THE NAZI SOLDIER IN GERMAN CINEMA, 1933-1945

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2015

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ABSTRACT

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Despite the plethora of scholarship focused on German cinema under the National Socialist regime, few works pay much attention to the development of the soldierly archetype in the feature-length films of the Nazi-era. This study attempts to fill this void by providing a systematic treatment of the “soldier” as portrayed in the cinema of the Third Reich (1933-1945). The first chapter focuses on the representation of German soldiers in combat, arguing that the depiction of the “model” German soldier in Nazi-era cinema evolved according to the external political and military circumstances facing Adolf Hitler’s regime. Chapter Two is concerned exclusively with gender relations between soldiers and women. A number of films released during the Second World War in particular suggest that both German men and women must contribute to the war effort. However, it is important to note that in these films both genders must contribute within their segregated public and private spheres of influence. Finally, the third chapter analyzes films that present the “enemy” soldier, arguing that the caricatures of Germany’s military opponents were intended to strike fear in cinema-going audiences during the war. Altogether, this thesis intends to present a more nuanced look at the soldier in Nazi-era cinema, while also providing the reader with a greater understanding of the use of propaganda under the Nazi state.
To my parents
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must begin by thanking my two committee members, Professors Douglas Forsyth and Beth Griech-Polelle. Professor Forsyth allowed me to experiment initially with this project in his seminar during my first semester in graduate school, and he therefore helped guide my work even before it turned into a Master’s Thesis. His help in seeing this work through to its finished product is greatly appreciated. Professor Griech-Polelle provided valuable feedback on all of my drafts and has been very supportive of my scholarship. In addition, I must thank Professor Michael Brooks and Tina Thomas for their help throughout my two years in the graduate program at Bowling Green. My inspiration for undertaking graduate work in history comes from the wonderful faculty who I was fortunate enough to be exposed to as an undergraduate at Denison University, and I would particularly like to thank Professors Donald Schilling and Catherine Dollard for their mentorship during my time there. Much thanks also goes to the many great friends I have had the privilege of meeting during my time in the History Department at Bowling Green. It would have been quite a miserable experience to write this thesis without the support of many of my fellow graduate students, whom I was able to bounce ideas off of or just simply head to the bar with after a long and frustrating week.

Finally, I must sincerely thank both of my parents, Cathy and Darryl Sycher, for their endless love and encouragement. They have always supported my education beginning at an early age, and they have seen me through a college career that at times has probably seemed far too long. This project truly would not have been possible without their help in gathering the necessary films for use as primary sources, as well as their assistance in carefully reading over drafts of my work. But most importantly, it would not have been possible without their encouragement and care during some of my lowest moments during the past two years. I dedicate this work to them both.
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INTRODUCTION

Writing during the 1920s in his infamous work *Mein Kampf*, future German Chancellor and Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler states: “By an able and persistent use of propaganda heaven itself can be presented to the people as if it were hell and, vice versa, the most miserable kind of life can be presented as if it were paradise.”¹ As this passage from Hitler’s most well-known political testament indicates, winning the hearts and minds of most of the subjects who were to come under the jurisdiction of the Third Reich was a primary goal for the National Socialist Party since its beginnings. Joseph Goebbels, an *Alter Kämpfer* who joined the Nazi Party in 1924 and soon became one of Hitler’s most fervent followers, was tasked with leading an enormous government-sponsored propaganda effort that took effect soon after the Nazi takeover in 1933. Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda ultimately held sway over all forms of official media throughout Germany and what later became the Third Reich until the end of the Second World War in 1945. This Nazi Propaganda Ministry severely curtailed freedom of speech within the areas under German control and censored much of the information disseminated inside the Reich, hoping to cast the regime in a highly positive light in front of its citizens. The Nazi attempt to control the flow of information within the Reich and to indoctrinate German citizens with National Socialist values ultimately contributed to both widespread support and quiet acceptance of German political, social, and economic policies before and during the Second World War.

The medium of film was considered one of the most important tools for rallying the support of ordinary individuals in favor of the Nazi cause, especially amongst top Nazi officials.

Goebbels realized from the beginning that film would serve as an important medium for the
distribution of mass media in the Third Reich. Between the years 1933-1945, over one thousand
films were produced by the German film industry, nearly all of them under the close scrutiny of
Dr. Goebbels and other Reich officials. The 1934 Reich Cinema Law gave the Ministry of
Propaganda exclusive rights to censor films both before and after production, and by 1937 a
government-owned trust company became the primary shareholder in all major German film
studios, further consolidating governmental control of the industry. In 1942 all independent
German film studios were absorbed into one centralized company, officially nationalizing the
cinema industry under Nazi control.\textsuperscript{2} Despite suffering from severe government censorship,
German audiences still flocked to see many Nazi-era productions, and the film industry under the
Nazis served as a distant competitor to American-financed Hollywood productions.

A majority of Nazi-era film productions were not created as heavy-handed documentary-
style propaganda films. Instead, Goebbels and his top German filmmakers believed that
audiences would respond better to fantasy and entertainment films that included more subtle
ideological messages. 1,094 feature films were produced in Germany between the years 1933-
1945 under Nazi rule; these films were from a variety of genres, and included melodramas,
comedies, adventure films, thrillers, historical adaptations, and war epics.\textsuperscript{3} This thesis intends to
analyze of number of these full-length feature films in order discern the different ways in which
the “common soldier” was depicted on screen throughout the twelve-year Third Reich.

Militarism had become a key aspect of everyday life for ordinary citizens in Germany under
National Socialism. Therefore, it was natural for Nazi-era German filmmakers to portray

\textsuperscript{2} Stephen Brockmann, \textit{A Critical History of German Film}, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 136-137.
\textsuperscript{3} Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien, \textit{Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich}
wartime conditions in films directed towards German audiences. Through a closer look at the portrayal of the soldier in the cinema of this period, this study intends to also shed light on particular aspects of Nazi ideology, at least as seen through the eyes of the filmmakers and propagandists in charge of film production.

Although the historical literature on German films released under the Nazi regime is quite rich and diverse, a more comprehensive and in-depth look at the actions of the cinematic soldier in the Third Reich is warranted. Much of the earliest scholarship on Nazi-era cinema emerging in the 1960s and 1970s focused primarily upon the propagandistic and ideological elements present in many of the films produced during the Nazi period. A few of these early scholars do address the portrayal of soldiers killing and dying on screen, but they mostly present the cinematic warrior as a monolithic and static entity throughout the Third Reich. Erwin Leiser, in his 1974 monograph *Nazi Cinema*, devotes a chapter of his work to the representations of the “heroic death” in the films of the Nazi-era. Unfortunately, this chapter is short on analysis and suggests that the treatment of death in combat remained constant in all films after the Nazi takeover in 1933. Historian David Welch limits his assessment of the soldier in Nazi-era film to a few paragraphs, arguing that “German soldiers on the cinema screen were never seen to express personal feelings or attitudes towards war in general; they were only vehicles to be manipulated by being given artificial speeches quite alien to the common experience.” Once again this suggests that the cinematic portrayal of the soldier was static and completely out of touch with the evolving experience of German soldiers in the “real world.”

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Later scholarship on the cinema of the Third Reich responds to the earlier focus on propaganda by drawing heavily upon film and literature studies to discover the continuities and contradictions in the ideological messages underlying the era’s entertainment films.6 This new historiography shifts the focus from a study of propaganda to the different ways in which Nazi-era films can be interpreted by their viewers, and has been mostly pioneered by film scholars instead of historians. The more recent scholarship also connects the Nazi-controlled German film industry to both its predecessor during the Weimar era, as well as its competitor in contemporary Hollywood.7 However, this more recent and compelling scholarship largely ignores any systematic treatment of the Germanic warrior on screen.

This paper attempts to fill the void by focusing on the ways in which soldiers were portrayed in German films released during the twelve years of the Nazi regime. Chapter One addresses the different ways in which Nazi-era filmmakers portrayed the German soldier in combat on the cinema screen. This chapter follows the progression of the combat soldier by analyzing a number of films released at three distinct junctures during the Third Reich, arguing further that the presentation of the model Nazi “soldier” in film evolved naturally as the regime itself progressed and ultimately collapsed. The first group of films under analysis was released near the beginning of the Nazi regime and presents the fictional accounts of idealized Hitler Youth and SA members pitched in bloody street battles against rival Communist organizations. These Nazi warriors are presented as peaceful and pure soldiers who resist committing violence against their foes, much as the early Nazi regime itself wanted to be presented. As the Second

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World War began, a number of German films attempt to reconcile with such issues as PTSD and the pacifist movement, both of which undoubtedly confronted actual German soldiers as they fought for the Nazi cause. Finally, the Third Reich’s very last film, produced in 1945, depicts the need for women to adopt soldierly attributes (at least in a limited sense) as Germany itself was collapsing under the strains of total war.

Chapter Two focuses upon the cinematic relationship between the German soldier and women as presented in four films produced under the conditions of the Second World War. Each of these films presents an important distinction between the “masculine” battlefield and the “feminine” home-front, arguing further that each gender should contribute to the German war effort within its own particular social sphere. Although war serves as “coitus interruptus” for the male soldier and the explicit sexual relationship with the woman he loves, eroticism is displaced onto the battlefield, where the rather homoerotic virtues of male comradeship and self-sacrifice fulfill the soldier’s needs. Meanwhile, the woman in each film must learn to do her own duty on the home-front, contributing to the war effort and remaining loyal to her man while he is away. If a soldier succumbs to romance and sexual pleasure instead of performing his duty in war, these films contend that his decision could have devastating consequences for the German war effort.

The final chapter deals with the portrayal of the “enemy” soldier in Nazi-era cinema. Although most Nazi propaganda films do not focus specific attention upon the “common” enemy soldier, this chapter analyzes two films which provide unique portraits of enemy combatants from two of Germany’s wartime opponents. The first film chronicles British imperialism in South Africa, while the second film follows the story of dastardly Soviet spies bent on instigating a communist takeover throughout Europe. Both films naturally portray the enemy soldier in a
highly negative light, and both serve as warnings to the German people as to what could happen if they fail to defeat their enemies during the Second World War.

Although this thesis does not claim to be an exhaustive study of Nazi-era cinema, it strives to achieve a more systematic treatment of the portrayal of the “common” soldier in German film during this period. Through a better understanding of the soldierly archetype as portrayed in the cinema of the Third Reich, readers should gain a more complete appreciation of the types of information that German audiences were exposed to under the Nazi dictatorship.
CHAPTER ONE - THE NAZI SOLDIER IN COMBAT: KILLING AND DYING IN GERMAN CINEMA, 1933-1945

With the ascendance of Adolf Hitler to the German chancellorship in January 1933, the newly established Nazi regime invested substantial resources in an expansive propaganda campaign intended to win the hearts and minds of the German people. Given the Reich Ministry of Propaganda’s widespread control over German studio productions, it only seems natural that many films released during the Third Reich would portray themes that reflected the ideology of the Nazi Party. Scholar Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien astutely observes that all films produced in Germany during this time period “were politicized by their function within the fascist state.”

For example, the 1940 films Der ewige Jude and Jud Süß both provide anti-Semitic portrayals of Jewish characters who bring devastation and defilement upon the perceived Aryan race. These films serve as chilling reminders of the severe antisemitism present in German society that ultimately culminated in the horrific murder of six million European Jews during the Holocaust.

Much like antisemitism, militarism played a key role in Nazi ideology and therefore was naturally present in many of the era’s films. This chapter focuses on the theme of militarism in Nazi cinema, looking specifically at the ways in which the ideal Nazi soldier was portrayed in combat while on screen. However, as this chapter will argue, representations of soldiers in Nazi-era cinema did not remain fixed throughout the twelve-year Third Reich. German filmmakers often entered into dialogue with the external conditions around them in order to highlight important issues that “real” German soldiers faced. A few films even addressed such troubling

8 O’Brien, Nazi Cinema as Enchantment, 10.
9 Der ewige Jude, directed by Fritz Hippler (Deutsche Film Gesellschaft, 1940), DVD (International Historic Films, 2004); Jud Süß, directed by Veit Harlan (Terra-Filmkunst, 1940), DVD (International Historic Films, 2008).
issues as PTSD and the horrors of total war, which were problems that many German soldiers undoubtedly confronted during the course of World War II.

In order to track the evolution of the soldierly archetype in the cinema of the Third Reich, this study will expand the definition of the word “soldier” to include any idealized Germanic warrior who is portrayed fighting and dying for the Nazi cause. Therefore, it will look beyond the standard *Wehrmacht* infantryman to see how filmmakers attributed soldierly qualities to a range of subjects, such as SA thugs battling communists during the early years of the regime or nineteenth century Prussian farmers defending their town from invading French forces. This chapter analyzes six different films released at three separate junctures during the twelve-year Reich. Each of these films tackles the issue of Nazi warriors who must fight and face death in order to protect Germanic ideals. Together these films illustrate how the portrayal of soldiers on screen evolved as the Nazi regime progressed. The first two films, *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933) and *Hans Westmar* (1933), feature young brown-shirted Nazi Party members fighting “evil” communists during the regime’s early struggle for political control over the city of Berlin and the rest of Germany. These films stress the non-violent nature of the pre-war Nazi soldier and celebrate heroic acts of martyrdom for the Party’s cause. The second set of films under analysis, *Ohm Krüger* (1941), *Stukas* (1941), and *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* (1941), illustrate the portrayal of the cinematic soldier during the height of German military successes. Surprisingly, these films deal with issues such as pacifism and PTSD, problems that undoubtedly confronted actual German soldiers drafted into fighting on the battlefronts of the Second World War. The final film under examination, *Kolberg* (1945), mirrors the military situation during the final moments of the Third Reich, when average citizens were expected to become soldiers in order to defend their Fatherland from impending invasion by the enemy.
By analyzing these six films, this study intends to provide a glimpse into the depiction of soldiers as viewed by German audiences at three distinct yet important moments during the history of the Third Reich. Through a closer examination of these films, it becomes evident that soldiers in German cinema were not purely static figures that “were never seen to express personal feelings or attitudes towards war in general.” The ways in which filmmakers dealt with the issues of soldiers killing and dying on screen were often more complex and developed over time in accordance with the military and political circumstances within German society.

*The Rise of the National Socialist Regime*

The first two films under analysis, *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933) and *Hans Westmar* (1933) contain depictions of young Nazi soldiers during the pre-war years. Released during the Nazis’ first year in power after Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor in January 1933, both films portray the lives of brown-shirted martyrs during the *Kampfzeit*, or the time of struggle for political power between the National Socialists and other social democratic forces. Although these films faced a great deal of post-production scrutiny and reworking at the hands of Joseph Goebbels and the Ministry of Propaganda, neither *Hitlerjunge Quex* or *Hans Westmar* was subject to the same pre-production influence as later *Staatauftragsfilme* (state-sponsored films). The film industry had not yet been nationalized under state control, and many of the regime’s most strident laws regulating film production and censorship were just being passed. Nevertheless, the filmmakers in both of these cases attempted to anticipate what the National Socialist regime and its German audience wanted to see in an ideologically-driven work of art.

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10 Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, 181.
Both *Hitlerjunge Quex* and *Hans Westmar* portray their young Nazi warriors in a very similar respect, suggesting a specific manner in which the newly-established National Socialist regime wanted to be perceived, at least in the fantasy world of film. In these early films, purity appears to be the number one virtue for a brown-shirted warrior. This includes purity in ideology, sexuality, personal appearance, friendship, and perhaps most importantly, purity in death. The protagonist’s enemy in both of these films, the communists, represents a very real allusion to the often bloody and violent street battles between Nazis and communists during the 1920s and 1930s. In these films the communists represent the opposite of Nazi purity: they use ideology for their own gain, they are sexually permissive, they are often depicted as unclean and slothful, and most notably, they are murderers. It is important to note that in both of these films, the communists do all of the *killing*, while the Nazi warriors do all of the *dying*. This was central to the way in which Hitler’s new regime wished to be perceived: as a political party that came into power peacefully against reactionary communist forces who were the ones really responsible for all of the violence in the streets. A further analysis of each of these films will help to define more clearly these themes and shed light on the way in which the Nazi soldier was portrayed on film during these early years of the Third Reich.

*Hitlerjunge Quex: Ein Film vom Opfergeist der deutschen Jugend* tells the fictionalized story of the life of Herbert Norkus, a Hitler Youth who was killed in Berlin by communists while distributing Nazi propaganda pamphlets.\(^{11}\) The film is based on a novel by Karl Aloys Schenzinger that was first published in the National Socialist-controlled newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*.\(^{12}\) Directed by Hans Steinhoff and produced by Nazi-era film legend Karl Ritter,

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\(^{11}\) Rentschler, *Ministry of Illusion*, 55.

Hitlerjunge Quex premiered on September 11, 1933 to a largely positive reception. Hitler and many other prominent Nazi Party members attended the spectacular premiere, which featured columns of Hitler Youth lining a Berlin theater decorated with Nazi flags and even a red, white, and black “floral raised swastika.”

The film’s main character, Heini Völker, is the embodiment of the pure Aryan German, as his völkisch name more than overtly implies. Heini’s father is a poor working-class member of the Communist Internationale, dependent on welfare to support himself and his family during periods of unemployment. Heini, working as a printer’s apprentice, is soon recruited by a man named Stoppel, who is the leader of the Communist Youth Internationale, to join the communist ranks. Heini is pressured by his abusive and alcoholic father into going with Stoppel on a communist youth retreat. While on the retreat, Heini is shocked by the behavior of the other communist youth. Their camp is depicted as a disheveled orgy, with young boys and girls drinking, smoking, and gambling together. Disgusted, Heini wanders off to another section of the woods where he finds the neat and orderly Hitler Youth, who are performing a pagan-like ritual honoring the Führer and celebrating the summer equinox. Taken in by the grand spectacle of the Hitler Youth camp, Heini becomes determined to join the organization.

Although his father beats him for wanting to turn away from the communists, Heini befriends a young Nazi boy and his sister Ulla, who invite Heini to a Hitler Youth meeting held in a heavily communist section of Berlin. Before Heini arrives, the communists raid the meeting place, violently beating the members of the Nazi Youth present. Believing that Heini had betrayed them, the Hitler Youth shun Heini until he warns them of a communist bombing attack he had learned of through a conversation with Stoppel. Although he has now regained the Nazis’

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trust, Heini has incurred the wrath of Stoppel and the other communists, who threaten to murder him for his betrayal. Heini’s mother, sensing his death is near, attempts to benevolently kill Heini and herself while they sleep by leaving the gas stove on in their apartment. Heini survives this attempt on his life, but must spend time recovering from his injuries in the hospital.

When it is time for him to leave the hospital, Heini must decide whether to go live with his father or with the Hitler Youth. The Youth’s leader, Bannführer Kass, convinces Heini’s father to let him live with the Nazis by appealing to his German patriotism. While with the Hitler Youth, Heini is given the task of spreading Nazi propaganda posters throughout Berlin. Unbeknownst to the Nazis, the communists have secretly infiltrated the Nazi group, foiling their plans in Heini’s home neighborhood of Beusselkiez by dumping all of the pamphlets into the Spree River. Using his expert knowledge of printing, Heini arranges to have the pamphlets reprinted and redistributed throughout the neighborhood, once again angering the communists who now more than ever are determined to have him killed. As Heini works alone to distribute his newly printed pamphlets throughout the neighborhood, a group of middle-aged communists surround the young boy and chase him into an abandoned fairground, where they brutally stab him to death. The rest of his Nazi friends follow his screams to find the dying Heini, who then utters his heroic last words: “The flag flutters before us.”

*Hitlerjunge Quex* serves to illustrate the perception of the Hitler Youth as soldiers in combat, both real and metaphoric, for the Germanic nation. The film makes this claim most clearly by connecting the exploits of the Hitler Youth back to the sacrifice of millions of German soldiers during the First World War. In the important scene in which Heini’s father argues with

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14 *Hitlerjunge Quex: Ein Film vom Opfergeist der deutschen Jugend*, directed by Hans Steinhoff (Universum Film AG, 1933), DVD (International Historic Films, 2007).
Bannführer Kass over his son’s future, Kass appeals to his Germanic pride in asking him to allow Heini to stay with the Hitler Youth. Kass asks Heini’s father if he had served in the First World War, and when he says yes, Kass indicates that he should allow Heini to make the same type of sacrifice for the Fatherland by joining the Hitler Youth. Later on in the film, Kass also shows reluctance in letting Heini go to aid the Nazis in his home neighborhood of Beusselkiez, fearing the communists there would kill him for betraying their cause. Heini adamantly protests, again appealing to Kass’s patriotism in much the same way as Kass did to his father beforehand:

HEINI: You told me once that a Hitler Youth is a soldier?
KASS: Yes, I said that.
HEINI: And you were an officer in the War?
KASS: Yes.
HEINI: Did you forbid your soldiers to go to the front when the enemy shot?¹⁵

Appealing to Kass’s emotions, Heini convinces Kass to let him go by connecting his sacrifice to that of German soldiers during World War I. This connection between the brown-shirted Nazi warriors and the soldiers of a previous generation suggests that the struggle for Germany is not yet finished, and that a new generation of young men must continue to sacrifice their lives until the safety of the Fatherland is secure.

From the beginning until the end, Heini embodies the ideal, pure Aryan soldier that the film intends to portray in a number of important ways. First of all, he rejects the disorganized and cosmopolitan environment inhabited by the communist enemy for the organized and soldierly atmosphere provided by the Hitler Youth. Scholar Eric Rentschler notes the difference in the film between the cosmopolitan fairground, which is largely inhabited by communists, and the natural world of the forest, which is the Nazis’ accepted sphere of influence. Heini does not quite feel comfortable in the disheveled, noisy, and international environment of the fairground, ¹⁵ *Hitlerjunge Quex*, directed by Hans Steinhoff.
where he eventually will be killed. Instead, he finds himself at home in the forest inhabited by the Hitler Youth, where he will eventually live on in spirit with his National Socialist compatriots.¹⁶

Secondly, Heini abstains from what appears to be the number one weapon of the communists as portrayed in this film: sexual permissiveness. Gerda, one of the female communist youths, often tries to entice Heini with sexual favors in order to win him over to the communist side. Like a good Nazi soldier, Heini places ideology and the struggle for Nazi political power over personal satisfaction, rejecting the sexual advances of Gerda and the other young women. Heini instead values his Platonic relationship with the Nazi female Ulla, whose closely cropped hair and simple appearance make her a perfect counter to Gerda’s unrestrained sexuality. Gerda’s sex appeal does work on one of Heini’s less pure Nazi comrades, who ultimately betrays the Hitler Youth, not because he has bought into communist ideology, but because he desires to have sex with Gerda. This example illustrates the manner in which Nazi soldiers must place ideology above personal pleasure.

Most importantly, Heini maintains his purity by always acting in honest, nonviolent ways. He and his Nazi friends are constantly the victims of communist aggression; never do they initiate confrontation or commit violent acts on screen. This is illustrated in Heini’s very first encounter with the Hitler Youth at a Berlin train station. In this scene, Heini witnesses a young communist throw food in the face of an innocent Nazi. Fully expecting the Nazis to fight back, Heini is amazed when the whole troop of Hitler Youths show restraint and allow the rest of the communists to pass by them unharmed. Surprised, Heini nervously asks his leader “Why are they

taking that? Aren’t you afraid of them,” indicating that the Nazis’ act of non-violent self-control was a more soldierly and therefore more powerful response to communist aggression.

This pattern continues throughout the film. At one point, the communists raid the Hitler Youth’s meeting place, violently attacking the Nazis until the police arrive. The Hitler Youth fend off the communists as best as they can, but ultimately they enact no reprisals. When the Nazis learn of the plans for a bombing of their headquarters, they simply blow up the factory where the bombs were stored and do not seek out individual communists for revenge. Instead, they feel that spreading propaganda posters throughout the city is a better option in the struggle for political power than actually attacking their communist enemies. Heini never engages in violence of any sort, and he is always honest with his communist attackers, telling them that he truly believes in Nazi ideology even as they threaten to take his life. In the end, Heini is brutally murdered by dozens of grown communist men, illustrating the power that his nonviolent actions have had in the film. In death, Heini is able to live on as a martyr for the Nazi cause, a theme which also has an important place in the next film under analysis.

*Hans Westmar* was released in December 1933, and received a slightly less enthusiastic reception than the more artistic and youth-oriented *Hitlerjunge Quex*. The film was based upon the novelized version of the life of Horst Wessel, the famous Nazi martyr who inspired the well-known song bearing his name. According to legend, Horst Wessel was murdered by communists while fighting for the Nazi cause. In reality, Wessel was killed by the jealous lover of his landlady, with whom he was having affair.17 Although reality often mattered little in the realm of Nazi folk lore, Goebbels was upset with the final cut of the film, forcing a few editorial changes before it was finally released. The most notable change was the protagonist’s name, which was

changed from Horst Wessel to Hans Westmar. Regardless of these changes, the film portrays a soldierly ethos compatible in many ways with that of *Hitlerjunge Quex*.

*Hans Westmar* begins in 1929 with the protagonist Hans visiting Vienna, where he is touring with his American girlfriend and her father. The three are having a joyous time in a Viennese beer hall, but when Hans is asked how life is back in his hometown of Berlin, the scene immediately cuts to the squalid streets of Germany’s capital city. Working class people line the sidewalks waiting for food, and some even argue that life would be better in Russia. Hans is a medical student in Berlin with clear Nazi sympathies, and he decides to become more politically active upon his return as he realizes the many ways in which Berlin has succumbed to unhealthy “international” influences.

As the Nazis attempt to battle the communists for votes in the upcoming parliamentary elections, Hans decides to join the SA in order to wrest Berlin from the control of communist leaders. Hans and his brown-shirted comrades are given an audience at a communist beer hall rally, where Hans intends to preach the values of National Socialism to his left wing opponents. The communists, however, start a massive brawl just as Hans is about to speak. Although the fight is broken up by the Berlin police, one of the young Nazis present at the meeting is brutally murdered by the communists, his head being bashed in and his body dumped into the river.

After leading a few more peaceful protests that are violently disrupted by communists, Hans realizes that the only way for him to gain more Nazi recruits among the working class is for him to become a worker himself. He abandons his studies and takes a job as a taxi driver in a working class neighborhood, much to the disappointment of his mother and his former American

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18 Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, 63. Goebbels did not believe that the film accurately portrayed the story of Horst Wessel in a manner acceptable to the Minister of Propaganda’s tastes.
girlfriend. By humbling himself to become a member of the working class, Hans is able to gain a great number of SA recruits in the heavily working-class neighborhood of Friedrichshain. The Nazis ultimately lose the elections, but this is only due to a last-second coalition that formed between social democrats and communists which allowed the communists to remain in power. Thanks in large part to Hans, the Nazis were able to gain many votes in neighborhoods that were formerly communist strongholds.

Losing control of the working class voting demographic, the communist leaders conspire to kill Hans. Fearing for his life, the top Nazi brass (including Dr. Goebbels himself) attempt to have Hans sent away from Friedrichshain. Hans dramatically refuses, defiantly stating that his place is with his SA comrades. Eventually Hans is betrayed to the communists by his female neighbor. He is shot and later dies in the hospital in front of his Nazi brethren. The film ends with a depiction of a massive funeral procession, in which communist-led crowds throw rocks at Hans’s casket as it moves slowly through the streets of Berlin. After the casket is buried, the final scene features documentary footage from a massive Nazi Party rally presumably held in 1933. A superimposed image of Hans marches along with the now victorious Nazis, as they sing in unison the words “Though dead, in spirit march on with us yet,” suggesting that Hans’s martyrdom will live on in Nazi lore for all eternity.¹⁹

Much like Hitlerjunge Quex, the film Hans Westmar also portrays the ideal German soldier during the years of the Kampfzeit as a warrior obsessed with purity, willing to die a martyr’s death in order to redeem the German nation from the internationalism of the communist party. As historian David Welch notes, Hans resembles Hitler in many ways: he gives up his

intellectual pursuits for grassroots politics, and he abstains from sex in order to keep himself pure and focused on advancing Nazi Party interests.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, one could also argue that Hans even more closely resembles a Christ-like warrior looking to save the German nation from the devilish desires of the communists.

In numerous instances, Hans’s life on screen closely resembles the biblical narrative of Christ, again illustrating the Nazis’ cinematic emphasis on the “pure” soldier during the first year of the regime. Hans lowers his social status, going from a wealthy bourgeoisie student to a working class member of the proletariat, in order to become one of the “people” and to gain disciples for his cause. In this way he not only resembles Christ, but also the protagonist Freder in Fritz Lang’s classic Weimar-era film \textit{Metropolis} (1927). In Lang’s film, the Christ-like character Freder is presented with the task of mediating between the “hands and the heart,” or in other words between the greedy capitalist bourgeoisie and the rebellious working class.\textsuperscript{21} In \textit{Hans Westmar}, Hans is also responsible for bridging the gap between the two classes. This represents the very real rhetoric of the Nazi Party as representative of the interests of both big business and the proletariat.

In addition to his role as mediator, Hans also displays a Christ-like approach while spreading the National Socialist message in the face of harsh communist resistance. It is important to once again note that it is only Nazis who are killed at the hands of communists in this film, and never the other way around. The SA is depicted as a completely non-violent organization throughout the narrative. At one point, when communists have completely surrounded an SA parade marching through Berlin’s streets, the viewer becomes convinced that

\textsuperscript{20} Welch, \textit{Propaganda and the German Cinema}, 67.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Metropolis}, directed by Fritz Lang (Universum Film AG, 1927), DVD (Kino International, 2010).
the Nazis will be forced to use violence in order to counter the threatening crowd. However, instead of fighting back, the SA men outsmart the communist hordes by revving up an old motor on one of their trucks, making a gunshot-like sound that scatters the approaching communists. At another juncture in the film, the SA men are searched by the police, who suspect that the Nazis are carrying concealed weapons to use against communist opponents in the streets. The police find no weapons among the troops, illustrating once again that at least on screen the Nazis planned to fight the communists legally and non-violently as they attempted to gain political power over Germany.

Hans, in Christ-like fashion, exposes the sins of communist internationalism in a non-violent manner. In one fascinating scene, Hans enters a cosmopolitan Berlin bar that is clearly a den of internationalist “decadence.” Inside, a characteristically Slavic-looking cabaret performer sings alongside an African American jazz band, while only English beer, Russian caviar, and other international food and beverages are available on the menu. When the performers play a jazzed-up version of the patriotic song “The Watch on the Rhine,” Hans forcefully exclaims that he “will not allow this song to be played here!”22 This sequence is juxtaposed with a contrasting scene featuring Hans and his SA friend sitting in a graveyard full of dead German soldiers from the First World War. As Hans tells his friend while looking out over the many graves, “Three million had to die. And these people, they dance, get drunk and bellow!”23 Similar to the protagonist in Hitlerjunge Quex, Hans sees himself responsible for taking up the mantle of these fallen soldiers in a new battle for Germany’s future.

22 Hans Westmar, directed by Franz Wenzler.
23 Hans Westmar, directed by Franz Wenzler.
Finally, Hans’s death and metaphorical resurrection most closely illustrate his position as a Christ-like figure. Hans, betrayed by his own neighbor, dies as a martyr for the country he loves. His death inspires others in the film, like a disenchanted communist named Ross, to emulate Hans’s idealism and to convert to the Nazi cause. After his death, Hans’ spirit is “resurrected” by the singing voices of thousands of marching Nazis, suggesting that Hans will in fact live forever in National Socialist lore. Therefore, in both this film and in *Hitlerjunge Quex*, death in combat is portrayed as a passageway to immortality. As long as one maintained purity in life and in National Socialist ideology, one would live forever as a martyr in the Nazi pantheon.

*The War Years*

After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the beginning of the Second World War, the entire Third Reich was mobilized for war against the Allies. With actual German soldiers fighting in real combat against both Britain and France, and eventually the Soviet Union and the United States as well, it seemed only natural that the depiction of the soldier in cinema would take into account the military conflict. In order to gain insight into the cinematic portrayal of soldiers at the height of the Nazi war machine, this section will analyze three different films from the year 1941, before the German defeat at Stalingrad and the military retreat in 1942-1943: *Ohm Krüger* (1941), *Stukas* (1941), and *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* (1941).

Although similar in some respects to the early years of Nazi warriors, the war years complicated the portrayal of the soldier on screen. Historian David Welch, in arguing for a monolithic view of soldiers in Nazi cinema, has suggested that films during the Third Reich hardly represented accurate depictions of problems faced by real-life German soldiers.24 While

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24 Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, 181.
Welch’s assessment is certainly correct in most cases, these films counteract his sweeping claim that Nazi-era cinema simply dismissed the personal emotions of soldiers towards the war and its many problems. With Germany now at war, the cinematic soldier was more likely to use violence and sometimes even faced death with more ambivalence than the fearless protagonists in *Hitlerjunge Quex* or *Hans Westmar*. Each of the films under scrutiny in this section attempts to come to grips with challenging issues, such as pacifism and PTSD, which real German soldiers encountered in their own lives while serving in the military. Although these films address these troublesome problems in highly inadequate ways, the fact that these issues were present at all in popular propaganda films suggests that these were real issues for German soldiers during the Second World War.

*Ohm Krüger* was an anti-British propaganda film directed by Hans Steinhoff and starring Academy-Award winning actor Emil Jannings.25 The film was a commercial success after its release in April 1941, becoming the first motion-picture under the Third Reich to earn the distinguished title “Film of the Nation.” It became one of Joseph Goebbels’s favorite cinematic achievements, and he even noted in his diary that the film was “a really great, thrilling work of art. The supreme achievement of the entire war. This is a film to go crazy about.”26 The movie focuses on the struggle of the Boer population of South Africa against the British army during the second Boer War in 1899-1902. Although the film is clearly pro-Boer, it can also be considered pro-German, since the noble Boer soldiers fighting to stave off greedy British colonists serve as an obvious parallel to the ideal German soldier, at least in the film. Indeed,

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25 Jannings was the first-ever recipient of the Oscar for Best Actor at the inaugural Academy Awards ceremony in 1929. He was presented with the Oscar for his starring roles in two silent-era Hollywood productions: *The Way of All Flesh* (1927) and *The Last Command* (1928).

even those who considered the Boers an inferior race acknowledged that the film intended to portray them as Germanic, as is evident in this report of the Sicherheitsdienst on the film’s reception:

Knowledgeable viewers and experts on Africa…question whether it is useful to portray in such heroic terms the Boers whose racially positive characteristics are accompanied also by strong negative elements and who in terms of their character, their economic and political actions did not always play a positive role. There were conflicting elements in the character of this mixed nation, and with a view to the colonial tasks of post-victory Germany it could not be portrayed as a Germanic ideal.27

The primary plot-line of Ohm Krüger focuses on the life of Boer president and politician Paul Krüger, who attempts to hold the Boer nation together against a greedy British capitalist, a drunken Queen Victoria, and a dastardly Winston Churchill look-alike, all of who look to exploit the Boer lands for gold and natural resources. Although the adventures of Paul Krüger receive the most attention in the film, for the purposes of this study it will be important to focus on another important character: Paul Krüger’s son, Jan. At the beginning of the film, Jan Krüger is a self-proclaimed pacifist with pro-British sentiments, primarily due to his education at Oxford University in England. After the devastation of the First World War, pacifism had gained strength as a movement especially among intellectuals. Therefore, it is not surprising that a German film in the Nazi-era would address this issue, as undoubtedly there were many real-life soldiers who struggled with the will to fight on a regular basis. Jan’s transformation from a peaceful pacifist to a brave and violent soldier in Ohm Krüger deserves further attention for its attempt to provide an answer to this “problem” in accordance with National Socialist ideology.

27 Quoted in Jo Fox, Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 183.
As Jan returns home from Oxford at the start of tensions between the Boers and the British, his father is shocked to learn of his unwillingness to fight against the English. After three years in England, Jan has become a cosmopolitan intellectual. This first becomes evident by his unwillingness to smoke his father’s strong Boer tobacco, preferring instead his own much lighter English cigarettes. Jan tells his father that the English treated him very well, and he argues that the British would be a benevolent and civilizing force upon the intensely nationalistic Boer nation. He believes in the principles of international law, stating that for “nations to live side-by-side in peace, they will have to try to adapt their status of rights, their laws and perspectives to each other.” Like other pacifists of the time period, Jan believes that the erasure of national borders would create a more peaceful world free of conflict between nations, even if that meant giving the British control over South Africa. Jan’s new pacifist beliefs are much to the dismay of his father, who accuses his son of being “Anglicized.” Later, when his father asks him again when he is going to join the Boer troops in the war against England, the following conversation ensues:

JAN: I am a pacifist.
PAUL: What does that mean “a pacifist?”
JAN: During my years of study, among like-minded people, I took an oath not to participate in any armed war.
PAUL: I see! That’s the definition of “pacifist.” Sitting at home while the others are fighting!

Paul Krüger, discouraged by his son’s pacifist leanings, warns Jan that the battle against the English represents life or death for the Boer nation, and he disowns him for not taking up arms against the British imperialists.

28 Ohm Krüger, directed by Hans Steinhoff (Tobis-Filmkunst, 1941), DVD (International Historic Films, 2007).
29 Ohm Krüger, directed by Hans Steinhoff.
30 Ohm Krüger, directed by Hans Steinhoff.
Jan remains firmly pacifist until later in the film, when a group of British soldiers visit his house in South Africa. Upon request, Jan invites the commander of the British regiment into his home, claiming that he is loyal to England and will help the commander as he searches the countryside for Boer resistance fighters. The fat and slovenly-looking British soldier asks Jan and his wife for a glass of wine, and nearly gulps down the whole bottle. As Jan steps into the next room to fetch the man another bottle of whiskey, the drunken British soldier pounces on Jan’s wife and attempts to rape her. Coming back just in time, Jan catches the soldier in the act and smashes the whiskey bottle over his head, killing the soldier and relinquishing his pacifist beliefs in the process.

After this incident, Jan becomes the model Boer (i.e. German) soldier. He realizes that he cannot afford to remain outside of the conflict and joins the fiercest Boer resistance regiment still in existence, making his father proud once again. Near the end of the film, Jan bravely attempts to break his imprisoned wife out of a concentration camp administered by the British military. He is captured and publicly executed by the British, who hang him from a tree perched on a hill near the edge of the camp, for all the Boer women and children to see. His death parallels Christ’s death on Calvary, and is therefore reminiscent of the martyrs in Hitlerjunge Quex and Hans Westmar.

Jan clearly is redeemed through his death and his soldierly honor is restored, while his belief in pacifism is now discredited. However, the fact that Ohm Krüger depicts pacifist beliefs suggests that the makers of the film thought that it was an important enough subject to be addressed. Notions of patriotism and nationalism do not appear to be enough to convince Jan to take up arms against the British. Only when the war enters his private sphere, and his wife is nearly raped, does Jan realize the need to use violence for what is portrayed as a just cause in the
film. The affront against pacifism in *Ohm Krüger* certainly reflects a tradition of anti-intellectualism and anti-internationalism present in many Nazi-era films, but perhaps it was also intended as a response to a perceived problem with a clear ideological message: if for no other reason, a German soldier must fight to protect his family from foreign defilement.

Just as pacifism represented a negative influence upon the German soldier, another detrimental problem experienced by soldiers during the war was “shell-shock,” or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Although the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was only officially coined in 1980 by the American Psychiatric Association in response to research on Vietnam War veterans and victims of domestic assault and rape, it is clear that the psychological effects associated with trauma victims of this sort have a long history that precede the era in which PTSD was properly classified as a medical disorder.\(^{31}\) PTSD symptoms plagued many traumatized German soldiers returning from the horrors of the First World War, as was evident in some of the expressionist artwork of the Weimar era. Film scholar Anton Kaes argues that some of the most prominent German films of the 1920s, such as Robert Wiene’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and Friedrick W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), symbolize the “shell shocked” emotions of former German soldiers by transforming “military aggression and defeat into domestic tableaux of crime and horror.”\(^{32}\) Although Nazi-era cinema was reluctant to delve into the psychological aspects of shell-shocked victims, a couple of films did ultimately address the issue, albeit in somewhat unsatisfactory ways.


Directed by Karl Ritter, *Stukas* (1941) was the first major wartime production to address the problem of a “shell-shocked” soldier. Ritter’s film was released during the height of Nazi military success, five days after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. *Stukas* tells the story of a fictional *Luftwaffe* squadron and its frequent bombing raids during the successful 1940 battle over France. The film is an example of what Ritter labeled *Zeitfilm*, a genre of filmmaking that featured episodic action sequences and dialogue, instead of a traditional plotline with strong character development throughout the entire narrative. The result is a confusing spectacle of special effects that glorifies the *Luftwaffe* as ideal Nazi warriors. As contemporary viewer Howard K. Smith described it in 1941: “[Stukas] was a monotonous film about a bunch of obstreperous adolescents who dive-bombed things and people. They bombed everything and everybody. That was all the whole film was – just one bombing after another.”

Even Propaganda Minister Goebbels had mixed feelings about the propagandistic film, writing in his diary that *Stukas* was “quite good, with some wonderful air footage, but a typical Ritter production. He cannot lead people. Rather too noisy.”

Despite its overtly nationalistic and militaristic themes, *Stukas* serves as an interesting case study for its depiction of a shell-shocked soldier. Near the end of the film, one of the squadron’s top *Luftwaffe* pilots, Lieutenant Hans Wilde, returns to the base severely wounded from battle. Wilde is sent to a military hospital inside Germany, where he is treated for both his physical and mental injuries. He quickly recovers from his physical ailments, but much to the dismay of his doctor, Wilde remains in his hospital bed, broken and depressed from the trauma he experienced in combat. The nurse in charge of his health desperately tries to get him to return

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to his duties on the war front. She gives Lieutenant Wilde militaristic magazines with Stuka bombers featured on the front cover, and even invites his former comrades to come and visit him. However, her efforts bring no results. Wilde continues to lie in his bed and stare into space, clearly suffering from his wartime experiences. As he declares in front of his comrades, “All sorts of things are broken within me.”36 Wilde, afraid of battle and completely immobilized, clearly suffers from some sort of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. While it is somewhat surprising that such an overtly-nationalistic film would portray such a serious condition, it nevertheless suggests the recognition of a real problem by the filmmaker and the public at large; despite Germany’s battlefront successes, soldiers were still returning to the home-front “broken men.” Perhaps only in a film produced during the highpoint of German military victories could PTSD be portrayed so prominently, especially under Dr. Goebbels’ close scrutiny.

As the story draws to a close, the film attempts to provide a solution to the very serious problem confronting the troubled Lieutenant. Wilde’s nurse convinces his doctor to allow him to accompany her to a concert at the Bayreuth opera house, hoping that he would find inspiration through attending a Wagnerian opera. Although Wilde had a prior distaste for “classical” music, he becomes utterly enthralled by the performance. It reminds him not only of his Luftwaffe comrades fighting on the front, but also of his Germanic roots. Overcome with patriotic fervor, Wilde suddenly exclaims: “Now I know again where I belong!”37 He leaves the performance and immediately heads back to the front. A subsequent montage scene depicts a giddy Wilde returning to base, where he is greeted enthusiastically by his fellow pilots.

36 Stukas, directed by Karl Ritter (Universum Film AG, 1941), DVD (International Historic Films, 2012).
37 Stukas, directed by Karl Ritter.
The film’s “happy” ending is quite far-fetched, and its response to the issue of “shell-shocked” soldiers is overly simplistic. The intense psychological burden suffered by the soldier Wilde is instantly solved when he discovers a renewed love for the German Fatherland. That appears to be the overall message: in the face of fear and death, one must remember that a true soldier is fighting for a higher ideal. This theme is illustrated earlier in the film, when the squadron’s medical doctor recites a poem while commemorating the noble death of a fallen comrade:

Oh, take me, take me into the ranks, so that I will not die a common death! I do not want to die in vain; but desire to perish on a hill of sacrifice for the Fatherland…to bleed the blood of my heart for the Fatherland, and heralds of victory descend: the battle is ours! Live on, above oh, Fatherland, and reckon not the dead! For you, Beloved, not one too many has fallen!”

Although an appeal to patriotism may have been an inadequate response to the psychological horrors suffered by Germany’s real shell-shocked soldiers, the film’s depiction of the disorder is nonetheless quite interesting. Its simplistic remedy to Lieutenant Wilde’s mental trauma suggests that the filmmaker may have realized that there was no “real” solution to the problem at the time. According to Nazi ideology, true German soldiers were never to fear death, and if they did, it was only because they had forgotten the reasons why they had to continue fighting.

Released in the same year as *Stukas*, the film *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* also portrays a character frightened by a traumatic experience on the battlefront. *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* was directed by Helmut Käutner, a German director known mostly during the Nazi-era for making romance films rather than pieces of National Socialist propaganda. Due to the non-political nature of most of Käuter’s films, scholar Robert C. Reimer even contends “that many film historians are reluctant to align his work completely with the film politics of the Third Reich

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38 *Stukas*, directed by Karl Ritter.
and instead accord him and his films a special position within National Socialist cinema.”39 In fact, *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* is first and foremost a melodramatic love story, and most scholars of Nazi cinema have focused solely on the film’s commentary upon gender roles, ignoring the film’s portrayal of death in combat. Similar to Lieutenant Wilde in *Stukas*, the male protagonist in *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* must decide whether or not he will fulfill his soldierly duty and fight for Germany in the Second World War.

Käutner’s film takes place in the years leading up to Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939. It chronicles the tumultuous romantic relationship between a fictional German photojournalist named Michael and his female counterpart Franziska. Although Michael is only a photojournalist and not technically a soldier throughout most of the film, he does experience the horrors of live combat, and therefore his character does pertain to the issues under consideration within this study. The film begins with the life-long bachelor Michael falling in love with the young Franziska in her small and quintessentially Germanic hometown. Michael proposes to Franziska, promising her that he will eventually quit his job as an international photographer in order to settle down and become a model husband and father. Franziska accepts his proposal, but Michael soon becomes restless and yearns for adventure. He takes a job working for a newspaper in New York, which sends him all around the world to cover stories of war and natural disasters in exotic settings. While overseas he flirts with a female American newspaper reporter and entertains a number of other promiscuous women in a North African strip club that is more reminiscent of a brothel. In fact, it is in this bar where a drunken Michael first receives a telegram from Germany letting him know that his first son was born. Michael’s adventurism and

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philandering begin to wear on the loyal Franziska, who is forced to raise the children while her husband remains outside the country. Franziska contemplates filing for divorce, and the couple’s relationship is nearly finished until a near-death experience forces Michael to reconsider his priorities.

Near the end of the film, Michael is sent on assignment to cover the Sino-Japanese war near Shanghai, China. While in Shanghai, Michael teams up with his close friend Buck Standing, an American reporter, to try and capture pictures as close to the front lines of battle as possible. It is clear throughout the film that Michael enjoys skirtling danger, as long as he is just far enough from the actual combat to remain unharmed. Earlier in the film he tells Franziska that he loves covering wars and conflicts as a photographer, since it allows him “to see the wounds of the world, and then leave when it gets too rough.” However, this time Michael and his friend Buck get too close to the actual battle. As the Japanese military surges towards the city, Buck is hit with a piece of shrapnel from a nearby exploding artillery shell and dies in Michael’s arms. Before he dies, Buck tells Michael to quit his dangerous job and to return home to his wife and children, as Buck wished he had done years before. Shaken by Buck’s death, Michael returns home to Franziska, vowing never again to risk his life by returning to the battlefront.

However, upon his return home in September 1939, Michael quickly learns of Germany’s declaration of war against Poland. Michael, still terrified by the prospect of dying in battle away from his wife and children, is determined not to participate in the war effort in order to finally fulfill his role as a proper husband and father. He confesses his love for Franziska, and this time she is convinced that he plans to give up his job and take care of her and the children. Despite

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40 Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska, directed by Helmut Käutner (Terra-Filmmkunst, 1941), DVD (Germanwarfilms.com, 2012).
her delight in Michael’s transformation, Franziska nevertheless realizes that he cannot stay. She
had received his draft papers in the mail only days earlier, and she knows that she must lose him
once again in service to the Fatherland. As Franziska urges him to join the military, Michael
earnestly protests:

MICHAEL: But I want to finally be there for you and the children!
FRANZISKA: But now, when you go [to the front], you will still be there for me and the
children.
MICHAEL: You are sending me away?
FRANZISKA: Yes. If you do not want to make that decision, then now I am telling you
go.
MICHAEL: Is it not my duty…
FRANZISKA: Come, do not talk about duty. You must first learn what [duty] means. 

With this line of argumentation, Franziska is able to convince Michael that it is indeed his
duty to leave home one last time in order to become a soldier in the German army. Although
Michael’s “shell-shocked” condition is portrayed less explicitly than Lieutenant Wilde’s in
Stukas, it is nonetheless reasonable to assume that Michael is suffering from his traumatic
experience in combat conditions. It is Buck’s death that causes him to return home; without that
experience Michael likely would have continued pursuing his career close to the front-lines.
Michael’s fear of dying alone in combat is manifested in his newfound desire to remain at home
with his family, something that hardly interested him before.

Not only does Michael’s condition resemble that of Lieutenant Wilde’s, but the film’s
solution to his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder also mirrors the resolution provided at the end of
Stukas. Despite her unwillingness to lose him again, Franziska reinvigorates Michael by
appealing to his sense of duty for the German Fatherland. In his travels as a photojournalist,
Michael had been serving only his own interests, working for international newspapers and not

\[41\] Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska, directed by Helmut Käutner.
for the German propaganda industry, the division of the military into which he is eventually drafted. Now he finally has his chance to truly serve the German war machine, and in doing so he can also serve Franziska and his children by fighting against Germany’s enemies abroad. Thus, like *Stukas, Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* presents an issue that was likely common amongst a number of real-life German soldiers, offering a somewhat idealistic and overly-simplistic solution to a highly problematic psychological disorder. For Jan in *Ohm Krüger*, Wilde in *Stukas*, and Michael in *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska*, the only way to solve the problems of pacifism and PTSD is for the individual soldier to once again become aware of his duty: to protect the German Fatherland and therefore to protect his own family. Despite their highly nationalistic message, the willingness of these three wartime films to portray the issues of pacifism and PTSD among German soldiers on the cinema screen is worth serious consideration.

**The Collapse of the Third Reich**

With the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943, the tide of the Second World War began to turn against the German military in favor of the advancing Allied armies. After the Western Allies’ invasion of Normandy in 1944 and the Soviet Union’s victories in the East during the same year, it became clear to the Nazi leadership that an extraordinary effort would be needed to prevent Allied domination of the shrinking Reich. Not only were German soldiers required to shoulder an immense burden in this last ditch military campaign; German civilians were now expected to participate in the violent struggle for the collapsing Fatherland. As Allied forces closed in on the capital city of Berlin, Hitler and the Nazis mobilized women, children, and the elderly in a fanatic effort to stave off an inevitable defeat. The mobilization of civilians cost many unnecessary casualties and prolonged the war further, as many untrained citizens willingly
sacrificed their lives for the Nazi cause. As the war came to a close, it was evident that all Germans, no matter their age or status, were expected to embody the values of the ideal German soldier, fighting and dying for the German state.

Given this gradual transformation of German civilians into citizen-soldiers, it is apparent once again that this emerging phenomenon was reflected in the cinema of the Third Reich. As one would expect, the reversal in Germany’s military prospects had only negative effects upon its ever important film industry. The yearly production of films in Germany declined from seventy-six in 1943 to a measly six in 1945, the final year of the war in Europe. Sensing the troubling military situation, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels commissioned director Veit Harlan in October 1943 to begin production on the film Kolberg (1945), which he hoped would address the Reich’s new military needs in the event of total war on German soil.

Perhaps the most lavish and epic film ever produced under the Third Reich, Kolberg was the last film released under the Nazi regime in Germany. It was shot in color using the expensive Agfacolor technique and featured some of the most prominent German actors and actresses of the time period. Elaborate pyrotechnic displays were used during the epic battle scenes, and thousands of active soldiers were recalled from duty in order to stand in as extras during a time when presumably every soldier was needed on the front lines. The film’s plot revolves around a historical event occurring in the actual town of Kolberg during the early nineteenth century. After Napoleon’s defeat of Prussia in 1807, the citizens of Kolberg banded together to bravely defend their small Germanic town from the mighty French invaders. Considering the future defense of Berlin by its own citizen-soldiers in 1945, the film appears prophetic in its ideological

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42 Welch, Propaganda and the German Cinema, 160.
43 Leiser, Nazi Cinema, 129.
message. Goebbels seems to have had the same vision for the film, writing as early as 1943 that
*Kolberg* “exactly fits the military-political landscape of the time when the picture will be
released.” The primary message, as portrayed both in the film and in Nazi ideology near the
end of the war, is clear: the German civilian must now become like the model soldier, ready to
fight and die for the country and the way of life in which all Germans must hold dear.

*Kolberg* begins with a scene at the royal palace at Breslau in 1813, on the eve of the
Prussian War of Liberation waged against Napoleon’s French imperial forces. Inside the palace,
Field Marshal August Neidhardt von Gneisenau is attempting to convince the apathetic Prussian
King Frederick William III to sign a proclamation of war against France. Gneisenau argues that
the people of Prussia will support him by rising up in civilian-organized militia units to help the
beleaguered Prussian military defeat Napoleon. When the king refuses to mobilize his willing
subjects for war, the following conversation ensues, accurately portraying the central message of
the film:

KING FREDERICK WILLIAM III: My ancestor Frederick the Great did not have a band
of citizens behind him, only soldiers. Citizens only suffer in war. Every people is an
enemy of war. What can I offer them?

GNEISENAU: Faith, your Majesty. In justice, strength, and victory. If it had been the
people’s choice we would have captured Napoleon when he fled through Germany. Only
those diplomats and soldiers hesitated, who were duped by Metternich. Let us not miss
the chance again.

This conversation aptly sets the stage for the rest of the film and establishes the premise that a
new demographic will now have to bear the burden of killing and dying. As Gneisenau’s
statement suggests, the professional diplomats and soldiers had failed to protect German soil; it
was now up to the people to rise up in defense of the Fatherland.

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44 Quoted in Giesen, *Nazi Propaganda Films*, 170.

45 *Kolberg*, directed by Veit Harlan (Universum Film AG, 1945), DVD (International Historic Films, 2004).
Much of the remainder of the film is told in flashback, as Gneisenau invokes his personal experience with the town of Kolberg’s struggle against the French in 1806 in order to convince the king to mobilize a people’s army. The plot largely centers upon Kolberg’s mayor, Joachim Nettlebeck, a former brewer who attempts to organize the town’s citizens as Napoleon’s forces stream into eastern Prussia. Arguing against other “defeatist” town citizens who believe that Kolberg should surrender its sovereignty to France in order to salvage its economy, Nettlebeck struggles at first to convince much of the town to mobilize in defense of the city. The town’s official army regiment is inefficient and ill-equipped. The regiment’s leader, General Loucadou, is completely opposed to mobilizing civilians for war, telling Nettlebeck’s small civilian militia unit to “stop playing soldiers” and to “go home.”46 Arrested by Loucadou for his efforts to arm Kolberg’s citizens, Nettlebeck eventually appeals to Queen Louise of Prussia to replace the general with a more apt leader willing to allow the people of Kolberg to die in defense of their town. The Queen consents to Nettlebeck’s request, sending the young Gneisenau to take military command of the rural region. Under Gneisenau and Nettlebeck’s command, the small military regiment bands together with Kolberg’s brave citizenry to defend the town against overwhelming odds. In an epic battle scene, the citizens of Kolberg, some armed with only pitch forks, sacrifice their lives and their homes to inflict large casualties upon the enemy troops, forcing a halt to the French siege of the town. The film’s final scene flashes forward once again to the palace at Breslau in 1813, where King Frederick William III, inspired by Gneisenau’s account of Kolberg’s brave stand against Napoleon, invokes the spirit of the Prussian people and declares the war of liberation from the French.

46 *Kolberg*, directed by Veit Harlan.
Despite its clear ideological and nationalistic message, Kolberg as a film presents an odd challenge to traditional military leadership. The people of Kolberg are the ideal warriors for the Germanic/Nazi cause; a great majority of the town’s inhabitants are portrayed as farmers, their families having been tied to the lands around the town for generations. The agrarian lifestyle of many of Kolberg’s residents makes them uniquely German and unwilling to allow foreign invaders to impinge upon the sovereign control of their ancestral lands. The town’s non-agrarian members, on the other hand, generally represent the defeatist faction. The traditional military elite, such as General Loucadou, are tied primarily to their titles, while the merchants and petty bourgeoisie have greater interest in their material wealth. Both of these groups lack any strong connection to the land in Kolberg, and therefore believe that they can remain in their positions of great status and prosperity even under French rule.

Having a stronger connection to their Prussian roots, the rural citizens of Kolberg are willing to do anything to see that their way of life is defended from French influence. When their town comes under siege from enemy forces, the people are willing not only to sacrifice their lives in battle for the Prussian cause, but also their sacred land. At one point in the film, the town’s farmers flood most of Kolberg’s arable land in order to stop a French advance in its tracks. While the Kolberger’s decision to sacrifice both their lives and their precious farmland may seem somewhat contradictory, the film makes it clear that preserving the German way of life during the turmoil of total war requires a completely different type of logic. This is illustrated perfectly during an earlier scene in the film in which Nettlebeck explains to the other members of Kolberg’s citizen council why they must refuse surrender to the French. In arguing for the surrender of the town to the powerful French forces before they can set siege to the city, the town schoolmaster presents a purely rational case:
It is merely a rational question, gentlemen…If we carry on the war alone, what will be the result? They will surround us, cut off our communications…Let us assume we defend ourselves to the death. But the enemy is not asleep either. Even Nettlebeck cannot spit against the wind. Against modern French artillery, heroism is not enough.47

Clearly the town rector represents the leftist intellectual viewpoint, which the Nazis saw as a detriment to the German Volk; yet in this case he makes a compelling argument, since the town is clearly outnumbered and will undoubtedly suffer heavy losses at the hands of the French. However, Nettlebeck retorts with an emotional response that is obviously intended to explain the rationale driving the truly Germanic citizen-soldier:

There are plenty of rational reasons. But there are also irrational reasons you may mention later. What would happen to a Prussian that said to Napoleon: ‘Come on you are so much stronger than we are. Come swallow us up.’ What would become of a people who could think and talk like that? They would destroy themselves and would deserve nothing less.48

According to Nettlebeck, a model German citizen must decide to become a soldier on what would appear to most outsiders as irrational grounds. Given the deteriorating military situation surrounding the Third Reich, the virtue of civilian self-sacrifice as portrayed on screen was undoubtedly one of the ideological messages that the makers of Kolberg hoped to project onto its German audience.

The new soldierly responsibilities thrust upon the town’s civilian population are best illustrated by comparing two of the film’s main characters: Maria and Klaus. The two are siblings, and also happen to be the niece and nephew of Kolberg’s heroic mayor Nettlebeck. Maria is portrayed as the stereotypically perfect Aryan young woman; she remains rooted in her father’s peasant farmhouse and embodies the type of female domesticity that was so valued

47 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
48 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
within Nazi ideology. At one point in the film she voices her disdain for war, expressing fear of losing her loved ones in battle. Nevertheless, as Maria is called upon to do her part in the defense of Kolberg, she willingly sheds her passive femininity and assumes a more masculine and soldierly role. As the French surround the town, Nettlebeck entrusts Maria with delivering a secret message to the Prussian king and queen at Königsberg. Although as a female Maria is an ideal courier because she stands a greater chance of maneuvering through occupied territory undetected by the French, her mission is portrayed as dangerous and challenges traditional Nazi views on female domesticity. A military officer and Maria’s love interest in the film even tries to stop her from going by stating that “girls do not go behind enemy lines.” Despite this officer’s pleas, Maria insists that her mission must be completed successfully in order to save the town from the French. Eventually, Maria does make her way past the French blockade to the palace at Königsberg, and she even survives being fired upon by enemy soldiers during her journey. By undertaking this hazardous mission into enemy territory, Maria leaves the feminine domestic sphere and enters into the masculine public sphere consisting of warriors and soldiers. The message is clear: when the Prussian way of life is threatened by outside invaders, all citizens must in one way or another take up arms regardless of gender. Although in peacetime Maria is presented as the ideally passive Germanic maiden, during war she becomes the model citizen-soldier.

Contrary to the example of Maria, the character Klaus represents the degenerate civilian anti-warrior. Throughout the film, Klaus is portrayed as a feminized and cosmopolitan figure.

49 Scholar Antje Ascheid notes how the success of Maria’s secret mission behind enemy lines “is firmly linked to her feminine attributes…she uses her girlish charms to break through Napoleon’s blockade.” While this observation is certainly true, Ascheid does not consider the manner in which Maria’s entrance into the male-dominated sphere of battle ultimately challenges Nazi views on female domesticity. Antje Ascheid, Hitler’s Heroines: Stardom and Womanhood in Nazi Cinema (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 64-65.

50 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
Not unlike the character Jan from *Ohm Krüger* (1941), Klaus has studied abroad and considers himself “a citizen of the world.” He is obsessed with playing his violin and is always seen dressed in the highest fashion. Clearly Klaus has become completely disconnected from his Prussian roots. When it comes time for every able-bodied citizen to fight against the French in defense of Kolberg, Klaus goes into hiding and declares to his sister Maria: “I am no hero!” However, unlike the earlier examples of Jan in *Uhm Krüger* or Lieutenant Wilde in *Stukas* (1941), Klaus never regains his will to fight. Instead, he dies an un-heroic death when he is struck by French cannon fire while trying to save his precious violin from the flooded ruins of the town. The treatment of Klaus’ unwillingness to fight in *Kolberg* in comparison to earlier films suggests a shift in the circumstances of total war. There is no longer time to shy away from the battlefield; all Germans must participate in the defense of their homeland or they will meet with tragic ends. Klaus’ death in the flooded waters of Kolberg is contrasted with a later scene in which Maria operates a large fire-hose, attempting to single-handedly put out a burning building with gallons of water. It is evident that Maria, despite her femininity, has answered her call to arms, while Klaus has refused. Maria’s willingness to sacrifice her life for Prussia (and thus Germany) suggests to the viewer that in the closing moments of the Second World War, a new form of citizen-soldier has developed on the German cinema screen, encouraging all civilians, regardless of sex, to become warriors for the Fatherland.

Despite *Kolberg*’s epic scale and enormous production costs, it was not widely distributed after its premiere in Berlin on January 30, 1945, the final anniversary of Hitler’s ascension to the German Chancellorship. The military situation within Germany had crippled

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51 *Kolberg*, directed by Veit Harlan.  
52 *Kolberg*, directed by Veit Harlan.  
the Reich’s film industry, much to the dismay of Joseph Goebbels, who had envisioned using *Kolberg* as an important piece of propaganda. For Goebbels, perhaps an even greater humiliation came in March 1945, when Soviet forces overwhelmed the German military installation at the actual town of Kolberg in East Prussia. Writing in his diary, Goebbels noted the effect the defeat would have upon the film:

> We have now had to evacuate Kolberg. The town, which has been defended with such extraordinary heroism, could no longer be held. I will ensure that the evacuation of Kolberg is not mentioned in the OKW report. In view of the severe psychological repercussions on the Kolberg film we could do without that for the moment.\(^{54}\)

Despite its limited success, the central theme of *Kolberg* appeared highly relevant in the last days of the Nazi regime, and its call for German citizens to rise up in defense of their collapsing empire reflected the historical circumstances of the final days of the Second World War.

**Conclusion**

As this study argues, the portrayal of soldiers fighting and dying in the cinema of the Third Reich developed in relation to the external conditions that existed within German society. The earliest films under analysis depicted soldiers exactly the way in which the Nazi regime wished to be viewed by the German public as it rose to power: as a largely non-violent political movement being violently persecuted by a dastardly communist faction. As the Second World War began and progressed, a number of films produced during the height of German military expansion featured a few troubling issues that often faced the everyday soldier. Although these films dealt with soldiers who were unwilling to fight and die for Germany in largely unsatisfactory ways, the fact that these issues were presented at all suggests a correlation with the

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conditions facing actual soldiers on the battlefront. Finally, the release of Kolberg in 1945 illustrates Germany’s dismal military situation and its need for civilian-soldiers to become the newest warriors ready to fight and die in defense of their homeland. As the analysis of these six films suggests, the fantasy world of Nazi-era cinema was in constant dialogue with the actual political and military circumstances surrounding it, projecting “real-life” conditions onto the soldierly characters that were portrayed on film.
CHAPTER TWO - SEX, WOMEN, AND THE GERMAN SOLDIER IN NAZI CINEMA, 1939-1945

With the onset of the Second World War in 1939 and the deployment of millions of German troops to areas outside of the Reich, life changed drastically for both women on the home-front and men serving in the military. Similar in some fashion to the home-front experience during World War I, women were essentially forced to assume new roles at home while a large segment of the German male population was abroad. German women often became the sole providers for their families and increasingly began to enter the workforce, while they were simultaneously subjected to increased food rationing and heavy Allied bombing raids. On the other hand, German men who had either volunteered or been conscripted into the Reich’s Armed Forces were expected to conform completely to German military culture, leaving behind all thoughts of the home-front in order to defeat the state’s external enemies.

The circumstances of total war and the separation between home-front and war-front undoubtedly strained the relationships between women and German soldiers. Although marriages increased with the outbreak of war, Matthew Stibbe notes that, “women who married during the war often found that there was little to separate them from single women in experiential terms” due to the lengthy periods of separation from their husbands. 55 This led to a (at times perceived) breakdown of sexual mores and a real fear of female infidelity on the home-front. Opportunities for new sexual adventures were also widely available to male soldiers serving on the war-front, as made evident by concerns that the spread of STI’s within the German military would ultimately undermine the Reich’s military effort.56

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Therefore, it is unsurprising that many German filmmakers addressed issues regarding sex and the relationships between German women and soldiers in films released during the war years. This chapter will discuss four films that illustrate the appropriate manner in which both women and soldiers were expected to act in relation to one another while under the strains of total war. When placed together as a set, each of these films advocate for an important separation between the “masculine” war-front and the “feminine” home-front. Each film makes it clear that the male soldier must place his duty above personal and sexual happiness at all times, rejecting a life of domesticity with the woman he loves for the “higher” virtues of male comradeship and self-sacrifice in battle. Women must also do their own duty by remaining loyal to their lovers and contributing to the war effort at home. They too must make a sacrifice, subjugating their desire for love and family by supporting their lover while he is away in battle. As a few of these films go on to suggest, any self-serving disruption of this harmonious balance between war-front and home-front, on the part of either the male soldier or his female counterpart, could have dangerous consequences that may work to undermine the all-important German war effort.

**Home-Front Films: Wunschkonzert (1940) and Die große Liebe (1942)**

One of the more notable aspects of Nazi-era cinema, especially after the start of the Second World War in 1939, was that German filmmakers were often reluctant to produce films that dealt with contemporary issues, characters, and settings. As scholar Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien concludes, fewer than twenty feature-length films were released during the Third Reich which in one way or another directly focused on the German experience during the war. Instead, many

films were set in an idealized historical past or an unidentified “present” devoid of any of the effects of war. This lack of Second World War-related entertainment films is striking, and it was perhaps intended in order to allow German audiences to “escape” their contemporary struggles, especially after the strategic turning point at Stalingrad in 1942 severely limited the Third Reich’s military fortunes.

Nevertheless, the scarcity of contemporary war movies makes those films which do present the German experience in World War II all the more interesting for scholars of Nazi cinema. While a number of films such as *Stukas* (1941) feature the experiences of the German soldier in combat, a handful of films present life on the home-front in the midst of total war. These films can be classified as “home-front films,” because they often center upon the relationship between a soldier at war and his girlfriend back home in Germany.58 Extremely popular among female audiences during the war years, these home-front dramas typically attempted to address issues faced by both women and their male lovers in a manner that ideologically furthered the German war effort.

The two home-front dramas under analysis in this study, *Wunschkonzert* (1940) and *Die große Liebe* (1942), were the two most commercially successful Nazi-era films ever released in Germany between the years 1933-1945. Although ostensibly romance narratives between a soldier and his far-off girlfriend, both of these films feature more complex themes that not only appeal to female audiences but also glorify Nazi ideology in the process. Each film depicts a masculine *Luftwaffe* pilot who falls in love with a woman after one night while on leave in his

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58 The film *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* (1941), discussed in Chapter One, can also be grouped into the genre of “home-front” film. Although this film depicts the relationship between a German photojournalist and his girlfriend, it features many of the same themes as other films included in this genre. See my own discussion of *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska* in Chapter One, 24-28. Also see the discussion of this film in Laura Heins, *Nazi Melodrama* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 168-174.
German homeland. Although war ultimately disrupts this perfect romance and the couple’s often explicit sexual relationship, it is war rather than “love” that actually drives the plotlines and themes of both films. While the soldier is away from his girlfriend at the war-front, eroticism and sexuality eventually become displaced onto the battlefield. The soldierly values of male comradeship and self-sacrifice take on a homoerotic undertone that elevates these virtues above the “castrating” sexuality of the feminine sphere at home. War is nearly devoid of violence in these films; instead, battle is presented as a male adventure that enables the soldier not only to find fulfillment in his love for his girlfriend, but even more so in his love for Germany. Women, on the other hand, are expected in both films to be ever cognizant of a soldier’s needs. At certain times this requires them to be available sexually, but even more so it means being patient while their men are away, even when they receive no word back from their boyfriends or are presented with offers from another suitor. Both films ultimately utilize music in different ways to connect the home-front to the battlefield, but this connection is at best tenuous: there can be no truly “happy” ending for each couple as long as the war rages on against Germany’s external enemies.

Directed by Eduard von Borsody, Wünschkonzert premiered in Berlin on September 30, 1940. It derived its title from the extremely popular Wünschkonzert für die Wehrmacht (Request Concert for the Military) radio series, which was broadcast over German radio every Sunday evening from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. This radio show worked to unite home-front and war-front by allowing both soldiers and those back at home in Germany to send messages and request songs over the airwaves for a small charitable donation. The film itself featured many of the radio program’s musical stars and hit songs, and the show plays an integral part in the film’s plotline.

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60 O’Brien, Nazi Cinema as Enchantment, 123.
Due to the popularity of the radio show and the recognizable actors and actresses featured in the film, by the end of the war *Wunschkonzert* became one of the most successful films in the history of the Third Reich. It was seen by nearly 26.5 million people and earned approximately 7.6 million Reichsmarks, making it second only to *Die große Liebe* in overall popularity.\(^{61}\)

*Wunschkonzert*’s plot begins at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, which are presented as an ideal romantic backdrop for the chance meeting of the film’s two lovers. Borrowing footage from Leni Riefenstahl’s famous 1938 documentary *Olympia*, the opening ceremony is portrayed as a grand spectacle highlighting German athletic and national achievement. The female protagonist Inge Wagner (played by Ilse Werner) arrives at Olympic Stadium with her aunt, whom she is staying with while on vacation in Berlin. When her aunt realizes that she forgot their tickets and must go home, Inge is confronted by Lieutenant Herbert Koch (Carl Raddatz), who is on leave from the military and who also happens to have an extra ticket due to his comrade being unexpectedly called back to duty. Herbert offers Inge his second ticket, but Inge continually refuses his offer. However, when Hitler himself enters the stadium, Inge becomes enthralled with the spectacle and goes into the stadium with Herbert, leaving her aunt behind. The two immediately begin to build romantic chemistry, and leave after the ceremony to get dinner and go dancing. Their love for each other escalates quickly, and Herbert proposes the next day, only two days after his first meeting with Inge.

However, shortly after planning a trip to meet Inge’s parents, Herbert is summoned on a highly important mission to Spain. Due to the secretive nature of the German military’s Legion Condor unit participating in the Spanish Civil War, Herbert is notified that he will be unable to tell anyone where he is going and that he cannot send any mail home for the first six months. He

informs Inge in the middle of the night that he must leave immediately and cannot tell her why or where. She cries out desperately and nervously replies, “Herbert, do not forget me!” Herbert is ultimately unable to contact Inge for nearly three years, for as soon as Herbert completes his mission in Spain he finds out that Inge has moved and cannot find her new address. When the Second World War begins, Herbert is stationed in Poland and has lost hope that he will be able to ever contact her again. Inge, meanwhile, has never forgotten about Herbert. Even though she has begun to receive advances from a young Luftwaffe lieutenant named Helmut who wishes to marry her, Inge remains resolute that she will be able to locate Herbert once more.

Eventually Herbert, who has been promoted to a Luftwaffe captain, decides to request the 1936 Olympic Fanfare to be played on the radio during the Wunschkonzert show in hopes of contacting Inge. Listening intently on the home-front, Inge hears his request and eagerly finds his military address in order to write to him. Meanwhile, Inge’s suitor Helmut has been placed under Herbert’s command. Both of them talk about their loves back home, but neither of them is yet aware that they are both in love with the same woman. Shortly thereafter, the two pilots are called to undertake a dangerous reconnaissance mission off the Atlantic coast. Although they achieve their objective, their plane is shot down over the ocean. While saving Helmut’s life from the wreckage, Herbert sees a picture of Inge in Helmut’s pocket, and he wrongly comes to the conclusion that Helmut and Inge were set to be married.

When Helmut is sent to a military hospital to recover from minor injuries, both Herbert and Inge go to visit him. Herbert, not wanting his comrade Helmut to know that he had once proposed marriage to Inge, decides to keep their former relationship a secret from the young

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pilot. He is cold towards Inge when she approaches him, not wanting to interfere with the couple’s happiness. Eventually, through a conversation with Helmut, Inge realizes that Helmut had mistakenly led Herbert to believe that the two were engaged. When Inge tells Helmut that she is still in love with Herbert, the young pilot sacrifices his love for her so that she and Herbert can once again continue their relationship. The film ends with the two happily leaving the hospital together, even if it is to an uncertain future.

Although Herbert and Inge’s romance is the main thrust of the film, the plot also focuses sporadically on other characters and events that are unrelated to the love story. A major sub-narrative of the film follows a rather comical regiment of Wehrmacht infantrymen as they travel back and forth between the home and war-fronts. This unit includes a butcher, schoolteacher, musician, and baker, each of which is supposed to represent a cross-section of German society involved in the military effort. A number of scenes depict these soldiers and their relationship with their families back home, suggesting the presence of a true Volksgemeinschaft connecting all facets of the community in the fight against Germany’s enemies. Other scenes throughout the film include musical numbers and performances from some of Germany’s biggest celebrities who also often appeared on the weekly Wunschkonzert radio program. These famous stars include Heinz Goedecke, Marika Rökk, Weiß-Ferdl, Heinz Rühmann, Josef Sieber, Hans Brausewetter, and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, among others. The inclusion of these various subplots further illustrates some of the ideological themes present in the film, while simultaneously working to entertain audiences who were also avid fans of the well-known radio program.

Despite the fact that the film is a romantic melodrama that revolves primarily around the “home-front,” the excitement and spectacle of war is what drives the love story and ultimately
unites all of the film’s characters together. There is very little reference to actual combat in the film; newsreel footage from the Spanish Civil War and the Polish Blitzkrieg take up only a fraction of the total screen time and are rather disjointed in comparison to the rest of the narrative. Only one soldier dies in the film, yet his death is portrayed as a highly aesthetic form of self-sacrifice that appears far removed from the actual brutalities of battle. Instead, war is portrayed as a grand adventure that is more comedy than tragedy. As Mary-Elizabeth O’Brien writes, “in Wunschkonzert war takes place on the symbolic level of art and popular entertainment and is presented in terms of musical performance, sports, technology, comedy, and heroism…since war is divested of its most destructive aspects, it becomes harmless, enjoyable, or at worst a tolerable and temporary burden to endure for the sake of the nation.”

Therefore, the film treats total war as a seemingly never-ending state of normalcy that works to bring out the best in each member of the Volksgemeinschaft.

From the very beginning of the film, it is war that drives members of the community together. Inge and Herbert would have never met if Herbert’s comrade had not been “called off to duty,” therefore giving him the extra ticket and the opportunity to court Inge. Although it is this same sense of duty that later keeps the two lovers separated, even the casualties of war typically serve to reconnect soldiers with their loved ones back home. When Herbert and Helmut’s plane is shot down by the Allies, it is apparent that Helmut only suffered minor physical injuries and will be able to return to duty after a short stay in the hospital. His wounds only serve a positive function in that they allow the two lovers, Inge and Herbert, to meet once again and rekindle their romance. In other scenes, soldiers are shown conversing with their families and neighbors while on leave from battle, displaying none of the fatigue one would

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63 O’Brien, Nazi Cinema as Enchantment, 122.
expect from participation in active service. In fact, most of the direct interaction between soldiers and the home-front is presented in a comedic manner, suggesting that both soldier and civilian are only slightly affected by the trials of war.

Along with the comedic elements of the film, many scenes within *Wunschkoncert* are more reminiscent of a musical than a classic melodrama. Music in this film serves to unite the home-front and war-front specifically through the *Wunschkoncert für die Wehrmacht* radio program. The spectacle of this musical program mitigates the actual horrors of war, suggesting that combat is more about aesthetics than physical destruction. Scholar Linda Schulte-Sasse suggests that in *Wunschkoncert*, the radio serves as “a vehicle that allows space and time to be transcended and that thus compensates for real-life fragmentation with imaginary wholeness.”

Therefore, the intent of Goebbels’ *Volksempfänger* is to destroy the physical separation of war and unite Germany into a single fighting machine. On the most basic level, it is music played through the radio that enables Herbert and Inge to reunite. Herbert’s request for the Olympic Fanfare during the soldiers’ radio program receives an immediate response from the patient Inge, who is eventually able to track him down by contacting the program’s offices. While the radio links Herbert and Inge in a physical reconnection, the Request Concert also reconnects other soldiers with their loved ones over the airwaves. The film portrays a soldier’s wife, who has just given birth to their first child, sending a message during the concert in order to alert her husband at the front that he has just become a father. In another sequence, a grieving mother plays her son’s favorite song in honor of the sacrifice that he made by giving his life in war. In this sense, the radio not only connects the home-front to the war-front, but also the living to the dead. This

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64 Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, 288.
example further illustrates the way in which this film portrayed the radio as an essential technology in total war, able to unite the German nation towards victory.

*Wunschklavier* not only paints war itself as a form of comedic popular entertainment, it also portrays combat as a highly (homo)erotic phenomenon. Much of the film revolves around Herbert and Inge’s necessary separation, which disrupts their love affair and planned marriage. However, Herbert’s lack of emotional and sexual access to Inge does not leave him debilitated. His sense of duty for the fatherland allows him to easily overcome his desires and ultimately transplant them onto the masculine realm of the battlefield. Herbert is a model soldier; he never succumbs to any lust for the home-front or his female lover while he is away at war. Instead, both he and the other soldiers in the film fulfill their (sexual) desires through the rather homoerotic values of male comradeship and self-sacrifice. Therefore, eroticism is displaced from its former location in the feminine sphere of the home-front and onto the masculine space of the battlefield. A soldier’s personal desire is not necessarily suppressed, but rather redirected into a new desire that celebrates German national greatness.

The relationship between Herbert and Helmut is a key example of male comradeship that perfectly illustrates the ways in which sexual desires have been reoriented towards the war-front. Shortly after the two meet, Herbert and Helmut are seen lounging on a beach together. Herbert, sunbathing shirtless in a bathing suit, begins trading stories with Helmut about their female lovers back home. Although both apparently miss the woman (Inge) they love, neither of them suffers from any war-related physical or psychological trauma. Instead, the scene depicts war as a tropical paradise in which men can relax and share intimate details as a form of bonding. At the very end of the scene, both men have stripped down to their bathing suits and are shown frolicking towards the water. Even when Herbert and Helmut finally realize that they are both in
love with the same woman, neither of them hesitates to place their comrade’s desire for Inge above their own. When Herbert incorrectly assumes that Helmut is engaged to Inge, he keeps his love for her a secret from his comrade and attempts to stay out of their way. Likewise, Helmut is also willing to give Inge away when he learns that it is Herbert whom she truly loves. As Schulte-Sasse notes, both Herbert and Helmut permit “male bonding to supersede heterosexual desire.” Even when Herbert admits to Helmut that he once loved Inge but will no longer stand in their way, Helmut ecstatically claims “You would give her up for me?” With this statement, Helmut realizes that “love” for another male comrade transcends love for a female, who essentially gets passed back and forth like an object between the two soldiers.

Although all the soldiers in *Wunschkonzer*t exhibit a certain level of sacrifice in leaving their loved ones for the war-front, one scene in particular clearly illustrates the erotic potential of soldierly self-sacrifice for the Reich. The scene features a musician-turned-soldier named Schwarzkopf. At the beginning of the film, Schwarzkopf is depicted as an expert piano player who is able to unite his small community around his recitals of Beethoven’s symphonies. While at war in France, Schwarzkopf is stationed as a sentry in a bombed-out Catholic church, keeping watch as the rest of his unit navigates through the fog to take out an enemy position. His unit succeeds in their mission, yet they soon become lost in the fog as they attempt to return to base. Realizing that his comrades are exposed to heavy artillery shelling and risk stumbling into an enemy minefield, Schwarzkopf begins to play a large organ located in the church’s steeple in hopes of guiding them back towards their original position. With his loud recital of Max Reger’s “A Mighty Fortress is our God,” Schwarzkopf is able to lead his comrades back to base with zero

65 Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich*, 299.
66 *Wunschkonzer*t, directed by Eduard von Borsody.
casualties. However, his musical number gives away his own position, and the French quickly bombard the church, killing Schwarzkopf in the process. The final scene in this sequence depicts Schwarzkopf playing the organ as the church burns and collapses around him. As the danger to his own life becomes inevitable, Schwarzkopf enters a trance-like state of apparent ecstasy. His eyes glaze over, and he seems to relish the opportunity to sacrifice his life for the German nation. In this way, his death is presented as a sort of “sexual” release; the young soldier has given everything for his male comrades. The audience is left with a final image of Schwarzkopf’s body slumped over the organ and surrounded by Christian iconography, suggesting that he has now become a Christ-like martyr for the Nazi cause.

Just as male characters like Schwarzkopf and Herbert find fulfillment in the soldierly ideals of comradeship and self-sacrifice, the film also suggests that women must subjugate their romantic desires while remaining alone on the home-front. Shortly after their initial encounter, Inge falls madly in love with Herbert and is clearly attracted to his masculine status as a military officer in the Luftwaffe. Fearing for her niece’s happiness, Inge’s aunt warns her about the trials of being in a relationship with an officer. Inge’s aunt’s personal story mirrors Inge’s future relationship with Herbert – she too fell in love with a lieutenant, who was called off on duty and never wrote back to her again. “The man would have had to leave the military in order to marry me,” states Inge’s aunt, which was obviously something that the model German soldier would be unable to sacrifice. Instead, she ended up settling by marrying another civilian suitor. Inge, in disbelief, states that the man must not have really loved her aunt. As Inge claims, “If you are truly in love, nothing can keep you apart.”

67 Wunschkonzert, directed by Eduard von Borsody.
68 Wunschkonzert, directed by Eduard von Borsody.
Unlike her aunt, Inge does manage to keep her love for Herbert, even though she does not see or hear from him for three years while he is away on duty. Despite not knowing Herbert’s whereabouts, the film suggests that Inge has one advantage that her aunt presumably did not have: the radio. Programs like the *Wunschkonzert* connect Inge to the war-front, keeping her hopes alive that she will once again find Herbert. It is through the modern technology of the radio that Inge is ultimately able to locate Herbert and rekindle their relationship. While waiting patiently for news from Herbert, Inge is courted by another suitor, Helmut, creating the awkward and somewhat comical love triangle that resolves itself at the film’s conclusion. Although Helmut is also a *Luftwaffe* lieutenant, he never seriously threatens Inge’s commitment to Herbert. Helmut lacks the masculinity that Herbert clearly exudes; Herbert appears almost like a father-figure to Helmut while the two are serving together. With Helmut’s boy-like appearance and mannerisms, the film suggests that he would have no clue what to do with Inge, unlike the much older and more masculine Herbert.

Throughout the film, Inge always remains patiently waiting for Herbert on the home-front. Although she is at first devastated that he must leave for Spain, she never wavers in her belief that they will be reunited. In fact, Inge is presented as so faithful to Herbert that she is given relatively little screen time except for the film’s beginning and its conclusion. Whenever Inge appears in-between, she is always presented loyally looking for news of Herbert, making her character rather flat and one-dimensional. However, Inge’s somewhat mundane role in the film presents a clear ideological message for both male and female wartime audiences. While Inge’s dream may have been to marry Herbert and have a family, she realizes that she too must redirect her desire toward the German war effort. As O’Brien suggests, “Rather than extolling the individual family, Nazi war propaganda stressed the need for disparate groups to bind
together into a large extended family, the *Volksgemeinschaft.*”69 A woman’s role was to remain patiently on the home-front, doing her part to support her lover and the military abroad. Only by Germany winning the war could Inge ever hope to realize her desire of settling down and starting a family with Herbert. Despite the film’s “happy” ending, Inge must know that the pattern of separation will continue until the *Volksgemeinschaft* can unite on all fronts to defeat Germany’s enemies.

Sharing many similar themes with *Wunschkonzert,* the 1942 melodrama *Die große Liebe* can also be classified as a home-front film concerned with the romantic relationship between a soldier and a woman separated by war. *Die große Liebe* was directed by Rolf Hansen and starred the famous Zarah Leander, who was perhaps the most well-known and respected female film actress in the history of the Third Reich. Leander was a tall and slender Swedish-born actress known for playing roles featuring independent and promiscuous women who are ultimately tamed by a strong male character. Her success in previous German productions such as *La Habanera* (1937) and *Heimat* (1938) made her a perfect fit for Hansen’s wartime feature.70 Building off of Leander’s star power and the popularity of earlier home-front films like *Wunschkonzert,* *Die große Liebe* became the highest-earning film ever made in Nazi Germany, bringing in over 8 million Reichsmarks while being viewed by some 27.8 million spectators.71 With wartime audiences flocking to theaters in order to watch a film that dealt with contemporary issues after the German defeat at Stalingrad, the film’s portrayal of the relationship between soldier and lover is particularly insightful.

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Die große Liebe begins with Luftwaffe lieutenant Paul Wendlandt (Viktor Staal) on leave from the North African war-front. Paul and one of his comrades are assigned to visit the Aviation Ministry in Berlin on official business, and afterwards they decide to spend a night out on the town. The two decide to go see a musical show with star singer Hanna Holberg (Zarah Leander) performing as the main act. As Paul watches the sensual Hanna sing a song titled “My Life for Love,” the lieutenant immediately becomes attracted to her. He tries to figure out a way to introduce himself to Hanna, and ends up following (or rather stalking) her as she makes her way home from the theater. When he follows her onto the subway, Paul forces his way over to Hanna’s seat in order to talk with her. Hanna appears uninterested in Paul’s initial advances, just as she was indifferent earlier towards her other suitor back at the theater, an intellectual songwriter named Alexander Rudnitzky. Despite Hanna’s apparent rejection, Paul remains persistent and follows her to what he thinks to be her flat. When it turns out to be a friend’s house party, Paul introduces himself as Hanna’s guest and walks in with her. Hanna subtly begins to show interest in Paul, but when she leaves him at the party Paul again follows Hanna to her actual apartment. Although initially Hanna refuses to allow Paul inside, a timely air-raid signal forces Hanna to let the lieutenant take shelter in her apartment building.

While in the apartment building’s basement waiting out the air-raid warning, Paul and Hanna begin to bond with the building’s other residents, who also represent a cross-section of the German Volksgemeinschaft. Hanna becomes more and more enamored with Paul as she watches him play with younger children, and after the air-raid warning is lifted she invites him up to her apartment. Just as Hanna is about to see Paul out the door for the night, Paul pushes the door shut and the film rather explicitly suggests that the two subsequently make love and spend the rest of the night together.
Paul leaves quickly in the morning, having not told Hanna that he must return to his wartime duties as a pilot. On the plane ride back to base, Paul explains to his comrade that he thought it best not to tell her that he was an officer since it could only cause her further grief. Having been dressed in civilian clothes on the night that they met, Hanna is left clueless as to why Paul left so abruptly and why he apparently refuses to contact her again. As time passes, she desperately awaits a phone call from Paul, thinking most likely that she was just used to satisfy his desire for a one-night stand. Finally, Paul returns again unexpectedly to Hanna’s apartment. Although Hanna is upset and tries to kick him out, Paul proves to her that he is a Luftwaffe officer and that he was called off on duty, and afterwards Hanna eventually accepts him back.

The remainder of the film focuses primarily upon the tension that develops in Paul and Hanna’s relationship as the war continues to keep the two lovers apart. When Paul receives an opportunity to go on leave once again, he decides to head to Berlin immediately in order to surprise Hanna, only to find that she is not at home. Hanna had scheduled a charity concert to entertain the German Armed Forces in Paris, hoping to meet Paul where he was stationed in France. The couple’s near-miss of each other further devastates Hanna, who is growing increasingly impatient waiting for Paul on the home-front. After spending more time separated from each other, Paul is once again able to secure a three-week period of leave from active duty. During these three weeks he proposes to Hanna, and the couple is set to be married before he must return to the front. However, on the day before their wedding, Paul receives a telegram ordering him back to combat. Paul’s sense of duty once again puts Hanna’s dreams for marriage and family life on hold, and she becomes even more saddened by his absence.

Hanna eventually travels to Rome to continue performing on stage and to get her mind off of Paul, but she struggles to remain focused on her work. Paul manages again to get three
weeks leave, and locates Hanna while she is touring in Rome. Thinking that the two can finally get married, Hanna is excited to spend a whole three weeks with him in Rome, only to find out that their time together will once again be cut short. Before seeing Hanna, Paul received a suggestion from another officer that he will be needed at the front. Hanna refuses to understand why Paul must report without receiving an official order, but Paul remains steadfast in his soldierly duty and insists that he must leave that very evening. Hanna becomes enraged at Paul, and it seems as though their relationship is over. Only when she learns the next day that Germany declared war on the Soviet Union does Hanna realize that she was selfish in not wanting Paul to return to the front. Hanna is unable to contact Paul in order to apologize, but she now knows that she must wait patiently for her man to do his duty for Germany. Paul, believing that Hanna no longer loves him, is wounded after his plane is shot down while on a mission in the East. Upon hearing of his condition, Hanna immediately travels to a military hospital where she reunites with Paul. The couple promise to try and get married once again, yet the film ends with Paul and Hanna glancing at war planes hovering in the sky above, suggesting that they must continue to live apart as the war rages on.

Much like its depiction in Wunschkonzert, war in Die große Liebe is also portrayed as a grand spectacle that functions to unite disparate members of the German community and spark romance between lovers. As Laura Heins suggests, Die große Liebe actually makes “wartime life appear desirable for both soldiers and civilians.” Once again it is war that brings together the two main characters, Paul and Hanna, at the very beginning of the film. Had it not been for Paul’s special assignment to Berlin, he would never have watched Hanna perform and had the opportunity to follow her home. More importantly, if it had not been for the air raid warning,

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72 Heins, Nazi Film Melodrama, 181.
Paul would have never been able to gain access to Hanna’s apartment and ultimately her bedroom. Therefore, the film takes a negative aspect of wartime violence that affects German civilians (Allied bombing attacks on the Reich’s capital city) and transforms this violence into an erotic relationship.

In fact, the film portrays the air raid (and war in general) as a grand adventure entirely divorced from the reality of death and violence. In one poignant scene in Hanna’s high-rise apartment, both Paul and Hanna stand together at the window looking out over the city shortly before it comes under siege from enemy bombers. Hanna claims that the city is “beautiful, like in a fairy-tale.” Paul retorts by saying that the city is actually “much more beautiful, like reality.” When Hanna asks how he can say this when bombs are falling all over the city, Paul responds “the reality is beautiful. Even if there is danger. Perhaps even because there is danger.” As director Rolf Hansen is illustrating in this scene, war creates a new reality that is far superior to any fairy-tale; one in which romance and love for Germany can flourish unabated.

Also like Wunschkonzert, Die große Liebe portrays the male Luftwaffe officer as a bastion of soldierly values and masculine qualities. Paul never wavers in his commitment to duty, refusing to become “castrated” by the threat of feminine domesticity no matter how desperate Hanna’s pleas are for him to remain at home. He too understands the military values of male comradeship and self-sacrifice, telling Hanna at one point in the film that “for every hour that I am not with my squadron, another comrade has to stand in for me, has to take over my duty.” Even when he is requested to leave for the front without official orders, Paul is willing

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73 Die große Liebe, directed by Rolf Hansen (Universum Film AG, 1942), DVD (Rarefilmsandmore.com, 2012).
74 Die große Liebe, directed by Rolf Hansen.
to sacrifice his relationship with Hanna in order to ensure that he is there for both his comrades and the German nation in battle.

While war “gives way to seemingly permanent coitus interruptus” in Paul’s erotic relationship with Hanna, Paul finds his true fulfillment in his military service to the German fatherland.75 Although combat scenes are even scarcer than earlier home-front films, Die große Liebe also presents a displacement of eroticism onto the battlefield.76 Highly reminiscent of a similar sequence in Wunschkonzert discussed previously, the film features a rather homoerotic scene illustrating the importance of comradeship. The scene begins with a shot of soldiers’ boots lying empty in the sand, suggesting ominously to the viewer at first that perhaps the owners of all of these boots had perished in battle. However, the camera pans away from the boots and toward a beach where their owners, a group of soldiers, are splashing around in the water. Paul is shown sunbathing on the beach with the rest of his squadron in their swimming trunks, talking about his girlfriend back home. Removing most images of violence and death from warfare, this scene suggests that combat consists mostly of lounging around and forming bonds with a soldier’s fellow comrades. In a later scene illustrating Paul’s penchant for self-sacrifice, Paul briefly comes to the realization that it is better that he is no longer with Hanna, so that no one will have to be burdened by mourning for him when he ultimately gives his life for Germany. As both of these instances in the film suggest, the soldierly values of male comradeship and self-sacrifice seem to fulfill Paul’s desires in a manner that even Hanna cannot.

75 Rentschler, The Ministry of Illusion, 140.
76 The absence of graphic combat is perhaps due to the fact that the German military had suffered severe setbacks in early 1942, and by the time Die große Liebe was released in June, audiences were less likely to be receptive to films that featured more direct images of contemporary combat. See Susan Tegel, Nazis and the Cinema (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 180.
Although the audience never gets to see Paul perform in actual combat, his hyper-masculine and soldierly qualities are put on clear display during his courtship (or really conquest) of Hanna. When Hanna initially refuses Paul’s advances, it becomes more than overtly obvious that Paul will not accept “no” for an answer. Following Hanna around town from the theater to her apartment, Paul essentially forces his way into her bedroom, closing the door shut when she attempts to show him out of the apartment. Furthermore, it is rather explicitly suggested that Paul did indeed stay the night and that the two had sex. While this initial encounter does indeed carry with it undertones of rape, the film suggests that Hanna would inevitably succumb to Paul’s sexual desire for her due to his status as a model masculine soldier.

Far from being considered a taboo subject, the couple’s engagement in premarital sex appears as a normal aspect of war in this film. Arguing that many Nazi-era home-front films subvert the traditional image of marriage, Laura Heins writes that in Die große Liebe “war allows for the release or living out of (male) sexual energies because it is an extraordinary circumstance that dissolves the bonds of the peacetime bourgeois moral order.”77 Therefore, Die große Liebe suggests that women on the home-front, regardless of whether they are married to their partners or not, need to be sexually available for soldiers while they are on leave. These sexually permissive and anti-marriage themes inherent within the film actually caused some concern among the German High Command (OKW), but the film’s message was ultimately supported by the top Nazi-brass. In a fascinating journal entry written in May 1942, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels writes of Hermann Göring’s support for the film’s depiction of premarital sex:

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77 Heins, Nazi Film Melodrama, 183.
I had a telephone conversation with the Reich Marshal who complained about the OKW because it protested against the new Leander motion picture. This picture shows an aviator spending a night with a famous singer. The OKW considers itself insulted morally and insists that an aviation lieutenant wouldn’t act that way. Opposed to this is the correct view of Goering that if an aviation lieutenant didn’t make use of such an opportunity, he simply wouldn’t be an aviation lieutenant. Goering pokes great fun at the sensitiveness of the OKW. That’s fine grist for my mill, since the OKW creates a lot of difficulties for me anyway in my movie work. In this case we can depend upon Goering as the better expert on the Luftwaffe and won’t have to fear any jurisdictional difficulties.78

As Göring’s comments imply, a true German soldier must exude masculinity in such a way that enables him not only to fight and die in battle, but also to sexually conquer any woman he pleases on the home-front. In this way, Die große Liebe suggests that women must serve as mere objects of erotic fulfillment for soldiers on leave from the all-important battlefront.

As the film progresses, Paul’s masculine and soldierly qualities are contrasted with those of Hanna’s other suitor, the civilian artist and intellectual Alexander Rudnitzky. Serving as Hanna’s songwriter and friend, Alexander (Paul Hörbiger) plays a rather prominent role in the film and has almost constant access to Hanna as she is performing on the home-front. Alexander professes his love for Hanna on more than one occasion, and he attempts to convince her that her love for Paul is nothing more than a one-night infatuation. In some ways, Alexander is almost presented as a sympathetic character, since he appears to love and care for Hanna even more than Paul. Alexander himself states in the film that by caring for Hanna, he risks becoming a “tragic figure, or what is even worse, a comic event.”79 Despite his desire for Hanna, Alexander is never presented as a true threat to Paul, and his advances are often dismissed out of hand by Hanna. He can never truly compete with Paul’s masculine dominance and military status. Alexander is

79 Die große Liebe, directed by Rolf Hansen.
portrayed as significantly older than Paul, and as an intellectual he does not possess the same physical prowess as the young officer. He is also depicted as potentially impotent in comparison to the overtly virile Paul. Alexander is married but has no children, and at the beginning of the film the audience discovers that he had just recently caught his wife in the act of sleeping with another man. Therefore, the love triangle is only a superficial ploy to enhance the film’s plot; Alexander’s civilian status as an artist eliminates him from contention in Hanna’s eyes. The war enables Hanna to find and to fall in love with a “hero,” and it is through his role as warrior for the German cause that Paul is able to prove his heroic nature.\(^{80}\) Although Alexander may treat her better, he will never be able to fulfill Hanna’s own sexual desires for a real soldier.

Due perhaps in part to Zarah Leander’s fame and star power, the female protagonist plays a much larger and more significant role in Die große Liebe. Unlike Wunsch­konzert, where Inge is portrayed as the perfectly patient girlfriend, Leander’s character must undergo a major transformation in order to become the ideal partner to her soldierly boyfriend. As Jana Bruns notes, the “central battle” in the film is not between Germany and its enemies, but between Hanna’s selfish desire for love and Paul’s steadfast adherence to military duty.\(^{81}\) Hanna is portrayed as a truly independent woman at the beginning of the film: she has a prosperous and self-sustaining musical career, she often attends parties either by herself or with various suitors, and she lives independently with another female roommate. Hanna quickly falls in love with Paul after their first night together, yet she fails to see why he continues to place his duty over their relationship. Only after she is “tamed” by Paul’s efforts does Hanna realize that she must also place the good of the Reich over her own desires.

\(^{80}\) Brockmann, A Critical History of German Film, 177.
\(^{81}\) Bruns, Nazi Cinema’s New Women, 162.
Hanna’s transformation from an independent “vamp” to a dutiful military girlfriend is best illustrated by the musical numbers she performs at various points throughout the film. When Paul first catches a glimpse of Hanna at the Berlin theater, she is wearing a rather sultry dress and a blonde wig, suggesting her status as a strong-willed and independent woman. The song she performs is titled “My Life for Love,” and its lyrics suggest that Hanna would be an unfit wife for an officer who must constantly be away at the front. As one part of the song states, “a heart like my heart dislikes being alone.” However, after falling in love with Paul, Hanna slowly begins to understand that she must also contribute to the war effort in her own way. Her next performance, titled “It’s Not the End of the World,” reflects Hanna’s newfound ability to manage being on her own while Paul is at the front. The fact that Hanna is performing this song in Paris in front of an audience of German soldiers is also important. Instead of selfishly singing only for profit, Hanna has given up her career in service of the German state. Her support of the war effort through music aids the group of weary soldiers, who link arms and sway back and forth to the music as Hanna performs.

Although she has started the process of sacrificing her desires for the betterment of the German nation, Hanna’s transformation does not become fully complete until the end of the film. When she finds out that Paul has decided to leave for the front without receiving an official order to return, Hanna becomes so distraught that she appears ready to walk out on the relationship. Knowing that his fidelity to his comrades and the German military is of a higher value than their personal happiness, Paul scolds Hanna for her resistance: “I want to go! I want to go to my comrades! I beg you, do not try over and over again to dissuade me from my decision that I

82 Die große Liebe, directed by Rolf Hansen.
consider my duty...I thought you knew what it meant to become the wife of an officer!”83 When Hanna finally realizes that Paul had left in order to fight the Soviets in Germany’s new Operation Barbarossa, she finally understands that she must also sacrifice her personal desires. This is reflected in her final performance, in which she famously sings the song “I Know a Miracle will Happen.” Dressed in a flowing white dress and surrounded by angelic background dancers, Hanna’s performance signals that she has completed her transformation into the loyal and patient girlfriend. The song’s lyrics suggest that she will be waiting for Paul until a “miracle” rekindles their romance once again. When Hanna is eventually reunited with Paul at the military hospital during the film’s final scene, she has come to the realization that the couple will only be able to be married and live happily together through a German military victory in the Second World War.84 Therefore, Hanna and Paul must continue to accept their separation while the war continues, and they both must contribute in different ways towards the military campaign and Germany’s goal of total victory over its foes. This theme is the very essence of the two home-front dramas under analysis in this section. Both Herbert and Inge in Wunschkonzert, as well as Paul and Hanna in Die große Liebe, must ultimately learn to channel their sexual desire for one another into a love for the German state and the military campaign it is waging against its external enemies.

The Love Struck Soldier: Mein Leben für Irland (1941)

In both of the home-front films discussed above, the male protagonist is portrayed as a strong, masculine, and ideal German soldier. He always places military duty over sexual

83 Die große Liebe, directed by Rolf Hansen.
pleasure, and he finds fulfillment in the soldierly values of male comradeship and self-sacrifice. His denial of the lure of his female lover enables him to remain entrenched in the masculine sphere of battle where he belongs, avoiding the metaphorical castration of the domestic home-front. Most importantly, the soldier’s denial of “personal happiness” allows him to fight for a much greater cause: the happiness of all members of the German state, the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

In contrast to the films described above, the 1941 film *Mein Leben für Irland* depicts the disastrous consequences of a young soldier’s faulty decision to place his lust for a woman over his soldierly duty. *Mein Leben für Irland* was one of the best received anti-British propaganda films under the Third Reich, chronicling the struggles of Irish freedom fighters in the attempt to gain independence from their English colonial overlords. Although the film is undoubtedly pro-Irish, it is obvious that its message is also pro-German: the Irish protagonists are clearly meant to represent model German warriors, evident even in the way in which the film’s actors pronounce the characters’ English names in a heavy German accent. As scholar Angela Vaupel puts it, the title of the film “is almost an insult to the viewers’ intelligence for it really should read ‘My Life for Germany.’” 85 The film is first and foremost an anti-British propaganda film intended to depict the British as ruthless colonizers and vicious imperialists. However, despite this film’s foreign setting and anti-British slant, it is a useful source to view how German soldiers are portrayed through the Irish protagonists.

Directed by Max Kimmich, who also happened to be Joseph Goebbels’ brother-in-law, *Mein Leben für Irland* follows the lives of a set of revolutionary school boys living near Dublin, Ireland, in the year 1921. The main character is a teenage boy named Patrick, who is sent to a

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British boarding school that specializes in reforming the sons of Irish freedom fighters, ultimately turning them into loyal British subjects. While at the boarding school Patrick meets a noble Irish classmate named Michael O’Brien, whose father was a member of the IRA and was executed by the British nearly twenty years earlier for inciting rebellion. Michael is the leader of a secret resistance movement within the boarding school itself, organizing the young Irish boys in connection with the larger underground army in Dublin. The two classmates become friends, and Michael invites Patrick to meet his mother, Maeve. Maeve is also part of the Irish underground, and for some time she has been hiding a prominent member of the IRA, named Davoy, in her house in order to protect him from the British. Patrick becomes instantly infatuated with Maeve and is jealous of Davoy, who he assumes to be her romantic lover. Unbeknownst to Patrick, the school’s British headmaster and its teachers happen to be in close contact with the British police, and his off-hand comments to a pro-British student tip off the police to Davoy’s whereabouts. Although Davoy is able to escape before the police arrive, the British arrest Maeve and Patrick is thereby accused of being a traitor to the Irish cause by his classmates.

The remainder of the film focuses on Patrick’s quest to redeem himself for his unknowingly treacherous actions. Soon after being asked by the British police to serve as a special agent within the boarding school, Patrick seeks out Davoy, who is hiding in a small shop in the streets of Dublin. He admits his mistake and proves his loyalty to Davoy, who asks him to work as a double agent for the Irish cause. Patrick hopes that his pivotal role in feeding the British false information about a future Irish attack will once again prove his loyalty to his classmates and, most importantly, to Maeve. However, according to Davoy’s instructions Patrick must remain silent about his resistance work until after the attack.
While performing his mission as a double agent, one of Patrick’s classmates spots him passing off plans to a British secret policeman. Later that night, the pro-Irish students at the boarding school kidnap Patrick in his sleep. They tie him up and proceed to extract information from him with an elaborate method of water torture in the school’s swimming pool. Despite nearly drowning, Patrick keeps his promise to Davoy and refuses to tell even his close friends and Irish allies about his work as a double agent. Eventually his life is spared, and a few days later Patrick’s secret work pays off. The plans he gave the British diverted the police away from the IRA’s real plan of attack, ultimately allowing the Irish resistance fighters to wage a full scale revolt in the streets of Dublin. Upon hearing of the uprising, the students at Patrick’s school raid the armory and rush towards the fight.

When Patrick finally arrives behind the Irish barricades, Davoy has been shot dead by British gunfire. In shock and devastation, Patrick now realizes that the only person who was aware of his loyalty to the Irish cause can no longer tell the others of his heroics, branding him forever a traitor. However, when the IRA finds itself boxed in by British tanks and heavy artillery, Patrick devises a way to take over British headquarters and clear his name from any treachery. He convinces a group of Irish soldiers to follow him through a secret passageway originally shown to him by his British handlers that leads directly into police headquarters. The Irish fighters successfully infiltrate the building thanks to Patrick, capturing their main objective and killing many British police leaders along the way. In the struggle to free fellow Irish political prisoners (including Patrick’s love interest Maeve), Patrick is shot and mortally wounded. The film ends with Patrick dying in Maeve’s arms, redeeming himself in her and his fellow Irishmen’s eyes.
Clearly one of the central themes of *Mein Leben für Irland* (other than its disparaging portrayal of British colonialism) emphasizes the consequences for a soldier who places love for a woman above his duty towards his fatherland. When the young Patrick first lays eyes on his love interest Maeve, who happens to be not only his new friend’s mother but also significantly older than himself, it becomes evident that his unrestrained lust for a woman interferes with the more valiant interests of his fellow Irish classmates. Patrick begins to fantasize about Maeve constantly, purposely alienating himself from his former friends while also allowing his grades to drop dramatically. He sketches Maeve’s name in his notebook all throughout class, and he even goes so far as to steal a picture of her from Michael’s locker for his own personal satisfaction. His classmates involved in the Irish resistance movement begin not to trust him, and therefore do not tell him about their plans for a future uprising. At last, Patrick becomes far too careless when he sneaks out at night in order to lustfully stalk and spy on Maeve. Climbing a tall tree in order to voyeuristically watch Maeve through her bedroom window, Patrick spots her interacting with the IRA leader Davoy, who he naturally assumes to be her lover. When a fellow student who is working as a British agent catches him in the act, Patrick confides in him, ultimately leading the British police to Maeve’s arrest. At this point, it is clear that Patrick’s infatuation with Maeve has gone too far; his obsession with her has (however unknowingly) betrayed the Irish cause and ultimately played into the hands of the British enemy.

In her work *Entertaining the Third Reich*, Linda Schulte-Sasse makes note of the misogynistic impulses in much of Nazi-era cinema. She argues that “female bodies literalize a threat to Lebensraum,” and therefore the feminine must be completely exorcised from a militarized collective consisting of men only.  

when the female body becomes the object of a soldier’s desire, or as Schulte-Sasse terms it, the object of the “gaze.” Patrick is punished because he can literally not look away from Maeve; his obsession with stealing her picture in order to constantly look at her face, along with his attempt to voyeuristically observe her through her bedroom window ultimately damages not only his own reputation, but also the objective of the soldierly collective fighting for independence. Patrick is “blinded” by his lust for Maeve, and he is unable to “see” what harm his actions have caused. Only later in the film does Patrick finally “open his eyes” and realize the danger that his lust for the feminine private sphere has thrust upon his soldierly compatriots.

Luckily for Patrick, he is able to redeem himself throughout the remainder of the film, although he must pay the price personally for his careless act of treachery. When he finally confronts Davoy regarding his mistake, Patrick admits that his love for Maeve blinded him from the dangerous circumstances surrounding the fight for Irish independence. He concedes that he once hated Davoy for his assumed relationship with Maeve, but that the last thing he wanted was for her to fall into British hands. Davoy believes his apology, yet boldly tells Patrick: “But your mistake is large. These days no one can follow their feelings blindly.” In this statement, Davoy poignantly illustrates the danger of placing love and passion over duty in combat. After this conversation, Patrick is no longer “blinded” by lust for the feminine. He is now able to see his own role as a soldier in the Irish independence movement and thereby completely exorcise his desire for the female body from his life. This message was undoubtedly intended as a less-than-

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87 See for example the importance that Schulte-Sasse attributes to the masculine “gaze” in the author’s discussion of director Han’s Steinhoff’s film Der alte und der junge König (1935); Schulte-Sasse, Entertaining the Third Reich, 126-144.

88 Mein Leben für Irland, directed by Max Kimmich (Tobis Filmkunst, 1941), DVD (International Historic Films, 2009).
subtle reminder to German audiences viewing the film during the war that a soldier’s first obligation was the battlefield, and not his sexual desires.

Despite Patrick’s atonement for his betrayal, he soon realizes that as a loyal soldier he must ultimately sacrifice his life, not solely for the Irish cause, but also to regain his soldierly honor. As Patrick is being tortured by his fellow classmates, he refuses to tell them anything about his secret work as a double agent, knowing that by keeping his oath to Devoy he will be validated as a hero even if he is killed. However, as soon as Devoy is killed in combat, Patrick’s attitude changes; he begins to fear that he will die labeled as a traitor with no one to verify his secret role in the resistance. From this point forward, Patrick realizes that he must find a way to restore his soldierly honor himself. He appears to be primarily motivated to clear his name in front of Maeve and her son Michael, making the film’s final scene a fitting ending as Maeve lovingly caresses the dying Patrick. As he breathes his last few breaths, Michael gives Patrick his own father’s special golden necklace and states: “You alone have earned it. You have given more than your life. You have sacrificed your honor.”

This symbolic gesture restores Patrick’s honor and ultimately assures his status as a martyr figure.

As Mein Leben für Irland suggests, a soldier’s neglect of duty in pursuance of a female love interest can have devastating consequences. Not only can it endanger the nation as a whole; it can also severely damage a soldier’s honor. Angela Vaupel writes: “Patrick…represent[s] the failure of those who put personal interests before the nation: Even if [his] actions were only human, [he has] to pay the ultimate price, and, in the end, [he is] ready to accept this.”

Therefore, the message to soldiers viewing this film in 1941 would have been evident: personal

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89 Mein Leben für Irland, directed by Max Kimmich.
90 Vaupel, “Imaginary Reality: Ireland and the Irish in German Nazi Film,” 178.
relationships and love interests with civilian women had to be sacrificed during wartime out of necessity. Duty must always come before pleasure, or there will be consequences for both the nation and the individual soldier.

*Feminine Sacrifice as Ideal: Kolberg (1945)*

As the example of Patrick in *Mein Leben für Irland* suggests, the male soldier must resist the entrapment of feminine lust in order to successfully defend the Reich against foreign elements. In essence, he must be “wedded to war,” committed fully to the male collective within the masculine public sphere of the battlefield, leaving behind the private sphere and its feminized subjects. Therefore, soldiers were asked to not only sacrifice their bodies, but also their status as a member of a nuclear family in order to serve the greater collective good in the manly arena of battle. However, as the already-discussed home-front melodramas *Die große Liebe* and *Wunsch konzert* propose, both men and women were needed to make sacrifices, each within their own spheres of influence, in order for Germany to successfully defeat its opponents and retain its “greatness” as a nation-state. Although women were to generally remain rooted within the feminine space of the “home,” certain Nazi-era films portray the sacrifices of virtuous German women as important in their own right. Ultimately, it becomes the duty of wives, girlfriends, mothers and sisters to willingly sacrifice their husbands, lovers, sons and brothers to the violence of a war filled with all-male comradeship, leaving little to no space for the “naturally peaceful” female body within the confines of battle. This feminine sacrifice, however, is necessary in the context of war, as virtuous German women must accept the loss of the male soldiers in their lives with stoic courage in order to truly support the Reich in its violent struggle for Lebensraum.
As already highlighted in the preceding chapter, Veit Harlan’s 1945 film *Kolberg* serves as a key point of discussion primarily due to the unique circumstances of its release, and also for its rather interesting treatment of war and gender. As Germany’s military situation steadily declined after the *Wehrmacht*’s defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943, Goebbels himself commissioned the production of *Kolberg*, envisioning the film as a call to arms for a German people facing invasion from powerful foreign enemies. The choice of Harlan as both the producer and director (as well as co-screenwriter) was no accident; Harlan had directed some of the most virulently fascist feature-films of the Nazi-era, including both *Jud Süß* (a 1940 antisemitic feature chronicling the life of the 18th century Jewish financier Joseph Süß Oppenheimer) and *Der große König* (a 1942 biographical film on the well-known Prussian king Frederick II). As infamous as these two films became, *Kolberg* was perhaps the grandest cinematic spectacle of the Third Reich, costing the nationalized German film industry approximately 8.5 million Reichmarks in a last-ditch attempt to visually and emotionally rally a nation facing imminent defeat.

*Kolberg*’s plot closely mirrors the Third Reich’s own military circumstances upon the film’s release, featuring a Germanic people encircled by its wartime enemies. Taking place during the War of the Fourth Coalition (1806-1807), which saw Prussia’s defeat at the hands of Napoleon’s French army, the film follows the story of a small Prussia town’s heroic resistance in the face of French troops who have laid siege to the fortress and its inhabitants. Harlan’s reimagining of the town of Kolberg attempts to visually harness an idealized “pre-modern” Germany; the film’s main protagonists, as well as a majority of the town, are all farmers tied to

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the land around Kolberg for generations, literally representing the Nazi ideological concept of
“Blut und Boden.” Any reference to “modernity,” notably the elements of capitalism and foreign
culture, are most closely associated with the French or with other defeatist notions that always
have a negative impact upon the previously harmonious Prussian town. Despite Harlan’s attempt
to create a “pre-modern” Prussian town removed from the Europe of the 1940s, contemporary
viewers undoubtedly recognized the film’s blatantly obvious relation to their own “modern”
Europe. One such example brought forth by scholar Peter Paret will adequately highlight the
film’s attempt to use Kolberg as a historical allegory for the present:

The fighting around Kolberg in 1807 consisted largely of the attack and defense of small
fortified positions, of night raids, ambushes and sniping, and of hand-to-hand fighting in
the ditches and trenches with which the attackers and defenders encircled the town. None
of that is in the film, which depicts the siege as a battle of huge units, moving in
geometric patterns until they are smashed by enemy fire, or of vast mobs rushing back
and forth across a cinematic landscape that has been deprived of any physical or moral
point of reference. The rejection of past reality continues in the most dramatic part of the
siege, the shelling of the town. The power of the French cannon draws up theatrically in
an endless line, and the devastation they create, go beyond anything imaginable in the
early nineteenth century, as Harlan himself admits in his memoirs. But these scenes are
only too truthful from another perspective, that of the film’s audience during the Second
World War. The shelling of Kolberg in 1807 becomes the bombing of Hamburg, Berlin,
and Dresden in the years between the first heavy air attacks on German cities and the
apocalyptic spring of 1945.93

German audiences undoubtedly saw the parallels between the film’s depiction of French artillery
fire and the Allied aerial bombardments that they endured near the close of the Second World
War, even if audience members themselves were aware that the film’s portrayal of massive
shelling was unrealistic within the context of the 19th century. Scholar Linda Schulte-Sasse
contends that all Nazi-era historical films such as Kolberg assume a prior knowledge of the story

93 Peter Paret, “‘Kolberg’ (1945) as Historical Film and Historical Document,” Historical Journal of Film, Radio
being retold in the film, allowing the audience to relish the fact that it already knows the outcome. As Schulte-Sasse argues, “the better ‘prepared’ [the audience is] for a given historical fiction, the more it is likely to affirm a delusory subjective stability, to let [the audience] ‘misrecognize’ [themselves] in a glorious past.”

Both Goebbels and Harlan surely hoped that German women viewing Kolberg in 1945 would recognize themselves in the film’s “glorious past” through the female protagonist Maria, whose actions have already been partly discussed in a slightly different context during the previous chapter. Maria’s character plays a dual role within the narrative’s ideological construction. As mentioned earlier, at certain points in the narrative Maria assumes a more soldierly role out of necessity. She undertakes a dangerous military mission in order to help save her town from defeat, acting as a courier carrying vital information across enemy lines. In doing so, Maria enters the masculine arena of the battlefield, a space in which the film itself suggests that women do not belong under normal circumstances. Despite this active role that Maria takes in the defense of Kolberg, the film goes to great lengths early on to attribute a much more passive ideal of feminine sacrifice to her character.

German audiences would have most readily identified the actress who plays Maria, Veit Harlan’s own spouse Kristina Söderbaum, as the archetype of female sacrifice on screen. Söderbaum had become famous for playing tragic female characters (often in her husband’s own productions) who are forced to cope with death and loss; Nazi-era films such as Jud Süß and Der große König both depict Söderbaum’s characters as objects of immense torture and suffering.

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94 Schulte-Sasse, Entertaining the Third Reich, 31.
95 See my own discussion of Maria’s role in the battle for Kolberg in Chapter One of this work, 33-34.
96 Söderbaum was perhaps most widely known for her role as the female protagonist Dorothea in Jud Süß, in which she is courted by the Jewish financier Joseph Süß Oppenheimer. In the course of the film, Süß Oppenheimer arrests both Dorothea’s father and husband, and when she goes to Süß directly to beg for their release, Süß rapes her.
In Kolberg, Söderbaum’s character Maria also has to suffer enormously, losing nearly all that is dear to her. Due to her town’s dire military situation, Maria must cope with losing all of the important male figures in her life to war, other than her uncle Nettlebeck. In this sense Maria must assume a passive role; all of the tragedies she faces are acted upon her feminine self by the masculine sphere of battle. Although she loves each of the men she loses, she remains powerless in stopping each of their eventual deaths, knowing that she must stoically sacrifice them for a greater cause. Although not celebrated nearly as much as the prominent male warriors in Kolberg, Maria’s sacrifice is depicted as both necessary and honorable, certainly paralleling the situation of many German women who had male companions fighting on the front in 1945.

Maria most clearly represents a passive form of feminine sacrifice through her romantic relationship with the character Lieutenant Ferdinand von Schill, played by actor Gustav Diessl. When Lieutenant Schill arrives in Kolberg wounded from a previous battle, Maria helps nurse him back to health. The two quickly become romantically involved, yet the film makes it clear that despite their mutual love for each other, their relationship can never endure. Both Maria and Schill inhabit two separate spheres; Schill is man of war, loyal to his masculine sense of duty, while Maria will always remain naturally in the home due to her sex, even if she must at times step into the line of battle under the circumstances of total war. Maria and Schill realize from the outset that their two spheres of influence are irreconcilable, which the following conversation regarding the trials of war reveals:

MARIA: “Schill, I’m afraid.
SCHILL: “Of me?
MARIA: “No, of war.”

Dorothea, unable to live with herself after this crime, tragically commits suicide by drowning herself. For more on the life of Kristina Söderbaum and her films, see Bruns, Nazi Cinema’s New Women, 171-224; and Ascheid, Hitler’s Heroines, 42-97.
SCHILL: “But it hasn’t reached Kolberg yet!”
MARIA: Not yet, but we’ve been fired at before, by the Russians forty years ago. What if it happens again?”
SCHILL: “Let us hope not.”
MARIA: “No. Does your wound still hurt?”
SCHILL: “Not anymore.”
MARIA: “Was it an officer who wounded you?”
SCHILL: “An officer at Auerstedt. Why do you want to know?”
MARIA: “People are terrible. Why did he attack you with his saber?”
SCHILL: “That is war.”
MARIA: “Exactly. It is terrible that they can attack you and shoot at you, Schill.
SCHILL: “Oh, Little Maria.”

As this conversation indicates, Maria is terrified by the prospect of war coming too close to both Schill and her hometown of Kolberg. She is unable to understand the rationality of war because, as the film suggests, she is female. Lieutenant Schill, on the other hand, answers her questions in a rather patronizing manner, treating her as though she were a child. As illustrated by his comment “that is war,” Schill’s domain is that of the battlefield, where violence in defense of the Fatherland is a matter of honor and simply a way of life.

The war begins to move closer and closer to Kolberg as Maria and Schill’s romance progresses, further indicating that the two cannot remain together for much longer. Before the French are able to reach the town, Maria’s brother Friedrich confronts Schill and asks him specifically if he loves Maria and intends to make her happy. Schill confesses that he does indeed love Maria, yet he knows he will not be able to remain with her forever, telling Friedrich that “I will never marry. I am married to war.” Later in the same scene, Schill walks over to Maria and lovingly exclaims: “Poor little Maria. You were made for peace. It is written in your

97 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
98 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
eyes. A man could forget all about war. And now, let us drink to those eyes and that peace.”

During this sequence it becomes important to recall Linda Schulte-Sasse’s discussion of Nazism’s fear of the feminine object as the subject of desire in the male gaze. When Schill looks sentimentally into Maria’s eyes, he realizes the danger that the feminine sphere represents to both him and Prussia (i.e. “a man could forget all about war”). Unlike Patrick in Mein Leben für Irland, Schill does not allow himself to be captivated by Maria; acting as the model-soldier, he eventually leaves to go on an implied suicide mission without even intending to say goodbye to her. In doing so, Schill literally turns away from the feminine world inhabited by Maria in order to avoid being effectively “castrated” by her “peaceful eyes.” Although saddened and tearful, Maria has to allow Schill to leave. She knows that Schill does not belong to her, but is ultimately “married to war.” As Schulte-Sasse writes, it is war that provides the true soldier with “the personal, implicitly sexual” experience that a man like Schill “so radically forfeits in the private sphere.”

The loss of Lieutenant Schill becomes only one of many sacrifices that are thrust upon Maria throughout the film. As the French begin to besiege Kolberg, Maria’s father is forced to burn their family farm, since its location outside of the town’s fortified zone would serve as a perfect outpost for French troops. The destruction of Maria’s home represents more than just the burning of her dwelling place; it disrupts her connection to the National Socialist ideal of Blut und Boden, as the farmhouse had been the ancestral dwelling place of her family for generations. As she states mournfully to her father, “we will not have anything without our house.” Her father, unable to cope with the sacrifice of his family’s home and the fraternization of his son

99 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
100 Schulte-Sasse, Entertaining the Third Reich, 118-119.
101 Schulte-Sasse, Entertaining the Third Reich, 120.
102 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
Klaus with enemy troops, commits suicide in the raging fire. Additionally, Maria’s brother Klaus has already been “lost” to foreign influence, as indicated by his feminized appearance and frivolous attire, his love for music, and the abandonment of his Germanic roots. He too ends up being killed when he is hit by a French artillery shell while trying to save his precious violin. Finally, after losing her home, her father, her brother Klaus, and her lover Schill, Maria’s other brother, Friedrich, is killed in battle against the French.

With only her uncle Nettelbeck still alive, Maria has effectively lost nearly all of the prominent male figures in her life to the violence of war. The final scene of the narrative illustrates the important sacrifice that Maria has made in giving up all of the men who had at one time or another served as her masculine “protector.” As Maria tearfully looks out over the Baltic Sea where Schill had originally departed on his final mission, she is joined by Nettelbeck, who comforts her with the following words:

You gave everything you had. But it was not in vain. Death is overcome by victory. That is the way it is. It is the greatest thing of all. We are reborn in pain. If someone endures great pain for us, than he is a great person. You are great Maria. You remained steadfast and did your duty, and you did not fear death. You too have conquered, Maria. You, too.

With this statement, Nettelbeck reiterates that Maria’s role in the defense of Kolberg was (almost) as important as the male soldiers who gave their lives in battle. Not only did she risk her own life by crossing enemy lines, she “gave everything she had” – i.e. nearly all of the men she had previously relied upon. Maria did not play an “active” role in this sacrifice; instead, she was forced as a woman to passively accept the devastation of war. In Kolberg and other Nazi-era films, as Schulte-Sasse argues, the violence of war “slowly and tortuously kills off the private

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103 See my own discussion of Kolberg in Chapter One for a more in-depth analysis of Klaus’ character, 34-35.
104 Kolberg, directed by Veit Harlan.
sphere that is the only space of women, leaving [in this case, Maria] symbolically transformed into a man."105 As this quotation suggests, Maria must now assume the responsibilities of rebuilding both her town and her own life without a masculine presence. This symbolic transformation into a “man” was an important ideological selling point directed at German female audiences, many of whom had lost male loved-ones to battle during the Second World War. Although they remained separate from the sphere of battle due to their position within the feminine private sphere, their sacrifice was great as well. Only through German women stoically sending the men in their lives off to war and remaining steadfast while on the home-front could the Third Reich stave off what was beginning to look like imminent defeat.

Conclusion

As the films in this chapter suggest, the relationship between German soldiers at war and women at home could be fraught with difficulties. Yet one coherent theme seems to connect each of these films within a clearly militarized ideological framework: true German men and women must each contribute to the war effort in their separate ways, transforming their desire for one another into a much needed desire for a German military victory. Failure to do so, as the characters Hanna in *Die große Liebe* and Patrick in *Mein Leben für Irland* illustrate, is portrayed as potentially detrimental to the war effort and to the much higher goal of advancing the German *Volksgemeinschaft*.

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CHAPTER THREE - THE ENEMY SOLDIER IN NAZI-ERA FILM DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Just as Nazi filmmakers intended to portray the “model” Germanic soldier on screen to their audiences, a few Nazi-era films also depicted caricatures of enemy combatants. Most of the films that focus upon “enemy” nations or peoples center primarily upon characters that cannot be classified as “soldiers,” such as the depiction of the Jewish financier Joseph Süß Oppenheimer in director Viet Harlan’s antisemitic picture *Jud Süß* (1940). Nevertheless, this chapter discusses two films that place an extensive spotlight on the actions of soldiers fighting for nations that opposed Germany militarily during the Second World War. The first, *Ohm Krüger* (1941), serves as an historical epic that depicts the violent roots of British imperialism in Africa, while the second film, *GPU* (1942), is a World War II spy thriller that intends to warn German viewers of the threat of Soviet communism in Europe. While both films naturally portray the enemy soldier in a highly negative light, each film serves an even broader purpose: to alert German audiences to the evil intentions of their enemies and to rally ordinary citizens to defend the Nazi cause.

*The British Soldier as Imperialist: Ohm Krüger (1941)*

With the defeat of France, America’s isolationism, and the Soviet Union’s non-aggression pact with the Nazi state, Great Britain was the lone major power fighting Germany on the battlefield for most of 1941. Hitler’s regime had long opposed the capitalist ideology of the British Empire, and anti-British propaganda was common in Germany in the years leading up to the Second World War. Much like the infamous Nazi Party-sponsored antisemitic films of the early 1940s, a number of notable films were released that portrayed the supposed decadence of British society. These films included the 1943 state-commissioned epic *Titanic*, which
chronicled British corruption as the cause of the great ship’s demise, and the feature film *Carl Peters* (1941), which served as an attack on British colonialism in Africa. As Germany began to increase its bombing attacks on the English island during the early years of the war, the Reich’s film industry, led by Minister Goebbels, also increased their cinematic attacks upon the British Empire. These anti-British propaganda films were seen as important measures used to sway the German populace against the English in what the Nazis hoped would be another swift military victory.

It was within the context of the Battle of Britain in early 1941 that the Nazi propaganda epic *Ohm Krüger* was conceived. Attempting to break Britain’s will in the hopes of an eventual invasion, Nazi propagandists surmised that an historical film focused on the horrors of British imperialism would further rally the support of ordinary Germans for the war effort. Joseph Goebbels personally commissioned the production of *Ohm Krüger* himself, and as scholar Rolf Giesen surmises, the Minster of Propaganda had in mind an epic the size of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) when he began the project. As touched upon in a previous chapter, Goebbels landed the Academy Award winning German film star Emil Jannings to play the lead role of Paul Krüger. Jannings was largely responsible for writing the film’s script, based on a novel written about the famous Boer statesmen’s life during the Second Boer War in South Africa. Goebbels entrusted Hans Steinhoff with directing the project. One of the more successful heavy-handed state-commissioned features, *Ohm Krüger* was the first film to be awarded film of the nation, the highest honor for a motion picture in Germany during the Nazi-era.

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The film undoubtedly played upon the militarism and fears of a German populace embroiled in a battle against a stubborn British opponent. *Ohm Krüger*’s depiction of British soldiers, in particular, suggests to viewers that the English were ruthless gluttons, willing to stop at nothing to expand the empire. By placing the film’s context within the relatively well-known story of the Second Boer War (1899-1902), *Ohm Krüger* intends to portray an historically “accurate” picture of the British military’s past misdeeds in South Africa. Although the film naturally twists historical truth in order to match the current regime’s goals, *Ohm Krüger* is able to show its audience a “real” example of British colonialism subduing a proud (and eerily “Germanic”) Boer nation and its fearless leader, Paul Krüger. By illustrating the mass violence that the enemy soldier is capable of, the film suggests that it rests upon the German people to revenge the past crimes of the British military.

In accordance with the general Nazi ideology concerning Western society, *Ohm Krüger* portrays British soldiers largely as pawns in the hands of a few powerful capitalists and monarchs. Much of the early portion of the film contrasts the protagonist Paul Krüger, a simple farmer with noble leadership capabilities, and Cecil Rhodes, the historical gold and diamond profiteer who is portrayed in the film as diabolically greedy and extravagant. It is Rhodes and his entourage who are able to convince an aging Queen Victoria of the need to go to war with the Boers in order to increase the British Empire’s vast wealth in gold. The Queen of England is presented as a sickly old woman confined to drinking whiskey in her throne room, allowing her Empire to be run by the capitalists and colonialists who were so resented both by the fictional Boers in the film and by Nazi audiences.

In order to provoke a war with the Boers that will allow the British to invade South Africa and exploit its riches, Rhodes and his cronies utilize a tried-and-true colonial tactic often
employed historically by the British Empire. Instead of using their own soldiers, the British incite the native African populations to spark a war for them. Local African tribes, once friendly to Krüger and his Boers, are persuaded by the English to become enemy-warriors. Relying on prevalent Nazi (and Western European) stereotypes, these African soldiers are portrayed as mentally childish and stupid brutes. They make fearsome tribal warriors, but they are easily persuaded by European colonists due to their low intellectual abilities. The British are able to incite the natives to violence against the Boers by sending Christian missionaries into their villages. One striking scene in particular shows two Anglican priests leading a tribe of Africans in a rendition of the British national anthem. As the Africans continue to sing, one of the priests distributes bibles throughout the group, while the other priest passes out rifles. The arming of this native tribe leads to the destruction of Boer property, and Paul Krüger himself is forced to pacify the Africans. Scolding their chief like a child, Krüger insists that the Africans have “learned nothing” and that they must rescind all British arms. Krüger then interrupts the Africans’ “war dance” to address the warriors in their native tongue, easily convincing them to return to the Boer’s side.\footnote{Ohm Krüger, directed by Hans Steinhoff.} This rather short sequence of events illustrates how the creators of \textit{Ohm Krüger} intended to portray English colonialism. As the film suggests, the British were willing to employ so-called “savages” to do their bidding as soldiers in order to mask their obvious imperial intentions.

When war is officially declared between Great Britain and the Boer nation, the film presents an impulse towards total war as a key aspect of the British military strategy. As Boer brigades continue to beat back the mighty British regiments, the English war cabinet decides to replace the current commanding general with the ruthless Herbert Kitchener, famous for his
military exploits in Sudan. Lord Kitchener announces before the cabinet that a new military
strategy must be implemented in order to subdue the brave and courageous Boer warriors in
South Africa:

The critical mistake of my predecessors was holding on to certain militaristic principles, which
might suit normal circumstances, but are out of place in Africa. This is a colonial war, gentlemen,
and it must be fought with colonial methods….It means no more humanitarian sentimentality. It
means we have to hit these Boers where they are the most vulnerable. Their farms have to be
burned, their women and children separated from the men and put into concentration camps.
From today on and without any exception, all Boers are outlawed. We will not discriminate between
armed forces and civilians.109

With this proclamation, Kitchener is clearly calling for a “total war” against the Boers.
Interestingly enough, Kitchener places his ruthless military strategy within the concept of a
colonial African war. By doing so, Kitchener is reiterating a viewpoint commonly held among
European leaders at the time. While there may have been codes of conduct to follow when
fighting other European nations, total war was acceptable when battling the “savage” races of
Africa. However, the film also goes to lengths to point out that although the Boers live in Africa,
they are descendants of the white Nordic (Germanic) race and not a part of an “inferior” African
bloodline. Scholar Marcia Klotz points out that Kitchener’s greatest mistake within the context
of the film was “not cruelty per se, but rather the recasting of the Boer War as a colonial war, to
be fought according to the same rules that might be used, that is, if the Boers were black.”110 By
waging total war against a racially fit group of “Europeans,” the British violate the ethical codes
of war and therefore must be punished. Furthermore, Ohm Krüger’s treatment of the concept of
total war as a largely British phenomenon is rather interesting considering Germany’s own

109 Ohm Krüger, directed by Hans Steinhoff.
German Critique, no. 74 (1998): 117.
record during the First World War and the early years of the Second. With the Germans’ own use of *blitzkrieg* tactics against other European powers, including the bombing and forced incarceration of civilians, it is not unlikely that German audiences would have pondered this seeming contradiction. However, the film suggests that total war was *first* introduced by the British, who continue to fight dirty in order to expand their empire.

An example of the effects of total war, as well as a highly important caricature of an individual British soldier, has already been discussed in a previous chapter but will be explored here briefly once again. After Lord Kitchener’s decree has taken hold in the South African theater, a British regiment arrives at the house of Paul Krüger’s son, Jan, looking for suspected Boer rebels who had been hiding in the area. Jan Krüger allows the sergeant to come into his home, thinking that as a non-combatant and a British-sympathizer that he and his family will be treated with respect by this “civilized” British soldier. The British sergeant is depicted as a fat, uncomely, and rude officer. It becomes immediately evident that the sergeant is interested in Petra, Jan’s wife, staring lustfully into her face soon after entering the house. When Petra offers the soldier a glass of wine, he gulps the drink down quickly, asking for a second glass immediately. He drinks the second glass even faster, and then proceeds to finish off the remainder of the bottle. Portraying British soldiers as drunken pillagers, the soldier asks Jan to fetch him another bottle of whiskey, leaving the sergeant alone in the room with Petra. The sergeant promptly sits down on the couch next to Petra, grabbing her forcefully by the wrist. When she tries to escape his advances, the sergeant tells her “do not make a fuss, your husband brought this on you.” He jumps on top of Petra, attempting to rape her until he is stopped by

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111 For more on this specific scene, see Chapter One, 20.
112 *Ohm Krüger*, directed by Hans Steinhoff.
Jan. This scene paints a picture of the British enemy as brutal and sadistic, having no restraints under the confines of total war. The filmmakers clearly hoped that audiences would internalize this message and view the British military as ruthless conquerors that needed to be defeated.

This inhumane treatment of civilian women and children on the part of British soldiers continues through the film’s climax. When a Boer military unit is surrounded by the British in a small South African town, the Boer soldiers ask the British if the town’s women and children can be assured safe passage through the front lines before any actual fighting resumes. The British agree to the Boer request, but secretly capture the women and children before letting them safely through their encampment. When the Boer soldiers make a charge towards the British lines the next day, they find the British soldiers using the Boer women and children as human shields, lining them up along the front lines in order to force the Boer infantrymen to fire through their own citizens. The Boer regiment ultimately surrenders, unable to kill innocent women and children. This scene is intended to illustrate the unwillingness of the British to “play by the rules” of European warfare and portrays British soldiers as cowardly and devious.

The film’s most notorious anti-British statement appears at the very end of the film, when the same Boer women and children captured by the British soldiers are herded into a military-run concentration camp. Surrounded by barbed-wire fences and armed guards, the Boer women and children suffer from the harsh conditions, malnutrition, and diseases that are endemic throughout the camp. While the women are forced to eat spoiled meat, the gluttonous camp commandant (who bears a purposeful resemblance to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill) gorges himself on steak, feeding the extra pieces of meat to his bulldog. Later, when a woman complains about the typhoid epidemic that has taken the lives of her children, the commandant
shoots her in cold blood and claims that he was acting in “self-defense.” Finally, in the film’s concluding scene, the unarmed women begin to riot against the British commandant in protest of an unjust execution. In order to quell the protest, a regiment of British soldiers gun down the women, leaving hundreds of bodies strewn across the barren landscape. This scene poignantly illustrates the brutality of the concentration camp system, which the film insinuates was an invention of the British during the Second Boer War.

This final scene is perhaps even more shocking to contemporary viewers aware of the Nazis’ own concentration camp system, which was responsible for the murder of millions of people sent to both death camps and labor camps. Although German audiences may not have been aware of the full extent of the Nazi camp system, most ordinary Germans knew that prison camps existed for civilian prisoners within the Third Reich. In a rather interesting argument, Marica Klotz asserts that the concentration camp in Ohm Krüger serves a dual function within the context of Nazi propaganda. The cinematic prison camp not only suggests to viewers that the British invented this insidious system; it also reminds Germans of the Nazis’ own camps for political prisoners. Thus, the film gives ordinary Germans an incentive for not stepping out of line, knowing that a similar result could happen to them in one of Hitler’s own concentration camps. At the very least, Ohm Krüger depicts the British military and its soldiers at their worst. The film’s message of ruthless British imperialism and total war tactics was undoubtedly intended to strike fear in the hearts of its German viewers, driving them to continue their own war of conquest and annihilation against the British enemy.

113 Ohm Krüger, directed by Hans Steinhoff.
The International Communist Menace: Soviet Spies in GPU (1942)

Unlike Great Britain, which remained an enemy of the Nazi regime militarily throughout the duration of the Second World War, Germany’s relationship with the Soviet Union was much more complex. Hitler’s fascist principles were naturally opposed to the Marxist-Leninism of the Soviet Union, and the two regimes remained ideological enemies after the Nazi rise to power and during the lead up to war. Therefore, throughout most of the 1930s, Joseph Goebbels and his Propaganda Ministry were able to portray international communism (most closely associated with the Soviet Union) in a highly negative light, as made evident in early Nazi-era films such as Hans Westmar (1933) and Hitlerjunge Quex (1933) discussed in a previous chapter. However, in 1939 Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov and German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop formally signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, bringing the two countries together in an agreement not to attack each other in the event of an impending war. Secretly, the Pact also divided Poland and Eastern Europe between the two nations, in an effort to help both Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin expand their empires. While the Nazi-Soviet Pact was a success politically for Germany, it presented problems for the Nazi propagandists who had been deriding Soviet communism in film and other media for years. Within the German film industry, all anti-Bolshevik projects were shelved immediately following the Pact, and the distribution of prior anti-Soviet films in theaters throughout the Reich was banned.\footnote{Giesen, Nazi Propaganda Films, 113-114.}

However, when Hitler violated the Nazi-Soviet Pact by invading the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda machine once again kicked into high gear. It was within this context that the plans for GPU (1942), the Nazi-era’s final major anti-Soviet film, were conceived. The original idea for GPU came from Andrews Englemann, who also played the
part of the villainous Soviet officer Nikolai Bokscha in the film. Englemann wrote the script along with director Karl Ritter and screenwriter Felix Lützkendorf.\(^{116}\) Goebbels himself commissioned work on the film in December 1941, and oversaw production until its release in August 1942. *GPU* is an example of director Karl Ritter’s self-proclaimed *Zeitfilm* genre, much like the previously discussed film *Stukas* (1941), and therefore *GPU* was unique in its attempt to portray contemporary war-related events to German audiences.\(^{117}\) Given the opening of a new Eastern Front against the Soviets, Ritter’s film was designed to illustrate both the brutality of the Soviet Secret Police and the international threat of communism. Although *GPU* focuses almost solely upon Soviet secret agents, these communist spies play an important role as “soldiers” for the Soviet menace, spreading Marxism through deception, terror, and violence.

*GPU* focuses upon a young woman’s quest for revenge against a brutal Soviet GPU leader who was responsible for murdering her entire immediate family. Although the film fails to note that the Soviet GPU was reconstituted as the NKVD in 1934, historian David Welch notes that “the G.P.U. was so firmly embedded in the minds of Germans as the symbol of Russian barbarism that it had to be perpetuated [through the film] regardless of whether it existed or not.”\(^{118}\) The opening title sequence to the film makes *GPU*’s anti-Bolshevik message abundantly clear:

Bolshevism is trying to spread anarchy and chaos across the world. The Bolshevik tools of destruction are the Comintern and the GPU. This film only shows some of the crimes the GPU has committed outside of the USSR. But it is enough to show the world the meaning of these three letters: G – Grauen (Horror), P – Panik (Panic), U – Untergang (Destruction).\(^{119}\)

\(^{116}\) Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, 214.

\(^{117}\) For more on Karl Ritter’s film *Stukas*, see Chapter One, 21-24.

\(^{118}\) Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema*, 215.

\(^{119}\) *GPU*, directed by Karl Ritter (Universum Film, 1942), DVD (International Historic Films, 2008).
GPU’s plot begins in the Baltic States in 1919, after the bloody Russian Revolution had established the communist regime in Soviet territory in 1917-1918. A GPU general named Nikolai Bokscha is shown leading a raid on a small Baltic town, rounding up the anti-communist inhabitants in order to be executed. Bokscha himself personally sees to the execution of Olga Feodorowna’s (played by Laura Solari) parents and siblings, shooting each of them at point blank range and yet for some reason sparing the young girl’s life. Olga vows to revenge her family’s murder, and spends the rest of her life attempting to infiltrate the GPU in order to kill Bokscha herself.

The film flashes forward to the year 1939, near the beginning of the Second World War. Olga has become a Soviet spy in the Baltic region, working as a double agent by covertly thwarting the GPU’s plans whenever possible. While playing the violin at a concert for a Communist-backed women’s organization in Riga, Bokscha introduces himself to Olga, telling her that he had admired her performance from the audience. Olga’s aunt, who was also at the concert and present when her family was killed, tips off Olga that it was Bokscha who was responsible for her family’s murder. Olga is unsure since he has taken on many different aliases since the murder, but she begins a romantic courtship with Bokscha in order to find out if it is truly him whom she must kill.

Meanwhile, the action shifts to a young student named Peter Assmuss, who is unknowingly set up by Bokscha and the GPU to murder an Armenian Soviet double-agent. Assmuss is given a package with a bomb inside to deliver to the agent’s residence unaware of its contents. When it explodes inside the man’s office, Assmuss is arrested by the Kovno police for murder. Bokscha secures his release, but only under the condition that Assmuss must now work for the GPU or face murder charges. When Assmuss initially resists, he is tortured in an
underground GPU holding cell, along with the assassinated agent’s secretary Irina, who refuses to give any information about her former boss’ secret contacts in other countries. Olga eventually is able to intervene, helping Irina escape and convincing Assmuss to work as a double agent within the GPU.

Olga continues her romance with Bokscha, and she finds out that it was indeed he who was responsible for the murder of her family. She also learns that Bokscha has been using GPU assassins to spark a war between the Soviet Union and Finland, and that he has ordered communist agents to stir up rebellion among the working classes throughout France. Once the two are alone in a hotel room, Bokscha convinces Olga to go with him to Brittany. She agrees, thinking that this would present her with the perfect opportunity to kill him, but once in Brittany Bokscha reveals his plans to marry her. He tells her that he owns property along the French coast and plans to leave the GPU and assume a new identity in which the two could live happily together. Instead of murdering Bokscha herself, Olga decides to alert GPU authorities of his betrayal. GPU agents are sent immediately to gun down Bokscha, shooting him in his Brittany mansion. With her quest for personal vengeance complete, Olga declares her intentions to leave the GPU in front of the leader of the organization in the Baltic region. When her request is denied, Olga reveals her work as a double agent within the GPU, and then shoots herself defiantly in order to avoid torture.

GPU goes to great lengths to illustrate the international threat of Soviet communism. Soviet spies are present in every major city worldwide, as is made evident in one scene in which a Soviet operator is shown sending orders via telegraph to agents in cities as diverse as Beijing and Paris. The GPU agents have passports that allow them to move freely between countries, and individuals like Bokscha are able to easily secure multiple identities in order to keep their past
crimes hidden. The secret communist organizations are able to stir up agitation in each of the cities in which they have a presence, and the film portrays the use of terrorism as the GPU’s primary tactic. The use of terror is presented in multiple examples throughout the film. During Olga’s violin recital near the beginning of the plot, an anti-communist politician interrupts the performance, denouncing the program as a Moscow-funded event and identifying Bokscha as a murderer. Upon Bokscha’s orders, the GPU agents forcibly remove the politician from the performance hall, place him in a small shipping crate, and send him on a ship to Moscow. The communists also use explosives to murder and strike fear in their opponents. A GPU agent who has secretly been working for the Axis powers is killed when a bomb is delivered to his office in the form of a package. In another scene, GPU agents are seen disguising a bomb in a briefcase that they plan to place on an Axis trading ship. The film also suggests that the GPU’s terror tactics were utilized in order to legitimize the Soviet invasion of Finland. In Helsinki, communist assassins were ordered by Bokscha to murder prominent members of their own communist party and to place the blame upon the opposition parties, providing the Soviets with an excuse to invade. The GPU agents are depicted shooting the communist politicians in cold blood in the streets of Helsinki, once again illustrating the ruthlessness of international Bolshevism as portrayed in this piece of Nazi propaganda.

Torture is another important theme within the film that is closely associated with the communist enemy. An important subplot develops around the character Peter Assmuss and his love interest Irina, who are caught and tortured for information regarding GPU double agents. They are held in secret underground torture chambers beneath the Soviet foreign embassy in Rotterdam. Assmuss is physically beaten and held in solitary confinement in a small holding cell where he suffers from malnutrition. The GPU also tortures Irina by depriving her of sleep and
interrogating her under a bright light. She is forced to watch Assmuss suffer increasing torture as she continually refuses to give the Soviet agents any information. The nature of these clandestine methods of torture in underground bunkers is eerily reminiscent of the Gestapo, which was torturing anti-Nazi prisoners in similar ways during the same time at which this film was released. However, within the context of the film, the Germans are presented as the humanitarian liberators who put an end to the Soviet’s brutal methods. The film’s final scene portrays Assmuss and Irina languishing in a GPU prison in Rotterdam, just as the German army begins its siege of the city. As the Luftwaffe drops bombs on the prison, a GPU guard ruthlessly begins the process of shooting each of the prisoners before the Wehrmacht can arrive to set them free. Luckily Assmuss is able to kill the guard before he can shoot both him and Irina. The two are then saved by the German army in a triumphant final scene in which the emaciated prisoners emerge from below to join their German liberators.

Despite an array of devilish supporting characters, Ritter’s film focuses upon Bokscha as the “model” Soviet soldier. While Bokscha is clearly depicted as evil throughout the film, he is not portrayed as a stereotypical “Jewish” Bolshevik; his racial characteristics are actually not important within the context of the film. Interestingly, Bokscha is also not portrayed as a hard-line communist either. He defies Marxist ideology by living an opulent lifestyle and he even repudiates the communist party through property ownership at the end of the film. As one of the film’s characters describes Bokscha: “[he is] someone who has made a career for himself [in the communist party] without being a Jew or a proletarian.”120

Instead of fitting into either of these two classic stereotypes, Bokscha is presented first and foremost as an opportunist. He is willing to murder and kill for his own personal gain,

120 GPU, directed by Karl Ritter.
hoping to rise through the party ranks in order to enjoy the benefits given to the Soviet leadership. Bokscha’s opportunism is best illustrated at the end of the film, when he reveals that he secretly owns a lavish house in France and has a large sum of money stashed away in a French bank. He even plans to leave the GPU and its Marxist-Leninist ideology in order to assume a new identity within “Western” society. Bokscha’s character is a microcosm of the film’s portrayal of the Soviet Union as a whole. The Soviets use the GPU to stir up communist agitation in places like France and Finland, but not to spread Marxist ideology in an effort to better the living standards of the working classes in these countries. Instead, the Soviets hope to use these disturbances to assert their own power abroad. Therefore, while the film does portray stereotypical “Jewish” characters and devout communists, most of the GPU agents can be identified along with Bokscha as opportunists looking out for their own gain. As GPU suggests, these ruthless Soviet soldiers will stop at nothing to slowly gain power over all of Europe.
CONCLUSION

Although it is often difficult for scholars of the Third Reich to judge the precise effect Nazi propaganda had upon its ordinary citizens, one can be sure that the Propaganda Ministry placed an inordinate amount of importance upon the German film industry as a tool to win over the hearts and minds of the proposed Volksgemeinschaft. Dr. Joseph Goebbels himself viewed film as an instrument that could rally the German people to victory even during the darkest moments of the Second World War. After watching Kolberg with his staff in April 1945, Goebbels poetically summarized the German military situation with a desperate plea for a last ditch effort:

Gentlemen, in a hundred years’ time they will be showing another fine color film describing the terrible days we are living through. Don’t you want to play a part in this film, to be brought back to life in a hundred years’ time? Everybody now has the chance to choose the part which he will play in the film a hundred years hence. I can assure you that it will be a fine and elevating picture. And for the sake of this prospect it is worth standing fast. Hold out now, so that a hundred years hence the audience does not hoot and whistle when you appear on the screen.\textsuperscript{121}

As Goebbels’ comments suggest, Nazi-era filmmakers weighed the ideological messages portrayed in their films carefully, hoping that individual films would have a profound effect upon those who viewed them. This thesis has illustrated the ways in which the “common” soldier was portrayed in German cinema during this time period by analyzing a number of films that were viewed by audiences throughout the Reich. By examining the evolution of the “model” cinematic soldier in combat, this study has shown that the depiction of the Nazi soldier did not remain static throughout the Third Reich, but instead changed along with the external circumstances affecting the regime. Gender relations were also important in a number of Nazi-era

\textsuperscript{121} Hull, \textit{Film in the Third Reich}, 265-266.
Soldatenfilme, and these films portrayed the importance of separate spheres for both men and women who were each to do their own part in aiding the German war effort. Finally, this thesis highlights the treatment of the enemy soldier in a couple World War II German films and analyzes the ways in which British and Soviet soldiers were depicted as imperial threats working to destroy the German way of life. This systematic study of the common soldier in Nazi-era cinema has brought out some of the themes important to Nazi propagandists and filmmakers during the Third Reich, leading to a greater understanding of the ideological underpinnings of the Nazi regime itself.
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