

# EXPOSING DISHONEST HISTORY: THE CREATION AND PROPAGATION OF STALIN'S FALSE ALLEGATION OF 'MASS TREASON' AGAINST CRIMEAN TATARS DURING WORLD WAR II

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**Abstract:** *On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1944, the Soviet Union deported all Crimean Tatars from the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea to Central Asia in what was one of the quickest and most total ethnic cleansings of the twentieth century. Joseph Stalin justified this crime by alleging the "mass collaboration" of Crimean Tatars with the Axis during World War II. While Crimean Tatar activists have correctly argued for decades that far more Crimean Tatars fought for the Soviet Union than collaborated, the myth of Crimean Tatar mass treason remains alive in the former Soviet Union. Through an extensive research at Soviet archives, this paper first presents a wartime counter-narrative to Stalin's charges by exploring Crimean Tatar service in the regular Soviet armed forces and in partisan units, and the reality of the Nazi occupation of Crimea. Next, this paper interrogates how deceit and censorship helped in writing the "mass collaboration" charge into Soviet popular history, giving it a staying power more impressive than many of Stalin's other false charges against political and ethnic 'enemies.'*

**Key Words:** *Crimean Tatar deportation, Censorship, Ethnic cleansing, Partisan warfare, Red Army, Soviet propaganda, Soviet Union*

## SAHTE BİR TARİHİN İFŞASI: STALIN'İN KIRIM TATARLARINA KARŞI ÖNE SÜRDÜĞÜ İKİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI ESNASINDA 'TOPLU İHANET' SAHTE SUÇLAMASININ ORTAYA ÇIKIŞI VE YAYILMASI

**Öz:** *18 Mayıs 1944'de, Sovyetler Birliği'nin, Karadeniz'deki Kırım Yarımadası'ndaki tüm Kırım Tatarlarını Orta Asya'ya sürgün etmesi, yirminci yüzyılda yaşanan en hızlı ve en topyekun etnik temizlik*

*hareketlerinden bir tanesidir. Joseph Stalin, bu suçu İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Kırım Tatarlarının mihver güçleri ile toplu olarak işbirliği yaptığı iddiası ile gerekçelendirmiştir. Her ne kadar, Kırım Tatar aktivistleri on yıllardan beri mihver güçleri ile işbirliği yapanlardan çok daha fazla Kırım Tatarının Sovyetler Birliği'nin yanında savaştıklarını haklı olarak iddia edegelseler de, Kırım Tatarlarının 'toplu ihaneti' söylentisi post-Sovyet coğrafyada halen canlılığını korumaktadır. Sovyet arşivlerinde gerçekleştirilen geniş kapsamlı bir araştırmaya dayanan bu çalışmada ilk olarak, düzenli Sovyet ordusu ve partizan birliklerindeki Kırım Tatarları ve Kırım'ın Naziler tarafından işgaline dair gerçeği irdelenerek, savaş zamanına dair, Stalin'in suçlamalarına karşı bir karşı-anlatı geliştirilmektedir. Bunu takiben, Sovyet popüler tarihi içine 'toplu ihanet' suçlamasının, Stalin'in diğer siyasi ve etnik 'düşman'larına karşı öne sürdüğü başka pek çok asılsız ithamından daha çarpıcı ve kalıcı olmasında aldatmaca ve sansürün nasıl bir rol oynadığı tartışılmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Kırım Tatar sürgünü, Sansür, Etnik temizlik, Partizan savaşı, Kızıl Ordu, Sovyet propagandası, Sovyetler Birliği*

## **Introduction**

In May 1944 Joseph Stalin lied and said that Crimean Tatars and other Crimean minorities were guilty of 'mass treason.' Using this excuse, Stalin began a project of ethnically cleansing Crimea.<sup>1</sup> These victims included over 180,000 Crimean Tatars and over 40,000 Greeks, Armenians, Bulgars, and other nationalities that the Soviet State deported to Central Asia, and other Soviet regions.<sup>2</sup> With encouragement from the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin believed that eliminating ethnic minorities in strategic regions was necessary in the context of the developing Cold War situation. The Soviet state confined the deportees to "special settlements," which from 1944 to 1956 acted as slave labor camps where tens of thousands of Crimean Tatars and other deportees died from intentional starvation, disease and exposure.<sup>3</sup>

Many Western scholars writing on the Crimean Tatars have analyzed the mass deportation, but they have avoided examining World War Two for two reasons. First, many of the relevant documents were sealed for decades. But most importantly, by arguing in detail over the exact number of collaborators, one engages in a discussion in which there seems to be some magic number or percentage of an ethnic group whose disloyalty to a state justifies ethnic cleansing. This is why scholars such as Greta Lynn Uehling simply (and correctly) argue that Crimean Tatar collaboration was no more extraordinary than that of other Soviet nationalities.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Soviet Union itself on September 5, 1967 acknowledged that the "groundless charge" of mass collaboration was a lie.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 See State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter GARF), f. 10026, op. 4, d. 1025, l.l. 88-93. Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovleniia GOKO No. 5859ss ot 11 maia 1944 "O Krymskikh Tatarakh."
- 2 By June 11, 1945 the official number of deported Crimean Tatars to the Uzbek SSR was 151,604 people. GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l.l. 5-9. Tashkent NKVD, Polkovnik Gosbezopasnosti Mal'ytsev i Podpolkovnik Gosbezopasnosti Maslennikov - V. V. Chernyshov. (sekretno), June 25, 1944. According to the NKVD, by the end of June 1944 they had deported 15,040 Greeks, 12,422 Bulgars, and 9,621 Armenians from Crimea. See GARF, f. 9479s, op. 1s, d.179, l. 227. Serov-Beria, June 28, 1944.
- 3 Over 40,000 Crimean Tatars would die within the first year, and around 10,000 more in the subsequent years. GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 246, l.l. 44-45. "Dokladnaia Zapiska o khoziastvenno-trudovom ustroistve spetspereselentsev iz Kryma, rasselennykh v Uzbekskoi SSR, za vremia 1.7-44 g. po 1.7-1945 g." NKVD General-Maior Babadzhonov and Nachal'nik NKVD UzSSR Polkovnik Kirillov in Tashkent to Chernyshev (No. 5/6451). September 15, 1945.
- 4 Greta Lynn Uehling, *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars' Deportation and Return*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1-3.
- 5 Document 2, "Edict of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union." September 5, 1967. In Edward A. Allworth (ed.) *The Tatars of Crimea: Return to the Homeland* (Duke University Press: Durham, 1998), 245-247.

So, why do the war and the lie need to be reexamined? First off, venturing into the messy wartime reality is fruitful because it supports the arguments of Crimean Tatar activists and historians. This study combines individual biographies and other archival evidence with secondary sources to explore wartime sacrifices and present a counter-narrative to Stalin's mass collaboration charges. As such, this paper first reviews Crimean Tatars in regular service in the Soviet armed forces, and then turns to occupied Crimea.

The second goal of studying these sources is to re-evaluate the evidence surrounding collaboration in Crimea. This effort is critical because some current historians such as O. V. Roman'ko still commit to the idea that collaboration both caused and justified the deportations. To make this argument, scholars such as Roman'ko wildly underestimate the number of Crimean Tatars that served in the Soviet Armed Forces and partisans and exaggerate collaboration numbers. By doing so, they argue that more male Crimean Tatars collaborated than fought against the Nazis. Furthermore, Roman'ko dubiously asserts that the willingness to honestly discuss collaboration by Crimean Tatar activists and historians such as Gulnara Bekirova somehow absolves Soviet authorities of the crime.<sup>6</sup>

I assert that Roman'ko's argument not only conflicts with Crimean Tatar accounts, but also can be discredited with Soviet archival material. The most important revelation of this study is that Soviet archival documents from the NKVD (secret police), MVD (Interior Ministry), KPSS (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), and Supreme Soviet actually corroborate Crimean Tatar claims that the majority of work-age Crimean Tatar males fought for the Soviet Union, and did not collaborate. For example, documents such as censuses, investigations, background checks, and surveillance on Crimea and the Uzbek SSR reveal that the police and military, from NKVD head Lavtreni Beria downwards, knew the charge was a lie. The NKVD was not alone. Knowledge of Stalin's lie was important in determining how the Communist Party and other Soviet organs functioned during and after the deportation. Soviet government and party documents display how, despite Stalin's atrocity against Crimean Tatars, the war experience served as a shared experience for Crimean Tatars and other Soviet citizens.

6 See O. V. Roman'ko, *Krym pod piatkoi Gitlera. Nemetskaia okkupatsionnaia politika v Krymu 1941-1944*, (Moskva: Veche, 2011), 50, 392-330; Gulnara T. Bekirova, *Krymskie Tatory, 1941-1991: Opyt politicheskoi istorii* (Simferopol', 2008), 73-74.

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The third and final goal of this study is tracing the lineage of the propaganda that the Soviet state used to justify the crime of ethnic cleansing against Crimean Tatars. In the years after the deportation, Soviet officials began a concerted effort to conceal Crimean Tatar participation in the partisan effort and the Soviet armed forces, while at the same time exaggerating Crimean Tatar collaboration with the Nazis. Through the examination of books, tour guides, and other Soviet publications, the final section of this paper exposes the individuals who became accomplices to Stalin's policies by providing false evidence, and what methods they used to create a false historical record.

### Crimean Tatars in the Soviet Armed Forces

All Crimean Tatars officially became traitors on May 17-18, 1944 when the NKVD made Stalin's justification for deportation public. Before that date, Crimean Tatars were one of the dozens of Soviet ethnic groups under occupation. Similar to all Soviet citizens, for Crimean Tatars the war meant service in the Red Army, partisan resistance and, for a smaller number, collaboration. But above all the war brought suffering and death. Germany and Axis allies invaded and occupied most of Crimea between September and November 30, 1941, with the exception of Sevastopol that held out until July 1942. Many Crimean Tatars began fighting as soon as the war began.

Drafted into the army in 1939, Izet Memetov served on the front lines in Ukraine, where he was shot in the left leg. Despite the injury, he kept fighting until he was again wounded fighting on the Dnepr River. When the Soviet front completely collapsed he went back on active duty and was wounded a third time near Kirovgrad and spent several months in the hospital. Finally, in 1945 he was seriously wounded a fourth time during the battle for Konigsburg (Kalinigrad) and remained hospitalized until early 1946.<sup>7</sup>

Party member M. Osmanov left his hometown of Simferopol on June 23, 1941 (the day after the war began) and joined the Soviet army, becoming an officer. He received commendations for defending Stalingrad, and fought in the campaigns to liberate Kiev, Lublino, and Warsaw, and in the storming of Berlin.<sup>8</sup> Other Crimean Tatars such as I. U. Ablaev

7 GARF, f. 7523, op. 101, d. 640, l.l. 113-114. Perechen- "Voprosov, postavlennykh hekotorymi grazhdanami Tatarskoi natsional'nosti v pis'makh I zaiavleniiaakh, postupivshikh v 1966 godu v adres Ver. Sov. SSSR." 1966. (hereafter "Perechen").

8 *Perechen*, l. 109.

served at sea. After working at the Sevastopol Shipbuilding Factory for 15 years, he began repairing damaged ships in the Black Sea Fleet during the battle for Sevastopol. On March 15, 1942 his repair unit evacuated to the city of Tuaps. Shortly afterwards, the Luftwaffe bombed Ablaev and his comrades while they were repairing the “Ostrovskii” transport ship. Hospitalized with head trauma, he and other patients were evacuated to the Kazak ASSR.<sup>9</sup>

Experiences such as these became a point of pride and thousands of these Crimean Tatar veterans would become a leading voice of the protest movement demanding the nation’s return to Crimea. A 1967 protest letter from 20 Crimean Tatars underlines this fact. Six of the signees, Enver Ablijev, Asan Kadyev, Minure Kadyeva, Femi Ametov, Osman Kasabov, and Abduraman Molla, identified themselves as “decorated World War Two veterans.” Five others including Seitumer Chalbash, Ismail Kenzhe, Settar Ipek-Ogly, Osman Ametov and Khodzhai Kendzhedmetov identified themselves as “World War Two veterans.”<sup>10</sup> Often, veterans participating in letter-writing campaigns also indicated where they fought. In an April 27, 1990 letter to Moscow, Crimean Tatar veteran Z. A. Chekhalaeva specified that he was a veteran of the Black Sea Fleet and had fought during the liberation of Odessa and Sevastopol. In the same letter, N. A. Salidzhanov stressed his service in the liberation of Briansk and Voronezh, while A. U. Bekirov highlighted that he had defended Stalingrad and later fought in Kursk and Briansk.<sup>11</sup>

Like all Soviet families during World War Two, most Crimean Tatar families lost members to combat and family members pointed out that fact in letter writing campaigns. While the Nazis forced A. A. Umerov into labor, his brother, Seit Bekir Umerov, served in the Red Army as a political commissar and was killed in the defense of Moscow.<sup>12</sup> In a 1966 letter to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, G. S. Suleimanova demanded to know how she was from a family of traitors when her sister was killed fighting in the siege of Sevastopol and her husband had received commendations for his participation in the same battle.<sup>13</sup> Thousands of more such accounts reside in Soviet documents, collections of *samizdat*,

9 Ibid, l. 109.

10 GARF, f. 7523, op. 101, d. 447, l.l. 21-26. Krymski Tatary iz goroda Sukhumi. January 17, 1968.

11 GARF, f. 9654, op. 6, d. 209, l.l. 28-29. Letter to Sov. Nats. Ver. Sov. SSSR Nishanov from Crimean Tatar Veterans. April 27, 1990.

12 *Perechen*, l. 110.

13 Ibid, l. 109.

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collections of human rights organizations, and the recent work of scholars such as Bekirova.<sup>14</sup>

Police documents echo the preponderance of such stories among those Crimean Tatars they deported. In fact, the reports of NKVD and MVD agents compliment the arguments of Crimean Tatar activists, providing both individual accounts and general trends. For example, the NKVD found that Zeidula Asanovich Stil'skii defended Sevastopol until he was wounded on February 21, 1942.<sup>15</sup> Other reports show that Meva Believa, Khaztizhat Khalilova and Malira Urachnieva were all widowed with children after their husbands died in combat, a fate shared by thousands of Crimean Tatar mothers and millions of other Soviet mothers.<sup>16</sup> Many reports are incredibly detailed. The NKDV report on Crimean Tatar Khatiszhe Alieva-Shibanova found that her two sons, Shanasi and Shevkem, served in the Red Army and Shevkem was wounded in combat. Her daughter, who was in Moscow when the war began, joined a defense unit, and received an "In Defense of Moscow" medal.<sup>17</sup> Another report describes how Iach'ia Abdurefa Ibrahimov had served in the Red Army since 1937, was awarded a "Red Star" for his actions early in the war, and received medals for the battles of Warsaw and Berlin.<sup>18</sup>

As the accounts above display, from 1941 to 1944, the Soviet Union awarded loyal Crimean Tatars with medals and other commendations. Some such as Uzeir Abduramanov became "Heroes of the Soviet Union."<sup>19</sup> Emir Usinovich Chalbash had one of the most impressive Crimean Tatar wartime careers. The NKVD reported that as a fighter pilot in the Soviet air force, he flew 345 sorties, fought in more than 50 dogfights, shot down 11 enemy planes, and assisted in shooting down 6 more aircraft. He received numerous medals and became a flight instructor. His brother, Kurt-Molla Khalul' Chalbash also served with distinction in a Red Army tank unit.<sup>20</sup>

The actual numbers of Crimean Tatars who served and died is a victim of chaos, but both Soviet and Crimean Tatar figures are much higher

14 See, Gulnara Bekirova, *Krym i Krymskie Tatary*, accessed on December 4, 2015, <http://kirimtatar.com>.

15 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 89. Zakliuchenie 28 avgusta, 1945.

16 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l. 138-139. "Spisok Krymskikh Tatar, prozhivaiushchikh na territorii Dagestanskoi ASSR." NKVD DASSR Kom. Gosbez R. Markaian. November 3, 1944.

17 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l.l 20-20ob. Zakliuchenie 28 Iulia, 1945 goda.

18 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 42. Zakliuchenie 31 August, 1945.

19 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 7. Zakliuchenie 12 Sentiabr', 1945

20 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l.l. 105-105ob. Zakliuchenie 29 noiabria, 1945.

than those given by scholars who believe the mass collaboration charge. On the high end, Crimean Tatar scholar and activist Aishe Seitmuratova claims that approximately 64,640 Crimean Tatars served in the war in some capacity. Of these, the conflict killed nearly 30,000 Crimean Tatars, including Seitmuratova's father.<sup>21</sup> In letter writing campaigns after de-Stalinization, activists often stated that approximately 28,000 Crimean Tatars served in the Soviet armed forces while more than 4,000 fought as partisans. Furthermore, more than 3,000 received condemnations and 17 became "Heroes of the Soviet Union."<sup>22</sup>

NKVD documents agree that the number of Crimean Tatar soldiers was large. During May 1944, the NKVD deported thousands of active duty Crimean Tatars. Like all Soviet nationalities, Crimean Tatar service men and women were spread across the front and Soviet Union. NKVD officers in the Uzbek SSR noted how some Crimean Tatars deported straight from combat such as Red Army Captain Ussin Suleimanov and infantryman Abdulla-Gani Sattarova arrived in exile still in possession of their service pistols.<sup>23</sup> Several thousand Crimean Tatar soldiers had taken leave immediately after the liberation of Crimea in May to help their families, and were deported. The NKVD in the Tashkent region became frustrated by the situation because they received large groups of "Crimean Tatar officers and regular soldiers" and simply did not know how to handle the influx of soldiers "with military identification papers still in their hands... and still in full military uniform, just without weapons."<sup>24</sup> The NKVD separated many of the higher-level Crimean Tatar party officials, military officers, and partisan leaders from the bulk of Crimean Tatars and deported them to Molotov *oblast*. Rather than receiving the traitors described in Stalin's decree, the head of the Molotov region NKVD, Major Natarov, reported that many of deportees were "party members with party tickets in their hands, partisans, and military medal winners."<sup>25</sup>

21 Hoover Institution Archives, Aishe Seitmuratova 8/3/1979, Box 47, Folder 2, pg . 2, A. M. Nekrich Collection.

22 GARF, f. 7523, op. 101, d. 447, l.l. 21-26. Krymski Tatory iz goroda Sukhumi. January 17, 1968.

23 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l 19. Kapitan Gosbezopastnosti Romashov- Upolnomochennyi NKVD SSSR po Uzbekskoi SSR Mal'tsevu. "Dokladnaia Zapiska o rezul'tatakh priema i rasseleniia spetspereselentsev (K.T.) po Andizhanskoi Obl." June 1944.

24 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l. 43. "Dokladnaia Zapiska- O prieme i rasselenii spetspereselentsev po Tashkentskoi Oblasti." Nachal'nik UKNVD Podpolkovnik Matveev i Upol. NKVD SSSR Polkovnik Tarkhonov- Kobulov. June 1944.

25 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l. 137. Kuznetsovu iz Zam. Nachal'nika UKNVD Molotovskoi Oblasti Po Kadram Maior Gosbez Natarov. September 5, 1944.



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Having to support Stalin's false allegations put the NKVD and Soviet Armed forces in the awkward position of deporting thousands of active-duty Crimean Tatars and this caused discontent. NKVD documents show that, while some NKVD and military officers followed the order to disarm Crimean Tatar soldiers and deport them, many refused to disarm and deport their comrades. The refusal was not isolated, but so endemic that the head of the NKVD overseeing Crimean Tatars deportees, Chernyshov, bluntly told Beria in an October 31, 1944 letter that not only were many Crimean Tatar Red Army officers and soldiers still fighting, many soldiers were requesting that their families be released from special settlement. When commanders were criticized for not arresting their own soldiers, they claimed there were "never clear instructions" on how to deport their fighters from active combat zones.<sup>26</sup>

This situation meant that thousands of Crimean Tatars served the remainder of the war, if not longer, and continued to arrive in special settlement throughout 1944, 1945, and in some cases until 1948. One typical sample form NKVD records is from the fourth quarter of 1945, when the organization reported that many of the 2,200 new arrivals in the Uzbek SSR were Red Army soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Officially more than 7,000 demobilized Crimean Tatar soldiers arrived after the initial deportation, but the number was likely higher. There is reason to believe that most of the 16,000 new Crimean Tatars that were added to the special settlement registry between July 1944 and July 1945 were veterans. Also, in some cases Crimean Tatars demobilized from the Red Army were not added to special settler lists as Crimean Tatars.<sup>28</sup>

A census of Crimean Tatar special settlers in the Uzbek SSR by the MVD in March 1949 counted 477 Red Army officers, 1,154 sergeants, 1,200 invalids, and 5,287 regular soldiers. In addition, 7,065 were still "serving" in some capacity. These numbers do not consider the thousands deported to other regions, the thousands who died in combat, thousands who died in special settlement, and hundreds of officers and soldiers who had already been released from special settlement.<sup>29</sup> Rough estimates of Crimean Tatars killed in combat and by German atrocities

26 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 160, l. 185. Kuznetsov i Chernyshov - Beria. October 31, 1944.

27 GARF f. 9479, op. 1, d. 246, l. 195. January 2, 1946. Zam. NKVD UzSSR General-Maior Zavgorodnii to Kuznetsovu. No. 5/655.

28 GARF, f. 10026, op. 4, d. 1025, l. 76. "Spetsposelentsy iz Kryma/ 1944-1956 gg." V. N. Zemskov. December 9, 1991.

29 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 483, l.1. Statisticheskie Svedeniia o rezul'tatakh perepisi vyselentsev-spets. na territorii Uzbekskoi SSSR. March 28, 1949.

often cite the figure of 12,000, but go as high as 30,000.<sup>30</sup> Considering those numbers and the NKVD and other Soviet documents together, the suggestion that 28,000 or more Crimean Tatars served in the regular Soviet Armed Forces during the war is reasonable, but the actual number is likely higher.

It is important to keep in mind these numbers include Crimean Tatars who served in the regular Soviet armed forces only. The figure of 28,000 does not count around 4,000 partisans and underground communists or the party workers and agricultural specialists that did evacuate. In fact, Crimean Tatar administrators, specialists, and workers who had been evacuated in 1941 to the Dagestan ASSR were not deported.<sup>31</sup> Nor does it count the able-bodied workers that were evacuated from Crimea to industrial areas of the Soviet Union. For example, 4,000 Crimean Tatar males were mobilized into the Moscow Region Coal administration in late 1941, and continued mining until 1948.<sup>32</sup> Considering the service of regular soldiers, party workers, partisans, regular workers, and Crimean Tatars in other capacities, the service of Crimean Tatars in the war effort is at least around 40,000 people, perhaps more. This was out of a prewar population of around 218,000 Crimean Tatars.

### The Failed Nazi Occupation of Crimea

Crimean Tatar activists never denied the fact that several thousand Crimean Tatars collaborated with Germans between 1941 and 1944, with the majority in “self-defense units.”<sup>33</sup> However, as Crimean Tatar activists and recent work by Uehling and Bekirova argue, Crimean Tatar treason was simply not any more extraordinary than that of other Soviet Nationalities. All Russians are not condemned for the traitors in Vlasov’s Russian Army and the same goes for Ukrainians and Stepan Bandera’s followers. Similarly, Volga Tatars, Georgians and Kazakhs also had large German units, and none of these groups saw their republics dissolved or were punished with “special settler” status.

Similar to Slavic peasants in the western Soviet Union who initially

30 Alan W. Fisher. *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press: 1978), 161.

31 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l.l. 138-140. “Spisok Krymskikh Tatar, prozhivaiushchikh na territorii Dagestanskoi ASSR.” NKVD DASSR Kom. Gosbez R. Markaian. November 3, 1944.

32 GARF, f. 5446, op. 49a, d. 3343, l. 2. Pis'mo Min. Ugol'noi Promyshlenosti Zapadnykh Raionov SSSR A. Zasiad'ko- Beria. March 8, 1947.

33 Fisher, 155, *Roman'ko*, 50.

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greeted German invaders as liberators from Soviet repression, the devastation of collectivization and Stalin's terror caused many Crimeans to see Nazis in a similar light.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, as the NKVD left Crimea in late 1941, they executed all prisoners in Simfiropol, Yalta, and other cities, including women and children. More importantly, as Fisher underlines, Moscow's scorched-earth policy did little to harm the German occupation and left both Crimean Tatars and Russians on the peninsula desperate and infuriated. Kolkhoz farmers watched as Soviet officials took their farm's livestock to Krasnodarskii *Krai*, Stalingrad *Oblast* and other regions, but left most of the farmers behind.<sup>35</sup> The retreating Red Army then destroyed farm equipment, stored grain, and livestock that could not be evacuated. This was also detrimental to the Soviet partisan movement, and one of the reasons Soviet partisan units immediately took to robbing villages where some livestock had escaped the agricultural purge.<sup>36</sup>

While the detailed plans for the Crimean occupation are far beyond the scope of this study, some general facts need to be established. First, Hitler (like Stalin) believed that Crimean Tatars could be a "fifth column" and he tried to organize armed Crimean Tatar collaboration around the formation of Crimean Tatar SS units, regular army units, and volunteer "self-defense" units. In Crimea, Field Marshall von Manstein ran these military affairs. The General Commissar for the Crimean Peninsula, Alfred Frauenfeld, handled administrative operations. He attempted to govern Crimean Tatars through "Muslim Committees" that encouraged collaboration by bringing in exiled Crimean Tatar political and religious leaders from Turkey and Romania. Russians and Ukrainians were governed through similar committees and were allowed to elect their own Orthodox bishop. While the push to elicit Tatar collaboration was intense in early 1942, Germany still relied on mostly Russians and Ukrainians for the local collaborationist government, and even in helping organize the Muslim committees.<sup>37</sup> For instance, after the war the NKVD arrested Elena Aleksandrovna Fedorets for her organizational work with Muslim committee members.<sup>38</sup>

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34 Fisher, 153.

35 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (hereafter RGASPI), f. 17, op. 44, 763, l. 140.

36 Fisher, 154-155.

37 Aleksander M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Tragic Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 16; Fisher, 155-157.

38 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 44, d. 763, l.l. 283-295ob. Protokol No. 61 Zasedaniia Krymskogo Obkoma ot 24 oktiabria 1944g.

Hitler's plan for Crimea was doomed by glaring contradictions. First, the administrative plan of relying on Crimean Tatar and Slavic collaboration in Crimea, while practical, was utterly against Nazi ideology. Second, while occupation authorities demanded collaboration, they simultaneously launched a wave of Gestapo terror to hunt down communists. The fate of thousands of Crimean party members was similar to that of Crimean Tatar and party member Ediiia Memetovna Memetova. The Gestapo arrested her, interrogated her, and executed her.<sup>39</sup> Some Crimean Tatars survived in the communist underground longer, coordinating propaganda and partisan activities. Sever Useinov was a member of the party underground in Simferopol from December 1942 until March 1943, when most members were arrested and executed. Useinov avoided arrest until January 1944, when the Gestapo captured, tortured and executed him.<sup>40</sup>

Remaining party and *komsomol* members not concealed in the communist underground formed dozens of partisan units that included Russians, Ukrainians, and Crimean Tatars. Similar to underground party members, Crimean partisans often met a quick and brutal end at the hands of the Gestapo in 1942. For example, Crimean Tatar *komsomol* members Lutfie Ibraimova, Suleiman Tairov, and Abla Ibraimov were among dozens of Soviet partisans that the Gestapo hung in public to set an example for the residents of Bakhchisarai.<sup>41</sup> Some partisans did survive 1942. Crimean Tatar and *Komsomol* member Alim Abdennanova led the "Dzhermai-Kaminskaia" partisans and regularly provided the Red Army intelligence. Still, the Gestapo eventually captured the group in March 1944, torturing and executing the members, including Abdennanova.<sup>42</sup>

The hunt for communists quickly turned into the hunt for Jewish Crimeans in 1942, thus beginning the Crimean Holocaust operation. All told, German documents record 91,678 murdered Jews, communists, Gypsies, and other "racially impure elements" between October 1944 and April 1942.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Nazi authorities kidnapped thousands of Crimeans of all ethnicities, including Crimean Tatars, for slave labor in

39 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l.l 57-57ob. Zakliuchenie 31 ianvaria, 1945.

40 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 101. Zakliuchenie 12 Sentiabr, 1945.

41 *Perechen*, l. 112.

42 *Ibid*, l. 57.

43 *Nekrich*, 15.

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the Third Reich. For example, A. A. Umerov was just 15 years old in 1942 when occupation authorities took him to Mathauzen in Austria.<sup>44</sup>

It was in 1942 that some Crimean Tatars and other Crimean residents collaborated with the Axis. Nazi occupation plans stated an ideal number of between 10,000-20,000 Crimean Tatar collaborators, and scholars from Fisher to Roman'ko cite these numbers. But those goals were never met. Roman'ko is able to locate the detailed accounts of Crimean Tatar collaboration leaders such as Abdulla Karabash, a former KPSS member who headed the most successful Crimean Tatar collaborationist battalion, nicknamed "Schuma," and edited the Crimean Tatar occupation newspaper *Kirim*. In addition, he found the names of 13 Crimean Tatar officers that led battalions.<sup>45</sup>

However, despite Roman'ko's exploration of Crimean, German, and documents of allied powers, he never presents proof of much more than 5,000 collaborators. When the Nazis evacuated Crimea in early 1944, they took around 2,500 collaborators with them, and this number included *all* nationalities. So, where are all of the proposed traitors that defenders of the collaboration charge allude to? They simply do not exist in any documents, and the only way to claim that the number was higher is by citing the around 5,000 firearms that the NKVD confiscated from Crimean Tatars during the deportation.<sup>46</sup> The use of this figure as proof of collaboration is absurd because most of these weapons came from the thousands of Crimean Tatar soldiers deported from the peninsula.

In reality, while the Nazis set grand goals for Crimean Tatar collaboration, they failed. Beria and the NKVD recognized this failure and that most Crimean Tatars were not collaborators, and this determined how they handled Crimean Tatars in 1944 and throughout special settlement. To understand the phenomenon, scholars must make a clear distinction between the three different NKVD operations concerning Crimea and Crimean Tatars. The first operation in 1944, from April 11 to May 14, was a sweep of Crimea, in which NKVD units arrested individuals actually suspected of treason. The arrest total of 1,137 Crimean Tatar "anti-Soviet elements" does not indicate 'mass treason.'<sup>47</sup>

44 *Perechen*, l.l. 110-111.

45 *Roman'ko*, 413, 235-236.

46 *Roman'ko*, 230-233.

47 GARF f. 5124, op. 7, d. 207, l. 10. Spravka o dokumentakh, otrazhaiushchikh istoriiu Krymskoi ASSR i ee Tatarskogo naseleniia. B. I. Kaptelov - Glavnogo arkhivnogo upravleniia pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR E. M. Kozhevnikov. August 25, 1987.

The second operation, the deportation, lasted from May 17 until delivering deportees into special settlement by the end of June 1944. They were being deported for treason, but suspected traitors had already been arrested. The third operation began after deportation in special settlement, with the Special Settlement Division of the NKVD. As with the initial sweep of Crimea, it was the job of special settlement authorities to make sure there were no collaborators among the deportees and arrest those suspected of treason. Again, numbers from this period do not support charges of mass treason.<sup>48</sup>

Interestingly, Supreme Soviet documents also show that Roman'ko was not the first historian to defend the mass collaboration charge with the same sources and unimpressive figures. The first serious attempt came from a historian whose name appears in Supreme Soviet records as Vasilov. Throughout the first half of 1967, Vasilov compiled material to support the mass treason charge on behalf of those who did not want Crimean Tatars returning to Crimea. Vasilov based much of his argument on the fact that, at his Nuremburg Trial, Manstein testified that at the height of the battle with Crimean partisans in 1942 he had 6 active Tatar battalions and 4 more comprised of the police volunteers that could be sent to fight if needed. Moreover, he claimed to have 300 to 800 men per battalion. If one assumes an average of 500 men per battalion, the figures indicate around 5,000 people in total. It is no surprise then that when Roman'ko scoured Manstein's paper trail for collaborators he did not uncover more than roughly the same number Vasilov cited and Manstein indicated at Nuremburg.<sup>49</sup>

The Nazis certainly tried to elicit mass collaboration during the first months of occupation, even allowing the "Muslim Committees" to use the Bakchisarai Palace as a functional and symbolic headquarters of collaboration. However, by February 15, 1942, only 1,632 Crimean Tatar volunteers had been recruited in Crimea. In order to find more men, German authorities sent Crimean Tatar collaborators to search Soviet POW camps for "Crimean Tatar volunteers." This effort was essential because most working age Crimean Tatar males were in the Soviet armed forces. However, the effort only produced a few thousand more recruits, and in no way met the goal of over 10,000.<sup>50</sup> Moreover,

48 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l. 66. NKVD Chernyshov and M. Kuznetsov to Beria. October 16, 1944.

49 GARF, f. 7523, op. 101, d. 640, l. 24. Spravka "k trebovaniyam nekotorykh tatar o ikh reabilitatsii i priniatii po etomu voprosu sootvetstvuiushchego akta." Vasilova. September 1967.

50 *Nekrich* 12-22.

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anecdotal evidence suggests that some of those assigned to the "Tatar brigades" were Muslims and even non-Muslim Soviet POWs. In some cases, whole brigades of Soviet prisoners from Central Asia, the Lower Volga, and Caucasus training in Simferopol were referred to as "Tatar brigades" by occupation authorities and some partisans.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of what one believes about the exact numbers, everyone at the time, including Manstein himself, admitted that the collaboration effort failed.<sup>52</sup> Manstein and his regime were successful at quickly alienating every ethnic group on the peninsula through their actions. As 1942 turned into 1943, the recruitment failure caused Germans to implement mass violence as the primary means of governing Crimea. Many of the "volunteers" joining brigades were coerced from the beginning, and such coercion blossomed in 1943. With numbers not increasing, the SS executed Crimean Tatars such as Kandar Abbliakim, to "encourage" what men remained in his village to "volunteer." In March 1943 alone, the SS executed 60 people to set an example.<sup>53</sup>

Coercion quickly morphed into mass atrocity. Soviet postwar documents simply listed many Crimean Tatar collective farms such as "Al'minskii," "Zales'e" and "Bodany" as "destroyed by the German occupiers."<sup>54</sup> In the case of the Crimean Tatar *sovkhoses* of "Tomak" and "Chotty," the occupation authorities pillaged the farms' hardware and leveled the settlements.<sup>55</sup> In retaliation for partisan actions and other infractions, the Gestapo carried out mass executions of Crimean kolkhoz workers. One such massacre occurred in the village of Mangush on November 13, 1943 when Nazis shot over 150 people and buried them in a mass grave. Of the 96 bodies identified after the war, 29 were Crimean Tatars.<sup>56</sup> In January 1944, the Germans burnt down the Tatar villages of Argin, Baksan, and Kazal, along with the Russian villages of Efendikoi, Kutur, and Neiman, and most of the survivors joined with partisans in the mountains for the remainder of the war. Between December 1943 and January 1944 alone, the occupation authorities burned down 128 Crimean Tatar villages.<sup>57</sup>

51 *Nekrich*, 20, 27.

52 Manstein lamented his failure in August 1942. Cited in *Nekrich*, 24. From Dokumenty ministerstva inostrannykh del Germanii. Vypusk II: Germanskaia politika v Turtsii (1941-1943 gg.) (Moscow, 1946) no. 25, p. 87 (Dittmann to Tippelskrich, August 5, 1942).

53 *Nekrich*, 27.

54 GARF, f. A-259, op. 6, d. 764, l. 4.A. Gritsenko to Kosygin. October 24, 1944.

55 GARF, f. A-259, op. 6, d. 1520, l.l. 5-5ob. Gosudarstvennyi Arbitrazh pri Sovnarkome RSFSR. M. Shaliupa- Sovnarkom RSFSR. March 5, 1945.

56 *Perechen*, l. 84.

57 *Nekrich*, 24.

Soviet economic data confirms the destruction of Crimean agriculture, and thus the lively hood of 70% of the Crimean Tatar population, during the war. With supplies destroyed or confiscated by the evacuating Soviets and occupation authorities, more than half of the previously cultivated land became fallow.<sup>58</sup> As the Nazi destruction of Crimean Tatar and Russian villages and deportations of working-age individuals to the Reich accelerated in 1943, Crimean agriculture ground to a halt and harvests in Crimea declined by more than 80%.<sup>59</sup> Being poached by Nazis and partisans alike, livestock was decimated.<sup>60</sup> For the Nazis, failure of the collaboration regime meant brutal retribution and the requisition of what human and material resources remained in Crimea.

### Crimean Tatar Partisans

One important distinction the NKVD documents make that directly undermines the charge of “mass” collaboration is that, after the dual failure of Crimean partisans and the Nazi collaboration efforts in 1942, the importance of Crimean Tatars in the Crimean partisan movement only accelerated. Ramozan Al’chik Kurt-Ucherov had served as the head of resort construction for the Presidium of the Crimean ASSR until the war. Active in the underground, he became the commissar of the 17<sup>th</sup> partisan unit of the 6<sup>th</sup> Crimean Brigade on June 16, 1943 and led the unit until being wounded on February 13, 1944.<sup>61</sup> In similar fashion, Mustafa Veis Selimov, the First Secretary of the Yalta Party *Raikom* until the invasion, became a commissar of a unit in the United Southern Front of Crimean Partisans in June 1943, and served until liberation.<sup>62</sup> In the meantime, Seit-Ali Suleimanovich Ametov became commissar for the 9<sup>th</sup> partisan division until liberation.<sup>63</sup> With his family safely evacuated to the Dagestan ASSR, Refat Mustafaev lead another partisan group outside the city of Alushta.<sup>64</sup>

Crimean Tatar partisan leaders such as Abdulla Dagzhy (who acquired

58 Russian State Archive of the Economy (hereafter RGAE), f. 4372, op. 46, d. 79, ll. 39-41. Otchet “o rabote otdela opredeleniia urozhainosti s 1 iiulia 1945 goda.

59 RGAE, f. 4372, op. 46, d. 79, l. 63. Dinamika polivnykh posevov po Krymu.

60 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 44, d. 759, l. 47. Stenogramma

61 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 49. Zakliuchenie 6 apreliia, 1945.

62 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 80. Zakliuchenie 19 sentiabria, 1945.

63 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 194. Zakliuchenie 14 Ianvaria, 1947.

64 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 180, l. 140. “Spisok Krymskikh Tatar, prozhivaiushchikh na territorii Dagestanskoi ASSR.” NKVD DASSR Kom. Gosbez R. Markaian. November 3, 1944.



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the nickname "Uncle Vova") raided occupation supply and communications infrastructure. The female Crimean Tatar partisan Alima Abduennanova led the sabotage group "Sofia." Other Crimean Tatar men and women such as Aishe Karaeva, Khatidzhe Chapchakchi, Server Syrly and Tairov Iusyf joined the uptick in partisan and underground efforts.<sup>65</sup> Sixteen-year-old Akhmet Osmanovich Koliak ran away from home to join a unit in 1943.<sup>66</sup>

Not only were Crimean Tatars in the Crimean underground promoted to top partisan positions in 1943, partisan coordinators arranged for the infiltration of Crimean Tatars from the Red Army into occupied Crimea in order to reinvigorate the partisan movement. When the war began, Romazan Gafarovich joined the regular Red Army and survived his first two years on the front. In 1943, he was sought out by partisan coordinators and dropped into Crimea. He served as a regular partisan before commanding his own unit as the Soviet liberation began, receiving commendations for his service.<sup>67</sup> Dzheppar Ametovich Kolesnikov also had served in the Red Army for the first two years, in his case as a political commissar. He also infiltrated Crimea in the summer of 1943, becoming the commissar of the Third Partisan Brigade of the United Eastern Front of Crimean Partisans, fighting until liberation.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, party lists of Crimean partisans that received commendations include Crimean Tatars, and continued to do so even after the deportation. For example, a list of 180 Crimean partisans that the Crimean communist party produced *after* the deportation includes 14 Crimean Tatars and several other Crimean minorities. On another list are Ali Ibraimovich Ibraimov who received a medal on September 1, 1944 and Khamedul Ryzhapovich Akhmetov who received a medal on May 8, 1944.<sup>69</sup> Yet another list records that Abdul Dzhelil' Khairulla received a medal during the April 29-30, 1944 awards ceremonies, while the May 10, 1944 ceremony awarded Tul Kubai Urmatov and Memet

65 Open Society Archives, Budapest. Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata: Tom 12 Dokumenty o Krymskikh Tatarakh (AC No. 379-1946) Sazmizdat Archive Association Munich, Germany, 1975. AC No. 1882, pg. 10. "Neoprevezhimye fakty iz zhizni krymskikh tatar za period s 1967 po 1973 goda." January 1973.

66 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 317. Zakliuchenie 12 Noiabria, 1947.

67 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 60. Zakliuchenie 6 oktiabria, 1945.

68 GARF, f. 9479, op. 1, d. 204, l. 137. Zakliuchenie 17 janvaria, 1946.

69 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 15, d. 476, l.l. 69-77. Otchet s proizvedenom vruchennykh medalei patizanu Otechestvennoi-voiny po Krymskomu Shtabu patizanskogo dvizheniia. 14 iulia, 1944 g.

Bilialovich Molochnikov the Red Star Commendation for partisan service.<sup>70</sup>

In the decades after the war, surviving Crimean Tatar partisan fighters also identified themselves with pride in protest letters to Moscow. In a 1967 letter Izzet Khairullaev, identified himself as a “former partisan commissar,” while Ava Musliu Mova signed as a “decorated female partisan” and Mussemma Garfurova as a “female partisan.”<sup>71</sup> In fact, after the Soviet Union officially denounced Stalin’s lie in 1967, the Crimean Tatar paper in Uzbekistan, *Lenin Bayragi*, was permitted to print documents outlining Crimean Tatar partisan service.<sup>72</sup>

### Providing Evidence to Support Stalin’s False Allegations

The charges then were not based on mass treason. Stalin was a dictator and could lie with impunity. But as Soviet writers began producing wartime narratives for public consumption after 1945, Soviet leaders made sure that accounts of the war in Crimea confirmed Stalin’s false allegations of Crimean Tatar treason. To lead this effort, new Crimean party leaders turned to individuals who had the desire to capitalize on these allegations after the deportation. First and foremost they sought out A. N. Mokrousov, the disgraced partisan leader that Moscow had removed in 1942 after the partisan failure.

When the Crimean Partisan movement began, Moscow appointed Mokrousov and A. V. Martynov to organize partisan actions. Mokrousov had been a successful partisan fighter during the revolution. At the same time, Crimean Tatars, Russians and Ukrainians in the communist underground launched separate operations that focused on infiltrating Nazi attempts to create battalions. By the end of 1942 the Gestapo had decimated both the general partisan movement and the underground.

In the summer of 1942, as the occupation forces were pressing their assault on partisans, Mokrousov and Martynov alleged to Marshal Budenny that the “overwhelming majority” of Crimean Tatars in

70 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 15, d. 476, l.l. 134-135. Protokol vrucheniia ordenov i medali SSSR 29-30 aprilia 1944 goda- Pred. Prezidiuma. Ver. Sov. K. ASSR A. Kh. Menebarievym; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 15, d. 476, l.l. 136-137. Protokol vrucheniia ordenov i medali SSSR 10 maia 1944 goda- Pred. Prezidiuma.

71 GARF, f. 7523, op. 101, d. 447, l.l. 21-26. Pis'mo Krymski Tatary iz goroda Sukhumi. January 17, 1968.

72 *Fisher*, 160-161.

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mountainous regions were “following the fascists.” These accusations came after Mokrousov had lost control of several Crimean Tatar partisan units who continued to attack Axis forces outside of Alushsta.<sup>73</sup> After refusing the authority of Mokrousov and operating on their own, he accused them of deserting to the Nazis. Many Crimean Tatar partisans did not condone Mokrousov's tactics to solve supply issues, and Crimean Tatar partisans in a 1957 letter claimed that often he simply did not let Crimean Tatars join his partisan units. Under Mokrousov's command partisan activities were often little more than the mass robbery of village livestock and foodstuffs, causing serious public relations problems.<sup>74</sup> Crimean Tatar partisans were often ordered to rob their own villages.

The bad blood devolved into an ugly situation by the late spring of 1942. When occupation forces destroyed several Crimean Tatar villages for providing men and supplies to partisans, several hundred Crimean Tatars civilians and a number of Crimean Tatar partisans took to the forest and sought to join Mokrousov's partisans. According to both Crimean Tatar accounts and the account of another Russian partisan, A. Ia. Olekha, Mokrousov refused to join with the groups and left the Crimean Tatars to be hunted and executed by the Gestapo. These victims included prominent Crimean Tatar leaders such as Abdurefi Seyt-Iagi (the former president of the Crimean ASSR Supreme Soviet), Asan Seferov, and Nuri Asmanov. Other allegations against Mokrousov and Martinov include reprisals against Russian and Tatar villagers who aided Crimean Tatar partisans not under his control.<sup>75</sup>

In the mean time, Crimean Tatars and the Crimean Obkom countered the allegations by providing evidence that Crimean Tatar villagers had aided partisan infiltration efforts throughout 1942. Even Manstein himself recalled fighting sixteen Crimean Tatar partisan brigades of around one hundred men each at the height of the anti-partisan campaign in 1942. The partisan failure was the result of, first and foremost, a sustained anti-partisan campaign by the Nazis. Mokrousov failed to sustain partisan efforts and angered Crimean Tatar partisans and even other Russian partisans. Moscow never bought his excuse, removing both Mokrousov and Martynov from their positions.<sup>76</sup> Yes, this

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<sup>73</sup> Nekrich, 26.

<sup>74</sup> Fisher, 160.

<sup>75</sup> Nekrich, 26-29.

<sup>76</sup> Gulnara Bekirova, *Krymskotatarskaia Problema v SSSR, 1944-1991* (Simferopol: Odzhak", 2004), 23.

campaign was aided by collaboration, but this was the case throughout every region the Nazis occupied. Furthermore, partisan failures were sometimes the sole fault of partisans themselves. Timofei Grigorevich Kaplun, the Commissar of the Karasubazar partisan division, got so drunk with the Sudak partisan commander one evening at the Sudak headquarters that their merrymaking gave away their position to a nearby Romanian patrol.<sup>77</sup> As already discussed, part of the correction to the failure was placing more Crimean Tatars, both partisans already on the peninsula and those infiltrated in, into leadership positions.

The fact was after May 1944 the history of the war in Crimea was going to have to be crafted to fit Stalin's allegation. This project turned out to be Mokrousov's ticket back into Moscow's good graces. After the deportation, both the KPSS and Crimean party renounced the earlier dismissal of Mokrousov and declared that, in fact, his allegations of Crimean Tatar mass treason were right after all. The problem for the party was how could they then use a rehabilitated Mokrousov to push this line? They quickly found the solution in the Crimean tourism industry, more specifically in the Crimean branch of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (hereafter VTsSPS). Becoming the director of the excursion and tourism division, it became Mokrousov's job to promote historical texts and accounts of the war that defamed Crimean Tatars in every way possible.

At first, the excursion writers used blanket commendations of Crimean Tatars. In excursion texts approved by Mokrousov, excursion writers declared that Crimean Tatars had always been "enemies of the Russian people and the proletarian revolution," repeated verbatim Stalin's accusation of treason, and proclaimed that the war in Crimea had been against both "fascists and Tatar traitors."<sup>78</sup> Crimean publishing houses in Simferopol soon repeated these lines, as with the 1949 "Crimean Almanac" that described all Crimean Tatars as "lazy," "parasitic," and "traitorous."<sup>79</sup> But the false allegations did cause a problem. As is evident in a correspondence between Mokrousov and his bosses, Moscow was nervous because Crimean materials were claiming "all Crimean Tatars were traitors since the very beginning of the war."<sup>80</sup> The

77 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 44, d. 763, l. 72. Protokol No. 57

78 GARF, f. 9520, op. 1, d. 153, l.l. 12, 19. VTsSPS, Metodicheskaya razrabotka ekskursia sevodya i budushi. I. Kirrilov, March 19, 1949; GARF, f. 9520, op. 1, d. 153, l.l. 39-40. Turpokhoda na goru "Chatir-Dag." Kirrilov. November 19, 1948.

79 *Al'manakh Krym*, No. 3 (Simferopol: 1949), 218-220.

80 GARF, f. 9520, op. 1, d. 153, l. 119. Pis'mo Nachal'nik Tur-Eks. Upravlenie VTsSPS G. Kosilov i Zav. Metodicheskomo Sektorom E. Supina- A. V. Mokrousov. March 3, 1950.

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reason for Moscow's apprehension was simple. Aside from blanket condemnations, no one had made an effort to censor the reality of the war in Crimea, erasing Crimean Tatar service and exaggerating Crimean Tatar collaboration. As displayed in the Soviet documents discussed earlier in this paper, evidence that Crimean Tatars were not mass collaborators is overwhelming.

Subsequently, the most important part of Mokrousov's job became getting Crimean partisans to write personal narratives of the war that supported Stalin's allegation. In 1949 Mokrousov tapped partisan veteran Il'ia Zakharovich Vergasov to pen his experiences for use in the Crimean tourism industry and other publications. Thus began the career of the Soviet Union's most virulently anti-Crimean Tatar popular writer who would present the false allegations of mass treason to the Soviet public for decades to come. In a 1971 publication he would go so far as to claim to have personally leveled Crimean Tatar villages. Therefore, Vergasov's 55-page account of Crimean partisan warfare, written in 1949, stands as one of the most extraordinary documents on partisan warfare in Crimea. The document is significant because it does not provide any evidence of overwhelming Crimean Tatar collaboration. In fact it does the opposite, echoing the complicated reasons for partisan failure, the participation of Crimean Tatars in the Crimean underground, the collaboration of small numbers of both Slavic and Muslim Crimeans, and even confirming the failure of Manstein's effort at recruiting Tatar brigades.<sup>81</sup>

While he begins the text praising Mokrousov, he goes on to list partisan units he commanded from Crimean Tatar mountain villages such as Kacha-Biiuk and Uzen. He then says that even during the worst of the German onslaught in 1942 villagers still helped them. In fact, he kept his headquarters in the Tatar village of Laki. He said that there were villagers that the Germans had collected into "volunteer" units, but that many of the villagers were on their side. He even claimed that some members of the local "Muslim committee" were assisting their operation. Other Tatar villages such as Chair, Makur and Stil provided food and treated wounded partisans. Moreover, Vergasov describes how his partisan units had nominal control over the Crimean Tatar villages of Beshui, Sabil, and Uzenbash and credits the villagers with "not allowing the Germans to operate" on their territory.<sup>82</sup>

81 GARF, f. 9520, op. 1, d. 136, l.l. 1-55. Stenogramma leksii podpolkovnika I. Z. Vergasova: "Krymskie Partizany.." 1949.

82 Ibid., 1-55.

While Vergasov certainly discusses collaboration, he gives no blanket condemnation of Crimean Tatars. Out of the four individual traitors that he most despises, there are three Russians (one his own partisan), and one Tatar. He describes the cooperation of some Tatars not as mass, but rather coming from some “elements,” mainly “reactionaries and nationalists” from the “old order of mountain villages” that had housed resistance to Soviet power in 1918. At the same time he described fighting recruits from the Russian Liberation Army (ROA). While attributing some issues to treason, he indicated that the general partisan failure was organizational, especially with their supply dumps. The Axis troops used this oversight to their advantage, leaving the partisans undersupplied and isolated in mountainous regions. This assessment corresponds with the evidence that Mokrousov simply lost control of many partisan brigades as the enemy pressed their assault from December 1941 through much of 1942.<sup>83</sup>

The most stunning revelation, especially given Vergasov’s later accounts, is that he confirms the failure of the occupation forces to illicit mass collaboration of Crimean Tatars through the Muslim committees and brigades of Tatar “self-defense units.” He admitted that when some villages were surrounded by German forces they might “help” Germans. But then he scoffed at the German effort of organizing Tatar brigades: “Volunteer units were formed, under the holy Muslim committee that was based in the Bakchisarai palace. All of this, of course, was a myth and later the Germans dissolved the committee.” Taken as a whole, Vergasov’s summary of Crimean partisan warfare aligns with NKVD documents and Crimean Tatar accounts. But why did his account fundamentally change in the coming decades? The answer is simple. Mokrousov took the transcript of Vergasov’s account and, with a pen, edited out the parts on the failure of Crimean Tatar collaboration and other positive information on Crimean Tatars. All that was left was those who collaborated.<sup>84</sup>

This is just one document, but the man who would become the most prominent partisan writer providing evidence of Crimean Tatar treason wrote it. Moreover, the Crimean partisan commander who not only created the myth of Crimean Tatar mass collaboration, but also had the job of popularizing the myth, censored it. As Mokrousov and his staff edited partisan accounts to exaggerate Crimean Tatar collaboration, he

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 1-55.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 1-55.

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established a body of work that by the early 1950s, in the words of Crimean Tatar activists, “systematically poisoned the consciences of Soviet citizens that travel to Crimea for treatment and relaxation with the shameful accounts in excursion guides, tourist materials, and racist and nationalistic books.”<sup>85</sup> The falsified accounts of Vergasov and Mokrusov's other writers became very specific. For example, in lectures and his 1959 book *In the Mountains of Tavridia: Notes of a Partisan (V Gorakh Tavrii: Zapiski Partizana)*, Vergasov singled out the decorated partisan Bekir Osmanov and said that instead of being a loyal Soviet, he was executed as a traitor.<sup>86</sup>

False allegations as specific as the one against Bekir Osmanov are easy to expose with archival evidence. Osmanov was a partisan leader and the KPSS recognized his service in 1943 and 1944 in a formal ceremony along with other Crimean partisan leaders. And this happened *after* he had supposedly been “executed for treason.”<sup>87</sup> The charge was almost comical because the Osmanov was still alive and a party member in the 1960s. Osmanov became so incensed that he traveled to Crimea to confront Vergasov personally and wrote specific letters to the Supreme Soviet.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, these efforts fell on deaf ears, and Vergasov's 1971 book, *Krymskie tetrady (Crimean Notebooks)*, continued the charade.<sup>89</sup>

Thus Mokrusov and Vergasov established the tone and method for exculpating Crimean Tatars from the Crimean partisan effort, and by the 1960s this effort escalated into denials of Crimean Tatars participating in the Red Army and receiving medals. When the Crimean publisher “Krymizdat” published a collection of stories of “Hero of the Soviet Union” winners who were born in Crimea, only one Crimean Tatar (two-time Hero of the Soviet Union Akhmet Sultan) was among the 46 included. Crimean Tatar activists also savaged this publication, correctly noting that Abduraim Reshitov, Abdul Treifuk, Bekir Mustafaeovich, Seitnafa Seitveliev, Uzeir Abduramanov and 11 other Crimean Tatars

85 GARF, f. 7523, op. 101, d. 447, l. 47. Pis'mo Sovetskikh grazhdan Krymskikh Tatar, vernuvshikhsia na svoiu rodinyu zemliu- v Krym posle 23 letnogo izganiia i “reabilitatsii” po ukazu ot 5 sentiabrai 1967 goda. January 23, 1968.

86 *Perechen*, l.l. 75-76.

87 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 15, d. 476, l.l. 69-77. Otchet s proizvedenom vruchennykh medalei patizanu Otechestvennoi-voiny po Krymskomu Shtabu patizanskogo dvizheniia- pri Nachalnik' Krymskogo Shtab patizanskogo dvizheniia po kadram-Maior Skrebets. 14 iulia, 1944 g.

88 *Perechen*, l. 75.

89 See I. Vergasov. *Krymskie tetrady* (Moscow, 1971), 260-64; *Nekrich*, 29.

received the medal.<sup>90</sup> Their exclusion from such publications was intentional and persistent until the late 1980s. Because of this, one must consider other partisan accounts of the war written in Crimea with extreme caution.

### Conclusion

Soviet officials made this effort to conceal Crimean Tatar service during the war because the evidence to the contrary was overwhelming. As this study has demonstrated, Soviet documents support a counter narrative to Stalin's charges by providing individual examples of Crimean Tatar wartime experiences. In addition, accompanying statistics support what Crimean Tatars had argued since 1944: the charge of mass collaboration was a false allegation. Stalin created this falsification of Crimean Tatar mass treason, and the propaganda of Mokrousov, Vergasov and their accomplices helped legitimize it by framing the myth of Crimean Tatar mass collaboration in the narrative of Crimean liberation and fascist defeat.

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However, Stalin's false allegation of Crimean Tatar mass treason was never accepted as fact by many important parties, and only became more difficult to sustain after his death. This contradiction meant that after the initial atrocity, the survivors in special settlement could still navigate the state to achieve a form of social mobility becoming *Komsomol* members and KPSS members, as well as collect pensions and even vote in the 1946 Soviet elections. At the forefront of this group were Crimean Tatar veterans who would begin petitioning for rehabilitation only a month after deportation. By the late 1950s these veterans were the vanguard of the Crimean Tatar movement for full rehabilitation and return to Crimea and constantly used their indisputable service during the war to demand the attention of the Soviet state. It was largely through their efforts that the Crimean Tatar return movement became the longest, largest, and most organized protest movement in the Soviet Union.

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90 See *Zvezdy nemerknushcei slavy* (Simferopol: Krymizdat, 1967). For the Crimean Tatar response to this publication see the Open Society Archives, Budapest. *Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata: Tom 12 Dokumenty o Krymskikh Tatarakh* (AC No. 379-1946) Sazmizdat Archive Association Munich, Germany, 1975. AC No. 1882, pg. 10. "Neopreverzhimye fakty iz zhizni krymskikh tatar za period s 1967 po 1973 goda." January 1973.



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