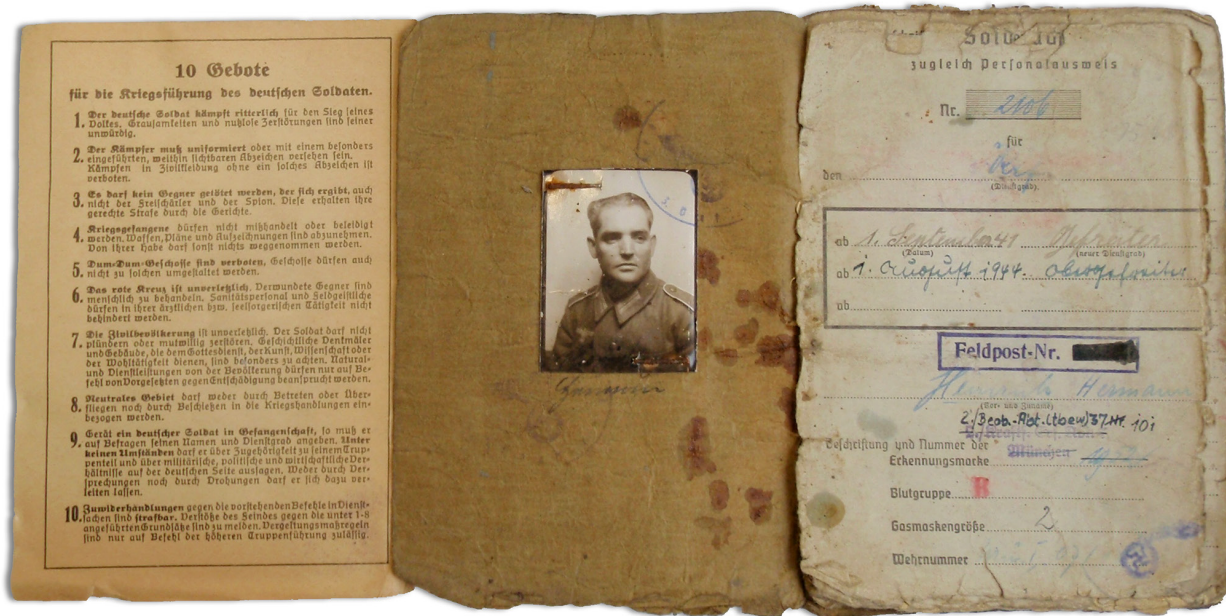


## RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

# Codes of Conduct in the German Military



A German soldier's paybook, including "The Ten Commandments for the Conduct of the German Soldier at War." *Deutsche Dienststelle (WASt)*.

Germany was a signatory to all of the major international agreements regulating the conduct of war, including the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and the Geneva Conventions of 1864, 1906, and 1929. Despite this, Germany was among the many countries whose leaders violated these international codes when they found it advantageous to do so. For instance, during World War I, the German military used poison gas, an act forbidden by the Hague Convention of 1899.

### Ten Commandments for the Conduct of the German Soldier at War<sup>1</sup>

1. The German soldier fights honorably for the victory of his people. Cruelty and pointless destruction is dishonorable.
2. The combatant must wear a uniform or be marked with a special noticeable sign. Fighting in civilian clothing without such a sign is forbidden.
3. No opponent who surrenders may be killed. This includes even the guerrilla fighter and the spy. They will receive their just punishment before the courts.
4. Prisoners of war may not be mishandled or insulted. Weapons, plans, sketches are to be confiscated. None of their personal possessions may be taken.
5. Dum-Dum Bullets are forbidden. Ammunition may not be adapted into such bullets.
6. The Red Cross is inviolable. Wounded opponents are to be treated humanely. Medical personnel and field clergy may not be obstructed while performing their medical or spiritual duties.

*continued >>*

<sup>1</sup> Deutsche Dienststelle (WASt), trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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### Codes of Conduct in the German Military (continued)

7. The civilian population is inviolable. A soldier may not arbitrarily engage in plunder or destruction. Historical memorials and buildings which serve as houses of God, or serve science, art, or the general welfare, are especially to be safeguarded. Resources and services from the population may be demanded against compensation only on the orders of superior officers.
8. Neutral territory may not be involved in hostilities, either by incursion on the ground or by air, or by shooting onto that territory.
9. Should a German soldier be taken prisoner, if asked, he may give only his name and service rank. Under no circumstances may he give information about the unit to which he belongs or about military, political or economic conditions on the German side. He may not let himself be led into giving such information either by promises or threats.
10. Actions contrary to orders while in service is a criminal offense. Violations of the enemy against numbers 1–8 of the above guidelines are to be reported. Retaliation is only permitted under orders from higher military authority.

#### Section 47, German Military Penal Code (1872)<sup>2</sup>

If through the execution of an order pertaining to official duties, a penal law is violated, then the superior giving the order is solely responsible. However, the subordinate who obeys shall be punished as a participant:

- (1) if he exceeded the order he received or,
- (2) if he knew that the order of the superior concerned an act which constituted a civil or military crime or offense.

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<sup>2</sup> Keller C., *Militär-Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich*, trans. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Berlin: Weidmann, 1873).