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Norwegian Volunteers in the Wehrmacht

by Bjorn Jervaas.

It will take a while to download all the pictures, but it will be worth it! Promise!!

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The subject of Norwegian volunteers in the Wehrmacht, has already been studied for years. This will be a very short and rough version of the complex topic.

About 15 000 norwegians volunteered to the Wehrmacht, and an estimate of 7000 reached the front lines in some way. This was a rather disappointing number, after Quislings opinion, he had expected 50 000, but one must remember that "only" 11 000 volunteered to the allies, usually the British.

About 1000 norwegians were killed in combat, or died in Soviet POW camps. Most norwegians volunteered for the Waffen SS, but also for other units.

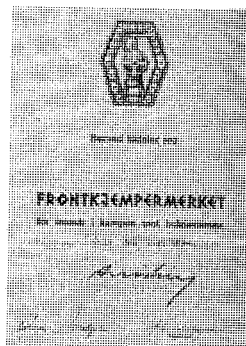
There were many reasons why a Norwegian wanted to go to the front. The most common were:

- Disappointment over the Norwegian armed resistance during the German invasion, and the political circumstances that allowed such a weak and outdated defense policy.
- Disappointment of the King and Government going into exile in the UK, and the feeling of have been betrayed by the British during the German invasion.
- The fear for the communist threat from East, a "crusade against Bolschewism"
- The fact that Norway had capitulated, and this was the only way to re-build a new national army.

Of course, many who joined were convinced nationalists, and believed in its international movement. Many were members of the national-socialist party in Norway, "Nasjonal Samling" (NS-National Unity)

However, a remarkable number of volunteers were amongst those who had fought the Germans during the invasion, and many were officers.

The word "Frontkjemper", or "Front Fighter" is a well known expression for the volunteers today, but in fact, according to the famous volunteer ex-SS Sturmbannfuhrer Frode Halle (DNL, PzGrenRgt Norge, SS-Schibatalion Norwegen), this expression was never used among the "Front Fighters" themselves. However, a famous award, given to those who had joined the SS, is the "Frontkjempermerke".



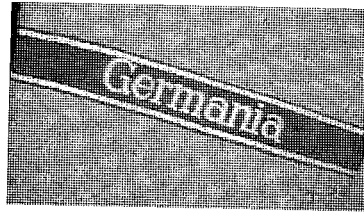
A citation to the "Frontkjempermerke"
(Front fighter badge)

Facsimile signature by Quisling.

This award was given for effort against bolshevism.

One must realize, that there were actually no real Norwegian units fighting for the Germans. Even if the names were norwegian, like "Wiking", "Nordland" or even "Norge", these units were all 100% german. This caused harm amongst the volunteers, who wanted to be in a pure norwegian unit.

We are now to concentrate on the most famous units where Norwegians participated, starting with Waffen SS.



A cufftitle to the Germania division.
Morten Balestrand collection

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5. SS-Panzerdivision "Wiking"

The recruiting of norwegians to this unit started on the 12/1-41. SS-PzDiv Wiking consisted of three standarten (regiments):, "Nordland" for nordic volunteers, "Westland" for dutch and Flemish, and "Germania" for volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) and Germans.

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A tunic, fully equipped, from the Germania division.
Morten Balestrand collection

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About 800 norwegians served in Wiking, and most were assigned to Nordlands infantry, but some got to different artillery units, and were placed in all three standarten. The panzer unit in Wiking was 5-SS-Panzer-Regiment "Wiking".

The officers and NCO's were mostly Germans. Totally, the division had a strength of 19 375 men, with about 950 vehicles, and they were led by the famous Felix Steiner.

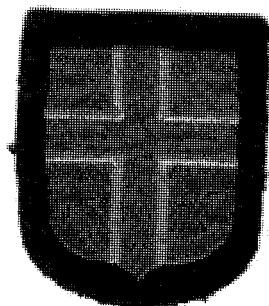
Wiking was assigned to the southern sector during the attack on Soviet, and the norwegians were split up, and assigned in small groups in almost every company. This was a situation that the Norwegians strongly disapproved upon, since they wanted to stay together as a Norwegian unit.

Wiking advanced and attacked Rostov and Tarnopol, and moved towards Kaukasus. There were huge Norwegian casualties, but Wiking was regarded as an elite unit, and always participated where the battle was at it's hardest.

Wiking advanced as far as Baku, but already in 1943, there were only 320 norwegians left. When Wiking was finally destroyed in the vicinity of Vienna in '45, only a handful of norwegians were left.

In 1943, standarte Nordland was withdrawn from 5.Div. Wiking, to be a part of a new division, also called Nordland. This was to be a Panzer-Grenadier Division, since it had only one panzer battalion. (11-SS-Panzerabteilung "Hermann von Salza") The name was 11. SS-Freiwilligen-Panzer Grenadier Division "Nordland". A new regiment was formed in this division: 23. SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment "Norge".

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A Norwegian waffen-SS
armshield.

Morten Balestrand collection

23.- Panzergrenadier-Regiment "Norge"

PzGrenRgt "Norge" was formed 9/3-43- Many volunteered from "Den Norske Legion" (DNL), and about 700 norwegians were in the barracks and training grounds. Others in this unit, were hungarians and volksdeutsche. Apart from "Norge", there was PzGrenRgt "Danmark", with about 1150 danes.

Two other smaller units were attached too, a company from "Germanske SS Norge", led by Hauptsturmführer Olaf T Lindvig, a legendary personality, and a Pionier-company led by Reidar Hoel.

The number of norwegians was disappointingly low, as Quisling had expected 3 500 men to volunteer.

The men got very good and hard education, and being in this high quality regiment suited everyone who wanted to build a professional career as a soldier or officer.

At first, the division was in the Balkans, mostly in Croatia, and participated in guard duties and anti partisan warfare. In december 43 the division, minus their tank battalion, was sent to Oranienbaum near Leningrad, to lead a siege of the russian forces still there.

During the soviet winter offensive in jan 44, Division Nordland had to fight their way back to Narva in the Baltic's, once again the Norwegians ha great losses. The division held the so-called "Panther-Stellung", and fought in the famous battles of the Kourland Pocket. In feb 45, SS-Div Nordland was sent to Stettin, and it was finally destroyed in Berlin.

The few surviving norwegians ended up as Soviet POW's, but still, survivors of this unit was regarded as an elite amongst the volunteers.

Norges SS (Norwegian SS)

Later renamed "Germanske SS Norge" (Germanic SS Norway - GSSN), this branch of Allgemeine SS was formed on the 21st of may 41. This was not a combat unit, but most who joined soon were enlisted in a newly formed combat unit called "Den Norske Legion" (DNL), or "SS-Freiwilligen-Legion-Norwegen".

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Den Norske Legion (DNL)

Originally, this unit was promised to be a fully norwegian one, with norwegian uniforms, weapons, language and officers. Of course, this never came true.

The uniforms were standard SS, but most men used the Norwegian Lion instead of the SS runes. Members of NS wore the Raven w/ sunshield on the sleeve, and a norwegian flag was also worn by all men on the upper arm.

The main purpose of DNL was to fight in Finland, this never happened. In dec 41, 1900 men had volunteered, however of the 900-1000 accepted, about 20 were more than 50 years of age!

DNL was organized as a battalion, or Sturmabteilung, and according to Frode Halle, the total strength after basic training was about 700 men. Most officers were norwegians, and many saw this unit as the real beginning of a new Norwegian national army.

Many of the volunteers did not accept the strong German influence, and left DNL – especially after it turned out that they were to participate in the siege of Leningrad instead of going to Finland. DNL was never, as seen by the Germans, a first class combat battalion, but it suited the static warfare in the trenches by Leningrad.

Stiftelsen norsk Okkupasjonshistorie, 2014

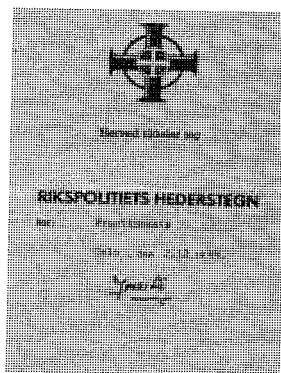
DNL remained in Leningrad until spring 43, and had 180 casualties. Actually, the presence of so many NS-Hird members, created a personnel problem in Norway.

1. SS und Polizeikompanie, led by GSSN leader Jonas Lie, was soon attached to DNL. In 43, DNL was disbanded, but the bad experiences in the co-operation with the Germans, caused severe problems with the recruiting of Norwegian volunteers later, in fact for the rest of the war.

The SS,- and Police Companies (SS,- und Polizei-Kompanien)

There were formed 4 SS and police companies with norwegian policemen. An special order was made for these, the "Jarnkross" (Iron Cross)

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A citation for Rikspolitiets Hederstegn.
(State police honor badge)

Facsimile signed by Jonas Lie

The above citation was awarded for effort at the front

1. Kompanie was lead by GSSN chief, and Police minister Jonas Lie. They were attached to DNL in 42-43. It's strength was about 160 men. Withdrawn spring 43.

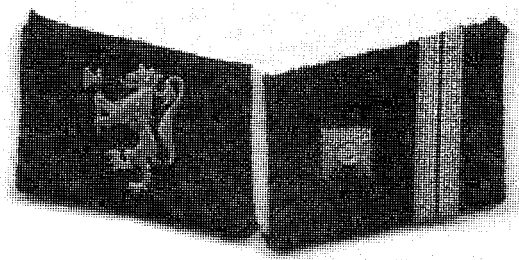
2. Kompanie was lead by Reidar Hoel, and also consisted of 160 men. It was originally to join SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment "Norge", but was sent to Finland instead. They were attached to AA 6 (Aufklärungsabteilung – recce unit) / 6. SS-Gebirgsdivision "Nord". Returned to Oslo in may 44.

3. Kompanie was lead by Aage Henry Berg, and got basic training in april 44. It was also sent to Finland to form the 3. Kompanie in the Schijäger-Batallion "Norwegen", but reached their unit just in time to join the Lapland Army in it's withdrawal. The only norwegian unit to have never lost a man in combat. Back in Norway, they split up in 10-12 "Jagdkommandos", and operated in Northern Norway.

4. Kompanie was led by Oscar Rustand, but never got ready by the german surrender. Was intended to fight the Soviets in the northern parts of Norway.

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A very rare pair of collar patches to the Norwegian SS-police company.
Not to be confused with the patch to DNL that had a more crunched lion.

The top of the axe was often broken off as per regulations from the Germans who did not like the Norwegian lion symbol.

SS-Schijäger-Batallion "Norwegen" (SS-Skijegerbataljon Norge)

The Skijägerbatalion was originally a company, and was a part of AA 6 / 6. SS-Gebirgsdivision "Nord". Led by Gust Jonassen, who was the Sports Leader in NSUF (Norway's athletic equivalent to Hitler Jugend). When he got killed, he got succeeded by Frode Halle. It became a battalion in late 43.

It was intended to be a purely Norwegian unit, just like DNL was, but their mission was completely different. SS-Skijägerbtl "Norge" mostly consisted of well trained Ski specialists, and was used for long-range patrols, ambush, and combat patrols. Regarded as an elite unit, they were mostly led by Norwegian officers and NCO's.

Many norwegians from other units, amongst them SS PzGrenRegt "Norge" volunteered, and was transferred to the Skijägers.

The strength was about 700 men in the beginning of 44, and 1200 at the end of the same year.

They were organized in three light platoons, each of three squads. Each squad had one MG, and two marksmen. There was one mortar group too.

Submachine guns, amongst them Czech ones was very commonly in use, only 2-3 out of 10 used the K98 rifle. French shrapnel hand grenades were also widely issued.

This unit suffered great losses at the hills of "Kaprolat" and "Hasselmann" were attacked by a Soviet regiment, the number ranging from 141 – 193 killed. Only a few were to escape, and soldiers from this unit are known to have been in Soviet imprisonment until 1955.

The remains of this battalion was reformed as SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Batallion 506 in Oslo.

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SS Vachbatallion Norwegen (SS Vaktbatajon Norge)

This rather infamous unit was in fact the only pure Norwegian unit. It's duty was mostly to serve as concentration camp guards, and the ones serving were either former Front fighters, or older NS members too old for front line service. About 360 men served totally.

Volunteer Uniforms

Norwegians used standard SS equipment, but some used slightly non-german items. Norwegian pre 1940 medals and badges were allowed. Some norwegian insignia, like arm cuffs, Lions and NS symbols were also common in certain units.

Norwegians served in amazingly many different German units, ranging from SS Standarte "Kurt Eggers" (Propaganda and recruiting) to ordinary Heer units. At least two norwegians met their fate in Stalingrad. Norwegians even volunteered for Italian service, but there is no evidence of them actually enlisting.

Luftwaffe

Many volunteered, but most were transferred to SS. About 75 - 100 men served as individuals, and only two managed to getting pilots. (one of them, Alf Lie, was a former Wiking veteran, with EK I, wound badge, Eastern Campaign Medal and KVK II)

Kriegsmarine

Stiftelsen norsk Okkupasjonshistorie, 2014

About 450-500 norwegians served as individuals, or small groups, a low number regarding norwegians to be famous sailors.

Norwegians are known to have served on "Schlesien" and "Lutzow" in the Baltic Sea, amongst them Oscar Bang, a former officer in the Norwegian Navy.

Suggestions were made to make a National Shield, but it most likely never happened. Ole Henderson Blom, whose parents were residents in the US, led the recruiting and education of officers.

Frontsisters

About 350-400 women served as front line nurses, and at least 13 were killed in the front lines. Mrs Moxness is the only non German woman to receive the Iron Cross ever.

Frontsisters were deployed in pairs, and those older than 21 years mostly served in Finland, the Baltic States, Soviet, Poland, Croatia, Italy, France – and Norway. The youngest ones were usually placed in Germany.

Fates

All volunteers were put on trial after the war. The standard sentence for a Front Fighter was 3,5 years imprisonment, but prominent ones, like Olaf T Lindvig got 12 years. Some committed suicide, and a few were sentenced to death, but only when working for Gestapo or Abwehr. Some escaped to South America or Spain, mostly by boat.

Frontfighters were also denied citizen rights, and only a few are actually "out of their closets" even in 1999.

Only a few got promoted to higher ranks than Hauptsturmführer, but EK's, KVK's and Assault Badges were common.

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This memorial plaque is in the German cemetery in Rovaniemi, Finland.

Roughly translated: To the memory of the 196 Norwegian volunteers that died in the war 1941-45

Owner: Klaus-Jürgen von Schmidt-Laussitz,
copyright: Nicolas von Schmidt-Laussitz

SS terms English equivalent

Gruppe- Army corps

Brigade- Division

Standarte- Regiment

Sturmbann- Battalion

Sturm- Company

Truppe- Platoon

Schar- Squad

Rotte- Team

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Bjorn Jervaas is one of the major contributors to this site, and have written many articles for other ww2 sites.

Norway during WW2

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