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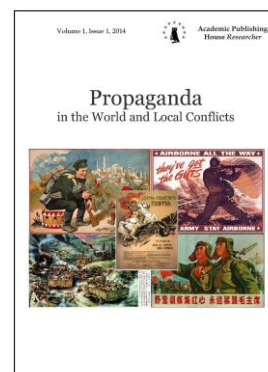
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Russian Liberation Army during World War II: Promotional Activities Outcome

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Abstract

The article examines some of the promotional activities of the Russian Liberation Army during World War II. The author studies the formation process of the Russian liberation movement, its political structure and first appeals to the Red Army soldiers and officers. The process of creating press materials, namely leaflets and newspapers is of a great importance. The article also reflects a political organization headed by General A.A. Vlasov, the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia, and its establishment in November 1944.

Russian historiography on the studied topic was used as the materials for the research as well as the published documents, for example, the proclamations of the Russian liberation movement.

In conclusion, the author notes that during the period of 1942–1944, The Russian liberation movement had a long way from its inception to the establishment of a mass organization. However, at the end of 1944 the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia already could not have any influence on the events on the Eastern Front. Time was irretrievably lost.

Keywords: Russian liberation army, propaganda, special operations, leaflets, World War II.

1. Introduction

The Russian Liberation Army was destined to become the largest military unit of the eastern troops of the Third Reich. By April 1945, its units consisted of 130 thousand soldiers and officers, included 8 divisions, several brigades and smaller units. The creation of this army is connected with name of one of the heroes of the battle near Moscow, the Red Army Lieutenant-General, Andrei Andreevich Vlasov. He was the Deputy Commander of the Volkhov Front and the Acting Commander of the 2nd Shock Army. He became a German war prisoner on July 11, 1942. Only 9,000 soldiers and officers remained alive at that time; 60,000 soldiers and officers were killed or missing.

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Fig. 1. General A.A. Vlasov

2. Materials and methods

Russian historiography on the studied topic was used as the materials for the research as well as the published documents, for example, the proclamations of the Russian liberation movement.

The methodological base of the paper is formed by principles of historicism and objectivity, customary for this kind of research, as well as analytical, probabilistic, statistical and comparative methods.

3. Discussion and results

Vlasov played the tragic and ungrateful role of the Commander of the Russian Liberation Army. On August 3, 1942, Vlasov sent a letter to Hitler from the prisoner of war camp. In his letter he proposed the creation of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA).

“To achieve victory over the Soviet Union,” Vlasov wrote, “you need to bring in the prisoners of war against the Red Army troops. Nothing will affect Red Army soldiers as much as the Russian units fighting alongside with the German troops ...” (Sushinskiy, 2015).

In December 1942 the “Russian Committee” was formed under the command of Vlasov, and its official name was the “Eastern Special Purpose Propaganda Battalion”. This battalion also consisted of Vlasov's office and the propagandists' school. V.F. Malyshev, G.N. Zhilenkov and M.F. Zykov took up their positions in this committee. The committee's activities began on December 27 with the release of an appeal to the soldiers and commanders of the Red Army, to everything that was Russian and other peoples (Pal'chikov, 1993: 132).

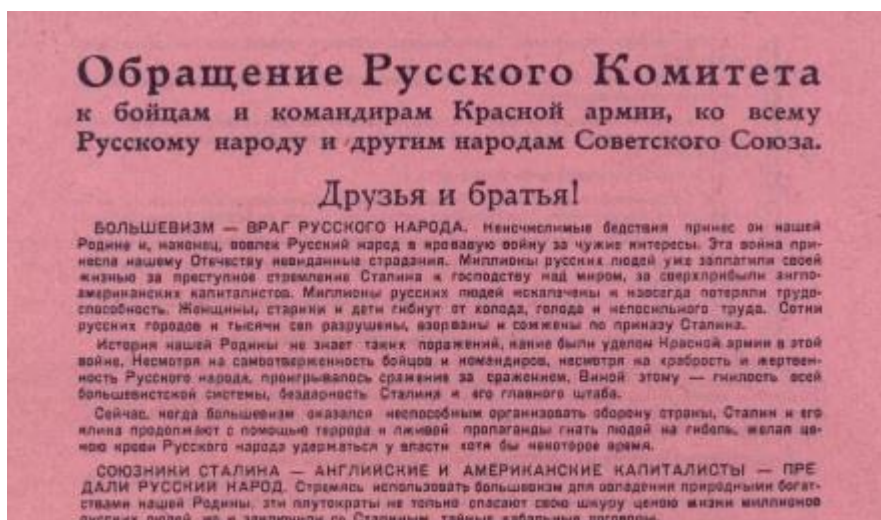


Fig. 2. The appeal of the Vlasov's "Russian Committee"

The leaflet states:

"FRIENDS AND BROTHERS!

BOLSHEVISM IS THE ENEMY OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE. It brought incalculable disasters to our Motherland and involved the Russian people in a bloody war for the interests of others. This war brought unprecedented sufferings to our Homeland. Millions of Russian people have already paid with their lives for Stalin's criminal desire to dominate the world and for the super-profits of Anglo-American capitalists. Millions of Russian people are disabled and permanently lost their ability to work. Women, old people and children are dying from cold, hunger and overwork. Hundreds of Russian cities and thousands of villages were destroyed, blown up and burnt by Stalin's orders.

Such defeats as the defeats of the Red Army during this war never happened in the history of our Motherland. Despite the dedication of the fighters and commanders, despite the courage and sacrifice of the Russian people, they lost battle after battle. The blame for this is in the rottenness of the entire Bolshevik system, the lack of talent of Stalin and his chief staff.

Now that Bolshevism is unable to organize the defense of the country, Stalin and his clique continue to drive people to death with the help of terror and deceitful propaganda, desiring to stay in power for some more time at the cost of the blood of the Russian people.

STALIN'S ALLIES - ENGLISH AND AMERICAN CAPITALISTS — BETRAYED THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE. Seeking to use Bolshevism to own the natural wealth of our Motherland, these plutocrats not only save their lives at the cost of the lives of millions of Russian people, but they also made secret and bonded contracts with Stalin.

At the same time, Germany is not waging war against the Russian people and its homeland, but only against Bolshevism. Germany does not encroach on the living space of the Russian people and its national-political freedom.

Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Germany sets as its task the organization of a New Europe without Bolsheviks and capitalists, in which every nation has an honorable place.

The place of the Russian people in the family of European nations, its place in the New Europe WILL DEPEND ON ITS' PARTICIPATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST BOLSHEVISM, for the destruction of the bloody power of Stalin and his criminal clique is IN THE FIRST PLACE THE MATTER OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE.

For the unification of the Russian people and the leadership of its struggle against the hated regime, for the cooperation with Germany in the struggle against Bolshevism for the building of a New Europe, we, the sons of our people and patriots of our Fatherland, established the **RUSSIAN COMMITTEE.**

RUSSIAN COMMITTEE sets the following goals:

- a. The overthrow of Stalin and his clique, the destruction of Bolshevism.*
- b. An honorable peace with Germany.*
- c. Creation of a New Russia without Bolsheviks and capitalists in cooperation with Germany and other peoples of Europe.*

The RUSSIAN COMMITTEE puts the following main principles in the basis of the construction of New Russia:

- 1. Elimination of forced labor and providing the worker with a valid right to work that creates his material well-being;*
- 2. Elimination of collective farms and systematic land transfer to peasants for private ownership;*
- 3. Restoration of trade and handicrafts, restoration of the private initiative's possibility to participate in the economic life of the country;*
- 4. Allowing the intelligentsia to freely create for the good of their people;*
- 5. Ensuring social justice and protecting workers from exploitation;*
- 6. Introduction of the real right to study, to rest and secure old age for the workers;*
- 7. Destructing the regime of terror and violence; introduction of real freedom of religion, conscience, speech, assembly, and press. Guarantee of the inviolability of the person and his home;*
- 8. Right of the national freedom;*
- 9. Liberation of political prisoners of Bolshevism and releasing all those subjected to repression for their struggle against Bolshevism to their homeland;*
- 10. Reconstruction of towns and villages destroyed during the war, on the expenses of the state;*
- 11. Restoration of state-owned factories and plants destroyed during the war;*
- 12. Refusal to pay any cable contracts that Stalin signed with the Anglo-American capitalists;*
- 13. Providing a living wage to disabled veterans and their families.*

Firmly believing that on the basis of these principles we can and should build a happy future of the Russian people. The Russian Committee calls upon all Russian people who are in the liberated regions and in areas that are still occupied by Bolsheviks - workers, peasants, intelligentsia, soldiers, commanders, party representatives - TO UNITE AND STRUGGLE AGAINST THE EVIL ENEMY OF OUR MOTHERLAND - BOLSHEVISM.

The Russian Committee declares Stalin and his clique the enemies of the people.

The Russian Committee declares the enemies of the people all those who voluntarily serves in the punitive organs of Bolshevism - the Special Departments, the NKVD and the detachments.

The Russian Committee declares those who destroy the values that belong to the Russians the enemies of the people.

The duty of every decent son of his people is to destroy these enemies who push our homeland into new misfortunes. The Russian Committee calls on all Russian people to fulfill this duty.

*The Russian Committee calls on the soldiers and commanders of the Red Army, all Russian people, to join Germany in alliance with the **Russian Liberation Army**. All those who took part in the struggle against Bolshevism are guaranteed inviolability and life, regardless of their previous activities and positions.*

The Russian Committee calls on the Russian people to struggle against the hated Bolshevism, create partisan liberation groups and turn their weapons against the oppressors of the people - Stalin and his henchmen.

RUSSIAN PEOPLE! FRIENDS AND BROTHERS!

Enough of the people's blood! Enough of widows and orphans! Enough hunger, forced labor and torment in the Bolshevik torture chambers! Rise and fight for freedom!

Fight for the bright cause of our country! Fight to the death for the happiness of the Russian people! Long live the honorable peace with Germany, laying the foundation for the eternal fellowship of the German and Russian peoples!

Long live the Russian people, an equal member of the family of the peoples of New Europe!
Chairman of the Russian Committee

*Lieutenant-General (Vlasov A. A.)
Secretary of the Russian Committee
Major General (Malyshev V. F.).
27th of December, 1942
Smolensk* (From the published, 1990: 62-64).

From the beginning of 1943 the Russian Committee intensified its activities by organizing the production of newspapers “Dobrovolets” and “Zarya” with a total number of about 120,000 copies. They also started propagandists training courses (Pal’chikov, 1993: 133).

Vlasov sent his leaflets with an appeal to the Russian people in a short period of time. In his proclamations, the General drew attention to the crimes of the Stalin regime, the colossal numbers of victims and the destitute, advocating a free and democratic Russia. It is clear that such propaganda found a response in the hearts of Red Army soldiers. In January 1943, leaflets with an appeal to the Russian people were dropped for Soviet troops near Smolensk. As a result, several hundred deserters crossed the front line, they all wanted to join Vlasov’s Liberation Army. In the summer of 1943, 13,000 soldiers and commanders of the Red Army fled to the Germans with Vlasov leaflets, in 1944 this figure dropped to 2,000 in the first two months (Commanders of World War II, 1998: 291).

It should also be noted that the first edition of the Vlasov’s leaflet of January 1943 was distributed on the Soviet territory in several million copies, and the number of copies was increasing to the last day of war (Kirchner, 1997: 74).

In the spring of 1943, in the interests of psychological support for Operation Citadel, an offensive in the Kursk area, the Wehrmacht headquarters planned the first large-scale psychological operation, code-named “Silver Stripe”. Its main task was to force as many Soviet soldiers as possible not to resist but to surrender with the beginning of the German offensive. A special interest was placed on the formation of the Russian Liberation Army. Therefore, the main slogan of the operation was: “The Russians flee to the Russians”. For example, the “Za Svobodu!” newspaper was published weekly for the units of the Russian National Army in Smolensk, the ROA field department of propaganda published the “K Pobede!” newspaper. There were also publications for Soviet prisoners of war, for example, the “Klich” newspaper. All this propaganda produced definite results.

By the summer of 1943, Soviet partisans reported about large Vlasov units in the German rear. For example, on June 14, the Estonian headquarters of the partisan movement in the Dyatkovo district reported about the 3rd Rifle Division of ROA. On 5th of August, the Central Headquarters of the partisan movement en route from Khotimsk to Belynkovich reported about the 5th Wild Division of ROA. On 15th of September The Smolensk headquarters of the Partisan Movement in the Kletnya region recorded a battalion of the 1st ROA Panzer Division and others (Semiryaga, 2000: 845-846).

Gradually, the attitude towards the prisoners of war changed. A number of benefits was promised to all the Soviet servicemen who declared themselves enemies of the Soviet government, for the period of their captivity. Those benefits were fixed by the order of the High Command of the Wehrmacht No. 13 “On the Red Army soldiers who voluntarily transferred to the side of the German Army”. The order stressed that every serviceman of the Red Army, that left his unit and came to the Germans on his own initiative, was “to be considered not a prisoner of war, but a voluntarily transferred to the German army”. Soviet officers who voluntarily transferred were promised, in addition to a plentiful food ration and kind treatment: up to the Captain rank, including the Captain rank, – one servant for three, from the Major rank and above – one servant for two, and a servant for each General (Krys’ko, 1999: 361-362).

The German leadership decided to form the ROA only in the autumn of 1944, when the outcome of the war became clear to all. However, it was not possible to create a million-people army that General Vlasov dreamed of out of the prisoners of war, “eastern workers” and soldiers of voluntary formations. The situation at the front line neither allowed the far eastern battalions to be withdrawn and concentrated under one command, nor it was possible to carry out the transfer of thousands of Slavs engaged in forced labor. In September 1944, at a meeting between Himmler and Vlasov, the chief of the SS expressed the desire to “unite all anti-Soviet organizations and create a political center for their leadership”. Soon Vlasov received a telegram from Reichsführer Himmler

in which it was noted that the Führer appointed Vlasov the Commander of the 600th and 700th Russian divisions with the right to be promoted to the Officer rank, up to Lieutenant Colonel (Katusev, Oppokov, 1991: 19).

General Vlasov did not take long and the constituent congress of the Committee of the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia took place on November 14, 1944 in Prague (KONR). It was attended by 500 delegates from 49 committees, representing mostly old and new emigrations and national formations. The Manifesto of the Committee of the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia was adopted at the congress, a political platform of the ROA, and the governing body of KONR was elected. A. A. Vlasov was elected the Chairman of the Committee and V. F. Malyshkin (former Major General of the Red Army, Chief of Staff of the 19th Army of the Western Front) became his deputy and the Head of the organizational management. Members of the Presidium were: F. I. Trukhin, (former Major General of the Red Army, Chief of the operational headquarters of the North-Western Front), D. E. Zakutny (former Major General of the Red Army, commander of the 21st Rifle Corps. Zakutny took another post of the Head of the Main Directorate for Civil Affairs in KONR. His task was to ensure the influx of people to KONR from the Soviet citizens who were brought as forced labor) and G. N. Zhilenkov (former brigade commissar of the Red Army, member of the Military Council of the 32nd Army). The head of the artillery department of the KONR Headquarters was M. V. Bogdanov, former brigade commander of the Red Army, chief of artillery of the 8th Rifle Corps. I.A. Blagoveshchensky (former head of the Libava Naval School of the coastal defense of the Red Army), became the Head of the Department of Propaganda. In addition to these people, in accordance with the international etiquette, the congress was attended by diplomatic representatives of countries allied with Germany and foreign correspondents. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the creation of KONR as a foreign policy act, and on April 28, 1945, the armed forces of KONR (though many continued to call them the ROA) were declared an army of the allied to Germany state. The flag of the commander-in-chief of this army depicted the image of St. George the Victorious. The official anthem was “If our Lord is glorious in Zion” (Nazarov, 1997: 79).

The next day after the opening of the KONR Constituent Assembly, the highest leadership of the SS ordered to recruit volunteers for the KONR's armed forces, and stated that recruitment was an urgent matter and should be conducted by specially trained propagandists. It was the duty of every propagandist to accept an application for admission to the Armed Forces in writing and to place a volunteer on the list, which indicated the surname, name, date of birth and his number as a prisoner of war (Katusev, Oppokov, 1991a: 48).

In the first week after the creation of KONR, 60,000 applications were received from volunteers with the request to enlist them in the armed forces of the Committee of the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (Korenyuk, 1990: 31).

4. Conclusion

Thus, during the period of 1942–1944, The Russian liberation movement had a long way from its inception to a mass organization. However, at the end of 1944 the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia could not have any influence on the events on the Eastern Front. Time was irretrievably lost.

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