

How to Lose a Guerrilla War:

Lessons Learned From German Anti-Partisan Tactics & Policies in White Russia
May Help the U.S. Army and its Current Problems in Iraq

By Antonio J. Muñoz,
U.S.M.C., Retired.

Introduction

Whether you are a die-hard conservative, out and out liberal or just lie somewhere between these two widely separate political ideologies, we must all agree that the current military situation facing the American Army in Iraq does not look good. The hardest thing for a regular military force to do is to defeat a guerrilla movement. The reasons for this are quite simple, although they may not appear to be clearly understood. First is the philosophy which teaches the guerrilla fighter that in order for his side to win, all he needs to do is to continue the struggle and survive to fight another day.

This is exactly correct. The guerrilla war is not over until the occupying army destroys the guerrillas but ironically, a military solution will never end a guerrilla struggle. The reason is that you can simply continue to kill guerrilla fighters, whose ranks can be replaced with more recruits, but you cannot kill the idea which spurs the local population to take up arms against the occupation army. Bullets cannot kill the drive which spurs the growth of a partisan movement. The only thing that can kill an idea is another idea, and one geared specifically to benefit the local population to the point that to the average citizen, taking up arms against the occupying power is no longer worth the trouble or no longer beneficial as opposed to either remaining neutral in the conflict and / or actually collaborating with the foreign force.

In Iraq today, the guerrilla movement is selectively targeting for elimination not only the occupation force's army, but all foreign and domestic military and civilian collaborator forces and agencies. This is a very effective tactic which has been copied from guerrilla forces throughout history. The guerrilla is a dangerous adversary because of the very nature of partisan warfare, where there are no real front lines and the next local civilian walking down the road could have a grenade or gun. This irregular warfare lends itself to not only exhausting and stretching out the occupation army's supply lines and communications networks, but also works to slowly demoralize the army it is attacking by working psychologically on the fears of the soldiers who now have to worry not only about their front lines, but also their left and right flanks and their rear. This is especially so when an army is occupying a region of enemy territory with insufficient forces. This seems to be the case in Iraq today, in spite of the repeated cries to the opposite by the current White House administration.

Understanding What Must Be Done

At the end of the Second World War, the U.S. Army set about to systematically interview and extract information from members of the German Armed Forces as well as from the industrial, judicial, and Nazi political systems. This was done with the thought of learning from the mistakes, errors, and lost opportunities of both the enemy and our armed forces. One subject matter which received a good amount of study was the German guerrilla and anti-guerrilla campaign in the USSR. This was an especially important subject matter, especially at the start of the 1950's given the numerous and diverse communist guerrilla movements which suddenly began to spring up all over the globe. However, the manner in which the U.S. Army fought these partisan campaigns did not prove to be completely successful and Vietnam in particular has shown us how exceedingly difficult it can be. Given the very nature of the difficulties involved in fighting a guerrilla war then, one would stand to reason that before a guerrilla war is fought, the occupying army must have a clear and precise plan of action which not only deals with the military dangers of guerrilla warfare, but also address a political and economic solution that will neutralize if not altogether destroy the *idea or ideas* which drive a guerrilla movement.

It would be exceptionally stupid for an occupying army's policies for example, both military and political, to make it easier for the guerrillas to operate and recruit potential volunteers from the local populace. This is not just a military problem, but rather the occupation government must also look at the current social and economic conditions of the enemy populace, and detect or discover what desires, political, economic, social, or otherwise the indigenous people want and then set out to supply them with these "wants", however difficult they may be. It is not an easy task, nor is it one that can most likely be resolved in a short amount of time. Remember that the guerrilla wins if he can simply survive, while the occupation force loses by not being able to destroy the movement completely. The 1968 Tet offensive virtually wiped out the Viet Cong, and from then on, most of the heavy fighting was done by the North Vietnamese Army. Yet in spite of this apparent defeat in the field, the guerrillas won the political and psychological battle when American public opinion, spurred on by Walter Cronkite's famous "*the war can no longer be won*" commentary, decided it was time to pull out of South Vietnam and the majority of Americans no longer supported a military solution.

Any regular army that is performing occupation duty must be prepared to stay for years if necessary, in order for the non-military incentives which hopefully are put in place, can take time to catch on with the local population and finally grow. These "counter-ideas" if you will, can eventually destroy a guerrilla movement by killing the idea for its growth in the first place. Eliminate the driving force which makes men take up arms, and you eradicate the movement. Granted, there will always be diehards who will wish to fight the occupation army to the end, but those fanatical members are always not as plentiful as the common man on the street. The common individual is most often a reasonable human being than a fanatical adherent who may be willing to sacrifice his life for a cause, even if the cause seems lost. The average man on the street will submit to an occupier if the manner and form of that particular occupation is at least acceptable if not completely to his liking. That is the key to separating the guerrillas from a virtually limitless supply of recruits. Another key is to saturate the countryside with such an overwhelming force that it makes the guerrilla strikes more costly and dangerous. Remember that the partisan fighters always like to strike the occupation army at their weakest points. If you do not give the guerrillas many of these "weak" points, they are forced to attack more militarily dangerous targets and thus are more open to attack and destruction.

The German Occupation of White Russia: Some Lessons Learned

During the Second World War, the German *Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces) engaged about 60% of its entire field strength on the Russian front. Daily losses in the USSR were always greater than in all the other theaters of war put together. A good portion of these losses suffered were not caused by the Red Army, but rather by the Soviet partisan forces behind the German lines. Not only were German soldiers killed, but all sorts of weapons and military equipment, rolling stock and warehouses with provisions, communications equipment and lines were also destroyed and collaborator forces were virtually neutralized by terror. The manner, in which the German forces of the interior as the rear area troops were referred to, fought the guerrilla war, is a case in point of how not to conduct an anti-partisan war. German tactics and policies all worked together to insure that the Soviet partisan movement would not only continue, but would grow. What were those policies and directives? In this article I shall use but a few examples of actual German anti-partisan drives in order to explain these insane and counter-productive policies.

A Policy of Murder is Infectious

The Nazi war against the Jews was particularly gruesome and fearsome in the Soviet Union. Not simply because any genocidal war is wrong and reprehensible, but the manner in which it was conducted was so heinous, that it defies almost any description and comprehension. At its lowest base was the wanton destruction of human life from which many involved in the murders extracted *Freudebosheits* (the joy of malice). A perfect example were the actions of Reserve Police Battalion 11 which entered Slutsk in October 1941:¹

“The 1st Lieutenant explained that the [11th Reserve Order Police Battalion]² Police Battalion had received the assignment to effect the liquidation of all Jews here in the town of Slutsk, within two days...Then I requested him to postpone the action one day. However, he rejected this with the remark that he had to carry out this action everywhere and in all towns and that only two days were allotted for Slutsk. Within these two days the town of Slutsk had to be cleared of Jews by all means...All Jews without exceptions were taken out the factories and shops and deported in spite of our agreement. It is true that part of the Jews was moved by way of the ghetto, where many of them were processed and still segregated by me, but a large part was loaded directly on trucks and liquidated without further delay outside of the town...For the rest, as regards the execution of the action, I must point out my deepest regret that the latter bordered already on sadism. The town itself offered a picture of horror during the action.

With indescribable brutality on the part of the German police officers and particularly the Lithuanian partisans,³ the Jewish people, but also among them White Ruthenians, were taken out of their dwellings and herded together. Everywhere in the town shots were to be heard and in different streets the corpses of shot Jews accumulated. The White Ruthenians were in greatest distress to free them from the encirclement. Regardless of the fact that the Jewish people, among whom were also tradesmen, were mistreated in a terribly barbarous way in the face of the White Ruthenian people, the White Ruthenians themselves were also worked over with rubber clubs and rifle butts. There was no question of an action against the Jews and any more. It rather looked like a revolution.”(1104-PS.)

¹ Muñoz, Antonio. *Hitler's White Russians: Collaboration, Extermination, and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Byelorussia, 1941-1944*. Europa Books: Bayside, 2003, pages 148-149.

² Westermann, Edward. “Himmler's Uniformed Police on the Eastern Front: The Reich's Secret Soldiers, 1941 – 1942. In *WAR IN HISTORY* Magazine: Hertfordshire, Volume 3, Number 3, July 1996. Page 321.

³ The town commissioner obviously was referring to the Lithuanian police auxiliaries.

The Nazi Party had nearly nine years in which to instill their anti-Semitic ideas on the German nation. This was also the case regarding the rest of the so-called *untermensche* (sub-humans), chief among them which were the Slavic peoples of the Eastern Europe and most especially those living in various parts of the Soviet Union. By making the Jews, and Eastern peoples and races seem less human, the Nazi hierarchy was making it easier for the average German to view the deaths of these people as not actually killing humans at all, but less than humans. It did not take long before even the common Russian was being destroyed mercilessly by the German invader:⁴

We entered the village (I believe in the Smolensk region) at mid-day and called for the mayor. The SS officer treated this man abysmally, even though he seemed to be a friend. He was ordered to gather all the people in the square, even the babies, and to take steps to round in all those who might be working in the fields. Guards were posted. By 14:00, all were assembled. The SS men had meanwhile filled in their time by walking around the village and doing precisely as they pleased. There was at least one rape, and nothing was done about it. To the assembled people, the SS officer, through me, told them that their area was bandit infested, that they must have collaborated with those bandits, and that disciplinary action would be taken against them.

There were twenty-three men in the square. Half of them were separated, irrespective of age and health, and taken down a side alley. The SS men seemed to know exactly what to do. Without one word of an order from the officer, automatic fire began, and then the SS men returned, without the peasants. The women became hysterical and had to be beaten into submission. Then the huts were set on fire, and all food that was found was destroyed. As the flames began to engulf the final row of huts, a man who had obviously been hiding ran out, his clothing partially alight. The SS men clearly expecting something of the sort shot him dead before he had taken five paces.

This was the signal for further brutality. The SS officer rounded the mayor, telling him that he was not merely a [partisan] collaborator, but a full bandit. He was therefore, to die like a bandit. First, he would admit where the bandit camp was. The mayor refused, quite probably because he did not know. The SS officer then had one of the young girls brought before them, and told the SS-Scharführer to 'perform.' I find the following incident impossible to recount. The result was that the girl, stripped naked, had one of her breasts cut off. The mayor still refused to talk. The girl was then shot in front of him, and the SS officer fired a few indiscriminate rounds into the group of women, felling two or three. The final refusal to provide information caused the execution of the mayor by slow strangulation and the death by shooting of the rest of the inhabitants. The SS men left, leaving some 70 dead peasants of all ages behind them. I cannot believe that this is either humane or sensible; Action to stop this must be taken.

Collective Guilt: A Failed Policy

Another counter-productive policy which the Germans used in fighting partisans in Europe and the USSR was the tactic of *Kollektive Gewaltmassnahmen* (collective punishment) and of summary executions of innocent civilians in retribution for the actions of the guerrillas. If ever there was a recruiting poster for guerrillas, this insane policy fit the bill perfectly. In fact, it was so successful that Soviet partisan forces would often times capture and mutilate some German soldiers, then position them in a grotesque manner in order to derive just exactly the kind of angry and bestial reaction that would bring about a German execution of the local populace. A few days later the local guerrilla unit would swell with recruits – often times these men were not

⁴ Cooper, Matthew. *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans, 1941-1944*. Stein & Day, Inc.: New York, 1979. Pages 82-83.

true communist believers but simply peasants too afraid to stay in their villages anymore for fear of being killed in a reprisal shooting.

Scorched Earth and the Raping of the Land's Resources

Three other policies which the Germans put in place in the Soviet Union was 1) the cultivation and collection of all food crops for the benefit of the German nation without any regard to the needs of the local inhabitants, 2) the compulsory conscription of an unwilling populace for forced labor in the Reich, and 3) the laying to waste by a scorched earth policy of vast tracks of territories in order to deny the guerrillas a base of support, food, and manpower. In the zones of the interior, particularly the areas where German civil administration ruled, Hitler had given overall command and responsibility for fighting the partisans to the SS.⁵ In the case of the SS, General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski was thus in overall control of SS and police forces fighting the Russian partisans. In that month, Erich von dem Bach had suggested to *Reichsführer*-SS Heinrich Himmler that he be appointed in overall command of all anti-partisan warfare in the East. Himmler sat on this until a meeting held in Russia on October 23rd 1942 when he finally agreed to appoint von dem Bach-Zelewski Plenipotentiary for Anti-Partisan Warfare in the East.⁶

SS General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski had a full year and a half to ascertain the effectiveness of various passive and active defenses against the guerrillas. In his opinion, the series of strong-points had met with limited success, but only if applied in conjunction with active patrols. No active patrolling had meant that these strong-points were basically useless and at the mercy of the guerrillas who could attack them at their leisure. Small scale operations had brought limited success, basically because the forces had either been too small to defeat the guerrilla band(s) and also because the partisans could easily escape the encirclement. Large-scale anti-partisan drives had proven to be the most effective, although the difficulty of trapping and destroying large guerrilla groups had proven great, it nevertheless seemed to von dem Bach to be the best system of dealing with the growing guerrilla threat. However, he realized that large-scale operations alone were not sufficient a detriment. Instead, he felt that the German command should continue with the series of strong-points and active patrolling – basically because of the vastness of the areas to be covered which by the beginning of 1943 was impossible for German and Axis forces to cover fully.

The number of anti-partisan troops which he had at his disposal in the beginning of 1943 had increased but the number of guerrillas and areas under partisan control had equally grown in size and number. His strategy for 1943 therefore, was to continue to mount large-scale operations on a continuous basis. The key phrase here was “continuous,” since experience had shown that the only way to keep a region free of partisan units and influence was to perform unrelenting, active large-scale operations.⁷ With this in mind another of Adolf Hitler's top lieutenants, *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring who was not only head of the German Air Force and Chief of the Prussian Police, but head of the German Four-Year Plan increased the Russian peasant's suffering by suggesting further draconian methods. At the Food Production Conference, Göring

⁵ Dallin, Alexander. *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945*. MacMillan & Co. Ltd.: London, 1957, page 210.

⁶ Reitlinger, Gerald. *The House Built on Sand. The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945*. The Viking Press: New York, page 237.

⁷ Heer, Hannes, and Klaus Naumann, editors. *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II 1941-1944*. Berghahn Books: New York, 2000, page 113.

had demanded a greater increase in food production from the East, to which Heinrich Lohse, the *Reichskommissar* for the Baltic States (who was also in attendance), retorted that the guerrillas were earmarking food cultivation and production for destruction.

Göring's reply was to suggest that all cattle and food stores captured from "pacified" regions- that is those regions where anti-guerrilla operations were performed, should be taken from the Russian civilian population. Additionally, he also requested that the civilian population be evacuated from these regions in order to deny the partisans of a base of support and to use the adult population as slave labor in the *Reich*. It did not matter to him what Lohse would do with the children and elder adult population that would remain, but this basically meant that in order to avoid having to move and take care of them, police and SS units in practice would eliminate them on the spot.⁸ This practice of eliminating the civilian population and sending some of the more physically fit people to work in Germany fit perfectly into the Nazi philosophy of *Kollektive Gewaltmassnahmen* (collective punishment) which had been implemented since the beginning of the Russian campaign and reinforced by decrees and orders from various high ranking Nazi leaders and officers, including Hitler, Jödl, Keitel and others. Erich von dem Bach did not believe that this practice of razing entire regions would prove particularly effective, nevertheless the actions of the SS and police forces under his command showed that this custom not only continued into 1943-44, but actually increased. It was clear to him however as early as the fall of 1942 that German forces needed to be reorganized in order to maximize effectiveness and to have sufficient forces at the ready to launch this ambitious plan of continued anti-guerrilla drives on a large scale.⁹

Death to All Collaborators!

Losses in Byelorussian collaborators began to increase in the spring of 1942 as well. This was due to a concerted effort on the part of the Soviet partisan movement to dissuade further collaboration on the part of the Byelorussian population with the Germans. For example, in 1942 the *Belsky* and *Pancencko* Partisan Brigades earmarked six village residents – all appointed by the Germans between the towns of Novogrodek and Novayelna, for assassination.¹⁰ In many instances, the entire family of the collaborator was earmarked for elimination. A local farmer by the name of Abell Kewitz, had been appointed as a captain in the White Russian KBS in 1942. He was head of the local guard unit located in the Novogrodek region. He and his entire family were earmarked for death: "*Orders were given forthwith that the guard captain's entire family be killed.*" Afterwards the partisans set fire to the farm which read: "*This family was destroyed for collaborating with Germans and for apprehending Jews.*"¹¹ Major attacks against local and isolated German and collaborationist guard posts also showed the very brutal nature of the growing guerrilla war, where no quarter was asked nor given. In July 1942 some 200 partisans attacked an isolated, combined garrison of German and Byelorussian policemen in Rubzhewicz. The guerrillas captured some 40 policemen who surrendered after the battle. The partisans shot them all in the market square.¹²

⁸ Eckman, Lester and Chaim Lazar. *The Jewish Resistance: The History of the Jewish Partisans in Lithuania and White Russia during the Nazi Occupation 1940-1945*. Shengold Publishers, Inc.: New York, 1977, page 237.

⁹ Muñoz, op cit, pages 189-190.

¹⁰ Ibid, page 104.

¹¹ Ibid, page 110.

¹² Cholowsky, Shalom. *The Jews of Byelorussia during World War II*. Harwood Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, 1998, page 247.

Many times, intended attacks by the guerrillas, especially the Jewish partisans, were planned in retaliation to massacres carried out by the Germans. For example, when hundreds of Jews at the Dereczyn Ghetto were murdered on July 24th 1942, the local Jewish partisan company, led by Dr. Yehezkel decided to attack the local Axis garrison at Kozłowszczyzna. They planned the attack in conjunction with the local, non-Jewish partisan battalion. Employing a few artillery pieces from the partisan battalion, the combined guerrilla force stormed the police headquarters in the town, killing the garrison on August 10th 1942.¹³ Shortly thereafter this same partisan group attacked an isolated German post in the village of Rodah-Orskah, capturing additional arms and killing the Germans and Byelorussian volunteers there. On August 2nd another partisan unit, named "Group 51" and in conjunction with other local *Otriads*, attacked the German garrison at Kosow, in the Slonim region. In this battle a total of 150 Germans and Byelorussians were killed and the guerrillas were able to free 300 of the remaining 500 Jews which were being kept in the town.¹⁴

The region of Slonim saw an increase in guerrilla activity in the summer of 1942. About 500 non-Jewish volunteers were grouped together in that month, in the vicinity of Vochi Nory and formed into another guerrilla "brigade." With this new increase in men, the Slonim region could boast of some 3,000 partisans by the end of August 1942. The guerrilla war continued to increase during the spring, summer and fall of 1942, so much so that German records indicate that between October 1942 and March 1943 a total of 268 *Schutzmannschaft* had been killed by the guerrillas in the region of White Russia.¹⁵ This was equivalent to two full strength companies. Author Shalom Cholawsky put it succinctly when he described the driving force of all Jewish partisan units when he stated: ¹⁶

"Vengeance: that was the Jewish aim in this war. Jews, Jewish fighters, lusted to take revenge on the murderous German, the Byelorussian, the Pole and the Lithuanian who had collaborated, robbed and murdered, and on all those who had stood by while Jewish blood was shed and had kept silent."

Continued losses during the spring and summer of 1942 forced the Germans into action. Following heavy losses by the Security Police from Baranovich on June 9th 1942 a meeting was held at the offices of the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* to discuss the mounting partisan threat.¹⁷ So serious had the problem gotten, that *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler ordered a large anti-partisan warfare meeting to be held in the USSR. He arrived in Russia in October 1942 in order to speak directly with his commanders in the field and to gauge the problem for himself.

By the fall of 1942 the number of SS, police, and indigenous auxiliary policemen killed fighting in the USSR was significant. German police forces had suffered particularly heavy losses. The commitment of most of these battalions to front line fighting during the winter crisis of 1941-1942 had not helped matters much either. By December 1942 a total of 5,012 Order Police men had been killed, 9,305 had been wounded and 251 were missing.¹⁸ Altogether 14,568 policemen had been listed as either being killed, wounded, or missing during the first year and half of fighting in the Soviet Union. When we consider that in June 1940 the entire German

¹³ Eckman, et al, op cit, page 56.

¹⁴ Eckman, ibid, page 151.

¹⁵ Dean, Martin. *Collaboration in the Holocaust. Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44*. St. Martin's Press: New York, page 137.

¹⁶ Cholawsky, op cit, pages 246-247.

¹⁷ Dean, op cit, page 122.

¹⁸ Muñoz, op cit, pages 292-293.

Order Police had stood at around 244,500 men, these losses represented about 16.7% of the entire police force.¹⁹

This was an average of some 810 men lost per month. Eight hundred and ten men are roughly equivalent to 1½ police battalions. This means that from June 1941 until December 1942 German police losses in the East were probably equal to 12 police battalions. In order to honor the German police forces, *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler officially prefixed all German police regiments as “SS” in March 1943. This was also in keeping with his pre-war intentions to amalgamate the police with the SS. To Himmler, this only made sense since 40% of the police officer corps were also SS members.²⁰ The numbers of German Order Police officers and SD men behind the German front lines at the end of December 1942 stood as follows:²¹

- 1) North Russia
 - a. *Ordnungspolizei* – 4,093
 - b. *Sicherheitspolizei* – 800
 - i. Total: 4,893
- 2) Central Russia
 - a. *Ordnungspolizei* – 7,000
 - b. *Sicherheitspolizei* – 750
 - i. Total: 7,750
- 3) Southern Russia
 - a. *Ordnungspolizei* – 12,900
 - b. *Sicherheitspolizei* – 2,000
 - i. Total: 14,900
- 4) Generalgouvernement (i.e.- Poland)
 - a. *Ordnungspolizei* – 11,400
 - b. *Sicherheitspolizei* – 2,200
 - i. Total: 13,600
1. Grand Total: 41,143²²

Behind the lines, the Germans tried to replace their losses in 1942 by adding additional SS and police reinforcements, as well as instituting a massive recruiting campaign of the local population. *Schutzmannschaft* losses in White Russia between October 1942 and March 1943 numbered 268 men killed and 236 wounded and taken out of action.²³ Already in 1942 the number of foreign police troops in Poland alone had stood at 16,337 men.²⁴ It was imperative that these native auxiliary losses in Russia not only be replaced, but the number of volunteers was to be increased.

¹⁹ Browning, op cit, page 6.

²⁰ Wegner, Bernd. *The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology and Function*. Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1990. Page 141.

²¹ Rürup, Dr. Reinhard and Dr. Peter Jahn, editors. *Der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941-1945*. Berliner Festspiele GmbH: Berlin, 1991. Page 137.

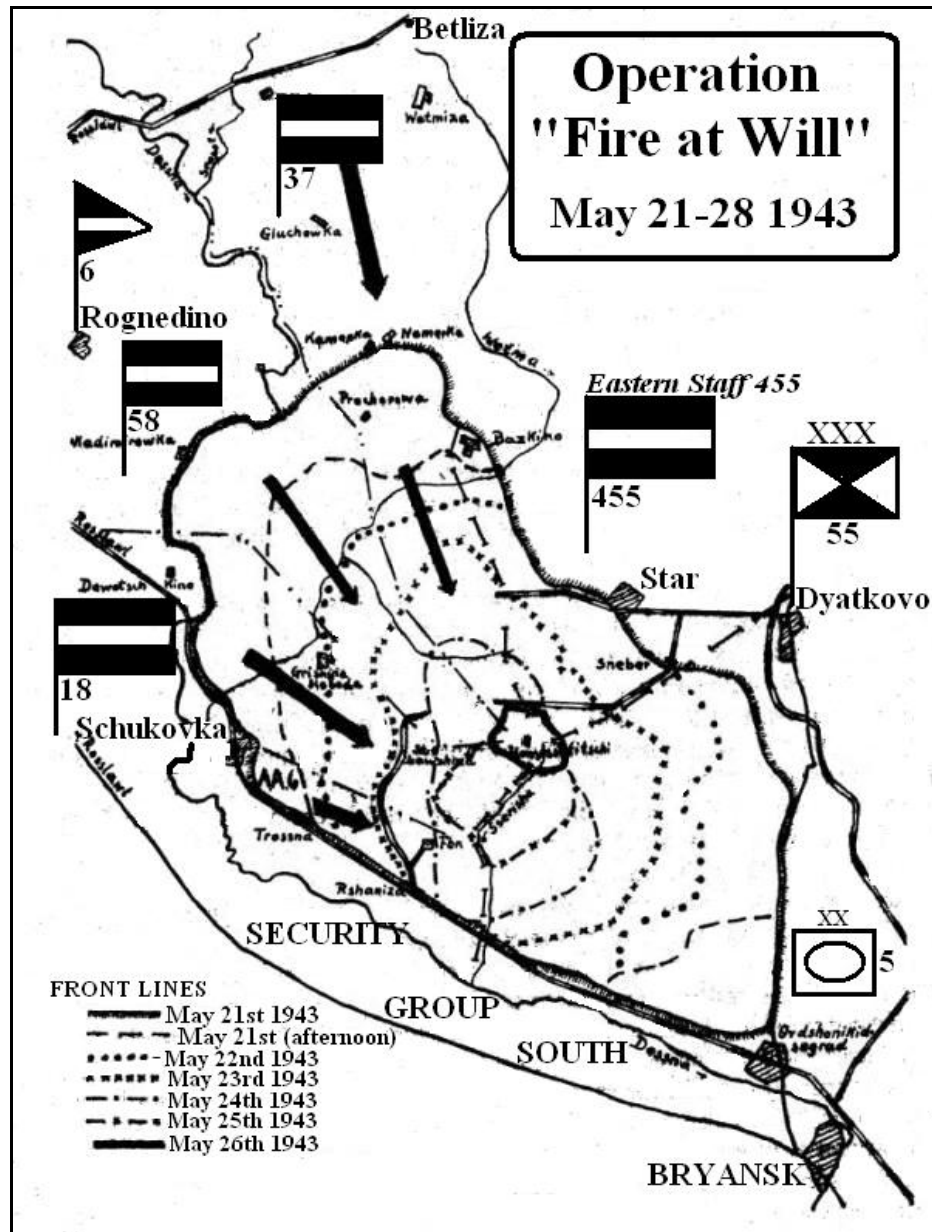
²² 35,393 Order Police and 5,750 Security Police personnel.

²³ Dean, op cit, page 137.

²⁴ Präg, Werner and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer. *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939-1945*. Deutsche Verlags Anstalt: Stuttgart, 1975. Page 605.

Two Typical Anti-Partisan Operations: “Freischütz” & “Kottbus”

Freischütz



“*Unternehmen Freischütz*” (Operation "Fire at Will") shown above, was launched in the region north and northwest of Bryansk, bordering the area Dyatkovo-Ivot-Zhukovo-Bryansk on May 21st 1943. Preparations for *Frieschütz* had been made as early as May 12th when units began to arrive at the various assembly areas.²⁵ This operation was performed beginning May 20th or 21st and lasted until May 26th - 30th 1943. The units used for this operation included the following formations:

²⁵ Ibid, page 464.

- 1) Elements of 5. *Panzer Division*, with Eastern Staff for Special Employment No.455.
- 2) Elements of 6. *Infanterie Division*, with attached 1st & 2nd "People's Army" Battalions / 1st Regiment / *Kaminski Brigade*.
- 3) *Grenadier Regiment 747 der 707. Sicherungs Division* acting as "Security Group South".
- 4) The 3rd "People's Army" Battalion / 1st Regiment, and 11th "People's Army" Battalion / 4th Regiment of the *Kaminski Brigade*.
- 5) *Sicherungs Bataillon 587 und 791*.
- 6) *Aserbeidschan Infanterie Bataillon 807* (807th Azerbaijani Infantry Battalion).
- 7) Armored Train No.4.

Operation "Fire at Will" employed the 55th German Army Corps to control the employment of the units used. In this anti-Partisan sweep, the guerrillas lost 1,459 men killed, and 420 men taken prisoner while Axis losses were reported to have been about 100 killed and an unknown number wounded. Although the operation was judged a success, by mid-June 1943 the area in question was once again threatened by about 2,000 Soviet Partisans. The operation netted 1,419 people were killed and 13 hamlets and 317 homes were destroyed during a *Befriedungsaktion* (pacification operation) in the Zaslavl region.²⁶ The operation, which was under the 55th Army Corps, was listed as concluded on May 28th 1943.²⁷

Kottbus

One particularly horrendous anti-partisan drive was "*Unternehmen Kottbus*," in which 16,662 Germans and native auxiliary troops were used.²⁸ It was launched against a "partisan republic" on the eastern border of the *Generalbezirk Weissruthenien* (White Russia). Coincidentally, this would be the last operation in which the *Druzhina SS Brigade* would participate in before its defection. This would prove to be one of the largest German anti-guerrilla drives of the war in the Soviet Union. SS General Kurt von Gottberg was placed in overall command of all German and native auxiliary forces. A German document titled "*Verteiler*" (dispatch) listed the following partial list of units for the operation:²⁹

- 1) 1st Battalion/ *Polizei Schützen Regiment 31* – Borisov.
- 2) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 54* – Borisov.
- 3) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 51* – Voloshin (Woloczin).
- 4) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 12* – Poloczny.³⁰
- 5) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 15* – Lida.
- 6) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 57* – Baranovichi.
- 7) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 118* – Novogrodek.
- 8) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 102* – Borisov / Stolpce.
- 9) *Gendarmerie Platoon* – Borisov / Stolpce.

²⁶ Chiari, op cit, page 128.

²⁷ Schramm, Ernst Percy. *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht 1939-1945*. Eight Volumes, Volume 5, page 549.

²⁸ Hesse, Erich. *Der Sowjetrussische Partisanenkrieg 1941 bis 1944*. Musterschmidt Verlag: Göttingen, 1969, page 281.

²⁹ NARS Microfilm T-175, Roll 225.

³⁰ *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 12* and *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 51* were in the process of forming into the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of *Polizei Schützen Regiment 31* (Police Rifle Regiment 31).

- 10) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 3* – Slonim.
- 11) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 115* – Slonim.
- 12) *Schutzmannschaft Bataillon 271* – Slutsk.
- 13) *SS Polizei Regiment 2* – Begomyl.
- 14) *SS Druzhina Verbände* – Begomyl (southwest of Lepel) and surrounding area.
- 15) *SS Sonder Bataillon Dirlewanger* – Begomyl and surrounding area.
- 16) *Gendarmerie Einsatzkommando “Kreikeborn”* – Begomyl and surrounding area.
- 17) *Gendarmerie Kommando “Plechtschenicze”* (northeast of Minsk).

The intent of the operation was the destruction of what was considered a partisan republic in Byelorussia – an area that had been under constant guerrilla control. This “republic” was located on the eastern border of the *Generalbezirk* White Russia.³¹ One of the principal units in this “republic” was the *Zhelezniak Partisan Brigade* which coincidentally, would feature prominently in the desertion of the *Druzhina SS* unit. This unit was an important component of the Byelorussian partisan movement.³² It is interesting to note that while negotiations for the *Druzhina* unit to defect were begun in June 1943 – a period when Operation *Kottbus* began, the unit and other partisan forces were able to evade the tens of thousands of Axis troops trying to trap them.

The numbers of people killed vary slightly. Two reliable sources state that 5,000 people were shot for suspicion of collaborating with the partisans after being taken prisoner, while another 4,500 enemy were left dead in the field.³³ Another equally reliable academic fountain of information states that SS General von Gottberg claimed to have left 6,042 partisans dead in the field and another 3,709 others had been liquidated. This same source also listed 599 prisoners taken by the SS and police forces.³⁴ In addition von Gottberg stated that “another two to three thousand civilians were blown up in helping to forcibly clear the partisan minefields.”³⁵

In both cases, the numbers seem to be about the same, although the latter is slightly higher to the tune of 850 people. One final source states that altogether 13,000+ people died during the operation.³⁶ In any event, the numbers of weapons captured by the Germans was not in proportion to the numbers of people killed. In fact, only 492 rifles were found among the dead, leading one to conclude that a massacre of the local population had taken place. In fact, author John A. Armstrong confirmed as much when he quoted a letter from General Commissar for Byelorussia, Wilhelm Kube:³⁷

“...He [Kube] also argued that if for 4,500 enemy dead only 492 rifles were captured, the implication clearly was that the dead included many peasants who were not necessarily partisans.”

Some Germans were astute enough to realize that this type of warfare would only lead to the complete alienation of the native population and the eventual increase in partisan strength

³¹ Mulligan, Timothy Patrick. *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943*. Praeger Publishers: New York, 1988, page 142.

³² Dallin, op. cit., page 29n.

³³ Armstrong, John A., editor. *Soviet Partisans in World War II*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 1964, page 538.

³⁴ Mulligan, op. cit, page 142.

³⁵ *Chef der Bandenkampfunternehmen*, “Verteiler über Unternehmen Kottbus, 23 Juni, 1943. Document NO-2608, NMI, XII, 305-309.- Yad Vashem Archive, Israel.

³⁶ Hesse, op cit, page 209n.

³⁷ Armstrong, op. cit, page 538.

through recruitment of willing volunteers. Heinrich Lohse,³⁸ the German *Reichskommissar für den Ostland und Weissruthenien*, wrote the following comments in a letter to Alfred Rosenberg:³⁹

“To lock men, women, and children in barns and then set fire to them does not appear to me to be a suitable way of combating partisans, even if one’s objective were the extermination of the population.”

Even SS officers on the staff of Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski’s anti-partisan headquarters complained about the manner in which “*Kottbus*” had been conducted. *SS Brigadefuehrer und Generalmajor der Polizei* Eberhard Herf, who was the head of the Order Police in Minsk and the Chief of Staff of von dem Bach’s headquarters, had this to say:⁴⁰

“Yesterday a Gauleiter...broadcast certain secret reports [intended for the Fuehrer] showing that some 480 rifles were found on 6,000 dead ‘partisans.’ Put bluntly, all these men had been shot to swell the figure of enemy losses and highlight our own ‘heroic deeds.’ I am under no illusions that, this being the system, the winter of 1943-44 will see the beginning of the end in the rear areas and probably at the front as well. The increase in guerrilla warfare is simply and solely due to the way the Russians have been treated.”

Given the brutal manner in which the war was being waged, we can only speculate as to what negative effect this all had on Russian volunteer units, but certainly it could not have been positive. This is not to say that Rodionov and his unit were free of acts of cruelty like their German benefactors. For example, in the village of Zembin, Rodionov’s men killed three young men and two girls solely because they were wearing Byelorussian [nationalist] emblems on their shirts and blouses.⁴¹ In the village of Sloboda, Gil himself played at “God” by first sentencing some poor peasants to death, but conditionally commuting their death sentence “if” the peasants could ask for their pardon in good literary language. Apparently they didn’t please Rodionov and they were summarily shot!⁴²

We can perceive his callous indifference to the lives of the local peasants as perhaps a premeditated attempt to continue to alienate the population against the Germans, or perhaps an even simpler reason – pure savagery and chaos for its own sake. Whichever is the case, it seems pretty clear that Colonel Rodionov’s decision to defect had been made before Operation “*Kottbus*” even began. If anything, it is possible that his decision might have aided the guerrillas since he might have given them vital information about the coming offensive which would have allowed them to evade destruction. The Germans encountered stiff resistance, and suffered about 700+ casualties. The slaughter began after the partisans slipped through the ring of SS, police, and Schuma units that had been arrayed against them. SS General Kurt von Gottberg claimed that his forces had killed 6,042 guerrillas, and that an additional 3,709 “other criminals” had been liquidated, while 599 prisoners were taken to the rear. Of this total number of 9,720 people, only 1,000 rifles and machine guns could be found.⁴³

³⁸ Munoz, op. cit, page 58.

³⁹ Dallin, op. cit, page 28.

⁴⁰ Krausnick, Helmut. *Hitlers Einsatzgruppen: Die Truppen des Weltanschauungskrieges, 1938-1942*. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1985, pages 346-347.

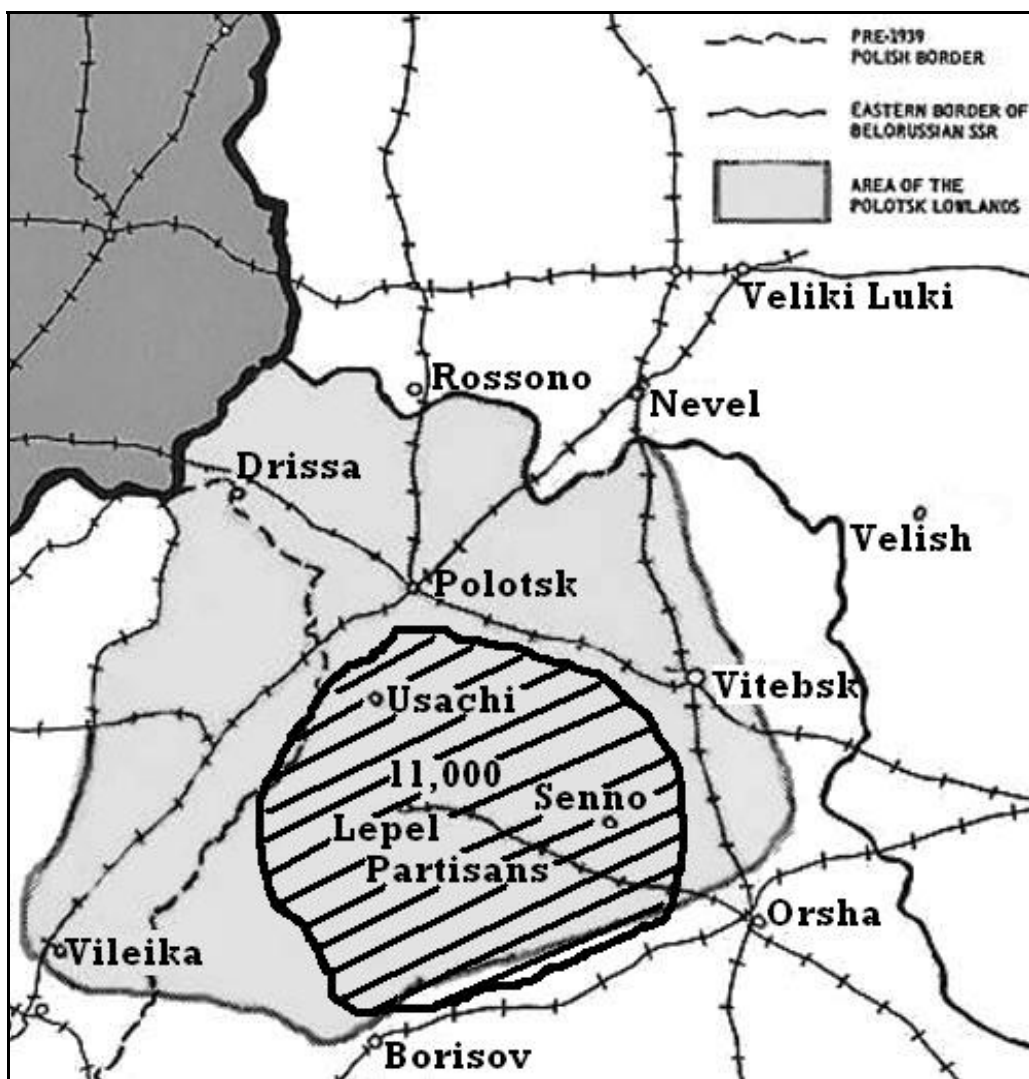
⁴¹ Dallin, op. cit., page 28.

⁴² Ibid, page 28.

⁴³ Mulligan, Timothy Patrick. *The Politics of Illusion and Empire. German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943*.

With such cruel and radical practices, the Soviets found it quite easy to employ effective propaganda against the collaborationist forces. Already the actions and practices of the Germans during these drives were sapping the morale of the men in the *Druzhina SS* unit and other indigenous voluntary formations. A taste of things to come occurred on the night of November 24-25, 1942 when sixty-three men from the *Druzhina SS* battalion stationed at Kolitschenko, killed five German *SD* men of the battalion liaison staff and deserted to the partisans.⁴⁴ Yet, in spite of this incident, nothing was done to check the allegiance or morale of the unit. According to Sven Steenberg, the chief *SD* officer in the *Druzhina SS Brigade*, *SS-Sturmabführer* Appel, was incompetent. Steenberg states that Major Appel, a former *SA* leader, had limited his control over Rodionov and the rest of the officers in the unit to teaching them how to conduct themselves in an officers' club!⁴⁵

Figure 1. Area of Operations of Operation Kottbus



⁴⁴ Cooper, Matthew. *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans 1941-1944*. Stein & Day: New York, 1978, page 123.

⁴⁵ Steenberg, Sven. *Vlasov*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1970, page 107.

The Search for a Legitimate Collaborationist Government

An excellent case study of how exile groups often use the opportunity of foreign invasion of their homeland in order to obtain their goals was the German use of Byelorussian exile groups before and during the invasion of the Soviet Union. The first problem which seemed to develop when the Germans began recruiting these White Russian exiles was that they were fragmented and had diverse political and socio-economic goals. This is often the case with exile communities and many times the government in power in their homeland even establishes “sleeper” elements within the exile groups in order to divide the community and therefore neutralize any potential organized efforts. A perfect recent example would be the Cuban-American exile community in Florida. The INS has documented cases where apparent Cuban “defectors” have turned out to be agents of Fidel Castro, who have either spied on their exiled people and / or have committed acts of sabotage or espionage against the U.S. government. Many times the attempt has been to discredit the exile community. It seems that in the current Iraqi war, Mr. Achmed Chalabi, the chief Iraqi exile leader, apparently supplied misleading intelligence information to the U.S. Government which was geared to induce or “trip” a U.S. invasion of his country. In effect, Mr. Chalabi used the U.S. Army to attain his political goal of eliminating Saddam Hussein.

Another problem encountered by an occupation army is the problem of border disputes which often are never completely resolved. These disputes may often surface whenever a country is conquered and its neighboring state decides that now is a good time for a land claim. The region of Byelorussia (White Russia) had undergone many border changes throughout its existence. For example, the western half of what was considered the BSSR (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1940 had actually been the northeastern part of Poland until the USSR annexed that area in November 1939. A small part of southeastern Lithuania had also been ceded to the BSSR in 1940. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, they too decided to change the borders of what was considered White Russia, most prominently by extending White Russia into parts of northeast Poland and by limiting Byelorussia on its eastern half to the region of Desna, Borisov, Minsk, and Slutsk. In this way, most of pre-1939 central and eastern Byelorussia was ceded to what the Germans called Central Russia.

Byelorussia, now known as Belarus lies in an area between the Baltic States and Poland in the west, Ukraine in the south, and Russia proper in the north and east. Throughout its history the Byelorussian people, also referred to as White Russians, or White Ruthenians have always been at the mercy of their more powerful neighbors. At the end of World War I, the Germans had sponsored the Byelorussian National Republic. This move had been made to try to place another buffer state between Germany and Russia. The brief White Russian independence lasted only until 1921 when the Bolshevik government in Moscow sliced Byelorussia in half in the Treaty of Riga. The White Russian nation was cut between western and eastern halves. The western part, which was predominantly Catholic, was ceded to Poland, while the eastern half, which was predominantly Orthodox, became a part of the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ This split would eventually come back to haunt the Byelorussians as it eventually divided the White Russian community into two antagonistic, though nationalistic political blocks.

On December 3rd 1918 the Byelorussian government established by the Germans fled Minsk and headed into exile. The Red Army occupied the capital city of White Russia nine days later,

⁴⁶ Dorril, Stephen. *M.I.6*. Fourth Estate Publishing Ltd.: London, 2000. Page 215.

on December 12th 1918. Members of the BNR government first took refuge in Vilna, and then headed for Germany and the Czech Republic. Some remained in what eventually would be Polish controlled western Byelorussia where they continued their activities until January 14th 1927 when the Polish government jailed almost 3,000 Byelorussian activists and tried them unsuccessfully later in the year. They were released due to insufficient evidence. Once freed, the Polish authorities suggested to these men that their chances for a real Byelorussian government lay in returning to eastern (Soviet controlled) White Russia and campaigning for power there using the constitutional laws as laid out in the charter for all states comprising the USSR. On paper this sounded legitimate, but once these men reentered communist controlled territory they were immediately arrested and executed as “Polish” spies.⁴⁷ However the attempt by the Polish (and Soviet) government to deprive their Byelorussian citizens of any leadership in hopes of producing more loyalty to the state proved ill founded.⁴⁸

It was during this Polish and Soviet repression that in 1933 the *Auslandpolitisches Amt* (Political Foreign Office) of the German Nazi Party approached a Byelorussian national socialist living in Poland by the name of Fabian Akinchits. With the aid of the National Socialist German Workers Party, Akinchits was able to publish a newspaper in Wilno titled “*Novy Shlakh*.” In addition, he also organized the “Alliance of Byelorussian Students in Germany.”⁴⁹ American author John Loftus seems to concur with Polish author Tadeusz Piotrowski when he wrote, regarding the Byelorussian mentality at the time, that:⁵⁰

“Persecuted by the Poles and betrayed by the Russians, they turned towards fascism. Fascism appealed to the Byelorussian émigrés because it provided the best chance for an anti-Soviet crusade. To the embittered exiles, any rule in their homeland – even that of Nazi Germany – was preferable to the continuation of the Communist dictatorship. Besides, it was often argued, the period of foreign domination would only be temporary.”

Recruitment of White Russian exiles continued and extended to other military, political and intelligence organizations within the Third Reich. In fact, as time passed and developments indicated an eventual clash between Germany and the Soviet Union, these Nazi agencies began to recruit not only Byelorussians who had lived under Polish rule, but even former Byelorussian Communist Party functionaries who had managed to evade the Moscow purges of the White Russian Communist leadership which occurred in the late Thirties. The old émigrés hated these new volunteers since they were former communists and “Johnny come late lies.” Accusations and counter-accusations soon followed amongst the ranks of ex-patriot Byelorussians working for the Germans. These differences were never resolved.

Another Byelorussian political group working with the Nazis before the start of the Russo-German war was the Byelorussian Self-Help, which was run by Professor Radislav Ostrowski,⁵¹ who had been the BNR Minister for Education in 1918.⁵² Others included a former land owner in Byelorussia, Ivan Ermachenko who would become chief advisor to Wilhelm Kube, the German General Commissioner for White Russia from 1941-1943.⁵³ When the Germans invaded the

⁴⁷ Loftus, John. *The Belarus Secret*. Alfred. A. Knopf: New York, 1982. Page 15.

⁴⁸ Vakar, op cit., page 135.

⁴⁹ Piotrowski, op cit., page 148.

⁵⁰ Loftus, op cit., page 15.

⁵¹ Sometimes his name has also been spelled as “Astrowski.”

⁵² Seidler, Franz W. *Die Kollaboration 1939 – 1945*. F. A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung: München, 1995. Page 51.

⁵³ Vakar, op cit., page 178.

USSR and conquered Byelorussia, other White Russians stepped forward to offer their help. Dr. Vitold Tumash was appointed Mayor of Minsk,⁵⁴ while another nationalist by the name of Basilevic was given control of the Mogilev *Oblast*. Control of the Bobruisk indigenous regional administration went to a non-Byelorussian from Russia named V. Odinkov. Another leading member in the Byelorussian pro-German government was Stanislav Stankevich who was appointed Mayor of Borisov.⁵⁵ According to one Polish author, Stankevich was partly responsible for organizing the deaths of about 7,000 Jewish men, women, and children in Borisov on October 20th 1941.⁵⁶

Fabian Akinchits⁵⁷ continued his national socialist work in Byelorussia, forming the White Russian version of the *Hitlerjugend* shortly after the German capture of the region. However his movement never appealed to the mass of the youth there and he only managed to recruit several hundred White Russian teenagers.⁵⁸ This youth movement should not be confused with the Union of Byelorussian Youth, which was established later on by other collaborators. Akinchits would be assassinated in 1943 by a Byelorussian youth named Matusevič.⁵⁹ Another White Russian collaborator to be killed by the partisans in 1943 was Editor in Chief Kozlovsky, of the “*Byelorussian Gazette*.” This was a pro-German paper published in the *Generalbezirk Weissruthenien* in the Byelorussian language. Kozlovsky was assassinated in November 1943.⁶⁰ There were also some Polish members in the collaborationist government in White Russia. The former Polish Army officer, Franz Kushel was made Chief of Police in Minsk.⁶¹ This was especially true in western Byelorussia where initially at least:⁶²

“In the initial stages of the German occupation – in the Bialystok, Lida, and Vileika regions, in Grodno, in Brest, in Baranovichi and Slonim – the Poles had a virtual monopoly on almost all the key positions in local and district offices. In addition, the local auxiliary police was mainly under their control.”

Control of these posts in both the collaborationist civilian and military government continued between the Polish and Byelorussian nationalist elements. In July 1941 the German SS Security Service, the *Sicherheitsdienst*, or SD tried unsuccessfully to appoint more Byelorussians into key positions in the western part of the region but most were denounced as former communist party functionaries and so discredited. The position of Mayor and Assistant Mayor in Grodno were successfully entrusted to two White Russians however. An SD report dated August 12th 1941 clearly states that this had been done to minimize Polish influence in the region.⁶³ Thus, it seems that running the indigenous White Russian administration was a virtual free for all. Author Nicholas Vakar put it succinctly when he said:⁶⁴

⁵⁴ Loftus, op cit., page 22n.

⁵⁵ Hilberg, Raul. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders. The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*. Harper Collins Publishers: 1992. Page 91.

⁵⁶ Piotrowski, op cit. Page 153.

⁵⁷ His name is also spelled as “Akincyc.”

⁵⁸ Vakar, op cit., page 188.

⁵⁹ Vakar, *ibid*, page 190.

⁶⁰ Belarus Central State Archive Records, 1941-49. RG-53.002M, Reel No.11, Fond 370, Section 9 - Opis: Main Commissariat Byelorussia.

⁶¹ Loftus, op cit., page 44.

⁶² Piotrowski, op cit., page 87.

⁶³ Piotrowski, *ibid*., page 87.

⁶⁴ Vakar, op cit., page 177.

“The views of the military command, Rosenberg’s officials, the SS, and the Gestapo, however, conflicted as to how and where the most effective ‘collaborationists’ could be found, and where they should be sought. Consequently, both the Byelorussian and Russian emigrants of Hitlerite or semi-Hitlerite persuasion were rushed to the country as counselors, advisers, interpreters, and assistants to the German administration. Wherever possible, offices were filled with natives of German descent. Volunteers were then called from among the local residents to fill the ranks of the police force and other subordinate agencies, and preference was given to those who had been repressed by the Soviets. In many places, however, former Soviet employees, even Party members, were retained in office.”

Finally, someone had to be appointed by the Germans to represent Byelorussian nationalist interests in the newly established *Gebietskommissariat Weissrussland*. Initially, the Germans turned to Vasil Zacharka, who represented the symbol of the Byelorussian National Republic and was currently living in exile in Prague. Eventually however, Zacharka turned down the German request in September 1941. For the time being, the Germans in Byelorussia would be without an indigenous leader to represent the pro-German collaborators. During the summer and fall months of 1941 then, the White Russian nationalists had gotten closer to realizing their dream of self-rule than they had ever been in the last two decades. That dream would prove to be a chimera however, as Byelorussian aspirations would clash with the often conflicting and changing German policies in the occupied eastern territories.

A Final Analysis

From the very beginning the Germans treated White Russia as a land only good for plundering. They extracted its resources, stole its goods, and even conscripted its population for slave labor in the *Reich*. They conducted the war against the partisans so ruthlessly that this conflict behind the lines was directly responsible for most of the devastation which the country suffered during the war. The German civil administrators who entered Byelorussia in the wake of the German Army were opportunistic individuals who were only concerned with acquiring wealth and power. Their freebooter attitudes, brown uniforms and golden epaulets soon earned them the nickname of “*Goldfassanen*” (Golden Pheasants) – a mocking tribute to their uniform and their corrupt souls.⁶⁵

“The worst kind of official was normally posted to White Russia. A milk rounds-man became a political advisor and a criminal sadist was Gebietskommissar of Slonim. The German civil ruler of White Russia was himself a man in disgrace, though he kept up some pomp and circumstance in miserable crumbling Minsk with its murderous ghettos and prisoner of war camps.”

As for the SS and Police officials, like their political counterparts in brown uniform, they followed Hitler’s plan in the East as outlined in *Mein Kampf* to the letter. No mercy was to be given and none was shown. The East was to be cleansed of the *untermensche* and made ready for colonization. Throughout the guerrilla and anti-guerrilla struggle German tactics showed themselves to follow the *Führerprinzip* (Leader principle) and all that came with it. Their campaign against the guerrillas was a plan destined to fail before it was ever implemented because it lacked any hope for the native people. The winning of the so-called “hearts and minds” has been established to be a foundation on which any anti-partisan struggle has to be set

⁶⁵ Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand*, op cit, page 156.

upon if it hopes to succeed. But the Nazis, who were inflexible and committed to the ways of terror, could not possibly grasp this human equation. By 1943 the cemetery in Minsk contained the bodies of 1,600 Germans who had understood this lesson too late.

The war against the partisans therefore, was lost before it was ever started. The idea of *Kollektive Gewaltmassnahmen* (collective punishment) failed miserably since it gave the peasants no choice but to flee to the woods. Threatened by death if he were to collaborate with the Germans, threatened by death if he were to assist the partisans, threatened by death if he aided any Jews, threatened by death through reprisal if a partisan attack occurred near him, threatened by death if conscripted into the local police, threatened by conscription for slave labor in Germany, and threatened with starvation because his crops were confiscated, the average Byelorussian *krestyanin* (peasant) had very few options which would help him to live out the war unscathed. His ultimate and best choice turned out to be to join the guerrillas in the woods, where he had a better chance to survive the war. In retrospect, the story of the war in White Russia could not be described without the above mentioned three principal themes: (1) The holocaust, (2) Collaboration, and (3) the Anti-partisan War. All three were intertwined and invariably had consequences on one another. Noted scholar Gerald Reitlinger already knew this when he wrote the following when speaking of Byelorussia in his classic work, *"The House Built on Sand"*:⁶⁶

"The actual extent of territory, which the Germans controlled at any moment, was so small and the degree to which civilian rulers were entrusted with it so slight, that the real history of the country under German occupation must be sought in the annals of Partisan warfare, of which White Russia remained the principal theatre throughout the German occupation."

The Germans lost the war behind the lines in White Russia in the killing fields created by the *Einsatzgruppen*, in the trains which hauled away for slave labor tens of thousands of unwilling people, and in the harshness and brutality of their anti-partisan policies. In this world of chaos where ruthless extremes were practiced no minor or major form of limited freedom or self-government, or eleventh hour change of heart, could change the outcome of the guerrilla struggle. The anti-partisan war behind the lines proved a partial success for the Soviet Union since it drew away about 250-280,000 German and axis allied troops from the front lines even though they continued to supply its forces there adequately enough.

Many scholars have argued that the German anti-guerrilla struggle in Russia was a success because it kept the front line troops supplied with a relatively acceptable number of men and materiel. However, in my opinion the anti-partisan struggle ultimately proved to be a failure since it neither destroyed the partisan movement nor did it manage to halt its growth. Quite the contrary, harsh Nazi policies seem to have accelerated the downward decline of their control in Byelorussia. It was only a matter of time before the Germans would have lost near total control in the rear areas. The expulsion of German forces from most of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1944 prevented this from happening but the writing was on the wall.

SS Brigadeführer Eberhard Herff's oft-quoted letter, written in the summer of 1943, clearly describes the events in Byelorussia during the war succinctly enough:⁶⁷ *"I am under no illusions that, this being the system, the winter of 1943-44 will see the beginning of the end in the*

⁶⁶ Ibid, page 155.

⁶⁷ Mulligan, Timothy Patrick. *The politics of Illusion and Empire. German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943.* Praeger Publishing: New York, 1988. Page 143.

rear areas.” How different was Adolf Hitler’s mind set, when he was quoted on December 1st 1942 as saying that: “*Fundamental to anti-partisan operations is that whatever succeeds is correct.*” At the end of the day, the Nazis proved to be their own worst enemy since the anti-guerrilla war in Russia was doomed from its inception because it’s planning, direction, and manner of implementation (its morality) was skewered, twisted and hampered by racial hatred and total indifference to human life.

Although the U.S. Army in Iraq is in no way what the Nazi mowing machine was in World War II, there are some similarities with the problems which our military faces in Iraq that were also faced by the Germans in Russia. For example, we are not plundering Iraqi oil, but the *perception* that we are doing this and that we entered Iraq for this main reason is out there, especially in the Arab world. Perceptions sometimes cause the same damage as the actual crime, so here we see that even though we are not stealing Iraqi oil, we are faced with the political consequences the Germans created when they stole the resources of Russia. As another example, we cannot compare the tortures and massacres of the *Gestapo* and SS with our own soldiers, yet the scandal of the prison tortures and humiliations have created the perception (there’s that word again!) that Americans no longer stand on higher moral ground. The crust of this is, of course, that we are no better than any occupying, foreign force, and therefore not worthy and “in the wrong” for being in Iraq in the first place.

In addition, there is a slippery slope syndrome which troops experience when they are exposed to long periods of tense and worrisome anti-guerrilla warfare. The frustration of not knowing where the next attack is going to come can make soldiers callous to the local population and in the end, can make these normally good and honorable troops behave in horrendous and callous ways towards the population. This has been shown by the actions of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, and even the Israeli Army in the Gaza strip. After a while, it becomes easier to shoot first and ask questions later. This too, works in favor of the guerrillas because it creates the Mi Lai massacres that the partisan movement needs in order to continue to have the anger and support of the local populace.

The current military situation facing the U.S. Army in Iraq is such that one wonders if our political leaders have learned anything from the past. It matters not that American military men have learned from past guerrilla struggles. The reason for this is that in our democracy, military officers cannot contradict our political leadership, although they can attempt to counsel. They must follow the orders of politicians who for one reason or another, may be trying to balance numerous military, political, economic, and social agendas – all on the backs of the U.S. military. It sounds cynical to say that, but it is the gut wrenching truth. It is the price we pay for living in a democracy. However, we must always have room for hope. There are some in Washington D.C. – especially politicians with past military experience, who have seen this problem clearly and are genuinely trying to stop ourselves from experiencing another Vietnam, but it’s always an uphill struggle against interests. George Santayana’s oft-quoted remark that, “*those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it*” still rings true today. Every day that we read about more American soldiers being killed in Iraq underlines that quote all too painfully.

POINT / COUNTER-POINT: A RESPONSE TO THIS ARTICLE-

Comments on the Introduction Chapter:

The situation in Iraq is far, far from "not looking good." We invaded a country with the 4th largest army in the world and run by a fanatical dictator for 30 years. In less than two years, there will be free elections in Iraq. Iraq now has a constitution that guarantees freedoms (and for the first time for women and minorities). Rebuilding is on or ahead of schedule. The economy is exploding. Oil production is above pre-war levels. There is freedom of the press, speech and assembly for the first time. An unexpected knock on the door no longer is met with fear and dread. Most of the population supports the coalition. We have lost some soldiers but looking at any historical perspective, those losses are extremely light in comparison to the mission that was accomplished. It took 7 years to have enough stability in post-war Germany to have an election. It took nearly a decade for Japan.

Our enemies, Islamic terrorists, conduct themselves like the Nazis and Communists in the history books. They want to gain and hold power through terror. Their tactics and strategy mirror those used by Nazis in the partisan war on the Eastern front in WWII. A regular military force alone does not defeat a guerrilla movement. That is why we have unconventional military units (mostly Special Forces). Special Forces are trained to win these types of conflicts and have a great track record. As you correctly pointed out, a large part of this is "winning hearts and minds" and respecting the local culture and traditions in combat operations. This is exactly how Special Forces units operate.

Most guerrilla movements do not just recruit "free-willed" members (the terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq are not the gentlemen farmers of the American Revolution). Most of the Islamic movement's grunt soldiers are conscripted peasants who either had the choice to fight or to see their family shot by foreign Arab Islamic fanatics. They don't make good fighters but have to give some effort in order to keep their family safe. I saw this all the time in Afghanistan and read about this with the Viet-Cong. Nearly all of the Islamic guerrilla leaders want power for themselves and do not fight for freedoms or a better country. They use the worst aspects of Islam for personal ambition.

Brutal treatment of a population or "suppression of ideas" does not automatically mean a guerrilla movement will start. Just look at Iraq under Saddam, North Korea, Cuba or Cambodia under Pol Pot. There are needed psychological reasons and external influences for one to start. There is a huge power grab going up in Iraq - and some are using force and terror to get that power. It is not a movement of the people "yearning to be free." The guerrillas in Iraq are far from effective. They control little area. They have not stopped any supplies. They have not hindered the progression of the new Iraq government. They do not have the support of the people. US Soldiers are not "demoralized." In fact, they are in high spirits and look forward to getting into the fight.

It is the terrorist leaders that fear for their lives every time an airplane, helicopter or US patrol comes by. They wonder every time they talk on the phone/radio, speak with a subordinate or sleep in the same bed for two nights in a row that the Americans will pinpoint their location. Death may come day or night, either delivered by a Special Forces Team or a JDAM no one ever hears coming. There is no safe place for them. The new Iraqi army and security forces continue to grow stronger and take on more and more military missions.

Comments on the "A Policy of Murder is Infectious" Chapter:

This is true, murder and killing can become standard operational procedure for an army. For instance, the Taliban in Afghanistan killed hundreds of thousands. They wiped entire villages off

the map. They thought nothing of slaughtering entire families for a single transgression. Saddam killed anyone (and families) he suspected of even thinking of another way of government. Saddam's lieutenants and his sons relished this power and were never afraid to use brutal actions against perceived enemies and the population in general. Islamic terrorists have the same mindset of the Nazis. They view any non-Muslim as an "infidel" or sub-human. And infidels deserve only rape, enslavement and death. To paraphrase, *"By making the infidel person seem less than human, the Islamic terrorist hierarchy makes it easier for the average Muslim to view the deaths of these people as not actually killing humans at all."*

When I read the passage of the *Waffen SS* in a village in the Smolensk region and the brutal treatment of the villagers (including the woman who had her breast cut off), I am reminded of the bridge incident in Fallujah, Saddam gassing Kurdish villages, the "rape rooms" of Saddam's secret police, the beheading of Nick Berg or the Taliban massacring the Hazara in Bamiyan. American soldiers do not act this way - however, their Islamic fanatical enemies do. And as pointed so well in your article, brutal treatment of civilians usually helps the side that treats civilians in a more humane way.

Comments on the Scorched Earth and the Raping of the Land's Resources Chapter:

When the Taliban took control of the last major city in northern Afghanistan, Mazar-e Sharif, they massacred over 3,000 people as a lesson for holding out for so long. They destroyed ancient non-Islamic temples/shrines, dug up great city gardens, cut down entire forests and even blew up mosques that were not "Islamic enough." When Special Forces were holding towns in Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance militia, the Taliban attacked with great ferocity. They were defeated by American airpower and strong defensive positions. Taliban prisoners spoke that they were going to kill every man, woman and child in any town that had Americans in it as a warning to other Afghans.

Comments in the A Final Analysis Chapter:

Americans understand history. We treat POWs and occupied countries better than any other nation on earth. We rebuild countries that we occupy and want the people of those countries to run them in freedom. Our enemies use terror as a tactic to gain power and influence other nations. The US military is trained to uphold human rights, the Geneva Convention and the Hague Conferences (1907). From what I have seen, the US military goes out of its way to avoid civilian casualties (even to the point of degrading military operations). If abuse cases of US military personnel are discovered, those involved will be persecuted under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) which is a lot tougher than the civilian justice system. No other country in the world has such a long tradition or takes as serious the well treating their POWs.

I am sure if you asked soldiers the world over, even with the recent prison abuse scandal, which army would be the preferred destination if you were a POW, the choice between being a prisoner of the America forces and Taliban/Saddam's Iraq/Al-Queda forces is pretty clear. 50 million people have been liberated from tyrannical oppression and bondage in Iraq and Afghanistan. The mass graves, torture centers and rape rooms have been permanently shut. Terrorists have lost their safe havens to train, plan, recruit and fundraise. It is hard to plan for the next 9/11 when you are worried about your very survival.

War is a dirty business. Guerrilla wars are even dirty. America will easily win militarily in Iraq and Afghanistan with honor. The real question is, *"Will we have the staying power politically to see it through in our free society?"* This is something that the Nazis, Saddam Hussein and the Taliban never had to worry about. But this is something that our Islamic terrorist enemies understand about America and will use against us (just like they did to Spain).

This is not a war like Vietnam where we can leave with little effect to American way-of-life. If we turn tail and abandon Iraq or try to appease the terrorists, this war will follow us. Instead of fighting in the dusty streets of Iraq or in the mud huts of Afghanistan, we will be fighting Islamic terrorists in our own cities and towns. This is a war like WWII; we either win it or lose our freedoms and way-of-life.

Speaking for myself only,
(CPT) Mark Westphal

NOTE from Antonio Muñoz:

My sincere thanks to Captain Mark Westphal for his incisive contribution above, describing current US military anti-guerrilla policies, trends and philosophies. Captain Westphal has conducted anti-guerrilla missions in Northern and South-Eastern Afghanistan and earned the Combat Infantry Badge (CIB) and Bronze Star while doing so. He is therefore infinitely qualified to discuss this subject! Mark, thank you!