The Resurgence of the Wehrmacht on the Western Front in the Fall of 1944

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THE RESURGENCE OF THE WEHRMACHT ON THE WESTERN FRONT IN THE FALL OF 1944

by

Aaron S. Hamilton
B.A. May 1993, William Paterson College

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
AUGUST 1996

Approved by:

Craig M. Cameron (Director)

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ABSTRACT

THE RESURGENCE OF THE WEHRMACHT ON THE WESTERN FRONT IN THE FALL OF 1944

Aaron S. Hamilton
Old Dominion University, 1996
Director: Dr. Craig M. Cameron

The resurgence of the Wehrmacht on the western front in the fall of 1944 was the product of the German Army High Command's attempt to overcome the severe effects of attrition by institutionalizing fanaticism and generating extreme self-sacrifice among its soldiers. The nature, form, and purpose of the Wehrmacht's resurgence in the west has never been fully explained and only examined in the context of operational histories. The Ardennes offensive has traditionally been used in the operational histories of the Allied campaign in Europe to demonstrate the Wehrmacht's physical ability to reorganize weapons, equipment and personnel effectively. The counter offensive, however, was the end product of three months of psychological strengthening that took primarily an ideological form. Through an examination of first person accounts from German officers, microfilmed German unit records, and the secondary literature on the European Theater of Operations, the German resurgence in the West will be analyzed.

Co-Directors of Advisory Committee: Dr. Carl Boyd
Dr. Bruce Campbell
TO MONIKA AND JAMES,
FOR ALL THEIR LOVE AND SUPPORT
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My M.A. thesis benefited from the help of many kind individuals and staffs at a number of research institutions. Among those I wish to thank is the helpful staff at the War Art Division of the United States Army Center of Military History and especially John Weingart who allowed me access to original captured German artworks. The artwork provided visual stimulation for a number of theoretical constructions. Mr. John J. Slonaker at the United States Army Military History Institute provided concise answers to all of my questions regarding the location of a number of works during my short but fruitful visit. I want to thank Gail Nicula at the National Defense University, Armed Forces Staff College, who allowed me unrestricted access to the institution’s holdings. The staff at the National Archives II found several hard-to-locate microfilm reels that contained essential information. The Old Dominion Library merit special credit for their diligent efforts in locating scores of books through inter-library loan.

The members of my defense committee deserve special thanks. My thesis director Dr. Craig Cameron helped focus my concepts and his classes evoked many of the themes I have subsequently drawn on in my research. The thesis is written with Dr. Carl Boyd’s succinct reminders to present my ideas in “stiletto-like sentences,” which I have attempted to maintain throughout the paper. Dr. Bruce Campbell receives thanks for his constant deconstruction of my arguments that served to enhance my analysis.

Measured insight was given by a number of individuals who listened patiently to my esoteric arguments and reviewed the written text. I want to thank Frank Schwuchow, Greg Davenport, David Perrich, Dave Kohnen, Lisbeth Cobas and Jackie Hengler, who
now knows more about the German army's experience in World War II than she ever thought possible.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The German Armed Forces (*Wehrmacht*) in the west appeared near collapse in the first week of September 1944. The summer battles in France inflicted a total loss of 333,837 officers and enlisted personnel on the 850,000 soldiers under control of Supreme Command West (*OB West*). The Wehrmacht underwent a near catastrophic period of attrition as soldiers of all services of the Army, Waffen-SS, and Luftwaffe field divisions retreated across France toward the German border in late August and early September 1944. A Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAЕF) Weekly Intelligence Summary dated 2 September assessed the state of the German Armed Forces in the west as “no longer a cohesive force but a number of fugitive battle groups, disorganized and even demoralized, short of equipment and arms.”

The Wehrmacht maintained cohesion and combat effectiveness along the western

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1The use of Wehrmacht represents the army, Luftwaffe, and Waffen-SS field divisions employed for combat under the command of the Armed Forces High Command or OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*). All German words introduced into the text for the first time that are outside direct quotations will be italicized and in parenthesis.

2“Blutige Verluste Ob West,” 6.11.44. *Records of Headquarters, German Armed Forces High Command* (College Park, MD: National Archives, Microcopy T-77), roll 826, frame 62125-26. Hereafter cited by Microcopy, roll, and frame numbers. All captured German records in the National Archives have been reproduced on microfilm and are grouped by a “T” series number. The documents are then broken down into separate rolls and each roll is further separated into individual frames.

frontier of the Reich despite the serious defeats in France.\textsuperscript{4} Divisions severely reduced in personnel, weapons, and equipment demonstrated continued defensive power without the benefit of rest or in many cases reinforcements. In the rear areas Army, Navy, Waffen-SS, and Luftwaffe personnel, as well as the old, young, and ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsch), from various countries who often did not speak German were brought together to reorganize and provide manpower for the cadres of burnt out armored units and the new People’s (Volksgrenadier) Divisions. The divisions reforming in the rear had at best only weeks to assimilate and train new replacements. These units often lacked heavy weapons and armor as well. The reorganization of the Wehrmacht in the west was an incomplete affair, despite the front’s priority in receiving new production and manpower. The western front’s strategic priority left the eastern front hollow and made the tenacious German defense along the western frontier of the Reich and the December offensive in the Ardennes appear as remarkable achievements. The nature of the resurgence and the maintenance of cohesion and combat effectiveness were rooted in the psychological cultivation of fanaticism and self-sacrifice. The traditions and professionalism of the German army served primarily to maintain the infrastructure of the military institution while ideology provided the catalyst for the resurgence.

The psychological resurgence of the Wehrmacht in the west during the fall was institutionalized by OKW in September 1944. The resurgence was maintained through the use of National Socialist Guidance Officers or NSFOs (National Socialist Führungs

\textsuperscript{4}Cohesion and combat effectiveness are two terms that represent the ability of an armed force to maintain unit integrity and striking power in defensive or offensive operations. Many different factors can affect cohesion and combat effectiveness. Their combination is termed combat behavior and represents individual or collective actions of soldiers on or off the battlefield.
and brutal military justice system. At the center of the resurgence was a devotion to Hitler that was reinterred with his survival of the 20 July assassination attempt and a belief in achieving final victory (Entsieg). The primary purpose of the NSFOs was to instill fanaticism among the soldiers and maintain their combat effectiveness despite the results of severe attrition. The NSFOs also fostered cohesion through the manipulation of propaganda, whereby the western Allies were dehumanized as a hated enemy that had to be stopped from entering Germany through individual or collective acts of sacrifice. The resurgence was policed by a brutal military justice system that used the threat of death on any ideologically unreliable soldier.

The Ardennes offensive in December 1944 was the product of three months of regeneration that took on primarily psychological characteristics. The material aspects of the reorganization were limited by inadequate personnel, equipment, weapons, and training time. The offense provided a release for German soldiers. The simmering ideological components of the fall reorganization manifested themselves on the battlefield in the form of fanaticism and brutality rarely seen on the western front before the fall of 1944. The resurgence in the west during the fall and its relation to battlefield behavior has gone unexplored in the literature of World War II because of traditionalism and the emphasis on the eastern front.

Academic and non-academic historians alike have neglected the impact of the western front on the development and psychological makeup of the Wehrmacht. A few historians argue that only by examining the eastern front can an accurate picture of the German experience in World War II be obtained because the majority of German soldiers engaged in combat on that front. Historian Omer Bartov, a pioneer in the psychological
understanding of the German soldier, epitomizes the eastern front centered view. He
argues:

Indeed, it was in the Soviet Union that the Wehrmacht’s back was broken long
before the Western Allies landed in France, and even after June 1944 it was in the
East that the Germans continued to commit and lose far more men. Hence, the war
experience of most German combat soldiers was forged on the Eastern Front, and it
is only by examining events there that one can gain the proper insight into the
functioning of the Wehrmacht, the mentality and self-perception of its troops, and
the changes it underwent during the war.5

Bartov’s narrow perception of the German soldier’s experience distorts the
developmental significance of the western front’s unique attrition, indoctrination and
brutal justice system. Although Bartov is correct in pointing out that the Wehrmacht was
decisively defeated on the eastern front no latter than 1943, a year before the Allied
invasion of Normandy, on a strategic-political level all decisions were made with the
western front in mind during the last year of war. The short and violent period of
attrition and reorganization that the Wehrmacht in the west underwent from August
through December 1944 provides important insights into the military institution’s
motivations and the mentality of German soldiers.

The importance of soldier’s psychological behavior in war was emphasized by
Carl von Clausewitz over a century ago. Clausewitz asserted that “the effects of physical
and psychological factors form an organic whole which, unlike a metal alloy, is
inseparable by chemical process” and “even the most uninspired theories have

5Omer Bartov, Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in The Third Reich (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29. See R.H.S. Stolfi, Hitler’s Panzers East:
World War II Reinterpreted (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 181-95,
223-35, for a new interpretation that persuasively argues the Third Reich was defeated in
the summer of 1941 and the subsequent war to liberate Europe was simply anti-climatic.
involuntarily had to stray into the area of intangibles. . . .

Military historians have only recently begun to broaden their scope of research on the Wehrmacht to encompass the behavioral factors that older histories lack. The trend began in the mid-1970s, partly in response to British military historian John Keegan’s more human historical model he termed the “Battle Piece” and an earlier American academic and institutional shift away from “drum and trumpet” military history. The American move away from traditional operational history was guided in part by prominent historian Russell F. Weigley’s call for a “new military history” concerned “for military history as a part of the whole of history, not isolated from the rest, for the military as a projection of the society at large, for the relationships of the soldier and the state, for military institutions and military thought.”

Despite both Keegan’s and Weigley’s early attempts to shift military history into a more behavioral and conceptual framework, quantitative analysis began to influence recent histories about the German army and diluted the move beyond traditionalism.  

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7John Keegan, The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 35-45. While his work is an excellent example of the new and useful interpretations that can be found in assessing soldierly behavior, Keegan does not go far enough in providing a concise framework for interpretation.


9Trevor Dupuy’s Numbers, Predictions and War: The Use of History to Evaluate and Predict the Outcome of Armed Conflict (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1977) offered a quantitative angle to military history that reduced the complex human element in war to a simple numeric variable. His work influenced a number of military historians and their
Historians have written extensively about the Wehrmacht’s summer defeats in France and the counter offensive through the Ardennes in December. Less literature, however, has been concerned with analyzing the complex nature of the psychological resurgence in the intervening three months or correlating the resurgence with combat behavior in the fall battles and the Ardennes offensive. The problems inherent in explaining the ability of the Wehrmacht to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness are the products of numerous traditionalist methodologies. Traditionalist methodologies artificially isolate battles and campaigns through a narrow focus on purely operational military concerns. Such interpretations have maintained that German military resurgence in the west was a product of increased production quotas, improved weapons, easily defensible terrain, fortifications along the Siegfried line, Allied supply difficulties and the Wehrmacht’s organizational excellence rooted in tradition and professionalism.

works, the most prominent being Martin Van Creveld. Based on Dupuy’s formula for quantitative analysis, Van Creveld argued that the excellent performance of the German Armed Forces in World War II was based solely on their superior military organization. See Martin Van Creveld, Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 3-6.

A dated, yet excellent overview of the second half of 1944, that provides an examination of military factors for cohesion can be found in Chester Wilmont, The Struggle for Europe (London: Collins, 1952), 540-78.

At the core of traditionalist examinations of cohesion and combat effectiveness is the “primary group” theory articulated by Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz in 1948. As members of the Intelligence Section of the Psychological Warfare Division of SHAEF during the war, both individuals interrogated German prisoners throughout the Allied campaign in western Europe and drew conclusions about the Wehrmacht’s cohesion and combat effectiveness. Their postwar study, a product of the sociological school then prevalent, argued that primary groups, the bond cultivated and shared by soldiers in combat and not National Socialist ideology, were the most significant foundation of cohesion in the Wehrmacht. While it is true that primary group bonds provided a means of fostering a support structure that soldiers relied on under the strains of combat, severe attrition served to retard the formation of bonds of camaraderie. Shils and Janowitz argued that primary group cohesion was lost only when individual or unit “separation, breaks in communication, loss of leadership, depletion of personnel, or

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major and prolonged breaks in the supply of food and medical care" fostered "such an
ascendancy of preoccupation with physical survival . . . that there was very little last
ditch resistance." These occurrences happened all through the Wehrmacht in the west
during the summer and into the early fall, yet no overall disintegration occurred. If the
Mortain-Falaise encirclement is examined closely it appears that every division present
experienced separation, loss of leadership and communication, depletion of personnel,
and major breaks in both food and medical supply. The combat behavior of the divisions
reveal that many fought on to escape, and in some instances fanatically. The fact that the
divisions that escaped the Mortain-Falaise encirclement continued to offer resistance all
along the western front demonstrates Shils and Janowitz theory is a weak argument when
contrasted to combat behavior.14

Compartmentalization, a product of traditional interpretation, has served to
disconnect the interrelatedness between campaigns on the western front in the fall of
1944, further preventing any comprehensive evaluation of the German resurgence. The
Mortain-Falaise encirclement in late August 1944 has been distorted as a major German
defeat, corroborating Shils' and Janowitz's primary group theory. The encirclement was
not as complete a defeat as postwar accounts assert. The encirclement initially trapped
twenty-eight divisions, all of which fought their way out to the east and showed
resilience and determination in their escape. Most historians have focused on the losses
of manpower and heavy equipment concluding the battle was a decisive Allied victory

13Ibid.

14For an example of the continued motivation of German units breaking out of the
Falaise pocket see John Keegan, Six Armies in Normandy, 275-82.
because 50,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner and only 20-30,000 escaped.¹⁵

Mortain-Falaise was a victory in the traditional sense of one army having forced another to yield terrain with severe losses. Mortain-Falaise, however, was an imperfect victory that left room for German military resurgence in the west.

The imperfect Allied victory at Falaise allowed experienced German cadres to escape, offer resistance along the western frontier of the Reich, and provide the nucleus for new Volksgrenadier divisions. Official United States Army historian Martin Blumenson, quoting Raymond Callahan, asserts in his recent work on the Mortain-Falaise encirclement that "'the remarkable resurgence of the German army in the autumn of 1944] obviously owes something forever unquantifiable to the imperfect Allied victory of Falaise.'"¹⁶ Contrary to Callahan’s assertion, the relation between Mortain-Falaise and the fall resurgence is quantifiable when a direct correlation is made between the divisions that escaped and battles that occur throughout the fall. For example, the stiff resistance that led to an eventual Allied defeat at Arnhem was a product of the


cohesion and effectiveness of the 85th Infantry and the 9th and 10th SS Armored Divisions that escaped from the Mortain-Falaise encirclement. At Aachen the 116th Armored Division and a battalion from the 1st SS Armored Division helped organize the defense of the city that contributed to the protracted Allied siege. Even more significant is that thirteen of the twenty-nine divisions that participated in the Ardennes offensive escaped from the Mortain-Falaise encirclement. All of these divisions demonstrated continued cohesion and effectiveness in their combat behavior after Mortain-Falaise, despite the fact that they met the preconditions Shils and Janowitz set for a primary group collapse and a reversion to simple survival.

Explanations for cohesion and combat effectiveness in the Wehrmacht other than primary group theory have been examined only in academic literature. In the mid-1960s German academics were among the first to examine the psychological issues of ideology in the Wehrmacht. In 1969 Manfred Messerschmidt broke new ground with his work on the ideological bearing of the German army. Messerschmidt argued the existence of strong connections between National Socialist ideology and the armed forces, especially in the latter stages of war. He did not equate his conclusions with cohesion and combat effectiveness limiting the impact of his work. During the Historikerstreit of the 1980s, Jürgen Förster, a historian at the research offices in Freiburg, concluded that a militarized Volksgemeinschaft that “incorporated the ideals of self-sacrifice and the elimination of foreigners” was the key element in maintaining cohesion and combat effectiveness in the

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17 Messerschmidt covers all the significance aspects of ideological indoctrination to include propaganda, the unshakable belief in Hitler and the exploits of the National Socialist Guidance Officers. Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination* (Hamburg: R.v. Decker’s Verlag, 1969), 326-491.
German military. While Förster’s argument is one of the best interpretations of the psychological relationship between National Socialism and the Wehrmacht in World War II on a strategic level, he fails to make connections between ideology and cohesion and combat effectiveness on an operational or tactical level. Instead Förster redeems the Wehrmacht from any ideological influences by stating that “the overall picture of the Wehrmacht is one of a superb instrument on the tactical and operational levels right to the end,” despite the fact that its National Socialist orientation fostered “strategic results for the German nation [that] were catastrophic.” Bernd Wegner, another German academic, completed a comprehensive study on the Waffen-SS that systematically documents that organization’s indisputable ideological orientation with National Socialism. Wegner, like Messerschmidt and Förster, makes almost no reference to the relationships between ideology and combat behavior.


19 Ibid., 214.

20 Care must be taken when examining the literature on the Waffen-SS because the majority of works are unscholarly and often apologetic works that revel in that organization’s military elitism without questioning its source of esprit de corps. See the introduction of Berd Wegner’s The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology and Function (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 1-8. One work that offers insight into the relationship between the Waffen-SS, ideology and battlefield performance is George Stein, The Waffen-SS: Hitler’s Elite Guard at War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966) for an overview of the organization’s developments. Ideology in specific divisions that served in the west in 1944 can be found by examining James J. Weingartner, Hitler’s Guard: The Story of the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, 1933-1945 (Nashville: Battery Press, 1995); and Craig W. H. Luther, Blood and Honor: The History of the 12th SS Panzer Division “Hitler Youth,” 1943-1945 (San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 1987).
Few non-German authors have attempted to examine in depth the psychological roots of battlefield performance among German soldiers. Only Bartov and recently Stephen Fritz have engaged in a comprehensive historical examination of the impact of orders, propaganda, and ideology on German soldiers’ cohesion and combat effectiveness. Bartov’s methodology is rooted in an abundance of primary documents that focuses on the destructive racial aspects of the National Socialist ideology that dominated the German soldier's perceptions about the conduct of the war in the east. He argues that through an intense fear and hatred of the “Judeo-Bolshevik hordes” of the east, the German army maintained cohesion despite demodernization of that front. Bartov’s work links National Socialism and combat behavior.

Fritz focuses more on the positive effects of camaraderie that individual soldiers embraced. The camaraderie of German soldiers was not simply a product of a primary group but of “the notion of Volksgemeinschaft, that seductive idea of a harmonious society which would eliminate class conflict and integrate the individual into the life of the community...” Fritz’s interpretation of cohesion and combat effectiveness has little to do with outright ideological indoctrination argued more persuasively by Förster. Whereas Bartov relies mainly on official documents, Fritz relies primarily on personal memoirs. He defends his sources by stating that “there is no better road to an

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21 See Omer Bartov, The Eastern Front, 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 1-6; and Bartov, Hitler’s Army, 9-10.

understanding of human behavior than through the eyes and ears of actual participants.\textsuperscript{23} While Fritz's methodology has merit, his argument is problematic because he offers no discussion of the historiographic problems inherent in relying on German veterans' memoirs, which are often apologetic and attempt to distance themselves from any affiliations with National Socialism.

A major problem of examining ideological influences on the psyche of Wehrmacht soldiers is that historians have different understandings of what constitutes ideology. Former Canadian Army officer Anthony Kellet provides a definition of ideology that serves the purpose of application in the current study. Kellet asserts that "ideology does not consist solely of a conscious political philosophy. For many soldiers ideological motivations may rest on a sense of the value of their own society and its way of doing things."\textsuperscript{24} In the context of the fall resurgence the value of German society—or more simply a belief in their homeland—was a key concept that provided an emotional ideological link between the OKW orders and the calls for fanaticism and self-sacrifice. Kellet's definition of ideology was touched upon by Fritz and Förster in the context of the Volksgemeinschaft; however, the continued neglect by historians of psychological motivations is ahistorical given the close relationships between military institutions, their social base, and the governing political apparatus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The impact of ideology on the psyche of soldiers and their behavior cannot be underestimated or simply left out because of authors' notions that military topics need

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{24}Anthony Kellet, \textit{Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle} (Boston: Klower and Nijhoff, 1982), 327.
not delve into psychological or ideological impulses. In the final historiographical analysis few works have examined the psychological factors that made the Wehrmacht effective during the war, especially along the western front in the fall of 1944.

The primary sources used in an examination of the German resurgence in the west consist of archival records and immediate postwar interviews of German officers conducted by the United States Army. The archival documents are division, corps, army, army group, OKW, Waffen-SS, and Himmler's office microfilm records at the United States National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Their holdings are vast and while the microfilm guides offer help in selecting rolls for examination, the material on the rolls is often not in order or complete. Very little divisional information exists from the fall of 1944 because of the chaotic situation in the west. Although some good information exists on the corps and army group level, the richest information was found on the OKW reels.

The hundreds of interviews compiled by the United States Army in Europe were a product of the Shuster commission created by Drs. George N. Schuster, Troyer S. Anderson, and Walter L. Wright. These scholars along with Army officers from the Historical Division, argued that German officers should be questioned concerning their military operations. They believed that if time elapsed between the surrender of

\[25\text{For example see the works written by British historian James Lucas,}\]
\[\text{Das Reich: The Military Role of the 2nd SS Division (New York: Arms and Armor Press, 1991), 15-17, and The Last Year of the German Army, 9-18.}\]

\[26\text{In particular the holdings starting on T-77/852/5597550 provided extensive information on the operations of the NS-Guidance Officers from the High Command level down through the division. Also significant was the information on the development and implementation of the brutal military justice system that started on T-77/788/5516807.}\]
Germany and the interview process, German officers would develop a collective "party line" to explain events. The accurate perception of the commission's originators provided a number of significant interviews that only recently have been declassified for public use.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one examines the severe attrition and physical reorganization of the Wehrmacht on the western front from late August through December 1944. Primary group theory as well as other traditional arguments for cohesion and combat effectiveness will be examined to reveal their weakness in supplying solid historical answers for the nature of the German resurgence in the west. In chapter two the institutional origin of the psychological resurgence in the west will be traced. Its component parts of the Hitler myth and the belief in final victory are placed within the context of propaganda and ideology. Chapter three examines the role of the NSFOs and the brutal military justice system in the maintenance of the resurgence. The behavioral effects on the battlefield will also be linked to the resurgence. The conclusion will place the fall resurgence into the larger context of National Socialist Germany and World War II.

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28Many of the interviews used in the current work were declassified in 1988 by Executive Order 10501, 24 February 1984.
CHAPTER II

THE EFFECTS OF SEVERE ATTRITION ON THE WEHRMACHT IN THE WEST

Many German veterans remember the western front in 1944 simply as the war of material. Nowhere on the eastern front was so much firepower, supported by abundant quantities of equipment and manpower concentrated as in the west. The vastness of the eastern front almost always afforded room to retreat, rest and refit, despite the extreme level of brutality. German apologist Paul Carell articulates the difference between the two fronts when he concludes that the “Die deutsche Wehrmacht war in den zermürbenden Materialschlachten im Westen und in den mörderischen Feldzügen in Rußland zur Schlacke ausgebrannt.” While the Wehrmacht was decisively beaten by the Soviets before the Allied invasion of Normandy, the presence of the western Allied armies on the European continent accelerated the disintegration of the German military field organizations.

The Wehrmacht in the west underwent a period of extreme attrition and

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1“Wehrmacht had been burnt to cinders in the crushing battles of matériel in the west and the murderous campaigns in Russia.” Paul Carell, Sie Kommen! Der Deutsche Bericht über die Invasion und die 80 Tägige Schlacht um Frankreich (Olenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1963), 284. Carell’s works represent the body of postwar literature that sympathizes with the cause of National Socialist Germany and the Wehrmacht. For example, in the 1994 preface of Scorched Earth Carell states that based on “new” evidence “the long-accepted view of the German-Soviet war, that on June 22, 1941 a peace-loving Soviet Union, organized only for defense, was attacked without cause by Germany, can no longer be supported.” Carell suggests in his preface that Germany did a service to Europe and the world by attacking the Soviet Union, while making no comment on the murderous campaign conducted by German forces. Paul Carell, Scorched Earth: The Russian-German War, 1943-1944 (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 1994), 5.
reorganization never experienced in that organization's history. German divisions in the west lost equipment, weapons and trained personnel at a rate unheard of on the eastern front. The combination of intense Allied firepower and rapid advances caused the destruction of primary groups and loss of morale that resulted in alarming desertion rates. In the face of a grave situation the German forces underwent organizational rehabilitation in order to hold the Allied armies along the western approaches of the Reich behind the dilapidated West Wall while a force was prepared for a future offensive through the Ardennes. The reorganization proved impossible to complete, although aided by increased production, large force mobilizations, and strategic priority. The dual problems of a manpower shortage and increased Allied air pressure against the transportation network in western Germany prevented divisions from effectively reorganizing to even 6 June 1944 levels. The German divisions that participated in the Ardennes offensive were weak in material strength, and consisted mainly of new recruits untrained in offensive tactical doctrine.

The Mortain-Falaise encirclement in mid-August began an intense period of

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2 It should be noted that in the twentieth century only the Soviet army on the eastern front in the summer of 1941 underwent a period of systematic destruction and forced reorganization experienced by the Wehrmacht in the west. Although the destruction of Army Group Center by the Soviets in late summer 1944 ranks as one of the worst defeats for the Wehrmacht, it was not as devastating as the summer defeats in France. More German soldiers were lost per division in the west than in the east, and the resulting gap in the front line brought the western Allies onto German soil by September. The Soviets would not reach Prussia for another month. Moreover, the retreat out of Byelorussia meant little economic loss for the Wehrmacht as the land between Smolensk and the Polish border was turned into a "desert zone" months earlier. The loss of France meant a severe reduction in the amount of horses, raw material, and conscripted labor that Germany relied on to sustain the already limited combat effectiveness of the Wehrmacht. See Keegan, Six Armies in Normandy, 313-27; and Alexander Werth, Russia at War, 1941-1945 (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964), 860-66.
attrition that stripped many of the German divisions in the west of their material, physical, and psychological strength. Twenty-eight of the forty-six divisions that participated in the battle for Normandy and France were caught in the Mortain-Falaise encirclement. The pocket’s small size allowed Allied artillery complete dominance over the battlefield while Allied fighter-bombers found an area rich in targets. Subsequently, German morale began to deteriorate rapidly, as commander of armored forces in the west, General Hans Eberbach pointed out to Field Marshal Model in their first meeting in late August. Eberbach apprised Model, the new commander of the western front, that “for the first time in the history of this war our deserters are no longer conscripted Alsatians or Poles but Germans. Serviceable tanks are found on the terrain, deserted by their crews, brand-new rifles clutter up the ditches, and trucks are abandoned.” In front of Waffen-SS General Joseph Dietrich, the former commander of the 1st SS Armored Division, Eberbach asserted that even “the S.S. has not escaped this epidemic. The 1st S.S. Panzer Division has never fought so miserably.”

The intensity of the Mortain-Falaise encirclement was echoed by many German veterans who participated in the battle. Egon Schulze, a tank radio operator with the 10th SS Armored Division, who participated in the latter stages of the battle, remembered “total chaos, with artillery duels going on everywhere, fighter-bombers and

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3The German divisions in the west numbered fifty-one at peak strength. Five of those divisions were broken down into fortress battalions.

4See Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, 555-58, for a description of the carnage within the pocket after the German withdrawal.

5MS#A-922, Panzer Group Eberbach and the Falaise Encirclement. By General der Panzertruppen Hans Eberbach (Headquarters United States Army Europe: Historical Division, 1946), 35.
fighters in the sky and tank battles raging all around." Many units became dispersed under the weight of Allied pressure, and officers and soldiers struggled east out of the pocket alone or in small groups without contact with their commanders. Erich Heller of the 2nd SS Armored Division and fifty men worked their way east without contact with their division headquarters for fourteen days. As remnants of the German divisions emerged from the pocket it was evident that many survivors were in a poor state of military readiness. Hans Postenberg, a member of the 12th SS Armored Division, which had fought continuously in France since the Allied invasion on 6 June, stated that the survivors "were very shaken and in no state for further combat." The commander of the 116th Armored Division, Lieutenant General Gerhard Graf von Schwerin summed up the experience of the Wehrmacht at Mortain-Falaise best when he emphasized that "never in the east or west, even during the most critical situations, did I see such disorganization and lack of discipline in the regular divisions of the Army as now were openly manifested by the SS units." Despite the poor physical and psychological state that German soldiers found themselves in, many fought fanatically when necessary, escaped the pocket, and reformed the remnants of their units to continue to oppose the Western Allies. The statements made by Waffen-SS soldiers as well as Eberbach and

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7Ibid., 99.


Schwerin on the performance of the SS divisions demonstrated that even those military formations perceived as elites suffered dramatically under the weight of the war of material in the summer of 1944.

Many of the divisions that escaped the Mortain-Falaise encirclement appeared in no state to continue operations effectively. On 25 August Model informed Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, chief of OKW operations that he required immediate rest for six of the ten armored divisions and twelve out of twenty-eight infantry divisions. Model's recommendation meant that nearly half of the divisions present in the west at that time were classified as unfit for combat. In fact almost all of the armored divisions had lost between 80% and 95% of their armored vehicles and approximately 60% to 90% of their combat personnel. Table 1 provides information on the level of material effectiveness of eight out of eleven armored divisions that served in the west.

The infantry divisions suffered equally high casualties. On 9 September, two weeks after Model prepared his report, OB West recorded that only nine infantry divisions were considered at full combat strength, eight at reduced strength, fourteen were battle weary

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11 The “Combat Personnel” totals reflect only the relative combat strength of the division and do not take into account the rear echelon or combat support personnel, which would increase the totals by several thousand. For example the actual strength of the 12 SS Division in the first week of September was between 8,000 and 9,000. See Hubert Meyer, “The Deployment of the 12 SS Panzer Division from the End of the Invasion to the End of the War,” in Kurt Meyer, Grenadiers, trans. Michael Mendé (Winnipeg: J.J. Fedorowicz, 1994), 185. Even if the “Combat Personnel” totals were increased several thousand, overall losses would still remain severe. The “Total Personnel Strength as of 6 June” represents the totals for all combat and combat service support personnel.
and nine were immediately to undergo reorganization. The Allied offensives in the west also precipitated a collapse in the supply and support infrastructure. A quartermaster report of the LVIII Panzer Corps revealed that the 3rd and 6th Parachute,

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Serviceable Tanks</th>
<th>Combat Personnel Strength</th>
<th>Combat Personnel Strength as of 6 June 1944</th>
<th>Total Personnel Strength as of 6 June 1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 SS Pz.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>12,038</td>
<td>19,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 SS Pz.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>11,038</td>
<td>17,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 SS Pz.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>11,038</td>
<td>17,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 SS Pz.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>12,038</td>
<td>19,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pz.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>8553</td>
<td>13,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Pz.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>8553</td>
<td>13,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Pz.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>8553</td>
<td>13,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116 Pz.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>8553</td>
<td>13,725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{12}\)Detwiler, ed., Vol. 10, The OKW War Diary Series Continued, Pt. 4, MS# A-862 The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes (Sep-16 Dec 44) By Percy E. Schramm, 1946, 29-30.
18th Luftwaffe, 9th Armored, 348th, 47th and 48th Infantry divisions were all suffering from severe shortages of weapons and ammunition.¹³

The attrition of the Wehrmacht in the west occurred throughout the late summer and continued into the fall where rebuilt or reinforced divisions found themselves continually in the front line. As tanks were lost, tank crews were used as infantry and died without passing their training or experience to new replacements. Experienced infantry officers and non-commissioned officers likewise were killed before their knowledge of battle could be passed on to the replacements who appeared sporadically along the front in the summer and early fall. The replacements who did arrive between June and August numbered only 40,000, which represented approximately 10% of the total losses suffered by the Wehrmacht in the west at that time.¹⁴ Replacements were not given a chance to assimilate with their units due to the high losses, retarding the formation of primary group bonds. As supplies of weapons, equipment, and ammunition and fuel dwindled, the divisions of OB West had little choice but to continue to offer resistance by any means available as they retreated in privation toward the fortifications


¹⁴The number of replacements received by OB West varies because no accurate sources are available. In Detwiler, ed., Vol. 10, The OKW War Diary Series. Continued, Pt. 4, MS# B-034, OKW War Diary (1 Apr. 44-18 Dec. 44): The West, By Major Percy E. Schramm, 1947, 63, OKW recorded that 14, 594 soldiers were replaced by 1 August and it was hoped that an additional 65,000 might be made available. In “OB West KTB Lagebeurteilung, 14 Aug. Anlagen,” 1379, quoted in Blumenson, Breakout and Pursuit, 516, it is stated that 30,000 replacements reached the front by 14 August and that an additional 10,000 were in route to the front. While divisions could draw on internal replacements from service support personnel their is no concrete evidence in either primary or secondary sources to suggest that such a process occurred with any frequency.
of the West Wall.

The fortifications of the West Wall have loomed large in postwar literature as a means to explain the ability of the Wehrmacht in the west to maintain organizational cohesion and combat effectiveness on the defense. Such a conclusion assumes that extensive fortifications existed, that they were in good shape, well armed and equipped. Even if the West Wall did exist as a properly maintained defensive barrier it does not offer an explanation for the Allied defeat in operation "Market-Garden," where several understrength divisions displayed fanatical resolve in the defense only days after retreating out of France and the Mortain-Falaise encirclement. Around Aachen in the south, United States Army armored task forces easily penetrated portions of the West Wall noting the absence of any defenders in pillboxes or mines at tactical choke points. Only at Metz was there significant resistance due to fortifications; however, those fortifications were in existence long before the West Wall was built in 1940. Even historian Anthony Kemp, who chronicled the costly Allied battle for Metz, conceded that prepared positions along the West Wall were a myth.

The West Wall offered little in the way of defensible fortifications for the

15Few British paratroopers will forget Waffen-SS Captain Victor Graebner’s ill-fated charge across the Arnhem bridge popularized by the 1977 film A Bridge Too Far. It should be noted that Graebner transferred to the Waffen-SS from the army only a year earlier. See Kershaw, 'It Never Snows in September,' 128.


Wehrmacht. General Guenther Blumentritt, von Rundstedt’s chief of staff, commenting on the impact of psychological warfare on strategy, exclaimed that the West Wall was one of Hitler’s “great propaganda tricks!” The West Wall consisted of two bands of pill boxes and anti-tank obstacles separated by several miles, which ran intermittently from the Luxemburg border south along the 1940 border with France. All of the communications equipment and weapon firing systems were removed for incorporation with the building of the Atlantic wall and many of the new weapons used by the Wehrmacht were too large for the existing emplacements.

The German High Command was well aware of the poor state of the West Wall and attempted to rectify the situation. Hitler issued Directive 61 on 24 August to begin the process of rebuilding the West Wall, which was a testament to the poor condition of the fortifications. The order was quickly outdated because the immediate inclusion of the West Wall into the front line in early September prevented construction from occurring. The West Wall’s pillboxes and fortifications simply became shelters “to keep the soldiers and material safe from air attacks and artillery fire” as “pillboxes were...

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incapable of housing any large-caliber weapons,” Major Herbert Buechs asserted. Buechs revealed the depth of attrition throughout the front when he stated that the “reason some of the boxes were not occupied was that we simply did not have enough troops to go around. Also when the troops withdrew from France they had difficulty finding the boxes” because local “guides were not posted, and vegetation concealed many of the installations.” More significantly, Buechs highlighted another serious problem besides a manpower shortage when he commented that “the opposition you [western Allies] met was unequal because of the local character of the troops. The situation was so far out of our hands that we could not control them. . . .”

The depth of attrition caused a severe psychological strain on many German soldiers. One tanker in a letter home wrote that “we have no vehicles or guns left, and whoever is still alive will have to fight as infantrymen. But I won’t stay with them very long,” because “I really don’t know what we are still fighting for. Very soon I shall run over to the Tommies if I am not killed before I get there. . . .” For this former tanker, the loss of his vehicle meant a loss of purpose, and a sense of defeat. Another German survivor of the summer battles in France was unable to provide a description of the events in which he participated. Writing home he stated “we reached Sedan again in a very hasty retreat—much faster than our advances four years ago—but there is only one-fifth of our regiment left. The rest of the men and vehicles do not exist any longer. It is


22Ibid.

23First U.S. Army G-2 Report, September 1944 quoted in Schulman, Defeat in the West, 228.
impossible,“ he continued, “to describe what happened to us during the last five days.”

One German soldier cloaked his concerns about the front in black humor, “my total estate now fits into my little bag as I have lost everything else. The words ‘hot meal’ sound like a foreign language. We are gaining ground rapidly but in the wrong direction.” These attitudes reflect the varying degrees that attrition affected each soldier psychologically. Every German soldier had individually to assess his situation and decide what course of action to pursue. Many elected to surrender and leave the war while others resorted to the looting of local villages and towns in order to gain needed supplies.

Desertion was a recurring problem with OB West from September through November 1944. Deserters to the enemy did not simply consist of Volksdeutsch or new recruits but experienced officers and veterans. One platoon from the 9th Armored Division deserted en masse to the British forces in October. The report issued to OKW on the incident stated that British soldiers called on the German platoon to surrender at a distance of one hundred feet and that the German soldiers simply ran the distance. The report also specified that the platoon leader and platoon sergeant, as well as several enlisted personnel were not conscripts but experienced veterans in service since 1938.

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24Ibid.

25Ibid.

26Neither of these options was often available to the German soldier on the eastern front, due to severe damage of scorched earth policy and three years of war that the Soviet economic infrastructure suffered under and the fear of Soviet captivity. Werth, *Russia At War, 1941-1945*, 863, 959.

The emphasis on the fact that they were veterans who deserted served to highlight the existing morale problem. In a memorandum from von Rundstedt dated 1 November, Keitel was informed that between 35 to 60 desertions occurred monthly in Army Group G and that as the intensity of combat increased in various sectors of the front, the numbers of desertions would increase. Army Group G was one of four Army Groups in the west and if all four suffered a comparable rate of desertion then between 120 and 180 desertions occurred a month, and this number did not include soldiers who were simply classified as missing. The number of soldiers reported missing during the month of September was 81,007 and by October that number dropped to 37,024; however, a total of 118,031 appears excessive considering that the Wehrmacht in the west conducted mainly defensive operations. Soldiers missing far exceeded the total number of dead, 14,611, or wounded, 48,993, in the same period. Undoubtedly large numbers of soldiers reported as missing chose to become prisoners-of-war.

The German civilian population in the west was not sheltered from the demoralizing state of the front. The high rate of desertions appeared in news articles published by many local towns. The intelligence branch of OKW expressed concern about the issue primarily in terms of the negative effect publicized desertions would have on the population's will to support the war. The reporting of desertions was only one concern, as looting by soldiers in many towns drew immediate attention from OKW.

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German soldiers suffering from the attrition of the front began to plunder towns and villages within the western borders of Germany. Individual divisions were often without basic necessities and soldiers resorted to their own devices in order to obtain needed supplies. On the 28th of October, for example, the soldiers of the 5th Parachute Division were warned that “eine selbständige Beschaffung bei Fliegerhorsten oder anderen Wirtschaftstruppenteilen ist verboten.”

Strategic priority provided little help in the reconstitution of the Wehrmacht in the west. Dr. Colonel-General Lothar Rendulic, a member of the operations staff at OKH, asserted that after 6 June the “west front was the first front. It influenced all political and military decisions of the German supreme command.” One decision the west front influenced was the plan to launch the Ardennes offensive in November, which Hitler decided on 16 September. From 16 September through the Ardennes offensive the western front superceded the eastern front in all aspects.

Despite the stability of the western front in the second week of September, massive reconstitution was needed to prepare for an offensive. Ideally, divisions selected for participation in the offensive were to be placed into special “Führerreserven” where

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32“Independent procurement at air bases or other supply units is forbidden.” Records of German Field Commands: Divisions (College Park, MD: National Archives, Microcopy T-315). “Besondere Anordnung für die Versorgung Nr. 3,” 28.10.1944. T-315/303/511.
33MS# B-190 Relationship of East-West Fronts. By Generaloberst Dr. Lothar Rendulic, 1946: A Study of German Strategy (Headquarters United States Army Europe: Historical Division, 1946), 7.
34MS# A-862. The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes, 28.
they would enjoy the benefits of receiving all available production and personnel at the expense of rebuilding forces in the east and the frontline divisions in the west. On 6 October a hand signed order by Keitel, issued by Hitler, created the new reserve and removed operational control of these units from the various front commanders. The “Führerreserven” consisted of the divisions selected for the Ardennes offensive.

The western front reconstruction overshadowed the eastern front in all areas except manpower from October through December. Heinz Guderian, former Chief of the General Staff stated that out of one hundred fortress battalions designed to man fixed positions, seventy-eight went to the west. All antitank guns with a caliber of 75mm or greater went to the west while the ineffective 50mm and 35mm were sent to the east. All captured enemy guns with 250 rounds of ammunition or more were also sent west. Even commanders known for their abilities were taken off the eastern front and sent to the west, which happened in the case of General H. Balck, who had demonstrated skill in isolating the Soviet bridgeheads across the Vistula. The quartermasters from OKH and OKW worked together in order to stockpile food, supplies, and horses for the western front. Even more significant is that all Category I and II soldiers were sent west after September, leaving only Category III in the east. No lateral transfers of complete divisions from the east front to the west front occurred after August 1944. Fourteen divisions were reformed in rear areas from burnt-out divisional cadres and sent to the

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36“Bevorratung und Landesausnutzung West,” 27.9.44. T-77/790/5518280.

37MS# T-42, Interrelation of Eastern and Western Fronts, 38-40. Category III soldiers consisted of mainly ethnic Germans and low quality recruits.
west after they underwent a brief process of reorganization as new Volksgrenadier divisions, which were structurally organized with a smaller complement of personnel reflecting the current manpower shortage within the Reich. All tank production shipments to the east were also suspended after 1 November while new motor and armored vehicles were sent west to the new reserve, on order of Hitler.

OB West still suffered from a lack of adequate manpower, weapons, and equipment despite strategic priority given to the Führerreserven. Total losses in manpower from June to August equaled 334,237 soldiers, and defensive operations along the western frontier from September through October caused an additional loss of 210,267. A total loss of 544,504 soldiers on the western front alone was simply more than the manpower base of the Third Reich could handle considering losses on the eastern front. Transfers of new recruits to the west after 1 September, including rebuilt Volksgrenadier divisions, equaled 152,000 men. Subsequent replacements in October that included transfers and rehabilitated divisions equaled only 86,000 soldiers, clearly demonstrating the acute manpower shortage that afflicted the western front.

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39 MS# A-862. The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes, 234-35.

40 T-77/826/62125-26.

41 Approximately 350,000 soldiers were lost on the eastern front in the three month period from June to August during the Soviet offensive that destroyed Army Group Center. "Verluste des Heeres an Toten und Vermissten in der Zeit vom 1.9.1939 bis 30.11.1944." T-77/826/62140.

42 MS#B-034. OKW War Diary, 296-97.
significant that the Wehrmacht in the west was never able to raise the strength of the
front to the 6 June 850,000 level despite the priority in manpower. Model, commander
of Army Group B, complained sardonically to von Rundstedt on 11 October that
"Grundsätzlich ist der harte und zwangamässig verlustreiche Kampf gegen die starke
personelle und materielle Kampfkraft des Feindes nicht ohne laufende Ersatzzuführung
durchzuhalten."43 The average strength of the Wehrmacht on the western front remained
approximately 550,000, although by the start of the Ardennes offensive that number
increased to about 650,000. The number of soldiers remained 200,000 less than in June,
and while German military manpower on the western front only decreased, Allied
strength increased from 939,000 soldiers in July to 3,724,927 on 3 January 1945.44 The
Wehrmacht in the west was outnumbered 4-1 in terms of manpower by December.

The character of the reorganization of divisions in the west was shaped by the
failed assassination of Hitler on 20 July. After the assassination attempt on Hitler more

43"Fundamentally, the battle against the numerically and materially strong combat
elements of the enemy, which is hard and necessarily high in casualties, cannot be
maintained without continuous supply of replacements." Letter to von Rundstedt from
Model. 11.10.1944 T-311/278/7702290.

44See Gordon Harrison, Cross Channel Attack (Washington, DC: United States
Army Center of Military History, 1995), 447, for the July figure and Charles
MacDonald, The Last Offensive (Washington, DC: United States Army Center of
Military History, 1995), 5, for the January total of Allied soldiers on the west front.
The German force total is based on replacement figures already cited. A total loss of
544,504 soldiers between June and October left OB West in command of only 305,496
soldiers. Total replacements in the same period provided 278,000 new soldiers raising
OB West's strength to only 583,496. Even if 70,000 soldiers are added to represent the
half dozen Volksgrenadier divisions that appeared between November and December,
the number of soldiers still would not total more than 650,000 (and this number is not
accurate because losses in November and December still have to be subtracted). Based
on the information already cited, OB West was in command of a force completely
inadequate to defend the western frontier of Germany against the numerically superior
Allied forces.
organizational authority in the Reich was relegated to those individuals who were strongly affiliated with the National Socialist German Worker's Party or NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische deutsche Arbeiterpartei) and demonstrated a clever ruthlessness to win over rivals and propel themselves into Hitler's favor. For example, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels was appointed Plenipotentiary-General for Total War, which provided him with the power to mobilize German society. He immediately began to mobilize new recruits from industrial labor, as well as calling up both old and young draftees.\textsuperscript{45} Goebbels' mobilization of industrial workers for military use sparked fierce opposition from Albert Speer's economic ministry; however, Speer's opposition was nullified by Hitler's support of Goebbels, which helped precipitate reductions in production.\textsuperscript{46} The manpower mobilized by Goebbels did not immediately go to the reorganization of army divisions but to the Waffen-SS. Reichsfürher-SS Heinrich Himmler was appointed to command the Replacement Army after 20 July and he began systematically to expand the Waffen-SS.\textsuperscript{47} Himmler placed both the available men and equipment into his divisions first, reorganizing those currently depleted and then creating new divisions before replacements went to the army. Between June and December 1944, the Waffen-SS grew by nine new divisions and by the end of the war an additional seven would be in the field. These new divisions were predominately assigned to the eastern

\textsuperscript{45}Alan S. Milward, \textit{The German Economy at War} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 178.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 157-61, 163.

\textsuperscript{47}For a brief overview of Himmler's desire for power within the Third Reich that was fostered in his expansion of the Waffen-SS see Bruce Campbell, "Waffen-SS Voluntary Military Units in Estonia, Croatia and the Polish Ukraine" (Masters of Arts Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1978), 10-15.
front and not the west.

Himmler’s favoritism had a negative effect among many senior army commanders along the western front. As commander of Army Group G, von Mellenthin complained about the favoritism that occurred in Himmler’s Replacement Army as priority shifted to the Waffen-SS units and not the “old Panzer divisions.” Even the OKW war diary reflected the obvious preferential treatment of the Waffen-SS divisions over the army during the period of reorganization. Rudolf Deich assigned to the staff of Military District V in the west, asserted that reconstituted army divisions received between 10% to 30% less their allotted complements, while the “Airforce and Waffen-SS got modern weapons in sufficient quantities.” Himmler’s control of the Replacement Army did not help the manpower crisis in the west, despite the priority for reorganization assigned to the demodernized divisions of the Führerreserven and western front.

An examination of the replacements sent to the Waffen-SS divisions reveals the poor quality of soldiers that even the premier divisions of the Wehrmacht received. Many divisions received groups of soldiers from the Luftwaffe and Navy as reinforcements, which were often assimilated at the front. The process of frontline assimilation, especially in regard to members of different military institutions, was not an


49MS# A-862. The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes, 234.

50MS# B-193. Wehrkreis V (September 15, 1944-April 15, 1945). By General der Panzertruppen Rudolf Veiel, 1946 (Headquarters United States Army Europe: Historical Division, 1946), 34.
ideal method of fostering cohesion. The 2nd SS Armored Division received its first
replacements on 7 September, earlier than most units on the western front. The division
received two ship companies from the navy and one anti-aircraft machine gun battalion
to use as infantry. Four days later on 11 September the 2nd SS also received one
battalion of infantry from the 12th SS Armored Division, one battalion of Russian
recruits who were former prisoners of war, and former Luftwaffe air crews.\textsuperscript{51} The
division was not even pulled out of the front line until 3 October, preventing any
systematic training of non-SS members. The 12th SS Armored Division was also
supplied with Luftwaffe air crews and naval personnel during that division’s
reorganization period in late October.\textsuperscript{52} Even the premier division of Himmler’s SS, the
1st SS Armored Division, had to rely on a substantial percentage of ethnic Germans from
Rumania, Hungary, and Slovakia for replacements, many of whom were in their forties
and fifties.\textsuperscript{53} In order to reserve manpower for frontline duties the division also
maintained a group of Ukrainian “volunteers” to undertake rear echelon duties who were
not even considered trustworthy.\textsuperscript{54} These three SS divisions were among the most
prominent in the armored forces of the Third Reich and Himmler’s SS. That these SS
divisions relied on such poor replacements for manpower is a testament to the level of
attrition that affected the Wehrmacht in general, as other divisions received recruits far

\textsuperscript{51}Lucas, \textit{Das Reich}, 150-152.

\textsuperscript{52}Meyer, “The Deployment of the 12SS Panzer Division,” 185.

\textsuperscript{53}Weingartner, \textit{Hitler’s Guard}, 119.

Luftwaffe and army divisions received little time to train the few replacements they received. The 5th Parachute Division, for example, received mainly untrained young draftees. The 3d company of Regiment 13, had a total of 138 officers and enlisted that was made up of 82 soldiers under the age of 22, of whom 53 were seventeen years old. The 5th Parachute Division also received a number of replacements from Luftwaffe bases in the rear who openly expressed hostility to their new role. The new replacements were not sufficiently trained and were thrown into the division while it was still engaged in defensive battles along the western front in Army Group G’s sector. Likewise, the 116th Armored Division was sent immediately from the Mortain-Falaise breakout to organize the defense of Aachen. After that city’s capture by American forces, the division was sent to the Huertgen Forest to engage in offensive operations without rest or any significant replacements. The combination of constant employment and no training time for the few recruits received prevented even adequate reorganization as experienced officers and non-commissioned officers were killed before training their replacements.

The Wehrmacht in the west was simply unable to reorganize divisions effectively in the fall. Severe losses in experienced personnel, poor recruits, and no provisions for


even partial training and assimilation consequently reduced the cohesion and combat effectiveness of the divisions in the west. Kellet maintains that because of constant casualties that occurred in these divisions soldierly bonds were not able to form with frequency. 58 A key issue was the new emphasis of Himmler's replacement system that retarded traditional methods of integration. 59 A comprehensive study of the German replacement system revealed that "with the breakdown of the system of obtaining training cadres from field units, the Replacement Army turned to the convalescent soldiers and officers passing through the Wehrkreis, and even on occasion took men on leave, to form new cadres." 60 These cadres were hardly efficient operations staffs around which to build new divisions, let alone use in battle. Those recruits who survived their initial tests of combat often found themselves in leadership positions in order to fill vacancies of experienced officers and non-commissioned officers killed in battle, further reducing cohesion and combat effectiveness.

While OB West was confronted with acute manpower shortages and a biased replacement system, Allied strategic bombing was beginning to paralyze the Reich's transportation network and oil industry. Speer's economic miracle peaked in July of 1944 and decreased monthly as production quotas in the armaments industry dropped to 1942 production levels. 61 There was never a complete collapse of the German economy

58 Kellet, Combat Motivation, 266-67.

59 Ibid., 128.

60 German and Soviet Replacement Systems in World War II (Dunn Loring, VA: Historical Evaluation and Research Organization, 1975), 43.

61 Milward, The German Economy at War, 72, 192-93. Alfred Mierzejewski, The Collapse of the German War Economy, 1941-1945: Allied Air Power and the German
and many sectors like tank and weapons production remained higher than any other point prior to 1944. While production figures remained high, a shortage in fuels and an increased targeting of the German transportation infrastructure caused severe problems in transporting material to the front as well as conducting training and combat operations. Motor gas production in August equaled 86,000 metric tons, while in December production was reduced to 50,000. Consumption of motor gas equaled 204,000 metric tons in August, 75,000 in November and only through extreme conservation was the consumption level able to rise to more than 90,000 in December. The motor gas shortage was a direct product of systematic Allied bombing of the oil industry. The German divisions in the west suffered severe restraints in movement throughout the fall, as consumption rates suggest.

Greater than the motor gas shortage was the systematic paralyzation of the German transportation network in the west. While the United States Air Force’s history of World War II asserts that “the allies had not wrecked Germany’s transportation system to a decisive degree. . . ,” the transportation network was reduced significantly


62 Milward, The German Economy at War, 163.


65 Craven, The Army Air Forces in World War II, 656.
enough to affect the reorganization of divisions in the west. United States Strategic Bombing Survey figures reveal that bomb tonnage released on railroad marshaling yards and transportation centers increased from 2,058 tons in August to 56,436 tons in December. The subsequent effects of the increase on German rail traffic were great. German freight-car loadings were reduced from 3,875 thousand in August to 2,600 in December. More revealing is that the net tonnage transported per kilometer was reduced by nearly half, from 14.5 million tons in August to only 8.8 million in December. Allied bombing exerted a disastrous effect on the Reich economy as stocks in coal, electrical generating capacity, and gas output dwindled because of a lack of transportation. The reduction in the rail capacity of Germany fostered an overall production decrease by 30% in December, down from the high point in July. More significant was that supply to the Wehrmacht was reduced. While Speer’s industry was producing tanks, planes, weapons, and ammunition at high levels, many of these items were unable to reach their units.

The entire western front was under pressure to manage their supplies as reduced rail traffic affected all aspects of military operations. Mellenthin asserted that despite a general strengthening of the west front by November, “under the impact of day and night bombing the supply system worked spasmodically and ammunition was woefully short. We had hardly any assault guns, and some divisions had none at all. We had a

66The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, 137.
68Ibid., 160. Although the collapse ultimately occurred in early January 1945, the prior reductions in shipments of supplies between October and December were severe.
considerable quantity of field artillery, but much of it consisted of captured guns with only a few rounds of ammunition.\textsuperscript{69} The 5th Parachute Division was ordered to enforce strictly its accountability for weapons and equipment, and detailed lists were provided for equipment assignments demonstrating the need to maintain the little equipment present in the field.\textsuperscript{70} As early as 27 September strict regulations were issued to the western Military Districts in order to marshal the needed supplies for continued military operations.\textsuperscript{71} More important than equipment was the reduction of motor gas stocks that were required for training and operations. The OKW diary stated that it “attempted to cut down the daily consumption of the entire Western Front to 500 cubic meters (132,000 gallons) in order to increase the OKW reserves” for the Ardennes offensive, “but, this proved to be impossible because the extension of the damages to the railroad network necessitated an increase in the consumption of POL.”\textsuperscript{72} Even the 1st SS Armored Division, which was traditionally given the priority in supplies, was ordered to reduce fuel consumption.\textsuperscript{73} The reduction in fuel, weapons and ammunition levels stunted the ability of divisions in the field to train new replacements and reduced their effectiveness to engage Allied units either defensively or offensively.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{69}Mellenthin, \textit{Panzer Battles}, 385.

\textsuperscript{70}“Besondere Anordnung für die Versorgung Nr. 2,” 7.11.1944. T-315/303/506.


\textsuperscript{72}MS# A-862, \textit{The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes}, 240.

\textsuperscript{73}“Maßnahmen zur Drosselung des Betriebsstoff verbrauchs,” 3.11.1944. T-354/623/094.

\textsuperscript{74}MS# A-862, \textit{The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes}, 242. Milward, \textit{German Economy at War}, 165, 171.
The Allied superiority in the summer battles in France caused severe attrition of the Wehrmacht in the west. The process did not end in August, but continued through the fall. Despite the strategic priority assigned to the west front and all the material advantages it brought to OB West, the Wehrmacht found itself barely able to cope with the dual tasks of maintaining a static front and rebuilding a new reserve to launch the Ardennes offensive. Motor gas, ammunition, supply, and trained personnel shortages also contributed to poor cohesion and combat effectiveness. Because almost no time was allotted for rest and refitting of divisions, an overall lack of training and doctrine permeated the entire armed forces in the west. Despite the effects of attrition the Wehrmacht in the west never collapsed. The front line remained stable from September 1944 through March 1945 and a major offensive was launched, despite the fact that Allied superiority was four-to-one in personnel alone. The reasons for continued German resistance and the overall maintenance of cohesion and combat effectiveness have only a limited basis in the physical aspect of the fall reorganization. While the traditions and professionalism of the Wehrmacht played a large role in preventing a collapse of the military institution's infrastructure, the main reason for the resurgence was the psychological rehabilitation of the German soldier fostered through OKW's attempt to instill fanaticism and self-sacrifice.
CHAPTER III

THE ORIGINS OF THE RESURGENCE IN THE WEST

Despite the physical attrition of the western front, Wehrmacht forces serving there maintained cohesion and combat effectiveness. Severe losses in equipment, weapons, and manpower, as well as an obvious decrease in the morale of the soldiers did not lead to a general collapse of the front. The rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht in the west was primarily psychological and not physical in nature as material deprivation was replaced with ideological strength. In the ominous atmosphere of the fall, German soldiers maintained cohesion and effectiveness through a reliance on a number of convictions manipulated by OKW orders and policed by the NSFOs and a brutal military justice system. OKW attempted to instill a universal sense of purpose that built on the predominant belief in Hitler, final victory, a xenophobic desire to prevent non-Germans from encroaching on “holy German soil,” and an increase in the fanaticism of the Wehrmacht. The new sense of purpose served to increase the self-importance of individual soldiers and unite them in a common bond that transcended weak primary groups, inter-service rivalries, or nationalities.

A key foundation to the new sense of purpose was Hitler’s image that presented soldiers in the west with a motivating ideal they grasped in order to maintain cohesion despite the crushing summer battles of material. The failed assassination attempt against Hitler on 20 July served, in many instances, to promote positive feelings for Hitler among the soldiers at the front. A censor who surveyed 17,332 letters sent home after 20 July wrote in his report that “the high number of joyful expressions about the salvation of the
Führer, which is emphasized as a true stroke of fortune for the German people, is not only proof of the devotion and loyalty of the soldiers to the Führer, but of the firm determination of the soldiers to fight and conquer for him, which is also brought out in the letters.” The censor continued to write that the letters showed “that the military duties of the soldier and his good military bearing are indivisibly bound up with the loyalty to the Führer and thus with a genuine National Socialist attitude in general...”1

While the use of letters to survey soldiers’ feelings may appear problematic, Ian Kershaw, a German cultural historian, maintains “while anti-Hitler remarks were obviously dangerous, it was not necessary to write in glowing praise of him, or even to mention him and the attempt on his life at all.”2 Surveys of captured German prisoners by members of the Psychological Warfare Branch of the United States Army reveal a similar trend expressed by the German censor. In July 57% of German prisoners questioned stated that they trusted Hitler and his conduct of the war, while in August the number of positive responses increased eleven points to 68%, despite August being the most disastrous month for the Wehrmacht since the Allied invasion in June.3 Kershaw maintains that after the unsuccessful assassination attempt “‘Thank God, the Führer is alive,’ was a sigh of relief which could be heard everywhere,” and “the bonds with the

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2Ibid.

Führer . . . deepened, the trust in his leadership strengthened. In Figure 1, Hitler at the Front visually captures the strong bond between Hitler and his soldiers that did not escape the artist's perception. Within the painting's context all members of the Wehrmacht vie for a position within the inner circle that surrounds "the first soldier of the Reich." German cultural historian Klaus P. Fischer remarks in his recent work on the Third Reich that "no politician in Germany, before or after Hitler, has been able to build up such intimate emotional bonds with the people," or his soldiers.

Throughout the Wehrmacht the failed assassination attempt on Hitler's life served as a rallying cry to retrench soldiers' belief in Hitler and final victory. Upon hearing about the failed assassination attempt on Hitler’s life relief and adulation swept the command of the LVIII Panzer Corps. General Kruger issued an order of the day on 21 July that expressed the feelings that many German soldiers in the west felt:

Soldaten des LVIII. Panzer-Korps!

Verräter habe am 20.7.44 einem Nordversuch [sic] auf unseren geliebten Führer Adolf Hitler unternommen [sic]. Dank der Vorsehung des Schicksals sind dem deutschen Volke in gleichen Maße untilgbare Schande und schwerster Verlust erspart geblieben. Der Führer ist unversehrt!

...Volk und Wehrmacht werden auf gefordert, umbeirrt [sic] ihre Pflicht zu tun. Die Oberbefehlshaber der Wehrmachtteile, Reichs-marschall Göring und Großadmiral Dönitz haben Aufrufe unwandelbarer Treue zum Führer an ihre Einheiten erlassen. Reichsführer SS Himmler und die Generalobersten Stumpff und Guderian haben Sonderaufträge des Führers erhalten, die in Reiche Sicherheit und Ordnung verbüren.

Für uns Soldaten des LVIII. Panzer-Korps gibt es nur eine Parole!

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Figure 1
Hitler at the Front, by Emil Scheibe, 1943.

Courtesy of the United States Army Center of Military History.
Kampf bis zum Endsieg, es lebe der Führer Adolf Hitler!6

The order identified the major connection between Hitler and his soldiers. The use of "providence" to describe the event by Kruger was not an act of individual emotion. Ernest Bramsted, a historian of German propaganda asserts that adulation expressed by soldiers over Hitler's survival took on a "quasi-religious zeal of a Messianic mission" found "under 'the protection of Providence.'"7 The "Messianic mission" was transferred into a desire to fight until the final victory and provided the basis for a heightened sense of purpose found in later orders issued by OKW and OB West.

OKH capitalized on the new found sense of purpose by strengthening the ideological convictions of officers. After his appointment as Chief of the General Staff following the removal of General Zeitzler, General Heinz Guderian issued an order to the General Staff:

Every General Staff officer must be a National Socialist officer-

Soldiers of LVIII Panzer-Corps!

On 20 July 1944 traitors have attempted to take the life of our much loved leader Adolf Hitler. Thank providence that the German people were spared from mass, irredeemable disgrace and from the heaviest damage. The Führer is unharmed!

...People and the armed forces are demanded to do their duty unflustered. The commander-in-chiefs of the branches of the armed forces, Field-Marshall Göring and Grand Admiral Dönitz have called on their services to swear unwaving loyalty to the Führer. Reichsführer SS Himmler and Colonel-Generals Stumpff and Guderian have been specially ordered by the Führer to guarantee the safety and order of the Reich.

For us Soldiers of LVIII Panzer corps there is only one motto! Fight on to final victory, the Fuehrer Adolf Hitler lives!

7Ernest Bramsted, Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945
(East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1965), 362.
leader, that is not only by his knowledge of tactics and strategy but also by
his model attitude to political questions and by actively co-operating in the
political indoctrination of younger commanders in accordance with the
tenants of the Führer. . . .

In judging and selecting General Staff officers, superiors should place
traits of character and spirit above the mind. A rascal may be ever so
cunning but in the hour of need he will nevertheless fail because he is a
rascal.

I expect every General Staff officer immediately to declare himself a
convert or adherent to my views and to make an announcement to that effect
in public. Anybody unable to do so should apply for his removal from my
staff. . . .

Guderian went on to assert that all officers must now work closely with the NSFOs who
were charged with the indoctrination of German soldiers, and whose power grew
substantially after 20 July. Guderian reinstitutionalized the ideological convictions
present among many German officers present since the earliest days of the Wehrmacht.

Former Army chief of staff Walter von Brauchitsch issued a similar order on 18
December 1938 that resembled Guderian's. Von Brauchitsch ordered that "the officer
corps must not allow itself to be surpassed by anyone in the purity and conviction of its
National Socialist Weltanschauung. . . ." In the emotional atmosphere of 20 July,
Guderian attempted to promote strength and unity within the officer corps by drawing on
those elements he felt would provide the needed psychological stability. Hitler's
survival, thus sparked an upsurge of morale among many soldiers in the west and
provided the origins of the High Command's attempt at maintaining cohesion and

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8SHAEP Weekly intelligence Summary, 23 September 1944, quoted in
Schulman, Defeat in the West, 181-82. For the entire order in German see
Messerschmidt, Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat, 435.


10Cited in Bartov, The Eastern Front, 1941-45, 74.
combat effectiveness.

The first step toward final victory was to take place in the west where Hitler believed that he had a better chance of making a decisive strike at the "weak" political coalition and supply base of the Allied armies. There was little distinction between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union for Hitler in September 1944. Both represented ideological enemies that were to be defeated by any means possible. There was never an idea of simply giving up the western front so that the eastern front could be reinforced against the Soviet armies. Karl Dietrich Bracher, a German historian of the structure and influence of National Socialism asserts that only in the post war period in the midst of the Cold War did the idea of a German desire to join with the Western Allies against the Soviets emerge as a product of still present German fascism. He states that "to this day we can hear the echoes of the Nazi thesis that only the myopia of the Western powers prevented a last-ditch stand against Bolshevism," however, "Hitler never for a moment intended to give up the Western front in favor of a defense in the East."11 Hitler believed all the armies of his enemies were equal enemies of National Socialist Germany as he looked toward the strategy of Frederick the Great in the Seven Years War to provide him guidance.12 In an early September meeting regarding the future offensive in the Ardennes Hitler stated "we shall fight, if necessary even on the Rhine. That is entirely immaterial. We shall continue this struggle under all circumstances—as Frederick the

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12 Ibid.
Great said—"one of four damned enemies will get tired of fighting on."\textsuperscript{13} His staunch attitude toward the Western Allies was maintained throughout the fall and was a significant part of his decision for launching the Ardennes offensive. As previously noted, almost all new production, current stocks of equipment and supplies, as well as new replacements would be sent west to reorganize for the Ardennes offensive. Even after the Ardennes offensive seemed incapable of achieving its ambitious strategic goals, Hitler remarked on 28 December in front of his staff officers that they were waging an ideological war and that he did not have "'the slightest intention of losing. . . . Think of Frederick the Great and his Seven Years war.'"\textsuperscript{14} During the fall, the western front became more significant than the eastern front on an ideological level, and drew special emphasis due to the proximity of Germany's industrial centers in the Ruhr and because it was the Western Allies that reached German soil first.\textsuperscript{15}

In order to maintain the cohesion and combat effectiveness of the Wehrmacht in the west OKW ordered an increase in the morale of the German soldier. Whereas Guderian was concerned with the behavior of German officers, OKW's action was specifically geared to all soldiers on the western front. OKW realized that it was on the western front where the enemy needed to be held back at all costs in order to prepare and

\textsuperscript{13}Charles von Luettichau, \textit{Ardennes Offensive: Germany's Situation in the Fall of 1944, Part I. The Political Situation} (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1950), 11.

\textsuperscript{14}Luck, \textit{Panzer Commander}, 225.

\textsuperscript{15}The fact is often neglected in many histories of the war that the western Allies reached Germany first—over a month before the Soviets. The Soviet armies in the east crossed over into German territory between 16 and 28 October, after the capitulation of Aachen to the United States First Army. Christopher Duffy, \textit{Red Storm on the Reich: The Soviet March on Germany, 1945} (New York: De Capo, 1993), 14.
launch the Ardennes offensive. OKW understood the severe shortages in manpower, weapons, and equipment present in every formation assigned to the front and planned to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness by increasing the individual German soldier’s inner convictions. On 16 September, the day the decision was made to launch the Ardennes offensive, OKW issued orders “for the building up of fanaticism” in the soldiers in the west. On that same day Chief of OKW Staff Field Marshal Alfred Jodl issued an order that would be echoed throughout the front. Jodl stated:

The Fuehrer has ordered:

1. In the West the fighting has advanced onto German soil along broad sectors. German cities and villages are being included in the combat zone. This fact must make us fight with fanatical determination and put up stiff resistance with every able-bodied man in the combat zone. Each and every pill box, every city and village block must become a fortress against which the enemy will smash himself to bits or in which the German garrison will die in hand-to-hand fighting. There can no longer be any large-scale operations on our part. All we can do is to hold our positions or die. The officers of all ranks are responsible for kindling this fanaticism in the troops and in the general population, increasing it constantly, and using it as a weapon against the trespassers on German soil. Any one, regardless whether officer or enlisted man, who is not aware of his duty or who shirks his task in this decisive hour in order to save his life should be eliminated or called to task. The commanding General, Armed Forces, West will take every step necessary at once in order to put an end to the retreat of the troops. . . .

The order clearly demonstrates the importance of the western front and how material weakness in the military organization was now to be replaced with fanaticism and self-sacrifice. Jodl’s order, like Guderian’s, made clear distinction between the behavior to be followed by all officers and enlisted personnel. Unlike Guderian, who simply stated

16 MS# B-034, OKW War Diary, 154.

that officers unwilling to comply with his priorities should be removed from the General Staff, Jodl specified death. The order was very honest about the current situation and appealed directly to the soldiers' desire to protect their homes and families from an unknown fate—an integral part of a new sense of purpose found in Kellets definition of ideology. The order was taken verbatim by the formations along the western front and transmitted to every division. Commander of Army Group B, General Krebs received the order and immediately reissued it in on the same day. Krebs quoted the entire order and added that the NSFOs, military justice officers and combat service officers must spread, strengthen, and advance the orders of the Führer. He also wrote that the order was to be sent down in written form to the division level, and from that point on through word of mouth to every soldier.¹⁸ For the German soldier in the west who believed in Hitler's Germany and final victory, the new orders clearly signified the importance of his task in a heightened emotional state where his life was to be sacrificed if necessary for the protection of his homeland.

Throughout the fall orders issued to the troops called for their fanatical sacrifice in the destruction of the western Allies on German soil. These orders reminded soldiers why they were fighting and created motivation that every soldier was able to identify. On 1 October von Rundstedt issued an order of the day that was entitled "Soldiers of the Western Front!":

"You have brought the enemy to a halt at the gates of the Reich. But he will shortly go over to new super attacks. I expect you to defend Germany's sacred soil with all your strength and to the very last. The homeland will thank you through untiring efforts and will be proud of you.

¹⁸16.9.1944. T-315/278/7002349-50."
New soldiers will arrive at the Western front. Instill into them your
will to victory and your battle experience. All officers and N.C.O.s are
responsible for all troops being at all times conscious of their great
responsibility as defenders of the Western approaches. Soldiers of the
Western Front!

Every attempt of the enemy to break into our Fatherland will fail
because of your unshakeable bearing.

Heil the Führer!19

Von Rundstedt’s order reflected his more reserved demeanor, but it contains the
elements of fanaticism and self-sacrifice originally ordered by Jodl in September. The
continued sincerity of OB West to identify with the hardships of the frontline soldier
fostered a positive relationship between soldiers and their command structure as both
found themselves in a common plight. Two weeks later on 14 October Model issued his
own order of the day to Army Group B that was far more outspoken in a call for
fanaticism. Model’s order exclaimed:

Soldiers of the Army Group!
The battle in the West has reached its peak. On widely separated
fronts we must defend the soil of our German homeland. Now we must
shield the sacred soil of the Fatherland with tenacity and doggedness. . . .
The Commandment of the hour is: None of us gives up a square foot of
German soil while still alive.

Every bunker, every block of houses in a German town, every
German village must become a fortress which shatters the enemy. That’s
what the Führer, the people and our dead comrades expect from us. The
enemy shall know that there is no road into the heart of the Reich except over
our dead bodies. . . .

Egotism, neglect of duty, defeatism and especially cowardice must
not be allowed room in our hearts. Whoever retreats without giving battle is
a traitor to his people. . . .

Soldiers! Our homeland, the lives of our wives and children are at
stake!

Our Führer and our loved ones have confidence in their soldiers! We
will show ourselves worthy of their confidence.

19Cited in Schulman, Defeat in the West, 275.
Long live our Germany and our beloved Führer! [Model's emphasis]\(^20\)

Model placed almost religious significance in his order to the troops as he issued a "commandment" that all German soldiers would give up their lives for Hitler and Germany. As in all previous orders, a delineation was made between those soldiers who continued the fight and those who did not. For those soldiers who demonstrated a lack of will to fight for the survival of Germany only the title of a traitor existed, which usually brought death. These same elements were found in orders all along the front. In Aachen, for example, as the city became surrounded, the commander, General Gerhard Wilk issued orders extolling the soldiers to fight until the last. He made it clear to the soldiers in the city that this was their last fight and that they must defend to the last cartridge as ordered by Hitler, using bravery and resolve.\(^21\) The use of calls for last ditch defenses or no retreats by OKW or OB West created a psychological state of the "last round," "end battle," and "final victory," that heightened the tendency of German soldiers to acts of fanaticism and self-sacrifice that unified them behind a common purpose.\(^22\) As part of the new motivation, the German soldier was constantly told that he alone was called to the task of preventing the enemy from breaking through into the heart of Germany, which increased his self-importance, and transcended inter-service rivalries, nationalities or service time.

The orders received from front line commanders were not the only method of

\(^{20}\)Ibid.


\(^{22}\)Messerschmidt, Die Wehrmacht Im NS-Staat, 303.
increasing the fanaticism of the German soldier in the west as published propaganda within the military institution was a primary source of influence. Increasing the fanaticism of the troops through propaganda was not new to the Wehrmacht in 1944. In the 1941-42 winter retreat in front of Moscow both staff officers and field officers believed that the indoctrination of the German soldier must be increased in order to prevent them from losing their morale under the severe enemy pressures.\(^{23}\) There was a big difference between the Russian front in the winter of 1941-42 and the western front in 1944. The obvious being that in the west the fighting was on German soil, thus, the character and intensity of the propaganda was stronger and more emotional. On the division level propaganda for the troops came in many forms. The most common was the various newspapers that circulated among the front line troops. *Mitteilungen für die Truppe, Nachtrichten der Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* and *Mitteilungen für das Offizier Korps* were among the primary written sources for indoctrination and propaganda.\(^{24}\) After 20 July the NSFOs became very active within the divisions providing structure for all aspects of indoctrination and propaganda. Goebbels’s Ministry for Public Enlightenment bombarded both the front line soldiers and the home front with daily propaganda that corroborated and enhanced the orders received by frontline soldiers. He focused on the “terror-bombings” of German cities to denounce the western allies as “demons” and promoted faith in victory through the use of “secret

\(^{23}\)Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, 75.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 69.
weapons” like the V-1 and V-2.25

Despite the reluctance in postwar literature to credit the impact of propaganda on German soldiers, their own accounts of the western front in the fall of 1944 reveal that propaganda did influence cohesion and combat effectiveness.26 The propaganda, like the orders sent down from OKW, struck a responsive cord among German soldiers, as it built on internalized fear, a desire to protect one’s family and way of life, and a belief in final victory. General Blumentritt, von Rundstedt’s chief of staff, commented on the effects of propaganda in the west and stated that “the battles west of the Rhine were, of course, influenced by propaganda, in order to prevent the enemy from reaching the Rhine and the Ruhr-basin,” and that all “appeals and orders alike now carried the motto: ‘From now on you are fighting on German soil and every inch of territory is holy!’ This explains the hard fighting west of the Rhine . . . .”27 Von Mellenthin, commander of Army Group G, asserted in his postwar memoirs that “the rank and file were whipped up to further resistance” through propaganda,28 and von Luck, commander of the 21st Armored Division, wrote forty-five years after the battles in the west that he still recalls the propaganda slogans that “Goebbels proclaimed every day.”29 Siegfried Westphal, an


26Martin van Creveld states in his poor and error-riddled book that the effects of such propaganda “on the morale of the German soldier, though impossible to measure, was probably no greater than that of similar non-sense in other armies.” Van Creveld, Fighting Power, 87.

27MS# B-278, Strategy and Psychological Warfare, 90.

28Mellenthin, Panzer Battles, 383.

29Luck, Panzer Commander, 215.
OB West operations staff member, asserted in his postwar account of the German campaign in the west in the last year of the war that "our own propaganda was stronger" than the western Allies.\(^{30}\) Hans Speidel, a member of the operations staff of OB West, also remembered the calls to defend the West Wall "to the last man."\(^{31}\) These German soldiers admitted to an influence that can easily be used as a defense to justify continued resistance that protracted a costly war. Yet in the above instances the former German officers make no attempt to shift blame onto propaganda. Instead they make clear statements regarding its influence, which was strengthened by its obvious appeal among the soldiers in the west.

Propaganda was an integral part of the maintenance of a new sense of purpose that played on internalized beliefs to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness.

Surveys of captured German prisoners revealed that 53% believed in war winning secret weapons in November, which was up 4% from early September.\(^{32}\) Hubert Gees, a soldier in the 116th Armored Division, wrote of the war that "a V-1 roaring loudly overhead would give us hope the new 'wonder weapons' would change the course of the war after all."\(^{33}\) Guenther Reichheim, operations officer for Army Group B maintained in a postwar interview that the staff discussed capitulation to the western Allies but did not because "of the good morale of the troops and of the civilian population." "In addition,"


\[^{32}\] Gurfein and Janowitz, "Trends in Wehrmacht Morale," 204.

\[^{33}\] Hubert Gees, "Fighting for the West wall," *Command* 33 (March-April, 1955), 89.
Reichheim asserted "the impression was still prevailing that the last possibilities had not yet fully been exploited based on the above mentioned 'announcements' contained in orders from higher headquarters . . . ." The "announcements" to which Reichheim referred were the OKW orders, and Goebbels' daily propaganda issued to the front line soldiers.

The reorganization of the Wehrmacht in the west along stronger ideological lines occurred on a divisional level. Divisional cadres that were burnt out after engagements along the western and eastern fronts were often grouped together to organize Volksgrenadier divisions, which were filled out with new draftees. The division was based on a reduced complement of soldiers that was originally called the "44" division for the year 1944, and reflected the reduced manpower available. The creation of these divisions, however, served a larger purpose by embodying the perception that the soldiers in these divisions were among an elite group of fighters defending Germany. The term "Volks" was conceived as a title to be bestowed upon German infantry divisions that distinguished themselves in battle like the use of "Guards" as a honorary prefix in Soviet armies. The records reveal that some divisions, like the 12th, received the honorary

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34 MS# A-925 Report on Activity of Colonel (CSG) Reichhelm, By Oberst i.G. Guenther Reichhelm, 1945, Army Group B on the Western Front from October 1944 to Spring 1945 (Headquarters United States Army Europe: Historical Division, 1947), 4.

35 T-315/1886/0290. The original order was entitled "Neugliederung der Versorgungstruppen der Inf. Div. 44," 21.8.44.

36 MS# P-065a. The Volksgrenadier Division and the Volkssturm. By Generalmajor Hellmuth Reinhardt, 1950 (Headquarters United States Army Europe: Historical Division, 1950), 7.
title because of their performance in battle.\textsuperscript{37} The Volksgrenadier divisions, however, were not actually elite. Yet the perception of elitness geared toward the divisions’ soldiers, which was rooted in fanaticism and self-sacrifice, help explain why these ad hoc formations maintained cohesion and combat effectiveness.

Ideological indoctrination was an important part of the structure of Volksgrenadier divisions. Major-General Hellmuth Reinhardt, who was involved in the early formation of the Volksgrenadier divisions, commented in a postwar interview that the assimilation of army divisions into the SS was “done on purpose to submit to the ‘moral guidance of Himmler’ and not the reactionary General staff.” The ideological orientation of the divisions, Reinhardt asserted, demonstrated the “importance [Hitler] ascribed to ideological training in increasing the striking power of troops” and that the extensive use of NSFOs “was given in accordance with the guiding principles and regulations valid for the Waffen-SS.”\textsuperscript{38} Major-General Helmut Heitman, another army officer involved in the organization of the Volksgrenadier divisions, also asserted in his own account of the ideological makeup of the divisions that “a more stringent course of indoctrination was envisaged for the new VGD [Volksgrenadier divisions], in which political instruction was to form an integral part of the training program according to the directives and principles of the Waffen-SS,” and “in fact units and individual personnel of the VGDs were intended to be interchangeable with units and individual personnel of

\textsuperscript{37}Helmut Heitman, “‘Volks’-Organizations in German Military Establishment,” in P-065a, The Volksgrenadier Division and the Volkssturm. By Generalmajor Hellmuth Reinhardt. 1950, 2.

\textsuperscript{38}MS# P-065a. The Volksgrenadier Division and the Volkssturm, 10-11.
the Waffen-SS. According to both officers, a lack of time and personnel prevented the assimilation of whole divisions of the army into the structure of the Waffen-SS and indoctrination was relegated to the NSFOs. Their statements attest to the heavy use of ideological indoctrination within the divisions, whether or not both officers are correct in asserting that soldiers of the Volksgrenadier divisions were to be equivalent to soldiers of the Waffen-SS.

The Volksgrenadier divisions consisted of diverse assortments of personnel that would not have functioned together without universal ideological indoctrination. The Volksgrenadier divisions were made up of any personnel available. The core of the divisions was a cadre element of a recently destroyed or burnt out division from either the western or the eastern front. If such a cadre was not available then the military districts were searched for any soldiers and officers who were militarily fit for combat. They were then filled out by elements of other divisions that were recently reduced below acceptable levels in battle or by new recruits recently raised by Goebbels for incorporation into Himmler's Replacement Army. The divisions often consisted of a motley assortment of Luftwaffe, naval, and army personnel, new recruits, and Volksdeutsche. Not only did divisional commanders have to form a cohesive and combat effective division, but they now had to mold service personnel from different military branches and nationalities. The 326th Volksgrenadier Division, for example,

\[\text{39\textsuperscript{Heitman, "Volks'-Organizations in German Military Establishment," 6.}}\]

\[\text{40\textsuperscript{Ibid.}}\]

\[\text{41\textsuperscript{Divisions that were numbered between 565-588 were partly formed in the early fall and were all subsequently absorbed by divisions pulled from the front and formed as Volksgrenadier divisions. Mitchell, Hitler's Legions, 292-303.}}\]
needed Russian, Rumanian, and Hungarian translators due to the diverse makeup of the Volksdeutsche in that division.\textsuperscript{42} These divisions would form primarily in rear areas to create the new administrative apparatus that needed to be set up and because of the time set aside for indoctrination. Many divisions like the 326th were sent to areas in central and south-eastern Europe to reform for a period of a month. By the end of 1944 at least thirty-two Volksgrenadier divisions could be found along the western front, and at least fifteen saw service in the east.\textsuperscript{43} The Volksgrenadier divisions were oriented to instill cohesion and combat effectiveness into units in the shortest time possible.

The mobilization of the western military districts was another factor that helped contribute to the solidification of the west front. On 16 September Borman issued an order to all political district leaders in the west that specified the NSDAP would volunteer its services to help the armed forces in keeping the enemy out of Germany and continuing the war.\textsuperscript{44} As part of Borman’s proposal, the Party leadership would select individual political leaders to be placed into the armed forces,\textsuperscript{45} in an effort to demonstrate the solidarity between the Party apparatus and the Wehrmacht. Provisions were also made between Borman and Keitel to assimilate political leaders in the western districts that fell under enemy attack into the Wehrmacht and arrange for smooth

\textsuperscript{42}Division Intelligence Officer’s note, 16.10.44. T-315/2040/330.

\textsuperscript{43}Based on a survey of the order of battle for the infantry divisions in the German army in Mitcham, Hitler’s Legions, 41-318. Twenty-one Volksgrenadier divisions served in the east, however, only a little more than half were on the front line on the eastern front in December 1944. The rest appeared in early 1945.

\textsuperscript{44}Verhalten der Parteiführerschaft in Gebieten, die Vom Feind besetzt werden,” 16.9.1944. T-314/1592/791.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
transition of authority between local military and political officials. Keitel also arranged that all party leaders and political officers would be provided army uniforms upon entering the military. At the highest levels of power within National Socialist Germany down to the lowest organizational levels within the Wehrmacht an attempt was made to unify soldiers behind a common purpose.

The fall resurgence originated with the German Army High Command’s institutionalized attempt to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness. The fanaticism in orders, the Volksgrenadier divisions, and the closer cooperation between the Party and Wehrmacht were the key elements in initiating a resurgence rooted in ideological indoctrination. As Kellet asserts “a man armed with ideological belief is better armed against demoralization then a soldier without, and is more apt to continue the fight.” Kellet’s statement holds particularly true for the individual soldier in the west, whether he was young or old, a native or Volksdeutsch, a professional soldier or Party leader, or whether he was a former U-boat crewman serving as infantry or a seasoned Waffen-SS grenadier. The belief in Hitler and final victory became transformed into a universal ideal of self-sacrifice and fanatically protecting the homeland from the enemies along the western frontier.

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48 Kellet, *Combat Motivation*, 327.
CHAPTER IV

THE STRUCTURE AND EFFECT OF THE RESURRENCE IN THE WEST

The ideological elements of OKW's institutionalized psychological resurgence on the western front were maintained through the extensive use of NSFOs and a brutal military justice system. Both developments occurred separately but eventually became mutually supportive throughout the western front. The NSFOs focused and maintained German soldiers' fanaticism on the battlefield and perpetuated the idea that they were engaged in an ideological war that needed to be conducted brutally against a hated enemy. The NSFOs were aided by a military justice system that offered death as the only alternative to those who crossed the delineated ideological boundaries of the psychological resurgence that helped to ensure stability within the military institution. These two elements exploited the soldiers' belief in Hitler, Germany, a concern for loved ones, and their immediate future. The combat behavior of some Wehrmacht soldiers at Aachen and during the Ardennes offensive suggests how susceptible they were to the influences that shaped the resurgence.

The development of the NSFOs originated as a result of Hitler's desire to foster a stronger ideological orientation within the Wehrmacht. Hitler recognized the effectiveness of Soviet commissars to foster fanaticism in Soviet soldiers and likewise observed the good performance of ideologically oriented Waffen-SS soldiers in battle.¹

¹The soldiers of the Waffen-SS in the 1941-42 retreat from Moscow proved themselves an organization that retained its fighting spirit even in defeat. Their subsequent performance at Kharkov in March 1943 demonstrated clearly their reliability to perform well in battle despite insurmountable odds. Stein, The Waffen-SS, 197-200.
Hitler asserted that the Waffen-SS were "an extraordinary body of men, devoted to an idea, loyal unto death... every division of the SS is aware of its responsibility. The SS knows that its job is to set an example... and that all eyes are upon it."\(^2\) Hitler had a growing distrust of the Wehrmacht's ability to maintain a war of ideology that he believed the NSFOs would rectify.\(^3\) The order that created the role for NSFOs within the armed forces was issued on 22 December 1943.\(^4\) Hitler's order began an intense process of indoctrination within the armed forces that would fully develop in the early fall of 1944, as a result of both the failed assassination attempt and his desire to increase the ideological beliefs of the Wehrmacht soldier. The NSFOs were to instill soldiers with the ideals of National Socialist ideology,\(^5\) in order to foster a "revolution" within the army whereby ideological reliability would increase the operational performance of the armed forces.\(^6\) Bracher summarizes the significance of the appointment of the NSFOs into the Wehrmacht correctly when he asserts that their teachings of "ideological-political reliability and fanaticism" replaced "all considerations of military expediency," which precipitated "costly sacrificial defensive battles and hopeless offensives [that] led deeper into chaotic self-destruction."\(^7\)

The assimilation of the NSFOs within the armed forces occurred throughout the

\(^2\)Hitler's Secret Conversations, cited in ibid., 199.

\(^3\)Bracher, The German Dictatorship, 462. T-77/852/5597556.

\(^4\)"XVI. Die Mitwirkung der Partei on der politischen Aktivierung der Wehrmacht," T-77/852/5597604.

\(^5\)Messerschmidt, Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat, 327.

\(^6\)"I. Einführungs ansprache," T-77/852/5597556.

\(^7\)Ibid.
military institution. On 28 March 1944, General of Mountain Troops Ritter von Hengl was appointed chief of the NSFOs in both the Army and Replacement Army, and was officially ordered to ensure that Hitler's orders for indoctrination were carried out. As previously noted in their orders, high ranking officers like Guderian and commanders like Krebs accepted the NSFOs and promoted their value to the officers and soldiers under their command. By the fall severe attrition in the west prompted the immediate placement of NSFOs into every military formation from OKW down through individual regiments, although they were present along the front in limited numbers soon after 20 July.

The NSFOs combined the OKW orders, Goebbel's and Allied propaganda, and the existing fears of soldiers to provide the character of the psychological resurgence. The NSFOs were well educated in the theories of National Socialist ideology and understood the ideological significance of what they taught. The NSFOs' propaganda was sophisticated and not simply the ravings of ideologues. Propaganda sheets frequently made use of quotes from various Allied sources such as Time, Jewish World or organizations such as the British-Israeli World Foundation to supplement existing propaganda. From these sources and Allied propaganda the NSFOs built arguments to strengthen the resolve of the soldiers. There was surprisingly little emphasis on the

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8Original and revised Hitler order, 28.5.1944. T-77/852/5597647-48, 5597716.

9MS# B-034, OKW War Diary, 163. While the NSFOs appeared on both fronts, the records in T-77/852/5597631-722 indicate that they were used primarily in the west, which is certainly supported by the orders and statements that placed extreme significance on the western front.

10"Führungshinweise des NS-Führungsstabes d.h. vom 22.12.1944," T-311/278/001241.
eastern front or the Soviet Union, which was not due to a fear of depressing soldiers about the fate that possibly awaited loved ones in the eastern provinces. It is clear that the NSFOs certainly used the fear of Soviet invasion when it suited their needs. Instead NSFOs focused on the western Allies stating that "Die USA sind der ernstest zu nehmende Gegner Europas und des Reiches." Attention was also focused on the "Jewish materialists" found in the west, which led to a general anti-"Jewish-Capitalist" concept not unlike the anti "Judeo-Bolshevik" orientation of soldiers serving in the east. It is plausible that the NSFOs attempted to manufacture a fanatical belief system in the west that drew heavily on the belief system already in place among the soldiers of the eastern front.

Within the combat divisions the NSFOs worked closely with the soldiers in order to maintain a heightened level of fanaticism and ideological orientation. Fanaticism in combat replaced the inability to train and reorganize new or existing divisions as per OKW orders. A key component of fostering fanaticism was to exhort individual soldiers to defend holy German soil. A soldier's life then took on less meaning as the significance of his sacrifice would be internalized as a worthy cause for the security of Germany. The idea of self-sacrifice took on greater meaning in the fall of 1944 because Germany was being attacked in a literal sense. In divisions where cohesion and combat

11Ibid., T-311/278/001242.

12"The USA is the enemy of Europe and the Reich to be taken most seriously." "Des Amerikaniste Jahrhundert," T-77/852/5597602.


effectiveness were needed the most, NSFOs preached fanaticism and ideological reliability weekly to all officers and enlisted personnel of the division. In the meetings the NSFOs took time to answer political questions regarding the state of National Socialist Germany and the war, examine the concerns and problems of enemy propaganda, as well as ease personal worries of the troops.\textsuperscript{15} In infantry divisions, NSFOs were assigned to each regiment where they worked extensively with individual companies.\textsuperscript{16} Through extensive personal contact and sincerity the NSFOs cultivated relationships that enhanced their influence, the soldiers' motivation and subsequent fanaticism. The close cooperation between NSFOs and unit officers also served to develop a strong bond with the soldiers.\textsuperscript{17} One German corporal serving on the western front related that “yesterday I was at a lecture given by our division’s general and the division’s NSFO,” and “the explanations of both men were appropriate to give us a stiffening for the coming events.”\textsuperscript{18} The soldiers on the west front understood the purpose of the NSFOs and in many cases soldiers responded favorably to the weekly lecture.

The individual power that the NSFO wielded over the command structure and soldiers of the division was total and certainly had a bearing on how their teachings were received. Soon after 20 July Himmler addressed a large meeting of NSFOs at Bad

\textsuperscript{15}T-77/852/5597566. “IV. Die praktischer Tätigkeit des nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffizier bei einer Infanterie-Division.” T-77/852/5597567-68.

\textsuperscript{16}T-77/852/5597568.

\textsuperscript{17}Fritz, \textit{Frontsoldaten}, 202.

\textsuperscript{18}Letter of Corporal W.P.C. (4 August 1944), cited in ibid., 201.
Schachen and stated:

I give you the authority to seize every man who turns back, if necessary to tie him up and throw him on a supply wagon. You should take such people at once to the Pioneer Company and put them to hard labor. Believe me, there will be no more detail parties at the base in the area of this division. I give you the authority and the order to halt everything that streams back. Put the best, the most energetic and the most brutal officers of the division in charge. They will soon round up such rabble. They will put up anyone that answers back against a wall.  

NSFOs were informed that if they suspected any deserters or caught a soldier planning to desert then the NSDAP should be immediately notified so that an investigation could be initiated. An OKW memorandum concerning the NSFO stipulated that “Der NSFOs muß mit den Parteidienststellen Hand in Hand arbeiten.” The impact of the NSFOs was felt throughout the military establishment and by the end of 1944 few aspects of soldiers’ lives were not monitored by the NSFOs.

Orders of the day issued from various army headquarters reveal the extent that the NSFOs were relied on to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness. In both Army Group B and the 15th Army, the NSFOs worked hard to instill fanaticism and keep up morale. The senior NSFO commander of Army Group B issued a twenty-point proclamation about his staff’s function within the Army Group. He stressed that the war

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20 “Hinweise für die nationalsozialistische Führung,” 29.9.44. T-77/852/5597723.

21 “The NSFOs must work hand in hand with Party Administrative Offices.” in “Rundbrief Nr. 4 an alle NSFO in OKW.” T-77/852/5597550.

22 See LIII Corp brief dated 16.12.44 concerning the close cooperation between the NSFOs and the operations branch. T-314/1335/0413; and “Feldpost versorgung der Truppe,” 26.12.44, for insight into their role in the postal system. T-311/278/001235.
in the west was a “Krieg der Weltanschauungen,” and asserted that all NSFOs must incite a deep hatred toward the western Allies in all soldiers of the front because of the terror bombing of German cities. He stated specifically that “Jeder Soldat muss darauf brennen Rache an den Mördern unserer Frauen und Kinder in der Heimat zu nehmen.”

The fanatical call for revenge, embodied in the idea that the German soldier was engaged in a war of life or death served to transcend traditional laws of war and degenerate combat to a level of intensity not experienced before by the Allied armies fighting in the west. The commander of the 15th Army took the initiative to address his soldiers and informed them that the NSFOs spoke the truth about the war and National Socialism and that they had a lot of work to do and needed to proceed with an increased intensity.

The battle for Aachen, which lasted from the end of September through October, suggests how the influence of NSFOs may have maintained cohesion and combat effectiveness of Wehrmacht soldiers. Renewed efforts were made to fortify the morale and fanaticism of the troops in Aachen when it became apparent that many soldiers were not performing to expected standards after the retreat from the Mortain-Falaise encirclement. An NSFO after action report regarding the battle asserted that while

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23"War of ideology," T-77/852/5597723.

24Ibid.

25"Each soldier must burn with revenge for the murder of their wives and children in their homes." Ibid.

26"Befehl," 1.10.44. T-77/852/5597719-20.

German soldiers appeared nervous at first they performed well.\textsuperscript{28} The report also stated that there was a decrease in desertions to the point where they no longer presented any problem.\textsuperscript{29} The NSFO report could easily have targeted any number of individual officers or soldiers as defeatists because several thousand soldiers went into Allied captivity, but the report maintains a balanced assessment of the operation that does not embellish the NSFO’s role in the defense of Aachen. Key divisions, like the 116th Armored Division, that participated in the siege of Aachen had recently retreated from the Mortain-Falaise encirclement (see Table 1 for reported strength), and were in a low state of physical and psychological readiness. The strong performance of the Wehrmacht forces around Aachen suggest that in certain instances the NSFOs helped to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness in divisions that only recently retreated out of France or were reconstituted as Volksgrenadier divisions.

The actions of two German officers who escaped the encirclement of Aachen also demonstrated an influence possibly imparted by the NSFOs. The 246th Volksgrenadier Division was sent to Aachen in early October. A large portion of the division was surrounded within the city and surrendered to the U.S. First Army. Not every German soldier felt that surrender was the appropriate course of action as the Waffen-SS battle group Rink, which was a battalion from the 1st SS Armored Division, along with a regiment of the 246th Volksgrenadier, broke out of the pocket to the south in an effort to continue the war and avoid capitulation. Two officers of the 246th, Second Lieutenant Hermann Drechsler and First Lieutenant Erich Starch, escaped Aachen dressed as monks

\textsuperscript{28}"Kampf um Aachen K.T.B.,” T-315/1594/000086..

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.
and were interviewed by a German legal officer as witnesses concerning an investigation into alleged atrocities committed by American forces. The two officers demonstrated a resolve to continue to fight. If they wanted to escape the war they would have surrendered to the Americans and not attempted to make it to German lines where they would only be placed back into combat. The report is replete with ideological references where the American officers encountered in the escape are referred to as the “Jewish” colonel or sergeant. Both German officers alleged that the American officers threatened them with violence or death. The sworn testimonies of Drechsler and Starch, which appear embellished, did not need to be drenched in the ideological rhetoric encouraged by NSFOs. Their actions on the battlefield suggest that the psychological rehabilitation initiated by OKW and maintained by the NSFOs had an influence on the combat behavior of these Wehrmacht soldiers in the west.

The incorporation of NSFOs in the armed forces was complemented by a draconian military justice system instituted in the fall by OKW. While the severity of the German military’s justice system has been explored, its development has not been carefully traced. After the 1939 invasion of Poland, German officers realized that the

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30 Throughout the war the German War Crimes Bureau routinely investigated allegations of war crimes against German soldiers and civilians. See Alfred M. De Zayas, The Wehrmacht War Crimes Bureau, 1939-1945 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 13-25, 142-53.

31 Investigation Report in the 246 Volksgrenadier division, 2.12.44. T-77/788/5516704-713.

32 Messerschmidt’s article is one of the best examinations of the German Armed Forces legal system in World War II; however, he does not present a detailed analysis of the factors that contributed to its most draconian development in 1944. Manfred Messerschmidt, “German Military Law in the Second World War,” in The German Military in the Age of Total War ed. Wilhelm Diest (Dover, NH: Berg, 1985), 324.
performance of soldiers could be increased under intense combat pressure by instituting severe discipline, which became part of the training prior to the invasion of the west in 1940.\textsuperscript{33} Severe measures only increased as the war continued and reverses on the eastern front grew more frequent. Erich Frederich, a German soldier who was a winner of the Iron Cross and wounded on the eastern front found himself arrested on 9 December 1942. While in a hospital bed recovering from his wounds, Frederich asserts that he was approached by a captain and placed under arrest. The captain stated:

\begin{quote}
'In the name of the German people, I hereby put you under arrest. You have violated the will of the German people by maliciously subverting and demoralizing the entire military establishment by maintaining--after refusing to make the German salute--that you have had it up to here with the system, and by contradicting Reichmarschall Hermann Göring by stating that you didn’t get shit to eat for days while serving on the eastern front. You are hereby ordered to stand trial in Berlin before a general court-martial.'\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Frederich’s sentence of eighteen months imprisonment was mild considering the severity later instituted by the military justice system against defeatists.

After the collapse of the western front in August 1944 desertions to the Allies occurred on an unprecedented scale for the first time within the Wehrmacht. By August 1944 desertions became a regular occurrence in the west as intense Allied material pressure shattered the will of many soldiers to continue the war. Many soldiers attempted to surrender through a feint attack on enemy lines that provided them paradoxically with the best chance for survival. Canadian Army Captain Peter Simmonds watched a group of Germans make an attempt to surrender under fire. He

\textsuperscript{33}Williamson Murray, \textit{German Military Effectiveness} (Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing, 1993), 237.

\textsuperscript{34}Erich Friedrich and Renate Vanegas, \textit{Hitler's Prisoners: Seven Cell Mates Tell Their Stories} (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1995), 2.
stated that:

The Germans . . . would come close enough to the high ground to make a pretense of a counterattack. These ‘attacks’ were 90 per cent purposeless. The bewildered wretches making them obviously wanted to surrender, but the S.S. men and other units still wanting to fight wouldn’t let them. So they came on with a hollow show of fight—hoping to get out of range of the S.S. guns in time to throw their hands up before a Canadian or British bullet got them.

It was one of the most inhumanly stupid and degrading scenes imaginable. One group of Germans was shelled and shot up by another German unit lying in some woods when they stopped and failed to advance in the face of Canadian machine-gun fire.  

Throughout the retreat from the Mortain-Falaise encirclement many German officers had to resort to extreme threats in order to maintain discipline. On 3 September Model issued an order of the day that stipulated “idle talk, rumors, haste, inconsiderateness, unnecessary disorder and shortsighted selfishness,” brought into the rear areas by retreating troops “must be prevented, at this moment of extreme tension, with the severest measures.”  

Lieutenant-General Kurt Badinski of the 276th Infantry Division stated that defeatist rumors were “punishable by death.”  By late summer and early fall 1944 the death penalty was frequently used as a means to maintain discipline, although it was not officially ordered by OKW at this time.

During World War II the death sentence was commonly used by the military establishment to maintain discipline in the Wehrmacht. By the end of 1944, 9,732 soldiers had been executed in the German military, and by the end of the war perhaps

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36Cited in Schulman, *Defeat in the West*, 229.

37Ibid., 207.
more than 15,000 total executions occurred.\textsuperscript{38} Comparably, 150 death sentences were handed out in World War I, and only forty-eight were carried out.\textsuperscript{39} Severe punishments in the Wehrmacht in World War II demonstrated how desperate the morale situation became, especially considering that while 10,000 executions happened in the first five years of war, almost 5,000 occurred in the last five months.

The regular desertion of German soldiers to the enemy was a problem that division officers and OB West needed to deal with effectively. The numbers of desertions varied and were often not always reported in time or to the appropriate sources.\textsuperscript{40} In the six months between June and November 2,100 death sentences were issued in absentia according to a NSFO staff report.\textsuperscript{41} That number did not include those soldiers declared missing and suspected of desertion or the actual number of German soldiers executed. On 1 November, commander of the western front, von Rundstedt, issued an order that took immediate steps to curb the problem of desertions. He stated that a soldier deserting would be court martialed in absentia, public disclosure of his desertion would occur to slander his family name, his property would be confiscated, and his family would be held liable for his actions.\textsuperscript{42} Von Rundstedt’s power was limited beyond the front line. The seriousness of the situation, however, immediately caught the

\textsuperscript{38}Messerschmidt, “German Military Law in the Second World War,” 324.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 323.

\textsuperscript{40}Schulman, \textit{Defeat in the West}, 271-72. Divisional correspondence from the 256th Volksgrenadier Division noted how desertions from September were not reported until the second week in October.

\textsuperscript{41}T-77/788/5516807.

\textsuperscript{42}“Behandlung von Überläufern,” 1.11.44. T-77/788/5516842.
eye of Himmler and Keitel who began to coordinate a unified policy on the issue of
desertion that would reach beyond the front line.

The creation of unified measures to be used against deserters was a product of the
Party, OKW, and SS cooperation. Himmler initially sent a hand signed order to Keitel in
which he strongly suggested that in cases of desertion pressure must be placed on the
family in order to deter further deterioration at the front.\(^{43}\) On 6 November a meeting
occurred between Himmler, Borman, and Keitel where they worked out a detailed list of
measures to be initiated against known and suspected deserters.\(^{44}\) The following day a
memorandum was circulated in OKW about the meeting, which stated that von
Rundstedt’s original four proclamations were to be institutionalized. The memorandum
also stipulated that another draft of further recourse needed to occur.\(^{45}\) The four
proclamations that von Rundstedt issued were finally written into general policy, with
only two exceptions. First was that the confiscation of property would be for the entire
family, and second that, in accordance with Himmler’s decree, the family would be
accountable for their relatives’ desertion with their freedom or lives. By 19 November
the final order was signed by Keitel, which stipulated that soldiers deserting should be
shot immediately by any soldiers witnessing the event. The order also stated that
suspicion of a possible deserter would cause an immediate investigation to result in the
immediate death of the suspect if guilty, and that the SS would take over legal

\(^{43}\)Letter from Himmler dated 5.11.44. T-77/788/5516835.

\(^{44}\)“Maßnahmen gegen deutsche Überläufer,” 6.11.44. T-77/788/5516834.

\(^{45}\)“Maßnahmen gegen deutsche Überläufer,” 7.11.44. T-77/788/5516832-33.
jurisdiction of all desertion cases.\textsuperscript{46}

The combined effect of OKW orders, the NSFOs, and a new draconian military justice system become apparent in the divisional order of the 18th Volksgrenadier. An order of the day issued by the commanding general illustrates the major elements of the psychological resurgence:

\textit{Volksgrenadier!}

Traitors from our ranks have deserted to the enemy.

Their names are:

- Volksgrenadier Geiger, Eugen
- Volksgrenadier Essmann, Johann
- Volksgrenadier Walczkiewitz Anton
- Volksgrenadier Gronalewski, Vincent
- Volksgrenadier Kobiela, Paul
- Volksgrenadier Wolf, Kasimir.

These bastards have given away important military secrets. The result is that for the past few days the Americans have been laying accurate artillery fire on your positions, your bunkers, your company and platoon headquarters, your field kitchens and your messenger routes. Deceitful Jewish mud-slingers taunt you with their pamphlets and try to entice you into becoming bastards also. Let them spew their poison!

\begin{quote}
We stand watch over Germany's frontier. Death and destruction to all enemies who tread on German soil.
\end{quote}

As for the contemptible traitors who have forgotten their honor, rest assured the division will see that they never see home and loved ones again. Their families will have to atone for their treason. The destiny of a people has never depended on traitors and bastards. The true German soldier was and is the best in the world. Unwavering behind him is the Fatherland,

\begin{quote}
And in the end is our victory.
Long live Germany! Heil the Führer!\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

The order of the day clearly demonstrates how fall resurgence affected the outward character of official divisional correspondence. Pertinent is the use of the term "Jewish mud-slingers," aimed at American soldiers, and the threat of extreme violence against

\textsuperscript{46}"Maßnahmen gegen Überläufer," 19.11.44. T-77/788/5516815-16.

\textsuperscript{47}Cited in Schulman, \textit{Defeat in the West}, 279-80.
the families of soldiers who deserted. Both elements of the order clearly originated from NSFO indoctrination and the brutal military justice system recently imposed along the western front that structured the resurgence before the Ardennes offensive.

The planned reorganization of the divisions for the Ardennes offensive that began in late September was not completed by 16 December. The OKW staff planned to launch an operation that consisted of twelve armored and twenty-two infantry divisions. By the time of the offensive in December, which was postponed nearly one month, only ten armored and seventeen infantry divisions were ready. The equipping and training of these divisions was poor overall. For example, Colonel Joachim Peiper was the commander of Battlegroup Peiper, which consisted of all the armor in the 1st SS Armored Division. Being the division with top priority of new equipment, it is significant that Peiper complained that his regiment consisted only of one mixed battalion of Mark IVs and Panthers instead of the normal two battalions of tanks a properly equipped SS division was allocated. In order to bring the division up to strength a battalion of Tiger tanks was assigned from corps reserve shortly before the Ardennes offensive. The 2nd SS Armored Division suffered from a shortage of winter clothing, ammunition, and general supplies, while one of its infantry battalions had no motor transport.

There was a severe lack of training among the divisions selected for the Ardennes offensive. The 1st SS Armored Division was given only four weeks to train its new

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48MS# A-862. The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes, 71.


50Lucas, Das Reich, 153.
replacements and assimilate them with their equipment, and even this extensive period was interrupted by orders to move to the Eiffel region in preparation for the offensive.\(^5^1\) New recruits with no experience were placed in positions of leadership in order to replace the loss of trained personnel. In Armor Regiment 1 of the 1st SS Armored Division, 450 privates had to fill in as non-commissioned officers.\(^5^2\) The 3rd Armored Grenadier, and 10th SS Armored divisions were not ordered out of the front line and issued orders to reorganize for the offensive until 6 December.\(^5^3\) The Panzer Lehr Division was withdrawn from the front on 25 November where it left its complement of tanks for the 11th Armored Division to take over. The Panzer Lehr was then to receive its own complement of new tanks. This process, which provided tanks to the front line units that needed them, only served to increase the need to train among the tank crews of Panzer Lehr, as they would now have to get used to their new equipment. The commander of Panzer Lehr stated only a fraction of the tanks needed for the Ardennes offensive were supplied "due to damaged railways and transportation difficulties."\(^5^4\) Many tank crews undoubtedly found themselves in the role of Infantry, a task they were not trained to carry out. Mellenthin stated that "even well-equipped units from Germany had received virtually no training and came straight from the parade-ground to the

\(^{51}\)T-354/623/000218.

\(^{52}\)Michael Reynolds, The Devils Adjutant: Joachim Peiper, Panzer Leader (New York: Sarpedon, 1995), 47.

\(^{53}\)MS# B-034, OKW War Diary, 363.

battlefield. Some panzer brigades [had] never even done any squadron training. . . .""\n
Many armored divisions had to be retaught offensive doctrine due to their defensive posture over the previous six months.\textsuperscript{56} Table 2 shows the reduced state of the units selected for the Ardennes offensive.\textsuperscript{57}

Table 2 illustrates the effect of attrition on the Wehrmacht in the west. Incomplete reorganization and inexperienced new troops were found in every division. Several armored divisions were materially reorganized to a sufficient degree for offensive operations, but in terms of trained manpower they almost always lacked. The origins of the divisions present for the Ardennes offensive reveals their poor state of combat readiness: fifteen of the divisions were severely depleted at the Mortain-Falaise encirclement; three were reduced in the retreat across France of which two contributed cadres to new Volksgrenadier divisions; six were rebuilt Volksgrenadier divisions that suffered heavy casualties along the western front before the Ardennes offensive; and two were Volksgrenadier divisions recently reformed from cadres of divisions destroyed in the east. With the weakly organized divisions in Table 2, Hitler attempted to reach

\textsuperscript{55}Mellenthin, \textit{Panzer Battles}, 382-83.

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{MS# A-862, The Preparations for the German Offensive in the Ardennes}, 232.

\textsuperscript{57}Attachments were assigned to a number of divisions only days prior to the offensive, and operated as their own units. These units consisted of independent brigades or battalions as in the case of the 1st SS Armored Division. While the number of assault guns appears to make up for the lack of tanks in many divisions, it must be noted that assault guns were non-turreted vehicles used primarily for defensive operations or infantry support. They replaced the lack of towed anti-tank guns in the divisions. Orders for the organization of the Volksgrenadier divisions specifically stated that assault guns were to be employed as the mobile anti-tank weapons of the division. "Hinweise für Führung und Kampf der Volks-Grenadier-Division," 23.9.44. T-315/1886/289, "Die Sturmgeschütz-Abt. Ist die \textit{bewegliche} Panzerabwehr-Reserve der Division."
Antwerp and isolate the British Army as had occurred in 1940. The Ardennes offensive was doomed to fail from the start. The motor gas shortage made any large scale offensive impossible to maintain and the complete reorganization of the divisions destined to attack on 16 December simply did not occur. Yet, the operational performance of the German divisions in the Ardenes was strong, which had much to do with their psychological rehabilitation. By the end of November a dramatic shift in beliefs for the German soldier occurred. Wartime interviews with captured prisoners-of-war reveal that the trust in Hitler had risen from 42% in mid-October, as the full effects of the summer defeats were realized, to 64% by the end of November, which was only 4% less than the reported level of trust in August after the failed assassination attempt. In the first week of September only 27% of German prisoners professed a belief in the ability of the German army to eject the Allies from France, yet by the end of November 51% believed it was possible. German prisoners also admitted that 50% felt Germany was winning the war in November, while only the month before 28% saw final victory as a reality. The German belief in secret weapons grew in the fall not faded, even after it was generally known that the V rockets were not as effective as originally hoped: 53% of those prisoners interviewed stated a belief that decisive secret weapons were a reality, which was up 20% from the month before. The psychological rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht in the west was rooted in the calls for fanaticism and self-sacrifice ordered by OKW, the NSFOs, and a brutal military justice system. These three developments transcended the problems associated with fostering cohesion and combat effectiveness among a diverse group of inexperienced soldiers and helped to maintain a belief in

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# TABLE 2

DISPOSITION OF DIVISIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE 16 DECEMBER 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Initial Personnel and Attachments</th>
<th>Tanks/Assault Guns</th>
<th>State of Reorganization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 SS Pz.</td>
<td>17,988 / 3,304</td>
<td>97 / 55</td>
<td>Considered fully reorganized by OKW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 SS Pz.</td>
<td>16,970</td>
<td>76 / 68</td>
<td>Considered fully reorganized by OKW. Placed into starting position only hours before attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 SS Pz.</td>
<td>13,307</td>
<td>66 / 53</td>
<td>Considered fully reorganized by OKW. Placed into starting position only hours before attack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 SS Pz.</td>
<td>18,548 / 2,152</td>
<td>70 / 57</td>
<td>Considered fully reorganized by OKW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pz.</td>
<td>12,680 / 1,777</td>
<td>72 / 49</td>
<td>Considered fully reorganized by OKW. Short of repair shop equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Pz.</td>
<td>13,083 / 793</td>
<td>38 / 22</td>
<td>Appeared on 24 December. Suffered heavily in the Roer battles. It was not completely reorganized or rested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116 Pz.</td>
<td>15,468</td>
<td>49 / 25</td>
<td>Suffered heavily at Aachen and the Huertgen Forest. It was not completely reorganized or rested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pz. Lehr</td>
<td>12,672 / 2,220</td>
<td>54 / 68</td>
<td>Committed along the frontline in the Army Group G sector throughout November and early December. It was not completely reorganized or rested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Pz. Gren.</td>
<td>11,424</td>
<td>0 / 39</td>
<td>Appeared on 24 December. Suffered heavily in the Roer battles. It was not completely reorganized or rested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Pz. Gren</td>
<td>11,181</td>
<td>11 / 24</td>
<td>Appeared on 24 December. Suffered heavily in the Roer battles. It was not completely reorganized or rested.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Initial Personnel and Attachments</th>
<th>State of Reorganization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>150 Pz. Bde.</td>
<td>2,955</td>
<td>Appeared on 21 December. Consisted of inexperienced troops. Was only the size of a regiment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Parachute</td>
<td>12,474</td>
<td>Committed to battle in the Dueren area in the beginning of December. It was not completely reorganized or rested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Parachute</td>
<td>13,543 / 2,799</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops. Short of transportation assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 VGD.</td>
<td>8,730</td>
<td>Appeared on 24 December. Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 VGD.</td>
<td>9,517</td>
<td>Partly committed to battle in the Eschweiler area through the end of November. It was not completely rested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 VGD.</td>
<td>10,390 / 1,727</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 VGD.</td>
<td>9,951 / 629</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62 VGD.</td>
<td>11,050</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79 VGD.</td>
<td>10,116</td>
<td>Appeared on 22 December. Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167 VGD.</td>
<td>10,973</td>
<td>Appeared on 24 December. Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212 VGD.</td>
<td>10,490 / 661</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>272 VGD.</td>
<td>8,771</td>
<td>Committed in the Huertgen forest. It was not fully rested, and consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276 VGD.</td>
<td>9,320</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2--Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divisions</th>
<th>Initial Personnel and Attachments</th>
<th>Tanks/Assault Guns</th>
<th>State of Reorganization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>277 VGD.</td>
<td>7,249</td>
<td>0 / 11</td>
<td>Partly committed in the Roer battles. Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>326 VGD.</td>
<td>9,083</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>352 VGD.</td>
<td>10,595</td>
<td>0 / 6</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>560 VGD.</td>
<td>11,197</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>Consisted of inexperienced troops.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hitler, final victory, and a fanatical desire to keep the western Allies out of Germany.

The Ardennes offensive was the first large scale offensive launched by the Wehrmacht in the west since the Allied invasions six months earlier. The thrill of being on the offensive was a major elation for many soldiers who now had a chance to release their emotions built up over months of indoctrination and defensive warfare. They finally were provided the opportunity to take revenge against the hated "Amis" and "Jewish-Materialists" who conducted daily terror-bombing raids against German cities.

One German soldier wrote home at the beginning of the offensive "we advance every day. What do you think our morale is like? Everyone is enthusiastic as never before."59

On the night of 16 December 1944 one member of the Waffen-SS wrote a letter to his

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59 Cited in Schulman, *Defeat in the West*, 313.
sister and said "Dear Ruth, . . . I write during one of the great hours before an attack . . . we attack, and will throw the enemy from our homeland. That is a holy task! . . . Overhead is the terrific noise of V-1, of artillery--the voice of war."\(^{60}\)

The NSFOs drilled into the German soldiers' minds that the war, especially in the west, was a war of ideologies and survival for Germany. This indoctrination broke down many of the traditional values and laws of war that worked to maintain a sense of humanity on the battlefield. One German soldier wrote on 25 December that "we have been on our way through Belgium from 11 to 24 December . . . No rest or sleep, however, "the main thing is that the Americans are on the run . . . Now this is just a hunt."\(^{61}\) A "hunter" mentality served to reduce the enemy from a human state into that of an animal to be tracked down and killed. The elation felt by Lieutenant Rockammer was indicative of the ideological indoctrination that reduced the German soldiers' concept of military operations into a crusade against the Western Allies. He wrote to his wife on 22 December:

This time we are a thousand times better off than you at home. You cannot imagine what glorious hours and days we are experiencing now. It looks as if the Americans cannot withstand our important push. Today we overtook a fleeing column and finished it. We overtook it by taking a back road through the woods to the retreat lane of the American vehicles; then just like on maneuvers, we pulled up along the road with sixty Panthers. And then came the endless convoy driving in two columns, side by side, hub on hub, filled to the brim with soldiers. And then a concentrated fire from sixty guns and one hundred and twenty machine guns. It was a glorious bloodbath, vengeance for our destroyed homeland. Our soldiers still have the old zip. Always advancing and smashing everything. The snow must turn red with American blood. Victory was never so close as it is now. The decision will soon be reached. We will throw them into the ocean, the arrogant, bigmouthed apes


\(^{61}\)Cited in Schulman, *Defeat in the West*, 314.
from the New World. They will not get into Germany. We will protect our wives and children from all enemy domination.

If we are to preserve all tender and beautiful aspects of our lives, we cannot be too brutal in the deciding moments of this struggle. . . .

Rockammer's elation becomes outright exaggeration in regards to the number of tanks present in a surprise convoy attack. The cited letters and diary entries of Wehrmacht soldiers present in the Ardennes illustrates how the psychological rehabilitation in the fall fostered a positive outlook absent in early September.

American soldiers' accounts of German attacks throughout the Ardennes repeatedly demonstrate how a lack of training was replaced in many instances with fanaticism and self-sacrifice. Ben Nawrocki, an American soldier of Company B in the 99th Infantry Division, withstood the human wave assaults of the 277th Volksgrenadier Division. He related that "on the left flank of the 3rd Platoon, a rifleman with a BAR was firing at the oncoming Germans who piled up three or four feet high in front of his foxhole."  

Harry F. Martin Jr., of the 106th Infantry Division stated how waves of Germans stormed his position, as "there were so many of them storming down the hill coming right for us. There was no way of stopping all of them. I had a feeling of utter hopelessness; I was panic-stricken."  

Charles MacDonald, a company commander, found himself in the advance of the 12th SS Armored Division during the offensive. He stated that "wave after wave of fanatically screaming German infantry stormed the slight tree-covered rise held by the three platoons. A continuous hail of fire exuded from their

62 Ibid., 313-14.

63 Cited in Astor, A Blood Dimmed Tide, 81.

64 Ibid., 87-88.
weapons, answered by volley after volley from the defenders, and "Germans fell right and left. The few rounds of artillery we did succeed in bringing down caught the attackers in the draw to our front, and we could hear their screams of pain when the small-arms fire would slacken. But still they came!" A battalion of the 3rd Parachute Division demonstrated no tactical training as its soldiers made fanatical frontal assaults up hill against a well emplaced American platoon, which resulted in the hillside becoming "carpeted with German bodies." A reinforced regiment of the 326th Volksgrenadier Division repeatedly assaulted the center of the 3/359th battalion front in an attempt to break through, suffering over 1,000 casualties in less than 48 hours. Regiments of the 560th Volksgrenadier Division performed well overrunning the positions of the American 112th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Infantry Division; however, the German performance had less to do with exceptional tactics then with fanaticism. As a platoon of the 560th approached the Ouren bridge immediately after the initial assault, an American soldier watched bewildered as the Germans advanced "so bunched up, almost marching in a columns of twos, that some of the men thought they might be prisoners coming to the rear..." As these examples clearly suggest, the combat behavior of many German soldiers did not demonstrate conventional military prowess rooted in the methods of mission-oriented tactics that made the Wehrmacht so

66 Dupuy, *Hitler’s Last Gamble*, 56.
67 Ibid., 67.
68 Ibid., 107.
successful in the early years of the war. Now good battlefield performance was replaced in instances by fanatical frontal assaults.⁶⁹

The intense indoctrination of the 1st SS Armor Division before the Ardennes offensive is an extreme example of how other SS and non-SS divisions were psychologically rehabilitated. Throughout November and December soldiers of the division had all leave canceled,⁷⁰ providing NSFOs with ample time to conduct indoctrination seminars and unify the old veterans, new recruits, and Volksdeutsch. The soldiers of the division were bombarded with ideologically based rhetoric and anti-American hate found in the pages of the divisional newsletter “Political News” (Politishe Wochenschau).⁷¹ The newsletters, published within the division, informed the Waffen-SS soldiers that they were “political” soldiers first, engaging American “Gangsters” and “Jewish-Zionists,” who raped pregnant German women and beat young children.⁷² Written propaganda received by Waffen-SS soldiers was spread by word of mouth throughout the division, and often written propaganda was fueled by real life horrors. Before the Ardennes offensive the soldiers of the 1st SS Armored Division dug out dead and wounded civilians after Allied carpet bombings in Köln destroyed large residential sectors of that city. After the war Peiper admitted that:

I recognize that after the battle of Normandy my unit was composed mainly of

⁶⁹Desperation or fear can also account for the fanatical actions of German soldiers against American positions. Such an argument, however, losses strength when one recalls the positive elation recorded in letters and diaries by these same soldiers.

⁷⁰Order from divisional commander Mohnke effective 5.11.44. T-354/623/245.


⁷²T-354/624/147, 171, 590, 611.
young, fanatical soldiers. A good deal of them had lost their parents, their sisters and brothers during the bombing. They had seen for themselves in Köln thousands of mangled corpses after a terror raids had passed. Their hatred for the enemy was such, I swear it, I could not always keep it under control.  

While the actual events that led to the shooting of unarmed American soldiers in the field at Malmedy by soldiers of the 1st SS Armored Division have remained clouded, the systematic shooting of all wounded Americans in the field was a direct product of the hatred and fanaticism purposely built up and fostered in the months prior to the Ardennes offensive. The elements that constituted the Wehrmacht’s fall resurgence were evident in the combat behavior of German units at Aachen and the Ardennes. Fanaticism and self-sacrifice were key components of the OKW orders, NSFO indoctrination and the redefined military justice system that attempted to reverse the effects of severe attrition and material weakness.

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73Cited in Reynolds, The Devils Adjutant, 36.
A psychological resurgence strengthened the resolve of soldiers serving on the western front. Institutionalized fanaticism and self-sacrifice became the primary components of cohesion and combat effectiveness. There was no ingrained fear to harness within the soldiers in the west as was the case among soldiers who served in the east. Ernest Bramsted, a historian of the effects of propaganda, states that in the fall of 1944 "it was not an easy matter to persuade the hard pressed but disciplined German masses that they had little to fear of the Western armies on German soil as much as they feared the Soviet troops."1 Förster argues that ideology was so readily accepted by the soldiers that served on the eastern front because German fear of the Russians existed prior to the rise of National Socialism.2 In the west no strong ideological convictions initially existed about the western Allies to maintain cohesion and combat effectiveness during the summer battles. Only after the full extent of the August defeat was realized and a decision made to launch the Ardennes offensive was there an institutionalized attempt by OKW to strengthen the convictions of the Wehrmacht in the west.

The elements that constituted the resurgence were a complex assortment of ideals and beliefs that provided enough variety to attract both German and non-German soldiers alike and not simply the embodiment of racist National Socialist ideology that dominated

1Bramsted, Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 327.

the soldiers in the east. In most cases it was enough for the soldiers in the west to know that they were making a supreme sacrifice in the protection of their homeland and that they stood shoulder to shoulder with men of other military services in the completion of that task. Simple service affiliation no longer provided a means for a strong identity or bond. For example, Waffen-SS divisions in the fall months routinely received navy, Luftwaffe and army personnel as replacements. The esprit de corps of these divisions was simply too diluted to be transferred over to the new replacements. Likewise, when cadres of burnt out divisions were assimilated they lost all historic unit identity with that formation's military heritage and former geographic location. Regional identities no longer fostered cohesion and combat effectiveness because members of the armed forces that were sent to Volksgrenadier divisions came from everywhere inside and outside Germany. Even the high level of professionalism and tradition found within the German army was not enough to maintain the military institution's infrastructure and provide the catalyst for a needed psychological resurgence.

The resurgence institutionalized by the German High Command created a unifying sense of purpose that reduced the distinctions that separated soldiers in the fall

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3Robert Koehl, a historian of the SS maintains that “needless to say, there was nothing cohesive about the last waves of the Waffen-SS... the rag-tag units of grounded Luftwaffe and sailors; the sallow, starchy complexioned boys of sixteen and seventeen; the confused and frightened eastern Europeans with only a dozen words of halting German; the grimy, tired Kampfgruppen of thirty or forty veterans of too many winter campaigns--this Waffen-SS was no longer an elite corps of political soldiers.” Koehl, however, paradoxically stated earlier that “the high quality of the many SS divisions and the SS armored corps did much to prolong the war...” Koehl is correct in both assertions. The elite political orientation of the Waffen-SS soldier gave way to the more universal ideals of self-sacrifice and fanaticism bound up in the fall resurgence. Robert Koehl, The Black Corps: The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1983), 220-22.
of 1944. The elite standards of the Waffен-SS slipped as its divisions now became an amalgamation of inter-service representation. At the same time the ideological orientation of the rest of the Wehrmacht increased causing an equalizing effect that allowed for service interchange-ability that would have been harder to accomplish earlier in the war.

German soldiers in the west were now armed with a solid psychological foundation from which they drew their resolve to fight until final victory. In one respect the secret “Wonder Weapons” German propaganda had predicted would win the war since 1943 did materialize in the form of resurgent Wehrmacht soldiers. Rudolf Lipus captured a perception of the German soldier in 1944 well in his painting entitled Infantry in Trench Warfare. Figure 2 portrays two strong soldiers who are indistinguishable from each other and focused on a common threat. Lipus’ painting highlights the universalism of the resurgence as soldiers are treated as equals without separate identities. The cultivation of fanaticism and self-sacrifice was itself a miracle weapon that prolonged the war and the horrors associated with National Socialism. Yet, for the German soldiers in the west culpability in their government’s actions were hardly a concern as they were burdened with the dual task of self-preservation and preservation of the way of life in Germany they hoped to return to after achieving final victory.

Within the larger context of the history of World War II the psychological resurgence in the west served to prolong the imminent collapse of National Socialist Germany. The soldiers who served in the west in the late summer and early fall appeared unwilling or unable to grasp the relationship between their continued resistance and the prolonged defeat of the Third Reich. Instead, their postwar memoirs indulge in self-
Figure 2
Infantry in Trench Warfare, by Rudolf Lipus, 1944.

Courtesy of the United States Army Center of Military History.
justifications that are bound up in the glory of war, military traditions, professionalism and the anti-communism of the post-1945 period. Mellenthin, the commander of Army Group G and the former commander of the western front concludes in his postwar memoir, “whatever the verdict of history on Nazi Germany, it will have to concede that in 1939-45 the Wehrmacht accomplished extraordinary feats, and worthily upheld the great fighting traditions of the German nation.” Mellenthin’s true thesis, however, is revealed when he asserts that he has attempted “to stress the dangers which we all face from the immense and well-organized armies of the Soviet Union.” Former member of Field-Marshall von Kluge’s staff, Siegfried Westphal stated in his book about the Wehrmacht’s experience in the west, that the individual soldier’s motivation to continue the fight was based “in his over-developed sense of duty, his surrender to the apparently inevitable, his desperate hope that so much blood and tears could not have been shed in vain, in the clever propaganda to which he was subjected for years, and not least in his manly virtues which have been preserved through the centuries.” Kurt Meyer, the former commander of the 12th SS Armored Division that fought against the western Allies, thought to himself as a prisoner-of-war being flown to England that “the war is over for me now. Europe lies in ruins behind me, bleeding from countless wounds, the Channel passes below and misty England appears in front of me. The England that wanted to liberate Europe but, in truth, threw it down communism’s throat.”

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professor of education, Micha Brumlik argued in the context of the debate over the idea of collective guilt within German society that:

The political culture of psychological repression becomes most evident when people cannot resist the temptation to assimilate the incomprehensible, historically unique event of the mass annihilation called the Holocaust, to other, familiar, intangible actions of killing. . . .

When this assimilation is accomplished, the Shoah is redefined as a kind of comprehensible massacre that had to be tolerated in order to prevent further massacres. In this way the German defensive battle in the East [or West] becomes in the last analysis a tragic occurrence. The soldiers, in this view, had to protect the slaughter in the concentration camps in order to save their own countrymen from the Soviet massacre [or the invasion of Germany by the western Allies].

Put another way, “Auschwitz was defended at Stalingrad too,” as Förster asserts. Likewise, the fanatical defense of the western frontier and the Ardennes offensive ultimately served the purpose of providing National Socialism time to fulfill its horrific destiny under Hitler’s leadership, of which the psychological resurgence in the fall played a large part.

Without a psychological explanation of the events that transpired along the western front in the fall of 1944 no other reasons for German maintenance of cohesion and combat effectiveness provide a plausible answer. Reinforcements, weapons, ammunition, training, and good morale all lacked in the divisions that served in the west in early September. The West Wall was in shambles and provided little defensible protection. What occurred was that “at the German frontier, the [Allied] armies ground


up against fiercely determined--fanatical--defenders..." wrote Pergrin, the American commander of the 291st Combat Engineer Battalion who participated in the campaign for Europe from D-day through the end of the war. The German army's traditions and professionalism were simply not enough to provide the maintenance of cohesion and combat effectiveness in the west. In the final analysis the psychological resurgence of the German army in the west remains an important development of the Wehrmacht during World War II.

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VITA

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