2. Crusade and Propaganda

SS Prototype: The "Wiking" Division

The initial wartime expansion of the Waffen-SS was accomplished primarily by drafting police and military-age members of the general SS organization into the new regiments and divisions that took form in 1939 and early 1940. The Army, Air Force, and Navy shared strict military recruit and draft quotas set by the Wehrmacht High Command. Any additional recruiting of manpower for the Waffen-SS would have to come from the shares of the other three services, which competed hotly for priority. The Waffen-SS command gloomily forecast that the Wehrmacht would only allow them to recruit approximately two percent (or 12,000 men) of the yearly draft. Since the maintenance of the units in hand required 18,000 men a year, new sources of manpower had to be found. For this rather pragmatic reason, the Waffen-SS began to organize a concerted recruiting effort in foreign territories that were coming under the control of the Third Reich. On 30 April 1940, the SS began to recruit in occupied Denmark and Norway for a new regiment, designated SS Nordland.

Foreigners of Germanic racial groups who could meet Waffen-SS physical standards already served in very small numbers, having been authorized for the SS Germania Regiment in 1938. Himmler's dreams of a pan-Germanic order led by his SS elite also dated back to long before the war began, but he had made little progress. Even before receiving Hitler's approval, recruitment for the Waffen-SS began in the Low Countries and Scandinavia, although the "clandestine" and supralegal period lasted only a few days before the permissions were obtained. The SS established formal recruiting stations in countries in these regions between July 1940 and January 1941, Norway being last.

The Danish and Norwegian volunteers in SS Nordland were intended to make up half of the regiment's strength, the rest being German recruits. Himmler specified that the German officers and non-commissioned officers had to be especially fit and ideologically sound to deal with the foreign volunteers as Germanic representatives of the Nationalist Socialist movement. After the fall of the Low Countries in June, the SS began to form the SS Westland Regiment, a formation for Dutch and Flemish Belgian volunteers. Because this small-scale foreign recruiting met with limited success at this time, the Waffen-SS was allowed to add a fifth (and last, in the viewpoint of Hitler and the High Command) Waffen-SS division. In September 1940, Hitler ordered a slight expansion of the Waffen-SS, parallel to the spring 1941 Army expansion program for the coming offensive against the Soviet Union. The division, named SS Germania in December, was to consist as much as possible of Norwegian, Danish, and Dutch volunteers, and would be equipped as a motorized division of the Army. SS Division Germania was then formed by bringing together the Nordland and Westland Regiments, filled out with German troops and officers, the Germania Regiment (detached from the old SS Verfügungsdivision), and an artillery regiment. In late December, the division was redesignated SS Division Wiking, to avoid confusion with the Germania Regiment.

Generally, the first recruits from the Nordic occupied countries appear to have been ideologically motivated by the Germanic concepts of the New Order, pan-Germanism, and anti-Bolshevism, as well as the apparent desire to escape the declining circumstances of their native homelands. Emil Staal, a Dane, joined the Danish Nationalist Socialist Party at the age of sixteen, and volunteered for the SS Nordland Regiment in June 1940, at the age of nineteen. Strongly anti-Bolshevik and pro-Nazi, he sought adventure and escape from the living conditions in Denmark, returning only after being seriously wounded in the

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Caucasus in 1942. Bent Lemboe, his countryman, joined SS Nordland for a year on the encouragement from his father, a Danish Nazi since 1933, even though many Danes thought a Nazi-Soviet war was inevitable by early 1941.

Two Norwegian veterans of Nordland, Ole Brunaes and Leif Kristiansen, felt despair and some guilt over the sudden collapse of Norway in 1940 and the flight of the government to British soil. They saw Germany as the only possible guarantor of Norwegian freedom and identified the Norwegian SS units as the cadre for a new Norwegian Army. These two volunteers displayed sympathy for Germany and antipathy for British war interests, and apparently learned anti-Bolshevism only on the front lines:

\[5\]

I didn't know what Quisling stood for and what he thought, but I could see the British plot developing: provoke German occupation of Scandinavia in order to produce a German-Russian War. (Kristiansen)

Though we doubted we would come into action within time—England, Germany's only opponent left, was nearly beaten—we accepted the aims [Norwegian independence after a German victory]. Later on, from the 22nd of June 1941, the motivation for the volunteers was plain enough: to fight the Soviet communism threatening against Europe and thereby Norway. (Brunaes)

The early volunteers of the regiments of the SS Wiking Division encountered their first shocks well before the opening of the Russo-German War, however. German training camps and hard-bitten drill sergeants assaulted the young egos of the volunteers both spiritually and physically. Brunaes observed:

The training was, of course, no Sunday school. Our German teachers were no real deep psychologists, but, like us, ordinary healthy German youth, from all parts of the people and from all professions. They had ... self-confidence, well skilled with a dynamic efficiency and were remarkably proud of their famous German military traditions.

We Norwegians, coming from a country where the national defense had been neglected, the military professions ridiculed and any tradition nearly ruined, here had a lesson to learn with regard to accuracy, toughness, discipline, cleanliness—physically as well as morally (fingernails being examined before eating, the locking of wardrobes strictly forbidden, thefts from comrades punished hard).

As a group, the Nordic volunteers lacked the military background that German youths had gained from their compulsory paramilitary and labor service; they proved to be "independently minded and strongly inclined to criticism." But SS training generally prevailed, and the Nordland and its sister regiment, SS Westland, took shape during training under the imaginative guidance of the Wiking Division commander, SS Brigadier General Felix Steiner, previously a commander of the elite SS Deutschland Regiment. Steiner, a former Army officer with World War I experience, proved to be a progressive and enthusiastic officer who stressed leadership by example and the maintenance of high morale among the troops. His persuasive enthusiasm and sensitivity to the disparate national characteristics of his former troops and the new volunteers made him an ideal choice as the commander of the first multi-national unit in the German armed forces. To Steiner, "the western volunteer phenomenon had deeper psychological foundations" that reflected the spiritual crisis of European youth. Disenchanted with the nationalism of their fathers, they would prove responsive to Steiner's characterization of a common European culture and heritage as a binding force in the Wiking Division. Steiner's innovative grasp of military leadership principles probably led him to accentuate a pan-Germanic or European bond among his men in order to establish unit integrity and cohesion. His postwar
reminiscences retained this pan-Germanic ideology, undoubtedly reinforced by his professional success as a leader of multi-national units. 10

The recruiting standards of the SS Westland and Nordland Regiments remained identical for both foreign and German applicants. Dutch and Flemish men, between seventeen and forty years of age, who could establish Aryan racial characteristics, attest to good health, and meet the minimum SS height (165 cm) would enlist in the SS Westland Regiment for two to four years. Recruiting officers at The Hague and Antwerp stood ready to receive the volunteers, as did similar offices in Oslo and Copenhagen for SS Nordland. 11

Recruiting for the Viking Division fell far short of the expectations of Berger and his recruiters. In June 1941, as the division slipped into its assembly area prior to the opening of the "Barbarossa" offensive against Russia, only 1564 foreign volunteers mustered in the total roll call of 19,377 men. The remainder consisted of German SS men, with a scattering of Volksdeutsch recruits among these. The representation of the nationalities in the division, as of 22 June 1941, took the following form: 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegians</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danes</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By 19 September 1941, the numbers had changed relatively little:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegians</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danes</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Himmler remained undaunted by the poor recruiting results, and continued to fantasize about building a pan-Germanic army within the Waffen-SS. Apparently, the mere presence of a thousand Western Europeans in the ranks proved sufficient evidence to him that his notions continued to be well-founded. However, the pre-Barbarossa recruiting effort had clearly failed, and the Waffen-SS manpower problems would be alleviated in the end only by the induction of ever-increasing numbers of Volksdeutsche from Eastern and Southern Europe. 13

Almost all of the non-German Viking volunteers served as infantrymen in the SS Nordland and SS Westland Regiments, although a few served as artillerymen in the Artillery Regiment. The SS apparently made no effort to train foreigners in technical services and specialties at this time. 14 These conditions would change somewhat under later recruiting programs, but in 1941 those foreigners assigned to this elite SS mechanized division simply filled in the ranks of the infantry companies.

The SS Viking Division crossed the Soviet border in 1941 with Army Group South units, generally operating as a flank guard unit or loaning its regiments to other corps units for particular missions. In 1942, however, the Viking Division played a more decisive role, spearheading the seizure of Rostov and the drive into the Caucasus and the Maikop oil fields. Following the German collapse at Stalingrad, the Viking Division took part in defensive battles around the Don until it was relieved for refitting in April of 1943. Wartime propaganda highly touted this division as the embodiment of the multi-national Germanic empire and its crusade against Bolshevism. Indeed, the third battalion of the Nordland Regiment was formed by a Finnish SS Volunteer Battalion.
in 1942. Later, a reinforced Estonian battalion would replace the Nordland Regiment in its entirety in the Viking order of battle. However, available statistics demonstrate that casualties outstripped replacements, and the numbers of non-German troops in SS Viking declined until its 1943 relief from the front lines.

Replacement troops found themselves assigned to various units of the Viking Division without attention to their nationality. Their new German commanders had little good to say about the quality of these replacements, compared to the veterans trained in the several months before the Barbarossa offensive began. The Nordland Regiment commander advised the division staff that the 275 Germanic volunteer replacements (mostly Danes and Norwegians) he received in December 1941 had created a good general impression, but were "much too soft" and "cry like babies" compared with the earlier volunteers. He pleaded for stricter basic training and insisted that a two-to-one ratio of German to non-German troops remained desirable.

Such reports may have represented scapegoating attempts by commanders eager to explain embarrassing incidents, such as a desertion in the 1st Company, Regiment, in early 1942. Even Himmler became aware of this apparent disgrace and cautioned his chief recruiter, Berger:

The missing in action report from SS Division Viking on Privates Asbjørn Beckström and Ludwig Kuta, a Norwegian and a Dane who both shamefully deserted, once again reinforces my opinion that the ideological and military training of Germanic volunteers must be combined to obtain real success or, as otherwise expressed, so as not to alter the heretofore successes.

The Legion Experiment

As the Russo-German War loomed, SS recruiters still faced severe personnel shortages, including a lack of foreign volunteers for the Viking Division. Although that division remained the only sizeable Waffen-SS expansion that Hitler had authorized, SS leaders, such as Berger, sensed the need to relax racial and physical standards in order to improve recruiting in the occupied territories. Permission came in April 1941 to recruit up to 2500 Flemish and Dutch nationals in a volunteer regiment, SS Nordwest. The volunteers received all SS privileges but were not considered true Waffen-SS men.

By 25 May, some 920 volunteers had been assembled in the Hamburg-Langenhorn barracks of SS Nordwest, to be joined by over 560 more Dutch, Flemish, and Danish volunteers over the next three months. Flemish and Dutch volunteers filled separate companies of the regiment, and SS planners foresaw separate battalions of Flemish and Dutch volunteers in SS Nordwest, with sufficient Dutchmen recruited to form an additional regiment. However, by late September, the SS admitted having too few recruits to complete this scheme, and the Nordwest Regiment was broken up to form a pure Dutch regiment and a Flemish battalion, both organized as motorized infantry formations.

The opening of the Russo-German War proved catalytic to the formation of national volunteer contingents in the Waffen-SS. Rather than fielding further multi-national formations such as the regiments of the Viking Division, the Waffen-SS adopted the expedient method of recruiting separate national "legions," counting on the sponsorship of the collaborationist parties to assist in recruiting, motivated by national pride in "their" legions and the crusade against the Bolshevik enemy now cornered by their German masters. The origins of the legions policy in the German hierarchy remain obscure, and it was most likely purely opportunistic. The spontaneous offers of neutral and occupied
nations to furnish volunteer contingents proved irresistible, if only on propaganda grounds. The Spanish, Dutch, and Danish offers certainly presaged the official legions policy, which Hitler approved on 29 June. In accord with the SS pan-Germanic ideology stressing Nordic blood ties, the Waffen-SS would accept only truly "Germanic" legions recruited in Denmark, Holland, Sweden, Norway, and Flemish Belgium, leaving the proposed Spanish, French, Croatian, and Walloon Belgian contingents to the Army for training and deployment.  

In Denmark, Danish Nazi Party leader Frits Clausen seized upon the announcement of the Barbarossa offensive to enhance his position with German authorities. Clausen called upon Danes in a speech on 23 June to fight for Europe against the Weltfeind ("world enemy") by enlisting in the SS Regiment Nordland. Party comrades urged Clausen to consider a national legion similar to one that had fought in Finland the previous year. The party contacted Lieutenant Colonel C. P. Kryssing, commander of the 5th Artillery Battalion, Danish Army, for support in this endeavor. Kryssing, a Danish nationalist, sought support from the Danish government for the legion's formation and received official permission for Danish citizens, including regular military officers, to accept foreign service in the same manner as had volunteers for the Finnish war.  

Sufficient volunteers assembled in Copenhagen to form a battalion, Freikorps Danmark, for service with the Waffen-SS. Official recognition of this venture by the Danish government came with a 8 July War Ministry regulation permitting foreign service for Danish officers, and then an official parade on 19 July as 435 officers and men, led by Colonel Kryssing, marched past an assembly of Danish officials and officers, under the Danish flag, to the music of a German military band. As the apparently friendly crowd cheered, the contingent boarded a train for movement to the German Langehorn Barracks at Hamburg.  

Kryssing served as the first volunteer of the Freikorps. He strove to set an example by enlisting his two sons as volunteer soldiers and his wife as a nurse in this unit. Of the approximately 1000 men of the Freikorps who reported by early August, some forty percent had served previously in the military, a few (thirty) being veterans of the Finnish War. The officers came from the regular and reserve ranks of the Danish Army. They had to demonstrate Aryan racial background, lack of criminal record, and financial solvency to the German Waffen-SS recruiting office at
Copenhagen. Many officers were hand picked by Colonel Kryssing. First Lieutenant Per Sørensen, who would perish in the rubble of Berlin in 1945 as the last battalion commander, was noted by the Copenhagen office to be "...a competent and reliable officer. Lieutenant Colonel Kryssing is very interested in his accession and posting as an SS first lieutenant. Sørensen is an officer of exceptionally good appearance. He disposes of a sure and deliberate bearing...."  

In contrast to the SS Nordland Regiment of 1940, where a large number of ethnic Germans from North Schleswig had volunteered, the Freikorps supposedly represented a purely native Danish movement, reflecting a variety of motivations, none of which included economic gain, according to former Major Oleif Krabbe, one of the first company commanders. He estimated the motives of non-commissioned officers of the Freikorps as follows:  

A. Professional military interest 2-5%  
B. War-adventurer 5-10%  
C. Dissatisfied with home life 3-5%  
D. Anticommunist beliefs 20-25%  
E. Conservative or nationalist beliefs 10-15%  
F. Favored new European political order 15-20%  
G. National-Socialist family or member 30-35%  

Thus, political motivations predominated among the early volunteers, according to Major Krabbe. Officers were mostly between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age, and enlisted men predominantly between eighteen and twenty. Most of the latter were skilled or unskilled laborers. As the Danish volunteers gathered in Hamburg to begin their training, SS headquarters issued orders to organize them as an independent battalion of three infantry companies and one weapons company, all to be motorized.  

While the basic training of the Freikorps continued, German authority began to exercise its influence on this ostensibly national unit. SS observers became impatient with the leadership of Colonel Kryssing and his manner of discipline. Kryssing was a patriotic officer, but was not sufficiently politically motivated to ensure that National Socialist values trumped Danish interests among those in his command. The SS headquarters viewed this as an insufferable characteristic given what they viewed as the National Socialist tenor of the unit's members. After the New Year, Himmler decided to replace Kryssing with SS Major Christian von Schalburg, a former Danish Army captain and an experienced officer in the Wiking Division. Kryssing protested that under von Schalburg the Freikorps would come under National Socialist influence and that the Bolshevik enemy should be fought under non-political auspices. Such was not the desire of Himmler and the SS leadership, however, and von Schalburg, a fierce anti-Communist with proven leadership acumen, became the commander on 13 February 1942.  

Von Schalburg proved a popular leader and took steps to raise the caliber of the Freikorps by integrating ten German officer instructors into the unit in key positions. By May, the battalion was prepared for combat assignment, with its three infantry companies and one weapons company, the latter featuring two platoons of two infantry cannon (75-mm), one with three anti-tank guns (50-mm), and a combat engineer platoon.  

The Freikorps was alerted on 7 May that they would be airlifted the next day to the Eastern Front, their destination the "Demansk Pocket." This was a nearly isolated salient
extending deep into Russian lines south of Lake Ilmen, still held under Hitler's "no retreat" order of the winter campaign by the badly depleted divisions of the German II Army Corps. The Danish battalion was earmarked as a replacement battalion for the lone SS division in II Corps, the 2nd SS Totenkopf Division.

After unloading from their Junkers-52 transports at the Demansk airstrip, the Freikorps moved into its assigned lines on 20 May. Major von Schalburg's Order of the Day, No. 70 of 22 May 1942, praised the Danish volunteers (in German) for entering battle to defend Germandom under the leadership of the Germanics, Adolf Hitler, against Judaic Bolshevisism. He urged the troops to fight loyally and well, as did their predecessors of the Wiking Division, ending his order with, "... we will become loyal fighters for Denmark's honor and the Greater Germanic Empire." That day, the Danes launched an attack, alongside the reconnaissance battalion of the Totenkopf Division, capturing hundreds of meters of the dense, swampy, forested terrain and causing great casualties among the Russian defenders (some 1300 killed, according to the II Corps journal). Russian counterattacks then hit the Danes, felling their commander von Schalburg, among twenty-one other dead and fifty-eight wounded on a single day, 2 June 1942. A week later, the Freikorps again mounted an assault, this time under its new commander, the German SS Lieutenant Colonel Hans von Lettow-Vorbeck. He also died in close combat, along with twenty-six of his troops, on 10 June. Captain Kund B. Martinsen, a Danish company commander, took command of the Freikorps as it struggled for its existence. Heavy skirmishing continued until early on 27 July, when the Danes were relieved and withdrawn from the Demansk Pocket. The Order of the Day of the SS Totenkopf Division for 3 August 1942 cited the accomplishments of the Freikorps Danmark as a key reinforcement for "Fortress Demansk." It credited the Danes with killing 1376 enemy troops and capturing an additional 103, along with over 600 weapons and much ammunition. 29

The battle strength reports of the Danish battalion revealed much of the nature of its three-month baptism of fire. Among the steady accumulation of casualties suffered by the Freikorps, 9 officers, 17 NCOs, and 133 enlisted men died in action. This extreme example also pointed out the continuing difficulty of maintaining the national contingents at the front, as recruiting and training replacements forever lagged behind their casualties, as the table below indicates. 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Effective Strength (Officers/NCOs/Enlisted Men)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 May 42</td>
<td>24 / 80 / 598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 42</td>
<td>19 / 63 / 446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 June 42</td>
<td>7 / 23 / 274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July 42</td>
<td>9 / 38 / 290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 August 42</td>
<td>10 / 28 / 171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 August 42</td>
<td>10 / 32 / 180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Danish volunteers returned to Copenhagen, and four weeks' leave was granted. Reassembling on 12 October in the Citadel garrison, the *Freikorps* now mustered 1100 officers and men, thanks to returning wounded and new recruits. From 18 October to 21 November the Danes retrained, and on 19 December they entered the front lines of the 1st SS Motorized Infantry Brigade, stationed between Newel and Veliki-Luki. The battalion then engaged in positional warfare with little action for four months. The Danes were then pulled out of their lines on 24 March 1943 and transported by the Germans to Grafenwöhr for reformation into a new SS regiment. The *Freikorps* officially disbanded on 20 May 1943.  

SS recruitment in Norway had lagged significantly in early 1941, despite Himmler's directive accepting married volunteers as old as forty with full SS status, and the inducement that former members of the Norwegian Army could obtain equivalent rank in the Waffen-SS. But with the start of the Barbarossa offensive, German recruiters could seize upon new incentives and motivations. They carefully orchestrated a call for volunteers based upon the "flood of requests ... to take part in the opposition against Bolshevism." The *Legion Norwegen* formed at the end of July under SS direction with the size of a reduced regiment of one infantry battalion and a cyclist battalion. A Norwegian, Major Jorgen Bakke, commanded the Legion. The Germans entertained the notion of deploying the Legion to the Finnish front, where the new 6th SS *Nord Division* was engaged. This measure would have revived feelings of Scandinavian solidarity that were kindled in 1939-40 by the Russo-Finnish War. Armed Forces High Command quashed these ideas, however, when it notified SS headquarters that transport shortages made such a transfer impossible for the moment.  

The Norwegian legionnaires moved to a German training camp near Kiel, and then overland to the Leningrad front of Army Group North in early 1942. On 10 March 1942, the Norwegians entered the German siege lines surrounding Leningrad as part of Battle Group "Jackeln." This unit, a conglomerate of Army and SS units, had relieved several first line divisions in their entrenchments to free them to counterattack the dangerous Volkhov Pocket to the south. The Legion at this time numbered about 1150 officers and men, with a further 150 in replacement depot. It fought as a single infantry battalion of three rifle companies, one weapons company, and one anti-tank company. The second, cyclist battalion never filled, probably because the new recruits flowed to the frontline companies as replacements.  

The first Red Army counteroffensive on the northern front brought several of the volunteer contingents into action. It opened as the newly formed Soviet Second Shock Army forced the Volkhov line on 13 January, penetrating at the juncture of the German 126th and 215th Infantry Divisions at Yamno. The Shock Army at first advanced slowly, but later, upon the vociferous urging of the Soviet High Command, it advanced to a depth of some forty miles. The two German infantry divisions held on to their ruptured flanks to preserve a tight bottleneck at the base of Second Shock Army's penetration, and Army Group North not only produced enough reserve potential to halt the Russian advance but was able to pull the 4th SS Police and 58th Infantry Divisions out of their positions near Leningrad and pinch off the penetration near Lyubino Pole from the north and south, respectively, on 19 March. The breakthrough battle now became a battle for the reduction of the "Volkhov Pocket," and the Second Shock Army was doomed to eventual dismemberment.  

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http://www.gutenberg-e.org/esk01/esk02.html
Norwegian legionnaires later engaged in difficult trench warfare on the static Leningrad front. Artillery fire, frequent patrols, and raids kept casualties steady and fatigue high. The sole major Soviet attack it faced, a thrust from Leningrad toward the Oranienbaum pocket, seems to have missed the Norwegian Legion, which fought to hold its positions on the Russian flank. In early August Battle Group "Jackeln" disbanded, and the Legion came under the command of the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade, where it remained for the rest of its frontline service.

The worrisome conditions under which Legion Norwegen struggled did not go unnoticed. Quisling himself visited the front for a couple of hours on 13 May. Following him, a delegation of Norway's occupation authorities and collaborationist ministers visited the Legion for a day on 1 July, accompanied by the German Army and Corps commanders. Ten days later, the SS Police Commissioner for Norway, Wilhelm Redeiss, fired off a letter to Himmler complaining of the "wasting away" of the Norwegian Legion at Leningrad and called for its withdrawal. He stated that only 290 men defended a four-kilometer front line and some forty casualties (three dead) had been suffered in the last ten days. Redeiss urged the consolidation of the legionnaires with the new recruits in the SS Wiking Division. The German Army Corps Commander, when he heard of this proposal, remonstrated that all the Norwegians could best serve in the Legion under his L Corps. Since so many foreign units (Spanish, Flemish, Dutch, Latvian, and Russian) already served in the Corps, it was best suited to be a showcase of national interests. He judged the battle-worthiness of the Norwegians as "good" and pleaded with authorities not to undermine the status quo.

SS headquarters proved less than satisfied with the Norwegian Legion, however, and its removal from the front was soon accomplished. Already, in the fall of 1942, headquarters had taken action to remove Major Bakke and his second-in-command, Major Andersen, from the Legion. Bakke had proved obstinate and fiercely "parochial" (read: nationalist) in his dealings with the Germans. His "unpleasant personality" and "independent character and spirit," combined with his age (forty-eight) and poor training, rendered him of little value in a political or training role. Personnel Chief Berger urged SS headquarters to deny the officers further duty, saying, "it is better in any case to have [Bakke and Andersen] as civilian opponents under our own skirts." The new commander, as of 23 September 1942, was Major Arthur Quist, a well-educated and linguistically talented former Norwegian Army officer who proved more popular with Germans and Norwegians alike.

Whether because of the lack of positive leadership or the abominable conditions at the front, most Norwegian legionnaires declined to extend their enlistments. This created a crisis at SS headquarters in disengaging the Legion from its position with the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade and shipping it home to Norway in time for discharge. They feared a consequent loss of credibility if they failed to do so. Himmler fumed at Berger at the end of January 1943 over the unit's poor leadership that had succeeded in motivating only twenty percent of the legionnaires to remain. The Reichsführer ordered the replacement of the Norwegian Legion with the Latvian Legion at the front in February 1943. He proposed to remove the legionnaires to an SS training base, merge them with new Norwegian recruits of the regular Waffen-SS, urge reenlistments, purge the officers, and consolidate the resulting companies or battalion through intensive training. Himmler called for the eradication of national politicization and reserved the decision on future deployment of Norwegian volunteer units to himself.

Himmler may have been alluding to the continued interference by the Quisling government in the administration of the Legion. Quisling hoped to use the Legion as leverage toward Norwegian autonomy in the new Germanic Reich. As a prototype of a Norwegian army, it would assert Norwegian sovereignty and his own position as head of
state. For his part, Quisling urged party members to volunteer for the Legion, thus winning Berger's approval. On the other hand, Norwegian authorities recruited a separate "Police Company" for the Legion and sent it to the front in September 1942. In October, a Ski Company, supposedly containing some of Norway's "world master" skiers, was recruited and sent to the SS Nord Division in Finland. Two more Police Companies would join the ski unit in Finland, elevating that unit to battalion strength. 39

While the Ski Company was being transported from its training camp to the German Northern Front, the Legion Norwegen detached from the Leningrad front in March of 1943 and withdrew to Grafenwöhr training camp for reassignment. 40

In Holland, the deeply collaborationist National Socialist Movement (NSB) of Anton Mussert served German recruiters well and responded positively to the outbreak of war with the Soviet Union. In addition to Mussert's party, German recruiters sought the numerous young Dutch conscripts between seventeen and nineteen years of age who had been called up during the Low Countries Campaign of 1940 but had not served. Finally, Dutchmen who contracted to work in Germany received some attention from SS recruiters. Himmler had pressured his recruiters to "fill the Westland Regiment in four weeks," preferably from the young conscript group. Recruiting Chief Berger also preferred non-NSB men, based upon reports that they performed well and demonstrated more willingness as soldiers. There were also concerns that the NSB and labor ranks should not be bled entirely dry for the SS recruiting program. 41

Mussert called upon the nation to join the "crusade" in the East, and the former Dutch Army Chief of Staff, General Hendrick A. Seyffardt, lent his prestige to the recruiting drive for a Dutch national legion. Ironically, the first such call for a legion had come from a fringe party, the Fascist National Front, whose leader, Arnold Meijer, gained the approval of SS Reichskommissar Hans Rauter and the Waffen-SS staff in the Netherlands. But he later recanted when the recruiting campaign was already underway, by then with the support of the full range of Dutch collaborationism. The Waffen-SS organized the Dutch Legion in regimental strength, but had to disband the SS Nordwest Regiment to furnish enough Dutchmen for the necessary three battalions and support companies. Half of the one thousand Dutch Nordwest members refused service in the Legion Niederlande, however. These men opted to return home, where 120 of them would eventually serve in a cadre battalion intended for local security duties in Holland. 42

In the Dutch case, some local initiatives worked against immediate increases in Waffen-SS recruitment. Mussert had agreed during April-June 1941 to support a Luftwaffe National Socialist Motor Corps (the German NSKK) recruitment program that apparently netted some 4000 recruits for appreciably more comfortable duty in the Netherlands. Presumably, a portion of these recruits might have rallied to the Legion or Waffen-SS later in the year. Mussert himself remained blind to realities, however, and spoke avidly in August 1941 of forming three regiments of legionnaires, leading to the "first Dutch division." The contingent passing before him in review on 11 October however, numbered a mere 650 men. 43

The Dutch legionnaires trained at Arys in East Prussia in the fall of 1941. Despite problems with Dutch officers similar to the case of the Danish Freikorps, the Dutch Legion became the second of the national contingents of the Waffen-SS to enter combat. Transported by ship from Danzig to Libau in mid-January 1942, the Legion entered the Volkhov Front north of Lake Ilmen, at the height of the Soviet winter offensive.

Legion Niederlande proved the strongest of the national legions in number, but also the
least "national" in composition, as the following strength report for 9 January 1942 indicates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>NCOs</th>
<th>Enlisted Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2179</td>
<td>2207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flemish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>2536</td>
<td>2937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures demonstrate that German personnel provided most of the leadership in the Dutch Legion, with the bulk of the troops being foreign volunteers. The few German enlisted men probably provided administrative and technical services, taking little part in combat.

The initial assignment of the Dutch Legion, as it moved by rail from Libau to the Volkhov Front, involved rear area security and mopping up remnants of the Soviet Second Shock Army, destroyed by the major German forces in the Volkhov Pocket during battles that raged from February through June. The three battalions of the Legion were attached initially to the German Army's 20th Motorized Infantry Division. This unit was a division headquarters with few organic troops, used to control various security operations in the Eighteenth Army rear area. The Dutch were grouped with some small German units in the Battle Group "Jaschke." The Second Battalion of the Legion Niederlande drew first blood on 11 February 1942 as it forced a roadblock on the Gora-Gusi road defended by "strong" Russian forces. The legionnaires forced the barricade, killing six Russians and capturing three. According to its war diary, "one prisoner (Jew) was shot while escaping." These initial operations revealed some difficulties in controlling the Legion, according to Group "Jaschke":

Working with the staff of Regiment Niederlande is very difficult, as officers fail to appreciate the tactical situation. Reports are so unclear and two-sided. Division directs the staff of II/A.R.20 [Second Battalion, Artillery Regiment 20, then supporting the Legion] to keep Division informed directly, such that a clear picture may be obtained.

Shortly thereafter, the Germans assigned the Legion to the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade, under which command the Dutch would serve out their deployment.

At the end of this operation, the SS replaced the unpopular German commander of the Dutch Legion, Colonel Otto Reich. His replacement, SS Lieutenant Colonel Josef Fitzthum, took command on 15 July 1942. He had commanded the Flemish Legion at the front and had already displayed some skill in handling foreign volunteers. After participating in the mopping up of the Volkhov Pocket, collecting prisoners and booty, the Dutch received the assignment of guarding the Leningrad-Novgorod railroad line, under tactical control of the 285th Security Division. By the end of July, however, the Legion had moved with its parent 2nd SS Infantry Brigade to the Leningrad siege lines. Its strength reports reflected the typical depredations of campaigning in the Russian winter and in the thickly forested swampland between Leningrad and Lake Ilmen.

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http://www.gutenberg-e.org/esk01/esk02.html
These figures indicate that Legion Niederlande never exceeded sixty-percent personnel effectiveness in its frontline duty, dropping to effective battalion strength by the time it occupied the trenches before Leningrad. The differences between nominal strength and combat strength reflected personnel out of action because of injury, sickness, and wounds. The overall decline over the six-month period was due to transfers, deaths, furloughs, and convalescent leave.

Probably because of its declining strength, the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade in September grouped the Dutch Legion with the Norwegian Legion and two Latvian security battalions in Battle Group "Fitzthum," under the Dutch Legion commander. These units settled down into months of tedious positional warfare on the Leningrad siege front. The Dutch volunteers fought a typical action on 4 December 1942. A 600-man Russian assault force hit the first battalion of the Legion, and many Russians broke through their lines. The Battle Group responded with a counterattack by Dutch and Norwegian legionnaires to restore their former positions, killing some 350 enemy troops and capturing 42 at a cost of 30 dead, 66 wounded, and 3 missing. Colonel Fitzthum's after-action report commented that the enemy consisted of penal companies of "... not especially high combat value." Another assault on the Legion in February 1943 included tanks, thirteen of which fell to Legionnaire Gerardus Mooyman's anti-tank gun. Mooyman became the first foreign volunteer recipient of the coveted Knight's Cross, with concomitant exploitation by propagandists and recruiters in the homeland.

On 27 April 1943, Legion Niederlande detached from the front and moved to Grafenwöhr training camp for refitting and reorganization. In mid-May, Himmler ordered a three-week furlough for the Legionnaires, who he wished to retain past their initial enlistment periods, but noted that, "for political and military reasons, it is impossible to send the entire group on leave to the homeland." There would be no victory parade for the Dutch Legion, now or in the future. Already, conditions in the homeland posed problems for Germans and collaborating natives alike.

Few Flemish recruits had entered the Waffen-SS during the establishment of the SS Westland Regiment of the Wiking Division in 1940. Generally, this fact stemmed from the divided interests of the right-wing Flemish National Union Party and other groups, which variously promoted Flemish independence, association with Holland (a "greater Dutch" union), as well as pan-Germanic interests. The creation of the volunteer unit Nordwest by the SS proved in some respects an answer to the political confusion in Belgium, as Staf de Clercq agreed to encourage his party and militia to volunteer for this native formation, ostensibly intended for local guard duty in the west. After its establishment in April 1941, Flemish volunteers were recruited for three companies of this regiment. German authorities generally disliked the "Greater Dutch" political philosophy festering in the ranks of SS Nordwest and opted for separate Dutch and Flemish Legions. The collaborationist parties in this largely Catholic nation responded favorably to the opening of the Russo-German War and supported a legion program. Thus, in the Radom training camp the Legion Flandern took form in September 1941. Like its Dutch counterpart, it included a significant number of German leaders and technical personnel, the former including the legion's commander, Major Michael Lippert.
Ironically, the formations of Flemish volunteers may have sparked similar interest in the French-speaking part of Belgium, which was ever anxious over Flemish notions of independence or union with the Netherlands. The Walloon political circles around the king and other Belgian unionist forces may have had a significant impact upon the public announcement in June that a *Corps Franc Wallonie* would form for service against the Russians, in competition with the Flemish separatists.  

The SS organized the Flemish volunteers as a motorized infantry battalion of three rifle companies, one weapons company, and a cannon company with anti-tank guns and heavy mortars. Problems developed in procuring vehicles for the legion, however, and horses were issued to the befuddled recruits. Then, when orders arrived on 27 October 1941 for a 2300-kilometer march to Tossno via Riga, the SS issued over 150 vehicles in November, requiring an emergency training program for their operation and maintenance. On 10 November, *Legion Flandern* began its trek eastward, to become the first of the SS volunteer units to enter combat operations, as part of the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade.  

The march to Russia turned disastrous in the freezing winter. On 14 November, no engines could be started in the -28° Celsius morning at Pleskau. Ten days later the first units of the legion began to enter the Tarassowa region (south of Tossno) and were assigned to anti-partisan duty. Finally, on 18 December, the Legion entered winter quarters at Zabeln and Kandau. By this time, the Legion reported some 125 of 161 vehicles as inoperable and only 23 officers (of 26 on hand), 72 NCOs (of 81), and 559 men (of 898) as fit for duty.  

Serious combat began for the Flemish in January as the Legion reinforced the 424th and 422nd Regiments of the German 126th Infantry Division in containing the Soviet Second Shock Army's thrust over the Volkhov River. Severe defensive fighting took place, with numerous frostbite casualties aggravating the state of the frontline riflemen. This assignment extended into March, when the first of many joint operations occurred with units of the Army's 250th (Spanish) Infantry Division (see below). On 17 March, the Legion reinforced the 58th Infantry Division, occupying a defensive position east of Ljubzy. On 1 April came another joint operation with Spanish troops, wherein the Flemish Legion observed great confusion and panic in Spanish ranks. Also in April came a change of command, as SS Lieutenant Colonel Lippert fell badly wounded. His replacement on 18 April was SS Lieutenant Colonel Josef Fitzthum, who would later command the *Legion Niederlande* as well.  

As with the other volunteer units receiving their baptism of fire, *Legion Flandern* demonstrated weaknesses that their German leadership quickly criticized. After a combat action at Veschki-Sentitzy (1-9 March 1942), the Legion's operations officer noted:  

1. Poor reconnaissance of enemy field positions and strength. The attack was not conducted with air and artillery support.  
2. Too few German officers and NCOs have been in the companies. As soon as the company commander is killed or wounded ... the attack stalls. As soon as a new leader arrives, the attack resumes. The troops are good but lack leadership.
3. Insufficient liaison between regimental headquarters and the Legion.
4. Unsatisfactory evacuation of wounded.
5. Unsuccessful coordination with Spanish units on flank.
6. Artillery fired on registration points, rather than by direct observation from the front lines.

The same report noted good cooperation with German units and handling of supplies and ammunition.

June saw the Flemish Legion engaged in the final mop-up of the Volkhov Pocket. By this time, its combat strength had dropped to a dangerously low level: 13 officers, 26 NCOs, and 288 enlisted men. Assigned to Battle Group "Burk," the Legion attacked alongside two Spanish battalions to clear the villages of Bol Samosje and Mal Samosje. According to the Legion's war diary, the Spanish attack stalled and a battalion refused to advance. Group "Burk" then ordered the Flemish Legion to continue their attack to relieve pressure on the Spanish. This four-day action alone cost the Legion two officers, two NCOs, and thirty-seven enlisted casualties (including eleven dead). 57

Evidently, the fighting skills of Legion Flandern had improved measurably with experience. The 26 June after-action report of Battle Group "Burk" praised the Flemish for their tough step-by-step fighting through the woods against a strongly fortified enemy. It credited the legionnaires with destroying thirteen bunkers and killing some two hundred enemy soldiers. Burk chastised the Spanish unit, on the other hand, for not carrying weapons at the ready, throwing off ammunition for heavy weapons, and panicking in the fight. 58

On 11 July 1942, the Flemish buried their dead in a burial ground by the Volkhov River. Lieutenant Colonel Fitzthum presided over this memorial service and decorated many of the survivors. He praised the bravery of the legionnaires and spoke of the history of Flanders and the mission of the Germanic Volk in Europe's search for lebensraum. How inspired the Flemish were at this point was not recorded, but certainly they must have felt physically and emotionally spent after six months of nearly unrelenting combat. 59

Legion Flandern now joined the German siege lines south of Leningrad, as the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade joined the L Army Corps in the vicinity of Pushkin. The commander, Fitzthum, took over the Dutch Legion, and Captain Konrad A. Schellong took charge of the Flemish on 16 July 1942. Schellong, who later emigrated to the United States, commanded the volunteers for the duration of the war, attaining the rank of colonel. 60

Along with the Dutch and Norwegian Legions in the 2nd Brigade, the Flemish Legion settled into trenches for a year of tedious trench warfare along the Izhora River. Fresh replacements then began to arrive from Belgium, and the Legion slowly revived as a battle-worthy unit. Allowing time for training and transportation, sufficient new recruits had probably joined the Legion by October to restore its ranks completely. 61

The Flemish volunteers patrolled and skirmished with Russian troops around Krasnoe-Selo into 1943. They rotated out of the trenches on 12 February as the brigade reserve in time for the Second Ladoga Battle. This assault saw part of the Spanish Volunteer Division, east of the 2nd SS Infantry Brigade, smashed by a Soviet corps assault. The Flemish Legion buttressed the western flank of the Soviet breakthrough for a month, while larger German units successfully counterattacked to stem the Russian effort. During these operations, the Legion (now only 450 strong) transferred to the 4th SS Police Division. It remained under this division until its withdrawal from the front on 14 April 1943. 62
Army Legions

The Russo-German War surprised the French public in the summer of 1941. For varied reasons, many Frenchmen welcomed the opening of an eastern front in the war, for it brought the prospect of the destruction of Communism, reduced pressure upon France, and later introduced the first realistic hopes that Germany might be defeated. It also strengthened the positions of the collaborationist parties, especially amid the depression, cynicism, and pessimism that the Armistice had fostered in French life. For some of those Frenchmen not interested in friendship with Germany, it posed the notion that a German victory remained the sole alternative to the Bolshevization of Europe, including France. For these observers, such a fate loomed worse than German domination of France. However, the Hitler regime took little note of this phenomenon, and would not share the war against Russia with Vichy France as it would with its Finnish allies and Italian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Slovakian, and Hungarian satellites. 63

The idea for a French legion to fight at the side of the Germans came neither from Vichy nor the Germans. Rather, it was the creation of the Paris collaborationist parties (the "Paris Fronde") in association with the German ambassador in Paris, Otto Abetz. The major parties were the Parti Populaire Français (PPF) of Jacques Doriot, the Ressemblement National Populaire (RNP) of Marcel Deat, and the Mouvement Social Revolutionnaire (MSR) of Eugène Deloncle. Smaller parties from the right-wing fringe also took part in the call for volunteers, which never found any central direction but remained subject to individual party initiatives. In early July, Abetz received approval via the German Foreign Ministry to accept the formation of a French Legion for service in Russia. Apparently, Hitler did not react warmly to the prospect of arming thousands of French fanatics (with a potential recruitment of 30,000 being estimated by Abetz), and stipulated that no more than 15,000 be recruited and that the initiative for the Legion remain on the French side. 64

Abetz continued to orchestrate the actions of the Paris collaborators with restraint. Public meetings, propaganda campaigns, and the formation of symbolic committees of party leaders and intellectual notables all took place amid a feverish anti-Bolshevik atmosphere in July and August. This case of military collaboration initially reflected themes common in pre-war French national politics. Only later would overlapping interests produce arguments paralleling German propaganda and notions of pan-Europeanism.

The usual Wehrmacht age, health, racial, and social regulations applied to the recruits, but the more stringent racial and physical strictures of the SS did not apply in this case to a legion destined for Army service. Nevertheless, it appears that the Germans used medical screening to deliberately keep the numbers of recruits at a tolerable level. These measures squelched the collaborationists' hopes for fielding a French division of all arms for the Russian front, similar to the Spanish "Blue Division" already being sent to Germany. The best records indicate that some 3600 legionnaires enlisted and were accepted by the German Army through February 1942, and a further 3000 through May 1943. These modest results were apparently not improved by the extension of recruiting to the Free Zone of France and North Africa, authorized by Admiral Darlan on 9 December 1941. 65

The Legion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme (LVF) first assembled with a parade on 27 August 1941 at the Borguis-Desbordes Barracks at Versailles. German and Vichy officials reviewed the first contingent of the LVF. The event was soured, and the misfortunes of the LVF presaged, by the wounding of Pierre Laval and Marcel Deat by a would-be assassin's submachine gun, fired from the ranks of the Legion. 66

The LVF entrained in segments from Paris and assembled at Deba, Poland during
September and October for its training under German Army supervision. The 1st Battalion (820 officers and men) and the 2nd Battalion (896 officers and men) and a regimental headquarters company first constituted the Legion, while a third battalion slowly accumulated over the next several months. The troops and leaders proved a strange mixture of idealists, adventurers, political opportunists, and professional soldiers. Doriot himself stood in the Legion's ranks as an NCO. Colonel Roger Henri Labonne, formerly military attaché to Turkey, assumed the command of the Legion, christened Infantry Regiment 638 by the German Army. At the age of sixty-five, Colonel Labonne brought to this challenging assignment no combat experience, along with a "... mediocre intelligence but a marked opportunism." His troops displayed little cohesion during training, indeed reflecting a diversity of physical, psychological, social, and political ability that would have shaken the most seasoned commander. 67

For instance, worlds apart from the old-soldier commander stood the idealistic chaplain, Monseigneur Count Jean Majol de Luppe. A sixty-seven-year-old monarchist and confirmed anti-communist, he believed firmly in the German New Order in Europe, and current German propaganda often featured in his sermons and rhetoric. Writer Jean Foutenoy represented the inassimilable soldier-of-fortune type of volunteer. Hailed as a fascist Malraux, he admired the Germans but criticized the Doriot faction, finding the ranks of Deat's RNP more congenial. He had worked as a correspondent in China, supporting the Kuomintang Party, and had fought in both the Spanish Civil War and the Russo-Finnish War as a volunteer. Abetz recommended him enthusiastically as the Legion's propaganda officer. He was fluent in Russian and German, had worked for the Havas Agency in Moscow, and was a confirmed anti-communist, anti-socialist, and pro-Nazi. His appointment was confirmed, with some reservations, by German Army authorities. 68

Outside of the various political rivalries at work, the major source of contention was between the professional soldiers and the political activists. The soldiers, including many of the senior officers of the Legion, saw the Legion as a symbol of France's military honor, and retained their traditional enmity for Germans and the Wehrmacht. The most radical Paris collaborators, however, advocated German hegemony and the absorption of France into the New Order. 69

The first battalion arrived in Deba on 8 September 1941, the second battalion on 20 September, and the assembled regiment took its oath of service on 5 October. Because the first elements departed for the front on 28 October, the Germans obviously provided only the most rudimentary training to this most heterogeneous regiment in their army. The degree of disinterest evidenced by the Army High Command in the French volunteers emerges from General von Trothas' address to the regiment on 19 October. He made no mention of New Order politics, but simply greeted the French as participants (Kampfgenossen) in the war against Bolshevism. He called on them to fight for France and for Petain. They were to remember that they wore the gray of the German Army, and to be loyal soldiers. 70

The German Army headquarters ordered the LVF into Army Group Center as a replacement regiment, presumably ready for attachment to one of its divisions. On 11 November, Field Marshal von Bock ordered the French to reinforce the 7th Infantry Division, then on the offensive near the Smolensk-Moscow highway. Almost immediately, the LVF began to attract criticism from German observers. On 16 November, Army Group Center wired the High Command: 71

The French Legion, at this time on the march from Smolensk to Vyasma, has not yet reached Jartzewo, with its daily progress of 8-10 kilometers. Yet
according to its liaison officer, the regiment is completely exhausted from this. Failures of officers, unsatisfactory care of horses, complete ignorance of march discipline seem to be the main causes, as well as insufficient training of the men. Army Group has reached an understanding with the Legion's commander to march on with short marches and several rest days and special measures for supply of the troops in order at least to bring the troops behind the battle lines.

Three days later, the first French troops straggled into the 7th Division's area. The division commander decided not to risk using the LVF as an integral regiment, and directed the two French battalions to reinforce his 61st and 19th Infantry Regiments, respectively. On 24 November, the First Battalion occupied its position and initiated the combat phase of the LVF's campaign. The French troops occupied defensive positions and carried out one confused attack on Russian lines before the Germans had seen enough. On 4 December, the division staff noted excessive frostbite cases in the Legion, the result of careless behavior in the cold and lack of knowledge of bunker construction.

The next day, the war diary noted that the 638th Regiment remained a "legion" (a novel pejorative usage) and had much to learn to become operationally ready. The French troops continued to suffer in the cold, and the division staff decided to relieve the first battalion on 6 December and the second battalion on 8 December. On the latter day, the division decided that the LVF should not return to operations, and that it would require much work in training and a training area to accomplish it. It ordered the LVF detached. The VII Corps noted the detachment, adding, "... the deficiencies in training are no longer to be spanned by improvisation." By this time, only 1040 of the 1520 legionnaires (or sixty-eight percent) remained effective for action, after less than two weeks of light engagement. 72

The VII Corps intelligence officer investigated the Legion the day following its relief. He judged their discipline and morale poor. The men seemed willing, but the officers were too old or broken in spirit. Seeing an immediate need for German officers to take over essential tasks, he recommended the merger of the German liaison personnel with the LVF command staff, a reorganization of support services, the institution of discipline along German lines, and immediate training in cold weather survival. 73

Army Group Center attempted to retain the LVF for rear area security duty, but the Army High Command announced Hitler's decision on 13 February to withdraw the legion to Radom, Poland, for training. In the post-mortem critique conducted by the Germans, all the organic weaknesses of the legion—which they could have detected in training—were reviewed: lack of cohesion, unfit leaders, and politicization. The entire Marseilles contingent, for instance, was rejected as overage, the youngest being forty-five years old! German observers also decided, perhaps in self-indulgent hindsight, that racial impurity in the Legion "must have contributed" to the unit's difficulties. 74

The Army High Command ordered the training command in Poland to refit and reorganize the LVF. Only the 1st Battalion and the 3rd Battalion (still in training camp) would remain operational. The regimental headquarters, the 2nd Battalion, and the separate companies were all disbanded. Headquarters further ordered the discharge of all enlisted men over forty years old, all colored troops, all former Russian émigrés, all Germans from the French Foreign Legion, and anyone who had failed individually at the front. The refurbished battalions would return to operations as soon as personnel and materiel had been prepared. 75

Apparently the Germans judged the 3rd Battalion ready for operations first. It had, after all, remained in Poland since its formation in November, and probably had benefited from
serious training. The camp commander shipped it out on 11 May to the 221st Security Division, on rear area security duty for Army Group Center. The command ordered the German liaison staff to supervise continuing leadership training for the willing but inexperienced French officers and NCOs. 

The 3rd Battalion attached to the 221st Security Division on 15 May, and fared no better than its French predecessors. The German officers criticized the French leadership, the weakness of volunteer spirit, political divisiveness, and the unit's poor care of horses and equipment. The Germans sacked the battalion commander on 7 June and placed a captain in command, noting some improvements. Troop strength plummeted, as division records indicated on 7 August shortages of 4 officers, 42 NCOs, and 284 men of the 11, 111, and 626 authorized, respectively. The Germans noted that none of the troops on hand had been granted leave since entering service the previous September. Yet the morale of the men must have impressed them, as the volunteers' major concerns regarding the battalion, beyond family support, centered on expanding the LVF to regimental size and returning it to the front to prove its worth.

Over the next six months (through mid-March 1943), the 221st Division continued to find fault with the personnel system of the French Legion. "Lawless, adventurous and criminal elements" constituted a significant proportion of the replacements. Too many officers requested their release. Losses in the 3rd battalion had remained low (one officer and 103 men were casualties, while 40 others had been furloughed), but qualitative and quantitative deficiencies remained (7 officers and 366 men had arrived as replacements).

The 1st Battalion of the French Volunteer Legion reformed and retrained in Radom. The German commander for Poland inspected it in July 1942 and apparently liked the training and material condition of the battalion. He still saw too many undesirables in the ranks, but ordered the battalion prepared for deployment by the next month. The battalion joined the 186th Security Division in the Borisov-Mogilev region in October 1942 for anti-partisan operations in Army Group Center's rear areas.

Attempts to revitalize the LVF extended to the rest of Metropolitan France. The Vichy Government's war minister, General Bridoux, announced that the LVF would be renamed the "Tricolor Legion" and would recruit from both zones of France with the sponsorship of Vichy. The popularity of service with the Germans did not increase, however, and the available French troops did not permit reactivation of the full 638th Regiment until late 1943. The occupation of the remainder of French soil in 1942 by the Germans demonstrated that Vichy would not be able to erect an integral army under the guise of the Tricolor Legion, so the government disbanded it in January 1943. Hitler in any case forbade the formation of any new legions, but authorized the return of the LVF to regimental size.

Before the demise of the Tricolor Legion, a curious offshoot had been spawned, the *Phalange Africaine*. This organization planned to field an LVF-style regiment in North Africa to resist the Anglo-American forces then advancing on Tunisia. Several hundred volunteers enlisted in this enterprise, but only a single 205-man company, called Volunteer Company *Frankonia*, served for a month in Tunisia. The company joined the 754th Regiment of the German 334th Infantry Division and was captured upon the fall of Tunis. Several French officers received German decorations and praise for their actions during the tough defensive fighting in April 1943.

By late 1943, sufficient new recruits had accumulated for the Germans to reform the regimental staff and 2nd Battalion of Infantry Regiment 638. Colonel Edgar Puaud, a
veteran of the Foreign Legion, took command of the regiment on 1 September 1943, and concentrated it at the end of 1943 under the 286th Security Division. Puaud brought great energy and verve to the reformed LVF, and the German liaison staff recommended a reduction of its own size because of the generally good discipline and leadership in the unit. During a major anti-partisan sweep in February 1944, Puaud's regiment gained credit from the Germans for capturing 1345 partisans, killing 1118, overrunning 43 camps, and destroying approximately 1000 positions and bunkers. These anti-partisan operations, at which many of the French veterans of North Africa apparently excelled, came to naught in face of the great Soviet summer offensive of June 1944. The bulk of Army Group Center's combat units were destroyed in this major debacle, and the LVF had to be pressed into action blocking the Smolensk-Warsaw highway before one of the Russian spearheads. A battle group composed of most of the Legion (less the 3rd Battalion), a few local German troops, and four Tiger tanks stood firm on 24-27 June. The survivors withdrew to Minsk and assisted in defending that city after rest and reinforcement. Finally, in August 1944, the LVF withdrew to its new training camp at Greifenburg, Pomerania. It was the last of the original legions of 1941 to cease operations.

In Belgium, the German campaign of 1941 proved a boon to Léon Degrelle, the embattled leader of the Rexist Party, a right-wing Catholic activist party with fascist pretentions. His party was torn by internal dissensions, his hopes for national status with the German New Order threatened by German plans for partition, and his hopes for a preeminent role for his party in the future dashed by German occupation policy. Degrelle seized upon the Russian campaign with characteristic vigor and flamboyance: "We were defeated civilians, surrounded by a victorious military; there was no nation in existence. I wanted to win rights for my country from the Germans at their side at the front."

On 8 August 1941, the first contingent of French-speaking Belgians, 860 strong, departed Brussels as the Legion Wallonne. Degrelle volunteered as a private soldier, having no military background himself, but determined to seize his moment of destiny. Arriving in the East Prussian training camp at Mesenitz on 10 August, the Walloons settled down for a month's training with the German Army. Typically, these volunteers suffered in their first encounter with German discipline and training techniques, and experienced some culture shock with the issue of German Army uniforms, but training concluded on 15 October. On the next day, the 373rd (Wallonien) Infantry Battalion of the German Army departed by train for the battle area of Army Group South in the Ukraine. Led by Captain Georges Jacobs, a reactivated retired professional officer of the Belgian colonial troops, last having served with the 17th Infantry Regiment, this battalion consisted of a headquarters and four companies, with a total of 19 officers and 850 legionnaires. Now it began a half-year odyssey in search of an identity.
The Rexist Party had failed in 1940 to turn its pro-German stance to any advantage, having been largely ignored by German occupation authorities. Rexist arrogance proved no substitute for performance, and the Germans saw no benefit in favoring a party that they consistently viewed as insignificant in membership and devoid of significant following among the Belgian population. Degrelle lacked nothing in effort, however, and his consistent ambition and opportunism would affect the Walloon Legion as much as his party in the ensuing years of the war. Initially, about the only person of any stature that would listen to Degrelle on the German side was the ambassador in Paris, Abetz, who encouraged Degrelle's fantasies of becoming a major figure in the New Order that had descended over the continent.

German Army commanders at the front saw little use for the small band of Walloons, consigning them to anti-partisan guard duty in the Dnepropetrovsk-Samara River sector. From 19 November 1941 to 17 February 1942 the Legion Wallonne fell under command of various units of the First Panzer and Seventeenth Armies, mostly resulting in ridicule from the Germans and charges from the Walloons of maltreatment. Cold, sickness, and a few casualties reduced the legion to 650 effectives in December. The Germans took mortars and heavy machine guns away from the Walloons on 10 December for redistribution to combat units, further humiliating them. Morale plummeted, command difficulties increased, and there was talk of dissolving the Legion. The operations section of the Seventeenth Army noted:

Difficulties with the Walloon Battalion. On one hand, the battalion complains about unfair treatment by the German command to OKW, yet on the other extreme, reports of Group "von Schwedler" (IV Corps) on behavior of troops bordering on treason. The Walloon Battalion will, in change of previous orders, be assigned to the rear of LII Corps. (21 Dec. 41) Use of the Walloon Battalion remains restricted depending upon its cohesion [inneren Festigung] (8 Jan. 42).

The Germans appointed a new commander, Pierre Pauly, formerly a Belgian general staff officer, along with a new German liaison officer. Only ten officers remained with the seven hundred-man battalion. Before much cohesion could develop, however, the Walloons found themselves facing part of a Russian breakthrough on the Donetz front toward Dnepropetrovsk. Under orders of the 100th Light Infantry Division, the
Walloon Battalion and a company from SS Germania of the Wiking Division cleared the village of Gromovaya Balka and stood firm on 28 February against an assault by two regiments supported by fourteen tanks. A second attack pushed the Walloons into a few huts on the southwest tip of the village, but the battalion commander rallied his men for a counterattack and retook the town hut by hut, leaving one hundred Russians dead. German troops relieved the battalion on 2 March, but only two officers and one-third of the troops remained in action. Among the survivors, the Germans decorated thirty-seven men with the Iron Cross, Second Class. Léon Degrelle, lightly wounded, won promotion to sergeant for valor in this action.

Despite the damage sustained by the Legion, its morale seems to have improved in the aftermath of the Gromovaya Balka battle. Captain Georges Tchekhoff, a Russian imperial naval officer and émigré, naturalized in Belgium, became the Legion's third commander as it withdrew behind the front to rebuild. In Belgium, replacement companies formed under Rexist recruiting efforts and German direction and reported to Meseritz for training. This new replacement effort reflected the wholesale failure of the Legion to gain popular approval. The Rexist party had to plumb the depths of its manpower pool, sending members of the political hierarchy, a part of its youth corps, and volunteers from the Walloon Guard, a local security force, to fill the draft.

On 21 May 1942, the Walloon Legion joined the 97th Light Infantry Division and began to find its identity. Lucien Lippert, newly promoted to captain, assumed command of the Legion. A professional Belgian officer and artillerist, he would prove its most popular commander until his death in 1944. Experienced NCOs, including Degrelle, had been promoted to fill lieutenant positions, and new replacements arrived to restore the battalion to some eight hundred strong. General Ernst Rupp, the 97th Division's commander, prescribed detailed training and exposure to limited operations to prepare the Walloons for battle. After refurbishing their weapons, the division deployed the battalion in reserve and patrolling duties, to allow cohesion and leadership to develop. The battalion occupied the division's front lines on the Donetz River in June, holding a defensive posture during the great German offensive assault of that month. The Walloons then trailed in the division rear as the infantry followed the victorious German mechanized columns into the Don basin and the Caucasus, entering the latter in August; Rupp praised the Walloons for securing the division's lines of communications. On 21-22 August, the Walloons received their first combat assignment: a mopping up of Cheryakov, a village in the Caucasus held by a weak enemy battalion.

The strangely political circumstances of operating foreign legions appear clearly in the record of this action. The Legion cleared Cheryakov by the end of the 22nd, capturing thirty-five Russians and an anti-tank gun. The Walloons lost one dead and a dozen wounded on their side. Despite the brevity of this light action, the division on two occasions radioed the battalion during the mop-up, asking "What is the situation?", as if its commanders were fearful of setback. The next day, division radioed the liaison officer, "Was Lieutenant Degrelle involved in the assault? Essential for assault award (Sturmabzeichen)." Upon confirmation of that fact, the division called for an immediate recommendation for an Iron Cross medal. The division staff then filed a report with corps headquarters. It attached a report to Armed Forces High Command citing the Walloon Battalion's work in action against the enemy, noting that the Rexist leader had distinguished himself with especial personal bravery. Finally, in September,
Captain von Lehe, the German liaison officer, wrote a glowing report of the seizure of the village in the style of a press release for the homeland.

Certainly the battle value of the 373rd Battalion had improved by late 1942, and there seems little reason to doubt Léon Degrelle's courage and energy under fire. Yet, the attention focused on the Cheryakov fight leads one to conclude that the German Army viewed the foreign legions as propaganda troops, not as actual units intended for serious military employment. Indeed, as the casualties mounted in the Walloon Legion from Russian counterattacks, the 97th Division relieved it on 28 August and used it for flank security duty thereafter. During this period, the battalion came under control of SS Wiking Division for about a week. Degrelle and General Steiner apparently took a liking to each other, Degrelle being particularly impressed by the SS manner of command, organization and ideological zeal.

Orders came for the withdrawal of the Walloons for leave and refitting. Degrelle received notice in early September to report to Berlin to coordinate the release of Rexist volunteers for the Legion from among the Belgian prisoners of war held by the Germans; the High Command had just authorized the release of three hundred of them. The Rex Party hoped to form a second battalion for service on the front, and the army command in Belgium provided assistance. All of the legionnaires at the front, excepting one company of about 150 men, returned to Belgium on 18 December for furlough. The last group participated in the German withdrawal from the Caucasus in the aftermath of the Stalingrad disaster, and flew out in mid-February 1943.

The German Army began assembling veterans and new Recruits in Germany at the Meseritz Camp in March of 1943. Released prisoners of war, new recruits from Belgium, and workers recruited from Germany swelled the ranks to between 1600 and 2000 strong by early April. By this time, however, Degrelle had determined to take the Legion into the Waffen-SS, and now negotiated with Himmler and Berger in Berlin toward that end.
Danske Soldaten I kamp på Ostfronten 1941-45 (Odense: Universitetsforlag, 1978), 127, states that there were 177 Danes in August 1943.

Jüttner letters, T175/106/2629439ff. [Back]

Staal interview, Glucksberg, Germany, 22 May 1982. [Back]

Lebbe interview, Glucksberg, Germany, 22 May 1982. [Back]

Brunaes and Kristiansen interviews, Glucksberg, Germany, 21-22 May 1982. [Back]

Kristiansen interview; Letter, Ole Brunaes to author, 7 April 1982. [Back]

Letter, Ole Brunaes to author, 7 April 1982. [Back]


SS Wiking report T354/639/199, for instance, shows no non-Germans in the communications platoon of the reconnaissance battalion. [Back]


Letter, Himmler to Berger, 14/4/42, T175/66/2582014. [Back]


Himmler letter, 29/6/41, T175/106/2629090; letter, Berger to Himmler, 9/7/41, T175/106/2629026-32. [Back]

Bertelsmann, 1971), 95-96.  

**Note 22:** Kotze telegram, 20/7/41, T175/106/2628961. The 8 July 1941 regulation is covered in several sources, best by Claus Bundgård Christensen, Niels Bo Poulsen, and Peter Scharff Smith, *Under Hagekors og Dannebrog: Danskere i Waffen-SS 1940-1945* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 1998), 396-99.  

**Note 23:** Ole Kure file, BDC; Copenhagen recruiting office letter 20/7/41; Per Sörensen file, BDC.  

**Note 24:** Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 21-22.  


**Note 26:** Jüttner orders 11/9/41 and 7/3/42, T175/110/2534499 and 111/2635392.  

**Note 27:** Thomsen, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*, 99; Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 59-60; cf. RFSS T175/111/2635496-7 and 2635498-500.  

**Note 28:** Tieke, *Lufttransport*, 191; Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 60.  

**Note 29:** T580/71/Ord. 335. This document confirms that Danish was abandoned as the language of command with the departure of Kryssing. Such actions by the Germans tended to undermine the national spirit that legionnaires reflected when they volunteered. II Corps, T315/143/1007. *Freikorps Dänemark*, T501/299/169-70; Krabbe, *Danske Soldaten*, 69-71; von Lettow-Vorbeck, nephew of the African colonial general of WWI, had been slated to command Legion Flandern, but was reassigned upon von Schalburg's death. *Freikorps Dänemark*, T501/299/254.  

**Note 30:** *Freikorps Dänemark*, T501/299/254, frames 169-172.  


**Note 32:** Himmler letter 3/2/41; T175/63/2579266. Reichskommissar Terboven's proclamation, partly reported in Kurt G. Klietmann, *Die Waffen-SS - eine Dokumentation* (Osnabrück: Munin, 1965), 369; Jüttner organizational orders 30/7/41, T175/110/2134589; OKW letter 5/2/42, T175/111/2135478. Gert R. Überschär notes that the employment of the Norwegian Legion was not welcomed by the Army Commander Norway, who commanded troops in Northern Finland; Förster and Überschär, "Freiwillige" (1998), 1076.  

**Note 33:** Battle Group Jackeln, T354/647/0004. L Corps, T314/1235/1064; Berger letter 16/3/42, T175/111/ 26535488. Some 1300 of 2242 Norwegian SS men were in the legions program at this point.  


**Note 35:** Battle Group Jackeln, T354/647/122, 142.  

**Note 36:** Ibid., frames 56, 82; Redeiss letter 17/11/42, T175/66/2582527-8; L Corps, T314/1239/288-90.  

**Note 37:** Brunaes interview; Berger letters 25/8/42 and 18/11/42; Bakke file, BDC; Quist file, BDC.
**Note 38:** Himmler letter 31/1/43; T175/66/2582499-502; cf. frames 2582474ff.  Back.


**Note 43:** Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule*, 293, 287.  Back.

**Note 44:** *Legion Niederlande*, T354/653/518.  Back.

**Note 45:** Ibid., T354/653/375.  Back.

**Note 46:** Battle Group Jaschke, T315/735/940.  Back.

**Note 47:** *Legion Niederlande*, T354/653/362, 491-93, 509ff. The designed strength of the legion was 111 officers, 546 NCO's, and 2840 enlisted men. Total Dutch SS losses by 7/9/42 reportedly were: Waffen-SS, 174 killed and 15 missing; Legion, 250 killed and 31 missing; Letter, Rauter to Himmler, 12/9/42 N. K. C. A. In't Veld, *De SS en Nederland* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 819.  Back.

**Note 48:** L Corps, T314/1235/969.  Back.

**Note 49:** Ibid., frames 581-94; In't Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, 1520.  Back.

**Note 50:** Himmler letter 19/5/43, T175/63/2579229.  Back.

**Note 51:** Berger letters 1/9/41 and 16/9/41, T580/71/Ord. 335.  Back.


Note 55: Ibid., frames 180-274; 2nd SS Brigade, T354/161/386792ff. Lippert recovered from his wounds and later commanded SS Brigade Landstorm Nederland as a colonel in late 1944; Lippert file, BDC. Josef Fitzthum died 10/1/45 in Albania as a general; Fitzthum file, BDC. Back.


Note 60: Schellong file, BDC. Back.


Note 65: Jurgen Förster, "Croisade de l'Europe contre les Bolshevisme," Revue Historique de la Dieuxime Guerre Mondial (RHDGM) 118 (1980): 12-15; Yves Barjaud, "Die Legion der antikommunistischen französischen Freiwilligen 1941-1944," Feldgrau 13:3/6 (1965): 129-30. Davey, "Origins of the LVF," 34-37, also suggests a sixty-five percent acceptance rate. Crucial to the limitation in numbers was the German refusal to allow French POWs to volunteer for the LVF. Delarue estimated 13,400 candidates in July 1941 for the LVF, a number that was reduced by 4600 for physical and 3000 for legal problems, leaving 5800 candidates, of whom 3000 were accepted. From November 1941 until August 1944 (34 months), 2800 more LVF recruits were accepted. Of the roughly 5800 in service, 400 died, 2400 were discharged, 800 deserted, and 2200 returned to the depot in Greifenberg. Jacques Delarue, Trafics et crimes sous l'Occupation (Paris: Fayard, 1968). Burrin accepts
Delarue as authoritative on these and other details of the LVF (France under the Germans, 383, 435). Back.


Note 78: 221st Security Division, T315/1680/282. Förster offers additional pithy commentary from the documents on the Legion's military acumen; see "Freiwilligen," 1062-64. Back.


Note 83: Barjaud, "Die Legion," 133; Rostaing, Le Prix d'un Serment, 134-41; on the character of French anti-partisan operations, see Rostaing, 52-126. Delarue noted the many judgments by German military tribunals against LVF personnel: prison terms and
reductions, as well as four executions (in May 1942). The Germans felt that they had to intervene to quell the pillaging by the French. He states that a score were executed between 1941-45, "a considerable number considering the effective strength of the LVF." Delarue, *Trafics et crimes*, 200. Back.

**Note 84:** Léon Degrelle interview, Madrid, 8 June 1982. Charles d'Ydewalle perhaps first noted Fernand Rouleau as the proper founder of the Legion in his "La Legion Wallonne sur le front russe," in Robert Aron, ed., *Histoire de Notre Temps* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1968), 236. The Belgian amateur historian Eddy De Bruyne, in his over twenty years of work on the Walloon collaboration, has borne out the initiative of Rouleau, who demanded the authorization for the legion from the German occupation authorities while Degrelle was out of town visiting his friend Ambassador Abetz in Paris. Degrelle took advantage later of the dismissal of his Rexist deputy to assert the idea as his own. Such rivalries among the Rexist equaled the internal dissention in the LVF for at least another year. Back.


**Note 86:** The best English-language source is Martin Conway, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); see especially 3-75, passim. Abetz, of course, filled a curious foreign ministry post, since Berlin was represented at Vichy and the occupied part of France fell under Wehrmacht administration. Thus, Abetz served literally as ambassador in Paris, where he provided unending encouragement to the collaborationist parties there. His wife and Degrelle's had been friends since childhood, hence the special relationship. German authorities estimated total membership of the Rexist party at approximately 8000 throughout the war; Conway, 219. Back.


**Note 88:** Seventeenth Army, T312/678/8312606, 8312663-64. Cf. 21/12/41 telephone conversation between commander, Seventeenth Army, and commander, Group von Schwedler: "Army commander informs that a complaint from members of Walloon Battalion has been passed to OKH; the strained relations with German liaison officers as well as the careless combination by the German headquarters [of Walloons] with Hungarians and Italians. The commander wishes to hold an interview with the responsible leaders to clarify the relations and to avoid, in retrospect, raising of a foreign policy discord by these elements." T314/229/1093. Back.


**Note 90:** de Goy, "Legion Belge Wallonie," 19. Maj. Baumann, a German staff officer in Brussels for Legion affairs, wrote about the effort in some detail; see T501/173/61, 190. Pauly was cashiered by the Germans after an affray with a German officer who reproached Walloon indiscipline. D'Ydewalle, "La Legion Wallonne," 242; Conway, *Collaboration in Belgium*, 121-23. Back.


**Note 92:** 97th Light Division, T315/1188/998ff, T315/1189/1-1049. The Army reported the losses of the Legion to 6/7/42:

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<tr>
<th>Officers</th>
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<th>Enlisted</th>
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http://www.gutenberg-e.org/esk01/esk02.html
OKH letter 8/8/42, T175/69/2585643. Conway, in *Collaboration in Belgium*, mistakenly falls for the Rexist legend that "throughout 1942 the Legion had little respite ... where it was frequently to the fore in German offensives" (127).! Back.

**Note 93:** 97th Light Division, T315/1189/1009-1049, T315/1191/66-216; Degrelle interview. Back.


**Note 95:** Back.

A European Anabasis — Western European Volunteers in the German Army and SS, 1940-1945