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**Fort Leavenworth,  
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**SOVIET FRONT SPECIAL PURPOSE TROOPS:  
AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

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June 1990

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SOVIET FRONT SPECIAL PURPOSE TROOPS:  
AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is much interest in the U.S. Army over the composition and mission of Soviet special purpose forces [voyska spetsial'nogo naznacheniya, SPETSNAZ] at the front and army level. The most recent edition of FM 100-2-1, The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics, postulates that the front may have a SPETSNAZ brigade.<sup>1</sup> This force may range in size from 900 to 2,000 personnel, and could deploy as many as 100 SPETSNAZ teams. These teams, according to FM 100-2-1, will operate between 500 and 1,000 kilometers beyond the Soviets' forward edge, with the following reconnaissance and destruction priorities: nuclear delivery means; headquarters and other command, control, and communications installations; road, rail, and air movements; and airfield and logistic facilities.<sup>2</sup> This information, if correct, is important to know. But how closely does it reflect actual Soviet experience and practice, past and present? This paper seeks to answer a part of that question, by examining Soviet combat experience in World War II with front- or army-level special purpose forces, or SPETSNAZ.

The Red Army in World War II employed front- and army-level SPETSNAZ extensively against the Germans in the west and on a more limited scale against the Japanese in the Far East.<sup>3</sup> These Soviet SPETSNAZ troops were essentially of two types: engineer-based units subordinated to the front chief of engineer troops, and reconnaissance units subordinated to the front chief of intelligence. Both types of SPETSNAZ units appeared very early in the war. Their evolution can be traced in a number of sources through to the conclusion of the war in the Far East.

To provide a broad experience base for analysis, this paper looks at four case studies, two each from the engineer and intelligence category of SPETSNAZ troops, one in a defensive role and the other in an offensive role. The first case is that of the employment of intelligence SPETSNAZ troops during the defense of Moscow in the fall and winter of 1941. The second case studies the use of engineer SPETSNAZ troops, in conjunction with naval infantry, defending near Rostov-on-the-Don in the winter of 1941-42. The third case examines engineer SPETSNAZ troops supporting the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation in October 1944. The last case is a look at intelligence SPETSNAZ troops supporting the East Prussian Offensive in January 1945.

CASE 1

As early as late June 1941, the Soviet General Staff created a small organization from men experienced in special operations and attached it to the intelligence staff of Western Front.<sup>4</sup> Their initial instructions were to conduct deep reconnaissance in the enemy rear, establish communications with personnel from local party and Soviet organs, and give operational assistance to

partisans and the party underground. The foci of their activities were the three axes leading toward Moscow - Smolensk, Mogilev, and Krichev.

In late August this small organization was formally designated "Unit 9903," and described as a "special purpose troop reconnaissance unit".<sup>5</sup> It remained subordinated to the Western Front intelligence staff. In a meeting with the front chief of staff, Lieutenant General G. K. Malandin, the commander of Unit 9903, Major A. K. Sprogis indicated that his unit was sending partisan reconnaissance-demolition groups into the Moscow area, around Smolensk, into Belorussia, and even a few groups into Polish territory. He sought and received permission from Malandin to recruit personnel for his unit from among 3,000 young male and female Komsomol members in Moscow.

With these personnel resources to draw from, Sprogis set out to select, train, and deploy a SPETSNAZ force in the Western Front's area of responsibility. Sprogis established a training center in the Moscow area, assembled a group of officers to conduct the training, and began preparing his students for actions in the German rear area.<sup>6</sup>

The German offensive against Moscow reached its full force in October and November 1941. During this period Unit 9903 deployed more than 100 small SPETSNAZ groups into areas totally or partially occupied by the Germans: Vyaz'ma, Kalinin, Mozhaysk, Ruza, Serpukhov, Podol'sk, Dorokhovo, and Shakhovska. These groups attacked small German garrisons in villages, captured "tongues" by ambushing staff vehicles on roads, and sent valuable information about German movements and dispositions back to front headquarters by radio or messenger.<sup>7</sup>

It is instructive to look more closely at the activities of one of these groups. On 13 October, a group of eight men departed Soviet lines and moved toward Vyaz'ma, an important city on the Smolensk-Moscow highway about 220 kilometers southwest of Moscow. Their mission was to conduct a reconnaissance-diversionary raid, for the purpose of finding all areas where German units were assembling for the anticipated next thrust against the capital. They were to place mines on tank-suitable axes, blow up bridges, and destroy enemy communications along the lateral routes Vyaz'ma - Sychevka and Ruza - Ostashovo - Volokolamsk. To avoid combat the group was to move from place to place, sleeping in forests and villages unoccupied by the enemy. Without encountering any enemy, the group accomplished its mission and returned to Soviet lines near Volokolamsk.

This same group went out on another raid on 14 November, this time taking along four female members. Each person carried 8-10 kilograms of explosives. In the area of Ruza, on a secondary road south of the Volokolamsk Highway, this group

placed devices on the road that punctured the tires of wheeled vehicles, along with antitank mines. They encountered a small German patrol in a forest and suffered some casualties, but safely avoided capture. On another occasion they were engaged by a larger German force, but were helped out of danger by Soviet artillery fired by a nearby unit. The group returned with information about German tank units in the area of their mission.

When the Red Army counterattacked in early December, Unit 9903 teams moved away from Moscow with the retreating German troops. They established ambushes on roads to attack small groups of withdrawing German soldiers; mined roads and blew up bridges, fuel storage tanks, and supply dumps; and set fire to dwellings that could shelter German troops from the cold. In January 1942 the groups were ordered to delay the continued German withdrawal to defensive positions by disrupting movement of men and equipment along all major roads and railroads.

While these actions were being taken in the immediate German rear, Sprogis also was running an agent operation in Belorussia, near Orsha, midway between Smolensk and Minsk. German airfields in the area were being used to bombard Moscow. Sprogis established contact with a pre-war acquaintance who was running a partisan group in the region, and sent one of his own female agents to work with the Orsha group. He later enlarged this intelligence activity with two or three additional agents, all of whom had false papers, enabling them to move freely throughout the German-occupied area. Sprogis received reports from these agents in the intelligence staff of Western Front headquarters.

#### CASE 2

In mid-December 1941, Colonel I. G. Starinov, an engineer officer with special operations experience in Spain and in the Western Front, reported to the commander of 56th Army, Southern Front in Rostov.<sup>8</sup> Lieutenant General F. N. Remezov assigned Starinov the task of assisting the army engineer in planning and carrying out the emplacement of minefields blocking the German advance on the westward approaches to Rostov. The Germans were then located in the vicinity of the Mius River.

While Starinov went about this business in the following days, he sought and received approval from the army and front commander to create a special battalion of demolition specialists. The mission of this group would be to attack enemy communications and strong points on the northern coast of Taganrog Bay.

Starinov conducted a selection from the troops that were made available to him, and by the third week of January, 1942, his engineer SPETSNAZ force was assembled. The men were equipped with winter clothing, camouflage capes, submachine guns, and special engineer kits for working with mines. Using Spanish



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demolitions specialists with whom he had worked since the beginning of the war,<sup>9</sup> Starinov trained these troops in the intricacies of mine warfare. They also gathered horses and sleds that would be used to cross the ice, a distance of from 30 to 60 kilometers.

By the end of January, Starinov was prepared to deploy his force. His plan of action was approved by the intelligence and operations staff of 56th Army, and then by the Army commander. Starinov then made contact with Admiral S. Gorshkov, commander of Azov Flotilla, to coordinate his plans with those of the flotilla's naval infantry units, who were already doing some diversionary activities in the German rear.<sup>10</sup> Gorshkov flew Starinov to flotilla headquarters at Primorsko Akhtarsk to have a face-to-face meeting.

Starinov's troops began their raiding operations in early February 1942, sending from one to six groups into the German rear each night. The groups executed ambushes on roads, laying mines and destroying German logistic and combat vehicles that were moving at night. They also attacked small garrisons and supply points, leaving in their trail explosions and fires. In mid-February they were able to destroy two bridges near a German garrison, and later to capture German prisoners.

In a joint action in late February, the army demolition specialists and naval infantry together attacked a small German garrison, destroying two artillery batteries and three searchlights. A few nights later, Starinov's men dragged dummy facsimiles of tanks, guns, trucks, and multiple rocket launchers out onto the ice, luring German artillery units into firing on this false target.<sup>11</sup> Sprogis' groups made a total of 110 sorties into the German rear before ceasing operations in mid-March, due both to the weakening ice and the lengthening days.

### CASE 3

On 7 October 1944, the Karelian Front and Northern Fleet launched the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, intended to clear German forces from the Murmansk axis.<sup>12</sup> An important aspect of the operation was the employment of engineer special purpose forces. These units were formed in July 1944 from troops of an assault combat engineer brigade.<sup>13</sup> The detachments became front assets and trained and operated under the command and control of the Karelian Front's commander of engineer troops, Lt. Gen. A. F. Khrenov.

In early September, generals K. A. Meretskov (front commander) and Khrenov approved a plan for the utilization of the SPETSNAZ detachments in support of the offensive. Their missions were to reconnoiter the route of the following light rifle corps around the German right flank positions; conduct detailed and

continuous reconnaissance of the enemy and terrain; gain control over the road net; and upon commencement of the offensive assist the main attack by striking enemy communications, destroying men and equipment, mining roads, and demolishing bridges.

The engineer SPETSNAZ troops trained rigorously for their mission, studying the terrain, practicing ambush techniques, learning to use demolitions and explosives, and conditioning their bodies for the physical rigors of the mission. When they went into enemy-occupied territory, each soldier carried 85-90 pounds of equipment and food. Detachments carried light machine guns, submachine guns, antitank mines, demolitions, sniper rifles, and radios with extra batteries. Men carried rations sufficient for up to seventeen days behind enemy lines.

The first 133-man detachment departed Soviet lines on 18 September, and seven days later lodged itself in an area midway between two German corps main lines of communication, near the Norwegian border. From this operating base the detachment maintained surveillance over an area 50 kilometers in diameter, focusing on the German road net. On 2 October a 108-man detachment departed Soviet lines and infiltrated into the area between two divisional lines of communication, eight kilometers behind the German front. A third detachment of 49 men set out on the same day and penetrated to a position about 15 kilometers from the first group, reaching it on 8 October.

Several hours before the 14th Army offensive was launched on 7 October, the SPETSNAZ detachments began active combat operations. At 1900 hours on 6 October, an element of the second detachment attacked a German outpost located about 10 kilometers behind the front.<sup>14</sup> Over the next several days, all three detachments executed several ambushes and attacks against German columns, telephone lines, bridges, and isolated units. On at least two occasions, according to Soviet sources, SPETSNAZ units directed air strikes against lucrative German troop targets. The detachment operating in Norwegian territory was resupplied with ammunition, food, and dry clothing by an airplane parachute drop on 12 October. The detachment operating closest behind the front line linked up with advancing Soviet forces on 12 October. The two detachments operating deeper in German-controlled territory did not link up with Soviet forces until October, during a lull in the operation.

#### CASE 4

On 25 August 1944, during the waning stages of the Belorussian Operation, six men and two women parachuted into German-occupied Polish territory north of Warsaw, approximately



130 kilometers behind German lines.<sup>15</sup> The group, code-named "Nevskiy," was subordinated to the intelligence staff of 2d Belorussian Front. In that front's sector, the Soviet summer offensive had halted along the Bebzha River northeast of Warsaw. The group was comprised of a commander (captain), a deputy commander (senior sergeant), a female translator (senior sergeant), a female radio operator (senior sergeant), another radio operator (sergeant), and three scouts (all junior sergeants). The group received twenty days of preparation which included a thorough study of the German internal passport and money system.

The specific mission of this SPETSNAZ group can be discerned from an analysis of their radio reports.<sup>16</sup> They monitored the movement of troops, equipment, and supplies on the railroad lines in their area of responsibility; the precise location, condition, and activity at German airfields; locations and activities of German field army headquarters and staffs; and presence and use of local German training areas and facilities. Although all of this information contributed to the front's knowledge of the German order of battle, and was of long-term value, some of it was of such immediate import that Soviet air attacks were immediately planned and carried out.

Members of the team were provided with false documentation, and often freely moved about during the day wearing German uniforms. They also made contact with local communist underground and partisan units, from whom they gained valuable support and information. Nor was this group of eight acting in isolation. The 2d Belorussian Front had deployed additional small SPETSNAZ groups into other areas in the sector of their anticipated offensive. The information provided by these groups went directly to the front commander, who in November 1944 was Marshal K. K. Rokossovskiy.

This front began its general offensive as part of the East Prussian Operation on 14 January, and reached the area of the deployment of the "Nevskiy" SPETSNAZ team on 19 January. The team had remained viable in the German rear for almost five months, living on the run, supported by partisans and the underground. They had suffered casualties in several unavoidable small engagements with German troops, and on the last day their leader was killed during the Soviet attack on the German command post he was observing.

#### ANALYSIS

By any reasonable definition of the concept, all four of these case studies show the actions of special purpose forces.<sup>17</sup> There are several attributes that all four examples have in

common: special selection of personnel; training in specific tasks related to their special mission; subordination to a relatively high level of command, with a concomitantly high level of command interest and supervision; and some combination of raid and reconnaissance activities as their mission.

There are differences in their operations as well. SPETSNAZ teams controlled by front intelligence tended to operate deeper in German-controlled territory and stay there longer. Out of the sheer necessity to remain undetected, they more frequently avoided armed contact with the enemy. Front intelligence SPETSNAZ were more likely to engage the support of a local partisan or underground network, and frequently supplied the locals with the means to conduct acts of sabotage and demolitions. Engineer SPETSNAZ troops, on the other hand, tended more to conduct direct actions than reconnaissance, and therefore sought enemy contact. When engineer SPETSNAZ teams used local partisans, it was usually to provide security or to distract the enemy while the engineer troops executed the demolition.

Finally, though not borne out in these specific examples, fronts that had an intelligence SPETSNAZ capability frequently did not have an engineer SPETSNAZ capability, and vice-versa. If one had to distinguish between which capability a front would tend to have, it would be that a front on a primary axis would have intelligence SPETSNAZ, while a front on a secondary axis would have engineer SPETSNAZ. More research is needed on this issue, however, to better define the distinction and to justify the generalization.

Two other issues with contemporary relevance are the size of these formations, and the depth to which they will operate. It is difficult to define the overall strength of any of the front intelligence SPETSNAZ structures, because most historical accounts dwell on the actions of small individual teams.<sup>18</sup> But at no time does it appear that they number more than a few hundred per front. Likewise, the engineer SPETSNAZ base unit was a battalion per front, and remained so throughout the war.<sup>19</sup> So it seems unlikely that even given the improvements in means of delivery and communications, front staffs today would be able to control effectively larger organizations. It is difficult to imagine, for example, a front headquarters trying to receive and assess reports coming from 100, 50, or even 30 separate SPETSNAZ teams simultaneously, or trying to resupply them by air, or trying to coordinate air strikes on the basis of their reports. On the other hand, the need to have a reconnaissance reserve argues for a larger force. A two-battalion SPETSNAZ brigade at front level would provide ample reserve.

Regarding depth of operations, in 1944-45 front and army SPETSNAZ teams functioned at tactical and operational depth, approximately 250 kilometers by that stage of the war. There

were other groups of Soviet SPETSNAZ operating at strategic depth, but they did not belong to front commanders, they were being controlled by higher echelons in Moscow.<sup>20</sup> So rather than postulate a range of 500-1000 kilometers, it seems more logical to define depth in terms of the front commander's immediate and subsequent mission depths. In the case of the immediate mission, it is the rear of the enemy army group, and for the subsequent mission, key points in the enemy COMZ (communications zone).<sup>21</sup> What are these key points? They are likely to be command and control nodes, transportation nodes, and deep strike conventional or nuclear weapons systems and their control facilities.

Using this approach, the Soviet Army's army-level SPETSNAZ could be expected to be deployed to about 350 kilometers, and the front SPETSNAZ to about 800 kilometers, depending on the nature of the theater of operations. World War II experience clearly shows that, in the case of offensive operations, SPETSNAZ teams will deploy across international boundaries if the territory is enemy-occupied. They will also attempt to gain support from civilians who are in sympathy with the Soviet cause. This is extremely important to the success and survival of a SPETSNAZ group. Civilians not in sympathy with the Soviet cause will be a threat to SPETSNAZ activities, because they could report the presence of deployed groups to local military or civilian authorities. Therefore a sympathetic civilian population would permit a Soviet commander to deploy a relatively larger SPETSNAZ force, while a hostile civilian population would mitigate toward a lesser SPETSNAZ presence.

Only a few accounts of SPETSNAZ action in Afghanistan have thus far been gleaned from the Soviet press. One article described a SPETSNAZ group of less than 30 men, inserted in the enemy's rear area along a supply trail.<sup>22</sup> The team executed an ambush against a rebel force of 60 men with 30 pack animals. Among the trophy weapons captured were two Stinger missiles.

The same article provided an account of a recent training exercise. In this case the nine-man group received the mission to attack and destroy an enemy communications center, consisting of several vehicles. The means of delivery was airborne or airmobile, and after the successful accomplishment of the mission the group walked out to 'friendly' lines. There was no mention of the subordination of the SPETSNAZ element or the depth of the raid. But in the photographs that accompanied the article, the men were wearing airborne-style battle dress.

This raises an interesting, and important analytical issue. Soviet sources indicate that at the end of World War II, guards miners battalions, the engineer SPETSNAZ base unit, were disbanded or subsumed into conventional engineer units.<sup>23</sup> Thus if there is a contemporary manifestation of guards miners, it will be difficult to unearth.<sup>24</sup> Since they were guards units,

the best hope may to be trace their lineage through the Soviet Army's well-established honorifics system.

It has long been believed that such SPETSNAZ troops as may exist in the Soviet Army are collocated with or even contained within the Soviet airborne force structure. Some of the reconnaissance troops may be from the special assault company at the divisional reconnaissance battalion, or a smaller analogous unit (platoon) in the regimental reconnaissance company. The Red Star article cited above adds credence to this belief. An inspection of the list of Heroes of the Soviet Union from the Afghanistan conflict presents several candidates for SPETSNAZ membership with an airborne connection.<sup>25</sup>

Principle among them is 20-year old Guards Senior Sergeant Nikolay Petrovich Chepik, a deputy platoon commander in an airborne engineer unit.<sup>26</sup> According to Soviet accounts, Chepik was leading a group of soldiers in an attack on a rebel strongpoint, killing a large number of rebels on the approaches to the position.<sup>27</sup> The "guardsmen" stealthily crept up to the strongpoint and destroyed it with demolitions. Chepik then took three men and went into the enemy's rear to destroy a group holding out in a bunker. This done, they were returning to their platoon, when they were detected and ambushed by another enemy force. In the ensuing engagement, Chepik was the last Soviet soldier remaining alive. When the enemy made a final charge on his position, he blew himself up with demolitions, taking a claimed thirty rebels with him.

Chepik is a good candidate for SPETSNAZ, not only for his deeds, but also for whom the Soviets themselves associate him with in their tributes to his heroic death. One description of his actions appears in the same text right after accounts of World War II engineer SPETSNAZ heroes of the 10th Separate Guards Battalion of Miners, and the well known engineer officer with SPETSNAZ connections Colonel I. G. Starinov.<sup>28</sup>

Two other Hero of the Soviet Union recipients most likely to be SPETSNAZ troops are a 20-year old private, Nikolay Yakovlevich Anfinogenov, and a 24-year old senior lieutenant, Igor Nikolaevich Ploskonos.<sup>29</sup> Neither are specifically linked to an airborne unit in any available source. Anfinogenov was a scout in a reconnaissance company [razvedchik razvedroty] of a motorized rifle regiment. Operating in the mountains, the small group of which he was a member was attempting to secure a road. They were ambushed by rebels, and Anginofenov used his last grenade to blow himself up along with an unspecified number of enemy.<sup>30</sup> After his death and posthumous awarding of Hero of the Soviet Union, a prize was established in his name for All-Russian athletic competitions among participating vocational schools.

These are strong indicators indeed. Razvedchik is the single most frequently used word in the historical context to describe SPETSNAZ soldiers. The two most distinguishing criteria in selection to a SPETSNAZ unit have long been physical prowess and political loyalty. Anfinogenov was an exemplary Komsomolist, and an outstanding boxer.<sup>31</sup> That he was assigned to a reconnaissance company of a motorized rifle regiment suggests that he may not have been a SPETSNAZ soldier. Additional study and analysis is warranted.

Ploskonos commanded a reconnaissance company. In a brief article about this young officer there is no mention of airborne training or assignments in his background.<sup>32</sup> He was a Master of Sport in a combined event of marksmanship, running, swimming, and gymnastics.<sup>33</sup> The combat action for which he earned his Hero of the Soviet Union title is only vaguely described, but it appears to have involved a helicopter landing in a mountain pass, followed by ten days of combat.<sup>34</sup> In a lengthier account, the author mentions Ploskonov's "senior supervisor" [starshiy nachal'nik], a lieutenant colonel.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that Ploskonov's reconnaissance company was subordinated to a staff section rather than a normal battalion chain of command. Based on historical precedent, that staff section would likely have been the intelligence staff of a large formation, such as an army.

The bottom line is that the Soviets did use SPETSNAZ troops in Afghanistan. Given the current need of the Soviet Armed Forces to maintain their prestige, and glasnost in the military press, it is only a matter of time before they write more extensively about them. Whether the principles governing the use of this type of force in that environment can be extrapolated to a more conventional setting is questionable. First the experience must be quantified and analysed. In this analysis, an historical perspective of SPETSNAZ employment is a most useful tool.

## NOTES

1. FM 100-2-1, The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics, (Initial Coordinating Draft), HQ Department of the Army, 15 September 1989, p. 7-16.
2. It is lamentable that the supporting sources for these assertions are other Western doctrinal manuals and publications. The basis of this analysis in Soviet theoretical or historical writings, if there is one, is not disclosed.
3. The Soviets also employed SPETSNAZ teams subordinated to the highest levels of military intelligence (GRU) and the NKVD. This paper does not discuss those strategic-level SPETSNAZ employments.
4. This case study is derived from the book by Georgiy Osipov, Tovarishch Artur, kto vy? [Comrade Arthur, who are you?] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1989), beginning on p. 82.
5. In Russian voyskovaya razvedchast' osobogo naznacheniya; see Osipov, p. 83.
6. One such officer mentions his involvement with Sprogis in his memoir. See A. G. Sinitskiy, Razvedchikam oshibat'sya nel'zya [Scouts cannot make mistakes] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987), pp. 8-17. Sinitskiy was detailed in the late summer of 1941 to teach military subjects (small arms, land navigation, parachute jumping, demolitions, etc.).
7. 'Tongues' in Russian is yazyki, and it refers to live prisoners captured for interrogation purposes. This term was and still is used throughout the Soviet Armed Forces in this context.
8. This account is taken from three sources: I. G. Starinov, Proydi nezrimym [Move unseen] (Moscow: "Molodiya gvardiya", 1988), chapters 11-13; A. V. Sverdlov, Na more azovskom [On the Azov Sea] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1966), chapter 3; and N. Petrov, "Morskaya pekhota v zimnikh boyakh" [Naval infantry in winter battles], Morskoy sbornik [Naval digest], No. 2 (February 1977): pp. 80-83.
9. These were Spanish nationals, communists who left Spain after the Republican defeat.
10. See Petrov, pp. 81-82. The naval infantry groups had been formed in December. They were normally comprised of 8-10 men, and were frequently accompanied on their missions by a hydrographic specialist to measure ice thickness and condition. These groups are characterized as razvedyvatel'no-diversionnyye in Russian, the same descriptors that are commonly used for both naval and ground force special purpose forces. A typical mission

of such a group was to penetrate the German area, conduct an ambush, and return to Soviet lines with a captured German officer. They also conducted raids on small German garrisons in the German rear. The naval infantry carried out these raid and reconnaissance operations from 1 January to 15 March, 1942.

11. Starinov gives no indication of the reason for this activity. Perhaps it was to cause the Germans to give away the locations of artillery units, or simply to expend ammunition.

12. See James F. Gebhardt, Leavenworth Papers No. 17, The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990).

13. Three accounts of the actions of the SPETSNAZ troops are available in Russian: S. S. Krutskiy, "Udary po tylam" [Strikes in the rear area], a chapter in the book Eto bylo na kraynem severe [It was in the far north] (Murmansk: Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1965), pp. 203-07; A. F. Khrenov, Mosty k pobede [Bridges to victory] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), pp. 318-24; and G. Emelyanov, "V glubokom tylu vraga" [In the enemy's deep rear area], Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal [Military historical journal], No. 10 (October 1974): 55-59. All these sources and others were used to write the only English account, contained in Gebhardt, chapter 6.

14. See Germany, 2d Mt Div, KTB 1, "Gebirgsjagerregiment 137, Gefechtsbericht ueber die Kampfhandlungen am 7.u.8.10.44 im Abschnitt Isar" [Mountain rifle regiment 137, action report on the defensive battle on 7 and 8 October 1944 in the Isar sector], microfilm series T-315, roll 109, frame 1089, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C., hereafter cited as NARA. See also Germany, 20th Army, KTB 5, Anlage 4, Morning report, to the entry of 8 October 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1063, NARA; and Anlage 1, Daily report, to the entry of 10 October 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1063, NARA.

15. This account is taken from Mikhail Korenevskiy and Aleksandr Sgibnev, "Vsekh poimenno pominil general" [The general remembered each by name], a chapter in I. V. Vasilevich, Daleko za liniyey fronta [Far behind the front line] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988), pp. 156-201.

16. Ibid., 162-65.

17. For a model by which to judge historical examples as SPETSNAZ, see James F. Gebhardt, "Special Purpose Forces: An Annotated Bibliography," (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, May 1989), p. 1.

18. It is also difficult in many cases to separate the SPETSNAZ formations from the partisan groups and activities with which they were associated. SPETSNAZ and partisan resources were performing complementary missions throughout the enemy rear, and shaped the size of front SPETSNAZ formations.

19. The engineer base unit was an otdelnyy gvardeyskiy batal'on minerov [separate guards battalion of demolition specialists], created largely by the efforts of I. G. Starinov, and standardized in mid-1942. See S. Kh. Aganov, ed., Inzhenernyye voyska sovetskoy armii 1918-1945 [Engineer troops of the Soviet army 1918-1945] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985), pp. 459-63.

20. These strategic-depth SPETSNAZ teams belonged to OMSBON units [otdel'naya motostrelkovaya brigada osobogo naznacheniya/separate motorized special purpose brigade] of the NKVD. The best single reference on these troops is F. L. Kurlat and L. A. Studnikov, "Brigada osobogo naznacheniya" [Special purpose brigade], Voprosy istorii [Questions of history], No. 9 (September 1982): pp. 95-104.

21. For a new look at Soviet objective depths, see Lester W. Grau, "Changing Soviet Objective Depths: A Reflection of Changing Combat Circumstances" (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, March 1989).

22. V. Astafyev, "Osoboye podrazdeleniye" [A special subunit], Krasnaya zvezda [Red Star], 15 April 1989.

23. See Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya [Soviet military encyclopedia] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978), 5:290, s.v. minery gvardeyskiye [demolitions specialists, guards].

24. Of the 65 known Heroes of the Soviet Union from the Afghanistan conflict, only two can be linked to engineer troops: Nikolai Petrovich Chepik, and Boris Innokent'yevich Sokolov. Chepik, who received the first Hero of the Soviet Union awarded in Afghanistan, was a deputy commander of an airborne combat engineer platoon, and Sokolov was an engineer officer. See Geroi Sovetskogo Soyuza: Kratkiy biograficheskiy slovar' [Heroes of the Soviet Union: Short biographical dictionary] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988), volume II.

25. See the entries for N. Y. Anfinogenov, V. V. Arsenov, A. G. Mironenko, I. N. Ploskenos, and I. V. Zaporozhan in Geroi Sovetskogo Soyuza, vols. I and II.

26. Chepik is listed in the unattributed article in Jane's Soviet Intelligence Review, March 1989:111-15; and has a short biographical sketch in Geroi Sovetskogo Soyuza: Kratkiy biograficheskiy slovar' [Heroes of the Soviet Union: Brief biographical dictionary] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988), 2:714.



27. This description is taken from two accounts. See I. M. Dynin, comp., Zvezdy podviga: Na zemle Afganistan [Stars of a feat: On the soil of Afghanistan] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985), pp. 181-91; and P. D. Gutenko and G. A. Matin, Minnoye oruzhiye [Mine weapons] (Moscow: DOSAAF, 1988), pp. 13-14.
28. Gutenko and Matin, Minnoye oruzhiye, pp. 10-11.
29. Ibid., I:72 (Anfinogenov); and II:280 (Ploskonos).
30. There is a brief account of the action for which he received his award in the chapter by Yu. Dmitriev, "Poslednyaya granata" [Last grenade], in I. M. Dynin, compiler, Zvezdy podviga: Na zemle Afganistana [Stars of a feat: On the soil of Afghanistan] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985), pp. 97-107.
31. Komsomol is the name of the Communist Party's organization for young people between Pioneer (ages 11-15) and full party membership.
32. See V. Sukhodolsky, "Reconnassance Company Commander," Soviet Military Review, No. 12 (December 1984): pp. 13-4.
33. Master of Sport is a ranking, surpassed in the Soviet Union only by Merited Master of Sport. Athletes with the latter ranking could be considered Olympic or world-class level. There is a long tradition in Soviet special purpose forces of cultivating soldiers to this level of athletic skill. Two military-related competitions are the biathalon (skiing and shooting) and military triathalon (shooting, grenade throw, and obstacle course). For a detailed examination of the latter, see H. F. Lodyaev, Voyennoye troebor'ye [Military triathalon], Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978.
34. In addition to the Sukhodolsky article cited above, there is another description of this incident in the chapter by A. Nekrylov, "Sol' zemli" [Salt of the earth], in I. M. Dynin, compiler, Zvezdy pidviga: Na zemle Afganistana, pp. 164-80.
35. Nekrylov, pp. 169 and 174.