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## **“March of the Vanquished”: Preparation, Organization and Symbolic Significance of Escorting German Prisoners of War through Moscow on July 17, 1944**

**ALEKSANDR L. KUZMINYKH**

Vologda Institute of Law and Economics of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Vologda, Russia, istorial@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6133-0300>

### **Abstract**

*Introduction:* based on the analysis of published and unpublished archival documents, as well as the Soviet periodical press, the author considers organizational, military-political and symbolic aspects of the mass convoy of prisoners of war of the German army in Moscow on July 17, 1944. *Purpose:* to study a set of interdepartmental measures to concentrate prisoners of war in Moscow, organize movement of columns, maintain public order in the city, and ensure media coverage of the “march of the vanquished”. *Methods:* theoretical methods of formal and dialectical logic, empirical methods of description and interpretation, textual and formal legal methods. *Results:* we have reconstructed a complete picture of the preparation, conduct and information support of the mass convoy of German prisoners of war in Moscow. *Conclusion:* the author concludes that the “march of the vanquished” was of great political and ideological importance, demonstrating the military and moral superiority of the Soviet army over Hitler’s troops and the idea of just retribution. The propaganda operation, unprecedented in its scale, the course of which was personally supervised by J.V. Stalin, instilled faith in the hearts of the Soviet people in the approaching Victory of the Soviet Union over Nazism.

**Key words:** Great Patriotic War; German prisoners of war; escorting; internal affairs agencies; military propaganda.

5.1.1. Theoretical and historical legal sciences.

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### *Introduction*

In the history of the Great Patriotic War, there are several exceptionally vivid symbolic events that had a significant impact on its perception by contemporaries. One of these events was the "March of the vanquished" – the mass convoy of German prisoners of war through Moscow on July 17, 1944. The history of this unprecedented propaganda event has been covered both in documentary publications [1; 2; 5] and scientific articles [3]. In this article, the author describes the preparation, course and results of the convoy of German prisoners of war through Moscow, as well as the perception of this event by contemporaries and its symbolic significance.

In the summer of 1944, Soviet troops conducted one of the largest and most successful offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War period, Operation Bagration. As a result of the defeat of the German army group Center, Belarus, most of Lithuania and a significant part of Poland were liberated. According to the Soviet Information Bureau, units of the 1st Baltic, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Belorussian fronts captured 158,480 German soldiers and officers, including 22 generals, from June 23 to July 23, 1944 [4]. In general, according to the Directorate for Prisoners of War and Internees of the NKVD of the USSR, in 1944, it received 7 times more prisoners of war than in the previous two years of the war (Russian State Military Archive. Archive 1p. List 23a. Case 1. Page 23).

In order to demonstrate the military successes achieved, the Soviet government decided to conduct a unique propaganda campaign – the march of captured Germans through the streets of Moscow. The NKVD of the USSR developed a detailed plan for transporting prisoners of war, which included material and sanitary provision, organization of the movement of columns, and maintenance of order during movement.

### *Research*

The event was prepared in close cooperation with the military command and state security agencies. The Deputy Head of the Central Directorate of Military Communications, Major General of the Technical Troops V.I. Dmitriev and the Head of the Transportation Department of the USSR People's Commissariat of State Security, the Commissioner of State Security D.V. Arkad'ev were appointed responsible for

the transportation of prisoners of war; the Chief of Staff of the Rear of the Red Army, Lieutenant General M.P. Milovskii and the Deputy Head of the NKVD Military Supply Department, Major General of the Quartermaster Service Ya.F. Gornostaev – for food provision, the Head of the Sanitary Department of the NKVD Department of Prisoners of War and Internees, Colonel M.K. Yezhov – for provision of medical and sanitary services to prisoners of war; the Commander of the Moscow Division of the NKVD Convoy Troops Colonel I.I. Shevlyakov – for military protection and organization of convoy service while transporting prisoners by rail, the Commander of the Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Motorized Rifle Division of the NKVD, Lieutenant Colonel Vasil'ev – for guarding and escorting around the city, and the Chief of the Moscow Police, Police Commissar of the 2nd Rank V.N. Romanchenko – for ensuring public order on the city streets [5, p. 135].

The scale of preparatory activities is eloquently evidenced by the figures. It was planned to deliver 60,000 disarmed German soldiers to Moscow, including: 26,000 people from the 1st Belorussian Front, 5,000 people from the 2nd Belorussian Front and 29,000 people from the 3rd Belorussian Front. There is evidence in publications that before sending prisoners of war to Moscow, healthy and able-bodied Nazi soldiers and officers were selected [6].

In the period from July 11 to July 16, 1944, 26 railway trains were supposed to transport 20 generals, 1,200 officers and 58,780 privates. Getting prisoners of war off the train in Moscow was scheduled to begin at 8 p.m. on July 15 and end at 9 p.m. on July 16, 1944. Then they had to be concentrated in three points: 33 thousand people on the Moscow Hippodrome square, 19 thousand people on the territory of the cavalry regiment of the 1st Motorized Rifle Division of the NKVD troops, 8 thousand at the Moscow-Tovarnaya station of the Western Railway. After the convoy was completed, it was planned to send prisoners of war in 26 echelons to NKVD camps from Savelovsky, Rzhevsky, Oktyabrsky, Yaroslavsky, Kazansky, Kursky, Paveletsky, Kievsky, Belorussky railway stations, as well as Boynya and Kanatchikova stations [5, p. 136].

Before the march, the prisoners were planned to be divided into 26 echelon columns, each of which, in turn, was divided into three

battalion columns – the first two for 800 people and the third for 900 people. The movement of the columns was ordered to be carried out in rows of 20 people along the front and 40 people in depth. An interval of 25 m was established between battalion columns and 50 m between echelon columns.

The route of the columns was agreed as follows: the Moscow Hippodrome, the Leningradskoe Highway, the Gorky Street, the Mayakovsky Square and further along the Sadovoe Ring through Samotechnaya and Kolkhoznaya squares, the Krasnye Vorota, the Kursky Railway Station Square, Taganskaya, Dobryninskaya, Krymskaya, Smolenskaya, Kudrinskaya, and Mayakovskaya squares, the Gorky Street, the Leningradskoe Highway, and the Moscow Hippodrome. Thus, the circular movement of the columns was envisaged. The lead column was supposed to move from the hippodrome, followed by a column from the territory of the cavalry regiment, followed by a column from the Moscow-Tovarnaya ramp of the Western Railway. Generals and officers were to follow in a special group (following the third column) under the letter “3-A”. The movement of columns was planned to be a free step, and not in the “attention” position. The prisoners of war had to follow in the form (uniforms, shoes, insignia) in which they arrived from the places of captivity.

Guarding echelons of prisoners on the way was assigned to convoys organized at places of getting the contingent to the train, to the 36th division of the NKVD escort troops when prisoners were transported from places of getting off the train to concentration points, and to the cavalry regiment of the 1st Motorized Rifle Division of the NKVD troops when they marched through the city. Each guard was armed with a rifle and a saber. During the movement of columns through the city, maintaining order was the responsibility of the Moscow police, with a cavalry squadron, a separate motorcycle battalion, ordinary and operational personnel being involved. According to a specially developed plan, reinforced police units were required to be deployed at points of large concentrations of people. Control over the movement of trams and vehicles during the passage of convoys was entrusted to employees of the department for traffic regulation [5, p. 137].

Food supplies (dry provisions) for prisoners of war on their way to Moscow were to be provided at the expense of the resources of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Belorussian fronts, before and after the convoy – funds of the NKVD Military Supply Directorate. To supply prisoners of war with water, 20 tanker trucks were located at the concentration points. From July 12 to July 15, prisoners of war were to receive hot meals once a day, on July 16 – twice a day, and on July 17 a hot breakfast was provided.

Medical and sanitary services for prisoners of war during transportation were provided by a doctor and a paramedic per train. Patients to be hospitalized were evacuated to the sanitary train No. 668, located on the military platform of the Belorussky Railway Station. Medical posts were set up at the concentration points of prisoners of war (the hippodrome, the cavalry regiment and the ramp of the freight station). During the movement of prisoners of war through the city, medical care was provided at mobile first-aid posts, which had vehicles for evacuating patients to sanitary trains at Kazansky, Paveletsky, Kievsky and Belorussky Railway stations. Patients who did not require hospitalization were offered to be evacuated in echelons in a general manner, and in case of mass concentration, they were sent to special hospitals. In case of death, prisoners of war were buried by forces of the Krasnogorsk NKVD camp No. 27 [5, p. 138].

On July 13, 1944, the Head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs L.P. Beria sent a report to the USSR State Defense Committee and J.V. Stalin about the upcoming convoy of prisoners of war through Moscow. Unlike the plan previously developed by the NKVD, it was proposed to escort prisoners of war not on July 17, but on July 15, that is, two days earlier. The number of escorted prisoners of war decreased from 60 to 55 thousand people, and the number of troop trains – from 26 to 24. The concentration of prisoners of war was established not in three, but in two points: at the Moscow hippodrome and the parade ground of the 1st Motorized Rifle Division of the NKVD. Both points, located in the area of the Khoroshevsky and Leningradskoye highway forks, were planned to be isolated and guarded by convoy troops.

The route of prisoners of war underwent changes as well. They were supposed to be

escorted from the Moscow Hippodrome along the Leningradskoye Highway, the Gorky Street, the Mayakovsky Square and further along the Garden Ring along Sadovo-Triumfalnaya, Sadovo-Karetnaya, Sadovo-Samotechnaya, Sadovo-Sukharevskaya, Sadovo-Spasskaya, Sadovo-Chernogryazskaya, Chkalovskaya, Zatsepnny Val, Zhitnaya, Krymsky Val streets, Zubovsky and Smolensky boulevards, the Tchaikovsky Street, through the Kudrinskaya Square along Barrikadnaya and Krasnopresnenskaya streets, through the Krasnopresnenskaya Square, along the Vagankovskaya Street to the hippodrome.

It was also indicated that the columns would include 20 people in a line, 800 people in a battalion column, with the exception of two sections of the route – from the Kursky Railway Station to the Krymskaya Square and from the Kudrinskaya Square to the Khoroshevsky Highway, where these rows were supposed to be reduced to a line of 10 people along the front due to the width of the street in these places. The movement was scheduled to begin at nine o'clock in the morning and be completed by four o'clock in the evening. The report also included a diagram of Moscow indicating the route of the convoy of prisoners of war [5, pp. 138–139].

However, the proposed date of the event had to be postponed due to difficulties with the reception and transfer of prisoners of war, as evidenced by L.P. Beria's report No. 758/b of July 16, 1944 addressed to J.V. Stalin. It detailed shortcomings in the work organization at the assembly points of prisoners of war and the prisoners of war affairs department at the 2nd Belorussian Front. To eliminate them, the Deputy Head of the Prisoners of War Department of the NKVD of the USSR N.T. Ratushnyi, the Head of the NKVD Convoy Troops V.M. Bochkov, and a group of operatives and interpreters were sent there [5, p. 140]. In order to improve the reception of prisoners of war from military units and formations and their evacuation inland, in July–August 1944, the front-line department of the UPVI of the NKVD of the USSR was formed, the system of front-line institutions of military captivity was reorganized, new reception and assembly points were deployed, front-line reception and transfer camps (Russian State Military Archive. Archive 1p. List 9a. Case 8. Pages 165–167; List 23a. Case 1. Pages 15–19).

On July 15, L.P. Beria submitted another statement to J.V. Stalin. It indicated that the convoy of prisoners of war through Moscow would begin at 11 a.m. on July 17. The route of the prisoners of war through the city was once again adjusted. It was planned to march 18 echelon columns from the hippodrome along the Leningradskoye Highway, the Gorky Street through the Mayakovsky Square, along Sadovaya-Karetnaya, Sadovaya-Samotechnaya, Sadovo-Sukharevskaya, Sadovo-Chernogryazskaya streets to the Kursky Railway Station Square. The remaining 8 echelon columns were to move from the Mayakovsky Square along Bolshaya Sadovaya and Sadovo-Kudrinskaya streets through Krymskaya and Kaluzhskaya squares and further along the Bolshaya Kaluzhskaya Street [2, p. 39].

The command of columns was entrusted to the Commander of the Moscow Military District, Colonel-General A.A. Artem'ev. It is interesting to note that the latter commanded the parade on the Red Square on November 7, 1941, and in May–June 1945 he was entrusted with the organization and general management of the Victory Day Parade [7]. The Commandant of Moscow, Major General K.R. Sinilov, and the Chief of the Moscow police, 2nd rank Police Commissioner V.N. Romanchenko were appointed responsible for maintaining order on the streets and the movement of vehicles and pedestrians. The operation was prepared in strict secrecy. The notification of the Moscow Police Chief about the convoy of prisoners of war was planned to be printed in the newspaper Pravda and transmitted over the Moscow closed radio network at 7–8 a.m. on July 17 [2, p. 39; 5, p. 139].

The newspaper Pravda of July 17, 1944 published a notice by the Moscow Police Chief, 2nd Rank Police Commissioner V.N. Romanchenko, "The Moscow Police Department informs citizens that on July 17, part of the German prisoners of war, ordinary and officers, will be escorted through Moscow in the number of 57,600 people from among those recently captured by the Red Army troops of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Belorussian fronts. In this regard, on July 17, from 11 a.m., the movement of vehicles and pedestrians along the routes of the columns of prisoners of war will be limited. Citizens are obliged to observe the order established by the police



and not allow any antics towards prisoners of war" [8].

On the evening of July 17, 1944, L.P. Beria sent a report No. 763/b addressed to J.V. Stalin (State Defense Committee), V.M. Molotov (People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR) and G.M. Malenkov (Central Committee of the CPSU(b)) on the results of the convoy of German prisoners of war through Moscow. It reported that the movement of columns of prisoners of war from the Moscow Hippodrome had begun at exactly 11 a.m. on July 17 along the route: the Leningradskoe Highway, the Gorky Street, the Mayakovsky Square, Sadovo-Karetnaya, Sadovo-Samotechnaya, Sadovo-Chernogryazskaya, Chkalova streets, the Kursky Railway Station and along Kalyaevskaya, Novoslobodskaya and 1st Meshchanskaya streets. 42,000 prisoners of war went along this route, including a convoy of 1,227 generals and officers, of them 19 generals and 6 senior officers (colonels and lieutenant colonels). The movement of the columns on this route lasted 2 hours and 25 minutes [2, p. 45].

The second part of the columns of prisoners of war marched from the Mayakovsky Square along Bolshaya Sadovaya and Sadovo-Kudrinskaya streets Novinsky and Smolensky boulevards, Zubovskaya and Krymskaya squares, the Bolshaya Kaluzhskaya Street, and the Kanatchikova Station of the District Railway. It took 4 hours and 20 minutes for 15,600 prisoners of war to pass along this route.

Afterwards prisoners of war were sent to camps by train. At 7 p.m., all 25 echelon convoys were in the train and sent to their destinations. Of the total number of 57,600 prisoners of war escorted through the city, only four prisoners needed medical attention and were sent to the sanitary train "due to weakness". Upon arrival at the Kursky railway station, generals were loaded onto trucks and delivered "to their destination" [2, p. 45].

During the passage of the columns of prisoners of war, the population behaved in an organized manner. Citizens saluted the Red Army, the Supreme High Command, generals and officers of the Red Army. There were also anti-fascist shouts, such as "Death to Hitler!", "Death to fascism!", "Bastards, so that they die", "Why didn't you get killed at the front?". No incidents were recorded in the city during the event. After

the passage of prisoners of war, the city streets were cleaned with irrigation machines [5, pp. 141–142].

Among the German generals who marched through streets of the capital were eminent military leaders of the Third Reich: the Acting Commander of the 4th Army Lieutenant General Vincenz Muller, the Commander of the 78th Assault Division Lieutenant General Hans von Traut; commanders of the 27th and 53rd Infantry Army Corps Generals Paul Vickers and Friedrich Hollwitzer, the Commander of the 260 Infantry Army Corp Gunther Klammt, the Commander of the 45th Infantry Division, Major General Joachim Engel, the Commander of the 383rd Infantry Division, the Commandant of Orel, Bryansk and Bobruisk, Lieutenant General Adolf Hamann, the Commandant of Mogilev Major General Gottfried von Erdmannsdorff and others. After the march, they were sent under heavy guard to Butyrskaya and Lefortovo prisons for interrogations and operational investigative measures. The fates of the mentioned German generals developed in different ways. Some (A. Hamann and G. Erdmannsdorff) were sentenced to death by hanging by a military tribunal for the atrocities committed on their orders, while others (G. Traut and F. Hollwitzer) were sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor. Someone died during the imprisonment (P. Völckers and J. Engel), some survived Soviet captivity and returned to post-war Germany (V. Muller, F. Hollwitzer, G. Traut) [6].

According to eyewitnesses, during the convoy, German generals, who had their uniforms, orders and insignia left behind under the terms of the surrender, behaved arrogantly. They tried not to look around, pretending that they were "not broken by captivity". As for Wehrmacht soldiers, their behavior was different: some frowned and glared at the sides, others walked in silence, lowering their eyes and looking at their feet, while others looked curiously at the capital and Muscovites [9].

On the following day, reports on this extraordinary event appeared on pages of central Soviet newspapers. So, the newspaper Pravda of July 19, 1944, published essays "The Germans in Moscow" by L. Leonov, "They Saw Moscow" by B. Polevoi and a poem "There is No Court More Terrible" by D. Bednyi. Later, a documen-

tary short film "The Convoy of German Prisoners of War through Moscow" (1944, directed by I.V. Venzher) was shown on the screens of Soviet cinemas. According to the instructions of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b), before publication, all materials had been sent for review and approval to the head of the Main Political Directorate of the Red Army, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) A.S. Shcherbakov [3].

"The Nazis, who had dreamed of conquering the whole world, marched through the squares of Moscow, but not as winners, but as the vanquished", was the main idea that the Soviet propaganda organs sought to convey to readers and viewers. "The would-be masters of the planet, they trudged past us – lanky and gobby, with their hair curled up like the devils in the chronicles, in tunics open, belly out, but not yet on all fours, in panties and barefoot, and others in sturdy, brass-studded boots, which were good enough to reach India if it weren't for Russia...", Leonid Leonov wrote with irony and sarcasm. The attentive eyes of the writer did not escape the reaction of Muscovites, who silently watched the march of the disarmed enemy with a feeling of contempt, "My people does not cross the boundaries of reason and does not lose their hearts in their passion. In Russian literature, there are no words of abuse or cliff-hanging against an enemy soldier captured in battle. We know what a prisoner of war is. We do not burn prisoners, we do not mutilate them, we are not Germans! Not a well-deserved spit or stone flew towards the enemies being transported from station to station, although widows, orphans and mothers of those tortured by them stood on the sidewalks for the entire length of the procession. But even Russian nobility cannot protect these criminals from the venomous word of contempt: whoever kills a child loses the high rank of a soldier..." [10]. The authors of the scientific work "The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union. 1941–1945. Brief history" describe a similar reaction of Muscovites [11, pp. 356–357].

By analogy with Moscow, similar marches of the vanquished were held in capitals of some Soviet republics liberated from the enemy. So, on August 16, 1944, 36,000 former enemy sol-

diers, including 549 officers, were escorted through streets and squares of Kiev. The Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR S.N. Kruglov and the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR V.S. Ryasnoi were appointed responsible for the operation. "The March of Shame" lasted over five hours, and the total length of the route running through the central districts of the city was more than twenty kilometers. The movement of columns of the defeated enemy was observed by over 150,000 Kievans. Prisoners of war were guarded by soldiers of the NKVD escort troops and police officers patrolled the streets [12].

After the event, prisoners were sent to rebuild destroyed cities, factories and mines, as well as other facilities of the national economy. In general, on December 5, 1944, over 435 thousand prisoners of war were allocated to the Union and Republican People's Commissariats for labor use (Russian State Military Archive. Archive 1p. List 9a. Case 8. Pages 148–149).

### *Conclusions*

Thus, the convoy of German prisoners of war through the streets of Moscow on July 17, 1944 was an important socio-political event that marked the collapse of the Nazi army on the Soviet-German front. This event, carried out under the personal control of J.V. Stalin, had not only domestic political, but also foreign policy significance, as it clearly demonstrated the increased military power of the Soviet Union.

The "March of the vanquished" was a major blow to the image of the German armed forces. If the capture of F. Paulus 's army at Stalingrad was brought to a mass audience through posters, photographic and cinematographic products, here Muscovites became living witnesses of the convoy of a huge mass of enemy soldiers and officers, which had a strong psychological impact.

The public escort of the disarmed enemy represented a symbolic debunking of the image of superman and supernationalism, which were cultivated by Nazi propaganda. In the minds of the Soviet people, this was an act of just retribution against Nazi Germany, which sought to enslave the peoples of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the USSR was opposed to the Third Reich in the practice of treating prisoners of

war. The latter retained the right to life and were sent to restore the national economy destroyed by the war.

The first experience of mass escorting of prisoners of war, which required close coopera-

tion and coordination between various government departments and the military command, was later implemented during similar events in other cities of the Soviet Union liberated from the Nazi occupiers.

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**ALEKSANDR L. KUZMINYKH** – Doctor of Sciences (History), Associate Professor, professor at the Department of Philosophy and History of the Faculty of Engineering and Economics of the Vologda Institute of Law and Economics of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Vologda, Russia, istorial@mail.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6133-0300>

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