

Luftwaffe Field Divisions 1941-45

Osprey Men-At-Arms series No. 229 (1990)

Text by Kevin Conley Ruffner; colour plates by Ron Volstad

Review by Rob Morgan

The endless variety of uniforms and equipment to be found in the multitude of armed forces operating in the service of the Third Reich never ceases to amaze me. This 'private army,' as Ruffner rightly describes it, was raised by Goring in 1942, largely because he refused to allow 'surplus' *Luftwaffe* personnel to serve in the army! The remarkable creation of another ground force to further complicate command structures and supply is briefly dealt with, which is by far the best way!



German fallschirmjager, c. 1944, with anti-tank rocket launcher.

The significant area of service for the new Field Divisions (LwFD) early activities of the German air force at ground level (they possessed huge numbers of the effective '88s,' for instance, and the creation and development of field regiments and then divisions and their role in combat at the fronts and against partisans in 1942-43 is discussed in detail. Unfortunately, the very high casualty rates and the rather poor performance of what after all were only basically trained and relatively inexperienced 'ground troops' led to serious controversy and repercussions, until eventually the Army High Command assumed control of the LwFDs in October 1943.

As the writer states, LwFD equipment was generally poorer quality, captures and cast-offs especially. There were few tracked vehicles, often vital in the East; but while Goring's creation might have been a nightmare for quartermasters, for the wargamer the opportunity to field an array of second-

hand weaponry at a critical point in the war makes for an interesting option. In effect the 17 or 18 LwFDs were split up again, and those men with specialised flak or paratroop or other skills remained under *Luftwaffe* control. Ruffner asserts that morale was discouragingly low, and that is almost certainly correct. He adds, as far as the 5 LwFDs on the Atlantic Wall were concerned, 'obsolete equipment, lack of transportation, inexperienced personnel and poor training,' were noticeable. Another key point in the table top portrayal of these units!

The role of these unfortunates is covered in great detail in the book, and their fate was not a happy one. Though individuals fought well, the divisions declined rapidly in strength and effectiveness -- many units simply were left behind, as at Le Havre. There was no transport to move them in the retreat. The remnants of some of the divisions ended their days consolidated into *VolksGrenadier* formations.

In the Mediterranean, the LwFDs were active on the Aegean island fronts and in the hard campaign up the Italian peninsula, where two LwFDs took part. The last division raised -- and another interesting wargame point emerges in Ruffner's text here -- the 20th, was redesignated as '20th Field Division (Luftwaffe) Bicycle.' The demise of this and the other formations is well recorded, and at the war's end there were numerous related and oddly-named *Luftwaffe* ground formations, including penal and 'special purposes' units. The book's final account is of the 'End in the East,' where they were overwhelmed along with everything else the dying Reich possessed. Only one LwFD survived at the war's end as a recognisable formation, No.14 which, based in Norway, had seen no action at all during the war. The rest of the divisions of this once enormous private army, were, as the writer says, 'mere skeletons' broken in Russia, France and Italy to no avail.

The photographs are interesting, and some are unusual, and Ron Volstad's plates provide excellent material as far as the wide range of clothing, from greatcoats to snow overalls and ponchos, as well as unofficial items, is concerned. An attractive if relatively useless 'army,' and one neatly and fully explained by the text, there's plenty to use to develop a decent LwFD for the wargamer if desired. As far as ranges go, well, the lateness of the creation of these divisions and their wide service, means that a large number of figures, especially the post-1944 ranges, and in many scales can provide the necessary items.

My own favourite for the LWFDs is the Peter Pig 15mm range, the poncho-wearing helmeted troops in particular (Plates B1 and F2) are ideal, and the company also provides the necessary late-war anti-tank weapons and some of the rarer heavy stuff and AFVs, like the StuG IIIs which operated in 4-gun batteries, one to a division.

Well worth reading.

