

Warrior

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# German Security and Police Soldier 1939–45



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# GERMAN SECURITY AND POLICE SOLDIER 1939-45

## INTRODUCTION

The security apparatus of the Third Reich was a huge and amazingly complex entity. The police alone were subdivided into a bewilderingly large number of branches that would need a substantial volume in their own right to cover in anything but the most basic form. To this must be added the security units of the Armed Forces, including the regular military police, the secret field police, and the army security divisions. The Waffen-SS, too, had its own military police as well as a number of field units which, though not strictly designated as security elements, spent most of their time on security and anti-partisan operations. The Allgemeine-SS incorporated some of the most feared security organs ever to have existed, the Gestapo and the SD. No other country in modern times has committed such a significant part of its forces to policing and security duties, with the exception of the Soviet Union, another totalitarian regime which fielded whole divisions of NKVD Security Troops.

For ease of coverage, the units in this book will be considered under three broad headings – Wehrmacht, Police and SS/Security Police. In actuality, the SS and police were inextricably interlinked: Heinrich Himmler, as Reichsführer-SS, also held the title of Chef der Deutschen Polizei. In order to minimise repetition, the military police proper are given only basic coverage here. For fuller details of these formations, see the author's *German Military Police Units 1939-45*, Men at Arms 213.

It is difficult to cover units so drastically different in their approaches to their tasks within a single title. Some of the most repugnant military formations ever to have borne arms are described in this book, yet by contrast, units such as the Feldjäger have an honourable tradition stretching back into the days of the Imperial German Army, and still exist in the modern German Army. In order to provide the reader with the widest possible coverage of Germany's police and security troops, both ends of this rather wide spectrum are included. Despite some of the dreadful

This Stabsfeldwebel, a typical Feldgendarmerie senior NCO, was photographed just after the Feldgendarmerie was formed in 1939. Note the Polizei pattern eagle worn on the left sleeve, a feature ultimately omitted later in the war. This NCO would certainly have been recruited directly from the Ordnungspolizei. (Author's own)



An Unteroffizier of Feldgendarmerie inspects the rear lights on a naval staff car. The 'W.M.' prefix to the number plate denoted 'Wehrmacht Marine'. Note the gorget plate and army-issue torch suspended from one his greatcoat buttons. Feldgendarmerie of the various services had reciprocal agreements, thus an army military policeman was perfectly within his rights to inspect a naval vehicle. (Josef Charita)

events recounted, it is worth noting that not all the many elements of Germany's police and security forces were directly involved in them. Even within some of the units that were involved in the more despicable actions, there were occasionally individuals whose personal moral standards would not allow them to take part, and who to their credit refused to become involved.

## WEHRMACHT POLICE AND SECURITY TROOPS

### Feldgendarmerie

#### Recruitment and Training

By far the largest and most significant of the army's security organs was the regular military police or Feldgendarmerie. On mobilisation in 1939, the Germany Army followed a practice carried out by many other nations (including Great Britain) of recruiting significant numbers of civilian policemen into the nation's military police branch. This provided a sizeable cadre of men who already understood the legal aspects of their duties and had belonged to a uniformed organisation with high standards of training and turnout. In Germany the police were an armed organisation, so these men were already fully trained in the use of small arms. The induction of former members of the Gendarmerie and Schutzpolizei thus provided the Wehrmacht with a body of men who needed little or no additional training before being sent into action.

The Feldgendarmerie Vorschriften, the official regulations of the military police, specifically stated that 'Feldgendarmerie officers and NCOs positions will be filled by police officers and NCOs of the Ordnungspolizei, commensurate with the ranks to be assigned upon transition to the Army...' Indeed examination of surviving pay books from Feldgendarmerie NCOs show in the entry indicating civil profession that the majority did indeed hold NCO rank in one of Germany's many police branches.



As time went on the original cadre of former policemen was augmented by influxes from the Wehrmacht proper. It was clearly laid down that ordinary soldiers had to be existing NCOs or at least display suitability to progress to NCO status, in order to be acceptable for transfer to the military police. Feldgendarmerie training schools were set up at Prague and Litzmannstadt-Gornau in Czechoslovakia to train army recruits in the policing aspects of their duties.

#### Active Service

The duties of the Feldgendarmerie were many and varied. The official German military police regulations (Feldgendarmerie Dienstvorschrift) describe some of them as follows: 'Traffic control, the maintenance of good order and discipline, escorting of prisoners of war, redirection of stragglers, prevention of looting, supervision of civilian populace in occupied areas, disarming civilians, searching captured enemy soldiers, investigating traffic accidents, checking ID and movement papers of soldiers in transit, removal of any propaganda leaflets dropped by enemy aircraft, searching for shot down enemy aircrew, street patrols in occupied territory, prevention of sabotage, co-operation with the Geheime Feldpolizei, arresting deserters, and anti-partisan duties as well as many others.'

In addition to those troops permanently assigned to the military police, it was not uncommon for others to be attached on a temporary basis for a specific policing task if sufficient military policemen proper were not available. Temporary assignees wore the armband described in the uniforms section.

In addition, at divisional level, it was a common practice for combat soldiers who had been wounded in the front line to be allowed to convalesce with the divisional support element. This could mean spending some time with the unit clerical or quartermaster staff, but for

An Oberfeldwebel of Feldgendarmerie inspects the vehicle of a French refugee during the campaign in France. The vehicle is somewhat overloaded as its owner attempts to save as many of his personal possessions as possible, including two bicycles. (Robert Noss)



Feldgendarmes from Hermann Göring in Sicily in 1943 during a traffic accident investigation, only one of many tasks the Feldgendarmerie could be called upon to perform. Though this unit had its own unique version of the gorget, this particular item seems to have been worn less often by military police of this unit than in most others. (Herbert Kail)



A Gefreiter of Feldgendarmerie on traffic control duty in Russia, October 1943. Note the traffic direction wand in his right hand. Although his belt carries a standard triple ammunition pouch for the Kar98k rifle, he appears to be unarmed. Almost certainly however, he will also be carrying a holstered 9 mm pistol on the right side of his belt, not visible in this view. (Josef Charita)



many it also meant a spell of duty with the divisional Feldgendarmerie Trupp. Such duties could have two distinct advantages. First, the wounded soldier was given sufficient time to recover from his wounds while still contributing to the efficiency of the division. Equally important, the appearance of combat front line soldiers within the ranks of the military police added a certain moral authority to these often unpopular troops while allowing the combat soldier to appreciate the difficult job carried out by the military policeman. A military policeman wearing combat decorations commanded additional respect and few would argue with him.

It is a fact of life that combat soldiers in most armies heartily dislike the military police, who are regarded as an unwelcome presence intent on making the soldier's life more difficult and unpleasant than necessary. Military policemen are often seen as having an easy life compared with the front line combat soldier. The fact is, however, that the life of the Feldgendarme was often extremely dangerous and the conditions in which he served extremely unpleasant. Standing point duty on traffic direction at some remote crossroads with no shelter in the midst of winter on the Eastern Front, exposed to attack from enemy partisans who would be extremely unlikely to take prisoners was no easy task. While military policemen operating in garrison towns in Germany may have had a relatively safe posting, with nothing more taxing than disciplining unruly soldiers, the tasks of the military police in the combat zone were more onerous. Their duties usually

involved operating in small patrols or *Streife*, with little or no back-up, meaning that they were particularly vulnerable to enemy attack. Significant numbers of military policemen were lost to enemy action, particularly from partisans.

In each military district or *Wehrkreis*, military garrisons had their own military police elements. In the field, corps, army, or army corps level, the administration and command structure also had its own military police elements. The highest rank within the Feldgendarmerie was a Generalmajor serving at the Headquarters of the Army High Command (Oberkommando der Heeres). At army level, a Feldgendarmerie Oberst was attached to the staff element.

The smallest operational element of the Feldgendarmerie was the patrol or *Streife*, which could be as small as just two men. *Streifen* were component parts of the platoon or *Zug*, commanded by a senior NCO or junior officer and a number of *Züge* were formed into a troop or *Trupp*, usually commanded by a Hauptmann. Ultimately, most major military units such as army divisions fielded their own company or *Kompanie* of Feldgendarmerie often commanded by a major. Feldgendarmerie were carried on the pay and rations accounts of the units to which they were attached.

On operational service, Feldgendarmerie were usually equipped with a mixture of solo and sidecar combination motorcycles, light field cars and a small number of trucks. Heavier vehicles were rarely used. The typical personal armament of the Feldgendarme was the Kar98k rifle and the P.08 or P.38 pistol. Unlike infantrymen, who carried two triple ammunition pouches for the rifle, Feldgendarmes carried a single pouch on one side and the pistol holster on the other. The MP38/40

A number of captured British paratroops are guarded by a Rottenführer of SS-Feldgendarmerie. The SS-Feldgendarmerie cuff title is just visible on his lower left sleeve and the chain of his gorget can be seen at the rear of his collar. Armament is the standard Kar98k rifle. (Josef Charita)



machine pistol was also widely used. Machine guns such as the MG38 or MG42 were also used where fire support may be needed at a control point or road-block, and these weapons were also often fitted to the sidecar of the motorcycle combination. In the field Feldgendarmes would rarely wear full marching order, wearing simple belt order instead and carrying only their weapon, ammunition and other minimum requirements. Unlike infantrymen who have to carry virtually all their equipment on campaign, the Feldgendarmes were motorised troops based with the divisional support elements, so their personal baggage remained with the supply train. This applies in fact to almost all of the

An Opel 'Blitz' truck from the Feldgendarmerie Trupp of the Hermann Göring Division. An NCO sits at the table in the background. Note the notice on the side of the bonnet stating 'Feldgericht d LW', or Air Force Field Court. Temporary courts could be set up in the field during wartime to expedite the processing of charges against front line personnel. (Herbert Kail)



Russia 1942: a civilian is being interrogated by a number of Feldgendarmerie officers. Given that the civilian does not look particularly fearful in face of this rather large assembly of Feldgendarmes, it may be that he himself is not in trouble, but may be relaying useful information. Note that only the NCOs and lower ranks in this view are wearing the gorget. It was not commonly worn by officers. (Josef Charita)

troops covered by this title. Wartime photographs rarely show police and security troops burdened down by carrying equipment.

The capture of a military policeman was always considered a great prize, as their knowledge of supply routes, troop movements, military signing and radio codes, etc., was invariably much greater than that of ordinary soldiers. In order to prevent the easy identification of a military policeman, the uniform use of the sleeve eagle and cuff title eventually ended. Only the gorget plate worn around the neck and the orange-red *Waffenfarbe* (badge piping) remained to identify the *Feldgendarme*. In the second half of the war the *Waffenfarbe* was actually the same colour as that used by other branches, such as the Corps of Engineers, so that once the gorget was removed, there was no visual definitive identification of the soldier as a military policeman. As another means of concealing their identity, military policemen were issued with a second, false paybook, endowing them with a unit less interesting to the enemy. If capture was imminent, the real paybook would simply be thrown away along with the gorget.

#### Uniforms and Insignia

The basic uniform of the *Feldgendarme* was identical to that worn by any other soldier in the *Wehrmacht*. What identified his status were specific pieces of special insignia.

The *Waffenfarbe* or branch of service colour was orange-red and was worn as piping or underlay to shoulder straps, collar patches and as piping to the crown and hat band of the peaked cap. A cuff title was worn on the lower left sleeve, woven in grey gothic script lettering on a medium brown band, with the legend 'Feldgendarmerie'. A police style eagle, within an oval wreath of oakleaves, embroidered in orange-red on field-grey and clutching a black swastika, was worn on the upper left sleeve. For officers, it was executed in hand-embroidered aluminium thread. This insignia was deleted in 1944. An armband in green cloth with orange-yellow lettering 'Feldgendarmerie' was worn on the left sleeve by non-military police personnel on temporary attachment.

The gorget plate or *Ringkragen* was the badge of office of the military policeman, and was worn only when on police duty. This anachronistic throwback to the Middle Ages was originally a metal plate designed to protect the throat on suits of armour, but gradually became more of a symbol of status or authority. The *Feldgendarmerie* gorget was a stamped half-moon-shaped sheet of metal with a raised strengthening-rim around the edge. At each end of the crescent was a plain stipple finish button. In the centre was a spread-winged *Wehrmacht* eagle over a dark grey painted scroll bearing the title 'Feldgendarmerie'. The buttons, eagle and lettering on the scroll were finished in luminous paint, while the gorget plate itself was a matt silver grey colour. The plate was worn on a plain open-link chain around the neck. On the reverse of the gorget was a long, narrow, blunt prong, which could be slipped into the tunic buttonhole to prevent it swinging about if the wearer was obliged to bend forwards.

Though not in any way unique to the *Feldgendarmerie*, the Motor Cycle Coat was used by them on a regular basis. It resembled the greatcoat, being double-breasted and calf length, but it was more generously cut and was made from a rubberised waterproof material.



The front flap and edges of the long rear vent could be buttoned up to create what almost amounted to 'leggings' for wear while riding on a motorcycle. The only insignia visible on this garment were the shoulder straps with their distinctive orange-red piping.

**Feldgendarmerie often acted as despatch riders with important messages. Here a Feldweibel in full motorcycle gear delivers a report to Feldmarschall Ewald von Kleist. (Josef Charita)**

#### The Feldjäger Recruitment

Established in November 1943, the *Feldjäger* were military policemen with a difference. All were recruited from the ranks of decorated soldiers who had gained at least three years combat experience and who had received at least the Iron Cross Second Class. It was assumed, probably correctly, that their fortitude through the most arduous of experiences at the front would give them the moral stature and authority to be able to carry out the difficult tasks of military policemen.

#### Active Service

The *Feldjägerkorps* consisted of three individual *Feldjägerkommando*, numbered I, II and III. FJK I was based in Königsberg, East Prussia, and was commanded by General der Flieger Ernst Müller; FJK II was formed in Breslau and commanded initially by General der Panzertruppe Kempf; FJK III was based in Vienna and commanded initially by General der Infanterie von Scheele. It is interesting to note that not only the *Feldjäger* themselves but also their highest commanding officers were seasoned front line soldiers.

The tasks of the *Feldjäger* were many and varied and included several tasks similar to those carried out by the *Feldgendarmerie*, including traffic control duties. At the other end of the spectrum, however, *Feldjäger* could be tasked with forming ad-hoc combat groups from military stragglers and



This photograph shows a temporary open air 'office' set up in a Russian village by Feldgendarmes from the Hermann Göring Division of the Luftwaffe. The seated NCO appears to be typing up some official papers, perhaps some form of permit or pass, for the villagers. No gorgets are being worn, suggesting these men are carrying out administrative rather than policing duties. (Herbert Kail)

whatever manpower might be available locally, in order to plug gaps in the crumbling front line. Their authority on these occasions came direct from the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the High Command of the Armed Forces, and not like the Feldgendarmerie, from garrison, district, division or even army level. This gave the Feldjäger much more significant powers. If questioned they were authorised to settle the debate at the point of a gun. They could conduct field courts martial and carry out whatever sentence was handed down. It is important to note that the Feldjägerkorps was an organ of the combined Armed Forces High Command and not of the army alone. Thus a mixture of Army, Luftwaffe and Waffen-SS troops could be found in the same unit.

#### Uniforms and Insignia

Like the Feldgendarmerie, the uniforms worn by the Feldjäger were absolutely standard, with no special identifying features. Even the orange-red *Waffenfarbe* of the military police was absent, as the Feldjäger adopted the white *Waffenfarbe* of the infantry. The following special insignia were worn, however.

A narrow armband was worn on the lower left sleeve. Printed in black letters on a red ground, it bore the text '*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht / Feldjäger*'. A gorget plate almost identical to that used by the Feldgendarmerie was worn. The only difference was that the dark grey scroll below the eagle bore the legend '*Feldjäger*'. Shoulder strap cyphers were intended for use by the Feldjäger, featuring the letters 'Fj' in basic Latin script. They were to be embroidered for junior ranks, white metal

for NCOs and gilt metal for officers. Although original examples of the metal cyphers are known, it is uncertain to what extent, if at all, they were ever used.

#### The Geheime Feldpolizei

##### Recruitment

Established in July 1939, the GFP was the Special Investigations Branch of the army (the Luftwaffe later also introduced its own GFP). Just as experienced civil policemen were drafted into the Feldgendarmerie, so the GFP was staffed by transferring experienced detectives from the Kriminal Polizei or Kripo. Although they were authorised to wear the uniform of an Army Administration Official, complete with a Geheime Feldpolizei cuff band, these men mostly appear to have worn civilian clothing during their investigations. GFP worked in close co-operation with the Sicherheitspolizei. As with members of the Kripo and Gestapo, the GFP carried a small metal 'warrant disc' impressed on the obverse with the national emblem of an eagle and swastika. On the reverse was the inscription '*Oberkommando des Heeres, Geheime Feldpolizei*', over the bearer's personal number.

Their tasks involved investigation of espionage, detection of treasonable activities, murder, theft, black marketeering and other crimes within the military sphere. They may well also have become involved in investigating such incidents in the occupied areas, especially sabotage and espionage within military bases, munitions works, etc. GFP also took part in background investigations for courts martial.

#### Miscellaneous Security Units

In addition to the military police proper, there were a number of other smaller units within the army which carried out policing and security duties, but on a smaller scale.

Railway Station Guards or *Bahnhofswache* were army guards stationed at major railway stations, whose task was to maintain discipline and check the papers of soldiers and other persons passing through, searching for deserters, awol soldiers, etc. Their only identifying feature was their gorget. Similar in appearance to the Feldgendarmerie gorget, the scroll on this type bore the inscription '*Bahnhofswache*', while above it, in place of the eagle and swastika, was the roman numeral indicating the Wehrkreis, over an Arabic number indicating the unit. In place of the plain button at either side of the Feldgendarmerie gorget was a small metal 'Wehrmacht' style eagle with swastika.

Train Guard Detachments or *Zugwachabteilung* provided security on the trains

The soldier on the left is a member of the *Bahnhofswache*, identifiable by the distinctive insignia on his gorget plate. His task was to ensure the maintenance of discipline within main railway stations and check the travel papers of travellers. (Josef Charita)





**Battle-hardened Feldgendarmes of a Luftwaffe paratroop division on patrol in Normandy in June 1944. Note the heavily camouflaged vehicle and the individual on the bonnet whose task was to scan the skies for Allied aircraft. Luftwaffe paratroop Feldgendarmes tended to wear the army rather than air force pattern of the gorget. (Josef Charita)**

themselves either for dignitaries or for trains passing through enemy territory, especially where partisan activity could be expected. Once again, the gorget was the only special insignia worn. Similar to the previous pattern, the inscription on the scroll read 'Zugwachabteilung' and the unit number above was in large Arabic numerals.

Headquarter guards were personnel assigned to guard and patrol duties in garrison towns from around 1937, before the establishment of the Feldgendarmerie. They wore a gorget plate with the inscription 'Kommandantur' on the scroll. It featured the unit number above and the usual Wehrmacht eagles at either side.

Established in 1943, the Wehrmachtstreifendienst, or Armed Forces Patrol Service, was a combined services organisation staffed by soldiers from all branches of the Wehrmacht. It carried out patrol duties in garrison towns. Although no special insignia was introduced, a duty lanyard was worn and a special Streifendienst ID card was carried. These troops were armed with machine pistols and had considerable authority. In the last months of the war stories were rife of Streifendienst patrols hanging soldiers from lamp posts for desertion if they were unable to provide proper papers or movement orders.

### **The Sicherungs-Divisionen**

As well as those troops who were dedicated to security and policing matters such as the Feldgendarmerie and the Feldjäger, the German Army fielded a number of so-called 'Security Divisions'. They were usually formed around men who were graded in one of the lower fitness categories, often older men with minor medical ailments which prevented them serving in front line combat units. Some of these units began life as regular infantry divisions and were subsequently

downgraded and had all their heavy weapons withdrawn. A few, such as 281 Sicherungs Division, which fought in the Cholm Pocket, were of a very high standard indeed. They were often called into action against partisan forces in Eastern Europe, but in the main were inadequate to the tasks allotted them. This was especially true as the war dragged on, and the few fit and able men serving in such units were drawn off to serve in front line combat formations. These divisions generally suffered heavy losses when facing regular Red Army units. A total of 15 Sicherungs Divisionen were formed, but as they were actually regular army formations they are not covered in any detail in this work. The full listing of such divisions is as follows.

- 52 Sicherungs Division: formed as 52 Infantry Division, downgraded to Sicherungs Division status in autumn 1943.
- 201 Sicherungs Division: formed 1942.
- 203 Sicherungs Division: formed 1942.
- 207 Sicherungs Division: formed as 207 Infantry Division, downgraded in 1941, disbanded 1944.
- 213 Sicherungs Division: formed as 213 Infantry Division, downgraded in 1941, disbanded 1945.
- 221 Sicherungs Division: formed as 221 Infantry Division, downgraded in 1941, disbanded 1944.
- 281 Sicherungs Division: formed 1941. A good quality unit which fought at Cholm and Demjansk, disbanded 1944.
- 285 Sicherungs Division: formed 1941, disbanded 1944.
- 286 Sicherungs Division: formed 1942, destroyed in East Prussia, 1945.
- 325 Sicherungs Division: formed 1943, garrison unit in Paris, disbanded 1944.
- 390 Sicherungs Division: formed as a training division 1942, disbanded 1945.
- 391 Sicherungs Division: formed as an training division 1942, destroyed in the battle for Berlin 1945.
- 403 Sicherungs Division: created simply as a admin divisional staff unit 1939, converted to Sicherungs Division 1941.
- 444 Sicherungs Division: formed 1940, disbanded 1944.
- 454 Sicherungs Division: formed 1940, disbanded 1944.

All of these divisions, with the exception of 325, served exclusively on the Eastern Front, and most were disbanded after combat with experienced Red Army combat units inflicted serious losses.

## **THE GERMAN POLICE**

The German Police was a massive structure, subdivided into myriad smaller subsidiary organisations dealing with matters as diverse as traffic control, population census, health and food control, controlling the trade in medicines and poisons, veterinary matters, inspection of abattoirs and even inspection of public baths. Fascinating as these are, they are of little direct relevance to the subject matter of this work. It may be useful to briefly examine the German police structure of the time in order to understand how the system and hierarchy worked.



All of the units covered here fell under the overall umbrella of the Ordnungspolizei (Order Police, or, literally, 'Police for the maintenance of law and order'). This organ was often referred to by its common German abbreviation, the Orpo. The Ordnungspolizei was under the control of the Hauptamt Ordnungspolizei, directly accountable to the Reichsführer-SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei, Heinrich Himmler, and falling under the general auspices of the Ministerium des Innern, the Ministry of the Interior. The senior ranking officer of the Ordnungspolizei was an SS-Oberstgruppenführer, originally Kurt Daluge, later replaced by Alfred Wünnenberg. The Ordnungspolizei was subdivided into seven main departments as follows.

Amt I	<i>Kommando Amt</i>	High Command
Amt II	<i>Verwaltungs und Recht</i>	Admin and Judiciary Matters
Amt III	<i>Wirtschaftsverwaltung</i>	Budget/Supply
Amt IV	<i>Technische Nothilfe</i>	Technical Emergency Services
Amt V	<i>Feuerwehr</i>	Fire Police
Amt VI	<i>Kolonialpolizei</i>	Colonial Police
Amt VII	<i>Technische SS u. Polizei Akademie</i>	SS/Police Technical Academy

The units relevant to this book came under Amt I, the Kommando Amt. In each geographical region was located a *Höhere SS und Polizei Führer* or Higher SS and Police Leader. Each region was subdivided into districts, in which police matters were controlled by a *Befehlshaber der Orpo*. Further down the chain of command came sub-regional commanders, the *Kommandeure der Orpo*. Units within the Ordnungspolizei fell into two basic categories, the normal uniformed police (*Polizeivollzugsbeamten*) and the administrative service of the police (*Polizeiverwaltungsbeamten*), often comprised of non-uniformed civilian clerical workers. It is within the first group that the units with which we are concerned will primarily be found.

### The Uniformed Police

The uniformed branch of the police can also be broken down into a wide range of specialist sections, the most important of which were:

- 1) *Schutzpolize* Protection Police
- 2) *Schutzpolizei der Gemeinden* Municipal Protection Police
- 3) *Gendarmerie* Rural Police
- 4) *Kolonial Polize* Colonial Police
- 5) *Wasserschutzpolizei* Water Protection Police
- 6) *Feuerschutzpolize* Fire Protection Police
- 7) *Feuerweh* Fire Brigade
- 8) *Luftschutzpolize* Air Raid Police
- 9) *Technische Nothilfe* Technical Emergency Corps
- 10) *Hilfpolizei* Auxiliary Police

From these, the two that will interest us most are the Schutzpolizei or Schupo, and to a lesser degree, the Gendarmerie.

### Recruitment and Training

Following the end of World War I, the size of Germany's armed forces was severely restricted and many former soldiers of the Imperial German



ABOVE LEFT The Berlin Schutzpolizei on parade before the outbreak of war. The German police were highly politicised under the Third Reich and those deemed 'unreliable' ousted. Note that the banner of the police is identical in style to the 'Deutschland Erwache' standards of the Nazi Party itself. (Josef Charita)



ABOVE RIGHT A Polizei junior NCO in active service dress with the single set of ammunition pouches typical of those armed only for security duties. Combat personnel, needing far more ammunition, would almost invariably carry a set of these pouches on either side. (Josef Charita)

Army who found themselves unemployed were welcomed into the police. The police expanded and were filled largely with militarily experienced men who in the main had predominantly right- rather than left-wing leanings and could be considered trustworthy in a period when Communism was proving a serious threat in Germany.

Great emphasis was placed on weapons training, not merely with small arms, but also with automatic weapons, heavy machine guns, and even armoured vehicles. Needless to say, when the Nazis came to power in 1933, they felt no need to alter the status quo. The careful recruitment of those considered politically reliable after 1933 only served to increase the generally right-wing bias of the police. It has been estimated that when the Wehrmacht was formed in 1935, as many as 60,000 fully trained policemen of high calibre were transferred into the military.

Well aware of the importance of a politically reliable police force, once they had come to power the Nazis set about ousting any policemen considered to have democratic, liberal or socialist leanings. Many first-class professional officers were thrown out of the police, only to be replaced with dependable party members who had little or no useful experience, so many who had been ousted subsequently found themselves re-employed. It is also known that police officers who were already members of the party were pressurised to apply for membership of the Allgemeine-SS. Virtually all police officers and many senior NCOs held dual rank in both the police and SS. Those whose loyalty to the state was even remotely in doubt were carefully monitored.



ABOVE LEFT A typical Schutzpolizei junior NCO in the field dress most often worn in the first part of the war in the East. Policemen on home duty tended to wear the traditional shako rather than the field cap shown here. (Josef Charita)

ABOVE RIGHT Polizei troops on the Eastern Front, 1943. The NCO at left still wears the civil police uniform with contrasting dark coloured collar and cuffs, soon to be replaced by a plain field-grey tunic similar to those worn by the army. (Josef Charita)



The Schutzpolizei was the nearest equivalent within the German police organisation to the British 'bobby' or the American 'cop'. It was divided into two basic components. The Reviere Polizei, or Precinct Police, comprised static units of up to 40 police officers patrolling a specific area. Five or more such Reviere constituted a Polizei Abschnitte or sector, and three to five sectors (but only in the largest towns such as Berlin and Vienna) formed a Polizei Gruppe. The Kasernierte Polizei or Barracked Police were far more militarised, have received infantry training and were, as their name suggests, based in military barracks. They were available to the Kommandeur der Schutzpolizei for specific tasks such as providing additional armed security at large civic events, dealing with internal unrest, maintaining order after enemy air raids and the prevention of looting in such circumstances and also the control of traffic after major disasters. It was principally from the Kasernierte Polizei that most of the principal Polizei Battalions were formed.

A number of training schools existed to provide training for those destined to serve in one of the numerous police battalions. As with military units, much of a police serviceman's training was given at a reserve or depot battalion. These training establishments included Polizei Waffenschulen, I, II, III and IV at Dresden-Hellerau, Dresden-Moritzberg, Den Haag, and Maastricht; *Polizei-Kraftfahrerschule* (Police Driving School),

Vienna; *Polizei Schule für Technik und Verkehr* (Technical and Traffic School), Berlin; *Polizei Sanitäts Ersatz Abteilung* (Medical Depot), Berlin; *Polizei-Nachrichten Ersatz Kompanie* (Signals Reserve Coy), Krakau; *Polizei-Reiter Ersatz Schwadron* (Mounted Replacement Unit), Posen.

On the outbreak of war, some 21 police battalions, each of some 500 men, had been formed, of which 13 were attached to the German armies on the invasion of Poland. Their duties were to round up Polish prisoners, remove weapons and abandoned military equipment, and generally secure the areas behind the front line. By mid-1940, over 100 such police battalions had been formed.

Generally, most police battalions were staffed by slight men in their 30s and 40s unsuitable for front line service in the Wehrmacht. However, police battalions in the number range 251 to 256 and 301 to 325 were formed around an allocation of younger volunteers to the Ordnungspolizei. These younger men were often far more fanatical in their loyalty to the National Socialist regime than many of the older policemen. On the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, 500 members of the Ordnungspolizei were attached to the Einsatzgruppen killing squads and a further 11 battalions (some 5,500 men) allocated to the various regions controlled by the Höhere SS-und Polizei Führer in occupied Russia.

There were two distinct chains of command. The regular police chain began with the head of the Ordnungspolizei, Kurt Daluege, through the Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei at regional level, to the district Kommandeur der Polizei and on to the battalions. On the other hand, orders direct from the Reichsführer-SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei, Heinrich Himmler, could be passed down via the Höhere SS-und Polizei Führer to the district SS-und Polizei Führer and on to the battalion. The latter chain was most often used for orders regarding actions by composite forces of both the Ordnungspolizei and Sicherheitspolizei.

A typical police battalion would be made up as follows:

HQ Element	4 officers, 12 men
Medic Detachment	1 officer, 6 men
Signals Platoon	1 officer, 18 men
Police Company (x3)	5 officers, 140-150 men
M/T Section	5 officers, 92 men

In addition, the following elements could be made available from regimental strength:

Motorcycle Platoon	1 officer, 34 men
Armoured Car Platoon	2 officers, 15 men
Anti-Tank Section	1 officer, 25 men
Light Infantry Howitzer Section	1 officer, 25 men

#### Active Service

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the original 84 Polizei Bataillonen were formed into 28 Polizei Regimenter, each of three battalions; the original numbering was then lost and the battalions designated simply as I, II or III Bataillon of a regiment. Subsequently, a number of other regiments were formed, designated



as Polizei-Schützen Regiment. Finally, in March 1943, all police regiments were re-designated as SS-Polizei Schützen Regiment. Eventually, a grand total of 38 SS-Polizei Schützen Regiment were formed.

In addition there were two distinct regiments identified by a name rather than a number: SS-Polizei Regiment *Bozen* and SS-Polizei Regiment *Alpenvorland*, both based in Italy. Police serving in these units were issued with an SS pay book of a special police design, slightly different to that issued to field units of the Waffen-SS. The personnel of these units also continued to wear standard police field dress with police insignia. From the beginning of the actions against the Jews and other 'undesirables' such as the Polish intelligentsia, Ordnungspolizei were used to provide armed escorts for the trains removing these unfortunates to their fates in one of the many concentration camps. Squads consisting of one officer and 15 NCOs and men were generally used, and as they escorted the trains right into the camps themselves, they could hardly have been unaware of what awaited the victims.

Schutzpolizei were widely used to clear villages of those considered undesirable by the Nazis, often on the pretext that they were 'partisans' or had supported the partisans. While part of the unit entered the town or village, a security cordon would be thrown around the outskirts to prevent any escapes. After the victims had been ordered to assemble, those too old or infirm to move fast enough were usually killed on the spot. The cordon would close in and sweep through the village, searching out those who had sought to conceal themselves. They, too,

ABOVE **Polizei units also had access to armoured vehicles, many of which were captured enemy types. Here, a French Panhard armoured car from a police unit (note the police emblem on the turret side) pauses outside a Russian village in October 1943. (Josef Charita)**

OPPOSITE TOP **A smiling NCO of the Gendarmerie humiliates an orthodox Jew by cutting off his beard. Such minor cruelties were far from unusual. (USHMM)**

OPPOSITE BOTTOM **A radio command car of a police battalion during an anti-partisan sweep on the Eastern Front, 1943. These troops wear the typical field dress from the second half of the war, a standard field blouse in field-grey wool. (USHMM)**



were usually summarily shot. In some cases, those captured were loaded onto trains to be shipped off to their fate. Often, however, they would simply be marched off to some wood or quarry or similar 'suitable' spot on the outskirts of the town or village and executed.

Police sweeps were also carried out through areas which had already been 'cleared', with the intention of surprising those who thought they had escaped the initial round-up. Many thousands were caught up in these subsequent sweeps. Even in cases where civilians had been allowed to remain and put to work in some business or factory contributing to the German war effort, they were often arbitrarily snatched by Ordnungspolizei or Sicherheitspolizei search squads. This annoyed those industrial managers who thought they had found an excellent source of free labour.

The Ordnungspolizei also made great use of Polish informers, rewarding those, often former neighbours, who were only too quick to betray Jews hiding from the Germans. They dealt out swift and usually lethal punishment to any found to be aiding the unfortunate Jews. Given that the men in these police units were predominantly ordinary Germans rather than Nazi fanatics, it is interesting to note that in general there seems to



have been no problem in finding volunteers to take part in such punitive actions and the murder of defenceless civilians. Indeed, from surviving documents and testimony, it seems that many of these elderly police reservists were considerably more cruel and bloodthirsty than some of their younger colleagues who were actually SS members.

It has often been claimed that these policemen may have obeyed their gruesome orders through fear that disobedience would lead to court-martial and execution. While such fears under the totalitarian Nazi regime might sound logical, there is evidence to show that several policemen did refuse to obey such repugnant orders and that they suffered no punishment. Indeed, some were subsequently promoted showing that neither their lives nor their careers were threatened. Once it became clear that no ill befell those who refused similar orders, there was little or no excuse for those who did obey and took part in the massacre of innocent civilians. The only problem, in fact, was that those who held out suffered abuse and scorn from colleagues who considered them 'weak'.

Policemen also took part in some of the largest, organised mass killings of the war, such as the notorious 'Erntefest' massacre around Lublin. In this incident, the victims were led to believe they were digging anti-tank ditches, a ruse made successful by arranging the ditches in zig-zag fashion. Once the ditches were complete, however, over 42,000

**Partisan suspects rounded up by a police unit on the Eastern Front. The chances of survival for these two would be almost nil. Very little attempt was usually made to establish innocence or guilt; mere suspicion was often enough to ensure a death sentence. (USHMM)**



**ABOVE LEFT** In April 1943 the inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto attempted to rise up against their tormentors. Here, police troops guard one of the exits with a heavy machine gun during the operation under SS-Gruppenführer Jürgen Stroop to clear the ghetto. (USHMM)

**ABOVE RIGHT** A number of police troops became highly decorated combat soldiers. Oberst Griese, a veteran of World War I, wears, among other awards, the Infantry Combat Badge, War Merit Cross First Class, Iron Cross First Class, Eastern Front Campaign Medal ribbon and the coveted Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. (Josef Charita)



civilians were driven at gunpoint by the policemen to the ditches, where they were shot by members of the Sicherheitspolizei. One single police battalion is recorded as having directly executed 38,000 civilians and taken part in the murder of 83,000. Few of even the most appalling of Nazi Germany's military units could come close to the levels of murder carried out by these 'ordinary' German policemen. Few were ever punished and indeed most of those who actually survived the war simply went back to their careers in the civil police. Indeed it has been suggested, incredibly, that it was fear of harming their police careers that led many to acquiesce in carrying out such terrible crimes.

Most battlefield atrocities are carried out by front line units fired up by the heat of battle, or those desperate for revenge after the death of their comrades. In general, front line troops are younger, fitter men, probably less temperate than older, more mature men. Yet, here were some of the worst atrocities of the war, carried out by these same mature family men who might have been expected to exercise a calming influence on their younger colleagues. They were men who, by definition, came from a body dedicated to maintaining law and order and protecting civilians from murder, rape and other such crimes.

The Gendarme can best be described as the equivalent to a village policeman. He was often the only policeman in his area, and indeed the only representative of any government organisation. He carried out a

range of 'civil service' duties. He was usually provided with a bicycle or horse for transport. In occupied eastern Europe, Gendarmerie personnel were used to supervise and control static local native police units where they were considered useful and were retained by the Germans. Despite their essentially non-mobile nature, Gendarmerie personnel, though less often used on anti-partisan duties, were certainly used in actions against the local civilian populace in their area.

## SS AND SECURITY POLICE

### The RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt)

As previously stated, the police resource was divided between the Ordnungspolizei under Kurt Daluge and the Sicherheitspolizei under Reinhard Heydrich. The SiPo itself was part of the RSHA, the Reichssicherheitshauptamt or State Security Main Office formed in 1938. The RSHA was organised into seven distinct departments as follows.

- Amt I Personnel Department
- Amt II Administration Department
- Amt III Sicherheitsdienst (SD)
- Amt IV Geheime Staats Polizei (GeStaPo)
- Amt V Kriminal Polizei (KriPo)
- Amt VI SD (Ausland) – SD overseas section
- Amt VII Ideology

It is with Amt III, Amt IV and Amt V that this work is concerned.

### Recruitment

Potential recruits into the RSHA were expected to be of a very high academic standard with a law degree at least. Recruits embarked on four months of intensive training with the Kriminalpolizei, learning the forensic and scientific aspects of police work. This was followed by three months' attachment to the SD for training in intelligence work, and finally, three months with the Gestapo. At the end of this period, the recruit would be posted to whichever branch of the RSHA most suited his skills.

### Amt III

Established in 1931, the Sicherheitsdienst, or SD, was recruited from those with a high level of academic ability – only well-educated candidates from good backgrounds were accepted. Despite the image history has left of this organisation, most of its true members were involved in intelligence and counter-intelligence work at which they were, in fact, rather successful. It may be considered as approximately the equivalent of Britain's MI5 and was a direct competitor to the army's intelligence service, the Abwehr, over which it ultimately gained control.



ABOVE Civilian captives are forced to lie prone while SD and Polizei troops search through their belongings. In the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, widespread looting by some of the German troops became a major problem, so much so that one of their commanders, Bronislaw Kaminski, was executed on a charge of looting. (USHMM)

OPPOSITE TOP Reinhard Heydrich, here seen as an SS-Brigadeführer, was head of the Third Reich's security police apparatus, until assassinated by Czech commandos in Prague during May 1942. In reprisal, the village of Lidice was levelled to the ground, its menfolk shot, and most of its women and children deported to concentration camps. (USHMM)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM An SD NCO in pre-war service dress with SD sleeve patch and cuff band. At this point, many of the SD's personnel were highly educated intelligence specialists. (USHMM)

The SD was the only one of the three branches that was regularly uniformed, the Kripo and Gestapo being predominantly plain clothed organisations. However, it was decreed that all members of the security police organisations serving outside the borders of the Reich were to wear uniform, specifically that of the SD. Thus, in many of the wartime photographs which exist, showing what appear to be SD personnel, many will in fact be members of other police organisations. Only minor differences in insignia worn on the uniforms will indicate the wearer's true status.

It has been estimated that as little as three percent of those who made up the strength of the SD Einsatzgruppen were in fact actual SD personnel. Nevertheless, the SD must bear its share of responsibility for those deeds carried out by personnel wearing its uniform and under its theoretical control.

### The Einsatzgruppen

As early as September 1939, Reinhard Heydrich, in his capacity as Chief of the Security Police, had issued instructions for his Einsatzgruppen to take part in rounding up Jews from rural areas, to concentrate them in larger cities with good rail links to facilitate further 'measures'. No executions were mentioned at this point, and indeed the economic security of the occupied territories was to be fully considered, especially the needs of the army and businesses supplying the army; any Jews contributing to these concerns were to be 'emigrated' later. However, after the launch of Operation Barbarossa, the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, all pretence was set aside, and the Einsatzgruppen began their mass murders almost immediately.



The last few seconds of the life of this victim of one of the Einsatzgruppen ebb away as his killer prepares to fire. The bodies of those already executed can be seen lying in the pit. A number of other Germans have gathered to watch the macabre spectacle. (USHMM)

Four Einsatzgruppen were formed to operate behind the front lines, putting into effect the Nazi racial policies, rounding up partisans and generally disposing of those the Nazis considered undesirables.

Einsatzgruppe A, commanded by SS-Brigadeführer Walter Stahlecker, operated in the northern sector of the Eastern Front. Its sub-units were Sonderkommando 1a, Sonderkommando 1b, Einsatzkommando 2 and Einsatzkommando 3.

Einsatzgruppe B, under the command of SS-Gruppenführer Artur Nebe, operated in the Central Sector and was divided into Sonderkommando 7a, Sonderkommando 7b, Sonderkommando 7c, Einsatzkommando 8, Einsatzkommando 9, and Vorkommando Moskau.

Einsatzgruppe C, commanded by Rasch, operated around Kiev. Its sub-units were Einsatzkommando 4a, Einsatzkommando 4b, Einsatzkommando 5 and Einsatzkommando 6.



A detachment of SD security personnel pose for a group photograph. Many wear the SD sleeve emblem and some the cuff band 'Grenz Polizei', indicating that they are security troops based at border locations some time prior to 1941 when these border guard units were disbanded. (Author's own)

Einsatzgruppe D, commanded by Otto Ohlendorf, operated in the Ukraine and the sub-units were Einsatzkommando 10a, Einsatzkommando 10b, Einsatzkommando 11a, Einsatzkommando 11b and Einsatzkommando 12. The Einsatzkommandos could then be further divided into individual squads or *Teilkommandos*.

#### Active Service

On the invasion of the Soviet Union, Einsatzgruppe A moved into Soviet-occupied territory from Gumbinnen in East Prussia, entering Lithuania two days later in the wake of the Wehrmacht's 18 Armee. The deportations and executions began almost immediately. By the start of July, the Einsatzkommandos had entered Riga. Having cut a swathe of terror and destruction through Latvia and Lithuania, the Einsatzgruppe entered the Soviet Union and was operational around Leningrad and Minsk, while maintaining bases in Latvia and Lithuania.

Einsatzgruppe B, following 9 Armee, operated in the Baltic states and in the Soviet Union around Minsk, where it was active around July and August 1941. Some of its Kommandos were responsible for mass executions in Byelorussia. Various elements were also stationed in Vitebsk, Mogilev and Smolensk.

Einsatzgruppe C moved into the eastern part of Galicia following the start of Operation Barbarossa, and by early July had already organised an anti-Jewish pogrom in Lvov. Zlotchev and Tarnopol suffered a similar fate. By mid-July it was operating in the area around Kiev, where in September it organised the infamous slaughter of over 30,000 Jews at Babi-Yar. It carried out mass executions around Kharkov and Belgorod and was aiming to visit its attentions on Stalingrad but the defeat of 6 Armee here forced it on to the retreat.

Einsatzgruppe D was attached to 11 Armee on the southern sector of the Eastern Front, advancing through Transylvania and eventually arriving at Simferopol in the Crimea. All along the western shores of the Black Sea, its personnel carried out mass executions, Sevastopol and Odessa being just two towns that suffered its attentions.

The Einsatzkommando personnel were made up from a mixture of SS, Gestapo, Auxiliary Police, Kripo and Orpo personnel, with a very small number of SD men. When members of the Sicherheitspolizei were selected for service with the Einsatzgruppen, it appears they were informed that their mission was to be one of putting down resistance and generally pacifying the areas to the rear of the advancing armies, a task which seemed perfectly logical and reasonable, so it is possible that some men may not have realised the types of actions that they were about to become involved with. Clearly, however, from surviving testimony and documentary evidence, the officers leading the Einsatzgruppen, Einsatzkommandos and Teilkommandos were fully informed that their tasks would include rounding up and eliminating Jews and Communists from the occupied areas.

Knowing the foul work that they were about to carry out, few of the Einsatzgruppen personnel had the stomach to carry it out themselves. It was policy to make 'every attempt to ensure' that what were described as 'reliable elements' of the local populace were encouraged to 'participate' in these actions. This would both absolve the Germans themselves from dirtying their own hands, and gave the impression that the local indigenous population had taken matters into their own hands, with the Germans reluctant to interfere in 'internal' matters. The Einsatzgruppen therefore lost no time in identifying nationalists in the local community who were only too happy to be encouraged to begin a pogrom against the local Jews and settle scores with former Communist functionaries and their sympathisers.

A report from Einsatzgruppe A in October 1941 contained the comment, 'It was the task of the Sicherheitspolizei to set these "self-cleansing" movements in motion and to direct them into the right channels in order to achieve the aim of this cleansing as rapidly as possible. It was no less important to establish as undeniable and proven fact for the future that it was the liberated populace itself which took the most severe measures, on its own initiative, against the Jewish-Bolshevik enemy, *without any instruction being evident.*' Even at this early stage in the war, the Einsatzgruppen commanders were seeking 'scapegoats' upon whom the atrocities could be blamed.

Many such actions turned into gruesome 'carnivals' nng of death, with local inhabitants cheering and applauding the beating to death of



**SS-Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln, Höhere SS und Polizei Führer Ostland und Russland Nord.** Jeckeln was executed by the Soviets in Riga, Latvia, in 1946 for his involvement in the crimes committed by the Einsatzgruppen in his area of responsibility. (USHMM)

**OPPOSITE The Anti-Partisan Warfare Badge, introduced by Himmler on 30 January 1944.** Although this badge was awarded to many members of the armed forces who had earned it honourably in fierce combat against armed partisans, the fact that harmless civilians targeted by the Einsatzgruppen were often labelled as partisans, certainly means that some of those who were awarded this badge earned it by murdering the innocent. (Author's own)



**ABOVE A group of civilians are led off by Einsatzkommando guards. The fact that they are carrying some of their possessions with them suggests that they are civilians who were initially duped by being told they were to be resettled. Had they been captured partisans, no such permission would have been granted. In any case, it is likely that these civilians were executed shortly after this photograph was taken. (USHMM)**



their former neighbours, as the Einsatzgruppen looked on approvingly. It must also be said that members of Wehrmacht units in the locality also often came along to such events as spectators and occasionally took part in killings. In fact, an order was published by Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt forbidding this, and warning of severe punishments which would befall any army personnel who were discovered to have involved themselves. One set of promulgated orders included the strict instruction that 'Individual actions by members of the Wehrmacht or participation by members of the Wehrmacht in excesses by the Ukrainian population against the Jews is forbidden; they are also forbidden to watch or take photographs of measures taken by the Sonderkommandos.' It is interesting to note that the actions by the local populace, encouraged and indeed initiated by the Sicherheitspolizei, are referred to by the army as 'excesses'.

The same orders specifically stated that any commander failing to ensure that his men followed these commands was failing in his duty of supervision and was 'to be severely punished'. Clearly, whilst they had no authority to interfere in the actions of the Einsatzkommandos, the details of which they were certainly aware, the army wanted to be sure that the hands of its own men were kept clean. There are, in fairness, recorded accounts of the army attempting to curb the excesses of the Einsatzgruppen. In December 1941, a Security Police commander, after boasting that he had cleared all but 'working' Jews from the whole of Lithuania, complained that he 'wanted to eliminate the working Jews and their families too, but the Civil Administration and the Wehrmacht attacked me most sharply and issued a prohibition against having these Jews and their families shot'.

Of course, ultimately, the Einsatzgruppen themselves would become heavily involved in the killings alongside their locally recruited



**OPPOSITE TOP Warsaw 1943.** A group of SD troops assemble for a briefing by their commander prior to the operation to eliminate the Warsaw Ghetto. Far from attempting to suppress photographs of the event, the officer in charge, SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop, had it meticulously recorded in numerous photographs which were added to a finely bound report, so proud was he of his 'achievements'. (USHMM)

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM** The beginning of the round-up. Civilians are apprehended by SD men and have their identity documents inspected before being deported to Treblinka. (USHMM)

**BELOW** A mixture of SS, police, SD and army officers in a briefing at a disused factory during the action to clear the Warsaw Ghetto. The SD NCO at left, with the MP28 machine pistol, is the same soldier who appears in many of the Stroop Report photos. (USHMM)



'auxiliaries'. Clearly, many who had believed that they were to be used on genuine policing duties in support of the Army found these tasks repugnant and many absolutely refused to take part. Even members of the SS are known to have refused outright to take part in the killings. Their punishment for refusing these orders? They were simply posted to other duties. There is not one single incident of an Einsatzgruppe soldier being formally punished in any way for such a refusal. In fact, Himmler himself had foreseen such eventualities and had accepted that 'any man' who felt unable to endure the psychological stresses of such tasks would be returned home to Germany for other duties. This indeed happened on numerous occasions. So, once again, as was the situation with the Ordnungspolizei troops who refused to take part in atrocities, there is little excuse for those who were willing to carry out such orders once they realised that no punishment would be forthcoming. Postwar interrogations of Einsatzgruppe leaders saw a former Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei admit that 'nothing could be done against those who refused to take part'. As the German armies in Russia were forced onto the defensive and pushed back towards their own borders, special units were formed to try to erase any evidence of the activities of the Einsatzgruppen, including digging up the bodies of their victims and cremating them.

#### Uniforms and Insignia

Pre-war, the black uniform of the Allgemeine-SS was used by the SD. By the outbreak of war, this had generally been replaced by the grey Allgemeine-SS uniform, though military issue uniforms in field-grey







SS-Brigadeführer Stroop and his staff view with obvious satisfaction the results of their efforts as the Warsaw Ghetto burns. Note the SD membership patch on the left sleeve of the individual at right. (USHMM)

were also used during wartime. Given the period that this work covers, only the grey uniform will be considered here.

The grey Allgemeine-SS uniform consisted of a four-pocket open-neck tunic. The two breast pockets were of the patch type, and the lower pockets of the slash type with only the flap visible. The tunic was fastened by four buttons. It was generally worn with grey breeches and black jackboots, although long grey trousers with white seam piping were also available.

Insignia followed the SS pattern. The standard SS national emblem and the eagle with swastika was worn on the left sleeve. On the right collar, a blank black patch, with a standard SS rank patch on the left collar. In the case of officers, both were piped in twisted aluminium cord. Officers of the rank of SS-Standartenführer and over wore the standard oakleaf SS collar patches for senior ranks. Shoulder straps for officers were in matt grey braid, with 'toxic green' intermediate piping, on a black base. Junior ranks straps were made in the same fashion as those of the Waffen-SS, in black wool with toxic-green piping, but also in Polizei style with silver aluminium cord, flecked in black, either in straight or plaited rows, all on a green base.

As white was the regulation branch colour for the Allgemeine-SS, SD straps were also found on a white rather than green base. Membership of a specific branch of the SiPo was indicated by special insignia such as the SD sleeve diamond, which was a diamond-shaped piece of black wool with the letters 'SD' worked in silver grey yarn for lower ranks or in

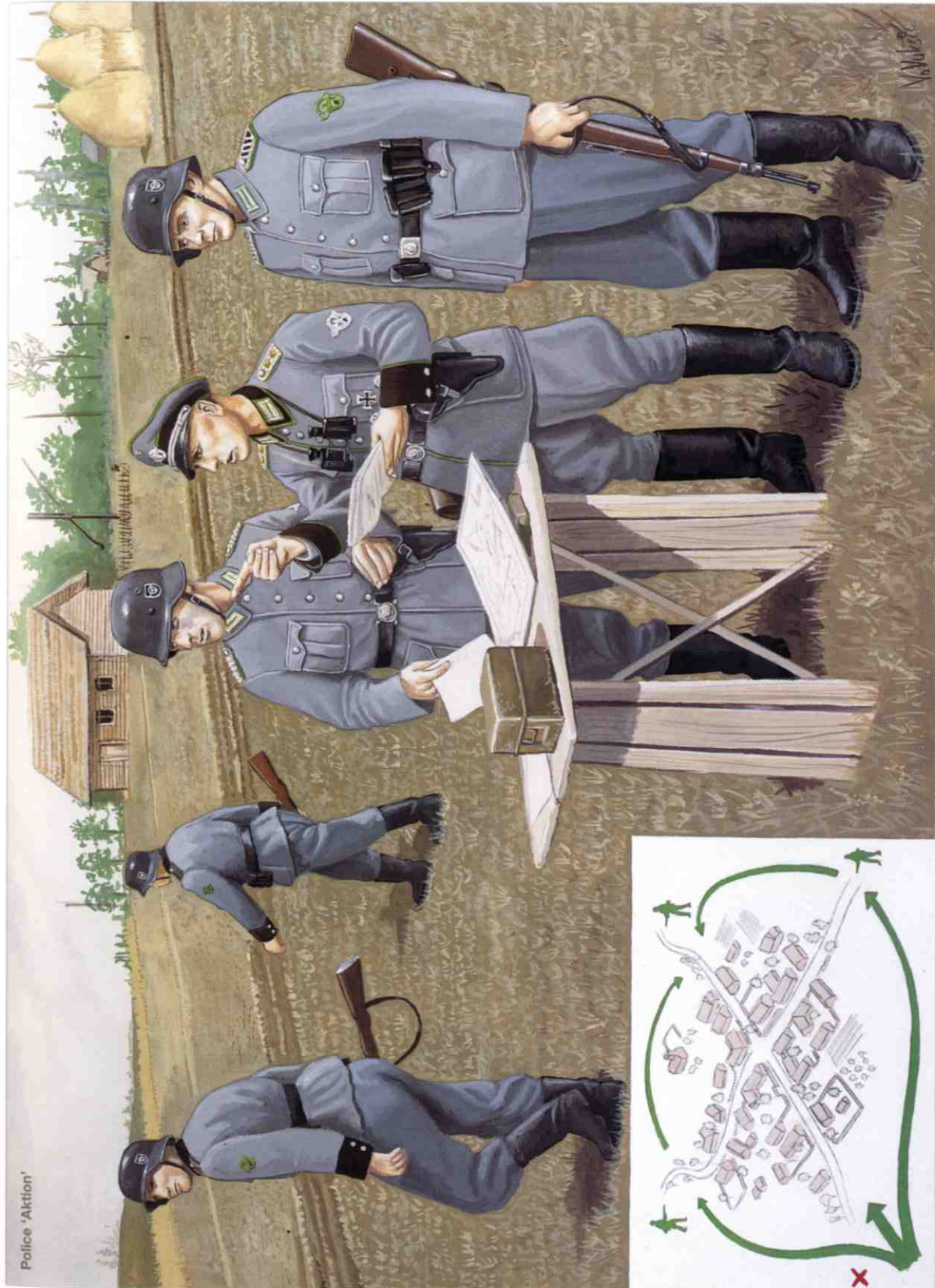
Military Police, c. 1940



B



Police 'Aktion'



C



Eastern Security Auxiliaries





Sonderkommando Dirlewanger

W. Wilschke



Ghetto clearance

W. Wilschke

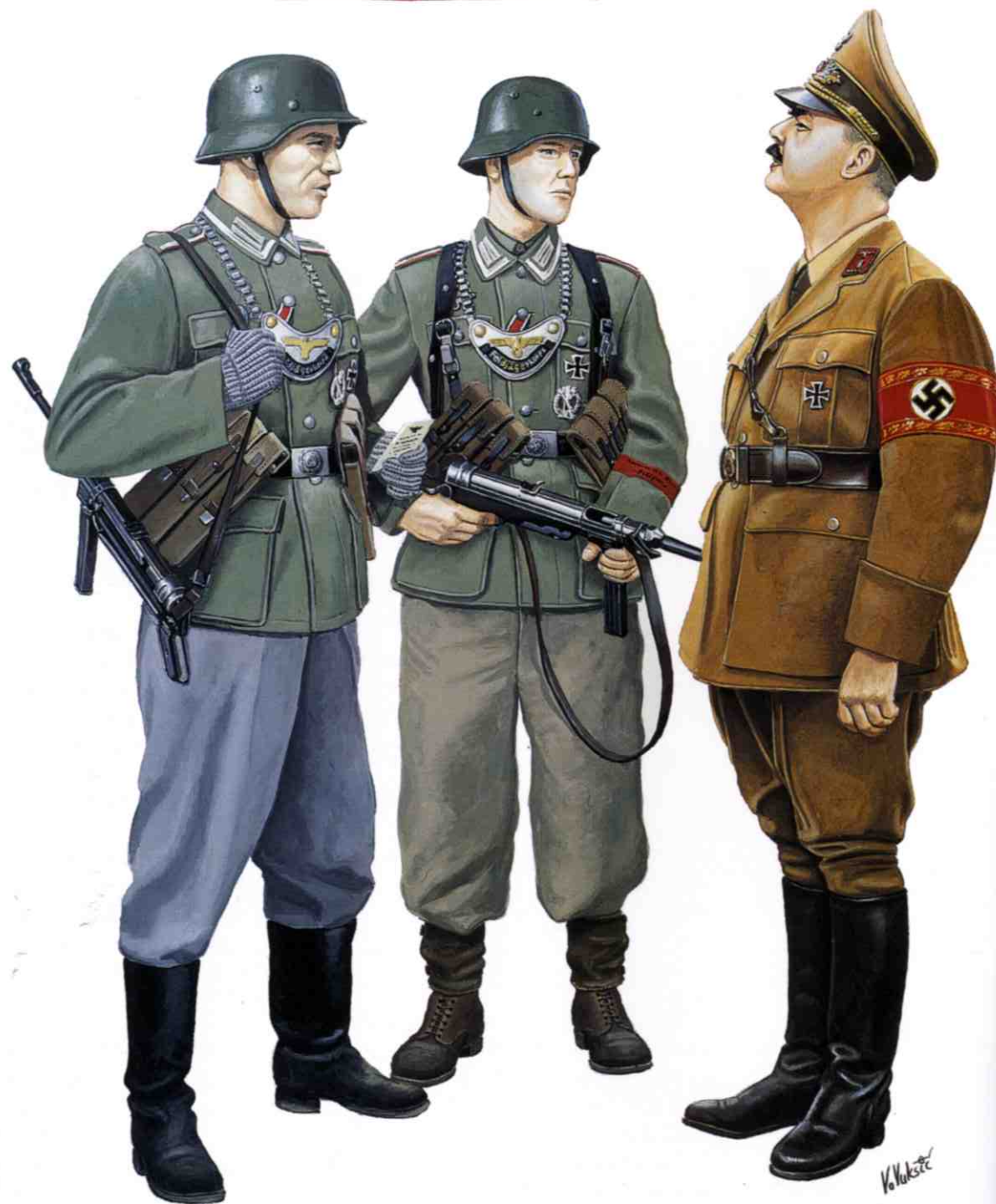
Schutztruppe der N. S. D. A. D.  
 SS-Führer-Bausweis-Nr. 280-2951  
 Partei-Mitglieds-Nr. 53827813  
 Dr. Max W e s n e r  
 geboren am ... 5. 4. 1912  
 SS-Obersturmführer  
 im Sicherheitsdienst (SD)



GEMEINE  
 STAATSPOLIZEI  
 1074



Oberkommando der Wehrmacht  
-Feldjäger-



An elderly Jew is interrogated by a group of SD NCOs during the clearing of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. These troops are wearing the special lightweight steel helmet typically used by the SD. Close examination will reveal distinct differences between it and the standard military steel helmet. This can be a useful factor in identifying SD personnel. (USHMM)

hand-embroidered aluminium wire for officers. This was worn by members of the SS attached to the SD-Hauptamt and by actual SD members, and had silver cord edge piping for former members of the Gestapo who had transferred to the SD. A blank black wool cuff band with woven aluminium thread edging was worn by SD men on the staff of an SD-Oberabschnitt (district) or SD-Unterabschnitt (sub-district).

The most common piece of headgear within the SD was the peaked service cap with a grey or field-grey top and black band with shiny black peak. Officers wore aluminium chin cords and lower ranks a leather chinstrap. Piping to the band and crown could be in toxic green, but seemed most often to be white. Insignia consisted of a metal death's head on the front of the cap band and a metal SS pattern national emblem on the front of the crown. Where field caps were worn, they were most often the standard Waffen-SS pattern with machine-woven SS pattern national emblem and death's head. Officers' field caps were piped in white or aluminium cord. One particularly distinctive item often worn by the SD was the Sicherheitspolizei-type steel helmet, which had a distinctive dip to the brim and a rear edge which was shallower than the standard M35 or M42 type helmets. The standard military M35 helmet was also occasionally worn. Where insignia was featured on the helmet, it consisted of a silver shield with black runes on the left side and a red shield with white circle and black swastika on the right.

### The Kriminal Polizei

The Kripo was that branch of the civil police apparatus which closely paralleled the plain-clothed criminal investigations departments of other police forces throughout the world. Their main duties were in the investigation of robbery, murder, rape, arson and other statutory, rather than political, crimes.

### Recruitment

When the Nazis came to power they lost no time in retiring any policeman considered to have anything but right-wing leanings. Any with suspected socialist tendencies were removed from post and their places filled with younger, politically 'correct' recruits, often members of the SA. This haemorrhage of experienced manpower was a mistake, however, and many experienced policemen were re-employed, although a close eye was kept on any considered to be anything less than completely politically reliable. The Kripo was therefore comprised of a mixture of professional old-style policemen, often apolitical, and younger, fanatically loyal, Nazis.

Kripo personnel carried a bronze oval disc on a chain attached to a leather fob to allow it to be buttoned to the wearer's waistband. On the obverse was the national emblem of an eagle and swastika, and on the reverse the inscription 'Staatliche Kriminal Polizei' over the bearer's personal ID number. This so-called 'warrant-disc' was the policeman's badge of authority, and the only insignia carried other than the Ausweis or ID card.

**An Einsatzkommando at work. Their victims are being forced to dig their own graves. The killers often expressed themselves amazed at how meekly their victims went to their deaths. Very rarely, it seems, did any offer any resistance. Perhaps many just could not believe they would be so cold-bloodedly murdered. (USHMM)**



### The Geheime Staats Polizei

Similar to the Kripo in many respects, the Gestapo was formed in 1933 by Hermann Göring around a core of politically reliable recruits from the Kripo. Its main duties were in combating political subversion, espionage, etc. As it grew, many sub-branches were formed, the most notorious of which was department b4. Amt IVb4 of the RSHA was the department of the Gestapo headed by Adolf Eichmann and devoted to the 'final solution' of the Jewish 'problem'. Gestapo agents operated throughout the occupied territories and co-operated fully in the round-up of civilians for despatch to the Konzentrations Lager (concentration camp), also known as KZs, and the capture of those who escaped or avoided the round-ups. Gestapo agents were also located at most if not all KZs.

The Gestapo was commanded by Heinrich Müller, nicknamed 'Gestapo Müller', and was itself sub-divided into several sections dealing with aspects such as enemies of the state, religious sects, counter-intelligence, the occupied territories and even frontier policing. Gestapo personnel, like the Kripo also carried a warrant disc. In their case, it was in nickel rather than bronze, and the inscription over the bearer's number was 'Geheime Staats Polizei'.

### Auxiliary Police

The sheer scale of police and security operations of the Eastern Front meant that the combined resources of the military, the police and the SS were inadequate for the task, and as early as the winter of 1941, suitable members of the local citizenry were accepted into an auxiliary police formation which became known as the Schutzmannschaft.

These units came under the control of the Höhere SS-und Polizei Führer in the area in which they were recruited.

### Recruitment

Theoretically, recruitment was on a voluntary basis for a period of six months, though it does seem that few who joined were ever given the option of leaving, or indeed any option at all about their service. It would seem that most recruits joined for purely opportunistic reasons. By volunteering to serve the Germans, these men avoided becoming victims themselves. It also ensured that they were at least paid and well fed compared with their countrymen, and put them in a position where they could perhaps protect their families and friends, and also, of course, settle a few old scores with any enemies.

Schutzmannschaften were organised into battalions of three, later four, companies of around 120 men, plus headquarters elements, three rifle platoons and a machine gun platoon. This gave the Schutzmannschaft battalion a strength of between 500 and 700 men. Each company had a command cadre of German officers and senior NCOs who appear to have been drawn primarily from the Polizei, Sicherheitspolizei and SS. It is estimated that within a year of the formation of the Schutzmannschaft, there were over 50,000 former Soviet citizens serving the Germans as auxiliary policemen.

As auxiliaries in the control of the Sicherheitspolizei, men from the Schutzmannschaft accompanied German troops in considerable numbers of punitive actions against the civil population, the suppression



A German Security Police patrol, accompanied by civilian collaborator 'auxiliaries', have hunted down and shot their unarmed victims, at least one of whom was female. Regrettably, there seems to have been no shortage of civilians willing to inform on their neighbours in order to curry favour with the Germans. (USHMM)

of the Warsaw Uprising being a prime example. Indeed, it seems that the Schutzmannschaft were often left to do the 'dirty' work that the Germans had no stomach for. Many of the auxiliaries had no compunction against carrying out the foulest of deeds against their countrymen, especially the Jews.

#### Uniforms

Initially, the need to kit out the huge number of foreign auxiliaries volunteering for service in the east was met from existing stocks of the pre-war black Allgemeine-SS uniform that had been put into storage 'for the duration'. The black uniform jackets were stripped of insignia and had bright blue or green facings added to the cuffs, collar and lower pocket flaps. These jackets were worn with black Allgemeine-SS breeches and field-caps, again with the insignia removed, and with black jackboots.

A simple system of braid chevrons sewn to the lower sleeve indicated the wearer's rank, which ran from Untertruppal to Kompaniefeldwebel. Those who were not issued with uniforms were required to wear an armband in green cloth with the inscription 'Im Dienst der Sicherheitspolizei' printed in black letters. Gradually, field-grey uniforms in the style of the M43 field dress worn by the police, army and Waffen-SS began to be issued, mainly to the mobile Schutzpolizei-equivalent units, while the static Gendarmerie units retained the black uniform. In reality, however, a rather chaotic mixture of uniform and insignia seem to have been worn by all units. It is certainly not uncommon to find photographs of Schutzmannschaften wearing, for example, the field-grey jacket with black breeches and black field cap.

Special insignia intended for the Schutzmannschaft uniform included the sleeve patch, an oval patch bearing an elongated diamond-shaped swastika surrounded by the motto 'Treue, Tapfer, Gehorsam' ('faithful, brave, obedient') and a wreath of laurel. This may be encountered in aluminium thread on black for officers and white on black for lower ranks, although versions in green on field-grey (for mobile Schutzpolizei elements) and orange on field grey (for static Gendarmerie elements) were also produced for lower ranks from 1943 onwards. The cap badge, an oval patch with a diamond-shaped swastika surrounded by laurel leaves and motto omitted, was woven in aluminium wire on black for officers and white on black for lower ranks. Shoulder straps were manufactured in both field-grey and black cloth. Embroidered into the face of the strap is the usual diamond-shaped swastika in aluminium thread for officers, and either white thread or thread in the appropriate green or orange colour for lower ranks. The straps were piped in aluminium cord for officers and in either white or green/orange as appropriate for lower ranks. The shoulder strap system seems to have caused much confusion even at the time, as straps may be found with a mixture of white swastika and coloured piping, all white embroidered, or with both the swastika and piping coloured. Matching mirror-image collar patches were produced from black cloth. Onto these, along the facing and lower edge were machined strips of flat aluminium braid as follows. For Korporal one strip; for Vize-Feldwebel two strips; and for Kompanie-Feldwebel three strips. Officers' patches had flat braid all around the border, with the outer edge trimmed in twisted silver cord. The central area was blank for Zugführer, with a single pip for Oberzugführer, two pips for Kompanieführer and a single vertical strip of narrow braid for Bataillonsführer. Headgear worn by the Schutzmannschaft usually comprised the reissued black Allgemeine-SS field cap, a police field cap, or a standard M43-pattern standard peaked field cap, all with the previously described cap badge, were any cap badge at all to be worn. The belt buckles used by the Schutzmannschaft



Even more brutal than many of the SS and SD troops were the Ukrainian auxiliary police. Here two such auxiliaries, wearing a mixture of field-grey and old Allgemeine-SS black uniform parts, observe the bodies of some of their victims. Their rifles and bayonets are from captured enemy stocks. (USHMM)



An SS-Totenkopf NCO 'assists' one of his captives into a truck with the toe of his boot whilst his smiling comrades watch. Such gratuitous sadism was far from uncommon. (USHMM)



Yet another fugitive Jew is rounded up for deportation as the clearing of the ghetto continues. It is difficult to ascertain whether the Germans involved are Waffen-SS or SD, but the soldier on the right wears a chevron on his right sleeve indicating he is an 'alte Kämpfer', a member of the Nazi Party prior to January 1933. (USHMM)

usually appear to have been the standard German police issue rectangular buckle with circular wreath bearing the motto 'Gott Mit Uns' surrounding a central swastika.

### The SS

A number of troops from the notorious SS-Totenkopfverbände operated behind the German lines in Poland and Russia. On the outbreak of war, SS-Totenkopfstandarten *Oberbayern*, *Brandenburg* and *Thüringen* moved into Poland. The first two operated behind 10 Armee in Upper Silesia, and *Thüringen* followed behind 8 Armee further south.

These units were tasked with 'cleansing and security' operations, but were little more than death squads tasked with hunting down Poles who had been added to Himmler's death lists: Communists, intellectuals and Jews. The fact that they were never really intended for genuine security duties is reflected in the fact that when the Army command in their area ordered them to take part in genuine anti-partisan actions, they refused. A considerable number of complaints were made by army units that became aware of the behaviour of these troops. Furious protests were lodged by Generaloberst Blaskowitz but the weak-willed Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Generaloberst Brauchitsch, was too afraid to press the complaints with Hitler and nothing was done to curb the excesses of these units until they were eventually recalled at the end of the year for absorption into the newly formed SS-Totenkopf Division. This division, like the three Standarten mentioned above, was commanded by SS-Gruppenführer Eicke, whose Totenkopf units had been formed to provide guards for the concentration camps. The division itself, although

The mix of uniforms worn by the troops leading away captured civilians in this photograph, suggests that they are a combination of SD and Waffen-SS personnel. The NCO at right, wearing the special lightweight helmet, is certainly SD. (USHMM)





displaying considerable bravery in action, was subsequently to be dogged by allegations of atrocities committed by its troops. Two Totenkopf Standarten (the 8th and 10th) were subsequently grouped together to form SS-Infanterie Brigade (mot) 1. This unit was active in the central sector of the Eastern Front behind Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Centre) and is mentioned in several 'post-action' reports as giving assistance in 'security' sweeps by the Einsatzgruppen against 'partisans'.

A number of Waffen-SS units were formed during the course of the war, which saw considerable action in security duties, especially in the war against partisans in eastern Europe, though most of these were organised on strict traditional military lines and were also to see action against front line enemy combat units. Others, however, although they fought against front line Red Army units in the closing stages of the war, were originally intended principally for anti-partisan and security duties and so are relevant to this work. These units tend to fall into two basic categories, mountain troops and cavalry units.

## MOUNTAIN TROOPS

The most significant of these was probably the 7 SS Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division *Prinz Eugen*. Formed in March 1942, this division was recruited predominantly from ethnic Germans from the Balkans. Initially it was to be a volunteer unit (as indicated by the divisional title), but when the manpower raised by voluntary recruitment proved to be inadequate, suitable personnel were simply conscripted.

**Military field police of the 13 SS Freiwilligen Gebirgs Division *Handschar* wearing the distinctive Fez headdress of this unit. Note also the Feldgendarmerie gorget plate and SS-Feldgendarmerie cuffband being worn. The soldier at right is one of the German cadre element as evidenced by the SS runes badge visible just above the belt on the lower edge of his left breast pocket. He is almost certainly a former member of the civil Ordnungspolizei. (Josef Charita)**



Within six months, the divisional personnel had received their basic training, and equipped with a mixture of obsolete German and captured foreign weapons and equipment, were sent into battle against Tito's partisans in occupied Yugoslavia, specifically in actions along the border between Serbia and Montenegro. The division's performance could only be described as adequate, but it quickly gained a reputation for brutality, being responsible for a number of atrocities. It was an area where both sides fought with equal savagery.

The division also disarmed Italian units after Italy's surrender and took part on the attack on Tito's headquarters at Drvar in May 1944. Although the division carried out its allotted tasks well, and militarily the operation was successful, if costly, Tito himself escaped. From mid-August 1944 onwards, the division frequently encountered elements of the Red Army as well as Tito's Communist partisans and suffered badly when in combat with the Soviets. Although the division suffered a significant number of desertions during this period, there were also a number of soldiers who fought well and were highly decorated, although they were generally members of the German officer and NCO cadre. At the end of the war, the division surrendered to a partisan unit, which immediately extracted its revenge, executing many of *Prinz Eugen's* soldiers.

### Uniforms

Personnel wore a cuff title bearing the inscription '*Prinz Eugen*' on the lower left cuff, and in place of the regular SS runes insignia, an emblem known as the *Odabrune*, on the right collar patch for those under the rank of Standartenführer. German SS members in the division were entitled to wear the SS runes insignia on the left breast pocket. Otherwise, the insignia and uniforms worn by the division were standard Waffen-SS issue.

### 13 Waffen-Gebirgs Division der Waffen-SS *Handschar*

This division was formed in the spring of 1943 by Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler in a cynical move to set Bosnian Muslim volunteers against predominantly Communist partisans from the Christian community. The division was over-subscribed, so great was the wish of Bosnian Muslims to take up arms against their former countrymen. During the training period in France, tremendous antipathy emerged between the Muslim volunteers and their German SS instructors many of whom were 'old time' SS men who regarded the eastern Muslims as racial inferiors. Eventually, a significant part of the division mutinied and murdered several of its German officers. The ringleaders were swiftly hunted down and executed, and anyone suspected of sympathising sent to prison or concentration camps.

The division finally went into action in anti-partisan sweeps in early 1944 and they immediately gained a reputation for brutality, especially against Christian communities whom they clearly regarded as their traditional enemies. The historical enmities in this region, many of which still exist today, also played their part. Despite several individual soldiers who received high decorations (in the main from the German cadre element), the division was of limited military value and was beset with problems of desertion (2,000 in September 1944 alone). The

division's reliability reached such low levels that it was eventually ordered that the Bosnian volunteers be disarmed and sent to serve in labour units. The German cadre and other reliable units which remained were re-formed and attached to Kampfgruppe *Hanke*, and performed well during the retreat through Hungary. The surviving elements surrendered to the British in May 1945.

#### Uniforms

The basic uniform worn by *Handschar* troops was the standard field dress of the Waffen-SS. However, two very distinctive insignia were also worn by this unit. A special collar patch, worn on the right collar, showed, in place of the SS runes, a hand holding a wide-bladed scimitar sword, over a swastika. German SS members could wear, in addition, the standard SS runes insignia on the left breast pocket. The most bizarre item of clothing used by this unit was its headdress. As Muslims, its Bosnian volunteers were permitted to wear the Fez. This was issued in field-grey felt, complete with black tassel and regulation SS insignia, for field wear, and in burgundy felt for dress wear. Many of the German personnel also elected to wear it.

#### 24 Waffen-Gebirgs Division der SS *Karstjäger*

Formed in the summer of 1942 at battalion strength, this was a mixed unit recruited from ethnic Germans from Romania (principally the Banat and Transylvania), Hungary, Ukraine and Yugoslavia, as well as Germans, Austrians, and even a few Spaniards. The unit fought extremely well in security sweeps against partisans in the north of Italy and the Adriatic coast. It was expanded to a division (in name only, reaching only brigade strength at its maximum) in the summer of 1944.

It eventually faced elements of the British 8th Army, which had been advancing northwards through Italy, and began to suffer heavy losses once faced with overwhelming enemy opposition. Unlike so many other

volunteer mountain units in the Waffen-SS, however, it retained its reputation for reliability and fighting spirit. By virtue of the type of warfare, both sides fought with great ferocity, but it did not become infamous for the kind of atrocities which stained the names of the *Prinz Eugen* and *Handschar* divisions. Slowly whittled down in size by combat attrition, the remnants were attached to a mixed Kampfgruppe of army, Waffen-SS and police units, and finally surrendered to the British in May 1945, one of the last German units of the war to surrender.

The mix of quality in these three units was very much apparent. *Handschar*, grossly oversubscribed with mainly poor quality volunteers, was extremely poor. *Prinz Eugen*, at normal divisional size, was better but still fairly mediocre, and *Karstjäger*, the smallest of them all, possessed a far greater fighting ability than its larger counterparts.

## CAVALRY UNITS

Although perhaps anachronistic in a war where fast mechanised units were at the forefront of the Blitzkrieg, and where jet fighters were being rapidly developed alongside rocket power missiles, both sides on the Eastern Front made widespread use of mounted cavalry units. They were particularly adaptable for use in anti-partisan and security duties as their horses could take them into areas where motorised transport simply could not penetrate. The units described here were all eventually annihilated by the Red Army and disappeared in the maelstrom of the Eastern Front; initially they were tasked with police and security duties, especially in the field of anti-partisan warfare.

#### 8 SS Kavallerie Division *Florian Geyer*

Formed initially at brigade strength in August 1941, this unit was under the direct control of the Kommandostab RFSS (the headquarters staff of Reichsführer-SS Himmler). The cavalrymen, recruited from mounted units of the SS-Totenkopfverbände, were predominantly used in actions against partisans and isolated pockets of Red Army stragglers cut off behind German lines. Upgraded to divisional status in 1942, this unit saw action around Vjasma, Briansk and Rzhev. The unit was also used in the Balkans against Tito's Communist partisans before drawing back into Hungary where it formed part of the Budapest Garrison. Along with the *Maria Theresa* Division and the 33 SS-Kavallerie Division, it was annihilated when Budapest fell to the Red Army in February 1945. Personnel wore standard Waffen-SS uniform with a cuff band, woven in grey letters on black, with the legend '*Florian Geyer*'.

#### 22 SS Kavallerie Division *Maria Theresa*

This unit was formed in Hungary in mid-1944 around a cadre transferred from *Florian Geyer*, which was then built up to divisional strength with locally recruited Hungarian 'volunteers' who were, in the main, actually forcefully conscripted. In October 1944 it was committed to action against partisan units and front line Red Army units in Transylvania. It gradually withdrew into Hungary where it was wiped out during the battle for Budapest. Despite its very short existence, this unit fought rather well. No cuff band was worn by this unit, but a special right-hand

A German guard views the destruction wrought upon the Warsaw Ghetto by Stroop's security and police troops. Warsaw was to suffer even more destruction during the actions to suppress the uprising in August 1944. (USHMM)

SS and police officers escorted by a trio of SS-Unterscharführer of Feldgendarmarie. (USHMM)



collar patch bearing a sunflower emblem in place of the regular SS runes was worn. The Hungarian gendarmerie also assisted the Germans in suppressing partisan activity and maintaining security behind the German lines. These troops wore Hungarian army uniforms and a gorget very similar to the German style, but with the legend 'Tabori Biztonsag' (Field Security). Although they assisted the Germans, these troops were members of the Hungarian Forces.

### 37 SS-Freiwilligen Kavallerie Division Lützow

This unit was a late-war creation, which existed for only a few weeks and was formed from the few straggling survivors of *Florian Geyer* and *Maria Theresa*. Although it was designated a division, it probably never exceeded regimental size. It is believed to have taken part in the defence of Vienna before surrendering to the Red Army in May 1945.

There are two additional specific units whose entire existence was based on their commitment to use in the security role in the east. In terms of military ability and discipline, both were of extremely poor standard, though when used against civilians, their barbaric methods had the desired effect of terrorising the local inhabitants into subservience on most occasions. Although ultimately given formal numbers in the official Order of Battle of the Waffen-SS, these units are best known simply from the names of their commanders, Kaminski and Dirlwanger, and deserve to be considered separately from regular military units.

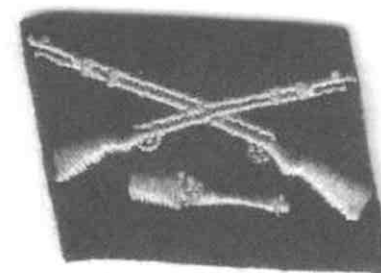
### The Kaminski Brigade

#### Formation and recruitment

This rather bizarre unit has its origins in the Lokot area of central Russia which was occupied at the beginning of 1942 by 2 Panzerarmee and found the populace to be fervently anti-Communist. Due to the amount of partisan activity in the area, the mayor of Lokot approached the Germans to obtain permission to establish a small self-defence force some 500 strong. This small force served the Germans well, taking part in many anti-partisan actions. Indeed, the mayor himself was killed in one such action. Stepping forward to fill the gap was one Bronislaw V. Kaminski, a 39-year-old fluent German speaker who, having served a five-year sentence in a Soviet labour camp, had no love for the Communist system. Kaminski also had considerable organisational skills and under his command the small force grew to a brigade of some 10,000 men formed into five separate regiments. As well as basic small arms, Kaminski had been able to obtain a number of captured field guns and, amazingly, over 20 captured Soviet T34 tanks. Kaminski styled his force, the *Russkaya Osvoboditel'naya Norodaya Armiya*, or Russian Liberation People's Army, known as the RONA (the letters appearing in their Cyrillic form as POHA).

#### Active Service

Kaminski led his men in many successful anti-partisan actions and sufficiently impressed the Germans to be awarded the Iron Cross First Class. Had Kaminski simply been a successful soldier, he may have gone down in history as a misguided patriot who threw in his lot with the Germans in order to achieve freedom from Communism.



Insignia of two of the most hated military units to have served the Third Reich. At left is the sleeve shield worn by members of Bronislaw Kaminski's RONA (Cyrillic POHA) Brigade and at right is the collar patch worn on the right-hand side of the collar by members of Sonderkommando Dirlwanger. (Author's own)

Unfortunately, Kaminski was also a despot. During his time in Lokot he set himself up in a private mansion and lived a life of luxury, controlling those under him with an iron fist. As well as ridding the area of partisan activity, Kaminski established his own tax system, levying 'tributes' from those unfortunate enough to live in his sphere of influence. He and his men also acted with great cruelty towards any civilians

unfortunate enough to cross his path.

When the fortunes of war began to turn against Germany in 1943, and the Red Army began its successful counter-offensive, the Germans were pushed out of the Lokot area. Kaminski's Brigade was moved into Poland and must have seemed like a medieval army on the march, with its by now 15,000 members accompanied by as many as 10,000 civilian camp followers and around 1,500 livestock. In March 1944 Kaminski's troops were briefly taken onto the strength of the German Army as a Volksheer Brigade, but within four months had been transferred to the strength of the Waffen-SS where it was listed as SS-Sturmbrigade *Rona* with Kaminski given the rank of Waffen-Brigadeführer.

In August 1944, elements of the Sturmbrigade were committed to the battle for Warsaw following the uprising by the Polish Home Army. Here Kaminski's troops indulged in an orgy of looting and murder. In fact, even the SS became alarmed by Kaminski's conduct. Surrounded by a hand-picked bodyguard, he was a law to himself. Eventually, the commander of German forces in Warsaw, SS-Obergruppenführer Erich

OPPOSITE Captive Jews are loaded into railway cattle trucks for transport to a concentration camp. To ensure no one escaped, security guards were often provided by the Ordnungspolizei, though in this case, it appears that SS personnel are being used. The victims were packed into these wagons like sardines in a can, with no room for movement, and no food, water or sanitation. Many died long before they reached their destination. (USHMM)



von dem Bach-Zelewski, decided to act. Kaminski was arrested in Lodz on charges of looting. Removed from the protection of his own band of cut-throats, he was quickly tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. The sentence was carried out immediately by an SS firing squad. In order to prevent an uprising from Kaminski's own troops, they were told that their leader had been killed in a partisan ambush. Kaminski's men suspected the truth and the brigade quickly fell apart without its leader. Its men were divided up between the newly formed 30 Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS and the 'officially approved' Russian Liberation Army (ROA) commanded by General Andrei Vlassov.

### Uniforms

The Kaminski Brigade basically wore whatever uniforms were available. In effect, this meant a mixture of both German and Russian uniform parts and in some cases, civilian clothing. Those who had no uniform wore an armband (after August 1944) in white cloth with the inscription 'Im dienst der Waffen-SS' printed in black.

Insignia was also mixed, if it was worn at all. Photos show the use of the special insignia produced for Russian volunteers in the German Army, although Kaminski himself appears to have worn a German Army officer's tunic, totally devoid of insignia except for the POHA armshield described below. Kaminski's cap also appears to have been a standard German officer's peaked service cap. It had all insignia removed and a cockade in Ukrainian colours (red centre with blue inner and white outer rings) placed on the front of the cap band in the place in which the wreathed German cockade would normally be found.

A special sleeve shield seems to have been worn by most Kaminski troops, or at least those who wore uniform. A shield-shaped piece of field-grey wool, probably cut from old uniform material, in its centre was a smaller shield-shaped white field, bordered in red, featuring a black Maltese cross in its centre. Across the top of the shield were the letters POHA in crude chain stitched letters. Former members of the RONA seem to have retained their sleeve shield after being allocated to other units. Many Russian volunteers in the German Army ended up in British captivity and a number of original sleeve shields turned up during the 1990s in the vicinity of a former POW camp in England where some of these troops had been held.

After the transfer of the brigade to SS control, a special collar patch in SS style was produced showing in silver grey embroidery, a cross of St George (similar to a Maltese cross) with a small disc-like centre pierced by two swords. Though certainly produced, it is doubtful if this insignia was ever issued.

### Sonderkommando Dirlwanger

#### Formation and recruitment

This despicable organisation was the result of a piece of inspired lunacy from Adolf Hitler himself. In early 1940 he had suggested to Himmler the establishment of a unit composed of poachers released from prison, to be used against the partisans or bandits in the east. Only those who were habitual offenders and had been convicted of poaching offences with a firearm were to be considered as they could be presumed to be skilled marksmen. Hitler's 'suggestion' was naturally regarded as a formal

command, and accordingly, Himmler authorised the release of a number of incarcerated prisoners into a unit initially categorised as a Wilddiebkommando, or 'Poacher Commando'. To lead this unit, SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger successfully recommended one of his old cronies, Dr Oskar Dirlwanger, a Party member and brutal thug whose behaviour was so appalling that he had been gaoled by the Nazis themselves for, among other things, using a party vehicle for illegal sex with a minor.

Dirlwanger had actually had a fairly respectable military career in World War I, earning the Iron Cross Second and First Class and being wounded in action several times. After the end of the war he had fought against the Communists in the Freikorps movement and was a fairly early Party member.

Dirlwanger's unit was set up at Oranienburg Concentration Camp from a core of some 84 suitable candidates. A small cadre of regular Waffen-SS officers was drafted in to command the unit. Dirlwanger had himself been accepted into the SS with the rank of SS-Obersturmführer, but his connections in high places ensured his swift promotion to SS-Hauptsturmführer within a couple of months.

In September 1940, the unit was renamed as Sonderbataillon *Dirlwanger*. From the beginning, Dirlwanger ruled with an iron fist. Orders were not merely obeyed, they were obeyed instantly. Corporal punishment was widely used. As the men serving him were released prisoners with no rights they would be immediately returned to prison or a concentration camp if they failed to measure up.

#### Active Service

In late 1940, Dirlwanger's unit was sent to Poland where it was used to guard a camp of forced labourers before moving to Krakow, from where reports of assaults and looting soon began to emerge. From here they were moved to Lublin where they were used to police the ghetto. Once again reports of looting and extortion began to emerge. Jews would be held to ransom and money or valuables extorted in return for their release. Of course their eventual fate would be the same.

The behaviour of Dirlwanger and his troops became of such concern that an SS legal investigator was assigned to examine the allegations against him. The local Höhere SS und Polizei Führer, SS-Gruppenführer Kruger, was so incensed by Dirlwanger's conduct that he threatened to arrest and imprison him if Dirlwanger was not removed from Poland immediately. Once again, however, Dirlwanger's well-placed contacts pulled strings on his behalf and SS-Gruppenführer Gottlob Berger had him moved from Poland and into Russia away from his enemies. The SS legal officer who had been investigating Dirlwanger was mysteriously demoted, and sent to the front to serve in a punishment battalion.

Dirlwanger's reign of terror continued unabated. Committed to the war against enemy partisans, he and his men conducted themselves with



Dr Oskar Dirlwanger, shown here as an SS-Oberführer. A foul-tempered drunkard, Dirlwanger had served a prison sentence for sexual offences with a minor and was saved only by having friends in high places. He was deservedly beaten to death by his guards after his capture at the end of the war. (USHMM)



A squad of Dirlwanger troops, photographed during the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944. Dirlwanger's troops swept through Warsaw on a wave of inhuman brutality. (USHMM)

the utmost brutality. Any village showing any sign of supporting the partisans was razed to the ground, any men who had not fled were executed, and on more than one occasion, the women and children were killed by marching them through partisan-laid minefields to clear a way for the Dirlwanger troops.

Reinforced by an intake of auxiliary policemen from the Schutzmannschaft, Dirlwanger's unit served in support of the Einsatzkommandos, rounding up civilians both for deportation to Germany as slave labourers and for transport to concentration camps and almost certain death. In mid-1943, an additional 500 convicted poachers were added to the Sonderkommando as the war against the partisans intensified. Dirlwanger revelled in his task of turning designated areas into virtual no man's lands, devastating villages, executing their inhabitants and destroying crops all to ensure that no support could be offered to the partisans. In fact, the levels of actual partisan involvement in some of the Sonderkommando's actions can be seen from a typical after-action report in which enemy losses were described as one partisan killed, several hundred civilians executed and several hundred others shipped off into slavery. Where the Sonderkommando did actually see combat against partisans, they treated prisoners with the utmost barbarity. One report tells of Sonderkommando troops dousing captured partisans in petrol, burning them alive, and feeding the remains to the pigs.

By early 1944, the Sonderkommando was facing units of the Red Army, and suffering accordingly. In an effort to maintain unit strength,

replacements were dredged up not only from the prisons, but from concentration camps such as Sachsenhauen and Auschwitz. Dirlwanger was by now almost completely out of control. Even his own officers made formal complaints about his abusive and violent behaviour to them, usually when he had been drinking, which seemed to have been often.

The Sonderkommando was withdrawn from the front in August 1944 just before its collapse in the face of a new Soviet offensive, and moved to East Prussia. The Sonderkommando plumbed new depths of barbarity when elements were sent in to support the German units under SS-Obergruppenführer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski in the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising. Von dem Bach had actually moderated the original orders from Hitler which insisted that not only insurgents, but all civilians captured in Warsaw were to be executed, and the city razed to the ground. Von dem Bach actually treated surrendered insurgents as regular prisoners of war and insisted that civilians should not be executed. His orders were certainly ignored by units such as the Sonderkommando.

Both sides, in fact, often refused to take prisoners. On 1 August, an Azerbaijani unit which had been promised clemency by the insurgents surrendered, only to have their throats cut. Shortly thereafter, a troop of some 700 Azerbaijanis were added to Dirlwanger's own 800 troops and the combination of vengeful Azerbaijanis and Sonderkommando barbarians fell upon Warsaw.

Dirlwanger's own men were far more frightened of him than of the enemy. Instant obedience was expected and woe betide anyone who showed lack of determination and courage in the face of the enemy. In one instance, a squad of Sonderkommando troops rushed a building occupied by a strong force of insurgents. Many were killed before the building was penetrated after which the raging Sonderkommando men pursued the Poles through the building and threw both dead and living from the fourth floor window. Dirlwanger's men made use of captured Polish women and children as 'human shields', hoping this would discourage the insurgents from firing. It did not. There are reliable reports of Sonderkommando troops burning captured insurgents alive, hanging mothers and impaling their children on bayonets. Not since the time of Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun had such barbarities been visited on non-combatant civilians.

Dirlwanger's own losses, because of his disregard for the lives of his own

SS-Brigadeführer Stroop and some of his staff watch as sappers, just visible in the shadows at the base of this photograph, dig out fugitive Jews who have hidden in the cellars of a ruined building in the Warsaw Ghetto. (USHMM)





Civilian captives are led off on their journey to Auschwitz. The NCO at right with the sub-machine gun appears in several photographs in this series taken to illustrate the notorious 'Stroop Report'. He wears the pre-war tunic with open collar, quite different to the military style tunic with high fastening collar worn by the NCO standing in the doorway in the background. (USHMM)

troops, were exceptionally high. The Sonderkommando joined battle at Warsaw with approximately 800 men. Subsequently 2,500 replacements were sent to the unit via the SS-Straflager (punishment camp) at Matzkau, yet the unit ended its involvement at Warsaw with just under 650 remaining. On 12 August, in recognition of his 'achievements' in Warsaw, Dirlwanger was promoted to SS-Oberführer and decorated with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

After the Warsaw battle, the Sonderkommando was to face the Red Army on an increasing number of occasions and suffered accordingly. In Slovakia, it was used against Czech partisans and again caused an outcry because of its behaviour which some SS officers described as being worse than the partisans. Looting, rape and theft were commonplace.

On 20 February 1945, the Sonderkommando was, on paper at least, raised to divisional status as 36 Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS. An Army Panzer Abteilung, Panzerjäger, Pionier detachments and a grenadier regiment were added to its existing troops. One can only imagine what must have gone through the minds of regular army troops being attached to this undisciplined mob of barbarians.

The unit gradually disintegrated in the face of strong Red Army forces. True to form, many Dirlwanger troops deserted and some executed their own officers before fleeing. Some succeeded in surrendering to British troops, while those captured by the Red Army were executed on the spot. Dirlwanger himself was in Germany on sick

leave when the war ended. He was arrested at Altshausen, and on being recognised, was beaten to death by Polish guards assisting the French troops who had him in custody, an apt and thoroughly well-deserved end for this despicable creature.

#### Uniform

The uniform worn by the Dirlwanger troops was standard Waffen-SS military issue clothing. The only specific unit insignia worn by these troops was a right-hand collar patch which, in place of the SS runes, featured crossed rifles over a stick grenade. The left patch was the standard SS rank patch. This insignia has often been specifically linked with Dirlwanger's troops and indeed it was worn by them. Given some of the actions in which they were involved, it is not surprising that photos showing identifiable Dirlwanger troops are very rare. It should also be noted that this patch was worn by other SS 'disciplinary' or 'probationary' troops, some of whom fought with courage and distinction and were in no way involved in Dirlwanger's excesses. One unit in particular, *Sonderverband Dora*, consisting of men who had been convicted of minor misdemeanours, but subsequently redeemed themselves in combat, wore this same collar patch, but in mirror image style on both collar patches. Unless, therefore, a photo shows both collar patches and this distinctive patch can be seen to be worn only on the right side, or unless the date and location of the photograph is known, the mere presence of this patch visible on the right side does not necessarily indicate that the subject of the photo is a Dirlwanger.

## MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

Given the nature of the actions performed by some of the units covered in this book, it is perhaps not surprising that there are no real specialised museum collections displaying material relating to such units. Several museum collections have examples of Feldgendarmerie uniforms and regalia on display as part of larger exhibits, such as the Imperial War Museum, the Armeemuseum in Rastatt and even the Museum at Les Invalides in Paris. Items such as those relating to the SD, Gestapo, Schutzmannschaft, Geheime Feldpolizei are less often seen, though larger museums, such as the Imperial War Museum in London, certainly have such items in their collections, and they may occasionally be put on display as part of larger, themed exhibitions.

Original examples of ephemera belonging to some of the units and organisations covered in this work are extremely rare indeed. Original Gestapo warrant discs, for example, now easily fetch four-figure sums and are so sought after that almost perfect reproductions have been made up recently in Poland. The Geheime Feldpolizei disc is even rarer and only a handful of originals are now known to exist. Regrettably, one of these few originals is now known to have been acquired by an East European forger, so it will only be a matter of time before high quality reproductions appear. Items such as the duty gorgets worn by some security troops are highly sought after by collectors. Although Feldgendarmerie gorgets are still obtainable, those for the *Feldjagerkorps*, the Luftwaffe Feldgendarmerie, Zugwachabteilung and

others are extremely rare, again fetching four-figure sums in some cases, and are widely reproduced or converted from original Feldgendarmerie gorgets. The only sound advice that can be given to those who might consider collecting these items is to exercise extreme caution and only buy from those willing to give a written money-back guarantee of originality.

Sadly, it has to be noted that even Holocaust items such as concentration camp clothing, Kapo armbands, etc., have been faked. Sometimes these have been legitimate copies made for the movie industry, but regrettably some unscrupulous individuals have lost no time in passing such artificially aged pieces off as genuine historical relics.

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## COLOUR PLATE COMMENTARY

### A: MILITARY POLICE, C. 1940

Several uniform details reveal this man's status. The shoulder straps (7) and collar patches (6) have orange-red *Waffenfarbe* branch of service colour for the military police and on his left sleeve are both the Gendarmerie eagle (4), again in orange-red embroidery, and the cuff title '*Feldgendarmerie*' (8). In addition, only when on duty, a special gorget plate or '*Ringkragen*' (5i) was worn on a chain around the neck, giving the MPs their pejorative nickname '*Kettenhunde*' or 'Chain Dogs'. The details on the gorget plate were picked out in luminous paint. His uniform is the standard army M36 field blouse, although in the early part of the war, military policemen who had transferred from the civil police often wore their original police uniform with army rank insignia added.

The insets show some of the equipment used by military police units of the Wehrmacht:

1: Those military policemen using motorcycles regularly wore the special rubberised weatherproof overcoat, giving them some measure of protection from the elements in bad weather.

2: The traffic wand was an essential piece of kit for those on traffic control duty. Many were simply plain discs devoid of insignia. Others featured police insignia and/or the words '*Halt Polizei*'. Similar traffic wands are still in use today.

3: Those on temporary attachment to the military police wore a special armband in green with the words '*Feldgendarmerie*' in orange lettering on the left sleeve.

5: The most distinctive piece of insignia worn by the military policeman was the gorget plate. A range was produced for various policing duties, not always carried out by military police, but often by ordinary soldiers temporarily assigned to patrol duties. The Luftwaffe gorget (5ii), with the Luftwaffe-style eagle, was only known to have been worn within the *Hermann Göring* Division. The *Feldjägerkorps* gorget (5iii), a real rarity, was introduced when the Corps of Military Police was founded in 1943. It differs from the standard gorget only in the wording on the scroll. The *Zugwachabteilung* gorget (5iv) was worn by detachments of troops providing security for railway trains moving through potentially hostile territory. Above the scroll was positioned the detachment number.

Security patrols around Garrison areas were provided by the local *Kommandantur* or military headquarters. Once again, a very similar gorget plate was worn (5v), differing only in the wording on the scroll.

Security within large railway stations through which huge numbers of troops might pass was provided by soldiers

assigned as *Bahnhofswache* or Station Guards. The gorget plate is similar to that for the *Zugwachabteilung* (5vi).

It is worth noting that with the exception of the *Feldgendarmerie* gorget which was produced in great numbers, all of these gorget plates are of extreme rarity and fetch very high prices on the collector market.

### B: PARTISAN INTERROGATION

The SS military police was a much smaller organisation than that of the army and in general terms provided security at divisional level while in the field; the SS had no equivalent to the *Zugwachabteilung* or *Bahnhofswache*. A *Feldgendarmerie* Trupp was attached to the headquarters element of each *Waffen-SS* Division. Among its many duties was the suppression of partisan activity in the division's area. The uniform worn by SS military police was very similar to the standard *Waffen-SS* uniform, but with the addition of a cuff band '*SS-Feldgendarmerie*' (the army issue cuff band was also widely used by SS units), the traditional orange-red piping to shoulder straps and the peaked cap, and the use of the standard issue *Feldgendarmerie* gorget (although not in use here).

The war against the partisans (whom Hitler insisted on being termed 'bandits') on the Eastern Front was fought with great ferocity and brutality by both sides. Quarter was rarely given and those suspected of aiding the partisans were treated extremely harshly. Civilians were often caught in the middle of this conflict.

Here we see the outcome of a search by *Waffen-SS* military police of a Russian farm. The wearing of the Anti-Partisan War Badge on the pocket shows that these men have been involved in several actions against partisan units. Some evidence has been found to suggest that the farmer has been aiding the partisans. It may well have been of course that partisans had hidden weapons or other supplies on his farm without his knowledge, but his ignorance would be considered no defence. Watched by a senior NCO, the farmer's wife pleads for her husband's life as a third military policeman leads him off at gunpoint. German soldiers captured by partisans were usually killed and often tortured and mutilated, their bodies left where they were sure to be found. This cruelty had a definite function, quite apart from instilling fear of the partisans. The Germans usually reacted with ferocity to such incidents and many innocent civilians would subsequently be killed in response to these attacks. Before long, what had begun as a relatively favourable attitude towards the Germans in many parts of occupied Russia where the Communists themselves were despised, was turned to hatred because of the many cruelties visited upon the civilian populace as the Germans sought revenge on the Partisans and those suspected of aiding them.

### C: POLICE 'AKTION'

A considerable number of the police and security actions carried out in the occupied territories were undertaken by units of the German Civil Police, the *Schutzpolizei* or *Schupo*. Not long after the invasion of the Soviet Union, police units, organised into Rifle Regiments (*Polizei Schützen Regiment*), moved into the rear areas to undertake security duties. Many of these units were involved in fierce actions against the partisans and even in some cases, such as the police units encircled with the military at

Cholm, saw actions against front line units of the Red Army. Many photographs exist showing police personnel wearing military combat awards such as campaign and even gallantry decorations such as the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. The other, darker side of the coin was that many such police units were involved in brutal actions against the civilian populace, including the rounding up of Jewish and other 'undesirable' elements and even in some cases the large scale executions of such unfortunates. Some units, such as *Reserve Polizei Bataillon 101*, were so heavily involved in such atrocities that they attracted reputations every bit as bad as some of the *Einsatzkommandos*.

The police personnel shown here are typical of the appearance of *Polizei* troops on the Eastern Front. Many troops wore the standard civil police uniform, identifiable from its contrasting brown cuffs and collar, although ultimately a police pattern field blouse in plain field grey very similar to that worn by Army and *Waffen-SS* troops was introduced. Police troops may be instantly identified by the large arm eagle within an oval wreath of oakleaves.

Members of such units were often issued with obsolete or obsolescent weapons and equipment.

The troops shown here are planning a sweep through the village shown in the distance. Typically, individual platoons will be sent out to form a security picket covering likely exit routes from the village prior to the main body entering along the main path into the settlement. Any occupants seeking to flee would be rounded up by the pickets and taken back to the village. Inhabitants would be ordered to report to a control point set up in the centre of the village and police troops would then commence a search of the houses for those who had failed to report.

In villages or towns near to rail links, victims of these sweeps might be transported to camps. In villages where transport was more problematic, their fate would often be decided on the spot. *Reserve Polizei Bataillon 101* alone is estimated to have taken part in the murder of at least 40,000 persons.

One of the worst aspects of such units is that they were indeed manned by 'ordinary' policemen, and not by some specially recruited Nazi fanatics, yet these men were prepared to sacrifice their moral standards and take part in some of the war's most terrible atrocities. Although there are several examples of members of these units refusing to take part in such actions, sufficient numbers did acquiesce to indelibly stain the image of the German policeman. Strangely very few members of the German police were ever prosecuted for their parts in such actions, and many simply went back to their normal civil police duties after the war.

### D: KAMINSKI TROOPS

Few military units in history have gained such appalling reputations for indiscipline and cruelty as the troops commanded by Bronislaw Kaminski. From a small mixed band of Red Army deserters, anti-Communist white Russian collaborators, *Bellorussians*, Ukrainians and some Poles, he established a 'self defence' force to protect the town of Lokot from Red Army partisans. This unit grew to brigade strength and was ultimately taken over by the *Waffen-SS* to become the very shortlived *29 Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS*.

Initially regarded favourably by the Germans because of their successes against bands of Soviet partisans around

Minsk, as the Kaminski unit grew, so did the arrogance of its commander and the number of atrocities committed by its men. Kaminski, a fanatical anti-Communist, was promoted to a rank equivalent to Generalmajor by the Germans and permitted to form the grandiosely titled Russian National Army of Liberation or RONA (appearing in Cyrillic form as POHA). The unit eventually became a law unto itself, Kaminski living a life of luxury on the proceeds of his unit's looting activities, and surrounded by his own private army.

The Kaminski troops wore a hotch-potch mix of whatever uniform items were available, some still wearing Red Army uniform with only an armband to identify them as being in German service. Ultimately, most seemed to wear standard German Army field-grey uniforms, often with the rank insignia specially designed for Russian volunteers, and usually with the unit's own sleeve shield, most of which were very crudely made. Wherever the Kaminski troops went, murder, looting and pillage were rife.

Here a small Russian town has suffered the attentions of Kaminski's troops. Having eliminated the inhabitants, Kaminski's men are rifling through the personal possessions of their victims looking for valuables, while others begin celebrating their 'victory' with alcohol. Kaminski and his men ultimately became a liability to the Germans and Kaminski was arrested and later shot by an SS firing squad. The unit members were dispersed to other units, primarily the 'officially approved' Russian Liberation Army or ROA under General Andrei Vlasov, a distinguished professional military officer, at the opposite end of the spectrum to the disgraceful Kaminski.

#### E: EASTERN SECURITY AUXILIARIES

The central figure on this plate shows the typical appearance of a member of the Schutzmannschaft. The need to provide the large number of volunteer auxiliary policemen with some sort of suitable uniform was solved by issuing modified examples of obsolete pre-war black Allgemeine-SS uniforms with the original insignia removed. They had coloured facings added to the cuffs, collar and to the flaps of the skirt pockets. Black SS breeches were also issued, as were field caps, also with the insignia removed. A range of sleeve chevrons was devised to indicate rank groupings, but in general it seems that little in the way of insignia was worn on the black uniform.

Weapons issued to these troops were often obsolete or captured types. The individual shown is carrying a Russian Moisin-Nagant rifle, vast quantities of which were obtained from the huge numbers of Red Army soldiers who surrendered to the Germans during the opening phase of Operation Barbarossa. These troops, never fully trusted, were always considered of mediocre quality and were usually poorly equipped with just enough for them to carry out their assigned duties.

Shown in the insets are:

1: Rank insignia worn by Schutzmannschaften on the field-grey uniform. For NCOs a plain black cloth collar patch was worn with braid along its forward and lower edges, one, two or three rows of braid respectively indicating the ranks of Korporal, Vize-Feldwebel and Kompanie-Feldwebel respectively.

Officer rank insignia was trimmed in braid along all four edges and had an outer piping to twisted silver cord. A blank

centre, one pip, two pips or one strip of braid in the centre indicating the ranks of Zugführer, Oberzugführer, Kompanieführer and Bataillonsführer respectively.

2: Sleeve chevrons worn on the black uniform. The ranks shown, from left to right, are, respectively, Unterkorporal, Vizekorporal, Korporal, Vize-Feldwebel and Kompanie-Feldwebel.

3: Cap insignia was an elongated diamond shaped swastika surrounded by laurel leaves.

4: The arm patch was similar to the cap insignia, but larger, and had the motto 'Treu, Tapfer, Gehorsam' ('faithful, brave, obedient') surrounding the swastika. Shown are the examples in silver on black for officers, the others in orange and green are shown in their uncut/unshaped form and would have been cut and folded to shape. The orange insignia was for Gendarmerie fixed units and green for Schutzpolizei mobile units.

5: The Schutzmannschaft shoulder strap also featured the elongated diamond shaped swastika, with piping colours analogous to the colour of the woven sleeve emblem.

6: Schutzmannschaften operating in an administrative or non-combatant role wore uniforms devoid of any insignia, but were obliged, theoretically at least, to wear a special armband, with black text on green, indicating they were in the service of the security police.

7: Schutzmannschaften were ultimately issued with a full field-grey uniform with field cap. In this dress a full set of rank insignia was worn, in the positions shown. Note that no eagle with swastika national emblem was worn.

#### F: SONDERKOMMANDO DIRLEWANGER

With a reputation even worse than the Kaminski Brigade, the Sonderkommando Dirlwanger was one of the most bizarre military units ever to have existed. Created at Hitler's suggestion, the unit was initially formed around a cadre of poachers released from prison. Commanded by Dr Oskar Dirlwanger, the unit grew rapidly and was enlarged by influxes of manpower from other prisons, concentration camps and SS Disciplinary Camps. Dirlwanger ruled with an iron fist, and even minor infringements of his regulations often resulted in severe beatings. Serious infractions, such as failure to instantly obey an order from Dirlwanger, could result in being shot on the spot.

This unit reached the zenith of barbarism during the suppression of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944. Amongst the Polish defenders were men, women and children, the wounded and the helpless who were slaughtered with equanimity by Dirlwanger troops. In this plate, one Dirlwanger soldier, identifiable by the distinctive collar patch, gets ready to take aim at a Polish insurgent sniping at the Germans from high up in an opposing building, while his comrade primes a stick grenade ready to lob it through the window of a house occupied by Polish Free Army defenders. A third, armed with a flame-thrower, is ready to use this most effective of weapons in clearing a house occupied by the Poles.

Many regular German troops, including the SS, were appalled at the behaviour of this unruly mob, but attempts to bring them to heel were regularly rebuffed. Dirlwanger threatened to murder SS-Standartenführer Golz and Chief of Staff of SS Obergruppenführer von dem Bach-Zelewski, and at one point Dirlwanger's men, toting sub-machine guns,

surrounded and threatened von dem Bach's own headquarters. Although there were many acts of reckless gallantry in the face of enemy action by individual members of the Sonderkommando (not all its members were released prisoners and criminals), the unit will be unlikely ever to be remembered for anything other than its barbaric cruelty. It is estimated that the Sonderkommando lost some 2,700 men during the action in Warsaw alone, many killed in massed frontal attacks against well-defended enemy positions; the Dirlwanger troops were more afraid of their commander's wrath if they failed, than of the danger facing them from the determined enemy defenders. Dirlwanger men captured by the Poles were almost invariably put to death immediately.

#### G: GHETTO CLEARANCE

The SS and SD were the troops most usually involved in clearing the Jewish ghettos in the East for deportation and 'resettlement' in the concentration camps. These actions usually took place early in the morning, because of the element of surprise, and also because there would be fewer witnesses. The inhabitants were ordered to report to a collecting point where lists of names were meticulously drawn up, before they were loaded onto cattle trucks, grossly overcrowded and with no food, water or sanitary provisions, to be shipped off to the destination camp. Victims were usually told they were being moved to a work camp in the East, and told to bring a small amount of personal belongings, all to feed the illusion that some form of future, however bleak, awaited them. Despite this pretence, anyone failing to move fast enough, or who showed any hesitation would be mercilessly beaten or shot on the spot.

In this scene an officer of the Sicherheitsdienst, with the distinctive blank collar patch and SD arm patch, collects the names of the victims of this particular round-up, accompanied by an official of the Gestapo. Meanwhile, an NCO armed with a machine pistol overlooks the scene, ensuring obedience to any instructions by the terrified victims of this clearance. Inset is shown the Warrant Disc (1) carried by members of the Gestapo. Impressed with the wearer's identity number, and combined with the SS-Ausweis (2), it gave the Gestapo official frighteningly extensive powers of arrest and detention. Most such items were destroyed by their owners at the end of the war. Few originals remain, and fetch astronomical sums on the collectors market. Also shown is an inset detail of the SD Arm Patch (3).

Scenes such as this were widespread during the second half of the war in occupied eastern Europe. Few who witnessed them would dare object for fear of their own lives. Some brave souls did protest, however. One recently decorated war hero, Gefreiter Hans Sturm, a young infantryman just decorated with the Knight's Cross for extreme heroism in the face of overwhelming enemy forces, witnessed such a scene during the clearing of the ghetto in Smolensk, October 1942. Sturm was still convalescing from the serious wounds he had received. Enraged at the brutal treatment being meted out to the terrified civilians, and in particular to a woman with a young child, he grabbed the weapon from one of the SD guards and smashed it over his head. Immediately arrested, he would almost certainly have been shot but for the doctor who accompanied him rushing to his defence, and assuring the SD officer in charge that he was a war hero who had just been decorated by the Führer,

and who was still recovering from serious head wounds. The SD officer, convinced that perhaps the soldier was not fully responsible for his actions, grudgingly released him into the doctor's care. Showing any sympathy or support for the Jews during the Third Reich, and especially in circumstances such as these, was a risky business. Regrettably however, Sturm's gallant action was to no avail and the young woman and her child were led off to their uncertain fate along with all the others.

#### H: FELDJÄGER

The extremely complex police structure of the Third Reich was complicated even further in 1943 by the formation of the Feldjägerkorps, a title drawn from Provost units of the imperial era.

Unlike the regular military policemen of the Feldgendarmerie, all members of this force were to be decorated combat veterans who had earned the Iron Cross in battle. Having faced the rigours of life in the front line, and been decorated for their efforts, these men would not flinch when faced with obstinate bureaucrats who sought to interfere with them in the execution of their duties.

During the final months of the war, these troops had to search through areas to the rear of the front line looking for stragglers, shirkers and any who may have so far avoided military service but were fit enough to fight, and despatch them to the front to defend the Reich.

To identify their position, they wore a gorget plate similar to that of the Feldgendarmerie, and also a red armband with the legend 'Oberkommando der Wehrmacht / Feldjäger'. An inset of which is seen here above the figures.

This indicated that their authority came not from a local division or military district, but directly from the High Command of the Armed Forces. These men attracted several less than complimentary nicknames. Their duty of literally press-ganging men for the front led to them being referred to as 'Heldenklau' or 'Hero Stealers'. Here, we see a scene in East Prussia in the late stages of World War II. With the Eastern Front crumbling in the face of the Soviet onslaught, manpower was a scarce resource and ad hoc combat groups were regularly formed from stragglers, elderly home guards, and any able bodied men who were capable of firing a gun.

Two Feldjäger, veterans of many a bitter action on the Eastern Front, as evidenced by the many decorations worn, are questioning an apprehensive looking Nazi Party functionary. These pompous and unpopular Party 'armchair warriors' were known to the civilian populace as Golden Pheasants due to their uniforms, with gold braid trim and colourful collar tabs. This rather portly fellow has obviously had an easy war so far and is right to look worried. These Feldjäger are determined to put an end to his privileged position by packing him off to the rapidly approaching front-line to do his duty along with every other able bodied male. He is well aware that his life expectancy at the front will be very short. The powers of the Feldjäger mean that there is very little influence that can be brought to bear to save him from being obliged to do his duty at the front.

It is interesting to note that in the re-formed German Army post-World War Two, the name 'Feldgendarmerie' was dropped for the new Military Police formations (though the orange-red branch of service colour was retained.) Germany's Military Police are once again known as 'Feldjäger'.



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