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Original Theoretical Research

Participation of the Don Cossacks in the Volunteer Movement During the Great Patriotic War as Part of Special Cossack Cavalry Formations

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Abstract

Introduction. During the Great Patriotic War, in the general context of a significant mass volunteer movement of Soviet people, the volunteer movement of the Don Cossacks arose and developed quite actively. It manifested itself in various organizational and structural forms as common, in the form of the voluntary entry of the Don Cossack men and women into fighter battalions, regular and irregular military units, partisan detachments, and special in the form of separate volunteer Cossack cavalry divisions.

Materials and Methods. Documents and materials containing information on various aspects of the volunteer movement during the Great Patriotic War in the Rostov Region were identified, analyzed and used. Various research tools are used: complex and multifactorial approaches, descriptive, comparative-historical and historical-systemic methods.

Results. The participation of the Don Cossacks in the volunteer movement during the Great Patriotic War was very significant. The Cossack volunteer movement began almost immediately after the outbreak of war. In the Don villages, at numerous rallies of local residents, resolutions were adopted calling on the Cossacks to enlist in the ranks of volunteers of the people's militia. Two Cossack cavalry divisions were formed from the Don Cossack volunteers. During the war, fighters of Don volunteer Cossack units and formations demonstrated personal courage and bravery, high morale and level of combat training, sustained power and response to orders, were awarded a great number of military orders and medals.

Discussion and Conclusion. The volunteer movement of the Don Cossacks was considered in a number of monographic studies and scientific articles devoted, in general, to the study of events during the Great Patriotic War on the Don and the participation of its inhabitants in the war. In historiography, there are also some works in which some aspects of the formation of Cossack regular and volunteer military units were studied. In this study, on the basis of a complex and multifactorial approach, a comprehensive analysis of the participation of the Don Cossacks in the volunteer movement during the Great Patriotic War as part of special Cossack cavalry formations was carried out.

Keywords: Don Cossacks, volunteer movement, cavalry divisions, cavalry corps, Great Patriotic War

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Участие донского казачества в добровольческом движении в годы Великой Отечественной войны в составе особых казачьих кавалерийских соединений

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Аннотация

Введение. В период Великой Отечественной войны в общем контексте значительного массового добровольческого го движения советских людей возникло и достаточно активно развивалось и добровольческое движение донского казачества. Оно проявлялось в различных организационно-структурных формах как общих, в виде добровольного вступления донских казаков и казачек в истребительные батальоны, регулярные и иррегулярные воинские части, партизанские отряды, так и особенных, в виде отдельных добровольческих казачьих кавалерийских дивизий. Материалы и методы. Выявлены, проанализированы и использованы документы и материалы, содержащие сведения о различных аспектах добровольческого движения в период Великой Отечественной войны в Ростовской области. Применяются различные исследовательские инструментарии: комплексный и многофакторный подходы, описательный, сравнительно-исторический и историко-системный методы.

Результаты исследования. Участие донского казачества в добровольческом движении в период Великой Отечественной войны было весьма значительным. Казачье добровольческое движение началось практически сразу же после начала войны. В донских станицах на многочисленных митингах местных жителей принимались резолюции с призывами к казакам записываться в ряды добровольцев народного ополчения. Из числа донских казаков-добровольцев были сформированы две казачьи кавалерийские дивизии. Бойцы донских добровольческих казачьих частей и соединений в период войны продемонстрировали личное мужество и отвагу, высокий моральный дух и уровень боевой подготовки, стойкость и исполнительность, были удостоены большого количества боевых орденов и медалей. Обсуждение и заключение. Добровольческое движение донского казачества рассматривалось в ряде монографических исследований и научных статей, посвящённых в целом изучению событий в период Великой Отечественной войны на Дону и участию его жителей в войне. В историографии присутствуют и отдельные работы, в которых исследовались некоторые аспекты формирования казачьих регулярных и добровольческих воинских частей. В данном исследовании на основании комплексного и многофакторного подходов проведен всесторонний анализ участия донского казачества в добровольческом движении в годы Великой Отечественной войны в составе особых казачьих кавалерийских соединений.

Ключевые слова: донское казачество, добровольческое движение, кавалерийские дивизии, кавалерийский корпус, Великая Отечественная война

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Introduction. During the Great Patriotic War, in the general context of a significant mass volunteer movement of Soviet people, the volunteer movement of the Don Cossacks arose and developed quite actively. In its essence and organizational forms, this movement had both common features inherent in the entire volunteer movement that unfolded in the country, and its specific features due to the moral patriotic worldviews traditional for the Cossacks and centuries-old traditions of their military service and military organization.

The mass volunteer movement of the Don Cossacks during the war testified to the dominance of high moral and patriotic feelings, real moods and their practical expressions in the form of the desire to defend the Motherland with weapons in their hands and joining the organized special Cossack volunteer cavalry military units and formations.

Materials and Methods. Documents and materials containing information about various aspects of the volunteer movement during the Great Patriotic War in the Rostov Region, identified in archival depots and contained in published collections, are used. Historiographic studies are involved, in which, to one degree or another, various aspects of the designated problem are addressed. The multifactorial approach, descriptive, comparative-historical and historical-systemic methods are applied. The latter, in particular, allows us to study the object of research by highlighting its individual structural elements, their direct and indirect functions, their relationship with each other and with the whole

scientific and critical analysis. Methods of data analysis and synthesis were also used as well as general scientific and special scientific historical principles, such as objectivity, scientificity, historicism.

Results. Almost immediately after the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War, the massive volunteer movement unfolded in the country. People who were not subject to priority conscription as well as those who due to their state of health, age, important professional activities (the so-called "reservation") were not subject to conscription, could join various volunteer militia formations.

The Don Cossacks also took an active part in this movement. In July 1941, a significant number of Cossack volunteers allowed to begin the formation of the Don Cossack volunteer cavalry divisions in the Stalingrad region, most of which were the lands of the former Region of the Don Army, and in the Rostov region.

On the 8th of July, 1941, a special resolution was adopted by the Bureau of the Stalingrad Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the regional executive committee of the Stalingrad Regional Council of Workers' Deputies on the formation of the Special Regional Don Cossack Cavalry Division as part of the militia corps formed in the Stalingrad Region [4].

On the 15th of July, the joint resolution was adopted by the Bureau of the Rostov Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Rostov Regional Executive Committee "On the formation of the Don Cossack Division in the Rostov Region". It emphasized, and this circumstance should be paid special attention to, that volunteer Cossack units were prescribed to be created from Cossack volunteers who were not subject to official military conscription due to their non-conscription age [5, p. 62].

In the Stalingrad region from July 4 to October 8, 1941, the formation of the "Special Combined Cossack Cavalry Division of the People's Militia" was underway. On the 23rd of November, 1941, an order was issued by the commander of the Stalingrad Military District No. OM/104356, according to which from December 1, 1941, the division was transferred to the position of personnel units of the Red Army and reorganized into the "Separate Cavalry Division". On the 24th of January, 1942, the division was given the name the 1st Don Cossack Cavalry Division. On the 2nd of February, it was renamed the 15th Don Cossack Cavalry Division and introduced into the 16th Cavalry Corps, stationed in Moscow. By personal order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR No. 782/Sh from March 30, 1942, the 15th Don Cossack Cavalry Division was transferred to the 17th Cavalry Corps [6, 1. 9–19]. More than half of its fighters were already older than 40 years. The regiments of the 15th Don Cossack Cavalry Division were named the 25th, 33rd and 41st Don Cossack Cavalry.

The forming volunteer Cossack division in the Rostov region received the name "the Don Volunteer Cossack Cavalry Division". The center of the formation of the division was the city of Salsk. Providing the division with horse-flesh, supplying it with food and provand was originally planned to be carried out at the expense of the collective farm fund of the region. The workers of the region coped with this difficult and responsible task perfectly.

On the 21st of January, 1942, based on the directive of the General Staff of the Red Army, the division was officially renamed "the 116th Don Cossack Cavalry Division". Colonel Pyotr Yakovlevich Strepukhov, a career military man, a hero of the Civil War, a Don Cossack of the Semikarakor village, was appointed division commander. On the 26th of January, 1942, the division became part of the army. At that time, it was a cavalry division of the so-called light type, which included only three cavalry regiments and separate special squadrons. The division during this period included the 257th Azov cavalry regiment (including the 1st Azov, 2nd Samarsko-Aleksandrovskaya, 3rd Kagalnitsko-Mechetinskaya and 4th Morozovskaya sotnias), the 258th Zimovnikovsky cavalry regiment, the 259th Salsky cavalry regiment [7, pp. 4–5].

A feature of these Don volunteer Cossack divisions was not only that their personnel consisted of the Don Cossacks. The main thing was that the Cossacks who volunteered for them for various legal reasons were not subject to mobilization in the army (elderly or, conversely, young, non-conscripted age, poor health, official "reservation"). Nevertheless, they all voluntarily went to a deadly fight with the enemy. Moreover, many of them enrolled in volunteer units with their sons and even daughters. For example, the Cossack Zubenko arrived at the assembly point with his wife, son and two daughters. The Cossack of the village of Morozovskaya I.A. Khomutov, being already at the advanced age, joined a volunteer division with his sons, 14-year-old Alexander and 16-year-old Andrey. The Cossack Vyshkvartsev joined one of the Cossack regiments of the people's militia with his wife and son. The Cossacks Sklyarov, Chernoyarov, Fedorov and many others joined the militia together with their sons. Many Cossacks, according to the old Cossack tradition, purchased combat horses and all the necessary equipment at their own expense. Thus, the elderly Cossack of the village of Kulmyzhenskaya P.R. Dorin arrived at the volunteer Cossack regiment having bought a horse and equipment using his savings. The 64-year-old Cossack P.S. Biryukov, having found out that a volunteer sotnia is formed in his village, insistently demanded to be included in the Cossack militia and, despite numerous refusals achieved his goal. The Cossack of the village of Nizhnechirskaya, 60-year-old Paramon Samsonovich Kurkin, gathered former fellow soldiers, created a detachment and at the head of it, having made a 400-kilometer march, arrived in the cavalry division [8, pp. 17–18]. There was a lot of such examples.

It should be especially noted that among the Cossack volunteers there were young men who had not reached the draft age (the youngest, Alexander Khomutov, was only 14 years old), and elderly men whose age was already much higher than the draft age (the oldest, Nikolai Erokhin, was 67 years old). However, despite the age restrictions, all Cossack volunteers valiantly and courageously fought the enemy, endured combat hardships [9].

Later Konstantin Iosifovich Nedorubov described the events of those days in his autobiography: "In 1941, during the treacherous attack of German bandits on our homeland, I first joined the people's militia. My example was followed by 57 people aged 50–60 years, and my youngest son Nikolai did not lag behind, at that time he was 17 years old. I had to form a squadron of the old Cossacks, participants in two past wars (World War I and Civil War — V.T.)... Leaving Berezovskaya we swore an oath to defend the Motherland to the last drop of our blood" [10, p. 103].

In the beginning of January, 1942, the 17th Cossack Cavalry Corps was formed. It included the 10th, 12th and 13th Kuban Cossack volunteer divisions. The corps commander was the Major General M.F. Maleev, the chief of staff, the Colonel A.M. Kuznetsov. In the spring of the same year, the 15th and 116th Don Cossack volunteer cavalry divisions were included in the corps. In our opinion, it is necessary to pay special attention to one very important and indicative document, which quite eloquently testifies to the social and age composition of these divisions. In one of the reports of the political department of the 116th Don Cavalry Division to the political department of the North Caucasus Military District about the state of the division, its chief emphasized that "the vast majority of the Cossacks are volunteers. More than 80 % of the rank and file are the Cossacks over the age of 40 (that is, very old age – V.T.), participants in the civil war… There are squadrons manned by the Cossacks of one district" [11, p. 84].

In June 1942, the Major General, Nikolai Yakovlevich Kirichenko, was appointed commander of the corps.

The analysis of the staffing of the Cossack divisions of the 17th cavalry corps by the Military Council of the North Caucasus Military District showed that it had serious shortcomings in material and technical terms and was poorly staffed with combat-experienced personnel. The corps divisions, except for the 116th cavalry division, did not have small arms. In the 116th cavalry division itself, there were only 234 rifles, 1 machine gun, 3 machine rifles for more than 3,000 ordinary personnel. There were only 64 % of saddles, and 53 % of shashkas (a single-edged sabre). It was also noted that there were no shoes and clothes in the parts of the corps [12, p. 22–23]. However, despite all the difficulties with the personnel, material and technical support of the corps units, the Cossacks were eager to leave for the front as soon as possible and engage in the battle with the enemy.

On the 27th of August, 1942, to commemorate the significant military merits of the Cossacks of the corps, the 17th Cossack Cavalry Corps was transformed into the 4th Guards Cossack Cavalry Corps. The 15th Don Cossack Cavalry Division became the 11th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Division, and the 116th Don Cossack Cavalry Division became the 12th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Division.

By decision of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command of November 20, 1942, the new 5th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Corps was formed, which included the 11th and 12th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Divisions, the 63rd Cavalry Division and individual corps units. The Major General, Alexei Gordeevich Selivanov, was appointed commander of the corps.

Units of the 5th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Corps actively participated in many battles. During intense hostilities, they suffered serious losses. In such a difficult situation, in February 1943, the corps command decided to send a letter to the fellow countrymen of the Don with an appeal to join the corps units. The text of the letter with a report on the military path of the Cossack corps and an appeal to send Cossack replenishment to its composition was collectively compiled and discussed at the meetings in units and subunits. The appeal on behalf of the Don Cossack Guards was signed by the corps command and 16 of the most respected Cossacks. This was done in the spirit of Cossack traditions, when an important written appeal was discussed at a meeting of the circle, and it was signed by the worthiest, most respected Cossacks.

On the 27th of February, 1943, this letter of appeal was published in the regional newspaper "Molot". This appeal found a lively response on the Don. New volunteers and conscripts were found despite the fact that, firstly, by that time the army had already had an overwhelming number of military-liable residents of the Don and volunteers, and, secondly, when recruiting recruits to the corps, there were rather strict criteria for selecting recruits in extraordinary wartime. The command of the Don cavalry corps was very serious about the selection of replenishment. Thus, on the 28th of March, 1943, the secret telegram signed by the chief of staff of the corps came to all corps formations. It said that according to the order of the corps commander, the commission for the selection of replenishment should include representatives from political departments, special departments, combat departments, division headquarters and medical workers. The commission was tasked with "accepting replenishment only worthy of serving in the Guards, Cossack Troops, quite healthy, politically tested and mainly the Don Cossacks" [13, p. 270]. The direction of replenishment in the corps was closely monitored by the highest regional party-Soviet bodies. Thus, at the meeting of the Bureau of the Rostov Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the 14th of May, 1943, at which the results of the mobilization work of the regional committee for the spring period were considered, it was noted that for the period from

March 20 to May 14, 3,674 soldiers and commanders were sent to units and subunits of the 5th Guards Cossack Cavalry Corps. In general, the inhabitants of the Don region honored their civic duty: instead of the planned 5 thousand people, by July 1943, 10481 people had arrived in the corps, including more than 7,000 Cossacks [14, p. 156].

The worthy replenishment of the corps was paid careful attention in the future. Moreover, this activity was carried out jointly by the party and Soviet leadership of the region and the command of the corps itself. Thus, the head of the political department of the corps, Colonel N.I. Privalov, in his letter to the first secretary of the Rostov regional committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). B.A. Dvinsky. of August 16, 1944, noted that all the commanders and chiefs of the corps were the sons of the Quiet Don: Gorshkov was from Uryupinskaya stanitsa, Maleev (deputy corps commander) was from Martynovskaya, he was from Zotovskaya stanitsa, and that for them Cossacks, there was no greater honor how to serve and lead the Don Cossacks, these brave of the bravest sons of our Motherland. It was emphasized that they, as leaders of the corps, understood all responsibility to the Motherland in this Great Patriotic War, but they, as the blood sons of Don, also felt the greatest responsibility to all the Cossacks of Don, to the living people of Don and to their glorious ancestors. The letter proudly stated that the whole country began to love the word "Cossack" more and all the horsemen want to call themselves Cossacks. The letter ended with a request to follow the reserve Don regiment located in Stavropol, so that it would be replenished with the Don people and that they go to the 5th Guards, and not to other corps. In this letter of the Cossack commander, factors were noted that were obvious at that time. In particular, heroism and courage repeatedly shown by the Cossacks of the 5th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Corps, their high-profile heroic deeds, which were well known to everyone and deservedly determined their very high combat and public authority [15, pp. 85-86]. This statement of an authoritative military leader, general, very eloquently testified to the high authority of the Cossacks of volunteer units both in the army and in society as a whole. The reason for this was heroism and courage shown by the Cossacks in battles, the feats they performed.

Discussion and Conclusion. Thus, on the Don in the summer and winter of 1941, the formation of the volunteer Cossack units and formations was carried out almost entirely at the expense of Cossack volunteers, the bulk of which were not subject to conscription into the army on legal official grounds. The process of manning these units was greatly complicated by a large shortage of weapons, equipment, uniforms, the necessary command personnel of the highest, middle and even junior levels, and quite naturally stretched out for a certain period of time. In subsequent periods of the war, the replenishment of the Don volunteer Cossack units and formations was carried out not only at the expense of volunteers, but also conscripts. However, recruits for these units, due to a number of circumstances, were recruited mainly in the territories of the former Cossack regions. The indisputable fact was the presence of the Don Cossacks as the bulk of the personnel of the 5th Guards Don Cossack Cavalry Corps.

During the Great Patriotic War, the Don Cossacks in droves and exclusively voluntarily defended the Motherland. The main driving force was a high sense of patriotism. The Cossacks courageously endured combat hardships, heroically fought the enemy at the front, worked tirelessly in the rear in the name of Victory. Even the new generation of Cossacks, which grew up already under the Soviet rule and absorbed the corresponding political, ideological, worldview attitudes, during the war years demonstrated the moral principles of patriotism, defense of the Fatherland, loyalty to the oath and civic duty, courage, selfless service to the Motherland. Of course, at that time, many, however, with varying degrees of sincerity, shared the Soviet ideology, but it was patriotic feelings that dominated their minds.

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