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## THE BIOGRAPHY OF G.P. LAMSDORFF IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIAN MILITARY EMIGRATION IN EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II

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### Summary

The article is dedicated to the biography of the Count Grigori Pavlovich Lamsdorff and to his participation in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. Lamsdorff was born in Russia, but after the revolution of 1917 his family escaped to Paris. In 1936 Lamsdorff volunteered to the General Franco's army to fight against the Second Spanish Republic. After the end of the war in Spain, he returned to Paris. In 1941 Lamsdorff joined the German troops that invaded the USSR. He was an officer in various groups of Russian collaborationists during World War II. On 22 June 1943 Lamsdorff was a color bearer during the parade of German troops in Pskov. In the end of the war he obtained the rank of major of ROA. After World War II Lamsdorff lived in Spain and died in 2004. His biography was studied after the interviewing of Lamsdorff's grandchildren who are currently living in Barcelona, Spain. The article shows the Lamsdorff's life in the context of the epoch; his biography is an example of life of a Russian military emigrant in Europe during World War II.

**Key Words:** Lamsdorff, Russian emigration, White Russians in Spain, Russian Liberation Army, Russian collaborationism.

### Introduction

The participation of Russian emigrants in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) remains one of

the most relevant issues in the field of modern studies of Russian military history. The Soviet historiography centered attention on the Soviet military aid to the Spanish Republic. After the fall of the USSR a number of Russian historians began to study the attitude of the White emigrants to the conflict in Spain.<sup>[1]</sup> The most of authors consider that 72 Russian emigrants, most of them officers of the Tsarist Army, took part in the Civil War.<sup>[2]</sup> <sup>[3]</sup> Semenov, in his recent study, presents a list of Russians in the army of Spanish rebels. According to his data, there were 127 Russians in Franco's army.<sup>[4]</sup>

One of the Russians that volunteered to the nationalist army was the Count Grigori Pavlovich Lamsdorff (in Russian: *Григорий Павлович Ламсдорф*). The study of his biography is relevant not only because of his lineage (the Lamsdorffs were one of the most prominent noble families in the Tsarist Russia), but also because of his extraordinary life. His biography is characteristic for Russian emigrants belonging to the ideology of so-called “porazhentsy” (in Russian: *пораженцы*; literally, “the defeaters”). They were White Russians who considered foreign military intervention to the USSR the only way to destroy the communist regime in the country; most of them fought against the Soviet Union in World War II on the side of the Third Reich. The recent investigations in this field show that the point of view of that segment of Russian emigration was prevailing among the military emigrants<sup>[5]</sup>, although there were different attitudes toward the nazi Germany. For example, the general A. I. Denikin, one of the leaders of the White Movement in the Russian Civil War, considered both bolshevism and national-socialism perilous for Russia, but expressed an idea that the British and French military intervention against the USSR could throw down Stalin's regime and bring freedom to the country.<sup>[6]</sup>

Lamsdorff, with his strong anti-communist ideology, took part in the Spanish Civil War, in World War II and tried to volunteer to the French Army to fight the Viet Cong in Indochina in the late 1940s. He believed that struggling against the communism was admissible in every situation.

After World War II Lamsdorff lived in Spain and died in 2004. It was possible to contact his grandchildren who are currently living in Barcelona, Spain. They agreed to cooperate in reconstructing the biography of their grandfather. The interview with them became the most relevant source in elaborating of the present article. The information concerning Lamsdorff is analyzed in the context of the war in Spain and World War II.

### **Lamsdorff's life before 1936**

Lamsdorff was born in Saint-Petersburg. As it was aforementioned, Grigori Pavlovich was a member of one of aristocratic families. His father, Pavel Konstantinovich Lamsdorff (in Russian: *Павел Константинович Ламсдорф*), was a secretary of the Governing Senate and his great uncle, Vladimir Nikolaevich Lamsdorff (in Russian: *Владимир Николаевич Ламсдорф*), was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire in 1901-1906.<sup>[7]</sup> The year of birth of Grigori Pavlovich remains unknown, because during his life he falsified his papers a number of times; later, responding on his grandchildren's questions, he always answered that he was 75 years old. Some studies indicate 1910<sup>[8]</sup> or 1913<sup>[9]</sup> as Lamsdorff's years of birth, but probably, according to his grandchildren opinion, he was born in 1905 or 1906.

After the revolution of 1917, the Lamsdorffs, as many other noble families, escaped from Russia. Initially they settled in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. After short stay in Belgrade, they went to Paris. The capital of France in the 1920s and the 1930s became the center of Russian emigration. There were Russian colleges and universities in Paris, and Grigori Pavlovich graduated a Russian school. After that he entered one of French high schools and received an

education in engineering. The Lamsdorffs, as well as many other Russians in Paris, were short of money, and Grigori Pavlovich being a student had to look for some extra jobs. Some time he spent at Russian opera in Paris where he got acquainted with Yul Brynner, a young Russian emigrant that later became a film artist and won Academy Award for Best Actor.

The start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 attracted attention of the Russian community in Paris. The most of right-wing emigrants sympathized with the rebellion against the Republic.<sup>[10]</sup> The most prominent Russian military organization in Europe, ROVS (in Russian: *РОВС, Русский Обще-Воинский Союз*; Russian Military Union) that unified former members of the White Russian army, favored the rebel generals. A group of Russian officers crossed illegally the border between France and Spain to join Franco's army. Lamsdorff shared the opinion of the most of members of ROVS. Therefore, he decided to go to Spain and to join the rebel army.

### **The Spanish Civil War**

Unlike some members of ROVS, Lamsdorff didn't have contacts among the Spanish military. Besides that, he was one of the first Russian volunteers in the Nationalist Spain, and when he crossed the border, he was arrested by the Spanish rebel authorities and sent back to France as a suspected Soviet spy. Lamsdorff was not disappointed by his failure, and crossed the border once again, swimming a mountain river together with his friend N. Zotov.<sup>[11]</sup> They were taken into custody once again. After spending one month in Spanish jail, they could persuade the nationalists that they were White Russians who wanted to fight the communists. In this way they were set free and sent to the nationalist army.

During the time spent in prison Lamsdorff learned some Spanish, and later he could translate Soviet documents captured by the nationalists. Beyond that he fought in Franco's army as a machine gunner. In August-September 1937 he took part in the fighting at Belchite, Aragon. This little town occupied an important strategic position. The republicans needed to capture it to continue their offensive to Zaragoza, and attacked it with superior forces. After the 2-days battle they took the town, but suffered heavy casualties. Lamsdorff participated in the defense of Belchite. He was seriously wounded and spent a few months in the hospital. After Belchite he didn't take part in other big battles during the war.

Lamsdorff ended the war in one of the “requeté” units. The “requeté” were the carlist militia groups who played an important role in the nationalist army.<sup>[12]</sup> All the members of the “requeté” were devote Catholics; ideologically they were monarchists. Their ideology attracted many of White Russians. A. P. Yaremchuk, another Russian volunteer in the “requeté”, wrote in his diary:

The captain Ruiz told us that the carlist motto was *For God, Fatherland and King*. One of ours answered that the motto of the Imperial Russian Army was *For Faith, Tsar and Motherland*, i.e., that our ideology was the same. It was established the mutual comprehension to the satisfaction of everybody.<sup>[13]</sup>

L. Redondo and J. de Zavala indicated that although the White Russians were not Catholics they admired the devotion of carlists.<sup>[14]</sup> The carlists in return “allowed the Russians to fly the Tsarist flag on parade and sew on their sleeves the white, blue and red colour patches of Imperial Russia”.<sup>[15]</sup> The parade mentioned by the Australian historian is the so-called Victory Parade (“Desfile de la Victoria”) that took place on 3 May 1939 in Valencia. The Russian squad of the *tercio* (regiment) *Doña María de Molina* participated in it as a separate unit.<sup>[16]</sup>

## World War II

After the end of the Spanish Civil War some Russian volunteers preferred to settle in Spain.<sup>[17]</sup> Nevertheless, Grigori Pavlovich returned to France. He was imprisoned for illegal crossing of the France-Spain border in 1936, but soon released and enlisted to the French army. Lamsdorff took part in the campaign of 1940 and despite the defeat of France obtained the “Croix du combattant” (The Combatant's Cross). As he said to his grandchildren, he received this decoration for “running less than the French themselves”.

After the German victory Lamsdorff returned to Paris. During the occupation of France Lamsdorff's family saved a few Jews helping them to escape from the nazis. In the meantime Lamsdorff was personally acquainted with some German high ranking officers. The most prominent of them was the admiral K. Dönitz (they get acquainted thanks to their wives). After the war Lamsdorff was in contact with the SS-Obersturmbannführer O. Skorzeny, who was an engineer by his pre-war profession (the same as Lamsdorff). Skorzeny also lived in Spain after World War II. Nevertheless, Lamsdorff himself never sympathized with the nazi ideology being an Orthodox Christian and monarchist by his political views. According to his grandchildren, Grigori Pavlovich during all his life displayed at home a portrait of the last Russian Tsar Nicholas II. After World War II, Lamsdorff said that if he had read the Hitler's “Mein Kampf” before the war, he would have never joined the German troops invading the USSR.

However, in 1941 he greeted the start of German offensive against the Soviet Union. Lamsdorff went to the Eastern Front and began to work as an interpreter. Despite the orders of Hitler, Russian units supporting the German army appeared yet in the beginning of the war. For example, on 24 August 1941 in Velizh (in the region of Vitebsk) it was created the first Russian collaborationist unit – the group *White Cross* (Russische Angriffgruppe «Weißes Kreuz»).[18] In March 1942 in the village Asintorf (in Russian: *Осинторф*), on the territory of modern Belarus, the Germans created the *Russian National People's Army* (RNNA; in Russian: *РННА, Русская Национальная Народная Армия*; in German: *Sonderverband “Graukopf”*). The unit consisted mostly of Soviet prisoners; the officers were White Russians. Lamsdorff was one of the officers. The soldiers wore the Soviet uniform and badges with white-blue-red colors of Russian Empire. Despite the great expectations of some White Russians, the RNNA showed a low efficiency in the war. It took part in actions against the Soviet guerilla fighters, but a high percentage of its military personnel were deserting and returning to the Soviets. In the end of 1942, the RNNA suffered heavy casualties in the fighting near Velikiye Luki; after that the unit was discontinued.<sup>[19]</sup>

In 1943 Lamsdorff joined the 1<sup>st</sup> guards battalion of the *Russian Liberation Army* (ROA; in Russian: *РОА, Русская Освободительная Армия*). It was formed in the beginning of 1943 and from May 1943 located near Pskov.<sup>[20]</sup> The operations of the unit were centered on the struggle against the guerilla fighters in the region. An important event in the life of the battalion (and a remarkable situation for the whole Russian emigration) was the participation of the unit in the parade of German troops in Pskov on 22 of June 1943. The event was dedicated to the anniversary of the “liberation of Russia of the communism”. The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of ROA marched on the streets of the town with the Russian traditional white-blue-red flag. That was the first time in more than 20 years since the old Russian flag was displayed on the streets of a Russian town. The color bearer on the parade was Lamsdorff.<sup>[21]</sup> One of Lamsdorff's photos bearing the flag helped him to prove to French authorities after the war that he was not a collaborationist because he fought under his country's

color.

The 1<sup>st</sup> guards battalion of the ROA was disbanded in November 1943. The reason was a low effectiveness of the unit's actions in their struggle against the guerilla fighters. Sometimes the ROA soldiers and the guerilla fighters in the region were arranging unofficial "treaties" not to conduct operations against each other. Furthermore, the members of the ROA often just simulated real military actions. The German command was dissatisfied with that situation and decided to restructure the unit. All the operations were cancelled; the officers returned to Germany and France. Lamsdorff entered the ROA officer school in Verdun, France. Thanks to his military experience in Spain and Russia and due to his study at Verdun, in the end of the war he had the rank of major of the ROA.

In 1943-1945 Lamsdorff did not take part in the warfare, but participated in the organization of the military forces of the *Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia* (KONR; in Russian: *КОНР, Комитет Освобождения Народов России*), formed on the initiative of the General A. A. Vlasov. In 1945 Lamsdorff was in Denmark. In the last days of World War II he crossed the whole Germany to reach the allied occupation zones and not to be captured by the Soviets. Finally, Lamsdorff was arrested by the French authorities. Unlike numerous Russians who had collaborated with the Germans during the war and later had been extradited to the USSR, Lamsdorff avoided the extradition. He was freed from all the charges by the French court and decided to emigrate to Spain.

## **After World War II**

After spending 9 years in constant military enterprises, Lamsdorff returned to peaceful life. He settled in Lerida, Catalonia. In that Catalan town he obtained a job as an engineer, his civil profession. After World War II, Lamsdorff tried one more time to participate in a military conflict. In the late 40s (Lamsdorff's grandchildren could not indicate the precise year) Grigori Pavlovich enlisted to the French army to fight communists in Indochina. He considered as enemies the members of the independence coalition Viet Minh with their leftist ideology. Motivated by an unabated enthusiasm to struggle the communism in every possible situation, Lamsdorff went to Paris, volunteered to the army, passed the medical examination and was sent to Indochina. There he was submitted to a more rigorous medical inspection and finally sent back to Europe. He was considered unfit for military service (because of his age and a few wounds). Lamsdorff was very disappointed about it, and preferred not to speak a lot about this story.

After that, Lamsdorff lived in Spain, first in Lerida and later in Sitges, Catalonia, and Barcelona. He worked as an engineer, also opened a hotel in Sitges. Till the death Lamsdorff never accepted the Spanish citizenship considering himself Russian. Serious health concerns impeded him to return to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union; also there were a number of bureaucratic difficulties that prevented him from obtaining the Russian citizenship. Grigori Pavlovich Lamsdorff died in 2004 in Barcelona.

His biography is a good example of life of White Russians who collaborated with the Germans during World War II. Their tragedy consists in the fact that they had to make a choice between Hitler and Stalin. The study of their biographies helps us to understand the nature of Russian collaborationism in World War II and to expand our knowledge about the tragedy of White Russians in exile.

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<sup>[1]</sup>Two scientific works in the USSR made a brief description of the participation of White Russians in the Spanish Civil War; nevertheless, in both investigations the war in Spain is shown as just an episode in a wide panorama of the White emigration (Komin, 1979; Shkarenkov, 1986 [1981]).

<sup>[2]</sup>Telitsyn, V. L. “The Pyrenees” in fire. The Civil War in Spain and the Soviet “volunteers”, Eksmo, Moscow, 2003.

<sup>[3]</sup>Pridantseva, M. Y. “The Russian emigration and the Spanish war: some aspects of relationships”, The Civil War in Spain 1936-1939 and Europe (70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning). Materials of the interuniversity scientific workshop. Belgorod, 52-70, 2006. [in Russian]

<sup>[4]</sup>Semenov, K. K. The Russian emigration and the Civil War in Spain 1936-1939, Algoritm, Moscow, 2016, pp. 142-151.

<sup>[5]</sup>Aleksandrov, K. M. “The Russian military emigrants in Europe in 1939-1940: Moods, reactions and intentions”. Gumanitarnye, sotsialno-ekonomicheskie I obshestvennye nauki, 11 (1), 207-210, 2015, p. 209

<sup>[6]</sup>Aleksandrov, K. M. “The Russian military emigrants...”, p. 207.

<sup>[7]</sup>Shilov, D. N. Public officials of the Russian Empire. 1802-1917. Bibliographical reference book, Dmitry Bulanin, Saint-Petersburg, 2001, p. 360.

<sup>[8]</sup>Vasiliev M. V. “The first guards battalion of ROA”, Pskov. Nauchno-prakticheski, istoriko-kraevedcheski zhurnal, 44, 159-175, 2016, p. 171.

<sup>[9]</sup>Semenov, K. K. The Russian emigration and the Civil War in Spain 1936-1939, Algoritm, Moscow, 2016, p. 144.

<sup>[10]</sup>Pchelinov-Obrazumov, A. A. “The image of the Spanish Republic (1936-1939) in the print media of Russian political exile”, Nauchnye vedomosti. Seria: Istoria, politologia, ekonomika, informatika, 1 (144), issue 25, 44-51, 2013, p. 45

<sup>[11]</sup>Semenov indicates that the Lamsdorff's companion in crossing the border was the baron B. S. Ludensgausen-Wolf (Semenov, 2017: 76 ); the Russian researcher bases this statement on Jurado's article (Jurado, 1998). The Lamsdorff's grandchildren told that their grandfather swam the river together with N. Zotov.

<sup>[12]</sup>The participation of the “requeté” in the Spanish Civil War is thoroughly studied in the book of Aróstegui (2013).

<sup>[13]</sup>Yaremchuk-II, A. P. Russian volunteers in Spain 1936-1939, Globus, San Francisco, 1983, P. 12

<sup>[14]</sup>Count Redondo, L. & De Zavala J. *The requeté (the tradition does not die)*, AHR, Barcelona, 1957, p. 405.

<sup>[15]</sup>Keene, J. *Fighting for Franco. International volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, Hambledon Continuum, London, 2001, p. 199.

<sup>[16]</sup>Semenov, K. K. *The Russian emigration...*, P. 99.

<sup>[17]</sup>*Report to the direction of the ROVS. 10 February 1940*, Aleksandrov K. M. *Russian soldiers of the Wehrmacht*, Eksmo, Moscow, 494-495, 2005.

<sup>[18]</sup>Aleksandrov, K. M. *The Generals and officers of the military formations of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia 1943-1946*, Doctoral dissertation, Saint-Petersburg Institute of History of Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint-Petersburg, 2015, p. 241.

<sup>[19]</sup>Vasiliev M. V. “The first guards battalion of ROA”, p. 161.

<sup>[20]</sup>Vasiliev M. V. “The first guards battalion of ROA”, p. 164.

<sup>[21]</sup>Vasiliev M. V. “The first guards battalion of ROA”, p. 167.

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