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THE HISTORY OF BELORUSSIA DURING THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR IN AMERICAN AND BRITISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

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The history of the Great Patriotic War always interested historians, but such world processes as the liberal relation to neo-fascist ideology, increased popularity of nationalism, the weapon used as a means of interstate problems solution – all of these made the subject urgent. So the development of a historiography of the USA and Great Britain concerning the history of Belorussia during the period of 1941–1944 is of great interest in this context.

Since the beginning of the 1950s a lot of works of the former German generals with real fighting experience on the Soviet-German front in 1941–1944 were published under the auspices of US State department, the CIA and the Air Force. Besides, the American army published some collections, prepared by the former German generals and officers, about events on the Eastern Front and in rear army areas, about activity of partisan and anti-partisan operations. The first authors were the former Wehrmacht generals who had a first-hand experience of participation in military operations, or took high military rank in the Nazi Germany (W. Varlimont, H. Guderian, A. Kesselring, E. Manstein, O. Skorzeny, K. Tip-pelskirch, etc.) [1, p. 29]. These works reflected mainly personal assessment of separate aspects (an assessment of military decisions of Hitler, planning and carrying out combat actions, material support in fronts, comparison of ratios of human and material resources of the Red Army and Wehrmacht, etc.). Cooperation of leading American military establishments and the former generals of the Wehrmacht made decisive impact on the subsequent assessment of a contribution of the USSR, as well as Belorussian contribution to the victory over fascism. For the first time in western historiography the German generals also voiced thought of minor influence of the Soviet-German front on the general course of World War II.

Works of 150 former generals and officers of the German General Staff under the auspices of historical department of the American army in Europe (EUCOM) and the US army Center for military history in Washington, aspiration of the western powers, first of all the USA and Great Britain, to admit Federal Republic of Germany to the military-political block of NATO (it was done on May 9, 1955), fight against dissent in the USA, the so-called “McCarthyism” – all this push studying of the role of the USSR (and Belorussia as one of the republics) in World War II, influence of fights on the Soviet-German front on the general course of war to the background. Actually it laid the foundation for a germanocentric position of all English-speaking historiography of the USA and Great Britain on the history of Belorussia during the Great Patriotic War.

It should be noted, that in 1948 the British military theorist major general J. Fuller published “World War II history, 1939–1945. Strategic and tactical history” in which the author perspicaciously warned about danger of excessive trust to reports and memoirs of the German generals and officers, and criticized concepts which only arose inside the American military establishments and the so-called “think tanks” (the group of experts which represents the ideas concerning political, social and economic problems) [2, p. IV].

Today these preventions of J. Fuller, who didn't share sympathy for the USSR, can be called as the historiographic forecast, because concepts about Hitler's preventive war against the USSR, “the theory

of decisive battles”, the theory about decisive influence of climatic factors on a course of operations in the east, “the totalitarian theory” and a number of others had considerable impact on the formation of theoretical and methodological bases of the historiography of the USA and Great Britain concerning the research of the Belorussian history during the Great Patriotic War.

The Nazi occupational regime and collaboration as its component, as well as the Soviet partisan movement were among the most important subjects in the works of Western researchers. What was the reason, that ideology influenced a lot on researches on these subjects? The answer was given by the known American researcher, a professional historian and a politician, an employee of strategic services of the USA in the years of World War II, and later a professor of the Columbia University and a special adviser to the president J. Kennedy A. Schlesinger-Jr. “...big “cold war” – between communism and democracy – generated small “cold war” – between historians” [3, p. 237].

The specific place in the Anglo-American historiography is taken by work of the British researcher, in the past – the foreign affairs journalist A. Werth “Russia in war 1941–1945” (1964) [4]. Within one book the author managed to give an exhaustive idea of background of World War II with its diplomatic games, the Great Patriotic War course, patriotism of the Soviet people in the Home Front and at the front line, the due attention was paid also to wartime events in the territory of Belorussia. In this work A. Werth combined macro- and microhistory that allowed him to avoid a fragmentariness, which is the weak point of the modern historiography of the USA and Great Britain on the subject of the Great Patriotic War, as well as Belorussian history. Later the tendency on gradual refusal of germanocentric views and approaches was continued in works of British military historians A. Clark [5] and A. Seaton [6]. These authors devoted much attention to the analysis of the Red Army offensive operations in 1943–1944 in the occupied territory of Belorussia.

Fundamental changes in studying of combat actions in the territory of Belorussia in the second half of 1943–1944 are connected with the name of the well-known British military historian J. Erickson. The major factors which prevented the American and English researchers from studying the Great Patriotic War, were the ignorance of the Russian language and lack of access to the Soviet archival materials. The access of this researcher to the Soviet archives was considered by the Soviet authorities, and after studying of his work “The Soviet Supreme command: political and military history, 1918–1941” J. Erickson received permission. A long-term work on the received Soviet archival materials resulted in fundamental works published in 1975 and 1983 accordingly [7; 8]. These facts from the scientific biography are not only the description of important milestones in life of one researcher, but in fact – the evidence of origin of the new period in development of an Anglo-American historiography on Soviet history 1941–1945. For the first time after A. Werth’s book the works written not from germanocentric positions in the West were published.

The work “The road to Berlin. Stalin war with Germany” by J. Erickson is atypical example of the academic publication on military history. Unlike the previous authors, this researcher gives a panoramic picture of military events on the Soviet-German front, skillfully combining the German and Soviet documentary sources and memoirs of military leaders; British, American, German and Soviet monographs. The operation “Bagration” is considered by the author from the moment of its planning, practical preparation and a real embodiment.

“One week after the opening of the Soviet offensive, the first phase of the battle for Belorussia ended; with the fall of Vitebsk, Orsha, Moghilev and Bobruisk, the German defensive system of the central sector of the Soviet-German front had cracked wide open”, – the author emphasized importance of this operation and its influence on a further course of operations for liberations of countries of Eastern Europe [8, p. 224]. “When Soviet armies shattered Army Group Centre, they achieved their greatest single military success on the Eastern Front. For the German army in the east it was a catastrophe of unbelievable proportions, greater than that of Stalingrad”, – J. Erickson concluded [8, p. 228].

D. Glantz, an American researcher, continued a tendency on wider use of the Soviet sources and the critical view concerning the tendentious German concepts. It is characteristic, that both J. Erickson and D. Glantz once were cadremen, both read lectures in military colleges and army schools of Great Britain and the USA respectively, both knew Russian perfectly well, both entered an editorial board of “The Journal of Slavic Military Studies”, both were lucky to work with the Soviet archives.

During Gorbachev and Yeltsin era many archival establishments of the USSR and later the Russian Federation provided services in search, copying, processing of the Soviet archival materials on a commercial basis. Under such circumstances after collapse of the USSR D. Glantz, earlier the head of US Army Soviet Military Studies Office in Leavenworth, Kansas, got access to previously secret documentary sources. From 1990s this American historian became the largest expert in the West on the Great Patriotic War history. His works became widely known on both sides of Atlantic for the introduction of a big number of factual information [10; 11].

Nevertheless, D. Glantz took the vast majority of the facts from the Soviet sources (monographs, scientific collections, memoirs, archives). His work “Belorussia 1944: The Soviet General Staff Study”, published at the same time in the USA and Great Britain in 2001 (2nd edition in 2004) [11], was the translation of the Soviet edition under a signature stamp “confidentially” “Research of the Soviet General Staff No. 18” (1944) which was intended only for official duties of the Soviet military staff.

The western historians also paid much attention to the Soviet partisan movement. Among the most important works by N. Vakar, A. Dixon, O. Heilbrunn, A. Dallin, R. Mavrogordato and E. Ziemke, B. Shepherd, J. Megargee, E. Howell, K. Slepian.

It should be noted, that the collection “Soviet Partisans in World War II” [12], edited by J. Armstrong, published on materials of the “Alexander” project by the Columbia University and the US Air Force, had a strong ideological component. The authors of the collection used the methodology of political sociology according to which partisan movement was considered as one of subjects of the Soviet system in the occupied territory of the USSR. The most part of the book was devoted to the analysis of the Soviet partisan movement as system of political control of the population. For this reason the analysis of partisan movement on the example of the Polotsk lowland contains not enough information on military progress of the Belarusian partisans and scales of their activity in Belorussia.

The work “The Soviet partisan movement, 1941–1944» by E. Howell was devoted to general offensive of the Red Army and coordination of the activity between partisan formations [13]. The main attention was paid to the analysis of combat actions throughout 1943 and January – June, 1944. What concerns the beginning of 1943, the author noted, that the greatest number of partisan formations was concentrated in three areas: the region of Polotsk swamps, the big forest area to the west from the line of Mogilev-Orsha-Vitebsk and Orel-Bryansk. By the end of March, 1943, according to this author, there was whole line created from partisan groups in the area of Bryansk–Orel–Vitebsk–Orsha–Bobruisk–Gomel. Based on the German sources, the author counted 34 separate partisan groups on lines Gomel–Orel 28 thousand people in total. To the west from Gomel there were 26 smaller groups with 7500 people in total. In the area of Orsha–Vitebsk–Nevel 37 partisan groups, 31 thousand, conducted combat actions. As a whole according to the German documents there were about 57800 partisans in an operational zone of German Army Group Centre by March 15, 1943. [13, p. 147–148].

It should be noted, that E. Howell’s work about a role of the Soviet partisan movement was one of the few works of such kind which was released by US Army and was distributed for obligatory studying in the American fighting divisions, military schools and establishments for training of the American officers in tactics and strategy of irregular forces, conducting war of nerves against the enemies («truth campaigns» – as it called in the USA), including analysis of the Soviet partisan movement in Belorussia during the Great Patriotic War.

In 1988 US army Major R. Glenn published the monograph «Soviet Partisan Warfare: Integral to the Whole» [14]. The value of this work is connected with system approach to the study of the Soviet partisan movement role, first of all during the Belarusian offensive «Bagration». According to the American author, «partisan activity in Belorussia had been evident as early as July 5, 1941 (this day M.F. Shmyrev’s first partisan group was created in Vitebsk region, however some days before it on June 28, 1941, there was the first fight with Germans of partisan group «Komarova» under the command of V. Z. Korzh – the remark by the author)» [14, p. 25]. Based on previously published documentary materials and monographs, R. Glenn came to a conclusion that on the eve of June 23, 1944 «partisan strength in Belorussia was approximately 140,000 (the calculation technique is not explained – the remark of author) in 150 brigades and 49 separate detachments... 90 % of all partisans in the Soviet Union [14, p. 26].

Estimating a general meaning of activity of the Belorussian partisans, R. Glenn came to a conclusion that «The partisans in Operation Bagration were integral to the force that crushed Army Group Center» [14, p. 33].

The Belorussian partisans participated not only in combat operations against the German invaders. The British historian B. Shepherd gave examples in his book «War in the wild East: the German army and Soviet partisans» when partisans successfully ruined economic plans of Nazis in Gomel region (areas near Korma and Chechersk) [15]. According to the reports of the German 221st Security Division (it fought in Belorussia during wartime period) from US National Archive, the supply points could be protected from partisan attacks only in the main towns [15, p. 181]. Nazis plans for labor export to Germany were also ruined. B. Shepherd gave excerpt from the report of Intelligence Sector of the 221st Security Division: «...despite every conceivable propaganda effort by the division itself, the population's resistance [to labor service] was so strong that the recruitment in July 1943 of the 1925–1926 year groups was a total failure in most areas of the division's jurisdiction» [15, p. 182].

In 1994 at the university of Michigan (USA) K. Slepian defended the dissertation «The people's avengers»: Soviet partisans, Stalinist society and the politics of resistance, 1941–1944» [16], 9 years later the same author published a research «Why they fought: motivation, legitimacy and the Soviet partisan movement» [17]. Works by K. Slepian destroy the stereotypes approved in a historiography of the USA and Great Britain about motivation, the purposes and tasks of the Soviet partisans, scales of their activity. Analyzing the reasons of emergence of the Soviet partisan movement, the American author came to a conclusion: «They did not recognize that the partisans fought for a variety of reasons, and that for many, the very presence of the Germans in their country, was reason enough to fight» [17, p. 29].

The similar idea was expressed recently by the American military historian R. Reese in «The Journal of Slavic Military Studies» when he noted, that «perhaps the most fundamental reason why Soviet citizens fought was that their country had been invaded. ... People could then justify fighting for their homes, villages, towns, cities, the very soil of Belorussia, Ukraine, and Russia against a foreign invader. ... It is impossible to gauge how many people actually thought about their relation to the state, but recent works of social history make it clear that many did» [18, p. 268]. The author came to a conclusion that «Soviet patriotism was real, but for many it did not equate with support for the Stalinist system...» [18, p. 282].

The opinions, expressed by K. Slepian and R. Reese, are naturally determined as these authors knew about the latest foreign, Soviet and modern Russian works on patriotism. The American and British researchers for last decades analysed the various aspects of activity of the Belorussian partisans – from military (A. Dixon, O. Heilbrunn, E. Howell, R. Glenn) and political (J. Armstrong, R. Mavrogordato, E. Ziemke) to economic (B. Shepherd) and patriotic (K. Slepian, R. Reese). One of the most prominent American archivists T. Mulligan used the expression «the partisan republic» concerning partisan zones in the territory of Belorussia [19, p. 142].

There are also cardinal different views at modern historiography of the USA and Great Britain. For example, the American historian, the graduate of Russian Institute at Harvard University, and the teacher of the Central European university in Budapest (Hungary) A. Rieber tried to present the Great Patriotic War events as «the Soviet civil wars 1941–1947» [20, p. 162]. There are a lot of similar examples.

To sum it up, the historiography of the USA and Great Britain had a difficult evolutionary way which was characterized by influence of both scientific, and extra scientific factors in the history of Belorussia of the Great Patriotic War period. The strongest positions were held by researchers who support a germanocentric position. From 1960s there were the Western historians, representatives of so-called «Soviet school of a military historiography in the West» who had neutral views. «War» between historians of these different views still determines a scientific landscape of an English-speaking historiography concerning the history of Belorussia during 1941–1945.

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Summary

The article is devoted to the evolution of historiography of the USA and Great Britain concerning the history of Belorussia during the Great Patriotic War. The most important subjects in English-speaking researches are shown. The scientific and extra scientific factors which influenced on the western scientific works are noted. The author analyzed approaches of various scientific schools, their strong and weak sides.