

# History of the Lutzow

## Freikorps *by Kyle O'Brien (Millander)*

In 1812 Napoleon was at his height when he and his Grand Armee marched into Russia. He was the humbler of all of Europe including the once proud nation of Prussia. After the disaster of the war against Napoleon in 1806 Prussia was slowly rebuilding her military in the hope of someday reconquering not only her lost territory but her lost honor. When the Grand Armee staggered back into Germany from the disastrous invasion of Russia and when the Czar called on the Kings of Austria and Prussia to rise up against Napoleon when he was weak. Prussia took the opportunity. Never before had the whole of Germany been united and stood together against a common enemy.

In 1813 the citizens of Prussia in all classes rose up in popular support of the war. German historians have dubbed this period "The Wars of Liberation". For the first time Prussia was engaged in a People's War with the entire population rallying behind the King. However even with this massive support the Prussian Army was still in shambles. Napoleon had shrunk the Prussian Army to only 40,000 men in total after 1806. Seven years later the army was caught in the process of major military reforms with little supplies for the flood of volunteers. The King of

Prussia began offering rank to men who would form and finance their own units. These Freikorps (Free Corps) as they began to take shape with army officers forming many in their own name. Most were attached to Regular Infantry Regiments however few acted as their own sovereign formations. The largest and most well renowned Freikorps would be the one of Major Von Lutzow.

The Lutzow's Freikorps were officially founded in February 1813 as *Königlich Preußisches Freikorps von Lützow* (Royal Prussian Free Corps von Lützow). Lützow, who had been an officer under the ill-fated Ferdinand von Schill, obtained permission from the Prussian Chief-of-Staff Gerhard von Scharnhorst to organize a free corps consisting of infantry, cavalry, and artillery for flank attacks and guerrilla warfare behind the French lines. Volunteers were to be drawn from all over Germany (including Austria) to fight against Napoleon; it was hoped that this broadly national force would aid in rallying the smaller German governments into the ranks of the Allies. This force being drawn from all over Germany had a varied character. French and French-Allied German deserters flocked to the Ranks of the Freikorps. However, being without pay and serving with strangers took its toll and at some points the Lutzow Freikorps had a desertion rate of 40%, The worst in the army!

The Wars of Liberation have been seen by historians as the start of German nationalism and helped pave the way to German Unification some 60 years later. Lutzow's Freikorps composed of unpaid civilian volunteers from all the German states rising up to Liberate Germany was seen at the time and after the war as the embodiment of German feeling and nationalism of the period. This image was also spurred on by the many romantic and well known scientific and literary figures who served in the Korps. The most popular figure was the young Prussian poet and dramatist Theodor Korner. Korner, who was a staunch supporter of German unification, was attracted to the characters of Lutzow's Freikorps. Korner wrote many romantic poems and songs about the unit and the fight for the freedom of Germany. He was killed in an attack on a French supply train at age 21.

The Lutzow Freikorps primarily operated as guerilla fighters behind French lines. They attacked supply trains and harassed French communications. Although not playing a huge role in the campaigns at the front the numerous Freikorps and Russian Cossacks operating behind French Lines became a huge annoyance to the French. Napoleon became so bitter at these irregulars that he was willing to break the rules of war to deal with them. During the late 1813 campaign a two week armistice was signed and the Lutzow Freikorps was ordered by the Prussian Government to return to Prussian Lines. While marching back to Prussian Lines the Lutzow's Freikorps was ambushed by French Cavalry and nearly entirely decimated. Only the Cavalry escaped without serious loss.

Over the winter the Freikorps reorganized and the 1st Squadron who up to this point were Hussars were converted to Uhlans (lancers). Lutzow himself went out recruiting and in little time the numbers of the corps swelled to more than their previous size. From this time forward the Lutzow Freikorps fought as a regular army unit in open battle. Although not well regarded by Prussian Commanders who preferred their Regular Line Regiments, the Freikorps served admirably in the campaigns in Germany and France

alongside fellow Freikorps units. When Napoleon abdicated for the first time in 1814 and it looked like there would be no more fighting the Lutzow Freikorps were absorbed into the Regular Army. The Infantry became the 25. Infantry Regiment, the Artillery became the 7th Horse Artillery Battery and the Hussars and Lancers became the 7. Uhlan Regiment.

When Napoleon returned from exile the former units in the Lutzow Freikorps were a part of the Army under Marshal Blucher who faced off against Napoleon at Ligny and saved the English at Waterloo. At Ligny officers saved Marshal Blucher when he was trapped under his shot horse.

