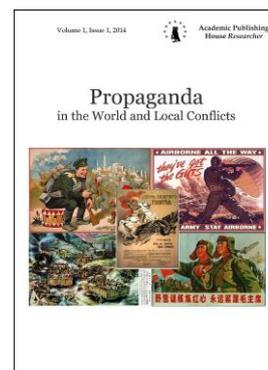


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## Agitation in Extermination Battalions during the Great Patriotic War as a Means of Political Training (as Illustrated by the Example of Sochi City)

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### Abstract

The paper uses the example of the city of Sochi to explore the forms of agitation and morale building activities practiced in extermination battalions during the Great Patriotic War.

Materials that helped accomplish the paper include archival records of primary party organizations in the Sochi extermination battalions, stored by the Center for Documentation of the Contemporary History of the Krasnodar Krai (Krasnodar, Russian Federation).

Research problems were addressed using both general scientific methods (analysis and synthesis, concretization, generalization) and traditional methods of historical analysis. The historical chronological approach allowed an insight into issues that existed in extermination battalions and was instrumental in reviewing the forms and methods of agitation and morale building activities carried out among the personnel.

The extermination battalions were created early in the Great Patriotic War, and first inspections revealed weak discipline and numerous violations in them. To correct this, the party bodies were assigned the task of organizing morale building activities and agitation campaigns among the personnel.

Agitation efforts in the extermination battalions were the responsibility of specialists appointed by primary party organizations of the units. These specialists utilized a wide range of activities, including rallies, lectures, production of wall newspapers and combat leaflets, roll-outs of patriotic and political campaigns and other. Importantly, these had a strong focus on reading and understanding the “Brief course of the history of the AUCP(B)” (Kratkiy kurs istorii VKP(b)), which contributed to the ideological indoctrination of Communists, Komsomols and non-Party personnel in line with Marxism-Leninism pillars.

**Keywords:** agitation, propaganda, morale building, extermination battalions, Great Patriotic War.

### 1. Introduction

June 22, 1941 saw the breakout of the Great Patriotic War. In this connection, the Politburo of the AUCP(B) Central Committee adopted a number of major Decrees “On the mobilization of citizens liable for military service...”, “On declaring martial law in certain areas of the USSR” and “On martial law” (Vestnik Arkhiva..., 2010; Vedomosti..., 1941).

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On June 24, 1941, the USSR Council of People's Commissars (hereinafter "the CPC"), in order to timely and efficiently terminate saboteurs, inserted by the enemy by parachute or otherwise, adopts the Decree "On measures to combat enemy paratroopers and saboteurs in the front-line zone". This resolution initiated the recruitment of the extermination battalions in the Soviet Union. Leadership over the extermination battalions was entrusted to Deputy Chairman of the USSR CPC, People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, Lavrentiy Beria (TsDNIKK. F. 1774-A. Op. 2. D. 276. L. 1, 2).

The newly formed extermination battalions received commanders appointed from among the NKVD personnel, as well as commissars and political instructors, typically from local party organizations that had a scope of activities extending beyond political propaganda and also included military training. Political training in the extermination battalions was given by commissars and political workers in various formats such as rallies, lectures, producing wall newspapers, arranging patriotic political campaigns, Particular emphasis was put on the study of the "Brief course of the history of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)".

## 2. Materials and methods

Materials that helped accomplish the paper include archival records of primary party organizations in the Sochi extermination battalions, stored by the Center for Documentation of the Contemporary History of the Krasnodar Krai (Krasnodar, Russian Federation).

Research problems were addressed using both general scientific methods (analysis and synthesis, concretization, generalization) and traditional methods of historical analysis. The historical chronological approach allowed an insight into issues that existed in extermination battalions and was instrumental in reviewing the forms and methods of agitation and morale building activities carried out among the personnel.

## 3. Results

The Decree of the USSR CPC dated June 24, 1941, established three extermination battalions on the territory of present-day Greater Sochi: Lazarevsky (Shapsugsky), Sochinsky and Adlersky (TsDNIKK. F. 1774-A. Op. 2. D. 276. L. 7). There were 220 people in the Sochinsky extermination battalion, and 200 in each of the Adlersky and Shapsugsky battalions. The total personnel were 620 people (TsDNIKK. F. 1774-A. Op. 2. D. 276. L. 30).

A combat readiness check was carried out in the new extermination battalions already in July 1941 and revealed massive violations. For example, these included personnel's late arrivals to collection points or failures to arrive (TsDNIKK. F. 1774-A. Op. 2. D. 276. L. 47). This resulted into a decision to launch efficient agitation efforts among service personnel of the extermination battalions. To this end, the task of managing entire party and political work in the battalions was given to first secretaries of City Committees (Gorkoms) and District Committees (Raikoms) of the AUCP(B) (TsDNIKK. F. 1774-A. Op. 2. D. 276. L. 47ob.).

Field activities began. For example, early in the operation of the party organization in the Sochinsky extermination battalion, two study groups were set up to read and understand the "Brief course of the history of the AUCP(B.)", and the knowledge was systematically checked and tested among Communists and Komsomols. The groups studying the "Brief course of the history of the AUCP(B.)" covered 35 people. Consultants were assigned and duty schedule was introduced at the party's consultant office. Following a series of classes, the two groups were merged into one because part of the students were sent on duty assignments, and the group leader, Kaylin, was off for medical reasons. The merged study group was supervised by Okhotnikov. In this mode, the study group continued operating until June 1943. As a large number of combatants and commanders left for duty missions to handle operational and administrative tasks, classes at the study group were suspended (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 97).

On November 24, 1942, the Sochinsky extermination battalion held rally led by Battalion Commissar Skorokhod and Secretary of the Primary Organization Yepikhin. The event celebrated the successful offensive mounted by the Red Army in the Stalingrad area. Here is the transcript of the speeches made at the rally:

*Skorokhod: Comrade Stalin has pointed out in his order dated November 7 that the day is not far away when the enemy will see the brunt of new attacks by the Red Army. The Hitlerite armies*

*are already bearing the might of our first assaults. In just three days, the Hitlerite gang has lost 26,000 killed, 24,000 taken prisoner, more than 700 guns, 2,625 machine guns, 2,826 vehicles and more. With each passing day the Red Army is becoming increasingly mature, tempered and strong in its power. The Soviet people have the profound belief that valiant Soviet soldiers, under the leadership of our beloved leader and commander, great Stalin, will crush Hitlerite brigands and will clear the Soviet land of the abhorrent enemy. Long live our great Stalin!*

*Yepikhin: The fire of battles has fortified and toughened the courage of Stalingrad defenders. They have fought firmly confident that not only will they defend the city of Stalin, they will drive Hitler's bastards away from the Volga. The Red Army soldiers have withstood! They have seen the joyous and inspiring day of retribution come true. Comrade Stalin has said that we can and must cleanse the Soviet land of the Hitlerite scum. The rout of the enemy at Stalingrad will mark the beginning of the defeat of the Hitlerite predatory army. Under the leadership of Comrade Stalin, our Red Army will destroy Hitler's rascals. Our extermination battalion, when it receives an order to march on our mortal enemy, our soldiers, commanders and political workers will honestly fulfill their duty to the Motherland. We will fight to live up to the example of Stalingrad defenders (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 4).*

After the political workers delivered their speeches at the rally, extermination battalion fighters resolved as follows *"Having heard the report of Battalion Commissar Comrade Skorokhod on the successful offensive of our troops in the Stalingrad area, We, the battalion soldiers, commanders and political workers, with a feeling of sheer joy are hailing our dear Red Army, its fighters, commanders and political workers who are successfully carrying forward the advance and smashing gangs of German fascist invaders.*

*The cities of Kalach and Abganerovo as well as the villages of Krivomuzginskaya, Chernyshevskaya, Sovetsk and others have been liberated, dozens of localities have been set free. This is only the beginning of fulfilling Comrade Stalin's instructions that "we can and must cleanse the Soviet land of the Hitlerite scum". The Red Army guided by its tried and true generals has already proved to the whole world that it is not only able to contain the onslaught of the armored German armies, but also smash them with the full support of its people, and through the comprehensive communication with the rear, it succeeded in fending off Hitler's hordes at a distance of 400 km in winter last year. It can protect our beloved capital of Moscow and the cradle of the revolution, the city of Lenin.*

*Now, when the enemy troops themselves have been exhausted over the vast Soviet-German front, when Hitler's best divisions have been exterminated, when thousands of tanks and aircraft have been destroyed, the day has come when the enemy will again experience the severity of new attacks by the Red Army. But we know that the enemy is not yet smashed, that we are yet to deal the final blow, that German invaders will orchestrate new schemes, and they will still try to execute their bloody plans. We know that the complete defeat of the enemy will require an even greater strain on all the sinews of the army and the people, of the front and of the rear, and therefore each of us undertakes to strengthen the iron military discipline, strengthen the unity of command and further enhance our combat and political training to be prepared any minute to join combat banners. We have the profound belief that our valiant soldiers, under the leadership of our beloved leader and commander, great Comrade Stalin, will crush Hitlerite brigands and will clear the Soviet land of the abhorrent enemy. Long live our valiant Red Army! Long live our beloved I.V. Stalin! (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 4ob.).*

The rally, as a propaganda tool, was intended to enhance morals, determination, patriotic and combat qualities of the extermination battalion personnel. The political workers acted in the spirit of their time – their speeches were focused on the talent of the leader, Supreme Commander-in-Chief Comrade Stalin, his role in the victories won, but also praised the bravery of the Red Army soldiers whom extermination battalions were to take for models.

On November 27, 1942, the general meeting by the AUCP(B.) primary organization of the Adlersky extermination battalion was attended by 5 party members and 1 candidate member to the AUCP(B.). The meeting elected M. M. Devyatov as a chairman.

The meeting heard Comrade Stalin's report commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Great October Revolution. In addition, it highlighted the work to make provisions for the defense

of the Adler district, a mission given to the extermination battalion. In this regard, party activists proposed to build up combat and political training for the soldiers. The meeting resolved:

1. Strengthen the combat and political training of the soldiers in the unit; implement these activities on a daily basis according to the developed plan;
2. Encharge the command of the extermination battalion with a task of formulating, no later than November 25, 1942, an action plan on combat and political training for November and December 1942 (TsDNIKK. F. 2473. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 2ob.).

The meeting also made a decision to start a wall newspaper – “Boevoy listok” (Combat Leaflet) – and recommend to M.M. Demin, G.I. Gurov and N.I. Kulakova for its editorial board (TsDNIKK. F. 2473. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 4).

We should note that the meeting by the primary party organization instructed the battalion command to develop a plan for combat and political training.

On November 28, 1942, a general, closed party meeting by members and candidates for AUCP(B.) membership of the Sochinsky extermination battalion took place. There was an attendance of 20 party members and 11 candidates for party membership at the meeting. The agenda comprised the following items:

1. Hearing a report by Battalion Commander Ignatenko on the soldier and commander combat training and a co-report by Commissar Skorokhod on political indoctrination work in the extermination battalion;

2. Approving the plan and schedule of the political indoctrination work for December 1942.

*Ignatenko: The territory of the city of Sochi, Shapsugsky and Adler districts were reconnoitered and developed in last winter, spring and summer. Soldiers and commanders grew stronger in the campaigns, and their morale improved. The extermination battalion sent 600 soldiers to the Red Army, and some demonstrated heroism and prowess. We will have to work hard with a new generation of fighters. The proximity of the front requires vigilance and better discipline, and we must be ready to join the battle at any moment. The battalion has the regular size of 200 people, while in fact, the detachment has 162 people (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 3).*

*Skorokhod: The soldiers and commanders in the battalion have undergone good political indoctrination and ideological training. Political conversations carried out – 105, motion pictures run – 59, lectures delivered – 15, theater visits made – 8, battalion wall newspapers produced – 6, which positively affected the morale of the soldiers and commanders (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 3-3ob.).*

The meeting further approved the plan and the schedule of the political indoctrination work for December 1942 (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 4).

The plan approved by the meeting and the schedule for political indoctrination work in December 1942 (Table 1) are methods of political work and agitation among the soldiers and commanders in the battalion. The planned activities included club work, commander training, a discussion meeting with the political personnel, lectures by political workers at the Sochi City Committee of the AUCP(B.), reports, amateurs’ events, meetings of Communists and Komsomols, consultations on the “Brief course of the history of the AUCP(B.)”. Communists were engaged to carry out events and activities.

**Table 1.** The schedule of the political indoctrination work in the Sochinsky extermination battalion for December 1941 (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 4. L. 44)

date	hours	Name of activity	Description of activity	Who delivers, arranges, reports	Completion date
	-30	Club work	Motion picture. Kinosbornik (Fighting Film Album) No. 11	Club Head	
	-30	Commander training	As per program	Assistant drill battalion commander	

	20-30	Briefing with command and political personnel	On the unity of command	T. Skorokhod	
	10-30	Lecture, a Gorkom lecturer	Events in North Africa and the internal situation in Europe	Lecturer Lobov, AUCP(B.) Gorkom Club Head	
	20	Report	Report on the Constitution Day	Skorokhod, Yepikhin	
	22	Club work	Motion picture "Makar Nechay"	Club Head	
	23	Club work	Amateurs' event	Baranovskaya	
	21	Commander training	As per program	Assistant Battalion Commander	
		Club work			
	- 20	Meeting by the party bureau	Report on the club work for the second half of the year	Club Head	
	- 20	Meeting by the VLKSM Komsomol Committee		Rogovskaya	
	- 20	Club work	Fiction reading	Baranovskaya	
	- 21	General Komsomol meeting		Rogovskaya	
	- 22	General party meeting	Report on the ideological level of Communists	Yepikhin	
	- 10 <sup>30</sup>	Lecture	Stalingrad defensive operation in 1918 and during the Patriotic War	Lecturer Nikolaev, AUCP(B.) Gorkom	
	- 21	Club work	Motion picture	Club Head	
	- 23	Amateurs' event		Baranovskaya	
	- 21	Commander training	As per program	Assistant Battalion Commander	
	- 20	Briefing with command and political personnel		Ignatenko, Skorokhod	
	- 22	Club work	Motion picture	Club Head	
	- 22	Club work	Fiction reading	Baranovskaya, Club Head	
	- 22	Consultation	On the study of the "Brief course of the history of the AUCP(B.)"	Skorokhod	
	- 21	Meeting by the VLKSM Komsomol Committee		Rogovskaya	
	- 10 <sup>30</sup>	Lecture		Lecturer Kabanova, AUCP(B.) Gorkom	
	- 21	Meeting of the party bureau	Report by the Secretary of the VLKSM Komsomol	Club Head Yepikhin, Rogovskaya	

			Organization on the work in study groups		
	- 22	General Komsomol meeting		Rogovskaya	
	- 22	Club work	Motion picture	Club Head	
	- 21	General closed party meeting	Report of the VLKSM Secretary on the organization of the VLKSM Komsomol with the new committee members	Yepikhin, Secretary of the VLKSM Komsomol Committee	
	18 <sup>30</sup> - 22	Amateurs' event		Baranovskaya, Club Head	
30.12	18 <sup>30</sup> - 20 20 <sup>30</sup> - 22	Commander training Club work	As per program Motion picture	Chief of staff Kobets	

The Politburo meetings considered the reports delivered by political instructors responsible for implementing political indoctrination activities. The Politburo members actually led political work and controlled that the plan for political agitation was consistently put into operation among soldiers and commanders of the extermination battalion (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 4. L. 44, 47).

On December 5, 1942, a closed meeting by the AUCP(B.) primary organization of the Adlersky extermination battalion took place, attended by 9 people. Participants also included a representative of the AUCP(B.) district committee, Soprunov. They heard a report on the state of the battalion and approved the action plan for the primary party organization in December 1942.

In the end, the party meeting concluded that there was insufficient political work (lectures, reports, conversations) carried out as there was no party organization within 4 months. To address this situation, it was decided to overhaul the work on the soldier political indoctrination, arrange conversations, lectures and reports on a regular basis, instruct secretaries of party organizations to make provisions for consultations with each member and candidate for party membership (TsDNIKK. F. 2473. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 7).

On December 16, 1942, the primary AUCP(B.) party organization of the Adlersky extermination battalion held a closed meeting that elected Krylov as a secretary and was chaired by Zubchenko. After they heard Lomtev's report on how large-scale organizational work and political indoctrination efforts were deployed, meeting participants decided to appoint responsible persons:

1. Vorobyov – the agitation team leader, agitators Krylov, Gazin, Markaryan, Kalashnikov, Lukyanenko and Kovalev;
2. Zubchenko – the wall newspaper editor, members of the editorial board – Lomtev, Mezhanov, Kovalev, Shcherbinin;
3. Markaryan – organization of slogan, poster and scale model production;
4. Romanenko – organization of cultural and awareness-raisin work;
5. Pogorelov – organization of reports and lectures;
6. Arkhinev – organization of library work (TsDNIKK. F. 2473. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 11-11ob.).

On December 17, 1942, a rally brought together soldiers and commanders of the extermination battalion in Sochi, aimed to celebrate the successful offensive by the Red Army and collect New Year gifts for soldiers at the front.

*Skorokhod: The struggle of our Red Army against Hitler's German-fascist army has been continuing over 17 months. Our heroic Red Army is leading a successful assault at the Stalingrad front, at the central front and in Mozdok. Everywhere our Red Army is chasing the enemy off our sacred land. Our enemies are digging in and are eager to hold on every hillock. The Red Army is sweeping the enemy out all fortified positions and is expelling it from warm places to the freezing cold. We are warming our fighters with our brotherly love and constant care. We, soldiers, of the*

*extermination battalion must now take care of our Red Army soldiers and pick up New Year parcels for them with various presents that will ease their burden and boost their courage and valor.*

*Bogatov: Each report brings us news of the successes notched by our Red Army at all fronts. It is essential to help our brothers, fathers and sons with New Year gifts. My proposal is that everyone should give at least 5 % of their wages.*

*Malin: It is about a year and a half that our heroic army is fighting against Hitler's predatory army. We as one will take part in collecting New Year gifts for our Red Army soldiers. I propose to allot two-day earnings for New Year gifts for soldiers.*

*Rogovskaya: We know what hardships our brother soldiers have to endure there at the front, but when they receive our gifts and letters, they will feel the love of their rear, which will comfort them and relieve their burden.*

We approve Malin's proposal to deduct two-day earnings of soldiers and commanders to buy New Year gifts for Red Army soldiers.

Having heard and discussed the information presented by commissar of the extermination battalion Skorokhod, (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 7), the rally adopted the following resolution: "We, soldiers, commanders and political workers, have made a decision to take an active part in the collection of New Year gifts for Red Army soldiers. The Soviet people have been fighting against the German fascist invaders over 18 months. Not only has the valiant Red Army held the furious onslaught of the fascist hordes at bay, but has made and is continuing to make violent strikes on them. The current year has marked the beginning of the defeat of the Nazi gangs, and the coming 1943, will be the year of the final cleansing for the Soviet land off the fascist scum.

*The Soviet people is expressing their love for the dear Red Army by picking New Year gifts for Soviet soldiers. Patriots are carrying out a gift collection campaign for the Red Army throughout cities and villages of the Soviet Union.*

*We, soldiers, commanders and political workers, will not stand aside in this patriotic initiative. We resolve to allot two-day earnings to buy New Year gifts for soldiers of the Red Army. Let the new 1943 bring a new success to Soviet weapons, let it pass into history as the year of cleansing the Soviet land of fascist gangs" (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 7ob.).*

In addition, commanders and political instructors rolled out political campaigns in the Sochi extermination battalions in December 1942 to raise funds needed to purchase fighter planes for the squadron "Kubansky komsomolets" (A Kuban Komsomol Member) (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 98ob; TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 3).

In addition to New Year gifts for Red Army soldiers and fund-raising activities to buy fighter planes, the party organization of the Sochinsky extermination battalion carried out other political campaigns as well: *Political campaigns deployed in the extermination battalion is one of the top priorities in the Sochi party organization. The extermination battalion collected 6,112 rubles for New Year gifts to the Red Army, and more than 12 thousand rubles for the "Kubansky Komsomolets" squadron. We are completing an application form for the 2nd State military loan with the 113 % repayment from the wages; we have collected scrap iron, books and magazines for people who have been in the enemy occupation (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 98ob.).*

December 25, 1942, saw a closed meeting by the primary AUCP(B.) party organization of the Adlersky extermination battalion. It paid much attention to the editorial board performance and wall newspaper production. The Communists ratified the following resolutions at the meeting – to approve the wall newspaper work plan and encourage party members to actively engage in the work of the wall newspaper (TsDNIKK. F. 2473. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 13-13ob.).

Political instructors put a major focus on conclusion by soldiers of the extermination battalions of socialist contracts to participate in the socialist competition that was conducted for individuals and for platoons, was a technique of public party activities and was designed to boost the combat and political training of soldiers and commanders (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 97ob.). The following criteria were used to choose a winner in the socialist competition – drill training, weapon materiel, grenade throwing, disguise skills, knowledge of the guard service regulations, intelligence, production of combat leaflets, discipline, alarm collection and bayonet fighting (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 4. L. 88).

The Sochinsky extermination battalion organized work with young communists on a regular basis. Young people were engaged in public work, political instructors routinely conducted conversations with them, Komsomol members had the task preparing reports and presentations at the party bureau and general meetings (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 97).

Political work comprised agitation activities that were implemented by study groups as well as individually by communists and Komsomol members. Lectures on a variety of topics were given by instructors and lecturers send by the AUCP(B.) city committee two or three times a month. A large section in the agitation efforts was dedicated to the activities of the battalion's editorial board, production of wall newspapers and combat leaflets. Cultural events included the organization of club evenings, amateur events for soldiers and commanders and visits to the state theater by the personnel. The planned agitation efforts, which engaged political instructors, soldiers and commanders, produced a beneficial effect on the work to maintain the military discipline and a combative mood of the battalion personnel (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 3. L. 97-97ob.).

In 1943, the Sochinsky extermination battalion ran the following study groups – arts and literature, drama, choral singing, sniper skills, chess, physical culture and amateur performances (TsDNIKK. F. 2378. Op. 1. D. 4. L. 19).

In late 1943, the extermination battalions were abolished together with their primary party organizations. Soldiers of the conscription age in the extermination battalions, suitable for military service, were drafted into the Red Army, and the rest joined local air defense units.

#### 4. Conclusion

The extermination battalions were created early in the Great Patriotic War, and first inspections revealed weak discipline and numerous violations in them. To correct this, the party bodies were assigned the task of organizing morale building activities and agitation campaigns among the personnel.

Agitation efforts in the extermination battalions were the responsibility of specialists appointed by primary party organizations of the units. These specialists utilized a wide range of activities, including rallies, lectures, production of wall newspapers and combat leaflets, roll-outs of patriotic and political campaigns and other. Importantly, these had a strong focus on reading and understanding the “Brief course of the history of the AUCP(B)”, which contributed to the ideological indoctrination of Communists, Komsomols and non-Party personnel in line with Marxism-Leninism pillars.

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