The Waffen-SS Field Blouse: 1940-45
A reenactment approach to the SS combat tunic.

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1. Introduction:

This document is aimed exclusively to German WWII historical reenactment, and more obviously to all of the reenactors who partially or exclusively reenact the Waffen-SS from 1940 to 1945. It is not intended to be dealt from the point of view of a collector as it only covers the most basic and important details and facts about these tunics on a general approach over them and as a whole.

Though I am fully aware that a collector or dealer who has handled many of these original tunics has a vast and rich knowledge I can only dream about, I also think that with the wealth of information one can find online, you can learn a lot just carefully studying and analyzing all these pictures and interesting debates found on all these Militaria websites and good old forums.

There’s dozens of original SS tunics featured on many Militaria sites. Just Virtual Grenadier alone has a good number of these. Every tunic is carefully photographed to the last detail: collar, pockets, lining, buttons, insignia... And every entry has an usually large and good text describing all those details. This will never give you the insight of someone who has actually owned several of these tunics, but once you have studied all of these posts and pictures you can really start to learn things.

The same as you learn history from history books, you can learn from all these sales post, militaria references and books you have online.

During my lifetime as a WWII German reenactor and more specifically as one who exclusively reenacts as a Waffen-SS grenadier, the German Feldbluse has been my most admired, favourite and beloved piece of German uniformity. There is nothing more elegant, beautiful and outstanding than the wool uniforms of the Third Reich. Along with the Stahlhelm they have become the most iconic German militaria ever produced. A true bearer of the classic and teutonic army fashion of that era.

Since my early days reenacting the SS, I was always rolling my eyes through countless period pictures of German grenadiers proudly wearing these tunics. And of course admiring dozens of surviving pieces that are carefully pictured and shown on Militaria sales sites.

Much to my dismay, the more I started to learn about the originals, the more these tunics I started with were unsuitable for what a "real" SS tunic had to be. And here started a huge personal "drama" with the reproduction tunics and how all the ones I had were totally wrong for what I wanted to do, and how everytime I wanted to have something correct I horribly failed:

- My first SS tunic: Gavin M43. What was the first thing I learned? Original tunics usually had very big, generous pointed collars. This Gavin had a squared, tiny collar. Sold it (or gave it?) away to buy something better.
-My second tunic: ATF tunic (made by Gavin). This tunic had a better collar, supposedly made after ATF indications. I was quite pleased with the collar, but at that time I also learned that contrary to most mass-reproduced tunics, originals had bigger pockets. After paying a good tailor, I had the sleeves taken out a bit and the breast pockets remade into bigger ones. I then learned something new that made me see this tunic as unfit while I was in contact with a retired tailor who accepted an order for what was my first custom made tunic. At this point and with the first tunic, this one + the modifications there was a considerable amount of wasted money.

-My third tunic: a custom made one from a retired tailor that is no longer on the business. Once I received the tunic, I was really excited and happy with it. That feeling lasted less than with the previous tunic. As more as I kept learning things, I realized that this tunic (that was not exactly cheap) was far from correct under my ever growing standards. What I learned? For example SS M42 and M43 tunics never had chest darts (I will talk about this further on), or that all tunics were short. This one not only had chest darts, but the tunic was stupidly large, to the point that after two costly modifications, it was impossible to make it shorter without compromising the integrity of the overall correct look (i.e. the position and alignment of the central buttons with the flaps and pockets, something I will also explain later). Some time after this third and monstrous failure, I was lucky to contact a skilled tailor from Poland who created not only, but two amazing SS tunics for me after all the specifications I gave him and of course his own knowledge. I was truly relieved with these two, yet my quest didn't ended here and still goes on today.

Now I am going to document all the information that I have been learning all this past years failure after failure, hoping that it will be helpful to all those interested to know more about the amazing SS tunics and to know what makes a reproduction tunic good or bad. Everything shown here are original tunics and period pictures, as I don't want to take reproductions, reenactment or anything modern as example.
2. The basic and important details:

2.1 The collar.
2.2 “Chest-darts”.
2.3 General pocket placement.
2.4 Pocket flaps.
2.5 Tunic length.
2.6 Kragenbinde buttons.
2.7 Insignia placement.
2.8 Bandage pocket buttonhole.

Most of the basics that am going to detail here are typical traits from all SS tunic models unless stated otherwise, so they will help you to know what makes a real SS tunic on general terms. Specific details from the different models will be explained later on each tunic section.

2.1 The collar:

This is perhaps one of the very first and worst details that stands out the most when looking at reproduction tunics. The reason? Original SS tunics usually only had big and pointy collars. Something that no current repro tunic has with the exception of some not-easy-to-find old ones or modern custom-made tunics that not everyone can afford.

In contrast to the Heer tunic that used the much smaller traditional Litzen on the collar, the SS tabs were considerably bigger thus as soon as the SS started to have their own contract tunics, collars were enlarged to accommodate such insignia and also enough space to have both the collar tabs and NCO tresse.

As what happens with most (or all?) German WWII militaria, there is not a single collar size for all tunics. To my knowledge the collars ranged from 7 to 9 CM width and I consider these to be the most correct or common sizes. 6 CM width may be too small for a SS tunic, and 10 CM way too much. But I am sure both existed on original tunics. Still and as I noted, I believe that 7, 8 or 9 CM is the best width for a SS collar.

Regarding the shape of the collar, 90% of repros are just squared. Originals varied in form though they were usually pointed. These pointy collars were sharp or round patterned, and sometimes a bit more squarish but (to me) the ideal collar is a pointy one.

Still a more square collar is not wrong, but not in the way that the mass-reproductions are being made.

Below, a selected series of original SS tunic collars for you to appreciate them yourself:
Thanks to Virtual Grenadier and Fjm44.
Note how these collars are all subtly different from each other but they're generally the same. Some are slightly straight, some are slightly rounded. This is just a very small fraction of how the vast numbers of originals looked.

What's wrong with mass-reproduced tunics? See for yourself:

Original tunic.

Gavin tunic.

This is how the original *usually* is, and how Gavin Militaria makes their collars for their tunics (or used to make these for a long time).

Despite the fact that original tunics varied between them and that this is just a single example, they all shared a similar form. You can see how the collar gets bigger until it reach the end, where it can end very sharply or rounded; with more or less pointy shape.

In contrast, Gavin tunics (and the likes) have a squared collars that are totally devoid of any given shape and usually small. And even if they are big enough, just for the form they have they are still *ugly* and not really SS-ish.

I took Gavin for this comparison for the sole reason that they are the most well known and used tunics worldwide by all reenactors. Perhaps the sole reason as why they make them wrong is because a total ignorance on this matter, from both the maker and the user alike.
2.2 “Chest-darts”:

This is another crucial detail that is missing (or in this case, faultesly added) on reproduction SS tunics: the "chest dart".

This thing is a very small thread running from the breast pocket flap to the sleeve seam. It was present on all Heer and SS M40 tunics, however SS M42 and M43 never had them.

I don't have any answer as of why these are being added to SS repro tunics all the time. But surely maker and buyer ignorance makes a huge part of the mistake.
The matter with the "chest darts" can be confusing. All SS lacked them? What about Heer tunics? What tunics had or hadn't them?

To make it easier I thought that a graphic may make things clear.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Heer</th>
<th>SS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M36/39</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>M40/41</td>
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<td>M42</td>
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<td>M44</td>
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It is important to note that the SS M39 tunic was the counterpart of the Heer M36. They are both added together. Both the SS and the Heer had M40/M41 variants. The M44 was conceived as an universal pattern for all German armed forces and thus it has an unique cut for all.

2.3 General pocket placement:

Looking at all the original SS tunics that you can find online, I reached to the conclusion that these had an usual "configuration" when it comes to where the pockets are installed in regards to other details such as the frontal buttons or the haken holes.

Of course every original had subtle or obvious variation, and this can not be taken as a sole example of how it should be but rather as how it can be:
It looks like this was a common configuration for SS tunics: the second button aligned close to the upper edge of the breast pocket flap. Third button aligned close to the lower edge of the breast pocket. Fifth button aligned close to the lower cargo pocket flaps.

Another tunic. Look how the same configuration can be appreciated. When looking at other original tunics, you will notice that they usually have the pockets, flaps and buttons on the same positions. This may vary, with buttons placed higher or lower than this. Still, they are all usually the same.

Length of SS tunics and pocket size plays a major role in this unique look.

And speaking on size of pockets, it seems that M42 and M43 tunics had bigger pockets than M40 tunics. Size may range with 12/13 x 17/18 CMs. It depends on the tunic itself.

### 2.4 Pocket flaps:

This is not a fault found solely on SS repro tunics, but rather on most mass-reproduced German tunics. Perhaps this may be something more personal, still I found it important to list it here.

Most M36, 40 and 42 tunics tend to have a pocket flap pattern that I consider unacceptable:
Typical from most Chinese-made tunics, they shape the flap on a very straight way. I consider they have to be diagonally straight and then peaked with a very curved pattern. The picture speaks for itself though.
2.5 Tunic length:

This is one of the most arduous debates I've had with many reenactors: the length of the SS tunic. This is a commonly overlooked detail by everyone. Yet the reality is another thing: the SS tunic was a short one.

This is not my opinion, but rather a straight fact. SS tunics were *usually* very short, short or with the same length as the sleeves. In some few cases, larger than the sleeves (quasi on a Heer fashion). Still this takes us to the same point: SS tunics are short.

I am always joking around saying that in reality, SS stands for: Super Short. And I have a good reason for this.

They were supposedly tailored short to give the wearer a taller, elegant impression. I don't remember where I have read this in the past, be it on a forum or on a sales pitch text from a vendor, but regardless of that it makes sense that they were made like this.

Every time you see a SS man on a sharp looking tunic, he looks tall and elegant. Not surprising at all considering how the SS always took a high pride on themselves.

As a reenactor, my aim is to make things not only correct, but as how they were supposed to be. So to me, the tunic has to be short cause that's how a SS tunic was meant to be.

Let's ignore all this conjecture and take a look at a selection of original tunic skirts:
I deliberately added some not so short ones to make justice to the variation found on originals. But as I always considered: the SS tunic is short. Look how most sleeves are way longer than the skirt. And in some cases, slightly larger or at the same level.
I personally regard this as the typical length of a SS tunic. Sleeves larger than the skirt. From one CM to many. On any model: M40, 42 or 43. And taking into consideration all of the points explained before, look how this tunic: has a big and pointed collar, lacks chest darts and has the pockets and flaps properly aligned with the frontal buttons.

Supposedly even those that have the sleeves at the same level of the skirt or slightly shorter may look short once being worn. But as we can see, overall they are short tunics.

If this is not enough proof, let's take a look at some period pictures from real SS men:
Again this is just a very few selection among countless original pictures. But I think these highlight very well the proper length of SS tunics. Can be a lot, can be just a little or close to none; but sleeves are *usually* larger than the skirt.
2.6 Kragenbinde buttons:

Another detail that is faultesly added to most reproduction SS tunics, but that nearly no originals had: the collar buttons for the Kragenbinde.

Collar buttons for the Kragenbinde. I haven't been able to find another picture of an original SS tunic with them, and in fact this one though original is a Heer pattern M36 used by the SS.

Some SS M39 and M40 tunics had these buttons sewed on the collar for the Kragenbinde. And I know I have seen at least a pair of originals with them, but all the ones I find lacks these buttons. M41 onwards, they are completely gone from SS tunics and none has been ever found with them.

Even for M39 and M40 tunics I consider these buttons as a rare sight so in my honest opinion I'd say they are incorrect for a repro tunic.

2.7 Insignia placement:

For some time there has been also a bit of debate of how to place and sew the SS insignias on a tunic. I have also seen some reenactors resorting to a totally fake drawing of a SS tunic indicating per centimeters where every insignia has to be placed like if this were some sort of "official" guide.

There is not a single way on how to place insignias as every tunic is different and size plays a major factor on where they are sewed.
Collar tabs are easy, as I think that they are usually placed with 1 CM of margin between it and the collar edge.

They have to be sewn by machine with straight black thread. However, you can use grey thread for late M42 and M43 as this has been observed on some originals too.
For eagles, this is a very common place to sew them: aligned with the lowest edge of the breast pocket flap. They can be placed a bit higher, or way lower, even close to the middle of the sleeve though I don't consider that as very common.

Both BeVo or embroidered, they have to be machine sewn with zig-zag black thread.

The rest of the insignias of the uniform can be hand sewn if desired as they often appear both machine or hand sewn, but collar tabs and eagles must be sewn with machine all the time.
2.8 Bandage pocket buttonhole:

This is a small detail that has passed largely overlooked by everyone. SS contract tunics were so different from the wellknown Heer tunics that even the buttonhole for the bandage pocket was different:

Example from a SS M42 tunic.

The SS had these buttonholes in diagonal and the Heer in horizontal.

However, not all SS tunics have diagonal buttonholes for the bandage pockets. Having examined some, I can say that:

- Diagonal buttonhole it is present on all M39, M40 and M41 tunics.
- Randomly seen on M42 and M43 tunics. I'd say a 50% diagonal and a 50% vertical.

From all the SS M42/43 tunics I have seen, I have randomly noticed both diagonal or horizontal buttonholes for the bandage pockets with no apparent reason.
3. Pre/early war tunics:

This chapter englobes the first three models of pre/early war tunics used by the SS minus the M37 and earlier.
They are: the M39, M40 and M41.
I decided to start with the M39 for the sole reason that this was the first tunic based on a Heer pattern but different on their own, meant for the SS only.
M37 or earlier tunics are not much relevant on reenactment, as they were seldom (or never) used during the war.

-The SS **M39** tunic is no more than the counterpart of the Heer M36.
It was manufactured during 1938 to 1939 when the SS adopted Army standards.

It was different from the Heer M36 on:
- Bigger collar
- Shorter skirt
- Different liner configuration
- Different maker stamps
- Usually no collar buttons for the Kragenbinde

-It later evolved to the **M40** that as same as the Heer, changed the bottle-green collar for a Feldgrau one.

-Finally evolved to the **M41**. In contrast to the Heer counterpart that changed the 5 frontal buttons for 6, the SS M41 tunic changed the cotton liner for a rayon one.

M39 tunic featuring all of the SS details. Picture from Virtual Grenadier.
However, these tunics are really difficult to tell apart from their Heer counterparts due to the fact that in contrast to the later M42 and 43 versions they are externally similar or near identical.

Except the M41, they share the same details as the Heer ones such as:
- 5 frontal buttons
- Three holes for the hakens
- Chest darts

The collars, though meant to be bigger were usually not as big than on their M42/43 versions and they could even have the same width than a Heer tunic. And the fact that the SS used countless Heer M36 and M40 tunics does not help to recognize them.

However, looking to the liner will reveal what the tunic truly is:

As you can see, the liner from SS M39, M40 and M41 tunics followed a simpler cut with only two steps in contrast to their Heer counterparts that had three steps. This and the maker stamp (if still visible) will be the final way to recognize a SS contract tunic if the other details fail (collar or/and skirt being the same as a Heer tunic).
4. Mid/late war tunics:

As happened with Heer tunics too, with the introduction of the M42 pattern German tunics were simplified in order to save materials and construction time.

The SS M42 was approximately approved in 1942 and first issued during mid 1943, where it was seldom seen until 1944 when it was started to be largely used.

While the SS M40/41 tunic dominates the early-to-mid part of the war (1940-1943 but still seen until the end) the SS M42 tunic dominates the latter part of the war (1944-1945) on most units and fronts.

With the change to the M42 pattern, SS tunics departed from the Heer ones even more:

- The most easily recognizable detail has been always the fact that while Heer M42 tunics changed from 5 to 6 frontal buttons, the SS retained his 5 frontal buttons.
- The holes for the hakens were reduced to two, while Heer tunics kept three.
- Collars were overall further enlarged and the length of the tunic shortened.
- “Chest darts” were omitted.
- No collar buttons for the Kragenbinde.
- The quality of the wool decreased compared to earlier patterns. Though plenty of older stocks of wool were largely used for the manufacture of this tunic.
- Breast pockets were usually enlarged.
- Different liner cut.
Typical liner for a M42 (and M43) tunic:
Installed with a single diagonal step down to the bottom and often using different shades of rayon fabrics.

The **SS M43** was approximately approved in 1943 and first issued during mid 1944, where it was seldom seen until 1945 when it was started to be largely used.
Contrary to reenactment lore, the SS M43 is not as common as believed to be. They are rarely seen during 1944 with a few sporadic occasions and/or specific units and it's not commonly seen until 1945.

The only differences with the M42 are:

- Straight pocket flaps.
- Made with really low quality wool. Still some older stocks of wool were used for the manufacture of this tunic.

**5. M44 tunics:**

The M44 tunic had an universal pattern for all German armed forces and thus it was the same cut for all. The Luftwaffe had some made in their blue “blaugrau” wool and some Polizei M44 tunics were made on their specific wool.

This was neither the case of the SS or the Heer.

Though SS M44 tunics of course did existed, the reality is that they were rarely used by the Waffen SS at all. Just a handful of period picture (5-6 as I recall) exist with SS personnel wearing these in contrast to the good amount of evidence we have of them being used by the Heer.

I deem this tunics as totally unaceptable for SS reenactment as we don't have enough visual proof of these being worn. As simply as this.
6. Epilogue:

I hope you have enjoyed this document as much as I enjoyed making it and that have served you to know what is the SS tunic with his own features and special details.

Of course I don't consider this document to be finished, as I'm sure I will need to make revisitions and fix/add new stuff on it.

The sole purpose of this document is to make awareness and for reenactors to have enough knowledge of the original pieces to judge on their own what makes a reproduction tunic good or bad, and to ultimately push the makers to fix all the issues that plague the overall mediocre reproductions that are flooding the market.

Oriol Rettinger, December 2019.