

The History of the SS-Standarte "Der Führer"

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Titles:

SS-Standarte 3/VT

SS-Regiment 3 "Der Führer"

SS-Panzer grenadier Regiment 4 "Der Führer"

Abbreviation: SS-"DF"

Stationed: Vienna

A few days after the return of Obersturmbannführer Keppler's I. Btl./SS "Deutschland" to Munich from Austria at the end of March 1938, Keppler was given the assignment of forming the third regiment of the SS-Verfügungstruppe using a large dose of new Austrian volunteers. The new regimental unit garrison were established as follows:

Regimental Staff and I.Btl.: Vienna

II. Btl.: Graz

III. Btl.: Klagenfurt

Austrian recruits were quickly sent to each of the above locations. Over the course of the next year, each city would build new barracks facilities for their assigned portions of SS-"Der Führer." I./"DF" was formed using personnel from II./"Deutschland," and its first commander was that battalion's old commander, Sturmbannführer Wilhelm Bittrich. II./"DF" received some personnel from the "LSSAH" and its commander was Stubaf. Fritz von Scholz, who had formerly been in charge of the 8th Machine Gun Co. of II./SS-"D." III./"DF" was formed around a nucleus of veterans from the "Germania" Rgt., and its commander was Ostubaf. Wackerle, who had previously commanded I./SS "G."

Both II. and III./"DF" were largely filled out with Austrian recruits. Regimental formation got underway in earnest in early May 1938, when the now Oberführer Georg Keppler assembled his cadre personnel in Klagenfurt. In a very short time a sense of inseparable comradeship developed between the SS men from the old Reich and the young volunteers from Tyrol, Steiermark, Kärnten, Vienna, Salzburg, Upper Austria and the Burgenland.

There were so many volunteers for the new SS regiment that a very rigid selection process had to be implemented. Only the absolute best of those who presented themselves could be taken in. All over Austria the SS soldiers were greeted with open arms by the civilians, who (contrary to "Allied" propaganda), were deliriously happy to be part of the Greater German Reich.

After the basics of training, the regimental commander placed great emphasis on military drilling, so the men of SS-"DF" saw no shortages of such activities. For Oberführer Keppler, the great psychological bonding between the German and Austrian soldiers took place at the Nuremberg Party Day celebrations in September 1938. At these festivities, the regiment formally became part of the SS. It received the title "Der Führer" and the regimental and battalion colors were presented. Afterwards, the Austrian SS regiment marched through the streets of Nuremberg to the strains of the "Prinz Eugen" March and the cheers of large throngs of spectators.

After returning to their garrisons, the men of "DF" undertook an accelerated program of strenuous day and night training. Late in September, the Army commander in Vienna, Gen. Kienitz, alerted the "DF" Rgt. to stand by for possible service during the forthcoming Sudetenland occupation. Since the regiment still was not fully operational, a special combat battalion composed of three reinforced companies was formed, drawing its manpower from all of the "DF" units. This battalion was assigned to serve as part of an ad hoc regiment with Gen. Schubert's "Vienna" Div., which was supposed to occupy the Sudeten territory around Znaim.

The "Vienna" Div. began its march into Czechoslovakia on 1 October 1938, and the resulting occupation went off smoothly. The men of SS-Kampfgruppe "DF" found themselves warmly greeted by the local inhabitants. Following this diversion, the battalion returned to the main regiment and its men went back to their old units.

During the winter of 1938/1939, training for the "Der Fuehrer" Rgt. continued at a rapid pace, and the unit was transformed from a horse-drawn formation to a fully motorized one. By early March 1939, "DF" was considered to be operationally fit, except for a lack of experience in the utilization of motor vehicles. At this time, the regiment was placed in the Army's mobilization plans for the total occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. "DF" was given the mission of occupying Pressburg (Bratislava) in southern Slovakia. Actually no long-term occupation of Slovakia was planned; the idea was to liberate this territory from Czech influence and then allow the long-suffering Slovak patriots to take over.



Collar patch



Sleeve title



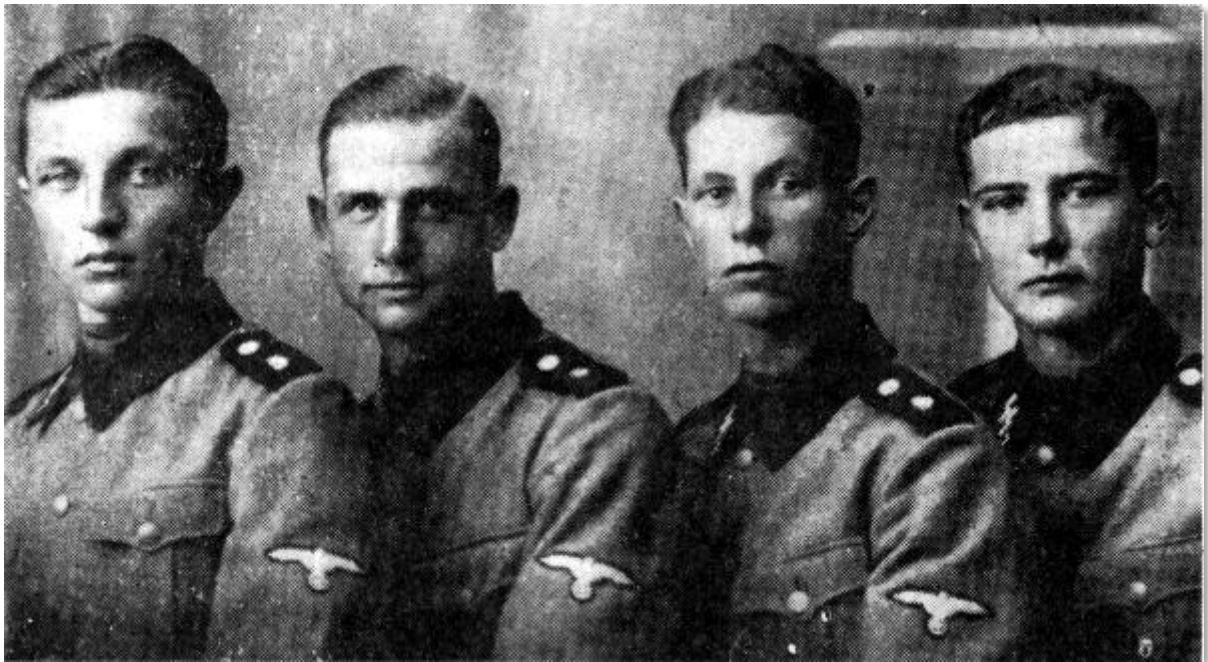
Regimental shield



Georg Keppler, first "DF" commander.



Stubaf. Bittrich, first CO of I./"DF."



Early members of the "Der Führer" Regiment.



Ostubaf. Wackerle, first CO of III./"DF."



First NCO training class for the Regiment in Vienna.

On the night of 14/15 March 1939, SS Rgt. "DF" assembled for its task near the bridge over the Leitha River on the Czech frontier. The forward elements were quickly placed into combat readiness positions. Back in Vienna, reports were received that "strong resistance" from the Czech Army could be expected in the "DF" sector, and this caused Gen. Kienitz to issue orders postponing the "DF" advance into Slovakia. But he was too late; the "DF" Rgt. went into motion just before dawn on 15 March, before the new orders were received.

To the east of Gänserndorf (northeast of Vienna), the regiment the Czech frontier and marched through the Little Carpathians to Boesing (Peczinok), without the slightest opposition from the "other side." From there, "DF" prepared to secure the Waag Valley from Pressburg in the south to Jablionca in the north. A battalion was detached to link-up with an Army division to the north.

The bridge to the east of Gänserndorf was set aside for use by the regiment's "heavy vehicle" convoy. Just as this column was getting underway, snow began to fall, and this combined with ice build effectively shut down the roads leading into the Little Carpathians. As a result, the entire heavy vehicle column had to be sent back to Gänserndorf to await improved weather conditions. In the meantime, I./"DF" managed to make contact with an Army division to the north and Oberführer Keppler established his command post in Bösing. During the course of the morning, Keppler learned that the bulk of the regimental vehicles probably would not be coming through to join the rest of the unit; news which caused more than a little consternation at the command post.

However, at about mid-day the snow stopped and the commander of the "DF" heavy vehicle convoy decided to proceed. What followed for the young, inexperienced truck drivers was a hair-raising journey along winding ice- and snow-covered mountain roads, but by evening they had caught up with the rest of the regiment without incident. By day's end, SS Rgt. "Der Fuehrer" had fulfilled its original mission.

On 17 March, the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, Generaloberst von Brauchitsch radioed the "DF" command post that he wished to visit the regiment. Oberführer Keppler informed him that the route through the Little Carpathians was a difficult and dangerous one, but this did not discourage von Brauchitsch. After arriving in Bösing the Generaloberst personally inspected the regimental units and spoke with individual soldiers. He praised the regiment for its successful actions and then proceeded on to the positions of I./"DF" farther to the north. For the men of SS Rgt. "DF" the occupation-march proved to be a valuable training exercise.

In May 1939, the regiment traveled in a motorized convoy to the Grossborn Training Grounds in Pomerania. It was quite an experience for many of the "DF" troopers who had never been out of their native Alpine valleys. At Grossborn, SS-"DF"

underwent its most extensive military training to date, both as an entire unit and in detached elements. Emphasis was placed on marksmanship and sharpshooting along with coordinated heavy weapons supported exercises. It has been said that the Grossborn experience was the building block for Rgt. "DF's" later successes during the war.

In June 1939, "Der Fuehrer" was named the "Guard Regiment" of Reichsprotektor von Neurath in Bohemia-Moravia, and was sent on to Prague for garrison duty. The outbreak of WWII on 1 September 1939, found "DF" still in place in the Czech capital. When France and Britain declared war on Germany, the decision was made to send SS-"DF" to the "West Wall" fortifications facing the French border. At the same time, the senior SS regiments were going into action in Poland.

By mid-September 1939, "Der Fuehrer" had reached Waldkirch, Schwarzwald, after a long march from the "Protectorate." It was then made the motorized reserve for Gen. Dollman's Army in the south Schwarzwald. In early October 1939, SS Rgt. "DF" was sent to the old Czech military training camp at Brdy- Wald, east of Pilsen, where it was combined with the other units of the SS-VT (except the LSSAH) to be formed into the new SS-"V"-Division under SS-Gruppenführer Paul Hausser.