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“Voluntary Mobilization” in July 1941: Recruitment of Divisions of People's Militia of Moscow

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Abstract: The author presents an analysis of the peculiarities of manning divisions of the People's militia, formed in Moscow in July 1941. Despite the abundance of literature on the history of the Moscow militia, this aspect of its history has not been studied enough. The research is based on archival sources: both documents of the military department and on documents of the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, which have been actively introduced into scientific circulation in recent years. The content of the regulatory framework of the militia, the formation of the administrative and command vertical, the production and territorial principle of recruitment and related features of the selection of commanding and enlisted personnel are considered. Special attention is paid to the analysis of voluntary and mobilization aspects of recruitment, as well as propaganda support of the campaign. Conclusions are drawn that the formation of militia was carried out in the shortest possible time set by the state, however, being organized as a typical mass campaign of that time, it had many drawbacks, among which the quality of personnel selection occupied one of the most prominent places and then required numerous adjustments that took several months.

Keywords: World War II, military history, recruitment of military units, defense of Moscow, Moscow battle

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«Добровольная мобилизация» июля 1941 г.: комплектование дивизий народного ополчения Москвы личным составом

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Аннотация: Представлен анализ особенностей комплектования личным составом двенадцати дивизий народного ополчения, сформировавшихся в Москве в начале июля 1941 г. Исследование опирается на архивные источники: как традиционное военное делопроизводство Московского военного округа, ответственного за формирование ополчения, так и массив документов Комиссии по истории Великой Отечественной войны при Академии наук СССР, в последние годы активно вводимые в научный оборот.

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Рассмотрены содержание нормативной базы ополченчества, формирование административно-командной вертикали, производственно-территориальный принцип комплектования и связанные с ним особенности подбора начальствующего и рядового состава. Особое внимание уделено анализу добровольных и принудительных (мобилизационных) аспектов комплектования, а также пропагандистскому сопровождению кампании и его влиянию на мотивацию москвичей, вступавших в ополчение. Делаются выводы о том, что формирование ополченческих дивизий было осуществлено в предельно краткие сроки, заданные государством. Однако, будучи организованным как типичная массовая кампания того времени, она имела много недостатков, среди которых невысокое качество подбора личного состава занимало одно из наиболее заметных мест и потребовало затем многочисленных корректировок, занявших несколько месяцев.

Ключевые слова: Вторая мировая война, военная история, комплектование воинских частей, оборона Москвы, Московская битва

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Introduction

The history of the Moscow people's militia is a popular subject in the historiography of the Great Patriotic War. In recent years, the number of publications has been increasing due to the wave of public interest in the Great Patriotic War, as well as the renaissance of local history research, in which both specialists and enthusiasts of studying local history and family genealogy are involved. Despite the abundance of works devoted to people's militia, upon closer examination they turn out, for the most part, to be a historical description of individual divisions, and within this the authors often focus on the personal history of the militia participants. The personal fates of Muscovite volunteers against the background of the general heroic and tragic pathos of the history of the militia divisions – this is the modern perspective from which one considers the history of the Moscow militia¹.

So far, a few attempts have been made to generalize the experience of forming divisions of the Moscow militia. Among the most significant works of the Soviet period are publications with the participation of A.D. Kolesnik². Among the modern publications, it is worth noting the works built on a modern documentary basis – by V.I. Karimov³, I.A. Slukhay⁴ et al.

¹ V.V. Klimanov, *Soboi zaslonili Moskvu: podvig 17-i strelkovoï divizii narodnogo opolcheniia* [They overshadowed Moscow: the feat of the 17th Infantry Division of the People's Militia] (Moscow: Abelia Publ., 2005); A.A. Kirillov, *Diviziia geroev: ot Moskvy do El'by: boevoi put' 21-i divizii narodnogo opolcheniia Moskvy* [Division of Heroes: from Moscow to the Elbe: the battle path of the XXI Division of the People's Militia of Moscow] (Petrozavodsk: IP Markov N.A. Publ., 2016); V.K. Biryukov, *Dobrovol'tsy-moskvichi na zashchite Otechestva. 3-ya Moskovskaya kommunisticheskaiia strelkovaia diviziia v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* [Muscovite volunteers in defense of the Fatherland. The 3rd Moscow Communist Rifle Division in the years of Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: Yauza Publ., 2017) etc.

² N.M. Aleshchenko, et al, eds., *Moskovskoe opolchenie: Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk* [The Moscow Militia: A brief historical essay] (Moscow: Voenizdat Publ., 1969; A.D. Kolesnik, *Narodnoe opolchenie gorodov-geroev* [People's Militia of Hero Cities] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1974); Yu.A. Polyakov, ed. *Opolchenskie formirovaniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* [Militia formations of the Russian Federation during the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1988); D.M. Proektor, ed. *Narodnoe opolchenie zashchishchaet Rodinu* [The People's Militia protects the Motherland] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1990).

³ V.I. Karimov, *Oni otstoiali Moskvu. Po zovu serdtsa, po veleniiu sovesti* [They defended Moscow. At the call of the heart, at the behest of conscience] (Moscow: Planeta Publ., 2017).

⁴ I.A. Slukhay, *Moskovskoe narodnoe opolchenie Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny* [Moscow people's militia of the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Patriot Publ., 2013).

An interesting and well-reasoned analysis of the genesis of the Moscow militia in the first days and weeks of the war is presented in a large article by O.V. Budnitsky⁵.

One of the least studied stages in the history of the Moscow militia seems to be the process of their formation in July 1941. In particular, there have not been revealed the principles and mechanisms of creating militia divisions which turned out to be radically different from those in the Red Army at that time. The purpose of the article is to reveal the experience of making and implementing urgent, non-standard decisions of the USSR state and military authorities on the recruitment of militias carried out simultaneously with the planned mobilization deployment of the armed forces in conditions of great uncertainty of the situation development on the Soviet-German front.

The main work on the formation of 12 divisions of the people's militia was completed within a few days – from July 2–3 to July 6–9, 1941. On average, 7–8 thousand people were recruited⁶. In the historical records of the former people's militia divisions, the dates from July 6 to July 9, 1941 are considered as the days of the “formation” or “completion of the formation” of the divisions⁷. A short but very eventful period of time in early July 1941 determines the chronological framework of this article.

The source base for the research includes published and archived official documents of the USSR government and military authorities. Above all, these are the documents of the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War at the USSR Academy of Sciences under the leadership of academician I.I. Mints formed at the end of 1941 to collect materials on the history of the Battle of Moscow. They are stored in the Scientific Archive of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In addition to the documents of Mints' Commission, the study involved a large array of published evidence related to the history of the militia⁸, as well as the materials from the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation which are rarely involved in research on the history of the Moscow militia. This gives an extensive picture of the creation of the Moscow people's militia.

⁵ O.V. Budnitsky, “Moscow People's Militia: reasons and features of creation,” *Rossijskaya istoriya*, no. 3 (2020): 13, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086956870010139-3>.

⁶ Scientific archive of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences (henceforth – NA IRI RAN), f. 2, razdel 9, op. 4, d. 10, l. 1 ob.

⁷ S.M. Klyatskin, ed. *Moskva – frontu. 1941–1945: Sb. dok. i materialov* [Moscow to the front. 1941–1945: Collection of doc. and materials] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1966), 152, 159, 167.

⁸ A.E. Gordon, “Moskovskoe opolchenie 1941 goda glazami uchastnika [The Moscow militia of 1941 through the eyes of a participant],” *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, no. 3 (2001): 158–163; V. Shimkevich, *Sud'ba moskovskogo opolchenca. Front, okruzhenie, plen. 1941–1945* [The fate of the Moscow militia. Front, encirclement, captivity. 1941–1945] (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf Publ., 2008); B. Runin, *Zapiski sluchaino utselevshego* [Notes of an accidental survivor] (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie Publ., 2010); V. Vakhromeev, *Vyzhit' i vernut'sia. Odisseia sovetskogo voennoplennogo. 1941–1945* [Survive and come back. Odyssey of a Soviet prisoner of war. 1941–1945] (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf Publ., 2011); B. Zylev, and A. Darkov, *V viazemskom okruzhenii. Vospominaniia boitsov 6-i divizion narodnogo opolcheniia. 1941–1942* [In the Viazma environment. Memoirs of fighters of the 6th Division of the People's Militia. 1941–1942] (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf Publ., 2015); V.I. Karimov, *Oni otstoiali Moskvu. Po zovu serdtsa, po veleniiu sovesti* [They defended Moscow. At the call of the heart, at the behest of conscience] (Moscow: Planeta Publ., 2017); Yu.T. Yushinsky, ed. *Rostokinskaia diviziia. Vospominaniia, pis'ma, biografii* [Rostokinskaya division. Memoirs, letters, biographies] (Moscow: Editorial URSS Publ., 2019); *Opolchentsy 5-i Frunzenskoi v bitve za Moskvu. Po vospominaniiam byvshikh opolchentsev 5-i divizion narodnogo opolcheniia Frunzenskogo raiona g. Moskvy i issledovaniiam istorikov* [Militias of the 5th Frunzenskaya in the battle for Moscow. According to the memoirs of former militiamen of the 5th division of the people's militia of the Frunzensky district of Moscow and the research of historians] (Moscow, 2021), etc.

Regulatory and organizational basis for the formation of the Moscow people's militia

The Moscow authorities and the command of the Moscow Military District apparently got the idea of creating people's militia in June 26 – July 1, 1941. The time frame is determined by the beginning of the militia formation in Leningrad, where the initiator of the creation of the army of volunteers was the Military Council of the Northern Front (transformed from the Leningrad Military District) which included the political leaders of the city – A.A. Zhdanov and A.A. Kuznetsov. At the same time, they were representatives of the country's top leadership that closely communicated with J.V. Stalin. In a number of key features (principles of recruitment, organizational composition of divisions), the Moscow militia project certainly followed the Leningrad example. The active participation of the head of the Moscow party organization and Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks A.S. Shcherbakov and People's Commissar of Internal Affairs L.P. Beria in the development of policy documents on the formation of the militia mentioned below does not exclude the fact that it was these officials wishing to keep up with their Leningrad associates that took the initiative in announcing recruitment of militia in Moscow.

The formation of the militia in Moscow was obviously an emotional decision dictated by fears of too rapid a pace of advance of the Soviet-German front in the central sector. On July 28 Minsk fell, and this made a grave impression on the country's leadership. If the rate of advance was maintained, the enemy could be expected at the capital in two weeks. Additional reserves were needed to protect the city⁹.

By July 1, the plan to form the militia in Moscow had become more concrete. On that day there was published the draft order of the commander of the Moscow Military District, Lieutenant General P.A. Artemyev entitled "On the procedure for mobilizing 300 thousand militiamen from Moscow and the Moscow region according to the decision of the Government."¹⁰ The document was approved by People's Commissar of Internal Affairs L.P. Beria, First Secretary of the Moscow Committee and Moscow City Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks A.S. Shcherbakov, A.P. Artemyev, as well as Chairman of the Moscow City Council V.P. Pronin. They signed the document on July 1. The typewritten version of the document contains numerous edits made by Beria.

On July 2, the document, taking into account Beria's edits, was formalized by order No. 0031 of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District "On voluntary mobilization of residents of Moscow and the Moscow region into the people's militia."¹¹ According to the minutes of the meeting, it was attended by commander of the district troops, Lieutenant General P.A. Artemyev, L.P. Beria and A.S. Shcherbakov as members of the Military Council, as well as invited persons – Chairman of the Moscow Council V.P. Pronin and "others according to the special list."¹² Obviously, the "others" stood for 25 secretaries of Moscow district committees that were urgently assembled on July 2 in the office of Prime Minister V.M. Molotov¹³; at the proposal of the latter they unanimously approved the formation of the people's militia.

Order No. 0031 of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District determined the scale of the mobilization (270 thousand people – 200 thousand from Moscow and 70 thousand from the Moscow region); its terms (it began on July 3 and ended

⁹ O.V. Budnitsky, "Moscow People's Militia," 6–10.

¹⁰ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12461, d. 9, l. 8–10.

¹¹ *Moskva pri frontovoi*, 89–90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 89–90.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the circumstances and content of this meeting, see: O.V. Budnitsky, "Moscow People's Militia," 6–9.

in Moscow on July 5, in the region – on July 6); age range of militiamen (17–55 years); the procedure for staffing with rank-and-file and commanding personnel; armament and supply of the volunteer divisions. The commander of the military district who was entrusted with the formation of the militia gave instructions regarding the combat training for the militia¹⁴. On July 4, the provisions of order No. 0031 of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District were reproduced almost unchanged in resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee which also established the order of the militia formation (12 divisions in the first stage and 13 divisions in the second stage) and the readiness period for the divisions of the first stage – July 7. Finally, on the same day, July 4, order No. 0027 was issued to the troops of the Moscow Military District signed by commander of the troops, Lieutenant General A.P. Artemyev, A.S. Shcherbakov as a member of the Military Council, as well as Secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks I.M. Sokolov¹⁵.

Order No. 0027 of the Moscow Military District referred to resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee and specified its provisions, namely: it announced the numbering of all 25 divisions being formed; it contained the staff of the first-stage divisions modeled on the staff of the reduced wartime rifle division (9,424 people, including 628 people of commanding staff, 1,310 – junior commanding staff and 7,486 – rank and file)¹⁶; it determined the deadline for staffing the divisions with commanding and rank and file staff (July 5 and 6, respectively); it determined 12 districts forming the first-stage divisions; finally, it determined the deadline for completing the formation of the divisions: the first stage – by July 7, the second stage – “according to the special order.”¹⁷

Resolution No. 0031 of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District dated July 2 and resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee dated July 4, as well as order No. 0027 to the troops of the Moscow Military District of July 4 formed the regulatory framework for the formation of the Moscow militia. The direct executors (chairmen of the party district committees, district military commissars and division commanders) were guided in their work primarily by resolution № 0031 of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District. It is this resolution that is mentioned in most reports on the progress of the militia formation. According to the Krasnogvardeisky district military commissariat, its implementation began already at 8 a.m. on July 2¹⁸.

Voluntariness and mobilization in the practice of forming militia divisions

In the public sphere, the large-scale campaign to form militia units became obvious already on July 1: on that day, at lunchtime, rallies were held at Moscow enterprises, and the registration of volunteers began (it had nothing to do with militia yet)¹⁹. On July 2, an article about this event appeared on the second page of the “Izvestiya” newspaper²⁰.

The official start of the campaign was given by J.V. Stalin’s appeal to the citizens early in the morning of July 3²¹. In particular, it reported that “the workers of Moscow

¹⁴ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 236.

¹⁵ Ibid., op. 12461, d. 9, l. 3–5.

¹⁶ Ibid., l. 11–56.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., op. 12462, d. 24, l. 228.

¹⁹ *Moskva – frontu*, 118–120.

²⁰ *Izvestiia*, July 2, 1941.

²¹ Stalin’s speech took place at 6.30 a.m. Moscow time, and at the request of A.S. Shcherbakov, the secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks responsible for propaganda, the central newspapers had reserved the front page for the emergency material the night before. After completing the front page, the central newspapers were printed at around 9 a.m. on July 3 and were immediately distributed. See: D.I. Ortenberg, *Iiun’ – dekabr’ sorok pervogo: Rasskaz-hronika* [June – De-

and Leningrad have already begun to create people's militia to support the Red Army." There was the call:

In every city that is in danger of the enemy invasion, we must create militia, raise all working people to fight in order to defend our freedom, our honor, our Motherland in our Patriotic War against German fascism²².

Thus, early in the morning of July 3, after the radio speech by J.V. Stalin who called, in particular, for the creation of "people's militia of many thousands to support the Red Army,"²³ the campaign to organize people's militia divisions in Moscow began in full force. The biggest burden in this work fell on extra-institutional emergency bodies – troikas headed by party leaders – heads of district committees of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. A district troika also included: a head of the district department of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs and a district military commissar. While creating the divisions, the work of the entire party, Soviet and military apparatus of the districts was completely subordinated to the troikas. The issues of selecting command and political personnel, rank-and-file militiamen, providing premises, transport, and equipment were distributed among the members of the troikas, who, in turn, involved the entire apparatus subordinate to them²⁴.

It is quite obvious that the administrative vertical which had emergency powers was aimed at organizing militia divisions through orders and directives. The documents of the Moscow Military District and the State Defense Committee listed above which regulated the formation of the militia in Moscow directly and unambiguously prescribe the mobilization method of recruiting personnel. It should be noted that in Resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee the term "mobilization" and its derivatives are used 18 times, while "voluntariness" is mentioned only once: it was personally written in the title of the very first draft resolution of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District dated July 1 by L.P. Beria; thus, there was invented the well-known oxymoron "voluntary mobilization," which later was used in the resolution of the State Defense Committee²⁵. However, in the very content of the resolution, the voluntary nature of joining the militia is not mentioned at all. Moreover, all of the listed documents required "thereafter" to carry out "registration of mobilization through military commissariats." Order No. 0027 of the Moscow Military District which, among other things, determined the procedure for the work of military commissariats required that they formalize the military registration documents for the militiamen as mobilized, which was later done in accordance with the "Manual on the mobilization work of local military administration bodies of the People's Commissariat of Defense of the Soviet Union" put into effect by order No. 095 of the People's Commissariat of Defense of March 5, 1941²⁶. The statistical materials of the organizational and mobilization department of the Moscow Military District contain no data on the recruitment of volunteers; all categories of citizens liable

member of the forty-first: A Chronicle story] (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel' Publ., 1984), 22–23; Already at 7.30 a.m., meetings were convened in the party district committees with the participation of enterprise directors, and afterwards there were held rallies at all enterprises and institutions, after which there began registration in the militia. See: *Moskva prifrontovaia*, 91.

²² "Vystuplenie po radio Predsedatelia Gosudarstvennogo Komiteta Oborony I.V. Stalina [Radio speech by Chairman of the State Defense Committee I.V. Stalin]," *Pravda*, July 3, 1941.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 9, op. 20, d. 5, l. 1–1 ob.

²⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12461, d. 9, l. 8–10.

²⁶ For the text of the Manual, see: *Russkii arkhiv: Velikaia Otechestvennaia: Prikazy narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR* [Russian Archive: The Great Patriotic War: Orders of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR], vol. 13 (2–1) (Moscow: TERRA Publ., 1994), 246–256.

for military service drafted into the army were classified under the category “conscripted by mobilization.”²⁷

In full accordance with this, on July 3, the district troikas made calculations for the party organizations of the enterprises, and the latter, in turn, compiled lists of workers enlisted in the militia²⁸. Brigade commander of the 15th division of the Proletarsky district Kuzmin called this event “list mobilization.”²⁹ The most efficient district troikas were ready to carry out such mobilization in one day. Already at 6 p.m. on July 3 the Stalinsky district committee reported to the secretariat of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District:

The mobilization of workers and employees of enterprises and institutions has been carried out, the check on the lists continues³⁰.

Meanwhile, on July 3 the mass recording of people was just beginning. Expecting forced mobilization, from the first day the emergency troikas encountered unprecedented enthusiasm of Muscovites. The number of volunteers was so great that in most cases there was no need in coercive measures. In the collective memory of the rank-and-file militiamen that certainly were not familiar with the secret orders for their mobilization, the campaign to form the Moscow divisions in July 1941 remained as a volunteer one. This was reflected in many published memoirs and became firmly entrenched in the public memory of the Battle of Moscow. The cases of coercion were rare. On the contrary, there were many examples when, for example, high school students or elderly people, as well as valuable specialists were dissuaded from enrolling or were turned down.

The instrument of coercion was of secondary nature. Military Commissar of the Sovetsky District I.F. Kachnov characterized the situation as follows:

This mobilization was based on the volunteer principle, but the troikas were given the right to mobilize even those who did not want to, but in general could enter the ranks of the people's militia³¹.

As noted in the essay on the history of the 5th Division of the Frunzensky District dated December 1943 which is preserved in the materials of Mints' Commission, “in some organizations up to 10–15% of people were mobilized into the militia. This measure to replenish the quantitative contingent was authorized by the district party committees, and there was nothing bad about it.”³² Obviously, the figure given by the chronicler of the 5th Division objectively describes the scale of forced enrolling in the militia. One can say that the mobilization campaign became a predominantly voluntary one.

“They told us that we were going to the rear militia...”

The procedure of direct, personal enrolling of employees of enterprises and institutions in the militia was reflected in many recollections of participants in the events. All of them indicate that the recruitment of the militiamen was simple and informal. The volunteers were enrolled at the enterprises by the party committee secretary, foreman or other person vested with state, party or official authority. One of the Moscow militiamen recalled:

I was enrolled in the militia by secretary of the party committee of the institute, my teacher of Structural mechanics, Tikhon Georgievich Frolov. From this day on, I am a militiaman, commander of a sapper platoon³³.

²⁷ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 182, l. 1–10.

²⁸ Ibid., d. 24, l. 207.

²⁹ Ibid., l. 235.

³⁰ Ibid., l. 253.

³¹ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 9, op. 19, d. 1, l. 15 ob.

³² Ibid., razdel 1, op. 43, d. 2, l. 2.

³³ B. Zylev, and A. Darkov, *V viazemskom okruzenii*, 10.

Another Muscovite recalled:

At the table covered with red cloth there was sitting shop manager Ozerov... I was asked for my last name, year of birth and personnel number - 996. The enrolling procedure was simple³⁴.

According to Soviet literature still widespread, in Moscow, in only the first days, 168,470 people applied to join the militia, and in the Moscow region – about 140 thousand people³⁵. These figures are difficult to verify, but it is definitely known that the voluntary enrolling was of mass proportions.

At the same time, if we delve deeper into the motives of Muscovites, we can say with confidence that some of them expected something other from the militia than participation in battles against regular enemy troops far from home. Many city people were preparing for some kind of work in the rear, law enforcement or something of the kind, and this certainly increased the flow of volunteers: “Everyone thought that this would be the defense of Moscow,” a militiaman of the 13th division of the Rostokinsky district noted. “That’s why everyone eagerly volunteered, despite their advanced age.”³⁶ “Everyone expected military defense works and that it would not be much different from work in production,” says another³⁷. Former commissar of the 18th division of the Leningrad militia A.P. Loginov who personally registered volunteers at his institute noted that on the first day of the campaign, July 3, by mistake the enrolling was carried out for the Red Army. As a result, “almost everyone enrolled, except the elderly.” The next day it was clarified that it was enrolling in the people’s militia, after which “even more people volunteered.”³⁸

In fact, Stalin’s speech on July 3 about the creation of militia “in every city that is in danger of the enemy invasion,” as well as the editorial in the “Pravda” newspaper on July 7 about the militia as a “great reserve” of the Red Army³⁹ could be interpreted literally: “People’s militia is being organized to build defensive fortifications around cities and give military training...”⁴⁰ Moreover, it was in this light that Muscovites received explanations from officials: “We were told that we were going to the rear militia...” (the 18th division of the Leningrad region)⁴¹; “They explained that people’s militia was supposed to help in the rear,” militiamen declared referring to their party committees (the 13th division of the Rostokinsky district)⁴². Similar information came from the districts of the Moscow region that created militia battalions⁴³. Neither the command nor the district committees knew the exact purpose of the divisions. According to the memoirs of political worker P.S. Proshchinsky (the 4th division of the Kuibyshevsky district),

as it later turned out, no one, including the division’s leadership, knew what task we received, because everyone was misled as they said that we were leaving for a short period of time and not very far away, we would be doing military defense works, so we needn’t take personal belongings with us. Everyone left their things at school⁴⁴.

³⁴ V. Shimkevich, *Sud'ba moskovskogo opolchentsa*, 25.

³⁵ *Narodnoe opolchenie Moskvy. Vospominaniia byvshikh boitsov i komandirov nar. opolcheniia* [People's militia of Moscow. Memoirs of former fighters and commanders of the people's militia] (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii Publ., 1961), 16–17.

³⁶ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 67, d. 10, l. 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, op. 30, d. 4, l. 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

³⁹ “Na podderzhku Krasnoi armii – moguchee narodnoe opolchenie [To support the Red Army – a powerful people's militia],” *Pravda*, July 7, 1941.

⁴⁰ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 30, d. 4, l. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, op. 67, d. 6, l. 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, op. 30, d. 15, l. 1 ob – 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, op. 27, d. 1, l. 60.

There is so much evidence of an erroneous interpretation of the essence of the militia in the materials of Mints' Commission that it would be incorrect to attribute them just to the ubiquitous rumors that emerge with any mass undertaking. There is every reason to assume that the delusion of many Muscovites and even the district troikas (informed from above) was not accidental, and the leadership of the country and the armed forces indeed initially prepared the militia specifically for the defense of city facilities, and the divisions were supposed to be stationed in Moscow. This is clearly indicated by the efforts made from the first day of the militia formation to equip the barracks of the divisions, for which many schools were given, placing orders at enterprises for barracks equipment (beds, trestle beds, bunks, tables, chairs, cabinets), preparing bedding (mattresses, blankets, pillows, bed linen), organization of a stationary food block and bath houses, etc. On the contrary, none of the preparations indicated an early long campaign. The hasty sending of the barely formed divisions out of Moscow at the end of the first ten days of July could be due to the inability to organize combat training and the intention to suppress the so-called "domestic" sentiments that negatively affected discipline.

The plans of the senior military-political leadership regarding the use of the Moscow militia were definitely determined only by mid-July due to the deterioration of the front-line situation in the west. On July 16, a decision was made to create the Mozhaisk defense line and two reserve armies which included ten Moscow divisions. In Moscow, the place of divisions in the local defense system was taken by fighter battalions which were also created according to the district principle, but they were more mobile and relatively well-armed.

Features of recruiting militia units

The urgent deadlines for the formation of divisions prevented individual selection of militiamen. The appointment of commanders of units and subunits was just a few hours before the appointment of rank-and-file personnel. The personnel department of the Moscow Military District appointed to the positions of senior commanding staff experienced personnel commanders, mainly teachers of military educational institutions. As for the middle and junior commanding staff, Resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee of July 4, 1941 ordered that "junior [commanding] staff, 50% of platoon commanders, up to 40% of company commanders, medical personnel and the entire political staff of the division created by the district" should be composed "of workers, employees and students of the district."⁴⁵ This meant that at least half of the middle commanders were to be career military personnel. But in fact, hundreds of positions in command, political, administrative, and medical personnel were filled from among the reserve command personnel, as well as from the ranks of the militia.

The appointment of command personnel followed a simple scheme. The district military commissariats selected the candidates' service records. Division commanders and chiefs of staff examined them and called reserve commanders for short conversations, which, due to the influx of people, lasted "no more than two or three minutes," after which the person was told:

You will be a regiment commander... You will be a battalion commander, a company commander, a battery commander...⁴⁶

As noted above, enrolling of rank-and-file personnel was everywhere carried out in absentia, according to the lists received from enterprises and institutions. According to one of the workers of the Proletarsky District Committee of the All-Union Communist

⁴⁵ *Moskva voennaia*, 261–262.

⁴⁶ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 67, d. 3, l. 1 ob.

Party of Bolsheviks, “we dealt with very few people, we mainly dealt with lists.”⁴⁷ In fact, the most efficient emergency troikas, for example, of the Kirovsky, Leninsky and Leningradsky districts, completed the list formation of the divisions (7.5–8 thousand people) already on July 4⁴⁸.

Following the submission of the lists, the militiamen gathered at the appointed hour at enterprises and, under the leadership of a party organizer, often accompanied by an orchestra, solemnly marched through Moscow streets to the assembling point – one of the schools in the district. Sometimes, by the time units arrived at the location, the militiamen had already been distributed among platoons and companies. In other cases, they were sorted into divisions right in school yards and parks, there were tables with signs. Unit commanders conducted brief surveys of those who had arrived identifying the military specialists they needed⁴⁹. However, there was shortage of such specialists. A political instructor of one of the batteries of the 18th division of the Leningradsky district recalled:

We found only 4 or 5 artillerymen, the rest were chosen at random – 60 people in total⁵⁰.

The leitmotif of all, without exception, testimonies of officials in charge of selecting and enrolling militiamen is the idea of “the best people.” It is not accidental. The objective impossibility of a full-fledged pre-conscription selection based on age, physical characteristics, educational level, political and moral qualities, pre-conscription military training or military specialty – i.e., all that military commissariats did under normal conditions – forced them to resort to surrogate selection of “the best people.” Since the main recruiters of militiamen were the party committees of enterprises and institutions, at the core were the political and moral qualities of a candidate. The other criteria were not ignored, but they were taken into account only superficially, since the party committees had neither time nor competence to evaluate them.

Privilege of militiamen: production-territorial principle of recruitment

The list method of recruiting to the militia was combined with another forced innovation called the *production-territorial principle of recruiting* units and subunits. As a rule, volunteers from some factory, institute, or people's commissariat applied to staff the same unit:

Within each unit... individual companies, platoons, battalions are staffed by certain enterprises according to the order of the emergency troika of the district⁵¹.

The units were informally named after their enterprises: “company of Mayevtsy,” “company of Menzhintsy,” etc.⁵² A large plant could provide enough militiamen to staff a rifle battalion or even a regiment. Obviously, the emergence of such an approach became one of many improvisations in those days, since the fundamental guiding documents, in particular order of No. 0027 the Moscow Military District of July 4 and resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee meant something slightly different, ordering

⁴⁷ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 9, op. 16, d. 3, l. 1.

⁴⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 261, 275.

⁴⁹ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 43, d. 2, l. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, op. 30, d. 13, l. 1 ob. These words are confirmed by the data from the headquarters of the formed divisions. For example, in the 1st division of the Leninsky district, 1,061 people were identified who had served in the army, of whom 301 had valuable military specialties (machine gunner, artilleryman, mortarman, sapper, signaler); in the 2nd division of the Stalinsky district, the number of people who had served in the army was 1,427 people, the number of specialists was 220 people. See: TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 257, 275.

⁵¹ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 192.

⁵² NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 30, d. 19, l. 27 ob.

“the formation of 25 divisions to be carried out according to the *district* principle”⁵³. In the latter case, it was about the *territorial* method of recruitment which was well developed in the Red Army in the 1920–1930s and became obsolete on the eve of the war; it provided that each military unit should be related to a certain administrative territory (region, republic) that could staff it in peacetime and wartime. The territorial principle was relatively cheap due to the radical reduction in military transportation and combination with the militia method of combat training (at short-term training camps) without a long absence of fighters from the production process. Before the war, the territorial principle of recruitment was abandoned in favor of the extraterritorial one, which allowed free maneuvering of human resources to form military groups of the required number.

The social ties based on compatriotic or ethnic identity in the territorial units of the Red Army in the 1920s–1930s in the case of the Moscow militia of 1941 were replaced by even closer ties – industrial, neighborly, family ones. The widespread (although not total) practice of recruiting the militia on a production basis meant nothing more than reducing of the territorial principle of recruitment to an extremely simple form of direct use of ready-made production connections and the hierarchy of the labor collective in the interests of the speedy combat coordination of militia units.

It is quite obvious that a common place of work and close fraternity (neighborhood) contributed to the rapid establishment of social ties between militiamen. The “Pravda” newspaper described this feature as one of its outstanding advantages:

The people’s militia is distinguished by people’s affinity through work, profession, production... it is a family of people who know and understand each other...⁵⁴

“Old industrial connections” as a factor of a “strong, morally stable team” were also noted by the inspection of the General Staff of the Red Army in late August 1941⁵⁵.

However, the production-territorial principle of recruitment had a number of significant disadvantages, which largely negated its advantages. Firstly, it prevented the selection of militiamen according to military specialties: in the same rifle company there were specialists from the same enterprise and profession (for example, cooks, drivers, signalers), whereas in special units “there prevail shooters and untrained people.”⁵⁶ Secondly, with this method of recruitment, the situation was as follows: doctors and candidates of sciences, professors and associate professors, management staff and valuable production workers – heads of locomotive depots, shop foremen, heads of railway stations and junctions, locomotive drivers who found themselves in rifle units were used as rank-and-file militiamen in earthworks. Veteran of the 6th People's Militia Division B.V. Zylev who in 1941 was a graduate student at the Moscow Institute of Transport Engineers recalled that in his platoon there were eight candidates of sciences, associate professors of the Moscow Institute of Transport Engineers, a doctor of sciences, a professor and a lecturer⁵⁷. The irrational use of valuable personnel in positions of rank-and-file soldiers is the most characteristic aspect of the recruitment of militia units in the initial period of the war.

Already on July 9, representative of the Mobilization Department of the General Staff of the Red Army, Major E.L. Zbanduto proposed abandoning the production principle of recruitment, for which purpose

they should allow division commanders to distribute scarce military specialties at their own discretion⁵⁸.

⁵³ A.A. Gurov, *Bitva za stolitsu: Sbornik dokumentov* [Battle for the capital: Collection of documents], vol. 1 (Moscow: [N.s.], 1994), 191.

⁵⁴ A. Isachenko, “S veroy v grudi, s oruzhiem v rukakh [With faith in your chest, with weapons in your hands],” *Pravda*, July 8, 1941.

⁵⁵ TsAMO RF, f. 56, op. 12234, d. 14, l. 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 193.

⁵⁷ B. Zylev, and A. Darkov, *V viazemskom okruzenii*, 10.

⁵⁸ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 193.

In practice, this happened quite often, despite the protests of the militiamen who perceived the territorial production principle of recruitment as a volunteer's privilege:

People really didn't want to leave, they submitted applications to the party district committee, but orders are orders...⁵⁹

On the other hand, the production principle directly contradicted the planned registration and mobilization work of local military authorities, since they conducted military registration and conscription at the place of registration, and not at the place of work of those liable for military service. It often happened that a person lived in some district and worked in another one. In this case, he joined the militia division of the latter district, while the military commissariat of the former district continued to take him into account in its mobilization plan⁶⁰. There were cases when district military commissariats refused to provide resources from registered command personnel in reserve to staff militia divisions without official sanction of a higher authority⁶¹.

Militia and human resources of Moscow

The work of the military commissariats was also complicated by the age range established by the State Defense Committee. Contrary to popular belief, not only people of "non-conscription age," i.e. old people and pre-conscription youth, were enrolled in the people's militia divisions. In the militia there were a lot of people who were born from 1905 to 1918, i.e. those who were subject to mobilization. Thus, according to the available statistics, in the 18th division of the Leningradsky district the proportion of people of this age reached 27.4%⁶². In the 1st Division of the Leninsky district, 15.8% of the militiamen were born from 1907 to 1916, and 569 people (7.3%) were born from 1917 to 1921⁶³, etc.

Resolution No. 10 of the State Defense Committee stipulated that "those liable for military service of the 1st category of conscription age that have mobilization assignments,"⁶⁴ as well as workers of defense enterprises were not subject to recruitment into the militia "at the discretion of the district troika"⁶⁵. This meant that only persons who were already subject to conscription following the mobilization announced on June 22, 1941 (under 35 years of age, with a military specialty), as well as workers who have an exemption from active duty were exempt from enrolling in the militia. All other categories of those liable for military service: 2nd category 1st class (up to 35 years old, not trained), as well as 2nd and 3rd class of both categories (from 36 to 50 years old, trained and untrained) could enroll in the militia without restrictions. Obviously, this is exactly what was meant in one of the inspection reports addressed to Deputy People's Commissar of Defense, Army Commissar 1st Rank E.A. Shchadenko:

The divisions of the Moscow militia are composed of volunteers, workers and employees of enterprises, establishments and institutions of Moscow that have not been mobilized...⁶⁶

That is, those who have not been mobilized by that moment, rather than those who were not subject to conscription at all.

⁵⁹ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 9, op. 20, d. 2, l. 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., op. 16, d. 16, l. 1.

⁶¹ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 285.

⁶² NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 30, d. 17, l. 18.

⁶³ Ibid., razdel 9, op. 7, d. 8, l. 3–7.

⁶⁴ According to the procedure established in the pre-war years, it was those liable for military service who had served active military service that were to have mobilization assignment to come to military units or assembling points of military commissariats.

⁶⁵ *Moskva voennaia*, 261–262.

⁶⁶ TsAMO RF, f. 56, op. 12234, d. 14, l. 14.

When determining the scale of “voluntary mobilization,” its initiators certainly proceeded not from the resource capabilities of Moscow, but from the planned number of divisions (25) and their staffing strength of about 10 thousand people, which was subsequently approved. The biggest burden of forming the militia fell on Moscow, although its resources of the population liable for conscription were less than those of the Moscow region. As of May 1, 1941, in Moscow there were registered 657.7 thousand general and special military personnel aged 17 to 50 years (for comparison, in the Moscow region – 829.9 thousand people)⁶⁷. Excluding the Muscovites who were on special record, free resources on the eve of the war amounted to 470.8 people⁶⁸. A significant part of them was referred to the most valuable category for recruiting – the 1st category the 1st class (according to the registration data of the Moscow Military District as of January 1, 1941, 41.7% of all those liable for conscription were referred to this category)⁶⁹. It was this category of those liable for conscription that was mobilized on June 22. Excluding those liable for conscription of the 1st category 1st class, in Moscow 280–300 thousand people constituted free resources, of which 200 thousand people were to be mobilized into the militia. Certainly, this immediately put the economic life of the capital in a predicament.

The irrationality and wastefulness in the use of human resources were obvious, especially in the first days of the formation, when the emergency troikas sought to fulfill plans ahead of schedule, for which reason, according to S.S. Musatov, the chief of staff of the 13th division of the Rostokinsky district, they overdid it and gave enterprises an order to “provide personnel indiscriminately.”⁷⁰ As a result, entire workshops and institutions were left without personnel overnight. Therefore, in the documents one can often find the principle of recruitment “without detriment to production.”⁷¹ The secretaries of the party district committees understood that overly zealous implementation of the task threatened the normal operation of the district enterprises. Secretary of the Kuibyshevsky District Committee N.M. Shakhova noted that

at some people’s commissariats⁷² absolutely everyone was enrolled, and then the people’s commissars called and said: “We can’t let everyone join the people’s militia.” They needed people there⁷³.

In the very first days, from the 4th division of the Kuibyshevsky district alone, 1.5 thousand people were disenrolled at the request of enterprises or people’s commissariats⁷⁴. Under time pressure, many personnel decisions turned out to be hasty, and subsequently it took several months to recall the necessary specialists from the militia divisions. Former division commander of the 1st division of the Leninsky district, Major General N.N. Pronin noted:

Long after we left [Moscow] with the division, requests were made for people from enterprises and institutions⁷⁵.

The disenrolling from the people’s militia was related not only to the production needs, but also to the physical unfitness of some volunteers. In Moscow, in the first days of the formation of militia units, up to 25% of the personnel were disenrolled from some

⁶⁷ TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 182, l. 10, 17–18.

⁶⁸ Ibid., l. 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid., d. 135, l. 29 ob.

⁷⁰ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 67, d. 3, l. 2 ob.

⁷¹ *Moskva voennaia*, 262.

⁷² This refers to industry enterprises.

⁷³ NA IRI RAN, f. 2, razdel 1, op. 27, d. 2, l. 1–2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., f. 2, razdel 1, op. 27, d. 2, l. 1–2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., razdel 9, op. 7, d. 1, l. 8.

regiments⁷⁶. There was a certain disenrolling based on the so-called “moral and political features,” that is, on the basis of political unreliability, but judging by the documents, its scale was small.

Enrolling in the militia in Moscow stopped as suddenly as it had begun: by July 6–8, the divisions had recruited 7–7.5 thousand people each. It appears that approximately this number was set to the districts. At least three districts declared it as the maximum number⁷⁷. In general, this quantity of militiamen corresponded to the staff standard approved by Order No. 0027 of the Moscow Military District of July 4, 1941 (7,359 people), excluding the reserve regiment which was formed by residual principle. Having recruited the required number of people, the district troikas clearly slowed down considering their mission accomplished. Subsequently, the divisions recruited the necessary quantity of militiamen from the districts of Moscow in which the formation of the militia was canceled, battalions from the Moscow region, as well as personnel commanders sent by the personnel department of the Moscow Military District.

Conclusions

Summing up the study of the first days of the formation of the Moscow people's militia, which in October 1941 was to play an important and tragic role in the battle for the capital, it should be noted that 12 divisions the creation of which took only a few days were a typical product of the Soviet mobilization administrative model when in emergency conditions, along with the institutional mechanisms, there were involved informal, temporary ones, based on the personal competencies and connections of the leading officials of the party, Soviet and military bodies. It was in this paradigm that the formation of the people's militia divisions was carried out. The management vertical that was formed in a short time bringing together the resources of the party, state and military governing bodies, proved to be quite effective providing a quick but formal result. Later it took a lot of effort to correct it.

The production-territorial method of recruiting the militia chosen as the simplest one contradicted the established principles of the work of local military authorities (military commissariats), the main of which was the summoning of conscripts to draft boards and medical inspection. The shortcomings in the selection of volunteers when recruiting the people's militia divisions led to the enrolling of many people unfit for military service due to age, health, as well as their official position. From July to September 1941, in several stages, people unfit for combat service were disenrolled from the divisions. The scale of attrition was very significant, which for a long time made it difficult to stabilize the composition of units in their regular positions and conduct full combat training.

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⁷⁶ *Moskva prifrontovaia*, 91.

⁷⁷ In their reports to the Military Council of the Moscow Military District the troikas of the Molotovskiy (the 3rd division), Kuibyshevskiy (the 4th division), Leningradskiy (the 18th division) districts cite the number “7 thousand people” as the maximum one. See: TsAMO RF, f. 135, op. 12462, d. 24, l. 207, 284.

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