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The Volunteer Phenomenon

The participation of foreign nationals in the service of the German armed forces during the Second World War has evoked both curiosity and consternation. Many Germans saw their presence as evidence of the legitimacy of the war against Bolshevik Russia and proof of a reassuring measure of acceptance of the "New Order in Europe," the political structure the German Reich's envisioned in occupied Europe. For the resistance movements and post-war liberated governments, these volunteers represented collaboration and treason of the basest order.

What foreign nationals volunteered for service in the German forces? For what ends did they serve and why? How many served, and to what extent did they contribute to German military fortunes? This study attempts to analyze the experience of Western European volunteers in the German Army and Waffen-SS in order to discuss the character of their military collaboration, their motivations, and the effects of their service on the German war effort. In so doing, it will focus on German efforts to integrate non-German nationals into the German *Wehrmacht* (armed forces), how successful they were in doing so, and what measures they took to achieve their objectives.

Although foreign nationals from virtually every European nation served in one or more branches of the German armed forces, those serving in the ground forces far outnumbered those who served in the air and at sea; they also took a more direct part in combat than the others. Of the national groups concerned, the Western European volunteers—especially those racially categorized as "Nordics" by the Nazi regime—served the longest in the war and came closest to achieving integration with the German forces. This study of foreign volunteers in the German armed forces will focus on the Army and Waffen-SS contingents, the manner and circumstances of their formation, and the method and rationale of their employment. In studying the character of volunteer participation and employment in a comparative cross-national and politico-military perspective, several interesting factors emerge: the nature of military collaboration, German attitudes toward foreign nationalities, actions of the German military bureaucracy, and true military performance.

The only full-length study of the volunteer phenomenon is the apologist work of a former SS commander, General Felix Steiner, entitled *Die Freiwilligen: Idee und Opfergang*.¹ Based largely on personal notes, memory, and contemporary literature, this book overemphasizes the notion of the SS as a pre-NATO anti-Bolshevik European army and exaggerates the numbers of participants. George Stein, in his classic study, *The Waffen-SS*, opened a chapter on the Western European SS volunteers with the remark that "no serious study of the mobilization of non-German manpower for the German armed forces has yet appeared...."² He exposed the notion of the SS as Euro-army as a myth and established the essential facts of its organization, composition, and operation, but developed none of these to any extent. Robert Gelwick's unpublished doctoral dissertation on SS personnel policies is encyclopedic but nonanalytical, although it includes a chapter on volunteer policy. Edgar Knoebel's unpublished doctoral dissertation on SS manpower policy in Belgium covers Belgian volunteers in some detail against a background of native politics and occupation policy. David Littlejohn, a British librarian, published *The Patriotic Traitors*, an encyclopedic study of European collaboration in general. He used a remarkable assemblage of contemporary literature to flesh out the basic secondary sources and outline the history of military volunteers as well as native militias, paramilitary and political action cadres, all as extensions of collaborationist politics. Finally, François Duprat muddied the waters in several

studies of the Waffen-SS by accepting much of the 1950s-vintage apologia, compiling numerous errors and failing to provide adequate documentation. ³

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The historiography of wars frequently demonstrates that a vital waiting period must elapse before sound historical analysis can begin to supplant the 'war as I knew it' brand of memoirs and the more tendentious and politically-tainted types of polemics. Thus, the 1980s brought considerable improvement to the field. The essay by Jurgen Förster and Gert R. Überschär in Volume Four of the German Military History Research Office series on Germany in World War II provided essential development of relevant themes, and Bernd Wegner's book on the organizational and ideological components of the Waffen-SS became a required adjunct to the surveys by Stein and Robert Koehl. However, the apologist line has regrettably gathered new momentum, under the guise of "revisionism," and even the myth of the Waffen-SS as a NATO progenitor is rising again with new fervor. The best of these remains the work of Hans Werner Neulen, who frequently provides most interesting details but without satisfactory documentation, more in the line of Duprat's earlier work. In the last decade, a number of studies by national historians have detailed the activities of volunteer contingents from France, Spain, Norway, Denmark, and Belgium in a manner that stimulates my hopes that we may eventually free ourselves from the apologist line. ⁴

What I hope to contribute by using new and original source material, as well as by fully exploiting the known sources, is to clarify the essential events, factors, and statistics of the volunteer phenomenon in Western Europe and to establish the diversity of the volunteer experience in terms of variables developed through German occupation policies, racial notions, and ideological values. In addition, I will seek to answer the question of the actual utility—military and political—of the volunteer movement to the German war effort in the same manner that Alan Milward assessed the economic value to Germany of occupied Europe. ⁵

With this material contribution to the history of the volunteer groups and military collaborationists in Europe, I also hope to place an obstacle before future writers. Any attempts to glorify or exaggerate the accomplishments of these volunteers must deal with my findings first. Otherwise, let readers of these authors beware!

There were four essential issues that determined the course and character of the Western European volunteers' service in the German forces: manpower policy, Nazi ideology, the New Order, and the Russo-German War. Military manpower policy in the German armed forces played a crucial role in the struggle of Himmler's Waffen-SS to obtain full-fledged status as a second army and the fourth military service. Later, the SS would fulfill the German Army's worst nightmares and conceive of itself as the sole military standard-bearer of the postwar Third Reich. Nazi ideology and racial doctrines, as sporadic and unbalanced as they became in practice, influenced the recruiting of volunteers. Notions of Germanic racial superiority initially limited the terms of service offered to foreign volunteers by the German forces, but at the same time Germanic racial myths possessed a powerful influence among the political right in the "Nordic" occupied territories. The political extension of the Germanic Reich, the New Order in Europe, had its own influence over potential volunteers and German bureaucrats alike. German propagandists would point to the Western volunteers as evidence of a nascent pan-European brotherhood, and the veterans themselves would allege, *ex post facto*, that they had done it all for Europe. Finally, the epic event of the Russo-German War of 1941-1945 proved catalytic (as well as catastrophic) for the fortunes of foreign nationals in the German forces. Initially, the coming of the war against the Soviet Union presented great opportunities for German propaganda in the occupied and neutral states of Europe. The war against Russia qualified in this extreme view as a crusade undertaken by the strongest European power—on behalf of the rest of Europe—to rid civilization of the "Bolshevik Menace," which in some tracts was even more wickedly referred to as the "Judeo-Bolshevik world enemy." These trends worked most decisively in

the evolution of the Waffen-SS, which sought particular advantages from the recruitment of non-German citizens.

Armed Forces Manpower and SS Recruiting

At the start of the European war, the Waffen-SS organization that would eventually deploy the bulk of the foreign manpower used in the war had only recently won official recognition as a military force. The SS (*Schützstaffel*) itself originated in the 1920s as a special security force of the Nazi Party, which protected Hitler and his chief functionaries as they toured Germany. With the elevation of [Heinrich Himmler](#) to the head of the 280-man SS in 1929, its final character began to take form. After the Nazi seizure of power and the overthrow of the revolutionary Nazi militia (SA) by the SS in 1934, the latter organization became institutionalized as the guardian of the movement and began to spread its influence, tentacle-like, through the Nazi hierarchy and the economic, legal, social, and educational frameworks of the new Germany. ⁶ Quasi-military functions within the ever-growing SS devolved upon the enlarged bodyguard, the *Verfügungstruppen* (Special-duty Troops), which had formed four motorized infantry regiments by 1938. Rigorously screened for political and ideological malleability and correct racial characteristics, these troops performed routine ceremonial duties but had no clear military function. ⁷ Their sole legal basis for existence stemmed from Hitler's decree of 17 August 1938, which designated them as a standing military unit obedient to his direction and independent of the Wehrmacht or the German police.

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Armed, trained, and established as conventional military formations, the SS troops received weapons, equipment, munitions, and tactical doctrine publications from the Army. They were subject to mobilization, but until that time the Army could exercise inspection authority only in matters of weapons training, and then only with Himmler's permission. Furthermore, service in the SS regiments eventually was to count toward fulfillment of a German citizen's military service obligation. ⁸ As Hitler's personal "army," the *Verfügungstruppen* regiments fought in the early campaigns of the Blitzkrieg, subordinated to Wehrmacht field commanders but administratively independent under Himmler's bureaucracy. This dichotomy was partially rectified when extended negotiations with the Armed Forces High Command over the composition, formation, and role of the SS military force culminated in the order of 2 March 1940, which designated, for the first time, the guard regiments, newly-formed divisions, and support units as the "*Waffen* (Armed)-SS." This act was the closest that the Armed SS would come to being officially designated as a *de jure* member of the Wehrmacht. Although the Waffen-SS continued to operate tactically under Army and Wehrmacht command, and its recruitment, training, equipment, and doctrine remained in accordance with Wehrmacht standards, Himmler still controlled the actual administration and training of the force up to the point when individual units deployed to the front. ⁹

Scholars have long thought that the exclusion of the Waffen-SS from official military status frustrated Himmler's search for its recognition as "the fourth branch of the Wehrmacht." We now know that Himmler's ambitions far exceeded this goal, and that he sought the replacement of conventional armed forces by a superior, ideologically prepared, and revolutionary order. Its major struggle centered upon recruiting and expansion. From the beginning of its effective field service in the Blitzkrieg era, the Waffen-SS sought a role as an elite armed force and permanent installation as the party's shock troop. SS leaders envisioned the eventual replacement of the regular armed forces as a necessary development in the transformation of Germany into the "Thousand-Year Reich" of the New Order, which could only be policed by a politically indoctrinated military force. Such motives could scarcely be admitted in the early days, especially when Hitler had consistently promised each of the various military services sole responsibility for the defense of the

German state. [10](#)

Obtaining manpower for the new Waffen-SS divisions became the chief responsibility of SS Brigadier General [Gottlob Berger](#), a man of considerable organizational ability, who in late 1939 established a national recruiting office at SS headquarters in Berlin to coordinate the activities of the local offices of the various military districts. With Himmler's enthusiastic backing, Berger exploited loopholes left to the SS by the Armed Forces High Command (OKW). The latter had allocated recruits for 1940 among the Army, Navy, and Air Force in the ratio 66-9-25. Waffen-SS recruiting was not taken into consideration in this allocation. Rather, the SS received authority simply to fill specifically authorized divisions, regiments, and requisite support troops. Berger and his aides ruthlessly exploited this gentlemen's agreement, under which the OKW did not supervise the detailed execution of SS policy. The SS recruiters ignored any implicit limits and took in as many draft-age volunteers as their recruiting propaganda could attract. [12](#)

Not content with such bureaucratic subterfuge, Berger also searched for manpower sources not directly controlled by the OKW, including men who were not citizens of the German Reich. Ethnic Germans, or Volksdeutsche, from annexed or occupied territories showed promise as a recruiting pool, especially when the war brought parts of Eastern Europe under German control. Finally, the so-called "Nordic" peoples of Northern Europe—Finns, Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, and Dutch—could meet the racial requirements of SS recruiters and, if induced to volunteer, would not count toward any OKW recruiting statistics. A hundred of these Nordics had entered SS service by 1940. After April of that year, Berger's recruiting offices pursued them in earnest. [12](#)

Without combat laurels, however, the Waffen-SS could not have grown in manpower and material strength as it did. The actions of the one *Verfügungsddivision* and several motorized regiments in the Battle for France as part of the mechanized spearhead established their worth in Hitler's view, which was all-important. Justification for further expansion was found in the pending campaign against Russia, such that SS field strength doubled between the fall of France and the beginning of the "Barbarossa" offensive, as the invasion of the Soviet Union was known. [13](#)

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Given such expansion, the megalomaniacal plans of Himmler and his recruiting chief appeared somewhat feasible. By late 1941, the Waffen-SS had emerged as a second army, and, thanks to its ideological training, constituted "an uncompromising National Socialist alternative to the traditional military establishment." As long as it pursued an active role in fulfilling Hitler's "historic mission" as a reliable, personal instrument of that destiny, the Waffen-SS could feel secure. The image cultivated by the SS as a unique ideological corps, separate from the Army and more closely tied to the party and political authority, would further secure its position after the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt upon Hitler, in which several German Army officers participated. This attempt tarnished the Army in Hitler's eyes and made Himmler's notion of elevating the SS to the status of sole arms-bearer of the nation feasible at last, despite the fact that the war was then reaching its final, fatal turn toward German defeat. [14](#)

Ideology and Race: The Greater Germans

The "Germanic" ideal that the propaganda of the SS and other branches of the Nazi regime often promoted emerged from the panoply of ideological currents swirling in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. Rooted in *Völkisch* concepts, Germanic thought placed preeminent value on racial purity in a society. Over time, this ideology became both non-Christian and anti-Semitic. Suffused in romanticism, mysticism, and utopianism, it attracted few followers as an intellectual movement. However, its influence over the general population, which read

Germanic treatises or other romantic literature reflecting Germanic thought, cannot be gauged. [15](#)

Hitler's own ideological constructs certainly favored the inclusion of Germanic ideals in any program of the Nazi state. Although the Führer never precisely articulated his thought, its chief components remained anti-Semitism, aggressive territorial expansion, and an all-encompassing historical view that emphasized national life as a continuing struggle for survival. [16](#)

Hitler consistently identified nationality with race. The racial status of the individual remained unalterable; hence, whole nations had their fates determined on the basis of racial criteria under the Nazi order of things. Hitler accepted the Germanic race as clearly superior. He saw it as having created the only cultural values of any worth, and therefore being morally destined for world domination. Under Hitler's direction, the German armed forces would cease their drive to the west and south and "resume the Germanic expansionist program where it had stopped six hundred years ago, and to press once again over the routes of the medieval crusading orders into the lands of the east." [17](#)

When it came to the concrete expression of Germanic thought and deed, Hitler proved rather indifferent to fashioning any Germanic utopia. For instance, the occupation of Denmark and Norway by Germany took place on strategic grounds, not out of ideological necessity. This reality did not prevent Nazi propaganda from using Germanic doctrines in an attempt to impress the Norwegians and Danes they now held captive. Hitler and his circle even spoke of Germanic empire-building, but discerning cynicism from naïveté in such matters remains well nigh impossible. [18](#)

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Ultimately, Heinrich Himmler became the most aggressive proponent of the Germanic Reich, not Hitler. The latter insisted that any final legal or political definition of the Nazi world would have to wait for the successful conclusion of the war. Himmler's Germanic policy envisioned the coordination and annexation of Northern and Northwestern Europe, using collaborationist parties and German propaganda in the process. Neither proved very compelling to the captive populations, who nevertheless bent to the letter of German rule, if not the spirit. Ultimately, Himmler's hopes for a Germanic Empire rested on the shoulders of foreign volunteers, who, if recruited in sufficient numbers, would win support for a pan-Germanic association with the Third Reich. Joint service against a common enemy—the oft-touted "Judeo-Bolshevik enemy of the world"—bonded by common SS arms would produce a cadre capable of converting the meeker populations at home. [19](#)

Even after the first offensives against Russia had failed, Himmler remained convinced of both final victory and the ultimate achievement of a Germanic Empire, with a multinational SS army guarding the eastern marches of the empire against the Asiatic hordes. He saw the pan-Germanic empire not merely as an extension of the old Greater Germany, but as part of a process leading to a "Germanic-Gothic" empire extending to the Urals, and perhaps even a "Gothic-Frankish-Carolinian Empire" whose dimensions had yet to be established! [20](#)

These notions so excited SS leaders that they easily confused chicken and egg. Thus Berger, the recruiting chief, claimed in a speech before Wehrmacht generals that, "the SS saw the Germanic Reich as its ultimate goal since 1929, when the Reichsführer SS [Himmler] took command." According to this vision of the past, the SS then more or less undertook the mission of "building a Germanic Reich for the Führer." [21](#)

The SS did stand at the forefront of the pan-German movement, using its prestige,

influence, and institutions to provide impetus to the Germanic agenda. Himmler's success in establishing "superior police and SS" administrative heads in Norway, Denmark, Holland, and Belgium gave him much the same influence there that he enjoyed in the Reich. Some concrete measures in line with pan-German ideology did emerge as the eastward conquest proceeded and the planned settlement of the land by Germanic settlers began. In the homelands, native party leaders and many of their followers received SS rank. Native SS organizations were formed in all the occupied Nordic countries extending south to Walloon Belgium, which belatedly received "Germanic" status in 1943. [22](#)

Through its very direction of the Germanic movement, the SS was to reveal its fatal weaknesses. In typical heavy-handed fashion, the SS insisted that pan-Germanism meant full subordination to the Third Reich and its hierarchies. Any notion of pan-German equality remained operational only in theory, or in the dreams of the collaborators. National politics had no role in the SS-defined empire, which reduced the occupied Nordic states to the level of *Gaue* (provinces) within the Third Reich. We will see that Germanic notions of ideology scarcely affected the methods by which Germany and especially the SS would treat the captive populations of Europe. [23](#)

New Order Policies and the SS

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Given the generally recognized heinous nature of German occupation policy, it seems curious that any of the occupied peoples could have been attracted by it. The Nazis claimed, with some relish, to have created a New Europe, unified in such a way that it cancelled all the ills of the nationalist past. However, other than the police and extermination functions of the SS, no German policy or institution applied equally across the old national borders. Nazi racial doctrines hopelessly crippled the project of forging a unified Europe. Possibly only Hitler himself could have implemented any synthesis of administrative, social, political, economic, and military policy in Europe, but the direction of his war left him no time and energy for such a massive task. [24](#)

Nevertheless, the myths of the "New Order in Europe" substantially displaced the "Germanic Empire" in German propaganda as the war continued. As larger numbers of non-Germanic peoples fell under German sway, their occupiers used pan-Europeanism to encourage collaboration. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the volunteer phenomenon swept up more non-Germanics than Germanics in Western Europe alone, not to mention the larger mass of non-German volunteers in the East. The propaganda of "Germanic Empire" gave way to pamphlets and posters extolling the unification of Europe, emphasizing the crusade against the Soviet Union. Typical was a series of pamphlets published by Dr. Franz A. Six of the German Foreign Country and Scientific Institute in 1944. These essays recalled the historical pattern of European community, the dangers of communism, the role of Germany in reuniting Europe, the crusade against Bolshevik Russia, and the role of European volunteers in fighting and supporting that crusade. [25](#)

By mid-war, the SS took particular care in its training camps to hold up the "Europa" concept to incoming volunteers, especially officers and NCO cadets. At the SS Cadet School, Bad Tölz, the program of instruction included five hours per week of "ideological training," mostly consisting of political history, racial history, and the study of Europe under National Socialism. The latter topic portrayed "the European task in the East: to create a new law, economy, and economic role of the East for Europe...." [26](#)

Germans and foreigners alike in the SS began to believe in this doctrine. Much of this feeling derived from the special comradeship-in-arms that developed in the combat units of the Waffen-SS, where in some cases a few foreign officers commanded German soldiers (and, more often, the contrary was true), with no apparent friction. Oblivious to economic

and social deprivation in their German-occupied homelands, the foreign troops grasped at the multinational ethos of the Waffen-SS as a harbinger of a new world, in which equality of citizenship would be guaranteed to the nations participating in the crusades of the New Order. An instructor at Bad Tölz, who later served as its last commandant, reported to Hitler personally in August 1944 that foreign volunteers were concerned not only with defeating Bolshevism, but also in guaranteeing the future of their homelands by fighting for their independence:

I received the reply that exactly as he [had] stated in a telegram to Reich Commissioner [Josef] Terboven on 28 September 1943 in Oslo, he guaranteed independence of all European states after the war. An excerpt of the text of this Hitler telegram to the Norwegians reads as follows: "It is the irrevocable will of the Führer after the victorious end of this battle of destiny to permit a National and Socialist Norway to arise in freedom and independence, which surrenders to the higher sphere of a European Community only those functions which are indispensable for the security of Europe since this community alone can sustain and guarantee such security."

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I was commissioned by Hitler to impart his opinions to the European officer candidates of the Waffen-SS. [27](#)

Several of the combat leaders of the Waffen-SS, including Generals Paul Hauser and [Felix Steiner](#) (both former Army officers), earned Himmler's reproach by transgressing SS ideology and ideals and advocating a European community over a Germanic Reich. As senior survivors of the SS after World War II, their published and private remarks stimulated much of the largely postwar mythology surrounding the SS as a European Army. [28](#)

Despite the enormous falsehood perpetuated by Nazi propaganda in this matter of pan-Europeanism, which runs in direct contradiction to their true policy, which baldly calculated to subjugate the entire continent, the postwar mythology has grown stronger. [29](#) The establishment of the NATO alliance and the European Economic Community provided encouragement for the much-maligned SS veterans and military collaborators. They persuaded themselves that the SS had served as the progenitor of the European integration movement, and that they had been the movement's pioneers. [30](#) Of all the German and Western European veterans of the Waffen-SS that I have interviewed, only one, a Flemish Belgian, saw things otherwise. A twenty-two-year-old teacher and reserve army officer, he joined the SS in 1942. He had no political affiliation, and remained a devout Catholic with a strong distaste for communism. He saw pan-Germanic and European doctrines as mere propaganda. German officers in the Waffen-SS units discussed no politics other than the general course of the war, certainly never in terms of Europa-policy. In his opinion, the "New Europe" concept grew out of the prisoner-of-war association after the war and the first writing of war experiences and unit histories. [31](#)

The Russo-German War

The most important influence on the foreign volunteer phenomenon stemmed from the campaign itself in which most volunteers fought, the war with the Soviet Union. Without this casus belli, the numbers of non-Germans volunteering to serve in the German forces would have remained very small, and would be a subject of only passing curiosity. But the nature of the war and the character of the major opponents created the most favorable conditions for volunteer service.

Given the pariah status of the Soviet Union in the first twenty years of its existence and

the polarization of political viewpoints in most European countries between the wars, it became most expedient for Nazi propaganda to feature the Russo-German War as a "crusade" destined to rid Europe of the encroaching Red Menace that had threatened weak and strong nations alike for a generation.

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The course of the four-year conflict between National Socialist Germany and Communist Russia has attracted a great deal of attention from popular writers and historians over the past several generations. As an epic event in human and military history it has no rival. It continues to capture the imagination of readers because of the incredible expanse of the battlefield, the numbers of men and machines committed and lost by each side, and the utter ferocity of combat, as the opposing ideologies portrayed the battle as a clash of civilizations. [32](#)

Operation Barbarossa, the German plan for the invasion and occupation of Russia, called for a lightning advance by the Wehrmacht to destroy the Red Army in its forward positions deployed west of the Dnieper River and out of the Stalin Line fortifications. A general pursuit would carry the German forces eastward to an approximate line between Archangel and Astrakhan. The area east of this line—the major cities and industrial and agricultural regions—would fall under the territorial administration of the Reich, leaving the Soviets in some form of a rump Siberian republic. Reinforced economically by the industry of the Donetz basin and the agricultural production of the Ukraine, the Third Reich would remain secure for its millennial rule. Although the Germans came perilously close to their objective, Hitler's fatal miscalculation proved to be his underestimation of the political strength of the Soviet system under Stalin.

The initial invasion force assembled by the Wehrmacht ensured its initial superiority in quantity and quality over its Soviet counterpart. Some 3.8 million men, 3300 tanks, 7000 artillery pieces, and 2000 aircraft launched Operation Barbarossa. On the ground, the Germans deployed 148 divisions, 19 of them armored, along with 14 divisions of the Romanian Army. Against these, the Red Army could bring into action only 138 divisions in the western border areas, all of them undermanned and under-equipped.

German planning staffs identified three possible strategic targets for the offensive. A northern thrust against Leningrad offered the political advantages of "liberating" the Baltic States, capturing the second-largest Russian city, and achieving an early link-up with Finland, which was waging a separate war to recover traditional Karelia. A direct advance eastward against Moscow would eliminate the Soviet capital and seat of the Stalinist administration and seize the transportation center of the country. A southerly offensive offered the economic advantages of an early conquest of the Ukraine and Donetz regions. Hitler, in his matchless fashion, chose all three objectives for his forces. [33](#)

The attack fell upon the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. To this day, the degree of surprise the Wehrmacht obtained remains inexplicable. Stalin had received direct warnings from Churchill and his own master spy in Tokyo, Richard Sorge. [34](#) Soviet forces in the border regions had fortified themselves very little, had laid no anti-tank mines, and yielded huge numbers of prisoners. Many operational errors grew out of contemporary Soviet military doctrine, which emphasized an immediate counteroffensive instead of static defenses. However, the Red Army also performed poorly as a result of leadership losses incurred in the great purges of 1937, obsolescent armaments, and its inadequate maintenance and training. [35](#) These early victories caused Hitler to think of a shift of strategic objectives prior to the final collapse of the Red Army. Thus, from Smolensk—reached by both Napoleon and the Germans in July—Hitler redirected the main Wehrmacht effort into the Ukraine and away from Moscow. German forces were not back in position to launch the attack on Moscow (Operation Typhoon) until September—the



Eastern Front, the

month Napoleon reached the city. At this point in the 1941 campaign, Fall 1941
 German losses totaled 410,000 men (eleven percent of the invasion force), and thirty per cent of their tanks and prime mover vehicles. Only 217,000 replacements became available, and twenty-one of the twenty-four divisions held in the OKW reserve had to be sent to the front. ³⁶ The friction of war literally worked hard on the Wehrmacht in terms of men and machines during the September-December slog towards Moscow.

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The Moscow campaign backfired on the Germans, as the Soviet Army had withheld its last reserves of fresh Siberian troops until 5 December. Their counterstroke Eastern Front, Winter 1941-2
 caught the German forces bogged down at the end of overextended lines of communication. The Germans reeled back fifty to one hundred miles, suffering some 200,000 casualties. After this defeat, the German Army staff called for a defensive posture on the Eastern Front in order to await new weapons and a general refurbishing of forces. Hitler, on the other hand, saw time running out, with the Italians already in trouble in North Africa and the United States having entered the war, albeit diverted for some time in the Pacific. He directed the Wehrmacht to Eastern Front, Spring 1942
 strike to the south in 1942, entering the Caucasus and eventually wheeling northward behind Moscow. The Red Army would thus have to fight for its oil and communications against a German Army refitted by the summer of 1942 with fresh mechanized equipment but still shorthanded in infantry. New allied divisions from Italy, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia would fill in the lines, but no reserves would remain. ³⁷

The Red Army also reorganized and re-equipped itself in the summer of 1942, replacing older leaders with younger generals. These commanders, however, wasted their strength in a fruitless summer offensive. The German forces crossed over the Don, invested Stalingrad on the Volga, and sent a small army group into the Caucasus. Hitler's quest for Stalin's city drew the Wehrmacht out of the campaign in the open into street fighting, where it Eastern Front, Winter 1942-3
 sacrificed its technical and training edge. Once again Soviet reserves, carefully marshaled and committed against under-equipped German and allied troops, broke the Axis lines and this time trapped a German field army. The surrender of the Sixth Army—the first German field army lost since the Battle of Jena—preceded only by a few months the loss of a second field army in Tunisia (with each, Germany lost some 300,000 killed, wounded, and missing). The Axis forces lost the initiative, and a fatal war of attrition now enmeshed the Germans and their cohorts.

Hitler's attempt to maintain the offensive in Russia in 1943 failed in the huge battles around Kursk, and from August onward the Germans fell Operation Bagration, 1944
 back before increasingly superior Soviet forces, which were now well equipped, better supplied, and led by seasoned combat commanders. The summer of 1944 saw the destruction of the German Army Group Center and the arrival of the Red Army at Central Europe, 1944
 the frontiers of Germany and Hungary. At the end of 1944, the Russo-German War ceased to be a discrete campaign, and the Third Reich simply folded under the triple onslaught of Eastern and Western Allied armies combined with aerial bombardment.

The collapse of the Thousand-Year Reich after a mere twelve years dashed any concomitant plans for a Germanic Empire stretching from the Pyrenees to the Urals, or any supranational realignment of the old nation-states under any New Order. The thousands of European volunteers who dug themselves out of the rubble of Germany or found themselves in Allied prisoner of war camps met with very little sympathy for their situation at the hands of their liberated countrymen or Allied captors. A few faced firing squads and hangmen, most endured a few years of imprisonment, and numbers of them sought sanctuary in exile from these and other repercussions.

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Aside from the tendentious argument that they led the wave of European integration that later swept over the continent, the surviving former volunteer veterans seem to share one attribute: they show little remorse, and avow that their years in Wehrmacht or SS uniforms remain in memory the most exciting years of their lives. Some may have dismissed these years as anachronistic, born of youthful exuberance, and many strive to forget. For significant numbers, however, frequent reunions with former comrades bring them back to the year they joined their regiments.

Notes:

Note 1: Felix Steiner, *Die Freiwilligen: Idee und Opfergang* (Göttingen: Plesse Verlag, 1958). [Back.](#)

Note 2: George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 137. [Back.](#)

Note 3: Robert A. Gelwick, "Personnel Policies and Procedures of the Waffen-SS" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1971); Edgar E. Knoebel, "Racial Illusion and Military Necessity" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1965). David Littlejohn, *The Patriotic Traitors* (New York: Doubleday, 1972); François Duprat, *Histoire des SS* (Paris: Les Sept Couleurs, 1968). [Back.](#)

Note 4: Jurgen Förster and Gert R. Überschar, "Freiwillige für die 'Kreuzzug Europas gegen den Bolschewismus,'" in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol 4, *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983); English edition, *The Attack on the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Bernd Wegner, *Hitler's Politische Soldaten: Die Waffen-SS 1933-45* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningher, 1982; English edition, *The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology and Function* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1990). Robert Koehl, *The Black Corps* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Hans Werner Neulen, *An deutscher Seite: Internationale Freiwillige von Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS* (Munich: Universitas, 1985). [Back.](#)

Note 5: Alan S. Milward, *War, Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). [Back.](#)

Note 6: Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS: Alibi of a Nation 1922-1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1957) has been supplanted by Robert Koehl's *The Black Corps* as the standard authority. However, its narrow concept of the Waffen-SS as an armed formation designed for internal security must be replaced by notions of the SS as an emerging revolutionary state in its own right, and the Waffen-SS as its future army, as asserted by Bernd Wegner, *The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology, and Function*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 360-65. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Stein, *Waffen-SS*, xxv-xxxii. [Back.](#)

Note 8: Ibid., 22; Alfred Schickel, "Wehrmacht und SS," *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau* 19:5 (May 1969): 247-50. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Stein, *Waffen-SS*, 49; Schickel, "Wehrmacht und SS," 257; Helmut Krausnick, Hans Buchheim, Martin Broszat and Hans-Adolph Jacobsen, *Anatomy of the SS State* (New York: Walker, 1968), 260-74. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Stein, *Waffen-SS*, 48. Wegner, *Waffen-SS*, 128-29. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Stein, *Waffen-SS*, 35-36, 48; Wegner, *Waffen-SS*, 209 ff. On the organization of

Berger's office, see Gerhard Rempel, "Gottlob Berger and Waffen-SS Recruitment, 1939-1945," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen (MGM)* 27:1 (1980): 107-22. General Alfred Jodl, Chief of Staff, OKW, commented in his diary entry for 25 May 1940, "the plan for a limitless expansion of the SS is alarming." Schickel, "Wehrmacht und SS," 260. Berger became head of the SS Central Office in August of 1940, but this only added duties of overseeing ideological training; Wegner, 209-12. [Back.](#)

Note 12: The OSS estimated that some 442,000 *Volksdeutsche*, including Alsatians, were available for military service, with 15,000 more coming of age each year. National Archives and Records Administration, Military Records Division, Record Group 226, OSS (R & A) document 1238, 25 September 1943. Luxemburgers and some Alsatians were considered citizens of the Reich under a complex set of rules. See Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, vol. 2, *The Establishment of the New Order* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 23-35, 166; Willard A. Fletcher, "The German Administration in Luxemburg, 1940-42," *The Historical Journal* 13:3 (March 1970): 533-44. Bernd Wegner, "Auf dem Wege zur pangermanischen Armee," *MGM* 28 (1980): 101-3. For a statistical breakdown of early volunteers by nationality, see Kurt G. Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS: eine Dokumentation* (Osnabrück: Munin, 1965), 501. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Schickel, "Wehrmacht und SS," 260. [Back.](#)

Note 14: *Ibid.*, 262-64; Wegner, "Auf dem Wege," 103, 113n; Stein, *Waffen-SS*, 17. Wegner later enlarged and detailed the Himmler vision of a new army decisively in his masterly *Waffen-SS*; see especially 346-59. [Back.](#)

Note 15: George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1963), 13-125, *passim*; Hans-Dietrich Loock, "Zur 'Grossgermanischen Politik' des Dritten Reiches," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 8:1 (January 1960): 38. University courses in Germanic Philology, such as those offered before the war at Louvain, may have influenced students and had some impact on the volunteer movement; Interviews with Franz Vierendeels, Groot-Bijaarden, Belgium, 29 May 1982 and Léon Degrelle, Madrid, 8 June 1982. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's Weltanschauung: A Blueprint for Power* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), 117-21. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, vol. 1, *Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973),, xlii, 4-7. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Loock, "Zur 'Grossgermanischen Politik,'" 39. See also his *Quisling, Rosenberg und Terboven* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), 263. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Loock, "Zur 'Grossgermanischen Politik,'" 40-56. [Back.](#)

Note 20: Bernd Wegner, "Der Krieg Gegen des Sowjetunion 1942/43" (esp. subsection "Germanische und Volksdeutsche Freiwillige") in Horst Boog, et al., *Der Global Krieg: Die Ausweitung zur Weltkrieg und der Wechsel der Initiative, 1941-1943* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1990), 836. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Loock, "Zur 'Grossgermanischen Politik,'" 56. [Back.](#)

Note 22: *Ibid.*, 57; Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, 2: 348-93. Wegner, *Waffen-SS*, 334. [Back.](#)

Note 23: Loock, "Zur 'Grossgermanischen Politik,'" 62-63; Wegner, *Waffen-SS*, 332-39. [Back.](#)

Note 24: Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, 1: 248-50. [Back.](#)

Note 25: Interviews with Alfred Mäder, Rendsberg, Germany, 13 March 1981 and Richard Schultze-Kossens, Düsseldorf, 26 March 1981; Franz A. Six, ed., *Europa und die Welt* (Berlin: Junker and Dünnhaupt, 1944). [Back.](#)

Note 26: Jüttner letter, 5 February 1944, on cadet school course plan for 1944/45, reprinted in Richard Schultze-Kossens, *Militärischer Führernachwuchs der Waffen-SS: die Junkerschulen* (Osnabrück: Munin, 1982), 126-43. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Testimony of Richard Schultze-Kossens at Trial of Gottlob Berger, *Nürnberg International Tribunal*, 13 January 1948. Copy in possession of Schultze-Kossens. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Stein, *Waffen-SS*, 146-48. See the personnel files of Hauser and Steiner as well as other officers of the Waffen-SS in the Berlin Document Center (BDC), U. S. Mission, Berlin, now administered by the Bundesarchiv. Later these were filmed in NARA Record Group 242, microform A3343. Former SS Major Alfred Mäder opined that "the Hauser crowd in the Waffen-SS was ready to smash the Brownshirts" when the war ended, thus ensuring the triumph of the European ideal over the SS state; Mäder interview. [Back.](#)

Note 29: On the calculable nature of Hitler's goals, see Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, vol. 2, 420-22. [Back.](#)

Note 30: George Stein, "The Myth of a European Army," *Weiner Library Bulletin* 19:2 (April 1965): 21-27, remains an adequate counterpoint to the postwar literature of pan-Europeanism. For a flagrant example of the last, see the discussion series "Freiwilliger für Europa" in the April-October 1976 issues of *Der Freiwillige*. [Back.](#)

Note 31: Interview with Jan Vincx, Herentals, Belgium, 29 May 1982. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Among the huge literature on the Eastern Front in World War II, the best surveys are Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War* (New York: Praeger, 1971), and John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) and *Road to Berlin* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983). Also useful for the general readers are Alan Clark, *Barbarossa* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1965), Alexander Werth, *Russia at War 1941-1945* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1964) and Paul Carrell [Paul Schmidt], *Hitler's War on Russia* (London: Harrap, 1964). [Back.](#)

Note 33: Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 138. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad*, 73-77, 87-94. [Back.](#)

Note 35: Ibid., 15-21 [Back.](#)

Note 36: George E. Blau, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations 1940-42* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1955), 71-72. [Back.](#)

Note 37: Ibid., 131. [Back.](#)

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