

Historical Background and Reasons for the Formation of the Caucasian Legions During the Second World War

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Abstract

The Second World War was one of the most catastrophic wars in human history. Many aspects of the Second World War have been studied by many scientists. Despite the deep study of the historical, political and social issues of the Second World War, there are still little-studied issues of such a pressing problem. The study of various aspects, in particular the "blank spots" of the Second World War, occupies a special place in modern historiography. The article examines one of the pressing and little-studied problems of modern Caucasian studies - the historical background for the formation of legions (military units) from among the peoples of the Caucasus. The Caucasus region occupied an important place in the politics of European powers throughout the history of the 19th and 20th centuries. During the Second World War, the region remained in the focus of interests of Nazi Germany. Beginning in the summer of 1941, many Soviet prisoners of war and citizens found themselves in German captivity. Unable to withstand the harsh conditions of captivity, many prisoners of war died. During the war, Soviet prisoners of war captured by the Germans were forced to collaborate with Nazi Germany. During World War II, the Germans began to form military units-legions from among the peoples of the Caucasus for military and political purposes. The article examines the main reasons and purposes of the formation of legions, the motives for the cooperation of prisoners of war with Hitler's Germany. The research paper examines the historical background and reasons for the creation of military formations on the side of Nazi Germany. Stalin's repressions, collectivist policies and other factors contributed to the formation of anti-communist forces. The military and political goals of the Third Reich to create volunteer formations from among Soviet prisoners of war, as well as the reasons for the cooperation of the peoples of the Caucasus with Nazi Germany are studied. The Eastern Legions as part of the German armed forces were created in the first half of 1942. From the first years of the German-Soviet war, volunteer units began to be created, which included prisoners of war and civilians. The article also provides brief information on the composition and structure of the formed legions.

Keywords: Caucasus, World War II, legion, prisoners of war, collaborationism

Історичні передумови і причини формування кавказьких легіонів у період Другої світової війни

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Анотація

Друга світова війна була однією з найтрагічніших воєн в історії людства. Багато аспектів Другої світової війни було досліджено багатьма вченими. Незважаючи на глибоке вивчення історико-політичних та соціальних питань Другої світової війни, все ще є маловивчені питання такої актуальної проблеми. Вивчення різних аспектів, зокрема «білих плям» Другої світової війни, посідає особливе місце у сучасній історіографії. У статті розглядається одна з актуальних та маловивчених проблем сучасного кавказознавства – історичні передумови формування легіонів (військових підрозділів) з-поміж народів Кавказу. Кавказький регіон займав важливе місце у політиці європейських держав протягом історії XIX і XX століть. У роки Другої світової війни регіон залишався у фокусі інтересів гітлерівської Німеччини. Починаючи з літа 1941 року багато радянських військовополонених та громадян опинились у німецькому полоні. Не витримавши суворих умов полону, багато військовополонених гинули. У роки війни радянські військовополонені, захоплені німцями, вимушено співпрацювали із гітлерівською Німеччиною. У роки Другої світової війни німці стали формувати військові частини-легіони з-поміж народів Кавказу у військово-політичних цілях. У статті розглядаються головні причини та цілі формування легіонів, мотиви співробітництва військовополонених із гітлерівською Німеччиною. У дослідницькій роботі розглянуто історичні передумови та причини створення військових формувань на боці нацистської Німеччини. Сталінські репресії, політика колективізму та інші чинники сприяли формуванню антикомуністично налаштованих сил. Вивчено військово-політичні цілі Третього Рейху зі створення добровільних формувань із радянських військовополонених, а також причини співпраці народів Кавказу з нацистською Німеччиною. Східні легіони як частину німецьких збройних сил було створено у першій половині 1942 року. З перших років німецько-радянської війни стали створюватися добровільні загони, до складу яких входили військовополонені та цивільні особи. У статті також подано короткі відомості про склад та структуру сформованих легіонів.

Ключові слова: Кавказ, Друга світова війна, легіон, військовополонені, колабораціонізм

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Introduction.

World wars are one of the main, at the same time tragic, pages in the history of mankind. Throughout history, an innumerable number of wars have occurred, but the most terrible and destructive among them was the war of 1939-1945, which still has not lost its relevance. The relevance lies in studying the "blank spots" of this period, as well as preventing humanity from repeating the tragedy in the "face" of the Second World War. One of the interesting and important problems in the history of this period is the issue of collaboration.

The purpose of the research work is to study and analyze important issues of historical background and the process of collaboration and cooperation of the Caucasian peoples with Nazi Germany during the Great Patriotic War.

There are still different opinions about whether collaboration is considered a war crime. Studying such a controversial issue is complex and interesting. To study this issue extensively, you should pay attention to the degree to which the issue has been studied. The source study and historiographical bases of the issue are very interesting. The historiography of the study should be divided into the Soviet and modern periods, which are very different from each other. Despite the contradictions, these works form the basis for the study of such a complex historical period.

Degree of knowledge of the problem.

The article examines the prerequisites and reasons for the formation of legions from among the peoples of the Caucasus. In historiography, the legions are called "Eastern" or "Muslim" legions. Considering that the Caucasus was one of the main regions of the Soviet Union, and also occupied an important place in the aggressive plans of the European powers, it would be advisable to study the problem within the framework of the Caucasian peoples, under the general name "Caucasian Legions". The article examines the historical background that led to collaboration with the Germans. The problem was studied regardless of the ideologies that were inherent in the historiography of the twentieth century.

Let's consider the historical background, reasons for the cooperation of the Caucasian peoples, and the formation of legions on the side of Hitler's Germany. Military historian and academician of the Academy of Military Science M.I. Semiryaga in his work deeply studied the problem of collaborationism. Even though this work belongs to modern historiography, here the problem of cooperation with Germany is given a negative assessment. "Collaborationism is a type of fascism," the historian noted. The author studied the origins and historical circumstances of the formation of collaborationism. The work notes that the end of the First World War and the Versailles system led to political and economic problems. The policy of repression of the Soviet government in the 30s is also analyzed. XX century. On the initiative of Stalin and Beria, by the fall of 1938,

millions of Soviet citizens were executed or isolated in distant Siberian camps and prisons (Semiryaga, 2000, p. 99).

Research results.

As you know, Soviet power in the Caucasus was established in 1920. The main goal of the internal political line of the Soviet leadership was economic development, as well as post-war reconstruction. The Soviet government took several measures that were not always effective. The NEP policy failed to adequately improve the economic situation in the Caucasus. The collectivization policy also aggravated the situation and became the reason for the brewing of social discontent among the peoples of the Caucasus. As a result of the collectivization policy, part of the population died, while others were sent into exile. Statistics indicate that 13 million people died. Of these, 7 million died of hunger. Other statistics are also given, where 10-16 million people died as a result of this policy.

Joseph Stalin, who headed the Soviet government until 1953, managed to defeat Nazi Germany and turn the USSR into a superpower. He pursued a policy of "Great Terror", collectivism, and deportation, which worsened the lives of civilians.

At the beginning of 1989, a commission was created that was supposed to determine population losses, headed by Polyakov. The statistics focus on two years of the "Great Terror". V. N. Zemskov estimates the number of those repressed during the years of the "Great Terror" at 1 million 345 thousand people. Russian demographer A. Vishnevsky gives different statistics. The number of repressed people is estimated at approximately 4-6 million people. The policy of collectivism and repression, which was carried out by J.V. Stalin, led to huge numbers of victims (Zemskov, 2012, p. 83). A huge number of works have been written about Stalin and his totalitarian regime. One of the interesting works, which is directly related to the Caucasus, was written by a German historian, and professor at the University of Berlin Baberovsky. In his work "The Enemy is Everywhere. Stalinism in the Caucasus," written in 2011, the author explored the origins of Stalin's repressions in the Caucasus. The author noted that the policy of collectivism and bloody terror was the most cruel in the Caucasus. The policy of "Great Terror" in the Caucasus began at the end of 1936. In 1937-1938, 1.5 million people were arrested, 681,692 of them were shot, N. Khrushchev announced this at the plenum of the Central Committee in July 1957 (Baberovski, 2010).

The real drama for the peoples of the Caucasus was the transition to complete collectivization. The measures of the Soviet government were called a policy of mass repression and mass terror (Aliyeva, 2013, p. 140). As a result of the collectivization policy, 7 million people died.

Summarizing the above, it can be noted that the policy of repression and collectivism will subsequently create conditions for the cooperation of some prisoners of war from among the peoples of the Caucasus with Nazi Germany.

On June 22, 1941, at four in the morning, Nazi Germany attacked the USSR. The Great Patriotic War began. This attack was unexpected for the Soviet leadership. On July 3, 1941, Stalin addressed the Soviet people and gave information about the situation at the front. As a result of general mobilization, along with representatives of other peoples of the Caucasus, 700 thousand Azerbaijanis also went to the front. At the initial stage of the war, a huge number of Soviet citizens were captured by Nazi Germany. The difficult economic and political situation in the Soviet Union, including the totalitarian regime established by Stalin, was the reason why military structures were formed among Soviet citizens who fought against Soviet power on the side of the Third Reich. Among these citizens, there were also representatives of the Azerbaijani people. The number of Soviet citizens captured by the Germans is estimated differently in research works. The German scientist Christian Streit names a more significant figure – 5.754 million Soviet prisoners of war (Shneer, 2005, p. 96).

The historian Schneer, in his work entitled “Prisoners of War,” noted that the number of such a huge number of prisoners of war was marked not only by any military miscalculations and mistakes among prisoners of war but also by those who voluntarily surrendered to the Germans. The author analyzed all the reasons that led to this combination of circumstances:

1. The internal policy of the Soviet government, which includes socio-political aspects: the policy of repression and collectivism, anti-religious policy, as well as hunger.

2. National problems that were associated with the multinationality of the USSR. Anti-Soviet and national liberation tendencies emerged (Shneer, 2005, p. 133).

Many captured were subjected to reprisals by the Germans. Prisoners were used as labor. Most of the prisoners could not withstand the inhuman conditions and died from hunger and disease.

When exploring Soviet historiography, you should pay attention to the term “collaborationism”. Collaborationism, translated from the French word “collaboration”, means cooperation during a war or armed conflict with an enemy. This term became widely used during the Second World War. During this period, those representatives from different nations who collaborated with the Third Reich and served in the security forces of the Wehrmacht were called “enemies of the people”, “traitors” and “traitors”. In Soviet historiography, there is a negative attitude towards collaborationists. There is no consensus among historians and politicians on the question of whether collaborators are enemies of the people, traitors, or whether everyone has the right to choose. A Russian military historian, a participant in the Great Patriotic War, noted in one of his studies: “No army that acted as an occupier of any country can do without cooperation with the authorities and population of that country. The occupation system needs translators, and

experts in the political system of local customs (Kovalyev, 2009, p.8.). There are several types of collaboration: economic, political, intellectual, etc. Hitler's Germany sought to embody economic collaborationism. This cooperation was aimed at ensuring that all citizens of the occupied territories had to work for Germany. Also, Nazi Germany pursued the goal of establishing control over industry in the occupied territories under the “guardianship” of German companies.

The famous historian O. Romanko in his work (2005; 2014) noted two important reasons for the formation of foreign volunteer groups: political and military goals.

Military reasons were determined by the need for manpower for the military machine. Political reasons were related to propaganda. To show the world the weakness of the ideology of communism (Romanko, 2005, p. 12).

The work notes that in the fall of 1941, the process of forming legions from representatives of the eastern peoples, and prisoners of war of the Red Army, which included representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus, began. O. Romanko called them not Caucasian legions, but eastern legions.

The Lebensraum policy occupied an important place in the foreign policy of Hitler's Germany. The term appeared in the 19th century. The policy was based on the idea of “living space” and was the basis of expansion. These ideas were put forward during the First World War. Hitler's Germany pursued the goal of actively applying this policy towards the USSR. The conquest of the Near and Middle East and the Balkan region formed the basis of the German expansionist policy. German politicians in Hitler's Germany prepared a plan that provided for the administration of the occupied territories. At the initial stage of the war, Hitler did not have the idea of creating military formations from among the Soviet emigration. However, defeat in World War II changed the situation.

In the early stages of the war, Adolf Hitler had a negative attitude towards the creation of armed forces from Soviet citizens. “It should never be allowed for anyone other than Germans to carry weapons! - Hitler said in the first months of the Eastern campaign. – This is especially important. Even if shortly, it would seem easier for us to attract any foreign, conquered peoples to armed assistance, this would be wrong. This one day would certainly and inevitably turn against us. Only a German has the right to bear arms, and not a Slav, not a Czech, not a Cossack, and not a Ukrainian” (Semenova, 2013, p. 121). Subsequently, G. Goebbels, E. Wagner, and E. von Weizsäcker began to put forward ideas about the formation of volunteer detachments from among Soviet prisoners of war.

In 1941, Hitler issued a decree “on civil administration in the occupied eastern regions”. Based on this decree, the Imperial Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories was also established. Alfred Rosenberg became Reich

Minister, and Nazi German statesman Alfred Mayer was appointed his deputy.

In the occupied eastern territories, Reichskommissariats were to be formed, the administration of which was to be carried out from Berlin. Among them, a separate Reichskommissariat called "Caucasus" was identified. Hitler's Germany managed to form only two Reichskommissariats: Ostland (Baltic lands) and Ukraine.

At the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, the German command decided to launch an offensive in the Caucasus. To create an effective method of managing these areas, it was decided to create military formations from among the Caucasian and Turkic peoples. Subsequently, based on these formations, the creation of a "national army of independent states" was envisaged. First, national committees were created in Germany: Azerbaijani, Georgian, North Caucasian, etc., which were to be transferred to the occupied territories of the Caucasus. O. Romanko's work also notes that Muslim legions had a higher status than other formations.

In archival materials from 1942 from the office of A. Rosenberg (German policy in the occupied regions of the Caucasus), the interests of Hitler's Germany about the peoples of the Caucasus are clearly expressed. It is noted: "None of the Caucasian peoples has the strength to ensure their independent existence for a long time." Based on this, we can conclude that the Germans, creating military units from among the Caucasian peoples and establishing cooperative relations with representatives of the Caucasian emigration, did not want to give the peoples of the Caucasus the right to independent existence. The Germans perfectly understood the complexity of the region and for its further subjugation, they provided for the free carrying of weapons (saber and dagger), freedom of religion, or a tolerant attitude towards the religion of the Caucasus. A. Rosenberg noted that Azerbaijanis have natural cultural inclinations towards the Turks. The Germans were ready to support the cultural community but did not accept pan-Turkism and political trends (Materials from the office of A. Rosenberg; Romanko, 2005).

First, the Turkestan Legion was formed at the Legionovo station in Poland. Then the Caucasian-Mohammedan Legion was formed from among Azerbaijanis, Dagestanis, Ingush, and Chechens. The Georgian Legion consisted of Georgians, Abkhazians, Circassians (Adyghe), Circassians, Kabardians, Balkars, etc. The Armenian legion had a homogeneous national composition (Romanko, 2005, p. 13).

Since 1941, the number of foreign volunteers has increased. Hitler's Germany, adhering to a policy of racial discrimination, began to staff military formations from among different nations for its military-political purposes. The Third Reich did not care who wanted to fight under its banner to achieve great military victories. The term *nichtdeutsche* attracts attention. Which means

non-German peoples who were to be brought into the military ranks of Germany.

Carlos Jurado notes in his work that the eastern legions were the first to become Wehrmacht volunteers. On December 30, the OKW gave the order for the formation of various military units. In the first half of 1942, 4 and then 6 legions were formed (Jurado, 1983).

In 1942, the Azerbaijan Legion was formed, in which Khalil Khasmammedov, Fuad Amirjan and others took part. The first battalions were formed in Poland at the Jedlino station. The number of the legion was 40 thousand people (Romanko, 2005, p. 56).

One of the legions formed during the Second World War on the side of the Third Reich was Georgian. The famous Georgian historian Georgiy Mamulia in his work highlighted the features of the formation of the Georgian Legion. Georgian-German cooperation was founded during the First World War. During World War II, Georgia's geostrategic position also attracted the attention of Germany. The order to create the legions was given on February 8, 1942. Georgian emigration played an important role in the formation of the Georgian Legion, on the initiative of Shalva Maglakelidze. The first German commander of this legion was Wilhelm Hussel (Mamulia, 2011, p. 24). Along with ethnic Georgians, the legion also included Circassians, Ossetians, and other nationalities. The headquarters was located in Wesola. To raise the patriotic spirit, the battalions "Shalva Maglakelidze", "Shota Rustaveli", "Queen of Tamara", "Tsar Irakli II", and "Ilya Chavchavadze" were created. In 1942, the newspaper "Sakartvelo" was published in Georgian, the editor of which was Gairoz Maglakelidze (Mamulia, 2011, p. 24).

Among the formed legions there was also an Armenian legion. Back in the 1930s, part of the "Dashnaktsyutun" party began collaborating with the Third Reich. The Armenian National Committee was created. The Armenian legion consisted of 8 battalions and had a homogeneous national composition (Romanko, 2014, p. 34).

From representatives of the peoples of the North Caucasus, the North Caucasus Legion was formed, the number of which was 25-30 thousand people. The North Caucasian Legion formed 8 battalions. A military unit "Bergmann" was also created, from among the peoples of the South and North Caucasus. A. Rosenberg noted: "The further fate of the legions depends on how they justify themselves" (Materials from the office of A. Rosenberg).

Conclusions.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Hitler's Germany, to implement its tricky plans, formed legions of representatives of the peoples of the Caucasus, for military-political purposes. On the eve of the formation of the legions, the idea of establishing cooperative relations with representatives of the Caucasian emigration was also put forward. Ideas about the independence of the Caucasian region put forward by political emigrants did

not lead to certain results, since the Caucasus as a region was supposed to be part of the Third Reich and serve as a springboard for further aggressive policies. The Soviet legions, formed from among representatives of Soviet citizens, continued their activities in harsh historical and

political conditions. The problem of prisoners of war and military collaboration is also relevant in modern historical and political conditions. This problem should be studied objectively, without ideologies. The war turned out to be a severe test for prisoners of war.

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