



## 5. Despair and Fanaticism, 1944-45

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### The Last Legion

As the new volunteer assault brigades of the Waffen-SS deployed to the front in early 1944, the last foreign legion joined the German Army. An anachronism, given the gigantic replacement problems facing the army, the Spanish Legion nevertheless salvaged Spanish honor and simultaneously allowed the withdrawal of the considerably larger and more effective 250th (Spanish) Infantry Division. <sup>1</sup>

The Spanish Legion officially was born on 19 November 1943, when the first volunteers transferred to the former Soviet Army barracks at Jamburg (Kingisepp), on the banks of the Luga River some fifteen miles east of Narva. Army Group North published an official table of organization the following day. <sup>2</sup> It established the Legion

as a command group with three *banderas*. The *bandera* was a small battalion-sized unit, immediately traceable to the Spanish Foreign Legion in origin. The first two of these units each consisted of three rifle companies and a machine-gun company. The third was a support unit made up of an infantry gun company, an anti-tank company, and a mixed company of communication, scout, and engineer personnel. The total strength on paper was to have been 2133 men, but a more reasonable estimate of the maximum strength of the Legion seems to have to be about 1650. The German Army furnished a liaison staff of twelve officers and seventy-three men, including translators. <sup>3</sup>

As noted in Chapter Two, the formation of the Legion took place under rather confusing circumstances and can rightly be termed an *ad hoc* action. Certainly, most of the officers and a cadre of the enlisted men came from the recently arrived march battalions, and the assembled personnel undoubtedly reflected the changed Spanish attitude over the benefits of service on the Eastern Front. According to German reports, the newly arrived replacements were an "insecure element in search of adventure" and numbered many released convicts among their ranks. Colonel Navarro rejected seventy-five men immediately and sent them home. In the first two weeks following the Legion's formation, seven men deserted and an equal number inflicted disabling wounds upon themselves. One of the former individuals was recaptured and promptly hanged on Colonel Navarro's order. To German observers, it remained clear that a quiet sector would have to be found to break in this heterogeneous organization. <sup>4</sup>



On 15 December 1943, the XXVIII Corps of the Eighteenth Army was notified that its 121st Infantry Division would receive the Spanish Legion—then en route by rail from Jamburg—for operational use. The 121st was positioned in the rugged, thickly wooded area around Vinyagolovo, defending a salient with its three weakened regiments (300-350 men per battalion). Since the Legion had a frontline infantry strength of about 1000 men, the Corps ordered it into a position occupied by four battalions of the German division. Between 18 and 19 December, the First and Second *Banderas* replaced battalions of the German 405th and 407th Infantry Regiments. This was considered a quiet sector of the German front, and the Spanish troops settled down to a month of uneventful positional defense. Discipline among the Spanish unit remained questionable, however, as Corps records indicated more cases of desertion and self-inflicted wounds. <sup>5</sup>

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The situation of Army Group North at the end of 1943 had deteriorated to a critical point.

The Spanish Division and three German divisions had been withdrawn by October, while the Army Group had acquired sixty miles of additional frontage from Army Group Center during the same period. As replacements, Field Marshal Georg von Kuchler received the Spanish Legion and three divisions of SS troops recruited in the [Baltic states](#). In such a weakened state, the Army Group staff planned a new position to its rear that would considerably shorten the front lines (by twenty-five percent) and remove the Soviet threats posed in many salients on the current lines. The plan, Operation "Blue," called for a January withdrawal of over 150 miles to the natural defensive barrier formed by the Narva and Velikaya Rivers and Lakes Peipus and Pskov. This position, the so-called "Panther Line," was buttressed by fortifications that had been constructed since September. The retreat would be carried out in stages, using intermediate defensive positions, the most important of which was the *Rollbahn* Line formed on the October Railway running through Tosno, Lyuban, and Chudovo. There the two most exposed Corps, the XXVI and XXVIII, would regroup and catch their breath before proceeding farther back to their positions in the Panther Line. [6](#)

The fate of Army Group North turned for the worse in the new year, for Hitler rejected all proposals for an early withdrawal into the "Panther" position, insisting that the Russian forces be kept as far as possible from Germany and that they be forced to pay dearly for each meter of ground. Finally, Hitler transferred three more first-rate infantry divisions out of Army Group North to reinforce Manstein's Army Group South as it reeled back from the Dnieper River under continuous Soviet assault. Field Marshal Kuchler now held an extremely precarious position, and could only await events on the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts with great pessimism. [7](#)

On 14 January 1944, a fearful combined Soviet offensive on the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts began. The weight of the Soviet attack fell on the German left flank, trapping some German forces between Oranienbaum and Leningrad. From the Volkhov Front, two Soviet Armies (the Eighth and the Fifty-ninth) fell upon the Eighteenth Army's center. Though not pressed particularly hard in their sector, the Spanish troops wavered and apparently withdrew from some of their positions without instructions. They probably were afraid of encirclement, since Russian troops and partisans typically infiltrated the German front and then appeared in the rear areas. The Legion's discipline—such as it was—cracked under the first strain of defensive fighting, and confusion reigned supreme in its place. The XXVIII and XXVI Corps were ordered back to the *Rollbahn* position on the 19th, and already the German commander of the 121st Division was pleading for the "immediate detachment of the completely unreliable Spanish Legion." [8](#)

The Legion fell back essentially in disorder to the town of Lyuban, where the 121st Division held that part of the *Rollbahn* for a week (21-28 January). The continual onslaught of Soviet forces quickly dashed all German hopes for a short withdrawal, and Army Group North initiated the general retreat on 28 January. Hitler replaced Kuchler with Field Marshal Walter Model on 1 February, agreeing belatedly to a withdrawal of the Eighteenth Army to the Luga River. The situation was irretrievable, since by 29 January the Army had lost two-thirds of its frontline infantry, and, after attempting a mobile defense for two weeks, Model began to move first the Army and then all of Army Group North into the Panther Line. [9](#)

The Spanish Legion played no further part in the intense fighting retreat—the German command literally banished it from the battlefield. The XXVIII Corps attempted to use the Legion to defend Lyuban, but achieved only misunderstandings with the Spanish Command and a dilatory attempt by the First *Bandera* to strike out to the north of the town. [10](#) The Corps and Army staffs decided by 26 January that the Spanish troops were "unfit for battle," and that night the Legion set out on the road from Lyuban through Vditsko and Oredezsh to Luga, finally camping a few kilometers east-



northeast of Luga on 29 January. Exhausted after marching and fighting occasional partisans, the Spaniards could not pause long, for the Army had decided to move them further to the rear and also to use them as railroad security troops. Thus, from 2 to 14 February the Legion moved by increments through the Panther Line at Pskov, then west of the Pskov and Peipus Lakes, to a strategic rail junction at Tapa. [11](#)

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The units of the Legion occupied four towns on the Reval-Narva railroad lines—Tapa, Lekhtse, Janedu, and Aegvidu—covering about fourteen miles distance in all. Colonel Navarro now determined to retrain his unit and purge it of its unsuitable elements with the intention of making it a combat-worthy organization. He felt that three months of training and personnel exchange would prove sufficient to make the Spaniards dependable. [12](#)

However, the future utility of the Legion was debated extensively in the German Command. The commanding officer of the Army Group North, Rear Area immediately protested the presence of the Spanish troops in his zone. He testified that more than two years of typical Spanish excesses, committed by troops on furlough and convalescent leave, had severely tested his patience and, therefore, the Spanish Legion could just as well continue their rearward march back to Germany! The commander of the XXVIII Corps wrote at the same time that the Legion, despite its assignment in a quiet sector, safe from tank attack and in improved positions, had proved "unable to carry its own weight at the front." Only after the complete replacement of its unreliable elements would the Legion be suited for defensive missions in positional warfare. Ultimately, the Eighteenth Army staff concluded that there was no place for the Spanish unit in the approaching defensive struggle to hold the Narva River line. [13](#)



Army Group North decided on 23 February, in spite of all these remonstrations, to retain the Spanish Legion for "coastal security" operations in the Tapa region. By this time, however, the obvious shift of the war in favor of the Allies had caused the United States and Great Britain to bring increased pressure upon the Spanish government to observe a stricter form of neutrality in the war. The principal objective that the Allies wished to obtain was the embargo of Spanish shipments of a critical war material, wolfram (tungsten ore), to Germany. Also at issue were German espionage activities in Spain and Morocco, Spanish internment of Italian warships and merchant shipping that could now aid the Allied cause, and the Spanish soldiers and airmen still in the service of the German Wehrmacht. [14](#)

Allied diplomats continued to pressure the Spanish government to withdraw the Spanish Legion and air squadron from the Eastern Front. On 11 February, Spain's government informed the German ambassador that the Spanish Legion had proved a failure, and that the record of the Blue Division had therefore been "clouded" by the men of the Legion. The implied request for the Legion's return was made official twelve days later, and it was duly reported to Berlin on 26 February. The German High Command decided almost immediately to honor the Spanish request, and a message to Army Group North on 3 March 1944 announced the Führer's decision to withdraw the Spanish Legion. OKW orders followed on 5 March to confirm the Legion's return to Spain, orders that also applied to the Spanish Air Squadrons. [15](#)

Field Marshal Model informed Colonel Navarro on 3 March that the Legion would return home with Germany's thanks for aiding the fight against Bolshevism. The Spaniards assembled for the last time at Tapa and boarded three trains on 16, 23, and 30 March for the long ride back to Hof and their demobilization. The last contingents crossed into Spain on 17 April 1944. Such was the ignominious end of the Spanish Legion, after scarcely a single month of combat operations. With the return of these last troops, the official participation of Spanish volunteers in the German Armed Forces came to an end.



[16](#)

## Final Levies

The contributions of the Western volunteer contingents to the German war effort of 1944 diminished after the defensive battles of the winter and spring. The III Germanic Corps fell back into Courland before the Russian summer offensive, and all three of the Western volunteer assault brigades returned to their training camps for reforming and retraining. Between June and November, the German Army lost almost a million men on the Eastern Front, and a further half million in the West. In addition, the fateful Allied landings in Normandy had breached the Atlantic defenses, opening a new front, and Allied troops marched into the Rhineland, recapturing most of the territory won by the Wehrmacht by mid-1940. In the East, an entire army group (Center) collapsed under Russian attack, and the first Prussian villages received their Soviet garrisons. [17](#)



Operation Bagration

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These disasters provided a two-pronged impetus for the final expansion of the Western European volunteer units. The staggering losses in German manpower dictated that Germany use all available sources of reinforcement, including the long-discussed "Vlassov Army," recruited for service with the German Army from among Russian prisoners of war. By comparison, the expansion of the Western SS volunteer brigades must have appeared a more attractive option to the German leadership. Secondly, the approach of the Anglo-American armies from the west produced a desperate surge of refugees from France, Holland, and Belgium, mainly former collaborationists anxious to escape the retribution that accompanied liberation. Collaborationist leaders established exile headquarters, at Soltau, Hannover (Hildesheim), and Sigmaringen for Flemish, Walloon, and French groups respectively, and refugee families located in the environs. Party militias and military-age youths joined their national Waffen-SS formations with some encouragement from collaborationist leadership. [18](#)



Kaisergruber: Refugees

In the case of the Flemish, thousands of collaborationist families had fled their homeland in August and September. The Germans resettled them as a group near Soltau (near Lüneburg), and some 2000 men volunteered for SS service in the first three months of their arrival. Encouraged by these numbers, Himmler ordered the Assault Brigade SS Langemarck to Soltau and directed it to be expanded to divisional size on 12 September. [19](#)

Lieutenant Colonel Schellong received the assignment to expand his brigade into the 27th SS *Langemarck* Division. The latter consisted (on paper) of three infantry regiments (Numbered 66-68), each of two battalions, an anti-tank company with seventy-two hand-held rocket launchers and a support company with eight mortars and four infantry guns. In addition, the SS planned to form an artillery regiment, a mixed battalion with assault guns, heavy and light anti-aircraft batteries, a brigade fusilier company, and support troops. [20](#)

Filling out this division required that the Germans draw Flemish troops from a variety of sources. SS recruiters continued to enlist Flemish workers from German factories, and other Flemings, originally recruited as truck drivers and laborers in the Todt Organization and the National Socialist Motor Corps (the German *NSKK*), arrived from France, Russia, and the Baltic and Balkan regions where they had been deployed. The refugee groups around Soltau provided significant numbers, as noted above, although "some pressure" was used to persuade all men capable of bearing arms to join the new battalions. Then, too, the Flemish auxiliary guards hired by the German Army, Navy, and Air Force to watch over military installations now found themselves newly "volunteered" for service in the Waffen-SS. Finally, the paramilitary arms of the Flemish collaborationist groups were absorbed into *SS Langemarck*. [21](#)

Various Flemish sources claim that some 15-18,000 men filled the ranks of the division: 3000 from the Assault Brigade and its replacements in depot, 7000 from other formations (military, NSKK, Todt), and 5000 from new recruits. Even if that many Flemings could be found, the difficulty of forming a complete division—with technical services, heavy supporting weapons, and the like—into a combat-ready organization was simply impossible given the time available and the chaotic political and military situation. German officers filled the primary staff and command billets through battalion commanders. Schellong took command of a regiment, and Colonel Thomas Müller received command of the division. <sup>22</sup>

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For its first assignment, *SS Langemarck* moved to the Eifel region, as a follow-on unit for the German Ardennes offensive. It probably would have garrisoned Belgian cities in the event of a German victory. For this purpose, as the division moved west from Soltau on 24 December, it included a "Ministerial Company" of civilian personnel intended to establish a puppet government in re-conquered Flanders. Not intended for frontline service, this company received only rudimentary military training. When the German offensive turned sour, however, the division was not risked in combat, and it returned to Soltau to resume training. In its place, the German High Command ordered a divisional battle group formed for combat employment. The first battalions of the 66th and 67th Regiments and the mixed anti-tank and anti-aircraft battalion assembled under command of the redoubtable Konrad Schellong. This group remained in the Eifel region until the end of January, when it entrained for the Budapest front. En route, the Germans redirected it to Stettin and a final battle in Pomerania. <sup>23</sup>

The Walloon experience closely paralleled that of their Flemish counterparts in the twilight of their Waffen-SS experience. Over 1800 new recruits came to the depots of *SS Wallonien* from among the political refugees moving into Hannover after Allied armies crossed the Belgian frontier. Also in this group could be found Walloons from the Todt Organization, the NSKK, the Wehrmacht auxiliary guards, and a company of Spaniards. The 28th *SS Wallonien* Division was formed on 18 September 1944 from the 1800-man assault brigade and these new recruits. Its organization duplicated that of the *SS Langemarck* Division, except that its size remained half that of the Flemish formation. Training began in mid-October, and it soon became apparent that only a much smaller unit could be prepared for combat, owing to the diminished morale and physical condition of so many of the recruits as well as the restricted amount of time, materiel, and ammunition available for training. The division consisted of two regiment headquarters (69th and 70th Regiments) sharing only three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, one engineer battalion, one anti-aircraft company, and support units. Apparently, the SS withdrew their German commander, a Colonel Burk, and the combination of Major Hellebaut and Lieutenant Colonel Degrelle resumed command of the Walloons. <sup>24</sup>

In mid-December, additional recruits permitted activation of a fourth battalion of infantry, with the division's overall effective troop strength now reaching 4300. The division moved to the Rhineland for possible use in the Ardennes breakthrough. Léon Degrelle took a small group of political aides with a motorized escort onto Belgian soil (Limerlé) in order to maintain contact with German forces and stake out ground for a political role in the event of a German victory. Degrelle also attended briefings at the German Sixth SS Army and Army Group B headquarters. As the offensive waned, the Walloons transferred back to the north to resume training. <sup>25</sup>

The largest refugee group was the French, and they also manifested the

most unusual transformation of a volunteer unit. As France fell to the Allied armies liberation, thousands of collaborators, paramilitary troops, and auxiliary police members fled to Germany. At the same time, the French Legion (LVF) of the German Army and the Cance Battalion of SS *Frankreich* returned from their respective batterings on the Eastern Front. Himmler secured an order from the Führer raising the *Frankreich* Brigade to divisional strength on 10 August 1944. Christened the 33rd SS *Charlemagne* Division, this unit was considered a second-rate SS division composed of non-Germanic levies, similar to the several "Eastern SS" divisions raised in the last months of the war by Himmler's lieutenants. 26



At a German SS training camp near Könitz in West Prussia, a startling agglomeration of Frenchmen gathered, wearing a wild mixture of military and paramilitary uniforms. The 1200 veterans of the LVF under Colonel Puaud watched trainloads of French NSKK men arrive, along with former local security guards enlisted by the German Navy and Army. The approximately 2300 transport personnel and 1200 guards showed a poor state of morale, shouting "A bas les biffins, a bas les boches" ("Down with the footsloggers [infantry], down with the Germans"). A few kilometers away stood the 1200 regular SS soldiers of the *Frankreich* Brigade. But the major disruptive element came in the form of 1800 men of the Vichy *Milice*, under the command of the mercenary, Joseph Darnaud. The latter had joined the SS in 1943 to enhance his status with the Germans and the various political circles of the Vichy regime. Now he hoped to lead his *Milice* as an integral unit of the *Charlemagne* Division, and his followers looked to him with total obedience. His former *Milice* subordinate, SS Lieutenant Henri Fenet, recently returned from the Sanok Front, told Darnaud that the war against Russia differed completely from fighting the *Maquis* in France, and that they would be exterminated. Only with Waffen-SS training and indoctrination would he and his subordinates be able to carry out their duties in combat. 27

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The first difficulties the SS faced, however, lay in convincing the LVF veterans not to desert the SS. The Legion had a long (if somewhat irregular) service history, and fought out of loyalty to France in a traditional (albeit foreign) armed service. They generally were older and less ideologically motivated than the SS men. The veterans of SS *Frankreich*, on the other hand, boasted of their place in the New Order and total subservience to Germany. 28

Since Puaud remained the senior French officer in the group and commanded the LVF, he proved to be the crucial element in consolidating the various French elements. He was initially given an SS appointment at the rank of colonel, then breveted brigadier (*Oberführer*) and given command of SS *Charlemagne*. He, with the assistance of the old chaplain, Majol de Luppe, convinced the bulk of the LVF to don SS uniforms. Darnaud bitterly accepted his fate, as the *Milice* troops were distributed throughout the division. The Germans shipped all of the disparate French troops to Wildflecken for training. 29

SS *Charlemagne* now numbered some 7600 troops, organized into two infantry regiments (each of two battalions), artillery and anti-tank battalions, support companies, and a replacement battalion. The regular SS men of the former *Frankreich* Brigade went to the first infantry regiment, the 57th, and the LVF veterans remained separate in the 58th Regiment. 30 At Wildflecken, the division began to train as a unit under the direction of a large German inspectorate, headed by SS Brigadier Dr. Gustav Krukenberg. A former reserve Army officer, Krukenberg was fluent in French and had lived in France between the wars. Well qualified culturally and linguistically, he proved ideally suited to the task of bringing the various personalities and heterogeneous political and social groups together in a large SS military formation. In effect, he commanded the SS *Charlemagne* Division, but

he did so as an intermediate commander between the German headquarters and Colonel Puaud, such that the latter received the full accords of a commander. [31](#)

As in the case of its predecessors, political forces continued to have a centripetal effect on the French unit. The rump Vichy government at Sigmaringen, under the influence of Darnaud (there for liaison duty), requested the division's employment on the Western Front. In the Vosges sector, German forces continued to occupy French soil, a state of affairs that offered the possibility of contact with collaborators still behind Allied lines. However, German forces in the East faced imminent disaster after the fall of Hungary, East Prussia, and Silesia, leaving a long coastal corridor, Pomerania-West Prussia, exposed to Russian attacks. Thus the French Division, along with other units still in training, collected its cadets from technical schools and moved to Hammerstein as a reinforcement unit for Army Group "Vistula." It had trained barely two months, however, and lacked the cohesion of the earlier French assault brigade. The latter had formed over a year's time, with ample opportunity to prepare officers at Bad Tölz, NCOs at Sennheim, and technical troops at SS weapons schools. The troops imbibed the SS spiritual motivation, and the *Cance* Battalion (*I/SS Frankreich*) displayed no failures in unit cohesion, probably as a result of the long training period. *SS Charlemagne*, on the other hand, never approached this level of preparation prior to its commitment to the front. [32](#)

The last division of Western European SS volunteers that the Germans created during the war proved a real curiosity. In March 1943, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, Reich Commissioner of the Netherlands, authorized the formation of the *Landwacht Nederland* as a "territorial home-guard unit" intended for service in the Dutch homeland. Rauter saw this organization as an ideal cadre for recruiting Dutchmen for the Waffen-SS, with the idea that a little taste of SS service would breed a thirst for field service with the elite. [33](#) In October, the three battalions thus formed (26 officers and 1912 men) became the *Landstorm Nederland*. German officers and NCOs predominated at the command levels, with Dutch recruits filling the ranks. It seems doubtful that the Germans saw this unit as ever having any potential combat value. Its Dutch recruits obviously preferred serving in the homeland, guarding concentration camps and performing police functions, to duty on the Eastern Front fighting the Red Army. However, the generally worsening manpower situation of 1944 and the Normandy landings caused the Germans to mobilize the *Landstorm* as the 7th Volunteer Infantry Brigade *SS Landstorm Nederland* of two regiments of infantry in September 1944. The first regiment (the original *Landwacht*) fought British para-troopers in the Arnheim area and other forces near Hasselt, Belgium. [34](#)



Operation  
Market Garden

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After the fighting around Arnheim, the brigade withdrew for refitting, having suffered some forty percent casualties in its two regiments. In the eleventh hour of the Germanic Reich, Mussert and the NSB forced their paramilitary guards into the brigade and added Dutch workers and "hunger volunteers," swelling the ranks to some 8000 strong. In February 1945, the SS raised the brigade to division status as the 34th Infantry Division *SS Landstorm Nederland*. But this designation remained purely official, since the two regiments (the 83rd and 84th) remained below strength, with two battalions each, and only an anti-tank unit was added, along with a scratch collection of German artillery batteries. The division stayed on the lower Rhine, out of direct action, until the general capitulation. The Germans judged it fit only to garrison villages as police units. [35](#)

As the SS created its last Western volunteer division, the ubiquitous Spanish volunteers reappeared for a third and final iteration of the national volunteer experience. The motives of these men are difficult to ascertain, but the group undoubtedly included soldiers of fortune, ardent anti-bolsheviks, and those seeking employment and living conditions superior to what Spain offered. The documentation of their experience, beyond the mere

facts of their existence, remains extremely sketchy due to the many gaps in German records from the last year of the war. Nevertheless, they are an essential feature of the Spanish volunteer experience if only because of the psychological expression of will that they represented, and the German policy that accommodated them in the last days of the Reich.

On 18 January 1944, the German Embassy in Madrid reported to Berlin that 135 Spaniards, mostly officers and men of the former Blue Division, had appeared at the embassy during the previous week to offer their service in the Spanish Legion or in the German Waffen-SS. [36](#)

On 26 February, after Count Jordana had requested the Spanish Legion's return, the German OKW ordered the establishment of a "Special Staff F" in Versailles for the induction of Spanish volunteers into the Wehrmacht. Some Spaniards had already begun to cross the border into France to enlist in German service, and the staff set up collection stations at St. Jean de Luz, Lourdes, and Perpignan to receive these men, who were aided by smugglers and mountain guides in evading Franco's border guards.



Despite ambiguous reports of Spaniards entering France and Count Jordana's formal protest over the "illegal" recruitment of Blue Division veterans, the numbers of men who actually were accepted for military service may have remained small. A 14 April 1944 telegram reported that, at that point, only one officer and forty volunteers had arrived in Versailles. In what was perhaps the peak six-week period of activity (8 June-20 July 1944), Special Staff F recruited 150 men for the Army and sent them to a training center in Hall, Austria. A further eighty men preferred industrial

labor to military service and transferred to Biarritz. [37](#)

As the first units of the Spanish Legion left the Russian Front for their ultimate return to Spain, the German High Command advised Army Group North to send any Spaniards wishing to volunteer for service in the Wehrmacht or find work in Germany to the Versailles recruiting office. The German liaison staff of the Spanish Legion in Königsberg advised the High Command on 27 March that over 100 men wished to join the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS, but their officers, ostensibly acting on orders from the Spanish government, had discouraged such actions. [38](#) The Königsberg office nevertheless established a cadre training battalion at the Stablack *Kaserne*, and a rifle company became operational on 31 July 1944. Two translators were placed with the battalion staff and thirteen more in the company, called "Volunteer Unit Stablack," which mustered sixty Spaniards initially. [39](#)

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With the Allied liberation of France, this obscure German recruiting of Spaniards had to cease. No records have been found that would clearly establish how many Spaniards were taken into German service in this way, but it was certainly several hundred men at the least. Furthermore, one small complement of Spaniards may have remained among the German forces, sheltered by the Königsberg staff.

The Spanish troops recruited in France and the troops retained in Stablack ultimately joined with two battalions billeted in towns about twenty-five miles north-northwest of Vienna. The "Spanish Volunteer Replacement Battalion" at Hollabrunn apparently fed the "Spanish Volunteer Training Battalion," activated on 25 October 1944 at Stockerau as part of the 1st Croatian Brigade. The latter unit was established for anti-guerilla operations along the Austro-Yugoslavian border, and proved unsatisfactory in this mission. [40](#) One Spanish company reportedly was assigned to the German 3rd Mountain Division—part of the Eighth Army in Army Group South—and during the retreat from the Ukraine into Slovakia this unit took heavy losses and had to be dissolved. [41](#)

The Spanish troops left in Stockerau numbered many restless and adventurous individuals among their ranks, for thirty-three of them left their unit between 11 and 17 December and joined the 28th SS *Wallonien* Division, then reforming near Osterwald, Hanover. The volunteers were attracted to the Walloon Division by a Lieutenant Luís García, who commanded a Spanish company of that unit. This action stemmed from Léon Degrelle's energetic and widespread canvassing of German-held territory as he attempted to build a complete SS division. The commander of the Croat Brigade strongly protested this recruiting procedure of the SS to his military district commander in Vienna on 19 December and enclosed a confiscated travel permit of a Waffen-SS man named Rafael Barrio, who apparently was one of the illicit recruiters. <sup>42</sup>



On the other hand, a memorandum in the OKW records dated 16 December indicated that Spanish units were ordered disbanded by the German Army, with all volunteers to be absorbed by the SS. However, whether the SS recruiters were merely acting within their understood rights or coercing Army troops remains a matter of conjecture. <sup>43</sup>

Just over a month later, the Vienna headquarters dissolved the Spanish Volunteer Battalions and established the 101st and 102nd Spanish Volunteer Companies as reinforcements for the 357th Infantry Division, then located at Sared, east of Pressburg (Bratislava). The Germans provided two officers and forty-two men as a cadre and six translators for each company, a fact that may indicate that few Spanish leaders were either available or desirable. The Army also ordered further recruitment of Spanish troops to cease, and advised commanders to "send any useless Spanish personnel to labor units." <sup>44</sup>



German documents contain no accounts of these Spanish volunteers for the rest of the war, although some documents do show the 101st and 102nd Companies serving with the 357th Division through the end of March 1945. During this period, the division was part of the Eighth Army and formed part of the German line along the Hron River in southern Czechoslovakia from 31 January through 2 March. It then fell back through the Lower Carpathians to a point about twenty-five miles north of Pressburg. <sup>45</sup>



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The SS finally absorbed the 101st and 102nd companies in March. Sources indicate that Spanish troops from these last volunteer companies attached themselves to the SS Nordland Division, then part of Army Group Vistula, which was in defensive positions northeast of the German capital in early April 1945.

The above details, while perhaps excessive, serve to indicate the scarcity of extant data relating to foreign volunteers in the last year of the war. This condition has fostered the publication of memoirs and revisionist works that have stretched the truth about the final volunteer contingents' experiences to questionable lengths. Carlos Caballero Jurado, a revisionist writing in Spain, published a short treatise on the last Spanish contingent entitled the *Ghost Battalion*, and asserted that over a thousand Spaniards had fought in the last battles of the Third Reich, driven by political and ideological convictions. Encouraged by Caballero and the Blue Division veteran Francisco Vadillo, Wayne Bowen included much of this point of view in his dissertation and other work, including an article that presents the revisionism of this cohort. <sup>46</sup>

But these and other studies have not taken into account the romanticism and downright fabrication that can accompany personal accounts. For example, the writings of Miguel Ezquerro, who claimed to have had many adventures, including having commanded the last battle group of Spaniards in Berlin and having been promoted to colonel in the SS by

the Germans, remain hard to verify, but they are unlikely to be reliable. But by far the most prolific—and convincing—author is Vadillo, author of no fewer than five sequential volumes spanning the years 1941-45. Vadillo returned from frontline service with the Spanish Division at the age of eighteen; he later became a journalist and art critic, wrote poetry and novels, and received acclaim as Spain's greatest boxing reporter. His books on the Spanish volunteers lack documentation, but show much authenticity. In my opinion, though, they must be treated as part novel, part history, and should be verified at every step, as in the case of a similar French author, Jean Mabirè, and the American Richard Landwehr, who also writes on the European volunteers. [47](#)

Counting the numbers of the Spanish (and other) die-hards becomes equally exasperating as evaluating the accounts of their experiences, and the possibility of a double count exists between records kept by SS and Army units and the various testimonial accounts. Thus, one harbors the deep suspicion that the total number of Spaniards serving in these and other post-Legion contingents may have numbered no more than 400. Compared to the almost 40,000 Spaniards that served in the volunteer Blue Division and the almost 1700 in the ill-fated Spanish Legion, this is a small number of war-adventurers and misfits who must have blended well with the last hard-bitten SS men gathered together in the ad hoc fighting units of the war's final days. Whether battalions were really companies and colonels really captains all became blurred in the final days of the Third Reich. Neither the (small) numbers of these last volunteers nor their enthusiasm for the doomed Nazi cause can really justify any claim that they "... represented the persistence of support for the New Order among certain elements of the Spanish population." [48](#)

### The Last Stand

New Year's Day of 1945 found the Western volunteer Waffen-SS formations preparing to fight the war's last battles as the Red Army broke into the Reich and advanced toward their meeting with the Anglo-American forces. The III Germanic Corps fought the fourth Battle of Courland in early January, with SS *Nederland* Brigade bearing the brunt of the Soviet



assault. Its 49th *De Ruyter* Regiment reported a combat strength of only eighty men at this point. German and ethnic German replacements continued to join the Corps, however, and the high command considered it valuable enough to order its withdrawal to West Prussia to engage in the defense of the Reich. Pulling out of the lines on 28-30 January, the Corps sailed for Stettin, arriving just over a week later, and immediately prepared for combat. [49](#)

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Since the replacement divisions of the German Army and SS raised in 1945 fielded only two regiments, the SS elevated SS *Nederland* to division status. This was typical of the creation of "paper" divisions that were barely under-strength brigades by the high command in the last months of the Reich. Since the SS had recruited only 339 Dutchmen for SS *Nederland* in 1944, one may assume that this unit, like SS *Nordland*, received mostly German replacements on the eve of battle. Germanic replacements from depots probably amounted to a few hundred returned convalescents and the last trainees from the 1944 recruiting effort. [50](#)

The Germanic Corps moved to Stargard for Operation "Sonnenwende," one last and futile German offensive. The two Belgian SS battle groups (now called divisions) joined the Corps, and the untried SS *Charlemagne* formed a reserve for Army Group Vistula. The real muscle for the Stargard attack came from SS *Nordland*, SS *Nederland*, the SS *Fruntsberg* Armored Division, and the SS Police Division, as well as the Army's Corps Group *Munzel*. SS *Nordland* no longer had the combat potential of a first-line division, however: the first battalions from both the *Norge* and *Danmark*

Regiments had been detached in November and sent to SS *Wiking* Division as replacement battalions. In their effort to maintain the one elite volunteer division at full strength, the SS command had reduced *Nordland* to a typical 1945 infantry division of five battalions of infantry, albeit motorized to some extent. [51](#)

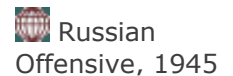
Preparations for the Stargard offensive soon went awry. Steiner's new staff of the Eleventh SS Armored Army had difficulty coordinating the disparate Army and SS units and meeting the high command's requirements for a mid-February attack. Instead of launching a crushing blow on the unsuspecting Russian forces, only a single division, SS *Nordland*, initiated the attack. Poor weather kept the division roadbound, but it penetrated seven miles to Arnswalden on 15 February, rescuing a small German garrison and thousands of refugees



trapped there behind Russian lines. The other assault divisions began their attacks over the next two days, with SS *Wallonien* and SS *Langemarck* covering the flanks of the point divisions. Minefields and stiffer anti-tank defenses brought this ragged attack to a close with only a few more miles gained. The mobile assault divisions withdrew to cover the Berlin-Oder front, leaving Steiner with *Nordland*, *Nederland*, and two Belgian battle groups to cover the now alerted Russian forces on

the Stargard sector. [52](#)

The Stargard offensive, unsuccessful as it was, did compel the Soviet Army to spend all of March clearing their northern flank in Pomerania, lest further disrupting attacks come from that direction. The Russian offensive started on 1 March. Four Soviet armies swept into Pomerania from the south, with the thrusts of two tank armies of the western flank of the drive falling upon SS *Nederland*, SS *Langemarck*, and some German Army units. The unfortunate Dutch units once again suffered partial dismemberment, and only two battalions remained of their former 48th and 49th Regiments. The Flemish brigade pulled back toward Altdamn and Stettin with companies reduced to between thirty and forty men each. The Walloons withdrew rapidly under cover of rear guard actions parallel to and north of the Flemings. SS *Nordland* used its remaining armor to parry Soviet thrusts, including those directed at neighboring units, as the infantry of Regiments *Norge* and *Danmark* delayed the Soviets and withdrew toward Stettin and the Oder River. The average strength of the infantry companies again fell below one hundred. Most replacements by this time were recent German conscripts and former air force and navy personnel. Thus the proportion of Western European volunteers fighting in the divisions diminished as casualties mounted. Upon reaching the relative safety of the Oder River, the division came out of line for reorganization. [53](#)



The worst disaster of the Russian offensive in Pomerania fell upon the 7000 Frenchmen of SS *Charlemagne*. In the vicinity of Körlin, while moving toward the German front in three columns, the division encountered the advanced breakthrough echelon of the Red Army's Second White Russian Front. Totally surprised, and without artillery support and supply columns, the 57th and 58th Regiments were bowled over by the Russian tanks and infantry. Colonel Puaud disappeared in the main action with most of his men. One column, including General Krukenberg and Captain Fenet's battalion, managed to stay together and fade into the forests. Krukenberg managed to rally some 1200 French SS men and retreat to the west and friendly lines. A third element, under Captain Martin of the artillery battalion, found itself cut off by Russian columns. These 300 Frenchmen withdrew east to Danzig, which became an isolated pocket of German forces in the wake of the Soviet offensive in Pomerania. The German command attached the French to the 4th SS Police Division as replacements, and on 1 April it boarded ships and left Danzig. They arrived at Copenhagen on 5 April, taking no further part in the fighting. [54](#)



Out of the wreckage of his division, Brigadier General Krukenberg scraped together a *Charlemagne* Regiment at Neustrelitz, with infantry battalions numbered 57 and 58 and no heavy weapons. Not surprisingly, of these 1200 surviving volunteers, approximately half had satisfied their curiosity about fighting the Red Army and asked for release from further action. They became a "labor battalion" and withdrew to the west. The remaining troops received weapons and training in close anti-tank combat with hand-held rocket launchers. [55](#)

Krukenberg received orders on 24 April to report to Berlin and take command of the battle group of SS *Nordland*, which fought Soviet troops in the city up to the last day of the war. Krukenberg took with him an escort group commanded by the fatalistic Captain Henri Fenet, consisting of about 300 of his 57th "Battalion." An equal number of French SS men in the 58th Battalion and the newly-converted "laborers" moved west, surrendering to British troops at Bad Kleinen. Fenet's mixed battalion joined *Nordland* in Berlin, fought for a week, and surrendered to Russian troops on 2 May. [56](#)

The last French SS troops to see action were the men of the depot battalion at Wildflecken, a cadre of the never-formed 59th Regiment under the ubiquitous Swiss, Major Hersche. Fleeing eastward to escape advancing American forces, the 600 Frenchmen joined the 38th SS *Nibelungen* Division, a battle group created from SS schools and training units in Bavaria. Together they fought a one-hour skirmish with U.S. forces at Moosburg on 29 April. The unit surrendered to U.S. forces at the Austrian frontier, but a few refugees continued south until captured by Allied forces at Bolzano. The latter group, ironically, included Lieutenant Colonel Gamory-Dubourdeau, last attached to the SS headquarters at Berlin and formerly the first commander of the 1943 Assault Brigade SS *Frankreich*. [57](#)

The fragmenting of the SS *Charlemagne* Division reflected the experience of all German forces in the East, as supplies and replacements dwindled and the last Soviet thrusts crossed the Oder River and closed around Berlin. After crossing the Oder, the III Germanic Corps reorganized behind German lines west of Schwedt. SS, Navy, and Luftwaffe men arrived as replacements, the first element including a Hitler Youth unit destined for the *Norge* Regiment. The Walloon and Flemish battle groups no longer accompanied the Corps, however, and received no replacements. They remained instead at Altdamn from 18 March onward, guarding the approaches to Stettin from a precarious bridgehead east of the Oder. On 27 March, the Germanic Corps moved SS *Nederland* and *Nordland* into the Oder defenses between Gartz and Schwedt. [58](#)

The final Russian offensive over the Oder in the sector of Army Group Vistula took the form of a combination punch, first at Seelow (16 April) and then south of Stettin (20 April). As reinforcements for the Seelow defenders, SS *Nordland* and most of SS *Nederland* were ordered to move to the south. The *De Ruyter* Regiment, in battalion strength, remained behind under the command of the 547th Infantry Division. The III Germanic Corps headquarters stood by without troops assigned. [59](#)

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Well-armed with infantry and anti-tank weapons, but pitifully below strength, the men of *Nordland* and *Nederland* moved directly into the path of the Soviet forces advancing from the Oder toward Berlin. Near Strausberg, on 18 April, SS *Nordland* was hit and bypassed by Russian mechanized forces. About half of the troops fell back into Berlin with their command group, but the rest had fallen as casualties or were cut off in their attempted retreat. The last battle of SS *Nederland* proved even more disastrous, as it was overrun and virtually destroyed west of Frankfurt in the "Halhe Pocket" battle. [60](#)



In the Altdamn-Stettin sector lay the bloodied battle groups of SS *Wallonien* and SS *Langemarck*, each having suffered about 100 killed and 400 missing, plus hundreds of wounded in the retreat across Pomerania. At first, the German command positioned the Belgian battalions several kilometers east of Altdamn in an attempt to keep the port in operation. By 18 March, however, the SS volunteers held, until early April, only a thin strip of land on the east side of the river, which at least afforded better fields of fire than did the German-held left bank. At this point, upon withdrawing behind the Oder, the Walloons held a council of war and released those volunteers who no longer wished to continue the losing fight. The 23 officers and 625 men who chose to remain assembled in one last battalion, plentifully equipped with machine guns, mortars, and automatic rifles. At the end of March, a second battalion was formed from men of the artillery and engineer units who had come forward from their technical schools, but it appears that it was never committed to battle in the first line. [61](#)

The Flemings of SS *Langemarck* likewise consolidated their remaining men into two heavily armed battalions and an artillery group. One Walloon and one Flemish battalion, along with a German battalion and a section of tank destroyers, was commanded by the Walloon Major Hellebaut as the final Russian push over the Oder developed on 20 April 1945. Colonel Schellong commanded the other Flemish battalion and the artillery, on Hellebaut's right flank. [62](#)

The Soviet forces crashed over the Oder along the Danzig-Berlin Autobahn, and demolished the battle group of the SS Police Division guarding the crossing. The Walloons and Flemings made feeble counterattacks, but the Russian breakthrough gained momentum, and by 22 April it had become a clear success. From this point onward, the Belgian SS men simply backed away helplessly from the Russians, who advanced between five and ten kilometers per day without any serious German interference. In all probability the SS volunteers joined the general flight of the entire German Third Armored Army of General Hasso von Manteuffel. By 1 May, the Belgians stood between Wismar and Bad Kleinen (the *Charlemagne* Regiment rested nearby). Degrelle ordered his troops to make for Lübeck, where they eventually surrendered to British troops. He then drove with his bodyguard into Denmark. The *Langemarck* Division commander, Colonel Müller, told the Flemings that they were free to evade capture or surrender to the Anglo-American forces. They burned division records and gave out workers' passports to volunteers who wanted them, but most men stayed together as a group and surrendered at Schwerin. The Dutch and German survivors of the SS *De Ruyter* Battalion, lightly engaged in April, also followed the Flemings into captivity at Schwerin. [63](#)



In the midst of the collapse of the Oder front, the final act of the Third Reich played out in its battered capital, Berlin. Among the rubble of the badly bombed city, some 50,000 defenders organized a semblance of resistance against superior Russian forces. Here stood the last battalions of SS *Nordland* Division, each fighting at company strength, commanded by Brigadier General Krukenberg from 24 April to 1 May. His escort company of French SS men joined Swiss, Belgian, and Spanish SS troops recently arrived from training schools. [64](#)

These last volunteer SS men—Frenchmen, Belgians, and Spaniards[Author: what about the Swiss, who you mention in the previous sentence?—arrived during the night of 24 April, and by 30 April were locked in furious combat at the Belle-Alliance Platz with Russian tanks and troops driving toward the Chancellery and Air Ministry buildings. As the Soviets pushed the SS troops back, some of them occupied the Chancellery for a last-ditch defense on 1 May. Hitler had already committed suicide, but the fanatical and hopeless defense of the dying city continued. Among these last stalwarts was a small group of Spanish volunteers.

In the rubble of the partially destroyed Chancellery, these Spaniards fought at the side of French and Estonian volunteers and defended the seat of the "Thousand-Year Reich" against Russian assault until they expended their last anti-tank rockets and hand grenades. The dazed survivors then fell back to the Air Ministry as the German commander of the Berlin garrison, General Helmuth Weidling, negotiated for a capitulation. The unconditional surrender of Berlin came on 2 May, but the SS men of the former *Nordland* and *Charlemagne* Divisions split into small groups and attempted to slip out of the city. Almost all became prisoners within a day. Among the dead left in Berlin were several veteran 1941 Legionnaires, including Per Sorensen of *Freikorps Danmark* fame and Jean Fonteroy, propagandist-correspondent of the *Legion des Volontaires Francais*. [65](#)

Numerous small groups of European volunteers fought at the front or found the front thrust upon them during the final collapse of the Reich. Many volunteers attending schools away from their units or involved in cadre training found themselves mobilized into scratch battle groups and thrown into the heat of battle in Berlin, Breslau, West Pomerania, and Hungary. On the latter front, the SS *Wiking* Division, first of the "European volunteer" divisions, fought its last battles along with the two battalions of *Danmark* and *Norge* and some scratch units of mixed nationality drawn from training commands in Austria.



Final

Operations, 1945

Several hundred each of the Danish, Norwegian, and Dutch volunteers participated in the heavy fighting in Hungary in front of Budapest. The Russians continued pressure in Hungary through the fall of Vienna in mid-April. Thereafter, the Red Army shifted its pressure north toward Berlin. The *Wiking* division drove west and surrendered to the Americans. [66](#)

## The Crusade Ends

The last year of the war found Germany struggling to avert collapse. The pursuit of foreign military volunteers was not overlooked among the many desperate moves the Nazi regime conceived and executed before that collapse came. The final responsibility for the foreign volunteer military units devolved upon the SS, as the Army formed no new foreign combat units after 1941, and those the Army had formed either dissolved or converted to the SS by the war's end. [67](#)

The volunteer program accelerated in the last year of the war, as the SS attempted to expand the successful assault brigades of 1943 into full-sized divisions. This appeared a feasible course of action as wartime exigencies cancelled the earlier racial, physical, political, and bureaucratic requirements of the volunteer program. The obstacles previously posed by the nationalism of the native collaborationist parties also disappeared with the 1944 invasion of France and the approach of the liberation. In France, Belgium, and Holland, the collaborationists lost all their inhibitions in siding with the German authorities. A refugee flow into Germany attested to this loyalty born of desperation and also provided the manpower for the final volunteer levies for the Western European volunteer Waffen-SS units. The lack of an Allied liberation in Denmark and Norway meant no change to the souring mood of the Scandinavian collaborationist movement and no final surge of military manpower for the SS in that quarter.

For their own part, the SS leaders demonstrated their increased need for foreign military units by promoting a true integration of their fighting forces. Not only did they form larger national units, but the SS also provided first-line equipment (except for armor) to all the volunteers, and the high command began to use them in a manner indistinguishable from other German units. The SS bureaucracy reflected the new status of volunteers as well, as they were promoted on an equal basis with German Waffen-SS officers. Foreign SS officers commanded German troops and other nationals of the SS without prejudice or apparent

difficulty. Lack of requisite experience prevented the elevation of foreigners to division command, but foreign battalion commanders proved effective in the SS system. [68](#)

The Stargard offensive indicated the degree to which the mixed and national units of foreign volunteer SS troops proved useful. That action proved a fiasco because of weather, German command and control problems, and the transportation nightmare that already had become reality by February 1945. The German-Scandinavian, German-Dutch, Flemish, and Walloon units engaged at Stargard performed to the limit of their personnel and material strength, but the overall war situation determined the fate of the Western European Waffen-SS. The situation of 1941-42 could not be duplicated. The final campaign proved a war of attrition in which Russian casualties were matched by German losses and those of the new battle groups and divisions of volunteers. The training of full divisions could not be accomplished amid shortages of time, fuel, and ammunition.

The collapses in the East, South, and West allowed no time for the proper preparation of the 1945 divisions, which instead sallied to the front piecemeal in battle groups or as untrained reserves. Neither of these stillborn training and preparation actions by the German high command could hold the front or spare the frail volunteer units.



Kaisergruber:  
Last Fight

65

The collapse came quickly. Other than the flood of refugees, recruitment proved notably poor in 1944 and probably next to nil in 1945. Thus casualties incurred in the actions in the last months of the war could not be replaced, and after Stargard the volunteer units fell back precipitously before the Russian tide, sustained only by scratch replacements transferred from the German Navy, Luftwaffe, and a few men from the volunteer unit depots. After the Oder River line fell and the Red Army surrounded Berlin, there remained no hope. The volunteer units began to march toward the west and survival. Many volunteers voted not to continue fighting, and their officers obviously supported their desires by forming "labor" units and leading their troops away from the fighting. Those few remaining die-hards, such as the few hundred Frenchmen of the Fenet Battalion that accompanied their German brigadier to Berlin, proved to be exceptional.

Ultimately, deficiencies in training, supplies, and equipment proved crucial for the volunteer units, although lack of replacements brought them to their final end. The Spanish Legion, *SS Landstorm Nederland*, and *SS Charlemagne* all deployed lacking the cohesion bestowed by unit training and remained underequipped across the spectrum of standard Army and Waffen-SS matériel. The still-operating elements of the *Wiking*, *Nordland*, *Langemarck*, and *Wallonien* units, along with the Fenet battalion, containing the final active remnants of *SS Frankreich*, all performed reasonably well in combat, in some instances down to the last days of the German *Götterdämmerung*.

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## Notes:

**Note 1:** Although the Spanish Legion proved to be the last legion formed by either the Army or SS, its operational life proved quite brief, and the French LVF outlasted it by remaining in action through mid-1944. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** DEV, 29/43/6/4; OKH, T78/412/885. The designation "Spanish Legion" is used here, as it was the official one used by the German Army. Spanish works sometimes refer to it as the *Tercio*, a traditional sixteenth-century military and legionary term, or in popular literature as the "Blue Legion." The term "Spanish Foreign Legion" is used loosely here to distinguish the standing organization in Spain's African Army from this unit, formed for service on the Eastern Front, for the former had changed the term to designate its constituent regiments in 1925. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** OKH, T78/412/885 Emilio Esteban-Infantes, *La División Azul* (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1956), 254; Army Group North, T311/72/7093863, 7093887; XVIII Corps, T314/800/494-75. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** Army Group North, T311/72/7093882, 7093900; Tomas Salvador, *División 250* (Barcelona: Ediciones Domus, 1954), 384. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** XXVIII Corps, T314/800/333-477. Esteban-Infantes, *División Azul*, 252-62. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Earl Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1968), 248-58; Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 408-12. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** Albert Seaton, *The Russo-German War* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 408-12. [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** DEV 29/43/6/4, 4; XXVIII Corps, T314/800/1253-61; Army Group North, T311/72/7093900. [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** Army Group North, T311/72/7093900; Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 258-66; Hartweg Pohlman, *Wolchow* (Bad Nauheim: Podzun, 1962), 118-26. [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** XXVIII Corps, T314/800/1280; Esteban-Infantes, *División Azul*, 258-62; Salvador, *División 250*, 394. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** DEV, 29/43/6/1, 4; XXVIII Corps, T314/800/1284-99; Eighteenth Army, T312/923/9112356-9113133; OKW, "Lage Ost" situation maps 23 January-14 February 1944; Esteban-Infantes, *División Azul*, 260-63. [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** Esteban-Infantes, *División Azul*, 363-66; Eighteenth Army, T312/982/9113134. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** Army Group North, T311/72/709389 and 7093900; Eighth Army, T312/728/9113024. [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** Army Group North, T311/72/7093902. Carleton J. H. Hayes, *Wartime Mission to Spain* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 212-25. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** OKW, T77/856/5601615-17, T77/885/5601699, 5634689; Army Group North, T311/72/7093904; Esteban-Infantes, *División Azul*, 220-21; Anfiesta interview. Spanish historians, such as Rafael García Pérez, indicate that Hitler approved of this course as early as 20/2/44, but no postwar writers seem to have noticed the wretched performance of the Legion in its brief baptism of fire, or the apparent relief with which the German military command detached this last Spanish contingent. See Pérez, *Franquismo y Tercer Reich: las relaciones económicas hispano-alemanas durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1994), 505. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** Army Group North, T311/72/7093903-13; OKW, T77/885/5634667-8; Esteban-Infantes, *División Azul*, 267; Salvador, *División 250*, 401-02. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 412. [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** Gerhard Hirschfeld cites a September 1944 flight of some 30,000 NSB followers and families to Germany, but they may not have produced an influx of volunteer replacements for the Waffen-SS. Much of Holland remained under the control of the German military, including the SS *Landstorm Nederland* Division, through the end of the war. This division was already swollen by forced drafts of NSB and other collaborationist militia. Note that Mussert joined the NSKK in June 1944, and his deputy Meinod M. Rost van Tonnigen joined SS *Landstorm Nederland* in September. See Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands under German Occupation* (Oxford: Berg, 1988),

309. [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** Edgar E. Knoebel, "Racial Illusion and Military Necessity" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1965), 275--76; Himmler orders 12/9/44 and 18/9/44 in Franz Vierendeels, *Vlamingen aan het Ost front*, 2 vols. (Antwerp: St. Maartensfond, 1973), 2: 147-48. [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 149-51; Jüttner order. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 158-59; Franz Vierendeels interview at Groot Bijaarden, 29/5/82; Kurt G. Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS — eine Dokumentation* (Osnabrück: Munin, 1965), 258. Reich Youth Leader Paul Axmann announced in a 9 March 1945 letter the formation of a Flemish Hitler Youth Battalion of four companies for the Flemish division, T175/66/2581969. This battalion trained in the rear until the "last stand" of the division at Prenzlau the following month. It then "went into action with one rifle per three men"; Vierendeels interview. [Back.](#)

**Note 22:** Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 162-65; de Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," Appendix, shows approximately 5500 men in SS *Langemarck* in January 1945 and approximately 3800 in April 1945. See also T175/91/2729117. [Back.](#)

**Note 23:** Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 169-71; Vierendeels interview; Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 258. [Back.](#)

**Note 24:** De Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," 75-83; Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 261-62. Degrelle claimed 6000 men in "his division" when interviewed, but the strength chart appendix in de Goy shows slightly over half that amount. [Back.](#)

**Note 25:** De Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," 84-87; Léon Degrelle, *Die verlorene Legion*, 390-94, Martin Conway, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 265. [Back.](#)

**Note 26:** Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 285; Albert Merglen, "Soldats francais sous uniforms allemands 1941-1945," RHDGM 108 (1977): 79. The SS officially designated the SS *Charlemagne* Division the 33rd Waffen-Grenadier Division, indicating its low status as a combat unit in the SS. [Back.](#)

**Note 27:** Pierre Rostaing, *Le Prix d'un Serment 1941-45* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1975), 145; Merglen, "Soldats francais," 70; Fenet maintained that the Frenchmen in the NSKK posed no problem as they already had served "under German discipline"; Fenet interview. Eberhard Jäckel notes that 100 French officers and 3000 troops served in the German Navy as security guards; Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), 300. Philippe Burrin also estimates a contingent of 3000 each for the combined NSKK and air force transport services and the armed guards of the construction agency Organization Todt. He concludes that French volunteers in the summer of 1944 totaled approximately 12,000 combat troops and 10,000 uniformed auxiliaries in the German forces; Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: New Press, 1996), 436. The collaborationist refugee wave of the fall of 1944 may have been over 15,000, including roughly 4000 Milice and their families (Burrin, 455). See Christian de la Mazière, *The Captive Dreamer* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974), 38-42. De la Mazière provides an impressive eyewitness account of his experience as a late-1944 refugee-volunteer in SS *Charlemagne*. [Back.](#)

**Note 28:** la Mazière, *The Captive Dreamer*, 29-30. [Back.](#)

**Note 29:** Ibid., 43-44; Merglen, "Soldats francais," 79. There were some desertions; see Rostaing, *Le Prix d'un Serment*, 148. Milice officers did obtain many commands, owing to their earlier rank in the SS; Merglen, 80. [Back.](#)

**Note 30:** Jean Mabire, *La Division Charlemagne* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 492-97. [Back.](#)

**Note 31:** Merglen, "Soldats francais," 81. [Back.](#)

**Note 32:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 423-28; de la Mazière, *Captive Dreamer*, 76; Fenet interview. Records from Bad Tölz show no French cadets among the 100 foreign cadre members in training between November 1944 and March 1945; T175/191/2729865-30067, passim. [Back.](#)

**Note 33:** Louis de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk des Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog 1940-45*, 10 vols. (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1969-), vol. 7/part 2:1202; In't Veld, *De SS en Nederland* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 1521; Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 291, 507; *Landstorm Nederland Division*, letters 31/4/43 and 21/9/43, T354/646/243 and 232; Armed Forces Command Netherlands, letter 29/4/44, T580/35/ ordering 234N. [Back.](#)

**Note 34:** Battalions of the SS *Landstorm Nederland* fought initially under the command of the 17th SS Götz von Berlichingen Mechanized Infantry Division; Netherlands, Documentatie (Amsterdam: Buijten + Schippenheihn, 1947), 185; Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 513; Battle report, II/1st Regiment 16/9/44, T354/646/345. Rosters of the 1st Regiment for August 1944 show mostly German officers, and these were in general overage, reserves, or had been previously wounded, T354/646/416-19. Jan Vincx and Viktor Schotanius, *Nederlandse vrijwilligers in Europese krijgsdienst 1940-1945. I: Landstorm Nederland* (Antwerp, 1988) details operations from September 1944 to the war's end. [Back.](#)

**Note 35:** Documentatie, 185; In't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, 1522; Klietmann shows a strength of 94/489/2647 as of 20 September 1944, but this is an SS headquarters tally, probably not reflecting losses in that month (*Die Waffen-SS*, 513). *Landstorm Nederland Division* telephone plan, 5/4/45, T354/646/4. [Back.](#)

**Note 36:** OKW, T77/885/5601722, 5634659-64. [Back.](#)

**Note 37:** OKW, T77/885/5634643, 5634650-65, 563583-4; Jordana's protest of 7/2/44 noted in OKW memo 23/2/44, frame 5634695. [Back.](#)

**Note 38:** Army Group North, T311/72/7093916; OKW T77/887/5634558. The Königsberg letter indicates that the commander of the *Bandera* concerned, a Captain "Carlier" (no record exists in DEV personnel files), had warned his troops that any man staying in Germany would be declared a deserter in the event that his mobilization class was called up by the Spanish government. However, Clyde Clark shows that Spanish legislation effective from 21 December 1943 to 1 January 1945 granted amnesty to draft evaders and deserters in foreign countries; Clark, *Evolution of the Franco Regime* (n.p., 1951), 442, 555-56. [Back.](#)

**Note 39:** OKW, T77/885/5634630-4; OKH, T78/412/6380883, T78/414/6382624-9. Curiously, the OKH files indicated that other companies were planned in Stablack from time to time for expansion to a full-strength battalion, but no mention was made of any additional sources of personnel. Probably this action was forestalled by the establishment of the Stockerau training battalion. Miguel Ezquerra stated that 400 Spanish troops gathered at Stablack; see *Berlin, a Vida o Muerte* (Barcelona: Ediciones Acervo, 1975), 22, 92. [Back.](#)

**Note 40:** OKH, T78/414/6382624-9; XVII Military District, T79/97/720; Ezquerra, *Berlin*, 70-71. [Back.](#)

**Note 41:** OKW, T77/885/5634563; OKH, T78/412/6380880; XVII Military District, T79/97/720. Two Spanish accounts of prisoner-of-war experiences noted the arrival in Russian POW camps of survivors of what most likely was this Spanish unit or the companies in the 357th Infantry Division noted below: Juan Negro Castro, *Españoles en la URSS* (Madrid:

Escelicer, 1959), 227; Gerardo Oroquieta Arbiol and César García Sánchez, *De Leningrad a Odessa* (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1958), 389. [Back.](#)

**Note 42:** XVII Military District, T79/97/720-9. Rafael Barrio Toquero had been in the anti-tank units of the 269th Regiment and Legion. Personnel Record #2892, Archivo de la Milicia Nacional (now in Archivo Militar, Guadalajara). [Back.](#)

**Note 43:** OKW, T77/885/5634561. Veterans of SS *Wallonien* recalled their Spanish company as having been of "average" quality, performing adequately in combat. Kaisergruber, Hellebaut, and Degrelle interviews. Cf. Ezquerra, *Berlin*, 80-87, 96. [Back.](#)

**Note 44:** XVII Military District, T79/94/672-74; OKH, T78/412/6380884. [Back.](#)

**Note 45:** OKW, T78/412/6380442, 413/6381250; OKW, "Lage Ost" situation maps, 8 January-27 April 1945; Editorial comment, *Die Freiwillige* 26 (September 1980): 31. Werner Haupt, "Von Narva bis zur Schlacht von Berlin," addendum in Emilio Esteban-Infantes, *Blaue Division*, trans. Werner Haupt (Leoni an Starnberger See: Druffel, 1958), 146-47; Ezquerra, *Berlin*, 105. [Back.](#)

**Note 46:** Carlos Caballero Jurado, *El Batallón Fantasma: españoles en el Wehrmacht y Waffen-SS, 1944-45*. (Valencia: AC Tercera Posición, 1987). See also his *Foreign Volunteers of the Wehrmacht, 1941-45* (London, Osprey: 1991). Wayne Bowen, "The Ghost Battalion: Spaniards in the Waffen-SS," *The Historian* (Winter 2001). [Back.](#)

**Note 47:** Ezquerra, for example, claims to have been promoted from lieutenant to lieutenant colonel orally between his 1944 arrival in Stablack and final combat in Berlin. During this time, he allegedly served in the Army's special operations unit, the "Brandenburgers," first fighting *Maquis* in and out of Paris, and then with his Spanish commando unit, fighting behind the American (!) lines in the Battle of the Bulge. He claimed to have had personal contact with Hitler, who orally (of course) awarded him the Knight's Cross, Himmler, Goebbels, and Berger, and to have seen Martin Bormann and Axmann. In the last days of the war, his "Ezquerra Unit"—now absorbed into the Waffen-SS, although all his oral promotions had come from Army officers—consisted of three companies of Spaniards, some "Doriot *Milice*" [*sic*] and more Spaniards from the Walloon Division. While I cannot prove this a fraud, neither can I find any corroboration of his tale. Given the frequency with which false war and military veterans are being "outed" in the United States, I feel that this perhaps falls in the same category. [Back.](#)

**Note 48:** Wayne Bowen, "The Ghost Battalion: Spaniards in the Waffen-SS," paper read at the annual meeting of the Society for Military History, Penn State University, 16 April 1999. [Back.](#)

**Note 49:** Wilhelm Tieke, *Tragödie um die Treue*, 3rd Edition (Osnabrück: Munin, 1981), 155; O. Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten I kamp pa Østfronten 1941-45* (Odense: Universitetsforlag, 1978), 212-13. Krabbe notes a replacement battalion of Alsations in SS *Nordland* (206). [Back.](#)

**Note 50:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 413; Kliemann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 238; Rauter letter 11/1/45, T175/64/2579779. Also recruited in 1944 were 318 replacements for SS *Wiking* and 2580 for SS *Landstorm Nederland*. The upgraded SS *Nederland* Division was given the number 23, borrowed from a Croatian SS division disbanded earlier; George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 297 [Back.](#)

**Note 51:** Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 137. Rolf Michaelis makes good use of Army Group Vistula records to show how SS *Nordland* fared in the last months of the war:

Cumulative losses 1 Sept. 1943-28 Feb. 1945

	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Enlisted</b>
Dead	82	2487
Wounded	225	8636
Missing	16	875

To which one may add losses in March 45:

	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Enlisted</b>
Dead	16	350
Wounded	242	1369
Missing	7	380

For the SS *Nederland* Division, the casualty figures worsened:  
Cumulative losses 1 Sept. 1943-28 Feb. 1945

	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Enlisted</b>
Dead	55	2487
Wounded	141	5748
Missing	42	1609

The losses for *Nederland* in March 1945:

	<b>Officers</b>	<b>Enlisted</b>
Dead	13	299
Wounded	38	932
Missing	6	776

The belief that SS recruiters could find Germanic volunteer replacements in any adequate proportion to fill these deficiencies defies all reason. The *Nederland* Brigade/Division in effect had to be completely replaced twice in its brief period of operation. Rolf Michaelis, *Die Panzergrenadier Divisionen der Waffen-SS* (Erlangen: Michealis-Verlag, 1996), 105, 300. [Back.](#)

**Note 52:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 446-47; Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 215-17; Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 191-96; de Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," 98-103. [Back.](#)

**Note 53:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 457-60; Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 201-03; Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 217-21; de Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," 108-12; Wilhelm Tieke, *Das Ende Zwischen Oder und Elbe: der Kampf um Berlin, 1945* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1981), 29. [Back.](#)

**Note 54:** Merglen, "Soldats francais," 82; Rostaing, *Le Prix d'un Serment*, 159-75; de la Mazière, *Captive Dreamer*, 86-126; Jean Mabire, *Mourir a Berlin* (Paris: Fayard, 1975), 328-29; Husemann, *Die guten Glauben waren*, vol. 3, contains no mention of French SS attached to the SS Police Division. Richard Landwehr, in *Charlemagne's Legionnaires: French volunteers of the Waffen-SS, 1943-1945* (Silver Spring, MD: Bibliophile Legion Books, 1989), 108ff, notes several experiences of small units of the division in March-April; however, these accounts are drawn from secondary sources that are impossible to confirm. [Back.](#)

**Note 55:** Merglen, "Soldats Francais," 83; Rostaing, *Le Prix d'un Serment*, 179-80. [Back.](#)

**Note 56:** Mabire, *Mourir a Berlin*, 330-31; Rostaing, *Le Prix d'un Serment*, 189-207. Fenet maintains that he overloaded nine trucks with thirty-seven men each, thus exceeding the hundred men usually assigned to Krukenberg's bodyguard; Fenet interview. Michaelis shows the French portion of the 1500-man *Nordland* battle group in Berlin to have been

roughly a company, counting the remnants of Fenet's battalion and some men from the SS *Charlemagne* Division school. (Panzer Grenadier Divisionen, 106-7). In any case, mentions of a French *Sturmbatallion* in Berlin that have been cited in postwar literature cannot be supported. [Back.](#)

**Note 57:** Mabire, *Mourir a Berlin*, 333-34, On the last day of SS *Charlemagne's* existence, 2 May 1945, Major Boude-Gheusi released his German troops, and told his French SS men to find civilian clothes and pose as foreign workers. Most were captured, ending up in POW camps; Tieke, *Ende*, 470. Hitler, despite his gift for charade in the final months, never took the French Waffen-SS too seriously. When informed of the arrival of SS *Charlemagne* units in the Konitz area near the Soviet breakthrough on 24 February, he commented, "die nutzen nichts." Helmut Heiber, *Hitler's Lagebesprechungen* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Verlag, 1962), 888. [Back.](#)

**Note 58:** Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 221-22; Tieke, *Tragödie um die Treue*, 238; SS *Langemarck* Division situation map of Franz Vierendeels Feb.-April 1945, copied by author from specimen furnished to U.S. National Archives. [Back.](#)

**Note 59:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 474-76; Tieke, 203. Army Group Vistula reports in late April showed SS *Nordland* to be short of infantry, officers, and NCOs, but with good artillery and reconnaissance battalions. The attachment of a half company of Tiger tanks may have bolstered its fighting power somewhat, but it must be considered a paper division by this time; Michaelis, *Panzer Grenadier Divisionen*, 103. [Back.](#)

**Note 60:** Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 225-29; Tieke, 204-12; Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 238. [Back.](#)

**Note 61:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 460; de Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," 117-35; Vierendeels map; Degrelle, *Die verlorene Legion*, 444-46, maintains that the Walloons suffered sixty percent casualties at Altdamn, but that only eighty men desired to leave the front when offered the chance. [Back.](#)

**Note 62:** Vierendeels, *Vlamingen*, 2: 204, 222-23. [Back.](#)

**Note 63:** Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 287; Tieke, *Das Ende zwischen Oder und Elbe*, 469-70; Vierendeels map; Degrelle, *Die verlorene Legion*, 473. Degrelle at this point left his troops, staying ahead of the Allied liberation forces until he reached Oslo. There he persuaded Albert Speer's pilot to fly him in an obsolete bomber (a Heinkel 111) some 2000 kilometers at low altitude to Spain on 8 May, where he crash-landed on the coast. His Spanish exile, although apparently comfortable, continued until his death in 1994. His wife refused to follow him into exile, and he later married a sister of Joseph Darnand. [Back.](#)

**Note 64:** On the rudimentary state of the Berlin defenses, see Erich Kuby, *Die Russen in Berlin 1945* (Munich: Schere, 1965). [Back.](#)

**Note 65:** Kuby, *Russen in Berlin*, 142, 233; Werner Haupt, *La Dernière Bataille de Hitler* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1966), 200; Haupt, "Von der Narva bis zur Schlacht von Berlin," 134; Cf. Ezquerra, *Berlin*, 105-23, for a highly questionable account. KTB des OKW, 7:1898; Andrew Tulley, *Berlin: Story of A Battle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 146-47. [Back.](#)

**Note 66:** Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 138-41. Improvised reinforcement units seem to have restored little resilience to German units. Ziemke notes the apparent failure of the IV SS Armored Corps, including SS *Wiking*, in late February: "...of deserters rounded up 75% were SS men." (Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, 458). Dutch researchers have noted that Dutchmen in labor battalions with the SS and the Netherlands East Company were trapped by the Russian offensives and did enter the fighting in self-defense. Apparently, however,

there was no wholesale incorporation of these groups into the Waffen-SS; E. Fraeukel Verkade and A. J. van der Leeuw, "Nederlandse SS-Frontarbeiders," in *Studies over Nederland in Oorlogstijd*, ed. A. H. Paape (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 63-67. [Back](#).

**Note 67:** An exception may be noted in the case of the Army's 162nd (Turkoman) Infantry Division and some ninety field battalions of Tatar troops formed in 1942-43. See Joachim Hoffman, *Die Ostlegionen 1941-43* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1976). [Back](#).

**Note 68:** Interviews with Alfred Mäder, Rendsberg, 13/3/81, and Richard Schulze-Kossens, Düsseldorf, 21/3/81. [Back](#).

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