

## 6. The Character of Military Collaboration

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### Motivations

It remains difficult to this day to determine the precise reasons that caused tens of thousands of Northern and Western European citizens to volunteer for service in the German armed forces. At best, one may identify an imposing array of social, economic, political, ideological, and psychological factors that operated variously or in tandem upon the captive and neutral populations.

There may exist a general psychological operative condition that great events like the Second World War bring into being. Faced with events of such impact, certain elements of the population may feel impelled to participate, not to sit by while the world changes its shape. However insignificant the service of a single soldier remains in a historical moment so expansive and weighty as the Second World War, one cannot ignore the individual's desire to contribute. Indeed, groups of foreign volunteers appeared in almost every theater of this war, on each side of the conflict. The Spanish Civil War and Russo-Finnish Wars also witnessed popular volunteer movements that presage the subject of this study. Robert Wohl, in his study of generational dynamics in the period between the wars, introduced the notion of the war-adventurer, citing the works of Uruh, Jungen, Flex, and Wurche as examples of this phenomenon. <sup>1</sup> The complex social, political, and intellectual conditions of post-World War I Europe included those brought about by a continent being torn between new and old ways, or by generational conflict. The youth welcomed the new ways and displayed great willingness to deal with and overcome the challenges of their day with direct actions. The direct-action gangs of political parties in interwar Europe certainly reflected such exuberance. In peacetime, such men pursued sports or engaged in other reckless actions. In wartime, they would seek combat service on distant fronts as an expression of decisive action. In a sense, the volunteer movements in the Second World War reflected the rekindling of the late Romantic *Wanderlust* movement. The desire to experience exotic activities and lands on the part of the social and intellectual inassimilable of 1940 may have been an expression of his longing for renewal. <sup>2</sup> There was nothing novel in Western culture about the idea of seeking a spiritual rebirth through adventure. A desire to be reborn and relinquish the trappings of contemporary society may well have led individual Danes and Spaniards to the shores of the Volkhov River and Dutchmen and Belgians to the mountains of the Caucasus. Foreign legions and flashy elite regiments held a certain attraction to those Europeans not emotionally satisfied by their experiences of the 1930s.

 Kaisergruber:  
Joins contingent

 Kaisergruber:  
Bordeaux

This general intellectual trend may best account for the shifting tide of volunteers in the German forces. As Wohl points out,

By 1943, it was clear to all but the most doggedly reactionary and antisemitic members of the generation of 1914 that Fascism had been a colossal failure. It had provided a means for checking social change rather than for advancing it; it had failed to deliver on its promises of creating a new type of human being and a new system of values; it had released a flood of violence and aggression; It had committed crimes of unprecedented horror; and it had resulted in a disastrous civil war of European nation-states that had left Europe impoverished and powerless. <sup>3</sup>

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The volunteer of 1940-41 clearly saw the war both as a period of service and as a cause in a markedly different fashion than did the volunteer of 1943-44. The Spanish student boarding a troop train for Germany in Madrid in July 1941 may well have imagined himself

detraining in Moscow in time to participate in the victory parade. Such a viewpoint would not have been found in the mind of the Belgian worker recruited in Düsseldorf in 1943 or the French collaborationist refugee joining the SS *Charlemagne* Division in Sigmaringen during the last winter of the war.

The actions of the collaborationist parties in occupied Western Europe bore heavily upon the volunteer movement. This condition was not true in the early years of the occupation, when German victory and long-term rule seemed relatively certain. Leading collaborationist leaders like Clausen, Degrelle, Mussert, and Quisling continually sought to solidify and even expand their position and influence with German authorities. By encouraging their followers to volunteer in national legions or "European" Waffen-SS regiments, they might secure the future of their parties in the homeland, even if the homeland was merely part of the New Order. National interests certainly prevailed initially, reflecting many pre-war themes such as anti-communism and increasing dissatisfaction with local bourgeois governments.

Later, however, the overlapping national interests of occupied states and Germany made the European New Order propaganda more viable. Some volunteers undoubtedly were genuine political idealists who believed (or acquired from propaganda themes) the notion that they could share in the creation of a supra-national Germanic empire and vanquish a Bolshevik menace from the eastern marches of Europe. These objectives did not even require a volunteer to be an active collaborationist. There existed a "thin gray line" between collaboration with and resistance to the German order in Europe that embraced large segments of the population. Within this category one may group anti-Nazis who remained at their posts in industry or civil service, thereby undoubtedly being of general benefit to the German war effort, yet who tried to do what they could to slow the Germans or thwart their aims. There were also those officials who remained on the job as buffers between the Nazi hierarchy and their own citizens. Many other officials accepted their collective fate as a German satellite state and worked to salvage the best possible position for their countrymen. Last in the "gray line" grouping were the men who saw in an authoritarian New Order the only chance to forestall the victory of dreaded Socialism or Communism. Mussert and Staf de Clercq may have qualified in the last group, described as "Germanics but not Greater Germans" by Norman Rich. <sup>4</sup>

Any consideration of the motivations of the citizenry of the occupied nations must include economic factors as well. The quality of life in Northern and Western Europe had varied through the 1930s and, under the double blows of wartime restrictions and occupation by a foreign power, were bound to become worse, even in neutral states. Factors of employment, income, savings, and material and food supplies undoubtedly preyed upon a population already rendered insecure by defeat and the seeming internal collapse of local government. The friendly, robust, healthy, well-fed, and well-equipped soldiers of the conqueror must have made some impression upon the young and active segments of the population. <sup>5</sup>

Beyond generalized hypotheses, what evidence exists to indicate tendencies among the volunteers? There exist a memoir literature, a few journals, and some associations of surviving volunteers. Unfortunately, the number of volunteers thus represented falls far short of the size of the volunteer groups. The selectability of such the sample represented by these materials—those surviving, living in the homeland, located close to the veteran's association, positively nostalgic about their wartime experience, and willing to publicly demonstrate such nostalgia—makes this source material immediately suspect. The feelings of surviving veterans in the associations moreover may remain too nostalgic and too corporative in the postwar period to indicate reliable trends of wartime thought. <sup>6</sup>

Two social scientists studied collaborationists, including military volunteers, in their homelands after the war. Because their sampling technique was sufficiently broad and random, these studies remain the best indicators of volunteer motivations. A Dutch psychologist, Dr. A. F. G. van Hoesel, published his study of 432 "young political offenders" in 1948. Of his study sample, 264 men had served in German military and semi-military

service in the war. The others had committed crimes of civil collaboration (joined the NSB, *Todt* Organization, etc.). Van Hoesel categorized his military collaborators in the following manner. <sup>7</sup>

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<b>Service</b>	<b>Politically Reliable (%)</b>	<b>Politically Unreliable (%)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Waffen-SS	29 (22)	31 (23)	60 (23)
Landstorm	4 (3)	4 (3)	8 (3)
Landwacht	3 (2)	15 (11)	18 (7)
Army	5 (4)	9 (7)	14 (5)
Navy	16 (12)	5 (4)	21 (8)
Air Force	57 (44)	50 (38)	107 (41)
Anti-aircraft	3 (2)	6 (5)	9 (3)
NSKK	14 (11)	13 (10)	27 (10)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>264</b>

Those men labeled as "politically unreliable" had joined or associated with the Mussert NSB Party or similarly national-socialist organizations. A few qualified as pro-German by holding German citizenship. Because van Hoesel dealt with men caught and convicted, and because his sample includes so many men who did not serve in ground combat units (especially the Luftwaffe), it may have only limited bearing on this study. However, one might group the *Landwacht* and *Landstorm* members with the SS, which absorbed them in 1944. The Army volunteer group, and later the Navy and Air Force groups, probably consisted in the main of local security guards, although individuals could and did volunteer in regular combat forces of the Wehrmacht. Thus, only the SS and its auxiliaries, which evolved into national volunteer units, may be clustered into a like-minded group. At any rate their combination yields a group of 36 "reliable" and 50 "unreliable" men, for a total of 86, second only to the Air Force contingent and almost one-third of the overall group.

Consider, then, van Hoesel's conclusions as to why these men became political offenders: <sup>8</sup>

<b>Primary Motivation</b>	<b>Reliable</b>	<b>Unreliable</b>	<b>Total</b>
Poor Domestic Situation	19	4	23
Evade Police	6	2	8
Escape Reform School	6	1	7
Arrested by Germans	6	2	7
Orphaned	-	2	2
Food Shortage at Home	71	12	83
Adventure	26	19	65
Employment	5	3	8
Attracted by Benefits	7	2	9
Idealism	1	11	12
Drafted (German citizen)	-	3	3
"Duty" to NSB or Family	-	176	176
Only Son of NSB'er	-	13	13
None of the Above	4	11	15
Unknown	-	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>432</b>

Unfortunately, van Hoesel did not select out his military group for separate motivational investigation. Among the entire group and, one may assume, the military volunteers, the majority cast their lot with the German side because of political status in National-Socialist circles, hunger, adventure, escape from home life, and idealism, in decreasing order of frequency. <sup>9</sup>

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Van Hoesel also supplied demographic and sociological data on his sample group. Essentially, this data only demonstrated that most of the offenders came from large cities (262 of 432) and held mostly lower-class occupations—unskilled, skilled, and clerical (373 of 432).

More detailed sociological research appeared in a study of collaborators in Denmark, published in 1955. Sociologist K. O. Christiansen studied 5152 male collaborators, out of some 13,000 that were sentenced after the war under the penal code. He then interviewed 2967 of these to obtain more detailed data. Significantly, Christiansen proved more discerning in his categorization of military collaborators. His group labeled "soldiers" excluded party militia and auxiliary guards. Only volunteers in the *Waffen-SS, Freikorps Danmark*, and anti-aircraft troops fell under the "soldier" designation; these totaled 3718 men, of whom 654 were interviewed. <sup>10</sup>

Christiansen split his study group into two major subdivisions: those recruited early in the war (1940-43) and those recruited in the last years of the war (1944-45). He further divided them by degree of "Nazification": German minority, Danish Nazi Party members, and the remainder. Frequency of "Soldiers" in Danish Collaboration Groups <sup>11</sup>

Group	Number	Total		Interviewed		
		Military	(%)	Number	Military	(%)
German Minority	2417	580	(24)	361	77	(21.3)
Danish Nazis	3956	1260	(85.9)	859	215	(25)
Rest	6627	1878	(28.3)	1747	362	(20.7)

Having established this correlation between his interview group and the overall group, Christiansen gathered sociological data for the various categories of collaborators, including his "soldiers" group. The most significant data follows:

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Geographical Distribution of Danish Military Collaborators <sup>12</sup>

Region	German Minority		Danish Nazis		Rest	
	1941-43	44-45	1941-43	44-45	1941-43	44-45
Capital	8	0	86	10	124	39
Prov. Towns	46	0	42	3	39	11
Countryside	12	3	33	1	42	18
Abroad	6	2	38	2	77	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>80</b>

Social Class of Danish Military Collaborators <sup>13</sup>

Class	German Minority		Danish Nazis		Rest	
	1941-43	44-45	1941-43	44-45	1941-43	44-45
Lower	11	2	38	5	121	34
Middle	61	3	55	11	155	46
Upper-Middle/ Upper	0	0	6	0	6	0

Unemployment among Danish Military Collaborators (when recruited) <sup>14</sup>

	German Minority		Danish Nazis		Rest	
	1941-43	/ 44-45	1941-43	/ 44-45	1941-43	/ 44-45
<b>Total in Military Group</b>	72	5	199	16	282	80
<b>No. Unemployed (%)</b>	7 (10)	0	22 (11)	0	59 (21)	14 (18)
<b>All Collaborators % Unemployed</b>	(11)	(26)	(25)	(26)	(34)	(51)

Evidence of Previous Criminality <sup>15</sup>

	German Minority		Danish Nazis		Rest	
	1941-43	/ 44-45	1941-43	/ 44-45	1941-43	/ 44-45
<b>Total in Military Group</b>	72	5	199	16	282	80
<b>Previous Criminality (%)</b>	5 (7)	0	31 (16)	0	72 (26)	41 (51)
<b>All Collaborators % Previous Criminality</b>	(5)	(19)	(13)	(15)	(25)	(32)

From this data, Christiansen concluded that Danish military collaborators came from groups that enjoyed better economic standing than other collaborators, and that economic motives played the least substantial role in their collaboration compared to other groups of collaborators. He also noted that soldiers recruited in the early part of the war were significantly older than those recruited in the last year. His inference that the latter were therefore the least mature of the group might gain support from the last column in the "Criminality" table, showing that half the non-Nazi Danes volunteering in the last year of the war had some criminal record! <sup>16</sup>

Major Krabbe, a 1941 volunteer in the Danish *Freikorps* who finished the war as a battalion commander in *SS Langemarck*, wrote the most detailed study of all the participants. His characterization of volunteer motivations in the Danish case echoes the findings of the above studies, albeit with a conservative flavor.

Krabbe saw the youth of Denmark as confused and agitated. They were nationalistic in spirit, but saw no employment or economic security afforded by their homeland. They also saw no leadership among the higher officials, as the latter knuckled under to German rule. Denmark represented no future; in fact, in their view Europe lay under the threat of internal collapse and civil war. Therefore, it was virtually instinctive for some of the young and the active elements in the population to react to the "dynamism" of National Socialism. The Germans were masters of their own destiny, and a young man could find direction in his life by embracing their cause. This condition existed partly because German foreign policy was not in itself disagreeable to most Danes in the early expansionist period of the war. No intelligent Dane expected neutrality to survive the outbreak of war, and therefore it fell to him to choose sides with some foresight. <sup>17</sup>

Danish patriotism proved rather narrow and old-fashioned in Krabbe's view. The volunteers in his homeland had no conception of the state as a living organism to which they owed a social responsibility. In the face of defeatism at home, many turned outward to the old dreams of a united Europe, united in this case under strong German rule, which appealed to many. <sup>18</sup>

While stressing the strongly nationalistic and political aspects of the volunteer character, Krabbe also strongly denies any economic motive. Danes, he said, did not seek to earn a living by military service. The money earned could not purchase anything of note, and he and his countrymen were not promised post-war jobs or land by the Germans in return for their service. [19](#)

In the main, it seems likely that Krabbe, like the other veteran writers of the postwar period, tended to exaggerate the degree of political idealism and minimize economic or material motives among the volunteers. There seems little doubt that individual motivations ranged over a considerable spectrum of possibilities, and no single interpretation of the movement is sufficient. Svein Blindheim, a Norwegian Army major who served in the Free Norwegian forces on the Allied side, studied Norwegian volunteers, drawing social data from 709 obituaries. He determined that the strongest motive in the case of the Norwegians was family environment, reinforced by political parties and organizations. The nationalist right-extremist party, the Fatherland Party, seemed to have had a strong influence on many Norwegian volunteers. The primacy of family influence might help to explain the fading recruitment pattern for the Waffen-SS in Norway, as only a finite number of right-wing families with military age members existed to answer further calls for volunteers. [20](#)

Willy Massin studied the collaboration movement in Flanders—including military volunteers—in the province of Limberg, where a Waffen-SS cohort of 530 formed from 1941 to 1944. According to Massin, the factors influencing Limbergers to join the Waffen-SS included support for the Staf de Clerq faction, the expectation that Belgium would cease to exist under the New Order, the geographic and ethnic proximity of Limberg and Germany, propaganda about the anti-Bolshevik crusade, and the attraction the uniform held as a status symbol for individuals. He created a hierarchy of motivations for this cohort of volunteers that includes: political-ideological motives, material gain, desire to escape to a foreign legion, labor in Germany, various personal situations, and lastly a spirit of adventure. [21](#)

Eddy De Bruyne, after decades of studying the Walloon volunteers in the Legion and *Sturmbrigade*, reading their papers and conducting interviews, divided this cohort into groups distinguished by their particular motivations for volunteering for German military service. These groups, ranked in order, are: [22](#)

1. Those legionnaires who had Belgium (and its future) in mind and on whom totalitarian propaganda did not have much grip, as faith in their country protected them from Nazi German influence.
2. The Rexists, who had tried to take advantage of the German presence to impose a New Order regime.
3. Volunteers blinded by national-socialist social realizations and who had ended up by showing sympathy or even admiration for Nazi Germany and its regime, and who, maybe for other reasons too, ardently wished the German victory.
4. Practicing Catholics yielding to their religious ideals who had gone to war to fight communism with the same spirit that once had animated the Crusaders, since they truly considered Bolshevism to be the greatest threat to Christianity.
5. Individuals attracted by material advantages for themselves and their families; individuals eager to avoid a criminal conviction or to forget either sorrow, grief or a domestic disagreement; individuals willing to put on the *feldgrau* uniform even knowing this gesture was reprehensible on moral or legal grounds.

6. The ones who on behalf of the oath of allegiance to Degrelle, naïve admiration, boundless friendship, inner conviction, or party discipline—joined Degrelle without being aware that the latter was (mis)using them for mere purposes of prestige and personal ambition.

### Volunteer Ebb and Flow

In addition to examining the motivations and sociological character of the volunteer movement, one must also investigate the raw statistics of these groups. The figures reveal not only some evidence of the military value of the foreign cohorts in terms of the numbers men placed in the field, but also demonstrate some of the variations in national experience.

The statistics relating to the recruitment and maintenance of the volunteer legions that resulted from the 1941 recruiting drives proved the most satisfactory because of the superior documentary coverage from the early war years.

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#### Operational Strength of SS Volunteer Legions, 1941-43 <sup>23</sup>

	15 Aug. 1941	5 Jan. 1942	6 Feb. 1943	30 June 1943
<b>Norwegians</b>	unk.	1218	612	1314
<b>Danes</b>	480	1164	633	1404
<b>Dutch</b>	1100	2559	1263	3975
<b>Flemish</b>	600	875	528	1960
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>c. 2500</b>	<b>5816</b>	<b>3036</b>	<b>8653</b>

#### Cumulative Personnel Accessions for SS Volunteer Legions

	Total Accessions		
	30 June 1943	Discharged (%)	Dead (%)
<b>Norwegians</b>	2296	824 (36)	158 (6.8)
<b>Danes</b>	1896	311 (16)	181 (9.5)
<b>Dutch</b>	5873	1329 (23)	569 (9.6)
<b>Flemish</b>	2636	410 (16)	266 (10)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,701</b>	<b>2874 (23)</b>	<b>1174 (9)</b>

Several conclusions can be drawn from these figures. The legionary program placed only about 5500 men, or roughly a brigade of troops, at the disposal of the Germans. Their peak strength was obtained only after the legions had been withdrawn from the front and in fact were being merged with the Waffen-SS through the creation of the SS *Nordland* Division. Obviously, Holland provided the bulk of the manpower in the foreign legions program, but all four legions represented the same approximate *pro rata* of the respective 1942 national populations (i.e., .041-.057 percent). <sup>24</sup> The higher rate of discharge (or, conversely, the lower rate of reenlistment) for the Norwegian Legion seems significant. This legion, which suffered the fewest casualties of the four surveyed, may serve to illustrate a lesser degree of willingness to volunteer for such service on the part of Norwegians, or a greater annoyance with German attitudes or policies toward the Germanic peoples as cited earlier in this study.

#### Western Volunteers in the Waffen-SS (Excluding Legions), 1940-44 <sup>25</sup>

	4/5/40	15/1/42	2/2/43	30/6/43	9/8/43	31/1/44
<b>Norwegians</b>	-	665	947	1415	1930	3878
<b>Danes</b>	41	1235*	630	2142	3575	5006

<b>Dutch</b>	11	2255	1815	5546	9583	18,473
<b>Flemish</b>	11	696	487	1525	3517	5003
<b>Walloon</b>	-	-	-	-	unk.	1812
<b>French</b>	-	-	-	-	unk.	2480
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>4851</b>	<b>3879</b>	<b>19,331</b>	<b>18,547</b>	<b>36,682</b>

\*including Danish Ethnic Germans

The above table demonstrates the general success of the 1943 expansion program, which combined the legions with the Waffen-SS (except in the case of the French SS) and reaped the benefits of improved recruiting and training measures directed by Himmler and Berger in 1942. With the exception of the French volunteers, the incidence of volunteering remains proportional to the respective size of the various national populations over the period investigated. By early 1944, Germany had gained -through the *Waffen-SS*-the equivalent of three divisions, or a field corps. However, these numbers include men still in training (basic, NCO, and officer training courses as well as instructor cadres) not immediately available for combat operations. In mid-1943 the training establishment comprised between forty-six and fifty-six percent of the personnel listed in the preceding table.

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The changing fortunes of the war and the failure of the Waffen-SS to maintain its recruiting success into 1944 brought an abrupt reversal of the above trends, a reversal that available documents can illustrate only in part. The SS recruiting office in Norway reported on 30 September 1944 that, of the 4133 Norwegian volunteers it had recruited for the Waffen-SS, only 1434 remained in service (606 dead, 2043 discharged). This report clearly indicates that only a few hundred recruits volunteered in 1944 in Norway and that the volunteer movement there had come to a standstill. <sup>26</sup> The SS fared little better in Holland that year, as only 3273 more men came forward, and 2580 of these volunteered only for the SS *Landstorm Nederland* Brigade stationed in the homeland. <sup>27</sup> One suspects, in absence of any documentation, that the SS met with equally dismal results in Denmark in 1944, especially since Danish SS units grew no more than the other "Nordic" units in the last year of the war.

Only in the territories liberated by the Allies did the Waffen-SS gain volunteers at anything approaching the levels of 1943. Here, in the case of French, Walloon, and Flemish volunteers, the Germans clearly benefited from the refugee flow of collaborationists and their families into the Third Reich. A few thousand civilians joined the ranks of the existing "national" SS units, but probably more volunteers proportionately came from other formations amalgamated into the SS: Wehrmacht, NSKK, *Organization Todt*, and paramilitary auxiliary forces.

In light of these statistics, we may now venture a generalization regarding the Western European volunteer phenomenon. It seems to have cycled through three phases: a slow buildup from 1940 to 1942, stimulated by the opening of the Russo-German War; a rapid expansion in 1942-43, as new sources of recruits, as well as better propaganda, recruiting, and training measures took effect; and a drying up of perhaps all but the most fanatical volunteer enlistments in the last year of the war.

In terms of national experiences, certainly the Dutch, Danish, and Norwegian cases support the general trend in great detail. The Spanish experience also reflects the pattern, given the immense spontaneous support of both the general population and the government for the Spanish Volunteer Division in 1941. The autonomous administration and regulation of Spanish volunteers by the Spanish government prevented any expansion on one hand or deterioration of replacement activity on the other. But a few hundred Spaniards returned to German arms in the last year of the war, against the express wishes of their home government. Their actions and their fates closely paralleled those of the other volunteers of the eleventh hour of the war. <sup>28</sup>

A statistical summation of the Western volunteers' service in the German Army and Waffen-SS must remain speculative because of gaps in the available documentation. However, the recruiting figures and the strength reports of the various national and mixed units suggest that the following numbers of Western volunteers shouldered arms alongside German Army and Waffen-SS soldiers in the Second World War (figures approximate): [29](#)

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Norwegian	6500
Danish	7000
Dutch	27,000
Flemish	10,000
Walloon	5000
French	10,000
Spanish	36,400
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>101,900</b>

Excluding the roughly 40,000 Spanish, French, and Walloons who served only in the German Army, the 62,000 men of the "Western European SS" barely exceeded ten per cent of the entire Waffen-SS at its peak strength in June 1944. Given the fact that almost one million men served in the Waffen-SS during the war, and that about half of the Western volunteers shouldered arms in the last two years of the war, one must conclude that their numbers may not have justified the efforts made by the Germans to recruit them. [30](#)

### Assessing the German Program

Much of the fluctuation experienced in the recruitment of volunteers in Western Europe reflected prevailing German administrative and professional military policies and attitudes. A variety of political, diplomatic, social, and military factors impeded the development of a truly positive policy on the German side for forming and deploying military formations of foreign volunteers. Volunteer recruitment began as a bureaucratic subterfuge on the part of the SS recruiting office to skirt OKW restrictions placed upon the expansion of Himmler's private army, which the *Reichsführer-SS* dreamed of shaping into an elite Germanic order. The handful of foreign recruits thus gained for the SS *Wiking* Division and the non-elite battalions of SS *Nordwest* scarcely merited notice before the opening of the Russo-German War brought substance and form to the program originally begun by the SS. The evident popularity of the German war against the Soviet Union with the European Right elicited genuine enthusiasm among adventuresome and politically-minded men in their twenties and thirties. The Franco government of Spain and the collaborationist parties in occupied Western Europe exploited the evident popularity of the war with their followers to represent themselves to the German government and armed forces as worthy co-belligerents. As sincere as the spontaneous motivations of the early volunteers seemed, so were the motives of their political leadership in the homelands patently self-serving with respect to German power on the Continent.

The German Army involuntarily received responsibility for the European volunteer contingents that were deemed racially unsuitable for the SS. Although no formal policy appeared at the Army staff level, the Army made its indifference to these volunteers clear in practice. The staffs of the various army commands considered the Spanish, French, and Walloon contingents to be propaganda troops to be employed at whatever level of involvement their competence merited. The rudimentary training given these troops by the Army scarcely prepared them for the "Battle of Civilizations" they would encounter in the East. Yet the German commanders and staff officers directed their standard military critique at these troops from their first appearance at the front. Despite any improvements in the performance of the volunteer units, though, no German army commander ever pressed for

a larger contribution by the Spanish and Vichy governments or the collaborationist groups to the war effort. Instead, the army commands dutifully accepted the burden of training, equipping, and deploying their foreign units in 1941 as a political necessity thrust upon it by the Foreign Ministry (and by Army occupation authorities in Belgium, in the case of the Walloons). Army commanders recognized the propaganda value of the New Order ideal and the anti-Bolshevik "crusade," but in no official document can one find any measure of enthusiasm for deploying foreign troops. In large measure, this institutional attitude stemmed from the professional pride and high standards that the Wehrmacht possessed as a result of its successes in the 1940 campaigns. No army in the world could approach the German Army in training, battle doctrine, experience, and equipment at that time. A certain professional arrogance undoubtedly grew out of this situation. Many officers probably saw no need for the Army to share its campaign with ill-trained Spanish, French, and Belgian troops of questionable steadiness. The Wehrmacht would triumph without any assistance from non-German misfits, especially when these arrived at the front unready for the rigors of combat. As a Ninth Army operations staff officer entered in his war diary after advancing beyond Smolensk, "only German civilization could have accomplished this!" <sup>31</sup> Likewise, the German Army arrogantly assumed it could conclude its campaign in the East without any measurable support other than that from their Finnish and Romanian allies guarding the flanks of the main contest.

The SS hierarchy, with its more ideological bent, displayed considerably more enthusiasm for the employment of foreign volunteer forces. But their own ideological and racial dogmas diffused their efforts and spoiled the opportunity to exploit fully the popularity of the Russo-German War with the European political Right. The reliance upon weak collaborationist parties in the early recruitment drives, mandated by Nazi political goals, tended to discredit the recruiting effort. A wider popular response could have possibly resulted from a general appeal to the public that specifically ignored the collaborationist element, which could and often did embarrass the bulk of the native citizenry. In addition, Nazi racism distorted the pan-Germanic ethos Himmler and his staff intended to foster within the Waffen-SS. Drill sergeants mistreated foreign recruits in a typical basic military training environment, but the SS also revealed racial prejudices typical of Nazi Germany at the peak of its power that mirrored these of the Army. Other than the few promising officer cadets, who were already commissioned in their native military services, no foreign volunteers received technical training in tanks, artillery, communications, engineering, and the like. Instead, they served as infantry and truck drivers in the legions and the SS *Wiking* Division of 1941-42. Apparently only in 1943 were SS technical schools opened to foreign volunteers of the assault brigades and III Germanic Corps. Likewise, only in late 1943 did the Waffen-SS begin to equip the volunteer units with modern, first-rate weapons and to train their personnel in the proper tactical use of these weapons.

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Perhaps the SS also thought in terms of the "home by Christmas" propaganda in 1941, and neglected to share the key role played by its elite divisions in the campaign. Admittedly, the legions program in the SS suffered from transitory problems of personnel selection and training, as well as the changing character of the Waffen-SS as it made the transition from being a military elite to a mass army. But the Danish *Freikorps* performed well when attached to the SS *Totenkopf* Division, and the other legions might have benefited from operating with an experienced parent unit. The SS recruited the legions under less stringent racial standards than those that applied to the Waffen-SS in 1941, however, and never seriously entertained notions of combining the two until the wartime situation deteriorated and the 1943 expansion program became necessary. Again, if the short-war illusion pervaded the SS leadership, then they too would have looked at the racially "inferior" legions program as more an adjunct to propaganda and political policy in the New Order than as a serious military program.

This continuing dichotomy between ideological values and military needs and requirements did not resolve itself until the midpoint of the war, after Germany had lost the military initiative on all fronts. Essentially, Germany proved unwilling to modify the racial and political tenets of her foreign and occupation policies in order to encourage a potentially large contribution to her war against the Soviet Union. Perhaps she could not have

absorbed large numbers of foreign volunteers due to a lack of equipment in 1941. The Germans fought their war on a *Blitzkrieg* economy that was finely tuned for short campaigns, with radical shifting of a partly militarized economy. By the time she geared up for a war of attrition against her implacable opponents, the occupied territories had endured several years of exploitation. Any popularity the Third Reich might have enjoyed with the masses was well past, and perhaps only the collaborationist groups and the social and economic inassimilables in Western Europe could be counted upon to provide recruits.

### Assessing Military Value

The statistical tabulations detailed earlier in this chapter establish the relative size of the national groups that resulted from the German volunteer program. The Waffen-SS began the program by admitting a few thousand Germanic troops in 1940-41. The legions program doubled this figure, and upon the combination of the two programs in 1943 the Waffen-SS had over 30,000 volunteers from Western Europe at its disposal. At this point the SS eclipsed the similar program of the Army, which operated with about 20,000 volunteers from later 1941 until the autumn of 1943. Standing force levels of Western volunteers may have reached 40,000 in early 1945, as the refugee-recruits entered the French and Belgian Waffen-SS units.

These thousands of men of the Western volunteer SS served in military organizations of varying quality, and therefore the mere statistics of their service do not indicate their military value to the Third Reich. Clearly, the SS *Wiking* Division ranked as an elite SS formation, although it was not decisively engaged until 1942. However, only a few thousand foreign volunteers stood in the ranks of this mechanized infantry division, and then only as infantry. By the end of the war, SS *Wiking* retained only a few Germanics on its rolls. The other 1941 volunteer formations proved a mixed bag. The SS Legions proved too small for decisive engagement because of the difficulty of furnishing replacements. The Danes and Flemish seemed to perform up to Waffen-SS standards, while the Dutch and Norwegian legions contributed little other than filling in the siege lines around Leningrad with other second-rate formations. The Army's Spanish Division could and did sustain casualties and proved as capable of limited offensive and reliable defensive operations as any German second-rate infantry division. The French Legion failed miserably at the front, and the small Walloon Battalion could not sustain casualties and proved of marginal use with regular Army divisions at the front.

In 1943, the SS formed a second multinational division, SS *Nordland*, and expanded further with a companion brigade, SS *Nederland*. The legions of the SS merged with these formations, now grouped under the headquarters of III Germanic SS Armored Corps. Ambition in SS headquarters outstripped recruiting levels, as only one-fourth of the Corps consisted of Western European volunteers, and large numbers of Germans and ethnic Germans filled the technical branches and some of the infantry ranks as well. The *Nordland* and *Nederland* formations performed satisfactorily until their destruction in April 1945, by which time they had few of the scarce Western European volunteers in their ranks. They resembled less and less the pan-Germanic ideal of the Waffen-SS, as most replacements came in the form of German and ethnic German SS men.

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The Army lost its Spanish Division in 1943, and transferred the Walloon Battalion to the Waffen-SS. The next year with its deteriorating military situations saw the usefulness of the French and Spanish Legions come to an end. However, the "pure" volunteer assault brigades of the SS acquitted themselves well, showing that French, Walloon, and Flemish volunteers could fight as first-rate troops when provided with proper weapons and comprehensive training.

Finally, scratch units appeared in 1945 to fight for Germany in its last throes of battle. The weak expansion divisions of French, Walloon, and Flemish SS troops and the lackluster Dutch Landstorm accomplished little beyond maintaining the continuity of the front, even less in the case of the unlucky French volunteers. The III Germanic Corps lost its armor,

and its divisions ran into the Russian steamroller between Berlin and the Oder. A few surviving companies and battalions fought in Berlin, Prentzlau, and Lake Balaton as the last flames of fanaticism flickered out.

It seems possible to generalize regarding the effectiveness of the volunteer formations on the basis of their performance at the front, where ground gained or held, unit cohesion, and casualty rates contribute to a subjective impression.

#### Combat Effectiveness of Western Volunteer Units

<b>Utility</b>	<b>Mixed Units</b>	<b>National Units</b>
<b>Good</b>	SS <i>Wiking</i> SS <i>Nordland</i>	<i>Freikorps Danmark</i> SS <i>Wallonien</i> (1944) SS <i>Langemarck</i> (1944) SS <i>Legion Flandern</i>
<b>Fair</b>	SS <i>Nederland</i>	Spanish Volunteer Division SS <i>Frankreich</i> (1944) SS <i>Legion Nederland</i> French Legion (1944) Walloon Legion SS <i>Legion Norwegen</i> SS <i>Landstorm Nederland</i>
<b>Failure</b>		French Legion (1941) Spanish Legion SS <i>Charlemagne</i>

In the final analysis, the changing character of the Russo German War decisively influenced the relative effectiveness of the volunteer units. The first year of the war featured a campaign of maneuver in which the Germans proved superior. Here the relatively small legions and the Spanish and SS *Wiking* Divisions could make calculable contributions. The year 1943 saw a balance in tactical power and skill on the battlefield, and volunteer units generally held static positions. But in 1944 the war became an attritional conflict in which volunteer units, with their tenuous replacement systems, proved hopelessly outmatched. They were beaten up too easily at the front and required larger infusions of German replacements to remain viable.

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The question may well be raised, Could the Germans have made better use of military collaboration? Certainly, it would seem that an early relaxation of Waffen-SS racial standards and the genuine offer of a measure of autonomy in Hitler's New Order in return for participation in the campaign against Bolshevism might have produced higher numbers of volunteers than the collaborationist parties and leaders were actually able to do. If larger, multi-national units had been equipped and trained with meticulous care—as was the case with the elite 1940 SS *Wiking* Division and the 1943 SS Assault Brigades—and sent into the decisive phases of the campaign, the popular enthusiasm for and reception of wartime propaganda might have been most rewarding. However, the available evidence seems paradoxically clear that Nazi Germany remained unable (or unwilling)—on ideological grounds—to give racially and politically "inferior" peoples a vested interest in the clash of the totalitarian powers. The victor of 1940 made no plans for native collaboration and, when it happened, it resorted to the basest forms of exploitation. In addition to such an ideological predisposition, it further seems clear that the Wehrmacht was not interested in sharing its limited inventory of first-rate weapons and equipment (particularly armor) with non-German forces. Contrasting hypothesis and reality, one may reasonably conclude that Germany's armed forces committed racial suicide on the Eastern Front as the cream of its manpower—equipped with the best weapons—was bled white in battle after battle, while the foreign volunteers looked on as loyal auxiliaries. The completeness of this suicidal policy

was illustrated in the last months of the war, when mostly foreign units were available as reserves to feed into the last, hopeless battles.

## Conclusions

These distinct phases of the volunteer phenomenon appear patently clear at this point. In the first two years after the fall of France, the Germans held some appeal for the inhabitants of occupied and neutral countries in Western Europe. There was a popular surge of support for the German cause in the opening weeks of the Russo-German War. Yet Germany made no preparations to encourage and receive foreign volunteers in her armed forces. When volunteers materialized—from various places, driven by various motivations—the only decision made at the highest level of the armed forces command concerning their disposition was to divide them on racial grounds between the Army and the Waffen-SS. The latter group further subdivided volunteers on physical and racial criteria between the native legions, formed as integral units in the homeland, and regular Waffen-SS units. As the war continued past the optimistic dates set forth in the planning for Operation Barbarossa, and several volunteer units compiled good operational records, they began to look more appealing to the Germans as part of a solution to their crushing manpower problems. Better recruiting, training, and propaganda yielded good results, and the number of volunteers roughly quadrupled, but the time of real enthusiasm had passed and the pace of recruiting faded after 1943. In the last year of the war, relatively few volunteers came forward except for refugees from the liberated territories, and these did not represent the best soldier material. These last volunteers became replacements for existing mixed or foreign units and, in a few cases, formed scratch units that were deployed for last-ditch stands. In summary, the Germans acted too late, with too little good will, to win a popular following in Western Europe that could have contributed in a decisive manner to their war in the East.

The motives that brought the Western volunteers to SS recruiting offices or the Army legions proved varied and not necessarily conducive to forming cohesive military formations. These motives usually boiled down to adventure seeking, material gain, or hopes for political advantage and status in the homeland. Certainly, once the volunteers entered combat, they developed considerable camaraderie with the Germans at the front. They also fought the Russian enemy under brutal conditions. It was easy for them to recognize the Bolshevik menace promulgated by the Nazi propaganda, and many believed that they were defending the eastern marches of Europe against Asiatic hordes. But to most Europeans, the notion of a Euro-army marching east under the banner of the New Order remained mere propaganda and probably rarely proved an effective primary tool of volunteer recruitment.

Some parallels exist between the foreign volunteers in the Army and Waffen-SS, on the one hand, and the character of the German freebooters as illustrated by Robert Waite in his study of the German *Freikorps* of 1919-23 on the other.<sup>32</sup> A study of war-adventurer phenomena in the Spanish Civil War and Russo-Finnish War might also establish some significant characteristics of the European milieu that presaged the appearance of Western European volunteers in the German forces. Such an analysis exceeds the scope of this work, but the similarities between soldiers of fortune, immature idealists, and social inassimilables among the *Freikorps* and the Spanish and Finnish war volunteers remain too striking a concept to dismiss out of hand.

The numbers of Western volunteers remained quite modest relative to the national homeland populations. Certainly they proved disappointing to the visionaries of the SS volunteer program—Berger, Steiner, Reidweg, and Himmler himself. However, these foreign volunteer accessions assisted the continuing expansion of the Waffen-SS and incrementally increased its combat power. The actual strength and utility of the mixed and native Germanic units varied wildly, although the mixed units of the III Germanic Armored Corps passed most tests of military efficiency until their final destruction in 1945. Even the weaker units, such as the legions and the higher-numbered divisions of the Waffen-SS, however, proved useful in occupying static positions at the front, thereby freeing stronger units for more vital tasks.

Such experiences placed the foreign volunteer units in less favorable circumstances than the glowing, tendentious myth-making of wartime propaganda or the postwar apologists would have us believe they occupied. The multinational Euro-army never existed. On the contrary, German racial policies and crude management techniques almost lost them the small national contingents they had accumulated, until the recruiting reforms and relaxed racial standards of Himmler and Berger temporarily augmented the intake of recruits. <sup>33</sup>

What, then, can the reader make of George H. Stein's assessment of the Western volunteers in his seminal study of the Waffen-SS at war?

Only the West Europeans—numerically the smallest group [of non-Germans]—fought consistently well. The best of them—and this included most of the early volunteers from Norway, Denmark and Holland—were practically indistinguishable from the native Germans in the crack SS divisions. [They] ... remained a formidable and reliable fighting force until the end. <sup>34</sup>

Stein's judgment of 1965 cannot be substantiated by the evidence. The Western volunteers in the Waffen-SS spanned a wide range of quality, and the performance of their units ranged from very good to pathetic. They did not fight consistently well, and it seems hard to determine what volunteer units matched the performance of the elite SS divisions other than the mixed SS Wiking Division, in which the volunteers filled mostly infantry companies and the majority of German troops manned the tank, artillery, and specialist units. By the end of the war, the volunteers hardly constituted "formidable and reliable" fighting units. Some formed pockets of resistance in hopeless positions, but most were swept aside by the numerous and well-supplied Soviet forces.

The history of military collaboration in Western Europe during World War II demonstrates clearly that the degree of participation by occupied states in the New Order was governed by rules of association rather than assimilation. The Germans offered little in the way of integration into their military or political systems, even to the most dedicated European collaborators. Only by the time the war situation had deteriorated beyond hope did the Waffen-SS achieve a degree of integration of foreign and German troops and leaders that resembled the picture advanced by the recruiting propaganda.

There seems no reason to doubt that the volunteers themselves gambled with the odds, and that they suffered considerably at the hands of postwar tribunals when Germany collapsed. <sup>35</sup> Things could have been different. Germany came perilously close to defeating the Soviet Union in 1941, and that event could have won Hitler's regime a stalemate in the Second World War, leaving him in sole control of the European continent. What would have been the position of the Western volunteers then? With their war decorations, Army and SS rank, and campaign laurels, the volunteers might have enjoyed an especially favorable position in the new Europe. Regardless of the racial-national hierarchy that most certainly would have characterized the postwar New Order, veterans of the "Crusade in the East" would have held indisputable advantages over fellow citizens in their homelands. Military rank, an Iron Cross around the neck, military pensions, and preferential jobs and land grants were the least emoluments of advanced status they could have counted on, far more than political collaborators might have had. Certainly, men like Léon Degrelle, Jacques Doriot, and General Mu&nti;Ide;oz Grandes could have expected to receive high political positions on the Nazi-dominated Continent (Mu&nti;Ide;oz Grandes, in any event, rose to a position in Spain second only to Franco prior to his death in 1970). Younger, lower-ranking volunteers of note might have included winners of the Knight's Cross, like the Dutch soldier Mooymann and the French Captain Fenet. These and others might have led postwar youth syndicates and probably would have fared well in the civil service in their native lands. <sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately for these volunteers, and fortunately for the majority of the Western states, the prospects for the New Order collapsed with those  Kaisergruber:

of the Thousand-Year Reich. The 100,000 Western European volunteers could not contribute enough to tip the scales in favor of German military victory. Today, a few hundred survivors, mostly in their seventies and eighties, meet regularly to relive their memories and pass them on to their children, few of whom seem to pay attention or understand. If this study gives any perspective to their amazing story, it has justified itself in that light.

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### Notes:

**Note 1:** Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 49-60. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** Ibid., 228-30. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** Ibid., 234; Cf. Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head*, trans. Richard Barry (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 459; George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 141. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** Norman Rich, "Collaboration or Resistance: The Thin Grey Line," address to the Citadel Conference on Hitler and the Nazis, 25 April 1980, elaborates on his conclusion to *Hitler's War Aims*, vol. 2, *The Establishment of the New Order* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 422-25. Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise* (New York: New Press, 1996), 384. In July/August 1941, the following Western European New Order collaboration leaders left for the Eastern Front with the first contingent to be raised in their respective countries: France, PPF Leader Jacques Doriot and Marc Augier, co-founder of *Les Jeunes de L'Europe Nouvelle* grouping; Belgium, VNV militia (Black Brigade) Leader Reimond Tollenaere (after 22.01.1942), *Verdinaso* Leader Jef François (no frontline duties), Rex-Vlaanderen Leader Paul Suys (no frontline duties), Rex Movement Leader Léon Degrelle, his deputy Fernand Rouleau (no frontline duties); the Netherlands, *Weer Afdeeling* Leader A.J. Zondervan (no frontline duties), *Nederlandsche-SS* Leader Henk Feldmeijer; Denmark, DNSAP (Danish Nazi Party) Youth Leader Christian Fredrik von Schalburg; Norway, Chief of Police Jonas Lie and Nasjonal Samling founding members Björn Oestring, Charles Westberg, and Ragnar Berg; Thanks to Eddy De Bruyne for compiling the list. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** John Lukacs, *The Last European War 1939-1941* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1976), 191-99. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Note, for instance, a May 1982 reunion of veterans of *SS Wallonien* and *Legion Wallonien* attended by the author where only some 110 veterans of the some 5000 who served in the war gathered. Interviews generate hypotheses, ideas, some historical data, and may indicate some emotional and psychological trends, but only the most detailed statistical survey encompassing those who eschew their past service as well would avoid the possibility of fallacious conclusions. See also Wohl, *Generation of 1914*, 49-60. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** A. F. G. van Hoesel, *Die Jeugd die wij vreesden* (Utrecht: St. Gregorinschuis, 1948), 7-8. [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** Ibid., 21. [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** Van Hoesel's number (176) of "automatic" offenders, who joined out of NSB family influence and propaganda leading them to obvious "duty," proves quite close to the size of his groups II and III, the nonmilitary offenders who were members of National Socialist organizations (122) or German civil organizations, such as Organization Todt (46). The method is fallacious, but if these motives and groups coincided, then the military group volunteered out of reasons of hunger, adventure, escape, and idealism, thereby conforming to the "Wanderer" generalization of Robert Wohl's *Generation of 1914*. [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** K. O. Christiansen, *Landsviger kviminaliteten i sociologisk . belysning*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: G/E/C/ Gads, 1955), 1: 49-53. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** *Ibid.*, 2: 33. The Germans counted the German minority Danes as Volksdeutschen, not Germanic volunteers, hence they served in any SS formations except the Germanic legions. Cf. memo 29 January 1942, T175/29/2535712. [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** Christiansen, *Landsviger kviminaliteten*, 2: 4. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** *Ibid.*, 2: 52. [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** *Ibid.*, 2: 22. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** *Ibid.*, 2: 47. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** *Ibid.*, 1: 341-44. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** O. Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten I kamp pa Østfronten 1941-45* (Odense: Universitetsforlag, 1978), 11-12. [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** *Ibid.*, 16-17. Krabbe also mentions fear of Russification in the event the Germans lost (18). [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** *Ibid.*, 2. See the discussion of *Freikorps Danmark* in Chapter Two of this study. Edgar Knoebel's study found that few Flemish volunteers for either the Waffen-SS or the Legion showed political affiliation; Edgar E. Knoebel, "Racial Illusion and Military Necessity" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1965), 379-81. [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** Svein Blindheim, *Nordmen under Hitlers Fame* (Omslag: Noregs, 1977), 190-91. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** Willy Massin, *Limburgers in het Vlaams Legioen en de Waffen-SS* (Diest: W. Massin, 1994), 166-89, 233. Well documented, this study contains interesting details such as the dates the first Flemings joined various units (*SS Westland*: 7 Feb 1941; *SS Nordwest*: 14 Apr 1942; *SS Nordland*[!]: 29 May 1941; and *Legion Flandern*: 6 Aug 41. He further details geographic, social, and other background elements of the 530 Waffen-SS volunteers, including a rich appendix of documents. [Back.](#)

**Note 22:** Eddy De Bruyne, *La Collaboration francophone en exil, Septembre 1944-Mai 1945*, unpublished manuscript, 338-340, to appear in English as *Walloon Collaboration in Occupied Belgium: Leon Degrelle 1940-45* (London: Helion & Co., 2003). [Back.](#)

**Note 23:** [T175/59/2574713/a>](#). [Back.](#)

**Note 24:** *Ibid.* [Back.](#)

**Note 25:** Compiled from Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS*, 500-01; Burkhart Müller-Hillbrand, *Das Heer 1933-45* (Darmstadt: E. S. Mittler, 1954-1969), 3: 142; T175, frames 109/2633910, 59/2574743-6, 59/ 2574712-14, and 59/2574725. [Back.](#)

**Note 26:** T175/66/2582381-82. These statistics quite possibly omitted recruiting successes of Norwegians from outside of Norway, such as men of the Norwegian Legion and Norwegian workers recruited into the SS *Norge* Regiment. [Back.](#)

**Note 27:** T175/64/2579779. These figures may reflect the absorption of the Dutch Landstorm into the Waffen-SS rather than the accession of new recruits, thus making the overall recruiting picture even more dismal for the SS. [Back.](#)

**Note 28:** A summary of the roughly equal number of Spanish volunteers serving on the Allied side appears in Javier Tussel, Franco, *Espa&nti;lda; y la II Guerra Mundial: entre el Eje y la neutralidad*. (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1995), 595-606. [Back.](#)

**Note 29:** The accounting method employed involved combining Müller-Hillbrand's totals for January, 1944 with known losses to mid-1943, and adding estimated recruiting for 1944-45. Spanish figures are more authoritative. The government estimated 36,000 volunteers, to which I add an estimated 400 unauthorized volunteers from 1944-45. Stein estimated as many as 125,000 in the Waffen-SS alone (*Waffen-SS*, 138); Lothar van Greelen, *Verkauft und Verraten* (Munich: Welsermühl, 1963), 363, estimated 131,000. These figures remain approximate, but are frequently supported by recent national studies—for instance, the detailed study of Kjell Fjørtoft, *De som tapte krigen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1995), 448-51, who concludes that over 7,000 Norwegians served in the Waffen-SS. Some scholars remain broad in their estimates, like Gerhard Hirschfeld, who estimates 22-25,000 Dutchmen serving in the Waffen-SS before 1945! Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands under German Occupation* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 288. I can give no better caution than did John F. Sweets in 1986, when he concluded, "My research suggests that authors dealing with themes of collaboration and resistance must be especially careful in examining evidence regarding the size of those two phenomenon." Sweets, *Choice in Vichy France: The French under German Occupation* (New York, 1986), viii. [Back.](#)

**Note 30:** The overall strength of the Waffen-SS peaked in mid-1944 at 594,443; Müller-Hillbrand, *Das Heer*, 3: 317. [Back.](#)

**Note 31:** Ninth Army, T312/281/7842340. [Back.](#)

**Note 32:** Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952). [Back.](#)

**Note 33:** Cf. Mark P. Gingerich, "Waffen-SS recruitment in the 'Germanic' Lands, 1940-41," *Historian* 59 (Summer 1997): 815, where he notes the irony that of the slightly more than one million Waffen-SS troops, over half were foreign volunteers, thus ignoring the discharge rate accruing to foreign volunteer enlistments, which does not correspond in the case of German enlistments, when charted over the war's duration. Thus, of the maximum strength of c.594,000, more were German, I suspect, than Gingerich's figures imply. Note Martin Conway's statement that the Germans made no preparations for the collaborationist phenomenon, and when it occurred, their instinctive behavior was to exploit it for their own narrow ends; Conway, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 284. [Back.](#)

**Note 34:** Stein, *Waffen-SS*, 191. [Back.](#)

**Note 35:** With the exception of the Spanish volunteers, and most other neutrals, the foreign volunteers of Western Europe serving in the German forces faced strict punishment as military collaborators. Although few executions took place, almost all received prison terms of two to six years, and lost most civil rights and any possibility of return to universities or civil service and military careers. The Danish volunteers experienced the irony of a retroactive criminalization of their service—imposed by the Penal Code Amendment of 1/6/45—that had the effect of revoking the original sanction of the Danish government, which alone of the occupied countries maintained its internal sovereignty until late 1943. A Danish historical team has compiled a broad assembly of otherwise unremarkable research and interesting local color obtained from letters and interviews of Danish Waffen-SS veterans that proved thrilling to an otherwise uninformed Danish population, receiving rave reviews and best-seller status: Claus Bundgård Christensen, Niels Bo Poulsen, and Peter Scharff Smith, *Under Hagekors og Dannebrog: Danskere i Waffen-SS 1940-1945* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 1998).

The prisoners of war held in the USSR returned early or later, depending upon the view the Russian leadership took of relative advantages of releasing them or not. Thus the French and Norwegians returned almost immediately upon the end of the war, but the Spaniards had to wait until 1954. Not surprisingly, more than a few of the foreign volunteer cohort ended up in the French Foreign Legion, along with former German comrades, several serving another lost cause in Indochina. See Echard Michels, "Mythen und Realität: Deutschen in der Fremdenlegion, 1943-55," *MGM* 55 (1996): 438-42. [Back.](#)

**Note 36:** Conway offers a pithy assessment of Degrelle that is applicable to many others as well: "... from the outset a whole-hearted collaborationist who never lost sight of the basic truth that the collaborators were no more than courtiers seeking the favor of the Nazi elite ... he maneuvered ceaselessly within the labyrinth of the Third Reich until finally—aided by the military feats of the *Legion Wallonie*—he achieved at least a partial reward" (*Collaboration in Belgium*, 285). [Back](#).

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in the German Army and SS, 1940-1945