



WERNER KINDLER

FOREWORD BY CHARLES MESSENGER

Obedient Unto Death

A Panzer Grenadier of the
Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler Reports

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Werner Kindler

Translated by Geoffrey Brooks
Foreword by Charles Messenger



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Foreword

There is no doubt that Werner Kindler was a very brave soldier and was probably very lucky to survive the war. He was also clearly a dedicated member of the Waffen-SS and appears to have retained his Nazi views throughout his life. True, Kindler had cause to be hostile towards the Poles. His family lived in the so-called Polish Corridor, which Germany had had to surrender to newly independent Poland after the First World War, and, as ethnic Germans, suffered. He therefore welcomed the German invasion of Poland. He then found himself in the SS Totenkopf, with whom he did his military training before joining the Leibstandarte, which had originally been formed as Hitler's personal guard. He entered Russia with it at the beginning of July 1941 and remained with the division until the very end of the war. Three spells on the Eastern Front, northern Italy over the time of the Italian surrender to the Allies, Normandy, the Ardennes counter-offensive, Hungary, and finally Austria provided the author with a wealth of combat experience.

Kindler claims that Hitler launched a 'preventive war' against the USSR because it was poised to strike at Germany and cites an article in Pravda of June 2001 and a book by Viktor Suvorov, *nom de plume* of Vladimir Rezun, a Soviet army officer who defected to the West in 1978. Rezun wrote a number of books claiming that Stalin intended to attack and was supported by a number of German and Russian historians. It was, however, a total myth in that, largely as a result of Stalin's purges, the Soviet Armed Forces were in no fit state to launch any form of attack and were still undergoing drastic reforms resulting from their poor showing against the Finns during the winter of 1939–40. Their posture in June 1941 was solely defensive.¹

When we get on to the actual fighting and what it was like, Kindler says little about his own feelings and experiences. The only aspect that he does recount in detail is the medals and other awards that he earned. In particular, he details every day that counted towards his Close-combat Badge. It is difficult not to believe that he was what the British

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called in the Second World War a 'gong hunter', although he does also recount the awards won by his comrades. Otherwise, the book is more a history of his battalion, 3rd Battalion, 2nd SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which he calls the APC Battalion. His ultimate hero is its commanding officer, Jochen Peiper, who time and again displayed extraordinary leadership and tactical flair, qualities which he would take with him when he was promoted to command 1st SS-Panzer Regiment, also in the Leibstandarte and under which Kindler's battalion often fought.

What is revealing is the author's views on general aspects of the war. The Russians are guilty of atrocities against German soldiers, but there is no mention of those perpetrated by the Waffen-SS and the German Army. He has little regard for Germany's enemies, except perhaps the Western Allies' air power, but Allied bomber crews are dubbed 'terrorists'. Unconditional Surrender meant the adoption of the Morgenthau Plan, which aimed to strip Germany of all its industry. This, indeed, was Allied policy until more realistic measures were adopted at the July 1945 Potsdam Conference and the German propaganda machine made much of it during the last months of the war. Kindler, however, goes one further, claiming that the intention was also to literally emasculate the German male population. When it comes to the December 1944 Ardennes counter-offensive and, in particular, the Malmédy Massacre, he claims that Peiper and his men were forced to make false confessions. As for himself, he was not at the scene since his sub-unit was providing security for the battle group's supply echelon. As to who did carry out the murder of the US soldiers, Kindler offers no explanation. Finally, he noted that morale plummeted when Hitler's death was announced.

What then to make of this book? Some will view Kindler as an arrogant and cold-blooded warrior, who delighted in combat. Others may consider him as a man displaying intense loyalty to his country. What his writing does reveal, however, is something of the mind-set of the Waffen-SS soldier, whose fighting spirit was largely forged from the very close bonds which existed among his officers and their men, bonds much closer than those in the Army. Add in National Socialist indoctrination and one begins to understand what motivated them to continue to fight with the same intensity long after the prospect of ultimate victory had vanished.

Charles Messenger

Preface and Translator's Notes

The author Werner Kindler was a Volksdeutscher, a person of German race and blood who by political circumstances had a bond, whether desired or otherwise, to the foreign country in which he was born and dwelt. In 1920, West Prussia became Polish territory by virtue of the Treaty of Versailles, and Werner Kindler was born there in 1922. It was Hitler's avowed intent that all these expatriate Germans, and the former German territories of which Germany had been dispossessed after the First World War, should return to the Reich. Although West Prussia was reincorporated into the German Reich in 1939 by conquest, the author was technically ineligible for the Wehrmacht, and so was conscripted into the Waffen-SS.

His memoir is the story of the ensuing six years of his life during which time he became one of the most highly decorated non-commissioned soldiers to serve in the German armed forces. He first saw frontline action in Russia in 1941 as a machine gunner, and was then selected for 1st SS-Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LAH). He remained in it until the end of the war.

Eighteen million men served in the German armed forces in the Second World War, and only 630 of them were awarded the Close-combat Clasp in Gold. The author was one of them. This statistic bears witness to the high value of this decoration, for which the soldier was required to have confirmed in his service record book (Soldbuch) fifty close-combat days. Accordingly this decoration could only be won after years of bitter fighting and privation. By October 1944, when the recording of his close-combat days was discontinued, the author had already amassed eighty-four confirmed days. He eventually received the award on 1 April 1945.

Werner Kindler served in Russia, Italy, Normandy, in the retreat across France and Belgium, in the Ardennes campaign, in Hungary and finally in Austria, where he sank his APC in the River Enns and surrendered to American forces on 10 May 1945, with the Soviets in hot pursuit. By then he commanded a company of the Leibstandarte in the

rank of Oberscharführer (sergeant), and besides the gold Close-combat Clasp he had been awarded the German Cross in Gold, the Iron Cross First and Second Class, the East Medal and the Gold Wound Badge, having been wounded six times in action. Although short-listed for the Führer's personal bodyguard, by choice he eluded selection in the summer of 1944, preferring to be at the front.

The detailed material in this book was compiled over twenty-five years, from 1985 to 2010. Many conversations ensued during this period with Kindler's former company commander Otto Dinse and platoon commander Bernd von Bergmann, and veterans of his erstwhile companies. Names, dates and other information are based on official files such as the war diaries of 2nd SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment and operations reports: also field-post letters from men involved, diaries and notes and replies to queries. Works of reference consulted were Rudolf Lehmann's history of the LAH Division (Munin Verlag) and P. Agte's biography of Jochen Peiper, commander of the Leibstandarte's Panzer regiment. Other contributions were made by the author's former battalion commanders Paul Guhl, Jupp Diefenthal and Georg Preuss. Much information was also supplied over the years by Erhard Gührs, Willi Pluschke, Erich Strassgschwandtner, Rudi Knobloch, Karl Menne, Fritz Thier, Erich Schöbel, Günther Wagner, Kuno Balz, Günter Gaul, Rudolf von Ribbentrop, Herbert Rink, Gerhard Stiller, Heinz Meier and Wilhelm Schermeng, to all of whom the author extends his grateful thanks.

The presentation is bereft of unnecessary commentary so as not to reduce the documentary value of the book as the faithful reporting of a soldier's personal experience. The intention is that the book should follow the guidelines laid down by the historian Leopold von Ranke that historical events must be researched and then reported free from ideological interpretations and told '... as it actually was'.

In the translation of the main text of foreign works, it is the publishing practice to use British equivalent ranks. These can only be approximations. The three ranks of the private soldier encountered in the Waffen-SS and used in this book were:

SS-Mann: Entrant

SS-Sturmmann: Trained Grenadier

SS-Rottenführer: Leading Grenadier. The Rottenführer was given responsibilities much greater than those of the British lance-corporal, but the Rottenführer was not an NCO. In the Waffen-SS the lowest NCO rank was full corporal (SS-Unterscharführer) and it was necessary

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to pass a training course at Unterführerschule to obtain the rank. Only in the last few months of the war does it seem that, as was the author's case, for the fighting units at least this requirement was occasionally waived.

The NCO ranks used by Kindler were:

SS-Unterscharführer: Corporal

SS-Oberscharführer: Sergeant

SS-Hauptscharführer: Senior Sergeant

SS-Stabsscharführer: Staff Sergeant

The Officer ranks most frequently used by the author were:

SS-Untersturmführer: Lieutenant (junior grade) shown in the text as 2/Lt.

SS-Obersturmführer: Lt

SS-Hauptsturmführer: Captain

SS-Sturmbannführer: Major

SS-Obersturmbannführer: Lt-Colonel

Standartenführer/Oberführer: Colonel

Brigadeführer: Brigadier

A few abbreviations are used in the text where the frequency of their use has justified it:

APC = armoured personnel carrier

LSSAH (Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler) or LAH, the same thing

OKH = Oberkommando des Heeres – Army High Command

The Translator

Introduction

On 20 December 1939 the Infantry Assault Badge (Infanterie-sturmabzeichen) was introduced, for which a soldier qualified after participating in three attacks on different days. As the war went on and the fighting became more bitter on the Eastern Front and in North Africa, the burden on troops fighting in the most advanced sectors of the frontline became ever heavier. Attacks became a constant feature, but now included close-combat skirmishes in which soldiers fought man-to-man using close-combat weapons such as pistols, submachine guns and entrenching tools.

Therefore on 25 November 1942, the Führer and C-in-C of the Army instituted the Close-combat Clasp (Nahkampfspange) as 'a visible sign of the recognition of those soldiers fighting man-to-man with cold steel and close-combat equipment'.¹ The OKH implementing regulations of 3 December 1942 prescribed that: 'To count as a close-combat day, the qualifying soldier must have seen "the whites of the enemy's eyes". i.e. he fought the opponent man-to-man to the final decision using close-combat weapons'.² From the outset, the Close-combat Clasp was to be awarded in three grades based on the number of officially-recognised close-combat days: fifteen for the bronze clasp, thirty for the silver and fifty for the gold. An exact individual conformation of the number of days, with each date and location, was required, confirmed by the unit commander with his signature and service stamp. The opening day was retroactive to 1 December 1941.

Since there had been no register of close-combat days of this kind before 25 November 1942, but only confirmed assault days to qualify for the Infantry Assault Badge, it was decided, 'in order to give prominence to numerous proven long-serving frontline soldiers' that those men who had been in action on the Russian Front without a break since 22 June 1941 would be eligible for fifteen close-combat days for fifteen months served, ten close-combat days for twelve months and five days for eight months. The same rules regarding confirmation applied.

After November 1942 the confirmed close-combat days had to be confirmed at regiment, or the respective reconnaissance unit, pioneer battalion and so on as applied for by the company commander and these then came down to the units in daily orders. The company commander would identify which of his men had been involved directly with the enemy on these close-combat days and would enter their entitlement on a certificated tabulated form pasted into the Soldbuch (soldier's service record book). The soldier would thus know precisely how many close-combat days stood to his credit. The close-combat days continued to be differentiated from the confirmed assault days for the award of the Infantry Assault Badge.

The exceptionally high standing which the gold clasp had in Germany can be seen from the fact that it was an award which Adolf Hitler desired to make personally, so as to see and know the man.³ This differed from the award of the Knight's Cross, frequently performed by Hitler in the Führer-HQs, but occasionally he would be represented by Himmler or Guderian. However, some gold clasps were awarded and distributed within the divisions before the publication of the Führer-order, and so there is an unknown but relatively small number of gold clasps which cannot be accounted for.

Undoubtedly the Close-combat Clasp enjoyed the highest recognition amongst front soldiers. If you met a grenadier who wore the silver clasp, you knew at once that he had been involved in hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy on at least thirty occasions and had come through. The few soldiers who had survived fifty or more close-combat days stood head and shoulders above these.

The award was won on pure merit, and could not be earned as the outcome of a single successful attack, but only through months and years of proven individual clashes beyond the foremost front, and it was a decoration reserved for the frontline soldier. In making the register entry it was necessary to confirm that the man in question had actually been involved in this or that attack. On 26 March 1944, OKH drew attention once more ' . . . that in the calculation of close-combat days – corresponding to the Führer's founding decree – an especially strict yardstick is to be employed in order to maintain the high value of the Close-combat Clasp'.

Because of the nature of the fighting at the fronts it was clear that only a few soldiers would be able to win the gold clasp, for which fifty close-combat days had to be confirmed. These soldiers would be accorded special recognition and attention by the Reich, and as from

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August 1944 it was laid down that soldiers who had been awarded the gold clasp could be recommended directly for the German Cross in Gold.

Furthermore upon awarding the gold clasp it is to be ascertained if the conditions of the award of the German Cross in Gold apply. This will generally be the case, since the count of fifty close-combat days represents a quite especial proof of worth over a long period of time. The Führer has agreed that the holder of the gold Close-combat Clasp can be recommended for the German Cross in Gold without further cause to be shown.⁴

As a result, some divisions acted accordingly and recommended their men holding the gold clasp for the German Cross in Gold without further ado. This was not the procedure in all units, for not all holders of the gold clasp received the German Cross in Gold.

In contrast to Knight's Cross holders a further measure of welfare was provided exclusive to holders of the gold clasp. They were to be removed from direct frontline operations for at least a year to attend training schools for their weapons branch. A number of NCOs and men were transferred into the Führer's escort brigade at the end of 1944 and withdrawn from their units before the Ardennes campaign. Hitler also ordered that holders of the gold clasp and their dependants were to receive the same care and welfare as holders of the Knight's Cross.⁵

For my unbroken service over a period of twelve months on the Russian Front from July 1941 I was awarded ten close-combat days. The other seventy-four confirmed days all occurred during my service with 3rd Battalion, 2nd SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment LAH. I have made an entry in bold in the text where any activity in which I took part on one of these days finds mention, otherwise the days are summarised at the conclusion of each relevant chapter.⁶ The last close-combat day credited to me, by when I had already been notified of the impending award to me of the gold clasp, was on 12 October 1944. Other panzer grenadiers in the APC battalion had confirmed close-combat days in Normandy, the Ardennes, Hungary and Austria.

Chapter One

From a Farm in Danzig into the Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler

I was born on 15 July 1922 at Kottisch in West Prussia, the first son of farmer Otto Kindler and his wife Elisabeth. He had served the Kaiser in the First World War as a soldier on the Düna. I grew up on the family farm with two sisters and a brother born in 1928. Kottisch, founded in 1818, lay in the Preussisch-Stargard district of West Prussia. Geographically it lay west of the Vistula and south of Danzig. Amongst others, the town of Preussisch-Stargard and Dirschau fell within the region governed by the great Baltic port of Danzig. Kottisch was a small village, half-gutted by fire in 1888. When I was a boy, the village had thirteen independent German farms. Shortly before my birth, my West Prussian homeland was severed from the territory of the German Reich and ceded to Poland under the victors' dictates of the Treaty of Versailles. From 1920 Poland exercised full control over West Prussia. Three-and-a-half million Germans therefore came under Polish domination whether they liked it or not. West Prussia now formed the so-called 'Polish Corridor'. This was the former part of Germany, now Polish, through which one was obliged to drive in order to get from Germany to the German province of East Prussia. The great Hanseatic port of Danzig was now controlled by the League of Nations.

In 1931 Germany estimated the presence of 1,018,000 persons of German racial stock in the Polish sphere of influence. As a result of the prevailing pressures, at the census 277,000 persons had preferred discretion to claiming they were Germans. Since Poland had been given West Prussia in 1920, over three-quarters of the original German population had left, and the remainder were to be oppressed and ousted in a long campaign aimed at forcing them to leave.¹

By 1924, by means of liquidations, expropriations and compulsory purchase, Poland sequestered 510,000 hectares of land, to which by 1939 they had added another 1.2 million acres through so-called 'agrarian reform'. A whole string of laws and decrees, the worst being

the notorious 'Frontier Zone Law', was created to dispossess and expel the Germans or deprive them of their legal rights. German miners and employees in Upper Silesia subsisted on meagre incomes, and in thousands of cases faced starvation. Men of the Hela fishery, established for centuries, suffered similarly.²

I grew up on the parental smallholding. Our family was cut off from the great economic and generally improving tendencies in Germany. From 1928 by Polish law I was obliged to attend the Polish village school at Kottisch, from where I went to German secondary school in Preussisch-Stargard until 1938. Germany under the Hitler regime considered it a matter of overriding importance to return to the Reich those Germans expatriated beyond its borders, and to reincorporate the occupied regions severed from the Reich by the Treaty of Versailles. In 1938 Austria and the Sudetenland were annexed to Germany. Tension with Poland over the West Prussian Corridor and the Free City of Danzig grew. In 1939, the German Foreign Ministry suggested to Poland that the time was now ripe for Germany and Poland to come to a general agreement over all existing problems. The German proposals were as follows:

1. The Free City of Danzig should return to the German Reich.
2. An extraterritorial autobahn and extraterritorial multi-track railway line would run across the Corridor.
3. In the Danzig region Poland would be given an extraterritorial highway or autobahn and a free port.
4. Poland would receive marketing guarantees for its products in the Danzig region.
5. The two nations would recognise and guarantee their common frontiers or the mutual territories.
6. The German-Polish treaty would be extended by ten years to twenty-five years.
7. Both nations would add a consultation clause to their treaty.³

Poland rejected all these proposals outright and ordered a general mobilisation, relying on the British guarantee of 31 March 1939 for support, and on 3 September 1939 Britain and France declared war on Germany.

In that calamitous summer of 1939 I celebrated my seventeenth birthday on 15 July working on my parents' farm. The Polish attitude had become more hostile. Polish radio and newspapers were stirring

up feelings against the Germans again. On 26 June 1939 a Polish newspaper published a letter showing Poland's territorial claims. After the Polish attack on Germany, the new Polish border would extend from Bremen through Hannover, Fulda, Würzburg and Erlangen, cutting Germany in half. A Polish 'Western Border Union' (Westmarkenverein) circulated a huge number of maps and postcards showing those parts of Germany to be annexed to Poland.⁴

Because of this agitation, Germans were attacked and killed in West Prussia and other regions. Especially from August 1939, larger numbers of Germans began to be kidnapped by Poles and murdered. German schools were closed by the Polish authorities. My own village escaped these attentions, although elsewhere Fräulein Maisohle, one of my sister's teachers, was killed. As I recall personally, in Preussisch-Stargard only a few kilometres away, several German businessmen were taken away and murdered.

Up to 21 August 1939 about 70,000 Germans had fled the state, but the terror even spilled over into German territory. Polish mounted units made repeated cross-border forays into German territory, killing farmers in East Prussia and torching their farms. For their protection the 57th Artillery Regiment was brought up from Königsberg to Garnsee/Neidenburg in East Prussia. On 26 August 1939 a party from the German regiment intercepted one of these Polish raiding groups returning from such an incident on German soil and killed forty-seven of them.⁵

In the late summer of 1939 the pressure intensified, and after the Polish mobilisation my father had to find somewhere to hide his horses, wagons and coachman. In order to escape the Poles I went into the forests. The war began on Friday 1 September 1939. With my friend Siegfried Sell I cycled to Dirschau and next day came across an SS-Heimwehr Danzig MG post on one of the Vistula bridges. Finally, the first German soldiers! On 3 September troops of the German Wehrmacht liberated nearby Preussisch-Stargard.

In the middle of the following week the population was called upon to protect West Prussia. Men aged from seventeen to forty-five years were to report. I was amongst them and, under the direction of German police units, assisted in street patrols, guarding the municipal building and Preussisch Stargard prison. No uniform was provided but I was given a green armband with the word Selbstschutz ('local militia') on it to wear on my civilian clothing, and armed with a 98-carbine and a 7.65mm pistol.

On 6 October 1939 Poland surrendered unconditionally. This cancelled the local provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and West Prussia was reintegrated into Germany. My home village of Kottisch was renamed Gotenfelde and fell once more within the jurisdiction of Preussisch-Stargard which, from 26 November 1939, became part of the newly-formed Reichsgau (Reich administrative district) of Danzig-West Prussia.

During my short tour of duty with the West Prussian militia, at age seventeen on 13 November 1939 I was called up at Kloster Pelplin and sent to Prague for four weeks' military training with 6th SS-Totenkopf-Standarte (SS-Colonel Bernhard Voss). At Prague-Rusin I met colleagues I had known in the Danzig militia.

This particular unit was the first of the Totenkopf-Standarten to have been set up in wartime. I went into No 9 Company, still in civilian clothing. The training at Prague was harsh. We were sworn in by SS-General August Heissmeyer on 16 December 1939 at the Heinrich Himmler barracks, Prague-Rusin.⁶ This is the oath we took:

I swear to thee, Adolf Hitler,
As Führer and Chancellor of the Reich
Loyalty and bravery!
I pledge to thee and to those placed by thee in authority over me
Obedience unto Death
So may God help me!

Two days after taking the oath I was transferred to No 2 Company, 13th SS-Totenkopf Standarte (SS-Colonel Klingemann) at Linz. My company commander was SS-Captain Fritz Holwein. We were 250-strong and composed mainly of men from Preussisch-Stargard, Dirschau and Karthaus. In February 1940 a rooting-out left only thirty-six of us in the company. All the others were discharged, most to be re-conscripted later.

We had harsh, intensive winter training in Upper Austria equipped with Czech weapons. I did not finish an NCO's course. On duty one day the Company visited Hitler's parents' house at Leonding. In March 1940 the regiment moved from Linz-Ebelsberg to Vienna-Schönbrunn into barracks previously occupied by 1st SS-Regiment Der Führer. In Vienna my company commander SS-Captain Holwein took over the 6th NCO Training Company and was replaced by SS-Lt Hans Opificius. He was a much-liked commander who visited the men on many weekends

with his two children. He lived with his family in Vienna. That April I got my first spell of home leave with my family in West Prussia.

In May 1940 they transferred me again to No 4 (MG) Company/13th SS-Totenkopf-Standarte to train on the heavy MG 08. At Vienna one of my instructors and also my gun-captain was SS-Corporal Hans Fuchs, a businessman and reservist from Franconia alongside whom I was to serve until 1944 in the same company. Another instructor was 40-year-old Professor Eckert who taught me how to make the best impression on NCOs and officers. On 15 July I celebrated my 18th birthday.

The 13th SS-Totenkopf-Standarte was disbanded on 15 August 1940. We held an ironic burial ceremony in the presence of its officers. My next drafting was to Holland, into the reorganised No 4 (MG) Company, 4th SS-Totenkopf Standarte, made up in the main of men from the same unit previously known as Ostmark. 1st Battalion was at The Hague, 2nd Battalion at Groningen and 3rd Battalion at s'Hertogenbosch. They put 4th (MG) Company in the Leopold School on the fishery dock at Scheveningen. Here I did infantry and weapons training in the sand dunes. We had only old MGs and the water-cooled heavy MG 08. For a change, we did turns of duty as coastal defence against expected British raids and we also blew up drifting mines by firing at the detonator horns. Unit welfare was outstanding, a hallmark of the admired battalion commander 'Kapt'n Schuldt'. However, men up to eighteen years of age received no coffee, only milk and cocoa on Sundays; adults got morning coffee. In September 1940 occurred a high point in my service when I stood honour guard over a week for former Kaiser Wilhelm II, exiled to an estate at Doorn, and I did guard duty on three occasions for the visits of Göring to Wassenaar.

It was at this time – August 1940 – that Waffen-SS Command was formed and the Totenkopf-Standarten were absorbed into the Waffen-SS. The average age in the Standarten was high. To reduce it, the older reservists were released and the younger men transferred into the lower numbered Standarten 4 to 11 inclusive while the others were disbanded. The surviving Standarten then reorganised along the guidelines set for the motorised SS-infantry regiments, and in September 4th SS-Totenkopf-Standarte was also motorised. I spent a whole month at driving school and obtained my Class I and II licences. I was taught about vehicles and engines, repairs and oil-changing and got to know all the vehicles in service.

The year 1940 drew to its close. The Netherlands Reich Commissioner Artur Seyss-Inquart attended the Yuletide festivities of our No 4

Company. In February 1941 our regiment arrived by train in the Warsaw district of Mokotov. On 25 February we removed our Totenkopf collar patches and sewed on the SS runes: our unit was now known as the 4th SS Infantry Regiment (Motorised), and in May attached to 2nd SS-Infantry Brigade (Motorised). Thus I completed an 18-month period of training under what amounted to peacetime conditions; I was an infantryman competent to handle the light and heavy MG, and able to drive all manner of road vehicles. This training would stand me in good stead later, and now a major change was to occur in my military fortunes.

In May 1941, the companies of the 4th SS-Infantry Regiment paraded for inspection by officers of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler who had arrived in Warsaw from Wischau. Together with others I was selected for transfer into the LSSAH. That was the last I ever saw of the 4th SS-Infantry Regiment (Motorised).⁷ I joined the ranks of the Leibstandarte at Wischau that same month and became a member of the most famous German unit. By virtue of its military achievements the prestige of this strengthened regiment was on a level with the Prussian Guard units of earlier centuries, whose famed predecessors included the Guard Regiment of Foot, the Garde du Corps and the 1st Life Guard Battalion of the 15th Guards Regiment. As a further parallel to the Leibstandarte it is valid to mention that the most elite Prussian regiment, the Garde du Corps, founded in 1740 in squadron strength, fulfilled the role of personal bodyguard to Prussia's king Frederick II. This corps, like the Leibstandarte, was composed of tall volunteers and was held in special regard in the Reich. Frederick the Great and the Prussian kings who succeeded him always had the privilege to be commander-in-chief of this regiment. Yet the Garde du Corps was by no means just for parades and bodyguard duty, for it fought with great bravery at Hohenfriedburg in 1745 during the Second Silesian War. Furthermore in all subsequent battles, and in the German Wars of Liberation, including the legendary People's Battle at Leipzig, the Garde du Corps proved itself outstandingly as heavy cavalry.

The Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler was in the direct frontline at the outbreak of war in 1939. It was still not a division although it was made up of four infantry battalions, a heavy weapons battalion, an SP-gun battery, a company of self-propelled 4.7cm anti-tank guns, an artillery regiment (two batteries), a pioneer battalion, reconnaissance unit, flak unit, signals unit and supply. After operations in the Balkans in the early summer of 1941, the LAH relocated to Bohemia and Moravia. In

the Brünn/Wischau area it received reinforcements including its own 4th Battalion from Berlin, previously the Guard battalion of the Leibstandarte there. Of the five companies comprising 4th Battalion (Nos 16–20 Companies), only Nos 16 and 17 Companies had gone into the field as originally composed, while Nos 18, 19 (MG) and 20 (Heavy) Companies had a nucleus of Leibstandarte soldiers but also men from various other units, particularly specially-chosen men from the 4th, 8th and 10th Infantry Regiments. Therefore the 4th Battalion of the Leibstandarte in its personnel structure may be considered new with effect from June 1941.

As a trained machine-gunner, in May 1941 I was transferred to No 19 (MG) Company/4th Battalion under SS-Captain Hans Meiforth who had begun service with 4th Battalion LAH in the summer of 1933. I was placed in 3rd (Heavy-MG) Platoon (SS-2/Lt Rudolf Möhrlin). A minority of the personnel of this company came from the Leibstandarte, but in the main from other units as for example No 12 (MG) Company of the 10th SS-Infantry Regiment from Cracow. Even Möhrlin came from the 8th Infantry Regiment. It was here that I was drilled in the MG 34.

No 19 (MG) Company, 4th Battalion LAH

Occupants of the Principal Posts from June 1941, Beginning of Russian Campaign

Company commander: SS-Capt. Hans Meiforth (fell 14 April 1942) then SS-Lt Georg Bormann

Runners: SS-Leading Grenadier Fritz Jacobi: SS-Corporal Dressler

Medical Orderly NCO: SS-Corporal Figura

(Acting) CSM: SS-Sergeant Joachim Thiele (with LAH since June 1933)

QM: SS-Sergeant Hoffmann

1st (Heavy MG) Platoon

Platoon leaders: SS-Lt Erich Otto Thomas (fell 12 July 1941)

SS-Lt Georg Bormann:

SS-Ensign Joachim Kaden

2nd (Heavy MG) Platoon: SS-2/Lt Hans Scharna (from 6th SS-Regiment Germania November 1938, fell 12 July 1941)

3rd (Heavy MG) Platoon: SS-2/Lt Möhrlin: SS-ensign Otto Bölk (fell 15 July 1943)

4th (Mortar) Platoon: SS-2/Lt Max Trampler (from 8th SS Infantry Regiment, fell 11 March 1945 at Kis Bajou as SS-Captain and commander, 3rd Battalion, 35th SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment)