

= Russian Corps =

The Russian Corps ( German : Russisches Schutzkorps Serbien , Russian : ??????? ?????? , Serbian : ????? ????? ) was an armed force composed of anti @-@ Communist Russian émigrés in the Territory of the Military Commander in Serbia during World War II . Commanded by Lieutenant @-@ General Boris Shteifon , it served primarily as a guard force from the autumn of 1941 until the spring of 1944 . It was incorporated into the Wehrmacht on 1 December 1942 and later clashed with both the Yugoslav Partisans and the Chetniks . In late 1944 it fought against the Red Army during the Belgrade Offensive , later withdrawing to Bosnia and Slovenia when the Germans withdrew from the Balkans . Shteifon was killed in April 1945 and was replaced by Colonel Anatoly Rogozhin , who subsequently managed to evade the Communists by surrendering to the British instead . He and his men were eventually set free and were allowed to resettle in the West .

= = Background and formation = =

In the Balkans before World War II there were approximately 15 @, @ 000 White Russian émigrés who had fled there in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution . On 6 April 1941 , Axis forces invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia . Poorly equipped and poorly trained , the Royal Yugoslav Army was quickly defeated . The country was then dismembered , with Serbia being reduced to its pre @-@ 1912 borders and placed under a government of German military occupation . Milan Nedi? , a pre @-@ war politician who was known to have pro @-@ Axis leanings , was then selected by the Germans to lead the collaborationist Government of National Salvation in the Territory of the Military Commander in Serbia .

The Russian Corps was formed by émigré White Russians and officers of the Russian Imperial Army , which had been defeated by the Communists in the Russian Civil War twenty years earlier . Over the course of the Uprising in Serbia in the summer of 1941 , the Communist @-@ backed Yugoslav Partisans killed approximately 300 Russian emigrants and injured many more , sometimes in acts of vengeance . In response , local Russians began to organize themselves into self @-@ defense units . At the time , there were an estimated 10 @, @ 000 Russian men within the borders of Yugoslavia , the majority of whom lived in Serbia .

The Russian Corps was founded in Belgrade by General Mikhail Skorodumov on 12 September 1941 and took shape under the supervision of the occupying German authorities , with the cooperation of Nedi? 's regime . At first , the group was an independent force reporting to the plenipotentiary for economic affairs , Franz Neuhausen . It was composed of White Russians who sided with the Germans because of their opposition to Communism and because they believed that their only hope of a non @-@ Communist Russia lay in a German victory in World War II . Russian émigrés from Bulgaria , Croatia and Hungary subsequently came to Belgrade to join the unit .

Due to illness , Skorodumov was replaced after only a month by his chief of staff , Lieutenant @-@ General Boris Shteifon , who was said to have had " warm and friendly relations with [ Milan ] Nedi? . " The Russian Corps was initially designated the " Independent Russian Corps " before being renamed the " Russian Defense Corps " on 2 October . It was envisaged by the Germans as a 3 @, @ 000 @-@ strong unit organized into three regiments . By late 1941 , it had 1 @, @ 500 members . Recruitment was carried out by Major General Kreyter , a White Russian émigré in German service who was the head of the Russian Intelligence Office ( German : Vertrauensstelle ) in Serbia . The Corps initially consisted of a single regiment , organized into four battalions . Major General Egorov commanded the 1st Battalion , Colonel Shatilov the second , Colonel Endrzheevskiy the third and Colonel Nestrenko the fourth , respectively . A second regiment was set up on 18 October , commanded by Colonel Zhukov .

= = Operations = =

= = = Early actions = = =

Although its aim was to fight Communist forces in the Soviet Union , the Russian Corps , when engaged in combat , was used almost exclusively to fight the Yugoslav Partisans in areas of occupied Yugoslavia . Composed of one cavalry regiment and four infantry regiments , it was reinforced with younger émigrés and former Soviet prisoners of war and was armed by the Germans with weapons captured from the Royal Yugoslav Army . Its command language was Russian .

Between the autumn of 1941 and the spring of 1944 , members of the Corps were responsible primarily for protecting weapons factories , mines , roads , and railroads throughout occupied Serbia in accordance with priorities established by the German High Command . During this time , the Corps was referred to as the " Russian Factory Protection Group " ( German : Weissrussischer Werkschutz ) . It was initially used during anti Partisan operations to guard mines in Krupanj , and later in Bor and Trep?a . In November 1941 it began actively collaborating with the Chetniks . By this time the Corps was composed of five regiments of about 7 @, @ 500 men , all of whom were Russian . An attempt was then made to expand it further by recruiting Soviet prisoners . However , this proved unsuccessful and the Corps never operated as a unified fighting force , the regiments being its largest operational units . These were later assigned to act as auxiliaries to German or Bulgarian occupying forces . On 8 December 1941 , the Corps defended the Stolice mine against the Yugoslav Partisans . The Corps grew in numbers throughout 1942 , following an influx of volunteers from Bulgaria , Croatia , Romania and Greece . During this time , it maintained good relations with the Nedi? administration . While guarding facilities , members of the Corps were largely assigned to manning brick bunkers , protecting the railway in the Ibar River valley , the Bor , Trep?a , Majdanpek , and Krupanj mines , as well as Serbian borders along the Danube and Drina rivers while deployed together with various Serbian collaborationist factions such as the Serbian State Guard ( SDS ) and the Serbian Volunteer Corps ( SDK ) , with whom they were most closely allied . The Corps also closely cooperated with the Croatian Usta?e and during this period its members often plundered Serbian villages .

Initially , the 1st Regiment was deployed in Loznica , Ljubovija and other towns along the Drina . On the other hand , the 2nd Regiment operated in towns such as Negotin , Bor , and Majdanpek . The two regiments were operationally subordinated to the 704th German Division . The 3rd Regiment was established in Banjica on 8 January 1942 , placed under the command of Colonel Shapilov and deployed to Kosovska Mitrovica , where it was operationally subordinated to the 1st Bulgarian occupational corps . The 4th Regiment was established on 29 April with General Cherepov as commander and was deployed to the area around Kraljevo . In May , the Corps was divided into two brigades . The 1st Brigade was placed under the command of Major General Dratsenko and its headquarters was established in the town of Aran?elovac on 22 May . On 30 November , the 4th Regiment was disbanded , its 1st Battalion assigned to the 1st Regiment and the rest of its manpower assigned to the 2nd Regiment . On 1 December 1942 , the Russian Corps was incorporated into the Wehrmacht and all its members were required to swear an oath to German leader Adolf Hitler . On 9 December 1942 , the 1st Regiment started to be transformed with the arrival of Kuban Cossacks led by Major General Naumenko . By January 1943 , it was fully composed of Cossacks . On 17 March 1943 , Major General Gontarev replaced Shapilov as commander of the 3rd Regiment . The 1st Regiment fought in Loznica in April and participated in a large operation in Zapolje on 11 ? 15 May , where it engaged in heavy combat with Communist forces . From 1 ? 8 July , the regiment was again stationed in Loznica and Ljubovija , participating in the defence of the Drina Bridge at Zvornik against the Partisans . During this time the regiment allowed the passage of 379 wounded Croatian soldiers and civilians , 1 @, @ 000 healthy soldiers and as many refugees , sustaining casualties of two killed and seventeen wounded . It clashed with the Partisans over the village of Nedelica on 19 July . Meanwhile , the 2nd Regiment clashed with the Partisans around the town of Negotin . The 4th Regiment was re @-@ established on 15 December , and was based in Jagodina , Para?in and ?uprija . Its regimental headquarters were moved to Aleksinac on 30 April and to ?a?ak on 15 October .

= = = Retreat and surrender = = =

Despite numerous clashes with the Chetniks , the Corps focused increasingly on fighting the Partisans penetrating Serbia from Bosnia and the Sandak . On 5 January , combat with the Partisans in Klenak resulted in the deaths of three Cossacks of the 1st Regiment . On 18 January , the 5th Regiment was formed in Obrenovac . The 3rd Regiment outfought a 2 @, @ 400 @-@ strong Partisan force advancing towards Jo?ani?ka Banja on 31 March . On 28 April , the 1st Regiment prepared defences along the Drina in Zvornik , Bajina Ba?ta and Loznica areas expecting the 16th and 17th Partisan Divisions to attempt a crossing there . On 1 ? 2 May , the 5th Regiment fought the Partisans in the village of Mravinci , sustaining casualties of 11 killed and 25 wounded . That summer , the Corps mediated an agreement between the Chetniks and the Germans in which the two parties agreed to fight the Partisans in Serbia . On 18 July , the 5th Regiment fought in Jo?ani?ka Banja and its regimental headquarters was moved there from Obrenovac , with battalion headquarters being established in Zve?an , Jo?ani?ka Banja , U??e and Vu?itrn . Elements of the 3rd and 5th regiments fought the Partisans on 4 ? 5 August near the village of Rudnik . The Partisans attacked the positions of the 5th Regiment in Leposavi? on 24 August .

In September , the Corps reached its peak of 11 @, @ 197 members . Several skirmishes occurred between the 1st Regiment and the Partisans in the Zvornik and Valjevo areas that month . On 7 / 8 September , the 2nd Regiment fought Partisans at the Ibar River , trying to deny them crossing . On 9 September , elements of the 3rd Regiment moved to Po?ega and on 11 September to ?a?ak . On 20 September , the 1st Regiment fought a group of Partisans south of Loznica . Major combat between the 1st Regiment and Partisans erupted in Loznica itself on 23 September , causing the regiment to fall back to ?abac with losses of 7 killed and 23 wounded . Combat continued daily throughout September with the 1st Regiment suffering up to 53 casualties per day . On 8 October , the 2nd Regiment headquarters in Po?arevac were evacuated as Soviet armour approached the town . As parts of the regiment moved towards Belgrade and Grocka , the force came into contact with Soviet troops and armour in the Ripanj area south of Belgrade , sustaining heavy casualties . On 10 October the Russian Corps was renamed the " Russian Corps in Serbia " . Elements of the 2nd Regiment arrived in ?abac on 22 October , then moved to Sremska Mitrovica on 23 October , Vukovar on 25 October , Osijek on 26 October and then to Vinkovci and Stari Jankovci on 28 October . Further parts of the regiment moved to Zemun on 13 October , Ruma on 14 October , Vinkovci on 16 October , and Stari Jankovci on 24 October . On 19 ? 22 October , the 4th Regiment fought advancing Soviet troops and Partisans and defended the ?a?ak @-@ Kraljevo road . On 23 October , the 1st Regiment abandoned ?abac and Klenak and moved to La?arak , and then to Tovarnik on 24 October where they were ordered to hold their ground . The 4th Regiment fought in the ?a?ak area from 27 October to 2 November . It faced the Red Army and the Chetnik 2nd Ravna Gora Corps before being overpowered and forced to abandon the city . The Chetniks captured 339 of its soldiers and turned them over to the Soviets . On 12 November , the 1st Regiment moved via railway through Vinkovci to Br?ko , with elements deployed in Gunja . On 8 December it regrouped north of the Sava and on 11 ? 13 December it fought the Partisans in and near the village of Vrbanja , killing forty @-@ three . The 4th Regiment arrived in Sarajevo on 13 ? 18 December . Elements subsequently moved to Kiseljak on 18 December , fighting Partisans in the Kiseljak @-@ Busova?a area on 26 ? 27 December . During this time , the 1st Regiment and a battalion of the 2nd Regiment guarded a bridgehead north of Br?ko in order to allow German forces that were stationed in Greece to withdraw through the town .

In January 1945 , elements of the Corps participated in the German capture of Travnik , part of Operation Lawine . Afterwards , they withdrew to Slovenia . On 30 April , Shteifon was killed while passing through Zagreb . Colonel Anatoly Rogozhin then took over as commander . On 12 May , Rogozhin surrendered to British forces near Klagenfurt . Members of the Corps were then allowed to resettle in the West after hostilities ceased . At the time of surrender , the Corps consisted of 3 @, @ 500 to 5 @, @ 584 men . It had suffered 6 @, @ 709 members killed , wounded or missing from 1941 to 1945 . Overall , 17 @, @ 090 men served in its ranks over the course of the war .

= = Order of battle = =

Throughout its existence , the Russians Corps was composed of :

1st Cossack Regiment Generala Zborovskogo

Infantry Regiments II , III , IV , V

In May 1942 , the Corps was divided into two brigades . The 4th Regiment was disbanded on 30 November 1942 , and re @-@ established on 15 December 1943 . The 5th Regiment was created on 18 January 1944 .

= = Commanders = =

The Russian Corps had three commanders during its existence :

General Mikhail Skorodumov ( September 1941 )

Lieutenant @-@ General Boris Shteifon ( October 1941 ? April 1945 )

Colonel Anatoly Rogozhin ( April ? May 1945 )

= = Uniform = =

Members of the Corps wore the uniform of the Russian Imperial Army from 12 September 1941 to 30 November 1942 . The uniform was sometimes worn with pips of the Royal Yugoslav Army , alongside special rank insignia on the collar . Wehrmacht uniforms and insignia were adopted on 1 December 1942 , but the old uniforms continued to be worn for some time .