

The Devils Shadow

A WWII article by Stuart Pearson
For C-P Models.

The order was barked out in German, the order was translated in to five different languages/dialects: but the message was clear, kill, maim and terrorise!

Introduction

This article looks in detail at one of the German Army's less known SS units formed from pre 1938 border Moslem volunteers. Looking in some detail at one of the more unusual German Army Turkoman units, (Soviet citizens of the Moslem faith) we will see how these volunteers initial dreams of freeing their minority from Soviet domination were exploited and then used to carry out the Nazi regimes murderous extermination policies during anti-partisan operations in the occupied Eastern territories.

The First Months

During the opening months of Operation Barborossa, (June 1941) the German Army intelligence department, (Abwehr) recruited captured Soviet Moslem POW's as part of its fight against the Red Army. Abwehr had some experience of recruiting 'natives' for their secret commando operations in the USSR; one unit raised in secret by Abwehr was *Sonderverband Bergmann*, formed in 1941 by the Army's intelligence department 'before' the attack on the USSR. Abwehr planned to use the Turkoman for commando type operations against the Red Armies supply lines.

A small group of Caucasus Muslim volunteers serving with the Abwehr Brandenburg Battalion 800 were later formed in to the *Turkestanisch Kaukasisch Mohammedanische* Legion in preparation for the spring offensive in to the Caucasus region. Many of the Moslem volunteers had experienced years of Religious oppression and repression, going back to WWI and saw the German's as possible liberators of their ancestral homelands. Many Moslem volunteers harboured an intense dislike of Russian's and decided to fight alongside the German's in an effort to liberate

their far off homelands from Soviet rule.

Abwehr wasn't the only branch of the German Army to raise Muslim units, elsewhere German field and security units were secretly, (circumventing Nazi racial policies for the Eastern territories) forming small units composed of Muslim and non-Russian volunteers against official policy. Many of these units received the name of their German commanders to hide their racial make up from the high command, but eventually when the ban was lifted and some order was imposed on the practice many units received the prefix 'Ost' to the unit number. The Muslim units were initially used for security duties to combat the growing partisan menace, securing communications routes and for construction tasks/menial jobs that freed up rear echelon German soldiers for the front line. So many volunteers were recruited in 1941 that it was inevitable that some order would have be introduced to manage their recruitment, but the intercession of a foreign power that Germany courted for the Axis partnership would increase the pace of recruitment of Muslim volunteers from the USSR.

Ostlegionen

Some time before November 1941 a General staff officer from the Turkish General staff approached Hitler directly and asked him to help the many thousands of Turkic/moslem men held in German POW camps. The communist government and its secret police had long oppressed Moslem minorities in the USSR; Moslem POW's could prove useful to the German's? They would reinforce the depleted ranks of the German Army and possibly coax Turkey in to the Axis partnership?

In November 1941 Hitler finally gave permission for the Army to recruit Moslem POW's, the following month a secret order was issued ordering the creation of a *Caucasian*, (later divided in to the *north Caucasian* and *Azerbaijani* legions) Georgian and *Armenian* Legion to over see the creation of battalion sized infantry units. National committee's were also formed to give the fighting units a political arm to their struggle. The national committee's were represented at the East Ministry.

So many volunteers were recruited from the POW camps that the fledgling Legion was able to form three separate units, one of

them becoming the 450th *Verstärkt Turkestanisches* Infantry Battalion, formed on the 1-13-42. Command of the Battalion was given to the Austrian Major Meyer-Mader.

Overseeing the recruitment and training of the new foreign Battalions was the National Legions; they were commanded by the inspectorate of Eastern Legions under General Ernst Kostring (ex-military attaché to Moscow) it set up command staffs for each of the six Legions in occupied Poland, (*Kommando der Ostlegionen in Polen*). Of interest to us was the *Turkestanische* Legion formed on the 24th of March 1942 in the General Government. It recruited, vetted and trained Muslim volunteers for the Wehrmacht. Volunteers for the *Turkoman Legion* came from the Kazak's, Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Turkoman and two other minor tribes, (Tajik)? A national armshield was issued and worn on the upper right arm. Legion style rank was worn.

Recruitment of Moslem, (or Turkic) volunteers was so successful after the German occupation of the Caucasus that a full sized Infantry Division was raised in occupied Poland, the 162nd Division was highly regarded by the German's and fought on the Eastern Front and in Italy during the war. The German's to their surprise found many of these newfound allies very loyal and determined fighters. Unfortunately many Army and SS security units exploited this trusting loyalty to use Ost or eastern volunteers to carry out the difficult hands on criminal tasks, that German troops found distasteful.

It must be presumed that many Turkic volunteers joined the Nazi cause to liberate their oppressed homelands, but the German's would soon pervert their ill feelings towards Russians, allowing them to run amok in an orgy of violence as recompense for the all years of repression they had suffered.

Major Andreas Meyer-Mader

During November 1941 the 444th Security Division cc. Lt General Russwurm, (17th Army) authorised the raising of two-Battalion of native troops, replacements of German casualties were in short supply so Russwurm authorised the recruitment of volunteers from both the Muslim/Christian people of the region to assist his Division in its security duties. The 444th Turkoman and 444th Caucasian Battalion

circumvented the OKW order that Russian's were not to serve in the German Army. Major Andreas Meyer-Mader was appointed as commander of the 444th Turkoman Battalion.

The unit was little more than a unit of armed thugs, hell bent on murdering and terrorising innocent civilians suspected of assisting partisans and fit only for guarding Soviet prisoners of war.

Meyer-Mader an Austrian had served on the staff of Chiang Kai-Shek's Chinese Nationalist Army before WWII. He was though suitable to lead Turkoman troops because of his experience handling Chinese infantry during the Chinese civil war, (to the racist German Army many volunteers were small and Asiatic looking, resembling people from China).

When officers were sought to command the new Legion Battalion's, Mayer-Mader was considered a prime candidate for the job. He had the rare practical experience of dealing with non-German troops.

The 450th Turkestanisches Bn.

The 450th Battalion was raised at the town of Legionowo, 13miles east of Modlin in the *General Gouvernement fur die besetzten Polnischen Gebiete* or General Government military district, (HQ Cracow). It was the first Turkoman Battalion to finish training and it left Poland in the spring of 1942 with five companies of Infantry. The Battalion was authorised the following German personnel, 10 officer's, 52 NCO's and 31 other ranks. Authorised Turkoman personnel were 7 officers, 102 NCO's and 620 other ranks. It is unlikely that a full compliment of German personnel was attached to the Battalion due to the lack of suitable Germans with the right temperament for leading foreign troops?

The 'foot' Battalion served directly under the control of Army Group South. The Battalion provided security for the 6th Army, some sources report front line action for the Battalion, but the Battalion spent most of the summer patrolling the dangerously long and venerable communications/rail networks between Kharkov and Stalingrad.

Within weeks of his new assignment in the Don region Meyer-Mader's Battalion earned an unenviable reputation for brutality against both the partisans and the Ukrainian/Russian civilian populations. Indiscipline, rape, looting

and gratuitous sadism became so bad that Meyer-Mader was removed from command of the 450th Battalion during 1943. The Battalion was little more than a rabble and found unsuitable for front line use.

The Devil makes use of idle hands

At the end of 1943 Major Meyer-Mader was introduced to the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler the head of the Waffen SS, Hitler's praetorian guard. He had become interested in the recruitment of Eastern people for his growing SS Army, losses amongst German military formations could not be made up from westerners anymore and new sources of recruitment were needed.

Particularly interested in Muslims Himmler not only needed Muslim recruits, but men with the necessary experience to lead them. Himmler always had a talent for spotting scum bags such as Meyer-Mader and he was offered a commission in the Waffen SS and ordered to raise a Muslim Infantry Regiment. Given a free hand Meyer-Mader began his recruitment drive amongst the disgraced 450th Infantry Battalion, by offering higher pay, inducements such as German made weapons and SS uniforms and promotions he attracted the bulk of the 1/450th Bn to his new Regiment.

The dregs of the 450th Battalion transferred to the Waffen SS on the 18th of December 1943, you can only imagine the Army's relief to be relieved of this ungovernable rabble of troops?! SS Colonel Meyer-Mader toured POW camps, Army supply units and also recruited men from the 480th *Turkoman* Battalion and 1/94th battalion; soon he had recruited enough men to form the 94th SS Regiment from Turkoman volunteers.

The latest addition to the SS security apparatus was gathered at Poniatowa and Kaposvar, Himmler had grand ideas of forming a whole Division from the Turkic tribes, (*muselmanische* SS Division Neu Turkistan). Even the self styled 'grand mufti of Jerusalem' approved the formation of the unit, (was also known as the 1st *Ostmuselmanische* SS Regiment) during January 1944.

It was soon apparent to Himmler that the new SS troops needed serious training/re-training the whole unit was moved in to the General Government and trained at the Travniki camp, near Lublin (long established centre for

training non-German concentration camp and security personnel). The Regiment had enough volunteers to form nine companies of infantry with a total strength of 3,000 men. During this phase Himmler decided the unit would not fight as conventional infantry, but its 'talents' were best suited for anti-partisan warfare.

Interestingly volunteers who did not wish their families to know that had entered the SS could use a secret mailing service to keep in contact with them. Volunteers mail in a second envelope could be sent to either a secret PO box address in Vienna or Berlin, they would forward the mail back to the family or vice versa.

White Russia 1944

By September 1941 the Wehrmacht Army Group Centre, (part of the OstHeer) occupied Belarus. The region was divided in to four parts. One part was run by the Army, land given to E. Prussia and the Ukraine and Lithuania and the last part was ran by the East Ministry and a commissariat of Belarus. General Commissariat Belarus had a population of 3.1 million and was divided in to 10 sub-districts, Baranovichi, Borisov, Vileika, Gantsevichi, Glubokoe, Lida, Minsk, Novogrudok, and Slonim & Slutsk. The city of Minsk was run as a separate region.

By the spring of 1944 the whole region was overrun with Soviet partisans despite the numerous security, police and SS units in the region. The partisans were successfully disrupting communications between the General Government and the front line in preparation for the summer offensive. The Army, Police and SS security units decided to launch a number of large anti-partisan operations in the region to crush the of partisan menace, (the German's called the partisans bandits). Himmler as head of the SS security arm would provide more 'specialist' ant-partisan troops for the offensive, using terror the SS hoped to separate the peasants from the partisans, cutting off their food supply would starve the partisans out and keep the communications line open for the front line forces.

The Devils Shadow

After training was completed at Travniki the 94th SS Regiment was sent to Byelorussia to join the anti-partisan battle.

It was apparent to the SS, (via SD agent reports) that Meyer-Mader had too many

lazy, inefficient officers in his new command, his fighters were not trained or motivated for front line fighting, but Himmler felt the unit was perfect for destroying peasant settlements and farms, rounding up civilians for slave labour in Germany and destroying crops.

The task facing the German security forces in Belarus was enormous; some 150,000 Soviet partisans roamed the region, seriously affecting the smooth running of the rail and road network to the front line. As an example: the Lida to Minsk rail line was significantly attacked on 43 occasions during the previous June 1943 alone!

The 94th SS Regiment was placed under the tactical command of SS General Von Gottberg the senior police commander of White Russia, (Minsk) during March 1944. The Regiment installed its' self in the town of Yuratishki near Minsk, the unit received supplies from the SS supply depot at Bobruisk. For the up and coming anti-partisan operation '*Regenschauer*' Von Gottberg planned to place the untried Regiment under the tactical command of the infamous Waffen SS *Dirlewanger* Sonder Battalion, (a Battalion of German convicted prisoners and Eastern volunteers). *Dirlewanger* a notoriously cruel SS field commander was an expert at dealing with recalcitrant German/non-German soldiers.

The Devil had recruited a terrifying shadow, but one that would prove completely useless in the battle against the Partisans.

Operation Regenschauer

Operation *Regenschauer* began on the 11th of April 1944, An Army operation led by the 3rd Panzer Army, (Korueck 559). Von Gottberg's forces contained a list of infamous SS forces, the *Dirlewanger* Bn, *Kaminski* Brigade, *schuma* forces and the 94th SS Regiment. Split in to combat groups Von Gottberg's forces attempted to squeeze the Partisans in vice between them and front line Wehrmacht forces. The *Dirlewanger* unit and the Muslim SS Regiment formed part of *Group Anhalt*, (Anhalt would command a battlegroup in the 1945 battle for the German Capital).

Quickly it became apparent to SS General Von Gottberg that SS Colonel Meyer-Mader had little or no control over his forces. They went on an orgy of murder, arson, rape and property destruction, a horde of terrifying

proportions was visited on the people of Belarus. The battle against the partisan's was forgotten as the SS Muslims went on its murder and looting spree. Once again Mayer-Mader had failed to control his Regiment during its first month on active duty.

Quickly the Regiment was brought under some control by SS officers from the *Dirlewanger* Battalion and Von Gottberg's staff and no longer took part in the operation. Small combat patrol groups from the Regiment secured Yuratishki.

SS Major Meyer-Mader is recorded as being a member of the SS *Dirlewanger* Battalion on the 2nd of May 1944 when he was killed by partisans near the town of Hornowo-Wiercinski, (*Dirlewanger* field HQ). Interestingly he was the only German casualty recorded that day.

Hornowo-Wiercinski had been bitterly contested during the offensive, but on this date the area was reportedly clear of partisans. Some mystery surrounds Meyer-Mader's death; *Dirlewanger* was no stranger to the world of SS murky dealings during the war and would probably not have been adverse to executing a fellow SS officer if ordered to.

The end in Belarus

Whatever really happened to Meyer-Mader we will never know, but within his orphaned Regiment moral plummeted, it was no longer reliable and was virtually un-controllable, the Regiment did not participate in operation Komoron, (22nd May) due to it's unreliability.

On the April 1st a new commander took command of the unit: SS Captain Billig began his short tenure by organising a kangaroo court for those identified as being insubordinate. He saw to it that 78 members of the unit were executed for insubordination, (many were original volunteers in the 450th Battalion).

This was a draconian step even for the SS, which had an unusually high execution record within its Eastern foreign units. Billig himself was removed from command on the 6th of April 1944 as a consequence of the high number of executions. SS Captain Herman took over the Regiment on the 27th of April, holding the post until the first week of May 1944. Some records indicate he may have been killed in action near Grodno the following month?

Interestingly during this period British Intelligence was intercepting Enigma signals

from Von Gottberg's Head Quarters and were in no doubt that large numbers of Soviet citizens were being massacred in the region.

During May 1944 the SS Sonder Regiment *Dirlewanger* received a message from the Reich Plenipotentiary for Labour and Manpower Fritz Saukel informing the Regiment it would be reinforced with two to three thousand Muslim volunteers in six weeks time, Saukel may have been suggesting that the Regiment fully absorb the troublesome 94th SS Regiment already in the same district as a way to solve its chronic manpower problems?

It is possible highly likely the unit conducted anti-partisan operations with the *Dirlewanger* Regiment during this period? Probably setting up road blocks and patrolling highways/railway lines or throwing cordons around villages that were to be searched or eliminated. By the end of June 1944 the Regiment stood at a total strength of 4,000 men.

Retreat to Lida

On the 4th of July 1944 the ill-equipped *Battlegroup Von Gottberg* was thrown in to the path of the advancing Red Army along a line Smilovici – Smolevici – Logojsk east of Minsk. His bands of murderers were soon in action against the 26th and 83rd Guards rifle Divisions.

The *Dirlewanger* unit and the unhappy 94th SS Regiment now led by Obersturmführer Gulum Azimov, (former Red Army NCO) retreated westward to the small town of Lida. Here they occupied old WWI trenches (Interestingly a few weeks before, the notorious Kaminski Brigade had rested here before being entrained for Poland, Himmler may have intended the same escape for the 94th SS Regt.) until orders came for them to be transferred west??

Dirlewanger had no intentions of being caught up in the maelstrom wrecking havoc on Army Group Centre he too marched his unit to Lida, ensuring his medieval force of killers could escape west by rail if things got too hot for him, (the main rail line to Warsaw ran through Lida).

When Minsk fell on the 3rd of July the remnants of Von Gottberg's unit, chased by the Soviet 31st Army ignored Army orders to join the VIth Army Corp, (falling back on Vilnius) and went instead to Iyve a few Km NE of Lida via Ivenec, reaching the village on the 5th of

July.

He dug his meagre Police/Schuma forces on the eastern outskirts of Iyve, defending the important railway line, (The Red Army's front line troops were using the rail lines to guide them to the major towns and cities, in lieu of detailed maps).

Throughout the 6th of July the *Dirlewanger* unit remained dug in SE of Lida and waited for the Soviets or a train to arrive. Surprisingly it is recorded that the *Dirlewanger* unit, (along with elements of the Muslim regiment) launched a successful flank attack the leading elements 26th Tank Corp attacking *Von Gottberg* units, this prevented Von Gottberg's forces being overrun.

The Soviets quickly reacted to the assault and counter-attacked, on the 8th of July the 3rd Guards Cavalry Corp captured Lida despite German reinforcements arriving, (*Gruppe Florke* and *Gruppe Weidling*) to bolster the SS defence. Handing the town over to the 31st Army the 3rd Guards Cavalry Corp marched south; they just missed cutting the withdrawing Muslim regiment off from the rail line!

When Lida fell on the 8th of July 1944; the 3-4,000 strong Muslim SS Regiment withdrew with orders to defend Grodno. Again ignoring Army orders the Regiment retreated to Lyack 50Km from Lida, (50Km SE of Rastenburg, Hitler's headquarters). The III Battalion was sent to Truppenübungsplatz Neuhammer (nr Sagan) in Silesia. *Group Weidling* gave up fighting for Lida on the 9th of July, *Group Florke*, fighting continued fighting the 2nd Guards Tank Corp till the following day, then retreated west to Lithuania.

The Muslim Regiment had survived the devastating Soviet summer offensive, militarily the SS Muslim Regiment proved a complete disaster, proving unreliable even when bolstered with German troops. The Army always desperate for troops to plug the holes in it's front line still had no use for this cowardly unit, but Himmler still had plans for the devils shadow.

Expansion plans

Himmler had not given up his dream of a second SS Muslim division and once the 94th Regiment reached E. Prussia he ordered it to re-form. SS Major Liebermann took up command of the 94th SS Regiment on the 29th of July, (until August

1944). Liebermann is recorded as having left the Regiment for a short period during July 1944 though no explanation has been found for his absence?

As the new head of the Army reserve Army Himmler fully realised the contribution eastern volunteers were making to the war effort and decided it was now politically safe to enlarge the Muslim regiment using Army units retreating from the Eastern Front.

During July 1944 the SS High Command formed a department to handle the influx of eastern volunteers, Amt III (Freiwilligen Leitstelle Ost) under Dr Fritz Arlt in Berlin would oversee the recruitment, vetting and training of new eastern units.

Warsaw 1944

During the Polish Home Army's Uprising in Warsaw in August 1944 elements of the 94th SS Regiment were attached to the Dirlewanger SS Regiment in Lyack, E. Prussia under the command of SS Captain Rainer Olzscha. Olzscha commanded the Muslim Regiment until the 20th of October 1944.

Its not known where the Regiment first and second Battalions fought during the battle for the Polish capital city, it is known that some members of the Regiment were decorated with the Iron Cross for their contribution to the battle. It's a possibly that the unit was used to man roadblocks in to and out of Warsaw during the battle, if not directly involved in the brutal suppression of the uprising? The 3rd Battalion is not believed to have participated in the battle?

During the terrible battle for the city the Azerbaidjani's volunteers from the I./111 Battalion, (Hptm Werner Scharrenberg) and the II Btl. 'Bergmann' (Lt Mertelsmann) were subordinated to the *SS Dirlewanger Battlegroup*, (this was subdivided in to sub-battle groups such as *KG Meyer*). These Caucasian volunteers would later join the *SS Ostturkischer Waffen Verband* in Slovakia later in the year.

The Amt III organised the transfer of the Regiment to Slovakia during October 1944 with the Dirlewanger Regiment/Brigade to assist in the 'suppression' of the Slovak uprising.

1944 Slovakian Uprising

The Slovakian revolt began on the 27th of August 1944 sparked by the arrival of the Red Army on its eastern borders and the reversal of

German fortunes elsewhere. SS General Gottlob Berger the commander of the SS-Hauptamt was made Wehrmacht commander of Slovakia on the 1st of September 1944. He held the command until the 7th of September when SS General H. Hoefle the high police commander for Slovakia replaced him. The SS was given the job to suppress the revolt; they had the necessary experience and the terror forces to defeat the Slovak partisans.

The 94th SS Regiment was transferred to Slovakia in order to re-form and assist the *SS Dirlewanger Brigade* put down the Slovak uprising. Amt III realising that there would never be enough volunteers to form a Divisional sized unit decided to re-organise the Regiment instead. The *Dirlewanger Brigade* arrived in Diviaky on the 16th of October and fought in the Ostro mountain region. Its highly likely the 94th SS Regiment followed the Dirlewanger Brigade in to the same area and provided security for them? The Sonder Regiment was operating in the area Necpaly – Biely/Potok around the 25th of October 1944. The fighting was hard and difficult; atrocities were commonplace despite complaints from the Army.

Again a new commander was found for the Muslim unit, a Muslim convert SS Colonel Harun el Raschid Bey Hintersatz was appointed commander on the 20th of October 1944. He had been a Colonel on the Turkish General staff and a liaison officer between the Reichsfuhrer SS and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. The unit was immediately purged of its most unruly elements renamed as the *SS Ostturkischer Waffen Verbände*. It was composed of two Turkistani Battalions, the Idel-Ural Waffengruppe and the Tartar Waffengruppe. Each group contained two battalions with five companies each. By November total strength reached 5,000 men. At the end of the month the Sonder Regiment was positioned SW of Trencin, (SE of Bratislava) the *SS Ostturkischer* was certainly not with Dirlewanger at this time.

The Bergmann Azerbaidjani Battalion attached to the Dirlewanger Regiment since the battle for Warsaw was attached to the *Ostturkischer* for a short period during this time. It was known as *Waffengruppe Azerbaidjani*. This unit had been mauled by the Polish Home Army fighters the previous month and had exacted a terrible revenge on the citizens of Warsaw; no doubt it behaved the same way in Slovakia?

During the fighting in Slovakia a second eastern unit was attached to the *Dirlewanger Brigade* for a short while, the *Waffen Gebirgs Brigade der SS (Tartar nr1)* with just over 3,000 men. The unit supported the *Dirlewanger Brigade* during its operations around Ruzomberok and Bojnica – Novaky most notably fighting the ‘*Vtacnik*’ Battalion.

Himmler had famously become the head of the Army’s reserve Army after the abortive coup the previous summer, since then he began a fast paced process to re-organise eastern units and place them under *Waffen SS* command. Much of the *Waffen SS* training camps and supply depots were based in Bohemia, this was natural region for the training and raising of new *SS* units now that the General Government was in the front line.

During December 1944 the *Ostturkischer* unit tired of the upheavals and uncertainty suffered a large-scale desertion. A rumour, (probably started by Slovak partisans or Soviet propaganda specialists) that the unit would transfer to the *Vlassov* Russian Liberation Army went around the unit, (frightened of some real fighting we may speculate)? On the 24th of December 1944 450 men deserted to the Slovak partisans, eventually 300 deserters returned.

The desertion may have been led by the previously loyal *Obersturmführer* Gulum Azimov, an iron cross winner, he had become disillusioned with the *SS* and the appointment of German officers to lead the unit? Certainly he was executed by the Partisans when the *SS* deserters crossed over.

1945

In January 1945 re-organising again in Pressburg, the *Ostturkischer* unit received an anti-tank gun company and an infantry gun company. A new commander took command of the unit too, *SS* Captain Furst took over command from *SS* Colonel Hintersatz now that training and reorganisation was complete. The *Azerbaidjani* *Waffengruppe* left the *Ostturkischer* unit for the forming *Kaukasischer* *Waffenverband* der *SS*, (formed from N. Caucasians, Georgians, Armenians and *Azerbaidjani*’s). In its place joined the *Tartar* *Waffengruppe* formed from Crimean volunteers. An armband and collar insignia was designed for the unit, but it is assumed they were never issued to the troops?

Unlike the *Dirlewanger* Brigade and it’s army of ex-prisoners the men of the *Ostturkischer Waffen Verbände* would not fight the Red Army in Hungary, Himmler decided to send his eastern units south to the Balkans, their ‘talents’ in the fight against partisans were in demand. As regular German units rushed East to shore up the crumbling front, units like the *SS* Muslims would have to guard the rail and road networks carrying vital war supplies.

The end in Italy 1945

The *Ostturkischer Waffenverband* der *SS* was marched south to Slovenia, the Titoist and Red Army were advancing westward and the Southern Alps were threatened with invasion. The unit was placed under the command of the high police authority, (HSSPF) *Adriatic* in March 1945. A reserve/training Battalion was formed in Neuhammer training camp during March. As a reserve unit for the *Ostturkischer Waffenverband*, its orders were to train recruits for the main unit. The name of the unit was the *Turkistanische Ersatz Abteilungen*.

The Balkan region had long been a partisan battlefield. It’s savagery surpassed that seen on the Eastern Front, the *Ostturkischer* killer unit was let loose in another round of barbaric lunacy.

In April the unit stationed itself in Lombardy, Italy. Its strength was again around 4,000 men. The 1,200 strong *Waffengruppe* *Turkistan* was sent to Carpi, Modena. The region was full of retreating German soldiers, deserters, partisans, fascists and a motley collection of refugees and a flotsam of eastern units. Desperate to keep the supply lines to the disintegrating front line the *Ostturkischer* were expected to bring order in a rapidly disintegrating world using every brutal method at their disposal.

Himmler again raised the idea of forming an *SS* Turkoman Division, from the many disparate Muslim units ‘milling’ around northern Italy. Only the rapidly worsening situation and lack of willing volunteers prevented him doing so. Finally he concluded that by stationing the unit and other Eastern units in Italy he hoped that come the end of the war the *Ostturkischer* would escape the vengeful Soviets, surrendering to the Western Allies and escape punishment for their crimes?

Finally the unit disintegrated in the

dying days of WWII. By the second of May 1945 the unit had surrendered in Col Di Nesse Italy, some 150 men were executed by the vengeful partisans. It is assumed that most survivors were handed back to the Soviet Union along with many of the Eastern volunteers in the German Army. Many faced execution as collaborators or more likely imprisonment in the Soviet concentration camp system. The fate of the reserve unit in Neuhammer is unknown, possibly it's members surrendered to the western Allies and were handed back to the Soviets after the war?

Conclusions

The task facing the German Army during its invasion of the USSR in 1941 was enormous. It had to defeat a field Army, secure its long communications networks and carry out its evil ethnic cleansing policies.

Exploiting the long-standing hatreds between the many minorities in the USSR they recruited Muslims in a cynical move to bring Turkey in to the war on the Axis side and to frighten the Russian people in to accepting German occupation. Many Muslims used the German invasion as an opportunity to take revenge on the Russian overlords after years of repression and religious intolerance. Ultimately the Turkistani security units proved counter-productive, the unnecessary, cruel random violence only turned ordinary Ukrainian's and Russian's against the German occupation, they eventually longed for the protection of the Red Army. Proving that terrorising civilians is not the way to defeat partisan units!

The Waffen SS recruited Muslim troops late in the war; the Bosnian Division proved that with the right training, Moslem soldiers could be brave, capable soldiers. The Ostturkischer Waffenverband der SS was never intended to be a front line unit, it was a terror weapon, formed to install fear among the Russian peasants, a new Mongol horde, a scourge to punish those who supported the partisans.

Under the tutelage of the *Dirlewanger* unit the *Ostturkischer* developed in to one of the most infamous murder units of WWII. In military terms the Devils shadow received much valuable training and equipment was lavished on them and they gave very little back in return.

Uniform Notes

The men of the 450th Battalion wore the M36, M40 or Tropical tunic and trousers with the full field webbing, (including gott mit uns belt buckle) found on German infantry during this period. Cossack style headgear was also worn, (recently the author has seen a photo of an SS colonel wearing a Kubanka Cap, maybe SS Col Hintersatz)?

Weapons were German made, usually the K98k rifle or MP40 machine pistol.

Many different armshields were designed for the Turkic volunteers; they were worn on the top right hand tunic sleeve. Eastern Legion rank insignia was worn on the collar and shoulder straps. Cap cockade was blue with red in middle, usually worn on M38 or M43 caps. It is possible a red over blue transfer was applied to steel helmets?

Three armshields were designed, the first was oval, 100mm x 68mm with a white mosque, (blue and white dome). Black frame, Turkistan written on base, Biz Alla Bilen written on top.

The second arm badge was a shield design and issued in 1943. It has a white bow and arrow on a red, (top) and blue, (bottom) background, black frame and on top written in light blue the words Turkistan.

The last shield design issued in 1944 was oval in shape with a light blue border 80mm x 60mm. A Mosque with minarets, Turkistan written in light blue along bottom and Tanri biz menen! All were either machine woven or printed. Arms of service colour authorised was light blue on the shoulder straps.

A unit flag was also issued, white bow and arrow on red over blue background, upper left hand quarter was a Nazi eagle in a shield. This Nazi insignia was later removed

When the unit transferred to the Waffen SS it must be assumed that the men continued to wear the uniforms worn in the Army until they wore out and were exchanged for SS field Grey uniform. SS runes were not worn on the collar, arms of service colour was white for infantry.

Non-German officers may have worn SS field caps with a death's head insignia? By the time the unit was worked up in Slovakia the men may have been wearing SS rank patches on their collar; SS runes would not have been worn. The much-publicised Lime-green unit armband with silver lettering was on balance probably not issued. A unit insignia with a white wolf head

on black background for the right hand collar was designed, but also unlikely to have been issued, unless an unauthorised version was being made locally and worn on an ad-hoc basis? Dirlewanger himself was not averse to kitting his Eastern volunteers in SS uniform once they had proved themselves in battle; it is possible that under his command that some examples of the wolf's head insignia were worn by the Turkoman once they had been in 'action'?

Shortages would certainly mean ex-Red Army POW's retaining favoured pieces of uniform or practical pieces of equipment. Familiarity with Soviet weapons and large stocks of captured weapons would mean a sizeable number of the riflemen would wear Red Army boots and head gear.

Appendix 1

I thought it worth adding some supporting material on one of the units mentioned in the article here, the Waffen Gebirgsjager Brigade der SS (Tartar nr 1) joined the Ostturkischer Waffen Verbände der SS in December 1944, forming its own separate national group within the unit.

During the fighting in Slovakia, (under the tactical command of the SS *Dirlewanger* Brigade) the unit was also known as the '*Edelweiss*' Brigade. A more unsuitable name could not be more inappropriate for a unit of cutthroats and bandits!

The unit was formed during June 1944 from Tartar volunteers from the Crimean region. A Regiment of mountain troops was envisioned from the stream of retreating refugees flooding in to Hungary. Despite objections from the Army and police the first 200 recruits were shanghaied from a police unit and a Crimean Schuma Battalion, (police auxiliaries). SS Colonel Fortenbacher commanded the unit.

Recruitment and training was begun in Moorlager training facility. The German High Command in Berlin opposed the formation of the Regiment and bitterly obstructed its formation in every way possible.

Training was completed in September 1944 and the unit had a final strength of 3,518 men. Straight away the unit was sent in to anti-partisan sweeps, earning a terrible reputation for brutality. The unit was also known as SS

Volkdeutschen partisanen Einheit 'Edelweiss' during its short but violent time in Slovakia.

Early December 1944 the unit was disbanded, many men were transferred to the Ostturkischer Waffen Verbände der SS by February 1945. Volunteers rejected by the *Ostturkischer* formed the basis of the SS Waffengruppe *Krim*, (Crimea).

The SS recruited the Tartars from the Crimea believing them to be descendants of Batu Khan's Mongol army of the 13th Century. It is now believed that the Tartars are descended from the Ostrogoths, Potonic Greek, Armenian and Kipchak Turks. It is estimated that some 20,000 Tartars fought alongside Nazi Germany, many hoped to gain freedom for their homeland.

During 1944 the entire Tartar population was exiled to East Uzbekistan as punishment for its collaboration with the German's. Tartars in the Waffen SS captured by the Soviets after the war were often executed or sent to the dreaded Gulag system.

Appendix 2

The 94th SS Regiment was sent to Travniki training camp to prepare for its anti-partisan operations in Belarus. This camp was originally created in the autumn of 1941 to train non-German concentration camp guards. Commanded by SS Major Karl Streibel the camp spent the next two and a half years training non-German SS volunteers, (Balt's and Ukrainians) for concentration/death camp duties. Up to 3,000 camp guards passed through the camp, receiving a basic six weeks military training and later training to guard victims of the death apparatus. The training camp was later expanded to include a concentration/work camp for Jews and was again later enlarged to include slave factories for the Osti, (Ostindustrie GmbH) or Eastern Industry Company. Following the Sobibor death camp uprising in the second week of October 1943 the camps 10,000 inmates were executed by the Travniki guards or transferred to other labour camps.

The Travniki camp continued to train camp guards from eastern volunteers until overrun by the Red Army in 1944. Personnel from the camp were used to guard camps in the General Government. The 94th SS Regiment entered the camp during January 1944 until March 1944, the facilities could in theory

support the creation of a Divisional sized unit, but it's German training cadre did not have the front line training or experience to do so. The 94th SS Regiment was trained at Trawniki to become a murder unit; we can safely speculate that the Muslim Regiment was never intended to be used as a front line unit?

Before the Red Army overran the camp SS major Striebel formed an emergency rifle Battalion from the camp staff, guards and trainees and retreated westward to Germany. Scum always floats to the top.....

Table-top scenario

The units described in this article were murder squads, they were formed to terrorise civilians in rural district in western Russia and to fight without the rules of war against the Partisans attacking German communications.

It is safe to say that the 450th or Ostturkischer unit went into action against partisans and also committed war crimes against unarmed civilians, often murdering their captured partisans. Any tabletop game is going to have to be sensitive to these issues, but a scenario does give us the opportunity to recreate some of the less understood battle of the Eastern Front and Balkan Front and publicise the fighting ability of the famed partisan.

German Mission

You command a Turkistani SS Battalion with five companies of infantry stationed in a town near Modena NE Italy during April 1945. Italian Partisans have captured an important railway bridge and are blocking the retreat of German refugees attempting to escape the Allied advance northward.

You Battalion must re-take the bridge within 15 moves to win the battle!

Partisan Mission

The war is almost over, your victorious veteran Partisan Battalion now swollen with Johnny come lately's has captured an important railway bridge in Northern Italy. You have done so on the orders of the SOE! The Allied army is no more than days drive away and will be with you soon. You have only to hold the bridge for 15 moves to win the battle.

Special rules

Both commanders must Dice 6 on every turn,

the German commander gets 1-3 Unit OK to attack 4-5 = unit stops to plunder, no offensive action. 6 = Unit deserts for two turns.

The Italian commander gets 1-3 Unit OK to attack/defend 4-5 unit stops offensive action 6 = unit runs away!

Normal morale tests apply when needed. This tabletop battle was designed for use with 20mm figures and Rapid-Fire rules, but other rule sets will do as well.



Figure Scale

Go for a scale of 15:1, unless you plan to scale down the action, company size only and use a scale of 1:1?

Figure Availability

The scenario was designed with the ever-popular 20mm scale in mind; I chose this scale because of the high level of detailed painting that can be added to the figures. Smaller scales will struggle to fully recreate the necessary detail to distinguish the SS Moslems from ordinary German infantry.

Specially designed 20mm scale Italian partisans are available from C-P Models, they also provide a set of armed clergy if you want create a catholic Battalion!

Battlefield Miniatures have a small but useful collection of 20mm scale Eastern volunteer infantry/Kaminski troops; try to avoid using infantry with Red Army equipment though.

You want German infantry that look irregular, with Cossack headgear if possible, but not front line troops at all!

Biography

Foreign Legions of the Third Reich – Littlejohn
Anti-faschisten in ss-uniform – H. Klausch

Foreign Volunteers of the Wehrmacht – C. Jurado
German security & Police soldier 1939-45 – G.
Williamson