

## Comparing Military Ranks in World War II

Maybe it's never been a problem for you. But when I read histories or novels about World War II I'm frequently confused when I see some military officer referred to as an "*Obergruppenführer*," for example, or a "Wing Commander." I'm American, and as a history buff I'm familiar with the ranks in the United States armed forces. But to what levels of command do those terms refer? And I discovered when I searched the Internet for some translation tool that there was none to be found.

So, I scraped up information here and there on the web. The following table is the result. It's *slightly* oversimplified. For example, in the Nazis' *Waffen-SS*—the combat arm of the [Schutzstaffel](#) headed by *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler—the rank of *Oberführer* has no precise correspondent in the fighting forces of other combatants. It's slightly higher than a colonel in the US or UK armies but slightly lower than a brigadier general. And the *Reichsführer* himself was not an officer in the *Waffen-SS*, since he ran the SS as a whole.

General Officer	US Army	US Navy	Wehrmacht	Waffen-SS	UK Army	Royal Navy	Royal Air Force
5-Star	General of the Armies	Fleet Admiral	Generalfeldmarschal	Reichsführer	Field Marshal	Admiral of the Fleet	Marshal of the RAF
4-Star	General of the Army	Admiral	Generaloberst	Oberstgruppenführer	General	Admiral	Air Chief Marshal
3-Star	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	General	Obergruppenführer	Lieutenant-general	Vice Admiral	Air Marshal
2-Star	Major General	Rear Admiral (Upper Division)	Generalleutnant	Gruppenführer	Major-general	Rear Admiral	Air Vice-Marshal
1-Star	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral (Lower Division)	Generalmajor	Brigadeführer	Brigadier	Commodore	Air Commodore
	Colonel	Captain	Oberst	Oberführer or Standartenführer	Colonel	Captain	Group Captain
	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	Oberstleutnant	Obersturmbahnführer	Lieutenant-colonel	Commander	Wing Commander
	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Major	Sturmabahnführer	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Squadron Commander
	Captain	Lieutenant	Hauptmann	Hauptsturmführer	Captain	Lieutenant	Flight Lieutenant
	1 <sup>st</sup> Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior Grade	Oberleutnant	Obersturmführer	Lieutenant	Sub Lieutenant	Flying Officer
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant	Ensign	Leutnant	Untersturmführer	Second Lieutenant	Midshipman	Pilot Officer