

Scientific article

УДК 94(470)«1941/1945»+94(470.323)+930.253

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2021-4-1191-1202

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Documents from the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation on the Problem of Safety of Horse Personnel in the Troops of the Central Front in the Spring - Summer of 1943

Abstract

The article studies the organization of the Central front rear agencies' work with horse personnel on the eve of and during the Battle of Kursk, one of the key events marking the

turning point in the Great Patriotic War. Preparation included a set of organizational measures. For timely movement of troops, weapons, and other military property within the newly occupied defense lines, it was necessary to make the most efficient use of all available vehicles. The novelty of the scientific research is due to the fact that the problem under consideration has not received its proper coverage in national and foreign historiography. It draws on the documents from the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation to sum up the activities of the rear services of the Central Front in providing livestock, horses used as draught animals, with food and medical care. Snow drifts, and later spring thaw, created serious obstacles to the movement of military and rear units of the newly formed Central Front to their deployment on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge. The retreating enemy destroyed roads and railways, bridges, and other facilities, which the newly liberated territories had to recover in time. Under these conditions, it was largely due to the use of draught animals (i.e. horses) at the disposal of the troops, that it remained possible to carry out rear and front-line transportations. The experience of the Great Patriotic War had drawn a line under the practice of mass use of cavalry in battle. Already in 1941–45, horses were mainly used by the rear services to move units and formations to hard-to-reach areas of deployment, to transport food, fuels and lubricants, medical equipment, etc., as well as for transportation of the wounded and sick to medical institutions. A significant part of army horses died on the battlefield, but, among non-combat losses, mortality from infectious diseases and exhaustion was recorded. As established, the loss of horse personnel in the rear happened largely due to irresponsible and negligent attitude, both on the part of individual officials and of the entire military formations of the Central Front.

Keywords

Historical sources, Battle of Kursk of 1943, Central Front, rear and front-line transportations, horse personnel, livestock, draught animals, rear, fodder, veterinary examination.

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Grant information

The article has been prepared with financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (science project no. 20-39-90001/20)

Submitted 18.03.2021, published (for citation):

BAIRAMOV, R. S., KOROVIN, V. V. Dokumenty Tsentral'nogo arkhiva Minoborony RF o probleme sokhrannosti konskogo sostava v voiskakh Tsentral'nogo fronta vesnoi – letom 1943 goda [Documents from the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation on the Problem of Safety of Horse Personnel in the Troops of the Central Front in the Spring - Summer of 1943. In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2021, no. 4, pp. 1191-1202. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2021-4-1191-1202

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Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .