

Germany

Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (GSG-9)



Note: GSG-9 no longer handles terrorist situations outside of Germany. They are now more akin to the U.S. FBI's Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) in that they respond only to terrorist situations with Germany's borders.

Hot Link

[Operation Magic Fire](#)

Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (GSG-9)

Formed: 1973

Headquarters: Hangelar, Germany

GSG-9 was formed as a direct result of the inept response of German police to actions of Black September terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Following the end of World War Two, German authorities had been apprehensive about creating an elite military unit for any purpose. This, in addition to the desire to demonstrate to the world that

Germany was no longer the fearsome entity it once was, caused planners to establish security that was as low-profile as possible. As a result, the terrorists were able to penetrate the Olympic compound, murder two athletes and take nine others hostage. The incident took an even worse turn when the on scene commander ordered his men to fire on the terrorists who were preparing to board two helicopters to effect their escape. Poor marksmanship, coupled with a number of snipers who refused to fire, led to the least desirable outcome - an open gun battle. When the smoke cleared on the Furstenfeldbruck military airfield, the nine remaining hostages and terrorists were dead.

After this, the Germans vowed they would not be taken by surprise again and authorized the creation of a counterterrorist unit which was deemed operational in April 1973 - only six months after the incident at

Munich. The only stipulation was that GSG-9 would be manned and controlled not by the military, but by the Federal Border Police Force (Bundesgrenzschutz) instead. One benefit that membership in the Federal Border Police provides to German government CT efforts is that these highly skilled operators can also conduct long-term infiltration of terrorist groups, which increases the potential for foiling any illegal act before it happens, rather than simply reacting after the fact.

Selection for those interested in becoming GSG-9 members has always been demanding. In keeping with their strict charter, all recruits must be volunteers and all must come from the Bundesgrenzschutz.

For those who are already members of the German Army (Bundeswehr), they must leave, then join the Border Police to become eligible. The initial training course is 22 weeks long. The first 13 weeks is spent learning the fundamentals of counterterrorism and police operations, including a ratio of academic work much higher than that found in most other CT units. This uniqueness is attributable to the additional responsibilities the GSG-9 trooper has as a member of the police, rather than the military. The last half is devoted to specialization of operator skills and advanced antiterrorist studies. An attrition rate of 80 percent is not uncommon. Some graduates are later sent to attend NATO's International Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) School located in Weingarten, Germany.

GSG-9 is currently broken down into three primary groups; GSG-9/1, GSG-9/2 and GSG-9/3. These units are specialized according to these respective taskings; counterterrorism, maritime CT, and airborne. The first two have approximately 100 operators each, with GSG-9/3 manning only 50. The unit is currently based at Saint Augustin, near Bonn, where they share a medium-sized compound with the regular Federal Border Guard. Those who have visited the facility have returned with reports that would seem odd to the uninitiated. According to the unit's charter, money is no object when it comes to equipping the team with the latest weapons and equipment. This benefit does not apply to the room and board of the team members. For example, the food has been described as being poor at best and their quarters bordering on Spartan. This may seem unusual on the surface, however German soldiers have long prided themselves on exactly this situation.

Operationally, GSG-9 has chosen the five man patrol as its principle combat unit. As previously mentioned, the troopers enjoy the full support of the government when it comes to their equipment. As such, they are issued not one, but two complete sets of combat gear. One of these sets is tailored to daytime operations, while the other is built around use at night. GSG-9, like many of the larger CT groups, also has its own aviation unit, known as Bundesgrenzschutz Grenzschutz-Fliegergruppe. Unlike numerous other CT and SO units, GSG-9 members are not compelled to leave the unit after a set period of time. Rather, operators are permitted to stay for as long as they are able to

maintain the group's high and inflexible standards. This policy is a logical one and has the added benefit of allowing the lessons learned by senior operators to be handed down to the newer members. As these 250 or so troopers fire over 1,000,000 rounds a year in training, it becomes obvious that the German government takes its investment in these soldiers quite seriously.

June 1994 - German counterterrorist police attempted to effect the apprehension of Red Army Faction leader Wolfgang Grams. A shoot-out erupted and Grams was killed. Later reports indicated that his death may have not occurred during the gun battle, but rather later when, it is alleged, GSG-9 troopers executed him shortly after subduing him. Retaliation followed when members of the offshoot group AIZ firebombed the home of a member of GSG-9. This action was remarkable due to the fact that any and all personal information regarding the identities of GSG-9 members is classified top-secret. The fact that AIZ members located such a target which suggests RAF/AIZ may have had assistance from an "inside" source.

July 1994 - Called upon to effect the release of a warden who had been taken hostage at the prison at which he worked. The raid that ensued ended a 22-hour riot and resulted in the rescue of the warden without injury. KLM flight from Tunis to Amsterdam was hijacked by a single terrorist who demanded the release of Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who was being held in New York in connection with the World Trade Center bombing. GSG-9 operators were dispatched to the scene and managed to subdue the lone hijacker without firing a shot. An editorial in the normally critical Aachener Volkzeitung praised the units restraint and called for their continued existence. Mention should also be made of a significant operation in which GSG-9 took part.

September/October 1977 - The benefits of the newly-created unit came to fruition in 1977 when terrorists of the Red Army Faction took hostage German businessman Hans-Martin Schleyer. At the time, GSG-9 was a smaller unit, numbering about 180 total personnel. Nonetheless, they had undergone years of CT-specific training and had evolved into, at least in training, one of the best organizations of its kind in the world.

RAF immediately demanded the release of 11 of their comrades-in-arms who were then being held in prison in West Germany. Despite attempts by the West German government to find a nation willing to take the terrorists, one month passed with no resolution. Finally, on October 13, French authorities reported that Lufthansa Flight LH 181 has been hijacked while en route from the Balearic Islands to Germany. The Boeing 737, with five crew and 86 passengers had changed course on the orders of an individual identifying himself as "Captain Mahmoud" - who would be later identified as known terrorist Zohair Youssef Akache - and was heading to Rome. The plane later

landed in Rome, refueled, and flew on to Cyprus where Mahmoud demanded the plane be refueled again. Authorities in Rome permitted the refueling after threats from the terrorists that the aircraft would be blown up. By this time, word had spread about the hijacking and many governments had resolved not allow Flight LH 181 to land on their soil. Such was the case in Beirut and Bahrain where, in the case of Beirut, the runways were physically blocked with equipment to prevent an unauthorized landing. The pilot finally put down in Dubai despite government landing denials. It was here that a significant event transpired. The crew was able to communicate to ground officials that there were four terrorists on board. The strain on passengers and terrorists alike began to take its toll, and later that day, Mahmoud killed the pilot. Additionally, he postponed his original 4:00PM deadline to 2:45AM the next day after accepting a promise from the West German Minister of State, who has been playing the role of chief negotiator. After making this announcement, he ordered the plane flown to Mogadishu, Somalia where it arrived on October 17.

Unbeknownst to the terrorists, GSG-9 had been following the aircraft, on board a modified Lufthansa 707, since it had landed in Cyprus. The "alert" 30-man group had been airborne soon after the German government learned of the airliner's destination. This group flew from Bonn to Cyprus then on to Ankara and back home after learning. A second 30-man unit, which included commander Ulrich Wegener, had meanwhile flown from Germany to Dubai. The cooperative Somali government permitted Wegener's GSG-9 flight to land. Upon arrival, the troopers were surprised to find that the Somali commandos had set up a security perimeter around the airport and were able to provide much-needed intelligence. Following procedure, GSG-9 deployed sniper and reconnaissance teams, and prepared to assault the plane immediately, in case such event dictated that such an emergency response was required. It was not, and along with the the recently arrived second element of GSG-9, planning began in earnest.

As the night wore on, officials came to the conclusion that, given Mahmoud's growing instability and having already proven his willingness to execute hostages, a rescue operation would be authorized. At 2315, sections of the assault element began their covert approach to the aircraft. Two SAS men, who had accompanied GSG-9 and were skilled in the use of "flash-bang" grenades, accompanied the assault teams. At 205, In an attempt to cause at least some of the terrorists to come to the cockpit (thereby establishing their whereabouts), the Somali commandos lit a bright signal fire a few hundred feet from the front of the plane. The reconnaissance team assigned to that section of the aircraft reported that in fact two of the terrorists, including "Captain Mahmoud", had gone to the cockpit and were confusedly observing the fire.

At the same time, GSG-9 commandos, using specially designed, rubber coated ladders, made entry through the aircraft doors. At 2:07,

the emergency doors were blown open with explosive charges and the SAS operatives, who had managed to sneak undetected onto the wings, tossed their grenades inside. With this, GSG-9 entered the plane, ordering the hostages to the ground. Within seconds, three of the terrorists were killed, and the fourth severely wounded. The operation was officially over by 212, when all the hostages were retrieved unharmed, with one GSG-9 operative slightly injured by gunfire. The same could not be said for Schleyer, the German businessman abducted a month earlier whose body was recovered three days later.

Here is a second unit profile, courtesy of Rexer.

Born out of history and tragedy, GSG-9 was created right after the 1972 Munich Olympic massacre, to combat the ever growing terrorism. Created within the Federal Border Police (Bundesgrenzschutz), and not the military, to avoid the impression of a new SS, the creation of the unit was give the go-ahead on September 8, 1972. Placed in command was Ulrich Wegener. An expert on counter terrorism, he modeled the GSG-9 after the Israeli Sayeret Mat'kal. It was even rumored that Wegener took part in the Israeli rescue in Entebbe.

GSG-9 (Border Marksman Group 9, or Border Protection Group 9), became operational on April 17, 1973. Two units were ready for deployment. Given powers of arrest and national authority, GSG-9 operators are skilled marksmen as well as highly educated police officers.

To become members of GSG9, volunteers must have served with the Border Police for over two years. If their application is accepted, they must pass a series of 3-day physical and psychological tests, and also endurance, shooting skills, fitness and intelligence, finishing with a medical examination. About 66 percent of the applicants are rejected. If accepted, the trainee is sent to an intensive 22-week training program. The program concentrates on teamwork, marksmanship and physical and mental fitness. The operators study the tactics and weapons of their unit, as well as major terrorist groups. Operators train in VIP security, driving, airborne insertions, aircraft and train takedowns, skiing, first aid, and other skills. At their base at St. Augustin, the GSG-9 has a \$9 million underground facility, presumably housing many forms of terrorist hardware, and other related items. Operators are taught how to use favorite terrorist weapons, the M61 Skorpion and the AK-47.

GSG-9's strength is about 200 operators, which are divided into a headquarters unit, five 30-man strike teams, a communications unit, an engineer unit, a training unit and a flight of helicopter and logistic backup. Each strike team is divided into a command element and five combat teams, called specialein-satztrupp. Each combat team consists of a commander, grenadier, cover man, point man and sniper (marksman). GSG-9's strike units are specialized in many different 'methods of operation.' For example, Strike Team One (GSG-9/1) is the 'standard' counter terrorist unit on the ground. GSG-9/2 is specialized in maritime

counter terrorism and is trained by German Navy's Kampfschwimmers. GSG-9/3 is an airborne unit, specializing in HALO and other forms of parachute drops.

Weapons are generally the same as many of the world's counter terrorist units. The favorite weapon is the MP5, and its many variants, MP5 SD3 (silenced), MP5K (shortened version), MP5A2 and many others. Sniper rifles include Steyr rifles, PSG-1 sniper rifle and the H&K G3. Pistols range from the indigenous P7 and P9, to Glocks and .357 magnums.

GSG-9's first deployment was at the 1974 World Cup games in Germany. Intelligence reported that the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group was planning an attack, but the sight of G3-toting GSG-9 members deterred them. Over the next few years, GSG-9 deployed to Austria in 1976, to assist the Austrians in securing their Olympic Games, and to Canada to assist the RCMP in securing the 1976 Summer Olympic Games. They also continued to forge ties with other counter-terrorist groups.

The unit's largest, and most publicized, deployment was in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1977, where they stormed a hijacked Lufthansa airliner and rescued all hostages. More details about this mission can be found in the Foreign Special Operations section under '[Operation Magic Fire.](#)'

During the Iraninan hostage crisis, when Delta Force was getting ready to mount their rescue, Wegener offered to infiltrate a team of GSG-9 operators to provide much needed intelligence. For reasons never explained, the offer was turned down.

In 1982, receiving reports from Frankfurt police of unusual activity in the outskirts of the city, Colonel Uwe Dee, who took control over GSG-9 after Wegener was promoted, inserted a 5-man surveillance team near the target. Waiting for six days, the operators finally spotted two people approaching the woods. They turned out to be the top two female terrorists. GSG-9 arrested them, and captured their arms cache. The cache included weapons, explosives, forged documents, maps and information about US military bases, and maps showing 14 other supply caches. All were placed under surveillance, and five days later, Christian Klahr, one of the most important Red Army Faction (RAF) figures was arrested at one of the supply stations.

GSG-9 was highly regarded, until June 27, 1993, in a small, rural town of Bad Kleinen. That night, some thirty GSG-9 operators were on a stakeout, with a mission to apprehend Birgit Hogefeld and Wolfgang Grams, the two most-wanted members of the Red Army Faction terrorist group. In an attempt to arrest them, Grams managed to shoot and kill one GSG-9 operator, and wound another, before being gunned down himself. Everything might have ended quietly, had it not been for a tabloid-hungry German press, and an eyewitness who swore that a GSG-9 operator had killed Grams in cold blood as he lay on the tracks. The very fate of GSG-9 hung on the edge, as officers resigned, and a cover-up descended over the incident.

Returning to the scene soon after the Bad Kleinen controversy, GSG-9 successfully apprehended a terrorist that had hijacked a KLM flight to

Dusseldorf. A GSG-9 squad managed to get into the airplane, and to subdue the lone hijacker without a shot being fired. After this operation, the GSG-9's image was restored, and they weren't seen as a bunch of trigger-happy, Rambo-types