

## HISTORY

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## **THE STUDY OF THE INVADERS' CRIMES IN CHERNIHIV REGION DURING WORLD WAR II: HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT REALITY**

**Abstract.** *The Purpose of the Research* is to analyze the archive materials in order to characterize the features of creation and the mechanism of activity of the ESC in Chernihiv region, to determine its historical significance, to dwell upon the experience of its activity in the context of current situation. *The Research Methodology* is based on the principles of scientificity, historicism, systematicity, authorial objectivity. To study the issue were used both general scientific (analysis, synthesis, generalization) and special-historical methods of scientific research. *The Scientific Novelty.* For the first time the author made an attempt to determine the significance of the historical experience of investigating the crimes of the military occupiers in Chernihiv region during World War II in the context of the study of tragic events, that took place in the region this year. *The Conclusions.* So, the ESC was created to search, check and systematize documents and materials that could be used to convincingly reveal the crimes of the Nazis and calculate the damages caused during the temporary occupation of the territories of Chernihiv region during World War II. Furthermore, it aimed to determine the names of war criminals. In today's conditions, there is an urgent need to create a similar commission to

investigate the crimes of Russian troops on the territories of Chernihiv region (from February 24 to April 2, 2022).

**Keywords:** war crimes, Chernihiv region, ESC (Extraordinary State Commission), patriotic education, historical and local history movement.

## **ВИВЧЕННЯ ЗЛОДІЯНЬ ЗАГАРБНИКІВ НА ЧЕРНІГІВЩИНІ У РОКИ 2 СВІТОВОЇ ВІЙНИ: ІСТОРИЧНЕ ЗНАЧЕННЯ В УМОВАХ СЬОГОДЕННЯ**

**Анотація. Мета дослідження.** На основі об'єктивного аналізу історичних джерел охарактеризувати особливості створення, механізм діяльності НДК (Надзвичайної державної комісії) зі встановлення і розслідування злочинів німецько-фашистських загарбників і їх спільників на Чернігівщині та визначити історичне значення досвіду її роботи в контексті сьогодення. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на принципах науковості, історизму, системності та авторської об'єктивності. Для вивчення питання використовується як загальнонаукові (аналіз, синтез, узагальнення), так і спеціально-історичні методи наукового дослідження. **Наукова новизна.** Уперше здійснено спробу визначити значення історичного досвіду розслідування злочинів окупантів на Чернігівщині у роки 2 Світової війни у контексті вивчення трагічних подій у регіоні на сучасному етапі. **Висновки.** НДК була покликана здійснювати пошук, перевірку та систематизацію документів і матеріалів, на яких можна було б переконливо розкрити злочини гітлерівців та підрахувати збитки, заподіяні під час тимчасової окупації території Чернігівської області у роки 2 Світової війни. Крім того, йшлося і про визначення імен військових злочинців. В умовах сьогодення існує нагальна потреба створення аналогічної комісії для розслідування злочинів російських військ на території Чернігівської області (з 24 лютого до 4 квітня 2022 року) та подальшому використанні матеріалів для посилення патріотичного виховання та поживлення історико-краєзнавчого руху в сучасній Україні.

**Ключові слова:** військові злочини, Чернігівщина, НДК (надзвичайна державна комісія), патріотичне виховання, історико-краєзнавчий рух.

**The Problem Statement.** In the context of the full-scale war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, the information attack has also tremendously intensified. The Russian Federation persistently spreads the idea of the existence of a "single fraternal nation", claims that "Ukrainian nation doesn't exist", invents fakes about the "artificiality nature of the Ukrainian state", etc. The study of the tragic events of our time should contribute to unity, rise of patriotism among Ukrainians, activation of historical and local studies movement in society and further formation of the historical memory of the Ukrainian people. Unfortunately, starting from February 24, a devastating number of victims is reported every day. The entire families have died, cities have been eradicated, and historical monuments have

been destroyed. During the first days of the invasion, Chernihiv region sustained heavy casualties. It is one of the oldest and most historic regions of Ukraine, which has managed to held back the attack of Russian troops on Kyiv for a long period of time. The crimes committed by the enemy on the territory of Chernihiv region are shocking and absolutely heartbreaking. The siege of Chernihiv began on 24 February and ended on 4 April. On March 3, a series of airstrikes hit the city, which resulted in the death of 47 civilians, destruction of residential buildings and 2 schools (school number 21 and school number 8). (Ukrainska pravda, 2022). According to Amnesty International, there are no military facilities in the area where the rockets were aimed at. Thus, according to the organization, this airstrike is considered to be a war crime. (Amnesty International, 2022).

On March 11, as a result of shelling, the library and the stadium were destroyed, and on March 12, the hotel "Ukraine" was razed to the ground. On March 16, the heavy artillery of the Russian troops killed 14 people, who were peacefully waiting in line to get some bread. The city suffered 53 casualties that day. (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022) Similar crimes took place not only in the city, but also across the whole Chernihiv region. For instance no one will ever forget the story about the village Yahidne. It was occupied by Russian troops from the beginning of March to April 3, 2022). The Russian troops kept 380 people (including children) in the basement of the school for 28 days. 11 citizens could not stand the terrible conditions and died (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022). The total civilian casualty ratio is still unknown. The mayor of the city, Vladyslav Atroshenko, reported that at least 350–400 civilians were killed in the city of Chernihiv. Almost half of the 300,000 citizens had to leave their homes and left Chernihiv (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022). It's hard to realize, but similar horrors took place here during World War II. Therefore, it is relevant to study the experience of the ESC (Extraordinary State Commission) regarding the investigation of the invaders' crimes in Chernihiv region and its practical use in modern conditions. After all, it is extremely important to establish crimes to punish the criminals, to boost the feeling of patriotism among the youth and to enforce the development of historical local lore in the future.

***Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches.*** In modern historiography, there is a certain number of studies that analyze the core and consequences of the military occupation regime on the territory of Chernihiv region during World War II. M. Koval devoted his academics papers to the general description of the events of the Soviet-German war and the period of occupation (Koval, 1999). Lysenko emphasized the crucial importance of studying the events of World War II for the creation of historical memory (Lysenko, 2004). The tragic events of 1941-1945 on Ukrainian lands were also studied by P. Panchenko, O. Utkin,

and V. Gorelov (Panchenko, Utkin, Horielov, 2005). I. Patrilyak, M. Borovyk analyzed the events of the Soviet-German war on the territory of Ukraine from the standpoint of a modern historical perspective (Patrilyak, Borovyk, 2010). Some regional aspects of the issue were studied by local historians. Among them should first of all be mentioned S. Lepyavko (Lepiavko, 2011), S. Butko, O. Lysenko (Butko, Lysenko, 2013), Lozovoy V., Kovalenko O. (Lozovyi, Kovalenko, 2013). The tragic events of 1941-1943 are analyzed in the academic papers of I. Gerasimov, I. Mukhovskiy, and P. Panchenko (Gerasimov, Mukhovskiy, Panchenko, 2003). The majority of the documents of this era is kept in the State Archives of the Chernihiv Region as part of the following funds: P-470 Chernihiv Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, P-1552, P-3013, P-1376 Collection of documents "Chernihiv Oblast during the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945.", P+3001 Chernihiv city administration, P-3003 Chernihiv district administration, Chernihiv, Chernihiv region. Unfortunately, nowadays there is a certain information vacuum regarding the analysis of the historical significance of the activities of the ESC for the patriotic education of Ukrainian youth in the modern conditions.

***The Main Material Statement.*** The patriotic education became extremely important because of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine. It is the feeling of patriotism that should contribute to the unity of Ukrainian society in the fight against the aggressor. Consequently, it is crucial to study the tragic events that are, unfortunately, currently taking place on the territory of Ukraine. It is the historical local knowledge (due to which patriotic education is enhanced) that will contribute to the further unity of the Ukrainian people in the fight against the enemy. In modern reality, it is worth remembering the activity of the ESC, which was created during World War II and initiated the study of the tragic events of the war in Chernihiv region.

The defeats at the initial stage of German-Soviet War forced the higher political leadership of the USSR to make certain concessions in the national and cultural aspects in order to use the patriotic upsurge in Ukrainian society in their own interests. As B. Kravchenko rightly noted, "these concessions were of great symbolic importance, because they legitimized what was an expression of Ukrainian national self-awareness" (Kravchenko, 1997). Not only evacuated to the East scientists and writers, but also state officials frequently appealed to the traditions of the liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people. Measures were taken to restore studies in the field of Ukrainian history and ethnography, and the oppression of the Orthodox Church was somewhat eased. In this context, the emergence of "Ukrainian" fronts, the introduction of the "Bohdan Khmelnytskyi" order, and the membership of the Ukrainian SSR in the UN should be considered.

The patriotic upsurge became the source of the gradual revival of the historical and local history movement, that tremendously suffered because of the repressions of the 1930s and the wartime tragedies. This happened, in particular, due to the activity of the Extraordinary State Commission (ESC). The goal of the ESC was to establish and investigate the crimes of the German-fascist invaders and their accomplices and the damage they caused to citizens, collective farms, public organizations, state enterprises and institutions. The commission was formed by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on November 2, 1942 (under the chairmanship of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions M.M. Shvernyk). Metropolitan Mykolai of Kyiv and Galicia was involved into commission's activity, as well as famous scientists and cultural figures such as B.D. Grekov, B.O. Rybakov, P.D. Baranovskyi, E.V. Tarle, I.Y. Mints, O.M. Tolstoy and others. The commission was created to search, check and systematize documents and materials, on the basis of which it would be possible to convincingly reveal the crimes of the Nazis and carefully calculate the damages caused during the temporary military occupation of the territory of the USSR by the armies of fascist Germany and its allies. Furthermore, it dealt with determining the names of war criminals - organizers and executors of repressive acts against civilians and prisoners of war. It should be mentioned that the materials studied by the ESC played a significant role in exposing war criminals during the Nuremberg Trials.

The ESC cells were formed on the territories liberated from the military occupiers. They collected information regarding the tragic events of the war years in "hot pursuit". In September 1943, during the Chernihiv-Pripyat offensive operation, Podesia was liberated from the fascist invaders, and in November the newspaper "Desnyanska Pravda" announced the creation of the Chernihiv Regional Commission for the Promotion of the ESC headed by the secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party(b) of Ukraine M.E. .Kuznetsov. Not only the head of the regional executive committee, the heads of the NKVD and health care joined the committee, but also the bishop of Chernihiv and Nizhyn - Borys, the protoiereus of the Saviour-Transfiguration Cathedral M. Artyukh and others (Desnianska pravda, 1943). Similar commissions were created in all districts of the region. A wide range of explanatory work was carried out among the population, in particular, the text of the Decree of the Presidium of the Verkhovna Rada (November 2, 1942) on the creation of the NDK was widely distributed. Agitators' seminars were held at district party offices, and a unified political\_day regarding the issue was held in all party organizations. In addition, in most districts, meetings of party activists took place with the agenda "Crimes of the German occupiers and their accomplices in the temporarily occupied territory of the USSR" (DACHo, F. R-

3013). The local press called on the residents of the region to actively participate in the investigation of crimes and in the calculation of damages (Balabai, 1945).

However, the Chernihiv regional commission for the promotion of the National People's Congress began to function for real only in May 1944. In terms of its activities, it relied on all social classes, nevertheless, it also had a small staff of six permanent employees. After special training, representatives of the regional commission were sent to all regions for the purpose of organizing work locally.

Nonetheless, despite all the measures that were taken, the activity progress tended to be rather slow. The reasons behind that was a lack of clear instructions, damage calculation methods, and even such simple things as forms or other documentation. Many issues of a technical and methodical nature were resolved after the arrival of authorized representatives of the ESC in Chernihiv Oblast.

According to the documents, the regional commission involved about 35,000 people. Due to their participation, it was established that during the years of occupation, more than 127,700 civilians and prisoners of war died in Chernihiv region, 41,500 people were deported to Germany for forced labor.

In the course of the commission's work, mass burials in Chernihiv, Pryluky, Novhorod-Siverskyi, Kholmy, Shchorsi and other settlements of the region were examined. Thus, during the investigation of the mass graves of the victims of the Nazis on June 8, 1944, a mourning rally and a memorial service were held in Shchorsi. The work was carried out under police watch with the participation of forensic medical experts. Memorial signs were installed at the site of the mass burials. Consequently, the efforts of the district and regional commissions for the promotion of the ESC made it possible to commemorate the soldiers, partisans and peaceful residents of the region who died at the hands of the fascists.

Moreover, the regional commission prepared and approved about 5,800 acts on the amount of damage caused by the occupiers. It was established that the Nazis destroyed more than 160 industrial enterprises, 1,141 schools, 345 medical institutions, 19 museums, and numerous architectural monuments on the territory of Chernihiv region. The acts arranged by the commission were published in periodicals, issued in the form of separate brochures. It helped to form a source base and to lay the foundation for further scientific studies of this issue.

In the summer of 1945, the ESC and its local branches ceased their activities, as they had completed assigned to them the tasks. Some of their functions were taken over by the Republican Commission for the Study of the History of the Great Patriotic War in Ukraine, which was created in accordance

with the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Ukraine in 1944 with the participation of the leading historians of that time. In February 1946, the Chernihiv Regional Commission for Studying the History of the Great Patriotic War began its activity. At the same time, commissions or support groups were formed at all district committees of the Communist Party (b) of Ukraine, they aimed to collect information about wartime events. The regional commission was headed by the secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party (b) of Ukraine P.V. Dniprovskiy. Among its members were executive workers of party, Soviet and Komsomol bodies, archivists, museum workers, and university teachers. The commission operated on a public basis, but also had its own apparatus of four people who coordinated the work on the scale of the entire region.

**The Conclusions.** To sum up it should be highlighted that right after the liberation of region, the study of the events of the German-Soviet War in the region was started. It went on with the participation of the local public, particularly scientific and pedagogical intelligentsia, and it goes without saying that the activities of the ESC played an incredibly important role. Therefore, at the current stage, there is an urgent need to create a similar commission, which would initiate an investigation into the crimes of the Russian troops in Chernihiv region and would contribute to the further development of the historical and local history movement in the region and the patriotic unity of Ukrainian society.

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