

# Campaign Shields of the Wehrmacht

by Sam Sheikh

*"... we few, we happy few, we band of brothers.  
For he today that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition.  
And gentlemen in England now abed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's Day."  
—Henry V, by William Shakespeare*

The notion of shared hardships forging fraternal bonds is persistent and strong in the warrior ethos through the ages, as the St. Crispin's Day speech above demonstrates. The tougher the campaign, the stronger the bonds. A common way to commemorate battles and to reward its participants is to bestow military decorations, a practice that dates back to the time of Alexander the Great.

During World War II, Germany awarded campaign shields for particularly hard-fought campaigns. The following five shields were officially instituted, produced, awarded, and worn in recognition of these campaigns.

## NARVIK SHIELD

(Narvikschild)



The battles of Narvik in the Norway campaign lasted from April 9 to June 8, 1940. It involved the Kriegsmarine, Luftwaffe, Fallschirmjäger, and Gebirgsjäger. The German forces teetered on the brink of defeat until the campaign turned in their favor following the Allied withdrawal in response to the Battle of France.

On August 19, 1940, to commemorate the successes of the German armed forces, Adolf Hitler inaugurated a shield for the "heroic and victorious joint operations at Narvik." Professor Richard Klein of Munich was appointed to design the decoration. Appropriately, the various services are recognized in the design: the edelweiss for the Gebirgsjäger, the propeller for the Luftwaffe and Fallschirmjäger, and the anchor for the Kriegsmarine. Members who participated at Narvik were eligible for the shield. The silver shield was awarded to men of the army and air force while the gold shield went to the navy. In all, 8,577 Narvik shields were awarded.

## CHOLM SHIELD

(Cholmschild)



As the German forces were thrown back from Moscow by the fierce Soviet counterattack in the winter of 1941, many units clung to their defensive positions. One such location was the little town of Cholm, located hundreds of miles from Leningrad and Moscow at the confluence of the Lovat and Kunja rivers. From January 21, 1942,

Kampfgruppe Scherer held out at Cholm against intense Soviet attacks until the siege was lifted by relief forces on May 5. The German defenders led by Generalmajor Theodor Scherer consisted of some 5,500 men, mostly from the army, but also Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine personnel.

The Cholm shield was initially designed by Polizei-Rottwachtmeister Sclimm, with encouragement from Generalmajor Scherer. The design was only slightly modified by Professor Klein. Instituted on July 1, 1942, the Cholm shield was awarded based on the following criteria to men who:

- Served honorably in the Cholm Pocket within the dates specified
- Were wounded in action during the defense of Cholm
- Flew on transport missions that landed on the Cholm airfield (it was not sufficient to have flown over Cholm to airdrop supplies)

An estimated 5,500 Cholm shields were awarded. Considered the rarest of the officially instituted campaign shields, it fetches around \$1,675 among collectors.

## CRIMEA SHIELD

(Krimschild)



The Crimean Campaign began on September 26, 1941, and lasted until July 4, 1942, with the Axis capture of Sevastopol. During the nine-month campaign, men from the German 11th Army as well as the Rumanian Third and Fourth Armies were locked in bitter fighting against the Soviet 51st Army and elements of the Black Sea Fleet.

The Crimean shield was instituted on July 25, 1942, to commemorate the campaign. Members of the Heer (including Rumanian forces) and Kriegsmarine were eligible based on the following criteria:

- Served in the region (or the surrounding waters for Kriegsmarine personnel) for three months
- Took part in at least one major combat operation
- Wounded in action while fighting in the campaign

Over 100,000 Crimean shields were awarded, making it one of the most widely distributed.

## DEMJANSK SHIELD

(Demjanskschild)



Over 100 kilometers northeast of Cholm, another desperate siege was unfolding. As in Cholm, German forces were trapped in the town of Demjansk by a tightening noose of Soviet troops. Over 100,000 men were trapped in the pocket, forced to rely on Luftwaffe airdrops for their supplies. The encirclement lasted from

February 8 until April 21, 1942, when the first elements of the beleaguered garrison were finally able to break out.

To commemorate the German effort at Demjansk, Hitler instituted the Demjansk shield on April 25, 1943. The criteria for the shield for Heer and auxiliary forces were as follows:

- Served in the besieged area for 60 days during the period of the encirclement
- Wounded while serving in Demjansk
- Earned an award for gallantry while serving in the besieged area

Luftwaffe personnel were also eligible for the shield, provided they had:

- Flown 50 combat missions over the besieged and surrounding areas
- Flown and landed 50 supply missions

Around 100,000 men were awarded the Demjansk shield, making this decoration fairly common.

## KUBAN SHIELD

(Kubanschild)



The battles in the Kuban region east of the Crimea saw the German 17th Army attempting to preserve the bridgehead against the Soviet 4th Ukrainian Front offensive. In a campaign which lasted from February to October 1943, when

the last German and Romanian troops were evacuated, each side lost nearly 100,000 men.

To commemorate these defensive battles, the Kuban shield was instituted on September 21, 1943. All military personnel, including auxiliaries and those who participated in the air, land, and sea battles in the Kuban bridgehead, were eligible for the decoration. The criteria for the Heer were as follows:

- Served in the bridgehead for 60 days
- Participated in at least one major engagement
- Wounded while defending the bridgehead

The Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine used a complicated point system to determine eligibility for the shield. For example, a sailor who served on a ship that was lost to enemy action could earn 60 points. With so many men eligible for the decoration, the Kuban shield is also fairly common.

### Other shields

Several other shields were in the prototype stage, authorized, manufactured, or perhaps even issued, but at present there is no evidence the following shields were actually worn.

**WARSAW SHIELD (Warschausechild):** Instituted on December 10, 1944, this shield was to be awarded as a battle badge to military and non-military personnel fighting in Warsaw between August 1 and October 2, 1944. The design by Benno von Arent was approved and ready for production. However, the dies were destroyed in an air raid. None were actually produced during the war.

**LORIENT SHIELD (Lorientchild):** The defenders at the Lorient submarine base were isolated following the Allied advance through Normandy, but managed to hold out until the end of the war. The Lorient shield, designed to commemorate the tenacious defense, was authorized by the garrison commander in December 1944. However, in the 1970s he denied any knowledge of the decoration. There remains great disagreement about the authenticity and existence of this shield, although in the collectors' market, it is the second-most highly sought after behind the Cholm shield.

**LAPLAND SHIELD (Lapplandschild):** The last to be officially awarded by the German high command, this shield was instituted around February-March 1945. It was intended for the 20th Gebirgs-Armee under General Franz Böhme. None are believed to have been officially awarded before the end of the war.

**STALINGRAD SHIELD (Stalingradschild):** Hitler ordered a shield for the Stalingrad forces on October 2, 1942. War artist Ernst Eigener, from Propagandakompanie 637, submitted his design depicting Stalingrad ruins and a dead soldier with a



crown of barbed wire by his head. It was rejected as being too morbid. Eigener was killed in action at Stalingrad on November 20, 1942. Another prototype very similar to the Eigener design was submitted by Feldmarschall Friedrich von Paulus. No approval was forthcoming following Von Paulus' surrender.

**BALKAN SHIELD (Balkanschild):** The German high command awarded the Balkan shield in January 1945 for engagement against Soviet and partisan forces in the region. The design was completed by Benno von Arent on March 7, 1945. No clear evidence exists to confirm that the shield was produced or issued.

**MEMELSHIELD (Memelschild):** The Memel shield may have been instituted by Generalleutnant Dr. Karl Mauss, commander of the 7th Panzer Division. It was to have been awarded to the defenders at Memel during the winter of 1944-45.

**DUNKIRK SHIELD (Dünkirchenschild):** Like the Lorient garrison, the Dunkirk garrison held out until the end of the war despite being isolated. The Dunkirk shield was introduced by Konteradmiral Friedrich Frisius in January or February 1945 to recognize that defense. It is believed only 50 were awarded, but little is known or confirmed about this decoration.

*Sam Sheikh pursued the quixotic dream of working for Avalon Hill before sanity prevailed. These days, he participates in the consim community by writing and playtesting for various publishers. When not engaged in the hobby, he spends his time practicing the gentlemanly art of association football.*

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STUDY CHOLM FURTHER WITH  
**AGAINST THE ODDS'**



**MICHAEL RINELLA'S**

**CIRCLE OF**

*Fire*

**- The Siege of Cholm, 1942 -**

