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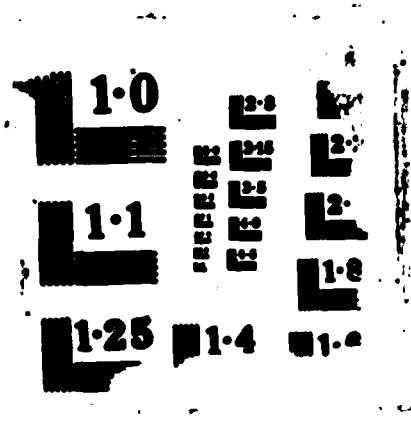
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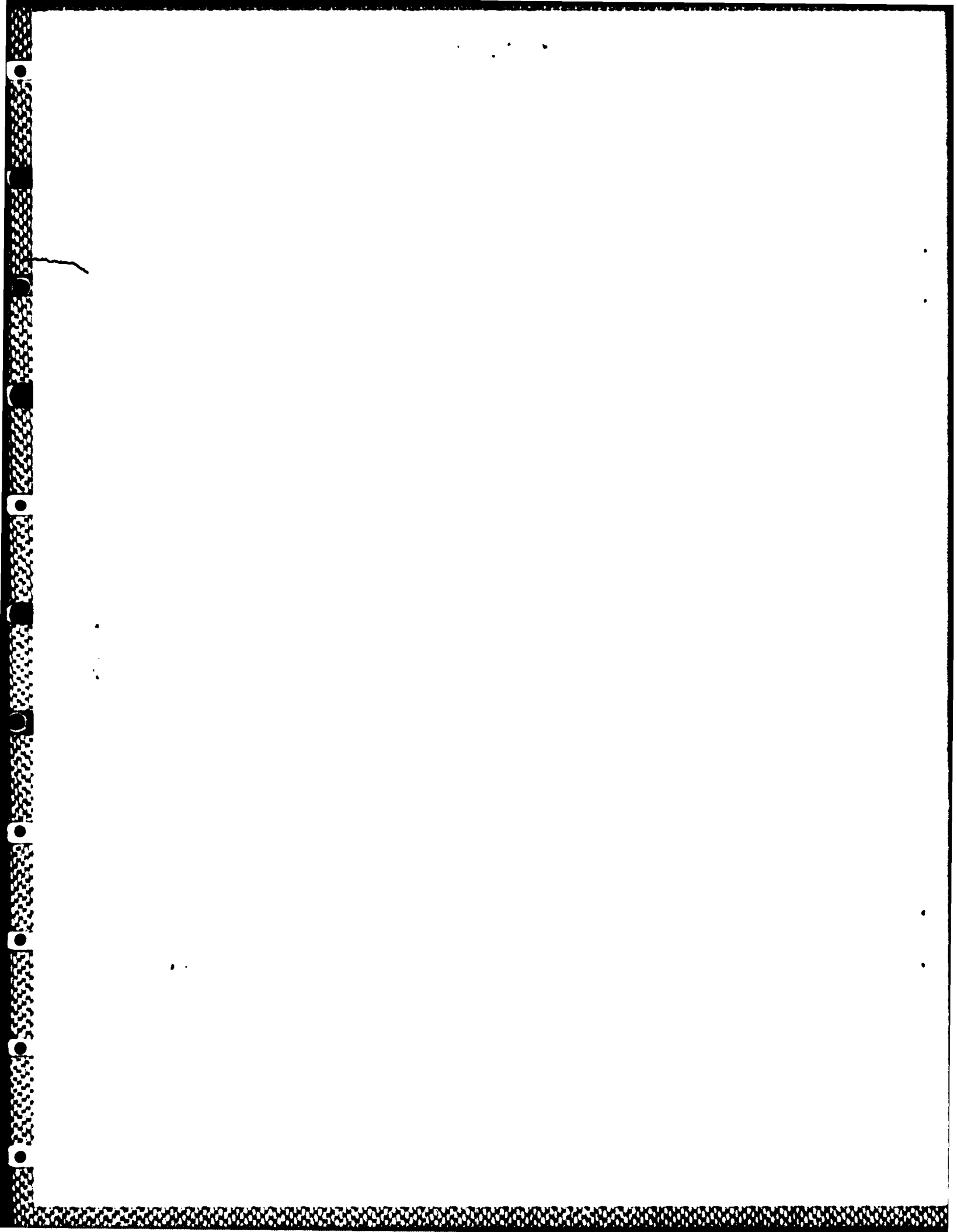
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**SOVIET SPECIAL OPERATIONS: THE LEGACY OF THE
GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR**

by

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April 1987

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Soviet Special Operations: The Legacy
of the Great Patriotic War

I. Introduction

On 9 February 1944 a Wehrmacht lieutenant stopped the Nazi vice governor of Galicia and his adjutant on a street in Lvov. "Are you Doctor Bauer?" he asked. "Yes" came the response. "Good, you're the one I need!" Several well-aimed shots rang out and Bauer and his assistant lay dead in the street.¹

The two Nazi officials had become the last official "kills" of perhaps the most famous Soviet special operator of the Great Patriotic War, Nikolai Ivanovich Kuznetsov. Fluent in German, Kuznetsov volunteered in 1941 to operate behind German lines. For almost two years (August 1942-March 1944), he masqueraded as "Paul Siebert", a lieutenant in the German Army. Together with a small group of specialists, Kuznetsov operated in and around Rovno and Lvov. Officially he is credited with six assassinations of members of the German hierarchy in the Ukraine. In addition, he seriously wounded the Gauleiter of the Ukraine with an antitank grenade and kidnapped General Hermann Knut of the Wehrmacht (for later trial and execution). Ukrainian nationalists eventually tracked down and surrounded Kuznetsov in a forest outside of Lvov. He killed himself (and several would-be captors) with a handgrenade. For his services to the Soviet Fatherland he was posthumously awarded the highest Soviet approbation, Hero of the Soviet Union.²

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Kuznetsov was in fact a member of a composite special operations group known as "Pobediteli" (the Victors) under the command of Dmitrii Nikolaevich Medvedev, a Colonel of the NKVD (Narodnii Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del or Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs). Soviet sources describe this group as a "detachment of special designation" (otriad spetsial'nogo naznachenia often rendered as "Spetsnaz" in the West). Medvedev's group was an example of a unique organization that operated independently in the German rear.

Recently, articles on Soviet "Spetsnaz" forces have abounded in Western military journals. However, many of these analyses rely on a limited number of Western sources. The unfortunate result is a one-dimensional view of the threat Soviet special operations forces pose to the rear areas in any future theater conflict. Western studies have tended to focus on Spetsnaz as an organizational entity, but a more complete picture emerges if we examine the nature of Soviet special operations themselves. Contemporary Soviet special operations can and will be conducted by a host of forces and agencies to include the KGB, GRU, Airborne and Air Assault forces and Naval Infantry. The study of special operations as opposed to special operators establishes a useful context for those who must understand the threat. An example of the difficulty posed by concentrating solely on analysis of "Spetsnaz" forces is the Soviets' own ubiquitous use

of the term. The term " Voiska spetsial'nogo (or osobogo) naznacheniiia" (Forces of special designation) has wide usage in Soviet works. It has been used to describe special engineer formations, armored trains, special radio-technical units and experimental formations as well as special operations forces.

For a more accurate picture of the Soviet potential for special operations it is necessary to examine the nature of those operations in a Soviet context. The Soviets are very much creatures of their history (especially their military history), and historical analysis provides a valid means to examine the current nature of Soviet thinking on special operations. Historical analysis also enables the commentator to tap a wealth of open-source Soviet materials. These appear in the form of memoirs, local histories and even fiction; when pieced together, these sources provide valuable insights into the nature of Soviet special operations. This examination of special operations from a Soviet historical perspective illuminates key aspects of the current threat.

II. Institutionalization of Special Operations

The Soviet Union had a rich history of special operations prior to the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. Special operations forces were employed with success during the Civil War, the campaign against the Basmachi in Central Asia and the

Spanish Civil War. In most cases, these forces were composed either of party cadre, of politically reliable personnel or of troops recruited directly from the security organs. The fledgling Airborne Forces, which were organized and employed in the 1930's, were in fact called Battalions and Brigades of Special Designation.⁴ Their primary role was to assist in translating tactical success into operational success through "diversionary" actions in the enemy rear areas.⁵ The rapid development of aircraft and parachute technology provided important means for inserting special operations forces in the enemy's rear areas and keeping them resupplied while they conducted extended operations. The wealth of experience gained by special operators during the Russian Civil War (1918-1920) and especially during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was to pay high dividends during the Great Patriotic War. Many of the participants in these earlier conflicts reappeared in 1941 in important special operations roles.⁶

The purges of the late 1930's had a devastating effect on the Red Army in general and left it unprepared to deal effectively with the German attack in June 1941. In addition, the ferocity and rapid tempo of the German offensive did not allow the Soviet High Command the time to employ many of the doctrinal concepts which evolved during the 30's. However, the value of special operations in disrupting the enemy rear never diminished.

The adhoc solution to placing reliable special operators in the enemy rear for diversionary activities and reconnaissance involved the formation of NKVD Destruction Battalions (istrebitel'nie batal'oni). The core of these units came from the numerous NKVD border units which bore the initial brunt of the German attack. As the units were bypassed, they were transformed into diversionary detachments for operations in the German rear. In many cases, they maintained radio contact with the Army or Front in whose sector they found themselves. In some instances, these units formed the nuclei for evolving partisan detachments. Their operations attracted local patriots as well as Red Army soldiers who found themselves isolated in the German rear areas. In all cases, these units had a high percentage of Communist Party and Komsomol members, and their leaders were NKVD officers. Through the use of these "stay-behind" forces the Soviets were thus able to establish politically reliable special operations forces in the German rear very early in the war.

The Destruction Battalions fulfilled a very important transitional role by keeping special operations in the German rear "honest", that is, by fulfilling a political role which, from a Soviet perspective, was as important as the purely military role they performed in support of the Red Army. In short, they bought the time necessary for a more organized

recruiting and training effort to support future special operations.

This effort began almost immediately with the onset of war. Beginning on 27 June 1941, the NKVD began formation of special operations units in Moscow. Two brigades were initially formed at the Dinamo sports stadium and then reformed and reorganized into a "Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade of Special Designation" (Otdelnaia Moto-strelkovaia Brigada Osobogo Naznachenia or as the Soviets refer to it, OMSBON).⁹ The OMSBON was a unique organization in the Soviet force structure with a variety of missions:

...cooperation with the development of a massive partisan movement; assistance to the party-soviet underground; deep reconnaissance; ascertaining plans of the German command; assistance to the Red Army by means of reconnaissance, diversionary activities and combat actions; disorganization of the German rear area; counter-intelligence operations; and acts of retribution against Hitlerite butchers or traitors to the Soviet Motherland.⁹

The NKVD provided the initial OMSBON cadres. Whereas the destruction battalions were formed around a core of Border Units, the OMSBON also drew on personnel from the internal security forces and the NKGB (Narodnyi Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti or People's Commissariat of State Security).¹⁰ The cadres and commanders of the OMSBON had similar backgrounds. In general, they had served in organs of State Security through the Civil War and the Spanish Civil War. As a result, they brought

to the OMSBON a common special operations experience. Many had organized and fought with partisan detachments and underground organizations, some had been involved in the early experiments with parachute forces; all had the political requisites essential to the Soviet concept of special operations in the enemy rear.

To make up the body of troops that would be employed on special operations, the NKVD recruited personnel with special qualifications. From Moscow, 800 athletes, including some of world-class standing, were assimilated. Radio operators, linguists, demolitions experts, parachutists and even "anti-fascist political emigrants" became part of the organization. The commanders and political officers were selected from Communists of the highest standing. By the fall of 1941, the OMSBON had a general strength of 10,500 personnel organized into two regiments along with separate companies for supply, engineer, communications and parachute services. The troops were task organized into subordinate units for specific operations:

- Independent detachments (samostoiatel'niye otriadi) for action at the front (1000-1200 pers)
- Special detachments (spetsotriadi) (30-100 pers)
- Special groups (spetsgruppi) (3-10 pers)

In fact, the most important role for the OMSBON was to act as a special operations training base.¹¹ Numerous schools were established to provide instruction in demolitions, radio operations, parachuting and reconnaissance-diversionary

activities. Personnel would rotate through the schools, be organized for specific missions and infiltrated into the German rear area. As part of the training process, OMSBON personnel after completing their training would normally be attached to a division or regimental reconnaissance unit for "practical work" prior to being employed on unilateral special operations. The result of the training process was the creation of a body of personnel of known political reliability, who were combat-tested and who combined a high degree of physical stamina with the ability to operate independently deep in the German rear.

The establishment of the OMSBON reflects Soviet recognition early in the war of the need for institutionalizing the recruiting, training and organization process for developing personnel and units capable of conducting special operations. More importantly, the OMSBON stands as an example of Soviet recognition of the utility of special operations themselves.

III. Nature of Soviet Special Operations During the Great Patriotic War

As noted above, the characteristics of Soviet special operations underwent evolutionary change during the course of the war. At the outset, a lack of trained personnel and the general confusion of combat dictated the ad hoc nature of operations. The destruction battalions provided a short-term solution to the

problem. As 1941 drew to a close, numerous partisan organizations began to form around the core of the destruction battalions and party cadres located in the German rear. The immediate objective of the Soviet High Command was to centralize control over these partisan organizations and thus insure that partisan operations were directed toward specific political and military goals in the overrun territories. The establishment of the OMSBON was one manifestation of this development.

Beginning in August 1941, special operations detachments were inserted both by aircraft and by ground infiltration. One purpose of these early infiltrations was to establish contact with partisan organizations. A second, perhaps more important mission was to gain experience and recruit likely operators for future operations. For example, D. N. Medvedev at the head of a spetsotriad (special detachment), conducted a "raid" in the Bryansk area lasting from August 1941 to January 1942.¹² During the course of this operation, Medvedev's spetsotriad helped organize local partisan activity. By the time he returned through friendly front lines to Moscow, his detachment had grown to ten times its original size. These personnel provided cadres for other special operations detachments.

During the course of the Battle for Moscow in the winter of 1941-42, special detachments were used for a variety of missions. Ski detachments conducted reconnaissance and diversionary

activities, covering distances up to 60 kilometers per night. ¹³ Special detachments reported on locations of German reserve units, airfields and POL and ammunition dumps. They also conducted raids on several corps and division level headquarters, destroyed stretches of railline and ambushed vehicle columns. These operations were generally conducted in support of frontal forces, i.e., armies and divisions. The growing number of special operations detachments and groups found immediate employment, and, in fact, requests for such units were submitted to the NKVD and sometimes directly to the OMSBON itself.¹⁴ In this way, the spetsotriadi and spetsgruppi filled gaps in regular army formations for reconnaissance and diversionary activities.

The establishment of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement in May 1942 added impetus to the expanding role of special operations organizations.¹⁵ The Central Staff had the mandate to coordinate partisan operations to insure they supported the objectives of the Supreme High Command. The special operations groups became the tool used to accomplish this mission. Trained personnel were parachuted into the German rear areas to link up with partisan detachments. These personnel established the organizational infrastructure to insure that partisan operations supported frontal operations. "Organization groups" normally numbered 10-25 personnel and consisted of a commander, commissar, deputy commander for reconnaissance,

radio operator, medic, demolitions instructor and others.¹⁶ The groups provided radios and trained operators, organized logistics support and provided politically reliable leadership for the groups. Representatives of partisan organizations sat on the respective military councils of the fronts and armies in whose areas they operated; this insured a measure of cooperation with Red Army operations. In addition, as the organizations matured, "osobie otdeli" (special sections) were created at all levels.¹⁷ The osobie otdeli were normally manned by NKVD special operators; they acted as political oversight organizations in the partisan formations. By the summer of 1942, with the assistance of the NKVD special operations detachments and groups, the partisan groups and their operations (especially in the all-important areas of the Ukraine and Byelorussia) had achieved a higher level of sophistication; communications with Red Army units and the Central Staff had been established, requisite political control existed and aircraft routinely infiltrated the enemy airspace to ferry logistic support and personnel to the groups.¹⁸

As the partisan movement was brought more firmly under centralized control, more special operations groups were being trained for the conduct of unilateral operations. These operations were directed by the NKVD against deep targets either inaccessible to partisans or requiring special skills to eliminate. Kuznetsov's activities in the Ukraine exemplify this type of operation. Kuznetsov himself was recruited into the

OMSBON in 1942. Following training and some combat experience during the Battle for Moscow, he parachuted with a small detachment into the Ukraine to link up with Medvedev's group. Similarly, other detachments, groups and even individuals were infiltrated into the German rear. Some were used to gather intelligence on the "nationalist" (i.e. anti-Soviet) partisans operating in the Ukraine. Others, like Kuznetzov, had assassination missions; some were dispatched to infiltrate the German Abwehr [intelligence] training schools or otherwise conduct deep reconnaissance. These groups also specialized in "black operations", that is using the unwitting aid of the Gestapo to eliminate "enemies of the state" out of reach of Soviet authority.¹⁹ These unilateral operations were controlled by the 4th Department of the NKVD, and as a rule involved no contact with local partisan organizations who continued to operate in support of Red Army units operating in their areas.²⁰

The role of the NKVD grew in 1944 with the disbanding of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement in January. The 4th Department of the NKVD assumed many of the functions originally attributed to the Central Staff. As a result, intelligence operations assumed a significance at least equal to combat operations; this was especially manifest in support of the Byelorussian Offensive in June 1944.

As the Red Army continued its offensives to the west, special operations groups were dispatched ahead of it to link up with and in some cases assume leadership of "fraternal" partisan organizations operating in Slovakia, Romania, and Poland. For example, between August and October 1944, 14 such spetsgruppi were parachuted into Slovakia to assist in the uprising there. In addition, Soviet partisan organizations themselves "raided" into Slovakia from Poland and the Western Ukraine to fight the "common enemy". The Ukrainian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement coordinated the provision of arms, ammunition and demolitions to indigenous partisan groups. The Main Headquarters of the Partisan Movement of Slovakia was established with an experienced Soviet partisan leader as its head. The NKVD presence throughout these operations remained significant. The groups parachuted into Slovakia and Poland are identified in Soviet sources as "operational-chekist groups of military counterintelligence". The partisan organizations operating in Poland and the Ukraine were dominated by NKVD personalities. 21

The operations in Eastern Europe drew on the entire Soviet experience of three and half years of war; activities spanned the entire gamut of special operations to include reconnaissance, organization and supply of partisan groups, combat operations to include unilateral direct action, counterintelligence and political infiltration of nationalist movements.

IV. Conclusion

This has been a very brief look at some of the unique aspects of the development of Soviet special operations during the Great Patriotic War. Through Soviet eyes these operations assume their own unique character and significance. A host of materials exists describing these operations; however in many instances they are subsumed under the rubric of partisan operations. The reader has a difficult time sifting "special operations" from "normal" partisan activities. The Soviets in fact rarely make a distinction between the two. In their approach to special operations, partisan activities are an integral part of an entire operational whole in the enemy rear area. The most important aspect of Soviet partisan activity was centralized political and operational control. The experience of the Great Patriotic War shows the utility of reliable special operators to establish and maintain that control. With such control, partisan operations become "special operations," since the units are executing combat missions and conducting reconnaissance in support of the conventional military formations and, in some special cases, the Supreme High Command.

The value of examining the historical aspects of Soviet special operations is understanding that they did it, and they did it extensively. Articles in the Soviet press discuss in detail such aspects of special operations as command and control,

logistics support, reconnaissance, tactics and cooperation with foreign partisans. Some easily recognizable terms also appear in the context of discussing historical experience, for example, "wars of national liberation" and "internationalist duty". More extensive study of the Soviet historical experience is required to fully understand the Soviet perspective on special operations, for that is largely how Soviet perceptions are formed.

It is also instructive to look at who is writing about partisan operations. For example, the most prolific Soviet writer on partisan operations in the Great Patriotic War is Major General V. Andrianov, now a Doctor of History. He began writing as a Lieutenant Colonel with the first issues of Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal (Military Historical Journal) in the early 60's. Oleg Penkovskii in his papers also refers to a Lt Col Victor Nikolayevich Andrianov as the GRU deputy in the Directorate for Foreign Relations of the State Committee for Coordination of Scientific Research Work. In addition, "V. N. Andrianov" co-authored a book published in 1974 titled Voina v tylu vraga (War in the enemy rear). Finally, Victor Suvorov in his book Inside Soviet Military Intelligence lists a Major General V. Andrianov with the simple notation "Spetsnaz". Since the ranks of these personalities match up over time, it is probable that these are all the same Andrianov. Another good example is the Soviet author of a 1982 article on the OMSBON, L.A. Studnikov.²² Studnikov was, in fact, the chief of the

political section of the OMSBON as an NKVD Lieutenant Colonel. Following the war he served as the Deputy of Special Bureau (Spetsburo) No. 1 of the NKGB responsible for peacetime sabotage and assassination.":

These examples point out the necessity for serious study of Soviet partisan operations for clues to modern application. The Soviet special operations threat is a real one. Our understanding of it is a function of the depth of research and analysis applied to understanding Soviet perceptions of such operations in the past as well as the present.

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August 28, 1987

Izvestia
11 November 1981

THE GENERAL. A SON OF A SOLDIER

As a member of a desant team and a parachutist, the general is more than marginally acquainted with the nature of the local sky. And now, after looking through the window at the clouds which have been painted by the sun, he said that it would rain today.

"And today there is a graded shooting with live shells. The rain will hamper visibility. But that's even better."

He didn't begin to explain why it would be better. Obviously he decided that this must be obvious: if you learn how to shoot in bad weather, then in good weather you won't miss. I was in his office where, among the portraits of great military leaders, there hung a portrait of Suvorov: without realizing it I expected Achalov in his narration about the life of paratroopers to make the citation traditionally made by military men of Suvorov's famous dictum: "Difficult in training, easy in battle:" however, I didn't hear this even once. Being accustomed to counting on the quick reaction and sharpness of others, he liberated his ideas from superfluous words. He was not inclined to evolve any theme to a known truth. Listening and answering, he looked his conversation partner right in the eye as if summoning mutual trust.

"If it is not a secret," he asked me at the time we made our acquaintance, "at whose initiative did you come to see us? I received an order to receive you, and I am obeying it."

The initiative was personal: it arose unexpectedly at the sight of some very young men in military uniforms with major and lieutenant colonel shoulder boards who were unhurriedly walking down a Moscow street. At that moment a thought suddenly came to me that perhaps there were already generals who were born after the war. And if so, who were they, what kind of men were they?

Newspapers write about the soldiers and officers of today: Movies and television portray them: for many of us they are younger brothers, nephews, neighbor kids. It is namely in the uniform of a soldier or officer that a generalized and concrete image of today's military man, the guardian of the Fatherland, appears before us. Love for senior commanders and military leaders who have experienced the school of fire during the war is universal. But we know less about the growing class of commanders who are replacing them than we'd like and ought to know. These replacements are, without a doubt, worthy, but what are their characteristics? What kind of training have they had? With time my desire to meet a general who had been born after the Great Patriotic War, if, indeed, there was one, became stronger. The

next day I was off for the region where Guards General-Major V.A. Achalov was serving: he was born 13 November 1945.

"As you can see, Vladislav Alekseevich, there is no secret."

He admitted with a smile that he still hadn't gotten used to the uniform of a general, although it was already the second year that he had been wearing it. Outwardly he looked his age. He had a large, open face: from it one could easily guess his mood. Those days that I spent with him his face mostly calm, friendly, sometimes pensive and strict: but it could also be severe, when it seemed that one look from the general could chill the soul of one whom he was dressing down with an even voice. He is of average height, broad-shouldered, and his carefully fitted uniform emphasizes the strength and solidity of his body.

There are weights in his office and at home, and one would imagine that they are not there simply as interior decoration. Although he occupies an important position, Achalov has not forgotten the way to the stadium, the gymnasium, the pool, or the ski slopes. He is able to do much of what is required of a young paratrooper. He knows karate, knife throwing, and can use a sapper shovel. He has made dozens of parachute jumps.

But there was a time, the most unpleasant time in Achalov's recollections, when the doctors doubted that he would remain a combat paratrooper commander. For several months there was no talk at all of jumping - he had to learn to walk all over again, first on crutches, then with a cane. However, his unhappiness was in no way reflected in his behavior: he suffered in silence. He had mastered the experience of having control over himself from childhood, when he often forced himself to do what he didn't want to do, but what was necessary to do.

"I will show you my homeland," Achalov said, leading me to a large map of Eurasia that almost covered the whole wall. "Here, 80 kilometers northeast of Kazan', surrounded by Tatar settlements is our village Atayvsh, founded by Russian peasants in the time of Ivan the Terrible."

He is the eldest of the children, six in all - three brothers and three sisters. From earliest childhood he was called upon, as the duty of the eldest son, to help his mother and father, a first-group invalid of the war. He wanted what all children want, but he gave himself the right to play games, have fun, read only after the house was heated, the younger children were fed and dressed, and the hungry cries and hubbub of the barnyard cattle and fowl were quieted. The school was in another village. It was eight kilometers of bad road to reach it, six kilometers as the crow flies. Rain, thick mud, snow, frost - you still had to go. It was at that time, in his early youth, that he learned

endurance. There is no risk of being mistaken in stating that at that time those qualities of his nature, which were later noted in military testimonials, were molded: seriousness, conscientiousness, resoluteness, steadfastness in work and in mastering knowledge. As a rule, energetic activity is peculiar to such natures, in any career, including the army. But why did he prefer the army?

By nature the man is frank and sincere: in his conversations with me Vladislav Alekseevich himself tried to understand who or what, directly or indirectly, influenced his choice of profession. His father? Hardly: in fact, more to the contrary, as his own military lot should have oriented his son toward some other peaceful occupation. Aleksei Afanas'evich returned from the front early, in 1943, seriously wounded in the arm, neck, and leg: even now not all the shrapnel has been removed. He didn't like to talk about the war: if he did sometimes recall it, then it was basically about its cruelty, and in this there is nothing attractive for a child's mind and heart. But it is not exceptional that the pain experienced by a child for his father's wounds gave itself over to his consciousness and laid the foundation for his gravitation toward the army. And, of course, books played a role as well, as did films, with their heroes from the Soviet Army, bearers of Russian glory and honor.

"Projecting myself in thought into the future with childhood friends, I most often saw myself in a military aspect. Predestination? But I don't believe in fate, since belief in it requires oblivion to one's own interests: my interest in the army grew steadily. Last year I went to see my father in my general's uniform - my mother died ten years ago. I reported to the old soldier, the commander dearest to me, changed, and went to the river. Nothing quite brings up memories as does its smell. Next to it are water-meadows and forests which cross into the taiga. What rare beauty! I admire it, but at some moment I catch myself with the fact that it is not the eyes of a man who spent his childhood and youth here, but the eyes of a professional paratrooper that are gazing at all this beauty. The fairy-tale landscape suddenly appears as terrain of average roughness: three-four areas for the landing of a large **desant** are marked out. It is better to widen the captured bridgehead in the direction of the forest, while from the direction of the meadow more attention should be given to the defense...I'm ready to curse myself for switching from a romantic view to a military-topographic one, but I manage to calm myself - I'm a military man, and, therefore, my feelings and thoughts are in the cast of a military man. On these shores my goal in life took shape."

In 1963 he enrolled in the Kazan' Tank School. Everything was new to him - barracks, clothes, food, the drill square, cross-country running, and equipment, tactics, and fire classes. Commands and orders which did not allow for discussion. It was

difficult for all the new men: for a few it was boring, but for him it was interesting. Some got dizzy by the exhaust pipe of a tank, but for him the burning of processed oil was like the aroma of perfume.

Regulations basically did not limit his freedom to think, to exhibit and satisfy his curiosity. He realized that a modern officer without knowledge is a tank without armor. As if obeying an order which he gave to himself, he profitably made use of the personal time at his disposal. He received excellent grades for each of his courses. Here he became a communist. His graduation certificate stated that, "he possesses high organizational abilities. He can serve as a personal example for the execution of any assigned task." Having graduated the school in 1966 as a lieutenant, he accepted a platoon far to the west of Kazan' and made it an excellent one. Three years later he was a senior lieutenant entrusted with a company. His personal record noted that, "he correctly understands the nature of modern battle. The company is ready to carry out its combat mission. He is worthy of being sent for study at the Tank Troop Military Academy."

From 1970 he was a student of the command department of the academy. Moscow is wonderful for everyone: however, it presents more than a few temptations. But on the strength of his "order to himself" of long ago, he spent his time profitably. In reference to his training as commander of a tank battalion: "He correctly uses excellent theoretical knowledge in practical work. He has given a great deal of help to the battalion commander in improving the training process and in planning and carrying out combat and political training. He himself has conducted classes with battalion staffs and commanders of companies, platoons, and subunits at a high methodological level." The time was approaching for him to receive his next promotion - to captain. In his graduation certificate it was noted that, "he is capable in a short period of time to evaluate the unfolding situation, to make a well-founded decision, and to execute it." In the summer of 1973 he graduated from the academy and decided to request to be sent to the Far East.

But he was unexpectedly summoned to the medical commission. The reason was not kept secret - was Achalov fit to serve in the paratroopers. The news surprised him and annoyed him. After all, he wasn't out of touch with tanks. Nevertheless, after his session with the doctor came out with what seemed at the moment a sentence to Achalov: he was fit. He was then summoned to the commander of the paratroopers himself. The commander said that the desant units were outfitted with new armored equipment and, therefore, officers who had tank experience were needed. There was no reason to be afraid of parachutes: it was important to overcome this fear with the first jump.

"You can refuse, but I repeat, we need you," the commander

concluded.

And this time the sharp conflict between "want" and "need" did not arise. The captain agreed and was soon off in a southern direction to become deputy commander of a paratrooper training unit. He taught others, and he himself learned. He took a liking to parachute jumping. On the ground he learned what he previously did not know, and what he did know he associated with new specifications. In the spring of 1974 Achalov was promoted to major and he was named commander of this unit.

Now he was not out of touch with the winged infantry; he was proud of the uniform, the emblem, and the signs. There arose a special desant spirit engendered by the solidity of the men who, independent of rank, were all similarly equal before the parachute. Achalov studied the war and postwar experience of desant troops, researched the principles of their possible use and modern factors influencing the success of operational and strategic operations in the depth of the enemy rear.

His name acquired even greater authority among professional paratroopers, and in May 1975 he became the commander of a parachute-desant regiment. He capably led desant landings day and night, in forests and swamps, worked out the capture of bridges, crossings, railroad junctions and communication centers, airfields, populated areas, and other targets. A year later he was a lieutenant colonel. In an attestation summing up his two-year command of the parachute-desant regiment, the conclusion was made that "he is appropriate for the occupied position. He is a promising officer who is worthy of a higher post."

And soon after he was advanced to a higher post and confirmed in Moscow. From this arrival in the capital there began the ordeal which would give cause for paratroopers to talk about Achalov's personal courage.

It is understood that the specialty of a paratrooper is connected with risk and danger, but at that time there occurred not a parachuting event (they are rare among paratroopers), but rather a road accident. At one of Moscow's intersections (in front of the "Volga") where Achalov was, there suddenly appeared a ZIL-130 with concrete slabs. The driver was not able to brake, and a collision could be heard. The doctors established that his right thigh, leg, and kneecap had been shattered. There followed a complicated operation which lasted several hours. The leg was stretched out for a long time on a special device. A half-meter chrome rod was introduced through the bone marrow so that the bone fragments would knit together properly. In time this was replaced by pintles. Several weeks passed before he could begin to move his toes and get around on crutches with metal in his leg. But the paratroopers would begin to talk about Achalov's bravery much later when having gotten rid of the crutches, cane,

and pintles, he obtained permission from the doctors to make a parachute jump. He landed on his left leg, still afraid of his right one. Even now he only jumps on his left leg. "I'm resigned to reflex. When I get up in the morning I stand up on my left leg." I saw him in the pool, and the entire right side of his body is deeply scarred.

He gets up early and returns home late. All his time with the troops and everything he does is subordinate to a main purpose - to be in constant combat readiness. Today is a firing using live ammunition from guns dropped many times from aircraft. The rain worsens visibility, but this is for the better... One evening when circumstances kept him for a long time at the staff he sadly said that he couldn't help noting that his son would reach draft age. "He is six years old now. I leave and he is still sleeping. I return and he is already sleeping." It is good that Larisa Pavlovna is not always busy at work for the whole day; she teaches at the local institute for higher mathematics, and is a candidate in mathematical sciences. She is a native Muscovite. She patiently bears all the inconvenience and burden of a nomadic life: after all, they haven't stayed in one place for more than two years. There was a move after the accident. In his new position Achalov was promoted to colonel ahead of schedule. After that his circle of duties and missions became even wider, and he executed these successfully, so that in 1980 he was promoted to General-Major.

I have had many meetings with his commanders and subordinates. They are all of one opinion: Achalov's rather rapid advancement in the service was based upon his knowledge, energy, and efficiency. We refrain from such terms as "command calling", "gift", and "talent", for these can only be fully observed in a military man during a war. We do not wish for this, but we should always be ready for it. Therefore, our valiant, gray-headed marshals and admirals are carefully training replacements who are capable on any day and at any hour to raise regiments, divisions, and formations in defense of the Motherland.

It remains for us to note that Vladislav Alekseevich Achalov is not the youngest general in the Soviet Army.

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