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On Crucial Tasks of the NKVD of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War

PETR N. KOBETS

National Research Institute of the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia, pkobets37@rambler.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6527-3788>

Abstract

Introduction: the NKVD of the USSR made a significant contribution to the victory in the Great Patriotic War. *Purpose:* to analyze key tasks of the NKVD of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War. Scientific cognition, comparative analysis, historical, and logical *methods* are used in the study. The *results* of the conducted research indicate that despite a lack of resources and qualified personnel of the NKVD of the USSR, a large number of tasks assigned to it by the country's leaders were solved. Sustainable performance of the NKVD of the USSR in wartime testifies to mobilization readiness and possibilities for effective execution of tasks. The author *concludes* that from the first months of hostilities, the NKVD of the USSR was ready to fight the enemy. This was evidenced not only by effective law enforcement practice, but also by a clear response to the solution of new functional tasks assigned to the NKVD of the USSR, which arose in the conditions of military life. This law enforcement experience needs to be further studied in order to be used in modern conditions, if necessary.

Key words: Great Patriotic War; law enforcement agencies; legislative bases; extermination battalions; evacuation; fighting crime; penitentiary practice; prisoner protection.

5.1.1. Theoretical and historical legal sciences.

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Introduction

The issues discussed in the article not only do not lose their scientific significance, but on the contrary, they only become more relevant every year. “We remember the lessons of the Second World War and will never accept the distortion of its events, attempts to justify the executioners and slander the true winners”, mentioned President of Russia Vladimir Putin at the celebration of the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War [1].

Such an important historical stage as the Great Patriotic War remains a landmark for every Russian. And after 80 years, it is perceived as a severe ordeal, as a result of which the country lost about 20 million citizens. The Great Victory was forged every day, not only at the front, but also in the rear. Considerable merit in bringing victory closer belongs to the workers of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the USSR, whose role, due to a number of circumstances, was not fully covered in

open scientific sources. Modern Russian historiography is represented by a number of serious scientific studies of activities of the internal affairs bodies in 1941–1945. Countering various kinds of criminal acts by police officers, such as desertion, alarmism, looting, and bagging, are analyzed. The specifics of activities of the NKVD of the USSR in the territories occupied by the Nazis and in the areas liberated from the German invaders are studied. At the same time, Russian researchers, for the most part, cannot go beyond the established scientific strategies and generally accepted assessments. Therefore, we believe that modern researchers of this period should focus on generalizing positive experience, which may well be in demand in the event of various kinds of emergencies and special working conditions of modern law enforcement officers.

Discussion

For many years, causes of reforming the NKVD of the USSR during the war period have not been openly discussed. Most issues related to the activities of domestic law enforcement officers both during and after the war have been a taboo topic for scientific research for a number of ideological reasons. Today, Russian historiography on this issue has been supplemented by works of V.P. Baranov, B.P. Belozеров, A.S. Berkutov, S.A. Vorontsov, E.G. Ermakov, V.A. Gusak, A.E. Epifanov, A.A. Zubkov, V.M. Isakov, Yu.N. Kirichenko, D.N. Kraev, A.L. Kuz'minykh, A.Ya. Malygin, R.S. Mulukaev, N.S. Nizhnik, S.A. Nevskii, E.A. Pushkarev, N.N. Starikov, G.P. Sechkin, S.P. Shatilov, and others.

On July 11, 1934, the newspaper "Izvestia" published a resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR "On the formation of the All-Union People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR" [2], according to which the security agencies and the police were subordinate to the newly formed commissariat. The Commissariat became a central authority not only in the field of law enforcement, but also in solving various kinds of tasks to maintain the active functioning of public life support systems. With each passing year, it acquired broader and broader powers in various government spheres, including organization of construction and other national economic sectors. The NKVD of the USSR also fulfilled functions related to protection of the country's

forests and gold reserves, extraction of hydrocarbons and diamonds, construction of roads for railway and automobile transport, laying of new water channels, and ensuring the safety of senior officials and heads of government agencies. In addition, the agency had powers in the field of state security, foreign intelligence and counterintelligence. In short, in the early 1940s, the NKVD of the USSR became a commissariat, which performed a huge amount of administrative, political, social and economic functions.

Before the war, its structure included the Main Directorate of Militia (GUM USSR) and the Main Directorate of Correctional Labor Camps (GULAG). In February 1941, the NKVD of the USSR was divided into independent commissariats of the NKVD and the NKGB of the USSR [3], and in July they were again united into a single People's Commissariat, which already included 47 directorates, departments and groups. From June 22, 1941, the country's activities were regulated on the basis of urgently enacted legislation. One of these was Decree No. 8/160 of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of June 22, 1941 (as amended on July 7, 1943) "On martial law". As a result, the functions of state authorities in the field of defense, state security and law enforcement were transferred to the army and front-line military councils [4, p. 73].

After the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, the activities of the entire state system, including the NKVD, changed radically. This commissariat acquired the broadest powers in the field of state security. Its staff could pass sentences out of court. The main legislative act, the directive of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks of June 29, 1941 "On mobilizing all forces and means to repel the Nazi invaders" [5, p. 12], was adopted to optimize and reform activities of all state authorities during the wartime period. Besides, it was also required to carry out a number of measures in the NKVD of the USSR, in particular the militia, to improve their performance with regard to the increase in the country's defense capability.

It is for this reason that the NKVD of the USSR and the GUM of the USSR, from the first days of the war, put into effect departmental regulatory legal acts that were based on provisions

of the decrees of the Supreme Military Council, resolutions of the Council of People's Commissars and the State Defense Committee of the USSR, which established new standards, as well as defined the rules and procedures for the work of law enforcement units in various fields [6, p. 134]. For example, in order to strengthen measures aimed at protecting defense enterprises, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR adopted a resolution "On protecting enterprises and institutions and establishing fighter battalions" on June 24, 1941 [7, p. 36]. The order of the NKVD of the USSR of June 25, 1941 "On measures to combat paratroopers and enemy saboteurs in the front line" [8] stipulated the development of local regulations, signed, as a rule, by heads of regional NKVD departments, on the creation of special fighter battalions ensuring the security of various military enterprises and the rear infrastructure of active army units. This legal act defined the requirements for organizing the work of fighter battalions, the training and operational use of which was entrusted to the NKVD. At the end of June 1941, 1,775 such units were formed, which included 328 thousand people. To assist fighter battalions in rural areas, volunteer assistance groups were organized, led by operational staff [9, pp. 312, 358]. Effective functioning of these units contributed to thwarting fascists' numerous attempts to disorganize the Soviet rear.

The legislative acts adopted during the war period were the legal basis and formed the standards that the NKVD of the USSR adhered to, countering new types of criminal manifestations, in particular, such as desertion from the active army and defense enterprises. Since April 1942, the GUM of the USSR had directed its subordinate units on the need to step up counteraction to desertion. The State Defense Committee (GKO) also paid serious attention to this problem and issues a decree No. 2401 of October 11, 1942 "On measures to punish deserters engaged in banditry, armed robbery and counter-revolutionary insurgent work" (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. RGASPI. Archive. 644. List 1. Case 63. Page 146; List 2. Case 101. Pages 155-157). Most law enforcement officers encountered this phenomenon for the first time. However, having quickly mastered the tactics of disclosure and investigation of these criminal attacks, the

NKVD employees developed an optimal mechanism to combat desertion. The researchers note that "the NKVD detained over 1 million deserters, of whom 150,000 were shot. During the war years, 999,510 Soviet servicemen were convicted of desertion, half of whom were sent to penal battalions" [10, p. 196].

It is worth mentioning that from the first days of the war, the NKVD of the USSR modernized the entire criminal correction system to meet military needs. In accordance with the directive of the NKVD of the USSR and the Prosecutor of the Soviet Union No. 221 of June 22, 1941, all camps and colonies of the correctional labor system were transferred to martial law [11]. According to Russian experts, the number of people held in prisons, correctional labor camps and colonies at the beginning of the war was 2 million 300,000 people. In 1941–1944, another 2 million 550,000 people arrived in places of detention. On December 21, 1944, there were 1 million 450,000 people held in prison [12, p. 15]. During the war period, 950 thousand prisoners were sent from places of imprisonment by the NKVD of the USSR to the active army [13, p. 145].

The work of the system of "correctional labor institutions in wartime conditions also had to be completely reorganized, as well as the activities of all other structural divisions of the NKVD of the USSR" [14, p. 95]. In general, since the beginning of the war, attention had been focused throughout the penitentiary system on intensifying efforts aimed at tightening the isolation of convicts and countering anti-Soviet manifestations in places of detention. At the same time, it was important to maintain a good physical condition of the convicts in order to use them as effectively as possible in labor and other economic activities. In particular, working groups were formed from the prison population for the construction of defense facilities, the production of ammunition, as well as other products necessary for the Red Army. In addition, prisons began to establish their own production bases to manufacture military products. These enterprises "produced more than 80 million rounds of ammunition (shells for artillery guns and mines). 22 million sets of military uniforms were sewn" [15, p. 94].

Thus, during the war, penitentiary institutions participated in providing for the needs of

the Red Army [16, p. 26]. The GULAG's activities during the Great Patriotic War are described in detail in the works of the famous Russian scientist and specialist in the history of the penitentiary system A.L. Kuzminykh [17].

It is also necessary to highlight the role of NKVD employees related to evacuation measures and assistance to local authorities in organizing the restoration and further operation of military factories behind the front line, where they arrived from the cities captured by the enemy from the first days of the outbreak of the war. Already on the third day of the war, by the Decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of June 24, 1941 "On the establishment of the Evacuation Council", the Evacuation Council was organized (RGASPI. Archive 17. List 166. Case 659. Page 67). Despite this, during the initial period of the war, organizing the evacuation and reception of people, institutions, enterprises, various cargoes, raw materials, cultural assets, etc. was a difficult task. Analyzing the number of enterprises of both the military industry and other national economic purposes displaced inland, we note the difficulty of the task assigned to the workers of the NKVD of the USSR to ensure operative functioning of this process. For example, in 1941 – 1942, according to experts, the authorities had managed to relocate about two and a half thousand enterprises [18, p. 408]. At the same time, as a rule, the leadership of this process was entrusted to the party and economic authorities of those cities and towns where enterprises were evacuated. The NKVD of the USSR carried out the tasks of protecting evacuation centers, including railway stations and stations.

Where there were events related to the loading and unloading of equipment arriving from territories temporarily occupied by the enemy, the NKVD of the USSR needed not only to ensure law and order, but also to prevent theft of state property and personal belongings of evacuated persons. An equally important task of the evacuation measures was to check documents of citizens arriving in the rear areas. During this period, employees of the Central Information Bureau of the Passport Department of the GUM of the NKVD of the USSR registered more than 6 million evacuees [19, p. 16]. It was

necessary to prevent the infiltration of saboteurs into strategically important locations of military factories, as well as various kinds of criminals who were hiding from criminal prosecution. Therefore, from the first days of the war, employees of the NKVD of the USSR created special posts and barriers.

Thus, bodies of the NKVD of the USSR made a significant contribution to the implementation of measures aimed at carrying out evacuation measures, the deployment of military enterprises, as well as increasing the volume of their products. Operational groups were created at a number of enterprises, which included NKVD personnel. As a rule, these were large and especially important defense facilities, which were assigned the most important strategic role. The staff's function was to provide operational support to enterprises. The evacuated enterprises of defense significance were also provided with paramilitary fire brigades of the NKVD [20, p. 80]. The involvement of NKVD employees in the work at the enterprises of the defense complex continued until the completion of conversion measures and the transfer of the national economic complex to peacetime.

The military actions led to the emergence of new specific criminal acts, which began to be committed not in the rear, but in the front-line territories. First of all, it concerned the sale and purchase of various weapons that were illegally taken from the battlefield. Police officers were responsible for collecting weapons and ammunition from the population. This work, as a rule, was carried out immediately in the area where there had recently been fighting. So, on April 1, 1944, employees of the NKVD of the USSR seized from the population 8,357 machine guns, 11,440 submachine guns, 257,791 rifles, 56,023 revolvers, and 160,490 grenades [21, p. 10]. The seizure of weapons and ammunition was necessary to prevent them from falling into criminal groups and gangs [22, p. 109].

Being a state body, the NKVD of the USSR, in accordance with the directive of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks of June 29, 1941, began work in wartime conditions. Despite the fact that the first by-law prescribing the possibility of participation of NKVD workers in military operations on the battlefield was adopted only on

July 7, 1941, NKVD officers entered into hostilities with the Nazi invaders from the moment the fighting began.

From the first days of the war, workers of the NKVD of the USSR, together with border guards, conducted bloody defensive battles in the border territories. From July to August 1941, 15 rifle divisions of the NKVD of the USSR were formed, which included employees of investigative units, as well as operational police officers. Employees of the NKVD of the USSR who were not subject to general mobilization went to the front voluntarily. During the first month of the war, four detachments of the people's militia were formed from communists, Komsomol members and NKVD officers in Moscow [23, p. 338]. At the end of August 1941, three additional militia battalions were formed in accordance with the order of the head of the Leningrad Directorate of the NKVD of the USSR. The first two battalions, each totaling more than four hundred men, were transferred to the seventh regiment of the twentieth Infantry Division of the NKVD of the USSR, which took a direct part in the bloody battles on Nevskii Pyatachok. The personnel of the third battalion also numbered more than four hundred people and became a reserve of the Leningrad Directorate of the NKVD of the USSR [24, p. 62].

In April 1943, the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR No. 915-138 approved the Main Directorate of Counterintelligence "Smersh", which arose on the basis of the Directorate of Special Departments of the NKVD of the USSR. As a rule, "Smersh" identified German spies, discovered and exposed Fascist accomplices, as well as groups engaged in subversive activities, and also checked Soviet military personnel who had been engaged in hostilities, but had been surrounded and had sought to cross the front line through the German rear.

The NKVD of the USSR also optimized the work of the State Traffic Inspectorate (GAI), taking into account the needs of wartime. The staff of this service was charged with the responsibility of mobilizing motor transport, which at that time was so badly needed by the military. In addition, traffic police officers checked performance standards of the operated vehicles. At the same time, employees of the NKVD of the USSR were not relieved of their pre-war duties

in the field of law enforcement and countering criminal manifestations [25, p. 165].

Thus, from the first days of the war, the tasks of the NKVD of the USSR expanded significantly by countering labor and military desertion, alarmism, various kinds of criminal elements both in the country as a whole and at defense and economic facilities, activities of German agents, and the theft of special military cargo en route to evacuation sites. In addition, employees of the NKVD of the USSR were to ensure evacuation of the population, industrial enterprises and goods, immediate and expeditious passage of various vehicles and military trains to frontline regions of the country, organize protection of strategic facilities, fight against looting, new forms and types of theft, child homelessness, etc.

During the war period, law enforcement was one of the priorities of the NKVD of the USSR. There was no significant increase in illegal manifestations in the country. According to Russian scientists, "with the total number of crimes committed in 1941 (100%), crime increased by 22% in 1942, decreased by 20% in 1943 compared to 1942, and increased by 8.6% in 1944 compared to 1943. In the first half of 1945, compared with the second half of 1944, there was a 9.9-percent decrease in the crimes registered" [26, p. 157].

At the same time, the detection rate of criminal assaults was 87.8% in 1944 and 89.9% in 1945.

We outline the following key conclusions.

First, it is important to note that many publications covering the period 1941-1945 did not address the activities of the NKVD of the USSR for a long time, since this information was usually intended for official use. Most scientific research began to appear in the late 1990s, as well as in the context of the new millennium.

Second, it is important to note that in the early 1940s the NKVD of the USSR became a commissariat, which concentrated under its control a huge amount of administrative, political, social and economic functions. The practice of the formation of the NKVD of the USSR in 1934 and its subsequent reform in the pre-war and war years (February 1941, July 1941 and April 14, 1943) confirms that these transformations were associated with the need to reform the state security agencies, whose tasks increased sig-

nificantly during the war. At the same time, the reform was conditioned by the need to improve the fight against crime during the war and other important processes that had to be solved on the basis of centralization and decentralization of the NKVD of the USSR.

Third, at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, as a result of reorganization of the entire power vertical and the state apparatus, the State Defense Committee of the USSR emerged, and the jurisdiction of the NKVD of the USSR was expanded with additional powers. This led to the reorganization of bodies of the NKVD of the USSR with a gradual increase in the list of their functional responsibilities. The legislative acts adopted during the war period acted as the legal basis and the most important regulatory standards that the NKVD of the USSR adhered to in their professional activities.

Fourth, it should be noted that the employees of the NKVD of the USSR, together with the soldiers of the Red Army, defended Minsk, Sevastopol, Novorossiysk, many of them died, but did not surrender. It was the employees of the NKVD of the USSR, together with the entire Soviet people, who defended Leningrad and Stalingrad and prevented the Nazi troops from breaking through to Moscow. The chronicle of the war years was able to preserve a large number of names of department employees, whose

heroism, valor and bravery became bright pages of the country's military history.

Fifth, it is important to point out that many of the tasks performed by the NKVD of the USSR in the pre-war period were not included in the main areas of their work during the Great Patriotic War. Undoubtedly, there were shortcomings in the work of units, but in general, the importance of activities of this People's Commissariat in the field of combating crime and other areas of work is extremely high. Despite the lack of resources and qualified personnel, they solved all the tasks set by the country's leadership at the beginning of the war. All of the above gives reason to assert that the stability of functioning of the NKVD units of the USSR in wartime once again testifies to their high mobilization readiness and the ability to effectively implement the functions assigned to them.

Thus, thanks to the legal and organizational measures taken by the Soviet government, bodies of the NKVD of the USSR were ready to fight the Nazi invaders. This is evidenced not only by the effective law enforcement practice during the war period, but also by the rapid solution of new functional tasks that arose during the Great Patriotic War. The analyzed law enforcement experience should be further studied in order to be used in modern realities, if necessary.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PETR N. KOBETS – Doctor of Sciences (Law), Professor, Chief Researcher at the Center for Organizational Support of Scientific Activities of the National Research Institute of the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia, pkobets37@rambler.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6527-3788>

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