**Camp** **165 - Watten Camp, Wick, Caithness**

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| **1947 Camp list** | | | | | | | |
| 165(B.C.) | Watten Camp, Watten, Wick, Caithness | Sc. | Priswar, Watten | Watten 219 | Watten | Lt.Col.R.L.T. Murray | V/202/4 |

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| **Prisoner of War Camps (1939 – 1948) - Project report by Roger J.C. Thomas - English Heritage 2003** | | | | | | | |
| OS NGR | Sheet | No. | Name & Location | County | Cond’n | Type 1945 | Comments |
|  |  | 165 | Watten Camp, Watten, Wick | Caithness |  | Base Camp | Scotland |

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| Extensive details of this camp are in the book: ‘**Camp 165 Watten’** by Valerie Campbell. Summary and further details here.  **Location:** NGRND 238 545. On the NW edge of the small village of Watten in Caithness. About 0.75km to the north is Loch Watten.  **Before the camp:** Fields.  The area around Watten was used for military training for many years prior to WW2. A rifle range was on the edge of Loch Watten in 1905. Agricultural land at the side of the village was purchased and became a military camp in 1943 and used for a short time by Polish troops. Ex-military camps all around the UK were acquired as pow camps after D-Day. Watten was isolated and ideal. |  |  |
|  | Ordnance Survey 1959 with camp area marked |

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| Watten station was 2km north of the village. (‘Photo-shopped’ picture to remove various modern features).  **Pow Camp:** The camp number ‘165’ was originally allocated to Kirkwall Camp, Orkney. After the pows there were dispersed in late-1944 / early–1945, the number was re-allocated to the newly opening camp at Watten.  The camp has the pattern of a standard camp with a pow compound within barbed wire fencing and guards’ huts at the front alongside the road. There was a double barbed-wire fence with watchtowers. Inside were rows of huts for the pows, an infirmary, cookhouse, bakery, two chapels, barbers, classrooms, workshops, a library/reading room, a detention hut and a theatre. Most huts were Nissen type, some were joined together. Additional huts were built at various times for additional accommodation and facilities. Buildings needing stronger structures, (e.g. latrines and showers) were made from concrete blocks.  The infirmary was larger than at many pow camps. It also housed some pows who were suffering from mental illnesses.  Nissen huts were provided for staff and guards just outside the perimeter fence. |  |

**May 1945** - The first prisoners arrived, most by rail, some by lorry. Some came from Normandy via transit/interrogation camps (‘Command Cages’), others were transferred here from other camps. The camp was initially for ‘other ranks.’

The camp had a changeable population with prisoners being transferred to and from other camps. The peak number of pows reached 2800 in December 1946, though the camp had an official capacity of 2000. At times there were some protected personnel at the camp.

**June 1945** - an ICRC Report recorded 1 officer, 71 non-commissioned officers, 429 men. The pows were mainly German, with some Austrian, Belgian and Polish prisoners – some Dutch pows were included for a short while. Camps for single nationalities were preferred and by the end of 1946 nearly all were German. There was also an Argentinian pow at the camp, Korvettenkapitän Heinz Scheringer, born in Buenos Aires – Captain of the U-26 sunk on 1 July 1940.

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|  | **November 1945** - The status of the camp changed. There were calls to segregate hard-line Category C (‘black’) Nazis in separate camps where they could not influence others, but this was considered to be impractical. However, within certain camps, separation of different categories of pows was put into place. Camp 165 was identified as a suitably large site for this to happen. The camp was divided into different compounds for this purpose;  Compound A was used to accommodate low risk pows – Category A, ‘white.’ These prisoners were allowed to work at nearby farms. As security restrictions were gradually decreased, some lived in an area of the camp without barbed-wire fencing, others were billeted at local farms.  Compound B with additional security, held mainly Category C, ‘black,’ hard-line Nazis. This compound was sub-divided further:   * Category B, especially younger pows thought likely to respond to re-education. A large group of these were later sent to Camp 180, (Radwinter), a re-education ‘Youth Camp’ for pows aged 18 to 26 to spend up to 3 months there. * Category C / C+, included some hard-line Nazi SS civilians. * Officers. (Officers were later allocated their own compound).   There was also a high security area for pows requiring further investigation, or who were awaiting war crime procedures.  Many of the pows held in Compound B were horrified to find themselves grouped with extreme hard-line Nazis. Some protested and appealed to be regraded (many were). Others, however, were most definitely dangerous, Nazi thugs.  < Note mix of Nissen and wooden huts. |
| Title: A LAGER MITTELSTRASSE - Compound A Middle Street. |

Compound B naturally attracts more attention, but also more sensational comments such as a headline in ‘The Scotsman,’ 2 December 2007: “*How top Nazis were brought to a secret Scottish prison camp for brainwashing”*. I cannot find any details as to how this camp was any more secret than any other camp that held ‘black’ Nazis. There were restrictions on information allowed to be given regarding the names and locations of individual pows which applied to all camps. As censorship restrictions were eased, many pows included the camp address on the back flap of the standard letter forms - incoming mail was directly addressed to the camp. News articles were published about Watten Camp, some written by the camp commandant. Dances, including local civilians, were held at the camp. The ICRC inspected this camp under the same rules as any other….

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|  |  | After the camp closed, many pows praised the camp. Others did not wish to talk about being held in the ‘black’ compound – it was a dark time for them – and they were wary of de-Nazification trials and employment restrictions back in Germany.  I can find no record of prisoners talking of ‘brainwashing’ or mistreatment – none were recorded by the ICRC. ‘Re-education’ activities occurred here and in other camps – see below – and could in no way be described as “brainwashing.” Considering the high-praise the Commandant received from many pows, it seems a shame to insult him, and the other guards, by making them complicit with ‘brainwashing’ with no evidence. |

There were disputes at the camp, mainly regarding work and length of confinement, but other than insubordination from some, no serious incidents were recorded.

There were few escape attempts. The seriousness of some of these has to be questioned; “”…*Lt-Col Murray not only instructed his men to find the prisoners, but also took part in looking for them himself, driving around in his own private car. Indeed, he recaptured some, throwing them into the car and returning to the camp*.” (Camp 165 Watten – p51). On other more determined attempts, prisoners evaded capture for several days, and one managed to stow away on a ship at Leith before he was re-captured.

One escape attempt border’s on being ludicrous. Two Germans in their late twenties left the camp making their way to Thurso. They went with two girls to the local cinema where they were recaptured. They were escorted back to the camp, but escaped again just two hours later. The following day they were spotted with the two girls again in Thurso. The two pows evaded capture despite shots being fired at them. They managed to catch a train and made it to Perth where they were recaptured. Now I’m guessing, but it seems the two insubordinate, young men must have known the girls, (perhaps from the dances held at the camp?) – and went to meet them. Going to the cinema is hardly an ‘escape attempt.’ After their first capture, and barely any consequences for the two ‘escapees,’ in a further act of defiance, they went off to meet the girls again. This time things got serious with shots fired, and rather than face the music, they did a runner…. ?

Punishments for escape attempts were usually up to 30 days in the detention hut.

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|  | **9 October 1946 –** Death of pow Ludwig Popp, married, aged 40. Cause heart attack. Later reinterred at Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery.  **July / November 1946** – Two editions of the camp magazine; [Nordlicht : Unser Geistiges Leben : Monatsschrift fur Deutsche Kriegsgefangene im Lager 165, Watten - The Wiener Holocaust Library](https://www.whlcollections.org/image/112823/)  **1 January 1947** - Illustration from a booklet produced by a pow at Watten and dedicated to ‘our comrade Daniel Sartor on his birthday.’ The picture entitled ‘Bunte Bühne’ (Colourful stage) is of the theatre hut. Building the theatre within one of the Nissen huts began in March 1946. It held plays, concerts and dances – 150 performances by September 1947 - programmes for some of these events were printed.  **15 January 1947** – Death of pow Erich Kollek, seaman, German Navy, aged 27; cause appears to be ‘Acute Mania Exhaustion’ ? Later reinterred at Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery. >>>  **Early 1947** - when pows were transferred from Canada, members of the Waffen-SS, Luftwaffe officers and forty U-boat commanders were sent to Watten. They were classed as “*unrelenting militarists*,” however after further questioning, many were reclassified and approved for release. |

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| Oversight and development of re-education activities and English teaching for German pows was carried out by PID (Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office) / COGA (Control Office for Germany and Austria – UK). Visits and reports were made. The standard of the reports varied greatly. The visitors took little interest, if any, in activities other than re-education. They rarely mentioned welfare, sports, games, pastimes, crafts, etc of the pows. If there were still Italian pows in hostels, they were usually ignored by PID. |

**20 May 1947** – 3 members of PID visited to carry out a re-education survey. Strength; 293 Officers, 513 Other Ranks in 3 compounds; A / B / Officers. It was recorded that this was the first visit for this purpose which is remarkably late in comparison to other camps (some started in 1945).

Commandant: Lt Col Murray. Camp Leader: St.Fw Walter Lindner (B) - A Compound. Hwm. Liesfeld (B-) – B Compound.

Interpreter: Capt Kingston Deputy C/L: St.Fw Rikale (B+) - A Compound. St.Fw Schichold (C+) – B Compound, German M.O.: St.Arzt Dr Kiell (B)

Officer’s camp: Capt Lt Schmoeckel (B) / Capt.zur See Berger (B-)

The Commandant actively supported re-education.

Interpreter Kingston had been at the camp since it was first formed and also took an active part in promoting re-education. He was ill at the time of this survey and was expected to be absent on sick leave. There was also a S/Sgt interpreter.

A Compound – St.Fw Lindner had been leader for 1½ years. Nazi Party member since 1934. A member of the Waterguard Police. Bailed out from a JU 88A-4 on its return from a bombing raid on Bristol, March 1944, previously held at Camp 21 Comrie. Co-operative, but “*his political outlook is very lazy and indifferent.”* 120 pows with good morale – *“fully co-operative… cause no trouble… respond to good treatment.”* Some political progress being made.

B Compound – Hwm Liesfeld had been leader for 1 year. Nazi Party member since 1930 and “*a militarist*.” He had been awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class. *“Still adheres to many of the Nazi ideas*” – he was however, co-operative and carried out his duties satisfactorily. Pows in this compound were, “*confirmed Nazis and entirely anti-British.”* Morale was NOT good. Little, if any, political progress – “*the worst kind of Nazis*.”

Officers – Leader, U-boat Capt Lt Helmut Schmoeckel. He took command of U-802 in December, 1943 and operated mainly in the North Atlantic and Canadian waters. He surrendered U-802 on 11 May 1945 at Loch Eriboll, Scotland. He was co-operative, efficient and “*endeavours to propagate English ideas*.” Most officers were “*appreciative of the educational and recreational amenities… The C+ officers* (65) *show the usual resentment.”* In general, officers were largely indifferent to political re-education activities. “*The U-boat officers pretended to be quite unaware of Admiral Doenitz orders to U-boat Commanders regarding survivors*.” [In response to the ‘Laconia incident’ where U-156, attempted to rescue survivors of the sunk ship Laconia, Admiral Doenitz issued the ‘Laconia Order.’ This order instructed U-boat commanders to prioritize their own safety and not to rescue survivors, as doing so could endanger their submarine and crew. It was ambiguously phrased and could be seen as an incitement to murder survivors].

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| Political screening: | A | B | C | C+ | Unscreened |
|  | 16 | 311 | 1 | 477 | 1 |

113 pows were appealing against their grading – the better the grade, the sooner repatriated, in theory. 122 pows had been repatriated since January 1947.

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| ‘Youth’ – aged 25 and under. | A | B | Officers |
|  | 24 | 73 | 8 |

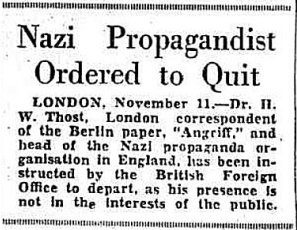
Of the 105 youth pows, 77 were C+. It was suggested that youth pows in Compound B should be removed from the older members Nazi influence – this did not happen.

The standard list of re-education activities was given – however, uptake was vey much dependent upon the compound:

Wochenpost and Ausblick - separate report.

Newspapers – “*adequate*.”

Library – “*adequate.”*

Lectures – mixed response. Only 8 pows attended the last lecture on ‘Germany and Britain.’ Lectures about conditions in Germany were requested and talks given by local civilians were popular, (e.g. a talk about Scottish folk songs). Some pows attended political lectures in order to create “*unpleasantness*.” A small number of pows gave lectures – amongst them was Dr Korn; reported to be a “*particularly dangerous Nazi,”* and the Commandant was warned.

Films – shows given fortnightly by the YMCA.

Wireless – a good set in each compound.

Camp Magazine - *Nordlicht’* (Northern Lights). Articles concerned world events and entertainment and some items of interest to the pows themselves, such as one entitled; ‘Health problems in captivity.’ An article written by Dr H W Thost, (a Nazi journalist expelled from London in 1935 and held at Watten), described the ‘highlights’ of working in all weathers on gathering the peat crop. “*He records* [Nordlicht October 1947*] how for the 100 men who boarded the five Bedford trucks every morning at 7 a.m. for a seventeen-mile drive to work, the red-haired girl who always stood at Halkirk stop waiting for the 8 o’ clock bus was the most welcome sight of the day. Neither side ever spoke or waved a hand, but for the POW’s it was visual proof of a world closed to them. How much greater was the joy and gratitude of these men at Watten when they were asked by local people to join in with their Highland Games, and thanks to support from their commandant, competed in some events. After admiring Highland dress, bag-pipes, and dancing, they took second place in the tug-of-war. The applause from the former enemy was heart-warming to them*.” (Details from an article ‘The Boys Own Papers,’ by Ingeborg F. Hellen, in the German Historical Institute London Bulletin, No 2, 2008).

(Some web pages report there was a newspaper called; “*Unser Lager*” (Our Camp) – this was the title of an article within Nordlicht).

Discussion group – had started but been abandoned due to repatriations. Small groups were held in the officers’ compound.

Press review - Prisoners from ‘Compound A’ held *Presseschau* (Press Reviews) where news articles were translated and read to them, followed by discussions.

English Instruction – Classes in compounds A and B had lapsed, but were being restarted. One of the English Instructors was Uffz Tietgen (B-) who committed suicide in December. 80 officers attended classes.

Other Camp Activities –

Religion – Protestant padre, Siefkes (B) had arrived 8 days earlier. Poor attendance with only 16 pows at weekly services from all compounds. H Muller (A), the Catholic priest, had volunteered to stay in the camp for an additional 6 months – he only had 8 pows attending services.

Entertainments – A theatre group with 12 members wrote their own playscripts, but requested more. An orchestra with 14 members played classical and chamber music.

Sport – “*ample equipment.”*

Vocational courses – Gardening, ‘locksmiths,’ surveying.

**May 1947 -** Colonel Faulk, Executive Field Officer of the POW Department, described what he found on a visit to the compound: “*One expected depression, animosity, defiance. But what one found was, first, a deep hatred against everything British, which exceed their passionate contempt for Bolshevism. ’We’ll go to the Russians,’ they say. ‘They’ll give us arms and we’ll put paid to these English dogs. Then it will be their turn.’ Secondly, the old arrogance hits you, particularly with the officers who talk less than the ORs but behave ‘correctly.’ At interrogations they are superior and contemptuous. Their answers are civil but the tone is barbed. The ORs seem to be drilled in the answers they give.”* (Thresholds of Peace, p303).

**19-20 June 1947** - Paul Bondy, a German-speaking refugee gave lectures at the camp. He recorded a camp complement of 270 officers and 525 other ranks.

**August 1947 -** The camp was re-inspected by the ICRC. The lead delegate, Frédérick Bieri, reported that morale at the camp was as, “*good as it can be in the circumstances.*” Anxiety was expressed about when they would be repatriated, and some pows complained about the category they had been placed in (Category C had greater restrictions).

**16 September 1947** – Death of pow Karl Franz Bälzer, a widower, aged 57; cause heart attack. Later reinterred at Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery.

**9 December 1947** – Re-educational survey. Strength 108 officers, 557 OR.

Commandant: Lt Col Murray. Camp Leader: St.Fw Lindner (B) - A Compound. Fw Siegfried Soest (B-) – B Compound.

Interpreter: Capt Broekere Deputy C/L: St.Fw Rikale (B+) - A Compound. H/Schaf Leuschner (C+) – B Compound, German M.O.: St.Arzt Dr Kiell (B) [or Keizl]

Officer’s camp: Oberst Gunter D’Alquen (C+)

The new IO was Polish. The unnamed S/Sgt was Danish.

A Compound – comments similar to previous. Repatriations raised morale. Some were developing good relationships with local civilians.

B Compound – a new leader since September; Aged 33, unmarried, a regular airman, shot down near Newcastle/Tyne in July 1940. “*A good disciplinarian but is mentally an unrepentant Nazi.*” Bad morale continued.

Officer leader d’Alquen – see notes below – described in this report as having a “*thwarted mentality*.” Despite his record for publishing atrocious propaganda, he was allowed to publish ‘*Der Wattener,’* a monthly magazine for the pows. Officers spent their time raising petty, worthless complaints. They were extremely anti-Russian, but also stated that they were being treated in Britain the same as Germans in the Russian Zone.

Sports got a rare mention – Football, handball, fistball and table tennis were most popular. Also pursued were athletics, gymnastics, boxing, chess, skat and bridge.

An ‘Information Room’ had been set up to display text and pictures on a theme – currently ‘Der deutsche Wald.’

**17 December 1947** – Suicide of pow Uffz Fritz Tietgen, married, aged 42. Death by hanging within his barrack. The Inquest stated he was aged 40. (National Records of Scotland reference SC14/15/1948/4). It was noted by d’Alquen, the camp leader, that the British guards on duty paraded at attention as the coffin of the suicide victim was carried through the gates and that this gesture was much appreciated. Later reinterred at Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery.

**January 1948** - numbers decreased to nearly 700 pows, including 104 officers. 689 were Germans, 2 Austrian, 1 Argentinian and 1 Yugoslavian. The security rating of the camp was downgraded.

**March 1948** – the camp closed with the last 200 pows transferred to other camps prior to repatriation.

Camp Commandants:

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|  | **< Lieutenant-Colonel Paris Hilary Drake-Brockman (**not Brockham listed elsewhere).  During his service in WW1 he was wounded three times. He later became Commanding Officer with The East Surrey Regiment. Brief details of his career and obituary are available from:  <http://www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk/index.shtml>  Commandant of 165 from early 1945 to November. Later Commandant at Stanhope Camp 86.  **Lieutenant-Colonel Rupert Luxmoore Tanner Murray >**  Served with the Black Watch including time in Ireland, Palestine and Crete. He was captured in Crete 1941, and was a pow until the end of the war.  On return to the UK, he was made commandant of a camp near Edinburgh and then of camp 165 from November 1945 to 1948. A pow described Murray; “*with bare knees and seven feet tall.”* He was able to speak simple German and was referred to by some pows as ‘Irene’ because he wore a kilt. (Thresholds of Peace, p301)  He retired in 1949. His command was praised in ICRC reports and he was well respected by guards and pows. |  |

**After the camp:** The camp was replaced by housing and a playing field in the late 1960’s. 2019 residential area and football pitch. There are information signs for the camp.

**Further Information:**

‘Camp 165 Watten’by Valerie Campbell – 2010 – Whittles Publishing.

National Archives FO 939/199 – Political gradings of Camp 165, Watten Camp, Wick, Caithness. Dated 1947-1948. Mainly lists of C+ grade pows.

National Archives FO 1120/230 – Re-educational survey visit reports for camps 165 to 175. Dated 1 Jan 1946 to 31 Dec 1948. Just 2 reports - used above.

IWM have a copies of the camp newspaper Nordlicht – Ref. LBY E.J. 404

IWM – Private papers of R Weitzel – Ref. Documents.8055. A memoir of a German called up in 1942, detailing experiences on the Eastern front; capture in France, September 1944; reception and interrogation at Kempton park; time at various camps; the screening process which resulted in his transfer to Watten classified as a Nazi. Particular reference to the re-education process.

[http://canmore.org.uk/site/202517](https://canmore.org.uk/site/202517)

**Some people associated with Camp 165:**

One guard, an Austrian born sergeant, nicknamed ‘Hermann’ was noted by several pows – in a negative way. Regarded as being viscous, it was apparently him who gave the camp the unpleasant nickname of ‘Little Belson.’

Oberstleutnant Ehrhardt Unger. Unger had previously been at Camp 191, Crewe Hall, as a camp leader until dismissed from that post after a German pow had been beaten up as a ‘traitor’. Despite this record he was a compound leader for a time.

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| SS-Obergruppenführer Gunter **d’Alquen.**  A member of the SS from 1931. A journalist who gained the attention of Heinrich Himmler, appointing him in 1935 as chief editor of ‘Das Schwarze Korps’ (The Black Corps), the weekly newspaper for the SS.  He held various other editorships and became head of the propaganda department in 1943. d’Alquen’s publications helped popularise the idea of Jews as “vermin” – it sold up to 750,000 copies per week.  d’Alquen was held at a pow camp in Italy. Transferred to the UK, he was interrogated at London District Cage before being sent to Camp 18 (Featherstone Park) in July 1947. A few months later he was sent on to Watten. He was amongst the last batch of pows to be repatriated from the camp.  In his trial, like so many Nazis, he denied any knowledge of the concentration camps – and yet his publications mentioned them several times. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, but instead he was transferred to the U.S. where he worked for a few years with the CIA. When he returned to Germany a de-Nazification court found him guilty of ‘incitement to murder by means of publication’ and fined him 60,000 DM in 1955, and then a further 28,000 DM in 1958.  SS Sturmbannführer Paul-Werner **Hoppe**.  SS member from 1933 and member of the Concentration Camp Inspectorate. He was based at Dachau and Auschwitz and served for a short time on the Eastern Front where he was wounded. He became the commandant of Stutthoff concentration camp, Poland between 1942 and 1945. A gas chamber and crematorium were added to the camp in 1943 – mobile gas wagons were also used. It was reported that an experimental factory for making soap from human corpses was built here, (see Russia At War 1941 to 1945, |  |

by Alexander Werth). It is estimated that between 63,000 and 65,000 prisoners of Stutthof concentration camp and its subcamps died as a result of murder, epidemics, extreme labour conditions, evacuations, and lack of medical help.

Hoppe was fortunate to have been captured by the British as many of the camp guards were executed in Poland. He was held at Watten between August 1947 and January 1948 with a short time spent at the interrogation centre in London. From Watten he was returned to Germany for trial. However, he managed to escape and lived in Switzerland for a number of years. He was re-captured in 1953 and sentenced to just nine years imprisonment.

Captain Otto **Kretschmer.** Brief details given under [Camp 1](file:///D:\POW\Camps151-200\Camps1_10.docx#kretschmer).

Josef **Sorowka** – participant in the Wormhoudt massacre.

Dr. Paul **Schröder.** Rocket scientist who helped to develop the V2 rocket. Held at Camps 184 and 403 before being transferred to 165. Various accounts indicate that he was a most unpleasant, vindictive man, though some uncertainty expressed as to whether he was a Nazi. He was interviewed by Lt Col A P Scotland of the War Crimes interrogation Unit who stated – “*He is a public enemy from our viewpoint*.” In August 1947, an appraisal of Dr Schröder suggested that he should be handed to the Americans due to his scientific expertise. He moved to the US in 1952 where he worked with the US Air Force until 1958, then returned to Germany. Various reports held in National Archive file FO 939/199.

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| SS-Sturmbannführer Max **Wünsche.** Member of the SS from 1933, joining the SS bodyguard unit providing security for Hitler in 1938. Served in The Netherlands, France, the Balkans and on the Eastern Front for which he was awarded the German Cross in Gold and the Knight’s Cross. He was transferred back to France in 1943 commanding the 12th SS Panzer regiment. He saw action against the allies during June. He was captured by the British in August and sent to camp 165 as a high-ranking officer from 1945 to 1948.  After his release, Wünsche returned to Germany and became manager of an industrial plant in Wuppertal.  SS-Sturmbannführer Max Wünsche in Normandy 1944 > |  |