

# HIMMLERS BOSNIAN DIVISION: THE WAFFEN-SS HANDSCHAR DIVISION 1943-1945 PDF, EPUB, EBOOK



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## **Verify your identity**

Operation Maibaum had not only stopped the Partisan 3rd Corps from crossing the Drina into Serbia, it had scattered the Partisan formation. The Partisans were encircled in the Stolice heights. An attempt by the Partisan 16th Vojvodina Division to relieve the surrounded force was defeated by the reconnaissance battalion and elements of the 28th Regiment. After heavy bombardment by the artillery regiment, the trapped Partisan force escaped south out of the pocket under cover of darkness on 18 May. The Partisans suffered considerable casualties, for example the 17th

Majevisa Brigade of the 27th East Bosnia Division lost 16 killed and 60 missing. Since its arrival in the zone the division had been assisted in this task by local forces of varying reliability. These same groups, along with the Partisans, had simultaneously been trying to encourage Bosnian and Croat members to defect. Between March and June, these attempts were largely fruitless, producing fewer than deserters.

The Partisan 3rd Corps planned an offensive that involved three parallel columns of divisional strength thrusting north into the zone to engage and destroy German and local allied forces. The columns comprised: [77]. Operation Vollmond Full Moon was devised quickly after the reconnaissance battalion observed Partisan forces crossing the Tuzla—Zvornik road on the evening of 6 June Sauberzweig's aim was to assault from the east and north, pushing the advancing Partisan forces against the Drina. After four hours fighting, and with half the battery's personnel dead, the artillerymen ran out of small arms ammunition and scattered into the forest.

According to German accounts, Operation Vollmond cost the division dead, wounded and 89 missing. Sauberzweig claimed 3, Partisans were killed in this operation, but Phleps dismissed this as "a large exaggeration". According to one German after-action report, they had killed over 1, Partisans and captured large amounts of arms and ammunition.

Both the new corps headquarters and new division were to be formed in southern Hungary. Soon after Hampel's assumption of command, he became aware that local Chetniks were scavenging the Operation Vollmond battlefields for divisional equipment. Throughout the remainder of June and into the first week of July, the division was engaged in fighting off attempted Partisan incursions into the security zone and reinforcing local NDH and Chetniks who were under attack from the Partisans.

While guarding the labourers, they subjected them to cruel treatment, and shot 22 who were unable to continue working. It aimed to destroy a makeshift Partisan runway in the Osmaci area about 26 kilometres 16 mi southeast of Tuzla, south of the Tuzla—Zvornik road and the Partisan forces guarding it. The airstrip was just north of the southern boundary of the security zone and was being used by Allied aircraft to bring in supplies and evacuate wounded Partisans to Italy.

At the same time as the counter-attack was underway, the headquarters of the Partisan 3rd Corps ordered the 36th Vojvodina Division to clear the enemy from the area so that the airfield could be used. According to German reports, 42 Partisans were killed, while the division's losses were four dead and seven wounded. A detached battalion of 7th SS Division would act as a blocking force driving north. On 17 July, the operation began. The 28th Regiment forced the Partisan 36th Vojvodina Division back. The battalion from 7th SS Division encountered serious resistance around Vlasenica but pushed through. The Partisans then committed the 16th Vojvodina Division to assist the 36th Vojvodina Division that had borne the brunt of Operation Heiderose to this point.

On 20 July, both divisions attacked the 27th Regiment, which counterattacked the following day after the Partisans were rebuffed with heavy casualties. On 23 July, the Partisans began to withdraw south out of the area. The division began to search for the hidden Partisan bases that German intelligence had indicated were located there. After a day of searching, the division uncovered more than ten Partisan bases, which the cooperating Chetniks began to clear despite having shown little interest in actually fighting the Partisans in previous days.

Operation Heiderose was a significant success for the division, inflicting serious losses on the Partisans. More than Partisans were killed and a large amount of equipment was captured: one anti-tank gun, two mortars, 22 machine guns, over rifles and nearly, rounds of small arms ammunition. The division suffered 24 killed and over wounded. In the first week of August, the Second Panzer Army was finally ready to move to thwart the Partisan advance from Bosnia into Serbia, originally planned as Operation Rose. Hackfleisch aimed to drive out the Partisans occupying the area between the towns of Kladanj, Vlasenica, Sokolac and Olovo, south of the security zone. The overall plan involved columns that were to force the Partisans eastwards into the pincers of the other units, thereby destroying them. The columns were allocated tasks and composed as follows: [99].

The 27th Regiment became locked in fierce fighting with the Partisan 27th East Bosnia Division and 38th Bosnia Division, which had launched an offensive near Vlasenica. The inability of the 27th Regiment to push forward meant that the plan to encircle the Partisan force was not achieved and the Partisans escaped by crossing the Vlasenica—Han Pijesak road to the east. As far as the Germans were concerned, Operation Hackfleisch was a moderate success, with Partisans killed and over 50 prisoners taken. It delayed, but did not prevent, the Partisans' advance into Serbia. The Partisan 11th Krajina Division and 38th Bosnia Division quickly infiltrated into the southern part of the security zone and the 27th East Bosnia Division crossed into the area north-west of Srebrenica and drove towards Bratunac.

After a series of rapid redeployments and battalion and regimental attacks, the division scattered the 11th Krajina Division and mauled the 27th East Bosnia Division. The division had by now been fighting almost continuously throughout the summer. According to divisional commander Hampel, it had been exhausted even before Operation Hackfleisch began. It held on despite being pressed hard during two days of fighting against the 11th Krajina Division. By the end of the first week in September, divisional supply columns were being attacked by Chetniks, sensing German weakness and looking for arms and supplies.

Three members of the division were killed in these attacks. Over the same week, the Allies conducted Operation Ratweek throughout the Balkans, which involved Allied air power pounding Axis troop concentrations and key infrastructure in order to impede the German withdrawal from Greece. The local effect was to complicate the division's logistics through destruction of the Sarajevo- Brod railway and mass desertions of NDH troops tasked with securing supply lines. After the first week of September, most of the division's fighting power was shifted to the western boundary of the security zone to meet Partisan incursions. As a result of the shift to the western area of the security zone, the zone's southern area was quickly overrun by Partisan forces.

Zvornik and Tuzla had fallen by mid-September. On 17 August, Tito offered a general amnesty and many in the division took advantage of this opportunity. During the first three weeks of September, while hard fighting continued, over 2, Bosnians deserted, many taking their weapons with them. Many defected to the Partisans, with over having joined the Partisan 3rd Corps by early October. In the early morning of 3 October, the

Partisan 28th Slavonia Division assaulted a squadron of the reconnaissance battalion at Janja close to the Drina on the eastern boundary of the security zone.

As they broke out of the encirclement to the north, the rest of the reconnaissance battalion drove south from Bijeljina and stopped the Partisan advance at heavy cost. At dawn the following day, an additional four Partisan brigades attacked the garrison in Janja, with fighting continuing throughout the day before the Partisans withdrew to the south. Jagdkommandos were sent after the fleeing enemy but were not able to inflict significant losses on them as they had already crossed the Drina into the German-occupied territory of Serbia.

Following this battle, Army Group F concluded that the division's overall combat value was minimal. The division was not re-united until January. Many took their weapons with them and hundreds joined the Partisans. By the beginning of November the division, which had been ninety five percent non-German in January, became fifty percent German. The plans to re-organise the division were abandoned and Sauberzweig was relieved of command. Meanwhile, the advance of the Red Army through Belgrade and north into the formerly Hungarian-occupied Yugoslav region of Baranja made holding the line of the Danube critical for the Germans. In early November the Soviet troops established a bridgehead over the Danube from Apatin in modern-day Serbia. As a result, the last Muslim SS troops left Bosnia. Within a week they were joined by the reconnaissance battalion, which had acquitted itself well in fighting west of Apatin. The following day Kampfgruppe Hanke was driven out of its positions, when the remaining troops withdrew.

By 25 November the rest of the division was on its way from the Zagreb area. Within days Kampfgruppe Hanke was withdrawn from the front line to rejoin the division and re-fit, and they were moved to Barcs on the Drava river for that purpose. On 2 December the division was reunited, except for the rest of the pioneer battalion, which remained stranded in Bosnia by damaged bridges and railways. As a result of continued desertions and the catastrophic casualties suffered by Kampfgruppe Hanke, the division retained little of its original Bosnian character.

Despite the return of disarmed Bosnians from labour units, the attachment of Hungarian infantry and artillery units and arrival of German replacements meant the division looked little different from any other unit in the Second Panzer Army. After a short break, the division was allocated to a sector of the Margarethe Line, a series of fixed defensive works south of Lake Balaton which held up the Soviet advance. After several Red Army assaults were repulsed, static trench warfare developed between December and January. Meanwhile, from December to March, the rest of the division remained at Barcs rebuilding. In February, they had been joined by the divisional pioneer battalion, which had finally managed to withdraw from Bosnia. That night, the division attacked the flanks of the Soviet drive at Heresznye, where it undertook its last offensive operation of the war.

The division, holding positions just south of the penetration, began to withdraw to the north-west. It fell back to the Mura and barely managed to cross under constant air and ground attacks, with grievous casualties. Unable to take up effective positions, the division crossed the Reich frontier on 6 April and took up positions at Pettau in the so-called "Reich Defence Line", where it remained until 5 May. Its last fighting was around Kiesamndorf on 19 April. On 5 May, the division's remaining men, both German and Bosnian, began to retreat northwards towards Austria.

On 8 May, an order was sent to retreat to Wolfsberg, Carinthia. Soon, all of the Bosnians remaining in the division were asked if they wished to remain. The retreat continued until 11 May. Hampel escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp in Fallingbostal. While it achieved successes and proved itself competent in counter-insurgency operations against the Partisans in eastern Bosnia, [ ] the division earned a reputation for brutality and savagery, not only during combat operations, [34] but also through atrocities committed against Serb [ ] and Jewish civilians [ ] in the security zone. Its reprisal attacks in northern and eastern Bosnia left many hundreds and possibly as many as several thousand Serb civilians dead by the spring and summer of Thirty-eight members of the division were extradited to Yugoslavia to face trial following the war.

Only seven of the 38 defendants were charged with specific offenses, although the indictment accused the division of murdering some 5, people. Goodwill Industries of the Valleys provides hope and opportunities to people with barriers to employment or independence. Providing a hand up, not a hand out for individuals with disabilities, disadvantages, or people who simply want to improve their skills so they are more competitive in the job market. Goodwill is empowering people to be more independent and to change their own lives through job training and employment programs. Official eBay for Charity listing Learn more about eBay For Charity - opens in a new window or tab Sale benefits a verified non-profit partner.

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