

Peoples of the Caucasus During the Second World War: from Captivity of War to Legions

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Abstract

Historical works during the Second World War explored the exploits of heroes and the thorny path to victory. Over the past 30 years, historiography has undergone significant changes; scientists have begun to explore previously unexplored controversial issues of history. This article examines one of the pressing and little-studied problems of the Second World War – the problem of prisoners of war. Every war ends in human losses, including the capture of citizens and military personnel. Prisoners of war during the Second World War and their thorny path are one of the actual problems of modern historiography. The fate of prisoners of war and their collaboration with Nazi Germany was one of the taboo issues in Soviet historiography. The study examines the features of captivity and the conditions of detention of Soviet prisoners of war and their cooperation with Nazi Germany. The work examines the historical background and reasons for the cooperation of prisoners of war with Germany. This work is devoted to studying the fate of Caucasian prisoners of war during the Second World War. The focus is on the tragic story of tens of thousands of people who were captured by the Wehrmacht. Difficult moving conditions, lack of food and medical care, repressive measures by the German authorities are the object of study of such a controversial problem. The article examines the reasons for Caucasians joining the ranks of the Wehrmacht, their goals and conditions of service. Studying the issue of Caucasian prisoners of war and their forced cooperation with Nazi Germany during the Second World War allows us to deeply understand the tragic consequences of the war for the Caucasian peoples.

Keywords: World War II, Caucasus, prisoners of war, Hitler's Germany, legion

Народи Кавказу в роки Другої світової війни: від військового полону до легіонів

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Анотація

В історичних працях періоду Другої світової війни досліджувалися подвиги героїв та тернистий шлях до перемоги. За останні 30 років історіографія зазнала значної зміни, вченими стали досліджуватися невивчені раніше суперечливі питання історії. У цій статті розглядається одна з актуальних та маловивчених проблем Другої світової війни – проблема військовополонених. Кожна війна закінчується людськими втратами, зокрема й полоненням громадян, і військових. Військовополонені періоду Другої світової війни та їх тернистий шлях є однією з актуалізованих проблем сучасної історіографії. Доля військовополонених та їх співробітництво з гітлерівською Німеччиною було одним із табуованих питань у радянській історіографії. У дослідженні розглядаються особливості полону та умови утримання радянських військовополонених та їхня співпраця з гітлерівською Німеччиною. У роботі вивчені історичні передумови та причини співпраці військовополонених із Німеччиною. Ця робота присвячена вивченню долі кавказьких військовополонених у роки Другої світової війни. У центрі уваги трагічна історія десятків тисяч людей, які потрапили у полон до вермахту. Тяжкі умови переїзду, відсутність їжі та медичної допомоги, репресивні заходи з боку німецької влади є об'єктом дослідження такої суперечливої проблеми. У статті розглянуто причини вступу кавказців до лав вермахту, їх цілі та умови служби. Вивчення питання кавказьких військовополонених та їх вимушене співробітництво з гітлерівською Німеччиною у роки Другої світової війни дозволяє глибоко зрозуміти трагічні наслідки війни для кавказьких народів.

Ключові слова: Друга світова війна, Кавказ, військовополонені, гітлерівська Німеччина, легіон

Introduction.

Throughout history, humanity has experienced many wars. Every war has left behind a tragic mark. Despite the tragedy of the picture, wars and military conflicts are still part of the historical and political processes of the modern world. One of the most destructive wars, which is a tragic page in the history of mankind, is the Second World War. Many issues of the war have been the subject of research by foreign and domestic scientists. However, even though 85 years have passed since the start of the anti-human war, there are still controversial issues, one of which is the problem of prisoners of war. The second important and controversial issue is collaborationism. This article will examine the main problems of prisoners of war during the war, and the main reasons and prerequisites for collaboration during the war, which subsequently led to the formation of legions.

Relevance of the issue. The largest war of the twentieth century is still relevant and interesting for a wide range of researchers of this problem. Prisoners of war are persons captured by the enemy during war. The issue of prisoners of war is relevant during war due to ethical, humanitarian, political and legal factors. These factors influence the processes of settling international relations, foreign policy, and other aspects. From a theoretical point of view, this issue has been studied by many researchers, but the process of becoming prisoners of war as a means for establishing military cooperation with the enemy was kept silent in Soviet historiography. The study of the prisoner of war issue includes various historical aspects. Historical literature has studied the conditions of detention and treatment of prisoners of war, agreements, and acts on the status of prisoners of war, etc. The study of the issue of prisoners of war has practical significance, which covers aspects of international law, diplomacy, and international relations. The object of the study is Soviet prisoners of war who found themselves in German captivity and were forced to collaborate with Nazi Germany. The subject of the research work is the study of the historical conditions and prerequisites for military cooperation between representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus during the war, as well as the process of formation of legions.

Purpose of the article. Scientific work pursues the goal of an objective study of the problem of prisoners of war and collaboration and its results. The objectives of the study are to analyze the historical context and reasons for the appearance of prisoners of war during the war, to study the attitude towards prisoners of war in various conflicts and to provide objective coverage of the situation of prisoners of war during the war. The study of the fate of prisoners of war is aimed at restoring the historical truth, documenting the tragedy of the war and a detailed description of the conditions of captivity, the regime in the camp, repression and loss of life. Studying the fate of prisoners of war allows us to understand the psychological and social consequences of war for

people who went through captivity. Studying the fate of prisoners of war allows us to analyze the policies of states towards prisoners, including the conditions of captivity and life, and repression. The study helps to understand the ideological context of the war, including the process of violation of the prisoner of war conventions. The study of the fate of prisoners of war is an important lesson that conveys to future generations the tragedy and inhumanity of war. Studying the fate of prisoners of war is important for understanding the war in all its tragedy, for restoring historical truth, for understanding the psychological and social consequences of the war, as well as for preventing new tragedies. The study of various aspects of the Second World War and the tragic fate of Caucasian prisoners of war is one of the pressing issues in modern Caucasian studies.

Research methods. The research was carried out based on such methods as: source analysis, comparative method, statistical method, hypothetical method. The work analyzes archival works, as well as historiographic studies. The comparative method helps to compare and identify similar features of the development of historical processes in the Caucasus during the Second World War. The article provides statistical information on the number of prisoners of war and formed legions. The study uses a hypothetical method that creates conditions for studying the prerequisites and reasons for the formation of legions.

Degree of knowledge of the problem. The study of prisoners of war is an important area of research related to the rights and conditions of prisoners of war during armed conflicts. This includes an analysis of international humanitarian law that governs the treatment of prisoners of war and an examination of the practices and policies applied by various countries and organizations regarding prisoners of war. Studying this topic helps to better understand and improve the conditions of prisoners of war and contributes to the development of international standards and norms aimed at protecting the rights of prisoners of war. The issues of prisoners of war and collaboration have been studied by Soviet and foreign researchers. Research on the Soviet period is very different from research in modern historical science. The identification of new archival materials and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to significant changes in the study of the "blank spots" of the history of the Second World War; collaboration and cooperation with the Germans of representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus were studied within the framework of the history of political emigration of each people. For a long time, the situation of Soviet prisoners of war during World War II was not widely studied and discussed.

Analysis of the historiography of the problem.

Issues of the Second World War are still relevant in modern historiography. Over the past 30 years, modern historiography has undergone significant changes, which have had a positive impact on the further development of historical science. In historiography, a place is given

to the study of topical, little-known problems in Soviet historiography. One of the problematic issues of the Second World War is the problem of collaboration. The term “cooperation” arose at the beginning of the 19th century; its widespread use dates back to the World War period. Cooperation - military, political, economic cooperation with the enemy. In historiography, collaborators were also called “traitors” and “enemies.” During the war years, thousands of people collaborated with Nazi Germany. Historical and political circumstances led to cooperation with the Third Reich. To survive and escape the harsh German concentration camps, POWs were forced to cooperate.

The historiography of prisoners of war is also divided into two periods: the first period is the study of this problem in the fifties and eighties of the 20th century; the second period is the study of the problem from the 90s to the first decade in 2000. In Soviet historiography, the problem of prisoners of war and collaboration was not fully studied, since historians could not objectively study this problem. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, since the nineties, the problem of prisoners of war in Russian historiography has been studied with a prism. Research was conducted and scientific articles were written on the problem of prisoners of war and collaboration.

The problem of prisoners of war has been widely studied in modern historiography. Among the works one can highlight the works of Azerbaijani, Georgian, and European scientists: R. Abutalybov (2007), N. Yagublu (2005), O. Romanko (2014), A. Shneer (.2005), S. Drobyazko & A. Karaschuk (2000).

Research results.

To the question of prisoners of war during the Great Patriotic War.

For the USSR, which included the Caucasus region, the war began on June 22, 1941, and was called the Great Patriotic War. During this period, the Caucasus, with its rich natural resources, occupied a major place in the aggressive plans of Hitler Germany. Oil and the favorable strategic position of this region attracted the attention of the Germans. After the treacherous attack of Nazi Germany on the USSR, Red Army soldiers and civilians came face to face with the most brutal war of mankind. From the first days of the war, Soviet citizens were captured by the Germans. The victims of the war were also prisoners of war, who lived in appalling conditions. On the territory of the Soviet Union, Soviet prisoners of war were called “enemies of the people.” Of course, this applied to that part of the prisoners of war who were captured because of desertion. Approximately 5.7 million soldiers were captured by the Germans. Prisoners of war were placed in special camps, where they lived in extremely unfavorable inhumane conditions, even though, starting from the end of the 19th century, certain legal norms were established to protect the rights of prisoners of war. The rights of prisoners of war were established based on the articles of the Geneva Convention and the Red Cross. As you

know, after the First World War in 1919, the League of Nations was created, which was supposed to resolve all conflicts peacefully and ensure a safe world. On July 27, 1929, the Geneva Convention concerning the Treatment of Prisoners of War was adopted. The articles of the convention stated:

- they (prisoners of war) must always be treated humanely, especially protected from violence, insults, and the curiosity of the crowd;

- prisoners of war have the right to respect their person and honor;

- in the same way, they can be imprisoned and kept under guard, but only according to the requirements of safety or hygiene, and only until the cessation of the circumstances that caused these measures;

- the food rations of prisoners of war must be equal in quality and quantity to the rations of troops in barracks.

The above articles are proof that humane laws were adopted in the legal norms regarding prisoners of war. In theory, all the warring powers, especially Hitler's Germany, which acted as the aggressor, were supposed to comply with the Geneva Convention of 1929. However, during the war, Nazi Germany violated all the principles of the convention (Geneva, 1929).

During the war, Soviet prisoners of war faced the terrifying side of a merciless war. At the end of 1941, 3.3 million Red Army soldiers and commanders were in German captivity. Many prisoners of war died en masse in the first years of the Great Patriotic War. The prisoners of war were united only by a tragic fate. Some prisoners of war died from cold and disease, many were shot. Some of the prisoners, to save their lives, enlisted in the Wehrmacht and served in the camp police. The Reich Minister for Occupied Territories, the official leader of Nazi ideology, A. Rosenberg, in a letter to W. Keitel dated February 28, 1942, indicated that the fate of Soviet prisoners of war in Germany was a tragedy of enormous proportions. Of the 3.6 million prisoners of war at present, only a few hundred thousand can work (Erin, & Kholn, 2000, p. 10).

Kafka Prize winner, writer L. Koval noted: “Captivity can be put on a par with genocide. This is a tragic and terrible layer” (Shneer, 2005, p. 3-6).

Prisoners of war found themselves in appalling conditions during the war and after it. The Soviet Union, which at that time had an indestructible communist ideology, viewed in every possible way negatively the facts of the captivity of Soviet citizens, as well as their collaboration with enemy forces.

During the war, some prisoners of war were forced to cooperate to save their lives. The history of the war also contains numerous facts of desertion among representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus. The reasons for the desertion were the policy of the Soviet leadership towards the peoples of the Caucasus. The policy of collectivization and repression leads to the emergence of anti-Soviet forces among the masses, who

subsequently cooperated with the Germans. The policy of "Great Terror" in the Caucasus, which began at the end of 1936, arrest in 1937-1938. 1.5 million people, and the execution of 681,692 of them is proof of the process of oppression of the peoples of the Caucasus (Baberovski, 2010).

It should be noted that the initiative for cooperation came primarily from the German leadership. For military-political purposes, Nazi Germany created the conditions for cooperation.

Many prisoners of war were a source of cheap labor. Prisoners of war were "slaves" who had to do hard work. The failure of Blitzkrieg and the failures of the German army convinced the German leadership of the duration of the war. To withstand the German economy, the hardships of the war, as well as to replenish the places of human losses, forced the leadership to attract prisoners of war from representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus for forced labor and cooperation. The German leadership decided to recruit them en masse into the German economy, use prisoners as "Hilfswillige" in the Wehrmacht, "order police" in the occupied territory, as soldiers in non-Slavic "legions" created from prisoners, and later also in Russian and Ukrainian military formations (Erin, & Kholn, 2000, p. 60).

Despite disagreements among representatives of the German leadership about the use of prisoners of war, a decision was made to form national units from representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus. During the war years, representatives of political emigration from the peoples of the Caucasus collaborated with the Third Reich. However, this is not proof that representatives of the emigration were adherents of fascist ideology. Cooperation with the Germans was aimed at creating local governments and gaining independence.

Collaborationism is military, economic and political cooperation with the enemy. This term became widely used during the Second World War. But the historical facts about the formation and activities of the legions during the war on the side of Hitler's Germany from among the peoples of the Caucasus are indisputable, they must be examined reliably and objectively and should not be forgotten.

Everyone knew the hardships of military captivity in German concentration camps. Soviet prisoners of war, like all other prisoners of war, faced harsh conditions of captivity – lack of food, cold and poor living conditions. Many of them were also physically and psychologically abused by their fellow Germans.

Representatives of the Caucasian emigration sought to rescue prisoners of war from appalling conditions. To implement political plans to restore independence with the help of Hitler's Germany, as well as the anti-Bolshevik struggle, led to cooperation with the Germans.

During the war, the German leadership also pinned its hopes on cooperation with representatives of the Caucasian peoples.

Formation of legions from among the representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus. The first prisoners of war were placed in camps on July 10, 1941. Prisoners of war were transported in special cattle cars. Also, many prisoners of war went to the camps on foot. Which was difficult for the weakened prisoners. The path was often called the "road of death." Prisoners of war were not always given water. Various infectious diseases spread among many prisoners of war. The mortality rate among prisoners of war gradually increased. Many could not withstand all the inhuman conditions. The most terrible test awaited the prisoners of war - hunger. Throughout the war, hunger haunted them. Its peak falls in the winter of 1941-42 and the spring of 1945. Hunger led to enormous physical suffering. (Erin, & Kholn, 2000, p. 38-39).

Let's consider the problem of involving prisoners of war in forced labor. The Nazis subsequently decided to pursue a policy of extermination by involving Soviet citizens in hard work. To develop the German economy, the German leadership decided to employ prisoners of war. In 1941, the German leadership did not take the initiative to use the labor of prisoners of war. Since this, to one degree or another, contradicted racial ideology. However, in 1942 the situation changed. The failure of the blitzkrieg, the human losses suffered by Hitler's Germany, changed the view of the German leadership on the above problem. Thus, from the above, we can conclude that the German leadership used prisoners of war as labor. It did not show complete confidence in prisoners of war. However, some military-political reasons led to a change in the tactics of the German leadership in relation to prisoners of war.

After the collapse of the blitzkrieg policy, Hitler's Germany decided to lose human resources. In relation to prisoners of war, the government began to pursue two main goals: political and military (Abutalibov, 2007, p. 36).

Let's consider the political goals of Hitler's Germany in creating foreign volunteer military units.

As you know, the Soviet political system was based on communist ideology, which seemed unshakable. The main ideas of Stalinism showed the invincible spirit of Soviet citizens. The Soviet leadership, to one degree or another, did not want to agree with the facts of cooperation of Soviet prisoners of war with the ideological enemy, and tried in every possible way to introduce harsh regulations against prisoners of war, which to one degree or another were inhumane in nature.

Political purposes include: 1. The creation of volunteers from among Soviet prisoners of war was of a propaganda nature. The German leadership wanted to show the world that volunteers from Europe and Asia were fighting on the side of Germany. 2. Show the Soviet leadership the "shakiness" of communism.

Military purposes include: 1. Replenishment of human strength at the front. 2. Replenishment of human resources in the rear.

The creation of volunteer units went through three stages: 1) In 1940, the following were involved: Danes, Norwegians, Flemings, Dutch. 2) Since 1941, Western European and Balkan peoples. 3) In the autumn of 1941, detachments of representatives of Soviet prisoners of war began to form. Within the military volunteer formations, certain units were created with the following functions:

- 1) "Hiwi" – auxiliary service volunteers.
- 2) Auxiliary police for maintaining order in rear areas (Hilfspolizei)
- 3) Auxiliary police in the rear areas of the active armies. (Romanko, 2005, p. 15).

Auxiliary units served as the main factor for replenishing human resources. As noted earlier, formations with Soviet prisoners of war began to be created starting in the autumn of 1941. Among the formations, those that were staffed with the help of representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus stood out. Although in historiography, there is no separate work in which the problem of collaboration was studied within the entire Caucasus region, works are devoted to this topic in which all Soviet prisoners of war who collaborated with Hitler's Germany were called eastern legions. In March 1942, Hitler signed a decree on the formation of military detachments from among prisoners of war. Gradually, legions began to form from representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus.

Legion (lat. legio, gen. n. legionis, from lego – collect, recruit) intended for special operations mainly outside the country. The military personnel of these formations undergo special military, physical and psychological training and are trained in combat operations in any natural and geographical area. In the fall of 1941, German intelligence, the Abwehr, began work on creating two battalions from prisoners of war. The main goal of creating these battalions was to attract Central Asian and Caucasian peoples to the fight against communism.

Starting in 1942, the process of organizing Turkic and Caucasian units began. On January 1, 1942, the Turkestan Legion was formed. The founder was A. Mayer-Mader. On August 2, 1942, the first reorganization of the Eastern Legions began. After the reorganization, battalions were created based on nationality. These battalions were transferred to Southern France, the Azerbaijani battalion was in the city of Mand.

Four legions were formed - Turkestan, Caucasian-Mohammedan, Georgian, Armenian legions. Due to the increase in the number of Azerbaijanis, whose number in the Wehrmacht troops reached 40 thousand people, the Caucasian-Mohammedan Legion was renamed Azerbaijani, and representatives of other nationalities were removed from its composition (Drobyazko, & Karaschuk, 2000, p. 15-20).

The headquarters of the Azerbaijani legion was in Poland. The total number was 36 thousand people. Each legionnaire had distinctive emblems. However, they wore German uniforms. The Azerbaijani Legion's emblems are

based on a 3-color flag. 176 The Germans also established silver stars of I, II, III degrees for the feat (Yaqublu, 2005, p. 101).

By the end of 1942, about 50 thousand people from the Soviet peoples were sent from Poland to the front. On December 30, 1941, an order was given to form the Armenian Legion. Although at first the German leadership trusted Muslims more. Initially, the formation of the unit began in Poland. A preparatory camp was created in Zaerzhirze, where prisoners of war were admitted and where their training took place. The Armenian legion itself was stationed in Pulawy. The legion consisted of 11 battalions. The number of the legion was 18 thousand people. The Georgian Legion was formed on February 8, 1942. In the creation of the Georgian Legion, Georgian immigrants, led by Colonel of the Army of Independent Georgia, former Tbilisi Governor General Shalva Maglekelidze, played an important role. Legion consisted of 8 battalions and 30 thousand people. One of the formed legions was also the North Caucasian Legion. On August 2, 1942, representatives of the North Caucasian peoples were brought together into a separate North Caucasian Legion under the command of Captain Hussele and stationed in Vesol. The Legion began its activities with 3 battalions. By the end of 1943, the legion included 7 battalions. Among the military units recruited from among the peoples of the Caucasus, the Bergmann battalion should be highlighted (Drobyazko, 2004, p. 151).

Conclusions.

In conclusion, it should be noted that studying various aspects of the history of the Second World War and bringing unique research to the future generation is the invaluable work of researchers. However, every historical event is worthy of objective study. Among the little-studied "blank spots" of human history, the history of prisoners of war should also be highlighted. Prisoners of war during the Second World War went through all the hardships of inhumane military captivity. The problem of prisoners of war was kept silent due to ideological considerations during the Soviet era. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent, sovereign states in the Caucasus region led to great changes in historiographical science, in which the process of studying the history of prisoners of war and their fate began.

This article explores the path of prisoners of war from captivity to cooperation with the enemy. Military collaboration between prisoners of war and Soviet prisoners had several reasons. The German leadership, for military-political purposes, sought to use the force of prisoners of war, although this contradicted its ideological beliefs. Prisoners of war from among the peoples of the Caucasus, having found themselves in military captivity, faced horrific inhumane conditions, which led to forced cooperation and fate in the ranks of the Wehrmacht.

During the war years, the activities of representatives of political emigration intensified, who also sought to achieve independence by saving their compatriots from military captivity. Hitler's Germany, which had its own political goals in relation to the Caucasus region, did not allow the peoples of the Caucasus to gain independence.

Both opposing sides had an ideology that destroyed not only the consciousness of people, but also broke their lives. The peoples of the Caucasus, suffering from Stalinist repressions in 1937, suffered from military captivity in

1942, and severe famine during the Second World War. The history of the activities of military prisoners and their fate, as well as the process of activity of the legions, must be deeply researched. Military-political conditions led to cooperation with the enemy. The military prisoners were not adherents of fascist ideology. The article also reflects works in which the topic of cooperation with the enemy was the object of research. Thus, military-political conditions, as well as inhuman conditions in captivity and the struggle for life created the conditions for military collaboration.

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