

27 (Polish) SAS

The brainchild of Major (then Captain) Alexander Poponick of 23 SAS, this unit was first established as P Troop 23 SAS in January 1996. It is composed of the children (and often the grand sons) of Polish immigrants. Recruiting from the Polish communities in the East and West Midlands provided a core group of fluent Polish speakers to which were added a number of Regular and TA NCOs who were also fluent in Polish. These formed the training cadre.

Advertisements were placed in local and national papers for fluent Polish speakers and the forces records checked for possible candidates. After selection through the Intelligence Corps depot at Ashford, successful candidates were trained as part of the standard SAS selection training (although expanded and extended to allow for the initial lack of military skills). Out of the initial 208 candidates the numbers were whittled down to 27 (although a large number of the unsuccessful ones were redeployed to Int Corps).

The first operation undertaken was Operation Furnace in December 1996, where the troops were inserted onto the Baltic coast. Here they undertook a number of sabotage operations but more usefully acted as military police directing Pact traffic down the wrong roads in a manner similar to Operation Grief during the Battle of the Bulge. Their biggest success was slowing down two divisions by over two days when they were both sent through the same small town. Of the 32 troops, 18 made it back to NATO lines in January (and a further 4 after an epic march via Warsaw in April). One, trooper Jan Wartaw was posthumously awarded the Victoria



Illustration 2: 27 SAS troopers behind Polish lines. Note the MP5 SMG, tropical trousers, shemaghs and woolly hats.



Illustration 1: Trooper believed to be from 27 SAS manning a GPMG on a Land Rover. Note the tropic shirt which was a popular choice among SAS troopers as it was harder wearing than the Soldier 95 equivalent worn by the driver..

Cross for his actions in acting as a rearguard allowing the rest of his unit to escape. Unusually for the Regiment this case and unit was publicised (perhaps as part of the deception operation mentioned below).

Permission was given in February 1997 to expand the troop to squadron size as P Squadron. This recruiting expanded numbers to two troops and the unit was renamed as 27 (Polish) SAS in April 1997 as a deception about its strength. Major Poponick was appointed commanding officer. He was instrumental in the peculiarities of dress listed below.

Since then the unit has continued its role of behind the lines operations and has worked with 21SAS on recovery of shot down pilots on a number of occasions. It has also operated in the role of co-ordinating anti-Pact groups in Poland. As the front has stabilised it has moved back to Germany and is intended to give BAOR a special forces capability as the Special Services Brigade is withdrawn to the UK. Currently Major Poponick is trying to strengthen the unit to meet this expanding role but is hitting problems as it is felt that the specifically Polish role is now no longer required. The RSM Peter Cavelock (a pre-war member of 1 Para who had escaped from Poland in the early 1980s) has suggested expanding the unit to include Germans to assist in the new role and this is being considered.



*Illustration 3: Major Poponick
pictured in May 2000*

Dress and Regimental Traditions

Stable belt: Red over white with a buckle showing the regimental badge

Cap badge: The traditional SAS winged dagger

TRF: Square, quartered red and white

Wings: SAS pattern

Beret: Sand

Lanyard: Mixed red and white

Collar dogs: Polish Imperial Double Headed Eagle

Regimental March: The Eagle Has Landed March (apparently this was an unofficial march from the beginning but was formally adopted in January 1999)

Motto: Kto (który) ośmiela się zwycięstwa (Who Dares Wins in Polish)

Strength: 59

Current subordination: Theatre level for BAOR