

## RENAMING SUMY STREETS UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION (1941-1943)

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Changes of place-names can often be regarded as a component of ideological struggle. It is interesting to observe such changes in Sumy in the period of World War II.

After Sumy was occupied by German troops in October 1941, the occupational administration made a decision to rename a huge part of Sumy streets. It was quite logical, because a great number of them were named after Communist leaders or events and symbols of the October revolution and the Civil war.

So the order of Sumy commandant as for renaming the streets was published in the newspaper *Sums'kyi visnyk* (The Sumy bulletin) on October, 26<sup>th</sup>. All Soviet names of the streets became invalid, and the pre-Soviet ones were returned. But three of them obtained new names: Red square got the name of Adolf Hitler, Lenin's street got the name of von Reichenau and Frunze's street the name of von Obstfelder.

Sumy received toponyms devoted to the Nazi leader and two prominent *Wehrmacht* generals. The city was a part of the Military zone of Ukraine, and it is not strange for German military administration to do it.

Adolf Hitler was the *Fuhrer*, the first man in Germany, who controlled all spheres of life in the Third *Reich*.

Generals von Reichenau and von Obstfelder had a great authority in the German army. They took part in the World War I and in military companies in Poland and France. In 1941 their troops were successfully fighting at the Soviet-German front in Ukraine.

General-*feldmarshal* Valter von Reichenau headed the 6<sup>th</sup> army. In December 1941 he was appointed to a post of the commander of the army group "The South". He was famous for his ruthless relation to prisoners-of-war and soviet citizens.

As for infantry general Hans von Obstfelder, he led the 29<sup>th</sup> army corps. In late July 1941 he was awarded by the Knight cross of Iron cross, which was one of the highest German rewards.

No doubt both of them were active adherents of National-Socialism. They were really respected among the top brass of the state.

But using the names of those figures for renaming the streets was politically inexpedient.

Some people close to Adolf Hitler attributed Ukrainians to the Baltic (or East Baltic) race type, which was considered to be quite full-grade.

According to the memorandum of April, 11th 1941 of the *Reichsleiter* Alfred Rosenberg, who was the head of Foreign policy department of NSDAP (in July 1941 he also became the *Reichsminister* of Eastern territories), Ukraine was an European country with the national life based on strong Norman tradition, and the statement of own Ukrainian national activity should become the main German goal in this area, because Ukrainian political formation was expected to be as resistant to Moscow.

That is why the Nazi propaganda positioned Germans as liberators of the Ukrainian people from the Bolshevik yoke and their rough violence. The occupational administration involved into collaboration different Ukrainian nationalists political groups to establish authorities which would be supported by local population.

But at the same time the city dwellers could perceive giving names of German men to the streets as an attribute of the new occupation. It is worth to say, that foreign words were cutting the hearing of Ukrainians. Moreover, the fact, that the streets were named in honour of persons, who were alive, might be annoying even for some of the Germans.

So after almost two months it had been recognized more useful to give the above-stated three objects their original names. Probably, it has been made under the influence of the Ukrainian nationalists, who cooperated with the occupational administration.

Thus on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1941 everyone could read in *Sums'kyi visnyk* that Adolf Hitler's square received the name of *Ukrains'ka* (Ukrainian) to underline the national characteristic of the city. Fon Reihenu's street became *Mykolayivs'ka* (Nicolas') because of the St. Nicolas church, which was situated there until the destruction by Communists some years before. Fon Obstfelder's street got the name of *Tsercovnaya* (Church) as the church (the Revivals church) was in it.

All these toponyms had native Ukrainian roots and were easy and clear for Sumy's inhabitants. They remained invariable until the Red Army's coming on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1943. After that all Soviet place-names were immediately returned.

Actually this factor was not able to compete with the terrible deprivation, the *Ostarbeiter* program and the permanent fear of German or Soviet punishment in people's minds, but nevertheless it was indicative in cultural and ideological city activities of that time.

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