

Original article

Cossacks in the service of the Third Reich

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ABSTRACT

The origins of Cossacs probably date back to the 15th and 16th centuries. Cossacks appeared both in the south-eastern areas under the authority of the Commonwealth and in the south-west of Moscow. They played a significant role in the history of our country, fighting together with the Crown and Lithuanian armies in the wars against the Tatars, Turks, Moscow and Sweden. However, they also caused uprisings which seriously weakened the Commonwealth.

In the 16th century, Cossack troops in the service of the rulers of Moscow were formed, used for conquests made by this country. Cossacks also suppressed uprisings and rebellions against tsarist authorities. During the civil war in Russia, a significant part of them sympathized with the Whites. After the Bolshevik occupation of the Cossack territories, there was repression compared by Lenin to the Vendée genocide during the French Revolution. Persecution also took place there during the collectivization and the Great Terror.

Many Cossacks emigrated. Some of them in Germany, where they later began cooperation with the Nazis, especially after the Third Reich's aggression against the USSR. After occupying the Cossack territories, the German authorities created local Cossack self-government structures. The first Cossack formations fighting on the Wehrmacht side also began to appear. During the war, tens of thousands of Cossacks who fought in German uniforms in the USSR, occupied Poland, Yugoslavia and northern Italy. They were used primarily to conduct anti-partisan activities. At the end of the war, the Cossacks tried to avoid Soviet captivity and surrender to the Western Allies' troops. However, as a result of the British-Soviet agreement, they were handed over to the Soviet authorities, which condemned them to a tragic fate.

KEYWORDS

Cossacks, collaboration, the Third Reich, the USSR, World War II



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Introduction

The origins of Cossacks until today are the subject of many studies and arouse numerous unresolved disputes. They most likely date back to the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries.

The river of great importance for the Cossacks was the Dnieper. On this one of the longest (over 2,200 km) rivers of Europe, there were numerous islets. They served the Cossacks as shelter from retaliatory expeditions of the Tatars, the Crown army. There, they also began their plundering expeditions, on boats called chaikas, to the Turkish and Tatar shores of the Black Sea. On these islets, Cossacks formed fortified camps called the siches, in which an organized military community operated [1, p. 57-8]. The Cossacks had certain features of the so-called soldier's democracy. They also conducted their own foreign policy, among others, by receiving envoys. It was dominated by Orthodox Ruthenians coming from the nearest areas, but there were also all kinds of fugitives or adventurers, often outlawed, coming from the areas of the Crown, the Moscow state and other mostly neighboring countries [2, p. 66].

1. The history of Cossacks until the outbreak of the German-Soviet war

King Sigismund the Old in 1541, noticing the advantages of the Cossacks, decided to formalize their service and create a name register of those being permanently paid by the Commonwealth. However, this attempt was unsuccessful, most likely due to a lack of adequate funding. It was not until 31 years later that the first small Cossack unit of 300 people in the service of the Commonwealth was created [1, p. 79; 2, p. 83]. However, in the event of a war, the number of Cossacks in the royal service was significantly increased, and so, e.g. during the war with Moscow in the years 1609-1618, Petro Konashevych-Sahaidachny was to mobilize as many as 30,000 of them. A similar number of them approximately had to be brought by the same famous Cossack commander to the battlefield of Khotyn in 1621. In 1635, construction of a Cossack flotilla of chaikas on the Baltic Sea began to use the Cossacks to fight the Swedish fleet in the Baltic, but in the same year a peace treaty with Sweden in Stuhmsdorf was signed [2, p. 102-4, 109].

During the peace period, the Commonwealth reduced Cossack formations. In addition, the borderland nobility tried to turn unregistered Cossacks into serfs. There were also religious conflicts. The above-mentioned reasons created conflict situations and contributed to the outbreak of the Cossack uprisings, which were joined by, living on Ukrainian lands and burdened with increasing duties, serfs. The first of them – the Kosiński uprising, broke out in 1591. By 1648, six more broke out. The largest Cossack uprising – the Khmelnytsky uprising, caused not only a serious weakening of the state, but also the division of Ukraine into two parts – Russian and Polish, as a result of the Cossack hetman's surrender to Russian authority in 1654.

In the 16th century, Cossack troops in the service of the rulers of Moscow were formed. The greatest number of them are the Don Cossacks. First of all, it was an irregular cavalry formation. Similarly to the Cossacks in the territory of the Commonwealth, the Don Cossacks were recruited from all kinds of fugitives of various nationalities, mostly locals, but also from other lands ruled by Russia, the Commonwealth, Crimea, and others. They were also people from various social classes [3, p. 33].

While in the 17th and 18th centuries the Cossacks stood against the tsarist authorities¹ several times, in the 19th and early 20th centuries the Cossacks became one of their supports. In

¹ Worth mentioning are here, among others, the uprisings of Stepan Razin, Kondraty Bulavin, and Yemelyan Pugachev (these were not exclusively Cossack uprisings, but mainly peasant ones, but they were headed

addition to participating in the wars led by Russia, they also made their mark by suppressing anti-tsarist and anti-Russian uprisings (in Poland, among others) and rebellions, for which they were relatively generously rewarded with land grants, much larger than those owned by peasants. During World War I, almost the entire Cossack male population was mobilized [4].

However, the Russian authorities gradually limited their autonomy and at the same time adapted their organization to their own military needs. The Cossack elders achieved officer ranks and Russian nobility. During the civil war in Russia, a significant part of them sympathized with the Whites.

During the Polish-Soviet war, Cossack troops also fought alongside the Polish Army. After the end of the war, the Polish authorities supported Cossack emigration ready to cooperate with Poles. Assistance given to this emigration was one of the elements of the Promethean project initiated by Józef Piłsudski. The Promethean project was carried out under the patronage of the Second Department of Polish General Staff² (i.e. the intelligence and counterintelligence unit of the Second Polish Republic) in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs³.

A significant part of the Cossack emigration was organized under the slogan of creating one common nation and state – *Kozakia*. Its main centers were on the territory of the Balkan countries, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Germany. Considering the fact that Soviet Russia was their main enemy, some of the Cossacks turned to Poland for help. Poland, in turn, tried to use the Cossack's potential to implement Promethean policy. However, conflicts occurring in the Cossack environment, often of a personal nature, as well as their inability to reach agreement with the emigration associated with the Ukrainian People's Republic or that of North Caucasus prevented the Cossacks from joining Promethean organizations [5, p. 15-6].

2. The beginnings of German-Cossack cooperation

The Cossack issue was not a priority in Polish Promethean plans, if only because of their relatively small number⁴. The fact that part of the Cossack emigration was in close contact with Russian emigration was certainly of some importance here. In addition, in the second half of the 1930s, more and more Cossacks remaining in exile were inclined to cooperate with the Third Reich, and, among others, at the end of 1939, on the initiative of the Germans, the All-Cossack Union was founded in Prague, which, in 1940, was renamed the All-Cossack Union in the German Reich [6, p. 1-2]. This fact was an announcement of further cooperation, which later resulted in the creation of Cossack military formations fighting alongside the Wehrmacht.

by Cossack leaders, and Cossacks supported peasants, as well as the Swedish troops during the Great Northern War) (Ivan Mazepa).

² Since 1928 the Main Staff.

³ More on this topic: A. Shymanovich, Yu. Lesyk. *Vil'ne kozatstvo i viys'kova rozvidka II Rechi Pospolytoyi v konteksti polityky prometejizmu*. Voenno-istorychnyy visnyk: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats' Natsional'noho universytetu oborony Ukrainy, 2017;3(25), p. 10-2.

⁴ About 9000 Cossacks were to be expatriates, of which in Yugoslavia – 3000, in Bulgaria – 2000, in Poland, France and Romania – 1000, in Germany – approx. 300 and in other countries – 700. S. Mikulicz. *Prometeizm w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza; 1971, p. 192-3. In contrast, the group centred around Bilyj was supposed to have around 300 people in 1934. P. Libera (scientific ed.). *II Rzeczpospolita wobec ruchu prometejskiego*. Warszawa: Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe im. mjr. Bolesława Waligóry: Tetrakon; 2013. *Ustne sprawozdanie mjr. Włodzimierza Dąbrowskiego z sytuacji organizacji prometejskich w Paryżu. Załącznik do L.dz. 69/1934 z 9 marca 1934 r.*, p. 293.

During the anti-Bolshevik Cossack Uprising in 1918, General Pyotr Krasnov became its leader. In a short time – in mid-June 1918, he organized 40,000 Cossack army [7, p. 117-9]. Krasnov began to look for allies in his fight against the Bolsheviks. He decided to establish closer relations with the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the Volunteer Army and Germany. He sent letters to the emperor Wilhelm in which he congratulated him on the victories of the German army and assured him of friendship and asked for help [8].

Krasnov managed to free the Cossack lands from the Bolsheviks with the help of the Germans and announced the creation of the Don Republic. The situation of the Don army deteriorated after the withdrawal of the German army. At the beginning of January 1919, under the influence of the successes of the next Bolshevik offensive, the Don Army disintegrated, the remains of which commanded by the new commander⁵ – Afrikan Bogaevsky – were subordinated to Denikin. As a result of the Bolshevik offensive, the Don Republic was liquidated at the beginning [9-11].

Some of the Cossacks emigrated to Germany in 1918. One of them was Ivan Poltavets-Ostrianytsia who had come from Kuban Cossacks. In 1917 at the congress in Chyhyryn, he was elected the acting ataman of the Free Cossacks. He was also an adjutant of general Pavlo Skoropadsky, with whom he later cooperated in exile. He took part in the battles with the Bolsheviks. In 1920 in Berlin, he created the Ukrainian National Cossack Association (UNAKOTO), which he also managed. Cells of this organization were also established in other European countries, also among the Cossacks living in Volhynia belonging to the Second Polish Republic. For some period of time, he published the UNAKOTO's press organ "Український Козак".

In the first half of 1921 he went to Munich, where he made contacts with the leaders of the NSDAP, and above all with Alfred Rosenberg. After the death of ataman Symon Petlyura, he proclaimed himself the successor and commander of Ukraine, which caused a serious split in UNAKOTO. During the reign of Adolf Hitler, he proposed creating a unit of Free Cossacks alongside the German army [12; 13, p. 255-65].

In one of the studies of the Polish intelligence from 1941, one can read that after the start of *Barbarossa* operation, the Cossack National Center in Prague sent a telegram to the addresses of the most important leaders of the Third Reich, in which on behalf of all Cossacks, both those in exile and those remaining in the USSR, *a feeling of joy and loyalty to the Germans* was expressed, while putting themselves *at their disposal*. These letters were to be confirmed by a demonstrative meeting of Cossacks staying in Prague on 28 June 1941.

In addition, the Cossack Center announced the registration of Cossacks, both civilian and military, located in European countries. Many Cossacks – further in the study of *dwójka*⁶ – were to report, in June 1941, to the Cossack unit serving in the uniforms of the Wehrmacht, which in a short time in the number of 500 *sabers* was to be sent to the Eastern Front [14].

Shortly after the invasion of the Third Reich of the USSR, in a short time – at the beginning of August 1941 on the territory of the North Caucasus Military District, the Soviet authorities formed, mainly from the Cossacks, 16 cavalry divisions, of which six were immediately sent to the front. During the entire war, more than 70 combat units were created from the Cossacks. The then Soviet press and subsequent Soviet scientific studies emphasized the bravery of Cossack units in the fight against the German invader.

⁵ Krasnov resigned from his position on 14 February 1919.

⁶ Colloquial popular name of the Second Department of Polish General/Main Staff.

However, soon after the October Revolution, the Cossacks were recognized by the Bolsheviks as a community, as *kulaks and enemies of the people*, therefore they were destined, mainly the rich, for physical liquidation. Often, however, all Cossacks were murdered without such a distinction. Lenin even described the battle against the Cossacks as *Bolshevik Vendée* [15, p. 30]. As early as 1920, the Soviet authorities liquidated the Cossack units, and in 1925 began to liquidate the Cossack separateness [5, p. 10].

Therefore, the Cossacks were ready for revenge for the victims of the revolution, civil war, collectivization and mass repression of the 1930s [16]. In the summer of 1942, the Wehrmacht troops entered Don, Kuban and Terek. German soldiers were often greeted by Cossack people with bread and salt, and showered with flowers [16]. Officials of the German military and civil administration, as well as of Abwehr and SD began to establish contacts with local Cossack activists. Creating of the structures of the local Cossack self-government, self-defense units, and ataman elections began. The Cossacks received guarantees of cultural, educational and religious freedoms [17].

In August 1942, the German military authorities published *Regulation 8000*, which classified Soviet citizens into six categories, at the same time specifying the official position as to the possibility of using them in the German army and attitude towards them. According to this document, only Cossacks, Turkmens and Crimean Tatars could be treated on an equal footing with German soldiers [18, p. 187].

Germany also took ideological measures to justify the use of Cossacks as their allies. So, there were “scientific” studies tracing Cossacks back to Ostrogoths, and therefore people of Germanic origin, settled in the 3rd and 4th centuries after Christ on the northern shores of the Black Sea [16].

Mentions of Cossacks fighting on the German side appeared in official German documents in mid-December 1941, although most likely already in the summer or autumn of the same year a unit of the Cossack cavalry was to be used on the Eastern Front for reconnaissance activities [19, p. 88-90]. However, the baptism of fire of the first sub-units of the Don Cossacks was to be the destruction of Soviet partisan groups in the swamps on the Don [17, p. 144]. Later, the Cossacks fought the Soviet underground and partisans in the areas of Don, Kuban and Terek with the help of the SD, and especially the Abwehr. Besides, German intelligence also created special Cossack sabotage and reconnaissance groups operating behind the Soviet troops [17, p. 175-81; 20].

In September 1942 in Novochoerkassk, with the consent of the German authorities, a Cossack assembly was held, at which the Staff of the Don Army was elected with the Colonel Sergei Pavlov at the top, who took the rank of colonel, and then also the marching ataman of the Don Cossacks. In practice, the staff became the main Cossack representation towards the German authorities. The new body quickly began organizing Cossack units to fight the Red Army. In November 1942, the Don Cossacks received permission from the Germans to form regiments. In this way the 1st Don Cossack Regiment was soon established, and later also other units and subunits [17, p. 144-6].

On 5 November 1942, Pavlov sent a declaration of the Don Army to the German government. In reference to the fruitful cooperation of the Don Cossacks with Germany in 1918, the Cossack commander requested the German government to recognize the sovereignty of the Don Republic, which would fight a joint battle against the Bolsheviks in an alliance

with the Third Reich. The ataman also hoped that as part of *establishing allied relations*, the German government would immediately release all Cossack prisoners of war from all Cossack troops held in German camps and send them to the staff of the Cossack army that was being formed. He also called for the release of youth from the Cossack lands sent to the Reich for labour, as well as the withdrawal of German commissioners for price control from the Cossack territories and providing supplies for the German army from there on the basis of bilateral agreements. In response to the declaration, the Germans established the Cossack Board of Don, Kuban and Terek at the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories. First of all, they improved the lot of forced labourers from Cossack lands by giving them the status of free workers.

Hitler's initial dislike of Cossacks was to turn into admiration for their soldier skills. He was, however, opposed to dressing them in German uniforms. He claimed that they should have their own Cossack uniforms.

3. Kazachi Stan (Cossack Nation)

After the defeat at Stalingrad, the Germans left Don, Kuban and Terek. The 1st Regiment of the Don Cossacks took part in fierce battles of Novochoerkassk on 12 and 13 February 1943, which after heavy fighting had to leave along with Germany. In subsequent battles in the Matveev Kurgan⁷ area on 14-21 February 1943, the regiment was defeated. Of 900 Cossacks, about 60 people remained after this battle, including Pavlov. Other Cossack troops also suffered heavy losses in the fighting [17, p. 148].

Already on 2 January 1943, the commander of Army Group A – General Paul von Kleist, signed the order to create the Caucasian Staff for the Evacuation of Refugees. It said that the Caucasian highlanders and Terek Cossacks could be evacuated to the West, where all the German commandant's offices were obliged to help them. In this way, thousands of people abandoned their homes and headed west. Soon, other Cossacks began to join them, whose columns were attacked by Soviet air force and units operating behind the front line. According to data from the Cossack Board of Don, Kuban and Terek, prepared in July 1943, almost 281,000 people were evacuated (men, women and children) from these three Cossack lands [16].

The main mass of these fugitives was concentrated for some time near the city of Proskuriv⁸. Crowds of refugees gathered around Ataman Pavlov were organized in the so-called Kazachi Stan, that is the structure of the military administration resembling the traditions of the Sich Cossacks. While moving to Kazachi Stan through the territory of Ukraine, a stream of smaller groups of refugees from eastern Ukraine joined, being exposed to partisan attacks. The Cossacks were moved to the territory of northern Belarus – to the area of Baranavichy, Stolbtsy and Navahrudak, where 180,000 hectares of land had been allocated for their distribution. There they created their own Orthodox diocese led by Father Vasily Grigoriev.

The partisans were thought to be there, so the Cossacks immediately went into battle. The Cossack forces were regrouping in the new location. Eleven new Cossack infantry regiments were formulated – 1,200 people each. They were armed by the Germans with captured Soviet weapon and uniforms from German warehouses. On 17 June 1944, Ataman Pavlov

⁷ Rural-type settlement in Rostov Oblast [t/n: administrative unit].

⁸ Currently Khmelnytskyi in the western part of Ukraine.

died in unexplained circumstances. Sotnik Timofei Domanov became his deputy, who was promoted to the rank of colonel.

Meanwhile, the front was getting closer to the areas occupied by the Cossacks. On the left bank of the Nemunas, near Lubcha, the encircled 5th Kuban regiment fought for 5 days, which was saved by the Waffen SS troops. At the same time, refugees were increasingly attacked by the Soviet partisans, who temporarily even managed to block Kazachi Stan from all sides. However, the Cossacks managed to break through in the direction of Grodno in heavy fighting, and at the beginning of July they found themselves in the area of Białystok. For fighting in Belarus, Domanov and the commander of the 5th Terek Regiment – Nazykov – were awarded Iron Crosses 1st class. Germans also awarded 286 other Cossacks with minor decorations.

The Kazachi Stan was moving with the front more and more westward. On 1 August 1944, an uprising broke out in Warsaw. Some Cossack units⁹ took part in the battles against the insurgents [17, p. 149-51]. Cossacks were the most numerous group among foreign soldiers fighting at that time against Poles in Warsaw [21].

On 6 July 1944, a decision was to be made to move the Kazachi Stan to north-eastern Italy. Less than a year earlier – on 29 September 1943, Italian Prime Minister – Marshal Pietro Badoglio signed an act of unconditional surrender to the Allies, and on 13 October King Victor Emmanuel III declared war on Germany and Japan. Released from detention by German commandos, Benito Mussolini announced on 18 September 1943 the creation, on the Italian territories controlled by the Germans, of the Italian Social Republic – a state formation dependent on the Third Reich.

The Kazachi Stan was deployed in, separated from that state, the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral¹⁰, and subordinated operationally to the Higher SS and Police Leader of that region. It included areas near towns and cities such as Udine, Gorizia, Trieste, Pula¹¹, Rijeka¹² and Ljubljana¹³. It was an area directly subordinate to German administration. In August 1944, it was the area of the most intense guerrilla activity directed against Germany and Mussolini's rule. The local resistance movement even managed to free a small area where it organized local authorities [22].

Most of the Kazachi Stan was transported to Italy by rail from 20 July to 10 August 1944. The German authorities sought to make the Cossacks identify with the Third Reich by granting them a safe place to live and giving their organization autonomy, as well as the possibility of cultivating their own traditions and customs [23]. According to a report by promoted to the rank of Major general Domanov from the end of April 1945, the Kazachi Stan was to have over 31,500 people at that time, of which over 18,000 soldiers [24] organized into a group (corps) consisting of two divisions. In addition to the Cossacks, nation representatives of the Caucasus, Ural and Turkmenistan, collaborating with Germans, were also to come there.

The local German occupation authorities did not prepare to provide housing and basic livelihood resources for the Cossacks. According to Italian studies, the Cossacks went on horseback

⁹ The suppression of the uprising was attended by the Cossack police battalion, the 5th Kuban Cossack Regiment, the Battalion 570 of Protective Regiment and the Escorting-Protective Sotnia.

¹⁰ German: Operationszonen Adriatisches Küstenland; Italian: Zona di Operazioni del Litorale Adriatico.

¹¹ Currently a city in Croatia.

¹² Currently a city in Croatia.

¹³ Currently the capital of Slovenia.

and robbed everything that could be used to ensure a minimum level of survival. Initially, the Cossacks occupied public facilities such as schools. In order to locate the Cossacks, the local population of some localities was displaced (there were cases that they had to leave their homes within 24 hours), in other cases they were quartered together with the locals¹⁴. The territory occupied by the Cossacks was divided into 44 stanitsas, and the town of Tolmezzo became their informal capital. There they organized their own schools, hospitals, various cultural institutions, etc.

According to the memories of the locals, the Cossacks treated the population of the inhabited areas as if they were conquered. From these memories, we can also learn that some Cossack families were given a share of the land they cultivated. Some witnesses also report that the Cossacks were involved in robberies and even rapes and murders directed to local people. They also ordered the locals, e.g. to provide them with hay for horses [23]. In northern Italy, Kazachi Stan units were subordinate to SS-Gruppenführer Odilo Globocnik, the famed executioner of the Zamość region and the creator of concentration camps at Majdanek and in Sobibor [25, p. 242].

Initially, after the arrival of the Kazachi Stan, the local German command expected a lot after the arrival of the Cossacks, expecting well-organized and armed regiments and brigades, which would immediately set about the battle with partisans, while civilians, that is Cossack families, were to arrive in the first transports [23].

However, thanks to the help of the Cossacks, the occupation forces managed to push the Italian partisans to the mountains and secure the most important communication routes. Fighting with partisans continued with varying intensity until the end of the Kazachi Stan's stay in Italy. However, there were also desertions¹⁵. Of the Cossacks who fled to the partisans, a battalion named after Stalin was even established [17, p. 154-5].

During the fighting with partisans, 996 Cossacks lost their lives, and in addition, as a result of bombing carried out by Soviet planes on the villages inhabited by them, 1254 people were killed, mostly women and children [26, p. 151].

At that time, General Andrei Vlasov made efforts to subordinate Kazachi Stan to, controlled by him, the Armed Forces of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia. He even found support in this among some Cossack atamans. General Pyotr Krasnov actively countered this propaganda. Nevertheless, about 200 Cossacks left Kazachi Stan with their families. The vast majority of Cossacks were in favor of separateness. At the end of March 1945, General Krasnov appointed the Cossack Military Council as part of the above-mentioned Committee [17, p. 154-5].

On 22 April 1945, three guerrilla officers came to the Kazachi Stan command, issuing an ultimatum demanding to lay down the arms and leave Italy. The Cossacks decided to get to southern Austria, where they intended to surrender to the Allies. After negotiations with

¹⁴ In this case, the Cossacks usually occupied the ground floor, and the owners were displaced to the further floors, fearing their cooperation with the partisans. S. Piovesan. *I cosacchi in Carnia e la battaglia di Pani di Raveo (1944-1945)*, p. 3, [online]. Venezia ed altro – il sito di Sergio Piovesan. Available at: [http://www.piovesan.net/raveo/1%20cosacchi%20in%20Carnia%20\(1944\)%20e%20la%20battaglia%20di%20Pani%20di%20Raveo.pdf](http://www.piovesan.net/raveo/1%20cosacchi%20in%20Carnia%20(1944)%20e%20la%20battaglia%20di%20Pani%20di%20Raveo.pdf) [Accessed: 25 October 2014].

¹⁵ J. Gdański reports that 69 of the Kazachi Stan soldiers went over to the partisans and 44 were found missing. J. Gdański. *Zapomniani żołnierze Hitlera*. Warszawa: „De Facto”; 2005, p. 151.

partisans, until 7 May, the Cossacks managed to cross the Italian-Austrian border, and then deployed themselves in the Drawa River valley between the cities of Lienz and Oberdrauburg, where they surrendered to the British [19, p. 88-90].

Already on the first day after surrendering, the Cossacks were disarmed. The weapon was left only to officers and every tenth soldier. At the end of May 1945, Cossack officers were arrested on the pretext of being invited to the conference, and then handed over to the Soviet authorities. On 1 June, the British, in dramatic circumstances, proceeded to deport and then hand over other Cossacks to the Soviets, including civilians. If someone resisted, British soldiers often beat them unconscious with clubs and rifle butts, as well as thrust their bayonets into them. Fugitives were shot. Many of the Cossacks were killed¹⁶. The same fate befell soldiers of other Cossack units – including the Cossack Cavalry Corps and the Cossack Military Reserve Force.

The Soviets proceeded to execute Cossacks without trial, often as they were just handed over by the British or Americans. It also happened that the Western Allies shot at Cossacks together with the Soviets. Cossack leaders, especially all the generals – Andrei Shkuro, Pyotr Krasnov and Timofei Domanov were transported to Moscow, where they were tried, and then, in mid-January 1947, executed by hanging. The rest were usually sentenced to long-term Soviet labour camps. Only a few of them lived to see the power of Nikita Khrushchev and the amnesty he issued [27, p. 181-208].

In the mass of Cossacks handed over by the British to the Soviets, there were also people who were never Soviet citizens. Among the Cossack officers, there were many famous heroes fighting during the civil war in Russia in the White Army together with the British. They included, among others, General Andrei Shkuro honored with the Order of the Bath for bravery by the British monarch George V. While handing him over to the Soviets, he tore the decoration off his chest and threw it under British officer's feet. The British handed over about 3,000 tsarist emigrants like him in Judenburg alone¹⁷ [28].

4. Cossack Cavalry Corps

From spring 1943, the Germans gathered Cossacks from various sections of the front and began to gather at one assembly point in Mława, where they intended to train them and then form a Cossack cavalry division. On 1 July 1943, its formation was completed. German general Helmut von Pannwitz became the commander of the division. At that time, it was to count over 18,500 soldiers, of which over 4,000 were Germans. As far as the officer corps is concerned, out of 413 division officers the Germans constituted the majority, as much as 222 [17, p. 182-4].

The German command decided that the Cossack division would be the best at fighting the Tito partisans in occupied Yugoslavia. After their arrival, the partisans began a propaganda campaign presenting the Cossacks among the local population as real monsters, with pleasure in killing and arson. At the beginning, it was effective. Later, the partisans began to strive for

¹⁶ Among others: J. Hoffmann. *Rosyjscy sojusznicy Hitlera: Własow i jego armia*. Warszawa: Bellona; 2008, p. 244-6. The dramatic course of deportation of Cossacks was presented by J. Mackiewicz in the article *Zbrodnia w Dolinie rzeki Drawy*. *Wiadomości*, 1955;43(499).

¹⁷ More on this subject in the study of N. Tolstoy. *The Minister and the Massacres*. London; 1986.

friendship with the Cossacks, calling them *Slavic brothers* and encouraging them to go over to their side, which was done by the few who were to return disappointed after some time. However, there were also Cossacks cooperating with partisan intelligence, as Abwehr operating at individual Cossack units was to state many times, but in the second half of 1944, that is when the situation of the Germans on the front significantly deteriorated, according to W. Krause there was not a single Cossack who would go over to the opponent's side [29, p. 165-6].

In the second half of this year, Heinrich Himmler, as the supreme commander of the Reserve Army, proposed to Pannwitz to move his division to the Waffen SS, and he in reply, especially after consulting with his officers, was not to agree. In any case, until the end of the war, the Cossacks fought in the uniforms of the Wehrmacht, but in terms of supply they were assigned to the Waffen SS, thanks to which they were also to receive heavy weapon, such as anti-aircraft guns or 105 mm heavy howitzers [29, p. 239-43]. In February 1945, the Cossack division was expanded into a corps.

According to general Pannwitz, the Cossacks' relations with the local population were improving. Moreover, as the Cossack commander said, Cossacks staying among this population were to be *the best anti-Bolshevik propaganda* telling their experiences of the *Soviet paradise* [29, p. 189].

However, there were also many accusations of crimes committed by Cossacks. In winter at the turn of 1944 in the area of Šunj-Zagreb, Pannwitz was to order them to hang 15 hostages from among the local population, and shoot three others on a charge of espionage, although there was no evidence. In May 1944, Cossacks of the 1st Regiment burned the village south of Zagreb, and the next month they were mass-raping women in the town of Metlika in Slovenia. The Cossacks from the 3rd, 5th and 6th cavalry regiments were also to be committing rapes, near the town of Broda, among others, where they were also carrying out executions. In December 1944, while they were conducting operations against partisans, they were accused of mass murders and rapes near the town of Virovitica. They also robbed, and they especially were to like horses, pigs and sewing machines. These are just some of the Cossack deeds taking place even in quiet areas where no military operations were carried out. The Cossacks *behaved there like bandits and marauders*. It should be noted, however, that Pannwitz tried to prevent these excesses by sentencing those guilty to death by firing squad [30, p. 140-3].

The Cossacks' activities caused the intervention of Hungarian and Slovak diplomats at the Independent State of Croatia to a representative of the German military authorities in that country. These diplomats defended their compatriots who were ethnic minorities in those areas. This representative was Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, who later stated that when reading the letter of the Slovak ambassador about the Cossacks' deeds, it *made his hair stand on end* [31, p. 329-31, 344]. The German officers were to compare units subordinate to Pannwitz to the SS Kaminski brigade in the Warsaw Uprising [25, p. 242].

Interesting information from this period is provided by A. Okorokow. According to him, by October 1944, at least 803 Red Army soldiers were to go over the Cossacks' side. He also posted information about six Soviet planes, whose pilots, after finding out that they were in the Cossack division's dislocation zone, raided one of Tito's troops, and then landed in the Cossack deployment area [32]. However, there is a lack of more precise information on this subject.

At the end of the war, German commanders were to express concern for the soldiers of the eastern units fighting in Wehrmacht uniforms. General Ernst Köstring, after the British and

Americans captured more of them on the Italian front for the first time, asked the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to call for their treatment in the same way as German soldiers. According to Werner Krause, the redeployment of eastern units to the West was to be a deliberate intention of the German command that their soldiers would avoid getting into Soviet captivity. Attempts were also made to provide officers, as far as possible, with documents that did not reveal their nationality [29, p. 261].

At the turn of 1945, three Germans¹⁸ went to Switzerland, where they sought contact with Allan Dulles – the head of the American intelligence cell in Bern. The purpose of the meeting was to convince the Americans that the Allies would not hand over the German soldiers of eastern volunteer units to Stalin after the war. During the conversation, the American assured of the positive outcome to the case [29, p. 275-6].

In March 1945, at a congress organized in the town of Virovica, the delegates of all Cossack corps regiments honored General Pannwitz by choosing him as Cossack supreme ataman – the head of all Cossack units. It was an unprecedented situation, because up to now the position of ataman has always been held by Cossacks or possibly Russians [29, p. 269-70; 19, p. 212]. At the same congress, General Pyotr Krasnov was elected the leader of the Cossack national government. This choice was the result of the guarantee of autonomy that Alfred Rosenberg announced this month for countries that had their national committees on the territories of the Third Reich [29, p. 280].

At the end of the war, Pannwitz decided to avoid surrendering to the communist guerilla of Tito or the Red Army and decided to make his way along with his subordinate troops towards the forces of Western Allies. On 12 May, he surrendered to British troops in the area of Klagenfurt. He began efforts for the guarantee of Western Allies that the Cossacks would not be handed over to the Soviets. On 24 May, a British officer delegated to the Cossacks assured them that this would not happen. The Cossacks also hoped that in the future there would be a conflict between Western countries and the Soviet Union and they could become needed by the West [29, p. 317-30]. However, the Cossack Cavalry Corps shared the fate of the Kazachi Stan.

General Pannwitz, despite being warned by British soldiers to save himself and run away, remained with his soldiers until the end. He was handed over to the Soviets with them, transported along with other Cossack high ranked officers to Moscow. There, he was tried for war crimes, sentenced to death and executed.

5. Other Cossack units

In September 1944, the Reichführer SS – Heinrich Himmler established with his special order the Cossack Military Reserve Force¹⁹ that operated at the SS Central Office in Berlin. The Reserve's task was to gather all Cossacks willing to fight on the side of the Third Reich and those staying on its territory as prisoners of war, forced labourers, soldiers serving in German

¹⁸ They included: General Ernst Köstring – from the beginning of January 1944, he took up the post of the General of Eastern Units at the German Army High Command, dr Fritz Arlt – head of the Volunteer Affairs Department at the SS Central Office, and professor Gerhard von Mende – Secretary of State in the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories.

¹⁹ German: Kosaken-Reserve, Russian: Резерв казачьих войск.

units, pre-war emigrants and others who were directed to the 5th Cossack training-reserve regiment. By April 1945, about 2,000 Cossacks were to pass through it. The Cossack Military Reserve Force was headed by General Andrei Shkuro [32].

In addition to the troops formed under German command, Cossack troops formed in the Far East with the support of the command of the Japanese army should also be mentioned. In Manchuria they occupied, the Japanese planned to use local Cossack emigration for intelligence activities. Cossack units were also formed. One of them (about 150-200 soldiers) was to take part in a skirmish during the Battle of Khalkhin Gol in 1939, where it was smashed [33].

Later, under the Japanese command were two Baikal Cossack brigades, a Mongol brigade, a Russian volunteer corps, two military schools, military courses, Manchukuo police and border units, protection units guarding concessions and mines, and also infantry and cavalry units [34, p. 195]. Most likely, several ROA²⁰ officers were sent to the Far East to Ataman Grigory Semyonov on a secret mission. It is known that in January 1945 he announced the subordination of his troops to the command of the Armed Forces of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia [32].

During the war, as well as before the war, the Cossack activists were divided into two basic factions: Cossacks who considered themselves Russians and Cossack-separatists. The leader of the latter was General Pyotr Krasnov. At the very beginning of the war, they established their center in Prague, which was an important center for Cossack emigration already in the interwar period. In September 1944, Hitler agreed to set up the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (KONR) under the leadership of General Andrei Vlasov, who planned to bring all USSR citizens residing on the territories controlled by the Third Reich under control of this organization in terms of politics. General Krasnov opposed this on the Cossack side. majority of non-Russian nations and soldiers serving on the German side were also opposed to KONR authorities.

Conclusions

During the battles of the Third Reich against the USSR, millions of Soviet soldiers found themselves in German captivity. A large number of them were ready to join the service and fight alongside the Wehrmacht: some because of the desire to survive the harsh conditions of German captivity, others out of hatred of the Soviet authorities. Often, both factors were decisive to join the German service. A significant number of emigrants from the civil war in Russia who never had Soviet citizenship also served in the Cossack armed forces.

In many areas of the USSR occupied by the German army, soldiers of the Wehrmacht were greeted as liberators, and a significant part of the local population expressed their willingness to cooperate with the occupation authorities. At the beginning of the German-Soviet war and the staggering German successes, the authorities of the Third Reich were not interested in forming troops composed of citizens of the USSR, although some German military commanders covered their losses thanks to them. Later, however, support for the Third Reich on the areas of the USSR, whose population favored Germany (e.g. Ukraine and the North Caucasus), began to weaken due to, among others, the German repression and economic

²⁰ Short for Русская освободительная армия (Russian Liberation Army).

exploitation. In addition, political activists, as well as the population of these areas, expected from the Germans political declarations of granting them independence or at least autonomy. Meeting these demands could significantly strengthen German potential, especially on the Eastern Front. However, the German authorities had other plans for them²¹.

According to Sergei Drobiazko, the total number of Soviet citizens and emigrants from the USSR who served in the Wehrmacht, SS, police and paramilitary forces amounted to 1.2 million (the majority of them were Slavs – 700,000) [35, p. 339]. Whereas Oleg Romanko reports that the number of Soviet citizens in German service during World War II was 1.3-1.5 million out of a total of about 2 million foreigners [36, p. 93]. About one-third of this number were soldiers of combat formations fighting on the front against regular forces or on the occupied territories against partisans. But most of them were all kinds of auxiliary services and local self-defense formations, which also partially participated in hostilities, and were also used to make up combat formations [35, p. 339].

The Cossacks, due to their numbers, could not play a serious role fighting on the side of the Third Reich. However, they showed their usefulness, mainly by fighting anti-partisan battles in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, as well as in northern Italy, and Yugoslavia. Until the end of the war, they usually fought faithfully on the German side. Just before their surrender, the Cossacks tried to surrender to the Western Allies. However, they did not expect that they would be turned in to the Soviet authorities, who often immediately began their physical liquidation.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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²¹ More on this topic: A. Szymanowicz. *Pomiędzy Warszawą a Elbrusem i Moskwą. Aktywność niepodległościowa narodów Północnego Kaukazu i polska polityka prometejska*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Akademii Wojsk Lądowych imienia generała Tadeusza Kościuszki; 2017, p. 185-93.

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Biographical note

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Kozacy na służbie III Rzeszy

STRESZCZENIE

Początki kozaczyzny sięgają najprawdopodobniej XV i XVI wieku. Kozacy pojawili się zarówno na południowo-wschodnich terenach podległych władzy Rzeczypospolitej, jak i południowo-zachodnich Moskwy. Odegrali niebagatelną rolę w historii naszego kraju, walcząc wspólnie z wojskiem koronnym i litewskim w wojnach przeciwko Tatarom, Turkom, Moskwie i Szwedom. Wywoływali jednak również powstania, które poważnie osłabiały Rzeczpospolitą.

W XVI wieku uformowała się również organizacja wojsk kozackich na służbie władców Moskwy, wykorzystywana do podbojów prowadzonych przez to państwo. Kozacy tłumili również powstania i bunty skierowane przeciwko władzy carskiej. W trakcie wojny domowej w Rosji znaczna część z nich opowiedziała się po stronie białych. Po opanowaniu terenów kozackich przez bolszewików nastąpiły represje porównywane przez Lenina do ludobójstwa w Wandei z okresu rewolucji francuskiej. Prześladowania miały tam również miejsce w okresie kolektywizacji i wielkiego terroru.

Wielu Kozaków udało się na emigrację. Część z nich na terytorium Niemiec, gdzie w późniejszym okresie rozpoczęli współpracę z nazistami, zwłaszcza po agresji III Rzeszy na ZSRS. Po zajmowaniu terenów kozackich władze niemieckie tworzyły lokalne struktury kozackiego samorządu. Zaczęły również powstawać pierwsze formacje kozackie walczące po stronie Wehrmachtu. W trakcie wojny w niemieckich mundurach na terenach ZSRS, okupowanej Polski, Jugosławii i w północnych Włoszech walczyło kilkadziesiąt tysięcy Kozaków. Byli wykorzystywani przede wszystkim do prowadzenia działań przeciwpartyzanckich. Pod koniec wojny Kozacy starali się uniknąć niewoli sowieckiej i poddawać wojskom zachodnich aliantów. Jednak na skutek porozumienia brytyjsko-sowieckiego byli oni przekazywani władzom sowieckim, co skazywało ich na tragiczny los.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Kozacy, kolaboracja, III Rzesza, ZSRR, II wojna światowa

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