

Forcible Mobilisation.

Forcible use of Lithuanian people in the USSR Armed Forces before the end of WWII August 1944 - May 1945

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Introduction

At the outset of the second wave of the Soviet occupation, on the territory of Lithuania occupied by the Red Army, the forcible mobilisation of men into the Soviet army was launched. The Lithuanian public treated the Soviet Union as an occupant, and therefore the men who did not consider themselves citizens of the USSR, sought to escape service in the Soviet army. In addition, the Lithuanian people had been influenced by the anti-Nazi resistance organisations telling people that the international law prohibited mobilisation of local residents from an occupied country. On the other hand (from a formal perspective), Lithuanian people did not possess the ID documents of a USSR citizen: introduction of the Soviet passport system started in 1945.

Mobilisation of Lithuanian men had been properly planned and prepared in advance. War-time mobilisation on the Lithuanian territory in the beginning was carried out by the front and reserve infantry regiments, and after the frontline moved westward, since August 1944 this function was taken over by the Military commissariats. On 1 August 1944 Order No1 of the Military Commissar of the LSSR on the Mandatory Conscription of Men Born in 1909-1926 to the Red Army was issued. On the same day the Resolution on the Measures to Carry Out the Mobilisation of Men Liable for Call-up on the Lithuanian SSR¹ (document No1) of the occupational authority: Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (Bolshevik) (hereinafter the CC LCP (B)) and the Council of People's Commissars of the LSSR. Although the mobilisation was to be carried out in an organised manner, was to be universal and immediate, however, because of mass draft dodging and evasion of service in the occupational army, it was delayed almost until the end of the war.

Historiography

The first news about the forcible mobilisation of Lithuanian men first appeared in the partisan press, and later in the publications of the Lithuanian immigrants in the West. From among them, works by K. Grinius, R. Misiūnas, J. Daumantas and others, depicting this problem, could be mentioned.² However, in their disclosure of the truth about the crimes perpetrated by the Communists against the Lithuanian nation, they could rely only on the sources published by the Soviets and recollections of witnesses.

Soviet historiography treated mobilisation into the Red Army as lawful and mandatory upon the inhabitants of Lithuania: none of the publications dedicated to this topic spoke about the repressive measures employed by the soviet authorities against the draft dodgers. On the contrary, they pointed out that the men joined the Red Army voluntarily and helped to bring the Fascist Germany to its knees. For example, the monograph by J. Dobrovolskis *Lithuanian Soldiers on the Fronts of the Great Homeland War* says that in

Kaunas from 25 August until 5 September 1944 some 10,145 persons came to the Mobilisation stations to be enlisted voluntarily, despite the fact that the call-up papers were handed in to 3,931 persons only.³ The publication claims that by 16 September 1944 allegedly some 83,941 persons enlisted in the army by their own free will, and that by the end of the war this figure reached 108 thousand.⁴ All soviet historiography publications on World War II upheld such approach.⁵

The greatest share of historical material on the forcible mobilisation of Lithuanian men is found in the Lithuanian Special Archive (the reports and certificates by the NKVD and NKGB chiefs). Historian A. Anušauskas in his monograph *The Soviet Annihilation of the Lithuanian Nation* was the first to provide comprehensive archival data on the massive NKVD armed force repressive actions against the defenceless draft dodgers evading service in the occupational army.⁶ The former Communist party archive (the present Archive of the Lithuanian Organisations) add to the picture of the forcible conscription. New facts on the boycott of the call-up of Lithuanian youth were revealed by the historian J.R. Bagušauskas.⁷ Other authors (M. Pocius, N. Gaškaitė, N. Kairiūkšytė, K. Kasparas, J. Starkauskas and others) discussed this problem only unsystematically.⁸ The unlawful actions of the USSR were depicted by an eyewitness of the events of those times K. Ēringis in 1993 in his book of recollections *The Tragedy of the Lithuanian Armed Forces*, and other witnesses. However, no special scientific study has yet been carried out on this subject.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. Legal aspect of the forcible mobilisation.

The Soviet Union, which in the second half of 1944 launched the call-up of Lithuanian men into the Red Army, violated provisions of the international law laid down in the Hague Convention of 18 October 1907 Laws and Customs of War on Land, forbidding to mobilise the inhabitants in the occupied territory to the occupant army or otherwise utilise them for the purposes of warfare. Article 4 of Annex III of the Hague Convention of 1907 sets forth that it is binding to the parties which have and have not ratified it. Its Article 45 proclaims that '[the occupant] is forbidden to compel the inhabitants of occupied territory to swear allegiance to the hostile Power.'⁹ (Document No16). In breach of the said article of the Convention, in the fall of 1944 and the start of 1945 Moscow made over 100 thousand Lithuanian men join the Soviet army by force and swear allegiance to the hostile power.

2. Executors and organisers of the forcible conscription.

The forcible mobilisation to the USSR army on the territory of Lithuania was mainly executed by the 4th Infantry Division of the NKVD (USSR) Internal army, commanded by General P.Vetrov, and the units of the NKVD (USSR) Border army, whose actions were co-ordinated by Colonel M. Byčkovsky. Some assistance also came from the units of the regular army. The principal organisers of this military campaign were: in Lithuania – party leaders – Chairman of the Lithuanian Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-union Communist Party (Bolshevik) (hereinafter CC AUCP(B)) and the 1st Secretary of the CC LCP A. Sniečkus, chiefs of repressive structures generals J. Bartašiūnas, A. Guzevičius, D. Jefimovas, I. Tkačenka, Lithuania's Military Commissar J. Soblys, the Prosecutor of

the Republic M. Baliasnikov, and in Moscow – Marshall L. Beriya, Generals V. Merkulov, S. Kruglov, B. Kobulov, A. Apolonov.

3. Forcible Mobilisation (recruiting), mass evasion, hunt for conscripts and massacre.

When the bulk of men refused to arrive in the mobilisation stations (military commissariats) ‘voluntarily’, in September 1944 the hunt for them was unleashed. Men, who had not register at mobilisation stations and were discovered in hiding, were often treated as partisans and other participants of the underground activities. Therefore, they were infrequently treated as the participants of the armed resistance: they were threatened with prison or death, they were arrested (‘detained’), tortured and even executed. Men caught by the NKVD people and officers in villages were often taken to the district centres tied and on attempt to escape were gunned. In towns they were lined up and taken by guards to Vilnius by foot. Even registering in the mobilisation stations was dangerous: there were no guarantees, that the person would be allowed to return home.¹⁰

The men-hunt was in particular intensified after 10 September 1944, a visit by the Deputy Commissar General S. Kruglov of the NKVD (USSR) to Lithuania. By 27 September 1944 the Vetrov punitive commando alone detained 2,833 draft dodgers. Vetrov in his report to the Head of the LSSR NKVD General J. Bartašiūnas pointed out, that through the use of force some 34 groups comprising 3-54 persons were liquidated, 70 persons killed, 23 wounded and 658 transferred to the NKVD (documents No17 and No15). All these people are called ‘bandits’, although it is evident that small groups of draft dodgers were being sought and exterminated, of whom only a small number took part in the armed resistance. In October as many as 5,434 draft dodgers were detained, out of which 2,795 were by force transferred to the military commissariats, 102 – to repressive structures, and 1,036 released home on various grounds.¹¹

The number of draft dodgers grew quickly. On 11 November 1944, the LSSR NKVD Division for Fight Against Banditry recorded 18,145 persons in hiding (document No 12), on 20 November this figure reached 33,660¹² (document No130, on 23 December – up to 51,700 (document No4), and on 1 January 1945 the figure was as high as 58 620.¹³ (document No3).

4. Murders of Draft Dodgers.

Fight against the armed partisans paralleled slaughter of draft dodgers. Each military NKVD operation usually culminated in the detention or killing of men desperate to avoid mobilisation. Numerous examples bear testimony to this. For example, in November 1944 the NKVD army killed 265 persons in total, despite the fact that 90 per cent of them bore no arms. On 13-31 December the 4th NKVD Division massacred 421 persons in north eastern counties, and during January-March 1945 – 1,396 people. The majority of those killed were defenceless draft dodgers. Units of the NKVD Border army were acting in an analogous manner (document No14). If men learned about the operation of the NKVD punitive commandos, everybody ran to hide in the forest. For example, the battalion of the 261st infantry regiment which came to the Gaigalai district (25 km south of Biržai) on 31 December, did not find a single man at home. However, in an effort to protect their families against the acts of repression, men often gave in to the mercy of occupants.¹⁴

5. Unleashing of repression. The Lithuanian occupational authorities in view of draft dodging escalating onto a massive scale resorted to harsher policy of repression. On 12 December 1944, the CC LCP (B) Bureau adopted a Resolution on the Measures to Combat the Deserters and Draft Dodgers of the Red Army (document no2). One of the resolution's items instructed the NKVD bodies and the city and county military commissariats to inspect systematically in urban and rural territories the documents of men, especially in the night-time. The executives of civilian institutions were forbidden to recruit men liable for call-up, also, control at medical institutions, courts and the prosecutor's offices was tightened.¹⁵ Taking into account this resolution, the Military Commissar of Lithuania J. Soblys urged for stepped-up repressive measures against these people. On 23 December 1944 he asked the Chairman of the Lithuania Bureau of the CC AUCP (B) M. Suslov to support the Order No064 of the Defence Commissariat foreseeing that in the search of farmsteads all draft dodgers be detained, and not allowing them to take care of family and other personal matters, be immediately delivered to the mobilisation stations.¹⁶ (documents No4 and No11). The fact that in December 1944 some 10,264 and in January 1945 – 17,496 men were mobilised to the Red Army leads to the conclusion that the aforementioned and other measures of coercion were put into practice actively.¹⁷ (document No5).

On 21 March 1945, Chief of the 1st Subunit of the Republican Military Commissariat Goskov wrote to the Head of the Military Commissariat Division of the CC LCP(B) that the performed registration of men liable for call-up during the said period enabled to increase the number of them mobilised into the army, and that, most importantly, this had been the result of a wide-scale fight to combat the banditry (the partisans, author's comment) organised by the NKVD bodies and military units. Goskov pointed out that mobilisation was largely carried out by the NKVD bodies with the army units catching the draft dodgers and delivering them to the military commissariats. He regretted that a number of draftees were arrested during the anti-partisan campaigns, and were pending court decision, that some got killed, which was why the military commissariats did not possess any data about such people.¹⁸ (document No5). On 12 April 1945 Security Captains Smirnov and Skolkin reported, that in an effort to step up the fight against deserters and draft dodgers, all the NKVD county branches had been instructed as of 21 March 1945 to resort to sterner measures in finding and detaining the said persons.¹⁹ (document No6).

6. Outcome of the forcible mobilisation.

From its very start very few men responded to the call-up. However, tens of thousands were forced to obey the forcible mobilisation when the terror was unleashed. Some 187,445 men were supposed to report to the mobilisation stations by 1 January 1945, however, only 128,825 did, and out of them 62,659 mobilised, 16,942 were discharged for the reasons of health (document No3), and some 24,100 were caught and forcibly delivered to the mobilisation stations by the NKVD army, and 15,803 went missing. Also, some 1,275 deserters were detained, and another 1,732 (document No7) reported missing. As many as 49,224 people were appointed to the mobilisation reserve. This figure comprised all the party, soviet institutions, Comsomol League members and trade union

executives, specialists of different fields, industry and transport sector workers, doctors, teachers, scholars and representatives of certain other professions.

Prior to Germany's capitulation in 1945 a total of 42 thousand men were mobilised, among which 20,462 delivered to the military commissariats by force (document No7). The latter, similarly as in 1944, were forcibly detained and interrogated by the NKVD people, and sent to the military units once established they were not participants of the armed resistance. The certificate of 21 March 1945 on the Mobilisation Activities in the LSSR indicates that in 1944-1945 in Lithuania 108,378 people were mobilised (document No8) (in 1944 – 636,061, in 1945 – 45,317), among them - 82 thousand Lithuanians. In total some 44,562 men were forcibly delivered to the military commissariats.²⁰ As soon as the war between the USSR and Germany was over, the forcible mobilisation was cancelled. It remains unclear how many men were drafted into the army from 21 March 1945 till 8 May 1945, because on 1 June 1945 Yakovlev quoted the same number of draftees to Suslov – 108,378.²¹

From 1945.07.15 till 1945.10.01 some 1,774 draft dodgers and 196 deserters were sentenced.²² (document No9)

7. Return to the Legal Way of Life. December 1945.

The report by the Commissar of the LSSR NKBG D. Yefimov and Commissar of the LSSR NKVD J. Bartašiūnas indicates that from July 1944 till 1 December 1945 as many as 36,144 persons legalised themselves (came to register with the Soviet repressive bodies and were issued temporary [identification] documents), out of which 27,361 were draft dodgers, 2,423 – deserters, and 6,259 – partisans.²³ (document No7).

8. Situation of the mobilised men.

In the summer and autumn of 1944 the “mobilised men” were sent to the Yarcev forests in Smolensk, where the 50th Reserve Infantry Division was being raised, whose regiments (around 25 thousand troops) in December of that year were transferred to Pabradė, Ukmergė and Jašiūnai. Till December 1944 Lithuanians were not being sent to other Red Army units. The Military Council of the Chief Formation Board of the Red Army forbade the military districts to send as replenishment to the active army formations of troops of nations which embraced their national units. The Directive of 18 October 1944 of the Red Army Mobilisation Board instructed all the privates and sergeants of Lithuanian nationality to move by 15 November from the operating army to the aforementioned 50th Division. Only a certain part of troops went to the frontline from it.²⁴

Service in the army was grim: accompanied by the lack of food, and under unbearable sanitary and hygiene conditions. Inhuman living conditions and the realisation that live-or-die fight in the Soviet army was unavoidable motivated Lithuanians to desert. The LSSR NKGB Commissar A. Gudzevičius in December informed the 1st Secretary of the CC LCP (B) A. Sniečkus, that many officers had deserted from the Pabradė Lithuanian Unit 02003 “C”. Soon the situation got out of control, because individual desertions were replaced by desertions of armed groups (some 1,001 troops deserted by 15 December, and,

according to the *Smerš* data, another 1,500 people were preparing to follow suit). Deserters often became partisans.

The USSR NKVD Deputy Commissar S. Kruglov and the USSR NKVD Representative to Lithuania I. Tkačenka sent a written communication on 14 December 1944 to the USSR NKVD Commissar L. Berija informing about the state of affairs. L. Berija referred the document to J. Stalin. V. Molotov. G. Malenkov and other members of the Cabinet.

The supreme political and military authority of the USSR took the decision to insure itself against any possible surprises. In January 1945 division regiments were transferred to reserve divisions, mainly deployed in Moscow's military region.²⁵

After the military training some of them were sent to the front, others (majority) – to other military units in the rear. Some 70 thousand Lithuanians found themselves on the frontline (in 1944 – 40 thousand, in 1945 – 30 thousand).²⁶ It is estimated that around 25 thousand Lithuanians sent into the Soviet army perished on the battlefield of war.²⁷ They took part in the storming of Königsberg (Kaliningrad), operations in Danzig (Gdansk), Pomerania, Berlin and Kuršas. Following the demobilisation, some 42,898 troops, among them 30 thousand Lithuanians, returned to Lithuania by 25 November 1946.²⁸

Since the soviet military authority considered that Lithuanians who emigrated or were forcibly taken to Germany, were citizens of the USSR, it issued the instruction to capture them, put the military uniform on them by force, and send them to the front. The number of such cases is not known.

The forcible mobilisation of Lithuanians to the Red Army in Lithuania was paralleled by the recruitment of Polish volunteers to the Polish Army. By 10 February 1945 the Polish Volunteers Union registered 16,735 volunteers, and, in practice, 17,505 people were sent to the Polish military units.²⁹

Short Conclusions.

1. The forcible mobilisation to the Soviet occupation army in August 1944 - May 1945 formed an integral part of the terror unleashed against the inhabitants of Lithuania. The Soviet Union violated the Convention on the Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV, 1907), forbidding to mobilise the men of the occupied territory to the occupational army.
2. The Lithuanian public viewed the Soviet Union as an occupant state, and that is why the men liable for call-up evaded service in the Red Army. On 11 November 1944 there were 18,145 draft dodgers, and on 1 January 1945 – 58,620 draft dodgers.
3. The forcible mobilisation in Lithuania was largely carried out by the USSR NKVD units and units of the regular army. Avoidance to obey the mobilisation orders was interpreted as amounting to armed resistance, and the said orders were implemented by force. The draftees were forcibly delivered to the military commissariats, and from there sent to military units. Men refusing to serve in the Red Army were threatened with punishments provided for in the soviet laws. Given that the family members and

relative of draftees were also terrorised, majority of draftees obeyed the forced orders and reported to the military commissariats ‘voluntarily’. In fear of repression, 128 thousand men registered at mobilisation stations by 1 January 1945.

According to the official data of occupational repressive structures, out of 108,378 mobilised persons, 44,562 (41 per cent) men were taken to the military commissariats by force.

4. The bulk of forcibly mobilised men were sent to the 50th reserve infantry division. Soldiers were continuously deserting from the division. As a result of mass desertion, the division was disbanded, and the Lithuanians transferred to other regiments.
5. About 70 thousand Lithuanians were sent to military units and the front. It is estimated, that in 1944-1945 around 25 thousand forcibly mobilised men perished in the Red Army units during the fight with Hitlerite Germany.

Glossary of terms

Mobilisation – conscription of citizens of a state (reserve of men liable for call-up) into the active military service.

Forcible mobilisation – forcible use of inhabitants of the occupied state in the hostile armed forces.

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9 October 2000

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²¹ LVVOA. Doc.f.1771.Inventory sch.8.File.188.L.60.

²² LYA .Doc.f.-1.Inventory sch..3.File.109.L.14.

²³ *Ibid.* L.10. Šiek tiek kitokius skaičius 1946 m. rugpjūčio 14 d. pažymoje nurodė J.Bartašiūnas: nuo 1944 m. iki 1946 08 15 legalizavosi 31 674, iš jų vengiantys tarnybos 25 587, dezertyrų 2224, partizanų 3 863 // Ten pat. L. 93 (dokumentas Nr.10). [*Slightly different figures in his certificate of 14 August 1946 were indicated by J. Bartašiūnas: from 1944 till 15 August 1946 some 31,674 legalised themselves, among them 25,587 draft dodgers, 2,224 deserters, and 3,863 partisans// Ibid*]

²⁴ Pocius M. P.134. K.Ėringis teigia, kad lietuviai kariai iki 1944 m. gruodžio mėn. buvo siunčiami į kitus nelietuviškus dalinius, taip pat ir tiesiai į frontą. // Ėringis K. P.38. [*K. Ėringis claims, that until December 1944 Lithuanian troops were sent to other non-Lithuanian formations, as well as directly to the front*].

²⁵ Pocius M. P.135-136.

²⁶ Anušauskas A. P.263.

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 264.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Dar apie 15 tūkst. buvo palikti ilgiau tarnauti, bet tai - apytikris skaičius. [*Another 15 thousand were left for continued service, however, the figure is inexact*]

²⁹ Anušauskas A. P.207.