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FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 1-22

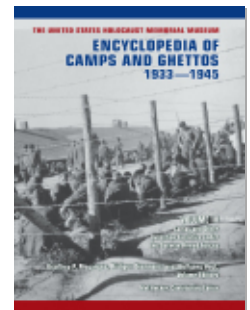
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Peter Kalmbach
Trans. Dallas Michelbacher

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 1

The German Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) ordered the establishment of FStGA 1 on April 26, 1942, “through the Commander of Defense District (*Webrkreis*) VIII at Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Glatz [today Kłodzko, Poland].”²¹ The original contingent consisted of 50 military prisoners from Glatz as well as 100 from WG Torgau-Fort Zinna and 50 from WG Torgau-Brückenkopf. The OKW order specified that the FStGA was established for “shirkers” and men who were repeatedly punished for “deliberate offensive actions.” Examples of shirkers included deserters, “sentenced for subversion of fighting power (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*)” and “serious cases of unauthorized absence.”²²

Prisoners who were sentenced to terms of less than six months were generally “not to be sent to the FStGAs.”²³ However, as early as June 1942—with a few exceptions—“fundamentally” all men with sentences of more than three months were sent to the FStGA.⁴ From the beginning, prisoners who were fit only for “service in garrisons in the homeland” were sent to the FStGA. As the OKW informed the chief of the Wehrmacht Medical Service (*Wehrmachtsanitätswesens*), sending these prisoners to serve in the garrisons in the Reich would “only encourage shirking,” and they were, therefore, sent to the FStGAs, where they would work according to their physical capacity.⁵ Prisoners with the lowest fitness rating, “fit for labor service,” were to remain in the WGs for the time being.⁶

Although FStGA 1 was the first of 22 such units to be formed and operated until the end of the war, there is little substantial documentation on its operation. In addition to a lack of reports on the unit’s activity, there are also no testimonies from former prisoners or guard personnel. This entry, therefore, relies on the instructions given to the FStGAs in general to reconstruct the history of FStGA 1. Since the FStGA units aimed for an “equal treatment of the prisoners,” one can make inferences about FStGA 1 from records pertaining to other FStGAs that are better documented.⁷ However, one should keep in mind that, although general instructions for the FStGAs existed, individual commanders retained substantial leeway to interpret those instructions, and so there was some variability among the FStGAs.

Like all of the FStGAs that the Germans established later, FStGA 1 was intended for service on the eastern front. General

der Artillerie Eugen Müller (the general in the Army High Command—*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH—who was responsible for the FStGAs) ordered on May 28, 1942, that FStGA 1 would be subordinate to Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*).⁸ While it was located in the area of Army Group South, it was supplied through the nearest Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG), which was in Dubno, along with its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffängstelle*) in Kiev. The four companies of FStGA 1 had a strength of about 165 men each, with about 50 staff personnel. In July 1942, a 5th Company was established, whose staff was assembled in WG Bruchsal or WG Freiburg,⁹ while the prisoners were sent directly from the field army.¹⁰ Almost all FStGAs were organized in a similar way, with a staff and five companies; only in exceptional cases was a sixth company established.¹¹

The order to establish the 5th Company of FStGA 1 also reveals the selection criteria for staff personnel. Specifically, only “energetic, especially energetic, and physically fit soldiers” were to be selected. “Unsuitable personnel” were “to be immediately exchanged by the commanders of the WGs, in coordination with the Defense District commanders.” These personnel, which would include at least one sergeant from the prison service, would be expected to bring 12 pairs of hand and ankle cuffs with them.¹² The Youth Prison (*Jugendgefängnis*) Niederschönfeld am Lech was to be the source of supplies for these personnel.

On May 28, 1942, the OKH sent an order to Army Group South that the prisoners in the FStGAs were to be sent to “the hardest labor, in dangerous circumstances and under difficult conditions.” In addition, it explained that “through these measures, the penal system could be organized effectively, so that soldiers who were afraid of danger and combat would not have the incentive to avoid front line service by committing criminal acts. For those of weak character, the existing military penal system in the homeland had lost its deterrent effect in comparison to the hard winter campaign in the east.”¹³

The primary plan was for the prisoners to perform difficult and dangerous military-related tasks in support of the fighting troops at the front, which would, on the one hand, free up reserves for the frontline units and, on the other, maintain discipline among the troops by achieving the desired deterrent quality of the penal units. The OKW guidelines for “punishment in the FStGAs” from April 15, 1942, gave the following examples of “the hardest labor”: “clearing mines; digging graves for dead enemy soldiers; bridge, bunker, defensive structure, and road construction, etc.” The prisoners would work every day, “including Sundays and holidays, at least ten hours a day if possible.” When working hours were limited by darkness or weather, work was to be replaced with “extended [military] exercises,” which would otherwise take place on the march to and from the work site.¹⁴ The prisoners received the lowest ration category (*Wehrmachtverpflegungssatz* IV 2), which was to be reduced by an additional 30 percent in the event of arrest, investigative detention, or hospitalization for “self-inflicted injury.”¹⁵ The guard personnel were ordered to “immediately use [their] weapons for any

attempt at physical defiance, sedition, or flight. A warning shot is *not* necessary! To prevent flight attempts, *special areas* will be established, in which the order is to fire *without* an order to halt.” [Emphasis in original.]¹⁶

In the fall of 1942, FStGA received new “instructions for the FStGAs and Feldstraflager” from the OKH.¹⁷ This document, which was designated as a “supplement” to the basic OKH orders of April 14 and 15, 1942, incorporated lessons learned from experience in the use of FStGAs that had been gathered since early summer. This experience demonstrated that, in practice, the prescribed use of the FStGAs had been counterproductive from a military perspective. The malnutrition and rapid exhaustion stemming from excessively long periods of difficult labor threatened the timely completion of military projects and could also allow the emergence of epidemics of diseases that could put the fighting troops in danger. Based on this experience, the new “instructions” informed FStGA 1 that the prisoners who were working on tasks of “military importance” were “to be kept in good physical condition and morale by whatever measures necessary.”¹⁸ In order to maintain these prisoners’ physical fitness, the FStGA commanders could petition the OKH for an increase of rations “with the approval of a military doctor” and “for a limited time.”¹⁹ General Müller’s instructions also specified that the “reduction of rations” for punitive reasons “was not to threaten the working strength” of the prisoners. His remark that “hunger . . . would lead to new offenses” was based on numerous instances of prisoners going absent without leave or deserting because of hunger, which often resulted in their execution.²⁰

Along with the “punishment and deterrence concepts,” the new instructions also incorporated more “reform and education concepts.” General Müller specifically ordered the FStGA commanders to “act firmly to prevent guard personnel from abusing their power.” However, in the same paragraph, he said that there was to be “no softening of punishment . . . for resistance, physical attacks, or flight,” which were still to be punished harshly.²¹ He recommended the creation of a “class system” in the FStGAs, in which prisoners could be promoted for good behavior and hard work, adding that “special incentives (smoke breaks, additional mail privileges, etc.) could be attached to these promotions.”²² However, it was noted, at the same time, that the newly arrived prisoners had to “feel the *full* difficulty” of service in the FStGA first.²³

The goal of this “reform and education” was to transform the FStGA prisoners into potential frontline soldiers. First-time offenders could be recommended for “suspension of sentence to probation at the front” after three months with good behavior. As a preliminary stage, it was suggested, prisoners, “especially the ‘promoted’” could be sent to perform exercises with weapons even before their release from the FStGA so that “in an emergency, they could be sent to defend against enemy attacks under the leadership of the staff personnel” and, “under certain circumstances,” also be “used in smaller operations.” In addition, the awarding of “wound badges” was possible.²⁴ However, it was noted that awards for “assault,

close combat, or anti-partisan combat” could not be given to prisoners in the FStGAs.²⁵

The introduction of the possibility of “promotion” harkened back to the penal reforms of the Weimar Republic, which were referred to as the “progressive system” or “level-punishment.”²⁶ However, the return to these ideas took place—as in the civilian penal system of the Third Reich—in the context of the Nazis’ racialized, social Darwinist worldview, which also provided for the “extermination” of alleged “ethnic” or “military vermin.” Therefore, the aforementioned instructions also informed FStGA 1 that “if a prisoner proves to be incorrigible after six to nine months, despite written warning, then he should be sent to a field punishment camp (*Feldstraflager*).”²⁷ In Feldstraflager I, II, and III, there were much more difficult conditions of confinement as well as the possibility to send the prisoners to one of the SS concentration camps.²⁸ The period of internment in the Feldstraflager or concentration camps would not count against the prisoner’s sentence, and he would still be expected to serve that sentence after the end of the war.

On August 19, 1943, FStGA 1, like all other FStGAs, was informed once again by the OKH that “incorrigibles . . . should no longer be kept in the penal institutions” because “their bad influence could unnecessarily reduce the effectiveness of the reform work” in the unit. Thus, “the strongest measure, that is, assignment to a prison camp, must be applied” in those cases.²⁹ This system would ideally divide the prisoners between “those soldiers who can be improved and reformed on the one hand, and asocials and those who are weak in character, constitution, and morals on the other.”³⁰

Because of the lack of eyewitness sources, it is not possible to say exactly how these regulations—which gave the FStGA commanders wide leeway—were implemented in FStGA 1 specifically. It is also not possible to determine to what extent the options of transferring prisoners to the Feldstraflager or assigning them to probationary service at the front were applied. A cursory examination of the prisoner identification directory of FStGA 1³¹ reveals that many more prisoners were sent to regular units for front probation than to special probationary units like *Bewährungstruppe 500*.³²

By late 1943, FStGA 1 had been relocated from the southern to the middle area of the eastern front. The last-known commanding authority for the unit was the XXVII Army Corps of the Second Army (*Heeresgruppe Weichsel*), which was located in West Prussia, in 1945.³³ The relocation of the unit to the central area of the front is reflected in the locations of the executions of prisoners from FStGA 1 who were sentenced to death. For example, Josef Zintl of 4th Company of FStGA 1 was executed for desertion on May 19, 1943, in Odessa.³⁴ The verdict was handed down by the commander of the German Troops in Transnistria (*Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Transnistrien*). However, Karl Bolgert, a soldier from Strasbourg, was executed on August 12, 1943, in Briansk, in the central part of the front.³⁵ On June 1, 1944, Emil Schmidtke was executed for desertion by a firing squad in Brest, which was also in the area of Army Group Center

(*Heeresgruppe Mitte*).³⁶ In his case, the death sentence was handed down by Oberbaustab 18. Just two weeks later, Karl Weippert and Günther Schulze, who had both been sent to Company 5 of FStGA 1 in May 1944, were sentenced to “death for collective unauthorized absence that exceeded the regular range of sentences in paragraph 5 of the Wartime Special Criminal Law Decree” by Oberfeldkommandantur 399. The text of the sentence reveals that the death penalty was rigorously enforced against military prisoners:

Orderly punishment in a Feldstrafgefangenen-Abteilung is only guaranteed when escapees, even if they cannot be convicted of desertion, are sentenced to death. Experience has shown that these escaped prisoners often present the excuse that they wished to return to the fighting troops. If the escapee is allowed to use this excuse and is only sentenced to be returned to the Feldstrafgefangenen-Abteilung as punishment, it would over time lead to an unacceptable number of such unpermitted absences.³⁷

In December 1944 and January 1945, seven death sentences were passed by Höheren Pionierführer 10 against prisoners from FStGA 1.³⁸ These sentences for desertion were all confirmed. However, it was only possible to carry two of them out. Hans Hochradl was shot in Schröttersburg (today Płock, Poland) on January 4, 1945, and Ernst Lindhorst, from Company 5 of FStGA 1, was executed in WG Anklam on April 6, 1945.

In instances of desertion in which the prisoner was absent for more than three months, the case was automatically referred to the Wehrmachtkommandantur Berlin. Three additional death sentences were handed down by this highest Wehrmacht court against prisoners from FStGA 1. The first, Fritz Hildebrandt, was beheaded in Brandenburg-Görden Prison on August 14, 1944.³⁹ The second, Karl Schuh, was shot in Spandau on October 19, 1944.⁴⁰ The third, Hermann Zimmermann, had his sentence commuted to “probation in special service” by Heinrich Himmler in his capacity as the head of the Replacement Army (*Ersatzheer*) on February 23, 1945.⁴¹

SOURCES Primary source information about FStGA 1 is located in BA-MA (H 20/497; RH 14/37); BA-MA (WF-03/3861; WF-03/24582; WF-03/32406); BArch PA (Sammlung WR); and WAST (Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 1, Bd. 49874–49879).

Additional information about FStGA 1 can be found in the following publications: Thomas Geldmacher, “Strafvollzug: Der Umgang der Deutschen Wehrmacht mit militärgerichtlich verurteilten Soldaten,” in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz: Urteilspraxis—Strafvollzug—Entschädigungspraxis in Österreich*, ed. Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2003); Otto Gritschneider, *Furchtbare Richter: Verbrecherische Todesurteile deutscher Kriegserichte* (Munich: Beck, 1998); Christiane Hottes, “Grauen und Normalität: Zum Strafvollzug im Dritten Reich,” in *Ortstermin Hamm: Zur Justiz im Dritten Reich*, ed. Elke Hilscher et al. (Hamm: Oberstadtdirektor der Stadt Hamm, 1991); Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungsgruppe 500:*

Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungsgruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug (Bremen: Temmen, 1995); Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ—Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012); Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 2: Die Landstreitkräfte 1–5* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 57; and Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997).

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NOTES

1. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H Str. I/II Str. 1041/42 vom 14.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.
2. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H Str. I/II Str. 1041/42 vom 14.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.
3. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. III/331/42 vom 28.5.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 889.
4. Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM), hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1942 (9), Nr. 1034 (OKW, 27.11.1942, 54 f 10 Vollstr. Pl. Str 3495/42 Tr Abt [Str II]), S. 576. In practice, it appears prisoners sentenced to terms between three and six months were only rarely sent to the FStGAs; cf. Geldmacher, “Strafvollzug,” p. 457.
5. OKW 54 e 10 Strafv. i. Kr.-Trupp.Abt. (Str. II) Str. 259/43 an den Chef des Wehrmachtsanitätswesens vom 5.2.1943, reproduced in Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz*, p. 817.
6. See entry for **FStGA 20**.
7. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.
8. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. III/331/42 vom 28.5.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 888. The transfer to Army Group Center—noted in Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 57—occurred later.
9. Two companies were formed in WG Bruchsal, and 5th Companies for FStGAs 1, 2, and 3 were formed in Freiburg. The exact assignments were not specified in the order.
10. OKW 54 e 10-Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H/Str I/IV vom 24.6.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, Bl. 875.
11. At the end of August or beginning of September 1944, one of each FStGA's companies was converted into a penitentiary company and a second was converted into a prison camp company. Normally, but not always, these were the 4th and 5th Companies, respectively. The background for this change is explained further in the entry for **FStGA 21**.
12. OKW 54 e 10-Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H/Str I/IV vom 24.6.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, Bl. 875.
13. OKH/General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. III/331/42 vom 28.5.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 888.
14. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/ H/Str. II vom 15.4.1942, BArch PA, Sammlung WR.
15. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H Str.I/II Str. 1041/42 vom 14.4.1942, reproduced in Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz*, p. 811.
16. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/ H/Str. II vom 15.4.1942, BArch PA, Sammlung WR.

17. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 189.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 192.

20. Ibid., p. 193.

21. Ibid., pp. 189, 191.

22. Ibid., p. 191.

23. Ibid., p. 189.

24. Ibid., p. 192.

25. Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM), hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1944 (11.), Nr. 622 (OKH, 17.10.44 – 29 e/allg. – PA/P 5 (f)), S. 336.

26. Hottes, “Grauen und Normalität,” p. 63.

27. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192. For more information on prisoners sent to the prison camps, see entries for **WG Glatz** and **Feldstraflager I–III**.

28. Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ,” pp. 78–86.

29. OKH Az. 469 Ju Abt Nr. 1728/43 vom 19.8.1943, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 1001.

30. Kurze Übersicht über Organisation und Aufgaben des Wehrmachtstrafvollzugs, der Bewährungstruppe sowie der Sondereinheiten des Heeres, Berlin, den 16.3.1943, BA-MA, RH 14/37.

31. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 1 (Bd. 49874–49879).

32. For more information on Bewährungstruppe 500, see Klausch, *Bewährungstruppe 500*.

33. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 57.

34. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 488 of the photocopied form).

35. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT): Mitteilung für Karl Bolgert.

36. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 690 of the photocopied form).

37. Feldurteil (St.L. 214/44) des Gerichts der Oberfeldkommandantur 399 vom 14.6.1944 gegen Karl Weippert und Günther Schulze, reproduced in Gritschneider, *Furchtbare Richter*, pp. 102–106.

38. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 692–694 of the photocopied form).

39. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1091 of the photocopied form). Because a large number of death sentences were handed down in Berlin, such sentences had been carried out there since the beginning of the war, primarily by beheading in Berlin-Plötzensee Prison (1939–1940) and then in Brandenburg-Görden (from 1940 on), because frequent, widely audible shootings could have caused unrest among the population in Berlin.

40. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1103 of the photocopied form).

41. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1108 of the photocopied form).

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 2

The Germans formed FStGA 2 through Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) XII command, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Gernersheim on May 1, 1942.¹ The

camp originally consisted of 130 prisoners from Germerseheim as well as 50 from WG Bruchsal and 20 inmates from WG Freiburg.

On May 28, 1942, General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, general for Special Tasks in the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH), who was responsible for prison sentences, informed the Army Groups and Armies in the east that FStGA 2 would be deployed with Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*).² Convicts from the Army Group Center area were to be transferred to FStGA 2 via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissow (Borisov/Barysaü), provided that a direct transfer was not possible.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—with the clarifications added by General Müller on October 28 after initial deployment experiences—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and employment. The FStGA 1 entry describes the guidelines in more detail. There is no known documentation as to their concrete implementation in FStGA 2.

Some casualty reports handed in by FStGA 2 for the period of July 12 to September 9, 1943, indicate around 30 dead and wounded through bombing raids, artillery fire, tank and infantry fire, and cavalry attacks.³ Accordingly, this report indicates that this unit was located directly on the front in this phase. The unit reported heavy casualties for the “withdrawal . . . in the period from June 29–July 18, 1944”⁴—that is, in the retreat following the collapse of Army Group Center. Along with the dead and wounded, there were 255 missing reported—a number that was actually, due to a missing report page, estimated at nearly 270 men. FStGA 2, which had been used initially, in 1942, as a supporting unit with the Second Armored Army, would remain in the central section of the eastern front until the end of the war. The end came for the unit in April 1945, with the Fourth Army in East Prussia.⁵

Among the few known details is that there were three executions of members of FStGA 2 who fled the unit, that is, went absent without leave. Gefreiter Johannes Roosen (b. February 12, 1920) escaped all the way to France. He was sentenced to death there on November 24, 1942, by the court of the Field Command (*Feldkommandantur*) 540. He was shot on November 26, 1942, in Rochefort.⁶ The engineer Franc Beaumart (b. May 30, 1920) appears to have hidden himself for more than three months. In such cases, searches fell under the responsibility of the court of the Armed Forces Headquarters, Berlin. This highest military court sentenced him to death on February 9, 1944. The execution was carried out on March 27 in Brandenburg-Görden Prison by beheading.⁷ Gunner Herbert Sachweh (b. September 29, 1922) was sentenced to death for absence without leave by the court of Division No. 190 in Hamburg. The shooting followed on April 9, 1945, after General Wilhelm Wetzel denied his pardon.⁸ The basis for the shooting of two members of FStGA 2 is unknown. On July 22, 1943, Günther Boll (b. March 18, 1921) was executed in Briansk, and, on October 21, 1944, in another location, Otto

Brüchert (b. August 28, 1915) was executed after a verdict by the court of the 17th Engineer Higher Commander.⁹

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

1. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H Str. I/II Str. 1041/42 vom 14.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.

2. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. III/331/42 vom 28.5.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 888.

3. BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 194 (Feldstrafgef. Abt. 2-3).

4. Ibid.

5. See Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, Vol. 2: *Die Landstreitkräfte 1-5* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 128.

6. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 793 of the photocopied form).

7. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1082 of the photocopied form). Death sentences awarded by military court were already in place in Berlin since the beginning of the war, in the entire Replacement Army (*Ersatzheer*) from the spring of 1943 until the fall of 1944, executed in large numbers through beheading. For additional information, see the entries to the Armed Forces Prisons Anklam and Bruchsal as well as **FStGA 1**.

8. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1115 of the photocopied form; the birthdate is incorrectly given as 1929). With respect to Wetzel, cf. Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), p. 416.

9. BArch PA, Sammlung "Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall" (MüT): Mitteilungen für Günther Boll und Otto Brüchert.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 3

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 3 on May 1, 1942, "through District II Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Anklam."¹ The unit originally comprised 100 prisoners from WG Anklam as well as 50 inmates sent from WG Graudenz (today Grudziądz, Poland) and 50 from the Armed Forces Prison Camp (*Wehrmachtgefängnenlager*, WGL) Donau.

On May 28, 1942, General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, general for Special Tasks in the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH), who was responsible for prison sentences, instructed the "Army Groups, Army High Commanders and Armored Armies in the East"² that FStGA 3 would be sent to Army Group North (*Heeresgruppe Nord*). Convicts in the vicinity of this Army Group were to be brought to FStGA 3 via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Wilna (Vilnius), if a direct transfer was not possible.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15,

1942—which General Müller expanded on October 28, 1942, after initial deployment experiences—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners' treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in the entry for FStGA 1. Their concrete implementation in FStGA 3 can be thoroughly reconstructed for the beginning phase.

On May 27, 1942, the Sixteenth Army in Army Group North reported that FStGA 3 would be incorporated into the XXXIX Army Corps. At the same time, AOK 16 requested guidelines for the treatment of the unit's personnel. In explanation, the following was cited:

According to a fundamental order of the Armed Forces High Command, the Field Penal Unit is to be deployed for the most difficult labor, under unfavorable climatic conditions and with perilous circumstances in the operational area, possibly in the deployment area of fighting troops, for building bunkers and fortifications, road construction, and mine sweeping, etc.

I ask for guidelines for the positioning of the guard units—which provide for their military service under the same circumstances that are imagined as strict punishment for prisoners. The difficult service of these irreproachable soldiers demands special recognition, also to make them stand out in the eyes of the prisoners. The question of the removal, replacement, or, if necessary, health care privileges, special bonuses, etc., requires fundamental regulation.³

The letter from AOK 16 was finally reflected in an order from Army High Command to ensure "heightened care for and care of supervisory staff through the outlined command authorities." With this came the directive not to "forget" the officers and permanent staff and to reward them with "decorations and promotions." A "permanent instruction" to operate within the troops was that the "guard duty in prisons was not inferior to, but rather equal to, infantry service."⁴ It was later indicated that officers of the FStGA could be recommended "for priority promotion" if their unit was "incorporated into a front division."⁵

A FStGA 3 duty report for July 1942 illustrated service (*Dienst*) for internees, which was "imagined [as] particularly severe punishment." According to this report, 375 prisoners from WG Wilna and five directly "from the [front line] troops"⁶ were sent to the unit in that month. The unit comprised 640 men, divided into four companies (i.e., 160 men per company). Mainly due to illness, 160 men were unavailable for service at that time. In July 1942, the four companies of FStGA 3 were deployed "near the front line with at least 120 men," in order to "make the sole highway (*Rollbahn*) under construction for the 218th Infantry Division somewhat passable." Specifically, the work entailed, "sawing logs, . . . to carry them to the highway." Felling the trees and transporting the logs was

difficult because the subsoil on all sides was made “nearly completely [of] swamp and water.” The men also had to deal with “thick underbrush everywhere.” The unit commander gave a positive report: “Working seven days, 120 men cut down between 7,331 and 9,527 tree trunks per week, which means building a wooden embankment [*Knüppeldamm*] of nearly five kilometers [3 miles] for the deployed company. Since the work is to be done in marshland, morass, and softened-up muddy roads, and the logs are to be carried 200 to 500 meters [656 to 1,640 feet] from the forest, the performance of the military prisoners—who have worked for a long while without a break—will be recognized.” The commander also commended “a minesweeping squad of approximately 16 men” who were working on the Loknia-Kholm highway under the 218th Infantry Division. This task had been “flawlessly operated” to that point. The report continued that “naturally, casualties from mine fragments, death, and wounds [would occur].”⁷⁷ The commander reported that, up to that time, 2 men had been killed and 10 wounded working on this task.

The assessment of the guard personnel was less positive. According to the unit commander, it did “not yet meet highest standards . . . despite much instruction and punishment.” Clearly, the selection standards were not closely observed. This problem continued “especially in the guard platoon [*Wachzug*],”⁷⁸ which was composed of soldiers who had only received six weeks of training after their conscription. Per an order from June 24, 1942, the guard personnel were to be chosen from “completely trained, reliable, particularly energetic and physically robust soldiers.”⁷⁹

The report indicated numerous additional permanent departures among the prisoners: 2 “in the course of punishment,” 4 through “sentence reassignment [to probation on the front],”¹⁰ 15 due to serious illness, 3 by “order of penal camp custody,”¹¹ and 6 “by updated sentence,” whereby it was supposedly based on prison sentences. Even though FStGA 3 had only been deployed for two months, two men had already been “shot for desertion.” Court authorities confirmed two additional death sentences at the time. The grounds for the two other “departures” were eventually entered as “absent without leave.”¹² Since the subsequent months and years yielded no comparable source material, it cannot be judged whether these figures are representative of the normal movement of personnel to and from FStGA 3.

The leader of FStGA 3 emphasized in his report of August 1, 1942, that he was “pleased” with the work carried out to that point by “all senior deployed units.”¹³ However, the flyer created in Everding’s name described the malnutrition and exhaustion the prisoners experienced in the unit: “With the rations that we in the battalion [*sic*] receive, and the great physical burden we won’t be able to hold out long. You know our daily rations well: 150 to 200 grams [5.3 to 7 ounces] of bread, thin soup without meat, etc. You all remember well how Reinhold Buhr once gave in under the weight of a heavy beam, and how the Feldweibel of the First Company gave him a kick.”¹⁴

This assessment—which might otherwise be attributed to Soviet propaganda—was confirmed later in the “Activity

Report of the Advising Internees at the Army Medic of the Sixteenth Army for the Period November 1, 1942 to May 1, 1943.” Oberfeldarzt Schmidt-Ott said of FStGA 3 that “of the 100 field prisoners, I often saw none with a body weight exceeding 50 kilograms [110 pounds]. This FStGA had the highest rate of deaths due to dysentery . . . even if the burden of the punishment abbreviates the sentence, the individual convict will very soon not be able to do the labor because he is too calorically malnourished.”¹⁵ Because of the lack of source material, it is not possible to determine whether the doctor’s evaluation led to any improvement in conditions.

FStGA 3 was supposedly the first FStGA to receive the order to deploy “climbers” (*Aufgestiegene*)—prisoners promoted within the unit for good behavior. In effect, the assignments for climbers were expanded on the spot—they were to take up arms in emergency situations—and were already deployed to antipartisan fighting. In the beginning of 1944, the Sixteenth Army formed two battalions with about 900 climbers from FStGAs 3, 9, and 14. They wore the insignia “Army Group-Probationary-Btl. III and IV.”¹⁶ Army Group-Probationary-Btl. IV had been dissolved by May 1944, after which its members were returned to the FStGAs. The same procedure was supposedly carried out with Army Group-Probationary-Btl. III. The reason for the dissolution of these units is unknown. In any case, General Müller confirmed that the FStGAs should continue to be deployed “without weapons, under perilous conditions . . . essentially as construction troops . . . positioned according to deployment and military duty with engineering posts.” “Temporary armed deployment of select field prisoners in a breakthrough company or platoon” was only to take place in “exceptional cases.”¹⁷

In the fall of 1944, FStGA 3 was among the eight FStGAs transferred to the western front to build fortifications against the approaching Western Allied troops in the area along the German border with France and Belgium.¹⁸ The last-known deployment of FStGA 3 was with Army Group B in the Eifel Mountains in western Germany and eastern Belgium.¹⁹

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

1. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H Str. I/II Str. 1041/42 vom 14.4.1942, BA-MA, H 20/497.
2. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. III/331/42 vom 28.5.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 888.
3. AOK 16 Abt. Ia Nr. 236/42 vom 27.5.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, Bl. 860.
4. Kurze Übersicht über Organisation und Aufgaben des Wehrmachtstrafvollzugs, der Bewährungstruppe sowie der Sondereinheiten des Heeres, Berlin, den 16.3.1943, BA-MA, RH 14/37.
5. Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM), hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1943 (10.), Nr. 838 (OKH, 13.11.1943, 7830—Ag P 1 [1 a I]), S. 505.

6. FStGA 3 Abt. I Nr. 78/42 vom 1.8.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, Bl. 896.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. OKW 54 e 1o-Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/H/Str I/IV vom 24.6.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, p. 875.

10. The “front probation” could proceed with a “normal” field unit or with the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500. For more information on Probationary Unit 500, see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995). See also the entry for **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

11. Prisoners rated as “incorrigible” were transferred to the custody of a penal camp. They were to be held there under harsh conditions. This time would not count against their sentence, and they would still be expected to serve their full prison term after the end of the war. For more information on prisoners sent to the prison camps, see entries for **WG Glatz** and **Feldstraflager I–III**.

12. FStGA 3 Abt. I Nr. 78/42 vom 1.8.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, p. 896.

13. Ibid.

14. Quoted in Klausch, “Man lässt Euch schufteln wie die Tiere,” p. 14.

15. Erfahrungsbericht des Beratenden Internisten beim Armeearzt der 16. Armee für die Zeit vom 1. November 1942 bis zum 1. Mai 1943, reproduced in Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), p. 353. The author of the report did not specify the FStGA to which it referred, but the conditions suggested at that time lead us to believe it concerned FStGA 3.

16. Okdo. H.Gr. Nord Ia/Id Nr. 1926/44 geh. vom 19.2.1944, BA-MA, RH 20-18/770.

17. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. 363/44 vom 4.9.1944 (Merkblatt über Vollzugseinrichtungen und Bewährungstruppen), BA-MA, RH 14/34, Bl. 82.

18. For additional information on the transfers from the Sixteenth Army of Army Group North, see Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz*, p. 364.

19. See Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Vol. 2: Die Landstreitkräfte 1–5* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 128.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 4

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 4 on August 1, 1942, through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) II in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Anklam.¹ In mid-September 1942, FStGA 4 was put into service on the eastern front with Army Group North (*Heeresgruppe Nord*). While it was deployed in this area, additional prisoners were transferred to FStGA 4 via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Wilna (Vilnius) in cases where direct transfers were not possible.

The guidelines issued to the FStGAs by General der Artillerie Eugen Müller—the general for Special Tasks at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) responsible for the FStGAs—on April 14 and 15, 1942, along with the updated guidelines from October 28, which were based upon the experiences earlier in the year, provide some insight into the makeup and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**. Essentially, the FStGA prisoners were to be sent “when possible into the area of the fighting troops and put to the hardest labor . . . particularly in unfavorable and dangerous conditions.”² The practical implications of this order for the prisoners in FStGA 4 are revealed in the monthly service report from the I Army Corps of the Eighteenth Army, under which the unit was operating. This report, from December 2, 1942, began with critical comments about the staff of the unit. According to the report, the previously issued selection criteria for FStGA staff were apparently not being followed closely, as was the case in other units (e.g., FStGA 3). The text states that

the service of the FStGA under the command of the I Army Corps places the highest demands on the guard personnel and prisoners. The composition of the guard personnel is in no way in accordance with the requirements placed upon staff of the penal system. 52 NCOs and soldiers are over 40 years old and can no longer enforce discipline on the prisoners to the extent that is required. In addition, they are physically not able to withstand the climatic conditions. Reports about escaped prisoners show that one NCO for every 10 prisoners does not provide sufficient supervision. A failure of the guard personnel could not be determined in any particular case.

It was also pointed out that the I Army Corps had made a request to the Eighteenth Army High Command (*Armeekorpskommando*, AOK 18) for the “replenishment, rejuvenation, and reinforcement of the guard personnel” because “an orderly penal system cannot be guaranteed under the current conditions.” The report then continues with a discussion of the prisoners:

The inadequate housing, nutrition, and clothing, the lack of proper hygiene, and deteriorating working conditions in the service area place great demands on the prisoners. Only about 20 percent of the men maintained a reasonably normal appearance, while the others were so emaciated that they were not capable of performing productive labor. There are no beds, except in the headquarters and in the field hospitals.

It was obvious that the emaciated prisoners could not carry out construction or transport work in a timely fashion. The

report also noted another aspect of the conditions in the FStGA that was counterproductive from a military perspective: “There is also the threat of epidemics which could pose a not-to-be-understated danger to the fighting troops.” For this reason, the I Army Corps submitted a “Request for the Improvement of the Food Rations” for the men in the FStGA, which AOK 18 immediately approved.³

Experiences like these led General Müller to adopt a more flexible approach to the enforcement of the OKH guidelines. However, despite the temporary increase in food rations, the prisoners in FStGA 4 continued to suffer from agonizing hunger. Many prisoners resorted to leaving the unit without permission to get something to eat. A military judge of the Eighteenth Army described the situation in the legal documentation of the death sentence passed against Heinz Dahms of the first company of FStGA 4 on November 19, 1942: “Absences without leave among the prisoners, as is well-known, have gotten out of hand. The escaped prisoners and their begging constantly disturb the fighting troops. The prisoners frequently resort to stealing others’ property which has been left unattended in the bunkers.” (Heinz Dahms was executed on May 10, 1943.)⁴

In addition, the same judge’s proceedings from the December 8, 1942, execution of Heinz Wilhelm and Xaver Rampp—both from the 3rd Company of FStGA 4—note the “repeated cases of desertion in the FStGAs,”⁵ which often occurred when the hunger and excessive hard labor became unbearable for the prisoners. In the 10-month period between November 1942 and August 1943, there were at least 29 executions of prisoners from FStGA 4.⁶ Of these, 23 were for desertion and two were for absence without leave. The remaining cases consisted of one assault on a superior officer, one for disobedience in the field, and two for the “subversion of fighting power (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*).”

On January 27, 1943, an order from AOK 18 reached FStGA 4, an order that led from the atonement and deterrent goals to those of “reform and education,” through the establishment of an “armed platoon” for prisoners who had exhibited good behavior. This order stated that “expansion to an armed company remains conditional upon the experiences with the armed platoon.”⁷ The order expanded on the instructions from General Müller that “in emergency situations, prisoners (particularly ‘promoted’ prisoners [those who had been rewarded for good behavior in the FStGAs]) . . . can be asked to defend against enemy attacks” or “be deployed in smaller operations.”⁸ The positive experience with a “task force” from FStGA 3, which was used to fight against partisans, was probably influential in this decision.

The armed platoon established in FStGA 4 was subordinated to the 21st Infantry Division in the summer of 1943, where a “probationary platoon” was also mentioned. Its “combat strength” consisted of 53 military prisoners on August 25, 1943; two days later, it had already grown to 107.⁹ In February 1944, after the order had also gone out to FStGAs 6 and 19, “out of the ‘promoted’ prisoners . . . to form so-called ‘task forces’ or platoons,” which were to be used “in combat, for example in

battling partisans [‘bandits’],”¹⁰ “promoted” prisoners from FStGA 4, together with others from FStGA 19, were combined into a temporary “Army Group Probationary Battalion I,” which was transferred to a “security detail at Lake Peipus.”¹¹

The extent to which prisoners from FStGA who had served in the “armed platoons” received suspended sentences through assignment to “front probation” in regular units or in special units like Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500 is unknown.¹² Lothar Walmrath describes the case of a sailor who was sent to FStGA 4 from WG Bruchsal in April 1944 for “subversion of fighting power” after a suicide attempt. After he was wounded there in August 1944, the Naval High Command (*Oberkommando der Marine*, OKM) transferred him to Probationary Unit 500.¹³

FStGA 4 was one of the eight FStGAs that was transferred to the western front in October 1944, in order to construct defensive works near the German borders with France and the Benelux states to resist the advancing Western Allies. Shortly before transport in the direction of Germany, four additional prisoners from FStGA 4 were executed for desertion. On September 13, 1944, Franz Krupp, Richard Schänzer, and Willi Schnock were executed, followed by Alfred Näger on October 6. All of these sentences were handed down by the Wehrmacht Local Commander (*Wehrmachtortskommandantur*) Riga.¹⁴

On the western front, FStGA 4 was subordinated to Army Group G on the Upper Rhine, then to First Airborne Army under Army Group B on the Lower Rhine, and, finally, to the Fifth Armored Army in the Eifel Mountains in western Germany and eastern Belgium.¹⁵ According to the testimony of Emil Bonetti, who arrived at FStGA 4 in Xanten from WG Torgau-Fort Zinna on January 16, 1945, the prisoners worked on “defusing dud shells” or “building defensive works on the front line.”¹⁶ Bonetti, whose death sentence for desertion was commuted to a 15-year prison term, recalled the hunger in the FStGA and that “a woman once gave us a piece of bread. An SS man immediately came over and shoved her to the ground.”¹⁷ Bonetti himself was knocked to the ground by a soldier’s rifle butt because he had spoken to another prisoner while marching. He managed to use his last bit of strength to get up just in time to avoid the dreaded “neck shot” (*Genickschuss*).

In this last period of its existence, the chain of executions under military justice continued in FStGA 4. On December 16, 1944, Georg Parczyk and Albert Sailer were shot for desertion. Their sentences were issued by the Field Court of the 7th Airborne Division.¹⁸ On February 17, 1945, Walter Engelmann and Rudolf Löwenstein were also executed for desertion. Their sentences were passed by the Field Court of the II Airborne Corps.¹⁹ It is unknown whether five additional death sentences, all of which were confirmed, were ever carried out.²⁰ In a sixth case, the sentence was commuted to “probation” in labor of military importance (“Interim Detention I” or “*Zwischenhaft I*”) at KZ Mauthausen.²¹ On April 6, 1945, Martin Herbst, who was sentenced to death for desertion by the Reich Military Court (*Reichs-*

kriegsgericht), was executed in WG Torgau-Fort Zinna.²² With more than 60 death sentences handed down for its prisoners—at least 50 of which were carried out—FStGA 4 holds the dubious distinction of having the most death sentences of any FStGA. Shortly before the end of the war, American and British troops encircled FStGA 4. The majority of the remaining prisoners in the unit were captured, although some, like Emil Bonetti, were able to escape and make their way home.²³

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

1. See Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, Vol. 2: *Die Landstreitkräfte 1–5* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 264.

2. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.

3. Gen.Kdo. I. A.K. Abt. IIa, TB der Gruppe II für die Zeit vom 1.4. bis 30.11.42, S. 9, BA-MA, RH 24-1/294. The number of the FStGA was not specified in the report, but, based on the description of the conditions, it most likely referred to FStGA 4.

4. The proceedings from April 15, 1943, are reproduced in Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), p. 750.

5. AOK 18 Abt. III, BAL 321/42 vom 6.12.1942, reproduced in Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz*, p. 762.

6. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 60, 62–64, 155–157, 159 f., 205 f., 211–214, 216, 238 f. of the photocopied form).

7. KTB AOK 18 Abt. Ia vom 27.1.43, BA-MA, RH 20-18/469, Bl. 103.

8. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.

9. 21. Inf.Div., Abt. I a, Mapped III zum KTB Nr. 19, BA-MA, RH 26-21/97.

10. AOK 18 Abt. Ia Nr. 8671/43 geh. vom 14.5.1943, BA-MA, WF-03/24402, Bl. 61.

11. AOK 18 Abt. Ia Nr. 2044/44 geh. vom 24.2.1944, in BA-MA, RH 20-18/772.

12. For additional information on Probationary Unit 500, see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995). See also **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

13. Lothar Walmrath, “*Iustitia et disciplina*.” *Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 245.

14. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1070, 1072, 1075 f. of the photocopied form).

15. See Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 264.

16. Testimony of Emil Bonetti, cited in Hannes Metzler, “Soldaten, die einfach nicht im Gleichschritt marschieren sind . . . ?” Zeitzeugeninterviews mit Überlebenden der NS-Militärgerichtsbarkeit,” in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz:*

Urteilspraxis—Strafvollzug—Entschädigungspraxis in Österreich, ed. Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2003), p. 548.

17. *Ibid.*

18. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1205 of the photocopied form).

19. *Ibid.*, Bl. 1191 f. of the photocopied form.

20. *Ibid.*, Bl. 1191–1193, 1205 of the photocopied form.

21. *Ibid.*, Bl. 1191 of the photocopied form. For information on the possibility of transfer to “Zwischenhaft I” from June 1944 on, see Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 232; and Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 86.

22. See the excerpt from the “Execution Book” of the Reich Military Court, reproduced in Norbert Haase and Brigitte Oleschinski, eds., *Torgau—Ein Kriegsende in Europa* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995), p. 110.

23. Testimony of Emil Bonetti, cited in Metzler, “Soldaten, die einfach nicht im Gleichschritt marschieren sind,” p. 569.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 5

The Wehrmacht formed FStGA 5 on August 1, 1942, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Germersheim, through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) II. The Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) ordered the unit to be sent to the central section of the eastern front, where it was subsequently utilized by the Third Armored Army, then by the Fourth Armored Army, and, finally, by the Ninth Army.¹ Additional prisoners were transferred to FStGA 5 from the area of Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*) during the FStGAs service at the front; when direct transfer was not possible, the prisoners were sent via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissow (Borisov/Barysaŭ) and its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) Smolensk. FStGA 5 also continued to receive prisoners from Germany, primarily from WG Anklam, WG Torgau-Brückenkopf, and WG Torgau-Fort Zinna.²

The guidelines issued by the Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) on April 14 and 15, 1942—which were later expanded on October 28, based on the experiences up to that point—dictated the organization and strength of the section, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These instructions are discussed in detail in FStGA 1. There is no documentation to speak to the implementation of these guidelines in FStGA 5. The only known archival records are wartime court documents concerning two escaped prisoners from FStGA 5, Werner S. and Georg H. After they were recaptured, they explained that they were repeatedly beaten in the unit and, therefore, tried to proceed to a front unit: “We cannot accept that we, as

German soldiers, are beaten by German soldiers. We can no longer bear this treatment.”³ Though it was difficult to prove their claim to have been attempting to join a frontline unit, the statement concerning the blows sustained through questioning at FStGA 5 was easy to prove, which spoke to their credibility.

In light of the problematic source material, it is of special significance that at the earlier Wehrmachtsauskunftstelle (WASSt)—later the “Deutsche Dienststelle (WASSt) for the notification of fallen soldiers’ next of kin of the former German Wehrmacht”—the Change Reports Re: the Identity Tag Index (*Veränderungsmeldungen zum Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis*) for FStGA 5 until the end of 1944 seem relatively complete, by all appearances. An examination of these records reveals that there were relatively few casualties due to “enemy action” from the summer of 1942 to the end of 1944—even though the official instructions ordered that the FStGAs were to be sent to “the hardest labor possible in the vicinity of the fighting troops” and “under particularly unfavorable and perilous conditions.”⁴ It is clear that FStGA 5 was deployed behind the front for a long period, since “only” 50 deaths were reported through the end of 1944. Prisoners who exhibited good behavior in the FStGA could be “promoted” within the unit and eventually sent back to the front on probationary status; casualties among these prisoners were recorded as having fallen “during infantry deployment.”⁵ FStGA 5, like other FStGAs, formed small units from these men, which “in emergency situations” could be “equipped with weapons to repel enemy attacks under the direction of the staff personnel” or used “for smaller operations.”⁶

Some prisoners were killed “in flight” or in subsequent wartime court executions. Escape attempts began shortly after FStGA 5 arrived in the deployment area. In some cases, the deserters were shot by guard soldiers immediately after their alleged escape attempts began. Such was the case for Gerhard Knoll (b. January 31, 1908), shot on April 28, 1943, in Waldlager Chotenowa;⁷ Willibald Schebeck (b. October 24, 1924), shot on June 10, 1943, in Belaia Rudnia (Smolenskaia oblast’);⁸ and Franz Schmidt (b. November 23, 1922), shot on September 17, 1944, 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) south of the Polish village of Orgonowice.⁹

Some escapees managed to avoid recapture for a longer period. At the turn of the year 1943–1944, it was reported of four men: “More than three months at large; records transferred to Armed Forces Prison Germersheim.”¹⁰ Anton Schardt also managed to evade capture for about three months; his records indicated that he was “in flight. Files on December 12, 1943, at Armed Forces Prison Germersheim.”¹¹ Schardt was executed shortly after he was recaptured on February 2, 1944, in Wilna (today Vilnius, Lithuania), seat of a wartime military court.¹² Some prisoners who fled FStGA 5 made it back to Germany before being recaptured. This was the case for Josef Doerner (b. March 8, 1923) who was beheaded for desertion in the Remand Prison (*Untersuchungsgefängnis*) Hamburg,¹³ as well as Edmund Hackhausen, reported as a deserter on October 15, 1942, who was guillotined on August 18, 1943, in Remand Detention Center (*Untersuchungshaftanstalt*) Dortmund.¹⁴ Two

other deserters, Heinz Bartholl (b. April 1, 1921) and Albert Reinhardt (b. September 22, 1919), were executed by shooting on April 12, 1944, in Königsberg (today Kaliningrad, Russia).¹⁵

An escape to the Soviet side did not carry a great likelihood of survival. The already emaciated FStGA prisoners rarely survived the difficult conditions in Soviet prisoner of war camps. Such was the case of Friedrich Wickel (b. June 5, 1922), a member of FStGA 5 who was sentenced to death in absentia by the court of the 260th Infantry Division on March 21, 1944, for desertion. However, Wickel never met his punishment at German hands, as he perished in Soviet imprisonment on February 10, 1945.¹⁶

Between 1942 and 1944, there are 24 definitively documented or highly probable known cases of executed death sentences of members of FStGA 5. Almost all of the known executions were for desertion. However, Hugo Hass (b. February 25, 1916) was shot for self-mutilation on May 26, 1944, in Wilna.¹⁷ The high number of shootings of members of FStGA 5 carried out in KWG Borissow is curious. In the period from October 3, 1942, until May 18, 1944, 10 documented executions occurred there. It is likely there were more such executions for which no documentation exists.

The end of the Change Reports records for FStGA 5 in December 1944 was not coincidental—the unit was destroyed in a Soviet breakthrough in Weichselbogen in January 1945 while it was evacuating westward. Only a few survivors made it to their unit’s original destination in Torgau.¹⁸ Nonetheless, there are records for some executions in this final phase. For example, Edmund Michelsen (b. October 22, 1914) was executed by firing squad in Ludwigsburg after being convicted of desertion by the court of the 465th Division.¹⁹ In another case, Gerhard Molto of the 5th Company of FStGA 5 was “shot in flight” on March 21, 1945.²⁰

No information is available about FStGA 5 prisoners who were deemed “incorrigible” and were sent to field penal camps (*Feldstraflager*); these prisoners would spend the rest of the war in the field penal camps and then begin to serve the term to which they were originally sentenced when the war ended.²¹ There is also no information about men who were sent to “front probation” with a normal combat unit or with the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungsgruppe*) 500.²²

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

Hans-Peter Klausch
Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 2: Die Landstreitkräfte 1–5* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 311.
2. The replacement transports are documented in the *Veränderungsmeldungen zum Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis* of FStGA 5 (WASSt: Bd. 49888–49890).
3. Quoted in Kristina Brümmer-Pauly, *Desertion im Recht des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: BWV, 2006), p. 54. Brümmer-Pauly, who, unfortunately, gives no dates, relies on court-martial documents FF 1190 in BA-MA. For the local

account, the documents cannot be viewed. The latter is also true for the court of Armed Forces Command Berlin on January 26, 1945, concerning its death sentence for Werner Elsner of the 1st Company of FStGA 5. The execution of this sentence, which is documented in BArch PA under Nr. 4355, was suspended after the agreement of March 26, 1945.

4. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.

5. WAST: Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49890, Bl. 74).

6. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.

7. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49890, Bl. 179).

8. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49888, Bl. 109).

9. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49888, Bl. 187).

10. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49888, Bl. 145).

11. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49890, Bl. 74).

12. *Datenbank des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.* at www.volksbund.de/graebersuche.html.

13. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 419 of the photocopied form); WAST: Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT): Mitteilung für Josef Doerner. For the execution of wartime death penalties through beheading, see **WG Anklam**.

14. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT): Mitteilung für Edmund Hackhausen.

15. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49890, Bl. 102).

16. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 231 of the photocopied form); *Datenbank des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V.* at www.volksbund.de/graebersuche.html.

17. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 5 (Bd. 49890, Bl. 106).

18. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 311.

19. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 435 of the photocopied form).

20. BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 155 (FStGA 5–8).

21. See **Feldstraflager I–III**.

22. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995); see also **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 6

The Wehrmacht formed FStGA 6 in Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) V, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Freiburg.¹ It was the only FStGA formed in this WG. In mid-September 1942, FStGA 6 deployed to the eastern front, where it was subordinated to Army Group North (*Heeresgruppe Nord*). Additional prisoners were added to the FStGA from the area of Army Group North during its deployment; if direct transfer was not possible, they were sent via Wartime

Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Wilna (Vilnius).

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded on October 28, based on the experiences up to that point—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in the entry for **FStGA 1**. The OKW’s instruction that the prisoners in the FStGAs were to be sent “to the hardest labor” under “particularly unfavorable and perilous circumstances”² was practiced in a particularly brutal manner in FStGA 6. On September 4, 1943, the court of the 61st Infantry Division reported to the Eighteenth Army that prisoners in FStGA 6 who were sick or otherwise incapable of working had nonetheless been forced to continue working to the point of physical collapse. The prisoners were also subject to torture, including having water poured over their naked bodies outdoors in subzero temperatures. A prisoner who was shot while attempting to break into a supply camp (*Verpflegungslager*) was subsequently tied to a tree for hours while almost naked during cold, rainy weather, and subjected to further beatings. These instances of torture took place in full view of the guard staff and with the knowledge of the unit’s commanding officers.³

A prisoner from FStGA 6 who managed to defect to the Red Army captured the prevailing conditions in the unit in a leaflet distributed in June 1943 under the headline “To the Comrades of the 6th Penal Battalion.” It continued: “They let you slave away like animals and treat you as such. And who condemned you? Men in clean, pressed uniforms, who have never felt any of the horrors of war, and who only benefit from all the killing. You’ve risked everything including your life to this point, and now your reward for it will be a slow ruin.”⁴

The inhuman conditions of imprisonment brought with them numerous escape attempts, which resulted in additional deaths through executions. On December 14, 1942, Wilhelm Bruhn of the 2nd Company of FStGA 6 was sentenced to death for desertion. The legal reports concerning his execution note that “in light of the many cases of desertion in the Field Penal Units . . . , the immediate execution of the sentence is necessary to deter all unreliable elements, despite the demonstrated mitigating circumstances.”⁵ In the 11 months between October 1942 and August 1943, there were at least 26 documented executions of prisoners from FStGA 6.⁶ The executions took place in Shar on the train line from Chudovo to Volkhov and at the train station in Mga. It should be noted that FStGA 6 had the highest number of prisoners of any FStGA, as it was the only such unit with six companies (all of the others had a maximum of five).⁷ Nonetheless, it should be noted that FStGA 6 approached the likewise high total of executions in FStGA 4, which was located in the area of the front between Leningrad and Volkhov.

After August 1943, fewer death sentences were documented. This change may have been because fewer prisoners

were sentenced to death, or simply because the documents for the executions during this period were lost or destroyed. It is possible that the abovementioned report by the court of the 61st Infantry Division of AOK 18 also led to an intervention against unnecessary torture, which could have led to a decrease in escape attempts and, therefore, death sentences. A letter sent to FStGA 6 and other units by the Eighteenth Army headquarters on May 14, 1943, emphasized that “fair and by-the-book treatment of prisoners under all circumstances must be ensured with all due toughness in imprisonment. Measures for their care must have the goal of absolutely holding onto the valuable labor force of the prisoners in the interests of the fighting troops.”⁸

In addition to preserving the prisoners’ ability to work, the Eighteenth Army also wanted to maintain their fighting strength for potential deployment to “front probation” for prisoners who demonstrated good behavior. On January 27, 1943, FStGA 6 acted on the order from AOK 18 to establish an armed platoon (*Waffenzug*) from prisoners who had been promoted within the ranks of the FStGA for good behavior, the so-called climbers. The order stated that “expansion [of the armed platoon] to an armed company remain contingent upon the experiences with the platoon.”⁹ This order followed the October 1942 directive from the general for Special Tasks at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) responsible for the FStGAs that the FStGAs should take measures so that “in cases of emergency, prisoners (particularly the ‘climbers’) could be armed with weapons to defend against enemy attacks” or “be deployed for smaller operations.”¹⁰ This order was likely motivated by positive experiences with a “task group” (*Einsatzkommando*) in FStGA 3—which was also deployed with Army Group North—in “anti-partisan warfare (*Bandenbekämpfung*).” In February 1944, “Army Group-Probationary-Battalion II . . . was formed from parts of FStGA 6 that were assigned to Pleskau [today Pskov, Russia] Garrison Command.”¹¹ Supposedly, this battalion was only used temporarily to carry out security-related tasks. It is unclear how many prisoners from FStGA 6 were assigned to front probation with normal combat units or the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500 after deployment to an armed platoon or similar group.¹² It is also unclear how many prisoners from FStGA 6 were deemed to be “incorrigible” and were assigned to field penal camps (*Feldstraflager*). Prisoners sent to the field penal camps were to remain there for the rest of the war; the time they spent there would not count against their sentences, which they were expected to serve in full after the war ended.¹³

Although it is possible that the worst excesses in the treatment of prisoners in FStGA 6 had ceased by the end of 1943, the conditions in the unit remained harsh, as indicated by the testimony of former prisoner Wolf Gerlach. Gerlach, a Luftwaffe airman, was sentenced to two years of prison for “subversion of fighting power” (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*) and transferred from WG Glatz to FStGA 6. Although he did not witness any executions as a result of courts-martial, his recollections nonetheless attest to the brutal conditions in FStGA

6 in 1943 and 1944, when the prisoners were assigned to “building obstacles in front of our own lines and minesweeping. In no-man’s land, the unarmed prisoners were continually exposed to their own and Russian fire. . . . And this was our lot: the hardest physical labor with total malnourishment, casualties under fire, and mistreatment and beatings to death for inability to work, whereby the poor parents were then informed that their son died of ‘circulatory system failure.’ The torture and harassment is impossible to describe in so few words. It was hell.”¹⁴ If the described treatment of individual FStGA prisoners was to serve as “atonement and deterrence,” it was also to serve a general preventive function. General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, the General for Special Tasks at OKH, had clearly stated that “the knowledge of these hardships [in the FStGAs] must effectively deter others from committing similar crimes. Only when they can realize the bigger picture can the incarceration fulfill its purpose.”¹⁵

The observations of Hans Breithaupt, who at the time served as a major in the 30th Infantry Division, show that the hardships in the FStGAs did, in fact, come into the “wider consciousness” of the troops at the front. He reported in April and May 1944 that “the deployment of one Prisoner Unit 6 [FStGA 6] in the division sector is also depressing. Among the prisoners are numerous demoted service ranks. Now they must manage the work of clearing out the direct vicinity of the front line, particularly the mountain of numerous dead from previous battles, with its awful side effects. They conduct their work quietly and give the soldiers food for deep thought, particularly since there are occasionally personal connections, even though the troops are forbidden from speaking with prisoners.”¹⁶ The “deep thought” Breithaupt mentioned had a dual nature—both the deterrent effect desired by the army leadership and pity for their mistreated comrades and anger at those responsible.

Breithaupt remarked of the guards of FStGA 6 that “the sentry is very sharp, but on the other hand also visibly happy when the dangerous deployment at the front line is over.”¹⁷ Wolf Gerlach also recalled the sharpness of the guards in FStGA 6. He recalled the case of two Soviet women who hid a bowl with boiled potatoes for the prisoners multiple times as FStGA 6 built reception camps (*Auffangstellungen*) for prisoners behind German lines. He noted: “It worked for eight full days . . . until a certain Unteroffizier, Butz, from Karlsruhe, became aware of them, smashed the potatoes, stormed into the house, dragged out the girl and her old mother, and along with Feldwebel Göttinger, Unteroffizier Mühleisen, Obergefreiter Dietz, and other guards, beat the women with the butt of the rifle until they lay in their own blood.”¹⁸

The front side of the aforementioned leaflet intended for the prisoners of FStGA 6, ended with the words: “All the work that you do builds the throne of your . . .” ‘oppressors,’ the text may have continued on the unavailable backside of the leaflet. Gerlach arrived at a similar view. He and a comrade fled together to the Soviet partisans in August 1944.

FStGA 6 was among four FStGAs that were sent from the sector of the Sixteenth Army to the western front between

October 1 and October 15, 1944. These units were deployed to the border region with France and Belgium to build defensive installations in advance of the approaching western Allied troops.¹⁹ Prior to this transfer, at least three more members of FStGA 6 were executed in Riga. On August 8, 1944, Hans Lasse (b. August 8, 1922) “was shot . . . for desertion . . . and buried in the Jewish cemetery” after he was sentenced to death by the court of Field Training Division North (*Feldausbildungs-Division Nord*).²⁰ The regular practice of burying executed deserters and prisoners convicted of “subversion of fighting strength” in the Jewish cemetery in Riga was intended to extend the shame of the prisoners beyond death.²¹ Werner Bandekow and Karl Bismanns (b. July 27, 1924) were also executed for desertion on September 11 and October 4, 1944, respectively, in Riga. The verdicts had been handed down by the court of the Armed Forces Local Command (*Wehrmacht-Ortskommandantur*) in Riga.²²

After it was transferred to the western front, FStGA 6 was deployed to Army Group G in the Upper Rhine region. It was temporarily subordinated to the 708th Volks-Grenadier-Division, as is apparent from two death sentences handed down by the divisional court on November 14, 1944, against Josef Gschwandtner for desertion and Gerhard Thiede for insubordination.²³ It is not known whether these sentences were carried out. FStGA was sent back to the eastern front in early 1945, where it was subordinated to Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*) in Silesia.²⁴ As late as May 1, 1945, sentences were still being passed against prisoners from FStGA 6 for various offenses. On that date, the unit leader drafted a verdict against Heinrich H., who had been interned in the Penitentiary Company of FStGA 6 for a term of 15 years for desertion.²⁵

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, Vol. 3: *Die Landstreitkräfte 6–14* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1966), p. 35.

2. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.

3. See Michael Eberlein, Norbert Haase, and Wolfgang Oleschinski, *Torgau im Hinterland des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Militärjustiz, Wehrmachtgefängnisse, Reichskriegsgericht* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1999), p. 68. The editors give a quote that is not word for word but rather a paraphrased report from the court of the 61st Infantry Division to the Army judge of AOK 18, from September 9, 1943 (BA-MA, RH 20-18 G/93, Bl. 138–140).

4. The front side of the leaflet is reproduced in Hans-Peter Klausch, “*Man lässt Euch schuften wie die Tiere.*” The Field Penal Unit as it appears in the leaflet in *Informationen. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift des Studienkreises Deutscher Widerstand 1933–1945*, 34, no. 68 (2009): 14.

5. Armeeoberkommando Abt. III, B.A.L. 321/42, Rechtsgutachten vom 6.12.1942, reproduced in Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein*

grundlegender Forschungsbericht, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), p. 766.

6. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 27, 114–117, 197–199, 204, and 213 f. of the photocopied form).

7. See the Veränderungsmeldungen zu den Erkennungszeichenverzeichnissen of individual FStGAs (WAST: Bd. 49874–49919).

8. AOK 18 Abt. Ia Nr. 8671/43 geh. vom 14.5.1943, BA-MA, WF-03/24402 Bl. 61.

9. KTB AOK 18 Abt. Ia vom 27.1.1943, BA-MA, RH 20-18/469, Bl. 103.

10. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MZA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.

11. AOK 18 Abt. Ia Nr. 2044/44 geh. vom 24.2.1944, BA-MA, RH 20-18/772. See **FStGA 4** and **FStGA 19**, from whose ranks Army Group-Probationary-Battalion I was formed at the time, as well as **FStGA 3**, **FStGA 9**, and **FStGA 14**. Men of the latter of these were assigned to Army Group-Probationary-Battalion III and IV.

12. For information on Probationary Unit 500, see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995); also see **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

13. See **Feldstraflager I–III**.

14. Wolf Gerlach, “Als Feldstrafgefangener in der UdSSR,” *Niedersächsische Volksstimme* 100 (August 27, 1949): 2.

15. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 189.

16. Hans Breithaupt, *Die Geschichte der 30. Infanterie-Division 1939–1945* (Bad Nauheim, 1955), p. 266.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

18. Gerlach, “Feldstrafgefangener,” p. 2.

19. Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), p. 364.

20. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Hans Lasse (Anlage: Gericht der Feldausb. Division Nord St.L. 406/44 vom 8.8.1944).

21. See the statements from the same day in Riga concerning executed deserters from the “500er” August Funhoff in Ralf Buchterkirchen, “. . . und wenn sie mich an die Wand stellen.” *Desertion, Wehrkraftzersetzung und “Kriegsverrat” von Soldaten in und aus Hannover 1933–1945* (Neustadt: Region + Geschichte, 2011), p. 105.

22. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1063 of the photocopied form).

23. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 327 f. of the photocopied form).

24. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 35.

25. See Stefanie Reichelt, “*Für mich ist der Krieg aus!*” *Deserteure und Kriegsdienstverweigerer des Zweiten Weltkriegs in München* (Munich: Buchendorfer, 1995), p. 101. For information on the attachment of Penitentiary Companies to FStGAs see **FStGA 21** and **WG Bruchsal**.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 7

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 7 on September 10, 1942, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Glatz, in

Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) VIII.¹ It was sent to the southern section of the eastern front, where it was subordinated to Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*), and, later, to its successor Army Groups A, B, and Don. Prisoners from this area of the front were sent to FStGA 7 primarily via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Dubno and its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) Kiev, if a direct transfer was not possible.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were supplemented with additional instructions on October 28, 1942, based on experiences up to that point—dictated the organization and strength of the FStGAs, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners' treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in the entry for **FStGA 1**. The application of the guidelines in FStGA 7 is quite well documented from different perspectives for the early summer of 1943. The unit, stationed in Zaporozh'e (today Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine), was subordinated at the time to the Superior Field Command (*Oberfeldkommandantur*, OFK) 397 in Dnepropetrovsk (today Dnipro, Ukraine).

Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Dr. Thoms from OFK 397 drew up a report about FStGA 7 at the end of June 1943. He had visited the unit on June 17, 1943, staying in a barrack in Zaporozh'e, to “get a closer look at these penal institutions.”² The unit leader, Major Knobloch, was in Germany at the time, primarily for home leave but also for a conference at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH), which general for Special Tasks, General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, had ordered all leaders of FStGAs as well as the commanders of the two existing Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*) to attend.³ In his one-hour visit to FStGA 7, Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Thoms came to the conclusion that “there can be no talk of . . . a hard sentence in the unit.” He claimed that “a stay in the FStGA [is] practically a lovely summer vacation with a little work.” He criticized the unit's commander for not forcing the men to work longer hours, not requiring additional “calisthenics,” and providing them with food rations that were too good. He believed that the prisoners' work in “construction of anti-tank ditches and bunkers” did not meet the “guidelines . . . prescribed for the punishment in FStGAs . . . namely deployment to the hardest work under perilous circumstances in the operational area.”⁴

Upon his return, Major Knobloch issued a statement contesting Thoms's conclusions. In a letter from July 21, 1943, he emphasized that punishment in the unit had, in fact, been “implemented with the guidelines of April 15, 1942.” However, he noted that “through later additions and through oral orders by General Müller, changes would be initiated.” Knobloch contended that even in the course of the prescribed harsh punishment, “German military prisoners certainly must be kept physically capable of working. Therefore, the care has also been improved.”⁵

In his statement, Major Knobloch gave an extensive report on the labor deployment of the prisoners in his unit. According to his account, three companies were “constructing

[defensive] positions in Zaporozh'e” and two were “deployed to cut timber.” He stated that “the work is hard throughout. Nevertheless, the results are considerably above average.” Knobloch added that “Sunday is also never free of work, since commandos must be constantly stationed for urgent tasks.” In order to underline that the prisoners were working “under perilous circumstances,” he added that “there are currently around 150 prisoners deployed against partisans, looking for mines or detonating duds.” Major Knobloch countered Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Thoms's claim that exercises were only performed on Sundays with a claim that the prisoners did “the exercise [marching] to and from”⁶ work.

It is unknown whether Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Thoms's report led to harsher conditions in FStGA 7. His report was presented to the OKH while Major Knobloch appeared at the abovementioned meeting with General Müller. If Knobloch was “not compelled . . . to make a statement”⁷ to the OKH, as he claimed in his statement from July 21, 1943, then the idea of an order “from above” to worsen conditions in the unit seems less likely.

Knobloch himself considered the platoon-level organization of punishment practiced within the FStGA 7 thoroughly successful. He saw the majority of prisoners making an effort to integrate back into “normal” military service, stating that “there remains in no way the intention, amongst the military prisoners, to prolong their stay here. . . . This is clear in their letters. They happily accept hard and dangerous work as a matter of course, in order to get out.”⁸ The men with good conduct were assigned to special platoons within their companies where they received “bonus pay, including, among other things, two cigarettes.”⁹ Prisoners who did not behave properly were placed in the third (lowest) platoon of each company. Knobloch conceded that the desired spatial “isolation of the third platoon” under the present conditions (“a dearth of equipment for accommodations”), similar to the “*Aussenlager* [satellite camps for WGs] in Germany,” could not be achieved at that time. The third platoons were thus to be put in place at the “back of the room” within the prisoners' quarters—but still in the same room.¹⁰

Knobloch's positive overall portrayal was based on what appeared to be a comparably low rate of recidivism: “Of the military prisoners who have gone through the unit, fewer than three percent have offended again.” The rate was clearly based on different offenses. Knobloch conceded that “it plays a role that some of these [offenses] may have been for the reason that it is safer to be in prison than on the front. In the second company there have recently been some cases of escapes and thefts.”¹¹ Escape attempts and absences without leave in FStGA 7 to this point—which were a daily routine in many other FStGAs—were apparently not very common. The low rate of such offenses was likely part of the reason why excessively harsh treatment was less prevalent in FStGA 7.

Günther Rosahl outlined the deployment of FStGA 7 from the perspective of an internee. Rosahl was sentenced to a prison term “due to a petty offense”¹² as an officer candidate (*Oberfähnrich*) in the navy, which he did not describe in detail.

In the summer of 1943, he was sent to FStGA 7 in a transport from WG Anklam:

Mornings at the crack of dawn we're taken out to lay down a line of fortification. For this work, each man's daily quota, according to soil conditions, totals 5 to 8 meters of excavated soil. Since I wasn't used to physical labor, I would have never, ever accomplished this. However, a Feldwebel at the time named der Flak, a career chess master from Teterow in Mecklenburg, kept me as his assistant in his cunning work techniques, through which we both accomplished our daily shared workload. Whoever did not meet his quota received only half rations at the field kitchen and soon met his end.¹³

The "cutting of rations"¹⁴ already being practiced in WGs as "in-house punishment" came into use in FStGA 7 as well. Rosahl's report does not mention Major Knobloch's use of prisoners to fight partisans, for which they were allowed "the rations normally approved for hunting detachments (*Jagdkommandos*), including chocolate," at first generally, then "from case to case, according to performance."¹⁵ Instead, he said that "only once to my knowledge was FStGA 7 issued weapons; that was in a particularly dicey situation with the breakthrough of the Russians at Zaporozh'e [on October 14, 1943]. Other than that, we were 'armed' only with spades and shovels."¹⁶

Rosahl, emphasizing that he remembered "the conditions in FStGA 7 . . . still very well,"¹⁷ mentioned neither mistreatment nor shootings. This recollection suggests that the prisoners in FStGA 7 under Major Knobloch were treated with less brutality than those in other FStGAs, which contributed to fewer absences without leave and desertions and resultant punitive measures. Attempts to defect to the Red Army were also rare, according to Rosahl. He states that "we wore no insignia that were known to the Red Army on our uniforms. Nevertheless, the fear of being in Soviet prisoner of war camps was so high that I have only once heard of prisoners going over to the Red Army." Rosahl noted an additional impediment to cooperative actions by the prisoners was the fact that "among the prisoners, mutual distrust reigned constant."¹⁸

Although the conditions in FStGA 7 may have been less brutal than those in other FStGAs, executions were still carried out. On April 2, 1943, Karl Sikora (b. December 1, 1921) of the 2nd Company of FStGA 7 was sentenced to death for desertion. The verdict of the court of the Standortkommandantur of Zaporozh'e was confirmed on May 1, 1943, by the Commander of the Army Group South Rear Area (*Befehlshaber des rückwärtigen Heeresgebiets Süd*) but was later commuted to 10 years in prison.¹⁹ Herbert Keller (b. February 12, 1923) of the 3rd Company of FStGA 7 endured a similar experience. He was sentenced to death for absence without leave on May 18, 1943; however, although the verdict of the court of the municipal commander in Rostov was confirmed on June 11, 1943, his sentence was commuted to 12 years in prison.²⁰ On

the other hand, Rudolf Endres (b. September 26, 1919), also of the 3rd Company of FStGA 7, was executed on July 15, 1943, after having been sentenced to death by the court of the municipal commander in Zaporozh'e on May 4, 1943, for alleged treason.²¹ The same court ordered the execution of Schütze Heinrich Ballmann (b. January 9, 1916), of the 2nd Company of FStGA 7, on September 2, 1943; he was beheaded on August 17, 1943, in Dresden. The execution was taken over by the court of the 408th Division in Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland).²² On August 27, 1943, the court of the municipal commander in Dnepropetrovsk gave Rudolf Schultz of the 2nd Company of FStGA 7 the maximum penalty for desertion; however, Schultz was convicted in absentia and the sentence could not be carried out.²³ Another prisoner from FStGA 7, Rudolf Beer (b. November 4, 1923), was executed on December 22, 1943, in Dubovaia Balka.²⁴

FStGA 7 took advantage of the opportunity to send "in-corrigible" prisoners to Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*). In the Field Penal Camps, convicts were subjected to harsh conditions of internment. However, their time in the camps was not counted against their sentences, which they would still be expected to serve in full after the end of the war.²⁵ In addition, a request could be made to the military police to intern incorrigible prisoners in concentration camps. One such case was that of Willi Schmidt, who was transferred from KWG Dubno to FStGA 7 in Zaporozh'e on April 18, 1943. A Luftwaffe court sentenced him to several years of prison for "subversion of fighting power" (*Wehrkraftersetzung*) and absence without leave. Due to his unruly behavior, he was transferred to Feldstraflager II via WG Torgau-Fort Zinna on December 29, 1943. After Schmidt had spent 10 months there in detention, another statement from WG Torgau-Fort Zinna was sent to the Gestapo, which resulted in his internment in a concentration camp. Schmidt survived imprisonment in the concentration camps at Gross-Rosen and Flossenbürg.²⁶ The total count of the transfers carried out from FStGA 7 to the penal camps is unknown. It is also uncertain how many prisoners were rewarded for good behavior by being sent to "front probation" with a normal combat unit or a specially created unit like Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500.²⁷

After the breakthrough of the Red Army at Zaporozh'e in October 1943, FStGA 7 was deployed in a series of retreating maneuvers, resulting in heavy casualties; these retreating actions were broken up by intermittent entrenchments. FStGA 7 was transferred to the First Armored Army in late 1943, then to the Sixth Army beginning on January 1, 1944. Rosahl, who had earned the privilege of working as a sentry by January 1944, reported that

the forced marches were the worst during the muddy period. Through malnourishment and forced labor, weakened by diseases like spotted fever and dysentery, filthy and lice-ridden, our unit must have made a heartrending impression. Grunts whom we begged for bread were shocked by our desolate state. The weakened were eventually just left to lie there. The

rest—to which I belonged—were able to bring themselves to safety across the Dniester into Bessarabia in April [1944]. With our last strength we reached a Romanian village in a snowstorm, where the farmers carried us from the street into their houses in order to save us from freezing to death.²⁸

Rosahl was transferred to a regular naval unit in April 1944. His account provides a vivid example of how the deployments of FStGAs often led to high casualties through sudden, often rushed withdrawals, which were exacerbated by frequent failures of motorized equipment.

Several more death sentences were carried out against prisoners from FStGA 7 in 1944. Alfred Eidam (b. March 6, 1924), who was sentenced to death for absence without leave by the court of the municipal commander in Rostov on January 14, 1944, was executed on April 25, 1944, by Municipal Commander 456 Lemberg (today L'viv, Ukraine).²⁹ The death sentence for desertion given to Rudolf Köhler (b. September 26, 1919) of the 5th Company of FStGA 7 by the court of Korück 593 (the headquarters for the Sixth Army rear area) on May 18, 1944, was confirmed but was later commuted to 12 years in prison.³⁰ Similarly, Bernhard Wilczak (b. September 5, 1922), who was sentenced to death for the same offense on March 13, 1944, by the Armed Forces Commander Berlin, had his sentence commuted to 15 years in prison.³¹

After the destruction of Army Group South by the Second and Third Ukrainian Front of the Red Army in late August 1944, FStGA 7 was virtually obliterated. Thereafter, it was officially dissolved and the remaining prisoners were transferred to FStGA 18.³² In the search registries of the German Red Cross, 317 prisoners from FStGA 7 were registered as missing.³³ This was the second-highest count among all FStGAs.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 3: Landstreitkräfte 6–14* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 74.

2. Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Dr. Thoms: Bericht über meinen Besuch bei der Feldstrafgefangenen-Abt. 7, H.Qu., den 21.6.1943, BA-MA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 412–415.

3. The conference is also mentioned in Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), p. 352.

4. Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Dr. Thoms: Bericht über meinen Besuch bei der Feldstrafgefangenen-Abt. 7, H.Qu., den 21.6.1943, BA-MZA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 412–415.

5. Feldstrafgefangenenabteilung 7: Schreiben vom 21.7.1943 an die Oberfeldkommandantur 397, Abt. Ia, BA-MA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 407.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., Bl. 409.

8. Ibid., Bl. 407.

9. Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Dr. Thoms: Bericht über meinen Besuch bei der Feldstrafgefangenen-Abt. 7, H.Qu., den 21.6.1943, BA-MA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 414.

10. Feldstrafgefangenenabteilung 7: Schreiben vom 21.7.1943 an die Oberfeldkommandantur 397, Abt. Ia, BA-MA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 409.

11. Ibid., Bl. 408.

12. Günther Rosahl, *Unruhige Zeiten: Jugenderinnerungen* (Kückenshagen, 2002), p. 64.

13. Ibid., p. 65.

14. Regulation for the implementation of prison sentences and other deprivations of liberty in the Armed Forces. From December 4, 1937 (Berlin, 1940), pp. 22, 35.

15. Feldstrafgefangenenabteilung 7: Schreiben vom 21.7.1943 an die Oberfeldkommandantur 397, Abt. Ia, BA-MZA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 408.

16. Rosahl, *Unruhige Zeiten*, p. 65.

17. Ibid., p. 65.

18. Ibid., p. 65.

19. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1056 of the photocopied form).

20. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1055 of the photocopied form).

21. See Ralf Buchterkirchen, “. . . und wenn sie mich an die Wand stellen.” *Desertion, Wehrkraftzersetzung und “Kriegsverrat” von Soldaten in und aus Hannover 1933–1945* (Neustadt: Region + Geschichte, 2011), p. 104. In the short biography there, Endres is falsely indicated as a member of a (nonexistent) “Field Gendarmerie-Unit 7.” It is possible that the description of his execution “by beheading” is also incorrect, since Endres was buried in Zaporozh'e, where there was no guillotine.

22. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT): Mitteilung für Heinrich Ballmann.

23. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1061 of the photocopied form).

24. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT): Mitteilung für Rudolf Beer.

25. See **Feldstraflager I–III** and **WG Glatz**.

26. See the short biography in Michael Eberlein, Norbert Haase, and Wolfgang Oleschinski, eds., *Torgau im Hinterland des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Militärjustiz. Militärjustiz, Wehrmachtgerichte, Reichskriegsgericht* (Leipzig, 1999), p. 157.

27. For more information on Probationary Unit 500, see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995) and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

28. Rosahl, *Unruhige Zeiten*, p. 65.

29. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1055 of the photocopied form).

30. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 722 of the photocopied form).

31. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1107 of the photocopied form).

32. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 74.

33. Deutsches Rotes Kreuz—Suchdienst München: Vermissenbildliste I C-F.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 8

The Wehrmacht formed FStGA 8 in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Anklam, in Defense District (*Webrkreis*) VIII, on September 10, 1942.¹ Like all FStGAs, FStGA 8 was deployed to the eastern front. It was transferred to the southern sector of the front, where it was assigned to Army Group (*Heeresgruppe*) B, which had been formed from Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*) in July of that year. FStGA 8 was originally deployed around Valuiki (137 kilometers [85 miles] east of Kharkiv), where defensive positions were being constructed, presumably. Additional prisoners from the front and rear area of Army Group B were transferred to FStGA 8 via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Kiev (Kiev/Kyiv) and its Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) in Kremenchug as well as via KWG Dubno, when a direct transfer was not possible.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were supplemented with additional instructions on October 28, based on experiences up to that point—dictated the organization and strength of the FStGAs, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners' treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in FStGA 1. Little is known about the implementation of these guidelines in FStGA 8 due to the lack of available documentation. The first of nine numbered "Named Casualty Reports" (*Namentlichen Verlustmeldungen*) claims that in the period from October 15, 1942, until March 31, 1943, at least 101 prisoners in FStGA 8 were killed, wounded, or missing.² Of that, the greatest number were lost as the unit withdrew from the front during the Soviet attack on Khar'kov. The leader of the 4th Company of FStGA 8 described the withdrawal of his unit:

Early on January 19, 1943, the small city of Urasov and the airstrip located nearby were attacked by Russian tanks and cavalry. The . . . FStGA had very few rifles at its disposal and was therefore forced to pull back to Kubiansk, 55 kilometers [34 miles] away. Due to heavy snowfall and darkness at night, parts of the company were scattered, as the unit marched continuously from early on January 1, 1943, around 8 a.m., until around 1 p.m. on January 20 without rest. In recognition of the exceptional difficulties . . . prosecutions for absence without leave were suspended, even when people were absent for several weeks.³

In the following months, April to October 1943, FStGA 8 appears to have suffered very few losses, probably because it was deployed to a quiet area far from the front line. The conditions in FStGA 8 at this time were briefly described by the Judge Advocate for the Commander of the Rear Area of Army Group South (*Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat beim Befehlshaber des*

rückwärtigen Heeresgebiets Süd), Dr. Thoma. The military jurist—known as an agitator—stated on the record that, in 1943, it had "occasionally" been reported to him that a sentence in FStGA 8 was "relaxation for the prisoners, and no punishment."⁴ In August and September 1943, FStGA 8 was assigned to build positions in Kiev, as indicated by the death sentence against prisoner Reinhold Heilig of the 5th Company, FStGA 8, who stated that he had been abducted from Kiev on September 24, 1943, by Soviet partisans in German uniforms.⁵

Further Soviet attacks near Kiev on November 6, 1943, forced FStGA 8 to withdraw once again. The surviving "Named Casualty Reports 2–9" record about 270 losses for the period of October 4, 1943, to July 27, 1944, many of whom were missing, rather than killed or wounded. Such records are missing for the remaining months of the war. FStGA 8 remained on the eastern front until the war's end; its final location was in Silesia with Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*).⁶

There are no records indicating how many prisoners were sent to the Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*) from FStGA 8 after being deemed "incorrigible." Prisoners who were sent to the Feldstraflager would remain in the camps until the end of the war, but their time there would not count against their sentences, which they would still be expected to serve in full after the war.⁷ A Penal Camp Company (*Straflagerkompanie*) was added to FStGA 8 in the late summer of 1944, when similar companies were also added to other FStGAs.⁸ There is also no information about prisoners from FStGA 8 who were sent to "front probation" with a normal combat unit or with specially formed units like Probationary Unit (*Bewährungsgruppe*) 500.⁹

There are only a few accounts of death sentences handed down against prisoners from FStGA 8. Alfred K. (b. July 1, 1921) was executed on March 23, 1944, in WG Anklam. He deserted from FStGA 8 during a retreat in early 1943 and eventually went into hiding in Germany.¹⁰ The verdict was issued by the court of the Swinemünde Branch of the Coastal Commander of the Western Baltic (*Küstenbefehlshaber westliche Ostsee*) on January 31, 1944. Hans-Werner Zühlsdorf (b. February 26, 1924) was executed for desertion on July 12, 1944, at the firing range on Klepazowskstrasse in Lemberg (then also known as Lwów; today L'viv, Ukraine).¹¹ The verdict was handed down by the court of Higher Pioneer Leader (*Höheren Pionierführer*) 14. FStGA 8 prisoner August Wagner was executed at the shooting range at Poppenweiler in Ludwigsburg on October 28, 1944.¹² Eight days before, the court of Higher Pioneer Leader 23 had sentenced Albert H., a member of the penal camp company of FStGA 8, to death. He was charged with continually shirking duty because he was constantly noticed illegally smoking, wearing a dirty uniform, saluting sloppily, and committing other disciplinary infractions. In his case, the execution was temporarily suspended because he was transferred to work in a concentration camp.¹³ Prisoners like Albert H. who had been sentenced to death were sent to "Transitional Internment I [*Zwischenhaft I*]" in Mauthausen.¹⁴

Unlike Albert H., sailors Felix Buchardt Held (b. May 11, 1923), Egon Klielz, and Hermann Stockfisch (August 21, 1922), who had fled FStGA 8 together on August 14, 1944, were shortly after sent to their deaths. After the verdict was passed by the Linz Branch of the Court of the Naval Command Italy (*Zweigstelle Linz des Gerichts des Marinekommandos Italien*) on January 8, 1945, the three men were executed on the Kagran shooting range in Vienna on February 13.¹⁵ The case of Wilhelm Larmann shows that executions continued in FStGA 8 right up to the end of the war. A member of the penal camp company, Larmann was sentenced to death by the court of the 17th Infantry Division on April 6, 1945, for “subversion of fighting power” by feigning illness.¹⁶ He was executed on April 10, 1945, in Schmottseiffen (today Pławna Górna, Poland). The entire 5th Company, as well as 25 men of the 1st and 20 men of the 4th Company of FStGA 8, were forced to watch the execution as a deterrent.

SOURCES See Sources, FStGA 1.

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NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 3* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1973), p. 114.

2. Namentliche Verlustmeldung Nr. 1 der FStGA 8, in BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 196 (FStGA 6–9).

3. Statement of the company commander at court-martial, quoted in Andreas Wagner, *“In Anklam aber empfängt mich die Hölle . . .” Dokumentation zur Geschichte des Wehrmachtgefängnisses Anklam 1940–1945* (Schwerin, 2000), p. 44. See also Lothar Walmrath, *“Iustitia et disciplina.” Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 617.

4. Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat Dr. Thoma: Bericht über meinen Besuch bei der Feldstrafgefangenen-Abt. 7, H.Qu., den 21.6.1943, BA-MZA, WF-03/7430, Bl. 412–415. See also the entry for FStGA 7.

5. The verdict is reproduced in Hermine Wüllner, ed., *“ . . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein.” Todesurteile deutscher Wehrmachtgerichte. Eine Dokumentation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), pp. 213–220. It should be noted that the death sentence was confirmed by the General for Special Tasks at the Army High Command, who was the responsible member of the court at the time. Execution was no longer an option, since Heilig escaped from Armed Forces Detention Center Proskurow with three other inmates on February 25–26, 1944.

6. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 114.

7. See **Feldstraflager I–III**.

8. See the case of Wilhelm Larmann, for whom FStGA 6 “[requested] Feldstraflager custody on August 25, 1944, as a result of his bad leadership.” On November 10, 1944, he arrived at the second (penal camp) company of FStGA 8. The verdict against Larmann is reproduced in Wüllner, *“ . . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,”* pp. 179–193. For information on the penal camp companies, see **FStGAs 19** and **FStGA 21**.

9. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995). See also **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

10. This case is documented in Wagner, *“In Anklam,”* pp. 44–49. See also Walmrath: *“Iustitia et disciplina,”* p. 616.

11. Todesurteile-Kartei der BA-ZNS (Bl. 694 of the photocopied form).

12. WAST: Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für August Wagner. He was eventually imprisoned in WG Bruchsal.

13. See Thomas Geldmacher, “Strafvollzug: Der Umgang der Deutschen Wehrmacht mit militärgerichtlich verurteilten Soldaten,” in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz: Urteilspraxis—Strafvollzug—Entschädigungspraxis in Österreich*, ed. Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2003), p. 462.

14. For information on Zwischenhaft I, see Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 232; and Hans-Peter Klausch, *Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen, in: Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 86.

15. See Ralf Buchterkirchen, *“ . . . und wenn sie mich an die Wand stellen,” Desertion, Wehrkraftzersetzung und “Kriegsverrat” von Soldaten in und aus Hannover 1933–1945* (Neustadt: Region + Geschichte, 2011), pp. 78, 103.

16. Feldurteil des Gerichts der 17. Inf.-Division StL. 69/45 gegen Wilhelm Larmann vom 6.4.1945, reproduced in Wüllner, *“ . . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,”* pp. 179–193.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 9

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 9 on September 10, 1942, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Germerseim through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) XII.¹ Like all FStGAs, FStGA 9 was deployed to the eastern front. It was subordinated to Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*), where it was temporarily placed into service with the Third Panzer Army and the 330th Infantry Division, respectively. Its service with the “Army Troop North Russia” (*Heeresgruppe Nordrussland*), documented by Georg Tessin, began at the end of 1943 or beginning of 1944.²

When FStGA 9 arrived at Army Group Center, it was composed of a staff and five companies. Each company consisted of about 35–40 permanent staff members and about 75 prisoners. Once the unit was in service, each company received about 60 additional men who were sentenced to the FStGA in the front or rear area of Army Group Center. These prisoners were transferred from Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissov when a direct transfer to FStGA 9 was not possible.³

The guidelines issued to the FStGAs by the Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) on April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded on October 28, based on the experiences in the FStGAs up to that point—provide information about the staff and strength of the unit,

the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners' treatment and service. These guidelines are described in detail in **FStGA 1**. It appears that these guidelines were implemented with the requisite harshness in FStGA 9, as is indicated by the seven "Named Casualty Reports" (*Namentliche Verlustmeldungen*) that were issued between October 7, 1942, and March 31, 1944. In the first quarter of this period (from October 7 to December 31, 1942), three prisoners died from "circulatory system failure" and one from "general bodily weakness," euphemisms that certainly indicate that they died from some combination of hard labor, malnutrition, and abuse. Three prisoners were shot during alleged "escape attempts" during this period, and two more were executed.⁴

In the second quarter (January 1 to March 31, 1943), one prisoner died of cachexia and another of "circulatory system failure/heart weakness." Two additional death sentences were carried out. Six other prisoners died due to "lawful use of weapons."⁵ These deaths stemmed from the standing order to the guard personnel that "the staff is required to immediately use weapons at every attempt at resistance, incitement, or flight. A preceding warning shot is not required. In order to prevent escape attempts . . . certain areas are to be established, in which prisoners will be shot immediately without the order to halt."⁶ The number of prisoners who were executed in the FStGAs and Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*) was eventually so high that Form 3705 43 2 A was printed to inform the relatives of the deceased. The form, which the guards would fill in with the prisoner's name, notified his relatives that he "has died as a result of a disciplinary measure which resulted from his own actions. Obituaries . . . are forbidden."⁷

"Named Casualty Report No. 3" from FStGA 9, which covered the third quarter (April 1 to June 30, 1943) counted one death from "heart weakness" and five from "lawful use of weapons."⁸ In addition, two men died from a mine explosion and one fell victim to an enemy aerial attack. On May 10, General der Artillerie Eugen Müller—the General for Special Tasks at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) responsible for the FStGAs—visited the Third Panzer Army High Command (*Panzerarmeeoberkommando*, or PAOK 3). Müller wanted to see how the penal servitude of the prisoners in FStGA 9 was being carried out with the Third Panzer Army, as well as in the special "front probation units," the 550th Infantry Division and Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500. During this visit, the commander of the Third Panzer Army, Generaloberst Georg-Hans Reinhardt, described the operation of FStGA 9 as "good," whereas the administration of FStGA 14, which was also under his overall command, was "not carried out harshly enough" and the unit was "filled with too many incorrigible elements."⁹

The next "Named Casualty Report" covered the four months between July and October 1943. In this period, a prisoner died of "circulatory system failure," another was killed by partisans, and three were killed "by lawful use of weapons during flight."¹⁰ In addition, two executions were registered. The last two months of the year were covered by "Named Casualty Reports No. 5" and "No. 6." During this period, two

prisoners died from pneumonia and two from "heart failure" or "circulatory collapse." There were no shootings registered during this period, but nine prisoners were reported as "killed in action."¹¹ Thus, the number of prisoners who were killed as a result of "enemy action" through the end of 1943 was rather small.

Around the beginning of 1944, FStGA 9 was transferred to Army Group North (*Heeresgruppe Nord*), where it went into service with the I Army Corps of the Sixteenth Army. The developments there during the first quarter of 1944 are documented in "Named Casualty Report No. 7." One death was reported due to an accident, one prisoner was shot "in flight," and another was executed.¹² The significant decrease in shootings that began in November 1943 continued through March 1944. Because of the lack of sources, it is unclear whether this decrease was the result of effective deterrence because of the shootings earlier in 1943 or if efforts to ensure the working strength of the prisoners resulted in better conditions and fewer escape attempts (and, therefore, fewer shootings).

The Change Reports re: The Identity Tag Index (*Veränderungsmeldungen zum Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis*) of FStGA 9 indicate a large number of transfers within the unit. These changes may have been the result of the so-called ranked punishment, in which prisoners who demonstrated good behavior could be "promoted" within the ranks of the unit, leading to better conditions and, eventually, recommendation for "probation with the [regular] troops."¹³ Conversely, there was also the potential for "demotion into lower classes for poor behavior."¹⁴ In FStGA 9, the 5th Company was used for transfer to the Field Penal Camp, where conditions were even worse than in the FStGA. Time spent in the Feldstraflager did not count against the prisoner's sentence, which he would be expected to serve in full at the end of the war. Thus, documents often refer to "transfer to the 5th Company for eventual transfer to a Field Penal Camp."¹⁵ The total number of prisoners from FStGA 9 who were sent to the Field Penal Camp is unknown. It is also unclear how many prisoners were sent to "front probation" with regular combat units or special units like Probationary Unit 500.¹⁶

At the beginning of 1944, the Sixteenth Army formed the "promoted" prisoners from FStGAs 3, 9, and 14 into two battalions, with "about 900 total prisoners," that were given the names "Army Group Probationary Battalions III and IV"—the men promoted from FStGA 9 were sent to the latter.¹⁷ However, by the beginning of May 1944, Battalion IV had already been dissolved, after which the men were returned to the FStGAs; it is possible that the same occurred in Battalion III. The reason for the dissolution of the battalions is unknown. In any case, at the beginning of September 1944, General Müller reaffirmed that service in the FStGAs was to be done "essentially without weapons, but under dangerous conditions" and that the prisoners were to work "basically as a construction unit, providing operational and military support under pioneer units." Only in "special cases" should "selected prisoners be temporarily armed for service in a Quick Reaction Company (*Eingreifkompanie*)."¹⁸

FStGA 9 had established at least one Quick Reaction Company after the dissolution of Army Group Probationary Battalion IV. The testimony of prisoner Hans Nussbaum, who was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for desertion or absence without leave (records conflict), reveals the nature of the service in the "3rd Quick Reaction Company" within FStGA 9:

On March 7, 1944, the company carried out a counterattack in the forest near Polotsk-North. The company suffered great losses and wounded, including the company commander, as well as many missing. After the battle the absence of Nussbaum was noted. It was impossible for the company commander to establish his whereabouts as the fighting had dragged on for several hours in dense forest without a clear view. Nussbaum was recorded as missing . . . Nussbaum had the possibility to report back to the company or to another unit. Because neither has happened, it must be assumed that he has deserted.¹⁹

Nussbaum had, in fact, reported to another unit, where he suffered a relapse of jaundice. In the hospital, he concealed his status as a prisoner so that he would not have to return to FStGA 9. As a result, he was charged with absence without leave and forgery and was sentenced to an additional year and a half in the penitentiary.

There is no reliable information about the number of deaths in FStGA 9 between April and September 1944. In the first half of October, the unit was transferred from the eastern front to the western front (like FStGAs 3, 4, 6, 14, 15, 16, and 19), where it was assigned to build defensive works in the border area with France and Belgium against the advancing Western Allied troops. Shortly before the transfer to the west, at least two death sentences were carried out. On September 2, 1944, Heinrich Braun was shot by a firing squad in Riga, and, on September 20, Alfred Bach died in the same manner.²⁰

On the western front, FStGA 9 was put into service with Army Group B in the Eifel Mountains in the Lower Rhine region.²¹ Their assignment was to dig trenches and foxholes. Even at this late stage the shootings of prisoners did not end. On December 23, 1944, Herbert Schöberl (b. January 14, 1921) was shot for desertion.²² On February 5, 1945, Fredy Paul (b. June 9, 1924) and Johann Ramsauer (b. March 23, 1926) were executed in Wolsfeld after they were convicted by a court-martial.²³ The same fate befell Wilhelm Bolz (b. March 23, 1921) on March 3, 1945, in an unknown place near Neuenahr.²⁴

Somewhat more is known about the death of Ewald Giessen (b. on June 9, 1909, in Wesel), who was shot "in flight" at 8:30 p.m. on March 14, 1945, in Hilgenroth.²⁵ Together with other members of FStGA 9, he was housed in a barn owned by the Spriestersbach family. The following description, published by the Idstein War Cemetery, was based on their report.²⁶ According to the report, several prisoners had escaped from the barn to beg for food. On March 14, Giessen sneaked

out of the barn with one of his comrades, either to beg for food or to escape. However, the guards were waiting outside and shot them both. The guard who shot Giessen, who was also from Wesel, sat in the Spriestersbachs' kitchen crying, rationalizing to himself that he had to shoot Giessen since his superiors were watching him. Giessen was buried on March 15 in a corner of the Hilgenroth Cemetery away from the other graves. His comrade was sent to the hospital in Bad Schwalbach with a gunshot wound to the stomach; he died shortly after. Two days after the death of Giessen, on March 17, two additional members of FStGA 9—Wilhelm Schwarzhloh (b. January 12, 1917) and Günter Voss (b. April 27, 1924)—were shot for desertion.²⁷

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 3: Die Landstreitkräfte 6–14* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 150.
2. Ibid.
3. BArch PA, Bd. 49901–49903.
4. Namentliche Verlustmeldung Nr. 1 der FStGA 9, BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 196 (FStGA 6–9).
5. Ibid.
6. OKH (Chef H Rüst u. BdE) Az. B 13 n 30 HR (IIIa) Nr. 2110/42 vom 7.9.1942 (10. Mob.-Sammelerlass), S. 9, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 130.
7. Reproduced as "Muster 2 zu Nr. 529" in *Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM)*, hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1943 (10.), 364.
8. Namentliche Verlustmeldung Nr. 3 der FStGA 9, WAST, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 196 (FStGA 6–9).
9. Pz.AOK 3 KTB Ia Nr. 6, Bd. 2: 1.4. —31.5.1943, BA-MA: RH 21-3/171.
10. Namentliche Verlustmeldung Nr. 4 der FStGA 9, BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 196 (FStGA 6–9).
11. Namentliche Verlustmeldung Nr. 5 der FStGA 9, BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 196 (FStGA 6–9).
12. Namentliche Verlustmeldung Nr. 7 der FStGA 9, BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 196 (FStGA 6–9).
13. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 189.
14. Ibid., Bl. 191.
15. BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 9 (Bd. 49903, Mai 1944). See also **Feldstraflager I–III**. Their predecessor organizations, the Straflagerabteilungen of the Wehrmachtgefängnisse, are described, for example, in **WG Glatz**.
16. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995). See also **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.
17. Obkdo. H.Gr. Nord Ia/Id Nr. 1926/44 geh. vom 19.2.1944, BA-MA, RH 20-18/770.
18. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. 363/44 vom 4.9.1944 (Merkblatt über Vollzugseinrichtungen und Bewährungstruppen), BA-MA, RH 14/34, Bl. 82.

19. Feldstrafgefangenen-Abt. 9, 3. Kompanie, O.U., den 3.12.1944, BA-MA, C 1817 (Untersuchungsakten des Gerichts der 276. Volks-Gren.Div. gegen Hans Nussbaum).

20. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilungen für Alfred Bach und Heinrich Braun.

21. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 150.

22. BArch PA, Erkennungszeichenverzeichnis FStGA 9 (Bd. 49902, Bl. 144).

23. *Ibid.*, Bl. 320.

24. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Wilhelm Bolz.

25. Standesamt Dickschied, Eintrag Nr. 5/1945.

26. “Giessen, Ewald,” *Kriegsgraberstätte Idstein*, at www.kriegsgraberstaette-idstein.de/Totendaten/giessen-ewald.htm.

27. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1115 f. of the photocopied form).

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 10

The Wehrmacht formed FStGA 10 on April 26, 1942, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Glatz in coordination with the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) VIII.¹ The unit was sent to the eastern front by the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH), where it was subordinate to Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*). Prisoners from this area of the front were sent to FStGA 10 during its deployment; if a direct transfer was not possible, they were sent via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Dubno and its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) in Kiev.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines for the FStGAs, issued April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded on October 28, based on the experiences with the FStGAs up to that point—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These instructions are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**. The recommended deployment of the FStGA prisoners “in dangerous conditions, to the hardest work . . . in the operational area of the fighting troops”² was clearly implemented in FStGA 10, with severe consequences, as indicated by the 42 casualty reports for the period of January 1, 1943, until August 15, 1944.³

Ten casualty reports covering the period between January 1 and September 25, 1943, which refer to deployment at the Kuban bridgehead (Kuban-Brückenkopf), near Novorossiisk, indicate nearly 280 losses as a result of death or wounds, most of which were the result of “enemy action.” Other deaths resulted from exhaustion or malnutrition due to the hard work the prisoners were required to perform and the insufficient rations they received. Among the casualties for the given period, 5 court-martial executions were also listed as well as 21 prisoners who were shot by the guards “in flight” or in “self-defense.”⁴ One episode highlights daily life in FStGA 10. Thomas Kryzaniak, who fled FStGA 10 in September 1943, depicted the unit as follows:

We laid in tents in a fruit garden. The first sergeant said “eat the fruit and die!” One morning as we were receiving coffee, a comrade saw an apple lying on the ground. He bent over and picked it up. But when he saw that the apple was half-rotten he dropped it again. The first sergeant saw this. He took his pistol, cocked it, and said to the prisoner, “do you also know that I can shoot you now?” The prisoner tried to immediately answer “yes sir,” but then the gunshot rang out and hit the man in the head above his nose.⁵

It is unknown whether the pointed gun was fired or if it had gone off involuntarily. The first sergeant could point to his orders “to summarily crack down . . . on resistance.”⁶ The families of prisoners who were shot while in a FStGA were sent a copy of Form 3705 43 2 A, which informed them that their relative “while a prisoner . . . had been shot as a disciplinary measure as a result of his own actions” and that “announcements of death or obituaries . . . are forbidden.”⁷

To compensate for the high casualties that occurred at the Kuban bridgehead, two replacement companies were formed in WG Torgau-Fort Zinna as early as May 1943. These prisoners reached FStGA 10 on June 3, 1943.⁸ FStGA 10 deployed to clear bridgeheads to the First Armored Army as of September 25, 1943, and, as of December 8, 1943, to the Eighth Army. Casualty reports 11 through 42 indicate losses of approximately 355 men for the period from September 25, 1943, until August 15, 1944. As of January 1944, there were also many listed as “missing” in these reports.

It is surprising that in this period, only nine of the shootings were reported to have been of prisoners “in flight.” This pronounced decline could indicate that the conditions in FStGA 10 improved by the fall of 1943, resulting in fewer escape attempts. The possible improvement of conditions may have resulted from the scandalous exposure of the conditions in FStGA 16, likewise deployed to the southern section of the eastern front, by Oberfeldarzt Dr. Katsch. The horrible conditions in that unit were deemed to be detrimental to productivity and military purposes. The ripples of this scandal reached the highest military positions. Katsch also mentioned in that regard a “Directive of the Army Sanitation-Inspector of July 24, 1943, concerning the monitoring of medical conditions of military prisoners in field penal facilities.”⁹

There is no information indicating the number of prisoners from FStGA 10 who were deemed “incorrigible” and sent to Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*).¹⁰ At the same time, it is also uncertain how many prisoners were sent to “front probation” as a result of good behavior, either with regular combat units or with the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500.¹¹ Two letters from the leader of the 2nd Company of FStGA 10 demonstrate the type of information that was relayed to the receiving unit when a prisoner was transferred from the FStGA. These letters concern Franz Herbert Charles de Beaulieu, who served a seven-month sentence in FStGA 10 for “subversion of fighting power” (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*) and insubordination. The commander’s

evaluation of de Beaulieu from October 13, 1943, notes that “he made every effort to cope with the demands at the building site. He is not an outspoken, snappy soldier, his performance in drilling exercises is average. He always maintained a soldierly attitude [toward] superiors. Compared to his comrades, he exhibited restraint on that day. All in all, [de Beaulieu] is the intellectual type of soldier who had a spoiled and soft upbringing. He has an open and honest disposition.”¹²

Along with this letter, enclosed with the personal papers of a prisoner relocated to Reconnaissance Unit 339, was a letter on the finding in the prisoner’s court-martial. The company commander highlighted the most serious aggravating circumstance: “The critical treatment of all aspects of the war and the spreading of his opinion to his colleagues poses a great danger. In this it should be especially considered that he is personally and spiritually drawn to Jewish-related circles.”¹³

While there are no known death sentences under wartime jurisdiction against members of FStGA 10 in 1943, a few accounts of such sentences in 1944 are available. Thomas Kryzaniak was beheaded on March 27, 1944, in Brandenburg-Görden Prison after he was sentenced to death by the court of the Armed Forces Command (*Wehrmachtkommandantur*), Berlin.¹⁴ On May 23, 1944, Johannes Smolinski of the 3rd Company of FStGA 10 was executed for desertion in Lemberg (then also known as Lwów; today L’viv, Ukraine). The verdict was passed down by the court of the town commander (*Stadtkommandantur*) of Lemberg on April 3, 1944.¹⁵ Walter Böhning (b. June 2, 1923) was executed by firing squad on August 1, 1944, in the forest north of Bahmut, in present-day Moldova.¹⁶

The death sentence given to Georg Rohrmüller by the court of the 106th Infantry Division on July 28, 1944, for absence without leave was confirmed by the Supreme Commander of Air Fleet 6 on September 15, 1944. However, his execution was temporarily stayed for “probation” with a work detail considered important to the war effort in the Mauthausen concentration camp (*Zwischenhaft I*).¹⁷ Siegfried Graf’s (b. April 11, 1922) death sentence for desertion by the court of Armed Forces Command, Berlin on June 28, 1944, was confirmed by Himmler on September 4, 1944, but was also stayed for service in *Zwischenhaft I*.¹⁸ Graf died on April 15, 1945, in Mauthausen.

It is no coincidence that the casualty reports for FStGA 10 end on August 15, 1944. The unit was destroyed along with the German Army Group Southern Ukraine during the major Soviet offensive against the combined German-Romanian forces that began later that month. The few remaining prisoners from FStGA 10 were sent to FStGA 18.¹⁹ They were not redeployed.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

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2. OKH Chef H Rüst u. BdE, Az. B 13 n 30 HR (IIIa) Nr. 2110/42 vom 7.9.1942, S. 9, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 130.

3. BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 197 (Feldstrafgef .Abt. 10).

4. The leader of the FStGA could call for courts-martial (*Standgerichte*), based on §13a of the Wartime Code of Procedure, if it were deemed necessary “for compelling military reasons.” See Rudolf Absolon, *Das Wehrmachtstrafrecht im 2. Weltkrieg. Sammlung der grundlegenden Gesetze, Verordnungen und Erlasse* (Kornelimünster: Bundesarchiv Abt. Zentralnachweisstelle, 1958), p. 199. For general information on Wehrmacht courts-martial, see Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), pp. 80–83; Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), pp. 411–415; and Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), pp. 207–215, 811.

5. Quoted in Norbert Haase, *Deutsche Deserteure* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1987), p. 27.

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7. Reproduced “Muster 2 zu Nr. 529” in *Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen* (AHM), hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1943 (10.), 364.

8. Michael Eberlein, Norbert Haase, and Wolfgang Oleschinski, *Torgau im Hinterland des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Militärjustiz, Wehrmachtgefängnisse, Reichskriegsgericht* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1999), p. 100.

9. Activity report of the consulting internist to the army doctor of the Sixth Army for the third quarter of 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.

10. For additional information about the Feldstraflager, see **Feldstraflager I–III** and **WG Glatz**.

11. For additional information about Probationary Unit 500, see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995); and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

12. 2./Feldstrafgefangenenabt. 10: Beurteilung des Funkers H. C. de Beaulieu vom 12.10.1943, reproduced in Eberlein, Haase, and Oleschinski, *Torgau im Hinterland*, p. 101.

13. Letter of the company commander of the 2./FStGA 10 vom 3.9.1943.

14. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1095 of the photocopied form).

15. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1079 of the photocopied form).

16. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Walter Böhning.

17. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 151 of the photocopied form). For information on *Zwischenhaft I*, see Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz*, p. 232; and Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 86.

18. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1088 of the photocopied form).

19. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 105.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 11

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 11 in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Anklam through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) II.¹ It was deployed to the eastern front with Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*), taking the place originally intended for FStGA 12. The unit, “about 800 men” strong, was subordinated to the LVI Army Corps at the end of November 1942.² Army Group Center had previously informed the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) that “the possibility of accommodating and utilizing additional penal units also exists [this] winter. The transfer of additional units, however, is only requested if a smooth and productive work deployment is guaranteed through the provision of a sufficient number of personnel—who are fully suitable as guards—with each unit.”³

There had already been problems with the prisoners’ productivity in FStGAs 2 and 5, which had both been deployed to the central section of the front. These problems were blamed on inadequate numbers and quality of guards.⁴ The General for Special Tasks at the OKH who was responsible for the FStGAs, General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, had indicated in his guidelines of October 28, 1942, that “few personnel suited for use as guards, who have been trained in the prisons, remain available” and that “it is therefore necessary to train qualified guards in the prison and use them to train a new generation of guards within the units [at the front].”⁵

Once it was deployed to the front, FStGA 11 received additional prisoners from WG Anklam (and presumably other WGs in Germany). Convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group Center were also incorporated into the unit at that time. If they could not be transferred directly to FStGA 11, they were collected and transferred via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissow and its Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) in Smolensk.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by General Müller on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in more detail in **FStGA 1**. Little information concerning the specific implementation of these guidelines in FStGA 11 is available. It is known that the unit remained in the central area of the front, with its final deployment near Danzig (today Gdańsk, Poland).⁶

The Soviet liberation of occupied Belarus, which began with the launch of Operation Bagration on June 22, 1944, resulted in the destruction of Army Group Center and FStGA 11. Many men in the unit went missing on or shortly after this date. Sailor Hans M., who was 19 and who had been sentenced to a year in prison for insubordination and resistance, was reported missing at Starossalia (today Starosel’e, Brianskaia oblast’, Russia) on June 23, 1944.⁷ Franz K., who had been

transferred to FStGA 11 from WG Anklam, had been sentenced to a year in prison for perjury. He succeeded in fleeing during troop movements on July 1, 1944.⁸ The 20-year-old naval Lance Corporal S., who had received five years in prison for breaking and entering, escaped by different means. As a straggler on a march toward the rear, he joined up with a regular combat unit and then took part in a successful small-scale counterattack. As a result, his sentence was commuted to “front probation” with Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500 on September 22, 1944.⁹ Although FStGA 11 reported “heavy defensive actions . . . on the front line” in the fall of 1944, the unit did not suffer as high a casualty rate as it had in the summer, unlike other units, such as FStGAs 2 and 15.¹⁰

Beyond the case of Lance Corporal S., there are no available accounts to indicate how many prisoners from FStGA 11 had their sentences commuted to front probation with regular combat units or Probationary Unit 500.¹¹ Similarly, there is no documentation of the number of prisoners who were deemed “incorrigible” and transferred from FStGA 11 to “custody” in a Field Penal Camp (*Feldstraflager*), where they were subjected to even worse conditions. Their time in the Field Penal Camp would not count against their sentences, which were still to be served in full at the end of the war.¹² However, at least one example indicates that prisoners from FStGA 11 were sent to the Field Penal Camp.¹³

Despite the general lack of source material, there are two examples from FStGA 11 that illustrate how the strict application of penal regulations shaped service in a FStGA. The first example concerns the connection between stays in field hospitals and the calculation of prison sentences. For prisoners in the FStGAs, treatment in a field hospital had to occur “under secure guard” and in the same section of the front or army group rear area (*Heeresgebiet*).¹⁴ Generally, the nearest KWG was responsible for their transfer to the hospital. However, the course of the war—which led to hasty retreats, cut-off transport connections, and other problems—increasingly prevented compliance with this regulation. The case of Grenadier Heinrich Kampmann, who was sentenced to a 10-year prison term for “subversion of fighting power” (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*) through self-mutilation, demonstrated the difficulties these circumstances created. An officer of the 3rd Company of FStGA 11 reported Kampmann on December 23, 1944, for having stayed in an unguarded hospital for 15 days. As a result, 15 days were added to the end of his sentence, moving his release date from September 7, 1954, to September 22.¹⁵

The second example concerns dealings with postal transportation and censorship.¹⁶ In October 1944, the authorities of FStGA 11 refused to give prisoner Ernst Röstel a letter from his mother, because the censor apparently found its contents objectionable. His mother had told him that of the 2,200 people in his hometown, “many from Wurzbach have fallen [in combat].” She added that “it will all be over quickly, then we will rejoice if we can celebrate the festival of peace.”¹⁷ It is unsurprising that such seemingly “defeatist” remarks did not

pass the censor; in fact, it is perhaps more surprising that in the sixth year of war the letter was not destroyed or filed away but returned to Wurzbach via the *Feldpost*, stamped “returned to sender for official reasons.”¹⁸

This strict compliance with regulations within a penal system in which permanent hunger, difficult working conditions, and frequent shootings all dominated—as well as the constant threat of the possibility of transfer to a Field Penal Camp, where conditions would be even worse—parallels the similar situation in the area of military judicial criminal proceedings. Alongside the proverbial “speedy trial,” there were also excessively protracted and meticulous investigations, even when the circumstances and required sentences seemed clear from the beginning. Denunciatory formulations could also emerge in the findings of these drawn out investigations, which were similar to the verdicts pronounced in the “speedy trials.” Historians detect here a “curious synthesis of authoritarian formality and Nazi-justice arbitrariness.”¹⁹ The compliance with formal standards can be understood as more than the result of “Prussian thoroughness.” A persistent “judicial” and “procedural certainty,” alongside the terror in certain spheres, was deemed necessary and appropriate for guaranteeing the functionality of the whole system of “educational,” penal, and probationary units of the Wehrmacht.

The adherence to legal formalities facilitated the rehabilitation of offenders who still appeared to have the potential to be useful soldiers. The strict adherence to codified procedural regulations simultaneously promoted the extensive, frictionless participation of men who came from the more traditional judicial service of the Weimar Republic and did not agree with all aspects of Nazi ideology, goals, or methods. They could cling onto this legal window dressing and block out the terror that loomed behind the facade. Those who were deemed “enemies of the Volk” or “Wehrmacht” and permanently unsuitable for military service were threatened with “eradication” through transfer to a Field Penal Camp or regular concentration camp or simply through execution.

Evidence concerning the exact number of prisoners from FStGA 11 who were sentenced to death and executed is limited. Heinrich Ackmann—who had been sentenced to death for collaborative desertion by the court of the Higher Pioneer Leader (*Höherer Pioneerführer*) 18 on November 13, 1943—could not be executed despite the confirmation of his death sentence on December 5, 1943, because he had still not been captured.²⁰ Walter Bunge and Paul Abramssohn of the fourth company of FStGA 11, both of whom had also been sentenced to death, avoided execution because they escaped during a Soviet offensive in the summer of 1944, while being transported from KWG Minsk to Molodechno, where their sentences were to be carried out.²¹ Helmut Ströll (or Ströhl) was executed by firing squad for “subversion of fighting power” on September 2, 1944, having been sentenced to death by the court of Field Command (*Feldkommandantur*) 186 on August 8, 1944.²² Richard Behnke, another member of FStGA 11, was executed on October 8, 1944.²³ On October 19, 1944, Karl Leiterholt (b. October 18, 1922) was shot by a

firing squad at Spandau Prison in Berlin. His sentence, for desertion, had been handed down by the court of Armed Forces High Command Berlin (*Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Berlin*).²⁴

On December 8, 1944, the commander of the Third Panzer Army, Generaloberst Erhard Raus, stayed the execution of two other members of the 1st Company of FStGA 11, Horst Broschinski and Heinz Hermsdorf, who had been sentenced to death for desertion.²⁵ The verdict had been pronounced by the court of the XXVI Army Corps on November 30, 1944. By that time, it appeared advisable (due to the drastic losses of personnel) to decrease the number of executions to a minimum, only carrying out those deemed necessary for effective deterrence. Those who were spared execution were to be utilized in armaments production or “front probation.” It is unknown whether Broschinski and Hermsdorf were sent to work deployment considered important to the war in the Mauthausen concentration camp (*Zwischenhaft I*)²⁶ or to “special probation”²⁷ in combat. The men were threatened with “death in installments” as the military sought to maximize the exploitation of “human material.”

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

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3. Ibid.
4. For similar examples, see the entries for FStGAs 3 and 4.
5. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.
6. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 214.
7. See the report from the 3rd Company of FStGA 11 from September 29, 1944, reproduced in Andreas Wagner, *“In Anklam aber empfängt mich die Hölle. . .” Dokumentation zur Geschichte des Wehrmachtgefängnisses Anklam 1940–1945* (Schwerin: Politische Memoriale, 2000), p. 25.
8. See Maria Fritsche, “Die militärgerichtliche Verfolgung von Fälschungsdelikten in der Deutschen Wehrmacht,” in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz: Urteilspraxis—Strafvollzug—Entschädigungspraxis in Österreich*, ed. Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Perlentaucher, 2003), p. 315.
9. See Lothar Walmrath, *“Iustitia et disciplina.” Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 245.
10. See report of FStGA 11 of August 13, 1944, contained in a court document (BArch PA, 36611), quoted in Walmrath, *“Iustitia et disciplina,”* p. 250.
11. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995); and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.
12. For additional information, see **Feldstraflager I–III**.

13. See Walmrath, *“Iustitia et disciplina,”* p. 246.

14. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.

15. See Hermine Wüllner, ed., *“. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein.” Todesurteile deutscher Wehrmachtsgesichte: Eine Dokumentation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), p. 221.

16. Although prisoners in the WGs could receive a letter every two weeks and send a letter every three weeks, the FStGA prisoners could only receive one letter and send one letter every six weeks. In both cases, “all incoming and outgoing mail is liable for inspection by superiors.” Later, FStGA prisoners were allowed to send and receive mail “only in urgent family, business, and judicial matters.” See OKW 54 e le Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/ H/Str. II Str. 1397/42 vom 15.4.1942, BArch PA, Sammlung WR.

17. Quoted in Rainer Lütgens, “Wehrmachtgefängnis und Feldstrafgefangenenabteilungen—Feldpost aus dem Strafvollzug der Wehrmacht,” *Rundbrief des Deutschen Altbriefsammler-Vereins* 487 (September 2010): 171. Feldpost forms for WGs Anklam and Gernersheim as well as FStGA 11, which show the respective post and visitation policies, are reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 172–174.

18. See Lütgens, “Wehrmachtgefängnis und Feldstrafgefangenenabteilungen,” p. 177.

19. Ulrich Baumann and Magnus Koch, “. . . kommt es auf Einzelheiten insoweit auch nicht an.” Drei Fallstudien in zeitgenössischer und erinnerungspolitischer Perspektive,” in *“Was damals Recht war . . .” Soldaten und Zivilisten vor Gerichten der Wehrmacht*, ed. Ulrich Baumann and Magnus Koch, in association with the Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas (Berlin-Brandenburg: Bebra, 2008), p. 52.

20. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 690, 695 of the photocopied form).

21. See Wüllner, *“. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,”* p. 127.

22. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 726 of the photocopied form).

23. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Richard Behnke.

24. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1096 of the photocopied form).

25. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 37 of the photocopied form).

26. For information on Zwischenhaft I, see Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 232; and Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 86.

27. After the period of “special probation,” which consisted of deployment to Probationary Unit 500 (or, from the summer of 1944, SS-Sonderformation Dirlwanger) on the front for a maximum of three months, it would be decided whether the prisoner was to be executed or transferred for an additional period of “front probation.” See Klausch, *Die Bewährungsgruppe 500*, pp. 85, 261; Hans-Peter Klausch, *Antifaschisten in SS-Uniform: Schicksal und Widerstand der deutschen politischen KZ-Häftlinge, Zuchtbaus- und Wehrmachtstrafgefangenen in der SS-Sonderformation Dirlwanger* (Bremen: Temmen, 1993), pp. 125–129; and Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz*, p. 233.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 12

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 12 on November 1, 1942, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Germersheim through the commander of Defense District (*Webrkreis*) XII.¹ The unit was deployed to the eastern front with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*). Convicts from the nearby area—including Army Groups A, B, Don, North Ukraine, and South Ukraine—initially came to FStGA 12 primarily via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Dubno, if a direct transfer was not possible. Other prisoners came from KWGs Kiev (Kiev), Makejewka (Makeevka), and Odessa after the establishment of those prisons. Like other FStGAs, FStGA 12 received additional transports of replacement prisoners from WGs in Germany as needed.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, the General for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**. Along with FStGA 16, FStGA 12 was subordinated for a long period of time to the newly re-created Sixth Army. The recommended utilization of the FStGA prisoners “for the hardest labor in the most dangerous conditions . . . in the area of the fighting troops”² was not applied as brutally in FStGA 12 as it was in FStGA 16. The difference in conditions between the two units is demonstrated by the report of Oberfeldarzt Dr. Katsch, who inspected FStGA 12 on August 14, 1943, while it was located in Sambek, near Taganrog. He noted “only limited severe malnourishment” and recorded that “the collective state of the unit makes a far better impression than FStGA 16.”³ In his quarterly report for the period from July to September 1943, the doctor returned to his inspection of FStGA 12. He conceded that he had seen “very emaciated figures and people underweight” but concluded that “altogether the nourishment and public health conditions, by the standards which are suitable for a FStGA . . . are not objectionable.”⁴

At roughly the same time, prisoners Hans Dublzyk, Harry König, Waldemar Mühlhausen, and Alfred Leisten remarked on the conditions of internment in FStGA 12 from an entirely different perspective. In late August or September 1943, the four prisoners allowed themselves to be taken prisoner by the Soviets. Their captors gave them the opportunity to appeal to their comrades who stayed behind with a leaflet (*Flugblatt*). The leaflet, dated September 19, 1943, bore the heading, “Soldiers of FStGA 12! Read this letter from Russian imprisonment.”⁵ In the name of the four German prisoners, various incidents from FStGA 12 were recalled: “You have surely not forgotten how in July of this year, as we were

at Sambek, the boss of the second company, Hauptmann Merkel, gunned down the soldier Gerlach only because he couldn't work anymore due to his physical weakness. Was that just?" The families of prisoners who were shot in the circumstances described in the leaflet were notified with Form 3705 43 2 A. This form, which was filled in with the name of the prisoner, noted that the deceased, "as a prisoner has . . . been shot as a disciplinary measure brought about by his own actions. . . . Announcements of death and obituaries . . . are forbidden."⁶

The four escaped convicts also discussed the calisthenics the prisoners were required to perform in addition to their work as well as the "house punishment" of decreased rations already practiced in the WGs: "Still today, you rail on the leader of the first company, Hauptmann Aschmudat, who often punishes you with exercises in blazing heat with full packs. There, with raised pistol, he threatens to shoot everyone who, completely exhausted, can no longer keep up. Was this just? Do you still remember how the leader of the fourth company, Oberleutnant Mayer, again and again decreased our daily rations if we could not live up to the work standards? Is this somehow just? No, and again no!"

The leaflet concluded with the invitation to voluntarily surrender to the Soviets in order to hasten the end of the war. This call was particularly directed toward FStGA 12 prisoners, who were referred to by name in the leaflet: "Comrades! Convince yourself whether it is worth it to save your life. Germany can no longer hold out in the war. But before the war is over, many Germans will perish. . . . The end of the war will come about more quickly if more soldiers lay down their arms. . . . Right now, while the German Army is in retreat, you all have the possibility to give yourself up as prisoners."

Retreats certainly offered better possibilities for fleeing across the line than guarded work deployments. However, the prisoners who surrendered to the Soviets did not find themselves "far from every danger," as was described in the leaflet. Their bodies, weakened by their time in the FStGA, were not able to hold up in the difficult conditions in the Soviet prisoner of war camps. It appears that none of the four prisoners who ostensibly authored the leaflet ever returned to Germany. Two of them appeared in the list of missing soldiers of the Tracing Service of the Red Cross. Alfred Leisten was listed as missing without a location as of September 1944, and the corresponding entry for Waldemar Mühlhausen read only "Soviet Union 9/43."⁷

Apart from the pursuit of "concepts of punishment and deterrence," FStGA 12 also aimed to employ "concepts of reform and education" for field prisoners with good conduct, the so-called climbers, who were eventually to be sent back to service with normal combat units. These men could be "in emergency . . . under the leadership of the unit staff" called up for "repelling enemy attacks" or "for smaller operations."⁸ FStGA 12 appears to have been quite successful in this area. At any rate, Oberfeldarzt Dr. Katsch recorded in his report of August 14, 1943, that "two companies were deployed at the front line with weapons."⁹

On August 20, 1943, just six days after the quoted entry, the only recorded execution of a member of FStGA 12 took place. The victim, Rudi Bortscheller (b. May 12, 1923), was executed by firing squad in Nikolaev (today Mykolaiv, Ukraine).¹⁰ It is certain that additional prisoners from FStGA 12 were executed during the course of its deployment; however, due to a fragmented and poorly preserved documentary record, it is impossible to determine specific information about further executions. Similar issues prevent the determination of how many prisoners from FStGA 12 were sent to the Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*) where they were subjected to still harsher conditions of internment. Their time in the Field Penal Camp would not count against their sentence, which they were still expected to serve in full at the end of the war.¹¹ There is also no documentation of the transfer of prisoners who exhibited good behavior to "front probation" with regular combat units or the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500.¹² FStGA 12 remained in the southern sector of the front until the end of the war. After numerous withdrawals, the unit ended up in the area of Budapest. While Georg Tessin states that FStGA 12 was destroyed in Budapest, the report of a former prisoner suggests a different fate.¹³ Hans Joachim H., a religious opponent of the Nazi regime, was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison by the court of the 192nd Division in Prague on January 12, 1945, for absence without leave, and transferred to the prison company of FStGA 12.¹⁴ His testimony from March 8, 1948, states that "in the area of deployment, the Danube marshes, I came down with malaria. Despite frequent bouts of illness, I had to participate in the whole retreat through Hungary and Austria. In May 1945, we were freed through the sudden breakthrough of the Americans in the Steiermark (Styria). With that the saddest period of my life was over."¹⁵

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

Hans-Peter Klausch
Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 3*: (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 250.
2. OKH Chef H Rüst u. BdE, Az. B 13 n 30 HR (IIIa) Nr. 2110/42 vom 7.9.1942, S. 9, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 130.
3. Oberfeldarzt Prof. Dr. Katsch, [Dienst-]Tagebuch August 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.
4. The consultant internist with Armeearzt 6, Erfahrungsbericht 3. Quartal 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.
5. The leaflet is quoted and partially reproduced in Hans-Peter Klausch, "Man lässt Euch schuften wie die Tiere." Die Feldstrafgefangenen-Abteilungen (FGA) im Spiegel des Flugblatts," *Informationen. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift des Studienkreises Deutscher Widerstand 1933–1945*, 34, no. 68 (2009): 15.
6. Reproduced as "Muster 2 zu Nr. 529" in *Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM)*, hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1943 (10.), 364.

7. Suchdienst des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes München, Vermisstenbildliste CF 259 und CF 260.

8. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MZA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.

9. Oberfeldarzt Prof. Dr. Katsch, [Dienst-]Tagebuch August 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.

10. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Rudi Bortscheller.

11. For more information, see **Feldstraflager I–III**.

12. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995); and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

13. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 250.

14. For the creation of prison companies in FStGAs beginning in the late summer of 1944, see **FStGA 21**.

15. Testimony of Hans Joachim H. from March 8, 1948, reproduced in Jörg Kammler, *Ich habe die Metzerei satt und laufe über . . . Kasseler Soldaten zwischen Verweigerung und Widerstand (1939–1945): Eine Dokumentation*, 2nd ed. (Fulda: Hesse, 1985), p. 56. A testimony from another prisoner from FStGA 12 can be found in *ibid.*, p. 134.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 13

The Wehrmacht probably formed FStGA 13 on January 5, 1943, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Glatz (today Kłodzko, Poland) through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) VIII.¹ The unit was subsequently deployed to Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*) on the eastern front, where it was subordinate to the Second Army in 1944 and 1945. Convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group Center were transferred to FStGA 13 primarily via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissow (Borisov/Barysaŭ) and its Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) in Smolensk.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, the General for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in FStGA 1. For many FStGAs, including FStGA 13, there is little documentation or research on the application of these guidelines. Specific information is only available for the last months of 1944 and early months of 1945.

A letter from FStGA 13 dated January 5, 1945, reveals how the instructions for “deployment to the hardest labor under the most perilous conditions possible . . . in the deployment area of the fighting troops” were implemented in the unit.² However, the document also illustrates how “ideas of reform and education” were applied, in addition to the “ideas of atonement and deterrence.” “Reform and education” were practiced

in the case of prisoners who, “having been recognized through good conduct and work performance,” would show themselves “in deployment on the front as an ordinary and bold soldier.” These prisoners would receive a “recommendation for probationary deployment” along with a suspension of their original sentence.³ The January 1945 letter deals with the case of Albert Dröge, who had attempted to withdraw himself from deployment on the front through falsification of documents, for which he was given a two-year prison sentence in September 1944. FStGA 13 requested that Dröge, who had been a member of the Nazi Party, receive a “suspension of sentence under assignment to the 560th Infantry Battalion z.b.V.” For the grounds of this transfer, unit leadership wrote:

[Dröge] was transferred on November 1, 1944 to incarceration with the unit and has belonged to the first (deployment) company since then. He has proved himself to be useful and reliable in office and field work. He regrets his crime earnestly and has sought, with success, to make amends for it. Despite his somewhat physically weak predisposition, he has always exhibited a laudable zeal [for work]. He showed himself to be a soldier especially conscious of his duty during a nightly work deployment, which was quite casualty-heavy for his company, at the front line in December 1944. He is suitable for [service with] the regular troops again.⁴

The request was granted and Dröge was transferred with the 560th Infantry Battalion z.b.V. This unit was one of the field battalions of Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500. For most of 1944, the standing order was that “the probationary teams [were] . . . always to be transferred to the 500th Infantry Replacement Battalion, currently in Skierniewice in the Generalgouvernement. From there they [were] transferred to the field battalion.”⁵ In order to guarantee the quickest possible deployment to the front, prisoners sent to “front probation” apparently bypassed FStGA 13 and were assigned directly to the 560th Infantry Battalion z.b.V., which was also deployed to the central sector of the front. By October 17, 1944, 149 former prisoners from FStGA 13 had arrived in the 560th Infantry Battalion z.b.V. They were spread out among the five companies of the probationary battalion.⁶ Many of them were reported missing in the casualty-heavy fighting in the last six months of the war, among them Dröge.⁷

There is no information as to how many prisoners in FStGA 13 were deemed “incorrigible” and transferred to the Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*), where they faced even harsher conditions. Their time in the Field Penal Camps would not count against their sentence, which they were still expected to serve in full after the end of the war.⁸ There are a small number of records of death sentences handed down against prisoners from FStGA 13 by courts-martial. Prisoner Karl Behnke was executed in Briansk on July 5, 1943. A death sentence against Michael Haas was carried out on February 1, 1944, in WG Glatz.⁹ Fritz Hallermöller was beheaded three

days later in Köln-Klingelpütz prison.¹⁰ The court of the 526th Division in Wuppertal had convicted Hallermöller of desertion on December 20, 1943. Joachim Bauer (b. May 6, 1924) and Werner Böhland (b. December 8, 1920) were executed by a firing squad on March 7, 1944, in Pinsk.¹¹ Bauer had been convicted of desertion, and it is possible that Böhland had faced the same charge.

A large number of prisoners from FStGA 13 were sentenced to death in late 1944 and early 1945. The court of Higher Pioneer Leader (*Höherer Pionierführer*) 10 sentenced 13 members of the unit to death in the five weeks from November 30, 1944, until January 3, 1945—mostly for desertion.¹² All of the sentences were confirmed by the commander of the Second Army (as the presiding judge) between December 6, 1944, and January 9, 1945. The first three death sentences were carried out on December 21, 1944, and on January 4, 1945, in Schröttersburg (today Płock, Poland). Information about the remaining 10 sentences is unavailable, possibly as a result of the Soviet Weichsel-Oder Offensive, which commenced on January 12, 1945. Comparing FStGA 13 with other units, such as FStGAs 4 and 6, shows that 13 death sentences in little more than a month was an unusually high figure.¹³

While the execution machinery was in operation in FStGA 13, another member of the unit, Walter Jamroszyk (b. September 5, 1921), awaited a decision on his fate back in Germany. The court of the 526th Division had sentenced him to death on two counts of desertion. However, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, as commander of the Replacement Army (*Ersatzheer*) and presiding judge in his case, granted him “special probation” with SS-Sonderformation Dirlewanger, which functioned as a probation unit within the Waffen-SS. The grounds for this pardon, as recorded in the confirming decree of March 7, 1945, read: “The [Reichsführer-SS] has stayed the implementation of the death sentence only with the expectation that this would be an incentive to the convicted to prove himself worthy of a future pardon through exceptional readiness for action, good conduct, and fortitude.”¹⁴ Prisoners sentenced to special probation would serve a maximum of three months, after which it would be determined whether their death sentence would be carried out or they would be sentenced to further front probation.¹⁵ Whether Jamroszyk ever went through this procedure is unknown.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

Hans-Peter Klausch
Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945*, Vol. 3: *Die Landstreitkräfte 6–14* (Osnabrück, Biblio, 1974), p. 278.

2. OKW 54 e le Feldstr.Gef.Abt.-AHA/Ag/ H/Str. II Str. 1397/42 vom 15.4.1942, BArch PA, Sammlung WR.

3. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 189, 192.

4. Letter of Field Penal Unit 13 to the court of Höheren Pionierführers 10 from January 5, 1945, BA-MA, Gericht der Division Nr. 409, Nr. 54. In der “1. (Einsatz-)Kompanie” wurden offenbar jene Strafgefangene zusammengefaßt, die wegen guter Führung zu den “Aufgestiegenen” zählten. Sie sollten “im Notfall [. . .] unter Führung des Stammpersonals mit der Waffe zur Abwehr feindlicher Angriffe, unter Umständen auch zu kleineren Unternehmungen eingesetzt werden können.” (OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.).

5. OKH Ch H Rüst u. BdE 54 e 10 Strafv. i. Kr.—Trupp.Abt. (Str II) Str 2499/42 vom 29.1.1943, BA-MA, RH 14/33, Bl. 5.

6. The transport of replacements is documented in the Veränderungsmeldungen zum Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis for Inf. Btl. 560 z.b.V. (BArch PA, Bd. 84376–84380).

7. For more information on Probationary Unit 500, see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995), pp. 291–296.

8. For additional information, see **Feldstraflager I–III**.

9. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilungen für Karl Behnke und Michael Haase.

10. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 454 of the photocopied form). For additional information, see **WG Anklam**.

11. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilungen für Joachim Bauer und Werner Böhland.

12. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 691–694 of the photocopied form).

13. For additional information, see **FStGA 4** and **FStGA 6**. These were the units with the highest known numbers of executions.

14. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 457 of the photocopied form).

15. See Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500*, pp. 85, 261; Hans-Peter Klausch, *Antifaschisten in SS-Uniform: Schicksal und Widerstand der deutschen politischen KZ-Häftlinge, Zuchtbaus- und Wehrmachtstrafgefangenen in der SS-Sonderformation Dirlewanger* (Bremen: Temmen, 1993), pp. 125–129; and Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 233.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 14

The Wehrmacht formed FStGA 14 on January 5, 1943, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Anklam through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) II.¹ The unit was deployed to the eastern front with Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*), where it was subordinate to the Third Armored Army. Its subordination to Army Group North Russia (*Heeresgruppe Nordrussland*), attested by Georg Tessin, took place in late 1943.² While FStGA 14 was stationed in the central sector of the front, it received convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group Center,

primarily via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefangnis*, KWG) Borissov (Borisov/Barysaŭ) and its Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) in Smolensk, if a direct transfer was not possible. After it was transferred to Army Group North Russia, prisoners were sent via KWG Wilna (Vilnius) and its Reception Center in Dünaburg (today Daugavpils, Latvia).

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, the General for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in the entry for **FStGA 1**. There is only fragmented documentation concerning the implementation of these guidelines in FStGA 14. According to testimony by Joachim T.—who had been assigned to FStGA 14 since its creation in WG Anklam and served part of his one-year prison sentence in the unit through September 1943—FStGA 14 followed the instruction that the prisoners were to be utilized “in the area of the fighting troops,” for “the hardest work possible.”²³ This work included tasks such as “felling trees, constructing bunkers and digging [anti-]tank ditches,” during which Joachim T. and his comrades had sometimes “come under fire.” Each man had a quota of 6 meters (almost 20 feet) of trench to be dug each day or 1 meter (3.3 feet) of antitank ditch. Joachim T. noted that “it was not allowed to go home before the work was completed.” When Joachim T. was sent to the “front probation” with Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500, in the summer of 1943, he had to report to the unit’s infirmary on arrival because of edema in his legs due to malnutrition and hard labor in FStGA 14. Nonetheless, he thought that the conditions in FStGA 14, considering the situation of the war, were “humane,” noting that his immediate superior in the unit was “an Oberfeldwebel, a former estate manager, a very decent man who had never harassed the men.”²⁴

Schütze Ernst Grzik (b. June 21, 1920) had less luck with his superiors. A message from FStGA 14 states that his death near Semenkovo on February 23, 1943, occurred when he was “shot through justified use of weapons for continued insubordination.”²⁵ Grzik was not detained and presented for court-martial but was instead summarily executed. His family received a copy of Form 3705 43 2 A, informing them of his death. The form notified the recipient that the deceased “as a prisoner has . . . been shot as a disciplinary measure as a result of his own actions. . . . Announcements of death and obituaries . . . are forbidden.”²⁶

Despite this incident, FStGA 14, similar to FStGA 7, seems to have been less brutal than other FStGAs. This assessment is corroborated by the statement of Joachim T., as well as a report from the commander of the Third Armored Army, Generaloberst Georg-Hans Reinhardt, on May 10, 1943.

General der Artillerie Müller arrived that day in order “to obtain an immediate impression of the implementation of Armed Forces imprisonment” by inspecting FStGA 14. Reinhardt criticized the regime in FStGA 14 as “not conducted harshly enough.”²⁷

In the course of his discussion with Müller, Reinhardt expressed concern that FStGA 14 “was pervaded with too many incorrigible elements.”²⁸ However, no documentation exists to indicate how many prisoners in FStGA 14 were deemed “incorrigible” and sent to Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*), where they would face even more difficult conditions. The time spent in the Field Penal Camp would not count against their sentences, which they were still expected to serve in full at the end of the war.⁹ It is also unclear how many prisoners were sent to “front probation” with a regular combat unit or—as in the case of Joachim T.—to Probationary Unit 500.¹⁰

It is certain that early in the deployment of FStGA 14, an “armed platoon” was formed from prisoners who were promoted for good behavior, the so-called climbers. Joachim T., who belonged to this formation, reported that it was released “completely equipped”¹¹ with rifles and ammunition. General Müller ordered that “in emergency, prisoners”—particularly the “climbers”—“with the leadership of the staff are also to be deployed with arms for repelling enemy attacks, [as well as] for smaller operations under certain circumstances.”¹² After the unit was transferred to Army Troop North Russia in October 1943, members of FStGA 14, along with men from FStGA 3, formed “Army Group-Probationary-Battalion III”¹³ on February 3, 1944. However, this new formation—like “Army Group-Probationary-Battalion IV,” formed from members of FStGA 9—was apparently dissolved at the beginning of May 1944.¹⁴ A combat deployment of FStGA 14 mentioned by Walmrath on April 7, 1944—in which at least one prisoner was killed—could have referred to Army Group-Probationary-Battalion III.¹⁵ In the summer of 1944, FStGA 14 added a Quick Reaction Company, in which prisoner Heinz Brathering was mortally wounded on July 15, 1944.¹⁶

Most of the few known death sentences handed down against prisoners from FStGA 14 came from its period of deployment near Polotsk in 1944. A sailor, who was being considered for “front probation,” was sentenced to death for desertion on March 11, 1944, by the court of Army Field Command (*Heeresfeldkommandantur*) 749 in Polotsk. The execution took place on March 31.¹⁷ The same court also sentenced Willy Bauer (b. November 3, 1922) to death for desertion on April 14, 1944.¹⁸ The commander of the Sixteenth Army confirmed the sentence on April 25, though it is unclear if or when it was carried out. Another prisoner was apparently court-martialed and shot for desertion near Polotsk a short time later, although accurate information on this case is lacking.¹⁹

FStGA 14 was one of the eight FStGAs transferred to the western front in October 1944 to build a defensive position against the advancing Western Allied troops in the border area with France and Belgium. Shortly before the unit was

redeployed, on October 4, another death sentence was carried out in Riga on the shooting range at the Kreuzkirchenkasernen. The court of the Wehrmacht Local Commander (*Wehrmacht Ortskommandantur*) Riga had sentenced the executed prisoner, Max Rauer (b. July 28, 1918), to death for desertion on September 21.²⁰ An additional death sentence given by the same court to Heinz Bärkefeld on September 5, for desertion, was confirmed on September 25; however, his sentence was later commuted to 12 years' imprisonment.²¹

FStGA 14's final deployment in the west was with Army Group G, under the command of the Nineteenth Army in the Upper Rhine region.²² The last of the executions of a member of FStGA 14 occurred there. Hubert Stengel (b. March 30, 1921), of the 5th Company of FStGA 14, was executed by firing squad on March 21, 1945 after a field court-martial for the 106th Infantry Division had sentenced him to death for desertion.²³ His grave is located in the military cemetery at Bühlertal-Oberbühlertal.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

Hans-Peter Klausch
Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 3: Die Landstreitkräfte 6–14* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 308.

2. Ibid.

3. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.

4. Author's interview with Joachim T. of June 25, 1992, subsequently cited as "Bericht Joachim T." The grounds for his sentence were based on a petty crime. To improve the rations, he and his comrades had stolen some sacks of potatoes.

5. BArch PA, Sammlung "Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall" (MüT), Mitteilung für Ernst Grzik.

6. Reproduced as "Muster 2 zu Nr. 529" in *Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen* (AHM), hg. vom Oberkommando des Heeres, Berlin 1943 (10.), 364.

7. KTB Pz.AOK 3 Abt. Ia vom 10.5.1943, BA-MA, RH 21-3/171.

8. KTB Pz.AOK 3 Abt. Ia vom 10.5.1943, BA-MA, RH 21-3/171.

9. For more information, see **Feldstraflager I–III**.

10. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995).

11. Bericht Joachim T.

12. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.

13. Obkdo. H.Gr. Nord Ia/Id Nr. 1926/44 geh. vom 19.2.1944, BA-MA, RH 20-18/770.

14. For additional information, see **FStGA 3** and **FStGA 9**.

15. See Lothar Walmrath, "Iustitia et disciplina." *Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 251.

16. BArch PA, Sammlung "Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall" (MüT), Mitteilung für Heinz Brathering.

17. See Walmrath, "Iustitia et disciplina," p. 210.

18. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 976 of the photocopied form).

19. See David Forster, "Die militärgerichtliche Verfolgung von Eigentumsdelikten in der Deutschen Wehrmacht," in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz. Urteilspraxis—Strafvollzug—Entschädigungspraxis in Österreich*, ed. Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Perlentaucher, 2003), p. 335. The leader of the FStGA could refer to §13a of the Kriegsstrafverfahrensordnung Standgerichte if it appeared to be relevant "for compelling military reasons." See also Rudolf Absolon, *Das Wehrmachtstrafrecht im 2: Weltkrieg. Sammlung der grundlegenden Gesetze, Verordnungen und Erlasse* (Kornelimünster: Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Zentralnachweisstelle, 1958), p. 199; Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Bundesarchiv Abt. Zentralnachweisstelle, 2012), pp. 80–83; Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), pp. 411–415; and Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), pp. 207–215, 811.

20. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1074 of the photocopied form).

21. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1062 of the photocopied form).

22. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 308.

23. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 152 of the photocopied form).

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 15

The Wehrmacht formed FStGA 15 in early January 1943 in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Germerheim through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) XII.¹ It was subsequently deployed to the eastern front with Army Group Center, where it was utilized primarily by the Fourth Army but occasionally also by the Ninth Army. Convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group Center were transferred to FStGA 15 via primarily Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissov (Borisov/Barysaŭ), if a direct transfer was not possible. Reserve Replacement Battalion (*Landeschützen-Ersatz-Bataillon*) 12 in Mainz served as the reserve pool for the guard personnel of the unit.²

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by General der Artillerie Eugen Müller, the general for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners' treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**. Comparatively few sources are available for determining the precise implementation of these guidelines in FStGA 15. As in the other FStGAs, the men were to be sent "to the hardest work . . . under especially unfavorable and

dangerous conditions.”³ These conditions resulted in deaths soon after the initial deployment of the unit to the front. The causes of death listed in the casualty reports of FStGA 15 from early 1943 reflect the hard labor and insufficient nutrition the prisoners received. Among the recorded causes of death were “indulgence in self-procured spoiled meat (crow),” “circulatory debilitation by general state of exhaustion,” “acute heart debilitation,” “circulatory debilitation as a result of dysentery,” and “severe state of exhaustion.”⁴

Along with the punishment and deterrence brought about through the conditions in the unit—which were to be “deliberately worse [than those experienced by] the front fighters”—FStGA 15 was also responsible for preparing suitable prisoners within the unit for armed combat. This program of selecting prisoners with good conduct, the so-called climbers, was in pursuit of “notions of reform and education.” These men were to be called up primarily “in emergency . . . under the leadership of the [FStGA] staff” for “repelling enemy attacks” or “for smaller operations.”⁵ A letter from FStGA 15, in which 13 climbers were reported missing, illustrates the nature of their employment: “On August 1, 1943, a probationary company was formed within FStGA 15 by order of the commander of the 268th Infantry Division, General-leutnant Greiner. The same was formed in the combat group of the 286th ID and was deployed on August 6, 1943 south-west of Viaz’ma.”⁶

It is unknown how many prisoners from FStGA 15 were granted a suspension of their sentence for “front probation” with a normal combat unit or a battalion of the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500 after a deployment in this “probationary company” (or its predecessors).⁷ It is also unknown how many prisoners of FStGA 15 were deemed to be “incorrigible” and selected for “transfer into a (Field) Penal Camp [*Feldstraflager*],”⁸ where conditions were even harsher than in the FStGA. Their time in the Field Penal Camp would not count against their sentence, which they would still be required to serve in full after the end of the war.⁹

The case of one such prisoner, Josef Kerner, is relatively well documented. Before being conscripted in the army, Kerner was “sentenced to four months [in] prison per [charge] by civil court for refusal to work and for theft.” As a soldier, the unskilled laborer was sentenced for desertion three times: once to 18 months in prison, once to 6 weeks in close arrest, and then again on April 1, 1943 (along with military larceny) to 3 years in prison. The last punishment was served with FStGA 15, where he was seen as having a “baseless, weak, and dishonorable character,” as a “shirker without the will to fight,” and as a “lazy, unwilling, and yellow soldier.” His “cleanliness and order” was “denoted with dirtiness and his whole conduct was assessed as insufficient.”¹⁰ In January 1944, Kerner delayed being treated for frostbite in order to allow his condition to become serious enough to require referral to a field hospital, which he succeeded in doing.

After 10 days of treatment in a field hospital in Borisov, which was presumably a section of KWG Borissov, Kerner

returned to FStGA 15 on February 2, 1944. On January 31, 1944, a report had already been filed against him, suggesting his frostbite had been self-inflicted. On February 7, he received seven days’ close arrest because he had “gone absent without leave from his work post and placed himself in a Russian house.” At the same time, custody in a penal camp was applied to him in the form that had been threatened in a written warning. On March 14, he received another seven days of strict custody, this time because he “relieved himself on his bivouac and wet a fellow prisoner lying underneath him.”¹¹ Another seven days strict custody followed on March 30, because Kerner delayed treatment for louse-eczema and, because of which, “the sickness [had] worsened.” On that day the unit requested the command of the field penal camp custody with the 260th Infantry Division because Kerner would have represented “a great danger to the discipline of the troops.”¹² Before that matter could be decided, first came the court-martial proceedings for the alleged self-mutilation in connection with his frostbite.

The field court martial of the 260th Infantry Division declared the 23-year-old guilty and sentenced him to death for “subversion of fighting power (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*)—self-mutilation.” The reasoning for this was that “the act . . . is capable of undermining and impairing the discipline and the deployment abilities of a FStGA to a great extent. Additionally, the . . . tactic used is very simple and, as is currently shown in the present case, capable of ‘catching on.’” In fact, several other prisoners had done the same. The report continued: “The protection of the decent German soldier, who puts at stake and sacrifices his life, requires a ruthless crackdown. Therefore, it is to be recognized on [issuing] the death sentence—which the court is persuaded in favor of—that elements like the defendant [would be], even after a successful conclusion to the war, only a burden.”¹³

The defense attorney assigned to Kerner applied for a clemency and commutation to a prison sentence. He protested that Kerner’s work ability “was not impaired by the frostbite for long,” and, as a result, “at the present time deployment to such necessary work [is] not prevented.”¹⁴ Though the death sentence from the commander of the 260th Infantry Division was approved and the plea for clemency was rejected, the commander of the Fourth Army recommended a commutation of the sentence and a retrial for “shirking,” a less serious offense than self-mutilation.

The case was retried by the court of Festen Platz Borissov (Field Command 516). Their verdict of June 6, 1944 read: “The self-mutilation that was brought about intentionally or through deterioration of frostbite symptoms is a nuisance. This phenomenon can now be regularly observed in the FStGAs and is not easy to combat, since intent . . . is in many cases difficult to prove. On this it appears to be necessary to crack down on the clearly-established cases in order to head off the further expansion of this abuse.”¹⁵ The court deemed a five-year prison sentence to be adequate punishment for Kerner.

A second judicial review by the Fourth Army, which had authority over the matter, agreed with the recommendation

of the court. However, the commander of the Fourth Army overrode the second verdict as well on June 23, 1944, and sentenced Kerner to three weeks of close arrest. This decision led to disputes between FStGA 15, the courts of the 260th Infantry Division, and Festen Platz Borissow on one side and AOK 4 and its judicial reviewers on the other. Though these controversies were based on differing legal evaluations of the factual findings, the lenient outcome had not presumably been influenced by acute labor requirements of the Fourth Army—to which Kerner's attorney had alluded in his plea for clemency. It is unknown whether Kerner knew about the commander's decision in his case. Similarly, little is known about the decision regarding his internment in a Field Penal Camp.

By the summer of 1943, increased losses due to "aerial bomb fragments" and "mortar fragments" were registered in FStGA 15, which indicated a deployment near the front.¹⁶ The heavy casualties that Georg Tessin records in 1944¹⁷ occurred after the last surviving casualty records (July 2, 1944) during the "withdrawal of the middle section" of the front in the face of the Soviet offensive in Belarus (Operation Bagration).¹⁸ With more than 300 prisoners missing in the area of the front between Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Minsk, FStGA 15 had the third-highest number of missing prisoners of all FStGAs recorded in the Tracing Service of the German Red Cross.¹⁹

The collapse of Army Group Center created the opportunity for some of the members of FStGA 15 to escape and survive—including Karl Holzappel and Josef Kerner. At that time, they were among 10 internees of KWG Minsk, for whom the former court of Field Command 516 in Borissow searched with special importance: "The criminal proceedings of the local court hung over these prisoners. It consistently concerned difficult cases, to a large part final death sentences."²⁰ Yet, the outcome of the investigations indicated that prisoners from "Minsk military prison, on the transport from Minsk to Molodechno, [had] been attacked by the Russians. The internees are scattered."²¹

After the heavy losses in the middle section of the eastern front, the remnants of FStGA 15 were transferred rearward for "renewal" in WG Germersheim. From there, the unit wrote on September 28, 1944, to the Armed Forces Information Office in Berlin: "After renewal of essential personnel, the department submits new dog tag directories for the staff and the first through fifth companies. The dog tag directories to this point went totally missing through enemy activity and thus could not be completed."²² It is possible that this loss of records is the reason that few death sentences from FStGA 15 during this period are known.

Luftwaffe soldiers Gerhard Becker (b. May 29, 1920), Heinrich Reitz (b. November 23, 1921), and Hans Nansen (b. January 26, 1923) were sentenced to death for cooperative desertion from the 3rd Company of FStGA 15 by the court of Air Defense District (*Luftgau*) XXVII in Smolensk on June 28, 1943. The execution took place on November 19, in WG Torgau-Fort Zinna.²³ Aloys Berghoff (b. June 9, 1921) was

beheaded on March 17, 1944, in Posen (today Poznań, Poland) after he was sentenced to death by the court of the Armed Forces Commander (*Wehrmachtkommandantur*) Posen.²⁴ Johann Podmoranski was executed on April 18 (or possibly 28), 1944, in Borissow after the court of the 299th Infantry Division sentenced him to death.²⁵ Horst Salewski (b. May 6, 1920), of the 1st Company of FStGA 15, was sentenced to death by the court of the navy (*Kriegsmarine*) in Berlin and executed by guillotine in Brandenburg-Görden Prison on May 22, 1944.²⁶

FStGA 15 was among the eight FStGAs transferred to the western front in September and October 1944. It was deployed in the border region with France and Belgium to build positions against the advancing Western Allied troops. The deployment area for FStGA 15 was initially the area around La Bresse in the Vosges, where the unit was subordinated to Army Group G. That region soon became a focal point for fighting in the west. As a result, both battalions of Probationary Unit 500 that were deployed in the west as well as Grenadier Battalions 291 and 292 z.b.V. were thrust into combat there.²⁷ In January 1945, six prisoners of FStGA 15 in that area of deployment allegedly succeeded in fleeing the unit.²⁸ Near the end of the war, FStGA 15—as well as FStGAs 14 and 19—was deployed with the Nineteenth Army in the Upper Rhine region.

SOURCES See Source, **FStGA 1**.

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Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 4: Die Landstreitkräfte 15–30* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 18.
2. BArch PA, Namentliche Verlustmeldungen FStGA 14–19.
3. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 190.
4. BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 157 (FStGA 15).
5. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.
6. Feldstrafgefangenenabteilung 15—Bewährungskompanie: Namentliche Verlustmeldung über Mannschaften o.D., WAsT, Namentliche Verlustmeldungen FStGA 14–19.
7. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995) and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.
8. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 524/Gr.Str. Nr. III 872/42 vom 28.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/32406, Bl. 192.
9. See **Feldstraflager I–III** and **WG Glatz**.
10. Feldkriegsgericht der 260. Inf.Div. St.L.Nr. 159/44 vom 11.4.1944, reproduced in Hermine Wüllner, ed., ". . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein." *Todesurteile deutscher Wehrmachtsgerichte. Eine Dokumentation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), pp. 114–116.
11. For similar incidents, see **FStGA 17**.

12. Sorré, Oberleutnant u. Kp. Fhr., Stellungnahme vom 27.4.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” p. 120.

13. Feldkriegsgericht der 260. Inf.Div. St.L.Nr. 159/44 vom 11.4.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” pp. 114–116.

14. Heeresjustizinspektor d.R. Albrecht, Gnadengesuch vom 11.4.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” p. 116.

15. Field verdict of the court of Fester Platz Borissov (F.K. 516) Nr. 95/1944 vom 6.6.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” pp. 121–123.

16. BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 157 (FStGA 15).

17. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 18.

18. BArch PA, Verlustmeldungen Nr. 157 (FStGA 15).

19. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 18.

20. Court of Field Command 516 St.L. Nr. 52/44 u.a., O.U., den 4.10.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” p. 127. According to this record, a prisoner from FStGAs 2 and 5, and prisoners from FStGA 11 were also among the 10.

21. Abwicklungs- und Betreuungsstab, Sachgebiet: Sicherungstruppen und Splittergruppe, vom 27.9.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” p. 127.

22. BArch PA, Bd. 49913 (Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis FStGA 15).

23. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Gerhard Becker, Heinrich Reitz und Hans Hansen.

24. WAST, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Aloys Berghoff. For information on executions of court-martialed prisoners by beheading, see **WG Anklam**.

25. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 250 of the photocopied form).

26. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1276 of the photocopied form).

27. See Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500*, pp. 281–291.

28. See Thomas Geldmacher, “Strafvollzug: Der Umgang der Deutschen Wehrmacht mit militärgerichtlich verurteilten Soldaten,” in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz. Urteilspraxis—Strafvollzug—Entschädigungspraxis in Österreich*, ed. Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Perlenauscher, 2003), p. 457.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 16

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 16 in March 1943 in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Glatz through the commander of Defense District (*Webrkreis*) VIII.¹ The unit deployed to the eastern front for service with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*), where it was subordinated to the Sixth Army. Additional convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group South were transferred to FStGA 16; in cases where direct transfers were not possible, the prisoners were usually sent via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Dubno and its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) Kiev.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by the General for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**.

Hauptmann Friedrich Böttger was responsible for the implementation of these guidelines in FStGA 16 as well as the unit’s deployment and leadership. Böttger was transferred from Infantry Replacement Battalion 10 in Dresden to WG Torgau-Fort Zinna in the middle of 1941, when he still held the rank of Oberleutnant, so that he could be familiarized with the Wehrmacht corrections system. In the fall of 1941, he took over a company of the offshoot Armed Forces Prisoner Unit (*Wehrmachtgefängenen-Abteilung*, WGA) Wolfen, which, due to its location (Lager Marie über Bitterfeld), was also designated WGA Bitterfeld. In the summer of 1942, Böttger took over leadership of FStGA 16 and remained in command until it was dissolved at the end of the war.² Böttger (who had by then been promoted to Hauptmann) was transferred to WG Glatz to form FStGA 16. After the war, in regard to the deployment of the unit with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*), Böttger stated: “I was deployed with this unit as its leader in April 1943 to dig trenches behind the front, ca. 150 kilometers [93 miles] east of Stalino [today Donetsk, Ukraine]. Several months later we were withdrawn and the unit was deployed temporarily at the bridgehead in Nikopol.”³

The report of Fritz D. discusses the detail of these deployments in the southern section of the eastern front. Fritz D. traveled with Hauptmann Böttger from Glatz to Stalino. Fritz D., who was sentenced to two years in prison for absence without leave, wrote about that time: “We had to bury corpses there, clear mines, build tank ditches and so on. My strength was nearly out, I was in pain, I was malnourished. If you could not accomplish the intended work, you were hit and didn’t get the watery soup.” Fritz D. was eventually transferred into KWG Dubno with a transport of “malnourished and sick [prisoners].” He stayed there for “recovery,” meaning the restoration of work strength. However, Fritz D. was soon sent to the front again: “It didn’t take long before I collapsed. I was struck with a rifle butt, and I couldn’t recover my breath.”⁴ He was diagnosed with open pulmonary tuberculosis and had to remain in the care of a field hospital (*Lazarett*) until well after the end of the war.

The disastrous consequences of the combination of insufficient rations, long and hard labor, and harassment by the staff were reflected in the reports of the consulting internist with Armeearzt 6, Oberfeldarzt Dr. Katsch. He first encountered members of FStGA 16 on July 9, 1943, in KWG Makejewka (Makeevka) and noted: “52 men from Field Penal Unit 16 have arrived who were pulled out of the Div.-Arzt [i.e., the Third Mountain Division] as no longer fit for deployment. Of

these, 51 are most severely malnourished. Yesterday the Standortarzt sent 14 directly to field hospital 776 because they to some extent could no longer remain on their feet or displayed severe hunger edema. The rest of the prisoners [of FStGA 16] are quite miserable, some underweight by up to 20 kilograms [44 pounds].⁵⁵

On July 14, 1943, Dr. Katsch traveled to FStGA 16, located in Lotikovo (today Lotykove, Ukraine), to carry out a “study of the health, work, and nutritional conditions” of the unit “on special orders” of commander of the Sixth Army. “Some 30 percent” of the prisoners were in a “catastrophic state of malnourishment.”⁵⁶ Dr. Katsch gave the commander a report two days later. This report ordered a continuation of the study. Katsch returned to FStGA 16 on July 23, this time accompanied by Armeerichter Kowarzik and Hauptmann Löhrmann of the OKW. The following day, Katsch and the Armeerichter met with the Pioneer Leader (*Pionierführer*) of the “Mieth Group,” under whose command FStGA 16 was deployed at the time.

In his activity report for the period of July to October 1943, Katsch wrote of FStGA 16 that “three cases of death have occurred. Numerous cases of hunger edema, even more numerous cases of extreme exhaustion with dried, exfoliated skin, shaggy hair, underweight by up to 20 kg. Festering wounds from work accidents or gunshots healed very poorly, which was apparently for the majority of the cases wrongly attributed to prisoners manipulating their wounds.”

Katsch described the vicious cycle that resulted from the treatment of the prisoners: “Psychological reactions were pronounced with some of the severely malnourished: a dull apathy from which they did not report their sickness, on the one hand, and indifference to orders or lack of cleanliness in dress and in physical posture on the other. Here they incurred particularly unfavorable judgments and special punishments (partially through food deprivation), through which they descended into a hopeless cycle of harm.”⁵⁷ For some, this “cycle of harm” led directly to death by exhaustion; others undertook futile escape attempts or simply quit obeying orders. In both cases, a death sentence often resulted, or the prisoner was shot “as a disciplinary measure resulting from his own actions,”⁵⁸ as it was called on the form used to notify next of kin.

In the above-cited postwar statement by the former leader of FStGA 16, Hauptmann Böttger, there are no hints as to the catastrophic internment conditions in the unit. In regard to other events, it merely says that “as a result of the quick advance of the Red Army, in which the unit was without weapons, we experienced great material—and through enemy activity also human—losses. Therefore, I submitted to the Generalkommando, Corrections Division [*Abteilung Strafvollzug*] a new formation of the unit. The new formation was approved and was to be prepared in the homeland.”⁵⁹

As a result of Böttger’s statement, the “majority of the personnel and all the prisoners” were divided among the other FStGAs in the southern section of the front. The “rest of the personnel” returned around May 1944 to WG Glatz to carry

out the reorganization of FStGA 16, which was to begin in August 1944 in Rokitnitz, in the Sudetenland (today Rokytnice v Orlických horách, Czech Republic). After the reorganization was completed, Böttger surrendered leadership of the unit because his appeal for release from the penal system, which, in his words, he “no longer felt physically up to,” was granted.⁶⁰ It is possible that Dr. Katsch’s suggestion that “procedures be taken” against the commander of FStGA 16 was based on his previous report.⁶¹ However, Katsch’s suggestion had little effect on Böttger or his career. He found further military employment and retained the rank of Hauptmann. In the last days of the war, he commanded Reserve Battalion (*Landeschützenbataillon*) 4.

The newly reformed FStGA 16 was spared redeployment on the eastern front. Instead, it was among the eight FStGAs transferred to the western front in the fall of 1944. FStGA 16 was deployed with the First Airborne Army in the Lower Rhine region. Between December 1944 and February 1945, six death sentences for desertion, handed down by the court of the Generalkommando of the LXXXVI Army Corps, were confirmed. These sentences were carried out in Walbeck, near the Dutch border.⁶² In January 1945, the same court issued three other death sentences, which, in two cases, were commuted to lengthy prison sentences. In the other case, the convicted was given over to the Gestapo for work deployment in a concentration camp.⁶³ In the case of a fourth death sentence, handed down in February 1945 for subversion of fighting power (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*), the prisoner was still awaiting a decision on his appeal for clemency. Finally, another death sentence, on March 24, 1945, was handed down by the field court of the Airborne Army Troops against Gerhard Klimek, for desertion. The sentence, although it was confirmed on April 26, was commuted to “special probation.”⁶⁴ Though there are some fragmented records of prisoners from FStGA 16 who were sentenced to death, there are no records of how many prisoners were deemed “incorrigible” and transferred to Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*),⁶⁵ or how many were sent to “front probation” with a regular combat unit or the specially created Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500 as a result of good behavior.⁶⁶

More than three years after the end of the war, a former military prisoner named Paul G. accidentally encountered the former leader of FStGA 16, Hauptmann Böttger—whom he recognized from his time in WGA Wolfen—at a company party in Dresden. Due to the mistreatment he had suffered there, Paul G. went to the police. In the course of the trial, the issue of death sentences carried out during Böttger’s tenure in FStGA 16 was raised. The verdict against him stated that the court had heard “the accounts of about 18 internees sentenced by court-martial to death by firing squad. This court-martial was the responsibility of the officer of the camp, and therefore also of the defendant. [Böttger] twice participated in the execution of these sentences. The condemned had attempted to flee. The other prisoners were required to witness the executions to show them what would happen to them if they were also to attempt to flee.”⁶⁷

The term “court-martial” may have been used in error. The leaders of FStGAs were authorized to call for court-martials under §13a of the Wartime Penal Process Regulation (*Kriegsstrafverfahrensordnung*), if it seemed to be necessary “for imperative military reasons.”¹⁸ However, it is questionable whether the 18 death sentences mentioned here were all handed down by a court-martial. As a rule, proper military courts were supposed to be available for such proceedings. The court of the 79th Infantry Division, which at the time represented the “Combat Command of the Bridgehead at Nikopol’,” sentenced four members of FStGA 16 to death for desertion in December 1943. In one case, the execution was commuted to probation, while two other convicts, Herbert Scholz and Franz Morgen, were executed on December 29. The fourth verdict was confirmed on January 16, 1944, by the court martial, though it is unknown whether the sentence was actually carried out.¹⁹

There are no accounts of death sentences issued to prisoners from FStGA prior to December 1943. Böttger stated in the course of interrogations that he could only remember two executions. However, six additional death sentences against members of FStGA 16 were entered in January 1944 alone.²⁰ At least two of these death sentences handed down by the court of the Local Commander (*Ortskommandantur*) 456 (formerly located in Rostov but by then located in Lemberg; then also known as Lwów; today L’viv, Ukraine). Both of these sentences were carried out: Rudolf Naake was executed on April 25, 1944, and Reinhold Bardischefsky was shot by a firing squad in Lemberg on May 22.

Böttger was sentenced to eight years in prison on March 5, 1949, for “an infraction of Control Council Directive No. 38, Paragraph II, Article II, No. 8 in concomitance with a crime against humanity,” by the Landgericht Dresden.²¹

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 4: Die Landstreitkräfte 15–30* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 44.
2. For additional information, see **WG Donau**.
3. Vernehmung von Friedrich Böttger durch das Kriminalamt Dresden vom 9.7.1948, BArch, KZuHafta Torgau, Bd. 1.
4. Testimony of Fritz D. vom 3.7.1946, reproduced in Jörg Kammler, *Ich habe die Metzerei satt und laufe über . . . Kasseler Soldaten zwischen Verweigerung und Widerstand (1939–1945): Eine Dokumentation*, 2nd ed. (Fuldabrück: Hesse, 1985), p. 33.
5. Oberfeldarzt Prof. Dr. Katsch, [Dienst-]Tagebuch Juli 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.
6. Ibid.
7. Activity report of the consulting internist with the Armeearzt of the Sixth Army for the third quarter of 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.
8. Printed as “Muster 2 zu Nr. 529” in Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (AHM), hg. vom Oberkommando des

Heeres, Berlin 1943 (10.), 364. Relatives of the deceased were instructed by this form that “death notices or obituaries” were forbidden.

9. Interrogation of Friedrich Böttger by Kriminalamt Dresden of July 9, 1948, BArch, KZuHafta Torgau, Bd. 1.

10. Ibid.

11. Activity report of the consulting internist with the Armeearzt of the Sixth Army for the third quarter of 1943, BA-MA, RH 12-23/70.

12. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 46–48 und Bl. 1186 of the photocopied form).

13. For the option, as of June 1944, to temporarily commute the execution of a death sentence to “probation” with a work deployment considered important to the war in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp, see Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 232; Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 86.

14. Prisoners whose sentences were temporarily stayed for “special probation” were deployed to the front for a maximum of three months with the Probationary Unit 500—or from the late summer of 1944, with the SS-Sonderformation Dirlewanger—after which it was decided whether the death sentence was to be carried out or the prisoner’s sentence would be commuted to “front probation.” See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995), pp. 85, 261; Hans-Peter Klausch, *Antifaschisten in SS-Uniform: Schicksal und Widerstand der deutschen politischen KZ-Häftlinge, Zuchthaus- und Wehrmachtstrafgefangenen in der SS-Sonderformation Dirlewanger* (Bremen: Temmen, 1993), pp. 125–129; and Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz*, p. 233.

15. For additional information, see **Feldstraflager I–III** and **WG Glatz**.

16. See Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500* and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

17. Verdict of the Landgericht Dresden of March 5, 1949, against Friedrich Böttger, in *DDR-Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Sammlung ostdeutscher Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen*, ed. C. F. Rüter, vol. 9 (Amsterdam, 2007), p. 267.

18. See Rudolf Absolon, *Das Wehrmachtstrafrecht im 2. Weltkrieg. Sammlung der grundlegenden Gesetze, Verordnungen und Erlasse* (Kornelimünster, 1958), p. 199; Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz*, pp. 80–83; Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), pp. 411–415; and Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), pp. 207–215, 811.

19. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 132 and 134 of the photocopied form).

20. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1055, 1057, and 1079 of the photocopied form).

21. Verdict of the Landgericht Dresden of March 5, 1949, against Friedrich Böttger, in *DDR-Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, p. 265.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 17

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 17 on March 20, 1943, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Anklam through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) II.¹ The Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) deployed the unit to the eastern front with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*). Convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group South were transferred to FStGA 17; if they could not be sent directly to the unit, they were transferred primarily via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Dubno and its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) Kiev.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by the General for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the OKH on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, and the prisoners’ treatment and deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**.

A report written by Karl Baumgardt indicates that these guidelines were implemented in an especially harsh manner in FStGA 17. Baumgardt, whose death sentence for desertion was commuted to a prison sentence, was among the first prisoners who were sent from Anklam with FStGA 17 to Sukha Kam’ianka, near Izium in the Donbass region. He recalled that, while the unit was deployed there, “we mostly had to dig trenches, lay out barbed-wire barriers, clear mines, and haul wounded out of the forward area, for long periods of time and in dangerous areas.” It is likely that recovering soldiers’ corpses was the primary task, because his report continues: “Occasionally I only had an arm, the thigh, and sometimes only the head of a grunt in my tent tarp.”² As for the FStGA’s own losses, he writes: “Many of us [were killed] in the mine clearing teams.”³

The guards frequently got drunk and vented their rage on the prisoners. Baumgardt remembered that “if we hadn’t excavated enough of the fire trench in front, then they flailed on us with a rifle butt. A couple times my legs got really swollen from rifle butt hits.”⁴ The prisoners were often unable to complete their work due to exhaustion and insufficient food rations. Baumgardt recalled that the prisoners were badly malnourished, leading them to resort to desperate means: “At the front they occasionally court-martialed and shot some [prisoners] for stealing bread. We were definitely hungry. . . . Sometimes I hungrily grabbed bread from the pockets of Russians or our [dead] soldiers who had been lying there, bloated, for several days. It literally tasted like corpses. We chowed down on it.”⁵ As a result, the prisoners were frequently affected by diarrheal diseases. While the field prisoners deployed in the north operated in fiercely cold weather, torturous thirst was common in the southern section of the front. Baumgardt reported that he had not only “shaved and washed”⁶ with his own urine but also drunk it. As the Red

Army conducted an offensive in the south in the late summer of 1943, Baumgardt was able to escape from FStGA 17 and allowed himself to be taken prisoner by the Soviets.

During that offensive, FStGA 17 withdrew to Krivoi Rog (today Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine). There, it received the order to create a second reception center. Aviator Werner Klein (b. May 5, 1920), who had arrived in a replacement transport from WG Glatz (today Kłodzko, Poland) to FStGA 17 on December 8, 1943, took part in this operation. According to the statements Klein made in an interrogation on May 2, 1944, the workday amounted to around nine hours (not including the time it took to distribute and collect work implements and march to and from the work site), with a half-hour lunch break. Afterward, some prisoners were forced to exercise “a half hour in full pack” while wearing gas masks as punishment for various infractions. Such infractions included a prisoner picking up “cigarette butts or pieces of bread off the ground on the march out or in”⁷ or missing an article of clothing or equipment in the weekly roll call—even if it had been stolen. For most prisoners, however, the workday ended around 4:00 p.m. This work period was presumably due to the early sunset in winter. Klein also experienced the same torturous hunger and appalling living conditions that Baumgardt reported.

As a general precept, the military corrections system sought “the easiest, most frugal lodging in solitary or collective imprisonment.”⁸ Collective imprisonment was particularly sought during field imprisonment. FStGA 17 came across a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) around the beginning of 1944 that was secured by barbed wire and posts. Klein’s company was locked in a stable. He indicated that he “could [only] wash once a day,” done after working “in a pond 300 meters [984 feet] away from the lodging.” Due to the “insufficient personal hygiene,” he and other prisoners eventually reached a “moral and physical low,” which led to the spread of vermin—which brought the “appearance of infectious diseases amongst the prisoners.” With this, “the greater part of the prisoners [refrained from] reporting a sickness” out of fear because, in the event that the unit doctor wrote that the internee was not sick, they ran the risk “of being punished with tougher internment” conditions by the company commander,⁹ which meant an additional decrease to their already hunger-inducing rations.

The combination of hunger, sickness, and poor hygiene culminated in disgusting lodging conditions. Werner Klein stated:

At 6 p.m. was inspection by the officer on duty, and after he left the billets were closed. At 8 p.m. was a communal visit to the latrine and following that was lights out. To relieve ourselves in the middle of the night we used a sawed-through gas tank, but it was not big enough to accommodate the needs of all the prisoners. And so nearly every night this tank overflowed and the urine spilled on the ground, spreading an unpleasant smell. For want of sufficient

rations and out of hunger bordering on madness, we all ate whatever was in reach, regardless of whether it was corncobs, red turnips, or potato peelings. In doing so we all got worse diarrhea, which . . . was particularly problematic in the middle of the night. Since it was forbidden to use the urinal—that is, the gas tank—during the night for solid waste, and since we also feared more punishment, many of the prisoners were so weak-willed that they relieved themselves in underwear, tissues, or a shirt and then threw it away.¹⁰

Despite the horrible conditions, Baumgardt gave a positive description of the relations among the prisoners in 1943: “We did not give each other any trouble. The camaraderie was good. We were in agreement: we wanted nothing to do with Hitler.”¹¹ By contrast, Klein reported of a progressive demoralization of the prisoners, including “scuffles” during ration distribution and “cases of theft among comrades.” These thefts “increased from day to day” and included bread as well as pieces of clothing and equipment. To escape these conditions, he fled the unit along with Aviator Willi Lehwalder (b. June 6, 1915) on February 12, 1944. Both were recaptured later that month and were sentenced to death for desertion on June 8, 1944. At the end of 1944, both were imprisoned in WG Anklam. It is unknown whether their death sentences were carried out.

The counterintelligence (*Abwehr*) daily report of the Sixth Army of July 15, 1944, recorded two other escape attempts: “In the area of Sserpeni [today Șerpeni, Moldova], two members of FStGA 17 escaped on July 13. There is suspicion that they defected.”¹² FStGA 17 was wiped out in August 1944 during a major Soviet offensive (the Jassy-Kishinev Offensive) that destroyed Army Group South Ukraine.¹³ The unit was not reformed. The German Red Cross lists 360 men missing from FStGA 17, the highest number of missing reported from any FStGA.¹⁴

Aside from those handed down against Werner Klein and Willi Lehwalder, only three other death sentences are known to have been given to members of FStGA 17. On January 5, 1944, Eugen Hoffmann was sentenced to death for desertion by the court of the Local Command (*Standortkommandantur*) in Rostov. The sentence was carried out on May 26.¹⁵ Four days prior, on May 22, Fritz Keller was beheaded in Brandenburg-Görden Prison after he was sentenced to death on April 6 by the court of the Kriegsmarine in Berlin for subversion of fighting power (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*).¹⁶ Josef Weidenkopf (b. October 6, 1922) was sentenced to death for desertion by the court of the 320th Infantry Division on July 19, 1944. Although his sentence was confirmed on September 30, it was later commuted to a 10-year prison sentence.¹⁷

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

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2. Report of Karl Baumann (pseudonym for Karl Baumgardt), cited in Norbert Haase, *Deutsche Deserteure* (West Berlin: Rotbuch, 1987), p. 102.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Wehrmachtgefängnis Gla[t]z, Vernehmung des Fliegers Werner Klein vom 2.5.1944, reproduced in Hermine Wüllner, ed., “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein.” *Todesurteile deutscher Wehrmachtgerichte. Eine Dokumentation* (Nomos: Baden-Baden, 1997), p. 233.

8. Kurze Übersicht über Organisation und Aufgaben des Wehrmachtstrafvollzugs, der Bewährungstruppe sowie der Sondereinheiten des Heeres, Berlin, den 16.3.1943, BA-MA, RH 14/37.

9. Wehrmachtgefängnis Gla[t]z, Vernehmung des Fliegers Werner Klein vom 2.5.1944, reproduced in Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” p. 233.

10. Wüllner, “. . . kann nur der Tod die gerechte Sühne sein,” p. 234.

11. Report of Karl Baumann (pseudonym for Karl Baumgardt), cited in Haase, *Deutsche Deserteure*, p. 102.

12. Ic-Tagesmeldung der 6. Armee vom 15.7.1944, BA-MA, RH 20-6/698, Bl. 58.

13. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 72.

14. Deutsches Rotes Kreuz, Suchdienst München, Vermisstenbildliste I C-F.

15. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1055 of the photocopied form).

16. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 1276 of the photocopied form). Military death sentences had been carried out by beheading in Berlin in great numbers since the beginning of the war and against members of the Replacement Army (*Ersatzbeer*) from the spring of 1943 to the fall of 1944. For additional information, see **WG Anklam**, **WG Bruchsal**, and **FStGA 1**.

17. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 255 of the photocopied form).

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 18

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 18 in early 1943 (probably in March) in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Germersheim through the commander of Defense District (*Wehrkreis*) XII.¹ The Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) deployed the unit to the eastern front with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*). Convicts from the front and rear areas of Army Group South were transferred to FStGA 17; if they could not be sent directly to the unit, they were transferred primarily via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Dubno and its subordinate Reception Center (*Auffangstelle*) Kiev.

The Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines of April 14 and 15, 1942—which were expanded by the General for Special Tasks responsible for the FStGAs at the OKH on October 28, based on the initial experiences with the FStGAs—dictated the organization and strength of the unit, the selection of the prisoners, their treatment, and their deployment. These guidelines are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**.

The OKW order of April 15, 1942, stated that FStGA prisoners were to work 10 hours a day, even on Sundays and holidays. However, on May 2, 1943, the XXXXII Army Corps, to which FStGA 18 was subordinate, decided that the prisoners would be allowed 24 work-free hours per week, in which the men were to be “educated and cared for.”² Nonetheless, the prisoners were quickly deployed (in the OKW’s words) “to the hardest labor, under the most perilous circumstances . . . possible in the deployment area of the fighting troops.”³ The implementation of this order is indicated by a casualty report from July 25, 1943. That day, prisoner Josef Meier was shot by a guard “in a disciplinary action resulting from his own behavior,” as the notification form sent to the prisoner’s next of kin read. The location of Meier’s death was reported only as “at the front line (location unknown).”⁴

By that time, court-martial executions were already being carried out in FStGA 18. Fritz Liebisch (b. September 28, 1918) and Max Schwabl (b. May 29, 1921) of the 2nd Company of FStGA 18 were executed for desertion in the village of Zarozhnoe, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) east of Kharkiv, on July 22, 1943.⁵ The next day, Otto Behringer (b. December 8, 1922), Robert Löhrengel (b. July 8, 1921), Willi Sarg (b. July 19, 1921), and Robert Schäffauer (b. January 20, 1922) were executed by firing squad for the same offense.⁶ All of these death sentences were handed down by the court of the 39th Infantry Division—to which FStGA had been subordinated in July 1943—which was at that time engaged with the Red Army along a static front east of Kharkiv.

FStGA 18 withdrew westward in response to the Soviet offensive around Kharkiv in August 1943. During the withdrawal, on September 18, 1943, two members of the unit—Waldemar Knappe (b. June 1, 1921) and Paul Knott (b. November 21, 1919)—were executed for desertion at KWG Dubno.⁷ These verdicts were also issued by the court of the 39th Infantry Division. Another escapee managed to get all the way back to Germany before he was recaptured. He was beheaded in Vienna on October 8, 1943, after being sentenced to death by the court of the 39th Infantry Division.⁸ The records of the court also included a 10th death sentence for a member of FStGA 18 during the period from July 15 to October 15, 1943, which was commuted to 12 years in prison.⁹

The (presumably complete) list of 10 known death sentences (9 carried out) during this period offers a point of comparison with a “normal” military unit, revealing the extent of the judicial terror within the FStGAs. For example, the 253rd Infantry Division—which was sent to the eastern front after the campaign in France, serving there from June 1941 to May 1945—kept quite thorough records of its death sentences.

Despite the fact that the 253rd Infantry Division had more than 10 times more men than FStGA 18, it only passed 14 death sentences in all of 1943, only 8 of which were carried out.¹⁰

FStGA 18’s subordination to the 39th Infantry Division ended when the latter was dissolved in the fall of 1943. In the first half of 1944, FStGA 18 was subordinate to different divisions of the Sixth and Eighth Armies along the southern section of the front. The deployment locations of the unit for this period can be reconstructed from the death sentences issued during this period. The surviving court documents indicate that the retreat movements of FStGA 18 took it from Kirovohrad (today Kropyvnyts’kyi, Ukraine) across the Bug River in the direction of Tiraspol, then to Kishinev (today Chişinău, Moldova), and finally to Iaşi (German: Jassy), in Romania.

On January 31, 1944, the court of the 282nd Infantry Division sentenced the prisoner Franz Schmied (b. April 15, 1915) to death for absence without leave. This verdict, confirmed by the commander of the Eighth Army on February 20, was later commuted to 12 years in prison. However, Albert Grabowski (b. July 2, 1924) sentenced to death for desertion by the same court on May 6, 1944, was not so fortunate. The verdict was subsequently confirmed by the commander of the Sixth Army on May 22, and Grabowski was executed on May 30, in Kishinev. The commander also declined to extend clemency to Willi Grzegoreck (b. May 20, 1923), who was sentenced to death for desertion by the same court on June 15, 1944. He was executed on July 7, in Kishinev.¹¹ Erich Hawlick was sentenced to death on June 2, 1944, for desertion and looting by the court of the 79th Infantry Division. Following confirmation by the commander of the Eighth Army, the execution took place on June 22.¹²

The court of the 376th Infantry Division handed down death sentences against Ernst Dörfler and Matthias Gassner for absence without leave on June 5, 1944. However, their sentences were commuted to probation by the commander of Army Group Wöhler (formerly part of the Eighth Army).¹³ The same court sentenced Walter Kubis of the 1st Company FStGA 18 to death for desertion on August 9, 1944. Unlike Dörfler and Gassner, Kubis’s sentence was confirmed by the commander of the 376th Infantry Division and carried out on the same day.¹⁴ It is unclear whether the death sentence handed down against Willi Kampschulte by the court of the 376th Infantry Division for subversion of fighting power on August 9, 1944, was carried out.¹⁵ Another member of FStGA 18, 19-year-old Horst Henze was beheaded on June 19, 1944, in Brandenburg-Görden Prison. He had been sentenced to death by the court of the Armed Forces Command (*Wehrmachtkommandantur*) Berlin for desertion and other offenses on May 5, 1944.¹⁶

FStGA 18 sustained heavy losses in the summer of 1944 as a result of the Soviet offensive that began on August 20, 1944 (the Jassy-Kishinev Offensive), which destroyed Army Group South Ukraine. The majority of the 262 prisoners from FStGA 18 who were recorded missing by the German Red Cross went

missing in eastern Romania, in locations including Iași, Bârlad, and others.¹⁷ Unlike FStGAs 7 and 10, which were in the same area, FStGA 18 was not completely destroyed; it absorbed the remaining prisoners from those units.¹⁸

After the destruction of Army Group South Ukraine, FStGA 18 was once again subordinated to Army Group South. During this period, Georg Ermentraut joined the unit. His 10-year prison sentence for desertion was commuted to a 10-year jail sentence. According to his words, the internees of FStGA 18 were treated like “the scum of the earth on bread and water” and sent to construct defensive positions, where they were “pushed back and forth across the Hungarian-Yugoslavian border.”¹⁹

Additional death sentences were recorded in this last period of FStGA 18’s existence. Anton Boos (b. October 1, 1921) was shot on December 11, 1944, on the Deuthen parade ground, after he was sentenced to death for desertion by the court of the 461st Division, Zweigstelle Allenstein. Richard Stemmler (or Stemmler), 22 years old, met the same fate in Ulm on March 21, 1945, after he was convicted of desertion by the 465th Division.²⁰

In the deployment area of FStGA 18, Richard Storch was sentenced to death on December 1, 1944, by the court of the commander of Army Area Hungary (*Befehlshaber im Heeresgebiet Ungarn*) for “cowardice before the enemy.” In his case, the execution was stayed and he was transferred “to Gestapo Vienna.”²¹ This phrase referred euphemistically to his transfer to Transitional Custody (*Zwischenhaft*) I—war-related forced labor in the Mauthausen concentration camp. This unit, established by the Luftwaffe on June 1, 1944, and taken over by the army six weeks later, was intended to preserve valuable manpower, especially those who were skilled in technical jobs.²²

FStGA 18 operated until the end of the war and continued its assignment of transferring potentially useful soldiers back to the front. Georg Ermentraut was deployed for four months digging trenches at the front and was sent to a four-week operational assignment with Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500 at Olmütz (today Olomouc, Czech Republic). Ermentraut, serving with the last remaining troops of Probationary Unit 500, was involved in the final skirmishes of the war at Olmütz between May 6 and May 8, 1945.²³ Information is not available about the final days of FStGA 18’s operation.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

Hans-Peter Klausch
Trans. Guy Aldridge

NOTES

1. Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 4: Die Landstreitkräfte 15–30* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), pp. 44, 72, 105; and Norbert Kannapin, *Die deutsche Feldpostübersicht 1939–1945. Vollständiges Verzeichnis der Feldpostnummern in numerischer Folge und deren Aufschlüsselung. Bearbeitet nach den im Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv verwahrten Unterlagen des Heeresfeldpostmeisters*, vol. 3 (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1982), p. 80.

2. Gen.Kdo. XXXXII. A.K. vom 2.5.1943.
3. OKH Chef H Rüst u. BdE, Az. B 13 n 30 HR (IIIa) Nr. 2110/42 vom 7.9.1942, S. 9, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 130.
4. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Josef Meier.
5. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 102 of the photocopied form).
6. Ibid., Bl. 101–103 of the photocopied form.
7. Ibid., Bl. 102 of the photocopied form.
8. Ibid., Bl. 101 of the photocopied form.
9. Ibid.
10. See Christoph Rass, “*Menschenmaterial*”: *Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), pp. 294–299, 445. In the period from September 1939 until February 1945, a total of 42 death sentences (25 of which were in reserve troop sections) were given to members of the 253rd Infantry Division. Of these, 18 were executed. Seven executions were from the front troops, while the other 11 were from the reserves.
11. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 241 of the photocopied form).
12. Ibid., Bl. 131 of the photocopied form.
13. Ibid., Bl. 275 of the photocopied form.
14. Ibid., Bl. 276 of the photocopied form. The location of execution was apparently Vulpești, northwest of Kishinev, in present-day Moldova.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid. Court-martial death sentences had been issued in Berlin since the beginning of the war and in the Replacement Army from the spring of 1943 and the fall of 1944, most of which were carried out by beheading. For additional information, see **WG Anklam**, **WG Bruchsal**, and **FStGA 1**.
17. Deutsches Rotes Kreuz, Suchdienst München, Vermisstenbildliste I C-F.
18. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, pp. 74, 105, 183.
19. Report of Georg Ermentraut, cited in “‘Sie haben etwas gutzumachen.’ Ein Tatsachenbericht vom Einsatz der Strafsoldaten, 13. Fortsetzung” *Der Spiegel* 18 (May 1, 1951).
20. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 436 of the photocopied form).
21. Ibid., Bl. 491 of the photocopied form.
22. See Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 232; and Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 86.
23. See “‘Sie haben etwas gutzumachen.’”; and Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995).

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 19

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 19 in April 1943 by the conversion of Field Penal Camp (*Feldstraflager*) III—which

had been created by Defense District (*Webrkreis*) IV in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Torgau-Fort Zinna on August 1, 1942—into a FStGA.¹ Prior to this conversion, the 237 remaining prisoners in Feldstraflager III had been transferred to Feldstraflager I. The decision to convert this unit was the result of the increasingly dire shortage of manpower at the front. The transfer of prisoners deemed “incorrigible” from the Field Penal Camp to the front was an attempt to alleviate this shortage.² These prisoners were transferred to the FStGAs with the hope that they could eventually be reformed and sent to “front probation,” where they would serve with a regular combat unit.

FStGA 19 was initially attached to Army Group North (*Heeresgruppe Nord*) and was deployed near Leningrad, where the prisoners worked on the construction of bunkers and defensive positions as well as retrieving dead and wounded soldiers.³ It operated under the Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, OKW) guidelines, which are discussed in detail in **FStGA 1**. The guiding principle of those instructions—that the prisoners were to be kept “under the hardest living and working conditions”—led to a high number of escape attempts, absences without leave, and other types of avoidance of service in FStGA 19.⁴

Thirteen prisoners from FStGA 19 were executed in the period from June to December 1943. Johann Waldmann (b. July 21, 1910), Heinrich Lathan (b. October 6, 1922), and Heinz Mitzner (b. July 23, 1921) were executed for desertion on June 9, 18, and 22, 1943, respectively, after being sentenced to death by the court of the 58th Infantry Division.⁵ On August 10, 1943, Kurt Brichta (b. June 3, 1921) and Kurt Steinert (b. January 30, 1914) were executed by firing squad. The court of the 21st Infantry Division had sentenced both men to death for “collective subversion of fighting power” (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*) under §5, Abs. 1 (3) of the Special Wartime Military Code (*Kriegssonderstrafrechtsverordnung*), which dealt with withdrawal from military service “through deceptive, calculated means.”⁶ Adolf Klosa was shot for desertion in Volosovo (Leningradskaia oblast’) on August 18, 1943, after he was sentenced to death by the court of the commander of the Eighteenth Army Rear Area (*Kommandeur des rückwärtigen Armeegebiets*, Korück, 583).⁷ The next two death sentences came from the court of the 24th Infantry Division. Hans-Joachim Wähling (b. February 5, 1924) and Günther Krautwald (b. November 7, 1920) were sentenced to death for desertion and executed on August 23 and September 13, 1943, respectively.⁸ Three other soldiers were executed as a result of verdicts issued by the court of the I Army Corps (*I. Armeekorps*): Heinrich Schwarz (b. May 22, 1919) on September 28, 1943, Kurt Lüttich (b. April 24, 1921) on October 29, and Friedolin Haus (b. April 19, 1924) on November 1. Schwarz and Haus had been convicted of desertion, while Lüttich had been convicted of withdrawal from military service “through deceptive, calculated means.”⁹ Christian Sopp was executed on November 5, 1943, for desertion after he was sentenced to death by the court of the 24th Infantry Division. Karl Eichler was convicted of “absence without leave” by the court of the

Eighteenth Army and sentenced to death on December 18, 1943.¹⁰

Although FStGA 19 applied a “concept of punishment and deterrence” in the treatment of its prisoners, it also pursued the goal of reforming the prisoners so that they could be used “again as useful, dutiful, honorable soldiers with the fighting troops,”¹¹ which represented a “concept of reform and education.”¹² The application of such a concept was based on an order from the Eighteenth Army High Command (*Armeekorpskommando*, AOK 18) from May 14, 1943. Under this order, prisoners who exhibited good behavior (referred to as “climbers”) were to be “brought up, equipped, and educated for the so-called ‘deployment groups [or] platoons.’” AOK 18 noted that these prisoners were “intended for combat deployment, for example [in] anti-partisan warfare.”¹³ In FStGA 19, the formation of these “deployment platoons” apparently occurred in the 5th Company. On June 23, 1943, its “provisional strength” was listed as 1 officer, 17 noncommissioned officers, 33 other staff personnel, and 166 prisoners.¹⁴ On July 12, 1943, its “combat strength” included 1 officer, 9 noncommissioned officers, 4 additional staff personnel, and 128 prisoners.¹⁵

Until January 1944, an “intervention company,” which was separated from the “deployment platoons,” was assigned to the 24th Infantry Division for “cleaning up” a “deep breakthrough,”¹⁶ as its temporary commanders Hans von Tettau and Kurt Versock later recorded. “Probationary Company 19, formed out of FStGA 19,” led by Tettau and Versock, was trapped in this counterattack together with the 225th Füsilierr-Bataillon. Nevertheless, it was able to “free itself from a constantly attacking enemy in full sight” and, together with the 225th Füsilierr-Bataillon, “fight [its way] back,” along with all wounded prisoners, who were transported with them. In February 1944, “climbers” from FStGA 19 were combined with those from FStGA 4 in a temporary “Army Group-Probationary-Battalion I,” which was transferred to “security on Lake Peipus.”¹⁷

The example of a sailor named Fan indicates how the use of prisoners in an “intervention company” was intended to work from the military leadership’s perspective. Fan had been sentenced to three years in prison for violently attacking a superior while drunk. As a member of the “intervention company” of FStGA 19, he was wounded by grenade fragments on July 18, 1944. As a result, on January 5, 1945, the Naval High Command (*Oberkommando der Marine*, OKM) granted him a conditional suspension of his sentence for “probation on the front” with Probationary Unit (*Bewährungstruppe*) 500. One of Fan’s accomplices had already been transferred from FStGA 19 to Probationary Unit 500 in November 1944.¹⁸

The existence of the “intervention company” shows that FStGA 19 achieved “successful reforms” and transformed prisoners into useful soldiers. However, this was only true for some prisoners. For example, the case of Kanonier Martin Krammer demonstrates that many prisoners from FStGA 19 were not capable of being successful soldiers after constant

hunger, long hours of physical labor, and other hardships. It was noted that “in January 1944 [he had not taken] the available opportunity to prove himself in the intervention company.”¹⁹ Due to his constant reticence—primarily due to hunger—Krammer was detained and transferred out of the unit and was “deployed to digging work at the front line”²⁰ with FStGA 19. The sentence he received later for subversion of fighting power noted:

He went, however, very slowly, required all of maybe five minutes rest, and explained to the noncommissioned officer: “If it is too slow for you, then order a car. And if you shoot me dead, I’ll go as it suits [me].” . . . [When] the officer of the court wanted to question [him], he feigned insanity; he indicated that he was the Count of Luxembourg, was born in the year 1400, his father had red hair, and so forth. As his company commander . . . tried to influence him with benevolent persuasion, [Krammer] interrupted him multiple times and demanded a piece of bread in the interest of public health.²¹

Krammer was declared a “simulator” (*Simulant*) by an army psychiatrist. The court of the XXXVIII Army Corps of the Eighteenth Army sentenced him to death for subversion of fighting power on August 18, 1944. In the verdict, the court-martial also remarked on the morale of the prisoners in FStGA 19, indicating a general concern about increasing defiance by the prisoners: “In the last few months the propensity of prisoners in the FStGA toward insubordination is increasing in dangerous ways. The delinquent portion of the prisoners take the hard battles on the front as cause to act fresh and act in an insubordinate manner toward the [unit] staff.”²²

Perhaps as a deterrent to this trend, Krammer’s sentence was carried out on the day he was convicted. Nine death sentences for desertion and absence without leave had been handed down against members of FStGA 19 between late April and mid-July 1944. However, six of them were commuted to prison sentences of between 10 and 15 years. Only two, Hans Bergemann and Bruno Arnold, were executed, on May 26, and June 1, 1944, respectively. Meanwhile, Heinz Heitmüller, who had been sentenced to death for desertion on July 14, 1944, had escaped and was still at large.²³

In the fall of 1944, FStGA 19 was among the eight FStGAs that were transferred from the eastern to the western front to build defensive positions against the advancing Western Allied troops in the border area with France and the Benelux countries. Under the command of the Nineteenth Army, FStGA 19 was sent to dig trenches, initially in the Vosges, near St. Dié and La Bresse, and then later in the Upper Rhine region.²⁴

In this final phase, FStGA 19 returned to the concentration camp methods that had been used in its previous iteration as Feldstraflager III. The report of Peter Schilling, who was sent to FStGA 19 for desertion in late 1944, indicates the nature of this change:

Upon reaching [the unit], the commander of the F[St]GA curtly and concisely informed me that I would surely not live a long life in his unit. In F[St]GA 19 the murder of prisoners was a daily occurrence. I witnessed, as one of our prisoner attendants ordered a comrade to go out over a pre-marked line—which we were not allowed to cross—to get a leaflet that had been blown from a propaganda grenade. As the prisoner hesitated and pointed out the restricted line, the watchman threatened to shoot him for failure to follow orders. As the prisoner then moved out, he was gunned down from behind as he crossed the demarcation line; that is, “shot during escape.” Similar things occurred daily. In addition, rations were minimal, such that one could speak of an extermination by hunger.²⁵

The reference to a daily occurrence of such “incidents” may be an exaggeration, especially since Schilling was apparently only “in the F[St]GA a very short time,”²⁶ since he fled after being wounded by a shell fragment. Some court-martial executions have been corroborated, however. On November 17, 1944, Paul Hagenow, Helmut Skott, and Max Glöckner of the 3rd Company of FStGA 19 were shot after having been sentenced to death for cooperative desertion by the court of the 708th Volksgrenadier Division in Allarmont.²⁷ On January 9, 1945, prisoners Werner Mensch (b. October 7, 1926) and Ernst Otto (b. June 24, 1910) were sentenced to death by the court of the Nineteenth Army; they were executed on January 29, 1945.²⁸

Werner Krauss was a convicted resistance fighter of the “Red Chapel” (*Rote Kapelle*), who had been initially sentenced to death by a court-martial before his sentence was commuted to five years’ imprisonment. He cites FStGA 19 as an example of how the FStGAs on the western front were, “along with the personnel, encircled and overrun by the enemy.” He supports his statement with information in the “Secret Reports on the Disposition of the F[St]GA,” which he was able to look through during his duty as a prison scribe (August 1944 to March 1945) of the 7th Company of WG Torgau-Fort Zinna.²⁹ However, no independent sources confirm the details of Krauss’s imprecisely dated account. It is possible that instead of being overrun, many of the prisoners in FStGA 19 voluntarily surrendered to the Allies during their retreat.

Among the last members of the unit, who built trenches and antitank obstacles in the area of Freiburg im Breisgau, were three Communist resistance fighters who had been sentenced to death by a court-martial. Eduard Czamlar, Heinrich Schifer, and Johann Schaubmair of Linz had had their sentences commuted to 10 years in prison by Hitler because they had children at home. A so-called Prison Company (*Zuchthauskompanie*) had been formed in FStGA 19 in late August or early September 1944.³⁰ The three men were transferred into this company from WG Torgau-Fort Zinna on March 1, 1945. Czamlar and Schifer were taken prisoner by the French in late April 1945. Schaubmair also survived; he

indicated April 22, 1945, as the end of his internment in the Wehrmacht penal system.³¹

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

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2. For additional information see **Feldstraflager I–III** and **WG Glatz**.

3. See the short biography of Walter Holländer, printed in Michael Eberlein, Norbert Haase, Wolfgang Oleschinski, eds., *Torgau im Hinterland des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Militärjustiz, Wehrmachtgefängnisse, Reichskriegsgericht* (Leipzig: G. Kiepenhauer, 1999), p. 116.

4. See the short overview of the organization and the assignments of the military prisoner platoons, the Probationary Corps, and Army Sondereinheiten, Berlin, March 16, 1943, BA-MA, RH 14/37.

5. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 111–113 of the photocopied form).

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8. Ibid., Bl. 91 and 93 of the photocopied form.

9. Ibid., Bl. 26 and 29 of the photocopied form.

10. Ibid., Bl. 20 and 92 of the photocopied form.

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13. AOK 18 Abt. Ia Nr. 8671/43 geh. vom 14.5.1943, BA-MA, WF-03/24402, Bl. 61.

14. KTB 21. Inf.Div. Abt. Ia, Nr. 19, S. 306, BA-MA, RH 26-21/96.

15. Anlagen zum KTB 21. Inf.Div. Abt. Ia, Nr. 19, BA-MA, RH 26-21/97.

16. *Geschichte der 24. Infanterie-Division 1935–1945*, ed. Hans von Tettau und Kurt Versock (Stolberg, 1956), p. 108. See also Horst Voigt, "Die 'verlor'nen Haufen.' Sondertruppen zur Frontbewährung im 2. Weltkrieg. Ein Beitrag zu ihrer Geschichte, Teil I," in *Deutsches Soldatenjahrbuch 28* (1980): 270.

17. AOK 18 Abt. Ia Nr. 2044/44 geh. vom 24.2.1944, BA-MA, RH 20-18/772.

18. See the description of the case in Lothar Walmrath, "Iustitia et disciplina." *Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 250, 622. For information on the "500ers," see Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995) and **WG Torgau-Fort Zinna**.

19. Verdict of the court of the XXXVIII Army Corps of August 18, 1944, against Martin Krammer, partially reproduced in Fritz Wüllner, *Die NS-Militärjustiz und das Elend der Geschichtsschreibung: Ein grundlegender Forschungsbericht*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1997), p. 753.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 19 of the photocopied form); BArch PA, Sammlung "Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall" (MüT), Mitteilung für Hans Bergemann.

24. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 124.

25. Peter Schilling, "Ich musste selber etwas tun," in *Ich musste selber etwas tun. Deserteure—Täter und Verfolgte im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Geschichtswerkstatt Marburg e.V. (Marburg: Schüren, 2000), p. 154.

26. Ibid.

27. BArch PA, Todesurteile-Kartei (Bl. 281, 327 of the photocopied form).

28. Ibid., Bl. 282 of the photocopied form.

29. Report from the estate of Werner Krauss, reproduced in Norbert Haase and Brigitte Oleschinski, eds., *Torgau—Ein Kriegsende in Europa* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995), p. 46. See also Werner Krauss, *Briefe 1922 bis 1976*, ed. Peter Jehle (Frankfurt am Main: Perlentaucher, 2002), p. 947.

30. See **FStGA 21**.

31. See Siegwald Ganglmair, "Widerstand und Verfolgung in Linz in der NS-Zeit," in *Nationalsozialismus in Linz*, ed. Fritz Mayrhofer and Walter Schuster, vol. 2 (Linz: Archiv der Stadt Linz, 2001), p. 1439.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 20

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 20 on October 1, 1943, in Armed Forces Prison (*Wehrmachtgefängnis*, WG) Glatz (today Kłodzko, Poland), through the commander of Defense District (*Webrkreis*) VIII.¹ The Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) placed FStGA 20 into service on the eastern front, with Army Group Center (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*). Convicts from the area of Army Group Center were sent to FStGA 20; when a direct transfer was not possible, they were sent via Wartime Armed Forces Prison (*Kriegswehrmachtgefängnis*, KWG) Borissow (Borissow/Barysaŭ).

There is only a limited amount of fragmented information available on FStGA 20. We know that on November 22, 1943, the prisoner F. Brackemeier was shot during an escape attempt.² Paul Wacker, who came to FStGA 20 via KWG Wilna in early 1944 after being sentenced to a year in prison (originally to be served in Feldstraflager II but later commuted to service in the FStGA), reported that the men in the unit were deployed to "armed combat against partisans in the Pripyat Marshes."³ FStGA 20 was attacked by partisans in April 1944, resulting in the death of one prisoner from the 5th Company.⁴ On September 1, 1944, Hans Bürger, a prisoner in the 5th Company, was shot "in flight."⁵ On July 24,

1944, Alfred Nüske (b. July 19, 1919) escaped from the unit. He also belonged to the 5th Company, which at that time was deployed in Ołdaki, Poland. Nüske was recaptured in Berlin and was sentenced to death for desertion in Torgau on February 15, 1945, by the court of the Armed Forces Command (*Wehrmachtkommandantur*) Berlin. Although the sentence was confirmed by the commanding general of Defense District III on March 29, 1945, he was not executed before the end of the war.⁶ The last-known location in which FStGA 20 was in service was East Prussia. On January 25, 1945, Army Group Center was redesignated as Army Group North (*Heeresgruppe Nord*), to which FStGA 20 remained subordinated for the rest of the war.⁷

The 5th Company reveals a feature that distinguishes FStGA 20 from all other similar units. On December 19, 1943, the general for Special Tasks at the OKH responsible for the FStGAs gave a written order to FStGA 20 that its 5th Company was to be used as a probationary unit for prisoners from the Field Penal Camps (*Feldstraflager*).⁸ Until that time, prisoners who had been classified as “incurable” had been sent to the field penal camps, where they would remain for the rest of the war under extremely strict conditions; their time in the Field Penal Camps would not count against their sentences, which they would still be expected to serve in full at the end of the war.⁹ The camps’ jurisdiction had applied explicitly to probationary prisoners of “all fitness levels.”¹⁰

From December 19, 1943, on, the “mixed” FStGA 20 would be responsible for convicts from the Field Penal Camps who had been classified as “suitable for work and conditionally capable of service in the Replacement Army [*Ersatzbeer*].”¹¹ Apparently, the purpose of this measure was to prevent prisoners from becoming too weak to serve as laborers at the front (where there was a severe shortage of labor), as often happened with those interned in the Field Penal Camps. In addition, prisoners who would have otherwise been the responsibility of the WGs due to their decreased fitness level could now be sent to “field enforcement” through FStGA 20.

In hindsight, the restructuring of FStGA 20 as a unit in which prisoners of lower fitness levels could potentially perform effective services and the creation of a mixed unit had an experimental character: it could be examined whether prison enforcement (*Gefängnisvollzug*) and prison camp probation (*Straflagerverwaltung*) could take place within a field penal structure. However, a principle formulated in September 1941 opposed such an arrangement, noting that “bringing together . . . trainable soldiers . . . with untrainable criminals [*Rechtsverbrecher*] or those who are not trainable in the foreseeable future . . . would achieve the opposite of the intended purpose” of the field penal system.¹² In fact, it had already been demonstrated during the normal operation of the FStGA system that the frequent lack of opportunities to place prisoners who behaved badly in separate accommodations could become a problem for military discipline and the “training process.”¹³ On the

other hand, there was an advantage to such a restructuring: the creation of a penal camp company within the FStGA could reduce the number of lengthy prisoner transports and the amount of long-distance correspondence, since the transfer of prisoners from the field penal system into the Field Penal Camps—and their return in the event of an “improvement”—could take place within a single unit.

In fact, as the case of FStGA 21 demonstrates, by the summer of 1944, it had been decided to equip all—or at least most—FStGAs with penal camp (or prison) companies.¹⁴ It would, however, be an exaggeration to view FStGA 20 as a sort of “pilot program” in this respect. The decision to add these companies to the existing field penal units was based not on the results in FStGA 20 but rather on the increasingly desperate situation at the front and the desire to bring all possible reclaimed prisoners of different categories (those in prison, those in the penal camps, and those in the penitentiaries) into service at the front.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

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2. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für F. Brackemeier.

3. Paul Wacker, “Stationen meines Lebens” (unpublished manuscript from November 24, 1988), cited in Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995), p. 105.

4. See Lothar Walmrath, “*Iustitia et disciplina*”: *Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 251, 390.

5. BArch PA, Sammlung “Mitteilung[en] über einen Todesfall” (MüT), Mitteilung für Hans Bürger.

6. See the short biography of Alfred Nüske in Eberlein, Haase, and Oleschinski, *Torgau im Hinterland*, pp. 141–143.

7. Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen*, p. 146.

8. See Eberlein, Haase, and Oleschinski, *Torgau im Hinterland*, pp. 66, 188. Aside from the special regulations applied to the Straflager company, the general OKW and OKH regulations for FStGAs applied to FStGA 20 as well; for more information on these regulations, see **FStGA 1**.

9. See **Feldstraflager I–III**. For the forerunner organizations, the Straflagerabteilungen of the WGs, see, for example, **WG Glatz**. See also Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 170.

10. OKW 54 e 10 Feldstr.Lag.-AHA/Ag/H/Str.I/II Str. 929/42 vom 13.4.1942 (Abschrift), BA-MA, H 20/497.

11. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. 363/44 vom 4.9.1944 (Merkblatt über Vollzugseinrichtungen und Bewährungsgruppen), BA-MA, RH 14/34, Bl. 83. See also Rudolf Absolon, *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich, vol. VI: 19. Dezember 1941 bis 9. Mai 1945* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1995), pp. 280–284.

12. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 469 Gr R Wes Nr. 1327/41 vom 21.9.1941, BA-MA, WF-03/3861, Bl. 817. Emphasis in original.

13. See the entry for **FStGA 7**.

14. For the creation of penitentiary companies, see **FStGA 21** and **WG Bruchsal**.

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 21

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 21 in March 1945 through the conversion of Field Penal Camp (*Feldstraflager*) I, which was in service at that time with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*) in Hungary.¹ The five companies of FStGA 21 (at least according to plans) included a penal camp company (*Straflager-Kompanie*) and a penitentiary company (*Zuchthaus-Kompanie*).

The redesignation and reclassification of Feldstraflager I (which took place in a similar manner with Feldstraflager II) brought to an end the process of expanding and unifying the military penal system, which had begun in the late summer of 1944. Up to that time, prisoners who were sentenced to terms in penitentiaries, if their sentences were not commuted to prison terms, were classified as “unfit for combat,” kicked out of the armed forces, and turned over to the Reich Justice Administration (*Reichsjustizverwaltung*, i.e. the civilian penal system). They were often sent to prison camps in Emsland—where they lived in conditions that were “similar to those in the concentration camps”—for what was deemed “probation.”² Their time there did not count against their sentence, which they were expected to serve in full at the end of the war.

Early on, there were already critics of the idea of returning penitentiary prisoners to Germany. As one naval court put it, “undesirable elements . . . may find it preferable to be sentenced to the penitentiary rather than prison.”³ The Naval High Command (*Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine*, OKM) expressed the same concern in October 1942. However, the OKM did not see a possibility for “field penal service for these bad elements” because of the lack of suitable guards. It stated that “the guard personnel cannot be assembled in sufficient strength for supervision and maintenance of the prisoners, to prevent mutiny, unauthorized leave, and desertion.”⁴ It had, in fact, already become apparent in some cases, such as those of FStGAs 3 and 4, that there was a shortage of adequate guard personnel. On October 6, 1942, General der Artillerie Eugen Müller of the Army High Command (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, OKH) stated that in view of the “the generally restricted availability of staff personnel” the FStGAs “unfortunately cannot be expanded.”⁵ Because field penal service for the penitentiary prisoners would have required increased

numbers of guard personnel, it appeared inefficient from a military standpoint.

In fact, two detachments with about 4,600 total penitentiary prisoners from the Emsland camps had been formed outside the Wehrmacht and deployed to northern Norway (*Kommando Nord*) and the Atlantic coast of France (*Kommando West*), where they provided good results in the eyes of the German authorities. The men were sent to work on military construction projects under Organisation Todt, which included the construction of defensive works and construction and maintenance of military supply lines.⁶ The Industrial Ministry, which was responsible for these units, expressed its satisfaction with the work done by these units to the Justice Ministry.⁷

It is unknown whether the experiences with Kommando Nord and Kommando West had any direct influence on the decision to use soldiers sentenced to penitentiary terms in the FStGAs. It is possible that the increasingly desperate military situation led the military leadership to resort to using these men. On September 4, 1944, General Müller gave the order for the large-scale transfer of penitentiary prisoners to penal service at the front. The special penitentiary companies were attached to the FStGAs in late August or early September 1944. According to Müller’s order, “members of the field army who have been sentenced to a penitentiary term” were only to be handed over to the Reich Justice Administration if they were “the most uneducable asocials; homosexual repeat-offenders; elements which were dangerous to the community; or convicts who were not needed by the Wehrmacht for various reasons.” In all other cases, “prisoners who were sentenced to the penitentiary” were to be sent “to the FStGAs or Feldstraflager under a conditional restoration of suitability for military service.”⁸

A day after Müller’s order, Heinrich Himmler, who had become the commander of the Replacement Army (*Ersatzheer*) on July 20, 1944, ordered that in his area of responsibility, the penal system was “to be placed without exception in the immediate service of the war effort”: “Soldiers and army officials . . . who have been sentenced to prison are no longer to be . . . given over to the civilian justice system. They are either to be sent to the penitentiary companies of the FStGAs or turned over to the Gestapo and transferred to labor service in a concentration camp.”⁹ The prisoners selected for the penitentiary companies were to be those who could be considered for “front probation” with Probationary Unit (*Bewährungsgruppe*) 500. Time served in the penitentiary company would only begin to count against the prisoner’s sentence when they were transferred to Probationary Unit 500. The Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe soon adopted the same practice.¹⁰ The army sent a commission of military judges to the Emsland camps to evaluate the prisoners there for suitability for service in a penitentiary company in a FStGA, in Probationary Unit 500, or in the labor service at Buchenwald. Since the majority of the prisoners in the Emsland camps were already working in war-related industries, the transfer of

prisoners to Probationary Unit 500 was very selective, while the transfer of prisoners to the FStGAs or labor in Buchenwald was much more common.¹¹ A similar practice was instituted for former service members who had been sentenced to the penitentiary because they were “unfit for duty on the Moor [i.e., in the Emsland camps].”

Alongside the integration of the penitentiary companies, the FStGAs also received penal camp companies, which in the special case of FStGA 20 had already been done in late 1943. In the process of a unification of the organizational structures, Feldstraflager I was reorganized as FStGA 21. If this change in the final weeks of the war had any practical effect it is unknown due to the lack of available sources. The prisoners in FStGA 21 were captured by American forces on May 8, 1945, and became prisoners of war.¹²

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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Trans. Dallas Michelbacher

NOTES

1. Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 85; Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 4: Die Landstreitkräfte 15–30* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 168. The field post number (*Feldpostnummer*) of Feldstraflager I was transferred to FStGA 21 on March 28, 1945 (see Norbert Kannapin, *Die Deutsche Feldpostübersicht 1939–1945. Vollständiges Verzeichnis der Feldpostnummern in numerischer Folge und deren Aufschlüsselung. Bearbeitet nach den im Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv verwahrten Unterlagen des Heeresfeldpostmeisters*, vol. 1 [Osnabrück: Biblio, 1980], p. 247).

2. OKW 14 n 16.20 WR (I/4) Nr. 496/44 g vom 26.7.1944, BArch, R 3001/2298, Bl. 92.

3. Gericht des Küstenbefehlshabers östliche Ostsee Memel B. Nr. 507 vom 16.9.1942, cited in Lothar Walmrath, “*Iustitia et disciplina*”: *Strafgerichtsbarkeit in der deutschen Kriegsmarine 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 230.

4. OKM AMA/MR IV B. Nr. 13539 vom 1.10.1942, cited in Walmrath, “*Iustitia et disciplina*,” p. 231.

5. OKH—General z.b.V. beim OKH Az. 556/Gr Str Nr. III/223/42 geh. vom 6.10.1942, BA-MA, WF-03/24582, Bl. 936.

6. The Kommandos Nord and West, which were also designated as “Einsatzgruppen,” temporarily carried other names such as the designations “Wiking” and “X.” See Frank Bührmann-Peters, “Ziviler Strafvollzug für die Wehrmacht: Militärgerichtlich Verurteilte in den Emslandlagern, 1939–1945” (PhD dissertation, Osnabrück University, 2002), pp. 238–251.

7. See Rainer Möhler, “Strafvollzug im ‘Dritten Reich’: Nationale Politik und regionale Ausprägung am Beispiel des Saarlandes,” in *Strafvollzug im “Dritten Reich”: Am Beispiel des Saarlandes*, ed. Heike Jung and Heinz Müller-Dietz (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1996), pp. 87, 102.

8. OKH General z.b.V., Az. 551/Gr.Str. Nr. 363/43 (Merkblatt über Vollzugseinrichtungen und Bewährungstruppen) vom 4.9.1944, S. 5, BA-MA, RH 14/34, Bl. 84.

9. ChefHRüst u. BdE B 14c 20 Ag HR Wes (IV b/1) 2082/44 vom 5.9.1944, BA-MA, RH 14/31, Bl. 31. See also Erich Kosthorst and Bernd Walter, *Konzentrations- und Strafgefangenenlager im Dritten Reich. Beispiel Emsland. Dokumentation und Analyse zum Verhältnis von NS-Regime und Justiz*, vol. 2 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1983), pp. 1395–1401.

10. See Peter Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz* (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), p. 190; and Walmrath, “*Iustitia et disciplina*,” p. 234.

11. See Hans-Peter Klausch, *Die Bewährungstruppe 500: Stellung und Funktion der Bewährungstruppe 500 im System von NS-Wehrrecht, NS-Militärjustiz und Wehrmachtstrafvollzug* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995), p. 257; and Kalmbach, *Wehrmachtjustiz*, p. 209.

12. Laut Aktenvermerk, WAST, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis Feldstraflager I (Bd. 49870).

FELDSTRAFGEFANGENEN-ABTEILUNG (FStGA) 22

The Wehrmacht established FStGA 22 in March 1945 through the conversion of Field Penal Camp (*Feldstraflager*) II into a FStGA. Feldstraflager II was deployed with Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*) in Hungary at the time.¹ FStGA 22 consisted of five companies, including a penal camp company and a penitentiary company (at least according to plans). Whether this restructuring—the background of which was similar to that of FStGA 21—had any notable practical effect on the prisoners during the last weeks of the war is unknown due to the lack of available source material.

On May 4 or 5, 1945, FStGA 22 was marching from the Horn camp to Zwettl in Lower Austria.² The unit was captured by American forces shortly thereafter, and the men became prisoners of war.

SOURCES See Sources, **FStGA 1**.

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NOTES

1. Hans-Peter Klausch, “Von der Wehrmacht ins KZ: Die Häftlingskategorien der SAW- und Zwischenhaft-Gefangenen,” in *Wehrmacht und Konzentrationslager*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Bremen: Temmen, 2012), p. 85; Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945, Vol. 4: Die Landstreitkräfte 15–30* (Osnabrück: Biblio, 1974), p. 168. The field post number (*Feldpostnummer*) of Feldstraflager I was transferred to FStGA 21 on March 28, 1945 (see Norbert Kannapin, *Die Deutsche Feldpostübersicht 1939–1945. Vollständiges Verzeichnis der Feldpostnummern in numerischer Folge und deren Aufschlüsselung. Bearbeitet nach den im Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv verwahrten Unterlagen des Heeresfeldpostmeisters*, vol. 1 [Osnabrück: Biblio, 1980], p. 247).

2. According to notation found in documents in BArch PA, Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnis Feldstraflager II (Bd. 49871).