

## THE GERMAN SOLDIER

### Manpower Problems

a. **ANNUAL CLASS SYSTEM.** When Hitler re-introduced general conscription in 1935, the greatest possible care was taken to create a strong military force without disrupting the economic life of the nation. Men were registered by annual classes and during the years before the war those of the older classes were called only in small groups to attend training exercises of limited duration. Even for the younger classes, all feasible arrangements were made for the deferment of students and of those engaged in necessary occupations. Men accepted for active service were called to the colors by individual letter rather than by public announcement for their annual class. This system was continued in the gradual mobilization which preceded the outbreak of the war in such a way that the wartime Army could be built up organically and the normal course of life was not seriously upset.

b. **WAR DEVELOPMENTS.** As long as the war was conducted on a limited scale, the Armed Forces were very liberal in granting occupational and medical discharges. As the war progressed and grew in scope and casualties mounted, it became necessary to recall many of these men and eventually to reach increasingly into both the older and the younger age groups.

After Germany changed from the offensive to the defensive in 1943, it became both possible and necessary to transfer an increasing number of Air Force and naval personnel to the Army, to enforce "voluntary" enlistment in the *Waffen-SS*, and to commit line-of-communication units to regular combat not only against partisans but against regular enemy forces.

The increasingly heavy losses of the Russian campaign forced Hitler to cancel his order exempting "last sons" of decimated families and fathers of large families from front-line combat duty. Prisons and concentration camps were combed out for men who could be used in penal combat units with the inducement of possible later reinstatement of their civic rights.

Although a "total mobilization" was carried out in the spring of 1943, after Stalingrad, it became necessary by the end of that year to lower the physical classification standards drastically and to register men up to 60 years of age for mili-



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tary service. Even men with severe stomach ailments were drafted into special-diet battalions. During the summer of 1944, civilian occupations were reduced to an absolutely necessary minimum. Finally, the remaining male civilians from 16 to 60 were made liable for home defense combat service in the "*Volkssturm*" and even Hitler Youth boys and girls were called up as auxiliaries.

Along with these measures there went a continuous reorganization of combat as well as administrative units for the purpose of increasing efficiency and saving personnel.

The strength of divisions was lowered while their firepower was increased and their components were made more flexible. Severe comb-outs were made among rear-area personnel and technical specialists. The strongest possible measures were introduced against waste of manpower, inefficiency, and desertions, particularly after the Army was brought under the ever increasing control of the SS, in the summer and autumn of 1944.

After the Allied breakthrough in France, Himmler was appointed Commander of the Replacement Army and as such made the *Waffen-SS* the backbone of German national defense. Whole units of the Air Force and Navy were taken over and trained by the *Waffen-SS* and then distributed among depleted field units. The organization and employment of the *Volkssturm* is under Himmler's direct control.

The complicated record system of the Armed Forces was maintained in principle but streamlined for the sake of saving manpower.

c. **FOREIGN ELEMENTS.** (1) *Original policy.* In their attempts to solve their ever acute manpower problems, the Germans have not neglected to make the fullest possible use of foreign elements for almost every conceivable purpose and by almost every conceivable method. Originally, great stress was laid on keeping the Armed Forces nationally "pure". Jews and Gypsies were excluded from military service. Foreign volunteers were not welcomed. Germans residing abroad and possessing either German or dual citizenship were rounded up through the German consulates from 1937 on. When Germany set out to invade other countries, beginning with Austria, only the inhabitants of these countries who were held to be of German or related blood became liable to German military service; the Czech minority in Austria, for example, was exempted.



(2) *Recruiting of foreigners.* With the invasion of Russia in June 1941, German propagandists set themselves to the task of changing the whole aspect of the war from a national German affair to a "European war of liberation from Communism". In this way the Nazis were able to obtain a considerable number of volunteers from occupied and even neutral countries, who were organized in combat units of their own in German uniforms and under German training. The original policy was to incorporate racially related "Germanic" people, such as the Dutch and Scandinavians, into the *Waffen-SS* and non-Germanic people such as the Croats into the Army. When the failures in Russia and other increasing difficulties began to affect the morale of the foreigners, their "voluntary recruitment" became more and more a matter of compulsion and their service in separate national units had to be brought under more rigid supervision. The organization of such units, therefore, was turned over in increasing measure to the *Waffen-SS*, even in the case of racially non-Germanic elements.

At the same time, it became necessary for the Army to fill its own depleted German units by adding a certain percentage of foreign recruits. This was done partly by declaring the inhabitants of annexed territories, such as the Polish Corridor, to be "racial Germans" (*Volksdeutsche*), making them provisional German citizens subject to induction into the Armed Forces. A considerable source of manpower was Soviet prisoners of war of different national origins. Some of these were put into regular German units as "racial" Germans; others were employed in such units as "auxiliary volunteers". Separate national units also were created from Cossacks and from the numerous peoples who inhabit the Caucasus and Turkestan and are collectively referred to by the Germans as "Eastern Peoples" (*Ostvölker*). Every possible inducement has been used for the recruiting of foreigners, including their religion, as in the case of the Mohammedans in the Balkans. Only in the case of Jews and Gypsies was the original policy of exclusion not only upheld but extended during the war to include those of 50 per cent Jewish descent.