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Aleksei A. Kilichenkov

Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, Russian Federation

“The Drivers Will Then Step On Their Starters.” Problems of Training the Red Army Armored Forces in Late 1930s

Abstract

Drawing on the yet unknown to researchers documents from the fonds of the Russian State Military Archive, the author assesses the qualification of the designated and cadre personnel of the Red Army tank troops in late 1930s. The peculiarity of documents involved is that they are reports of the NKVD special departments, which in addition to their direct duties informed the national command authority of the real circumstances in the armed forces. At this, the attention of special departments was focused on the shortcomings and disqualification of the units and formations command. The article examines reports of the special department for the Leningrad

Military District, which informed the national military authority of the virtual disruption of the tank reserve commanders training and of failures in the maneuvers of regular units. The events of September 1939, associated with the campaign in Eastern Poland, demonstrated true levels of the Red Army combat efficiency. This was especially the case of designated personnel and equipment mobilization and of reserve soldiers and commanders qualification. Analysis of the reports on the armored troops' field activity reveals acute problems of command and control over the armed forces interactions with the national economic enterprises in the process of mobilization. The mobilization dragged on. The troops received useless tractors, automobiles and supporting means, and ill-trained personnel, and thus the effectiveness of units and formations was thwarted. These flaws in aggregate sprang from the Red Army command underestimating the complexity of mobilization and training of both reserve and cadre personnel of the Army units and formations. However, reporting documents on the performance in Poland showed optimism and gave assurances in the Army power to execute any order, which could but confuse the Soviet leaders' assessment of war preparedness.

## Keywords

Historical source, NKVD special department, designated and cadre personnel, interwar period, Red Army, Dmitry G. Pavlov, armored troops, retraining of reserve commanders, mobilization, readiness for war.

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About the author

Kilichenkov Aleksei Alekseevich, PhD in History, associate professor, Russian State University for the Humanities, department of contemporary Russian history, professor, Moscow, Russian Federation, +7-916-542-90-76, kilichenkov@yandex.ru

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