

History 202: The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Soldiers in World War II

Professor: Dr. Christopher W. Huffman

University of Pennsylvania

Semester: Fall 2014

Course days/time: Thursdays from 6:00 pm — 9:00 pm

Location: Willams Hall, room 216

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Individual meetings can be scheduled for before or after class or by appointment

Course Description:

The Waffen-SS (armed SS) are considered to be not only an elite group of soldiers, but also Hitler's/Nazi Germany's most determined and fanatical troops. Waffen-SS soldiers were predominantly volunteers and were recruited from Germany and other areas from across Nazi occupied Europe; the ranks included not just men from Germany, but ethnic Germans from much of Europe, and also men from many different nationalities in Europe. Throughout the war, Waffen-SS troops were deployed to many of the toughest and most critical sectors of the front, whether to attack or defend. While individual Waffen-SS soldiers often displayed significant battlefield fighting ability, there are a number of well-documented war crimes that some Waffen-SS troops participated in. This course will focus on the reality and the history of the Waffen-SS, examining the role they played, and the men who served in Waffen-SS units (both in combat and behind the front lines). The readings assigned for the course include actual accounts by soldiers of various Waffen-SS divisions, and include such primary source elements as memoirs, diaries, and wartime letters. Those types of sources are at the heart of what is considered the new military history, as well as everyday life history, and the emphasis is placed on the enlisted men, NCOs, and junior officers, who made up the majority of the Waffen-SS. In this way, students will get a sense of the average Waffen-SS soldier's view from below, the concrete reality and everyday lives of those individuals as experienced in wartime, both on the home front and the front lines, and the immediacy of their lives in what was the largest, most costly, most widespread, and most devastating war in human history. In addition, books and other readings for the course have been assigned which are written by historians, which will enable students to gain a greater sense of expert's views on the Waffen-SS/Waffen-SS soldiers and their place in history. The course will be discussion-based, which will promote student involvement, participation, interaction with the professor, and analysis, retention, and understanding of the readings under discussion.

Required Book Chapter:

Bernd Wegner, "My Honour is Loyalty.' The SS as a Military Factor in Hitler's Germany," in *The German Military in the Age of Total War*, edited by Wilhelm Deist and published in Dover, NH by Berg in 1985 (pages 220-239)

Required Books: (please pay close attention to the ISBN when obtaining/ordering books so that everyone will have the same editions with the same contents/pagination)

George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, 1939-45*; ISBN: 978-0801492754

Charles W. Sydnor, Jr., *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death's Head Division, 1933-1945*; ISBN: 978-0691008530

Hendrik Verton, *In the Fire of the Eastern Front: The Experiences of a Dutch Waffen-SS Volunteer, 1941-45*; ISBN: 978-0811735896

Johann Voss, *Black Edelweiss: A Memoir of Combat and Conscience by a Soldier of the Waffen-SS*; 978-0966638981

Erik Wallin and Thorolf Hillblad, ed., *Twilight of the Gods: A Swedish Waffen-SS Volunteer's Experiences with the 11th SS Panzergrenadier Division Nordland, Eastern Front, 1944-45*; ISBN: 978-0811736053

Wolf T. Zoepf, *Seven Days in January with the 6th SS-Mountain Division in Operation Nordwind*; ISBN: 978-0966638967

Required Journal Articles:

Mark P. Gingerich, "Waffen SS Recruitment in the "Germanic Lands," 1940-1941," *The Historian* 59 (1997), pages 815-30

George M. Kren and Leon H. Rappoport, "The Waffen SS: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Armed Forces and Society*, Volume 3, Number 1, November 1976, pages 87-102

Peter Scharff Smith, Niels Bo Poulsen and Claus Bundgård Christensen, "The Danish Volunteers in the Waffen SS and German Warfare at the Eastern front," *Contemporary European History*, 8, I (1999), pages 73-96

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance is very important and will be recorded every class. It is also a key part of the course grade. Every effort needs to be made to attend each class, to arrive on time, and to stay until the completion of class. If a student misses a class they will not receive attendance credit for that class unless they can provide the professor with sufficient documented proof of an excusable absence, such as for a medical emergency (where a

medical doctor could provide documentation). The professor reserves the right to deduct attendance points for students who arrive late to class or leave early from class without an excusable reason and documentation, and to withdraw a student from the class for excessive absences. It is also important for students to strive for one hundred percent attendance because notes should be taken and class times are when discussions will be held, and papers will be handed in. Papers are to be handed in at scheduled times; points may be deducted otherwise. Papers should be handed in to professor on dates noted on the syllabus to the professor in class (papers are not to be emailed, mailed, dropped off to the office or to an office mailbox, etc.). Since this is a discussion-based course, student participation is extremely important, and so a record will be made of participation which will also be factored into the grade for class attendance/participation. Students are encouraged to participate/contribute to the class discussions often.

Statement on Academic Honesty:

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated at the University of Pennsylvania. Academic dishonesty refers to actions such as, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabricating research, falsifying academic documents, etc., and includes all situations where students make use of the work of others and claim such work as their own. More information may be found concerning these policies on UPenn.edu, such as by viewing the Code of Student Conduct (<https://provost.upenn.edu/policies/pennbook/2013/02/15/code-of-student-conduct>) and the Code of Academic Integrity (<https://provost.upenn.edu/policies/pennbook/2013/02/13/code-of-academic-integrity>).

Student Disabilities Services Office Information:

Student Disabilities Services (SDS) is an office at the University of Pennsylvania which can determine reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who request accommodations need to submit documentation of their disability according to the SDS Documentation Guidelines available at: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/index.php>. If a student request is made, the SDS Documentation Review Committee reviews all documentation to determine reasonable accommodations.

Assessment and Grading:

Class attendance/participation: 20%

Primary source analysis paper: 10% (students will write a brief paper of 3 (full)-5 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font) which will be on a chapter students will select [one of the main chapters; not an introduction or conclusion] from one of the memoirs assigned for class; students should select a chapter that is long enough to contain sufficient information for the paper)

Research paper proposal: 10% (students will write a brief 2 (full)-3 page paper (double-spaced, 12-point font) concerning their paper proposal which will include a provisional research paper title as well as a synopsis of the themes they plan to develop in the paper, and why they consider the proposal to be a strong one)

Annotated bibliography: 10% (a 1 (full)-10 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) annotated bibliography including citations and descriptions of each source you plan to use [provisional list] for the research paper); in the annotated bibliography there should be at least five primary and five secondary sources listed that you plan to use in your paper (sources/readings beyond books and other readings assigned for class)

Research paper: 50%: Students will write about an aspect of the Waffen-SS/Waffen-SS Soldiers in World War II (it is important that students focus on an issue/topic that is defined/focused enough for class paper length); students are encouraged to consult with the professor about paper topic before writing papers; paper will be based on both primary and secondary sources – use printed sources, not online/internet/web-based sources – and the paper (typed) text length is to be 15 (full) to 20 pages (the header/title page, page numbers, citations, and bibliography do not count towards actual paper text length noted above), double-spaced, in 12-point font with 1 inch margins all-around and pages numbered; students should consult a style manual, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Turabian, APA, or MLA; there should be citations (listing source and giving page number(s) where sources quoted or taken from a text, article, etc., should be listed) and a bibliography (bibliography must have separate sections where primary and secondary sources are listed separately; students may use a class book or books (and/or other readings assigned for class) as sources in the bibliography but additional sources besides a class book(s) and/or other readings assigned for class must also be used in the paper and cited in the bibliography). At a minimum, there need to be at least five primary sources and five secondary sources (sources above and beyond any books or other readings assigned for class that might be used for paper); it is encouraged that there be further sources used beyond the minimum. Do not include a source(s) in the bibliography unless that source is cited at least once in the actual paper. Page number(s) from exactly where a citation was taken from need to be provided in the citation(s) [unless there is the rare occurrence that there is not a page number in the source that is used]. The University of Pennsylvania library is a good place to begin paper research; in addition there are other college/university libraries in the area, the Philadelphia city library, and almost any book or article can be ordered for you by the University of Pennsylvania library through inter-library loan (if those sources are not available at the University of Pennsylvania library). There are plenty of printed books and articles (such as scholarly journal articles) that are available to be used for the paper such as at the University of Pennsylvania library or other nearby libraries and through inter-library loan, and you can also make use of archives (e.g., letters, diaries/journals, government records, etc.) if they are pertinent to your paper topic. To reiterate: no online/internet/web-based sources should be used for papers; just about any book can be ordered through inter-library loan, many printed articles should be available at nearby libraries, and articles can also be printed; articles that are not available at the library can be ordered from another library (and a printed copy or electronic version of the article can be delivered to the library requesting the copy). Microfilm/microfiche materials (e.g., newspapers, etc., if pertinent to your paper), such as at a library, can also be used as sources. It is important that students allow enough time before the paper is due for conducting research, ordering materials through inter-library loan (if applicable), and writing/typing/editing the paper.

Classroom Guidelines:

It is required for students to bring the appropriate book and/or other assigned reading to class that will be discussed that day since the course is discussion-based and the professor may want to refer students to certain pages or have students read/focus on certain passages of the text during class; additionally, students may want to refer others to certain pages or sections during the discussion.

Classroom decorum is important. Not only should students be on time to class and stay until class is finished, but they should always be polite, courteous, and respectful to each other and to the professor. Class discussions should be conducted in a calm and rational way and the professor will act as the facilitator, arbiter, and director of the class discussions. Rude and/or disruptive behavior is against university guidelines and the professor may deduct attendance/participation points and/or take appropriate action for any such cases. If any rude or disruptive behavior would continue after a warning, the professor reserves the right to withdraw a student from the class.

Students are encouraged to take notes in class, either with a pen or pencil and paper or by using a laptop computer. Laptop computers should only be used for taking class notes if used in class. There should be no reading of non-class materials during class, or completing assignments for other classes, or doing other non-class related activities.

Audio and/or photographic or video recording of class is not permitted. Music devices should not be used during class. Cell phones should be turned off or put on silent before entering the classroom and should not be answered or used (that includes talking on the phone, texting, etc.) during the class.

Schedule and Assignments:

Note: As per student readings, students are to have read material denoted below before the class noted below when material will be discussed. Having read the appropriate material in time before class, students should come to class prepared to participate/contribute in a thoughtful, informed, and constructive manner, such as, for example, if called upon to answer a question, or when engaging in a class discussion.

August 28: Introductions of professor and students; introduction to the course; syllabuses distributed and explained

September 4: Theme: A Historian's Overview of the Waffen-SS; discussion of Stein, *The Waffen-SS*, Preface-Chapter 6

September 11: Theme: A Historian's Overview of the Waffen-SS and Selected Scholarly Studies on the Waffen-SS; discussion of Stein, *The Waffen-SS*, Chapter 7-Appendix IV, Gingerich, "Waffen SS Recruitment," Kren, "The Waffen SS," Smith, "The Danish Volunteers," and Wegner, "My Honour is Loyalty"

September 18: Theme: A Historian's Focus on a Specific Waffen-SS Division; Discussion of Sydnor, *Soldiers of Destruction*, List of Illustrations-Chapter 5

September 25: Theme: A Historian's Focus on a Specific Waffen-SS Division; discussion of Sydnor, *Soldiers of Destruction*, Chapter 6-Postscript

October 2: Themes: Foreign Volunteers of the Waffen-SS and the Eastern Front; discussion of Verton, *In the Fire of the Eastern Front*, Foreword-Chapter 15; primary source analysis paper due handed in to professor in class

October 9-12: Fall term break: no classes

October 16: Themes: Foreign Volunteers of the Waffen-SS and the Eastern Front; discussion of Verton, *In the Fire of the Eastern Front*, Chapter 16-Epilogue; research paper proposal due handed in to professor in class

October 23: Theme: The Northern Front; discussion of Voss, *Black Edelweiss*, Introduction-Chapter 12

October 30: Theme: The Northern Front; discussion of Voss, *Black Edelweiss*, Chapter 13-Epilogue; annotated bibliography due handed in to professor in class

November 6: Themes: The Western Front and Operation *Nordwind*; discussion of Zoepf, *Seven Days in January*, Foreword-The Third Day

November 13: Themes: The Western Front and Operation *Nordwind*; discussion of Zoepf, *Seven Days in January*, The Fourth Day-Rank Equivalences

November 20: Themes: The Battle of Berlin and the End of the War; discussion of Wallin, *Twilight of the Gods*, Map-Chapter 8

November 25: Themes: The Battle of Berlin and the End of the War; discussion of Wallin, *Twilight of the Gods*, Chapter 9-Appendix III

November 26-30: Thanksgiving break begins at 4:30pm on November 26 and extends through November 30

December 4: Research paper due handed in to professor in class; film/documentary on the Waffen-SS/Waffen-SS soldiers; discussion of film/documentary to follow; last day of class for this course