



Siegrunen

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118224



Estonian SS volunteer on the Narva Front, 13 July 1944.
[Courtesy of Erik Rundkvist]

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EDITORIAL

Assorted Frauds, Thuds, Blunders and Errors

I doubt if I have ever seen a historical work that was totally free of mistake or error; in fact, all too many of the "establishment" books in this line are liberally larded with deliberate fraud, slander and prejudice. But quite often the situation hits home. Although not intentional some rather whopping goofs have transpired both in SIEGRUNEN articles and my books on the Waffen-SS; if and when I get a chance to rewrite, as many of these stumbles will be eliminated as possible. Certainly Lieutenant General Count Strachwitz, whom I killed off by mistake in NARVA 1944, deserves to be brought back to life, at least for the time era being chronicled!

Further to the theme of this editorial, a couple of very unintentional frauds turned up in SIEGRUNEN #39. Chiefly of these is the cover photo which I have been assured by "one who knows" that this is a phony. This despite the fact that I received two detailed biographies (one from Europe) about the individual depicted on the cover! Apparently the photo (and possibly others like it) and information have been circulating as genuine on the "collector's" market and there is evidence to indicate that a number of other alleged original Waffen-SS photos are also doing the same. While not particularly ethical, I don't consider this any major malicious problem. Just something to watch out for a little more carefully.

Also, having followed the excellent articles on Wehrmacht/W-SS penal formations in the last several editions of DEUTSCHES SOLDATENJAHRBUCH by Horst Voight, I think we can also conclude that the SS-Sturmabteilung 500 covered in SR #39, did not exist as such. The story, as I have been able to understand it, is more than a little complex, but it is safe to say that this unit was a part of, and/or a composite element of the Dirlewanger SS penal formations. It seems the author of several books dealing with the subject, from which my information was derived, was actually a former member of the "Dirlewanger" units. In order to publish anything at all about his wartime experiences and the story of his "troop," he was forced to engage in the subterfuge of titling his unit the "SS-Sturmabteilung 500"; mention of the "Dirlewanger" Brigade would not have been acceptable due to its "war criminal" status.

In any event, literary license was taken ... how much I don't know. I have a feeling that the gist of the facts in the article are true, but names were, of course, changed to protect the living. The "Dora" Companies certainly existed as such, and a "Dirlewanger" Battalion (which by all indications was "SS-Sturmabteilung 500" under its fictional designation), did operate to some extent independently from the main formation and finished up the war under the jurisdiction of the 35th SS Police Division. In any event one can certainly understand and sympathize with this "fraud"; it was done for the best, altruistic motives. Though it means some of the facts will remain forever scrambled, that was likely to be the case anyway!

Less excusable to my way of thinking, are many of the errors that appear in otherwise exceptional books, such as Littlejohn's FOREIGN LEGIONS OF THE THIRD REICH series. A little checking in readily available sources might have spared Mr. Littlejohn some of his blunders.

Throughout the four volumes of this group he has constantly misstated facts about various Waffen-SS units, and although I did not read Volume IV very carefully, I noticed several more in that book. Sticking in my mind was his allegation that 14th SS Division was never again in the frontlines after the Battle of Brody (July 1944) - untrue, as it was in the frontlines in Austria in April 1945; and his comment that XV. Cossack Cavalry Corps never utilized any Waffen-SS insignia. We can disprove this one with a future SIEGRUNEN cover photo! Watch for it! I still recommend the Littlejohn books for the sheer wealth of their overall contents and brilliant layout, but I don't like his constant little errors in fact and carping sarcasm.

There is very good news ahead in the Waffen-SS publishing field; a massive, four-volume, partly pictorial history of the Dutch Waffen-SS, starting interestingly enough with 34.SS Division "Landstorm Nederland," is to begin publication this year. I will give full details as to where to obtain this as soon as I can. Knowing this particular Belgian publisher I think I can guarantee the books will be of the absolute highest quality. Also look for the first ever English language editions of the "LSSAH" Volume II (Lehmann) and EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER: 5.SS-PZ.DIV. "WIKING" (Strassner), both later this year from John Fedorowicz Publishing. They will be available through SIEGRUNEN.

The Merciless March of the Media

Between a chance perusing of a newsstand "WWII History" Magazine, which contained a collection of inept, even slanderous articles, including a biased, factually deficient account of the destruction of Dresden, and the recent appearance of another hatchet piece on the Malmédy incident in a "conservative" veteran's magazine, it was once again driven home how far we still have to go to receive a little truth and justice in the media. To be fair, there are an increasing number of books being published that are offering a more balanced view of the World War II era and the Waffen-SS, but everything else in the communications media is still lagging far behind.

One can think immediately of the numerous scholarly books now appearing that have rent such enormous holes in the exterminationist/atrocities mythos. Without exception they and their authors, such as Irving, Rassinier, Butz and Staeglich, have been the subject of some of the most obnoxious vilification by the various media outlets that one can imagine. The books are labeled "evil" and "hateful," and every effort has been made to limit their circulation, through outright bannings in many countries to blacklisting and threats against people who deal with them. What amazes me is that never once has a thoughtful, factual rebuttal to any of the better class of revisionist literature appeared!

If I didn't like what a particular work had to say about a subject and I had the facts and documentation to support

my position, then I would go after what I objected to and tear it apart sentence by sentence and show precisely where it was in error. In a free, civilized society that is how you discredit something that is inaccurate and faulty. But that is not what is being done with revisionist works; the books and authors are simply being slandered out of hand in the media. No attention to contents, other than to distort them, is permissible. In fact, the taboo that exists is so "sacred," that we have been told over and over by our national leaders no less, that there can be no detailed examination or questioning of the "Nazi atrocity" stories allowed.

Efforts are being made around the world to terrorize and even prosecute the people who have asked questions, but no effort whatsoever has been made to rebutt the questions and the literature concerned with it. That is simply "beneath the dignity" of the people who have such a big stake in perpetuating the stories. To me that is an awfully suspicious approach to a problem; if you have the facts use them to bolster your case! Instead, censorship and outright terror are the response. Does that mean they don't have the facts?

In keeping with the fine journalistic standards exhibited continuously by our distorted media, American and British television producers have decided to put "Nr.1 War Criminal" Kurt Waldheim on "trial" in a special fictionalized television courtroom drama. Handling the prosecution will be none other than some odious former employees of the OSI, who also served as eager KGB collaborators. It was these people who ruined the lives of dozens and dozens of innocent victims and their families, and caused a few deaths as well, through their efforts with the sordid, obscene OSI agency. It seems to me that it is these creatures that belong on trial in a real courtroom, for their crimes against humanity! Instead we will be given the utter travesty of having another ludicrous "docu-drama" hatchet job performed for the benefit of further controlling our minds and thought processes. Undoubtedly there will be "learning aids" provided for the schools, so that teachers and students can participate in this project as they have been invited to do with other television atrocity "docudramas"!

In regards to the Mark Weber piece about Vladimir Sokolov, which also appears in this issue, it is interesting to note that all of these ardent "Free Speech/First Amendment" people have yet to put in an appearance on behalf of Mr. Sokolov, or any of the other intellectuals and writers that the OSI is trying to drive to their deaths. Sokolov faces a death sentence in the USSR once he is shipped there. The OSI is very upset over the failure of West Germany to further prosecute anyone being deported there, so look for most future deportations to be either routed to our Bolshevik buddies or our little pals in the Middle East.

Thanks to all who ordered from the last Booklist; if you never got one, write in and ask for it!

The 36th SS Division at Guben and the Neisse River Front

Most of the following information became available too late for inclusion in the article on the history of 36th SS Division to appear in SR #42.



Brigfhr. Fritz Schmedes, commander of 36th SS Division.

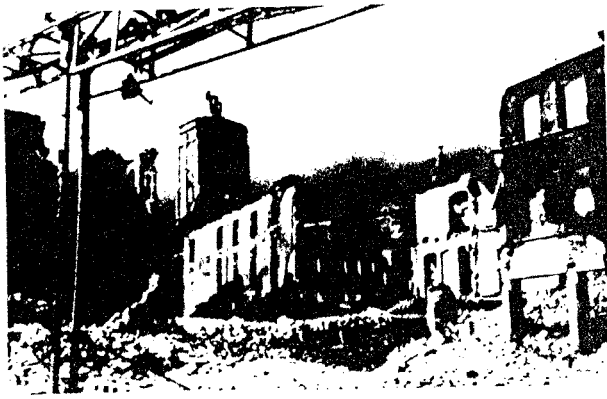


Hauptmann Rudi Kirsten, "Grossdeutschland" Division/Special Brigade 100, acting battle commandant for Guben.

On 23 February 1945, the Fortress Machine Gun Battalion 3097 was assigned to the 36th SS Division near Guben and on 28 February, the Divisional units were withdrawn from the frontlines for reorganization. Except for the two assault regiments (also known as Waffen-Grenadier Regiments 72 and 73), all of the internal units now received the Divisional number '36.'

Also at the end of February, the reinforced 2nd Regiment (WGR 73) of the Division was subordinated to the Special Use Army Brigade 100 under Oberst Berger, which had been given the task of defending the city of Guben. Also in the Brigade were the replacement troops of the "Gross Deutschland" Division (Hauptmann Kirsten) and a Volksturm battalion and scattered other units. Overall command jurisdiction belonged to XXXX. Panzer Corps. Brigade 100 was dissolved on 16 March 1945 and at that time WGR 73 returned to the 36th SS Division on the Neisse Front.

In the meantime, 36th SS Division had been further reinforced by three Army emergency (alarm) battalions and two Volksturm battalions along with a portion of the 35th SS Police Division. In the course of further reorganization, 36th SS Division came under the control of V. Army Corps under General der Artillerie Dr. Waeger.



Guben after the fighting.

The 35th SS Police Division left the Neisse sector for deployment between the 344th and 214th Infanterie Divisions in the Cottbus area to the north of Forst. It left behind one battalion with the 36th SS Division, but in return took a battalion from 36th SS Division with it. This was the so-called "SS-Sturm Bataillon 500" and the attached SS Commando/Anti-tank Company "Dora II."

During the massive Soviet "Berlin Offensive" from 16-19 April 1944, 36th SS Division was driven from its positions on the Neisse Front. After suffering high losses, it was reorganized as a battlegroup by Brigfhr. Schmiedes and fought valiantly but in vain to break out of a Soviet encirclement to the west. For further details on the Dirlwanger formations and the 36th SS Division see SR #42.

Note to Subscribers

I imagine there will be an increase in price of SIEGRUNEN from \$5.00 to \$6.00 per copy once the new postal rate hikes kick in sometime this spring. There will also be a new mailing address for SIEGRUNEN shortly as I will be moving to a new location in Oregon shortly. Hopefully this will not cause any more delays than usual. CHARLEMAGNE'S LEGIONNAIRES will be out after one last pre-publication advertising barrage with the Bibliophile Legion Books mailing list. It will probably be a \$29.95 hardback with 272 pages! As usual, thanks for all of the letters and comments and please forgive me if I don't always respond personally. It continues to remain a great honor and privilege to be able to put out SIEGRUNEN and other works and your fine support and encouragement helps immensely!

--Richard Landwehr

Last Minute Notice

To all of those who ordered copies of the forthcoming publications Hungarian Volunteers Of The Waffen-SS and Croatian And Moslem Volunteers Of The Waffen-SS, my thanks. They will appear, however, as special editions of SIEGRUNEN and in turn, you will have your subscription extended by one or two issues as the case may be. Non-subscribers will not be affected, receiving these special editions as issued.

The reason for this is simply a matter of cost-effectiveness; i.e., time and money. I can at least save a little of both this way. Otherwise it just takes too long to recoup my investment.

This will not, of course, affect full-length book projects and word on the status of Charlemagne's Legionnaires will be passed along as soon as I get it.

Look for Hungarian Volunteers to now appear as SIEGRUNEN No. 46. Thank you for your understanding with this!

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Former Yale Lecturer Stripped of Citizenship

By Mark Weber

Vladimir Sokolov, a former Yale University lecturer, was stripped of his U.S. citizenship in early June by a federal judge in Connecticut for having concealed his wartime work as an anti-Communist writer for a German-controlled newspaper.

The 73-year-old defendant taught Russian language and Soviet dissident literature at Yale from 1959 until he was forced to resign in 1976 when his wartime past was made public. The Russian-born Sokolov now faces deportation to the Soviet Union.

From 1942 to 1944, Sokolov wrote numerous articles, including some hostile to Jews, for the German-sponsored Russian-language newspaper *Rech*, which was published in his native Orel, a city 200 miles southwest of Moscow.

At his recent trial, Sokolov described himself as a lifelong opponent of Bolshevism and said that he wrote the articles only to oppose Communism. He said that he did not know of any killings of Jews.

The federal court stripped Sokolov of his citizenship on the grounds that he had willfully concealed his wartime work when he applied for entry to the United States in 1951 and again when he applied for, and obtained, U.S. citizenship in 1957.

The case against Sokolov was initiated by the U.S. Justice Department's "Office of Special Investigations" (OSI), an agency established to find and punish Europeans who allegedly helped persecute Jews during the Second World War. The Jewish Director of the OSI, Neal Sher, announced that "the department is very pleased with the outcome" of the Sokolov trial.

Significantly, Sokolov has never been accused of actually harming or even mistreating anyone. He was targeted by the OSI solely for what he wrote. If the OSI has its way, Sokolov will face possible imprisonment and even death at Soviet hands for activities which are not illegal in the United States.

If, let us suppose, Sokolov had written articles praising Communism, a legion of sympathetic journalists and intellectuals, clamoring about "civil liberties," "freedom of expression," and "McCarthyism," would now be demanding his release. Actually, though, if the Yale lecturer had been pro-Communist, he would never have become the victim of the U.S. government's vindictive campaign. As Sokolov's fate clearly demonstrates, the federal authorities operate by a double standard, with one set of rules for "Nazis" and another for everyone else.

The Sokolov case should be a warning to all Americans. If a respected academic can lose his American citizenship for articles written four decades ago that a small but powerful minority group considers offensive, can the day be far off when native-born Americans will find themselves facing courts for expressing similarly heretical views.



SS Legion Flandern – first aid.



Flemish SS troops laying field telephone lines.

THE MEMORIAL CEREMONY AT LANGEMARCK ON 28 AUGUST 1944

At the end of July 1944, the commander of the 6th SS Assault Brigade "Langemarck," Stubaf. Conrad Schellong along with the Flemish nationalist leader (and later SS-Sturmabführer) Dr. Jef van de Wiele, began a recruiting tour among Flemish workers in Germany. The campaign to gain volunteers met with good results and at the end of a particularly successful day in Bitterfeld it was decided that a major public ceremony in Flanders itself might also help the cause. It seemed only right and appropriate that the commander of the "Langemarck" Brigade journey to the town of Langemarck in Flanders to pay a special tribute to the German student volunteers who had sacrificed themselves there in World War I.

Late August was selected as a date for the ceremony, as in the interim, Stubaf. Schellong was needed back in Knowitz, Bohemia to supervise the reformation of his brigade. So on 28 August 1944, despite the critical battlefield situation in the west, the memorial tribute at Langemarck was held. A Wehrmacht orchestra and field kitchens were provided for the occasion and numerous Plak batteries were positioned around the town for air defense if needed. Pamphlets bearing a photograph of Stubaf. Schellong and describing the history of events to be honored were widely distributed.

The commander of the SS Replacement/Recruiting Commando in Flanders, Hstuf. Bertl Schindelmeyer was

present at Langemarck with a contingent of Flemish Waffen-SS men (mostly recovering wounded, those on home leave, and new recruits). The Wehrmacht provided an honor guard company and the German Navy also sent a delegation. The Luftwaffe had its hands full elsewhere at the time so did not put in an appearance.

The public ceremony got underway on the afternoon of 28 August 1944 with the laying of flowers and bouquets at the cemetery followed by a march back to the street in front of the main church in Langemarck. Here the Army band, the Wehrmacht company, the Flemish Waffen-SS men, a troop of Flemish Germanic-SS, the German Naval contingent, Flemish Hitler Youth groups and large numbers of civilian spectators all gathered in an orderly manner.

At the front of the uniformed soldiers stood Stubaf. Schellong along with the Flemish nationalist leader, Father Cyril Verschaeve. The Wehrmacht troops may have been surprised to see "Godless" SS officers in such close contact with a Catholic priest! While the military orchestra played Beethoven's 3rd Symphony ("Eroica"), Schellong strode forward and solemnly but clearly spoke the words: "Germany must live even though we must die!" When the music ended, he gave a longer inspirational speech and a march past the church began.

Boys and girls of the Flemish Hitler Youth placed



At the cemetery in Langemarck on 28 August 1944. In the center is Father Cyril Verschaeve, flanked by Dr.

Jef van de Wiele in the black Germanic SS uniform and Stubaf. Schellong to his left.

four large memorial wreaths on the plaza in front of the old building (an idea developed by the Hitler Youth District Leader Bennewitz), and soldiers of the German Army and the Flemish-SS marched slowly past, shoulder to shoulder. The entire ceremony was broadcast live to Brussels by the Flemish SS radio reporter, Oberscharführer Jef Desseyn. It was hoped that the maximum publicity given to the event would gain many new volunteers for the Waffen-SS, as a tribute was also included to the fallen Flemish East Front fighters.

Afterwards, Stubaf. Schellong said: "This was the most moving day in my life!" The ceremony also marked the last manifestation of true Germanic brotherhood to "officially" take place in Flanders. Schellong of course later emigrated to the United States and became an American citizen. In recent years he has suddenly become a monstrous "Nazi war criminal" to the pro-communist "Nazi" hunters and their secret police allies in the "Justice" Department!

§

Before the church in Langemarck on 28 August 1944. In the front is Stubaf. Schellong with two honor guards. Back row, left-to-right: Father Cyril Verschaeve, HJ Leader Bennewitz, Tony van Dyck, Raf van Hulse, Hstuf. Schindlmayer, Flemish HJ wreath bearers, Dr. Jef van de Wiele and SS-Ostuf. Paul Suys.



Sketch by Flemish SS war artist Frans van Immerseel.



SS Legion Flanders on the Volkhov Front.

SS ARTILLERY REGIMENT 27

27.SS-Frw.Pz.Gr.Div. "LANGEMARCK" (FLEMISH Nr. 1)

At the beginning of October 1944, SS-AR 27/"Langemarck" began forming in Komotau, a small village on the fringe of the Erz Mountains along Autobahn Nr. 7, which led to Chemnitz. The nucleus for the regiment was the 88 mm Flak Battery from the disbanded 6.SS-Sturmbrigade "Langemarck," which had been situated in the nearby town of Strichkow. Hundreds of Flemish refugees, mostly from para-military organizations, were assigned to the new regiment, but very few had had any experience handling artillery. Therefore a comprehensive training program had to be undertaken. The first regimental commander was SS-Obersturmbannführer Schavabacher (sp.), who was succeeded in December 1944 by SS-Sturmbannführer Holger Arentoft.

The planned structure for SS-AR 27 was as follows:

Regimental staff and staff battery

I.Abteilung (Detachment) with staff battery and three field batteries all equipped with six 7.5 cm anti-tank guns.

II.Abteilung with staff battery and two field batteries, each equipped with six 10.5 cm field howitzers.

III.Abteilung (identical to II.Abt.).

IV.Abteilung with staff battery and two field batteries, each with six 15 cm field howitzers.

In sum total there were supposed to be five staff batteries and nine field batteries, but given the extreme armament shortages that existed at the time along with the pressing military situation, this was clearly an impractical arrangement.

The initial selection of Abteilung commanders looked like this:

I.Abt. - SS Stabaf. Felix Deron

II.Abt. - SS-Stabaf. Jef De Bruyn

III.Abt. - SS-Hstuf. Zink

IV.Abt. - none listed

It would appear that the formation of IV.Abt. never seriously got off the ground. In the course of October 1944, numerous Flemish officers, many of whom had



SS-Ostuf. Clem Meulemans, CO Light Detachment Staff Battery.



SS-Ustuf. Bert de Wit, CO 3rd Battery/Light Detachment.

arrived at the regiment from the Vlaamische Waacht (Flemish Guard - sort of a planned nucleus for a Flemish Army), and SS-Junkerschule "Toelz," were sent to weapons training courses held at the SS Artillery Schools I and II in Beneschau near Prague. Major De Bruyn, the infantry commander of the Flemish Guard Brigade that had fought the "Allies" during the withdrawal from Belgium and around Arnhem, transferred into the Waffen-SS at this time with the rank of SS-Standartenoberjunker (officer designate). He was soon commissioned a Sturmbannführer. Due to his experience with the Belgian Army Artillery he was penciled in to command first the II.Abt. and then the I.Abt. of SS-AR 27. he eventually ended up as a technical/tactical officer when the regiment was reformed for combat duty in 1945.

While other portions of the "Langemarck" Division were rushed to the Eastern Front on an emergency basis, SS-AR 27 continued its training around Komotau until 10 February 1945. On this day the regiment left by rail to join the bulk of the "Langemarck" Division on the Lueneburger Heath in Northern Germany. At this time the troop strength for SS-AR 27 was roughly 650 men, but this would be augmented in the days ahead by detached troops who were returning from various speciality (including signals) schools. Planned further advanced training with 10.5 and 15 cm field howitzers at the SS Troop Training Grounds "Bohemia-Moravia" now had to be scrapped, due to the fact that most of the training personnel were being converted into combat troops.

On the Lueneberger Heath the detachments and batteries of SS-AR 27 were stationed in the following villages surrounding Visselhoevede: Wittdorf, Ottingen, Reipholm, Hiddingen and Jeddingen. The signals platoon was quartered in Hiddingen, while the regimental HQ was in Wittdorf with its staff battery (10.5 cm field howitzers commanded by Ustuf. Jos Meurens, a veteran of the old Legion Flandern), stationed in Jeddingen. While SS-AR 27 was in this area a British bomber crashed close to the nearby village of Geddingen. The crew members were killed



SS-Ustuf. Nest Osselaer, Orderly Officer, Light Detachment.

on impact and they were given military burials by the Flemish SS men.

Towards the end of March 1945, SS-AR 27 was ordered to proceed by rail to the Oder Front where it was to join the rest of the combat ready portion of the 27th SS Division in Kampfgruppe "Langemarck." The regiment was still far from fully formed and was only about half-developed, with seven artillery batteries in shape to use, as opposed to the 14 intended batteries. Therefore, the regiment was reorganized into a more realistic format before it proceeded to the front. The combat structure of SS-AR 27 looked like this:



Flemish MIA: Emiel J.M. Carette. Born Antwerp, 6 March 1906; SS Pi. Btl. Dresden; missing 12 January 1945.



SS Legion Flandern on the Volkhov Front.



Flemish SS artillery "spotters" in training at Knowitz Camp, Bohemia, 1944.

HQ and Staff

Commander: Stubaf. Arentoft

Heavy Detachment

Commander: Hstuf. Zink

Medical Officer: Ostuf. Dr. Moelaert

Supply Officer: Ustuf. Flor Stuyck

1st Battery: Ustuf. Haase

2nd Battery: Ustuf. Cesar Geerts

3rd Battery: Still in initial stages of formation

Staff Battery: Ostuf. Clem Meulemans

Armaments: 150 mm field howltzers, three per battery, horse-drawn transport.

One heavy howitzer battery, led by Ustuf. Karel Beeckmann was eventually fully motorized (possibly 3rd Battery?). It participated in the last defensive battles on the Oder and helped hold off the Soviets

during the withdrawal to Schleswig-Holstein before surrendering at Futin with all equipment still intact.

Light Detachment

Commander: First a Dane, then a Hungarian Sturm-bannfuhrer.

Tactical/Technical Officer: Stubaf. Jef de Bruyne, former CO of II.Bn./Flemish Guard. An ex-Belgian artillery officer, he would lead Wehrmacht and Labor Service artillery detachments and rocket mortar elements in the last days of the war.

Orderly Officer: Ustuf. Nest Osselaer



Flemish SS man somewhere on the Eastern Front.

Signals Platoon: Led by a German Untersturmfuehrer from 12th SS Pz.Div. "Hitler Jugend."

Staff Battery: Ustuf. Jos Meurens

1st Battery: Ustuf. Rudy Berg

2nd Battery: Ustuf. Schoolmeesters

3rd Battery: Ustuf. Albert de Wit

Other Flemish SS Officers attached to SS-AR 27 at this time (positions unknown):

Ustuf. Bob Velleman

Ustuf. Marcel Elbers

Ustuf. Jans

Ustuf. Karel Beeckman

At the end of March 1945, the make-shift SS-AR 27 left Visselhoevede by rail for Angermuende, where it disembarked some time later and proceeded to the vicinity of Schwedt on the Oder. The only weapons transported with the regiment were six light field howitzers and two heavy field howitzers; other weaponry was supposed to be provided from depots near the front.

The Light Detachment/SS-AR 27 took up positions in early April 1945 in a triad of villages, Bartz, Tantow, Greifenhagen, near Mescherin. The HQ Staff, staff battery and supply section were all quartered in Tantow. As of 10 April 1945, the Heavy Detachment/SS-AR 27 was situated around the town of Damitzof. During this period time, the Oder River Front was still quiet.

The storm broke loose on 16 April 1945, when the Soviets began their great spring offensive: objective Berlin. For a few days only minor inroads had been made across the Oder, with the most serious penetrations coming on 20 April. Two days later the entire front collapsed and the Reds began advancing at will. The artillery pieces of the Flemish SS batteries had the grand total of about 20 shells each to expend and once these were gone, the weapons had to be spiked (the exception apparently being Battery Beeckman, which kept on functioning). With their weapons gone the troops from the Light Detachment/SS-AR 27 were converted into instant infantrymen. The Heavy Detachment, led by Battery Beeckman, seems to have remained intact.

SS-AR 27, or what was left of it, subsequently retreated



"Langemarck" light artillery in action.

to the west through Sommerfelde, Radikow, Tantow, Starkow, Penkun, Schmoell, Prenzlau and Neusterlitz. On 24 April 1945, Stubaf. Arentoft relinquished his command to an unknown German Stubaf., a purely superficial gesture at this juncture! SS-Artillery Rgt. 27/"Langemarck" Division surrendered to American troops at Schwerin on 3 May 1945.

SS-Artillery Regiment 27/"Langemarck"

Order of Battle and Field Post Numbers, December 1944

Regimental Staff and Units [05 814]

I.Abt. with 1st-3rd Batteries [07 534]

II.Abt. with 4th-6th Batteries [06 939]

III.Abt. with 7th-9th Batteries [06 124]

IV.Abt. with 10th-12th Batteries [07 944]

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Flemish volunteers for the "Langemarck" Brigade in training.

The Flemish W-SS volunteer, SS-Rottenfuehrer Firmin Van Belle, a tank driver in SS-Pz.Rgt.2/2nd SS Pz.Div. "Das Reich" was murdered by the so-called "resistance" while on the last day of his home leave at Schoten, Belgium on 3 September 1943. He was a veteran of the hard battles at Kharkov and Kursk but still could not escape the bullet of a cowardly terrorist!

One of the volunteers in the first contingent of recruits to join the SS Legion "Flandern" was Emil Pallemans. He was born in Antwerp on 28 March 1918. After distinguishing himself during the early actions of the Legion and being decorated with the Iron Cross, 2nd Class, the Infantry Assault Badge, and the Winter 1941/42 medal, he left for his first home leave in the summer of 1942. Immediately after his return to the Legion on the Leningrad Front he was killed by a Soviet sniper on 4 August 1942—an all too familiar story!

I.SS POLIZEI BATAILLON "FLANDERN"

In October 1944, the RSHA (Reich Security Main Office), assembled a number of Flemish refugees from para-military or police forces in the now Allied-occupied Belgium, for the purpose of incorporating them into a special Police Battalion. The nucleus for the unit was to be composed of contingents of Belgian policemen (more than 30) and former members of the Flemish Guard militia (more than 30 of them). They would be joined by some members of the Germanic-SS in Flanders and virtually all of the Flemish SD (SS-Security Service) personnel who had managed to flee Belgium, along with a few members of the Waffen-SS proper. The initial unit strength came to a total of 150 or so men.

Leadership of the embryonic battalion was placed in the hands of Ustuf. (soon promoted to Ostuf.) Leysen, with his adjutant being an Army transferee, Ostuf. Franz Tack. The senior Flemish police officer was Major De Koninck. On 30 October 1944, the former Flemish policemen in the battalion were assigned to a police training course at the German Gendarmerie Barracks in Guestrow, while the other members of the battalion were sent to a class (directed by Ostuf. Leysen) in criminology and police tactics held in Fuerstenberg. This course also started in October but came to a halt in January 1945.

On 15 November 1944, advertising began for further battalion recruits in the Flemish Post, a newspaper for the Flemish refugee community in Germany. Former policemen were asked to volunteer and it was noted that the Police Bn. was slated to serve as an "elite unit" within the SS-Volksgrenadier Division "Flandern" (i.e., the still evolving 27th SS Div. "Langemarck"). The battalion staff was established in Berlin on 22 November 1944 and it remained there through the first half of January 1945. The larger portion of the Police Bn. joined the "Langemarck" Division on the Luenenburger Heath in early 1945 coming under the jurisdiction of Stubaf. Rene Lagrou. Whether or not he was the battalion commander

remains unclear.

Some of the Police Bn. officers were sent to an advanced criminology class in Prague in early 1945, but they soon found their course interrupted by the advancing Eastern Front. In April 1945, members of the battalion staff in Berlin made a somewhat desperate move to get new recruits. They advertised for volunteers amongst former Belgian policemen in the newspaper Free Flanders for 11, 12 and 13 April 1945, while somewhat expansively depicting their little unit as the SS-Polizei Brigade "Flanders." Obviously at this stage of the game a little hyperbole wouldn't hurt!

Be that as it may, the staff and other parts of the battalion in Berlin, broke up into three separate groups in mid-April 1945. One group decided to remain in Berlin to the end, while another left to join the "Langemarck" Division in northern Germany and the other left for the "Alpine Redoubt" in Austria.

The battalion group that left for Austria consisted of three officers (Ostuf. Leysen, Ostuf. Tack and Ustuf. Maris) and 25 men with orders to report to Ogruf. Kaltenbrunner (Head of the RSHA) in Salzburg. Upon their arrival they were sent on to Ostubaf. Otto Skorzeny for "special deployment." On 20 April 1945, a squad from this group under Uscha. Raes was instructed to locate the Flemish nationalist leader Father Cyril Verschaeve, to protect him from possible harm during the Allied advance. After completing their assignment the SS men brought Verschaeve to Ebensee, where he was to be escorted under the direction of Stubaf. Lagrou to the "Langemarck" Division.

Happy over the success of their mission, the Flemings returned to Ostubaf. Skorzeny for further orders. He had none. He told a Flemish officer in charge to: "Send your people home, the war is over." Dissatisfied, the officers insisted upon fighting on as "Werewolves" in conjunction with the Hitler Youth. The pragmatic Skorzeny



Ostuf. Franz Tack



Ustuf. Leysen

was probably not too impressed with the notion!

The 25 other ranks from the Police Bn. group in Austria were released from further service and most tried to make their way back to northern Germany to rejoin their families in exile. The three officers, Leysen, Tack and Maris, went off to find the "Front." They journeyed first to Bad Toelz, then continued on to Lengries in the Alps, hoping to find a defensive force to put themselves at the disposal of. As chance would have it they ran into the VW command car of Brigfhr. Hugo Kraas, the com-

mander of 12.SS Pz. Div. "Hitler Jugend" and asked him what the situation was at the front. Kraas dutifully pulled out his mapboard and explained: "Here is my map," pointing to what passed for the "Front," "and here I am!", placing his finger on the same location as that of the "Front." Their question answered, the three SS officers were advised to become civilians and make their way home. That episode marked the end of the uneventful history of 1. SS Polizei Btl. "Flandern"! §

The Flemish SS Rottenfuehrer Claes Gustje was born in Antwerp on 23 February 1923. In 1941, as a student, he was one of the early Flemish volunteers for the Waffen-SS and was sent to the SS-Standarte "Nordwest" in Hamburg. He was then assigned to the SS Volunteer Legion "Flandern" and fought with it on the Leningrad Front until being wounded in the autumn of 1942. After recovering in his homeland he was sent to the SS "Totenkopf" Division and served with it in its battles around Kharkov.

When the Flemish 6. SS-Sturmbrigade "Langemarck" was established in the summer of 1943, Claes Gustje, like many other Flemings serving in different Waffen-SS units, transferred into it. In the course of his service with the "Langemarck" Brigade/Division he was again seriously wounded and spent the remainder of the war in a military hospital in Breslau. While still convalescing from his last wounding he was sent to a prison camp in "liberated" Belgium in May 1945. The authorities sentenced him to death for "collaboration"; since he had been a front soldier throughout his career with the Waffen-SS it would appear that he was simply selected at random (as were many hundreds of others) for this "treatment."

An appeal for mercy was rejected by the Prince-Regent and on 14 July 1945, SS-Rttfhr. Claes Gustje was brought before a firing squad. With courage and stoicism he rejected a blindfold and died shouting: "Long live Flanders!" as a dozen bullets entered his body. He was another victim of "Allied" misjustice whose only crime was attempting to fight to save a thousand plus years of European civilization and ending up on the losing side. Claes Gustje and the evil fate that befell him deserves to be remembered in this era when hate-filled pro-communist "Nazi" hunters still dominate events in our declining western societies!

SS-Ustuf. Hugo Willems, a Flemish student from Knokke, served with the "Wiking" Division, the SS Motorcycle Regiment "Langemarck" and SS Panzer Regiment 2 "Das Reich" and saw action at Kharkov and in Normandy. He managed to escape forced extradition to Belgium after the war.

SS-Sturmann Jos Wuyts was born in Geel, Flanders on 11 January 1925 and served with 8th Company/6th SS Sturmbrigade "Langemarck" as a motorcycle messenger. He received his basic training at the Sennheim Germanic Volunteer Training Camp in Alsace. Wuyts was listed as missing in the Zhitomir sector (probably near Dryglav), on 4 January 1944. He was most likely captured. His brother-in-law, Laurent Cools (see photo), served with



the Military Construction "Org.Todt" and was also captured by the Soviets and was later thought to have been incarcerated in the same slave labor camp as Jos Wuyts. Tragically, neither Flemish volunteer survived their communist captivity.

Numerous European members of the Germanic-SS, who were mostly civilian workers, were mobilized in April 1945 for the defense of Berlin. They were then sent to various Army and SS units to defend the city center and the Reichschancellery. An unknown number of Flemings and Dutchmen were among them.

The SS-Anti-tank Detachment 38/"Nibelungen" Division was formed from assorted Waffen-SS remnants around Weiden/Oberpfalz on 16 April 1945. The commander was Hstuf. Nestler. The 2nd Company was led by Ostuf. Jenkins and probably was derived from the "Nord" Division—either 1.Bn./SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 11 "Reinhard Heydrich" or from SS-Anti-tank Detachment 6.

PARACHUTE BATTALION

THE HISTORY OF THE SS-FALLSCHIRMJAEGER-BATAILLON 500/600

PART I

by Antonio J. Munoz, R.T.R.

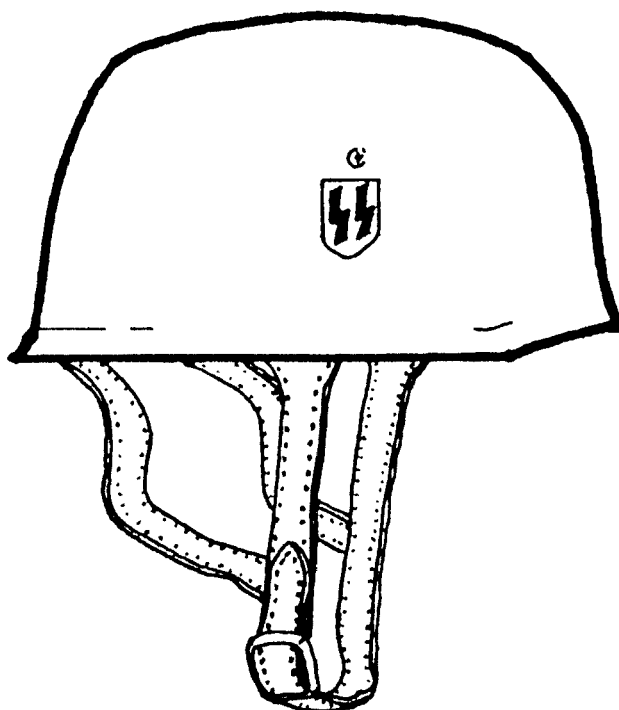
INTRODUCTION

The idea to form an SS parachute battalion was the brain-child of none other than Adolf Hitler himself, the Leader of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. The year was 1943. On all fronts, Hitler's war machine was being beaten back by the now resurgent Allied armies. Once thought to be unstoppable, Hitler's armies were now waging a defensive war of attrition which was clearly weighed against their favor. A nation of 80 million was fighting the World.

Although his Wehrmacht was slowly being destroyed on the battlefields, it continued to fight as best it could under the severe conditions in which it was constantly being placed. The Panzer divisions in particular still retained much of their old "elan," even till the end of the war. But the spirit and energy with which the main bulk of his armies had fought during the victory years of 1939-1941 was clearly gone. This was particularly true after the crippling failure of the Kursk Offensive in July 1943. The German armored force had its back broken in that battle.

Although the Germans caused heavy losses to the Red formations, particularly in armored vehicles destroyed, their own tank casualties were so heavy that Germany was never able to fully recuperate. The Red Army, however, not only replaced their losses, but in no time it was able to increase their armored strength to a staggering amount. From that point on the German Army was on the defensive in the east. Only at local focal points were tactical successes achieved. No longer would entire German armies or army groups sweep forward, unopposed over the vast Russian steppes.

Hitler, now faced with the consequences of his strategic blunders, looked for a scapegoat. His generals were the most obvious target. He degraded them, and humiliated them. His Waffen-SS formations, he would tell them, were the only units which still believed in total victory. In this he may have been partly correct (at least in 1943). Fanaticism often blinds an individual to the reality going on around him. It makes him the perfect soldier, sacrificing himself for a cause which can be already lost.



While the shadow of doubt now began to envelop most of his clear-thinking generals, Hitler began to believe that only his SS formations were capable of carrying out the struggle to final victory. This idea was confirmed in his eyes as he was constantly forced to use his SS troops as mobile "fire brigades," plugging up the torn German lines which his "defeatist" generals could not do.

On 8 September 1943, Italy was invaded on the mainland and the Italian government sued for peace. Mussolini himself was removed from power by his own Fascist Grand Council, and was placed under house arrest by Italy's King. [Benito Mussolini was the Fascist dictator of Italy from 1922 to 1943. He established a new Italian Republic in Northern Italy after his rescue and raised

Fallschirmjäger

a small army with German help. Captured by Italian Communists in 1945, he was subsequently murdered.] Hitler had foreseen this "stab in the back," and had been slowly moving German divisions into Italy since the summer of 1943. When Italy surrendered, his divisions moved to block the U.S. and British forces moving north from southern Italy, while at the same time disarming the Italian Army.

There was still a large segment in the Italian Army and populace which remained loyal to Mussolini. Hitler needed Mussolini in order for this viable Fascist force to have a rallying point. In this way, the Italians themselves would help him bolster his defenses against the Allies in Italy. For this reason, it was imperative that Mussolini be rescued from his captives before they decided that he was too dangerous to have alive.

Of the eight capable SS officers which Hitler considered for this rescue mission, he chose one Hauptsturmführer Otto Skorzeny. At six-feet, five inches, Skorzeny stood out like a sore thumb. But this giant was to prove his worth many times over. With a picked company of commando-trained, glider-borne troops, Skorzeny managed to rescue the Italian dictator in a daring rescue mission which was publicized throughout the world. The manner in which the operation was planned and executed was so daring and fantastic, that it could have been written by some Hollywood director.

Hitler's mind was now firmly made up. On the ground, only his SS formations still had the "will to win." For dangerous missions of the uppermost importance, it had been an SS officer, leading a picked company of SS troops which had carried the day in Germany's favor. Only SS troops, he reasoned, were capable of saving Germany from defeat. This is the reason why the Waffen-SS began to expand at a prodigious rate, from a strength of 350,000 men (280,000 men fighting in the field units and 70,000 men in training and reserve units) in September 1943, to peak strength of around 950,000 men in December 1944.

This idea was also the reasoning behind the eventual formation of the SS parachute battalion. No longer trusting his Luftwaffe or Wehrmacht, Hitler believed that only

SS units could bring him the victories he needed. He could have picked a ready-trained parachute battalion from the Luftwaffe, and given it a quick course in commando tactics. He could have even picked a commando-trained battalion from the Brandenburg Division (specialized commando troops which had been raised by the Abwehr [German secret service]; they had been successfully used as saboteurs and commandos during the years 1939-42; by late 1943, this group of specialized soldiers were being wasted on conventional warfare and they ended the war fighting as an armored infantry division on the central sector of the Eastern Front). Instead he chose to form a completely new unit, made up exclusively of SS men.

This delayed the employment of the unit (since it had to be formed from scratch) until the summer of 1944. By that time the military balance had swung too greatly against Germany's favor. No power on earth could now hold up the Third Reich's defeat. This SS parachute battalion, the experiment which was to help Hitler change the tide of war, only arrived in time to partly delay Germany's inevitable collapse.

The price that these men paid for their efforts was quite high. A total of about 3,500 men served in the SS parachute forces. Of these, less than 180 survived the war. There can be no better indicator than these losses to the hardships and dangers that these men underwent. Fighting for a cause which had long been lost, these men fought on with an almost complete disregard for their lives. Their personal reasons shall never be known. Most of them were volunteers in the true sense of the word. Certainly they were not stereotyped fanatics fighting for the enslavement of the world. It's much closer to the truth if we try to consider them fighting for their families and their homes. Their bravery and actions are what set them apart from the regular German forces. For this reason at least, their full story deserves to be told.

THE BATTALION IS FORMED

On Hitler's direct instructions, the SS-Fallschirmjaeger-



Bataillon 500 was formed in the autumn of 1943. The order was sent through the Führungshauptamt der Waffen-SS (command Headquarters of the Waffen-SS). The unit would be formed mainly from volunteers from the existing combat formations of the Waffen-SS. In addition, the battalion was to contain some court-martialed officers and enlisted men from the penal units of the Waffen-SS.

These poor unfortunates were not hard-core criminals, but men who had the misfortune of arriving late for duty, failing to carry out an order, and other "harmless" infractions. The real criminals, the ones who had been convicted of murder, rape, poaching, and the like, were sent to another unit - the infamous "Dirlewanger" unit. This unit was composed of the more insidious criminals who had managed to pass through the ranks of the Waffen-SS. The commander of this unit was Dr. Oskar Dirlewanger, a convicted sex offender. It was this Dirlewanger unit which was to make itself "famous" throughout the world for its actions in Warsaw in August 1944.

The number of men who comprised these penal cases numbered about one-third of the battalion's strength. Seeing as how these men had committed relatively minor infractions, it was hoped that through particularly distinguished service in the battalion, these men could be deemed rehabilitated and sent back to their former units. As the war continued, the number of these disciplinary cases in the parachute battalion decreased (through attrition and transfers). In the end, the battalion contained only volunteers in the true sense of the word. The court-martialed officers and enlisted men were given the choice of serving in jail or in the battalion (not much of a choice, but a choice at least).

Initial formation of the battalion was carried out at Chlum in the Bohemian Protectorate of Czechoslovakia. Command of the SS para battalion was given to SS-Sturm-bannführer Gillhofer. The battalion was composed of four companies, three rifle and one heavy weapons. In addition, there was a reserve training company and the battalion headquarters company. The headquarters company contained the following units: a supply company, reporting squad, signals platoon, motorcycle dispatch squad, repair platoon, parachute maintenance platoon, and Section III. Section III consisted of a lawyer and a clerical staff for keeping records on the probationary cases.

Each rifle company contained three rifle platoons, plus a signals section. Each rifle platoon had three rifle sections, a mortar section, and three machine gun sections. The heavy weapons company had four platoons. There was a heavy machine gun platoon, medium mortar platoon, anti-tank platoon, and a flamethrower platoon. The flamethrower platoon was an experiment. During the initial parachute and glider drop at Drvar, the flamethrowers were so damaged on impact (while landing), that they were rendered unusable. The anti-tank platoon contained four LG-40 75 mm guns. These weapons were specially designed to be transported by paratroopers. Other weapons in the heavy weapons company included four 81 mm mortars, and four heavy machine guns.

Training began in earnest during the fall of 1943. Shortly after training began, parachutist training was shifted to Parachute School Number 3 in Madarushka-Banja by Kraljevo (Sarajevo), just northwest of Nish (Nis) in Yugoslavia. Later, the school would be moved to Papa, Hungary. At Madarushka-Banja the battalion continued its parachute and glider training under the overall direction of Oberstleutnant Hoffman of the Luftwaffe. Hoffman and his instructors were considered the best the Luftwaffe had to offer. It was hoped that the SS paras would be trained as quickly as possible. Motorization for the bat-

talion included a full complement of 81 lorries and 19 motorcycles (the standard motor pool for a Luftwaffe parachute battalion). By now the strength of the battalion had swelled to 1,000 men. This was considerably higher than the standard Luftwaffe parachute battalion which contained a table of organization strength of 853 men.

Actual combat training now began with the battalion seeing action in Uzice, Serbia, and Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Later, the battalion saw combat in Montenegro, and spent some time in the Macedonian Mountains of Greece. It later moved back to Albania for further anti-partisan operations. Around the middle of April 1944, the battalion was moved back to Madarushka-Banja under the most strict security precautions. There the battalion was "interned." No one was allowed to leave the base or to write home. Rumors now sprang up within the ranks of the battalion, with stories ranging from the very bland to the most whimsical. It was during this time that the battalion commander was replaced. In his place, SS-Hauptsturmführer Kurt Rybka now took over. This new commander had seen extensive action on the Eastern Front.

Partisan activity against the fairly stationary German and Croatian Army troops in Yugoslavia had increased in number and boldness since the beginning of 1944. Even after numerous concerted anti-partisan drives on a large scale, the communists under Tito had managed to evade destruction. Not only did his communist forces remain in the field, but they increased in size so that by 1944, the Germans were no longer calling his formations "bandit groups," but "partisan brigades" or "divisions." This ability to remain in the field was partly attributed to the geography of the country, with its mostly high mountainous ranges.

The main reason why the communists had survived three years of warfare was the superb ability of its leader and commander, Marshal Joseph Broz Tito, to hit his enemies where they were weakest, then retreating before a sizable enemy force could be brought up against him. Retreating, then turning around and striking again at the Germans or Croatians at weak points was his favorite tactic. This served to weaken his enemy's strength, while conserving and slowly increasing his own. These hit and run tactics were not new, but the men who had learned to master them had to be eliminated.

The German Army High Command had compiled an extensive dossier on Tito. A Croatian by birth, his interest in communism had started when he was a young man working in a factory. He had served in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Thoroughly trained in guerrilla warfare, and toughened by years of militant action, Tito was the perfect candidate to lead a guerrilla campaign. If Tito could be eliminated, the entire partisan movement would be dealt such a strategic and demoralizing blow that the movement would never be able to recover from it. Some even thought that under the severe strain of one or two more German led offensives, his forces, now leaderless, would crumble and dissolve.

Tito's field strength at the end of 1943 was perhaps 90-150,000 men (depending on who is telling the story). By the summer of 1944, this strength had grown to an estimated 150-250,000 men (again, depending on whom you believe). The numbers were significant and the threat of all-out conventional warfare was now a reality. For several weeks Marshal Tito had been receiving reports from his extensive network of agents in the German and Croatian camp of an impending seventh anti-partisan operation. This time with an interest being paid by his German adversaries on not only knocking out a large part of his field army, but destroying the top partisan

army headquarters (which meant himself).

These reports indicated the increasing combat readiness of units under the V SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Korps (5th SS Volunteer Mountain Corps), and the Wehrmacht XV Gebirgs-Armee-Korps (15th Mountain Corps). Early on, intercepted ULTRA messages by British MI6 had revealed that the Germans were discussing a large-scale operation near Drvar (in Western Bosnia). This was the area under the operational control of the XV Gebirgs-Armee-Korps. Other ULTRA messages decoded insinuated (as early as 22 and 23 May) that for an important operation in the next few days, 300 men were to be accommodated at the airfields at Bihac and Banja-Luca. This decoded message was obviously of importance but at this time the British were unaware that they had intercepted a message that was of critical importance. [ULTRA was the British codeword for their operation of decoding German orders and commands. The Polish Secret Service had gotten a hold of a German Army cyphering machine in 1938. This had come about quite by accident. The secret of its inner workings had been photographed and recorded. The Germans never realized that their cypher system had been broken. After Germany invaded Poland, the British, who had been supplied with a working model of the cypher machine, began intercepting Germany's military commands and using the information to plan their own moves. It was the most guarded secret of the war, and it was the one factor which probably helped win the war more than anything else (including Hitler's strategic blunders). It is ironic that Poland, the country which was the first to suffer Hitler's military aggression, should have supplied the Allies with the key to winning the war against Germany.]

The message was surely referring to part of the SS Parachute Battalion 500. A further decoded message noted that Fliegerfuehrer Croatia (Flight Command Croatia) was to receive temporary aircraft reinforcements. The British now began to get suspicious, though as yet they had no solid idea of what was up. On 24 May a further message disclosed that an operation was scheduled to take place the following day, 25 May. On the 25th, one more decoded message dated "24 May" revealed the most alarming news of all: the German air force in Zagreb had notified an "SS parachute battalion" that "all was ready for boarding." This last intercepted message was enough definite proof that a German parachute drop was imminent. Fortunately for the Germans, the message was decoded too late to make any difference in the tactical surprise that the parachute drop achieved.

Other messages which had been decoded in time to be forwarded on to Tito's headquarters were passed on to Tito himself by Winston Churchill's son, Randolph, who was head of the British Military Mission at Tito's headquarters. These reports were handed to Tito with the warning that "an impending German bombing mission would soon be launched against Drvar."

Tito was not at all surprised. His suspicions had been aroused by low-flying German aircraft over Drvar during the previous few days. It was obvious to him that these flights had been reconnaissance missions, possibly in anticipation of a heavy bombing mission against his headquarters. Tito believed this bombing attack would herald another major German offensive. Both men now firmly believed that they had interpreted the German intentions correctly. They were to be proved correct in their assumption, but with one important exception - neither of them realized that they would also have to deal with a crack battalion of SS paratroops. This non-observance would most cost Tito his life.

In his biography, Otto Skorzeny wrote that he had

been given the mission of "neutralizing" Marshal Tito himself. Hitler had charged his premier commando with a most difficult task. It is typical of the German system of duplicity of command that Skorzeny was given the same orders as the SS Parachute Battalion 500. As it turned out, this entanglement of command was to prove negative, since Skorzeny and General Loehr (the Commanding Officer of all German forces in Southeast Europe) differed on just how Tito should be dealt with.

"Get Tito - alive or dead!" That was the challenge tossed to Skorzeny. Leaving the capital of Agram (Zagreb) in Croatia, he drove all the way to Belgrade in his Mercedes, right through partisan-infested territory! His only escort had included his driver, and two other enlisted men. The commander at Belgrade could not believe that Skorzeny had motored all the way from Zagreb. Upon arrival, Skorzeny began his search for Tito's headquarters. Reports quickly began to flow in, so much of it contradicting that he realized that Belgrade was a hot-bed of intrigue, and his search would be in vain from there. He left Belgrade for the interior of the countryside disguised as a partisan. Skorzeny took with him only a small escort so as to avoid bringing attention



The one-eyed Battalion adjutant, SS-Obersturmfuehrer Mertely, killed in action just a short time after the picture was taken, Drvar, 1944.

to himself. It took him approximately four weeks to locate Tito's headquarters. Tito was in Western Bosnia, at Drvar. His "secret" headquarters was in a cliff-side cave which overlooked the town of Drvar, and not accidentally, all the approaches by road.

Skorzeny did not know how long Tito would remain at Drvar, so he set out to work on a plan quickly. The problem of getting to Tito seemed all but impossible. He was protected by 6,000 picked men. This included his personal escort battalion of 350 hard-core communist fanatics. These men and women had been hand-picked and specially trained, and were prepared to give their lives for their leader. All of them were fervent communists whose political opposites were the Nazis. It's no small wonder that, when faced with the realization that they were defending Tito from an SS unit, they would fight like wild dogs, giving no quarter to their enemy, wounded or otherwise.

Skorzeny finally decided that the only sure way to get close to Tito was to come in disguised as partisans. As soon as he and his men would reach the mouth of the cave, he would instruct his men to rush forward, overrunning Tito's escort battalion. With the element of surprise on his side, Skorzeny hoped to destroy any resistance quickly and capture Tito. If his capture proved

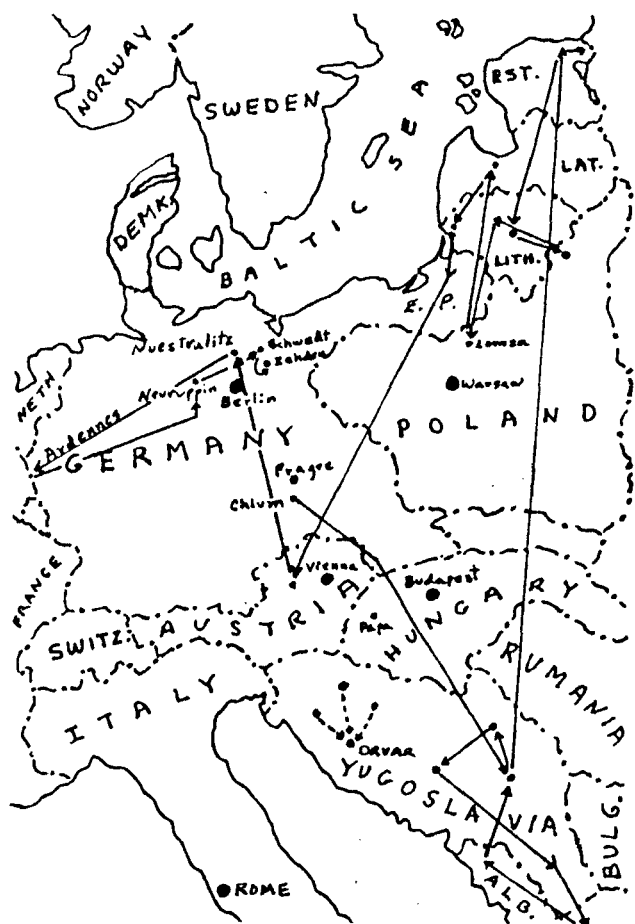
impossible, then at least he would have been close enough to do away with the partisan leader. His combat group would be composed of Waffen-SS men from his SS Commando School at Friedenthal. These men were the best Germany had to offer. Many of them were ex-Brandenburgers like Adrian von Foelkersam, his Chief-of-Staff.

He sent von Foelkersam to inform the general in command of the Drvar operation of his own idea as to how Tito should be dealt with. The general in charge of 2nd Panzer Army, General Rendulic, received von Foelkersam very icily. This extremely chilly welcome was due to the fact that Rendulic was siding with General Loehr on the problem of how to eliminate Tito. The meeting accomplished nothing and lasted very briefly. Two days later Skorzeny learned from two Yugoslav agents in the field why Rendulic had turned down his plan outright. It seems that a seventh anti-partisan offensive was planned to start soon, with the main important element being a newly-raised SS parachute battalion, which would land on top of Tito's headquarters with the aim of killing or capturing him.

Skorzeny radioed General Rendulic and informed him that his agents knew of the impending assault, and especially of its surprise factor (i.e., the paratroopers). He told Rendulic that if his agents knew of the paras, it was very likely that Tito by now had gotten wind of it, too. Since this plan of General Loehr's was now compromised, the mission would only turn into suicide for the men of the para battalion if it was attempted. Skorzeny offered to place himself and his men under Rendulic's control. This was a way for him to attempt Tito's elimination through the only possible means which offered some chance of success. In addition, it offered the vain generals their "glory," but Loehr turned the offer down. The die was now cast. All Skorzeny could do was to hope that the "sledge-hammer" tactics of the glory-hungry generals would work, where he knew that the skillful use of a surgeon's "scalpel" was needed.

As early as April 1944, Tito's partisans had re-captured a deserter who had given complete details of Tito's headquarters at Drvar. This deserter had described in detail the state of the partisan defenses at Drvar, even to describing Tito's escort battalion and its composition. He described how the battalion was split up into four companies. He even mentioned that there were four partisan tanks at Drvar, though later this turned out to be false. In the general vicinity of Drvar there were 6,000 men, all seasoned veterans of previous campaigns. An officers academy was also nearby. The deserter had also mentioned that Tito had already alerted the six partisan divisions in Western Bosnia of the impending German offensive. The deserter was forced to describe in detail what he had told the Germans. He was then given a quick court-martial and shot.

Though his presence at Drvar was now clearly compromised, Marshal Tito felt very secure that his forces could hold down the German offensive, at least long enough to withdraw his headquarters if the need ever arose. Secure in knowing that he was being well guarded, he awaited the German offensive. The only thing he wondered about was the exact date of its start. Marshal Tito had not counted on a parachute drop. Amazingly, this little bit of information had managed to escape the ears of his extensive spy network behind the German lines. This relaxed mood was also felt by Tito's Chief-of-Staff, Jovanovic, who had always sworn that a German airborne attack on Drvar was impossible. He would later eat his words and curse his overconfidence at having underestimated the Germans.



This general reference map shows the movements of the SS-Fallschirmjaeger-Bataillon 500/600 between 1943-1945.

RYBKA PREPARES

On 20 May 1944 SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Kurt Rybka was given a small outline of the role that his SS paratroopers would perform. He was told that there would not be enough gliders and planes to transport his entire battalion in one sortie. His plans had to encompass the capture or destruction of Tito and his headquarters, the communications station located at Drvar, and the elimination of the British, American, and Soviet military missions.

Rybka's battalion was to be dropped over Drvar by transport planes and gliders. Glider Towing Group 1 had been assigned to support Rybka's men. This group was divided into three squadrons. The 1st Squadron was composed of four Henschel Hs 126B's pulling 17 DFS-230F-1 gliders. The 2nd Squadron also contained 17 DFS-230F-1 gliders. Until recently, these gliders had been towed by six aging Heinkel 45c biplanes. These planes had been in service in Germany even before the Nazi Party came to power in 1933. Just before the Drvar operation, these planes were replaced with Junkers Ju 87 dive bombers. These dive bombers were now to be used to transport the gliders. The 3rd Squadron was the "heavy" transport unit in the towing group. It had five Heinkel He 111 medium bombers towing three Gotha Go 242B-1 large transport glider. Each DFS-230 glider could carry up to seven or eight men, while the Go 242 could carry a larger load of 21 men. Glider Towing Group 1 could thus transport only around 300 men.

Rybka now set about organizing his assault force. Six hundred fifty-four paratroopers would form the first assault wave. Of these, 314 would jump by parachute, while 340 would be brought in by Glider Towing Group 1. Clearly the gliders would be overloaded, but Rybka needed to get as many men as possible in the first assault wave as he could. The larger the number of paratroopers, the better were his chances of pulling off a successful operation. Rybka split up the 314 parachutists into three groups: "Rot" (Red), "Grün" (Green), and "Blau" (Blue). The paratroopers would land over the town of Drvar while Tito's mountain headquarters in a cave overlooking Drvar would be assaulted in gliders. The glider pilots were told that they would have to land as close to their targets as possible. Some gliders were also assigned to land at Drvar.

Rybka's command was augmented by a select group of men from the Luftwaffe, some signalers from the Brandenburg Division, plus some Bosnians from the "Prinz Eugen" Division acting as interpreters. The glider troops were divided into six assault units, each with a mission. The following was the order of battle and the mission each group was ordered to carry out:

"Panther" Group: 110 men to destroy Tito and his headquarters (including his 350-man guard).

"Greifer" Group: 40 men to destroy the British Military Mission.

"Sturmer" Group: 50 men to destroy the Soviet Military Mission.

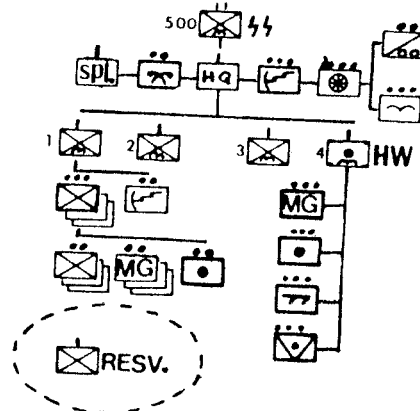
"Brecher" Group: 50 men to destroy the American Military Mission.

"Aufgänger" Group: A composite force of about 50 paratroopers plus 20 men of the "Svadil" group, intelligence officers from the Brandenburg Division, Luftwaffe signalers, and interpreters from the 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Lands-Division "Prinz Eugen." This group was to destroy

the partisan line and radio communications network, gather intelligence, and evaluate radio techniques and capture code and signal books.

"Beisser" Group: 20 men to seize an outpost radio station, after which it was to assist "Greifer" Group to attack the British Military Mission.

Rybka was in direct command of the most important combat group ("Panther" Group). If he and his men were successful in capturing or killing Tito, a swastika flag would be draped over the entrance to the cave. If the

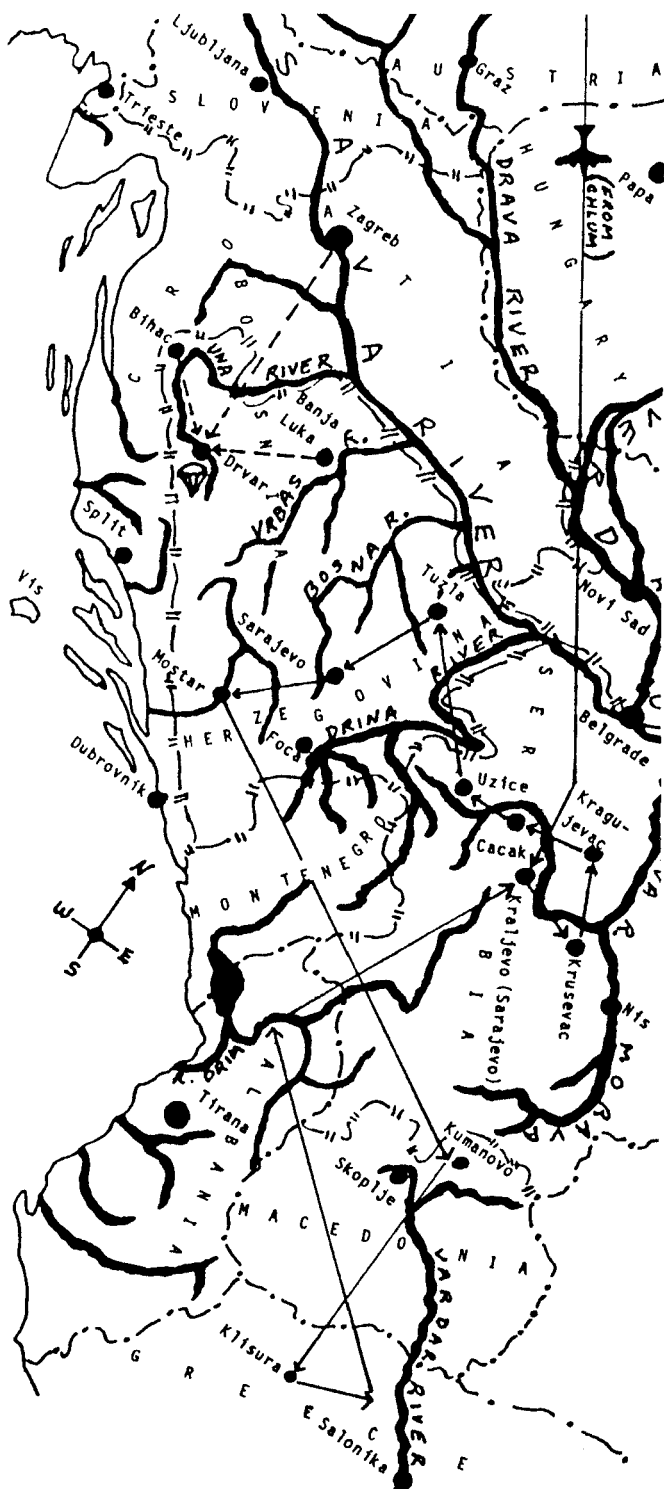


- KEY -

- PARACHUTE INFANTRY
- HEADQUARTERS
- SIGNALS
- MAINTENANCE
- MOTORCYCLE DESPATCH
- PARACHUTE MAINTENANCE
- SECTION III (LEGAL)
- SUPPLY
- MACHINE-GUN
- MORTAR
- FLAMETHROWER
- ANTI-TANK
- RESV. RESERVE
- BATTALION
- COMPANY
- PLATOON
- SECTION / SQUAD
- HEAVY WEAPONS

This schematic diagram shows the full structure of the SS-Fallschirmjaeger-Bataillon 500 on 25 May 1944. Total strength amounted to around 1,000 men.

assault ran into trouble, Rybka would order a red flare to be fired. This would signal the "Grun" and "Sturmer" Groups to disengage from their own assaults, and rally to the aid of "Panther" Group.



SS-Fallschirmjaeger-Btl. 500 in Yugoslavia, 1943-1944.

During the night of 22 May the SS-Fallschirmjaeger-Bataillon 500 (plus its attached units) were transported to the three assembly areas. Dressed in regular Wehrmacht uniforms and driven in unmarked trucks, platoon after platoon moved into their staging areas. In some cases, trains were used where it was convenient. In this way, each group was quickly and quietly moved into place.

The first wave of paratroops stationed at the Nagy-Betskerék Airdrome was composed of men from the No. 2 and No. 3 companies of the Battalion. The Battalion Headquarters Company was also billeted at Nagy-Betskerék. In addition, a platoon of the No. 4 Company was also attached. Number 1 Company, and the rest of No. 4 Company were placed at the Zagreb airfield. The Brandenburg and Bosnian contingent ("Svadi" Group) were also placed at Zagreb airfield. The second wave of paratroopers would have to await the return of the "Auntie Jus" (a nickname given by paratroopers to the Ju 52 transport plane), and the Italian Savoia-Marchetti heavy bomber/transport. These Italian transport planes were piloted by Italians who were still loyal to the "Duce" ("Leader," i.e., Mussolini).

The remainder of No. 2 Company, and the Parachute Training Company were to form the second wave of the assault. They were stationed at Banja-Luka, and were scheduled to be dropped over Drvar around noon, just five hours after the initial assault. A few gliders not used in the initial landing would accompany them, carrying supplies which would be then be needed.

At 3:30 a.m. on the morning of 25 May 1944 the men of the SS Parachute Battalion were awakened at all the airfields. Lights were turned on and yells of "Mach, dass du weiter kommst!" ("Get going!"), "Sich fertig machen!" ("Get ready!"), "Sich beeilen ihr faul bastards!" ("Hurry up, you lazy bastards!") could be heard reverberating off the wooden barracks walls holding Rybka's men. Half-asleep and completely startled, the men instinctively began getting dressed. There would be no shower today, there was just enough time to get one's gear together and run outside for formation. Many had not slept that night, expecting the day's up-coming events nervously.

By 4:30 a.m. they had all been assembled at each airfield, their equipment ready for inspection. Somehow they had managed to find time for a quick breakfast. The men had noticed that the kitchen top sergeant had been especially generous with the rations. Most probably compared it to a condemned man's last meal, but every plate was cleaned out. Everyone seemed especially hungry that morning. Now standing at attention by the runway, the men of the SS Parachute Battalion 500 received a few words of wisdom: "When you land, get rid of your harness quickly, and head for the cannisters to arm yourselves. Don't stop for any wounded, or you won't leave the field alive!" Sturmann Schultz wondered where the hell they were going. Wherever it was, it certainly seemed like it was going to be hot. Maybe they were going to hell to fight the Devil himself! Schultz would remember his thoughts that Thursday morning with bitter sarcasm. After it was all over, he would write to his sweetheart that he had done just that!

With mixed feelings of excitement and foreboding, the men of the SS Para Battalion boarded their gliders and transport aircraft. The airfields of Zagreb-Lucko, Banja-Luka, and Nagy-Betskerék were bristling with activity that misty Thursday morning. One by one, Rybka's men clambered onto the waiting aircraft. Eight "Auntie Jus" and four Italian Savoia transports swallowed up the camouflaged and armed mass of men. The planes were already revving up their engines. Now fully loaded, the group pilots awaited the "Go" signal from the ground

flight officer.

The pilots did not have to wait too long. With a heavy roar, the first wave of planes took off from the airfields. Operation "Roesselsprung" ("Knight's Move") was on! The gliders and transports were now flying at an altitude of only 3,000 meters. The men in the transports could now see the planes of the German Night Fighter Group 7, and the Croatian Luftwaffe Legion pass them, on their way to Drvar on a bombing mission. Everyone hoped that the bombardment would be sufficient to allow for a fairly unopposed landing. Of course, this was just wishful thinking. No airborne assault is ever unopposed, and the men of the SS Para Battalion would soon find themselves in the worst of it.

Taking off after the transports and gliders had already left the airfields, the German bombers and dive bombers arrived over Drvar an hour ahead of the airborne troops. The time was around 6:00 a.m. Tito had already awakened and was having a heavy breakfast of eggs, porkfat, farmers' bread, with an ample supply of goat's milk. The delicacy of the day was the British marmalade which had been given to him by Randolph Churchill. Spreading a thick slab of butter on a large piece of bread, Tito would complete the high cholesterol treat by adding an equal amount of marmalade. He had not taken two bites from this delicious dessert when he heard the high droning noise of a German air armada overhead. He had not even reached the mouth of the cave when the first of the bombs began to explode at Drvar, down below. Tito cursed the Germans for not allowing him the opportunity of finishing his breakfast. With an air of surety, he turned to Jovanovic and said: "It's started. At least now we don't have to wonder anymore about when their offensive will begin. I'm going to make those Nazi bastards pay for not letting me finish my breakfast." Jovanovic laughed out loud, adding that if anything he should thank his Fascist opponents for saving him from such a fattening meal. An hour later both men would be contemplating much simpler things, like whether they would survive that Thursday morning of 25 May 1944.



SS Paratroopers before the attack on Tito's headquarters at Drvar.



SS Paratroopers enroute to Drvar.

SS Paratroopers in action
at Drvar.

THE HELL THAT WAS DRVAR

The one hour-long bombardment forced the partisans to evacuate the town of Drvar, but no sooner had the German and Croatian planes left, that Tito's technicians and guards returned, in order to assess and repair any damage caused by the air attack. Almost immediately, at exactly 7:00 a.m., Tito's partisans in and around the surrounding area were treated to a sight they had never seen before - nor would they quickly forget. The whole sky seemed to fill up with planes, German planes. This time, however, they weren't dropping bombs, but men! A young partisan strained his eyes almost as much as his elderly companion, trying to make out what was afoot.

These "human bombs" seemed to be floating down to the ground by what looked like white bed sheets. Quickly, these bed sheets reached the ground, discharging its cargo which now looked human-size. Their descent took almost 20 seconds; the longest 20 seconds of their lives. Down below surprise and curiosity quickly turned to alarm and excitement. Now the partisans were over their initial surprise and the reality of what was occurring had hit them straight in the forehead - a paratroop attack! Rybka's men were now being fired upon.

As the first of the paratroopers hit the ground and tumbled over on their sides in typical paratroop fashion, the enemy fire began to intensify and was directed not only at the men now on the ground, but on the poor unfortunates who had the luck of being the last few out of the transport planes. These defenseless men could do nothing but hope that they could reach the relative safety of the ground below before a lucky partisan could claim him with a bullet. Once on the ground, they also had to struggle with their gear and all this under constant,

heavy enemy fire.

All of them reached the ground but many did not stir once they landed, their "bed sheets" still blowing up by the occasional gust of the wind. Everywhere "stick" leaders were running around, pistol in hand, trying desperately to gather their men together and head for the cannisters which had also been dropped. In them they would find their rifles and machine pistols. There was no time to mourn a dead comrade, not even to say a quick prayer for the dead. Each man remembered the small speech made to them before leaving the safety of the airfields: "... Don't even stop for the wounded or you won't leave the field alive!"

The paratroopers had not even finished landing when the "Go" was given for the towing group to discharge its cargo of gliders. The paratroopers had not had an easy landing, in spite of the hour-long bombardment. The gliders were now coming in and they would have it worse. For what seemed like several minutes, the SS paratroopers on the ground seemed to be running in all directions; stopping briefly in front of a small group of men here and there, then signaling some others this way or that way. Finally, they all seemed to merge together in some sort of cohesive order, then they all moved out.

Enemy fire was getting particularly heavy by now, and it seemed almost impossible that anything could be running upright over the field without getting killed. Rybka didn't have time to really see what was going on down below. His glider had already begun to make its descent and now all he could see was the very steep angle that his fragile craft had taken. The whooshing noise of the wind hitting the nose and wings of his glider made a terrible impression, scaring everyone who knew

how tricky and difficult a glider-borne landing was, especially under fire.

Rybka scanned his mind to see if there was anything he had forgotten, any detail which he had left out. He could think of none, all was as he had planned it. He wondered if his preparations and his men would be enough to overcome the odds. He felt his heart pumping faster, he would soon find out. He was scared of the future, of what might happen to his men if he made a critical mistake. He felt extremely thirsty. The effects of the "pep pills" we were given, he thought to himself. Wonderful drugs which quicken your reflexes, but my God did they ever give one a thirst!

The men inside the gliders now instinctively gripped the handle bars and braced themselves for the landing. From his glider, Sturmmann Fritz Hess saw one of the gliders going down in too steep an angle, almost 90°. From the ground, the partisans and paratroopers alike could see the glider coming down, now out of control. The SS men watched helplessly as their comrades were leading to their deaths. Many turned their attention and anger on the enemy in front of them in order to avoid watching the crash. Like madmen, they raced forward towards the town of Drvar, almost bewildered at the energy which they possessed. The "pep pills" were certainly working, but so was their rage. It was later learned that the glider which crashed had contained the leader of "Greifer" Group and his headquarters.

Rybka's glider now seemed to be almost on top of the ground. He knew that at any moment his craft could disintegrate into a million pieces, but his mind kept racing back to what awaited them once they landed. He closed his eyes and arched his body back, almost immediately he felt the glider now racing on the ground, and bouncing roughly up and down, out of control. He opened his eyes and saw that the craft had been badly shaken and torn, but he and his men were still alive. For how long would his luck last, he wondered.

The men of the "Daufganger" Group landed so close to Drvar that it took them no time to reach the town and blow up the radio station. Ten SS paras and the "Svadil" Group which landed with them attacked the telephone building but became immediately embroiled in a fire-fight. A heavy enfilade of rifle and machine gun fire now began to cover the area around the telephone exchange. In spite of this, the SS paras surged forward, oblivious to the enemy fire and their comrades who seemed to be falling left and right. Three and a half years of warfare in Yugoslavia had taught the Germans that the partisans gave no quarter. In a war such as this, it was better to take one's life rather than fall into the hands of the enemy.

The partisans fought on like cornered animals. With every conceivable weapon they resisted, from room to room. Special armor-piercing shells were fired from a lower level of the building in order to kill the partisans waiting in the upper floor. Two SS paras entered a back room, shooting from the hip. From the corner of the room a partisan officer fell back against the wall riddled by Schmeisser fire. Before they knew it, both men were in turn shot in the neck and face by a female telephone operator who had hidden underneath a desk. She in turn was sent to hell by the blast of a grenade. In this type of fighting revenge was not only a pleasure, but a necessity.

Where barricades prevented the paras from entering a room, grenades were thrown at the doors, which blew up into a thousand pieces. Two more grenades would finish off the dazed partisans still in the room. Hand-to-hand fighting was the worst. Killing a man was not even



SS Paratrooper at Drvar.

given a second thought, but bayoneting a woman was only overcome by the thought that given the opportunity, that piece of feminine work was capable of the worst acts of cruelty on a wounded or captured comrade.

The few partisans who had no stomach for this fierce fighting attempted to escape via the windows, but were picked off by German snipers waiting outside. Half a dozen satchel charges were enough to send the building flying sky high. Moving through the town, the SS paras were subjected to sniper fire from every crevice and window. Often the snipers were old men and women who would pick off the lead man of the squad, then run like hell before the fury of the men could exact its vengeance.

Two Allied correspondents, Stojan Pribicevic of the American press, and a Mr. Talbot of the British press were captured by Rybka's men. Pribicevic would later escape his captors to join the partisans. After what seemed like an eternity, the town was considered secured. All eyes now turned on the hills overlooking Drvar, and thoughts were concentrated on how well the attack on Tito's headquarters was going.

The gliders of "Panther" Group landed as close as possible to Tito's headquarters. Almost immediately after landing they were fired upon by Tito's escort battalion. In spite of this, several attempts were made to rush



the mouth of the cave holding Marshal Tito, but each time several more paras would fall. For every inch of ground gained, the men of the parachute battalion had to pay with their blood. Every bush, every crater held a well-concealed machine gun nest. Finally, around 8:00 a.m., Hauptsturmfuehrer Rybka ordered a red flare fired - the signal to rally around the headquarters (which was located by some gliders at the entrance to Drvar). The reinforcements arrived in the form of the "Greifer," "Sturmer," and "Brecher" Groups. Personally led by Rybka, these reinforcements now began to force-march their way up to Tito's headquarters on the hill high above Drvar. Upon reaching the command post of "Panther" Group, its commanding officer communicated the situation to Rybka. His men had met stiff resistance almost immediately after landing. He himself had made several attempts to rush the mouth of the cave, but the fire coming from the enemy was too severe.

The battlefield was littered with the dead and dying men from both sides. Clearly the fighting had not continued to be very fierce. The whole hill was one interlocking field of machine gun and mortar fire which no one group no matter how motivated could penetrate. Less than 110 men (for many had died on landing while trying to clear the gliders) had attempted to attack an excellently defended position held by 350 fanatical communists. The odds had been severely stacked against the paratroopers favor from the start. The wondrous thing was that in spite of all this adversity, they had surged forward, almost into certain death, in complete disregard of their lives and their situation, the SS paras attacked. These were truly the specialized soldiers which Hitler had wanted, for no other type of man would have tried what they were now attempting to do.

Rybka now ordered the attack continued. With his new strength he sought to finally overcome the odds. His men moved up the hill once again, using fire and movement as the only means to reach the cave. Again precious fighters began to fall. Using as few rounds of ammo as possible (for they were now short of ammunition), Rybka's men got closer and closer to the mouth of the cave. Inside, Tito wondered just who was the madman leading these paras to certain death. Tito could only think that whoever was in control of the attack had to be insane. How else could he explain the ardor and energy with which these men moved forward, into the jaws of death.

Only the timely arrival of over 100 men from the Partisan Officer's Academy saved Tito from meeting first-hand Rybka and his paratroopers. These cadets had been force-marched from the village of Sipoulyani on the Unac River, just a short distance from Drvar. Rybka's force now had to be divided in two in order to deal with this new

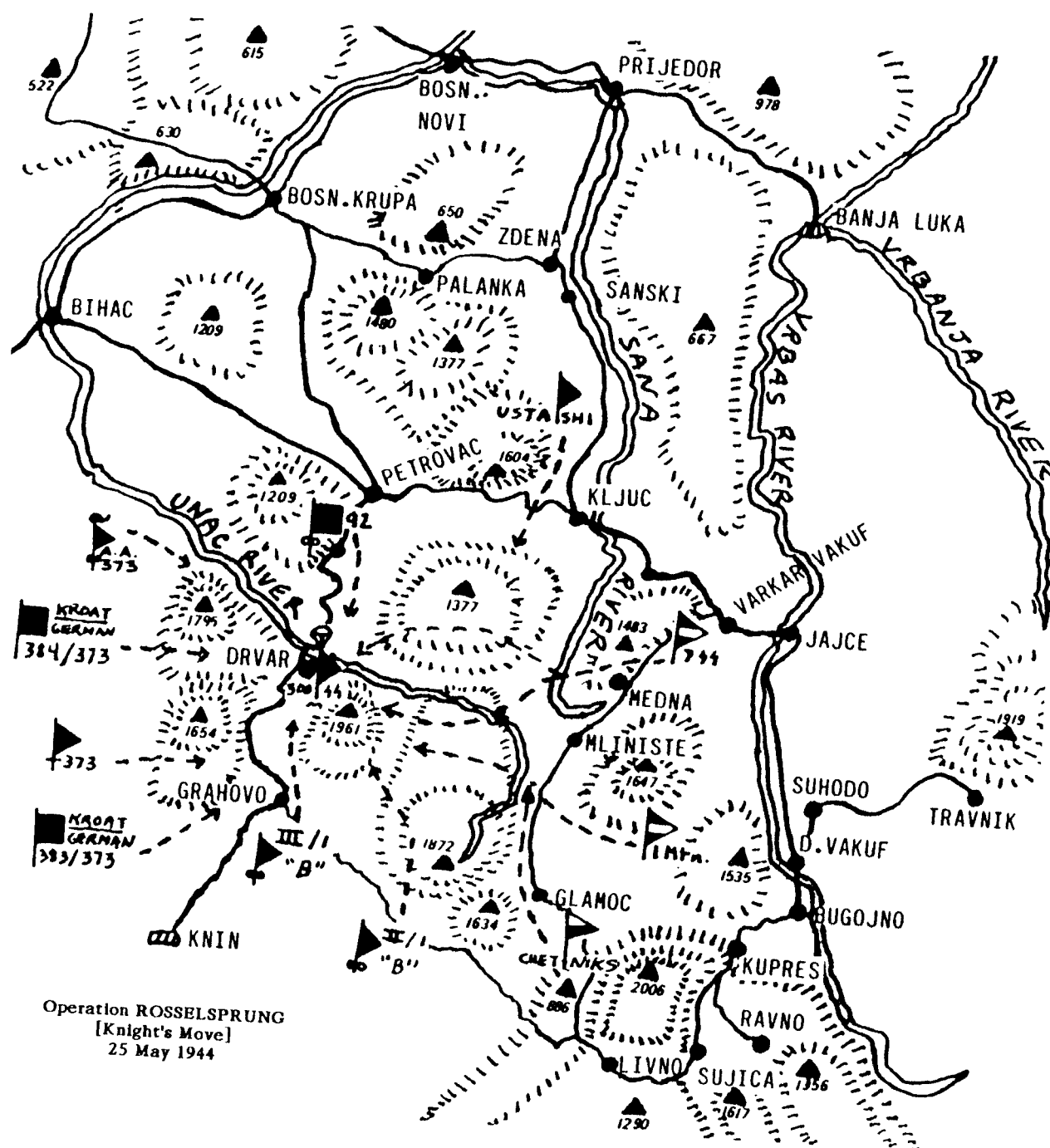
A special weapon of the SS Paratroops: a portable light infantry cannon.

partisan threat which attacked his flank as soon as they were within rifle range. This company of officer cadets had received orders from Jovanovic, Tito's Chief of Staff, himself: "If you fail and the Germans capture Tito, then it will mean the end of our battle for freedom. Are you all clear on what this means? Tito and the Party must continue to live! We can deal with a defeat, but Tito must live!" With one concerted yell came back the reply: "Tito must live!" and off they went, ready to prove to anyone that they were willing to die for their communist leader.

Rybka had thought of air support but now it was out of the question since his men were too close to the enemy. The German pilots could not be sure of who they would be strafing - that's how close they were. By 10:00 a.m. Rybka feared that he would never be able to get to Tito. It was about this time that fate again favored the partisans with the arrival of an entire partisan brigade from the 6th (Lika) Partisan Division. The brigade was immediately committed west of Drvar, turning Rybka's problem from bad to serious. Regrettably, and with much bitterness and reluctance, Rybka called off the assault. To the paratroopers who had fought their way so close to the cave, it was an order no one understood or wanted to follow. Slowly, the men began their withdrawal. Using fire and movement, they withdrew in order, leaving behind many a comrade. The wounded were relieved of their ammunition, and where possible, taken to the rear. The ones who were too exposed to be retrieved were left on the field. There was nothing Rybka's men could do except hope that these wounded men would take their own lives and thus spare themselves the horrible alternative that awaited them if captured by the partisans.

Late in the morning Marshal Tito and Edvard Kardelj (the partisan leader of Slovenia) had managed to find a hole in the ceiling of the cave. They escaped through the hole like rats trying to escape a mouse trap. Once on top of the cave, they found Aleksandar Rankovic-Marko (the partisan leader of Serbia) and a score of partisans. With their aide, Tito managed to escape to a waiting train which had been kept in readiness for just such an occasion. Meanwhile, the partisan brigade from the 6th (Lika) Division began to encircle Rybka's men at Drvar.

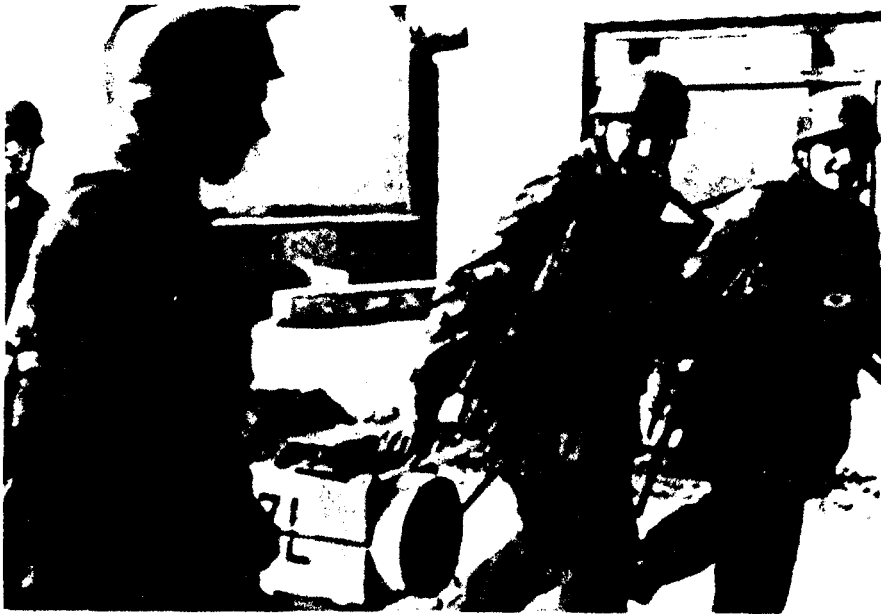
With this new threat, and with partisan bands arriving every minute with ever-increasing numbers, Rybka was faced with the question of whether to attempt another assault as soon as his reinforcements arrived (the second wave of paratroops), or form a defense. Rybka knew



KEY

A.A. 373 - Recon battalion of the 373rd Croat/German Infantry Division.
 384/373 - 384th Infantry Regiment, 373rd Croat/German Infantry Division.
 373 - 373rd Anti-tank Battalion, 373rd Croat/German Infantry Division.
 83/373 - 383rd Infantry Regiment, 373rd Croat/German Infantry Division.
 I/1 "B" - III Battalion, Brandenburg Regiment 1.
 /1 "B" - II Battalion, Brandenburg Regiment 1.
 2 - 92nd Imperial Motorized Infantry Regiment.
 SS - 7th SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen."

I Mtn. - 1st Gebirgs (Mountain) Division (German).
 USTASHI - 200-300 men of the Ustashi Guard (Croat Republic).
 CHETNIKS - 500 Serbian guerrillas. These men were loyal to the exiled King of Yugoslavia. The Chetniks hated, above all, Croatians. Their next enemies were the Tito communists, and, coming in last place for a tie were the Germans and Italians. The Chetniks fought their enemies in that order, choosing to side with one group at a time, in order to deal another enemy a blow.
 500-SS - SS-Fallschirmjaeger-Bataillon 500.



Supplies being brought up to the battle area near Tito's headquarters.

that quite possibly Tito was already gone from the area, and one more assault on the cave would probably endanger the existence of his battalion. If their backs were left exposed for an assault on the cave again, the partisans would surely catch his men out in the open. With the enemy in such numbers, his small and dwindling force would be cut to pieces. This decision was correct. Rybka attempted to capture Tito up until the very last moment; but now that the opportunity was gone, his only concern was for the welfare of his men. A true leader of men, this Rybka. Even more so since he was now personally leading the assault.

Hauptsturmfuehrer Obermeier's group of 220 men parachuted on Drvar at 11:50 a.m. About this time Rybka's men were being reformed and redistributed with the last of the ammunition. Obermeier's men landed to an even heavier enfilade of rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire. A good number of these men never left the field, but the ones who made it to the town were a welcome sight. Inspired by this new surge in strength, Rybka took stock of his situation and once again contemplated another assault on the cave. He figured he had just enough men to leave a small defensive force at Drvar, while the bulk of his men would attack the cave one more time. Failure was a bitter pill to swallow. Rybka would try one more time. This time, in spite of all the bullets and mortars that the partisans lobbed at them, the paras advanced on the cave. Stiff resistance was still being felt by Rybka's men. Surely this was proof that Tito was still in the cave! But what the Germans did not know is that the big rooster had flown the chicken coop, and had failed to tell his fanatical followers that he was gone. They were sacrificing themselves for nothing.

Fate again turned Rybka's men as the 1st Battalion of the crack 1st Partisan Brigade relieved the now greatly reduced Escort Battalion and Officer Candidates. Rybka now knew for sure that reaching the cave and taking Tito, if he were still there, was out of the question. A hand grenade had also wounded him. Before he lost con-

sciousness he ordered his men to disengage so as to avoid having his command outflanked and destroyed piecemeal.

The order was now sent out: "Rally in the town cemetery." The message was passed on from platoon to platoon. Slowly, in an orderly fashion, the SS paras began their withdrawal to the Drvar Cemetery which was located at the foot of a hill overlooking the town. It wasn't until 10:00 p.m. that the main body of the battalion reached the cemetery. Some paras were already digging trenches and foxholes. Many joked that they were digging their own graves, but their words were deceiving. They were desperate and determined men. Everyone knew what awaited them if they fell into the hands of the partisans. Men buddied up and swore to take each other's lives with their last bullets rather than get captured alive. Now feeling cornered, they would fight like wild dogs, and with more vigor than before; and all this after a tiring and grueling day-long fight. Their hopes rested on the advance the relief groups of the "Prinz Eugen" and 373rd Division were making.

The order had come down straight from Tito himself: "All partisan units will now disengage from the fighting at Drvar starting immediately. Strong enemy units are expected there within the next 24 hours." In spite of this direct order, Tito's field commanders, now knowing that Tito was safe, decided to disobey his order to withdraw in order to annihilate the SS parachute battalion, and teach the Germans a lesson. Their "lesson" was nothing but pure revenge which they now wanted to exact from Rybka's men for putting up such a brave attack against such superior odds. The partisans now knew what these men were capable of, and they did not want a repetition of Thursday's events. They would make sure that this SS battalion would not survive to stalk them again.

As fate would have it, one SS platoon which was defending a farm on the outskirts of town failed to get the order to withdraw. Now the partisans vented their anger on this isolated group of paras. Even the partisan officer cadets joined in on the fun. With each new successive assault on the farm, more and more casualties were incurred by the paras, who would repulse each attack. It was around 11:30 p.m. when the last remaining NCO in the farm took count. Everyone was wounded, himself



included. Ammunition was now almost exhausted. He knew they did not have much time left. The end came just before midnight in a fierce room-to-room fire-fight where the bayonet and grenade ruled. Wild-eyed with sadistic joy, these "partisans," the "freedom fighters" the Western world was hearing so much about, went about systematically decapitating and dismembering the dead and wounded paras. Cutting off their sexual organs and extremities in a savage festival of animal butchery.

Back in the cemetery, Rybka's remaining 260 men clung on desperately. The night was filled with the shattering sound of mortars exploding, followed by the screams of the wounded and dying. Untersturmfuehrer Dr. Herrmann was doing all he could for the wounded, but morphine had been exhausted. The wounded cried and whimpered all night, another sound which weighed heavily on the tensions of the remaining paras.

The battle turned into a see-saw melee of bitter attacks and counterattacks. One member of the battalion described it in this way:

"I was dug in under a cross in the cemetery. Platoon headquarters was in a tomb from which we had taken off the stone cover and turfed out the coffins. I was never so frightened in my life as I was that night. We had an outer perimeter of positions and a small inner perimeter. After every one of the bandit attacks was driven off, those in the outer perimeter were relieved by a man from the inner line.

"That way the burden was not too hard to carry. It was 1:30 a.m. in the morning. I was cold. I was sleepy

SS Paratroopers fighting in the town of Drvar.

and the only water was a trickle from a sort of standpipe inside the cemetery, near the chapel. At intervals, Very lights would be fired to see if the bandits were forming up for a new assault. One light had just gone out. Suddenly, without warning the Reds were climbing over the wall.

"A whole mass of our flares burst - all of them white - and in the glare the bandits were silhouetted. We shot them down but they seemed to be immune to rifle fire and kept on coming. Then some of them from behind cover of the wall threw hand grenades and got some light mortars into action.

"In that particular attack the Reds actually got inside the cemetery and held a small bridgehead. Those partisans in the bridgehead and those outside the wall tried to knock it down in order to form a corridor through which to ferry forward reinforcements of men and weapons. One of our platoons went into a counterattack and wiped out the Reds who had crossed the wall. It was a frightening night."

The last partisan assault came just before dawn. In a concerted attack, the enemy attacked the cemetery from two sides, hoping to break through from one end or the other. The SS paras repelled this last attack with only the greatest of difficulty. The hope that enough time had elapsed and the relief groups were probably very close to arriving, inspired the SS paratroopers to fight on as stubbornly as they had done before. This last assault was broken up just like all the others.

Shortly after dawn Rybka and his men heard firing from what seemed to be "Hitler's Sagen" ("Hitler's Saws" - a term used to denote the particular sound of the German MG-42 heavy machine gun). As the partisans were also supplied with this excellent weapon, Rybka's men did not take heart, but braced themselves for another partisan attack. Then, in the distance, two then three German Schwimmwagens appeared. An agitated and tired member of the battalion jumped up and shouted, sensing that safety was just 1500 feet away from him: "Das Entsetzungsgruppe Kommend!" (The relief group is coming!). As the German recon vehicles got within shouting distance, the SS paras were greeted with soothing words they would not soon forget: "Wir sind von der Prinz Eugen, wir holen euch raus!" (We are from the Prinz Eugen, we've rushed to get you!).

Victorious shouts and yells erupted within the ranks of the 200 or so survivors of the SS-Fallschirmjaeger-Bataillon 500. The whole cemetery of Drvar seemed to come alive. As more units of the 13th Regiment of the "Prinz Eugen" Division appeared, the men left their positions and began to mingle with their saviors. Pats on the back and hugs were followed by offers of cigarettes.

The attack on Drvar had been a failure from the point of view of the mission's objective. The attack had not been a complete failure, however, for in early June Tito and his headquarters took off from an airfield in the Bosnian mountains near the town of Kupres in an American Dakota flown by a Soviet pilot. Several days later Tito was transferred to a British destroyer which sailed for the Italian port of Bardì. From there he and his staff were transported to the Yugoslav island of Vis.

His command was disrupted for several months, and his field commanders had to make constant trips to the now well-defended island for conferences. It wasn't until late in the fall of 1944 that Marshal Tito was able to have his headquarters running efficiently again. Yes, the mission had been a technical failure, yet, the men of the Battalion were not merely celebrating their relief. They considered themselves victors. The sheer fact that they had survived against all odds was enough of a victory for the men of the SS parachute battalion. Anyone who went through the hell that was Drvar deserved all the praise in the world. For the men of the SS para battalion, it was merely the start of similar things to come. §

COMMANDERS

Autumn 1943 - April 1944

SS-Sturmabfuhrer Gillhofer

April 1944 - 25 May 1944

SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Kurt Rybka

end of May 1944 - 25 June 1944

SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Siegfried Millus
(unofficially)

25 June 1944 - December 1944

SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Siegfried Millus
(officially)

January 1945 - May 1945

SS-Sturmabfuhrer Siegfried Millus

BATTALION COMPANY COMMANDERS January 1945

SS-Obersturmfuehrer Leifheit, 1st Company
SS-Obersturmfuehrer Scheu, 2nd Company

SS-Obersturmfuehrer Markus, 3rd Company
SS-Obersturmfuehrer Droste, 4th Company

PARTIAL LIST OF OFFICERS AND NCO'S

Commanding Officer

SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Kurt Rybka
(wounded 25 May 1944)

Second in Command

SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Obermeyer
(killed in action 25 May 1944)

Battalion Adjutant

SS-Obersturmfuehrer Mertely
(wounded 25 May 1944)

Battalion Doctors

SS-Obersturmfuehrer Dr. Hermann
SS-Obersturmfuehrer Dr. Helmersen

1st Company Commander

SS-Obersturmfuehrer Leifheit

1st Company Staff Sergeant

SS-Hauptscharfuhrer Blum de Lorm

1st Company Officers

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Vogelsang

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Brorup

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Drager

1st Company NCOs

SS-Oberscharfuhrer Aussenthal

4th Company Sergeant Major

SS-Oberscharfuhrer Pichler

Other Officers in the Battalion

[first four may possibly have been 2nd Company officers]

SS-Obersturmfuehrer Bertrai

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Grimmig

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Hollenders

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Scheu

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Richter

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Sauder

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Wabersich

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Konzac

SS-Untersturmfuehrer Haselwanter

Other NCOs in the Battalion

SS-Unterscharfuhrer Fischer

SS-Hauptscharfuhrer Muller

SS-FALLSCHIRMJAEGER-BATAILLON 500 25 May 1944

Battalion Strength Table

Battalion Headquarters	(267 men)
Signals Platoon	42 men
Headquarters Company	66 men
HQ Motor Transport Platoon	30 men
Section III (Legal)	7 men
Parachute Maintenance Platoon	31 men
Supply Company	91 men
Heavy Weapons Company	(200 men)
Company Headquarters	33 men
Signals Section	11 men
Flamethrower Platoon	28 men
81 mm Mortar Platoon	34 men
Heavy Machine Gun Platoon	38 men
Light 75 mm AT Platoon	56 men



Parade of Waffen-SS Brigade troops before RF-SS Himmler.

attack on Tossno the railroad line received a direct hit but other than that there was no particular damage. The brigade losses for the day included nine men killed and five others wounded.

SS Cav. Bde.: SS Cav. Rgt. 1 occupied Cholmjetzy and deployed scouting parties to the north of Jetkino. The enemy was in evidence and an action to clear the area was quickly undertaken. Following this, recce troops advanced to Barssuki and Semtzy.

The commanding general of the 253rd Inf. Div., Lt.Gen. Schellert, issued a special commendation to the SS Cav. Rgt. 1, thanking its soldiers for their successful efforts to protect the flanks and the rear of the 253rd Division. A special tribute was paid to SS-Standartenoberjunker Bossfield for his role in the destruction of key enemy bunkers.

7 November: 1st SS Bde.: A sharp clash took place with strong partisan groups in the direction of Novgorod; 10 terrorists were killed in battle and three field pieces, four light machine guns and artillery ammo in quantity, were taken.

2nd SS Bde.: No major change in operations. The partisan hunting commandos of the Escort Bn. returned having disposed of six of the enemy, while SS Flak Det. "Ost" was engaged in shelling Kolpinski.

SS Cav. Bde.: SS Cav. Rgt. 1 liberated the area around Cholmjetzy-Jetkino; operating to a distance of 15 km to the north and south of the advance march route to Jetkino. SS Cav. Rgt. 2 used strong, battle-ready scouting parties to clear the territory around Lake Nagobje in the direction of Cholm and Klimsaturapog-Potschen. Other troops from the brigade recce detachment were in action to the south and north of Bibjerevo and to the north of Jetkino.

8 November: 1st SS Bde.: Recce missions were carried out to the north of Putivl and the east of Grusskoje with an advance through the Sjubitoff-Rsenso Forest, without encountering the foe. During mop-up actions around Gaivoron and Krolevez, 44 partisans and five Asiatics were apprehended and 14 regular Red soldiers were captured.

2nd SS Bde.: SS-IR 4 sent two search-hunt commandos out towards Ljenanpolole and on a recon towards Lovda. Five partisans were surprised and killed.

SS Cav. Bde.: "Cleansing" and scouting operations continued. The Bicycle Recce Det. in conjunction with the Eng. Co. destroyed 26 bunkers that had been used as quarters by partisans. During the advance a portion of SS Cav. Rgt. 1 skirmished with terrorists along the Cholmjetzy-Jetkino march route.

9 November: 1st SS Bde.: The fuel dump at the Krovelez railroad station was attacked by partisans with rifles and machine guns during the night of 8/9 November, but no substantial damage was done. Twenty-six partisans were captured along the Chmeloja-Chikovka road through increased surveillance (or road control) of the civilian traffic. A mop-up action at Baturin brought in a rich haul including 53 partisans, 29 Communist Party functionaries, two heavy machine guns, four light machine guns, 108 rifles, one light mortar and 20 hunting weapons.

2nd SS Bde.: [It should be noted that SS-IR 14 that had been assigned to this brigade did not actually serve with it.] A search commando was sent off to the north of Schapki. Flak Det. "Ost" zeroed in on a Russian loud-speaker wagon that had been encouraging German troops to desert near Kolpinskaja-Kolonja, and destroyed it with a direct hit, much to the delight of German onlookers!

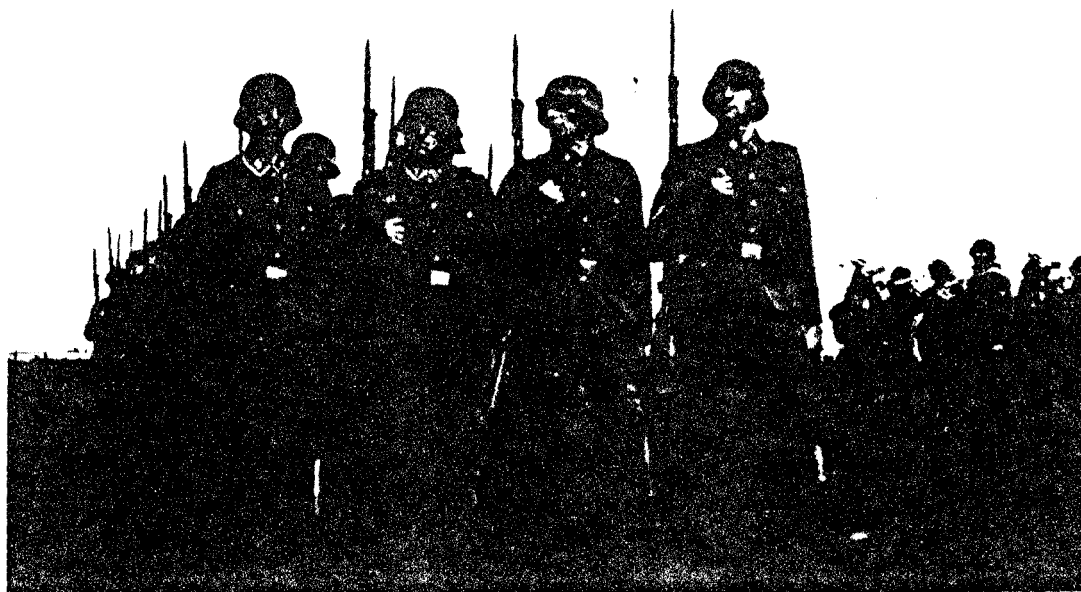
SS Cav. Bde.: SS Cav. Rgt. 1 was in Szjoly, SS Cav. Rgt. 2 was in Klimjatina with a segment in Rog-Potschen to the east of there. The Bicycle Recce Det. was in Bibjerevo. Scout troop operations were carried out all along the Toropez-Rzhev road in the area around Bibjerevo, Butaki-East, and Dubno; 24 enemy bunkers were destroyed and mines and road blocks were removed in the process. One scouting party destroyed a partisan group in a brief firefight and 44 of the terrorists were captured along with six rifles and 15 hand grenades.

10 November: 1st SS Bde.: Partisan groups were reported operating around Voronesh to a point some 10 km SE of Kampol. The SS troops guarding the Voronesh-Shostka railroad bridge came under attack by bandits with automatic weapons but the assault was broken off after a vigorous firefight. Guard posts at the POW camp south of Skurovka were assailed by automatic weapons fire from the "outside" and by pistol fire from the inside. A search for the culprits was unsuccessful, but the commandant of the facility decided that 25 prisoners should be shot as an example to hopefully prevent future sabotage on this scale. Elsewhere scouts located two chests of rifle ammo and two chests of explosives and killed four more of the enemy and captured 35.

2nd SS Bde.: SS-IR 4 sent out partisan hunting commandos towards Markajevskaja, Vjevolopova, and Lodva. The Escort Bn. "RF-SS" began preparing for a large anti-partisan undertaking in the area around Radovinnikova-Gorka. The 6./SS-IR 4 managed to eliminate a seven-man enemy scouting party in the direction of Maluska.

SS Cav. Bde.: The brigade protected the road from Toropez to Rzhev to Jetkino. A partisan strongpoint in the Berjosav Valley was destroyed during recce and mop-up actions with 519 partisans and accompanying civilians being taken into custody.

11 November: 1st SS Bde.: In the night of 10/11 November there was a serious, large-scale breakout attempt made at the Skurovo POW Camp. The guards were forced to



SS Brigade troops on parade march.

that lasted until nightfall. The detachment also readied anti-tank defenses before the NW portion of Krasny-Bor.

SS-IR 4 reported four partisans killed and a partisan camp near the Ostvogo Monastery burned down.

From 0930 hrs. on the communists were attacking the entire sector of 122nd Div. with the aid of strong artillery and air support. All attacks were repulsed and three enemy tanks (T-52s) were destroyed and another heavily damaged. The positions of the SS Flak Det. "Ost" near Ishova were attacked by enemy bombers, but no damage was reported.

The SS Cav. Bde. had nothing special to report.

4 November: 1st SS Bde.: A number of partisans were apprehended around Siressa, to the south of Jampol and near Kutovitshi. Terrorists attempted to mine the road and blow-up bridges at Putisol. [Their success or lack of it was not recorded.] To the south of Schuvavka a partisan band led by a major and a commissar was reported in operation. During mopping-up duties near Vogeoff a terrorist band was encountered and for the most part destroyed. In this brisk battle 94 partisans were killed and a small arsenal of weaponry was captured as follows: 21 8.5 cm artillery pieces, six cases containing 2,000 flares, 44 hand grenades plus rifle and artillery ammunition. The field pieces had to be destroyed since they could not be easily transported out of the area.

2nd SS Bde.: Two platoons from I./SS-IR 4 were assigned to the Army Inf. Rgts. 410 and 411 of 122nd Div. and were placed into the frontlines as defensive reinforcements. The II. and III./SS-IR 4 continued their previous assignments including partisan hunting. Five terrorists were found and killed in the field.

The Flak Co. of the Escort Bn. "RF-SS" shot down an enemy plane (Rata model) over Tossno and scored several hits on another. At Krasny-Bor, SS-Flak Det. "Ost" was even more successful, shooting down four Russian aircraft before turning its "88" guns on a Soviet ground assault and helping to bring that to an abrupt halt. Brigade casualties were one killed and one wounded for the day.

SS Cav. Bde.: The 2nd SS Cav. Rgt. liberated the territory around Knieshestjevo, 36 km to the NW of Toropez and then sent out scouting parties.

5 November: 1st SS Bde.: Scout troops turned up evidence of extensive partisan activity and mining around Putivi.

Dispersed Red Army troops and terrorists were reported to the south of Vogett. Litvinovitsch was cleansed of the partisan menace. SS troops carried out security duties for the Novgorod - Severssk - Rimidon railroad line to the brigade's sector boundary. The areas around Novgorod-Sev and the gunpowder factory at Libosbkey were also under brigade protection. In the course of operations 25 partisans were killed and the following armaments captured: three artillery pieces, four light machine guns, two machine-pistols, 27 carbines, 33 hunting guns and quantities of artillery ammunition.

2nd SS Bde.: SS-IR 4 continued on with its previous assignments. Partisan hunting commandos from the Escort Bn. were in operation around Blybotschkia and Kamjenka. Flak gunners from the battalion also drove off four fighter-bomber attacks.

SS Flak Det. "Ost" repelled two overflights and destroyed an anti-tank gun position. There was extensive enemy air activity and one SS man was killed and another three wounded as a result. SS-IR 4's "Jaeger" commandos brought in 31 prisoners.

SS Cav. Bde.: The 1st SS Cav. Rgt. in Okovtsy secured the brigade's left flank while the 2nd SS Cav. Rgt. was situated in Kajesheszielo and the Bicycle Recce Det. was deployed on the Toropez-Jetkino road. Local terrain clearing operations were conducted by combat-strength scouting parties and 92 partisans were captured.

6 November: On the orders of the Reichsfuehrer-SS, the SS Vol. Legion "Flandern" was to be attached to the 2nd SS Inf. Bde., and was to commence on its march from Ayrs, East Prussia to Tossno at 0700 hrs. on 10 November.

1st SS Bde.: The brigade relinquished its security sector to Army troops and undertook a protective reconnaissance assignment to the area including Grusokoje - Rakilinoje - Koljadicka - Litvinovitschi. The enemy was not spotted at all. Some mopping-up was done around Putivi and several places were liberated to the SE of Grem-Jatheka. Some partisans were captured, and 32 were killed. Twelve prisoners who attempted to flee were shot and killed, and 20 rifles were reported captured.

2nd SS Bde.: SS-IR 4 reported shooting four partisans and capturing an enemy pilot with the rank of captain.

SS Flak Det. "Ost" fought off nine enemy air raids and downed four planes over Krasny-Bor. During a bomber



Waffen-SS troops on an anti-partisan operation. Steel helmets could not be worn as they interfered with hearing.

a land mine was killed. Two hundred seventy-seven hand grenades and 18,000 rounds of infantry ammo were secured. SS Cav. Rgt. 2 set out on a march to Chohnu, 20 km to the northwest of Toropez.

1 November: The 1st SS Bde. remained in the same area, but SS-IR 8 had its battalions scattered as follows: I. Bn. in Putivel, II. Bn. in Krovolez and III. Bn. in Smeloje. A portion of SS-IR 10 had reached Schostka. The I./SS-IR 10 was in Voronesh, II./SS-IR 10 was on the march to Jampol and III./SS-IR 10 was heading for Novgorod-Sevsk.

The brigade was making preparations for a major security operation, but forward movement was exceedingly difficult and vehicle losses due to breakdowns were high. Nonetheless, six soldiers, ten communist officials and 33 partisans (including three riflemen) were captured along with three heavy machine guns, one light machine gun, 35 rifles, 17 hunting guns and 73 chests of rifle ammo.

At 2nd SS Bde., SS-IR 4 remained extremely active. Its Staff and II. and III. Bns. guarded the rail lines, fought partisans and provided air protection for Uljanovka. All in the sector of I. Corps. Search commandos from the Escort Bn. "RF-SS" were still in action and one further one was dispatched towards Nurma.

An air attack on Tossno was battled off by the Flak Battery of the Escort Bn. and about ten rounds scored hits on the enemy bombers. SS Flak Det. "Ost" fought it out with a Soviet battery in southern Kolpinos and observers confirmed the effectiveness of the SS firing. Three enemy planes were driven off after each received a direct hit. Still the enemy air force remained very active and the Tossno railroad station was bombed. There was some damage to the tracks but no lives were lost.

The SS Cav. Bde. reported that its 2nd Rgt. had reached the area around Lake Nagobje, 30 km to the north of Toropez, and continued on with its job of freeing the territory. Fifteen partisans were captured.

In other matters, the Signals Co. of the "RF-SS" Field Command Staff was ordered incorporated into a new SS signals detachment by the SS Main Office.

2 November: The 1st SS Bde. reported that its march into its assigned area had become extremely difficult due to poor weather conditions. Six brigade members were killed in skirmishes while two heavy machine guns, one light machine gun and 35 rifles with ammo were captured.

At the 2nd SS Bde., I./SS-IR 4 was in reserve with the 122nd Div., and II. and III. Bns. continued on with their former assignments. The commandos from the Escort Bn. completed their partisan hunting mission, having killed 21 of the foe. Flak Det. "Ost" was heavily engaged in ground fighting against Soviet positions south of Kolpino and at Kolpinskaja-Kolonija. The German attack towards Tichvin continued to proceed at a slow but sure pace.

Before the lines of XXVIII. Corps a great amount of enemy movement was observed in the direct vicinity of the front. According to POW interrogations the Soviets were preparing to break through the German lines on either 6 or 7 November. Flak Det. "Ost" received heavy enemy artillery fire on its positions.

Losses: Two officers from 6./SS-IR 4 killed and five other troops wounded including one officer.

The SS Cav. Bde. kept up local actions aimed at liberating territory from enemy control. Ten partisans were killed and 27 captured.

3 November: The CO of 1st Bde. had spent several days journeying to the locations of his deployed infantry regiments and returned to Staff HQ on this day. In the sector of SS-IR 8 there were no special occurrences. SS-IR 10 reconnoitered and mopped-up in the area around Dubovitschek - Kampol - Jankova, but had no significant results to report. The sector based on Sagedina, Ruda, Makovo, Novgorab, Seversky and Bummidova was thoroughly scouted in preparation for the brigade's assumption of road security duties there on the next day. One partisan and two civilian suspects were apprehended.

2nd SS Brigade: While still serving as a reserve for 122nd Div., I./SS-IR 4 was put on an emergency alert for a counterattack. The II. and III. Bns./SS-IR 4 had the same mission as that of the previous day: preparing anti-tank positions before the NW outskirts of Szablino. A command briefing was held concerning the deployment of the regiment from Schapki through Mgst towards the north, NW and west.

From 1410 to 1700 hrs., SS Flak Det. "Ost" fired 409 rounds in support of ground defensive operations on the behalf of 1st Div. that was battling off an enemy attack

along with the final segments of SS-IR 10. SS-IR 8 was still on the march trying to get to there. RF-SS Himmler stopped in Smolensk to inspect SS activities there.

The 2nd SS Bde. noted a lack of success by its partisan hunting commandos. Flak Det. "Ost" repelled three enemy overflights. Some prisoners indicated that a major Soviet offensive thrust was planned for the immediate future.

The 1st Platoon of the 2nd SS Military Geology Co. with 76 officers, NCOs and men, was attached to the 1st SS Bde. It would draw its equipment and supplies from the "RF-SS" Command Staff.

25 October: Units of the 1st SS Bde. (SS-IR 8 and the supply column) finally reached the area in and around Konotop. The brigade CO briefed the SS-IR 8 commander on the brigade's current mop-up and security duties.

At 2nd SS Bde., SS-IR 4 with its I. Bn. (reinforced by the regimental engineer platoon) built up positions behind the lines of 122nd Inf. Division. The "88" Flak battery from SS Flak Det. "Ost" shelled an enemy battery and observation post at Kolpino with good effect. "Ost" also reported driving off three enemy overflights.

The brigade reported capturing four partisans along with three mortars, one light artillery piece and its ammunition.

26 October: No news from 1st SS Brigade. The 2nd SS Bde. was put on readiness alert during the night of 25/26 October for a possible enemy breakout effort through the Skajadub Novka Bridgehead to the east. The Soviets tried to carry this out but did not get very far; their communications had been intercepted by German intelligence and this obviated any chance of surprise.

Two enemy overflights above Krasny-Bor were driven off and one partisan (actually a Red Army officer) was captured. There were no SS losses. Fifteen suspected terrorists and saboteurs from Tossno were sentenced to death and shot.

27 October: The 1st SS Bde. worked at liberating the area around Rommy - Moropolje - Bisilino and Sjeverks. SS-IR 8 discovered a GPU (Soviet secret police) ammo dump with over 12,000 rounds of ammunition stored in it.

The 2nd SS Bde. still had all of its segments divided up over a wide area. The I./SS-IR 4 continued to strengthen the second line of defense for 122nd Inf. Division. Escort Bn. "RF-SS" sent out two partisan hunting commandos in the area north of Lissino. The brigade assumed air protection duties for Uljanovka and also began closely monitoring the civilian population there. The Escort Bn. was made responsible for the air defense of Tossno, Krasny-Bor and Ishora. It also placed some of its Flak guns into position for ground fighting duties to the north-east of Ishora. The SS Cav. Bde. was now operating in the area northwest of Toropez.

28 October: The 1st SS Bde. was in the same area that it was in the day before. The hunt and search commandos from 2nd SS Brigade's Escort Bn. "RF-SS" were still operating. The 3.7 cm battery from Flak Det. "Ost" destroyed a machine gun nest and fired effectively on Russian field positions; interrupting the resupply of the frontline elements.

The SS Cav. Bde. was subordinated to the commander of the rear area of Army Group Center.

29 October: The march of units of 1st SS Bde. into their designated territory was made very difficult by heavy rainfall, and progress was limited to about 4 km an hour. SS-IR 8 staff was in Altyhovka; I./SS-IR 8 in Krolovez, III./SS-IR 8 in Smeloje and SS-IR 10 was trying to make its way to Krolovez. Nine partisans and 20 Communist Party functionaries were apprehended.

At the 2nd SS Bde., SS-IR 4 continued its positional construction behind 122nd Division's front. The II./SS-IR 4 patrolled the railroad line from Mga to Szaltzo, as well as an area centered around Pogostje-Maluska. The battalion engaged in some sharp skirmishes with partisans



A Brigadefuehrer at the grave of a fallen SS Brigade trooper.

in the territory south of the above in I. Army Corps' sector to Schapki. It also sent out three commandos on a search-and-destroy mission around Kungalovka. The brigade provided air security for Uljanovka and civilian movements were monitored.

Escort Bn. "RF-SS" still protected the air space over Tossno. Flak Det. "Ost" did the same for Krasny-Bor and Ishora and managed to damage five enemy planes on this day. The detachment also continued to battle enemy ground and infantry positions with considerable success.

30 October: The 1st SS Bde. had nothing special to report. The 2nd SS Bde. noted that the staff of SS-IR 4 had relocated to Schapki. Four more partisan hunting commandos were sent out by the Escort Bn. around Tarassova and were reported still in operation at the end of the day.

Flak Det. "Ost" leveled a particularly disruptive fire on enemy positions in Kolpino. Two enemy overflights were repelled and one plane was damaged by accurate gunnery. The Soviets fired back at the "Ost" positions near Krasny-Bor and Ishora with heavy artillery, killing one man and wounding another. At long last the attack of the right wing of I. Corps along the Volkhov River began to move forward.

The SS Cav. Bde. reported no special occurrences.

31 October: The 1st SS Bde. remained in Konotop and the foremost portion of SS-IR 10 was reported to be before Krolywiz, while III./SS-IR 10 began the day in Schostka. Again continuous rains made road travel ever more difficult. SS-IR 8 marched in staggered formation by platoons through previously liberated territory.

The 2nd SS Bde. noted that the HQ of SS-IR 4 (for all purposes the main field command post of the brigade as well) was now located at the NE exitway of Kostuja. The I./SS-IR 4 still built positions with 122nd Div., while II./SS-IR 4 guarded the railroad lines and fought partisans with I. Army Corps. The III./SS-IR 4 was on the march to the I. Corps' sector at Venjapolova. The Escort Bn. still had commando teams hunting partisans around Tarassovo and Kamjenka.

Flak Det. "Ost" carried on with its designated assignments; it came in for some weak enemy artillery fire at Krasny-Bor. The attack by the right wing of I. Corps went on slowly forward.

The SS Cav. Bde. liberated the territory NW of Toropez and along the Toropez-Rzhev road. At Gzludcha, 22 km to the north of Semzy, a partisan camp was discovered in the forest and a brief firefight took place. Seventy-one partisans were captured and an SS man who stepped

THE WAFFEN-SS BRIGADES ON THE EASTERN FRONT JUNE-DECEMBER 1941

1st SS Infantry Brigade (Motorized)
2nd SS Infantry Brigade (Motorized)
SS Cavalry Brigade (partially motorized)
Assorted Units of the Kommandostabes Reichsfuehrer-SS

(PART 2)

19 October: The 1st SS Bde. reported that its HQ Staff was in Rommy. Because of "impassable" roads the march to Konotop could not continue.

At 1700 hrs. the two 3.7 cm Flak platoons from 2nd SS Bde. opened a blistering fire on enemy machine gun nests and mortar, infantry gun and field positions at Kolpinskaja-Kolonia. About 3,000 rounds of ammo were expended and as near as could be ascertained, they had been placed with very good results. Some deserters pointed out the specific buildings in Kolpinskaja that housed the political commissars along with a Red Army Bn. HQ and these were zeroed in on by the SS gunners and set afire. By 1930 hrs. some eight houses in the village were in flames and many loud detonations were noticed in their vicinity. There was little visible enemy activity although later on a strong artillery barrage was directed towards the 3.7 cm SS Flak positions. No enemy overflights were seen.

Seven POWs were taken on this day, but two SS men were killed and another four wounded. The SS Cav. Bde. reported taking 22 prisoners in the course of its new operations.

20 October: The 1st SS Bde. reported that the side roads to Konotop were totally "bottomless" and that the direct, main road was impassable due to being blocked by stalled Army vehicles. The results being that no further march progress could be made.

At the 2nd SS Bde., a check point had been established in Tossno by the Escort Bn. "RF-SS" to monitor civilian traffic. The credentials of some 600 locals were inspected and most were in order, however, 12 people were detained because they did not live in town and had no ID papers. This group had to be turned over to the Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service or SD) for further investigation. In the process of handing these people over to the SD one individual attempted to flee and had to be shot down. A similar check point was set up in Krasny-Bor by members of the SS Flak Det. "Ost." Some suspects without papers were also rounded up here. In the most flagrant instance one man was found to be carrying a radio transmitter, a signaling device and a new German Army tunic in his luggage. It didn't take long to determine that he was an enemy saboteur and punishment, by hanging, was swift and sure. Six of the other suspects attempted a group escape and they also had to be gunned down.

The SS Cav. Bde. reached the foremost part of Duena to the east of Toropez.

21 October: The 1st SS Bde. again reported that the roads to Konotop were unusable. The 2nd SS Bde. made no report. In the course of liberating the area east of Toropez, three SS cavalymen were wounded by mines.

22 October: After a personal reconnoiter by the commander of 1st SS Bde., the decision was made to resume the march to Konotop, even though road conditions continued to be terrible.

With the 2nd SS Bde., SS-IR 4 became the Corps' reserve in interception positions behind the right wing of 122nd Division. Several partisan hunting commandos were sent out by the Escort Bn. "RF-SS" towards Kanduja and to the north of Lissino and Tarassovo. Flak Det. "Ost" continued to provide air protection for Krasny-Bor and Ishora and it also contested any visible ground targets on the southern part of Kolpinos. On this day the detachment drove off three air attacks and smashed up some enemy anti-tank and artillery positions south of Kolpinos with "88" Flak fire.

Sixteen partisans were killed in battle and another three were captured and hung as saboteurs. Quite a few automatic weapons were also found along with a radio set. A cache of explosives was discovered and had to be destroyed. One SS man was killed and another eight were wounded in the fighting.

23 October: The Reichsfuehrer-SS visited Mogilev to inspect SS activities in that town. The 1st SS Bde. had nothing special to report. At the 2nd SS Bde., SS-IR 4 remained in Corps' reserve with one battalion engaged in constructing blocking positions behind the 122nd Inf. Division. The brigade assumed responsibility for air security over Uljanovka as well as for the monitoring of civilian traffic in that proximity. The "RF-SS" Escort Bn. sent out more partisan-hunting commandos in the vicinity of Kostuja and Schapki.

Flak Det. "Ost" kept up a riveting ground fire on south Kolpinos. The 2nd SS Bde. motorcycle platoon sent out its own partisan search commando in the vicinity of Bjelovka but it returned late in the day with no success to report. According to field observation, Flak Det. "Ost" managed to score direct hits on an enemy regimental HQ and a number of Soviet light artillery positions. Substantial columns of smoke were observed coming from the target areas. There were no brigade casualties.

The SS Cav. Bde. noted that it had liberated some more territory to the east of Toropez.

24 October: The 1st SS Bde. staff finally reached Konotop



40 731
KREDLER, Stefan



30 798
SCHMIDT, Peter



"Prinz Eugen" MIA's

The spirit of the "Prinz Eugen" – a typical member of the division.

It was clear that the main road was no longer passable.

Now another break of fate played into the hands of the "Prinz Eugen" troopers. The enemy pursuit simply failed to develop as the Bulgarian advance forces paused to loot the destroyed "Prinz Eugen" motorized convoy and a number of intact supply depots in and around Nish. As far as they were concerned the partisans could now take care of the fleeing Germans. And this is exactly what happened. A large part of the divisional staff and many of the soldiers from the motor vehicle column fell into the hands of Tito's terrorists and were gruesomely murdered. But by the evening of the 14th, some 4,000 men and 1,200 horses from the "Prinz Eugen" Div. and the Nish garrison were making their way back to German-held territory through the high mountains. They had to cross through the Jastrebac and Kapaonik ranges without adequate supplies or rations, so a lot of hunger and deprivation awaited them before their march came to an end. But they would live to fight on again.

After the downfall of Nish, the partisans, Bulgarians and Soviets announced the "conclusive" destruction of the "Prinz Eugen" Div. through their assorted propaganda media and their fellow travelers in the west. It was a bald-faced lie, of course; much of the Division was never even engaged at Nish and the 7th SS Mnt. Div. would continue to fight the communists for every inch of ground in Yugoslavia until the final German capitulation. But the debacle on 14 October did cost the lives of 1,000 German soldiers (from all branches of the service), all too many of whom ended up being murder victims of the "Allied"-backed terrorists.

Postscript

The losses for the 7th SS Mnt. Div. during the course of its operations from 1 October to 28 October 1944 were staggering, mainly due to the vicious battles around Nish. The casualties were as follows:

Killed: 32 officers / 145 NCOs / 1,244 men (Total:

1,421).

Wounded: 76 officers / 532 NCOs / 3,071 men (Total: 3,679).

Missing: 56 officers / 321 NCOs / 2,233 men (Total: 2,610).

Sum Total: 164 officers / 998 NCOs / 6,548 men (Total: 7,710).

With this many soldiers removed from action, and the divisional staff in particular, crippled, "Prinz Eugen" could only put some 6,000 troops in the field over the next few weeks. Out of the 200-some individuals attached to the divisional staff, only 13 survived the retreat from Nish! These included the commander, Oberfhr. Kumm, staff officers Niedermayer (Hstuf.) and Kirchner (Ostuf.) and ten NCOs and men.

Among those lost was the "PE" chief-of-staff (1a), Stubaf. Wachsmann and the divisional medical officer Ostubaf. Dr. Wagner. The first divisional columns to leave Nish, under the escort of the Kampfgruppen "Joanni" and "Voegtler," which carried most of the wounded, were able to safely reach the lines of Corps "Mueller."

It was not until 19 October, five days after the division left Nish, that Oberfhr. Kumm and the majority of his 4,000 dispersed troops and Staf. Deutsch and his SS-Gebirgsjaeger Rgt. 13 were able to link up with the intact SS Engineer Bn. 7 under Stubaf. Hahn and make radio contact with Corps "Mueller." Because of transmission problems only a brief message could be sent through as follows: "I've been out in the woods. Kumm." It was in keeping with the divisional commander's dry, self-effacing humor! Full contact with Corps elements was not made until 20 October, by which time the "Prinz Eugen" survivors had covered a distance of over 90 kms (by air – much more by foot!) over the most inhospitable, steep and rugged terrain imaginable. The whole episode only served to make the "Prinz Eugen" Div. a much tougher and even more formidable opponent for the communists in the months to come.



Franz Prifach, "PE" MIA.



"Prinz Eugen" officers gathering information from Royalist Chetniks.

1./SS-GJR 13 blocked the Aleksinac road northwards to enemy troops. The "PE" HQ also directly relocated to the western outskirts of Nish. In the town of Krusevac to the west of Aleksinac, an effort was underway to make the place defensible and Ostubaf. Kuenstler (7th SS Div'l. Supply officer), was appointed the town battle commandant.

"Prinz Eugen" was now under orders to hold the Morava River line south to Oriljani and it was forbidden to further withdraw any of its southern flank forces. The Oriljani garrison was instructed to stop any attempts at enemy movement westwards towards Prokuplje. Fortunately the weather had now begun to favor the defenders somewhat; an uninterrupted rainfall from 12 October on had considerably slowed the communist advance. In the late morning of 13 October, the first "PE" vehicles began crossing over the repaired Morava River bridge at Nish. The roads, such as they were, on the west bank of the river had been heavily saturated by the rain and after a vehicle or two passed down them, became all but impassable. The supply troops therefore had to spend much of the day straining to pull tracks out of the mud, so much valuable time was lost. This meant that the approaches to the town of Nish had to be defended for an extra day until all of the vehicles could cross the bridge.

The retreat of the motorized columns towards Prokuplje in the southwest was led by the battle-groups of Hauptmann Voegtle and Hstuf. Joanni but was further slowed by the need to repair road washouts and the need to restore crossings over streams and gullies. All through the day of 13 October and the night of 13/14 October, the "PE" vehicles crossed over the Morava bridge, with the transports of the wounded, guided by Oberst Gabelmann, leading the way. As the retrograde movement progressed, the divisional HQ in turn relocated until by the morning of the 14th it was situated directly on the west end of the Nish bridge. On the previous afternoon the engineer Hauptmann, who had disobeyed his orders to repair the bridge, had been located while trying to leave the town in his armored command car. Oberfhr. Kumm promptly had him arrested for dereliction of duty and ordered him court-martialed at the earliest possible convenience. His lack of action had cost the division some 12 hours that it could ill afford to lose.

While this was going on the battle for the outskirts of Nish grew in intensity and the fighting spread into the city itself during the night of 13/14 October. The defensive force was based on SS-GJR 13, part of the

SS Flak Det. 7, and the Special-use Panzer Det. 12 under Oberleutnant Sterr. By the morning of the 14th all of the defensive units except 1./SS-GJR 13 were fighting between the town and the river bank. The I. Bn. had long since crossed the river and had taken up defensive positions facing the north.

At 0800 on 14 October the last "Prinz Eugen" troops, from the divisional staff and the signals detachment, crossed the Morava River bridge at Nish. The divisional HQ was next established in a small cluster of houses in the village of Merosina, about 7 km to the west of the bridge. A scouting party was sent out to link up with a Luftwaffe company thought to be holding a hill about 1½ km to the south of the main road. The recon troop was not out for long; when it approached the hill it immediately began receiving hostile fire, so it hastened back to the "PE" HQ with the news.

But it turned out the HQ had more than enough trouble on its hands already; it was being shelled by German field howitzers that were now in enemy hands! Then Soviet tanks appeared in the nearby hills and they began blazing away at the withdrawing "PE" motorized column. Within a short time a kilometer long segment of the convoy, including all of the divisional staff and communications vehicles, was engulfed in flames, with the drivers and crews bailing out. The proximity of the main communist forces had been seriously underestimated and the 7th SS Div. was paying for it.

In the meantime, Oberfhr. Kumm organized all of the officers and men on his staff into combat groups to try and make a last-ditch defense of the "PE" HQ. Almost three years earlier, Kumm and the "Der Fuehrer" Regimental staff had been in a similar fix near Rzhev, where they had to fight for survival in desperate close combat. But this time Kumm was not at all convinced that they could make a successful stand of it. The HQ sent out a last radio message to SS-GJR 13, instructing it to get back over the Morava and counterattack towards Merosina, but the transmitter ominously went dead at the end of the communication.

That decided it; Oberfhr. Kumm decided to break out. By the time the first Bulgarian troops appeared within view of the former HQ buildings, the divisional staff had begun moving out in small groups northwards towards the main road, using a shallow ravine for cover. Here Oberfhr. Kumm was able to intercept some troops from SS-GJR 13 and he passed on the word that all dispersed or unattached troops were to proceed on foot to the church tower on Jastrebac Mountain for reassembly.

and as much material as possible would have to be sent out to the west through Prokuplje very soon to avoid the enemy onslaught.

About 8 kms to the west of Nish was the 80 m wide Morava River which was spanned by one bomb-damaged bridge, over which the entire Nish garrison would have to pass. Kampfgruppe "Voegtje" and the Divisional Staff Jaeger Co. "Joanni" were entrusted with protecting the bridge as well as reconnoitering to the west and clearing the route of retreat towards Prokuplje.

At noon on 12 October, Corps "Mueller" HQ reported the advance of a reinforced Russian force, including tanks, from Aleksinac southwards towards Nish. After much furious fighting on the northern "PE" sector, the KGr. "Gen.Maj. Fischer" pulled out from the Cuprija area, but not before destroying (as much as possible) the road to the southeast of the town. The bridge crossing the Morava to the west of Cuprija was also blown up and Generalmajor Fischer's mixed force withdrew to St. Jagodina. It would no longer be able to assist the main portion of "Prinz Eugen" and between it and the rest of 7th SS Div. there now yawned an enormous 60 km gap in the lines.

In the afternoon the city commandant of Nish put himself and his staff under the command of the "Prinz Eugen" Division. What Oberfuehrer Kumm wanted from him was some engineers to work on repairing the Morava River bridge so that his vehicles could cross it in safety. So at 1500 hrs. the city commandant ordered his engineering officer and two platoons from a construction company to report to the 7th SS HQ for their assignments.

A short time later an orderly officer arrived by car in Nish and reported that the road to Aleksinac was still free of the enemy. This news instantly got things moving. Three truck columns were rapidly assembled to haul the 700 wounded men in Nish and as much supplies and material as possible to Aleksinac for a link-up with Corps "Mueller." Stubaf. Neumann was placed in charge of the operation and I./SS-GJR 13 was assigned to provide security towards the north. A grim report suddenly came in to the "PE" HQ suggesting that I./13 had gotten bogged down in fighting against enemy tank troops about 5 km to the south of Aleksinac, but this turned out to be a false alarm.

Once the evacuation convoys had been readied an inquiry was sent out to the bridgehead guard force: Had the bridge been fortified for the motorized columns to use? A shocking reply came from Hstuf. Joanni: Nobody had turned up to work on the bridge as ordered. Joanni then put his own men to work on the bridge in an effort to repair it as quickly as possible. Stubaf. Neumann and his vehicles then struck out from the city, laboriously switching to side roads to prevent congestion on the main highway, but the enemy pressure proved to be too great and by nightfall the "PE" truck convoys had been forced to return to Nish.

At 2045 hrs., divisional HQ reported to Corps "Mueller" that the bridgehead position at Nish was coming under persistent, strong enemy pressure. During the evening "Prinz Eugen's" extreme right flank was assaulted by an entire enemy regiment, which was repelled in brisk fighting. In this area, III./SS-GJR 13 was forced back to a line running from Hill 359 to Brzibrod, where it again came under heavy attack by communist infantry and tank forces. The main Soviet effort was being made against Aleksinac to the northwest of Nish, with lesser elements being diverted southwards.

It was the hard job of I./SS-GJR 13 to shadow the Soviet advance elements as well as to locate and protect all of the potential crossing points to the west bank of the Morava. Back in Nish, the "PE" HQ was frantically trying to make the city garrison Flak units usable for ground combat. The problem was that the guns were virtually in permanent position for air defense and there were no transport carriages to maneuver them around with.

On 13 October, "Prinz Eugen" was ordered by Corps "Mueller" to do everything possible to prevent the Soviets from crossing to the west bank of the Morava. SS-GJR 14, now including much of KGr. "Gen.Maj. Fischer," defended the northern divisional sector along the Morava with the regimental HQ situated in Jagodina. At 1840 hrs., strong enemy forces began threatening Nish directly from the east (direction of Bela Palanka) and the south (direction of Orliani). The suburbs of Nish and the airfield now came under substantial artillery fire. The Kampfgruppen "Voegtje" and "Joanni" were put to work opening up the partisan endangered road west to Prokuplje while



Hauling wounded soldiers out of the mountains.

On the northern divisional front, KGr. "Gen.Maj. Fischer" faced an effort by 500 to 600 enemy troops to cut off its links to the north of Lukovo. With the help of close artillery support this enemy action was resisted. At 1730 hrs. the battle-group fell back on blocking positions on the outskirts of both sides of Krivivice. Here it was miraculously joined by the survivors of SS-KGr. "Neumann" who had managed to fight their way out of the communist pocket at Boljevac. For his heroic efforts in escaping from Zajecar with most of his troops and all of his wounded, Stubaf. "Eggi" Neumann would be awarded the Knight's Cross.

By 11 October 1944, Corps "Mueller" staff had a good idea of what they were up against and they transmitted the following information about enemy troop dispositions to "Prinz Eugen" HQ:

"The enemy is marching on the Corps' front with the following forces: Bulgarian: two Armies with five infantry divisions, one cavalry division, one frontier guard brigade and one tank brigade all backed up by three Soviet rifle divisions. Russian: 57th Army with nine rifle divisions and one armored corps. Behind our front stand seven partisan divisions."

The 7th SS Division was then ordered to fall back behind the Morava River, using that waterway as the new defensive line. Orljani, to the southwest of Nish was to be the cornerstone of the new front. In addition, III./SS-GJR 13 was ordered to block off the main road from Knjasevac through Sokobanja in the west to prevent the enemy from using it.

At Svrlijig, the task force based on I./SS-GJR 13 became threatened by a large enemy motorized infantry force, backed by eight tanks, that was advancing on the town from Knjasevac. As a result the battalion evacuated the town and began making for Nish. By the afternoon of the 11th the far northern "Prinz Eugen" front had almost collapsed. At 1300 hrs. an enemy tank force had

reached the Morava River and was attacking the key town of Cuprija from the northeast. Kampfgruppe "Gen. Maj. Fischer" had already crossed back across the Morava in this area but was keeping the bridges open to Cuprija. This outfit was not capable of putting up any prolonged defense of the area.

Elsewhere the entire front was in chaos with the enemy appearing in strength all over the place. A major breakthrough was reported at Rusterce and the road to Paracin (northwest of Nish), was now closed to "Prinz Eugen" troops. SS Recce Det. 7 made a feeble and unsuccessful attempt to reopen the road; it had suffered heavy casualties in previous fighting and really lacked the punch necessary to do the job.

On 12 October, overpowering communist attacks hit the entirety of the "Prinz Eugen" front. SS-KGr. "Deutsch" found all of its positions confronted by strong enemy contingents to the south of Kocane. Near here a regimental-sized Red attack was driven off and five tanks were destroyed in close combat, but the SS Flak troops lost two of their "88" guns in the combat. Elsewhere in the southern sector, KGr. "Voegtler" (1st Mnt. Div.) was forced to pull back from Grabovac, but II./SS-GJR 13 moved unmolested upon Megjurovov and reoccupied a hill 4 kms to the east of it. In the course of the morning an enemy advance with 12 tanks and substantial artillery support was reported in progress from the direction of Bela Palanka.

Also on the 12th, I./SS-GJR 13 began an attempt to reopen the road towards Aleksinac to the north of Nish. Plans to evacuate the Nish garrison were being formulated. In the town itself was a large motor vehicle park consisting of 800 trucks, armored cars and assorted odds and ends. There were also 1,000 inexperienced replacement troops from the supply and clerical services of the Army, Navy and Air Force, not to mention a large number of divisional wounded. All of these people along with as many vehicles



Members of an armored platoon attached to the "Prinz Eugen" recce detachment.



41 654
STENGEL, Johann



40 732
LARDY, Nikolaus

"Prinz Eugen" MIA's



"PE" soldiers at Mostar, 15 November 1943. Never before published.



"PE" trooper at Split, October 1943. Never before published.

Dubrava. This little force found itself facing the bulk of two full enemy divisions and was soon fighting for its life. Due to the heavy fire there was no way to break off the battle and it was not until nightfall that these two German elements managed to slip away, having lost more than 100 men altogether.

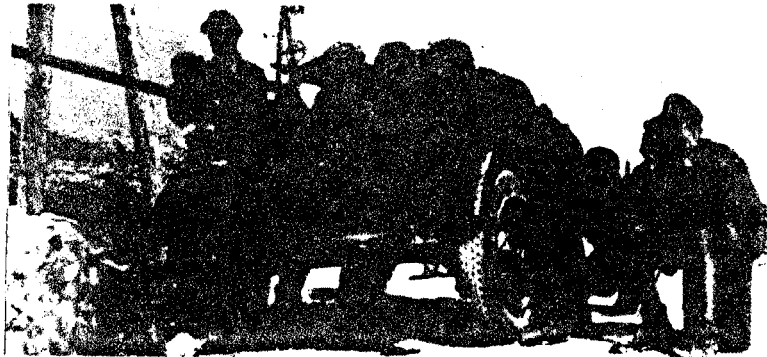
Up until noon on the 10th, II./SS-GJR 13 under Stubaf. Kaiser had been able to hurl back all enemy attacks through its own counterattacks, but when its flanks became threatened the battalion was forced to begin a pull back to the west. In the afternoon the central "Prinz Eugen" positions around Knjasevac became untenable; the enemy had largely outflanked them. A relief effort had to be mounted and divisional HQ sent an artillery-backed task force towards this area with orders to hold open the mountain passes for all retreating friendly units while at the same time blocking them off to the foe. But this operation came too late; Tito's partisans already controlled the roads and high passes so the withdrawing troops would have to fight their way back. The relief task force stayed in readiness to provide assistance for any breakout effort.

This force, consisting of Stubaf. Fischer's I./SS-GJR 13, the Divisional Staff Jaeger Co. (Hstuf. Joanni) and 3rd Battery (2 cm)/SS Flak Det. 7, took up blocking positions at the town of Svrlijig to the southwest of Knjasevac. It was able to stay in place here until link-up was made with the withdrawing Knjasevac garrison. Somewhat earlier in the month, I./SS-GJR 13 had narrowly escaped an enemy envelopment near Kalna. Prisoners taken by the battalion indicated that there were no fewer than three Soviet rifle divisions in place before this sector of the 7th SS Division's front (in the vicinity of Pirov).



"PE" member directing traffic.

Troops from SS Flak Det. 7/"PE" shown in both air defense and ground fighting.

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L. Anton30 946
SCHMIDT, Johann

"Prinz Eugen" MIA's

The rest of SS-GJR 14 along with KGr. "Gen.Maj. Fischer," were unable to hold the town of Boljevac and were forced back to the mountain pass near Lukovo (10 km south-southwest of Boljevac), where they dug in for a desperate defensive effort.

After spending the morning in a fruitless effort to reach Boljevac while under extreme enemy pressure, SS-KGr. "Neumann" switched the direction of its withdrawal to the north towards Osnic in an effort to find a line of lesser resistance. The troops had about reached the end of their strength and were beginning to fragment. Remnants of II./SS-GJR 14 along with the commander of IV./SS-AR 7 and 20 of his dispersed soldiers managed to slip through the communist net and reach positions held by SS-GJR 14. The return of these shaken troops the realization that the Boljevac defensive lines had collapsed caused a near panic to set in in the regiment. The new regimental CO, Ostubaf. Breimair tried to restore calm by ordering a pull back to new positions around Lukovic. The level of combat activity had reached a point of desperate fury hitherto unknown to the soldiers of the "Prinz Eugen," who had been used to violent, but not of clashes with terrorists and irregulars.

In the night of 10/11 October an attempt was made to get the bulk of the 7th SS Mnt. Div. into a new general defensive line running from Leskovac in the south to Bogovor in the north, but individual units and battle-groups were stuck all through the mountains and valleys, and many of them were completely surrounded by the enemy. It was a nightmarish situation that nobody could fully keep track of. The only positive note was that the Soviets and Bulgarians probably could not keep up with their own troop dispositions, although the sinister Tito terrorists always seemed to know the lay of the land.

In the evening of 10 October, KGr. "Fischer" reported the loss of the town of Lapovo (20 km northeast of Kragujevac), after much heavy fighting and the destruction

of the railroad station. SS Recce Det. 7, without its commander and "heavy" company, was sent out to reinforce the German forces in the Lapovo area. It travelled from Kragujevac to Batocina without encountering the foe.

Following a brief layover for replenishment, the communist forces resumed their assault all along the "Prinz Eugen" front in the course of 10 October. The focal point of the offensive was the Vlasotince-Ravna-Dubrava area and after a long hard fight, Vlasotince was lost to an enemy tank brigade which deployed 21 armored vehicles. A "Prinz Eugen" 5 cm anti-tank battery was lost in the process. The III./SS-GJR 13 under Hstuf. Wigand along with KGr. "Voegtler" were ordered to retake Ravna-



Members of "PE" Flak Battery in Bosnia, 1944. Never before published.

the Bulgarians were observed busily reinforcing their units. In the morning hours an enemy attack with tank and artillery support was made to the southeast of Bela-Palanka but was easily repulsed. A scouting party from II./SS-GJR 13 left Bela-Palanka and linked up with the hard-pressed KGr. "Voegtler" (Reinforced Co./1st Mnt. Div.), to the southwest, about 4 km northeast of Ravna Dubrava. No contact was made with the foe in the process.

Then at 1500 hrs. the Bulgarians launched a sudden mass assault on the entire southeastern front sector with one prong heading for Ravna Dubrava and another, consisting of two full regiments, moving in on Bela Palanka. The German strongpoints around Ravna Dubrava held firm and the 700-man attack force that tried to take them was crushed with many prisoners being taken from elements of the 6th and 9th Bulgarian Inf. Divs. and a tank brigade. From Lestovac in the southwest, Staf. Deutsch launched an attack along the Ravna Dubrava-Vlasotince road aimed at relieving the pressure being applied by the Bulgarians. The Vlasotince garrison was now getting a brisk artillery harassing fire and was on the receiving end of some fighter-bomber attacks.

The central portion of the "PE" front came in for its share of problems. Near Kalna, I./SS-GJR 13 was kept busy repulsing regimental-sized enemy attacks, while an enemy breakthrough was reported to the north-northwest of its positions. A mixed battalion battle-group led by Generalmajor Fischer was responsible for the defense of this area and by putting out a supreme effort the troops of KGr. "Fischer" were able to hold a line running from Boljevac to a point some 10 kms north of Valakonje. But now the positions of I./SS-GJR 14 and Alarm Bn. "Nis" were severely threatened and two companies from III./SS-GJR 14, which was advancing towards Zajecar, had to be diverted to counterattack and drive the enemy away from the rear of Boljevac. As of 1825 hrs., SS-KGr. "Neumann" from Zajecar reported reaching Osnic to the north of Planinca, but had not yet linked up with III./SS-GJR 14.

The 9th of October was another day of crisis. Early in the morning Vlasotince was bombarded by enemy artillery and III./SS-GJR 13 became entangled in a difficult

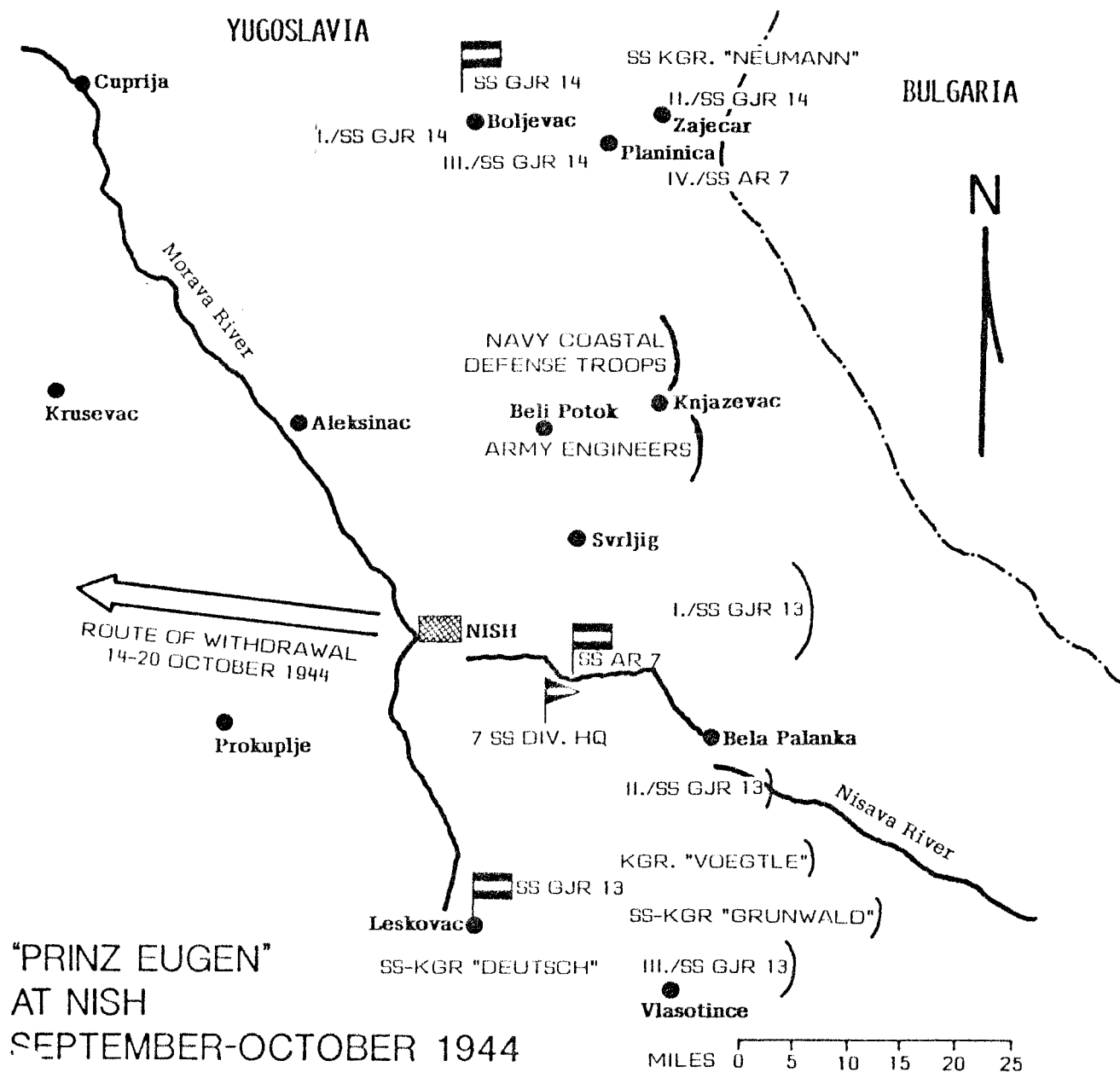


Stubaf. Neumann. CO of II./SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 14 and later the regimental commander; the defender of Zajecar.

battle about 7 kms to the east of the town. An artillery bombardment of about two hours in duration was reported all along the "Prinz Eugen" front and this was followed by a major offensive by 2nd Bulgarian Army. The fighting was intense everywhere and the battlefield reports soon began flooding the 7th SS HQ. Bela Palanka came under a severe air attack and SS-KGr. "Deutsch" had to fight off a strong enemy assault before launching one of its own and linking up with KGr. "Voegtler" (1st Mnt. Div.) at 1007 hrs. near Ravna Dubrava. On the northern front, SS-KGr. "Neumann" and II./SS-GJR 14, still retreating from Zajecar, were engulfed by the enemy tide and had to fight off attacks from all sides to the north of Planinca.

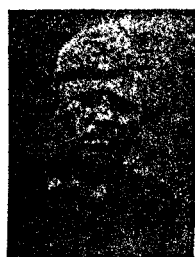


"PE" supply ponies bogged down in heavy snow. 4 January 1944.



"PRINZ EUGEN" AT NISH SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1944

NOTE: Knjazevac (Knjasevac) was defended by a 620-man garrison of Navy and Army troops, none of whom were combat experienced.



36 732
Krimmer, Mathias
Soldat
geb. 20. 8. 1904
Lazarfeld/Jug.
Landwirt
Letzte Nachricht
März 1945
Klagenfurt



41 650
DAMASCHKO-
VITSCH, Johann



18 496
BARLIAN, Stefan



41 725
KITTELBERGER,
Jakob



50 145
WUNDERLICH,
Josef

"Prinz Eugen" MIA's

terrorist attacks. The supply column for I. Bn./Rgt. "Veste Belgrad" was jumped by terrorists near Dusnik (24 km southeast of Nish), and was totally destroyed, with all of the vehicles being set afire and most of the drivers murdered.

Elsewhere the enemy assault on Zajecar continued unabated and the defensive front to the south and southeast of the town collapsed when KGr. "Wissmann" (Field Replacement Bn. 79), gave way. At 1145 hrs., a company from III./SS-GJR 14 counterattacked to stabilize the situation. Following this, another counterattack was launched to regain some lost artillery positions near Zajecar. But the enemy came back with a powerful assault that swept into the eastern part of the town. Fierce fighting went on until nightfall. To compound the calamity the nightly aerial supply drop to the Zajecar garrison completely missed its mark and wound up in enemy hands. Much farther away at Topola, the reinforced I. Bn./SS-GJR 14 (which did not go to the Nish Front) under Stubaf. Rau, had to fight off a violent night attack by 300 to 400 partisans.

On 6 October, the Zajecar garrison (including SS-KGr. "Neumann"), repulsed the attack of three Soviet rifle regiments backed up by strong air and artillery support. In the extremely violent combat that raged for the possession of the town, 50 German troops were killed and 250 more were wounded. Still, Ostubaf. Neumann was able to report the following to 7th SS HQ: "We're holding!" The III./SS-GJR 14 was sent towards Zajecar to relieve some of the pressure on the town, but its advance was delayed by ferocious air and dive bomber attacks. Both to the north and south of Zajecar strong enemy forces were reported moving to the west, an ominous sign.

The German defensive effort in central-eastern Yugoslavia began to coalesce on 7 October. Assigned to block the Soviet advance into the country was the Army Group Felber, to which 7th SS Mnt. Div. "Prinz Eugen" was attached. On the south wing of Army Group Felber was a new provisional army corps that had been assembled from assorted police, mountain and training battalions all placed under the command of General-of-the-Infantry Friedrich-Wilhelm Mueller, who had been the last German C-in-C on the island of Crete. For operational purposes, "Prinz Eugen" was answerable to Corps "Mueller," although it was given much flexibility in how it carried out its assignments.



Ostubaf. Zimmerman, divisional engineering officer.



Ostuf. Harry Paletta, commander of SS Assault Gun Co. 105/V.SS-Mountain Corps. and Knight's Cross winner.

The 7th SS Mnt. troops were heavily engaged on 7 October. They smashed a number of Bulgarian attacks to the south, southeast, east and northeast of Vlasotince. Enemy artillery bombardments increased against "PE" positions to the north of the Nisva River, and battalion-strength recon operations and increased bridge building activities were observed throughout the Vlasotince-Pirot sector.

The battle for Zajecar continued at an even more frenzied level; much of the town was reduced to rubble by heavy enemy artillery bombardments. These were followed by persistent tank and infantry ground attacks that were all driven off but at an increasing price to the defenders. The Zajecar garrison lost another 100 men killed, 300 wounded and 40 missing. The III./SS-GJR 14, which hoped to relieve the pressure on Zajecar by retaking Planinica, could not carry out its assignment due to concentrations of vastly superior enemy forces blocking the way. Stubaf. Rau's I./SS-GJR 14 now left Topola to rejoin the main body of the regiment at Zajecar.

Oberfhr. Kumm, CO of "Prinz Eugen," sent word to Corps "Mueller" command that due to constant positional changes it was no longer possible to construct the proposed blocking positions near Boljevac. In return the Corps ordered "PE" to maintain its defensive lines as before but to reinforce the garrison in Knjasevac (about midway in the divisional front from north to south), to prevent the Reds from cutting the roads around it and outflanking it to the northwest. On the northern divisional front, Zajecar was now virtually isolated so an attempt to relieve and evacuate the garrison was authorized to begin on 8 October. Ordered to advance on the town were portions of SS-GJR 14, the Alarm Bn. "Nis" and I./Artillery Rgt. 79 (less 2nd Battery). Once the garrison was safely out of Zajecar, it was to occupy the area west of Boljevac with the support of 2nd Battery/AR 79.

The situation at Zajecar soon took a distinct turn for the worse. At 0100 on the 8th, enemy forces swept into the northern and southwestern portions of the town and it was apparent that SS-KGr. "Neumann" and the weak garrison troops could not hope to eliminate these incursions. Therefore the "Prinz Eugen" HQ directed SS-KGr. "Neumann" to break out to the west as soon as it could, carrying all of the wounded (some 400 men in all). The III./SS-GJR 14 would spearhead a simultaneous relief attack. At first light on 8 October, the battle-group expended its last heavy weapons' ammo then spiked the guns and began moving towards the west.

The southeastern portion of the divisional front also came under mounting pressure. In front of Bela-Palanka



Hstuf. Kaiser, CO of II. Bn./SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 13.

to be left unfulfilled.

SS-KGr. "Neumann" (Recce Det. 7 and AR 7), relieved the remaining portions of 1st Mnt. Div. in Zajecar, but in the process a dangerous gap was left in the lines to the north of the town. On the morning of 4 October the enemy began an artillery bombardment of Zajecar and followed this up with a series of tank-supported infantry attacks, all of which were driven off by the "PE" troopers. Three heavy tanks (15 cm cannons) were destroyed along with their Red infantry escort. In purely conventional fighting like this the Waffen-SS soldiers proved themselves unsurpassed in their ability to courageously and effectively deal with whatever was thrown at them.

SS-GJR 14 saw considerable action on 4 October. Its II. Bn. under Hstuf. Martens was sent early in the day to reinforce the Zajecar garrison. On the way there it had to overcome a number of terrorist road blocks in the area 22 kms to the east of Paracin. The III./14, led by Hstuf. Pensel, was sent to occupy Paracin while the Paracin-Lukovo road was secured and patrolled by the Territorial Police Bn. 977. The III. Bn. soon got into trouble while still enroute to its destination; a vicious partisan ambush hit the unit's left flank and heavy fighting developed. The battalion managed to secure the town of Zanimica only to meet a strong Soviet force marching from the northeast. Although this threat was successfully dealt with, a follow-up, artillery-backed Red assault was too much for the battalion to handle. With partisans on their flanks and the Soviets close behind, the SS mountain troopers made their way back to Boljevac.

Casualties on the day were fairly heavy for the division: one officer (Ostuf. Diestler, CO of 9th Co.) and 13 men had been killed and six other officers (Ostuf. Gross, the regimental CO, Hstuf. Grunwald, CO of 13th Co./SS-GJR 13, Ostuf. Kromholz, SS-GJR 14 adjutant, Ostuf. Tabler, Ostuf. Gross and Ostuf. Mechow) and 151 men had been wounded. The first three wounded officers were among the best in the 7th SS Div.; Ostuf. Kromholz in particular had achieved a fine reputation as the leader

of the regimental "striking" company, and had been decorated with both the German Cross in Gold and the Knight's Cross. Also lost on this day were 32 horses and five vehicles and one 10 cm field piece; the latter items to direct artillery hits. There were 94 known enemy dead.

On 5 October, after crushing stubborn enemy resistance at Vlasotince, SS-KGr. "Deutsch" went on the attack to the east. Staf. Deutsch set up his HQ in Leskovac and his objective now was to eliminate the Bulgarian elements near Pirot. Hstuf. Wigand's III./SS-GJR 13 was deployed to the east and northeast of Vlasotince. While just beginning to leave Vlasotince in the sidecar of a motorcycle, Staf. Deutsch was surprised to see a 1938 Mercedes auto rapidly bearing down on him from the opposite direction. On its fenders, the car bore the metal standards of a Bulgarian Army Corps.

Some of the "PE" troops in the vicinity fired warning shots above the vehicle and forced it off the road into a ditch. The occupants then were apprehended. These included a Bulgarian lieutenant colonel and captain from the staff of 2nd Bulgarian Army and seven journalists who had been sent from Sofia to cover the combat situation at the "Front," such as it was. Unfortunately for them the driver of the car had gotten disoriented and had driven smack into the "Prinz Eugen" lines. Documents carried by the Bulgarian officers gave the entire plan of attack for 2nd Bulgarian Army as well as very accurate dispositions of the "enemy" (i.e., German) forces.

The Bulgarians knew quite a bit about the "Prinz Eugen" Div. and other German formations since they had fought alongside them for many years in the Balkans. The newly captured Bulgarian lieutenant colonel had received much of his advance training in Germany. As it turned out his companion, the Bulgarian captain, had been looking for the first good opportunity to defect back to the German side, and he may have purposely misdirected the driver. Contrary to orders he preserved the "top secret" papers being carried to hand them over intact to the Germans. This incident and the information gathered were reported to divisional HQ and the prisoners were rushed by special escort to the Corps' intelligence officer.

In other developments on this day, SS-KGr. "Grunwald" (14. and 15./SS-GJR 13), tenaciously defended Mountain Pass 774, 10 km northeast of Leskovac, against strong



Ostuf. Kromholz, Adjutant SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 14 receives the German Cross in Gold from Oberfhr. Kumm.



Hstuf. Sepp Niedermeier, last "PE" chief-of-staff.

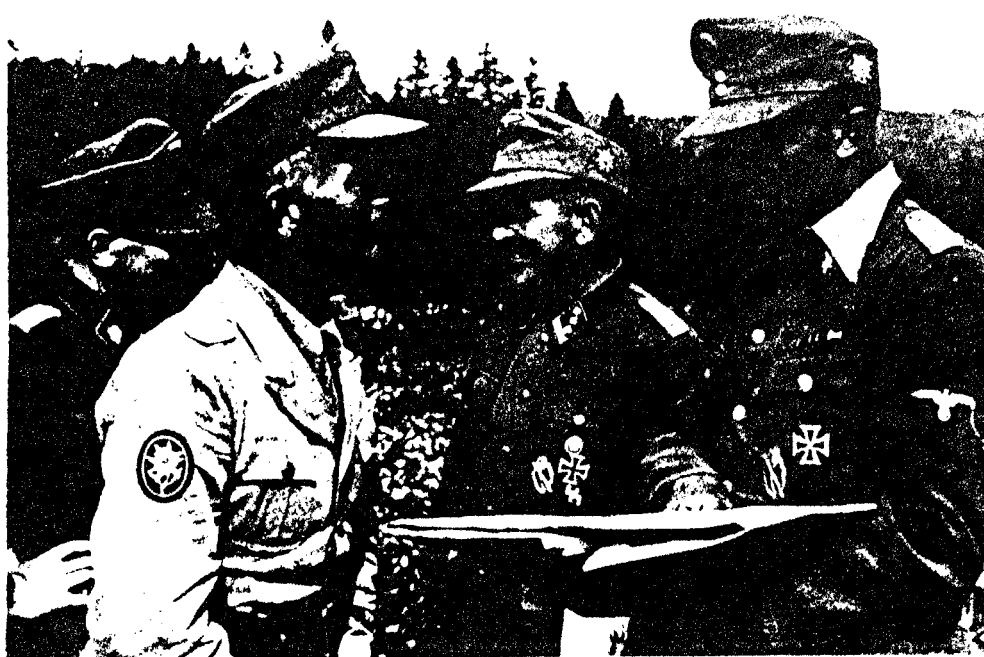


Stuf. Rau, CO of I. Bn./SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 14 with Ostuf. Lipczinsky.

fought off a persistent enemy probing attack of roughly battalion strength. Staf. Deutsch was concerned about the precarious situation of KGr. "Voegtle" (1st Mnt. Div.), so he sent out SS-KGr. "Grunwald" to try and link up with it. The companies of this battle-group began moving towards Ravna-Dubrava but in the course of the morning they became tied down before the high ridge near Krusevica due to very stiff enemy defensive fire.

In other actions on this day a reinforced, motorized

Jaeger company from "Prinz Eugen" was ordered to blow up a bridge in Vratarnica. To get there an enemy force had to be pushed out of the way to the east. When the southern outskirts of Vratarnica were reached a strong Bulgarian battalion was found to be already in place in the town. After a stiff fire-fight the SS Jaegers found that they could not budge this bunch so the mission had



Staf. Deutsch (right), CO SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 13 with Hstuf. Wigand (second from right), CO of III. Bn./SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 13 and Oberfhr. Kumm with his adjutant.



50 050
TILLMANN, Alois



50 034
USEL, Emil



39 911
KUHN, Johann

"Prinz Eugen" MIA's



Members of the divisional staff: Hstuf. Niedermayer, Ostuf. Kirchner, Oberfhr. Kumm (center - commander), Ostuf. Dr. Lardschneider (concealed), Stuf. Wachsmann.

deal with this menace. Staf. Deutsch had the following units at his disposal:

- III./SS-GJR 13
 - 2nd Battery/SS-AR 7
 - 10th Battery/SS-AR 7
 - Divisional Staff "Jaeger" Co. (Hstuf. Joanni)
 - 16th Co./SS-GJR 13
 - 15th and 17th Cos./SS-GJR 13
 - Kampfgruppe "Grunwald" under Hstuf. Grunwald consisted of these elements:
 - Army Combat School "Nish" (strength: three officers/9 NCOs/149 men, with seven light machine guns, seven mortars and nine machine-pistols)
 - I. Bn./Rgt. "Veste Belgrad" less two companies (strength: 20 officers/83 NCOs/476 men, with seven light machine guns, 12 machine-pistols and 560 assault rifles)
- Despite the presence of Staf. Deutsch, the "battle



Stuf. Wachsmann and Oberfhr. Kumm at divisional HQ, 1944.

commandant" for the town of Leskovac was the Luftwaffe Oberst Gabelmann who had four companies of Luftwaffe ground personnel (514 men in all) under his command. These troops were basically inexperienced in combat and not much value was placed on their net worth should push come to shove. In the nearby mountain country between Vlasotince and Bela Palanka was a reinforced company from 1st Mnt. Div. under Hauptmann Voegtle; it had recently been pushed out of position by a strong enemy attack.

The town of Bela Palanka was defended by II./SS-GJR 13 under Stuf. Kaiser along with III./SS-AR 7 (less 8th Battery) and in the course of 4 October this force



42 415
BACH, Stefan



41 863
FABER, Dr. Michael



Stuf. Breimaier with the staff of SS-Geb.Jg.Rgt. 14 in Breznica, autumn 1944.

"Prinz Eugen" MIA's

had launched four separate artillery supported attacks against German forces on either side of Customs Post 400, but were thrown back each time. Then at 0800 on the 3rd, an assault force in regimental strength continued the attack and by afternoon had achieved a significant breakthrough. Red troops now began moving rapidly westward on both sides of the Customs Post.

To meet this increasing threat, Group "Wissmann" from the Army Field Replacement Bn. 79 was sent to Zajecar to reinforce SS-KGr. "Neumann," which was under orders to hold onto the town at all costs. Stubaf. Neumann also had some excess supply troops and the remnants of Anti-tank Det. 117 at his disposal. The rest of SS Recce Det. 7 (three light squadrons) was supposed to be sent to KGr. "Neumann" from Kragujevac, but the town "battle commandant" refused to release it.

This became an increasing problem as other divisional elements were also either redirected or appropriated by local commanders before they could arrive at Nish. This was the case with SS Mnt. Engineer Bn. 7 under Stubaf. Hahn which was halted in Kraljevo on its way to the division and forced into the town garrison. Likewise, SS Anti-tank Det. 7 under Stubaf. Schmutzler and the attached SS Assault Gun Det. 105 was re-routed to Belgrade for the potential defense of that city. This left "Prinz Eugen" without its major anti-tank and combat engineer elements, something that would prove very costly during the latter stages of the Nish fighting. The SS Gebirgsjaeger Regiments still had engineer and anti-tank platoons of their own but they would be of little help to the division at large. Elsewhere on 3 October a Red Army regimental force led by motorized artillery was reported advancing at Izvor, while the vital road traffic between Knjasevac and Zajecar was brought to a halt by terrorist sabotage.

On 4 October the enemy onslaught continued and it now proved possible to identify most of the main opposition elements. The principal threat came from the 2nd Bulgarian Communist Army which was situated around Vlasotince-Kalna, with its HQ in Pirot. It consisted of five infantry divisions (2nd, 5th, 6th, 8th and 9th), a cavalry division and a tank brigade. Due south of the "Prinz Eugen" right wing was the XIII. Serbian Partisan Corps consisting of four divisions (22nd, 24th, 46th and 47th), which were little better than glorified battalions in size. The threat



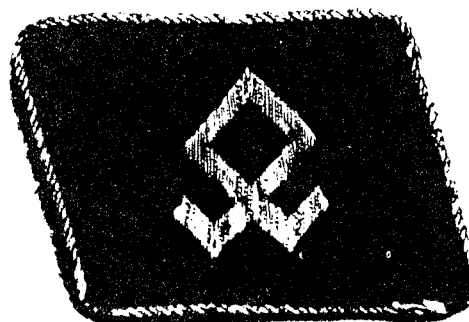
"PE" trooper with a supply horse.

posed to Zajecar was much more serious as the Soviet 57th Army had units to the northeast and southeast of the town. The left wing of this army stood in place before Knjasevac and consisted of the 64th Rifle Corps (three divisions and one tank brigade). Along with this formation in the Kalna-Zajecar area was the so-called XIV. Serbian Partisan Corps with the 23rd, 25th and 45th Divisions.

The Soviets had begun to bring up reinforcements by rail to the Vrazogrnac area and a mere 1½ km to the northeast of Zajecar they had managed to build a bridgehead across the Timok River. Near Vlasotince, a mixed Bulgarian-Titoist force in the strength of about 3,000 men had begun to congregate. SS-KGr. "Deutsch" in Leskovac began preparing to march on Vlasotince to



Original and fake "PE" sleeve titles.



"PE" officer's collarpatch.



Mixed column of "Prinz Eugen" troops and civilians.

killing ten of the foe on the way. In the meantime, the "PE" HQ was becoming acquainted with the new divisional sector. It certainly proved to be a formidable one running to the east of Nish from Zajecar in the north to Leskovac in the south for a distance by air of 150 kilometers! And there was little but wild, mountainous terrain split by some wide, rushing rivers in between the two towns.

The 29th of September saw a battalion-sized Bulgarian force feint towards Nish on a reconnaissance mission; once discovered it hurried back across the frontier. To the east of the Bela Palanka-Knjasevec line (a little southeast of Nish), substantial enemy movement was observed (including tracked vehicles) and some fire was received. All of these activities indicated that a major assault was in the offing.

SS-GJR 14 again saw heavy action on the 29th, pushing the 5th Titoist Div. out of the Arandjelovac area to the northwest. A pursuit attack was launched by II./14 and II./SS-AR 7 and this resulted in some very savage fighting, in which 84 of the guerrillas were killed with the Waffen-SS losses being four killed and 14 wounded.

The next day, 30 September, saw the beginning of the advance of the 57th Soviet Army to the Serbian border south of the Danube. Much hectic enemy activity was now observed in front of the entire 7th SS Divisional sector, with considerable motorized movement noted to the southwest of Kula. Oberfhr. Kumm and his staff officers had to be sitting on pins and needles as they anxiously awaited the arrival of some "Prinz Eugen" troops; as of this date none had yet arrived in Nish outside of the HQ elements. Thus only a very light screen of troops and ends, including Serbian militia, manned the divisional sector.

SS-GJR 14 remained busy in its old sector, continuing to relentlessly push the enemy to the northwest. The roads remained generally free, and the regimental units were able to stop at various spots without pressure, to regroup. By day's end, I./14 was in Vencac-Brosovac,

4 was in the twin villages of Satornia, III./14 was in the Kopljare area and the regimental staff was still in Topola.

The 1st of October proved to be a day of crisis for the "Prinz Eugen" HQ staff. Even while divisional units began trickling into Nish the Reds were on the move. A Bulgarian communist division was advancing unhindered towards Vlasotinc in the south, while a Soviet force in unknown strength crossed the Serbian frontier near Customs Post 400 (about 10 km southeast of Zajecar) and continued advancing towards the northwest. A Red Army battalion also cut the supply road for 1st Mnt. Div. near Vrazogrnac and Kopronica and reconnaissance units were active all along the "Prinz Eugen" front. Something had to be done swiftly to impede the enemy so a contingent of

7th SS supply troops in Zajecar were formed into an assault group which attacked the Soviet-occupied town of Vrazogrnac. In what would prove to be the first clash between "Prinz Eugen" soldiers and Red Army regulars, the SS men fought their way into the town only to be driven back by a strong enemy counterattack.

In the hard-pressed Bela-Palanka/Kalna sector, units from SS-GJR 13 began to relieve elements of the 1st Mnt. Division. The regimental command post was established in Nishka Banja, with I./13 under Hstuf. Fischer situated around Kalna. III./13 led by Hstuf. Wigand and the Staff and I. Det. of SS-AR 7 remained for the time being in Nish. The fighting on this day, including the battle for Vrazogrnac, cost the division nine men killed and 12 more wounded. Six enemy dead were noted by actual body count, but the figure was probably much higher.

On 2 October the enemy continued vigorous reconnaissance activities along the "Prinz Eugen" front that were now supplemented by harassing artillery fire. A divisional task force attacked and disrupted an enemy bridge building operation over the Morava River near Nomanice. Another battle-group was put together under the command of Stubaf. Eggel Neumann to hold open the main road from Zajecar northwards to Negotin. This element was composed of SS Recon Det. 7 and the IV. Heavy Artillery Det. from SS-AR 7. SS-GJR 14 (less its reinforced I. Bn.) now began preparing to relocate to the Nish sector via Kragujevac.

The 2nd of October also saw SS-GJR 14 launch an attack on strong enemy forces from the 5th Titoist Div. to the southwest of Arandjelovac with mixed results. A communist night attack at Kamena, 6 km west of Topola, was successfully repelled. The disengagement of the regiment for transfer to Nish began with only I. Bn. and 1st Battery/SS-AR 7 left behind to eventually be relieved by troops from 117th Jaeger Division.

On 3 October, SS-Kampfgruppe "Deutsch" was formed from III./13, SS-GJR 13 regimental troops, and 2nd Battery/SS-AR 7, all under the command of Staf. Deutsch, and was given the job of keeping the 24th Titoist Div. away from Leskovac. To the southwest and northwest of Kalna strong Bulgarian forces were reported driving to the west; they bypassed Stubaf. Fischer's I. Bn./SS-GJR 13 and threatened it from the rear. Soviet forces were noticed increasing in strength to the east and northeast of Zajecar. In the night of 2/3 October Red Army units



Waffen-SS officers with Orthodox priest in Yugoslavia.

sion, taking Milanovac and driving off an enemy counter-attack afterwards. The new orders then arrived and the regiment disengaged to regroup in Kragujevac, where it stayed awaiting transport to Nish until the evening of 27 September. In the town of Milanovac the regimental commander, SS-Standartenfuehrer Deutsch was surprised to find many of the buildings decked out with flags and banners saluting the "victorious Red Army." In fact, there was an "official reception committee" on hand to offer their greetings to the Soviets and they were somewhat shocked to find out that the troops entering the town belonged to the Waffen-SS! Staf. Deutsch was not too happy with the reception either and he had the "official greeters" taken captive and treated as POWs.

Elsewhere SS-GJR 14 and the 1st Brandenburg Rgt. had only limited contact with the enemy and suffered light casualties. Many of the other "Prinz Eugen" units were gathered in the town of Cacak to await transport to Nish. These included the Staff and III. Det. of SS Artillery Rgt. 7, which left on 28 September, and the SS Armored Recce Det. 7 and SS Engineer Bn. 7, both of which stayed there until 1 October.

At 0000 hrs. on 27 September 1944 the responsibility for the defense of Nish was officially transferred to the "PE" Division. Any remaining Army troops in the area also reverted to the control of the 7th SS Div. and the Div'l. HQ was to be located at Nishka Banja. The main enemy threat in the vicinity came from the 2nd Bulgarian Army which was now under Soviet control following a putsch in Bulgaria which jumped that forlorn country to the side of the communists. It was backed up by Titoists who had been busy mining the roads to the south of Nish in the Lescovac area and to the south of Knjasevac. The mines quickly took a heavy toll of German vehicles. During the evening hours of the 27th, SS-GJR 13 began readying for its journey towards Nish.

In the meantime, SS-GJR 14, under Ostubaf. Gross, had gotten severely entangled with the enemy at many points on 27 September, and without exception, had managed to drive him off. The regimental command post was temporarily located at Topola and due to the fierce nature of the resistance encountered it would be several days at least before the regiment could be sent to the Nish sector. Also on the 27th, part of the division, including SS Anti-tank Det. 7 under SS-Sturmabfuhrer Schmutzler and the SS Assault G'm Det. 105 under SS-Obersturmfuehrer Harry Paletta (which belonged to V. SS Mnt. Corps), was ambushed by Chetnik partisans (the only true "freedom fighters" in Yugoslavia who were betrayed by the "Allies"), on the Rogatica-Visegrad road and lost contact with the "PE" HQ.

On 28 September, with the exception of SS-GJR 14, "Prinz Eugen" units were en route to Nish from all over. In Kragujevac, SS-GJR 13 finally obtained the necessary transport and got underway, as did the SS Artillery Rgt. 7 with its II. and III. Detachments in Cacak. In Pozega, IV./SS-AR 7 also got ready to move. In the course of the relocation march of SS-AR 7, its commander, Stubaf. Illner was killed by terrorists. He was replaced by Stubaf. Sukkau when the regiment reached Nish.

SS-GJR 14 remained active in its previously assigned operational zone; divided into three battle-groups it moved in on terrorist strongholds at Arandjelovac, Bukulja and Vugosavci. Its reinforced III. Bn. made a successful advance from Rudnik north to the Dresnjevic area,

Waffen-SS Photo Gallery

A special tribute to the missing-in-action; the forgotten rank and file troopers to whom recognition has usually been denied. This issue: MIA's of the "Prinz Eugen" Division.



First aid in rough mountain country.



50 033
LENDL, Franz



40 742
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SS-Nachr.-Abt. 7
„Prinz Eugen“
LN: 2. 6. 1944
Sarajewo

THE 7TH SS MOUNTAIN DIVISION "PRINZ EUGEN" AND THE DEFENSE OF NISH

On 20 August 1944 the Soviets began their drive into the Balkans with a major offensive aimed at Romania. Three days later a coup toppled the Romanian government and the country went into the communist camp. Sixteen full German divisions were cutoff and destroyed due to this act of treachery and the door was left wide open for the Reds to march into Hungary and Yugoslavia. In anticipation of the Red Army advance into Yugoslavia, the bandit leader Tito began to assemble his strongest terrorist elements (I. Proletarian Corps with 1st, 5th, 17th and 21st Divisions and XII. Corps with 11th, 16th and 36th Divisions), in the area some 50 to 80 kms to the south of Belgrade, in preparation for an advance on that city with the help of the Soviets. The German command therefore dispatched the 7th SS Mtn. Div. "Prinz Eugen" from Bosnia to meet this growing menace.

On 24 September 1944 the division received its new combat assignment during a conference in Belgrade between the commander of Army Group "F," Generalfeldmarschall Graf von Weichs, and SS-Oberfuehrer Otto Kumm, the commander of "Prinz Eugen." Von Weichs wanted "Prinz Eugen" to destroy Tito's partisan concentration. To do this it would have the help of the 1st "Brandenburg" Rgt., the Motorized Inf. Rgt. 92 and assorted Police and White Russian volunteer battalions. A veteran of fighting the terrorists, Kumm had no illusions about the task. When asked by von Weichs how long it would take him to eliminate the partisan divisions, Kumm replied three weeks, but he also noted that they would not stay in place so there would have to be a long, exhausting chase through the mountains to consider. This was not

welcome news to von Weichs who had hoped for a much speedier undertaking particularly considering the fact that a large Soviet advance force was now sitting on the Danube River near Turni Severin just waiting to cross into Serbia. But there was no time to lose, so Kumm was ordered to commence operations on the next day.

Thus on the morning of 25 September 1944, the "strike force" of the "PE" Division, SS-Gebirgsjaeger Rgts. 13 and 14, began moving out to the south from their billets in Sarajevo. SS-GJR 14 on the divisional right, advanced towards Topola, while SS-GJR 13 on the left moved in the direction of Greater Milanovic. Supporting elements reconnoitered and secured the territory that was bypassed. Soon after the regiments were in motion they both reported seeing enemy troop movements towards the north/north-west. Then in the afternoon an alarming change of orders arrived at the "PE" HQ. The first Soviet battalions had begun crossing the Danube in the vicinity of Nish (south-eastern Serbia), and the 7th SS Div. was ordered to proceed there and throw them back across the river.

The former defensive force at Nish (part of 1st Mtn. Div.), had to be deployed near the Bulgarian border in an effort to keep open the retreat route for the soldiers of Army Group "E" that were coming up from Greece and Albania. Oberfuehrer Kumm protested that it would take a week to get his troops to Nish and that the Soviets would not be standing still during that interval, but his objections were overruled; the war in the Balkans was no longer one of trying to contain the enemy – for the German side it was a matter of sheer survival!

On 26 September, SS-GJR 13 continued on its old mis-



"PE" battalion commander scouting the terrain.

take your pick!), will provide a little background on one of the memorable achievements of this truly noble and elite division!

Cover Photo Identified

Contributing Editor Mark Yerger miraculously (at least in my mind) provided the identification of the man on the cover of SR #39. He was Allgemeine (General) SS Standartenfuehrer Kurt Kleist, the commander of Allgemeine SS Standarte 32, who also served as a Waffen-SS officer (with lower rank) in 1st SS Pz.Div. "LAH." Born in 1909, he was killed-in-action with the "Leibstandarte" on the Eastern Front in December 1943. My thanks to Mark and his incredible archives for providing the information!

Next Issue

Watch for the "History of the Dirlwanger Brigade and 36th SS Division" and expect some surprises. Finally the truth can be told even if it is a wild and woolly story! Also there will be some rare pics and a previously unpublished cover photo.

FRONTFIGHTERS Released

Frontfighters: The Norwegian Legion Of The Waffen-SS was finally released after the usual agonizing months of worry and effort on the parts of all concerned. It contains another fabulous cover by Ramiro Bujeiro (worth the \$15 price tag alone!), who also is responsible for the map inside, which was unfortunately not mentioned in the book. Because of the last minute rush to get this book finally produced a few noticeable typos crept in (as usual), and at least one text redundancy which I could have done without. The heart of the book are the photos of the Legion (taken from less than perfect originals), and they all came out relatively cleanly, except for perhaps two or three. Anyway, you will not likely find the rare material in this book anywhere else and I think it does a reasonably good job of covering the Legion in depth. The war correspondents' reports (translated from the original Norwegian), provide much of the flavor of the times, and as such stand as valuable and interesting documents. I would very much appreciate your support for this book (if you have not already purchased one), so we can go on to further titles in the future.

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My deep thanks to everyone who has written, subscribed or sent in orders over the last several months. Your kind words in particular are always helpful! Unfortunately I cannot always reply, but rest assured your correspondence and comments are much appreciated. Due to any number of private business difficulties on this end, the proposed publishing schedule for SR (in #40) has yet to be implemented, but be assured that you will receive the number of issues subscribed for, no matter when they do appear and hopefully we can get a definite schedule going in 1987.
—Richard Landwehr



WAFFEN-SS BOOKS

Pioniere die Waffen-SS im Bild

Munin-Verlag, Germany; large format, photo history; 100s of photos; German-English text.

This pictorial history of the combat engineer arm of the Waffen-SS is one of the latest efforts to come out of the W-SS veteran's publishing house. It is a superb treatment of some of the hardest working, most under-rated specialty troops: the combat engineers. Some of their tasks included road and bridge building, mine laying and removal, construction of defensive fortifications and obstacles and just about anything else you can think of in this line, frequently under fire. It took an extraordinary amount of skill and courage to serve in this branch of service, which was an essential element of all field operations.

The photos in this book cover the Waffen-SS combat engineers from the beginning; in the field and at the training schools. Most of the pics, of course, derive from the "elite" divisions which were in action the longest, but there is a representative sampling from many other units, including non-German ones as well. There is a special pictorial section on the most highly decorated W-SS engineers and a solid, clear and informative text that touches upon both technical and historical details. Highly recommended.

EUROPAISCHE FREIWILLIGE IM BILD

by Heinz Ertel and Richard Schulze-Kossens. Munin Verlag, West Germany. 1986. German/English text. 310 pages.

This is a new pictorial history of the assorted European volunteers of the Waffen-SS as assembled by former veterans of that organization. As such it is a far better effort than most of the books-to-make-a-quick-buck that have been thrown out on the Waffen-SS lately by a number of people both here and abroad, especially in Great Britain. The photo coverage is generally excellent, with most nationalities touched upon, some in great detail.

The photo sections devoted to the Scandinavian volunteers in particular are quite exceptional, and many of these photos seem not to have been published before — or if so, not widely circulated. The same can probably be said for the section on Dutch volunteers. Unfortunately a good many of the East European volunteer photos have seen print elsewhere, but they are still interesting. There seem to be a few goof-ups wherein some of the photos appear more than once in different sizes with different captions, but that is a minor complaint. All-in-all this is a work that should interest all Siegrunen readers and will be a cornerstone for many years to come for any library of Waffen-SS books. The endpapers and title page are in full color and offer descriptions of flags, armshields and recruiting posters. Highly recommended; price tag should be \$30 or so.

EDITORIAL

The Trials And Torments Of

The "Prinz Eugen" SS Mountain Division

"... in the first days and weeks after capture, thousands of soldiers of the 'Prinz Eugen' division were shot or otherwise killed in a barbarous manner. Some were driven into a ravine to be buried under the rockfall of a detonated cliff. Rows of them were shot through the back of the neck after digging a ditch as their grave. Groups of five or six of them were tied together by their hands and then thrown into the torrential waters of the River Save to drown pitifully, or were walled up alive in rock caves." —Otto Kumm, in *Prinz Eugen im Bild*.

It should be added that those who were fortunate enough to escape being murdered by the Titoists on the spot, were "death marched" the breadth of Yugoslavia. Those that survived this excursion into agony, were then made into slave laborers, kept alive only at the whim of their captors. Many of the divisional officers were also imprisoned, tortured, given show trials, then executed. As if that were not bad enough, most of the families of the ethnic-German "Prinz Eugen" soldiers were subjected to genocidal treatment by the Reds, with the tacit approval



"PE" soldiers on a hard march.

of the Western "Allies." The beautiful German homelands in remote portions of the Balkans were denuded of life itself, and the inhabitants slain, imprisoned or driven away. Worst of all, nobody seemed to care; certainly not the blustering "Allied" politicians and their flunkies, who claimed to have "liberated" Europe and brought the blessings of "democracy" to the heathen foe.

To a large extent the fiction lives on today. The murder and suffering of millions of ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe is simply not open for discussion. That a great and beautiful slice of civilization was brutally extinguished in a gory bloodbath is simply not relevant to the "victors". Perhaps this is why I have a special admiration for the soldiers of the "Prinz Eugen" Division, who incidentally are still classified as "murderers" in the establishment press, despite the fact that most of them were murdered themselves! On the surface these men were quite ordinary people: farmers, craftsmen and tradesmen plucked from quiet lives in remote and peaceful towns and villages and placed squarely in the middle of a violent war against the worst elements of international Bolshevism.

On the one hand they had to fight off the depredations of the Allied-backed Red terrorists, then later fight the Red Army and its puppet elements itself. In both cases their performance, over some of the most impossible terrain on earth, without adequate supplies and equipment, was fantastic. Tito's bandits, even with enormous outside assistance, were absolutely no match for them; they could only prey on the defenseless and vulnerable — on the field of battle they were useless, even as "guerrillas". The "Prinz Eugen" amateurs were also able to fight the Soviets on equal terms until overwhelmed by "material" and sheer force of numbers.

The "Prinz Eugen" soldiers suffered much and lost virtually everything yet gave their all in a desperate struggle against a truly despicable enemy. For all that, and despite the fact that most of them were horribly killed in captivity, they are still routinely maligned and slandered. So anything I can do to reverse, however slightly, this situation in *Siegrunen*, will be a small payback to these valiant "peasant warriors." Their memory and their deeds should be held in high esteem, and probably would be in any "normal" time and "decent" society. At the very least they must be remembered until they eventually receive the just tribute they so richly deserve.

Hopefully the article in this issue, "PRINZ EUGEN" AND THE DEFENSE OF NISH (or "Nis" or "Nisch" —

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