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АРМИЯ ГЕНЕРАЛА ВЛАСОВА — ФИНСКАЯ СВЯЗЬ

Статья рассматривает антисоветскую деятельность, включая вербовку волонтеров из числа военнопленных в Русскую Народную армию (РНА) в конце Зимней войны и вербовку в Русскую Освободительную армию (РОА) во время Великой Отечественной войны Советского Союза. Поскольку практически все первичные документы, имеющие отношение к РНА и РОА были уничтожены, заключения, представленные в данной статье основаны на личных воспоминаниях ключевых персонажей и на фрагментарных документах из разных архивов.

Задача волонтеров из РНА и РОА заключалась в борьбе против Красной Армии с целью свержения большевистского правления в России посредством пропаганды, листовок и убеждения советских солдат нарушить свой долг. Определенное количество отдельных этнических батальонов было сформировано из волонтеров из числа военнопленных, каковые были присоединены к различным немецким подразделениям в России. Как указывает автор, эти отдельные отряды не были однако подчинены генералу Власову, из-за чего РОА осталась исключительно фиктивной армией до 1944 г. Как только информация о генерале Власове достигла Финляндии осенью 1942 г., многочисленные заявления от волонтеров были написаны в финских лагерях для военнопленных. Статья выявляет детали операции *Silberstreif Fi* в финской Лапландии и подготовку агентов из числа военнопленных волонтеров в финской шпионской школе и приходит к выводу о неудовлетворительных результатах, а в некоторых случаях и о возвращении обратно в ряды Красной армии отдельных “Власовских батальонов”.

Ключевые слова: Армия генерала Власова, военнопленные, Русская Народная армия, Русская Освободительная армия, Зимняя война, Великая Отечественная война Советского Союза.

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GENERAL VLASOV'S ARMY — THE FINNISH CONNECTION

The article considers an anti-Soviet activity including recruitment of prisoners of war (POW)-volunteers to Russian Peoples Army (RNA) at the end of the Winter war, and Russian Liberation Army (ROA) recruitment during the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union. As practically all primary documents related to RNA and ROA were destroyed, the conclusions presented in this paper are based on personal reminiscences of key persons and fragmentary documents in various archives.

The task of RNA and ROA volunteers was to fight against the Red Army with the objective of crushing the bolshevik rule in Russia by means of propaganda, leaflet production and by persuading Soviet soldiers to defect. A number of separate ethnic battalions had been set up of voluntary POWs, and were attached to various German units in Russia. As the author points out, these separate units were however not subordinated to General Vlasov, why ROA remained fictive army only until 1944. Once the information about General Vlasov had reached Finland in autumn 1942, numerous volunteers applications were written in Finnish POW-camps. The article reveals the details of the operation Silberstreif Fi in Finnish Lapland and agent training of voluntary-POWs in Finnish Spy school and comes to conclusion about insatisfactory results and in some cases even desertions back to the Red Army of separate "Vlasov-battalions".

Key words: General Vlasov's army, prisoners of war (POW), Russian Peoples Army (RNA), Russian Liberation Army (ROA), the Winter war, the Great Patriotic war of the Soviet Union.

Only Russians can defeat Russia
Friedrich Schiller: Demetrius

Introduction

The Russian revolution in October 1917 provided the opportunity for Finland to declare its independence on 6 December 1917, which was acknowledged by V.I. Lenin's government on 31 December 1917.

Since 1809 Finland was a Grand-Duchy of the Russian Empire with semi-autonomous internal legislation and privileges. Numerous Finns made careers in the Russian Empire as civil servants, military officers, engineers or craftsmen. Russia became soon the prime market for the developing Finnish industry. Reciprocally there was also a strong influx of Russians to Finland, with established merchants and entrepreneurs adding to the long-existing Russian diaspora.

Garrisons and fortifications of the Russian Imperial Army were constructed in the Grand Duchy, in particular along the archipelago and coastline Gulf of Finland as the so-called "naval fortress of Peter the Great". The Orthodox church got official status in Finland, the overwhelming majority of the population remaining evangelical-lutheran. However, the russification policy during the reign of Czar Nikolai II turned Finland's public opinion in an anti-Russian direction.

Nevertheless, 553 officers with Finnish ethnical background (of which 343 born in Finland) served in the Russian Imperial Army during World war I¹. The most prominent were Lt.Gen. Mannerheim (1867-1951; in Finland Marshal of Finland, Supreme Commander of the Finnish Army and President 1944-1946), Lt.Col. Wilho Nenonen (1883-1960; in Finland General of Artillery) and Col. Oscar Enckell (1878-1960, Head of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence of the Imperial Army; in Finland Lt.Gen., Head of General Staff etc.). Also Rudolf Walden (1878-1946; later Finnish Defence Minister, General of Infantry) and

¹Mirko Harjula: Ryssänapseerit, p. 22.

Carl Enckell (1876-1959; brother of Oscar E.; later Finnish Foreign Minister) were former officers in Imperial Russia².

Opposing the russification almost 1 900 young Finns went illegally to Germany in 1915-1918 in order to get military training, aiming at separation of Finland from the Russian Empire. In Germany the Finnish volunteers were attached to the 27th Royal Prussian Jaeger Battalion. “Jaeger” became since then an honorary title of the volunteers.

Shortly after the Finnish independence declaration a short and tragic civil war was fought in winter-spring 1918. This war started as a liberation campaign to disarm the Russian garrisons in Finland, but became soon a fierce civil war between the White army of the Finnish government (commanded by Lt.Gen. Mannerheim) and opposing Red guards, supported by Russian bolsheviks. During the Civil war the Finnish Jaegers returned to Finland, providing Mannerheim with trained officers for the White army.

After the Finnish civil war incidents and disturbances along the Finnish-Soviet border continued. Kronstadt was attacked by British naval and air units from Koivisto, and uprisings among the Ugro-Finnish population in Soviet Karelia were supported by Finnish “volunteers” (“heimosodat”), until the peace treaty was signed in Tartu (Russian Juryev) in Estonia 14 October 1920. Even after the peace treaty some semi-officially supported Finnish volunteer groups attempted to enter Soviet Karelia, but were thrown back after considerable losses.

Finland attracted Russian emigrants before and during the Winter war

After the Tartu peace treaty several Russian anti-bolshevik emigre organisations (in particular ROVS and NTS NP) became active in Finland, and used Finland as springboard for antibolshevik raids into Soviet Russia. Numerous white refugees had arrived from Russia to Finland after the Russian revolution, with more to come after the Russian civil war and the Kronstadt uprising in 1921. It was thus not too difficult to enlist supporters and agents among the Russian diaspora in Finland. The best known refugees in Finland were Major-General Severin Dobrovolskiy (1881-1946; who served in Gen. Yevgeniy Miller's Northern Army until 1920) and Stepan Petrishenko (1892-1947, leader of the Kronstadt uprising in 1921).

²Mirko Harjula: Ryssänupseerit.

From 1936 the unofficial Finnish ROVS-representation (led by General Dobrovolskiy, assisted by Fedor Schulgin, former Captain in Kolchak's army) arranged clandestine officers courses, according to the syllabus of Lt. Gen. Nikolai Golovin (1875-1944, former Professor of the Russian Imperial General Staff Academy) in Paris. After examination by General Golovin the first five Finnish ROVS-cadets Petr Bystreyevskiy, Bastamov-brothers Vyacheslav and Nikolai, Nikolai Stratov and Anatol Budyanskiy were promoted to ROVS-officers on 19 December 1936. In 1938 another seven ROVS-officers were promoted³.

Already before the Soviet attack against Finland 30 November 1939 several renown Russian emigrant officers approached Marshal Mannerheim, applying for voluntary service in Finland. The number of applicants arose drastically after the outbreak of the war. Although numerous volunteers from various countries were welcomed, Mannerheim did not accept Russian volunteers as this might have dramatically turned the Winter war in a way unfavourable to Finland. The sole exception was Count Emmanuel Golitsyn (British citizen and RAF-fighter pilot), whose father had served together with Mannerheim in the Imperial Chevalier Guard. The young Count Golitsyn was twice received by Mannerheim before returning to England in late 1940⁴.

In early December 1939 Mannerheim and Foreign Minister Väinö Tanner considered formation of a Russian exile-government to be chaired either by Aleksandr Kerensky or by Lev Trotskiy, as counterpart to the so-called Finnish Democratic Republic located in Terijoki and headed by the Finnish exile-communist O.W. Kuusinen. The idea of a Russian exile-government was however quickly dropped.

After repeated appeals from several prominent emigrants, including Lt. Generals Aleksei Arkhangelskiy (1872-1959, ROVS-Chairman) and Vladimir Vitkovskiy (1885-1978, ROVS-Chairman in France), Mannerheim invited Boris Bazhanov (1900-1983, former Komitern-Secretary) to Finland in early January 1940. Bazhanov got permission to visit some POW-camps from 20 January to 9 February 1940, reporting directly to Defense Minister Lt. Gen. Rudolf Waldén. In the POW camps in Pelso and Köyliö Bazhanov met with

³Geust 2017, p. 31-35.

⁴Geust 2017, p. 38-41 and 42-43 (Golitsyn).

some 500 POWs, of which some 150 POWs volunteered for service in *Russian Peoples Army* (RNA) as presented by Bazhanov. As practically all primary documents related to RNA were destroyed, the conclusions presented in this paper are based on personal reminiscences of key persons and fragmentary documents in various archives. Indicated numbers of RNA-volunteers are also highly differing in available sources⁵.

Simultaneously with Bazhanov's visit the Propaganda Dept of the Finnish HQ (headed by Captain Kalle Lehmus) 27 January 1940 published the first issue of Друг пленных (POWs' friend), a newspaper in Russian to be distributed in the POW-camps. The editors included General Dobrovolsky, Father Simeon Okulov (Rector of the Orthodox Parish in Helsinki) and the above-mentioned "ROVS-officer" Petr Bystreyevskiy. A total of 16 rather improvised issues were published from 27 January to 6 April 1940. In addition to religious and anti-bolshevik material, with a certain delay carefully formulated information about the situation at the fronts was also published⁶.

Russian People's Army

At the end of February 1940 150 POWs were transferred to POW-camp No.5 in Huittinen for training and instructions by Vladimir Lugovskoi (former Imperial Army Shtabs-Captain) and ROVS-officers Budyanskiy and Nikolai Bastamov, each instructing some 40 POWs. Captain Vladimir Kiselev was selected to command RNA, the task of which was to fight against the Red Army with the objective of crushing the bolshevik rule in Russia.

At first RNA was to concentrate on propaganda tasks, leaflet production and anti-Soviet broadcasting. In the second phase specially trained commando-type task forces were to be transported (possibly even by aircraft) to locations in Red Army rear area. The commando troops were to cut off the Kirov railway from Murmansk to Leningrad, and liberate political prisoners in GULAG forced-labor camps (including Solovetsk) in North-West Russia. Later attacks against Leningrad would be performed, which would subsequently arouse vast internal unrests and political protests in the Soviet Union, leading to civil war between RNA and the Red Army, and ultimately causing dissolution of the Soviet regime. The planning of the second phase was also actively supported by aggressive elements in NTS NP.

⁵Geust 2017, p. 43-45.

⁶Geust 2017, p. 45-47.

After the training period the first RNA-unit of 20 men (C.O. Capt. Lugovskoi) arrived to Kasinhäntä, Sortavala on 2 March 1940. Identified RNA-officers include also Petr Bystreyevskiy, Vyacheslav Bastamov and the experienced intelligence agent Petr Sokolov (with contacts to British intelligence in the 1920s; during the Winter war Russian speaker of *Yleisradio*, or Finnish Broadcasting Co.).

Capt. Lugovskoi's unit participated in propaganda actions in Ladoga Karelia, aimed at the Kitilä motti, where Red Army 168. Division (C.O. Col. Andrei Bondarev) was encircled. The RNA unit persuaded some 300 Soviet soldiers to defect (there are so far no verifying Finnish documents). According to Bazhanov some 450 RNA-volunteers were ready to depart to the front in March 1940.

The peace treaty signed in Moscow at night 12/13 March 1940 was apparently a surprise to the RNA-activists. All actions were immediately interrupted, and the POW-volunteers were returned from Sortavala to a POW-camp in Utti, while Minister Waldén instructed Bazhanov to depart from Finland immediately.

Repatriation of the 5 700 Soviet POWs in Finland was initiated in mid-April 1940. Before the repatriation process the RNA-volunteers were advised by their instructors to stay in Finland. Most volunteers seem however to have chosen to return, and like all repatriated POWs became subject to strict investigation ("*filtration*") by special NKVD troops. On 23 May 1940 NKVD People's Commissar Lavrentiy Beriia reported to Stalin, that "*efficient filtration of 5 277 POWs had exposed 106 spies, 166 members of an anti-Soviet voluntary military unit, 54 provocators and 13 deserters*". One month later, 28 June 1940 232 POWs were sentenced to death, of which 158 are reported to have been executed. Apparently all detected volunteers of RNA were executed.

On 2 April 1940 General Arhangelski, Chairman of ROVS, wrote to his deputy, General Vitkovskiy, that Bazhanov's experience in Finland proved that "*during favorable circumstances it is possible to form fighting units from Soviet citizens opposed to Stalin*"⁷.

⁷Geust 2017, p. 47-52.

Ukrainian unit

In parallel with RNA, there were also plans to form a voluntary Ukrainian POW-unit, supported by exile-Ukrainians in various countries. The Ukrainian unit was formed without official Finnish support by active members of AKS (*Akateeminen Karjala-Seura*, an aggressively anti-Soviet Academic Carelian Association aiming at unification of all Ugro-Finnish tribes in various countries), and opposed to any kind of cooperation with ethnic Russians, but with close contacts to exile-representatives of various minority nationalities in USSR. The activists included Deputy Chairman of AKS, Lt. Eng. Reino Castrén (Head of *Osasto K[arelia]* of HQ Propaganda Dept.), and former jaeger, shipowner Ragnar Nordström (participant of the Karelian campaigns after 1918) and Professor Herman Gummerus (former Finnish Minister to the short-lived Ukrainian Republic in 1918).

General Oleksandr Udoviczenko (Ukrainian Defence Minister in 1918) informed Marshal Mannerheim 30 December 1939 that 3 000..4 000 exile-Ukrainian volunteers were ready for service in Finland. Mannerheim declined this proposal three weeks later, as arrival of numerous volunteers from France, USA and Canada would have changed the defensive nature of the Winter war in a way unfavorable to Finland.

The activists continued their efforts (without official permission of the Finnish General Staff!), and invited former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Oleksandr Shulhyn to Finland. The exile Ukrainians arrived in mid-January, and visited also the Pelso POW-camp (visited by Bazhanov somewhat earlier). Over half of the 1 000 POWs in Pelso where ethnical Ukrainians (of which most from the 44. Division encircled at Suomussalmi). After Shulhyn's visit the activists decided to set up a Ukrainian volunteer unit of 40..50 soldiers, "*fighting under Ukrainian flag, and led from Paris*". This unit was to be financed from England and France, although the wealthy Nordström undertook to pay initial travel costs. Gummerus returned to Paris to organize the formation of the unit. The clandestine venture was however exposed when Gen. Oscar Eckell arrived in Paris on 7 February 1940 for official negotiations with French authorities concerning planned military intervention to Finland. Subsequently Gummerus was given a strict order to interrupt all actions to set up a Ukrainian volunteer unit, much to the disappointment of the activists. "*The half-Russian ("ryssä" - referring to Mannerheim!) in the HQ does not understand the difference between Russians and Ukrainians, nor the best for Finland.*"

However, as the outcome of the Winter war was very uncertain, the all exile-Ukrainian contacts were still not broken. On 11 March 1940 *Osasto K* invited three representatives of the *Ukrainian Front Veterans Association* to Finland to prepare the arrival of the expected Ukrainian unit...⁸

POWs remaining in Finland - Osasto Sokolov

In spring 1940 up to 100 Soviet POWs remained in Finland, most of which apparently had volunteered for service in the RNA. The exact number and identity of these POWs was not revealed the Soviet authorities. Some 20 of the POWs remaining in Finland were at first kept in Turku Central Prison, and in May 1940 attached to the secret *Osasto Sokolov* (headed by above mentioned Petr Sokolov) in Helsinki. The tasks of *Osasto Sokolov* included analysis of Finnish and Soviet war-time propaganda, and proposals to improve Finnish propaganda.

Identified ex-POWs of *Osasto Sokolov* in 1940 include ml.lt. Mark Ivanovich Antipin, lt. Orest Filippovich Biljanski (cover name *Aleksandr Kalashnikov*), Ivan Petrovich Gromozdov, Konstantin Nikolayevich Kamaritsev, Paul [Pavel] Mills [Milsh?], Jakov Fedorovich Popov, politr. Andrei Titovich Semihin, st.lt. Aleksei Fedorovich Shvetsov, Nikolai Ivanovich Yakovlev (cover name *Nikolai Ivanovich Stafeyev*)⁹.

Continuation war 1941-1944

Volunteer POWs in Finnish Army Propaganda tasks

In connection with the Finnish mobilisation on 18 June 1941 an Information Department (*PM/Ttus*; headed by Capt. Kalle Lehmus) was formed at the HQ. At *PM/Ttus Special Information Bureau No. 3 (Ttus.3)*, was responsible for “*propaganda actions aimed at the enemy*”, including production of leaflets and other propaganda material.

The State Information agency (*Valtion Tiedotuslaitos, VTL*), headed by Capt. Heikki Reenpää, was responsible for (civil) media surveillance and control, functioning in close cooperation with *PM/Ttus*.

⁸Geust 2017, p. 58-68.

⁹Geust 2017, p. 68-71.

The volunteers (ex-POWs) of *Osasto Sokolov* were at first attached to *VTL* as “*Soviet propaganda specialists*”, but were soon transferred to *Ttus.3*, where most personnel were Russian-speaking Finns. Gradually more volunteer-POWs were recruited to *Ttus.3*. From 27 June 1941 *Yleisradio* (Finnish Broadcasting Co.) transmitted news in Russian, with Andrei Semihin, Aleksandr Kalashnikov (*Biljanskiy*), Mihail Antipov (*Mark Antipin*) and Nikolai Stafeyev (*Yakovlev*) from *Osasto Sokolov* as speakers.

From 15 July 1941 *Gazeta vojennoplennyh* (POWs' newspaper) was published with one weekly issue, print-run some 25 000 examples. From issue No. 20-21/1941 the title was *Severnoje slovo* (Northern word). Two weekly issues were published from July 1943. The last issue No. 52/1944 (202) was published 26 September 1944.

Responsible editors include Capt. Kalle Lehmus, Lt. Eino Jamalainen (Ingrian, after WW II Professor of Botany), Mikko Murtamo, Lt. Vilho Toivari and Maj. Reino Raski. The responsible editor was assisted by Petr Bystreyevski, Severin Dobrovolski, Andrei Sumbarov, and ex-POWs (mainly from *Osasto Sokolov*) Igor Andropov, Andrei Semihin, Ivan Gromozdov, Mihail Antipov, Nikolai Stafeyev. The assistant editors of *Osasto Sokolov* were soon joined by new voluntary POWs including Konstantin Ryabchevskiy, Nikolai Lebedev, Aleksandr Kuzmin and others.

Severnoje slovo was professionally edited with modern and attractive layout, and became immediately very popular in the POW-camps. The articles were short and easy to read, dealt with (carefully edited) war news, Russian culture, history and Orthodox religion, and also corresponding descriptions of Finland and Finnish way of life. Among the most popular features were a brief Finnish language course and “missing relatives” section, where POWs had the opportunity to publish personal family information. The Finnish language and “missing relatives” -sections were soon discontinued, apparently because of suspicions of improper contacts with Soviet intelligence).

The regular *News from the liberated areas* section gave clearly the impression that normal and prosperous civil life had returned to the German-occupied areas. Thus agriculture activity, schools, concerts, theatres, private enterprises etc. were described in details. The information was taken from newspapers published by the German administration in occupied cities in

Russia, Ukraine and Baltic republics. *Severnoje slovo* published also a similar supplement for the Russian-speaking population in Finnish-occupied Eastern Karelia.

Big losses on the German East front - to be solved by ROA?

Already in late summer 1941 the German army had suffered serious, increasingly irreplaceable losses on the East front. Eg. Central Army Group (*Heeresgruppe Mitte*) had lost 20 % of its nominal strength in September 1941. In order to compensate the losses civilians from the occupied areas and also voluntary POWs were recruited by various German units (at first even without official permission!) for unarmed auxiliary tasks (so-called *Hilfswillige*, *Hiwis*). As the losses could not be fully replaced, and as the German strategic situation continued to deteriorate some German staff officers (including Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, and also some Russian-speaking officers of Baltic-German origin) started clandestinely to envisage an anti-bolshevik Russian exile-government, which might initiate internal disintegration of the Soviet government structure as the only foreseeable way to defeat the Red army¹⁰.

No suitable anti-bolshevik leader was identified until Lt. Gen. Andrei Vlasov, C.O. of 2nd Shock Army, was taken prisoner at the Volhov front south-east of St.Petersburg. Vlasov was one of the most talented Soviet Generals, and his photo was printed on the first page of *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* on 13 December 1941 as one of the saviours of Moscow, when he commanded 20th Army¹¹. Already earlier Vlasov's 99. Division of the Kiev Military District had been subject of several praising articles in *Krasnaya Zvezda*¹².

In German imprisonment Vlasov, disappointed and disillusioned because of lack of Red Army support to his encircled 2nd Shock Army, became gradually inclined to accept repeated German proposals and encouragements to form and lead a Russian Liberation Army (ROA). He signed his first anti-bolshevik leaflet *Comrade officers! Soviet intelligentsiya!*¹³, on 10 September 1942, and on 27 December 1942 Vlasov, four other high-rank POW-officers and Boris

¹⁰Geust 2017, p. 17-22.

¹¹Pravda and Izevstiya 13 December 1941.

¹²Krasnaya zvezda 3, 4, 9 October and 4 December 1940. On 22 February 1941 Vlasov was decorated with the Order of Lenin.

¹³German leaflet 480/RAB IX./42, see Buchbender 1978, p. 222-223.

Menshagin (Mayor of Smolensk) signed the so-called *Smolensk-declaration*¹⁴. The key paragraphs of the *Smolensk-declaration*, which invited all Russians, both civilians and soldiers were invited to join ROA, included:

- honorable peace with Germany
- destruction of Stalin and his hated bolshevik regime
- formation of a new, democratic Russia without communists and capitalists.

Although the Smolensk declaration was in fact written and signed in Berlin (with possible exception of Menshagin's signature), the ancient and fabulous city of Smolensk was chosen as formal ROA-site, in order to create the impression of a real Russian popular movement behind the declaration. The declaration was spread in big numbers both in the Red Army rear, and clandestinely also in German-occupied areas.

A number of separate ethnic battalions had at this moment been set up of voluntary POWs, and were attached to various German units in Russia. These separate units were however NOT subordinated to Vlasov, why ROA remained a fictive army only. Nevertheless, German propaganda published continually information about ROA-uniforms, medals and symbols, even mentioning successful combat participation, and thus clearly supporting the impression that Vlasov commanded an unified and strong ROA.

In order to encourage deserters from the Red Army Vlasov was early February 1943 given permission to set up a propaganda school (*Ostpropaganda-Abteilung zu besonderen Verfügung*) in Dabendorf (some 40 km from Berlin). This propaganda centre became in fact a clandestine General HQ-embryo of the envisaged "real" ROA. On 3 March 1943 Vlasov's open letter *Why I started to fight against the bolsheviks* was published in the ROA-organ *Zarya* (edited in Dabendorf)¹⁵.

Two front trips were performed by Vlasov in spring 1943: 25.2-15.3.1943 he visited Smolensk, Mogilev and Bobrusjk; Pskov, Gatchina, Luga and Riga were visited 30.4-8.5.1943. Accompanying Germans, his own escort and Vlasov himself where overwhelmed by enthusiastic receptions shown by both civil Russians and soldiers of the Russian units visited, with people shouting "*He is ours!*" etc. During his second (and last) front-visit Vlasov, possibly over-

¹⁴See Buchbender 1978, pp. 226-227.

¹⁵Dabendorf propaganda school: see Geust 2017, p.107-112.

enthusiastically impressed by the overwhelming popular reception during his round-trip, caused a scandal by welcoming his German dinner-hosts to St.Petersburg “*after he had liberated the city*”. Hitler was informed of Vlasov’s boastful speech, and explicitly prohibited any further trips of the shameless Russian, and declared that no German weapons will ever be given to Russian *Untermenschen*. After this Vlasov was practically interned in house arrest near Potsdam¹⁶.

POWs volunteering for service in Finnish Army - supported by ROA-propaganda

Already on 28 August 1941 Capt. Fedor Schulgin (ROVS-representative in Finland) repeated his proposal Marshal Mannerheim to set up five POW-units of 100 men strength, but his proposal was not accepted¹⁷.

On 11 December 1941 the Finnish HQ decided categorically not to accept POWs for service in the Finnish Army. At this moment there were already over 56 000 Soviet POWs in Finland. Finland lost some 10 % of its territory (including some of the most valuable arable areas) after the Winter war, relocated some 400 000 persons from the territories ceded to USSR, and new arable fields were not yet cultivated, why food supply for the Finnish population and for the additional surprisingly big number of POWs was clearly insufficient in winter 1941-1942. Some 12 000 POWs died in early 1942, most of them apparently simply because of lack of food.

On 12 September 1942 Finnish POW-newspaper *Severnoje slovo* published two small photos of national legions - oath-swearing ceremony in a Ukrainian unit and a group of Latvian volunteer soldiers. Already the same day the first volunteer applications for service in Germany were sent from POW-camps in Finland. In September-October 1942 at least 300 POWs applied for military service in Germany. Nevertheless the Finnish General HQ (*Päämajä*) decided 17 October 1942 that *POWs can not serve in Allied* (here meaning German!) *armies*.

On 1 November 1942 the Soviet POWs in Finland numbered 41 672 (of which 1 084 officers and 1 467 NCOs). At the same moment even 16 090 POWs

¹⁶Vlasov’s front trips: see eg. Aleksandrov 2009, p. 268-271. Vlasov’s speech in Riga 7 May 1943: KA (Finnish National Archive), T20679/11.

¹⁷KA, Mannerheim collection, file 18.

(or 38 % of all POWs) had applied for voluntary service in the Finnish army. Among POW-officers and -NCOs applicant proportions were even bigger: 438 officer- and 1 171 NCO-applicants. Because of the surprisingly big number of applications for voluntary service both in Finland and in particular in Germany many frustrated POW-camp officers, instructors and pastors asked for advice from Finnish military authorities, who apparently were similarly disoriented themselves...¹⁸ At this moment the Finnish Army started to accept Finno-Ugric volunteers (mostly Ingrian, and also some Karelian, formally Soviet citizens), which were organized into two infantry battalions: *Heimopataljoona 3*¹⁹ (consisting of voluntary POWs) and *Erillinen pataljoona 6*²⁰.

Already before the Smolensk declaration information about General Vlasov had gradually reached Finland in autumn 1942, and *Severnoje slovo* started to publish information of Vlasov's activities in winter 1943. The Smolensk declaration was published 6 March 1943, and two weeks later Vlasov's open letter was published. After this information about ROA and Vlasov was updated in every *Severnoje slovo* -issue. Subsequently numerous volunteer applications were written in Finnish POW-camps, eg. 3 April 1943 a joint application by 57 POW-officers was published²¹. Numerous applications were also sent by civil persons living in Finnish-occupied East Karelia, in particular by Ukrainians

¹⁸KA T19654/F5.

¹⁹*Heimopataljoona 3* was set up 10 November 1942, and consisted of 119 Finnish personnel (officers, NCOs and some soldiers), and a total of 1070 men: 423 Ingrians, 380 Olonets-Karelians, 101 Tver-Karelians, 94 Viena-Karelians, 30 "Red" Finnish emigrants, 24 Vepsians etc). 367 men were lost in combat (fallen and injured). According to the peace agreement all ex-POWs were to be dispatched to USSR as Soviet citizens, but some 200 men were able to escape to Sweden.

²⁰*Erillinen pataljoona 6* consisted of young Ingrians (who had never served in the Red Army, but formed Ost-Batallion 664 in German occupied Ingria) transferred to Finland in December 1943. Of approx. 600 Ingrian soldiers of Er.P 6 some 200 escaped to Sweden, the rest were more or less forcibly sent to USSR. In April 1990 President Mauno Koivisto declared the Ingrians living in Russia as Finnish returnees (*paluumuuttaja*), after which over 30 000 Ingrians have returned to Finland from Russia. All Ingrian soldiers regardless of citizenship, who served in the Finnish Army in WW II are granted Finnish war veteran status and same social benefits as all Finnish war veterans.

²¹KA, T2870/14.

deported in late 1930s, who now wanted to return to their “liberated” home regions.

In winter-spring 1943 ROA-leaflets were also spread on the Finnish fronts on the Karelian isthmus and in East Karelia. From March 1943 an increasing number of Red army deserters, encouraged by the leaflets (although collection and reading of ROA-leaflets was strictly prohibited), arrived at various Finnish units. Even four aviators deserted and performed forced-landings with their aircraft on the ice of Lake Ladoga or at remote fields near River Svir. After the fourth successful force-landing in August 1943 a special leaflet indicating safe force-landing sites was prepared by the Finnish Intelligence department and the Finnish Air Force, but intended results remain unconfirmed²².

On 8 May 1943 *Severnoje slovo* told that Vlasov-corners (*Vlasovskije ugolki*) existed in all POW-camps, providing ROA-literature, and possibility to listen to radio transmissions of articles from ROA-newspapers *Zarja* and *Dobrovolets*. In May 1943 the strenght of Vlasov’s ROA was told to already be appoximately 1 million soldiers. This information was also distributed to ordinary Finnish newspapers, and aroused big interest among Finns.

Thus Erich Luther in Helsinki wrote 25.5.1943 to his son Lt. (res) Fred Luther: “*I am following with big interest ... the organization of the Voluntary Army of General Vlasov. This Army will certainly have a serious impact, and will also provide a big favor for us [Finns]. Because of its imposing strength it will also open the eyes of the English and American peoples concerning the real situation in Russia*”²³.

In summer 1943 all Vlasov- and ROA-references in *Severnoje slovo* were published only with rather long intervals, and with rather indifferent wording. The Barbarossa-day (22 June 1943) was nevertheless referred to as *the second anniversary of the liberation of the Russian people*. In the 100th issue of *Severnoje slovo* (7.7.1943) a collective congratulation by POW-officers in POW-camp No.1 was printed, with thanks for extensive and updated information of ROA and Vlasov. Nevertheless *Severnoje slovo*’s ROA-propaganda campaign was coming to an end, and in issue No. 36/1943 (6.8.1943) the very last ROA/

²²Geust 2017, p. 157-166.

²³Letter in the possession of Birgitta Geust, Helsinki.

Vlasov item was published (a citation from the Bulgarian *Zora*-newspaper, as German ROA-related material was apparently not longer available).

Operation Silberstreif

The Vlasov-activists in Germany attempted still in summer 1943 to perform a major propaganda operation, called *Silberstreif* (Silver ribbon) on the entire east front, in order to definitely prove that ROA is able to attract Red Army-deserters in big numbers. The *Silberstreif*-leaflet campaign was planned to start simultaneously with *Unternehmen Zitadelle*, the planned major attack operation at Kursk in spring 1943. Anticipated fast and long frontline movements were supposed to provide ample desertion possibilities.

As *Zitadelle* was repeatedly delayed, *Silberstreif* was initiated independently without envisaged mutual support of the voluminous tank attacks at Kursk. After big German losses at Kursk, the strategic initiative went inexorable to the Red Army, and *Zitadelle* was to become the last German offensive on the east front²⁴.

Operation Silberstreif Fi in Finnish Lapland

Because of the dissimilar environment in Lapland a separate, somewhat different propaganda operation *Silberstreif Fi* was to be performed by German 20. Mountain Army from 8 June 1943. Eleven groups of a total 43 of Dabendorf-trained ROA-propaganda officers were sent to various German units and POW-camps in Lapland. The ROA-propagandists were supposed to attract deserters and recruit volunteers to ROA. Deserters were offered generous terms, and options to serve in ROA-units at the front, anti-partisan service in near rear areas, or civil service in the German rear. Even “home leave” to Germany was offered at the end of July. Despite the major effort the predicted number of deserters was not fulfilled.

Furthermore, in August 1943 serious disputes between the ROA-propaganda officers and the Finnish liaison officers in Lapland were reported. The Finnish officers refused to have their meals simultaneously with the *Vlasovites* in the officer's casino in Alakurtti, and were surprised of the privileges given to the *Russkies* (ryssät).

²⁴Geust 2017, p. 135-142.

Because of unsatisfactory results and in some cases even desertions back to the Red Army, all separate “Vlasov-battalions” were transferred to France-Italy in October-November 1943 for “*rest and completing*”. The relocation, which in some cases was forcibly performed, with ROA-soldiers even in chains, affected naturally the fighting spirit of the Russian soldiers very badly. Subsequently the German “Atlantic-wall” was manned by a number of separate “ROA”-battalions, much to the surprise of the Anglo-American invasion troops²⁵.

Agent training of voluntary-POWs in Finnish Spy school

In late summer 1941 a mobile unit, intended for quick collection of intelligence information and interrogation of POWs, was set up by the Finnish Army. This unit, named *Osasto Raski* after its Commander, the above mentioned Maj. Reino Raski, was gradually transformed into a top-secret “spy school”, or training unit for voluntary POWs willing to serve as Finnish agents in the Red Army rear. It is estimated that some 200-300 agents were trained, of which some 100 were dispatched to perform intended tasks.

The internal language of This unique unit (often named “unit 9382” according to the field post number) was most of the time located near Petrozavodsk in Finnish-occupied Karelian-Finnish SSR, with Russian as internal language, and a number of Red Army regulations were even used as text books. The personnel included Russian emigrants and Russian-speaking Finns (including Petr Sokolov and Igor Vahromeyev - after WW II renown Professor of Russian language and literature at Helsinki University, then using the modified surname *Vahros*). Gradually Finnish instructor-officers were joined by ex-POWs acting as assistant instructors (“doublers”), including Maj. Vladimir Vladislavlev (Vladimirov), who formally became Maj. Raski’s deputy.

After some months of preparatory training agent-pairs were sent behind the lines into the Soviet rear, often parachuting from Finnish Air Force Dornier-bombers at preselected locations. Despite thorough security checks, the Spy school seems to have been penetrated by NKVD (at least in some respect), and many volunteer-POWs sent on missions gave themselves immediately up to Soviet authorities. Finnish agents are known to have been arrested in Moscow, Arhangelsk and Belomorsk.

²⁵Geust 2017, p. 147-156.

On 8 June 1943 (the same day as operation *Silberstreif Fi* was initiated!) the Finnish Spy School was ceremonially attached to ROA as *Reconnnaissance Regiment No.1 of ROA Northern Branch*. Major Vladislavlev was promoted to Lt.Col., and all “cadets” of the Agent (or Spy) School were correspondingly promoted to ROA-officers²⁶. In his reminiscences (written in 1946) Maj. Raski tries to play down the significance of this event, calling it only “theater”, arranged to keep up the spirit of the volunteers... Preserved photos of the ceremony, and in particular the chosen date, indicate without doubt that the intension was more serious, and might in fact reflect plans to introduce large scale ROA-operations in Finland²⁷.

Finnish epilogue in April 1945

In connection with the Finnish-Soviet peace negotiations in September 1944 several Finns, who had been actively involved in intelligence and propaganda operations as described, and also several volunteer-POWs escaped abroad in order to avoid possible Soviet retaliation actions. Petr Sokolov, who had a central role in several operations, escaped already in early September 1944 to Sweden, where he lived as “Peter Sahlin” until his death 1971. On the other hand Igor Vahros - his colleague in the Spy School - served rather paradoxically as interpreter during the Soviet-Finnish *Friendship and Assistance Pact* negotiations in Kremlin 1948.

After the interim peace treaty was signed in Moscow 19 September 1944, an Allied (Soviet) Control Commission (ACC) chaired by Andrei Zhdanov arrived in Finland in order to control fulfilment of the peace agreement. Repatriation of Soviet POWs from Finland was initiated in mid-October 1944, with reciprocal repatriation of Finnish POWs from USSR starting somewhat later. The repatriated Soviet POWs became subject of similar “filtration” as was applied after the Winter war. Soviet security authorities collected thus voluminous information about Finnish ROA-related and other anti-Soviet intelligence and propaganda activities.

After analysis of collected information the Soviet counterintelligence SMERSH-department in ACC requested the Finnish State Police (VALPO) to

²⁶Vladislavlev was handed over to Soviet authorities in October 1944, condemned to death punishment, and executed 18 May 1945. See Sergei Kluchnik’s article in *Rodina* No. 9/2009.

²⁷Geust 2017, p. 181-188.

arrest and hand over some 20 persons (all Russian-speaking Finnish citizens or stateless Russian emigrants, except Richard Dahm, interpreter at the Abwehr-office in Helsinki and Unto Parvilahti, liaison officer at the Finnish SS-office in Berlin), who had been involved in anti-Soviet activity including RNA and ROA recruitment of POW-volunteers to RNA at the end of the Winter war, and ROA during the Soviet Great Patriotic War. The arrest, sanctioned by the Communist Minister of Internal Affairs Yrjö Leino, was performed at night 20-21 April 1945. All arrested were immediately flown to Moscow and subsequently sentenced to severe punishments. General Severin Dobrovolsky was executed in 1946 and ex-POW Orest Biljanski (Aleksandr Kalashnikov) was probably also executed. Petr Bystreyevski, Vladimir Kuznetsov, Maximilian Laudon, Juri Narbut and Stepan Petrishenko died in GULAG-camps. Andrei Sumbarov and Igor Verigin chose to stay in USSR after serving their sentence, and the rest (Finnish citizens Boris Björkelund, Dmitri Kuzmin-Karavajev, Vasili Maksimov, Fedor Pihra, Boris and Georgi Popper and Kirill Pushkarev; and stateless Vladimir Bastamov and Dmitri Daragan returned to Finland in 1954...1956.

The Finnish government payed subsequently a moderate compensation to the illegally arrested and deported persons or to their families, and Minister Leino was dismissed because of misconduct of his ministerial duty in 1948²⁸.

Meanwhile Vlasov's story had come to end - only after an absurd meeting in September 1944 with Heinrich Himmler, who was ready to forget all his previous *Untermenschen* propaganda in order to get fresh troops in order to give him time to sign separate peace with the western powers, while Vlasov also needed time for possible peace contacts with the International Red Cross and the Vatican. Thus the *Committee for Liberation of the Peoples in Russia* (KONR) chaired by Vlasov was founded in Prag (the last major Slavonic city still controlled by Germany) 18 November 1944, as a substitute of the originally envisaged Russian exile-government. Vlasov was now finally given armed troops under his command. Thanks to efficient preparations made in Dabendorf Vlasov was able to set up the KONR-armed forces surprisingly fast in the chaotically disintegrating Germany. In spring 1945 KONR three infantry divisions (of which only one was more or less fully organized and armed), tank and aviation units etc, totally some 100 000 soldiers.

²⁸Geust 2017, p. 202-203 and 207-210. Smersh 2003, p. 143.

After the merciless fight of KONR's 1st Infantry Division advancing Red Army units at Oder, the division was relocated to Bohemia. Here Vlasov's soldiers now turned their weapons against the German occupation force, and together with Czech resistance controlled the Czech capital Praha for two days from 7 May 1945, hoping to be able to surrender to General Patton's American tank army, which had already entered Czechoslovakia. Patton stopped however at Plzen, and the Red Army arrived in Prag and arrested Vlasov, his closest officers and numerous soldiers. After thorough investigations followed by a secret trial in Moscow Vlasov and eleven of his closest Generals were 1 August 1946 condemned to death punishment, which was immediately executed. Next day Vlasov's name was again printed in Pravda and Izvestiya - this time in a short item on page 4 without photos²⁹.

In the global history of collaboration the magnitude of the Vlasov-movement is unique. While no one of the Russian generals taken prisoner by the enemy in the Patriotic war 1812 nor in World war I turned their weapons against their fatherland, Andrei Vlasov was able to attract over 35 Generals (of which 12 POW-Generals, and some two dozen white emigrant-Generals), approximately 150 Colonels and a total of some 5 000 officers, whose armed attempt to overturn Stalin's regime ended extremely tragically.

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²⁹Pravda and Izvestiya 2.8.1946. General Vlasov: Istorija predatelstva 2015. Aleksandrov 2009 and 2016.

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