

# **VARANKMUN'24**

## **HCC**

### **Study Guide**

*(Historical Crisis Committee)*

**Agenda item:** Wehrmachtsführungsrat  
(Wehrmacht Leadership Council)

**Written by:** Yiğit Kapusuz-*USG*

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## Welcome letter from the Secretary General

Esteemed delegates,

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome you to VarankMUN'24. My name is Barbaros Şıracı, and I am privileged to serve as your Secretary-General for this year's conference.

In a world increasingly interconnected, the role of youth in addressing global challenges has never been more critical. At VarankMUN'24, we aspire to cultivate a spirit of diplomacy, collaboration, and innovation among our participants. Over the next few days, you will have the unique opportunity to step into the shoes of international diplomats, engage in thought-provoking debates, and contribute to meaningful resolutions.

At VarankMUN'24, we are committed to providing a dynamic and engaging platform for tackling some of the most pressing issues facing our world today. From environmental sustainability to international security and human rights, each committee and topic has been thoughtfully selected to encourage rigorous debate and foster innovative solutions. This conference is not just about discussing problems but about collaboratively exploring ways to build a more equitable and prosperous global community. We believe that your ideas and contributions will play a pivotal role in driving these conversations forward and in crafting actionable resolutions.

VarankMUN'24 is more than just a conference; it is a community of passionate and driven individuals from diverse backgrounds. This diversity is our strength, and it is through our collective efforts that we can create a more inclusive and equitable world. I encourage you to embrace this opportunity to learn from one another, challenge your perspectives, and forge lasting friendships.

As you prepare for the sessions ahead, I urge you to remain open-minded, respectful, and resilient. Diplomacy requires patience and empathy, and it is through these virtues that true progress is made. Remember, every voice matters, and your contributions are vital to the success of our deliberations.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to our academic team, whose tireless efforts have made this conference possible. Their passion and commitment to excellence are the pillars upon which VarankMUN'24 stands.

On behalf of the entire VarankMUN'24 team, I wish you an inspiring and rewarding experience. Let us come together with purpose and optimism, ready to shape a better future for all.

Welcome to VarankMUN'24. Let the journey begin!

Warm regards,

Barbaros Şıracı  
Secretary-General

## Introduction to the Committee

In this unique committee, you, the delegates, will take on the roles of key figures in the Wehrmacht's leadership during a crucial period in history. The Wehrmacht, the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1945, played a central role in the Second World War and comprised the Army, Navy and Air Force. Participants will navigate the complex military, political and ethical landscape of this era and make decisions that could change the course of history.

As members of the Wehrmacht's Leadership Council, you will be tasked with managing a variety of challenges and crises that confronted the military leadership. From strategic military operations and resource allocation to internal conflicts and ethical dilemmas, every decision you make will be scrutinized and have significant consequences.

This board is designed to provide a deep understanding of the complicated dynamics within military leadership and offer perspective on the pressures and responsibilities military leaders face. It is vital that you approach this simulation with historical accuracy and develop a deep sense of the gravity of the decisions made during this period.

Your role involves not only strategic thinking and tactical planning, but also managing the moral complexities of wartime leadership. This is an opportunity to engage with history, understand the intricacies of military leadership and explore the implications of leadership decisions in a time of global conflict.

As a Historical Crisis Committee, the Wehrmachtführungsrat will follow standard crisis procedures. Delegates will be given a workshop at the beginning of the committee regarding directives and updates.

We encourage you to fully embrace your roles, engage in thoughtful debate and strive for a nuanced understanding of this period. This is more than a historical exercise; it is an opportunity to reflect on the broader implications of leadership and decision making in times of crisis.

## Important Terminology

### Appeasement Policy

Appeasement is a diplomatic strategy. It consists of making concessions to an aggressive foreign power in order to avoid war. It is most often associated with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who was in office from 1937 to 1940. The British government pursued a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Today, the policy of appeasement is generally regarded as a failure, as it was unable to prevent the Second World War.

### Lebensraum

Lebensraum, meaning "living space," was a concept central to German expansionism and nationalism from the 1890s to the 1940s. Initially popularized around 1901, it became a key goal of Imperial Germany during World War I and was later adopted by the Nazis. Under Adolf Hitler, Lebensraum justified the invasion of Central and Eastern Europe during World War II. The Nazi plan, Generalplan Ost, called for the displacement, extermination, or enslavement of Slavic populations to make way for German colonists. This policy led to widespread starvation and the extermination of the Jewish population. Inspired by manifest destiny, Hitler believed that the German Aryan race had the right to expand and dominate. Nazi Germany also supported similar expansionist ideologies from other Axis powers like Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan.

## Historical Context

### Far-right Military and Paramilitary Groups Before the Wehrmacht

#### Freikorps

The first Freikorps were established by Frederick the Great during the Seven Years' War. On July 15, 1759, Frederick ordered the formation of a squadron of volunteer hussars, commanded by Colonel Friedrich Wilhelm von Kleist, and initially consisting of 80 Hungarian deserters. This squadron, under Lieutenant Johann Michael von Kovacs, was part of the 1st Hussar Regiment. By the end of 1759, four squadrons of dragoons, made up of

Prussian volunteers and later deserters, were organized. Freikorps, seen as unreliable by regular armies, were primarily used for minor duties and as sentries.

These units emerged during the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, involving France, Prussia, and the Habsburg monarchy. They included diverse ethnic groups such as Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Lithuanians, South Slavs, Turks, Tatars, and Cossacks, often described imprecisely in regimental lists. Frederick created 14 "free infantry" units between 1756 and 1758, targeting soldiers seeking adventure without military drill. These units, used in combination and often to counter Maria Theresa's Pandurs, participated in outpost, reinforcement, and reconnaissance duties.

Despite being seen as undisciplined, Freikorps conducted guerrilla warfare, disrupting enemy supply lines. Captured members faced execution as irregular fighters. Frederick the Great disbanded the Freikorps after the war, denying them pensions or invalidity payments. In France, some units continued until 1776, attached to dragoon regiments as jäger squadrons. Austria recruited Freikorps during the Napoleonic Wars, though their combat effectiveness varied, with border regiments of Croats and Serbs being an exception.

During Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia, Denis Davydov formed partisan detachments that harassed French supply lines and inflicted defeats on the retreating Grande Armée. The modern Freikorps emerged in Germany during the Napoleonic Wars, fighting for patriotic reasons against the French Confederation of the Rhine. Notable units included the King's German Legion, Lützow Free Corps, and the Black Brunswickers.

Freikorps gained popularity during the German War of Liberation (1813-1815), with commanders like Ferdinand von Schill, Ludwig Adolf Wilhelm von Lützow, and Frederick William, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel leading attacks on Napoleonic forces. The exploits of the Freikorps were later glorified by German nationalists and inspired a genre of patriotic, republican, and anti-French poetry by soldier-poets like Theodor Körner, Max von Schenkendorff, and Ernst Moritz Arndt in Germany, and Denis Davydov in Russia.

Freikorps continued to appear in varying forms after the Napoleonic era. Student Freikorps emerged during the March 1848 riots in Munich, and they also played roles in the First Schleswig War of 1848. In 1864, the French formed the Counterguerrilla in Mexico, and Giuseppe Garibaldi organized his famous Freischars in Italy, notably the "Thousands of

Marsala" in 1860. Before the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, France developed Freikorps known as franc-tiers.

After World War I, the term Freikorps referred to various paramilitary organizations in Germany. Following the country's defeat, around 500,000 formal members and 1.5 million informal participants were part of these groups. During the early Weimar Republic, the government, under Friedrich Ebert and Defense Minister Gustav Noske, used the Freikorps to suppress socialist and communist uprisings, including the Marxist Spartacist uprising, resulting in the executions of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg on January 15, 1919.

In April 1919, the Freikorps crushed the Bavarian Soviet Republic, a short-lived socialist state in Bavaria, with around 30,000 men, including brigades led by Hermann Ehrhardt and Colonel Franz Ritter von Epp. Their brutal actions included executions and violence against suspected communists, resulting in mass graves due to overwhelmed undertakers.

In Eastern Europe, the Freikorps fought against communists and Bolsheviks in regions like East Prussia, Latvia, Silesia, and Poland, displaying fervent anti-Slavic racism. They committed numerous atrocities, such as the massacre of 500 Latvian civilians and the slaughter of 3,000 people in Riga.

Freikorps members were primarily former World War I soldiers struggling to reintegrate into civilian life. Many joined due to the government's poor support for veterans, seeking camaraderie and a sense of purpose. Others, angry at Germany's defeat, fought against communism and socialism. The Freikorps idealized a militarized masculinity characterized by aggression and emotional hardness, viewing themselves as defenders of German conservatism.

After the failed Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in March 1920, the Freikorps' autonomy declined as Hans von Seeckt, commander of the Reichswehr, removed them from the army and cut off funding. By 1921, the Freikorps had largely disbanded, re-emerging as far-right thugs for the Nazis in 1923.

The Nazi rise to power saw many Freikorps members join the Sturmabteilung (SA) and Schutzstaffel (SS), using them as enforcers. However, during the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, Hitler purged many Freikorps leaders, viewing them as threats. Despite this, numerous future Nazi leaders had Freikorps backgrounds, including Martin Bormann,

Richard Walther Darré, Reinhard Heydrich, Heinrich Himmler, Rudolf Höss, and Ernst Röhm.

### Sturmabteilung (SA)

The term Sturmabteilung (SA) originally referred to specialized assault troops in Imperial Germany during World War I, first authorized on March 2, 1915. These troops were used effectively in battles such as the siege of Riga and the Battle of Caporetto, and widely during the 1918 German spring offensive.

The Nazi Party, originally the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP), was formed in Munich in January 1919. Adolf Hitler joined in September 1919 and quickly became a key figure due to his speaking and propaganda skills. By February 1920, the party was renamed the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) to appeal to left-wing workers, over Hitler's objections.

Before the official formation of the SA, Hitler and his associates used informal groups to protect party meetings and disrupt opponents. After a violent incident at a meeting in February 1920, Hitler began organizing these groups more formally. By August 3, 1921, he redefined the group as the "Gymnastic and Sports Division" to avoid government scrutiny, and by September 1921, the term Sturmabteilung was being used informally.

The SA's first major confrontation occurred on November 4, 1921, during a meeting at the Munich Hofbräuhaus, which erupted into a violent clash, solidifying the SA's role in the party. Hans Ulrich Klintzsch, a former naval officer, became the SA leader during this period. The SA grew in structure and function, involving ex-soldiers and brawlers to protect Nazi gatherings and disrupt others'.

In 1922, the Nazi Party created a youth section, the Jugendbund, later becoming the Hitler Youth, under SA command until 1932. Hermann Göring joined the Nazi Party in 1922 and became the SA leader in 1923. Following the failed Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923, the SA was reorganized as the Frontbann to circumvent a ban on the Nazi Party. Ernst Röhm was instrumental in this reorganization.

By 1930, the SA had added a Motor Corps for better mobility and secured independent funding through the Sturm Cigarette Company. In September 1930, after the Stennes revolt, Hitler assumed supreme command of the SA and asked Röhm to return as chief of staff.



Röhm reorganized the SA, creating new regional groups and significantly expanding its membership.

By January 1932, the SA had 400,000 members, growing to approximately 2,000,000 by January 1933 when Hitler came to power. The SA's growth and power led to tensions with the Reichswehr and other Nazi leaders. Heinrich Himmler and the SS emerged as a counterbalance to the SA's influence.

By the end of 1933, the SA had over 3 million members. Röhm's ambitions to absorb the Reichswehr into the SA alarmed military leaders and other Nazis. In 1933, General Werner von Blomberg and General Walter von Reichenau, with Göring and Himmler, conspired against Röhm. Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich fabricated evidence to suggest Röhm was plotting against Hitler, leading to the Night of the Long Knives, where Röhm and many SA leaders were purged.

Hitler had multiple reasons for wanting to remove Ernst Röhm, head of the Sturmabteilung (SA). Röhm's ambition to merge the SA, a force of over three million men, with the smaller Reichswehr alarmed military leaders who feared the destruction of their professional army. Industrialists, crucial to the Nazi rise, disliked Röhm's socialist economic views and his call for a continued revolution. President Hindenburg warned Hitler in June 1934 that without action against the SA, he would dissolve the government and declare martial law.

Fearing Röhm's power, Hitler, influenced by Göring and Himmler, ordered a meeting of SA leaders at Bad Wiessee. On June 30, 1934, Hitler and SS units arrested Röhm and other high-ranking SA leaders. Over the next 48 hours, about 200 SA officers were arrested, with many killed. Initially, Hitler pardoned Röhm but later, under pressure, agreed to his execution. Röhm refused to commit suicide and was shot by SS officers Theodor Eicke and Michael Lippert on July 1. Estimates of the total number of executed range between 150 and 200.

The purge, known as the Night of the Long Knives, shocked some Germans but was seen by others as Hitler restoring order. Propaganda highlighted the "Röhm-Putsch" and publicly exposed the homosexuality of Röhm and other SA leaders.

After the purge, the SA, led by Viktor Lutze, was significantly reduced in size. In November 1938, the SA was involved in Kristallnacht, destroying Jewish businesses and synagogues and arresting over 30,000 Jewish men. By 1939, the SA had little significance,

with most members joining the Wehrmacht. In January 1939, the SA's role was redefined as a training school for the armed forces.

### Schutzstaffel (SS)

By 1923, Adolf Hitler had established the Nazi Party's initial security unit, the Saal-Schutz, to guard meetings in Munich. That year, Hitler also formed a small bodyguard unit, the Stabswache (Staff Guard), composed of eight men under Julius Schreck and Joseph Berchtold, modeled after the Erhardt Naval Brigade, a Freikorps. This unit was renamed Stoßtrupp (Shock Troops) in May 1923, but was disbanded after the failed Beer Hall Putsch.

In 1925, Hitler ordered Schreck to create a new bodyguard unit, the Schutzkommando, which later became the Sturmstaffel (Storm Squadron) and finally the Schutzstaffel (SS) on November 9, 1925. The SS initially protected Nazi leaders, expanding under Schreck and Berchtold's leadership, before Berchtold was replaced by Erhard Heiden in March 1927, who enforced stricter discipline.

During 1925-1929, the SS was seen as a small unit of the SA, with membership dropping from 1,000 to 280. Heinrich Himmler joined as Heiden's deputy in September 1927, showing better organizational skills. Himmler became Reichsführer-SS in January 1929, expanding the SS to 3,000 members and establishing the SS-Hauptamt with offices for administration, personnel, finance, security, and race matters. He reorganized SS-Gaue into three areas and began the SS's independence from the SA, prioritizing loyalty to Hitler.

Under Himmler, the SS grew significantly, reaching 209,000 members by the end of 1933, and was increasingly assigned state and party functions. Himmler established SS-Junkerschule schools in 1934 for officer training, emphasizing ruthlessness and Nazi ideology. Himmler also acquired Wewelsburg Castle for SS rituals and training.

The SS was viewed as the Nazi Party's elite, requiring Aryan ancestry back to 1750 for officers and 1800 for other ranks. Members had to be loyal to the Führer and committed to the German nation. Himmler also promoted physical criteria, though they were not strictly enforced. SS members received higher salaries and homes, expected to have more children to further Nazi goals.

After the Nazi Party came to power on January 30, 1933, the SS became a state organization integrated into the government. The SS, under Heinrich Himmler, increasingly took over law enforcement roles, creating a police state to suppress opposition to Hitler. Hermann Göring established the Gestapo in 1933 and later transferred its control to Himmler on April 20, 1934. Himmler appointed Reinhard Heydrich as Gestapo chief on April 22, 1934. This move set the stage for the Night of the Long Knives, where the SS and Gestapo executed SA leaders, significantly reducing the SA's influence.

On July 20, 1934, Hitler separated the SS from the SA, making it an elite corps answerable only to him. Himmler's rank of Reichsführer-SS became the highest in the SS, equivalent to an army field marshal. By June 17, 1936, all police forces in Germany were unified under Himmler, making him and Heydrich extremely powerful. They controlled the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), Gestapo, Kriminalpolizei (Kripo), and Ordnungspolizei (Orpo).

During Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938), SS security services orchestrated violence against Jews, resulting in the destruction of Jewish properties and the arrest of around 30,000 Jewish men. Thousands of Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues were vandalized, with up to 2,000 deaths reported.

In September 1939, the security and police agencies, including the Sicherheitspolizei (SiPo) and SD, were consolidated into the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) under Heydrich, further increasing SS authority. Senior SS officers in each military district also became police chiefs, enabling them to bypass local authorities in emergencies.

Hitler's protection was managed by three main SS groups: the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH), which provided an outer ring of protection, the SS-Begleitkommando des Führers (later Führerbegleitkommando or FBK), which escorted Hitler during travel, and the Reichssicherheitsdienst (RSD), responsible for his security in Bavaria and later throughout Germany.

The SS also ran Nazi concentration camps. On June 26, 1933, Himmler appointed Theodor Eicke as commandant of Dachau, establishing it as a model for future camps. Eicke later led the SS-Totenkopfverbände (SS-TV), which managed the camps. By September 1939, six major concentration camps held 21,400 inmates. By the end of the war, the number of camps had grown significantly, holding nearly 715,000 people, mainly targeted for racial reasons. The SS's repressive measures intensified with Germany's military defeats.

## Establishment of the Wehrmacht

In January 1919, following the end of World War I and the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, Germany's armed forces were named Friedensheer (peace army). In March 1919, a 420,000-strong preliminary army called the Vorläufige Reichswehr was established. The Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919, imposed severe restrictions on Germany's military, limiting the army to 100,000 men and the navy to 15,000. The fleet was restricted to six battleships, six cruisers, and twelve destroyers, while submarines, tanks, and heavy artillery were banned, and the air force was dissolved. On March 23, 1921, the Reichswehr was established as the new post-war military, with conscription abolished under the Versailles Treaty.

The Reichswehr, limited to 115,000 men, was led by Hans von Seeckt, who focused on retaining only the most capable officers. Historians Alan Millet and Williamson Murray noted that Seeckt chose new leadership from the best general staff officers, disregarding war heroes and nobility. This elite cadre force aimed to serve as the nucleus of an expanded military if conscription was restored. In the 1920s, Seeckt and his officers developed doctrines emphasizing speed, aggression, combined arms, and lower officers' initiative. Seeckt's influence remained even after his retirement in 1926, evident in the army's actions in 1939.

Despite the Versailles Treaty prohibiting an air force, Seeckt created a clandestine cadre of air force officers in the early 1920s, focusing on air superiority, strategic bombing, and close air support. The lack of a strategic bombing force in the 1930s was due to economic limitations, not disinterest. The Navy, led by Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, sought to revive Tirpitz's High Seas Fleet, while submarine warfare advocates, led by Admiral Karl Dönitz, were a minority before 1939.

By 1922, Germany covertly circumvented the Versailles Treaty conditions, collaborating with the Soviet Union after the Treaty of Rapallo. Major-General Otto Hasse negotiated further terms in Moscow in 1923, with Germany aiding Soviet industrialization and training Soviet officers. German tank and air-force specialists trained in the Soviet Union, and German chemical weapons research was conducted there. A fighter-pilot school was established at Lipetsk in 1924, training several hundred German air force personnel until their

departure in September 1933. Hitler's rise to power brought political support for the arms buildup.

After President Paul von Hindenburg's death on August 2, 1934, Adolf Hitler became President and commander in chief. Defence Minister Werner von Blomberg, acting on his own, discharged all Jews from the Reichswehr in February 1934 and incorporated Nazi symbols into uniforms in May 1934. In August 1934, the military took the Hitler oath, swearing personal loyalty to Hitler, an offer that surprised him. The oath pledged unconditional obedience to Hitler and readiness to give one's life for the oath.

By 1935, Germany openly defied Versailles Treaty military restrictions. German rearmament was announced on March 16, 1935, with the "Edict for the Buildup of the Wehrmacht" and the reintroduction of conscription. The standing army size remained at 100,000, but new conscripts equal to this size were trained annually. The Reichswehr was officially renamed the Wehrmacht on May 21, 1935, with Hitler's proclamation including 36 divisions. In December 1935, General Ludwig Beck added 48 tank battalions to the rearmament program. Hitler initially set a ten-year remilitarization timeframe but shortened it to four years. The remilitarization of the Rhineland and the Anschluss significantly increased the German Reich's territory, providing a larger conscription pool.

Recruitment for the Wehrmacht involved voluntary enlistment and conscription, with 1.3 million drafted and 2.4 million volunteering between 1935 and 1939. Approximately 18.2 million soldiers served in the Wehrmacht from 1935 to 1945. Initially, the military aimed for a homogeneous force with traditional Prussian military values. However, Hitler's desire to expand the Wehrmacht's size led to accepting citizens of lower class and education, decreasing internal cohesion and appointing inexperienced officers.

Effective officer training and recruitment contributed to the Wehrmacht's early victories and its prolonged resistance even as the war turned against Germany. As World War II intensified, personnel from the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe were transferred to the army, and SS enlistments increased. After the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943, fitness standards for recruits were lowered, and "special diet" battalions were created for men with severe stomach ailments. Rear-echelon personnel were sent to front-line duty, with the oldest and youngest recruits driven by propaganda to fight to the death.

Initially, the Wehrmacht aimed to remain an ethnic German force, exempting minorities from military service. Foreign volunteers were not accepted before 1941. However, with the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Wehrmacht and SS sought recruits from occupied and neutral countries, presenting the war as a multi-national crusade against Jewish Bolshevism. Germanic populations were recruited into the SS, while non-Germanic people joined the Wehrmacht. Recruitment often became coercive, especially in later years, with Poles in the Polish Corridor declared ethnic Germans and drafted.

Initially, Hitler opposed women's conscription, but with men going to the front, women took auxiliary positions as Wehrmachtshelferinnen (Female Wehrmacht Helpers), serving as telephone operators, administrative clerks, anti-aircraft defense operators, meteorology service employees, and volunteer nurses.

## German Foreign Affairs Prior to the War

### Anschluss (Annexation of Austria)

When Adolf Hitler and the Nazis rose to power in the Weimar Republic, Austria distanced itself economically from Germany. Both countries faced severe economic hardships due to the Great Depression, with high unemployment and unstable industries. During the 1920s, German capital heavily invested in Austria. By 1937, Germany's rapid rearmament spurred Berlin's interest in annexing Austria, which was rich in raw materials and labor, supplying Germany with essential resources like magnesium, textiles, and machinery products.

Hitler, originally from Austria, adopted German nationalist ideas early on. After joining the German Workers' Party (DAP) in 1919, he quickly rose to leadership, transforming it into the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) in 1920. Hitler's vision included unifying all Germans into a "Greater Germany," as he articulated in his 1921 essay and his book, "Mein Kampf"

Austria, under the Christian Social Party, experienced political and economic instability, eventually evolving into a corporatist, one-party state by 1933. Engelbert Dollfuss, the chancellor, sought Mussolini's support to maintain Austria's independence. However, Mussolini's alignment with Hitler through the Berlin–Rome Axis in 1937 weakened Austria's position.

Despite the Austrian Nazi Party's failure in the 1930 elections, Nazi support grew after Hitler's rise in Germany. By 1932, many Austrians favored unification with Germany, but Nazi terrorism and a failed coup in 1934, leading to Dollfuss's assassination, turned public opinion. Dollfuss's successor, Kurt Schuschnigg, also opposed Nazi influence and sought to maintain Austrian independence, but by 1936, the pressure from Germany was mounting.

Hitler's Four Year Plan in 1936 aimed to boost Germany's military and economic self-sufficiency, increasing the push for an Anschluss (union with Austria) to secure Austria's resources. Hermann Göring, a key Nazi leader, strongly advocated for the annexation to solve Germany's resource shortages.

In early 1938, Hitler demanded significant political concessions from Schuschnigg, including appointing pro-Nazi officials like Arthur Seyss-Inquart. Schuschnigg agreed under duress, but when he announced a referendum on Austrian independence for 13 March 1938, Hitler threatened invasion. Schuschnigg resigned on 11 March, and Seyss-Inquart became chancellor, immediately inviting German troops into Austria.

On 12 March 1938, German troops entered Austria, greeted by enthusiastic crowds. Hitler's triumphant tour culminated in a massive rally in Vienna on 15 March, where he proclaimed Austria's annexation into the German Reich. The subsequent referendum on 10 April 1938 officially recorded 99.7% support for the Anschluss, though the process was neither free nor fair.

The Anschluss marked the end of Austria's independence, transforming it into a province of Germany. Hitler's popularity soared as he achieved the long-desired unification of Austria and Germany, fulfilling a key goal of his expansionist agenda.

### **Invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Munich Agreement**

The First Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918 after the Austro-Hungarian Empire's collapse at the end of World War I. Recognized by the Treaty of Saint-Germain and the Treaty of Trianon, Czechoslovakia was divided into Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Rus'. It included over three million ethnic Germans, about 22.95% of the population, mainly in border regions later called the Sudetenland, bordering Germany and Austria.

Sudeten Germans were not consulted about joining Czechoslovakia. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, there was a tendency to promote Czech and Slovak nationalism, leading to underrepresentation of Germans in the government and military. The Great Depression further impacted the Sudeten Germans, who were highly industrialized and export-oriented. By 1936, they comprised 60% of the unemployed in Czechoslovakia.

In 1933, Konrad Henlein founded the Sudeten German Party (SdP), which quickly gained popularity, capturing two-thirds of the vote in German-heavy districts. It is debated whether the SdP was initially a Nazi front organization or evolved into one. By 1935, it was the second-largest party in Czechoslovakia due to the concentrated German vote.

Following Austria's Anschluss with Germany, Henlein met Hitler on March 28, 1938, and was directed to make demands unacceptable to the Czechoslovak government led by President Edvard Beneš. On April 24, the SdP issued the Karlsbader Programm, demanding autonomy for Germans in Czechoslovakia. While the government was willing to offer more minority rights, it hesitated to grant autonomy. In May 1938, the SdP won 88% of the German votes.

Amid rising tensions, Beneš offered on September 15, 1938, to cede 6,000 square kilometers of Czechoslovakia to Germany in exchange for the repatriation of 1.5 to 2 million Sudeten Germans. Hitler did not respond.

France and Britain, intent on avoiding war, advised Czechoslovakia to accede to Germany's demands. Beneš resisted, initiating partial mobilization on May 19, 1938, in anticipation of a German invasion. On May 20, Hitler presented Operation Green, a draft plan for attacking Czechoslovakia, conditional on provocation or political justification. By May 30, he ordered the plan's implementation by October 1 at the latest.

Poland's stance was ambiguous, promising to oppose Soviet intervention while indicating willingness to fight Germany if France supported Czechoslovakia. However, Western powers focused on appeasement.

Czechoslovakia fortified its borders from 1935 to 1938. Hitler accelerated military preparations, aiming for a quick resolution of the Czechoslovak issue before British rearmament. Britain demanded Beneš request a mediator, leading to the appointment of Lord Runciman on August 3. France publicly supported Czechoslovakia but was unwilling to go to war over the Sudetenland.



In September, German propaganda exaggerated Czechoslovak atrocities against Sudeten Germans, pressuring the West to make concessions. Hitler stationed 750,000 soldiers on the Czechoslovak border. On September 12, Hitler's Nuremberg speech condemned Czechoslovakia, accusing it of violating self-determination principles and persecuting minorities. He claimed over 600,000 Germans had been forced out since Czechoslovakia's creation and accused Beneš of executing German protesters and preparing for war against Germany. Hitler portrayed Czechoslovakia as a French puppet state, intended to threaten Germany's economy and industry.

On September 13, 1938, following internal unrest in Czechoslovakia, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain sought a personal meeting with Adolf Hitler to avert war. Chamberlain, advised by Lord Halifax, Sir John Simon, and Sir Samuel Hoare, aimed to find a diplomatic solution. The meeting, announced at 10 Downing Street, generated optimism in Britain. Chamberlain flew to Germany on September 15 and met Hitler at Berchtesgaden. This marked one of the first instances where a head of state flew to a diplomatic meeting due to time constraints.

During their discussions, Hitler demanded that the Sudeten Germans be allowed to join Germany, falsely claiming that 300 Sudeten Germans had been killed by the Czechoslovak government. He expressed concerns over British threats, which Chamberlain denied. Hitler assured Chamberlain he did not wish to destroy Czechoslovakia but believed the country would collapse if the Sudetenland were annexed. Chamberlain returned to Britain to consult his cabinet.

On September 16, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier met with British officials to devise a plan. They proposed that Czechoslovakia cede territories with over 50% German population to Germany in exchange for guarantees of Czechoslovakia's independence. Czechoslovakia rejected this proposal.

On September 17, Hitler established the Sudetendeutsches Freikorps, a paramilitary group that conducted cross-border operations into Czechoslovakia. This marked the beginning of an undeclared war between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Over the following days, Czechoslovak forces suffered significant casualties and abductions.

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini declared his support for Germany on September 18. Meanwhile, German military opponents planned a coup against Hitler, led by General Hans

Oster, on September 20. On September 22, as Chamberlain prepared for further talks in Bad Godesberg, he announced his objective of achieving peace in Europe.

Chamberlain arrived in Cologne on September 22 and was welcomed warmly by the Germans. Hitler, however, demanded the complete dissolution of Czechoslovakia, causing Chamberlain significant concern. Hitler later issued an ultimatum for Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland by October 1, which he later extended to September 28.

The Czechoslovak government mobilized its military, with strong public support, on September 23. The Soviet Union offered assistance, but Poland and Romania refused to allow Soviet forces to cross their territories.

On September 24, Hitler issued the Godesberg Memorandum, demanding the Sudetenland's cession by September 28 or facing war. Chamberlain returned to Britain, and his announcement of Hitler's demands enraged British and French supporters of confronting Hitler. The Czechoslovak government eventually agreed to the Allies' terms on September 25, but Hitler added new demands.

On September 26, Chamberlain sent Sir Horace Wilson to deliver a personal letter to Hitler, seeking a peaceful resolution. That evening, Hitler gave a speech in Berlin, stating the Sudetenland was his last territorial demand in Europe and set a deadline for Czechoslovakia to comply. Britain began war preparations.

On September 27, Chamberlain addressed the British people, highlighting the gravity of the situation. On September 28, with no agreement reached, British Ambassador to Italy Lord Perth requested Mussolini's intervention. Mussolini persuaded Hitler to delay the ultimatum and agreed to attend a four-power conference in Munich on September 29.

At the Munich conference, attended by Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler, and Mussolini, an agreement was reached on September 29 and signed early on September 30. The Munich Agreement stipulated that the Sudetenland would be ceded to Germany by October 10, with an international commission deciding on other disputed areas. Czechoslovakia, realizing it could not resist alone, reluctantly agreed.

Chamberlain met Hitler privately on September 30 to sign a statement symbolizing a desire for peace between their countries. Upon returning to Britain, Chamberlain delivered his famous "peace for our time" speech on September 30, believing the Munich Agreement had averted war.

In 1937, the Wehrmacht developed "Operation Green" (Fall Grün) for the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which was executed shortly after the Slovak State's proclamation on March 15, 1939. On March 14, Slovakia seceded from Czechoslovakia and became a Nazi-subordinate state. The following day, Carpatho-Ukraine declared independence but was quickly annexed by Hungary.

Czechoslovak President Emil Hácha traveled to Berlin, where Hitler threatened to bomb Prague unless Czech troops surrendered. This caused Hácha to suffer a heart attack, but he was revived by Hitler's doctor and agreed to the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. On March 15, German armies occupied Prague, transforming the rest of the country into a protectorate under Konstantin von Neurath, appointed Reichsprotektor by Hitler. Immediately, arrests began, targeting refugees, Jews, and Czech public figures. By November, Jewish children were expelled from schools, and their parents lost their jobs. Universities and colleges were closed after protests, leading to over 1,200 students being sent to concentration camps and the execution of nine student leaders on November 17 (International Students' Day).

The occupation provided Nazi Germany with Czechoslovakia's skilled labor force, heavy industry, and military weapons, which significantly contributed to the 1940 Battle of France. Additionally, Germany seized Czechoslovakia's gold reserves, including gold stored in the Bank of England. Only a fraction of the gold was returned to Czechoslovakia in 1982. The country was also forced to sell war materials to the Wehrmacht, accruing a debt that was never repaid.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain viewed the Prague annexation as a breach of the Munich Agreement and a move beyond legitimate grievances from the Treaty of Versailles. This shift in perspective led to concerns about Poland being the next target of Nazi expansion, resulting in an Anglo-Polish military alliance. Chamberlain, feeling betrayed by Hitler, abandoned his policy of appeasement and began mobilizing British armed forces. France followed suit, and Italy, feeling threatened, invaded Albania in April 1939.

The annexation of Czechoslovakia greatly strengthened the Wehrmacht. Hitler highlighted the acquisition of significant military equipment, including 2,175 field guns, 469 tanks, 500 anti-aircraft artillery pieces, 43,000 machine guns, 1,090,000 military rifles,

114,000 pistols, a billion rounds of small-arms ammunition, and three million rounds of anti-aircraft ammunition.

### Pact of Steel

The Pact of Steel, officially the Pact of Friendship and Alliance between Germany and Italy, was a military and political alliance formalized on May 22, 1939. It was signed by foreign ministers Galeazzo Ciano of Italy and Joachim von Ribbentrop of Germany. Initially intended as a tripartite alliance including Japan, disagreements on the pact's focus led to it being a bilateral agreement between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Japan preferred an anti-Soviet stance, while Italy and Germany aimed at countering the British Empire and France.

The Pact of Steel was one of three key Axis agreements, alongside the Anti-Comintern Pact and the Tripartite Pact. It consisted of two parts: a public declaration of trust and cooperation, and a "Secret Supplementary Protocol" encouraging military and economic policy unification.

Germany and Italy, former adversaries in World War I, saw the rise of radical political parties like the Nazis and Fascists after the Great Depression. Mussolini, who became Italy's Prime Minister in 1922, gained popularity through public works and building a powerful navy. Hitler, appointed Chancellor in 1933, similarly initiated extensive public works and rearmament. Both leaders shared similar ideologies and met multiple times in the 1930s. On October 23, 1936, they signed a secret protocol aligning their foreign policies on issues like the Spanish Civil War and the Abyssinia Crisis.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, provoking tension with the Soviet Union. Japan signed a pact with Germany in 1936 to guard against Soviet attacks. However, Japan focused on anti-Soviet rather than anti-Western alliances, and thus did not join the Pact of Steel.

The Pact of Steel obliged Germany and Italy to support each other militarily, economically, and otherwise in the event of war, and to collaborate in wartime production. It assumed no war would occur within three years. However, when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and war broke out on September 3, Italy was unprepared and delayed its entry into World War II until June 1940, invading Southern France.

The pact's articles outlined continuous consultation on common interests, mutual support in case of external threats, immediate military assistance if either party was involved

in conflict, intensified cooperation in military and war economy, joint decisions on armistice or peace, and maintaining relations with friendly powers. The pact was initially valid for ten years, with a potential extension.

The secret supplementary protocols, undisclosed at the signing, urged quickened military and economic cooperation and coordinated propaganda efforts to enhance the Rome-Berlin Axis's power and image. Specialists were to be assigned in each capital to liaise with the respective Foreign Ministers.

### Disagreements with the West and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

The aftermath of World War I was catastrophic for the German and Russian empires. The Russian Civil War erupted in late 1917 after the Bolshevik Revolution, leading Vladimir Lenin to recognize the independence of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Facing a German military advance, Lenin and Trotsky signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, ceding many western Russian territories to Germany. After Germany's collapse, an Allied-led army intervened in the Russian Civil War from 1917 to 1922.

On April 16, 1922, the German Weimar Republic and Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Rapallo, renouncing territorial and financial claims against each other. This was followed by the Treaty of Berlin in 1926, where both pledged neutrality if attacked. Trade between Germany and the Soviet Union, which had fallen after World War I, increased significantly to 433 million RM annually by 1927 due to mid-1920s trade agreements.

In the 1930s, tensions between Germany and the Soviet Union rose as the Nazi Party gained power and promoted anti-Slavic and antisemitic ideologies, linking Jews with communism and capitalism. Hitler's speeches often mentioned an inevitable battle for land in the east. Consequently, German-Soviet trade declined sharply to 223 million RM by 1934 due to increased Soviet foreign debts and Germany's reduced reliance on Soviet imports.

During the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Germany and Italy supported the Spanish Nationalists, while the Soviets backed the Spanish Republic, making the conflict a proxy war. In 1936, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, later joined by Italy.

On March 31, 1939, Britain guaranteed Poland's independence, infuriating Hitler. This led to a strategic pivot towards negotiating with Moscow. In early May 1939, after viewing a

film of Stalin, Hitler became intrigued with a potential Soviet alliance, and negotiations commenced.

Hitler's anti-Soviet rhetoric contributed to Britain and France excluding the Soviet Union from the 1938 Munich Conference on Czechoslovakia. The Munich Agreement allowed Germany to annex part of Czechoslovakia, raising Soviet fears of being the next target. The Soviet leadership believed the West wanted German aggression in the East to weaken both regimes.

For Germany, economic self-sufficiency and an alliance with Britain were unattainable, making closer ties with the Soviet Union essential for raw materials. After the Munich Agreement, increased German military needs and Soviet demands for machinery led to talks from late 1938 to March 1939.

In response to Germany's defiance of the Munich Agreement, Britain and France guaranteed Poland's independence on March 31, 1939. On April 6, Britain and Poland formalized this guarantee as a military alliance. On April 28, Hitler denounced previous non-aggression pacts with Poland and naval agreements with Britain.

From mid-March 1939, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France exchanged proposals for a potential alliance against German expansionism. Negotiations began in May, with Soviet fears of "capitalist encirclement" leading them to seek an ironclad military alliance. Britain and France, still hoping to avoid war, were reluctant, believing the Soviet Union, weakened by the Great Purge, couldn't be a major military force.

By mid-June, tripartite negotiations focused on guarantees for Central and Eastern Europe against German aggression. Disagreements over defining "indirect aggression" stalled political negotiations, leading to military talks starting on August 12 in Moscow. The Soviet delegation, led by Kliment Voroshilov, faced British and French delegates without the authority to make firm commitments, prolonging discussions without resolving key issues, particularly Poland's stance on Soviet troop movements.

From April to July 1939, officials from the Soviet Union and Germany expressed mutual interest in political negotiations, marking a shift towards collaboration after years of strained relations. In May, Stalin replaced Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov with Vyacheslav Molotov, allowing for broader diplomatic discussions. On August 23, 1939, German

diplomats led by Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow for talks amid orchestrated fanfare, signaling the seriousness of the negotiations to the Soviets. Despite tensions, economic negotiations were largely settled by late July, paving the way for political discussions.

Throughout early August, Germany and the Soviet Union finalized their economic agreement and commenced political talks centered on their shared anticapitalist ideologies. Meanwhile, British, French, and Soviet officials planned military discussions in Moscow aimed at a collective response to potential German aggression. Talks stalled over Poland's refusal to allow Soviet troops passage in case of a German attack.

On August 19, the German-Soviet Commercial Agreement was signed, followed by the suspension of tripartite military talks by the Soviets on August 21, citing external reasons. Stalin sought assurances from Germany regarding secret protocols concerning spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, leading to the signing of a ten-year non-aggression pact on August 23. A secret protocol assigned spheres of influence over Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland between the two powers.

## Inner Workings of the Wehrmacht

### Command

Adolf Hitler became the commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht in his role as Germany's head of state after President Paul von Hindenburg's death in August 1934. When the Wehrmacht was created in 1935, Hitler assumed the title of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, a position he held until his suicide on April 30, 1945. Werner von Blomberg was initially appointed Commander-in-Chief and Reich Minister of War. Following the Blomberg-Fritsch Affair, Blomberg resigned, and Hitler replaced the Ministry of War with the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW), led by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel.

The OKW coordinated the three branch High Commands: the Army (OKH), Navy (OKM), and Air Force (OKL), with Hitler at the top. Despite suggestions from senior officers like von Manstein for a unified Joint Command or a single Joint Chief of Staff, Hitler refused. He believed that Göring, as Reichsmarschall and his deputy, would not accept being subordinate or equal to other commanders. Additionally, Hitler wanted to maintain his image as a military strategist.

With the establishment of the OKW, Hitler consolidated his control over the Wehrmacht and became increasingly involved in military operations as the war progressed. However, there was a lack of cohesion between the High Commands and the OKW, with senior generals often unaware of the other branches' needs and capabilities. This resulted in inter-service rivalry, as influence with Hitler depended not only on rank and merit but also on perceived loyalty.

## Branches

### Army

The Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH) was the High Command of Nazi Germany's Army from 1936 to 1945. Though the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) was supposed to coordinate the Wehrmacht's branches (Heer, Kriegsmarine, Luftwaffe, and Waffen-SS), it functioned mainly as a subordinate to Hitler's personal military staff. The OKW translated Hitler's ideas into military plans and orders, increasingly exercising direct command authority, particularly in the West, by 1942. The OKH's authority was thus confined to the Eastern Front.

The Abwehr, Germany's military intelligence organization from 1921 to 1944, initially focused on counterintelligence. After February 4, 1938, it was renamed the Overseas Department/Office in Defence of the Armed Forces High Command.

Germany used military districts (Wehrkreis) to manage administrative tasks and ensure a steady flow of recruits and supplies. The OKW separated the Field Army (OKH) from the Home Command (Heimatkriegsgebiet), which managed training, conscription, and supply.

The German Army was organized into army groups (Heeresgruppen), including allied and non-German units. During Operation Barbarossa in 1941, forces were divided into Army Group North (targeting Leningrad), Army Group Centre (targeting Smolensk), and Army Group South (targeting Kiev). Below these groups were field armies, panzer groups (later army-level formations), corps, and divisions. The army used Kampfgruppe (battle group) for provisional combat groupings.



Select arms of service included Afrika Korps, Feldgendarmerie (Field Military Police), Gebirgsjäger (Mountain Troops), Panzergrenadier (Mechanized Infantry), and Panzerwaffe (Armored Forces), among others.

The German military emphasized Blitzkrieg, a doctrine involving rapid, sweeping movements to quickly destroy enemy forces. Influential figures like Fuller, Liddel-Hart, and von Seeckt contributed to its development, and actions by commanders like Rommel and Guderian during the Battle of France exemplified it. However, Blitzkrieg was never an official doctrine, partly because not all of the Wehrmacht was trained for it, and high-level leaders didn't fully understand it.

The German Army focused on high combat performance through adaptability, flexibility, and decentralized decision-making, rewarding good combat performance. This approach, argued by Max Visser, allowed the German Army to achieve superior combat efficiency compared to traditional organizational doctrines. Studies, like those reported by Peter Turchin, indicated that German combat efficiency was significantly higher than British and American armies.

Tactically, the German Army used mission-based tactics (Auftragstaktik) and emphasized rapid response over meticulous planning. Despite being seen as a high-tech army, many technologies were only available in limited numbers. For instance, only 20% of units were fully motorized, with the rest relying on horses and bicycles. Losses in vehicles during campaigns, such as in the Soviet Union, further limited motorization.

In offensive operations, infantry attacked broadly to pin enemy forces, while mobile formations concentrated on narrow sectors for breakthrough and encirclement. In defensive operations, infantry held the main defense line while mobile units launched counterattacks. Disagreements about tactics, especially regarding the use of armored units under Allied air power, illustrated strategic challenges. For example, Rommel's experience led him to advocate scattering armored units to reduce vulnerability, a view not shared by his peers.

### Luftwaffe (Air Force)

The Luftwaffe, Nazi Germany's air force, had two commanders-in-chief during its history. Hermann Göring was the first, followed by Generalfeldmarschall Robert Ritter von Greim, appointed in the final days of the war. Von Greim was the last German officer

promoted to the highest rank, Generalfeldmarschall. Other high-ranking officers included Kesselring, Hugo Sperrle, Erhard Milch, and Wolfram von Richthofen.

At the war's end, with Berlin surrounded, Göring suggested to Hitler that he take over the Reich's leadership. In response, Hitler ordered Göring's arrest and execution, but the SS guards did not carry out the order. Göring survived and was later tried at Nuremberg. Sperrle was acquitted at the OKW Trial, one of the last Nuremberg trials, and died in Munich in 1953.

Initially, the Luftwaffe was divided into four Luftflotten (air fleets), each responsible for a quarter of Germany. As the war expanded, new air fleets were created, such as Luftflotte 5 in 1940 for operations in Norway and Denmark. Each Luftflotte contained several Fliegerkorps (Air Corps), Fliegerdivisionen (Air Divisions), Jagdkorps (Fighter Corps), Jagddivisionen (Fighter Divisions), or Jagdfliegerführer (Fighter Air Commands), with units including Geschwader, independent Staffeln, and Kampfgruppen.

A Geschwader, commanded by a Geschwaderkommodore (rank of major, Oberstleutnant, or Oberst), included administrative officers and specialist staff for navigation, signals, and intelligence. Each Geschwader consisted of Gruppen (groups), further divided into Jagdstaffel (fighter squadrons). A typical fighter Geschwader (JG) was equipped with Bf 109 or Fw 190 aircraft. By 1944-45, advanced aircraft like the Heinkel He 162 were introduced. Bomber Geschwader (KG), night fighter wings (NJG), and dive bomber wings (StG) had similar structures. A bomber Geschwader typically had 80-90 aircraft.

In 1939, the Luftwaffe's peacetime strength was 370,000 men. By 1941, it had reached 1.5 million, and its peak strength from November 1943 to June 1944 was nearly three million, including 1.7 million soldiers, one million Wehrmachtsbeamte and civilian employees, and 300,000 auxiliaries. By October 1944, anti-aircraft units comprised 600,000 soldiers and 530,000 auxiliaries, including young males, older men, females, and foreign personnel.

### Kriegsmarine (Navy)

Adolf Hitler, as the Supreme Commander of all German forces, including the Kriegsmarine, exercised his authority through the Oberkommando der Marine (OKM). The OKM had a hierarchical structure with a Commander-in-Chief, a Chief of Naval General Staff, and a Chief of Naval Operations. Erich Raeder was the first Commander-in-Chief of the OKM, holding the position until after the Battle of the Barents Sea, when he was replaced by

Karl Dönitz on January 30, 1943. Dönitz remained in command until he became President of Germany following Hitler's suicide in April 1945. Hans-Georg von Friedeburg briefly succeeded Dönitz until Germany's surrender in May 1945.

The OKM oversaw regional, squadron, and temporary flotilla commands. Regional commands, managed by a Generaladmiral or an Admiral, included the Baltic Fleet, Nord, Nordsee, Norwegen, Ost/Ostsee, Süd, and West. Squadrons, organized by ship type, had their own Flag Officers. Major naval operations were directed by a Flottenchef, who controlled a flotilla during specific operations. The Kriegsmarine's ship design bureau, Marineamt, faced issues due to a lack of practical design experience among its officers.

Communications were secured using an eight-rotor Enigma encoding system. The Luftwaffe held a near-complete monopoly on military aviation, causing rivalry with the Kriegsmarine. Naval aviation units, like the Bordfliegergruppe 196 and Trägergeschwader 186, operated aircraft from land bases due to the incomplete aircraft carrier Graf Zeppelin. Coastal groups supported naval operations with reconnaissance aircraft and torpedo bombers.

The Kriegsmarine's coastal artillery was stationed on German and occupied coasts, particularly in France and Norway as part of the Atlantic Wall. Naval bases were protected by flak batteries, and Seetakt sea radars were used for coastal monitoring.

At the start of World War II, the Marine Stoßtrupp Kompanie conducted operations like the assault on Westerplatte in Danzig and the landing in Narvik in 1940. As the war progressed, the Kriegsmarine formed regiments and divisions from surplus personnel to fight on land, especially following the invasion of Normandy in June 1944 and the Soviet advance. By January 1945, six divisions were formed from around 40 regiments.

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