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German Commanders of World War II (2)

Waffen-SS, Luftwaffe & Navy



Gordon Williamson • Illustrated by Malcolm McGregor



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Gordon Williamson • Illustrated by Malcolm McGregor

Consultant editor Martin Windrow



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Waffen-SS & Luftwaffe officer ranks, with British (US) equivalents:

W-SS	Luftwaffe	Allied
SS-Untersturmführer	Leutnant	2nd Lieutenant
SS-Obersturmführer	Oberleutnant	1st Lieutenant
SS-Hauptsturmführer	Hauptmann	Captain
SS-Sturmbannführer	Major	Major
SS-Obersturmbannführer	Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant-colonel
SS-Standartenführer	Oberst	Colonel
SS-Oberführer	–	Brigadier (1-star)
SS-Brigadeführer	Generalmajor	Major-general (2-star)
SS-Gruppenführer	Generalleutnant	Lieutenant-general (3-star)
SS-Obergruppenführer	General	General (4-star)
SS-Oberstgruppenführer	Generaloberst	–
(none)	Generalfeldmarschall	Field marshal (5-star)

Kriegsmarine officer ranks, with British (US) equivalents:

Leutnant zur See	Sub-lieutenant (Lt junior grade)
Oberleutnant zur See	Lieutenant
Kapitänleutnant	Lieutenant-commander
Korvettenkapitän	Commander
Fregattenkapitän	Captain
Kapitän zur See	Commodore 2nd class (–)
Kommodore	(Commodore) 1st class
Konteradmiral	Rear-admiral
Vizeadmiral	Vice-admiral
Admiral	Admiral
Generaladmiral	–
Grossadmiral	Admiral of the Fleet

GERMAN COMMANDERS OF WORLD WAR II (2) WAFFEN-SS, LUFTWAFFE & NAVY

INTRODUCTION

This second volume contains an even more diverse selection of personalities than Elite 118, which is devoted to Army commanders ranging from men who led entire army groups, armies, corps and divisions, to a few representative regimental and battalion commanders whose accomplishments were particularly impressive. No meaningful generalizations can be made about this second group, which embraces two commanders-in-chief of the German Navy, one theatre commander, army, corps, divisional and regimental commanders, a lieutenant-general who ended the war flying as a simple squadron leader, and three submarine captains.

The men who rose to high responsibilities in the armed forces of the Third Reich displayed as wide a range of personal and professional qualities and faults as any other group of military leaders in history. Some owed their motivation, and their initial appointments to field command, to explicit enthusiasm for the Nazi regime; most were simply patriotic soldiers, following their military calling. The older ones were the products of an age when political education among the military was not merely rare, but grounds for professional mistrust; most of the younger men were caught up, unreflecting, by the tides which shaped the times when they happen to have been born.

SS-Ogruf 'Sepp' Dietrich seen with personnel from his 1.SS-Pz Div 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler'. Dietrich owed his command of the premier Waffen-SS unit throughout its evolution from a regiment to a division – and his later leadership of a corps and an army – to his early loyalty to Hitler. The fanned ribbon under the button of his right breast pocket flap is that for the 'Blood Order', awarded to those who had taken part in Hitler's abortive Munich *Putsch* of November 1923. On his right sleeve is the so-called 'Alte Kämpfer' chevron or *Ehrenwinkel*, worn by those who had been Nazi Party members prior to 30 January 1933. (Gary Wood)



To exclude senior Waffen-SS officers from any such study as this, simply on grounds of moral distaste, would be unhistorical and pretentious. Theodor Eicke certainly owed his command of the 'Death's-Head' Division to his position at the head of the early concentration camp administration, and is included here as a representative of brutal Nazi careerists with little military talent. But both Paul Hausser and Felix Steiner, two of the most effective field commanders of the war, transferred to the armed SS after learning their trade as Army officers in World War I, and earned their promotions on the battlefield. Among the younger commanders, it is surely realistic to draw distinctions between the records of, for instance, Kurt Meyer and Heinz Harmel; both of them had fought for years on the Russian Front before their SS units fought side by side in North-West Europe, yet their reputations were very different.

In 1945 the Allied nations, appalled and enraged by the emerging evidence of Nazi crimes against humanity, put on trial not only men whose guilt was undeniable, but also a number of senior officers whose indictments for war crimes were based on extreme interpretations of the doctrine of command responsibility. Some of the sentences imposed provoked protests from Allied military commanders, who were well aware of the limits of the control that senior officers can exercise in conditions of total war. A number of those convicted and imprisoned were subsequently released early, and today we can recognize the justice of some of these individual decisions. This cooler view of particular cases in no way contradicts, and even strengthens a natural indignation over other cases where no prosecution could be pursued.

WAFFEN-SS COMMANDERS

SS-Oberstgruppenführer Josef Dietrich (Plate A1)

Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich was born on 28 May 1892 in Hawangen, Bavaria. He spent some time as a trainee hotelier before joining the Bavarian Army as an enlisted man in 1911. He was invalided out of the Army again only weeks after joining Feldartillerie Regiment Nr 4, due to an injury sustained when falling from a horse. Following the outbreak of war in 1914 he applied to enlist once again, and was accepted into the Bavarian artillery. He was wounded in action several times, thereafter bearing the scars from an enemy lance thrust above his left eye and a shell splinter on the right side of his head. After attending the Artillery School and qualifying as a senior NCO, he joined the Sturmtruppe (Assault Troops).

This new concept was an attempt to break the deadlock of static trench warfare by introducing self-sufficient spearhead units of men trained in fast-moving assault tactics; as well as small arms and grenades, these Sturmabteilungen had integral trench mortar, machine gun, flame thrower and light infantry gun teams. These picked units displayed high morale, and within them relationships between officers and men were less rigidly formal than was normal in the Imperial Army. The ethos of the Sturmtruppe would later be consciously revived by the future Waffen-SS.

Dietrich won the Iron Cross in both classes; and he subsequently joined yet another small and elite band of soldiers – those selected

for Germany's first tank units. As a member of the Bavarian Sturmpanzerkraftwagen Abteilung 13, he served in both the German A7V and captured British tanks. He was awarded the Bavarian Militär Verdienstkreuz for his exploits as a tank NCO, and would later proudly wear the Imperial Tank Badge on his SS uniform. Dietrich reached the rank of Vize-Wachtmeister by the end of hostilities.

After the war he joined the Bavarian Landespolizei, and became involved with the Freikorps movement – volunteer units of ex-servicemen who fought against Communist revolutionaries, and also in border campaigns against Poland, and Baltic Bolsheviks.¹ Dietrich served with Freikorps Oberland, a unit that saw combat against the 'Bavarian Red Army' in Munich in May 1919, and against the Poles in Upper Silesia in spring 1921. On leaving the police, Dietrich took a job in a petrol filling station; its owner was a Nazi supporter, who introduced him to the NSDAP. In May 1928, Dietrich joined the party and became one of the earliest members of the SS, formed just two years before and at that point a genuine 'bodyguard' unit consisting of a small number of hand-picked men.

Dietrich was given command of the SS-Standarte in Munich, a post which brought him into regular contact with Hitler. In 1929 Dietrich was elevated to command SS-Brigade 'Bayern' with the rank of SS-Oberführer. Hitler came to value Dietrich's fearlessness and unquestioning loyalty highly, and selected him to represent the Party in the Reichstag; he was duly elected in 1930, although he was never a particularly active parliamentarian.

In 1932 the SS-Begleit Kommando was formed to provide personal protection to Hitler; this evolved into the SS-Stabswache Berlin, the forerunner of the premier combat unit of the future Waffen-SS, the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH). In 1931 Dietrich was promoted to the rank of SS-Gruppenführer, roughly equivalent to lieutenant-general in the Army (although the size of the unit under his command was minute compared with the army corps conventionally led by officers of that rank). Dietrich and his 'Leibstandarte' provided the execution squad which eliminated many of the SA leaders, including SA Stabschef Ernst Röhm, on the so-called 'Night of the Long Knives' on 30 June 1934.

On the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, Dietrich commanded the 'Leibstandarte' regimental group during the campaign in Poland; the unit performed reasonably well under fire, though not spectacularly. Promoted in March 1940 to SS-Obergruppenführer, Dietrich saw field command once again in the May–June campaign in the West, where the 'Leibstandarte' performed better. He was almost killed when his car was shot up while he was travelling between two of his battalions, and he and Max Wünsche (qv) were forced to take cover in a culvert until rescued. Dietrich was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 5 July 1940 in recognition of the performance of his regiment.



Dietrich is shown here in a fleece-lined winter cap and coat, and wearing the Oakleaves to the Knight's Cross, awarded on 31 December 1941 for the good showing of his 'Leibstandarte' regimental group during the hard fighting of winter 1941/42 against the first Soviet counter-offensive. (Josef Charita)

¹ See Elite 76, *The German Freikorps 1918–23*.

The 'LSSAH' was enlarged to brigade status in July 1941. It did well during the Balkan campaign and the opening phases of Operation 'Barbarossa' in Russia, and on 31 December 1941 Dietrich was decorated with the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross. His brigade played an important part in the capture of Rostov in January 1942, and its unquestionably impressive performance in the grim winter campaign led a delighted Hitler to agree to its expansion to (lavishly equipped) divisional status in July 1942. As the 'Leibstandarte' matured into a powerful and effective combat formation, Dietrich's stature grew with it, despite his limited military talents; he was a determined and popular leader, but he displayed no great imagination or initiative. Following the recapture of Kharkov in March 1943, Dietrich was decorated with the Swords. At this point he was obliged to give up command of his division when he was promoted to command the planned I SS-Panzerkorps, though as the 'LSSAH' formed part of this corps his interest in and influence over 'his boys' remained strong.

Dietrich commanded I SS-Panzerkorps during the very costly and unsuccessful defensive campaign in Normandy in summer 1944. By this time, however, his loyalties lay more with his men than with Hitler; even though GFM von Rundstedt judged him to be 'decent, but stupid', he could see the writing on the wall, and it is now known that he expressed willingness to support Rommel had the latter refused to carry out Hitler's increasingly irrational orders.

Dietrich was promoted to SS-Oberstgruppenführer on 1 August 1944, and five days later was decorated with the Diamonds. Although he had lost faith in Hitler due to the Führer's erratic interference in the conduct of operations, the latter clearly retained his faith in Dietrich. Dietrich was elevated to command 6. Panzerarmee in the Ardennes offensive in December 1944, and in the last great effort in the East, around Lake Balaton in Hungary in March 1945. Dietrich and his men pulled out westwards as Vienna fell to the Soviets in May, and surrendered to units of the US 3rd Army.

Tried for complicity in the murder of US prisoners by SS troops at Malmédy during the Ardennes offensive (see Peiper, below), Dietrich was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment. In 1955 he was released on the grounds of ill-health, only to be re-arrested and convicted by the Germans for his part in the murders of SA men during the 'Night of the Long Knives'. He served a further brief term in jail, being released in 1958.

Dietrich was perhaps a more interesting character than is often assumed. He was no great intellect, and his promotion to senior general rank was far beyond his military talents or training; yet his physical bravery in World War I was matched by tactical courage in senior command. Often dismissed as a mere thug, he was a popular commander who took a strong protective interest in his troops, even though he did not hesitate to risk high casualties in order to achieve objectives. He held his nominal superior, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, in complete contempt; and although perfectly willing to take part in the execution of Hitler's political rivals, he is known to have expressed opposition to the genocide of Europe's Jews.

After his release Dietrich lived quietly in retirement until his death in 1966 at the age of 74.

SS-Oberstgruppenführer Paul Hausser (Plate A2)

Paul Hausser was born in Brandenburg on 7 October 1880. His long military career started at the age of 12 when he became a cadet at a military preparatory school. He was commissioned as a Leutnant in 1899 and assigned to an infantry regiment. By the outbreak of war in 1914 he was a Hauptmann with the General Staff, and he served on the staffs of various commands throughout World War I, being promoted Major in March 1918. Hausser was retained in the Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic and continued to progress through the ranks, serving variously as a battalion and regimental commander and commander of the Münsingen troop training grounds, and being promoted Oberst in 1927. In February 1931 he was elevated to Generalmajor, and one year later to Generalleutnant, at which point he retired from the Reichswehr.

Hausser joined the SS in 1934 but, interestingly, he did not become a member of the Nazi Party for another three years. Making best use of the immense experience of this accomplished senior officer, Himmler appointed him as commander of the SS-Junkerschule (officer training academy) at Brunswick. Two years later Hausser was made Inspector of SS officer training schools; in May 1936 he was promoted to SS-Brigadeführer, and in October of that year appointed Inspector of the SS-Verfügungstruppe (SS-VT), the forerunner of the Waffen-SS.

During the invasion of Poland, Hausser served as SS liaison officer with the Army's Panzer Division Kempf, and in October 1939 he was given command of the SS-Verfügungs Division, which would later evolve into 2.SS-Panzer Division 'Das Reich'. Hausser commanded the division through the Balkan campaign and the early stages of the invasion of the USSR in 1941, being decorated with the Knight's Cross on 8 August for his success in command. On 1 October 1941, Hausser was promoted to SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS; but that same month he was seriously wounded, losing the sight of his right eye. On his return to duty in May 1942, now sporting the eyepatch that was to become his trademark, the 61-year-old 'Papa' Hausser moved to a staff posting which he held until September, when he was given command of II SS-Panzerkorps. On 28 July 1943, Hausser was awarded the Oakleaves for his command of the corps, especially in the recapture of Kharkov that March – an operation which had involved his calculated disobedience of Hitler's orders.

In August 1944, Hausser was promoted to SS-Oberstgruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS, the highest rank attainable short of the Reichsführer-SS himself. He was appointed commanding general of 7.Armee on the Western Front, and saw action throughout the fighting in Normandy, where he once again suffered a serious head wound



A fine formal portrait study of SS-Gruf Paul Hausser, shown here wearing the pre-1942 style of rank insignia. The photo was taken just after the award of his Knight's Cross in August 1941, for his performance in command of SS-Div 'Reich' in Operation 'Barbarossa'. During the 1930s Hausser probably made the greatest single contribution to the training of the future Waffen-SS for a serious military role.



An informal snapshot of 'Papa' Hausser as a corps commander, in shirt-sleeve order during a visit to SS-Pz Regt 2 of his old 2.SS-Pz Div 'Das Reich' on the Eastern Front in spring 1944. The Panzer officer on the left is SS-Stubaf Rudolf Enseling, commander of the regiment's I Bataillon; the tank in the background is a PzKw V Panther.

during the breakout from the Falaise Pocket. The Swords were added to his Knight's Cross on 26 August 1944. On returning to duty in January 1945 he was appointed to command Heeresgruppe Oberrhein, holding this post until the command was disbanded in April 1945. During the closing days of the war he was attached to the staff of GFM Kesselring (qv), the Commander-in-Chief South-West. Hausser surrendered to US troops in Austria at the end of the war, and was finally released from captivity in 1948.

Paul Hausser was greatly respected by his men, and indeed by his former enemies; his qualities as a soldier were undeniable, and no war crimes charges were ever brought against him. After the war Hausser was the senior member of HIAG, the ex-servicemen's organization of the Waffen-SS, and published two books, the better known being *Soldaten wie andere auch* ('Soldiers Like Any Others'). He died in Ludwigsburg on 21 December 1972, at the age of 92.

SS-Obergruppenführer Herbert Otto Gille (Plate A3)

Born in Gandersheim on 8 March 1897, Herbert Otto Gille entered the Imperial Army as a cadet. He served in Baden Feldartillerie Regiment Nr 30 throughout World War I, reaching the rank of Oberleutnant by the Armistice. He was not one of the lucky 100,000 who were retained in the army of the post-war Republic, and was forced to find civilian work. He was eventually employed as an estate administrator after obtaining further educational qualifications.

In 1934 he volunteered for service in the SS-Verfügungstruppe, becoming first a platoon, then a company commander in the 'Germania' Regiment. With the expansion of the SS-VT an artillery regiment was authorized, and the former gunner officer Gille was heavily involved in its formation, ultimately serving as one of its battalion commanders during the campaign in Poland. Promoted to SS-Standartenführer, he commanded his regiment when it later became part of the new SS-Division 'Wiking', with which Gille saw heavy action during the early part of the Russian campaign (see Steiner, below). In the rank of SS-Oberführer he was decorated with the Knight's Cross in October 1942 for personal bravery and exemplary leadership.

In May 1943, Gille was promoted to general rank as an SS-Brigadeführer to command the 'Wiking' Division, which continued to earn a formidable reputation under his popular leadership. In the historic battle for the Cherkassy Pocket, 'Wiking', along with SS-Division 'Totenkopf', held out against Soviet forces which reached more than 20 times the strength of the encircled German units, before successfully breaking out. Subsequently ordered to take command of the 'last man, last bullet' defence of the city of Kovel, Gille refused to take his battered division into what he knew was a death trap; but he himself flew into

LEFT **SS-Staf Herbert Otto Gille**, the World War I gunner officer, shown here as colonel commanding an SS artillery regiment. Note the unusual display of the SS runes on both collar patches; in this rank he should have worn a single silver leaf on both patches, and in any lower rank the runes on his right collar and a rank insignia on the left. (Josef Charita)



RIGHT A formal portrait of Gille taken after the award of his Oakleaves in November 1943. His rank of SS-Gruppenführer is shown here by his post-1942 pattern collar patches. By this date he had risen to command of the 'Wiking' Div, which he led with great success and undeniable courage, both physical and moral. Notwithstanding his apparently unsoldierly appearance, Gille was a popular and trusted commander, who cared for his men's welfare.



Kovel, where the forces under his command held out against repeated armoured assaults by four Soviet armies – despite not having a single remaining tank of their own – until a relief force from the 'Wiking' Division broke in. Hitler was finally persuaded by GFM Model that the city must be abandoned; Gille withdrew his men and vehicles, with over 2,000 wounded, along a narrow corridor held by 'Wiking'. For this remarkable achievement Gille was decorated with the Diamonds on 19 April 1944. He was subsequently appointed to command IV SS-Panzerkorps, being promoted to SS-Obergruppenführer on 9 November 1944. After taking part in the doomed attempt to save Budapest his corps fought in the last offensive around Lake Balaton in March 1945; after its failure Gille took his men westwards, and surrendered to US troops.

After his release Gille lived modestly, opening a mail order book service and founding the newspaper of the HIAG (see Hausser, above). He died suddenly of a heart attack on 26 December 1966.

SS-Oberstgruppenführer Theodor Eicke (Plate B3)

One of the most unsavoury senior officers of the Waffen-SS, Theodor Eicke was born in Hudinggen on 17 October 1892, the son of a railway stationmaster of modest means. He joined the Army in 1909, and served in both the infantry and artillery during World War I. Although he was a paymaster NCO, Eicke did receive several decorations including the Iron Cross. After the Armistice he joined the police – on three occasions, in various districts – but each time he was dismissed for subversive right-wing political activities. Finally, in 1923, he secured employment with the chemicals company I.G.Farben, where he ultimately worked as a security advisor.

Eicke joined the Nazi Party in December 1928, and the SS – as an enlisted man – in July 1930; just over a year later he had attained the rank of SS-Standartenführer, equivalent to full colonel, in command of SS-Standarte 10. In June 1933, by then promoted to SS-Oberführer, Eicke was given command of the newly opened concentration camp at



SS-Obergruppenführer Theodor Eicke, in a formal portrait study c.1942. Eicke, the first head of the concentration camp organization, showed little military talent as commander of the SS 'Totenkopf' Div; he was criticized for his blundering recklessness, which led to needlessly high casualties among his men. (Josef Charita)

Dachau, and one year later was appointed Inspector of Concentration Camps. This post is said to have been his reward for his part in the murderous purge of the SA leadership on 30 June 1934. Eicke was elected to the Reichstag in 1937, holding a seat until his death. (While it is accurate to draw a distinction between the crimes committed in the wartime extermination camps in occupied Poland, and the first concentration camps in Germany, it must be emphasized that the regime to which German political prisoners were subjected in the latter was murderously brutal.)

By the outbreak of World War II, Eicke had been promoted to SS-Gruppenführer. During the Polish campaign he served as Höhere SS und Polizei Führer (HSSPF) – Senior SS and Police Commander – in the areas of operation of Armeeoberkommandos 8 and 10. In this capacity Eicke's men were heavily involved in the rounding-up and murder of thousands of Jews and other Polish civilians; vigorous complaints by some Army commanders were ignored.

In November 1939, Eicke was given command of the SS-Division 'Totenkopf' that was being formed from members of the SS-Totenkopfverbände – the 'Death's-Head' units which staffed the concentration camps controlled by Eicke. This attempt to transform into soldiers thousands of prison guards of varying age, fitness, intelligence and military aptitude was due to Himmler's determination to increase the armed strength of the SS at a time when he was forbidden to compete with the armed services for high quality conscripts. The 'Totenkopf' Division was under-trained, chronically under-equipped, and poorly officered when Eicke led it into the 1940 campaign in the West. Although he himself was awarded the Iron Cross First Class, his division did not perform well, taking heavy casualties and narrowly avoiding a panic retreat. Eicke's leadership was brutal, headstrong and insubordinate, and he was accused by a senior Army general of being a 'butcher' of his own men. His division was responsible for a number of atrocities against Allied prisoners of war, murdering both French North African troops and, at Le Paradis on 27 May, about one hundred British soldiers of the 2nd Bn, Royal Norfolk Regiment.

During the first phase of the campaign on the northern sector of the Eastern Front in June 1941, Eicke was seriously injured when his command car ran over a mine and his right foot was shattered. Evacuated for hospital treatment, he returned in September 1941. Although it again suffered heavy casualties, the division performed better than the previous year; and in December 1941, Eicke was decorated with the Knight's Cross. Isolated by the Soviet counter-offensive of January 1942, his division was encircled around Demjansk with a number of Army formations; by the time the Demjansk Pocket was relieved in April 1942 the 'Totenkopf' had been reduced to a fraction of its former strength. That month Eicke was promoted to SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS, and decorated with the Oakleaves.

Six months later, Eicke's division was withdrawn from the front for rebuilding and upgrading to Panzergrenadier (mechanized) status. The 'Totenkopf' returned to Russia in January 1943 in time to take part in Hausser's (qv) Kharkov campaign. On 26 February the divisional HQ had lost contact with the 'Totenkopf's' tank unit, and Eicke took off in a Fieseler Storch for a personal reconnaissance. Over the village of Orelka the spotter plane came under heavy small arms fire and was shot down; Eicke died in the crash.

SS-Oberstgruppenführer Felix Steiner (Plate B1)

Felix Steiner was born in Ebenrode on 23 May 1896. During World War I he saw combat on both the Eastern and Western fronts, and took a particular interest in the development of the Sturmtruppe concept employed so effectively in the German offensive of spring 1918. He was retained in the Reichswehr after the war; but it was only when Major Steiner transferred to the SS-Verfügungstruppe – the forerunner of the Waffen-SS – that he had the opportunity to develop training for these tactics free from the more traditionalist inter-war thinking of the Army. Steiner's motto, 'Sweat saves blood', was to prove entirely valid.

The SS-Regiment 'Deutschland' fought well under SS-Standartenführer Steiner's leadership in 1940, winning him the Knight's Cross on 15 August. When the decision was taken the following month to form a division including volunteers from 'Germanic' countries, the forward-thinking Steiner was chosen to lead it and promoted to general rank. Formed around the SS-VT's 'Germania' Regiment, the new formation (originally entitled 'Germania', but after a few weeks renamed 'Wiking') also included men from Holland, Denmark, Norway, Belgian Flanders, the Baltic states, and even some volunteers from neutral Sweden and Switzerland. Under Steiner's leadership, 'Wiking' became one of the best of the Waffen-SS motorized, later mechanized, and finally armoured divisions. He commanded it on the southern sector of the Eastern Front from June 1941, fighting at Tarnopol, Uman and Korsun before being checked on the Mius river in December.

In 1942 Steiner's division took part in the Wehrmacht's deepest penetration, via Rostov on the Don to Tuapse, the Maikop oilfields and the Terek river in the Caucasus; and on 23 December 1942 he was decorated with the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross. Early in 1943 the re-equipped SS-Panzergrenadier Division 'Wiking' was instrumental in preventing the Red Army from breaking through to the Sea of Azov and thus encircling huge numbers of German troops in the area between the Don and Donetz rivers. At the beginning of March 1943, SS-Gruppenführer Steiner was appointed to command the newly forming III (germanisches) SS-Panzerkorps, which he led with distinction until October 1944, being promoted SS-Obergruppenführer in July 1943. His corps was in the Oranienbaum bridgehead south-west of Leningrad when the Soviet offensive from that city and along the Gulf of Finland began in January

SS-Staf Felix Steiner, commander of the 'Deutschland' Regt of the SS-Verfügungstruppe, awarding decorations to his men for the 1940 campaign in the West; he does not yet display the Knight's Cross awarded to him on 15 August. He wears an old-style Gothic script 'Deutschland' cuff title. (Josef Charita)





A studio portrait of SS-Gruf Steiner, wearing the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross, awarded in December 1942 for his command of the SS-Div 'Wiking'. The other neck decoration, partially obscured by the edge of his tunic, is the Finnish Order of Freedom. (Josef Charita)

1944; his units were heavily committed to fierce defensive fighting until September, finally being forced back into the Baltic states. For his skilled leadership Steiner received the Swords on 10 August 1944; and in September what was left of his corps was given a brief respite in Croatia.

Steiner commanded the nominal 11. Panzerarmee during the defence of Pomerania in early 1945; although in practice far weaker than its title suggested, this formation checked Zhukov's advance by desperate counter-attacks around Stargard, before being forced westwards over the Oder river. In the last days of the Third Reich, Hitler entertained a fantasy of an attack southwards by Steiner's units as his final hope for the relief of Berlin. Steiner had no intention of squandering the lives of his remaining troops, and simply ignored the orders he received from Gens Jodl, Keitel and Heinrici.

After release from British captivity, Steiner was active in working for the welfare of veterans. He wrote a number of books describing his wartime experiences, the most famous being *Armee der Geächteten* ('Army of Outlaws'). Felix Steiner died in retirement in Munich on 17 May 1966.

SS-Brigadeführer Theodor Wisch (Plate B2)

Theodor 'Teddi' Wisch was born at Wesselburener Koog in Holstein on 13 December 1907. He joined the SS in 1930, and after serving for some time as an NCO with SS-Standarte 53 he was commissioned an SS-Sturmführer in July 1933, by which time he was attached to SS-Sonderkommando Berlin. In October of that year he was further promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer, and by the outbreak of World War II he was in command of 1 Sturm (company) of the 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler'. During the Polish campaign Wisch won both classes of the Iron Cross. Promoted to SS-Sturmbannführer on 30 January 1940, he distinguished himself during the spring campaign in the West.

Wisch was appointed to command II Bataillon of his regiment for Operation 'Barbarossa'; on 15 September 1941 he was decorated with the Knight's Cross, and 12 days later was promoted to SS-Obersturmbannführer. On 15 July 1942, on the expansion of the 'LSSAH' from a single reinforced regiment into a two-regiment brigade, Wisch was given command of SS-Infanterie Regiment (mot.) 2. After the Stalingrad disaster of January 1943 the new brigade was rushed from France back to the Russian Front, and the 34-year-old lieutenant-colonel led his regiment in the heavy fighting around Kharkov as a unit of Hausser's (qv) Panzerkorps. He was promoted to SS-Standartenführer on 30 January 1943, and decorated with the German Cross in Gold on 25 February. In July of that year, at the time of the Kursk offensive, Wisch was further promoted to SS-Oberführer and succeeded Dietrich (qv) as commander of the 'Leibstandarte' – now a Panzergrenadier division and, in October 1943, redesignated as 1. SS-Panzer Division 'LSSAH'.

Promoted to SS-Brigadeführer in January 1944, Wisch was decorated with the Oakleaves on 12 February. He led the 'Leibstandarte' in



ABOVE LEFT **Theodor Wisch** is shown here in his command post on the Eastern Front in the first half of 1943, in conversation with **SS-Stubaf Joachim Peiper** (right). At the time this photograph was taken 'Teddi' Wisch held the rank of **SS-Standartenführer** and commanded **SS-Inf Regt 2** in the 'Leibstandarte'; he wears the **Knight's Cross** awarded to him on 15 September 1941. (Josef Charita)

ABOVE RIGHT **SS-Brigaf Wisch** in about February 1944 as divisional commander of **1.SS-Pz Div 'LSSAH'**, wearing the **Oakleaves** awarded on 12 February. (Josef Charita)



extremely fierce fighting around Caen during the battle for Normandy in June 1944. On 28 August he received the Swords, a few days after being severely wounded during the breakout from the Falaise Pocket. After his discharge from hospital Wisch spent the rest of the war in a desk job with the **SS-Führungshauptamt** in Berlin.

Theodor Wisch died in retirement in Hamburg on 11 January 1995.

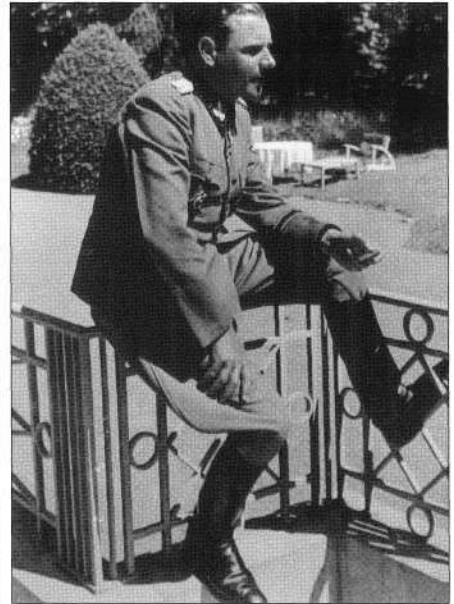
SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Witt (Plate C2)

Born at Hohenlimburg on 27 May 1908, Witt was the son of a salesman. After leaving school he followed his father into commerce, and for a few years was employed as a salesman by a textiles firm. Witt joined the SS in December 1931; and in 1933 he was selected for service in the **SS-Stabswache Berlin** – the elite SS guard unit, just over one hundred strong. In September 1934 he was promoted to **SS-Obersturmführer** and given command of **3.Kompanie/SS-Standarte 'Deutschland'** of the **SS-Verfügungstruppe**. In this position he served through the brief campaign in Poland, winning both classes of the **Iron Cross**. Promotion to **SS-Hauptsturmführer** followed, and with captain's rank came command of his battalion.

During the **SS-VT's** 1940 campaign in Holland and France, Witt distinguished himself during defensive actions on 27 May following the crossing of the **Lys Canal**. Strongly counter-attacked by British troops with some 20 tanks in support, Witt and his men – who had no anti-tank weapons – held their ground using only light infantry arms, and succeeded in destroying nine tanks. Witt's regimental commander recommended him for the **Knight's Cross**, citing him as 'the soul of the resistance' and as a 'model of the young leader, never retreating in the face of anything'. In October 1940, Fritz Witt was transferred to the '**Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler**' and given command of **I Bataillon**. During the brief campaign in the Balkans in spring 1941 he played a key role in the seizure of the **Klidi Pass**, where his men captured over 500 prisoners and substantial amounts of equipment.

LEFT **SS-Oberf Fritz Witt**, who won the Knight's Cross on his 32nd birthday, fighting British troops before Dunkirk as a captain commanding a battalion of the SS-Regt 'Deutschland'. His Oakleaves were awarded on 1 March 1943 for his command of SS-PzGren Regt 1 of the 'Leibstandarte' in the Ukraine, during the Soviet counter-offensive following the fall of Stalingrad.

RIGHT Here Witt is seen as an **SS-Brigadeführer** and divisional commander of the unblooded 12.SS-Pz Div 'Hitlerjugend', taking his ease at a French chateau in May 1944 shortly before the Allied landings in Normandy. Witt would meet his death on 16 June during the bombardment of his divisional headquarters by Allied warships. When he heard of Witt's death, 'Sepp' Dietrich is reported to have said, 'That's one of the best gone – he was too good to stay alive for long.'



After the first campaign in the Soviet Union in 1941–42 the 'Leibstandarte' was considerably strengthened, and in July 1942 Witt's battalion was upgraded to regimental status; he was appointed to command, in the rank of SS-Obersturmbannführer. On 1 March 1943 he was awarded the Oakleaves for his successful leadership in many battles, particularly the ferocious fighting for Kharkov. Witt was promoted to SS-Oberführer on 1 July 1943, and at the end of that month was appointed to command the newly forming 12.SS-Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend'. This formation was raised largely from 17-year-old Hitler Youth boys, around an armature of battle-hardened NCOs and officers from the 'LSSAH' and the Army. In April 1944 Witt was promoted to the rank of SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS – at the age of 35, Germany's second youngest general officer after Adolf Galland (qv).

Early on 7 June 1944 the 'Hitlerjugend' Division was thrown against the Allied landings in Normandy, the first battlegroup (led by Kurt Meuer, qv) hitting Canadian troops on Caen-Carpiquet airfield. Savage fighting continued without respite; and on the morning of 14 June, when Witt's field headquarters at Venois came under heavy bombardment from Allied warships, he was killed by a shell fragment in the head.

SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel (Plate C1)

Heinz Harmel was born in Metz on 29 June 1906, the son of a soldier. Intent on following his father, Harmel enlisted in 1926, serving in Infanterie Regiment 6 in Schleswig-Holstein. Due to eye problems he was forced to relinquish his chosen career after two years, though he remained a reservist; he took up farming, completing his agricultural training just in time for the great depression of the early 1930s to render him jobless once again. Joining the Volunteer Labour Service (Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienst), Harmel eventually became an instructor with the Reichskuratoriums für Jugendertüchtigung, which in turn led

to his involvement in 1934 with the new schools being set up to give pre-military preparatory training.

Harmel joined the SS in 1935 after a brief period of refresher training as an Army reservist, and was accepted with the rank of SS-Oberscharführer (sergeant-major) into the 'Germania' Regiment of the SS-VT in October of that year. He subsequently passed a platoon leaders' course with distinction, and was commissioned as an SS-Untersturmführer in 1937. After transferring to the 'Deutschland' Regiment in Munich, Harmel was promoted to SS-Obersturmführer in 1938. He took part in the annexation of Austria, and thereafter transferred to the 'Der Führer' Regiment raised in that country where, in January 1939, he was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer.

Harmel led a company of this Austrian regiment in the SS-Division 'Deutschland' (former SS-Verfügungs Div, later 'Das Reich' Div) during the campaign against France and the Low Countries, earning the Iron Cross in both classes. In January 1941 he was given command of II Bataillon of his regiment, which he led through the Balkan campaign, being promoted to SS-Sturmbannführer in April 1941. Operating on the central sector of the Eastern Front after the launch of Operation 'Barbarossa', Harmel was decorated with the German Cross in Gold on 29 November 1941. In December 1941 he was given command of the 'Deutschland' Regiment, a considerable responsibility for a 35-year-old

BELOW LEFT **Heinz Harmel is seen here as an SS-Sturmbannführer; he was promoted SS-Obersturmbannführer in June 1942, so this photo presumably shows a personally acquired mountain cap rather than the so-called 'M1943' Einheitsfeldmütze. At this time Harmel was commander of SS-Regt 'Deutschland' in the SS-Div 'Reich'; on his right breast pocket is the German Cross in Gold, awarded on 29 November 1941. (Gary Wood)**

BELOW RIGHT **Harmel as an SS-Standartenführer, to which rank he was promoted on 20 April 1943; the Oakleaves he displays here were awarded on 7 September that year.**



major. His success was recognized by promotion to SS-Obersturmbannführer effective from June 1942. During the attack that regained Kharkov in March 1943, Harmel personally launched a successful night-time counter-attack on his own initiative, leading a combined force of tanks and armoured infantry; during this action he single-handedly destroyed a Soviet tank. This exploit brought Harmel the Knight's Cross on 31 March 1943, and on 20 April he was promoted to SS-Standartenführer. Colonel Harmel was an inspirational leader, always in the thick of the fighting with his men, and was greatly admired and trusted. On 7 September 1943 he received the Oakleaves, and was also decorated with the Close Combat Clasp in Silver.

In the spring of 1944 Harmel attended a divisional commanders' training course before being appointed to command the recently formed 10.SS-Panzer Division 'Frundsberg' that May; this carried with it promotion to SS-Oberführer. A couple of months previously 'Frundsberg', with its sister 9.SS-Pz Div 'Hohenstaufen', had formed II SS-Panzerkorps under Paul Hausser (qv), and saw action in the relief of the German pocket around Tarnopol in March–April, before being rushed back to the West following the Allied landings in Normandy. After suffering badly from Allied air strikes on its way to the front, Harmel's division went into action on 30 June against the British Operation 'Epsom', taking heavy casualties in the intense fighting around Hill 112. The 'Frundsberg' fought most effectively in the see-saw battles during July and August, being fortunate to escape over the Dives river before the final closing of the Falaise Pocket.

Withdrawing into Holland, the division was resting between Arnhem and Nijmegen in September when the Allied Operation 'Market Garden' sent them back into action, before they had received the replacement for much of their heavy equipment. Harmel – promoted to SS-Brigadeführer that month – played an energetic part in defending the Waal bridge at Nijmegen, and thereafter slowing the Allied advance along 'Hell's Highway'. For his part in the defeat of the airborne operation Harmel was awarded the Swords on 15 December 1944.

Rebuilt in Germany, the 'Frundsberg' Division fought the advancing Americans around Geilenkirchen, Jülich and Hagenau in December/January, before being sent east to face the Red Army on the Oder in February 1945. By mid April, Harmel's division was encircled near Spremberg; he disregarded an irrational order to attack, and instead managed to break out with remnants of his units to rejoin German forces. Relieved of his command, Harmel was assigned to lead a Kampfgruppe fighting in Austria in the last weeks of the war, and fell into British captivity.

A highly respected soldier, Harmel was never accused of any war crimes; in fact, in 1984 he was awarded the Medal for Franco-German Reconciliation by the town of Bayeux, Normandy, around which his division had fought 40 years previously. He also developed a post-war friendship with MajGen John Frost, against whose British paratroopers he had fought at Arnhem; Harmel had personally authorized a cease-fire to allow the collection of British wounded from the battlefield, and ensured their decent treatment thereafter. Heinz Harmel maintained close links with his former soldiers after the war, taking a personal interest in their welfare. He died in retirement in September 2000.

SS-Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer (Plate C3)

Kurt Adolf Wilhelm Meyer was born at Jerxheim on 23 December 1910, the son of a factory worker. On completing his education he became a policeman; he joined the SS on 15 October 1931, and on being commissioned in 1934 was posted to the 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler'. In 1936 he was promoted to SS-Obersturmführer and given command of the regiment's anti-tank company. In Poland in 1939 he was wounded in action and earned the Iron Cross Second Class. Shortly thereafter he was transferred to command the motorcycle reconnaissance company, which he led during the 1940 campaign in the West as an SS-Hauptsturmführer, winning the Iron Cross First Class.

When the 'Leibstandarte' was upgraded to brigade size Meyer's reconnaissance company was enlarged to battalion strength as the Aufklärungs Abteilung, and he retained command with the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer. It was to be during the 1941 Balkan campaign that his star began to rise. On 13 April 1941 he launched an assault to seize the Klissura Pass, break through to Lake Kastoria and cut off Greek forces. The advance bogged down in the face of heavy fire from the flanking heights; Meyer split his force into three assault groups, personally leading the central attack through the pass while the other groups tackled the enemy troops on the flanks. It was here that Meyer famously lobbed a hand grenade behind his own troops to 'encourage' them to leave cover and storm the enemy positions. Two days later Kastoria was in Meyer's hands, along with over 1,100 prisoners. For this achievement Meyer was awarded the Knight's Cross on 18 May 1941.

BELOW LEFT **SS-Ostufaf Kurt Meyer in 1943. As well as the Oakleaves awarded on 23 February that year, for his command of the 'Leibstandarte's' armoured reconnaissance battalion in the fighting for Kharkov, in the uncropped print he also wears the German Cross in Gold and, on his left breast pocket alongside the Iron Cross, the Bulgarian Order of Military Virtue.**

BELOW RIGHT **Meyer photographed during the Normandy campaign, wearing over his private-purchase black shirt a field uniform made from Italian camouflage material. His nickname of 'Panzermeier' did not mean that he was a tank officer - he never was - but was in reference to his aggressive and fearless tactics. When he fell into the hands of *maquisards* on 6 September 1944, only the arrival of Allied troops saved him from summary execution. (Josef Charita)**



Meyer continued to command the Aufklärungs Abteilung 'LSSAH' through the opening phases of the Russian campaign; after a spell of sick leave he returned to combat duty in January 1942, and a few days later he was awarded the German Cross in Gold. In early 1943, having made a strategic withdrawal from Kharkov during a Soviet counter-attack, Paul Hausser (qv) sent his SS-Panzerkorps storming back into the city, and for his unit's part in this victory SS-Obersturmbannführer Meyer was awarded the Oakleaves on 23 February 1943.

Following the creation of the new 12.SS-Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend' in summer 1943 (see Witt, above), Meyer was transferred from the 'Leibstandarte' to take command of its SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 25, with promotion to SS-Standartenführer. The new division was heavily involved in defensive fighting and counter-attacks following the Allied landings in Normandy, and Meyer led the first battlegroup to make contact with Canadian troops near Caen on 7 June 1944. When, little more than a week into the campaign, Fritz Witt (qv) was killed, 'Panzer Meyer' was appointed as temporary divisional commander. The 'Hitlerjugend' saw some of the bitterest fighting of the war as the fanatical young Panzer Grenadiers held back the advance of the British and Canadians, and their disdain for casualties amazed those who faced them. Another result of their indoctrination was a disregard for the Geneva Convention – within the first week they had murdered at least 64 British and Canadian prisoners, and after the bodies were found Allied soldiers were reluctant to give quarter to captured SS men. By the time Meyer's 'HJ' Division was withdrawn on 11 July, its losses had reached some 60 per cent in four weeks. On 27 August 1944, Kurt Meyer was awarded the Swords, and on 1 September – still only 33 years old – he became the youngest general officer in the Wehrmacht when he was promoted to the rank of SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS.

Five days later his command of the division came to an abrupt end when he was captured by Resistance fighters at Durnal; the arrival of Allied troops saved him from being killed out of hand, but when the war ended he was put on trial for his life as a war criminal. The charges included assertions that he had encouraged his men to give no quarter, and responsibility for the execution of Canadian prisoners at the Ancienne Abbé at Ardenne near Caen on 7 June 1944. He was found guilty and sentenced to death on 28 December 1945; but the sentence caused some unease, and the Canadian MajGen Christopher Vokes commuted it to life imprisonment when, on reviewing the prosecution case, he found it to be 'a mass of circumstantial evidence'.

Meyer in fact spent only nine years in prison before being released in September 1954 on grounds of ill-health. He became a brewery manager, and was an active member of HIAG, publishing his memoir *Grenadiere* in 1957. His health continued to decline, and in 1961 he suffered three strokes followed by a fatal heart attack. He died on his 51st birthday, 23 December 1961.

SS-Oberführer Otto Baum (Plate D2)

Born on 15 November 1911 at Hechingen, Baum joined the SS-Verfügungstruppe at Ellwangen at the age of 23. After a year in the ranks he attended the SS-Junkerschule at Brunswick, eventually gaining his commission as an SS-Untersturmführer in 1936. He was appointed as



LEFT SS-Ostufaf Otto Baum, as commander of I Bataillon/ SS-Totenkopf Inf Regt 1 (later redesignated SS-PzGren Regt 5 'Thule') in the 'Totenkopf' Division. Before the outbreak of war Baum had served in both the 'Germania' and 'Der Führer' regiments of the SS-Verfügungstruppe and the elite 'Leibstandarte' before joining 'Totenkopf'. His Knight's Cross was awarded for the winter 1941/spring 1942 campaigns on the northern sector of the Russian Front.

RIGHT A later shot of Baum, wearing the Oakleaves awarded to him on 12 August 1943 as commanding officer of his regiment. (Josef Charita)

a platoon commander, joining II Bataillon/ SS-Standarte 'Germania'. In December 1937 Baum was promoted to SS-Obersturmführer and posted to II Bataillon/ SS-Standarte 'Der Führer' in Austria, eventually taking command of 10.Kompanie with the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer. On 1 June 1938 he was posted to the 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler' in Berlin; in 1939 he saw action with this unit in Poland, winning the Iron Cross Second Class in combat south of Modlin. In the May-June 1940 campaign in the West he was decorated with the Iron Cross First Class for actions at the crossing of the Marne near La Ferte.

March 1941 saw Baum promoted to SS-Sturmbannführer and given command of III Bataillon/ SS-Totenkopf Infanterie Regiment 3 in the 'Totenkopf' Division. He saw much heavy fighting in the breaking of the Stalin Line and the advance to the Kuga river on the northern flank of Operation 'Barbarossa', which earned him the German Cross in Gold in December 1941. His behaviour in the Demjansk Pocket in spring 1942 brought him the Knight's Cross on 8 May. The 'Totenkopf' was subsequently withdrawn to France for rebuilding and mechanization, and Baum was promoted to SS-Obersturmbannführer and given command of I Bataillon/ SS-Totenkopf Infanterie Regiment 1 in November 1942.

In January 1943, SS-Ostufaf Baum returned to the Eastern Front, where his battalion took part in heavy fighting between the Donetz and Dnieper rivers. During February he took command of his regiment – now redesignated as SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 5 – which he led through the battles round Kharkov in March and the great armoured offensive at Kursk in July. After the failure of the latter the 'Totenkopf' faced the major Soviet counter-offensive in the Ukraine; Baum was seriously wounded at Kharkov, and was evacuated for treatment of multiple injuries. On 22 August 1943 he was awarded the Oakleaves; on recovery from his wounds he rejoined his regiment

in the area around Kirovograd, and on 30 January 1944 he was promoted to SS-Standartenführer.

Shortly thereafter SS-Staf Baum was moved to the officer reserve, and spent some time travelling around Germany giving lectures at various NCO training schools. After the Normandy landings, and the serious wounding of SS-Staf Werner Ostendorff in heavy fighting against US Airborne forces around Carentan, Baum was appointed to succeed him in command of 17.SS-Panzer Grenadier Division 'Götz von Berlichingen' on 20 June 1944. For a brief period in July–October he commanded 2.SS-Panzer Division 'Das Reich' in addition to his own, following the death in action of the latter's commander SS-Staf Christian Tyschen on 28 July. Baum led the counter-attack against the US breakthrough at St Lô, and was instrumental in assisting the breakout of German units trapped in the Falaise Pocket. On 2 September 1944, Baum was awarded the Swords and shortly afterwards was promoted to SS-Oberführer.

November 1944 saw Baum given command of 16.SS-Panzer Grenadier Division 'Reichsführer-SS' in northern Italy. In February 1945 that division was moved to Hungary, where it fought as part of 6.SS-Panzerarmee under SS-Obstgruf Dietrich (qv). The remnants finally surrendered to Allied forces in southern Austria, where SS-Oberf Baum was taken into British captivity.

Otto Baum died in retirement at Hechingen in 1998 at the age of 86.

SS-Brigadeführer Wilhelm Mohnke (Plate D3)

Wilhelm Mohnke was born in Lübeck on 15 March 1911, the son of a cabinet maker; after working as a manager in a porcelain factory, he joined SS-Standarte 4 in 1931, transferring the following January to SS-Standarte 22 in Schwerin. Shortly thereafter he was selected by Dietrich (qv) to become a member of the elite guard company SS-Stabswache Berlin. Commissioned an SS-Untersturmführer in June 1933, he had achieved the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer by that October, and eventually took command of 5.Kompanie of the 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf



LEFT SS-Staf Wilhelm Mohnke, awarded the Knight's Cross on 11 July 1944 as commander of SS-Pz Gren Regt 26 in 12.SS-Pz Div 'Hitlerjugend' – a command in which he would be implicated in the shooting of Canadian prisoners in Normandy. A fanatical Nazi, Mohnke lived to be 90 years old; in his old age he was interviewed at length by the greatly respected writer Gitta Sereny, who became convinced that he played a shadowy part in the 1983 scandal of the faked 'Hitler diaries', which cost the magazine *Stern* and the London *Sunday Times* so much money and credibility. (Josef Charita)

RIGHT Mohnke as an SS-Oberführer and commander of 1.SS-Pz Div 'LSSAH' in December 1944, during an inspection of 6.Panzerarmee units by SS-Obstgruf Dietrich on the eve of the Ardennes offensive. Mohnke was not a charismatic commander; unlike contemporaries such as Gille and Harmel (qqv), he never developed close bonds with the men under his command. After the war some veterans expressed intense dislike of him, and did their best to avoid contact with him.

On the first day of the Ardennes operation, 16 December 1944, Mohnke (right) is seen in his Kubelwagen, caught up in one of the traffic jams which delayed the advance.



Hitler'. For his service in the Polish campaign he was awarded both classes of the Iron Cross, on 21 September and 8 November 1939.

Mohnke led his company during the opening phase of the attack on France and the Low Countries, and subsequently took command of II Bataillon. On 28 May 1940 some 80 British prisoners of war were murdered at Wormhout by men under his command. SS-Sturmbannführer Mohnke commanded the battalion in the Balkans in April 1941, and was seriously wounded in Yugoslavia during an aircraft attack. This resulted in the amputation of his right foot; he almost lost the whole leg, but refused to allow this. He subsequently spent many months recuperating, only returning to duty in 1942. Mohnke languished in the replacement battalion of the 'LSSAH' until 1943, when he was posted in the rank of SS-Obersturmbannführer to the newly formed 12.SS-Panzer Division 'Hitlerjugend' as one of the large cadre of experienced soldiers from the 'Leibstandarte'.

Mohnke was given command of SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 26, which he led through the brutal fighting around Caen as the division struggled to hold back the British and Canadian advance. Promoted SS-Standartenführer on 21 June 1944, he was awarded the Knight's Cross on 11 July, and wounded again on 17 July; he is also alleged to have ordered the execution of 35 Canadian prisoners who were murdered at Fontenay le Pesnel. During August, Mohnke also had temporary command of the 'Leibstandarte' Division after SS-Brigaf Wisch (qv) was wounded. Promoted SS-Oberführer on 4 November 1944, he was confirmed in the divisional command, which he exercised during the ill-fated Ardennes offensive. Although it was troops of his division who were responsible for the shooting of US prisoners of war at the Baugnez crossroads – generally known as the Malmédy massacre – these men were part of the detached Kampfgruppe Peiper (qv) rather than the main body of the 'Leibstandarte'.

Mohnke was promoted to SS-Brigadeführer on 30 January 1945. Wounded again shortly thereafter, he spent some time recovering before

being appointed to command the motley troops allocated to defending the 'Central Government Area' of Berlin around the Reichstag, the Reichskanzlei and the Führerbunker beneath it. Mohnke took his orders directly from Hitler; during the last days of April he conducted the hopeless defence with ruthless energy, deploying as best he could a force including various mostly Waffen-SS remnants, including Frenchmen from the 'Charlemagne' Division and Scandinavians from the 'Nordland'. Mohnke is also believed to have been involved in the summary executions of German stragglers and supposed deserters. He survived the battle of Berlin, and was taken prisoner by the Soviets while trying to lead a group of survivors from Hitler's bunker towards the west.

Held as a POW until 1955, Mohnke returned to Germany and went into the truck business. At various times there were demands that he be tried for various war crimes, but no prosecution ever took place. He died on 6 August 2001, aged 90.

SS-Standartenführer Joachim Peiper (Plate D1)

A Berliner, Joachim Peiper (usually known by the nickname 'Jochen') was born on 15 January 1915, the son of a soldier. He enlisted in the SS in 1934, and was commissioned in 1936; subsequently he was selected for the prestigious post of adjutant to the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler. Married in 1938, he was posted to the 'Leibstandarte', first seeing action in Holland and France; his 11. Kompanie took part in the attack on the Wattenberg Heights, where SS-Obersturmführer Peiper earned the Iron Cross in both classes.

Peiper rose to fame during the campaign on the Eastern Front, as commander of what became the armoured infantry battalion III/ SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 2 'LSSAH'. During the Kharkov campaign early in 1943 he led a mission to rescue the remnants of the Army's 320. Infanterie Division cut off at Stary Oskol, and success brought him the Knight's Cross on 9 March 1943. The division went on to see heavy fighting in the Kursk offensive in July. In September 1943, during the 'Leibstandarte's' brief transfer to Italy following the Allied landings, two of Peiper's Panzer Grenadiers, on a foraging mission for spare parts, were captured by Italian troops who had thrown in their lot with the partisans. Peiper joined the rescue mission with two companies, and was met by heavy fire outside the town of Boves near Cuneo in Piedmont. He ordered self-propelled artillery to lay down fire on the area held by the Italians, and about 33 civilians were killed.

The 'LSSAH' returned to the Russian Front in late 1943 and was once more thrown into savage fighting as one of the few reliable 'fire brigade' formations. On 20 November, Peiper took command of I Abteilung of the division's tank regiment. Battles around Zhitomir at the turn of the year cost it heavy casualties, and by the end of February SS-Panzer Regiment 1 'LSSAH' had at one stage only three tanks left operational. By now the regimental commander, SS-Sturmbannführer Peiper was awarded the Oakleaves on 27 January 1944. In April the 'Leibstandarte', reduced to a remnant, was finally pulled back for refitting in France – where it faced the Allied landings in Normandy two months

A studio portrait showing Joachim Peiper wearing black tank uniform and a matching shirt, in the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer with SS-Pz Regt 1 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler'. (Josef Charita)



One of only 20 or so PzKw VI Ausf B 'King Tigers' of sSS-Pz Abt 501 attached to Kampfgruppe Peiper for the Ardennes offensive, '008' of the battalion staff was filmed passing through Tondorf on the way to Peiper's assembly area on the eve of the advance.



later. Peiper survived all these battles; and in December 1944, by now promoted SS-Obersturmbannführer, he was given command of a key battlegroup bearing his name for the ill-fated Ardennes offensive.

Kampfgruppe Peiper formed the armoured spearhead on 'Rollbahn D', one of two routes assigned to the 'Leibstandarte' in the vital central sector. The command consisted of his regiment's I Abteilung with two companies of PzKw IVs and two of PzKw V Panthers (about 35 of each type); about 20 heavy PzKw VI Ausf B 'King Tigers' of sSS-Pz Abt 501; plus mechanized infantry, engineers, and self-propelled artillery and Flak units. The route west lay along narrow secondary roads and tracks through heavily wooded and snowbound terrain; like the rest of 6.Panzerarmee, the Kampfgruppe was very short of fuel.

The advance began on 16 December; on the 17th, making good progress, the battlegroup attacked a US convoy near Baugnez before pressing on for Ligneuville and Stavelot; but that afternoon about 100 US prisoners were machine-gunned to death in a field near the Baugnez crossroads. On 18 December, bridges over the Amblève and Salm were both blown as the Panzers approached. Peiper took Stoumont on the 19th, but that was his last attack westwards. Stiffening US resistance and dwindling supplies kept Peiper blocked around La Gleize until 23 December, when he was forced to destroy his remaining tanks and lead his 1,000-odd men back to German lines on foot. Despite the failure of the offensive, Peiper's personal performance earned him the Swords on 11 January 1945, and promotion to the rank of SS-Standartenführer.

There is no evidence that Peiper was personally present at the Baugnez crossroads massacre, or that he gave any orders for the killing of prisoners. As the officer in command of the Kampfgruppe, however, he was among those prosecuted, and was sentenced to death on 26 July 1946. However, when US advocate LtCol Everett Willis exposed many serious abuses during the investigation and trial the sentence was commuted. Released in December 1956, Peiper moved to France in 1959 in search of obscurity. He lived quietly in the village of Traves near Vesoul, with the full knowledge of the local authorities. In 1968 an Italian attempt to have him tried for the deaths of civilians at Boves was rejected

but agitators began to harass him. He sent his family to safety; but on 14 July 1976 his cottage was petrol-bombed, and he died in the fire. No one was ever prosecuted for his murder.

SS-Standartenführer Max Wünsche (Plate E3)

Max Wünsche was born on 20 April 1915 at Kittlitz. After completing his high school education, in 1928 he joined the Reichslandbund (agricultural union) while continuing his further education at a mercantile school. For a short time he worked as an estate manager, before becoming a head of department with an accounting firm. Already a member of the Hitlerjugend since 1932, in July 1933 he joined the SS. He was selected for an officers' course at the SS-Junkerschule at Bad Tölz in Bavaria, and was commissioned an SS-Untersturmführer in 1936. Assigned to the 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler', Wünsche served as a platoon commander until 1938, when the handsome young lieutenant was posted to the Begleitkommando, Hitler's personal escort unit, as an orderly officer.

Wünsche remained in this post until January 1940, missing the Polish campaign, but returned to his platoon command with the 'Leibstandarte' in time for the campaign in the West. After this initiation to combat Wünsche returned to Hitler's escort detachment, but only briefly. It is believed that some incident of bad behaviour led to his being returned to combat duties, but whatever the incident may have been it certainly did not mar his career. On his return to the 'LSSAH' Wünsche was appointed adjutant to 'Sepp' Dietrich (qv), and served throughout the Balkan campaign and the opening stage of Operation 'Barbarossa' in this position. Wünsche seems to have been an energetic staff officer, and was often called upon to take over temporary command of units whose officers had become casualties, earning himself the Infantry Assault Badge.

Eventually, in February 1942, Wünsche was given command of the unit's Sturmgeschütz Abteilung in the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer. He showed considerable zeal at the head of his self-propelled assault guns, but was forced to relinquish command in June 1942 to attend a General Staff course at the Kriegsschule in Berlin. Graduation brought him promotion to SS-Sturmbannführer; he then returned to his battalion, which he led until October 1942, when he was appointed to command I Abteilung of the newly formed SS-Panzer Regiment 'LSSAH'. After working-up, this new tank unit was sent to the front early in 1943, virtually rolling straight off the railway flat-cars and into battle. In blizzard conditions Wünsche's tanks halted a major Soviet advance at Merefá, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy; he then pressed on to link up successfully with Kurt Meyer's (qv) Aufklärungs Abteilung, which had become cut off. The tank and armoured reconnaissance battalions then formed a Kampfgruppe, attacking units of the Soviet 6th Guards Cavalry Corps to great effect. In late February, Wünsche

Max Wünsche, photographed as an SS-Sturmbannführer in field-grey service uniform with opened collar. At this time he was commander of I Bataillon/ SS-PzGren Regt 1 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler'. (Josef Charita)



was responsible for encircling and eliminating a large Soviet force near Yeremievka; for this achievement he was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 28 February 1943. Two weeks later, Hausser's (qv) SS-Panzerkorps retook Kharkov, and the city's Red Square was renamed 'Platz der Leibstandarte' to commemorate the part played by the division in this significant victory.

In June 1943, Wünsche, like many other experienced 'Leibstandarte' officers, was transferred to the new 'Hitlerjugend' Division and given command of its SS-Panzer Regiment 12. When the 'HJ' went into action against the Allied landings in Normandy a year later, Wünsche's young tank crews inflicted severe losses on British and Canadian troops attempting to advance around Caen; his regiment was responsible for the destruction of more than 200 Allied tanks over a five-week period, and for this achievement the Oakleaves were added to his Knight's Cross on 11 August 1944. Finally forced back with heavy casualties, the 'Hitlerjugend' was trapped in the Falaise Pocket.

On 20 August 1944, Wünsche and three of his comrades stumbled into an Allied position. Although Wünsche was wounded, he and two others managed to escape by commandeering an abandoned vehicle; but later, while resting and awaiting the cover of darkness, they were discovered and captured. Wünsche spent the remainder of the war in British captivity.

After the war he built a successful career, managing an industrial plant in Wuppertal. He died in retirement in April 1995, at the age of 80 years.



SS-Stubaf Max Wünsche, whose record with the 'Leibstandarte' in Russia brought him in 1943-44 command of the tank regiment in the new 12.SS-Pz Div 'Hitlerjugend'. His film-star good looks, instantly recognizable in any wartime photograph, are here set off by the silver-piped officers' version of the black Waffen-SS Panzer uniform, and a private-purchase black shirt. Wünsche received the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross on 11 August 1944, and had been recommended for the award of the Swords just before he was captured in Normandy later that month.

NAVY COMMANDERS

Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz (Plate E2)

Karl Dönitz was born on 16 September 1891 at Grünau near to Berlin, the son of an engineer. He joined the Imperial Navy in 1910 as a sea cadet, and in 1912 he was an officer candidate (Fähnrich) aboard the cruiser SMS *Breslau*. He gained his commission to Leutnant zur See aboard her, serving briefly in the Black Sea before transferring to the U-boat service.

Oberleutnant zur See Dönitz's first assignment was as watch officer on U-39 under Kapitänleutnant Walter Forstmann, one of the Imperial Navy's most successful commanders and holder of the Pour le Mérite. After service in the Adriatic on U-39, and passing the boat commanders' training course, in March 1918 Dönitz was given his own boat, UC-25. This small vessel, armed with mines and just five torpedoes, operated out of Pola in the Mediterranean. On his first patrol he sank a 5,000-ton steamer after penetrating inside the harbour at Augusta in Sicily, making good his escape afterwards. His exploits were drawn to the attention of the Kaiser, who awarded him the Hohenzollern House Order. His next patrol achieved three further sinkings.

Dönitz was subsequently given command of the larger UB-68. This boat had recently been the subject of a refit during which a heavier deck

gun was fitted and weights added to her keel to keep her trim balanced. This class of boat already had problems with stability, and Dönitz' crew were not particularly experienced. One night in September 1918, Dönitz took UB-68 on the surface through the escort screen of an Allied convoy. Two torpedo attacks missed, but alerted Allied escort ships. At daylight Dönitz submerged in order to continue stalking the convoy, but the boat went out of control in a steep dive which left UB-68 standing on her bow almost vertical in the water. When Dönitz ordered her tanks blown she shot vertically upwards, and observers on British warships reported seeing her stern and almost one-third of her length rise above the surface. As the boat settled on to an even keel again Dönitz found himself in the middle of the convoy and under fire from several warships; damaged too badly to dive again, UB-68 had to be abandoned, and Dönitz and most of his crew were rescued by the British.

Dönitz secured his repatriation in July 1919 after feigning a mental breakdown. He remained in the post-war Navy, being promoted Kapitänleutnant in 1921; Germany was no longer permitted to have submarines, and he served in a torpedo boat unit. In 1923 he began training for a position on the Naval Staff, and served in senior administrative posts until 1934 when, with the rank of Fregattenkapitän, he was given command of the cruiser *Emden*. In 1935 Kapitän zur See Dönitz was entrusted with the task of rebuilding the German submarine service. Promotion first to Kommodore and then to Konteradmiral followed in 1939, and with the latter rank came the title of Befehlshaber der Unterseeboote (Commander of Submarines).

At the outbreak of World War II, Dönitz was fully aware that with a force of just 57 submarines – of which only half were capable of patrol operations in the Atlantic – he could not hope to directly challenge the power of the Royal Navy. Instead, while pressing for a vigorous building programme he opted to target the merchant shipping which was Britain's lifeline, and did so with enormous success in the early years of the war. Successes against naval targets – such as the sinking of the battleships HMS *Royal Oak* and *Barham* and the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* – also kept Hitler and the Navy C-in-C Grossadmiral Raeder (qv) happy, since both had tried to direct Dönitz to use his submarines primarily against warships.

The successes of his U-boats saw Dönitz promoted to Vizeadmiral in 1940, and he was awarded the Knight's Cross in April of that year; promotion to full Admiral followed in 1942. The successes of the U-boats contrasted with the waning fortunes of the surface fleet; and in 1943, when Raeder offered his resignation due to irreconcilable differences with Hitler, the Führer accepted his recommendation of Dönitz as his successor. As Grossadmiral and Oberbefehlshaber der Marine (C-in-C Navy) Dönitz would retain a passionate involvement in the operations of his U-boat service.

Dönitz was awarded the Oakleaves in April 1943, just a month before what is generally accepted as the turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic in favour of the Allies. Increasingly effective Allied anti-submarine measures, and Allied success in cracking the Kriegsmarine 'Enigma' codes, steadily reduced the impact of U-boat operations on the Allied war effort thereafter, but the achievements of Dönitz's submarine fleet remain impressive. Over 2,800 Allied ships totalling over



ABOVE LEFT A formal portrait of Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz. Below two rows of Imperial and Third Reich medal ribbons he wears a diamond-studded 1939 U-Boat War Badge presented to him as a token of personal esteem by the then Commander-in-Chief Navy, Grossadmiral Raeder; below this are the 1914 Iron Cross First Class with its silver eagle-shaped 1939 bar for a repeat award, and his Imperial Navy U-Boat Badge.

ABOVE RIGHT Dönitz with members of his staff during an inspection of U-boat officers. His greatcoat has the exposed cornflower-blue silk lapels of admiral's rank, with the naval officer's dress dagger hanging beneath the pocket flap. He carries the baton of a Grossadmiral, covered with blue velvet and studded with gold eagles, Iron Crosses and fouled anchors. The baton was taken from him during his captivity, and is now held in a museum in England.



15,000,000 tons were sunk by the 'Grey Wolves' during the war, though at the cost of a catastrophic rate of casualties among their crews.

In the closing days of the Third Reich, Hitler nominated Dönitz as his successor, and on the former's suicide on 30 April 1945 the C-in-C Navy also became the German head of state. Fully aware that the war was very nearly over, he concentrated his efforts in these final days on the rescue of as many civilians and soldiers as possible from the Red Army advancing across northern Germany.

Karl Dönitz was indicted for war crimes during the Nuremberg Trials in 1946. One of the unhappy British judges at Nuremberg is recorded as saying, 'The Germans fought a much cleaner war at sea than we did'; nevertheless, Dönitz was convicted of 'crimes against peace' and sentenced to ten years in prison – a controversial sentence, which was served in full. Released in 1956, Dönitz lived quietly in retirement at Aumühle; his memoirs *Mein Wechselvolles Leben* were published in 1968. Karl Dönitz died on 24 December 1980 at the age of 89; his funeral was attended by many former wartime sailors, and his pall-bearers were all highly decorated U-boat commanders.

Grossadmiral Dr Erich Raeder (Plate E1)

Erich Raeder was born on 24 April 1876 in Wandsbeck, the son of a school headmaster. On completion of his education he joined the Imperial Navy in 1894. Promoted Leutnant in 1897, he subsequently attended the Marineakademie in Kiel, and in 1906 was appointed to the Signals Bureau of the Navy Department. From 1910 to 1912 Raeder

served as the navigation officer on the Kaiser's yacht *Hohenzollern*. His career progression was relatively rapid, and in 1912 he was appointed chief-of-staff to Admiral Hipper. He remained a staff officer until 1917, when he was given command of the light cruiser *Köln*.

After World War I, Raeder remained in the Navy; he was promoted from Kapitän zur See to Konteradmiral in 1922, and became Inspector of Naval Training. In 1924 he was given command of light naval forces in the North Sea, and in 1925 took over the Baltic naval command. Finally, in 1928, Raeder was appointed to command the Reichsmarine in the post of Chef der Marineleitung. Supporting the Nazi plans for German re-armament, Raeder was responsible for the construction programme that resulted in the 'pocket battleships' (super-heavy cruisers) *Deutschland*, *Admiral Graf Spee* and *Admiral Scheer*. When the new Kriegsmarine was formed in 1935, Raeder was appointed as Oberbefehlshaber der Marine (C-in-C Navy). Although he fully supported the expansion of the Navy, Raeder warned Hitler against seeking to challenge Britain's naval superiority at this early stage.

On the outbreak of war the newly promoted Grossadmiral Raeder cautioned Hitler against risking a war on more than one front, and urged that the Navy should be concentrated against Great Britain before turning elsewhere. It was Raeder who devised plans for the spring 1940 invasion of Denmark and Norway; he would only consider Operation 'Sealion', the proposed invasion of Great Britain, if Göring's Luftwaffe could neutralize the RAF, and when the Air Force failed to create such conditions he was realistic in his opposition to the plan.

Raeder was a firm opponent of the attack on the Soviet Union. He gradually lost faith in Hitler due to the latter's constant interference in

BELOW LEFT In this formal study of Grossadmiral Erich Raeder the crossed silver batons on his shoulder straps can just be seen. Note in this photo the massive gilt ends of the Grossadmiral's baton, the brocade belt worn with ceremonial uniform, and, on his left breast, the Gold Party Badge. Raeder was not a member of the Nazi Party, and this badge was an honorary award.

BELOW RIGHT Raeder on an inspection visit to one of the U-boat bases in occupied France, prior to relinquishing his post of Commander-in-Chief Navy to Dönitz in early 1943. Note that even in everyday service uniform the conservative Raeder still wears a starched wing collar with his shirt.



military matters, and his preference towards the expansion of the U-boat arm at the expense of the surface fleet. Following a debacle in December 1942, when a powerful naval force including the pocket battleship *Lützow* and heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* attempted to intercept a British convoy and were driven off by relatively weak escort forces, Hitler flew into a rage and threatened to scrap all the major units of the fleet and mount all their heavy weapons in shore batteries. Raeder immediately offered his resignation, recommending Karl Dönitz as his successor.

Tried and found guilty at the Nuremberg trials in 1946 on charges of waging an aggressive war and war crimes, Raeder was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released in 1955 on grounds of ill-health, and published his memoirs the following year. Erich Raeder died in retirement on 6 November 1960.

Fregattenkapitän Otto Kretschmer (Plate F2)

Kretschmer was born on 1 May 1912 at Heidau. He joined the Navy in 1930 as a Seekadett, becoming Fähnrich in April 1932, Oberfähnrich in April 1934 and finally being commissioned as Leutnant zur See in October 1934. After the usual rights of passage on sail training ships and light cruisers, Kretschmer joined the U-Boat service in January 1936. His first boat was U-35 (KL Werner Lott), on which Oberleutnant zur See Kretschmer served as watch officer during non-intervention patrols in Spanish waters during the Spanish Civil War.² In September 1937 he took command of U-23, a small Type II coastal boat. Promoted to Kapitänleutnant on 1 June 1939, after the outbreak of war he carried out mine-laying patrols in the North Sea off the Scottish coast; he was awarded both classes of the Iron Cross, as well as qualifying for the U-Boat War Badge. His first sinking came on 12 January 1940 when he torpedoed the 10,000-ton freighter *Danmark*, and the following month he sank the destroyer HMS *Daring*. In all, Kretschmer carried out eight patrols totalling 94 days at sea with U-23.

On 18 April 1940, KL Kretschmer commissioned the new U-99, a Type VIIB. During his time with U-99 Kretschmer completed a further eight cruises totalling 119 days, during which he achieved a total of enemy tonnage sunk which was to take him into the record books; and on 4 August 1940, after his tally reached 117,000 tons, he was decorated with the Knight's Cross. During November 1940 he went on to sink three British armed merchant cruisers – *Laurentic*, *Patroclus* and *Forfar* – totalling over 46,000 tons between them, which brought him the Oakleaves. Kretschmer habitually attacked his targets at night, infiltrating between the columns of convoys on the surface, where the diminutive size of the U-boat's exposed tower and deck made it difficult to spot in the darkness. He was an incredibly accurate shot, with a 'one torpedo – one ship' policy.

On 25 February 1941 he set sail on what proved to be his last patrol. On 1 March he was informed that he had been promoted to Korvettenkapitän; and by 17 March he had attacked a further ten ships, taking his record to 43 sunk

This well-known photograph of KL Otto Kretschmer in 1940 shows him wearing the captured British denim battledress uniform, found to be so practical as seagoing wear that the Kriegsmarine soon copied it closely. Kretschmer was awarded the Knight's Cross on 4 August 1940 as commander of U-99, and the Oakleaves that November; the Swords were only presented to him in British captivity, so this photograph has clearly been retouched to show them – a not uncommon practice on wartime propaganda postcards. Note that in this shot Kretschmer wears an ordinary seaman's boarding cap.



² See Elite 131, *The Condor Legion*



A formal portrait of Kretschmer, once more retouched to show the Swords, and captioned 'Korvettenkapitän' although his jacket shows only the two-and-a-half cuff rings of Kapitän-leutnant. One of the first great U-boat 'aces', along with Prien and Schepke, Otto Kretschmer was one of the most highly respected of German naval commanders, and went on to serve his country in senior commands in the post-war Bundesmarine.

totalling 263,682 tons, and a further five, totalling nearly 38,000 tons, damaged. On 17 March 1941 he was caught and depth-charged by the British destroyer HMS *Walker* after diving during an attack on a convoy south-east of Iceland. The damaged U-99 was forced to the surface, and Kretschmer scuttled her; even in those icy waters he managed to save 40 of his 43-man crew, all being rescued by the Royal Navy after U-99 sank. While in captivity, on 26 December 1941, Kretschmer was awarded the Swords. In tonnage terms Kretschmer remained the highest scoring U-boat commander of World War II, despite the relative brevity of his combat career.

Unlike many of the great U-Boat aces, who while at sea permitted their officers and crews to grow luxuriant beards and to adopt whatever clothing made them most comfortable, Kretschmer – though no martinet – always insisted on a military standard of neatness; even after return from long patrols he and his men were always smartly turned out. Neither was Kretschmer inclined towards the over-exuberant behaviour for which some of his peers were noted; he was a quiet, serious man, who was nicknamed by his men 'Silent Otto'.

For more than four years Kretschmer was held in the notorious Bowmanville POW camp – Camp 30 – in Canada, where he was the senior ranking officer. The prisoners managed to get in radio contact with U-Boat HQ; and in September 1944, Kretschmer was informed that he had been promoted in captivity to Fregattenkapitän on 1 September. Finally released in 1947, he joined the reborn German Navy in 1955, at first commanding 1. Geleitgeschwader (1st Escort Squadron), before being appointed Commander of Amphibious Forces in 1958. From 1962 there followed a number of senior staff postings including chief-of-staff of COMNAVBALTAP, a senior NATO position, from 1965 to 1969. Kretschmer eventually reached the rank of Flotillenadmiral before retiring in 1970. A fluent English speaker, who had spent some time in Britain before commencing his naval career, Otto Kretschmer remained ever-willing to discuss his experiences with historians and scholars. He died in hospital following an accident while on holiday in Bavaria in 1998.

Kapitän zur See Hans Rudolf Rösing (Plate F3)

Hans Rudolf Rösing was born in Wilhelmshaven on 28 September 1905. He joined the Reichsmarine in April 1925 as a Seekadett, gaining his commission as Leutnant zur See in October 1928, and serving on the light cruisers *Nymphe* and *Königsberg*. Germany was forbidden to operate submarines under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles; and in the early

1930s Oberleutnant zur See Rösing was one of a small number of chosen personnel who were detached to foreign navies to gain experience in submarines. After spending two years at the Unterseebootsabwehrschule, Rösing, recently promoted Kapitänleutnant, was given his first submarine command when he commissioned the new U-11. After two years in this small Type IIB coastal submarine, he took command of U-35, a larger Type VIIA ocean-going boat. In 1937 Rösing was given command of another Type IIB, U-10, and assigned to the Torpedoeerprobungskommando, responsible for the testing of new torpedo types. After a year in this post he was appointed commander of 5.Unterseebootsflotille – Flotille Emsmann – at Kiel.

July 1939 saw Rösing promoted to Korvettenkapitän. Following a short spell of duty on the staff of the Befehlshaber der U-Boote (Dönitz, qv), Rösing was posted to command 7.Unterseebootsflotille at Kiel. This command lasted until 21 May 1940, when he took over the Type VIIB boat U-48 from her highly successful previous commander, Herbert Schultze. In the course of his two war patrols with U-48, Rösing showed himself to be as capable a commander as he was a staff officer, sinking 12 ships totalling over 60,000 tons, and earning himself the U-Boat War Badge, Iron Cross First Class and Knight's Cross.

Rösing left U-48 in December 1940, and was appointed liaison officer to the Italian submarine force operating out of Bordeaux in occupied France. After some months he was given command of 3.Unterseebootsflotille, but in August 1941 returned to the staff of the Befehlshaber der U-boote. In July 1942, Rösing was appointed as FdU West (Führer der U-boote West), with headquarters in both Paris and Angers; he was responsible for all boats committed to the Battle of the Atlantic, and thus of the great majority of the entire U-boat fleet. In February 1943 he was promoted to Fregattenkapitän, and one month later to Kapitän zur See. He remained as FdU West until autumn 1944, when the Allied liberation of France forced the Kriegsmarine to transfer the remaining boats of 2. and 7.U-flotillen to bases in Norway, Denmark and northern Germany.

After the German surrender in May 1945, Rösing spent about a year in British captivity before being released. He subsequently joined the post-war Navy, and was given command of German naval units operating in the North Sea (Marine-Abschnittskommando Nordsee), and later of Military District I, rising to the rank of Konteradmiral. He retired from active service in 1965, having added the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Federal Service Cross) to his wartime decorations. He died on 16 December 2004, at the age of 99.



Hans Rudolf Rösing, in the rank of Korvettenkapitän, wearing the officer's gold-piped boarding cap, and displaying the Knight's Cross awarded for his successful command of U-48 in 1940. Rösing was the only officer to hold the post of FdU West – Commander Submarines/ West – during its existence from 1942 to 1945.

Fregattenkapitän Erich Topp (Plate F1)

Erich Topp was born on 2 July 1914 in Hanover. He joined the Kriegsmarine in April 1934 as an officer candidate, and gained his commission as Leutnant zur See in April 1937. After initial experience on the light cruiser *Karlsruhe* he volunteered for the U-boat branch. In 1938, after completion of specialist training, he was posted as watch officer to U-46, an ocean-going Type VIIB boat commanded by Kapitänleutnant Herbert Sohler, and gained promotion to Oberleutnant zur See in April 1939.

Seeing active service from the very earliest days of the war, Topp had already completed his first two war cruises and earned the U-Boat War Badge by November 1939. On 5 June 1940, having proved himself as a sea officer on a *Frontboot*, Topp was given command of his own small coastal boat, the Type IIC U-57. In two war patrols lasting 36 days during June–September 1940, Topp sank six ships totalling just under 37,000 tons. His career with U-57 came to a sudden end, however, when she sank after an accidental collision with a Norwegian freighter.

Nevertheless, in December 1940 he was given command of a new Type VIIC; and it was in this U-552 that Erich Topp would achieve his remarkable success – both against Atlantic convoys in 1941 and, early in 1942, during the so-called ‘Second Happy Time’ off the east coast of North America, when U-boats sank large numbers of ships before the USA developed effective anti-submarine tactics. Topp was decorated with the Knight’s Cross in June 1941, and promoted to Kapitänleutnant in September of that year. In April 1942 he was awarded the Oakleaves after sinking five Allied tankers totalling over 35,000 tons within just 16 days; he also received the U-Boat Badge with Diamonds – a personal gift from the C-in-C Navy, given only to those U-boat commanders who had gained the Oakleaves. On 17 August 1942, Topp was further decorated with the Swords and was promoted to Korvettenkapitän. His U-552 became almost as famous as her commander; a prancing red devil brandishing a club was painted on her conning tower, earning her the nickname ‘Rotesteufelboot’.

In September 1942, Topp was given a shore posting – a common practice, since it was felt that the experience of highly decorated commanders was best used in command roles, to say nothing of the potential blow to morale should such ‘aces’ be lost at sea. Topp commanded the tactical training unit 27.Unterseebootsflotille at Gotenhafen, and was responsible for preparing instructions for the use of the revolutionary new Type XXI boats. Nevertheless, promoted to Fregattenkapitän on 1 December 1944, Topp returned to sea again on 23 March 1945: during the remaining weeks of the war he commanded first U-3010 and then U-2513, both Type XXIs – though neither



KK Erich Topp is seen here in a rather serious formal portrait taken not long after his promotion and the award of the Swords to his Knights Cross in August 1942. In that month he finally gave up command of U-552, the ‘Red Devil Boat’, in which he had achieved great success since December 1940.

1: SS-Obstgruf u. GenObst der Waffen-SS Josef Dietrich; France, August 1944

2: SS-Ogruf u. Gen der W-SS Paul Hausser; Normandy, July 1944

3: SS-Ogruf u. Gen der W-SS Herbert Otto Gille; Hungary, November 1944



1



2



3

- 1: SS-Ogruf u. Gen der W-SS Felix Steiner; Latvia, autumn 1944
2: SS-Brigaf u. GenMaj der W-SS Theodor Wisch; Berlin, late 1944
3: SS-Ogruf u. Gen der W-SS Theodor Eicke; N.Russia, March/April 1942



1



2



3

1: SS-Staf Kurt Meyer; Normandy, June 1944

2: SS-Brigaf u. GenMaj der W-SS Fritz Witt; France, May 1944

3: SS-Brigaf u. GenMaj der W-SS Heinz Harmel; Holland, September 1944



- 1: SS-Ostufaf Joachim Peiper; Ardennes, December 1944
2: SS-Staf Otto Baum; Normandy, July 1944
3: SS-Oberf Wilhelm Mohrke; Ardennes, November 1944



Götz von Berlichingen



1



2



3

- 1: Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, 1939
2: Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz, 1945
3: SS-Ostufaf Max Wünsche; Germany, April 1944



1



2



3

- 1: KL Erich Topp; St Nazaire, summer 1942
2: KL Otto Kretschmer; Brest, winter 1940/41
3: KzS Hans Rudolf Rösing; Angers, 1943



1



2



3

1: KK Peter Cremer; Hamburg, April 1945

2: GFM Hugo Sperrle; Paris, c.1942

3: GFM Albert Kesselring; Italy, autumn 1944



1



2



3

1: Gen der Fallschirmtruppe Hermann Bernhard Ramcke; Brest, 20 September 1944

2: GenLt Adolf Galland; München-Riem airfield, April 1945

3: GenLt Wilhelm Schmalz; E.Prussia, February 1945

Jagdgeschwader Schlagerer



1

2

3

undertook war patrols. Erich Topp survived the war as Germany's third most successful U-boat captain in tonnage terms, his total record being 33 ships sunk and four others damaged during more than 298 days at sea, totalling more than 200,000 tons (there are complications of definition in reaching an exact figure).

After the war Topp was employed for a short period as a fisherman, before turning to architecture; and in March 1958 he joined the new Navy of the Federal Republic. For several years he served as a staff member of the Military Committee of NATO, and at one point was deputy commander of the Bundesmarine's small U-boat fleet. Topp retired in December 1969 with the rank of Konteradmiral, and thereafter worked as a consultant in the shipbuilding industry; he was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz for his services to the Federal Republic. In 1990 he published his wartime memoir, *The Odyssey of a U-Boat Commander*. Topp was always ready to assist historians and submarine enthusiasts; despicably, one criminal took advantage of his hospitality to gain access to his home and steal his military decorations, including his priceless diamond-studded naval honour dagger, which have not yet been recovered. At the time of writing (summer 2005) Erich Topp was still alive.



Fregattenkapitän Peter Cremer (Plate G1)

Peter Erich Cremer was born on 25 March 1911 in Metz. Joining the Navy as a potential officer in January 1934, he passed through the usual progress from Seekadett to Fähnrich and Oberfähnrich before being commissioned Leutnant zur See in January 1936. Cremer trained on the light cruiser *Köln* and the pocket battleship *Deutschland* before transferring to the land-based Marine Artillery, being promoted Oberleutnant in 1937. Subsequently he transferred back to sea duty, serving as second watch officer on the destroyer *Theodor Riedel*. He was promoted Kapitänleutnant in February 1940, in which month he was awarded both classes of the Iron Cross; and following the decimation of the German destroyer fleet at Narvik, he transferred to the U-boat branch in August 1940.

'Ali' Cremer's first command was U-152, a small Type IID coastal boat on which he carried out only training patrols between January and July 1941. In August 1941 he took command of U-333, a Type VIIC, and despite his lack of combat experience he succeeded in sinking three ships on his first war patrol – unfortunately, one of them was German. The court of enquiry cleared Cremer of any responsibility for the mistaken identification of the blockade runner *Spreewald*. His next patrol took him into American waters, where he sank four more ships, and although his boat was rammed and damaged he succeeded in bringing her back safely. Cremer's third patrol was even more eventful,

This more characteristically cheerful shot shows KL Topp immediately after the award of his Knight's Cross on 20 June 1941. The presentation was made immediately on his return to port after a war cruise, so he is still bearded and wears a denim working blouse; note also the whistle (or watch?) lanyard of plaited cord on his pocket.



KK Peter 'Ali' Cremer is seen here in the closing days of the war, serving ashore as commander of a naval tank-hunter battalion in the Hamburg area. Plate G1 illustrates in colour this unusual combination of uniform items: a naval officer's cap with a Luftwaffe ground troops camouflage jacket, still bearing the breast eagle of that service. Just visible on the left side of his cap band – and on that of his adjutant, Luftwaffe Hptm Paul Löser – is the unofficial 'three little fishes' badge of Cremer's former command, U-333. She had been sunk with all hands soon after Cremer handed over command, and his new unit continued to wear the badge in memory of his lost comrades. (U-Boot Archiv)

with U-333 caught on the surface by an enemy corvette. Cremer was seriously wounded and several of his crew killed by enemy gunfire. He was forced to rendezvous with one of the 'Milch Kuh' supply submarines and take on a replacement watch officer to help him nurse the damaged boat back to port. On recovering from his wounds Cremer was temporarily posted to the staff of the Befehlshaber der U-Boote.

By spring 1943 Germany's U-boat fleet was coming under serious pressure and losses were rising alarmingly; experienced commanders like Cremer were needed back at sea, and accordingly he returned to U-333 once again in May 1943, carrying out a further five war patrols. During one of these cruises Cremer yet again had to nurse a heavily damaged U-333 back to port after a depth-charge attack. When he finally relinquished command of U-333 in July 1944, Cremer had completed eight war patrols, spending a total of 320 days at sea. He sank or damaged eight enemy ships totalling around 36,000 tons – a modest score by comparison to 'aces' like Kretschmer and Topp (qqv); but his performance had impressed his superiors sufficiently to bring him the Knight's Cross in June 1942. Cremer was promoted to Korvettenkapitän on 11 July 1944.

Although his misfortunes had earned Cremer the nickname *Ali-Wrack* ('Ali-Wreck') from some of his peers, his own crew formed the opinion that it was their good luck in having him as their commander that enabled them to survive such incidents. This superstition seemed to be confirmed on U-333's first patrol without Cremer, when she was lost with all hands under command of Kapitänleutnant Hans Fiedler.

In November 1944, Cremer was given command of the new Type XXI boat U-2519, but did not carry out any war patrols with her. In February 1945 he was given command of the so-called Marine Panzervernichtungsbataillon (Naval Tank Destroyer Battalion), a 'tank-hunter' ground unit which was involved in defensive actions around the Hamburg area against the advancing British and Canadian armies. This reportedly achieved more success than was usual for such *ad hoc* units scraped together in the last desperate weeks; Cremer was mentioned in Wehrmacht despatches on 25 April 1945, when it was reported that his sailors had destroyed 24 Allied tanks in just a few days' combat. Finally, in the closing days of the war Cremer took over command of Grossadmiral Dönitz's (qv) personal guard battalion, the Wachbataillon Dönitz.

After the war Cremer became a successful businessman, and recounted his wartime experiences in his book *U-333* published in 1982. Peter 'Ali' Cremer died on 5 July 1992 in Hamburg.

AIR FORCE COMMANDERS

Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring (Plate G3)

Albert Kesselring was born on 20 November 1885 in Marktsteft, Bavaria, the son of a schoolteacher. He joined the Bavarian foot artillery as an officer cadet in 1904, and was commissioned in 1907. Promoted Oberleutnant by the outbreak of World War I, he served throughout the conflict with the artillery and in staff appointments. He continued to alternate staff with regimental posts between the wars, reaching the rank of Oberst in 1932. In October 1933 Kesselring officially left the Army to become a civil servant with the Air Transport Commission, but this was a cover for the planning of the as yet clandestine Air Force. In April 1936, within a year of the unveiling of the Luftwaffe, Generalleutnant Kesselring was Chief of the Air Staff. Promoted General der Flieger in June 1937, at the outbreak of World War II he was commanding general of Luftflotte 1.

Kesselring commanded this air army during the Polish campaign of September 1939, and was decorated for its success with the Knight's Cross on 30 September. The even greater tactical achievements of his Luftflotte 2 in supporting the Army during the spring 1940 Western *Blitzkrieg* brought the rank of Generalfeldmarschall on 19 July 1940. Kesselring was over-optimistic about Luftwaffe achievements during the Battle of Britain; but after the Air Force's dazzling success in the early months of the invasion of the USSR, in late 1941 he was appointed commander-in-chief of all German forces in the Mediterranean and North African theatre (Oberbefehlshaber Süd). A theatre command was seldom entrusted to an Air Force officer, but Kesselring's long and

GFM Kesselring in a formal portrait. Note the Luftwaffe marshal's white collar patches with gold edging cord, large eagle and wreath, and at the base the crossed batons of his rank, which were repeated on the shoulder straps. In compliment to his command of Italian troops as Commander-in-Chief/South, he wears on his left breast Italian pilot's wings and general's stars.





Kesselring in his better known persona as 'Smiling Albert', wearing tropical uniform. Apart from his Knight's Cross array, note that he also wears a bomber-pilot's *Frontflugspange*. His conduct of the long delaying campaign by German forces stubbornly retreating up the length of Italy in 1943-45 has been described as sheer genius. (Josef Charita)

impressive career on Army staffs fitted him for this post. Initial success brought the Oakleaves in February 1942 and the Swords that July; however, by autumn 1942 the balance of forces and logistics was tipping inexorably towards the Allies. After the final Axis surrender in North Africa in May 1943, and the very successful evacuation of German units from Sicily that summer, in late 1943 Kesselring was appointed commander-in-chief of Heeresgruppe C in Italy.

His exercise of this command brought him to the pinnacle of his reputation as one of the most able of all Germany's wartime generals. Aided by the difficult terrain, Kesselring conducted a highly effective defensive campaign as the Germans retreated slowly up the Italian peninsula, frustrating Allied offensives one after the other before falling back to subsequent defensive lines, and saving his troops from entrapment by the Anzio landings behind his lines in January 1944. Kesselring was well liked and respected, and his men nicknamed him 'Smiling Albert' for his usually genial appearance; by July 1944, when he was decorated with the Diamonds, he had long earned the ungrudging respect of his Allied opponents.

In October 1944 he was seriously injured when his staff car collided with a heavy gun in transit, and he did not return to the front until early 1945. He was appointed Oberbefehlshaber der Westfront in March 1945 when final collapse was only eight weeks away. At the end of hostilities Kesselring was charged with war crimes; the SS had been active in Italy following the Italian armistice in September 1943, and a number of atrocities had been committed by troops in areas under his command. In May 1947 he was sentenced to death for a massacre of Italian prisoners of war, but in July, after protests by several senior Allied commanders, this sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

In the event Kesselring was released in 1952 because of failing health. His autobiography, *A Soldier's Record*, was published in 1954. He died in retirement at Bad Nauheim in July 1960 at the age of 75.

General der Flieger Hugo Sperrle (Plate G2)

Hugo Sperrle was born in Ludwigsburg on 7 February 1885, the son of a brewer. His military career began in June 1903 when he joined the Imperial Army as an officer candidate with Infanterie Regiment Nr 126 (8.württembergische) 'Großherzog Friedrich von Baden', and he was commissioned Leutnant that October. After attending the Kriegsakademie in 1914 he was promoted to Oberleutnant; and on the outbreak of war in 1914 Sperrle was transferred to the Army's infant Air Service, where he flew as an observer in the two-seater unit Feldflieger Abteilung 4. By the closing stages of World War I he had become Kommandeur der Flieger with 7.Armeekorpskommando.

After the war Sperrle, like so many disaffected soldiers, responded to the revolutionary chaos in Germany by joining the right-wing Freikorps movement. He served briefly as Fliegerkommandeur with

Freikorps Lüttwitz, before rejoining the new Reichswehr. As Germany was no longer permitted an air force Sperrle found himself in command of an Army transport detachment. In 1920 he was posted to the staff of Wehrkreis-kommando V (Military District 5); and in 1924 he moved to the Berlin Kommandantur. In 1925 he was posted to the Armed Forces Ministry, attached to the department tasked with researching theoretical problems in aerial warfare, and in this appointment he was promoted to Major in 1926. In 1929 he was appointed a battalion commander with Infanterie Regiment 14, and on promotion to Oberstleutnant in 1931 he took command of Infanterie Regiment 8. This brought promotion to Oberst in 1933.

The appointment of Hermann Göring as Minister of Aviation saw Sperrle join the new Air Ministry, and in 1935 he was promoted to Generalmajor. Since the great majority of the German volunteers who served with the Condor Legion in support of the Nationalist forces in the Spanish Civil War were Air Force personnel, the Legion was always commanded by Luftwaffe officers, and Sperrle was its first commander, from November 1936 to October 1937. The success of his command subsequently earned him Göring's gift of the Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds.³ He was promoted to Generalleutnant in October 1937, and to full General der Flieger one month later.

On the outbreak of World War II, Sperrle commanded the air army Luftflotte 3; this was not committed in Poland, being kept in reserve in Germany's southern defences facing France. When his command was unleashed in support of Rundstedt's Heeresgruppe A for the spring 1940 *Blitzkrieg* in the West, this tactical force – particularly the Stuka dive-bombers – played a significant part in the German victory. Sperrle was decorated with the Knight's Cross in May 1940, and promoted to Generalfeldmarschall in July. He retained command of Luftflotte 3 during the Battle of Britain; but by September 1940 he was in heated disagreement with the optimistic Kesselring (qv). That officer – like his commander-in-chief Göring – underestimated the RAF's surviving fighter strength; Sperrle in fact overestimated it, but correctly urged the continuation of attacks on British airfields rather than switching the assault to the cities.



Hitler called GFM Hugo Sperrle 'one of my two most brutal-looking generals', the other being Gen von Reichenau of the Army; he made sure that Sperrle was present at a meeting at Berchtesgaden on 12 February 1938, to browbeat an Austrian delegation into accepting his planned *Anschluss*. Sperrle's massive frame, thick neck, ferocious features and habitual monocle made him the perfect caricature of a Prussian general; in fact he was an intelligent officer, recalled by contemporaries for his 'unusual vitality'. He reacted with outspoken sarcasm to the incompetent direction of the air war in 1943–44, and is believed to have shared Rommel's conviction that a separate peace should be sought on the Western Front. (Josef Charita)

³ See Elite 131, *The Condor Legion*

For the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 most of Germany's air power moved eastwards, but Sperrle remained in France as Luftwaffe theatre commander at the head of the Luftwaffenkommando im Westen. He remained at his headquarters in Paris for three years, overseeing much reduced offensive operations over the Channel and defensive cover for northern France; he was increasingly handicapped by shortages of aircraft and experienced crews, and – although originally a Nazi sympathizer – increasingly disillusioned with the shortcomings of Göring and Hitler. On the day of the Normandy landings, 6 June 1944, he had only 319 operational aircraft with which to face the Allied air armada of nearly 9,000 machines. Despite the obvious impossibility of his task, the Luftwaffe's failure to influence the battle of Normandy led to his dismissal from his command on 18 August 1944, and he was placed on the retired list.

After the end of the war Sperrle was arrested by Allied troops in Bavaria, and was tried for war crimes. However, testimony from senior Allied officers that he had conducted his campaigns in a fair and honourable manner resulted in his acquittal of all charges on 27 October 1948. Hugo Sperrle lived quietly in retirement until his death during a hospital operation in April 1953.

General der Fallschirmtruppe Hermann Bernhard Ramcke (Plate H1)

Hermann-Bernhard Ramcke, who had one of the most remarkable military careers of any German officer of the 20th century, was born in Schleswig on 24 January 1889. In 1904 he joined the Imperial Navy as a 16-year-old *Schiffsjunge* or 'ship's boy'. At the age of 18 he became a *Matrose* (ordinary seaman), serving variously aboard the cruisers SMS *Medusa* and *Prinz Adalbert*, the heavy cruiser SMS *Blücher* and the ageing battleship SMS *Wettin*. By the outbreak of war in 1914 he was back aboard *Prinz Adalbert* as a gunner with the rank of *Oberbootsmann*, remaining with her until September 1915, when he transferred as a *Feldwebel* to the II *Seewehr Abteilung* (later *Matrosen Regiment Nr 2*), a naval land unit which served on the Western Front as part of the *Marinekorps Flandern*. Ramcke saw infantry combat as a platoon leader; seriously wounded, he was decorated with the Iron Cross Second Class in April 1916 and the First Class in January 1917. Ramcke fought on in the ranks of a naval *Sturmabteilung*, and in April 1918 he was awarded the coveted Prussian Gold Military Merit Medal – in effect, this was the enlisted men's equivalent of the officers' *Pour le Mérite*, and was awarded only 1,770 times before the end of the war. In July 1918, Ramcke was commissioned as a *Leutnant der Marine Infanterie*; wounded in action yet again in late 1918, he was still recovering when the war ended.

Hermann Bernhard Ramcke is seen here wearing the Luftwaffe tropical tunic, with the regulation pin-on breast eagle and without collar patches. He wears the Oakleaves awarded to him on 13 November 1942 for taking over command of the *Luftlande Sturmregiment* at a critical moment in the battle for Crete. (Josef Charita)





Photographed with paratroop and Panzer officers in 1944, Ramcke (centre) was at that date a **Generalleutnant** and commander of 2.FJ Div, whose last remnants he would surrender at Brest in late September. Here – against regulations – he wears his collar patches of rank on a greatcoat. (Bundesarchiv)

company command in that regiment. In September 1934 he was promoted to Major and given a battalion command in Infanterie Regiment Allenstein. Staff training and various administrative appointments followed, and Ramcke was promoted to Oberstleutnant in March 1937.

During the opening stages of World War II, Ramcke was in command of various training areas and replacement units, and in early 1940 served briefly as commander of Infanterie Regiment 401 with the rank of Oberst. Eventually, in mid July 1940, Ramcke moved to the staff of the parachute formation 7.Flieger Division, formally transferring from the Army to the Air Force in August. After undergoing parachute training at Brunswick-Broitzem and earning his jump badge at the age of 51, he joined the staff of Fallschirmjäger Regiment 3 and soon afterwards Fallschirmjäger Regiment 1, where he worked to develop heavy weapons systems.⁴

From January 1941 to February 1943, Ramcke was commander of operational training for XI Fliegerkorps, but he also went on a number of attachments which brought him combat experience. In May 1941 he was given temporary command of Luftlande Sturmregiment 1 during the airborne invasion of Crete after its commander, Eugen Meindl (qv), was seriously wounded. Ramcke dropped by parachute on the island on 21 May with 500 reinforcements, and personally led a number of attacks that secured the capture of Canea on 27 May. Ramcke was promoted to Generalmajor in July 1941, and on 21 August of that year was decorated with the Knight's Cross for his exploits on Crete.⁵

During March 1942, Ramcke was briefly attached to the Italian Army to assist with the training of the Italian 'Folgore' Parachute Division, and was then given command of an airborne brigade earmarked to accompany the Italian troops in the proposed invasion of Malta. When that operation was cancelled, Ramcke's three-battalion brigade was instead diverted to North Africa, arriving in July–August 1942. Placed in the southern sector of the Axis positions facing the British El Alamein Line, the brigade was plunged into heavy fighting following the British

⁴ See Men-at-Arms 139, *German Airborne Troops 1939–45*

⁵ See Campaign 147, *Crete 1941*

offensive in October, and succeeded in temporarily blunting the British advance north of the Quattara Depression before being forced to retreat westwards on foot. In an audacious attack, Ramcke's paratroopers seized a British transport convoy and made off in the captured vehicles, travelling more than 80 miles across the desert to rejoin the main body of the Afrikakorps. Ramcke was awarded the Oakleaves on 31 August 1942, and summoned back to Germany for a formal presentation by Hitler. He was promoted to Generalleutnant in December 1942.

In February 1943, 'Papa' Ramcke was appointed as commander of the newly forming 2.Fallschirmjäger Division, and in September this formation moved to Italy, where it initially helped to maintain order in Rome after the Italian capitulation. Divisional units made some limited operational jumps in the Mediterranean theatre before being sent to Russia; but for the next five months Ramcke himself was absent, recovering in hospital from a serious illness. In February 1944 he rejoined 2.Fallschirmjäger Division, which had suffered a mauling in the Ukraine, and in March it was withdrawn to Germany for rebuilding. In May 1944 the division moved to France, and was in Brittany when the Allies landed on 6 June.

Operating against overwhelmingly superior US forces, Ramcke's troops were forced back westwards on the port of Brest, which was declared a 'Fortress' on 11 August 1944. Here Ramcke held out, refusing all Allied surrender demands for five weeks. He was promoted to General der Fallschirmtruppe on 14 September; and five days later, he was awarded the Swords and at the same time the Diamonds, as one of only 28 recipients of the latter. However, with food and ammunition running out he was forced to surrender Brest to the US Army on 20 September 1944.

Ramcke was shipped to a prison camp in the USA, from which he made two escape attempts purely in order to draw public attention to the mistreatment of German prisoners. Ultimately he found himself in French captivity; in March 1951 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment on trumped-up war crimes charges, but after international protests he was released only three months later. Hermann Bernhard Ramcke died in retirement on 5 July 1968 in Kappeln, at 79 years of age, having served in all three of the German armed forces and won his country's supreme decoration for gallantry and leadership.

Generalleutnant Adolf Galland (Plate H2)

One of Germany's youngest, most famous and most charismatic generals, Adolf Galland was born in Westerholt, Westphalia, on 19 March 1912, the son of an estate manager. As a boy he was fascinated by aircraft, and he was one of many who profited by the government's encouragement of sports aviation to build up a pool of flying skills in the years before Germany could openly create an air force. At the controls of a glider young Galland proved expert at finding thermals, and set a record for a time endurance flight. In 1932 he began formal flying training, as one of the future military pilots who were being prepared under the guise of civil aviation, and he attended clandestine military courses in Germany and Italy. His obligatory military service was undertaken in 1933-34 with Infanterie Regiment 10 at Dresden; but in 1935, in the rank of Leutnant, he was posted to Jagdgeschwader

'Richthofen', the premier fighter squadron of the newly revealed Luftwaffe. That October he was lucky to survive, with severe head injuries, a crash in an aerobatic trainer.

During his brief career as an airline pilot with Lufthansa, Galland had enjoyed visits to Spain, and it was unsurprising that in April 1937 he volunteered for service with the air contingent of the Condor Legion sent to support Gen Franco's Nationalist forces in the Civil War. As an Oberleutnant he served with (and subsequently led) 3 Staffel of Jagdgruppe 88 until May 1938, flying nearly 300 missions in Heinkel He 51 biplanes – mostly in the ground-attack role; but he never managed to get his hands on the revolutionary new Messerschmitt Bf 109 monoplane fighter. This campaign brought him the award of the rare Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds.⁶

On the outbreak of World War II, Galland continued to fly ground- support missions over Poland in Henschel Hs 123 biplanes with 4 (Schlacht)/LG 2, earning himself the Iron Cross and promotion to Hauptmann. Galland longed to fly fighters, however, and in February 1940 he finally secured a transfer to Jagdgeschwader 27 by feigning rheumatism, wangling a doctor's certificate stating that he should no longer fly in open-cockpit aircraft. Flying the Bf 109E at last, he proved his skill in aerial combat in May 1940, shooting down seven Allied planes in 26 days and earning the Iron Cross First Class.

On 6 June he was posted to command III Gruppe of JG 26 'Schlageter', and soon became one of the most famous pilots of the Battle of Britain. Promoted to Major on 18 July, he achieved a total of 17 victories by 1 August 1940, which brought him the Knight's Cross. On 22 August he left III/JG 26 to take command of the whole Geschwader, and on 24 September he was awarded the Oakleaves when his score reached 40 victories. The propaganda machine exulted in the apparent race between Galland and his friend and rival Werner Mölders, then commanding JG 51, and 'Dolfo' Galland was the sort of colourful character that journalists love. Darkly handsome and sporting a dashing moustache, he had his fighter adorned with the 'Mickey Mouse' badge of 3/J88 from his days in Spain, and was often photographed with his crushed service cap at a jaunty angle and a cigar clamped rakishly between his teeth. (He was such an inveterate smoker that he had an electric lighter fitted in the cockpit of his Messerschmitt; and it was reported that after being shot down and wounded he even insisted on smoking while having his wounds dressed in the operating theatre. Famously, the artist of one of his official portraits had to paint out the



GenMajor Adolf Galland is seen here in the famous studio portrait taken shortly after he became Germany's youngest general officer in December 1942. He wears his Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Swords and Diamonds at the closed collar of his tunic. Galland retained the 'Jagdgeschwader Schlageter' cuff title of his old fighter wing, JG 26, throughout his career. He also displays the *Frontflugspanne* for 100 missions, above the Pilot/Observer Badge in Gold with Diamonds, and – barely visible here on his right breast – the Spanish Cross in Gold with Diamonds; both the latter were in the personal gift of Göring.

⁶ See Elite 131, *The Condor Legion*



Galland owed his success partly to his marksmanship, and was a keen shot with hunting weapons; here, as a Hauptmann commanding III/JG 26 on the Channel coast in June 1940, he keeps his eye in with a Mauser Kar 98k service rifle on the small arms range. (Private collection)

cigar from the first version of the picture on the orders of Hitler, a fanatical anti-smoker.) Galland was also a chivalrous combatant, and welcomed the legless British ace Douglas Bader to his mess after the latter was shot down, wining and dining him before he was driven off to prison camp. However, Galland was far more than a courageous playboy; he was well aware of the shortcomings of German fighter tactics, and when asked by Hermann Göring what he would like if any wish could be granted, Galland had the gall to reply, 'A squadron of Spitfires'. The Reichsmarschall was not amused.

Nevertheless, Galland was promoted to Oberstleutnant in November 1940. Still flying Bf 109Fs on the Channel front when the bulk of the Luftwaffe moved east for the invasion of Russia, in June 1941 he became the first German serviceman to be decorated with the Swords when his score reached 69 victories. After Mölders was killed in the crash of a transport aircraft on 22 November 1941, the following month Galland was promoted to Oberst and appointed to succeed him as General of Fighters (an Inspector-General's post, not an executive command). On 28 January 1942 he was awarded the Diamonds following his 94th aerial victory. The following month Galland was responsible for planning the air cover for the highly successful 'Channel Dash', the escape of the warships *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* from Brest through the English Channel and safely into German waters.

In December 1942, Adolf Galland was promoted to Generalmajor – at 30 years of age, the youngest general in the German forces. He continued to make regular visits to front-line squadrons on all fronts, representing the views of the combat pilots to the Oberkommando der Luftwaffe; but his authority at OKL was purely advisory, and he was increasingly frustrated by bureaucracy and political obstruction. He kept up his flying, and even managed a few discreet combat missions to try

out tactics against USAAF bombers. In May 1943 he was the first service pilot privileged to fly a prototype of the astonishing Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter, which impressed him deeply. As the Allied bombing campaign increased relentlessly in range and strength during 1943–44, Galland could see the way Germany's fortunes were going, and argued that the Luftwaffe should concentrate on defensive strategies. However, to Hitler such arguments smacked of defeatism, and the Führer was influenced by a 'bomber lobby' at OKL to order that the Me 262 should be developed not in its natural role as an interceptor fighter but as a ground-attack bomber. Galland argued forcefully against this decision, as against many other examples of incompetence at the highest levels, and his outspoken realism infuriated Göring – now an increasingly marginalized and petulant figure.

Although promoted to Generalleutnant in November 1944, Galland was dismissed from the post of General der Jagdflieger in January 1945. Göring even connived with plans by some senior Nazis to put Galland on trial for the failure of the fighters to counter the Allied bombing campaign; any excuse to malign his loyalty was scraped up, including even his mother's long-ago protest about Nazi pressures on the Catholic church. However, Hitler found out about this conspiracy and put a stop to it: Galland was too good a commander to be wasted in a Gestapo cellar, and in February 1945 he was granted permission to return to combat flying, forming a fighter unit equipped with the Me 262. Galland recruited some of the greatest surviving aces into this remarkable Jagdverband 44, which counted in its ranks several highly decorated senior officers. Galland himself flew combat missions with the Me 262, shooting down four more Allied aircraft to bring his total score to 104 victories. Wounded on his last mission, Galland went into American captivity while still in hospital on 5 May 1945.

After lengthy interrogations he was released in 1947, and moved to Argentina as a military flying advisor. His memoir, *The First and the Last*, was published in 1954. A year later he returned to Germany, where he worked in various capacities in the aviation industry; unlike several of his contemporaries, he never returned to military service. Galland remained very active in retirement, maintaining contacts with historians and friendships with many of his 'opposite numbers' from the wartime Allied air forces. Adolf Galland died on 9 February 1996.

Generaloberst Kurt Student

Kurt Arthur Benno Student was born on 12 May 1890 at Meyn near Flensburg. In 1910, at the age of 19, he began his military career as a Fähnrich with the light infantry unit Jäger Bataillon York von Wartenburg (ostpreussisches Nr 1). He was commissioned Leutnant in March 1911, and by the outbreak of World War I he was serving with Feldflieger Abteilung 17. He was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class in September 1914; promoted to Oberleutnant with this unit in June 1915, he received the First Class that August. During a number of subsequent postings Student gained combat experience flying with both reconnaissance and fighter units, and in October 1916 he was appointed to command Jagdstaffel 9, then operating under 7.Armee in Champagne. Decorated in May 1917 with the Knight's Cross of the Royal Hohenzollern House Order, he was wounded in aerial combat at

around this time and spent two months in hospital. Student had qualified as an 'ace', shooting down at least six Allied aircraft, and on recovering from his wounds he was appointed to command the Jagdgruppe of 3.Armee. Student was promoted to Hauptmann in June 1918, and ended the war at an experimental flying unit.⁷

Retained in the Reichswehr of the new Weimar Republic, Student served in the War Ministry's Inspectorate of Weapons and Equipment until October 1921, when he was appointed a commander of troop training grounds. During this period Student maintained his interest in flying, and was at one point hospitalized following a gliding accident. In November 1928 he was posted to Infanterie Regiment 2, in which he was promoted to Major in January 1930; in late 1931 he was detached from this unit to undergo a flying course. Finally, in 1933, Student left the Army, and on 1 September of that year he joined the Reichs Luftfahrtministerium (Aviation Ministry). On 1 October 1933 he was appointed director of Flying Technical Schools, and subsequently became head of the flying equipment test centre at Rechlin. He remained there until September 1935, when he was appointed commander of Flieger Regiment 3 in the newly unveiled Luftwaffe with the rank of Oberst. A number of staff posts followed until April 1938, when he was promoted to Generalmajor and shortly thereafter was appointed commander of 3.Flieger Division. Later the same year he was named as commander of 7.Flieger Division, a post he held concurrently with that of Inspector of Parachute Troops. Student was promoted to Generalleutnant in January 1940.

His background as a pilot of both powered and glider aircraft, and as an infantry officer, fitted Student well for his new responsibilities. His glider and parachute troops played a significant part in the assault on Belgium and the Netherlands during the campaign in the West.⁸ On 14 May 1940, on entering Rotterdam in order to negotiate the surrender of that city, he was fired on by SS troops who mistook him for the enemy; seriously wounded by a bullet in the head, he spent several months recovering. In August 1940 he was promoted to General der Flieger (this rank was later amended to General der Fallschirmtruppe).

From January 1941 to March 1944, Student held the post of commanding general of XI Fliegerkorps – the formation embracing all German parachute and air-landing units and their airlift squadrons; and on 27 September 1943 he was decorated with the Oakleaves. However, after the costly success of the airborne invasion of Crete in May 1941, Hitler forbade any further large scale airborne assaults. Although a few special operations and insertions of reinforcements were undertaken in battalion strength, the Fallschirmtruppe were largely employed thereafter as conventional light infantry, fighting on all fronts. Increased to a strength of five divisions, they earned an excellent battlefield reputation, particularly in Italy; but by 1944 few of the troops

Kurt Student, a World War I flying ace, is seen here wearing the insignia of a Generaloberst, and the Knight's Cross awarded to him on 12 May 1940 for his command of the German parachute and glider troops of 7.Flieger Div, whose various coups de main in the Low Countries opened the Blitzkrieg campaign in the West.



⁷ See Elite 135, *German Air Forces 1914-18*

⁸ See Elite 136, *World War II Airborne Warfare Tactics*

who wore paratroop uniform and bore the prestigious title of Fallschirmjäger were actually jump-qualified.

The veteran 1.Fallschirmjäger Division and a new 4.Fallschirmjäger Division fought in Italy in 1943–45, forming I Fallschirmkorps. The 2., 3. and 5.FJ Divs fought well in Normandy in June–August 1944, the latter two forming II Fallschirmkorps, but were more or less wiped out there (see Ramcke, above, and Meindl, below). New and largely nominal 6., 7. and 8.FJ Divs were scraped together from the remnants and from various Luftwaffe troops, and were also destroyed on the Western Front in 1944–45. The equally disparate elements 9.FJ Div were wiped out in the East between the Oder and Berlin.

In July 1944, Student was promoted to Generaloberst, and from that September he held the post of Oberbefehlshaber der 1.Fallschirmarmee. The actual combat strength of this ‘parachute army’ was only about 30,000, however, and while it included a nucleus of survivors from veteran regiments it also contained many Luftwaffe personnel of very mixed background and combat value. With this force Student was entrusted with holding a front of about 60 miles in the Low Countries, between Antwerp and Maastricht. In the last winter of the war the divisions – often reduced to *ad hoc* battlegroups – fought dispersed as they fell back into western Germany, and Student did not exercise a unified operational command over them. From late 1944 until spring 1945 he held various appointments, culminating in his being posted East to command a nominal army group on 29 April 1945, as Oberbefehlshaber Heeresgruppe Weichsel. At the time of the appointment Student was based in Holland; by the time he made his way across what remained of the Reich the war was virtually over. He arrived only on 1 May 1945, and the following day US troops overran part of the Heeresgruppe’s rear area, narrowly missing capturing Student himself. Six days later the European war ended, and Student went into British captivity.

During the invasion of Crete in May 1941, Student had been in overall command and had visited the battlefield. After the war he was



Gen Student (right) being briefed by paratroop officers during an exercise in North-West Europe prior to D-Day. Student had a reputation for being open to new ideas, both technical and tactical, and those who misinterpreted his slow manner of speech as the sign of a slow mind learned to regret their mistake. (Bundesarchiv)

charged with war crimes relating to atrocities alleged to have been carried out by German troops on Crete in reprisal for the deaths of German prisoners at the hands of Cretan partisans. Student was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, but was released after two years. Kurt Student died in retirement on 1 July 1978 at Lemgo.

General der Fallschirmtruppe Eugen Meindl

Eugen Meindl was born on 16 July 1892 at Donauschingen in Saxony. He joined the Army as a 20-year-old officer candidate in the artillery, and was commissioned as a Leutnant in February 1914. He served with that branch of service throughout World War I, spending most of it with the Lower Saxon Feldartillerie Regiment Nr 67; he won the Iron Cross Second Class in July 1915 and the First Class in January 1916. He was promoted to Oberleutnant in April 1917; subsequently he was decorated with the Knight's Cross of the Saxon Albert Order, and the Knight's Cross of the Baden Order of the Zähringer Lion.

Meindl's distinguished war record earned him a place among the 100,000 men retained in the Reichswehr of the post-war Weimar Republic. He served initially as a battery officer with Artillerie Regimenter 13 and 5, being promoted to Hauptmann in August 1924 and joining the staff of Wehrkreis V (Military District 5) in Stuttgart. Thereafter Meindl served briefly with 5.Division before being posted to the War Ministry; over the next few years he held a number of staff posts, being promoted to Major in April 1934. In October 1935 he was

appointed commander of I Bataillon/Artillerie Regiment 5, and was promoted to Oberstleutnant in August 1936. In November 1938, Meindl transferred to the Gebirgstruppe as commander of Gebirgsartillerie Regiment 112, part of 3.Gebirgs Division, and was promoted to Oberst in April 1939.

On the outbreak of war Meindl saw action during the Polish campaign. In April 1940, GenMaj Dietl, commander of 3.Gebirgs Division, took Gebirgsjäger Regiment 139 by sea to seize the Norwegian port of Narvik. Meindl's artillery regiment did not take part in this operation; but later, when things began to look desperate for Dietl's force surrounded outside Narvik, Meindl immediately offered to jump by parachute with a relief force – despite having no jump training. After Dietl retook Narvik on 8 June, Meindl was decorated with the 1939 bar to the 1914 Iron Cross First Class, and the Narvik campaign shield. On the successful conclusion of the Norwegian campaign he was placed on reserve, allocated to Wehrkreis XVIII in Salzburg, Austria. However, after a detachment to the Air Force to complete regulation parachute training, on 1 November 1940 he formally transferred from the Army to the Luftwaffe, and was promoted to Generalmajor on 1 January 1941.

Formal portrait of GenMaj Eugen Meindl, wearing the Knight's Cross awarded in June 1941 for his part in the successful airborne invasion of Crete. His first involvement with the parachute troops was in April 1940, when as an Army artillery colonel he volunteered to make a jump near Narvik to reinforce Gen Dietl's beleaguered mountain troops. (Josef Charita)



At the head of the Luftlande Sturmregiment (Air-Landing Assault Regt), GenMaj Meindl took part in the airborne invasion of Crete in May 1941; landing near the hotly contested Maleme airfield, he was soon badly wounded, and had to pass control of the regiment to Oberst Ramcke (qv). In recognition of his regiment's success on Crete, Meindl was awarded the Knight's Cross.

On recovering from his wounds, in January 1942 Meindl was sent to Russia to command scratch ground units formed from disparate Luftwaffe personnel to try to stem the Soviet winter counter-offensive. At the beleaguered town and airfield of Yukhonov the so-called Luftwaffe Kampfverband (mot.) Meindl – later retitled Division Meindl – at first comprised the HQ company from his old air-landing assault regiment led by Maj Walter Koch, a veteran of Eben Emael and

Crete, with various other newly arrived paratroopers from 7.Flieger Division, and a motley group of Luftwaffe field units, including a ski battalion; to these were added several stragglers Army and Waffen-SS units. Meindl breathed new spirit into the defence, launching attacks to clear the airfield, from which his chief medical officer, the remarkable Dr Heinrich Neumann (who had won the Knight's Cross in infantry combat on Crete) organized the evacuation of many neglected wounded. In March a Soviet breakthrough saw Meindl's men fighting north of Yukhonov; thereafter – though suffering from typhoid fever – he moved to Staraya-Russa to take control of newly arrived Luftwaffe field regiments, transported piecemeal from East Prussia to serve under Heeresgruppe Nord. Some of these fought to break the encirclements of German forces at Demjansk and Kholm. By June 1942, Division Meindl – with four Luftwaffe field regiments but virtually no artillery – was holding a 60-mile front between Demjansk and Kholm, in close contact with Soviet forces and harassed by strong partisan bands in almost impassable swamps.

In October 1942, Meindl's division (later redesignated 21.Lw Feld Div) and SS-Division 'Totenkopf' carried out a successful attack towards the Lovat river. That same month Meindl was appointed to command XIII Fliegerkorps based in Germany, and tasked with the raising and training of no less than 22 new Luftwaffe field divisions. He was promoted to Generalleutnant in this post, which he held until June 1943; after a brief spell at the Air Ministry, in July 1943 he was appointed Inspector of Luftwaffe Field Units.



Gen der Fallschirmtruppe Meindl, commanding II Fallschirmkorps, in conference with Army GFM Model during the battle for Normandy. The white cloth of the prized 'Kreta' cuff title can just be seen on his left sleeve.

Meindl returned to the Fallschirmtruppe in November 1943 when he took command of the newly formed II Fallschirmkorps, based in occupied France under the Oberbefehlshaber West; the corps comprised 3. and 5. Fallschirmjäger Divisions. Meindl was promoted to the rank of General der Fallschirmtruppe in April 1944. After the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944 his 3.Fallschirmjäger Division fought alongside the 17.SS-Panzer Grenadier Division 'Götz von Berlichingen' against US forces in the area around St Lô. After two months of bitter fighting against both US and British troops the corps was pushed eastward into the Falaise Pocket, and almost annihilated. Meindl was awarded the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross on 31 August 1944.

After refitting and reinforcement, Meindl's corps was back in the front line in the Netherlands in September, fighting against the Allied Operation 'Market Garden' as part of I.Fallschirmarmee commanded by Gen Student (qv). Meindl's corps fought dispersed during the Ardennes offensive, 3.Fallschirmjäger Division under 15.Armee and 5.FJ Division under 7.Armee. These divisions were forced to surrender in April and March 1945 respectively, in the Ruhr and near Nürburgring; but Meindl was decorated with the Swords on 8 May 1945 – the last day of the European war. After the German surrender he was taken prisoner by the British and held in captivity until September 1947.

Eugen Meindl died in retirement in Munich on 24 January 1951 at the age of 58.

Generalleutnant Wilhelm Schmalz (Plate H3)

Wilhelm Schmalz was born on 1 March 1901 in Reussen, into a leading local family. Although too young for service in World War I, when much of Germany collapsed into revolutionary chaos after the 1918 Armistice the young Schmalz volunteered to join one of the Freikorps – units of ex-servicemen which fought Communist revolutionary forces to restore government authority, and also in various border wars in the east and north. Schmalz joined a largely naval unit, the III Marine Brigade raised by Korvettenkapitän von Löwenfeld; this served in Gen von Roeder's Landeschützenkorps, which put down a Communist insurrection in Bremen in February 1919. In April 1920 the brigade also took part in savage fighting against the 'Red Army of the Ruhr'.⁹

In 1922, Schmalz entered the Reichswehr as an officer candidate, gaining his commission as a cavalry Leutnant in February 1923 and being assigned to Reiter Regiment 15, headquartered at Paderborn in Hanover. He was promoted to Oberleutnant in February 1928, and in May 1934 to Rittmeister (captain) commanding a squadron. In the autumn of that year part of the large cavalry branch was transformed into Schützen (motorized infantry), motorcycle, armoured and anti-tank troops, and Schmalz was assigned to Schützen Regiment 11. In November 1936 he married a princess of the royal house of Prussia.

At the outbreak of World War II, Hauptmann Schmalz saw action in Poland as a company commander in his regiment – then part of 4.leichte Division – gaining both classes of the Iron Cross. In January 1940 the 4th Light was converted into 9.Panzer Division, and Schmalz's regiment formed half of its motorized infantry brigade. Promoted to

⁹ See Elite 76, *The German Freikorps 1918–23*

Major, he commanded I Bataillon during the campaign in the West, and for his conduct Major Schmalz was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 28 November 1940. He commanded a motorcycle unit, Kradschützenbataillon 59, in the Balkan campaign of spring 1941; and went on to fight in the Soviet Union in 1941–42 as commander of Panzergrenadier Regiment 11.

The elite Luftwaffe ground unit, the Regiment 'General Göring', had fought in the same campaign, and earned enough credit for its part in Operation 'Barbarossa' to merit its expansion, at first to brigade and later to armoured division status as the Division 'Hermann Göring'.¹⁰ This process took place in France during the second half of 1942, under the command of GenMaj Paul Conrath; as well as paratroop veterans, many Army officers and NCOs with relevant experience transferred to the Luftwaffe to provide cadres, and among them was Oberstleutnant Schmalz. The organization of the new division was interrupted when many units were shipped piecemeal to reinforce the beleaguered Axis forces in Tunisia; by the time of the surrender in Africa in May 1943 some 11,000 men of the 'HG' had been sent, and the creation of the division had to be repeated virtually from scratch.

In early summer 1943 much of the new Panzer Division 'HG' was deployed to Sicily; and following the Allied landings on 10 July, Schmalz was given command of a detached Panzergrenadier battlegroup bearing his name, moving east to counter the British landings. Kampfgruppe Schmalz engaged the British on 12 July near Augusta, under heavy fire from Allied naval and air power; for the next month it was continuously in action in eastern Sicily, making a stubborn fighting withdrawal towards Messina. Between 11 and 17 August the surviving German forces conducted a brilliantly successful evacuation to the mainland, where the 'HG' Division rested and refitted around Naples. For his success in Sicily at the head of Panzergrenadier Brigade zbV 'Hermann Göring', Oberst Schmalz was decorated with the Oakleaves on 23 December 1943.



GenMaj Wilhelm Schmalz, as commander of the 'Hermann Göring' Division in 1944. Schmalz was a well-born cavalry officer, married to a princess, and in all photographs he is seen wearing immaculate uniforms.

¹⁰ See Men-at-Arms 385, *The 'Hermann Göring' Division*

Serving as part of Gen Hube's XIV Panzerkorps, the division fought to contain the Salerno landings in September 1943. When this battle was finally lost, they played an important part in rearguard actions allowing GFM Kesselring's (qv) skilful withdrawal to the Volturno-Termini and 'Gustav' lines in October; thereafter the 'HG' went into reserve. In late January 1944 divisional units were rushed piecemeal to contain the Allied landings at Anzio, fighting there around Cisterna throughout February. That month the titles of the division and its units were given the prefix 'Fallschirm-' (Parachute), but this was purely for prestige reasons and did not affect the 'HG's composition or employment.

On 16 April 1944, in recognition of his achievements at the head of the Panzergrenadier brigade, Wilhelm Schmalz took over command of the 'Hermann Göring' Division in the rank of Generalmajor. When the Allies broke through the Cassino defences and advanced up the Liri Valley in May, his division was rushed to the Velletri sector in daylight, suffering badly from Allied air attacks. In stubborn fighting the 'HG' was pushed back to the Aniene river east of Rome, and then to positions south of Florence in mid July. They were then withdrawn from Italy and sent by rail to the Eastern Front, as one of five divisions transferred to help GenObst Model shore up Heeresgruppe Mitte, which was collapsing under the massive Soviet summer offensive. The strongly equipped 'HG' was now regarded as one of those absolutely reliable formations which could not be spared when crisis struck.

Together with 19.Panzer Division and 5.SS-Panzer Division 'Wiking', GenMaj Schmalz's division achieved a significant victory over the over-extended Soviet 3rd Tank Corps north-east of Warsaw in August, earning Model's praise; it was then thrown against a Soviet bridgehead over the Vistula near Magnuszew. While it was fighting on the Vistula front under 9.Armee, on 1 October 1944 its expansion into the two-division Panzerkorps 'HG' was ordered, and a few days later GenMaj Schmalz was confirmed as its commander. In practice this expansion was greatly hampered by the difficulty of organizing, equipping and training the planned second Panzergrenadier Division 'HG' and a corps staff while the original division was still heavily committed to combat. Schmalz drew on his long field experience to shape the new organization, with strong corps assets under his own command, and both divisions were declared combat-ready in January 1945. Schmalz was promoted Generaleutnant on 30 January.

Meanwhile, during October 1944 the division had been shifted from the Vistula north to East Prussia to resist the advance of the Soviet 11th Guards Army towards Königsberg. Schmalz's troops held their ground for 14 days and drove the attackers back from Nemmersdorf and Angerapp; static defensive fighting in snowbound trenches south-east of Gumbinnen followed in November-December. In mid January 1945, Fallschirm Panzer Division 1 'HG' (GenMaj von Necker) and some corps assets were transferred south again to Poland to face a renewed Soviet threat to the Vistula front. Soon afterwards the Red Army also attacked in East Prussia, and during February 1945 the remaining Fallschirm Panzergrenadier Division 2 'HG' (Obst Walther) and corps units were driven back into the Heiligenbeil Pocket on the coast of the Frisches Haff. Of the original 24,000 men, about 6,000 were extracted by sea in late March and shipped to Swinemünde.

Meanwhile, Fallschirm Panzer Division I 'HG' had been fighting under the Panzerkorps 'Grossdeutschland' between the Vistula and Oder rivers, and by mid March 1945 had been driven back into Upper Silesia. Here, they were rejoined by GenLt Schmalz with the partially rebuilt Panzergrenadier division and corps units evacuated from East Prussia. The Fallschirm Panzerkorps 'Hermann Göring' carried out one last successful counter-attack near Königsbruck in Saxony; they were fighting north of Dresden when they received the order to surrender on 8 May.

Wilhelm Schmalz was released from captivity in 1950. He died in retirement in Braunfels in March 1983.

THE PLATES

A1: SS-Oberstgruppenführer und Generaloberst der Waffen-SS Josef Dietrich; France, August 1944

Waffen-SS general officers used this style to indicate both their rank in the SS political organization, and their military rank. Dietrich is illustrated following his award of the Diamonds to his Knight's Cross, Oakleaves and Swords on 6 August, when he was commander of I SS-Panzerkorps in France. His Waffen-SS general officer's uniform, of field-grey tunic and 'new-grey' breeches, bears collar rank insignia in the sequence adopted in 1942. General officer's shoulder straps of gold and silver interwoven cord, with appropriate numbers of silver 'pips' or stars for the exact rank, were mounted on general's dove-grey underlay. Note that SS generals did not wear *Lampassen* stripes and piping on the breeches. Dietrich affected a few personal embellishments to regulation uniform: unique Army general's gold piping, cords and national emblem on his cap (though this is fitted with the regulation SS black velvet band and silver death's-head), a gold SS national insignia (eagle and swastika) on the left sleeve, and a gold-lettered 'Adolf Hitler' cuff title of the 'Leibstandarte' – all of which should have been silver. His Knight's Cross array is worn at the throat; the ribbon of the Eastern Front Winter 1941/42 Medal is worn in a buttonhole, and the Crimea campaign shield on his left sleeve; on his left breast are the Gold Party Badge, the 1914 Iron Cross First Class with silver 1939 bar, and his World War I tank service badge. He also sports the Pilot/Observer's Badge in Gold with Diamonds, a purely complimentary presentation from Göring. (See caption on page 3 for identification of other insignia.)

A2: SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Paul Hausser; Normandy, July 1944

Hausser, with his unmistakable profile and eyepatch, is illustrated as Befehlshaber (commander-in-chief) of 7.Armeekorps in France, displaying the Oakleaves awarded on 28 July 1943 but not yet the Swords that he received on 26 August 1944. He wears SS insignia and silver general officer's piping on an Army-style field cap, and his plain field uniform includes an Army M1936-style enlisted man's *Feldbluse* with dark green collar facing. His rank insignia and decorations are conventional, and he wears a regulation SS officers' silver bullion embroidered national emblem on his left sleeve. He wears the 1939 Iron Cross bar pinned to the 1914

Second Class ribbon in his buttonhole, and on his left breast the Gold Party Badge above his Iron Cross First Class and a Wound Badge.

A3: SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Herbert Otto Gille; Hungary, November 1944

Promoted to this rank on 9 November, he had just taken command of IV SS-Panzerkorps comprising 3.SS-Pz Div 'Totenkopf' and 5.SS-Pz Div 'Wiking'. By contrast with Hausser, Gille wears a well-cut general's service dress with the SS officers' belt, and the officers' version of the M1943 universal field cap (*Einheitsfeldmütze*). This has silver piping round the crown seam, and eagle and death's-head insignia on the left side and front. (For outdoor winter wear at this time Gille had another cap with a fleece flap, which he wore with a fur-collared cut-down watch coat.¹¹) He displays his full array of decorations awarded in both World Wars; note, beside his Iron Cross First Class, the General Assault Badge which reminds us that he first saw combat in World War II as an artillery officer. The only individual touch is his old divisional 'Wiking' cuff title, which bore Gothic rather than the regulation Latin script.

B1: SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Felix Steiner; Latvia, autumn 1944

Steiner is illustrated as commanding general of III (Germanisches) SS-Panzerkorps, at the time when that formation was fighting south of Riga, Latvia, after being forced to abandon the Narva Line on the Baltic coast. He wears on his regulation Waffen-SS general's service cap, with silver piping and cords, one of several styles of goggles that are seen in photographs of him. His shoulder straps and sleeve eagle have been added to a soldier's field-grey watchcoat (*Wachmantele*) – extra long in the skirt and (turned-up) sleeves, broad in the collar, with vertical hand-warmer pockets on the ribs and, in this case, leather shoulder reinforcements (these were a fairly common variation on the watchcoat). At his throat Steiner displays the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and the Swords awarded on 10 August, over the Finnish Cross of Liberty. Such honours were occasionally

¹¹ See Elite 139, *Knight's Cross with Diamonds Recipients*, Plate C



Herbert Otto Gille (see Plate A3) in a trench on the Eastern Front; his Knight's Cross with Oakleaves and Swords dates this photo to after 20 February 1944. Note his unusual Gothic script version of the 'Wiking' divisional cuff title. (Josef Charita)

presented to German senior officers by foreign nations whose troops fought under their command or alongside them.

B2: SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Theodor Wisch; Berlin, late 1944

The Swords to his Knight's Cross date this portrait after their award on 28 August 1944, while he was in hospital after being seriously wounded during the breakout of his 1.SS-Pz Div 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler' from the Falaise Pocket in Normandy. After his recovery 'Teddi' Wisch spent the rest of the war in an office job at the SS-Führungshauptamt. His service dress uniform, rank insignia and decorations are entirely regulation. Note the Infantry Assault Badge on his left breast, with the Wound Badge and Iron Cross First Class; the Eastern Front Winter 1941/42 ribbon in his buttonhole; and on his right breast, the German Cross in Gold, awarded for his conduct in the battles around Kharkov and Bjelgorod in early 1943.

B3: SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Theodor Eicke; northern Russia, March/April 1942

The photo on which we base this illustration of the commander of the SS-Division 'Totenkopf' predates the award

of the Oakleaves on 20 April 1942, which marked his division's conduct in the Demjansk Pocket. Like Hausser, Eicke favoured SS insignia on an Army-style field cap, and the Army-style tunic with dark green collar facing; on the latter his rank patches show the early war design. The long, loose trousers bloused over laced ankle boots – perhaps with short puttees? – are not exactly identifiable. Otherwise the only noteworthy item is the cuff band, which retains the old death's-head insignia of SS-Standarte Oberbayern rather than showing the regulation lettered 'Totenkopf' title (see detail). This pre-war band was sported by a number of the division's officers.

C1: SS-Standartenführer Kurt Meyer; Normandy, June 1944

Pictured as colonel commanding PzGren Regt 25 in 12.SS-Pz Div 'Hitlerjugend', Meyer was one of many officers who had field uniforms privately tailored in camouflage material. Both Meyer and his 'HJ' Division comrade Max Wünsche had tunics, and field caps modelled on the M1943 *Einheitsfeldmütze*, made up in the three-coloured cotton duck material used for Italian Army shelter halves, which was captured in large quantities and widely used by W-SS personnel. Meyer and Wünsche each had caps complete with both W-SS insignia on the front. The details of tunic cut differed; a portrait of Wünsche shows a deeper, shirt-type collar, fly front, and straight pocket flaps with plastic buttons. Both officers were photographed wearing these tunics over private-purchase black shirts; neither displayed the regulation oakleaf-and-bar sleeve rank patches (see detail – SS-Standartenführer).

C2: SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Fritz Witt; France, 27 May 1944

This illustration is based on colour photographs taken on Witt's 36th birthday – note the celebratory cigar. His service uniform, insignia and decorations are largely unremarkable. Although he had been appointed commander of the 12.SS-Pz Div 'Hitlerjugend' the previous summer, he still wears the 'Adolf Hitler' cuff title of his previous service with the senior Panzergrenadier regiment of the 'LSSAH'. A group photograph taken of this occasion shows only a few of the divisional officers wearing the 'Hitlerjugend' cuff title at this date. Below his Iron Cross First Class, Witt displays a Bulgarian award, the Officer's Cross with Swords for Bravery (*'Za Chrabrosm'*). (Detail: 'LAH' monogram as displayed on officers' shoulder straps.)

C3: SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Heinz Harmel; Holland, September 1944

Newly promoted to this rank, the commander of 10.SS-Pz Div 'Fruntsberg' is illustrated in the weeks between the withdrawal of his mauled division from France for rest and reinforcement, and the unexpected Allied airborne landings which pitched them back into battle. Harmel had a field tunic privately tailored in camouflage cloth, in his case from the smooth cotton/rayon material of the general issue M1944 W-SS *getarnter Drillchanzug*. This non-reversible suit was printed in the all-seasons pattern now termed by collectors 'pea pattern' (*Erbsenmuster*), with a prominently spotted appearance. Unlike Meyer and Wünsche (see under C1 above) – but like Hausser, who also had one – Harmel wore his shoulder straps of rank on this camouflage jacket; none seem to have worn any insignia on the sleeves.



SS-Brigaf Heinz Harmel (see Plate C1), shown here in the black W-SS Panzer uniform and displaying the Swords to the Knight's Cross. This dates the photograph to after 15 December 1944, when he received the Swords to his command of 10.SS-Pz Div 'Fruntsberg' in the fighting against the Allied airborne divisions committed to Operation 'Market Garden' in Holland in September 1944. Harmel was noted both for his decent treatment of Allied prisoners, and for the trust and loyalty that he earned from his soldiers; it is said that even in retirement, no veteran of his division was ever turned away from his door.

D1: SS-Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper; Ardennes, December 1944

The commander of the 'Leibstandarte' Division's tank regiment, and of the armoured spearhead of the 'LSSAH' and sSS-Pz Abt 501 for the Ardennes offensive, Peiper was often photographed wearing the black Panzer uniform. Note the Army-cut field cap with SS insignia, and the soutache of Panzer rose-pink 'Russia braid' around the death's-head. The jacket insignia and decorations are mainly conventional, including his Knight's Cross with Oakleaves. Note, however, the Close Combat Clasp – *Nahkampfspange* – in silver on the left breast; and the badge for single-handed destruction of an enemy tank on the right sleeve (see detail) – Peiper earned this on 24 July 1943 near Kharkov, using hand-placed anti-tank grenades. Several photographs show him wearing a private-purchase black shirt, as also favoured by Wünsche and Meyer, but in this case it is regulation white.

D2: SS-Standartenführer Otto Baum; Normandy, July 1944

Baum is reconstructed in regulation service uniform for a colonel of Waffen-SS infantry, as applicable during his brief command of the 17.SS-PzGren Div 'Götz von Berlichingen' in



SS-Ostufaf 'Jochen' Peiper (see Plate D1), commander of the tank regiment in 1.SS-Pz Div 'Leibstandarte', wears an unusual uniform combination during an inspection parade on the Eastern Front in spring 1944: the field cap from the black Panzer uniform, with a field-grey tunic tailored open at the neck, matching breeches and riding boots.

Normandy. This formation was notable for the number of commanding officers it had: no fewer than 12 are recorded in the 11 months between D-Day and VE-Day, although several of these were acting commanders for only a few days. The divisional cuff title is shown (see detail); we have no photographic evidence that Baum wore it, but it seems plausible that he would have adopted it on arriving to take up his first divisional command. As a colonel he still wears branch-of-service underlay on his shoulder straps; this was infantry white – unlike the Army, the Waffen-SS never authorized green *Waffenfarbe* for the Panzergrenadier branch. All officers below SS-Brigaf had a second, black base underlay to their straps. Apart from a few months in 1940, officers below general rank were ordered to wear white *Waffenfarbe* piping on their caps whatever their branch, although this order was sometimes disregarded.

D3: SS-Oberführer Wilhelm Mohnke; Ardennes, November 1944

This illustration is based on a photograph of Mohnke (see page 20), newly promoted to SS-Oberführer and serving as divisional commander of the 1.SS-Pz Div 'LSSAH' shortly before the opening of the Ardennes offensive, greeting SS-Obstgruf 'Sepp' Dietrich, commander-in-chief of 6.Panzerarmee. He wears the regulation Waffen-SS officer's greatcoat with dark green collar facing, shoulder straps, sleeve eagle and cuff title, but no collar patches. As a brigadier – which was a field officer's and not a general

officer's rank – he still displays cap piping and shoulder strap underlay in white infantry *Waffenfarbe*. He also wears the SS officer's belt with its round clasp. His coat collar hides his Knight's Cross; by this date he had also been awarded both classes of Iron Cross, the War Service Cross with Swords, the German Cross in Gold and a silver Wound Badge.

E1: Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, 1939

The first commander-in-chief of the Kriegsmarine is shown in admirals' full dress service uniform, with frock coat, stiff collar and bow tie, full medals, the satin parade belt, and the naval officer's dirk with aluminium wire cords and knot. His service cap has the white summer crown, and two rows of gold embroidery on the dark blue cloth-covered peak (visor). The national emblem – eagle and swastika – embroidered in gold bullion wire is worn on his right breast. His rank is indicated by the shoulder straps (worn over the fixing loops for fringed epaulettes) bearing crossed silver batons, and the gold cuff rings – four narrow above one broad, all beneath the star of a sea officer. Below the row of Imperial decorations on his left breast is a Gold Party Badge and his Iron Cross First Class.

E2: Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz, 1945

This figure is largely based on a photograph taken at Flensburg on 24 May 1945 after his surrender to the Allies, but with some additional features from other photos. Displaying at his throat the Knight's Cross awarded in April 1940 and the Oakleaves added in April 1943, for his leadership of the submarine service, the Navy's second Befehlshaber presents a much more modern appearance than Raeder. He wears everyday service dress of a double-breasted 'reefer' naval officer's jacket with cuff ranking only, and ribbon bars rather than full medals. Below these are seen his World War II U-Boat War Badge with Diamonds, his 1914 Iron Cross First Class with the silver eagle bar of a World War II repeat award, and World War I U-Boat War Badge. He carries the Grossadmiral's handsome baton, equivalent to that of an Army or Air Force Generalfeldmarschall.

E3: SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche; Germany, April 1944

This illustration of Wünsche as a lieutenant-colonel commanding the tank regiment of the 12.SS-Pz Div 'Hitlerjugend' is based closely on a photograph of Hitler's birthday celebrations in April 1944. The photographic record suggests that Wünsche was one of those officers who wore whenever possible the striking black 'special uniform for tank troops', even though this was authorized for wear only when serving with armoured vehicles. Unusually, full-length photographs taken in Berlin on 1 April 1943, and in France on Fritz Witt's birthday in May 1944, both show that Wünsche wore the jacket with black walking-out dress trousers specially tailored to hang loose over laced shoes; the regulation trousers for this uniform were tapered to the ankle, where they fastened with buttons and drawstrings. A non-regulation black shirt also sets off his Knight's Cross. The Waffen-SS version of the jacket has officers' silver cord piping to the collar, which bears the usual rune and rank patches on his right and left respectively. The shoulder straps of rank have Panzer-pink over black double underlay, but his field-grey service cap has regulation all-arms white piping. Obscured on his right breast is the German Cross in

Gold, awarded on 28 February 1943. Note that he wears the Infantry Assault Badge, rather than the General Assault Badge which his previous command of the 'LSSAH' assault gun battalion might suggest. He retains the 'Adolf Hitler' cuff title of his old division – see also comments under C2 above.

F1: Kapitänleutnant Erich Topp; St Nazaire, summer 1942

The original photograph showing the commander of U-552 wearing his Knight's Cross with Oakleaves but not Swords dates it to between 11 April and 17 August 1942. His service cap has the white cover which was now the traditional prerogative of the boat commander only. Interestingly, he still wears the British Army 'overalls, denim' of battledress cut, issued from stocks captured after Dunkirk two years earlier. Gilt uniform buttons and shoulder straps of rank are the only official German additions, though Topp displays a braided pocket cord, presumably for a whistle.

F2: Kapitänleutnant Otto Kretschmer; Brest, winter 1940/41

Well-known photographs show 'Silent Otto' and his U-99 crew wearing the captured British denims as early as August 1940, but the German-made grey-green herringbone twill Kriegsmarine copy (lacking the left thigh pocket) became available at about the turn of the year. In this reconstruction from a photograph, Kretschmer wears them with seaboots, and the officer's gold-piped boarding cap; other photos show him using an ordinary seaman's unpiped version. The Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross were awarded in late November 1940; he also displays, in port, his Iron Cross First Class and U-Boat War Badge.

F3: Kapitän zur See Hans Rudolf Rösing; Angers, France, 1943

The Führer der Unterseeboote West was appointed to his post in July 1942, and promoted to this rank in March 1943. Here he is reconstructed wearing the variation on service uniform featuring riding breeches and boots. This rank wore oakleaf embroidery on the cap peak, and four gold cuff rings. His Iron Cross First Class and Knight's Cross were awarded in July and August 1940 respectively, when he was commander of U-48. His ribbons include the Iron Cross Second Class awarded in February 1940 when he was commanding 7.Unterseebootsflotille at Kiel.

G1: Korvettenkapitän Peter Cremer; Hamburg, April 1945

'Ali' Cremer was photographed in this interesting mixture of uniform clothing in the last weeks of the war, when he was commanding a naval tank-hunter battalion made up of sailors re-trained to stalk Allied tanks with the Panzerfaust. His service cap bears, as well as regulation insignia, the unofficial 'three little fishes' badge of his old U-333. Tucked into the trousers of a U-boat HBT working suit is the long skirt of a Luftwaffe splinter-camouflage field jacket, which retains its Air Force breast eagle. He has also acquired a Luftwaffe officer's field belt and a pistol holster. Cremer wears the Knight's Cross he was awarded in June 1942; and has added to the combat jacket his U-Boat Combat Clasp (*U-Boots-Frontspange*), awarded on 27 September 1944, above his Iron Cross First Class, U-Boat War Badge and a silver Wound Badge.

**G2: Generalfeldmarschall Hugo Sperrle;
Paris, c.1942**

The commander of Luftflotte 3 wears the walking-out uniform of an Air Force general officer. His service cap has gold piping, cords and insignia. His special generals' tunic (*kleiner Rock*) has white lapels and piping, with gold cord around the collar, and a gold national emblem on the breast. The white collar patches of general officers bear a gold eagle above the crossed batons of a marshal, the latter being repeated larger in silver metal on his shoulder straps. The straight trousers worn with this order of dress bear the white *Lampassen* of general officers; and he carries the marshal's undress baton in a Luftwaffe version – brown rather than black, and lacking the bone ferrule of the Army type. The Gold Spanish Cross with Swords and Diamonds on his right breast was a personal award by Göring, marking Sperrle's earlier command of the Condor Legion. His Knight's Cross was presented in May 1940 for his success in the French campaign; he won the Iron Cross First Class for his World War I service as a combat pilot, and the 1939 clasp is worn above it. Below it is the Pilot/Observer's Badge.

**G3: Generalfeldmarschall Albert
Kesselring; Italy, autumn 1944**

Kesselring is portrayed as Oberbefehlshaber Süd or Italian theatre commander, the appointment in which he earned his greatest fame. Next to the massive and gaudy figure of Sperrle, living a life of luxury in Paris, this brilliant commander of armies in the field cuts a relatively austere figure. For those with eyes to see, the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Swords and Diamonds marks his special status. He wears the regulation general officer's cap but a plain officer's greatcoat.

**H1: General der Fallschirmtruppe Hermann
Bernhard Ramcke; Festung Brest, 20
September 1944**

Ramcke was photographed wearing this interesting combination of items at the time of his final surrender of 'Fortress Brest'. The headgear is a version of the M1943 universal field cap cut in Luftwaffe splinter camouflage; note the gold general's cap eagle – and his shoulder straps of this rank, although he had only been promoted to this status the day before. However, he still displays the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves dating from his service in North Africa in November 1942; he obviously has not yet physically received the Swords and Diamonds awarded together on 19 September. The Kriegsmarine-issue grey leather three-quarter length coat for U-boat deck personnel doubtless came from the naval stores at Brest. Ramcke wears it over paratrooper's field-grey jump trousers, and old side-laced jump boots.

**H2: Generalleutnant Adolf Galland;
München-Riem airfield, April 1945**

We reconstruct the 33-year-old former General der Jagdflieger, now merely the Kommandeur of JV 44, in regulation uniform for this rank and date, though with flying boots. His service caps were always rather crushed-looking, even after he attained general rank. His *Fliegerbluse* has the general officers' gold breast eagle, and retains the gold cord collar edging officially discontinued years before; but he wears only white seam piping on his breeches, in



GenMaj Adolf Galland (left – see Plate H2) was seldom photographed wearing tropical uniform; here he is seen visiting units in Sicily during spring 1943, as part of his duties as Inspector-General of Fighters. At right is his friend Obst Gunther 'Franzl' Lützwow, who would die in April 1945 flying an Me 262 of Galland's jet squadron JV 44. (Private collection)

accordance with the order of late 1943 suppressing the white *Lampassen*. Obscured here by the angle of his right arm is the silver-grey title 'Jagdgeschwader Schlageter' on his blue cuff band (see detail), which he retained from his first days with JG 26 on the Channel coast in 1940. His dazzling array of combat badges and decorations is led by the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Swords and Diamonds, the latter presented in January 1942 as only the second award (after Werner Mölders) of this supreme decoration. On his right breast is the Gold Spanish Cross with Swords and Diamonds, presented for his leadership of 3/J88 of the Condor Legion; opposite this – below the gold *Frontflugsparange* for 100 missions – is the Pilot/Observer Badge in Gold with Diamonds, also presented by Göring, and below this the Iron Cross First Class.

**H3: Generalleutnant Wilhelm Schmalz; East
Prussia, February 1945**

The commander of the Fallschirm Panzerkorps 'Hermann Göring' wears regulation uniform for his rank, though his breeches retain the white *Lampassen*. The divisional cuff title 'Hermann Göring' on his right sleeve is the officer's version with silver edges and lettering on dark blue. Most of his decorations were earned while he was still an Army Panzergrenadier officer serving with 4.leichte Div and 9.Pz Div in Poland, France and Russia, but his Oakleaves were won at the head of a battlegroup of the 'HG' Division in Sicily in summer 1943. Note that below his Iron Cross First Class he – like Fritz Witt, C2 above – displays the Bulgarian Officer's Cross with Swords for Bravery.

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