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Dmitriy E. Komarov

K. G. Razumovski Moscow State University of Technologies and Management (Vyazma branch), Vyazma, Russian Federation

Revisiting the Scope of Collaboration in the Days of the Great Patriotic War: A Case-Study of the Smolensk Region

Abstract

The article assesses the scope of collaboration in occupied Soviet territories in the days of the Great Patriotic War. This topic is a matter of intense debate in modern Russian scholarship. The most controversial issue is the extent to which Soviet citizens participated in events organized by invaders in occupied territories and the support which local population lent to occupation authorities. The article assesses potential threat of collaborationism in political, as well as economic terms. Having seized the richest and most economically developed regions of the

country, the enemy could have significantly strengthened his military potential. National historiography has not yet integrated all data on stratification of local population in their stance toward invaders. It is an extremely difficult task to accomplish nationwide. As occupied territories were culturally, historically and socio-politically heterogeneous, it should be approached by studying republics and regions on a standalone basis. The case-study of the Smolensk region draws on archival materials to determine the share of Soviet citizens cooperating with occupation authorities within the framework of 'administrative collaboration.' It concludes that the number of Smolensk families whose members can be classified as 'administrative collaborators,' did not exceed 12%, whereas more than 9% of Smolensk families had members who took an active part in the struggle against invaders in the partisan detachments. Thus, the article demonstrates that two extreme irreconcilable phenomena in the occupied territories — collaborationism and partisans movement — were practically in balance. The absolute majority of Smolensk residents (almost 80%) did their utmost to avoid participation in both. Further developments in the Smolensk region proved that their 'neutrality' was conditional: the population remained loyal to the Soviet government and formed a social base for large-scale resistance to the occupation policy. Smolensk region became one of the centers of the partisan movement. To a certain extent, Smolensk data can be extrapolated to other western regions of the Russian non-black earth area.

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Keywords

Sources, Great Patriotic War, Smolensk region, collaboration, occupation regime, partisans, archival document.

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About author

Komarov Dmitriy Evgenievich, PhD in History, associate professor, K. G. Razumovski Moscow State University of Technologies and Management (Vyazma branch), assistant professor, Vyazma, Russian Federation, +7-910-780-17-80, buffel1943@mail.ru

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