

The 12th SS Panzer Division “Hitlerjugend”

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By

Adrian Dragoş Defta

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In loving memory of the most special ladies of my life:
my Grandmother Elisabeta and my Mother Elena.

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Dr Phil. Adrian Dragoş Defta

CHAPTER I

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE STUDY

There is nothing absolute about historical truth. What we consider as such is only an estimation, based upon what the best available evidence tells us. It must constantly be tested against new information and new interpretations that appear, however implausible they may be, or it will lose its vitality and degenerate into dogma or shibboleth.

—GORDON CRAIG

1.1 Introduction

The 12th Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend” [Eng: “Hitler Youth”] was one of the few Waffen-SS corps which exclusively extracted its *Mannschaft* [Eng: “man force”] from the Hitler Youth Organisation. Membership of the newly formed division (initially assigned as the *panzer grenadier division*) was opened to young German males with a minimum height of 170 cm, born in 1926 and who were 17 years old at the time of conscription. The Leadership Corps of Hitler Youth (*die Reichsjugendführung*) had already reserved some 30,000 Hitler youths to undertake a selection process at the Health Offices for a medical and physical evaluation. The Admission Committee, responsible for their final evaluation, sent the recruits to special military training camps known as *WEL-Wehrrtütigungslager*, where the Waffen-SS and Heer¹ professionals (qualified officers) would subject the recruits to a six-week intensive military training programme. The young recruits would also be exempted from compulsory service in the *RAD-Reichsarbeitsdienst*—the Reich Labour Service.² The establishment

¹ *Heer*—German Army ground forces. Often, when referring to the *Wehrmacht*, most Western authors mean ground forces—*Heer*. In order to avoid confusion, all references to the German Army ground forces are hereafter referred to as *Heer*, since the *Wehrmacht* represented, in fact, the entirety of the German Armed Forces during World War II (A. D. Defta).

² LAC, Ottawa: *File 12 SS Div. (Hitlerjugend)*, Ref. No: Record Group 24-G-3-1-a, Vol./Box Number: 20531, File No: 981 SSPzD12 (D1), VS – Tgb. Nr. 1067/43 g./18.02.1943.

of the WELs outlined one of the main factors that would later imbue this Waffen-SS formation with its distinct nature, given that all recruits had to perform a full session of military training prior to their actual assignment to the SS-Hitlerjugend Division. Several aspects put the finishing touches to the Hitlerjugend Panzer Division that outlined its overall specificity: apart from the youngsters who had all completed the military training programme before being conscripted to the Waffen-SS, there was also the veteran officers' corps which had been extracted from the Leibstandarte Division, hereafter referred to as the "Mother Division" of the Hitlerjugend. These battle-hardened, *bona fide* warfare professionals, who had achieved notable military successes on the Eastern Front, took over the Division's physical, psychological and technical preparations. Owing to a unique leadership style which imitated the authoritarian model specific to family-type relationships, the Mother Division was able to introduce a set of values consisting of team spirit, combat motivation, commitment and determination. Another factor that contributed significantly to the soldiers' distinctive character came from the intensification of the political and ideological lessons that further supplemented the actual indoctrination that they had already been subjected to. The notable turn of events in Germany during the 1944-1945 stage of World War II, and, in particular, the way the Normandy invasion came about, were key factors that influenced and shaped the Hitlerjugend fighters in a special way that will be explored later. Although initially, few people had been willing to entertain the thought, the conflagration in the West would soon reach similar levels of savagery as in the East, if not worse. All belligerents were strongly encouraged by a well-cultivated hatred of each other as a result of a long-term, comprehensive and perfectly designed process of indoctrination. While the Allied troops were convinced that they were fighting an inhuman enemy, on the other side, their German counterparts were indoctrinated to regard their enemies as subhuman entities. In turn, this particular state of affairs created an environment where both sides yearned to mutually annihilate themselves. The specificity of the war on the Western Front was perhaps best illustrated by the astonishing propensity of both sides to commit outrageous war crimes and trample over the provisions of the international conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. Both sides benefited from circumstantial factors that enabled them to approach sensitive issues in a casual manner, especially since the inviolability status of unarmed civilians (or prisoners of war) was no longer taboo and thus became less important. Having said that, I strongly warn against the immorality of any moral equivalence exercise. Above all, the typical Hitlerjugend soldier displayed a unique psychological

profile due to a series of factors: early childhood and home environment, subsequent political National Socialist education, conscription to ideologically designed Hitler Youth camps and military training institutions, a social environment contorted by savage bombardments of their homeland, and eventually, the impact of their own experience in dealing with and fighting against the Allied enemies.

The problems discussed in this study emerge from the peculiar characteristics of this elite military unit of the Third Reich's Armed Forces and, as a result, the present analysis strives to answer some specific questions surrounding this topic. In order to understand the military achievements or the noteworthy combat motivation of the young soldiers belonging to the Hitlerjugend Division, we first need to describe the spirit³ of the Hitler Youth and identify the key issues that led to the creation of its special ethos. The youths of the Hitlerjugend Division were undoubtedly among the most relevant examples of a generation that grew and developed ethically, politically and ideologically in the purest spirit of National Socialism. In light of this, the study strives to answer whether or not the implementation of the entire palette of Nazi ideas resulted in the development of a military machine that acted in a particular way, that was different from other Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht fighters. Did the National Socialist system succeed or fail in the production of the best-trained and ideologically suited warriors? Based on this line of reasoning, there is another question that needs to be answered: was the National Socialist dictatorship able to successfully translate the Nazi ideals into the Hitlerjugend soldier's ethos? The study will also further analyse whether or not Nazi propaganda alone forms the basis of what we commonly describe as the Hitlerjugend ethos, or whether the later phases of the war, with the appalling atrocities inflicted upon unarmed German civilians, also played a significant role in the creation of the typical Hitlerjugend soldier. Further inquiries into controversial matters need close examination too. Was their indisputable heroism an outcome of an insidious process of inducing fanaticism? How exactly did their alleged fanaticism manifest itself and what were its consequences? How can we reconcile unquestionable proof of fanatical behaviour with praised soldierly attitudes, comradeship and other similar behaviours that animated these young warriors? And last but not least, there is the question of fanaticism itself: is fanaticism rightly

³ The Hitlerjugend "spirit" is intended to define those morale (team spirit) and courage peculiarities such as: combat braveness, strength of character, stout-heartedness, determination of purpose, enthusiasm, and dynamism, all of these being systematically fostered through Waffen-SS ideology (A. D. Defta).

described in a conventional sense as “one person’s hero is another person’s fanatic” or should the approach to fanaticism provide a more complex ethical context which must be applied accordingly? Since the “fanaticism phenomenon” seems to have been particularly relevant to the Hitlerjugend Division, perhaps to a much larger degree than to other Waffen-SS formations, I approach this issue from different perspectives and, therefore, several stages of the present analysis will be dedicated to the typology of the Hitlerjugend soldier. The question of fanaticism is tackled in conjunction with a series of other peculiarities of the Hitlerjugend soldier, such as battle performance, combat motivation and ideological acquirements. From the interplay of all these factors, the very issue of fanaticism, so quintessential to Hitlerjugend soldiers, perhaps even more than to other German military entities, can be thoroughly studied.

From the very beginning of its formation, the Hitler Youth was created in order to raise a new, fresh young generation educated in the purest Nazi spirit. The youth organisation of NSDAP⁴ incorporated a full range of Nazi precepts interwoven with “Darwinian ideology”, hereafter referred to as “social Darwinism”,⁵ which was further strengthened by the youthful élan and combative ethos specific to the Hitler Youth Organisation.

In Figure 1, the scheme synthesises the interplay between ideological instruction and military training, each of which consists of specific theoretical and practical contents; it also explores the subsequent impact of its structural input on the general portrait of the average Hitlerjugend soldier. By *völkisch* nationalism [roughly, *ethnic* nationalism], I refer to a radical racist and nationalist orientation which has no equivalent in the English language and therefore will be left in German throughout this book.

⁴ *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or *National Socialist German Workers’ Party*, hereafter abbreviated as *NSDAP* (A. D. Defta).

⁵ Whilst many historians argue whether or not Nazis unconditionally and fully embraced Darwinian evolutionary theory, numerous writings produced by Nazi anthropologists and related National Socialist publications confirm the fact that human and racial evolution played a fundamental role in the development of Nazi racial theory. They asserted that humans evolved from primates and the Aryan race had evolved to a higher level than other human races due to harsh climate conditions that enforced natural selection. For further reading, see Richard Weikart: *The Role of Darwinism in Nazi Racial Thought*, (German Studies Review, 2013: German Studies Association), 537-556 (A. D. Defta).

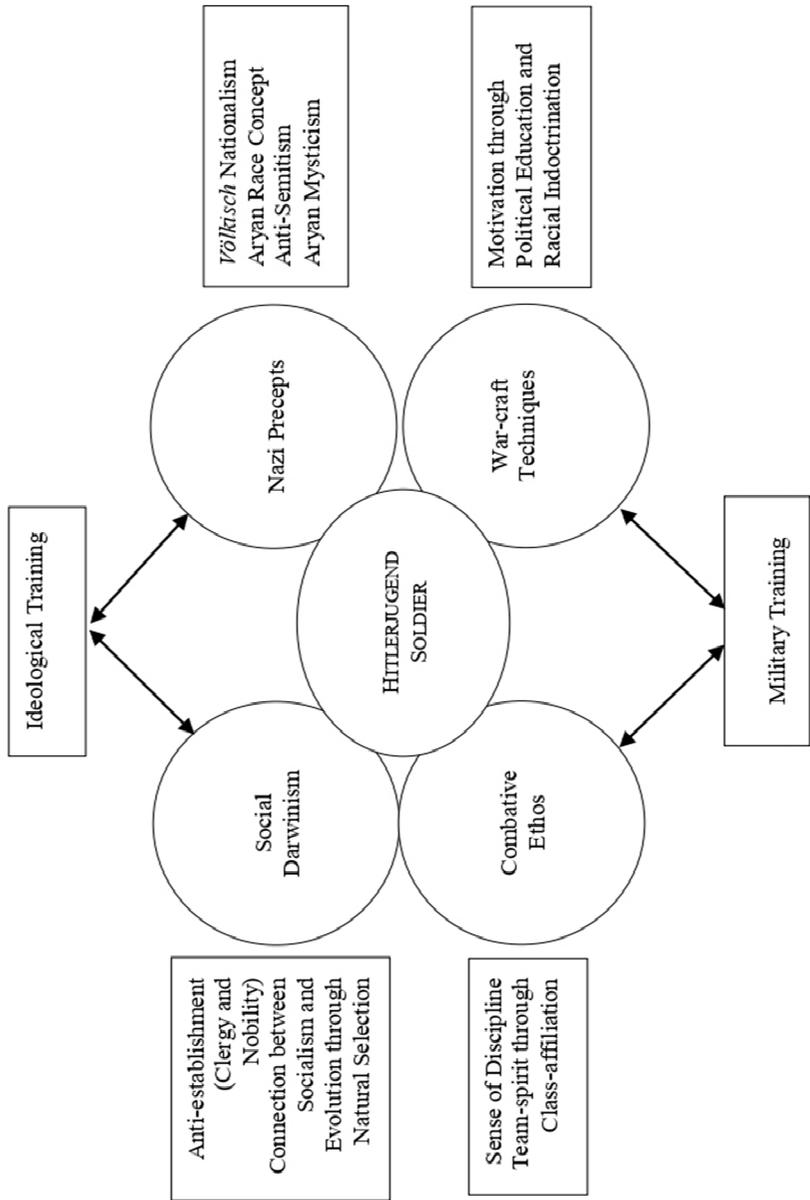


Figure 1: Scheme depicting the interplay of ideological instruction and military training

1.2 Literature Review: the 12th SS Panzer Division “Hitlerjugend” in Contemporary Historiography

The historical literature published about the Wehrmacht in general and the Waffen-SS in particular is considerable. Since the Waffen-SS had been officially assigned as the “fourth branch” of the German Armed Forces, many studies, reports and subsequent related material dealing with the history of the Wehrmacht also include particular writings about the SS armed wing. According to Samuel W. Mitcham and Gene Mueller,⁶ present-day historians specialising in Nazi Germany are generally divided into two opposite camps: the traditional or so-called “establishment historians” who view the Waffen-SS as an indisputable criminal organisation whose members were, with no or few exceptions, criminals by association, guilty by adhesion and war criminals by participation, and the other historians, so-called “apologists” or “revisionists”, who hold on to the conviction that most Waffen-SS members were *Soldaten wie andere auch* [Eng: “soldiers like any others”].⁷ Military historian, Simon MacKenzie, offers a newer classification of the revisionists, ranging from “extreme admirers on the fringes of the far-right”, such as Richard Landwehr and Jean Mabire, to partisan authors, such as Edmund L. Blandford and Gordon Williamson, including popular historians who are generally tempted to illustrate the Waffen-SS in a positive light, such as John Keegan and Bruce Quarrie. Other popular authors like Herbert Walther and Tim Ripley are regarded by MacKenzie as being part of the “militaria category” of non-scholarly, uncritical works.⁸ Moderate historians trying to eschew any classification as such, who admit that the Waffen-SS was guilty of war crimes but show a reluctance to label the organisation on the whole as “criminal”, are also considered apologists. The question of polarisation in the field of interpretation and ethical judgement is further detailed in the final chapters of MacKenzie’s work.

The theme of the present research is generally conducted following two lines of inquiry: on the one hand, I adopt a highly descriptive approach

⁶ Mitcham, Samuel & Mueller, Gene: *Hitler’s Commanders and German Bravery in the Field, 1939-1945*, (Havertown, PA, USA: Pen and Sword, 2014), 298.

⁷ “*Soldaten wie andere auch*” is the syntagma and title of Paul Hausser’s book, last published in 2005. He was a prominent Waffen-SS general (*Generaloberst der Waffen-SS*) and the architect of what was to become the specific Waffen-SS battle strategy (A. D. Defsta).

⁸ Mackenzie, Simon: *Revolutionary Armies in the Modern Era: A Revisionist Approach*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87.

with a decisive emphasis on moral issues and ethical judgements, while, on the other, I outline a pronounced investigative, analytical, detailed and focused research framework based on the studies produced by recent German historians. The latter addresses the phenomenology of the Waffen-SS by taking into account a large palette of scientific research, using sociological and psychological instruments of investigation. The first approach is reflected in the vast majority of literature on Waffen-SS topics and includes a series of well-known military historians along with other authors who produced numerous descriptive materials which had a substantial impact on the public by mainly popularising the subject of Nazi Germany's political army. Their work is generally inconclusive in terms of socio-cultural analysis, lacking relevant in-depth investigations of the essential reasons behind the SS phenomenology. As a result, they fail to answer those key questions regarding the creation, function, structure and organisational mechanisms of the totalitarian state which were required to secure and preserve the specific institutions that kept it standing strong for such a long period of time.

Amongst the most prolific authors of this kind are: Charles Messenger, biographer of several famous Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS personalities and high-ranking officers, such as Generalfeldmarschall⁹ Gerd von Rundstedt, Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel and General der Waffen-SS Josef (Sepp) Dietrich, who also captured in his writings various crucial campaigns of World War II; Michael Reynolds, biographer of the notorious SS-Standartenführer Joachim Peiper and author of a vivid description of I SS Panzer Corps in Normandy and the course of battle; Marc J. Rikmenspoel, the first author who produced a complete Waffen-SS encyclopaedia; Charles W. Sydnor with his relentless judgement of Germany's ideological objectives and how they were upheld by one of the deadliest SS divisions—"Totenkopf" [Eng.: "Death's Head"]; and Gordon Williamson's investigation of Hitler's elite army which also provides an extensive examination of the SS origins, units and main battles, as well as short biographies of some of the Waffen-SS leaders. Williamson is also the author of a rich collection of interviews conducted with former Waffen-SS veterans, providing recollections of controversial facts, all gathered in the book, *Loyalty is my Honour*. Additionally, the list includes dozens of other authors, whether historians, journalists or private researchers, who have provided their own interpretations and descriptions

⁹ All military ranks of the German Armed Forces (*Wehrmacht*) are hereafter provided in German. The English translations and Allied Forces equivalents of these ranks can be found in the *Appendix* section of this book (A. D. Defsta).

of the military campaigns of the Waffen-SS units: Gerry Villani, Jochen Böhler, Jacques Delarue, Adrian Weale, George H. Stein and many others.

The second methodological pattern is supported by professional research and historians who reviewed the Waffen-SS by making full use of all the scientific instruments available, enabling them to approach the subject from social, cultural, anthropological and ethical perspectives. The following authors have produced valuable historical writings, further providing the reader with in-depth analyses on the SS State and its coercive institutions: Hans Buchheim, Martin Cüppers, Antony Beevor, Bastian Hein, Chester Wilmot, Bernd Wegner, John Keegan, René Rohrkamp and others. The list is completed by personal accounts and memoirs which, even though the accuracy of the facts is coloured by the subjectivism of the interpretation, nonetheless provide a wide palette of personal views and eyewitness accounts of the phenomenon. The authors are as follows: Johann Voss, Hubert Meyer, Leon Degrelle, Kurt Meyer, Paul Hausser and others.

A collection of examples of relevant literature and other related works which have been published in the Anglo-American historiography sections, and in Germany respectively, is provided below, with the mention that the list is far from exhaustive. A part of the British historiography in the field of the Waffen-SS, although immense, generally approaches the subject from a narrative perspective and is still prone to moral judgements. Notably, Richard Evans and Ian Kershaw are two prominent British historians who have suggested an alternative research style and engaged in a different form of analytical writing that has enabled them to avoid the traditional approach that characterises most post-war historiography:

I do strongly believe it is unsuitable for any historical writing to indulge itself in the luxury of moral judgements. Firstly, it is non-historical; and secondly, it is arrogant and improper. I cannot imagine how I would have behaved if I had lived under the Third Reich, given the fact that, should I have lived then, I would have been an entirely different person from what I am now. Like Ian Kershaw said: *a foreigner, a non-German person, who did not experience Nazism, may be easily tempted to criticise and demand a standard of behaviour which was impossible to achieve under those circumstances.*¹⁰

¹⁰ Evans, Richard: *Al Treilea Reich*, (București: RAO, 2010), 15.

This is also the case in Antony Beevor's work: *D-Day. Die Schlacht um die Normandie*,¹¹ published in 2011. Several valuable accounts of the Normandy landings had previously been produced in British historiography, so Beevor's gripping narrative work had to reveal new aspects overlooked by some outstanding "predecessors", namely indisputable specialists such as John Keegan, Max Hastings or Chester Wilmot. Beevor researched the matter using a greatly detailed approach, drawing on more than 25 archives from several countries. His "trump card" was, beyond doubt, his expertise in German history, which he used in professionally extracting material from existing archives. His experience in utilising archival material to obtain the best results also enabled him to tackle challenging controversies in military history: British and Canadian *l'esprit du corps*, deficiencies in the Canadian leadership, Montgomery's errors, as well as other controversial matters, which he addressed with a high degree of diligence, sharpened by his academic authority. In this respect, the German troops are treated quite impartially, which represents a novel approach among eminent British historians. Throughout his work, Beevor insists on the differences between the sense of moral duty among those who kept it and those (mainly the Waffen-SS individuals) who had lost it for good. Beevor, who was not just a traditional military historian, assessed that the retreating Waffen-SS troops may have used a lot of brutality in battle; also, he does not seem to approach this subject from a tactical perspective. Discussing Beevor's book, a prolific German historian, Klaus Wiegrefe,¹² reviews several contentious aspects that had been somewhat surprisingly revealed by the British author: unexpectedly, Beevor insisted on using personal accounts that described the German treatment of the prisoners of war, belonging to both the Heer and the Waffen-SS, who were used as human shields or forced to walk through minefields. Beevor also frequently quoted from the memoirs of Allied soldiers which have always been available but never used hitherto, in an attempt to preserve the glamorous image of the "greatest generation" of soldiers, the actual term used by Americans to glorify their triumphant troops who had fought in World War II. Wiegrefe's final conclusion considers the assumption that the number of war crimes committed by Allied soldiers in Normandy in the summer of 1944 is perhaps much greater than modern historians are willing to admit. Beevor's newer book:

¹¹ In the English language, the first edition of Antony Beevor's book was published in 2014 by Penguin, under the name: *D-Day. The Battle for Normandy* (A. D. Defta).

¹² It is Klaus Wiegrefe's review in *Spiegel Online*, 4th May 2010 (A. D. Defta).

Die Ardennen Offensive 1944. Hitlers letzte Schlacht im Westen,¹³ which was published in 2016, deals with Hitler's last attempt to change the course of World War II in his favour and gain a hypothetical separate peace with the Western enemies. According to Beevor's analysis, the Führer's decision had aimed to divide the Western Allies by pushing the British into a new Dunkirk scenario and compelling the Canadians to leave the war. More than in any of his other previous studies, Beevor directs his attention to the elite force of the Third Reich: the Waffen-SS. He recounts with impeccable accuracy how all four SS panzer divisions had been marshalled together in the largest Waffen-SS army ever assembled. The British historian arguably advances the notion that SS formations had failed to show the exceptional effectiveness expected of them, given the fact that they had been equipped with the best weapons and armour available at the time. He gives detailed descriptions of their war crimes, especially highlighting the episode at Malmedy, where American soldiers who had surrendered were killed in cold blood by Waffen-SS troops under the command of SS-Standartenführer Joachim Peiper of the 1st SS Pz. Div., "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler". Beevor also tackles the question of poor military training within the US Army, a fact which enabled German troops to gain the advantage in several well-known cases. One of the best aspects of the book is perhaps found in how fairly the author approaches and treats both warring sides and their predilections to commit atrocities against each other. For example, the Malmedy episode is described as a routine Waffen-SS *modus operandi* for dispatching their prisoners of war. On the Allies' side, the response of the Americans was to execute not only the Waffen-SS captured fighters but also the Heer soldiers. The American actions are treated critically and objectively:

It is surely shocking that a number of generals, from Bradley downwards, openly approved of the shooting of prisoners in retaliation.¹⁴

Beevor's conclusion on the matter is laid out when discussing his view of the campaign, which he regards as "a last spasm of a dying regime", a futile and expensive military operation. George Bennett, a British historian and professor at the University of Plymouth, has also released a comprehensive study of the Normandy landings using British and American archives as well as other written memoirs and reports available

¹³ The book was also published in English: *Ardennes 1944: Hitler's Last Gamble* (Penguin, 2015) (A. D. Defta).

¹⁴ Beevor, Antony: *Ardennes 1944. The Battle of the Bulge*, (Penguin Books, 2015), 364.

in places such as the Devon and Leicester Record Offices, the US Army Center of Military History, various libraries, and even French diocesan archives at Coutances. The study focuses on the military operations of the 116th, 22nd and 507th (Parachute) American infantry regiments and their subsequent encounters with German forces during D-Day. It provides a deep insight into the military formations fighting to break through key German strongpoints of *Festung Europa* [Eng.: “Fortress Europe”].¹⁵ The British historian tackles the legend of D-Day by opening the field of view more broadly to the reader. He also punishes the glamorisation of war for the American audience by closely examining the high price for liberty paid by French civilians in Normandy during the bombardments of St. Lo and Caen. Bennett’s remarkable approach to segregation and race in the American Army is without a doubt one of the main standouts of his book. Ironically, the US Army was involved in a total war against a racist enemy whose ideology concerning race had been widely condemned by the international community, yet racism became a sensitive issue for the British government which was faced with recognising the segregation problem in the American Army stationed in England. By comparison, the situation created by a multicultural and multi-ethnic British Empire ruled out any official support for the American policy of segregation.

As one may have expected, the German historiography on the issue of the Waffen-SS is remarkably committed and consists not only of descriptive frameworks and comprehensive histories of the entire SS army, but also contains in-depth analyses of its structure, personnel, organisation and leadership. Many of the studies examine the background to the collaboration between the high-ranking structures of the Waffen-SS and the Heer High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*); the division and coordination of competencies between the two organisations; and how political ideology and race propaganda imposed upon their own troops led to outbursts of inner self-denial amongst officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and ordinary soldiers. It is the case in Jürgen Förster’s recent work: *Was wäre die Waffen-SS ohne den Generalstab gewesen? Zur strukturellen Zusammenarbeit von Heer und SS*,¹⁶ published in 2015, in Michael Jonas’s (Ed.) *Dynamiken der Gewalt Krieg im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Ideologie*

¹⁵ “Fortress Europa”: it was a military propagandistic term used by both sides during World War II (A. D. Defta).

¹⁶ “What Would the Waffen SS Have Been Without the General Staff? Towards Structural Cooperation Between the Army and the SS” (A. D. Defta).

*und Gesellschaft. Festschrift für Bernd Wegner.*¹⁷ Gerhard Rempel's *Hitler's Children. The Hitler Youth and the SS*, published in 1989, uses descriptive history to provide a full account of this issue by analysing the organisation of the National Socialist Party's youth associations. In examining the relationship between the leadership of the SS and Hitlerjugend, Rempel concludes that this coalition led to formidable outcomes for National Socialism, especially by winning over to their side the youthful, passionate energy of the recruits, an energy that was later brutally and indecently used. The initial political and military success of the Nazis is regarded as a logical outcome, once the youngest generation of Germans had unconditionally and enthusiastically pledged their obedience to Hitler's cause. Rempel previously unearthed relevant historical facts extracted from available archival documents regarding the recruitment methods and regulations, and the special role SS-Obergruppenführer and General der Waffen-SS Gottlob Berger played in transforming the Hitlerjugend Organisation into an exceptional selection base for Waffen-SS recruitment offices.¹⁸ One of the most comprehensive in-depth analyses on the Waffen-SS organisation, personnel and social structure can be found in René Rohrkamp's works: *Weltanschaulich gefestigte Kämpfer. Die Soldaten der Waffen-SS 1933-1945. Organisation – Personal – Sozialstruktur*,¹⁹ published in 2010, and *Die Waffen-SS im letzten Kriegsjahr. Personalwesen und Sozialstruktur*²⁰ released two years later. After introducing the key questions (the problem of the study) and methodology used, Rohrkamp introduces the reader to issues specific to a military organisation and identifies the actual operational framework of the *Waffen-SS als militärische Organisation: eine Organisation ist ein soziales System mit überdurchschnittlich spezifizierter Zielbestimmung und überdurchschnittlich spezifizierter Struktur* (the organisation is a social system with an above-average specified target definition and above-average specified structure).²¹ As far as a typical Waffen-SS soldier is concerned, Rohrkamp

¹⁷ *Dynamics of Violence: War Between Politics, Ideology and Society. Commemorative Publication Dedicated to Bernd Wegner* (A. D. Defta).

¹⁸ See: "Gottlob Berger and Waffen-SS Recruitment 1939-1945", in: *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 27 (1980).

¹⁹ *Fighters Established Through Ideological Terms. The Soldiers of the Waffen SS 1933-1945. Organisation – Personal – Social Structure* (A. D. Defta).

²⁰ *The Waffen-SS in the Last Year of War. Human Resources and Social Structure* (A. D. Defta).

²¹ Rohrkamp, René: "*Weltanschaulich gefestigte Kämpfer*". *Die Soldaten der Waffen-SS 1933-1945. Organisation – Personal – Sozialstruktur* (Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 41.

builds his study around a few key questions: Who would become a member of the Waffen-SS? What is the social profile of the candidate? Were there any particular social traits known in the Waffen-SS? To what degree was the person's social profile reflected in the Organisation's purposes? Were any of the tasks specific to military activities, such as efficiency, discipline and commitment, mirrored in the social background of the Waffen-SS members?²² Apart from analytical comments, the study also contains a large number of charts, diagrams and tables, dealing with death rates at a certain time and geographical areas, recruitment variations, timescale between medical examination and admission to the Waffen-SS, comparisons between awarding military decorations to Waffen-SS and Heer divisions, comparative tables showing the educational background of soldiers, NCOs and officers from the Waffen-SS and the Heer, suicide and suicide attempts, desertions and so on. Finally, a detailed chronological table of the events, covering the entire history of the Third Reich with a special focus on SA, SS and Waffen-SS organisations, is appended to the study. A welcomed new study on the Waffen-SS was published in 2014 and gave a fresher insight on the topic. The work is signed by three reputable German experts in the field: Jan Erik Schulte, Peter Lieb and Bernd Wegner, and their study is called *Die Waffen-SS. Neue Forschungen*.²³ Schulte, Lieb and Wegner's book addresses key questions as regards the history of Hitler's notorious political army by focusing on new research topics, such as the role played by female personnel within the Waffen-SS, or understanding how the motivation of foreign volunteers (*ausländische Freiwilligen*) was built and preserved at a high level at all times.²⁴ Special analyses are devoted to the volunteers originating from Yugoslavia, Romania, Estonia, Denmark and Norway. The contribution of certain Waffen-SS units to running and executing the Holocaust is also assessed. One of the most appreciated historical writings ever produced on the Waffen-SS is perhaps *Hitlers politische Soldaten. Die Waffen-SS 1933-*

²² *Ibid.*, 47.

²³ *The Waffen-SS. New Research* (A. D. Defsta).

²⁴ The foreign volunteers' motivation and commitment were arguably higher, in some respects, than those of Waffen-SS members of pure German origin, especially when considering that in the last days of the Battle of Berlin, French SS "Charlemagne" and the soldiers of "Nordland" divisions formed the core of the last resisting units fighting for Germany. For further reading, see: Beevor, Antony: *Berlin – The Downfall 1945*; Bishop, Chris: *SS Hitler's Foreign Volunteers in the Waffen-SS 1940-1945*; Le Tissier, Tony: *SS Charlemagne: the 33rd Waffen-SS Grenadier Division of the SS*; Trigg, Johnathan: *Hitler's Gauls: the History of the 33rd Waffen Division Charlemagne* etc. (A. D. Defsta).

1945²⁵ published in 2008. This work is by the reputed expert and historian, Bernd Wegner. The book is thoroughly comprehensive and covers all the essential issues: ideology (an in-depth background is given focusing on nationalism, authoritarianism and militarism, followed by a close analysis of specific SS concepts such as *Lebensraum*,²⁶ *Heerenschaft*,²⁷ *Germanische Frühzeit*, *Rassen Konzept* and *Weltanschauung*²⁸); organisation (from the early small SS formations through the *Röhm-Putsch* [Eng.: The Night of the Long Knives] and the reorganisation of the *Reichsführung-SS* (the leadership of the SS) and the organisation of the *Totenkopfverbände*²⁹ respectively, to setting up the *Junkerschulen* and the final militarisation of the SS); training and education (a critical examination of the learning plan within the *Junkerschulen*, the standardisation of military concepts specific to the *Waffen-SS*, the formation of operational units, etc.); social structure (regional recruitment offices and their operational methods, confessional and NSDAP members' allegiance, and the "Führerkorps" of the *Waffen-SS*); and expansion (specific problems, solutions for continuity as regards the principles of volunteering, *Waffen-SS* losses, the shortage of military commanders, especially NCOs, and General Staff positions).

The historiography on the *Waffen-SS* is further complemented by a number of books written by a prolific French historian, Jean-Luc Leleu, who published both in France and Germany. Leleu wrote his PhD Thesis, *Soldats politiques en guerre: Sociologie, organisation, rôles et comportements des formations de la Waffen-SS en considération particulière de leur présence en Europe de l'Ouest, 1940-1944* under the supervision of Professor Bernd Wegner from "Universität Bundeswehr" in Hamburg and thus became one of the best-known non-German historians specialising in

²⁵ In English, Bernd Wegner's book was first published in New York by Blackwell Publishers in 1990: "The *Waffen-SS*: Organization, Ideology and Function" (A. D. Defta).

²⁶ "Living Space". German concepts of settler colonialism which proliferated before and during the Third Reich (A. D. Defta).

²⁷ "Lordship"—a propagandistic German term inducing the idea of German superiority and supremacy (A. D. Defta).

²⁸ "Worldview"—a German term linked with Hitler's political views (A. D. Defta).

²⁹ "SS-Totenkopfverbände" (abbreviated SS-TV; literally "Death's Head Units") was the SS organisation responsible for the administration and function of the Nazi concentration camps and extermination camps in Nazi Germany, among other similar duties. For further reading, see: Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis C (June 1997), *Volume II: The Schutzstaffeln (SS)*. Part 3 of 16 (A. D. Defta).

Waffen-SS matters. In his PhD Thesis, Leleu examines some of the main topics with a special focus on the Waffen-SS divisions which fought on the Eastern Front: “Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler”, “Totenkopf” and “Das Reich”. Among his best-known works that appeared in Germany are “Imaginerter Feind, erklärter Feind. Die Wahrnehmung der Waffen-SS durch die westlichen Armeen im Verlauf des Zweiten Weltkrieges”³⁰ published in 2012, in Jörg Echternkamp’s (Ed.) book: *Militär in Deutschland und Frankreich* [Eng.: “The Military in Germany and France”]. He is also the author of a comprehensive study in the French language, *La Waffen-SS. Soldats politiques en guerre*,³¹ which he published in 2007. Another non-German author whose work was released in Germany is Carlo Gentile. His book, *Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Partisanenkrieg. Italien 1943-1945*,³² was published in 2012.

As already stated above, a vast literature consisting of hundreds of studies, pieces of research and historiographies published in all European languages has been dedicated to the topic of the Waffen-SS; however, when we refer to the “Waffen-SS” we mean a large multi-national military organisation consisting of almost one million men spread throughout no less than 38 divisions. Only a few of these formations have been the subject of research, and most of them were only occasionally dealt with. Therefore, the existing Waffen-SS literature consists mainly of works dedicated to a limited number of divisions, for example: “Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler”, “Das Reich”, “Totenkopf”, “Polizei”, “Wiking”, “Charlemagne”, “Dirlewanger” and “Hitlerjugend”.

As far as the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend” is concerned, despite its notoriety and fame, it has been somewhat overlooked by historians. While Alexander McKee (*Caen – Anvil of Victory*, published 2012) and Michael Reynolds (*Steel Inferno. I SS Panzer Corps in Normandy*, published 1997) investigated the German units—including the Hitlerjugend Division—which went up against the Allied army in the Normandy invasion, among non-German authors, only Rupert Butler has written an inconclusive history of the 12th SS Division alone. Titled *SS-Hitlerjugend – The History of the 12th SS Division 1943-1945*, the work was published in 2012. The only detailed historical work dedicated to the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend” belongs exclusively to Hubert Meyer, its former commander from 6th

³⁰ Imagined Enemy, Declared Enemy. The Perception of the Waffen-SS by the Western Armies in the Course of the Second World War (A. D. Defta).

³¹ *The Waffen-SS. Political Soldiers at War* (A. D. Defta).

³² *The Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS in Partisan War. Italy 1943-1945* (A. D. Defta).

September 1944 until 24th October 1944 when he was replaced by SS-Brigadeführer Fritz Kraemer. His book, entitled *Kriegsgeschichte der 12. SS Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend*,³³ was published in 1982, long after his former fellow officer and division commander, Kurt Meyer, had published his memoirs, *Grenadiere*, in 1957, a book which to this day is regarded as an attempt to glorify the Waffen-SS organisation. The eminent American historian, Charles W. Sydnor Jr., an expert on the Holocaust and World War II, reckons that *Grenadiere* is perhaps the “most truculent of the apologetically written testimonies”.³⁴ It should be said that, in using this harsh expression, Sydnor appears to neglect a series of valuable information released by Kurt Meyer that was later confirmed to have been accurate according to the available archival documents released for public research in recent years. Coming back to Hubert Meyer’s exclusive history of the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend”, it should be noted that the book was the result of 14 years of laborious effort, at the end of which the former SS-Sturmbannführer was eventually able to present his work to German readers; it was the first time a history about the division he had once commanded became available in German. Hubert Meyer’s writing provides a detailed reconstruction of the events from the very beginning of the Hitlerjugend Division until its final disbandment in May 1945 and makes full use of the war diaries found in American, Canadian, British and German archives. He also used a variety of personal accounts from the Division’s veterans whom he had been able to interview; as he admits, the former divisional commander restricted himself to describing facts, without any attempt to debate the social and moral aspects of the actual military conduct of his division. During his research, Hubert Meyer managed to build up valuable networks with former enemies—Canadian, American and British veterans—whom he met and visited the fields of Normandy with. His book does not contain any reference to the controversial conduct of some of his men, nor does it sociologically analyse the structure of his division’s personnel, leadership and ideology. Historiographies that discuss the last days of the Battle of Berlin are full of reports and accounts about the active presence of Hitlerjugend fighters who kept on fighting until the very end of the war. Many of the writings describe young teenagers aged 14-16 using weapons and fighting fanatically for a lost cause, hence why the phrase “baby division” was often mistakenly associated with the Hitlerjugend Panzer Division. When

³³ In English, Hubert Meyer’s book was published in two volumes under the name: *The 12th SS: The History of the Hitler Youth Panzer Division* (A. D. Defta).

³⁴ Sydnor, Charles W.: *The History of the SS Totenkopfdivision and the Post War Mythology of the Waffen-SS*, (Cambridge University Press), 340-360.

conducting the present research, I failed to identify any documentary proof of boys who were younger than 17 when recruited into the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend”; in light of this, I conclude that such accounts were the result of a misunderstanding whereby the young boys belonging to the Hitler Youth (the youth organisation of the NSDAP) were confused with the actual soldiers who formed the Hitlerjugend Panzer Division. It is important to remember that the latter did not actually participate in the final battle to defend the capital city of the Third Reich. Such an error surprisingly endures, even in the recent writings of eminent historians. Antony Beevor is a relevant example of such an author who seems to confuse the young boys of the Hitler Youth with the soldiers of the Hitlerjugend Panzer Division: he refers to the “so-called Hitlerjugend Division”³⁵ under the command of Artur Axmann who allegedly supervised their training at *Reichspostfeld* and taught them how to use anti-tank weapons during the Battle of Berlin. Yet Axmann was, at the time, *Reichsjugendführer* [Reich Youth Leader] and had no commanding attributes in the Waffen-SS whatsoever. Beevor’s misapprehension is confirmed by another account in his book that tells the story of General Helmuth Weidling, the last commander of the Berlin Defence Area during the Battle of Berlin. The General is renowned for having strongly opposed Axmann’s decision to throw into battle young boys of 15 years of age, arguing that “such action would be nothing but a futile sacrifice of the kids”. All that Axmann had to say was that he regretted the insufficient training of his boys and did nothing to stop them from engaging in the battle.³⁶ Using underage boys in the final fight for Berlin was indeed the logical outcome of the long-term alliance between the Hitler Youth and the SS. Answering Goebbels’ call for *Totaler Krieg* [Eng.: Total War],³⁷ the subsequent mobilisation of an army of children into the *Volkssturm* [territorial German army raised at the end of World War II] became a matter of normality, given the state of affairs in those days. In order to evaluate the military performance of those young boys, it is perhaps sufficient to refer to Klaus Küster’s case, a 15-year-old teenager. He was a specialist in knocking out T-34s from a range of less than 50 metres. Like him, there were more than a thousand boys in Berlin alone capable of similar impressive feats, otherwise accessible only to battle-hardened,

³⁵ Beevor, Antony: *Berlin. Căderea – 1945*, (București: Editura RAO, 2013), 316.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 434.

³⁷ “Total War” was a concept advanced by the Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels, at a meeting held in Berlin Sportpalast on 18th February 1943. On that occasion, he called for “total war” against the Axis enemies (A. D. Defita).

experienced panzer grenadiers.³⁸ Having asserted that, there is a need to further explore how this kind of military proficiency was the result of a perverted education that had been foisted upon the majority of German children and teenagers, and how this had indecently removed any trace of their candour. Accounts of the behaviour displayed by the teenagers of the Hitler Youth fighting in the Battle of Berlin are nevertheless extremely valuable for they create an illustrative and relatively complete portrait of the youngsters who were supposed to be later recruited into the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend” should World War II drag on.

A new study regarding the panzer regiments of the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend” in Normandy was published by Hungarian military historian and analyst, Norbert Számvéber, in 2012. The book is actually a reproduction of the war diaries (*Kriegstagebücher*) of the 12th SS Pz. Regiment and the 12th SS *Panzerjäger-Abteilung*; in spite of a lack of basic analysis and comments on strategy, Számvéber’s writing introduces the reader into the real atmosphere of those days of battle, as they were written in the fields and forests of Normandy in the summer of 1944. Alexander McKee and Michael Reynolds are the only non-German well-known authors whose writings, though they may not be comprehensive histories, are exclusively devoted to the 12th SS Pz. Div. “Hitlerjugend” and contain substantial accounts on this unit as part of the German forces defending Normandy in 1944. Former Major General of the British Army, Michael (Mike) Reynolds, gives an impressive tactical analysis of the Leibstandarte and Hitlerjugend units fighting to forestall the Allied advance in Normandy; his testimony is perhaps more compelling if we take into account that he had started his career as a traditional military historian. As a historian, Reynolds had been an adept exponent of a typically conservative and “patriotic” persuasion that overvalued his fellow countrymen and attached depreciative labels to the German enemies. Towards the end of his prolific writing career, Reynolds reviewed his considerations dramatically:

It is strange that in the post-war years, the former Allies have spent so much time criticising each other, but admiring their enemy—particularly the Waffen-SS. At the end of the day, it has to be said that the soldiers of

³⁸ Rempel, Gerhard: *Hitler’s Children. The Hitler Youth and the SS*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 239.