

Abstract

"The Use of Guerrilla Forces for the Intelligence Purposes of the Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941-1945"

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This research is an attempt to remove the veil of secrecy still surrounding the intelligence activities of the Soviet Partisan Movement from 1941 to 1945. The Movement's intelligence apparatus was formed from July 1941 onwards, and became an integral part of the Soviet Union's intelligence and security community, where it supplied the Soviet leadership – both political and military – with information regarding events not only in the occupied territories of the USSR, but also in some provinces of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. The apparatus was extensive, as it consisted of the intelligence department in the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement (CHQPM) in Moscow, as well as dozens of intelligence sections in the movement headquarters operating in the occupied Soviet republics and the various sectors of the Eastern Front, numbering thousands of officers, agents and collaborators.

Although Soviet historical research has acknowledged the fact that the Partisan Movement was used by Soviet military leadership as a tool to obtain intelligence regarding the enemy, due to secrecy it has avoided addressing this issue, with the exception of a handful of severely censored publications. After the Soviet regime's collapse, from the early Nineties onwards, Russian scholars intensified their research of the intelligence gathering activities of the Partisan Movement. However, even that period yielded not a single monograph devoted solely to Soviet Partisan intelligence,

whereas the general Russian language publications on the Partisan Movement are characteristically uncritical of the partisans' achievements in the field of intelligence gathering.

Western historiography of the Soviet Partisan Movement, on the other hand, focuses to this day on the partisans' combat and sabotage activities, while almost completely ignoring the existence of partisan intelligence and its contribution to the comprehensive Soviet war effort. Only a few western scholars provide a more detailed and aware account of the activity of the intelligence apparatus within the Soviet Partisan Movement, but even they attribute much more significance to the partisans' combat activities, and tend to undervalue their intelligence activities. In scope, references to partisan intelligence usually range from one paragraph to an entire chapter, yet scholarly discussion of this issue has never ripened into an intensive, exhaustive monograph.

Thus, the current study is the first of its kind in both Russian and western historiography, focusing, as it does, on the intelligence apparatus of the Soviet Partisan Movement – its emergence as an organization and its deployment in the German occupied territories, its interactions with the Partisan Movement subsidiary organs, such as recruiting or logistics mechanisms, its patterns of operation regarding the gathering, processing and dissemination of information, and finally, its actual contribution to the various end-users in the political echelons of the Soviet Union, its intelligence and security community and the Red Army. The geographic scope covered by this research includes the German occupied territories of the Soviet Union, cities in the Soviet hinterland where various partisan apparatuses operated, as well as those provinces in Eastern European countries into which Soviet partisans infiltrated in 1943-1945.

The sources used for this research are mainly documents produced by the various apparatuses of the Soviet Partisan Movement. These had been preserved in the Movement's collections, now housed in the archives of the former Communist Party in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and up to now, for the most part, inaccessible to researchers. Additional significant sources are documents originating in the Yad Vashem institute in Jerusalem, and the German Military Archive in Freiburg. Among the latter, the most important are German military intelligence (Abwehr) documents, including reports on the situation in the occupied Soviet Union territories, the state and activities – including intelligence gathering activities - of the Soviet Partisan Movement, as well as information on the German warfare against the partisans and their intelligence organization. Auxiliary references for this primary information were collections of documents from the archives of the former KGB, published by the security and intelligence services in Russia and Ukraine, memoirs of veterans of the Soviet Partisan Movement and the Soviet Union's intelligence organizations, studies and books on the activities of the Partisan Movement's intelligence apparatus, as well as scholarly researches, books and publications which supplied the historical, geographic and demographic background on the subject at hand. Cross referencing the above-mentioned sources has significantly helped mitigate the problematic accessibility of sources in Russia, which to this day is still hindering the study of the history of the Soviet Partisan Movement, and to fill in most of the lacunae in the collections of partisan documents, mostly stemming from loss of documents, faulty report procedures, deliberate falsification and forgetfulness.

This study clearly indicates that the geographic scope of activities, as well as the 'capability space' of the partisan intelligence were delimited by numerous

circumstances and factors, which shaped its form and modes of action, and ultimately determined its operational achievements. First and foremost among these factors is the topography of the German occupied zones in the mid-western part of the Soviet Union and north-eastern Slovakia, which was kind to the partisans and enabled them to establish themselves and survive over time. Another positive influence was the huge efforts invested by the CHQPM in developing both the organizational and professional aspects of its intelligence arm. This effort included the establishment of the intelligence command at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of the Partisan Movement's chain of command; wide deployment of field officers in different occupied areas; the adoption of the principles and operating procedures of the Soviet intelligence and security community and the consistent effort to instill them in the field operatives; and the recruitment of army and intelligence officers to assist in the partisan intelligence training efforts and the actual intelligence gathering activities in enemy territories. Without the achievements attained in each of these fields, the intelligence activities of the Soviet Partisan Movement would have been no more than a random collection of operations lacking any purpose or real value.

On the other hand, the organizational formation and professional development of the Soviet partisan intelligence were also negatively affected by a range of problematic circumstances and factors, which curtailed its ability to fulfill its mission. Foremost among those were the topographic and climatic features of many of the partisan operational theaters, far less convenient for guerilla warfare than the Soviet mid-west or Slovakia; the attitude of the occupied territories' population towards the Soviet partisans and their struggle – which usually ranged from the hostile to the merely indifferent - and that population's willingness to assist the occupiers, including in their anti-partisan warfare; the inferior quality of the communication, transport and

intelligence gathering technologies available to the Soviet army and intelligence, and passed down to the Soviet Partisan Movement; and finally, the general weakness of the Soviet intelligence and security community, which could only provide the partisan with limited operational and material assistance, not always commensurate with the required professional or technological level. The effectiveness of the German intelligence and security services appears to have been another factor that made the deployment of the partisan intelligence infrastructure and its operation very difficult.

Along these factors and circumstances outside the Partisan Movement, one can detect a range of internal factors, arising from within the movement itself, that affected the functioning of the Soviet guerilla infrastructure in the intelligence field. Of these, the most prominent was the management system employed by the infrastructure from its inception and up to its disbanding at the end of the German occupation. It was a disorganized system of overlapping authorities, bestowed simultaneously on several factors in the Soviet Communist Party, Red Army and intelligence and security community. The separate chains of command, besides cooperating, also competed with each other – sometimes violently – often creating within the system a situation bordering on chaos. This made it extremely difficult for the partisans to achieve their military objectives – of combat, sabotage and naturally, intelligence gathering. The difficulty in achieving these goals can also be attributed to the fact that the apparatuses of the Soviet Partisan Movement, intended to aid operations in the German hinterland – recruitment, training, communications and logistics – were themselves negatively affected by various circumstances and factors, both internal and external, and therefore unable to fully achieve their mission. Most severely affected, apparently, was the partisan communications apparatus, which remained

undeveloped up to the very end of the Soviet Partisans' mission in Eastern Europe, in early May 1945.

Thus, under the combined influences of the aforementioned circumstances and factors, there emerged in the first year of the German occupation what may be termed a proto-nucleus of the future partisan infrastructure, which established itself in Russian territory, near the then close to Moscow front line. From the second half of 1942 until approximately mid 1943, the permanent geographic nucleus of the partisan intelligence, which settled between Leningrad and Pskov provinces in north-western Russia and the left bank of the Dnieper river in the Ukraine, consolidated itself and grew. The partisan intelligence infrastructure was at its densest within Belarus, in the eastern and north-western parts of the republic. In the strip of frontier land left outside these boundaries – i.e. in Karelia, in the Baltic region, in South-western Belarus, western Ukraine, Moldavia and southern Russia – its presence was much more sparse, and on the Baltic coast sector and along the border with Finland, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Rumania it was practically non-existent. As of the second half of 1943, when the Red Army crossed to the right bank of the Dnieper and liberated the areas in north-western Russia, the geographic nucleus of the partisan intelligence transformed itself, withdrew into Belarus and by late 1944 ceased to exist. Yet before its final disappearance it managed to reach out towards Poland and Slovakia, in an attempt to form there a new geographic nucleus. This project, however, soon failed, subsequent to the general failure Soviet partisan activity in Eastern Europe.

Similarly, partisan intelligence's 'capability space' formed gradually, under the influence of the aforementioned factors and circumstances. Initially, the embryonic partisan military intelligence enjoyed a limited collection ability, in which it made a limited and extremely cautious use of basic field intelligence – foot patrols,

observation and questioning of local population. It was only from the latter half of 1942 – that is, concurrent with the evolvment of its permanent nucleus – onwards that partisan intelligence began including human intelligence within its capabilities. 1943 marked the transition of both arms of the partisan collection infrastructure – field intelligence and human intelligence – into the accelerated development stage. Field intelligence units were formed in nearly every partisan force, networks of agents and collaborators covered the occupied territories, recruiting into their ranks growing numbers of new members. However, in general the professional level of the infrastructure remained relatively poor. At field level, the chain of command consisted mainly of young intelligence officers, either graduates of the Partisan Movement training institutions or "imports" from the Soviet intelligence and security community. Lacking both professional know-how and operational experience, they were forced to opt for maximum cautiousness and prefer simple operations to complex, high-risk operational moves. At the same time, a severe shortage of vital means of collection, as well as the wide scale deployment and high efficiency of the German security service, limited the partisans intelligence activities mainly to the rural areas in the vicinity of their bases. It was here, at distances no larger than 20 miles from their bases, that their field intelligence units operated, and their agents and collaborators were recruited. Consequently, the majority of these agents and collaborators were illiterate farmers and laborers, or at best, low level employees of the occupation administration' local offices.

In conclusion, the intelligence apparatus operated by the Soviet Partisan Movement between 1941 and 1945 appears to have been a rather weak organization in the professional sense, managing to fulfill its missions only partially. Its activity as an auxiliary to the Red Army – its chief consumer – yielded no strategically significant

successes, whereas at the operational level of the war its successes were limited to two fields alone – mapping the enemy's stationary military infrastructures and providing meteorological forecasts; and to one geographic arena – the western parts of the Soviet Union within its September 1939 boundaries. All in all, it seems that as far as military collection is concerned, the partisan intelligence's most serious shortcoming – stemming from lack of access to decision making centers in the German army and the weakness of the intelligence research – was its inability to supply its consumers with information and assessments regarding the enemy's intentions, plans and potential future actions. Consequently, the Red Army often found itself, in the midst of intense fighting at the front, surprised by the enemy and incurring heavy losses. It should be stressed that these fatal encounters occurred not only in the first stages of the occupation, but also towards its end, in places such as the Russian-Estonian border or Minsk district, both considered a hub of partisan intelligence activity.

Partisan intelligence's contribution to the political leadership of the Soviet Union and its intelligence and security community appears to have been greater and more effective, especially in collecting information on living and socio-economic conditions in the occupied territories, as well as the structure of the occupation administration and its day to day operation. Nevertheless, the political and intelligence consumers too were negatively affected, in some measure or another, by the shortcomings in the partisan intelligence activity, and primarily by their lack of access to the German decision making centers.