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The Partisan Trace in the Koriukivka Tragedy (16 January – 11 March 1943)

Summary: This study examines the concealment of information regarding the Nazi genocide of the civilian population in the town of Koriukivka in March 1943 by the leadership of guerrilla units led by Fedorov and Popudrenko, based on an analysis of archival documents.

The article explores the possible motives that may have guided the partisan leaders in deliberately suppressing the true causes and circumstances of the Koriukivka tragedy. The tactic of ‘sweeping one’s tracks’ by the so-called people’s avengers, including the concealment of their own culpability, became a defining feature of the Soviet side’s efforts to avoid potential retaliation.

Particular attention is given to several obscure yet revealing episodes in the lives of the main figures involved—Dmitriy Rvanov, Nicholas Popudrenko, and Alexei Fyodorov. It is suggested that the tragic death of N. Popudrenko, as well as the tacit justification (and perhaps even exaltation) of A. Fyodorov by the Soviet leadership, may be directly connected to the events that unfolded in Koriukivka village, Chernihiv region, in late February to early March 1943.

The author concludes that the guerrillas’ inactivity and their silence regarding their own responsibility necessitate a critical reassessment and symbolic ‘dethronement’ of the partisan leaders, despite their contributions to the struggle against the Nazi invaders during the Second World War.

Keywords: Koriukivka massacre, Ukraine, WW II, archival documents, military operations, genocide, guerrillas, falsification, cipher telegrams

Introduction

The restoration of historical justice in the past’s assessment, which became relevant during the years of Ukraine’s independence, prompted scholars to take a critical position in relation to several episodes of World War II canonised by Soviet propaganda.



In times of impartial attitude to the heroism and tragedy of the events of those years, modern scholars resorted to a critical rethinking of its fundamental postulates. One of such historical stereotypes is the concept of idealisation of the so-called 'people's avengers' — Soviet partisans and underground fighters.

It is impossible to discover how certain events unfolded and to determine their consequences without uncovering the causal factors. Establishing a cause-and-effect relationship in the process of studying the past is a basic postulate for a historian. Such a relationship should be based on a fairly specific primary source base: memories of participants in the events, eyewitness accounts, memoirs of leaders, analysis of archival documents, all supplemented by logically and factually substantiated conclusions of the researcher.

One such event, the causes of which have not yet been fully explained, is the mass extermination by the Nazis of the inhabitants of the town of Koriukivka, Chernihiv region, in March 1943.

Despite the significant number of publications devoted to the Nazi genocide of the inhabitants of Koriukivka, this tragic episode of the German-Soviet war remains a little-studied page of history. The Koriukivka tragedy is considered the largest single-moment destruction of the civilian population during the Second World War in Europe. Despite this, the genocide of the Koriukivka people did not appear as evidence of the inhumanity of Nazism at the Nuremberg Trials. The Koriukivka tragedy did not become a textbook canonical episode of the atrocities of the German-fascist occupiers in the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which should have been included in history textbooks.

Despite its scale and resonance, over a period of over eighty years, historical science has only outlined the general contours of those tragic events. Historians generally focus on the results, as if intentionally overlooking the motives for the Hungarian punitive expedition.

Aim of the Study

The article aims to review the causes of the Koriukivka tragedy of 1943, which allows for the clarification of the fatal role of the actions of Soviet partisans in provoking the enemy. It is believed that inadequate actions of the Hungarian Sonderkommando were caused by a previous attack on the Koriukivka settlement by Soviet partisans. It was the Koriukivka partisan sabotage action that became the impetus, and perhaps one of the main reasons for the systematic and gradual destruction of the civilian population of the aforementioned settlement by the occupiers.

To achieve the aim, the study pursues several objectives:

- To analyse the causes and course of the Soviet partisan operation, arguing that the partisans spontaneously decided to attack the town and adjacent settlements

for food and personal ambitions, and that officials falsified the reports regarding the ‘successful operation’ afterwards.

- To examine the role of the partisans in provoking the enemy and the scale of the tragedy, assessing whether the cruelty of the partisans provoked an asymmetric response from the punishers and whether the death of the prisoners was the reason for the repeated burning of the city.
- To evaluate the inaction and consequences for the command, justifying why the partisan unit did not take revenge for the destruction of civilians, having enough forces to do so, and how the leadership tried to hide its responsibility.
- To investigate Soviet myths and commemoration, revealing the mechanisms of Soviet propaganda that for decades silenced the role of the ‘people’s avengers’ and to justify the need to recognise the Koriukivka tragedy as a symbol of national grief.

Results and Discussion

Using memoir literature (which concerns the Koriukivka tragedy), which was carefully censored during Soviet times, makes it impossible to establish any objective picture of those events. The leader of the partisan movement in the Chernihiv region, Balytskyi Hryhoriy, deliberately ignores it.¹ The diary of Mykola Popudrenko, which ends a month and a half before this tragic episode, does not add objectivity.² The Koriukivka tragedy is not in the field of view of the leader of the Ukrainian partisan movement, Tymofiy Strokach.³ In his memoirs, Oleksiy Fedorov does not mention the genocide of the Koriukivka people at all.⁴

However, representatives of the middle management and ordinary partisans left behind memories of the attack on the town and the atrocities of the punishers in early March 1943. In this context, it is worth highlighting the memories of Soviet partisans Hryhoriy Artozyeyev,⁵ Fedir Bykov,⁶ Ivan Vodopyan⁷ and war journalist Mykhaylo Sheremet.⁸

Unlike the direct leaders and coordinators of the partisan movement in the north of the Chernihiv region, the memoirs of the leaders of individual partisan groups and participants in those events allows for the restoration of the general picture of the partisan battle, which became the impetus for the corresponding reaction from the Nazi executioners.

1 Bazhan O.V. et al. (eds), 2010.

2 Popudrenko M.M. 1949.

3 Strokach T.A. 1966.

4 Fedorov O.F. 1981.

5 Artozev G.S. 1956, 267.

6 Bykov F.I. 1987, 168.

7 Vodopian I.I. 1982, 175.

8 Sheremet M.S. 1947, 163; Sheremet M.S. 1964, 179.

Isolated testimonies of witnesses and eyewitnesses, acts of state commissions investigating the Nazi crimes depict the consequences of the Koriukivka tragedy. However, little attention was paid to revealing its causes.⁹

Soviet researchers and witnesses of this event focused mainly on the misanthropy associated with the brutal destruction of the inhabitants of the town of Koriukivka. The analysis of the reasons, determination of motivation and excessive cruelty on the part of the punishers had remained beyond the attention of scholars until now.

There was a purposeful reprogramming of the consciousness and subconsciousness of people who were supposed to stop grieving and start rebuilding the war-torn infrastructure of their land. Although this artificially constructed, ideologically balanced motivation aided national recovery, it also contributed to the gradual suppression from memory of events that could be seen as a military-strategic error with unpredictable consequences.

Some documents cited and used in this article are stored in fund No. 62 of the Central State Archive of Public Associations of Ukraine (TsAGOU), a significant amount of which contains information concerning the partisan movement in the Ukrainian SSR. Several files were introduced into scientific circulation in 2006 in the collection of Oleksandr Gogun and Anatoliy Kentiy dedicated to revealing the specifics of the activities of Soviet partisans, in the context of reviewing the established heroic tendencies of the communist era.¹⁰

The plan for the attack on Koriukivka and a report on the results of the partisan action were discovered and published on the page of the Ukrainian Internet resource *Historical Truth* on 4 March 2011 by Ukrainian historian Oleksandr Zinchenko.¹¹

Since 2014, Kharkiv scientists Nataliya Saltan and Oleksandr Saltan have joined the study and analysis of the partisan movement in the Chernihiv region. Based on a critical systematisation of existing research and a new reading of archival documents, an attempt was made to rethink the root causes and development of events related to the Koriukivka tragedy, as well as a number of mysterious related facts.¹²

The analysis of primary source data continued the archival and documentary phase of the study of events related to the Koriukivka tragedy. This stage became an alternative to the memoir period of ascertaining individual episodes of the genocide of the civilian population of the town of Koriukivka. It opened a new page in the systematisation of historiography and the source base in the study of this scientific problem.

9 *Akt Koriukovskoi raionnoi komissii...* 1978, 98–99; *Akt o zverstvakh fashistskikh zakhvatchikov...* 1985, 301–303; Melnyk S.M., Boiko M.K. 1994, 150; Narizhnyi B.M. 1988, 176; Skrypka M. 2003, 6; Tykhonovskiy A.M. 1973, 5; *Sovetskaia Ukraina...* 1985, 511.

10 Gogun A., Kentii A. (eds), 2006, 403.

11 Zinchenko O.M. 2011.

12 Saltan N.M. 2015, 316–319; Saltan O.M. 2014b, 61–74; Saltan O.M. 2014a, 123–147.

The archive documents of the TsDAGOU, related to the events of the Koriukivka tragedy, can be conditionally divided into two categories: reports by special agents and documents of an operational-tactical nature. Inherently, they are cipher telegrams, plans and reports of combat operations.

The study of the first group of primary source data invokes a feeling for the internal atmosphere that prevailed in the first Chernihiv partisan unit in February 1943. This is the so-called moral side of partisan reality, which traditionally remained behind the scenes and as is known, directly influenced the fighting spirit of the people's avengers.

The second group of documents, in terms of content and subject matter, is directly related to the events of particular interest, due to being of a planned and final nature. Their authors are the main figures in the events related to the Koriukivka tragedy: the chief of staff of the first Chernihiv partisan unit — Dmytro Rvanov and its temporary head — M. Popudrenko.

The first of the documents — a plan for an attack on the town of Koriukivka and two neighbouring villages — appears as a perfect, well-considered, thorough military operation to the minutest detail, which was conducted, 'on wheels': the day after its development.¹³ This document allows for the analysis of a partisan sabotage scenario whose success, according to the text, the 'people's avengers' did not doubt.

The visual layout of the Koriukivka partisan operation is embodied in the form of a map drawn mechanically on a piece of Whatman paper 59.4 x 84.1 cm.¹⁴ Despite its considerable age, the map looks new. It has no dirty spots, tears, folds (e.g., from being kept in an officer's map case or in a boot), tobacco smell, and traces of soot, typical of other documents of this type. The folds of the map are not glued, which indicates its infrequent use. This is another confirmation that the map could have been drawn after the Koriukivka battle.

It is not known whether there was a replacement plan for the attack on Koriukivka in case 'Plan A' did not work. At least, we have not yet discovered such information. The encrypted telegram signed by M. Popudrenko under No. 902.209 and the report by D. Rvanov, according to their content, are of a summary-generalising nature, some aspects of which warrant a more detailed focus.¹⁵

Judging by the pathos of both messages — everything went as well as possible: the town was captured, the garrison was destroyed, prisoners were released, people were helped and they returned with rich trophies. The action was presented as a large-scale and effective operation, the reason for which was the desire to inflict irreparable losses on the enemy, and not to free the family of an ordinary partisan. Obviously, the liberation of Feodosii Stupak's children was only a pretext and by no means the reason

13 TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 21.

14 TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 23.

15 TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47; F. 64. Op. 1. Spr. 19. No. 22.

for the attack on the Koriukivka garrison. The results of the attack can be conditionally divided into two groups: military (destruction of the enemy) and trophy (seizure of material resources). By comparing and systematising, it can be concluded that the second factor was dominant. The partisan attack on the town became something akin to a socialist competition, to destroy the enemy and seize material resources.

The results of the work were embodied in a report on the implementation and over-fulfilment of the plan.¹⁶ However, M. Popudrenko went even further. Having round-the-clock access to the radio, he reported 'up the mountain' concerning the successfully conducted anti-Nazi action, confirming that 'he has the ability and desire to conduct large offensive operations.'¹⁷

Mentioning D. Rvanov, Fedir Lysenko, and himself as 'the leaders of production' as if implying that they should be encouraged somehow. At the same time, M. Popudrenko clearly outlines the role of all the characters involved: D. Rvanov organised and implemented, F. Lysenko developed success, but it was Popudrenko who exercised overall leadership.

Based on the specifics of the party hierarchy, the system of circular responsibility in matters of accountability, which was formed back in the 1930s, everyone took risks; but M. Popudrenko was the most at risk. If something had gone wrong, the tribunal would have been unavoidable, but M. Popudrenko could have blamed everything on his subordinates at any moment, who had shown excessive enthusiasm for the cause. In any case, the negative had to be carefully hidden. Therefore, it was no coincidence that on the first night of 2 March 1943, M. Popudrenko sent a radio message full of victorious reports. Regarding the German mass retaliation action, which actually turned the capture of Koriukivka by the partisans into a Pyrrhic victory, not a word was said.¹⁸

It is also worth noting the rather short time between the Koriukivka operation and the partisan report that reveals its details. The attack was undertaken on 27 February, and on the night of 1–2 March 1943, M. Popudrenko sent the legendary victorious radiogram No. 902.209. The commander of the partisan unit had to carefully consider its text. There was more than enough time — almost two days. Its content is almost impeccable from the point of view of the data indicated there.¹⁹ If the results are compared of the Koriukivka operation (allegedly compiled by D. Rvanov) with the text of the above-mentioned message by M. Popudrenko, it should be noted that he minimised its scale. Such actions can be explained by purely nomenclature pragmatism.

Underestimating the scale of the results obtained allowed them to receive help from the mainland. There is no such thing as excess ammunition. And if there is enough of it,

¹⁶ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 22, 47.

¹⁷ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 34.

¹⁸ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

¹⁹ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

it can be exchanged for food, clothing and horse-drawn transport from the local population, or from the police, Hungarians and Germans.

It should be noted that the partisan unit was in dire need of food. Especially considering that after returning from Moscow, O. Fedorov would launch a raid on Right-Bank Ukraine, which required significant resources. Therefore, the partisans under the command of the acting unit commander M. Popudrenko attacked Koriukivka and two adjacent villages — Tikhonovichi and Huta-Studenetska. Judging by the reports of the partisans, a large amount of food and fuel was concentrated in these settlements, which could be used by the partisans who remained in the Chernihiv region, or by those who were to go on a raid.

This study draws attention to several interesting details, the consideration of which allows for a reassessment of the nature of the event. The scale of the action, or rather its consequences, D. Rvanov described quite vividly and in detail. This person had a literary talent and assessed the event as a former military man. But Popudrenko, judging by the text of the above-mentioned cipher telegram, is a talented extra. He reports on the work done more specifically, but without high indicators. At the same time, he did not forget to note the performer, D. Rvanov, and to contrast him with F. Lysenko, whose group destroyed the enemies, captured weapons, provisions and dispersed the German troops. The last sentence of this document, for unknown reasons, partially disappeared from the text of the same radiogram, published together with the diary of M. Popudrenko back in 1949.²⁰

Therefore, it can be concluded that Lysenko's group had some separate tasks or acted autonomously. His name does not appear in the plan of the operation, which required concerted and coordinated actions of all its participants without exception. M. Popudrenko emphasises that F. Lysenko led the second group, which 'destroyed the gendarmerie garrison and dispersed the German armed formations.'²¹ It transpired that Lysenko's group conducted a distracting punitive raid, while the main forces of the partisans were concentrated around Koriukivka. The pursuit of the enemy cannot be dismissed, as the enemy suffered minor losses, despite the formal tactical perfection of the planned event.

As can be witnessed during the operation, the 'Lysenko men' clearly demonstrated themselves as professional quartermaster marauders. Despite the insignificant war trophies, Lysenko's group provided the connection with grain and meat in such quantities that the excess was distributed to the local population. In the aforementioned cipher telegram, M. Popudrenko transparently hints that these are his men. However, this hint cannot be interpreted unambiguously.

²⁰ Popudrenko M.M. 1949, 154.

²¹ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

In this situation, M. Popudrenko found himself in an advantageous position. The forces of the unit are formally at his disposal. The operation is planned and implemented by D. Rvanov. The 'Lysenkovtsy' act independently, delivering an auxiliary blow or performing a distracting manoeuvre. The success or failure of the operation primarily falls on D. Rvanov, and M. Popudrenko exercises general leadership, acting as an overseer.

The formal uncoordinated actions of the partisan units during the Koriukivka operation are obvious, and M. Popudrenko clearly distinguishes between 'their' and 'our' roles in these events. His logic is easy to understand. The enemy Sonderkommando has already completed the first stage of the cleanup of Koriukivka: therefore, sooner or later, someone must take responsibility for the inability to prevent the Nazi horror. The destruction of Koryukivka remained a constant and fatal burden for Popudrenko. Therefore, he tries in any way to justify himself and frame someone else.

However, in addition to artificial documentary gaps, there is a fact that is indicated in the incomplete and most reliable publication of the above-mentioned cipher telegram. Among those captured by the partisans, one German is mentioned alongside the Hungarians. Unlike the latter, M. Popudrenko focuses on this individual, identified as a railway engineer from Dresden, raising the question of his identity. It is possible that this person was extremely important and could be used as an argument or the subject of certain agreements during negotiations with the German side. Perhaps the exchange did not take place. The German was shot or killed under brutal torture. This may have provoked the cruelty of the punishers.²²

The summary of D. Rvanov and the radio report of M. Popudrenko contain some other significant discrepancies. It is necessary to pay attention to the scale of the operation. D. Rvanov's document refers to the entire settlement. Judging by the tactical and strategic considerations indicated in the attack plan, significant partisan forces were involved in this action, all directions leading to Koriukivka were blocked.²³

In contrast, M. Popudrenko's report significantly narrows the scope of the operation to the capture of a railway station. This prompts the question of whether the partisans seized a town or merely a railway junction. By definition, a station is a fixed stopping point for railway and other land transport, usually located on the outskirts of a settlement. Theoretically, it was not advisable to involve the forces of the entire unit in an attack on the prison. Several sabotage groups with the support of the Koriukivka underground cell could cope with this task perfectly. Reading the document, one gets the impression that it was planned to capture the railway station, but the scale of the operation, its uncontrollability and the fighting fervour of the partisans significantly expanded the theatre of hostilities.

²² TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 47.

²³ TsDAGOU. F. 62. Op. 1. Spr. 1368. No. 21, 22.

This is what gave M. Popudrenko the reason to position the attack on Koriukivka as a successful and strategically important action, emphasising in the next cipher telegram that he and his men have the ability to conduct large-scale operations. This could have influenced the asymmetric actions of the punishers, which led to mass casualties among the civilian population.

Another interesting fact is worth noting — the signatories of the documents. The attack plan was developed and signed by one person — the chief of staff of the Chernihiv formation of partisan detachments — D. Rvanov. M. Popudrenko, who in the absence of O. Fedorov actually led the formation, and Fedir Korotkov, who at that time performed the duties of the commander of the partisan detachment of O. Fedorov, for reasons unknown are not listed in the list of persons who planned the attack. They gave verbal consent, consciously removed themselves from planning the operation, shifting responsibility to the partisan headquarters, or it may have been possible that they were not informed by D. Rvanov.

The final summary of the attack on the town includes the names of individuals who could not physically be present at the time of its conclusion. This includes the commissar of the Chernihiv partisan unit, Volodymyr Druzhynin, and its head — O. Fedorov, who were in Moscow at that time. However, the absence of V. Druzhinin and Fedorov, whose surnames are mentioned in the aforementioned document, is further complicated by the absence of a concluding date. This allows for the conclusion that it was printed and signed, ‘retroactively’. There is no doubt that D. Rvanov wanted to use this document to protect himself in case the military prosecutor’s office began an investigation into the causes of the destruction of Koriukivka. This raises the question of why V. Druzhinin and O. Fedorov were formally associated with events in which they did not directly participate. It is obvious that the Rvanov report was, if not compiled, then at least signed by V. Druzhinin and O. Fedorov no earlier than 5 March 1943 — after their return from Moscow. It is conceivable that they were thus protecting D. Rvanov, with whom M. Popudrenko was distrustful. It is possible that D. Rvanov and M. Popudrenko were in conflict. Although a careful reading of the text of Mykola Mykytovych’s diary does not confirm this, it remains unclear why M. Popudrenko, when printing the text of cipher telegram No. 902.209, did not take as a basis the results of the Koriukivka operation recorded in Rvanov’s report. After all, the main volume of work was conducted by the ‘Fedorovites’ — and should be privy to the report. At the same time, M. Popudrenko emphasises in the aforementioned cipher telegram that it came from Fedorov’s detachment. This means that M. Popudrenko clearly outlined the key nodes of the system: ‘organisation’ and ‘direct participation’ — D. Rvanov; ‘general management’ — he (M. Popudrenko). On the same day, at 10:30 p.m., M. Popudrenko sends a second encrypted telegram to Timofey Strokach, noting that not everything went well. There are seriously wounded, and possibly dead; a large amount of ammunition has been exhausted — so replenishments are needed.

The war trophies captured from the enemy are not enough to conduct active sabotage operations, for which the detachment as a whole is ready. Theoretically, after the attack on Koriukivka, the Soviet partisans expected a large-scale action by the occupying authorities to destroy their units. That is why M. Popudrenko hastily tries to get the 'centre' ammunition as soon as possible. The question arises as to the reason for such a rush to provide ammunition: the desire for revenge — or the necessity to repel a possible attack by Hitler's special forces to destroy partisan groups.

Nevertheless, the presence of seriously wounded remains unclear. It is worth noting that the partisans suffered no losses during the attack on the Koriukivka garrison. At least, no such data exists in Rvanov's report and Popudrenko's encrypted telegram. This short message from the leader of the partisans of the Chernihiv region expressed, first of all, the readiness to conduct large-scale military operations. The text of the cipher telegram contains the phrase 'I have the opportunity', as opposed to the alternative phrase 'I want to'. The actual opportunity to beat the enemy, to conduct an act of retaliation for the destruction of Koriukivka, was supposed to be based on the certainty of the success of such steps. In other words, the Chernihiv partisans had all the necessary means: personnel, a high level of professionalism, support from the local population and a sufficient amount of ammunition. Provided all the listed factors were present, the desire (I want to fight) was supposed to be supplemented by the functional component (I can fight) of the partisan formations that operated in the northern regions of the Chernihiv region.

Despite being 33 years old, M. Popudrenko was clearly aware that collective responsibility does not always work in war. Despite the scale of the Koriukivka operation by the partisans, the German punitive action did not simply overshadow it. It turned the actions of the Rvanov-Lysenko detachments into a Pyrrhic victory. The scale of the SS genocide against Koriukivka and its inhabitants would definitely become known in Moscow. And then punishment could no longer be avoided. It is therefore not surprising that M. Popudrenko sent another coded telegram almost a day after the 'heroic radio message' — essentially a plea. He said: 'we are ready to atone for our guilt, even take revenge — just take away the seriously wounded (whose presence slows down the mobility of the unit's actions) and give us ammunition!'

The Germans destroyed another settlement. Before that, such actions happened on a regular basis. The activation of the partisan movement in the Chernihiv region had little effect on the weakening of the dynamics of the destruction of settlements and their inhabitants in the northern regions of the region. The genocide of the civilian population of Koriukivka outweighed the total losses of peaceful residents of the three northern regions of the Chernihiv region for the entire period of German occupation.²⁴

24 *Informatsiini materialy...* 2023.

Regarding the destroyed Koriukivka, they learned 'on the mountain', although the statistical data on the causes of demographic losses of this settlement were of little interest to the Soviet leadership at that time. In war as in war — that's why everything was blamed on the Germans. In legal practice, this is called excess — going beyond the limits of what is permitted, or *casus improvisus* (*unforeseen event*), the main content of which, by external signs, corresponds to what happened on 1, 2 and 9 March 1943 in the town of Koriukivka.

The special commission, convened in September 1943 and 1944, was limited to clarifying the tragic consequences of this event. Among the motives, only the statement of the bestial cruelty of the occupiers appeared.²⁵

The USSR Military Prosecutor's Office did not investigate this case, which was most likely deliberately hindered by interested parties. It is not excluded that one of these interested parties could have been O. Fedorov. Ultimately, the death of M. Popudrenko, in the author's opinion, halted the process of identifying the perpetrators of this tragedy from the Soviet side.

Summing up this article, it should be noted that a careful and impartial study of archival documents dedicated to the Koriukivka tragedy allows scholars to emphasise the real factors behind its cause. A certain disproportion between the probable and formal side of this event is noteworthy.

The available archival documents contain quite significant discrepancies. The inconsistencies in the final reports submitted to different addressees are evident. It remains unclear on whose accounts the partisan leaders, D. Rvanov and M. Popudrenko, relied when preparing their reports — particularly given that their participation in the attack on the town has not been substantiated.

Referring to the content of the above-mentioned documents and the timing of their conclusion, a clear pattern emerges: a tendency to create self-serving alibis, conceal information, distort facts and engage in deliberate efforts to obscure the truth.

Conclusions

To summarise, it is important to consider the following factors:

- The chronological framework of the Koriukivka tragedy: 16 January – 11 March 1943.
- The starting date of this event should be considered the departure of the partisan unit commander, O. Fedorov, to Moscow. The ending date is marked by the beginning of the raid by the Chernihiv partisan unit on the right bank of the Desna River.

25 *Akt Koriukovskoi raionnoi komissii...* 1978, 98–99; *Akt o zverstvakh fashistskikh zakhvatchikov...* 1985, 301–303.

- The February attack on Koriukivka by Soviet partisans was driven by the personal ambitions of M. Popudrenko and, primarily, the desire to improve the food and material supply of the unit.
- Despite the availability of military-tactical documents, the partisan units attacked the town semi-spontaneously.
- The map of the Koriukivka operation, the combat report, and possibly the attack plan, were created and signed ‘retroactively’.
- The inhuman and asymmetric actions of the punishers were most likely undertaken due to the excessive cruelty of individual partisan units.
- Mykola Popudrenko, and over time, O. Fedorov, deliberately suppressed and falsified the fact of the Koriukivka tragedy.
- Koriukivka is the only settlement in the Chernihiv region that was destroyed by the enemy in two stages during the German-Soviet war.
- The two-stage destruction of Koriukivka can be explained by the breakdown of negotiations with the enemy regarding the return or exchange of prisoners, who were presumably brutally killed.
- The partisan unit had the capability and therefore could theoretically have conducted a massive retaliatory action; however, its leadership considered it inexpedient.
- This is explained by the reluctance to unleash a local war, which could lead to the disruption of the planned raid by the main forces of the unit, as well as the destruction of all partisan forces in Pravodesenna.
- Considering the tragic consequences, the partisan operation became a ‘Pyrrhic victory’ and a ‘sword of Damocles’ for O. Fedorov and M. Popudrenko.
- O. Fedorov made M. Popudrenko a ‘scapegoat’, who would die on 6 July 1943, under rather strange circumstances.

The perpetrators of the tragedy on the part of the enemy did not receive a fair punishment for the war crime they committed, which has no statute of limitations.

For many decades, the Soviet government shifted responsibility for the actions committed onto the occupiers, deliberately concealing and falsifying the role of the so-called ‘people’s avengers’.

To gain a more objective understanding of the events related to the Koriukivka tragedy, it is imperative to conduct a thorough analysis of the available historical documents from the Hungarian and German sides.

Despite its scale, the Koriukivka tragedy has never become a symbol of national grief and conscious commemoration in Ukraine and remains only fragmentary and local in nature.

Several questions still concern specific details of the partisan punitive action — in particular, the place and role of individuals such as F. Lysenko, D. Rvanov, M. Popudrenko, and the infamous German doctor from Dresden along with the attitude of the partisans towards trophies and prisoners.

Further exploration of the details of the Koriukivka tragedy is possible only if the archival funds of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the Central State Archive of Public Associations of Ukraine (TsDAGOU) and TSAVOU, are studied, along with primary sources in Russian archives, primarily the Russian State Archive of Modern History (RDANI) and the Russian State Military Archive (RDVA). The most valuable contents of these archives could be the subjectively critical testimonies of special agents and 'envious people', who acted as indicators of the activities of Soviet partisans. A more objective picture of events could be gleaned by reading the top-secret combat logs of partisan units. By comparing the information contained with partisan reports, researchers would be able to reconstruct the true events.

It would suffice to compare memoirs and documentary-journalistic publications that describe not so much the Nazi genocide as the partisan sabotage, as herein lies not only the pretext but also the root cause of the asymmetric actions of the punishers. Despite the high degree of opportunism and bias, this type of primary source will contribute to a comparative analysis of archival and memoir data regarding the partisan military operation.

As noted above, the emergence of a new impetus in the disclosure of this tragic episode of the Soviet-Nazi confrontation would be facilitated by the creation of a joint Ukrainian-German commission of scientists, which should study the military archives of the FRG. Their study will allow for the most objective assessment of this tragic episode of World War II.

Scientific analysis of the above-mentioned historical event should be conducted taking into account the actual steps of both representatives of the partisan underground movement and the occupation authorities. It is precisely the comparison of the motivational positions of both warring camps that will contribute to the reconstruction of the most truthful and realistic picture of the events that happened around the town of Koriukivka in February–March 1943.

Thus, the study of the events related to the genocide of the Koriukivka residents in March 1943 reaches a qualitatively new level. Its main content is based on identifying the true motives of both the Soviet and German sides. Ultimately, only an awareness of the motivational factors will make it possible to uncover the true reasons for the extraordinary steps of the opposing groups at the turning point of the German-Soviet war. Finally, identifying the true reasons for the actions of the subjective side of this crime will give an answer to the question 'why did it happen?' Having received it, scientists will be able to identify the names of all the criminals, and Ukraine will eliminate one of its 'white spots' known as the Koriukivka tragedy.

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