

# Waffen SS Part I

## Birth of the Elite: A Brief Summary of the Development of the Waffen SS 1939-1940

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### Introduction

On September 1, 1939, 1.8 million German troops invaded Poland, initiating the beginning of World War II in Europe. Two German Army Groups consisting of 35 standard infantry divisions, four motorized infantry divisions, five panzer divisions, four light infantry divisions, and three mountain divisions were formed to attack Poland from three fronts.[1] In addition to the traditional Army divisions, there were three obscure military formations listed as part of the Wehrmacht order of battle. They were the SS Verfügungstruppe Regiments *Deutschland*, *Germania*, and the *Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler"*. These formations, together not equaling an entire division, would receive their baptism of fire in Poland, overcome the harsh criticism of the German Army leadership, and emerge as an organization that would eventually grow into the "fourth branch of the Wehrmacht," the Waffen SS.

The SS formations were unique in that the Reich leadership did not originally consider them front line combat formations. As early as 1936, the Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler described the mission of the SS, "The task of the SS is to guarantee the security of Germany from the interior, just as the Wehrmacht guarantees the safety of the honor, the greatness, and the peace of the Reich from the exterior." [2] However, while Adolf Hitler described the Waffen SS as first and foremost, "an elite police, capable of crushing any adversary," he further recognized that his political army had to prove itself in combat in order to maintain its prestige.[3]

The contributions of the SS Regiments during the Polish Campaign were minimal compared to those of the Army, but not inconsequential. Assigned to larger army groups and serving under the command of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), the SS Regiments were assigned some difficult missions resulting in moderate casualties. However, their accomplishments did not immediately earn them respect from Army leadership. Army commanders such as General Walther von Brauchitsch, the Wehrmacht Commander in Chief, commented that the *Leibstandarte* for example was, "untrained for battle and had no knowledge of strategy and had to pay the price for being policemen dressed up in army uniforms." [4]

Despite the negative views of the generals of the OKW, Hitler authorized an expansion of the Waffen SS resulting in the establishment of three divisions by the end of November 1939, including the *Verfügungsddivision*, *Totenkopfddivision*, *Polizeiddivision*, and an expanded *Leibstandarte* into a motorized rifle regiment. By the time the 1940 campaign began, the Waffen SS strength had increased to 125,000 men under arms.[5]

From the beginning, these formations were different compared to their Wehrmacht brethren. The Waffen SS formations were formed as elite organizations whose members saw themselves as more physically fit, motivated, and in general, better than their army counterparts. SS Grenadier Friedrich-Karl Wacker remembers this feeling of superiority, "Our confidence was overwhelming. We had an arrogant pride in our selves, an immense esprit de corps. I always felt better than any Wehrmacht soldier. I wasn't, of course, but I felt that I was." [6]

For many of the volunteers joining the Waffen SS, just being selected justified their elite status. Every young man who was accepted into the Waffen-SS, according to Heinze Kohne, a grenadier with the *SS Leibstandarte*, "was very proud of this achievement. In my muster group were some 500 young men who were prepared to volunteer for this elite force, but only 28 were of a suitable caliber. Merely

being accepted was already a great honor, because the selection procedure was so rigorous." [7]

The elite esprit de corps so commonly found in the Waffen SS compared to other Wehrmacht units was as much a product of leadership as selection. The relationship between officers and enlisted men in the Waffen SS differed greatly from the class separation found within the German Army. In the Wehrmacht, less than two percent of the officers were of 'peasant stock', whereas 90% of the Waffen SS commanders had been brought up on the land. [8] Waffen SS officers deliberately fostered a close relationship between themselves and their men. Expected to rise from the ranks, Waffen SS officers earned the respect and loyalty of their men by leading from the front and never asking them to do anything that they would not do themselves. For many, this bond between brothers in arms was the most memorable aspect of serving as part of the Waffen SS. "My most enduring memory of the Waffen-SS", according to SS Veteran Gerd Rommel, "was the spirit with which we were all filled. We were all just around 18 years old, and our officers just 20 to 30 years old. Our Divisional commander, SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Harmel was then just 38 years old. The troops never addressed him as 'Herr General', just as 'Brigadeführer'. It was this spirit of equality which made us all feel so proud." [9]

The professional quality of many prewar Waffen SS officers was, according to author George Stein, "not on a par with that of their Army colleagues." [10] However, many of the most senior officers had served with great distinction during World War I. Influential men such as Paul Hausser and Felix Steiner both served in the highly mobile, super-fit, and well-armed Stosstruppen (shock troops) during the First World War. Many of the same tactics utilized by these formations were therefore adopted as part of a rigorous SS training program that emphasized sport, physical fitness, and above all, field craft. [11] Author Rupert Bulter goes further in acknowledging that, "Under the influence of Hausser's cadet schools the Waffen-SS was to develop the most efficient of all the military training systems of the Second World War." [12]

The leadership within the Waffen SS used the time between the end of hostilities in Poland and the beginning of the war in the West to train new recruits within its expanded ranks and acquire the arms and machinery necessary to equip "elite" motorized forces. Acquiring the necessary equipment proved to be a formidable challenge for Waffen SS organizations during this time period. The Waffen SS units were supported by a Wehrmacht supply system that routinely denied Waffen SS units significant quantities of weapons and equipment. Aggressive leadership however, by such SS officers as Theodore Eicke, Commander of the *SS Totenkopf Division*, managed to overcome many of the shortfalls. Eicke's scrounging ability earned him a "reputation as the most original, resourceful – and successful – stealer of weapons, supplies, and equipment in the SS." [13] A large percentage of the weapons and equipment provided to the *SS Totenkopf* and the *SS Polizei* Divisions for example were of Czech manufacture. But the most significant shortage was in the acquisition of heavy artillery guns to outfit the division artillery units. Equipment shortfalls plagued the Waffen SS units throughout the winter as they conducted training for the upcoming campaign in the West. It was not until April 1940 that the *SS Totenkopf* received its full allocation of heavy field artillery and prime movers along with German equipment to replace that of Czech manufacture. [14] The *SS Polizei* was forced to make due with its Czech manufactured equipment and horse drawn artillery. In terms of priority of arms and equipment, the Waffen SS remained secondary to other Army units.

Operation *Fall Gelb*, the invasion of France and the Low Countries began on 10 May 1940. Three Army Groups consisting of 136 divisions were deployed for this offensive. At a time when only seven of the 157 divisions in the German Army were motorized, the OKW had little choice but to deploy the fully motorized Waffen SS divisions. [15] The *SS Leibstandarte* and the *SS Verfügungsddivision* were both deployed as part Army Group B whose mission was to break through Dutch defenses and occupy Holland. Although the *SS Totenkopf* and the *Polizei* Divisions were initially deployed as part of the reserve, both were eventually engaged in the battles for France. The 1940 campaign marked the first time that SS units fought under the command of their own officers. [16]

The German *blitzkrieg* through May and June 1940 was an astounding success. The new panzer divisions moved rapidly through the countryside splitting the allied armies in two. The motorized SS units, able to keep up with the panzer divisions, were quickly ordered to engage the enemy at critical points such as defending against the British counter attack near Arras. Throughout the campaign through the Low Countries and France the Waffen SS Divisions displayed a reckless aggressiveness, which resulted in great success along with a high casualty rate, especially among officers. The courage and success of these formations however was overshadowed by the actions of the *SS Leibstandarte* at Wormhoudt and the *SS Totenkopf* at Le Paradis where members of these SS formations executed allied prisoners of war. The Western Campaign of 1940 demonstrated the hallmarks of Waffen SS behavior; reckless aggressiveness in the assault, fanatical defense against enemy attacks, and a reputation for committing savage atrocities.

In comparison with the Wehrmacht units, the presence of the fledgling Waffen SS units had a very limited impact on the overall success of either the Polish or the Western Campaigns. The differences however, between regular German Army units and Waffen SS units in regards to leadership, training, personnel, morale, and equipment was to become of notable significance throughout the further expansion and development of the Waffen SS formations during the Second World War.

## The Rise and Fall of the Elite in the East

On June 22, 1941, exactly one year after the French surrender in 1940, Hitler ordered the commencement of "Operation Barbarossa", the invasion of the Soviet Union. For this enormous undertaking against "Jewish Bolshevism", Hitler and his Nazi ideology's archenemy, the German high command concentrated 129 divisions comprised of over three million soldiers.[17] They were divided into three Army Groups; North, Center, and South. The now expanded Waffen SS organizations, consisting of only five divisions and just over 160,000 men, were divided among the different army groups. Placed under the command of the *Wehrmacht*, these units were once again considered as secondary by many army commanders. However, by the end of November 1941, the Waffen SS had suffered 411 officers and 8055 men killed and 829 officers and 27,122 men wounded or missing.[18] Their steadfastness in battle now demanded respect from their critics and had established their growing reputation as elite combat formations.

For the Waffen SS, the year between the surrender of France and the attack to the East saw a major reorganization and expansion. Five divisions were established to include the *SS Leibstandarte*, *SS Das Reich*, *SS Totenkopf*, *SS Polizeidivision*, and *SS Wiking*. With the expansion came the requirement for more trained personnel and equipment. Units such as the *Leibstandarte* and *Das Reich* received additional operational experience during operations in the Balkans and Greece, while other units such as the *Totenkopfdivision* used its time wisely to train for the challenges of fighting in Russia. According to Sydnor, "The main emphasis in the new training was on mobile warfare over much broader and more open expanses of territory. Special drills included assaulting fortified positions, fighting in villages and heavily wooded areas, and the practice in developing camouflage techniques for long distance moves through open country." [19]

The colossal war in the East is often divided by scholars into three distinct phases. The first phase consists of the initial German *blitzkrieg* in the summer of 1941 that ended with the assault on Moscow, the subsequent Soviet winter counteroffensives, and the German defensive operations. During this period, the Waffen SS divisions continued to serve as separate divisions under the command of different Army Groups. The *Totenkopfdivision* attacked as part of Army Group North, *Das Reich* served as part of Army Group Center, the *Leibstandarte* and the *Wiking* divisions were part of the Army Group South, while the *Polezeidivision* was kept in reserve.

As part of Army Group North, the *Totenkopfdivision* fought desperate engagements south of

Leningrad. Trapped in the Demyansk Pocket from January – October 1942, the *Totenkopfdivision* was, "the nucleus of a mixed force of surrounded army and waffen SS formations that hung onto the Valdai Hills, prevented a major Russian breakthrough, and stabilized the weakened right flank of Army Group North." [20] When they pulled out in October 1942 they had the combat strength of a battalion.

The *Das Reich* Division began the war in the East driving with Army Group Center towards Moscow. During the bitter fighting outside of Moscow against the Soviet counteroffensive, the *Das Reich* was virtually destroyed. During a meeting between a regimental commander of *Das Reich* and General Model, Model asked, "What is your regimental strength at the moment?" The commander replied, "'General, my entire regiment is paraded outside.' There in the snow stood thirty-five men. They were the remnant of a regiment which had gone into battle more than two thousand strong." [21]

The *Leibstandarte* and the *Wiking* divisions fared little better as part of Army Group South. The net result of the first year of fighting in Russia was two fold. First, the heavy casualties among veterans meant that replacements had to be found. Often, these replacements who, according to Theodore Eicke were, "Markedly inferior soldiers to those whose places they filled". [22] This had dramatic effects on the recruiting efforts within the Waffen SS organization. A shortage of manpower within the Reich forced the Waffen SS to relax the once stringent selection process and recruit from *volksdeutsche*, people of German heritage living within the Greater Reich, and eventually from non-Germanic races.

A second outcome of these difficult battles of attrition was the added prestige and confidence that senior Army officers such as General Manstein bestowed upon the Waffen SS for their excellent performance in combat. For example, General Eberhard von Mackensen, commander of the IIIrd panzer Corps, wrote of the *Leibstandarte*, "Every division wishes it had the Leibstandarte as its neighbor. They are a genuine elite formation that I am happy and proud to have under my command." [23] The Waffen SS divisions had indeed achieved the goals set by their Fuhrer. They had proven themselves in combat and gained the prestige and confidence of the German Army. In view of this, the Leibstandarte, the *Totenkopfdivision*, *Wiking* and the *Das Reich* were reorganized into panzer grenadier divisions, complete with tank battalions. Hitler also authorized the creation of more SS divisions and the SS Panzer Corps. As the tide began to turn against Hitler, with the fall of Stalingrad and the loss of North Africa, he placed a greater demand upon the men of the SS who where, "an extraordinary body of men, devoted to an idea, loyal unto death." [24]

In March 1943 the 1st SS Panzer Corps did not let their Fuhrer down. Spearheading an operation to recapture the city of Kharkov, the SS divisions, *Leibstandarte*, *Totenkopf* and *Das Reich*, achieved one of the most spectacular victories of the war by recapturing this key city and bringing the Soviet offensive to a halt. With his faith in his SS formations now vindicated, Hitler ensured that the SS divisions to include the newly forming *SS Hohenstauffen*, *Frundeberg*, and *Hitlerjugend* divisions no longer had to fight the German Army for resources and received a priority of both men and materials to include the recently developed heavy tanks and the latest equipment. [25]

The second half of 1943 would not go as well for the elite SS divisions. Despite the Stalingrad victory, the Soviets in the summer of 1943 went on the strategic defensive in anticipation of a German attack against the Kursk Salient. The SS divisions were again asked to spearhead another offensive. It was hoped by the senior German leadership that a summer offensive would break the Soviet's offensive capabilities and provide the Fuhrer with a much needed victory in the face of defeats in Africa and Sicily. The results of "Operation Citadel" were a disaster for the Wehrmacht and the SS divisions taking part. Between the 5th and the 18th of July, the divisions of the SS Panzer Corps, *Leibstandarte*, *Das Reich*, and *Totenkopf* made substantial gains in terms of the distance of their advance but in turn lost over 50% of their personnel and equipment including their many of their tanks at the battle of Prokharovka. [26] Hitler's last chance to win a limited strategic victory in 1943 was lost.

With the German defeat at Kursk, the Soviets gained the strategic initiative for good. The subsequent Soviet offensive during the summer of 1943 proved devastating for the *Wehrmacht*. During the retreat, the SS formations became the "fire brigades" in the East. As motorized divisions, they were routinely rushed to the critical points on the front to seal a breach in the German lines or slow down the Soviet onslaught long enough for other formations to escape. They had in the words of General Wohler, commander of the 8th Army, "stood like a rock in the Army, while the enemy broke through in neighboring sectors." [27]

"The Waffen SS during the early stages of the war in Russia was fit, cocky and supremely confident of attaining ultimate victory." [28] By the end of 1943, the SS formations were a shadow of their former strength and confidence. By 10 December 1943 for example, "the battalions of the Das Reich had almost been bled to death. The SS soldiers had fought from Kharkov in the spring, through the summer offensive at Kursk and into the fighting retreat of autumn and early winter. They had been in action, almost without pause or let up, committed to unceasing, murderous battle for nearly ten months." [29] The elite volunteers, the veterans who survived these trying times were few. Replacements, including a large number of draftees, continued to fill the ranks but their level of training and experience was negligible.

However, on paper the Waffen SS was more robust than ever, possessing seven of the thirty panzer divisions and six of the seventeen panzer grenadier divisions in the *Wehrmacht*. The total personnel strength of the Waffen SS had doubled since the beginning of the year and the total number of SS divisions had risen to thirty-eight. [30]

Six of the elite SS panzer divisions were transferred to France in 1944 in order to receive replacements, new equipment, and prepare for the Allied invasion of France. (See part 3) As these divisions fought the Allies through Normandy, Holland and Belgium, the other divisions such as the *Totenkopf* and *Wiking* Divisions remained in the East fighting a brutal war of attrition with an enemy that had grown vastly superior in terms of both manpower and equipment.

Again, on 22 June, this time in 1944, it was the Soviets who went on the offensive launching "Operation Bagration". This surprise offensive completely destroyed Army Group Center and erased 350,000 men and 28 German divisions from the *Wehrmacht* order of battle. [31] It was through this inferno and the "great retreat" which followed that the SS divisions that remained on the Eastern Front waged their idealistic war to slow the Soviet juggernaut.

It wasn't until the early months of 1945 that the SS formations would finally cease to exist as combat formations. The last battles of the elite SS divisions occurred not in the *Fatherland* but on the plains of Hungary. The final offensives on the Eastern Front conducted by the SS divisions occurred during operations to relieve the siege of Budapest and protect the Reich's last fuel reserves, the Hungarian oil fields. The reconstituted "elite" SS divisions, consisting primarily of draftees combined with untrained and inexperienced former *Luftwaffe* and *Kriegsmarine* personnel, were completely destroyed and ceased to exist as effective combat formations. The survivors were captured by the Soviets or fought their way through vengeful partisan groups to reach American lines in order to surrender. A description of the *Totenkopfdivision's* performance provides a brief conclusion for those individuals serving in the Waffen SS on the Eastern Front:

"The SS man's ability to remain calm in the face of disaster, his willingness to fight on against impossible odds, his lust for killing Russians, and most important, his readiness to perish rather than retreat and appear weaker than his racial enemy were all qualities that proved crucial throughout the war in retrieving hopeless situations; they became hallmarks of the *Totenkopfdivisions's* performance wherever it fought." [32]

The war in the East was very different from that in the West. The Soviet soldiers displayed comparable suicidal aggressiveness, fanatical defense and courage as the soldiers of the Waffen SS. Against this enemy, the Waffen SS formations earned their legendary reputation. Through it all, the Waffen SS divisions maintained an extremely high level of *esprit de corps*, morale, and a deep trust in their officers. This combined with the most advanced weapons of warfare available made the Waffen SS formations formidable foes.

## Attrition in the West

On June 6 1944, Allied forces began 'Operation Overlord', the invasion of France, and opened the long awaited second front against Germany in Western Europe. Facing the overwhelming military might and the complete air superiority of the Allies, Hitler once again relied on his trusted and powerful Waffen SS divisions to defeat the Allied armies, first in the brutal fighting in Normandy, and then in the dense forests of the Ardennes. During these decisive battles, the soldiers of the Waffen SS repeatedly demonstrated their elite *esprit de corps* and aggressive fighting spirit, but in the end were unable to win the victories Hitler desired.

Hitler directed that six Waffen SS panzer divisions be sent to France to thwart the expected Allied invasion against his Atlantic Wall. These included the *Leibstandarte*, *Das Reich*, *Hitlerjugend*, *Hohenstauffen*, *Frunedesberg*, and *Gotz von Berlichingen* divisions. In terms of equipment, personnel strength, and veteran leadership, they were among the most powerful divisions in the German army at the time and constituted 50% of the panzer formations in France. They were a far more formidable force with a much greater responsibility placed on them than their earlier battles in France in 1940. However, units such as the *Leibstandarte* and *Das Reich* were struggling to rebuild their shattered divisions, which had been decimated in 1943 during difficult fighting on the Eastern Front. The *Leibstandarte* for example was critically short of NCOs and officers. In June 1944, most replacements had been with the division for only a few weeks and were relatively untrained. Much of their new equipment also had only recently arrived, allowing the soldiers very little time to familiarize themselves with their equipment much less become proficient with its use.[33]

For the Waffen SS formations, the days of having to compete with the Wehrmacht for the latest equipment were gone. A Fuhrer order dated 3 May ensured the requisition of weapons for his favored *Leibstandarte* division. The equipment being sent to the elite Waffen SS panzer divisions was the best available. The German soldier was well equipped with excellent panzers such as the much feared Tiger and Panther tanks. He also possessed what may be considered the best machine gun produced at the time, the MG42. What the grenadiers of the Waffen SS lacked was protection against the Allied air forces and a method to counter the overwhelming Allied advantages in artillery and naval gunfire support.

The training proficiency of the SS grenadiers in Normandy varied within each division. The *Leibstandarte* and *Das Reich* divisions again needed more time to train new replacements. The *Hitlerjugend* along with the *Frunedesberg* and *Hohenstauffen* divisions were newer formations, which had received more time to train together but lacked the combat experience of the older SS divisions. All of the Waffen SS divisions would have to rely heavily on their battle-hardened veteran NCOs, many of whom had been fighting since 1939.[34] "We knew that we were quick, agile, and confident, remarked a grenadier of the *Hitlerjugend*. We trusted our officers and NCOs who had been hardened in battle. We had known them since the beginning of the training. During combat training with live ammunition we had enjoyed seeing them in the mud together with us, with steel helmet and sub machine-gun." [35] Among these veterans, such as, Kurt 'Panzer' Meyer, Michael Wittmann, and Josef Peiper, the old arrogance and recklessness remained. These charismatic leaders instilled in the new replacements and young volunteers the same confidence representative of a soldier of the Waffen SS.

The bitter fighting in Normandy was very different for the Waffen SS divisions compared to what many had experienced on the Eastern Front. They faced many new challenges such as the complete

and overwhelming air superiority of the Allies. Formations were forced to move as much as possible during the hours of darkness in order to avoid constant attack from Allied fighter-bombers. A panzer commander remembers the Allied air attacks, "Like eagles, they fell out of the sky, dropped their loads of bombs, pulled up, and climbed away again. They came at us like a swarm of hostile hornets and covered us with a hail of medium-heavy bombs." [36] The air attacks caused many delays, and frustrating losses in both men and equipment. Unable to move quickly and maintain unit cohesion, the SS divisions were forced to counterattack the Allies before they could properly consolidate all of their combat forces resulting in piecemeal attacks and heavy casualties among the SS formations.

The bitter battles that took place in the Normandy countryside, much of which was crisscrossed with hedges, fields, and sunken roads, forced fighting to occur over short distances with limited visibility, reducing the German advantages in combined infantry and armor maneuver warfare. Large-scale combined arms maneuver operations were replaced by small unit actions of infantry and individual panzers.

Throughout these bitter battles, Waffen SS formations were called upon to spearhead offensive operations and to fanatically defend against Allied offensives. The Waffen SS divisions were always the lead elements during the critical battles in Normandy such as those around the city of Caen, the German counterattack towards Avranches to close the Allied breakout of "Operation Cobra" and the struggle to hold open the Falaise Gap.

The Waffen SS divisions were once again nearly bled white during these terrible battles. They were unable to stop the advancing tide of the Allies overwhelming personnel and materiel superiority. What they did accomplish was to significantly delay the Allied advance. It is doubtful that the German defenses in France would have held as long as they did without the courage, determination, and overall combat power of the Waffen SS divisions. General Eisenhower remarked that, "while the SS elements as usual fought to annihilation, the ordinary German infantry gave themselves up in ever-increasing numbers." [37] This reckless fanaticism in the face of defeat was exactly what Hitler needed from the troops who were to execute his planned counter offensive in the West.

Code-named operation '*Wacht am Rhine*', the planned offensive was for three German Armies to conduct a surprise offensive through the rugged, heavily forested Ardennes region. The SS *Leibstandarte*, *Das Reich*, *Hitlerjugend* and *Hohenstauffen* divisions were organized into the 6th SS Panzer Army in order to spearhead this operation. This formation, commanded by SS veteran *Obergruppenfuhrer* Sepp Dietrich, was the most powerful German Army in the West. [38]

The reconstitution of the Waffen SS formations following their near complete annihilation in Normandy was nothing short of a miracle. The loss of both men and materiel had been enormous. By September for example, the combat strength of the *Hitlerjugend* consisted of only 600 men and no tanks. [39] Replacements were sent to bring the divisions back up to strength but they consisted mostly of untrained naval and *Luftwaffe* personnel and there was no time to train them as true elites. To illustrate, the *Das Reich* pulled out of the line in late October, received new replacements and by 11 November was on the move to take part in '*Wacht am Rhein*'. [40]

The SS divisions had received new replacements of both men and weapons including tanks and guns but were severely lacking in motor transportation and most importantly fuel. The Ardennes offensive began successfully, with the German formations achieving complete surprise. The Waffen SS divisions made good progress initially but were unable to achieve a breakthrough. They were soon stalled by the difficult terrain, massed Allied artillery, and rear guard elements left behind to defend key road junctions. Unable to mass their forces and move forward, the SS formations were soon caught in long bottlenecks along the narrow Ardennes roads. Supply shortages combined with the deadly appearance of Allied airpower destroyed any possible chance of success for the German formations.

In describing the Ardennes offensive, one grenadier remarked that, "Three years ago we would probably have stormed forward during the night in order not to allow the enemy any time to recover. But now after nearly five years of savage fighting things move much more slowly . . . The men are all right but tanks and guns need fuel and shells and it does not matter how much fighting spirit there is, without those two things nothing much can be achieved." [41]

*Wacht am Rhein* was a failure. The 6th Panzer Army was unable to meet any of its rather optimistic objectives. The achievements of the *Wehrmacht's* 5th Panzer Army were greater. It was the 2nd Panzer Division, not the Waffen SS that penetrated furthest into the Allied defenses. Hitler's elite, Sepp Dietrich and his Waffen SS divisions had failed him, proving that in 1945 a triumph of the will was not possible against the superior military might of the Allies.

## Footnotes

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