

Activities of the Turkestan Legion in the Field of Battle

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Abstract: This article analyzes the activities of the Turkestan Legion, formed from Turkestan prisoners of war on the German side during World War II.

Introduction. One of the most terrible events of the 20th century was the Second World War. This war led to the deaths of millions of people and caused great destruction. As a result of the war, millions of soldiers who fought in the Red Army were taken prisoner by the German army. The Soviet government's failure to sign international documents regarding prisoners of war, combined with Germany's brutal policies, resulted in the deaths of millions of Soviet prisoners.

World War II began with the invasion of Poland by Germany on September 1, 1939, and by the Soviet Union on September 17. In response to Adolf Hitler's aggression, Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3. However, from September 3, 1939, to May 10, 1940, Great Britain and France did not conduct large-scale military operations, and this process of war entered history under the name of "Phoney War". After all, serious hostilities against Germany were not carried out by Great Britain and France. On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded the territory of the USSR in violation of the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty signed on August 23, 1939 [1]. With this event, the Second World War will continue at a new stage. Germany's attack on the Soviet state entered history as the "Barbarossa Plan".

Results and Discussion. By the end of 1941 alone, about 3,300,000 Soviet soldiers had been taken prisoner by Germany[2; 132-133]. According to Ali Khan Kantemir, 4,500,000 Soviet fighters were captured during the first period of the war[3;23]. Between 1941 and 1945, the number of Soviet prisoners in Germany exceeded 5,700,000. Many European historians also cite this number in their books and research. In particular, German scholars write that between 1941 and 1945, over 5,700,000 Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner, and 3,300,000 of them died in captivity [4; 5-6]. The English scholar Alexander Dallin also provides information in his book that 5,754,000 Red Army soldiers were taken prisoner by Germany[5; 427]. According to the report of the Supreme Command of Germany on May 1, 1944, 5,231,057 Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner of war[6; 100].

Soviet soldiers who were taken prisoner were placed in consular camps organized in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland and a number of other territories occupied by Germany. In particular, in the camps built in Lyublin, Demblin, Auschwitz, Holm, Sobibor, Białystok, and Treblinka, Poland, millions of Soviet prisoners of war are held without any rights or assistance. The policy of stamping was widely implemented to prevent the transfer of many Soviet prisoners of war to the USSR and to distinguish escaped prisoners of war from others. On July 20, 1942, the Supreme Command of Germany issued a decree on the imposition of a special mark on the bodies of Soviet prisoners of war that would not fade for a long time[7; 184-185]. This policy will continue until Germany surrenders. This decision will be of great assistance in the search and identification of prisoners who fled the consular camp.

Millions of Turkestanians also fought in the ranks of the Red Army in the war against Germany. The number of Turkestanians serving in the Red Army in 1941-1943 was approximately 4,847,775 people[8; 151]. The fact that millions of Turkestanians did not receive military training and were not sufficiently equipped with military weapons led to their capture by the fascists. In particular, most of the Turkestanians who fought against the fascists consisted of soldiers who served from several weeks to two years[9; 156-157]. Many Turkestanians did not know how to use weapons. Also, some Turkestanians served in duties that were not related to military service during the period of pre-commissioned combat



readiness. The Soviet government, on the other hand, evaluated all Turkestanians who had switched to the side of Germany as “traitors of their homeland” and declared them traitors who used their weapons against their people and homeland[10;37].

The first step towards the formation of the Turkestan Legion was taken on October 6, 1941. It was on this date that the 1st Turkestan Regiment consisting of Turkestanians was formed in the German military units. The Turkestan Regiment is used not on the battlefield, but in the service of protecting a special area or buildings behind the field. On November 15, 1941, the 444th Turkestan Battalion was formed on the basis of the Turkestan Regiment in the Zaporozhian region. Also, the 450th Turkestan Infantry Battalion will be formed under the leadership of Andreas Meyer-Mader. The task of the newly formed battalions was also limited to the security services behind the front lines.

There were several reasons for the transfer of Turkestan prisoners of war in the concentration camp to the German side and becoming members of the Turkestan Legion.

Firstly, the Soviet government renounced its captured soldiers and declared them traitors of the Motherland. For this reason, Turkestanians realize that it is impossible and very dangerous to return to their homeland. Turkestan prisoners understood that the only way to save them from hard labor, hunger, and death in concentration camps was to fight against the Soviet state in a legion.

Secondly, the ideas expressed by Mustafa Chokay and Veli Kayumkhan to liberate Turkestan from the Russians with the help of Germany and to create an independent state give impetus to the inclusion of Turkestanians prisoners in the legion. Because they realize that by liberating their native Turkestan, they can strip themselves and their families of the label “betrayers of the Motherland” and “family of the Motherland”. In an interview with Radio Ozodlik, one of the members of the Turkestan Legion expressed the following thoughts about the goal set before the Turkestan Legion:... “At that time, the Germans were fighting against the Bolsheviks. The goal of the Turkestan Legion was to take arms from the Germans and liberate the Turkestan region against the Russians. Cooperating with the fascists does not mean following their ideas”[11].

By the end of 1941, the German government was intensifying efforts to create military units from Soviet prisoners of war who would fight against the USSR. This process was also caused by the defeat of the German army at the entrance to Moscow in December 1941[12; 44-45]. Because the Supreme Command of Germany aims to replace the fallen soldiers with Soviet soldiers in captivity. As a result, military units such as the Turkestan Legion, the Azerbaijani Legion, the Armenian Legion, the Idel-Tatar Legion, the Georgian Legion, and the Russian Liberation Army were formed from Soviet prisoners of war held in the camp.

In a short period of time, the number of Turkestanians wishing to serve in the ranks of the Turkestan Legion will increase. By May 1942, the number of Turkestanians who had expressed their written consent to serve in the Turkestan Legion exceeded 130,000. There are different opinions about how many Turkestanians served in the Turkestan Legion. Thus, according to Baymirza Hayit, by the middle of 1944, the legion's number reached 267,000 soldiers[13;44]. The magazine "Milliy Turkistan" reports that more than 200,000 soldiers served in the legion[14;4]. Of the troops in the legion, 181,000 fought on the battlefields, and over 85,000 carried out various work behind the lines[15;151]. By the time Germany surrendered, 65,000 legion soldiers would be killed on the battlefields.

The soldiers of the Turkestan Legion were armed with weapons of Soviet production (these weapons were captured as trophies during the wars waged by German troops against the Soviet state). The soldiers of the Turkestan Legion were armed with weapons of Soviet production (these weapons were acquired by German troops during the wars against the Soviet state). In particular, in one report sent to Moscow by the Soviet Security Service, one of the battalions of the Turkestan Legion had 3 anti-tank weapons, 15 “Maksim” machine guns, 25 “Degtyarev” automatic rifles, 82 mm mortars, 800 Russian guns, 150 Belgian pistols, Russian and German grenades[16;328]. The Supreme Command of Germany does not allow the soldiers of the legion consisting of prisoners to fight with weapons made in Germany itself.



According to Baymirza Hayit, the first group of the Turkestan Legion was put into action in the Bryansk forests on May 2, 1942[15;154]. This was the first battle of the Turkestan Legion since its official formation. Also, most of the newly formed Turkestan battalions will be included in the divisions of the 6th Army under the leadership of General-Colonel Friedrich Paulus[17;11]. Between 1942 and 1943, six battalions of the Turkestan Legion participated in the German Army's attack on the Caucasus. Soldiers of the Turkestan Legion also participated in the battles for the famous city of Stalingrad on the side of Germany. Thus, three battalions of the legion fought against the Red Army in the Battle of Stalingrad. According to Veli Kayumkhan, most of the battalions consisting of legion soldiers who fought in Stalingrad and the Caucasus regions will be destroyed by the Red Army[18;165]. By order of the Soviet government, the soldiers of the legion were not taken prisoner and were shot on the battlefield. They were called "black fascists" and were seen as allies of the fascists.

In the structure of the Turkestan Legion, the 162nd Turkestan Infantry Division was one of the divisions that gained the trust of the German government[19;208]. This was due to many successful actions in the fight against the Soviet state and the partisans. The division was led by Major General von Nidermayer. This division was sent to the territory of Slovenia in September 1943 and carried out a series of military operations there[17;12]. On March 21, 1944, this division was sent to the Verona-Paduya district of Italy, where it was tasked with ensuring security and fighting guerrillas[20;116]. This division also participated in battles against British and American troops in Normandy during the final stages of the war. Many soldiers in the division were returned to the Soviet state at the end of the war and were thrown into the Gulag camps.

On August 10, 1943, the 3rd company of the 1st Turkestan Battalion was sent to the disposal of the 62nd German infantry division in the Zolyotrovka-Lisichansk district. However, on the night of August 17, 1943, legionnaires of the 3rd company destroyed a group of German soldiers and moved with their weapons to the side of the Red Army. This year, a group of soldiers from the 3rd Turkestan Battalion established contact with the partisans during the military action in Rechitsa, Belarus, and joined them with their weapons, cooperating in the fight against the Germans[21; 483]. Several battalions of the legion will also be sent to put an end to the activities of partisans in the Chernigov region, located on the territory of Ukraine[20; 114]. However, in September 1943, during the Battle of the Desna River, a battalion of 370 men led by Abdulla Atakhanov voluntarily surrendered to the Soviet state. German security forces will also identify legionnaires who want to join the Red Army, and they will be punished. In particular, 7 fighters of the Turkestan Legion were sentenced to death by the German military tribunal for attempting to join the Red Army.

By the end of World War II, a number of changes had occurred in the nomination and political activities of the Turkestan Legion and the CIS. In particular, on March 24, 1945, the German government officially recognized the Turkestan Legion as the National Army of Turkestan, and the Turkestan National Unity Committee as the National Government of Turkestan. By the end of World War II, a number of changes had occurred in the nomination and political activities of the Turkestan Legion and the Turkestan National Unity Committee[22;190]. In particular, on March 24, 1945, the German government officially recognized the Turkestan Legion as the National Army of Turkestan, and the Turkestan National Unity Committee as the National Government of Turkestan.

Conclusion. The victory of the USSR in World War II was achieved through the blood of millions of soldiers. Like other Soviet soldiers, Turkestaners who entered the battle without military training and weapons and performed the task of a "alive shield" were turned out to be "traitors of the Motherland" based on communist ideology. The Turkestaners, who fought separately on two sides, became victims of Stalin and Hitler. The Soviet government declared all the captured soldiers of the Red Army traitors of the Motherland. The laws on the rights of prisoners mentioned in the articles of international conventions such as The Hague and Geneva were ignored by Germany and the Soviet state.

Turkestan prisoners of war were held in the most difficult conditions in German consulates. Thousands of Turkestaners died from hunger, disease, and a number of other causes. At the initiative of Mustafa Chokay and Veli Kayumkhan, the lives of many Turkestan prisoners were saved, and the Turkestan



Legion and the National Turkestan Unity Committee were created from them. The Turkestan Legion fought against the Soviet state on the side of Germany.

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