Foreword

Vorwärts immer - rückwärts nimmer!

Forwards ever, rearwards never! - Soldiers entering the training facilities of 7th battery of Artillerielehrregiment (7./A.L.R.) in Jüterbog near Berlin were welcomed by this fanciful motto. Military organizations of all eras relied, and still rely, on such jingles - simple, catchy slogans intended to create and boost the motivation of a group. Even more, they can help form a strong bond between the members of this group. It was in this spirit that the Sturmartillerie, a new service branch, was formed. Only volunteers would man these weapons – modern assault guns with highly trained artillerymen full of motivation and dash.

The term Sturmartillerie stands, beside its pure historical importance, for innumerable stories. Only a few arms of service can boast such a vast mixture of hero worship from their own side and true tributes from the enemy side. It has always been puzzling to this German author why the military achievements of his forefathers found, and still find, many admirers outside his own country. To make a point: Why are there hundreds of books and other publications about the Tiger tank and its unquestioned qualities, yet only comparatively few contributions about those who destroyed such tanks? Why is the reader’s sympathy engaged in such a biased manner?

In Germany itself, military subjects are still a sensitive issue, and only in recent years has the German public started to discuss this part of its history in an unbiased manner and without exaggerated self-criticism. This late attempt at assessing Germany’s history in all likelihood stems from the fact that this same nation instigated two catastrophic world wars, but was totally defeated in both. With an empirical awareness of the first defeat in 1918 (the consequences of which invited further tumult just twenty years later), the victors of 1945 decided to liberate the German population through a process of reeducation. While this was perhaps too late for the surviving contemporary generation of active combatants, it was hoped that at least the next generation could grow up in a prosperous society that possessed a sense of pride in what their country could achieve. As a consequence there was no place for national pride in old-fashioned achievements. Perhaps this was the price for what the victors brought with them,