

= HIAG =

HIAG (German : Hilfspgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen Waffen @-@ SS , literally " Mutual aid association of former Waffen @-@ SS members ") was a lobby group and a revisionist veteran 's organisation founded by former high @-@ ranking Waffen @-@ SS personnel in West Germany in 1951 . Its main objective was to achieve legal , economic and historical rehabilitation of the Waffen @-@ SS .

To achieve its aims , the organisation used contacts with political parties and employed multi @-@ prong historical revisionism and propaganda efforts , including periodicals , books and public speeches . A HIAG @-@ owned publishing house , Munin Verlag , served as a platform for its publicity aims . This extensive body of work ? 57 book titles and more than 50 years of monthly periodicals ? has been described by historians as revisionist apologia .

Always in touch with its Nazi past , HIAG was a subject of significant controversy , both in West Germany and abroad . The organisation drifted into right @-@ wing extremism in its later history ; it was disbanded in 1992 at the federal level , but local groups , along with the organisation 's monthly periodical , continued to exist into the 21st century .

While HIAG only partially achieved its goals of legal and economic rehabilitation of Waffen @-@ SS , its propaganda efforts led to the reshaping of the image of Waffen @-@ SS in popular culture . The results are still felt , with scholarly treatments being out @-@ weighed by a large amount of amateur historical studies , memoirs , picture books , websites and wargames .

= = Post @-@ World War II context = =

The Potsdam Conference held by the Soviet Union , United Kingdom and United States from 17 July to 2 August 1945 determined the occupation policies that the Allied @-@ occupied Germany was to face . These included demilitarisation , denazification , democratisation and decentralisation . The Allies ' attempts were often perceived by the population as " victors ' justice " and met with limited success . For those in the Western zones of occupation , the arrival of the Cold War undermined these policies further by reviving the ideas of the necessity to fight against Soviet communism , echoing those of Hitler .

Another important post @-@ war development was the decision to rearm West Germany . In 1950 , after the outbreak of the Korean War , it became clear to the Western Allies that a German army would have to be revived to help face off against the Soviet Union . Many former German officers were convinced , however , that no future German army would be possible without the moral rehabilitation of the Wehrmacht . To this end , in October 1950 , a group of former senior officers produced a document , which became known as the Himmerod memorandum , for West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer . It included these key demands :

All German soldiers convicted as war criminals would be released ;

The " defamation " of the German soldier , including those of the Waffen @-@ SS , would have to cease ;

The " measures to transform both domestic and foreign public opinion " with regards to the German military would need to be taken .

Adenauer accepted these propositions and in turn advised the representatives of the three Western powers that German armed forces would not be possible as long as German soldiers remained in custody . To accommodate the West German government , the Allies commuted a number of war crimes sentences . Public declaration from Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower followed in January 1951 , which read in part :

I have come to know that there is a real difference between the regular German soldier and officer and Hitler and his criminal group . For my part , I do not believe that the German soldier as such has lost his honor . The fact that certain individuals committed in war dishonorable and despicable acts reflects on the individuals concerned and not on the great majority of German soldiers and officers .

In the same year (1951) , some former career officers of the Wehrmacht were granted war pensions under the Basic Law . Unlike the Wehrmacht , the SS had been deemed a criminal

organisation at the Nuremberg trials and could thus act as an " alibi of a nation " (as Gerald Reitlinger 's 1956 book of that title suggested) . The SS was the entity onto which all crimes of the Nazi regime were conveniently shifted . Consequently , Waffen @-@ SS career soldiers were not covered under the 1951 law .

In 1949 , the political climate was changing and the ban on forming veterans ' associations had been lifted . Encouraged by the shifting tone of the World War II discourse and the courting of the Wehrmacht veterans by the West German government and political parties , former Waffen @-@ SS members came forward to campaign for their rights .

= = Formation = =

HIAG began in late 1950 as a loose association of local so @-@ called support groups . The majority of participants were officers , most often of junior grades . In the summer of 1951 , HIAG was formally established by Otto Kumm , a former SS @-@ Brigadeführer . By October 1951 , HIAG consisted of 376 local branches .

= = = Leadership = = =

In December 1951 , former high @-@ ranking Waffen @-@ SS general Paul Hausser became HIAG 's first spokesperson . Two well @-@ known former Waffen @-@ SS commanders ? Felix Steiner and Herbert Otto Gille ? became early leading figures . Sepp Dietrich and Kurt Meyer became active members upon their release from prison , in 1955 and 1954 respectively ; Meyer became HIAG 's most effective spokesman . After Meyer 's death in 1961 , Erich Eberhardt , formerly of SS Division Totenkopf , assumed that role . As of 1977 , Wilhelm Bittrich served as the chairman ; as of 1976 Hubert Meyer acted as the federal spokesperson .

Ostensibly , HIAG existed to provide aid to veterans , but it included many members who were convicted war criminals . These included Bittrich , Dietrich , Meyer and Gustav Lombard . Kumm managed to avoid extradition to Yugoslavia to stand trial for war crimes by fleeing over the wall of the Dachau internment camp .

= = = Organisational principles = = =

With the publication of its first periodical in late 1951 , HIAG was beginning to draw attention to itself and generate public controversy , including speculation that it was a neo @-@ Nazi organisation . In response , Hausser wrote an open letter to the Bundestag denying these accusations and describing the HIAG as an advocacy organisation for former Waffen @-@ SS troops . Hausser asserted that its members rejected all forms of radicalism and were " upstanding citizens " .

The HIAG bylaws of 1952 described the aims of the organisation as providing comradeship , legal assistance , support for those in Allied captivity , help for families , and aid in searches for those still missing . The HIAG campaigned for Waffen @-@ SS veterans to be awarded the legal status of " persons formerly in the public service " under article 131 of the Basic Law , so that they would qualify for the same rights and pensions as Wehrmacht 's career soldiers .

The historian David C. Large wrote that , like any public pronouncements , these bylaws did not tell the full story about HIAG 's real goals . By investigating how these statutes were applied in practice , he was able to tease out what the organisation stood for . For example , HIAG claimed to represent the entire Waffen @-@ SS membership , surviving and fallen , as well as their families : 500 @,@ 000 in total . In reality , the organisation 's rolls did not exceed 20 @,@ 000 . HIAG attained this number in the late 1950s , and held it until the early 1960s .

The organisation also asserted that the Waffen @-@ SS was merely " the fourth arm of the Wehrmacht " ; these claims were even " more dubious " , explains Large . As a Nazi organisation combining both military and police powers , the Waffen @-@ SS was a military arm of the SS : its members stood under SS jurisdiction separate from that of the Wehrmacht ; personnel transitioned smoothly between the frontline formations , punitive detachments and SS concentration camp

organisation ; and the frontline units themselves were thoroughly implicated in war crimes during the campaigns in the West and in the East , and in the atrocities against civilian population in the Soviet Union and Poland .

On the other hand , as the war progressed and the Waffen @-@ SS grew to encompass conscripts (from 1943) , Waffen @-@ SS personnel began to resemble that of the Wehrmacht , contributing to the postwar confusion as to the organisation 's status . It allowed the Waffen @-@ SS proponents to advance the idea of Waffen @-@ SS men being " soldiers like all other " ? the phrase first put forth in HIAG 's materials , and later publicly used by Chancellor Adenauer . Large argues that the equivalence is meaningless , as , contrary to the myth of a clean Wehrmacht , it actively participated in the racial war of extermination in the Soviet Union .

= = = Ideology = = =

Although political affiliations were discouraged by HIAG 's leaders , any leanings were to be " in the spirit of European and patriotic sentiment " , as described in a 1951 issue of Wiking @-@ Ruf (" Viking Call ") , HIAG 's first publication . Internal disagreements began to emerge in the mid @-@ 1950s as to the stance of the organisation : Steiner , Gille and Meyer favored a more political , outspoken orientation . The rest of the leadership favored a moderate approach in order not to jeopardise HIAG 's goals of legal and economic rehabilitation , which , in their opinion , could only come from the establishment : the government and the Bundestag .

= = Waffen @-@ SS advocacy = =

The main stated aims of the organisation were to provide assistance to veterans and campaign for the rehabilitation of their legal status with respect to war pensions . During its early existence , HIAG also focused on " help @-@ find @-@ lost @-@ comrades " actions (Kameraden @-@ Suchdienst) .

= = = Tracing service meetings = = =

HIAG embraced the Suchdienst activities , not only because it was concerned for the fate of some 40 @, @ 000 members of the Waffen @-@ SS who were missing in action , but because this outwardly humanitarian and non @-@ political activity could help improve its perception by the West German government and the society at large . Such public relations activities (" image polishing " , according to Large) were important to HIAG as it faced on @-@ going scrutiny , and even calls for a ban on the organisation . The Suchdiensttreffen events (literally : tracing service meetings) later evolved into annual Kameradschaftstreffen (" veterans ' reunions ") , which were in fact large @-@ scale conventions , often accompanied by rallies .

= = = Inaugural convention = = =

In 1952 , the organisation held its first major meeting in Verden . It began respectably , with Otto Gille announcing that the veterans were ready to " do their duty for the Fatherland " and Steiner declaring support for " freedom , order and justice " . But the next speaker delivered a different message . Hermann @-@ Bernhard Ramcke , a former paratroop general and a convicted war criminal , invited to demonstrate so @-@ called solidarity with the Wehrmacht , condemned the Western Allies as the " real war criminals " and insisted that the blacklist on which all former SS members then stood would soon become " a list of honour " .

The outburst caused a furor within West Germany . Periodicals as far as the U.S. and Canada carried headlines Hitler 's Guard Cheers Ex @-@ chief and Rabble @-@ Rousing General Is Worrying the Allies , with the latter article reporting that Ramcke 's speech had been greeted with " roars of approval and cries of ' Eisenhower , Schweinehund ! ' (' Pig ? Dog ') " . HIAG and its spokesperson Steiner hastily tried to distance the organisation from Ramcke and his remarks .

Subsequent conventions , which were in effect used for political purposes , added to the controversy surrounding the organisation . (See also " Controversies " section below .)

= = = Waffen @-@ SS war criminals as victims = = =

The notion that Waffen @-@ SS personnel had been " soldiers like all others " found its way into the discourse of war captivity . HIAG claimed that its members were victims of victor 's justice and complained of harsh internment conditions . HIAG equated the status of prisoners of war with that of war criminals , obfuscating the differences between the Wehrmacht and the Waffen @-@ SS .

Along with other veterans ' organisations , HIAG campaigned for the immediate amnesty and early release of war criminals still in Allied captivity . This issue was significant , as most of these organisations made their cooperation in the area of rearmament contingent on the satisfactory resolution in this area . It was partly for this reason that the West German government was sympathetic to the fate of these individuals and made every effort to secure their early release . Chancellor Adenauer even met with Kurt Meyer in Werl Prison when he went there on an inspection tour .

In its periodical Wiking @-@ Ruf , HIAG made use of the same drawings of emaciated German POWs behind barbed wire used by the publications of another post @-@ war organisation ? the West German Association of Returnees and Families of POWs and MIAs (VdH) . War captivity was depicted as the last stage of the so @-@ called ordinary military career in the Waffen @-@ SS in books and publications of the HIAG . In its turn , VdH saw its role as a peace @-@ seeking counterbalance to militaristic veterans ' organisations such as HIAG and explicitly distanced itself from them in the early 1950s .

= = = Relationship with political parties = = =

Behind the scenes , HIAG cultivated close relationships with the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the main opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD) , garnering attention by inflating its membership numbers and influence . In meetings with politicians in the early 1950s , HIAG claimed to represent 2 million potential voters , a vast exaggeration as only 250 @,@ 000 Waffen @-@ SS veterans were living in West Germany at that time .

HIAG was successful in stoking politicians ' fears that millions of disaffected former soldiers would be a threat to the nascent West German democracy . That is perhaps why SPD leader Kurt Schumacher , who himself had been persecuted by the Nazis , decided to establish contact with HIAG . When he first met with its leaders in 1951 , Schumacher believed that 150 @,@ 000 people were already members of HIAG , as evidenced by internal party correspondence ; he considered that number to be " politically significant " . In the same letter , Schumacher referred to the Waffen @-@ SS as a " branch of the Wehrmacht " .

Later , the SPD defence policy expert Fritz Erler (politician) and Helmut Schmidt , a member of SPD parliamentary delegation and a future Chancellor of West Germany , handled the relationship with HIAG . They maintained close contact , attending private and public meetings and keeping regular correspondence . They often admonished HIAG leadership for the membership 's " undemocratic " ways , but these efforts at reforming the veterans were futile . Such dealing with the " unteachables " (Unbelehrbaren) only succeeded in causing concerns within SPD , as evidenced by internal party correspondence , where HIAG 's members were thus described (" unteachable ") .

HIAG found its best champion in the centre @-@ right Free Democratic Party (FDP) , whose platform was most closely aligned to its goals . The FDP voted against the de @-@ nazification process in 1950 ; demanded the release of all " so @-@ called war criminals " in 1951 (as the war criminals were largely termed in West Germany at that time) ; and welcomed the establishment of veterans ' organisation of former Wehrmacht and Waffen @-@ SS members . However , as only a coalition partner to the larger CDU and SPD , it could not deliver on what HIAG wanted ; hence , the main thrust of HIAG 's lobbying was directed at CDU and SPD , especially during the election years .

== = Controversies == =

HIAG took on the cause of those imprisoned or executed for war crimes and openly celebrated its Nazi past . Below is a partial list of ensuing controversies in the first 12 years of HIAG 's existence :

In 1953 , HIAG conventioners staged a torchlit procession for a " solstice celebration " (the manner in which Christmas was celebrated in Nazi Germany) . They marched up to Stauffenberg Castle in Bavaria , chanting Nazi songs , including This Is the Guard that Adolf Hitler Loves .

In 1954 , plans for a HIAG convention in Göttingen faced strong opposition from the local Social Democratic Party (SPD) , the Jewish Council , the Students ' Association and the University hierarchy . Federal government officials intervened , and the event was first postponed and then scaled down to a much smaller meeting lacking the qualities of a political event .

Following the reburial of executed war criminals in Hamelin in 1954 , the cemetery became the focal point for veterans ' reunions , with distinct Nazi overtones . In 1959 , the HIAG convention in Hamelin attracted a crowd of 15 @, @ 000 and concluded with " comrades gathering around the tomb " of Bernhard Siebken , a convicted war criminal who had been executed in 1949 .

Also in 1959 , the Interior Minister of Hesse prohibited the holding of a HIAG Suchdiensttreffen citing the German Red Cross 's decision not to lend its support due to these meetings being " superfluous " .

In 1961 , HIAG attempted to place a glorifying obituary of Max Simon , a former Gruppenführer in the SS , in the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine . Simon had been convicted as a war criminal and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Allied courts for his role in the Marzabotto massacre , but was pardoned in 1954 . He was subsequently tried twice in the Federal courts for the killings in Bretthelm and other crimes , but , " to the horror of the West German public " , as Frankfurter Allgemeine wrote in 2010 , was found not guilty . To HIAG 's indignation , Frankfurter Allgemeine refused to run the obituary .

In 1963 , a HIAG convention planned for the city of Hamelin had to be cancelled at short notice , due to public pressure .

Large , who studied HIAG extensively , stated in 1987 that HIAG 's anti @-@ democratic and anti @-@ Semitic public statements were " the essence of what HIAG was all about " , concluding that the HIAG 's leaders remained true to their Nazi ideology . Similarly , the historian Karsten Wilke , who worked with the HIAG archives in the 2000s , discovered that the HIAG members ' positions were " consistently racist , anti @-@ Semitic and anti @-@ democratic " , as the German news magazine Der Spiegel described in its 2011 investigative article " The Brown Bluff : How Waffen SS Veterans Exploited Postwar Politics " . Referencing Wilke 's work , Der Spiegel quoted a HIAG member 's letter to the leadership conveying the dismay at " Jews " who became " powerful once again " and could thus stand in the way of political support for the Waffen @-@ SS rehabilitation . Spiegel also reported Wilke 's findings that the HIAG leadership maintained close contacts with far @-@ right groups .

== = Results == =

Lobbying by HIAG and other revisionists produced some early successes . In 1953 , Chancellor Adenauer announced in a public speech in Hannover that members of the combat formations of the Waffen @-@ SS had been " soldiers just like the rest " who had been " simply drafted " . (Large describes this declaration as " irresponsible and unhistorical " , while the military historian S.P. MacKenzie refers to it , when used in reference to the Western Front , as " the least credible " of the several claims put forth by Waffen @-@ SS apologists . He points out that , in the East , the Wehrmacht equaled the Waffen @-@ SS in its brutality , so the attempted equivalence was " rather ironic " .)

In the following months , a number of war criminals from the ranks of the Waffen @-@ SS were released . Many of them were made eligible for prisoner @-@ of @-@ war compensation from local governments . In 1956 the Federal Ministry of Defence announced that former members of the

Waffen @-@ SS , up to the grade of lieutenant colonel , would be accepted to the Bundeswehr at their old rank .

Former Waffen @-@ SS men who wished to join the Bundeswehr still faced heightened scrutiny . All Waffen @-@ SS applicants went through the rigorous vetting process reserved only for those with the higher ranks in the Wehrmacht . HIAG protested to the government and its military planners , but to no avail . As a result , by September 1956 , only 33 of 1310 applications by ex @-@ Waffen @-@ SS officers had been accepted (making them 0 @. @ 4 % of the Bundeswehr 's officer corps) , as compared to 195 of 462 applications by enlisted men .

At its height in the early 1960s around 8 % of the approximately 250 @, @ 000 former Waffen @-@ SS members living in West Germany were members of HIAG . This was the timeframe when HIAG achieved its last success in the economic rehabilitation : in 1961 , the West German government partially restored pension rights to Waffen @-@ SS personnel under the 131 legislation . Included were those former Waffen @-@ SS members who had served for a minimum of 10 years strictly in the military capacity , thus amounting to a tiny number of eligible personnel . HIAG greeted this development as a partial victory , which they hoped would lead to a complete rehabilitation .

But this wider aim proved impossible to achieve : the government was circumspect as rehabilitating the Waffen @-@ SS would have opened the door to claims by personnel of other SS and Nazi organisations , including SA , SD , Hitler Youth , and others ? a prospect the federal government would rather not have raised either domestically or internationally . The public image of the organisation was not helping either , because some of the more outspoken HIAG members sounded " alarmingly Nazi in their pronouncements " , according to Large .

= = Waffen @-@ SS historical revisionism = =

During the Nuremberg Trials , Waffen @-@ SS personnel , such as Hausser in his testimony as a defence witness , contended that it was a purely military organisation no different from the Wehrmacht . The prosecution at Nuremberg rejected that claim and successfully argued that the Waffen @-@ SS was an integral part of the SS apparatus . The Tribunal found that " the units of the Waffen @-@ SS were directly involved in the killings of the prisoners of war and the atrocities in the occupied countries " and judged the entire SS to be a criminal organisation .

HIAG aimed to reverse that judgement through significant propaganda efforts in the service of its historical revisionism . HIAG 's rewriting of history encompassed multi @-@ prong publicity campaigns , including tendentious periodicals , books and public speeches , alongside with a publishing house dedicated to presenting the Waffen @-@ SS in a positive light . Restoring the " tarnished shield " was viewed by the leadership as a key component of the desired legal and economic rehabilitation , and thus no effort was spared .

= = = Periodicals and illustrated books = = =

HIAG 's first periodical was Wiking @-@ Ruf . It was launched by Gille in 1951 and was initially aimed at the veterans of the SS Division Wiking . Within its first year of existence , it became the official publication of HIAG . In 1955 , it was renamed Der Freiwillige (" The Volunteer ") . The 1952 editorial by Kumm highlighted key themes that were used throughout HIAG 's subsequent history :

Even during the war , and especially after the war , infamous and lying propagandists have been able to make use of all the unfortunate events connected to the Third Reich and also with the SS to destroy and drag through the mud all of what was and is sacred to us . (...) Let us be clear about it : the [Allied] battle was directed not only the authoritarian regime of the Third Reich , but , above all , against the resurgence of the strength of the German people .

Erich Kern , a far @-@ right Austrian journalist and a former Nazi war correspondent , became the organisation 's key employee responsible for its publishing arm . He first became active within HIAG in 1955 , and then joined as a full @-@ time employee in 1959 . (Until his death in 1991 , Kern remained an " unrepentant and unreconstructed Nazi " , according to the historian Jonathan Petropoulos .)

The theme of foreign volunteers was featured prominently , with Steiner lending his voice in this area . In an 1958 editorial , he praised the foreign volunteers who , like their German comrades , saw the " diabolical " threat of Bolshevism and " fought like lions " against it as part of the Waffen @-@ SS . The picture books echoed the same themes ; one of them proclaimed : " From all European lands came volunteers as genuine comrades @-@ in @-@ arms . They fought for their Fatherland against Bolshevism . "

Glossy books such as Waffen @-@ SS in Pictures (1957) featured , as described by MacKenzie , " tales of valour and heroism " and " propaganda photographs of Aryan @-@ ideal volunteers from all over the Continent " . In 1973 , HIAG produced a five @-@ hundred page SS picture tome under the nostalgic title When All Our Brothers Are Silent ; the project was spearheaded by Hausser , with Jochen Peiper , a controversial Waffen @-@ SS figure , as a contributor . Other similar books included Scattered are the Traces (1979) , Cavalry Divisions of the Waffen @-@ SS (1982) , Panzer Grenadiers of the ' Viking ' Division in Pictures (1984) and many others . (One of the cavalry units in question , SS Cavalry Brigade , was responsible for the murder of an estimated 23 @,@ 700 Jews and others in July ? August 1941 alone during the Pripyat swamps punitive operation . Its regimental commander Lombard reported eliminating close to 11 @,@ 000 " plunderers " in the first two weeks the same operation .)

= = = Public speeches = = =

HIAG leadership denied that there was any connection between the Waffen @-@ SS and Nazi atrocities . In 1957 , Paul Hausser wrote an open letter in Der Freiweigige to West Germany 's minister of defence , stating that the concentration camp guard units (SS @-@ Totenkopfverbände) served on external detail only , " without the possibility of interfering with the internal procedure " . He did not mention that the guards accompanied prisoners to labour sites and that the commanders of concentration camps generally came from the Waffen @-@ SS . This apologist position also ignored the fact that the organisational structure of the SS tied Waffen @-@ SS to the Nazi annihilation machine through transfer of personnel between various SS units and the shifting responsibilities of the units themselves , as they may perform frontline duties at one time and then be reassigned to " pacification actions " , the Nazi term for punitive operations in the rear .

Kurt Meyer embodied the voice of Waffen @-@ SS apologists . Speaking before some 8000 SS men at the HIAG convention in Karlsberg , Bavaria , in 1957 , he stated that " SS troops committed no crimes , except the massacre at Oradour , and that was the action of a single man " , who , moreover had died a " hero 's death " before he could be court @-@ martialed . Meyer also insisted that the Waffen @-@ SS was a regular army outfit , just like any in the Wehrmacht . On another occasion , Meyer publicly denounced the " regime " [West Germany] that could " honour traitors " but would vilify its soldiers . He condemned the notion of " collective guilt " and equated Jews and Jesuits to the Nazis and the Waffen @-@ SS as all being victims of history and prejudice . In the first instance , Meyer was most likely referencing Adolf Diekmann who was the senior officer present during the Oradour massacre . Meyer himself had served a lengthy prison term for his role in the Ardenne Abbey massacre . In the second instance , he was apparently referring to the members of the 20 July plot .

The rhetoric of victimhood and pan @-@ European unity continued well into the later history of HIAG . At Peiper 's memorial in 1976 , Hubert Meyer referenced Peiper 's open letter from Landsberg Prison , which had been previously quoted in Hausser 's 1953 books :

For a broad public in Germany and even more throughout the rest of the world , [Peiper] has become the embodiment of that which all of us were clearly , intentionally and wrongly burdened in Nuremberg We have not forgotten what Jochen Peiper wrote to us from Landsberg Prison in 1952 : " Don 't forget that the first Europeans killed in action were in the units of the Waffen @-@ SS , that the one beaten to death during the post war period mostly were men from our ranks . They had become fair game because of their belief in the indivisibility of Western Europe . Remember these martyrs " .

== = Memoirs = = =

The memoirs by HIAG 's leading members portrayed Waffen @-@ SS men as " misunderstood idealists who fought honourably and well " and included testimonials by former Wehrmacht generals endorsing the fighting skills of the Waffen @-@ SS . Steiner 's , Meyer 's and Hausser 's books have been characterised by historian Charles Sydnor as the " most important works of [Waffen @-@ SS] apologist literature " . They demanded rehabilitation of the military branch of the Nazi Party and presented Waffen @-@ SS members as both victims and misunderstood heroes . Nothing was said on the Nazi indoctrination of the troops or the atrocities committed by them .

Paul Hausser 's 1953 book Waffen @-@ SS in Action (Waffen @-@ SS im Einsatz) was the first major work by one of the HIAG leaders . It had an unmistakable connection to the Nazi origins of the Waffen @-@ SS : the SS runes on the cover art and the SS motto (" My honour is called loyalty ") embossed on the cloth cover . Former Wehrmacht general Hans Guderian endorsed Waffen @-@ SS troops in a foreword and referred to them as " the first realisation of the European idea " . Hausser went on to describe the growth of Waffen @-@ SS into a so @-@ called multinational force where foreign volunteers fought heroically as a " militant example of the great European idea " . Waffen @-@ SS in Action was included in the index of objectionable war books maintained by West Germany 's Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons . The index was created in 1960 to limit the sale of such works to minors due to their chauvinism and glorification of violence .

Kurt Meyer 's memoirs , Grenadiers (German : Grenadiere) , published in 1957 , detailed his exploits at the front and served as an element of the rehabilitation campaign . He condemned the " inhuman suffering " that the Waffen @-@ SS personnel had been subjected to " for crimes which they neither committed , nor were able to prevent " . Sydnor referred to Grenadiere as " perhaps the boldest and most truculent of the apologist works " .

Felix Steiner published The Volunteers of Waffen @-@ SS : Idea and sacrifice (German : Die Freiwilligen der Waffen @-@ SS : Idee und Opfergang) in 1958 . It presented the sacrifice messages echoing those of Der Freiwillige and stressed the theme of the purely military Waffen @-@ SS .

Both Hausser and Steiner followed up their 1950s books with works published in the 1960s . Published in 1963 , Steiner 's book was called The Army of Outlaws (" Die Armee der Geächteten ") . Hausser 's work appeared in 1966 under the title Soldiers Like Any Other (" Soldaten wie andere auch ") . According to MacKenzie , the books ' titles were symbolic of the Waffen @-@ SS image that HIAG 's leaders wanted to portray , while Sydnor describes this later generation of books as " equally tendentious " .

Prior to the establishment of HIAG 's own publishing house Munin Verlag (below) , HIAG @-@ affiliated books were predominantly published by Plesse Verlag in Göttingen , owned by an extreme right @-@ wing politician and publisher Waldemar Schütz .

== = Munin Verlag imprint = = =

HIAG established its own publishing house ? Munin Verlag ? in 1958 . The name comes from Norse mythology , popular with the right @-@ wing movements . Muninn is one of the two ravens that are the companions of the war god Odin on the battlefield ; muninn is Old Norse for " memory " .

The aim of the publishing house was to publish the works of former Waffen @-@ SS members , in cooperation with HIAG . The authors of the publishing house were former Waffen @-@ SS unit commanders or staff officers , who were members of HIAG . The Munin Verlag titles did not go through the rigorous fact @-@ checking processes common in the traditional historical literature ; they were revisionist accounts unedited by professional historians and presented the former Waffen @-@ SS members ' version of events .

Until HIAG 's dissolution in 1992 , Munin @-@ Verlag published 57 titles . The authors included Patrick Agte ; Willi Fey , Albert Frey ; Paul Hausser ; Otto Kumm ; Rudolf Lehmann ; Hubert Meyer ; Eberhard Wolfgang Möller ; Richard Schulze @-@ Kossens ; Franz Schreiber ; Hans Stöber ; Peter

Strassner ; Ralf Tiemann (Wilhelm Mohnke 's adjutant) ; Wilhelm Tieke ; Karl Ullrich ; Otto Weidinger , among others .

= = = Unit histories and biographies = = =

Waffen @-@ SS unit histories were produced with the assistance from HIAG from the 1950s . Walter Harzer took on the role of the official historian of HIAG , in charge of coordinating the writing of the histories of Waffen @-@ SS divisions . HIAG worked with the German Federal Military Archive in Freiburg to screen materials donated to it for any information that may have implicated units and personnel in questionable activity . To legitimise its image , HIAG underwrote the publication of works by right @-@ wing academics sympathetic to the Waffen @-@ SS .

The unit narratives were extensive (often in several volumes) and strived for a so @-@ called official representation of their history , backed by maps and operational orders . MacKenzie points out that " the older or the more famous the unit , the larger the work ? to the point where no less than five volumes and well over 2 @, @ 000 pages were devoted to the doings of the 2nd Panzer Division Das Reich " , authored by its former officer Otto Weidinger .

The French author Jean @-@ Paul Picaper , who studied the Oradour massacre that was perpetrated by the men of the Das Reich , notes the tendentious nature of Weidinger 's narrative : it provided a sanitized version of history without any references to massacres . He argues that the unit histories , like other HIAG publications , focused on the positive , " heroic " side of National Socialism . The researcher Danny S. Parker notes similar efforts undertaken to rewrite the history of the Leibstandarte division . HIAG worked with Rudolf Lehmann , chief of staff of 1st SS Panzer Corps , to produce what Parker calls an " exculpating multi @-@ volume chronicle " of the division , even including the Malmedy massacre . HIAG involved a legal consultant to make sure the account would be within the framework of the strict German laws prohibiting glorification of the Nazi past . The project also included the former chief of staff of the unit , Dietrich Ziemssen , who in 1952 produced a revisionist version of the massacre in his pamphlet Der Malmedy Prozess .

In the mid- to late 1970s , HIAG attempted to commission a favorable biography of Peiper , to stop " the bad rumors " , according to a HIAG official . " We must steadfastly remain behind the wheel and direct this book ourselves , otherwise [Erich Kern] will do it " , Harzer wrote to a fellow member in 1976 . HIAG contemplated approaching (or approached) Herbert Reinecker , a prolific screenwriter who had served in a propaganda company (Propagandakompanie) of the Waffen @-@ SS , but nothing came out of it .

= = = Successes and outcomes = = =

By the mid @-@ 1950s , HIAG established an image that separated the Waffen @-@ SS from other SS formations and shifted responsibility for crimes that could not be denied to the Allgemeine @-@ SS (security and police) , the SS @-@ Totenkopfverbände and the Einsatzgruppen . The Waffen @-@ SS was thus successfully integrated into the myth of the clean Wehrmacht .

The positive image of the Waffen @-@ SS as an organisation indeed took root , and not only in Germany itself . In the era of the Cold War , senior Waffen @-@ SS personnel were " not shy about the fact that they had once organised a NATO @-@ like army , and an elite one at that " , notes MacKenzie (emphasis in the original) . John M. Steiner , in his 1975 work , points out that SS apologists , especially strongly represented in HIAG , stressed that they were the first to fight for Europe and Western civilisation against " Asiatic Communist hordes " .

Quoting German political journalist Karl Otto Paetel in his 1966 book , the historian George Stein writes that the works produced by HIAG 's circle were " trying to prove only what no tolerably informed person has ever attempted to deny , viz . , that the soldiers of the Waffen @-@ SS were brave fighters , suffered big losses and , as far as they served in the front line , did not run exterminations camps " . Stein notes that the apologists define the Waffen @-@ SS " in the narrowest of terms " and are silent on the matter of war crimes . He notes that only a minority of men were implicated in known atrocities and that the most historically significant role of the Waffen

@-@ SS was in the battles for " Hitler 's Europe " . But " to recognise this is not to agree with the apologists who picture the overwhelming majority of the men of the Waffen @-@ SS as idealistic , clean @-@ living , decent and honourable soldiers " , Stein writes .

Wilke argues that , by the 1970s , HIAG attained a monopoly on the historical representation of the Waffen @-@ SS . Its recipe was simple and contained just four ingredients :

The Waffen @-@ SS was apolitical

It was elite

It was innocent of all war crimes or Nazi atrocities

It was a European army par excellence , the Army of Europe .

Historians dismiss , and even ridicule , this characterisation . Picaper labels it as a " self @-@ panegyric " , while Large uses the words " extravagant fantasies about [Waffen @-@ SS 's] past and future " . MacKenzie refers to HIAG 's body of work as a " chorus of self @-@ justification " and Stein as " apologetics " . The historian James M. Diehl describes HIAG 's claims of the Waffen @-@ SS being the so @-@ called fourth branch of the Wehrmacht as " false " , and HIAG 's insistence that the force was a precursor to NATO as " even more outrageous " .

= = Transition into right @-@ wing extremism = =

In the 1960s , it became clear that the legal rehabilitation of the Waffen @-@ SS was out of HIAG 's reach . At the same time , attitudes were beginning to change as the country emerged from a " decade of suppression of Germany 's Nazi past " . Waffen @-@ SS veterans ' activities were increasingly greeted by suspicion from the community , while the government and military planners came to the realisation that they could meet their goals of rearmament without them . HIAG was thus increasingly marginalised and ignored by the political parties , while any pretences of moderation no longer served a purpose as no further benefits were forthcoming from the government .

HIAG then began its drift into the far right , further retreating into its Nazi past . For a time , HIAG published a calendar that marked Nazi commemoration dates . Many of the organisation 's founding members did not evolve with the times . For example , at least through the 1970s , Kumm remained " the ever unreformed Nazi enthusiast " , according to Parker , who was given access to the previously closed HIAG archives .

As the West German public 's awareness of the SS atrocities grew in the 1970s and 1980s , the attitudes towards Waffen @-@ SS veterans shifted dramatically . The federal organisation and the local groups were ostracised , with their meetings and commemorations greeted with protests . At the same time , neo @-@ Nazi and nationalist movements found in the Waffen @-@ SS an icon to project their understanding of World War II .

During the 1980s , the HIAG celebrations grew so large and bold that they created enormous problems for the organisation 's image , such as when a 1985 meeting turned into a public relations disaster . The press reported on singing of forbidden Nazi songs , clashes with demonstrators and Waffen @-@ SS reenactors (SS reenacting was illegal in West Germany) . In an even more damaging development , Stern investigative reporter Gerhard Kromschroder infiltrated the meeting posing as a war buff . He later published a damning article called " Nazi Family Reunion " containing statements from Waffen @-@ SS veterans that ranged from Holocaust denial to virulently anti @-@ semitic comments and references to happy concentration camp inmates " singing like birds " .

In its later history , HIAG was monitored by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as a far @-@ right organisation . It briefly went off the list of neo @-@ Nazi and extremist groups in 1984 , causing another controversy .

= = Dissolution = =

Perceived by the West German government to be a Nazi organisation , HIAG was disbanded at the federal level in 1992 . HIAG 's last chairman was Hubert Meyer , who provided access to the previously closed HIAG archives to several researchers , including Parker . Parker used the HIAG

materials in his 2014 study of Jochen Peiper .

Der Freiwillige was still being published in the 2000s . At some point , Der Freiwillige and the Munin Verlag publishing business had been taken over by Patrick Agte , a right @-@ wing author and publisher . Regional HIAG chapters continued to exist through the 2000s , at least one into the 2010s . These groups worked to maintain momentum through the recruitment of younger generations and through outreach to foreign veterans of the Waffen @-@ SS , aided by the continued publication of Der Freiwillige . " [Its] acclaimed aim , today [2014] , is to link older and younger generations in a common cause , " note the historians Steffen Werther and Madeleine Hurd . The publication 's predominant theme continued to be " Europe against Bolshevism " , with several editorials devoted to the idea that the Waffen @-@ SS laid the foundation for the unification of Europe , expansion of NATO and " freedom of Fatherlands " , as stated in one of the issues .

HIAG 's informal successor was the international War Grave Memorial Foundation " When All Brothers Are Silent " (Kriegsgräberstiftung ' Wenn alle Brüder schweigen ') , formed with a stated goal of maintaining war graves . In the 1990s and 2000s , after the fall of the Berlin Wall , it worked on arranging new commemorative sites for the Waffen @-@ SS dead in the former Soviet Union , including one in the Ukraine .

= = Assessment and legacy = =

HIAG never grew to the size of other West German veterans ' organisations , the most successful of which , VdH , had membership approaching 500 @, @ 000 . Diehl , who studied postwar veterans ' movements in West Germany , writes that Der Freiwillige 's " fire @-@ eating editorials " were ignored by the overwhelming majority of Waffen @-@ SS veterans , who were more interested in rebuilding their civilian lives or getting too old to consider returning to military service . HIAG 's membership began to fall sharply in the 1960s , while the organisation itself was never a significant threat to democracy . " HIAG 's main goal was pensions , not a restoration of the Third Reich , " he notes .

= = = Performance as lobby group = = =

HIAG 's performance as a lobbying organisation was mixed . Large sees a " combination of resentment , myopia and inflated self @-@ importance " in HIAG 's efforts and attitudes . " [The campaign] to regain their ' honour ' and exercise political influence (...) was only partially successful " , he writes . He credits West Germany 's government , major political parties and military planners with keeping sufficient distance from HIAG and other veterans ' organisations to limit their role in the new republic and its armed forces . " In that respect , (...) Bonn was not Weimar , " he concludes .

On the other hand , as a " crucible of historical revisionism " (in Picaper 's definition) , HIAG achieved remarkable success in its rewriting of history . The results are felt to this day in public 's perceptions and popular culture , with many works translated into English . The historians Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies write : " Unfortunately , the scholarly writings remained confined to a small audience , whereas the readership of the German authors (and their English @-@ language spin @-@ offs) was considerably larger " . The authors note that " with a forty @-@ year head start " , the predominance of the German view , and the related fascination by Waffen @-@ SS romancers , " hardly remains a mystery " .

= = = Revisionist tradition outside of HIAG = = =

HIAG was instrumental in creating the perception in popular culture of the Waffen @-@ SS being " comrades @-@ in @-@ arms engaged in a noble crusade " (according to MacKenzie) . These notions were questioned by West German researches , but German society overall , wanting to forget the past , embraced the image . MacKenzie highlights the long @-@ term effects of HIAG 's revisionism :

As older generation of Waffen @-@ SS scribes has died off , a new , post @-@ war cadre of writers has done much to perpetuate the image of the force as a revolutionary European army . The degree of admiration and acceptance varies , but the overall tendency to accentuate the positive lives on , or has indeed grown stronger .

The revisionist tradition continues to the present time , through popular history books , web sites and wargames . New titles appear every year , propagating the myths first put forth by HIAG 's propaganda efforts . Some of the books are amateur historical studies that focus solely on the military aspects of the Waffen @-@ SS . Others are reprints of apologetic accounts by former Waffen @-@ SS personnel . Adding to the volume of material are groups of international admirers who consider Waffen @-@ SS to have been incorrectly judged by history .

= = = = Popular history = = = =

Smelser and Davies contend that some of the better known or prolific authors in the Waffen @-@ SS revisionist tradition include Agte , who wrote hagiographic accounts on Jochen Peiper , Michael Wittmann and other Waffen @-@ SS men , and Franz Kurowski , who provided numerous non @-@ peer reviewed wartime chronicles of Waffen @-@ SS units and highly decorated men . Critics have been dismissive of his works , describing them as Landser @-@ pulp (" soldier @-@ pulp ") literature and " laudatory texts " , that focus on hero @-@ making at the expense of the historical truth . Another popular author , Mark Yerger , published 11 books up to 2008 , mostly through Schiffer Publishing .

According to MacKenzie , authors in the revisionist tradition range from " extreme admirers [on] the fringes of the far @-@ right " , such as Richard Landwehr and Jean Mabire , to partisan authors (Gordon Williamson and Edmund L. Blandford) , and popular historians who generally present the Waffen @-@ SS in a positive light . These include John Keegan , James S. Lucas and Bruce Quarrie . The historian Henning Pieper notes non @-@ scholarly works by Christopher Ailsby , Herbert Walther (writer) , and Tim Ripley as part of " militaria literature " genre (in his definition) , while the military historian Robert Citino includes books by Willi Fey and Michael Reynolds among uncritical works aimed at " military history buffs " .

= = = = Websites , wargames and reenactment = = = =

Smelser and Davies argue that the revisionist @-@ inspired messages and visuals found their way into wargames , Internet chatrooms and forums and the popular culture of Waffen @-@ SS " romancers " , that is those who romanticise the German war effort . They contend that the Achtung Panzer and Feldgrau websites are especially attractive to this group .

Popular culture of the romancers also includes Waffen @-@ SS reenactment . Although banned in Germany and Austria , SS reenacting groups thrive elsewhere , including in Europe and North America . In U.S. alone , by the end of the 1990s there were 20 Waffen @-@ SS reenactment groups , out of approximately 40 groups dedicated to German World War II units . In contrast , during that time there were 21 groups dedicated to the American units of the same era .