

UDC 94(477)-055.2“1939/1945”
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.33.317473

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Bibliographic Description of the Article: Ginda, V., & Lysenko, O. (2024). Sexual assault against women in Soviet partisan units. *Skhidnoievropeiskyi istorychnyi visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 33, 181–196. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.33.317473

SEXUAL ASSAULT AGAINST WOMEN IN SOVIET PARTISAN UNITS

Abstract. *The purpose* of the study is to do the research on the issue of sexual assault among Soviet partisans and against the civilian population, to clarify its moral and psychological foundations and behavioral models. **The methodological basis** of the study is a combination of interdisciplinary research tools in the field of gender studies and history of everyday life. An appropriate, special conceptual apparatus has been used. **The scientific novelty** of the research is determined by the formulation of the problem, methods of solving it, conclusions, and the complex of sources used. **The Conclusions.** The existential nature of World War II had various manifestations and forms, covering all spheres of social existence. The destruction of the established legal field under conditions when several military political powers fought on the territory of Ukraine occupied by Hitler's troops (German occupation units and garrisons, "red" partisans, participants in the Ukrainian national liberation movement, Polish nationalist underground), the civilian population was in an extremely difficult situation, having no protection from various types of violence, including sexual assault. War causes the spread of legal nihilism, a sharp lowering of a moral threshold, trivialization of coercion and armed violence. Women become the least protected category of participants and contemporaries of war. Enshrined in tradition and specific stereotypes of mass consciousness, gender behaviour models among the Soviet partisans doomed women to stigmatized social roles, when in the absence of gender parity, they were assigned the function of a subordinate, secondary,

servicing cohort. The image and status of the Soviet “people’s avengers,” formed (largely owing to the Bolshevik propaganda), de facto secured for them a position that was often interpreted as permissiveness and impunity for any actions, including those that were prosecuted under the Soviet criminal law. If male partisans, prone to deviation, abuse and sexual violence, were guided by purely physiological reflexes (less often by the desire for punishment or satisfaction), the behaviour patterns of the majority of potential and actual victims of sexual assault were motivated by survival strategies. The efforts of the military political leadership of the USSR to eliminate sexual assault were not entirely successful. A large number of women became victims of severe physical and psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder for many years after the war.

Keywords: German-Soviet War, Ukraine, partisans, gender relations, sexual assault, civilian population.

СЕКСУАЛЬНЕ НАСИЛЛЯ НАД ЖІНКАМИ В РАДЯНСЬКИХ ПАРТИЗАНСЬКИХ ЗАГОНАХ

Анотація. *Мета* дослідження полягає у науковій реконструкції феномену сексуального насильства у середовищі радянських партизанів і стосовно цивільного населення, з’ясуванні його морально-психологічних підстав і поведінкових моделей. **Методологічне** підґрунтя розвідки становить поєднання міждисциплінарного дослідницького інструментарію в руслі гендерних студій та історії повсякдення. При цьому використовується відповідний, спеціальний понятійний апарат. **Наукову новизну** матеріалу визначають постановка проблеми, способи її розв’язання, висновки та узагальнення і комплекс залучених джерел. **Висновки.** Екзистенційний характер Другої світової війни мав різні вияви і форми, охоплюючи всі сфери соціального існування. Руїнування усталеного правового поля за умов, коли на окупованій гітлерівськими військами території України вело боротьбу кілька військово-політичних потуг (німецькі окупаційні структури і гарнізони, “червоні” партизани, учасники українського національно-визвольного руху, польське націоналістичне підпілля), цивільне населення потрапляло у вкрай складне становище, фактично не маючи захисту від різних видів насильства включно із сексуальним. Війна спричиняє поширення правового нігілізму, різке зниження морального порогу, баналізацію примусу і збройного насильства. Найменш захищеною категорією учасників і сучасників війни стають жінки. Закріплені традицією і специфічними стереотипами масової свідомості моделі гендерної поведінки у середовищі радянських партизанів, прирікали жіноцтво на стигматизовані соціальні ролі, коли за відсутності статевого паритету йому відводилася функція упослідженої, другорядної, обслуговуючої когорти. Сформований (багато в чому завдяки більшовицькій пропаганді) образ і статус радянських “народних месників” де-факто закріплював за ними становище, часто трактоване як уседозволеність і безкарність за будь-які дії, зокрема й ті, що переслідувалися радянським кримінальним правом. Якщо чоловіки-партизани, схильні до девіації, аб’юзу та сексуального насильства, керувалися суто фізіологічними рефлексами (рідше – прагненням покарання чи сатисфакції), то моделі поведінки більшої потенційних і реальних жертв сексуального насильства вмотивовувалися стратегіями виживання. Зусилля військово-політичного керівництва СРСР, спрямовані на унеможливлення насильства на сексуальному ґрунті, не мали цілковитого успіху. Велика кількість жінок стали носіями важких фізичних і психологічних травм і посттравматичного синдрому упродовж багатьох років по війні.

Ключові слова: німецько-радянська війна, Україна, партизани, гендерні стосунки, сексуальне насильство, цивільне населення.

The Problem Statement. The German-Soviet war was fought not only at the front and frontline, but also in the rear, where partisan and underground forces of various political orientations fought actively. One of the most famous aspects of this confrontation, due to political and propaganda factors, was the activity of the Soviet partisan units on the territory of Ukraine. In the USSR tens of thousands of scientific, popular, purely propagandistic publications, and fiction were devoted to this issue, which aimed at glorifying or even

canonizing this movement in an official commemorative model. That is why, during that period, it was impossible to find any materials and research that would go beyond the rigid Soviet historical framework. But with the collapse of the USSR, historians were able to study a wide range of documents, including original sources, that related to various aspects of the German-Soviet war, including the partisan movement. The original sources allowed historians to look at the activities of paramilitary formations not from the angle of heroization and romanticization of events, but through the prism of military rear reality with all its positive and negative consequences, where the focus was not on the leadership role of the Communist Party or the state, but on a person with all his or her experiences, everyday troubles, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral patterns. As a result of the research efforts, various studies of the Soviet partisan and underground movement appeared, aimed at reconstructing an everyday life of the “people’s avengers”, their relations with the civilian population, organizational problems, and the specifics of partisan social environment. Among them, there should be mentioned the publications by Iryna Petrenko and Oksana Mazur (Petrenko & Mazur, 2023), Mykola Yezerskyi, Pavlo Kryshniy (Yezerskyi & Kryshniy, 2019) and Mykhailo Slobodianiuk (Slobodianiuk, 2017). Despite scholarly pluralism, the issue of sexual assault in Soviet partisan units remains on the periphery, likely due to its politicization and ambiguity, and a certain sentiment inertia.

The Review of Recent Research and Publications. In modern Ukrainian historiography, there are several studies on the above mentioned issue. These are the studies by Volodymyr Poliakov (Poliakov, 2009; Poliakov, 2011; Poliakov, 2013), who analysed this issue in the Crimean partisan units and Volodymyr Ginda (Ginda, 2013; Ginda, 2021). Sexual assault among the UPA soldiers was researched by Marta Havryshko (Havryshko, 2015; Havryshko, 2016,).

In foreign historiography, this issue is reflected in many publications. Thus, the Russian historian Olexander Gogun focuses on the non-status and intimate relationships between men and women in partisan units and notes that sometimes they took on immoral forms, and debauchery and sexual violence in the units became the cause of “free relations between the sexes, which were promoted in the USSR at the beginning of the 1920s, the struggle of the communists with religion, changes in the country’s way of life caused by World War I, and socio-economic changes during the two five-year plans and the disruption of a natural gender-age pyramid of society” (Gogun, 2012). American researcher Earl Zimke wrote about intimate life in partisan units and its prohibition among rank-and-file (Armstrong, 2007). German historians Senke Naitzel and Harold Welzer, referring to rape during the war, note that partisans often used it on captured enemy women as punishment, which was also practiced by Wehrmacht soldiers (Neitzel & Welzer, 2013).

Sexual assault against the Jewish women in partisan units is reflected in the publications by Necham Tek (Tek, 2003), Dave Teilor (Teilor, 2019), Bohdan Musial (Musial, 2009), Anika Walke (Walke, 2011), Leonid Smilovitsky (Smilovitsky, 2006) and Maksym Hon and Nataliia Ivchuk (Hon & Ivchuk, 2022) and the others. The rape of women by members of partisan movements based on ethnic revenge and “legendary or pseudo-partisan groups” with the aim of discrediting the enemy was studied by American researcher Jeffrey Burds (Burds, 2015) and Belarusian researcher Sviatoslav Kulinok (Kulinok, 2018).

The main segment of the research source base is the reports of Soviet partisan units and detachments, accumulated in the funds of the central archives of Ukraine and the collections of documents “Russian Archive: The Great Patriotic War. Orders of the People’s Commissar of Defense of the USSR. 1943 – 1945” (Barsukov, 1997), “Women of the Great Patriotic

War” edited by Nataliia Petrova (Petrova, 2014), “The Partisan Movement in Crimea during the Great Patriotic War. Collection of Documents and Materials” (Malgin, Kravtsova & Sergienko, 2006). Sexual assault is a separate section in the collection of documents about the Soviet partisans edited by Anatoliy Kentii and O. Gogun (Gogun & Kentii, 2006). Non-statutory relations among partisans are reflected in the full version of the diary entries of participants in the partisan movement F. Tkachenko, M. Sheremet, Ya. Bashmak, K. Stepanov and P. Khymych, prepared for publication by the Institute of History of the NAS of Ukraine and the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II (Lehasova, 2015), and also in a documentary story written by P. Berezovska, a participant in the partisan movement in Chernihiv region (Berezovska & Diachenko, 2006).

The purpose of the study is to do the research on the issue of sexual assault among Soviet partisans and against the civilian population, to clarify its moral and psychological foundations and behavioral models.

The Results of the Research. During the German-Soviet War, the ranks of the Soviet partisans numbered, according to various estimates, from 200 to 300 thousand participants. The number of women who participated in the resistance movement is also not fixed and ranges about 28–100 thousand (Zhenshchiny Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 2014, p. 7), which is about ten times less than men. From the very beginning, women in partisan units were discriminated on the basis of gender. They were usually assigned secondary roles: they washed clothes, cooked, cared for the sick or wounded, etc. The majority of commanders and rank-and-file partisans did not take into account professional, underground, or combat qualities of women in the units, but received them as a “sexual object”. That is why, women in the forest were rarely taught combat skills and had to earn their “place in the sun” themselves. A partisan Nadiya Vasevych, speaking on August 14, 1943, at a women’s meeting of one of the partisan brigades, complained: “They look down on us in the brigade, many girls with tears in their eyes ask for combat missions, but the commanders don’t involve them. We often hear such words: “She must not be involved in a combat operation – she’s a woman”. The majority of us don’t know anything about rifles, and we don’t have any” (Zhenshchiny Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 2014, pp. 270–271). The head of the Kovpak intelligence service, Petro Vershyhora, recalled that in his unit, the partisan Nina literally pleaded for a machine gun and finally got it, and the intelligence rank-and-file Hanna stayed in the unit, because she knew how to find moonshine and moonshine making devices among the local population. Owing to this “gift”, she earned authority among partisans and got the nickname “Anka the moonshine maker” (Vershyhora, 1975, pp. 67, 103).

But in addition to the contemptuous attitude in military affairs, sexual assault, rape, constant harassment, forced sex, both physical and moral abuse became a harsh everyday experience for many women in the units. The “people’s avengers,” being far from command and control centres, were more susceptible to numerous temptations than regular troops. One of them was the desire to have sex with a woman he liked, even without her consent. This reflected a sense of lack of control and permissiveness in the territory controlled by the partisans. Women’s attempts to change the state of affairs ran into persistent masculine stereotypes entrenched in the mentality and mass consciousness of partisans, while possession of weapons and the status of “people’s avenger” fueled self-confidence and a sense of impunity. If a woman or a girl refused to engage in one-time sexual contact or cohabitation, it could even cost her life. In such cases, it was extremely difficult or practically impossible to prove the guilt of the commander for his involvement in a woman’s death.

On June 16, 1944, the UShPR received a report from a partisan Mykola Sendziuk, the Kutuzov detachment under the command of A. Odukh, in which he asked to draw the command's attention to a sexual harassment of the chief of staff, Major Krykunov. In the report it was indicated that the partisan leaders did not shy away from even blackmail during harassment. A partisan noted: "Krykunov led a dissolute life... He threatened his own partisans with sending them to the front if they did not allow him to have sex with their wives. (After the Red Army troops took control of the territory where the partisans operated, they were checked in the rear, and then they were either sent to the front or left in place to establish a peaceful life – *Authors.*). It happened to my wife Vasylyna Nitsevich... I didn't let him. But then, counting on me not being at home, he came to my house and suggested going for a walk in the forest, promising her to leave me at work. Having gone to the forest, he proposed to marry her, promising various awards. There were many similar cases. I ask you to take measures" (CSAHAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 533, p. 9).

The actions of the commanders usually showed a contempt for women and their privacy; they reacted negatively and angrily to refusals and resistance, convinced that women partisans they liked had to satisfy their sexual desires without any refusal. In some partisan units, the issue of intimacy lost its privacy and became a subject of general discussion and praise of partisans in the presence of women who were actually being talked about. In addition to the fact that such misogynistic treatment humiliated them in the eyes of others and traumatized them psychologically, they also had to resist many "suitors" in the future who received information about their alleged easy availability. Thus, the commissar of one of the partisan detachments in the Crimea, Mykhailo Buskadze, following his commander, decided to make the wife of the deceased colleague his mistress. Having invited the woman on a date, he immediately began to cling to her, trying to kiss her. When she, outraged by this behaviour, remarked that she was taking life more seriously and practically did not know the "cavalier," she heard in response: "What are you talking about! Why do you need to know me? The party and the government know me, so take off your underwear and lie down" (Poliakov, 2013, p. 243). In S. Kovpak unit, the commander of one of the detachments believed that he had the right to intimate relations with all newly arrived women and girls, and in many cases he adhered to it. Everyone in the detachment knew about it, but kept silent (CSAHAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 533, p. 46). A veteran of the Vinnytsia unit, Ya. Melnyk, during an interview with O. Gogun, said that the commissar of "For the Fatherland" detachment, M. Yekhalov, forced women to cohabit, and "took them by force" (Gogun, 2008, p. 369).

The same partisan commanders who were rebuffed, using their power, could send women to accomplish the most difficult missions for refusing intimacy, demote them for the slightest offense, and shoot them on charges of "collaborating with the enemy" or "espionage". The partisan P. Braiko wrote about this in a report addressed to S. Kovpak about the commander of one of the detachments of the Kovpak unit, V. Kudriavsky: "He harassed women," writes P. Braiko. "He harassed the miner-instructor L. Nikolskaya. From the first days after his arrival, Kudriavsky wanted to have sex with her, but Nikolskaya refused, then he disarmed her and sent her as a rank-and-file to the squadron, hoping that she would subdue, but he was mistaken. She died heroically in the battle..." (CSAHAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 533, p. 46).

In addition, commanders had many opportunities to resort to sexual assault against their female subordinates not only within the units, but also outside them. This assault was facilitated by the peculiarities of a partisan life and combat operations, which sometimes required "soldiering" from the forest in small groups of 2–3 people. In cases of intimacy

refusal, the commander could take the woman with him on a combat mission, reconnaissance or “household operation”, during which he could rape and kill her, or shoot her, accusing her of treason or collaboration with the enemy. This is exactly what the squadron commander of the Shchors partisan detachment of the first Chernihiv unit, O. Platonov, did: he raped the female Sofia, during one of the missions, and then killed her, accusing her of treason. In Ivan Khytrychenko Kyiv unit, during a “business operation” in the village of Huto-Mariatyn (Zhytomyr region), the commander Hryshchenko raped a girl arrested on suspicion of espionage. Trying to hide his crime, he insisted on her being shot, although by that time it had already been determined that she was not a spy (CSAHAU, f. 77, d. 1. c. 3, p. 109v).

The vast majority of women were forced to endure sexual abuse and harassment because they had almost no opportunity or courage to complain. Some were ashamed of these facts, the others tried to avoid condemnation for “immoral behaviour”, which was often the case for girls who could not preserve their honour (Havryshko, 2015, p. 206). Some were afraid that their commanders would send them on risky missions from which there would be no return, or accuse them of collaborating with the enemy, which would mean being shot. Those who did complain to senior partisan commanders usually encountered misunderstanding or silence about the problem, because such forced sexual contacts were also practiced in their environment. For example, Oleksiy Fedorov did not pay attention to sexual harassment in his units. And in some cases, he even made girls do it. His deputy, Mykola Popudrenko, judging by archival documents, was a known womanizer in the unit. Anton Brynsky noted that he had several women with whom he constantly sorted out relationships. (CSAHAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 1308, p. 30). As M. Popudrenko’s “forest wife” later stated, he initially demanded her sexual submission, she complained to O. Fedorov, but this was unsuccessful. The first secretary of Chernihiv regional committee “calmed down” the woman partisan, saying: “He is actually a good man, you can live with him”. Only after being threatened with execution “for espionage” did the woman surrender, but when she became pregnant, she was exiled to another unit, out of sight of her “husband”. When she gave birth, her baby was killed by order of the new commander, and the mother was sent to the Soviet rear (Gogun, 2012, p. 426).

Trying to avoid such situations, women in partisan units tried to have one boyfriend who protected them from a constant harassment of other men. Nina Zhydkova, recalling non-status relationships in the unit, noted that many commanders had their own “forest wives” (this is what the partisans called the commanders’ mistresses – *Authors*). Often, a young girl was molested by boys, but annoying suitors bypassed her because she had an affair with the commander of the detachment (Zhydkova). Relatives (brothers, fathers) could also protect women against harassment in the detachments, but only in cases where they held high positions in the partisan hierarchy. The daughter of the commander of Battalion 4 of Sydor Kovpak unit, even asked to be sent to another unit due to her father’s excessive care, because she wanted, as Petro Vershyhora notes: “to be just a partisan, not a battalion commander’s daughter” (Vershyhora, 1975, p. 386). Their profession in the “forest” also provided some protection for female partisans: if a woman or girl had skills valuable for the “people’s avengers,” this could restrain male ardor. The profession of a doctor, a signalman, a radio operator, and even the ability to cook well could protect against sexual harassment if no one else could do it except a woman. In such cases, complaints about sexual harassment to higher commanders could have positive consequences for her.

It is worth noting that there were also women who voluntarily entered into intimate relationships with partisan commanders, counting on various preferences in partisan units in

the future. In particular, they could take advantage of their husband's position and his access to vital resources.

Partisan sexual atrocities against civilian women

The ordinary "people's avengers" had limited opportunities to engage in sexual contact with female partisans. Firstly, there were few women in the units, so there were not enough of them for all the men; secondly, they preferred commanders who could better provide for them in terms of living, and thirdly, many units had prohibitions on sexual contact between men and women, which, however, were mostly required to be observed by rank-and-file personnel. O. Gogun notes that the main motive for the bans was the desire not to overcrowd the units with families, children and women, which would limit the maneuver ability of the units significantly (Gogun, 2012, p. 428). Soldiers had to look for victims outside the units among civilians. Armed with weapons that gave them a sense of unlimited power over the defenseless, partisans often resorted to sexual assault against civilian women and girls they liked. They explained such actions in a rather primitive way: they said, "We are fighting the occupiers, we are being bitten by lice in the forests, and here you have sex with German officers, but you don't want to have sex with us". Sexual aggressiveness was compounded by the lack of a normal family comfort and the use of alcohol, as most rapes were committed when partisans were intoxicated. Alcohol usually stimulates sexual desires in people and blurs the line between what is permissible between a man and a woman, and also provokes aggression towards others. Some partisans had a tendency towards deviant behaviour, uncontrolled sexual aggression, perverted ideas about intimate life, or experiences of violent sexual contacts that were hidden from justice during the pre-war period. In civilian life, all this was prohibited at the legislative level, so it was difficult to implement them without punishment. Another thing was a partisan everyday life: "partisan forest", "economic operation", "raid in unfamiliar areas", punitive action against a traitor and his relatives, weakness and defenselessness of potential victims, all this gave fighters a variety of sexual opportunities. After all, in these cases, partisans were their own masters, had unlimited power and many options to realize their desires, concealing them, or justifying their actions.

Analysis of partisan reports and recollections of participants from that time show that the most common victims of sexual abuse (especially group abuse) were women and girls who accidentally met drunk partisans in the field or forest, or those who found shelter in the forests from the Germans and had no connection to the Resistance Movement. Sometimes these sexual victims were Jewish women who were hiding in groups or alone in forests or villages from Nazi terror. It was mainly their defenselessness, lawlessness, racial intolerance, lack of witnesses, and the ability to avoid punishment that provoked the partisans to commit sexual crimes. (Tek, 2003; Kulinok, 20018; Smilovitsky, 2006; Musial, 2009). When a partisan or policeman saw an attractive woman in front of him during interrogation, he, using his power over her, did not miss the chance to violate her sexual integrity, forcing her to expose her naked body or excessively pressing her body during a search. Sexual assault during armed conflicts can also have a military psychological significance as a means of intimidation and demoralization of the enemy.

It is worth noting that the sexual atrocities of partisans against civilian population differed in their motivational and determinative component from harassment and rape in the detachments. Among partisans, these crimes were in the absolute majority committed under the pressure of the natural intimate desires of mainly young men who had power over women they liked. Sexual crimes against civilians, on the other hand, had a multitude of

motives (including biological satisfaction), objectives, and options. The only thing they had in common was that they both breached the law.

The analysed documents of the Ukrainian State Police indicate that the Soviet partisans often committed rape in Western Ukraine. In the reports of units deployed in Sumy, Zhytomyr, Chernihiv, or Kyiv regions, there are few mentions of sexual assault against women, but they increased during the raids into Halychyna. This is explained to some extent by the attitude of the “red” partisans towards the inhabitants of this politically turbulent region and the corresponding mood among the local population. The vast majority of Galicians considered the Soviet partisans to be representatives of the Stalinist totalitarian regime and supported the Ukrainian insurgents. Accordingly, the partisans treated them as enemies, especially the population of those villages or towns where the UPA units were stationed. M. Havryshko notes that the rape of women belonging to the enemy community is often a weapon of the warring parties, a way of communication between dominant and subordinate masculinity. It should not be dismissed that the partisans were not too concerned about their reputation during the raids: they probably hoped that they would not soon return to the scenes of their crimes. Being in the same territory, it is more pragmatic to think about establishing normal relations with the population in order to be able to receive food, clothing from them, or not be betrayed to the enemy. However, ideological and political reasons often conflicted with a common sense. During a raid, all this could be taken by force if the residents did not want to give it up voluntarily.

Reports on rape of civilian women by the Soviet partisans are often found in reporting and information documents of the Ukrainian nationalists. Thus, in the “General Political Review of the Brest-Kobrin District for August of 1943” it was stated: “The Reds mercilessly rob the population, terrorize it, rarely go sober and even rape women” (CSAHAU, f. 3833, d. 1, c. 116, p. 1). And there is the information on what the OUN members reported regarding the actions of the Red partisans in Horokhiv district of Volyn region in February of 1944: “Operating in villages, the Reds raped women. In the village of Voromli, during the rape of five girls, a red senior lieutenant came in, and when he forbade this act, he was almost shot” (CSAHAU, f. 3833, d. 1, c. 129, p. 59). The situation in Kovel region, according to the reports of the OUN underground member for February of 1944, was not better. “The Reds rob the population to the bone. In the villages of Mshantsi, Holovna (nowadays Liuboml district of Volyn region – *Authors*) and the others, they raped women and girls” (CSAHAU, f. 3833, d. 1, c. 129, p. 51). The Ukrainian insurgents of Ternopil region noted in their reports for March of 1944 that the Soviet partisans were not limited to fighting; their other task was to search for vodka and lard. In the report from one of the UPA units from Zhovkva district dated April 8, 1944, it was stated: “When they get vodka, they (“red” partisans” – *Authors*) drink it until they lose consciousness. They throw weapons, shoot in the house, roll on the ground. They rape women en masse. There are “queues” going to the raped women. 10–20 men go to one raped woman. There are mass cases where 20 to 50 women are raped in one village” (CSAHAU, f. 3833, d. 1, c. 126, p. 65).

To clarify the scale of sexual assault committed by the “red” partisans, information from independent formations should be verified with the Soviet sources, as the authors of the OUN reports and memoirs could have “exaggerated” this aspect. In the documents of the Ukrainian Special Operations Command there are mentioned the many facts of sexual assault against civilians by the “people’s avengers”. Cases of sexual assault were described in detail by former partisans of the Budionny unit, V. Buslaiev and M. Sydorenko, in the report

they sent to S. Savchenko, the head of the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR. In the document it was specifically stated the following: “During quartering in the village of Holybisy, Shumsky district, Volyn region, a foreman Mezentsev, while drunk, beat two girls with a spinning wheel, demanding their consent to cohabitation. In the village of Dubovtsi, near Ternopil, a woman aged 40–45 was raped by the partisans Hardonov, Panasiuk, Mezentsev, the detachment commander Bubnov, and others. The victim’s last name is unknown. In the village of Verkhobuzh, near Brody, a sergeant Mezentsev tried to rape a girl and her 65-year-old mother, he took her outside at night and demanded her consent to have sex, pointing the gun to her. He put her against the wall, shot with a machine gun over her head, and then raped her... In one village, I don’t remember the name, near Sniatyn, a sergeant Mezentsev, drunk, pulled out a gun and tried to rape a girl who ran away, then he raped her grandmother, 60–65 years old. When the apartment was searched, a lot of communist literature was found. According to the neighbours, the grandmother’s son was a teacher and a member of the Communist Party, for which he was arrested and shot by the Germans. Another son was in the Red Army, conscripted in 1940.

The commander, Pavlo Bublyk, personally incited the fighters, he was engaged in selling horses for vodka, which he took back before leaving... He drank, systematically, and conducted illegal searches independently, and demanded vodka from the population. He always did this with a gun in his hands, shot in apartments, and intimidated the population. In the village of Byskiv (in the Carpathian Mountains), in the apartment of the unit headquarters, the cook shot through the windows, kitchen utensils, and ceiling because he wanted to rape the landlady, but she ran away.

Robberies were carried out, of course, during searches under the pretext of searching for “spies” or “Bandera members,” and places where other valuables might be found were searched – watches, razors, rings, expensive suits, which were taken away without any explanation” (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 2, c. 300, pp. 58–60).

The NKVD leadership demanded explanations from the unit command. In the report, Captain Makarov, the commander of the “For Kyiv” detachment, explained everything quite simply: he denied all the facts, and accused the partisans who wrote such a note of “treason to the homeland” and “connections with Bandera” (the complainants left the detachment and went to the rear of the Red Army) (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 2, c. 300, p. 63). This type of response from the command of partisan units was common in cases of accusations of looting, drunkenness, or sexual assault. The paradox was that before that, Makarov did not even suspect that there were two “Bandera members” in his detachment, but as soon as they wrote their report on the violations in the detachment, he realized that they were “enemies”. The case was probably not publicized. At least, it was not possible to trace its further progress due to the lack of any documents indicating the punishments of those involved.

Rumors of mass sexual abuse by partisans and looting of civilians spread among Galicians quickly. It got to the point that frightened women, hearing about the approach of the “people’s avengers”, would leave their homes and flee to the forest in hope of salvation. “The population usually knew about the approach of our partisan unit 30–40 km away. And in the last days you could find villages abandoned, only grandfathers stayed there, and empty houses. When asking the population why they ran away, they explained as follows: “We are not afraid of the Red Army, but we are afraid of those dressed in civilian clothes, they rob so much, rape women and beat innocent people,” wrote V. Buslaiev and M. Sydorenko in the report (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 2, c. 300, p. 63). Nataliia Leontovych-Bashuk, an active

participant in the Ukrainian nationalist movement in Zakerzonnia, recalled that when the Soviet partisans appeared in the region, they often resorted to sexual assault against local women. In particular, she recalled the story of one woman who had to face “people’s avengers”. “When the Bolshevik partisans raided the house, they stayed at the house for three months. She had to cook for them, wash their shirts, even though she said she was a widow. Every night she slept in a different place – under the ramparts, in the field, or somewhere else, because the Muscovites hunted for women.

And the children ran after me. When the youngest cried too much, I had to throw him to the wind, and I ran away into the forest... and that’s what all women did” (Lenko, 1999, p. 59). In 1992, Lutsk resident R. Sydorчук, in a conversation with a journalist of the newspaper “Volyn” P. Boyarchuk, recalled that peasants were more afraid of partisans than bandits: “At first, I spent my time in the cellar, waiting out their attacks, and then in the apiary, in a corner where there were thickets and impenetrable nettles, my father dug a hiding place for me. He worried about me so much” (Boyarchuk, 1992, p. 5).

Ordinary partisans could rape and kill wives, sisters, and daughters of collaborators whom they considered responsible for the actions of their relatives who collaborated with the Germans. They did the same with German spies when they fell into their hands. In addition to satisfying their sexual desires, partisans in this way tried to send a message to members of collaborationist formations or administrative institutions about what awaited their relatives for collaborating with the enemy. One of these stories was told by the aforementioned R. Sydorчук. According to her, in October of 1943, partisans from A. Brynskyi’s units resorted to horrific scenes of assault against women who were relatives of local riflemen in the village of Stara Rafalivka. At first, when the detachment appeared near the village, the “red” partisans behaved appropriately, because they did not have a significant number of fighters and could not openly oppose the Ukrainian insurgents and the Germans, but when they grew in number, they began to resort to brutal reprisals against the civilian population in case of non-support of their ideas. “Our good relations with the ‘petrivsiamy’ (as the people called O. Brynskyi’s partisans – *Authors*) ended as soon as they came into force,” the woman said. – It all started when “Uncle Pete’s” partisans began to “judge” families whose boys were the Schutzmanns. Then, for the same reason, they committed a savage massacre in the Pasevych family. In it, besides the elders, there were two girls, and boys – Mykolai, Dmytro and Leonid, who were the Schutzmanns. The eldest, Pasevych, was killed immediately. Later, in front of her mother, they raped her eldest daughter, Lisa. And they shot everyone... They did the same thing to the Palamarchuk family... there were seven children in the family. Sons Ivan (he joined the Schutzmanns), Andriy, Heorhiy and daughters Nadia, Klava, Yulia, Vira... All the Palamarchuks, except Ivan and Heorhiy, whom the partisans did not find at home, were made to kneel and shot. Nadia was dealt with especially cruelly; she was raped, her arms were twisted, and she was tortured. Klava was also raped before being killed” (Boyarchuk, 1992, p. 5).

W. Langfeld, the German soldier, recalled how the Soviet partisans captured a bus with 30 German signal-women in the forest near Bobruisk. The Germans later recaptured the women from the enemy, but all the girls had already been raped by that time (Neitzel & Welzer, 2013, p. 165).

Sometimes the partisans were driven to such actions by incredible hatred and a desire for revenge for their murdered relatives. In the diary of Mykola Sheremet there is an entry about the headman of one of the villages of Chernihiv region, who, using his position, took

beautiful women and girls by force. The partisans caught the criminal and punished him: they hung him, cut off his penis and put it in his mouth (Lehasova, 2015, p. 185).

The rape, humiliation, and mutilation of the bodies of girls and women were also used by partisans (of various political orientations) as punishment for belonging to the enemy or the enemy nation. One of these episodes is described in the scandalous book “The Executioner” by a soldier of the Polish Home Army, Stefan Dombiski, who, as a 17-year-old boy, joined a special unit of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* in Polish) and was a witness and participant in the Volyn events of 1943. In one village, its leader, having “counted out” a Ukrainian girl among three girls who lived together in a house, decided to punish her with gang rape. “She was young and very beautiful, “Twardyi” decided that the best punishment for her Ukrainian origin would be if all three of us raped her” (Spovid kata, 2011).

During the UPA’s confrontation with the Soviet authorities, suspicion or affiliation of a girl with the Ukrainian underground often led to her being humiliated by the NKVD fighters or investigators. They used rape not only as a punishment for other political views, but also as a method of torture during interrogations and intimidation of women who had contact with the insurgents. In Horodochchyna region, the NKVD, conducting raids to search for Bandera supporters, caught a seventeen-year-old girl suspected of collaborating with the insurgents, and staged a sexual orgy over the poor girl (Moroz & Vovk, 2009, p. 81). On April 1, 1945, the NKVD investigators released six girls from the village of Kustyna, Lviv region, who had been arrested on suspicion of collaborating with the UPA. The girls were severely beaten, raped, and sexually infected in prison (Moroz & Vovk, 2009, p. 179). In some cases, investigators, taking advantage of their position, offered female suspects intimate relations in exchange for dropping charges of involvement in the insurgent movement.

Members of legendary or pseudo-partisan units used the rape of civilian women actively. As D. Burds notes, the rape of women by “legendary detachments members” was a kind of tactical weapon for the USSR special services in the fight against the UPA, which was intended to increase the conflict and distrust between the local population and the UPA (Burds, 2004, p. 337). The Soviet partisans also resorted to such methods when they entered settlements under the guise of police units or auxiliary German troops. A similar practice was used by O. Saburov’s units (Lehasova, 2015, pp. 196–197).

The command staff’s fight against sexual crimes

In partisan units, they tried to combat sexual promiscuity using various methods: they shot the guilty of sexual atrocities, forbade sexual relations with women, sent women from units, and discipline was supervised by political commissars or the NKVD officers sent from the “Great Land”. Thus, the commander of the partisan regiment S. Hryshyn issued an order prohibiting partisans from having sexual relations with women. In the units of O. Fedorov, S. Kovpak (“order” No. 200), and M. Naumov, those guilty of sexual atrocities against women were shot. Here are a few such examples. In O. Fedorov’s unit, there was a case when two drunken soldiers raped a woman in one of the villages of Galicia. Upon learning of this, the command ordered the rapists to be shot in front of the villagers (CSACAU, f. 1, d. 22, c. 18, p. 6). In M. Naumov’s unit, a rank-and-file was shot for a similar incident in January of 1944. (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 42, p. 114). In the J. Stalin partisan detachment, the intelligence chief was executed for raping a girl in a village while drunk (Lehasova, 2015, p. 89).

Usually, many of the above mentioned prohibitions remained on paper, as it was difficult for unit commanders to control the actions of their fighters during raids or “economic operations”. At that time, it was possible to shoot a victim, accusing her of “anti-Sovietism,”

“resistance to the partisans,” “collaborationism,” “treason,” etc. In addition, the command feared revenge from subordinates who could shoot them in the back during the battle. On March 25, 1944, Khrushchev partisan unit (2nd Voronezh) under the command of the deputy commander of the guard, Captain Olexander Maminov, and Chief of Staff Mykola Vynohradov passed through the town of Verba in Rivne region. The leadership of the “people’s avengers,” having drunk heavily, staged a brawl in the town. The commandant of the headquarters of Army 13, Lieutenant Colonel Svislotsky, in a report addressed to a member of the military council of Army 13, Major General M. Kozlov, wrote: “I report: the entire command staff of the formation was drunk, the officers were detained by me and were rude and ill-mannered people. Lieutenant Vynohradov committed a series of riots on the way from the village of Stolts to the town of Verba and in the very Verba. A group of officers of the unit, at the initiative of the chief of staff, forcibly took away from citizen Ivan Opanasenko his two daughters - Tetiana and Halyna. The girls then managed to escape” (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 2, c. 300, p. 42). When during the investigation the head of the unit’s counterintelligence was asked, “Why didn’t he stop his commanders?”, he replied that if he contradicted them, they would kill him, and wondered why this case ended without bloodshed at all, especially during the detention (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 2, c. 300, p. 42v.).

It is worth noting that those guilty of sexual assault were not always shot. Sometimes they were given the opportunity to atone for their guilt in battles with the enemy, but usually in cases where the rapist was a distinguished soldier or commander. Such a case took place in I. Khytrychenko’s detachment. The above mentioned commander, who in Zhytomyr region raped a girl suspected of espionage, was removed from his post by the leadership, demoted to rank-and-file, and offered to “atone for his crimes in the battles against the German occupiers in the nearest future” (CSACAU, f. 77, d. 1, c. 3, p. 109v.).

Sexual abuse and harassment in partisan units had a depressing psychological impact on the rank-and-file, often leading to conflicts and undermining discipline. Women who suffered from it, in addition to psychological and physical trauma, were stigmatized by others, which prevented them from living normally and performing their functions in the units. Some of them resorted to suicide, others left the units, collaborated with the enemy in order to take revenge on their offenders. Pregnancy could be an additional problem for a woman.

The appropriate behaviour of the partisans turned the civilian population against them, which made it difficult for them to stay in their areas of base, limited the possibilities of intelligence, the source of which in many cases was the inhabitants of the surrounding villages, threatened the population with surrendering their places of deployment to the enemy, gave the enemy indisputable facts for anti-partisan propaganda, etc. The partisan leadership understood this perfectly well and in individual units tried to react promptly. “These and other actions of the partisans were used by the Germans. Showing the partisans as bandits and looters, they called on the population to betray them. Our party committee considered it its duty to wage a resolute fight against this kind of behaviour and called on the partisans to treat the population loyally. We demanded this from all commanders of partisan detachments and groups,” wrote S. Malykov after the war, who was the commander of the M. Shchors partisan unit, which operated in Zhytomyr region (SAZhR, f. 1376, d. 1, c. 189, p. 36).

Another equally important problem caused by sexual assault and uncontrolled intimate life was the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The women who became the source of venereal diseases, according to the Soviet regulations, were to be treated properly, giving them the right to treatment. But usually, angry commanders who became infected, seeking

revenge, gave the woman a difficult combat mission, during which she died. Some, realizing that they would not return alive, refused to carry out the order: they were arrested and shot for refusing to carry out a combat mission. Thus, at the end of October 1943 A. Brynsky wrote to the USHPR that venereal diseases had spread among the fighters. The “source” was a married woman, Yevdokiia Kuznietsova, who infected four commanders and two ordinary partisans (CSACAU, f. 1, d. 22, c. 20, p. 56). One of the sick commanders shot the woman. In order to hide the crime, according to the testimony of the former partisan of this brigade, Faina Solomian-Lots, Yevdokiia was executed according to the documents on the charge of “traitor to the Motherland” (Gogun, 2008, p. 371). A. Brynsky reported to the USHPR that he had dismissed the commander from his position. The relevant facts testify to the lack of rights of women in partisan units and the power of commanders over them. After all, instead of sending Yevdokiia Kuznietsova for treatment, the commander simply shot her, without suffering any criminal punishment for it.

Similar massacres were not widespread among the partisans. Commanders tried to limit the desire to lead an uncontrolled sexual life with the help of disciplinary sanctions or threats of execution. For example, the commander of the Shchors partisan detachment of Chernihiv formation, Fedir Tkachenko, threatened to shoot the cook of Squadron 3, M. Veresovych, after she infected a soldier (Lehasova, 2015, p. 135). The medical department at the USHPR also suggested that doctors of partisan units conduct preventive lectures among the fighters and, if possible, the civilian population about sexually transmitted diseases and their consequences (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 1784, p. 56). But such calls usually remained on paper.

Units that had connections with Moscow and sent patients for treatment to the Soviet rear. The deputy commander of Chernihiv formation, V. Vasiuk, wrote in a memo dated October 17, 1943 to the head of the intelligence department of the USHPR, Mokrov, that after syphilis was discovered in a radio operator and rank-and-file (there was an affair between them), they were placed in a partisan hospital at the USHPR. Later it became known that the rank-and-file was a German spy and was trying to recruit the radio operator. As a result, both were shot in June of 1943 (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 217, pp. 87–87v.). In 1942, 174 partisans suffering from gonorrhea were hospitalized at the USHPR hospital. (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 1784, p. 40). From May of 1943 to December of 1944, 105 venereal patients passed through the sanitary unit of the Ukrainian partisan headquarters, 94 of them were infected with gonorrhea, 11 – with syphilis (CSACAU, f. 62, d. 1, c. 1784, p. 76). Considering the number of partisans who operated on the territory of Ukraine (about 220 thousand during the entire war), this is an insignificant figure, although the true scale of the spread of these diseases was much greater.

The situation was more complicated in the detachments that had no connection with the USHPR and no appropriate medicines. In general, the problem of shortage of medical supplies was urgent for all formations. In such units, venereal patients could be shot in front of the line due to the impossibility of treatment. American historian Earl Zimke, in his study of partisan life, gives an example of a female doctor who deserted from a partisan unit in 1943 and told the Germans that her unit received small doses of a vaccine to treat typhus and a special soap to remove lice. She claimed that in one partisan detachment, ten men and two women infected with syphilis were shot because they could not be treated under field conditions (Armstrong, 2007, p. 209).

The Conclusions. As sources indicate, in partisan units women and girls were often subjected to sexual assault and harassment by commanders. The factors that provoked such behaviour were the corresponding worldviews and stereotypes, the lack of a regular sexual

life with women, which was not a problem in pre-war life, unlimited power over subordinates. A significant role in such actions was played by a misogynistic attitude towards women and gender inequality that existed among partisans. Sexual assault against female partisans and civilian women outside of units is characterized by a motivational component. Sexual crimes against civilians could have many motives and reasons: from the natural desire to satisfy one's own "sexual hunger" in such an illegal way to revenge, punishment, intimidation of the population, etc., while among partisans they were usually provoked by a physiological need for sexual life.

Women and girls could often be raped because of their nationality or political orientation, so women hid their nationality (Polish, Ukrainian, Russian), religion, and worldview whenever possible. Sexual assault was often used by partisans as a way to demoralize the enemy. According to documents, the Soviet partisans committed sexual crimes during raids in Western Ukraine mainly, because they considered representatives of this region to be enemies and did not care much about their reputation.

Sexual crimes affected the moral and psychological situation in the units negatively, undermined discipline, incited the civilian population against the partisans, and provided an opportunity for fruitful anti-partisan propaganda by the enemy. That is why, the command of the partisan units tried various methods to combat this phenomenon, which did not yield the necessary results due to the impossibility of controlling the actions of partisans outside the units, the fear of commanders of possible revenge by subordinates in battle, the importance of fighters for partisan activity, etc. Raped female partisans were mostly left alone with their problems because they could not complain about their abusers-commanders, were afraid of the condemnation of others, and were intimidated by their abusers.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that a thorough development of the outlined issue is still ahead. Historians in this matter should go beyond the systematization of examples of sexual violence, paying attention to the development of methodological approaches to the study of intimate life among partisans. In the future, it is worth analyzing the strategies through which civilian women and partisans tried to avoid violence, how they experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and struggled with the psychological and physiological consequences of rape, and how those around them treated the shamed. The use of sexual assault by partisans as a weapon, punishment, and intimidation in the fight against their opponents remains an understudied issue. These and other aspects of the topic require careful analysis in the future in an interdisciplinary research discourse.

Acknowledgements. We express sincere gratitude to all members of the editorial board for consultations provided during the preparation of the article for publishing.

Funding. The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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The article was received March 30, 2024.

Article recommended for publishing 29/11/2024.