

SCTCMG 2018
**International Scientific Conference “Social and Cultural
Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism”**

**MOBILIZATION ACTIVITIES IN CHECHEN-INGUSH ASSR ON
EVE OF GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR**

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Abstract

The article deals with the specifics of carrying out military mobilization activities in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR on the eve and at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. The author believes that the decision to terminate the conscript of Chechens and Ingush for military service in the Red Army in the spring of 1942 was not due to the revealed serious violations in the mobilization process, but to a series of difficulties that poorly trained conscript soldiers with poor Russian language proficiency experienced adapting in multinational military teams. The language barrier, the difference in domestic habits and religious differences required a certain amount of time to achieve psychological compatibility between fighters of different nationalities. At the same time, the resulting interethnic tensions were only a by-product of organizational turmoil in the first period of the war. This conclusion is underpinned by the fact that besides the Vainakhs, indigenous people of all union republics and autonomous entities of the Caucasus and Central Asia ceased to be recruited to the army.

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Keywords: Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Great Patriotic War, mobilization measures, organization of multinational military teams.



1. Introduction

In republican historiography mobilization activities conducted in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR during the Great Patriotic War are traditionally considered within a broader perspective on the overall Chechen and Ingush contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany. This is explained by the continuing attempts of some authors to justify the deportation of Chechen-Ingush indigenous population, including the allegedly mass evasion by Vainakh conscript soldiers of mobilization and their “untrustworthiness” in the field.

2. Problem Statement

The relevance of study is justified by the need to provide clear insight into mobilization to the Red Army taking place across the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and its impact on social processes in Chechen society, interethnic relations in the republic and daily life of the population. The relevance of study is also determined by the fact that mobilization measures in wartime Chechen-Ingushetia have not become the subject of a special study so far.

3. Research Questions

The object of study is military mobilization measures in Chechen-Ingushetia, including those associated with the creation of national military units. The subject of study is essential characteristics of military mobilizations, general patterns and local specific features of their conduct.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to determine the value of mobilizations carried out in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR to achieve the victory over the enemy in the most difficult period of the war of 1941-1943.

5. Research Methods

The source base of the paper comprised: 1) electronic copies of archives of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), that could be accessed through the activities of the Archival Administration of the Government of the Chechen Republic (hereinafter referred to as AAGCPP; 2) republican periodicals of the study period; 3) documents and materials on the activities of the Grozny Municipal Defense Committee, first published only in 2015 (Grozny Municipal Defense Committee. Documents and materials, 2015).

6. Findings

6.1. Military mobilization activities in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.

From the first days of the Great Patriotic War, military mobilization activities in the USSR turned to be crucial for achieving victory over Fascist Germany, as they made it possible not only to compensate for the losses suffered by the Red Army, but to consistently increase the active military strength. The above activities were carried out across the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. During the war years, over 50 thousand people were called up from Chechen-Ingushetia, including more than 30 thousand Chechens (Gakayev, 1996, p. 235). Before the war 726 thousand people of all nationalities inhabited the republic (60 years..., 1982).

Mobilization during the Great Patriotic War is quite well described in republican historiography. First of all, these are works by Abazatov (1973), Filkin (1960), Gakaev (1988) and others. The indicated issue is most fully disclosed in the studies by Musa and Movsur Ibragimov (2017) and the joint work by Ibragimov and Khatuev (2015).

Military mobilization, carried out in the USSR, is covered in more detail by many foreign authors, for example, in the collection *Why Hitler lost at war. German Insight (Why did Hitler lose at war? German Insight, 2009)*, or in the capital edition *World War II. Day by day (World War II. Day by day, 2005)*. However, all of them fail to deal with mobilization measures in national republics. Besides, a certain political commitment of Western researchers is especially noticeable in that they often address the deportation of some ethnic groups of the Soviet Union (Pohi, 1999, pp. 93-98), which makes the topic under consideration even more relevant.

The organization and implementation of mobilization activities in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR were monitored by the regional committee of the AUCP(b) and the republican CPC. As for the Grozny Municipal Defense Committee, it held meetings to deal with issues of providing armaments to the national cavalry division that was formed in the autumn of 1941 – early 1942 (Osmaev, 2018).

Following the termination of Chechen and Ingush recruitment to the Red Army in March 1942, three so-called volunteer mobilizations were conducted in the republic from September 1942 to March 1943. The first two resulted in over 5 thousand Chechens and Ingush to be drafted for the active army (Akhmadov, & Khasmagomadov, 2005, p.769).

A significant number of conscript soldiers from Chechen-Ingushetia were sent to military units formed in the republic. Based on some calculations, a total of 17 separate units and formations were created in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, including the 242nd mountain rifle and 317th rifle divisions, the 16th sapper and 4th maneuvering dogfight brigades, separate communications battalions, aerial surveillance, people's volunteer corps and mopping-up detachments (Ponomareva, & Sevostyanov, 1987, p. 80).

In addition, two national military units were created: the 255th Chechen-Ingush Cavalry Regiment and the Chechen-Ingush Cavalry Division. The strength of these units was quite significant. For example, the regular strength of the 317th (Grozny) division was 10.374 people (Archival Administration of the Government of the Chechen Republic (AAGCPP). Some officers for the national cavalry units being formed, apparently, were trained in the republic, where a cavalry department was created at the Grozny Infantry School (Grozny Municipal Defense Committee. Documents and materials, 2015. P.47).

6.2. The attitude of the population to mobilization events

The implementation of military mobilization from the first days of the war was greatly facilitated by a patriotic upsurge that swept over the population of the USSR. Thus, on June 25, 1941, the Chechen-Ingush regional committee of the AUCP(b) and the Council of People's Commissars (CPC) of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR considered the issue "On the political and moral state of the population in view of the mobilization". It was noted that in all cities and districts mobilization activities were held at a high moral, political and patriotic level (State Archive of the Chechen Republic (SACR).

During the war years, Chechen-Ingush the print media was constantly covering this issue. For example, it was reported that the first mobilization measures were carried out successfully across the republic, including the high-land regions (Draft for the Red Army in the hill region, 1941).

In one of the newspapers of 1941, a high level of military training of army conscripts was emphasized. 94% of them had AAD pins (the Air and Chemical Defense), 93.4% had GSO pins (Ready for Sanitary Defense), 58% had GTO pins (Ready to Work and Defense the USSR), 36% were sharpshooters (Voroshilovsky strelok). Komsomol members made up almost half of the conscripts. (We will hold the next conscription in the Red Army in an orderly way, 1941).

The success of the formation of the Chechen-Ingush cavalry division was described in detail, with special attention being paid to the patriotic rise among the Chechens and Ingush. It was also emphasized that the logistic support of the armed forces, including munitions, was arranged by and at the expense of the republic itself (Klevakin, 1942, p. 3). In 1943, the newspaper “Grozny Worker” informed its readers that a voluntary draft among the Chechens and Ingush was taking place in the republic with great patriotic enthusiasm (Monastyrskaya, 1943).

6.3. Organization of military mobilization on the eve and during the Great Patriotic war

It is only in recent times that the documents have been introduced into scientific circulation, that highlight numerous gross violations concerning military mobilization conducted in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. Moreover there was a frank arbitrary behavior of military enlistment officers and commanders of some military units. As it turned out, military registration and enlistment offices of the republic were unsatisfactory in keeping records of conscripts. There were identity cards for the dead, the arrested, those who moved to other places and even those who were already in the army, in whose names the call-up papers were sometimes issued. The transportation of conscripts to assembly points was not properly arranged. Relatives of local leaders were exempted from conscription, call-up papers were not given out; with a view to fulfilling mobilization plans, military aged males “caught right in the streets” were detained and sent to conscription centers (Ibrahimov, 2015, pp. 45-46).

There are, however, some archival documents indicating that nearly the same disruptions in military registration and enlistment offices and local authorities took place before the World War II. It is well known that Chechens and Ingush, as well as other representatives of hill people of the Caucasus, was not subject to the law on universal military service for a long time. The first mass draft for urgent military service in Chechen-Ingushetia was held in the autumn of 1939. It was accompanied with a large number of violations and gross arbitrariness on the part of military registration and enlistment officers.

There are a number of archival documents covering the course of recruiting campaigns in Chechen-Ingushetia in 1939 and 1940 that were not properly addressed by historical researchers. Among these documents is a memorandum to the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) “On the results of the investigation of mass evasions by Chechen-Ingush draftees of service in the Red Army” dated October 7, 1940, signed by the deputy head of the Main Political Propaganda Department of the Red Army Kuznetsov.

It is reported that following the conscription of 1939, 6.246 people were enlisted, of which 3.325 were sent directly to the military units, and 2.921 people were kept on standby. In February and June 1940, personnel in reserve were sent to the Red Army, but the transportation was extremely poorly organized:

529 people did not reach assembly points. 84 people deserted directly from the units. As of September 18, 1940, 180 people were arrested, of whom 37 were convicted by military tribunals.

The memorandum acknowledges that the main reason for the mass evasion of service was the unsatisfactory work of party, Komsomol, Soviet, public organizations and district military enlistment offices. It also contains a large number of examples designed to show that local party and Soviet bodies did not rebut “direct counter-revolutionary utterances”. What is more, many senior officials and communists from among the Chechens and Ingush attempted to cover up for deserters in every way. It is reported, for example, that in the Itum-Kaleinsky district, of the 62 dodgers, half were communists and Komsomol members, 7 – rural teachers and a technical worker of the district committee of the AUCP(b). In the same district, 12 deserters allegedly opted for clandestinity and joined the gang. In the Shatoy district, out of 58 who did not report to assembly points, 3 were candidates for the AUCP(b) and 18 – Komsomol members, and some communists concealed fugitives from military service. Among the dodgers was the prosecutor of the Shatoy district. Similar accusations were brought against the leaders of rural executive committees and it is argued that the situation was similar in other regions of the Chechen-Ingush Republic.

The memo notes that the adequate draft was hampered by the unsatisfactory registration of citizens by year of birth, which was based on economic register books. Every year or two, these books were started up again, and the number of bound to military service and military aged males was constantly decreasing. Thus, in the economic book of the Pamyatoisky Village Council of the Shatoy District for 1937 there are 14 people born in 1921, 6 – in the book of 1939, and only 1 – in the book of 1940. Out of 224 village councils of the Chechen-Ingushetia, only 13 kept record of those liable for call-up. In the republic 60-70% of those subject to conscription, in fact, were not registered at all.

The shortcomings were also noted in the work of military registration and enlistment offices, which did not establish a system for registering recruits; call-up papers were issued in unlimited quantities and were even given out to those who did not appear at the draft board. They were often not served upon a draftee, but on his parents, neighbors, or even just acquaintances. Russian language training was poor. Separate district military committees ruined the work, “getting on the path of drunkenness and bribery”.

It is emphasized that the facts about the mass draft evasion in February 1940 were reported to the secretary of the Chechen-Ingush regional committee V. Ivanov and the chairman of the CPC CHIASSR S. Mollaev, but no decisive measures were taken. The two secretaries of the district committees received a reprimand; none of the chairmen of district executive and rural executive committees, as well as the communists who covered up for deserters, was punished.

Further, it reports on the unsatisfactory work of the republican police and prosecution authorities in curbing the activities of anti-Soviet elements. The memo's allegations refer to some beatings and even murders of party and Soviet workers thought to have left unpunished (AAGCPP). A member of the Organization and Instruction Department of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) Akhmetov was sent to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in order to verify the facts stated in the memorandum of the Main Political Propaganda Department of the Red Army (the head was the notorious L. Z. Mehlis). The audit made it possible to clarify the number of dodgers on the wanted list (321, not 529), but most of the accusations against certain party and Soviet leaders of the district level were not confirmed. The information in the event of the 12 conscripts from the Itum-Kalinsky district who reportedly had joined the gang or the attack

on the military commissar of the Ataginsky district was not factually accurate. It turned out that a number of people declared deserters in the memorandum, in fact, were in military service. The figures on no-shows turned out to be exaggerated.

According to the confirmed facts, immediate measures were taken. Those responsible were arrested and convicted, expelled from the AUCP(b) and the Komsomol or dismissed from their jobs (for example, the prosecutor of the Shatoy district). Party penalties were imposed on some heads of district committees. By the way, dodgers' relatives illegally detained by law enforcement agencies were released.

It was also noted that the memo did not fully cover the deficiencies in the work of military registration and enlistment offices: neglect of military registration, poor training and clearly unsatisfactory notification of conscripts, which in some regions led to illegal arrests. As of August 1, 1940, the military prosecutor terminated 39 criminal cases out of 105 against conscripts as unsubstantiated. It was emphasized: "The military officers themselves are often guilty of allowing illegal arrests". Thus, the conscript Adamkhanov Alaudin from the Kurchaloy district spent three days at the draft board and asked to send him to the unit. The military registration officer promised to send him in the fourth team, and then mistakenly included him in the list of evaders. Adamkhanov was arrested and without any reason was kept in prison for two months. Another conscript Abayev from the highland Sharoevsky district was enlisted on February 22, 1940, and on the same day was arrested as a dodger. The Vedeno military registration and enlistment office sent two people to the army who were not subject to conscription, and the military commissar of the Itum-Kalinsky district wrote out a call-up paper to an 11-year-old boy. In the Ataginsky district, several people were reported dodgers who had already been sent to the army, etc.

A special emphasis was placed on the fact that the draft in 1940 was more organized than in 1939. In 1939 76 people (0.9%) did not appear at the draft board, in 1940 there were 21 people who did not (0.4%). On October 9, 1940, 25% of conscripts were sent to the army. Leaving for active service was more organized than in 1939, but still there were 8 escapes from the assembly point in Grozny. The main reasons for unsatisfactory work are: poor organization and on-site party work; improper performance of a number of military enlistment offices and executive committees to get to know draftees; poor logging routine, especially that the Chechens and Ingush did not use to keep metric records; major shortcomings in the sentencing practice by individual judicial and investigative bodies and military registration and enlistment offices in relation to deserters and their accessories.

It was also acknowledged that in many regions there were deficiencies in economic work. As a result, "anti-Soviet and anti-kolkhoz elements launched anti-Soviet agitation right up to overt action with the full acquiescence of the district committees of the AUCP(b), the NKVD bodies and the prosecutor's office." The situation in the Shatoy and Itum-Kaly districts became aggravated due to the illegally launched campaign to socialize the lands in use of collective farmers, which also impeded carrying out an involuntary draft. The Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the AUCP(b) was completely insufficient to control both high- and lowland regions (AAGCPP).

According to the cited document, it logically follows that the difficulties in conducting the draft campaign of 1939 and 1940 mainly occurred due to the district military commissioners, who, seeking to evade responsibility, blamed the draftees.

A memorandum prepared by the Organization and Instruction Department of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) contains the findings related to the draft campaign and resulting events that took place in the Chechen-Ingushetia in 1939 and 1940. In particular, certain facts of evasion and desertion were confirmed. However, it was republican and district military registration and enlistment offices that were mainly to blame, as they did not take into account that the draft of 1939 was carried out for the first time and did not ensure its thorough preparation and transportation of conscripts. Most cases of “evasion” were due to neglect of military registration and a completely improper alert system disregarding country-specific conditions, especially in mountainous areas. Thus, conscripts were notified of leaving for military units on the day of departure, while on their way to the recruiting station; it sometimes took 3-4 days to get to the draft board from mountainous areas. Mass delays caused by this reason were regarded as desertion and led to unreasonable arrests. The memo indicates the chaos and confusion that prevailed at military registration and enlistment offices.

The Chechen-Ingush regional committee and district committees of the AUCP(b) were partly to blame for the incident. They did not conceive the importance of the draft conducted for the first time, recused themselves from monitoring military enlistment offices and did not carry out satisfactory on-site political work, especially in remote villages and farms. The work of military registration and enlistment offices was considered by the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the AUCP(b) on September 19, 1940, with the presence of representatives of the Defense Commissariat. Following the meeting, a decision was made to remove the military commissar of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and nine district military registration and enlistment officers from their positions “as having failed to do their job well”. Besides, the meeting outlined measures to eliminate deficiencies in the work of military enlistment offices. Thanks to the measures taken, the draft of 1940 was held in a more organized manner – out of 5.463 recruits 5.442 came to recruiting stations.

Recognizing the need to hear at one of the organizing meetings of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) a report of the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee on the situation in agricultural, especially in mountainous, regions, the Organization and Instruction Department of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) considered that the measures taken by the Defense Commissariat and the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the AUCP(b) eliminated the shortcomings noted in the memo of comrades Mehlis and Kuznetsov (AAGCPP).

However, the recruiting campaigns of the first year of the war showed that the deficiencies in the work of military registration and enlistment offices, district authorities and law enforcement agencies had by no means been eliminated. This was the reason that the military mobilization of 1941 were held in Chechen-Ingushetia with a large number of gross breaches of legislation, which, in turn, brought about some tension in society.

6.4. Difficulties in adapting recruits-nationals in the military units

Another problem was a downright resistance of individual military commanders in the war to accepting recruits from among the representatives of the Caucasian ethnic groups. As soon as June 26, 1941, when examining the mobilization process, the Chechen-Ingush Regional Committee of the AUCP(b)

had to consider the case when the head of the 526-regiment, a certain captain Rebrov, refused to accept several dozen mobilized Chechens, arguing that they were not trained (Movsur, 2015, p. 158).

The case at hand was far from being isolated. It is known, for example, that the above mentioned L. Z. Mehlis, being a representative of the Supreme Command Headquarters in the Soviet grouping of troops operating in the Crimea in the spring of 1942, widely practiced the deletion of Caucasians from the subordinate units (Bezglolny, 2006, p.128).

A completely egregious incident occurred in April 1942, when the commander of one of the cavalry units of the Southern Front made every effort during the battles to “use up” the accession of non-Russian fighters as quickly as possible. He explained his actions as follows: “Let the tanks crush them down and let the enemy shoot them, then we’ll be able to head for the rear for reformation more quickly. We need to save the Cossacks and the Russians, they will be useful to us.” The commander was arrested and court-martialed (Bezglolny, 2006, p. 134). Unfortunately, he was not the only officer of the Red Army against “non-Russian” soldiers.

The unwillingness of many commanders to accept poorly trained fighters with bad Russian language proficiency was conditioned by the necessity to devote extra efforts to their training in the most difficult military situation. The language barrier, the distinction in everyday habits and religious differences complicated the formation of cohesive military teams and took some time to achieve psychological compatibility between fighters of different nationalities. For example, many Chechens, being in the field, initially refused to accept “Commissar’s hundred grams of spirit” and tobacco, but later got them in order to give them to their Russian comrades (Movsur, 2015, pp. 156-157).

In the first year of the war, almost nothing was done in the Red Army to facilitate adaptation of Caucasians being in close community with the holders of a different national-cultural mindset. It is not by chance that most of the manifestations of national tensions in troops were related to the relationship between Russians and Caucasians. Moreover, the former, as a rule, were commanders, the latter – common soldiers and junior commanders. This indicates that conflicts were primarily based on the problems of organizing a multilingual military team, but the interethnic conflict as such was only a side effect of organizational turmoil (Bezglolny, 2006, p.127, 134).

7. Conclusion

It was precisely the difficulties associated with the psychological adaptation of non-Russian recruits that became the main impellent to terminate the recruitment of some nationalities into the army. Moreover, the list of “non-conscripted” nations was quite large. Thus, in 1943 representatives of the “local nationalities” including the Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani SSR, Dagestan, Chechen-Ingush, Kabardino-Balkar, North-Ossetia ASSR, Adyghe, Karachay and Cherkess AR were not subject to military service. (AAGCPP).

At the same time, unfounded accusations against Chechens and Ingush of “mass military evasions and desertions” (along with the myth of mass collaboration with the Germans and the anti-Soviet movement) were later used to justify the deportation action against them.

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