

HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



THE WAFFEN SS IN THE WEST



A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL OF THE SS ON CAMPAIGN

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THE WAFFEN SS IN THE WEST

A REPRINT OF THE 1941
GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

WITH ENGLISH CAPTIONS AND ANNOTATIONS.

Introduced and Edited by Bob Carruthers



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ORIGINAL WARTIME PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL

WAFFEN SS IM WESTEN

(THE WAFFEN SS IN THE WEST)

ORIGINAL 1941 FOREWORD
BY GUNTER D'ALQUEN

INTRODUCTION

This photographic journal was originally published in the spring of 1941. It was edited by Hauptsturmführer Gunter d'Alquen, commander of the SS Propaganda Kompanie and editor of the official SS paper, *Das Schwarze Korps*. D'Alquen also provides the introductory foreword, which launched the exploits of the SS-VT in typical bombastic style.

Gunter d'Alquen was born on 24th October 1910 in Essen; he was the son of a staunchly Protestant businessman who also served as an army reserve officer. D'Alquen attended secondary school in Essen, his generation was the first to grow up under the influence of National Socialism. d'Alquen was a passionate supporter who fully embraced the Nazi political philosophy, he enthusiastically contributed to the movement and joined the Hitler Youth. In 1925 he took up full membership of the NSDAP at the age of just seventeen, he also enrolled in the ranks of the SA and somehow found time to be active as a Party Youth Leader between 1927 and 1931.

As a University student d'Alquen played an active part in the National Socialist German Students' League, but he did not complete his university course and concentrated instead on pursuing a journalistic career. On 10th April 1931 he joined the SS, rising to the rank of SS Hauptsturmführer (Captain) in the relatively short qualifying period of just three years service. In 1932 d'Alquen joined the staff of the *Völkischer Beobachter* as a political correspondent where he soon came to the attention of Heinrich Himmler. In March 1935, Himmler appointed d'Alquen as editor of the official SS paper, *Das Schwarze Korps*.

D'Alquen soon became chief spokesman of the SS in the German press and under his editorship the paper fervently trumpeted the National Socialist agenda and relentlessly attacked those who were perceived as enemies of the movement. Intellectuals, greedy capitalists, slackers and communists were all regular targets. The magazine was, of course, also notorious for its vicious and crude anti-semitism. As the war progressed d'Alquen saw it as his duty to project a positive slant at



The front cover of the original book as first published in 1941.

all times and Das Schwartz Korps regarded itself as a bastion of hope even in the years of defeat and disaster, constantly focussing its attention on German victories at the front however slight these had become.

In January of 1940 an SS-Kriegsberichter-Kompanie (Waffen-SS war reporters company) was established, and its züge (platoons) were attached to the four main Waffen-SS combat formations that fought in the Western Campaign of May and June, 1940.

These platoons remained with their respective divisions for the Balkans Campaign in the spring of 1941.

Gunter d'Alquen commanded the SS-Kriegsberichter unit throughout the war. By 1940 he had attained the Allgemeine-SS rank of Standartenführer, but began his Waffen-SS command in 1940 as a Waffen-SS Hauptsturmführer der Reserve. During the course of the war, he rose through the ranks until he became a Waffen-SS Standartenführer der Reserve and exercised the equivalent of regimental command.

D'Alquen was responsible for a large back room staff, which processed the incoming material, as well as the front line photographers, movie cameramen, writers, broadcaster and recorders, who served in the front lines. The Kriegsberichte in the field were assigned to the various platoons for variable periods of service. Where possible, non-Germans served with their own national formations, but were sometimes detached to cover a particular campaign and report specifically for their own domestic press.

D'Alquen himself was a distinguished SS war reporter and served in the front lines during 1939 and 1940. In 1944 he was appointed by Himmler as head of the entire Wehrmacht propaganda department. Among the books he published was an official history of the SS, "Die SS. Geschichte, Aufgabe und Organisation der Schutzstaffeln der NSDAP" (1939). He also edited "Das ist der Sieg" (1940) and of course the volume originally entitled "Waffen-SS im Westen" (1941), a reprinted version of which you now hold in your hands.



*The SS
Kriegsberichter
Kompanie recorded
the actions of the
Waffen SS from
1940 onwards.*

After the war d'Alquen found it difficult to leave his past behind. In July 1955 he was fined DM 60,000 by a Berlin De-Nazification court and deprived of all civic rights for a period of three years and debarred from drawing an allowance or pension from public funds. The court found him guilty of having played an important role in the Third Reich, of war propaganda, incitement against the churches, the Jews and foreign countries, and incitement to murder. He was judged to have glorified the Waffen SS, the Nazi State and reinforced the legend of Hitler's infallibility, he was also adjudged to bring democracy into contempt and encouraged anti-Semitism. After a further investigation into his earnings from Nazi propaganda, d'Alquen was fined another DM 28,000 by the Berlin De-Nazification court on January 7, 1958. He died in 1998.

THE STANDARTE "GERMANIA" AND THE SS VERFÜGUNGS DIVISION (SS-VT)

Many of the pictures taken in this book feature the men of Waffen SS Standarte "Germania". In 1940 the men who bore the word Germania on their cuff bands were fighting as a motorised regiment under the command of SS-Standartenführer Karl-Maria Demelhuber.

Originally Germania was formed in August 1934, as SS-Standarte III. It was soon renamed SS-Standarte II when Hitler ordered that SS-Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler would not be included in the SS numbering sequence. At the 1936 Nürnberg Rally, SS-Standarte II was officially granted the honour title "Germania" where it received the unit colours and authority to wear the cuff band bearing the unit title. It subsequently took a part in the annexation of Austria and was responsible for security during the Italian leader Benito Mussolini's visit to Germany. Germania also took part in the annexation of Sudetenland. It later served as a guard regiment in Prague, as Wach-Regiment des Reichsprotectors von Böhmen und Mähren, until July 1939.

In August 1939 Adolf Hitler, in preparation for Fall Weiss, placed

the SS-VT under the operational command of the OKW. At the outbreak of hostilities in Poland, there were four SS armed regiments in existence "Leibstandarte", "Deutschland", "Germania" and the new regiment from Austria named "Der Führer" (although "Der Führer" was not yet combat-ready and played no part in the Polish campaign). Events during the Invasion of Poland raised a political furore with OKW expressing doubts over the combat effectiveness of the SS-VT. Their courage and willingness to fight was never in any doubt; but at times they were almost too eager for action and this naïve enthusiasm led to disproportionately high casualties. The OKW reported that the SS-VT had unnecessarily exposed themselves to risks and acted recklessly, incurring far heavier losses than Army troops and endangering the achievement of operational mission objectives as a result. It was also strongly argued by OKW that the SS-VT was poorly trained and many of its officers were unsuitable for command. In retaliation the SS-VT argued strongly that it had been mishandled and was hampered by its deployment as sub-units intermixed with regular Wehrmacht forces. Himmler took issue with the fact that SS-VT units were fighting piecemeal with the mixed Wehrmacht/SS Panzer Division Kempf instead of as one SS-VT formation. The SS-VT he argued was also improperly equipped to carry out some of the tasks, which had been allocated of it.

As a result of all this Heinrich Himmler, as always, went too far and insisted that, in future, the SS-VT should be allowed to fight only in the form of its own discrete formations, under its own commanders and high command. The OKW reacted strongly to this nonsensical suggestion and in response mounted an attempt to have the SS-VT disbanded altogether. Hitler was unwilling to consider this, but neither did he wish to upset the Army and he chose a conciliatory path. Hitler ordered that for the campaign in the West the SS-VT should form its own self contained Division, but this Division and all subsequent Waffen SS divisions would still come under Army command.

Accordingly in October 1939, the "Deutschland", "Germania", "Der Führer" and various support units including artillery and reconnaissance battalions were reorganised into the SS-Verfügungs Division (SS-VT).



SS-Standartenführer Karl-Maria Demelhuber, Commander of the Germania regiment.



*Generalleutnant
der Waffen-SS Paul
"pappa" Hauser.*

Initially SS Leibstandarte were earmarked to form part of the formation but the decision was rescinded and SS Leibstandarte did not fight alongside the other units. The SS-Verfügungs Division which took part in Fall Gelb came under the command of Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS Paul "pappa" Hauser and took part in the Campaigns in the West against the Low Countries and France in 1940. This time round the SS-VT distinguished itself in combat and was to win praise from OKW. The SS reconnaissance battalion played a distinguished role in the campaign and many of the photographs in this book feature that formation.

The SS-VT first saw action in the main drive for the Dutch central front and Rotterdam and many of those images are presented in this book. After Rotterdam had been captured, the Division, along with other divisions, intercepted a French force and forced them back to the area of Zeeland and Antwerp. The SS-VT were next used to mop-up small pockets of resistance in the areas already captured by the German advance. The Division was then transferred to France. Despite Hitler's express orders to halt, Sepp Deitrich ordered an advance by his SS Leibstandarte which breached the strongly defended La Bassee canal line, but at a high cost in Waffen SS casualties. Meanwhile the SS-VT division finally participated in the drive on Paris. At the end of the Campaign, it had advanced all the way to the Spanish Frontier.

The SS-Verfügungs Division was later to gain far greater fame when it was re-named as the Waffen SS Division Das Reich. However SS "Germania" had no role to play in that particular formation. The victorious campaign in the West had proved the fighting reputation of the Waffen-SS, and in the process had also opened new and fertile recruiting grounds among the populations of the conquered territories many of whom were sympathetic to the aims of National Socialism. The low countries in particular were to prove a very strong recruiting ground for the Waffen-SS. Initially there were so many volunteers that a new regiment, "Westland", was quickly formed and it's ranks almost immediately filled by Dutch and Belgian volunteers. This was followed by a sister regiment, known as "Nordland", which was formed from the ranks of Norwegian and Danish volunteers.

Soon after the French campaign, “Germania” was detached from the SS-VT division and combined with these two new foreign formations, to form the new 5th SS Division comprised of, “Westland”, “Nordland” and “Germania”. The division was originally entitled “Germania” but in order to better reflect it’s origins it was soon redesignated as the 5th SS Division “Wiking” and was destined to become one of the most controversial fighting formations of the war.

ORIGINAL FOREWORD BY GUNTER D’ALQUEN, COMMANDER OF THE SS-KREIGSBERICHTER KOMPANIE

The fast, unstoppable whirlwind campaign in the west, the march which swept through Holland, Belgium and France has provided us with a new perspective on warfare, it has changed our understanding of war, both from experience at first hand in the field and in the command post. The new tactics developed by the forces of the National Socialist revolution and its new army brought a new mobile dimension to the war, which once again took advantage of the vastness of the great battlefield.

It is the soldier, the individual soldier who is now back in focus after the unimaginative affairs dominated by matériel, which characterised the battles of World War I. The individual soldier is once again the key to the battle, equipped with the best weapons; he buckles his backpack led on by faith, strengthened by the firm and clear conviction that he is the anvil of victory.

In him, in his face, in his attitude during the opening attack, even in exhaustion after yet greater efforts in the long, hot days of incessant combat, can be seen the collective power. He is secure in the strength of this sublime camaraderie; he is focused on the objective oblivious to everything around him. All else is merely background; the vast backdrop of this unfolding drama.

The war reporters of the SS, accompanied the soldiers of our mobile



*Gunter d'Alquen,
commander of the
SS Propaganda
Kompanie.*

divisions, and took part in the long, hot marches and were present in battles and attacks; their duty was to help preserve the true image of the National Socialist soldiers. They sometimes gave their lives for the cause, they proved that both themselves and the other men of the regiments of the Waffen SS, the infantryman, tank hunter, the artilleryman, will never be equalled.

In the units under my command I know that we have many fine front line photographers who fulfilled their duty. As can be seen from the following pictures, the SS Kriegsberichter Kompanie which was deployed, made a fine contribution to the task of documenting this war. They concentrated from the beginning on the soldier, his face and his attitude in action and was the focal point of this task. These images can never claim to be exhaustive, but they accurately mirror the events of the German war for freedom. The sequence here was taken during the struggles of a division of the Waffen SS in the West; many other parts of the Waffen SS have experienced similar events in the East. This Division, fought and won and the other divisions and regiments of the Waffen SS in future will take strength from that and will ensure that the common desire for victory is fulfilled.

This book and these images will be testimony to the young soldiers of the German army, the proud bearers of the Army's honour, men who gave their best and who lived up to their oath to Adolf Hitler given since the first days of the first Scutstaffel: "SS man, your honour is loyalty."

Gunter d'Alquen, in the field, February 1941.



Das Gesicht der Waffen SS (The face of the Waffen-SS)

“Schnelle Truppen”
(“Flying column”)







***Aufklärung-
sabteilung
seit Tagen hinter
dem Feind***
(A reconnaissance
unit behind
enemy lines)

The SS Aufklärungsabteilung (Reconnaissance Battalion) was a key component of the SS-VT Division structure. The battalion played a vital part in the French campaign. One of the chief tasks allocated to this fast moving and highly mobile force was to maintain contact with retreating enemy forces.

