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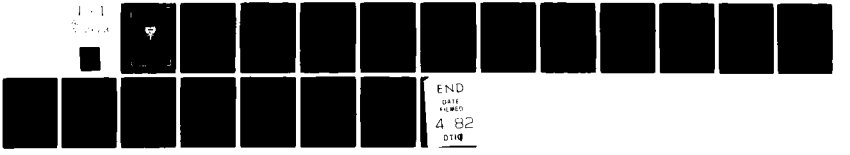

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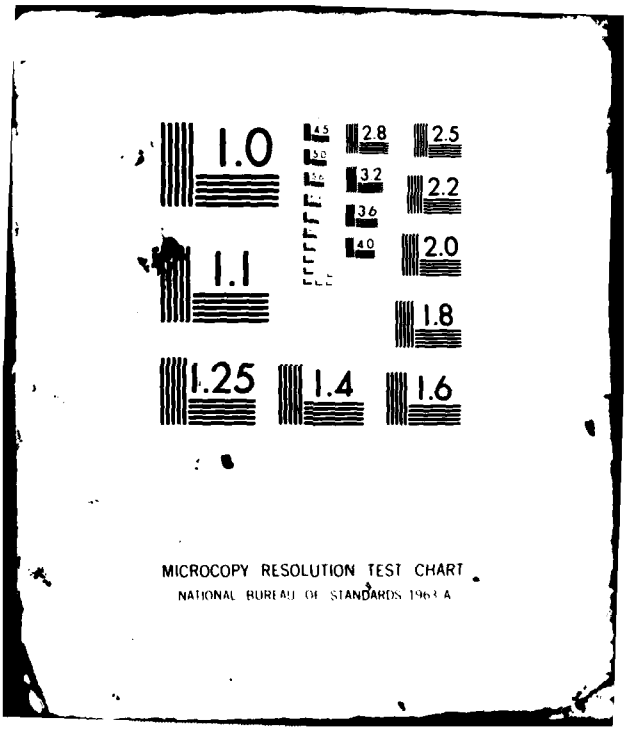
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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

THE ZAMPOLIT, THE COMMANDER AND UNITY OF COMMAND

MAJ Michael P. Connolly

1981

GARMISCH, GERMANY

APO NEW YORK 09053

USARI Form 1
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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER USARI-2533	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO. AD-A112 625	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) THE ZAMPOLIT, THE COMMANDER AND UNITY OF COMMAND		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s) Major Michael P. Connolly		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS US Army Russian Institute APO NY 09053		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Office of the Director of Instruction US Army Russian Institute		12. REPORT DATE June 1981
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 18
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS(if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE

16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)

18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

THE ZAMPOLIT, THE COMMANDER AND UNITY OF COMMAND

Major Michael P. Connolly

June 1981

US ARMY RUSSIAN INSTITUTE

Garmisch, Germany

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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FOREWORD

This research project represents fulfillment of a student requirement for successful completion of the overseas phase of training of the Department of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program (Russian).

Only unclassified sources are used in producing the research paper. The opinions, value judgements and conclusions expressed are those of the author and in no way reflect official policy of the United States Government, Department of Defense, Department of the Army, the US Army Intelligence and Security Command, or the Russian Institute. The completed paper is not to be reproduced in whole or in part without permission of the Commander, US Army Russian Institute, APO New York 09053.

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SUMMARY

This paper addresses the relationship between the Party-political worker (the zampolit) and the commander in today's Soviet military. It deals with the evolution of the concept of "unity of command" and traces the development of the role the zampolit has traditionally played in the Soviet system. In order to better appreciate the duties and responsibilities of the zampolit, insight into his training and the overall organization of the political structure that he supports (the Main Political Directorate) is provided. In conclusion the mutual interdependence of the zampolit and the commander is discussed. (The zampolit and his commander, despite instances of conflict, are dependent upon one another for the proper conduct of their duties.)

INTRODUCTION

Political control mechanisms have been an integral part of the Soviet Armed Forces since the fall of the Tsar. Given the totalitarian nature of Soviet society and the significant role that the military has traditionally played therein, it is understandable that the Communist Party places the importance it does in its uniformed political apparatus, the Glavnoye Politicheskoe Upravleniye (GPU or Main Political Administration).[1]

The GPU's prime actor within military units today is the zampolit (political assistant), whose full title is zamestitel' komondira po politicheskoi chasti (assistant commander for political affairs). This paper will address the changes that the GPU has undergone over the past six decades, and the impact those changes have had on the zampolit's training, his roles, and his responsibilities.

A considerable amount of western literature has developed surrounding what kremlinologists refer to as "the inevitable conflict between the zampolit and his commander."[2] A clear understanding of yedinonachaliye (unity of command) is invaluable in fully appreciating the relationship that exists between today's zampolit and his commander. Insights derived from current articles appearing in the GPU's main propaganda organ Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star) help to alleviate the misconception that the current typical zampolit-commander relationship is a conflictual one. If anything, the emphasis placed by the present director of the GPU,

General A.A. Yepishev, on the principle of unity of command illustrates the institutional interdependence of the political apparatus and the professional officer corps.[3]

FROM COMMISSAR TO ZAMPOLIT

Michael Deane in his study Political Control of the Armed Forces cites the existence of "a perpetual power struggle among the Soviet leadership,"[4] i.e., the GPU, the Party, and the professional military, as being the prime catalyst for change within the Soviet political-military hierarchy. Evidence of this conflict dates back to the Civil War, when voyenkomy (military commissars) were appointed to Red Army units to share command with unit commanders, the majority of whom had been Tsarist officers and were not to be trusted. At that time all military orders had to be countersigned by the voyenkomy, who were entitled to countermand orders and even arrest commanders for actions they deemed to be counterrevolutionary. A resolution passed by the Fifth Congress of Soviets in July 1919 summarizes the role played by the military commissar during those early years of the GPU:

> Military commissars are the guardians of the close and inviolable inner bond between the Red Army and the workers' and peasants' regime. Only irreproachable revolutionaries, staunch champions of the proletariat and the village poor, should be appointed to the posts of military commissars, to whom is handed over the fate of the Army.[5]

In 1922 a decree modernizing and reorganizing the military established personal ranks and redefined responsibilities for commanders and political cadre. The political officers' positions in effect at that time, in ascending order were: politruk (contraction for politicheskii rukovoditel', political instructor), senior politruk, battalion commissar, regimental commissar, and divisional commissary of the Army of the first

and second rank. Politruks were assigned to each company, battery, and squadron, and were under the direct control of the commissar at the next higher echelon. Their main function was to establish schools, both to combat illiteracy and to indoctrinate soldiers and sailors in Party tenets.[6]

Leon Trotsky's successor as chairman of the Revvoyensoviet (Revolutionary Military Council), M.V. Frunze, introduced several reforms for the military in 1925, not the least of which was the concept of yedinonachalive. In effect this was little more than the militarization of the one man control principle Lenin had outlined in 1920 at the Third All-Russia Congress, "The practical management of all institutions, enterprises, undertakings or tasks should be entrusted to one comrade. As a general tendency we have arrived at the principle of one man responsibility as the only correct method of work."[7]

The decree signalled, among other things, the abolishment of countersigning all orders by the zampolit. One of the driving issues behind the unity of command decree, which was instituted on a unit by unit basis, depending upon the commander's political reliability, was the fact that well over 75 percent of the corps commanders, and almost half of the company, regimental and division level commanders were Party members by 1925. By 1931 unity of command was in effect in all units. During this period Party political work was carried out by political assistants to the commander, who countersigned only those orders pertaining strictly to Party matters. The company level politruk was generally considered to be a mid-level commander, subordinate to the battalion commander, but independent of the company commander concerning political matters.[8]

The Concise Dictionary of Operational-Tactical and General Military Terms, prepared by the Frunze Military Academy faculty, explains the concept of unity of command:

> Its essence is the personal responsibility of a commander for the morale, discipline, military and political training, combat readiness and combat activity of his unit. Unity of command is developed and reinforced on a Party basis. A commanding officer, making a decision personally in combat, depends on the support of Party organizations and the entire military collective. The Party reinforces unity of command, which is indispensable in the Armed Forces.[9]

During the period preceeding the purges, from 1927 to 1937, as the Soviet Armed Forces increased from 586,000 officers and men to 1,433,000, this textbook concept of yedinonachaliye was put aside. The tripling of the military was paralleled by a disproportionate increase in the percentage of Party members in the military, creating an imbalance that was addressed in 1933 when the Party restricted its membership and forced many members to surrender their cards. In addition to the reduction of Party membership from 300,000 in 1932 to 150,000 by 1935, commissars were reintroduced, with politruks being assigned down to the company level.

It was during this period that the GPU experienced its lowest popularity, as commissars assumed the role of screening the ranks of officers for those guilty of political complacency or lack of party-mindedness. Commissars were generally feared and distrusted, considered by most commanders to be "the eyes and ears of the Party and the government."[10] Despite the fact that commissars shared equality of rank with unit commanders during this period, in reality they possessed more power and exercised greater authority than other officers. Any aloofness the commissars displayed was shortlived however, for the ranks of the political workers also underwent the purging process that afflicted the entire Soviet system.

In 1940 Stalin's initial attempt to do away with the commissar/political officer organization was short-sighted. His tactic of removing all commissars from line units had to be discarded in 1941, when the Germans invaded the Ukraine and were welcomed as liberators, as they overwhelmed the Soviet forces. By 1942, according to Krasnaya Zvesda "a well trained corps of officers, tested by fire and utterly devoted to the people, the Party, and the homeland, formed the core of the officer cadre."[11] On 9 October of the same year the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued a decree entitled "On the Establishment of Full One-Man Command and the Abolition of the Institution of Commissars in the Red Army."

The commissar was again replaced by the zampolit, whose major concerns were the education of the troops, morale and propaganda. The GPU as it is organized today became the central focal point for party-political work within the military, with the zampolit as its primary actor.

THE ZAMPOLIT IN TODAY'S GPU

The GPU has an organizational structure that has been subject to change as the political environment has changed, and its duties have also undergone gradual, and sometimes not so gradual, alterations. Because it has both political and military responsibilities, the GPU's duties are widely diversified. Among the missions it is formally charged with are:

- Directing the activities of its subordinate political control organs, as well as the Party and Young Communist League (Komsomol) organizations in the military.
- Verifying the performance of the political control organs and military party organizations to ensure that Party, state and Defence Ministry orders are carried out.

- Participating in the selection, assignment and political evaluation of military and political officers.

- Supervising the content and ideological direction of all military journals, periodicals and publishing houses.

- Supervising military training institutions; controlling research and curriculums in the social sciences at all academics, schools and military training institutions.

- Supplying the troops with political, educational and propaganda materials.

- Recording and maintaining all vital statistics pertinent to Party work in the Armed Forces.[12]

The headquarters of the GPU, according to Michael Deane, is organized into five directorates, one each for Party and organizational work, agitation and propaganda, mass cultural work, personnel, and the military press. The heads of the directorates comprise the core of the GPU's decision making bureau, which has been headed since 1962 by General A.A. Yepishev.

At the lower military echelons, political directorates operate in the headquarters of Military Districts, fleets, and groups of forces abroad. In the lower echelon headquarters and institutions such as military academies, the GPU is represented by the politotdel' (political department). At the regional level the political officer has a staff, but the zampolit, who functions at battalion and company level, relies on assistance from Komsomol members and off-duty troops to fulfill his plan.

According to General Yepishev, the GPU's indoctrination efforts in the Armed Forces are not only designed to mold ideal Soviet soldiers and sailors, but also to continue the development of what has been called the "new Soviet man". In light of this it is quite fitting that the zampolit's primary goal in party-political work is:

> ...to train soldiers in the spirit of Communist consciousness; in Soviet patriotism, internationalism, political vigilance, and class hatred toward enemies of the Socialist Fatherland; in loyalty to military duty and his oath; and to be in constant readiness to defend socialist achievement, the peaceful labor of the Soviet people, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the USSR.[13]

In addition to this institutionalized insight, provided by the Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Krasnaya Zvesda stresses: "The political officer persistently teaches officers the art of educating men, advising them on the preparation of classes, the use of literature and propaganda in political training."[14]

The training that the zampolit receives to prepare him for molding the new Soviet man is both extensive and varied. The zampolit is not only responsible for political indoctrination, but also for managing and stimulating socialist competition and other activities intended to promote greater zeal and effectiveness in military training and operations. To this end the zampolit's training at one of the eight military-political schools emphasizes the ability to lecture well, to speak with conviction and clarity, and to exercise emotional influence on the men in his unit.[15]

The training for junior political officers begins at an early age, with almost all candidates having experience in prior Party work. The specialty schools the zampolit attends qualifies him in a technical specialty (combat arms, artillery, armor, air defense, construction troops, aviation, engineering and communications, and naval service).[16] The military proficiency of the zampolit is essential in establishing his professional credentials in the unit he is assigned to.

An example of the kinds of literature the aspiring zampolit is exposed to are the three most current memoirs of Chairman L. I. Brezhnev,

Malaya Zemlya (Little Earth), Vozrozhdeniye (Rebirth) and Tselina (Virgin Land). These books, which won the Lenin Prize for Brezhnev in 1979, recount the leader's experiences as a political officer and are indicative of the direction and substance of political education of the zampolit.

In addition to simply personalizing all of the grandiose and wide ranging responsibilities of the GPU, the zampolit in defining his mission statement must add the development of his troops' moral fiber to his long list of duties. This casts him in much the same role as the chaplain in the US military, giving him the responsibility of advising the soldier on family problems and personal affairs. Counseling young troops on hygiene and excessive drinking takes a disproportionate amount of the zampolit's time in many units.[17]

In 1978 Voyennyy Vestnik (Military Herald) featured a series of articles detailing the commander's responsibilities in preparing for combat. One of his duties is determining the tasks of the party-political worker, which Colonel Timerkhanov feels have taken on new and increased importance in the era of nuclear weapons. The zampolit in the nuclear environment will be expected to continue to fulfill his obligations to the troops, keeping their morale high by effectively carrying out his party-political work.[18]

One of the tools zampolits use in achieving their many faceted mission is that of promoting socialist competition. Socialist competition, according to the Frunze Academy, is one of the primary methods of Communist education, serving not only to increase the number of outstanding units, but also as a way of resolving problems of combat and political training.[19]

General Yepishev, in proclaiming that the zampolit must be the initiator of socialist competition if he expects his unit to achieve success, raises a critical issue in the zampolit-commander relationship. If the unit's success or failure is determined by the results of the zampolit-inspired socialist competition, and if the unit commander is ultimately responsible for every aspect of his unit's preparedness, to include political and Party training, then it would seem likely that the zampolit and the commander with so much in common at stake would develop a relationship stressing mutual support.

The evolution of yedinonachaliye has driven the relationship between commander and zampolit to both extremes over the years. Today, in the 1980's, a balance appears to have been reached.

CONFLICT OR INTERDEPENDENCE?

The relationship between the zampolit and the commander receives what is considered by many to be a disproportionately large amount of attention in the western press. Given the turbulent history of the Soviet officer corps, which chronicles the political downfall of such military giants as Marshall M.N. Tukhachevskiy and Marshall G.K. Zhukov, this is understandable.

An interesting development in current Soviet propaganda styles has provided some insight into the relationship between the commander and the zampolit. This development, an increase in the amount of fiction being written by young Soviet propagandists, could be the result of extensive efforts on the part of Party-military leaders to promote increased enthusiasm for the Armed Forces through the medium of literature.[20] Attractive incentives and specific guidance has produced a new wave of young writers who are glorifying the daily life of the soldier.

As recently as last year Krasnaya Zvesda published several articles which had undercurrents detailing disputes between zampolits and their commanders over such varied issues as limited time for training, improper methods of instilling discipline, poor attitudes toward training, disorganized training programs, and insubordination.[21]

Any intimation at conflicts going unresolved in the situations posed in these articles was generally well guarded, and all resolutions to the problems that were discussed were stated in extremely positive, almost uplifting Party prose. One recurring theme in those articles where disputes had arisen between the zampolit and the commander was the concept of an unofficial checks and balance system that seems to exist at the working level between these two positions. If, for reasons of a personality conflict or something equally disruptive, the dispute couldn't be easily resolved, the fact that both officers depend upon each other for support in so many critical areas, seemed to reduce the conflict.

The lasting impression the reader is left with is that the zampolit does not generally pose the threat today to the commander, or seriously impeded his decision process in the manner that was typically the case back in the mid 1950's, when Marshall Zhukov was intent on eliminating all "meddling zampolits".[22]

The fact that the political officer plays a role in the evaluation and assignment process of the professional officers serving as commanders, balances the fact that the commanders have the powers of yedinonachaliye. Given the political powers the zampolit can yield, it would appear that the commander needs the political officer's support not only to secure the success of his unit, but also to insure his personal success, creating a complementary, rather than an adversary relationship.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Throughout the text GPU will be used interchangeably with the terms Main Political Directorate (MPD) and Main Political Administration (MPA).

[2]See Roman Kolkowitz', "The Military," chapter 5 of: H. Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths (eds.), Interest Groups in Soviet Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 131-168.

[3]Timothy J. Colton, Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 24.

[4]Michael J. Deane, Political Control of the Soviet Armed Forces (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, 1977), p. viii.

[5]Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers' and Cossack' Deputies: Verbatim Report, July 4-10, 1919, Moscow, p. 213.

[6]"Voyennyy" (Military), Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya (Soviet Military Encyclopedia), Vol. II (1978), p. 268.

[7]Alexander Khmel' (ed.) O Vospitanii Sovetskogo Soldata (Education of the Soviet Soldier) (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p. 22.

[8]Herbert Goldhamer, The Soviet Soldier (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 97.

[9]"Yedinonachaliye" (unity of command) Dictionary of Basic Military Terms (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 74.

[10]Pravda, 8 September 1938, p. 3.

[11]Krasnaya Zvesda (Red Star) 11 October 1942, p. 7.

[12]For a more detailed discussion of the GPU's internal organization see Harriet and William Scott, The Armed Forces of the USSR (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), pp. 106-111.

[13]"Party-Political Work" Sovetskaya Voyebnaya Entsiklopediya Vol VI (1978), p. 240.

[14]Krasnaya Zvesda, 14 April 1972, p. 2.

[15]A. Averin, "Budushim Politrobotnikim," (Future Political Workers) Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil, (#23, 1970), pp. 33-36.

[16]Krasnaya Zvesda, 29 January 1971, p. 4.

[17]Ibid., 12 December 1980, p. 6.

[18]D. Timerkhanov, "Zadachi Partiyno-politicheskoy Raboty Opredelyaet Komandir" (The Commander Determines the Tasks of the Party Political Worker) Voyennyy Vestnik, (#12, 1978), p. 63.

[19]"Sotsialisticheskoe Sorevnovaniye" (Socialist Competition) Dictionary of Military Terms, p. 205.

[20]Based on a series of lectures delivered by E.P. Posdeeva on the topic "Military Themes in Contemporary Literature,"; of particular interest is A. Kyleshev's novel Belyy Veter (White Wind), which recounts the exploits of a current day zampolit.

[21]See "Kontakt: Partiynaya Zhizn" Krasnaya Zvesda 18 February 1980; "Inspector" Krasnaya Zvesda 19 March 1980; and "Chya Zabota, Hastroenniye?" (Whose responsibility is spirit?) Krasnaya Zvesda 10 July 1980.

[22]For a more detailed insight see Chapter 16 of O.P. Chaney's Zhukov (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), pp. 406-444.

[23]Krasnaya Zvesda 28 March 1973, p. 3.

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