

Hitler's Russian & Cossack Allies 1941-45
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A very interesting title this ó covering the voluntary contribution to the Axis forces that was made by Russian and Cossack manpower in World War II. These were not inconsiderable attachments of troops ó Nigel Thomas suggests that at the height of the German invasion of the USSR as many as 600,000 volunteers had been raised through nine distinct categories, of which some 300,000 were combat troops. Three of these streams of recruitment ó the Ukrainian Liberation army, the Eastern Legions and the Russian Corps in Serbia -- are not covered by this book: police, SS and Operation Todt recruitment are also not covered.

Eastern troops covers a wide range of troop types. The Hilfswillige (abbreviated to Hiwi) were initially recruited as non-combatants at no more than 15% of divisional strength ó numbers and duties which soon went out of the window with it being quoted that the 6th Army in Stalingrad was 25% Hiwi, and a large number were in armed roles. This offers the wargamer the chance to add some local colour to German armies ó with troops initially wearing Red Army uniforms without Soviet insignia, civilian clothes and German uniforms, again with insignia removed, although as time went on the Hiwis standardised on German uniform. There is a section on Security Units raised for anti-Partisan warfare, and again these displayed a mixture of uniforms ó Russian and German ó as well as a mixture of weaponry. Photographic evidence is shown for the reuse of the otherwise outdated M1916 helmet. Later in the war, as shown by plates B, C and D, the various Russian volunteers became almost indistinguishable from German-raised units in terms of uniform ó there are small differences of badging and insignia but, at least at wargame scales, these will be very hard to pick out (or paint!).

This, however, is not the case with the Cossacks, who retained distinctive uniform features ó most noticeably in headwear ó throughout the war. Having suffered for their support of the Tsarist cause in the Russian Civil War, many Cossacks chose to join the German armed forces ó and unlike other Russian volunteers were, from the start, recruited into armed roles in regimental strengths: this being due to Hitler believing they were the descendants of German Goths and so not limiting their numbers or roles. They served widely in Russia and Croatia with only a few being transferred to the Western front ó but examples of troops in France and even the Channel Islands in 1944 are given. There is also a very good, and extremely useful, breakdown of the numbers and equipment available to a Cossack regiment ó they shouldn't be thought of as just horsemen, as even a mounted regiment was accompanied by anti-tank guns, mortar platoons, other heavy weapons and, quite bizarrely, bicycle battalions.

This book offers some interesting additional and distinctive troop types for the World War II wargamer, as well as a wealth of detail for larger scale modellers to work with. There is limited detail on actual combat deployments but there are several pages given over to highly detailed breakdowns of deployments and dates which summarise a wealth of research into a very small space and would easily allow for the accurate historical deployment of units of Russian volunteers into wargames. For Eastern front gamers looking for some added variety in their troops, this volume is highly recommended.

