

# The memory of the Norwegians in the Red Army: personal dramas, professional brotherhoods and cultural expressions

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## Abstract

When Norway was occupied by the Germans in 1940 – around 100 Norwegian citizens from the border area fled to Murmansk. Many of them were members of the local communist party and were afraid for persecutions by the Germans. During the war many of them participated in reconnaissance operations in Norway within the Northern Fleet and the NKVD.

Altogether 50 Norwegians had assignments for the Soviet Army. More than half of them died while on mission. After the war those who remained alive suffered. Several of them were arrested in the Soviet Union and were charged with espionage. Those of them who returned to Norway suffered under the constant suspicion of the Norwegian authorities and were under surveillance for many years. In Norwegian, the Norwegians who fled to the Soviet Union and participated in the war, are often referred to as "the partisans".

The contribution of the 'partisans' in the war was only publicly acknowledged in the 1980s after and peaked in the late 1990s. The King of Norway expressed his gratitude to the partisans in 1992, and new monuments were erected in 1997 in Kiberg, the home village of most Norwegians who fled to the Soviet Union and in Lavna, a settlement in the vicinity of Murmansk where the "partisans" were trained. Local and regional authorities supported the initiative. In 2017 the Norwegian Ministry of Defence concluded after examining their case that the 'partisans' should not be awarded with a medal for their participation in the war.

In 2016 a Russian Norwegian expert group on the history of the partisan struggle against fascism in the North between 1941 and 1944 was established in Kirkenes. The group was initiated by the veteran organisation *Shtit* (a non-profit foundation for support of former staff and retirees from FSB in Murmansk region) and had broad participation - members from veteran organisations, the Russian Geographic Society and the regional authorities on both sides of the borders - that is Finnmark county and Murmansk region. The group has annually commemorated the memory of the partisans on both sides of the border and has received ample public attention.

In 2019 during the commemoration of the 75 years from the liberation of Finnmark from German occupation, the memory of the 'partisans' was lifted on official level defence



officers in the period from 1949 to 1965 and antiheroes in the early years of the cold war confrontation – suspicious Norwegian citizens sworn for NKVD (KGB), a gradual change from the turn of the 1960s to the 1992, when their activities in Northern Norway were described and led to acknowledging their role in the fights against the German occupation. This process was accompanied by recognition of how they have suffered as victims of the Cold War. A third period from the 1990s up to 2000, when the memory of the partisans became a political issue - both as an issue of regional memory and became incorporated into the Russian – Norwegian commemorative practices. In this period a memory infrastructure was created and established (monuments, memorials, museums) and a fourth period since the 2010s when the memory of the partisans became an object of new (grassroot) reinterpretations and cultural performances in the trans-border region. The latter include diverse Norwegian- Russian initiatives by veteran organisations and Norwegian- Russian cultural expressions related to the memory of the partisans. In order to understand these recent commemorative initiatives, it is important to look at how the ‘partisans’ have been commemorated in Russian (Soviet) context and at the earlier interplay between Russian and Norwegian memories of the partisans.

In this paper my focus will be on the *razvedchiki* - the scouts, those partisans who were sent on mission to Norway with the task to provide information on the German activities in Northern Norway to the Soviet Army. The operational groups where the Norwegians were active were often small (3 persons) and mixed (2 Norwegians, 1 Soviet). The memory of the partisans in Norwegian context has often been related to the memory of the local population, often relatives, friends and neighbours who used to help them (and rarely to locals who betrayed them). In the Soviet Union / Russia the recognition and the memory of the Norwegian partisans was in the first postwar decades not existent. Despite the extensive literature on the WWII, they were barely mentioned before the late 1970s. Information about the Norwegian partisans is to be found in memoirs and narratives by Soviet officers, however in many cases they are only vaguely mentioned. Since the 1990s, the role of the Norwegian partisans has been gradually recognised and the number of texts about them in Russian are growing.

This recognition could be partly seen as influenced by the new postsoviet tide in the memory of WWII in the 1990s - when the victory over Nazi Germany was remembered as a ‘shared victory’ of the Soviet army with the Allies and was used politically to overcome cold war antagonisms. In the past decade, this tide has gradually been replaced by a more dominant interpretation in Russia- that the victory should be treated as an exclusively Soviet achievement. One intriguing question is to what extent the recent initiatives in the memory of the partisans are projecting "shared-ness" across the border and collective solidarity of war experiences. Has the role of the Norwegian partisans been recognised on a par with the Soviet soldiers’ role? Or are the recent initiatives from Russian actors an attempt to incorporate and appropriate the memory of the Norwegian partisans in the collective image of the Soviet soldiers?

However, the argument of this paper is that in the border region the 'national' memories become outmoded through the interplay between Russian and Norwegian perspectives. In the following, I will trace the memory of the partisans as it has evolved in Norway, in Russia and in joint Russian-Norwegian commemorations along three lines: through personal stories, as part of the professional military comradeship, and through cultural expressions.

### The story of Dagny Sibblund

The first mentioning of Norwegian participating in the Soviet Army in the Norwegian press was the case of Dagny Sibblund. It appeared in the popular magazine *Aktuell* in December 1945. The mentioning was to correct the information on the first Norwegian woman who had jumped with a parachute. Dagny had been among those Norwegians who moved to the Soviet Union in 1940. She became educated there as a telegraphist and worked as telegraphist for the Northern Fleet and NKVD. Her husband was assigned to the special detachment for reconnaissance and got training but died in an accident in 1942 (5.10.1942). She then applied to the special detachment and got combat training. She participated in the Kirkenes-Petsamo offensive and was sent in the vicinity of Vadsø in the autumn of 1944 (where she had to jump with a parachute). During this operation she got sick. After a convalescence stay in the Murmansk hospital for frost injuries, she returned to Norway in 1945.

Her name came up in a public discussion several years later, after she married a Swedish man in her hometown area of Kirkenes. Her husband was a communist, and the authorities did not give him a residence permit and the new-weds had to leave the country and move to Sweden. The refusal of residence permit was considered an expression of the anti-communist sentiments in Norway, but the authorities on the other hand argued that the reason was that he did not have any work and there was no need for his qualifications - a construction engineer<sup>1</sup>.

Dagny Sibblunds postwar experiences are similar to the stories of the other partisans. While many Norwegians were awarded medals for their participation in the war, the partisans who had been to the Soviet Union were rather mistreated and did not get any recognition for their contribution in the war.

Dagny Sibblunds story appeared then 30 years later in 1978, in the book by the North-Norwegian journalist Harry Westrheim "The land they burned: the forced evacuation of Finnmark and North Troms in the autumn of 1944", where she is mentioned for her participation in the Kirkenes-Petsamo operation. Dagny Sibblund was then invited to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Finnmark celebration in Kirkenes 1994 and her story was then published in two books - in 2010 entitled "With life at stake: 21 Norwegians' dramatic fates during the war" by the Oslo-based journalist Dag Christensen and in 2017 "

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<sup>1</sup> (Stortingsforhandlinger 1949 Vol. 93 Nr. 7b, Sak nr. 13, 21 juli 1949)

Those who did not fail us: Norwegians who made a special effort during World War II " by Morten Malmø. <sup>2</sup> While earlier attention to the partisans has been from local regional journalists from Northern Norway as Harry Westrheim, these two books place Dagny Sibblund along many other Norwegians from different parts of Norway, and mark a clear tendency to incorporate the experiences of the partisans not as a regional issue, but of national importance.<sup>3</sup>

### Personal dramas: From cold war spys to the forgotten war heroes

The case of Dagny Sibblund is a representative case for the partisans. In the 1960s and 1970s, they were an issue of local and regional historical interest. In the growing body of regional historical literature on the war they were described as those who have contributed to the liberation of Norway from German occupation but have not been celebrated or recognised. They were represented first and foremost as Norwegian patriots who opposed the German occupation and fled from the country but came back to fight. This body of literature was written by regional historians, but it reverberated in the society and created awareness about the role of the partisans and the fate they had suffered. The royal family had paid attention to the partisans - the first public speech for the memory of the partisans was held by King Olav in 1983 in Kiberg and his son Harald V expressed a public gratitude to the partisans and acknowledged the fact that they have personally been burdened and suffered from the shadows of the cold war (3. August 1992). <sup>4</sup>

The first books on the partisans fitted into the growing regional focus on the traumas caused by the war in Norwegian context –the forced evacuation and the burning down (the scorched earth – tactics used by the Germans) of Northern Norway. Further awareness about the partisans came with the books of Hans Kr. Eriksen, a writer from Kiberg. He published two books in 1969 and in 1972 and Kjell Fjørtoft, a Tromsø based journalist continued in the 1980s the same line. These accounts are based on witness accounts and were written in collaboration with survivors. Later, in the 1990s the work of the journalist Morten Jentoft complemented these stories with insights from newly opened Russian archives. <sup>5</sup> Alf R. Jacobsen's "Rød Oktober" [Red October] put together previous research and new. In these books the cold war persecution of the partisans was seen as a continuation of the suffering caused by war. The processes have been described in 2018, by the local journalist Arne Store in the book "*Under mistanke : en beretning om politisk overvåkning i Sør-Varanger*" [transl. Under suspicion: a story about political surveillance in Sør Varanger" based also on insights from the Norwegian security archives after they opened in the late 1990s. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (Westrheim 1978, Christensen 2010, Malmø 2017)

<sup>3</sup> (Balsvik 2015)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=30959>

<sup>5</sup> (Eriksen 1969, 1972, Fjørtoft 1983, 1981, Jentoft 2005, Johansen 1996)

<sup>6</sup> (Store and Jentoft 2018)

The opened archives of the Norwegian security services made possible for the descendants of the partisans to obtain information. More personal histories got publicity also through a TV documentaries – for example, in 1996 *Spionene blant oss* [The spies among us] by Arne Store and Morten Jentoft. Similar, and more recent example is the documentary "For all our fathers fought: A Norwegian-Russian documentary about the war heroes Norway wanted to forget." by filmmaker Hilde Korsæth, broadcasted on the Norwegian television in 2019. The documentary is a close portrait of the son of Ragnvald Figenschou, a Norwegian partisan and who after the war in 1954 was convicted to two years imprisonment for espionage for the Soviet Union.

The common frame is the personal drama of the involved individuals. All these examples show the double burden and the double trauma the Norwegian partisans who suffered as wartime heroes and cold-war victims (as the ad for the documentary *For all our fathers fought* summed it up "they won the war, but lost the piece"). They fit into a broader aspect of the commemoration of the war – the war as a trauma that caused the suffering of millions.

In the 1960s and 1970s the memory of the partisans was never part of the official celebrations and it was not considered as an issue within the Norwegian-Soviet commemorations. Although the publication of the first book on the topic - *Partisaner i Finnmark*" (1969) coincided with the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Finnmark, it was not related to the official Soviet-Norwegian commemorations of the liberation. At the same time as the book was published, there were Norwegian delegations to Moscow and Murmansk, and Soviet delegations to the northern part of Norway and travelling cultural delegation around the larger cities in the southern part of Norway. However, *Aftenposten*, one of the largest newspapers in Norway published an article with the title "Glemt krigsinnsats blir hedret i bok" [Forgotten war efforts get honored in a book] with no reference to the occasion, and probably the intention was not to relate it – in the interview the writer Eriksen stated his intention to break the silences around the war in Northern Norway<sup>7</sup>. The memory of the partisans was in the shadow of the overall memory of the war in Northern Norway and represented as local / regional issue. Its dark side (the connections to the NKVD/ KGB) apparently made it also inappropriate for the official commemorations. Kjell Fjørtoft, one of the journalists who wrote on the partisans, claimed that it was also another reason. German archives showed that 65 persons from Eastern Finnmark (the area where the partisans came from and where they operated in 1941-42) who worked as agents for Abwehr, the German security services. Many of them were in top positions, and only few of them had been on trial.<sup>8</sup>

## Comrades In the Soviet Army : naval scouts / navy seals

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<sup>7</sup> *Aftenposten*, onsdag 15. oktober 1969

<sup>8</sup> *Parisankvinner i Finnmark*, NRK Radio (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) 19 February 1984

In the 1960s and 1970s the Norwegian partisans were also barely mentioned in the Soviet written sources and never in public commemorations. Only sporadically, as in the documentary "War in the Arctic" (1979) it was mentioned that in the Northern Fleet there were 15 Norwegians. There is a scarce information in the memoirs of Soviet officers from the military units where the Norwegians served. Most of them were under the recon squad and the 4<sup>th</sup> (subversive operations) squad of NKVD (16 Norwegians) and the recon squad of the Northern Fleet (18 Norwegians). While officers from the Northern Fleet published their memoirs from the 1950s, some assessment by the officers in NKVD has become accessible only in the recent years.

The first memoirs of Soviet officers from these units appeared in the 1950s - with Viktor Leonov's *Litsom v litsu* [Face to Face] (1957). Leonov was a commander of the recon squad of the northern fleet from 1943, a special unit assembled by elite soldiers, who were able to get behind the enemy lines. In his memoirs he described several raids to Norway but without mentioning the Norwegians. However, the cases he described were in the winter of 1943 - 44 when many Norwegians were already dead<sup>9</sup>. The memoirs glorified the role of the soldiers and were creating an affirming moral for the generations to come. They were very much in line with the memory politics in the Soviet Union after the war.

In 1964, a book with the memories of participants on the North front, was published in Russian and in Norwegian. Behind the publication of the book - in Russian "*Cherez Fiordy*" [Through the fjords], in Norwegian "*Finnmark fritt*" [Free Finnmark] was the Norwegian communist party and the introduction is written by Just Lippe, the leader of the Norwegian Communist Party who had connections to Moscow from the interwar period. Among the text, there was a text written by Viktor Leonov. However, in this book the role and the situation of the Norwegian partisans were not mentioned.

Viktor Leonov has given an account about the Norwegians only in a later (and rather educational) book "Lessons of Manhood" [*Uroki muzhestva*], published in 1975.

In that book, the role of the Norwegians was to tell the truth - to disclose that some of the leading staff actually fabricated intelligence data. Leonov writes about a young sailor by name Fedor N who had been on several missions - and reported to his superiors information about the German positions. When they came back his achievements were celebrated. The Norwegians who had been along with him to Norway participated in the celebrations. However, they did not understand what they actually celebrated. When they were told that it was about fulfilling a so dangerous mission in a successful way, one of them reacted: they have not been on any dangerous mission. They had been hiding in the deep forest and only few times the commander went somewhere with one of the other

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<sup>9</sup> One can distinguish two periods in the operations and the missions assigned to the squad - first, the establishment of the naval intelligence when the Norwegian partisans were sent to Norway to gather information on the German activities (1941-spring 1943), and a second period after the Abwehr destructed the existing channels and several of the groups in the summer of 1943 when the missions assigned to the agents were to capture informers (prisoners of war) in 1943 and 1944.

soldiers. The Norwegians explained that they had exposed themselves to any risks. Fedor N had fabricated data, and was disclosed and convicted by the military tribunal. Whether Leonov used this as a moral narrative and the Norwegians played a “supporting role” in fighting with the enemy.<sup>10</sup>

In 1991 Leonov’s memoirs were published in English, by major James F. Gebhard, a military historian and translator with interests in the area. author of *The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation: Soviet Breakthrough and Pursuit in the Arctic, October 1944*<sup>11</sup>. Later Leonov’s memoirs were also published in Swedish. The 'Navy seals' as the English translation of Leonov’s memoir in 1991 defines them were represented as strictly professional and brave special forces with extraordinary qualities.

However, the situation has changed for the past three decades and in the 1990s and the early 2000s the operations with Norwegian participation have been nuanced and more sober assessment on the organisation had come to the public.<sup>12</sup>

### Contesting stories

During the late 1970ies the memory of the partisans started to appear in the public, it became marked by the cold war. Another naval scout from the recon squad, Makar Babikov, published memoirs under the title “Naval scouts” “Morskie razvedchiki” in *Syktyvkar* (1966). Two articles written by him on his missions in Norway were published in Norwegian language in *Sovjetnytt*, a journal published by the Soviet embassy in Oslo in 1970 and in 1971. “Siste oppdrag på Varanger halvøya” [Last mission on the Varanger Peninsula], in *Sovjet Nytt* 1970 and *I kamp på norsk jord* [Fighting on Norwegian soil] (1971) Babikov's contribution in *Sovjet-nytt* were used by Hans Kr.Eriksen in the book “Partisanenes død” in 1972. There has been a general tendency to complement the Norwegian sources with Soviet sources and vice versa. Hans Kr. Eriksen and Kjell Fjørtoft made use of the German archives in the US. The Russian sources based on memoirs of Viktor Leonov, Makar Babikov and Pavel Kolosov have also revealed the discussions and the dilemmas of the Soviet officers who communicated with the Norwegian partisans and some of them have been incorporated in the work of Alf R. Jakobsen in his book *Rød August* in 2005. Babikov also used the Norwegian sources. However, while in most cases the sources have given a complementarity, there have been controversial cases about the partisans.

On 31 October 1979 in the regional newspaper *Finnmarken* was published a story about the dramatic landing of one of the partisan groups on Magerøy by a Russian journalist<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> (Leonov 1975)

<sup>11</sup> (Leonov 1993)

<sup>12</sup> (Babikov 2009) see also: <https://iremember.ru/memoirs/razvedchiki/kolosov-pavel-gordeevich/>

<sup>13</sup> *Finnmarken*, 31. October 1979 nr. 252 p. 10



The soviet version brought new information and differed from the version in Hans Kr. Eriksens book about the partisans that was reprinted in 1979. One reader reacted with a letter to the editors entitled "Soviet fabrications of history" [Sovjetisk historieförvringing], and the soviet journalist, P. Semtsov wrote back and warned about the propaganda on central events in Eriksen's book. The journalist claimed that much of the literature in Norway tries to diminish the role of the Soviet Army, and present it in a bad light and the particular case was an example of this. The particular case were the events on Magerøy, the so called Opnan tragedy.

The story is controversial and there are no sources that can shed light. One of the partisan groups were launched in Opnan on Magerøy in February 1942 with a submarine. The deployment was dreadful because of the weather and besides the partisan group consisting of 2 Norwegians and 1 Russian soldier, two marine soldiers who assisted the deployment were unintentionally left on shore. Apparently two members of the partisan group drowned under the deployment and much of the equipment and the products sank in the sea. Left without products, the marine soldiers tried to survive waiting to be picked up by a submarine - they got some food by local fishermen. At the end they made it to the nearest settlement where they were caught by the Germans. Several weeks later the newspapers in Norway, wrote about a court case against the Soviet soldiers who had admitted that they had killed and eaten the other members of the group. The Germans had found human rests in a kettle on the stove. At the same time locals who had had contacts with the Russians were arrested and sentenced to death. There are no sources and the Norwegian authors who have described the events have diverting opinions whether everything was fabricated by the Germans for propaganda purposes against the Soviet Army.

The debate in *Finnmarken* left the last word to the Soviet journalist in 1979. However, it was a returning topic for the surviving veterans. In his 1986 book "*Otryad osobogo naznachenia*" Makar Babikov published a new version on what actually happened in Opnan and in 2009 a new version of the book incorporated knowledge from Norwegian sources<sup>14</sup>. His version was a denial of the German interpretation. He built on the Norwegian writings, but also on insider information and argued that NKVD managed to send a person, equally fluent in Norwegian and Russian, to the prisoner camp in Tromsø who interviewed the two marine soldiers about what had happened on Magerøy. This is not confirmed by any documents, and the personality of the interviewer is not disclosed.

In his books *Otryad osobogo naznachenia* (1986), *Voina v Arktike* (1991) and "*Ikh ne nazyvaly v svodkakh*" (1987) Makar Babikov emphasises the professionalism of the scouts. He gives the Soviet side of the events throughout the operations in Norway and describes the Norwegian partisans as incorporated into the soviet army rather on equal terms. «We share the dangers with the Norwegians, and die next to each other<sup>15</sup>». The scouts are

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<sup>14</sup> (Babikov 2009)

<sup>15</sup> (Babikov 2009, 297)

represented through their professional high moral and qualities and the failing missions are represented as a result of bad commander's decisions. Babikov's narratives are also filled with professional elitism - as Babikov writes, the only Norwegian partisan who remained alive under the abovementioned deployment in Opnan could not count on the two marine soldiers - they could not help him, he could not talk with them about intelligence matters and they were useless in Norway as they did not speak any languages. In the book of Babikov, Arne Eriksen one of the Norwegian partisans who survived the deployment, actually survived. Although Babikov did not describe what actually happened to him after he left Opnan. A such ending was probably needed as uplifting light for this otherwise very dark story and blurs the limits of fact and fiction.

Thus, in these writings the partisans are not represented through personal dramas but their importance from military point of view and in terms of professional comradeship. They are not driven by journalists and the personal dramas - but written by military professionals and showing professional pride. The writing of the soviet officers allowed also western officers to write about these topics. Major James Gebhardt in 1989 published an article -entitled Soviet Naval Special Purpose Forces: Origins and Operations in World War II in *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*. Gebhardt also contributed to the translation of Viktor Leonov's memoirs to English, and also of texts written by Makar Babikov. As Gerhardt has argued, it was important to get insights in the work if these groups because the modern soviet special forces (*spetsnaz*) has had their origins in the reconnaissance squads used in WWII. Tønne Huitfeldt, a major in the Norwegian army, has also written about the partisans from a military point of view and through professional interests in the late 1990s<sup>16</sup>.

While in the 1990s the writings were mainly from the point of view of the northern fleet, in the 2000 the memory of the partisans has been in the focus of professionals engaged in the military counterespionage and NKVD. In the period 1992 to 1999, the period when monuments in the memory of the partisans were erected on both sides of the border on Norwegian initiative and with the public support and attention of the regional authorities, the head of the FSB in Murmansk was Genadiy Gorylev. After retiring in 1999, he became very active in reconstructing the story of the of the NKVD in Murmansk during the war - both through publications and public events (conferences, books, media, websites and the museum and an NGO). Gurilyev had published / edited several books like - *Gosbezopasnost - nash dolg* [State security – our duty] in 2007. In it he praised Håkon Øien one of the Norwegian partisans who shot himself in order not to get caught by the Germans - claiming that this example is that the NKVD agents was most brave men who never gave up alive.<sup>17</sup> Gurylev contributed also to an award-winning series about the Norwegian partisans in Murmanskii vestnik, the regional newspaper. The series entitled "Radiograms from the rocky shore" [*Radiogramy s skalistykh beregakh*] written by Igor

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<sup>16</sup> (Huitfeldt 1997, Gebhardt 1989)

<sup>17</sup> (Gurylev 2007)

Arystov described the life of the Norwegian partisans in Murmansk<sup>18</sup>. A most detailed description on the Norwegian partisans who worked for NKVD is based on archival work by Aleksey Ershov, son of the NKVD head in Murmansk during the war - A.B. Ershov. His work is based on the archives of VMA in the book the *Nezrimii front Otechestva 1917-2017 Kniga 1 (The invisible front of the fatherland 1917-2017, Book 1)* and gives a detailed account of what happened during the first landing on Norwegian territory.

In these publications the emphasis is also on the professional work of the agents providing invaluable information to the Moscow, to the Northern fleet and to 14<sup>th</sup> Army. From the interrogation of the Norwegians who moved to the Soviet Union in 1940 most of them stated that they went to Murmansk not to seek security, as some Norwegian sources have it, but in order actively to fight against the Germans. However, it was only in the 1990s Norwegian partisans got recognition within the FSB system. The names of the two brothers Håkon and Kåre Øien were written in the hall of the FSB building in Murmansk<sup>19</sup>. The Norwegian patriots within the NKVD is also acknowledged in recent publications of *Spetsnaz Rossii*, a monthly newspaper of the veterans of the anti-terror unit *Alpha*<sup>20</sup>. The memory of the Norwegian partisans in the North in this context could also be seen as part of the increased attention to the role of NKVD during the war. The gradual turning of the Norwegian partisans from antiheroes to heroes in Norway, was thus followed by literature in Russian where they were represented as elite soldiers - “navy seals”, and *spetznas*, an image that is in strong contrast with the personal dramas in the commemorations in Norwegian context.

Both Gurylev and Ershov have been active in the veteran organization *Shtit*, and were among the initiators of the the Russian Norwegian expert group on the history of partisans. At the same time, in Norway a new group became interested in the role of the partisans and who were represented in the Expert group, namely veterans who have participated in military activities under UN missions like Lebanon, Libya etc. The Norwegian Federation of Military Veteran Associations, has arranged trips to Murmansk titled “In the footsteps of the partisans” - Thematic tours to commemorate the soviet soldiers and the Norwegian partisans [ «Tematur til minne om sovjetiske soldater og norske partisaner»] in 2017 and 2018<sup>21</sup>.

This is relatively new phenomenon and in the context of the new political situation. The interests are beyond the particular individuals who suffered and represent a professional brotherhood. As the name of the group suggests - they prefer to call themselves "experts", but this is apparently not about historical expertise but professional commitment. It is

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<sup>18</sup> The series published in Murmanskii Vestnik (11, 12 and 17 November 2015) received the “Best newspaper and internet publication” at the regional journalist competition “Murmansk Frontiers” (<https://gov-murman.ru/info/news/150287/>)

<sup>19</sup> (Gurylev 2007)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.specnaz.ru/articles/282/8/3561.htm>

<sup>21</sup> [https://portal.styreweb.com/api/files/332007/rdZ8gCMqVoW4cnFaTEHfWQ/Invitasjon%20til%20norske%20partisaners%20minne%20i%20Russland%20og%20Norge%20\(1\).pdf?ref=%2Finformasjon%20Fnyheter%20Fvis%20F%3FTur%2520til%2520Murmansk%26ID%3D11270](https://portal.styreweb.com/api/files/332007/rdZ8gCMqVoW4cnFaTEHfWQ/Invitasjon%20til%20norske%20partisaners%20minne%20i%20Russland%20og%20Norge%20(1).pdf?ref=%2Finformasjon%20Fnyheter%20Fvis%20F%3FTur%2520til%2520Murmansk%26ID%3D11270)

about the experience of being on mission in foreign lands, and foreign units. The memory of the partisans has got also another dimension complementary to the personal dramas rooted in the local – that of military professional comradeships.

### Cultural diplomacy

The third element adding to the memory of the partisans is within the realm of culture diplomacy and the cultural performances that refer to the partisans. In 2019 “Partisan requiem”, a music composition by Henning Sommerro was set up by Finnmark county and the philharmonic orchestra and performed by Norwegian and Russian musicians in Kirkenes and Murmansk. The announce was “The magnificent composition about the hidden story of the war in northern Norway”. This was not the first time the memory of the partisans was interpreted in musical terms. In 2009 Anne Lise Berntsen, and Heidi Kvernevik made plans to establish a company that will promote classical music in Northern Norway and in Northwestern Russia, and one of the first projects was an opera dedicated to the partisans and titled "*Kibergodyseen*" [The Kiberg Odyssey] (Kiberg is the home settlement of most Norwegian partisans). Kiberg, also known as the ‘little Moscow’ was framed through heroic Hellenic mythology. “It should be a hero history, not a tragedy” were the words of Anne Lise Berntsen to the regional newspaper Finnmarken 8.august 2018<sup>22</sup>. The opera was played in Northern Norway and in Murmansk as a part of its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Additionally, in 2014 the Samovar theater in Kirkenes, an international performing arts company founded in Kirkenes in 1990 had a play "Vodka, water and glasnost - a foxtrot for three" about the Norwegian partisans and the closed borders after the war. The play was conducted with both Norwegian and Russian actors, and bilingual. The project was supported by Barentskult (The Barents Secretariate/ Norwegian MFA) and was set up also in Murmansk and Petrozavodsk. The texts written by an established local writer, Ingeborg Arvola, was assembled into book publication in 2020. These two examples both can be seen as continuation of the culture diplomacy between Russia and Norway. The culture diplomacy was always a part of the official commemorations. In contrast to the personal narratives that emphasised the personal dramas, and the glorifying chronicling of the military personnel, the memory of war within the field of cultural diplomacy was in most cases used to transcend the real and traumatic war experiences and to project aspirations to peace. The role of literature, music and art have had their place since the end of the war and the first Soviet delegation to Norway in 1946. They were supported by the Peace movement and the Norwegian - Soviet / Soviet – Norwegian friendship societies. Along arranging meetings of war veterans since the 1960ies, these societies were also involved in publishing literary texts and arranging concerts.

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<sup>22</sup> In the same issue there are two more articles on the memory of the partisans - the film by Hilde Korsæth mentioned above and the diploma given to Harald Sunde for among others his work for the commemoration of the partisans (Sunde published a book *I partisanenes fotspor* [In the footsteps of the partisans] in 2019 that can serve as a travel guide for the history of the partisans)

In 1946 the euphoria after the victory, a cultural delegation from the Soviet Union visited Norway (not Northern Norway). The music performances of the Soviet musicians were described in the newspapers as icebreakers. The same year a book with sixteen Russian novels written by Soviet authors who had fought on the Eastern Front was published. The delegation visited also graves of Soviet soldiers. The driving forces behind this project were the Just Lippe and Nina Krymova. Just Lippe was a leading member of the communist party of Norway, but also security officer and interpreter for the Norwegian government in November 1944 in Kirkenes. Nina Krymova had been working in the Soviet diplomatic mission in Oslo in the 1920s and later part of the communist party school in Moscow where she further nourished her connections with Norwegian communists.

In the interwar period the Norwegian communist party had established especially good connections with Moscow and the Party school there. These connections along the ideology persisted - and after the war were used to promote the victory over Germany as an achievement of the Soviet society and ideology. After the war many members of the communist party in Norway but also independent intellectuals supported the Soviet peace-movement, and this support and engagement provoked discussions in the leftist circles in Norway. It added to the polarisation within the Norwegian communist and the labour movement. The sympathisers of the Soviet Peace Committee - were perceived as "useful idiots", the phrase, often ascribed to Lenin, was used for leftist western intellectuals whose visits to the Soviet Union, and leftist views were used as antiwestern propaganda.<sup>23</sup>

Although the peace movement declined, the cultural exchanges continued. The main actor was the society for friendship Norway - Soviet Russian Union. In Norway the society was established on initiative of politicians from the labour party in 1945- in gratitude for the liberation of Finnmark and organized travels and cultural meetings. As with the peace movement, the overall impression was that also the friendship societies were built on the connection between the communist parties and therefore were instrumental in the hands of the communist parties in the Soviet Union and Norway. In 1958 its counterpart the society "SSSR-Norvegia" was established in Moscow and later in the fall of 1958 in Leningrad. Behind the establishment, and many, if not all of the delegations and initiatives, as well as the translations, was Nina Krymova, a translator and literary scholar and also one of the voices of Radio Moskva in Norwegian language. During the first cultural delegation she was described as the "hyphen" in Soviet-Norwegian relations (Mrs Hyphen [*fru bindestrek*])

Nina Krymova was also one of the closest persons to the Norwegian partisans from the summer of 1941 to 1943 when their activities seized and she was sent back to Moscow. In the interwar period she had established good connections with many central politicians in the NKP (Norwegian Communist Party) and she continued to maintain these connections, after the war. While her connections with Norwegian intellectuals were profiled in the

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<sup>23</sup> (Rowe 2002)

media after the war, she kept silent about her experiences with the Norwegian partisans. She even told the leftist newspaper *Friheten* (8 August 1946 p.2) that during the war she did not have any connection to Norway. It is also known very little about her and her role during the war. She was awarded medal *Otechestvennaia Voina* (Fatherland's War) 2<sup>nd</sup> degree on the occasion of 8 March 1943 for her work in the intelligence department of Northern fleet.

The explanation was

"She perfectly mastered the matters of secret communication with foreign correspondents and [] constantly provided for this type of communication [] She was fluent in languages and did a great job for reporting on the undercover situation, which facilitated and facilitated the accident-free work of intelligence groups.

Babikov writes that she was also called *politruk* (political leader) of the squad but for the youngest Norwegians she was a "mother keeper", and he states that 40 years after she could remember each of them and give objective assessment about "looked after" the partisans, on the other hand she has also been remembered for really taking really care of the Norwegians and arranging national day (17 May) celebrations for them with additional and fancied food.<sup>24</sup> However, neither she, nor her communist contacts in Norway from the previous stay did "promote" her participation in the war in the post-war period – apparently the Norwegian intellectuals were rather trying to avoid getting associated with possible agents in the North of Norway. Therefore, they have focused on transcending the real experiences of war through cultural performances (understood broadly theatre, music, literature) As a person who had been in Norwegian media mentioned hundreds of times (National Library of Norway gives 652 results in different media) it is striking that her relationship to the Norwegian partisans (except for a photograph with the Norwegian women telegraphists who worked for the Red Army) has almost not been mentioned before the 1980s. Has the memory of the partisans been downplayed in the shadow of cultural diplomacy or in the light of cultural diplomacy?

The second person who was close, even closer to the Norwegian partisans than Nina Krymova, was Pavel Sutyagin. He had been part of the Soviet trade delegation in Oslo in the 1939-1941, but when he drafted in the war he was sent to Murmansk and the Northern Fleet. In the Russian sources he is credited for his extraordinary interrogator skills that made the German prisoners of war speak and give information. He was responsible on missions with Norwegian partisans and followed them on the submarines, their presence was often kept in secrecy for the marine soldiers but did not participate in the missions. Babikov suggested that the tragic events on Magerøy were result of Sutyagin's decision<sup>25</sup>. In Norway his name war later circulated with in the espionage cases in the late 1940s and early

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<sup>24</sup> (Babikov 2009, 135)

<sup>25</sup> (Babikov 2009)

1950s<sup>26</sup>. After the war he was decorated as a war veteran, moved to Leningrad became a professor in geography and an active member of the friendship society Soviet Union – Norway. There he met also the Norwegian traveller Thor Heyerdahl whom he had met in the autumn of 1944 in Kirkenes. They met again in 1984. While his war connection with Heyerdahl was promoted by the friendship society, his engagement with the Norwegian partisans was not mentioned. There are no sources that shed light on his attitude to the partisans.

One possible explanation on the silences of Krymova and Sutyagin might be that they had their insights into the work of NKVD and did not want to expose further their Norwegian colleagues, another possible explanation was that they were instrumental for the further activities of KGB in Norway also through their commitment to the friendship societies and cultural exchanges during the Cold War. Gurylev gives a short account on them in a book dedicated to the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UFSB in Murmansk county<sup>27</sup>. Sutyagin was a professional military intelligence officer, working in Oslo undercover as a consul, and Nina Krymova as professional intelligence officer since 1934.

She helped her wards (the Norwegians) in solving a variety of issues. At the same time, she processed the information gathered by the intelligence teams in Norway, prepared information messages to the commandship of the Northern Fleet, the commandship of the intelligence of the Fleet and the intelligence department of UNKVD. She insisted that the Norwegians had the opportunity to listen to broadcasts in their native language from London (where the Norwegian government was in exile) and even to allow them to listen to pro-fascist broadcasts from Oslo, for which she was given a special radio receiver. It was exceptional achievement for wartime with the strictest information censorship solution.

A third explanation to the silences of these agents, and also a very plausible one, might be that it was just simply too painful to remember and to talk about. This was described by Hans Kr. Eriksen in “Partisanenenes Død”. The survivors remembered that it could happen that someone went to see her during the night and then find her crying, especially if there was a tragic accident with some of the Norwegians – it could take her to a nervous breakdown”<sup>28</sup>

These two accounts of Nina Krymova, the one - Norwegian and personal, the other Russian and professional, make us recognise the complexity of human beings and also the sensitivity of the issues related to the memory of the partisans. By juxtaposing the narratives on both sides of the borders they reveal an intricate and complex image.

The case of the partisan memory thus raises a multitude of problems. It relates closely to the memory of the Soviet Army, but also to the memory of the security services. Therefore, how they are commemorated might also provoke engagement and involvement from both sides of the border. The actual human fates of the partisans have deep ethical dimensions.

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<sup>26</sup> (Jacobsen 2005)

<sup>27</sup> (Gurylyov 2014)

<sup>28</sup> (Eriksen 1972)

They overgo local and specific experiences. Being represented as a Hellenic tragedy as in the case of the opera *Kiberg Odyssey* emphasises the universal in their experiences. The role of the expert group is also a step into that direction – transcending the personal experiences of the partisans and projecting the partisans through the generalised experience of military action and military professionalism. The transborder dialogue has undoubtedly played a part for these more generalised interpretations. Such generalised commemorative practices and performances undoubtedly release some of the tensions caused by earlier unjust treatment of the partisans. Most likely, they also made possible the apology to the Norwegian partisans for the unjust treatment after the war by the Norwegian defence minister in 2019. However, a such distancing from the actual experiences and the existing historical knowledge about the partisans might also lead to misinterpretations and misuse. The Opnan story suggested that empty spots generate speculations and engage the imagination. Nevertheless, half-truths could be a new form of unjust treatment for the partisans.

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Murmansk 1942. Fra venstre: Borgny schanche, Nina Krymova  
DagnySiblund. Foran: Oddny Johnsen.  
Disse hadde ansvaret for kontakten med de norske partisan-  
gruppene under krigen.



# RUTER

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