

W. W. II S.S. Wiking Division Badge, \$55.00

It's purely historical interest in World War II.

—Rich Iott, 5th S.S. Panzer Division Wiking re-enactor and 2010 Republican nominee for U.S. Representative, Ohio's 9th District

The first time I wore a dress in public
without a hint of irony—a MaxMara
wrap adorned with Japanese lilies
that framed my shoulders perfectly—
I was still thin but thickly bearded
and men on the train whispered to me
in a conspiratorial tone, as if they hoped
the dress was a joke I could let them in on.
You are so beautiful, my love said.
I want to tear you apart, and for once,
I believed him. The dress had come off by then,
but I still think of silk against my skin
when I remember him. Clothing is a part
of how men know one another. When you
pinned that S.S. badge to your chest, Rich,
who did you become? Re-enactors claim
the sonnenrad rune—that circular
swastika that marks you as a Wiking—
does not make you a Nazi. Okay,
I'll play along as if there were no death
marches, no Wiking diaries left behind
to detail the off-duty murder of Jews,
as if the Wehrmacht veterans whose memoirs
you devour came close to truth. As a boy,
I thought for a time I might learn discipline
in uniform. I've always been interested
in discipline, though mostly from a distance,
or on my knees. What does the uniform
make of you, with its death's head
and sig runes? Does it straighten
your spine, bring a touch of Aryan
arrogance to the corners of your smile?
What does it take to make a man
shiver through winter weekends
in the trenches of Ohio? Olav Tuff,
a Norwegian peasant, signed up



with the Wiking Division for 300 acres
of fertile Ukranian soil. A letter he sent
from the front warned his younger brother
not to follow. Could this have been his badge?
You signed up, Rich, as *a father-son bonding thing*,
to make the kind of memories, I suppose,
that last a lifetime. *Civilians were herded
like cattle into a church*, Tuff recalled
seventy years later. *Soldiers from my unit
started to pour petrol onto the church.
Between two hundred and three hundred
people were burned. I was assigned
as guard and no one came out.*