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

DAVID WINTER

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

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with the Wiking Division for 300 acres of fertile Ukrainian 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.