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Geheime Feldpolizei

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*Not to be confused with the **Feldgendarmarie**, the ordinary military police.*

The **Geheime Feldpolizei** (help· info) (Secret Field Police) or GFP, was the secret military police of the German *Wehrmacht* until the end of the **Second World War**.

These units were used to carry out **plain-clothed** security work in the field such as counter-espionage, counter sabotage, detection of treasonable activities, counter-propaganda and to provide assistance to the **German Army** in **courts-martial** investigations. GFP personnel, who were also classed as *Abwehrpolizei*, operated as an executive branch of **German military intelligence** detecting resistance activity in **Germany** and **occupied France**.

The need for a secret military police developed after the annexations of the **Sudetenland** in 1938 and **Czechoslovakia** in 1939. Although security *einsatzgruppen* (or security task forces) belonging to the **Nazi Security Services** had been used during these operations, the German High Command felt it needed a specialist intelligence agency with police functions that could operate with the military but act like a security service to arrest potential opponents and eliminate any resistance. After studying data collected in Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia, Generaloberst **Wilhelm Keitel**, commander in chief of the **OKW**, issued the "*Dienstvorschrift für die Geheime Feldpolizei*" (Regulations for the secret police).

Geheime Feldpolizei	
Active	1939 - 1945
Country	 Nazi Germany
Branch	Heer
Type	Military Police
Role	Security, counterinsurgency and counter-espionage
Nickname	Gestapo der Wehrmacht
Disbanded	8 May 1945
Commanders	
<i>Heerespolizeichef</i>	SS and Police Leader William Krichbaum

in chief of the **OKW**, issued the "*Dienstvorschrift für die Geheime Feldpolizei*" (Regulations for the secret police).

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Function [edit]

The GFP was created on 21 July 1939. Although officially part of the Wehrmacht, its personnel were mainly recruited from **police officers** who had been assigned to the armed forces. They were assigned the legal status of *Wehrmachtsbeamte auf Kriegsdauer* (military officials for the duration of the war) and retained the authority of other police agencies as well as the *Sicherheitsdienst*.

GFP agents could wear either civilian clothes or uniforms in the course of their duties. A GFP official was also entitled to pass through any military roadblocks or enter military buildings. They could also utilise military signals and communications equipment, commandeer military vehicles, procure military supplies and accommodation wherever necessary in execution of their duty. In occupied areas, the GFP also provided personal escort to military VIP's, assistance to state security agencies in counter espionage, interrogation of suspects, prevention of sabotage and the detection of enemy agents.

In practice, GFP activity depended on the region in which it was operating. Work in occupied northern and western Europe was markedly different from operations conducted on the **Eastern Front**. In the **Netherlands**, **Denmark** and **Norway**, GFP agents were mainly confined to the secret police protection of senior Wehrmacht officers. In Belgium and France, the GFP became an executive part of the civilian police service, working alongside the military authorities to combat acts of resistance, **Allied espionage** and sabotage using terror tactics such as detentions, deportations and the execution of hostages.

However in the East and the Balkans, the GFP used constantly escalating terror against partisans, Jews and arbitrary "suspects". As an anti-partisan group, it worked alongside *einsatzgruppen* to execute and torture captured fighters and civilians suspected of helping the **Soviet resistance**. With the help of collaborators, the GFP also mounted operations to systematically burn down homes and entire villages. The GFP was also responsible for summarily executing prisoners before they could be liberated by the advancing **Red Army**. For example, in 1943 a GFP report to **SS and Police Leader** William Krichbaum stated that 21,000 people had been killed "some in combat, and many shot after interrogation" on the Eastern Front.

From mid-1943 onwards, the GFP was ordered to track down and capture all deserters after some *Wehrmacht* soldiers in France and Russia had begun joining partisan groups. By 1944, desertion rates rapidly rose following the major retreats on both the **Eastern** and **Western** fronts. The *Geheime Feldpolizei* arrested 3142 *Wehrmacht* personnel for desertion from **Army Group Centre** in 1944. But many troops were victims of increasingly confused rear areas where competing, often overlapping responsibilities of many military departments meant soldiers did not have the correct papers or were in the wrong locations. Convicted soldiers were either shot or sent to *Strafbattalionne*. The GFP also investigated any claims of defeatism talk in line infantry.

Another specialist unit called *gruppe 729* was created to interrogate all *Wehrmacht* soldiers who had managed to escape from Soviet captivity. The general fear was that the **NKVD** may have "re-educated" these former captives to spread defeatism and Communist propaganda. Soldiers suspected of being Soviet spies were sent to a special GFP camp at **Danzig** in **Poland**. By 1944, the camp held 400 prisoners.

Organization [edit]

The *Geheime Feldpolizei* was commanded by the *Heerespolizeichef* (Chief of Army Police), who initially had the equivalent military rank of **major**. Subordinate to the *Heerespolizeichef*, but equivalent to the rank of major, was the *Feldpolizeidirektor* who was in charge of a GFP unit or *gruppe*. On 24 July 1939, the title of *Heerespolizeichef* was upgraded to the military rank of *oberst*.

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A GFP unit in the *Wehrmacht* consisted of 50 personnel. This included:

- 1 Field director
- 32 Military police officers (higher and intermediate ranks)
- 17 Military support staff (e.g. drivers, clerks *etc*)

However after 1941, units sent to Russia were strengthened to 95 personnel.

- 1 Field director
- 54 Military police officers (higher and intermediate ranks). These could also include *hilfsfeldpolizeibeamten* (auxiliary field police officers) recruited from suitable soldiers.
- 40 Military support staff (e.g. drivers, clerks, security staff)

All groups were fully motorized. Their armaments were limited to light infantry weapons. In 1943, the *Luftwaffe* was given its own version of GFP. This resulted in another reorganisation of the ranks structure.

- *Feldpolizeichef der Wehrmacht* - General Major
- *Heerespolizeichef* - Oberst
- *Oberfeldpolizeidirektor* - Oberstleutnant
- *Feldpolizeidirektor* - Major
- *Feldpolizeikommissar* - Hauptmann
- *Feldpolizeiobersekretär/Inspektor* - Oberleutnant
- *Feldpolizeisekretär* - Leutnant
- *Feldpolizeiasistent* - All other NCOs.

Although the GFP was a distinct military organisation, from its inception it generally carried out the same duties as the *Gestapo* and the *Kripo*. Operations directed against populations in occupied countries employed methods similar to the SD and SS. This earned it the nickname "*Gestapo der Wehrmacht*".^[1]

By the end of 1942, nominal control of the GFP was transferred to the SD. The *Reich Security Main Office* finally took full control in the spring of 1944 despite the reluctance of the *Wehrmacht*. All GFP units remained under the full control of the SS until the end of the war.

Operations in occupied France [edit]

See also: *Carlingue* and *Milice*

Following the *defeat of France* in 1940, the GFP established its main headquarters at the Hôtel Bradford on the rue Saint Philippe du Roule in *Paris* (8ème arrondissement). Other sections for the départements of *Nord* and *Pas de Calais* were based at rue de la Traversière in *Brussels*.

Each GFP *gruppe* consisted of a fifty-man unit until May 1942 when the entire command was restructured by SS *Brigadeführer Karl Oberg*, the *Higher SS and Police Leader* (*Höhere SS-und Polizeiführer*, HSSPF) "Frankreich" (France). This reorganisation created the "Group 6/10" which contained the *Kommando für Kapitalverbrechen* (Capital crimes unit). It ran the infamous *Balard shooting range* at *Issy-les-Moulineaux* in the 15e arrondissement which was used to torture and execute 143 prisoners.

The GFP also oversaw the work done by the French *Brigades Spéciales* part of the *Renseignements généraux*. These units, which were part of the *French police's intelligence service*, specialised in tracking down "internal enemies" (e.g. the *French Resistance*), Jews and those evading *work conscription*. The Special Brigades were based in room 35 of the *Paris police headquarters*. The *Brigade Spéciale N°2* was notorious for using torture as well as leading investigations, manhunts, surveillance and interviews of suspects in *Occupied France*.

See also [edit]

- *Feldgendarmarie*, the uniformed *Wehrmacht* military police.
- *Feldjägerkorps*, formed in 1943, it became the senior military police service within the *Wehrmacht*.
- *Kempetai*, the military police of the *Imperial Japanese Army* from 1881 to 1945.

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External links [edit]

- *History of the Geheime Feldpolizei* [↗]
- *A chapter of the memoirs of Maurice de Cheveigné on the Geheime Feldpolizei* [↗]
- *An article on group 700 of the Geheime Feldpolizei; accessdate 18 February 2008* [↗]

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