

Waffen SS Division, Prinz Eugen

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The justification for the German Waffen SS Prinz Eugen Division comprised of men from the Danube Swabian areas of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Even today the member of the Waffen SS Prinz Eugen Division are still frequently falsely accused by the Tito's Partisans and the history writers of former Yugoslavia as well as other countries as having betrayed their country while fighting against the Tito's Partisan Terrorists in Yugoslavia. These accusations were made either on purpose by Tito propagandist to justify their actions or in ignorance to the actual facts by history writers.

The facts as developed by the political events however; hardly a voice was raised in justification to the relationship of the facts in honor of these brave soldiers serving in this unit. Either Tito or the allied nations never presented the actual facts of the political events leading to the formation of the Prince Eugene Division and the factual justification for the members' involvement in the war. Connections are made between the Division and the entire ethnic German group in Kingdom of Yugoslavia and thus are collectively accused of collaborating with the enemy.

This is the reason why the following facts of the political development are extremely important to understand which explain the circumstances the Division was placed in and did perform their sworn duty in the best interest of their homeland and not as accused fighting against their homeland. This presentation should shed a new light on the facts and why the members of the unit acted the way they did.

Prior to these considerations one has to point out that it is untrue to claim that the Waffen SS Prinz Eugen Division consisting of the ethnic German citizen, also known as Danube Swabians of what later became Yugoslavia, fought against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during WWII. It is also untrue that the soldiers of the ethnic Germans of Kingdom of Yugoslavia made themselves guilty of treason during their action in Yugoslavia.

When the war between Germany and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia broke out on April 6th 1941 the Danube Swabian men fought on the side of the Royal Yugoslavian army as Yugoslavian soldiers against Germany and many died in the Yugoslavian uniform for Yugoslavia. On April 17th a cease fire between these countries was reached followed by the capitulation on April 18th 1941 and the Yugoslavian army disbanded. King Peter and his administration left the country and went into self-exile in England.

With King Peter leaving the country a totally new situation was created in the country. The Croats declared their independence; the Batschka, the territory between Theiss and Danube was reclaimed by Hungary, Macedonia was taken by Bulgaria and Dalmatia and Slovenia were occupied by Italy. The northern part of Slovenia the region of Lower Styria and the Serbian Banat were placed under the administration of the German troops.

The relative unfavorable situation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was favored by the Yugoslavian Communists whose aim was to oust the capitalistic-monarchist government of Yugoslavia, to dissolve the Constitution, the Royal Army and aimed to form a communistic government in the sense of the international communist party of Moscow. After the cease-fire agreement between Germany and Yugoslavia the communist party in Yugoslavia did not undertake any steps against the German occupation since Germany had a non-aggression pact with Russia at the time.

As soon as Germany invaded Russia on June 22nd 1941 the communist in Yugoslavia on demand by Stalin began to organize the Communist Partisan Units. The first victims of their executions in Serbia were not ethnic German soldiers but the Royal Gendarmes, which remained loyal to the King. It must be understood that the majority of the ethnic Germans did not wish the downfall of the Yugoslavian Central State, since the Central State insured their

rights and saw that their rights and their economic development as a minority would otherwise be in jeopardy.

The Yugoslavian leaders knew exactly that after the withdrawal of the German troops they would have a difficult fight against the communist in their country and it was for this reason that they formed units to oppose the communist partisans.

The Serbian General and Minister President Milan Nadic organized the Serbian State Gendarmes, the right fascist national Tschetnik organization was revitalized under the Royal Justice Minister Dimitrija Ljotic, which they already had done before the war and the Royal General Draza Mihajlovic formed troops again which were loyal to King Peter from men disbanded by the Royal Army of Yugoslavia after the seize-fire.

Further more General Rupnik formed the so-called "White Guards" while in Croatia the Ustascha under the leader Ante Pavelic seized power. In Bosnia the Moslem population later formed their own SS troop unit the "Handzar" as protection against the Communist Partisans while in Albania the "Skander Bag" fought their ideological enemies, the Communist in their country.

The Yugoslavian Generals and patriots were convinced about their actions to form units were necessary and in their fight against the left oriented fascists of the communist Tito Partisans and that it would be the only way to avoid a communist takeover of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Of course they did not want the German troops to occupy their country since they were fighting the Germans, Hungarians and Italians prior to the seize-fire. However, now the communist Tito Partisans presented a greater danger to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and were considered the more dangerous enemy since they knew that the Germans would leave after the war but the communist would stay put.

By 1942 the fight between the communist on one side and the royal loyal patriots of the King had inflamed throughout the country. The German occupational forces watched this development of the battles between the Yugoslavian rivals for some time without getting involved. But after communist gangs on order of Stalin began to sabotage factories of German suppliers and transport installation in the Banat and Batschka, they saw themselves committed to interfere and formed defensive units to protect the Banat and recruited their men for military duty.

The action by the partisan had been extended to the Banat, Batschka and Slovenia and as protection of the territories against Partisans and safety of the civilians in the region the 7th SS-Volunteer Mountain Unit Prince Eugene was formed and it was the Danube Swabian men from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which were pressed into uniforms involuntarily. The Prince Eugene Division was the first division, to which the attribute "Volunteer Unit" was attached too. With this attribute "Volunteer" the International agreement was circumvented which states: "that a country may not draft soldiers from another country into their army". The Danube Swabians from Yugoslavia were forced to serve like any other German from the "Reich" and to refuse this order was punishable the same way as any other nation had a right too. Certainly there were also ethnic Germans in the unit ranks who felt compelled and committed to serve for the cause and to protect themselves and their land from being vandalized by the communist terrorist groups and invisible Partisan troops.

It is correct to assume that it is against the law of nations to force men from occupied countries to participate in the defense against their own country. However, the ethnic Germans of Yugoslavia did not fight against Royal Yugoslavia; they were active against the communist terrorist the very same the "Kings Loyalists" were fighting as well and it must be looked as helping their countrymen fight a common enemy the "Communist Tito Partisans Terrorists" not yet even recognized as the official government of the Yugoslavia.

The troops formed in Yugoslavia from Yugoslavia's men in German uniforms according to Article 43 of the "Haager Resolution" governing the rights of countries during a war, saw themselves compelled in view of the attacks on civilian installation within Yugoslavia, to reestablish law and order. In addition according to law of nation an occupational force must provide law and order in an occupied country regardless whether they entered the country rightfully or not.

The position and the situation of the political developments were discussed and explained in details at a conference in Belgrade by Major Upenkamp military commander of the occupational force to the Serbian administrators in

which he also pointed out that the actions taken by the occupier is within the parameters of the “Haager Resolution” and as such fully justified and work in the support of the interest of the Serbian population loyal to the King till the end of their occupation. It became quite clear to ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia if the communists Tito’s Partisans would win against the Kings Loyalists their private property would be confiscated and Russian type “Kolkhozes” established on it.

The ethnic German recruits followed the explanation by the authorities and were aware about the reasons presented to them. They were not acting against the Yugoslavian Kingdom or against the interest of the King to whom they would have been loyal too and thus would not violate any laws as outlined in the “Haager Resolution”.

The communist Partisans under the leadership of Josip Broz “Tito” (= Tajna Internationalna Teroristicka Organizacija/Secrete International Terrorist Organization) at this time it is not identical with the later internationally recognized “Föderativen Jugoslawischen Republik” (Federation of the Yugoslavian Republic). The Partisan units did not represent the Kingdom Yugoslavia at that time. The legal representation of Yugoslavia was the exiled King in London and his administration in

Yugoslavia. The exiled administration in London did not recognize the leadership of the partisans as the rightful representative of the country. The King however recognized the royal General Draza Mihajlovic and named him as Minister of War on June 18th 1943 in order to act on behalf of the King. This situation in Yugoslavia was in effect till May 15th 1944 when the exile government was reorganized, but even then the communist under Tito were not recognized by the government of Yugoslavia in exile.

The government in exile was in constant communication with the German occupational administration and did not fight against the Germans but they fought together with the Germans against the communist partisans their common enemy. The Danube Swabians saw a need to support their King and the action against the communist Partisans as fully legal and according to the laws of the land; they were not and did not do anything, which would be punishable. What they did was in the interest of the “Law and protection of the Country” established in 1922, which was still in place and not that of the Tito Partisans. Only after strong pressures from Britain, did the King during a radio speech on September 12th 1944 taken a somewhat different position. Until that date King Peter refused to speak to Tito or to his Partisans.

The leadership of the Partisans was aware of this and because of all their efforts they did not receive the recognition to represent Yugoslavia from the exiled government therefore they ousted the exile Government of Yugoslavia in London on their second day of their “Antifasiticko Vece Narodnog Oslobodjenja Jugoslavije” (“Antifascist Tribunal for the Liberation of Yugoslavia”) conference in Jajce, Bosnia on November 29th 1943 in which they forbade King Peter to return to Yugoslavia and decided to reorganize the country into the “Federation of the Yugoslavian Republic”. Several of the royal ministers were accused as criminals and sentenced as such. The Royal Minister of War General Draza Mihajlovic who was recognized as the representative of the king until May 15th 1944 was captured and tried after the war in Belgrade as traitor and executed.

From all the facts presented the Tito Partisans were units operating as illegal organization in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the war and as such were not protected under international law nor did they recognize and observe the international laws of wars, established under the “Haager Resolution”.

This is why the Danube Swabian men who followed the draft into the “Waffen-SS Division Prinz Eugen” and fought against the enemy of the King did not commit any wrongdoing against the Yugoslavian law by fighting against the Tito Partisans. All the communist organizations were illegal in Yugoslavia according to the “Law for the Protection of the State” from 1922 until September 12th 1944 (speech of King Peter). There is nothing, which could change that fact, not even the speech by Churchill of May 25th 1944 where he was outspoken against the King’s decision not to support Tito, although England and Russia supplied the terrorist organization with weapons so that they could tie up the German troops in the Balkan.

When on November 21st 1944 by declaration of the AVNOJ (“Antifascist Tribunal for the Liberation of Yugoslavia”) Resolutions by the Communist Tito Partisan, stating that all ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia will have their citizenships revoked, and declared every person of ethnic German decent enemies of Yugoslavia and their property declared property of the state of Yugoslavia, they had no right to do so. In other words the ethnic Germans

in Yugoslavia lost all their rights by this decree and thus it became legal to do what they pleased with the ethnic Germans even murder them.

The ethnic Germans in the Prince Eugene Division had as one can see now, a rightful duty to fight along with the Kings Loyalist against Tito Partisans, as we saw the political situation develop. The idea of expelling all ethnic Germans was not a new one and was often said by Tito that the ethnic Germans should have been expelled already after WWI. As it becomes clear now Tito's excuse that the Danube Swabians were traitors of their country can not be accepted, but was only a convenient excuse to disown the ethnic Germans and settle his loyal men who stood at his side on the confiscated Danube Swabian property and he fueled their rage with false propaganda, to make his followers take revenge against innocent ethnic Germans.

Because of the AVNOJ Resolutions the Danube Swabians in the Prince Eugene Division now no longer citizens of Yugoslavia, were given German citizenship by declaration of the Third Reich and now as such came under all the rights of the Haager War Resolutions as Germans.

The aftermath for the Danube Swabian soldiers were the same as the other German soldiers who after May 1945 capitulated to the allied troops in the region between Rann and Zagreb and laid down their weapons and should have had the same rights as any other German soldiers. Without seeking their identity the Tito Partisans selected 3,500 soldiers and simply butchered them in the cruelest ways totally ignoring the rights of a POW. These were war crimes, which never were punished.

Summary

The Danube Swabian men in the 7th Waffen SS Prinz Eugen Volunteer Mountain Division as the only Donauschwaben division ever organized drew a fate no other military unit in the German Wehrmacht did experience. The Donauschwaben who settled after the Turkish war in the Hungarian part of the Austrian Empire during the three Great Swabian Migration periods served in the military units of the Royal Imperial K&K army of Austrian Empire, which later became Austria-Hungary, the Hungarian Honvéd, the Romanian army and the Yugoslavian Royal Army but only once did they served as a Unit in their own cause. The Unit marked as 'Volunteer' unit to circumvent the "Haager Resolution" the governing the laws of nations during war times established at the Geneva Convention were for the most part rubberstamped volunteers among actual volunteers.

The unit comprised of farmers and craftsmen would see action in the mountains and valleys of Bosnia, Dalmatia, the Herzegovina and Montenegro. An invisible enemy who fought disregarding all established laws of war during the Geneva Convention continually opposed them. The partisans in civilian clothes attacked from ambush positions and did not take prisoner but killed their captured soldiers by torturing them first and then literally butchering them. A young medical student assigned to a German Medical Unit was an involuntary eyewitness of such Partisan's cruelties time and time again. They found corpses with open bellies, limbs and sex parts cut off. The reports of cruelties committed by the Tito Partisans as told by this eyewitness were committed without mercy and are a disgrace to humanity.

During the later stages of the war the unit saw action against the Red Army moving forward from Romania and Bulgaria to cover the retreat of the German Army in the Balkans. They sacrificed their lives and fought valiantly against world communism much like the American GI's in Korea and Vietnam. They were killed in action, murdered by Tito's Partisans and only very few of them survived. Their homeland would be overrun by the Russians on October 2nd 1944, then by the Tito's Partisans who created havoc among the unprotected civilian ethnic German populations and their relatives, rounding up many and setting up tribunal style court hearings on open fields outside of towns torturing them and then killing them without mercy.

One of the examples took place in the field between the towns of Filipowa and Hodschag where 212 men found a cruel death without mercy; one after the other was tortured and then butchered in front of the others who had to watch the proceedings wondering who would be next. Only one was able to escape through the firewall, which was

created around them by sheer luck to tell the story. The irony however is that the town of Filipowa was one of the most religious towns in the Donauschwaben regions which produced an abundance of priests and nuns.

The Danube Swabian civilian population in the area had extremely difficult times to flee across the Theiss River as a result of this, they became subject of persecution by the Tito's Partisans. They were expelled from their homes and incarcerated into death camps and thousands lost their lives.

Nenad Stefanovic, a young Serbian author, brought this to light in his book; "A people on the Danube" what was a history distorted by the communist government after the war for over half a century.

The men from the Prince Eugene Division learned of the tragedy their family had to face and continued their fight without hope. When the capitulation came and the end in Carinthia, Krain and Croatia, instead of being treated as POW's with all of the rights they should have received they were betrayed and murdered by the thousands by Tito's Partisans. Some of them were driven into ravines, ditches or had to dig their own graves prior of being executed. There were also reports of 5-6 soldiers being tied together and thrown into the Save River where they drowned.

Finally the so called revenge march of German POW's who surrendered in the regions of Cilli and Ljubljana were driven towards Belgrade some 750 o 800 kilometers away without food or water and most of them poorly dressed, some without shoes because they were robbed of their clothes and shoes by Serbian civilian gangs. Those who fell behind because of illness or weakness were driven on by various ways of mistreatments till they collapsed and died. The mistreatment partly ordered by the Partisan leaders and tolerated by the victors. Their treatments were „Criminal Acts against prisoners of war" punishable under the war criminal acts, but they were never enforced the world organizations in Communist Yugoslavia as they should have been.

The POW survivors from this march were taken to the coalmines of Bor in Serbia and again they were exposed to inhumane conditions, which took more lives. That some of them did actually survive is a miracle attributed to their unyielding willpower and determination and will to live against all odds. Many of the leaders among the soldiers were executed for even the smallest trumped up charges so revenge could be taken against them. This explains the reason of why only a few of the Division survived the ordeals placed upon them.

This ends one of the most unheralded military units of all time who severed their country faithfully.

May we remember them in our prayers in all infinity.