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Verigin, Sergey G., Popov, Denis A.

Institute of History, Political and Social Sciences, Petrozavodsk State University, Petrozavodsk,
Russian Federation

Prokhorova, Margarita N.

Olonets Municipal Archive, Olonets, Russian Federation

New Documents on the Finnish Occupation of the Olonets Region of Karelia in 1941–44

Abstract

The article analyzes newly identified documents detailing the detention of prisoners in Finnish detention facilities created on the territory of the Olonets region of Karelia during the Great Patriotic War. They provide an opportunity of studying regional aspects of the Finnish occupation of Karelia in 1941-44, comparing the data with other materials on the Finnish occupation of the Olonets region. The documents are letters of concentration camp prisoners, written to the archive in late 20th century in order to obtain certificates of their occupancy in the camp. Although the letters should have been stricken off, the archivists of the Olonets Archive have preserved them and carried out their initial analysis. These letters are, in essence, memoirs, and in the case of the Finnish occupation of Karelia, memoirs are often the only source allowing us to study the nature of the occupation regime. For instance, the letters have permitted to identify the exact location of some Finnish camps on the territory of the Olonets region, which remained unclear when working with the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB) documents. Some war crimes of the Finnish occupiers were already known, but these documents reveal new crimes of the camp guards, some against children. The letters listing names of deceased relatives are also of great interest, showing the mortality rate in the camps. In addition to confirming their occupancy in the camp, former prisoners recalled the events of the Finnish occupation of Karelia. This material demonstrates what work was performed by prisoners, reveals specific war crimes, and reconstructs everyday life in the detention camps. It is worth noting that modern Russian historiography often raises the issue of the impact of occupation on the psyche of children. The documents presented in the article contribute to the study of this issue. They can be used for studying regional aspects of the Finnish occupation of Karelia, for identifying war crimes, for micro level study of the Finnish occupation, and for inductive study of the occupation regime on the territory of the USSR in the days of the Great Patriotic War.

Keywords

Personal provenance sources, occupation, Karelia, prisoners of Finnish concentration camps, documents, letters, war crimes, Finnish occupation regime, Great Patriotic War of 1941–45.

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About the authors

Verigin Sergey Gennadievich, PhD in History, Petrozavodsk State University, professor, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation, +7-814-271-10-01, +7-911-400-46-51, verigin@psu.karelia.ru

Popov Denis Aleksandrovich, Petrozavodsk State University, Institute of History, Political and Social Sciences, student, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation, +7-814-271-10-01, +7-911-668-50-15, dps1939@mail.ru

Prokhorova Margarita Nikolaevna, Olonets Municipal Archive, archivist, Olonets, Russian Federation, +7-8143-64-19-95, +7-921-523-72-97, margarit-prokhorov@yandex.ru

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