



German map of the European part of the Soviet Union (1941), section showing Eastern Ukraine, Black Sea, Azov Sea, Northern Caucasus, Kalmykia, Volga River valley, Caspian steppes. National Library, Warsaw, Poland, polona.pl

**Ryszard Sodel**Institute of National Remembrance Archives, Warsaw, Poland  
ORCID 0000-0002-1792-2146

DOI: 10.48261/INRR230515

# THE FOUNDATION OF THE KALMYK CAVALRY CORPS

ARTICLES

**Abstract**

The aim of this article is to present the history of the foundation of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps and its combat activities from August 1942 to May 1945. The author will first present the history of the Kalmyk nation and their relations with the tsarist state from the 17th to the 20th century, followed by their social, political and economic situation within the USSR. The next part examines the activities of the Soviet authorities in the period from June 1941 to July 1942, when the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union's war economy. The author then explores the reasons behind the formation of this collaborative unit composed of Soviet citizens, as well as the founder of the Corps and its first commander, Otto Vierba, alias Dr. Doll, a mysterious personality. The article outlines his combat journey in the years 1942–1944, leading through the steppes to the Volga region and Ukraine. The last part of the article presents the activities of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps in the years 1944–1945, including its participation in anti-partisan operations in the Podkarpacie and Lublin regions as part of the *Grosseinsatz Maigewitter*, *Sturmwind I*, *Sturmwind II* and *Wirbelsturm* operations. The article then describes the organisational changes and political activities of the Kalmyk National Committee, which led to its accession to the Committee for the Liberation of the Nations of Russia (*Комитет освобождения народов*

*Россуи, Комитет освобожденија народоv Россii, KONR*). It also presents the group's combat actions in the Kielce region of the German-occupied Poland from the end of the summer of 1944 to January 1945, during which it faced heavy struggles as it was retreating before the advancing Soviet troops. The group ended its combat trail in Austria in May 1945, subordinated to the 15th SS Cossack Cavalry Corps.

**Keywords:** Kalmykia, Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Otto Wierba, Dr. Doll, *Grosseinsatz Maigewitter, Sturmwind I, Sturmwind II, Wirbelsturm*, Kalmyk National Committee, Committee for the Liberation of the Nations of Russia (KONR), 15th SS Cossack Cavalry Corps

## Introduction

The Wehrmacht's attack against the USSR on June 22, 1941, came as a great surprise and shock to the Red Army, and resulting in a catastrophic a loss of human lives, material and equipment during the first few days of the assault (Newland 2010, pp. 35-38). The lost battle for the borders, in which rank-and-file soldiers, non-commissioned officers and lower-ranking officers were killed *en masse*, was aggravated by pointless counterattacks aimed at pushing the advancing German troops back to their initial positions and launching offensive actions in selected operational directions. During the campaign of the summer of 1941, the Red Army soldiers were taken into German captivity in large numbers, where a cruel fate awaited them. Both on their way to the prisoner-of-war camps and when they reached them, they suffered from ill-treatment, starvation and disease.

During Operation Barbarossa, many lower- and higher-ranked Wehrmacht officers on the front were surprised by the scale on which individual soldiers, and even entire Red Army units, defected to the German side (Bishop 2008, pp. 68–69, 72–74). Deserters from the Red Army and prisoners of war in the frontline divisions started to be used as coachmen, drivers, translators and porters; they were also armed with captured weapons, and formed sentry, protection, counter-insurgency and reconnaissance units operating deep behind the Red Army lines. Officially, in the Wehrmacht documents, these formations were called *Hilfswillige*, abbreviated as *Hiwis* (volunteers, helpers). The actions of the German side were dictated, among others, by the lack of their own troops ready to be sent to the front, where they where they were needed due to personnel losses and where they

could serve as human resources in the occupied areas. The extended communication lines, poor condition on the roads and railroads, as well as diminished load capacity of the bridges, made it difficult to supply the troops engaged in offensive operations.

Among the Wehrmacht troops invading the territory of the USSR were representatives of the so-called 'White émigrés', who served as translators, intelligence officers and experts on national, religious and cultural matters (Institute of National Remembrance Archives [*Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, hereinafter AIPN], ref. no. 01222/3114, report of April 1, 1944, 994/B., pp. 20–22 (Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*] intelligence report), Borys Smysłowski, alias Major Regenau, alias Borys Spiechowski, alias Brother 'Hermes' the Grand Conservator, 15.6.[19].44, pp. 23–24). This group included Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Tatars, Bashkirs, representatives of the Turkic peoples, Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians, Armenians, Georgians, Kalmyks and Buryats. They had emigrated from Russia shortly after their defeat in the civil war, and included figures such as Piotr Krasnov, the ataman of the Don Army, General Anton Denikin, General Piotr Wrangel and many other military men, civilians and clergymen who had relocated to Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland. These people had lost their independence either due to defeat of their respective national uprisings, such as that of the Basmachis in Central Asia (Cheda 2017) and the Musavatists in the Caucasus (Czachor 2014, pp. 295–298); or more recently due to the annexation of their countries, as in the case of Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians. In the Soviet territories occupied by the Wehrmacht, national committees began to form with the aim of regaining independence based on the Third Reich. However, these efforts met with harsh reprisals from the Germans, who were not interested in creating independent nation states (Gdański 2005, 28–31, 38). During this war period, the Germans believed that the campaign against the Soviet Union would last just a few weeks and that it would end in complete success (as the previous campaigns in 1939–1940 had), which aligned with the Nazi ideology that admitted no compromise and demanded the extinction of the Slavic peoples.

The Soviet state and party authorities, as well as the High Command of the Red Army, were surprised by the scale of desertions and the number of prisoners captured by the Wehrmacht, and even more so by the possibility that the Germans would be able to create military and police formations from these prisoners. Such formations, apart from their military significance, could constitute political support for

national committees whose main goal was to regain independence (supported by the Third Reich) in the future, and which indeed attempted to do so during the later period of the war (Thorwald 2010, pp. 302–313). For these reasons, on August 16, 1941, the High Command of the Red Army issued Order No. 270, treating all prisoners of war as deserters, traitors to the motherland, subjecting them to the harshest punishment. Similar regulations were incorporated into the Soviet penal code, which treated POWs as criminals against the state; these laws also extended to their family members. Despite these draconian punishments, however, many members of the Red Army deserted or surrendered to the invading Wehrmacht troops, and many civilians defected to the side of the aggressor. This was a manifestation of a great reluctance, or even hostility felt by the citizens of the USSR towards the state and its policies resulting in famine, denationalisation of entire nations and ethnic groups, terror, the destruction of their places of religious worship, and the forced programmes collectivisation and industrialisation which claimed many lives.

One such nation was the Kalmyks, who fell victim to the Soviet system and its efforts to create a new industrialised state and the new ‘Soviet citizen.’ At this point, we should ask: Who are the Kalmyks, and where do they come from? The Kalmyks are descended from the Oirats, and are the only Mongolian people in Europe who profess Buddhism, unlike their neighbours, the Tatars, Bashkirs, and Nogai, who are of Turkish origin and mostly profess Sunni Islam. This nomadic people, which during its history fought fierce battles against the Tatars, the Nogai, the Kabardians, the Kazakhs and the Bashkirs, played a significant political and military role on the Volga steppes at the turn of the 18th century (Khodarkovsky 2009, 139–145). The peak of the Kalmyk Khanate’s power was the reign of Khan Ayuka (1669–1724). The Kalmyk light cavalry he commanded took part in the Third Northern War on the side of Russia (Krokosz 2010, 146–149). The decline of the khanate’s political and military importance began after Ayuka’s death; one reason being the fact that the quota of horses intended for the Russian cavalry was increased, which had a direct impact on the polity’s economy. At the same time, Russian administration introduced regulations requiring the Kalmyks to trade in certain designated border cities, limiting the number of goods they could exchange, and intensifying the process of their Christianisation. In 1771, the Kalmyk Khanate was completely subordinated to Russia during the reign of Tsarina Catherine II (Kundakbaeva 2005, pp. 243–251). Subsequently, the

Russian colonisation of Kalmykia began, granting the best lands to the Cossacks as well as to the Russian colonists, who displaced the local population from the best pastures to inferior lands for horse and cattle breeding. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Kalmyks were included in the troops of the Don, Astrakhan (Prozritelev 1912, pp. 36–44), Orenburg and Ural Cossacks. It is worth noting that they participated in all the wars conducted by the tsarist empire in that period (Shovunov 1992, pp. 35–59, 71–89). The Kalmyks also took an active part in the First World War, serving in the Cossack army in various locations, including the Kingdom of Poland, Galicia, and other fronts of the conflict. The unfavourable course of hostilities in the years 1914–1917 had a huge impact on the economic, social and political situation in Russia, leading to the fall of the Romanov dynasty. In 1917, the Kalmyk People's Steppe District was established, in which the Kalmyks exercised administrative and judicial power. After the civil war broke out in Russia, most of them supported the Whites; about 2,000 served in the Volunteer Army of General Denikin, which was one of its best cavalry units. Some Kalmyks also served in the cavalry of the Red Army, where they were regarded as its elite due to their equestrian skills & excellent handling of horses, and their mastery of warfare, allowing them to maneuver into the deep corners at the rear of the enemy army. After the defeat of the 'Whites' in the civil war, the Soviet authorities repressed the Kalmyks for participating in the fighting against them; around 1500 emigrated to Europe and the USA, giving rise to the global Kalmyk diaspora. On November 4, 1920, the Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast was established; on October 20, 1935, it was renamed the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the policy of *korenizatsiia*. In 1929, Kalmykia, like other parts of the USSR, was subjected to brutal collectivisation, accompanied by the process of forcing the Kalmyks to change their lifestyle from nomadic to sedentary. The Kalmyks began to resist, killing their own herds of cattle, sheep and horses – an act of great desperation for the nomads, for whom their livestock was the basis of existence. These processes were associated with the destruction of their tribal structures, family and clan ties, their culture, religion and their traditional farming and pastoral way of life. In 1930, the process of repression against Buddhist monasteries began; these were not only religious, but also cultural and social centres for the Kalmyk people. In 1931, as part of the fight against religion, the authorities arrested Lubsan Sharab Tepkin, who was the *shajin lama*, the leader of all Buddhist monks; the last monastery was closed in 1939 (Bormanshinov 1997, pp. 27–29).

## Kalmykia during World War II

From the start of the war between the Third Reich and the USSR, the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was integrated into the massive transition of the Soviet economy from a peacetime to a wartime footing. At the end of November 1941, 110th Semyon Budyonny Independent Kalmyk Cossack Division and the 111th Independent Oka I. Gorodovikov Kalmyk Cavalry Division were formed. On March 12, 1942, the Soviet Head Defence Committee (GKO) suspended the formation of the 111th Independent Cavalry Division, handing over the two regiments which had already been formed to other Red Army cavalry units, while its staff and regimental school were incorporated into the 110th Independent Kalmyk Cavalry Division. By May 1942, it consisted of three cavalry regiments, the 273rd, the 292nd and the 311th; the 110th independent horse artillery; and rear service squadrons (see i.a. Ochirov 2017). The independent Kalmyk Cavalry Division consisted of about 3,500 soldiers, most of whom were Kalmyks, but it also included representatives of other nationalities, such as Russians and Ukrainians. The division was incorporated into the 51st General Military Army, which was part of the North Caucasian Front. During the battles in July 1942, the division suffered heavy losses in terms of killed, wounded and missing; moreover, a significant part of its soldiers deserted, either escaping home, or forming partisan units which began attacking army units, militia posts and civil administration headquarters on the Kalmykia steppes (Krause 2003, 136-137). These spontaneously emerging partisan units were joined by conscripts who had been in hiding before being drafted into the Red Army.

It is estimated that at the beginning of the war about 20,000 Kalmyks were drafted into the Red Army, and 16,000 horses and 700 carts were transferred from the republic, along with propellants, lubricants, oil and food.

On June 28, 1942, the German offensive, code-named *Fall Blau*, began. Its strategic goal was to capture the oil-rich fields of the Caucasus and thus deprive the USSR of its crude fuel base in the form of oil and its products, which were essential for modern warfare. One element of this operation was the capture of Stalingrad, an important industrial centre and river port on the Volga, where raw materials and food delivered from the Caucasus were processed. Controlling of the area would also enable the Germans to block the Volga, along which

British and American military equipment was transported from Persia under the Red Army's lend-lease agreement. The city became a symbol for both sides in the ongoing propaganda and ideological war that was taking place simultaneously with the military struggle. The capture of Stalingrad was entrusted to the 6th Army of Gen. Friedrich von Paulus and the 4th Panzer Army of Gen. Hermann Hoth, although without the 40th Armoured Corps, which was transferred to the 1st Panzer Army of Gen. Paul von Kleist.

On August 11, 1942, Otto (Otmar) Rudolfovich (Karlovich) Vierba (born November 2, 1900, died July 1944), also known by various other names, such as Ottmar Vrba, Otmar Rudolf Verba, Werba, Wierba (alias Dr. Doll, Otto Doll), appeared in the Kalmyk steppes. He acted as a *Sonderführer* in *Abwehrgruppe* 103, and had a driver and car at his disposal (Molendowski 2013). An intriguing character, his early biography appears in several mutually exclusive versions; it appears that he was familiar with the Kalmyk language, customs and culture. His main task was to create a highly mobile formation that was well-acquainted with the terrain, and that could conduct subversive reconnaissance operations, and cover the weak eastern flank of the Wehrmacht's 52nd Army Corps. To this end, he began talks with the Kalmyk elders to establish a cavalry detachment which was to carry out covering and anti-partisan operations, behind the lines of the Red Army. These talks yielded positive results, and he was granted permission to form a Kalmyk cavalry unit to carry out protective and sabotage activities (Hoffman 1977, 21).

On August 12, 1942, the German army captured Elista, the capital of the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic; they took over 5 out of the 13 *ulus* (traditional districts) in their entirety, and a further 3 in part, leaving the rest under Soviet control. The Germans appointed two mayors in Elista; one of them was Bemba Tsuglinov, whom they presented as the 'president of the Kalmyk people' claiming that he would best represent the national interests of his countrymen. Moreover, in the territories they occupied, the Germans supported private property, introduced freedom of religious worship, permitted the construction of temples and Kalmyk education; they published periodicals called *Halmar* and *Kalmyk*, dissolved the *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, and distributed the cattle, sheep and horses among the Kalmyk people.

In 1942, the Kalmyk emigrants who supported cooperation with Germany established the Kalmyk National Committee, headed by Shamba Balimov. In addition to political activities, it also initiated the creation of military units composed of Kalmyks. Otto Vierba





Kalmyk Corps soldier named Bazr (25 October 1944). Institute of National Remembrance Archives, ref. no. AIPN Ki 015/11

of the unit. On November 30, 1942, they were named the 1st and 2nd Kalmyk Squadrons. These squadrons conducted subversive and reconnaissance operations in the deep rear of the Red Army, attacking Soviet communication lines, eliminating landing parachutists, and defending German transports, roads, bridges and rear infrastructure facilities. These squadrons operated independently of those commanded by Dr. Doll.

At the beginning of winter 1942, units of Dr. Doll's Kalmyk Military Union carried out reconnaissance and intelligence operations in the area of Yusta, where large German forces were concentrated. The Kalmyk units focused on covering their flanks and rear. They operated on both sides of the railway line and the Elista-Astrakhan road, paralysing the movements of the Soviet units and interrupting the transport of supplies to the units at the front. They destroyed Soviet parachute units in the area of Utta and Khalkhuta, as well as a partisan unit near Ulan Tug (Muñoz and Romanko 2001, 154–158). They demonstrated high combat capability, manoeuvrability, and excellent knowledge of the terrain needed to conduct irregular operations,

commanded a special unit composed of Kalmyks, which was transformed into the *Kalmückische Militärunion Dr. Doll* (Dr. Doll's Kalmyk Military Union), and then incorporated into *Abwehrgruppe* 103 (Hoffman 1977, 23).

## Establishment and Operation of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps

In September 1942, two Kalmyk cavalry squadrons were formed within the 16th Motorised Infantry Division, commanded by General Siegfried Heinrici. The squadrons were to form the nucleus of the Kalmyk Legion. On October 17, 1942, the decision was approved, and the squadrons were incorporated into the 16th Motorised Infantry Division, where they remained until the dissolution

despite their small numbers. According to estimates, at the turn of 1943, the number of soldiers in Dr. Doll's Kalmyk Military Union was quite variable, and in November 1942, it reached about 1,575 soldiers (Fowler 2001, 41).

On January 18, 1943, squadrons of Dr. Doll's Kalmyk Military Union from *Abwehrgruppe* 103 near Yegorlik, north of Salsk, repelled a Soviet attack near the town of Manich (Muñoz & Romanko 2001, 159). In the same month, Dr. Doll's Kalmyk Military Union was incorporated into the 4th Panzer Army under the command of Gen. Hermann Hoth and fought along a 650 km-long front. In February 1943, after the German defeat at Stalingrad, the Kalmyks, together with the von Jungschulz Cossack regiment, were reassigned to the 3rd Panzer Division to secure the coast of the Azov Sea against sea landing in the Taganrog region. In March 1943, as the Kalmyks' front line stabilised, they carried out cover and security operations in the Taganrog-Mariupol region. In addition to conducting combat operations, the Kalmyk troops were actively expanded, and so by April 18, 1943 their number had reached 2,200 people. On April 28, 1943, the squadrons of the Kalmyk Military Union consisted of 79 Kalmyk officers, 353 NCOs and 2,029 soldiers, with 2,030 horses. On May 23, 1943, their forces amounted to 67 Kalmyk officers, 3,165 NCOs and privates, and 1,941 horses. (Muñoz and Romanko 2001, 160)

In the summer of 1943, the Kalmyk Military Union was reorganized as the the *Kalmüken Verband Dr. Doll* [Dr Doll's Kalmyk Cavalry Corps], under the command of by Otto Vierba. The Germans granted the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps the status of an allied formation which, unlike the Ostlegionen, enjoyed extensive autonomy (Rutkiewicz 2006, 54-8). The functions of officers and NCOs were performed by Kalmyks, mostly by the former Soviet POWs with high military qualifications, as well as some emigrants, many of whom had served in the Tsarist army. The Germans in the Corps performed auxiliary functions within the staff (Lucas 2008, 154-155). The Kalmyk Cavalry Corps consisted of four divisions (battalions), each of which had five squadrons. In addition, there were five more squadrons operating independently, bringing the a total of 25 squadrons. Division I (battalion) included squadrons no. 1, 4, 7, 8, 18; Division II (battalion) had no.s 5, 6, 12, 20, 23; Division III (battalion) had no.s 3, 14, 17, 21, 25; and Division IV (battalion) had no.s 2, 13, 19, 22, 24. Squadrons no. 9, 10, 11, 15 and 16 conducted independent operations in the deep hinterland of the enemy front. The number of soldiers in the squadron ranged on average from 100 to 150 soldiers, although



Kalmyk Corps mounted soldiers (1942–1945).  
Institute of National Remembrance Archives, ref. no. AIPN Ki 015/11

marches relied heavily on horses, of which there were never enough; their shortage was alleviated by the Germans, acquired through war booty and requisitions from the occupied territories (for more see the Institute of National Remembrance Archives Kielce Branch, ref. no. AIPN Ki, 015/11, vol. 2, collection WUSW Kielce, series IV, object case-files [*sprawy obiektowe*], Case materials concerning the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps operating in Kielce province in 1944, record of interrogation of witness Wanda Bilska, Kielce, April 25, 1966, pp. 87–90, an object-oriented case). During the combat operations in Kalmykia, the Kalmyks used Bactrian camels as riding and pack animals; they were well-suited for dry steppe areas characterised by large differences in temperature between day and night. Trucks were also used as a means of road transport (both, German-made vehicles and captured Soviet, American and British vehicles). These trucks were used as a means of transport to the battlefield as the Kalmyks fought, for the infantry, or for very fast travel over short and long distances.

The individual armament of a Kalmyk cavalryman consisted of a rifle or a submachine gun, personal weapons held by officers and NCOs, and a sabre. The cavalymen were armed with small arms of various types, designs and calibres. The basic type of small arms

this changed as a result of combat losses, diseases, desertions, and the numbers available for re-manning. The reconnaissance squadron included 60 of the most experienced cavalymen. It should be noted that each of the 4 squadrons had a reconnaissance squadron. The divisions and squadrons of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps were recruited based on the principle of tribal and territorial affiliation: Divisions I and II were recruited from among the Torguts, Division III from the Lesser Derbets, and Division IV from the Derbets and the Don Kalmyks.

The Kalmyk Cavalry Corps' basic means of transport both on the battlefield and during the

was the Russian and later the Soviet Mosin 1891 repeating rifle, the Cossack version, the dragoon version, and its later modifications: the 1891/30, 38 and 44 models. Other weapons included German Mauser 98k rifles, Dutch Het Geweer M.95 rifles (a Dutch version of the Austrian Mannlicher M.1895 rifle), PPSH 1941 submachine guns (135 pieces), and German MP 40 submachine guns (33 pieces) (Drobnyarko, Karashchuk 2001, 33–34). The equipment of individual cavalymen also included Soviet SVT 40 semi-automatic rifles. The crew-served weaponry included the Soviet DP 28 armoured car, the Maxim 1910 heavy machine gun, as well as the German MG 34, and later in the war, the MG 42. The support consisted mainly of captured mortars and Soviet-made guns adapted for motor and horse traction. According to the preserved documents, officers and NCOs, and to a lesser extent the privates, were mainly armed with submachine guns, though they were rather scarce. Personal weapons were mainly TT 33 pistols, Nagant 1895 revolvers, and German pistols of various types and calibres; there were single cases of short arms produced in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, French and others.

Moreover, the cavalymen were armed with a secondary weapon, namely Cossack *shashkas*: the 1881, 1927 and 1934 models, as well as Russian 1881 dragoon sabres. In terms of uniforms, the Kalmyk cavalymen initially wore Soviet uniforms, and, not infrequently, also civilian clothes. As part of the consolidation process, they were replaced with German uniforms consisting of a shirt and trousers; the headgear was a German military cap or Cossack *papakha*, or a *kubanka*.

In April 1944, the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps was transferred to Poland in order to defend the hinterland of the eastern front against the operations carried out by partisan groups. In May and June 1944, the Corps participated in anti-insurgency operations codenamed *Grosseinsatz Maigewitter*, *Sturmwind I*, *Sturmwind II* and *Wirbelsturm* in the present Podkarpackie voivodeships (see the Institute of National Remembrance Archives, Rzeszów Branch, collection Voivodeship Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia in Rzeszów, ref. no. AIPN Rz 11/30, Materials regarding the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps in the Nisko district, Statement obtained

Kalmyk Corps soldier  
(1942–1945).  
Institute of National  
Remembrance  
Archives, ref. no.  
AIPN Ki 015/11



from a KPMO employee in Przemyśl, 2nd Lt. Adam Kołodziej, former member of the Kaczmarek's partisans, in connection with a letter of January 22, 1965, L. Dz BA-092/65, Przemyśl on February 3, 1965, pp. 1–3, Protocol accepting the testimony of Albina Olszówka, Rzeszów, on October 20, 1965, pp. 15–19) and Lublin (see Institute of National Remembrance Archives, Lublin Branch, collection Voivodeship Office of Internal Affairs in Lublin, ref. no. AIPN Lu 08/296, vol. 1, Materials collected in the years 1966–1967 by the Investigation Department of the Voivodeship Citizens' Militia Headquarters in Lublin as part of legal assistance to the USSR concerning crimes committed during the Nazi occupation of Lublin Province by the 1st Division of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps, Report of the interrogation of witness Ksawery Fedorczyk, Biłgoraj, April 20, 1966., pp. 73–75). This operation showed great cruelty towards partisans, prisoners of war and civilians. In the battles at Portowe Wzgórze and near Osuchy, the unit proved to be very effective and, as an anti-partisan formation, capable of eliminating individual partisans and entire units. The events in this area were presented in a collection of sources entitled *Kalmucki Korpus Kawalerii, Zbrodnie popełnione na ziemiach polskich w 1944 r. w dokumentach SB* [The Kalmyk Cavalry Corps. Crimes committed on Polish territory in 1944, in the documentation of the Security Service]:

In the month of June 1944, I don't remember the exact date, a large group of people called Kalmyks came to the village of Aleksandrów, parts I, II, III and IV, on horseback, on foot and by water. They were armed with rifles, automatic machines and other machine guns, the names of which I don't know because I don't know anything about weapons. Most of them were dressed in the uniforms that were then worn by the German army soldiers. Upon their arrival, quite a lot of local people, mostly young men and women, fled to the forest. Meanwhile, I stayed at home with two minor children. Also my neighbours, Marianna Swit and Katarzyna Przytuła, stayed at home. Let me add that the Kalmyks stayed in the village for about a month. They took cows, chickens and food from the local people. From my place, they took a horse and half of the cart. [signature below:] Katarzyna Garbacz.

[...] One day, I don't remember the date, [only] that it was on a Sunday, I was at home when the Kalmyks arrived around lunchtime. Suddenly, I heard a shot. I went to the window and saw a Kalmyk riding out of Maria Swit's yard on horseback and heading towards Aleksandrów, part I. What kind of weapon this Kalmyk had, now I can't recall – it may have been a machine-gun with a drum...

In 1944, I don't remember the exact date, at the end of June, units of German troops consisting of Germans and Kalmyks joined the fight against the Polish and Soviet partisans. I distinguished the Kalmyks from the Germans by their dark complexion, slanting eyes, black hair and small flattened noses. The headquarters of these troops was located in Borowiec, in the buildings of Wiktor Wawrzyniewicz. There were a lot of Polish and Soviet partisans in the Biłgoraj Forest, and the Germans and the Kalmyks sent their forces to fight them. In addition to fighting, the Kalmyks robbed the farms of their food and possessions, they raped women... (Sodel 2011, 107–108).



At the end of July 1944, Otto Vierba (Dr. Doll) was killed while retreating with the Red Army units in the Lublin region. Extant sources document several versions of his death, which are mutually contradictory. The death of the unit's founder, and also its first leader – a mysterious, multidimensional commander, difficult to categorize, charismatic. He enjoyed high authority among his subordinates, and acted as a spokesman for the Kalmyks among the German officers. His loss was painful for the Kalmyks and they had difficulties to come to term with his death. During the fights in the Lublin region, several other senior Kalmyk officers were also killed besides Dr. Doll.

At the end of July 1944, the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps was withdrawn to the Kielce region, where it was reorganised into two cavalry brigades, each of them consisting of two regiments. Its new commander was one Lt. Col. Pipgorra (alias Bergen) (Majewski 1997, 35–37). In the Kielce area, the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps conducted actions against Soviet parachute troops, protected railway lines and supply depots (see Institute of National Remembrance Archives, Kielce Branch, collection WUSW Kielce, ref. no. AIPN Ki 015/11 vol. 1, Materials

Kalmyk Corps soldiers (1941–1945).  
Institute of National Remembrance Archives, ref. no. AIPN Ki 015/11

concerning the case of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps operating in Kielce Province in 1944, Official note, Łódź, November 30, 1965, p. 91). The Kalmyks were also active in the Kielce, Końskie, Starachowice and Skarżysko counties (see Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw 1945-54, collection Ministry of Public Security in Warsaw, AIPN BU 1557/22, *Kalmuckenverband Dr. Doll*. Notes on informers' reports, Secret report of 25 December [19]44), p. 5). During their activities in the Kielce region, they carried out many pacification actions aimed at the rural population that had been cooperating with the partisans (see Institute of National Remembrance Archives in Warsaw, collection Ministry of the Internal Affairs in Warsaw 1954–1990, ref. no. AIPN 1585/2080, Crimes committed during the occupation against civilians and members of the resistance movement by the so-called 'Kalmyk Cavalry Corps' in the service of Nazi Germany, Warsaw, June 22, 1966, pp. 64–71):

In September 1944, in the village of Gałęzice, Kielce district, a hospital of a Home Army division was set up, with a detachment of 14 partisans, including Andrzej Bratkowski, quartered nearby. On September 22–23, 1944, a unit of Kalmyks, about 300 people, arrived on horses from the direction of the Szewce village. During the fight with the partisans, 5 Kalmyks were killed. The partisan unit and the local population withdrew towards the village of Miedzianka, Kielce district. Some of the civilians who did not manage to escape fell into the hands of the Kalmyks. Two Kalmyks, whose names Bratkowski does not know, were shot on the spot, and about 12 people were taken with them, their fate being unknown. Before leaving the village of Kalmyks, they stole the cattle and set the village on fire (Sodel 2011, 58).

During this period, in addition to their combat operations, the Kalmyks also conducted intense political activity, supervised by the Kalmyk National Committee, headed by Shamba Nyudelich Balinov. Towards the end of 1944, the Kalmyks were the only non-Russian nation to join the Committee for the Liberation of the Nations of Russia (KONR) headed by General Andrei Vlasov. On January 12, 1945, the Red Army launched a huge offensive, its main goal being to destroy the German troops on the eastern bank of the Vistula, cross the borders into the Third Reich and secure the best possible starting positions for the attack on Berlin. The Kalmyk Cavalry Corps took part in heavy fights with the Soviet units, and was almost destroyed in the vicinity of Kielce. However, the attack undertaken by the Kalmyks

allowed them to break out of the encirclement. In January 1945, plans were made to include the Kalmyk troops into the *Kaukasischer Waffen Verband der SS*, known as *Freiwilligen Brigade 'Nordkaukasien'* (the Caucasian Battle Union of the SS). Nothing came out of these plans, due to technical and organisational difficulties caused by the dispersion of the unit along the Eastern Front.

In February 1945, Kalmyk troops were sent to the training ground at Neuhammer (Świętoszów), to be reorganised and strengthened. In March 1945, the Kalmyks were transported to Croatia, where, in the strength of one foot regiment, they were incorporated into the 3rd Cossack Infantry Division (Plastuns), under the command of Colonel Ivan Kononov. They formed a foot regiment commanded by Captain Brückner (according to other data, this was the 9th Kalmyk cavalry regiment); this unit was part of the 15th SS Cossack Cavalry Corps, commanded by General Helmut von Pannwitz. The last German commanders of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps were Captain Brückner (from December 1944 to January 1945), and later Colonel Raimund Hörst (from January 1945). On May 12, 1945, the Kalmyks, along with other Cossack units, capitulated to the British troops in Austria at Klagenfurt. The British troops handed all the Cossacks, including the Kalmyks, over to the Soviet authorities, who deported most of them to Siberia or Kazakhstan.

## Summary

To sum up, the creation of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps begins with the Third Reich's attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941. This is when Kalmyk émigrés started cooperating with Germany, which suggests that they also established relations with other representatives of the diaspora in Europe, Cossack unions and Kalmyks living in the USSR to defeat Stalin's state. At the same time, they started looking for Kalmyks in POW camps offering them cooperation; those who agreed to cooperate were saved from starvation, exhaustion and mistreatment. The Kalmyk émigré community was not a solid bloc, however; apart from those who left during the Civil War, emigrants who had been abroad since 1940, reappeared. The new wave of emigrants was made up of the former Red Army POWs who had ended up in Finnish captivity during the Soviet-Finnish war, and had remained there or moved to other European countries which were either neutral or occupied by the Nazis (Ubushayev 2007, 74–79). One



such emigrant was Yermak Lukyanov, a commander in the 3rd, 4th and 1st squadrons of the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps (Sodel 2011, 20–23). He represented the newest Kalmyk emigrants, who found themselves abroad just before the outbreak of the war between the USSR and the Third Reich, and who knew the realities of a totalitarian state, its political, social and economic system, all too well. This knowledge was useful and helped in the recruitment of Kalmyks to the cavalry units fighting on the German side. The representatives of those who had emigrated during the civil war knew and remembered Kalmykia as it had been during and shortly after the collapse of the Tsarist empire; for them, the social relations, political system and the economy of the USSR were something new and mysterious. One might say that some disharmony ensued from the different views which the two sides held on these issues. At first, the Kalmyk émigrés and the local political elite were united by the desire to create a mobile formation with high combat value, capable of conducting offensive and defensive manoeuvring operations; a formation grounded in the traditions of the Cossack troops in respect to its organisation, uniforms, and the signs and colours of individual units, but also the older ones, going back to the empire of Genghis Khan (see i.a. Bazyłow 1981, 82).

The Kalmyk Cavalry Corps, which was very effective in carrying out anti-partisan and subversive activities, and at conducting long-distance reconnaissance in the enemy's hinterland, fit perfectly into the Russian concept of 'rebel wars'; it was capable of conducting both conventional and non-regular raids, deep strikes into the enemy's hinterland and counter-terrorist operations, as well as fighting against enemy parachute landings in its own hinterland. According to the surviving reports of the inhabitants of the present Podkarpackie, Lublin, Kielce and Łódź provinces, the Kalmyk cavalymen were characterised by great cruelty towards the paratroopers, partisans and civilians they captured during the pacification operations. This resulted *inter alia* from the nature of the combat operations, their high intensity, the so-called stress of the battlefield, and detachment from the homeland that many would never see again.

## References

- Bazyłow, Ludwik. *Historia Mongolii*. Wrocław, 1981.
- Bishop, Chris. 2005. *Hitler's foreign divisions: foreign volunteers in the Waffen-SS, 1940–1945*. London: Amber Books, 2005.
- Bormanshinov, Arash. *Lamy kalmytskogo naroda: lamy donskikh kalmykov..* Elista, Moscow: Kal'mytskiy institute gumanitarnykh i prikladnykh issledovaniy, Zelenogr. Obyvatel', Zareale', 1997. Russian translation of the English edition: Bormanshinov, Arash. *The Lamas of the Kalmyk people. The Don Kalmyk Lamas*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Cheda, Robert. "Jak mieszkańcy Kaukazu walczyli z ZSRR". *Rzeczpospolita* June 22, 2017. Accessed November 6, 2020. <https://www.rp.pl/Rzecz-o-historii/306229891-Jak-mieszkanicy-Kaukazu-walczyli-z-ZSRR.html>.
- Czachor, Rafał. *Abchazja, Osetia Południowa, Górski Karabach: geneza i funkcjonowanie systemów politycznych*. Wrocław: Fundacja Instytut Polsko-Rosyjski, 2014.
- Drobyarko, Sergey Igorevich, Karashchuk, Andrey. *Vtoraya mirovaya voyna, 1939–1945. Vostochnye legiony i kazach'i chasti v vermakhte*. Moscow: AST, Astrel', 2001.
- Fowler, Jeffrey T. *Axis Cavalry in World War II*. Osprey Publishing, 2001.
- Gdański, Jarosław W. 2005. *Zapomniani żołnierze Hitlera..* Warszawa-Kobyłka: De Facto, 2005.
- Hoffmann, Joachim. *Deutsche und Kalmyken, 1942 bis 1945*. Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1977.
- Khodarkovsky, Michael. Na granicach Rosji budowanie imperium na stepie 1500-1800. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2009. Polish translation of the English edition: Khodarkovsky, Michael. *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1880*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Krause, Werner H. *Kosaken und Wehrmacht: Der Freiheitskampf eines Volkes*. Graz–Stuttgart: Stocker, 2003.
- Krokosz, Paweł. 2010. *Rosyjskie siły zbrojne za panowania Piotra I.* Krakow: Arcana, 2010.
- Kundakbaeva, Zhanat Bekovna. "Znakom milosti E.I.V..." *Rossiya i narody Severnogo Prikaspiya v XVIII veke*. Moscow, Saint-Petersburg: AIRO-XXI, Dmitriy Bylanin, 2005.
- Lucas, James. *War on the Eastern front: the German soldier in Russia, 1941-1945*. London: Greenhill Books, Mechanicsburg, PA, USA: Stackpole Books, 1998.
- Molendowski, Leszek. "Najmniejsza armia sojusznicza III Rzeszy: Wehrmacht i Kałmucy 1942–1945", 2013. *Odkrywca* 4 (2013): 54–60.
- Muñoz, Antonio J., Romanko, Oleg Valentinovich. *The East Came West: Muslim, Hindu & Buddhist Volunteers in the German Armed Forces, 1941–1945*. Bayside, NY: Axis Europa Books, 2001.
- Newland, Samuel J. *Cossacks in the German army 1941–1945*. London, Portland: Frank Cass, 1991.
- Ochirov, Utash B. "Formirovanie 110-y i 111-y kal'mytskikh kavaleriyskikh diviziy v 1941–1942 godakh: Trudnosti i itogi. The Formation of the 110th and 111th Kalmyk Cavalry Divisions in 1941–1942: Difficulties and Results." *Novyi Istoricheskiy Vestnik* 4 (54) (2017): 55–70. DOI: 10.24411/2072-9286-2017-00016.

- Prozritelev, Grigoriy Nikolaevich. *Voennoe proshloe nashikh kalmykov: Stavropol'skiy kalmytskiy polk i Astrakhanskiye polka v otechestvennuyu voynu 1812 goda*. Stavropol: Tipografiya Gubernial'nogo pravitel'stva, 1912.
- Rutkiewicz, Jan. „Legion Turkiestański w Wehrmachcie”. *Poligon. Magazyn miłośników wojsk lądowych* 1 (2006): 54–58.
- Shovunov, Kim Pavlovich. *Kalmyki v sostave rossiyskogo kazachestva (vtoraya polovina XVII-XIX vv.)*. Elista: Skoyuz kazakov Kalmykii, Kalmytskiy Institut obshchestvennykh nauk RAN, 1992.
- Sodel, Ryszard. *Kalmucki Korpus Kawalerii. Zbrodnie popełnione na ziemiach polskich w 1944 r. w dokumentach SB*. Lublin: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2011.
- Thorwald, Jürgen. *Iluzja: żołnierze radzieccy w armii Hitlera*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2010. Polish translation of the German edition: Thorwald, Jürgen. *Die Illusion: Rotarmisten in Hitlers Heeren*. München: Droemer Knauer, 1974.
- Ubushayev, V.B., and Ubushaev, K.V. *Kalmyks: eviction, return, revival*. Elista: Publishing House of Kalmyk University, 2007.