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FATHERS-HEROES AND DISCIPLINED SONS: CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF SOVIET MILITARY BOARDING SCHOOLS (1943–1950)

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The article explores the history and ideological implications behind the creation of the *Suvorov* and *Nakhimov* military boarding schools. The author argues that these educational institutions had several important functions within the Soviet society of the 1940s. The institutions promoted the model of educating new cadres of military elite, while employing, as their main pedagogical approach, a tricky combination of harsh discipline and demands of limited inventiveness and initiative. Another important task the schools were charged with was the provision of secure space (which included clothing and nutrition) for those boys whose fathers were either killed or still at the battle grounds of WWII. The formation of symbolically meaningful skills, such as ball dancing or horse-back riding, was essential for this new military elite generation, since such abilities meant to create self-identification and, most importantly, external perception in connecting these Soviet era cadets with the traditions of pre-revolutionary nobility upbringing. The young generation of future warriors was perceived as happy, well-trained, and loyal symbolic substitutes for their predecessors who perished during the Great Terror and the WWII. The author argues that all mentioned features have persisted till nowadays, and contemporary parents eagerly send children to study at military schools (and, correspondingly, to leave the family) in order to increase their "competitiveness" for the future life.

Key words: history of education, elitism, Suvorov and Nakhimov military schools, Soviet culture of the 1940s.

1

On August 24–27, 1942, the leading Soviet newspaper *Pravda* published Oleksandr Korniychuk's play, "Frontline." ("Front") The ideological message of this work was obvious: the old generation of high-ranking military officers whose only point of reference was the Civil War had to be replaced by people who understood current military strategy and new weapons, and who valued rational planning using new technologies, rather than relying solely on the bravery of Soviet troops. This publication was authorized and promoted personally by Stalin himself. He edited the text and was virtually its co-author. [Dobrenko, 2013]

Eight months later, in April 1943, Stalin received a special note regarding the future of military education in the Soviet Union. Its author, General Mayor Alexey Ignatiev, worked for the Voenizdat Publishing House, but before the Revolution he had been educated at the Kiev Cadet Corps, and was a graduate of the Page Corps at St. Petersburg. This background led him to propose the new form of military education for the young Soviet male population: starting in childhood, Soviet boys receive their military education at special institutions, which he envisioned as Soviet incarnations of the Imperial Cadet Corps. In Ignatiev's view, this "old-new" system would address the lack of discipline and professional ethics among middle-ranked officers in the Soviet army. Ignatiev proposed opening a single experimental institution for 500 students, which would be based in Moscow and admit children starting in the 3rd grade (of age or ten years old). [Ignatiev 1943] Stalin followed this recommendation and implemented Ignatiev's project on a larger scale. According to the decree "On Urgent Measures for Restoring the National Economy in Recently Liberated Territories," issued on August 21, 1943, nine Soviet cities have been selected to host the new Suvorov military schools, admitting a total of 4500 boys and young men. [O neotlozhnykh merakh 1943, p. 53--54] The schools were opened by October 1943, and within a year, eight additional schools were established in other Soviet cities. The Soviet Navy was granted its own educational institutions: three Nakhimov Naval Academies were opened in Leningrad, Tbilisi, and Riga between 1944 and 1945.

The most evident context for the Suvorov and Nakhimov military schools was the ideology of imperial restoration, described in detail by Nickolai Timasheff [Timasheff 1946] and David Brandenberger [Brandenberger 2002]. I would like to focus on a less obvious context of these changes: the ideology and educational policies of Soviet elitism. As some primary sources on the history of the Suvorov Schools have been recently prepared for publication[1], my investigation is based on three categories of published materials: first, the printed archival sources , particularly those of the Kalinin Suvorov school from 1943 to 1946, second, the *Journal of Military Pedagogy*, launched in 1944 and published annually, aimed especially for Suvorov faculty; third, memoirs of graduates of these schools; and forth, prose fiction and films set at imaginary versions of these schools.

The representation of the Suvorov and Nakhimov military schools was an important concern for Soviet authorities. During the period of "malokartinie," two films depicting life at these schools were released. One was based on a novella: "Scarlet Shoulder Loops" by Boris Izumskiy, a teacher of military history from the Suvorov School in Novocherkassk. The publication of this novella drastically changed Izumskiy's career. When the book was published to admiring reviews, Izumskiy left military service and became a professional writer. It is particularly interesting that he was neither a graduate of the imperial cadet corps, nor a professional soldier. After years of living in penury and working underpaid jobs, he became a schoolteacher, and was only called up for military service in June 1941. With his life experience and leftist views, Izumskiy had an unusual perspective on the Suvorov school system[2]. That is why his novella deserves close scrutiny. My approach is to identify and analyze visible gaps and tensions in the aforementioned sources, particularly in their descriptions of the elitism and closed character of these schools. His story could serve as an indirect evidence of these two characteristics, and it can tell us much more than official reports of the time.

My main argument is that, apart from fulfilling the task of imperial revival, the Suvorov military schools had been conceived, and were for many years perceived, as a symbolic and a real compensation for the losses of WWII, and for the traumas and social problems that accumulated during the 25 years of the Soviet regime. The future Soviet elite was seen as military, and it should have served as a model for the whole country. As I hope to show, the whole project proved to be self-contradictory, a logical result of the equally controversial ideas of the post-War society that took shape between the end of the Battle of Stalingrad and the beginning of the Cold War.

2

The documents show that organizing the Suvorov military schools was a project shared by both Soviet party leaders who were trying to revive nostalgia for Imperial Russia, and by members of the Soviet military elite who had been educated in the imperial military schools or approved of this pedagogical model. However, these schools soon became extremely popular and admission turned out to be highly competitive. Aside from the better nutrition and state welfare system provided to Soviet cadets, these schools were appealing because of the cultural model they represented and promoted. Books and movies about "Suvorovtsy" had a large audience of both children and adults.

Discipline was central to the new institution. It was proclaimed in Ignatiev's letter to Stalin, and later became a recurring theme in the *Journal of Military Pedagogy*. In his letter, Ignatiev addressed the lack of discipline in the Soviet army. However, in the eyes of Stalin and his associates, this was a countrywide problem. Anomie, which spread across society from the first days of the war, was a real challenge for the Soviet authorities. For Soviet citizens, it had a dual meaning. They could take advantage of it when buying food on the black market or planning risky military operations, but when faced with the complete paralysis of the railway system or supply services, they were more inclined to demand restoration of social order and harsh discipline. The same applied to children and adolescents: without supervision, they often missed school or joined gangs to provide food for themselves and their families. The model of a military boarding school with strict behavioral rules seemed like the best solution to this problem[3].

The key principles of military discipline were clearly explained in pedagogical articles, as well as in novellas and movies which depicted the new schools. Discipline was identified with obedience, and this idea was supported by multiple aphorisms ascribed to Suvorov and Kutuzov. «Вот кончим, сыну, войну, приеду к тебе, обниму крепко-прекрепко. Мы ведь теперь с тобой соратники. Только научись, родной, сначала повиноваться». "As soon as we finish the war I'll come to see you, my son, and will embrace you very tightly. We are comrades-in-arms now. But first you need to

learn how to obey." [Izumskiy 1949, v. 1, s. 95] This quotation from Izumskiy's novella "Scarlet Shoulder Loops" shows that obedience was seen as the only condition for the happy reunion of fathers and sons after the war; and, vice versa, disobedience was the only obstacle that could prevent this reunion.

Two other principles of military discipline deserve special attention. The first is hygiene and adjustment to cold since adapting to cold symbolized in this context both endurance and fortitude. The rules of hygiene stipulated morning washing-up with cold water, brushing teeth, splashing oneself with cold water, and weekly baths including a complete change of underwear, linen and undercollars [Pravila 1946, s. 29–30; Vasilenko 1945, s. 8–10]. These civilized norms were almost completely abandoned during the war [Vasilenko 1945, s. 40–-44]. Hot water and soap were considered luxury. Several books about the Suvorov schools tell the same story about a boy who got used to telling lies to his mentors and friends. Every two or three days he would pretend that he was running out of soap, thus, he would be given a new bar. He collected these bars to send them to his peasant mother who had not seen soap in years, even before the war[4]. While the story was meant to teach children to be truthful, in fact it attested to the deep poverty of the Soviet population.

The second disciplinary principle was a strict daily regiment that left boys with no free time: even homework had to be done in the same rooms where children had their classes, and under the supervision of a mentor or an officer on duty [Vasilenko 1945, s. 12; Saplin, s. 85–86].

How were disciplinary rules implemented? Articles from the mid-1940s containing guidelines for teachers and mentors often argued against rudeness and roughness in communication with students; against raising one's voice; against inappropriate epithets and comparisons in describing students' actions; against imposing sanctions that children would perceive as shameful or offensive [Drjagin 1946, s. 5–15]. If even an official journal had so much to say about teacher misconduct, what was really going on inside the Suvorov and Nakhimov military schools? Did officers dare to beat students? Given that most of the teachers and mentors had left the front lines with severe wounds and psychological trauma, we can be sure that this practice was widespread. Memoirs of Suvorov school graduates [Alexandrov 1980, s. 39], as well as official documents, provide us with sufficient factual support for this conclusion. Thus, the chief of the Kalinin Suvorov school had to dismiss and send to the penal battalion at the frontline the junior commander, sergeant Onishchenko, as he used to "grab his students by the ears and yank them on" («брал воспитанников за уши и трепал») [Istoriya 2018, s. 85].

As a final measure before expelling a misbehaving student, the rules prescribed ripping off his shoulder loops in front of the whole school, and depriving him of the right to wear shoulder loops for at least one month. This action was equal to dishonoring a military personal, thus equalizing the cadets with their adult counterparts at the front line. Several memoirists attest to the effectiveness of this procedure [see: Selivanov, s. 136], but it certainly could not be performed too often.

There was also the last resort measure – to dismiss a student and send him back home. During the first months of their existence the Suvorov military schools had to pick out from the recently accepted students those who could not succeed due to their immense lack of academic preparation, inappropriate behavior, or illnesses. However, on January, 1944 the supervisors from the Narkomat oborony (National Defense Committee) strictly limited this growing expulsion demanding that each case became a subject of a special appeal to the officials from Narkomat [Istoriya 2018, s. 90].

Taken together, the strict daily regimen, emphasis on obedience and tidiness, clear hierarchical structures, and obsession with military dress – particularly shoulder loops – indicate that the Suvorov military schools were to form the basis of a postwar regular state, similar to the one that Peter the Great dreamed of building during his reign. We can see other striking parallels, such as the determination to wage wars against world powers, mentioned in Ignatiev's letter of 1943, the enforcement of lifelong service to the state, and the insistence on complete loyalty to the sovereign.

The authors of the *Journal of Military Pedagogy* praised Peter the Great for establishing a so-called "national military tradition," [Korobkov 1946, s. 152] a clear indication that the key social actors of the age were well aware which social model they were emulating.

One question that immediately springs to mind is whether this system left any leeway for ordinary human attachments and affections, especially among teenagers who had been withdrawn from their homes and families, or had lost their fathers or both parents in the war. Izumsky was apparently

the first to attempt to solve this problem by introducing a certain model of values: on the one hand, he consistently emphasized discipline and obedience; on the other hand, he insisted on the crucial role of trust, tact, and the preservation of personal dignity among the young students. This model was represented in the schematic plot of "Scarlet Shoulder Loops": the text introduces several characters –two military pedagogues who constantly argue about the priority of discipline vs. kind-heartedness, a teacher who successfully combines both approaches, and the boy-protagonist who finds a balance between two equally vital sources of authority over the course of the plot. In fact, the main reason why Izumsky's book became so popular with readers was the introduction of psychological analysis, and the insistence on trust and tact. Two films about the Suvorov and Nachimov schools followed the same model.

3

The second compensatory element of the Suvorov military schools was that they were designed to substitute for the loss of the military elite during WWII and the Great Terror. Admission to the Suvorov Schools was based on a clear social hierarchy: the privilege of admission was granted first of all to the sons of the army generals and officers and to the commanders-in-chief of large partisan units killed in action; second, to sons of living officers and partisan commanders; third, to children of sergeants, privates or ordinary partisans killed in action; fourth, to boys from families of workers, peasants and party officials who had been killed by Nazis in any circumstances; fifth, to sons of sergeants and privates serving in the Red Army; sixth, to boys from all other families [Bondarenko 2013, s. 118]. This hierarchy clearly shows that high-ranking officers had an advantage over low-ranking service people; that the killed outranked the living, and that military outranked civilian. It's worth noticing, however, that living generals and commanders were seen as more important than killed sergeants and privates.

Among the boys accepted to these schools were children who had seen military action as members of partisan brigades and Navy and Army units. According to memoirs of the graduates of these schools, there were at least one or two students with this background in the cohorts of 1943–45 [Vasilenko, s. 14–23; Baranov, s. 56]. The printed sources alone indicate that adapting to the way of life in these schools was not easy for teenagers who had experienced the trauma of killing and exposure to death, danger, and cruelty. In his novella, "Son of the Regiment" (1945), Valentin Kataev suggests that admission to the Suvorov military school was the logical result of his protagonist's military career. Twelve years later, however, in 1957, Vladimir Bogomolov was more dubious about the possibility that a boy who had survived the terrors of war and loss of his closest relatives, and had even killed people himself, could become a loyal and joyful member of the Suvorov school collective. Andrey Tarkovsky, who directed a movie based on Bogomolov's novella, supported and developed that view.

The shaping of the future elite is a ubiquitous theme in books and movies about the Suvorov schools. "Do you want to become an admiral?" the head of the Nakhimov school asks a novice in the "Have a happy sailing" film (1949), and after receiving a nod, authoritatively adds: "We really need admirals." In Boris Izumsky's novella, the head of the school in Novocherkassk leaves his students with the following statement: "Excellent boys, who knows – maybe that same Golikov will become a marshal, and Semyon Ivanovich Samsonov – a first-class officer of the General Staff?" [Izumskiy, v. 1, p. 106]

The social function of the new schools influenced both the curriculum and students' daily lives. In addition to regular academic courses, boys were required to study ballroom dancing, horseback riding and fencing. This was more than just a formal tribute to the "noble traditions" of the cadet corps: mastering all three skills was considered vital for the boys' future success. This is evident from memoirists' descriptions of the role of ballroom dance in their school life. I'll offer only one quotation, but similar examples can be found in almost all memoirs about the early Suvorov schools: «За танцы выставлялись оценки и на зачеты приглашали девочек, оценка выставлялась только за танец в паре. […] Мы умели танцевать все бальные танцы, даже мазурку» / "Dances required special grading, and girls were invited to the examinations. A grade could be given only for a dance with a partner. […] We knew how to dance all the ballroom dances, even the mazurka" [Polskiy 2002, s. 43][5].

Another attribute of the elite upbringing that could be found in almost all the schools was presence of a billiard-table. Boys were not only allowed but encouraged to play billiards, and such an obviously 'old army" skill was considered important for the future in the military.

These old-regime attitudes were not the only anachronistic part of the curriculum. Military training consisted mostly of marching drills. Students were taught marksmanship with obsolete weapons, like the Mosin-Nagants first introduced in 1882, while soldiers on the frontline were already equipped with much more modern firearms. Evidently, these methods were not meant to prepare the technically skilled officers described in Kornichuk's play. Therefore, it's important to explain the coexistence of two cultural models of the military elite: the one described in Kornichuk's *Frontline*, where the new commanders possess a high level of technological expertise and personal initiative, and the one implemented in the Suvorov schools. Strange as it may seem, "Suvorovtsy" were expected to demonstrate initiative and savvy during war games as well as in a real war. This is evident both in analogous scenes from the two movies, "Have a Happy Sailing" and "A Comrade's Honor" and in pedagogical literature of the time period. For the rest of their lives, they were expected to remain obedient subordinates of their commanders. The switch from one mode to the other was neither described nor conceptualized. Nevertheless, based on the plots of the movies, we can infer that initiative was perceived as a natural result of the willingness to win glory for the Soviet motherland, and went hand in hand with true friendship.

At the same time, this vision of boys and young men training for military service and learning to shoot and survive in severe conditions had a therapeutic effect on Soviet society in the 1940s. The younger demographics had suffered heavy causalities during the war, when they had proved to be unprepared to fight against the enemy. The new generation promised to be well equipped for future wars and to survive in any conditions that could lay ahead of them.

4

Another feature that set the Suvorov schools apart from the rest of Soviet society was sufficient – even excessive – nutrition. All the memoirists devote pages to descriptions of their daily rations, and emphasize the striking contrast between the school and home ration [Maltsov, s. 123–125]. We should keep in mind that these supplies were often provided by North and Latin American Charities or by the policies of Lend-Lease. Here are some impressive quotations: «То, что я увидел в столовой, я до сих пор не могу забыть. Столы были сервированы как в ресторане: тарелки с подтарельниками, хлеб для каждого на отдельной тарелочке, столовые приборы мельхиоровые на специальной мельхиоровой подставке. Компот уже стоял на краю стола, разлитый в стаканы, а солдатский бачок был наполнен вкусным супом из макарон с большими дырками. […]Наелись мы до отвала, но каждый свой недоеденный хлеб засунул себе в карман» / "I cannot forget the picture I saw in the dining room. The tables were set up like in a restaurant: plates with the service plates underneath, bread for everybody on a separate dish, fine cutlery made of German silver, on a special German silver plate. Glasses of compote had already been placed at the edge of the table, and a soldiers' cauldron was filled with a tasty soup with large whole cannelloni. […] We ate to bursting, but each one of us stuffed his unfinished bread in his pocket" [Milenin].

Boris Izumsky noted the sharp contrast between the Suvorov schools and other children's institutions: in his novella, he dwells on this social disparity by having his protagonists travel to another city where they are shown life in an ordinary Soviet trade school (remeslennoe uchilishche). The *Suvorovtsy* were struck by the difficult labor conditions endured by their coevals, but justify their privileged position by arguing that their future military life would be just as difficult, and that they would pay their long-term debt to their country [Izumskiy 1949, v. 1, s. 98].

When pointing out to this privileged standing of the Suvorov schools, we cannot ignore that it was also strongly connected with disciplining directed if not at the students, then at the personnel. Thus, for example, orders and special regulations issued by the chief of the Kalinin Suvorov military school demonstrate that providing students with sufficient nutrition demanded daily control over people involved in getting, cooking, and serving food, which included first of all preventing theft and resale of food supplies [Istoriya 2018, s. 46, 110].

5

This new notion of a military elite soon acquired a distinct aesthetic form in visual representations. For all its tributes to the memory and achievements of Peter the Great, the style of the Suvorov school and the *Suvorovtsy* had nothing in common with visual images of the Petrine epoch, even those from the famous movie of 1937-38, starring Nickolay Cherkasov. In fact, the Suvorov style was based on the 19th century imperial style. This style became a symbolic visual substitute for the students' and alumni spiritual motherland, the motherland they longed for and hoped to find in the near future. This ideal motherland was a far cry away from the actual Soviet Union. Two film episodes represent this notion best: the first depicts a dialog between a Suvorov school graduate and his girlfriend; the second shows a ball for *Suvorovtsy* at the Palace of Young Pioneers. We can see that both episodes present the imperial style as an unattainable sublime, an ideal world that could be acted out but never reached in the presence of outside observers[6]. The spectator must believe that these extraordinary young men and women will eventually reach out to their spiritual motherland when they grow up, and they will do it simply by virtue of their moral education.

This is not an attempt to historicize everyday life, but rather a way to live among historical forms and trappings as if they were contemporary. The screen shows nothing modern that can be compared to these outdated objects and manners. The spectator is supposed to participate in a contemporaneity that is neither modern nor historical, but is embodied in "eternal" classical forms.

This aesthetic was short-lived. In Khrushchev's time, after the significant curtailment of military forces, many Suvorov schools were closed, and their graduates and staff lost their jobs. Khrushev's *internaty*, that sprang up on his orders starting in 1956, borrowed and radically transformed the model of an elite school where children were alienated from both family and society. However, beginning 1990s, Suvorov schools have once again come into vogue. Reinvented under their old title, the "Cadet Corps," they are once again considered prestigious. Many parents dream of sending their sons there. It is possible to assume that the popularity of these "refurbished" institutions in the post-Soviet Russia is rooted in the war memory, and in postwar compensatory social expectations which have gone unfulfilled since 1943.

Appendix: the film frames
"Have a happy sailing!" (1949)

The interior stage set with piano, 0.41.42

The first scene of Nakhimovtsy's regatta, 0.29.20

"A Comrade's Honor" (1953)

Writing a letter with the busts of Leo Tolstoy and Nickolay Nekrasov in the background

"You should love common people": Soviet general reprimands his son with the Suvorov's bust in the background

Notes

[1] See a very valuable publication prepared by M.A. Timoshenko: Istoriya 2018.
[2] On Izumskiy, his biography and works see: Izumskiy 2009.
[3] The same problem was addressed by the introduction of separate schooling of boys and girls in the same year 1943. See: Ewing 2010, p. 20—52.
[4] See, for example: Vasilenko 1945, s. 37.
[5] See also: Vasilenko 1945, s. 48–54 on dancing, s. 54–58 on horseback riding; Pravnuki 2003, s. 106–107; Alexandrov 1980, s. 40.
[6] "A Comrade's Honor" (1953): https://my.mail.ru/mail/boris.volkov.44/video/10570/10606.html. 1.16.00 – praises to Leningrad; "Have a happy sailing" (1949): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WKcoRJJQhA.

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«ПАНСИОНЫ БЛАГОНРАВНЫХ СОЛДАТ»: СУВОРОВСКИЕ И НАХИМОВСКИЕ УЧИЛИЩА В ИСТОРИЧЕСКОМ И КУЛЬТУРНОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ 1943–1950-Х ГОДОВ

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Рассматривается история создания и первый период существования суворовских и нахимовских училищ. На основе опубликованных архивных документов, материалов из «Военно-педагогического сборника», воспоминаний первых выпускников суворовских училищ, а также произведений художественной литературы и кино, специально посвященных жизни в этих учебных заведениях, делается вывод о том, что суворовские и нахимовские училища были призваны выполнить несколько задач. Первой и главной было воспитание новой военной элиты. Эта воспитательная концепция была основана на идее строгой дисциплины и установке на умеренную изобретательность и ограниченную инициативу. Второй задачей было дать детям, отцы которых воевали или погибли на войне, возможность провести несколько лет в относительном материальном достатке и сытости. Третья задача состояла в формировании у воспитанников некоторых знаковых навыков, которые позволили бы им идентифицировать себя как представителей советской военной элиты, по сути, наследующей дореволюционной. Немаловажными считались многим современникам задачи, связанные с компенсацией травмы войны и Большого террора: создать в обществе представление о защищенности молодого поколения, его подготовленности к будущим войнам, невозможности масштабных потерь среди

молодых воинов в будущем. Заложенные в основу концепции суворовских и нахимовских училищ противоречия между строгим дисциплинированием и установкой на гуманизацию, между эгалитарным и элитарным образованием сохранились в них и по сей день и являются, по мнению автора, причиной большого спроса на «кадетское» образование в современной России.

Ключевые слова: история образования, элитизм, суворовские и нахимовские училища, советская культура 1940-х гг.

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