

SS Brigade „Schuldt“ and the Stalingrad Relief Effort

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On 19 November 1942, a massive Red Army armored offensive shattered the Don River Front to the north of Stalingrad, splintering the Italian, Romanian and Hungarian defensive forces into panic-stricken fragments. These German allies had the manpower but lacked the will and the leadership to stand up to the resurgent Red Army. In addition, their own armored forces and their anti-tank capabilities were antiquated and nearly useless. One reforming German panzer division was in reserve behind the crumbling Axis armies, but it alone was unable to stop the Soviet offensive. Even then it has been stated that one more fully equipped German armored regiment might have prevented the encirclement of the 6th Army in Stalingrad that took place on this day. But such was not the case.

With an enormous gaping hole in the southern part of the Eastern Front to fill and the large German forces in the Caucasus region being threatened, something had to be done fast. Improvisation was the order of the day, and any battle-worthy contingent that could be spared for action was given consideration for use. The Waffen-SS was not left out; it was requested to dig into its „reserve“ pool to make a contribution. Unfortunately, its three major divisions (1st, 2nd and 3rd SS Panzergrenadier), were being refurbished in France and had been tied down there longer than anticipated due to the „Allied“ invasion of North Africa and the resultant complications from that action. So they were not immediately available. And nearly every other segment of the Waffen-SS was fully engaged elsewhere on the Eastern Front. That meant that the training camps and homeland garrisons had to be combed out for experienced troops.

In early December a couple of Waffen-SS contingents had been zeroed in on. One was the „Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler“ Guard Battalion in Berlin, which was nominally listed as VII. Battalion/I.SS Pz.Gr.Div. „LSSAH“; its troops were all front veterans. Another unit that was available was I./SS-Polizei Infanterie Rgt.1 from the 4.SS-Polizei Grenadier Div. that had been refitting in East Prussia. It was a veteran element as well and nearly ready for action. The idea was to combine these battalions into a regimental or brigade strength battlegroup along with troops from assorted Waffen-SS specialty training schools.

On 4 December 1942, authorization was granted to form this ad hoc „brigade,“ under the command of SS- Standartenführer Hinrich „Kapt’n“ Schuldt (a former Navy Captain). Schuldt was a natural selection for this role, as during the previous winter he had directed a number of mixed emergency groups (based on his SS Inf.Rgt.4), during a very critical situation in the central part of the Eastern Front. His success at

handling makeshift forces had clearly made him the top candidate for his new position.

SS Brigade „Schuldt,“ as it was called from the start, quickly assembled a staff and staff company from reserve pools and replacement units. The VII./“LSSAH,“ with a staff, staff company and three rifle companies, became the first brigade unit, though it was not at full strength. It had to leave the equivalent of a full company behind in Berlin to continue the tradition of a „Leibstandarte“ guard troop in the German capital. The I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.I was added on paper to the brigade and it was commonly designated SS-Kampfgruppe „Dietrich“ after its commander, Sturmbannführer Dietrich. This battalion would make its way separately to the brigade assembly area in Russia.

On 6 December 1942, all of the brigade elements, including a new heavy weapons company under Ostuf. Drescher which was assigned to VII./“LSSAH,“ were to begin making their way by rail to the Eastern Front. The structure and command roster for SS Brigade „Schuldt“ initially looked like this:

Commander: Staf. Schuldt

Adjutant: Hstuf. Molt

Ordnance Officer: Ostuf. Vogel

Staff Company containing the following elements:

Motorcycle Messenger Platoon from the SS Motorcycle Replacement Bn. in Ellwangen

Anti-tank Platoon from the staff troops of the Waffen-SS Commander-in-Chief for the Netherlands
Combat Engineer Platoon from the SS Engineer

Replacement Bn. in Dresden
Signals Platoon from the Field Command Staff of the Reichsführer-SS (Himmler)

VII. Bn./“LSSAH“:

Permanent commander in Berlin: Stubaf. Ernst Mayer, who had been rendered unfit for frontline service due to his severe battle wounds. He took over the guard company left behind.

Commander during transport: Hstuf. Beutler

Commander after arrival in Russia: Hstuf. Ott

Commander as of 31 December 1942: Hstuf. Lantscher

1st Rifle Company: Hstuf. Ott, later Ostuf. Horvath

2nd Rifle Company: Ostuf. Leiteritz; wounded during disembarkation in Russia and replaced by Ostuf. Knoesel

3rd Rifle Company: Ostuf. Blunck

4th Heavy Weapons Company: Ostuf. Drescher; this company was assembled as follows: infantry gun platoon from the staff troops W-SS C-in-C „Netherlands,” anti-tank platoon from the same place and combat engineer platoon from the SS Engineer Replacement Bn. in Dresden.

I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.I (SS-KGr. „Dietrich“)

Commander: Stubaf. Wilhelm Dietrich

Staff Company: Ustuf. Kersten, then Oberjunker Schroeter

1st Company (portion of it only): Ostuf. Tigge

2nd Company (intact): Ostuf. Waldmann, then Ostuf. Drieske

3rd Company (portion only): Ostuf. Schneider 4th Company (portion only): Hstuf. Schwarting

The first elements of SS-Bde. „Schuldt,” consisting of the staff, staff company, 1./VII./“LSSAH” and part of 4./VII./“LSSAH,” arrived in the threatened city of Millerovo on 16 December 1942. The formation was assigned to Army Detachment „Fretter-Pico” and was given orders to assemble at Meschkoff and then dig-in in the hills surrounding the town to block off a Soviet advance.

Just before midnight on 17 December, the bulk of VII./“LSSAH” reached the railroad station in the southern part of Meschkoff. Due to the close proximity of the front the unloading of men, vehicles and equipment had to proceed with utmost haste, and this procedure was further hampered by the bitterly cold weather. To top it off, a Soviet fighter-bomber attack interrupted the „Leibstandarte” disembarkation and caused significant damage to the train station as well as casualties to the troops. Both Ostuf. Leiteritz (CO of 2nd Co.) and Hstuf. Beutler (Bn. CO) were wounded, and early on the next day, Hstuf. Ott took charge of the unit.

SS-KGr. „Dietrich” (Polizei Div.) had a more chaotic journey to the brigade assembly area. It had been sent by rail to Tschertkovo from where a truck convoy was to take it to Meshkoff. However, before it had even arrived at Tschertkovo, SS-KGr. „Dietrich” had had some of its troops siphoned off for other emergency duties. The bulk of the 1st and 4th Companies along with a portion of the battalion staff had been re-routed to Zschertkovo to help stop an enemy armored breakthrough in the sector of 19th Panzer Division. This contingent led by Hstuf. Schwarting, would in fact never join the brigade but would instead link up with the 1st SS Pz.Gr.Div. „Leibstandarte” in early February 1943 near Kharkov. Thus from SS-KGr. „Dietrich,” SS-Bde. „Schuldt” only received the major portions of the battalion staff and 2nd Co. along with small

contingents from the 1st and 3rd Companies. Promised Flak and anti-tank troops were not initially available.

During the evening hours of 18 December, SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ reached the brigade and was sent to Nasaroff, about 6 km to the west of Meschkoff. In the meantime, V11./„LSSAH“ had already gone into action in the hills about 3 km to the northwest of Meschkoff. This was a relief attack designed to save elements of the 8th Italian Army which were in full retreat. After fighting a delaying action, the battalion disengaged and fell back on the northern part of Meschkoff at around midnight on the 18th. On the next, SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ was inserted in the main defensive lines around Meschkoff.

At noon on 19 December, a Russian armored force approached SS Brigade „Schuldt“ from the west, driving towards Nasaroff. A violent battle developed in which the SS troops were able to destroy four enemy tanks. This caused the Reds to break off the attack, but recon troops observed a massing of Soviet infantry, transported in captured Italian trucks, to the southwest. In the night of 19/20 December the situation at Meschkoff grew more serious. A pair of Russian tanks broke through the lines of Brigade „Schuldt“ and raised havoc in the rear area, destroying three trucks filled with German wounded in the process. Enemy forces were also reported in virtually all directions. Aware of the dangerous predicament facing the brigade, Army Detachment „Fretter-Pico“ gave it the go ahead to withdraw from Meschkoff.



Staf. Schuldt and Stuf. Dietrich discuss the battlefield situation.

At midnight, Brigade „Schuldt“ pulled out of Meschkoff and began withdrawing towards Millerovo. But not far down the road a Soviet tank force put in a surprise appearance and effectively split-up much of the SS task force. Part of VII./“LSSAH,” consisting of 1st Co., the bulk of 2nd Co. and part of 4th Co., fought its way to Millerovo under Ostuf. Dahl (ex-Polizei Division). These troops were then attached to the 3rd Mountain Div. and reorganized into two combat companies which were designated Kampfgruppe „Dahl.“ This force was then caught up in the Soviet encirclement of Millerovo along with 4,000 German and 12,000 Italian troops. The SS men were generally held in reserve for use in counterattacking enemy penetrations. The siege of Millerovo lasted until 15 January 1943 when a successful breakout was made. By 20 January, KGr. „Dahl“ had rejoined SS Bde. „Schuldt.“

While Ostuf. Dahl and his men made their way to Millerovo, the other components of Brigade „Schuldt“ began to regroup at Donskoj at 0400 on 20 December 1943. All that now remained of VII./“LSSAH“ was the battalion staff, a part of 2nd Co., 3rd Co., and engineer and heavy mortar platoons from 4th Company. After it had reassembled the brigade continued on in a southeasterly direction, passing through the Jablonovaja and Bolschoja sectors to Ssmolin on the Metschettka Creek. Ssmolin was reached at 1430 on 20 December after some 70 km had been covered in a motorized „march.“ Here the SS men were able to rest for the first time since their frontline deployment.

On 21 December, most of the brigade, except for the supply troops, was sent west to fortify the nearby village of Kijevsky. In the night of 21/22 December positions on the west/southwest part of Kijevsky were fully occupied and extended even further westward. At the same time the survivors from various dispersed Army artillery and anti-tank units were incorporated into the brigade and used to strengthen SS-KGr. „Dietrich.“ An entire emergency „march“ battalion was also latched on to.

In the early afternoon of the 22nd, an enemy armored attack was brought to a screeching halt through the destruction of four of the advancing tanks. But a neighboring Italian unit was unnerved by the incident and began an unauthorized withdrawal. As a result, SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ was ordered to extend its lines to cover the gap left by the Italians. Only 80 men were available for this task which really required the services of a full battalion!

On 23 December, Army Detachment „Fretter-Pico“ ordered SS Brigade „Schuldt“ to sever the enemy supply route near Roshek, 10 kms to the south. To do this job properly the town itself would have to be taken. In preparation for this attempt, the brigade relocated to Metschettka, 7 kms to the south. SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ was deployed due north of Ssnetschinikovo, a village about 1 km west of Roshek, while VII./“LSSAH“ was placed to the north and east of Roshek. Staf. Schuldt personally led the assault on the town on 24 December. In a swift, decisive action, the SS troops seized

Roshek, while knocking out two T-34 tanks in the process. One T-34 was captured intact along with a number of prisoners.

Following this success, Staf. Schuldts took stock of the troops still left under his command and began reorganizing the brigade units „downward“ to reflect the depletion of personnel. SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ became the new 1st Co., with the remnants of VIL/„LSSAH“ becoming 2nd Co. and the Army March Bn. 179 being used to constitute a 3rd Company. The remaining troops and heavy weapons elements were simply attached directly to the „brigade“ staff. Now only battalion size at best, Bde. „Schuldts“ was rechristened a „Group“ for operational purposes.

On Christmas Day, Group „Schuldts“ found itself attached to the XXIX. Army Corps Staff under Gen. Geier in Krassnojarovka, about 5 kms southeast of Roshek. At midnight on the 25th, a powerful Soviet armored force attacked the town. The foremost tanks were knocked out but the following ones broke into Krassnojarovka and began rambling about at will. One T-34 smashed right through a house wall and drove on into the building that housed the supply troop from what had been 3./SS-Pol.Rgt.1 (KGr. „Dietrich“), interrupting the preparations for a Christmas feast. This action enraged Stubaf. Dietrich who was in the building at the time. Without hesitation he clambered up on top of the tank, flung open the turret hatch and shot all of the individual crew members with his pistol! That was one way to capture a tank intact, but it probably would never have happened if he had given it any forethought!

Fortunately, the Red infantry failed to follow-up on the armored breakthrough and when the tanks were forced to withdraw, the Germans still held the town. But Krassnojarovka was now completely surrounded and orders soon arrived for the trapped troops to break out and evacuate the town during the night of 25/26 December. There would be no more waiting around for another Stalingrad to occur!

After throwing back further Red armored onslaughts in the early morning hours of 26 December and destroying two more tanks, SS Group „Schuldts“ left Krassnojarovka and began moving to the southeast; KGr. „Dietrich“ was still motorized but the „LSSAH“ troops had to march on foot. The withdrawal route led southeast through Vodjany to Romanovsky, where the task force regrouped before marching south to Pritschensky. Due to the deep enemy inroads all over the place, resupply had to be carried out via air drops when possible. In order to secure supplies, units had to set up agreed upon recognition signs (usually Swastika flags) that were visible from the air.

SS Group „Schuldts“ reached Pritschensky at around dusk on 26 December and found it filled with milling Romanian and Italian troops from units that had largely collapsed and evaporated. XXIX. Army Corps and Group „Schuldts“ was now told to continue advancing towards the Skassyrrskaja bridgehead in the southwest where a

link-up with the neighboring Army Detachment „Hollidt“ needed to be made. SS Group „Schuldt“ spent the entire morning of the 27th fighting off enemy attacks and when things calmed down in the afternoon, Staf. Schuldt again regrouped his dwindling command.

At 0300 on the 28th the march towards Skassyrskaja continued. During a rest break a pair of armored recce cars suddenly appeared, sending the surprised SS troops scurrying for cover. But the vehicles were revealed to be „friendlies“ from a German Army unit, and the alarm was soon over. Staf. Schuldt appropriated them for his use and they would later prove helpful in escaping through enemy envelopments. By now the „brigade“ had only a few functional motor vehicles and these were relegated to transporting the badly wounded and needed supplies; the soldiers were left to make their way through the deep snow on foot.

When SS Group „Schuldt“ reached Skassyrskaja on 29 December, Staf. Schuldt reported that his „brigade“ was no longer battleworthy and he left for parts unknown. It is thought that he visited the Führer HQ for new instructions, but his exact whereabouts for the next several days were not recorded. In any event, command of the „brigade“ now passed entirely over to Stubaf. Dietrich.

The brigade was outfitted with ten new field kitchens and informed that it was to proceed to a refitting area on the next day. On 30 December an advance commando arrived at the designated refitting area at Alexejev with the objective of lining up some more motor vehicles for the battle-group. The rest of the SS troops arrived at dusk after a difficult 20 km foot march. They reported that they had heard heavy gunfire emanating from the direction of Skassyrskaja behind them.

After a day of rest, the SS battle-group was attached to the 6th Panzer Div. under Gen.Lt. Raus, which was part of XVII.Army Corps/Army Det. „Hollidt,“ on 1 January 1943. SS-Brigade „Schuldt“ was considered temporarily out of commission and the entire task force adopted the interim title of SS-Kampfgruppe „Dietrich.“ To confuse things even further, SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ would remain functioning even after Brigade „Schuldt“ was reformed!

In any event, Bde. „Schuldt“/KGr. „Dietrich“ was next ordered to relocate to Kamensk and for this purpose it was given a 17 vehicle truck convoy to transport the troops. But once Kamensk was reached on 3 January, the trucks were recalled to XVII. Corps. On the 3rd, SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ reached its new reassembly area and was quickly deployed in blocking positions in the sector that ran from Makjev to Alexejev and thence to Kovylkin and Bakova. I./Pz.Gr.Rgt.I 14 was now temporarily subordinated to the battle-group. In terms of other individual units, SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ also contained the following:

Staff I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.I
2nd Co./I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.I
3rd Co./I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.I
Mixed Improvised Rifle Co./VII./"LSSAH"
Engineer Platoon/4.Co./VII./"LSSAH"
Infantry Gun Platoon/4.Co./VII./"LSSAH"
Staff Co. (portion only)/VII./"LSSAH" (Hstuf. Lantcher)
Anti-tank Detachment 518 (Oberleutnant Wilde)

In the course of 3 January 1943, the battle-group's sick and wounded were evacuated and the resupply process was completed. The 6th Panzer Div. had been given a two-pronged mission: 1. To restore a gap in the front north of Tazinskaja left by fleeing Italian troops, the success of which operation would cut off the line of retreat of the XXIV. Red „Guards“ Tank Corps under Gen. Badanov. 2. Hold down the frontlines between Morosovskaja and Tazinskaja. The first assignment was to be carried out by an armored task force based on the armored recce detachment, while SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ and the remainder of the division took care of the latter task. In conjunction with the above, 11th Pz.Div. was to bag and destroy Soviet breakthrough forces near Tazinskaja. All operations were to be carried out with „dash and precision.“

In the meantime the portion of SS Bde. „Schuldt“ that had gotten separated from the main force during the retreat from Meschkoff in the night of 19/20 December 1942 (i.e., KGr. „Dahl“), was having its own problems in the besieged town of Millerovo. This contingent, two companies in strength, drawn from parts of VII./"LSSAH" and I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.I, came under the control of Group „Kreysing“ of 3rd Mountain Div. in Millerovo.

At 0600 on 27 December 1942, the Soviets attacked the town from all sides with substantial armored support. Numerous tanks broke through the lines, but each was eliminated in close combat. Continuous fighting raged until 0800 on the 28th when it was finally broken off. At dusk on the 29th, the Reds again assaulted Millerovo from the north, west and east, with extensive artillery backing. SS-KGr. „Dahl“ was kept busy all night long battling off enemy attack waves. It was now known that Millerovo was severed from the main German lines by three Soviet Army Corps (note: a Soviet „Corps“ was equivalent to a German division). The raging battle continued on through 30 December and an attempted relief attack by 19th Pz.Div. from the north, was thwarted by a counterattack launched by 3) Soviet divisions. On the 31st the fighting eased off but Millerovo still remained surrounded.

On 1 January 1943, the remnant of SS-Brigade „Schuldt“ which was not attached to SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ or encircled in Millerovo, reported in to the Army Brigade „Nagel“ in Donskoj. This consisted of the brigade staff company, part of 4th Co./VII./“LSSAH,” with two light infantry guns and six anti-tank guns, and a portion of the Polizei Mortar Bn. 15, which had 12 heavy mortars and four anti-tank guns. This was to be the nucleus for an entirely new Bde. „Schuldt,” which was authorized to begin forming on 5 January 1943, at about the same time that Staf. Schuldt returned to the front.

„Kapt’n“ Schuldt had received a new assignment, perfectly suited to his improvisational command skills: at 0000 on 7 January 1943 he was to take command of all detached mobile combat groups attached to Army Group „Fretter-Pico“ and the strongpoint at Donskoy Krassnovka. The „new“ SS-Brigade „Schuldt“ (which to add to the confusion was also referred to as „Detachment Schuldt“!), was to be headquartered at Tarassovo and take its orders directly from the Army Det. HQ, except when it became necessary to assign it to the 304th Infantry Division.

SS Brigade „Schuldt’s“ neighbor was to be the improvised Army Brigade „Nagel“ and the boundary line between the two formations ran through the following towns:

Boundary terminating in the Donez River, then proceeding through Jelan (occupied by Bde. „Nagel“), Prognoy (Bde. „Nagel“), and Blagoschveschtschenka (Bde. „Schuldt“) to Rognalik Creek. SS Brigade „Schuldt,” as reconstituted, now contained the following elements:

Staff, Staff Company and Signals Platoon with communications assistance provided through the Corps’ Signals officers. Attached to the staff was a Luftwaffe Observation/Signals Troop under Lt. Schreiber.

Luftwaffe Feld Bn. 100 (composed of mixed units)

4./VII./“LSSAH“

One company from Polizei Mortar Bn. 15

6th Battery/Flak Det.43 („88“ guns)

4th Battery/Flak Det. 100 (2 cm guns)

One improvised heavy field howitzer battery

One infantry battalion comprised of soldiers dispersed from their original units

Mobile Kampfgruppe (composed of mixed units)

One infantry battalion from 304th Inf.Div. with improvised motor transport

Panzer Det. 138

Staff and 3rd Battery/Luftwaffe Flak Det.100

The „Führer“ Flak Detachment (whenever it arrived and reassembled)

In addition to the above, other units would be added as the situation dictated.

On 9 January 1943, Army Det. „Fretter-Pico“ launched a relief attack towards Millerovo along the main road from Tarasovo. SS Bde. „Schuldt“ spearheaded part of the effort and drove the enemy out of his positions at the road curve about 2 km to the west of Turoveroff, which was in turn 6 km to the south of Millerovo. Heavy casualties were inflicted upon the foe. On 11 January, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was ordered to secure and defend Matvejevka and then reconnoiter the area to the southeast to see if a further advance was possible. Afterwards the route of advance for a 360 man replacement battalion for 3rd Mnt.Div. had to be scouted out and protected. On the next day, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was able to report that all objectives had been secured and that the key Hill 201.3 had also been occupied.

With this accomplished the brigade was ordered back to Tarassovo to carry out recce duties around that town and from Donskoy to Kossnovka to make sure that no enemy reinforcements got through. The fighting on 11 and 12 January 1943 had not been easy and the list of casualties for SS Bde. „Schuldt“ reflected the severity of the combat. Forty-two men had been killed including the following four officers: Ostuf. Hemsiecke, 7./V11./ „LSSAH,“ Ustuf. Friedrichs, 1./VII./„LSSAH“ and Obit's Vogel and Finster from II./Inf.Rgt.575/304th Inf. Division. In addition, 118 soldiers including four officers (one from the „LSSAH“), had been wounded and 16 NCOs and men were listed as missing.

SS Brigade „Schuldt“ was given several new missions on the extreme south flank of the Army Detachment for 13 January. Its most important assignment was to secure and keep open the river crossing at Oreschkin and occupy a string of villages running from Djadin to Demischoff. Reconnaissance was to be conducted to the south, east and northeast of those towns. At the same time contact was to be maintained with the extreme right wing of 304th Inf.Div. near Ostaschkin. The brigade's supply and maintenance troops were to relocate to Kamensk and the strongpoint of Donskoy was to be turned over to Bde. „Nagel“ at midnight on the 13th.

SS Brigade „Schuldt“ spent the entire day moving its forces to the assigned area. A sharp, violent clash with the Reds took place at Oreschkin, which ended with the enemy forces being thoroughly routed. Thirty Soviet dead were left on the battlefield while two prisoners and anti-tank gun were captured. Staf. Schuldt subsequently moved his HQ up to Oreschkin and by 2030 hrs. had been able to report the successful accomplishment of all the day's assignments.

About 40 km to the south was the brigade's old component part, SS-KGr. „Dietrich,“ which was holding down the extreme left wing of Army Detachment „Hollidt,“ but it would be more than another month before the two forces linked up again. On 14 January, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was ordered to hold and defend Kalitvenskaja and Novy Jerochin in the Kalitvinez sector, as strong enemy attacks were expected there. At this time the brigade lost the services of Polizei Mortar Co. 15 which was detached from the formation and sent to help defend the Donskoy strongpoint. To the north a deep enemy penetration was made near Kamensk and some of the supply troops from SS Bde. „Schuldt“ were sent there to reinforce KGr. „Baer,“ effective 15 January.

January 15, 1943 also saw a successful breakout made from the Millerovo Pocket. Ostuf. Dahl's two SS companies helped to spearhead this effort along with troops from 3rd Mnt. Div. along with several broken Italian units. Despite the very cold weather and savage fighting the Millerovo garrison was able to effect a link-up with the main German lines. SS-KGr. „Dahl“ then took up new defensive positions around Petrova (effective 21 January 1943), before rejoining SS Brigade „Schuldt“ on 23 January.

In the meantime, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ had been placed in Army Detachment reserve and saw little action for several days. On 23 January it was located in the south part of the city of Vorosschilograd, where it received the following reinforcements:

Anti-tank Det.138

Führer Flak Det. with one heavy, one medium and one light Flak batteries

I./SS-Pz.Gr.Rgt.4 „Der Führer“; stiffened by two batteries from SS Art.Rgt.2 „Das Reich,“ a platoon from 16./„DF“ (engineers), 14./„DF“ and 3rd Battery/SS Flak Det.2, all under the command of Hstuf. Hans Opificius

SS-KGr. „Dahl“ under Ostuf. Dahl

The newly refurbished SS Brigade „Schuldt“ was given an offensive assignment for 24 January: It was to advance to the northwest of Podgornoje and destroy any enemy forces that had crossed the Donez in that direction and were moving southwards. In addition the area around the towns of Sslavjanosserbsk, Ssmelyj-Novogrigorjevka and the terrain towards Sheltoja and Dolgoje was to be captured from weak enemy forces and held. Following all of this, combat strength recce troops were to scout the line to locate good crossing points over the Donez for motorized and armored forces.

The attack by SS Bde. „Schuldt,“ which ran due north of Hill 168.1 to the northwest of Podgornoje, met with only weak resistance. The foremost elements, I./„DF“ and Pz.Det.138, were able to achieve their objectives rapidly despite encountering strong enemy artillery fire. Enemy flank attacks from Sheltoja and

Dolgoje were easily repulsed. By the end of the day, around 100 Soviets had been killed and six of their heavy field pieces had been eliminated. Brigade losses totaled one killed and six wounded. During the night of 24/25 January, brigade HQ was established in Alexandrovka, and the attached units, including I./"DF," were positioned in the nearby hills and villages.



Members of an entrapped SS-Polizei-Div. battle-group that fought their way free.

This night proved to be one of the coldest of the winter with strong, gusty winds and temperatures dipping to -28° C. To make matters worse, most of the soldiers had left their heavy winter clothing behind before the day's action in a motor vehicle park. The results were disastrous. What the communists had not accomplished on the battlefield, „General Winter“ did. By morning fully 50% of the troops belonging to I./"DF" reported on sick call with frostbite!

Be that as it may, the war went on and on the 25th, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was ordered to relinquish its positions and attack Soviet penetrations across the Don near Skeltoje and Dolgoje. The III./Gr.Rgt.682 was to be attached to the brigade for this operation only. Afterwards, Bde. „Schuldt“ was supposed to regroup in the southern part of Voroschilovgrad to remain again at the disposal of the Army Detachment.

Actions on this day fell somewhat short of the mark. SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was unable to regain much territory and had to spend much of the day trying to retake the high ground southeast of Sheltoje which had been seized by the Reds. For most of 26 and 27 January, the brigade simply dug in where it stood and fought off a number of Soviet attacks, which were mostly in company strength. On the 27th a significant

defensive success was achieved and the brigade was able to report that another 80 enemy soldiers had been captured and more than 100 others had been killed. Numerous Soviet heavy weapons, including ten anti-tank guns, were also destroyed. The brigade was supplemented on this day by I./Art.Rgt.335 and reported that it had 15 operational armored vehicles.

Staf. Schuldt now sought to have all the parts of his brigade reunited (he was thinking in particular of the still absent SS-KGr. „Dietrich“), but was informed by Army Det. staff that the battlefield situation was still much too fluid to enable that to take place. About 300 kms to the northeast of Bde. „Schuldt's“ positions, the first contingents of the „Leibstandarte“ and „Das Reich“ Divisions had begun to arrive from France.

On 28 January 1943, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was relieved by Grenadier Rgt. 684 and relocated to Alexandrovka and Rodakovo to prepare for further operations. In addition, 111./Gr.Rgt.682 and I./AR 335 were removed from the brigade's jurisdiction, while Pz.Det.138 and two Flak platoons from the Führer Flak Det. were subordinated directly to the Army Detachment. So instead of gaining strength as Staf. Schuldt had hoped, the brigade was instead further truncated. SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was ordered to relocate to Voroschiloff on the 29th and make contact with 304th Inf.Div. in preparation for an attack on Bolschoj Ssuchodol, where the enemy had constructed a small bridgehead across the Donez. After arriving in Voroschiloff on 30 January, I./“DF” was reinforced by the replacement battalion of the 304th Inf.Div., less its staff and supply section.

The planned attack on the bridgehead never developed due to an enemy breakthrough and advance on Petrovka to the northwest. SS Brigade „Schuldt“ was ordered to intercept this communist force near Shiroki while at the same time maintaining the defense of Voroschiloff.

The latter town was to be held by 3rd Co./“DF” under Hstuf. Lex along with the engineer platoon from 16./“DF,” under Oberscharführer von Eberstein and SS-KGr. „Dahl” from VII./“LSSAH.”

On 1 February, the bulk of I./“Der Führer” under Hstuf. Opficius made a desperate attempt to block off the Soviets at Shiroki, but in the end the town had to be abandoned. The focus of the fighting then shifted to Petrovka which was stoutly defended by 1st Co./“DF,” a platoon from 14./“DF” and part of 3rd Bttry./SS Flak Det. 2. All enemy attacks here were repulsed, and SS- Rottenführer Heider was decorated with the Iron Cross, 1st Class on the spot for destroying five Soviet tanks with his anti-tank gun. But due to another enemy penetration farther to the north, the „Der Führer” Battalion had to be withdrawn to Vodjanoj.

On the following day, 2 February, both the 304th Inf.Div. and SS Bde. „Schuldt“ were transferred to the XXXXV1II. Pz.Corps of the neighboring Army Detachment „Hollidt,“ and on the 3rd, the brigade was attached to 6th Pz.Div. and immediately saw some heavy fighting. A full-scale enemy assault was launched against the German positions, and I./“DF“ found itself fighting for its life. Hand-to-hand combat raged in the Waffen-SS foxholes, trenches and in the nearby buildings. Only the intervention of Stuka bombers and tanks from 6th Pz.Div. managed to save the day and turn the tide. But severe losses had been sustained and a direct artillery hit on the battalion HQ had killed the commander of 4./“DF,“ Hstuf. Hocke.

SS Brigade „Schuldt,“ along with Panzergrenadiers from 6th Pz.Div., advanced to Popovka on 4 February and proceeded on to Voroschilloff on the following day. Popovka was evacuated on 6/7 February, and a new security line, manned by part of the brigade until 12 February was set up in the hills north of the town. The 12th saw a renewed Soviet offensive due south of Voroschilovgrad, and the brigade, which was in the course of needed regrouping, had to be rushed to 304th Inf.Div. of XXI.Army Corps for emergency deployment. This caused the reunion of the brigade with SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ to be postponed again.

SS Brigade „Schuldt“ reassembled in Krassnoskij on 14 February, where it was at the disposal of XXI.Army Corps. On the 15th it was sent towards Uspenka to provide support for 22nd Pz. Division. Upon arriving in its new area, Bde. „Schuldt“ was deployed in the hills 2 km to the northwest of Lutogino, and for the next few days defended this sector in fierce fighting. During this struggle, individual positions frequently changed hands several times over. The area was evacuated on 18 February and by the next day, Bde. „Schuldt“ was back under the control of Army Det. „Fretter-Pico“ in the vicinity of Adrianopol. Here the brigade was finally rejoined by SS-KGr. „Dietrich“ and a major restructuring got underway using soldiers from the 1st, 2nd and 4th SS Divisions. The brigade structure that resulted looked like this:

Commander: Staf. Schuldt

Adjutant: Hstuf. Molt

Staff/Staff Company

SS Batallion „Dietrich“

Commander: Stubaf. Dietrich, replaced by Hstuf. Lex on 23 February

1st Co. (Rifle Co./“DF“ Rgt.): Hstuf. Lex

2nd Co. (formed from troops of VI1./“LSSAH“ and I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt.1): Ostuf. Knoesel

3rd Co. (same composition as 2nd Co.): Ostuf. Dahl

4th Co. (Heavy Weapons Co./“DF“ Rgt.): Hstuf. Repplinger

2nd Battery/SS-Art.Rgt.2 „DR“

3rd Battery/SS-Flak Det.2 „DR“

A portion of the „Führer“ Flak Detachment

It is not clearly known whether or not some of the previously attached Army and Flak troops remained with the brigade.

Regrouping continued until 22 February when the brigade was put on alert. An enemy force in battalion strength, with heavy weapons support, had secured and fortified a ravine to the north of Utkino and the brigade was ordered to eliminate this penetration. Preparations for this undertaking got underway by Bn. „Dietrich“ but they were brought to a halt when a new emergency arose. A stronger enemy force had gotten a foothold in the Vassjukova Gorge near Baschtewitsch, and Bn. „Dietrich“ was needed to dislodge it.

The march to the new locale was a different one, hampered by heavy snow drifts and clashes with dispersed enemy troops. However, on 23 February, Bn. „Dietrich“ began its attack towards an enemy-held destroyed village at the far end of the gorge between Jelisavetovka and Schterovka. The SS troops were supported on both flanks by Army units, and had good heavy weapons backing. In a brief but violent clash the Reds were pushed out of the town and into the wild and rocky ravine. In this type of terrain the fighting was particularly difficult and both sides took high losses. Stuf. Dietrich was wounded during the afternoon but he stayed with his men until Staf. Schuldt ordered him to leave for medical treatment that evening. Dietrich's replacement was Hstuf. Lex from the „Der Führer“ Rgt., who had commanded the 1st Co. in Bn. „Dietrich.“

By now, Stalingrad had gone under and the Soviets were able to concentrate on driving westwards, so each day the pressure increased on the mixed and scattered German forces that opposed them. On 24 February, Bn. „Dietrich“ reported observing strong enemy units advancing towards Vodino through the Olchovka Valley. The brigade ordered the battalion to take up defensive positions to the east of Baschtevitxch to block off this advance. In the course of 24/25 February the SS troops of Bn. „Dietrich“ fought off a number of tank supported enemy probing attacks with the backing of Stuka dive bombers. The battalion was able to report the destruction of two of the three enemy tanks involved in the fight.

On 25 February, SS Bde. „Schuldt“ was reinforced by a full regiment from the 62nd Inf.Div. along with the assault gun detachment from the 19th Pz. Division. The brigade was then given a major mission to carry out using these new components. It was to seal off a gap in the lines near Jelisavetovka, with the aim of securing the hills to the east of the town. The attack was to be carried out in conjunction with an offensive operation by the now fully arrived SS Panzer Corps.

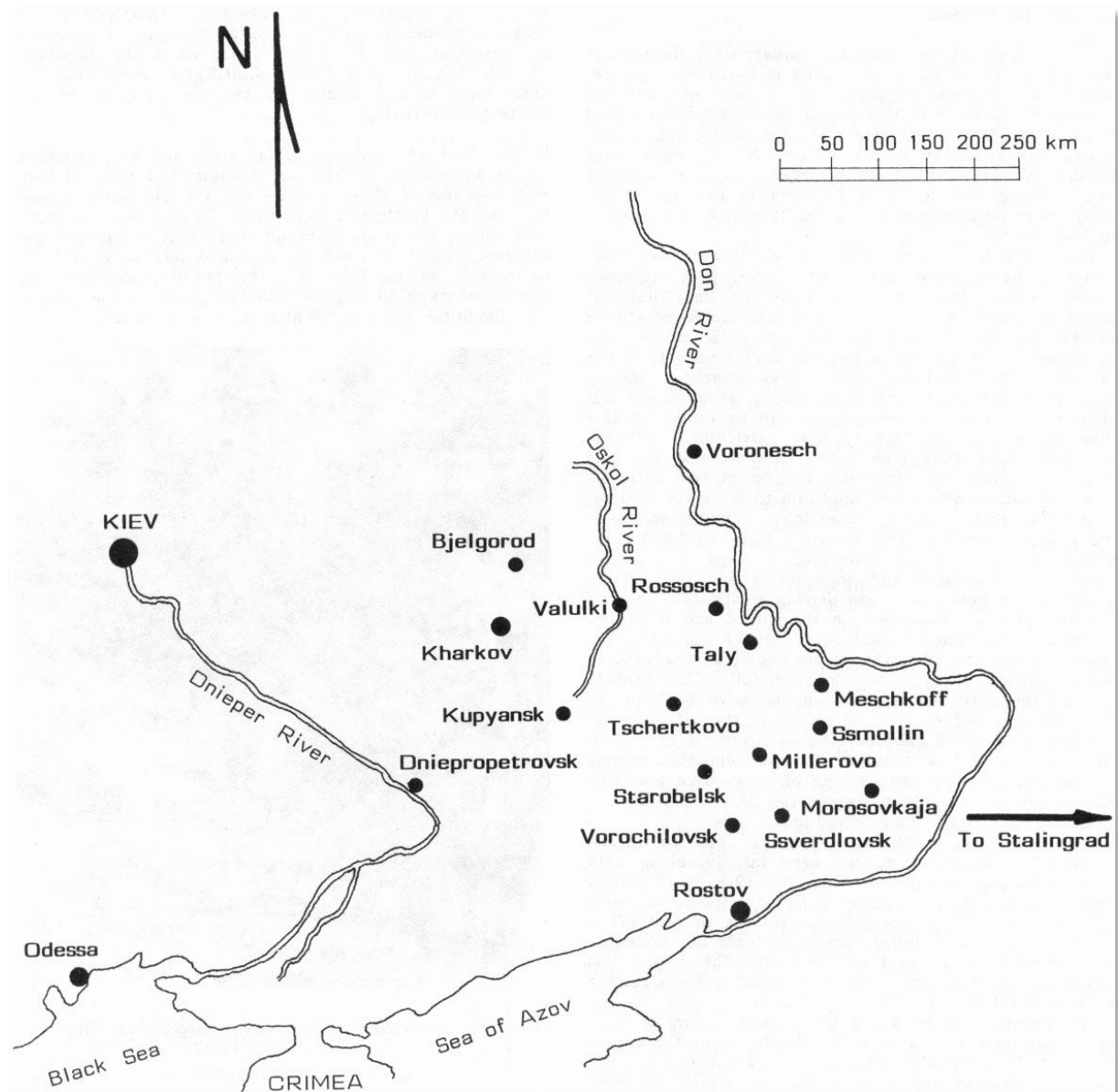
The carefully planned brigade assault began at 0700 on 26 February with a Stuka bombardment of the enemy positions. Staf. Schuldt directed the operation from the foremost element and as a result was lightly wounded at about 0900 and was forced to return to his HQ in Nitovka. At 1015 he was visited by Gen. Fretter-Pico, the commander of XXX.Army Corps, who gave him his best wishes and congratulated him on the successful development of the attack. By noon all objectives had been attained and the pursuit of fleeing Red soldiers had begun. But any serious follow-up action had to be put aside, since the regiment from 62nd Inf.Div. was now immediately withdrawn from SS Bde. „Schuldt.“

In the following days, the brigade relocated to the Debalzevo sector where it was engaged until 7 March in maintaining the link-ups between XXX.Army Corps (facing east) and III.Pz. Corps (facing north). Many small engagements were fought during this time. On 7 March the „Das Reich“ and „Der Führer“ troops that remained with the brigade were ordered to immediately return to the 2nd SS Pz.Div. „Das Reich“ (which was in the vicinity of Kharkov), via Pavlograd. This effectively reduced SS Bde. „Schuldt“ to a hollow shell, but it remained in existence until 15 March 1943, when the survivors of VII./„LSSAH“ and I./SS-Pol.Inf.Rgt. 1 were sent by train back to the Debica SS training camp in Poland for rest and refitting.

It had been a supremely trying time and the members of the improvised SS Brigade „Schuldt“ had done all that was required of them, despite the terrible weather and the chaotic battlefield conditions. Losses were so high that all of the original intact units that comprised the brigade, ceased to exist as such and had to be rebuilt as rapidly as possible. But the heroic sacrifices and achievements of SS Brigade „Schuldt“ deserve an honorable mention in the pages of the history of the Waffen-SS.



Grenadiers from the 4. SS-Polizei-Panzergrénadier Division.



**Deployment area of SS-Krg. "Schuld" and SS-Kgr. „Dietrich”
December 1942 - February 1943**