

So you are new to the 353rd Infanterie Division.

Costs, Dues, and Fees:

In order to reenact with the 353rd you will need to be a member of the WWII Historical Re-enactment Society (HRS) Membership presently costs \$20 per year and lasts through December 31st each year. It is not prorated. Most members renew in January and it lasts through the whole year. You will need to ask one of the unit members to share the link and password for joining the HRS since the online registration link changes every month.

You will also need to pay unit dues of \$20 per year. We pay annually at the Rockford event. This fee covers things such as food, awards and other things the unit needs to support its members. If you are not present at Rockford please contact one of our leaders to figure out where to mail your dues.

Unit Registration:

You will need to let our Feldwebel, Doug Strong know you want to join the unit. He handles the online e-mail list, maintains our unit roster and other things that help keep you informed. You can contact him at Doug-strong@comcast.net. There is a 353rd *Infanterie Division Members Group* on Facebook where we discuss a lot of things. Ask to join. It is critical to participate in this group if you wish to participate as a member of the unit.

Uniform Requirements:

Please follow this link for the unit uniform requirements.

<http://www.353id.org/uniform.html>

For information on making an informed purchase of German boots follow the links.

[http://talbotsfineaccessories.com/boots/German%20WWII%20Schnurshue%20\(Low%20Boots\)%20evaluation.pdf](http://talbotsfineaccessories.com/boots/German%20WWII%20Schnurshue%20(Low%20Boots)%20evaluation.pdf)

[http://talbotsfineaccessories.com/boots/German%20WWII%20Marschstiefel%20\(Tall%20Boots\)%20Evaluation.pdf](http://talbotsfineaccessories.com/boots/German%20WWII%20Marschstiefel%20(Tall%20Boots)%20Evaluation.pdf)

Buying your first uniform

Many guys borrow uniforms to start with, but at some point you will purchase your own uniform. Before you do that, talk to other unit members and learn from their mistakes. Most of us have purchased uniforms or equipment that turned out to be poor quality or unnecessary. Do not shy away from used gear and uniforms. This can save you quite a bit of money. Ask around and bring cash to events.

Buying a feldbluse (tunic) can be one of the most challenging things for new guys. The tunic itself does not come with everything you need on it. The tunic will need to have the insignia sewn on and this is challenging for some guys. Many of the uniform suppliers will sew it on for you for a price. For a basic impression you will want a woven subdued late war bevo breast eagle and late war generic litzen for the collars. You will also need a set of field grey wool shoulder boards with white piping. Additionally you will want to get a set of belt hooks for the tunic. Many guys order the uniform and then are frustrated to discover they need additional items to finish it off.

Another common pitfall is purchasing trousers. Forget what you think you know about your size. You are probably wrong! The only way to get proper trousers is to take a

tape measure and measure around yourself at your natural waist. THIS IS NOT WHERE YOU WEAR YOUR BLUE JEANS! The tape measure should be wrapped horizontally around you at the level of your belly button. I know you think you wear a size 36 pants but when you actually take the measurement you will probably find that you need a pair of 42s or some other equally ghastly size. One major contributing factor to the size dilemma is that clothing manufacturers lie about the sizes of their clothes. If you actually measure a pair of blue jeans you will probably discover they come out to be between 2 and 6 inches LARGER than the tag reads. That is because of vanity — no one wants to admit they have gotten fat. We look for brands of jeans that fit our body style. When we do this we are actually searching for brands of jeans that LIE TO US in just the right way to fit our bodies. This is called Vanity Sizing. This website provides the information quite clearly <http://www.ties.com/blog/pants-size-comparison> I compared many brands of pants and found that EVERY SINGLE pair was larger than the listed size with the average being 2.5 inches larger and they ranged up to 4 inches larger. When all is said and done, put your ego aside and buy the size you measured.

Grooming standards:

You will need to have an appropriate haircut for a German soldier of WWII. This means, among other things, no hair should be touching your ears.

You will also need to be clean shaven. German infantry soldiers did not wear beards or mustaches except in the rarest of circumstances. If you have a beard or mustache you are particularly attached to consider how much you want to re-enact WWII. You will need to shave.

Eyewear:

Glasses were comparatively rare in the German army. If you can see without your glasses please put them away. If you cannot see without correction then consider contact lenses. If this is not an option then get some appropriate eye where. For military eyewear look for Dienst-brille (German service glasses) glasses. There are reproduction ones made and can be had for under \$30 with clear plastic lenses. Your local eye shop can put your prescription in them.

Most photos of German soldiers wearing glasses show them wearing civilian frames. For this an option is to get modern glasses that pass for period correct civilian frames. Another is to buy original WWII period vintage frames at an antique store or flea market and have the lenses replaced. A company called Zenni Optical will sell you glasses in your prescription for under \$20 (including frames, lenses and delivery). This is the pair I wear.

<http://www.zennioptical.com/450015-metal-alloy-full-rim-frame-with-spring-hinge.htm>

They are not perfect, but they are a decent approximation and will get you going.

Field Gear:

One very confusing thing can be how does all the field gear work together and where is it worn. The German soldier had lots of optional field gear. Here is the list of what you really need for an infantry impression in addition to your uniform:

- helmet
- Y-straps
- Gas mask canister

- Kar98k rifle (See below)
- Belt
- Buckle
- 2, black, three-pocket, 2-strapper-clip wide, WWII ammunition pouches
- Bayonet, scabbard, bayonet frog
- Shovel and shovel carrier
- Bread bag
- Canteen with cup
- Having items such as a mess kit, mess kit strap, and fork/spoon combo will be good if you will be in the field for more than one day. There are plenty of add on items and optional gear but this list will get you going.

Re-enactor Etiquette

If this is your first event you will want to take a lot of pictures. That is understandable but do this after hours or where no one else can see. It is very poor form to allow the public to see you walking around with your digital SLR taking pics unless you are the official photographer for the event or the unit. If you want to take pictures take your uniform off and become a member of the populace.

Leave modern items behind. You don't need that cooler and lawn chair. If you have medication or something you need to carry, by all means bring it, but keep it out of sight. Put it in a pocket or in your gas mask can.

Turn off your phone. If it is vital you have it on then you must silence it and get out of sight before answering any calls or replying to any texts.

When you die in battle do so in a comfortable position and be prepared to stay there for a long while. If you are dead — be dead. Lay still and don't talk about the Chicago Bears with the other dead guy next to you.

Never give the Nazi party political salute with the right arm raised under any circumstances. German army soldiers saluted like most other nations. This is prohibited by HRS rules.

As a new guy, be prepared to work hard. Look for what needs doing and lend a hand. If someone asks for a volunteer (or Freiwilliger) step up and do the work. If the unit is hosting or helping with the event (such as Rockford) be prepared to come early and stay late to take care of that which needs to be done. You are no longer a visitor. This is your duty. Do it willingly.

If someone who outranks you tells you to do something do it immediately and without question. You are re-enacting a German soldier. It is not your job to ask the feldwebel why he wants that crate placed behind the house it is your job simply to put the crate behind the house. If a more seasoned re-enactor (even one who does not outrank you) tells you to do something take their advice and do it. There is probably a reason for it. In this case you may want to ask them why so you can learn from the situation.

There is lots of cool stuff at a re-enactment. Much of it is very expensive and a lot of it is very valuable originals. Please do not touch anything without getting permission. This is especially true for firearms. These are expensive and may be damaged from improper use. If your buddy dies with his full auto MP40, do not pick it up in the heat of battle and start blazing away.

If you must leave the event site you should remove all items bearing Third Reich insignia. This includes traveling to and from the event. We don't want to get reports of a "Nazi" walking into Burger King in the local paper and have it be one of our guys.

Remember you are re-enacting a member of the German army. Germans are traditionally a neat and orderly people. This is even more so in the Military. Do not leave your junk lying about. If you slept overnight in a zeltbahn or in a barracks, straighten up your bunk or the area in which you slept.

Leave your drama at home. We are all about cooperation with one another. We work hard together and are all pulling our oars in the same direction. We get much further that way. Similarly leave any racist, offensive, or sexually provocative behavior at home. If you make racist statements, tell off-color jokes or behave in a sexually inappropriate manner you will be asked to leave the unit.

Take care of yourself physically.

Being at a re-enactment is exciting. It is easy to forget to eat or drink. You will often be walking or running more than you are used to. You will also probably be wearing more wool in the summer than you are used to. Don't be afraid to take a break. Drinking enough water is vitally important. Even when it is not hot or sunny you need to keep drinking. There are three rules of thumb to keep in mind with staying hydrated--

1. if you are thirsty you are already dehydrated,
2. if you are not urinating frequently you are not drinking enough, and
3. if your urine is anything but clear, you need more water.

Speaking to and in front of the public:

At a public event while engaged in a battle where the public can see and hear you speak in German. If you are not able to speak German then you should remain silent to the maximum extent possible. If you must speak in English during a battle do so in such a way that the public cannot hear you. When you are interacting with the public during static displays or in question and answer type sessions it is strongly encouraged that you speak in English and answer any questions you are asked in a knowledgeable fashion. If you do not know the answer do not be afraid to tell them you do not know. If possible seek out a more experienced re-enactor who can answer the question.

When in the public eye (or ear) do not talk about blatantly modern topics unless directly addressed about that topic by a member of the public. There is plenty to talk about with your fellow re-enactors. This is a great time to listen to them and learn. Feel free to ask questions about what other re-enactors are doing and why. You will learn and so will the public.

Often the public will assume you can speak German because you are wearing the uniform. If you are able to converse with them feel free to do so. It is a great opportunity to practice. If you cannot speak German politely tell them that you can't.

Avoid associations with Nazism and the Nazi Party. You are a German soldier. Being in the German army prohibited you from being a party member. You are representing a common German soldier.

Do not take offense if someone refers to you as a Nazi soldier. Gently correct them by telling them you are a German soldier and not a Nazi soldier. Many people do not know the difference. This is a great opportunity to educate them. A very small

percentage of the public will have a very negative reaction to you and will not be able to separate the German army from Nazism and you as a re-enactor from an actual living Nazi. Disengage from them as quickly and as graciously as you are able.

Obtaining your Rifle:

The one and only firearm you need is a Mauser Kar98k. This rifle was the backbone of the German army. Firearms such as pistols or the MP40 were reserved for specific ranks within the army or specific duties. You do not need to buy a rifle right away. There are far more Mausers in the safes of our unit members than there are people. Let folks know you need to borrow a rifle and someone will bring you a rifle and blanks. If you borrow one, treat it with respect and return it cleaned and well cared for (See below.)

Your first gun should be a plain and simple Mauser rifle. Look for one that is in solid condition, but not a collector's item. Some amount of wear and tear on the rifle is perfectly fine, but it should be serviceable. Remember this rifle will be in the field and will be subjected to rain, mud, sand and other forms of abuse. Russian captured rifles that have the markings peened out can be a good value and tend to be quite solid. The prices on Mausers can vary wildly and there are many Mauser models that appear similar to the Kar98k that can confuse you. If you are not sure of a rifle, don't buy it without asking for help. There are many knowledgeable gun guys in the unit who would love to steer you in the right direction. Someone may even have one for sale. Buying from other unit members or re-enactors in general tends to be a very economical and safe way to purchase a gun. Remember these are real guns and all gun laws apply. In Illinois, where many of our members live, you will need to have a FOID card and be legally able to

possess and purchase a firearm. Here is a link to Illinois gun laws <http://www.isp.state.il.us/docs/ptfire.pdf>. If you do a face to face sale/purchase you must follow all applicable laws. Two important laws are the requirement for a 24 hour waiting period (This begins when the parties agree on the sale not necessarily when the transaction takes place) and the new requirement for the seller to verify that the buyer's FOID is valid on face to face sales between private parties. This form is located here and requires only two pieces of information (the buyer's date of birth and FOID number) takes only seconds to complete. <https://www.ispfsb.com/Public/Firearms/FOID/PersonToPersonFirearmTransfer.aspx>

Blanks and Firearm Care:

Different guns need different blanks. For most Kar98k rifles the red tip 8mm blanks work perfectly. These however are very loud, forceful and can be expensive. The unit resizes 7.62x51 Nato (.308) blanks to fit into 8mm rifles. Some of these rifles have well used and worn chambers. If this is the case with your rifle you may find that it can run 7.62x51 Nato (.308) blanks just fine without resizing. The Israelis also purchased many German army WWII Mausers in the late 1940s and rebarreled them for 7.62 NATO. For some rifles, even the dark green or black West German plastic .308 blanks will work. It is best to try out several types of blanks to see what works in your rifle.

When you are done shooting for the day, you need to clean your rifle. Blanks can be quite dirty and a small percentage of the blanks on the market are even corrosive. The shorter .308 blanks also deposit more material in the chamber, which can build up and prevent loading of full length 8mm blanks. There are plenty of videos on the internet on how to

properly clean a rifle. (Here is one of many <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nB5ckKcebMY>) If you are not sure what to do and the videos did not tell you enough, feel free to ask for help at an event. We were all new once and caring for a 70 year old Mauser rifle is not second nature to most folks. Take your time and do it right. Your firearm is both an expensive item and a piece of history. These rifles are not being made any more. You are the caretaker of this rifle for a future generation. Treat it with respect and give it the maintenance, cleaning, and lubrication it deserves.

Re-enactor Safety: (adapted and expanded from the HRS website)

- No weapon is to be fired directly at anyone closer than fifty (50) feet or whenever anyone is close to the muzzle of a rifle. This applies to the persons who are next to you, as well as in front of the muzzle. Watch out for the other person's hearing. Never fire a firearm when the muzzle is near another re-enactor or spectator even if they are on your side. Be especially aware of where the “dead” are lying. One very safe practice would be always to misdirect your fire and never aim at another person.
- Strongly consider wearing earplugs to preserve your own hearing.
- In any urban type setting be aware of windows. These can be shattered by the force of a blank's shockwave near the muzzle.
- Be aware of where the hot brass ejected from your firearm is going. It is really bad form to send a hot piece of brass flying into the crowd of spectators.
- No projectile may be fired at less than a forty-five (45) degree angle from the horizontal. Signal flares must be fired at (90) degree angle from horizontal.

- No live ammo is to be in possession of any participant at a SOCIETY sanctioned event EVER! This includes bringing your concealed carry firearm into the event, even if you are properly licensed to do so.
- No one may fix any bayonet to any rifle, except for controlled (posed, staged) photographs.
- Wood tipped blanks may only be used in semi-automatic and automatic weapons equipped with blank adapters, NEVER IN A BOLT ACTION RIFLE.
- Star crimped blanks may be used in all firearms. Firearms must be fired at a safe angle and not less than fifty (50) feet at anyone. All firearm bores must be clean of any debris at all times.
- Helmets must be worn by all participants during public battles.
- All glasses must have safety or shatter-resistant lenses.
- All shoulder weapons must be on safe when a person is loading or unloading from a vehicle and in the field, except when actively engaging a target.
- All firearm laws and regulations that apply to a particular location whether federal, state, or local must be followed at a WWII HRS event.