

# LAW and ORDER

## German Police Change Uniforms

by Kevin Gordon

If you have seen Germany police officers on the news, in print or in person, you no doubt noticed their green police uniforms. This green uniform, designed by Heinz Oestergard, has been used since 1974. After 32 years of service, the green uniform is retiring, at least in some areas.

Germany is about the size of Montana with a population around 82 million. The country has about 235,000 officers plus 32,000 Bundesgrenzschutz (BGS), which are the federal border police. Germany is made up of 16 states, which are actually 15 regions of the country with the city-state of Berlin making up the 16th state.

The police services of other countries are not as fragmented as American departments. While America has about 18,000 police departments with their own chiefs, structures, rules, regulations and policies, other countries including Germany, have far fewer departments due to a more centralized, national policing style that most utilize.

Policing differs very little from state to state as laws, both traffic and criminal, are the same all over Germany, including fines. Rank insignia is also the same across the country. But each force has regional differences, as each of the 16 regions is a separate department with its own police academy and Chief of Police. The chief by rank is "Inspekteur" and there is only one per state. These Inspectors report to the Minister of Interior in their respective states. As the BGS is the federal police, the Inspector of the BGS reports to the Minister of the Interior of Germany.

Each region can make decisions about their police force including choice of weapon. Some states use the H&K P2000, some use the Walther P 99, and others use the H&K P7. Each state is also able to decide whether to stay with the traditional green uniform or switch to blue. Five of the 16 states have already decided to change to new blue uniforms beginning January 2006. Undoubtedly, more will decide to change in the future.

According to Sven Kouril, an officer of the Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony) state, the uniforms are changing because officers want to have a more "European" style uniform. Germany was the last country in Europe with a police force wearing green/tan uniforms. All other countries are wearing blue uniforms. Kouril, whose title is Polizeikommissar, is part of the Hannover police area or Polizeidirektion Hannover.

The States of Hamburg, Bremen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein and Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony) are considered "northern states" simply because they are located in the northern portion of Germany. These five states are changing from green to blue with Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony) and Hamburg going first because those officers work in the capital and the soccer world championships will bring five games to Hannover.

The BGS, i.e., the Federal Border Police, was recently renamed Bundespolizei (Federal Police) and also changed to the blue uniforms. Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony) was also the first state equipped with Safariland duty belts and under belts, which replaced the traditional black leather, trousers belt.

It is estimated that it will take five years for the uniform changeover of these states. Each state has its own patch and in the past the patch was worn on the left arm. With the new blue uniforms, patches will be worn on both arms. The famous designer Luigi Colani designs the new uniforms. While a very few U.S. agencies have colors very specific to their agency and many agencies are certainly proud of their uniforms, I don't recall any U.S. police uniform being "designed" by a famous designer.

When asked what he thought about the uniform change, Kouril stated, "I think, and I think many of my fellow officers feel the same way, that it was time to change the look of our police to a modern look.

Sometimes in the past we thought we were looking like park rangers and not police officers. Also the new uniform is a better quality." The officers are not giving up their traditional leather according to Kouril: "We are keeping our leather jackets and that is real good!"

An impressive cooperation between the department and the individual officers has resulted in a unique method of payment for the new uniforms that will result in no additional cost to the German taxpayers. Each German officer is provided an annual uniform allowance of 200 Euro (about \$240) for uniforms and equipment. For the next five years, the officers will only be allotted half of that annual amount, 100 Euro, a 500 Euro savings over five years. The initial blue uniforms that will be issued to each officer will cost about 500 Euro, resulting in no actual additional cost to the agency as the officers are actually paying for the uniform.

Along with the uniform change, the police vehicles that are also green are being changed to blue. Police cars will not be changed at one time due to the costs. They will be changed one by one, which should help in the transition for the citizens.

It is hard for American officers to realize how drastic this change will be for both the German officers and the public. You only need to drive a few miles in America to see different color and/or stripe designed police vehicles. But in Germany, all police vehicles (cars, vans, trucks, buses and motorcycles) follow the same color scheme, green and silver or green and white. As new vehicles are purchased, they will be blue and silver but the old colors will remain until the vehicles are removed from service.

To see additional photos of the navy blue uniforms (top and bottom) and the blue and silvers vehicles, go to the uniform site at [www.lzn.de](http://www.lzn.de).

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