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This study grew out of my persistent interest in the Russo-German confrontation in World War II. In my reading, I found occasional references to the Spanish "Blue" Division operating with the German forces on the Eastern Front. When the Marine Corps detailed me to Duke University in 1973, I read the published literature on the Spanish Division, and through it found that a score of volunteer formations fought on the German side, made up of troops from a variety of Western European countries. By the time I began to teach European and Military History at the U. S. Naval Academy, I had resolved to research and write a history of these troops and the circumstances of their service.

Any attempt to relate the experiences of a select hundred thousand Europeans within that vast campaign would seem, on the surface, to reflect a rather shallow calling. However, so little is really known—and so much has been misunderstood—about the relationship of the European volunteers to the German Armed Forces as to justify a study that makes use of all available archival and published sources. In many otherwise respectable studies of European history or of the war on the Eastern Front, the Spanish "Blue" Division, the "Walloon Legion," or the "Danish Free Corps" have been depicted as quasi-Nazi militias, totally in the service of German interests. Thus, the principal objective of this study has been to determine who these volunteers were, why they fought on the German side, and what they accomplished. Beyond the essential factors of the operational histories of the volunteer units, though, remains the examination of the peculiar circumstances encountered by the volunteers in an expeditionary force in a distant and strange land, under the control of an equally unusual military command, in an ideologically charged struggle in which their homelands remained to the end non-belligerents.

Thanks to a generous fellowship provided by the American Historical Association and the Mellon Foundation, I have been able to return to this subject in the twenty-first century and finish preparing it for publication with Columbia University Press. I never imagined, however, that the need for it would have increased so markedly from the time of its inception. I have been surprised to find that a right-wing branch of the historical revisionist "movement" has revived notions of the Western European SS as a forerunner of the NATO alliance and a precursor of the united stand against the ambitions of the USSR in Europe. Typically, J. Lee Ready, in his *Forgotten Axis*, offers an ethnic interpretation of European warfare, replete with crusades and exaggerated numbers. He even has the Waffen-SS conducting the training of the French Legion, which served only in the German Army. He labels the USSR a "prison for nations," and portrays Russians as bloodthirsty and sneaky throughout. The Waffen-SS is described as "Europe's first army." Equally disheartening is Christopher Ailsby, who in *SS: Hell on the Eastern Front*, declares, "The Waffen-SS was an organization that had fought in a manner never encountered before ... and was to lay the foundation for the integrated NATO defenses after the war," with nary a mention of how this sleight of hand actually was accomplished. ¹ My mission is thus to provide a more logical basis for understanding the volunteer phenomenon in the ensuing pages.

This study would never have been completed without the substantial assistance given me by many individuals and organizations. I credit my continuing interest in history above all to Professor William H. Russell, my principal mentor during my undergraduate years at the U. S. Naval Academy. Professors Theodore Ropp and Irving B. Holly improved the vigor and scope of my contemplative powers at Duke University during my early graduate years. This study developed under the careful scrutiny of Professors James F. Harris and George O. Kent at the University of Maryland. Professor Kent directed the dissertation development and provided unbounded confidence and patience as I prepared it over a considerable period of time.

I have benefited over the years from institutional support rendered by the U.S. Naval Academy, and particularly by my department chairmen there, Professors John A. Huston and Larry V. Thompson. Several U. S. Marine Corps officers provided encouragement and opportunities for me to further my studies: Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Colonel Robert C. McInteer, Colonel Marc A. Moore, and Lieutenant Colonel Charles C. Seabrook, in particular. John Cummings and Helen Branham placed the resources of the Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy at my disposal, and Emerson Ford proved remarkably adept at finding obscure writings through the Interlibrary Loan Office of Duke's Perkins Library. Robert Wolfe and George Wagner provided a decade of help with the records in their charge at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Numerous individuals assisted me in my work at the following libraries: Library of Congress; Weiner Library, London; Danish Royal Army Library; Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt, Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Stuttgart and Spain's Servicio Historico Militar (now named the Instituto de Historia y Cultura Militar) and Archivo de la Milicia Nacional (now combined with the Archivo Militar, Guadalajara). Michael B. Barnett of the Citadel allowed me an opportunity to float a trial balloon at his 1980 conference, where Earl F. Ziemke handled it kindly and cogently. Finally, for what success I met with in meeting former volunteers in the Waffen-SS from various European countries, I must thank the late Richard Schulze-Kossens for providing names and introductions. One of these led me to the home of [Fernand Kaisergruber](#) in Brussels for several days' stay and further introductions to many fascinating characters, including Léon Degrelle, the senior surviving European volunteer, then still living in exile in Madrid.



Fernand
Kaisergruber

Columbia University Press' elite EPIC group, directed by Kate Wittenberg and editor-in-chief Sean Costigan, has provided the most exquisite publishing experience that an author might desire, a level of coddling and pampering of historians and writers that I have never seen in my previous work with publishers. The technical assistance of the staff has quelled the substantial gamut of fears and unknowns connected with electronic publishing. Copy editing by Paul Erickson greatly enhanced my presentation. The attention of AHA, Mellon and EPIC staff to the project and the historians involved certainly elevated the character and prestige of the project more than I had imagined. We of the third cohort in the Gutenberg-e project of course benefited enormously from the interaction we enjoyed with the preceding groups, and I have drawn many insights and ideas for my own project from observing them and their works. I remain spoiled by the EPIC experience, and am glad of it.

Beyond these individuals remain hosts of colleagues, friends, and family, too numerous to mention, who have contributed ideas, lent sympathetic ears, and provided encouragement over the years.

Notes:

Note 1: J. Lee Ready, *The Forgotten Axis: Germany's Partners and Foreign Volunteers in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1987), passim. Christopher Ailsby, *SS: Hell on the Eastern Front: The Waffen-SS War in Russia, 1941-1945* (Osceola, WI: Motorbooks International, 1998), 183. [Back](#).

[A European Anabasis — Western European Volunteers
in the German Army and SS, 1940-1945](#)