

# PART FIVE

## PARTISAN WARFARE

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### Chapter 16

#### Partisan Combat Methods

Generally speaking, Russian partisan groups on the Eastern Front were formed early in 1942. At first they were mainly isolated bands of little strength, frequently dropped from aircraft, operating in rear areas well behind the German front. During the summer of 1942, however, these bands were gradually combined into more closely knit groups, put under a unified command, and continuously reinforced. Accordingly, their operations grew in scope and impact.

Partisan group activities seldom covered areas near the front except when extensive, pathless forests favored their approach. In general, the partisan groups would maneuver in the rear areas of the German armies, in woods and swamps next to highways and railroads. They avoided open territory and regions occupied by German troops, but kept the latter under surveillance.

From the outset the German troops had difficulty defending themselves against this type of warfare. Its effectiveness had been underestimated. Apart from the fact that, considering the vast areas, the German forces were not numerous enough to combat the steadily expanding partisan groups, the front-line troops, which had been trained for orthodox warfare, all lacked experience in antipartisan warfare.

During large-scale enemy break-throughs, or German withdrawals, strong partisan groups frequently managed to coordinate their operations with those of Soviet cavalry, ski units, infiltrated infantry, or paratroops. Substantial German forces (usually several infantry and panzer divisions) had to be mustered in order to combat the joint enemy efforts. Prior to large-scale Russian offensives, strong bands would often migrate to the areas that the Red Army soon hoped to take. Such movements, therefore, gave some indication of Russian intentions. Prior to the beginning of the large-scale Red Army offensive in East Galicia in July 1944, for example, numerous bands worked their way into the Carpathian Mountains southwest of Lwow, which were among the objectives of the Soviet operations.

On the other hand, during each Russian withdrawal, as well as subsequent to battles of encirclement, innumerable soldiers cut off from their own forces, and sometimes entire combat units, made their way to the partisans and fought with them. In such instances, too, partisan activities developed into a serious threat.

During the winter, strong bands, well organized from a military standpoint and commanded by specially trained leaders, developed intense activity in the extensive woodlands of the Eastern Front.

The bands were generally organized into groupments of from 3,000 to 5,000 men each. As long as the front remained static, these groupments would remain in a fixed location; they were quartered in winter-proofed camps, excellently constructed and heavily guarded. Smaller groups, varying greatly in strength, comprised at least 100 men. Attached to each groupment was a number of these smaller partisan groups. They branched out through the entire rear area and frequently were only in loose liaison with the groupment. They constantly changed their position and therefore were difficult to locate in the vast rear area, which was only sparsely occupied by German troops. They had contact men in all the larger villages of importance to them. Dispersed and cut-off Russian units gave them even tactical striking power. In 1941, for instance, in the area of Army Group Center, 10,000 men under General Kulik operated very skillfully and could not be cornered. Another example was the remnants of the 32d Kazak Division, whose destruction required the commitment of German front-line troops on 6 and 7 August 1941. In 1944, activities of partisans, reinforced by infiltrated troops, had reached such proportions west of the extremely swampy Narva River that the left wing of the northern front (III SS Panzer Corps) had to be pulled back in order to form a shorter and more easily guarded line.

Every camp of the larger partisan groups was secured on all sides—in some sections to a depth of several hundred yards—by thick underbrush, brier obstacles, or abatis and wire entanglements. All roads leading to the camp were blocked or camouflaged, or detours were built which led in another direction. Traffic to the camp was conducted on paths known only to the initiated. Sometimes these paths were protected by bodies of water, with crossings built 8 to 12 inches below water level, or by large stretches of swamp which could be crossed only on swamp skis. All movements of strangers were carefully controlled by sentries stationed far from camp and disguised as peasants. Strangers were also kept under close surveillance by a network of spies active in all villages in the vicinity.

The camps were well supplied with weapons, ammunition, explosives, and rations. Only very reliable partisans were put in charge of these supplies.

The camps procured their food supplies by forced requisitions in nearby villages. Villages refusing food contributions were ruthlessly put to the torch by the partisans; the men were dragged into the woods, and the women and children dispersed. Supplies were also received by aircraft, which dropped the rations in the immediate vicinity of the camp when prearranged light or fire signals were displayed. Looting vehicles during partisan raids likewise provided ammunition and small arms for the bands.

Excellent camouflage prevented any aerial observation of the camps. The shelters were allowed to be heated only at night, so that no smoke would disclose the existence of the camp during the day. The partisans succeeded in maintaining the secrecy of the camps for a long time by having small bands appear in remote villages and by disseminating false rumors concerning partisan movements. The mere suspicion of betrayal was sufficient cause for execution of the suspect. The same fate threatened the family of the condemned. These measures explain why all partisan operations were kept secret. Whoever joined a partisan group, voluntarily or involuntarily, could leave it only at the risk of his life.

The partisans also had signal communications at their disposal. The larger partisan units received their directives by short-wave radio, so that they had up-to-date information about current military developments in their respective sectors. Air couriers were also used. There was a carefully camouflaged landing place for liaison airplanes in the immediate vicinity of almost every major camp.

Practically without exception partisan operations were carried out at night. Daytime raids seldom took place, and then only in areas in which no German troops were stationed for miles around. Raids of that type were usually confined to individual motor vehicles.

A major partisan operation, with the demolition of a railroad bridge as its objective, would proceed as follows: A long column of women and children would move along the right of way in the direction of the bridge. Presuming them to be refugees, the German sentry would take no action. When the head of the column had reached the bridge, heavy surprise fire was directed against the bridgehead from the end of the column. Machine guns, set up on the roadbed in the direction of the bridge, pinned down the German guards. Under this fire cover, and by utilizing women and children in violation of international law, the partisans succeeded in installing prepared demolition charges and in destroying the bridge.

Partisan operations generally included mining main highways, demolition of railroad tracks, mining railroad beds and arming the mines with push and pull igniters, surprise fire attacks on trains, looting derailed railroad cars, raids on trucks and convoys, and burn-

ing ration, ammunition, and fuel depots. Less frequent were raids on command posts of higher German headquarters.

The partisans followed the practice of avoiding open combat as much as possible. This practice was indeed the guiding rule upon which their method of warfare was based. Unusual developments at the front would immediately result in extremely lively partisan activity, essentially aimed at the disruption and destruction of railroad lines. During a major German attack, for instance, the main line of a railroad that had to handle the supplies for three German armies was blasted at two thousand points in a single night and so effectively disrupted that all traffic was stalled for several days. Such large-scale operations, carried out by small partisan teams and numerous individuals, at times seriously hampered the supply of the German troops.

## Chapter 17

### Defense Against Partisan Activity

The German forces in Russia took both passive and active defense measures to protect their rear areas against the surge of partisan activities.

#### I. Passive Antipartisan Measures

Each army group created a special staff whose duty it was to collect all information concerning the appearance and movement of partisans by close contact with the military authorities in the rear areas and with Russian community heads, as well as by a network of agents in areas threatened by partisans. All information thus gathered would immediately be passed on to the German military authorities concerned.

Small headquarters were combined to protect them more effectively against partisan raids.

Local defense units were drawn from among the Russian population in threatened areas. Often Russian civilians urgently requested this measure because they suffered from confiscation of cattle, forceful removal of men, etc., by the partisans.

All traffic was halted on especially endangered roads at nightfall; such roads were used in daytime only at certain hours and in convoys escorted by armed guards.

Railroads, bridges, and trains were protected. Outguards within sight or earshot of each other were posted along railroad lines in threatened areas. The outguards were quartered in blockhouses protected by wire entanglements and abatis, behind which lay also the entrenchments for defense. Wherever the railroad line led through wooded terrain, all trees within 50 yards of either side of the right-of-way were felled to provide a better field of vision.

Reinforced outguards equipped with infantry heavy weapons protected all bridges. Another precaution, however, had to be taken in addition to furnishing local protection for bridges and adjacent bridgeheads, particularly whenever larger bridges were to be safeguarded. Strong guard detachments had to be posted at a great enough distance to permit them to spot approaching partisan bands, and to allow time for an orderly preparation of countermeasures. Precautions of that nature had not been taken prior to the previously mentioned partisan operation against the railroad bridge.

All trains going through danger zones had two sand-filled gondola cars coupled in front to protect their locomotives from mines. Each train was escorted by a guard detachment of about forty men.

Furlough trains were guarded by the soldier-passengers themselves. For that reason, all men going on furlough had to carry their small arms. Night traffic on particularly imperiled railroad lines was discontinued from time to time. During the day, the trains on these lines sometimes traveled within sight of each other. This procedure, however, was possible only because Russian air activity in the rear area was very limited.

## II. Active Antipartisan Measures

Units such as security divisions and forces particularly organized for that purpose were normally assigned the mission of fighting the partisans. The great depth of area required a substantial number of such units, and since they were not available in desired numbers, security divisions frequently had to be assigned zones that they were hardly able to control.

In the forest terrain of Baranovichi and Minsk, for instance, the German 707th Security Division had to guard an area of 40,000 square miles (larger than all of Austria). Its duties usually consisted of protection of important points in seriously threatened wooded areas; surveillance and protection of zones and villages through which led military supply routes, and which were constantly imperiled by partisan bands; reconnaissance of partisan camps and roads leading to them; daily dispatch of as many combat patrols as possible into partisan territory to prevent the partisans from uniting into groups and establishing permanent bases; and operations against detected partisan camps.

Whenever the Germans planned a major operation against a detected partisan camp, the project had to be kept a strict secret from the troops. Experience had taught that if such plans were revealed, even larger partisan groups immediately dissolved, only to assemble again at a different location. It happened repeatedly that in carefully prepared operations partisan camps, which shortly before had been fully occupied, were found deserted. The troops, therefore, could only be informed of the actual plans after they had reached the outer line of encirclement.

The assembly of the attacking troops had to take place at least 1 day's march away from the partisan camps. The advance toward the outer line of encirclement had to be so timed that all troops could reach it simultaneously and occupy it immediately. As far as possible, the outer line of encirclement was anchored on natural obstacles that were easy to block and to keep under surveillance (for example, rivers).

The troops were deployed in the outer line of encirclement in such a manner that they formed a continuous line of sentries, with each soldier within calling distance—and at night, within sight—of the next. Behind this line of sentries, pursuit detachments were kept ready for immediate employment against partisan bands which might break out. As soon as the encirclement had been completed, leaflets were dropped over all inhabited places within the ring, ordering all inhabitants to evacuate at once and to assemble at a designated point.

The contraction of the ring of encirclement proceeded during daytime only, in phases covering not more than 2 to 3 miles per day, and the territory was carefully combed. Individual sectors had to be occupied by at least 2 hours before twilight, so that the troops could establish themselves and become acquainted with the terrain ahead while it was still light.

Sectors easily distinguishable in the woods (glades, paths, railroad lines) were designated as the new line of encirclement. Close contact between individuals had to be maintained. Nighttime security at the sector boundaries was of particular importance. The procedure of detaching forces for guarding unit boundaries, as well as the command over those forces, had to be clearly regulated. The further contraction of the ring up to the final encirclement of the camp followed the same pattern as described above.

As soon as the encirclement had started, the surrounded area was kept under constant aerial observation. By dropping messages, the planes immediately notified troops and officers in command of any observed breakout attempts. Since breakouts were to be expected mainly at night, sufficient security detachments had to be posted in front of the sentry line. With the contraction of the ring of encirclement a proportionate number of reserves could be withdrawn, and their follow-up had to be properly regulated. If the partisans still remained in their camp by the time the troops had reached the final line of encirclement, a heavy air attack would usually enable the troops to score a quick success.

Experience had taught the Germans that this type of antipartisan warfare, though requiring large numbers of troops and much time, promised the greatest success. No other methods proved themselves in wooded terrain, since breakouts at night could hardly be prevented. Rigid discipline was a prerequisite for the success of such an operation. The designated objective for the day could not be changed during the operation, and the slightest independent changes on the part of the troops would disrupt the line of encirclement and make the breakout of partisans possible.

Winter proved to be the most favorable season for antipartisan operations because all movements could be more readily observed in snow-

covered terrain. In summer the dense foliage of the woods made such operations very difficult. As far as possible they were to be carried out during bright nights, best of all during a full moon. Liberal armament with machine pistols proved advantageous. Mortars were found to have more of a demoralizing than actual effect, since their shells burst in the trees. Artillery could hardly be used during advances in woods. As a rule it could be put into action only during the battle for the fortified camp itself. Depending upon the terrain, the Germans found it advisable to have individual guns follow directly behind the leading elements. The employment of tanks, where the terrain was suitable, produced excellent results. In such operations the troops had to have an adequate supply of signal pistols and cartridges. In the case of swampland, the troops were to be equipped with swamp skis.

The wooded terrain, which afforded poor visibility, and deceptions at night often caused shooting frays that started a panic among German units or resulted in their firing on their own troops. The Germans therefore found it advisable to prohibit the firing of all infantry light weapons except during partisan attacks. Special regulations for opening fire also were required when the final ring of encirclement had been closed and the troops were facing each other at a short distance.

## Chapter 18

### Non-Russian Partisans

In addition to the Russian partisan groups, there also existed in the East strong Ukrainian and Polish groups, as well as a few weak Czech and Jewish groups. The latter two were of no great importance. Some of the bands were for, and others against, Russia. They fought each other cruelly and ruthlessly to the point of annihilation. In 1944, for instance, at the Polish-Ukrainian linguistic frontier, Polish bands raided Ukrainian villages, and Ukrainian bands raided Polish villages, burned them, and massacring the entire populations including women and children. There were insufficient German troops to occupy the entire territory densely enough to prevent such raids. Emergency detachments usually came too late.

Behind the German front, severe fighting, even to the extent of employing heavy weapons, frequently broke out between the partisan groups of different camps. Such disturbances at times caused a local paralysis of Soviet partisan activity.

The very active bands of the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement (UPA) formed the strongest partisan group in the East except for the Russian Communist bands, which they fought bitterly. The UPA repeatedly offered its cooperation against the Soviet partisan bands to the German Army and asked for a German general to act as organizer and tactical leader, but the High Command of the German Army, very much to its disadvantage, continually refused these requests. Only tacit, local agreements were therefore made between the UPA and German military authorities. They proved advantageous to both parties. Sometimes the UPA would participate in fighting the Soviet bands even without any previous agreement (as in 1944 north of Lwow and at Stanislav). The UPA forces were deployed in groups of several thousands each in the rear of the Russian, as well as the German, armies. Although they fought the German political organizations and their police forces, they never fought the German troops, and they seriously harassed the Soviet Army. Not only did they severely impede its supply, they also attacked Russian headquarters and rendered them powerless by encirclement (for example, in 1944 at a Russian corps headquarters in Korosten, which had to be liberated by motorized troops). Furthermore, they incited revolts of the Ukrainian population in the rear area (in Kiev, for example), the

quelling of which required the withdrawal of several Russian divisions from the front for an extended period of time.

Although seriously disturbing German supply operations, and thereby also the conduct of battle, even the strongest partisan movement, that of the Soviets, had little influence on the over-all operations in the East. This is illustrated in the report on the protection of supply lines near Kirovograd against partisan raids (1942-43).

The Kirovograd region was administered by German civilian authorities, with the aid of municipal and regional commissioners who had their seats in the larger towns. The former town and community boundaries were retained as much as possible. The security of the region was the responsibility of the regional military government officer (*Feldkommandant*) and the local military government officers (*Ortskommandant*) under him. It included mainly the security of railroads, the two important supply routes (express highways IV and IVc), and the Bug bridges at Pervomaisk and Voznesensk. Two local defense (*Landeschuetzen*) battalions were available for these tasks.

Except for occasional minor sabotage acts against railroads, telephone lines, etc., by the native population, the area administered by German Regional Military Government Office (*Feldkommandantur*) 509 remained absolutely undisturbed throughout 1942, and substantial progress was made in the work on express highways IV and IVc. Not until March of 1943 did a sizable partisan group invade this area.

Of the railroad lines in this region, the one with the branch line to Dnepropetrovsk and Krivoi Rog, via Aleksandriya-Pyatihatka, was the most vital from the military as well as the war-economy standpoint. The important junction and marshalling center of Znemenka was the point most vulnerable to sabotage operations. Had that place been destroyed, the entire supply of the front, and shipments of badly needed war materials destined for Germany, would have become seriously endangered for a rather long time. The terrain was level and flat, with little vegetation. It was partially steppeland. Except for a fairly large, dense patch of forest between Znemenka and Tsibulnos, only smaller strips of woodland limited the visibility along the railroad line. Features extremely favorable for sabotage operations were the extensive fields of sunflowers, growing taller than a man, and to a lesser degree, the grain fields.

Raids on the railroad line were always carried out in insidiously cunning ways by bands which found refuge mainly in the woods north of Znemenka and which were willingly aided by elements among the population of the neighboring villages. Organized into small combat patrols (*Troikas*), and carefully protecting their lines of withdrawal, they blew up railroad tracks, damaged control towers and signal in-

stallations, and terrorized the native railroad personnel. The *Troikas* disappeared upon the completion of their work of destruction, as a rule without having suffered any losses. Their activities were directed from a higher level, and they were regularly supplied with weapons, communications equipment, explosives, maps, medical supplies, etc., which sometimes were dropped by aircraft. The explosives consisted of demolition charges, mines, artillery shells, or improvised infernal machines.

The weapons of the *Troikas* were generally machine pistols, daggers, and rifles. The members wore civilian clothes, but some were dressed in uniforms of the German Army, Luftwaffe, or political organizations.

In March 1943, a partisan group, at first numbering from 200 to 300 men, with a few women as medical and signal personnel, invaded the region of Feldkommandantur 509 at Chigirin (35 miles west of Kremenchug). It was very ably led and highly mobile in its conduct of battle. The group used sleighs in the winter and requisitioned horses during the muddy period. For 3 weeks they roamed through this region; raided agricultural centers, sawmills, and other plants; killed the managers of the agricultural centers as well as the German harvest control officers; liberated prisoners of war; and disrupted rail traffic at Sosnovka. The partisans sought shelter in villages adjacent to woodlands. Horses and vehicles were sheltered in steep ravines to project them against artillery fire. The expertly arranged security and reconnaissance measures precluded the possibility of surprise raids by German troops. Orders and instructions were received by short-wave equipment which was kept in a suitcase. Because of their well-functioning intelligence machinery, searches of woodlands and villages for the smaller sabotage teams of partisans were almost never successful. The Ukrainian community authorities' lists of inhabitants were seldom in order, making identification of the inhabitants of a village very difficult. It was, therefore, found practicable to chalk the names of the residents of each house on the front door.

In combatting the partisans, railroad stations, control towers, wooded zones, and bridges were focal points of security. Shifting German reserves by motor vehicles was planned for a quick reinforcement of the defenses. All places that had to be defended were converted into strong points. Arrangements had to be made in buildings to permit firing from various floors, and machine gun emplacements with flanking and alternate firing positions had to be installed. Plank walls had to be erected for protection against fragmentation, and windows had to be provided with gun shields and embrasures. Fire steps, ammunition lockers, communication corridors, and observation posts had to be established. Telephone lines were laid so as to be protected

as much as possible against gun fire, and supplemented by optic and acoustic alarm signals. In the vicinity of each German strong point, the terrain was cleared of obstructing vegetation for a distance of about 1,000 yards in each direction along the railroad line; this cleared area extended some 300 to 400 yards from the tracks.

The goal of all these precautions and preparations was to assure the smooth functioning of rail traffic. In addition to military security, the railroad lines were frequently inspected by employees walking along the tracks, and patrolled by handcars, or locomotives pushing freight cars ahead of them. The speedy formation of "alert" units for fire fighting, and the procedure of transporting them by motor or rail had to be planned and practiced in drills. The use of armored trains, or the addition to trains of cars carrying troops, proved to be effective methods of antipartisan defense.

The Germans soon realized that their military forces were not sufficient for the manifold tasks of railroad security. To ease their burden, local inhabitants were assigned to the troops as so-called voice-alarm sentries. Upon spotting partisans, these sentries were to shout the information to their neighboring guard posts, stationed at a distance of five hundred yards, but were not to fight. For that reason the native sentries were unarmed. Their reliability varied, since they feared the cruel reprisals of the partisans against themselves and their families. Organized indigenous forces, some of which were employed for railroad defense, likewise functioned only when they were heavily intermixed with German units. The German regional defense units were not properly armed. Their equipment, too, was completely inadequate. For reconnaissance, the *Fieseler-Storch* (liaison aircraft) proved equal to all demands. The evacuation of villages directly adjacent to railroad lines, and the establishment of so-called death zones, within which any civilian would be shot on sight, were found to be appropriate measures.