unprepared, a massive Soviet force tore into the positions of the unlucky 2.LwFD and captured Nevel. The disaster infuriated Hitler, who demanded that the Army retake Nevel, an important supply centre and road junction. Hitler was angry with his generals that when asked if the destroyed 2.LwFD could be consolidated with Army units, the Führer responded 'that he did not want to water down good Air Force troops with bad Army troops'. In fact, 2.LwFD was no longer combat effective, and merged with the neighbouring 3 and 4.LwFD. The fighting around Nevel continued until December and drew in all the Luftwaffe field divisions, leaving them in a highly exposed position at Vitebsk.

These disasters immediately preceded the transfer of the Luftwaffe field divisions to the Army in the late fall of 1943. Hitler, Göring, and Army commanders issued proclamations highlighting the role of the field divisions in the struggle against Bolshevism. While Göring expressed reluctance to give up his divisions, he recognized that the Army could provide better replacements and equipment than the Air Force.

## *The Army Takes Over*

The condition of the Luftwaffe field divisions varied greatly at the time of the Army's assumption of responsibility in November 1943. Division strength reflected unreplaced losses from combat and other causes. 3.LwFD, for example, had 5,800 officers, men, and Russian volunteers (*hiwis*) on

December; 6.LwFD, in the same general area around Vitebsk, reported 7,475 soldiers and support personnel. 11.LwFD, in Greece on occupation duty, had a total strength of over 10,000 troops, not including attached units or non-military personnel. 21.LwFD was the strongest formation at this time, with nearly 16,000 officers and men; the division had absorbed members of 22.LwFD when it disbanded in early 1943 prior to its full activation. 21.LwFD in fact had two artillery and four infantry regiments, making it far stronger than the average division, which still had one artillery regiment of three battalions and two infantry regiments of two battalions each.

The equipment of the Air Force ground units was generally of poorer quality than that of the Army. Early in 1943 the Luftwaffe reorganized the artillery regiments of the field divisions and issued captured French 75 mm guns modified on the carriage of the German 50 mm Pak 38 in lieu of the mountain guns or heavy mortars specified in 1942. Most of the divisions were provided with trucks to tow the artillery while a few had tracked vehicles, mainly Raupenschlepper OST prime movers. 13, 16, 17, and 18.LwFD were permitted only horse transport for their artillery battalions in January 1943. The artillery regiment of each field division had five battalions in 1943: two light, one heavy, one flak, and one anti-tank. This changed again in March when the field divisions formed a separate Panzerjäger Abteilung with four batteries, the last battery being the Sturmgeschütz battery with four assault guns. Initially the artillery regiments were not provided with any heavy artillery, although some units later received cast-off French, Polish or Russian 105 mm or 155 mm howitzers. With the exception of the assault gun battery (which was vastly understrength when compared with an Army 12-gun battery) and the flak battalion, the artillery of the Luftwaffe field divisions was obsolete and unsuitable for combat on the Eastern Front.

The Army instituted a number of alterations when it took control. Virtually every officer in the entire chain of command of each Luftwaffe field division was replaced by an Army officer. The Army redesignated the formations as 'Field Divisions (Luftwaffe)' and gave them Army post office numbers. Most importantly, beginning in Novem-



**Oberleutnant Karl Seibod, commander of 4.FR der Lw.2 (later JR41 of 21.LwFD), is seen with the Luftwaffe Tuchrock. His decorations include the army *Infanterie Sturmabzeichen*, the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class (the latter is worn as a ribbon with the War Merit Cross), and the SA Sport Medal. Seibod has rifle green collar tabs as specified in January 1943 for members of LwFD although he still retains the army infantry assault badge, which was supposed to be turned in by Air Force members when the Luftwaffe instituted its own Ground Combat Badge in March 1942.**

ber 1943 and continuing through the summer of 1944, the field divisions were reorganized as Army divisions under the new 1944 infantry division establishment.

The new field division now had three Jäger regiments of two battalions, each battalion having a headquarters company, three rifle companies, and one heavy weapons company. The Jäger regiment, likewise, had a headquarters company, a 13.Kompanie with infantry assault guns, and a 14. (anti-tank) Kompanie. The Army reorganized the artillery regiments of the field divisions into three light battalions of three batteries (still variously equipped with 75 mm or 105 mm guns) and one heavy artillery battalion. Each field division



**A section of Artillerie-Regiment 22 training at Fallingbösel in February 1943. Wearing the *Zeltbahn* as an outer garment, this crew operates a 75 mm Pak 97/38—a French 7.5 cm model 1897 gun modified with the carriage of the German 5 cm Pak 38. This weapon formed the backbone of the artillery for most LwFD.**

was supposed to have a flak battalion which, for the most part, was never organized. The anti-tank battalion contained three companies while the Sturmgeschütz battery expanded into a separate battalion. The Army also formed a reconnaissance battalion for the field division, later renamed as a Fusilier Battalion; this unit had the same general organization as a Jäger battalion. Similarly, the new field division had both a pioneer and a signal battalion, and some divisions gained a field replacement battalion. The Army intended to standardize the equipment and personnel of the field divisions with those of the Army and to increase their overall strength. In reality, the reorganization never kept pace with developments on the fronts, and organisational and equipment differences existed between all field divisions.

These changes did not come easily for the officers and men of the Luftwaffe field divisions. The Air Force kept large numbers of Luftwaffe officers and specialists, flak personnel, and technicians as well as 10,000 volunteers for airborne units. The fourth, or flak, battalion of the Luftwaffe artillery regiments did not transfer to the Army and remained under air force control. The loss of the flak battalion and of many officers and

enlisted men had a discouraging effect on the morale of the troops that remained with the Army. An example of the disruption caused by the Army's takeover in November 1943 can be seen in 11.FD(L) on occupation duty in Greece. The division lost not only its anti-aircraft artillery battalion, but also over 700 officers and men who left the division as volunteers for paratroop service. Another 400-odd men remained under Air Force control because of their specialised training. Aggravating these losses was the addition of 1,250 new recruits, mostly men of older age categories with little training. The replacement of Luftwaffe enlisted men and officers, from company grade up to divisional commander, with Army personnel also created confusion in terms of administrative and training procedures. The situation in 11.FD(L) was repeated in the other field divisions reorganized along Army lines during the winter of 1943: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21.FD(L).

The decision to transfer the field divisions also impacted on the Luftwaffe field corps. II.LwFK transferred from Army Group Centre to Italy in late 1943, where it consolidated with I.FJK. III.LwFK converted into II.Flak Corps; while IV.LwFK moved to France, where it acted as the control group for several field divisions. The corps then commanded Army units in southern France at the time of the American invasion in August 1944 until it consolidated with an Army corps at the end of the year.

## War in The West

The Luftwaffe field divisions stationed in western Europe did not see combat until mid-1944. Unlike their sister units in Russia, the divisions in Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland, and Norway had time to organize and train, although they were hindered by similar problems of obsolete equipment, lack of transportation, inexperienced personnel and poor training. The Army stripped the divisions of motorized vehicles, and they served primarily as static units with a defensive mission of repelling Allied seaborne and airborne assaults. Because of this task the Luftwaffe soldiers spent most of their time constructing fortifications, which limited the amount of time available for training.

In June 1944 five Luftwaffe field divisions manned the Atlantic Wall to meet the expected Allied invasion of western Europe. 14.FD(L) occupied the northernmost region of the German defences in Trondheim, Norway. After the Normandy invasion the division shifted to Jutland where it remained until the end of the war when it returned to Norway. The unit surrendered in Norway to British and Norwegian forces without seeing battle. 19.FD(L), soon to depart for Italy, was stationed at Thielt, Belgium; and 16.FD(L) held a portion of the Dutch coast between Tymuiden and Harlem. 17.FD(L), commanded by Army Generalleutnant Hans Hocker, defended the French coastline from Dieppe to Le Havre; the division was not responsible for the control of either town. Generalleutnant Joachim von Tresc-

know, a former Army division commander in Russia, assumed command of 18.FD(L) in February 1944; his division manned a defensive front that stretched from Dunkirk to Calais.

During spring 1944 the Luftwaffe field divisions in the west were still adjusting to the demands imposed by the Army's take-over. Army officers now filled about half the slots in the divisions, with the most important combat duties under Army domain. The divisions also formed new units as specified by the new Army tables of organization and equipment. 16.FD(L), for example, made a new rifle regiment, JR46, by taking one battalion each from JR31 and 32. 17 and 18.FD(L) followed suit and formed a third regiment, JR47 and 48 respectively. The divisions also had to organise new fusilier battalions and assault gun battalions (mostly of battery strength), which were not ready for service until the summer of 1944. The lack of transportation was a critical worry for divisional commanders in the light of Allied air superiority. As late as July, 18.FD(L) had only one fully mobile unit, the anti-tank battalion, and the division was forced to requisition 2,500 horses when ordered to the invasion front.

Division commanders encountered even greater problems in maintaining unit strength and coherence. 16.FD(L) lost 2,000 men who remained with the Air Force after the Army took control of the field divisions; this left the division

**Staff officers of a Luftwaffe field battalion. The majority of officers in the LwFD were Air Force personnel until the divisions transferred to Army control in November 1943. This group photograph shows only one army officer assigned as an adviser while the Air Force officers wear a mixture of flying blouses and service jackets.**



with only 60 per cent of its normal complement; and while it received some replacements—mostly troops of Volksdeutsche extraction—their training was incomplete and their devotion to duty suspect. The average age of divisional personnel was around 30, and the commanding general noted that ‘the level of their training was sufficient for defensive and other minor missions. Being without combat experience and not motorized, the division was not equal to an enemy with superiority in material.’

17.FD(L) also gained new troops in the form of two battalions of former Soviet prisoners of war who volunteered for duty in the Wehrmacht. One unit, Nordkaukasische Bataillon 835 from the Caucasus region, became III./JR34; the battalion did not serve exclusively with 17.FD(L) as it also acted under the operational control of Army units

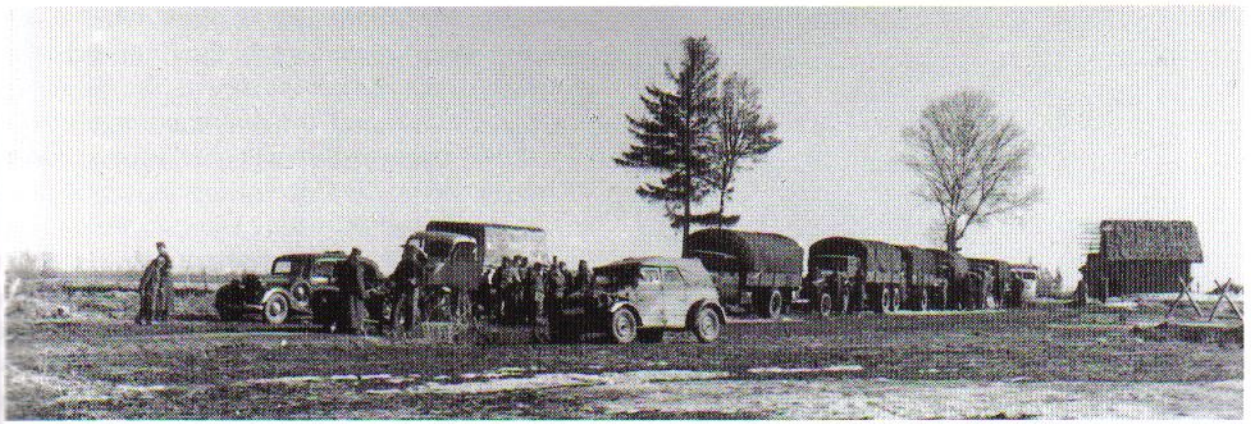
**An Oberleutnant commanding a battery of AR22 in Russia, 1943. This regiment, organized as part of 22.LwFD, became part of 21.LwFD when the decision was made in early 1943 not to raise the 22.LwFD. This officer previously served in the flak artillery as he was awarded the Luftwaffe Flak War Badge.**



in the Le Havre area. A second foreign battalion served in 17.FD(L) under the command of Hauptmann Keilig, a German officer; this unit was assigned as the third battalion of the division's artillery regiment. These two Eastern units added to the paper strength of the division but were untested in battle and German officers were uncertain as to their overall reliability.

Throughout the first half of 1944 the field divisions busily prepared defences along the coastline to meet the Allied attack. The work of 17.FD(L) was typical of the units stationed along the Atlantic Wall. The division had a threefold mission: to defeat an enemy invasion from the sea prior to landing; to defeat the enemy during landing operations; and finally to drive off any enemy troops that managed to land. The division had a secondary task to move the entire division or portions of it within 48 hours to reinforce the German line elsewhere in case of emergency. The Army's 346.ID acted in direct support of 17.FD(L) to defeat a sea attack or airborne landings. The two divisions emplaced some 250,000 camouflaged stakes with barbed wire in likely airdrop zones behind the coast, while 17.FD(L) erected similar barriers on the beaches. The division also constructed numerous bunkers and pillboxes along the coast, although the armament of these posts was often inadequate.

The division's main line of defence consisted of a coastline of steep cliffs interspersed with small harbours. The defensive positions were constructed to cover these harbours, while few works were built along the ridges because of the lack of time or resources. Minefields, anti-tank ditches, and barbed wire entanglements were scattered throughout the division's sector. The rear area of the division had been flooded to prevent air drops, and this sector was covered by Army units and rear echelon troops of 17.FD(L). Machine gun nests and emplaced anti-tank positions were also located throughout the main line of defence and in the secondary zone. The depth of the main defensive positions extended about 4 to 5 km behind the coast. Each strongpoint had enough rations to hold for 20 days. The various units could communicate via radio and wire; land transportation was limited to the night-time because of the threat of American and British fighter-bombers.



### The Normandy Campaign

17.FD(L) went to alert status in the early hours of 6 June as reports arrived in Le Havre of large air formations in the Normandy area. The Germans immediately suspected that Le Havre was a target, and 17.FD(L) moved into battle positions. The first Luftwaffe field division to meet the enemy, however, was the 16.FD(L), which moved by rail from Holland to Paris in mid-June without loss or delay by Allied bombing. The division replaced part of 21.Panzer Division along the Orne River to the north of Caen. The British and Canadian efforts to seize Caen bogged down in the first week of July in the face of tough German opposition. The Allies planned to smash the Germans with a combined artillery and aerial bombardment, followed by an infantry and armour assault. The push began on the afternoon of 7 July, when shells from a British warship from a range of 25,000 yards struck Point 64, a hill that controlled the sector of 16.FD(L). Later that evening 450 bombers dropped 2,300 tons of high explosive on the German defences near Caen, and at 11 p.m. artillery from two British corps opened fire.

The shelling continued until the morning when the British 3rd and 59th Divisions launched the assault against 16.FD(L). Within an hour the British had achieved their objective of capturing Lebieux and Herouville, and continued the attack towards Point 64 and Caen. The British faced little opposition from the Air Force ground troops of 16.FD(L), and by the evening of 9 July the enemy had seized Point 64 and cleared the French city. The bombardment and enemy attacks left 16.FD(L) virtually destroyed; every battalion commander had been killed, and the division as a

**A battery of AR22 lined up to conduct a road march in March 1943. The different types of vehicles employed by a motorized Luftwaffe artillery unit can be seen in this photograph.**

whole lost 75 per cent of its strength in the few days of fighting. The remnants of the division retreated across the Orne River and encamped with 21.PD.

The division had a momentary rest after the débâcle at Caen, while the survivors regrouped and refitted. On 18 July the British continued their attempt to clear the Caen area with Operation 'Goodwood'. Once again, the sector of 16.FD(L) lay in the middle of the target zone designated for the Allied bombers and fighter-bombers. The aerial assault and artillery/naval gun fire proceeded without delay, and the attacking land forces smashed through the thin line held by 16.FD(L). The British encountered some stiff opposition from tanks of Army and SS units, but 16.FD(L) simply dissolved under the enemy's overwhelming superiority. The division never again entered combat against the Allies as a single body; some soldiers continued to serve with 21.PD or 346.ID after Caen. The headquarters of 16.FD(L) consolidated with that of 158. Reserve Division to form 16.Division; and later engaged American forces in the Loire valley.

The other two Luftwaffe field divisions which faced the Allies in France during summer 1944 experienced similar difficulties. 17.FD(L) left Le Havre for the invasion front in the first week of August. The breakthrough of the Allies prompted this move, and the division crossed the Seine River below Rouen in mid-August. The division still lacked vehicles to transport much of its equipment and was forced to leave a number of units at Le Havre, including the Caucasian battalion. The



**This Leutnant of 21.LwFD has earned the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the SA Sport Medal. He uses slip-on tabs to conceal the rank on the shoulder straps.**

artillery regiment, at the last moment, was issued with old World War One era 150 mm guns with which it had no prior training. 17. FD(L) arrived in line of battle on 17 August along the Eure River near Dreux, which had already been seized by American forces. The division was responsible for a sector of 70 km with only two-thirds of its normal strength and few supporting units.

The American drive from Dreux towards the Seine threatened to cut off 17.FD(L), and on 20 August the entire division was forced back towards Evreux. This proved short-lived, as the Americans seized the division's command post and shattered contact with higher headquarters and with subordinate units. Fusilier Battalion 17 fought a sharp action with elements of the 5th US Armored Division at Pacy-sur-Eure and at Heuniers. Enemy tanks and fighter-bombers eliminated most of this resistance and the division, in the meantime, failed to make contact with flanking

units. By 25 August the division fell back to Louviers, near the junction of the Eure and Seine rivers. To remain fighting below the Seine appeared pointless, and the divisional commander ordered the removal of artillery and supply units to friendly territory.

The columns of retreating German troops were subjected to frequent harassment by enemy air forces and Generalleutnant Hocker had to seek shelter as many as 20 times a day from roving fighter-bombers. Through personal intervention, Hocker and his staff prevented full-scale panic when several batteries of Artillerie Regiment 17 were struck by enemy aircraft. A severe rainstorm on 26 August aided the German withdrawal across the Seine, and the division was able to re-establish contact with the Fifth Panzer Army and parts of 2. Panzer Division in the new position. The division lost heavily during the retreat to the river, and two Jäger regiments could field only one battalion each. Other divisional units suffered similar losses, and were now commanded by junior officers due to casualties throughout the chain of command. On the morning of 27 August British troops crossed the Seine at Elbeuf and encountered resistance from 17.FD(L). The British pushed the division further beyond Rouen and, once more, contact was broken with other German units until early September.

17.FD(L) briefly established its headquarters on 30 August at La Feuillie, which was soon abandoned when the British moved in the direction of the Somme. The following day the remainder of the combat units of 17.FD(L) were ordered to fall in with 331.ID. Some portions of the division continued to fight as a Kampfgruppe and were evacuated across the Schelde at Terneuzen in Holland with the Fifteenth Army; they later formed the basis of Generalleutnant Hocker's new command, 167.Volksgrenadier Division.

18.FD(L) entered combat about the same time as 17.FD(L) when it departed Dunkirk on 14. August. The division moved mostly by foot and with horse transport in the direction of Amiens, and then to Mantes on the Seine, in eight days, with little opposition from the enemy. After the breakthrough by American forces the division was given the mission of throwing the enemy back across the river. Fusilier Battalion 18 fought the

Americans north-east of Mantes and momentarily halted them. Heavy fighting drew in the rest of the division, causing losses over the next several days. The division continued to attack and succeeded in recapturing some territory, although this left the division exhausted by 25 August. That same day the division fell under the command of I.SS Panzerkorps, which provided some badly-needed reinforcements in the form of units of 17.FD(L) from the Le Havre garrison.

The pressure of the enemy did not lessen and on 27 August the division prepared to retire, but this was upset by an American attack which split 18.FD(L) from its flanking division. To alleviate the pressure on the right flank JR48 launched an attack with the support of armour that morning. Meeting initially with partial success, the troops suffered up to 50 per cent casualties, which halted the drive. The division received an order to withdraw towards Rouen, but some units, JR548 in particular, were unable to disengage readily. During the withdrawal Generalleutnant von Tresckow formed three combat commands within the division: Kampfgruppe Schmidt (JR35), Kampfgruppe Mangold (JR48) and Kampfgruppe Koppel (JR33 from 17.FD(L)). The remnants of JR36 were given to these groups, and the artillery divided to support each group equally.

The retreat of 18.FD(L) was conducted in an orderly manner in the direction of Beauvais. The Americans, however, were not far behind, and struck JR48 with a penetrating armour attack on 30 August. The commander of the regiment was captured, and throughout the following day the Americans shifted around Beauvais. The speed of American movement could not be matched by the slow-moving columns of horsedrawn artillery and supply wagons of the 18.FD(L), which were always exposed to the terrifying attacks of 'jabos'. The division moved on 1 September to take up a new position along the Somme Canal at Ham, in the vicinity of St. Quentin. This was a brief halt, and the division moved again on 2 September towards Cambrai. By now the formation had an actual strength of less than two battalions, and the divisional commander re-formed the remnants into two Kampfgruppen (Schmidt and Behrens).

At this point in early September the rapidly approaching Americans ran into a growing cluster



**Feldwebel Henke wearing walking out uniform, Germany, 1944. A former bomber radio operator during the Battle of Britain, Henke then served in Kholm with III.FR der Lw.4 and later as signal platoon sergeant, III.JR43. He wears the Tuchrock with the Sommermütze. Among his decorations are the ribbon for the Iron Cross 2nd Class, the ribbon for the Winter Campaign on the Eastern Front, the Air Force ground combat badge, and the Wound Badge. His arm-of-service colour on the collar tabs is gold-brown. (Jürgen Henke)**

of German forces trying to escape from France into Belgium on the Amiens–Cambrai–Mons road. The movement of the 3rd US Armored Division and other American and British formations sealed an unexpected trap of three German corps in the Mons area. Realizing their dilemma, the commander of LVIII Panzerkorps authorized the break-out of units under his command. The paratroopers of 6.FJD were placed under the tactical control of von Tresckow's 18.FD(L) to execute the withdrawal from Mons; the divisional commander launched this movement at 0200 on 3 September, but he soon found the road jammed with troops from other units. After many delays von Tresckow



arrived at his destination to find that US armor and Belgian soldiers had arrived earlier that morning and now held the crossroads at Gognies-Chaussée. The general immediately ordered as many troops as possible to seize the village.

This proved impossible as Allied planes raked the extended German columns, dropping bombs and leaving a trail of destroyed vehicles. The Americans also shifted artillery fire onto the Germans, and launched a counterattack which created further problems for von Tresckow. The German commander now assumed command of all forces on the field as the ranking officer, and ordered that all German troops individually cut their way from the tightening trap. The two battle groups of 18.FD(L) had already succeeded in this earlier when they found an unoccupied route west of Mons. Generalleutnant von Tresckow took charge of a group of 300 men and evaded the enemy during the evening of 3 September. Later that night von Tresckow further divided his men into smaller groups of 40 each to allow for better control. The general continued to lead a group of three officers and seven men who marched directly east, avoiding large towns such as Charleroi, and eventually moving only at night to avoid Allied troops and unfriendly civilians.

Von Tresckow's small band of soldiers faced

**Troops of III.JR43 wearing camouflage smocks with captured partisans and a young girl, September 1943 near Kholm. (Jurgen Henke)**



other problems besides the enemy. They suffered from a lack of food and water, and had to ford many rivers and streams in Belgium, including the Sambre and Maas rivers, where enemy soldiers were on the lookout for escaping German troops. The band managed to cross the Maas in a small boat (which sank after the last members reached the eastern bank five kilometres south of Dinant). This was accomplished within yards of enemy patrols during a stormy night. The following day, 8 September, Belgian troops surrounded the woods where the Germans were resting and opened fire. Von Tresckow received wounds to both legs from a hand grenade and another soldier was also injured. The group immediately scattered, re-assembled a few kilometres away, and continued the march. By the morning of 10 September the handful of bedraggled survivors entered the Malmedy-Eupen region of Belgium and were greeted by German-speaking natives. They had evaded several attempts by American troops to capture them and had crossed another major river, the Ourthe. A last attempt to capture the group by Belgian troops on 16 September was fought off. Von Tresckow's men reached the Belgian-German border and lay within the shadow of the West Wall; they had to be extremely careful to avoid being shot by their own troops as well as by enemy patrols. Waiting until dark, the four officers and four enlisted men made their way through the minefields and crossed into a zone

- 1: Gefreiter, Luftwaffe Alarmeinheit;  
Russia, Autumn 1941  
2: Flieger, Fliegerhorst Yukhnov;  
December 1941  
3: Jäger, III. Feldregiment der Luftwaffe  
Nr.1; Nagowa, February 1942

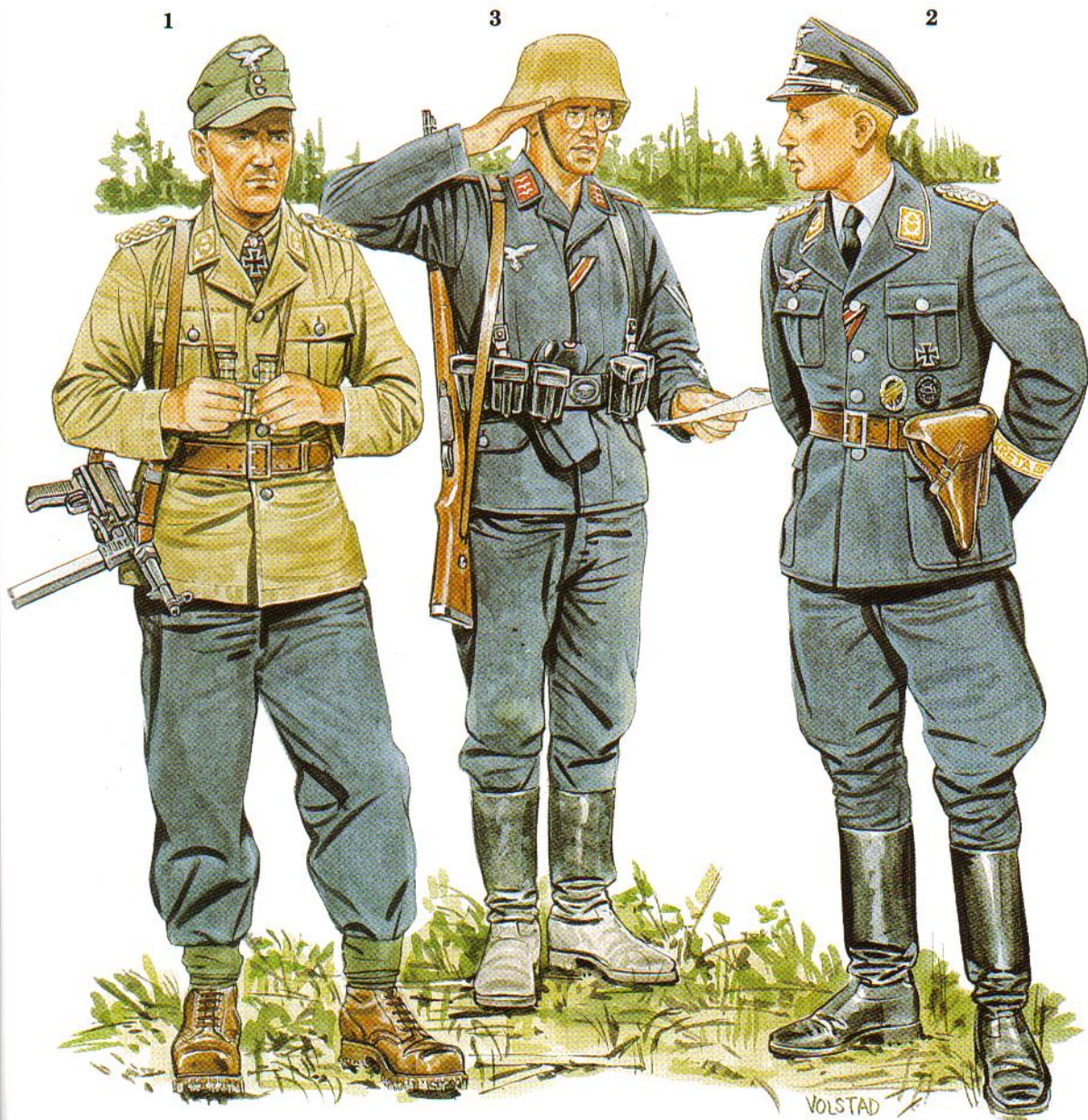


VOLSTAD

- 1: Unteroffizier, I.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr.4;  
Volkhov pocket, spring 1942  
2: Funker, II.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr.1;  
Kholm, 1942  
3: Wachtmeister, II.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr.2;  
Russia, spring 1942



- 1: Generalmajor Meindl, Commander, Division Meindl; Staraya Russa, summer 1942  
2: Major, Division Meindl; Staraya Russa, summer 1942  
3: Obergefreiter, I.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr.2; Staraya Russa, summer 1942

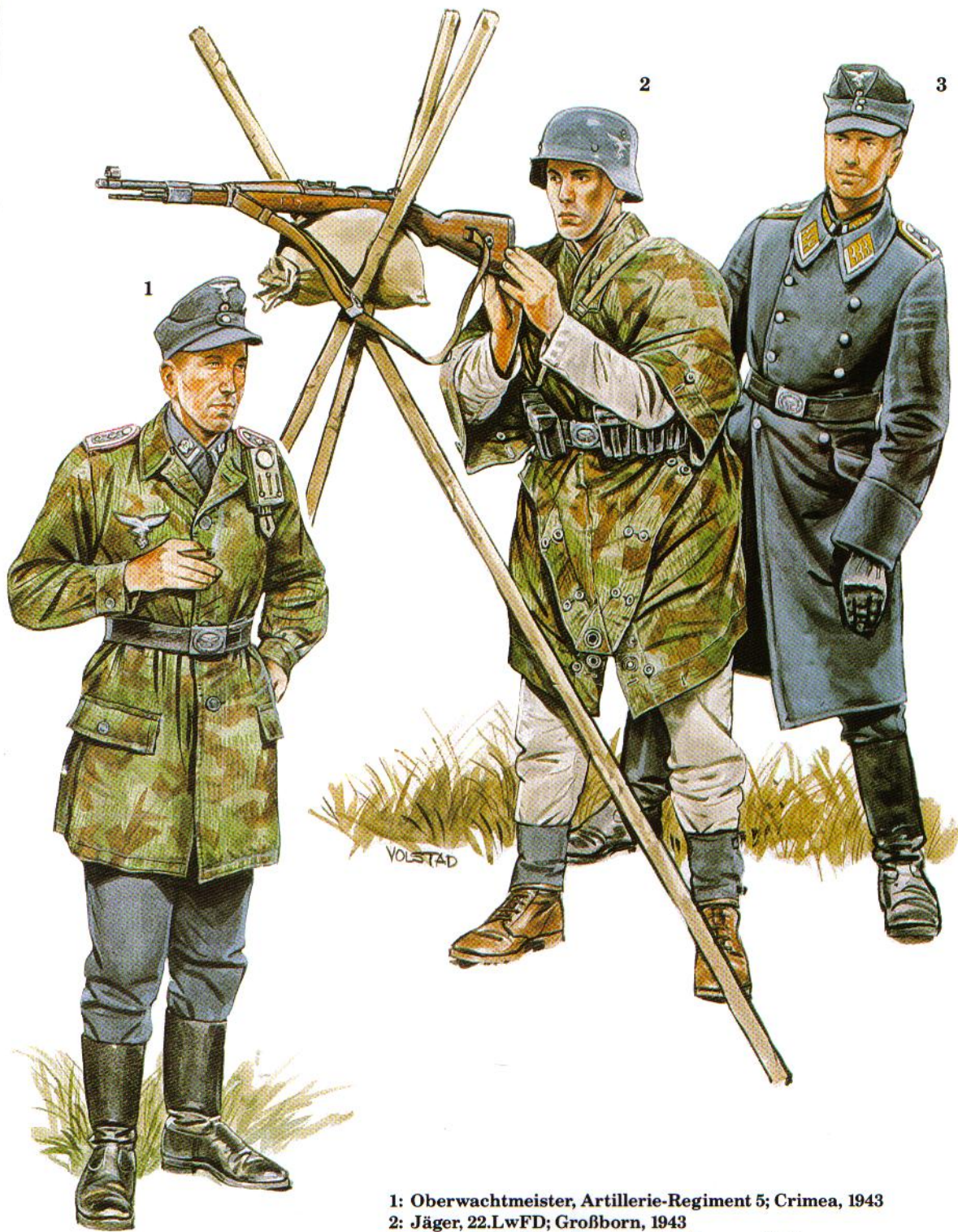




1: Oberleutnant, 9.Jäger Regiment 43;  
Russia, January 1943  
2: Fahnenjunker, 9.Jäger Regiment 43;  
Russia February 1943  
3: Jäger, 9.Jäger Regiment 43;  
Russia, February 1943

- 1: Unteroffizier, III. Jäger Regiment 43;  
Russia 1943  
2: Leutnant, Artillerie-Regiment 6;  
Vitebsk, 1943  
3: Kanonier, Artillerie-Regiment 6;  
Vitebsk, 1943





1: Oberwachtmeister, Artillerie-Regiment 5; Crimea, 1943  
2: Jäger, 22.LwFD; Großborn, 1943  
3: Feldwebel, I.Jäger Regiment 37; Bergen, 1943

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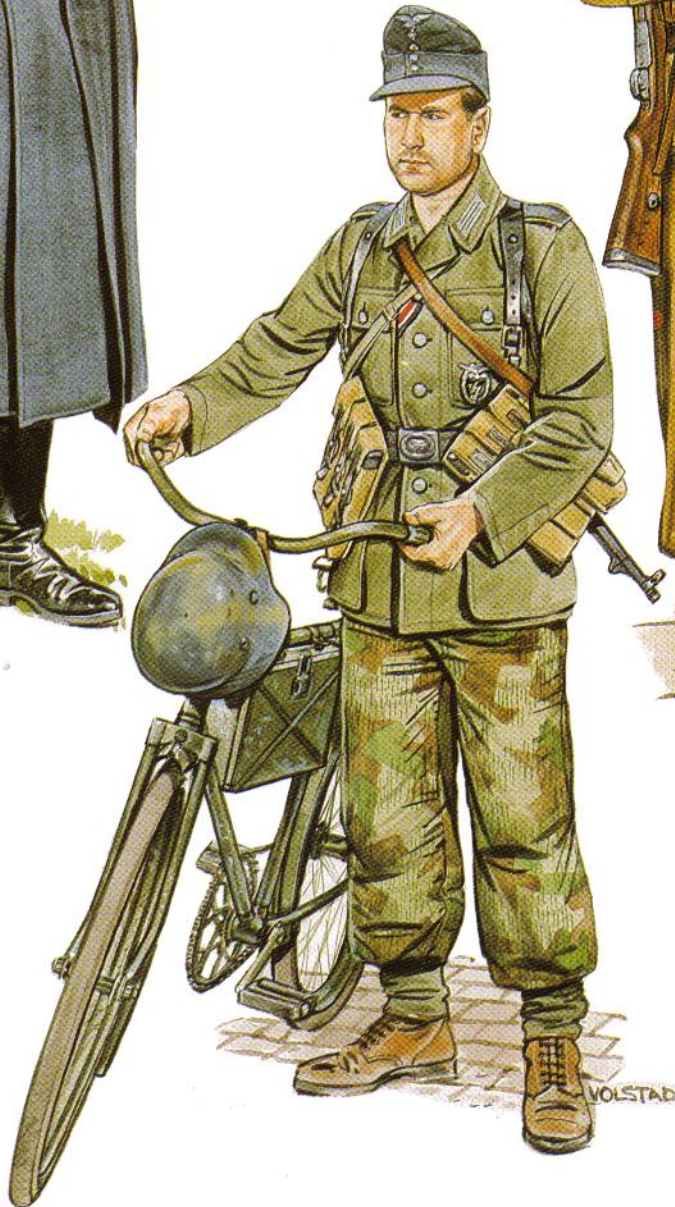


- 1: Generalmajor Schimpf, Commander,  
21.LwFD; October, 1943  
2: Kanonier, 2.Artillerie-Regiment 22;  
Athens, August 1943  
3: Reiter, I.Jäger Regiment 40;  
Lucca, September 1944

2



3







- 1: Hauptmann, Fusilier Battalion 17;  
Pacy-sur-Eure, August 1944
- 2: Fusilier, Fusilier Battalion 17;  
Pacy-sur-Eure, August 1944
- 3: Oberstleutnant, 14.FD(L); Norway,  
May 1945

dragon's teeth. Emerging from the shadows, they surprised a German officer near Hallschlag at around midnight of 18 September. After marching 260 km in 17 days, the weary survivors of 18.FD(L) arrived safely in Germany. For his bravery in this action Generalleutnant von Tresckow was awarded the Knight's Cross, and later commanded a corps on the Western Front. The remainder of the division (about 300 soldiers) was consolidated with other units to form 18. Volksgrenadier Division.

## *The Mediterranean Theatre*

Only one Luftwaffe field division was initially assigned to duty in the Mediterranean basin. 11.LwFD arrived in Greece in early 1943 and spent most of the war on occupation duty in the vicinity of Athens. For the most part this was relatively easy duty, and a good post for Luftwaffe personnel. The division's first commander was Generalleutnant Karl Drum, the former chief of the Inspectorate of Air Reconnaissance Forces and Operations in Berlin—another example of poor utilization of the Luftwaffe's general officer corps. The division played a major rôle as an anti-partisan unit in Greece. 5.Kompanie of JR22, for

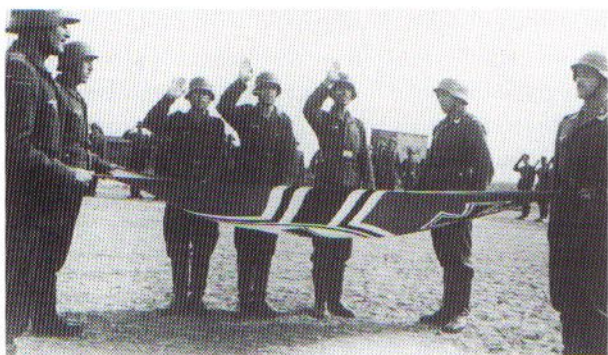
example, fought a skirmish with 'bandits' near Kymi which resulted in the death of two Greeks and the capture of four guerrillas in October 1943. Later that month the same company captured 60 partisans near Chalkis; and several days later apprehended a spy in a German uniform with a weapon and propaganda material.

The capture of the island of Leros from British and Italian troops in late 1943 involved part of 11.FD(L). Italy's capitulation opened much of the Mediterranean to the Allies and the British were especially eager to exploit this weakness to liberate Greece and the Aegean Islands. Hitler, likewise, refused to withdraw any troops from the overextended German positions in the eastern Mediterranean and ordered the entire region to be held. On 24 October 11.Kompanie, JR21 from 11.LwFD boarded a transport plane for the island of Stampalia. The unit was sent to this small island to assist a company of paratroopers and a company of the Battalion Brandenburg which had seized the island the day before from 500 Italians and a handful of British troops. The Luftwaffe troops were assigned the task of patrolling the island and constructing defensive works.

The German operation to capture Leros, an island in the central Aegean occupied by the

**A rare photograph of Luftwaffe troops of 21.LwFD preparing to fire a 100mm Nebelwerfer 40; Lowat River, Russia, October, 1943. (Courtesy of Georg Jagolski)**





**This German propaganda photograph does not state the location of this swearing-in formation nor its unit or date although the caption says these are Caucasian volunteers. While uncertain, this may be 'Nordkaukasische Bataillon 835' which became III./JR34 of 17.FD(L) in May 1944 near Le Havre, France. These soldiers wear Luftwaffe uniforms and equipment. The collar tabs of the two men on the right may be for foreign volunteers. (Library of Congress 7489-A)**

British 234th Infantry Brigade, took on great importance in late 1943. The German preparation was hindered by Allied air and naval superiority, although they speedily gathered their forces from throughout southern Europe. II./JR22 was among the units selected for the invasion, and the battalion departed the Greek mainland in several shipments: the first group consisted of the battalion's 6 and 7.Kompanie under the command of Oberleutnant Bottcher, while Hauptmann Marschall's second group had the battalion staff, signal platoon, 8.Kompanie, and the anti-tank platoon. Bottcher's men departed from Porto Rafti in nine J-Boats at 0800 on 3 November. The second group simultaneously embarked at Lawrion on 13 L-Boats. During the six-day voyage to Calino both convoys experienced enemy air attacks and suffered casualties. A third element followed the main body of the battalion, carrying unit vehicles and heavy weapons with 76 personnel; this vessel did not leave Lawrion until 13 November and also experienced strafing from British Beaufighters before its arrival at Calino on 18 November.

II./JR22 formed a battle group under the command of Major von Saldern with the objective of landing on the eastern face of Leros; the

**Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt inspecting the crew of a 75 mm PAK 40 of 17.FD(L) along the Channel coast in the spring of 1944. The airmen wear Luftwaffe splinter pattern camouflage smocks and woven string helmet nets. (Library of Congress 7489-D)**

Kampfgruppe would then seize the heights overlooking Alinda Bay and Leros city. Two other battle groups, including paratroopers flown from Italy, would assist in the conquest of the island. The battalion boarded three L-Boats at Calino in the evening of 11 November with ten officers and 174 enlisted men. The landing at Leros faced stiff opposition from 4th Bn. The Buffs as Saldern's vessels sought a safe place to land. One vessel of II./JR22 was struck by artillery fire and later sank, leaving the unit with only eight officers and 123 soldiers when the eastern battle group managed to disembark at Grifo Bay at 0600 on 12 November. Fortunately for the Germans, the British did not oppose this landing and the battalion was able to ascend the steep cliffs of Clipi Hill. The fight to seize Point 320, the peak of Clipi, cost the battalion a handful of casualties, but it was secured by nightfall.

Meanwhile the second battle group reinforced Saldern's men on 13 November, while paratroopers of I./FJR2 landed on the opposite side of the island at Gurna Bay and moved inland. The Germans also enjoyed local air superiority over Leros, which kept the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy from assisting the beleaguered defenders. Fighting spread throughout the island as the Germans consolidated their hold; despite British counterattacks, Kampfgruppe Saldern captured the headquarters of the island commander on 16 November, and the garrison soon surrendered. Both sides lost heavily at Leros with II./JR22 suffering 145 killed, wounded, and missing from a total strength of 395, which included some elements of the battalion that fought elsewhere on the island with other German units.

The capture of Leros marked the most signifi-





cant operation by 11.FD(L) during the war. The division participated in the withdrawal from Greece in 1944, and fought against Yugoslav partisans and regular troops in Macedonia and Yugoslavia. The division still served as a part of I. Kosakkorps of Army Group E near Zagreb when it surrendered to Yugoslavian and Bulgarian forces at the end of the war.

Two other Luftwaffe field divisions served in the Mediterranean theatre in the last months of the war. 19 and 20.FD(L) reinforced German troops in Italy in early summer 1944 when the Allies captured Rome and threatened to smash the entire German line. These two formations were the last field divisions raised by the Luftwaffe, and had served on occupation duty in north-western Europe prior to moving to the Italian front. 19.FD(L) formed near Munich in early 1943 from the usual assortment of Air Force personnel with additional cadre provided by an Air Force infantry regiment, Lehr-Infanterie-Regiment 'Moskau'. This unit had served in Russia since 1941 as an independent organization until it merged with the new division. The division moved to France in mid-1943 and was later stationed in Holland; it was at Thielt, Belgium, when it received orders to move to Italy with its three Jäger regiments and divisional elements in June 1944.

20. FD(L) preceded its sister unit to Italy in May, to reinforce the Fallschirmpanzerdivision 'Hermann Göring' which was heavily involved in resisting the Allied breakout from Anzio. This field division had also formed in Germany in early spring 1943, a majority of its Jäger and Panzer-

**The rapid thrust of Allied troops overran slow-moving German units. Here, 5th US Armored Division infantrymen sample German fare from a mess wagon of 17.FD(L) near Vernon on 23 August, 1944. The surprised cook, wearing a camouflage smock, has been searched and is now a prisoner. (National Archives 111-SC-392268)**

jäger companies coming from personnel of Flieger Regiment 23. Originally a training unit for aviators, this regiment had been based in France until it moved to Russia in November 1942. The unit fought in the sector of Army Group Centre on anti-partisan details until it returned to Germany to merge with 20.LwFD. Following the period of organization and training at Fallingsbostel, a camp on the Lüneberg Heath, 20.LwFD moved to Denmark and garrisoned Jutland.

With the transfer of the Luftwaffe field divisions to the Army the future of 20.FD(L) appeared uncertain. Army commanders in Denmark preferred to integrate the division with another Army unit, but Hitler forbade this and ordered that the division be formed into a 'fast brigade' with motorized vehicles. The re-equipment of the division proved impossible, and the majority were issued with bicycles! Six of the ten Jäger companies became bicycle-mounted squadrons, and the division was redesignated '20th Field Division (Luftwaffe) Bicycle'. To make matters worse, many soldiers of the division remained with the Air Force and were replaced by older recruits whose physical condition made them unsuitable for 'mounted warfare'. The army, despite somewhat ambivalent feelings, allowed the division to carry the titles, honours, and traditions of a regular cavalry unit. The majority of the new Army officers, including



**Members of AR16(L), 16.FD(L) taking a break in Holland, 1944. The man on the left wears army-issue trousers. These four artillerymen all have army-issue canvas straps on their helmets to hold camouflage. (Photo courtesy of Alfred Lack via Georg Jagolski)**

the divisional and two regimental commanders, were cavalrymen and had combat experience in horse and bicycle warfare in Russia.

20.FD(L) arrived in Italy in late May and was followed by 19.FD(L) the next month. Despite the setback that the Allies inflicted upon the Germans with the capture of Rome, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring succeeded in stabilizing German forces to oppose the enemy's advance north of the capital. Kesselring established the Frieda Line, with 19.FD(L) securing the right flank near Piombino; 20.FD(L), also in the same corps, guarded the inland approach to the line near Roccostrada.

The Americans opened their push to the Arno River on 21 June as the 36th US Infantry Division moved up Highway One, which paralleled the Ligurian Sea on Italy's west coast. 19.FD(L) was unable to offer much resistance and narrowly escaped capture near Piombino. 20.FD(L), which had suffered some losses during the retreat from Rome, put up a strong fight alongside the 90.Panzer Grenadier Division against elements of the 1st US Armored Division. One regiment of the division opposed French colonial troops in vigorous battle for the historic city of Siena in late June.

19.FD(L), in the meantime, established a roadblock at Rosignano Solvay to cover the road to Leghorn, the large port town on the Ligurian Sea. The division was prepared to meet the onslaught of the 34th US Infantry Division, reinforced with other units including the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team. The Americans kicked off their attack on 3 July, although they

were soon slowed down by the task of clearing a number of villages from 19.FD(L). Severe fighting continued for several days as German artillery and mortars struck American columns. The German Air Force troops also launched sharp counterattacks, at heavy loss. Stymied in their drive along the coast, the Americans assaulted the left flank of 19.FD(L) and managed to cut through in the direction of Leghorn. This movement and other reverses forced the German Fourteenth Army to withdraw to the Arno River after 12 July. 19 and 20.FD(L)—the latter having fought on the left flank of the former—scattered mines and other booby-traps along the retreat route, as well as destroying port facilities at Leghorn.

With the completion of the withdrawal, both divisions were relieved by 3.Panzer Grenadier Division in mid-July. The two divisions then secured the coast between Viareggio and La Spezia, and generally recuperated from the campaign. The losses sustained by 19.FD(L) forced most of that formation to be absorbed in July by 20.FD(L), while other members went to form 19.Volksgrenadier Division. 20.FD(L) continued to act as corps reserve along the coast, and fought Italian guerrillas behind the Gothic Line in September; on the 12th of that month the divisional commander was mortally wounded by an Italian civilian. The division never again served as a complete formation. JR39 and 40 fought near Rimini with 26.Panzer Division, while other units served with 29 and 90.Panzer Grenadier Divisions. The 20.FD(L) was briefly reconstituted in December 1944, but then converted to 155.Feldausbildung Division with some detachments to other commands.

## *The End in The East*

The bulk of the Luftwaffe field divisions continued to serve in Russia after the transfer to the Army. As in the West, the Luftwaffe divisions experienced numerous administrative and personnel changes when the Army took charge. One Air Force officer noted of the Luftwaffe units near Vitebsk in early 1944 that 'they have the best morale. The soldiers

are good, the weapons and equipment are excellent. But the training is insufficient. How can they gain experience? The division commanders were company commanders in their last assignment with the Army. The majority of officers are as good as untrained in ground combat. Certainly the divisions will bravely defend their positions. But if they have to attack then it is over.'

For many of the field divisions the end was certainly near. While still listed on Army rolls, 5 and 15.FD(L) were virtually nonexistent; and 3.FD(L) disbanded in January 1944, its soldiers joining the two remaining divisions, 4 and 6.FD(L), around Vitebsk. 1.FD(L), which lost over 1,300 casualties in two weeks of fighting during the first month of 1944, deactivated on 25 January; the division's survivors were mostly assigned to 28.Jäger Division.

Elsewhere along the Eastern Front, the situation went badly for the remaining field divisions. The Soviet Army launched a massive offensive on 14 January which smashed Army Group North and forced the entire German front to withdraw from Leningrad. The Soviet Second Shock Army, caged in the Oranienbaum pocket, struck III.SS Panzer Corps and its two Luftwaffe divisions, 9 and 10.FD(L). These formations had been posted in this relatively quiet area of the front with a hodgepodge of foreign SS outfits and were unprepared for the Russian onslaught. 10.FD(L) disintegrated at the beginning of the attack and a valuable Army division had to be sent to prevent the total collapse of the German line. Both 9 and 10.FD(L) lingered on as small combat groups during the rigorous fighting along the Narva front until they consolidated with Army and Air Force units in the spring and summer of 1944.

The same general offensive also struck the centre and southern flank of the German Eighteenth Army, where 1, 12, and 13.FD(L) held the line. The Russian assault was aimed to smash at the weakest German points, which also happened to be the locations of the army group's Luftwaffe field divisions; it also met great success at Novgorod. 1.FD(L) was thrown off guard by a surprise Soviet movement across frozen Lake Ilmen, and pushed out of the way. This drive cleared the northern approach above the lake for the Russians and encircled the Germans around the destroyed city.

Simultaneously, 12 and 13.FD(L) were hit in the centre of the German line, where they were positioned along the Volkhov River. Within days the Germans were forced to abandon their tenuous hold near Leningrad, and progressively fell back to the Panther Line—prepared works along two lakes on the Russian border with Estonia and Latvia. This withdrawal cost many casualties in 12 and 13.FD(L) in the vicinity of Luga, and led to the amalgamation of the latter division with 12.FD(L). The staff of 13.FD(L) was assigned later in the spring as a control group for Estonian police and auxiliaries.

The Sixteenth Army, as the southern element of Army Group North, was gravely affected by the January offensive. The successors of Division Meindl, 21.FD(L), who had fought around Staraya Russa since 1942, were now forced to abandon the swampy region and withdraw to the Panther Line. This retreat, conducted in heavy snow and harassed by Soviet ground and air pursuit, was one of the most difficult operations of the war for a division which had previously been engaged in static defensive fighting. The front

**Unteroffizier Thomfohrde of 11.LwFD wearing Luftwaffe tropical dress and marching boots in Greece, August 1943.**



stabilized with the arrival of spring, and attention again focused on Army Groups Centre and South.

The scene of much fighting and embarrassment for the Luftwaffe field divisions, the German defensive position at Vitebsk posed an even greater risk in 1944. The loss of Nevel by 2.LwFD in October 1943 and the ensuing struggle through December placed the Russians in a favourable position to isolate Vitebsk. 4 and 6.FD(L), as a part of LIII.Armeekorps, had the primary mission of holding the southern and eastern faces of the city. The Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre on 22 June 1944 swept south of Vitebsk, and within one day the city was declared by Hitler as a 'centre of resistance'. This tied the entire corps to a useless defence of Vitebsk under a terrible pounding by Soviet aircraft, artillery, mortars, rockets, and direct-fire weapons. 4.FD(L) was rendered ineffective by 25 June, and its commander, Generalmajor Pistorius, fell in action two days later when the corps attempted to break out from Vitebsk. 6.FD(L) and its commander, Generalleutnant Peschel, suffered the same fate. Both divisions and the corps collapsed after the poorly co-ordinated break-out and the remnants surrendered to Soviet forces. The destruction of Army Group Centre opened the door for the Soviets to enter Poland and pierce the heart of the Third Reich.

After summer 1944 only two Luftwaffe field divisions continued the struggle on the Eastern Front. 12 and 21.FD(L) fought with Army Group North as it was pushed from the Panther Line in

Members of 11.LwFD in Greece, April 1943.



July and forced back through Latvia to be bottled up in Courland by October. The two divisions remained as part of the newly-designated Army Group Courland, and participated in six fierce battles. Losses among the units took their toll and 12.FD(L) was partially evacuated by ship to Danzig while other units of the division consolidated with 21.FD(L). This unit, in turn, fought under its own identity as well as with 329.ID and as a separate combat group.

A testimony to the hard fighting seen by the last Luftwaffe field units during the Courland siege is provided by the experience of one officer of 21.FD(L). Hauptmann Heinz Schwoppe assumed command of the division's field replacement battalion at the beginning of December 1944. The battalion consisted of only 80 men at this time, but soon increased with the addition of other Air Force personnel and local volunteers. The battalion acted as an emergency unit to plug gaps in the German line and, in this unrewarding rôle, was involved in fierce fighting near Doblen in March 1945. Schwoppe's battalion defended the line against numerous Soviet attacks which reached close quarters. One village in the unit's sector was overrun 11 times (three times at night) and subsequently recaptured each time by Schwoppe's men, with heavy loss to the Russians. The captain was wounded on 26 March and evacuated to a hospital behind the lines. There the commander of the Sixteenth Army awarded the Knight's Cross to Schwoppe for his bravery under fire—one of 18 known soldiers of the Luftwaffe field divisions honoured by this decoration. Schwoppe returned to his battalion, and surrendered with approximately 500 other men of 21.FD(L) in May.

### Conclusion

The state of the Luftwaffe field divisions in 1945 was symbolic of the demise of Nazi Germany's military prowess. Of the 21 Luftwaffe field divisions raised in 1942 and early 1943 only one remained in any viable shape, and that division—14.FD(L)—had not seen any action at all during the war. There were scattered remains of three other divisions—11, 12, and 21.FD(L)—still engaged against the Soviets or their allies in 1945, but they were mere skeletons. The backbone of the field divisions had been broken in Russia, France,

and Italy to no avail. The Luftwaffe field units had a limited value as emergency troops, as seen in Russia in the winter of 1941–42; but they could not replace regular Army units. The Air Force ground formations, while composed of many good troops, were sacrificed in the name of personal egotism and inter-service rivalries.

No exact figures detail the losses of the Luftwaffe field divisions. It is commonly believed that about 250,000 airmen accepted Göring's call and joined the new divisions in 1942 and 1943. Of that number, 160,000 transferred to the Army in late 1943. Given the destruction of these divisions in 1944, it is probable that relatively few of these soldiers survived the war unscathed. Similarly, it is uncertain as to how many casualties were suffered by Luftwaffe ground troops in Russia during 1941–42 prior to the formation of the field divisions. This example of the formation of 'private armies' proved a disaster to Nazi Germany's war effort—a costly mistake that Hitler and Göring could not afford.

#### Note on other Luftwaffe field units

There were a number of other ground combat units raised by the Luftwaffe in the Second World War that do not fall under the category of the Luftwaffe field divisions. Whenever hard pressed for troops in an active theatre, Air Force commanders organized *Feldbataillone zur besonderen Verfügung*

**20 mm Flak 38 gun crew of 9.LwFD in northern Russia. The gunner in the forefront wears Luftwaffe coveralls, popular with static personnel for warmth and durability. He also exhibits a civilian scarf and belt.**



*der Luftwaffe*, 'field battalions of the Luftwaffe for special purposes'. These units were independently raised by the Air Force from personnel convicted of military, civilian, or political crimes, and organized into penal units to earn their pardon in the heavy fighting on the Eastern Front. One battalion served at Stalingrad, and three others were attached to 21.LwFD. The best known Luftwaffe unit 'for special puposes' was Feld Regiment 503 which fought in Finland. In the last weeks of the war the Luftwaffe organized a plethora of units with a variety of titles, all of which were short-lived, last-ditch measures to stave off the conquest of Germany by the Allies.

## The Plates

*A1: Gefreiter, Luftwaffe Alarmeinheit; Russia, autumn 1941*

Luftwaffe support personnel were not usually committed to combat duties at the beginning of the war, but in Russia the rapid drive through the country isolated thousands of Soviet combatants behind German lines. To protect lines of communication all available German troops, including Luftwaffe airmen, were hastily organized into emergency security units. This corporal from a signals unit is sweeping an important supply route and repairing communications wires. The *Fliegerbluse*, originally designed as a comfortable tunic for aircraft crewmen, soon gained popularity among all branches and ranks of the Luftwaffe. The airman wears an old pattern *Fliegerbluse* which lacks side pockets or the Luftwaffe flying eagle on the right breast: after late 1940 the *Fliegerbluse* of enlisted men was modified to include pockets and insignia. Lacking collar ranks, this Gefreiter has a chevron on his left arm. The gold-brown *Waffenfarbe* or arm-of-service colour for the signals branch can be seen as piping on the epaulettes.

*A2: Flieger, Fliegerhorst Yukhnov; December 1941*

The terrible winter of 1941–42 caught Luftwaffe personnel in Russia without adequate clothing or shelter. This airman, a private in the flying branch, clears the runway at Yukhnov to permit





An 88 mm Flak 36 employed in an anti-tank rôle at the Oranienbaum pocket by the Flak Abteilung of 10.LwFD. This unit was retained by the Luftwaffe when the division transferred to the army and became II.Flak regiment (mot.)<sup>32</sup>. The loss of this unit left 10.LwFD without any major firepower to prevent the Soviet breakout in January 1944.

flight operations at the threatened airfield. Such ground personnel of the Luftwaffe fell under the command of Generalmajor Meindl and were used as a reaction force in the case of Russian breakthrough. Inadequately dressed in the freezing cold, he has an issue overcoat and the enlisted man's forage cap or *Fliegermütze*. Air Force overcoats still carried rank and arm-of-service collar tabs, although they are hidden here on the upturned collars. The use of civilian items such as scarves was common among German troops in the East; civilian apparel helped to alleviate some of the burden imposed by the winter on the German military supply system, but use was officially discouraged in areas other than the front lines.

*A3: Jäger, III.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr. 1; Nagowa, February 1942*

A crewman loads a 5 cm light mortar wearing the two-piece snow suit. Offering some concealment, this uniform was a quick makeshift solution to the lack of German winter camouflage. The *Schneeanzüge*, worn by Army and Air Force troops, consisted of a shapeless white jacket and trousers. To identify friendly from enemy forces the Germans wore cloth strips on both sleeves of the winter uniform, alternated every day according to the

Luftwaffe crew preparing to fire a 120mm s.Gr.W.42, a mortar copied from captured Russian models. The quilt pattern of the reversible winter uniform is easily seen as are stains. (National Archives 242-GAP-228-K-16)

unit's identification system. This infantry private wears the Model 1935 steel helmet, painted white to match the snow suit. The effectiveness of the camouflage is somewhat marred by stains on the trousers.

*B1: Unteroffizier, I.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr.4; Volkhov pocket, spring 1942*

With the change of seasons in Russia, German Air Force ground troops once again lacked camouflage uniforms in the now snowless terrain. This sergeant uses the *Zeltbahn*, a camouflaged tent-section, as concealment and to ward off inclement weather. Made of water-repellent cotton drill, the *Zeltbahn* could be worn as a poncho or combined with other capes to construct a shelter. Under this practical garment the NCO wears the *Fliegerbluse* and carries an MP40.

*B2: Funker, II.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr. 1; Kholm, 1942*

The Luftwaffe assigned a number of paratroopers to form the cadre of the first field regiments in early 1942. These combat-hardened veterans continued to wear the uniforms and insignia of the Fallschirmjäger in their new assignment, and this signaller wears the 'second pattern' jump smock in splinter camouflage. Introduced in 1941, the 'second pattern' smock allowed the wearer better mobility because it could be completely buttoned from the neck to crotch for airborne assaults and then loosened at the legs while on the ground. The



haste which accompanied the formation of the Luftwaffe field regiments and, later, divisions meant that no single uniform or insignia was adopted for these units until early 1943. Thus, in the early period, a wide variety of items from every branch of the Luftwaffe were seen among the officers and men of the field regiments.

*B3: Wachtmeister, II.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr. 2; Russia, spring 1942*

This Wachtmeister (equivalent to Feldwebel in other units) is assigned to a heavy company and wears the one-piece Luftwaffe fatigue uniform. Made of either dark blue-grey or black twill, the fatigue uniform was issued to mechanics and other personnel who performed maintenance on aircraft, vehicles or weapons; it was commonly seen among members of Flak companies of the Luftwaffe field units. The only notable features of the outfit are the collar *Tresse* for NCOs and the single rank stripe on the left arm. The 1937 fatigue uniform had a single pocket on the right breast, and replaced the earlier two-breast-pocket uniform.

*C1: Generalmajor Meindl, Commander, Division Meindl; Staraya Russa, summer 1942*

Photographs of Meindl in Russia during 1942 and in France two years later reveal that he preferred the Army's five-button tropical field service uniform. A former mountain artilleryman, Meindl retains the *Bergmütze* without the Edelweiss cap badge. He wears regular Luftwaffe rank insignia and devices on the mountain cap and tropical jacket. While his trousers are Luftwaffe, Meindl once again wears mountain boots and puttees. As an inspiration to the troops (and as a practical measure) Meindl carries an MP40. This general's energetic leadership at Yukhnov and later at Staraya Russa motivated the Luftwaffe field units and gave the division and its successor, 21.LwFD, a proud heritage.

*C2: Major, Division Meindl;*

*Staraya Russa, summer 1942*

The majority of officers in Division Meindl had previously served as paratroopers. This major, a divisional staff officer, fought in Crete and earned the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Classes as well as the



**Crew of 5.AR21 emplaced along the 'Rollbahn' Staraya Russa-Kholm, December 1943.**

*Fallschirmschützen-Abzeichen.* He is a veteran of the 1941-42 'Order of Frozen Meat', the winter campaign on the Eastern Front, the ribbon of which is worn below that of the Iron Cross 2nd Class. The Wound Badge in black signifies that this officer has received either one or two injuries from enemy action. The *Kreta* cuffband, authorized on 16 October 1942, for wear by Army and Air Force personnel who fought on the island, was worn on the lower left sleeve of the uniform jacket. This officer's jacket is the five-button (only four exposed) *Tuchrock* service tunic. Silver aluminium piping edges the collar for officers, while the yellow arm-of-service colour for flying personnel (paratroopers, flight crews, and ground support) is readily apparent. The *Schirmmütze* uniform cap is worn here although it was normally reserved for walking-out uniform and not seen in combat.

*C3: Obergefreiter, I.Feldregiment der Luftwaffe Nr. 2; Staraya Russa, summer 1942*

The *Fliegerbluse*, with *Tuchhose* (trousers) and *Marschstiefel* (marching boots), were the major uniform items for Luftwaffe ground troops in 1941-42. This corporal reports to division headquarters with a message from the front lines in normal Luftwaffe dress. The Model 1935 helmet has a sacking cover to reduce reflection, while the *Fliegermütze* is tucked into the belt. Once again, the variety of *Waffenfarbe* can be seen. This former Flak artilleryman earned the Flak specialist badge, which he wears on the cuff of his sleeve. Despite this proficiency, the Obergefreiter is now assigned to the infantry but continues to wear the insignia of his previous duty. The collar rank for Obergefreiter, three wings on a



**Four scenes of the withdrawal of 21.FD(L) to the 'Panther Line' in February 1944. The practicality of the Russian *panje* wagon was once again proven in the heavy snow and allowed the division to escape mostly unscathed.**

tab of the Flak's red arm-of-service colour, is worn on the flying blouse. The wings could either be sewn directly to the collar patch or, in this case, be metal pin-on devices. The Mauser Kar 98K was the basic weapon for Luftwaffe ground troops and is slung on this soldier's back.

*D1: Oberleutnant, 9.Jäger Regiment 43; Russia, January 1943*

Drawing on the lessons of the previous winter, German troops were better prepared for combat in late 1942 and early 1943. The new Luftwaffe field divisions received ample stocks of normal uniform items and winter gear. In late September 1942, XIII Fliegerkorps authorized the issue of uniforms, equipment, and special items such as winter clothing to the troops while still in training camps in Germany. Winter clothing was issued to be worn over normal field uniforms, and winter boots, for example, were loose-fitting to allow the soldier to wear two pairs of socks as well as rags or newspapers as stuffing. Commanders were sup-

posed to give soldiers enough time to break in new footwear prior to movement to Russia. Divisions carried minimal reserve stocks of uniform items in order to reduce transportation requirements, and XIII Fliegerkorps strongly advised subordinate units to prohibit troops from taking unauthorized clothing (or valuables such as rings, watches, cameras, and musical instruments!) to the front. Each member of the new field divisions received the following items: five pair undershirts, five pair underpants, one belt, one mountain cap (precursor to the M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze*), two tight-fitting hoods, one overcoat (for 20 per cent of the unit's total strength), one service tunic (for the remaining 80 per cent of the unit), one flying blouse, one pair knit gloves, one pair mittens (for 20 per cent of the unit), one wool scarf, and three blankets (four blankets for 25 per cent of the unit). In addition, combat troops received one pair of the winter reversible jacket and trousers as well as one woollen cap, one pair gauntlets, one pair felt boots and one pair of knee protectors. For those solidiers

assigned to sentry duty or rear echelon jobs the Luftwaffe issued fur hats, oversized overcoats, and felt or straw boots. Ski equipment was also available to those units performing reconnaissance missions. Similarly, pioneer units, motorcyclists, and horse-mounted personnel received specialized uniform items. This Oberleutnant wears some of the newly-issued clothing in northern Russia.

*D2: Fahnenjunker, 9. Jäger Regiment 43; Russia, February 1943*

This appointed officer candidate wears the rank of Gefreiter with the addition of aluminium braid around the collar and on the base of the epaulettes. If he survives combat, the NCO can expect to receive a field promotion in his company. The most notable item of the uniform is the *Waffenfarbe* on the collar tab and piping on the shoulder straps. The Luftwaffe adopted a *Waffenfarbe* on 4 January 1943 to identify the new field divisions; the basic arm-of-service colour selected was rifle green for all personnel. Soldiers in other branches assigned to the field division, such as artillery, flak, anti-tank, or signals, would wear rifle green collar tabs with piping of their individual arm-of-service colour, such as red, pink, or gold-brown. This Fahnenjunker is an infantryman, hence his collar tab is rifle green with a thin black line separating the rifle green edge piping from the background. He wears the *Fliegerbluse*, including the ribbon for the Iron Cross 2nd Class; the East Front ribbon; and the Luftwaffe Ground Combat Badge. It was common to see winter uniforms mixed with regular apparel; this soldier wears the heavy winter cap with the blue-grey flying blouse and reversible winter trousers. To complete this picture, he sports the plaited straw overboots that were issued to 10 per cent of the unit for sentry duty.

*D3: Jäger, 9. Jäger Regiment 43; Russia, February 1943*

Struggling to move through heavy snow, this private is seen in full winter uniform worn over the basic uniform. The only item lacking from winter kit is boots: he wears ordinary black leather marching boots. The tight-fitting white hood worn by the airman is of particular interest; it provided considerable warmth and protection to the head and neck with its inner lining of thick blanket

material. It could be made to fit tightly around the neck and, in conjunction with the white face mask, offered complete protection as well as camouflaging the head and face in the snow. The hood, however, deprived the wearer of peripheral vision, which could be a deadly drawback in combat. Luftwaffe personnel carried the standard field equipment of Army troops with minor variations; metal equipment, such as the canteen cup, mess tin, and gas mask container, were originally painted in blue-grey, but later equipment had Army paint finishes. Similarly, Air Force leather gear was brown at the beginning of the war and black later. Variations could be seen in metal and leather equipment throughout the war. The distinctive Luftwaffe belt buckle for enlisted men was retained.

*E1: Unteroffizier, III. Jäger Regiment 43; Russia 1943*  
Enjoying a break, this sergeant of 21.LwFD reads a letter from home and enjoys his pipe. German troops in Russia often spent the quiet hours

**Generalleutnant Rudolf-Eduard Licht, fourth commander of 21.FD(L), decorating personnel of his division in 1944. Even at this later date, the spit and polish image of German troops can still be seen as can be the older tricolor decal on the helmets of two officers.**





**Photographs of LwFD personnel on the Eastern Front are rare after 1944 because most divisions were destroyed that year and the survivors scattered to other units. A number of members of the 9, 10, and 21.FD/(L) joined 2.Flak Division in the spring of 1944 after the retreat to the Narwa River line. This photograph shows the battery commander of 10.Flak Regiment 32 decorating cannoneers. They exhibit a variety of footwear, including felt boots, leather marching boots, and short ankle boots with gaiters.**

whittling elaborate pipes or walking sticks, known as 'Wolchowstock'. The sign behind the Unteroffizier, however, warns the passerby to be careful: 'If you want to see home again walk behind the camouflage wall.' He wears the standard uniform for field division personnel with its newest addition, the 1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze*. This field cap soon supplanted most other forms of headgear among officers and enlisted men because of its comfort and versatility. Based on the earlier *Bergmütze* and tropical field cap, the Air Force version had a single button to attach the side flaps together at the front of the cap above the bill. The Luftwaffe's flying eagle national badge and national cockade were displayed on the front. The rank of this NCO is shown only by his epaulettes as he has no collar insignia. Bordering the aluminium NCO's braid on the shoulder straps is his *Waffenfarbe* piping: gold-brown for signals. A veteran of hard service in Russia, the Unteroffizier earned the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the East Fron medal; both are worn as buttonhole ribbons and, interestingly, as a chest ribbon for the Iron Cross.

*E2: Leutnant, Artillerie-Regiment 6; Vitebsk, 1943*

Acting as forward observer, this artillery lieutenant spots rounds from his battery at the front. To reduce his own visibility as a target the officer wears no rank on his collar and has covered his shoulder straps. The only insignia visible on the uniform is the aluminium piping on the collar of the *Fliegerbluse*. He has an Army-issue camouflage cover for his Model 1943 steel helmet. Despite these precautions, the lieutenant persists in displaying his Luftwaffe Flak War Badge and Army Infantry Assault Badge. The Air Force Flak decoration was instituted in 1941 for individuals in anti-aircraft units who accumulated a certain number of points for the destruction of enemy aircraft. The badge was also awarded to Flak personnel for significant acts of bravery and merit. Battery commanders, such as this officer, received the Flak War Badge when 50 per cent or more of the unit had already earned it. The Army Infantry Assault Badge was awarded to members of infantry units who partook in three assaults against the enemy on three different days; personnel in non-mechanized units received silver decorations, while motorized infantry and Panzer Grenadiers received bronze. This officer, while originally in a flak unit, volunteered for service in a Luftwaffe field regiment as an infantry officer in early 1942 and earned the Army Infantry Assault Badge. Upon the organization of the Luftwaffe field divisions later that year the lieutenant transferred to an artillery regiment. He should have returned the Army decoration in exchange for the Luftwaffe Ground Combat Badge in the spring of 1942, but did not do so. Note that this officer wears the enlisted man's belt and buckle.

*E3: Kanonier, Artillerie-Regiment 6; Vitebsk, 1943*

This enlisted assistant notes corrections made by the forward observer. He wears the M1943 field cap and the mouse-grey version of the reversible winter uniform, the double-breasted jacket and trousers made extra thick for warmth. Two buttons on each arm keep the coloured identification bands in place. The reversible winter uniform was the same for Army and Air Force personnel. This artillery private is identified as a member of the Luftwaffe only by his field cap and belt buckle. He carries an MP40 because forward observers often

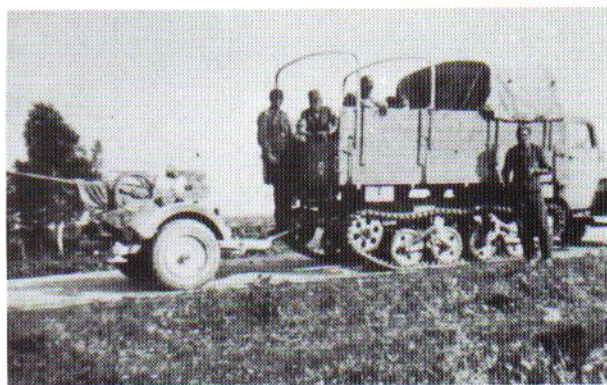
needed to move quickly, and light-weight equipment could make the difference between life and death.

*F1: Oberwachtmeister, Artillerie-Regiment 5;  
Crimea, 1943*

An interesting and rare example of the uniform and insignia worn by a Panzerjäger crewman of 5.LwFD. This Oberwachtmeister, or battery sergeant major, inspects a Sturmgeschütz III of 3.AR 5 while in transit to southern Russia. The newly-issued Luftwaffe camouflage smock is worn over the *Fliegerbluse*. This three-quarter length camouflage smock, specially designed for the Luftwaffe field divisions, became their most distinctive piece of clothing. The five-button smock was worn with or without the flying eagle on the breast. Shoulder straps with rank could be pinned on to the smock, or left off. The smock was issued in 'splinter' and 'water' patterns, although most personnel, including this NCO, wore the former. In addition to the unique camouflage smock, the sergeant major has silver *Tresse* on the collar, and, in lieu of normal rank insignia, he has a Panzerjäger *Totenkopf* badge on each collar of the *Fliegerbluse*. His rank is denoted on the epaulettes, whose pink *Waffenfarbe* identifies the Panzerjäger arm.

*F2: Jäger, 22.LwFD; Großborn, 1943*

This recruit was initially assigned to 22.LwFD at Großborn training camp in early 1943. When the Luftwaffe decided not to complete the organization of this division most of the personnel in training were reassigned to 21.LwFD or to other duties. Here we see a recruit undergoing instruction in basic marksmanship. He wears a Model 1935 steel helmet with the Luftwaffe flying eagle decal on the left side. Under the *Zeltbahn*, the recruit's uniform is the *Drillichanzug*, a denim fatigue suit normally given to new soldiers and useful for training, maintenance work and fatigue duties. When the field divisions were first organized in late 1942, XIII.Fliegerkorps ordered that the denim fatigue uniform be worn by all soldiers in training in order to preserve service uniform stocks for actual field use. The higher Luftwaffe headquarters also specified that the white denim fatigue suit was to be turned in and replaced with a similar suit of olive green: photographs of Luft-



**Ford Maultier of 10.Flak Regiment 32 towing a 20 mm Flak 38 during the retreat through Estonia, August 1944.**

waffe field division trainees show that this order was not implemented. As an economy measure, the Luftwaffe introduced short ankle boots and gaiters after 1941 to replace the marching boots. In some cases Luftwaffe units received blue-grey canvas gaiters, while others had Army-issue tan or grey gaiters.

*F3: Feldwebel, I.Jäger Regiment 37; Bergen, 1943*

This NCO supervises rifle training prior to the movement of 19.LwFD to western Europe. A veteran of Luftwaffe Lehr-Infanterie-Regiment 'Moskau', this soldier fought in Russia and returned to Germany in 1943 as cadre for the new division. He wears the standard Luftwaffe overcoat and retains rank insignia on its collar; the Air Force prohibited this for enlisted men and NCOs after October 1942 and for officers in the spring of 1943. The *Waffenfarbe* seen here is for members of the flying branch: the Lehr-Infanterie-Regiment was originally conceived as a test unit for infantry tactics and air-ground support. The lack of experienced NCOs in many field units proved a critical shortcoming, and did not improve when the Army assumed control of the field divisions in autumn 1943.

*G1: Generalmajor Schimpf, Commander, 21.LwFD;  
October, 1943*

Generalmajor Schimpf is shown here shortly before his replacement when the field divisions transferred to the Army in autumn 1943. His dress is of interest for several uniform items. The Luftwaffe cape, in particular, was rarely seen in the field after the outbreak of the war; the commander



**Taking a break during the summer 1944 retreat, Georg Jagolski (left) and members of 10.Flak Regiment 32. Jagolski had previously served with 21. FD(L) until early 1944 and, following his recovery from a wound, was reassigned to 2.Flak Division. He wears the Luftwaffe splinter pattern camouflage smock and leather marching boots.**

of 21. LwFD wears the blue-grey cloth version with the gold eagle clasps at the top. Schimpf's cape collars are not piped in white as prescribed for officers of general rank and it is uncertain whether the large, hand-embroidered gold wire eagle is actually worn on the upper left arm. His overcoat also lacks the white lapels, but has piping. In accordance with Luftwaffe regulations, no rank is worn on the collars of the overcoat—it is displayed only on the epaulettes. The popularity of the M1943 field cap was such that it was worn by all ranks from Jäger to Generalmajor. Schimpf wears a field cap with general's gold piping on the crown.

*G2: Kanonier, 2.Artillerie-Regiment 22;  
Athens, August 1943*

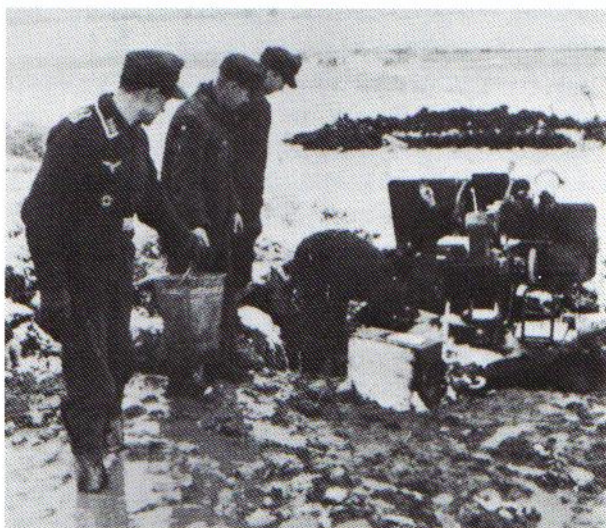
Service in Greece was perhaps the best duty for Luftwaffe field division personnel. During the early part of the war 11.LwFD served as occupation troops in the Balkans, with minimal risk of combat. Most soldiers spent their time guarding railway lines, patrolling the countryside, and generally enjoying a less hectic war. This artillery private has been posted to secure the ammunition dump of his regiment against sabotage. Clad in the Luftwaffe tropical uniform and helmet, he presents a distinctive figure. Issued to 30 per cent of a unit's total strength, the tropical helmet proved cumbersome and fell out of favour with the troops. The tropical uniform is seen here with the five-button,

four-pocket yellow-tan tunic with open collar, exposing a tan shirt and tie. No insignia was normally worn on the collar although the Luftwaffe flying eagle is located on the breast. Rank insignia was restricted to the epaulettes or, in the case of enlisted men, to chevrons on the left arm. The baggy trousers, with a large pocket on the upper left thigh, are tucked into short ankle boots and gaiters, now known derisively as 'retreat' gaiters.

*G3: Reiter, I. Jäger Regiment 40; Lucca, September 1944*  
19.FD(L) was converted into a bicycle-mounted unit by the Army at the beginning of 1944. While the regiments retained their infantry identification, the Army gave those companies and battalions equipped with bicycles the honours and traditions of the cavalry; this meant that battalions changed to 'squadrons' and ranks took on cavalry symbolism—e.g. Hauptmann became Rittmeister and Jäger became Reiter. At the same time the division received numerous replacements; most, however, were older men and poorly suited to riding bicycles into battle.

This Reiter in Italy wears a mixture of uniforms and insignia. When the Army assumed control of the field divisions supply functions and distribution channels also underwent change. Items of

**German crew bailing out 20mm flak gun emplacement in Courland, November 1944. The Oberwachtmeister, another former member of 21.FD(L), wears the War Order of the German Cross in Gold, and was killed in action shortly after this photograph was taken. 2.Flak Division fought beside the remnants of 21.FD(L) until evacuated in March 1945.**



common Luftwaffe wear, such as the flying blouse, became harder to obtain, and Army clothing was used to replace worn-out Air Force uniforms. This private wears the new Model 1943 Army service tunic, a cheaper variant of the earlier Model 1936. He has Army insignia on the collar and, interestingly, the yellow *Waffenfarbe* of the cavalry—mounted personnel of 20.FD(L) were permitted this privilege by the Army in early July 1944. Despite the M1943 service tunic and Army camouflage trousers, the Luftwaffe affiliation is still apparent from the M1943 field cap and the Air Force Ground Combat Badge. His equipment is standard Army issue, with the belt buckle for enlisted members of the Luftwaffe.

*H1: Hauptmann, Fusilier Bataillon 17; Pacy-sur-Eure, August 1944*

Directing fire against advancing American forces, this captain from Fusilier Bataillon 17 of 17.FD(L) is one of the few Air Force officers still assigned to the division: the majority of them left the unit prior to the Normandy invasion and were replaced with Army officers. He wears the normal uniform for an officer of the Luftwaffe at this time: the M1943 field cap, flying blouse (note German Cross in Gold), blue-grey trousers, and ankle boots and gaiters. Under the same Army order authorizing the use of the arm-of-service colour and titles of the cavalry in 20.FD(L), Jäger and Fusiliers of the remaining field divisions adopted Army infantry white *Waffenfarbe* and new designations in July 1944. Despite the lack of time to change *Waffenfarbe*, this officer has managed to obtain epaulettes with white underlay to conform to the Army directive.

*H2: Fusilier, Fusilier Bataillon 17; Pacy-Sur-Eure, August 1944*

A private of the same battalion wears the unique Luftwaffe camouflage smock while defending his



**Staff of 21.FD(L) in Courland, December 1944. With the exception of the Luftwaffe officer on the left, all men wear army uniforms. Generalmajor Henze is in the centre and Hauptmann Schwoppe, who later earned the Knight's Cross in March 1945, is seated next to the Luftwaffe officer.**

position with an MG34. The smock was the primary field uniform for 17.FD(L) and easily identified the unit to Allied intelligence because of its unusual characteristics. Another feature worn by members of this division is the *Luftwaffe* camouflage net. Adopted in late 1942, the net attached to the front and back of the helmet by two hooks. Marching boots were still worn by some Luftwaffe personnel at this stage of the war.

*H3: Oberstleutnant, 14.FD(L); Norway, May 1945*

Only one Luftwaffe field division still existed in any fighting strength when the Third Reich collapsed in May 1945: 14.FD(L) surrendered to Allied forces in Norway without firing a shot in anger. This artillery staff officer of the division marches into captivity in the Luftwaffe camouflage smock and normal Air Force uniform. By the end of the war the camouflage smock had lost its affiliation with the field divisions and was worn by Air Force personnel serving in a variety of scratch organisations. This officer's rather jaunty look is achieved by removing the rigid cap wire of his *Schirmmütze*—an unauthorized, but common practice among Luftwaffe officers.



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