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## THE PARTICIPATION OF KAZAKHS OF THE 131<sup>ST</sup> LIGHT ARTILLERY REGIMENT IN THE DEFENSE OF THE BREST FORTRESS IN 1941

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper analyzes the main events of defense of the Brest Fortress on June 22-29, 1941, and for the first time in post-Soviet history lays bare the heroic actions of Kazakhs of the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment, participated in the defense. The use of diverse sources, including archival data from Kazakhstan, Germany and the Brest Fortress itself, memories of participants helped the author to obtain the whole picture of the events. Besides, the author managed to find the individual's record files of Kazakhstani draftees that allow a more profound analysis of officers and soldiers' deeds, ranks and losses of the regiment.*

**Keywords:** 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment, 45<sup>th</sup> Division, the Brest Fortress, the Red Army, Kazakhstan, 1941

## LA PARTECIPAZIONE DEI KAZAKI DEL 131° REGGIMENTO D'ARTIGLIERIA LEGGERA NELLA DIFESA DELLA FORTEZZA DI BREST

### SINTESI

*Il saggio analizza i principali eventi che riguardarono la difesa della Fortezza di Brest nei giorni tra il 22 e il 29 giugno 1941 e per la prima volta nella storia post-sovietica mette in evidenza le azioni dei kazaki del 131° reggimento d'artiglieria leggera che parteciparono alla difesa. Per ottenere un quadro esaustivo degli eventi l'autore si era avvalso di varie fonti, tra queste quelle conservate negli archivi in Kazakistan, Germania e della stessa Fortezza di Brest, inoltre delle memorie dei partecipanti. L'autore è riuscito, infine, a trovare i documenti individuali dei coscritti del Kazakistan che offrono l'opportunità di un'analisi ancora più approfondita delle attività, dei gradi militari e delle perdite tra gli ufficiali e la truppa.*

**Parole chiave:** 131° reggimento d'artiglieria leggera, 45a divisione, fortezza di Brest, armata rossa, Kazakistan, 1941

## INTRODUCTION

The defense of the Brest Fortress that got to be a symbol of Soviet soldiers' resistance came to pass on June 22–29, 1941. In 1965 the Brest Fortress was awarded the title of Hero Fortress for these events. However, despite hundreds of books and articles published both in former Soviet countries and abroad, revealing the heroism and courage of Soviet soldiers as well as the decisive contribution of the Soviet Union in the defeat of the Axis powers, there are still white spots to be discovered and discussed. For instance, very little is known about the role and the participation of Kazakhstani draftees served in the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment in the defense of the fortress. Therefore, this paper is aimed at depicting the actions of Kazakhstani combatants of the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment and conducting a comprehensive study of the defense of the Brest Fortress on the basis of new archival documents and other sources.

The main objectives of the paper are: (1) to determine the USSR policy concerning the draft to the Red Army, the formation of national divisions and other aspects in focus of ethnicity, (2) to give a brief review of the main event of the defense of the Brest Fortress, and (3) to identify the names, the number and track the military fate of Kazakhstani soldiers of the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment.

To reveal the abovementioned goal and objectives we used a wide range of sources. First, it is the individual's record file of Kazakhstani draftees, kept in the Museum of the Brest Fortress (Zatsepin et al.), and archives of Kazakhstani military commissariats. Second, it involves documents of the Wehrmacht, comprising orders, reports, etc. (Römer, 2008). Thus, the Soviet people learned the details of the Brest Fortress capture only after the defeat of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in February 1942, when Soviet military command took the division's archive, including the "Battle Report about the Capture of Brest-Litovsk" (Hartmann, 2010, 792). Third, it is books, articles and monographs written by Russian, Belarusian, German, British and American historians. In this regard, we should mention the works of Christian Ganzer, a Professor of the University of Leipzig, who in close cooperation with colleagues from Russia and Belarus, deeply researches various issues related to the defense of the Brest Fortress (Ganzer et al., 2011, 37–47). Besides, the range of publications about the Brest Fortress has expanded largely thanks to the translation of Wehrmacht's documents and materials into Russian by R. Aliev (2010), Y. Fomin (2010), V. Beshanov (2011) and others. In addition, we used legal acts of the USSR and Nazi Germany concerning the general issues of the World War II and studies related to the most distinguished battles of the war, where Kazaks also took part (Roberts, 2012).

The chronological scope of the study covers the period from September 22, 1939 when Brest and the Brest Fortress were handed over to the USSR, to June 29, 1941

when the fortress was officially captured by the Nazi invaders.

The paper is based on the principles of historicism, scientific certainty, which alongside with the system approach permit to lay bare and analyze a unique historical phenomenon – the defense of the Brest Fortress in a spatiotemporal context. While working with documents, we sought to carry out a comprehensive and critical analysis of historical sources, determining the degree of their representativeness (reliability and accuracy), as well as to identify specific forms and nature of the distorting influence on historical information of political, ideological and corporate interests. We believe that the extensive range of accumulated sources allows conducting a full-fledged scientific research and formulating sound conclusions based on a variety of concrete historical material.

## USSR MILITARY POLICY OF MOBILIZATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF RED ARMY SOLDIERS

The Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on June 23, 1941 declared the mobilization of the persons *liable for military service* born between 1905–1918 in Leningrad, Baltic, Western, Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, Orel, Moscow, Arkhangelsk, Ural, Siberian, Volga, North Caucasus and Transcaucasus Military Districts (RSMA, I.210-221). In Trans-Baikal, Central Asia and the Far East Military Districts mobilization was announced a month later by such a special government decree in a covert way as "*large civilian combat trainings*".

General and complete mobilization of men and partial mobilization of women was carried out in June and July, 1941. By that time, the class restrictions established by the Compulsory Military Service Act (1925) had already been lifted. In accordance with the Act, military service in Soviet *Armed Forces* was *strongly* prohibited to the so-called "persons of the exploiting classes", like children of former noblemen, merchants, and officers of the Imperial army, priests, manufacturers, Cossacks and the kulaks (USSR Law of September 18, 1925).

In addition, following the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on mobilization, the Red Army began to replenish the troops with the reservists. Nevertheless, the huge irreparable losses of the first months of the war required more and more soldiers. By the beginning of 1942 the conscription into the Red Army had already been provided by draftees born in 1923–1925. In 1941–1945, during the entire period of the war 34.5 million people were drafted to the military service (Barber and Harrison, 2015, 22). More than 4.5 million Ukrainians and 1 million Belarusians joined the *Red Army* to fight Nazi Germany (Fedor et al., 2017). Kazakh SSR formed, trained and sent to the front fourteen rifle and cavalry divisions, and six brigades (Omarov et al., 2015, 10).

The Kazakhs defended the Brest Fortress, took part in the battles for Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, etc. In the battle for Moscow soldiers of Panfilov's Division under the command of Senior Lieutenant B. Momyschuly showed exceptional courage and heroism (Nagorski, 2008, 73). A group of submachine-gunners headed by the political instructor Malik Gabdullin, after destroying enemy tanks, took 12 fascists as military prisoners. Malik Gabdullin was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Military units, formed in Kazakhstan, fought for Leningrad. 156 soldiers from Kazakhstan served on the battlecruiser "Kirov" that provided gunfire support during the Siege of Leningrad (Belan, 1973, 14). The famous sniper of 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Duisenbay Shynybekov fought on the Oranienbaum bridgehead (Pleysier, 2008, 161).

Kazakhstan was the closest rear of the Stalingrad Front. Therefore, when in the autumn of 1942 the invaders fought their way into *Stalingrad* against fierce resistance of Soviet soldiers, the resources of the West Kazakhstan region were widely used to gain the victory. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Guards Division, commanded by Colonel Gani Safiullin, destroyed 120 enemy tanks and 800 vehicles (Roberts, 2012, 81).

The 38<sup>th</sup> Alma-Ata Infantry Division distinguished itself in the Battle of Stalingrad as well. I. Aitykov and K. Aukhadiev were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. A fighter pilot Sergei Lugansky, who personally shot down 37 enemy bombers, pilots of attack planes, Talgat Begeldinov, Leonid Beda and Ivan Pavlov, who carried out more than 200 sorties each, destroyed more than a dozen planes, tanks and materiel and killed several hundred fascists were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union twice (Roberts, 2012, 103).

Thousands of Kazakhstanis took part in *liberation* operations of Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia, the *Baltic Republics*, the countries of Eastern Europe. *Aftertheend of the war* in Europe Kazakhstan soldiers fought the Kwantung Army (Omarov et al., 2015).

A peculiar feature of recruitment to the army was that along with the persons liable for military service, thousands of volunteers "attacked" military commissariats with applications for sending them to the armed forces. In 1941, local party organizations of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, Minsk and some other cities initiated the creation of about 60 divisions of the people's militia, 200 separate regiments, and a large number of battalions, companies, platoons and detachments. These voluntary formations included about 2 million people (Glantz, 2005, 561).

On November 13, 1941, the State Defense Committee decided to form national divisions in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Kalmykia, Bashkiria, Checheno-Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and in the Cossack areas of the Don and the North Caucasus (Podpryatov, 2010, 190). It is interesting that all these divisions were to be kept at the expense of lo-

cal, republican budgets, special and voluntary funds. However, it was impossible to follow these plans, since some recruits, e.g. from Central Asia, did not know the Russian language nor did they study military matters properly. Furthermore, the formation of such divisions as Chechen-Ingush, Kabardino-Balkar and additional Cossack, was a mistake, since a significant part of the population of these territories collaborated with the Axis powers. According to the data presented by Section for *Combating Banditry* of the NKVD, there were 109 anti-Soviet gangs in the territory of the Stavropol region, 54 in the Chechen-Ingush region, 47 in the Kabardino-Balkaria, and 12 in the Kalmykia (Schneider, 2015, 52). In addition, there were a lot of deserters and those who evaded the military service. Their total number, according to the Section for *Combating Banditry* of the NKVD, was about 1.6 million people.

As for the northern peoples of the USSR, the Yakuts, Nenets or Evenks were often sent to combined arms units. By a special decree of the State Defense Committee the small peoples of the North were not drafted to the army. Nevertheless, hundreds of volunteers wished to fight against Nazi invaders. Thus, during 1942, more than 200 Nanaians, 30 Orochos, and about 80 Evenks left for the front. In total, more than 3 thousand aboriginals of Siberia and the North fought in the armed forces.

On October 13, 1943, the State Defense Committee adopted Decree GOKO-4322ss, declaring that there would be no further conscripts from Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republics, Dagestan, Chechen-Ingush, Kabardino-Balkarian, North Ossetia Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and Adygea, Karachaev and Cherkess autonomous regions (Postanovlenie GKO SSSR N. GOKO-4322ss ot 13 oktyabrya 1943 g.).

#### A SHORT HISTORICAL OBSERVATION OF THE DEFENSE OF THE BREST FORTRESS

The Brest Fortress, the largest defensive building in the west of Russia, was laid on June 1, 1836, under the leadership of Major-General I.I. Den. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at a distance of up to 4 km from each other and from the Citadel there were erected a ring of 9 outlying forts. The total length of the frontal line, intended to restrain the enemy on the approaches to the fortress, was about 30 km. In 1913, the construction of the second ring of fortifications was begun, which was supposed to have a circumference of 45 km, but the First World War prevented the implementation of these plans. After signing here on March 3, 1918, the separate Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which marked the defeat and withdrawal of Soviet Russia from the First World War, the fortress passed into the hands of the Germans, and then of the Poles. Only on September 22, 1939 Brest and the Brest Fortress was handed over to the USSR in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Nichtangriffsvertrag



Zwischen Deutschland und der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken, 23. August 1939).

At the beginning of summer of 1941 the garrison in the fortress comprised 8 rifle and 1 reconnaissance battalions, 2 artillery battalions (anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery guns), 6<sup>th</sup> Orel and 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division of 28<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, units of 17<sup>th</sup> Brest Frontier Detachment, 33<sup>rd</sup> separate Engineering Regiment, several divisions of 132<sup>nd</sup> Separate NKVD Battalion, and medical unit (Ganzerand Paškovič., 2010, 81–96). On the eve of the war more than half of the units of 6<sup>th</sup> Orel and 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Divisions were sent to annual camp trainings out of the Brest Fortress. These units included 10 out of 18 rifle battalions, 3 out of 4 artillery regiments, anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery battalions, reconnaissance battalions, and some other units. Thus, on the morning of June 22, 1941, there were to be 10,774 personnel in the fortress. But in fact the number of soldiers in the units was significantly lower than it must be, thus about 9,300 regular soldiers and officers, border guards and NKVD operatives stayed in the fortress.

The Brest Fortress was located in the path of German Army Group Centre, moving into the territory of the USSR in accordance with Operation Barbarossa plan, so the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps had the task to take the Brest Fortress within the first day. The total staff strength of this division was 17,700 soldiers and officers, its combat units comprised 15,100, including 10,500 infantry, artillerymen and sappers (Gschöpf, 2002, 14).

Analyzing the opposing forces, one should take into account not only the number of soldiers and material. The Soviet units defending the fortress, in fact, did not even know that the war had begun. Stalin delivered a speech by radio to the Soviet population only on July 3, 1941, when the fortress was captured. In addition, the Germans strictly followed a clear plan of action; while the Soviet soldiers neither received directives from the high command nor knew what was happening on the neighboring spots of the border.

As the fortress was surrounded with forests, swamps and river channels the command of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division decided to take it only by infantry without tanks or planes. The immediate task of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division was to capture the Brest Fortress, a railway bridge across the Bug River northwest of the fortress and several bridges across the Bug and Mukhovets rivers inside, to the south and east of the fortress. By the end of June 22, the division was to advance 7–8 kilometers into the Soviet territory.

Wehrmacht started the attack with a 29-minute shelling with artillery at 3:15 in the morning Berlin time (Fig. 1). Every 4 minutes the artillery fire was moved 100 meters to the east. At 3:19 the assault detachment in 9 inflatable boats headed to capture the bridges. At 3:30 German Infantry Company supported by sappers took the railway bridge across the Bug River. By 4:00 the detachment captured two bridges connecting West and



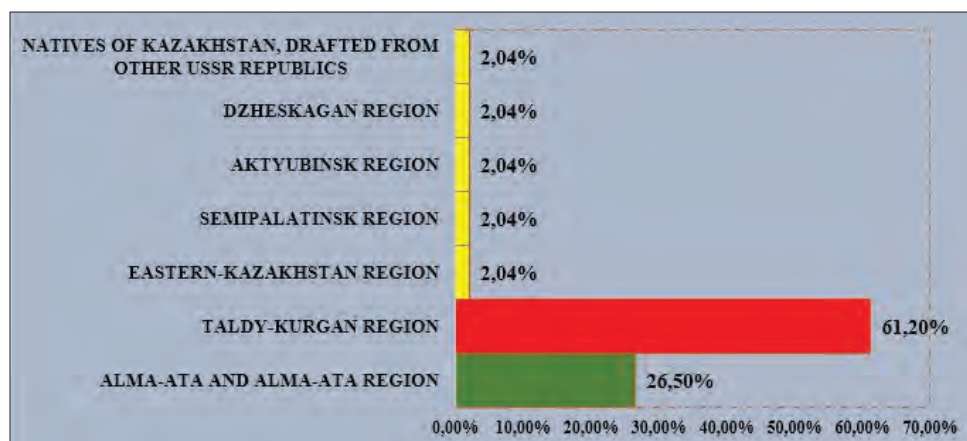
**Fig. 1: Artillery Shelling on June 22, 1941** (<https://military.wikireading.ru/7957>)

South Islands with the Citadel. The islands, defended only by border guards and NKVD battalion, had been seized by 4:00 as well.

At 6:23 the headquarters of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division reported to the High Command that the Northern Island of the Brest Fortress would soon be taken. The report stated that the resistance of the Soviet troops increased, but the situation was under control. However, later on the reserve 133<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment was sent into the battle. By that time, two out of five German battalion commanders had been killed and the regiment commander had been seriously wounded.

At 10:50 the headquarters of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division wrote about the great losses and stubborn battles in the fortress. The report said that the fierce resistance of the Soviets continued. In the Citadel, Soviet infantry units managed to organize the defense with support of 35–40 tanks and armored cars. The fire of enemy snipers led to great losses among officers and non-commissioned officers. In general, on June 22, 1941 21 Wehrmacht officers, about 290 soldiers and non-commissioned officers died the first day in the fighting for the Brest Fortress (Ganzer, 2014, 450).

At the very beginning of the Nazi attack, Soviet defenders were unable to form a solid front, thus defending isolated strongpoints, like the fortress itself, barracks, islands, etc. They did not have headquarters and high command, communication and interaction with the other defenders. The defense was headed by commanders and political workers, and even by privates, who assumed command. At night of June 23, Germans began shelling, forcing the garrison to surrender. Approximately 1,900 combatants surrendered. Later on that day the remaining defenders of the fortress succeeded, including troops of the 455<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and a troop of so-called "Officers' House", to link up and coordinate their deeds under the command of Lieutenant A.A. Vinogradov, Captain I.N. Zubachev, Regimental Commissar E.M. Fomin, Senior Lieutenant N.F. Shcherbakov and Lieutenant A.K. Shugurov. At 5am on June 23 the Ger-



*Fig. 2: The percentage of draftees from different Kazakhstan regions*

mans began shelling the Citadel. But on the same day, the besieged on the Central Island discovered two large armament depots with a great number of Degtyarev sub-machine guns, mortars and ammunition. Defenders of the fortress began to shell the enemy's positions to the south of the Citadel. In the darkness several groups of the besieged tried to escape from the fortress. As on the eve, all their attempts ended in failure. Many soldiers died or were captured (Nagorski, 2008).

On June 24, the fortress defenders still controlled the Central Island, and the eastern part of the North Island. The shelling continued the whole day. At 4 pm, the headquarters of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division reported that the Citadel had been taken. At 9:40 pm the headquarters of the Corps reported about the complete capture of the Brest Fortress. However, individual soldiers and even small groups of the Soviet soldiers kept fighting on different spots of the fortress (Nagorski, 2008).

The main center of resistance on the North Island was the Eastern Fort that was defended by 400 combatants led by Major Peter Gavrilov. On June 26, the defenders under the command of Lieutenant A.A. Vinogradov, who had concentrated in the northern barracks of the Citadel, decided to break out from the fortress. Later on this day A.A. Vinogradov troop was surrounded by Germans. A.A. Vinogradov and several privates were captured. Attempts to break out from the Central Island continued on June 27 and 28. They were also terminated due to large losses.

Once the East Fort could not be taken the commander of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division turned to the Luftwaffe for support. At 8:00 am on June 29 the German bomber dropped 2,500 and 1,800-kilogram bombs on the Eastern Fort, which was practically destroyed. The bombing forced 389 soldiers to surrender (Ganzer, 2017, 198). On June 30, the headquarters of the 45th Division reported about the complete capture of the fortress again.

However, if we analyze all the available data, it is worth noting that, having declared the full capture of

the fortress on June 30, the command of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division was a bit mistaken. According to official Soviet data, resistance in the fortress continued for some more weeks. A small group of soldiers, headed by P.M. Gavrilov, continued to fight in the Eastern Fort until July 23. The resistance of individual Soviet combatants in the fortress casemates lasted until August 1941. To eliminate the resistance of Soviet armed forces the German High Command gave orders to flood the cellars of the Brest fortress with water from the Western Bug River (Axell, 2002, 39–40).

#### KAZAKH SOLDIERS OF THE 131ST LIGHT ARTILLERY REGIMENT: PARTICIPANTS, NUMBER, AND VALUE

Among the defenders of the Brest Fortress in June 1941 there were fighters of the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment (LAR), part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The creation of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR, as well as of a number of other divisions was caused by the reunification of the western regions of Ukraine and Belorussia. The Division was established in September 1939 in Orel on the basis of the 6<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment and became part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Orel Red Banner Rifle Division, which participated in the liberation campaign in Western Belorussia. The personnel of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR showed high stamina, organizational skills and military discipline in that campaign. In November 1939, the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR was located near the Brest Fortress (Fomin, 2010, 26).

Before the outbreak of the war, the Brest Fortress housed the regiment headquarters and staff divisions, one fire division, regimental school, stables, warehouse of clothing service. They were located 100 meters from the western shaft of the Kobrin fortification. The artillery park of the regiment was closer to the garrison cemetery. The 2<sup>nd</sup> division was located in "Graf Berg" Fort 500 meters from the fortress, behind the railway. The 3<sup>rd</sup> division was disbanded and transferred to the 204<sup>th</sup> Howitzer Artillery Regiment. On June 1, 1941, 786 soldiers



**Fig. 3a: The ruins of location of the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment (Aliev & Ryzhov, 2013, 66)**



**Fig. 3b: The ruins of location of the 131<sup>st</sup> Light Artillery Regiment (Aliev & Ryzhov, 2013, 58)**

and officers were enlisted in the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR, but like all the units stationed in the Brest Fortress, not all privates of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR were there on the night of June 21–22, 1941 (The Brest Fortress, 1963).

On the night of June 22, 1941, one battery of the 1<sup>st</sup> fire division and two batteries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> fire division were withdrawn to participate in the demonstration of materiel and military exercises at Brest Artillery Range near the Southern township. Therefore, only about 500 personnel of the regiment stayed on the territory of the fortress (Fomin, 2010, 26). According to our information (Fomin, 2010), 49 combatants out of this number were drafted into the Red Army from Kazakhstan. In addition, 11 Kazakhstans of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR fought with Nazi invaders near the city of Brest.

The graph (Fig. 2) shows the number of draftees from this or that region of Kazakhstan.

Thus, the vast majority of soldiers of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR were summoned from the Taldy-Kurgan region, 30 people or 61.2% of the regiment's personnel. Defending the fortress, 32 Kazakhstans were killed, 8 managed to break out of the fortress and continue the war on other fronts, 9 people were taken in captivity, 5 of them were brutally tortured and died in prisoner-of-war camps.

The attack on the fortress was so unexpected and well-prepared that the deputy commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the political part, the regimental commissar M.P. But in wrote in his report to the commander of the 4th Army about the huge losses of personnel, died or captured, and the destroying of the materiel of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR.

According to Gabdilhak Valishanov, the commander of one of the reconnaissance detachments of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR, the 131<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the 6th Infantry Division was located on the outer circumference of the fortress along the bank of the Western Bug River and only a 100-meter strip of water separated the regiment from the advanced units of the German army (RMCBHF, 98), which at dawn on June 22, 1941 forced the Bug River in inflatable boats. Having received an order to break out from the fortress, the commanders of the 131<sup>st</sup> Regiment decided

to move east towards Brest, as in the north there was the railway, occupied by the invaders, in the south there was the western shaft of the Kobrin fortification and the western part was washed by the river.

The Russian researcher Y. Fomin notes the transience and extreme intensity of the battles in the location of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR near the Brest Fortress. The battles lasted about two hours (The Brest Fortress, 1963). Knowing the location of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR, the surprise attack of the enemy and other factors, we will try to restore these events, based on the memories of Kazakhstani combatants, who participated in the defense of the Brest Fortress.

The scatteredness of the Soviet units weakened their fighting capacity and adversely affected their actions both near Brest and during the defense of the Brest Fortress. In addition, commanders, many staff officers and the military units were in fortified areas or in camp trainings. From the very first days of the war, the whole territory of the fortress was subjected to massive air shelling. Many sections were shot through with machine-gun fire. Heavy fire was directed at the barracks and houses, parks and tethering, bridges and gates leading to the fortress (Fig. 3 a, b).

However, the defenders of the fortress managed to do almost impossible – to withdraw from the fortress a significant part of the personnel, who later on joined the 6<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Divisions (Aliev & Britton, 2013, 107).

The radiomaster of the headquarters battery platoon Mikhail Dimurin, drafted into the Soviet Army from Alma-Ata in 1939, recalls that during the shelling one shell fell into the club. He was wounded in the side with the ruins of the building. The assistant to the commander of the reconnaissance squad of the headquarters battery, senior sergeant Konstantin Ovsyannikov, also drafted into the army from Alma-Ata, helped to bandage his wound, however M. Dimurin *passed out from extreme pain*. He came to himself in the rank, surrounded by the Germans. His comrades supported him on both sides. 13 soldiers of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR were taken in captivity (Shahov, 1967, 167–168).

Mikhail Dimurin survived in the inhuman conditions of the German concentration camps Bialo Podlaska, Nuremberg, Buchenwald and Stuhof, despite numerous beatings, famine and bullying. In May 1945, British airplanes fired at military prisoners in Hamburg port. M. Dimurin miraculously managed to escape. After treatment in a hospital in Denmark, he returned to his homeland. The film-mechanic of the club, private Alexei Sevostyanov, privates Nurlibay Sabirbayev and Tastan Bimoldinov and the cadet of the top-ranking platoon of the regimental school Ilya Ananyin were released from captivity. The fire commander, sergeant Ivan Fisenko, privates Anatoly Fesenko, Yakov Borovkov, Semyon Belyaev, Fedor Kurlov, Beysimbek, Sergey Yasnitsky and Gennady Ostroumov died in the German camps Frontstalag 307, Stalag 302, Stalag HD 310, Stalag 308, and Oranienburg (Shahov, 1967, 170-176).

Assistant duty officer G. Valishanov clearly remembers the first days of the war. The High Command ordered to hold demonstration exercises throughout the garrison with the participation of tanks, aircraft and artillery at the Brest training ground on June 22, 1941. Therefore, when German planes appeared in the sky in the distance, G. Valishanov thought that these were exercises. Only when he saw a fascist swastika on the aircraft, he realized that the war had begun (RMCBHF, 98).

The Soviet soldiers defended the fortress under the heavy fire from the armored train moving along the railroad. Once the forts could not be taken by infantry, massive mortar, artillery and machine-gun fire, the 45<sup>th</sup> Division decided to use tanks. Seeing them G. Valishanov and his comrades unfurled the gun and fired four times at the enemy's tanks. They managed to destroy two German tanks; the column of tanks moving towards the Brest Fortress continued to shell it. G. Valishanov and other defenders of the fortress crept to the next gun. However, there were no shells in the gun. Therefore, they decided to withdraw to the shelter, to the barracks. But the shell that got into the barracks, piled up the fighters with bricks: Erbek Yensebayev was mortified with bricks, and Dastan Bimoldinov was seriously wounded. Almost two days the soldiers were hiding in ruins, and on the night of the second day of the war those who survived and were not wounded broke out from the fortress to the east (Shahov, 1967).

In general, 13 Kazakhstani of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR broke out from the siege. However, not all of them celebrated the victory over Nazi Germany. For instance, sergeant Alexander Zatsepin (RMCBHF, 102), junior sergeants Sinkin and Sotsky, privates Kanatbek Sareitov and Karim Tleubayev died in 1941, private Shayakhmet Zheksekov was killed on September 28, 1942 (RMCBHF, 104). Only senior sergeant Konstantin Ovsyannikov, political instructor Semyon Mikhailov, sergeant Gabdilhak Valishanov, privates Alexander Sopikov, Zhaksykeldy Akhmetov, Bazhholbaev and Zhuman Gabdaldayev managed to return alive from the battlefields of the World War II.

23 draftees from Kazakhstan were killed in the Brest Fortress during the first two days of the war. They were senior sergeant Fedor Sheremetov, sergeant, paramedic Kuleke Karabasov, sergeant Korf, privates Kozhahmet Kulbayev, Pavel Rybkin, Erdenbekov, Koshumbaev, Bayoraz Maniyarov, Isagaliy Alticinov, Ryskeldy Amirbekov, Esimbay Besimbekov, Jalal Zlavdinov, Sipat Kamaliev, Saraz Tuyakbaev, Babubek Amanzholov, Beysebek Artauov, Arutayev, Ashirbek Butagorin, Erbek Yensebayev, Borantay Iskakov, Baubek Nursetov, Baubek Serikbayev, and Georgiy Fedosenko.

Thus, only 12 out of 49 Kazakhstani combatants of the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR survived by the end of the war. 23 people died defending the Brest Fortress, 8 soldiers died in concentration camps, 6 draftees, despite the fact that they managed to break out from the fortress, died in other battles of the Soviet-German war (Ganzer et al., 2016).

In our opinion, it is also necessary to analyze the fate of 11 Kazakhstani of the 131 LAR who fought near Brest. In March 1941, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the 131<sup>st</sup> Artillery Regiment under the command of Captain N.M. Nikolayevsky was transferred from the Brest Fortress to "Graf Berg" fort. On June 19–20, 1941 the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> batteries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division moved to training exercises on Brest polygon. Some of the guns from the artillery fleet were sent to the exercises, others were in artillery workshop or in disassembled form. Just few guns and canons were in service. Thus, the only weapon that the soldiers of the 131<sup>st</sup> artillery regiment could use on June 22, 1941, was Mosin-Nagant and Tokarev self-loading (SVT-40) rifles. However, despite the numerical superiority of the Germans and the notable lack of weapons, draftees from Kazakhstan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division held out in "Graf Berg" Fort for the first day of the war, repulsing Nazis powerful attacks (Beshanov, 2011).

By evening, the bulk of the privates left the fort. The platoon commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division Lieutenant T. Saklakov wrote in his memoirs:

*We rushed to the location of our division, where commander of the 4th battery Lieutenant Lukashko had already arrived. Together we organized a circular defense. We lasted until about 6 pm. By the evening we decided to leave the fort for Tyukhinichy village. Six people, led by sergeant Konovalov, stayed in the fort to cover us. Sergeant Konovalov knew the place. But they never came (Mityukov, 2014).*

Like Konovalov group, seven Kazakhstani were killed in the first days of the siege. Their names are Tursun Dosbaev, Asyl Kolnarov, Ivan Maneilov, Semyon Posochilin, Tuganbayev, Rafik Hasanov and Sergeant-Major Ivan Kuznetsov, who at 10 am on June 22 attacked the enemy tank with a bunch of grenades, destroyed it, but died himself (The feat of Ivan Kuznetsov, 1969). Kobel Kudekov and Andrey Chernov were captured and died in autumn 1941 in the Demblin Fortress (Poland). Pavel Nikuiko

from the Karaganda region and Grigory Buyanov were also captured, but stayed alive after housing in several prisoner-of-war camps (Kazakhstani soldiers in the battles for Belarus in the summer of 1941, 2005)

Therefore, the majority of Kazakhstanis who were the first to face the Nazi attack on June 22, 1941 in the Brest Fortress and in the Brest region were killed in the first days or died in captivity. Only a few managed to survive, however, none of the 131 LAR was honored with orders and medals for the defense of the Brest Fortress. The soldiers who were in captivity were given the permission to leave for home only after a series of special inspections of the NKVD and exhausting work to restore the national economy in the regions liberated from the occupation.

#### CONCLUSION

Brest and the Fortress were the key points in German Barbarossa plan. High Command made plans to seize

the fortress within the day. However, the Soviet Armed forces held it out longer than expected. The German attack started on June 22, 1941. On June 22–24 the entire territory of the Brest Fortress was the site of heavy fighting for the fortress. On June 25–26 local fighting continued only in the East Fort, the Citadel and in some barracks to the right of the three-door gates. On June 29 the fortress was captured. The Soviet losses in the battle for the Brest Fortress were incredible: killed, wounded and taken in captivity. Among heroic defenders of the fortress was the 131<sup>st</sup> LAR, whose 49 soldiers were drafted from Kazakhstan. They bravely fought for life and freedom, but according to sad statistics only 12 out of 49 combatants celebrated the victory over Germany. The majority of Kazakhstani defenders fighting both inside the fortress and outside it, near Brest, were killed or died in prisoner-of-war camps. Due to long standing studies and researches we found out the names, the reasons and place of death of these 49 soldiers and officers.

## SODELOVANJE KAZAKOV 131. LAHKEGA ARTILERIJSKEGA POLKA PRI OBRAMBI TRDNJAVE BREST LETA 1941

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### POVZETEK

*Obramba trdnjave Brest, ki je postala simbol odpora sovjetskih vojakov, je potekala med 22. in 29. junijem leta 1941. Namen članka je (1) razumeti politiko Sovjetske zveze pri snovanju Rdeče armade, oblikovanju nacionalnih divizij in razumeti nekatere druge etnične aspekte; (2) na kratko povzeti potek dogajanja pri obrambi trdnjave Brest in (3) identificirati imena, število ter usodo kazahstanskih vojakov 131. lahkega artilerijskega polka. Kronološko članek zajema obdobje od 22. septembra 1939, ko je trdnjavo Brest zajela Sovjetska zveza, do 29. junija 1941, ko so jo zajeli pripadniki nemške vojske.*

*Članek temelji na zgodovinopisni analizi, ki nam je skupaj s sistematskim pristopom omogočila, da natančno analiziramo zgodovinski fenomen – obramba trdnjave Brest v prostorskem in časovnem kontekstu. Brest ter njegova trdnjava sta bili osrednji cilj nemške operacije Barbarossa. Vrhovno poveljstvo je načrtovalo, da bo trdnjavo zajelo v roku enega dne.*

**Ključne besede:** 131. lahko artilerijski polk, 45. divizija, trdnjava Brest, Rdeča Armada, Kazahstan, 1941

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