

Wehrmacht

(Armed Forces of Germany), name of Germany's armed forces from 1935--1945. The name *Wehrmacht* was taken on in March 1935 after a mandatory military draft was introduced in Germany. In April 1938 the *Wehrmacht's* land forces consisted of 28 divisions. Less than a year and a half later, when World War II broke out in September 1939, the *Wehrmacht* had grown exponentially to 75 divisions, consisting of 24,000 officers and 2.7 million military personnel. Before 1935, the German army included only 100,000 soldiers and 4,000 officers.

In 1938 Hitler instituted the Armed Forces High Command (OKW). The OKW, an advisory organization, was intended to coordinate the activities of the Army High Command, the Air Force High Command, and the Navy High Command. When World War II began, most of the fighting was done by the army because the war's main venue was land.

The *Wehrmacht* was quite "nazified" by 1938, after Hitler gained the respect and fear of the armed forces by taking over territories, such as Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, without having to resort to war. In addition, by that time, many young soldiers had joined the armed forces straight out of the Hitler Youth movement (Hitlerjugend) and the Reich Labor services. Some officers may have disapproved of the atrocities carried out by the Nazis when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939; however, they kept quiet after Germany vanquished FRANCE in May and June 1940 in a striking display of military strength and might. Almost no officers voiced objections to Hitler's barbaric orders regarding the "ideological war" initiated against the Soviet Union when Germany invaded in June 1941. The main criticism *Wehrmacht* officers had for Hitler was about not being able to keep to the original schedule for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Members of the *Wehrmacht* stood by as *Einsatzgruppen* units attached to the army carried out the mass murder of Jews. Some *Wehrmacht* units even gave the *Einsatzgruppen* military support. A very few *Wehrmacht* officers objected to the extermination of Europe's Jews. Those that did were immobilized or dismissed from the army.

