

Original article

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Organization and Activity of Surveillance and Reconnaissance Groups of the NKVD Rear Protection Troops of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War

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Abstract

Introduction: the article analyzes problems related to the organization and activities of surveillance and reconnaissance groups of the NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR in 1941–1945. The chronological framework of the study covers the period of the Great Patriotic War, which marks an active phase of tactical activities of the NKVD troops of the USSR to protect front lines of the Red Army. *Purpose:* by generalizing the experience of organizing surveillance and reconnaissance groups of the NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR during the period under study, to supplement and correct ideas about the history of internal affairs agencies during the Great Patriotic War. *Methods:* general scientific and historical research methods, as well as methods of materialistic dialectics, chronological, comparative, system analysis, statistical, etc. The author uses materials from the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) to summarize the experience of organizing surveillance and reconnaissance groups of the NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR, many of which are being introduced into scientific circulation for the first time. *Results:* the analysis of the regulation of surveillance and reconnaissance groups of the NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR shows improvements in the activities of these units in the period under study. In turn, this ensured the fulfilment of the most important tasks of protecting the rear of the Red Army. The activities of surveillance and reconnaissance groups aimed at ensuring victory over the enemy, public order and the fight against crime in the immediate battle area were of great importance. *Conclusion:* focused on the protection of the military rear, surveillance and reconnaissance groups in the period under study combined intelligence and operational search activities. Thus, they ensured the effective and uninterrupted conduct of military operations by units and formations of the Red Army. The primary tasks of surveillance and reconnaissance groups were to detect, detain, or destroy spies, saboteurs, paratroopers, and other enemy agents, as well as various criminals, in case of resistance.

Keywords: surveillance and reconnaissance groups; NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR of the active Red Army; Great Patriotic War.

5.1.1. Theoretical and historical legal sciences.

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Introduction

Despite all the variety of literature related to the history and legal status of the NKVD/MIA/MGB troops of the USSR, the problems of the research topic were only fragmentary in it. In the works of G.S. Beloborodov, E.I. Belov, V.V. Knyazev, N.S. Nakonechnyi, V.F. Nekrasov [1–5] and others, issues related to organizational and legal foundations of the activities of surveillance and reconnaissance groups during the period under study were only partially reflected, and they did not receive a systematic and comprehensive study. Meanwhile, it was the surveillance and reconnaissance groups that made a significant contribution to the fulfillment of operational and combat tasks assigned to the NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR of the active Red Army [6, p. 19].

On April 28, 1942, the Decree on the NKVD rear protection troops was signed by Marshal Shaposhnikov, Deputy People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR, and Major General Apollonov, Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR [7, pp. 6–8]. So, units of the NKVD troops protected the rear of the fronts (Russian State Military Archive (RSMA). Archive 38,650. List 1. Case 12. Pages 6–8). In May 1942, according to the NKVD order No. 00852 of April 28, 1942, NKVD rear protection troops of the Red Army were reorganized and incorporated into the NKVD internal troops, which they were part of until May 1943 (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 592. Page. 251). The total number of NKVD troops reached 65,978 units, the enlisted number was 50,758 fighters and commanders (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 592. Page. 251). During the period under study, the territory in which supply facilities (warehouses, etc.), service facilities (medical and sanitary, veterinary, workshops, etc.), as well as supply and evacuation routes were located was recognized as the rear of the Red Army (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page. 40).

Surveillance and reconnaissance groups (RPG) were the main type of the duty detail of NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR, especially in large areas, wooded and swampy areas with a limited number of roads. It was they who optimally combined agent intelligence and active military search. So, a properly organized RPG service, as well as clear and vigilant service by their personnel, made it possible to most effectively identify and eliminate criminals [7, p. 87].

Meanwhile, the experience of the Red Army's rear guard service shows that there was no clear understanding of using surveillance and reconnaissance groups among commanders and personnel of such units. Meanwhile, RPGs were recognized as successors of the NKVD border troops, inheriting all their best qualities. The ability to relentlessly search for, detect, identify, pursue, destroy or neutralize enemy infiltrators and agents was considered the most preferable. The significance and importance of RPGs lay in the fact that they were able to independently perform tasks that were beyond the power of other types of internal troops. The RPG service was the most difficult, as it required a lot of mental and physical exertion. Every fighter in an RPG had to have resourcefulness, courage and bravery combined with caution.

The inspections carried out in the units of internal troops (as, for example, on the Central Front in April 1943), as well as the analysis of relevant reports demonstrated that the RPG service had not found proper and correct use. In some units, misunderstanding and sometimes ignorance of the requirements of the "Instructions to the NKVD troops guarding the rear of the Active Red Army" by individual representatives of the command staff led to such low results of the RPG service that they simply discredited this most important and basic type of the duty detail of the internal troops (RSMA.

Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page. 23). A similar situation developed, in particular, on the Central Front. There, in February 1943, in the 2nd Frontier Regiment, the RPG detained 247 people out of 1,635 (15.1% of their total number), while in the 98th border regiment – 94 people out of 1,057 (8.9% of the detainees). In total, the RPGs of both regiments detained only 13% of the total number during this period (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page. 23).

There were several reasons for the unsatisfactory service of surveillance and reconnaissance groups. Areas and directions of the groups' actions from the point of view of the expediency of using RPGs were not carefully selected. Surveillance and reconnaissance groups were often weak in their quantitative and qualitative composition and characterized by a lack of initiative. Group leaders did not prepare for their official combat work beforehand and did not have carefully thought-out action plans. The execution of orders was poorly controlled and the practical activities and results of the RPG were not taken into account. Scout commanders were rarely included in surveillance and reconnaissance groups.

To eliminate these shortcomings, as well as to enhance the role of surveillance and reconnaissance groups, in the general service system, Colonel Serebryakov, Chief of the NKVD rear protection troops on the Central Front, issued an order on April 9, 1943, stipulating that the organization of surveillance and reconnaissance groups was one of the main tasks of the commanders of units, divisions and headquarters. Special training of the commanding staff and soldiers of the rear protection troops was aimed at mastering solid knowledge of the organization and practical service of the RPG. The RPG service was under special control of regimental and battalion headquarters. This type of the duty detail was subject to systematic analysis in order to timely identify and eliminate shortcomings (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 23 flesh side).

On April 9, 1943, the chief of staff of the NKVD rear protection troops of the Central Front Colonel Malyi, approved a summary plan for conducting training sessions with the commanding staff of surveillance and reconnaissance groups. This course was aimed at training the commanding staff in full accordance with the

“Instructions to the NKVD troops guarding the rear of the Active Red Army”, as well as other orders and directives on this issue (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 592. Page 24).

On May 11, 1943, the chief of staff of the NKVD rear protection troops on the Volkhov Front, Major General Velikanov put forward the initiative to publish a special memo for every commander of the internal troops to refer to on a daily basis (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 52). This manual was to describe RPG tasks, composition, weapons, equipment, service life, communications, movement, tactics and techniques of work. After the relevant decision was made by the chief of the Main Department of the NKVD rear protection troops, State Security Commissioner Leont'ev, the necessary instructions were developed, approved by chiefs of the formations of the internal rear protection troops and disseminated to all fronts. “Memo to the senior of a surveillance and reconnaissance group (RPG) in the conditions of protecting the rear of the active Red Army” to a certain extent reflected the accumulated experience of RPGs by that time (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 9).

Functioning as one of the types of the duty detail to protect the rear of the front, surveillance and reconnaissance groups had all the means to search, identify, detain or destroy the enemy. The primary task of the RPG was to search for, detect, and detain spies, saboteurs, paratroopers, signalmen, and other agents deployed by the enemy to the Soviet rear. So, in September 1942, the reconnaissance and search group of the 1st infantry battalion of the 90th border regiment in the village Krasnoe of the Usman district of the Voronezh Oblast detained Kazenkov, a soldier without documents. During the filtration process, it was found that in November 1941 he surrendered to the Germans, was recruited by their intelligence service and transferred to the Soviet rear on espionage missions. In total, 8 such enemy agents from among local residents were detained that month (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 584. Page 37).

The RPG was engaged in the search and detention of deserters and other hostile elements hiding in the immediate battle area. Often, this contingent, as well as their relatives and friends, resorted to all sorts of tricks in order to avoid ex-

posure and detention. For example, on December 14, 1942, the chief of the RPG of the 10th outpost of the 92nd border regiment received information from local residents that deserters were hiding in the village of Medvezhye in the Melovatsky district of the Voronezh Oblast. As a result of the search, a hole was found under the floor of one of the houses in which the deserter was hiding. He breathed through the beehives stacked under the bed above the pit. Another deserter was also removed from a shelter equipped under the bed. At the same time, his wife hindered the border guards in every possible way, shouting that her husband was in the Red Army, while they were torturing his family (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 490. Page 26). On November 3, 1942, the RPG of the 5th infantry battalion of the 90th border regiment, due to skillful and energetic actions of the fighters and their wit, detained 6 deserters who had been hiding for several months in artfully equipped caches in their homes.

The RPG's competence included combating looting and plundering of socialist and collective farm property; maintaining the established regime in the 25-kilometer battle area and expelling all illegally located persons; combing forests, swamps and other areas for these purposes; identifying small military teams, units and others who had broken away from their units and illegally remained in the rear; identification and detention of those responsible for the damage to communications; inspecting settlements in the immediate battle area, from where the local population was resettled (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 52–52 flash side).

RPG fighters and commanders were to be always ready to search for, detain, or destroy an enemy spy, signalman, or scout (or groups of them) hiding in the relevant area; an active enemy radio station; parachutists thrown by the enemy from an airplane; crew members of an enemy aircraft that landed; and enemy soldiers who found themselves in the immediate battle area.

In addition, RPG personnel were charged with detecting and marking warehouses, weapons, equipment, mined areas, etc. left by the enemy. Their task was also to identify and remove the enemy's henchmen and accomplices from the local population during the liberation

from occupiers; to search, pursue and destroy small groups of enemy scouts and machine gunners, individuals and groups of bandits who broke into the immediate battle area; comb out forests, swamps, ravines, mowing and vegetable gardens; to inspect settlements for the detection and detention of fugitive deserters and violators of the immediate battle area regime; to search, collect and destruct anti-Soviet leaflets and other "counter-revolutionary" literature dropped by enemy aircraft, detect and detain their keepers and distributors; to conduct reconnaissance of the area and the situation at the unit's site; to search for the pilot who landed his plane and parachuted out; fulfil other tasks arising from the situation to protect the rear of the front. For example, in March 1943, the RPG 92 of the NKVD border regiment of the rear protection of the Voronezh Front detained 3 burgo-masters, an assistant to the German commandant, 6 translators, 4 clerks of the elders, 14 managers of the occupiers, 12 concubines of German officers, 22 volunteers of the Ukrainian national formation, 12 gendarmes, 2 lawyers, the police chief and other henchmen and accomplices of the enemy who were hiding from the Soviet authorities (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 490. Page 52).

As a rule, RPGs operated in a certain direction, area or point. Their main method of action was an active search for sabotage and reconnaissance groups and enemy individuals, spies, deserters and other criminal elements within the assigned area or route. To make the search more effective, the groups used all possible sources of personal intelligence and surveillance, as well as operational materials from NKVD bodies and troops, NKGB bodies, Red Army units, assistance brigades (fighter battalions) and survey data from local residents.

According to the established procedure, the senior RPG could be a commander or in some cases a well-trained junior commander who was familiar with the methods and tricks of the enemy's agents and the criminal element, who was able to navigate freely and correctly in the most difficult combat situation, who had the skills to check documents with high command demands and politeness (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 14 flash side). There were 2 chief deputies. As a rule, RPG personnel included 10–15 fighters and com-

manders. Its number could be increased to 20 people when the group was sent to the territory just liberated from the enemy (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 24).

Only the commander of the relevant unit of the internal troops could set the RPG chief a combat task. The head of the outpost, battalion or regiment commanders within the assigned areas were entitled to send RPGs to complete the task. In addition, the RPG could be sent by the headquarters of the regiment or formations of the internal troops as a whole, within the entire security zone of the front rear. It is worth mentioning that RPG fighters and commanders were strictly forbidden to be distracted by tasks unrelated to the assignment they had received. However, upon receiving information about the presence of Hitler's henchmen, spies, deserters and other hostile elements, the RPG chief was obliged to organize their detention or liquidation (in case of resistance) but not to the detriment of the task set by the higher command (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 29). In all cases, if the situation required it, the RPG chief was obliged to immediately provide support to neighboring units (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 30).

The tasks performed by surveillance and reconnaissance groups in each specific case required a selective attitude towards the choice of its chief, determining the number (squad, platoon, etc.) and composition (including a scout commander, orderly, sapper, signalmen, guide search dogs, etc.), choosing a means of transportation (on foot, on skis, carts, cars, etc.), weapons and ammunition, equipment and food, means of communication, service life, and the method of sending urgent reports. Surveillance and reconnaissance groups had to be maneuverable and "fast-moving", capable of performing the task in any conditions, with the least expenditure of effort and energy (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 14). For this reason, their equipment in winter and summer was as light as possible.

Depending on the task at hand, the RPG could serve from several hours to several days. Having received the task, its commander was obliged to give necessary orders to prepare for its implementation, obtain maps and diagrams of the area and, based on them, think over and draw up a plan of action for the group. As a

rule, the situation was not fixed on maps and diagrams. It was allowed to make only marks in an arbitrary style. In practice, the commanding staff tried to remember everything.

It was necessary to take into account the presence of fighters, commanders and specialists in the RPG, their personal qualities, time of day, terrain and weather conditions, the time set for service, the means and sources allowed for use in the RPG area (NKVD and militia, awareness, assistance brigades, Red Army garrisons, Komsomol youth formations, etc.) In addition, when preparing an RPG for an operation, its commander had to take into account its duration, location of the occupied area and its consequences. In order to obtain intelligence data and possible assistance in people, the presence of former partisan detachments and the location of their fighters were clarified.

In the absence of a reconnaissance commander in the RPG, it was necessary to receive instructions from the chief who was sending the group about the need to contact informers in the area of action. In the presence of unfamiliar areas, the need for engineering reconnaissance was considered. In addition, the RPG got from the commander a conditional signal (sign) to communicate with Soviet aircraft, which could be contacted for help in completing the task.

The operation plan necessarily provided for the sequence of "processing" of local objects – mowing with barns, ravines, swamps, farms and other settlements, woodlands, forests, etc. If the forest was large, it had to be divided into sections depending on the available forces. The technique of examining each local object was planned in advance, namely the location of posts and patrols and secrets, the order of combing the area in order to exclude any possibility of leaving unnoticed by anyone who was wanted or simply found himself in the area of the group. The time needed for work, rest, movement from facility to facility, and return to the location of the unit were also replanned.

The chief of a surveillance and reconnaissance group carefully checked its readiness before the start of the operation. For this purpose, clothes, shoes, weapons and equipment were examined. The availability, packing and condition of food were checked. In winter, special attention was paid to skiing, as well as to the

preparation of weapons (especially automatic weapons) for shooting.

Poor-quality recruitment of personnel was one of the main shortcomings of the RPG's combat activities at its initial stage. At first, groups were hastily recruited from fighters and commanders without required skills. For this reason, searches were conducted clumsily and, as a rule, turned out to be fruitless. In those cases, when such groups engaged in battle with the enemy, they showed cowardice, confusion and, instead of active actions, went on the defensive. During the pursuit of the enemy, they acted slowly and, due to the inept organization of the pursuit, often came under sudden fire from ambushes, were blown up by mines, and suffered unnecessary and unjustified losses (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 592. Page 267).

In this regard, the RPG chief was previously obliged to personally get acquainted with all its members, especially those who arrived from other units. The selection of RPG personnel, as required by the instruction, was carried out strictly individually, taking into account the readiness for its service and combat operations. Preference was given to the "party-Komsomol stratum", politically literate, stable, physically hardy and vigilant fighters who were able to recognize tricks of enemy's agents [9, p. 15 flash side]. As required by the instruction, the "revolutionary legality" had to be maintained during all service and combat operations of the RPG. Those found guilty of its violation were to be immediately removed from the RPG and brought to liability (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 34).

The personnel included in the RPG, as a rule, were armed with automatic weapons – light machine guns, machine guns and grenades, supplied with the necessary amount of ammunition, gas masks, chemical and individual packages. A miner included in the RPG had to have a mine detector and a proper tool with him, in addition to the required means for fencing or marking minefields. Depending on the task at hand and working conditions, in special cases, it was allowed for RPG fighters and commanders to change into civilian clothes. Their weapons were limited to pistols, revolvers and grenades (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 15 flash side).

Before an operation, the commander specifically and clearly, without unnecessary reasoning and general phrases, set the RPG personnel the task, clarified the area and terms of service, and gave necessary instructions. Sick and unreliable fighters were excluded from the group and replaced by others. If the RPG had to operate in areas where it was possible to come across the enemy, its entire personnel had to comply with the requirements of Part 1 of Article 104 of the 1942 Infantry Combat Regulations. In this case, documents of the RPG personnel were kept at the chief of the outpost.

The RPG's service and combat activities were carried out strictly according to plan. Depending on the situation and the nature of the tasks performed, the RPG was entitled to set up posts, secrets, roadblocks, conduct raids in settlements, forests and farms, allocate convoys, etc. In accordance with the situation, the RPG chief could divide its staff into groups:

- mission support groups that were sent to probable escape routes of the enemy and operated by ambush;
- cover units (the so-called "firing" group);
- active search and capture of the enemy (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 29 flash side).

When moving along an unknown route, especially in the territory liberated from the enemy, miners had to be assigned to the head patrol for reconnaissance and mine clearance. Prior to the engineering survey, unauthorized entry of fighters into dugouts and individual empty buildings was not allowed. Also, before the inspection by miners, it was strictly forbidden to pick up any objects. An instructor of a service search dog was part of the head patrol. At the same time, the latter was on a long leash or even got off it (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 43).

Depending on the situation and terrain conditions, the RPG personnel were instructed to move in a column of one, two, or in a chain. The area was subject to a thorough inspection when performing the task. RPG fighters and commanders always had to make sure that they could see and hear everything, while remaining unnoticed by themselves. In order to avoid mines or a sudden ambush by the enemy, RPGs did not move along roads, trails or clearings.

If the RPG performed combat missions for a long time, its chief had to take care of the organization of rest and meals for the personnel entrusted. At the same time, a place for rest (overnight stay) was chosen, if possible, outside of populated areas. When stopping for a rest or overnight, accommodation with local residents was strictly prohibited. During the overnight stay, RPGs posted guards. In case of possible encounter with the enemy (bandit groups), an ambush (cover) from among the machine gunners was set up on the completed route (if the traces left after the movement of the RPG were clearly visible) 400–500 meters from the location of the RPG. No one from the RPG personnel was allowed to take off their shoes and uniforms during the rest.

It is worth mentioning that the RPG could not for a minute stop its reconnaissance activities, including monitoring what was happening in the vicinity, interviewing local residents and passers-by, communicating with local authorities, Red Army garrisons, etc. If the task involved secrecy (when searching for spies, saboteurs, deserters, etc.), it was forbidden to openly go out on the roads and prescribed to regularly change the direction of movement. If there were guides in the RPG, they should be protected from communication with the local population in every possible way and kept under constant supervision of the chief of the group and his deputies (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 34).

During the inspection of the settlement, the RPG approached it covertly, having previously studied its configuration and approaches from afar. All exits from the settlement were to be blocked by patrols and posts. Only after that, the RPG was allowed to enter the settlement. There they talked with the chairman of the collective farm or village council about their plans and tried to obtain necessary operational and intelligence information.

If necessary, the settlement was divided into several sections, according to the number of designated inspection groups. At least 4–5 fighters and a representative of the local government were assigned to each of them. As a rule, the inspection started at all sites at the same time. All buildings, attics, closets, basements, cellars, piles of hay and straw, large chests, drawers, cabinets, etc. were examined. The citizens'

documents were checked. During the inspection of the interior, surveillance posts were set up outside. The detained persons were filtered on the spot. Those to be further developed followed along with the RPG, or were escorted to their destination. The convoy was distinguished from the best fighters depending on the number and importance of the detainees, but always at least two people. Those who offered armed resistance or tried to escape during the arrest, as well as detained enemy paratroopers and bandits were escorted with their hands tied. Hand binding was checked periodically.

Meadow, fields with barns and haystacks were preliminarily covertly studied. Posts were set up on the outskirts of the field or meadow in such a way that no one could escape into the forest. The named objects were combed from a more closed area to a more open one, namely from a dense forest to a swamp, river or field. During the inspection, the personnel were divided into groups, each of which was allocated a separate search lane. When examining a large dense forest, it was divided into areas with clearly visible landmarks in the form of a clearing, stream, glade, ravine, etc. Patrols or posts were sent along lateral and front borders of the inspection area in order to prevent the wanted from leaving forward or sideways unnoticed. During the inspection of the forest, the RPG personnel were divided into small groups of 3–5 people led by their senior staff. When moving through the forest, they were forbidden to make noise, as well as to give signals in the form of shouts, whistles, etc. Communication between these groups was maintained visually and audibly.

The search parties had to move slowly, carefully examining all the pits, huts, dugouts and thickets. Special attention was paid to footprints, freshly broken or felled branches, trees, remnants of campfires, food and human excrement, and well-trodden paths. RPG fighters and commanders were well aware that the enemy often mined their tracks. When enemy tracks were found, they were subject to careful study. Special attention was paid to their prescription and direction of movement. As a rule, it was necessary to move parallel to the track. Search dogs were used to study the trail. The direction of movement was indicated by the launch of lighting flares, rifle shots with tracer bullets, notches in trees, twigs, etc.

The RPG's operation in the 25-kilometer frontline had its own specifics: a complete ban on the presence of civilians there and the need to interact with military commandants of settlements. All military personnel and undocumented civilians detained in the frontline were subject to detention, arrest and sent for further filtration to the chief who sent the RPG. In addition, RPG personnel were required to pay attention to violations of camouflage rules by Red Army troops located in populated areas of the front line, especially their artillery, tanks, vehicles, wagons, etc.

The enemy (paratroopers, saboteurs, bandits, etc.) discovered during the RPG's service and combat activities was subject to encirclement and forced to surrender. When encountering single enemy soldiers, small groups of deserters and bandits, the RPG personnel had to suddenly attack them and capture them without firing a shot. When an unknown (wanted) person approached, it was required to set up an ambush and detain the person. If a detainee had a weapon, it was subject to immediate seizure. Every detainee was subject to a search, during which documents, money and other items that could be used for attack were taken away. When an unknown man tried to escape, the RPG personnel had to immediately chase him/her. If they could not catch up, they had to "use a grenade or a bullet", but only as a last resort. It was mandatory to shout "Stop" and fire one warning shot. Shooting to kill was allowed in case the detainee did not stop. As stated in the instruction to the senior of the RPG, "a calm, accurate shot from a rifle (submachine gun) will always catch up with the enemy" (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 479. Page 7).

According to the instruction, the RPG chief was obliged to use weapons in cases of an apparent attack on its personnel, armed resistance, or escape attempt (after calling "stop" and firing a warning shot) (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 30). In case of armed resistance, it was necessary to act quickly and decisively – to open fire and go on the attack. When capturing someone from an enemy group, it was required to quickly establish whether any of its members had disappeared, and if so, in which direction. At the same time, the testimony of detainees was checked by studying traces and other signs.

If the enemy fled, it was prescribed to pursue them immediately. The instruction distinguished between two types of pursuit: direct pursuit, when the enemy tried to escape in front of soldiers, and pursuit based on the traces left by unknown persons. In both cases, the RPG was to use all the possibilities to detain offenders. In any pursuit, the RPG personnel were to use a search dog (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 588. Page 17 flash side).

It is noteworthy that the enemy could be followed by the tracks and at the same time by specially designated groups and patrols. Fatigue, weather, night, numerical superiority of the enemy, or losses were not recognized as valid reasons for stopping the pursuit of the enemy.

The RPG chief was personally responsible for indecisive actions and even more so for their termination. It was required to attack the enemy decisively and quickly regardless of the numerical superiority. The RPG fighter was obliged to complete the task in any case, even if he was left alone against the numerically superior enemy. As it followed from the instructions to the senior of the RPG, in case of a sudden encounter with the enemy, especially at night or in a fog (blizzard), as well as when operating on heavily rough terrain, it was necessary to boldly attack the enemy.

The RPG's operational and combat work involved direct clashes with regular enemy units, mainly with reconnaissance groups. They are most widespread in the Karelian Front. In total, 17 enemy reconnaissance and sabotage groups numbering from 25 to 600 people were recorded in its rear in 1942–1943. As a result of the fighting with them, 186 Nazis were killed, 82 wounded and 31 captured. The losses of the internal troops amounted to 19 people killed, 21 wounded and 1 missing (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 592. Page 262). For example, the RPG of the 4th outpost of the 1st border regiment (Karelian Front) consisting of 7 fighters under the command of Sergeant Kashlev engaged in battle with the Nazis 9 kilometers west of Olonets on June 26, 1944. Two enemy soldiers and an officer were killed and 12 were captured. One of the RPG fighters died in the fight (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 5. Case 592. Page 105).

It was required to report immediately to the commander who sent the RPG about the fight.

Reports were sent without fail in cases of detection or elimination of the enemy, receiving new information about the enemy or the situation. Whatever task the RPG performed, everything that could be seen, clarified, and discovered should be recorded, mapped, and reported in detail, clearly, and truthfully to the command upon return to the unit.

In total, according to the operational department of the Main Directorate of the Internal Troops of the NKVD of the USSR, during the Great Patriotic War, the internal troops of the NKVD of the USSR together with surveillance and reconnaissance groups conducted 9,292 Chekist-military operations to combat banditry, during which 47,451 bandits were killed and 99,732 captured alive. As a result of their operational activities, 2,578 spies and saboteurs, 47,577 traitors to the motherland, 132,695 hooligans, thieves and speculators, 119,648 deserters and 227,928 people who evaded service in the Red Army were detained. In addition, a large number of accomplices of the enemy, who escaped from places of detention, captivity and from the occupied territory, members of fascist

parties, violators of the established regime, etc. were detained (RSMA. Archive 32,880. List 1. Case 140. Pages 35–35 flash side).

Conclusion

Thus, the conducted research allows us to conclude that during the period under study, surveillance and reconnaissance groups of the NKVD rear protection troops of the USSR made a significant contribution to the fulfillment of the assigned operational and combat tasks, namely, search, capture or destruction of enemy in the Soviet rear, criminals, as well as ensuring the rule of law and public order in the immediate battle area. The command of the NKVD troops protecting the rear of the active Red Army paid great attention to the organization and activities of RPGs, which manifested itself in the development of relevant regulatory documents. The experience of operational, service and combat activities of surveillance and reconnaissance groups deserves close attention of modern researchers of the history of the Great Patriotic War, as well as competent specialists of the Russian armed forces. It seems that it can be used in similar conditions of current armed conflicts.

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