

TOTAL DETAIL  
Sd Kfz 250/1 Alt  
'GD' LIVING HISTORY

Richard Stone













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# TOTAL DETAIL

# Sd Kfz 250/1 Alt

Volume 1

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## INTRODUCTION

The opportunity to mix high quality living historians with an original '250' was initiated by Total Detail Publications during the 'war and peace show' at Beltring, England in 2001. The impromptu photo shoot that sowed the seeds for this book is to be found in chapter five, and this led to almost three years of research and further shoots to complete the volume you now have before you.

There were certain compromises we had to make. The majority of the vehicles seen within these pages came from one private collection, and were entrusted to us on the understanding that they were returned in their impeccable condition. Likewise, the owners of the original uniforms and equipment that appear throughout were also concerned not to damage these often-valuable items. In the reality of frontline service, things would of course be much different, but we hope the reader will understand our reasons for not 'trashing' everything in sight. However, it was also important to us to present equipment which was in as good a condition as possible, reflecting a fresh, 'just issued' quality rather than a sixty-year old collector's piece.

This book is the first of a three volume set dealing with the Sd Kfz 250 'Alt', and the first of hopefully many future works covering the equipment of the world's armies. I hope it succeeds in exploring what it must have been like for the vehicles and men of the reconnaissance battalion 'GD', caught in one of the most brutal conflicts in history.

Sadly, I must record that during the course of completing this book one of the original members of the 'crew' died, and so, ironically, we also learned what it feels like to lose a comrade. Richard Webb played an active part in supplying kit and information, and was responsible for researching and writing the section on the MG34 (long before the superb 'collectors grade' publication on the weapon appeared). Apart from one or two minor adjustments, this part of the book has been left as he wanted it, and is presented here in the memory of a dear friend.

Richard Stone







## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 'GROSSDEUTSCHLAND' 1943-45**

In July 1943, when the armoured 'Grossdeutschland' Division was grinding its way through the Russian defences south of Kursk, few would have thought that this was to be the last major offensive in which it would participate. The encouraging initial advances were ultimately halted and then reversed under the sustained counter blows of a powerful and motivated enemy, and subsequently, throughout the winter of 1943/44, 'GD' actively participated in the defence of the retreating Axis forces from Southern Russia.

Deployed in aggressive delaying actions and desperate last stands designed to blunt the Red army's spearheads, it was not until the spring of 1944 that 'GD' brought their opponents to a halt on the carefully chosen ground at Targul Frumos in Romania.

After a brief rest and upgrade, in late July 1944 the division found itself being transferred north to Lithuania. Once again to briefly experience successful advances, only to be caught up in a retreat of 'Wagnerian' proportions, the decimated division stubbornly provided cover for the sea borne evacuation of civilians from Prussian coastal towns. Shattered, with its back against the Baltic Sea and not a vehicle to its name, Grossdeutschland was finally destroyed in the port of Pillau, East Prussia in April 1945.







## THE "HUSSARS"

A German army-training manual, giving instruction on the purpose of reconnaissance, comments that "Cunning and cleverness, a quick eye, resolute action and love of adventure and boldness are the prerequisites for the successful execution of every reconnaissance mission."\* Such a statement can easily conjure the image of the dashing horseman galloping along the flanks of a Napoleonic army, and it was from such origins that the 'armoured reconnaissance battalion Grossdeutschland' was to claim its roots.

The foundation for a new reconnaissance unit for the then motorised infantry division 'Grossdeutschland' was laid by an order on the 1st April 1942. Officially known as 'motorcycle-troop battalion GD', the unit was actually a combination of vehicles and equipment more in keeping with an 'armoured' reconnaissance battalion, a title not bestowed until March 1943. Built from scratch on the Wandern training grounds near the Oder River, the personnel required to fill the ranks were largely drawn from the armoured branches. The commander, Horst Von Usedom, had strong links to the hussars of old, and his experience with the 11th Panzer division had seen him headhunted to lead the new unit. With volunteers being selected from all over Germany, the battalion needed an identity, and the nickname 'Usedom's Hussars' plus the use of cavalry terms such as 'squadron' instead of 'company' went some way in establishing a sense of heritage. However, by the end of July 1942 the Hussars were no longer Von Usedom's. He left for another command, literally handing over the reins to Rudolf Waetjen. The battalion soldiered on as the 'Hussars' until 1945.

\*German squad tactics in WWII. M. Gajkowski. The Nafziger collection, Inc.

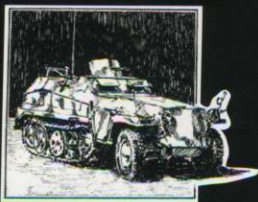


One



REPORTING IN





German reconnaissance methods were defined in three distinct categories, 'operational', 'tactical' and 'battle'. The first was initiated by aircraft at a strategic level, the second involved the placing of

troops on the ground, the third when divisions actually deployed for action. The 'battle' doctrine called for an aggressive reconnaissance by strong, mobile forces that were expected to fight for information. As a division's eyes and ears, they would scout ahead, form skirmish lines or maintain flank contact with friendly forces. If retreating, they would throw up 'armoured screens' behind, intended to counter enemy reconnaissance units.

The ability to operate in a 360 degree arc assessing both enemy and terrain, coupled with the flexibility to exploit objectives, was a role for which '*Aufklaerungs Abteilung GD*' was well equipped. The battalion command group, mounted in various armoured and cross country vehicles, remained at the centre of any reconnaissance 'net', coordinating reports from its sub units and feeding them back to division. Their vital up to date details on enemy strengths and dispositions allowed GD's staff to respond promptly to circumstances, and it was not unusual to find the Hussars shuttled about a sector in quick succession to take on new missions.

Equipped with four and eight wheeled armoured cars, the battalion's 1st squadron was primarily designed for reconnoitring roads. Fast on firm ground but susceptible in poor conditions, under ideal circumstances they would form small "point" units which moved in bounds ahead of the battalion, leaving a trail of signs or chalked marks to follow. Regular reports were transmitted back in Morse detailing road conditions, terrain and bridge weight bearing capabilities.

Named after the men who led them, the 'Meyer' or 'Kabnitz' patrols considered themselves the elite pathfinders of the division. Fraught with danger, crews chain-smoked their way through missions that could last from half an hour to two days, all ultimately seeking to provoke the enemy and test his strength. Both the nature of the local terrain and the maximum range of radio equipment determined the distance and duration of any patrol. As a situation became more uncertain, or through a change in the terrain, the crews became more cautious and decreased the length of each bound. At times it paid to simply switch the engines off and have a listening halt.

Contact with the enemy was immediately reported and responded to according to circumstance. If outgunned, the patrols were to pull back to a safe distance and await reinforcement, but it was not unknown for the 1st squadron to take on enemy armour. If heavy resistance





was expected, elements from other units could be attached. (At Karachev in 1943, two Tigers and three flamethrower tanks joined a patrol of four 8-wheelers as they followed up reports of an ambush). On completion of a mission the point units returned to the battalion command group and were kept in reserve until rotated out.

An intrinsic part of the battalion's flexibility for holding ground, the 2nd (armoured), 3rd (rifle) and 4th (machine gun) squadrons provided the means to clear areas dangerous or inaccessible to the armoured cars. Often following up behind the pathfinders, the *Schuetzen* ('rifleman', a rank apparently retained within the squadrons until the end of the war) secured objectives, mounted foot patrols, formed skirmish lines and, when called for, provided infantry to storm defensive networks. Gains were expected to be held until relieved by following battalions, and on reassembling, the squadrons would move on to their next mission.

The 2nd squadron used the light '250' armoured personnel carrier. Offering good crew protection with all-terrain performance, this vehicle allowed squads to move about a battlefield in comparative safety. However, early in the 1942 campaign the squadron was singled out as an ideal companion for the division's tanks. As the only armoured half-track borne infantryman in GD until the first battalion of the Grenadier regiment received a batch of '251's in 1943, the *Schuetze* was to spend the intervening months sporadically fighting as a Panzer grenadier. Both 3rd and 4th squadrons were equipped with the '*Kuebelwagen*', a neat vehicle for transporting men around but extremely prone to enemy fire. With questionable cross-country performance, it was a poor substitute for the '250', and these two squadrons were often seen going into action on the back of tanks or assault guns.

The fifth ('heavy') squadron was the one weak unit in the battalion, due to the small size of its platoons. Mounted on lorries and '*Kuebelwagen*', it supplied pioneers, anti-tank elements and a light infantry gun section to support the other squadrons. Obstacles such as bridges were seldom undamaged, and while the others sought to establish a foothold on the opposite bank or sent further patrols to search for alternative crossing points, the accompanying pioneers would strengthen the bridge for the main body of troops following up behind. The light field guns would provide direct and indirect fire, the anti-tank platoons were placed so as to counter threats from enemy armour.

This mobile 'armoured' battalion amounted to a powerful force, able to respond to any number of circumstances\*. However, it was not unusual for the division to second an extra company of pioneers, howitzers or more powerful anti-tank elements to ensure a successful operation. Such a combination often saw the battalion classed as 'reinforced', and this marked the beginnings of a cross attachment of arms that were to see the unit becoming the division's own 'fire brigade', a title under which the Hussars were to suffer horrendous casualties.

The months of constant, dangerous combat snatched lives away at a frightening speed. During the fighting withdrawal across the Ukraine in late 1943, the squadrons were estimated to be down to around 20-30 men each, and it is recorded that by October 15th the 2nd had only 9 men on the books. In one action to dominate a prominent landmark, the battalion suffered the loss of a squadron commander and two staff NCO's within hours of each other, while the 5th squadron's pioneer platoon of just 20 men was to lose 8 of them in a matter of minutes. By the time of the defensive battles in Romania throughout May 1944, the division's commander estimated that the battalion was, on average, at two-thirds strength, and had amalgamated its shattered squadrons into 'alarm' groups. Pertinent to this decision was Point 256; a hotly contested corner of the Targul Frumos battlefield where the Hussars, fighting alongside GD's assault guns, lost so many men the survivors dubbed it 'Whore Hill'.

By June 1944 it was apparent that the battalion had to be withdrawn from the front line and rebuilt. Elements of the squadrons were sent back to Germany to re-equip and train on new vehicles, while the other remnants, still hoping that the continuing rumours of a transfer far away from the war applied to them as well, moved to the south of Jassy with the rest of GD to form an army reserve.

\* The original 1942 OOB was constantly tweaked as planners responded to battlefield conditions. In 1944, the battalion underwent a major revamp. The 1st squadron were supposedly up-armoured to '38(t)' reconnaissance vehicles (one of a series of late war weapons systems based on the Czech 'Hetzer' chassis, it is not known if this rare vehicle was ever issued), the vulnerable 3rd and 4th squadrons (along with elements of 2nd) were amalgamated to form a new 3rd (armoured) squadron mounted in 250's, and the 5th were disbanded to form a new 4th (heavy) squadron mounted on tracked vehicles.



**EXAMPLES OF THE RECONNAISSANCE  
BATTALION AS POINT UNIT**

**20/7/42**

3rd and 4th squadrons advance alongside both sides of road.

2nd squadron covers right flank.

1st squadron with attached light field howitzers and battery of 88's follow along the road.

Division follows up.\*

**12/3/43**

(8 wheel armoured car patrol ahead of point unit.)

3rd squadron with 1 battery of assault guns.

4th squadron with 1 battery of assault guns.

2nd squadron.

1 battery of Flak battalion with 1st squadron's Flak platoon.

1st squadron.

HQ squadron.

5th squadron.

Division follows up.\*

**EXAMPLE OF BATTALION DEPLOYING -  
DIVISION FOLLOWING UP**

**23/2/43** (around Kharkov)

"Moving out at about 07.00, the battalion, driving on good roads with thawing weather and a cloudy sky, with headquarters, 1st and 4th squadrons, the assault gun platoon of 'battle group FBB' and the Flak battery, reached Skorochoodovo station; the other three squadrons were brought up immediately. Deployed from the battalion:

4th squadron to secure Filenkov, with recon toward Otrada.

3rd squadron in Ryabkovka, with recon towards Mikhailovka and Vyasovaya.

2nd and 5th squadrons in Skorochoodovo, with recon to Nagalnyi.

HQ and 1st squadron in Filenkov."\*

(This screen covered an area 25km wide! RS)

\*History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H Spaeter. J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.

<sup>(1)</sup>The original 1942 platoon headquarters group consisted of a 250/3 (radio) and 250/10 (37mm Pak). By 1943 they had been replaced by a 250/1 and 250/8 (75mm gun). The 1944 set up of 1 250/1 remained in place until the end of the war. The platoon ratio of 3 groups of 2 250s remained unchanged throughout.

**THEORETICAL ESTABLISHMENT OF  
2nd SQUADRON JUNE 1944 to MAY 1945.**

**Squadron Headquarters Group**

Sd Kfz 250/3 (Radio) - Company Commander

Company Troop Leader

Radioman (NCO), radioman plus driver(NCO)

Sd Kfz 250/3 - Vehicle squad leader Radioman, messenger plus driver

Kuebelwagen - Company Sergeant Major Medical NCO plus driver

Kuebelwagen - Weapons NCO plus driver

3 motorcycles (Sd Kfz 2) and messengers

**1st PLATOON** - see opposite page <sup>(1)</sup>

2nd Platoon (same as 1st platoon)

3rd Platoon (same as above but led by senior NCO)

**'Heavy Weapon' Support Platoon**

Sd Kfz 250/1 - Platoon leader, (NCO)

Driver (NCO)

**Mortar Group**

2 x Sd Kfz 250/7 - Troop leader, (NCO)

Mortar leader with mortar man/telephone operator

2 mortar men and driver

Sd Kfz 250/7 (munitions) 2 mortar men and driver

**Cannon Group**

Sd Kfz 250/8 (75mm 'assault' gun)

Group leader, (NCO)

Gun layer

Driver

Sd Kfz 250/8 - Gun captain, (NCO) Gun layer and driver

Sd Kfz 250/6 - 2 munitions handlers and driver

**TOTALS**

3 X officers.

35 X NCOs.

119 other ranks.

2 x 81 mm mortars.

2 x 75mm L/24 cannons.

30 light armoured personnel carriers with 44 MGs.



**THEORETICAL ESTABLISHMENT. 1st PLATOON WITHIN THE 2nd SQUADRON**

**JUNE 1944 to MAY 1945.** (Note that by June 1944 some of the 250's would be the 'Neu' version)

**Platoon Headquarters Group.<sup>(1)</sup>**

Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 5.

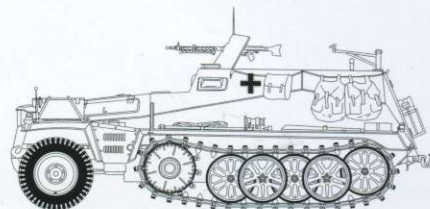
Platoon commander, *Leutnant* (MP40).

Platoon troop leader, *Wachtmeister* (MP40).

Messenger *Funker* (K98).

Stretcher-bearer *Krankentraeger* (P38).

Driver, *Fahrer* (MP40).

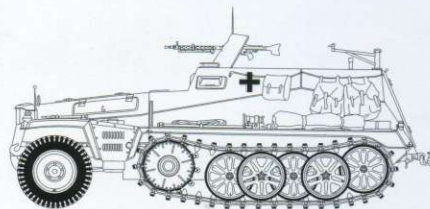
**1st Group**

Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 5.

Group leader, *Unteroffizier* (MP40).

3 x riflemen, *Schuetzen* (K98's).

Driver, *Fahrer* (K98).

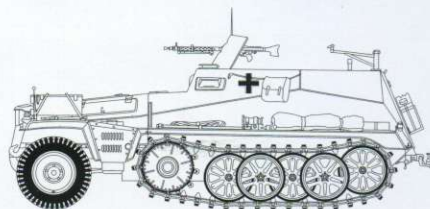


Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 6.

Assistant group leader, *Obergefreiter* (MP40).

4 X riflemen, *Schuetzen* (K98's).

Driver, *Fahrer* (K98).

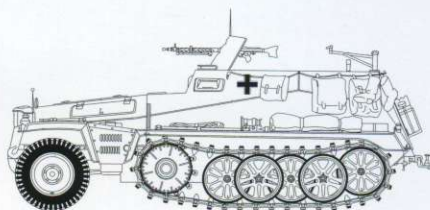
**2nd Group**

Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 5.

Group leader, *Unteroffizier* (MP40).

3 x riflemen, *Schuetzen* (K98's).

Driver, *Fahrer* (K98).

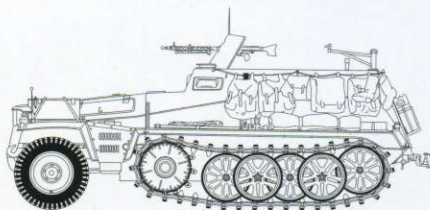


Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 6.

Assistant group leader, *Obergefreiter* (MP40).

4 X riflemen, *Schuetzen* (K98's).

Driver, *Fahrer* (K98).

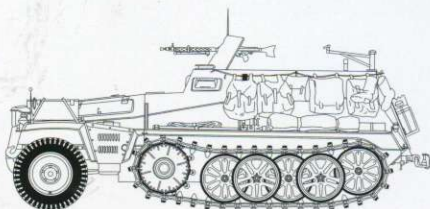
**3rd Group**

Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 5.

Group leader, *Unteroffizier* (MP40).

3 x riflemen, *Schuetzen* (K98's).

Driver, *Fahrer* (K98).

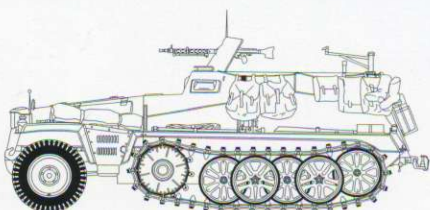


Sd Kfz 250/1 - Crew of 6.

Assistant group leader, *Obergefreiter* (MP40).

4 X riflemen, *Schuetzen* (K98's).

Driver, *Fahrer* (K98).



















*Armoured half-tracks of the 2nd squadron move into an assembly area. Having withstood the latest attempts by the Red army to destroy them, the crews are in a buoyant mood and speculate about a rest.*

FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

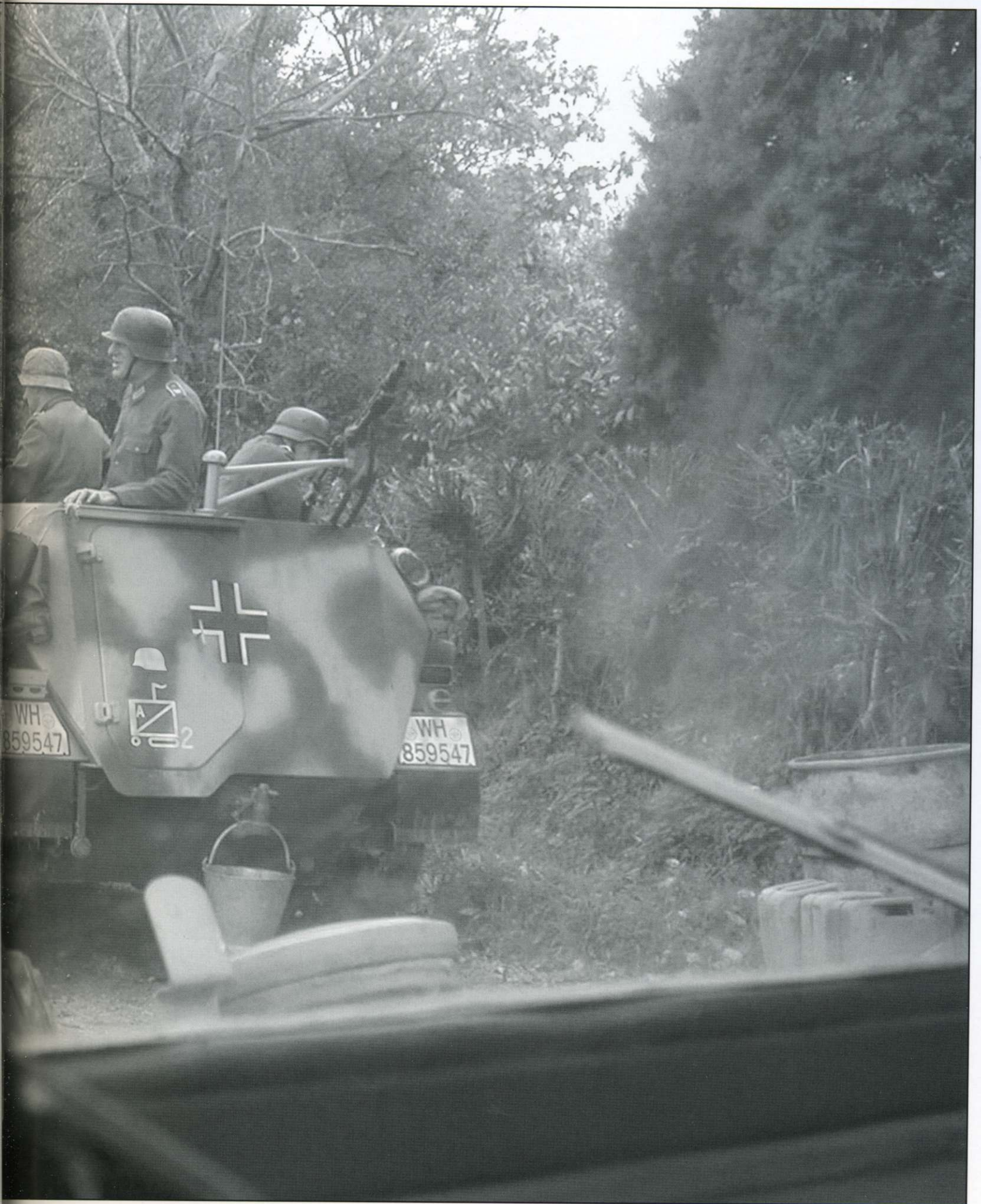
- Basic Soldiers Equipment: see page 201.
- Uniforms: see page 163.
- 250 interior details: see page 278.
- 251 details: see TOTAL DETAIL 251 books.













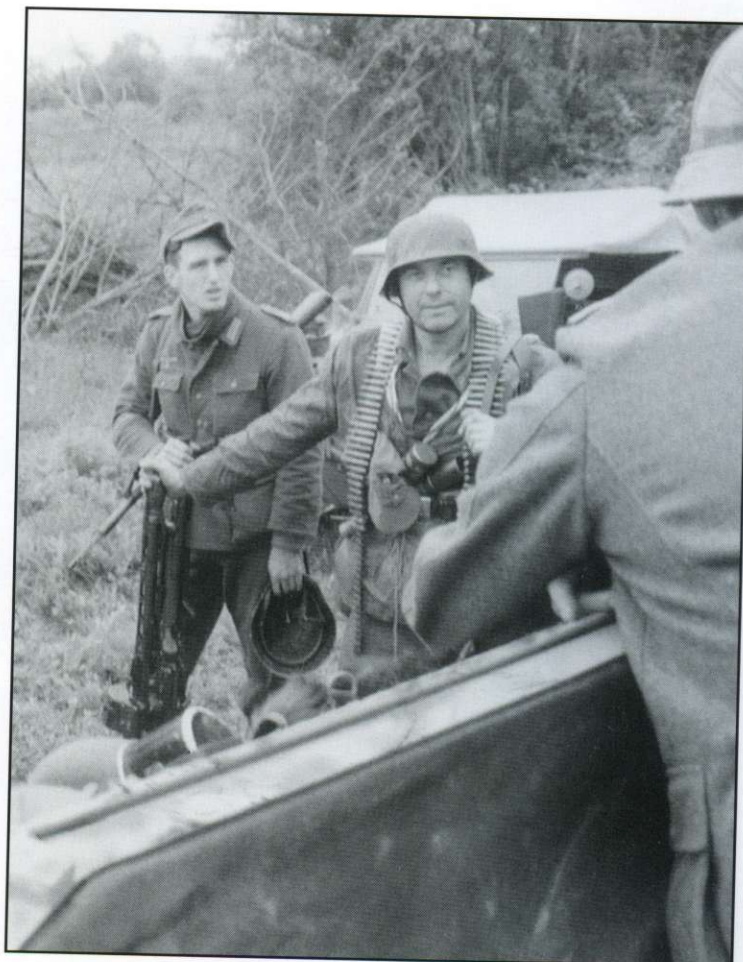




The Grenadiers are eager for news and happy to see their brothers in arms from the reconnaissance battalion. Mock insults are traded. Everyone is happy to relish in the division's latest success.

FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Stowage and Mud: see page 267.
- Overhead 250 and crew: see page 135.
- Full Soldiers Equipment: see page 201.
- SD KFZ 251: see TOTAL DETAIL 251 books.
- MG 42: see TOTAL DETAIL 251 books.
- MG 34: see page 228.
- Rifle K98: see page 234.











FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- MG42 team: see TOTAL DETAIL 251
- Schwimmwagen: see page 115.
- War time pictures: Vol. 3 - 250 Archive.
- 250 External Stowage: see page 276.
- 250 Chassis Details: Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Radio equipment: see page 278.
- Zeltbahn: see pages 192 & 212.
- This Chapter: see page 111.

The winter battles in the Dnieper bend must seem a world away, yet they were only five months previously. A year ago, after the successes at Kharkov and Tomarovka, GD was preparing to fight its way north in operation 'Citadel'.





















Two



LIAISON





Only once did the Hussars romp ahead of GD in the classic reconnaissance role, for a week in July 1942 when they blazed a way towards the Donetz River.

Hampered only by fuel shortages, and with a Red army reluctant to suffer the losses of the previous year furiously back-peddling to the Volga, it was not uncommon for the battalion to cover 100km's a day. However, as resistance increased, the need to 'beef up' the battalion to complete certain missions resulted in the attachment of 'heavy' weapons and other specialised units, and under titles such as 'battle group (*Kampfgruppe*) Von Usedom' or the 'reinforced reconnaissance battalion', the Hussars led GD's tanks, pioneers, Flak, howitzers and anti-tank guns on several offensive missions through the rest of the year.

The beginning of 1943 marked a distinct change in the employment of the battalion. The nature of the fighting had become a relentless slugging match that saw the 2nd squadron increasingly separated from its parent battalion to take on the role of armoured infantry. It was only when the first battalion of the Grenadier regiment was equipped with APC's a month before Kursk<sup>(1)</sup> that the Panzer Grenadier were able to claim their rightful role of escorting the tanks (with the addition of a further APC battalion within GD's *Fuesilier* regiment in July 1944, the division was able to field no less than three powerful battle groups). In the meantime, the 'little brothers' of 2nd squadron continued to enjoy periods of "outstanding teamwork"\* with the division's assault gun battalion.

This successful combination of arms came about because of Waetjen's sympathetic use of the assault guns. This was achieved through close cooperation with the attached battalion's officers, and a sound grasp of both the strengths and weaknesses of the guns themselves. It was all too easy to use heavy armour in the wrong way; some infantry commanders expected a wonder weapon that would clear a battlefield on its own. Such misconceptions infuriated the assault gun crews, who knew only too well the limitations of their vehicles and had witnessed the tragedies that resulted in their misuse. The squadrons and batteries operated in close harmony for many weeks in 1943, notably around Kharkov and later at Kursk, and went on to serve alongside each other sporadically until June 1944. During the spring fighting around Kharkov, the 3rd and 4th squadrons were often seen clinging to the backs of the assault guns, their Kuebelwagen of little use in the spring thaw. The

subsequent counter attack had in fact been delayed because the entire SS -'Totenkopf' division, struggling to reach its jump off positions, had sunk up to its axles during a sudden warm spell.

The concept of the battle group knew no restrictions to size, and could be applied to a single squadron reinforced with a couple of anti-tank guns, such as '*Kampfgruppe Schubert*', or a regimental sized combination similar to '*Kampfgruppe Kassnitz*'. This flexibility of term would often lead to the assumption that its application entailed a powerful combat unit, but as the war ground on it often referred to a solitary group of desperate men clustered around a tank. The Red army, who would give a stunning lesson in the art of '*Blitzkrieg*' when they smashed army group centre to pieces in the summer of 1944, had increasingly adopted the German ethos of armoured units charging through an opponent's front line. In contrast, the Germans were slowly reduced to localised counter attacks and tactical operations carried out by small battle groups.

The success of a combined arms battle group depended on trust and co-operation. Often hastily thrown together, the first most would learn of a new mission was a transfer into an assembly area. Here the various units assigned to the battle group collected together, immediately holding order groups that had to filter information from the top down to the lowest ranks, allowing each man to know what was expected of him in any given circumstance. It was at the squad level where the '*Kampfgruppe*' really gelled. The men within the reconnaissance battalion had got to know the assault gun teams, tank crews, Grenadiers and pioneers well, having shared much through enemy fire, and on meeting up again were quick to pick out familiar faces. They genuinely mourned the losses of each other's comrades, many, irreplaceable veterans. Such knowledge instilled a determination to see each mission through to the best of their capabilities; if one group faltered, the rest were at risk.

Pre-operation liaison was imperative if unnecessary losses were to be avoided. Simple errors over a place name could lead to dangerous situations. The place names in the east presented their own challenges to the Germans, one veteran proclaiming that it "helped to cough, sneeze or have a touch of flu"\* to pronounce most names, and consequently more familiar terms were used to identify important locations. 'Cornfield Hill' was self-explanatory, while 'Nameless Village' would do for the ram shackle dwellings that could never be





satisfactorily located on the map. Places like 'Heroes Curve' would have a tale of valour attached to it, and 'Panzer Hill' was so named because of the burnt out T34's that lined its crest.

By June 1944 GD's troops knew they were going to be rested, and the tension they had borne for so long was slowly starting to leave them. The subsequent disengagement was one of those rare occasions when textbook conditions prevailed. Holding a comparatively quiet part of the frontline, the division handed over in record time. All the rumours of French girls and red wine seemed to be coming true. Relieved by Romanian troops and able to pull out in good order, GD moved into assembly areas just south of Jassy, partly to form a sector reserve, but mainly to prepare to relocate to an unknown destination for a thorough rest and refit.

However, they were never to enjoy a break in the west, particularly as the allied and German armies were now churning up the apple orchards and cornfields of Normandy. Their destination was to be a lot nearer, and perhaps less exotic, 100 kilometres to the south around the town of Bacau.

*\*History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H. Spaeter. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.*

<sup>(1)</sup>There has been some confusion about this in recent books on GD. Despite claims to the contrary, the first battalion of the Panzer Grenadier regiment did not have APC's at Kharkov in the winter of 1942/43. (The photo of the GD 'C' types in the snow that appear in some books as 'Kharkov 1943' was actually taken a year later, near Kirovograd in January 1944). Helmuth Spaeter is explicit that Otto Remer's battalion received their first batch of half-tracks (83 '251' type C) in June 1943. The transition from a lorry borne to armoured unit was announced in January 1943. Oversight of this detail obviously led to some misunderstanding in subsequent research on the subject. RS.



**EXMPLES OF RECON BTN BATTLEGROUPS**

- all units GD unless stated.

**6/2/43** - 'Battle group Schubert'. (*Defence of bridge*)

4th Squadron.

2 88 A/T guns.

**20/2/43** - (*Attack to reopen supply route*)

Arm. Recon. Btn.

Pioneer Btn.

1 battery of assault guns.

1 batt. of Flak.

1 batt. of light howitzer.

1 batt. of heavy howitzer.

Elements of 3rd SS recon. Btn. 'Totenkopf'.

**6/3/43** - 'Battle group Waetjen'.

(*Attack against fortified positions*)

Arm. Recon. Btn.

Assault gun Btn.

Flak battalion.

Elements of artillery Rgt.

**9/3/43** - (*Attack against fortified positions*)

Arm. Recon. Btn.

Assault gun Btn.

1 batt. of Flak.

2 batt. of light howitzer.

3rd squadron with 1 batt. of assault guns, 1 37mm flak platoon and 2 20mm flak.

2nd and 4th squadrons with 1 batt. of assault guns, and 1 37mm flak platoon.

**7/1/44** - (*Defence of village*)

Arm. Recon. Btn.

Assault gun Bt. 286.

Artillery Btn. 934.

**9/1/44** - 'Battle group Buesing'

(*Attack against Russian spearheads*)

Tank regiment.

1 (armoured) Btn. of panzer grenadier regiment.

Elements of Arm. recon. Btn.

**12/1/44** - (*Defensive action*)

Arm. Recon. Btn.

Elements of pioneer Btn.

1 Batt. of artillery.

Division Escort Company.



# An overview of GD's movements in WW II

From July 1943 to May 1945

3.8.44 Elements of GD detrain along the rail-road west of Wilkowischken.

11.8.44 GD capture Wilkowischken.

12.8.44 GD move north. towards Schaulen.

16.8.44 GD cross the Venta river

22.8.44 Units withdrawn from the front line facing towards Schaulen and move north east to rejoin advanced units in Autz.

24.8.44 GD advance north east towards Doblen.

4.10.44 Elements of GD withdraw south west to cover the Russian bridgeheads over the Venta river.

5 to 9.10.44 GD withdraw back to Memel.

10.10 to 20.11.44 GD defend Fortress Memel.

22.11.44 GD commence evacuation by sea to Koenigsberg.

15.1 to 29.3.45 GD withdraw north to the Balga peninsula and are destroyed in Pillau.

16.8.44

Memel 27.1.45

Koenigsburg 9.4.45

Tilsit 19.1.45

Wilkowischken 3.7.44

Allenstein 20.1.45

Ortelsburg 25.1.45

Makow 15.1.45

Warschau 17.1.45

Bialystok 18.7.44

Brest Litowsk 28.7.44

Lublin 27.7.44

Kowel 5.4.44

28-8 to 15.9.43 Defensive action west of

Kharkov and north of Poltava.

16.9 to 29.9.43 Withdrawal south to the

Kremenchug bridgehead north of the Dnieper River.

GD were the last units across before the bridge was blown.

16.10 to 31.12.43 GD move south to cover

the Russian crossing of the Dnieper.

1.1.44 Defensive battles west of Kivroi Rog.

8 to 15.3.44 GD withdraw to the Bug river.

16 to 30.3.44 GD transfer back to the Dniester river.

25.4.44 GD counterattack at Targul Frumos.

2-6.5.44 Heavy defensive action

north of Targul Frumos.

8.6.44 GD are withdrawn from the front line.

15.6 to 24.7.44 Complete withdrawal

to Bacau, 100kms south of the front line

to rest and re-fit.

25.7 to 2.8.44 GD entrain and

move north to Gumbinnen in

East Prussia to stem

the Russian threat to

the Baltic coast.

25.4-6.5.44

Targul Frumos 25.4-6.5.44

21.8.44

Bacau 15.6-24.7.44

Chisinau 31.3.44

2.4.44

8-15.3.44

Kivroi Rog 1-3.1.44

22.2.44

Sofiyevka 16.10-31.12.43

Kremenchug 29.9.43

Poltava 16.9.43

Kharkov 20.6.43

Konotop 17.7.43

Karachev 23.7.43

Bryansk 17.9.43

Orel 5.8.43

Kursk 8.2.43

Tomorovka 20.6.43

Akhtyrka 5.8.43

Kiev 6.11.43

Zhitomir 31.12.43

Winnista

Cherkassy

Mosyr

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Kiev 6.11.43

Zhitomir 31.12.43

Winnista









FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Forage Cap: see page 187.
- Helmets: see pages 176, 182 & 213.
- Water Bottles: see page 213.
- Grenade launcher: see page 237.



South of Jassy, the Grenadiers have been waiting in reserve for the last two days, still on high alert. Everyone talks of a well-deserved rest. As a platoon from the Schwadron passes by, an officer recognises a face from the past and flags him down.





FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- *Rucksacks: see pages 222 & 274.*
- *Soldiers basic equipment: see page 214.*
- *250 interior: see pages 268 - 281.*

*The men know they cannot stay in the open too long, so the meeting will be brief. The reconnaissance platoon has orders to move back to an assembly area some four kilometres away. The presence on the map of nearby marshalling yards leads to further speculation of a move away from the front.*











*The shared news is encouraging. Most of the division seems to have settled into the local area, while advanced elements are thought to have already left for redeployment.*

FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- GD Cuff title: see page 191.
- Helmets: see page 213.
- Basic equipment: see page 212.
- Officers map case: see page 258.
- Maps: see page 258.















*With a final salute and wishes for luck, the men go their separate ways wondering if they will ever meet again?*

FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Headphones: see page 185.
- Radio equipment: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Engine bay pictures: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Camo schemes: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Troop leaders uniform: see page 188.

















Three



SUPPLIES





Between 1942-45, less than half a dozen orders led GD away from the front to a rest area, approximate statistics revealing that 70-80% of that period was spent in a combat zone, and it is of

little wonder that news of a transfer prompted a prayer for a proper quiet spell. There were times when GD spent calm periods in the front line, but the dangers never quite went away. A sniper's bullet, stray shell or occasional mortar 'stonk' could carry a life away in an instant, placing the troops under an enormous amount of stress.

A year ago, in July 1943, the division had been participating in the Kursk offensive, and had subsequently gone on to fight its way through the following twelve months. Even the much-lauded GD needed a break and the long-awaited order that led to foothills of the Carpathian Mountains must have been received with pure elation.

However, the high command had no intention of allowing the division to rest on its laurels. Once settled, a tough training regime was implemented to re-mould GD into a coherent fighting force, and the maxim 'first the machines, then the men'\* ensured that armoured crews commonly worked long extra hours taking on ammunition, preparing weapons and servicing vehicles for another day of gruelling field exercises. The 'old sweats' groaned their way through most of these, but aware of the inexperience of the latest influx of replacements, persevered to save blood later. Indeed, in an intriguing insight into some of the relevant skills required in GD's 'reconnaissance' battalion, the Hussars were noted for the battle schools where they taught the art of 'bunker busting' and destroying T-34's with hand held weapons.

Even while temporarily 'non-active', the division still consumed hundreds of tons of munitions, fuel and other general provisions. In a static location with an adequate transport infrastructure, there were few difficulties in re-supplying the troops. The story at the front had been quite different. Hasso Von Manteuffel, who commanded GD for most of 1944, tried to dispel the 'fairy tale'\* that the division suffered shortages by stating that "anyone concerned about supplies got them"\*, but it is hard to ignore the archives, which have many examples to the contrary. At the sharp end, GD's troops commonly faced critical shortages, despite tremendous efforts by the supply troops (or 'rear echelon swine').

Theirs was no easy task. Over a one year period, the division's 'supply train slaves' covered a distance equivalent to 50 times around the globe, and in doing so delivered to the combat units around 85 tons per day of general provisions alone. (In action GD could consume a total of 700 tons a day.) When the 2,010 rounds of 7.9mm allocated to a single 250/1 could be expended by its 2 MGs in a little over a minute, it can be seen that just in ammunition a staggering amount had to be supplied to keep GD battle-worthy. Struggling through all weathers to supply MG crews that could fire off 27,000 rounds in 2 days, and carrying up rations to an average complement of 16,000 who would eat their way through 2 million loaves a year, the supply troops often came under attack from partisans or packs of T34's that had broken through the front line. Desperate times would find them being grouped into last ditch 'alarm units', and many a Hussar who was sent back to the 'train' for a "well deserved"\* rest quickly returned to his squadron, explaining that he felt safer at the front!

Installations such as depots, fuel dumps and rail bridgeheads were prime targets for enemy spearheads. In late 1943 GD lost 10 brand new Tigers, still on their rail flatbeds, along with 220 tons of ammunition, when the Russians 'bounced' the Dnieper River and rampaged through the division's rear. Juggling the need to pull back whilst serving the ongoing demands of the troops covering them, the retreat through the Ukraine back into Romania saw many supply dumps being blown up, much to the consternation of the troops. The Hussars came across one, filled with everything from "toothbrushes to red French wine"\*, being ransacked by soldiers and civilians. Not shy of joining in, they marvelled at the items available whilst helping themselves to sausages and cheese.

Supplies from home were generally transported by rail, where they were deposited in army level dumps. Divisional support units would then collect their allocations and in turn distribute them to each battalion's supply column. From there, requisitions were carried by road or on foot up to the troops in the front line. All types of vehicles were used by the supply troops to transport their goods, including captured examples, as they too suffered motorised losses. A former Hussar remembers NCOs marking up Red army trucks for the battalion's motor pool, while a veteran of the tank regiment recalls with some pride two U.S. built lorries that served with their supply train till the end of the war.





Despite the best efforts by all, the division's archives are littered with vehicles that simply ran out of fuel. Perhaps the most painful shortage any armoured division has to endure, the reconnaissance battalion alone could consume a considerable amount a day carrying out the simplest of missions. Determined by the amount of petrol required to keep a vehicle moving for 100km (known as the 'consumption unit'), the fuel was commonly brought to the vehicles in the famous 20-litre 'Jerry can' (a nick name first applied by British troops fighting Rommel's 'Afrika Korps' in 1942) or 200 litre drums. In theory, each unit was automatically replaced once used. Reconnaissance units held a reserve of six and half units due to the extended distances they might cover in an operation.

The armoured vehicles of the battalion were, whenever possible, repaired 'on site' by unit mechanics or mobile field workshops. If a problem required more than 3 days to rectify, the vehicle would be sent back to field army tank parks for repair. There was a concerted effort by the divisional mechanics to avoid this happening as once the vehicle was sent away it could be re-allocated to another unit. If a vehicle was 'written off', it was either scrapped for parts, sent back to permanent repair workshops or returned to the factory where it was produced.

Requisitions for spares were sent back to the appropriate depot. In theory this was fine, but in practice, given the diversity of military equipment used by the German Army, keeping the appropriate level of spares was far from easy, and mechanics were often seen rooting through dumps about to be blown up searching for useful parts. Word would quickly spread of disabled tanks and vehicles beyond repair, which would be stripped of anything useful to bolster stocks at the workshops. Although rare, attempts to sabotage equipment by disgruntled conscript workers in the factories did have an effect at the front, and all vehicles had to be checked by crews or mechanics on delivery.

By mid July 1944 the division was almost a permanent feature of the Romanian landscape, reaping the rewards of its 'elite' status in the form of a steady, uninterrupted stream of supplies and reinforcements from home. Situated some 100km behind a static front line, the marshalling yards at Bacau enabled not only men and equipment to be more or less dropped off at GD's doorstep, but also the millions of items needed to sustain them in the field, from hobnails, laces and socks to gaskets, petrol and tyres.

*\*History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H. Spaeter. J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.*























Late in a July evening, the day's combat and live firing exercises finally over, the crew move under cover and prepare to settle down for the night. First they replenish their supplies, delivered in a factory fresh Kuebelwagen.

FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- SD KFZ 250: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Uniforms: see page 163.
- Hand grenade: see page 246.
- Twin 50 MG 34 carrier: see page 232.
- These scenes: see page 128.
- Vehicle stowage: see page 135.
- Grenade case: see page 246.











FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Wooden ammo case: see page 240.
- Cardboard ammo boxes: see pages 238 - 240.
- Ammunition information: see page 238.
- Rifle ammo pouches: see page 212.
- Belted ammunition: see page 164.
- Ammunition tins: see page 233.
- These scenes in colour: see page 128.

Virtually direct from the railhead, there is a plentiful supply of ammunition. Experience has taught them to take great care in the loading of ammunition belts. Tracer rounds are added at regular intervals. Their weapons had to function perfectly. If the current rumours are true, they know they will soon be back in action.













Four



AT REST





The move to Bacau saw GD settling down to some semblance of normality. Rest days allowed the troops to relax, overhaul their equipment and socially indulge themselves, the evenings brought

light relief with concerts, plays and sing-a-longs, sometimes with the assistance of "plenty"\* of alcohol. The official ration charts were dusted off and reviewed, the post caught up bringing belated birthday 'treats', and in between the lectures, demonstrations and live firing exercises, crew members would slide off into the surrounding countryside hoping to 'bag' a little something extra to add to their evening meal.

Most important though for the individual was the time allowed to clean, repair or replace the personal equipment that had and would continue to sustain him in the field. The ultimate task of a rifleman is to launch a piece of metal at high velocity towards his enemy, and a whole range of both every day and specialist items are required to support him to do this, sometimes for weeks on end. Burdened with weapons, combat equipment and ammunition, every man perhaps valued more his mess kit, water bottle and shelter quarter.

Prominent was the ubiquitous 'Zeltbahn', a poncho, ground sheet and tent quarter rolled into a compact bundle and secured with a simple leather strap. Possibly one of the finest items of 'kit' that the German soldier was issued with, a plethora of regulations for its wear and utilisation was to be found in manuals throughout the Wehrmacht. Often used to carry cold rations up to the frontline, it could be instantly turned into a makeshift stretcher to take back the wounded and dead, although it is said that it was never used to wrap corpses for burial.

Of equal importance was the mess kit. While behind the lines, NCOs checked such items for cleanliness on food parades, because like the Zeltbahn, the mess tin was commonly used for purposes probably not envisaged by its designers. In the summer dash of 1942, the 2nd squadron, obliged to reconnoitre but low on fuel, used their mess tins to top up enough vehicles to carry out a mission. Never far from his side, the mess tin enabled each man to accept food brought up to the frontline, sometimes by runners, sometimes by two men from each squad, who went back with all the tins and a Zeltbahn to find the field kitchen.





One of the benefits of being mounted in a vehicle was the means to carry items that made life just a little more comfortable. As well as the extra blanket or Zeltbahn, crews would liberate coffee pots, frying pans and cooking utensils on their travels, often storing them in an ammunition crate that doubled as a dining table. Very few crews did not have a bucket hanging around somewhere, ideal for washing both themselves and their clothes, while water containers were topped up at every opportunity, as one never knew when clean water would become available again.

GD may well have been an elite division, but observations from the veterans give some hint that it was not immune to the dietary deficiencies that affected every unit serving on the eastern front. When it is considered that GD was also often on the move, it is not surprising that food deliveries were at best erratic, and once received, inevitably eaten cold. The spectacle of the division's few remaining field kitchens being dragged by a tractor through the snow of January 1944 could hardly have raised hopes amongst the squadrons for a hot meal, and the sight of freezing riflemen huddled around small fires thawing out their day's ration was apparently not unusual.

Pea and barley soups receive a special mention from the veterans, as do the "most welcome"\* fruit trees that were sometimes found along the way. One recalls cold meat cutlets being handed out to passing troops as they moved up to the front, another having to survive on apparently nothing but pickles and raw potatoes for days on end. Coffee, fresh bread and honey were considered a "treat"\*, and on at least one occasion a GD platoon were handed a pound of chocolate each for their day's meal.

Occasionally in combat, some recall that they went without any food for up to three days, at the end of which all would have looked very closely indeed at their 'iron ration'. This last-ditch meal of preserved meat and hard bread could only be eaten on the express order of an officer, and only then if no food had been received for three days. Some ignored this order, the need to eat outweighing any future punishment they might suffer.

The German army in the east was expected to live off the land. The vast problems involved with re-supply forced divisions to appropriate foodstuffs locally, often trading, purchasing or sometimes taking at gunpoint. (one GD veteran recalls swapping items of kit for butter and eggs, commenting that it was nothing unusual to see civilians



entirely clothed in Wehrmacht issue garments). Responding to Hitler's 'scorched earth' order, during the retreat across the Ukraine in the autumn of 1943 GD formed an "evacuation commando", confiscating livestock and crops and destroying everything deemed useful to the advancing Red army. In contrast, at rest in August 1942, GD had access to vast fields of watermelons and tomatoes while a local river offered a plentiful supply of crayfish, a "welcome change"\* to the menu, and it can be imagined that such 'local delicacies' were eagerly sampled by the division's troops in the subsequent summer refits of 1943 and 1944.

\*History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H. Spaeter. J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.



**EXAMPLES FOUND OF WHAT THE TROOPS WOULD EXPECT TO RECEIVE**

The march ration (marschverpflegung) is a cold food ration issued for not more than three consecutive days to units in transit either on carrier or on foot. It consists of approx. 700 grams of bread, 200 grams of cold meat or cheese, 60 grams of bread spreads, 9 grams of coffee (or 4 grams of tea), 10 grams of sugar and six cigarettes.

The iron ration (Eiserne portion) consists of 250 grams of biscuits, 200 grams of cold meat, 150 grams of preserved vegetables, 25 grams of coffee and 25 of salt. There also existed an iron half-ration, composed of 250 grams of biscuits and 200 grams of preserved meat.

A representative breakdown of maximum ration allowances in grams per day for combat troops:

Rye bread	700
Fresh meat with bones	136
Soybean flour	7
Headless fish	30
Fresh veg and fruit	250
Potatoes	320
Legumes	80
Pudding powder	20
Sweet condensed milk	25
Salt	15
Other seasonings	3
Spices	1
Fat and bread spreads	60
Coffee	9
Sugar	40
Wine (in summer)(quarts)	.026
Cigarettes	7

**COLD RATIONS**

750 grams bread.

45 grams butter or fat.

120 grams sausage (fresh or canned), fish (preserved), cheese (in tubes etc).

200 grams jam or artificial honey (delivered in pails or cans and divided).

7 cigarettes, 2 cigars, 1 roll of candy drops or the like.

**WARM RATIONS**

Around 750 grams potatoes, vegetables, baked goods, etc., with 120 grams of fresh meat.

45 grams of vegetable or animal fat.

15 grams sauces.

8 grams bean coffee and 10 grams ersatz coffee (or tea)".

*The following document was compiled when the division was 'working up' before the Kursk offensive. The division obviously went to some lengths to care for the 'spiritual welfare' of the troops.*

*The troops would have genuinely welcomed the musical instruments, games and theatre shows. The newspapers would have been full of blatant propaganda, and commonly ended up being used for purposes that would have horrified the editors.*



- 1 -

Panzer Grenadier Division  
1943

Div. Com. Post. 5th June

Grossdeutschland

Ie

Report on the spiritual Welfare of the Division

in the span from 5th May - 5th June 1943

After the re-positioning of the Division in the area Opeschnja - Kotelwa - Achtyrka, we were able introduce an effective welfare system, due to favourable circumstances. The solid base of the unit and the accessibility by the welfare support and logistics unit made the the organisaton for welfare easier.

As well as a generous newspaper delivery to the division, regular film and stage performances began on 5. 5. 43. Adding to that, the unit recieved a considerable amount of book material for the soldier library, i.e. valuable volumes toward professional advancement and instructional courses. Further more, musical instruments, relaxing games and other useful articles were made available to the unit in large volumes.

Among the distributed welfare materials were the pamphlets: "Soldiers Wisdom", "What moves us", "A walk through time and countries", "India", "Finland", "Resistance and plough", "What the soldier must know about the economy", "Germany's resistance / geographical situation", "European Russia", "Legacy of time", and "Officers and his recruits". These publications serve as a foundation for the spiritual guidance of Commanders and Unit Leaders.

Individually distributed were:

1.) Front newspapers:

East Courier (Printer Poltawa)	135,000 Sheets
East Front (Delivered via XXXXVIII Anti tank Co.	27,200 "

2.) Daily papers:

The Reich, V.B., Frankfurter paper, D.A.Z.	
Deutsche Ukrainian paper, Berliner Borsen paper,	
Krakauer paper, Wiener Daily paper.	
(average age 6 days, distributed by	
field post office, or Section I.e)	14,907 Items
Daily 6 papers per unit via field post	27,000 "

3.) Illustrated papers

(from the Dr. Goebbels Collection)

Berliner-, Hamburger-, Stuttgarter-	
Illustrated, Illustrated Observer	
and further mixed Coloured Periodicals	5,364 Items

Total	209,471 Items
-------	---------------

2.)



Accordingly, in the course of 1 month, each unit received 1,400 papers and illustrated publications. That number does not include the privately ordered papers by the unit members.

4.) <u>Books</u> from the rosenburg Donation	1,600 Items
<u>Books</u> from the soldiers library O.K.W.*	4,000 "
<u>Books</u> for professional advancement	3,700 "

---

Total 9,300 "

---

5.) Pamphlets:

Knapsack journals (spiritual education)	4,300 items
Soldier leaflets, for rest and leisure	5,200 "

---

Total 9,500 "

---

6.) Assorted Welfare Material:

Accordians	49 Items
Dice beakers	450 "
Folding games	1,400 "
Rummy games	90 "
Mouth organs	200 "
Games (Table tennis, chess, etc.)	200 "
Card games	400 "
Welfare boxes	100 "

7.) Cinema:

During the report period, in the Achtyrka, Kotelwa and around Opochnja, there was 1 film projector operating, without interruptions, daily with 1 - 2 performances.

8.) Theatre:

In Achtyrka and Kotelwa the K.D.F.\* and playgroup performed repeatedly in the town theatre Poltawa.

Of the aforementioned welfare materials, the following was provided by way of (XXXXVIII. Pz A.K. )

Front newspapers	27,200 Items
Books	640 "
Accordians	41 "

Welfare materials in small amounts  
1 Film projector

The remainder of the welfare items was obtained by the Division.

(\* Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) Army high command  
\* Kraft Durch Freude (Strength through joy)









FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- PPK sub-machine gun: see pages 168 & 192.
- Ammo boxes: see page 238 - 240.
- Rucksack contents: see page 222.
- 250 external stowage: see pages 272 - 277.
- SD Kfz 250: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical..

Finally, with the next day's preparations taken care of, the crew can settle in for the night. In comparison to the last six months, this must feel like a holiday.



FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Cooking stove: see page 255.
- Soldiers full equipment: see page 220.
- Food items: see page 250.
- Zeltbahns: see page 192.
- This chapter: see page 124.





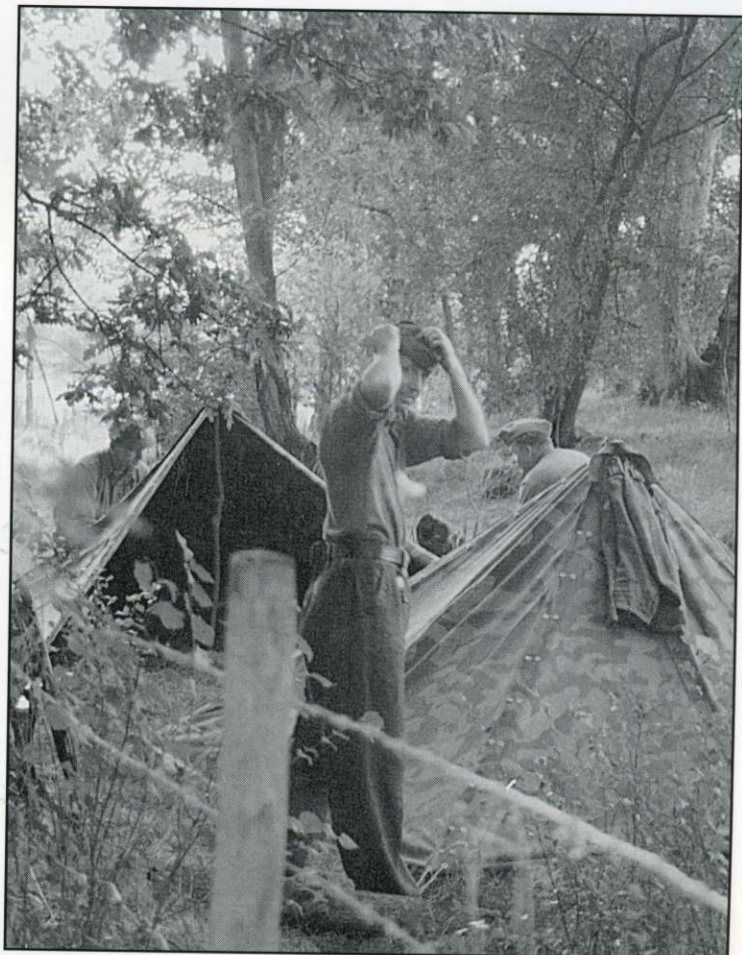






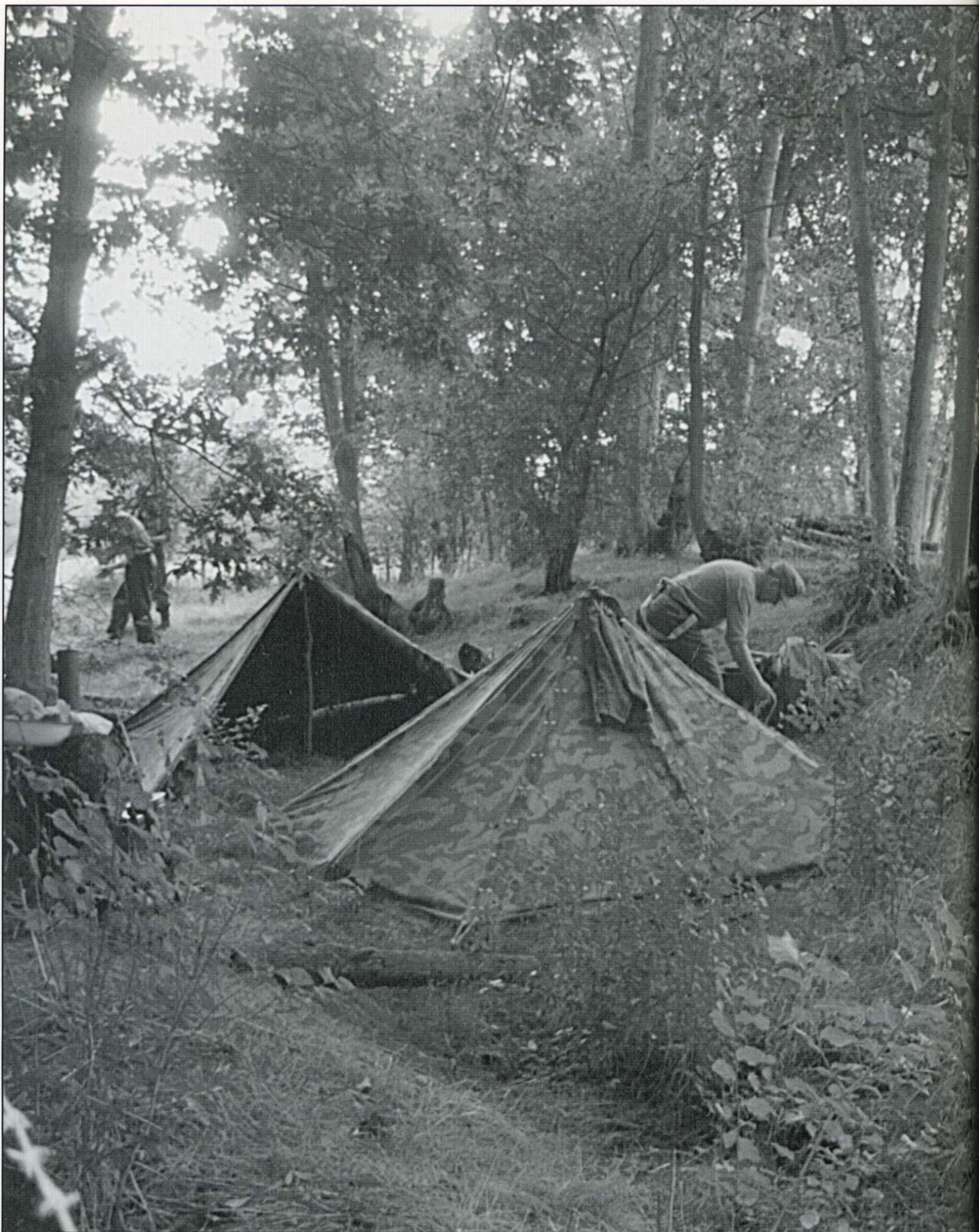
FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- 250 in colour: see pages 111 & 267.
- Uniforms: see page 163.



Word has gone around that someone in the platoon has 'acquired' a couple of chickens and a pig. With the vegetables, eggs and fruit the crew have accumulated, the next few days will not be without fresh food.





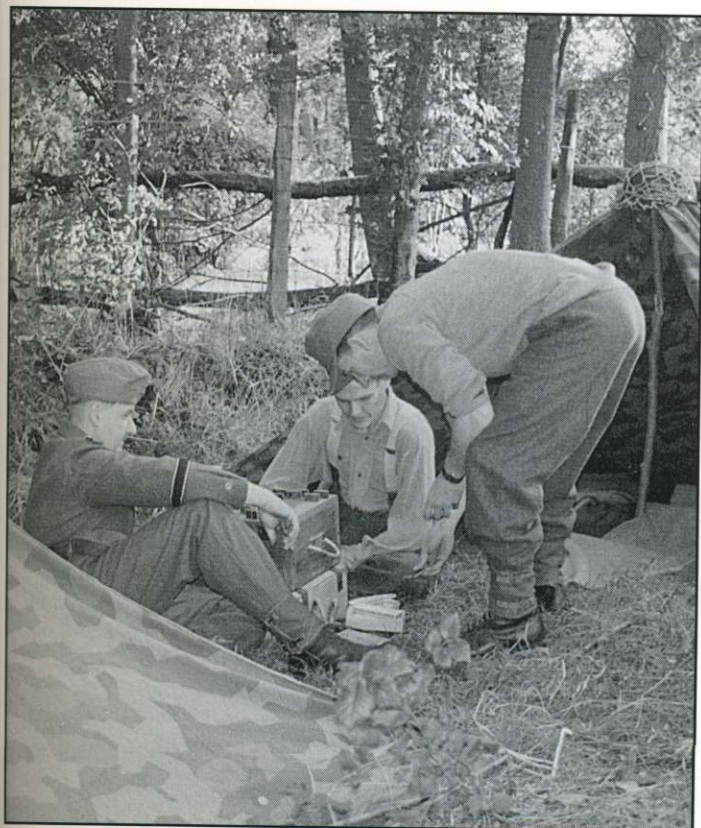












FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Coffee grinder: see page 256.
- Cooking utensils: see page 220.
- Board games: see page 265.



With sleeping quarters arranged, the stove is lit. The crew are intent on a decent cup of coffee, courtesy of a parcel from home. As the coffee brews, the chores continue. Two of the crew try out one of the games they have been given, whilst water is fetched from a local farmhouse.







The recent assassination attempt against Hitler has reverberated down to the lowest ranks. Amongst other things, the crew discuss the implications. Perhaps now they would return to active service, but where? The bets are placed.





Five



MOVING OUT





It has been said that you could judge a German unit on its 'march discipline'. For Grossdeutschland, whose disposition on the eastern front was mostly dictated by Hitler's finger jabbing on a map, the ability to move lock, stock and barrel with the minimum of fuss called for the utmost dedication from the troops. The Red army's summer offensive (operation Bagration) had seen their spearheads closing in on East Prussia, and with GD now rested and close to full strength, they were again called upon to restore a dangerous situation. One of the few occasions when the whole division was moved by rail, the transfer from Romania to the border of Lithuania in late July/early August 1944 involved relocating around 350 fighting vehicles plus an unreported number of motorised support units in an operation that took well over 80 trains to complete. As so often before, their transports were given 'Blitz' status, a somewhat misleading phrase as little moved fast on the railways. In real terms, it meant that the division had absolute right of way on a journey that took over a week, crawling north along a rail network choked by enemy action.

Sometimes known as "GD journey day"\*, every transfer required careful planning, the responsibility of the 'march officer' and his staff who, located within GD's tactical command, coordinated sub unit movement by issuing timetables, maps and orders of march. Advance parties marked routes, anti aircraft batteries were posted at key installations and fuel dumps were established.

Well aware that the overall speed of GD in good conditions was approximately 20km an hour, and that the reconnaissance battalion alone had a theoretical column length of some 8kms, it is no wonder that their regulations were primarily concerned with roads, space and time. If rail transportation was ordered (a decision based on mechanical considerations such as the lifespan of a Panther engine, which was estimated to be around 1,500 km), they liased with higher command to fulfil overall requirements, confirming details such as who was responsible for providing chocks for the vehicles. If insufficient rolling stock was available tracked vehicles always had priority; wheeled elements were commonly left behind to make their own way to a redeployment area.





A surviving example of an order to load aboard trains provides a fascinating insight into the transfer process. Complete with times, dates and entraining stations, it is summarised with suggestions, warnings and threats. All possible cargo space was to be filled to a set tempo, while it was strictly forbidden to interfere with the loading procedures, citing an officer who did so and

caused a 45-minute delay. Much emphasis was placed

on "iron discipline"\* , and any violations of the order would be "severely punished"\*. A comment that each unit was to be "advised again"\* about removing or damaging railroad property hints that station masters had reasons to complain in the past, most likely when items like their coffee pot or wood burning stove went missing!

However, the "strained transport situation"\* combined with the need for urgency often saw GD tearing up the rules in an attempt to arrive at a new destination on time. While the regulations recommended that journeys over 150km were to be made by rail, a lack of rolling stock commonly resulted in GD's tracked vehicles undertaking lengthy road marches, including an epic 220km forced drive by tanks from the Panzer regiment, which upon arrival at their destination immediately refuelled and went into action. A later transfer into the Kirovograd region in January 1944 witnessed the last few tracked vehicles of the division striving to reach their next combat obligation "with several others already in tow"\*.

During a further crisis in March, some tracked elements of GD were loaded aboard 'fast' trains and despatched in a desperate race to counter enemy spearheads, never knowing if the next station was still in friendly hands. The rest were left to struggle along as best as they could, the road impassable due to slow moving columns of troops and horse drawn units "up to their knees"\* in mud. The conditions were so bad that many took to the railway embankment and followed the line, except three Tigers, who tried to ford a river. All eventually became stuck, the first simply bogged down, the other two suffering drive damage trying to tow it out, leaving an embarrassed commander having to explain away the loss of 3 million Marks worth of hardware. A stark lesson in the art of proper reconnaissance, if ever there was one.

The Hussars did not always lead the way. Low in strength and without any heavy weapons due to the ongoing refit, they were to play only a minor part in the defence of Lithuania. The first to arrive were elements of the Panzer Grenadier regiment who, stiffened with Tigers, immediately secured the railheads at Gumbinnen

and Wirballen. It took a further three days for GD to assemble and the subsequent recapture of the border town of Wilkowishken was to be the last time the whole division participated in a successful offensive action. An order to march further north to participate in 'operation Doppelkopf' (the attempt to restore contact with the severed Army Group North) found GD snaking along a

single road for over 95km, a phenomenon somehow

missed by the Soviet air force. A photo exists of that event in August 1944, showing GD stretching off into the distance under a summer blue sky, with not one vehicle displaying so much as a twig. (Unlike the German forces in the west, the use of foliage for camouflage was obviously still a matter of divisional choice.)

This operation saw the reconnaissance battalion fed into a 'serial', a standard road formation that was but one small part of GD's overall march column. A different set of rules applied here. Unlike the battle ready spearheads they would normally adopt, such occasions allowed the squadron to relax just a little and let someone else lead the way. It was important to keep at a steady pace and maintain regular spacing between vehicles so as to negate an accordion effect, and a strict radio silence meant that visual contact was vital so distances were generally kept between 30 to 100 metres. Crews were expected to maintain a listening watch, which was only to be broken on contact with the enemy, and this led to a whole range of visual signs being used to pass information along a column. In a 250, this involved someone standing behind the driver's position acting as an extra pair of eyes, alert for signals and, with the use of his arms or, if the vehicle had one, a signal disk, communicate any instructions to the vehicle behind. The driver would also require guidance in a tight squeeze, with the engine running and a limited field of view he was very much reliant on the spring mounted, vehicle width indicators and instructions shouted in his ear.

Planned for every 3 to 4 hours, it was the short stops along the way that the crews enjoyed the most, not least so they could attend to the calls of nature. Intended for checks on the vehicles, refuelling and any necessary maintenance, it was also a time to switch off the engine, stretch the legs and have a smoke, something frowned upon in the explosive confines of an armoured fighting vehicle.

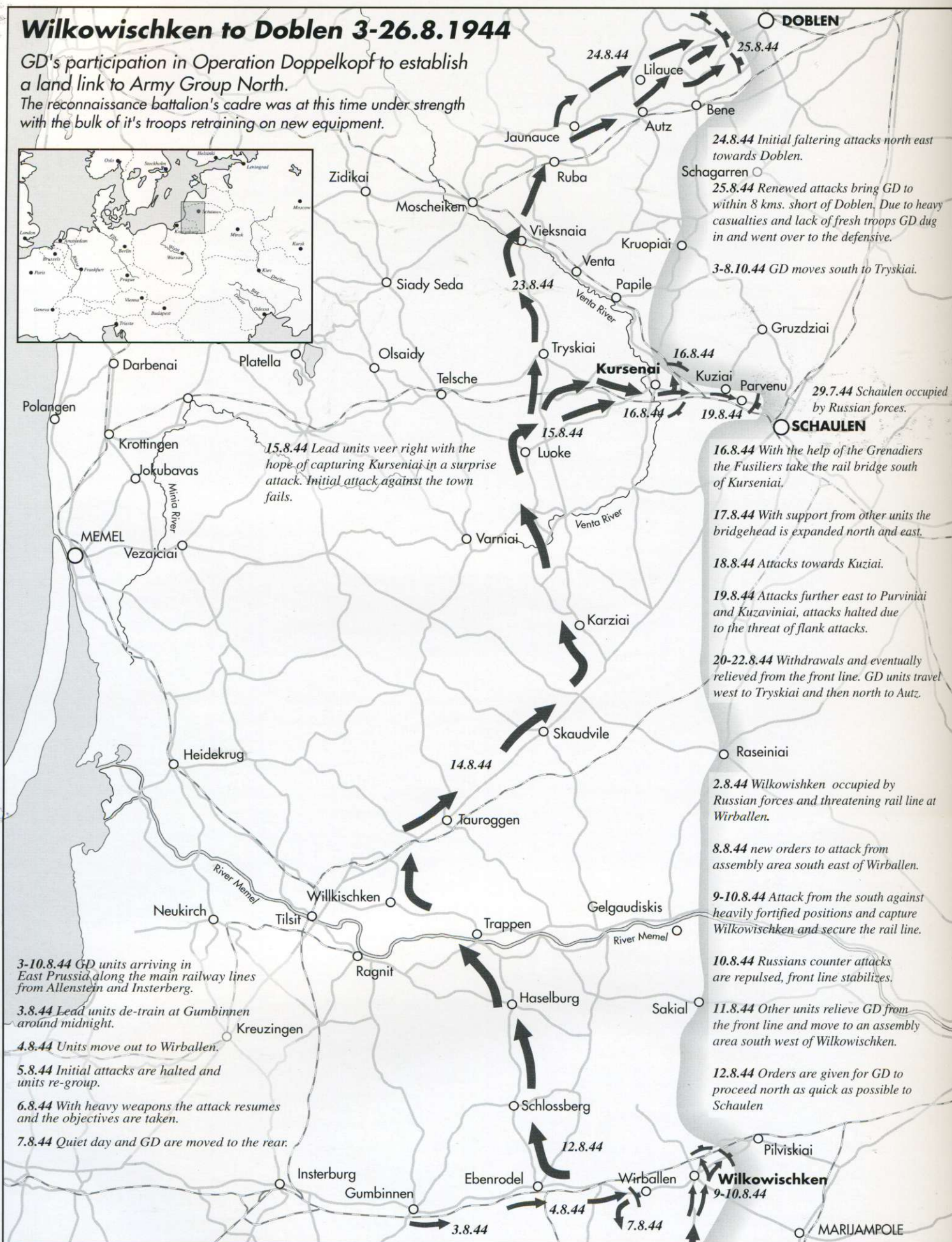
\*History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H. Spaeter. J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.



## Wilkowischken to Doblen 3-26.8.1944

GD's participation in Operation Doppelkopf to establish a land link to Army Group North.

The reconnaissance battalion's cadre was at this time under strength with the bulk of its troops retraining on new equipment.





With the ranks bolstered with fresh troops, and fine summer weather, the mood is optimistic. However, the veterans know in their hearts that unless the high command really does have some type of 'wonder weapon', it will only be a matter of time before the enemy finally defeats them.

FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- GD Cuff Title: see page 191.
- MG 34: see page 228.
- Panzerfaust: see page 198.
- Uniforms: see page 163.



**AVERAGE SPEEDS FOR MARCH COLUMN**

Mounted troops - 10 km/h  
 Motorcycles and cars - 35 km/h  
 Trucks - 35km/h  
 Trucks with trailers - 26 km/h  
 Half track vehicles - 26 km/h  
 Tanks - 20 km/h

**APPROXIMATE ROAD SPACE REQUIRED**

Tank Rgt. - 19.5km  
 Pzr Gren Rgt. - (x2) 12km  
 Recon Btn. - 8.3km  
 Anti tank Btn. - 3.5km  
 Artillery Rgt. - 13.2km  
 Signals Btn. - 3.4km  
 Pioneer Btn. - 5.8km  
 Division services - 10.7km  
 Div. HQ. - 1.3km  
 Others. - 5km

Approx. Overall length (including intervals between units). 94.7km.











FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Interior details with crew: see page 142.
- Interior details: see Vol. 2 250 Technical.
- General reference: see page 111.
- Soldiers complete kit: see page 201.
- Maps: see page 258.

The crews discuss the proposed march route to the north and their place in it. Schaulen, where the division is to assemble, is some 100kms away, a gruelling road journey for armoured vehicles in the best of circumstances. At the end of it, the troops know they may be in for another tough fight.

























*It is a time to listen to invaluable experience. The veteran's quiet assurance lends a confidence to the youngsters, who he knows will probably not see October, never mind Christmas 1944.*

**FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:**

- 250 Seat Box: see page 280.
- Vehicle plans: see Vol. 2 250 Technical.
- Stowage and Mud: see page 267.
- Camo painted helmet: see page 192.













Six



RECONNAISSANCE





For the young recruits absorbed in Romania, the unsuccessful attempts to dislodge the enemy from Schaulen was to be their first taste of failure. Those that had survived the initial first shock of

combat through Wilkowitzken had continued to follow the veterans, learning from experience, listening to advice and sharing their exultation in "a good shot, a daring dash, a brave comrade."\* They quickly picked up the language of the front line. To kill an enemy was to send him to "commissar and Red army heaven"\*, while a mission order was a "ticket to the target"\*. They also learned at great cost to identify the many weapons that were arrayed against them. Incoming 152mm howitzer rounds were 'brickbats'; the 'Stalin' chassis assault guns were cursed as 'black pigs'. The "much feared"\* 7.62cm cannon was nicknamed the 'rautsch-bum' (crash-boom, emulating the distinctive sound it made on firing), and the terrifyingly effective enemy rocket systems, first christened 'firing Elias' by GD, were later dubbed with the more familiar term, 'Stalin organ'. Planes that dropped bombs on them at night were 'sewing machines' or 'night crows', US built lend-lease bombers were the 'stubborn ones', and they soon learned to identify an IL-2s fighter-bomber, the 'butchers' that could hack the unwary to pieces.

By late 1944 no German could ignore how the Red army had adopted their methods of armoured warfare, and practiced 'Blitzkrieg' on a scale that the likes of Guderian could only write about. Now in almost constant contact with their opposing numbers, both veterans and recruits regarded their opponents with mixed feelings. Known to some as 'Popov', 'Ivan' or 'brothers', to others simply 'dogs' or 'scum', they were generally held to be 'nitwits', a term that reflected a mix of respect for their combat abilities tempered by contempt for the sometimes inflexible way that they fought. Some would fight to the death; others ran away. The ones who threw their hands up were herded to the rear for interrogation.

The need to know as much as possible about the Red army and its equipment required observation of their every move, listening in on their communications network, capturing documents and questioning prisoners of war. In some circumstances, the division was able to form an amazingly concise assessment of their opposition. GD's archives have documents that go into great detail about the enemy regiments placed against them, complete with the names of commanders and

NCOs. Such information came about through a dedicated detachment within the division's staff, which collated all the various sources at their disposal. However, they knew from experience that it was the information from those 'on the ground' that was often the most valuable.

Prisoners came to the division in many ways. Some were captured during specific missions, others were deserters who hoped the grass would be greener on GD's side of no mans land. After initial questioning, they were sent back down the line, a period of intense personal danger if, as was so often, the squadrons could not spare troops to accompany them. In the past, so many were being shot on sight by rear area troops, afraid that they would pick up discarded weapons and continue to fight, that the division had to appeal to the ranks to desist, as such actions would only result in a "stiffening of the enemies resistance"<sup>(1)</sup>. However, as many GD veterans could tell of old comrades being shot in the back by supposed prisoners, or as recruits stumbled over grotesquely mutilated corpses of their comrades, it is no surprise that the maltreatment of captives continued tit for tat until the end of the war.

The Germans readily admitted that the Red army were masters of counter intelligence and deception. They too had interests in knowing about their opposition. Once, as GD was holding a precarious sector of the front, the troops were each given a lump of chocolate for a meal. Within hours enemy loud speakers were announcing to them that this ration was "to take with you to heaven"\*, a detail that could only further enforce the German's fear of the snatch squads that operated throughout the night. Such attention to GD was born from its unsurpassed combat reputation. An ongoing concern for the Russian high command, the division's constant shuttling about would leave them fretting for a few days as to its whereabouts, its new location only to be resolved by the alarmed cries from the front that "GD is in front of us"\*.

<sup>(1)</sup> Hitler's Army. O. Bartov. Oxford University Press.







By the beginning of October, the division was fighting a costly step-by-step withdrawal west from Doblen to the Baltic coast, shielding thousands of desperate civilians and broken troops from a vengeful enemy. Deployed in security screens and where possible launching sharp counter attacks, the reduced reconnaissance battalion covered GD in turn as it withdrew towards Memel. Few of the recruits would have known that the much rehearsed security screens they now put into regular practice was a tactic born of desperation from the division's earlier days in Russia. An officer recalled with some consternation that in 1941 it was "something new for us"\*, a procedure forced upon them by the sheer size of the landscape they had to cover. By 1944 it had become a standard practice, and one of many harsh lessons handed down through successive generations of replacements.

Never sure where the fast moving enemy spearheads were, the reduced squadrons deployed to cover the approaches of villages and towns while other elements combed the flanks. Once secure, a built up area would be held until the division had safely passed through, the squadrons withdrawing only on command or under intense enemy pressure. If a town were occupied, but an imperative location on the division's axis of movement, it would have to be forcefully taken. The veterans knew a few tricks to save lives. A favourite ruse was to suddenly pull back, making any enemy present think they had been spotted and, if inexperienced, reveal their presence by firing. A second was to open fire on likely positions, again in the hope of provoking a reaction, while a third drastic option that perhaps only a Hussar would consider was to rattle through the town in close order, a tactic that must have had all the potential pitfalls of the charge of the light brigade.

Fending off probing attacks before being pulled back into what was described as a "ghost town"\*, the division took up a defensive posture just in time to beat down initial probing assaults. Ceded in the 1919 Versailles treaty, the enclave of Memel was handed back to Germany in 1939 when Adolf Hitler appeared off the coast with an invasion fleet. Ironically, the same heavy cruiser that he had sailed on had now returned. Renamed 'Luetzow' (because Hitler could not bear the thought of a battleship with the title 'Deutschland' being sunk), she sat out at sea along with 'Admiral Scheer', 'Hipper' and 'Prinz Eugen', firing powerful and accurate salvoes at enemy troop concentrations many kilometres in land.

To add further punch to the town's defence, the division liaised with the coastal defence guns (as the only ice-free port in the Baltic, Memel had become a vast, well-defended munitions warehouse), about-turning their 105mm barrels to support the defensive perimeter. The troops appreciated this kind of scenario, triumphant that they could now call for as many as 9,600 shells a day to rain down on their adversaries. The Red army, momentarily content that the port was cut off, turned their attentions elsewhere.

By the end of October the last remaining civilians had been evacuated. Assuming that they were ensconced for the winter, the division set about improving positions and establishing bunkers. Life took on a more regimented tempo. Food was delivered at mid-day; ammunition arrived at midnight, and GD's own newspaper, 'Die Feuerwehr' (the 'Fire brigade'), reappeared in the foxholes, a sure sign of stability. The autumn issue was mostly devoted to the defence of the 'Memel bridgehead', full of stirring accounts of valour, including the exploits of a sergeant who roared around on a motorbike picking off tanks with a 'Panzerfaust'.

Such élan did not go unnoticed by the high command. Aware that the Red army was now within a stone's throw of Berlin, and reluctant to let a unit of GD's calibre stagnate in siege warfare, the division was ordered to evacuate and re-deploy for what was to be its last refit. The first units to leave embarked in late November, sailing south into Königsberg and then by train into the Rastenburg area of East Prussia. When Memel finally fell, at the end of January 1945, GD had long since left.

The final months of the war saw GD's Hussars entering their own 'valley of death'. Twinned with the 'Brandenburg' division, GD was plundered to provide extra formations for the new 'Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland'. However, the two divisions were never to fight shoulder to shoulder. In mid January, a lunge by the Red army to clear their way for the assault on Berlin split them apart. Fortunately for the Hussars, they were left to continue as GD's eyes and ears and, not surprisingly, seen "constantly in action"\* throughout the final weeks of the war. Marched south into northern Poland to hit the enemy's flanks, only to pull back to the north when threatened with encirclement itself, the division was fragmented as the Red army picked up speed driving for the coast. Unable to organize a cohesive defence, by the end of March the remaining units had been bulldozed back to the Balga Peninsula



where, under intense pressure, they were forced to cross the 'Frisches Haff' lagoon to temporary safety in Pillau.

From there, the last few thousand shattered survivors were deployed into the Samland area. Without vehicles or heavy weapons, the division had lost well over 14,000 men in the past couple of months, and the remaining ranks were filled with troops from other units tagging along because they simply had no one else to follow. Ironically, the few remaining Hussars, now without their 'beloved' armoured mounts and reduced to foot soldiers, were forced to live almost exclusively on a diet of horsemeat.

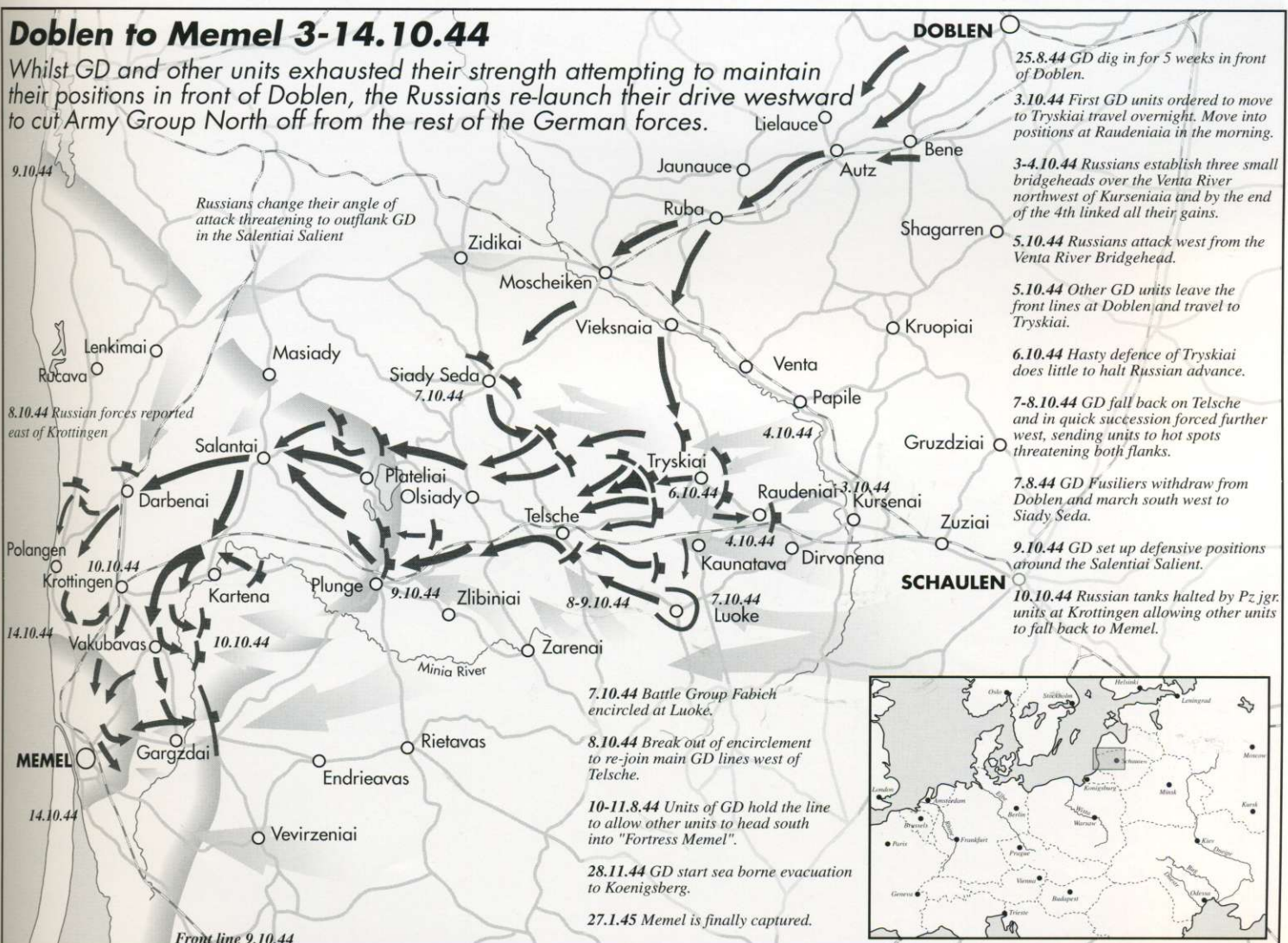
In the middle of April 1945, the Red army stepped forward to administer the coup de grace. Sweeping down through the Samland Peninsular, a powerful assault forced GD into a last, savage fighting withdrawal that, for the Hussars, ended back in Pillau.

Under the command of their last officer, Rittmeister Duevel, the remaining 30 men of the 'Panzer Aufklaerungs Abteilung GD' took up position in the port's citadel, and in doing so, disappeared from the chronicles of the Grossdeutschland division.

\*History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H Spaeter. J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.

### Doblen to Memel 3-14.10.44

Whilst GD and other units exhausted their strength attempting to maintain their positions in front of Doblen, the Russians re-launch their drive westward to cut Army Group North off from the rest of the German forces.















FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Stowage and Mud: see page 267.
- MG 34: see page 228.
- Rucksack contents: see page 222.
- Officers map case: see pages 174 & 258.
- Ammunition box and contents: see page 128.
- Full technical plans: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Gloves: see pages 172, 176 & 179.
- Binoculars: see page 174.
- Full interior details: see Vol 2 - 250 Technical.

*A report of enemy tanks moving fast on the west flank sees the reconnaissance unit deployed to investigate. Without heavy weapons it is a dangerous mission.*













*Caution is required as built up areas are full of potential hazards. Every window holds a potential sniper; every alley could be covered by an enemy machine gun. If the calculations are right, the Red army tanks are not too far away.*



**FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:**

- Wooden ammo box: see page 137.
- MP40: see page 242.
- Walther P38 pistol and holster: see page 241.
- Officers uniform: see page 172.
- Squad leader's uniform: see page 176.













FOR DETAILED COLOUR REFERENCE OF:

- Uniform details: see page 163.
- MG 34: see page 228.
- Soldiers issued equipment: see page 201.
- Ammunition box and contents: see page 240.
- Full technical plans: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- 98K rifle: see page 234.
- Officers peaked cap: see page 173.
- Full interior details: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.

The rumours are true, at least a battalion of T34s and one company of the new 'Stalin' tanks are observed along with mounted infantry. Unable to cope with such a powerful battle group, the reconnaissance troop is ordered to withdraw to a safe distance and shadow this dangerous threat. The division will send reinforcements to this sector as soon as they become available.

















With the reconnaissance battalion more or less turning over its complement every twelve months, no amount of recruits could compensate for the experience lost as the 'old ones' were whittled away. Rudolf Waetjen had left the battalion in November 1943, handing over to a Major Von Schkopp, who was in turn followed by Rittmeister Schroedter.

Squadron commanders had also come and gone, killed, wounded or transferred, including Helmuth Spaeter, who went on to become GD's post war chronicler. Tired, bitter and perhaps sick of it all, the handful of Schuetzen that had survived from the heady days of 1942 had one more test to endure, the final eviction of GD, after four years, from the eastern front.





GD's final actions of WW II.

Caught up in the Red army drive to clear their northern flank GD are continually threatened with outflanking maneuvers on both sides and remorselessly pushed back into the sea.



Seven



GENERAL REFERENCE





The following photographs are offered to complement the black and white chapters, and although some of the 'atmosphere' is lost, they give some idea of how colourful the veteran's world would

have been. The subtle differences between the 'ordnance tan' used on 'jerry cans', vehicles and equipment is indicative of many factories trying to conform to a standard colour code, while the 'Feldgrau' uniform in natural light and in a 'proper' setting is seen to good effect.

Most obvious at the time was just how quiet the 250 is, considering the size. Ideal for reconnaissance work, it literally 'purred' past several times throughout various photo shoots, no louder than a large modern 'off-roader', rumbling along on rubber blocks with only the occasional clatter from the tracks when a corner was turned. However, one wonders what it would have sounded like when a whole squadron started up at 5:00 in the morning.



























FOR FURTHER DETAILED REFERENCE OF:

- Headphones: see page 185.
- Soldiers issued equipment: see page 201.
- GD Cuff title: see page 191.
- Ankle webbing: see page 187.
- Vehicle tools: see Vol. 2 - 250 Technical.
- Uniforms: see page 163.





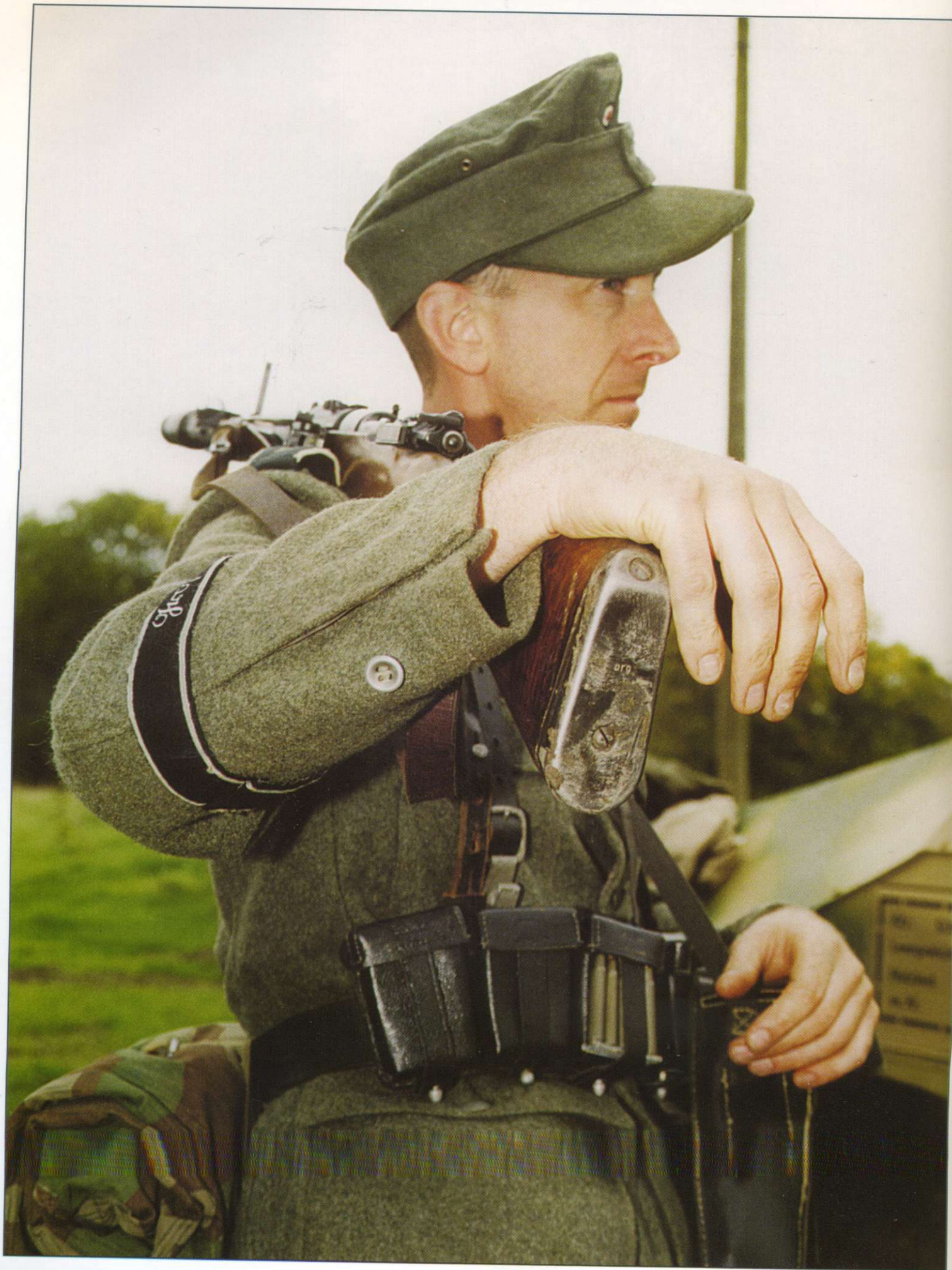
















Two would be veterans (left, above and top right), and two youngsters. In real life their respective ages of 17 and 19 are very representative of the average age of replacements arriving in GD as the war progressed. As inexperienced recruits, their life expectancy was incredibly short, counted in days and weeks rather than months and years.

Note in the picture on the left how the soldier is carrying 'stripper' clips on his K98 ammunition pouches. Seen in many wartime pictures of German troops, this particular practice enables a rifleman to carry up to 30 extra rounds. A manufacturers code can clearly be seen in the rifle's butt-plate.



#### FOR FURTHER DETAILED REFERENCE OF:

- 98K grenade launcher: see page 237.
- 98K ammo pouches: see page 212.
- Shoulder harness:



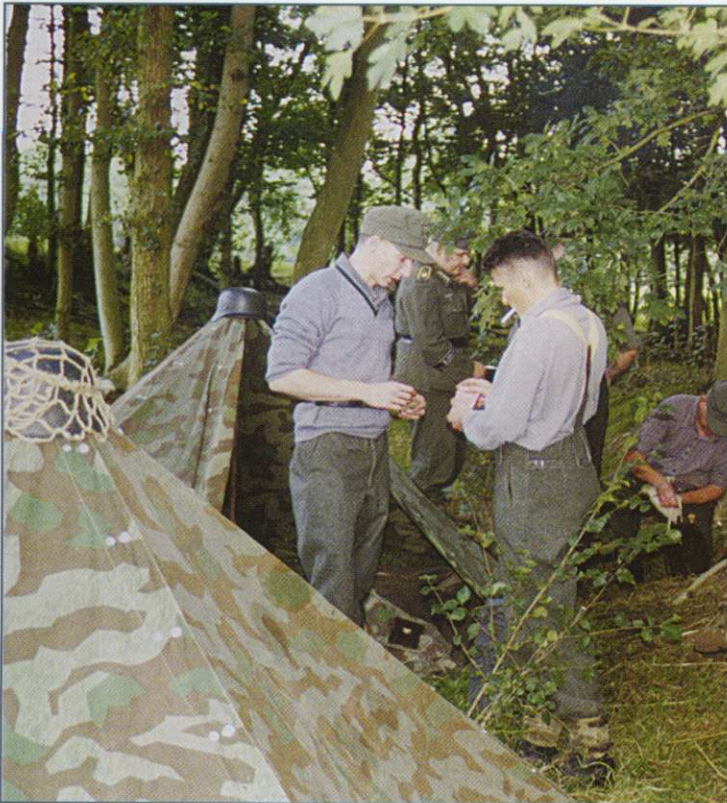
## SETTING UP CAMP

At this photo shoot a suitable spot was located so as to 'live history' for the weekend. The Zeltbahn were joined to form 'four man' tents (actually meant to sleep three, the fourth was theoretically on watch duty), a process involving at least two men, one to hold the central pole(s), one to fit the pegs. There should be no slack, and if secured correctly the bottom edges of the tent should fall vertical to the ground, allowing water to run off. (In more permanent locations a small trench would be dug around the tent to act as a gully).

Wood was collected and the stove fired up. Although adequate for heating purposes (it consumed wood at a voracious rate!), the 'Oranier' was not designed to cook on. We fretted over starting a fire, would this have been allowed? On the evidence, GD were 60 odd miles behind the front at this time, and with their equivalent of a drive-in-movie possibly going on in an adjacent field, we supposed that five crewmen gathered around a small fire was not a major breach of security.

### FOR FURTHER DETAILED REFERENCE OF:

- *Cooking stove: see page 255.*
- *PP sh machine pistol: see page 192.*
- *Zeltbahn: see pages 192 & 212.*
- *Coffee grinder: see page 256.*

















## RE-ARMING

Preparing the ammo belts was a time consuming, laborious task. Original photos exist of APC radio operators filling these belts between decoding messages, and it appears that it would have been 'all hands to the decks' during breaks in intense combat. The official quota of ammunition would have been 'topped up' at every opportunity, and every trick in the book was used to fit in those couple of extra crates and tins.

The Kuebelwagen used throughout this particular shoot had just been fully restored to a factory fresh condition, and because the owner quite rightly wanted it to stay that way, it had to be displayed as such. It quickly became apparent that it would not take much to chip a wing or dent a door, and the crew were especially conscious of carefully placing hobnailed boots on the wooden foot-well frames. It can be imagined that a 'Kuebel' in real service would receive little such sympathetic treatment and would soon display many marks of wear and tear.

### FOR FURTHER DETAILED REFERENCE OF:

- *Ammunition and cartridges: see pages 238 - 240.*
- *Grenade Box: see page 246.*
- *Hand grenade: see pages 246 & 247.*
- *Ammunition boxes: see page 240.*









## RUSSIAN POW'S

Once interrogated, Russian POW's were faced with a stark choice, a prison camp, or 'volunteering' to serve in a non-combative way within the ranks of the division. Not surprisingly, many hundreds chose the latter, not least because it could give them the opportunity to defect if things got too bad. The subsequent treatment of these 'helpers' varied on a considerable scale.

Put to work clearing roads, digging positions or carrying supplies, they voted with their feet when they learned that the division was going to use them to clear minefields. In October 1943 the supply echelon of GD's tank regiment had over 600 Russian 'mechanics' in the workshops, and at one stage so many were serving within the division that it considered issuing leaflets and newspapers in the Russian language. (Thanks to Ray and Paul of the 2nd Guards division [UK]).

















Eight



FIGURE REFERENCE















So how roomy is it in a 250? Various answers would be given if asked, "cosy" or "bloody cramped" just two of the politer. All five were allowed one rucksack each for belongings, and were allocated a space to stash combat kit. Every nook and cranny was filled to accommodate the most basic equipment, and it was soon apparent that the rucksacks would have to go on the outside. This would pose a problem in combat. Crews would have been reluctant to fight like this, not least because hot metal fragments would cause the bags (and the treasured contents) to catch fire (a consequence rediscovered by armoured crews in the 2003 Iraq conflict).

Items like helmets needed to be immediately accessible, and were stowed appropriately. Once the equipment was in, the crew settled down. It has been said that a soldier's life was 90% boredom and 10% action (although whoever said it had obviously not seen GD's 5 year combat record), and the opportunity was taken to break out the cards and photographs. Scenes such as this would have been repeated all over the division in quiet periods.











FOR FURTHER REFERENCE OF:

- *Helmet camo net: see page 177.*
- *Rucksacks: see page 222.*
- *Seat bin stowage: see pages 155 & 280.*
- *General interior details: see pages 269 - 271.*
- *Vehicle plans: see 250 Vol. 2 - Technical.*
- *Archive pictures: see 250 Vol. 3*
- *Fire extinguisher details: see page 270.*
- *Egg grenades: see pages 178 & 281.*
- *Squad leaders uniform: see page 188.*
- *Greatcoat: see pages 168 & 196.*





The driving position is surprisingly comfortable. The steering wheel is set at this odd angle so as to be efficiently accommodated, and is easy to handle. A turn in either direction will cause the appropriate track to brake and guide the vehicle. With the front and side visors open there is a decent view, but vision to the right is virtually zero, and this is where an extra pair of eyes would come in handy for guidance. However, overall the view is better than imagined, and the clarity of the original armoured glass is near perfect. With the front visor lowered it is necessary to lean as far forward as possible to see through the slit.

Above the driver's head, on the leading edge of the roof, are two grab handles that allow him to slide in over the back of his chair. A leather cushion located under the roof protects the top of his head, but he is liable to have his eye poked out by the handle that opens the front visor. Note how it juts out. Over rough terrain, this must have been problematic; certainly experience of driving the 250 at military vehicle shows today proves it can be something of a liability. The driver is surrounded by noise and vibration and it is almost impossible to hear anything from a crewmember standing behind him, and even the radio operator needs to shout to be heard.



## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE OF:

- Headphone set: see page 185.
- Dash details: see page 278.
- Fusprech f radio set: see page 278.
- Seats: see 250 Vol. 2 - Technical.
- Archive pictures: see 250 Vol. 3.
- Original manuals: see 250 Vol. 2 - Technical.

Perhaps the radio operators were chosen for the size of their feet, as there seems to be room for only one foot at a time in the space provided. To add further discomfort, his chair is narrower than the drivers because the gearbox is offset in the chassis. Surrounded by the cacophony of a moving vehicle, he has to be ever alert for further orders and directions from the unit commander.













































Developed and originally produced exclusively by the Carl Walther firm, the 27mm Leuchtpistole was adopted by the German army in 1928 and remained in service until 1945. At first constructed from steel, a request for a lighter version resulted in an aluminium-framed model appearing in the mid 1930s, superseded in turn with a zinc-framed version in 1944. This smooth bored, single action, breach loaded pistol could launch a variety of single and multiple star shells as well as smoke recognition signals, vital for both battlefield and ground to air co-ordination.

A 1942 training manual gives the following definitions for the use of coloured flares:

### White

"Here is the foremost position!", or "Here we are!" or "We are halting in this position!" and "All is in order!".

### White (shot in a specific direction)

"Enemy position there!"

### Red

"Enemy attacking, (immediate) fire support required."

### Green

"Firing too short!" or "Increase range!" or "We want to advance!".





## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE OF:

- Munitions boxes: see page 233.
- Cupboard details: see 250 Vol. 2 - Technical.
- Seatbox details: see 250 Vol. 2 - Technical.
- Interior stowage: see pages 280 & 281.

Once out of combat, the most important preoccupation of the crew was to re-arm as soon as possible. The 250 could carry double the official issue of 7.9mm rounds, and provision also had to be made for the various pistols and submachine guns that used 9mm. Storing it all could take up a lot of space. The seat box is designed to accommodate the 300-round ammunition tins; others would end up in or on the rear locker. (One veteran known to the author recalls lining the floor of his armoured vehicle with extra ordnance and placing blankets over it for protection).

















## FOR FURTHER REFERENCE OF:

- Verbandkasten details: see 250 Vol. 2 - Technical.
- Boots: see page 264.
- Interior stowage details: see page 271.

Whatever spare time there was left between re-arming, maintenance, eating and washing was spent sleeping. In combat conditions, sleep was taken anywhere possible. As can be seen, a crew of five had to get on well (or be absolutely exhausted!) to catch 'forty winks' in the back of a SPW. An original photo of GD troops asleep in the back of an Sdkfz 251 inspired the following pictures.













Nine



UNIFORMS



**MG SCHUETZEN****AUTUMN 1943**

On the 28th September, having seen almost daily action since the start of the 'Kursk offensive' (5th July 1943), the exhausted men of the 2nd Schwadron were pulled from GD's defensive positions around Kremenchug and sent to the west bank of the Dnjepr River. All hoped that the promises of a solid front line to hold the Red army through the coming winter months were true, but advance elements of some 68 rifle and tank divisions were already 'bouncing' the Dnjepr further to the south, rapidly establishing bridgeheads and filling them with men and equipment. True to form, GD was immediately redirected with orders to seal off and eliminate this new threat.

Although a GD casualty list for the period April to September 1943 suggests that overall losses for the Hussars were comparatively light (and that includes the slogging match at Kursk), the first two weeks of October would see them effectively wiped out trying to contain the enemy bridgeheads. By the 9th, the 2nd squadron had suffered some unfortunate losses amongst its remaining 250's. Accompanying a last handful of 'Tigers' in a localised counter attack, the APC's became snarled in a sunflower field. Defying all logic, the Tigers stuck to the original plan and, unsupported, were promptly cut off and eliminated (this action saw GD subsequently reporting zero operational tanks).

The entangled squadron soon found itself surrounded by Grenade-lobbing enemy troops, stalking the SchuetzenPanzerWagen through the head high crops. While most of the precious vehicles were recovered in time, some had to be immobilised or destroyed, the survivors returning on foot to the mission's jump off positions. Subsequently pinned down with less than 30 men and little hope of relief, a head count taken at noon six days later revealed a Schwadron of 1 officer, 2 NCOs and 6 other ranks.

With his SPW (armoured personnel carrier) out of action, a survivor of the abortive counter attack waits for new orders.

He has tried to salvage what he can to carry on the fight. Prominent is his Zeltbahn, buttoned up to form a poncho and hastily thrown over his equipment. Obviously of importance to him is the blanket, not only a wise choice with the weather turning, but also for placing to the left of the MG when in action on the ground. The ammunition could then be laid on it ready to feed, free from dirt and entanglement.







Placed into 50-round loading belts that could be joined together, brass rounds were generally reserved for close quarter fighting, where reliability was of the essence. Some veteran's recall having nothing but problems with the 7.9mm lacquered steel cases. Where possible these rounds were used for long distance firing only, thus allowing the MG crew time to deal with any jams. As a rule, the non-disintegrating links were to be retained after use, checked for damage and reloaded.





The new M43 Einheitsfeldmuetze, the 1943 model 'general service field cap', intended to replace all previous patterns and only now starting to appear at the front in numbers. In the chaos he has left behind his entrenching tool and gas mask. He wears laced ankle boots (Schnuertiefel) and canvas gaiters (Gamaschen), an unpopular combination increasingly worn in lieu of the 'jackboot'.







Chosen for his shooting abilities, the Richtschuetze (first gunner) was responsible for the upkeep and use of the weapon. He was issued with a pouch that contained various maintenance tools and accessories (note the asbestos mit for changing hot barrels), plus a P08 'Luger' for self-defence. As a rule the gunner should have a 'number 2', responsible for bearing extra ammunition and spare barrels, but in cases such as this it was not unknown for MG men to fight on alone.



**GEFREITER****WINTER 1943**

By the end of October the Red army had broke out of their bridgeheads on the west bank of the Dnjepr and were advancing through a wet and cold November into the first snow falls of December. The depleted Hussars, battling alongside the remnants of GD east of Krivoi Rog, were forced into a step-by-step withdrawal. Effectively fighting an infantryman's war, officers and NCOs were being wounded or killed faster than they could be replaced, and the command of sections and platoons was accepted without hesitation by junior ranks.

It was said that in winter time one only had to locate the nearest field kitchen to round up 'lost' men, and this *Gefreiter* (ordinary private, first class) has found himself temporarily leading a small 'alert' unit; ready at a moments notice to counterattack an enemy breakthrough. Formed from shattered squadrons or supply trains, such groups (often only half a dozen men) were the last ditch tactical reserve of any squadron commander, and where possible would carry a high complement of automatic weapons.

Acting as a squad leader, this *Gefreiter* would normally have to survive 4 months before he would be promoted to the correct rank for this task (*Unteroffizier*/ Corporal), although faster promotion could come through distinguished battlefield conduct. Dressed to endure the bitter weather, he is wearing a fur cap, gloves and greatcoat over his M43 uniform. Originally intended for cold-weather parading, greatcoats (*Ueberzieher* or *Uebermantel*) came in many variations. The version shown here, with 12cm wide collars, complies with an order of 1942 stipulating that the distinctive back pleat (previously sewn up) was to be unstitched, while new coats were to be made with an open pleat. Armed with a PPSH-41 sub machine gun he has retained his bayonet (*Seitengewehr*), probably to help him reload the weapons drum magazines, a fiddly job at the best of times. He also carries a Tokarev pistol along with the M31 'bread bag', normally for containing food or personal items, but in this case just as likely to be stuffed with captured ammunition.







The saga of the German soldier during the 1941-42 winter is well known, suffice to say that the civilian clothing donated through the 'winter relief fund' was too little, too late, and for the most totally unsuitable for military application. During the winter of 1942-3 troops serving in the east began to receive fur caps (Pelzmuetzen) as part of a drive to implement the lessons learned from the previous year.

Very early patterns were made from remaining stocks of crash liners from the discontinued tank beret, but no official version seems to have been implemented, resulting in a wide variety of types being seen. Manufactured from 'field grey' wool together with sheepskin, rabbit or fake fur, insignia was a matter of choice. This example has a 'national emblem' (Hoheitszeichen) from a M36 tunic attached to it.





In 1930, trials were held to determine a successor to the Red Army's 1895 Nagant revolver; a pistol said to have had some difficulty in penetrating the winter coats of German soldiers in the First World War. True or not, the revolver had seen its day, and Fedor V. Tokarev of the Tula arsenal had his design for a single action, recoil operated pistol chambering the standard 7.62 X 25mm cartridge accepted in the same year. Chosen for its reliability and accuracy, the Tula-Tokarev 1930 was noted for its simple design and fabrication, with flat springs and split pins replacing otherwise expensive, machined parts. In 1933, further modifications were made to ease production, including the simplification of stampings and reduction of milling around the barrel. These revised models became the TT-33.







Used to equip communist 'advisors' during the Spanish Civil War, the TT-33 was to later become a common sight to German troops on the eastern front, who retained them primarily for their novelty factor. Although compatible with the 7.63mm Mauser round and reissued on a limited basis as a 9mm conversion, the pistol was regarded with some suspicion as a combat weapon. It had no safety device, the 8 round magazine, could easily be released by mistake and the hammer and sear assembly could not be field stripped, having to be replaced as a whole if defective. Despite this, enough were being captured to warrant an official German designation, 7.62mm Pistole 615 (r). The Model shown here was manufactured in 1943 and is complete with its original holster. Constructed from leather, the holster has compartments for a spare magazine and barrel-cleaning rod.



**LEUTNANT.****WINTER 1943-44**

Having finally dug their heels in northeast of Krivoi-Rog in time for Christmas, GD's troops had scant time to reflect on the previous 5 months of fighting. Rumours of a move to rest areas were quashed when orders were received on the 3rd January to disengage and march northwest for Zhitomir, where they were to join other armoured divisions for an attack. The first to leave was the reconnaissance battalion, sliding over ice-covered roads in freezing temperatures. Within hours the original order was countermanded. The enemy had just broken through at Kirovograd; GD had to go there instead.

Faced with a change of instructions, this Lieutenant (second lieutenant) attends an order group. The situation has suddenly developed from a road march to an assembly area into a reconnaissance towards unknown enemy forces, a problem that he would have covered in his training. To cope with the expansion from a motorised infantry regiment into an armoured infantry division, GD had set up its own officer candidate school at Cottbus in 1942. As well as accepting younger applicants (statistically a graduate from the middle classes), the division recognised that it had a lot of experienced men and NCOs already serving in the ranks, and offered them the opportunity to become an officer through an 'in-house' training scheme. On recommendation from his commander, a potential officer (*OffizierAnwaerter*) would be sent to Cottbus for a 4-6 month period where he would be taught the skills of command up to company (squadron) level. Commission as a Lieutenant would come in 2 forms. As an all-volunteer division, some 75% of GD's officers signed on as a *career soldier and, mainly aged between 20-30, would have had a good chance of promotion*. The others (generally those over 30 or technical specialists necessary for an armoured unit), were classed as *Leutnant der Reserve* or '*Kriegsoffiziere*', would probably not exceed the rank of *Oberleutnant* (First lieutenant), and could expect to be 'demobbed' as a reservist at the successful conclusion of the war.

Following the harsh winter conditions of 1941/2, a padded suit (*Wintertarnanzug*) was called for to protect front line troops against the cold. Developed by textile specialists working with first hand knowledge gleaned from the troops, the suit underwent testing in refrigerators and wind tunnels to conform to the requirements of a warm, hard wearing and inconspicuous combination intended to fit over combat equipment (as the 'smock', but rarely worn so in the







field). It was not until the winter of 1943/4 that the reversible suit with the M31 'splinter' pattern was seen in any numbers. Unlike the earlier models, which were tailored with the standard Zeltbahn material, the suit worn here is of the latter (and more common) kind, with the camouflaged outer shell 100% spun rayon. Regulations dictated that the white side was worn only when necessary, as it was quickly soiled (and difficult to clean and dry) under combat conditions. The double-breasted Jacket is secured with numerous buttons, strings and cloth cords; the trousers are high cut, with integral braces and drawstring adjustments to both waist and ankles. Special rank insignia for the arm of the jacket were designed, but seldom worn. As this officer shows, there are other ways of displaying his position within the Squadron. He is armed with a MP40 and has his trousers tucked into a pair of enlisted men's marching boots.



*Schirmmuetze (peaked cap). This was a popular choice of headwear amongst frontline officers. Based on the 1934 alter Art ('older pattern'), this version has the characteristic raised 'saddle' form found in models made after 1935 and was probably a private purchase. Officers were granted a clothing allowance and were able to acquire items from a wide range of military outfitters and tailors. With woven insignia, a leather peak and no interior strengthening, this cap allows the use of headphones and is easily stored away.*





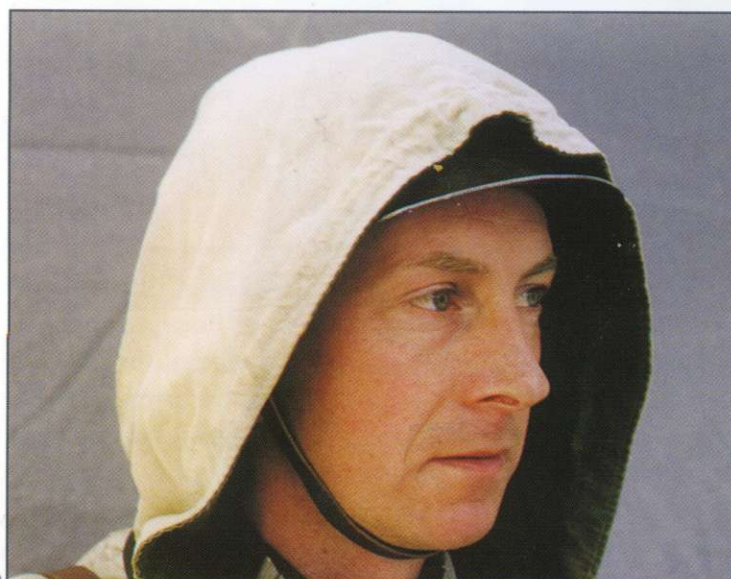
A 1935 Meldekartentasche (despatch/map case). Constructed from black, pebbled leather, there were many variations of this style, mainly dependant on manufacturer. With external pockets for writing implements, the interior was designed to expand to accommodate maps and reference manuals.



Standard binoculars (Doppelfernrohr) with 6 x 30 magnification. Issued with a black Bakelite case that rarely stood up to combat conditions. Note the buttoning tab (Anknopflasche) for securing the glasses.







TOP: The standard issue early pattern officer's belt in black leather, later reduced in width from 5 to 4.5 cms. The belt is secured with a metal double claw fastener. Attached to the belt the officer carries a Walther P38 pistol in a black pressed leather case.

MIDDLE: The hood is cut over-large so that it could be raised and worn over a steel helmet.

BOTTOM: His gloves are of fine grey kid leather, privately purchased and worn by officers and senior NCO's in the field.



## TRUPPFUEHRER

## SPRING 1944

By the end of April 1944, GD had fought its way out of the Ukraine into Romania. Having blunted the enemy's spearheads, the division made a stand at Targul Frumos; the infantry dug in just to the north of the town, the Hussars, pioneers and tank regiment kept back as a reserve. Orders were passed down from the division's commander; possible march routes and potential battle zones were to be immediately reconnoitred down to company level.

The *Truppfuehrer* (Troop leader) was like a 'supervisor', to support *Gruppe* (section) and *Zug* (Platoon) commanders by leading small teams (such as MGs) or reduced platoons in combat. As such, he would commonly be used for terrain reconnaissance (*Gelaendeerkundung*), a vital part of determining road conditions and knowing the lie of the land, particularly important when considering the use of heavy armoured vehicles. Potential strong points and attack lanes were identified; pre-plotted fire zones would be arranged with heavy support weapons, and ambush positions could be properly prepared, negating any future costly delays.

Lightly equipped to carry out a tactical assessment patrol, this troop leader shows no visible markings of rank, but the MP40 slung over the shoulder, P38 pistol and field glasses are the 'classic' equipment of a junior NCO. The MP38/40 spare magazine pouches were generally issued as a pair, but ordered not to 'start a fight', he carries just one, enough to get him out of trouble should he bump into his Russian counterparts. Like wise, a couple of 'egg' grenades are carried for a little extra protection. Wearing M43 trousers (*Hosen*), ankle boots and gaiters (known as 'retreat-gaiters' to the men, as the combination was unpopular), the smock is printed with the 1943 '*Sumpfmuster*' (marsh) pattern, a successor to the 'splinter' pattern seen on the *Zeltbahn*. Despite early versions being manufactured with a distinct white interior, it appears that the smock was never designed to be reversible. The cloth used in this example is so thin the print has 'bled' through. This version came with a hood large enough to pull over the helmet, and has a drawstring waist.







6 x 30 'universal' binoculars (Einheitsdoppelfernrohr) with moulded rubber protective cup and leather flap for securing to a tunic button, in factory finish 'ordnance tan'.



Rear view of M42 helmet with M42 net (Stahlhelmtarnnetz). The net was designed to allow a veil to drop over the wearer's face, and is attached by the means of a drawstring and wire hooks mounted at the front and back of the helmet. When not in use, two hooks attached to the veil allowed it to be pulled back over the helmet. However, experience has shown that it easily snags and is often more of a hindrance than help.





The deep V-shaped slash and drawstring of the Tarnhemd (camouflage smock) is most noticeable. Scarves were not an issued item and so this is a personal possession.



Close up of 2 M1939 Eihandgranate ('egg' hand grenades). These are of the type manufactured from 1942 onwards, differing from the earlier type in that they have 'O' rings attached, enabling them to be hung from equipment or used as booby traps. The blue caps denote a 4-5 second fuse. To arm this weapon, the cap, attached to a short cord connected to the detonator, was unscrewed and pulled before throwing.







TOP: P38 'hard shell' holster. Note that the smock has a vertical slit on either side, as it was designed to be worn over the equipment. This was rarely done, and as shown, access was restricted to the upper tunic pockets.

MIDDLE: An M42 steel helmet, note the sharp edge. This is the result of a manufacturing process designed to speed up production. Previous types had a crimped rim.

BOTTOM: Worsted yarn knitted issue gloves. Note adjustment straps and buttons on the smock sleeves.



**OBERSCHUETZE. SUMMER 1944**

After months of continuous fighting withdrawals, GD was moved into reserve south of Jassy in June 1944. Still on a state of alert, rumours were once again circulating of an imminent move, perhaps for an extended rest and refit. The orders finally came through. GD was to move to the south, well away from the front line, while elements of the reconnaissance battalion were to be rotated to Germany for retraining on new equipment.

Like many of his comrades, this Oberschuetze (senior private/trooper) could well have had his first experience of the eastern front whilst serving his 6-month tour of duty with the ReichsArbeitsDienst (state labour service). Originally created to both physically and politically motivate the 18-20 year olds denied military service through the Versailles treaty, the RAD had gone on to back up the army's engineer and construction battalions as they advanced to the east in 1942, primarily clearing minefields and repairing roads and bridges. On discharge, the men would be available for military service, and those wishing to volunteer for GD would make their application. As the war ground on (and the age of voluntary military service was reduced from 17 to 16), many of the young men who were to fill the ranks of the division in the 1944 summer refit had come straight from school or their first job and, as such, would have had limited service in the RAD. However, all would have been well grounded in military parlance and procedures as a result of being brought up through the Hitlerjugend organisation.

Armed with a MP40 and wearing a non-standard mixture of uniform, this Oberschuetze waits for news of the imminent move. The tunic is the other ranks lightweight reed green twill type introduced from 1943. (This is a later version of the original with plain straight-edged patch pockets which; superseded the pleats or scallops of the previous design). The tunic is adorned with the standard mid-war breast eagle of grey over a green backing, although he has retained his high quality shoulder boards (M36 Schulterklappen). This is worn over a light jersey shirt made of grey cotton.

The trousers are from the 2-piece working uniform for armoured vehicle crews, allowed within the reconnaissance battalion as per an order of January 1944 (it was not impossible for variations of the black Panzer uniform to be worn within the 2nd squadron), which are tucked into his old, much repaired marching boots.





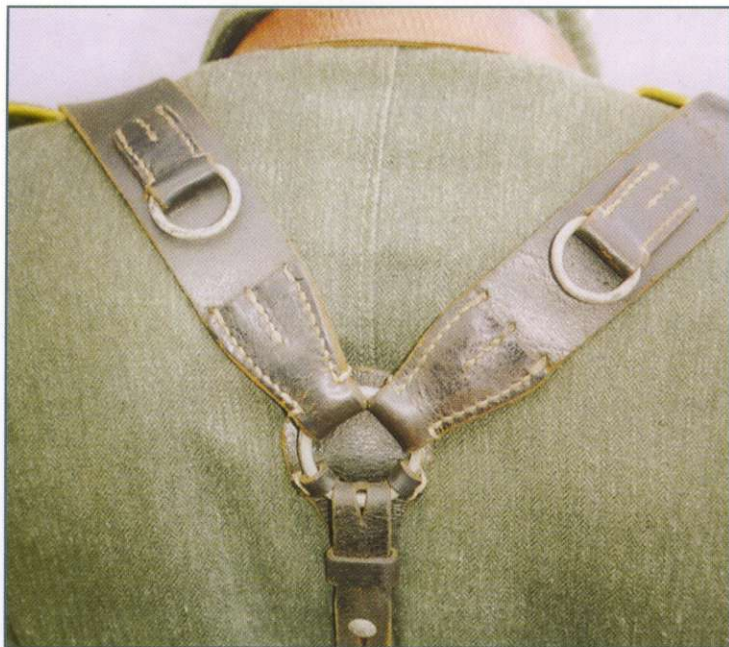


*Non - issue scarf acquired by individuals for protection against dust and sweat, often in a variety of colours and patterns. Note the open necked field grey shirt underneath.*



*The bar for the Winterschlacht im Osten campaign medal, awarded to those who saw service on the eastern front through the winter of 1941-2.*

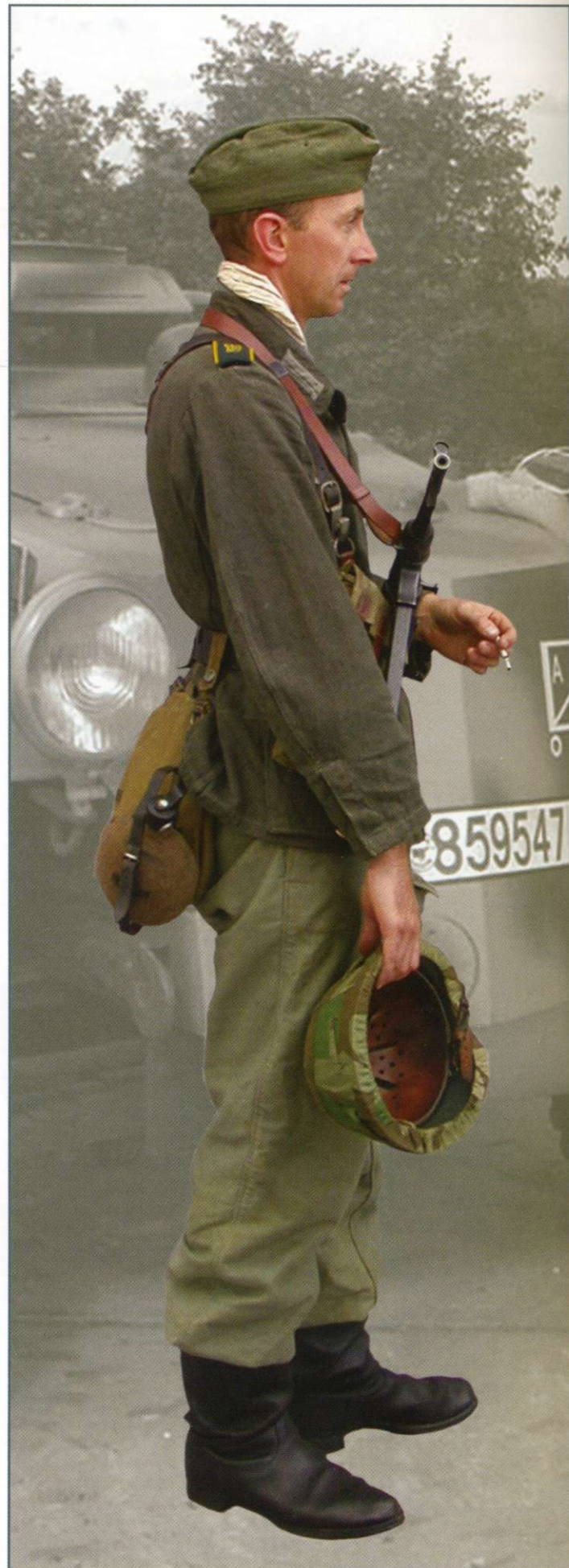




Rear view of the Koppeltraggestell, leather-supporting straps for the wearing of infantry equipment. The two 'D' rings are for attaching the 'A' frame, which allowed a user to carry more equipment or personal belongings. As a general rule, 'A' frames were not issued to armoured infantrymen.



The M42 steel helmet has a factory made 'splinter' pattern Tarnhelmueberzug (camouflage helmet cover) over it. Constructed from 5 panels, the cover has 7 loops for attaching foliage and reverses to white for winter use. The cover is secured inside the helmet with a drawstring cord.







The M34 Feldmuetze (Field cap), often called a Schiffchen (Little boat), was a popular form of headgear that was slowly being phased out by the 'universal' M43 field cap. The order strictly forbidding the top of the Schiffchen being stitched or pinned together was commonly ignored as each owner moulded his cap to achieve a better 'look', but he has complied with the 1942 order to remove the branch of service soutache.



Only light field equipment is being worn; a Walther P38 sidearm in its holster, a M31 Brotbeutel and M31 Feldflasche without its cup (Trinkbecher).



**FUNKER.****MID SUMMER 1944**

The *Nachrichtenpersonal* (signals operators) or *Funker* (Lit. 'Sparks'), were always among the first to learn of fresh news, whether the move south to Bacau for the rest and refit in June, or the subsequent transfer up to East Prussia in late July. Many of the rumours that carried around the division emanated from 'radio shacks' and message control centres, and while the recent gossip would be of sports events and concerts, along with the occasional gripe at the incessant training. The 'stop press' news that Hitler had survived an attempt on his life (the 'bomb plot' of July 20th) raced like wildfire through the ranks. Within days the rumours of another move surfaced again. The bets were placed. To Berlin, to reinforce the Wach Bataillon GD, which had played such an important part in crushing the revolt, or Poland, where the Red army was beating a way to the west? Only those at the top knew for sure, the ranks would find out on the trains taking them to Prussia.

Radio operators were highly trained and brought a much-needed skill into the infrastructure of the division. The radio net required to control GD in the heat of combat relied on a wide range of sender and receiver equipment along with a knowledge of codes, operating procedures and practices. The *Spaeh* (point) units of the division would generally broadcast in short bursts of Morse as they probed for information, though 'chatter' was permitted as long as it was brief and suitably encoded.

Airtime priority was reserved for commanders (most operators within a 250 of 2nd Squadron would be simply 'listening in'), so as to keep the net clear, but a call for enemy contact could be made by anyone at any time. Each station had a code name and its operator was issued with a booklet that contained frequency settings and emergency channels in case contact was lost (inevitably at the height of a battle), with strict instructions to prevent it falling in to the hands of the enemy. Cross training was encouraged in vehicle crews and, ideally, the operator within the 250/1 not only had sufficient knowledge to carry out repairs on the radio, vital on such a delicate piece of equipment, but was also expected to know how to drive and maintain the vehicle when needed.







*TOP: The Doppelfernhoerer.b (Double headphones model b) were specifically designed for use within armoured vehicles. They have large rubber pads to block out noise and a sprung metal, leather lined headband.*

*MIDDLE: The Kehlkopf-mikrofon (throat microphone set). A leather lined sprung metal band holding Bakelite microphone housings against the larynx, allowing hands free operation of the radio.*

*BOTTOM: The Bakelite control box with talk on/off switch, secured to the shirt by a metal spring clip. The wires were a constant impediment and when not in use were often pushed into the waistband.*





The M43 Rundbundhosen (belted trousers) were designed to replace all earlier army patterns, which could only accommodate braces. This new pattern allowed the wearing of a belt, making shirtsleeve dress more presentable, and were tapered and slit at the ankles so as to give a better fit for the gaiters.



As well as having 3 pockets, waist adjustment straps and internal brace attachments, the trousers have a small, built in pouch and securing loop for a fob watch. The 'pullover' shirt (Hemd) was introduced by an order in 1943. With 2 breast pockets, it was intended to be worn as an outer garment in warm climates with these types of trousers.







*Standard issue boots and ankle gaiters.*



The M34 field cap. Unlike the later M42 and M43 versions, it has no buttons to the front and if cold the sides were simply pulled down to provide protection to the ears, the scalloped front allowing the wearer a full field of vision. The cap retains an inverted chevron of 'Russia Braid' in the colour of his arm of service (supposed to have been removed as per an order of 1942). Note the Reichskokarde in the centre bearing the national colours and the Hoheitszeichen above. Both are hand-stitched, indicating that for whatever reason the original factory applied insignia has been replaced.



**WACHTMEISTER. LATE SUMMER 1944**

With the bulk of the reconnaissance battalion refitting in Germany, only a small battle group accompanied the division on its transfer to East Prussia. Having successfully recaptured the Lithuanian border town of Wilkowitzken, GD marched north to seize a bridgehead over the Venta River at Kursenai and then pushed on for Schaulen in an attack that rapidly ran out of steam. A further attack towards Doblen also ran into strong enemy resistance, and by the end of August the division began to consolidate and settle into static positions.

A Wachtmeister (equivalent to a Feldwebel or staff sergeant) could command the third platoon (Zug) of the Schwadron (the other 2 were each commanded by a Leutnant) and was just as liable to the high attrition rate suffered by his fellow officers. Expected to lead from the front, company and platoon commanders within GD were having to be replaced almost on a weekly basis, some killed, a few missing in action, but most incapacitated, sometimes for months, due to wounds. Lightly wounded men were normally returned to their units within hours, but more serious cases were passed back up the line, eventually to end up in a convalescent home in Germany. Many would return to the front before they had fully recovered, some through their own choice, others because their physician was under pressure to discharge as many patients as possible. With all leave officially cancelled, getting wounded was one of the few legitimate ways a German soldier had of getting away from the front and, like soldiers all over the world, many prayed for the Heimatschuss, the shot that would take you home.

*Somewhere between Schaulen and Doblen, this Wachtmeister prepares to organise the Gruppen into a skirmish screen, a role commonly carried out by the depleted battalion in Lithuania. He is wearing the M43 field cap and tunic along with the armoured working over-trousers.*







**TOP:** The NCO lace is of the late-war subdued pattern, and is also used on the collar. The GD monogram and 'pip' are cast in white metal. Despite conflicting regulations, GD's reconnaissance battalion formally adopted the cavalry yellow *Waffenfarbe* (branch of service colour) in 1943. However, by 1944, you might possibly see shoulder straps with pink, meadow green, copper brown or white piping being worn within the 2nd squadron.

**MIDDLE:** Heer (army) breast eagle, silk woven type.

**BOTTOM:** A braided rank lanyard of a *Kameradschaftsfuehrer*, retained from the *Hitlerjugend* uniform and utilised in place of the issue whistle cord (*Signalpfeifeschnur*). It has a single chamber, black Bakelite whistle (*Signalpfeife*) attached to it.





M43 'universal' field cap. Based on the mountain trooper's Bergmuetze, the M43 had a longer peak stiffened by a cardboard liner. Many peaks took on a distinctive curved appearance, either deliberately moulded by the owner in an attempt to personalise his appearance, or as a result of being folded in a pocket or the bread-bag.



A typical sunglass case of the period, made from pressed metal. The tortoise shell framed sunglasses are a private purchase of the type found in the late 1930's. Armoured crews were also issued dust goggles with tinted lenses for bright conditions.







Introduced by an order in October 1940, the black woollen cuff title with silver embroidered 'German' script was worn by all branches of the Grossdeutschland division throughout the course of the war. Inspired by the distinctive cuff titles of the SS, it was slated to replace the two existing patterns which, with their silver gothic lettering on a green background, were so detested that even the then regimental commander felt moved to denounce it, stating that he did not want GD to be mistaken for an army postal unit. It is widely believed that this negative observation led to the new pattern being instigated.

The order of 1940 stipulated that the new cuff title was to be worn on service coats, blouses and greatcoats, but the inevitable wartime shortages resulted in it being usually limited to one per man. A second variation, different only in that it had a Latin script, was introduced sometime later in the war. \*B.L.Davis states that this was not until November 1944, but confusingly this alternative version can clearly be seen in pictures taken in June 1944. However, judging from the photographic evidence, the use of the 'Latin' cuff title was scarce and it seems that the 1940 pattern remained the most prolific type. Unofficial variations of the 1940 pattern are occasionally seen, possibly field-made due to lack of availability, and examples also exist of high quality versions reserved for officers.

\* *Badges and Insignia of the Third Reich, 1933-45.*



**OBERGEFREITER.      AUTUMN 1944**

GD spent the whole of September holding the line. The efforts to link with Army group Kurland had been abandoned, and the division quickly settled into the routine of trench warfare. Constant patrolling, to determine enemy strengths and also to dominate 'no-mans land', were the orders of the day. All the evidence pointed to a major attack by the Red army within days. By October 8th GD had been pushed back to the Baltic Sea and bottled up in the port of Memel.

Despite the odds, a hardcore of veterans somehow survived the years of combat. Possibly wounded many times, these men would be surrounded by replacements from the training battalions eager to know about the enemy. A handful of these veterans were older men who had seen active service in the trenches of the First World War, or perhaps had served as one of the 100,000 strong interwar Reichsheer. Called up from the reserves at the outbreak of war, such men were generally placed within training units or civil guard (Landesschuetzen) battalions, but as the war ground on they were eventually combed out and sent to the front. (Indeed, the Great-Grandfather of one of the chaps who appear in this book was well into his forties when serving with GD's artillery regiment in 1944).

*Wearing a Zeltbahn for camouflage and equipped with a PPSH-41 submachine gun, this Obergefreiter (acting corporal with more than 6 years service) prepares to lead a Spaehtruppe (battle reconnaissance patrol). As such, he would be taking around 4 men to locate enemy positions and minefields, but would avoid getting into a fire-fight by pulling back on contact. Every patrol member would be liberally equipped with fast firing weapons and both concussion and smoke grenades to protect themselves. Individuals became well known within GD through their successful and aggressive patrolling methods. Some returned with prisoners, others never came back at all, while at least one reported he had killed a Russian General inspecting the front line (later confirmed).*

*He is wearing the standard M43 service tunic and trousers and carries on his belt a mess tin, bread bag and bayonet. The M42 Stahlhelm was originally factory painted in a slate grey and an aggregate mix to give a textured finish, as per an order of 1940. This one has been over sprayed with vehicle paint, a common practice at the front.*







A highly prized battlefield trophy, the 7.62mm Pistolet Pulemet (submachine gun) Shpagin 1941, complete with its 71 round drum magazine, offered many advantages to the German soldier when compared to the 5 round chamber of his Mauser rifle. Many thousands were captured (along with tons of ammunition) and inevitably utilised by the Germans, who simply re-christened the weapon the 7.62mm Machine Pistole 717 (r). However, an alternative designation, the Umgeaendert (modified) 9mm Machine Pistole 41 (r), exists for those converted to fire the standard Parabellum cartridge from MP38/40 magazines.

With the exception of the precisely made chrome-lined barrel, this weapon was deliberately designed to a loose tolerance and constructed from cold pressed steel plate and wood, allowing it to be produced in most machine shops. The only real drawback to an otherwise excellent machine pistol was the drum magazine that proved difficult to re-load. An experienced owner would have a second, fully loaded drum magazine complete with its own canvas pouch.





ABOVE: The Polish Radom pistol was given the German designation 9mm Pistole 35 (P). It was the brainchild of Piotr Wilniewicz, an employee of the Polish State arms factory. The plans of his own design for a new pistol were accepted over a Czechoslovakian alternative. He joined with Jan Skrzypinski, (the director of the State rifle factory in Warsaw), to produce a prototype, termed WiS wz. 1931. (Wilniewicz i (and) Skrzypinski model 1931). Renamed as the 'VIS', the pistol was adopted by the Polish military as the 'Vis model 1935', with production at the Radom factory from 1936 until the fall of Poland in September 1939. Returned to production by engineers and management from Steyr-Daimler-Puch in 1940, manufactured parts were sent to Steyr in Austria for assembly, proofing and final distribution.







It has been estimated that well over 250,000 were produced before the Radom Plant was evacuated in January 1945. It used the standard Parabellum cartridge and, unlike many of the foreign pistols (adopted for use by the Germans), was held in high regard for its reliability and accuracy. The model shown here has the manufacturing marks of Radom (WAa 77), and the proof mark of Steyr (WAa 623). Unlike the original Polish leather holster, which had provision for two spare 8 round magazines and a cleaning rod, the German design had one spare magazine and a toggle to assist in removing the weapon from the holster.



ABOVE: The ordnance tan Stielhandgranate 43 is a modification of the M24. With its solid wooden handle (Stiel), the fuse was now screwed directly into the top of the explosive head. They were designed for 'storm' tactics, to concuss the enemy without harming the assaulting parties quickly following up. A fragmentation sleeve was also available and could be wrapped around the head, to increase its splintering effect. The other is a Nebelhandgranate 39 (Smoke 'hand grenade' 1939). The (white) smoke was released through holes in the base of the head and would continue to burn for up to 2 minutes. Plainly marked with white lettering and stripes, the handle is notched for night recognition, and a label on top of the head warns against using it in confined areas.



**OBERGEFREITER. WINTER 1944-45**

By mid-October 1944, GD was firmly entrenched in the defensive perimeter of Memel, beating off enemy assaults with the assistance of the 'big guns' of the German navy. Suitably deterred, the Red army turned its attention elsewhere, leaving the besieged division to improve its positions for the winter. However, plans to join the Brandenburg division with GD to form an armoured corps soon had the first units being shipped out to Koenigsberg, with the remaining elements following through the weeks into December. By the middle of January 1945, GD had had little time to prepare before the Red army offensive to clear the Baltic coast struck towards Koenigsberg. By the end of March, the shell-shocked survivors, lacking vehicles and heavy weapons, were ferried into Pillau and deployed to defend the Samland peninsular. The last remnants of the *Panzer Aufklaerungs Abteilung GD* were evacuated from the Eastern front at the end of April 1945.

*On his way to positions in the Samland, there is little to distinguish this Hussar as a member of an elite formation. He has acquired a late war greatcoat from somewhere, complete with Infanterie shoulder boards, and has long since ditched his PPSH, probably through lack of ammunition. In turn he has been issued with a K98 rifle and a factory fresh Panzerfaust to combat enemy armour.*







*OPPOSITE: On his belt he is carrying only basic equipment, a bread bag, water bottle, rifle pouches, a couple of grenades and his camouflaged steel helmet.*

*TOP: First issued in 1943 this new style greatcoat was made of inferior quality materials and quickly developed a worn and shoddy appearance. The collar is now the same colour as the coat but is larger than its predecessor to provide greater weather protection to the head and neck.*

*BELOW: Kopfschuetzer. (Head protector) A grey knitted wool tube that was pulled over the head and neck. Unlike scarves, the head protector was an issue item and he wears the M43 field cap.*









The development to combine the concepts of recoilless cannon and rocket into a one shot, anti-armour projectile began in the summer of 1942. The Panzerfaust 30 was introduced in October 1943 and superseded by the Panzerfaust 60 ('Armoured fist' 60 metres) in the summer of 1944. This became the most widely used version with 1.3 million manufactured in December 1944 alone. It consisted of two parts the warhead and a light steel tube that contained the 134kg propellant charge in a wax cardboard container. The 3kg hollow charge warhead with a velocity of 45 metres per second was capable of penetrating up to 200mm of armour at a maximum range of 80 metres. The warhead was stabilized by spring steel fins wrapped around the wooden shaft which held the warhead in the tube before firing. The launch tube was fitted with an aiming and firing device with a range sight notched for distances of 30, 60 and 80 meters (60 being the optimum). The complete assembly weighed only 6.8kgs.

The Panzerfaust was a formidable weapon for its size and potentially just as dangerous to the user. Warnings printed on the tube caution bystanders to stay clear when fired, the user was advised to ensure that no obstacles impeded the blast, as he too was likely to get burnt. With a possible back blast of up to 3 metres, this mini explosion would almost certainly reveal the firers position to the enemy, requiring a hasty tactical withdrawal. Once fired, the tube was discarded and (in theory) eventually returned to the factory for a new warhead.



Ten



STANDARD ISSUE  
EQUIPMENT



## NEW RECRUITS

### INDOCTRINATION, INDUCTION & TRAINING

Theoretically, a volunteer destined for the 2nd *Schwadron* in early 1944 would initially have presented himself at the Hermann Loens barracks in the Cottbus area. This was the home for the 'armoured troops replacement and training battalion', which dealt with men intended for GD's tank regiment and reconnaissance battalion. Companies 1-3 trained the former, the 4th (referred to as 'squadron') the latter.

At some stage (possibly in August 1944 due to the foreseen formation of the Panzer Korps GD), this squadron went on to provide the cadre for a new four-company strong 'armoured reconnaissance replacement and training battalion'. The 4th squadron apparently retained its original numerical designation and 'Gemischte' (mixed) complement of training platoons for armoured car and APC crews, heavy MGs, mortars and motorcycle troops.

By 1944 basic training (*Grundausbildung*) had been reduced from 16 to around 8 weeks, and consisted of an intense rush of weapons and equipment familiarisation, combat training and lectures. (Foot and rifle drill had been reduced to a minimum, not least because all recruits would be more than familiar with the basics from past service in the *Hitlerjugend* or RAD).

The principles of reconnaissance were taught, both in and out of vehicles, along with camouflage and concealment techniques, many of which had been learned the hard way from the Red army. The squadron's replacement battalion was also responsible for the rehabilitation of wounded troops affiliated to it, and much of the knowledge imparted to the 'rookies' came from veterans waiting to be pronounced fit to return to action.

On completion of training, the rifleman would be incorporated into a *Marsch-kompanie* (a transfer company, usually part of a larger transfer battalion comprising replacements from all of GD's training establishments) and shipped to the front, there to either undergo a brief refresher course with the division's field replacement battalion, or, as in this case, go directly to the squadron. Here he would be posted to the platoon relevant to his training.

### ISSUED ITEMS

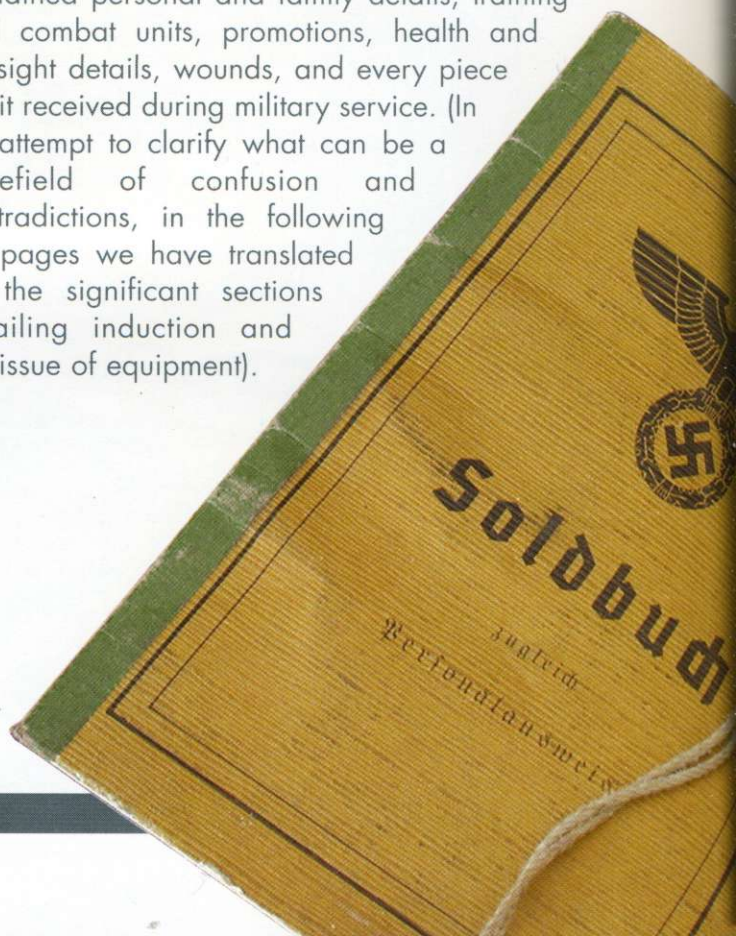
Upon reporting for induction at the home depot, (perhaps after a slight detour, as elements of the *Ausbildungs Schwadron* were also billeted in the nearby village of Kiekebusch due to space restrictions at the barracks), the recruit would be issued with his first military items.

#### **Dog Tag** - (*Erkennungsmarken*).

Hung around the neck on an 80cm long piece of string (a chain was authorised for 'armoured vehicle crews', but it is not known how liberally this term was interpreted), the *Erkennungsmarke* was commonly cut from zinc or light metals and was designed to be broken in two should the wearer be killed. The top half remained with the body, the bottom part was sent to the rear for official registration. (It is not clear what the hole in the lower half is for. One source suggests that it is so 'dead' halves could be wired together. Alternatively, possibly a form was attached as part of the recording process.) Hand-stamped on both halves were the wearer's unit designation, roster number and blood group. If a disc was later lost, a new one would be issued bearing the designation of the unit the soldier was then currently serving in. (Going by the number of original 'dog-tags' on the collectors market bearing combat unit markings, lost tags were quite common!)

#### **Pay Book** - (*Soldbuch*).

Kept in the upper left tunic pocket, the 'pay book' contained personal and family details, training and combat units, promotions, health and eyesight details, wounds, and every piece of kit received during military service. (In an attempt to clarify what can be a minefield of confusion and contradictions, in the following six pages we have translated all the significant sections detailing induction and the issue of equipment).









Page 4 records the recruit's former replacement unit (stamped on induction), transfer company, current combat unit and current replacement unit (both applied at the front). Page 5 notes the holder's next of kin. Page 6 and 7 record the initial clothing and equipment issue. This had been checked sometime during the transfer. Page 8 records any changes to issued articles. Pages 8a-8c record issued weapons and 'special' equipment.

[illegible]

Born on 11. 7. 1926 in FLensburg  
(Place, Country, District)

Religion ROMAN CATHOLIC Position, Occupation PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANT

**Personal Description**

Height 1.75 Build MEDIUM  
Face OVAL Hair BROWN  
Beard NONE Eyes BROWN  
Any special marks (ie. Spectacle Wearer) NONE

Shoe Length 26 Shoe Width NORMAL

Johann Braun  
(Fore & Surname, Own Signature of owner)

The correctness of the non circled responses on pages 1 and 2 and the own hand signature of the owner are certified

on the 13. APRIL 1944  
4/Pz Tr. E. u. A. B. I. G. D.  
Trawant Troop (Signal, Department)

W. B. [Signature]  
Oberleutnant u. Komp.-Chef  
(Own Signature, Rank and Surname, Position of Superior)

2







## A. Last Appropriate Defence Reserve Unit:

FLENSBURG

## B. Delegated to the front force from:¹)

	Reserve Unit	Company	No. of Unit Nominal Roll
a	4/Pz.E.U.A.Btl.G.D.		IV/88/44
b	ERS. MARSH KOMP. Pz-TR. AVE. BATL.		321/44
c			

	Field Unit Section²)	Company	No. of War Nominal Roll
a	2/Pz.AufKL.Abt.G.D.		189/44
b			
c			

	Now Relevant Unit Section²)	Base
	ERS. BRIG. 'GROßDEUTSCHLAND'	COTTBUS

(Report locally after return from field force or hospital for replacement of clothing and equipment)

¹) To be entered by the unit, from which the paybook holder is sent to the field force.

²) To be entered by the field unit, and on transfer from one unit to another to be altered then and the old entries crossed out, (but still legible)

Further space for entries on page 17.

4

## Addresses of the next of kin

JOHANN BRAUN

of

(For and Surnames)

## 1. Wife: Fore and Surnames

SINGLE

(for instance "single")

Town (District)

Street, No.

## 2. Parents: Father, Fore and Surnames

LEO BRAUN

Profession or Trade COMPANY DIRECTOR (AUTO PARTS)

Mother, Fore and Sur/Maiden Names GERTRUDE BRAUN

NEE: RAUH

Town (District) FLENSBURG

Street, No. KÖPENIKER STR. 22.

## 3. Relatives or Bride:³)

Fore and Surnames

Position or Trade

Town (District)

Street, No.

³) Only to be completed if neither 1 or 2 have been completed.

5

## Records of Clothing

Unit Section	Field Cap	Field Blouse	Overalls	Working Suit	Cloth - Boots or Field Trousers	Under Pants	Coat-Grass Coat	Protective Coat	Collar Band	Shirt	Sweater
1) 4/Pz.E.U.A.Btl.G.D.	1	1	1	1	2	1				2	1
2) ERS. M.K.P. 3. 'GD'	1	1	1	1	2	1				2	1
3)											
4)											
5)											
6)											
7)											
8)											

Steel Helmet	Back-pack	Clothing bag	Pack Bag	Grease Tin	Tent Gear	Belt & Buckle	Coat Belt	Snack Bag	Field Bottle	Sweat Knot	Arms Pouch	Sleeves & Straps	Mess Tin & Tools	Report Case	Signal Whistle	Sweat	Eating Utensils
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Foot Note: Items not preprinted here, are to be entered in free spaces. Available to "Cloth Trousers", etc. All changes

6

## and Equipment Items

Head Protector	Gloves	Over Gloves	Over Socks	Socks & Foot-Bags	Marsh & Riding Boots	Long-up Boots	Burner Shoes	Felt Shoes	Body Band
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Sun Proof Glasses	Handkerchief	Brush	Brush	FLASH-LIGHT	Blanket	Name Sign of Issuer & Recipient	Date
1	1	1	1	1	1	28.4.44	AL
1	1	1	1	1	1	14.6.44	AL

spaces may be corrected, i.e. "Rucksack" to "Backpack", "Mountain Trousers" to be certified by signature.

7



## A. Zuletzt zuständige Wehrersatzdienststelle:

Flensburg

## B. Zum Feldheer abgefordert von: 1)

	Erfahrttruppenteil	Kompanie	Nr. der Truppenstammrolle
a	4/Pz. E. u. A. B. G. D.		78/44
b	En. Marsch Komp. Pz. Tr. Ave. Bat.		371/44
c			

	Feldtruppenteil 2)	Kompanie	Nr. der Kriegsstammrolle
a	2/Pz. Aufkl. Abt. G. D.		149/44
b			
c			

	Jetzt zuständiger Erfahrttruppenteil 3)	Standort
a	En. Brip. 'Großdeutschland' Cottbus.	
b		
c		

(Meldung dortselbst nach Rückkehr vom Feldheer oder Lazarett, zuständig für Ersatz an Bekleidung und Ausrüstung)

1) Dem Erfahrttruppenteil einzutragen, von dem der Soldbuchinhaber zum Feldheer abgefordert wird.

2) Dem Feldtruppenteil einzutragen und bei Beförderung von einem zum anderen Feldtruppenteil darauf abzuzeichnen, daß die alten Angaben nur durchstrichen werden, also leserlich bleiben.

Weiterer Raum für Eintragungen auf Seite 17.

4

## Anschriften der nächsten lebenden Angehörigen

des Johann Braun  
(Vor- und Zuname)1. Ehefrau: Vor- und Mädchenname - Hedwig -  
(ggf. Zuname)Wohnort (Kreis) FlensburgStraße, Haus-Nr. 2. Eltern: des Vaters, Vor- und Zuname Leo BraunStand oder Gewerbe Betriebsleiter (Auto Ersatzteile)der Mutter, Vor- u. Mädchenname Gertrude Braun  
geborene: RaukWohnort (Kreis) FlensburgStraße, Haus-Nr. Köpenicker Str. 32.

3. Verwandte oder Braut: \*)

Vor- und Zuname Stand oder Gewerbe Wohnort (Kreis) Straße, Haus-Nr. 

\*) Ausfüllung nur, wenn weder 1. noch 2. ausgefüllt sind.

5

## Nachweis über Bekleidungs-

Truppenteil	Selbstmüge	Selbstmüge (Selbstmüge)	Drahtgürtel	Arbeitsanzug	Reit- oder Selbstmüge	Unterhose	Mantel	Übermantel	Schultermantel	Kragenbinde	Hemd	Schlusssack
1) 4/Pz. E. u. A. B. G. D.	1	1	1	1	2	1						2
2) En. M. K. P. 3. '50'	1	1	1	1	2	1						2
3)												
4)												
5)												
6)												
7)												
8)												

Stahlhelm	Tarnlatter (Sechseckspinn)	Bekleidungs- jacke	Dunkelstich	Seitbüchse	Selbstmüge	Koppel mit Zubehör	Mantelklemmen	Brustbeutel mit Band	Selbstmüge (Leder-)	Drahtgürtel (Schnurklemmen)	Drahtgürtel	Einzelknoten- fächer	Einzelknoten- fächer mit Riemen	Rohrgeflecht	Melkmarken- tafeln	Signalfarbe	Hemdtuch	Eisbecher
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Anmerkung: Stücke, die nicht vorgegedruckt sind, sind in freie Spalten einzutragen. „Berghole“ statt „Tuchhole“. Alle Änderungen

6

## und Ausrüstungsstücke

Kopfschutzhelm	Handschuhe	Überhandschuh	Überhandschuh	Socken/Strümpfe	Mantel- Rittstiefel	Schulter- Rittstiefel	Laufschuhe	Stiefel	Leibbinde
1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1

Sonnen- (Schutz-) Brille	Taschentuch	Rücken	Flaschentrag	Decke	Namenszeichen des Ausgebenden und Empfängers	Datum
1	1	1	1	1	28.4.44	AL
1	1	1	1	1	14.6.44	AL

Vorhandene Spalten können auch beachtet werden, z. B. „Rucksack“ statt „Tornister“, sind durch Namenszeichen zu bezeichnen.

7



(For instance: Proposal of the field unit, to exchange items)  
After completion, former page to be entered in red.

8

- H.M. 1940 No. 205 -

Type of Weapon or Equipment	Manufacture		Date of Issue	Name Sign of Equip. Chief
	sign	number		
Rifle	<del>98K</del>	<del>5698</del>	<del>28.4.44</del>	<del>Horn</del>
		1004	2.5.44	Horn
Pistol				
Bayonet Sabre	84/98		28.4.44	Horn
March Compass				
Binoculars				
Folding-Pick			28.4.44	Horn
Spade				
Claw Hatchet				

89

- H.M. 1940 No. 205 -

Type of Weapon or Equipment	Manufacture		Date of Issue	Name Sign of Equip. Chief
	sign	number		
Wire Cutters				
Cleaning Kit 34			28. 4. 44	Horn
38 Gas mask		8424	28. 4. 44	Horn
Mask - Glasses				
Cotton Wool & Vaseline (tube)				
2 Losantin			13. 5. 44	Horn
Gas Cape			13. 5. 44	Horn

86

- H.M. 1940 No. 205 -

[illegible]

84



### Besondere Bekleidungsvermerke

(3. B. Antrag der Geldeinheit auf Umtausch von Sachen usw.)  
Nach Erledigung vorseitige Eintragungen in rot ändern.

8

## Besitznachweis über Waffen und Gerät:

— Н. М. 1940 Пс. 205 —

Waffen- oder Gerätart	Serierungs-		Tag des Empfangs	Namens- zeichen des Gerät- verwalters
	zeichen	nummer		
Gewehr	98K	5698	28.4.44	Horn
		1004	02.5.44	Horn
Pistole				
Seitengewehr Säbel	84/98		28.4.44	Horn
Maschinengewehr				
Doppelferndroh				
Klapphacke			28.4.44	Horn
Spaten				
Klaueisen				

8 a

**Besitznachweis über Waffen und Gerät:**

— Н. М. 1940 Пс. 205 —

Waffen- oder Gerätart	Zertifikats-		Tag des Empfangs	Namens- zeichen des Gerät- verwalters
	zeichen	nummer		
Drahtfähere				
1 Reinigungs- gerät 34			28. 4. 44	Korn
38		8474	28. 4. 44	Korn
1 Gasmaske				
Maskenbrille				
Watte und Dose- lme (Tube) (für Trommel- felloerlegte)				
2 Zofant			13. 5. 44	Korn
1 Gasplane			13. 5. 44	Korn

86

### Besitznachweis über Waffen und Gerät:

— Н. М. 1940 Пс. 205 —

[illegible]

8c











designation *Koppeltraggestell mit Hiltstrageriem*en who can blame them?), the 'infantry belt support straps' saw widespread use throughout the Heer. Constructed from leather with metal fittings, the straps distributed the weight of all standard ammunition and MG-tool pouches. The 'D' rings and auxiliary straps for the attachment of 'battle packs' ('A' frames) and rucksacks were largely superfluous to motorised troops.

2. **Shelter Quarter** - A *Zeltbahn*, neatly squared and rolled (an art form in itself), and attached to the *Koppel* by 2 greatcoat straps (*Mantelriemen*). Adopted by the Heer in 1931, the triangular, cotton twill shelter quarter was overprinted in a unique camouflage pattern recorded as *Heeressplittertarnmuster* (army 'splinter' camouflage pattern). This highly successful, dual-purpose item has been much copied by post war European armies.
3. **Belt with cartridge pouches** - The leather belt (*Koppel*) had a built-in hook and claw provision to adjust the belt buckle (*Koppelschloss*) to the user. The belt was to be worn so as to "not restrict blood circulation" nor "rub or chafe", and as a rule the centre of the buckle was to lay in line with the vertical row of tunic buttons. The cartridge pouches (*Patronentaschen*) were a refinement of a pattern adopted in 1909. Each compartment held 10 7.9mm rounds (loose or on strips).

4. **Gas mask container** - Constructed from pressed steel (the fluting provides strength). Despite a host of regulations concerning its wear in differing circumstances the container was generally slung over the shoulder and attached to the rear of the waist belt by a metal hook. Inside the lid can be seen a sprung-closed box which contains up to four pairs of gelatine-coated disks (*Klarscheiben*), which were fitted over the mask's lenses in cold conditions to prevent fogging. A cleaning cloth was placed in

the bottom of the container. Although stories exist of the mask being 'lost' and the container utilised for personal possessions, any soldier caught lacking one without good reason could expect severe repercussions.



5. **Gas mask** - The *Gasmaske 38* became the predominant model throughout the armed forces, and were said to provide good protection against the more common chemical agents expected to be used in wartime. Largely made from synthetic rubber, the mask came in three sizes, with 1 being the largest, and was expected to fit snugly over the face. It was held in place by a series of adjustable, elasticated straps. This example has the universal filter (in this case the *Filter Einsatz 42*) attached and is finished in 'ordnance tan'.
6. **Gas cape bag** - The gas cape (*Gasplane*) was a rectangular sheet treated to combat chemical attacks. Kept in a rubberised or cloth pouch, in the event of an attack the sheet was to be unfolded and pulled over the top of the prone body. The gas cape bag was carried in numerous ways.

Regulations (often overlooked in this case)

stipulated that this it was not to be attached directly to the container, as this would damage the cape. This example is attached to the container's long strap by means of two cloth loops on the rear of the bag.





7. **Skin decontamination tablets** - 'Losantin' skin decontamination tablets (*Hautentgiftungsmittel*). Each case held ten stabilised bleach powder lozenges designed to counter standard blister agents. A lozenge was to be mixed with water and applied to the affected area. The case warns against applying the contents near the eyes and mouth. The cases had a 'production year' tape wound around the lid: red-1940, black-1941, green-1942 and yellow-1943.



8. **Steel helmet** - Introduced as an economy measure, the Model 42 *Stahlhelm* had become the standard pattern throughout the armed forces by 1944. With its distinctive 'raw edge' (a by-product of the manufacturing process), the helmet was to be worn horizontal, "with the front edge about 1cm above the eyebrows." The chinstrap had to be "tight enough to firmly hold the helmet in place."
9. **Bayonet** - The standard 'sidearm' for all riflemen was the 84/98 bayonet. Like the K98 rifle, it had been refined from a longer, heavier version and remained in service until 1945.
10. **Entrenching tool** - The folding pick/shovel (*Klapphacke*) was introduced in 1938 and remained in service until the end of the war. Held in a leather frame, the E-tool was to be made "readily available" prior to combat, which usually involved tucking it into the *Koppel*. The Bakelite nut allowed the blade to be locked into a 90-degree or 'full open' position, creating both a handy digging implement and a formidable close-combat weapon.
11. **Mess tin** - Introduced to replace a somewhat larger version, the *Kochgeschirr* (1931 model) was at first manufactured in Aluminium. By 1944 raw material shortages saw steel examples appearing at the front, identical in pattern but internally coated with red anti-rust paint (which is thought to have a high lead content). Both types soon lost most of the protective outer paint, mainly due to being used over fires.
12. **Bread bag** - The 1931 model *Brotbeutel* was originally designed to contain its own detachable carrying strap, rations (including the 'butter dish'), cooking/eating utensils, field cap and, "if necessary", the rifle cleaning kit. Such restrictions were overlooked at the front, resulting in a wide variety of personal objects being held within it.
13. **Water bottle** - Able to hold nearly a litre, the 1931-pattern field canteen and cup (*Feldflasche und trinkbecher*) was placed on the right side of the bread bag for easy access. The removable felt cover had a dual purpose; to protect against 'icing up', and when soaked in water it kept the contents cool. A range of powdered fruit and 'energy' drinks were available to mix with drinking water.

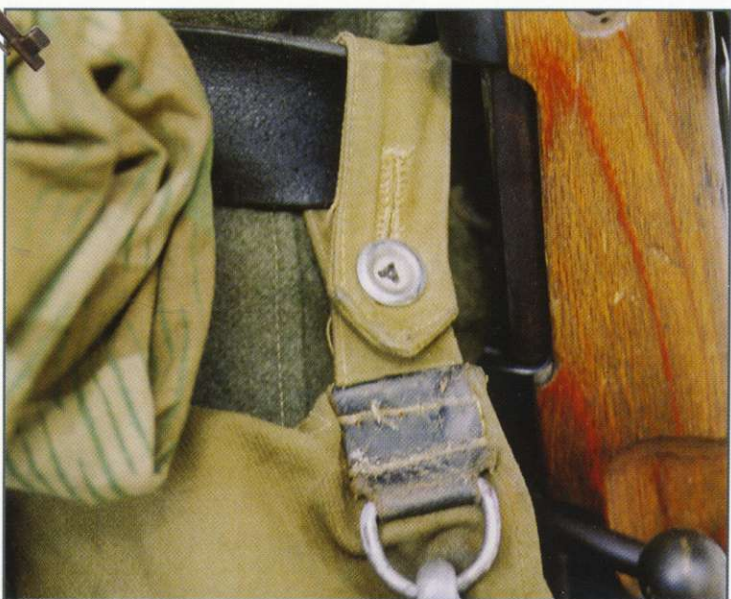


## STANDARD UNIFORM & EQUIPMENT

Often having to fight on foot, a reconnaissance troop rifleman would carry all he needed to sustain him in the field. While training manuals gave some direction in the positioning of equipment (e.g. The ammunition pouches were to be "one finger's width from the buckle"), experience and common sense prevailed at the front. Items such as the gas mask canister and mess tin were notorious for causing unwanted noises, and troops on the march that had not adjusted these accordingly could sound like a tinker's wagon. Note here that the *Zeltbahn* separates the two to prevent knocking (the gasmask tin is actually hooked to the 'D' ring intended to secure 'assault frames' or rucksacks to the wearer's back), and that the strap for attaching the mess tin to the Brotbeutel also encompasses the handle, thus stopping it from rattling.

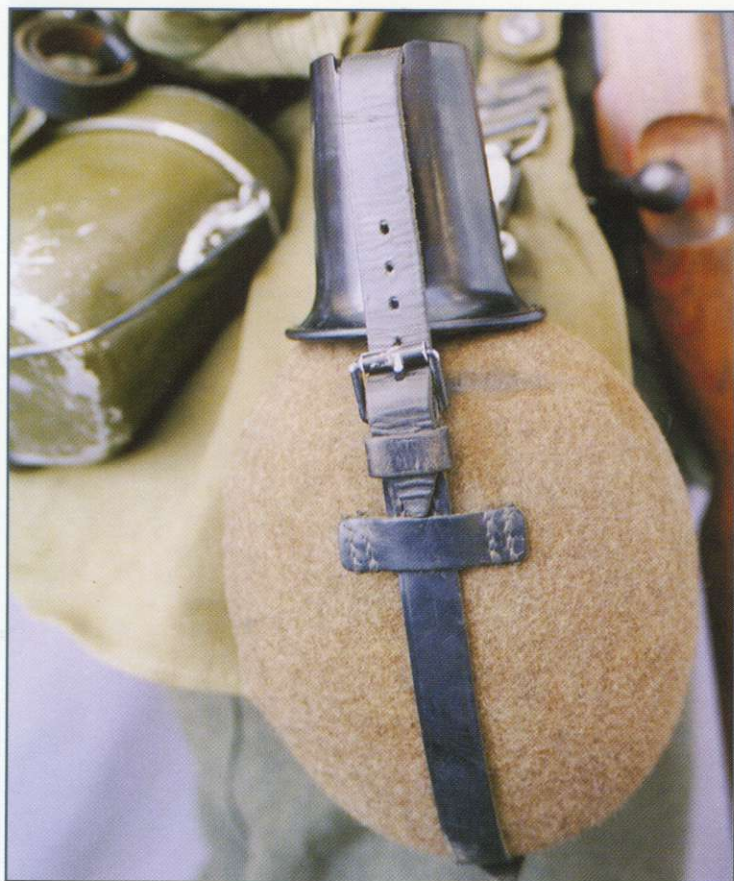








The field flask (here with a Bakelite cup) was another item that could contribute to unwanted noise. Half-full flasks allowed water to 'slosh' about and, when running, would knock against the mess tin.







According to regulations, the bayonet was to be placed "a matchbox width from the left rear belt support hook". To prevent it 'flapping about' when running, the entrenching tool carrier has a loop on the back to secure the scabbard. Although tightly fastened, note the waist belt folding along the top. This is due to the weight of equipment resting on the lower back, in particular the gas mask canister bearing down on the *Zeltbahn*. Regulations also stipulated that the E-tool was to have a varnished handle while metal parts were "to be greased or oiled, to prevent rust formation."











## STANDARD ISSUE EQUIPMENT

1. **Tent Pole Section** - Each soldier would carry one section, four sections would be needed to erect a zeltbahn shelter.
3. **Tent Pegs** - Three metal tent pins, for use with the Zeltbahn. These, along with sections of wooden poles, were commonly wrapped up in the shelter quarter when not in use.
2. **7.9 Steel catridges** - (see page 238)
4. **Trench Knife** - Close combat knife (Nahkampfmesser). Not a common sight, this type of knife was used for a variety of tasks. The scabbard has two prongs that allow it to be attached to a tunic. Based on the succesful First World War model, numerous versions exist.
5. **Service Issue Spectacles** - Case marked in black "DIENST-BRILLE". The spectacle frames are unpainted in this particular example. Inside the lid is the optician's card showing the type of lenses and the owner's name, Unteroffizier Heinz Egli who received this pair on the 30th August 1943.
6. **Soldiers Diary** - Marked as "Wehrmacht Merkbuch 1944", however the recording of military details in diaries was strictly forbidden.
7. **Soldiers Catholic Prayer & Hymn Book** - GD, unlike other Heer units, did not have any chaplains, and were strictly forbidden to hold religious services. This was attributed to a thanksgiving service held in Notre Dame cathedral in 1940, which proved inconsistent with the concept of GD being the 'standard bearers' of a new Germany. However, long held individual religious beliefs could never be squashed, especially at the front, where God became a close friend to many in times of danger.
8. **Silver match cover** - (see page 263)
9. **Dog Tag.**
10. **Soldiers Pay Book.**
11. **Wristwatch** - Generally reserved for officers and NCOs, this black faced, Swiss made issue watch is marked for army service on the rear. Civilian timepieces were commonly worn by all ranks.



12. **Rifle Cleaning Kit** (see page 236)
13. **Flashlight** (see page 257)
14. **Eye Goggles** (see page 257)
15. **Compact Shaving kit & Soap** (see page 261)
16. **Fat Container** - Introduced in 1938, the (Fettbuechse) was made from bakerlite and came in a range of colours. It and would contain butter or other bread spreads issued in lieu as part of the daily ration.
17. **Leather polish** - In cardboard container.





18. **Spoon & fork** - Folding fork and spoon combination. Made of steel or aluminium and largely based on a design from the First World War. Supposed to have been kept in the bread bag but often found in tunic pockets.

19. **Aluminium comb** - Kept either in the breadbag or a tunic pocket.

20. **Soldiers Ration Heater** - (see page 254)

21. **Chocolate** - A tin of Scho-ka-kola: a fortified chocolate with a high caffeine content. Wartime tins are rarely found with dates later than 1942.

22. **Sewing Kit**. (see page 261)

23. **String** - A 2 metre long rope for use with the Zeltbahn. Often kept in the breadbag.

24. **Lighter** (see page 263)

25. **Cigarettes** (see page 263)

26. **Gas mask Spectacles** - "Maskenbrille", these differed from the regular version by replacing the metal ear loops with an elasticated strip or tapes to avoid any sealing problems when the gas mask was being worn.

27. **Skin Treatment Tablets** - Stored in the gas mask canister.

28. **Gas Treatment Kit** - (below). The lozenge form was largely replaced by the introduction of a skin decontamination ointment (Hautentgiftungssalbe) in 1941. This (orange) Bakelite screw-top bottle, along with six swabs, was issued in a lacquered cardboard container stamped Haut (skin). A weapons and equipment decontamination bottle (brown Bakelite) also existed.



29. **Bandages** - Two bandages kept in the inside pocket of the jacket.



### RUCKSACK (TOP RIGHT)

1. Blanket roll.
2. Summer reed green trousers.
3. Magazines (private purchase).
4. Goggles.
5. Underwear x 2.
6. Field cap.
7. Dirty laundry bag.
8. Parcel from home (books).
9. Shirt.
10. Neck warmer.
11. Towel.
12. Summer reed green tunic.
13. Shirts x 2.
14. Parcel from home (boardgame, see page 265).
15. Flashlight (see page 257).
16. Socks.
17. Gloves.

### BREAD BAG (BOTTOM RIGHT)

1. Zeltbahn rope.
2. Folding fork and spoon combination.
3. Tin opener.
4. Fat container.
5. Rifle cleaning kit (see page 236).
6. Sewing kit (see page 261).
7. Shaving kit and brush (see page 261).
8. Esbit cooker (see page 254).
9. Chocolate (see page 252).



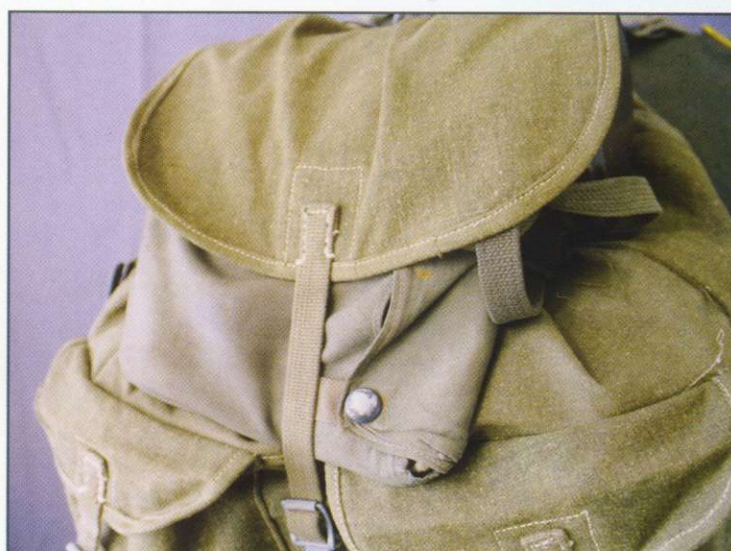














Eleven



ORDNANCE



that the machine gun would continue to remain the principal weapon of any future conflict.

When re-armament began in Germany in the 1930's an effective weapon design was therefore sought, the basic requirement was for a universal machine gun (*Einheitsmaschinengewehr*) which could perform a multitude of tasks, was light-weight and could be used in both the heavy and light machine gun roles. Standardisation meant production would be simplified, training reduced and maintenance/repair made easier.

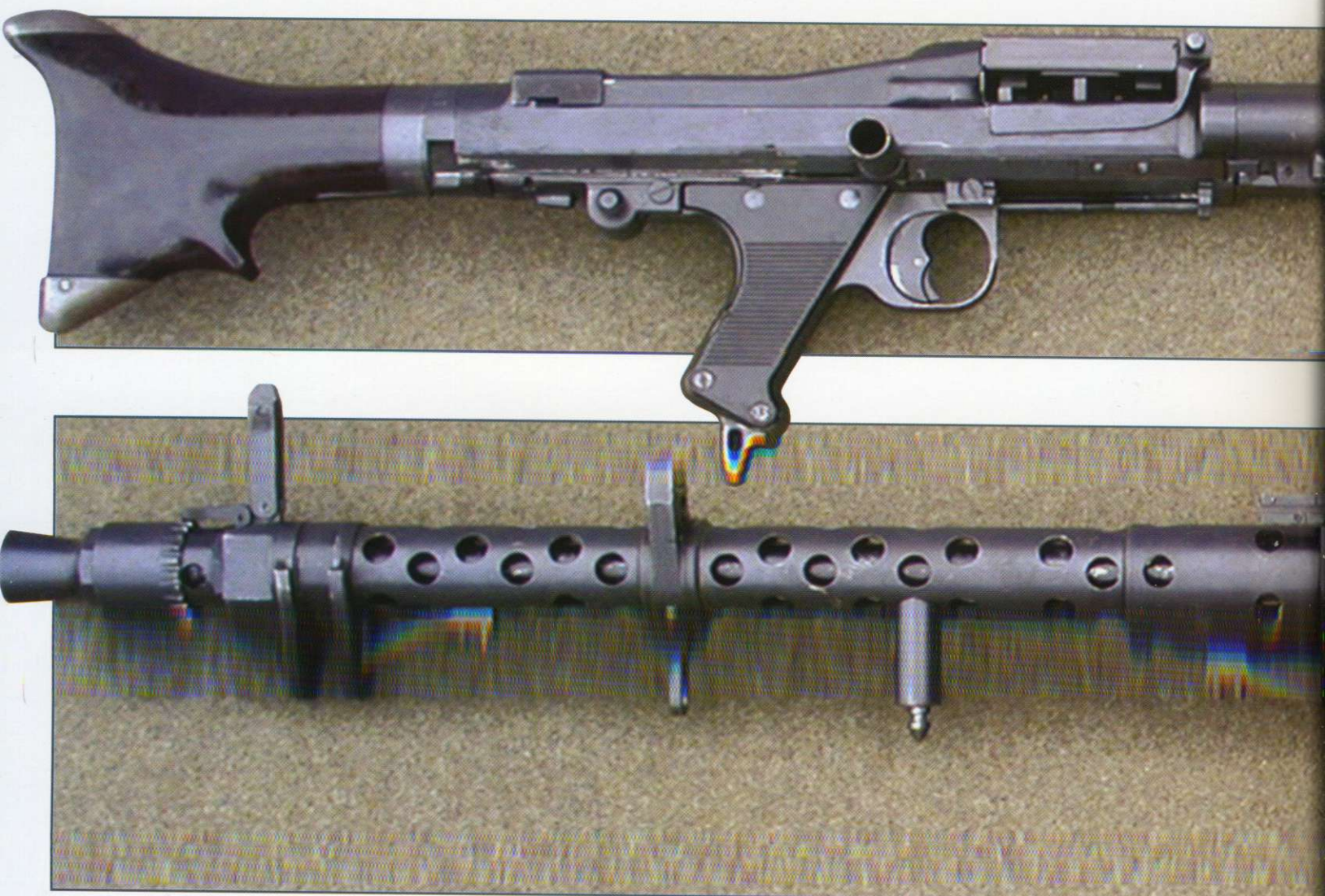
The new weapon was to be air-cooled doing away with the large barrel jacket of the earlier water cooled guns and reducing weight. After approximately 250 rounds on full automatic fire the accuracy of the barrel was affected due to expansion, this, then, asked of the designers, a quick and effective method of barrel change.

The firms of Mauser and Rheinmetall submitted designs. Each weapon was considered by the *Heereswaffenamt* (Army ordinance office) and although both had

Rheinmetall was given the task. It was headed by their chief designer Louis Stange and overseen for the *Heereswaffenamt* by Major Dipl. Ing. Ritter von Weber who was killed in action at Smolensk in 1941.

The previous Rheinmetall design contributed the bipod and trigger assembly, which had the ability to produce selective fire. If the upper portion of the trigger was depressed (marked 'E' for *Einzelfeuer*) single shots were produced, pressing the lower part of the trigger (marked 'D' for *Deuerfeuer*) gave full automatic fire. The Mauser works prototype added the bolt locking device and effective barrel change.

The end result was ready by 1934, after trials and further design changes, production started in 1936. German weapon designation of the time usually consisted of the weapon types initial letter or letters followed by the year of introduction, therefore the weapon was named MG (*MaschinenGewehr*) Machine rifle 34 (*vierunddreissig*).







The MG34 was produced right throughout the war, the main manufacturers were:

Maget, Berlin (letter code cra)  
Gustloff Werke, Suhl (formerly Simson & Co.) (dfb)  
Mauser Werke. A.G Berlin (ar)

Steyr Damiler Puch A.G. Steyr, Austria (bnz)  
Waffenwerke Brunn A.G, Brunn (Czechoslovakia) (dot)

*(note: other sub contractors were used for parts and accessories).*

Accepted guns from September 1939 to 1945 number 345,109 with peak production in 1941 (81,467).

Many in the Wehrmacht (armed forces) at the time considered the MG34 to be the best of its type, but because it was developed in peace time with no shortage of funds, materials or labour and allied to a lack of actual combat, testing proved problematic. Production was slow due to the complex nature. Combat experience in North Africa and Russia showed that the fine tolerances involved in the production caused the mechanism to jam with the infiltration of sand or dirt, but with correct training of the gun crew the MG34 operated efficiently.





## MG 34 ACCESSORIES

1. **E-Tin** - (*Ergaenzungskasten*). Housed in a standard ammunition can, a capital letter 'E' stencilled on the lid to aid identification and usually found with the weapons serial number on the side, this contained various accessory items needed for the maintenance and repair of the gun, some of the contents shown are a *Petroleumbuechse fur den Rueckstossverstaerker 34s*, used for cleaning the recoil booster with the aid of petrol (round black container) and *Behalter für die Schliessfeder*, a spare main spring in its container (long tube). Kits could be adapted to suit the individual's requirements.

2. **P-Tin** - (*Petroleum Kasten*). Again a standard ammunition box, this time used to hold two tins each with a screw top lid, one holding petrol for cleaning parts and the other containing oil for lubricating. A 'P' was stencilled on the lid for identifying its use.

3. **Sling** - (*Trageriemen*). Constructed from two strips of leather with clips at either end, one attached to the lower portion of the grips (square clip) the other to the loop along the underside of the barrel jacket. The straps can be separated and each one brought around the sides of the weapon and held over the gun. This method of carrying the gun allows it to be balanced under the sling and is a very comfortable way of carrying nearly 12kg of metal.

4. **Spare Barrel Container** - (*Laufschuetzer 34*). A pressed metal carrying case for spare barrels.





**Gunners Pouch** - (*Werkzeugtasche 34*). The gunners pouch, when used with the MG in the Infantry role, was worn on the belt. When used in vehicles it was usually stowed on a bracket on the inside. It could contain the following:-

1. Oil Can - (*Ölkanne*)
2. Sulphur Container - (*Streubüchse für Schwefelblüte*)
3. MG Glasses
4. Aircraft Sight - (*Kreiskorn anti*)
5. Insulated Pad for removing hot barrels - (*Handschützer*)
6. Spanner - (*Schlüssel*)
7. Spare Bolt - (*Verschlußkopf*)
8. Shell Extractor - (*Gerät zum Entfernen von Hülsenreissern u Hüsenklemmern*)
9. Offset Screw Driver - (*Winkelschraubenzieher*)
10. Spare Firing Pin - (*Schlagbolzen*)





## MG 34 AMMUNITION ACCESSORIES

1. **50 Round Drum** - (*Gurttrommel 34*). Pressed metal drum for carrying 50 rounds of belted ammunition, it can be clipped onto the weapon and used as a magazine. It has the benefit of keeping the ammunition clean and could be used in the anti-aircraft role on the tripod as well as being ideal for quick assaults on enemy positions, stopping the belt swinging around reducing the risk of snagging on equipment.

2. **50 Round Drum Carrier** - (*Gurttrommeltraeger*). Carrier for two 50 round drums, each drum was firmly held in place, a carrying handle was provided on the side.

3. **Starter Tab** - (*Einführstück*). Used in conjunction with ammunition belts to ease loading, it connects to the end of a standard belt and enables it to be inserted through the feed mechanism of the gun without the need to raise the top cover.

4. **Belt Loading Tool** - (*Gurtfueller 34*). Used for loading loose rounds into belts, the standard ammunition belt is clipped into the mechanism in front of the hopper, rounds are then fed into the hopper and the lever depressed. The mechanism feeds single rounds into the belt and then advances it to accept the next. Belts can be loaded in a fraction of the time taken to hand load.

5. **Ammunition Belt** - (*Zwischenstueck tbr 50 Patronen*). The standard non-disintegrating ammunition belt for use with the MG34 as well as MG42, standard length for 50 rounds, belts can be joined to create any length required.

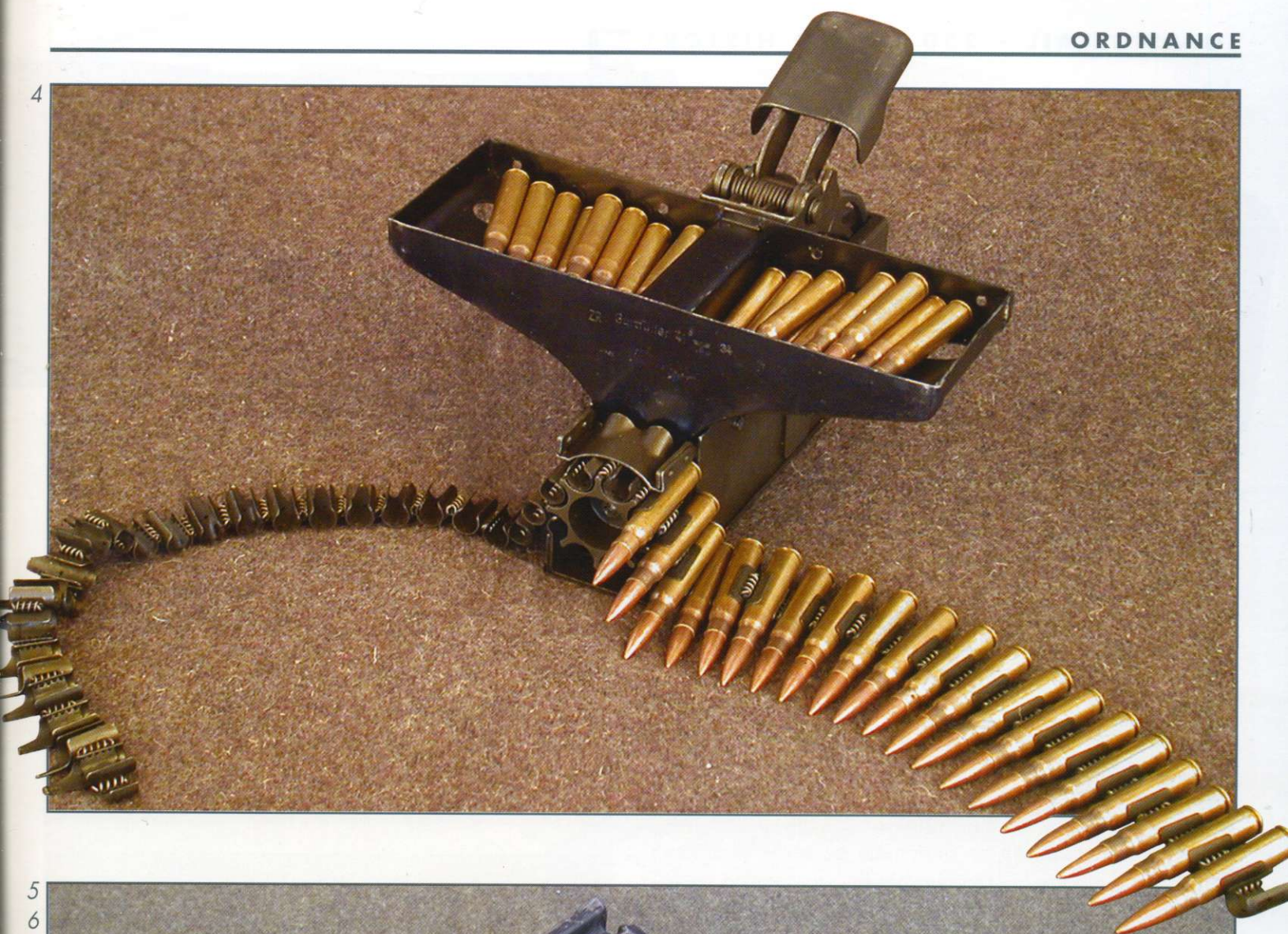
6. **Ammunition Can** - (*Patronenkasten fuer MG*). The standard ammunition can for use with a variety of weapons, it carried 300 rounds of belted ammunition. Due to the rounds being thinner at one end, when placed inside the box the first two belts were positioned with the nose of the rounds pointing backwards (towards the firer) and the remaining four belts pointing in the direction of shot, this stopped the ammunition nose diving to the bottom of the box. Two main types of box exist, the standard shape with angled lid in either steel

or aluminium with one catch and the patronenkasten 41 with a flatter straight lid, a catch at either end and included a nibber seal in the lid.

7. **Ammunition Carrying Strap** - (*Tragegurt 34*). An adjustable belt made of canvas, (although leather example exists), used for carrying 2 ammunition boxes, each end had a carbine hook for attaching to the carrying handles of the boxes, the strap could then be worn over the shoulder distributing the weight of the ammunition. There was also a metal loop along one of the strap sides presumably for slipping under the waist belt to prevent the boxes swinging.









## GEWEHR 98k

Adopted by the Wehrmacht in 1935, the 7.9mm *Karabiner 98 kurz* (carbine 98, short) was to become the most widespread version of the Mauser designed series. A modification of the 1898 Gewehr, this five round, bolt-action rifle had an effective range of 800 metres and was manufactured throughout Germany by a variety of contractors until 1945. Whilst production standards fell as the war ground on, (resulting in the 'Kriegsmodell' [war model], with stamped steel fittings and Beech plywood/laminated stocks), the barrel and bolt assembly continued to retain their high standards of finish. The rifle accepted the S84/98 bayonet (although the attaching lug was deleted on later 'war models'), and had a 305mm cleaning rod secured beneath the barrel (for emergency use only). Three could be screwed together to 'pull through' the barrel or dislodge jammed cartridges, but the M34 cleaning kit was the preferred option for general maintenance. The rod also allowed rifles to be stacked in pyramid form.

By 1942, around six per cent of rifle production was carefully selected and modified to accept an optical sight (most commonly the *Zielfernrohr 41*) for the use of sharp shooters but, in the hands of a trained user, the standard K98 was still an extremely accurate weapon, deficient only in the limited number of cartridges it could hold. This factor ensured recruits were taught to pick targets carefully and fire only when necessary (German doctrine held that the squad machine gun was expected to fight tactical battles, the riflemen were there to protect and supply it). The K98k was produced in massive numbers, with well over 8 million being manufactured between 1940 and 1944. The 'home' of Mauser (the Oberndorf factory near Stuttgart), was said to be still churning out 40,000 rifles a week as late as March 1945.







### Loading strips.

Made from nickel-plated, tinned or parkerized steel, but sometimes found in brass, loading strips (*Ladestreifen*) held five 7.9mm rounds and allowed ammunition to be pulled from the pouch and placed in the rifle with ease. The charged strips arrived at the front in cartons over-stamped 'I L' (*Im [in] Ladestreifen*), and are thought to have been issued on a *first come, first served* basis. Where possible, empty strips were retained for further use.

### Bayonet

The *Seitengewehr 84/98* (modified 1884 bayonet for the 98 rifle) was adopted in 1934 and attached to the waist belt by the leather (sometimes webbing) *Seitengewehr tasche* (sidearm carrier).

Sheathed in a blued steel scabbard, the blade was shaped so as to reduce weight and is seen with both wooden and Bakelite grips. Two types of carrier were originally issued for the bayonet, one with retaining straps for mounted troops, and one without for foot troops. As early as 1939 enough bayonets had been lost for an order to be lodged that all future examples (with the rare exception of some late war versions), came with retaining straps.

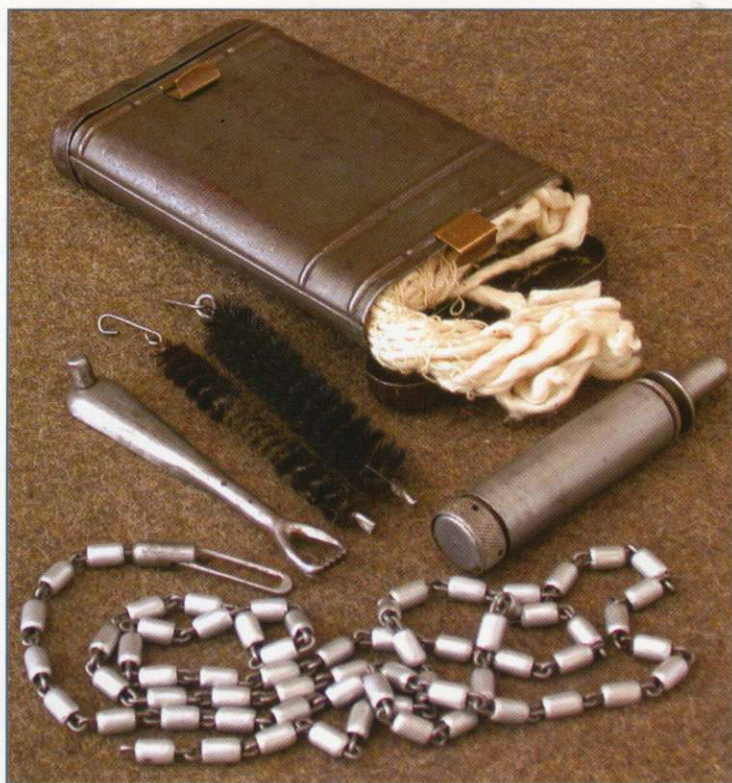






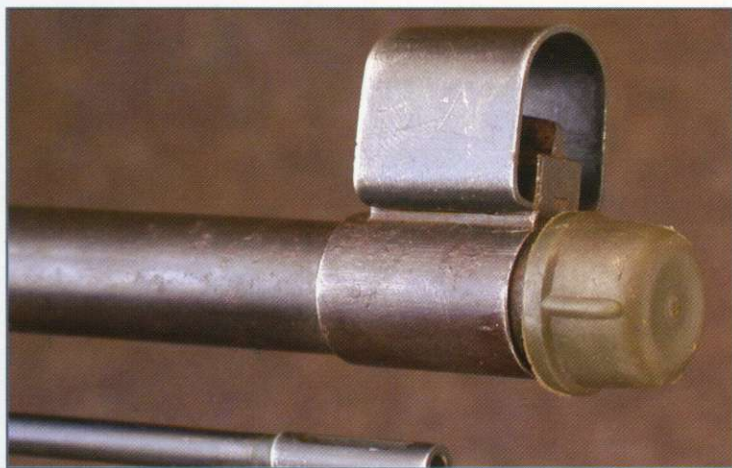
### Safety catch positions

1. Ready to fire.
2. Half safety.
3. Full safety..



### Cleaning kit 1934 - (*Reinigungsgeraet 34*).

This was to become the universal bore cleaning kit for all standard 7.9mm weapons (The larger 'field cleaning kit' said to be for the MG34 and MG42 was actually for the long barrelled '*Panzerbuechse*' anti tank rifle). Manufactured from sheet metal, the case has two compartments; the smaller for a strip of *Reinigungsdochte* (cleaning wick, cut to size), the larger containing a pull through chain, bore brush, oiling brush, oil bottle (made from Bakelite or steel) and the *Huelsenkopfwischer*, a tool for cleaning inside the receiver and removing the magazine plate.



### Muzzle caps - (*Muendungskappe*).

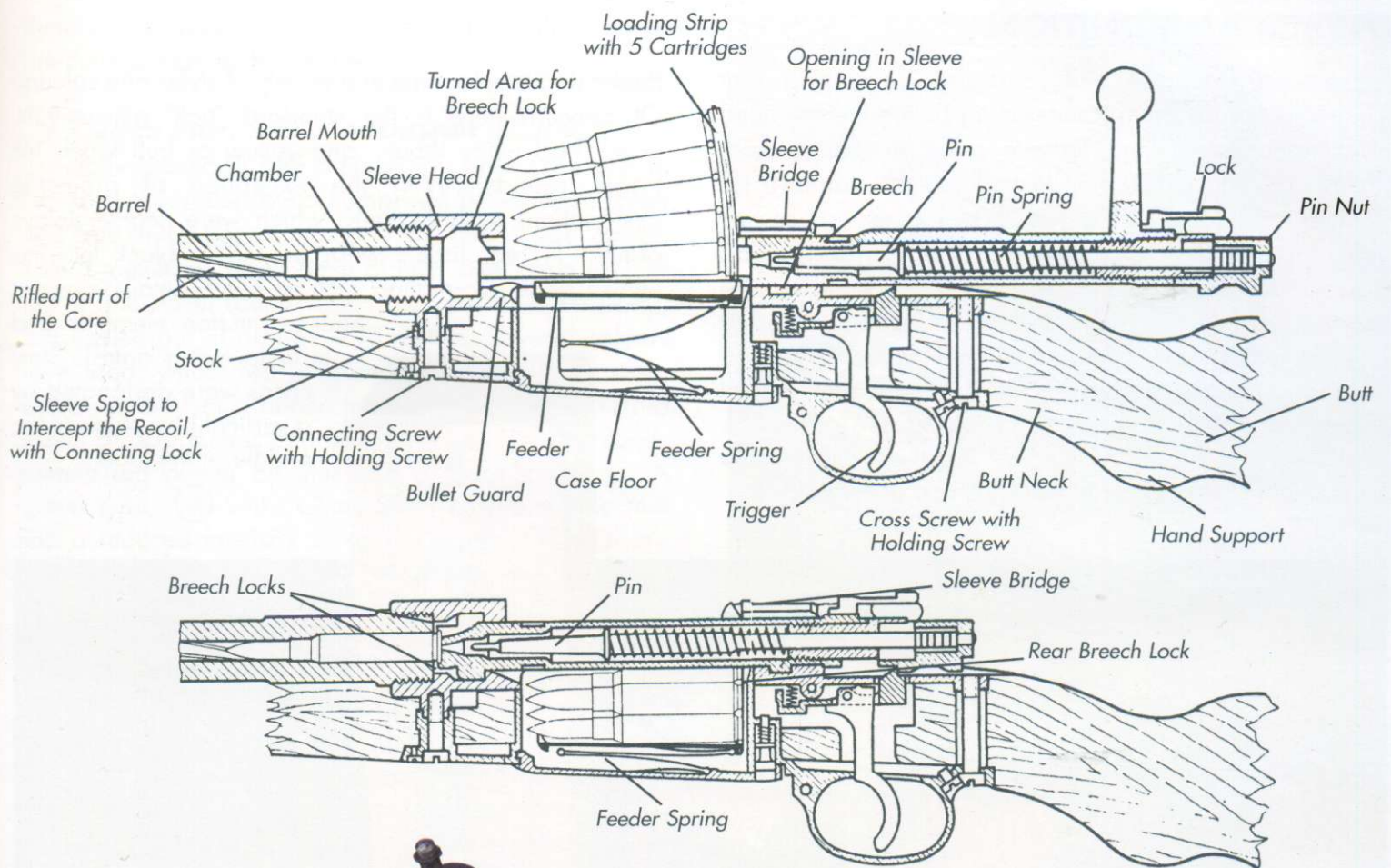
Intended to protect the barrel (*Lauf*) from dirt and dust. The earlier, elaborately designed versions including one that opened to allow a cleaning rod to enter the barrel were largely replaced by artificial rubber caps that could simply be shot off if required.

### RIGHT: Grenade Launcher -

(*Gewehrgranatengerat*).

With well over 1 million examples being manufactured before production ceased in mid-1944, the rifle-grenade launching device allowed a rifleman to attack targets out of reach to hand thrown grenades. Comprising of a 30mm calibre short rifled barrel (*Drallrohr*), clamp (*Halter*) and trajectory sight (*Visier*), a simple tool for unscrewing the barrel from the clamp for cleaning purposes completed the kit. Also seen are examples of the High Explosive round, which were propelled by a 7.9mm blank. Note the rifled lower band, which, married with the '*Schiessbecher*' discharge cup, gave the projectile 'spin stabilisation'.







## 7.9mm AMMUNITION

Developed from the '88' cartridge, a casing that originally held a 8mm round nosed bullet, the renamed and reshaped 7,9mm *Patrone schwere Spitzgeschoss* (heavy pointed bullet) was to become the standard for infantry rifles and MG's. The 57mm case was at first manufactured from brass (which gave a smooth feed), but various attempts in the 1930's to develop steel alternatives (to save rare metals) resulted in a range of copper washed or lacquered examples being issued. However, despite the best attempts, the lacquered steel cases continued to cause problems in automatic weapons until the end of the war, (as the lacquer could stick to hot receivers), particularly those of the MG42.

Packaging labels came in a variety of styles and colours. Of concern here is the standard 'ball' ammunition, which had white labels, and yellow or buff labels for tracer rounds. With the exception of projectile designations such as SmK, which were nearly always printed in red, labels were printed in black lettering (which gave information such as batch details; powder and percussion elements and manufacturing dates). Steel cases were designated by a vertical blue stripe in the middle of the label.





There was a wide range of 7.9mm ammunition used. The most commonly found were:

① **7,9mm Patr. SmK. Leuchtspur** (Tracer)

Generally loaded in MG ammunition belts on a one in five ratio, the tracer round comprised a slightly reduced steel core and a trace compound in a plated steel jacket. Able to penetrate up to 8mm of mild steel plate at 100 metres, the tracer round would burn as it left the barrel and fizzled out at around 900 metres. Several colours were used; white, red or green were commonly seen, and a version that changed from green to red (or red to green) at 500 metres can also be found. Tracer rounds have a red primer annulus and a black bullet tip. A further type, ④ SmK 'Glimmspur', was available that had a reduced intensity so as not to disturb the firer's night vision. This too had a red primer, but the black painted tip was reduced in size from 11 to 5mm.



② **7,9mm Patrone SmE Spitzgeschoss mit Eisenkern** (pointed bullet with iron core).

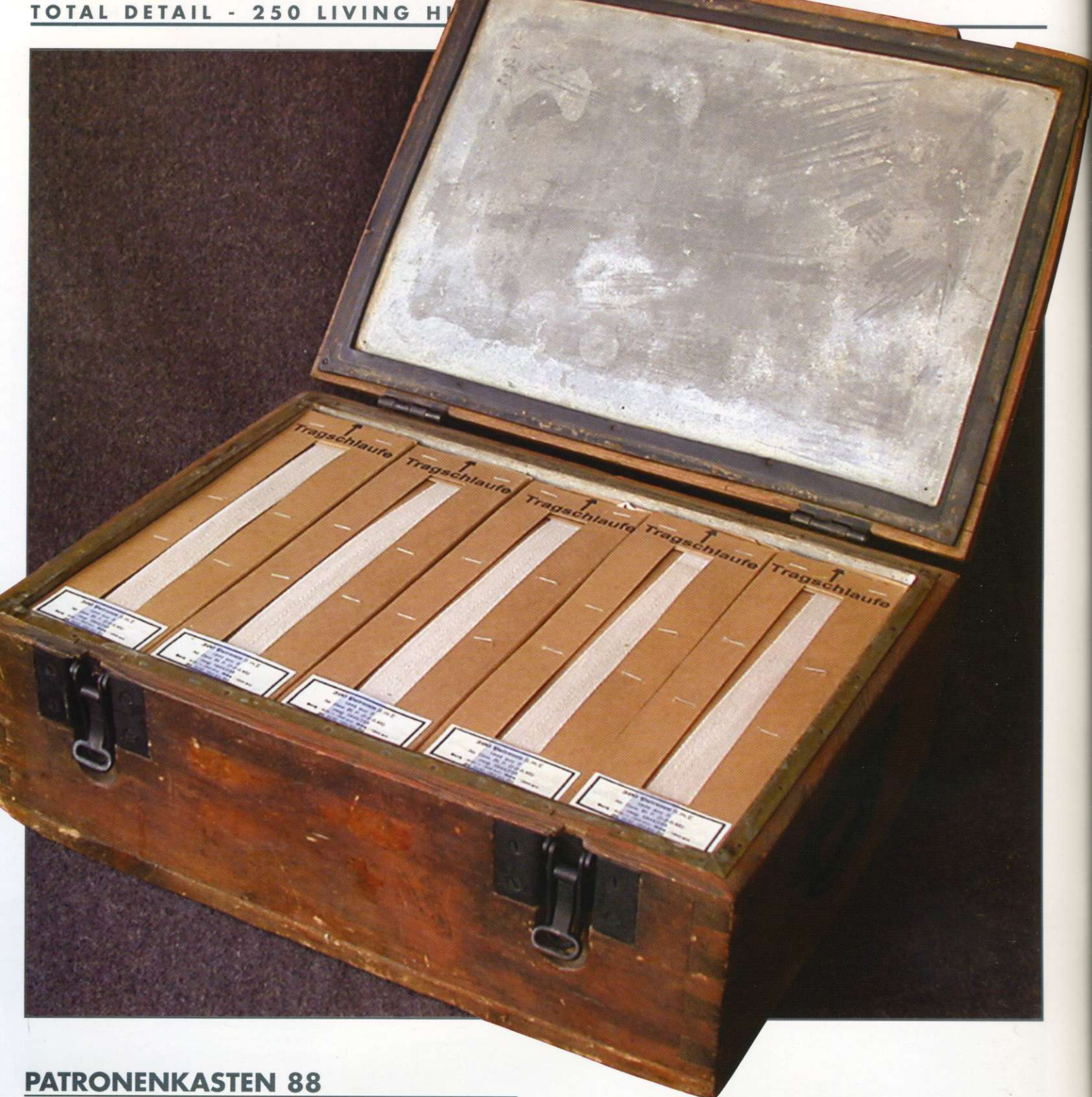
In an effort to economise on lead, by 1942 the prevalent standard round had a mild steel core, wrapped in a galvanized zinc jacket. The cartridge contained a 2.85gm charge of *Nitro-zellulosegewehrpulver* (Nz.Gew.P. Nitro-cellulose gunpowder) which drove the 11.5gm bullet at a muzzle velocity of 700 metres per second. An alternative *Lang* (long) version was authorised in 1944, intended to compensate for the lack of weight by being a longer bullet (39mm as opposed to 37mm). The overall dimensions were the same as the standard round, the bullet simply sat deeper in the case. Both types were virtually indistinguishable and were generally marked with a blue primer annulus.

③ **7,9mm Patr. SmK Spitzgeschoss mit Kern** (pointed bullet with hardened core)

The standard armour piercing round, with a hardened steel core encased in a plated steel jacket, was able to achieve a muzzle velocity of 800 metres per second and could penetrate up to 12mm of mild steel plate at a distance of 100 metres. The primer annulus was red.







## PATRONENKASTEN 88

All 7.9mm rounds were delivered to the front in the wooden ammunition box. Two types are seen, a zinc lined version with metal handles and lid catches, and a simplified example with cloth handles and leather lid catches.

Containing 1,500 rounds, a crate of 7,9 held five cardboard containers, each of which had a cloth handle on top that allowed them, if required, to be carried as emergency ammunition boxes. Within these were 300

cartridges divided into 15-round cartons. 4 of these cartons would fill the standard infantry ammunition pouches. The crates were collected and returned for re-use.



## WALTHER PISTOLE 38

Accepted by the Wehrmacht in 1940, the *Pistole 38* had started life several years earlier when engineering studies concluded that the existing military handgun (the *Pistole 08* 'Parabellum' or more commonly 'Luger') was far too complicated and expensive.

Trials for an alternative, saw the Carl Walther firm making modifications to their 1938 'Armee-Pistole' and presenting a recoil-operated, locked breech design with a double action trigger, the first hand-gun to incorporate such a feature. This allowed the weapon to fire the first shot faster than a conventional single action pistol. Chambering the 9mm *Pistole Patrone 08* (held in an 8

round grip magazine) and finished in blued or polished steel, the weapon was produced in large numbers, with well over a million pieces being manufactured until 1945.

With Walther unable to produce sufficient numbers, contracts were given to other manufacturers (including the Mauser works, who were to cease production of the P08 and switch over) to speed up supply. A popular and robust pistol, the P38 was issued to armoured crews, officers and NCOs in either a 'flapped' or 'hard-shell' leather holster, each with a compartment to accommodate a spare magazine.

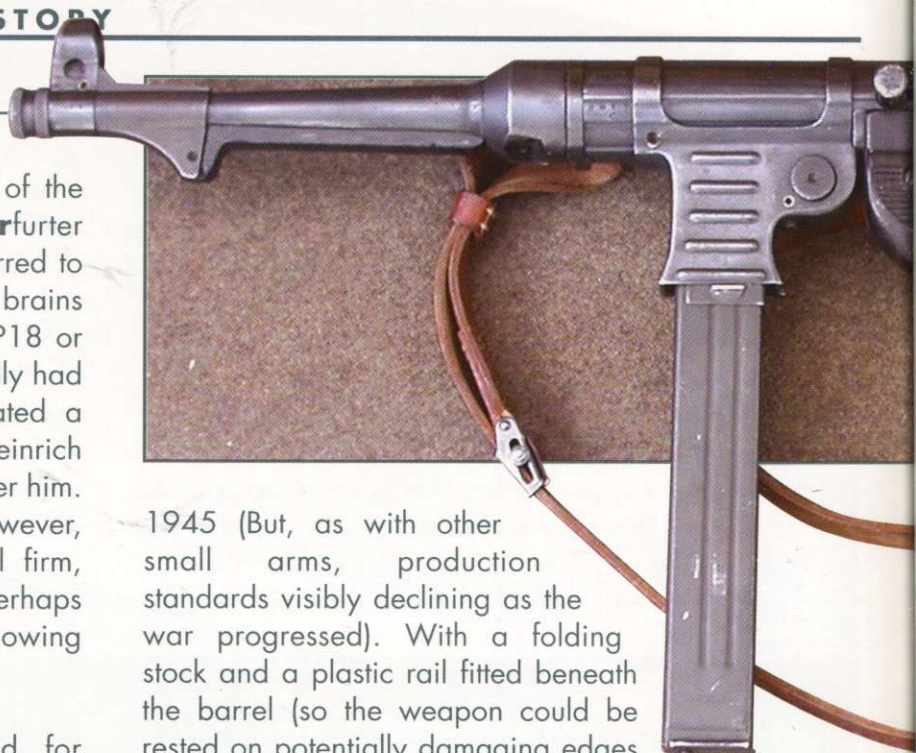




## MASCHINENPISTOLE 40

Accepted after trials in 1940, the Maschinenpistole 40 was an improved version of the earlier MP38 from the ERMA works (**E**rfurter **M**aschinenfabrik) in Thuringen. Commonly referred to as the 'Schmeisser' (after Hugo Schmeisser, the brains behind the ground breaking World War one MP18 or 'Bergmann' sub machine gun), this weapon actually had little to do with him. The MP38/40 incorporated a unique telescopic mainspring designed by Heinrich Vollmer, and as such should have been named after him. (It is hard to account for this discrepancy. However, Schmeisser was involved with the C.G Haenel firm, which took on production of the MP40 in 1942. Perhaps allied intelligence had jumped to conclusions, knowing his reputation from the 'Bergmann'?)

Thought to have been originally developed for paratroopers and armoured crews, the weapon utilised a blow back operated telescopic mainspring and fired the 9mm '08 pistol round to a maximum range of 200 metres. Constructed from pressed steel and clad with resin impregnated fibre grips, the MP40 underwent further modifications after battle experiences in Poland found fault in the absence of a safety mechanism for the bolt, which allowed the weapon to be accidentally fired. With these problems solved (and the official designation MP40/I), the weapon went into mass production, first by ERMA but later others, including Steyr-Daimler-Puch, leading to well over a million being produced before



1945 (But, as with other small arms, production standards visibly declining as the war progressed). With a folding stock and a plastic rail fitted beneath the barrel (so the weapon could be rested on potentially damaging edges for firing stability), this popular weapon accepted a 32 round 'stick' magazine and had a practical rate of fire of around 180 rounds per minute.

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### Magazine loading tool

The magazine-loading tool (MP38 u 40 *Magazinfueller*) enabled 32 rounds of 9mm 'Parabellum' to be charged in each clip with ease, although it was possible to do it by hand.

The tool slotted on top of the magazine and would push each (single loaded) round down into a staggered row. It is said that

veterans would not fill their magazines to full capacity as they felt this damaged the magazine's internal expansion spring.

leading to well over a million being produced before 1945 but, as with other small arms, production standards visibly declined as the war progressed.

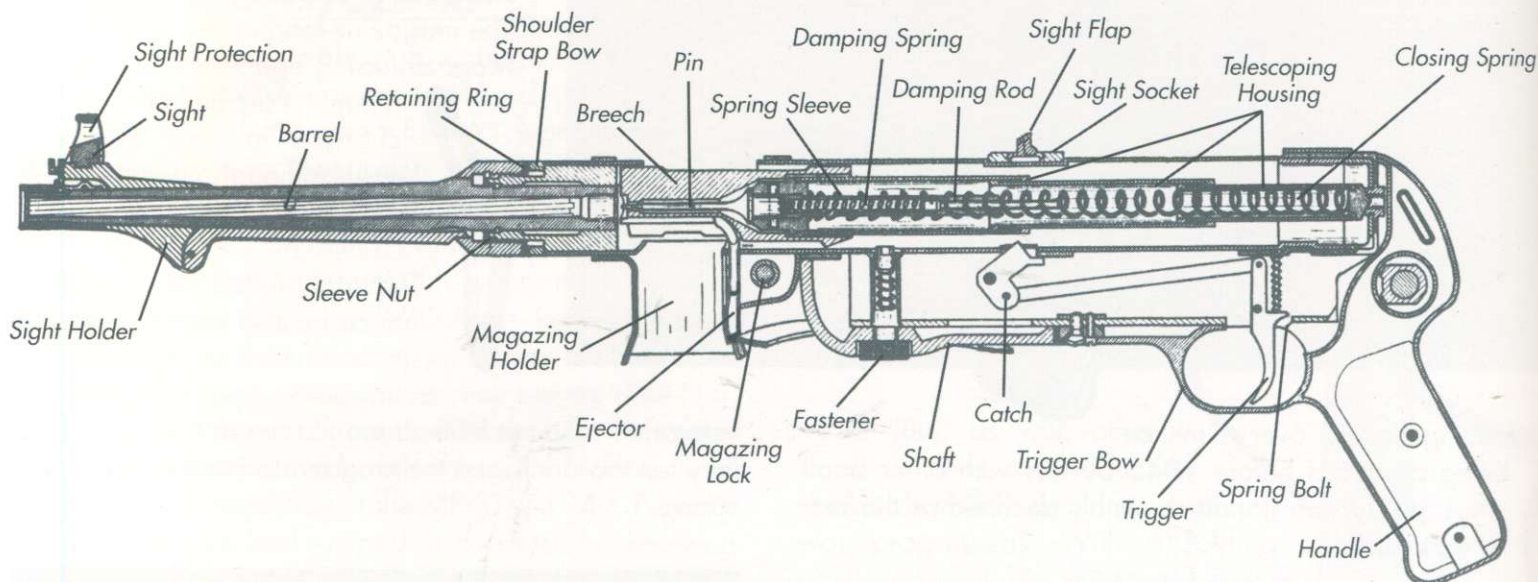
### Magazine Pouches

Each MP40 was issued with a pair of pouches (*MP38 und 40 magazintaschen*) capable of holding six spare magazines. Generally constructed from canvas with leather fittings, and seen in a wide variety of tan, grey and olive green colours, the left side pouch also held a magazine-loading tool.

While early versions had the 'D' ring for the equipment support strap attached directly to the pouch, later versions were produced where the 'D' ring was attached to a strip of leather, allowing further flexibility for adjustment.







*LEFT:* The bolt retracted and placed into the 'safe' (*sicher*) position. The tension of the spring holds it in place.

*BELOW:* By releasing the fastener under the handgrip and twisting the barrel assembly away from the lower body, the MP40 could be field stripped. The telescopic housing for the spring is removed through the rear of the weapon. This was about as far as a soldier would 'take down' this machine pistol; any damage to otherwise inaccessible internal pieces would normally result in it being sent to the unit's armourers.





**TOP RIGHT:** Close up of the rear bolt mount housing. The 'bnz. 43' marking provides the code for the manufacturer (Steyr-Daimler-Puch), and the year it was produced. The four digits are a unique serial number, which, with the exception of machine pistols re-assembled from spares, would be found throughout the weapon.



**MIDDLE RIGHT:** With the bolt retracted in the firing position, the first round sits ready to be fed into the breech. Once fired, the empty case is pulled out by the withdrawing bolt and flicked through the breech ejection port, allowing the next round to rise to the top of the magazine. Working on this simple 'blow back' bolt principle, the MP40 could let loose some 6-7 rounds per second, thus emptying a 32-round magazine in around 5 seconds if the finger was kept on the trigger. Such use was, unless in desperate circumstances, not encouraged; all users were taught to 'squeeze off' controlled bursts.

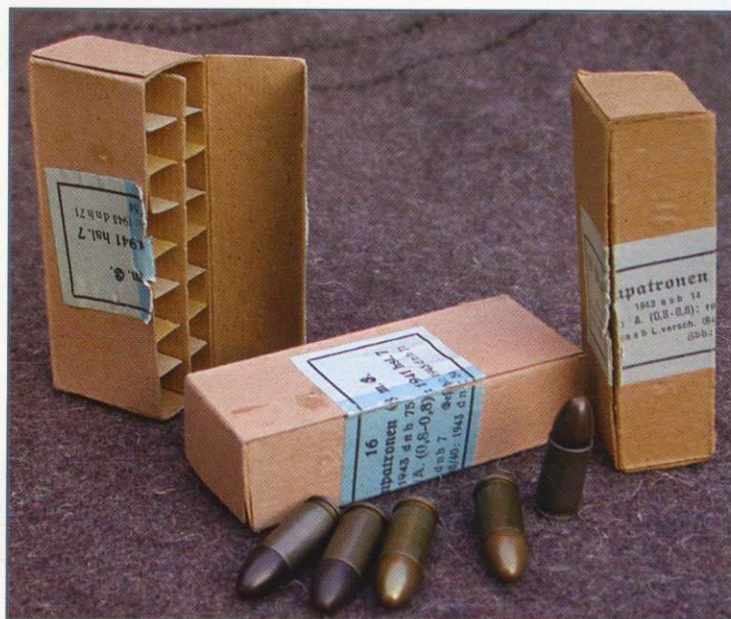


## 9mm AMMUNITION

Introduced in 1902 by Georg Lueger and the DWM (German weapon and munitions factory) to beef up the automatic ('Luger') pistol from a 7.65mm cartridge (regarded as a civilian round) to military specifications, the 9mm Parabellum (from the ancient Latin saying '*Si vis Pacem, Para bellum*' - if you want peace, prepare for war) has become a standard calibre around the world. Adopted by the German navy in 1904 and the army in 1908 (as the *Pistole Patrone 08*), the cartridge case had the same base dimensions as the 7.65x23mm cartridge but was only 19mm long. Originally, cases were brass while bullets were of a lead core with a gilded steel jacket, but as early as 1939 cases were being produced from steel protected with a copper wash or lacquer. The primer annulus was black.

### 9mm Pist. Patr. 08 (mE) mit Eisenkern

In 1941, a new round was issued to economise on lead. Only a lead cup remained in the base of the round, the remainder now replaced by a mild-steel core wrapped by a steel black painted jacket. This round had a slightly higher muzzle velocity due to its reduced weight (6.5gm as opposed to 8gm).



### 9mm Pist. Patr. 08 (SE) Sinter Eisen

In 1943 a further version appeared with the bullet made of 'sintered' iron. Even lighter (5.9gm) than the standard round, the bullet and steel case was said to have caused no end of feed problems in automatic weapons. This cartridge was not in common use until 1944.



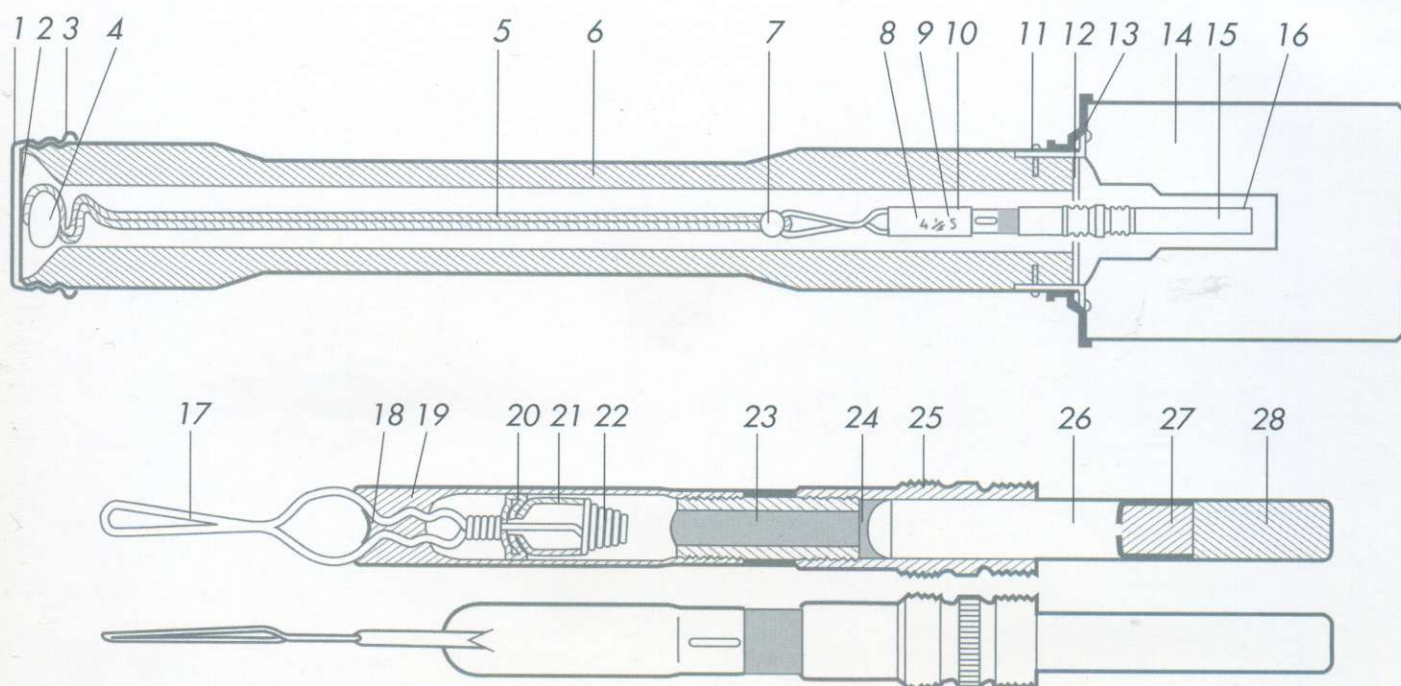
## STIELHANDGRANATE 24

A streamlined development of the type used in the First World War, the *Stielhandgranate* 24 was by far the most prominent hand grenade used by German forces. Comprised of a sheet metal head packed with 165g of TNT screwed into a hollow wooden handle, the grenades were transported to the front in stamped-metal or wooden boxes, each of which held 15 unarmed grenades, 15 friction fuses (*Brennzünder* 24) and 15 detonators (*Sprengkapsel* Nr. 8). To prime the grenades, the head had to be removed and the detonator inserted into its base. The friction fuse (which had 'burning'

time of 4.5 seconds) was in turn attached to the detonator, all of which was linked by a wire loop to the 'Rip cord' (*Abreiss-schnur*). This ran through the handle and terminated in a porcelain ball, which was kept within the handle by a screw-on security cap (*Sicherungskappe*). To ignite the grenade simply entailed releasing and firmly pulling the rip cord. The wooden 'sticks' were usually marked with manufacturer's codes and finished in a thin coat of varnish, while metal parts were commonly painted dark green. A reminder to 'insert detonator before use' was stencilled onto the explosive head. In 1939, a slightly longer and heavier version the *Stielhandgranate* 39 was issued and used until the end of the war, despite the later introduction of the M43 grenade. Once emptied, the grenade boxes were collected and sent back to be refilled.







#### STICK HAND GRENADE 24

1. Safety Cap.
2. Cardboard Disc and Spring.
3. Threaded Ring.
4. Pull Knob (Ring).
5. Pull Cord.
6. Stick (Handle).
7. Lead or Steel Pearl.
8. Makers Stamp.
9. Date Stamp.
10. Burn Fuse.
11. Rain Cap.
12. Threaded Cover.
13. Cardboard Rings.
14. Pot (Body).
15. Detonator No.8.
16. Detonator Sleeve.



#### FRICTION FUSE 24

17. Wire Noose.
18. Seal.
19. Lead Coating (Sleeve).
20. Ignition Base.
21. Friction Ignition Cap.
22. Friction Spiral.
23. Delay Pipe.
24. Seal.
25. Sleeve with Left Hand Thread.
26. Detonator No.8 - No.8 (A1).
27. Inside Cap with Load.
28. Main Charge.



## Twelve



## SMALL ITEMS



Back in 1940, during a speech to troops of the division, General Guderian forewarned of the testing times to come, when there would be 'days of uninterrupted driving and fighting, without rest, without sufficient food. (When) A piece of army bread, some Scho-ka-cola and a canteen of coffee will have to suffice.'\*

In fact, there were to be times when a Hussar could only yearn for a piece of chocolate or a sip of real coffee, but there was always a piece of bread to be had, whether the 'commissary' loaf baked in the field kitchens, a crisp

bread from one of the swankiest districts of Berlin, or the Zwieback, the twice baked, teeth defying rusk that constituted part of each man's final reserve, the 'iron ration.' Occasionally supplemented by treats sent from home, the troops would have pooled whatever their supply echelons (who issued what they could to fulfil the designated daily quota) passed on. Towards the end of the war, a limited effort was made to standardise front line rations with the introduction of individual 'combat' packets, recorded to have contained a chocolate bar, sweets and biscuits, but little mention is made of these by GD veterans.







**Soup** - (*Suppen*) 'Two servings of pea soup'. The solidified contents of such packets need only be added to hot water to make a meal, and in many ways were the equivalent of modern day convenience foods. Originally intended for the pre-war 'outdoor pursuits' market, such items were easily prepared on a soldier's 'Esbit' stove.



**Spices and Tea** - *Kuechengewuerz/Tee*) Left, 'Spicy kitchen herbs' from Nuremberg. Right, possibly Juniper, a bag of German tea. To make: 'Add 1 tablespoon per cold litre. Quickly bring to the boil and then leave to brew for fifteen minutes.'



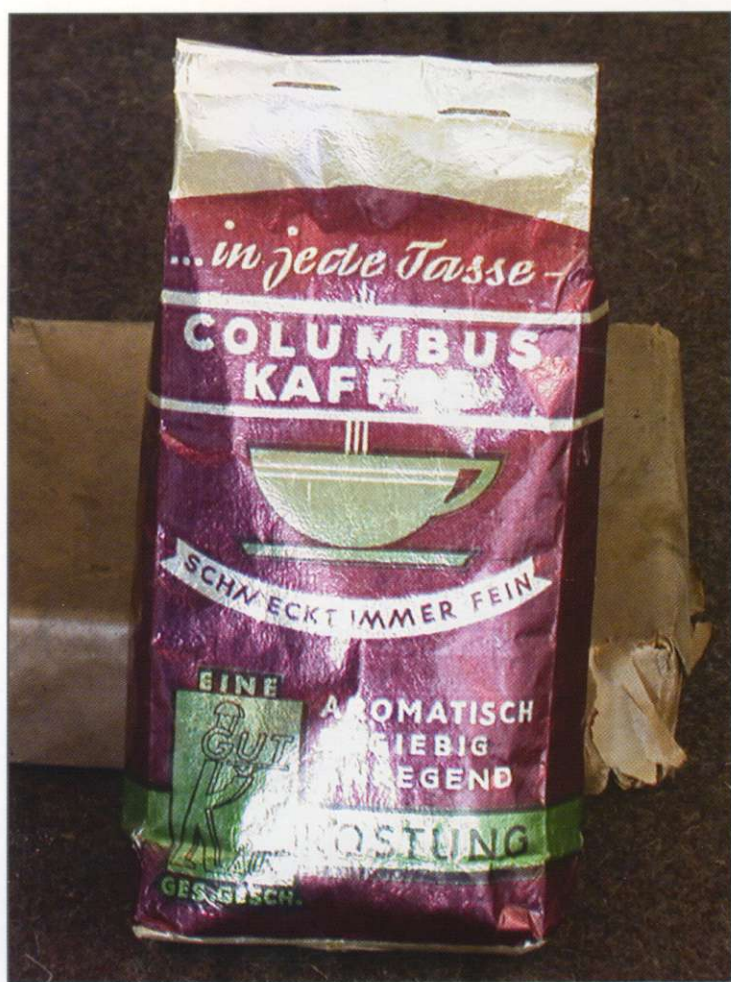
**Sugar** - (*Süßstoff*), Saccharin, 'Crystallized sweetener'. Sugar rationing saw a significant increase in the use of saccharin; a sweet organic compound derived from petroleum, which remained popular despite its bitter, metallic aftertaste. The small packet contains one hundred tablets.



**Ration Bags** - 'Supplementary rations for those fighting at the front with infantry units'. Folding out to twice the length shown here, these are possibly related to the late war 'combat packets'.

\* History of the Panzerkorps Grossdeutschland. H. Spaeter. J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc.





**Coffee** - 'In every cup Columbus coffee-always tastes fine.' This bag would have been worth its weight in gold on the black market. Most troops would have to suffice with Ersatz (substitute) coffee, often made from acorns.



**Crispbread** - (Knaeckebrot) Manufactured by 'Heinis crispbread bakery' of Potsdam-Babelsberg. This was traditionally made using rye, yeast, salt and water, with baked loaves being slowly dried out above the oven to produce a type of 'cracker'. Many troops would know of Babelsberg as the Hollywood of the German film industry. Home of the UFA studios since the 1920's, this plush residential area had attracted many film stars and party officials, and largely escaped the allied bombing offensive due to the nearby International Red Cross warehouses.

**Wine** - Part of the summer ration. A 1935 'Klosterberg' (Bavaria) Champagne reserved with a red stamp for the German armed forces, and an empty wartime Carlsberg beer bottle.



**Chocolate** - 'Scho-ka-kola, the full flavoured chocolate.' A tin and a rare cardboard version, both marked underneath 'Armed forces packaging.' Below, a bar of 'milk-coffee Glycolade'.







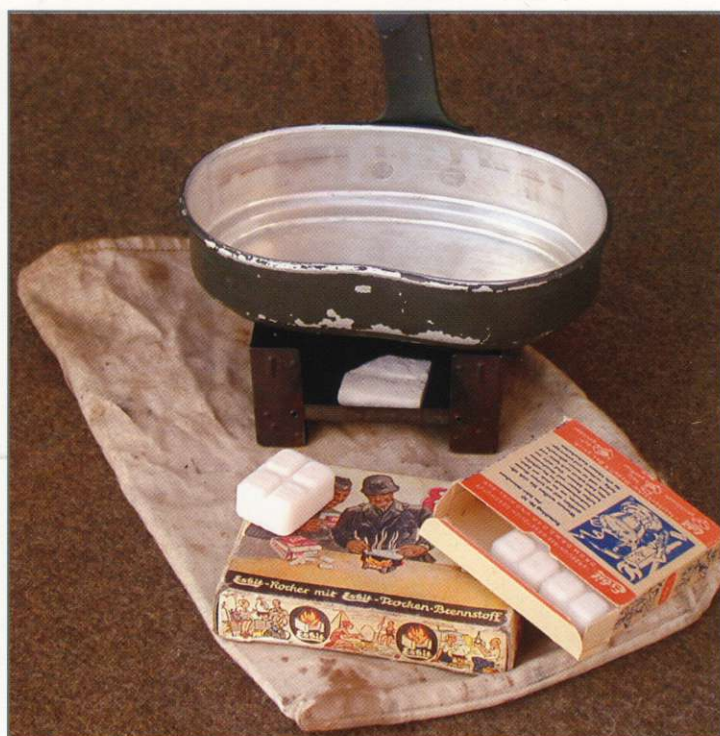
## FIELD COOKERS & STOVE

### TOP: Soldiers Ration Heater

The 'Esbit' (**E**rich **S**chumm **B**rennstoff **I**n **T**ablettenform) Model 9 stove. Said to have been designed by the entrepreneur Schumm, the real success behind these stoves were the fuel (*Brennstoff*) tablets. Smokeless, non-explosive and non-toxic, they allowed an individual at the front the means to 'brew up' when group meals were not possible. The *Tablettenauflage* (tablet support tray) was designed to allow air to circulate around the fuel.

### BELOW: Juwel 33 Cooker

Based on the civilian (Swedish) 'Svea 123', a popular pre-war model amongst back-packers, the 'Juwel 33' stove was manufactured by the Gustav Barthel Company in Dresden. Intended for specialist units such as mountain troopers, the stove was also ideal for vehicle crews. Clearly marked 'Nur Fuer benzin' (only for use with petrol), it was primed by placing a small amount of fuel onto the top plate and setting light to it. Once hot, the metal would ignite tiny streams of escaping vapour that, once regulated, provided a steady source of heat. This example is complete with accessories.







### Oranier Stove

Thought to have originated in the First World War, this stove has been manufactured by the 'Oranier' firm of Gladenbach. Specialising in heating and cooking appliances, this example seems to have been made to military specifications and is possibly intended for use in barracks or bunkers. Rarely seen in original photos (and the few that do exist show the stove being used outside), the stove has hooks around the side and a kidney shaped hole in the top to allow food or water to be heated in mess tins. (Interestingly, this may also be why the M31 mess tins were manufactured in a curved shape, so as to 'lay flush' against such stoves).



## COFFEE GRINDER

Although unmarked, this *Kaffeemuehle* is thought to be from a field kitchen, and is constructed from stamped steel plate. Considered a rare item, the mill sits alongside a bag of cocoa beans, just as rare in wartime Europe. Most of the time troops had to endure *Ersatz* (substitute) coffee, which was reported to mainly consist of roasted barley or rye, but acorns, oak leaves, tree bark and, if one account is to be believed, coal dust! could also be used to add interest. The use of such substances came as no real shock to the German soldier; 'alternative' coffees and herbal teas were well known in pre-war Germany.





## FLASHLIGHT & GOGGLES

One example of the many different styles employed for use in the armed forces. Seemingly designed for military service, this version has three different Perspex filters built into it, blue (in the strip seen in the hood), plus green and red controlled by the switch. A series of commands were found in handbooks for employment in darkness or fog, green for positive, red for negative and white for neutral signals. This torch is powered by a 3.8 volt (0.07 Amp) 'Phoenix' battery.

Three of the most common varieties of goggles are shown here. The two types of Perspex eye-shields are seen with their relevant packets (dark for coloured lenses, light tan for clear lenses). Note that the clear version is wrapped in protective cardboard. Both examples are dated 1944. The 'all-purpose' goggles are made from leather and, like the Perspex models, were on general issue to motorised troops. This example is seen with its leatherette case and is dated 'Jan. 41'.





## OFFICER'S MAP CASE AND BOARD

An officer's primary combat role is to coordinate his troops so as to achieve their mission, and various specialist items were issued to aid him in this task. The M1935 despatch case (*Meldekartentasche*) was the platoon leaders office. As well as pencils, notebooks and a ruler, the case contained a variety of map reading instruments. These included protractors, Perspex grid scales, a *Kilometermesser* (Km measure), and the *Kurvenmesser*, a wheeled tool for measuring the 'real' length of roads on a scale map. Two examples of compass are shown here. The model on the right bears the manufacturing code 'cxn', identifying the manufacturer as Emil Busch (optics) of Rathenow, while the other is stamped 'NEAG Berlin.so.004723'. The map board was used at staff levels and doubled up as writing 'desk'.





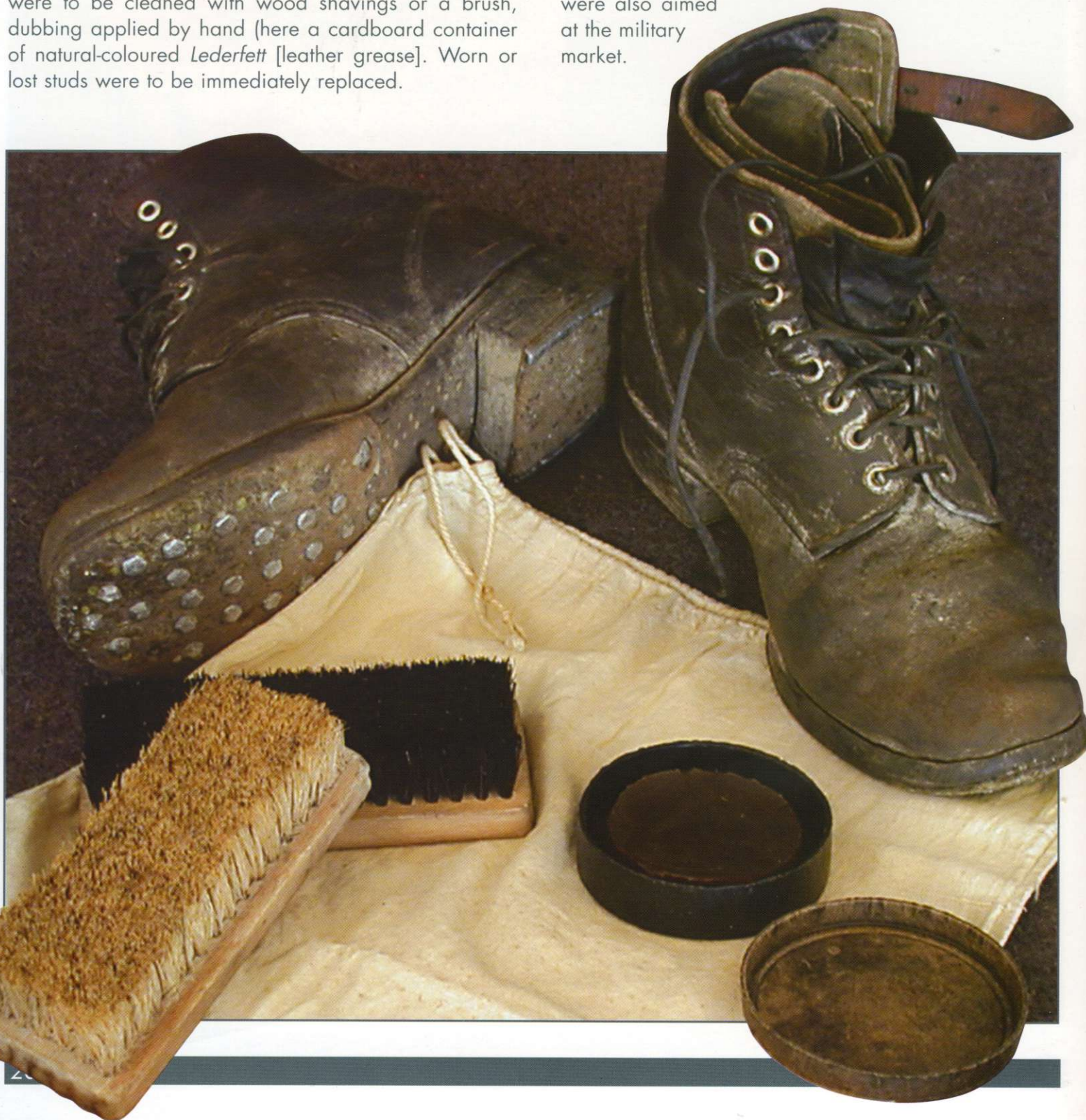




## CLEANING, WASHING & SEWING

The regulations were quite explicit about the maintenance of issued kit. "The soldier is duty bound to respect and care for his clothing and equipment. From his own means he has to provide brushes, cleaning and sewing items and replenish same as required. The soldier is to maintain his clothes and equipment himself and rectify small defects (tears, etc) himself." Bread bags were to be washed with warm water and soap, wet woollens were not to be wrung but squeezed, and if no washer woman was available, underclothes had to be soaked overnight in a cold soda/water solution. Boots were to be cleaned with wood shavings or a brush, dubbing applied by hand (here a cardboard container of natural-coloured *Lederfett* [leather grease]). Worn or lost studs were to be immediately replaced.

Having to repair tears or replace lost buttons resulted in a wide array of largely civilian needlework items being utilised. Some commercial firms manufactured 'housewife' pouches '*Kameradenhilfe*' shown here and packs of needles '*Nadeln*' purely for the military market. The cardboard sheets of tunic buttons were issued to company tailors. As with the sewing kits, many washing accessories (such as the 'Swan' soap and 'Gold-star' razorblades) were civilian purchases, stashed in the suitcases of recruits as they joined up. Commercial pieces like the white-metal comb and razorblade wallet were also aimed at the military market.









## PERSONAL CAMERA & CIGARETTES

The pre-war boom in compact, affordable 35mm cameras saw an unprecedented amount of men able to record their wartime experiences. For the first time in history, the average soldier was able to permanently capture images on film with cameras such as this, the 'Leica III.' Manufactured by Ernst Leitz (**Leitz camera**) of Wetzlar some time after 1933 (serial no. 121806), over 27,000 of this particular version (with a black leather 'jacket') were made before being discontinued in 1939.

This example is fitted with a 'Summar' 50mm f2 high-speed lens, ideal for moving objects and bad light conditions. The light metre is Leica made and can slot on top of the camera. Note the roll of 35mm film and canister.

Although part of the daily ration allotment (7 per day for front line troops), cigarettes, along with cigars and pipe tobacco, were also commonly sent from home by a thoughtful friend or relative. Consequently, packaging on cartons and rolling papers often bore the seal of the Reich tax office.

A wide range of smoking brands and associated paraphernalia could be found at the front, from 'Efka' cigarette papers to 'Roland' matches, along with lighters (here the standard mass-produced petrol version) and privately purchased tin-plate match books.









## BOOKS & BOARD GAMES

A wide variety of books were made available for the German soldier to help idle away the few hours he would get to relax. For the troops of GD, the annual periods of refitting would see an avalanche of literature descend upon them, both from home as the post caught up, or from libraries set up by the division. (Just before the 'Citadel offensive', GD received over 9,000 books from the German high command and other political organisations.)

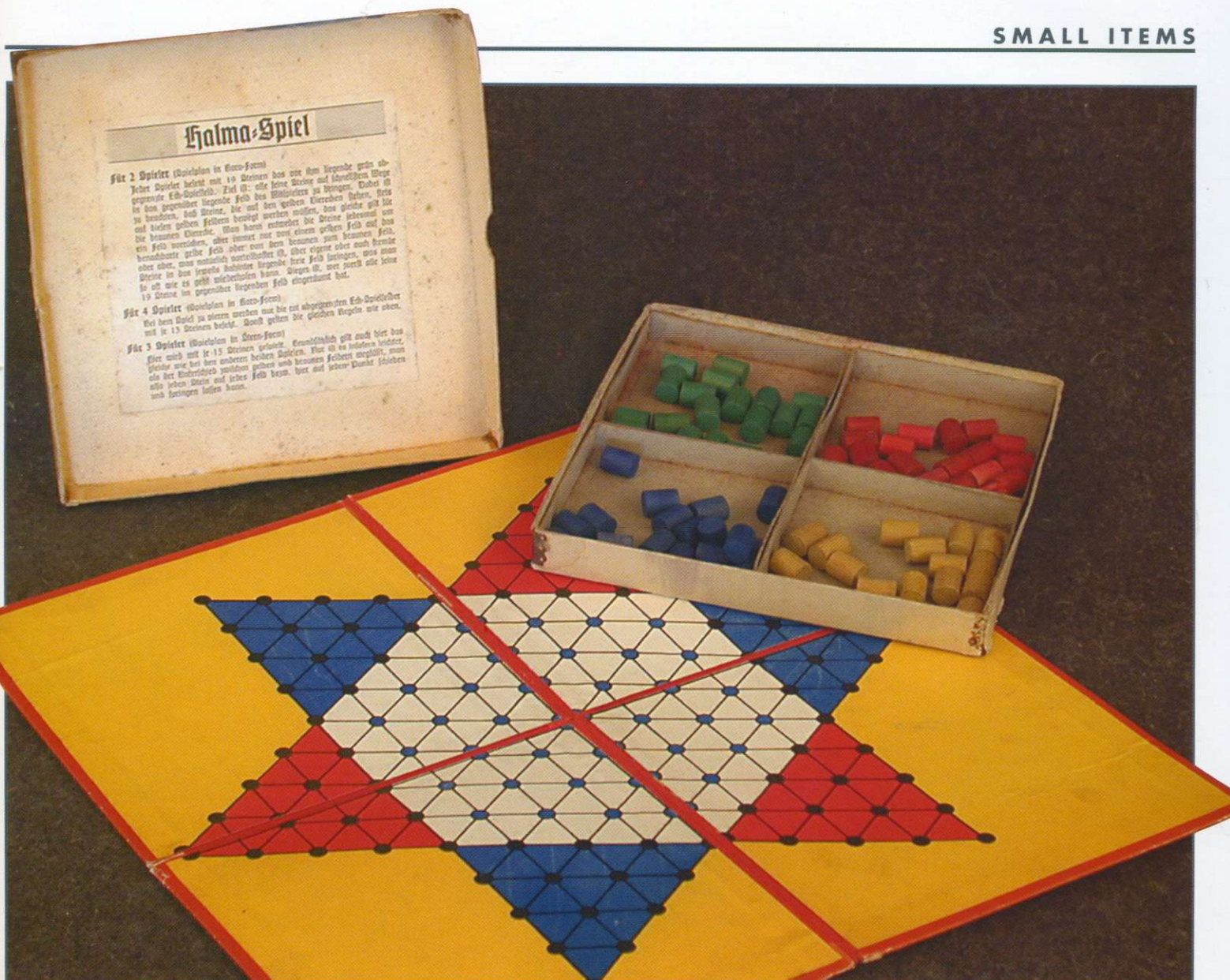
Such was the demand for fresh material that a whole series of items were designed to conform to military post weight and packaging requirements. Most numerous here are 'Die bunten hefte fuer unsere soldaten' (The colourful booklets for our soldiers). These periodicals were published by W. Kohlhammer (Stuttgart/Berlin), and encompassed a broad range of subjects, from the 'German heroic sagas' through to 'humour and fun'. Each of these booklets had a flap inside the front cover that allowed them to be sealed to the back cover which, in turn, had pre-printed instructions for posting to the front.

The 'VB-feldpost' was a book published by the 'Voelkischer Beobachter' (people's observer), a newspaper available in Germany. This volume is a collection of tales and anecdotes sent to the paper by troops from all branches of the armed forces.

The game of chequers seen here is another example of a 'field post friendly' item that could be purchased 'back at home', while the *Halma-spiel* (Chinese chequers) game is thought to have been marketed exclusively for troops and available from barrack canteens.









Thirteen



STOWAGE & MUD





Before this project, one could only wonder what it felt like to live in and around a German armoured fighting vehicle, and it was a real privilege to become so closely acquainted with this beautifully

restored\* sixty year old 'war horse'. Admittedly, we are certain that a SPW would be far more 'knocked about' after two years of front line service, with bent wings and missing parts, but with a vehicle this rare we had to bear in mind the owner's wishes to respect its condition at all times. To preserve the paintwork, rope was used to hang and lash equipment onto the exterior and we covered the main interior floor with grey 'mount board' to protect it from hobnailed boots (the card soon took on the shape of the floor tread pattern). In reality the paint in this area would quickly be worn away, as would the outer edge of the crew compartment where the baggage chaffed.

But how real an experience was it for 'our' men? Faced with the same problems as an original crew (apart from being shot at!) what you see here is not contrived. For example, there really is not enough room in the vehicle to store the kit of five, let alone a full complement of six. It could be argued that a crew would not take rucksacks with them, instead leaving them with the battalion or squadron 'train'. However, the said train was rarely around when you needed a fresh pair of socks or an extra jumper for that chilly night.

The mud that collected is a result of one particular photo shoot. During the course of a weekend, with minimal movement, the 250 quickly collected a layer of mud that took three days to clean off with a pressure hose! The day before that shoot the heavens had opened, and we set off for the designated area the following morning little realising quite how soft the ground would be. After two further days of poor weather the 250 managed to sink down to its belly and get stuck, only to be saved by the Sdkfz 251 pulling it out. Unfortunately a camera was not to hand to record the event, but it did prove the strength and capabilities of the 251, tugging 5.3 tons of 250 up hill through a waterlogged field. Such a sight

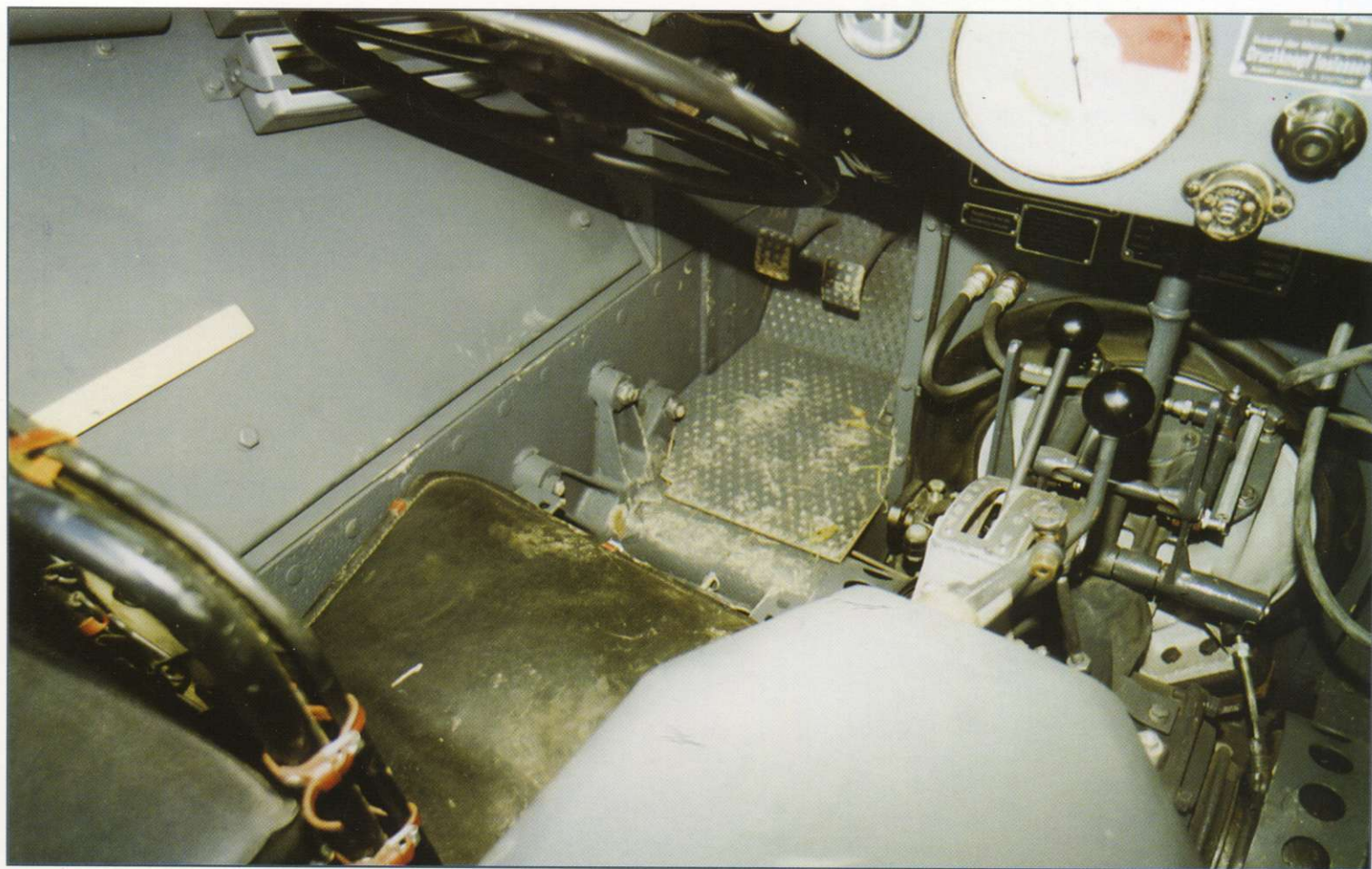
has probably not been seen since 1945, and it did

(literally) throw up some interesting observations on where and how mud collects on the SPW.

\*For the full story of the vehicle's restoration, the reader is kindly referred to the companion '250 Technical' volume.

*From the photographs in this section it is fairly self explanatory as to what you are seeing, but for further detail of what was in some of the rucksacks and bags go to "Small Items" chapter 12.*





















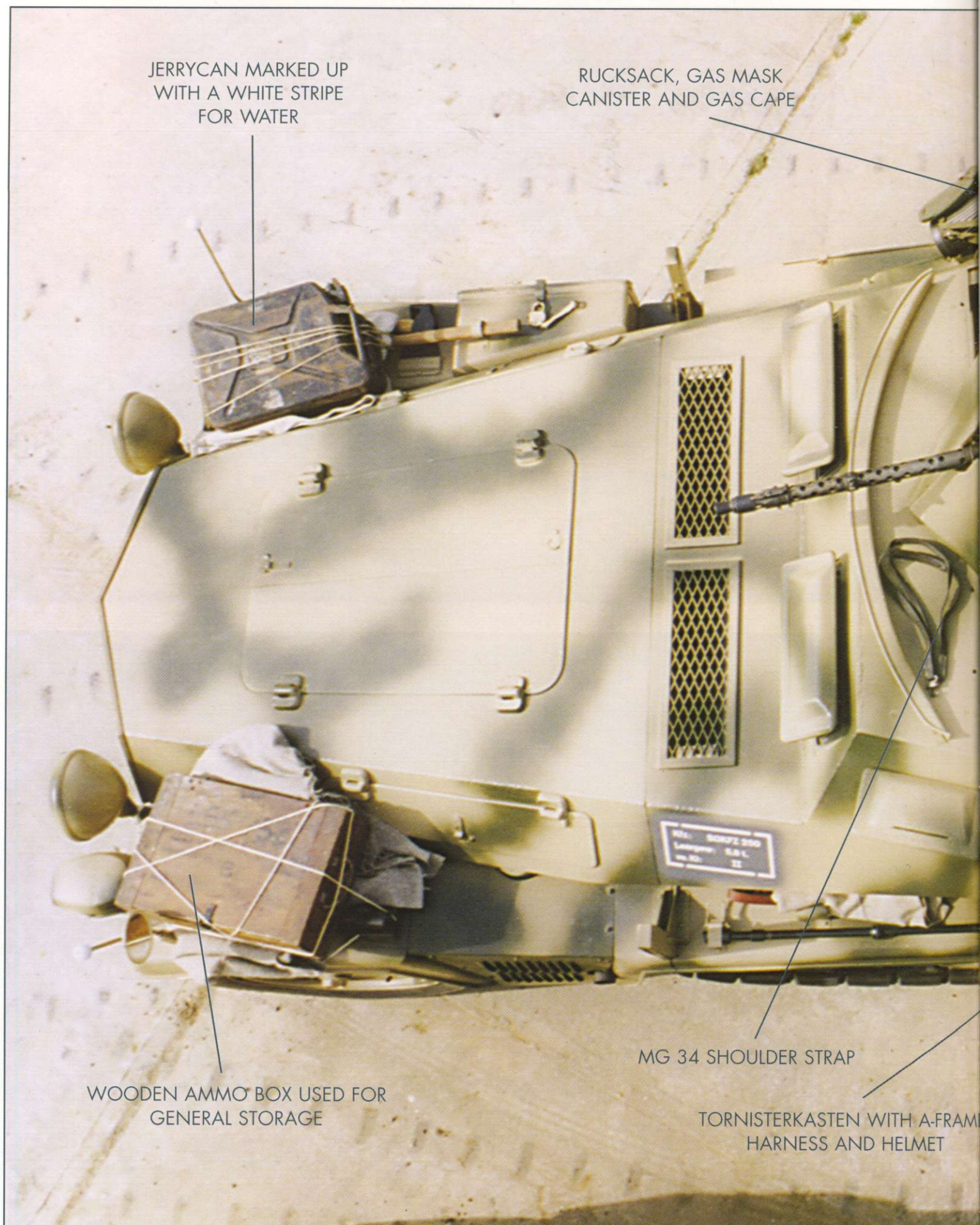












JERRYCAN MARKED UP  
WITH A WHITE STRIPE  
FOR WATER

RUCKSACK, GAS MASK  
CANISTER AND GAS CAPE

WOODEN AMMO BOX USED FOR  
GENERAL STORAGE

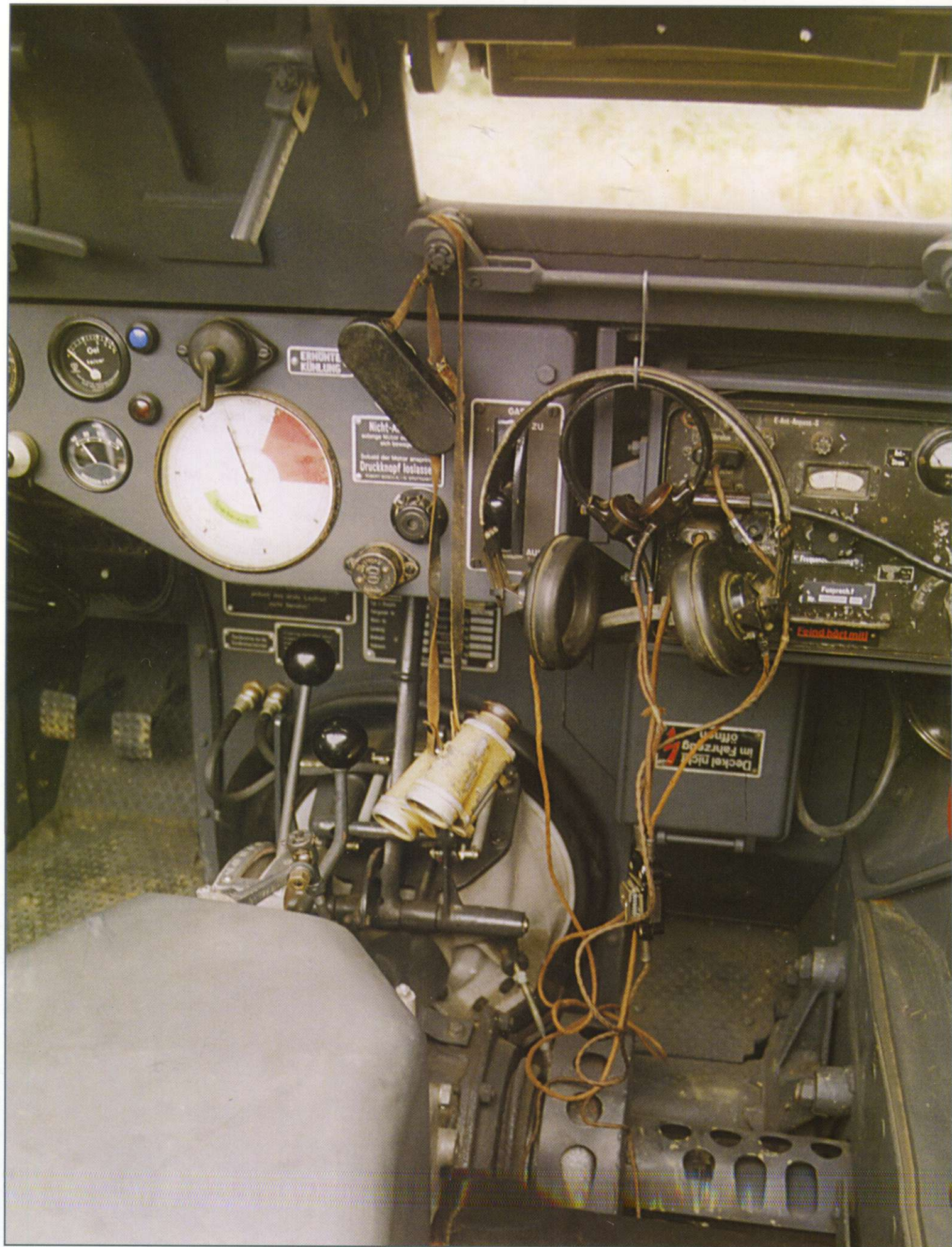
MG 34 SHOULDER STRAP

TORNISTERKASTEN WITH A-FRAME  
HARNESS AND HELMET













*ABOVE:* Stashed behind the locker are the crew's blankets, two greatcoats, a rucksack, mess tin and gas mask container. A tunic and more blankets are stored between the locker and rear inner bodywork. The small grey box is for the dry storage of flare cartridges, while the pouch seen on top of the locker allows them to be carried on dismantled missions.

*RIGHT:* Thrown on the folding chair is a fur-lined greatcoat, ideal for sleeping in. Note the elaborate K98 rifle 'butt' mounts, beautifully made and lined with leather. These are perfect examples of the famous German trait to 'over engineer' what should be a simple requirement.

*LEFT:* The radio operator's position. Note how little room is allocated in the foot well for a pair of size ten boots. Directly below the radio is its transformer. This is mounted onto a panel that allows access to the fuel pump and magneto. Any inspections or repairs to these vital parts were achieved headfirst!







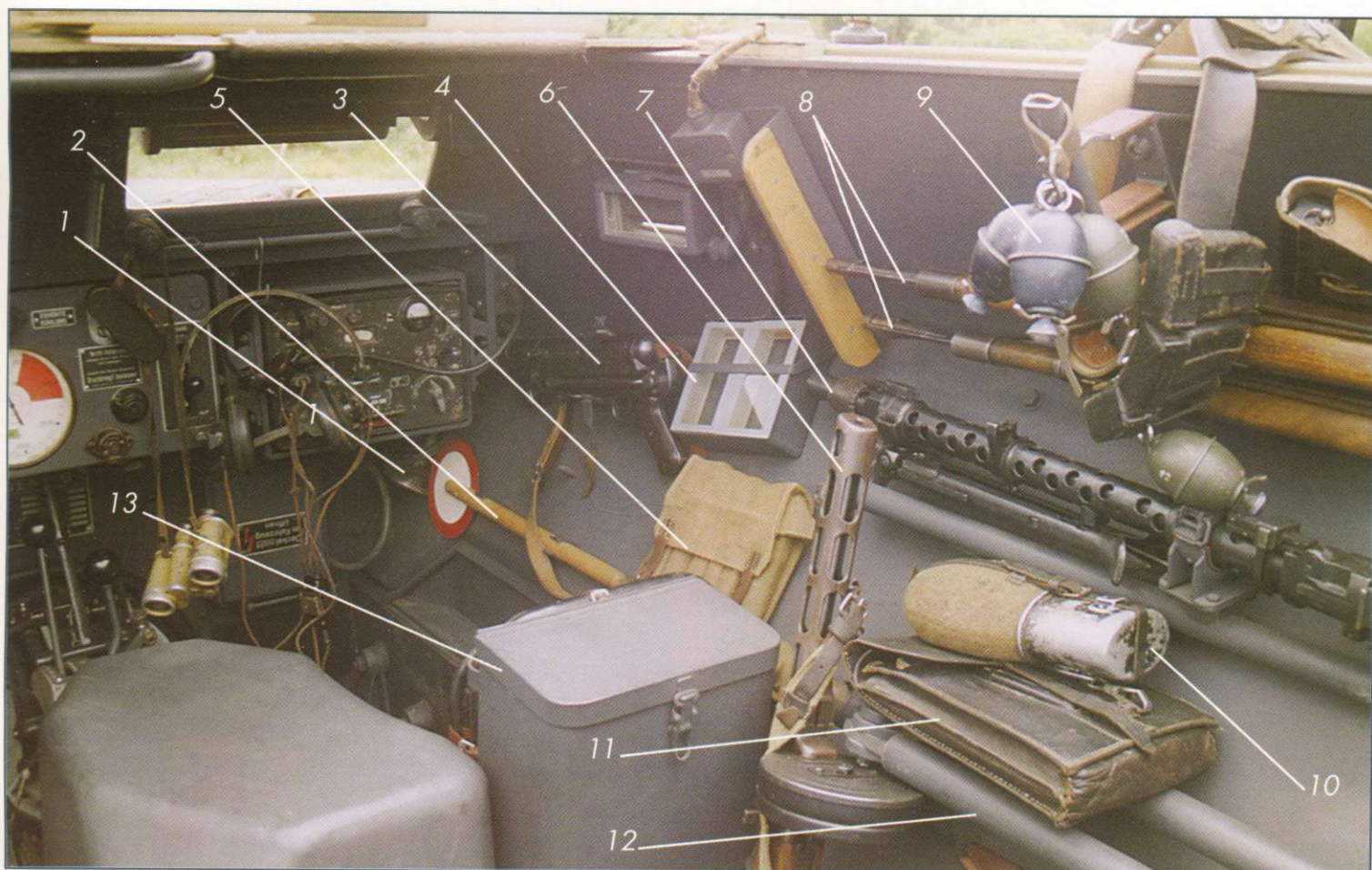
ABOVE & LEFT: The back of the seat had a built in storage bin. There were official recommendations for what was stowed where, but in the course of day-to-day living the regulations were all but ignored. Note the various contents, exposed because the canvas cover has been folded back.



*RIGHT:*

1. Under the radio, hand held torch in its bracket.
2. Traffic wand (not used in combat).
3. MP 40.
4. Two spare small vision blocks for the side visors.
5. MP 40 ammo pouch with six magazines plus the loading tool.
6. PPSH sub machine gun.
7. MG 34 in its travel mount.
8. Two K98 rifles in their rack.
9. Enlisted man's belt with rifle pouches plus egg grenades.
10. Water bottle.
11. Map case.
12. Anti-aircraft tripod for the MG 34.
13. Seat back box containing windscreens.



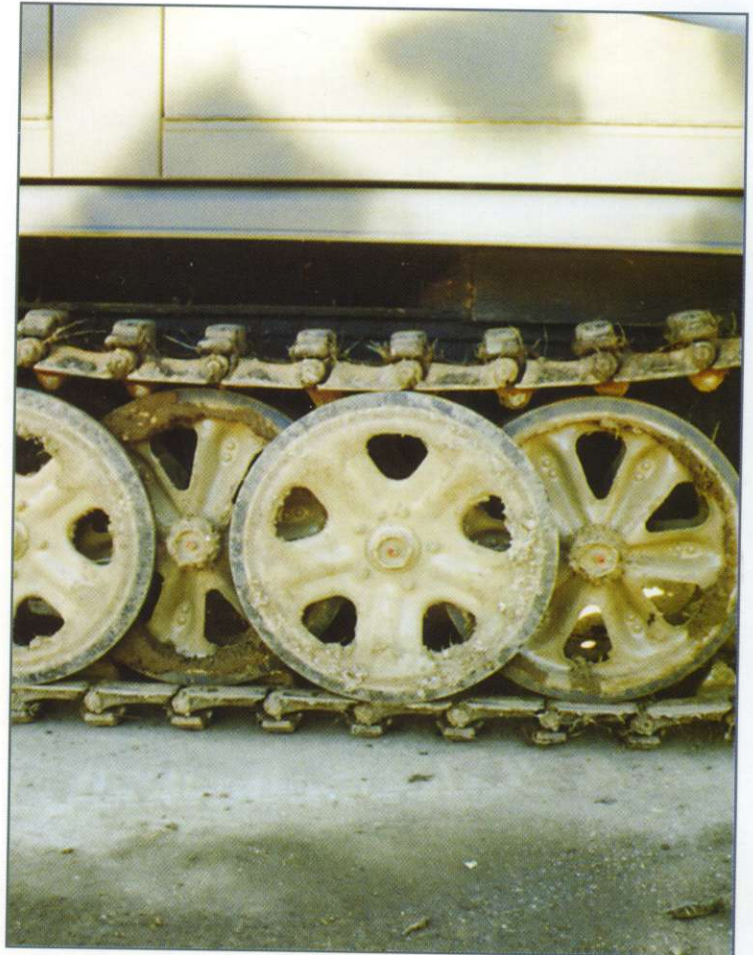




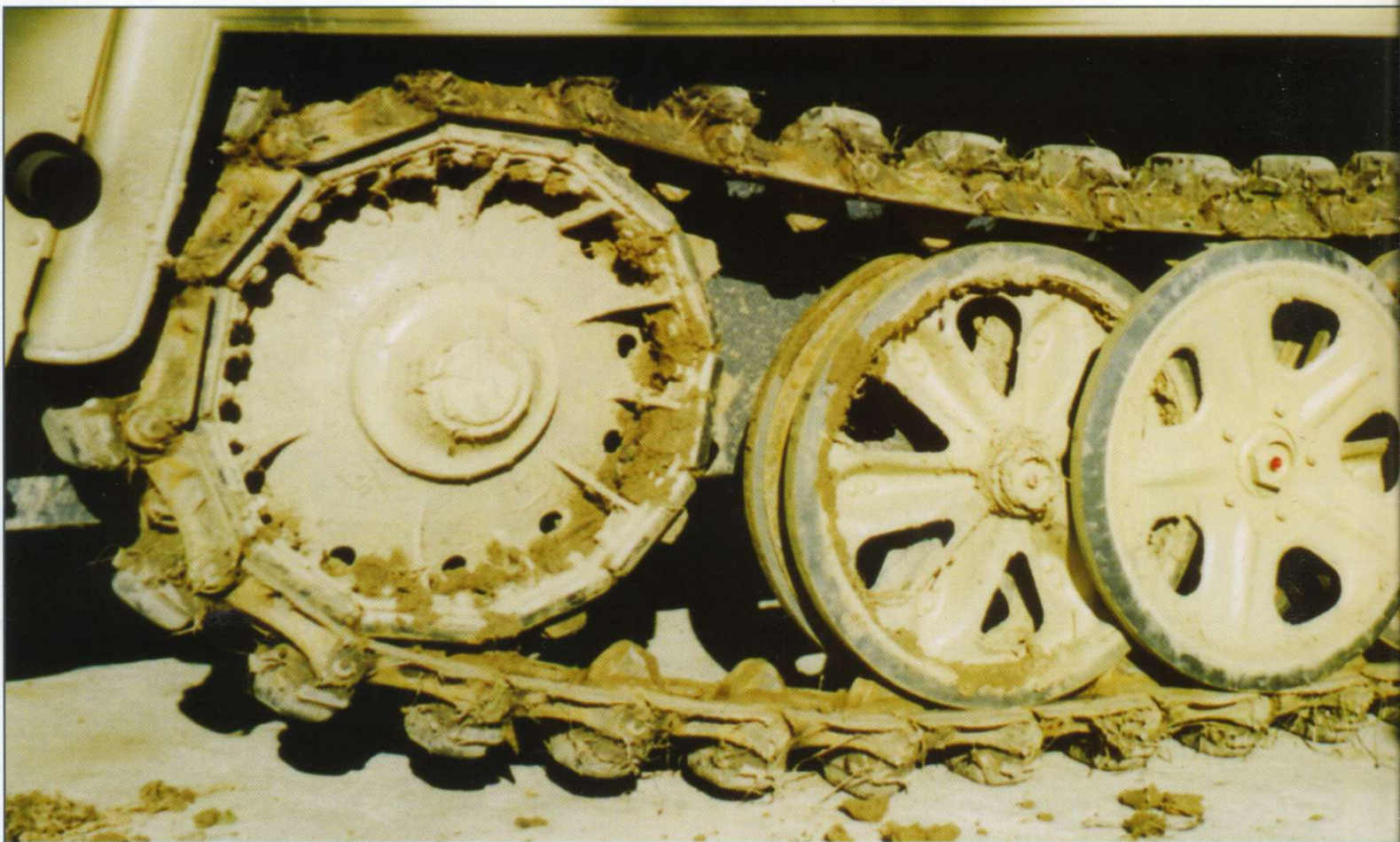




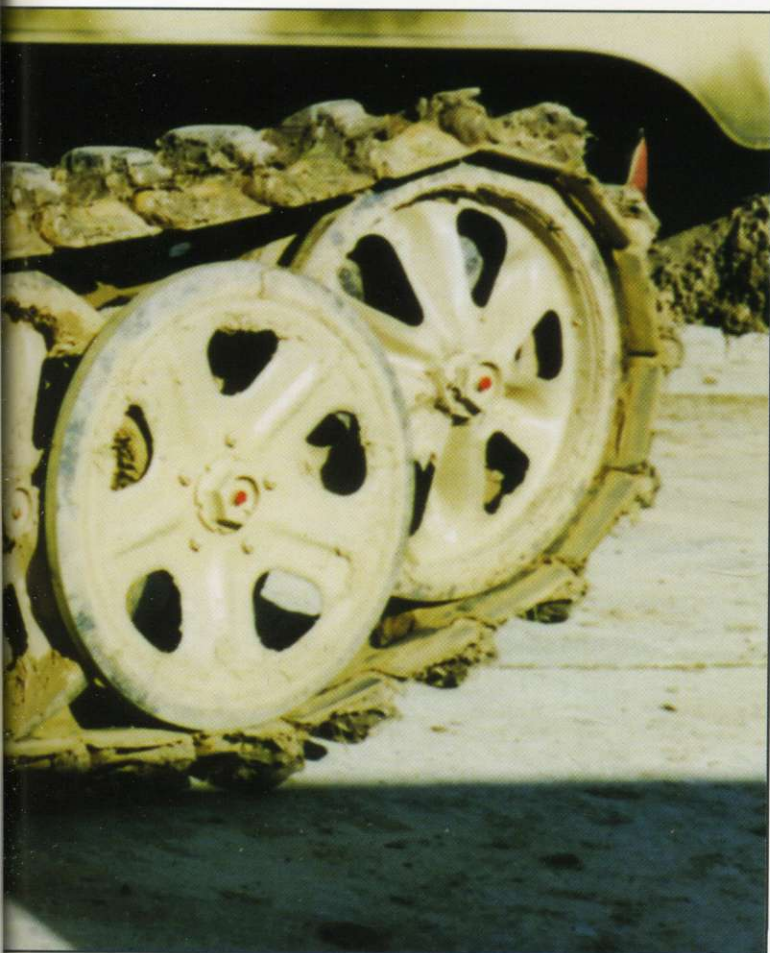
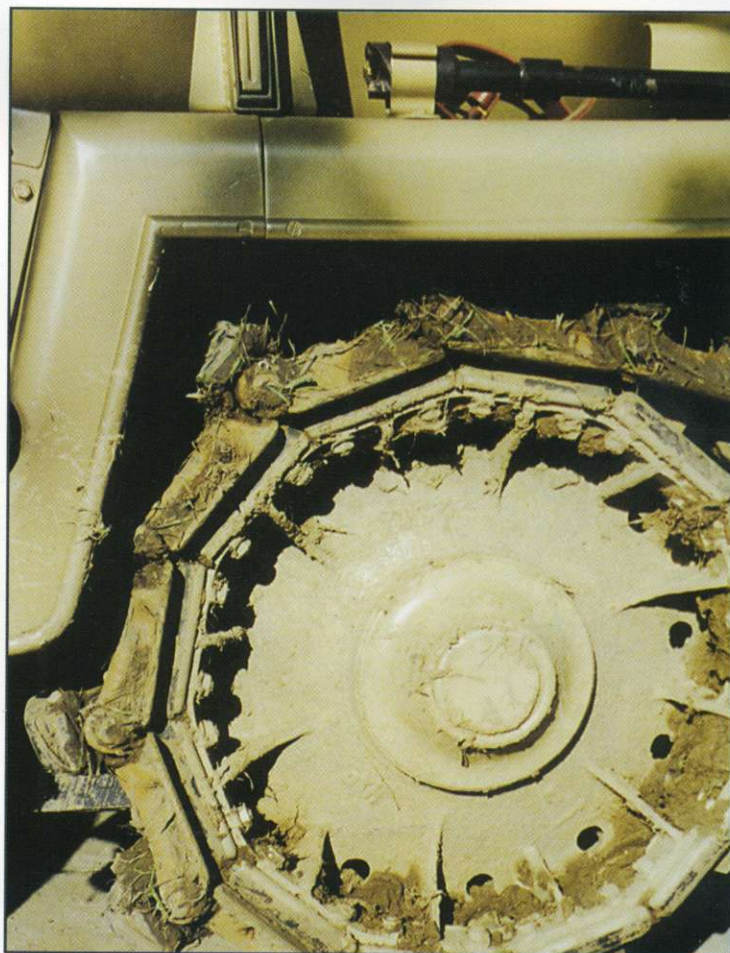
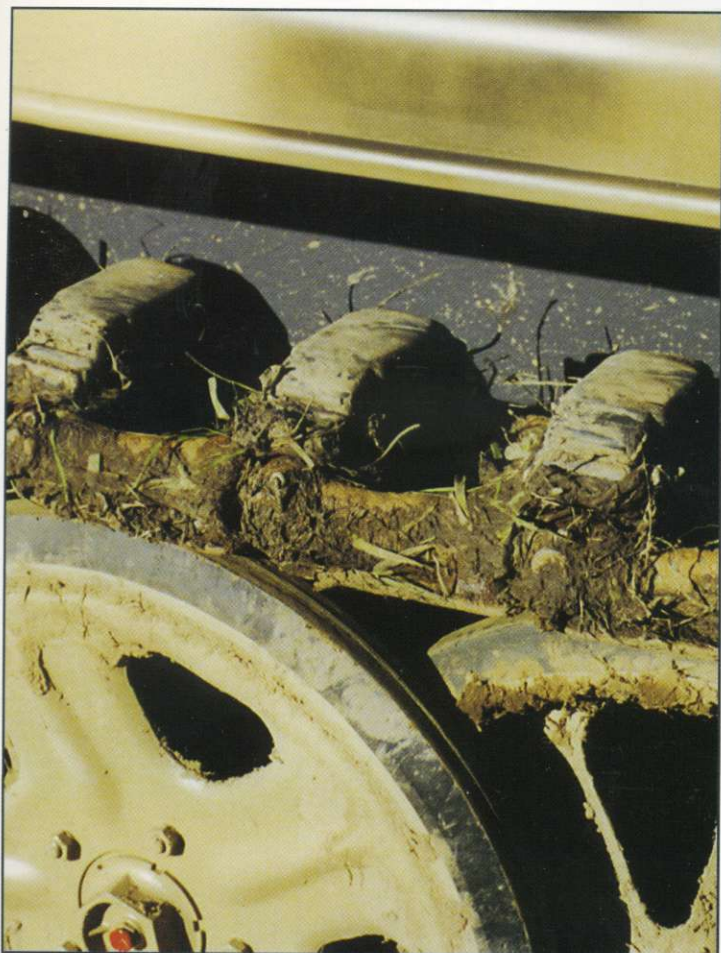
A selection of pictures taken two days after a photo shoot. All of the stowage you see has settled quite naturally onto the vehicle's sides. The clumps of mud visible in the photo top left have fallen off just through driving the 250 backwards and forwards, but for the most part the mud is still drying and stuck like glue to both tracks and wheels. The vehicle did not collect mud where we thought it might. The chassis behind the front wheels and under the engine was almost perfectly clean, a real surprise considering where it had been. The inner mudguard immediately behind the front wheels was also remarkably clean. This is attributed to the fact that the wheels are not motor-driven, and consequently do not spray mud back onto this area. The section of the track mudguard in front of the drive sprocket was another area that stayed virtually mud free. The ground was so soggy, and the tracks of the 250 so narrow, that it would quite happily sink down to its belly. This explains why the mud is seen on the outer (and inner) faces of the track wheels. The outer set of wheels were rubbing themselves clean as they passed through the mud, whilst the side walls of the tyres both inside and out collected mud, not in clumps, but smeared where the wheels slid trying to steer the 250.











The action of the track whipping around the rear idler has flung mud onto the underside of the track-guard and mud flap. Given enough time this clumping would grow and spread forwards, and it would not take too much to clog up and almost touch the track itself. It has collected in the joints between each track and under the track block, but see how the outer chassis face behind the track wheels has stayed relatively clean. More mud would collect on the inner face of the sprocket and start oozing through the gap between and behind the sprocket track rollers.

Note how the track has acted like a lawn mower, nipping off the grass in the joint as it straightens out after passing the sprocket. We were not able to take the 250 on a proper cross country jaunt, but we do not think that this is a vehicle to collect vast amounts of mud on the nose or under the rear door. It had a tough time coping with English summer showers, and we were left wondering just how vulnerable it would have been in the bottomless slush of a Russian spring.



Fourteen



ARCHIVE, CAMOUFLAGE  
& MARKINGS









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*PREVIOUS PAGE:* By the middle of June 1942, the freshly raised reconnaissance battalion GD had been transported from Germany to the south of Orel for further training. Here the untried squadrons were acclimatised to Russian conditions before being committed to battle. Judging by the relaxed atmosphere in these three photographs, the day's exercise is over. Three officers (possibly Von Usedom with back to the camera and 2nd squadron CO Hans Klemme extreme right) look on as a 250/10 crew attach the canvas cover over a muzzle capped 37mm PAK 35/36.

This vehicle was normally found in platoon command groups under direct control of the Zug leader, but the low number (4) suggests this one may have been attached to the squadron command group. A brand new example of the 'second version' with the classic rib-edged mud and track-guards and 'second version' driver's visors, it still retains the hubcaps on the drive sprockets. It is unusual that this vehicle should be towing a Sonderanhänger 32 ammunition trailer, usually associated with the Sd Kfz 252.

*BELOW:* Having secured the vehicle the crew settle down for the evening. Note the belts and holsters hanging off the rear Notek light, use of the '88' ammunition crate to store personal belongings, and what appears to be a wash bag and bar of soap on the trailer. Lined with straw for insulation, the Zeltbahn has been correctly erected with taut sides.

*OPPOSITE:* A Kuebelwagen crew from the 3rd squadron relax at the end of the day with a comfortable meal. Sitting on chairs removed from the vehicle, they eat from a table constructed from the leather backseat cover supported on a frame.

Note the MG34 sight box under the table and amount of other kit lying around. There are at least three MG34 twin spare barrel containers along with the MG mount post behind the men on the left. Of interest is the lack of GD insignia being worn. This is possibly attributed to an initial hold up in appropriate supplies, as GD had just been transformed from a battle worn regiment into a brand new 18,000-man division.



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There are two distinct versions of the 250 Alt. The first model (Mark 1) was based on the Sd Kfz 253 with the roof removed and the classic and most prevalent Mark 2 with new single slot visors, mud and track-guards, headlamps and brackets and new toolbox and tool stowage arrangement.

*BELOW:* With an apparently endless vista, elements of the squadron pass civilians who perhaps have something to do with the dead cow. Attached to the squadron command group, the solo motorcycle messengers follow their leader on a BMW R75 combination. The first 250 has collected tree branches from some way back judging by the lack of woodland in the distance. With the Red army retreating to avoid the staggering losses of the previous year, these somewhat casually taken pictures and relative lack of concern for enemy air attacks must have given a surreal feeling, almost as if they were on a training jaunt. Within a few weeks the squadron would be at the forefront of some tough fighting as the Red army dug in and fought back.

*OPPOSITE TOP:* Wearing a motorcycle coat over his Black Panzer uniform, Von Usedom listens intently as he receives a situation report from an unidentified Leutnant of the squadron. The metal pennant (thought to be gold and black) denotes this 250/3 as his personal transport as commander of the battalion. (For a colour illustration see page 304). Note the driver peering out the visor window. Of interest is the small running light fixed on a bracket to the semaphore indicator housing, this was never a factory fitting on any 250.

*OPPOSITE BOTTOM:* A pair of 'Mark two' 250 alts use trees for cover to observe the terrain. Note the position of the large axe on the exhaust cover just forward of the semaphore indicator, and that the wire cutters are missing below the fascine of tree branches. Of interest is the lack of a Balkenkreuz on the side armour panels. Note the two bread bags hanging on the rear of the forward 250, the rack on the right side track guard for 'jerry cans', the rearward position of the radio aerial which was perhaps copied from the 253, and how neatly the tarpaulin cover has been rolled up and attached over the rear door. The rear registration plate is covered by mud.



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The entire column featured in these pages (and other, previously published photographs from the Bundesarchiv) is held up by this hole in the road. For some reason the battalion has to cross here and not go around it. (Perhaps it is a gully that runs across the terrain and can only be crossed at this point?) Note the dog peering over the top of the armour. The Leutnant on the right is seen reporting to Von Usedom on the previous page.







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BA101I-748-0100A-T2





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LEFT: There is no evidence of an exploded mine. Whatever it is, it was important enough for several NCOs and officers to 'muck in' to help fill it. This Mark 2 250 clearly displays its unit affiliation, with GD Stahlhelm, Kradschuetzen tactical symbol (2nd Schwadron) and vehicle number (3). Note the registration plates and Stahlhelm on the front have been deliberately daubed with mud to lessen their visibility.

ABOVE: The driver now attempts to cross over the hole, but judging by the angle of the axle and how far the right wheel is raised under the mudguard, a log has shifted. Given that there is an Sd Kfz 263 waiting in the column behind (which weighed 3 tons more than the 5.3 ton 250), they will need to find a few more logs to solve their predicament.





As the Army's premier and newest division, it seems that for propaganda purposes a war photographer accompanied the battalion for a short time as it advanced across the Steppes in July 1942, and in doing so captured a wide variety of vehicles originally found within the reconnaissance battalion. If ever there was a set of photographs that show the depth of equipment afforded to GD during the war, the following two pages justify the reality. Although others in this series have been seen before, it is still a remarkable set of pictures.

Of the four 250s seen here, only the lead vehicle is an original Mark 1 version with twin-slot front visors and early style stowage box (behind the semaphore indicator).

It is interesting that all the 250s as well as the Sd Kfz 222 use 2 metre rod aerials, and not the 1.4 metre whip aerial. All four 250s are the heavy MG versions and have added racking for fuel cans on the right track guard. The DKW motorcycle belongs to a despatch rider from the squadron command group. Making up the rest of the column are two Sd Kfz 222s, an Sd Kfz 263, and late models of both Sd Kfz 260 and 261 based on the 222 chassis, all from 1st squadron. Note the black Panzer uniforms of the 'pathfinders', and the Zug designation inscribed on the bucket on the first 250.



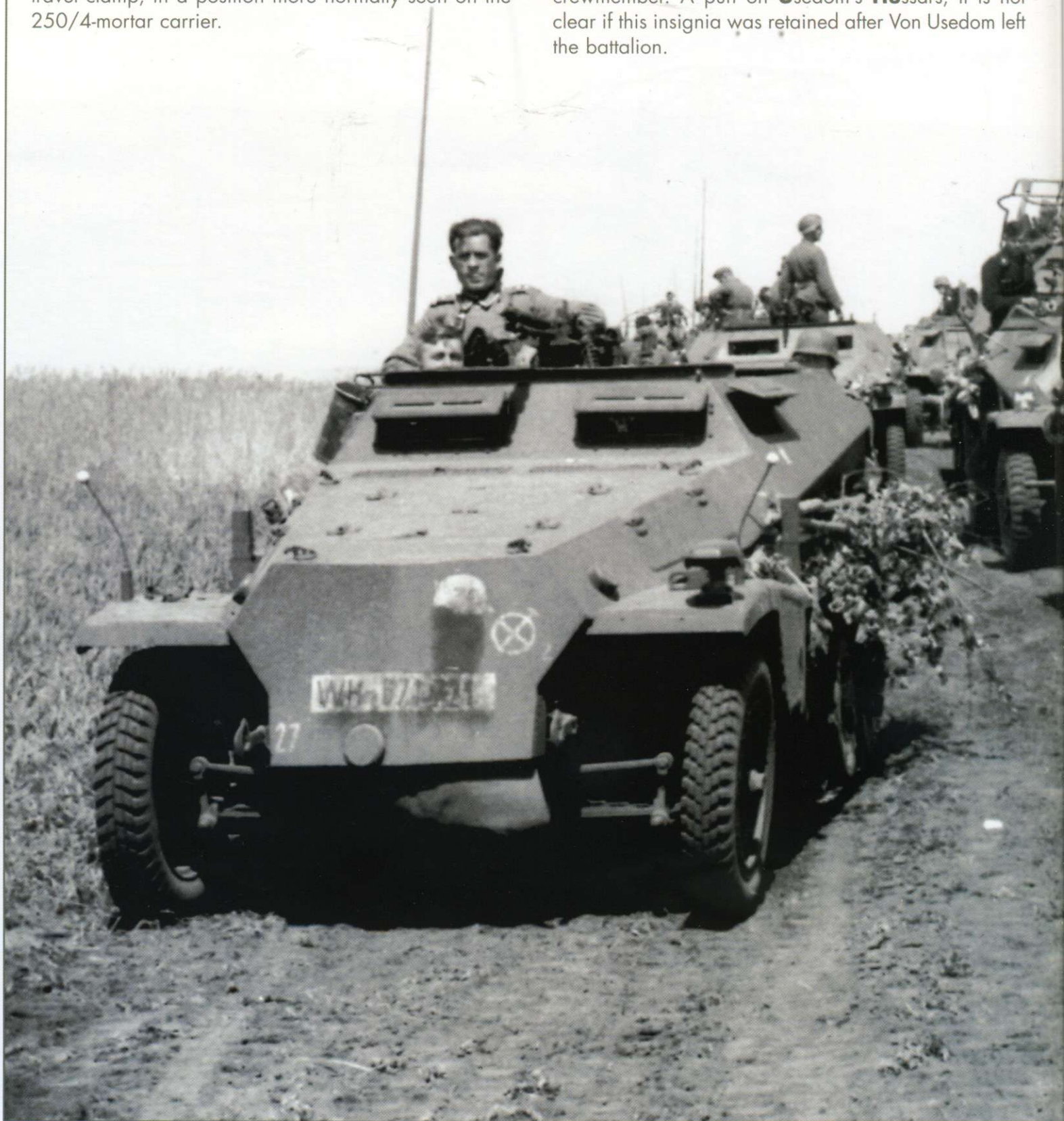


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The left hand 250 in this photograph is the right hand vehicle on the previous page notice the difference between the mudguards on this Mark 1 compared to the Mark 2 on pages 294/5. The lead 250 is also a Mark 1 and the soldier behind the NCO on the right has his hand resting on what appears to be an MG34 travel clamp, in a position more normally seen on the 250/4-mortar carrier.

Note also the different wire mesh used on the air vent grills on the upper deck. The NCO is wearing a SA sports award with two unidentified ribbons above. Few of the men seen here would survive long enough to exhibit a full chest of combat awards. The Uhu (Owl) motif has been carefully cleaned by a proud crewmember. A pun on **U**sedom's **H**ussars, it is not clear if this insignia was retained after Von Usedom left the battalion.







BA1011-748-0100A-17





High summer on the Russian Steppes. With their tarpaulin covers stowed on the right front mudguards, a platoon from the 2nd squadron move out as GD advances to the Don basin. Even though the majority of the 250s seen in these photographs carry the long range sustained fire mount (in effect the top half of the MG34 laffette), none of them are equipped with the rack to carry a complete laffette on the rear plate.

This type of MG mount seems at odds with the 'up close and personal' type of work to be undertaken by GD AA. Not designed for quick directional changes like the shield-equipped version, in a previously published picture it is clearly seen that the MGs have been removed from the fixed mount and are trained to offer cover fire to the sides.





BA1011-609-1906-03A

GD was one of the first divisions to be fully equipped with the Sd Kfz 250. Perhaps as an experiment on behalf of the Army planners or a direct request from GD the majority of the 250s were equipped with the 'Heavy MG' type seen in most of the pictures but without the provision for the laffette usually mounted on the rear armour plate.

However, because the bulk of the other pictures in the Total detail archive book show 250s equipped with MG shields, perhaps it was realised that this particular version was neither practical nor effective in the reconnaissance role. As such, it is thought that as these types were lost, the shield-mounted types became the prevalent replacement. One can be seen here bringing up the rear.









BA1011-609-1906-02A





BA1011-732-0111-13A

ABOVE: In 1943 GD's reconnaissance battalion was re-classified as an armoured unit. This picture was taken during the re-fit near Poltava before the Kursk offensive in July 1943 and the Kradschuetzen tactical sign has been painted over and replaced with symbol for a motorised reconnaissance unit. The original bleached grey contrasts with the new patch of paint under the tactical symbol. The number left of the rear door appears to be seven.

This particular 250/10 has seen a fair amount of action, with a buckled track-guard, bent rear reflector arm and missing drive sprocket hubcap. Note the position of the bridge capacity plate. It is just visible behind the driver's side visor instead of the normal position, closer to the body join line.

OPPOSITE TOP: Apparently taken during the Kursk offensive, this 250 belongs to GD's Panzer regiment (or attached Panther brigade). The Stahlhelm is surrounded by a black stripe, and the tactical lozenge of a tank unit can be seen below it. It is thought that by mid 1943 most vehicles throughout the division would have received a coat of Dunkelgelb, whether it was new in the factories or re-sprays at the front. This example has a mottled overspray of green. On closer inspection this 250 has lost its toolbox, front mudguard and associated tools, plus part or all of the track guard as well, as none of it looks standard.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: This late war private snapshot shows a GD crew tucking into their cold rations. The vehicle is thought to be one of the 'other rank' heavy MG survivors of 1942 elevated to a command vehicle. Of interest is the small white on black pennant protruding from the inner edge of the mudguard, quite clearly marked 1st Zug. Common on battalion or regimental staff vehicles, this is unusual at platoon level, and suggests that this may be the platoon commander's vehicle.

Just visible to the lower right of the GD Stahlhelm on the nose plate is the tactical sign. It is not the old Kradschuetzen symbol seen in earlier photographs and seems rectangular enough to be the standard emblem for either a motorised or armoured half-track unit. Even though this picture is of poor quality, the 250 appears to be finished with green and brown over the dunkelgelb base coat.

Parked on a wet cobbled street with trees still in leaf, this could have been taken anytime in 1944. Possibly somewhere in Romania, the house is not typical of East Prussia, but could be in keeping with Lithuania or Latvia. The standing NCO obscures where the original "Uhu" insignia could be, leaving it uncertain whether it has been retained. He wears a M43 cap, assault gun (or M44) trousers, and a herringbone twill work tunic to which he has attached the Grossdeutschland cuff title.

For further Sd Kfz 250 related archive pictures see Volume 3 of this series - Total Detail 250 Archive.





BA1011732-0134-15A



W. FLEISCHER



## CAMOUFLAGE CHANGES 1942-1944

These three illustrations show how a 250 could have had its appearance changed from April 1942 to possibly late 1944. There is some discussion as to what AA GD was equipped with throughout the war. Certainly the photographic and document evidence is conflicting, and post-war misunderstandings have not helped matters either. As an example, records state that the 1st squadron went back to Germany in June 1944 to re-train on the new Panzer Aufklaerung 38(t) tank, but there is no conclusive evidence either way that these rare tanks later saw combat with the battalion. Like wise, one veteran of the 2nd squadron recalls using a Sd Kfz 251 fitted with the Wurfrahmen 40 rocket launcher, yet no such weapon system is found on any of the known original 'foreseen organisation' charts of GD's reconnaissance battalion.

Because there was only one 250 that could be used to produce this book, we had no choice in how it was equipped. We know from photographic evidence that the shield versions were found in the original order of battle for 2nd squadron, which is why we have chosen to show 'our' vehicle in these illustrations and not the more common heavy MG mount seen in 1942.

As seen in the archive pictures, the reconnaissance battalion did not utilise the three digit numbering system often seen on German armoured vehicles. Instead, the vehicles within each squadron appear to have been numbered from 'top to bottom', with the digits painted on the lower left of the nose plate and left of the rear door. The sparse photographic evidence reveals that these numbers reached as high as 32 for the 2nd squadron, indicating that they easily received a full quota of vehicles.

The top illustration shows our 250 in standard panzer grey, first issued to the Kradschuetzen Abteilung GD in April/May 1942.

In preparation for Operation Citadel the remaining 250s were possibly re-painted in overall dunkelgelb and over sprayed with green camouflage, as seen in the photo from the Panzer regiment GD and other German AFVs of the time. We cannot be certain if the individual vehicle numbering system was re-organized with the inevitable combat losses. Our best guess is that the original numbers were over painted with the dunkelgelb, and if individual numbers were used then they were re-allocated to reflect the number of 250s at the time. A white outlined black Balkenkreuz has been added to the upper sides of the vehicle.

From the Kursk offensive onwards, GD were moved around so much that it probably was not until June 1944 that the crews of the reconnaissance battalion could have found the time for a re-paint.

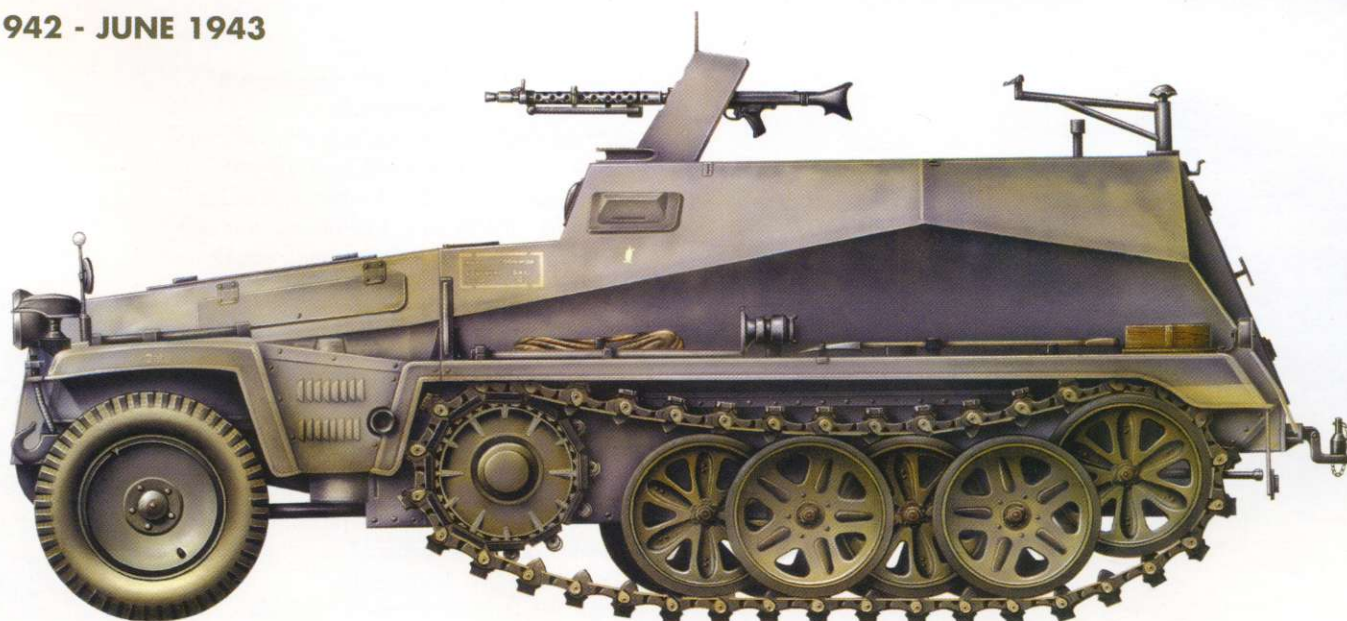
The second illustration depicts it as it may have appeared in the late winter/early spring of 1944, after the heavy fighting for Kirovograd.

The lower illustration is a rendition of our vehicle but with the camouflage scheme seen on the 1944 photo on the previous page. The 250 is now in a sorry state, having survived two years of hard fighting and a few thousand of kilometres on the clock. Still without the three-digit numbering system on the upper armour, it now has a white outline Balkenkreuz. The Stahlhelm and tactical sign has been retained on the nose.

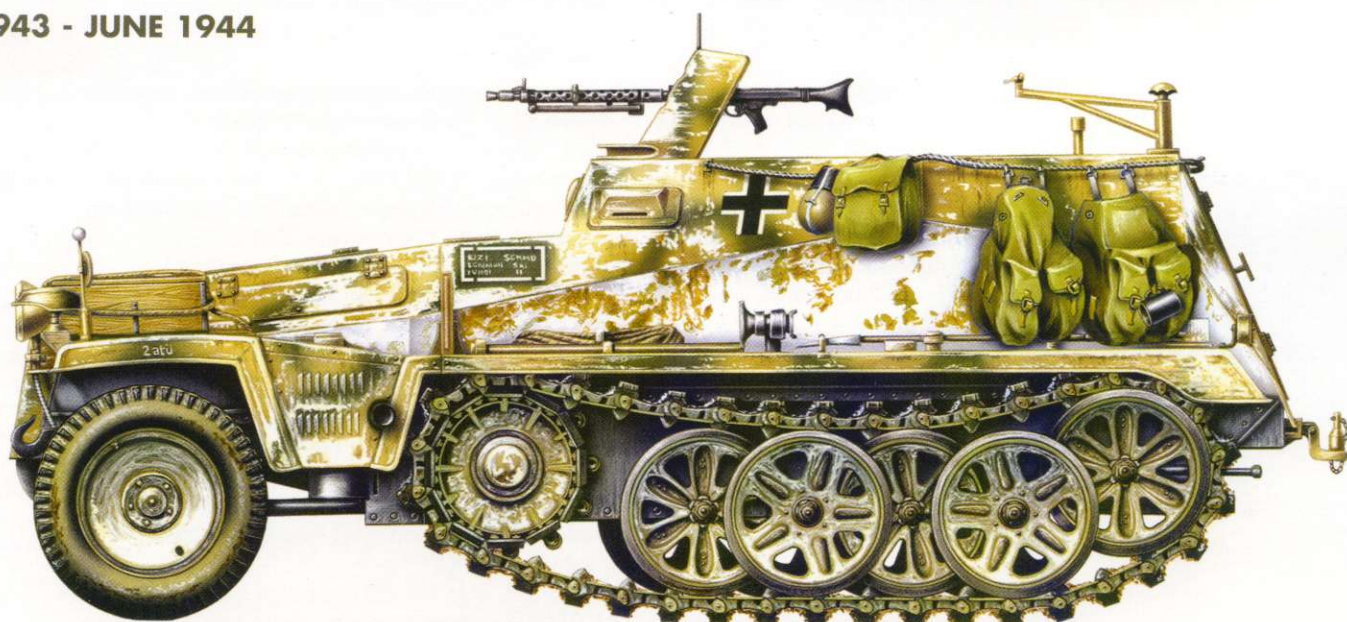




APRIL 1942 - JUNE 1943



JUNE 1943 - JUNE 1944



JUNE 1944 - NOVEMBER 1944





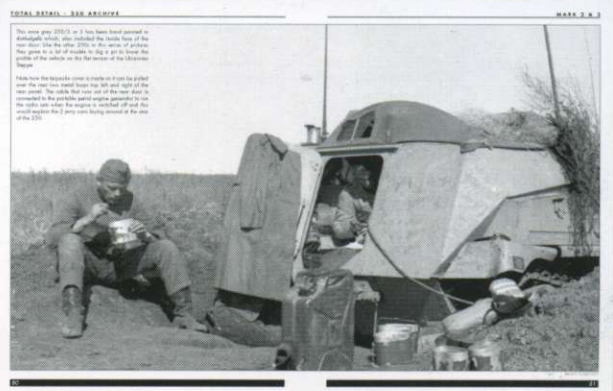




## TOTAL DETAIL



## Detailed text of changes, units and uniforms



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