

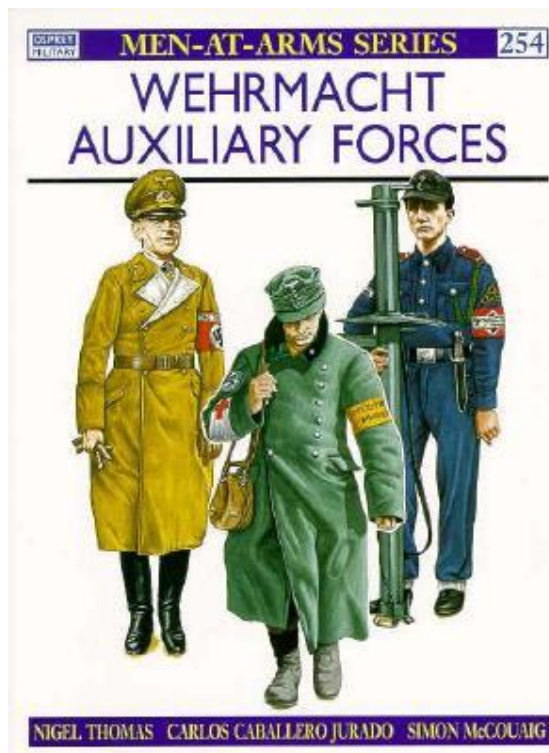
Wehrmacht Auxiliary Forces

Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 254 (1992)

Text by Nigel Thomas and Carlos Jurado; colour plates by Simon McCouaig

Review by Rob Morgan

When I was about 30, my old friend Brian and I regularly wargamed with a bloke who believed that every wargame involving the German army between 1939-45 was played on the German (his!) side with indefatigable SS units of 88s, Tiger tanks, supermen and heroes. This he thought was all the might of the Reich consisted of. Wrong. This book tells the true tale, that from the outbreak of World War II the Germans relied upon a whole host of uniformed auxiliaries, from the Organisation Todt to the NSKK motoring corps, and the late-war organised Transportkorps Speer and, with defeat looming, the unfortunate mass ranks of the Volkssturm.



Now the reason these little units are of some appeal to the wargamer is their uniforms. Hitler in 1941 declared that they should not wear army field grey and that they should wear rank and unit badges in a different manner and style to the regular Wehrmacht and SS forces. Hmm. In actual fact, what the Germans ended up with was a rag-tag bunch of oddly equipped and uniformed auxiliaries who frequently found themselves, due to the failure of the leadership's vision, acting as front line troops or at the very least as active anti-partisan and support groups. Their true name, at least in Nazi and in Geneva Convention terms was *Wehrmachtsgefolge*, and by mid-1944 there were some 3.8 million of

them, which, if the book is correct, was roughly 40 percent of the Nazi men under arms!

The volume deals with the four main groups, the NSKK, which consisted of German, Flemish and Dutch specialist troops, and many Norwegians, as well as Russian emigres and ex-POWs. Units of this type were intended to deal with motorized transport, but also controlled river flotillas and ran ambulance and heavy rescue units. The NSKK controlled the Reich's internal transport lines.

They had a substantial anti-partisan role, and Thomas and Jurado usefully give the 1944 Order of Battle of this force which expanded to embrace the *Leistungsgemeinschaft Speer* by the middle of the war.

The *Transportkorps Speer* was a late-war invention, from early 1944, and though short-lived its members fought on all fronts until the surrender in May 1945. The German Labour Service, the RAD, was an odd force, intended as a stepping-stone between civilian life and entry into the army. It was a huge force, and its value to the Nazis, though usually overlooked, is best remembered for several RAD battalions having fought as front-line infantry at Arnhem, being awarded a cuff title for that service! It contained a large number of females, who served in a range of roles, by 1945 a few of these were front line.

The *Organisation Todt*, 1.5 million men strong by 1944, is perhaps better known, and this *Osprey* deals effectively with the force which undertook combat engineer roles and the authors rightly call it the fifth branch of the Reich's armed forces. Its troops saw action everywhere, units were lost at Stalingrad, and at Rzhev. It was in many respects the Reich's major anti-partisan force as it was responsible for communications development. The volume ends with a decent account of that most unfortunate of all WWII armed forces, the *Deutscher Volkssturm*, created in September 1944, and exhausted in the last-ditch fight to defend the beaten Reich. A sad tale, but a tale of a military force which did fight with some skill and effectiveness.

The coloured plates are excellent. They provide the wargamer with different and diverse uniforms, ranging from the deep khaki-brown of *Transportkorps Speer*, and of RAD with their unusual distinctions, easily converted from many of the late-war figures available, to the black and grey-blue of the NSKK. A great deal of obsolete or superseded uniform items appear in the photographs in the volume which indicates the problems of non-army units. The variety of the uniform gear worn by the *Volkssturm* and the range of equipment and arms are well known and the book does show some interesting variations. I liked the book, it provides something more than the King Tiger, JagdPanther, 88 and SS Grenadier options for a German WWII gamer, and one which is rather more accurate, I suspect.

In terms of figure availability in 28mm and 25mm, there are several good sources, Raventhorpe Miniatures in the UK being one, but my preferred scale is 15mm, and there are two excellent ranges around. These auxiliaries came into their own after the big army defeats, when the Third Reich was crumbling, and so it's a late-war scenario for them. Mick Yarrow's sturdy WWII Germans are reasonably priced and several packs offer the opportunity to create OT, RAD and *Volkssturm* groups. GER 1, is Infantry and an officer, in a variety of poses,

GER 2, excellent MG42 teams, while GER 3 is naval infantry which can be used as Transporteflotte Speer (plate B3 shows this). GER 4 is described as "partisans," use them as Volkssturm, which is how pack GER12 is described; and GER 6 is Polizei and Gestapo, a couple of amazing figures there!

Peter Pigø's 15mm Germans are rather slight, and more expensive but a few will fit in usefully with the Mick Yarrow troops. In Pigø's WWII range pack 457 is late-war German infantry posed lying firing, good for snipers. While if you are modelling a slit trench, then pack 358, late-war riflemen, if cut to the waist, will man it for you. I like pack 560 Panzerschrecke teams, and one will bulk out the firepower of your NSKK or OT fighters. This is the range for the odd vehicle or light AFV, pack 154 is a French Citroen car, and pack 111 a Kettenrad. Plenty of other choices, mine was an Italian Cv 33 tankette which had survived the front to be put up against partisans. It's partisan warfare and break-out groups which provide good scenarios for these Wehrmacht Auxiliary Forces, don't put them up against a division of T-34's, but on the other hand don't forget they beat British paras at Arnhem.

A worthwhile read, and a decent and different set of armed forces.