

## *History of the Totenkopf Division of the Waffen-SS*



*Source: Wie ein Fels im Meer. 3. SS-Panzerdivision "Totenkopf" im Bild, Band 2*

**T**he divisions and army corps of the Waffen-SS took orders from the Supreme Army Command during the 2 080 days of the second world-war. The commanders-in-chief and the commanding generals of the higher head-quarters were full of praise and solely competent for judgement. These were their orders of the day.

When the "T."-Division left the purview of the LVI<sup>th</sup> A.C. (mot.) on 12th Sept. 1941, the General-Commanding wrote to SS Brigf. (Major-General) Keppler, then temporarily leading the SS "T." Division:

"In hard fights against an enemy toughly defending himself and in overcoming difficult weather- and terrain conditions the Division has again accomplished brilliant feats. I convey my special recognition to the troop and its leaders of all ranks for this performance.

I pay honourable tribute to the many dead and wounded who gave their blood and lives for the success of the Division.

I wish you and your brave Division all the best and much soldier's luck.

Heil Hitler!  
sign, *von Manstein*  
General of Infantry

I do not want to refer to the feats of the Pz. Group (4) in the Army Area North, to which you were subordinated for a longer time, without once more thanking you and your Division with special acknowledgement for the performances during the time of the subordination to the Pz. Group.

*von Leeb*  
Fieldmarshal  
Supreme Commander of the Army Group North

#### **To 3rd SS-Div. "Totenkopf"**

The 8th Army is proud to be able to count "Totenkopf" among its old basic divisions. In its unperturbable fighting vigour it has accomplished all the tasks with exemplary readiness to do its duty, be it defensively as an unshakable cliff in the sea, be it in attack as a flashing sword of revenge. We shall fight until the Russian is ready for his doom.

Hail 3rd SS-Pz.Div. "Totenkopf"!  
sign. *Wohler*  
General of Infantry

#### **Teletype to III<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps**

The Corps has to register two great successes within the last days:

1st. The victorious defence of SS "Wiking" which altogether resulted in 84 enemy panzers knocked out after engagement of the "Tiger"-Detachment.

2nd. The bold thrust of SS "Totenkopf" across the Merla in order to establish the connection with XXIVth Pz.Corps. Many thanks, my full acknowledgement to the leadership and the troop.

sign. *Wähler*  
Commander Supreme of 8th Army

General of Infantry Corps

Command Zorn

### **Order of the Day!**

The garrison of Bjakowo, which was cut off since 9th Feb. 1942, repelled numerous superior attacks until 16th March under the command of SS Obstuf. (First-Lieutenant) Meierdress and, after his being wounded, under Ustuf. (2nd Lieutenant) Wissebach, later killed in action. It held Bjakowo against vehement enemy panzer attacks until evening in spite of numerous casualties among the defenders and, according to order, pushed its way through together with the transportable wounded.

In heroic fight the garrison acted according the order of our Führer, to hold out to the last. It has given a splendid example of obedience, self-sacrifice, courage and tough resistance, virtues which have to be demanded of every single man in our momentary situation. Certainly we shall then hold on successfully. For the heroic fight of Bjakowo has again put the absolute fighting and moral superiority of the German soldier into a bright light, too. This fact can give us firm confidence. What must be demanded of the individual soldier is very much; that I am fully aware of. But only then, if everybody is conscious of this necessity, stays firm and does his utmost the success in this fight, into which fate has thrown us, will remain with us. With loyalty and thankfulness I remember these who gave their lives for Führer and Fatherland at Bjakowo. I express my thanks and my fullest appreciation to the garrison of Bjakowo for its valour and exemplary willingness to do one's duty. It shall be an example to us. We shall yield to no one, when there is the time for action.

Hail to our Führer!

sign. *Zorn*

18th April, 1942

You have defeated an enemy who often offered desperate and bitter resistance, in a four-day-fight.

Hardened by winter-battles you started this decisive attack. Neither the enemy, nor the severity of the weather, nor the bad road-conditions, nor the swampy woods could check your advance.

You did better than the advancing fighters, tried in the summer- and autumn-battles of the year 1941.

Few in number, but iron on will you have justified in the first attack- battle of this year the faith pinned on you by Führer and Fatherland. It is my duty to thank you, my soldiers of the Army and the Waffen- SS, from all my heart.

The General Commanding  
*sign. Graf Brockdorff*  
General of Infantry

### **Copy**

Chief Commanding II<sup>nd</sup> A.C. - Com. Post, 22nd April 1942  
General Commanding

### **To Group Eicke**

The group Eicke has just been placed under the command of I<sup>nd</sup> A.C.

Herewith I am entitled to give an appreciation of the Group Eicke: The Group Eicke fought excellently.

The men of Kobylkino and Wasilewtschina under the commanders SS-Stubf. (Major) Ullrich and SS-Stubf. (Major) Kleffner are heroes in my opinion.

Carry on like that, my dear soldiers and SS-men for our Führer until victory.

*sign. Graf Brockdorff*

F.d.R.  
Friedrich  
SS-Ostuf. (1st Lieutenant)  
O 1

From the Order of the Day:

The SS T-Division has left the area of command of the 16th Army. After the victorious advance through the eastern countries the Division fought under its continually proved leadership of its energetic commander within the purview of the 16th Army since July 41. It was involved in heavy fighting on the Mschaga River, checked the advance of strong Russian forces southwest of Lake Ilmen and annihilated together with army and airforce units large parts of the Russian 34th Army in the battle of Staraja Rusza.

In victorious advance towards east, under the most difficult terrain and weather conditions the Division scattered the enemy's resistance on River Lowat and Pola and pushed on as far as the Waldai area in hard fights.

When the enemy started his winter offensive south of Lake Ilmen in January 1942 the SS T-Division kept its positions in a tough, stubborn and heroic engagement against manifold enemy superiority in one of the coldest winters in war-history. With the 2nd Army Corps the Division remained in heavy defensive fighting on the various fronts of the "Demjansk Fortress" for months in faithful companionship with the Army units.

Attacking from the Fortress in spring it re-established the connection with our own frontline and troops pushing forward from the west, under the most difficult terrain situation. In ceaseless defensive fighting against renewed Russian attacks, planned to cut off the 2nd Army Corps, the Division, in heroic defence, smashed the enemy's assaults of constantly replenished units at the Robja-front.

The SS T-Division took again an outstanding part in the attack of the Army delivered to extend the land-bridge to the 2nd Army Corps, and in the destruction of large parts of the 1st Russian Thrust Army.

Ever victorious in attack and defence the Division now leaves its combat-area round Demjansk, Staraja Rusza.

Hard were the battles during these long months, harder still the determination of the leadership and of every soldier of this proud division.

I pay homage to the fallen men of the Division. The 2nd Army Corps is now bound in honour to care for their graves.

My best wishes for the future go in grateful recognition of its excelling combat merits to the SS "Totenkopf" Division.

Heil Hitler  
signed: Busch  
Colonel-General

**To the 3rd SS Pz.Div. "Totenkopf"**

On command of the Führer the 3rd SS Pz.Div. "Totenkopf" leaves the area of my command in order to be employed in a different front-section. Herewith I

lose a division which has belonged to the Army since February 1943 with only short-termed interruptions.

The long series of heavy, successful battles in attack and defence - I mention the names of Kharkow, Uda, and Dnjepr, Kirowograd, Balta, Helestiene - have tied the name of the Division to that of the 8th Army most closely. Wherever "Totenkopf" stood and fought, there was no danger, no serious crisis.

I was proud to have this excellent division in my Army.

Hail "Totenkopf"!   
sign. *Wähler*

### The "Death's Head" - The Recognition-Mark of the Division

There has always coexisted great love of life and deep awareness of t! beyond. Already in the Baroque period there existed dynamics ai contrariness. Eros stands in a secret connection with death. Out this polarity also springs forth an attraction, which is accepted and n at all despised by life. So that wonderful poem which Johann Giint (1695-1723) wrote might have originated, when he sent his sweethea a "Ring with a Death's Head". He wrote:

"Don't be afraid of this love-token,  
it bears our picture that is to come,  
at the sight of which only those grow pale  
to whom reason counts nothing any more.  
But how do ice and flames go with each other?  
And how do love and death combine?  
They fit and agree far too well,  
for both are of an equal strength  
and play their miraculous works  
with all that wander on this earth.  
I give you this pawn as a lesson:  
The gold means steadfast loyalty,  
the ring that time may honour us,  
the little doves how to enjoy;  
the head reminds you of your life,  
all wishes are in vain when dead,  
love and live therefore, because you'r able,  
who knows, how soon we have to go!  
Life is hiding in faithful kisses,  
Oh, start this moment, now begin!"

Whoever reminds people today, that the death's head has only been sign of predetermination, that it has always been an emblem used of the manifold military gadgets, on uniforms, in cockades, he will be at loss, because today few people understand emblems.

Emblems are community-signs, and community-thinking today step back behind growing individuality and egotism. Little help will be found in the fact, that many have worn the death's head. We only quote a few of them:

The Death's Head Hussars 1714,  
the Spanish Death's Regiment 1808,  
the Hussars Regiment von Deutsch 1757,  
the Brunswick Black Corps 1808,  
the Brunswick Hussars of the 17th Regiment,  
the Cavalry Regiment 5 in about 1943,  
the Panzer Regiment of the Airforce "Hermann Goring",  
the Volunteer (Free) Corps "Scharnhorst-Lützow",  
the Body-Guard Hussars 1910,  
the 5th Regiment of Hussars 1758 (winged cap),  
the Infantry Regiment 92 (helmet decoration),  
the pennons of 1st and 2nd Body-Guard Regiments

and, finally, all the panzer-troops of the Army or the carrier-aircraft of the atom-powered carrier "Nimitz", or the black banners of the Peasants' Wars. The German Crown-Prince and Field marshal Mackensen wore it.

Also in foreign countries, in the armies of the U.S.A., Sweden, Chile, Poland, Britain, France and Hungary caps and sabre-taches sported in. It has never been typical national-socialistic emblem. An isolate statement aiming at a principally distinguishable emblem, on account of different length of bones or forms of the skull, is a conception now worth being advocated, it is a blot. I wonder whether the soldiers of the Potsdam Infantry Regiment, who carried on the tradition of the Zieten-Hussars, regarded themselves as a death-despising soldiers. The SS-Verfügungs-Troops did certainly not, though, in the beginning, they were often inspected by the commander of the regime: mentioned above. This fact cannot be rightly judged by juvenile ignoring editors of a news-magazine without consulting the bearers. From their own knowledge they can attribute little to it.

Birth and death always belonged together whenever this sign was interpreted. Already Theodor Körner put it this way: "Who loves life and does not fear death wanders joyfully through the sinking time." We have loved Life and it is not allowed to say that we were obsessed by Death.

Shortly before birth man is fully developed, his personality is already preshaped within the embryo. Only his will is still missing. If man possessed it before birth, he would be afraid of it. Certainly he would manifest his will to that intent: I want to stay where I am, here I am not in need of food, warmth or security. But still, he is pushed into an immense brightness. He enters the world in a state of weakness, and he leaves it in the same way. Later he will not find the world, as it could be and he will leave it without having changed it to the better. For us death has always been only the reversed process. The circle closes itself. One must agree with the poet, when he says: "That only those grow pale who are wanting in reason ..."

About 2 million men of the German Panzer-Troops wore this sign, be it on the cap or on the collar-patches. Who wishes to form a collective judgement?

We are all in an age in which we feel and perceive the approach of death, but we are not afraid of it. Every evening we fall asleep and awake every morning, and, if you don't shrink from comparison, so each falling asleep is a little death, as awakening is a little birth. Who does not know it? We, in our age, don't especially esteem the bustle of men, nor is of worth while to show fear of men, even if the state of things might cause alarm. Our "Senior", Generaloberst (Senior General) Hausser was our ideal also in that respect that he loved life and was not afraid of death. He finally reached the age of 92 and, when he was hurried, it became obvious, what he had entered in pencil into his notebook already in 1943:

"That I should begin the day with You,  
should receive the world out of Your hand  
and should see all remoteness and all nearness  
within the mirror of Your eyes."

There is again this polarity, which attracts and is able to form entirety. What we experienced as young soldiers and now as men of advanced age is that certainty, for which a different symbol could also have been used instead of the death's head, - but still we wore it. The intention to interpolate now a conviction, different from what all earlier soldiers had, is simply the ever-lasting continuation of the persecution, discrimination and alienation. We have known many men whom death took away a long time ago and we are especially grateful that he let us live on for more than 50 years. Therefore, exactly, we shall not tolerate that those who fell to the right and left of us are brought into discredit. We also know that everybody at the end is all by himself and must also pass the gate alone, as "Everyman" on the stage. We



acknowledge whatever senseless conclusions regarding symbolical signs are constructed. We also have acknowledged the insult for more than 30 years, an insult which runs down like rain on the window- pane and does not bother us. There is floating much nonsense “down the stream”. It would be completely ridiculous to attempt making clear the symbolic meaning of the death’s head to those so-called fans on motorbikes and in leather-waistcoats or to a military sports-group. Only formalities are “in” with them.

## The Shadows

The theme “Criminality and Crimes” is treated in all works on the Waffen-SS. It often plays a major role. Heinz Hoehne has claimed that the officers of the Waffen-SS

“accepted the Death’s Head Units of the Concentration Camps ..., they integrated (into their units) the strengthened Death’s Head Standards, the bearers of political terror in German-occupied Europe, they even took personnel from Auschwitz and Kulmhof. With the introduction of these non-combat elements, however, the Waffen-SS became susceptible to many kinds of inhumane warfare.”

It is correct that the Death’s Head Units, which were under the command of the Inspector of the Concentration Camp network, Theodor Eicke, were conscripted for military service at the outbreak of the Second World War, as were all eligible males. About 6,500 men were incorporated into the 3rd SS-Division “Totenkopf.” All together, this division contained over 18,000 men. Just as the members of the Death’s Head Units, members of the police were also conscripted in great numbers for military service when the war broke out, and these were incorporated into the 4th SS-Division (“SS-Police-Division”). If the Wehrmacht had not acquiesced in the acceptance of these two groups into the Waffen-SS, then they would have had to satisfy their military obligations within the Army. In such a case, they would have been “accepted” by the officers of the Army, as had been the case already before the war broke out, whenever members of Death’s Head Units were conscripted for fulfilment of general military service (Wehrpflicht). Service in the Death’s Head Units was not considered a substitute for military service.

They were also “accepted” during the war by General of the Infantry Count Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, the Commanding General of a German Army Corps which, in Fall 1941, was caught with 6 divisions in the pocket of Demjansk at Ilmensee, and which was threatened with destruction by the Red Army. In company and squad formations, the “corset strings” of the “Totenkopf” Division were divided among the other units; the encircled Corps was not destroyed. The officers and men of the Army did not ask what duty some of their comrades had performed before the war, they accepted them for what they were: comrades in a battle of encirclement, in a struggle

for survival. Their steadfastness, their bravery, and their reliability were the determining factors in judging them!

When Hoehne says that “they even accepted personnel from Auschwitz and Kulmhof”, this should be contrasted with the well-grounded description of the Concentration Camp system given by Stein. He shows quite clearly that the Concentration Camps had no direct connection whatsoever with the fighting units of the Waffen- SS, even if the personnel of the camps carried the same pay books and wore the same uniform. To be sure, it is correct that transfers did occur from the troops into the Concentration Camp sphere and vice versa. Stein paints the entire picture, however: transfers of this type also involved the Army.

A German professor - during the war, a member of the Luftwaffe - once asked the following question with regard to this subject: “Would it have affected the airborne units, the paratroopers, and the Flak crews, if the Concentration Camp system has been ‘placed in the hands’ of Hermann Goering during the war, and if he, for purpose of organization, had incorporated it into his sphere of command as High Commander of the Luftwaffe?” One will have to agree that in such a case, the Luftwaffe itself could not be held responsible.

### 3. SS-Panzer-Division „Totenkopf“

10.39-8.41 – SS-Totenkopf-Division

9.11.42 – SS-Totenkopf-Division (mot)

17.11.42-21.10.43 – SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division „Totenkopf“

22.10.43-5.45 – 3. SS-Panzer-Division „Totenkopf“

### History

By order of the Fuehrer and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, 18. 9. 1939, formation of the division took place. A decree of the Army High Command - C-in-C of Army Reserve, 27. 10.1939, shows details:

The partly motorized division was transferred to northern Wuerttemberg and later to Muensingen training area to complete military field service.

March 1940 followed transfer to the area of Waldeck, from where the division moved up to the area northeast of Cologne, 12./13. 5.1940, as OKW (Supreme Command Armed Forces) Reserve and from here the advance through Belgium and France started on 18.5.1940.

Before transfer from France to the east in the time between 2.-5.6.1941, reinforcement and strengthening of the division took place. Formation of an AA-Bn. started at the end of April 1941. May 1941 a mobile Depot Bn. was formed and each of the three Infantry Regiments received one 15th and 16th Coy. etc.

The Division fought splitted in battle groups at the pocket of Demjansk. During September 1942 remains of the groups in the pocket were united to one battle group under SS Oberfuehrer (senior colonel) Simon.

In the course of reorganization into Panzer-Grenadier-Division with effect from 1. 6. 1942, one Panzer-Regiment was formed with the newly formed Panzer Bn. and the Assault Gun Bn. During November 1942 a Heavy Coy. was added.

Under order of 1st Army, located in southern France (Angoulême), the following units were formed:

SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment 1 "Totenkopf", I.-III.

SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment 3 "Totenkopf", I. — III.

Panzer Regiment 3, I. II. (formed with Pz. Bn.)

Recce Bn. (4 Coys.) - Anti Tank Bn. (3 Coys.) - AA Bn. (4 Batts.) Assault Gun Bn. (4 Batts.) - Engineers Bn. (3 Coys.) - Comm. Bn. (3 Coys.) and Supply Services.

Although <sup>3</sup>A of the Division were recruits, it took part in marching into nonoccupied France at the end of 1942, using fit units like Fast Rifle Regiment "Thule" without completion of training the division was transferred to the Eastern Front.

During 1943 the Division again suffered heavy losses and additionally a considerable contingent of soldiers was transferred for formation of 16th Panzer Grenadier Division as a kind of sponsor to it in October 1943, reinforcement was absolutely necessary.

Summer 1943 Aufkl. Abt. (Recce Bn.) expanded to 6 Coys, and Panzer Rgt. (Tank Rgt.) to 8 Coys. October 22. 1943 the Waffen SS received new designations and serial numbers.

The Division was redesignated in 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf".

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 5

SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 6.

All other units received - as far as they did not yet bear it - number 3.

December 1943; Sturm Geschütz Abt. (Assault Gun Bn.) was incorporated into Pz Jäger Abt. (Anti Tank Bn.).

1945 the Division capitulated in the area Linz-Pregarten with its mass to the Americans and was then handed over to the Russians.

## Commanders

18.9.39-6.7.41 – SS-Gruppenführer, since 20. 4. 42 SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Theodor Eicke

7.7.41-15.7.41 – SS-Standartenführer Matthias Kleinheisterkamp m. d. F. b.

15.7.41-9.9.41 – SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Georg Keppler

10.9.41-25.2.43 – SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS Theodor Eicke

26.2.43-1.10.43 – SS-Brigadeführer Max Simon m. d. F. b.

1.10.43-20.6.44 – SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Hermann Prieß, since 20. 4. 44 SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Waffen-SS

20.6.44-13.7.44 – SS-Standartenführer Karl Ullrich m. d. F. b.

13.7.44-12.5.45 – SS-Oberführer, since 1. 10. 44 SS-Brigadeführer und Generalmajor der Waffen-SS Hellmuth Becker

## How They Died!

The ordeal of the SS-Panzer-Division “Totenkopf” after the capitulation.

This report of experiences of a former leader of the Assault-gun Battalion of the Division, Hanns Bitterlich, shows the unintelligible actions of the American troop-leaders and the brutal behaviour of the escort. None of us has ever heard of any legal proceedings, not to mention any sentence. We publish this report unabridged and unchanged.

## Withdrawal of the Division towards Zwettl

After Vienna had to be given up and the Russians had broken through south of the Danube as far as St. Pölten, The T-Division tried to hold the road-crosses of

Stockerau and Krems north of the Danube as long as possible, until the withdrawal of the rear units, scattered far to the north, had somewhat been accomplished. Only few of them, among them the Panzer-Rapair-Company, succeeded in crossing the Danube to the south far backwards, and to reach the American Zone on capitulation-day. All the other units, among them the Assault-gun Brigade, Artillery Regiment etc. withdrew along the Danube from Stockerau via Krems, Senftenberg, Rastendorf into the area around Zwettl, in order to set out from there towards the demarcation-line, as was planned by the divisional commander. Both the above mentioned points of junction could not be held any more, because the loss of heavy weapons, caused since the last freshing up in the area of Papa on Lake Balaton by the running fights and withdrawals, was so great that you could state in fact: There was nothing available any more. After the loss of the Krems-bridgehead all the heavy and not urgently needed vehicles were driven into the woods of the Senftenberg-area, because it was impossible to provide fuel for them. The blocked-up roads overran Becker's time-schedule, so that the bulk of the Division reached the area of Zwettl only on capitulation-day in the morning hours. Becker succeeded in attaining his first goal completely, not to have his division split up, and let the mass of the Division march past him at the crossroad in Zwettl at 11 h a.m. for the last time.

Though (according to American information) the demarcation-line should run about 40 km west of Zwettl only, Becker, in wise foresight, had given the order to all units at Rastendorf to get in detachments from Zwettl to the demarcations-line as rapidly as possible, regardless of other units. That was why 1. the road-jams caused by other units, fugitives etc. were more and more growing serious and 2. the demarcations-line had to be passed by 12h p.m. precisely. Whoever was not on the American side by 12h p.m. became Russian prisoner. Moreover Becker had ordered to lay down the weapons only after passing the demarcations-line, though the general capitulation had already been announced and American armoured scout-cars were already patrolling the landscape. That he was only too right was demonstrated in the late afternoon-hours, when the countryside swarmed with numerous gangs of former concentration-camp inmates from the camps of the Linz area, partly on foot, partly on trucks, armed with tommy-guns and machine-guns and who shot down smaller groups of our Division who had not heeded Becker's orders.

### **The demarcation-line is transferred about 50 km to the west**

In these most difficult hours our Gruppenführer (Lieutenant General) would accordingly have proved himself capable of leading home the whole Division by clear and practical orders unless the following had happened: In the late afternoon-hours it became known that the demarcation-line was removed for about 50 km to the west according to an agreement between Americans and Russians and now ran from south to north in the direction of Prägarten and Freistadt. That it was impossible to reach this new demarcation-line by 12h p.m. because of the completely blocked roads Becker

knew as well as any other commander. In spite of that the separate detachments and regiments tried to manage the impossible matter, everyone in one's own way. Becker sacrificed himself for his Division. He negotiated with the Russians; a car with the white flag came for him, he returned, was called for a second time by Russian bearers of the white flag of truce but he never returned. Since then nothing has been heard of him anymore.

Who has fought only against Russians for years can imagine what this piece of news meant for every member of the Division in order to escape the Russian claws. Comparisons with other nightly withdrawals as e.g. the retreat across River Bug, where almost all vehicles were blown up and the Russians followed us at our heels, at a distance of 2-3 km, faded. Here everybody, from the commander to the panzer-grenadier, was conscious that arriving at the demarcation-line or, respectively, its passing meant freedom or, in the case of failure, slavery.

In this race Fate decided for our "T"-Division for the last time. A few hours and the attitude of American military posts decided the fate of thousands of human beings unfortunately. The Americans refused the passing of the demarcation-line! The first vehicles of the main body of the Division had reached the line at 12h p.m. yet. The mass of the Division stayed on the road to Pregarten, where naturally thousands of vehicles assembled in the course of the night. Even women and civilians were not allowed to pass, only wounded and ambulances.

As the Division was not yet disarmed and the picqueting of the demarcation-line or of the road was performed by few American panzers only, the desperation and anger caused by the transfer of the line rose to extremes.

### **Breaking through the demarcation-line**

Towards 3h a.m. the demarcation-line was broken through by force, the barricades run over - an immense stream of vehicles poured forth into the American zone of Interest. Only behind Pregarten, i.e. south of it, American panzers could erect a new barricade. The vehicles were directed to the east, the units disarmed and led by American guards into a valley, the slopes of which were protected by American panzers, and whose western end was closed by the road Pregarten - Linz. The men themselves were exhausted to the utmost, but they cherished the inner satisfaction of having escaped the Russian captivity and of seeing again their homes and next-of-kin, even after years perhaps. The valley filled up with huge masses of men. Not only almost the entire "T"-Division, but also other bigger complete units were assigned in e.g. a regiment of parachutists, which had arrived from Italy shortly before and should have been employed here. (Rarely have I seen such splendid boys as these parachutists and never so many decorations in one single unit - almost every lance-corporal or NCO wore the Iron Cross 1st class). Besides there arrived complete police regiments and



other Army-units. In the afternoon the new situation was discussed by the battalion-commanders and it was stated with satisfaction that about 80-90% of the "T"-Division had managed to break through the demarcation-line i.e. into the American Zone, and that many sections were almost complete. So our Gruppenführers aim was achieved. What was now happening might be unique in history.

### **The Americans deceive us**

More and more American panzers were concentrated. The whole valley was surrounded tighter and tighter. Strangely enough, they concealed the preparations hereto. During the day everything was quiet, whereas at nightfall the well-known rolling of driving-up panzers could be heard, so that at daybreak could be stated, that the chain around the valley had become tighter again. There were no rations for days and weeks. The Americans denied any kind of food to the utterly tired men. Moreover, the days after the capitulation were extremely hot, but the nights cold. There were no blankets, no tents, nothing to eat. Teams of speaking choruses formed-up near the road to Pregarten demanding water, whereupon crowds of civilians wanted to bring water in pails and other vessels. The American panzer-crews poured out the water and sent the civilian columns back. Thirst seemed to be worth than hunger for the young people, for many of them ran towards the guards and were shot down.

In the evening of the third day an American loudspeaker-car went criss-cross through the valley between 5h and 6h p.m. and announced the following in the exact words: "Comrades, tomorrow you will be dismissed from Linz to your homes. You will get water for the march to Linz. There will be issued enough water to fill all your water-bottles. Fill your canteens and other receptacles but be sparing with it. The individual commanders are herewith instructed to line up their units in blocks of 500 men each, so that the march-off can take place at 8h a.m. punctually."

And then the perpetual repetitions sounded: "Tomorrow you will be dismissed!" That was well the greatest deceit of world-history and the greatest betrayal of prisoners.

The idea that you need not fill all the receptacles with water for the march to Linz or that you would have to be parsimonious with water on that very short way, occurred to nobody. On the next morning it became evident to everybody that the American loudspeaker-car had announced this only for fear or cowardice for, if the truth had been said, 24 000 unarmed men in the valley would have broken through the chain of panzers.

So everybody was looking forward to the march to Linz next morning and to the dismissal or return home. Although, as mentioned above, no gramme of food had been issued for 3 days, on the fourth day at 7h a.m. the columns stood ready in the valley

for the march, a vast mass - straightened out endlessly and formed up in virtue of their own discipline without much effort of their superiors. A disciplined spontaneity, the view of which from the surrounding heights would have made Becker's or Hausser's old soldiers' hearts laugh - that internal joy of going home to Germany inspite of defeat and capitulation -. During the 3rd night so many American panzers had arrived yet that, at daybreak, there practically stood one panzer beside the other.

### **The march to the east begins**

The start of the columns began. The head of the first column had reached the road to Pregarten from the valley, exactly at the crossroads: To the right to Pregarten, to the left to Linz. The head was directed by the American panzers not to the left, that is to say to the west, but to the right, into Pregarten, therefore to the east. So it had become rather obvious to us, what the Americans meant with us prisoners. Behind each small detachment a panzer was inserted. After about 1,5 to 2 km the village of Pregarten was reached, the civilian population already shouted to us: "The Russians are expecting you!" Here already the knapsacks were thrown into the road-ditches in heaps, although everybody knew that he would urgently need every piece of clothing later. But the boys could not stand it any longer. No regular food for weeks, the restless hurrying towards the demarcation-line, when nobody thought of food and drink, three days without any rations with the Americans, these men, who had pulled themselves together once more by their innate discipline for their return home, were now at their ends.

The commanders and officers of the respective groups had to march at the heads of the columns, i.e. directly behind the guns whereas the 40 metres of column-length were covered by machine-guns.

The road-fork about 2-3 km behind Pregarten made it clear to all of them. It was a pointed fork, one road to the left, the other one to the right. Within the fork-point, raised on a slope, there stood a Russian commissioner, on the right side of the tunic the big Sovjet-star, grinning broadly and with the expression of satisfaction. From here on we were escorted by Russian panzers, driven by women, partly equipped with loudspeakers, which sounded the old password: "Nobody will ever return!"

### **The flight**

Three of us broke out. A Senior-Corporal was shot on the slope, whereas a Corporal and I reached the slope and let ourselves roll helter-skelter into the brook. Fate meant well with us. After about 4 days, i.e. in night-marches, we reached a small place, west of Gallneukirchen, where we were captured again by an American patrol on account of our blood-group-tattoo. Then we started on our journey to the camp in



the direction of Germany, hungry and beaten-up, as was the usual American way of treatment with SS officers.

As I could meanwhile learn from an authentic repatriated comrade, only about 2000 men of our "T."-Division arrived at Odessa and were transported from there into the interior of Russia.

That the successes of the American soldiers at the handing-over of our "T."-Division and other prisoners of war did not always meet with full approval in America can be gathered from Mac Arthur's statement of July 8th, 1952, in which he points out literally:

"Hundred thousands of German prisoners of war we have handed- over to the Soviets without any protests as slave-workers under violation of every human principle and every tradition. We have failed to resent the massacres."

### **Americans shoot German prisoners of war**

On this road to Freistadt there happened a general massacre of German prisoners of war by American soldiers which the world has not yet heard of by now. The men and leaders were so much bodily enervated - they simply could not go on any more. The rate of marching speed was destined by the American panzers and was extremely fast, as 40 km had to be covered on foot daily! They dragged themselves to the road-ditch or let themselves fall into it. Already at the cross-road, where the Russian commissary had stood, the escorting American soldiers jumped down from their panzers and shot from the shortest distance with their tommy-guns bullets into the temples or necks of the German prisoners of war sitting or lying at the road-ditch.

There they lay, the old Sergeant-Majors and Corporals, who had fought for years and who had gone with glad confidence into American captivity only four days ago - one beside the other at a distance of few metres. By reason of one's own bodily condition everybody could judge for himself, when it would be his turn. From time to time several tried to break out, but were mostly shot down by the elevated panzer machine-guns. It seemed that the American panzer- unit wanted to win the same glory which we had acquired before in fair fight and not by massacres. I myself marched with the second group of our Assault-Gun Battalion, approximately in the 5th or 6th row. Shortly before Freistadt the road made a right-hand bend and through various cuts in the side-wall (the farmers use them to get to their fields), one could make out that there was a steep downwards slope and a brook behind it. The instinct of self-preservation is known to head no dangers.

## Sociology of the Waffen-SS

Figures of May 5th, 1940, Total strength 124 199 men

| Age                   | Verfügungstruppe incl.<br>Leibstandarte | Totenkopf division incl.<br>T-Standarten | 4. SS-Police<br>division |
|-----------------------|---|--|--------------------------|
| 40 years and<br>older | 0,6 %                                   | 9,3 %                                    | 0,5 %                    |
| 30 to 39 years        | 9,8 %                                   | 52,9 %                                   | 45,9 %                   |
| 21 to 29 years        | 39,0 %                                  | 20,2 %                                   | 30,2 %                   |
| 18to 20years          | 50,6 %                                  | 17,6 %                                   | 23,4 %                   |

In July 1940 there served of 253 529 men of the Allgemeinen SS

6211 or 2,45 % with the Waffen-SS

37 268 14,7 % with the Police Reinforcements (SS-Totenkopfstandarten)

94 744 37,4 % with the Army, Navy or Air Force

45,9 % were not yet drafted. All together never more than 24,7 % of them served with the Waffen-SS

Occupations of the soldiers of the Waffen-SS at the end of the war

|                       |       |                         |       |
|-----------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| Professional soldiers | 0,9 % | compared to the fathers | 0,8 % |
| Schoolboys/Students   | 4,6 % | compared to the fathers | 0,9 % |
| Workmen               | 8,5 % | compared to the fathers | 13,8% |
| Free professions      | 14,8% | compared to the fathers | 16,9% |
| Civil Service         | 14,7% | compared to the fathers | 17,8% |
| Employees             | 18,9% | compared to the fathers | 8,7%  |
| Artisans/Peasants     | 37,6% | compared to the fathers | 41,9% |

Drafted to military service with the SS were 61 %, Volunteers 39 %. 49 % were members of the NSDAP, 13,2 % of them were members before the Party came to power.

80,4 % of the standing units (peace-time garrisons of the SS-Verfüg. Truppe, of the "Leibstandarte" and of the Junkerschulen (Military Colleges) were below the age of 25 years.

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Sources:

- 1) Statistisches Jahrbuch der Schutzstaffeln 1938
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- 3) Personnel, Policies and Procedures of the Waffen-SS (Dr. R. A. Gelwick, Lincoln-Nebraska, USA 1971 S. ee2
- 4) SS-Erfassungsami. Statistische Monatshefte Nov. 1940
- 5) "German-Manpower" quoted in: "Das Heer", Vol. III., "Der Zweifrontenkrieg", page 317, Frankfurt/M