

A Dissertation

Entitled

The Soviet Union through German Eyes: Wehrmacht Identity, Nazi Propaganda, and the  
Eastern Front War, 1941-1945

By

Justin T. Pfeifer

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy in History

---

Dr. Larry D. Wilcox, Committee Chair

---

Dr. Beth Griech-Polelle, Committee Member

---

Dr. Roberto Padilla, Committee Member

---

Dr. Robert McCollough, Committee Member

---

Dr. Patricia Komuniecki, Dean  
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo  
December 2014

Copyright 2014, Justin T. Pfeifer

The document is copyrighted material. Under copyright law, no parts of this document may be reproduced without the express permission of the author.

An Abstract of  
The Soviet Union through German Eyes: Wehrmacht Identity, Nazi Propaganda, and the  
Eastern Front War, 1941-1945

by

Justin T. Pfeifer

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in History

The University of Toledo

December 2014

This dissertation investigates the worldview of German frontline soldiers during the Eastern Front conflict of the Second World War. It argues that Nazi era propaganda's creation of a racial and ideological "Other" in the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the attitude of the military in the East. These ideological imaginations of the enemy were often transformed by the realities at the front through the experiences of common enlisted men. While the Nazis constructed a racially and politically charged image of the enemy to justify a war of conquest, the German soldiers fighting in the East developed their own views of an expanding imperial landscape. An identity transformation amongst German combatants took place during the Eastern Front campaign for many reasons, including the effects of Nazi dogma, a foreign environment and local populace, the strains of combat, changing war circumstances, and genocidal policies. This project utilizes the wartime writings of Hitler's ordinary men to provide a partial reconstruction of their mentality, revealing their beliefs, fears, and perceptions of the Soviet enemy.

To my family, for their support of a dream that began in the sixth grade and is now a reality. Thank you. I love you all.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to start by thanking my wife Stephanie Pfeifer for her patience and understanding during my years of graduate school. Dr. Larry D. Wilcox, my academic advisor and dissertation committee chair, has been a mentor and constant source of support to me throughout my academic career at the University of Toledo. Dr. Wilcox's personal and professional guidance has been invaluable to me throughout this process. I am also indebted to Dr. Beth A. Griech-Polelle of Bowling Green State University for acting as my co-advisor, your insights and our conversations have helped me beyond measure. I greatly appreciate the willingness of Dr. Roberto Padilla and Dr. Robert McCollough to serve on this committee. I also want to thank past and present faculty of the University of Toledo's Department of History who influenced my preparation as a historian, including Dr. Michael Jakobson, Dr. William J. O'Neal, and Dr. Glenn Ames.

There are a number of people and organizations who have provided me with generous funding and advice towards this project. Many thanks to Phi Alpha Theta National (Doctoral Scholarship), the Foreign Languages Department (Herbert B. Schering Scholarship), the History Department (Lapp Award), the Graduate Student Association (Research Award), and Northwestern University (HEF Fellowship Award). I also want to thank Dr. Wendy Lower, Dr. Felix Römer, Bernhard Sulzer, Ron Coleman (USHMM), and the staffs at NARA (College Park, MD), the *IfZ* (Munich), the RBMS (Ohio State University) and the Special Collections Library (University of Michigan).

## **Table of Contents**

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	<b>vi</b>
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Historiographical Essay: The Wehrmacht, Propaganda, and German Soldiers' Writings.....	14
2. Das Feindbild: Nazi Domestic Propaganda and Representations of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945.....	37
2.1 Home Front Propaganda: Selling and Sustaining War through Ideology.....	41
2.2 The Alliance between Plutocratic West and Soviet Russia.....	46
2.3 Antisemitism and the Jewish-Bolshevik Threat.....	53
2.4 "Europas Freiheitskrieg" and European Unity.....	73
2.5 Soviet Citizenry and the Red Army.....	88
2.6 Communist Oppression.....	97
2.7 Conclusions.....	107
3. What Informed the Soldiers: Military Propaganda on the Eastern Front.....	113
3.1 Wehrmacht Propaganda Division: The Military and Indoctrination.....	115

3.2 Media and Soldier’s Ideology: Film and Radio Propaganda .....	124
3.2.2 Film Propaganda: Die Frontschau .....	125
3.2.2.2 Radio Propaganda: Die Wehrmachtbericht .....	133
3.3. Print Propaganda: The Mitteilungen für die Truppe .....	148
3.3.1. The Alliance between Plutocratic West and Soviet Russia.....	153
3.3.2. Antisemitism and the Jewish-Bolshevik Threat .....	157
3.3.3 “Europas Freiheitskrieg” and European Unity .....	166
3.3.4 Communist Leadership and Oppression.....	174
3.4 Conclusions .....	179
4. “This is a short description of the Russian paradise.....:” German Soldiers Experience the Soviet Union, 1941 .....	182
4.1 Perceptions of the Occupied Territories: Civilians, Landscape, Society .....	184
4.2. Liberating the East, Saving the West, and Destroying Bolshevism.....	197
4.3 Views of the Enemy Combatants: The Red Army and Partisan Warfare.....	211
4.4. War without Mercy: Atrocities against Civilians and Partisans .....	221
4.5. The War against the Jews: Antisemitism and Mass Murder in the East .....	233
4.6. Conclusions .....	245
5. “We are all slowly facing the end:” Triumph and Setback on the Eastern Front, June 22, 1941-June 28, 1942.....	249
5.1. Frontline Indoctrination: The Impact of Propaganda on the Troops.....	251

5.2. Sieg Heil!: Overconfidence in Success and Faith in the Führer .....	262
5.3 The Realities of War: Combat, Conditions, and Changing Perceptions .....	283
5.4. Conclusions .....	306
6. “Furlough is the only escape:” Shifting Mentalities during the Stalingrad Campaign, 1942-1943 .....	309
6.1. Humanizing the Untermensch: Perceptions of Russia and Communism, 1942.....	311
6.2. Myth versus Reality: Frontline Propaganda and Hoping for Victory .....	330
6.3. Eroding Morale: The Effects of Combat and Defeat against the Red Army .....	344
6.4. Conclusions .....	385
7. “Who were we?:” Despondent Soldiers, Desperate Ideologues, and the Demise of the Wehrmacht, 1943-1945.....	387
7.1. Visions of War: Combat, Defeat, and the Enemy from Kursk to the Endkampf .....	389
7.2. The Minds of the Vanquished: Reflections on the Ostfront by POWs, 1943-1945.....	426
7.3. Conclusions .....	451
8. Conclusion .....	453
References.....	464



## Chapter One

### Introduction

No one forced the soldiers to make positive comments about the Nazi regime and the war, so that if some letters have the ring of propagandistic mimicry about them, others reflect a genuine sympathy and support for Hitler and Nazism. An army, and the men within it, cannot be completely separated from the value system that produced it. Indeed, an army tends to reflect the society from which it sprang, so that if the men of the Wehrmacht fought steadfastly in support of Hitler and Nazism, something within the Hitler state must have struck a responsive chord.<sup>1</sup>

During the Eastern Front conflict of the Second World War, the Nazi ideological paradigm imagined the German military as a crusading vanguard of invincible Aryan warriors fighting to defend the civilized West. In contrast, the Soviet enemy transformed from a brief détente ally of 1939-1940 into subhuman monstrous creatures with an insatiable bloodlust, bent upon merciless destruction for the entire world. Dehumanization of the enemy required a comprehensive “othering” process through ideological indoctrination and pervasive propaganda meant for domestic and international consumption. The goal of this project is to provide a comprehensive investigation of the German military’s ordinary infantry soldier and their worldview as

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 9.

demonstrated through the Eastern Front conflict. My research provides a social understanding of the average soldier fighting for the Third Reich, showing how perceptions of the Soviet enemy and the brutality of warfare impacted the ideas of the common enlisted man.

This dissertation examines the construction of German soldier's identity in relationship to the Soviet Union. In 1941, the Nazi war machine was at the apex of success, a predisposition which fostered loyalty to the state and a general acceptance of Hitler's vision for a new world order. Yet following the defeat of the *blitzkrieg* in the winter of 1941-42, the changing fortunes of war placed a heavy burden upon the men at the front. The barbarity of conflict challenged some notions and reinforced other ideas held by the soldiers, whose own personal and collective identities hinged upon the outcome of the conflict. The Nazi regime's volatile propaganda endeavors to demonize the Soviet Union and dehumanize Eastern Europeans are reflected through the writings of German troops throughout the war. An examination of how soldier's opinions were shaped and destroyed by the tests of the war places a focus upon the discourse on the social history of warfare and the impact of war upon both individual and collective identities.

German soldiers' mindset during World War II was shaped in part by Nazi ideology and propaganda, situational circumstances, and the barbarous and genocidal war on the Eastern Front. This dissertation examines the Wehrmacht's imagined views of the Soviet Union during the period of 1941-1945. Specifically, the project explores the outlook of the average infantryman, but also incorporates a thorough analysis of Nazi propaganda representations of the Soviet enemy. This project frames a view of

military perceptions of an ideological and racial enemy of the Reich, to help better understand the attitudes and actions of soldiers who fought a war of annihilation against an enemy the Nazis perceived as subhuman.

This dissertation project has significance from several perspectives. My research is unique in its utilization of German soldier's writings to show how a carefully constructed Nazi war community disintegrated after years of bitter fighting. The malleability of German soldier's opinions represents part of the transformative identity experience in Soviet Russia. My work provides a more in depth analysis of enlisted German soldiers' views of subjective categorizations related to Soviet civilians, the Communist state, the Jews, and Red Army soldiers. The German army's involvement in wartime atrocities and the Holocaust is also addressed as part of the project. Nazi propaganda posited the Nazi-Soviet struggle as a war between two worlds and a racial war, a message influencing German soldiers in a variety of ways. My project explores the nature of the German military's passivity towards and active participation in murder and genocide in the Soviet Union. Crucial to this part of the dissertation are sources such as Nazi and Wehrmacht propaganda, as well as soldiers' writings from the front. This is a subject of significant controversy in the discourse on Holocaust and Genocide studies as well as military histories of the Second World War, namely because there is much debate about the average German soldiers' ideological views and their levels of participation in war crimes.

Since the project focuses chronologically and thematically upon the German army's experience fighting the Soviet Union during the Second World War, it is important to understand how the military underwent an identity transformation which

broke down traditional morality but largely failed to break down the Wehrmacht's levels of resistance until 1945. The malleability of German soldiers' identity on the Eastern Front represents part of a transformative experience shaped through travel, conflict, and barbarization in Soviet Russia. German perceptions of the "other" were based upon a variety of factors including preconceived notions of the East, Nazi indoctrination, and the pressures of combat and wartime expediencies. What role did these prejudicial constructions of people play in the building of German soldiers' identities on the Eastern Front? If perceptions are part of our reality, than we must address how these experiential and social constructs shaped the mindset and actions of the Wehrmacht during the Second World War.

While there can be no singular view of German military consciousness, an assessment of soldier's writings reveal both levels of uniqueness and striking similarities in their subjective classifications of the Soviet Union. These perceptions show the effects of Nazi ideology and personal bias in the field. The "average" soldier was not a robotic automaton who hated all humanity and worshipped Hitler, and thus generalizations must be avoided regarding Wehrmacht mentality and identity. From looking at the sources, there is no direct evidence to suggest an inbred racism amongst the Germans fighting on the Eastern Front. Rather, stereotypes and prejudiced notions of Soviet Russia were the byproduct of ignorance of the East, Nazi propaganda efforts, political differences, and the age old boundary between the "Occident" and "Orient."

German soldiers had their own unique views of the Soviets, ranging from acceptance of Nazi conceptions, to outright disdain for their military's brutal occupation policies and atrocities. There is no way to prove the levels of influence of Nazi

propaganda on the German troops during World War II. However, the Nazi regime's inundation of the Reich, and the Wehrmacht hierarchy's perpetuation of Nazi ideology in frontline literature and radical proclamations as the Reichenau Decree, makes the debate around German soldier's psyche all the more fascinating. Aspects of German identity present themselves through the writings of soldiers who fought in the East, and the Wehrmacht's various encounters with the Soviets acted as a formative experience from which to build their biases and hatreds.

The conceptual framework of this project focuses on the transformation of the German soldier's worldview and their beliefs regarding the Soviet Union throughout the war. Using a system of what I call "categories of perception," the dissertation examines the mindset of the soldier from 1941-1945 on the Eastern Front. Some of the categories to be examined in regards to perceptions of the Soviet Union include: Communism; antisemitism; the Eastern European environment; Russia as Orient; religion; socio-economic conditions; the Red Army; and conceptions of civilization. The use of categories of perception allows for an introspective analysis of the conceptualizations made by the Wehrmacht men during the war about a foreign land whose way of life and standard of living were alien to most Germans. In a sense, German soldier's writings become a form of imperialist travel literature during wartime conditions, revealing how perceptions themselves are important for understanding the distance between ideology and action, myth and reality, hate and war crimes.

The examination of German military consciousness and categories of perception through soldiers' diaries and letters reveals both plurality and similarities in their

generalized classifications of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> In a sense, identity is both an individual and group creation, in this case manifested through the words and deeds of military men who fought and died for a criminal imperialist regime. The impact of Nazism and Hitler's war aims on soldiers' identities cannot be overlooked, but neither should the transformative experience of fighting in a foreign land for several bloody years. This was a war where two distinctly imagined worlds collided, and the travel experiences of the German soldier in the East represent a new paradigm in socio-cultural studies on perceptions of the "Other."

Nazi propaganda and ideological preparation of the German population from 1933-1941 sculpted a psychological architecture of destruction, in a process Thomas Kühne describes as "perfecting community building through violence and racist ethics."<sup>3</sup> The Wehrmacht soldiers were armed with deadly weapons to destroy the Red Army, but it was their xenophobic and ethnocentric believed abstractions which made them all the more dangerous to the Soviets. However, the eastern army was huge, and even with the amount of indoctrination to which the soldiers were exposed there was bound to be differences of opinion. What is found in the documents is that the Germans on the *Ostfront* either reinforced their suppositions about the Soviet Union, or developed all new views about their enemy.

---

<sup>2</sup> Soldiers' letters and diaries are valuable source materials which can provide a glimpse into the mindset of the Wehrmacht's ordinary men. Stephen Fritz describes the letters and diaries as "the most reliable human documents available" in order to depict the shared experiences of war. While each person fought their own individual battles, "out of the myriad individual perceptions emerge common themes and patterns." (Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 7).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 6.

In attempting to provide a social understanding of the German army, soldier's views of themselves and their enemies are a crucial element in the dissection of imagined identities and stereotypes. A re-conceptualization of the war experience requires an emphasis on history from below, personal and group relationships, and the impact of perceptions of race, combat, military, society, and culture of the "Other." These perceptions were influenced by prejudices and stereotypes about the Soviet Union and its people. Nazi intolerances and attacks about Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, and other undesirable groups were built upon previously conceived stereotypes of people already viewed as suspect by many Germans. A categorical system of analysis of German soldiers' worldview and system of beliefs about the Soviets makes clearer the process by which German military men's individual and collective identities were constructed. These identities were altered through their experiences in the Soviet Union during World War II.

Equally important is how the Nazi worldview coupled with the categories of perception met with adversity when the fortunes of war changed for the worse against the Third Reich. The Wehrmacht soldiers found themselves facing a tenacious and skilled foe in the Soviet Union, both on the battlefield and behind the lines against partisans. A breakdown of aspects of the mythical Nazi world began crashing down, leaving soldiers to question the foundations of their socio-cultural landscape. While some abandoned the lies of propaganda and re-conceptualized the East on their own terms, others clung to radical ideology long after the war was lost. Ideas often long outlive their creators, and the hateful messages professed by Hitler and the Nazi regime

impacted a generation of Germans well beyond the Second World War, namely in their conceptualizations of Communism and the East.

The theoretical framework of the project is influenced by the concepts of Benedict Anderson, Claude Levi-Strauss, Edward W. Said, and Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius. According to Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community, imagined because most members of the community do not know each other but accept a mindset image of communion.<sup>4</sup> For Anderson, nationalism's cultural artifacts are modular and transplantable to varying degrees of consciousness, social tensions, and political-ideological views.<sup>5</sup> The influence of media on people plays an important role in spreading these ideas throughout the nation.<sup>6</sup> National identity is spread into public consciousness through media and the spoken word, tying people together with concepts such as *Gemeinschaft* and a sense of belonging.<sup>7</sup> Anderson believes that out of nationalism can also arise racism, with a focus on ideas of "eternal contaminants" transmitted through an endless sequence of detestable copulations.<sup>8</sup>

Equally important to this project is Anderson's discussion of institutions of power and the systems of classification which shape the image of people, places, and things.<sup>9</sup> The ideas on systems of classification as posed by Anderson are also tied to

---

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 1-4.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 169.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, 143-44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 149-151.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 171-177.



those of Claude Levi-Strauss, whose discussion of “totemic classifications” regarding people’s observations of other societies influences my framework regarding “categories of perception.”<sup>10</sup> Levi-Strauss finds that those from so-called civilized societies often classify other groups as “primitive peoples” based upon pre-conceived notions and limited range information.<sup>11</sup> Levi-Strauss argues that anthropologists, scientists, and scholars have often misjudged the rituals and practices of other cultures as inferior or without merit, while not taking into consideration that our own systems of classification might be incapable of understanding other societies.<sup>12</sup> In general, people’s relations with their environment remain “objects of thought,” and human beings compound them in order to arrive at a system. Thus, such things as myths become the medium to which mankind attempts to explain facts, or rather, people and societies make interpretations based upon their own systems of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

The theories of Edward Said regarding Orientalism are also important to my argument, as Said states that Orientalism is crucial for explaining European imaginations of the “Other” and the identity of empires.<sup>14</sup> For Said, Orientalism was a “Western style for dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient,” or rather, a form of knowledge directly linked to the exercise of power.<sup>15</sup> While Said focused on the British

---

<sup>10</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 35-6.

<sup>11</sup> Levi-Strauss, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 55

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 95

<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 2

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 3

and French Orientalism, German imperialism did not begin until the 1880s. However, Germany's *Griff nach der Weltmacht* and aggression towards the East would contribute to the First and Second World Wars.<sup>16</sup> Orientalism has far more to do with Western ideology than Eastern geography, meaning the actual location of "the Orient" matters less than the Orientalist discourse. In the case of the Second World War, Eastern Europe and specifically Soviet Russia became the Nazis' Orient. The Nazis drew upon a long tradition of the German myth of the East, where the two top priorities of the regime came together: anti-Semitism and the demand for *Lebensraum*. This made the East future place for a new German identity which was cast in strictly racial terms.<sup>17</sup>

Equally important to my argument are Said's ideas about orientalism being based upon an imagined East-West divide in which artificial boundaries and concepts of civilization and barbarian justified imperialism. In many ways, the Nazis took part in *orientalizing* Eastern Europe, combining Eurocentrism with racism to dehumanize the Soviets. The Nazis used their propaganda to redefine themselves by classifying the "other" in the East. For example, qualities such as barbaric, uncivilized, murderous, conspiratorial, and dirty are attributed to the oriental Jewish-Bolsheviks. In contrast, the Europeans thus became civilized, cultured, peace loving, just, and sophisticated.<sup>18</sup> In order to justify "*Lebensraum* imperialism" in the East, the Nazis drew upon their ideological and propaganda arsenal to create a *Feindbild*, or image of the enemy, which

---

<sup>16</sup> Todd Knotje, *German Orientalisms*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Vejas Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171.

<sup>18</sup> Said describes how Orientalists often portrayed the Orient as under-humanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, etc. (Said, 150)

placed Germany as *Mitteleuropa* standing between civilization and barbarism.

Ideologically speaking, the Nazis drew upon nineteenth century terms such as *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* to emphasize German uniqueness and the benefits of a civilized society. For the Nazis, orientalism existed primarily as an academic medium to justify aggressive imperialism, combining Euro-centrism as well as anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and Indo-Germanistic themes.<sup>19</sup> German Orientalism thus had internal and external directions during the Nazi period, motivated by expansionist policies and the desire to eliminate racial enemies.

Edward Said's study of "Orientalism" can be applied to German soldiers' views and experiences in the East as well, with Wehrmacht occupation representing a cultural and ideological mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, colonial bureaucracies, and colonial styles. The European collective mentality of 'us' versus 'them' fits with Said's paradigm, including the idea of Orientalism as a form of cultural hegemony which the Nazis intended to impose by Germanizing the East.<sup>20</sup> Said argues how the imaginative geography of the Orient reveals the arbitrary nature of boundaries. European travelers and colonialists desired to civilize the barbarians despite the will of the people there. As Europe moved outward, the European inner strength fortified, with traveler's tales reinforcing stereotypes and ethnocentric views.<sup>21</sup> The geographical space of the Orient was penetrated, worked over, and taken hold of by the Orientalist, transformed from an alien into a colonial space.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Kontje, 7

<sup>20</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2-8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

Said concludes by labeling Orientalism as a system of ideological fictions which has serious implications because it is intellectually discreditable.<sup>23</sup> The representation of other cultures such as Orientalism is ultimately a failure, and perhaps instead there needs to be a greater promotion of the human community instead of racial, ethnic, and national distinctions.<sup>24</sup>

Lastly, Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius' *The German Myth of the East* studies German frontier mythology and the impact of Germany's relationship with Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>25</sup> Liulevicius finds that Germany's quest to civilize the East was a projection of the hopes and anxieties of Germany itself, namely a mission to develop a national identity which was constantly being redefined.<sup>26</sup> Liulevicius defines a myth as something which "...designates a set of common assumptions, related stereotypes, recurring images, and ubiquitous metaphors."<sup>27</sup> The 'East' was not so much of a geographical location but a state of being to the Germans, who saw it as a designation for "...disorganization or underdevelopment."<sup>28</sup> For Hitler and the Nazis, the need to conquer *Lebensraum* in the East and destroy Judeo-Bolshevism was a task for all Germans during the Third Reich period, recasting German identity into a highly

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 321.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 325-28.

<sup>25</sup> Liulevicius, 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 3.

racialized and imperialistic form.<sup>29</sup> The Nazis imagined vision of the East was to transform the vast spaces of land into a Germanic cultural landscape, with millions of soldiers destined to become colonial settlers in Eastern Europe.<sup>30</sup> However, once the war took a turn for the worse by 1943, Nazi ideology transformed from visions of empire to hopes for an *Ostwall* to stop the floods of barbarity from destroying European civilization.<sup>31</sup>

The project thus provides visions of the Soviet Union as represented through the eyes of German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front throughout World War II. These perceptions were influenced by long-standing prejudices and stereotypes about the Soviet Union and its people which predated the Third Reich period, but were views which the Nazis reinforced and expanded upon to develop further hatreds towards them. Nazi intolerances and attacks against Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, and other undesirable groups located in Eastern Europe were well-known stereotypes of people who many Germans already viewed as suspect. These views are an important part of our historical understanding of the conflict, because they help in part to explain individual and collective motivation and action on the Eastern Front. Furthermore, racist ideology and barbarizing warfare made atrocities against the civilian population in the East part of a normalized process in an “Us versus Them” mentality. In essence, the Wehrmacht became the primary weapon for the Nazis to wage an ideologically charged imperialist crusader race war against Judeo-Bolshevism.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 171-2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 201-202.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 204-5.

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters including an introduction and conclusion, arranged both thematically and chronologically. Chapters two and three assess wartime Nazi domestic propaganda and military propaganda sources, in order to synthesize the major ideological themes which influenced the attitudes and writings of German soldiers. Chapters four through seven each present Wehrmacht soldier's views of the Soviet Union and the war through their letters and diaries. Chapter four addresses the representation of "categories of perception" regarding the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa, showing how the German troops believed they were fighting an ideological crusade against a malicious enemy.

Chapter five covers the chronological period from June 1941 to June 1942, emphasizing the contrasting images of the enemy and the war through the letters and diaries of soldiers at the front. While most were confident in victory and believed in their Führer Adolf Hitler, the effects of Red Army strength, a terrible winter season in 1941-1942, and the inability to defeat the Soviet Union destroyed the myth of the invincible Wehrmacht. Chapter six argues that the battle of Stalingrad was the ideological turning point of the war for Nazi Germany and the Wehrmacht. Gone was the spirit of overconfidence and fervor expressed in 1941, replaced with fear and despair by January-February 1943. However, as shown in chapter seven, the war would last for another two years, with the German soldiers continuing to doggedly resist the Allied coalition until May 1945, primarily motivated by fear and hatred of the Soviets.

*1.1 Historiographical Essay: The Wehrmacht, Propaganda, and German Soldiers' Writings*

My research builds upon the historiography of the field in new ways by investigating the socio-ideological landscape of conflict through an analysis of German military men's perceptions as evidenced in their own words. While pioneering works by historians such as Christian Streit, Omer Bartov, Christopher Browning, and Söhnke Neitzel have deconstructed the German military and effectively destroyed the myth of a "clean" Wehrmacht, my work delves deeper into the mentality of the average foot soldier, reconstructing their perceptions of the enemy and the war from 1941-1945.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the end of the Cold War has provided scholars the opportunity to view never before seen documents about World War II, completely altering perceptions about the German military's complicity with the Nazi regime. The post-Cold War world has allowed historians access to materials in the former Soviet Union, and also archival records declassified by the West in the last thirty years.

Over the past sixty years, scholars have made substantial contributions to our understanding of German military ideology and the close ties between the Hitler regime and the Wehrmacht. One of the earliest works, *The Other Side of the Hill* (1948) by Basil Liddell Hart published German generals' opinions of military tactics and strategic blunders of the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> Robert J. O'Neill's *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939* (1966) argues that there was an extensive relationship between

---

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978); Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Söhnke Neitzel & Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing and Dying: The Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill: Germany's Generals, their Rise and Fall, with their Own Account of Military Events, 1939-1945*, (London: Cassell, 1948).

the Wehrmacht and the state apparatus in the prewar years.<sup>34</sup> One of the best studies is Manfred Messerschmidt's *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat* (1969), which provides a survey of the traditional power structures of the German military while brilliantly displaying the ways in which the Wehrmacht incorporated Nazi ideology into its training and worldview.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1970s, the historiography on the Wehrmacht built upon the work of Messerschmidt in debating the collaboration between Nazism and the military. Klaus Jürgen Müller's *Armee, Politik, und Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1933-1945: Studien zum Verhältnis von Armee u. NS-System* (1979) maintains that Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 threatened the army leadership.<sup>36</sup> Müller questions the impact of the Army in the opposition and resistance to the Nazis, and shows how the structure of the Hitler regime bore much continuity to its predecessors. Wolfgang Kern's assertion in *Die innere Funktion der Wehrmacht, 1933-1939* (1979) is similar to Müller's, posing dueling images of opposition in the *Reichswehr* and Wehrmacht to the Nazi state, while noting the regime's efforts at coordination.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1980s, historians began the shift from macro histories of the Wehrmacht to structural analyses and efforts at viewing a history from below. The shift in the

---

<sup>34</sup> Robert J. O'Neill, *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939*, (New York: J. H. Heineman, 1967).

<sup>35</sup> Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination*, (Hamburg: R. v. Decker, 1969).

<sup>36</sup> Klaus Jürgen Müller, *Armee, Politik und Gesellschaft in Deutschland 1933-1945: Studien zum Verhältnis von Armee und NS-System*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979).

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Kern, *Die innere Funktion der Wehrmacht, 1933-1939*, (Berlin: Militärverlag der Deutsche Demokratische Republik, 1978).



historiography took time, as exemplified by Albert Seaton's *The German Army, 1933-1945* (1982) which is a much more traditional approach to the subject, heavily reliant on the records of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (High Command of the Armed Forces) and the General Staff to provide a narrative of the transition from *Reichswehr* to *Wehrmacht*.<sup>38</sup> Seaton's book deals more with strategy and operational organization than ideology, whereas Wilhelm Deist's works including *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament* (1981) and *The German Military in the Age of Total War* (1985) explore the continuities of nationalist and military ideologies, as well as the adoption of the people's war concept from the interwar period.<sup>39</sup>

Some of the most important work in recent years has been produced by Omer Bartov, beginning with his groundbreaking book *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare* (1986).<sup>40</sup> In *The Eastern Front*, Bartov maintains that Nazi ideological indoctrination of the troops played an essential role in the conduct of the war in the East. Bartov's subsequent book *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (1991) further delves into the issue of the Nazification of German soldiers.<sup>41</sup> By examining the Nazi regime's efforts to propagandize the troops with the most extreme ideological arguments, Bartov shows that

---

<sup>38</sup> Albert Seaton, *The German Army, 1933-1945*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Wilhelm Deist, *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

<sup>41</sup> Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

soldiers became more willing to commit atrocities and even participated in the Holocaust.

More recently, historical interpretations have continued to build upon the role of Nazi ideology in the Wehrmacht. Wolfram Wette's *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (2002) is a reexamination of the role of the German army in Hitler's Reich.<sup>42</sup> Wette maintains that the Wehrmacht held long standing anti-Semitic, anti-Slavic, and anti-Bolshevik beliefs, indicting millions of ordinary German soldiers for committing wartime atrocities. James Steiner's book *Hitler's Wehrmacht: German Armed Forces in Support of the Führer* (2008) explores the motivation behind the Wehrmacht leadership's support for Hitler and his geopolitical agenda.<sup>43</sup>

Significant scholarly work also exists on National Socialist domestic and military propaganda. In the 1960s, historians provided comprehensive views on the impact of the Ministry of Propaganda and produced some of the earliest studies on the subject. Zybnek Zeman's *Nazi Propaganda* (1964) provided a chronological overview of the Propaganda Ministry and the role of propaganda in the Third Reich period.<sup>44</sup> Another of the earlier works was *The Captive Press in the Third Reich* (1964) by Oron Hale, which contributed significantly to our understanding of Nazi propaganda through an analysis of newspapers.<sup>45</sup> Hale traces the development of the Nazi press from the creation of the

---

<sup>42</sup> Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden*, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> James Steiner, *Hitler's Wehrmacht: German Armed Forces in Support of the Führer*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Z.A.B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

*Völkischer Beobachter* in the 1920s to the formation of the Propaganda Ministry and its subsequent total dominance over German media in the Third Reich period.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1970s, *The War that Hitler Won: Goebbels and the Nazi Media Campaign* (1978) by Robert Edwin Herzstein is an excellent study which details the impact of propaganda upon the German public. Herzstein analyzes numerous sources produced throughout the party's history, with a particular focus on the war years. Herzstein essentially argues that Hitler's propaganda apparatus was very effective in mobilizing the German nation to war, and by creating enemies through slander and misinformation the Propaganda Ministry actually succeeded in many of its goals. While Herzstein admits that as the war worsened for the Nazis the propaganda lost much of its effect, it continued to cultivate the *Führerprinzip* and contributed to the Germans' will to fight until the very end.<sup>47</sup>

Also in the 1970s appeared Jay W. Baird's *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda* (1974) which is still one of the best studies of the subject. Baird examines the retreat of Nazism into mythology from 1939 to 1945, and he argues that National Socialist ideology failed to survive in the world of objective reality.<sup>48</sup> Examining

---

<sup>45</sup> Oron J. Hale, *The Captive Press in the Third Reich* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964).

<sup>46</sup> For a more recent study of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, see Detlef Mühlberger's *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933*, (New York: P. Lang, 2004). See also Roland V. Layton, Jr.'s doctoral dissertation *The Voelkischer Beobachter, 1925-1933: A Study of the Nazi Party Newspaper in the Kampfzeit* (University of Virginia, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War That Hitler Won: The Most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1978).

<sup>48</sup> Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi Propaganda, 1939-1945*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974).

numerous sources of information, including newspapers, Baird finds that war reporting provided mixed examples of either factual or counterfactual accounts depending upon the outcomes of battles and campaigns. As the war deteriorated, Baird maintains that the Nazi leadership blurred the distinction between the Party and the nation in order to convince the people of the need for final victory.

Randall Bytwerk's *Julius Streicher* (1983) emphasizes the role of the individual in relation to the propaganda being produced.<sup>49</sup> Bytwerk's book is largely a biography, providing insights into the role of Streicher and his publications. Bytwerk argues that Streicher's virulent antisemitism manifested itself not only in *Der Stürmer*, but also permeated numerous other materials as well. While Streicher was viewed as extreme even by his colleagues in the Nazi hierarchy, his tactics were nevertheless a reflection of the Nazis growing radicalization which ultimately turned to genocide during the Second World War.

Ian Kershaw's *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (1987) provided a new direction for the historiography of the subject by emphasizing Hitler's central place within Nazi propaganda.<sup>50</sup> Kershaw examines the development of Hitler's cult of personality in Nazi Germany, particularly the deification of Hitler in propaganda throughout the 1930s and the war years. While many of the previous works on propaganda emphasized the politics of Nazi Germany, organization structures, or ideological themes, Kershaw shifts the dynamic to the emphasis on the Hitler image by

---

<sup>49</sup> Randall L. Bytwerk, *Julius Streicher*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1983). See also Dennis Showalter, *Little Man, What Now?: Der Stürmer in the Weimar Republic*, (Hamden, Conn: Archon, 1982).

<sup>50</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

noting the techniques used by propagandists to make the Führer the symbol of the nation.

David Welch's book *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (1993) analyzes politics, propaganda, and public opinion in Nazi Germany. Welch's overview of the Propaganda Ministry's tactics includes the organization's efforts to manipulate public opinion, made easier by the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of all media sources in Germany. The main argument for Welch is that propaganda provided an illusory effect of omnipresent terror and control in Germany, and also gave the impression of consensus in a state where conformity became a way of life as a result of a dictatorship.<sup>51</sup>

One of the best books to date on Nazi antisemitic propaganda is Jeffrey Herf's *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (2006). Herf's work utilizes documents from the Ministry of Propaganda and juxtaposes that information with propaganda materials to show the Nazis' portrayal of Jews as an internal and external threat to Germany. Herf's emphasis is on the wartime years, arguing that propaganda portrayed the German people as victims of a massive conspiracy by the Allied Powers which were controlled by a Jewish gang of criminals. Therefore, both the war and the Holocaust could be justified by the Nazis as a defensive measure to protect the Reich from extinction.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*. (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

Historians have also contributed greatly to our understanding of German military propaganda, in particular studies of the *Wehrmacht Propagandaamt* and the impact of Nazi ideology on the army. One of the earliest studies on German military propaganda during the National Socialist period is by a former commander of the propaganda troops, Hasso von Wedel. Wedel's book is largely based on his own memory of events, but it serves as an important contribution to understanding first hand technical information about the propaganda troops.<sup>53</sup> A far more reliable study of Wehrmacht propaganda is a dissertation by Jeffrey Robert Willis, who studied under former military intelligence officer and twentieth century Germany specialist Oron Hale.<sup>54</sup> Willis's research provides a history of the *WPr* and its contributions to towards *Truppenbetreuung* (troop entertainment), censorship, and combatting foreign propaganda.

One of the best works on the subject is Manfred Messerschmidt's monumental study of the Wehrmacht's role within the Nazi state.<sup>55</sup> Writing in the late 1960s, Messerschmidt was the first German historian to analyze the status and nature of the Wehrmacht within the overall scheme of Hitler's Reich. While propaganda is not the central focus of the book, Messerschmidt discusses Wehrmacht ideology and

---

<sup>53</sup> Hasso von Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppen der deutschen Wehrmacht*, (Neckargemund: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1962).

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Robert Willis, *The Wehrmacht Propaganda Branch: German Military Propaganda and Censorship during World War II*, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1964); The pioneering efforts of the late Oron Hale at the University of Virginia contributed significantly to our understanding of Nazi propaganda. Among Hale's best works include *The Captive Press in the Third Reich*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), and *The Great Illusion: 1900-1914*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). For more information on Hale, see: Oron J. Hale Papers, 1891-1991, Accession #12800, 12800-a, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.; [<http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=uva-sc/viu01888.xml>].

<sup>55</sup> Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination*, (Hamburg: Schenck, 1969).

propaganda in chapters four and five. In particular, Messerschmidt examines the role of the OKW and WPr in the Nazification of the Wehrmacht through such mediums as the frontline news-sheet *Mitteilungen für die Truppe*, radio programs such as *Der Wehrmachtbericht*, and other forms of propaganda.

More recently, Daniel Uziel's work on Wehrmacht propaganda provides an encompassing view of the subject.<sup>56</sup> Uziel traces the origins of army propaganda to the Second Reich and World War I, and he notes how the *Reichswehr* of the 1920s participated in far more political activities than previously assumed. Uziel then describes the army's transition to the National Socialist state, including the efforts of military officers such as General Blomberg and Major Hermann Foertsch in redefining the nature of the Wehrmacht's functions and the role of ideology. The creation of the WPr in 1939 and its functions throughout the war is Uziel's main concern, noting the evolving status of WPr organization and the methods it used throughout the war to project Nazi ideology to the troops and the German people.

The subject of German perceptions of the East has an equally dynamic and diverse historiography. While the pre-modern German historiography addresses the *Ostsiedlung* or eastern expansion during the medieval period, the discourse on the modern period initially focused on the German *Drang nach Osten*. Among the best works in German on the subject are by Wolfgang Wippermann, whose *Der deutsche Drang nach Osten: Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes* (1981) details the development of the "deutsche Ostsiedlung" as part of the political and

---

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Uziel, *The Propaganda Warriors: The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).

historical discourse from the middle ages through the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> More recently, his work *Die Deutschen und der Osten: Feindbild und Traumland* (2007) is an attempt to deconstruct the stereotypes surrounding the German perceptions of the East.<sup>58</sup> Wippermann emphasizes nineteenth century German Orientalism as laying the foundations for Nazi imperialism and wartime cruelties against Russia during the Second World War.

Among the best English language works on the subject of German perceptions of the East are two works by Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius: *War Land on the Eastern Front* (2000) and the previously discussed *German Myth of the East: 1800 to Present* (2009).<sup>59</sup> Liulevicius traces nineteenth and twentieth century Germany's intellectual, political, and ideological relationship with Eastern Europe. This relationship, often strained by political differences and warfare, influenced the way Germans viewed themselves and how in turn they viewed the East, thus creating a transformative identity experience which shaped Germany's national destiny. Germans perceived the East in different ways during various periods, but the German desire for expansion coupled with beliefs of racial and cultural superiority contributed to terrible atrocities committed during the World Wars.

---

<sup>57</sup> Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der "deutsche Drang nach Osten": Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981).

<sup>58</sup> Wolfgang Wippermann, *Die Deutschen und der Osten: Feindbild und Traumland*, (Darmstadt: Primus, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).



Shelly Baranowski's book *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (2011) traces the development of the Nazi *Lebensraum* ambitions, emphasizing such themes as nineteenth century imperialism, World War I, and radical military culture.<sup>60</sup> Baranowski attempts to avoid the *Sonderweg* interpretation of German history, which argued that Germany followed a special path in its historical development. Baranowski states that the German military's policy of absolute destruction, dating back to the nineteenth century, anticipated the army's extreme violence during World War II. Baranowski finds many interesting correlations between Hitler's foreign policy and those of the Second Reich, including plans for Germanizing the East as part of an imperialist colonial endeavor.

The historiography of Nazi propaganda and German perceptions of the East become intertwined in the above mentioned works and in others such as Michael Burleigh's *Germany Turns Eastward: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*.<sup>61</sup> Burleigh details the creation of an academic discipline in the Nazi period called "Eastern Research," which essentially replaced Orientalism as the new topic regarding the East. As noted by Burleigh, the Nazi regime co-opted academia with its pseudo-scientific and racist ideology, leading to possibilities for career advancement for those scholars willing to pursue and support Nazi visions of the East. The connections between such academic rhetoric and Nazi atrocities cannot be underestimated, as noted in Gretchen Engle Schaft's *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich* (2004) which

---

<sup>60</sup> Shelly Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

discusses the process by which racial theory became reality during the war.<sup>62</sup> The Nazi use of slave labor and mass murder in the East are but a few examples of ideology transforming into action, and historians continue to research new materials from the former Soviet Union regarding Nazi ideological discourse and the war in the East.

While many histories of World War II and the Third Reich have been written since the conflict ended, the amount of research conducted about rank and file soldiers in the German Army is far less numerous than those using government documents or accounts by senior officers. Since significant research did not truly begin to be conducted until the last thirty years or so on the subject, one has to ask the reasons why wartime letters and diaries are not utilized to a greater extent. Wartime letters are a huge body of potential research material, with estimates ranging from 40-50 billion letters being sent to and from the front during 1939-1945. As noted by Stephen Fritz, this flood of letters meant that “many passed through censorship unopened, and the longer the war continued, the less seriously many *Landsers* regarded the censor.”<sup>63</sup> The simplest argument for the use of soldiers’ writings as legitimate bodies of historical research stems from the micro-historical school of *Alltagsgeschichte* which emerged as a reaction to the Bielefeld School of German historians in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Gretchen Engle Schaft, *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> While the wider historical school focusing on “history from below” dates back to the 1920s and the *Annales* School, the evolution of social history in Germany from the 1950s onward in West Germany tended to still provide a “top down” approach, as evidenced in the works of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka. The work of Richard Evans, David Blackbourn, Geoff Eley, and Alf Lüdtke all contributed to the establishment of the “history of everyday life” as a credible field in German historical studies.

Thus, it is no coincidence that *Feldpostbriefe* as the subject of in depth methodological research did not begin until the 1980s, specifically with the publication of Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Sterz's *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges*. Buchbender and Sterz gathered over 50,000 *Feldpostbriefe* for their study, and after careful research chose 327 letters to include in their book in order to describe various events and subjects of the war. Among the topics they examined are the Polish and French campaigns, the war on the Eastern Front, the home front, the air war, the 20 July 1944 plot, and the persecution of the Jews. The authors argue that even though over forty billion letters were sent between the front and home during the Second World War, "letters" continued to be the "stepchild of contemporary history."<sup>65</sup> Buchbender and Sterz helped to reshape the historiography with their work, paving the way for historians to examine soldiers' writings from a variety of new perspectives.<sup>66</sup>

Works such as Omer Bartov's *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare* (1985) paved the way for historians to study letters and diaries in order to examine the impact of ideology and brutalization during the Second World War. In 1991, Omer Bartov published his follow up to *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945* (1986) with his very popular *Hitler's Army* (1991), which utilizes soldiers' letters and diaries to show the parallels between soldiers' mentality and Nazi ideology.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, Reinhold Sterz, eds., *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges. Deutsche Feldpostbriefe 1939-1945*, (München: Beck, 1982), 9.

<sup>66</sup>A number of historians in the 1980s continued to study letters from the Second World War. For example, the work of Peter Knoch on the reconstruction of the *Kriegsalltag* is best exemplified in his book *Kriegsalltag. Die Rekonstruktion des Kriegsalltags als Aufgabe der historischen Forschung und der Friedenserziehung*, (Stuttgart: Metzler, Stuttgart 1989). An equally important work was a doctoral dissertation produced by one of the leading scholars on this subject area, Jens Ebert. For more information, see Jens Ebert *Zwischen Mythos und Wirklichkeit. Die Schlacht von Stalingrad in deutschsprachigen authentischen und literarischen Texten*, (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 1989).

Bartov argued in *Hitler's Army* how letters revealed the impact of propaganda on the troops at the front, stating: "...soldiers letters showed that they both received and read propaganda material amply supplied to them, for their interpretations of the war situation were undeniably similar to the regime's official line."<sup>67</sup> In regards to the value of letter collections and personal writings as historical sources, Bartov noted that: "one does gain considerable insight particularly into the younger combat soldiers' perception of reality and ideological make-up, as well as into the vocabulary and imagery with which they expressed themselves and articulated their thoughts."<sup>68</sup>

The 1990s were a decade filled with major contributions towards the study of German *Feldpostbriefe*. Jens Ebert published his doctoral dissertation in 1992 as *Stalingrad: eine deutsche Legende*, a book which scientifically examines letters from, propaganda about, and perceptions of the battle of Stalingrad.<sup>69</sup> Another very important study of Wehrmacht *Feldpostbriefe* was also published in 1992 by Klara Löffler titled *Aufgehoben: Soldatenbriefe aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Löffler's emphasis on the "individual experience of history" necessitated a study of wartime letters to produce a form of *Alltagsgeschichte*.<sup>70</sup> As noted by Löffler, letter and diaries provide a

---

<sup>67</sup> Bartov, *Hitlers Army*, 150.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>69</sup> Jens Ebert, *Stalingrad, eine deutsche Legende: Zeugnisse einer verdrängten Niederlage*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992); Ebert has published numerous other works utilizing letters, including *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad: November 1942 bis Januar 1943*, (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2003), and *Von Augusterlebnis zur Novemberrevolution: Briefe aus dem Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> Klara Löffler, *Aufgehoben: Soldatenbriefe aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Eine Studie zur subjektiven Wirklichkeit des Krieges*, (Bamberg: Regensburger Verein für Volkskunde, 1992), 13.

“...relatively unfiltered view of the consciousness of the author in a particular historical moment.”<sup>71</sup>

Then in 1993, writer Walter Kempowski published the first volume of his collection and collage of documents by people during World War II. The collection, titled *Das Echolot*, consists of thousands of personal documents and letters, including numerous soldiers’ letters and diary entries. The multi-volume series covers the period from Operation Barbarossa in 1941 through the end of the Second World War in May 1945.<sup>72</sup> Another important work utilizing letters and diaries was published by Stephen Fritz titled *Frontsoldaten* (1995), which tells the story of the Second World War from the perspective of the “average” German soldier. Fritz focuses on the *Alltagsgeschichte* of the common *Landser*, providing a history of German soldiers’ lives at the front, combat situations, and the infantryman’s mindset. Fritz argues that diaries and letters can aid in “...the quest to see the *Landser* as subject as well as object. Just as important, they provide valuable insight into what remains one of the puzzling ironies of the war why the average *Landser* fought so furiously in defense of such a seemingly deplorable regime.”<sup>73</sup>

The specialized focus on German enlisted soldiers’ perceptions of the East is also an area of more recent and continuing scholarship. James Lucas’ *War on the Eastern*

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot: ein kollektives Tagebuch, Januar und Februar 1943, Bänden I-IV* (Munich: A. Knaus, 1993); Kempowski, *Das Echolot: fuga furiosa: ein kollektives Tagebuch, Winter 1945, Bänden I-IV*, (Munich: A. Knaus, 1999); Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Barbarossa '41: ein kollektives Tagebuch*, (Munich: Knaus, 2002); Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Abgesang '45: ein kollektives Tagebuch*, (Munich: A. Knaus, 2005).

<sup>73</sup> Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 9.

*Front-1941-1945* (1980), assesses German perceptions about the Soviets. Providing accounts by soldiers and officers alike, Lucas tries to encapsulate German views of the Red Army and the Soviet Union itself. Chapter four of the work, entitled “The foreignness of it all,” endeavors to explain the mindset of the German soldier and their ideas about Soviets in less than ten pages. According to his source information, the Germans regarded Russian soldiers as fanatical rugged brutes who possessed an incredible ability to endure the worst of conditions. However, Lucas does not provide more than two German soldier’s accounts. One of these accounts was written by a Wehrmacht soldier and the other by a SS officer, each of which describes the essence of German perceptions of the Red Army.<sup>74</sup> He presents significantly more information about Soviet partisans, providing a detailed view of guerilla warfare in the East. Lucas explains how the main accomplishment of partisan forces was more psychological than tactical because the Germans greatly feared *francs-tireurs* who may have attacked at any moment.<sup>75</sup> *War on the Eastern Front* is effective through Lucas’s combination of quotations and his own summarizations in order to depict various aspects of the struggle. Lucas focused more on military matters than on providing a picture of the German beliefs and biases about the Soviet Union.<sup>76</sup>

Omer Bartov presents more significant findings, in *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945*, regarding the importance of ideological indoctrination of the troops and the barbarization of warfare. Bartov emphasizes that the education of the new officer corps

---

<sup>74</sup> James Lucas, *War on the Eastern Front, 1941-1945: The German Soldier in Russia*. (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 51-54.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 60-69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 28-36.

by the Nazis played a crucial role in the conduct of the troops in the eastern conflict.<sup>77</sup> The troops were educated in Nazi doctrine through film, radio, written propaganda and the spoken word.<sup>78</sup> Bartov cites a number of contributing factors for the “efficacy of indoctrination,” including the combination of military and racial theory and phraseology, prevalent anti-Semitism in Germany, the appeal of the Nazis in the prewar years, and the influx of propaganda.<sup>79</sup> When the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the infusion of Nazi ideology, extreme military ideology, and racial prejudices towards the Slavs and Jews, all contributed to barbarism in warfare. The issuance of the “criminal orders” intensified and justified the brutal policies enacted by the army and SS in the east. A concurrent theme in both of his works is the emphasis on the permeation of ideology into the German army, and its major impact on the conduct of soldiers fighting against the Soviets. The terrible combat in the East resulted in a “brutalization of the soldier,” acting as a dehumanization process making him much more willing to commit atrocities.<sup>80</sup>

Bartov also documents in *Hitler's Army* how ideological indoctrination played a crucial role in this barbarizing process, enabling the Nazi leadership to legitimize all military endeavors in the name of state security and forging a greater nation. In essence, the German army in the East tended to act in accordance with the policies and ideology

---

<sup>77</sup> Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (NY: Palgrave, 2001), 66-7; Note that the first edition was published in 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 69-73.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 88-91.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 144-145.

of Hitler's regime.<sup>81</sup> Bartov emphasizes that the intensity of indoctrination during the Russian campaign coupled with prejudices against "Slavs and Mongols, Gypsies and Jews, and of course Bolsheviks," becomes evident in letters from the Eastern Front with "...references and racist sentiments" in numerous cases.<sup>82</sup> Bartov's interpretations about the Nazi-Soviet struggle provided a detailed understanding about the German outlook on Russians and helped to explain why barbarism became normality for Wehrmacht soldiers.

Stephen Fritz also attempts to offer a view from below of the German *Landser* in the historical narrative *Frontsoldaten*. Fritz utilizes a vast array of soldiers' writings in order to relate the story of the war from the regular German soldiers' perspective. Fritz attempts to explain the motivations of the German soldier during the war in considerable detail by quoting various letters, diaries, and memoirs; emphasizing the importance of ideology on the common *Landser's* worldview.<sup>83</sup> According to Fritz, German soldiers saw themselves as decent human beings, but for them the "Nazi vision of the racially determined *Volksgemeinschaft* achieved a certain reality on the Eastern Front as ideology and experience became mutually reinforcing."<sup>84</sup> Fritz also notes that, "In soldiers' letters and diaries one finds hardly any real disagreement with the Nazi view of the enemy as *Untermenschen* who deserved their harsh fate, no protest at the special treatment meted out to the Jews."<sup>85</sup> *Frontsoldaten* represents one of the best scholarly

---

<sup>81</sup> Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 152.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>83</sup> See chapter eight in particular "Trying to Change the World" in Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 187-218.

<sup>84</sup> Fritz, 238.



works to date concerning the mentality of German soldiers on the Eastern Front, one that attempts to give a thorough explanation of German soldiers' beliefs and ideology.

Martin Humburg's *Das Gesicht des Krieges* (1998) is a comprehensive social-psychological study of German *Feldpostbriefe* written by soldiers on the Eastern Front. Humburg poses a range of inquiries in his study, including how letters are mediums which help historians understand the "burden of war" and also serve as individual responses to questions of "self-worth."<sup>86</sup> Humburg shows how letters written from the East reveal themes including the "deterioration of hopes," and *Kriegsalltag*, soldiers' environment and conditions.<sup>87</sup> In addition, Humburg examines how the letters display the "motives of the fighters" by looking at evidence of "comradeship" between soldiers versus "hostility" towards their enemies.<sup>88</sup> Humburg concludes that letters present a "construction of reality" or rather a "subjective report" of events as they witnessed them.<sup>89</sup>

Wolfram Wette's *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (2006) examines the German army's unique role in Nazi Germany as an aggressive instrument in an ideological race war.<sup>90</sup> Wette explores the nature of German perceptions of the Soviet

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>86</sup> Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion, 1941-1944*, (Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 59, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 118, 129, 147-8.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>90</sup> Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Union, emphasizing the impact of socio-cultural biases dating back to the 1917 Revolution as well as the pervasiveness of Nazi anti-Communist propaganda. He clearly defined the National Socialist image of Russia and its influences on the German army. The Nazi outlook on the Soviet Union was anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic in nature, and it “gathered together all the native clichés about Russia and the Soviet Union current in Germany at the time and assembled them into a single portrait of the enemy.”<sup>91</sup> Wette also describes the effects of Nazi propaganda on the enlisted men. He argued that war propaganda was aimed at reducing a soldier’s inhibitions about committing atrocities. In addition, he maintained that the barbarous nature of the conflict only reinforced the extremist ideology of the Nazis amongst the troops.<sup>92</sup> His interpretation of the Eastern Front conflict offered a comprehensive combination of primary source materials to describe the ideology and mindset of the *Wehrmacht*.

Thomas Kühne’s *Belonging and Genocide: 1918-1945* (2010) indicts the Wehrmacht for its complicity in the Holocaust and atrocities during World War II. Kühne shows how the Nazi strategy of *Gemeinschaft* and *Kameradschaft* made troops either indifferent to or even supportive of crimes against humanity and genocidal warfare. In particular, his fourth chapter “Spreading Complicity” utilizes letter and diaries to show how ideas of community and comradeship helped blur the lines between right and wrong during the war. Kühne argues that most soldiers knew the actions their nation committed were morally unacceptable, and this complicity: “engendered a fear of

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 169-175.

revenge from the Jews, Russians, or other enemies.”<sup>93</sup> Yet they either took part in genocide or stood by and did nothing to stop it because of their military bonds and group think mentality.

In September 2010, the *Museum für Kommunikation* Berlin held the conference “Schreiben im Krieg – Schreiben vom Krieg: Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege.”<sup>94</sup> The Conference was the first international conference held exclusively to studying personal war correspondence, and brought together over 100 scholars from around the world. Jens Ebert chaired the conference proceedings, and Ortwin Buchbender provided the keynote address for the event. Among the topics discussed at the conference included “War Worldviews” and “European War Experiences.” Particularly of note was Michaela Kipp’s analysis of 7,000 Wehrmacht soldier’s letters from the Eastern Front, later published in 2014 as *Grossreinemachen im Osten: Fremdbilder in deutschen Feldpostbriefen im Zweiten Weltkrieg*.<sup>95</sup>

The plurality of research conducted on the war in the East has contributed much to our understanding of the Wehrmacht identity and soldiers’ biased outlooks on the Soviet Russia. This project will further delve into the subject by posing important questions regarding German soldiers’ worldview and identity, transformations of self-image, images of the ‘Other’, and dehumanization through combat, atrocities, and

---

<sup>93</sup> Kühne, 7.

<sup>94</sup> For a review of the conference proceedings, see Sebastian Ziegler, “Schreiben im Krieg – Schreiben vom Krieg – Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege,” Review of “Schreiben im Krieg – Schreiben vom Krieg,” (Berlin: Museum für Kommunikation Berlin, 13.09-2010-15.09.2010), *H-Soz-u-Kult* (November 2010), 1-6. For the published version of the conference proceedings, see Veit Didczuneit, Jens Ebert, and Thomas Jander, eds., *Schreiben im Krieg, Schreiben vom Krieg: Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> Michaela Kipp, “*Grossreinemachen im Osten*”: *Feindbilder in deutschen Feldpostbriefen im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2014).

genocide. By examining propaganda materials as sources of information for troop consumption and soldier's opinions as evidenced in writing from 1941-1945, parallels can be drawn between the ideology of the Nazi regime and its impact on the *Wehrmacht*. However, I have found that soldiers had much to discover on their own about the Soviet Union, leading to major changes in their belief systems and categorizations. Hatred of the Bolsheviks was a commonplace theme in soldiers' writings, but dissent and disillusionment with the war also existed, thus challenging the National Socialist thought paradigm and leading to growing dissatisfaction with the regime by 1944-1945.

## Chapter Two

### ***Das Feindbild: Nazi Domestic Propaganda and Representations of the Soviet Union, 1941-1945***

They were preparing to plunge into the heart of Europe. Human imagination is insufficient to picture what would have happened if their animal hordes had flooded into Germany and the West. The Führer's order to the army on the night of 22 June was an act of historic magnitude. It will probably prove to be the critical decision of the war. The soldiers obeying his order are the saviors of European culture and civilization, saving it from a threat from the political underworld. Germany's sons once again are defending not only their own land, but also the whole civilized world. Schooled firmly in the teaching of National Socialism, they storm eastward, tearing the veil of history's greatest deception, and giving their own people and the world the opportunity to see what is, and what will come. They hold in their hands a torch that will keep the light of humanity from going out.<sup>1</sup>

Adolf Hitler's destructive *Weltanschauungskrieg* (war of ideologies) against the Soviet Union employed a massive propaganda campaign influencing German perceptions of Russia and justifying the military campaign as necessary to protect the Reich and ensure victory. The Nazi ideological paradigm during the Second World War posited German soldiers as invincible Aryan warriors of the civilized West and their

---

<sup>1</sup> Josef Goebbels, "Die Schleier fällt," ("The Veil Falls"), *Volkischer Beobachter: Kampfblatt der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung Großdeutschlands*, Edited by Alfred Rosenberg, (Berlin: NSDAP, July 7, 1941), 1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are by Justin Pfeifer.

Soviet counterparts as bloodthirsty Oriental Judeo-Bolshevik *Untermenschen*.

Propaganda declared the innocence of the German nation throughout the conflict, while blaming the war upon international Jewish conspiracies and aggression from foreign powers. These imagined stereotypes reflect a mythological world created by the Nazis used to justify their war of conquest in the East, which required an “othering” process to dehumanize their enemy. The goal of this chapter is to analyze depictions of the Soviet Union through various stages of the Second World War in domestic Nazi propaganda sources.

While assessing Nazi media is complex due to the diversity of the types of sources and the scope of the individualized content, there are a number of important themes throughout the war period that are consistent and enduring. By determining the types of myths and stereotypes utilized by the Nazis to provide an overall image of the Soviet Union as a subhuman state ruled by criminals, it is possible to reveal how Nazi propaganda maintained a static consistency in its hate filled message despite the changing conditions at the front. This chapter examines a variety of print materials, including booklets, newspapers, and pamphlets.

By examining these materials, certain thematic categories can be deduced from Nazi ideology and its worldview by means of comparison. The dissemination of these categorical themes throughout war was an attempt not only to legitimize Nazi imperialism in the East, but also to delegitimize the Communist government, in order to shape the hearts and minds of the German people towards believing the war in the East was both necessary and just. Using what I call “categories of perception,” the Nazis shaped their conspiratorial racist anti-Bolshevik rants into clearly developed tropes

throughout World War II. These thematic topics include: alliance between Plutocratic West and Soviet Russia, anti-Semitism and Jewish-Bolshevism, “*Europas Freiheitskrieg*” (Europe’s War of Liberation) and European unity, “*Sowjetmenschen*” (Soviet People) and Communist brutality.<sup>2</sup> While these are not intended to be representative of all Nazi propaganda and excludes discussion of other themes (anti-Americanism, etc.), these are among the topics which receive the most significant attention in Nazi propaganda from Barbarossa onwards, and it is through these thematic categorizations that representations of the Soviet Union through the Nazi worldview can be ascertained.

Propaganda was the mainstay weapon of the Nazi regime from its triumphant inception in 1933 to its final destruction in the ruins of a nation in May 1945. The dissemination of ideology through propaganda sources was utilized in both war and peacetime as a means to constantly sway public opinion while also attempting to reshape the national psyche towards Party doctrine. While peacetime propaganda covered a range of topics on the domestic and foreign policy levels ranging from racial ideology to anti-Versailles rhetoric, one topic that did remain the same was anti-Bolshevism. As noted by Lorna Waddington in her book *Hitler’s Crusade* (2007), antisemitism and anti-Bolshevism were the driving force behind the Nazi movement, which is evident through Hitler’s speeches, Nazi newspapers, and especially Nazi foreign policy.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Among these themes, it is the contention here that the Nazis established clear categorizations regarding the Soviet Union and its people. These categories, while addressed in a thematic approach through a discussion of such things as antisemitism and anti-Communism, will be further examined in the later chapters regarding soldiers’ perceptions of the Soviet Union.

<sup>3</sup> Lorna Waddington, *Hitler’s Crusade: Bolshevism and the Myth of the International Jewish Conspiracy*, (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 1-11.

When Germany renounced its Non-Aggression Pact and attacked Russia in June 1941, the Nazis went to great lengths to sell the war to the German people. While Hitler was master of Europe and had defeated all of his continental enemies (save Britain), his gaze had always been set upon *Lebensraum* in the East.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet Union was the perceived thorn in Hitler's side, an ideological and military enemy which needed to be exterminated before it could mobilize against the Reich. While Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had concluded the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, Hitler wanted more than anything to destroy that treaty and finish the crusade he had long prophesized to the world in the early 1920s. The Soviet Union must be destroyed for there to be peace in the world and, more importantly, to create a massive Eurasian empire that would last for a thousand years.<sup>5</sup>

While Hitler's *Ostpolitik* was martially grandiose and callously inhumane, Nazi propaganda had to present the war and the Soviet enemy in the most one-dimensional and convincing ways possible. Among the chief tenants of the Nazi Party's ideology were anti-Communism and antisemitism, and combining these two enemies into a singular "Jewish-Bolshevik" menace was a key part of the simplistic aims of Nazi propaganda and racial ideology.<sup>6</sup> The Goebbels propaganda apparatus controlled all of mass media in Germany, and the business of mass marketing a war for public consumption was already two years in the making by June 1941. For example, during

---

<sup>4</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174.

<sup>5</sup> Rolf Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Hitler's War in the East, 1941-1945: A Critical Assessment*, (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997), 209.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 100.



the campaigns against Poland and France, propaganda ranging from the Nazi press to the weekly newsreels, *Deutsche Wochenschauen* flooded Germany with conspiracy theories and anti-plutocratic West rhetoric, characteristic of the Nazi propaganda message throughout the war. By the time of Barbarossa, the methods of modern propaganda were still being perfected, but the tools were in place to implement one of the most effective misinformation campaigns of the twentieth century.

The means which the Nazis had to disseminate their war aims and ideological content to the German public were many. Mass amounts of pamphlets, leaflets, newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, weekly newsreels, documentary and feature films, artwork, public speeches, and museum displays were among the many methods at the government's disposal.<sup>7</sup> There are literally thousands upon thousands of such materials produced by the Nazis during the war period alone, making the task of the historian especially difficult to survey all the available literature and media forms. In addition, because of coordination between the military and regime, this meant the military utilized the regime's methods and materials as well as their own, but this will be discussed in the second portion of the chapter. Therefore, due to the incredible mass of materials available, the attempt in this chapter will only be to provide an illustrative survey of the types of media sources and their presentations of the Soviet Union during the Second World War.

### *2.1 Home Front Propaganda: Selling and Sustaining War through Ideology*

---

<sup>7</sup> For a very recent and excellent overview of the types of propaganda used by the regime, see Susan D. Bachrach, Dr. Edward Phillips, & Steven Luckert's *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*, which was published in conjunction with an exhibit displayed at the USHMM from 2009-2011.

Given the broad range of propaganda sources created throughout the Second World War, it is necessary to limit the scope of this investigation of domestic materials to Nazi newspapers, books and pamphlets, and select films and weekly newsreels. While there are limitations to the sources consulted in breadth and scope, this is not meant to be a definitive study of all types of propaganda materials. The major group of sources to be used for the discussion of domestic propaganda are Nazi newspapers. The Nazis mass produced many newspapers and magazines for public consumption, such as the tabloid style *Der Stürmer* (*The Attacker*) and the Berlin based paper *Das Reich*. The official daily newspaper of the National Socialist party, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, had the highest readership and circulation numbers within the party press.<sup>8</sup> The *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB), originated during the early years of the Nazi Movement in the 1920s as the official paper of the Party.<sup>9</sup> The lead editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter* was Dr. Alfred Rosenberg. Rosenberg, an influential “intellectual” within the Nazi Party, helped craft Nazi foreign policy goals with his ideas of world conquest, Lebensraum, anti-Semitism, and anti-Slavism.<sup>10</sup> His book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, while largely an unreadable text riddled with racist theoretical drivel, attacks Judeo-Christianity and posits the Nordic Aryans of Europe as a superior people in contrast to Semitic and Slavic peoples. Since Dr. Josef Goebbels, Head of the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, controlled all media in the Nazi state, he

---

<sup>8</sup> David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: The Most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History*, (New York: Putnam, 1978), 170.

<sup>10</sup> Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, German Historical Institute, (Washington, D.C.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 490-1

frequently used the *Völkischer Beobachter* to shape public opinion about the war, creating damning perceptions of the Reich's enemies.<sup>11</sup> Media was an important tool to win public support for the party line doctrine, and could be used to play upon public fears and prejudices to great effect.<sup>12</sup>

*Der Stürmer*, often described as pornographic in its racist and perverse content and pictures, was the most extreme of the mainstream Nazi publications. Julius Streicher, the paper's creator, was vehemently anti-Semitic and frequently authorized articles during the Second World War that demanded the destruction of the Jewish race. At the bottom of every title page appeared the statement "The Jews are our misfortune," a phrase which originated from nineteenth century German intellectual Heinrich von Treitschke.<sup>13</sup> During the 1930s, *Der Stürmer* was put on display at bus stops, newsstands, and market places so casual bystanders could hardly avoid the tabloid's message. The official circulation numbers ranged around 25,000 in 1933, but rose to over 700,000 by the late 1930s. Streicher's publication was overtly racist and vented the fanatic's rage, frequently using terminology like "extermination," "purging" and "elimination" to fuel the appetites of anti-Semites even before the war began.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Herzstein, 384; Note that Josef Goebbels also had his own newspaper called *Der Angriff*, but it is not utilized in this study due to its relatively low circulation numbers, as it was only a Berlin based paper. The newspaper had its peak years during the *Kampfzeit* and 1930s when Goebbels was the editor. However, during the Second World War Robert Lay took control of the paper, making it a centerpiece on issues related to the German Labor Front. Goebbels shifted his focus to the paper *Das Reich*, writing lead articles and achieving circulation numbers as high as 1.5 million per week in 1943. (Herzstein, 47, 168, 176).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>13</sup> H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 875.

<sup>14</sup> Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 228-230.

*Das Reich* was a weekly newspaper founded by Joseph Goebbels in May 1940.<sup>15</sup> Though Goebbels is attributed as the creator of this paper, it was largely the work of three men: journalist Rudolf Sparing, lawyer and media mogul Rolf Reinhardt, and SS-*Obergruppenführer* Max Amann.<sup>16</sup> There is no coincidence in the fact that *Das Reich* was founded within the first year of the outbreak of World War II. German public attention was consumed by current events, with total daily newspaper circulation around 26.5 million, and the circulation of weeklies and illustrated papers at 20.8 million.<sup>17</sup> *Das Reich* was launched as a psychological warfare weapon, utilizing top journalists such as Oskar Loerke, Luis Rinser, Gertrud von Lefort, and Albrecht Goes. In addition, Goebbels frequently contributed an editorial article for the newspaper, increasing the public's attention as well as the political weight of the work.<sup>18</sup> Topically, the paper was a successful example of Nazi publication strategy, and by 1943 *Das Reich* reached a printing of 1.5 million.<sup>19</sup>

While newspapers and the other media sources do not represent an exhaustive study of Third Reich propaganda, the focus here is on the ideological content of the materials during the war in the East, with a specific emphasis on key categorizations of the enemy and major themes which the Nazis created and emphasized throughout the duration of the war. These major plot points, always crucial for showmen like Hitler and

---

<sup>15</sup> Welch, 126.

<sup>16</sup> Oron Hale, *The Captive Press in the Third Reich*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), 278.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Grünberger, *The Twelve Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany, 1933-1945*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 400.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 400.

<sup>19</sup> Hale, 278.

Goebbels, were to be the script upon which a war of annihilation could be planned and implemented with remarkable efficiency and cruelty. Using a thematic approach, it is important to note that while the conditions in the war were constantly changing at the front and the regime was acutely aware of the situation, the propaganda message often remained the same throughout the war. During the Barbarossa campaign the groundwork was laid regarding the military, political, economic, and socio-cultural reasons for the war, and despite the changes at the front, these arguments were never redacted or significantly changed. The major shift only occurred following the defeat at Stalingrad, and even with this “setback,” the regime simply amped up the levels of racist dogma, extremist ideology, and forlorn hopes in a final victory for a just cause predicated upon a mass of lies and deceit.

Operation Barbarossa, the planned invasion of the Soviet Union, began on the early morning of June 22, 1941. Each of the aforementioned papers provide unique insights on the war against Soviet Russia. During the campaign, a number of important themes emerge within all of the papers, reflecting how the coordination of all Nazi publications created uniform messages directed towards the German people at this crucial period in European history. The dissemination of certain ideologically formulated themes throughout the war reveals not only the political and cultural aspects of propaganda, but also the strong levels of dehumanization of the enemy through anti-Semitic and “othering” rhetoric. The propaganda attacked the Communist government, and shaped the minds of the German people regarding the horrors of the Soviet Union.

## 2.2 *The Alliance between Plutocratic West and Soviet Russia*

In order to dispel beliefs that the invasion of the Soviet Union was an act of German aggression, Nazi propaganda embarked upon a campaign to describe a massive conspiracy between the East and the West against Germany. This conspiracy, concocted in detail by Nazi propagandists, imagined a year's long alliance between the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States in a quest for world domination and the destruction of Germany. While this might seem far-fetched and convoluted with the benefit of hindsight, the belief in a far-reaching external threat was not entirely a myth based upon the actions of the Soviet Union from 1939-1941. For the Nazis to justify an imperialistic war they needed a motive: the Bolshevik conspiracy coupled with both real and imagined evidence was exactly the kind of theme the Nazis hoped to capitalize on.

One of the first newspaper articles regarding the war in the East appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, in an editorial by VB editor Alfred Rosenberg. The VB editorial by Rosenberg, "The Hour of the East," posits a conspiracy between the Western Powers and the Soviets to destroy Germany. Rosenberg states that National Socialism and Fascism were the only forces standing in the way of Communist domination of Europe.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the theme of a Soviet conspiracy emerges to cover up the reasons for another of Hitler's broken treaties. In another editorial in the VB, Josef Goebbels describes "The Old Front," focusing on the anti-Nazi alliance of Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Goebbels states that the Nazis discovered "a concubinage that prostitutes themselves between plutocracy and Bolshevism." The "Moscow-London

---

<sup>20</sup> "Die Stunde des Ostens" (The Hour of the East), *VB*, June 24, 1941, 1.

conspiracy against the Reich” was also presented by Goebbels as long-term cooperation between the Soviets and Britons.<sup>21</sup>

Establishing the link between the Americans, British, and Soviets reinforced the myth of a Jewish global conspiracy to wipe out the National Socialist state. Goebbels argued in his editorial “The Old Front” that there was nothing new about the union of western Plutocracy and Bolshevism, which confirmed his long time suspicions. According to Goebbels, the German effort with the Nazi-Soviet Pact wanted to “cause a bearable relationship between the Reich and Soviet Russia.” However, the Soviets had no intention of “keeping the nonaggression treaty entered with the Reich.” Goebbels argued that the Soviet goal was to wear the Germans down, so Europe, “would be easy prey for their world revolutionary goals...a disfigured Europe...would be easier for Bolshevism than when intact.”<sup>22</sup> Political conspiracy and paranoia reinforced the myth of a just war in the east, and ideological messages throughout June-July 1941 about the Soviets added to the validation of their cause.

The newspaper *Das Reich* explained how the OKW uncovered a secret alliance between the Soviet Union and England, which began to “undertake the largest military deployment in history against Germany.”<sup>23</sup> In the VB, OKW “facts” were used to show how the Soviet military amassed a huge force of at least 158 divisions on the borders with the Reich.<sup>24</sup> This treachery was part of Churchill’s and Stalin’s greater plans to

---

<sup>21</sup> Josef Goebbels, “Die alte Front” (“The Old Front”), VB, June 25, 1941, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “Englands Letzter Versuch” (England’s Last Try), *Das Reich: Deutsche Wochenzeitung*, (Berlin: NSDAP, June 29, 1941), 1.

destroy Germany, and evidence suggested that “Churchill wanted to speed up the schedule of open military cooperation with the Russians.” As a result, Germany was forced to attack the Soviet Union in order to save Europe from destruction.<sup>25</sup> In an article of *Der Stürmer* from July 1941, the invasion of the Soviet Union was described as a pre-emptive strike against a Jewish “stab in the back” and sold to the public as a defensive battle aimed at stopping “the plans of world-Jewry.”<sup>26</sup>

Justifying the war to the German people was a main aspect of articles in the VB during the initial days of the war. In one article, “The Führer to the German People and the Soldiers of the Eastern Front,” Hitler declares how a “conspiracy between Jews and Democrats, Bolsheviks and Reactionaries” sought to destroy the Reich and take over Europe.<sup>27</sup> As the main representative of “European Culture and Civilization”, Hitler vowed to stand alone against Soviet Russia. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact failed because the “Jewish rulers of Bolshevism in Moscow” oppressed Finland, sought to take over the Balkans, and amassed troops on the Reich’s eastern border.<sup>28</sup> The Nazi myth of a preventative war to combat Soviet expansionism justified the war in the east.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> “So bereitete die Sowjetunion den Aufmarsch gegen das Reich vor,” (“The Soviet Union prepared deployment against the Reich”), *VB*, June 25, 1941, 1.

<sup>25</sup> “Langes Zusammenspiel London-Moskau erwiesen: Schon im Oktober 1939 betrachtete Churchill den Kreml als Bundesgenossen,” (“Long Cooperation London-Moscow proven: Already in October 1939 Churchill considered the Kremlin an Ally”), *VB*, June 25, 1941, 1

<sup>26</sup> “Kampf im Osten.” *Der Stürmer: Deutsches Wochenblatt zum kampfe um die Wahrheit*. Edited by Julius Streicher, (Nuremberg: NSDAP, July 10, 1941), 1.

<sup>27</sup> “Der Führer an das deutsche Volk und die Soldaten der Ostfront.” (“The Führer to the German People and the Soldiers of the Eastern Front.”), *VB*, June 23, 1941, 3.

<sup>28</sup> “Bolschewistischer Aufmarsch an der deutschen Ostgrenze.” (“Bolshevik Advance on the German east border.”) *VB*, June 23, 1941, 3.

<sup>29</sup> The issue of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was downplayed in the propaganda, with an emphasis instead on the German invasion being an act of self-defense. Soviet Russia is depicted as an



Other newspaper articles also reaffirmed the theme of a conspiracy against the Reich. One headline in the VB read, “Churchill admits to the Conspiracy with Stalin: England’s collaboration with the Kremlin confirmed, Soviet Union as Vanguard of the Empire.”<sup>30</sup> Another article, “Throughout Europe Moscow works against the Reich,” described how German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and the Foreign Office discovered documents that proved how the Soviets intended to betray the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact.<sup>31</sup> The VB intended to place the burden of guilt on the Soviets, which supposedly planned to destroy the Reich. Another article, “The Soviet Union Prepared Deployment against the Reich” described with statistical data how the Red Army amassed hundreds of military divisions on the German eastern border.<sup>32</sup> If the Soviets planned the complete destruction of the Reich, then any action deemed necessary to achieve victory would be acceptable for the Germans.

The Nazis also linked the United States to the Soviet Union in the article, “USA. Plutocracy and Bolshevism Arm in Arm. Sumner Welles Welcomes Moscow as an Ally.” The article maintains that the Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles supported the Soviets in the war against Germany, citing U.S. aid to Great Britain as a

---

aggressive imperialist power not unlike England, and the Pact of 1939 was Hitler’s attempt to stop the spread of Bolshevism by peaceful diplomatic means.

<sup>30</sup> “Churchill gibt das Komplott mit Stalin zu: Englands Zusammenarbeit mit dem Kreml bestätigt; Sowjetunion Vorfeld des Empire.“ (“Churchill admits to the conspiracy with Stalin: England’s collaboration with the Kremlin confirmed, Soviet Union as vanguard of the Empire.”) *VB*, June 24, 1941, 1.

<sup>31</sup> “In ganz Europa wühlte Moskau gegen das Reich” (“Throughout Europe Moscow works against the Reich.”) *VB*, June 24, 1941, 8.

<sup>32</sup> “So bereitete die Sowjetunion den Aufmarsch gegen das Reich vor“ (“The Soviet Union prepared deployment against the Reich.”) *VB*, June 25, 1941, 1.

confirmation of U.S. intentions.<sup>33</sup> The article “Roosevelt Gives His Blessing to the Marriage between Moscow and London” also seeks to link the United States to the Soviets via Britain.<sup>34</sup> However, while the U.S. eventually provided Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union, official declaration of war between the U.S. and Germany did not occur until December 1941.

The theme of a conspiracy between the plutocracy and bolshevism adapted following the United States’ entry into the war. No longer was there need by the Nazi propagandists to make assumptions about American aid to Great Britain and the Soviet Union, since now the U.S. was committed to opening a Second Front at some point. The newspapers shifted their attention attacking the political, military, socio-economic, and racial aspects of the Allies.

During the Stalingrad campaign of 1942-43, the theme of the alliance between Plutocracy and Bolshevism appeared in newspaper articles as well. In an editorial of *Das Reich* titled “Auch der Versuch ist strafbar” (Even the Attempt is Criminal) from August 2, 1942, Josef Goebbels denounces the Allied war effort and attempts to renew the hopes of the German people of possible victory in 1942 or 1943. Goebbels notes that the failure of the Soviets to destroy the German army in the winter of 1941-42 and the Red Army’s subsequently “extremely heavy military setbacks” resulted in the Allies being in a “nervous, if not to say hysterical mood.” This failure by the Soviets pushed Stalin “like

---

<sup>33</sup>“USA.-Plutokratie und Bolschewismus Arm in Arm: Sumner Welles begrüsst Moskau als Bundesgenossen.” (“USA.-Plutocracy and Bolshevism arm in arm. Sumner Welles welcomes Moscow as an ally.”) *VB*, June 25, 1941, 2.

<sup>34</sup>“Roosevelt gibt der Ehe Moskau-London seinen Segen: Das Haupt der internationalen Plutokratie verspricht dem Bolshewismus seine Unterstützung.“ (“Roosevelt gives his blessing to the marriage between Moscow and London: The head of international Plutocracy promises Bolshevism his support.”) *VB*, June 26, 1941, 1.

a Shylock” to “insist on his bill,” that of a Second Front by the Anglo-American forces. Goebbels insisted that any such attempt would result in “another Dunkirk,” and closes with the following cynical and boisterous statement:

We therefore call out to the British with a warm welcome. Hopefully they bring some Americans. Then Mac Arthur would make for the first time acquaintance with German soldiers, who would not bring with them the tennis clubs and golf balls, but rather first-class weapons and a wealth of martial experience gained on all theaters of war in Europe. With pleasure they would take the opportunity to explain to the Yankees, that they are also banned from entrance into Europe.<sup>35</sup>

The overconfidence expressed by Goebbels is echoed in all of the newspapers at the height of the Stalingrad campaign. Another *Das Reich* article, “Churchill and Roosevelt Intervene,” describes the continued efforts by the Western Allies to support Stalin despite major internal problems facing those countries. For example, the article states that while Roosevelt plotted with Churchill to open a Second Front, the U.S. was riddled by “economic chaos” which weakened its war capacities. In his desperation, Roosevelt decided to allow the Jew Bernard Baruch to run his “economic brain trust” and thus complete the creation of a “Jewish dictatorship.”<sup>36</sup> In a similar manner the article “New Genuflection by Churchill for Stalin” attempts to describe the “Bolshevisation of England” by allowing the publication of the Communist newspapers “Daily Worker” and “Week.”<sup>37</sup> While the newspapers had previously been banned in

---

<sup>35</sup> Josef Goebbels, “Auch der Versuch ist strafbar“(Even the Attempt is Criminal),” *Das Reich*, August 2, 1942, 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> “Churchill und Roosevelt greifen ein,“ (Churchill and Roosevelt Intervene), *Das Reich*, September 13, 1942, 1.

<sup>37</sup> In January 1941, the British government banned the Communist run newspapers “The Daily Worker” and “The Week” as part of an effort to prevent radical propaganda from entering the country. For more information, see “Britain Outlaws Red Newspaper and Weekly to Check Propaganda,” *The New York Times*, (January 22, 1941), 1.

1941, this new step was proof of Stalin's influence over its allies. This revealed their inner weakness and would lead to their eventual downfall.<sup>38</sup>

In the aftermath of the Stalingrad campaign of 1943, the emphasis on the growing Communist influence over the Western Allies becomes more apparent in Nazi propaganda. One article spoke of the England's "solidarity with bolshevism" as exemplified by the British celebration of the twenty fifth anniversary of the founding of the Red Army.<sup>39</sup> Another article denounced the Western Allies for accepting Stalin's plans to "bolshevize Bulgaria, Croatia, and Hungary."<sup>40</sup> Yet another article regarding U.S. "Dollar Imperialism" warned that the Americans intended to make the "...entire world an Americanized Nation."<sup>41</sup> The Nazis essentially were warning of the impending disaster facing Europe if the British, Americans and Soviets should succeed in conquering Europe.

Even as the war entered its final stages in the summer of 1944 with the opening of the Second Front in Europe, Nazi propaganda undermined the Allied forces by attacking their ideological and political foundations. The article "The Weapons of Ideas" from July 6, 1944 argues that the Soviet Union, United States, and Great Britain were all

---

<sup>38</sup> "Neuer Kniefall Churchills vor Stalin," (New Genuflection by Churchill for Stalin), *VB*, August 28, 1942, 1.

<sup>39</sup> "25. Jahrestag der Roten Armee ein britisches Nationalfest: England demonstriert seine völlige Solidarität mit dem Bolschewismus," (25th Anniversary of the Red Army, A British National Celebration: England Demonstrates its Complete Solidarity with Bolshevism), *VB*, February 22, 1943, 1.

<sup>40</sup> "Der zweite Rate des Stalin-Programms: Moskau will Ungarn, Kroatien, und Bulgarien bolschewisieren. England natürlich auch damit völlig einverstanden!," (The Second Part of the Stalin-Program: Moscow wants to bolshevise Hungary, Croatia, and Bulgaria. England naturally also completely agrees with it), *VB*, February 23, 1943, 1.

<sup>41</sup> "Wallace verlangt: Schrankenlose Weltherrschaft des Dollar-Imperialismus," (Wallace Demands: Unimpeded World Domination by Dollar Imperialism), *VB*, March 26, 1943, 1.

led by the Jews and united in their efforts to enslave the world. According to the article, “Bolshevism has reduced men to robots, and imprisoned him into the brutal drudgery of the Jewish system.” While each of those countries faced economic and social injustice for all of their peoples, so-called “Jewish Materialism” used empty slogans to promise their populations a better existence. However, the reality of the situation was that the Allied war effort was a treachery that would result in “the peoples of Europe falling to Bolshevism.”<sup>42</sup> In the end, the Nazis were right about Eastern and Central Europe coming under the rule of Communism, the result of a war caused by Hitler which promised the end of Bolshevism but actually aided its expansion in the world.

### *2.3 Antisemitism and the Jewish-Bolshevik Threat*

The much used propaganda trope of a Western Plutocratic and Soviet conspiracy against Germany often implemented the idea of an all-encompassing specter of Jewry as a factor which unified all the Reich’s enemies. For the Nazis, the Jews could take on a variety of forms as wolves in sheep’s clothing, but the one thing all the Jews and the nations they hid behind had in common, was a desire to destroy Germany. Antisemitism provided the perfect link for Nazi propagandists to provide an opaque view of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian state dominated by rich Jews who used the slogans of Communism to hold the Eastern European peoples in slavery. Racial antisemitism thus combined with political and ideological hatreds to produce the myth of the Jewish-Bolshevik, making all Soviet government and military personnel a target for propaganda slander and abuse simply based upon their affiliation with the Jews. Furthermore, it

---

<sup>42</sup> “Die Waffen der Idee,” (The Arsenal of Ideas), *VB*, July 6, 1944, 1.

allowed propaganda to easily tie all of its racial and political enemies together using the Jewish boogeyman as their connection.

A perfect example of how the Nazis overlapped their antisemitic hatreds with anti-Western and anti-Soviet ideology is the booklet *The War Aims of World Plutocracy: Documentary Publication on the book by the President of the American Federation of Peace Theodore Nathan Kaufman "Germany Must Die,"* by Wolfgang Diewerge.<sup>43</sup> The booklet is a direct rebuttal to the book *Germany Must Perish!* by Jewish-American businessman and writer Theodore N. Kaufman. Kaufman's book, published in 1941, was a highly racist and radically anti-German work which called for the destruction of the German state and the forced sterilization of the German people. While Kaufman's work was not endorsed by the U.S. government or even the Jewish community at large, Nazi propaganda utilized the work as proof of a plot to destroy Germany.

While the pamphlet is filled with antisemitic ravings and quotes the extremist views of Kaufman, Diewerge attempts to link this singular work as proof of an alliance between the Soviet Union and the West, and of a plan to exterminate all Germans. In

---

<sup>43</sup> Wolfgang Diewerge, *Das Kriegsziel der Weltplutokratie: Dokumentarische Veröffentlichung zu dem Buch des Präsidenten der amerikanischen Friedensgesellschaft Theodore Nathan Kaufman "Deutschland muss sterben,"* (Berlin. F. Eher, 1941); Wolfgang Diewerge was a trained lawyer and Nazi Party member who began writing for the VB in 1934 as a correspondent in Cairo. By 1936, he managed the ministry's propaganda campaign related to the murder of Wilhelm Gustloff, a Swiss Nazi who was killed by a Croatian Jewish student David Frankfurter. Following this, he became the lead man in charge of press coverage of the Herschel Grynszpan affair, in which Polish Jew Grynszpan assassinated German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in 1938, an event used as a pretext for *Kristallnacht*. (Alan Steinweis, *Kristallnacht, 1938*, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 20-1. By 1941, Diewerge had risen in the ranks, serving as director of the radio division in the Propaganda Ministry (Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*, 112). Later he was acted as a special deputy of Goebbels, charged with interviewing former French foreign minister Georges Bonnet in 1942 regarding the Herschel Grynszpan affair (Peter Longerich, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, 212). After the war, Diewerge worked as the FDP's foreign policy spokesman and became a leading figure in the FDP Nordrhein-Westphalia, from 1951-1953 until being ousted due to his connections with Goebbels and his former rank of SS *Standartenführer* (Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, 280, 290).

one portion of the book, Diewerge writes that “New York, London, and Moscow are One Front.” Diewerge exclaims:

Just as Reaction, Bolshevism and liberalism were allied in their shared Jewish foundations in the domestic German battle against National Socialism, so today London, New York, and Moscow are arm and arm in the effort to create a second, more terrible Treaty of Versailles....World Jewry in New York, Moscow, and London agrees on the complete destruction of the German people.<sup>44</sup>

Diewerge’s main target for slander in this pamphlet is Kaufman and the United States, but it is clear that the linkages made by the author about the soon to be Allied powers provides a common cause for hatred of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Kaufman’s book literally called for the eradication of Germany, and Diewerge maintains that Kaufman is “President Roosevelt’s adviser” and that “world plutocracy’s ‘peaceful solution’” means “death for Germany.”<sup>45</sup> For Diewerge, this call for Germany’s “death” is all part of the Jews’ agenda, as exemplified in their tyrannical actions in the Soviet Union. Jewish Bolshevism was guilty of committing “mass murder in the Soviet Union,” revealing that not only were the Jews and Plutocrats in the West plotting such actions, but the Jewish-Bolsheviks in the East had already killed millions. Diewerge says the following about the Soviet Union:

Or we may think of the Soviet Union. Millions of people, who were members of the intelligentsia, were slaughtered. Jewish commissars played the crucial role. Millions of people were deliberately starved to death. And now, during the great battle for freedom in the East, the Jewish commissars stand behind the Bolshevik soldiers with machine guns and ruthlessly shoot down the dull masses, if they begin to retreat. The Jew has always avoided honest, open combat, not from a love of peace, but rather from simple fear. Instead, he has always used murder,

---

<sup>44</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG-68.076M, “Selected Records of the *Reichspropagandaleitung*,” Reel 1, 430.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 436.

the cowardly, treacherous crime, from the rear, even when in power. The list of Jewish murders is very long, stretching from biblical times to the present day. Every opponent of Jewry — whether an individual or a people — has always been at risk of being murdered.<sup>46</sup>

While the author of the book being scrutinized by Diewerge is a Jewish American, there is a clear attempt to single out the individual enemy powers and denigrate their character as much as possible. The overlying question for Diewerge is an antisemitic and genocidal one, when he asks “Who Should Die, Germans or Jews?,” and proceeds to describe the goals of the war as simply “Victory or Death, That is What This War is About.”<sup>47</sup> Kaufman’s book was thus posed as a justification for the war in the East and thereby a war against the Jews, since it was the Jews who planned to destroy the German people first. Diewerge concludes that a united Europe stands behind Germany in the fight against Jewish Plutocracy and Jewish Bolshevism, and that “England’s final fortress on the continent, the Bolshevik Soviet Union, is crumbling.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, Diewerge’s work is as virulently antisemitic as it is anti-Bolshevik, revealing the multifaceted nature of Nazi categorizations and the means by which antisemitic war propaganda could be utilized in a variety of different ways.

Antisemitism and Jewish-Bolshevism are frequent topics referenced throughout Nazi newspapers throughout the duration of the war in the East as well. During Barbarossa, the Nazis centered on Jewish-Bolshevik machinations for world domination and oppression of all mankind as a justification for the invasion, and

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 438.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 433; 441.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



subsequently used this argument throughout the war. An article in *Der Stürmer* “The Russian People and the Jews,” essentially describes the Jews as rulers of the Soviet Union who hold the Russian people in bondage. According to the article, the Jews had control of “ninety percent” of the Bolshevik party and used terror and manipulation to control “170 million in the yoke of Jewish power.”<sup>49</sup> The “culprits” of the conspiracy were thus “the Jewish-Bolshevik rulers” and not the Russian people, who were mere slaves to the Communist Jews in charge of the government. Thus, the Nazi “defensive battle against the Jewish-Bolshevik Soviet government” would “reverse the plans of world Judaism for all times.”<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, in *Das Reich* virulent antisemitism appeared in an editorial by Dr. Goebbels titled “Mimicry.” In the article Goebbels viciously attacks Judaism as a pestilence which plagues the Earth, masking itself like a virus before it strikes. Germany was only saved from this disease by National Socialism, which prevented a Bolshevik revolution from occurring in Germany. Below is an example of the anti-Semitic conspiratorial rhetoric used by Goebbels in the article, describing how Jews seized power under the guise of Revolution:

Bolshevism, too, is an expression of Jewish *chutzpah*. Turbulent Jewish party doctrinaires and devious Jewish capitalists managed the most shameful coup that can be imagined, in which they took control of the so called proletariat and its ranks by ruthlessly puffing about real or perceived social problems and evils to mobilize class struggle, and then with their help, the Jews took total control over the people. The crassest plutocracy used socialism to establish the crassest financial dictatorship. The Soviet Union would then spread this experiment to other nations with

---

<sup>49</sup> “Das russische Volk und die Juden,” (“The Russian People and the Jews”), *Der Stürmer*, July 10, 1941), 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

the help of the World Revolution. The result would have been Jewish world domination.<sup>51</sup>

According to Goebbels, this situation put Germany in a position where war was inevitable, and even necessary in order to save Europe. If not, the results would have been catastrophic for Europe. Much like Hitler's haunting "prediction" of 1939 calling for the destruction of the Jews of Europe, Goebbels states "There will be a Day of Judgment by the people upon their destroyer. Ruthlessly and without mercy then the blow will be conducted. The enemy will fall and Europe be at peace."<sup>52</sup>

Another editorial by Goebbels titled "The Jews are Guilty!" appeared in *Das Reich* on November 16, 1941. Goebbels argues that because the "Jews wanted war," the Führer's prophesy of January 30, 1939 to the Reichstag would indeed come true. Goebbels states that "If international finance Jewry should succeed in plunging the world into war once again, the result will be not the Bolshevization of the world and thereby the victory of the Jews, but rather the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." For Goebbels, the war was "the fulfillment of the prophecy" made by Hitler in 1939, and since the Jews were to blame for the war, then they also were to blame "for each German soldier who falls in this war." Goebbels likens the Jewish threat to a national security issue, describing how "the security of the state" requires every German to support the state which would "deal with them."<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Josef Goebbels, "Mimikry," ("Mimicry"), *Das Reich*, July 20, 1941, 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Josef Goebbels, "Die Juden sind schuld" (The Jews are Guilty"), *Das Reich*, November 16, 1941, 1-2

While Goebbels' placed blame upon the Jews and prophesized about their destruction in his editorials, the newspapers continued to put forth other antisemitic articles. In an article of *Der Stürmer* titled "Mass Murderer International Jewry: They were Criminals from the Beginning," the author describes the Jewish oppression of non-Jews throughout history. This culminated in the battle in the East, which would reveal the true extent of Jewish plans for world domination. The conditions in the Soviet Union, "the empire of Bolshevism, subhumanity has carried out the mass slaughter and is still carrying it out, epitomizing the Jews and their non-Jewish accomplices."<sup>54</sup>

Other antisemitic newspaper articles continued to appear throughout the campaign in all of the papers. The VB article "Jews Press England for New Promises," describes how the Jews led by the "Jewish agent" Chaim Weizmann were pushing the British and Americans for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>55</sup> But since the British Empire was defeated in war and the "Jewish bastion in Eastern Europe was collapsing under the assaults of the German Wehrmacht," the proposal was surely to fail in the long run.<sup>56</sup> Another especially long VB article by Dr. Wilhelm Koppen "This is Soviet Judea" describes the Soviet regime and Russia as completely overrun by

---

<sup>54</sup> "Massenmörder Alljudas: Sie sind Verbrecher seit Anbeginn" (Mass Murderer International Jewry: They were Criminals from the Beginning), *Der Stürmer*, July 24, 1941, 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Chaim Weizmann was a Russian born Jew who became active in the Zionist in the early twentieth century. Weizmann served as president of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), and after World War II was instrumental in the creation of Israel. Weizmann later served as the first President of Israel from the state's creation until his death in 1952. For more information see The Jewish Virtual Library, "Chaim Weizmann," Accessed March 23, 2013, <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/weizmann.html>>.

<sup>56</sup> "Juda preßt England neue Vesprechungen ab" (Jews press England for new Promises), *VB*, July 3, 1941, 2.

Jews.<sup>57</sup> Not only were half a million Jews living in and around Moscow, but Jews were also the leading members of the Communist Party, including GPU head Lazarus Moisewitsch Kaganowitsch, *Pravda* editor and Central Committee member L.S. Mechlis, and Commander of the air force General Smuschkewitsch. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” was actually a mask for the “dictatorship of the Jews,” ruling through violence and terror.<sup>58</sup>

The emphasis on two particular ideas, the myth of a “Soviet Judea” and the Jewish control of the Soviet leadership via Jews such as Kaganowitsch, are both frequent themes in Nazi media, emphasizing the conspiratorial and Jewish subhuman nature of Germany’s enemy. “Murder and Defilement: From Canaan to Soviet Judea” in *Der Stürmer* describes how through “racial defilement” and “mass murder” the Jews came to dominate the Soviet Union.<sup>59</sup> Another article, “The Religion of the Godless in Soviet-Judea”, describes the Jews’ efforts to eradicate religion in Russia under threats of pain and death.<sup>60</sup> The article “The Culprits of the People’s Misfortune: How our Soldiers learned to know about the Jews in the Soviet Union” uses firsthand accounts by war reporters to describe the situation at the front. For example, one reporter, Otto

---

<sup>57</sup> Wilhelm Koppen was a political commentator during the Third Reich period who worked for the Anti-Komintern agency in the Ministry of Propaganda. Koppen was a major contributor to the VB, authoring 58 articles in 1939 alone. For more information, see Moritz Florin, *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt in der Propaganda des Leitmediums*, (Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2009), 53, 169; Koppen also authored several books, including: *1848: das Jahr der Warnung und grossdeutschen Mahnung*, (Leipzig: Lühe & Co., 1939), and, *Deutsche gegen Deutschland: Geschichte des Rheinbundes*, (Hamburg: Hanseat. Verl.-Anst., 1936).

<sup>58</sup> Dr. W. Koppen, “Das ist Sowjet-Judäa” (“This is Soviet Judea”), VB, July 11, 1941, 8.

<sup>59</sup> “Mord und Schändung: Von Kanaan bis Sowjetjudäa” (“Murder and Defilement: From Canaan to Soviet Judea”), *Der Stürmer*, August 7, 1941, 1-2.

<sup>60</sup> “Die Religion der Gottlosen in Sowjet-Judäa” (The Religion of the Godless in Soviet-Judea), *Der Stürmer*, August 21, 1941, 3.

Schwarz, from a *Propaganda-Kompanie* at the front argues that the Jews “are preparing to subjugate the world” as evidenced by Jewish-Bolshevik policies in Russia.<sup>61</sup>

Propaganda labeled Bolshevism and Jewry as one and the same, and the Nazis concocted a story nearly as bogus as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to convince the German people how the Soviets were an imminent threat. Articles such as “They wanted to destroy Germany!” described a plot dating back to the 1930s, in which Soviet Russia planned to use Czechoslovakia as a “springboard” to launch an invasion of the Reich. These insidious long-term plans by the Jewish-Bolshevik hierarchy did not happen due to the intervention of June 1941. The same article praises both the Führer and the German soldiers for “ensuring that the bloody sword of the Judeo-Bolshevik mass murderers” would not hang over the heads of “European humanity.” The use of terms such as “mass murders” juxtaposed with “European humanity” fosters an image of good and evil, creating symbolism of a just war through extreme language.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the war, antisemitism and the threat of Jewish Bolshevism continued as a constant theme in Nazi propaganda. In one 1942 pamphlet titled *Judaism: Its Role and Importance in the Past and Present* by Peter Heinz Seraphim, the author played upon a familiar theme in Nazi ideology which traced the history of the Jews from the Biblical period to its zenith of power in Eastern Europe.<sup>63</sup> Seraphim attempts this

---

<sup>61</sup> Otto Schwarz, “Die Schuldigen am Unglück der Völker: Wie unsere Soldaten den Juden in der Sowjetunion kennen lernten” (“The Culprits of the People’s Misfortune: How our Soldiers learned about the Jews in the Soviet Union”), *Der Stürmer*, July 31, 1941, 2.

<sup>62</sup> “Sie wollten Deutschland vernichten!” (They wanted to destroy Germany!), *Der Stürmer*, July 17, 1941), 2.

<sup>63</sup> Considered an academic expert on Jews by the Nazis, Seraphim was a Baltic German whose father Ernst Seraphim was a historian, journalist, and editor of several newspapers in Riga. Following the First World War, Peter-Heinz joined the *Freikorps*, then later in the 1920s trained as a political economist. Most of his research pertained to Eastern European affairs, but after 1937 his focus increasingly involved

chronological approach to show how the war in the East was in fact started by the Jews, and he attempts to prove this with vague historical causation. For example, in the first chapter, “Jewry in the Near East Region” Seraphim explains the racial composition of the Jews, arguing that the Jewish race traces its origins to multiple “racial components,” including the “oriental race,” “Near Eastern,” and “Mediterranean and also the Nordic race.” Seraphim believed that the Jews had a “uniquely Near Eastern and Asiatic character,” and that the Jews were able to infiltrate Europe through Spain and later Eastern Europe.<sup>64</sup>

Seraphim then proceeds in the subsequent chapters to describe the process by which the Jews “invaded” Europe. Seraphim explains that the Jews first moved into Europe during the time of the end of the Roman Empire and were only able to make a foothold on the continent because they were “money changers.” This line of work provided them security in dealings with the Romans, but nevertheless tension arose between Christians and the Jews since the Jews had “crucified the Savior.”<sup>65</sup> Seraphim notes how King Ferdinand of Spain courageously expelled or forced the conversion of the Jews there. However, for Seraphim this incident revealed the real problem with the Jews. The Jews of Spain merely “camouflaged” themselves as Catholics, while “in

---

the ‘Jewish question.’ In 1938 he published *Das Judentum im osteuropäischen Raum*, his most significant contribution to *Judenforschung*. Up to 1945 Seraphim had been chair in political economy at Griefswald, and later he taught economics after the war at a civil service academy in West Germany, continuing to publish and conduct research on eastern European economics. For more information, see Alan E. Steinweis & Daniel E. Rogers, eds., *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 71-77.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Heinz Seraphim, *Das Judentum: Seine Rolle und Bedeutung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, (Munich: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1942), 6-18.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

reality not giving up their own racial-religious existence.”<sup>66</sup> Also, the expulsion of some Jews from Spain merely allowed them to move elsewhere into Europe.

Herein we see the use of historical causation to describe the gradual “infection” of Europe by the Jews. Seraphim describes how the wealthiest and most successful of the Jews became “court Jews” for European monarchies, acting as the harbingers for “early capitalism.” Jews came to dominate all financial institutions, as best exemplified through the Rothschilds.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, the Jews also came to assimilate in many European countries, thanks in part to the triumph of the Enlightenment and the tenants of the liberal French Revolution.<sup>68</sup> Despite the presence of many Jews in Western Europe, the “quantitative reservoir of European Jewry” was actually “in the East.” Following the First World War, the hordes of Jews in the East began migrating West, and during this process Jews in Germany began taking over all aspects of German society. Seraphim explains how “in the press, sciences, literature and art, in the free trades, and especially in the economy and leading economic positions the Jews stood strong, and in the parliamentary life of the Second Reich they were in reality often in control.” Therefore, the Nazis coming to power was a reaction to the attempted Jewish domination of Germany, and thus the main goal in the Nazis’ mind was solving the racial nature of the Jewish Question.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 27-28.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 30-1

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 33.

Chapter three, “Eastern European Jewry,” is the most important part of the book for the purposes of this project. Seraphim explains that while the Jews of Western and Central Europe were fewer in number and more assimilated, the Eastern European Jews were members of the proletariat, lived in cities, practiced traditional “religious commitments and ritual rules,” and they spoke Yiddish.<sup>70</sup> Seraphim provides a warped version of the history of the Jews of Eastern Europe, describing the many privileges given to them by the ruling elites. According to Seraphim, the Jews in the East came to dominate the economic activities of the states in which they resided. Eastern European cities developed a distinctly “Eastern Jewish Character,” which the author notes “for the most part still shows today.” Seraphim warns that “the old Jewish ghettos” in Eastern European cities threatened to transform these cities into “urban ghettos.”<sup>71</sup>

Seraphim depicts the Jews as being very influential in the politics, economics, and the religion of Eastern European states, citing Poland and Lithuania as two examples.<sup>72</sup> The nation with the greatest Jewish influence infiltration is of course Russia, where in the nineteenth century “Marxist-socialist ideas invaded Russia and Jews played a special role amongst the terrorists, nihilists, and free-masons.”<sup>73</sup> There was resistance to the Jews by both the Russian people and the government, with the people launching pogroms and state sponsored segregationist policies under Alexander II. Yet these efforts were not enough, and soon the Jews began to take hold of banking throughout

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 39



Eastern Europe, which soon spread its tentacles into many industries.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Jewry held a significant position of power in Eastern Europe by the end of the nineteenth century. Even more dangerous, however, was the Jews' attempt to spread "proletarian socialism" and the idea of a "Jewish-World Nationalism." The author links all of the upheavals of the twentieth century directly to the Jews. Seraphim blames the Jews for establishing "illegal socialist groups" in Polish schools, groups whose ties with "Nihilists and Anarchists" would later lead to social revolution led by the "Marxists and socialists."<sup>75</sup> The author states "The Jews were the radical champions of the Communist Marxist character." This is best manifested in Russia, where the Jews were responsible for the propaganda and agitation leading to the Russian Revolution of 1905. In order to explain how Judaism manifests itself beyond the theological-spiritual realm, the author maintains, "...the Jews in Eastern Europe directed proletarian socialism towards Bolshevism in the postwar period."<sup>76</sup> According to the text, the economic position of the Jews following the World War changed, allowing them to seize control of all major economic and industrial interests in Europe, slowly squeezing out the artisans and craftsmen of Germany.<sup>77</sup>

As the author laments the power and sheer numbers of Jews in Eastern Europe, he then shifts focus to the current disposition of the Jews since 1939. The USSR, described as "the largest Jewish dwelling zone in the world," was the center of Jewish

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 45.

life since it held “the majority of the world’s Jews,” with millions of Jewish inhabitants living in lands from Lithuania and the Ukraine to Russia and Bessarabia.<sup>78</sup> However, with the expansion of the German Reich from 1939-1941 came the influx of several millions Jews, making the Reich “the third largest dwelling place of world Jewry.”<sup>79</sup> The war between the Reich and the Soviet Union only added to the massive number of Jews in German occupied territory. Seraphim describes how the war resulted in the “breaking of the Jewish position of power,” but the problem of “hundreds of thousands of Jews in big city ghettos” remained to be solved.<sup>80</sup> For the author, the only way the Germans could deal with this problem was by getting rid of the Jews:

The Final Solution to the Eastern European Jewish Question can only be solved through the introduction of a strategic mass-deportation of the Eastern Jews of Greater German Reich to an overseas Jewish living area, both in the interests of the non-Jewish population as well as for the Jews themselves...<sup>81</sup>

Seraphim thus emphasizes the actions already underway in the East, with the *Einsatzgruppen* committing genocide by mass shooting and the Final Solution’s implementation in 1942. For Seraphim, the war against the Soviet Union was a war against the Jews, as he noted “It is remarkable that the removal of Jewry has largely been completed within the Greater German Reich, and the elimination of Jewry’s

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 52; Seraphim’s idea of mass deportations of Jews from Europe bears much in common with the ‘Madagascar Plan’ touted by leading Nazis ranging from Julius Streicher and Hermann Göring, to Alfred Rosenberg and Hans Frank. The plan was taken into the planning stages by Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann in the Reich Main Security Office as early as 1939-1940, but abandoned after Germany’s military fortunes sunk in the Battle of Britain. For more information, see Christopher Browning and Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 81-89.

economic position of power has prevailed in lands of the east.”<sup>82</sup> Thus this pamphlet echoes both the ideology of the regime and reflects the realities of Nazi policy in the East, in which the German Wehrmacht and SS worked hand in hand to destroy the Soviet Union and the Jews of Europe simultaneously. Propaganda merely reinforced the policies already underway, providing justifications for German brutality and explicating the racial theories of the Third Reich.

A similar publication in a periodical in 1942 titled “Jews Make World Policy“ provides further explanations about the history of “world Jewry,“ the role of the Jews in the Soviet Union, and the international aims of the Jews. The author of the article, Karl Baumböck, authored numerous anti-Communist works in the 1930s and 1940s, and in each of those works displayed a virulent antisemitism blaming the Jews for all the world’s problems. <sup>83</sup> In “Jews Make World Policy” the thesis is quite simple; for centuries the Jews had been plotting world domination, and their most contemporaneous and potent scheme was manifested through Bolshevism.

According to the author, the Jews have since “...the earliest of times desired a world policy,” acting as “parasites in the bodies of other peoples” in order to gain

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Karl Baumböck was in charge of press affairs for the special agency Anti-Komintern within the Propaganda Ministry, charged with publicizing anti-Bolshevik propaganda. For more information, see Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 194-195. Baumböck authored many publications for the Nazis, with the main topic being the Jewish-Bolshevik enemy of the Reich. His works include: *Der Weltfeind : Wesen, Ziel u. Methoden d. internat. Bolschewismus*, (Berlin : Propaganda-Verl. P. Hochmuth, 1936); *Moskau im Angriff*, (Berlin, P. Hochmuth, 1937); *In den Kerkern der GPU: Tatsachenberichte aus der Sowjetunion*, (Berlin : P. Hochmuth, 1937); and *Deutschlands sieg im Osten, Grundlage für das neue Europa*, (Berlin, P. Hochmuth, 1942.).

“international supremacy.”<sup>84</sup> The author then laboriously details the Jewish plot towards “domination over people” through a history of the Jewish program “from the beginning.” This tale of conspiracy and paranoid delusion begins with the biblical period, citing quotes from Moses to indict the “imperialist program” of the Jews.<sup>85</sup> The Diaspora, a time of misery and sadness in Jewish history, thus appears in Baumböck’s warped mind as a Jewish quest for world power, in which Jews infested the various Middle Eastern kingdoms and eventually spread into Europe.<sup>86</sup> While Jewry’s spread into Europe was supposedly limited to “usurers and financiers” for the princes, in Eastern Europe the “great mass burst upon the East” where the Jews enjoyed “special privileges” under the law.<sup>87</sup> The author describes the East as the “great Jewish cradle,” where it gained power from the Middle Ages to the present period.<sup>88</sup>

Baumböck is quick to cite historical examples to justify his anti-Semitism, linking “Jewish world power offenses” to the Enlightenment, Freemasonry, the French Revolution, and Liberalism.<sup>89</sup> The ideas of Jewish equality and the emancipation of the Jews during this time made them all the more aggressive in their quest for control over the nations of the world. Jews could control liberal democracies through “the authority of high finance,” and later gain more power through Marxism and Bolshevism.

---

<sup>84</sup> Karl Baumböck, “Juden machen Weltpolitik,” *Nationalpolitische Aufklärungsschriften* Heft 16, (Berlin: Verlag Paul Hochmuth, 1942), 4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 10.

Baumböck maintains that the Jews' lust for power is best manifested contemporaneously through the "joint exploitation of Bolshevism and democracy for its purposes."<sup>90</sup>

The most pervasive part of the work is Baumböck's argument that the Jews started the Second World War. According to Baumböck, "Jewish World Power Politics" was a process throughout modern history, especially distinct in four key periods. The four phases are: "Germany in the Years 1812-1932;" "the Soviet Union and World Bolshevism;" "Plutocratic-Democracy of the USA;" and "international Jewry's unleashing of the Second World War."<sup>91</sup> The author provides loose causation connecting these threads together, positing that the Jewish takeover of Germany began during the Enlightenment and only ended with the rise of the Nazis. However, despite the defeat of Jewry in Germany, Baumböck argues that the two main bastions for Jewish power were in the Soviet Union and the United States.

Baumböck argues that in Russia the Jews used the slogans of "class struggle" and the "proletariat" in order to gain power. In this quest, the Jews "pitted workers against other classes of people, the abolition of private ownership, the expropriation of production goods, the creation of a new political power structure, and finally commenced inducing world revolution in all countries."<sup>92</sup> According to Baumböck, since the beginning of the Bolshevik movement the Jews have acted in leadership positions. Jews ranging from Karl Marx and the supposedly partially Jewish Lenin, to

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 16.

the 1920s clique of three Jews (Bronstein-Trotsky, Apfelbaum-Sinowjew, and Rosenfeld-Kamenew) and a non-Russian Caucasian (Stalin) controlled the main seats of power.

The author then characterizes how organizations such as the Politburo, Central Committee, the GPU, the Red Army, and other functionaries were dominated by Jews. In returning to an aforementioned theme, one of the figures subject to some of the most vicious attacks in Nazi propaganda, Lazarus Mosessohn Kaganowitsch, is described as Stalin's most trusted official as a member of the Politburo.<sup>93</sup> Baumböck dedicates an entire page listing the so-called "Kaganowitsch Dynasty" of twelve family members who held influential political, social, or economic positions within the Soviet government.<sup>94</sup> Baumböck also lists countless names of numerous Jews in key positions, such as GPU leader Lavrenti Beria.<sup>95</sup> This evidence thus is meant to provide overwhelming proof of the Jewish domination of the Soviet regime.

Nazi propaganda's obsession with Lazar Kaganowitsch is apparent in the amount of literature produced about the man. Not only were there numerous newspaper articles, there were also pamphlets and books which discussed Kaganowitsch in detail. For example, the book *Kaganowitsch's Fools* by Karl Miedbrodt is an anti-Semitic novel published by the Nazi Party's publishing house in 1937. The novel was reprinted after the invasion of Russia in 1943, and the content deals with the alleged nefarious actions

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 19.

of Jews such as Kaganowitsch in the Soviet Union. While the work is laborious at over four hundred pages, it provides a disturbing view of how the Nazis wanted to depict life in the Soviet Union under the Jewish-Bolshevik regime and their foreign policy aims. The following passage is but an illustration of the ideology displayed in the novel: “If not today...tomorrow the order will come from Moscow to set the world on fire against Germany. Then the war machine of Stalin-Kaganowitsch will stomp across the world, with the satanic Kaganowitsch already smiling over Spain.”<sup>96</sup> Kaganowitsch represents one of the boogeymen figures used by the Nazis as a perfect example of how the Jews conceptualized, created, and controlled the Soviet Union.

The narrative of propaganda messages was carefully woven by the Nazis to continuously remind the population of the causes of the war, with special ferocity targeting the Jews. With the fate of the war hanging in the balance in 1942 during the Stalingrad campaign, Nazi ideology increased its levels of patriotic nationalism and racist xenophobia to match the stakes at the front. An editorial in the VB by Alfred Rosenberg titled “The Total War” emphasized the enormous task ahead for Germany in the fight against “Democracy and Marxism,” both controlled by “Jewish High Finance.” According to Rosenberg, the war had been caused by “the hatred of the carriers of racial chaos, the Jews...”<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, the title of the article, “The Total War,” would later become an important slogan utilized by Josef Goebbels in 1943 to emphasize the

---

<sup>96</sup> Karl Miedbrot, *Die Narren des Kaganowitsch, (Kaganowitsch's Fools)*, (Munche: F. Eher, 1943), 11.

<sup>97</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, “Der totale Krieg,” (The Total War), *VB*, September 1, 1942, 2.

seriousness of the war situation, which became all the more apparent with the news of the surrender of Stalingrad and the bombings of Germany in the summer of 1943.<sup>98</sup>

As a follow up to the aforementioned editorial, in the following month the VB ran an article praising Rosenberg and his book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*. The article, written by Professor Alfred Baeumler, celebrates the likely inflated circulation numbers of the book, purporting that the work reached its one millionth sale in 1942. Baeumler, a professor of philosophy at the Institute for Political Pedagogy in Berlin, was an ardent nationalist and follower of Nietzsche who wholeheartedly supported National Socialism.<sup>99</sup> In the VB article, Baeumler praises Rosenberg's work as a product of the "political struggle" in Germany during the 1920s, which through the victory of National Socialism allowed for the "rebirth of the German people."<sup>100</sup> Baeumler praises Rosenberg's antisemitism throughout the article as well.

The significance of Baeumler's article in the VB in 1942 is tied specifically to his work on the book *Alfred Rosenberg and the Myth of the Twentieth Century*, which was published the following year. This work pays homage to Rosenberg through an emphasis on Nazi social darwinism, antisemitism, and antibolshevism. In the book, Baeumler describes the threat of Judeo-Bolshevism as follows:

The international Jew, by making use of money thinking, raised himself up to world domination and threatened to destroy all creative power; bolshevism was about to annihilate the nations physically as well. Just

---

<sup>98</sup> Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 434

<sup>99</sup> Dr. Alfred Baeumler (1887-1968) emerged as the main conduit between Berlin University and Alfred Rosenberg. In 1942 he was appointed head of the Science Division in Rosenberg's Ideology Department. For more information on Baeumler, see Robert S. Wistrich, *Who's Who in Nazi Germany*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 8.

<sup>100</sup> Alfred Baeumler, "Rosenberg und sein Mythos," (Rosenberg and his Myth), *VB*, October 6, 1942, 1.



then, in the time of distress, arose the will and understanding that led to regeneration of the most threatened people. Instead of the mixture of vague concepts and values which used to be called the spirit of humaneness or the idea of Western culture, national socialism established an organically founded *Weltanschauung*.<sup>101</sup>

Baeumler's use of Rosenberg's rhetoric to support Nazism as the solution to Germany's problems makes his writings all the more important for propaganda purposes. Scholars provided the aura of validity to Nazi ideology by giving hate speech an academic source, while continuing to purport the same racist rhetoric as ever.

#### 2.4 "Europas Freiheitskrieg" and European Unity

The theme of the Third Reich as protector of Europe is as ironic as it is incongruous, yet the Nazis used this trope repeatedly to rally public opinion and foster a new German identity as the leaders of the continent. During Barbarossa, the *Völkischer Beobachter* continuously pressed the notion of European unity in relation to the war in the East. Headlines such as "The Rise of the European Peoples Against Bolshevism," and unity themed articles like "Europe against Moscow" and "Europe united in the Struggle against Bolshevism" are testament to the importance propagandists placed upon the image of solidarity and strength in the new war against Soviet Russia.<sup>102</sup> The "us versus them" dichotomy is a perfect example of the "othering" process, which uses concepts of European civilization to bolster an underlying Orientalist ideology evident in Nazi propaganda.

---

<sup>101</sup> Alfred Baeumler, *Alfred Rosenberg und der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (München: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1943), 97.

<sup>102</sup> "Der Aufbruch der Völker Europas gegen den Bolschewismus," *VB*, June 28, 1941, 1; "Europa gegen Moskau," *VB*, June 28, 1941, 1; "Europa einig im Kampf gegen den Bolschewismus," *VB*, June 28, 1941, 2.

On June 25, 1941, the VB ran an article, “The World is for the German Undertaking: Campaign of the European Spirit,” attempting to paint a picture of European solidarity in the face of the Communist threat. Using a series of newspaper quotes from various “allies” in Europe, the article maintains that the war was a “struggle of the European spirit against Bolshevik barbarity” and the Jewish-Plutocrat-Bolshevik attempt at global dominance.<sup>103</sup> This VB article partakes in the “othering” of the Soviet Union by creating a vast Jewish Bolshevik conspiracy with Great Britain’s capitalists and even the plutocrats of the U.S.A. As a result of the threat of communist invasion, the German attack was a battle for the “freedom and civilization of the entire world.”<sup>104</sup> In the same way, the article reinforces an Orientalist type notion of Soviet Russia as the barbaric and uncivilized East which sought to destroy the West. The article notes that Germany was fighting against “Moscow’s conspiracy” to take over Europe, in effect acting as a bulwark against the communist hordes of the East. In addition, Hitler was described as “the military leader of the Occident,” a deliberate choice of words which elicits the East-West conflict dichotomy as a struggle of two worlds.<sup>105</sup>

In the fight against the Soviets, the Nazis did their best to sell the war as a united front with Europeans against the threat of Bolshevism. An article in the VB from June 28, 1941 describes how in Europe all the countries “adopt the same position against the...threat from the East.” The armies of Germany, Romania, Spain, Denmark

---

<sup>103</sup> “Die Welt zum deutschen Schritt: Feldzug des europäischen Geistes,” (The World is for the German Undertaking: Campaign of the European Spirit), *VB*, June 25, 1941, 5.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

Hungary, Finland, and Italy are said to be participating in a “war of liberation” This show of “brotherhood” might tell the reader that all of Europe’s might would be able to crush the Bolshevik war machine, but, of course, the camaraderie amongst the coalition of the unwilling was hardly perfect. The “new Europe” was depicted as “fighting for its own destiny,” as well as the “noblest values and the highest traditions.” This “free and happy Europe” was united in its mission, except none of Hitler’s adjutants were willing to admit the failures of Nazi policies over the next several years.<sup>106</sup>

The notion of European unity might have been absurd to most countries of the period, yet it would seem the Nazis believed that the message of a united continent would benefit the Reich’s war effort. After all, what better way to convince the German people of the righteousness of their cause than to report on how all of Europe joined willingly to fight the Soviets? News articles exclaimed how “...the fight between Germany and Moscow is now a crusade against Bolshevism.” Repeatedly references were made about how “volunteers” from nations such as Spain, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and France were all joining the Germans in the East. However, this crusade was a “defensive fight” to save “freedom” and “humanity” from the ravages and barbarities of Jewish Bolshevism.<sup>107</sup> In this rudimentary way, the Nazis lumped together Judaism and Bolshevism as symbols of oppression and bloodthirstiness, while posing a German led Europe as the culturally superior and peace loving center of civilization.

---

<sup>106</sup> “Europa gegen Moskau,” (Europe Against Moscow), *VB*, June 28, 1941, 1.

<sup>107</sup> “Europa einig im Kampf gegen den Bolschewismus,” (Europe united in the Fight against Bolshevism), *VB*, June 28, 1941, 2.

A quote from the VB article “Europe United in the Fight against Bolshevism” epitomizes both the skillful language and the terrible hypocrisy of Nazi propaganda.

The article exclaims that the goal of the war was:

...to restore the dignity and freedom of human personality, the family as bearer of the moral and natural life of each nation, the restoration of the concept of private ownership, the freedom of religious convictions, the freedom and cultural autonomy of peoples and national groups as members of the European community, in short, the restoration of the foundations, which will build a united Europe, that is determined to assert its place in the world.<sup>108</sup>

The propaganda message seems clear: Europe was on board with the war because Hitler and the Nazis had the clairvoyance to discover planned Bolshevik aggression which would have wiped out the world had they not have acted first. Drawing upon the ideas of unity, culture, freedom, religion, and even private property, the Nazis were willing to find any ideological justifications deemed necessary to sell the war. The promise of salvation in the face of certain death and destruction does seem to offer face value benefits, yet the real meaning behind these words of tyranny are far more sinister and perhaps even worse than eastern Communism.

Similar themes also appeared in *Das Reich*, beginning with Rudolf Fischer’s article “Emancipation of Europa: The decisive Confrontation with Bolshevism” on June 29, 1941. Fischer, a journalist in the Press Division of the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office) and employee of “Transkontinent Press,” was a strong advocate of a propaganda message which presented the image of “European solidarity” in the war.<sup>109</sup> Fischer’s

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Longerich, *Propagandisten im Krieg: Die Presseabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes unter Ribbentrop*, (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1987), 80, 260, 316; Note also that Fischer was lead editor of the periodical *Volk und Reich*, in which he authored a number of articles as well. For more information, see Norbert Frei & Johannes Schmitz, *Journalismus im Dritten Reich*, (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2011), 194.

*Das Reich* article reflects his work for the Foreign Office, citing the need for a new “unity in Europe” to combat the machinations of the English and the Bolsheviks. The Soviets, led by an “Oriental Despot” in Stalin, desired “the conquest of Germany” which would destroy western civilization and culture.<sup>110</sup>

A second article by Fischer, “Welcome, Europe! The Fruit of Joint Action” appears in the following week’s newspaper. This time Fischer describes “the growing feeling of a destined European community” and “the development of an active solidarity” amongst the nations in coincidence with the war in the East. The fight against Bolshevism had become both “a war of liberation” and a war for “European unity,” in order to protect the continent from Anglo-Russian designs. Fischer maintains that the war against Russia was being fought for the “freedom” of Europe in a “coalition” effort, against a Soviet enemy who desired only “anarchy” for the people of the world.<sup>111</sup>

Another editorial in the VB during September 1942 titled “The Fateful Mission of the European People,” in which Alfred Rosenberg describes the important military and political role played by the people of Europe in the fight against the Reich’s Plutocratic and Soviet enemies. Rosenberg argues that ever since the aftermath of the First World War “Jewish agitators” around the world worked to destroy Germany. Only the successful opposition posed by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany saved Europe from enemy occupation and destruction, and all of the European states now worked together

---

<sup>110</sup> Rudolf Fischer, “Emanzipation Europas: Die entscheidende Auseinandersetzung mit dem Bolschewismus” (Emancipation of Europa: The decisive Confrontation with Bolshevism), *Das Reich*, June 29, 1941, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Rudolf Fischer, “Willkommen, Europa! Die Frucht der gemeinsamen Tat” (Welcome, Europe! The Fruit of the concerted Endeavor), *Das Reich*, July 6, 1941, 3.

in the fight against a common threat. Rosenberg depicted the Nazi coalition in lofty terms:

We know that very many people realize this is the hour of fate, and are unconditionally committed to the defeat of Bolshevism and await their incorporation into the new Europe. Legions from almost all the European nations march shoulder to shoulder with Germany in the vast lands of the East, and have avowed their commitment through their wills and impressive deeds.<sup>112</sup>

Rosenberg's avowed antisemitic and anti-Bolshevik rhetoric in such articles serves a dualistic purpose, using internal and external threats to unite a continent under the flag of Nazism. While all of this was likely done for posterity's sake, it is convincing enough of an argument to state that the German nation was threatened by the Soviet Union, thus necessitating a preemptive strike and war to save Europe from annihilation. Thus, a dangerous political ideology and military threat was used as the excuse for German occupation of Europe in the 1940s.

Nazi Germany as a "protector" is quite an interesting take on *Lebensraum* imperialism, and the argument continued to be purported throughout the war. With this "protection" also came collaboration, as exemplified through such Axis partners as Finland. Dr. Theodor Seibert, the General Editor of the VB, wrote an article series "Europas Schild im Nordosten" in August 1942, emphasizing the role of Finland in the fight against the Soviets. This relationship, according to Seibert, was fostered because of Soviet aggression in the 1939-1940 Winter War. Seibert maintains that the Soviets reduced west Karelia to "ruins," stealing anything they could get their hands on,

---

<sup>112</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, "Über die Schicksalsaufgabe der europäischen Völker" (The Fateful Mission of the European People), VB, September 6, 1942, 1.

including “household items, art objects, and agricultural implements...”<sup>113</sup> Such evidence revealed the true nature of Soviet military aggression of 1939-1940: to murder, rob, and enslave all things in their wake.

For Seibert, the imprint left upon Finland was the “seal of their barbarism,” which would have befallen “the other European nations” had not Germany intervened in 1941. Finland, as the model Nazi ally, thus stood as a perfect example to showcase Bolshevik occupation policies. According to Seibert, of the 450,000 Finns who inhabited W. Karelia in 1939, only “several hundred” remained after the Soviet occupation was lifted. Seibert notes that the West Karelian example was what awaited “the entire European cultural community.”<sup>114</sup> The Bolshevik “hordes from the East” wanted to rule the “venerable continent” of Europe, and this plan was supposedly approved by Churchill and Roosevelt at their June 1942 military conference in Washington, D.C.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the Finns had every reason to partake in the war against the Soviet Union, in order to retake their occupied lands and destroy the Bolshevik enemy before it could seize the entire “free” world.

---

<sup>113</sup> Dr. Theodor Seibert, “Europas Schild im Nordosten: III. Leben über Trümmern,” (Europe’s Shield in the Northeast: III. Life Among Ruins) *VB*, August 27, 1942, 6; Seibert was a Nazi journalist and author who spent a significant amount of time abroad, both in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and England during the 1930s. Seibert also authored several books, including: *Das rote Russland: Staat, Geist und Alltag der Bolschewiki*, (München: Knorr & Hirth, 1931); *Wie sieht uns der Engländer*, (Berlin, F. Eher Nachf., 1940); *Das amerikanische rätsel, die Kriegspolitik der USA in der aera Roosevelt*, (Berlin, F. Eher Nachf., 1941). For more information on Seibert, see James J. Barnes & Patience P. Barnes, *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930-1939: The Fate and Role of German Party Members and British Sympathizers*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 199; and also Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*, 224.

<sup>114</sup> While the numbers given by Seibert are greatly exaggerated, recent scholarship suggests growing evidence of Soviet efforts at the “Russification” of Karelia and mass murder. For more information, see Auvo Kostianinen, “Genocide in Soviet Karelia: Stalin’s terror and the Finns of Soviet Karelia,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21(1996):4, 332-341.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

In East Karelia, Dr. Seibert argues that the Soviets intended to use this portion as their primary base of operations. The Soviets chose to make Äänislinna (Petrozavodsk) into their capital in the region, using “forced laborers,” including Finns and Russians, to build up their power there. Seibert maintains that following the division of Karelia in 1918 between the Soviets and Finland, there were ca. 200,000 Finns living between Lake Ladoga and Onagasee in the occupied Soviet zone. However, as a result of GPU terror and forced labor, this number was reduced to 127,500 Finns by 1932. Seibert argues that the construction of a Soviet Paradise in East Karelia was only for the benefit of the Communist Party elites, leaving the “proletarian population” to live in “old huts from the Tsarist period.” For Seibert, the East Karelia occupation is “a perfect example of Soviet culture, the model of brutal, inhuman barbarism.”<sup>116</sup>

In a similar article, Dr. Wilhelm Koppen addressed “The Caucasus and Europe,” noting that region’s longstanding problems with Russia and the Soviet Union. Dr. Koppen explains that in the aftermath of World War One the people of the Caucasus attempted independent rule, but the Bolsheviks quickly reasserted their authority in the early 1920s. Despite the Soviets’ use of the term “autonomous regions,” the Georgians, Armenians, and other groups under Communist rule faced the “tyranny from Moscow.” Koppen emphasizes that “the fate of 16 million people between the Don and the Ararat was Soviet slavery,” and this included the “shattering of their ancient culture and their humanity.” Thus, the military campaign in the Caucasus

---

<sup>116</sup> Dr. Theodor Seibert, “Europas Schild im Nordosten: IV. Der Muster-Rätestaat,” (Europe’s Shield in the Northeast: IV. The Model Council State), *VB*, August 28, 1942, 6.



underway in the fall 1942 would liberate the people, and end such a “terrible fate” by providing a new “freedom” for the Soviet subjects.<sup>117</sup>

Likewise, in a unique article featured in the VB in September 1942 titled “Northern Caucasus Battle for Liberation,” Rifat Dawut delves into the issue of the Muslim peoples of the Northern Caucasus who for centuries battled against Russian imperialist aggression.<sup>118</sup> While this article does not directly pertain to Europe and is largely a historical recounting of battles between Tsarist Russia and the peoples of the Caucasus, it attempts to provide a rallying cry against the Soviet Union by calling for active resistance by the Muslim population of the region. Dawut sees the Nazis as liberators of the peoples in the Caucasus from Bolshevik aggression, stating “The raising of the Swastika flag atop the highest mountain in the Caucasus, the Elbrus, is not only an expression of immeasurable German strength, but also a symbol for a future righteous regime in this part of Europe!”<sup>119</sup>

The failure of the Stalingrad campaign ended any hopes for a drive into the Caucasus, and with it the end of the Nazis’ promises to liberate the peoples of the Soviet Union. From 1943 onwards, the propaganda message largely shifts to focusing on

---

<sup>117</sup>Dr. Wilhelm Koppen, “Der Kaukasus und Europa,” (The Caucasus and Europe), VB, August 26, 1942, 6.

<sup>118</sup> Mollah Rifat Davut, born in Kashgar, China, was an Islamic theologian and writer whose works were utilized by the Germans in their efforts to win over the Turks as well as Muslims in Soviet territory. Davut had been an Islamic theology student in the 1920s, and while studying in Egypt conducted comparative analyses between Islam and Christianity. The organization LDOM (Dr. Lepsius Deutsche Orient-Mission) became familiar with his work, and hoped to have Davut attend a German university in order to attempt a conversion as occurred with the Muslim Turk Johannes Awetarianian. For more information, see Atanas Damianov’s *Die Arbeit der Deutschen Orient-Mission unter den türkischen Muslimen in Bulgarien von Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts bis zum 2. Weltkrieg*, (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2003), 167-68; Rifat Davut’s publications include *So hat mich Christus errettet: Wie ich als Mohammedaner Christ wurde* (Berlin: Ostwerk-Verlag, 1937).

<sup>119</sup> Rifat Dawut, “Nordkaukasiens Freiheitskämpfe” (North Caucasians Battle for Liberation), VB, September 24, 1942, 6.

defensive warfare and protecting the areas of the Greater German Reich still under Nazi rule. The battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943 was the last great push in the East, and with that failure a certain shift occurred in the ideological discourse. For example, during the Soviet Kursk offensives following the collapse of Operation Citadel in July 1943, the emphasis quickly shifts from hopes of a great victory to an emphasis on the continued struggle to survive and the hope for the eventual defeat of the enemy.<sup>120</sup>

The emphasis on Nazi promises of European freedom changes in the propaganda as well. For example, in the article “The Shared Fields: Europe’s Growing Food Autonomy” focuses only on the impact of the Ukrainian agricultural goods upon the European food supply.<sup>121</sup> With the Soviets continuing their offensive in August and Anglo-American forces on the attack in Italy, Nazi propaganda warned of the dangers facing Europe if the enemy were victorious. On August 1, 1943, *Das Reich* ran the editorial “A Better World? Europe in the Enemy’s Looking-Glass” focuses on the Allied designs for “a better future for Europe and the world,” which in the Nazi worldview meant Bolshevik enslavement and the destruction of the Reich.<sup>122</sup> The emphasis here on the Atlantic Charter reminds the reader of the growing dangers and grand designs of the Western Allies, providing very little hope other than to simply fight on.

---

<sup>120</sup> Note the shift in the following headlines and articles. The first two detail the successes and hard fighting involved in the battle of Kursk. In *Das Reich*, see the headline “In Harten Kampfen,” (In Hard Fighting), *Das Reich*, 18 July 1943; also see the article “Östliche Materialschlacht: Im Raum von Kursk,” (Eastern Battle of Material: In the Area of Kursk), *Das Reich*, July 18, 1943, 2. Subsequent articles denote a clearly changed tone. For example, see Chrisoph Freiherr von Imhoff, “Die Faust von Kursk: Zur Entwicklung der grossen Schlacht im Osten!,” (The Fist of Kursk: The Development of the Great Battle in the East), *Das Reich*, July 25, 1943, 3.

<sup>121</sup> “Der gemeinsame Acker: Europas wachsende Nahrungsfreiheit,” (The Shared Fields: Europe’s Growing Food Autonomy), *Das Reich*, July 25, 1943, 3.

<sup>122</sup> “Eine bessere Welt?: Europa im Feindspiegel,” (A Better World? Europe in the Enemy’s Looking-Glass), *Das Reich*, August 1, 1943, 1.

Likewise, an editorial from August 22, 1943 by Josef Goebbels provides a similarly bleak view of the war without any real answers. The editorial, “The Realities of War” is an uncharacteristically bland article by the Propaganda Minister, clinging to promises of a “new weapon” rather than any tangible hopes of progress. The following is a passage from the article, which reveals a rather melancholy mood expressed by Goebbels:

Our evaluation of the war is affected by the great victories of the past. They have given an impression of things that are often false. Many of us believed that one could survive such a great world struggle without having to endure any crises. But that would be unnatural, not natural. We had to assume at the beginning that enormous problems would come, and view it as good fortune that we did so well during its first half. That is what happened. We broke the enemy’s stranglehold on us at the war’s beginning. If one wants to talk about the weakness of our position, it was then. We were compressed into our limited territory, and had to begin by gaining breathing room. It was a miracle that we succeeded. There was real reason to fear when our enemies attacked us. The worst danger was removed by the victories of the war’s first three years.<sup>123</sup>

While the mood of hopelessness and despair is not an all-encompassing theme in Nazi propaganda from 1943 on, it becomes apparent that with growing military defeats the ideology developed a more pessimistic and melancholy tone. Instead of reports of victorious campaigns came false promises of wonder weapons, instead of plans for a final victory came mere defamations of the enemy, and instead of new offensives came glorifications of the attrition campaigns to follow. By 1944, with the Allied invasion of France and the Soviet *blitzkrieg* to destroy Army Group Centre, the situation was especially gloomy for the Nazis. The propagandists thus used the only weapon at their

---

<sup>123</sup> Josef Goebbels, “Die Realitäten des Krieges,” (The Realities of War), *Das Reich*, August 22, 1943, 1.

disposal to attack the enemy, with warnings of a Bolshevik assault on the heart of Europe and fate which awaited the civilized world if the Allies succeeded.

The transformation of the ideological discourse thus made the theme of Germany as a defender of Europe against Soviet terror even more important in 1944. The defense of Europe against the Jewish Plutocrats in the West and the Jewish Bolsheviks in the East remained a dominant topic in Nazi propaganda with ever more urgency and alarm in the tone. On January 16, 1944 in Prague, Alfred Rosenberg gave a speech about the topic “German and European Freedom of Thought,” reemphasizing the role of Germany as Europe’s greatest hope for protection from the Western and Eastern threats.

In the speech, Rosenberg creates the image of an unholy alliance of Jewish criminality by attacking the political, social, and economic foundations of the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union. Rosenberg denounces “Jewish-Niggerish Americanism” as a culturally degenerate nation aimed at destroying the foundations of German life.<sup>124</sup>

Rosenberg’s depiction of the Soviet Union is no less crude, describing its primary goals as establishing a “Jewish-Proletarian World revolution” and to “deport millions of Germans to the colonies or to Siberia for forced labor.”<sup>125</sup> Rosenberg concludes the speech with an emphasis on the war effort in order to save Europe:

All the soldiers in Europe today carry an honorable shield against the criminals of the East and West, who want to rob us of freedom and exterminate us physically, so that we could never rise again. With the defense of life the soul of the country is protected, with the home the freedom of spirit, the precondition of all future creativity. And therefore there is only one solution for all Germans and all Europeans who have

---

<sup>124</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Deutsche und europäische Geistesfreiheit*, (German and European Freedom of Thought), (Munich: Franz Eher, 1944), 11-12.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 12

realized this fateful hour of their freedom: into the dirt with all the enemies of our venerable, beloved European continent!<sup>126</sup>

Rosenberg's sentiments reflect the growing gloom and doom mentality utilized by Nazi propaganda to mobilize resistance against the Allies. In many cases there are promises made of a final victory by force of arms, but more often than not the focus is on merely emphasizing how terrible the enemy was. This theme continued to be displayed throughout the remainder of the war. For example, a newspaper article from June 22, 1944, "Germany's Sword Protects Europe: Three Year War against Bolshevik Aggression," reiterates the preventative war theory as an inevitable clash between good and evil. In an attempt to quell all doubts about the righteousness of the struggle, the article argued that Stalin wanted to destroy Europe to carry out world revolution. The war in the east was a justifiable conflict because: "...on 22 June 1941 the Führer sprang to action in the last hour against an avalanche, which ought to have buried Europe. The Eastern Front is but the levee which protects the Occident from disaster."<sup>127</sup> Notice how the author not only presents the Reich as a shield against a monstrous force, but he also draws a religious connection by describing Europe as the Western European Christian "Occident" battling against the atheist barbarians.

Another article from June 23, 1944 by Helmut Sündermann attempts to depict the Allied war against Europe as a Bolshevik fraud.<sup>128</sup> "Bolshevism and its Stirrup

---

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>127</sup> "Deutschlands Schwert schützt Europa: Drei Jahre Krieg gegen die bolschewistische Aggression," (Germany's Sword shields Europe: Three Year War against Bolshevik Aggression), VB, June 22, 1944, 1.

<sup>128</sup> SS-*Oberstumbannführer* Sündermann was an adjutant of SS *Obergruppenführer* Otto Dietrich, who was Nazi Germany's Press Chief. Sündermann was charged with running the Party Press Office, and also was chief editor of the Party's official news service the N.S. Korrespondenz, which

holders: The Methods of Moscow's World Deception" describes the Anglo-American and Soviet alliance as a farce, due to apparent ideological divisions between east and west.<sup>129</sup> Sündermann's article instilled hope by describing the Soviets as having "colossal feet of clay", sending the message how the Red Army advance might soon halt. The "strength of those against Moscow," meaning the Germans, continued to fight for a free future.<sup>130</sup> Representation of the Bolshevik-Capitalist alliance in a negative light allowed Sündermann to provide renewed faith in victory, while also reiterating how Germany was the only force standing in the way of Anglo-American and Russian domination of the continent.

Again on June 29, 1944, the *Völkischer Beobachter* featured another headline article with a similar theme, entitled "Our Hour will come again: In the Center of the Storm on Europe." As with the previous articles, the hope of a final victory over the Allies continues, in spite of all the odds against them. According to the article, the Germans stood "in the center of the storm, which has been unleashed against Europe, and which the Führer saw coming." American Jewry backed the British Empire of course, and Anglo-Americans held overwhelming material advantages against Germany.

---

provided both the Party press with news of the movement and official views of the Party. Sündermann's work in the Party Press Office was crucial in shaping views on antisemitic policy, particularly in his own publications. For more information, see Michael Berkowitz, *The Crime of My Very Existence: Nazism and the Myth of Jewish Criminality*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 121-126; In addition to his newspaper articles, among Sündermann's other publications includes *Der Weg zum deutschen Journalismus: Hinweise für die Berufswahl junger Nationalsozialisten*, (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1938); and *Die Grenzen fallen: von der Ostmark zum Sudetenland*, (München: F. Eher, 1938).

<sup>129</sup> Helmut Sündermann, "Der Bolschewismus und seine Steigbügelhalter: Die Methoden des Moskauer Weltbetruges." ("Bolshevism and its Stirrup holders: The Methods of Moscow's World Deception") *VB*, June 23, 1944), 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Together with the Soviets, the three superpowers were a massive military coalition aimed against “the bulwark of the Occident’s culture.” The article ardently reports the Allied “Luftterror” (aerial terror) against German cities, arguing that Germany, “won a moral position, a willingness of heart, a force of will”, through continued resistance. The language in these articles contrasts with the assuring and confident attitudes of 1941, but an almost sobering and illusory faith in Hitler and a military victory continued. However, the hope for the preservation of that faith in the regime until “one day the sun shines again over the German people” did not reflect the actual status of morale for the army and citizens of Germany.<sup>131</sup>

The bomb plot against Hitler in 1944 provides proof of German dissatisfaction with the turn of events in the war, even if it was only amongst the ranks of some aristocratic officers in the Wehrmacht. On July 20, 1944, the infamous plot to kill Hitler, codenamed Operation Valkyrie, went into effect. However, the explosive device planted in the *Wolfsschanze* (Wolf’s Lair) failed to kill the Führer, and the subsequent attempt to take over the government in Berlin also failed. Interestingly, on July 22, 1944, an article in the VB titled “European Press on the Assassination Attempt on the Führer” reasserts the idea of European solidarity around Hitler. In a series of snippet summaries of “news reports” from various European nations, including Italy, Finland, Croatia, and France, the article attempt to paint a picture of continued loyalty to the Führer. Supposedly, one unnamed “politician” from Croatia exclaimed “We thank Providence that he survived

---

<sup>131</sup>“Unsere Stunde wird wieder kommen: Im Zentrum des Sturmes auf Europa,“ (Our Hour will come again: In the Center of the Storm on Europe”) VB, June 30, 1944, 1.

for Europe.”<sup>132</sup> While nothing in this article seems genuine, it is fascinating to view the last ditch efforts of Nazi propaganda to salvage a terrible situation by relying on their well-worn war time themes.

### *2.5 Soviet Citizenry and the Red Army*

The depiction of who the Nazis called the “Sowjetmenschen,” including the civilian and military population, is a prevalent part of wartime propaganda. While hardly a homogenous group in the diversified regions of the Soviet Empire, the Nazis often lumped groups together when convenient, and in other instances spoke of their individuality when touting the “war of liberation” theme. Newspaper articles from the start of the military campaign strove to depict the Soviet people in two distinct ways. On the one side, the Nazis proposed that the people inhabiting the Soviet Union were victims of Communism, and therefore the invasion of the USSR was a good thing for the population. On the other hand, the Nazis described the Soviet people as wretched subhumans, bastardized by years of racial intermixing with Jews and Asiatics. In regards to the Soviet military, the Nazis labeled it as a criminal organization led by Jewish commissars and consisting of a vast racial mixture in the composition of the soldiers. The Soviet hierarchy, as the harbinger of all the misery and death facing Russia since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was a criminal organization and the Nazis’ greatest enemy. These characterizations and many others can be found in all forms of media from the period.

---

<sup>132</sup> “Europäische Presse zum Attentat auf dem Führer,” (European Press on the Assassination Attempt on the Führer), *VB*, July 22, 1944, 2.



In a VB article “Why does the Soviet Soldier fight?,” war reporter Dr. Clemens Graf von Podewils attempts to explain the motivations and tactics of the Red Army soldiers. Dr. Podewils, a journalist and writer by profession, does his best in this article to describe the average enemy combatants as slaves to their Bolshevik masters.<sup>133</sup> According to Podewils, the Soviet-Russian soldiers were motivated by different factors for fighting against the Germans, whether because they were a “fanatical bolshevist,” or if they were forced by the “infamous political commissars.” Regardless of their reasons for fighting, Podewils labels those soldiers as Bolsheviks who used tactics such as “shooting from an ambush, whether from the ground, from a tree or from out of a house.”<sup>134</sup> Given the nature of the infamous Commissar Decree and orders regarding taking prisoners of war, labeling enemy combatants as Communists or partisans would certainly have meant a death penalty on the Eastern Front.

The Nazis made a considerable attempt not only to dehumanize the enemy, but also to “reveal” that the Soviet regime was desperate and lacked any form of civility in warfare. Perhaps one of the most interesting topics dealt with Red Army women in an article from July 20 entitled “Bolshevik Gun Dames.” The information in the article derived from a previous work, “Bolshevik Women’s Destiny” by Dr. Adelheid

---

<sup>133</sup> Clemens Graf von Podewils was the son of Bavarian politician Clemens von Podewils-Dürniz. Podewils received his juris doctorate in 1927, and became a journalist for the newspapers *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, *Germania*, and the *Kölnische Volkszeitung* working in England and France. During World War II, Podewils served as a war reporter in Russia, Italy, and France, until his capture by the English in 1944. After the war, he published a memoir of his wartime experiences titled *Don und Wolga* (1952). For more information, see Albert von Schirnding: *Clemens Hans Theodor Konstantin Maria Graf von Podewils-Juncker-Bigatto* in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB), (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 558.

<sup>134</sup> Dr. Clemens Graf von Podewils, “Wie kämpft der Sowjetsoldat?” (Why does the Soviet Soldier fight?), *VB*, June 29, 1941, 1-2.

Petmecky.<sup>135</sup> The newspaper article demeans Soviet women who fought in the Red Army, stating how they “no longer deserved such a description,” insinuating they were no longer feminine or even human. The Red Army women are described as “bestial,” having been transformed by a sadistic regime. The use of females in the military was viewed as an act of desperation because the Soviets had no other choice but to mobilize “girls and women in great quantities, and send their remaining reserves in closed formations into the firing line.”<sup>136</sup> Blatant disregard of the valuable contributions women made to the Soviet war effort also illustrates Nazi gender discrimination at the time.

Not only did the article depict the use of women in combat as a barbaric act of desperation, but it also completely disregarded the women’s movement in the Soviet Union. Petmecky’s article slandered the “golden slogans of the ‘liberation’ of the woman, of its ‘equal rights’ in all areas of economic, national, cultural, political, and public life...” According to the article, these were merely hollow statements, misleading half-truths of the true Soviet intent. In reality, “the woman was equalized to the man, treated equally in misery and hardship, treated this way by a subhuman, who from Moscow controls 170 million servants.” Describing Red Army women as “female beasts” and “shrews” in uniform was a complete underestimation of the value of women in combat and reflected Nazi Germany’s views about women at the time.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Dr. Adelheid Petmecky’s two publications during the war dealt with the status of women and children in the Soviet Union; For more information, see; Adelheid Petmecky, *Bolschewistisches Frauenschicksal: Im Spiegel der Sowjetpresse und –gesetze*. (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP. Franz Eher Nachf. GmbH, 1941); Adelheid Petmecky, *Das rote Kinderparadies*, (Berlin: Junge Generation, 1941).

<sup>136</sup> “Bolschewistische Flintenweiber,” (“Bolshevik Gun Dames”) *VB*, July 20, 1941, 8.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

In an article from June 29, 1944, “The Face of the Soviet Army,” general editor Theodor Siebert of the *VB* emphasized the impact the Communist regime and ideology had upon the troops. Siebert described the Soviet “Workers-Peasants-Army” as unlike any army in the history of armed forces because their task “was not in the defense of their native country and homeland, but in the spreading by force of their political ideology to the entire world.” Siebert compared the Soviet army with the armies of Islam, medieval Christianity, Oliver Cromwell’s Puritan army, and the French revolutionary army. The purpose of the Red army was as the “Weapon of the Working Class” designed to transmit bolshevism to the rest of the world.<sup>138</sup> This article also reflected Nazi racism in Siebert’s comments about the racial composition of the Soviet army:

The special predominance of non-Russian peoples in the Soviet army is also a demonstration of their international Character. In the officer corps, the high rate of foreign races, (Kalmuks, Bashkirs, Tatars, Mongolians, etc.) is downright striking. In the Elite divisions, which one year ago advanced into the Baltic countries and today are at the German front, consist largely of non-Russian contingents. This tendency, already observed during the Russian civil war on the side of the Red Guard, incidentally reveals the opinion of the Kremlin that the illiterate foreign nationals in an international nation represent a more willing, or mindless, cannon fodder than the Russians and Ukrainians.<sup>139</sup>

The racial bias against the so-called Asiatic people created a negative stigma arguing that ignorant non-Russians make up much of the Red Army. Equally important to the author’s thesis was how the purges of the Soviet military leadership resulted in the execution or imprisonment of thousands of capable officers. The failures of the Russo-

---

<sup>138</sup> Theodor Seibert, “Das Gesicht der Sowjet-Armee” (“The Face of the Soviet Army”), *VB*, June 29, 1941, 8.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

Finnish War prompted military reforms to improve the tactics and quality of the Red Army. However, the lack of “practical military experience” and the focus on Tsarist like mass deployment tactics revealed their severe weaknesses, which the Wehrmacht continued to exploit with great success.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, an article titled “Menschen des Osten” by Willy Beer describes the massive amounts of prisoners being taken by the *Wehrmacht*, including “Ukrainians, Kyrgyzs, Ruthenians, Mongolians, Tartars, Uzbekians and Jews.”<sup>141</sup> All of these soldiers, whether from “Asiatic regions” or Russia, were forced under the power of the “hammer and sickle” to conform while their “living comforts” were stolen and replaced by propaganda slogans.<sup>142</sup> The biased misinformation presented about the Red Army depicts an unintelligent, racially inferior, and incompetent force unequal to the superior might of German arms.

Distorted images of Asiatic or even Jewish looking soldiers represented the Soviet soldiers in the newspaper. One image of downtrodden prisoners held the caption, “Typical of the multicolored mixture of people in the Soviet Army.”<sup>143</sup> An adjacent image featured the simple label “Mongols”.<sup>144</sup> The enemies of the Reich were brutish beings, incomparable to the noble Aryans fighting in defense of Europe. Clear evidence

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>141</sup> Karl Willy Beer was a journalist who worked for the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Deutscher Allgemeinen Zeitung*, and later for *Das Reich* in the Nazi period. After the war, he continued his work in the German press for *Deutschen Korrespondenz*, *Der Tag*, and *Politischen Meinung*. For more information, see Wilhelm Mogge, “Zeitungsman aus Berufung und Leidenschaft. Karl Willy Beer (1909-1979),” in *Jahrbuch des Archivs der deutschen Jugendbewegung*, 12 (1980), 147-154.

<sup>142</sup> Willy Beer, “Menschen des Ostens: Gespräche in der Sowjetunion”(“People of the East: Interviews in the Soviet Union”), *Das Reich*, August 3, 1941, 3.

<sup>143</sup> Unaccredited Image, “Typen aus dem bunten Völkergemisch der Sowjetarmee,“ (“Typical of the multicolored mixture of people in the Soviet Army.”), *VB*, July 1, 1941, 3.

<sup>144</sup> Unaccredited Image, “Mongolen,“ (“Mongols“), *VB*, July 1, 1941, 3.

of this concept appeared in a set of images in the VB on July 8, which displayed a German soldier as “*Mensch*” (human), and a Soviet soldier as “*Untermensch*” (Subhuman). Under the caption “Human and subhuman” is the following description: “The German soldier fights for the National Socialist ideology and for a positive future. He is the savior of all cultural values of mankind. The Soviet soldier is a hired defender of criminality, who acts lawlessly in the Bolshevik blood terrors, to the horror of the entire world.”<sup>145</sup> Nazi loathing of a barbarous enemy intent on the destruction of Europe undoubtedly influenced the mindsets of the Germans, and, in particular, it aided in the military’s justification for the terrible actions taken against Soviet soldiers and civilians.

Nazi propaganda blatantly depicted the Soviet citizenry in socio-cultural and racial terms. Propaganda provided a somewhat sympathetic image of the Soviet populations, in an attempt to create a clear divide between the Bolshevik leadership and ordinary Russians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and other groups. One newspaper article “Soviet Man” by Gerhard Thimm describes the discrepancies between Communist ideology and the realities of life in the Soviet Union.<sup>146</sup> Thimm depicts the living conditions in Soviet Russia as grim, with low wages for factory workers keeping people in poverty, in contrast to the wealth of the “new upper class.” Thimm argues that “the income of the new upper class in the supposedly classless state bore no proportion to the average income,” leaving millions in poverty while a few grew

---

<sup>145</sup> Unaccredited Images, “Mensch und Untermensch,” VB, July 8, 1941, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Dr. Gerhard Thimm, who received his Ph.D. in 1924, was assigned as a correspondent to Moscow prior to the outbreak of the war, and later continued his services as a war correspondent. In the postwar period, he continued to publish works about the Soviet Union, including *Das Rätsel Russland: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Scherz & Goverts Verlag, 1952), and *Der Preis und Kostenstruktur in der Industrieproduction der Sowjetzone*, (Berlin: Berichte der Osteuropa-Institutes an der Freien Universität Berlin, 1956).

rich.<sup>147</sup> The representation of the peoples of the Soviet Union as poor, downtrodden, wretched masses provided an excuse for the Nazis to overthrow the Communist regime, as well as to rule over the peoples of the East at their own discretion.

Propaganda represented the peoples of the Soviet Union in negative terms throughout the war period. While often times the subject of the various peoples in the East only came up when discussing Soviet government and atrocities, there are many instances in which the propaganda dehumanized the “victims” of the Communists as an uncivilized and amorphous mass. For example, the newspaper article “Soviet People: Fates from the East” by Willy Beer describes the process of how “the gigantic machine of Bolshevik despotism transformed everyone into robots...”<sup>148</sup> The article provides a rather sympathetic view of the “Soviet people” by emphasizing their plight under “Bolshevik barbarism.”

Beer utilizes images and stories of Soviet citizens to highlight their terrible existence. One such biographical sketch pertains to an inhabitant of Kharkov named Wladimir K., who worked as a “film equipment repairman in a specialized factory.” The article describes Wladimir as a “tremendously modern and progressive thinking man” who had to endure years of Communist oppression. Another person highlighted in the article was a Professor of Philosophy Nina N., whose father had been sentenced to twenty years “forced labor.” As a Professor, Nina N. had no artistic license in Bolshevik Russia, being forced to teach the “dogma of mass terror” specifically emphasizing

---

<sup>147</sup> Gerhard Thimm, “Der Sowjet-Mensch” (Soviet Man), *Das Reich*, August 10, 1941, 3-4.

<sup>148</sup> Willy Beer, “Sowjetmenschen: Schicksale aus dem Osten,” (Soviet People: Fates from the East), *Das Reich*, April 4, 1943, 4.

“Marx and Lenin.”<sup>149</sup> Thus the conditions for ordinary people in the Soviet Union were meager in existence, being subjected to constant propaganda, poor living conditions, and constant threat of punishment or death by the regime.

A similar article “Chortitza on the Dnjepr: Chronicle of a Village” by war reporter Joachim Press tells the “tale of Chortitza,” a settlement on the Dnieper river in the Ukraine.<sup>150</sup> Press provides a brief history of the village from the late eighteenth century on, highlighting the influx of Mennonite colonists from the Netherlands to the area, the threat of Turkish incursions, and of course the presence of German colonists who utilized “the first modern agricultural equipment” and “built factories for these machines.”<sup>151</sup> However, the impact of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution devastated this colonial community with violence, disease, and starvation.

Then in 1929 came “the time of collectivization and de-kulakization,” which effectively turned the people into “modern slaves” under the guise of the collective farm. In addition, the Bolsheviks destroyed the villagers’ way of life, turning their church into a “movie theater,” forbidding “religious education in schools,” and “outlawing the German language in schools.” Press concludes his “Chronicle of a Village” with a short numerical listing of those victims of the Soviets. Press claims that thirteen people were murdered by robber bands in 1918; 337 men and women were exiled from 1929 on; 51

---

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>150</sup> Joachim Press was a war reporter in the *Propaganda Abteilung* of the *Wehrmacht*. Press was assigned to the 62<sup>nd</sup> Volks-Grenadier Division, and his war reports were utilized by Nazi propaganda in various forms. For example, Press wrote an article in the frontline newspaper “*Ostfront*” on October 6, 1941 titled “Wellenbrecher in der Sowjet-Flut” (Bulwark to the Soviet Flood). For more information, see *Die 62. Infanterie-Division, 1938-1945*, (Fulda, 1968), 241.

<sup>151</sup> Joachim Press, “Chortitza am Dnjepr: Chronik eines Dorfes,” (Chortitza on the Dnjepr: Chronicle of a Village), *Das Reich*, April 25, 1943, 3.

men were conscripted into the Red Army; and 193 men, women, and children were displaced since the beginning of the war. In addition, Press states that “sixty percent of all children in Chortitza have lost their fathers due to Bolshevik forced labor.”<sup>152</sup> Therefore, war reporter Joachim Press provides a summary of the fate of European settlers in the Ukraine under Bolshevik rule.

The importance of understanding the Nazis humanizing effort regarding the “Soviet” civilian population cannot be underemphasized. While sympathy was rarely a part of Nazi rhetoric and almost never so in practice, their propaganda often played upon the belligerent-victim trope. The Nazis liked to present themselves as the underdog, dating all the way back to Hitler’s humble origins and life of struggle tale presented in *Mein Kampf*. Propaganda often described the German people as victims of foreign aggression, whether it be the Treaty of Versailles, the *Dolchstosslegende*, the Great Depression, or the conspiratorial plotting of Judeo-Bolshevism.

The Soviet people represent one of those special cases in which the Nazis could utilize them as an example of Bolshevik barbarism and willingness to commit atrocities to achieve their devilish ends. While they often appear as an amorphous mass, the Soviet people also appear in individualized cases as downtrodden Finns and oppressed Ukrainians, or more generally as uneducated and childlike slaves who were easily controlled by the Jews. Here again the Nazis could use vague hints of historical causation and cultural bias regarding the peoples of the East. Propaganda explained the Eastern peoples defeat and enslavement by Judeo-Bolshevism as a byproduct of multiple factors from the past such as their racial mixture from centuries of Oriental invasions,

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 3.



the willingness to follow despots as during the tsarist period, and even the replacement of the Orthodox religion with Communism as a new kind of ideological faith.

## *2.6 Communist Oppression*

Throughout the existence of the Nazi party, their propagandists consistently attacked the leadership of the Soviet Union as demagogues utilizing a criminal ideology of Bolshevism to warp the minds of people to fulfill self-serving motives. The Nazis pointed to evidence of atrocities committed by the Communists against their own people, emphasizing how easily such a pestilence could fall upon and destroy Germany. This theme was the easiest for the propagandists to display with credibility, since collectivization, de-kulakization, and the purges alone could be cited as examples of Bolshevik bloodlust and murderous tendencies. While the Nazis would unleash atrocities and genocide throughout the war, their ideological discourse warned of the Jewish-Bolshevik death machine up until the Third Reich's annihilation.

There are countless examples in Nazi newspapers regarding Communist oppression. In an article from *Das Reich* titled "The Battle with Space: Aggression Westward, Soviet Russia's Biggest Mistake," general editor Werner Wirths provides a large exposé on Soviet Russia.<sup>153</sup> Wirths details the geography and population numbers of the Soviet Union, and provides a narrow history of Russia from the time "under the tsarist eagle" to the "hell of Bolshevism." Wirths argues that promises of "paradise"

---

<sup>153</sup> For more information on the career and writings of Werner Wirths, see Erika Martens: *Zum Beispiel Das Reich*, (Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982), 82-85.

under Bolshevism in reality “was no more than the theory.” After “eliminating the opposition,” Stalin chose despotic rule and planned expansion westward into Europe<sup>154</sup>.

Wirths reiterates the concept of a German first strike against Soviet aggression, and he proceeds to explain the evil Soviet designs. According to Wirths, “...the German deployment destroyed all of the Soviet Russian plans,” and thus “the reckoning with Bolshevism had begun.” The Germans were discovering the true nature of Bolshevism as a result of the military campaign, finding that the Bolshevik morals centered on “murder” and “destruction.” For the Soviet citizens, their “living standards were ruthlessly leveled” by the Soviet regime, yet the Red Army and “military necessities” were provided for under the three Five Year Plans. Thus, the plans of the Soviet Union were expansion “westward of the Volga,” where the buildup of the military and industry were strongest.<sup>155</sup>

Depicting the Soviet regime as barbaric and tyrannical was an effective way to delegitimize its existence and permit the Nazis takeover of the region. In early July 1941, the VB focused its attention for several days on a singular topic which came to represent the face of Stalin’s Russia. The NKVD massacres of political prisoners in the Ukraine during 1941 were ruthlessly exploited by Nazi propaganda as proof of the Jewish-Bolshevik’s murderous nature. While estimates range from 7,000-10,000 victims

---

<sup>154</sup> Werner Wirths, “Der Kampf mit dem Raum: Aggression nach Westen, Sowjetrusslands Grösster Irrtum” (The Battle with Space: Aggression Westward, Soviet Russia’s Biggest Mistake), *Das Reich*, July 6, 1941, 5-6.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

of the NKVD shootings throughout the Ukraine, reports of these executions became easy fodder to drum up support for the war in Germany.<sup>156</sup>

The first front page article in the VB to describe the NKVD massacres was “The Mask falls: The German Soldier Witnesses Bolshevism’s World Swindle,” which focuses on the “mass murder of Lemberg” in the Ukraine. According to the article, the German army’s invasion of the Soviet Union revealed “a hellish reality” about Bolshevism which was “hidden behind a protective wall of propaganda.” The following is a passage from the article, which describes what the Soviet Union actually stood for:

Bolshevism is the most horrible form of government in the history of the world; an oppressive system of exploitation, perpetuated through tyranny and mass murder; it is the despotism of subhumanity, the triumph of the criminal instinct of Jewry and its sadistic grip over 180 million people; it is in its uninhibited aggression a deadly threat to all of human culture.<sup>157</sup>

Other articles in the VB expound upon the murderousness of the Soviet regime and the GPU. Examples of the numerous articles include: “Planned Destruction by the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine,” “11 Million People Murdered by the Soviets,” “Soviet Atrocity in Lemberg,” and “Bolshevik Bloodlust in the Prison of Dubno: 528 Ukrainian Men and Women Massacred.”<sup>158</sup> These stories are riddled with grisly details of the

---

<sup>156</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 46.

<sup>157</sup> “Die Maske fällt: Der Deutsche Soldat erlebt den bolschewistischen Weltbetrug” (“The Mask falls: The German Soldier Witnesses Bolshevism’s World Swindle”), *VB*, July 6, 1941, 1.

<sup>158</sup> “Planmässiges Vernichtungswerk der Bolschewiken in der Ukraine” (Planned Destruction by the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine), *VB*, July 6, 1941, 2; “11 Millionen Menschen von den Sowjets ermordet” (“11 Million People Murdered by the Soviets”), *VB*, July 6, 1941, 2; “Greuel der Sowjets in Lemberg” (Soviet Atrocity in Lemberg), *VB*, July 6, 1941, 3; “Bolschewistischer Blutrausch im Zuchthaus von Dubno: 528 ukrainische Männer und Frauen niedergemetzelt” (Bolshevik Bloodlust in the Prison of Dubno: 528 Ukrainian Men and Women Massacred”), *VB*, July 6, 1941, 3.

murders of innocent people by the Soviet GPU, meant to reinforce the reasons why the Germans had to fight and win this war.

Regarding the massacre at Lemberg, the VB explains how the perpetrators were “Bolshevik subhumans” who undertook “gruesome punishments and torture here and in other parts of the country.” With the massacre at Dubno in the Ukraine, the VB similarly describes the perpetrators as “mass murders composed of GPU Commissars, Party functionaries, and two Jewesses.”<sup>159</sup> The murder of innocent men and women was a useful propaganda tool, as long as the Germans were not the ones not carrying out the killings. Another article described a mass murder committed in the city of Luck (Lutsk), where purportedly some “1,500 Ukrainian nationalists were “massacred with machine guns” by the GPU. This large execution of prisoners thus “revealed the satanic methods of the Bolsheviks” and showed “what kind of enemy and beast confronted Europe” in this war.<sup>160</sup>

In the wake of the massacre articles, Josef Goebbels wrote an editorial in the VB in response to the recent news. The editorial, entitled “The Veil Falls,” is an attempt by Goebbels to argue that Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union was to save Western Civilization from destruction. The following is an excerpt from the editorial, describing the Lemberg massacre:

We sent a commission of doctors, jurists, journalists, and radio people to Lemberg. They returned with drawn faces. What they saw there cannot be

---

<sup>159</sup> E. Arndt, “Bolschewistischer Blutrausch im Zuchthaus von Dubno: 528 ukrainische Männer und Frauen niedergemetzelt” (Bolshevik Bloodlust in the Prison of Dubno: 528 Ukrainian Men and Women Massacred”), *VB*, July 6, 1941, 3; Ernst Moritz Arndt was a war reporter with the propaganda companies, and wrote articles for various newspaper and periodicals including the *VB* and *Der Adler*.

<sup>160</sup> “1500 Ukrainer mit Maschinengewehren in Luck niedergemetzelt: Wieder ein neuer Massenmord der GPU entdeckt,” (1500 Ukrainians Massacred with Machine Guns in Luck: Another New Mass Murder of the GPU Discovered,” *VB*, July 7, 1941, 1.

described. Our newspapers have printed only a portion of the dreadful things that happened under Bolshevism. We have pictures of murdered Ukrainians that we refuse to release to the public, since we fear that viewers would lose all faith in humanity. Given the usual methods of execution, it is practically an act of grace when a bestial soldier rips open the womb of a Ukrainian woman and nails the embryo to the wall. The human eye is not strong enough to see a long series of such photographs. It is hell on earth. The teaching that led to all of this cannot exist in a world in which we wish to live. It must be wiped out.<sup>161</sup>

Perhaps the most outlandish representation of the Soviet Union during the Barbarossa campaign appeared in *Der Stürmer* with a series of articles beginning in August 1941. The article series, described by the editors as “an answer to what was viewed for centuries as a mystery about the peoples of Russia,” revealing “how this ‘Russian mystery’ became intoxicated with Bolshevism.”<sup>162</sup> The series, titled “Hell on Earth” by Volker Dankwart, is a highly racist and discriminatory group of articles providing gross generalizations and subjective views on Russian history, society, culture, and religion.

While the articles themselves are rather long (around three pages each) and riddled with biased information, they reveal an attempt by *Der Stürmer* to provide a comprehensive look at Soviet Russia through Nazi eyes. The first piece in the series of “Hell on Earth” poses the question “How was the invasion possible?” and proceeds to explain why Bolshevik aggression led to the start of the war. The article then explains the “racial background” of the Soviet Union, providing a skewed history of Russia from the invasion of “the Tartars” to the Revolution of 1917 when the “Jewish-Asian lust for

---

<sup>161</sup> Josef Goebbels, “Die Schleier fällt,” (“The Mask Falls”), *VB*, July 7, 1941, 1.

<sup>162</sup> The Editors of *Der Stürmer*, “An unsere Leser!” (“To our readers”), *Der Stürmer*, August 7, 1941, 5.

power” prevailed. Dankwart argues that “only with the Slavic mind was such a massive swindle possible,” allowing for “parasites” led by the “half-Jew Lenin and the full-Jew Bronstein-Trotsky” to seize power and destroy old Russia systematically.<sup>163</sup>

Subsequent issues of the article series “Hell on Earth ” detail subjects such as the Bolshevik seizure of power, Jewish-Bolshevik attempts at world revolution, Communist atheism, the destruction of traditional society, and the enslavement of the population. Dankwart describes the transition from the Tsarism to a Republic during the First World War as merely a precursor to Communism, since the Republic was led by “the stirrup holder of world-Jewry,” the Jew Alexander Kerensky.” Essentially Dankwart argues that Kerensky allowed the Bolsheviks to seize power, and in doing so, allowed for the creation of the first “Jewish state” in the world.<sup>164</sup>

In another article of the series, Dankwart describes the Jewish “advance to world domination” through the spread of Communism throughout Europe and beyond. Dankwart describes the Spartacist revolt in Munich as led by Jewish agitators such as Erich Mühsam, Arnold Wadler, and Kurt Eisner-Kosmanowski.<sup>165</sup> While the *Freikorps* and *Reichswehr* troops were able to put down the Jewish revolt, other nations such as Hungary fell to the revolution which overthrew King Charles until the entrance of

---

<sup>163</sup> Volker Dankwart, “Die Hölle auf Erden” (“Hell on Earth”), *Der Stürmer*, August 14, 1941, 4-6.

<sup>164</sup> Volker Dankwart, “Die Hölle auf Erden” (“Hell on Earth”), *Der Stürmer*, August 21, 1941, 4-6.

<sup>165</sup> The Soviet Republic in Munich, proclaimed on April 7, 1919, did in fact include the efforts of Erich Mühsam and Arnold Wadler. However, Kurt Eisner had been assassinated in February of 1919, though he had been the first head of the revolutionary government in Bavaria following the overthrow of the Wittelsbach monarchy. These individuals made easy fodder for Nazi propagandists, looking to trace the efforts of a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Germany and all of Europe. For more information, see Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 207-214.

Miklos Horthy as the leader of the Hungarian state.<sup>166</sup> These historical connections regarding the Communist attempts at revolutions in Europe presented the threat of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy as both real and dangerous, adding to the credibility of Nazi claims through historical precedent.

The article series “Hell on Earth” is by far the most interesting of the newspaper articles produced during the Barbarossa campaign. While Volker Dankwart is keenly aware of his readership by playing upon the familiar antisemitic rhetoric of other *Stürmer* articles, he also uses causation through past events in order to justify his claims that the Soviet Union is literally “hell on earth.” While Dankwart paints the tsarist period as a time when good Germans such as Catherine the Great ruled over Russia, once the Romanovs were overthrown everything that was civilized in Russia disintegrated. Somehow a vast conspiracy of Jews was able to fool an entire nation into believing that the working class mattered, and under the slogan of “proletarian revolution” the Bolsheviks seized power and took all the wealth and authority for themselves. Dankwart succeeds in presenting the Soviet Union as a desolate and deadly place, where lawlessness ruled and the people suffered under the yoke of subhuman oppression.

Perhaps the best example of Nazi propaganda regarding the Soviet Union was the 1942 exhibition *The Soviet Paradise* displayed in Berlin. *The Soviet Paradise* was quite successful as a traveling exhibit, starting in Berlin and making its way to various German cities, including Munich.<sup>167</sup> The Nazis published a pamphlet to accompany their

---

<sup>166</sup> Volker Dankwart, “Die Hölle auf Erden” (“Hell on Earth”), *Der Stürmer*, August 28, 1941, 4-5; A subsequent article in the series from September 4, 1941 provides further arguments regarding Hungary being “in the claws of Bolshevism” before being “liberated” by Horthy.

<sup>167</sup> Herf, 167.

show, detailing subjects ranging from “Marxism and Bolshevism: the Invention of Jewry” to “Classes in a Classless State.” While the pamphlet begins with a history of Russia emphasizing German attempts at colonizing the East, the scheme abruptly changes with an emphasis on “Marxism and Anarchism in Europe, 1848-1918.” The Nazis essentially link Karl Marx to the start of revolutionary upheavals in Europe, culminating in the Bolshevik Revolution. As an accentuation of the point, the pamphlet claims that during the years 1917-1934 alone “over twenty-one million people” were killed by the “Jews” in Soviet Russia.<sup>168</sup>

In another section “The Façade of Bolshevism” the pamphlet breaks down the aesthetic walls of Communist ideology to reveal the true conditions in the Soviet Union. According to the exhibit, Soviet propaganda had presented the idea of a “paradise of farmers and workers,” but in reality this only concealed the “gray misery of daily life under Bolshevism.”<sup>169</sup> The exhibit contrasts the conditions for the government and military with ordinary citizens, noting that an average worker makes only “100-125 rubles per week” while paying “24 rubles for a kilo of butter” or “22 rubles for a kilo of meat.”<sup>170</sup> The author of the text notes that the “glaring contrast between the impressive weapons and the deep poverty of the people is clear from the living conditions in Moscow,” revealing how by the year 1939 the average room in an apartment housed six people.<sup>171</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> *Das Sowjet-Paradies. Ausstellung der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP. Ein Bericht in Wort und Bild.* Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1942, 16.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 19



The blame for such terrible conditions is placed solely upon the Jews of the Soviet Union. Using the familiar trope of a Jewish controlled Bolshevik state, the pamphlet maintains “a look at statistics regarding the Jewification of high offices in the Soviet Union makes everything clear.” According to their statistics, nearly all the government ministries were “controlled by Jews.” Further proof of this “Jewification” of the Soviet state is noted by using women as “slave laborers,” including such heavy labor jobs as “coal mining and the smelting industry.”<sup>172</sup> Emphasis on the “Jewish” nature of the Soviet system and their crimes is apparent throughout this pamphlet, revealing the Nazis’ efforts to dehumanize the Jews and link the entire Communist movement to Jewish criminality.

*The Soviet Paradise* not only attacks the horrible conditions in the Soviet Union, but also describes the danger facing Europe. In the section “The Soviet Army: A Terrible Threat to Europe” the pamphlet explains that the “Jewish-Bolshevik ruling clique in Moscow has planned the annihilation of Europe.” In continuing to play upon the idea of the Soviet state as ruthless to its own people, the pamphlet states that “the whole labor force” was “ruthlessly exploited to meet this goal.” This labor force of “180,000,000 people” had to “work under the most brutal and primitive conditions” for the purpose of “arms production.” All of this weaponry was meant to “help Jewry overrun Europe,” operating from bases established in Finland, the Baltic, Poland, and Bessarabia.<sup>173</sup> The classification of the Jewish-Bolshevik state as an external threat to

---

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 19-20.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 24.

the Reich and all of Europe helped to justify the war effort, and through the use of statistics, artifacts, and images about the Red Army helped to reinforce the idea of a looming colossus in the East.

Returning to the theme of Bolshevism's empty promises, the pamphlet juxtaposes the image of a "paradise" with the reality of the "slavery among the population" in the section "Classes in a Classless State." In the Soviet Union, the "Jewish ruling class and its lackeys are at the top, then the masses of factory workers are in the cities." From there the hierarchical pyramid only gets worse for the Soviet people. The collective farmers sat near the bottom of the socio-economic heap as "totally impoverished" people. At the very bottom were the "forced laborers" who the Communists used as "cheap and defenseless slaves" and due to "bad food, poor accommodations, and hard work" they died by the "millions."<sup>174</sup> This emphasis on the conditions of the workers and farmers of the USSR provides a level of empathy for the victims of Communism while showing the dangers facing Germany if such a system were allowed to spread west.

The emphasis throughout the exhibition on the working and living conditions of the Soviet people is a unique propaganda technique to delegitimize Communism while strengthening the righteousness of the Nazi cause. While the exhibit was also laden with sections on topics such as of the Soviet secret police and collectivization, and the creation of an almost sympathetic Soviet citizenry shows the attempts by propagandists to legitimize the war effort in a return to the "war of liberation" theme. While nothing in

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 26-27.

*Generalplan Ost* (General Plan East) suggests a long term plan by the Germans to allow sovereignty and freedom for the peoples of the East, it is interesting how throughout the war propaganda trumpeted such a myth for domestic and military consumption.<sup>175</sup>

## 2.7 Conclusions

Print media was only one form of propaganda utilized by the Nazis to indoctrinate the German people. The use of radio and film were the newest and most exciting forms of technological advancements by which Goebbels could disseminate information to the masses, with the ability to reach millions of viewers and listeners across the Reich.<sup>176</sup> Even though I have limited my examination in this chapter to newspapers, books, and pamphlets, the visual media medium utilized by the Nazi regime also passed along similar ideological messages such as anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism.<sup>177</sup> Hitler may have won the hearts and minds of some Germans with the power of oration, but equally important were the visual components of propaganda which could capture everything the Nazis wanted to say in the form of images. These images appeared in almost every newspaper, magazine, pamphlet, book, and other forms of print media. While the focus of this chapter has not been on propaganda imagery, it

---

<sup>175</sup> General Plan East was planned by Heinrich Himmler and his staff at the *Reichssicherheitskauptamt* (RSHA) and the offices of the *Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums* (RKF). The programme called a massive racial reorganization of Eastern Europe and a Germanic settlement of the region. This process would require the elimination of the Jews, Poles, and other minority populations over time. For more information, see Adam Tooze, *Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, (New York: Viking Penguin Group, 2007), 463-467.

<sup>176</sup> Herzstein, 176-86; 259-297.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 155, 223.

must be noted that such things effectively accentuated many of the points touched upon here.

The defamatory campaign by the Nazis against the Soviet Union throughout the Second World War represents a concerted and long term effort to influence the minds of the German people regarding their major ideological foe. These imagined perceptions of the enemy were heavily laden with polarizing imagery in order to maximize the levels of identity and difference between the Germans and the “other.” This brings up a number of important points regarding the use of propaganda as a source of historical inquiry, and how it can be used to show the Nazis dissemination of information and the variable types of information available to the public. More broadly speaking, it shows us how the RMVP manufactured depictions of the Reich’s enemies for a variety of political and ideological purposes.

One of the interesting themes of Nazi propaganda in the wartime period was the restructuring of a centuries old trope of West versus East. For the Nazis, this intentionally divisive categorization reinforced the long-term political, socio-cultural, geographical, overall historical differences between Western and Eastern Europe. Propagandists had an arsenal of material to work with in this regard, including topics ranging from the Huns and Mongols to the threat of Judeo-Bolshevism spreading from Eastern Europe. There is little evidence to suggest that in the socio-cultural representations of the East you find attempts by the Nazis to draw commonalities or parallels between the varying cultures of Europe. Rather, they spend much more time praising Nazi Germany as the protector of European civilization, acting as a dam against a flood of barbarism in the East.

Such conceptions actually required the Nazis to present a dual dichotomy in their rhetoric, which is as contradictory as most of their ideological discourse in their foundations and representations. Propaganda utilized a description of the Soviet Union as an “empire” with the intent to invade and destroy all of Europe, a threat so terrible it required Germany to intervene with a preemptive strike to destroy the Bolshevik cancer at its source. However, it is difficult to imagine how such a dangerous and deadly threat could so easily be juxtaposed with the view of the East as an uncivilized wasteland ruled by Jews and Communists. The Nazi conception of Jews as uncultured usurers who exploit and terrorize innocent people contradicts the notion of the Soviet Union as a major power capable of destroying the world.

Nazi propaganda often attacked the capabilities of the Soviet government, the Red Army, and even the working population. While such representations changed throughout the war period, generally one finds that these motifs existed in concert with one another. The Soviet Union was a powerful force to be reckoned with, yet because of its racial and ideological flaws it could never defeat the *Übermenschen* of Germany. The Nazis had to wrestle with this fundamental flaw in their argumentation, since over the course of the war Germany suffered numerous defeats against the Soviets especially from December 1941 to May 1945.

However, even flawed ideology could still sell newspapers, and Nazi propaganda had many other topics it could discuss beyond the capabilities of the Soviet Union and Red Army. For example, propaganda utilized historical causation to draw linear connections between tsarist dreams of westward expansion and Stalinist imperialism of the 1930s and 1940s. While the Soviets themselves rejected imperialism as a mechanism

to sustain and expand capitalism, the Nazis had no qualms about labeling the Allied Powers as imperialists, since they claimed to reject capitalism as a materialistic and Jewish controlled economic system.

Nevertheless, the propagandists did not have to lie about Soviet foreign policy aggression because such things actually existed throughout the Stalinist period, including the Winter War against Finland and Soviet designs against Bessarabia. While the motives of the Soviets are even today debated by scholars regarding territorial expansion, it is clear that these moves made for excellent propaganda fodder for the Nazis. Thus, depending upon what message they were selling any given week, the ideologues could one day suggest that from tsarist times to the 1940s the Russia was always a belligerent power, and on another day suggest that Judeo-Bolshevism represented a break with the past as a more sinister and deadly global threat. There is symbiotic relationship between truth and contradictions in much of Nazi rhetoric, but their ideology in general often proved dispensable when reality broke down the distance between fact and fiction.

The racial component of National Socialist ideology cannot be underscored enough as an essential facet of their propaganda war against the Soviet Union. One cannot deny that in the 1940s mindset of many peoples across the globe understood, believed in, or at least knew about elements of racism about particular groups. The Nazis were an extreme byproduct of their times, echoing sentiments about Jews and Eastern Europeans which some Germans took to heart. If the World War II generation of the U.S. can be described as the “greatest generation,” it must also be understood that the German counterpart was among the “most racist” of generations. This was not

something unique to Germany whatsoever, but the Nazis made the most of racial ideology to dehumanize their enemies.

Antisemitism was the most pervasive of all the racial arguments, echoed throughout all of Nazi media sources whether designed for domestic or military consumption. Antisemitism tied together all of the Reich's enemies under one guise, the Jews were the leading force in the Soviet Union and also controlled the purse strings of the British and Americans. Race was the factor binding all of these Jews from different continents together, their desire for worldwide domination, and their primary motive for starting a war against Germany. The Jews could be anything the Nazis wanted them to be, a foe who could take on numerous forms like a chameleon. Such a sustainable and malleable hatred was the best ammunition for propagandists, who could describe Jews in the most despicable and inhuman terms, and excuse it all due to the Jews supposed crimes and atrocities.

Lastly, it must be understood that Nazi propaganda worked to indoctrinate a generation from 1933-1945, and this effort undertaken by the regime should not be underestimated. While Nazi ideology became unsustainable in the post 1945, post Hitler period, for many Germans the fate of their nation weighed in the balance between good and evil on the Eastern Front. Millions died in the titantic struggle between two superpowers, and both soldiers and civilians on either side were forever scarred by the conflict. The Nazi regime went to great lengths to inform their citizenry and soldiers about the evils of the Soviet Union, exposing the German people to a variety of media in order to influence their views. German soldiers in the war period were exposed to domestic sources frequently, and civilians could learn about military propaganda from

soldiers writing home or visiting on leave from the front. The correlations between domestic and military propaganda will be explored in the next chapter, revealing that Germans were exposed to the same types of ideology no matter where they were during the Nazi period.



## Chapter Three

### What Informed the Soldiers: Military Propaganda on the Eastern Front

The National Socialist leadership in the German Wehrmacht provides soldiers the inner strength to endure our long and difficult conflict. We understand today, that without this political leadership we as a people could not endure this struggle. They are omnipresent. They appeal to allies at home as well as to the soldiers at the front, both whom fight for the same great cause.... We must act for our men, and not only in the defense against enemy attacks but also their spirits, in order to prevent the enemy from doing so. Officers are always told to be aggressors, and here is one of the ideas that profoundly influences the attitudes of German soldiers. We not only want to defeat our enemy, but also to be warriors for a better Europe, whose peoples also express our ideological motivation.... The new Europe is not only fought for by soldiers but also must be built by soldiers. For this we need every last German. Our ideological warriors act not only for the spirit of today, but also for tomorrow, and with it the future.<sup>1</sup>

-Oberleutnant Hans Müller, "The Political Will of the Soldiers and Propaganda," 1944.

"The soldier in the Eastern territories," wrote Walter von Reichenau, "is not merely a fighter according to the rules of the art of war, but also a bearer of ruthless

---

<sup>1</sup> Oberleutnant Hans Müller, "Der politische Wille des Soldaten und die Propaganda", in *Offiziere des Führers: Die nationalsozialistische Monatschrift der Wehrmacht für Politik, Weltanschauung, Geschichte und Kultur*, Herausgegeben vom NS Führungsstab der Wehrmacht, 5. Heft 1944, s. 17; (All translations in chapter are by Justin Pfeifer unless otherwise noted).

national ideology and the avenger of bestialities which have been inflicted upon German and racially related nations.”<sup>2</sup> This statement derives from the infamous “Reichenau Decree” of October 10, 1941, in which a German Field Marshal instructed soldiers of the Sixth Army to become harsher in attitude and action towards the people of the Soviet Union. Reichenau’s order is an excellent example of the pervasiveness of radical Nazi ideology within the Wehrmacht. While official orders authorized and condoned atrocities, military propaganda targeted German soldiers with ideology that dehumanized the Soviet enemy. The power and influence of military propaganda was instrumental to the Nazi war effort, as it expounded the regime’s *Weltanschauung* and influenced the hearts and minds of the troops. In order to understand how the Wehrmacht indoctrinated its troops with Nazi rhetoric, an investigation of the origins and methods of the *Wehrmacht Propagandaamt* (WPr) and the *Propaganda-Kompanien* (PK) is important to gain a better understanding regarding the potential impact of propaganda targeting German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front. This chapter will analyze Wehrmacht propaganda materials specifically related to the war in the East and the Soviet Union, in order to show the efforts made by the military to use Nazi ideology to shape the perceptions of German soldiers regarding their Soviet enemy.

Despite many misinterpretations regarding the regime’s role in the production and dissemination of propaganda, in most cases military propaganda was actually produced by members of the Wehrmacht, and without their contributions the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* could never have achieved the

---

<sup>2</sup> John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes. Vol. 10: The Einsatzgruppen or Murder Commandos*, (New York: Garland, 1982), 11-12.

widespread propagation of materials. The Nazi regime systematically coordinated its philosophies with the army, utilizing propaganda and military discipline as weapons to enact their violent dogma on the Eastern Front. Both the Party and the Army perfected the canons of brutality and hatred during the 1930s, and then manifested it physically as mass murder and genocide throughout the Second World War. This worldview was the hybrid byproduct of the German military's destructive beliefs and Nazi racist Social Darwinism, which made possible complicity with and active participation in war crimes by soldiers in Soviet Russia.

### *3.1 Wehrmacht Propaganda Division: The Military and Indoctrination*

The origins of the propaganda troops began with the creation of a special department within the Propaganda Ministry (RMVP). This special department, called the *Reichsverteidigungreferat* (RV) dealt with all Wehrmacht propaganda issues in case of a war and was led by an army officer Major Alfred von Wrochem.<sup>3</sup> Working in conjunction with the head of the *Abteilung Inland* (Interior Department) Major Hermann Foertsch, Major von Wrochem planned for the first time to use war reporters, photographers, film squads, field theaters, and cinemas under the supervision of *Inland* as early as 1935. While there was much opposition in the army to having too much civilian influence in military operations, weak leaders such as Werner von Blomberg had to compromise with Hitler, leading to the creation of military propaganda units

---

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Uziel, *The Propaganda Warriors: The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 69.

consisting of army and civilian personnel.<sup>4</sup> By 1938, the first propaganda companies were being raised in the army with close collaboration between the OKW and RMVP, and these would be tested during the Sudetenland crisis with great success.<sup>5</sup>

The Wehrmacht Propaganda Division was created on April 1, 1939, by order of the OKW. Lieutenant Colonel Hasso von Wedel, head of the Press Section of the Interior Branch of the OKW, was named leader of the WPr. Planning for the creation of the organization began in 1938 by order of Field Marshal Keitel, with the chief goals in mind to direct “*geistige Betrauung*“ (mental support), execute military censorship, and control correspondence within the Wehrmacht.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the WPr was to “harmonize the propaganda war with the arms war,” which included collaboration with *Reichsminister* Goebbels and the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of a meeting between Goebbels, Wedel, and Keitel during the winter of 1938-1939, the OKW in cooperation with Goebbels’s demands created number of important provisions regarding the tasks of the new WPr. According to Wedel, these provisions titled "Agreement on the Implementation of the Propaganda War" were the following:

- 1.) The Propaganda war is recognized as equally important to the war effort as are the weapons of war. The weapons of war will be the responsibility of the Wehrmacht, and the propaganda war will be carried out by the RMVP. The

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 71-72.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 90-96.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Robert Willis, *The Wehrmacht Propaganda Branch: German Military Propaganda and Censorship during World War II*, (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1964), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Willis, 7.

latter directs the home front independently, and in areas of operation works in coordination with the Army High Command.

- 2.) The OKW, in the event of mobilization, works in cooperation with the RMVP and organizes Propaganda companies into every army of the military.
- 3.) War strength reports for PKs to be immediately shared by the OKW and edited by the RMVP. The staff of this company consists of professionals and military personnel. The OKW is committed to the War Strength Reports (Kriegsstärkenachweisungen, or KstN), and are to use only those people designated by the RMVP.
- 4.) In the event of war, the OKW and PKs will refer to the RMVP for all propaganda directives. The OKW will provide the fastest means for forwarding these directives to the PKs. If these directives are of a military nature, consensus must be reached before distribution to the troops.
- 5.) The OKW provides the fastest transmission of war reports and other propaganda materials produced by the PKs and by other troops of the Wehrmacht.
- 6.) The OKW provides the fastest military censorship of enemy propaganda materials. The Military Censor of the OKW will be provided with guidelines by the RMVP.
- 7.) Materials produced by the PKs are to be evaluated by the RMVP and the Military Censor.<sup>8</sup>

The directives mandated by Goebbels reveals a deliberate attempt at oversight and control of military propaganda by his ministry. While the military would enjoy considerable autonomy in its actions due to the limitations of the RMVP at the front, the presence of Nazi personnel and more importantly the implementation of Nazi ideology were key to the war effort. Information was power for Goebbels, and with direct influence over the production and dissemination of the propaganda the RMVP strengthened the regime's efforts at propagating its worldview to the soldiers.

As noted by Jeffrey Robert Willis, the connection between military propaganda, political propaganda, and the Propaganda Ministry was a complex relationship.

Goebbels believed that all propaganda should be directed by his Ministry, and that the

---

<sup>8</sup> Hasso von Wedel, *Die Propagandatruppen der Deutschen Wehrmacht*, (Neckargemünd: K. Vowinckel, 1962), 20.

OKW was to undertake military propaganda with the Propaganda Ministry's supervision. However, the Wehrmacht was responsible for psychological fitness of the troops and instilling the desire for victory. The Wehrmacht's tasks thus were to collect military materials for propaganda purposes, conduct psychological warfare aimed at the enemy, and perform troop indoctrination and education. Execution of propaganda duties was to be a collaborative effort between the WPr, the Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup>

In theaters of military operation, propaganda companies were created and subordinated under the headquarters of the army, navy, and air force. While the Reich Propaganda Offices were responsible for carrying on propaganda in home districts and occupied areas, the theaters of operation were handled exclusively by the WPr and the propaganda companies. All propaganda activities of the army were supposed to be executed in cooperation with army propaganda officers, though military censorship was an exclusively army affair while political censorship a Propaganda Ministry matter.<sup>10</sup> While the organization and function of the WPr did go through changes throughout its existence, the men who were in leadership positions were primarily responsible for its policies from 1938-1945. These men included Hasso von Wedel and his assistant Rolf Kratzer, both of whom were loyal to the Party and willing to subordinate propaganda tasks to the whims of Goebbels.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Willis, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 10-12.

The subdivision of the WPr into various sections allowed for specialized tasks to be completed by different departments. The original planning created four *Gruppen* (groups), but additional sections were created and the tasks of those sections altered throughout the war. Section I of the WPr was in charge of the general direction of propaganda activities. Section II was responsible for *Truppenbetreuung* (troop entertainment), which dealt specifically with soldiers' propaganda materials such as newspapers and films. Section III handled military censorship, and Section IV was in charge of foreign propaganda.<sup>12</sup> By 1940, two additional *Gruppen* were created to handle military propaganda. Section V handled publications of the Commander in Chief of the Army, biographies of army leaders, army propaganda in book form, army propaganda in the form of photographs and film, employment of artists and cartoonists, army propaganda in the schools, and the radio program "Voice of the Soldier."<sup>13</sup> Section VI dealt with propaganda in special reference to the Luftwaffe, and in June 1941 an additional seventh section dealt with navy matters.<sup>14</sup>

The invasion of Russia in June 1941 shifted the focus of WPr Sections IV and V into a much more aggressive direction. Section IV, charged with foreign propaganda, became tasked with propaganda specifically targeting Russia. This included foreign language radio and directing propaganda agents in prisoner of war camps. Section V still supervised the propaganda questions related to the army, but now took charge of the PKs and issued directives to them.<sup>15</sup> The WPr largely remained unchanged from June 1941

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 12

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 27, 32.

until mid-1944, when the massive military campaigns launched by the Allies opening a Western Front and destroying the German Army Group Center in the East corresponded with major changes to the organization. The restructuring attempt aimed at simplifying the WPr's structure and to cut down on the number of divisions in the Branch, likely to free men up for military service.<sup>16</sup>

The tasks of some of the sections changed with the reorganization effort. Section II, formerly charged with *Truppenbetreuung*, was now placed in charge of recruiting and domestic propaganda. WPr II still continued to utilize material of artists and cartoonists and supervise periodicals and military publications, as well as to control radio propaganda and military lectures. In addition, WPr II continued to be responsible for the reporting of propaganda companies in the press and for experience reports of the troops in the press, as can be frequently found in newspapers such as the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Other alterations to the WPr included charging Section IV with handling the content of combat propaganda in the East, analysis of enemy propaganda, supervision of propaganda materials produced by the troops, and preparation of materials for Eastern Europe and Soviet prisoners of war.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most important alteration to the WPr during 1944 was the creation of a new section for countering enemy propaganda (*Gruppe Abwehr Feindlicher Propaganda*). This new section controlled production of the *Mitteilungen für das Offizierkorps*, *Mitteilungen für die Truppe*, lectures about methods to combat enemy

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 37-39.



propaganda, and course instruction. The new section also directed frontline newspapers and was responsible for *Nachrichten des OKW*, *Stimme der Heimat*, and *Front und Heimat* publications. In June 1944 a new Press Section of the Propaganda Department emerged in the Wehrmacht. This section was in charge of daily press directives, the release of military news, short news notices for the troops, and Wehrmacht Propaganda statistics. Finally, film had become such a valued portion of Wehrmacht propaganda that a Film Work Staff was added to the Propaganda Branch. This section was tasked with the organization of films for the Wehrmacht, including *Die Deutsche Wochenschauen*, *Die Frontschau*, and other news, feature, or educational films.<sup>18</sup> This was the overall structure of the Wehrmacht Propaganda Branch in its various forms throughout its existence.

The WPr itself should be viewed overall as a dualistic mechanism of indoctrination from both the Wehrmacht and the Party. The principles of independence, so often exclaimed by members of the military, were often cited as a reason to keep the NSDAP and the RMVP away from the troops. However, this was not done because the Wehrmacht rejected the ideas of the NSDAP, but merely as part of their old tradition of independence within the state.<sup>19</sup> As noted by Daniel Uziel, some parts of the Wehrmacht were eager and willing to “indoctrinate their soldiers in accordance with NSDAP ideology.”<sup>20</sup> The use of the PKs in the military significantly aided this task, and as the war grew in scope so did the efforts of the propagandists increase as well.

---

<sup>18</sup> Willis, 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> Uziel, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 108.

By the time of Operation Barbarossa, there were a total of thirteen army PKs, allowing for each of the armies to have its own propaganda unit. The invasion of the Soviet Union allowed a massive number of PK access to the occupied territories, but their actions were confined to military matters since interior propaganda was handled by the RMVP. As the military campaign turned from triumph to defeat in the winter of 1941-1942, the propaganda troops became in even more high demand by the RMVP and the Wehrmacht. Overall, as the war worsened there was a dramatic rise in the demand for more psychological warfare, and until the final stages of the war the WPr operated with significant numbers and resources at its disposal.<sup>21</sup>

The war allowed the Wehrmacht to dominate the matters of supply and developmental tasks regarding the WPr and the PKs given the fluidity and dangers of the front. However, since the RMVP possessed significant expertise and resources from the regime, it continued to work in special conjunction with the PKs and the overall military apparatus. The propaganda troops and the RMVP thus maintained a close relationship from the WPr's inception, ranging from staffing personnel to training and equipping the troops. However, because of this relationship between the RMVP and Wehrmacht, the army had to allow the NSDAP access to its soldiers. This allowed the regime and its loyal propaganda warriors to infiltrate and influence the military, and overall this factor was accepted by the Wehrmacht hierarchy as a necessary component for troop morale and discipline.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 120-121

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 150.

The WPr was an instrumental component of wartime policy, which included strategic as well as ideological and psychological aspects. For example, in early 1941, the WPr was tasked with three main initiatives in addition to its journalistic duties. These included: spreading the illusion to the Soviets that Germany's next military operation would be against England, creating special educational materials for the troops about Communism, and propaganda efforts targeting Red Army and Soviet ethnic minorities.<sup>23</sup> The Russian campaign greatly increased the tasks of the WPr given the scope and importance of the military endeavor. By mid-1942 the staff of the WPr grew to over 300 men, and by late 1942 the strength of the PKs numbered nearly 15,000, or roughly the size of a Wehrmacht division.<sup>24</sup> The importance of this branch of the Wehrmacht seemed only to increase rather than decrease based upon the seriousness of the war situation, and this would alter dramatically only when the war entered its final stages.

It would be a mistake to assume that the Nazis simply gave up their efforts at indoctrination as the war turned for the worse. On the contrary, while the size of the PKs decreased and organization disintegrated in the last year of the war, the nature of Nazi propaganda message continued to be as virulent, defiant, and racist as ever. Only the destructive power of the war itself reduced the propaganda effort to impractical effects. According to Uziel, there were three reasons why the WPr experienced a dramatic reduction in manpower, resources, and overall importance by 1944-1945. First, the

---

<sup>23</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, *Das tönende Erz: Deutsche Propaganda gegen die Rote Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1978), 30.

<sup>24</sup> Uziel, 167.

manpower shortages at the front resulted in PK units being disbanded so that those men could be shuffled into the meat grinder. The series of military defeats suffered on the Eastern and Western Fronts took their toll on the PKs as well. For example, up to October 1943 only 546 propaganda troops had been killed or MIA, 480 wounded and 32 POW. By the end of September 1944, the numbers were 761 killed or missing, 582 wounded and 35 POWs.<sup>25</sup> The second reason for the reduction in the size of the PKs was the massive loss of territory controlled by the Reich. The third reason, not surprisingly, was that the morale of the troops and public sank to such lows that the propaganda troops became largely ineffective by war's end.<sup>26</sup>

### *3.2 Media and Soldier's Ideology: Film and Radio Propaganda*

The Nazification of the Wehrmacht was a collaborative effort between the regime and the military, requiring a massive amount of indoctrination in order to ensure that the soldiers were adequately informed of military matters while simultaneously inculcated with National Socialist precepts. Hitler was obsessed with propaganda as a means of maintaining troop morale, undoubtedly influenced by the German army's capitulation in the First World War. This meant that cooperation between the NSDAP and OKW was essential for a *Gleichschaltung* of information to be cultivated and maintained throughout the duration of the war. Uniformity and order were key components of the Nazi system, and propaganda provided the educational component necessary to keep the German people apprised of the Führer's expectations.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 174-5

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 176-77.

In regards to radio and film, the use of radio receivers played an important role in the indoctrination of the troops. Radio vans accompanied divisions with a powerful receiver which circulated among the units. For example, during May-June 1941 alone, the 18<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division had 134 receivers so all the troops could listen to radio broadcasts. Films were also very popular amongst troops, and film vans allowed soldiers to view films on an almost daily basis. Omer Bartov concludes in regards to radio and film propaganda, that: “even at the front the troops were as amply supplied with them as possible under the circumstances.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, multiple forms of media would be utilized by the Nazis to sway the minds of the soldiers throughout World War II on the Eastern Front.

### 3.2.2 *Film Propaganda: Die Frontschau*

In order to carefully indoctrinate and inform the German citizenry, the Nazis utilized the mediums of film and radio to masterful effect. Throughout the 1930s the Nazis tested techniques for presenting military operations, such as the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936.<sup>28</sup> Prior to the start of the Polish Campaign, in February 1939 filmmaker Fritz Hippler was made director of the German Newsreel Center within the RMVP, with the goal of making the *Wochenschau* the primary propaganda tool of the regime during the wartime period.<sup>29</sup> Beginning in November 1940, Josef Goebbels put four existing newsreel companies (Ufa, Tobis, Delig, and Fox) together under the

---

<sup>27</sup> Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, 69-70.

<sup>28</sup> Hilmar Hoffmann, *The Triumph of Propaganda: Film and National Socialism, 1933-1945*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1996), 210.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

control of the RMVP, merging them to form a single wartime newsreel the *Deutsche Wochenschau*.<sup>30</sup> The widespread availability of these films cannot be understated, as figures suggest that around five million feet of film was used for the DDW.<sup>31</sup>

German soldiers were subjected to multitudes of propaganda throughout the Second World War. The ideological nature of the Eastern Front conflict, as well as its duration, made the use of propaganda all the more important to sustain morale against an increasingly more dangerous foe. Film propaganda, while not the most convenient form of indoctrination at the front lines, was utilized by the military in suitable areas to inform the troops. Between 1941-1943, the Nazis collaborated with the military to produce a series of training films called *Die Frontschau* (literally the “Front Show”).<sup>32</sup> These films were carefully laced with subtle forms of Nazi ideology and useful military information to educate the German soldiers about the realities of the front, while providing fair warning about the dangers posed by their new tenacious enemy in the East.

*Die Frontschau* was directed by one of the Nazis leading propaganda film makers Fritz Hippler. Hippler in his capacity as head of the RMVP’s film division was highly productive at producing militaristic and antisemitic documentaries.<sup>33</sup> In 1939-1940 Hippler directed the propaganda films *Feldzug in Polen* (1939) and *Der Westwall*

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 92-93

<sup>31</sup> Harro Segeberg, Editor, *Mediale Mobilmachung I: Das Dritte Reich und der Film*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), 162.

<sup>32</sup> According to International Historic Films, these documentaries were never shown to the public, and were “screened to recruits to help prepare them for the realities of the east.” For more information, see International Historic Films, “*Die Frontschau*,” IHFFilm.com, <http://ihffilm.com/22900.html>, Accessed 10/28/2013.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, (Williard, OH: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, 2002), 120.

(1939), depicting the Polish campaign and the Siegfried Line respectively.<sup>34</sup> In 1940, Hippler directed one of the most reviled films of all time *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), which relied heavily upon footage from the Warsaw Ghetto to depict the Jews in the worst possible manner.<sup>35</sup> Thus when Hippler was commissioned to produce military propaganda films for soldiers on the Eastern Front, he was already firmly committed to Nazi ideological principals in his work.

*Die Frontschau* (FS) is hardly the best example of the sort of racist antisemitic and anti-bolshevik propaganda that can be found in *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* or other such films, but it serves as a more objective source by providing a look at the type of educational material used by the Wehrmacht to describe their enemy and explain combat situations at the front.<sup>36</sup> There were at least fourteen of the “front show“ films produced during the war, although not all of these are known to have survived intact.<sup>37</sup> What is particularly interesting about these films is both what they show about combat in the East, and also equally important is what the documentaries leave out. These well edited instructional videos with uplifting musical scores were meant to provide soldiers with an

---

<sup>34</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won*, 275-6.

<sup>35</sup> Toby Haggith, ed., *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 85-90.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to *Die Frontschau*, the military also produced a series of additional training films. The *Abteilung Lehrfilm* (Training Film Branch) was responsible for the creation, distribution, and archiving of the films. For more information, see David Stone, *Hitler's Army, 1939-1945: The Men, Machines and Organization*, (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2009), 246; Rudolf Absolon, *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich, Volume 5, 1. September 1939 bis 18. Dezember 1941*, (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1988), 179.

<sup>37</sup> This number is based upon my research of the subject, in being able to locate the films or references to the titles of films titled under the *Frontschau* series.

understanding of combat, but in many cases only act as ideological reinforcements regarding German superiority.

*Frontschau* two (FS 2) titled *Russian Fortifications* provides a detailed look at the Red Army's defensive positions, which the Nazis dubbed the "Stalin Line." The film shows the Soviet defenses after their capture in 1941, revealing the elaborate trenches, artillery positions, massive tanks, barbed wire, and bunkers. The narrator states the following about the Soviet defenses, "The Russian is a master of fortifying terrain and defending positions, the better we know his principles the more easily we can attack his positions." This statement suggests a greater level of appreciation by the German military of the Red Army's tactics, undoubtedly because the film was produced in the later parts of the Barbarossa campaign when victory was far less assured than in June 1941. Interestingly, the later portions of the documentary were filmed in the winter months, which would provide incoming trainees with a first hand look at the weather conditions even prior to being subjected to the dreaded "General Winter."<sup>38</sup>

FS three titled *Advance* is a fifteen minute film from 1941 detailing the German advance into the Soviet Union. The information provided is rather general and rudimentary, providing endless images of soldiers advancing by foot, motorcar, horse, tanks into the Soviet Union. The use of first person camera shots provides an element of realism of the experience on a horse drawn cart or motorized car. In addition, the camera crews are careful to show the types of roads in the Soviet Union, largely endless unpaved dirt paths, which appear navigable if uncomfortable for the soldiers.

---

<sup>38</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau: Russischer Stellungsbau*, Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1941, Film.



Interestingly, the film showcases how much the Wehrmacht still depended on horses for its primary means of transportation, revealing the problems the army faced in the difficult terrain and inclement weather conditions.<sup>39</sup>

FS four *Infantry on the Attack*, a short ten minute film, displays a German assault on a Soviet defensive position. The film begins by showing how Wehrmacht soldiers interrogated Soviet prisoners of war for information about enemy positions. Images of surrendering Russian soldiers are shown, and the narrator states “prisoners assembled and searched,” and “the officers are separated and interrogated.” This information is utilized by the Germans to plan their assault, involving immense artillery support to pulverize enemy positions. Following the attack, mass amounts of Soviet prisoners are shown being taken, depicting the ease with which Red Army positions could be taken given the proper planning and logistical support.<sup>40</sup>

In FS five/six, *Mountain Troops Battle for a Town* depicts the assault on Baronwice in Soviet occupied Eastern Poland in 1941. The first images in the film show how the Soviets used snipers to attack German troops in an uncivilized manner. Following the killing of the enemy snipers, the film portrays the massive logistical coordination to show the overwhelming material and manpower advantage of the German forces. The film attempts to portray the effects of an artillery barrage on the enemy side by displaying cowering enemy soldiers through the use of captured enemy footage (or perhaps Germans dressed as Soviets in a reenactment). Realistically, the film

---

<sup>39</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau: Vorwärts*, Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1941, Film.

<sup>40</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau: Infanterie im Angriff*, Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1941, Film.

depicts how Russian heavy tanks attacked the German flank, forcing them to use antitank weapons to destroy the hulking Soviet machines.<sup>41</sup>

FS seven *Attack by Infantry and Armor against a Town*, displays an assault on a Soviet town during winter conditions in 1941-42. The film emphasizes the role of mechanized units and armored vehicles as key to such an attack's success. However, even with strong armored support, the Soviet enemy is depicted as a formidable foe. The narrator states, "The enemy often lets the first weak forces pass, and then goes to work with stunning effect." According to the narrator, even after the occupation of the town takes place, precautions must be taken against captured enemy combatants. "Prisoners," states the narrator, "must be carefully searched for weapons. Search every house, shed, and loft. Hiding enemy squads remain behind and battle our supply troops for days." This warning hints at the growing partisan and Red Army infiltration behind German lines over the course of the war. Relations with the townspeople in this film are depicted as friendly, with the German soldiers shown as a liberating force. In an interesting contrast, the narrator instructs that while "a captured officer should be interrogated," the townspeople "provide information" to the Wehrmacht willingly.<sup>42</sup> This unique display of the German army as a liberating force, treating prisoners of war in a fair manner, and receiving aid from the civilian populace, was all part of the propagandistic attempt to describe the war in far different terms than it was actually being conducted.

---

<sup>41</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau Nr. 5/6: Gebirgsjäger im Kampf um eine Ortschaft*, Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1941, Film.

<sup>42</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau Nr. 7: Angriff von Infanterie und Panzer gegen eine Ortschaft*, Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, ca. 1942, Film.

FS eight *Defensive battle in Winter* is an interesting film which shows German troops coming under attack by the Soviets in 1942. The film emphasizes the speed of Russian offensives despite winter conditions, revealing the difficulties the Wehrmacht faced in the winter of 1941-42 and the necessity of educating incoming recruits about these dangers. While German troops are depicted in full winter gear and heavily armed, the troops who faced the Russian winter during Barbarossa were hardly as prepared for the conditions or the Red Army counterattacks. This film signals a shift in German strategy for the first time in the *Frontschau* series, revealing Wehrmacht soldiers relying on earthen bunkers and trenches reminiscent of World War I to combat enemy attacks.<sup>43</sup> The narrator even stresses that when facing Bolshevik offensives, the soldiers needed to become “cold blooded” in their actions against the enemy. However, in this idealized version of a Soviet attack, the Wehrmacht troops had heavy artillery and tank support to repulse the Red Army onslaught.<sup>44</sup>

FS nine *Terrain difficulties in the East, Winter and Spring* from 1942 depicts the major contrast between the hot summer conditions and the cold winters in the Soviet Union. The film begins with images of trucks attempting to navigate the terrible roads, and shows how tracked vehicles frequently became mired in the mud. To combat this, the Germans had to use horses as a necessity in cases where vehicles could not pass, and troops were forced to construct wooden land bridges to aid tanks and trucks in their maneuvers. However, while the winter weather is shown as a hindrance to the

---

<sup>43</sup> *Frontschau* Nr. 9 titled *Stellungsbau der Truppe* (Construction of Troop Positions) from 1942 further details the construction of defensive positions and quarters in winter conditions.

<sup>44</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau Nr. 8: Der Abwehrkampf im Winter*, (Defensive Battle in Winter), Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1942, Film.

*Wehrmacht*'s transportation abilities, no difficulties are shown among the soldiers themselves, such as breakdowns with weaponry, hypothermia, or frostbite from the conditions.<sup>45</sup>

One of the last of the *Frontschau* produced during the war, *The Unseen Weapon* in 1944, addressed sniper warfare against the Red Army on the Eastern Front. This film is quite different from the others of the series, as it is 58 minutes in length and is much more like a movie production than a documentary. The soldiers in the film engage in dialogue with each other, frequently describing the enemy combatants as “Bolshevists.” This film addresses topics such as using effective camouflage, techniques to locate and eliminate enemy sharpshooters, and the importance of snipers on the battlefield. However, the film attempts to provide more realistic accounts and depictions of combat, with one experienced soldier describing an engagement as a battle with “a hellish Bolshevik sniper,” who managed to hold up his entire unit for hours before he was killed. This film accurately depicts the deaths of both German and Soviet soldiers in sniper battles, providing realistic battlefield scenarios and worthwhile techniques to educate soldiers at the front.<sup>46</sup>

The importance of *Die Frontschau* as a propaganda source for German soldiers should not be underestimated. While the films lack the ideological precepts of many other military and non-military Nazi sources, *Die Frontschau* helps us to better

---

<sup>45</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau Nr. 11/12: Gelände schwierigkeiten im Osten: Winter und Frühjahr*, (Terrain Difficulties in the East, Winter and Spring), Directed by Fritz Hippler, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1943, Film.

<sup>46</sup> OKW, *Die Frontschau: Die unsichtbare Waffe* (The Unseen Weapon), Unknown Director, *Herresfilmstelle*, 1944, Film.

understand the fact that not all sources of information given to the troops were based in dogma alone. Soldiers had to be trained to fight in extreme conditions on the Eastern Front, and film sources such as *Die Frontschau* focus far more on military tactics than on anything else. These types of materials counterbalance the Nazi propaganda to a certain extent, but even these films were not without biases. Every film depicted the Germans as being capable of overcoming all obstacles, and the Soviets were viewed as tenacious but ultimately uncivilized brutes destined for defeat at the hands of the Third Reich.

#### 3.2.2.2 Radio Propaganda: Die Wehrmachtbericht

The radio was an important technological medium to produce propaganda during the period of the Third Reich. The establishment of the RMVP in 1933 facilitated the *Gleichschaltung* of privately owned industries in Germany. However, the radio broadcasting system had been state regulated since 1925 by the Reich Radio Company (RRG). Goebbels saw the radio as an excellent propaganda tool to unify the people into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and he wanted to have complete control of the airwaves.<sup>47</sup> In order to assert his new ministry's control over the radio industry, Goebbels persuaded Hitler to issue a decree on 30 June 1933, allowing the RMVP to consolidate its hold over educational and intellectual life in Germany. This decree allowed the RMVP to assume responsibility over the radio, and by 1 April 1934, the RRG was part of Goebbels' Ministry.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 38

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 39

The radio became the regime's primary propaganda mechanism to propagate Nazi ideas and form a singular public opinion. By in 1934 six million radio sets were produced by the regime, and in 1935 Hitler's speeches reached an audience of over 56,000,000 people.<sup>49</sup> However, despite the major proliferation of radio propaganda, the Second World War period proved a disappointment for the RMVP. The average listener tended to be bored with the news programs, so that Goebbels decided in 1942 that seventy percent of radio transmissions had to include light music in order to attract larger audiences by mixing entertainment with propaganda.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the radio proved the largest and most far reaching of the Nazis' technological innovations for disseminating propaganda.

The German army created a daily radio report on the RRG published by the OKW, which addressed the military situation during World War II. The radio report, titled the *Wehrmachtbericht* (armed forces report, WB), relied on information provided by the PKs, which was later edited by the Chief of Operation Staff of the OKW and the RMVP. This report was aired on September 1, 1939, and from there on the WB announcements became the main source of military information available to the German public.<sup>51</sup> The effect of the WBs was aided by the work of Dr. Erich Murawski of the *Wehrmacht Propaganda Abteilung*, who from May 1940 on was given the task of providing commentary on the radio program and in the press.<sup>52</sup> Murawski gave the WBs

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 42-3

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Uziel, 270

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 270.

a professional demeanor, giving the aura of an unbiased military report which ordinary people could understand.<sup>53</sup>

In the postwar period, our historical understanding of the *Wehrmachtbericht* was largely shaped by Dr. Murawski. After the Second World War, Murawski worked for the *Bundesarchiv* at Koblenz, and later was the first head of the *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* at Freiburg. In 1962, Murawski wrote a history of the *Wehrmachtbericht* entitled *Der deutsche Wehrmachtbericht, 1939-1945*. This is the only major work published about the WB, but as noted by Daniel Uziel, the main problem with the book is its “uncritical approach to the subject.”<sup>54</sup> Murawski’s role within the hierarchy of the OKW makes his book less than reliable, nevertheless his personal involvement with the WB provides unique insights into the functions of the radio program.

Murawski describes the purpose of the WB in its capacity as a propaganda tool in his book. According to Murawski,

The mission of the WB was to inform and to influence. The target of these measures were:

1. the troops at the front and at home.
2. the allied troops fighting in their own front-line.
3. the population in the fatherland and in the occupied territories.
- 4 the allied peoples.
- 5 the neutrals.
- 6 and if possible also the people and leadership of the enemy.<sup>55</sup>

Here, of course, we see that Murawski and the OKW was keenly aware of the target audience, thus making the message of the propaganda as far reaching as possible.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 388.

<sup>55</sup> Erich Murawski, *Der deutsche Wehrmachtbericht, 1939-1945: Ein Betrag zur Untersuchung der geistigen Kriegführung*, (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1962), 38.

Murawski notes that the “language of the WB” was intended to “achieve the hoped-for propaganda effect.”<sup>56</sup> This meant that the “linguistic design” of the WB had to be understood by “the soldiers themselves” and to “military laymen” in order to be effective.<sup>57</sup>

In Erich Murawski’s analysis of the WB, he finds that the style of reporting underwent changes over the course of the war period. Murawski explains that the WB “underwent a fourfold transformation,” characterized by the following:

- a. cautious restraint (1939 until May 1940)
- b. exuberance of intoxicating success (Western Campaign 1940 until end of 1941)
- c. camouflage the setbacks (1942 until Fall 1944)
- d. sober liquidation reports (Fall 1944 until May 1945).<sup>58</sup>

The importance of this “transformation” in the style of reporting from the WB is that the Nazi regime and military leadership apparatus continuously experimented with methods to influence the minds of the troops and the people depending on the circumstances in the war. When the WB was new the reporting is described as having a form of “restraint,” whereas for example during the Barbarossa campaign the “intoxicating success” took over the form of presentation. In this way, it is clear that the WB was indeed a biased propaganda tool, even if it was more restrained than most Nazi newspapers and films.

The WB is an important source for understanding the types of information soldiers received on a daily basis on the Eastern Front. German troops were bombarded

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 124.



by propaganda in verbal, print, radio, and film mediums, but the radio in many ways was the most accessible form of Nazi propaganda for the army because of its portability.<sup>59</sup> Ordinary enlisted men, like the civilian population back in Germany, regularly received *Wehrmachtberichte* and political speeches on the radio at the front.<sup>60</sup> By examining selected WBs from 1941-1945 pertaining to the Eastern Front conflict, one can determine the type of information soldiers received on the radio about the war situation.

On the night of June 22, 1941, the OKW gave its *Wehrmachtbericht* to the soldiers and civilians of the Third Reich. On the day of the attack against the Soviet Union, very little information was given regarding the magnitude of Operation Barbarossa. The first report on the war in the East stated the following, “On the Soviet border, fighting has occurred since the early morning hours of the day today. An attempt by the enemy to fly into East Prussia, was repulsed with heavy losses. German fighters shot down numerous Red warplanes.”<sup>61</sup> This was the only information provided in the broadcast regarding the assault on Russia, revealing the levels of secrecy and perhaps the lack of information available regarding the first day of fighting in the East.

The next day, on June 23, 1941, the WB provided a much greater amount of detail regarding the war situation on the Eastern Front. The report began with the following statement, “In the east, the battle of the Army, Air Force, and Navy against the

---

<sup>59</sup> For more information on German radio vehicles at the frontlines, see Jean-Denis Lepage, *German Military Vehicles of World War II*, (NC: Mcfarland and Company, 2007); Chris Bishop, *The Encyclopedia of Weapons of World War II*, (NY: Metrobooks, 2002).

<sup>60</sup> Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 197-198.

<sup>61</sup> OKW, *Die Wehrmachtberichte Band 1: 1939-1941*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 585.

Red Army is on track and successful.”<sup>62</sup> More information is provided in this report, such as descriptions of battles in the Black Sea and aerial fighting over East Prussia. Perhaps the most important component here is the repeated emphasis of the military’s “success,” and that everything was going according to plan. In a second reiteration of the first line of the radio address, the WB stated the following, “In the East, the operations of the German army take their planned course with great success.”<sup>63</sup> While the WB continued to be vague and general in its information, the emphasis on early achievements would only underscore the euphoric reporting over much of the Barbarossa campaign.

The WBs over the next several days began to provide more and more details about the campaign in the East. On June 29, the reporting by the OKW that day gave significant levels of information about the actions of the first week of fighting. According to the announcement, the German people would “be informed by a series of special reports in the running of the day” regarding the “recent operations in the East.”<sup>64</sup> The reason for war against the Soviet Union was explained as follows: “In order to avert an impending threat from the East, the German Wehrmacht on June 22, 3 a.m., assaulted into the middle of a massive deployment of enemy forces.”

Subsequent “special announcements” on the evening of June 29 detailed the threat posed by the Red Army and reported on the great victories of the German armed forces. This included mention of the destruction of 2,582 aircraft since June 23, and of

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 585.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 587.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 592

many hundreds of Soviet tanks as well.<sup>65</sup> The conclusion of the radio announcement for the evening echoed the same propaganda message of Nazi newspapers regarding the dangers of Soviet aggression. “These massive numbers of aircraft, tanks, and other materials” stated the announcement, provided for the German people a “surprising picture of the magnitude of the danger that had been brewing in the east on the border of the Reich.” The report emphasized that the German army acted “at the last minute to save *Mittleuropa* from an invasion, the consequences of which would have been immeasurable.”<sup>66</sup> Thus, the image of the war as a defensive struggle was firmly established within the first week of the military campaign.

The establishment of the myth of German victimhood was used in all of the Third Reich’s military and genocidal campaigns. Ideologically speaking, the war in the East was by far the most pervasive and virulent of the Nazi causes, echoing the longstanding commitment by Hitler to rid the world of Judeo-Bolshevism. These sentiments occasionally emerged in the WBs, though it must be emphasized that the WBs focused on military operations. On July 1, 1941, the WB describes the military engagements on the Eastern Front taking place between Bialystok and Minsk for much of the broadcast. However, the concluding portion of the announcement stated the following, “the Soviet armies were ready to be the spearhead into Germany’s back and to carry the torch of Bolshevism into Europe.”<sup>67</sup> Once again, such statements coupled with information about the massive amounts of Soviet troops and equipment being

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 594-5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 596-7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 602.

captured or destroyed provided the evidence necessary to justify *Lebensraum* imperialism.

During the Barbarossa campaign many of the propaganda tropes utilized by the Nazis regarding the war in the East manifested themselves in the WB. For example, on July 23, 1941, the WB emphasized that operations in the Ukraine were conducted by an alliance of European forces against the Soviets, including “German, Romanian, Hungarian, and Slovakian troops.” This concept of a European coalition battling together against Bolshevism was heavily utilized in all Nazi propaganda, and echoed in the WB from an early stage as well. The same report went on to describe the situation on the “Finnish Front,” in an attempt once again to emphasize the importance of the Eastern Front as a European effort, and not just another German war after two years of largely going at it alone against the Allies.<sup>68</sup>

The same sentiments regarding a Nazi led coalition of allies continues throughout Barbarossa. On July 26, the WB remarked that the “allied troops” in the Ukraine and the “Romanian forces” in Bessarabia were fighting hard won victories against the Bolshevik armies.<sup>69</sup> On July 28, the WB reported that “German and Finnish troops gained further ground against enemy resistance” on the Finnish Front.<sup>70</sup> Then on July 29 the WB exclaimed that “Romanian troops have reached the mouth of the Dniester.” As a result, “Bessarabia is thus completely freed from the enemy,” revealing

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 622-23.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 624

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 626.

a deliberate attempt by the WB to showcase coalition forces efforts in liberating enemy territory.<sup>71</sup>

While Nazi propaganda worked best when the military was winning the war, there were plenty of problems the regime had to address in the face of bitter reality. The winter of 1941-42 was particularly brutal in Russia, making the final assault on Moscow a near impossible feat for the Wehrmacht. In a WB from November 26, the announcement relies on familiar anti-Bolshevik rhetoric while attempting to deflect rumors about German atrocities. The report states the following:

From the battles outside Moscow, Bolshevik soldiers' defections are increasingly reported. To counter this crisis, the Stalin regime is compelled to report in a message about atrocities of German soldiers against Soviet prisoners of war. The German Wehrmacht and the Allied troops fighting with her view such lies with the deepest contempt, disguising the beastly behavior of the Bolshevik hordes in an attempt to lift their morale.<sup>72</sup>

When the German blitzkrieg ground to a halt outside Moscow, the Soviets used the opportunity to launch a massive counterattack to destroy the Nazi invaders. Evidence of this major setback was only referenced vaguely in the WB, making the WB an increasingly unreliable source. As with all propaganda of the Third Reich, military defeats were always reported upon in cryptic, euphemistic, and heroic language. On December 8, the WB asserted that "The continuation of operations and the type of warfare in the East is limited for now by the onset of the Russian winter. On long stretches of the Eastern Front only localized hostilities are taking place."<sup>73</sup> Certainly the

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 626

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 732.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 742.

Wehrmacht soldiers at the front were experiencing something far different than “limited” operations and “localized hostilities.”

Subsequent WBs in the month of December revealed small amounts of information regarding the terrible situation at the front. On December 17, the WB described Soviet offensive gains as merely part of the “transition from offensive operations to the trench warfare of the winter months,” which necessitated “improvements and reductions” to be made on “different sections of the Eastern Front.”<sup>74</sup> Another WB from December 23 described events at the front as “hard fighting” against enemy “attacks,” but only on December 27 did the WB actually describe the situation as a “defensive battle” being waged between the Wehrmacht and Red Army.<sup>75</sup>

The Nazis masked the failure of the Wehrmacht in the winter of 1941-1942 as only a setback in the campaign to save Europe and the German people from the USSR. The WB of July 2, 1942 described the past year of fighting between Germany and Soviet Russia as a “hard but victorious battle.”<sup>76</sup> According to the announcement, from June 22, 1941 to June 21, 1942 on the Eastern Front, the German forces suffered 271,612 deaths and 65,730 missing.<sup>77</sup> The WB’s supposed levels of honesty regarding the Wehrmacht’s

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 748-749.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 748, 756

<sup>76</sup> OKW, *Die Wehrmachtberichte Band 2: 1942-1943*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985),188.

<sup>77</sup> According to Rüdiger Overman’s study of German wartime military deaths, the WBs reported figures were grossly inaccurate. For the period of June 1941-June 1942 on the Eastern Front, Overman’s study suggests that the Germans lost over 500,000 dead during that time period. For more information, see Rüdiger Overman, *Deutsche Militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (R. Oldenbourg Verlag, München 1999), 238.

casualty figures added a level of credibility to their coverage of the war effort. However, even in this radio address with detailed information, propaganda manifested itself in the concluding portion. The WB stated: “All those who fell for Germany are guarantors of our victory that secures the future of Germany and thus the freedom of Europe.”<sup>78</sup> This statement tied the casualties suffered by the German armed forces to the notion of a war to liberate Europe from a terrible threat.

During the Stalingrad campaign of 1942-43, the WB provided extensive coverage of the daily military operations in the German assault on the city and the Soviets’ relentless counterattacks that resulted in the Sixth Army’s annihilation. On October 24 the WB reported “In Stalingrad, infantry and armored units were on the attack, throwing the enemy back in fierce house to house fighting...”<sup>79</sup> On October 28 the WB announced “Our troops in Stalingrad defended against several counterattacks and stormed other parts of the industrial areas and housing blocks.”<sup>80</sup> When the Soviets launched their massive counterattack to encircle the Germans inside Stalingrad on November 19-20, the WB vaguely reported on the events taking place. The WB of November 20 stated, “On the Don-Front Romanian and German troops experienced hard fighting against strong enemy panzer and infantry attacks.”<sup>81</sup> The events of the ensuing weeks would result in the eventual eradication of an entire German army by February 1943.

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 330.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 336.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 365.

The destruction of the Sixth Army in Stalingrad was primarily described in the WB as part of a series of defensive battles over the course of December-January 1942-43. On January 16, 1943, the WB described the battle of annihilation in Stalingrad as follows:

In the area of Stalingrad our troops, who for weeks have stood firm in their heroic defense against enemy forces attacking from all sides, again yesterday faced strong assaults by enemy infantry and armored units, with heavy losses for the Bolsheviks. The commanders and troops are a shining example of heroic German soldiery.<sup>82</sup>

The next day, similar information about the battle was provided in the WB, illuminating the fighting taking place in and around Stalingrad. The WB of January 17, 1943 stated that in the area of Stalingrad, “our troops hold fast in the difficult defensive battle against new massive attacks of the enemy, which failed against the resolute resistance will of the brave defenders.”<sup>83</sup> Then on the January 18, the WB announced that “Under the most difficult of conditions, German troops in Stalingrad battled against enemy attacks with determined perseverance and a resolute fighting spirit.”<sup>84</sup> Thus the WB description of the battle of Stalingrad, even in its final phases, painted a picture of a heroic German army fighting bravely and defeating overwhelming odds up until the bitter end.

The ultimate fate of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad was unveiled in the WB only in the very last stages of the battle. On January 31, 1943, the WB made a lengthy statement regarding the dire situation facing the German forces in Stalingrad:

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 423.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 424.



In Stalingrad the enemy first pushed from all sides of the defensive positions and then attacked concentrically. Under the personal leadership of Field Marshal Paulus, the heroically fighting southern army group is huddled together in a confined area and makes the last resistance in the GPU buildings.<sup>85</sup>

Following this grim report, even more disturbing news was given on February 1.

According to the WB, “In Stalingrad the Sixth Army under the leadership of Field Marshal Paulus has been overwhelmed in battle after more than two months of heroic defense by a superior enemy force.”<sup>86</sup> Finally, on February 3, 1943, the WB gave its last announcement about the battle of Stalingrad. The WB somberly reported:

The battle of Stalingrad is over. True to the oath of allegiance unto their last breath, the Sixth Army, under the exemplary leadership of Field Marshal Paulus, succumbed to superior enemy forces and unfavorable conditions. Their fate is shared by an Air Force Flak Division, two Romanian divisions and a Croatian regiment, who have in loyal comradeship with the German army done their duty to the utmost. Now is not the time to describe the course of events that led to this development. But one thing can already be said: The sacrifice of the army was not in vain. As a bulwark of the historic European mission, it broke only after many weeks from the onslaught of six Soviet armies. Completely surrounded, it kept the strongest forces of the enemy tied up for weeks through the hardest of struggles and the toughest adversity. It gave the German leadership the time to enact counter-measures, upon which the fate of the entire Eastern front depends on their implementation. . . . The Air Force, despite the utmost efforts and severe losses, was unable to secure a sufficient air supply and the possibility of relief eventually faded away. The twice-demanded surrender by the enemy was soundly rejected. Under the swastika flag, which was hoisted atop the highest ruins of Stalingrad, the final battle took place. Generals, Officers, NCOs and men fought shoulder to shoulder to the last cartridge. They died so that Germany can live.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 433.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 434.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 435-6.

The battle of Stalingrad was the strategic turning point of the Second World War, and it certainly shows in the types of reporting from this point to the end of the conflict. As noted by Murawski, the WB would attempt to “camouflage the setbacks” as much as possible, although in the case of Stalingrad it was hard to do so given the gravity of the situation. During the Kursk campaign of July-August 1943, the WB described a series of attacks and counterattacks between the German and Soviet forces. Soviet losses were always heavily emphasized during this entire battle, but if one were to listen to the reports carefully it is clear things were not going well.

Concurrently with the battle of Kursk on July 12, 1943, the WB reported that “British-American forces” had landed on Sicily, and on July 13 described “hard fighting against the enemy landings.”<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, German forces faced “strong Soviet counterattacks” (July 14), and later an “onslaught of the Soviets” (July 20).<sup>89</sup> By September it is clear in the WB that the Eastern Front was facing severe pressure by the Soviets, and in the Mediterranean the Allied conquest of Sicily and invasion of Italy was underway. On September 10, 1943, the WB reported that on “8 September Italy capitulated,” and that the Italy’s defense now was in “our hands.”<sup>90</sup> While the impact of such reports is difficult to measure, it is not hard to imagine that the defeat of Germany’s principal ally would have been a major blow to the morale of the civilian and military population.

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 516-17.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 517, 520.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 558.

The WB continued to attempt to “camouflage the setbacks” even in the summer of 1944, with the Allied landings at Normandy and the massive Soviet offensives in the East which destroyed Army Group Center. On June 6, 1944, the WB announced “the long awaited attack of the British and North Americans” had begun in France, including a statement about massive “bombing attacks” and “landing boats” at Normandy.<sup>91</sup> The situation would appear largely unclear to the listeners of the WB, with slogans such as on June 15 stating, “The enemy had very heavy losses,” and “Our troops forcefully held their positions” providing misleading views of the invasion of France.<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, on the Eastern Front the reports surrounding Operation Bagration provide sporadic forms of information about a new Soviet advance. On June 22, 1944 the WB announced vaguely “localized artillery attacks” in the East, and on June 23 reported that in the middle of the Eastern Front the Soviets began an “anticipated attack.”<sup>93</sup> By June 25 the reports became more indicative of a serious threat, describing “a hard defensive battle” and an “enemy onslaught,” and on June 26 the situation appeared critical with Soviet attacks of “unrelenting severity.”<sup>94</sup> Once the offensive entered its crucial stages in July, the WB announced on July 18 “our troops threw back the Bolsheviks” from the Neman River, near the border between pre-war Poland and

---

<sup>91</sup> OKW, *Wehrmachtberichte Band 3, 1944-1945*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 118-119.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 134-135

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 137-38.

Lithuania.<sup>95</sup> On July 19, the fighting had reached Galicia and the city of Lemberg, which had been “liberated” in the opening phases of the Barbarossa campaign of 1941.<sup>96</sup>

The WB accounts about key events taking place during the war leave much to be desired as regards accurate and complete information. For example, on July 20, 1944, the WB did not make a special announcement about the assassination attempt on Hitler. The WB kept its focus largely on military matters for the remainder of the war, except in the instance of the death of Hitler, which was reported on May 1, 1945. As a propaganda source, the WB had a mixed legacy of presenting data on offensive and defensive campaigns, the deaths of important military leaders, and even reports on anti-partisan actions. However, the news provided was filled with half-truths, misleading information, empty slogans, and completely disingenuous facts. The WB was far from being the worst offender in the Nazi propaganda war, but, as with film, the medium of radio was probably an effective tool to influence the German people.

### *3.3. Print Propaganda: The Mitteilungen für die Truppe*

While radio and film propaganda were the newest technological mediums of indoctrination, the Nazis had far more direct access to instruct the troops on a daily basis using newspapers, military newsletters, and leaflets. For the troops at the front, this was “often the only source of information,” and the “impact of the ideologically oriented facts they provided can therefore hardly be overestimated.”<sup>97</sup> The Propaganda Section of

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 168.

the OKW distributed a bi-weekly news-sheet entitled *Mitteilungen für die Truppe* (Information for the Troops), and the officers received another news-sheet *Nachrichten des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (News from OKW). By 1942, officers also had the *Mitteilungen für das Offizierkorps* (Information for the Officer Corps) which was both informative and propagandistic in its content.

Omer Bartov notes that soldiers had access to both military and civilian newspapers, as noted in divisional records and personal subscriptions.<sup>98</sup> In his study of the 17<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, Bartov notes that in 1942 that unit had 16,140 books. Bartov concludes that soldiers were “extremely well provided for” in regards to reading materials, and thus soldiers would have had to make a “special effort to avoid being directly influenced by the continuous stream of indoctrination materials directed at them throughout the war.”<sup>99</sup> The MfdT was one such source of printed material utilized by the WPr to educate the soldiers, and the information presented within them was representative of the Nazi worldview.

The *Mitteilungen für die Truppe* provided a means by which the Nazi regime could attempt to influence soldiers’ perceptions on a variety of subjects. As noted by Bill Borys: “Potentially, every reader faced a possible reexamination of personal values because of what he read.”<sup>100</sup> Attitudes, beliefs, and actions could have been affected by

---

<sup>97</sup> Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, 70.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 69-70.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 70-73.

<sup>100</sup> Bill Borys, “*Mitteilungen für die Truppe: Ideology in Publication*,” (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1994), 30.

the ideological discourse in the MfdT. The Nazis wanted to create political soldiers through prolonged exposure to propaganda, and, as shown by Omer Bartov, this was achieved in many ways on the Eastern Front. The types of topics examined in the MfdT have been extensively surveyed by Bill Borys, who noted the following broad thematic categories: Anti-enemy propaganda, counter-enemy propaganda, pro-German propaganda, and troop propaganda.<sup>101</sup> Within these categories, the articles addressed numerous events and topics, ranging from ideological attacks against the Soviet Union, to racist diatribes against the Jews. Thus, although the MfdT presented itself as an objective military newspaper, in actuality it was heavily laden with Nazi rhetoric and misinformation.

Interestingly, the regime utilized many of the same ideological tropes in domestic as well as military propaganda. Familiar themes ranging from antisemitism to the perils of Communism are equally as prevalent in the MfdT throughout the war. The main difference between domestic and military propaganda is in the writing style for the intended target audience, and the different range of topics given the importance of the MfdT as an informational newspaper for troop instruction and indoctrination. For example, in the MfdT there were articles related to the dangers of enemy propaganda or the importance of good treatment of enemy prisoners of war, in contrast to domestic propaganda where the focus was much more so on reporting about foreign affairs and lambasting the Reich's enemies while championing military victories and national news.

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 40-44.

The importance of the Mfdt as a historical source for understanding military propaganda and ideology should not be underestimated. While it is impossible to gauge readership of such materials, what is known is that throughout Nazi propaganda the attempt was made to use newspapers as a means of indoctrination. This was not a conspiratorial act by a totalitarian regime attempting mere mind control over an unwilling mass, rather the Nazis spoke rather openly about the importance of ideology and propaganda to their troops for morale and strategic purposes. For example, in numerous issues of the MfdT, articles appeared regarding the use of military and non-military newspapers as an important weapon of war. Two such articles from November 1941, “Our Comrade the Newspaper” and “Why Carry the Newspaper and the Uniform?” both emphasize the vital military importance of civilian and military newspapers at the front.

The MfdT article “Our Comrade the Newspaper” argued that: “a soldiers’ life without the newspaper is absolutely inconceivable for the people of today.” The writer acknowledges that the “modern man is always in contact with events in the world” because of the “radio and the newspaper.” Thus it was the military’s responsibility to “deliver” the “field newspapers,” “the field post,” and also “home newspapers” to the soldiers.<sup>102</sup> The subsequent article “Why Carry the Newspaper and the Uniform?” described how during the First World War, soldiers were limited in their access to accurate information due to the many “Jewish newspapers” and even German

---

<sup>102</sup> “Unser Kamerad die Zeitung,” (Our Comrade the Newspaper), *MfdT* 152, (Nov. 1941), 1.

newspapers such as *Berliner Tageblatt* which had many Jewish writers. This all changed in the Nazi period, allowing the newspaper to assume the role as a “spiritual uniform.”<sup>103</sup>

The emphasis made in both of the aforementioned articles upon newspapers cannot be underestimated. Both articles stress the importance of soldiers reading both domestic and military newspapers in order to receive information about the war as well as to bolster morale. Soldiers were to trust the accuracy of the newspapers as noted in the article “Why Carry Newspapers and the Uniform?,” which stated that “every German newspaper speaks the will of the Führer.” The article also emphasizes that domestic newspapers, such as *Das Reich* and the *VB*, were both equally as important as the “field newspaper.” By providing soldiers with the belief that the “German press marches with the great German Wehrmacht in absolute lockstep,” the MfdT hoped to justify its own importance while attempting to solidify soldiers’ belief in all official sources of information.<sup>104</sup> This information, as well as the numerous similarities between domestic and propaganda source materials, reveals the attempt by the regime and military to synchronize their information in order to provide a consistent message to the Reich’s citizens and soldiers.

Thus, using a similar argument and framework as in chapter two, it is the contention here that the Nazis utilized a number of important themes in their military propaganda regarding their Soviet enemy and the war in the East. The themes the Nazis emphasized throughout the war in military propaganda included (but were not limited

---

<sup>103</sup> “Warum tragen auch die Zeitungen Uniform?“ (Why carry the Newspaper and the Uniform?), *MfdT* 157, (Nov. 1941), 1.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*



to): Nazi conspiracy theories on the alliance between Plutocratic West and Soviet Russia, racism as exemplified through anti-Semitic ideology and the myth of Jewish-Bolshevism, concepts of a European war of liberation, and the demonization of Communist leadership and brutality.<sup>105</sup>

### *3.3.1. The Alliance between Plutocratic West and Soviet Russia*

Similar to domestic propaganda, the WPr described the reasons for the war in various ways. One of the frequent excuses for the invasion of the Soviet Union was the conspiratorial pact between the West and the East against Germany. While this theme continued throughout the war, its presence was particularly powerful during Operation Barbarossa in order to explain the causes of the conflict, and later was used as one of the reasons why the Germans were facing adversity at the front. In a June 1941 article of the MfdT titled “Between Plutocrats and Bolsheviks,” the WPr depicted the new war situation as similar to that facing Germany in the First World War. However, in this battle, the Reich’s enemies had changed significantly, since the Western Powers and Russia were under the control of Jews. The article explains that, “The German people must fight their great struggle for freedom against Plutocrats and Bolsheviks, against the

---

<sup>105</sup> While in the previous chapter the themes discussed were in Nazi domestic newspapers, here in the MfdT the emphasis will shift to prioritize different experiences for men at the front. Thus, it is important to emphasize that while the above categories are evident in the MfdT, there are other important areas that are discussed in the newspaper as well. This included discussion of Soviet propaganda which targeted German troops, and the MfdT articles which warned against this and other dangers. For more information, see Bill Borys, “Mitteilungen für die Truppe: Ideology in Publication,” (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1994).

Jewish World Capitalism of England and America and also against the Jewish spirit roused in Russian Bolshevism.”<sup>106</sup>

The article also attempts to argue that a war against the Soviet Union and the West was necessary in a battle for survival, and also explains the reasons for the union between East and West. “It is not surprising, that agents of usurious world capitalism and the rulers of Bolshevism have found each other. Both seemingly disparate forms of thinking have in common an ice-cold materialism of the world and of life.” The WPr writers further used religious and socio-cultural arguments to underscore the need for victory.

It is our unwavering conviction that Germany must rely on the blessings of God in this difficult battle. .... entrusted to us is the welfare of the family and the circle of life, as well as the life of socialism; loyalty and comradeship are the bases of German thought and action. For these values, for the honor of the people and nation we fight and triumph.<sup>107</sup>

Another article addressing the alliance between the Soviets and the Plutocrats from September 1941 titled “England’s Lost Hopes. This article described how the English for years hoped to destroy Germany through various schemes and plots with other countries. At every turn, Churchill undermined Germany and push for conflict as in the case of Poland. It was the English who occupied Norwegian cities and to take over Denmark in preparation to destroy Germany. The English also used the Dutch, Belgians, and French in a similar capacity, but in all these cases their plans failed because of the might of German arms. In another conspiracy against Germany, England planned to use

---

<sup>106</sup> “Zwischen Plutokraten und Bolschewiken,“ (Between Plutocrats and Bolsheviks), *MfdT* 113, (June 1941), 1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

the armies of Bolshevism to destroy the Reich.<sup>108</sup> However, once again the German army proved triumphant in battle, foiling Churchill's plans perhaps for the last time.<sup>109</sup>

Linking the British and Soviets together as a dual threat to Europe was a convenient argument regarding the nature of the Allied coalition. The *MfdT* article "Europe free of English and Bolsheviks" argued that the German Reich had liberated Europe from the threat of English and Bolshevik domination. According to the article, "For over a generation, the Bolshevik poison, prepared by Marxism, infiltrated everywhere in Europe," while Germany had been able to "finish with such unrest wherever it occurred." Despite the fact that "Bolshevik agitation still tries to impose itself in many locations in Europe," for the Nazis "where criminals are at work, no time will be wasted in dealing with them." In addition, the "revolutionary power of the German people and the military power of the German Reich" would also eliminate the "specter of England" from the continent.<sup>110</sup> Such articles provided soldiers with the ideological reinforcement to justify their previous military campaigns and the invasion of the Soviet Union.

---

<sup>108</sup> While conspiracy theorists have tried to vindicate Nazi aggression in the Second World War in favor of the view of Anglo-American and Soviet imperialism, their arguments do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, conservative political commentator Patrick Buchanan's book *Churchill, Hitler, and The Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World* suggests that the start of the Second World War over Poland was Great Britain's fault, and therefore forced Hitler's hand. However, the failures of appeasement at Munich prove that Hitler would not have stopped with the Polish Corridor. As noted by Gerhard Weinberg, "In the decade 1924-1934, Hitler had thought that a war with England could be postponed until after the one with Russia, but events early in his rule disabused him of this illusion; and by 1935 he was convinced of the opposite and making preparations accordingly." For more information, see Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, (New York: Cambridge, 2005), 21.

<sup>109</sup>"Zerronnene Hoffnungen Englands," (England's Lost Hopes), *MfdT* 140, (Sept. 1941), 1.

<sup>110</sup>"Europa frei von Engländern und Bolschewiken," (Europe Free of English and Bolsheviks), *MfdT* 147, (Oct. 1941), 1.

The elimination of the threat of England and the Soviet Union from the European continent was also juxtaposed with the creation of a new European order. For example, an article from 1942 “Reconstruction of Europe“ discusses how the occupied areas of Europe were not part of the “lebensraum of the German people.“ According to this article, England had dominated Europe for several centuries, but Germany’s military victories had brought this to an end. The British and the Americans had wanted to use the Bolsheviks to destroy Germany and occupy Europe, which would have led to the eradication of European culture. By defeating this threat, Germany had secured its “lebensraum for ourselves and our children.“<sup>111</sup> In this way, Nazi imperialist ideology was justified through external threats to Germany and the continent, allowing for aggressive expansion and genocide to be excused as a liberation effort with fringe benefits for the German people.

The defeat of the blitzkrieg in 1941 and the continuation of the war meant the MfdT had to keep blaming the Allies for starting the conflict while warning of their plans to dominate Europe. For example, a November 1943 article “Die Moskauer Konferenz” described Allied intentions for Germany and the rest of Europe.<sup>112</sup> The article argues that the Bolsheviks were promised control over “Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic and Balkans states,” and in addition Stalin wanted major influence over

---

<sup>111</sup> “Europa im Umbau,” (Reconstruction of Europe), *MfdT* 190, (Apr. 1942), 1-2.

<sup>112</sup> The Moscow Conference of October 1943 was a meeting between British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov. The main issue of the conference was the opening of the Second Front against the Nazis, which the Western powers reaffirmed as their main goal in 1944. In addition the three powers discussed postwar plans for Germany, including demilitarization and denazification. For more information, see Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s War’s: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 178-179.

Norway, Sweden, the Aegean Sea, and even Iran! This conference only reiterated what the Nazis already knew, which was that the enemy wanted the total “destruction of Germany,” which had been evidenced after the First World War when the Allies made Germany “weaponless, powerless, and broken.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, if the Reich were to be defeated in this conflict, it would mean the end of Germany forever.

While there are many articles dealing with the alliance between the West and the East, this is far from the most pervasive theme in the military propaganda. The war against Russia was ideologically conducive to the Nazi worldview as a battle of opposing political and economic systems, but strategically and logistically, the campaign was a nightmare from autumn 1941 until the end of the war. These dueling conditions created conflicting attitudes about the battle in the East, largely the result of discrepancies between Nazi propaganda and reality on the frontlines. Many of the articles in the *MfdT* echo the stories in domestic newspapers regarding the war situation, reflecting official lies and deceit about the tactical situation. However, of far greater importance in the *MfdT* was the attempt at dehumanizing and demonizing the enemy. While on the combat front, the Nazis were limited in their successes post-1941, on the propaganda front they continued a steady output of hate filled stereotypes and half-truths about the Soviet Union in order to shore up their ever-weakening cause.

### *3.3.2. Antisemitism and the Jewish-Bolshevik Threat*

---

<sup>113</sup> “Die Moskauer Konferenz,” (The Moscow Conference), *MfdT* 292, (Nov. 1943), 1.

The WPr helped to break down the barriers between the military and the Nazi Party, fostering a common sense of purpose between the two entities through their war aims. The organization used information as an educational tool and a weapon to shape the minds of Hitler's political soldiers. While the Nazi Party's ethos was highly antisemitic in its core, it had to work hard to influence the German masses to accept its rhetoric through continuous propaganda. In the MfdT, there were plenty of articles that are explicitly racist in their content, making the war against Russia both a political and racial war against a boogeyman enemy personified in the Jewish-Bolshevik. The racialization of the military campaign paved the way for terrible atrocities and genocide by "othering" the peoples of the East into a malicious and deadly subhuman foe.<sup>114</sup>

From the outset of the invasion of the Soviet Union, the MfdT exhibited the worst kinds of xenophobic racism exemplified in Nazi propaganda and policy. One of the earliest articles from the Barbarossa campaign described the dangers of the "Jewish spirit roused in Russian Bolshevism."<sup>115</sup> Another article from August 1941 titled "Rallying Cry" provides a quasi-historical narrative about the many threats Jewry posed to Germany over the years. Germany during the years 1919-1932 had to endure numerous attacks by the Jews, forcing "soldiers," "Freikorps," and other organizations to fight against the Jewish controlled press and rival political factions. Having overthrown the yoke of Jewish oppression in 1933, Germany now enjoyed "the freedom of choice" thanks to the Fuhrer. Therefore, the war in the East was in fact a "battle

---

<sup>114</sup> For more information on Hitler and the Nazis' perceptions of the East, see Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171-202.

<sup>115</sup> "Zwischen Plutokraten und Bolschewiken," (Between Plutocrats and Bolsheviks), *MfdT* 113, (Jun. 1941), 1.

against the Jews,” who now controlled Germany’s enemies and hoped to destroy German freedom once more.<sup>116</sup>

The MfdT’s emphasis on the role of Jews as the harbingers of the Second World War and as the Reich’s mortal enemy continues throughout the existence of the publication. In the hope of making their soldiers believe the worst aspects of Nazi ideology, the WPr continued with their antisemitic message with the short article “Jews”, which describes the massive Jewish conspiracy of “High Capitalism” and “the Communists” against Germany. The Jews were the arbiters between these unlikely allies, with England, the U.S., and the Soviet Union all under the direct influence of Jewish control. The article argues that in those three countries, “...of 104 government representatives 89 were either Jews or half-Jews!,” testament to the fact that the Jews were united behind “the masks of the Communists and the Plutocrats.” The war against these deadly foes was thus one to prevent “Jewish World Domination.”<sup>117</sup>

The racist rhetoric emphasized in the MfdT in 1941 continued in 1942 as well, emphasizing the continued importance of a war in the East as a battle against Jewish-Bolshevism. An article from May 1942 “Jews and Bolsheviks,” provided continuity between the current war against the Soviets and the Nazis’ rise to power as a bulwark against Judeo-Bolshevism. The article emphasizes that “the memory of events in domestic German history must not be forgotten,” noting that the younger German soldiers “cannot imagine what role Jewry previously played in Germany.” The author then shifts to the story of Max Hölz, a Bolshevik “criminal without equal,” who

---

<sup>116</sup> “Schlagworte” (Rallying Cry), *MfdT* 125, (Aug. 1941), 1-2.

<sup>117</sup> “Juden,” (Jews), *MfdT* 147, (Oct. 1941), 1.

“ravaged the Vogtland and terrorized other areas, until he was arrested and sent to prison.”<sup>118</sup> According to the article, Vogt once stated to his followers “destroy the rails, the courts and prisons, slaughter the people without regard to age and gender....” This article underscored the idea that there is an “insoluble” link between Jews and Bolsheviks, and that both groups are by their nature “chaotic.”<sup>119</sup>

The emphasis on historical events to justify the war to the soldiers is apparent in these articles, tying the Third Reich exclusively to a battle against Jewish-Bolshevism since 1933, and the Nazi Party to this battle since the Party’s inception. One article retreated to the period following the First World War to decry the “Versailles Diktat” and the efforts by “Jewish International Capitalism” to destroy Germany. This article stated that the Jews wanted Germany to be “disgraced for all times and forced into slavery,” but this slavery would be “enslavement by an ideal interest rate.”<sup>120</sup> While the emphasis in this article was primarily on Jews and capitalism, the underlying element of antisemitism is a pervasive argument. In many ways, it only reinforced the notion of the many enemies facing Germany in the past and present.

Establishing a historical precedent to justify the war of annihilation in the East is an ever recurrent theme in the articles, which is ironic considering the war was already a

---

<sup>118</sup> The real story of Max Hölz is far more complicated than the dubious image of a chaotic murderer presented in the *MfdT*. Hölz was indeed a member of the USPD and then the VKPD, but his actions were in part a response to the Kapp Putsch. Hölz liberated political prisoners and embarked on military actions in the Vogtland in an attempt to raise a “Red Army.” Battling the military, police, and political rivals, Hölz and his forces used partisan tactics to surprise and deceive the enemy. Hölz hoped for a workers insurrection in all of Germany, however, there was little support for an armed revolution amongst the majority of workers; For more information see Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic: 1918-1933*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 62-75.

<sup>119</sup> “Juden und Bolschewiken” (Jews and Bolsheviks), *MfdT* 195, (May 1942), 2.

<sup>120</sup> “Eine jüdische Rechnung, die nicht aufging” (A Jewish Bill that did not add up), *MfdT* 206, (Jun. 1942), 2.



year old by the summer of 1942. For some reason, the Nazi propagandists and the WPr believed there had to be causation in order to rationalize the failures of *Blitzkrieg*, and there had to be a clear historical line of Judeo-Bolshevik aggression against Germany in order for the war and its terrible costs to be justified. The article “Socialism, Designed by Jews” attempts to show the connections between the foundations of Jewish Marxism to the creation of the sadistic Bolshevik regime in Russia. Marxism, the ideology created by the “Jew Marx,” is said to have a “purely materialistic basis for its worldview,” and in that materialistic attitude it “denies the idea of creation by a powerful and decisive God.” Here the author clearly is relying upon the idea of Marxism as an atheist ethos in order to arouse a response from those German Christian soldiers.<sup>121</sup>

This “materialistic worldview” was best personified through the “Jewish Marxist ideology of Bolshevism” which for the “single train of thought in Russia” for twenty-four years. Since Marxism dismissed the ideas of “nation and race” this also leads to the neglect of the “family” unit in society. Soviet propaganda viciously “attacks religious values with caustic mockery and derision,” but also “undermines the connections of people to their community.” Thus, the connection is made here between a Bolshevik state which is atheist and attacks organized religion, but also targets values of family and race which were pivotal in the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. The author concluded: “the Jew, like the great historian Mommsen once put it, is always ‘a ferment of decomposition,’ or in other words: a disintegrating poison.”<sup>122</sup> Thus the Jews became equated with

---

<sup>121</sup> For more information on Marxist ideology and religion, see John Raines, ed., *Marx on Religion*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

<sup>122</sup> “Sozialismus, jüdisch konstruiert” (Socialism, Designed by Jews), *MfdT* 209, (July 1942), 1-2; Note the reference made to Theodor Mommsen, whose mention of the Jews in his *History of Rome* in 1854-56 was often utilized by antisemites. While Mommsen did state that the Jews were one of the

poisonous vermin which threatened all mankind, dehumanizing their opponent in the midst extermination process taking place in 1942.<sup>123</sup>

The MfdT continuously justified the war in the East to the troops by emphasizing the dangerousness of their enemy. By asking the question, “Warum ist der Bolschewismus unser Todfeind?” the author reexamined the reasons why Germany was fighting in such a terrible war against the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> As in many such articles, the author cited a direct line between Marx and Bolshevik terror. The following is a passage from the article:

There is no doubt about what Bolshevism is in reality. Created by Jewish brains, we think of Mordecai the Jew called Marx, three generations ago in Germany, this dismal system of machinery and materialism, became in hands of the villains in Moscow an instrument of destruction of all our essential values in life.<sup>125</sup>

The article proceeds to describe the Soviets as “an incredibly dangerous enemy“ who “for over two decades had massively armed themselves and fanatically focuses on one goal, to bring the Marxist Jewish World Revolution to the rest of the civilized world and to destroy the culture bearing people.”<sup>126</sup> The author cited the many dangers posed by the Bolsheviks, ranging from Communist agitation in the 1920s, to the Spanish Civil

---

elements leading to the breakdown of the Roman state and the growth of cosmopolitanism, he later defended the rights of German Jews and citizens of the state. Mommsen’s main issue was with the prominence of religion in the modern state, and he hoped that the Jews would assimilate into German society. For more information on Mommsen, see Ruth Gay, *The Jews of Germany: A Historical Portrait*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 217-220.

<sup>123</sup> The Nazis’ transition from using *Einsatzgruppen* to the implementation of the ‘Final Solution’ fully emerged only after the Wannsee Conference of January 1942. See Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*, (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2008), 261.

<sup>124</sup>“Warum ist der Bolschewismus unser Todfeind?” (Why is Bolshevism our Deadly Enemy?), *MfdT* 225, (Sept. 1942), 2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

War, to westward expansion in the years 1939-1940. These many threats to Germany were thus the causes of the battle against Russia, and this article used distorted historical causation to rewrite the past and continue the war of annihilation.

Following the failures of the Stalingrad campaign and the destruction of the Sixth Army, the war took its turn towards the defeat of the Third Reich. While the MfDT acknowledged the defeat at Stalingrad and the enormous sacrifices of the German Army, the publication continued to emphasize the racialized ideology of the Nazis regarding the Soviets. An article in the MfDT from March 1943 titled “Why does the Bolshevik Fight?” explained why Red Army soldiers fought for the Soviet regime. The article, a recycling of an essay by novelist Bruno Brehm titled “Die russische Wandlung” (The Russian Transformation), summarized Brehm’s racist anti-communist views about the Soviet Union.<sup>127</sup> According to Brehm, while some people might begin to question whether Red Army soldiers fight so hard and so well because the Soviet state is not so bad, he counters that the Russians are essentially slaves to the Jews who force them to fight. The following is a sample of the conspiratorial ranting of Brehm:

---

<sup>127</sup> Bruno Brehm (1892-1974) was the son of an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and volunteer in World War I. Following the war he was supportive of an *Anschluss* between Germany and Austria, and his career as a writer was shaped by his war experiences and nationalist views. His trilogy *Apis und Este* (1931), *Das war das Ende* (1932) and *Weder Kaiser noch König* (1933) was gained him the national book prize from Josef Goebbels in 1939. Brehm became a member of the NSDAP and also served on the city council of Vienna. In 1941 he became president of the *Wiener Kulturvereinigung*. During World War II, he was a major and an aide-de-camp. (Helmut Schmitz, ed., *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, New York: Rodopi B.V., 2007, 46). However, due to his status as an important writer, Brehm managed to avoid frontline service despite holding a military commission (Ernst Klee: *The Cultural Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. Who was what before and after 1945*. S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2007, 76-77). Instead, Brehm spent his time writing propaganda pieces in various periodicals, including an article in the *NS-Monatshefte* in January 1942, in which he described the value of human life and intelligence in Russia as low (Herztein, *The War that Hitler Won*, 363). For more information on Brehm, see Jürgen Hillesheim & Elisabeth Michael, *Lexicon Nationalsozialistischer Dichter: Biographien, Analysen, Bibliographien*, (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1993), 85-93.

The Jews crept into Russia as beneficiaries; they have sharpened and perfected their method, developing themselves alongside the Russians. With the same fervor with which the Russians once believed in god, they now believe in the machine, with the same obsession to which they devoted completely to god, they now give to the terrible nature of the collectives. The power of faith has remained the same, only the goals of the faith have changed.<sup>128</sup>

Brehm's depictions of the Soviet Union in this essay are similar to much of his other writings on the subject, representative of Nazi *Lebensraumpolitik* and ideology regarding Jews, Slavs, and Bolshevism.<sup>129</sup> In essence, Brehm described the Russian people as slaves to the Communists and the Jews, a unique juxtaposition which humanized the Russian people while dehumanizing the Red Army and the Soviet regime. For Brehm, the Jews replaced the old order with a new more sinister one, and the Russian people remained slaves under the tsarist regime and then under the Communist one.<sup>130</sup>

Perhaps the most striking of all the antisemitic articles to appear in the MfdT during the period of 1941-1945 appeared in May 1943. The article, "Why Did It Come to the Jewish Question?" described a massive Jewish infiltration around the world into leadership positions and in general society in order to dominate humanity. The article

---

<sup>128</sup> "Weshalb kämpft der Bolschewist?," (Why does the Bolshevik Fight?), *MfdT* 253, (Mar. 1943), 1.

<sup>129</sup> Bruno Brehm published numerous novels and essays for the Nazi regime and the *Wehrmacht*. For example the essay "Unser Kampf im Osten" in the book *Die Dichtung in kommenden Europa: Weimarer Reden 1941* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlaganstalt, 1942) uses similar rhetoric as in this essay. For additional information on Brehm's writings, see Richard A. Etlin, *Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Note that Brehm also published an article in an OKW journal in 1941 describing what German soldiers' conduct should be in foreign territories. Please see: Bruno Brehm, "Deutsche Haltung vor Fremden: Ein Kameradenwort an unsere Soldaten," (Berlin: W. Limpert, 1941).

<sup>130</sup> "Weshalb kämpft der Bolschewist?," (Why does the Bolshevik Fight?), *MfdT* 253, (Mar. 1943), 1.

presented a long antisemitic diatribe about the history of the Jews and their attempts at global control, using assimilation and various political ideologies to mask their true intentions. However, then the article shifts towards the heroic efforts of the NSDAP to finally challenge the Jews. The following is a selection from the article which described the “racial character” of the Second World War:

Therefore, the war is a battle of racial character, a battle of race conscious people against the eternal, devilish disturbers of peace in human society, against the Jews throughout the world. This we must clearly recognize in order to understand the profound meaning of our struggle. It is our determination to make Europe free of Jews and thus give all Cultured Nations of our Continent the possibility for positive coexistence, and the creative construction of culture for all the civilized nations of our continent.<sup>131</sup>

The article concluded with a direct reference to a speech made by Hitler in 1939. Hitler’s speech before the Reichstag on January 30, 1939 warned of the consequences if another European war should break out. The following is the infamous quote by Hitler, directly quoted in the article to emphasize the true nature of the racial war in the East, “If international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”<sup>132</sup> This speech was even more relevant in 1943 than in 1939, since the Second World War and the Final Solution to the Jewish Question had already claimed the lives of millions.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> “Deshalb kam es zur Judenfrage?” (Why did it come to the Jewish Question?), *MfdT* 264, (May 1943), 1-2.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 2; for a complete transcription of the speech, see N.H. Baynes, ed., *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler: April 1922-August 1939, Volume 2*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 737-741.

### 3.3.3 “Europas Freiheitskrieg” and European Unity

The conceptualization of the battle in the East as a “war of liberation” was not merely a pacification method to convince a war weary home front populace about the merits of the Nazi-Soviet conflict. While Hitler desired *Lebensraum* for the creation of a Germanic eastern empire, there was a considerable emphasis in military propaganda regarding the ideas of “freeing” the peoples of Eastern Europe and creating a new European order. This leads to some important questions regarding our understanding of the Eastern Front war. The current trend in coverage of the Nazi-Soviet conflict is to emphasize the oppressive and genocidal policies of the Third Reich, but the idea of the Nazis’ waging a war to “save” the peoples of the East from Bolshevism was an important part of the propaganda discourse. Given the major attempts by the Nazis to envisage the war as a battle between good and evil in order to save Europe from barbarian Jewish-Bolshevik hordes, it is hard to believe that all German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front were motivated by genocidal imperialist delusions of grandeur in the war. The regular propaganda theme of the war as a struggle against Communism and a fight to save some of the peoples of the East from Judeo-Bolshevik atrocities was a cause many ordinary soldiers could rally behind in the initial years of the conflict.

In the MfdT, there were many articles produced throughout the war that suggest the Nazi and military propagandists wanted to foster notions of European unity, Germany as defender of Europe, the dangers posed by Bolshevism against the Europeans, and the war as a collaborative effort amongst the nations to save themselves

---

<sup>133</sup> While the figures vary, it is possible to argue that nearly half of the victims of the Holocaust had been killed by the end of the summer 1943. For detailed statistics, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

from the terrors of the Soviet Union. The Nazis used the invasion of the Soviet Union as a mechanism by which the territorial aggression of 1939-1941 could be justified: it was all done to save Europe from the Jewish led Plutocratic-Bolshevik conspiracy to destroy the continent. The articles throughout the army newspaper speak volumes about the lengths the propagandists would go to “sell” the war as a righteous cause.<sup>134</sup>

The MfdT article “Our Allies, the Shock Troops of a New Europe” emphasized the creation of a “*Waffengemeinschaft*” (Community of Arms) between the Wehrmacht and the “many thousands of soldiers of European nations” in the fight against the Bolsheviks. According to the article, a multinational force consisting of “Italians, Finns, Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Spaniards, French, Croats, Wallonians, Flemings, Dutch, Danes, and Norwegians” represented to the world “that Europe understands the importance of the fateful struggle against the Bolsheviks.”<sup>135</sup> The description of an allied coalition amongst the nations of Europe was an important part of this article, emphasizing how the Germans pretended to work together with the European continent for a common righteous cause.

The representation of a Nazi led allied coalition as a freedom fighting force is important for understanding the military propaganda of the Barbarossa campaign. In the aforementioned MfdT article, the allied nations of Europe are described as “blood

---

<sup>134</sup> One finds evidence in all forms of Nazi media regarding the Eastern Front conflict. For example, the book *Die Wehrmacht 1941: Um die Freiheit Europas* describes the war in the East as a defensive battle against “Bolshevist imperialism,” and emphasizes the importance of the war as a “planned Soviet betrayal” against Germany and Europe. For the Nazis, it was thus important to portray the war as an act of Soviet aggression. For more information, see Karl Fischer, ed., *Die Wehrmacht 1941: Um die Freiheit Europas*, (Berlin: OKW, 1941), 227-231.

<sup>135</sup> “Unsere Verbündeten, die Stosstruppen des neuen Europa,” (Our Allies, the Shock Troops of a New Europe), *MfdT* 138, (Sept. 1941), 2.

bound” in the fight against Bolshevism. The battle against the Bolsheviks could not be compared with the “armed conflict of nations,” such as Britain and France, because in the Soviet Union “everything here is the opposite” of European “culture, values, faith and knowledge, and a high living ideal.” The war against the Soviets was a battle involving “foreign soldiers liberating more of Europe every day,” fighting against “the hordes of absolute destruction.” The Bolsheviks thus represented “chaos” against the “order” of European civilization, and it was the responsibility of the Europeans to “exterminate the devil” for the “salvation” for the people of Europe.<sup>136</sup>

After the failure of Barbarossa, the *MfdT* ran an article “The German People and the Battle in the East” in January 1942, emphasizing the importance of the winter defensive battle against the Soviets. The article depicted the Wehrmacht’s defense against the Soviet counteroffensive as an “enormous achievement” because the “German soldiers has fended off the Red Army.” While the *MfdT* was attempting to underline the dangers facing the entire Eastern Front, at the same time it argued that the troops kept away a “deadly danger” from the Reich. The article presented a terrible warning if the Soviets should prevail against the German Army in the East. According to the article:

The English have promised the Bolsheviks a free hand in Europe. What that would mean is the end of Germany. The misery that prevails in Soviet Russia among the population in the cities and countryside, the desperate hopelessness of Bolshevism would have destroyed our German homeland, all that was dear to our hearts, would be drowned in a sea of blood, ashes, and tears, if the German soldier of the Eastern Front were not faithful to his duty unto death.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>“Das Deutsche Volk und der Kampf im Osten,” (The German People and the Battle in the East), *MfdT 170*, (Jan. 1942), 1.



In the aftermath of this defensive “achievement,” it is apparent that the Nazis were reconsidering some of their strategies in the East. For example, the article “The Soldier in the Occupied Territories as Representative of the People and the Reich” is important for understanding military ideology of 1942, as it recommended a change of attitude and action for the troops. The German soldiers were “representatives of the people under arms for Germany,” and such an esteemed job required the troops to exercise a demeanor equal to their “important mission.” Soldiers were to display “a high degree of disciplined attitude, a soldier’s sternness, restraint and skill.”<sup>138</sup> This may have reflected a conscious effort by the military to at least speak about adjusting their occupation policies in preparation for a longer term war than expected.<sup>139</sup>

According to this article, the German soldiers had to display a greater degree of professional responsibility and demeanor than had been conducted previously. The article calls for a “high degree of disciplined attitude, a soldiers’ sternness, restraint, and skill.” However, it is clear that this was not meant to be a hearts and minds campaign, as the article emphasizes that whether “the peoples of those countries love us or reject us, in any case the image of the German soldier must indelibly impress them with

---

<sup>138</sup> “Der Soldat im besetzten Gebiet als Vertreter von Volk und Reich,” (The Soldier in the Occupied Territories as Representative of the People and the Reich), *MfdT* 179, (Feb. 1942), 1.

<sup>139</sup> In all actuality, little changed in regards to occupation policies and the brutality of the Germans in the East, and in many ways it became more severe as the war worsened. While orders from above instructed soldiers to win over the locals with kindness, the reality was that these orders were a response to already brutal and oppressive behavior. The Nazi hierarchy in the occupied Eastern territories held onto their racist *Herrenmenschen* ideology throughout the war, and the inhabitants of destroyed cities and villages were forced to deal with privation caused by the occupiers and the damages of many battles. In contrast, the Germans confiscated food and goods for their consumption at will, took the best accommodations available, and committed robbery, rape, and murder as long as discipline and obedience to the authorities remained. For more information, see Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, David Stahel, eds., *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 246-252.

Germany's strength and power, and the soldiers' force and determination must embody the construction of a strong new European order." This stoic attitude included allowing the population to starve, as noted in the article "The German soldier there will witness terrible hunger and need. Nothing can be done." It is interesting that MfdT rejects humanitarian considerations, and merely encouraged soldiers to show "strength and power" because after all the suffering of the Soviet peoples was "not the fault of the German soldiers."<sup>140</sup>

In addition, the article hinted at the Nazi regime's long term planning for the occupied East and the overall goals in the fight against the Soviet Union. The article asked an important question: "How should the German soldier regulate this situation?" To answer this question, the article pointed to the situation in the Ukraine, where the Führer "had not yet decided on the future national configuration of the Ukrainian population and the occupied territory." This decision was "dependent on the attitude and cooperation of the population," and a "positive attitude towards the German soldier must be maintained."<sup>141</sup> Therefore, the soldiers had to maintain a delicate balance, in which "the requirements of the Wehrmacht" would "make hardships towards the population unavoidable," but the soldiers had to use "as sensible and reasonable procedures as possible." While the Germans had liberated from "bolshevism for all time," they were

---

<sup>140</sup> Der Soldat im besetzten Gebiet als Vertreter von Volk und Reich," (The Soldier in the Occupied Territories as Representative of the People and the Reich), *MfdT* 179, (Feb. 1942), 1.

<sup>141</sup> During the course of the Second World War Ukrainians collaborated with both the Nazis and the Soviets. Since the Ukraine was not a sovereign state a degree of nationalism was prevalent amongst the peoples there. Much of the Eastern Front conflict was fought on Ukrainian territory, which meant the Soviets and Nazis utilized them in large numbers in their military formations. The Nazis also sent millions of Soviet nationals to work as forced laborers in the Reich, which included many Ukrainians. For more information, see Yuri Boshyk, Andriy Wynnyckyj, eds., *Ukraine During World War II: History and Its Aftermath: a Symposium*, (Downsview, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

“intended to remain subservient to the new Europe.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, soldiers were keenly aware of the “new European order” intended for the former Soviet states, making the army and its soldiers the mechanism which facilitated Nazi imperialism and genocide.<sup>143</sup>

However, it would be a mistake to posit that imperialism was used as the main justification to motivate the soldiers to keep fighting in the East. The short and long term designs of the Nazi regime were not common knowledge for the “ordinary *Landser*,” who was far more concerned with immediate threats and daily needs. The *MfdT* continuously reiterated the theme of Bolshevism as a threat to Germany and Europe, which made the Eastern Front into something of a defensive conflict battling against an aggressive foe. For example, the article “The Bolshevik Danger Existed for a Generation” from January 1943 described the war in the East as a struggle to “prevent the Soviet Asiatic World Revolution from invading Europe.” The threat of Bolshevism had supposedly existed for a “generation” because from its inception Bolshevism “proclaimed its goal to impose its revolutionary ideology on the entire world.” Since it was the goal of the Soviets “that Europe must become Bolshevik,” than the battle against Bolshevism was a “holy war” to rid the continent of an external threat.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> “Der Soldat im besetzten Gebiet als Vertreter von Volk und Reich,” *MfdT* 179, (Feb. 1942), 1.

<sup>143</sup> The Ukraine was a special target for Nazi colonial and imperialist ambitions. In the East, the Nazis saw a colonial endeavor not unlike their previous experiments at empire in Africa and Asia. As noted by Wendy Lower, “in the outstanding example of Ukraine, we see the disastrous unfolding of the Nazi concept of empire-building that drew its strength from völkisch utopian fantasies, the Lebensraum tradition of continental migration, and the imperialistic Weltpolitik tradition of economic exploitation.” (Lower, 22-23), For more information, see Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, (Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2005).

<sup>144</sup> “Die bolschewistische Gefahr besteht seit einem Menschenalter,” (The Bolshevik Danger existed for a Generation), *MfdT* 244, (Jan. 1943), 2.

The argumentation regarding a war for European freedom and unity would require the complicity of members in the occupied nations. With the tide of the war turning against them at Stalingrad, the MfdT ran the article “Volunteers and Voluntary Helpers in the East” argued that the battle against Bolshevism yielded scores of volunteers amongst the “defectors, prisoners of war, and members of the civilian population.” People in the “liberated areas” had the opportunity to stand up to Bolshevism by aiding the Wehrmacht in any way they can. The MfdT emphasizes the “propaganda value” of volunteers, since the Soviets argued that Germany had no other aim except to “enslave the peoples of the Soviet Union.”<sup>145</sup> The article utilized the image of a coalition force fighting against the Soviet Union as a heroic battle between good and evil:

The fact that Russian, Ukrainian, White Ruthenian, Caucasian, Turkish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and other volunteers fight side by side with German troops and their allies against Stalin’s Judeo-Bolshevik system, proves that the German Wehrmacht is only fighting against this system and not the peoples of the Soviet Union.<sup>146</sup>

This stated policy reversal coincided with Reich’s increasing reliance on foreign forced labor and foreign soldiers, a number historian Rolf-Dieter Müller puts at two million over the course of the Second World War. While Hitler did not want to rely on occupied countries for such massive help, the depletion of Germany’s manpower left them little choice in the face of such overwhelming odds against the Soviets.<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> “Freiwillige und Hilfspwillige im Osten,” (Volunteers and Voluntary Helpers), *MfdT* 241, (Jan. 1943), 1.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Rolf-Dieter Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers*, (London: I.B. Tauris& Co., 2012), xxxii.

Interestingly, the MfdT article makes the argument that winning over the population is a good idea for both propaganda and wartime purposes. Good treatment of volunteers would aid the German cause, whereas bad treatment would only help Soviet propaganda and the Soviet cause. The Germans were presented as the better alternative to Judeo-Bolshevism, and must be seen as “liberators” in opposition to the oppressive Soviet state.<sup>148</sup>

Additional articles further emphasized the necessity of allied and volunteer forces in the war against the Soviets. One article written contemporaneously with the defeat at Stalingrad “Allies and Comrades in Germany’s War of Liberation” reiterates Germany’s dominant role in the fight against the Soviet Union while at the same time emphasizing the major role of other Europeans. According to the article, the Germans had to bear the “brunt of the difficult battle against the destructive intentions of the Plutocrats and Bolsheviks.” However, part of this “burden” had to be “bore by them also,” with “them” described as “Italians, Finns, Slovaks, Romanians, and Hungarians.” Their contributions had “immeasurable value” and made the war a “European matter,” which also allowed the author to use such slogans as European “solidarity,” a “comradeship of the European people,” and even a “federation of European nations.”<sup>149</sup> In this way, the MfdT seems to want to relate to the soldiers that the war was not just a German problem but a European problem because the threat of Bolshevism faced every nation on the continent.

---

<sup>148</sup> “Freiwillige und Hilfspwillige im Osten,” *MfdT* 241, (Jan. 1943), 1.

<sup>149</sup> “Verbündete und Kameraden im deutschen Freiheitskampf,” (Allies and Comrades in Germany’s War of Liberation), *MfdT* 248, (Feb. 1943), 1.

One of the most interesting articles regarding the role of Russians in the new Nazi order came in 1943. The article, entitled “Briefing for the Troops in the East Regarding the Vlasov-Action” addressed the controversial (and ultimately failed) attempt by the Nazis to form a “Russian Liberation Army.”<sup>150</sup> According to the article, it was “necessary that every soldier learns some facts” about the ROA in order to address the supposedly large numbers of “Russian volunteers” inquiring about the movement. Vlasov is described as a “Russian patriot” who was “determined to fight against Bolshevism.” In essence, the article utilizes the Vlasov story as an effective propaganda piece both for the troops and for the Russian people, in order to provide hope to the German troops about possible reinforcements as well as to encourage prisoners of war and civilians to defect.<sup>151</sup>

#### *3.3.4 Communist Leadership and Oppression*

The MfdT sought to create as much political and ideological distance between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as possible. While positing the war as a defensive struggle to save Europe, the MfdT also viciously attacked the Soviet leadership and terror tactics. For example, in a July 1941 article “What is meant by ‘Collectivism’” explained to the soldiers entering Soviet territory what things such as

---

<sup>150</sup> The ROA (*Russkaya osvoboditel'naya armiya*) was an organization of former Red army prisoners of war and deserters that the Germans wanted to use as a military force against the Soviets. Five Red Army generals were at the center of the ROA, with General A.A. Vlasov as the preeminent figure in the movement. Vlasov was captured by the Germans near Leningrad in July 1942, and while in captivity was persuaded to aid in the fight against Stalin. His efforts were largely a propaganda scheme by the Nazis, since Hitler did not trust the Russians to be loyal soldiers. While the ROA existed on paper, the first units did not appear until 1944, and very few were employed in actual combat in 1945. For more information, see Alexander A. Maslov, *Captured Soviet Generals: The Fate of Soviet Generals Captured by the Germans, 1941-1945*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 161-69.

<sup>151</sup> “Unterrichtung der Truppe im Osten über die Vlassow-Aktion,” (Briefing for the Troops in the East Regarding the Vlasov-Action), *MfdT* 264, (May 1943), 1.

“collective“ and “collectivism.“ The article states that the Bolsheviks under false pretenses of promised land redistribution harnessed the support of small farmers to help the Revolution succeed. However, by the 1930s the Bolsheviks betrayed the farmers of the Soviet Union, liquidating the Kulaks and creating state run collectives depriving farmers of land ownership. Collectivization was described as the “antithesis“ of life in Nazi Germany, allowing the article to use politics and economics to emphasize socio-cultural differences between the two states.<sup>152</sup>

The cruelty of the Bolsheviks is also described within the context of the war effort, as well in the article “Cruel Consequences of Bolshevik Destructiveness for the Soviet Population.“ In the article, the Communists are described as cruel brutes who did not care for the people they ruled. When the Germans invaded, the article reports that the Bolsheviks “summarily either hauled away or destroyed large stocks of foodstuff.“ Emphasis was placed upon the fact that the Soviets lacked “consideration for the safety of their own people,“ and because of their barbarism “millions of their own people will face terrible hunger.“<sup>153</sup> Interestingly this article could serve multiple purposes for the Wehrmacht and Nazi regime. By attacking the credibility of the Soviet regime, they could claim a sort of moral high ground when coupled with their many military victories. In addition, the article could also be used to mask the privations the Soviet people would face in the winter of 1941-1942, since neither the regime nor the military

---

<sup>152</sup> “Was versteht man unter “Kollektivismus”?” (What Is Meant by “Collectivism?”), *MfdT* 118, (July 1941), 1.

<sup>153</sup> “Grausame Folgen Bolschewistischer Zerstörungen für die Sowjetische Bevölkerung,” (Cruel Consequences of Bolshevik Destructiveness for the Soviet Population), *MfdT* 152, (Nov. 1941), 2.

would make attempts to feed the civilian population nor the massive numbers of prisoners of war.<sup>154</sup>

The MfdT frequently attacked the Soviet regime and especially the dictator Josef Stalin. Demonization of the Soviet Premier took on multiple forms, including Stalin the aggressor, Stalin the liar, Stalin the murderer, and Stalin the conspirator. For example, Stalin the aggressor appears in the article “A Speech by Stalin“ from November 1941, with excerpts from a speech given by Stalin on the “twenty-fourth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution.“ In the text of the speech, Stalin is quoted as calling for the opening of a “second front“ against Germany by the “English and Americans.“ The article described Stalin as the “most cunning villain of all human beings,“ who was responsible for the “grisly deaths“ of “many millions of people.“ While Stalin sought to sell himself as the man who “strengthened the socialist system,“ the “German soldiers“ knew the realities of the Soviet Union and Stalin’s militarist aggression.<sup>155</sup>

Another seething attack against Stalin as a murderous oppressor can be found in a 1942 article regarding Stalin’s Secret Order Nr. 227 from July 28, 1942. The article, titled “Stalin’s Secret Decree“ explained how the secret order outlines the amount of territory and supplies lost to the enemy, and then shifts to military matters.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> The defeat of the German blitzkrieg meant that the economic exploitation of the eastern territories was incomplete. Due to domestic grain shortages, the Nazis were unable to import enough food to cover the shortfalls. German authorities tried to use starvation rations for the Ostarbeiter sent to the Reich, and in the occupied territories the Nazi authorities distributed food from east to west on a massive scale. The Wehrmacht was to sustain itself as much as possible from supplies in the occupied territories, thus combining the Nazis’ genocidal war against the Jews with a starvation policy against the rest of the Soviet and Eastern European population. For more information, see Stephen Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler’s War of Extermination in the East*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011).

<sup>155</sup> “Eine Rede Stalins,” (A Speech by Stalin), *MfdT 153*, (Nov. 1941), 1.



According to the article, Stalin believed that the reasons for the defeats at the front were the result of “a lack of discipline and order in the units.” Stalin blames “commanders, soldiers, and political commissars” for leaving their positions “without authorization” and denounces them all as “scaremongers, defeatists, and worthless cowards.”<sup>157</sup> In order to counteract this internal threat, this article argued that Stalin wanted to utilize “penal battalions” to force cowards and shirkers to fight until the death against the Germans.<sup>158</sup>

The article continues to explain the full extent of Order 227, describing Stalin’s decree as “desperate measures.” These desperate measures included the fact that “every field army must have three to five well-armed units deployed at the rear to shoot any fleeing troops.” Accordingly, the author writes that among the captured Soviet documents was a report from the commander of the 902<sup>nd</sup> Soviet Security Division, which was described as being responsible for the implementation of this command. According to the 902<sup>nd</sup>’s report, “The rear units are in place, but this measure only leads

---

<sup>156</sup> Order no. 227 was issued on 28 July 1942 by decree of Josef Stalin. The order was an attempt to boost morale and prevent further retreats by the Red Army. A new slogan “Not a step back!” was the army’s new motto, which meant those who surrendered or withdrew without orders were to be considered traitors and shot. For more information, see Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: The Red Army at War, 1939-1945*, (London: Bloomsbury House, 2010), 208-210.

<sup>157</sup> “Stalin’s Geheimbefehl,” (Stalin’s Secret Decree), *MfdT 216*, (Aug. 1942), 1.

<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, the Germans also utilized penal battalions during the Second World War as well. David Raub Snyder has provided a fascinating view of penal and parole battalions. While the penal battalions acted as construction and engineering troops, they also could be issued weapons and made to fight against partisans or as reinforcements in critical areas at the front. The goal of the penal battalions was to instill discipline and order amongst cowards and deserters, while allowing them to return to active duty after a period of three to nine months. In contrast, the parole battalions were established as early as 1940-1941, and were meant to act solely as combat units for soldiers who did anything contrary to military law. These units were heavily armed and utilized throughout the Eastern Front. For more information, see David Raub Snyder, *Sex Crimes Under the Wehrmacht*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2007), 75-77, 87; The SS also utilized penal battalions as well, most notoriously with the 36<sup>th</sup> Waffen SS Grenadier Division commanded by pedophile SS Oberführer Oskar Dirlewanger. The 36<sup>th</sup> Waffen SS was among the troops used to quell the Warsaw Uprising of 1943. For more information, see Gordon Williamson, *The SS: Hitler’s Instrument of Terror* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004), 191.

to losses without tangible successes.” The MfdT article concludes, among other things, that the German offensive of the summer of 1942 had “yielded significant gains,” which proved the “superiority of German breeding.” Lastly, the author believes that the Soviets were “not a match for the power of the German Wehrmacht,” as evidenced by the “draconian measures” taken by the Red Army against “panic” amongst their troops.<sup>159</sup>

Stalin the conspiratorial aggressor emerges in the article “Stalin Disguises Himself” from March 1943. In order to make Stalin appear as the culprit for starting the war in the East, this article describes the “twin face” of Bolshevism. Stalin’s goal was to lie to the allies by disguising himself as “fighting a defensive war,” while secretly planning the “Marxist World Revolution’s long term plans for the domination of Europe.” The Soviet leader is described as wearing the “mask of patriotism,” which in reality was a false front as evidenced by his creation of “enormous armored forces” even before the war began. This transformation of Stalin from the “bloodthirsty conqueror of the world” to an “upright citizen concerned with the welfare of his people” is presented as utter nonsense, a propaganda scheme aimed at undermining the German war effort. The article argues that tactics were a deliberate attempt to mask Bolshevism’s true intentions, namely to “threaten the destruction of the entire civilized world of the West.”<sup>160</sup>

As defeat loomed nearer for Nazi Germany, the MfdT articles became more and more fatalistic, warning against the impending disaster awaiting the Reich if the Soviets should prevail. An April 1944 article “The Enemy and German Freedom” is a cynical

---

<sup>159</sup> “Stalin’s Geheimbefehl“, *MfdT*, August 1942, 1.

<sup>160</sup> “Stalin tarnt sich” (Stalin disguises himself), *MfdT* 251, (March 1943), 1.

article which denounces Soviet propaganda regarding their war aims. According to the article, the Soviets called for the creation of a “democratic Germany” and utilized captured German officers in their propaganda to act as co-conspirators in the “negotiations over the future destiny” of the Reich. The article maintains that this is all a “deception” and “dupery” because German soldiers “know exactly what a Bolshevik staged German freedom would look like.” The endgame for Germany would be as follows: ...”those who do not believe in Bolshevism are liquidated. This shall be the fate for all upstanding and proud Germans. But the rest would join the millions of others in the Bolshevik labor camps in Siberia.”<sup>161</sup> This article illustrated the type of fear tactics used by the Nazis late in the war, in which they constantly decried Bolshevik atrocities and the fear of what would befall Germany if the Soviets invaded and conquered them.

### 3.4 Conclusions

Military propaganda provided multiple mediums for disseminating information and misinformation to the soldiers of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. The sources examined in this chapter: *Die Frontschau*, *Der Wehrmachtbericht*, and *Die Mitteilungen für die Truppe*, are each unique forms of different types of educational materials utilized by the armed forces. Each of these sources were chosen for examination purposes to show the range of ideologically charged propaganda, with FS as arguably the least

---

<sup>161</sup> “Der Feind und die deutsche Freiheit,” (The Enemy and German Freedom), *MfdT* 318, (Apr. 1944), 1.

ideological, the WB moderately ideological, and the MfdT as the most ideological.<sup>162</sup>

This variance allows us to understand the complexity and diversity of military and Nazi publications, revealing that soldiers were not only exposed to racially charged and radical propaganda, but also materials which provided some objective military information.

Given the materials examined for this chapter, my conclusion is that military propaganda was just as biased and false as anything else produced solely by the Party. The film series *Die Frontschau* may not have utilized debasing antisemitic rhetoric, but instead it provided rather unrealistic depictions of combat situations on the Eastern Front. While the FS was intended to educate soldiers regarding weather conditions, offensive and defensive battles, and even sniper warfare, it is clear throughout the series that the filmmakers wanted their viewers to feel confident about the war effort against the Soviets. In contrast, the WB reported about the overall situation for both domestic and frontline audiences, relaying information about battles and major events throughout the war period. The goal of the WB was to give the aura of a legitimate and objective radio broadcast by the military free from the propaganda utilized by the regime.

The MfdT was the most ideologically based form of military propaganda examined for this chapter, and yet it bears much in common with the most extreme forms of antisemitic and anti-communist beliefs. While the FS and WB were more

---

<sup>162</sup> However, this does not mean that film and radio were less ideological forms of mass media. *Die Deutsche Wochenschauen* reflected well Nazi views, including antisemitism and anti-bolshevism. Similarly, the programming of the *Grossdeutscher Rundfunk* was centralized by the Nazis and in the wartime period transmissions were synchronized even more so across Germany. For more information, see Ansgar Diller, *Rundfunkpolitik im Dritten Reich*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1980).

moderately propagandistic in their rhetoric, the MfdT was in many ways the most easily identifiable as a direct source of Nazi oriented material. Printed material, as noted by Omer Bartov, still was the most accessible and attainable means of reaching a mass audience such as the Wehrmacht soldiers. Pamphlets, newspapers, leaflets, films, and radio all combined to fulfill one purpose: to produce political soldiers who identified with the regime and were willing to help to achieve its goals.

Not all soldiers were racists, or ideologues, or even committed to Nazi principles. Soldiers came from various backgrounds of education, religious affiliation, political persuasion, social status, and geographical locations. Yet propaganda wanted to unify all of Germany together with the power of persuasion. Information was the most powerful weapon in the Nazis arsenal, capable of turning men into soldiers and murderers, two categorizations whose identities often blur in times of war. For Hitler, war and genocide were intertwined, and on the Eastern Front the battle for the creation of a new empire was to be built upon the bones of millions of people. The soldiers of the Wehrmacht were the true vanguard of Nazism, and their perceptions of the Soviet Union reveals the extent to which Hitler's propaganda war was won or lost.

## Chapter Four

### **“This is a short description of the Russian paradise....:” German Soldiers Experience the Soviet Union, 1941**

Up to now, all of the troops have had to accomplish quite a bit. The same goes for our machines and tanks. But, nevertheless, we're going to show those Bolshevik bums who's who around here! They fight like hired hands, not like soldiers, no matter if they are men, women or children on the front lines. They're all no better than a bunch of scoundrels. By now, half of Europe is mobilized. The entry of Spain and Hungary on our side against this Bolshevik archenemy of the world overjoyed us all. Yes, Europe stands under the leadership of our beloved Führer Adolf Hitler, and he'll reshape it for a better future. The entry of all these volunteer armies into this war will cause the war to be over soon.<sup>1</sup>

-Sgt. Karl Fuchs, Tank Gunner, 7<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, June 28, 1941.

When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, millions of German soldiers confidently marched into Eastern Europe with the hopes and dreams of a victorious new empire before them. While many of the soldiers did not want another war, most believed in Germany's ability to defeat their foes after two years of Blitzkrieg successes. The Wehrmacht was at the apex of its military might that summer, destroying the Red Army piece by piece, as it had done to the Poles and French during the previous

---

<sup>1</sup> Horst Fuchs Richardson, *Sieg Heil!: War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941*, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1987), 115.

two years. However, by the end of 1941 the Wehrmacht would face its biggest defeat to date in the Second World War, proving that the Third Reich was not invincible and the Soviet Union was a far different foe than Poland and France. In the midst of destructive modern warfare, German soldiers wrote letters home to their loved ones and kept private diaries to record their daily experiences. Soldiers acted as witnesses to the Soviet Union, reflecting many of the views and beliefs they had been indoctrinated with by the Nazis. The history from below of the German soldiers on the Eastern Front is told in their wartime writings, providing perspectives on the Soviet civilian population, the Red Army, and even atrocities committed by both sides. Soldiers' writings provide a window into the terror of combat, the horrors of total war, and the worldview of Hitler's ordinary men in the Eastern campaign.

Most of the invading German soldiers had only vague conceptions about anything to do with Eastern Europe or Russia, other than the National Socialist propaganda about Slavic *Untermenschen* and the horrors of Judeo-Bolshevism. Reliable information had been a hard thing to come by for the average German since 1933 let alone 1941, leading to significant amounts of speculation, stereotyping, and overall perceptions of the East as a backward, Bolshevized, and Oriental land. Much of what the Wehrmacht soldiers knew about the East derived from preconceived biases regarding the evil Soviet empire or from the views of official propaganda sources. In this chapter, the use of thematic categories, including some of those reflected in the previous chapters on propaganda, draws parallels between many soldiers' views while also retaining the uniqueness of the individual author. Additional categorizations, such as "Overconfidence and Faith in the Führer" and "Combat, Conditions, and Changing

Views,” are unique products of the war itself. In combination, all of these themes help to frame a more complete view of outlook and ideology, victory and defeat, and life and death on the Eastern Front in 1941.

The views that the soldiers of the Third Reich brought with them into the Soviet heartland undoubtedly changed in the face of the bitter realities of war, yet the effects of political and social biases, cultural differences, racist sentiments, and extreme nationalism, were major factors in the battles and several year occupation within the Soviet Union. It is the contention here that the cumulative effects of Nazi propaganda and ideological indoctrination of the German troops influenced their actions and reactions to what they saw. The soldiers were infused with National Socialist, anti-communist, and anti-Semitic beliefs, which helps to explain the severe brutality that the Germans inflicted upon the peoples of the East, as well as why the Wehrmacht battled so ferociously for four long years against the Soviet Union.

#### *4.1 Perceptions of the Occupied Territories: Civilians, Landscape, Society*

The Nazis had prepared the German soldiers entering the Soviet Union with a psychological and ideological foundation of racial hatred and cultural bias years in advance of June 1941. As the propaganda cited in earlier chapters indicates, the Nazis only increased their indoctrination as the war progressed in order to shape the minds of their troops and justify their imperialist genocidal actions in the East. Despite all the political bantering and exhortations by the Goebbels Ministry about the Soviet Union, nothing could have prepared the ordinary foot soldiers who marched eastward that summer for what they witnessed, perpetrated, and endured. The best and brightest of



Hitler's army invaded Russia that summer, and their letters and diaries provide witness to what they experienced.

The secrecy surrounding Operation Barbarossa left most throughout Europe in the dark about what was about to occur on June 22, 1941. As Wehrmacht soldiers were shifted from locations around the continent to the Soviet border in June, most were either informed of or suspected what was about to occur. Corporal Wilhelm Moldenhauer of the 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry Motorized Division was part of the initial invasion of the Soviet Union. During the initial contact with the border of Soviet occupied Poland, Moldenhauer made observations regarding the living conditions of the Polish people in his diary on June 21, 1941. "It was probably about 6 o'clock when I saw in a small town, in front of a butter shop, many people in a queue for milk. These are the consequences of a war! Famine, poverty and misery. It is the same here as in Germany, a card system for food. But the Poles are an undisciplined people." In his comments about the Poles, he notes the "significant traces" of combat from the 1939 invasion which accounted for much of the destruction and poverty.<sup>2</sup> In his sense of cultural superiority, he finds that the Poles are an "undisciplined people," perhaps in contrast to his ideas on German orderliness in the face of adversity.<sup>3</sup>

When the invasion began on June 22, the Wehrmacht poured over the Soviet border, and with it came the opinions and prejudices of Hitler's soldiers. Private Harry Mielert began to encounter the populace of occupied Poland in the first week of the war,

---

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are by Justin Pfeifer.

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Moldenhauer; Jens Ebert, *Im Funkwagen der Wehrmacht durch Europa: Balkan, Ukraine, Stalingrad ; Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Wilhelm Moldenhauer 1940-1943*, (Berlin: Trafo, 2008), 120.

and he commented in a letter home to his wife about the poverty and misery he witnessed. Mielert wrote on June 27, 1941, “The people are the poorest in the world, you can see that in their standard of living....”<sup>4</sup> Descriptions of the poverty and squalor was a frequent theme in most of the letters and diaries of German soldiers throughout the Eastern Front conflict. Equally shocking was the reception some of the soldiers received from the civilian population. Lieutenant Walter Melchinger wrote on June 26, 1941, the following about the initial German-Ukrainian relations: “We were greeted as liberators by the Ukrainian population. It is a great pleasure for us to receive such a hearty welcome daily. Everywhere there are friendly faces, with bunches of flowers they are on the streets, the whole village comes to our bivouac places, and willingly they give us all the support we need.”<sup>5</sup>

Many of the German soldiers entering Soviet occupied territory were not sure what to expect from the civilian population when they swept through towns and villages in East Poland, the Baltic States, and the Ukraine. Many were actually surprised when they found that some members of the populace greeted them as liberators. Corporal Moldenhauer came upon a Ukrainian village after only a week of fighting, where despite the poverty he noted on June 28 that: “The population is known to be very friendly to Germans. The people were trustworthy and talked as best they could with their broken German.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Harry Mielert, *Russische Erde: Kriegsbriefe aus Russland*, (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1950), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot: Barbarossa '41: Ein kollektives Tagebuch*, (München: Knaus, 2002), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Moldenhauer, 122-23.

As Moldenhauer continued his advance towards Tarnopol further into the Ukraine, he continued to experience a positive response from people in the Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> On his journey between Zoborow and Tarnopol, he noted in his diary about the bartering that took place between German soldiers and the local people. Moldenhauer wrote the following on July 2-3:

The people flocked literally in both directions. Women from the surrounding villages set out to take advantage of opportunity and buy cheap. They hauled with them all kinds of rubbish, especially bits of garments. The men, an immense number, were probably without exception former Russian soldiers. Of course, they were Ukrainians. But we did nothing to them anyway. This Horde, half dressed in civilian clothes, usually barefoot, can bring us no more harm.<sup>8</sup>

Moldenhauer's views in this unique situation appear to be mixed between general interest in the trade relations, and a condescending tone regarding the Ukrainian men and women. Moldenhauer suspected that the men in the crowd were former Red Army soldiers who had deserted, but rather than question them, he seemed content to allow their economic activities to go unimpeded. Likewise, another German soldier in the Ukraine, Corporal Gustav Böker, wrote to his parents and siblings in Lower Saxony about the reception from the local populace. Böker wrote on June 27: "What do you think of how we are sometimes warmly welcomed by the population. Some of the people put flowers on our vehicles, others gave us buttermilk, thick milk or white bread.

---

<sup>7</sup> German troops experienced the welcoming reception in other parts of Soviet occupied territory as well. For example, Sergeant Karl Fuchs noted in a letter home to his wife from Lithuania on 24 July 1941 the following, "On the third day of the campaign we reached Vilnius. The Lithuanian civilians had staged an incredible reception for us. We were literally showered with flowers!" For more information, see Horst Fuchs Richardson, *Sieg Heil!: War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941*, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1987), 121.

<sup>8</sup> Moldenhauer, 124.

Yes, the Ukrainians actually speak broken German, this I had not expected.”<sup>9</sup> The positive reception of the Ukrainian people is a common theme amongst Wehrmacht soldiers, as illustrated by Moldenhauer and Böker’s letters.

Corporal Moldenhauer was quite impressed by the good relations established with the Ukrainians, and he wrote much about it in the initial months of the campaign. As late as August 1941, he continued to take account of these good vibrations, though he also began to comment extensively upon the living conditions and cultural differences between Germany and Ukraine. In one instance, he described an encounter on a small Ukrainian farm in a letter home to his wife. Moldenhauer noted on August 2:

Since yesterday we are in a village on a small farm, where we are for the first time treated very hospitably. I have never experienced anything like it in my life! First, sour milk was brought to us. I was usually never a big fan of it, but this tasted like whipped cream, with sugar and some bread. Then we got butter and eggs and smoked meat with boiled potatoes. So suddenly our food situation improved incredibly.....The farmer has a very primitive house. A mud hut with a thatched roof. On the right is a large room that represents the whole life of a Ukrainian peasant family. In one corner stands a large brick furnace stove, oven and heat dispenser at the same time.....In the next corner is a large old bed beside which is a kneading trough....On the third wall is a large chest with junk in it, and finally a window wall with a long bench.<sup>10</sup>

Moldenhauer, like many of his countrymen, began to emphasize the major socio-cultural and economic differences between Germany and the Soviet Union. While Moldenhauer noted that the hospitality of the Ukrainian farmer was unlike anything he ever witnessed in his life, he also felt the need to tell his wife about the paltry foreign nature of the

---

<sup>9</sup> “Gustav Böker an seine Eltern am 27.6.1941 (3.2002.0966),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed 12 April 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=607&le\\_keyword=Sport](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=607&le_keyword=Sport).

<sup>10</sup> Moldenhauer, 142.

“primitive house” they resided in. The idea of good relations combined with cultural differences is interesting and unique to the Barbarossa campaign, since brutal occupation policies and the rise of partisan warfare soon changed the nature of this victor-conquered relationship. Thus, while Moldenhauer mentioned in a letter home to his wife as late as August 23, 1941 that “We experience a friendly attitude from the civilian population,” one finds less of such positive rapport between the Germans and Eastern peoples from Barbarossa onwards.<sup>11</sup>

When examining soldiers’ diaries and letters from the Eastern Front, one has to attempt to determine the frame of reference of the individual soldier in order to understand his worldview. While it is true that the German populace was subjected to years of propaganda and indoctrination about the Soviet Union, it also seems that many of the most basic views regarding the East stem from conceptions of what soldiers were familiar with versus what was alien to them. In many cases, as evidenced in soldiers’ writings, the conception of Germany and German identity was juxtaposed with the Soviet Union, in order to either identify with or construct sociopolitical and corporal distance between the invaders and their foes. One finds that in the letters and diaries from the Eastern Front, the troops tended to make comparative statements and analyses between Germany and the Soviet Union, with varying conclusions and sentiments.

The letters of Sergeant Karl Fuchs, a tank gunner in the 7<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, provide excellent insights into the mindset of a young, optimistic, and ideologically charged member of the Nazi military. In a letter home to his wife on August 15, 1941, Fuchs begins the first of a series of comparisons between the Third Reich and the Soviet

---

<sup>11</sup> Moldenhauer, 148-9.

Union. While resting in an unknown part of “Russia,” Fuchs wrote the following: “Our songs sounded almost like prayers in this wretched Russian land. While we sang, our native Germany materialized in front of us. Our homeland seemed more magnificent and beautiful than ever before. Our thoughts traveled west towards home, to wife and child, to parents and sisters, to all of those for whom we fight out there.”<sup>12</sup> Fuchs’ illustrative language allows us to conceptualize the camaraderie of his compatriots, the nationalism of German soldiers, and the authors’ personal views of the Soviet Union.

Fuchs continued to express his comparative outlook in the letters he wrote home. In a letter from August 22, 1941, Fuchs wrote to his wife in a similar tone as in the August 15 letter: “What an immense contrast this Russian land is to our homeland! The people here can’t give you anything because they have nothing, they possess nothing. Sometimes we feel lonely in this vast land. You should hear how fervently we sing our simple folk songs, hoping that you at home can hear them.”<sup>13</sup> Once again, in this passage Fuchs emphasizes the poverty and misery of the Russian people, while reflecting a sense of patriotism and hope for the future which many soldiers embodied in this stage of the war. Yet Fuchs’ comparisons between the Fatherland and enemy territory became much more hostile and judgmental as time passed. In a letter from September 22, Fuchs makes a series of negative comments characteristic of Nazi ideology:

Our German proverb, “different people have different customs,” does not apply to this endless, monotonous country of Russia. I suppose this proverb may be applicable to many countries on earth, but not here. This country, like its people, seems eternally gray and monotonous. Everywhere you look there is nothing but poverty and misfortune. Poverty looks at you from every corner, and certainly the men, women,

---

<sup>12</sup> Fuchs Richardson, 125.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 127.

and children are terribly poor. Can you imagine that human beings grow up to live like animals? That seems to be the case here. Just the other day I mentioned to one of my comrades that even a little flower in God's wonderful nature grows up with more sunshine during its lifetime and enjoys more care and happiness than these people here. It would be inconceivable for me to have our child live in such an environment! I suppose it's just as impossible to ask a Russian to think of something beautiful and noble.<sup>14</sup>

Fuchs maintained in his letter from September 22 that the Russian landscape and people were equally poor and lifeless in his perception. Fuchs finds no beauty in the East, only forms of poverty and wretchedness seemingly foreign to his Nazi worldview. Fuchs made similar comments in a letter to his mother on October 20 while on guard duty during a cold winter's day. Fuchs lamented the conditions and people surrounding him:

When we had the first real cold spell, the people were still walking around barefooted. Most of them have no shoes, but only rags that they wrap around their feet. They do this no matter if it's dry or wet and now in this muddy weather, they're walking around with incredibly dirty rags around their feet. Hygiene is something totally foreign to these people. You folks back home in our beautiful Fatherland cannot imagine what it's like. These people here live together with the animals, indeed they live like animals. If they could only once see a German living room. That would be paradise for them, a paradise that these Communist scoundrels, Jews and criminals have denied them. We have seen the true face of Bolshevism, have gotten to know it and experienced it, and will know how to deal with it in the future. Yes, my dear Mother, there is only one Germany in the world and we hope to return to it soon.<sup>15</sup>

In this letter from October 20, Fuchs reveals both his use of contrasting images of the German Fatherland and Russia, as well as the impact of National Socialist

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 147.

indoctrination upon his mentality. While all of his views may appear synonymous with Nazism, it seems when comparing his ideas with other soldiers that even the less ideologically charged felt the same way about the immense poverty and terrible living conditions facing the Soviet populace. This helps us to understand some of his views within the context of cultural difference, while at the same time recognizing that Nazism was also at the core of his belief system. Clearly, anti-Communism and anti-Semitism were synonymous in Fuchs' mind, linking Jewish-Bolshevism to the plight of the Eastern peoples.

Not all of the soldiers of the Third Reich were as ideologically charged as Fuchs, yet they also observed many differences between Germany and the Soviet Union. In a letter to his parents on August 24, 1941, Corporal Moldenhauer described his views of the backwardness of the Russian peasantry: "We have seen enough of what it looks like here in Russia. It's possible that for the peasants their servitude is not as hard as it seems to us. For the people have always been primitive in their standards. They live from day to day..."<sup>16</sup> Another anonymous Wehrmacht soldier echoed comparative sentiments when describing the lack of infrastructure, cleanliness, and clothing in Eastern Poland in a letter to the mayor of Bietigheim on July 29: "The ordinary people go about barefoot and clad in miserable rags. It is good to keep away from the natives, otherwise a flea may jump onto you. The streets are dismal....A German dirt road is better. They have muck all over them. ...In contrast, France is beautiful, and Germany is a paradise."<sup>17</sup> The

---

<sup>16</sup> Moldenhauer, 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> Christa Lieb, *Feldpost: Briefe zwischen Heimat und Front, 1939-1945: Eine Collage*, (Bietigheim-Bissingen: Stadt Bietigheim-Bissingen Stadtarchiv, 2007), 159.



writings of Moldenhauer and the anonymous soldier have much in common, namely the use of the familiar ideas with statements such as “not as hard as it seems to us,” “Germany is a paradise,” in order to denote differences between the two societies. This allowed both of the soldiers to compartmentalize all that he was seeing, and it also likely helped to justify the worthiness of the Nazi cause as well.

Likewise, another soldier named Hans Roth, who served in an anti-tank battalion of the 299<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, provided similar views in his diary on October 27 of living conditions in Kramino, Russia:

Anyone who does not absolutely have to go outside during this shitty weather stays inside these pathetic shacks, choosing to endure all the repulsiveness of these pig sties. ....All of this only increases the feeling of a prehistoric atmosphere, which one would expect in the huts from early civilization. Possession of paper indicates education and wealth.....Just imagine the following: local people of various ages, surrounded by many children, who altogether have not washed themselves for years, other than taking a sip of water into their mouths, spitting this onto their hands, taking another sip, and wetting their faces with it.....And so this is it: indigenous people, with their many small children, pigs under the stove, sheep skins which have not been removed from the stove for generations, gummed up windows, barricaded doors.<sup>18</sup>

Roth’s description of village life in Kramino is representative of the socio-cultural disconnect that many Germans soldiers felt about Russia. Roth describes the village as “prehistoric” and reminiscent of “early civilization,” the type of terminology one often finds in nineteenth century European imperialist writings regarding Africa or Asia. This notion of Eastern primitiveness or “rawness” in the Levi-Strauss sense of the term, adds to the overall self imposed sociological divide between perceived civilized

---

<sup>18</sup> Hans Roth, Christine Alexander, *Eastern Inferno: The Journals of a German Panzerjäger on the Eastern Front, 1941-1943*, (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2010), 120-122.

peoples versus barbarian ones. One finds that such conceptions permeated at all levels of the German military. For example, a Lt. J.H. of the 131<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division made the argument in a letter home dated October 25 that while the Red Army was well equipped, the ordinary Russian people were suffering and in poverty. Lt. J.H. maintained that: “This primitiveness surpasses any conceptions. There is no comparison to quantify this...only filth and decay, that is the Soviet paradise.”<sup>19</sup> Here in this letter we find a soldier who believes that there can be no comparison between the rest of the world and the Soviet Union, because in his opinion there could be nothing worse than the evils wrought by the Communists in Russia.

The “Us versus Them” dichotomy in a conflict the Nazis described as a “war of ideologies” can also be explained through the lens of German identity of the period as well. Nazi propaganda emphasized the uniqueness of German *Kultur* within western civilization, as members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* were able to idealize their past and present self-image.<sup>20</sup> Sergeant Karl Fuchs, in a letter to his wife on August 15, exemplified this rationale when he wrote: “You can’t find a trace of culture anywhere. We now realize what our great German Fatherland has given its children. There exists only one Germany in the entire world...”<sup>21</sup> While Fuchs is certainly an ideologue, it is interesting just how many Wehrmacht soldiers echo similar themes in their writings, even if they do not explicitly use the terminology of the Nazi regime. Fuchs takes great

---

<sup>19</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, Reinhold Sterz, *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939-1945*, (München: Beck, 1982), 85.

<sup>20</sup> David Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Fuchs Richardson, 125-126.

pride in his Nazi German identity, and constantly juxtaposes it in opposition to Soviet identity.

Not all soldiers saw the East in such biased or political terms, even when making comparisons between Germany and the Soviet Union. Dr. Konrad Jarausch, a high school teacher of religion and history, served in a reserve battalion in Poland and Russia. Unteroffizier Jarausch's letters provides us with a far more complicated image of Wehrmacht soldiers, but of course he was unlike many of his compatriots as a highly educated teacher who read Greek and Latin. However, while Jarausch may not have been an ardent Nazi, he witnessed and was responsible for the deaths of untold numbers of Soviet prisoners of war in the winter of 1941-1942. Jarausch is thus one of the cases of the "unordinary," a man whose banality matches his complexity in his writings.

While in Minsk, Jarausch wrote a letter to his wife on August 14, 1941, in which he offered a comparison of the city with Germany: "What a difference between these two worlds! Here one sees the old Russian world: filthy, without any German sense of order, but yet filled with life, and right next to it these modern buildings." Jarausch was similar to his fellow countrymen in his belief that Germany and Russia were "two worlds," and that Russia was "filthy" whereas Germany had a "sense of order." Yet Jarausch was also honest with himself and his wife to whom he wrote, noting, "...German troops have failed here miserably, in a most shameful manner. It was clear that we had to occupy the building thoroughly. It was also obvious that we needed to convert the large hall into a space for troops. But the manner in which we have spread dirt and disorder hardly accords with our claims to represent a higher cultural order." The openness to which Jarausch admits the faults of the German military is stunning in

August 1941. In addition, he openly disagrees with the ideas of soldiers like Karl Fuchs, mocking the idea of Germany's "higher cultural order."<sup>22</sup>

Another example of Jarausch's complex worldview is in a letter from August 16, in which he described attempting to learn the Russian language from a young Ukrainian while stationed at Kochanowo prison camp. Jarausch seems to have befriended the young man, who helps him translate works such as Pushkin into German. For Jarausch, it was important to tell his wife the truth about ordinary Russians, "In reality, not all Russians are 'swines' or 'beasts.' Of course, we knew that before, but it's good to have that impression confirmed by firsthand experience...."<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Jarausch seems to assume that he and his comrades all understood beforehand that many Russians were good people, despite what the German people had been told by the Nazi regime. Despite the tender humaneness exhibited by Jarausch, there was still a great deal of prejudice and cultural difference for him to overcome. For example, when making a comparison between a German and a Russian village, Jarausch stated the following in a letter from August 24: "...the wooden houses could have been German. At least if viewed from afar, in their misty grayness. On closer inspection, one could tell the difference. The lack of order and the disrepair are too obvious." Jarausch further commented that the most "alienating" thing about Russians was "their inability to maintain order." Once again, it seems that when making comparisons between something familiar with something foreign, even the most educated of soldiers were biased in their judgments. As noted by

---

<sup>22</sup> Konrad Jarausch, *Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 249-250.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 256-7.

Jarausch, “It must have something to do with the people themselves,” a declaration which could only mean that the people were inferior to the Germans.<sup>24</sup>

In the end, despite the superiority complex many of the Germans held regarding the East, there was still sympathy for the Russians from some of the soldiers. A soldier named Kurt Vogeler, in an undated December 1941 letter lamented the fate of the Russian people. Vogeler asked rhetorically in his letter “Who is able to resist sympathy?,” emphasizing his feelings about the war when he stated “Indescribable is their hardship, and heart shattering their misery.” For Vogeler, a former theology student at the Universities of Göttingen and Tübingen before being called up to fight, the treatment of the Russians by the Germans was “a crime against humanity.”<sup>25</sup> Yet it was Unteroffizier Jarausch who said it best when describing the Russian peasants to his wife in a letter dated October 28, “These people are people just like us.”<sup>26</sup> If only the Nazi leadership had felt that way, perhaps the fate of millions would have been quite different.

#### *4.2. Liberating the East, Saving the West, and Destroying Bolshevism*

Nazism was fundamentally a racially charged imperialist movement which sought territorial expansion and the annihilation of its enemies, especially Jews and Communists. If Germany was to achieve the territorial expansion outlined by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, it had to invade the bastion of Judeo-Bolshevism in Russia to both acquire

---

<sup>24</sup> Jarausch, 267.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Bähr, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten, 1939-1945*, (Tübingen, R. Wunderlich, 1952), 109-110.

<sup>26</sup> Jarausch, 313.

and destroy.<sup>27</sup> Prior to 1933, Germany's communist party was one of the largest in Europe, though the forces of the right had continuously battled it with ideology and brute force since 1919.<sup>28</sup> Hitler's Germany outlawed the KPD and placed Communism at the forefront of Nazism's main enemies, using propaganda and martial law to attempt to make the Soviet Union the most hated nation on earth in the eyes of the German people.<sup>29</sup> These factors should be noted when considering the attitudes of German soldiers, who invaded having been imbued with various ideologies in their lifetimes, including eight years of Nazism.

A number of themes regarding Communism and the Soviet Union are revealed in the writings of German soldiers during the Barbarossa campaign. These sub-themes include ideas on liberating the East from Bolshevism, a battle between Europe and Asia, the godlessness of the Soviet Union, and reactions to perceived Communist atrocities. These various themes are part of a pattern which emanates from the minds of Hitler's soldiers, revealing the vast complexities of individual perceptions of the war and their enemy. There was little consensus, but the evidence suggests that many German soldiers were strongly anti-Communist, and they sought to reaffirm their beliefs in their writings regarding what they witnessed.

---

<sup>27</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 641-667; Woodruff Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 235.

<sup>28</sup> Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia, 1925-1933: The Illusion of Strength*, (Pittsburg, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 157.

<sup>29</sup> For more information about public opinion regarding Communism, see Detlev Peukert's *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

One of the major anti-Communist notions evidenced in soldiers' writings during the Barbarossa campaign is the idea of the war as a *Freiheitskrieg* against Bolshevik Russia. Incidentally, soldiers had various views on the subject, from subjective ideological perceptions to outright socio-cultural beliefs about the justness of their cause. Some soldiers saw the struggle as a war between East versus West, as one soldier Hermann Stracke noted in a letter dated June 22, 1941: "Then in the early morning hours of the day the battle against Russia, the war of Europe against Asia began."<sup>30</sup> The notion of the war against the Soviets as a conflict between Asiatic hordes and European civilization was a pervasive part of Nazi propaganda, relying on historical imagery of the Huns and Mongols to encourage feelings of fear and anger.

In this war of liberation from Bolshevik tyranny, German soldiers came to believe that they were fighting a preventative war to protect the Reich. In his diary entry from June 22, upon viewing deceased civilians killed by artillery shelling, Hans Roth blamed the Communists for all the misery and destruction: "I am compelled to think of you Rosel and Erika, when I witness such horrible images. How wonderful it is that we are able to exterminate these murderous beasts. How good it is that we have pre-empted them; for in the coming weeks these bloodhounds might have been standing on German soil. It is inconceivable what would have happened then!"<sup>31</sup> Roth displays the kind of cognitive dissonance displayed by many soldiers of the Wehrmacht. Rather than take responsibility for those civilians killed by German artillery fire, Roth focuses on who he perceives as the culprits for starting the war.

---

<sup>30</sup> Bähr, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Roth, 27.

Many soldiers came to believe in and appreciate the sympathy of the local population as part of an effort by the Germans to liberate the East from the Soviet menace. Lieutenant Eugen Altrogge, a German Catholic from Gelsenkirchen, wrote a letter to a friend Hans Alrbing on June 22 in which he echoed sentiments of freedom for the Eastern peoples: “What an immense territory now stands before us, from the exterior an old mysterious Russia, which has become the modern, cruel Soviet state! Far away from all the political and military considerations I hope that many people will want freedom from the Bolshevik yoke, I think especially of the Ukraine.”<sup>32</sup> While soldiers such as Altrogge entered the Soviet Union with notions of freeing the Eastern peoples, another soldier corporal Kurt Krämer developed such ideas upon experiencing the friendly attitudes of the locals. Krämer wrote in a letter home dated June 27: “The population here is very German friendly and bring us things on all the roads and paths. Therefore we are not hungry. It is amazing how many people can speak German here. We are greeted as liberators. During their withdrawal the Bolsheviks burned down homes and murdered the inhabitants.”<sup>33</sup> For Krämer, his perceptions of events at the front reinforced notions of the war as one against a barbarous foe who ruled with an iron fist.

Many of the soldiers felt relieved at the sight of a population who seemed to welcome the invaders as heroes. Lieutenant Walter Melchinger wrote a letter home on 26 June, describing how the Ukrainians felt about the new occupation: “We were

---

<sup>32</sup> “Eugen an Hans am 22.6.1941 (3.2002.0210),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed April 10, 2014, <[http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=920&le\\_fulltext=eugen%20an%20hans](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=920&le_fulltext=eugen%20an%20hans)>.

<sup>33</sup> Kempowski, 119.



greeted as liberators by the Ukrainian population. It is a great pleasure for us to receive such a hearty welcome daily....We really are lucky that we have been stationed here and must not contend with a treacherous and insidious enemy population.”<sup>34</sup> The Ukrainians seemed particularly fond of the Germans during Barbarossa, as noted by Wilhelm Moldenhauer in a letter to his wife Erika from July 16. Moldenhauer wrote ““In the small villages, I have the impression that the people are glad to be rid of the Russians.”<sup>35</sup> Moldenhauer saw that the people who lived in poverty and in agricultural pursuits were the least likely to support the Soviet system of rule.<sup>36</sup>

However, in the same letter from July 16, Moldenhauer also noted that the sentiments in the cities were quite “different.” Moldenhauer continued in his letter, “Here the officials and Jews have done a great job with their propaganda. It is not too difficult for the party to win people over who have nothing if they give them advantages....In the cities one can find gardens, cheap statues, sports grounds and places of entertainment.”<sup>37</sup> Moldenhauer believed the Soviets could bribe and manipulate the urban citizens with basic goods and propaganda, but for him it was nothing but a total sham. Moldenhauer concluded, “A Stalin monument was particularly noteworthy. This plaster bust had been stuffed with straw atop a black marble base. Thus it is with everything that the Communists flaunt, an illusion.”<sup>38</sup> Yet while utopian Communism

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>35</sup> Moldenhauer, 135-6.

<sup>36</sup> Ukrainian support of the Germans had less to do with any ideological affection for Nazism than it did the reactions to interethnic tensions and anti-Stalinism. Such initial fervor for a liberation movement quickly changed, once the true intentions and terrible occupation policies began. For more information, see Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, 42-3.

<sup>37</sup> Moldenhauer, 136.

may have been an illusion, the idea of a Nazi led liberation movement was equally a myth, but one many soldiers initially believed in.

It seems ironic today to think of the Nazis as championing ideas such as freedom and culture, but during Barbarossa tyranny hid behind a mask of virtue. Soldiers such as Corporal Hans Efferbergen wrote in their diaries about the lofty ideals of the Germans, stating on August 12, 1941: “We are essentially a people of poets and thinkers and were compelled to take up the sword in order to win freedom and social justice and bestow them on all contemporary peoples.”<sup>39</sup> Likewise, Wilhelm Moldenhauer maintained on September 6 that the Ukrainian people “expected that one day the Germans would come and free them from the yoke of Bolshevism and Jewry.”<sup>40</sup> Sergeant Karl Fuchs also echoed these tenants in a letter to his father on October 12 written from Russia near Vyazma, writing: “In the evening, civilians helped us reload our machine guns. You cannot imagine how glad they were to have been freed of Bolshevism.”<sup>41</sup> The common theme linking these three different soldiers together was their belief in the war as “freeing” the local populations from the Communists.

The Wehrmacht’s war of liberation in the East received ideological reinforcement by the soldiers themselves, who came to actually see themselves as part of a great crusade bearing witness to the living conditions, social standards, and atrocities caused by the Soviets. This is where Nazi ideology, cultural difference, and opposing

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>39</sup> *True to Type: A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians, Collected on the Soviet-German Front*, (London: Hutchinson, 1945), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Moldenhauer, 154.

<sup>41</sup> Fuchs Richardson, 142-3.

worldviews come into full force during World War II, when soldiers such as Private First Class Heinz Postenrieder became convinced of the righteousness of their cause when encountering the people. In a diary entry from August 24, 1941 near Gomel, Belorussia, Postenrieder wrote about the local conditions, crimes committed by the Soviets, and the role of the German soldier:

3 o'clock departure for Sherebnaia. We pass refugees. It is strange. We come as enemies, but when the Germans are here the Russians are happy and breathe a sigh of relief. Everybody wants to tell his tale and unburden his soul of the defiance and rage against the Bolsheviks. The Red Hordes have taken everything from them. First their sons. Whoever did not want to sign up immediately was simply shot. Our farmer lost four sons, grain, cattle, and corn, everything gone. "What shall we live on, Mr.?" In Gomel one kg. bread costs one Ruble. For 60 kg. grain the farmer gets only 1 Ruble. A pair of shoes cost 200 Ruble. No wonder the farmers are so poor. What they wear is all the clothing they own. And very often they wear rags. A two year old child lies in the room on rags. Shot through the leg. In the house is nothing to bandage the child except filthy tatters. The German soldier is supposed to help. The people trust him as if he could do everything. We simply cannot see the misery, the sorrow and the horrible injuries without getting involved and helping. But we have to harden our hearts. We are soldiers meant to fight. This ocean of misery we can't bail out. Sometimes it is quite hilarious. When airplanes appear, even if one just hums in the distance, the Russians are getting nervous and come to us: "Russki?" they ask fearful. The Bolsheviks have managed to make themselves thoroughly hated in their own country.<sup>42</sup>

Postenrieder's diary is interesting as a source because it utilizes the terminology of the Nazis combined with real life situations which seem to support the ideology. Their strengthening of ideals coupled with a renewed sense of purpose for the Germans as warriors of a grand cause was part of a shift in the overall nature of the war.

Postenrieder saw the "Red Hordes" as having caused the people to hate them through

---

<sup>42</sup> Heinz Postenrieder, Christine Miller, *Feldzug im Osten, 2.8.1941 - 19.4.1942*, (Carol Stream, IL: Publisher's Graphics, 2010), 52.

their many misdeeds, including economic and political suppression, cold-blooded murders, and religious persecution.

The theme of religious persecution deserves some attention as part of the anti-Communist crusade, namely because many soldiers talked about it in their letters and diaries. Many German soldiers knew about Soviet atrocities committed against Christian churches, and they had experienced years of propaganda about the horrors of Communist godlessness. One soldier, Corporal F., described the mood among German troops regarding Russia's religious policies on July 3: "Adolf and I march against our great enemy Russia. Thus one of my wishes has come true, for I have always wanted to go against this blasphemous country. This time the fate of an ungodly power will be determined."<sup>43</sup> According to Corporal F., the Soviet Union was both "blasphemous" and "ungodly," suggesting that he took great offense to the Communists because of their anti-Christian beliefs. Likewise, Private Harry Mielert described the Russians near Kiev on 1 October as having "no religion," relying upon their "ideology" rather than the belief in "one God."<sup>44</sup> The recognition by soldiers of the Soviets' relative atheism created cultural and ideological distance between the beliefs of the invaders and those of the enemy regime as well as members of the populace.

Soldiers became witnesses to the crimes that had been unleashed against organized religion in the Soviet Union. Since Nazism had co-opted portions of the Christian religious community into its ranks, Wehrmacht soldiers displayed their Christian beliefs and

---

<sup>43</sup> Kempowski, 200.

<sup>44</sup> Mielert, 19.

challenged the actions of the Communists. When Lieutenant Siegfried Vaubel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division entered Smolensk on August 8:

In the morning I went with Frenzl to Smolensk....The city is completely destroyed. Only ruins. On the other side of the Dnieper the great cathedral with its golden domes stands amongst the destruction. Parts of the medieval city walls with brick towers still stand. The city center and the university buildings are brick, everything else timber huts....In front of the cathedral are two German tanks from the world war. Inside, the church is almost intact. In the small room, an anti-religious Museum. Pictures about the life of mammals and the evolution of humans. Images of clergy and landowners describe the ill-treatment of the people. Bolshevik propaganda pictures! Inside the church, an old priest and an old teacher who know German. She explains, that the cathedral was not closed, church services could be held, but they were so strongly taxed by an amusement tax that they could hardly pay for it.<sup>45</sup>

In a similar situation, Sergeant Karl Fuchs' unit entered Smolensk in September 1941, and he found out what happened to the cathedral there, whereupon he vented his anti-Communist rage in a September 10 letter to his wife:

Yesterday I had the opportunity to visit the city of Smolensk. Although I gathered many impressions there, let me just tell you of one. I was able to visit a former orthodox cathedral. The interior of this cathedral was richly decorated with gold and other artifacts and I doubt that you could find such a magnificent church anywhere else in the world. The Bolsheviks, however, have altered this cathedral considerably and have turned it into an anti-God museum. It is really disgusting how these Communist scoundrels treat everything that is great and holy. If you had a chance to observe these Russians with their distorted, grimacing faces, driven by a political insanity, then you would feel the same kind of rage which I felt after I had walked into that church. In my opinion, these Bolsheviks are murderers of all culture!<sup>46</sup>

Fuchs' rage over his experiences in Smolensk is quite typical amongst Wehrmacht soldiers in this period. Many felt compelled to write about the destruction of religion in

---

<sup>45</sup> Diary Entry, August 8, 1941, Siegfried Vaubel *Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, 1941, ED 181, *IfZ Archiv, Institut für Zeitgeschichte* München-Berlin, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Fuchs Richardson, 135.

the Soviet Union, likely because they contrasted it with their own culture in Nazi Germany. Likewise, soldier Konrad Jarausch was very interested in the matter of Christianity in the newly liberated territories. In a letter to his wife from August 14, 1941, he wrote about the fate of a church in Minsk:

...I noticed a church tower right next to the Lenin House in Minsk. It could have been located in one of the more modest neighborhoods in Berlin. The church was made of red brick and was Romanesque in style; it reminded me of the Kapernaum Church in the Seestrasse in Berlin-Wedding. Except that everything was more marked by poverty, and the tower was smaller....It wasn't damaged much on the outside. But there were no crosses or Christian iconography of any kind. Plastered on the fence posts outside were theater and cinema announcements. The main entry had been blocked off with a kind of glass wall that looked like a storefront window. A side entrance led me past a ticket counter. Inside, carpenters and others were at work. They were whitewashing the walls and refinishing the floor. A few men and women were standing around looking at what had already been accomplished. So we started a conversation. I could get the basic facts despite our problems in conversing, the Bolsheviks had converted this "beautiful, wonderful Kyrka (church)" into a movie theater. It is now supposed to be turned back into a church. It was clear that people were interested in it. Were they expressing some kind of religious sentiment? Who can say?<sup>47</sup>

Jarausch's letter reveals many things about both his personal identity as well as of German perceptions of the Soviets. Jarausch uses comparatives to find likenesses between the East and the West, showing some consideration of cultural understanding in his mind. When he inspects the Orthodox Church, he found that the Communists had turned the religious space into a movie theater. Jarausch felt this was important enough to write home about it to his wife, and clearly expresses his view that people might want to revive Christianity in Minsk.

---

<sup>47</sup> Jarausch, 250-1.

The most important issue that affected German soldiers regarding their Bolshevik enemy was the overwhelming evidence of atrocities committed against civilians in the various liberated territories. Almost as soon as the Wehrmacht troops entered Soviet territory, they began coming across scenes of murdered civilians in the wake of Red Army withdrawal from villages, towns, and cities. When Hans Roth came across the prison at Lutsk in the Ukraine, he was appalled to find that the Communists had murdered the civilians.<sup>48</sup> He wrote about this event in his diary on June 26, 1941: “The local prison is a gruesome sight. Prior to their retreat, the Bolshevik mob staged a terrible bloodbath. More than a hundred men, women, and children were slaughtered like cattle. Never will I forget such appalling images!”<sup>49</sup> Roth was a strong anti-Communist, and his convictions were confirmed when viewing the murders of men, women, and children.

The impact such incidents had upon German troops strengthened the perceived validity of Nazi ideology and the daily propaganda distributed in the armed forces. For Wilhelm Moldenhauer, witnessing the atrocities against Ukrainians at Zhovka near Lvov had a powerful effect, confirming his pre-existing beliefs and pushing his resolve to fight harder against the Soviets.<sup>50</sup> Moldenhauer wrote in his diary on June 29 about the massacre at Zhovkva:

---

<sup>48</sup> Under orders from Moscow, the NKVD began mass executions of Ukrainians of political prisoners or anyone who might collaborate with the enemy. On June 23-24, 1941, the NKVD massacred scores of “prisoners,” with estimates ranging between 1,500 to 4,000 killed. For more information, see Karel Cornelis Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> Roth, 31.

<sup>50</sup> When the Germans entered Zhovkva on June 28, 1941, they discovered the bodies of prisoners murdered by the NKVD. After this, the Ukrainians instigated a pogrom against the local Jews. For more

Here I have been witness to how the Bolsheviks have dealt with a large portion of the Ukrainians. We were going to extract bodies from a large hole when we realized that the people had been mutilated and tortured before they were beaten to death. When I was there, about 25 bodies had been dug up. There were women and children amongst them. It is altogether incomprehensible to us, how people are capable of such atrocities. Outside the gates is where these sorry scenes took place. On the faces of the people who stood outside the gate, the horror of death was reflected again. How many of them have lost a relative to these bestial acts. It is once again the Jews who had their hand in the terrible events. These horrible murders by the Bolsheviks have taken place in every city.<sup>51</sup>

While Nazi propaganda covered many such stories of Soviet atrocities in various media forms, the event most covered in 1941 was the massacre at Lemberg (Lvov). The Lvov massacre began on June 22 following the Nazi invasion, when the NKVD was ordered to liquidate the political prisoners held there. By June 25, some 3-4,000 had been murdered by the NKVD, buried in shallow graves which the Nazis later discovered.<sup>52</sup> Subsequent to these Soviet atrocities, the Germans would seize Lvov and find the mass graves, resulting in Nazi instigated pogroms and exterminations of the local Jews by the SS.<sup>53</sup>

German soldiers were particularly horrified by the NKVD killings at Lvov. One soldier, Sergeant Paul Rubelt, in a letter from July 6, 1941, described what he saw in graphic detail: "I was in Lemberg yesterday and saw a bloodbath. It was terrible. Many

---

information, see Omer Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-day Ukraine*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 189.

<sup>51</sup> Moldenhauer, 123-4.

<sup>52</sup> For more information see Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 21.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002), 61-2.



had their skin stripped off, men were castrated, their eyes poked out, arms or legs chopped off. Some were nailed to the wall, 30-40 were sealed into a small room and suffocated. About 650 people in this area must have died in such ways.” Rubelt assigned blame for the murders not upon the NKVD, but instead wrote that: “The Jews did most of it,” and even admitted that: “The culprits will be shot.”<sup>54</sup> A Catholic military chaplain Alphons Satzger also witnessed the NKVD crimes at Lvov, and wrote the following description on July 4, 1941: “At 10 o’clock in Lemberg. The Cheka wreaked havoc in the prisons. About 2,000 Ukrainian hostages were murdered. They were lying around in the courtyard, most in the basement of the prison, all decaying, oven-like heat, only endurable with a gas mask! A terrible picture!”<sup>55</sup> These two sources alone helped to confirm the propaganda regarding the Soviet massacres committed there, providing more validation for Nazi brutality and justification for the extermination of the Jews.

An account by lance-corporal F., a medic in the 125<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, provides another look at the German perceptions of the NKVD massacres at Lemberg and other locales. The lance-corporal places blame for the atrocities directly upon the Jews and Bolsheviks, entities he believes are one and the same. *Gefreiter F.* wrote on July 3:

We witness Jewish Bolshevik barbarity that I had never thought possible. Yesterday we passed by a prison in a larger city. It smelled uncannily like corpses from afar. As we came closer, it was hardly bearable. Inside were 8,000 dead civilian prisoners, beaten, murdered, shot without regard, a bloodbath wreaked by the Bolsheviks shortly before their departure. In another town very similar cases, perhaps even more cruel. Dangerous are

---

<sup>54</sup>Wolfgang Diewerge, *Deutsche Soldaten Sehen die Sowjet-Union: Feldpostbriefe aus dem Osten*, (Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1941), 44.

<sup>55</sup> Kempowski, 227-228; Alphons Satzger, 1899-1978, was a divisional chaplain during the Second World War. He volunteered in First World War, won Iron Cross 1<sup>st</sup> class. He also was awarded Iron Cross I class in WW2 as military chaplain with *Wehrmacht*. For more information, see Karl-Theodor Schleicher, *Aus Feldpostbriefen junger Christen, 1939-1945: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Katholischen Jugend im Feld*, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 232.

the snipers, which yesterday an SS regiment commander fell victim to. The murderer was a Jew. You can imagine that such a thing cries out for vengeance, which is also carried out.<sup>56</sup>

What is both interesting and disturbing about the letter by *Gefreiter* F. is not only that he does not differentiate between Judaism and Communism, but also that he links Judeo-Bolshevism with all the crimes committed by the NKVD. Thus, he does not challenge the execution of the Jewish sniper in his writings because he believed this person was the killer of an SS officer and deserved to be murdered.

The psychological impact of witnessing the living conditions, destruction of churches, and alleged atrocities caused by the Soviets cannot be underestimated. The writing of the soldiers themselves reveals the continued or renewed ideological fervor such experiences instilled in their hearts and minds. For most, it foretold what could have happened if the Communists had invaded Central and Western Europe. An anonymous soldier in Russia wrote a letter from September 14 to the Mayor of Bietigheim revealing how such two themes became linked in soldiers' minds: "...The villages and farms were simply set on fire by the Bolsheviks without regard to their own people. ...The misfortune that threatened us cannot be overlooked. The numbers of dead and military equipment, etc., speak a clear language, and if one could see these beasts in human form, one could appreciate the danger threatening us."<sup>57</sup>

The worldview of the soldiers became shaped by their experiences, actions, and the ideology of the regime. Many became convinced that the war was a battle against Communism, as noted in a letter from September 22 by a corporal H.K. of the 72<sup>nd</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Buchbender, 73.

<sup>57</sup> Lieb, 160.

Infantry Division written near Kiev: “We are not fighting against the Russian people, but against the world enemy Bolshevism, which has made the Russians its mercenaries.”<sup>58</sup>

In this way, the troops tried to separate the “people” of the East from the maniacal intentions of their Soviet overlords. Hans Roth provided similar comments in his diary entry from September 30 at Priluki, Ukraine: “Unscrupulously these Bolshevik criminals have sacrificed the life and happiness of their people for an armament which in its scope is without parallel....The Bolsheviks have succeeded in deceiving the entire world about the extent of their armament.”<sup>59</sup> Roth combines the notions of Soviet oppression and military buildups to suggest the Red Army was a criminal organization led by a totalitarian regime. Roth continued in his diary about the devious foreign policy intentions of the Bolsheviks in Europe: “They had imagined that one day, their army of millions, equipped with unimaginable weapons, would start to march westward and trample down all of Europe. Is there a single soldier who doubts that such a march would have led to a world catastrophe of unknown proportions for all peoples? Does anyone doubt that in Germany no stone would have been left unturned?”<sup>60</sup> In this way, soldiers’ mentality was shaped by both Nazi propaganda and their own direct involvement in the war, signifying a linkage between ideology and reality which made the cause more justified in their eyes.

#### *4.3 Views of the Enemy Combatants: The Red Army and Partisan Warfare*

---

<sup>58</sup> Buchbender, 81-2.

<sup>59</sup> Roth, 114.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Nazi ideology and propaganda manufactured enemies both inside and outside Germany including political, social, and racial groups. The nationalistic xenophobia and militarism of the Third Reich manifested itself through the terrors of the SA and SS at home, and through imperialist expansion throughout Europe and beyond. Soldiers of the Wehrmacht were citizens of a nation subjected to years of indoctrination about the Soviet Union, while simultaneously being part of an organization which was a crucial tool of the Nazi regime. While the soldiers themselves had an array of their own personal beliefs, the German army collectively treated their enemies with cruel brutality, racial discrimination, and murderous rampage.

The conflict on the Eastern Front, like all wars, created new enemies amongst the members of the belligerent militaries. While propaganda conditioned German soldiers in the prewar and wartime period to negatively view the Red Army with disdain, the conditions of combat during Operation Barbarossa shaped the perceptions of the Germans in a variety of ways. Wehrmacht soldiers tended to view their opponent as stubborn and vicious on the battlefield, capable of often superhuman feats despite their inferior cultural and racial status. At the same time, the Germans denounced political commissars, Soviet guerilla and sniper tactics, and the use of female soldiers. Much like the Nazis did in Germany itself, the “othering” of targeted elements of their opponent’s military apparatus helped to excuse terrible atrocities throughout the war.

From the beginning of the campaign, the writings of German soldiers’ reveal a dualistic attitude of admiration and disdain for their Soviet enemy. The toughness of the Red Army, often in the face of insurmountable odds, was a wakeup call for those Wehrmacht troops who thought the invasion would be over in the matter of a few

months. One German soldier, Corporal Hans Efferbergen, noted on June 29, 1941 that the enemy was: "...more stubborn than anybody could believe. And what nerves Ivan has! All due respect to him."<sup>61</sup> The Wehrmacht offensives met significant resistance, and despite an initial lack of Soviet preparedness they proved quite good at defensive warfare. For example, Hans Roth noted in his diary on July 11, 1941 regarding fighting near Rzadkowka and Czykowka: "Thank goodness, the Russians have lost their drive to keep attacking us. They are occupied with digging themselves in. They're masters at that."<sup>62</sup>

The Blitzkrieg faced its greatest challenge in the vast open spaces of the Soviet Union against a tenacious and stubborn foe. The German offensive turned into a war of attrition over time, one that soldiers like Hans Efferbergen commented about on August 10, 1941:

We know nothing about the casualties of the enemy. He was attacking us incessantly from 2 to 7.30...He has so strongly entrenched himself that our offensive is petering out. He is dug in in absolutely invisible positions and keeps up a murderous fire. His snipers, whose rifles are equipped with telescopic sights, have made another nice mess. Today again two Russian batteries are pelting us with shells. It's enough to drive one mad.<sup>63</sup>

In a similarly descriptive commentary, Hans Roth wrote a lengthy entry in his diary regarding the Red Army's leadership, soldiers, and tactics. Roth wrote the following on September 30:

We all underestimated though, the leadership as well as the smallest soldier, the Russian himself and the huge degree of his armament. The loot of weapons is much larger than we expected the entirety of the arms

---

<sup>61</sup> *True to Type*, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Roth, 51.

<sup>63</sup> *True to Type*, 9-10.

of the Russian Army to be, not to mention the aircraft, tanks, and automatic weapons. And as for the Red Army soldier himself, he is the toughest enemy, the grimmest fighter that we have encountered up until now. The six weeks of trench warfare outside of Kiev has demonstrated better than ever his strength, as well as his weakness. The strength of the Red Army soldier lies in the defense. His natural inclinations enable him to masterfully utilize all advantages in the terrain. The most distinguishing trait of the Russian soldier is his stoic holding out until the end, often out of fear of the commissars. The enemy has proven to be nimble at delaying tactics, and well planned organized retreats, in addition to camouflaging his withdrawals....The Russian has proven to be a master in the construction of mock installations; their field positions are unsurpassed. Their attacks are predominately executed in stoic, mass advanced; if they do not succeed, they simply repeat them until they do. Almost always, a recurring characteristic of their attack is prepping the field with intensive artillery fire supported by tanks. The time of the attack is most often at dusk or during the night. The infantry leads the advance in tight formations, often upright in a strict march. Their digging in after reaching a certain position is fast and skilled. The Russian favors guerrilla warfare; here he is the champion through his cunning methods of fighting. The partisan war has been well planned, prepared, and executed by the Red leadership. Let's not forget to mention the artillery, those God damned Bolshevik batteries which are considerably greater in strength than we ever imagined. Their weapons of all calibers seem infinite; we encounter them even on the smallest of stages.<sup>64</sup>

The comments by Efferbergen and Roth reflect the German soldiers' respect for aspects of the Red Army's abilities. Efferbergen highlights three main areas of Soviet strength: entrenchments, snipers, and artillery. Roth provides a more extensive list of advantages, including the Soviet's armament, defensive tactics, guerilla warfare, and artillery. These examples provide an interesting view of the levels of resistance facing the Germans, and the particular strengths of the Red Army at this stage of the war.

However, many of the German soldiers' attributed the high levels of resistance amongst Soviet troops to the threats of political commissars. The commissars were hated not only as Communist ideologues but also as committed fighters on the battlefield.

---

<sup>64</sup> Roth, 114-115.

Corporal Fritz Hübner wrote describing one encounter with commissars on June 22, 1941 near Bialystok: “We had the misfortune on the first day to encounter disciples of Stalin that were prospective officers and Politruks who did not surrender, but fought to the last man and had to be killed in their bunkers. The nature of warfare has fundamentally changed, this was foreign to us.”<sup>65</sup> Hübner’s perception of the commissars reflects a general view among Wehrmacht soldiers that the Soviet political officers were radical fanatics. Another soldier, Sergeant Karl Fuchs, also believed that the main reason for continued Soviet resistance was the influence of commissars. Fuchs wrote in a letter home to his wife on September 2: “They’re desperate and right now are driven towards the front with threats from their political commissars.”<sup>66</sup> Fuchs saw the very existence of the commissars as proof of the Soviet Union’s inevitable collapse, believing the Red Army was being forced to keep fighting for a lost cause.

The perception of Soviet commissars was fundamentally shaped by Nazi anti-Communist ideology and the “criminal orders” disseminated by the OKW during Barbarossa. In particular, the infamous “commissar decree” directed that all political commissars who were captured were to be shot, an order passed on verbally to soldiers at the front in order to leave behind little evidence, as well as to be as vague as possible.<sup>67</sup> However, much as with the treatment of Jews in the occupied territories, the

---

<sup>65</sup> Kempowski, 24-5.

<sup>66</sup> Fuchs, 132.

<sup>67</sup> Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*: (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 198; The idea of vagueness with such orders as the Commissar Decree played an important role when frontline soldiers were asked to help assist the SS in roundups or shootings of Jews. Executions of so-called “partisans” could be rationalized as part of such overly generalized commands, allowing for improvisation as well as flexibility as to how killings could be accomplished.

Germans manufactured horror stories about the alleged atrocities committed by commissars against Wehrmacht soldiers. Corporal Fritz Hübner described on June 22 the fate of the “first patrols” that had fallen into Russian hands, “While they were still alive they had cut off their genitals, gouged out their eyes, cut their throats or their ears and noses were cut off.”<sup>68</sup> Hans Roth also provided a similar soldier’s tale regarding the purported fate of soldier’s who fell into the hands of commissars. Roth wrote on July 1, 1941: “Good luck to the German soldier who falls into their hands. With sadistic joy they will torture them to death and then mutilate his body beyond recognition. We have already witnessed such atrocious scenes. I pray to God that I will not be taken prisoner.”<sup>69</sup> While the veracity of such stories cannot be ascertained from soldiers’ writings, what is clear is that the myths and rumors surrounding the reported actions of commissars only strengthened the Wehrmacht troops’ resolve in attitude and actions against them.

Another element within the Red Army negatively targeted by Nazi propaganda and by the Wehrmacht were female soldiers. While German women were utilized in auxiliary positions in ever increasing numbers on the home front from 1941 onwards in Flak units and medical battalions, the Nazis’ views on gender limited the full range of potential that women could offer for the Wehrmacht.<sup>70</sup> The German soldiers at the front viewed the idea of women in combat units as an abhorrent abomination, as evidenced in

---

<sup>68</sup> Kempowski, 24-5.

<sup>69</sup> Roth, 38.

<sup>70</sup> D’Ann Campbell, “Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union.” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57., No. 2, (April 1993), 314.



many of their writings about the subject. For example, private Erich Kuby wrote about the subject on June 25, 1941 near Kaunas, Lithuania: “Just where we stopped, there was a dead woman in uniform, one of the renowned forward guard, and with her the last Russian soldiers who were shot when resistance was hopeless....if the Soviet leadership can incite the rest of the Russian nation to such fanaticism as the party members, we will have to struggle through it.”<sup>71</sup> For Kuby, women in uniform represented the fanaticism of Communism’s extreme ideological precepts.

Another soldier, Helmut K., while on patrol in a vehicle in the city of Minsk, encountered enemy sharpshooters firing from hidden positions. Helmut K. described the situation on July 9, 1941 as follows: “Yesterday in Minsk from two houses *Flintenweiber* shot at us. We stopped and I went behind the shed roof, saw a woman and shot. One car had 6 strikes, the driver only grazed on the right arm. Our group has to today 80 dead, including 32 by snipers.”<sup>72</sup> In this instance, armed females were not described as enemy combatants but rather mere “*Flintenweiber*” (gun dames), a Nazi pejorative used to categorize Soviet women at arms as no better than partisan fighters. Tank gunner Sergeant Karl Fuchs also encountered female Soviet soldiers, which he accounted for in a letter to his wife from July 17, 1941. Fuchs wrote of his encounter near Smolensk, “Yesterday....we saw our first women soldiers, Russian women, their hair shorn, in uniform! And these pigs fired on our decent German soldiers from ambush positions.”<sup>73</sup> Fuchs equates Russian female soldiers to effeminate “pigs” with short hair,

---

<sup>71</sup> Kempowski, 98.

<sup>72</sup> Ingrid Hammer, Susanna zur Nieden, *Sehr selten habe ich geweint : Briefe und Tagebücher aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg von Menschen aus Berlin*, (Zürich:Schweizer Verlagshaus, 1992), 127.

<sup>73</sup> Fuchs, 119.

noting they fired from “ambush” positions in a cowardly fashion. These familiar tropes help to elucidate the military’s mentality regarding women in uniform, and suggest an overall negative attitude towards female participation in the armed forces.

While the *Politruks* and *Flintenweiber* represented political and ideological enemies of the Wehrmacht, perhaps the most significant threat facing the Germans were Red Army snipers and enemy partisan fighters. The psychological and physical effects that snipers and guerilla warfare had upon the Germans should not be underestimated, as is evidenced by the writings of soldiers at the front. For example, on June 26, Corporal Hans Efferbergen complained in his diary about Russian tactics:

The Russians are nothing but low down curs. For one thing, they often let us come up to within twenty yards of them and then start blazing away at us from positions so well concealed that they simply can’t be seen. For another thing, they ensconce themselves high up in the trees and before you have any inkling of their presence their guns start popping. For a third thing, they work hand in glove with the civilians, put on ordinary clothes and in the twinkling of an eye change into a gang of the most abominable bandits.<sup>74</sup>

Efferbergen’s complaints are a threefold presentation of Russian tactics, including firing from concealed positions, hiding in trees, and using civilians to engage in partisan warfare. Another soldier Ernst Gunter Merten equally complained about partisan troubles and enemy snipers in the opening days of the Barbarossa campaign on June 27: “After all, the troops were quite nervous. Everyone who was not wearing a uniform was shot. It was forbidden to shit without wearing a steel helmet, otherwise you could be shot as a spy and sniper. The Slavs are cruel fighters. Paramedics no longer wear the white armband with a red cross, because they shoot first at the ambulances.”<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> *True to Type*, 8.

While Merten appears to be unclear about whether the perpetrators of the attacks against them were partisans or army snipers, it appears the line between soldier and armed civilian blurred such distinctions in modern warfare.

This destructive type of warfare was part of a battle of attrition engaged by the Soviets to wear down their opponent, which over the course of several years proved quite decisive. German soldiers did not view partisans as conventional soldiers, which meant they fell outside of military regulations in regards to treatment of prisoners of war. One anonymous soldier described the struggle against partisans in a letter from November 27 to his family: “Our current battle is against the partisans, now called bandits, who operate in large and small units, causing chaos and destruction, targeting individual soldiers and vehicles, as well as small crowded columns.” The anonymous soldier also commented about the effectiveness and brutality of the guerilla fighters that: “It is a tough, fanatical gang, mostly very well armed. They evade open battles, instead only use treachery and ambushes. A very nasty type of warfare. They have the advantage of knowledge of the area and language and helpers among the inhabitants.”<sup>76</sup> Such an emphasis on both the skills of the partisans, as well as their ruthlessness, reveals the real dangers facing German troops both at the front and behind the lines.

Yet the presence of propaganda stereotypes and negative perceptions of their enemy was also a theme in soldiers’ writings, especially those whose ideas were in line with Nazi ideological precepts. One such soldier, Hans Roth, described the Russians on 18 July as being a “different opponent” than the Belgians or French, and he provides

---

<sup>75</sup> Kempowski, 120.

<sup>76</sup> Lieb, 172.

several examples. Roth states that: "...the enemy here resembles a dull, indifferent, soulless machine of destruction and death," in contrast to the French who "learned from experience" and "attempted to avoid unnecessary casualties."<sup>77</sup> Sergeant Karl Fuchs utilized the language of the regime to similarly describe the Germans' opponent. Fuchs wrote in a letter to his in-laws on August 3: ""This war against these sub-human beings is about over. It's almost insulting when you consider that drunken Russian criminals have been let loose against us. We really let them have it! They are scoundrels, the mere scum of the earth! Naturally they are not a match for us German soldiers."<sup>78</sup> Roth and Fuchs engage in the "othering" of their enemy by generalizing about the mentality and character of the Russians while describing them in racist and pejorative terms.

While Fuchs spent much time denigrating the Soviet people and culture, Roth targets the Red Army in a similar manner. In one diary entry, Roth espouses a view of his opponent that mirrors the tenants of Social Darwinism and Nazi philosophy. Roth wrote on September 29, 1941:

The long line of Soviets passes. What kind of people are they? In their eyes and in their demeanor is something strange, something dull, completely un-European, even un-human. Bolshevism has destroyed their soul and de-humanized them to an animal level; therefore they fight out of instinct like animals in a herd. It is not the personal braveness of the individual who is called to sacrifice his life for a greater idea but the instinctual defense against danger. Bolshevism has consciously destroyed everything soulful, everything individual and private that also makes up the character and the value of a human being. What is left is the animal in the Bolshevik, who, however, does not have its finer instincts. Humans in the state of animals are much lower than the actual animal. That is why the animal Bolshevik is so hard and bloodthirsty, cruel and stubborn against the enemy and against himself. This is how to understand the

---

<sup>77</sup> Roth, 58.

<sup>78</sup> Fuchs, 123.

demeanor of the Soviet in this war. What looks like braveness is brutality!<sup>79</sup>

Roth's perception of the Red Army soldier essentially reduces them to a sub-human status by blaming Bolshevism for dehumanizing the troops. However, his other writings not only stress Bolshevism as part of this "un-European" characteristics, but they also reflect a racial component. On October 6, Roth lamented the amount of "Asians" in the Red Army's ranks, an ethnic group he labeled with such descriptors as "devilish," "fanatical howling horde," "...no longer human beings!," "Indians," "niggers," and "treacherous Asian mob."<sup>80</sup> Roth's words reflect a deep seated racism, as well as a thoroughly narrow minded set of social and cultural biases. While his views may have been the exception rather than the norm in the writings of soldiers about their perceptions of the Red Army, what is clear is that at least some of the troops had negative attitudes towards the Soviet Union in general from the beginning of the war in the East.

#### *4.4. War without Mercy: Atrocities against Civilians and Partisans*

The distance between ideology and action is an oft debated part of the academic discourse on studies of crimes committed during the Second World War. While the motives of soldiers who raped, stole, and murdered certainly varied, the end result of terrible atrocities against enemy civilians and combatants remained the same. While a clear connection cannot be drawn between those soldiers who exhibited zeal for Nazism

---

<sup>79</sup> Roth, 112-13.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 117.

or a propensity towards extremist rhetoric, there is significant evidence in letters and diaries from the war period which document that German soldiers involvement in such actions was far more accepted and widespread than previously assumed.

There are multiple important reasons for studying evidence of war crimes amongst soldiers. At macro level it is generally understood that the Wehrmacht provided institutional support for the most ideologically extreme aspects of Hitler's goals in the USSR.<sup>81</sup> However, at the micro level it is far less clear what role ordinary soldiers played in committing crimes, even genocide, by an army of roughly twenty million men.<sup>82</sup> Growing amounts of evidence since the collapse of the Soviet Union suggest that the men of the Wehrmacht not only were active in robbing, raping, murdering, and executing civilians and prisoners of war, but they also were active participants in the roundup and massacring of Jews during the Holocaust. The excerpts from diaries and letters provided below will add to that breadth of historiography, adding even more evidence that the Wehrmacht was a criminal organization complicit with some of the worst aspects of World War II.

From the opening weeks of the campaign, it is clear that any sort of rules of warfare were completely null and void during the German invasion of the Soviet Union. What is particularly shocking about the documentation of war crimes in the first part of this invasion are soldiers' willingness to record such events on paper (whether diary or letter), and also the sheer number of examples. For instance, on the first day of

---

<sup>81</sup> Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941-1944*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 275.

<sup>82</sup> Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann, and Mary Nolan, editors, *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New Press, 2002), xiv.

Barbarossa, June 22, 1941, Corporal Hans Roth wrote in his journal about a battle which took place at Molnikow, Ukraine. During this battle a number of prisoners were taken by the Germans; however, certain groups among the enemy were not to be taken alive. Roth noted what occurred: “We have taken our first prisoners, snipers and deserters receive their deserved reward.”<sup>83</sup> While one might infer a number of possible outcomes for these snipers and deserters, likely they were summarily executed rather than treated as prisoners of war.

Another such example is found in the diary entries of Lieutenant Siegfried Vaubel. In his diary, Vaubel also recounted the taking of prisoners of war, and he noted a similar process of “selection” in which some were chosen to die. Vaubel wrote on June 23: "On the way we took prisoners. . . . Prison camp, the first ‘gun broad’ (*das erste Flintenweib*), ‘Commissars will not be taken prisoner.’”<sup>84</sup> Vaubel references several interesting items in this passage. First, he makes special note of Soviet female soldiers, derogatorily dubbed *Flintenweiber* by the Germans. The most important part of the diary passage comes immediately after with the use of a quotation, “‘Commissars will not be taken prisoner.’” Lt. Vaubel deliberately uses a direct quote in reference to the Commissar Decree, which stated that Soviet commissars were to be executed.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, this appears to be a subtle hint about what the German troops were doing to

---

<sup>83</sup> Roth, 27.

<sup>84</sup> Diary Entry, June 23, 1941, Siegfried Vaubel *Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, 1941, ED 181, *IfZ Archiv, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin*, 11.

<sup>85</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History*, (New York: H. Holt, 1989), 160.

Red Army prisoners. In other words, those elements targeted for elimination by the Nazis were weeded out by the German soldiers and summarily killed.

The mistreatment and killing of prisoners of war became a central theme of the war on the Eastern Front. There is a significant amount of evidence to suggest that not only did the deaths occur as a result of negligence on the part of the German High Command but was actually an accepted mode of operations to eliminate enemy soldiers. For example, one soldier, Pfc. I. Richter of the 40<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, wrote on July 1 about the killing of surrendered soldiers. Richter wrote simply, “We shot 60 prisoners at headquarters....,” without explaining the details for the action.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, Lt. Vaubel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division also noted in his diary about the killing of select prisoners. Vaubel wrote, “Today nothing special. Bombs. For the last few days more than 1,000 Russians have been taken by the 87<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Their officers and commissars have been shot. Post.”<sup>87</sup> The deliberate shooting of unarmed enemy combatants suggests a deliberate policy by the Nazi regime and military to reduce the number of POW’s. This policy was clearly enforced by the soldiers at the front, who provide testimony to the efficiency of the German army in its endeavors.

However, the bulk of the deaths amongst prisoners of war would occur far behind the frontlines, primarily at hastily constructed camps ill equipped to handle the numbers of Red Army soldiers taken in 1941. The letters of Konrad Jarausch offer historians a unique look at the day to day problems facing the prisoner of war camps,

---

<sup>86</sup> *True to Type*, 23.

<sup>87</sup> Diary Entry, September 6, 1941, Siegfried Vaubel *Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, 1941, ED 181, *IfZ Archiv, Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin*, 8.



and the terrible treatment and conditions for Soviet soldiers. Jarausch, who was transferred to the 286th Security Division, came to work at Dulag 203, a transit camp at Kochanowo where mass deaths were frequent. In an undated letter from August 1941, Jarausch described the chaos and murderous policies of the German prison guards,

The creek flooded and the meadows were covered in water. At the same time, we received some 10,000 to 12,000 prisoners. They had marched thirty to forty km from the front; they were soaked; they had gone days without food and had eaten green sheaves of grain. In an instant the meadow was transformed into a muddy morass, with the prisoners sprawled all about. Their hunger drove them to the kitchens. Shots were fired to keep them in order. Some (not many) were killed. Others rolled around in the mud, howling from their hunger pains. The next morning several corpses were pulled out of the mud; only their legs or heads stuck up out of the mess.<sup>88</sup>

Jarausch's letter from August 1941 reveals the number of prisoners around a dozen staff was supposed to guard and take care of in a small camp. Jarausch emphasizes that the hunger of the Soviet soldiers led to riotous behavior, which the Germans quelled by shooting at and even killing some of the prisoners. The results of such measures, and the mass deaths from starvation, exposure, and disease, had a great impact upon the psyche of Jarausch. The troubled soldier offered some reflections on deaths of prisoners in a letter from September 20: "The world is so barren without God both here and at the other side of the front. I have often thought so when watching yet another one of our prisoners lie dying. No priestly words. Carried out like a corpse. Such deaths occur by the millions. This is truly the work of the devil...."<sup>89</sup> Likely, Jarausch was plagued both by the amount of deaths occurring amongst the Red Army troops in

---

<sup>88</sup> Jarausch, 261.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 291.

captivity, as well as the policies and procedures adopted by the Germans. For example, in a subsequent letter from October 25, Jarausch admits that after thousands of prisoners were transferred from his camp, he could stop having to resort to brutal tactics. Jarausch wrote: "I no longer have to play the policeman and don't need to beat anyone down with a nightstick or have them shot. Still, things are harrowing enough."<sup>90</sup> Clearly these are the words of a man with a troubled conscience, yet he continued to do his duty despite the terror and death surrounding him.

Amidst this chaos of the murderous prisoner of war system, other Wehrmacht troops took notice of the suffering and ill treatment of the Soviets. When Geert-Ulrich Mutzenbecher was traveling near Smolensk on October 16, 1941, he witnessed large columns of ill-treated Red Army soldiers heading off to captivity. Mutzenbecher wrote in a letter to his parents, "Continuously we drive past prisoners. They travel in open train cars through this snow storm. I saw a Russian women's battalion amongst the Russians. You cannot imagine the treatment....Perhaps it must be this way, when one thinks that the mass number of prisoners might remember their strength."<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Hellmuth H. of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division wrote in a letter to his family on November 22 about the impact of the weather on prisoners. Hellmuth H. wrote:

At the same time a train remained stuck in the area for several days with 2,000 prisoners and 8 men guarding. The Russians were scraping potatoes from the frozen ground and gathering grains from the grain ricks. Nevertheless, every day a number of them died from fatigue and cold.

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>91</sup> Geert-Ulrich Mutzenbecher, *Feldpostbriefe an meine Eltern, 1941-1945* (Oldenburg: Isensee, 2009), 34-35.

Not easy days for the 8 men. Thus the Russian winter claims the Russians themselves.<sup>92</sup>

This letter by Hellmuth H., written at Juschun in the Ukraine, provides a more thorough understanding of the extensive levels of human suffering being caused directly by the Nazis in the Soviet Union. While the weather was certainly a major factor here, the lack of preparedness and consideration for the prisoners reveals the true nature of Germany's "liberating" the East from communism.

The conditions described by soldiers such as Hellmuth H. and Geert-Ulrich Mutzenbecher were increasingly felt by Konrad Jarausch at the *Dulag* as well. In reflecting on brutal policies which had taken place during September-October, Jarausch commented in a letter to his friend Werner on November 25 about, among other things, the beating and killing of prisoners. Jarausch wrote:

I had to feed 16,000 to 18,000 men during many days, at least as far as that was possible. We had five Germans in the administration and the kitchens and eight guards. You can imagine that we had to beat and shoot. During such times the kitchen administration doesn't resemble anything in civilian life. One beats and shoots to create some kind of order around the kitchens. One takes care of the sick so that they don't starve, plays judge when provisions are stolen, etc. Now things are much quieter. The prisoners have been transported farther west, at least those who withstood the strain and the hunger, they were dying by the thousands. The real communist elements have already been eliminated before they get to us.<sup>93</sup>

Jarausch's letter from November 25 highlights the very real difficulties of the German prison camp system in the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa and the winter of

---

<sup>92</sup> "Hellmuth H. an seine Familie am 22.11.1941 (3.2002.7139)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed April 15, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1148&le\\_fulltext=hellmuth%20h](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1148&le_fulltext=hellmuth%20h).

<sup>93</sup> Jarausch, 331.

1941-42. What it also showcases is the fact that violence and murder were accepted parts of German policies towards Soviet prisoners of war.<sup>94</sup>

While atrocities were committed against enemy prisoners, the war also targeted the civilian population. Franz Siebeler, a corporal in the 14<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, was a part of the initial assault force during Operation Barbarossa. After heavy fighting near the Bug River, Siebeler wrote a letter to his parents on June 24 describing events unfolding in the immediate aftermath of the battle. Siebeler stated that: “The enemy had heavy losses. The bunkers were overpowered. According to the shock troops, the political commissars had forced their men at gunpoint to return to the bunker which they had fled because of the shelling.”<sup>95</sup> In this initial statement, Siebeler described how the defeated enemy had been driven by political commissars to continue fighting against all odds. Following this, Siebeler continued: “The civilian population had been involved in an ambush in these battles. 20 people, including two women, were summarily executed. This is more than legal, because there are probably none other more despicable.”<sup>96</sup> In this second part of his statement surrounding a battle, Siebeler combines different themes to excuse killing of twenty people. Siebeler describes how the enemy soldiers were “driven by political commissars,” and then immediately follows this by stating how the civilians were involved in an “ambush” against German soldiers. As a result of this,

---

<sup>94</sup> In August 1941 dysentery and typhus began killing mass amounts of POWs in the east, and soon spread to the *Reich*. Through disease and malnutrition, by February 1942 of the 3.3 million prisoners taken in 1941, roughly two million had died in German custody. For more information, see Christian Streit, “Soviet Prisoners of War in the Hands of the Wehrmacht” in *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II*, 80-81.

<sup>95</sup> “Franz Siebeler an seine Eltern am 24.6.1941 (3.2002.1285),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed April 9, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=630&le\\_fulltext=siebeler](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=630&le_fulltext=siebeler)

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Siebeler believes the murder of 20 civilians, including two women, was “legal” because they acted as partisans against the Wehrmacht.

Killing of civilians appears to have been initially justified by soldiers on the grounds based upon the pretext that if the population resisted with armed hostility, than the Wehrmacht had the right to retaliate by any means necessary. A perfect example of this can be found in an episode described by Hans Roth regarding the murder of a noncombatant. Roth recorded the incident on June 26:

The rashness of the Russian strategy can be seen in the following example: This afternoon, when Russian tanks appeared, the crew of one of our panzers climbed out to position its cannon. When we returned, we found it all in flames. A civilian who was in hiding had set it on fire. He was captured and also set on fire.<sup>97</sup>

According to Roth, the civilian’s actions are categorized as a form of “rashness” as part of a systematic “strategy” of sorts. Thus, in retaliation for the destruction of a German tank, the civilian’s death was deemed justifiable.

Once the German Army broke down the traditional barriers between military and civilian targets, all of the rules appeared to completely disappear, allowing for untold amounts of crimes exercised without impunity. One soldier, a Private Rudolf Lange, described on June 28 how he went “hunting for booty” at Krusko near Baranovichi in modern day Belarus. Lange made the process of “ransacking of the abandoned homes” sound like a bit of fun, even going so far as to describe his “three eggs” quota per house.<sup>98</sup> Another heroic Wehrmacht warrior Pvt. Werner Bergholz wrote about a similar scene in Rovno, Ukraine on June 31. Bergholz stated that: “....all the shops were raided

---

<sup>97</sup> Roth, 31.

<sup>98</sup> *True to Type*, 11.

and everybody took whatever he could lay his hands on. We “organized” a stock of 5,000 eggs and can now gorge ourselves with eggs until they stick in our throats.”<sup>99</sup> Yet another soldier, Pfc. Schobert of the 260<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, exclaimed on July 31 how in one village his unit “landed a pig and some roast beef,” while on August 6 another round of looting allowed the soldiers to eat and drink “to our hearts’ content.”<sup>100</sup>

The harsh treatment of the local populace went beyond mere stealing, however. Occupation policies were brutal and inhumane, quickly dispelling any hopes for sovereignty or independence movements by a liberating army. The evidence against the German occupiers’ harshness is overwhelming. In one instance, Kurt Fuchs of the 521<sup>st</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment described on July 14 how a teenager in Rokitino, Poland was sentenced to “25 lashes” for an unknown crime.<sup>101</sup> In another example, Pfc. Schobert, noted that after looting several villages on July 31, a Russian civilian was “shot in the village,” likely for opposing the theft of their goods.<sup>102</sup> Another example of such crimes occurred near Kirovo in modern day Moldova, when an unknown soldier of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division witnessed the murder of a woman villager on August 10: “In one of the villages our soldiers had hanged a woman head down. The matted hair of the dangling corpse hung down in bloody strands, the face was just chunks of bloody flesh.”<sup>103</sup> These various crimes against civilians in locations across Eastern Europe

---

<sup>99</sup> *True to Type*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 23-4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

suggest that war crimes were widespread, and that violent behavior and criminal activity amongst Wehrmacht soldiers was pervasive.

The barbarity of German occupation policies engendered resentment and resistance from the local populations, leading to a second front behind the lines in which the Wehrmacht and security divisions battled partisans. Soviet guerilla fighters were labeled “terrorists,” which meant no rules of warfare existed regarding their treatment upon capture.<sup>104</sup> Evidence of the Germans’ brutality against partisan fighters is abundant in soldiers’ writings from the period. Pfc. Richter noted dryly in his diary on July 19, 1941 that one of his comrades had “captured a guerilla in the woods,” and subsequently “hanged him” without hesitation.<sup>105</sup> Corporal Hans Roth also recounted a situation on August 18, 1941 involving the capture and interrogation of young partisans near Barachty and Wassilkow in modern day Poland. Following their brutal questioning involving threats and torture, the guerillas were to be executed. Roth wrote in his diary:

The four are led away. Three young and fresh girls will die for these bloodthirsty hyenas in Kiev. A group of soldiers with rifles lines up, the girls are blindfolded. This is nothing for us old guys who are used to fighting with the devil and death. But these are three girls of great beauty for whom we feel compassion. Regardless, they are ordered to shoot iron bullets into these young bodies. I cannot witness this. I retreat to the most remote corner. Finally, after what seems like an eternity, I hear the rifle salvo. The war against the civilians is not for us *frontschweine*.<sup>106</sup>

Roth blatantly labels the events behind the lines as a “war against the civilians” and voices his disdain the killing of girls involved in partisan actions. In this type of

---

<sup>104</sup> Ben Shephard, “The Continuum of Brutality: The German Army and the Soviet Partisan War, 1942,” *German History*, Jan. 2003, Vol. 21 Issue 1, 52.

<sup>105</sup> *True to Type*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Roth, 84.

warfare, the lines became blurred between combatants and non-combatants, and reprisal actions would claim the lives of countless civilians.<sup>107</sup> Soldiers like Roth were both witnesses and perpetrators in such war crimes, as an entry in Roth's diary on November 18, 1941 regarding a battle with partisans near Lebedyn, Ukraine explains. Roth described the engagement and atrocities that occurred as follows:

Immediately within the first few days, a militia was formed of trustworthy Ukrainians who have proven themselves to be faithful and brave comrades during these crucial hours over the upcoming weeks. A partisan group of 2,000 men has been reported. We deploy our men and encounter initial exchanges with these well-armed gangs....At one point, we even have to flee, leaving our dead and injured men behind, whom we later find mutilated like animals. In the town itself, insecurity is mounting. A petty officer is mugged; the culprit is hanged from the gallows on the very same day....During the afternoon, ten hostages were shot dead. We are now acting with an iron fist; the gallows in the town square is always busy. Executions are the daily norm. It has to be this way.<sup>108</sup>

The ferocity and ruthlessness of the fighting described by Roth partly explains the extreme actions of soldiers bent on revenge for the death and mutilation of their fellow comrades. However, the murder of hostages in villages by shooting and hanging was a byproduct of deliberate policy condoned by the Wehrmacht leadership and perpetrated with impunity.<sup>109</sup> While the motives of the killers varied in range from following military orders, exacting revenge, or committing racially charged murder, the soldiers of the German army accepted this kind of warfare as legitimate in modern warfare.

---

<sup>107</sup> Shephard, "The Continuum of Brutality," 52-54.

<sup>108</sup> Roth, 125.

<sup>109</sup> Alexander Hill, *The War Behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in Northwest Russia, 1941-1944*, (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 17.



#### 4.5. *The War against the Jews: Antisemitism and Mass Murder in the East*

The average German soldier on the Eastern Front was a rank-and-file conscript pressed into a situation many did not want to be in. That being said, since the Wehrmacht was indeed a far more realistic representation of Germany society in the 1930s and 1940s than the SS or Nazi Party leadership, it is fair to assume that the attitudes and actions of the army's ordinary men are more representative of true German identity of the period. This segment of the chapter will show that antisemitic sentiments were a pervasive part of Wehrmacht character during Operation Barbarossa. Furthermore, since the year 1941 was the pivotal point at which Nazi policy turned from ghettoization and Aryanization to annihilation of the Jews of Europe starting in the East, I argue that the Wehrmacht was a criminal organization which fully participated in the opening stages of the Holocaust during the first six months of the war with the Soviet Union.

The massive scale of the Nazi genocidal policy planned and implemented in 1941-1942 required the complicity of many segments of the Nazi state, including the most massive organization at its disposal, the German army. As previously stated, the distance between racial ideology and violent action on the Eastern Front was not a linear path, but over the course of the initial campaign the process of mass murder evolved. As noted by Waitman Beorn, the development of Wehrmacht complicity occurred in four stages, which he argues include "improvisation; clarification-exhortation-execution; routinization; and internalization."<sup>110</sup> The following presentation of evidence will

---

<sup>110</sup> Waitman Wade Beorn, *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6.

support Beorn's supposition regarding the initial stages of this process, revealing the extent to which ordinary soldiers were both bystanders and perpetrators in one of the most heinous crimes in human history.

One area of significance that is important when studying genocide is the motives and ideological outlook of the perpetrator group. While it is hard to make the case that racism and ideology predisposed people towards violent behavior, it may very well have allowed for a nation of bystanders and witnesses rather than one of resisters and rebels. In the writings of soldiers, one finds that there are numerous examples of antisemitic attitudes or policies by the Germans. For example, on June 23, 1941, Heinz Rahe of the 13<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division wrote a letter to his wife Ursula regarding the situation at the front. In this letter, Rahe commented about the number Jews in city, writing: "Towards the evening we passed through a city J., which was swarming with Jews who probably had left the ghetto and are now wandering about. We saw mostly all Jews, identified using a white armband on their arms."<sup>111</sup> Likewise, another anonymous Austrian soldier noted in his diary on September 23 about the presence of Jews in the area he was advancing in. The anonymous soldier wrote that: "Very many Jews are walking in front of the vehicles on the dirt road with the yellow star on their backs."<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, one of the first things Rahe thought to tell his wife on June 23 was about the presence of Jews in a city, whereas the Austrian soldier bore witness to antisemitic policies forcing Jews to wear the Star of David.

---

<sup>111</sup> "Heinz Rahe an seine Ehefrau am 23.06.1941 (3.2002.0985)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed April 18, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=974&le\\_fulltext=rahe](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=974&le_fulltext=rahe)

<sup>112</sup> Diary of Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, Acc: 2000.146, USHMM, September 23, 1941, Translated by Bernhard Sulzer, 8.

This was not an anomaly in the letters from the front, because many soldiers commented about the presence of Jews in the East. Erich Kuby in a letter to his wife on June 24 remarked about the presence of Jews in Kowno. Kuby wrote: “In the distance, a column of smoke from the capital Kowno. The houses on the banks are filthy, with a Jewish population.”<sup>113</sup> Other soldiers blamed the plight of the local population on Jews, many of whom were believed to be in leadership positions of the Communist Party. Lt. Walter Melchinger wrote on June 26 regarding the crimes of the Jews in the Ukraine that: “Whole villages were resettled, the people drained until they starved by taxation, church going banned, every man and every woman monitored by brutal Jewish commissars.”<sup>114</sup> In these two selections by Kuby and Melchinger, we find the usage of familiar antisemitic tropes, namely Jews as “filthy” and Jews as “commissars.”

As the invasion advanced further eastward we find a continued pattern of antisemitic rhetoric in the writings of soldiers. One soldier, Wilhelm Moldenhauer, wrote in his diary on July 1 about a form of Jewish “business” at a synagogue. Moldenhauer wrote: “On 1.7. we left Zolkiew. Our next destination was Busk....In the basement of a synagogue eggs were found in large quantities. The Jews had placed the eggs in a huge basin, and to be sure they made a good deal of business from it every year.”<sup>115</sup> Moldenhauer’s diary entry captures another familiar part of Nazi propaganda about Jews and money making, even using their synagogue as a place to sell eggs. In another source entry written two days later, soldier Alexander Cohrs echoed similar

---

<sup>113</sup> Kempowski, 85.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>115</sup> Moldenhauer, 124.

sentiments as those of Lt. Melchinger regarding Jewish oppression of the local population at Wysoka, Poland. Cohrs wrote on July 3:

The people have been looking forward to the German invasion, because they hoped it would end Jewish domination. In this region especially young Jews ca. 20 years old have excelled, having forced themselves into all organizations and had become dominant. Of course, all of these people have fled from the advancing German troops.<sup>116</sup>

Cohrs' main argument here is that the local inhabitants welcomed the Nazi invasion as a liberation effort to rid them of the Jewish yoke. This sentiment coincides with an earlier mentioned category regarding the war as a fight for freedom against Judeo-Bolshevik tyranny.

Since Nazi propaganda had fueled German perceptions of the Soviet Union as a Jewish dominated wasteland, soldiers must not have been shocked to enter the East and perceive that many of these Nazi tall tales were grounded in reality. Thus it is no surprise that some soldiers' antisemitic beliefs were given some faux validity by the war against the Soviet Union, allowing them to justify their invasion as a battle between Aryans and Jews. Sgt. Karl Fuchs wrote a letter to his father on August 4, 1941, in which he denounces the Jews for planning to attack Germany. Fuchs wrote:

Having encountered these Bolshevik hordes and having seen how they live has made a lasting impression on me. Everyone, even the last doubter, knows today that the battle against these subhumans, who've been whipped into a frenzy by the Jews, was not only necessary but came in the nick of time. Our Führer has saved Europe from certain chaos.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Kempowski, 199.

<sup>117</sup> Fuchs, 124.

As an ardent supporter of Nazism and Adolf Hitler, it is not surprising that Fuchs readily believed that the Jews controlled Communism and the Soviet Union and were the main antagonists in the struggle against Germany.

Not only were some members of the German army antisemitic, but they also participated in atrocities against the Jews as well. Following Waitman Beorn's proposed model for the Wehrmacht and genocide, many of the initial killings appear indeed to be improvised. For example, Corporal Hans Roth described a combat situation in one of his journal entries from June 26. Roth noted that surviving members of the Red Army and "Jews" were taken from their "hiding places" for execution. Roth described the killings as a "solo gun performance" which "echoed across the square" of the town they were in.<sup>118</sup> Another soldier Heinz Rahe described in a letter to his wife on June 26 a situation involving the interrogation of a Jew in a town square. Rahe described the situation as follows: "At a small square there were many soldiers, talking to a Jew who did not know what to do and was in fear for his life. Pleading he was lying on the ground. He is said to have been complicit in the mutilation of two German airmen who had to make an emergency landing. Shortly after, I heard some gun shots."<sup>119</sup> In both of these two cases involving Roth and Rahe, it appears that these improvised killings were committed by members of the army.

However, a more systematic policy of murder seems have begun as early as July 1941, though the motive for these killings ranges from reprisals to organized slaughter.

---

<sup>118</sup> Roth, 31.

<sup>119</sup> "Heinz Rahe an seine Ehefrau am 26.06.1941 (3.2002.0985)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed 7 April 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=975&le\\_fulltext=rahe](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=975&le_fulltext=rahe).

The diary of one Private Werner Bergholz mentions on July 2 that after two German sentries were found dead at an unknown location, “A hundred men were put up against the wall for this. It must have been Jews.”<sup>120</sup> The diary of Wilhelm Moldenhauer also describes retaliatory killings of Jews by the SS in the city of Tarnopol, Ukraine. Moldenhauer described in an entry dated July 2-3 how “strong retaliations for the murders of Ukrainians” were carried out. The Germans utilized “the help of Ukrainian civilians” to identify elements “mainly Jews” as being “responsible for the killings.” What happened then is described by Moldenhauer as follows: “The SS then retaliated in an appropriate manner to these people (Jewish people). Some ordered the men into a basement room and had them lay there. In other cases, the men first had to dig their graves and then were shot.”<sup>121</sup> In these two examples, Bergholz and Moldenhauer appear to justify the killing of many Jews as a direct response to alleged Jewish atrocities.

Wehrmacht evidence of a direct policy of murdering large groups of Jews can be found in the diary of Pfc. Richard Heidenreich of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. Heidenreich describes the murder of Jews in the city of Minsk in an entry from July 7, 1941.<sup>122</sup> Heidenreich wrote: “After a few days’ travel we arrived in Minsk. Our battalion was assigned the mission of guarding 6,000 prisoners and shooting all the Jews in the city. Many of the prisoners ran away at night and we had to resort to our weapons. We

---

<sup>120</sup> *True to Type*, 22.

<sup>121</sup> Moldenhauer, 124-25.

<sup>122</sup> While the Minsk ghetto was not established until after the alleged killings by Heidenreich, US military tribunal records suggest that *Einsatzgruppe* B began murders as early as July 1941. For more information, see, *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals Under Control Council Law No. 10, Oct. 1946-April 1949, Volume IV*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949-1953), 15-21.

finished off 500 Jews alone.”<sup>123</sup> Heidenreich’s entry suggests that the members of his battalion were tasked with killing the Jews of Minsk in a premeditated fashion, perhaps in direct coordination with *Einsatzgruppe* B which was organizing and carrying out executions in the area.<sup>124</sup>

The journals of Corporal Hans Roth are an extremely valuable source regarding soldiers’ perceptions of genocide committed in the Ukraine in 1941. After the fighting for Kiev was complete, Roth bore witness to the initial searches for partisans and Jews in the city. Roth described on September 23 how “two full divisions” were ordered to form “special command units” tasked with searching the city for “dangerous elements and terror groups.” Roth describes how the SS in particular was busy in its activities in Kiev, as he watched the “round-ups of the Jews” starting to occur.<sup>125</sup> Subsequently, Roth wrote about on September 25 how militant forces left behind after the occupation of Kiev had sabotaged and burned parts of the city. Roth blames the actions not on local Ukrainians but rather on “the sons of Judah,” reinforcing the oft adopted linkage between Jews and terrorist activities.<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting and disturbing part of Roth’s journals are his descriptions of executions in Kiev, the story of a nineteen year old SS trooper regarding

---

<sup>123</sup> *True to Type*, 29.

<sup>124</sup> According to Waitman Beorn’s research, soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division to which Heidenreich belonged took part in the guarding of POW’s at Minsk in July 1941. Beorn finds that members of the *Einsatzgruppen* and soldiers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion took part in the massacre of Jews in the camp, thus corroborating Heidenreich’s diary account. For more information see Waitman Wade Beorn’s *Marching into Darkness*, 68-69.

<sup>125</sup> Roth, 107.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

a massacre at Zhitomir, and also witnessing a mass shooting. Roth wrote a lengthy entry on September 26, 1941 regarding the horrors he witnessed:

The SS special command is extremely busy. Interrogations and executions non-stop. Somewhat suspicious individuals are simply shot in the street and their bodies remain right there where they fell down....The *Einsatzkommandos* of the *Waffen* SS are very busy as well. All Jews without exception have until noon of the 25<sup>th</sup> to report. Sure, only half of them show up, but nobody will evade us, for a tight belt of outposts surrounds the city. That very day the revenge for our comrades who lost their lives in the mine attacks is beginning. Now, 24 hours later, already 2000 Hebrews have been sent to Jehovah! I have a long conversation with a young SS soldier of this "kill commando." They "freed" all the larger cities which were touched by our advance of the Jewish population. They understand their butcher job well; these boys are experienced killers, I am astonished....He tells me about the holocaust of Zhitomir. "At that time we were bloody beginners," says the 19-year-old. "For two days they had to dig 50-meter-long trenches;, each trench was calculated for 250 Jews. We killed a total of 1800 Jews in Zhitomir, 5000 somehow died before. Then on the third day the trenches are ready, everybody, from baby to oldest senior had to strip naked. The first 250 have to step to the edge of the ditch, the throaty barking of 2 machine guns, the next ones are herded forward, they have to climb into the ditch and position the dead bodies nicely next to each other, no room must be wasted, the larger spaces are nicely fitted with the dead children, forward, forward, more than 1500 must fit! Then the machine guns rip the air again, here and there somebody moans, a short re-shooting of the machine guns: next! And this continues through the evening. We have so little time, too many Jews inhabit this country!' First I cannot speak at all. This young man talks about it as if he was on a casual pheasant hunt. I cannot believe all this and tell him so. He laughs and says I should have a look. We are riding our bikes to the outskirts of the city, to a steep gorge. I will cut this short; the food in my stomach is curiously loose. What I see there is terrible, this horrible picture I will never forget in my entire life. At the edge of the gorge there are Jews standing, the machine guns are whipping into them, they fall over the edge, 50 meters. Whatever stays at the edge is "swept" down. When the one thousand quota is filled, the heap of dead bodies is detonated and closed up. "Well, isn't that a great idea, the detonation?" asks the blond with the smiling boy-face. My God, my God. Without a word I turn and run more than walk back to the city.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Roth, 111-112.



Hans Roth's detailed narrative of events in September 1941 suggests it had a major impact upon him. While in his previous journal entries he discussed the horrors of combat and killing of prisoners of war, the kind of war being waged against the Jews was far more methodical and ruthless. It is hard to understand what Roth's personal feelings are about the Jews, since there is every indication from his journal that he was a racist and antisemite. However, in this instance of genocide, he seemed shocked by the brutality of the SS, though it is important to note he voiced no major displeasure and did absolutely nothing to stop the killing. Therefore, it is safe to assume that while he may have found the methods of the murderers shocking, he likely did not disapprove of their ultimate goals.

Evidence of the Holocaust can be found throughout writings of soldiers for the rest of the year 1941 as well. As the killings became more accepted and widespread, the more some troops decided to take note of the events which they witnessed. One Austrian soldier when traveling near Roslavl, Russia noted in his diary how Jews had been killed in nearby villages. The soldier wrote on September 28: "In the next villages, 10 Jews and forest bandits were hanged. What happened was that a bridge had been set on fire and, another time, the farmers were kept from their work by the bandits."<sup>128</sup> While evidence of atrocities against the Jews is usually presented in the form of death and destruction, in other instances it is important to note what the victims left behind. For example, in a letter home to his wife from September 30, Konrad Jarausch presents a scene of a town somewhere between Gomel and Smolensk which had been cleared of

---

<sup>128</sup> Diary of Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, Acc: 2000.146, USHMM, 28 Sept 1941, Translated by Bernhard Sulzer, 13.

Jews. Jarausch wrote: “On the way (to town) there’s a small, clean building and above the door there is a sign (indicating the Orthodox faith). It’s a provisional meetinghouse of the Orthodox Church. I’d like to look around here. A rabbi must have lived across the street. Among the ruins there were printed and handwritten books in Hebrew.”<sup>129</sup> Both the Austrian soldiers’ account and Jarausch’s letter present different images of genocide, the physical destruction of the human body and the erasure of entire communities from the geography of towns, villages, and cities across Europe.

The genocide against the Jews took its most fateful turn beginning in the autumn 1941. Hitler and the Nazi leadership developed a vision of the Final Solution in September-October, and it was being turned into reality through mass shootings and later through the death camp system. By October, deportations throughout the Reich began to send Jews to the East, suggesting that plans for the destruction of the European Jews were already underway even before Wannsee.<sup>130</sup> While the Nazi leadership continued to plan a more efficient genocide, the “Holocaust by bullets” continued behind the front.<sup>131</sup>

The diary of Richard Heidenreich is a source of particular significance in tracing the participation of Wehrmacht soldiers in the mass shootings of 1941. On September 18, 1941, elements of the 354<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (of the 213<sup>th</sup> Division) were tasked with rounding up the Jews of the town of Krupki, Belorussia for “resettlement.” The

---

<sup>129</sup> Jarausch, 298.

<sup>130</sup> Christopher Browning, Jürgen Matthäus, *Origins of the Final Solution*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 424-427.

<sup>131</sup> For more information, see Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Jews of Krupki were assembled, marched outside of town to a field near a swampy area and a forest, where they were to be executed. While the SS and Belorussian collaborators were tasked with the murders, Wehrmacht participation in the event was only supposed to include guarding the Jews and the area around the killing site.<sup>132</sup> However, the diary of Private Heidenreich helps shed light onto the levels of actual partaking in the execution of Jewish men, women, and children. The following is a diary entry dated October 5, 1941, several weeks after the incident:

In the evening our lieutenant was looking for 15 men with strong nerves. I of course volunteered. We did not know what it was all about. Next morning at five we were to line up in front of the Company office, helmets on, and receive 300 cartridges a man. We waited for morning in tense expectation. At exactly 5 a.m. we were ready and the First Lieutenant explained our task to us. There were about a thousand Jews in the village of Krupki and all these had to be shot today....One platoon was assigned to us as a guard. Its function was to see that nobody escaped. At precisely seven all Jews, men, women, and children, had to report at Inspection Square. After reading off the list the whole column moved to the nearest bog. The execution squad, to which I belonged, led the way and an escort marched on either side....The Jews had been told that they were all being deported to Germany to work there. But many guessed what was in store for them, especially when we crossed the narrow gauge line and proceeded to the bog. A panic arose and the guard had a hard job keeping the lot of them together. When we arrived at the bog all were told to sit down, facing in the direction from which they had come. Fifty yards away there was a deep ditch full of water. The first ten were made to stand by that ditch and to strip, down to the waist. Then they had to get into the ditch and we who were to shoot them stood above them on the edge. A lieutenant and sergeant were with us. Ten shots rang out, then Jews popped off. This continued until all were dispatched. Only a few of them kept their countenances. The children clung to their mothers, wives to their husbands. I won't forget this spectacle in a hurry.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Beorn, 73-76.

<sup>133</sup> *True to Type*, 31.

Richard Heidenreich's diary provides crucial evidence to the fact that at least in some instances, members of the Wehrmacht actively participated in the genocide against the Jews.<sup>134</sup> While such direct involvement in killings may have been on a limited or improvisational basis, it is clear that regular soldiers of the German Army were at least both witnesses and bystanders to the crimes committed in the East. Konrad Jarausch, a low level Wehrmacht officer at a Soviet prisoner of war camp, was well aware of the terrible atrocities being committed against the Jews. On October 12, 1941, Jarausch noted in a letter home to his wife that "The SS are cleaning out the area in terrible fashion."<sup>135</sup> In another letter dated November 14 to his wife, he described the terrible suffering amongst the POWs in the terrible winter cold. Jarausch described his attitude towards the conditions for some Jewish civilian prisoners: "There are civilians among the prisoners, many who are just in shirtsleeves, especially the Jews. It would be the most merciful thing if they would be taken out into the forest and bumped off, as the experts put it. But the whole thing is already more murder than war."<sup>136</sup> While Jarausch appears as an apathetic and passive observer in these two letter excerpts, his knowledge of the SS crimes and direct involvement in the suffering and deaths of countless prisoners implicates him in malicious activity and murder.

By the end of 1941, the Soviets mounted a massive counteroffensive pushing back the German Army, ending the Barbarossa campaign. While the war against the

---

<sup>134</sup> While Beorn admits that Heidenreich's "diary" or testimony may actually have been written while in Soviet custody, the events accounted are verifiable by cross checking the information with other sources. For more information, see Waitman Beorn, *Marching into Darkness*, 263.

<sup>135</sup> Jarausch, 306.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 324-5.

Soviet Union was failing, the Nazis stepped up the war against the Jews by shifting towards a more comprehensive European wide extermination program with the construction of death camps.<sup>137</sup> A sergeant major on the Eastern Front with the 294<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Army Group south, stationed in the vicinity of the Donetsk Basin, described the process the deportation of Jews in December 1941.<sup>138</sup> Anton Böhler's letter to his sister on December 21, 1941 stated that the Jews of the unknown city he was stationed in had until December 19 to "leave the city for specially assigned industrial sites" outside the city. Böhler stated that "24,000 pieces" was "a nice number," and described how the Jews were "A miserable lousy filthy rabble" who "went on the march to a new home." Böhler justified the mistreatment and ghettoization of the Jews in the letter, because "...these pigs are to blame for much calamity after the occupation."<sup>139</sup>

#### 4.6. Conclusions

The thematic categories analyzed in this chapter represent an attempt at recreating the worldview of German soldiers on the Eastern Front by focusing on their individual and collective frames of reference. A number of conclusions can be drawn after examining these categories of perception and carefully reconstructing their

---

<sup>137</sup> The extermination camp at Belzec was constructed as early as November 1941, and was designed to experiment with methods of mass extermination by poison gas. For more information, see Omer Bartov, ed. *Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 134.

<sup>138</sup> It is possible that Sgt. Major Anton Böhler's account concerns Kharkov, as the dates for the establishment of the ghetto are fairly consistent with Böhler's letter. For more information, see Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 191-192; For more information on the service history of the 294<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, see Samuel W. Mitcham, *German Order of Battle: 291<sup>st</sup>-999<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007).

<sup>139</sup> "Anton Böhler an seine Schwester am 21.12.1941 (3.2002.0889)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed April 19, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=843&le\\_fulltext=anton](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=843&le_fulltext=anton)

experiences. One of the most important lessons to be learned from the Barbarossa period is that the soldiers on the Eastern Front were not all hardcore Nazis or antisemites, contrary to some popular beliefs about the average German soldier. On the contrary, the plethora of hopes and dreams, identities and viewpoints, loves and hates, all add to the complexity to transforming the view of a Hitlerite army or a Nazi army to a far more grey area of understanding.

One area that needs to be emphasized in the historiography today is the fact that ordinary soldiers' perceptions do indeed matter, and the writings of soldiers in wartime can constitute a legitimate source for research by evaluating their credibility through comparison with numerous other materials. Through a careful study of these types of sources, both patterns of behavior and outlook as well as discrepancies and abnormalities become apparent. This broadens the perspective on military studies, and challenges historians to view soldiers' experiences through their eyes rather than through operational or grand scheme narratives.

More specifically, the themes evaluated in this chapter tell us much about the Germans who entered the Soviet Union in 1941. The troops in the East had much to say about the peoples they "liberated," the lands they conquered, the enemy combatants they fought, the conditions they endured, and the reasons they were fighting. While for some Wehrmacht soldiers, their ideas lined up neatly with the tenants of National Socialism, others tended to fall into more of a middle ground between right and wrong. Soldiers such as Konrad Jarausch were hardly Nazis, yet Jarausch like many of his compatriots had his own prejudicial views about Eastern Europe and shared them in his letters.

Jarausch was also capable of complicity in the deaths of untold numbers of Soviet prisoners of war, though he likened it to problems that were outside of his control.

Many German soldiers' writings reveal a combined sense of morality and immorality. While an ardent Nazi like Karl Fuchs viciously attacked Jews and Communists in his letters, he also described his ardent love for his wife and newborn child. Others such as Wilhelm Moldenhauer and Hans Roth also displayed racist views and sympathies towards Nazism, yet could also display a sense of humanity rarely seen in letters and diaries of any conflict. All of this evidence helps to create a new image of the Nazis' Soviet enemy through the eyes of the men who were charged with destroying that foe. Certainly their views were formulated and altered by events throughout the war period, but it must also be noted that many came to the East with preconceived biases and beliefs already firmly established, ready to be tested.

What is equally valuable about soldiers' writings is the incredible amount of evidence they provide regarding racial antisemitism, war crimes, and the Holocaust. German troops were byproducts of Hitler's Third Reich, indoctrinated as youths in the 1930s and as young soldiers in the *Wehrmacht*. After reading thousands of letters and diary entries, it becomes painstakingly clear that at least a portion of the German military's personnel were sympathetic to Nazi ideology and held highly racially charged views of the world. In addition to evidence of racism and antisemitism, some soldiers were willing to either write letters or diary entries about war crimes and genocide on the Eastern Front. While the amount of material is limited due to military and government censorship as well as individual fears of punishment in the postwar period, the sources that are available suggest that the *Wehrmacht* was complicit with Nazi war crimes.

German soldiers' views were tested in the trenches, the killing fields of genocide, the villages and towns of the vanquished, and on the road to victory and defeat against the Red Army. Perception and reality become blurred in times of war, as in times of peace, and in the most deadly conflict of mankind's history the importance of information about one's enemy is always important for determining strategy and decisive outcomes. Thus, in this chapter it has been argued that letters and diaries revealed aspects of the war not normally subjected to detailed scrutiny, including soldiers' views on the Soviet people, Communism, and the Red Army. The image of the enemy is not singular but multi-faceted, showing us that the worldview of individual combat men vary, no matter what system they live under or the amounts of indoctrination they endure. Propaganda had a huge effect on German soldiers to be sure, but the durability of half-truths was only viable if the regime could reasonably argue that the war could be won. After 1942, much of the overconfidence in victory and faith in the regime would diminish, and be replaced by fears of Soviet retribution, mistrust of their leadership, and longing for the end of the war.



## Chapter Five

### **“We are all slowly facing the end:” Triumph and Setback on the Eastern Front, June 22, 1941-June 28, 1942**

Due to my frozen toes, the doctor declared me unfit for duty and I can at least stay in a warm room and write. This dog's life is almost no longer bearable. I sometimes wonder how I have not yet mentally and physically collapsed. But it will all have an impact, all the hardships and privations, because one is not made of iron. I do not want to give up hope that everything will still turn for the better.<sup>1</sup>

-Lance-Corporal Alois Scheuer to his wife, January 31, 1942

We surely know, that all Germans, that the entire German people can look proudly on its heroes at the front. Again and again this gives us the strength that we need in the fight against Bolshevism. Thus we want to finish this year what we started last year. With agony we wait for the day when our dear Führer gives us the command to advance. Then the time will not be far off when the Russian army is completely destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

-Unknown German soldier to the Mayor of Bietigheim, May 9, 1942

The period of June 1941-June 1942 was a year of varying contrasts in political and military history. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union went to war in 1941,

---

<sup>1</sup> Alois Scheuer & Günter Scheuer, *Briefe aus Russland: Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Alois Scheuer, 1941-1942*, (St. Ingbert: Wassermann Verlag, 2001), 59; Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are by Justin Pfeifer.

<sup>2</sup> Christa Lieb, *Feldpost: Briefe zwischen Heimat und Front, 1939-1945: Eine Collage*, (Bietigheim-Bissingen: Stadt Bietigheim-Bissingen Stadtarchiv, 2007), 213.

beginning one of the deadliest conflicts ever to occur throughout the world. The German Army scored numerous victories over the Red Army, leading many Germans as well as foreign observers to believe that the Nazis would win the war by year's end. However, victory soon transformed into reversal and deadly attrition on the Eastern Front when the Wehrmacht failed to capture Moscow and the Soviets led ferocious counterattacks in the winter of 1941-1942. This chapter examines three key aspects of German soldiers' mentality from 1941-1942: first, the effects of propaganda upon the troops at the front; second, the belief of many German soldiers in a quick final victory; and third, the impact of barbarous warfare, tactical defeats, and conditions in the East had upon the ordinary men of the Wehrmacht. Such major changes in the fortunes of war over the span of a year affected the minds of the soldiers in varying ways, ranging from the confident belief in victory against the Soviet Union to the forlorn hopes for many to simply get the opportunity to return home to their loved ones. By June 1942 the Germans would be preparing yet another massive offensive, and, much as with Barbarossa, the battle of Stalingrad would end in bitter defeat.

This chapter seeks to gain a better understanding of the significant disparity in the attitudes of the Wehrmacht soldiers fighting in the East from June 1941 to June 1942. To do this, it is important to put into proper context the dual effects of Nazi propaganda and military achievement on the soldiers, as well as the increasingly melancholic morale as a result of intense fighting, climactic conditions, and military setbacks. In regards to propaganda, it is my contention that the average German soldier had access to a significant amount of domestic and military materials, including radio programs, newspapers, and film. These materials may have had a considerable impact on

the morale of the troops, particularly in the stages of the war when the Wehrmacht was victorious, thus reaffirming their belief in success. Soldiers' attitudes tended to be confident and zealous during much of the Operation Barbarossa. However, once the Russian winter combined with Soviet counterattacks began in November 1941, a considerable shift in mood and perceptions of the situation occurred. This transformation of worldview continued into 1942, with a combination of confidence and caution during the year often defined as the turning point of the Second World War.

### *5.1. Frontline Indoctrination: The Impact of Propaganda on the Troops*

The distribution of propaganda and media materials to the soldiers of the German Army on the Eastern Front primarily occurred in two different forms: through official and unofficial channels. Officially, propaganda was disseminated by the military directly to the troops, as noted in chapter three, using special P.K. units, army newspapers and periodicals, films at theaters and transportable army vehicles, and movable radios. Unofficially, propaganda and other media sources made its way to the troops in the East as care-packages from family and friends through the Wehrmacht mail service (*Feldpost*). While it is often assumed that soldiers at the front only had regular access to military propaganda sources, the research conducted for this project suggests that troops had access to domestic propaganda materials such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* and *Illustrierter Beobachter*. Since soldiers seem to have actually requested many of these items from home, it appears that at least some at the front found such sources appealing, suggesting that Nazi propaganda had a certain level of appeal and therefore influenced soldiers during the war.

In their letters and diaries in 1941-1942, German soldiers frequently discussed the types of media available to them on the Eastern Front. The impact of propaganda sources can be traced chronologically from the start of Operation Barbarossa, in which soldiers noted the prevalence of media materials available to them. Soldier Wilhelm Moldenhauer illustrates in two separate diary entries from June 1941 the importance of the *Wehrmachtbericht* as a source of information at the front. Moldenhauer summarized a report of the WB on June 23, 1941, noting that the radio broadcast exclaimed how “numerous enemy aircraft” had been destroyed. This information gave Moldenhauer the impression that “the enemy was surprised” by the German invasion, allowing “great success for our Wehrmacht.”<sup>3</sup> On the subsequent day, June 24, Moldenhauer noted that “news and *Wehrmachtbericht* are eagerly followed” by the troops, suggesting that the radio provided crucial information in the initial days of the campaign.<sup>4</sup>

Soldiers found that many of the stereotypes perpetuated by Nazi propaganda about Communism and conditions in the East were confirmed by their experiences in the Soviet Union. In a letter on July 10, an unknown *Unteroffizier* described the Soviets in highly discriminatory terms and referenced a popular Nazi newspaper, drawing connections between his beliefs and propaganda sources. The *Unteroffizier* wrote:

What we have seen cannot be described in a newspaper. It borders on the unbelievable, even the Middle Ages do not come close to what happened here. And when someone in Germany reads and sees the pictures in the *Stürmer*, this is only a very small part of what we see here and what crime are committed here by the Jews. Believe me, even the

---

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Moldenhauer; Jens Ebert, *Im Funkwagen der Wehrmacht durch Europa: Balkan, Ukraine, Stalingrad ; Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Wilhelm Moldenhauer 1940-1943*, (Berlin: Trafo, 2008), 122.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

most sensational newspaper reports are only part of what is happening here...<sup>5</sup>

The *Unteroffizier*'s opinions about the Soviets stemmed from his witnessing the bodies of unarmed civilians murdered by the GPU, which in his mind was an organization consisting of of Judeo-Bolshevik criminals. For the *Unteroffizier*, everything that the Nazis wrote about the horrors of Communism was confirmed by his own eyewitness testimony, which was even worse than what the propaganda papers were reporting. Similarly, Wilhelm Moldenhauer noted how the living conditions in the East were just as Nazi propaganda had depicted them. Moldenhauer wrote on September 19, 1941: "The people live primitively. It is small and dirty. Then they have several children. For the first time I saw a child in a bed, it was probably about three years old, which looked exactly as in our propaganda posters about the conditions in the Soviet Union."<sup>6</sup> Once again a soldier found the Nazi media to be telling the "truth" about the horrors of Communism.

Soldiers relied upon official sources of news for their daily information, if for no other reason than that was all which was available to them. For example, on July 12, 1941, Wilhelm Moldenhauer wrote about the influence of the *Wehrmachtbericht* on his opinion of the war. Moldenhauer noted:

I have just heard the *Wehrmachtbericht*. 'The fighting in the east in proceeding on schedule.' When that is said, something is again in the making. One would assume that the Russians will soon have no more tanks. Then it will become more difficult for the enemy every day. And let us hope, that the victory is soon won here.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, Reinhold Sterz, *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939-1945*, (München: Beck, 1982), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Moldenhauer, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 134.

The importance of radio programming such as the WB cannot be underestimated, as it provided what appeared on the surface to be raw data gathered by military experts and made available to the troops and German public. Moldenhauer seems to suggest that the WB messages contained hidden meanings, such as when he noted that “When that is said, something is again in the making.” By this he seems to imply that further German attacks would soon be underway, and links the idea of the war “proceeding on schedule” to his hope that the Russians would run out of tanks, leading to final victory.<sup>8</sup>

In a situation involving the spoken word as a form of propaganda, Corporal Hans Roth recounted in his diary how military commanders gave laudatory speeches to the troops after destroying the Stalin Line on July 25, 1941. Roth wrote:

One could wallow in self-glorification after all the laudatory speeches we’ve heard: ‘Your admirable accomplishments will find their place in history. Your bravery is unprecedented!’ and so on....It goes like this the entire day. The commander of the division, the commander of the corps, and Field Marshal Reichenau, all of them have suddenly taken us into their hearts.<sup>9</sup>

While this excerpt is rather unextraordinary on the surface, it is important to note that the spoken word was an important part of Nazi ideological indoctrination. Speeches, whether delivered by Hitler at the Nuremberg Rallies or by a military officer at the front, were perhaps among the more effective means of inspiring and mobilizing opinion in support of the regime and its military apparatus. Furthermore, Roth makes sure to note that the Field Marshal Reichenau had made a speech to the men, and it is well known

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Roth and Christine Alexander, *Eastern Inferno: The Journals of a German Panzerjäger on the Eastern Front, 1941-1943*, (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2010), 64.

that Reichenau was an ardent Nazi and antisemite responsible for issuing orders justifying the murder of civilians.<sup>10</sup> Whether directly or indirectly, Roth was exposed to Nazi ideology and propaganda through the spoken word, as others experienced it through various forms of media sources.

Soldiers deployed in the East not only had access to printed media sources but also film. One can find numerous examples of soldiers discussing films they had seen during their time in the military, or conversely the production of such films by P.K. units. For example, Wilhelm Moldenhauer noted on September 1, 1941 that while stationed at a market near Tomakowka, Ukraine, that a “P.K. film man” was filming scenes taking place at the market.<sup>11</sup> Nine days later on September 10, Moldenhauer described once again how at a marketplace in an unknown city, he and some of his comrades witnessed P.K. units filming activities and locales there. Moldenhauer happily noted to his wife that “So it could be that you or your friends recognize me in the newsreel.”<sup>12</sup> This exposure to propaganda, either directly or indirectly, allowed soldiers to participate in the process of film making while doing their duties at the front.

One also finds examples of films that soldiers had viewed, sometimes with titles mentioned or simply vague references to what they had seen. Sergeant Helmuth H., a soldier in the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, described visiting a “nice Russian theater” in a letter to his parents on September 2, 1941. While at the theater, Helmuth H. watched “the very latest *Wochenschau* and *Männerwirtschaft (Bachelor Life)*,” the latter of which

---

<sup>10</sup> Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 256.

<sup>11</sup> Moldenhauer, 128.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

was a 1941 comedy by Johannes Meyer laced with Nazi ideology.<sup>13</sup> Another soldier Heinz Rahe of the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division described his opinions on a film he had seen in a letter on September 28, 1941. Rahe noted that while the two *Wochenschauen* he watched were “very interesting,” the hyped movie which followed the *Wochenschauen* titled *Hochzeitsnacht* (Wedding Night) he was less than impressed with.<sup>14</sup>

There are numerous other examples of soldiers referencing propaganda or feature films they viewed while in the East. For example, in an unknown soldier’s letter to his family on November 20, 1941, he described watching a 1939 movie by Joseph Stöckel titled *Der arme Millionär*.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Wilhelm Moldenhauer asked his wife in an 8 December letter if she had seen a film about “the murdered Ukrainians,” perhaps in the hopes of generating some discussion about events he had witnessed in the Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> One of the more interesting references to films comes from Sergeant Anton Böhler of the 294<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. In a December 2, 1941 letter to his family, Böhler describes viewing a *Wochenschau* about “a tank deployment in Mariupol.” Böhler argues that the

---

<sup>13</sup> “Hellmuth H. an seine Familie am 02.09.1941 (3.2002.7139),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1145&le\\_fulltext=wochenschau](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1145&le_fulltext=wochenschau); For more information on *Männerwirtschaft*, see Hilmar Hoffmann, *The Triumph of Film Propaganda*, 59.

<sup>14</sup> “Heinz Rahe an seine Ehefrau am 28.09.1941 (3.2002.0985),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=985&le\\_fulltext=wochenschau](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=985&le_fulltext=wochenschau); *Wedding Night* was a 1941 comedy film directed by Carl Boese. For more information see Klaus Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany’s Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945*, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996), 313.

<sup>15</sup> Lieb, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Moldenhauer, 179.



film was “far from the reality” of the situation because when “you are fighting it is much different.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to films, the soldiers had access to a variety of written materials, including books, newspapers, and magazines. The availability of this propaganda and the frequency with which soldiers talked about it in their writings suggests it played a significant role in their lives on the Eastern Front. For example, in a letter to his wife on September 2, 1941, Sergeant Karl Fuchs described the importance of having a “small library” available for him and his comrades. For Fuchs, a former teacher, having access to the library was “stimulating,” and allowed him to utilize the materials in order to “instruct my comrades in history and geography.”<sup>18</sup> Fuchs also wrote on September 10, 1941 about two specific books he had had finished reading. One of the works, titled *Walter von Plettenberg*, is described by Fuchs as a book about “the struggles and battles of the German knights against the frightful destruction of Russia under Ivan the Terrible, the bloody Czar.”<sup>19</sup> The other book Fuchs mentions is titled *Hermann Göring, the Man and his Work*, which he describes as: “a novel that depicted this man and fighter as he was, the story of a real national socialist.”<sup>20</sup> While one might assume that these books

---

<sup>17</sup> “Anton Böhler an seine Schwester am 02.12.1941 (3.2002.0889),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=842&le\\_fulltext=wochenschau](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=842&le_fulltext=wochenschau).

<sup>18</sup> Horst Fuchs Richardson, *Sieg Heil!: War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-1941*, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1987), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 135; The full title of the book, *Wolter von Plettenberg, Deutschordensmeister in Livland*, was written by Hans Friedrich Blunck and first published in 1938. Blunck was the President of the Reich Chamber of Literature from 1933-1935, and a member of the Reich Culture Senate and Senate of the Academy of Literature. For more information on Blunck, see Karl-Heinz Schoep, *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*, 296.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; The book about Hermann Göring is originally titled *Hermann Göring, Werk und Mensch*, written by Erich Gritzbach in 1938. The book was the authorized biography of Göring, and the author

had little impact on Fuchs, he actually writes in his letter home that the work *Walter von Plettenberg* was “indeed a powerful novel,” suggesting that Fuchs found the arguments of that work interesting and worthwhile.

The reading material, whether newspapers, magazines, or books, served dual purposes for the German soldiers. While they could provide important information about the war situation, they also served as tools to educate the troops as well as simply a form of entertainment. Many soldiers yearned for information of any kind, including Wilhelm Moldenhauer, who had items frequently sent to him from home. In a letter from September 17, 1941, Moldenhauer thanked his family for sending him a copy of the *Illustrierte Beobachter*.<sup>21</sup> Such sources were officially sanctioned by the NSDAP and could influence the minds of men like Moldenhauer on a daily basis. There are numerous other examples of this type of media’s impact at the front as well. For example, Konrad Jarausch wrote to his wife on October 28, 1941, thanking her for sending him “Reklam books” about Russia, which “complement so well the impressions I’m gaining here.”<sup>22</sup>

The presence of official Nazi propaganda at the front beyond mere military sources is important for understanding how pervasive the regime’s ideology and misinformation extended. Soldiers were exposed to the tools of indoctrination at a

---

Gritzbach served as head of Göring’s military household. He was the Chief Liaison Officer for the Hermann Göring Works and helped play a major role in Göring’s stolen art collection. For more information on Gritzbach, see Kenneth D. Alford, *Hermann Goring and the Nazi Art Collection: The Looting of Europe's Art Treasures and their Dispersal after World War II*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 22-25.

<sup>21</sup> Moldenhauer, 162.

<sup>22</sup> Konrad Jarausch, *Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 313.

constant rate, suggesting that the potential influence of such materials could have been alarmingly high. Even those soldiers who appear less ideologically motivated in their writings could not help but be exposed to Nazi totalitarian efforts. On Christmas day 1941, Konrad Jarausch wrote to his wife about the presence of “K.d.F. troops” at his location, who provided forms of entertainment for the troops.<sup>23</sup> Other forms of official propaganda dissemination appeared in the East as well, such as a reference made by Wehrmacht soldier Gerhard Udke regarding a Josef Goebbels magazine. Udke wrote to his wife on January 5, 1942, thanking his family for sending him the periodical *Dr.-Goebbels-Spende für die deutsche Wehrmacht*, which was published throughout much of the Nazi period.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of propaganda at the front increased in significance with the failure of Operation Barbarossa in the winter of 1941-1942. Due to this military disaster, ideology had to fill part of the void where logistics and tactics were failing, which is suggested by the continued use of propaganda in the East despite the loss of territory and life. Soldiers regularly received the media materials, and the effects on them varied from person to person. For some such as Konrad Jarausch, the highly official sources left something to be desired, so on January 4, 1942 he requested from his family “more sophisticated journals” rather than the “newspapers and magazines” which arrived

---

<sup>23</sup> Jarausch, 348; KdF, or *Kraft durch Freude*, was a state controlled leisure organization that had an agreement with the Wehrmacht to provide low cost entertainment to the soldiers. This included theater performances, concerts, variety, puppet, and marionette shows, lectures, and craft lessons for enlisted men. For more information, see Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 203-204.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Udke & Gerwin Udke, *Schreib so oft du kannst: Feldpostbriefe des Lehrers Gerhard Udke, 1940 bis 1944*, (Berlin: JKL Publikationen, 2002), 46.

“months late.”<sup>25</sup> Klaus Becker, a soldier with the 74<sup>th</sup> and 126<sup>th</sup> Flak-Scheinwerfer-Regiment, wrote a letter to his wife on February 17, 1942 regarding his negative view of propaganda. Becker noted:

Newsreels and reports from the front that are shown to you at home, give you a completely false picture. There are always reports of individual events that are over generalized. Therefore there is...a general denial by the soldiers. Phrases such as “from the newsreels and reports from the front we saw” are thus not very popular. Anyone who has seen the newsreels and heard reports from the front, may know something about the course of combat operations and decisions, but knows nothing about the lives of the soldiers in Russia.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the misgivings by some of the soldiers about the factuality of propaganda, many continued to rely on these same official sources for information. For example, a letter by an anonymous soldier in Russia written on February 2, 1942 described the *Wehrmachtberichte* as “moderate” and “unembellished.”<sup>27</sup> Another 33 year old *Landser*, field post number 22070B, proudly wrote a letter to his wife about how his division was “mentioned by name in the *Wehrmachtbericht*.”<sup>28</sup> The importance for soldiers to get any sort of news about the overall war situation is apparent in their writings and helps to explain their willingness to rely on Nazi materials. Gerhard Udke wrote in a letter to his wife on February 21, 1942 regarding news about the fall of Singapore and hopes for an end to the war. Udke maintained to his wife that: “If we did not have the *Wehrmacht’s* news in brief, we would not know anything about world

---

<sup>25</sup> Jaraus, 356.

<sup>26</sup> “Klaus Becker an seine Ehefrau am 17.2.1942 (3.2002.0224),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed on June 16, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=778&le\\_fulltext=klaus%20becker](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=778&le_fulltext=klaus%20becker).

<sup>27</sup> Lieb, 186; Records indicate that the soldier died in Russia in 1942.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 189; Soldat 22070B was 33 years old when he died in 1943.

events.”<sup>29</sup> Udke’s statement is striking because it provides us with a better understanding of how isolated and unaware German soldiers were without the support of their command structure and official communication systems.

As winter slowly turned to spring in 1942, the German army began to prepare for new offensive operations. Evidence suggests that soldiers continued to get access to propaganda materials throughout the year, as noted in a letter from Gerhard Udke to his wife on March 3, 1942. Udke requested that his wife send him newspapers from home; he preferred to receive the “DAZ” (*Deutscher Allgemeiner Zeitung*).<sup>30</sup> In a similar request, soldier Heinz Sartorio wrote to his sister on March 28, 1942 asking for something to read from back home. Sartorio wrote “Illustrated newspapers and reading material of all kinds are welcome. Here you can only purchase war literature in the soldiers’ library.”<sup>31</sup> Another soldier, field post number 22070B from Bietigheim, also thanked his spouse on April 8, 1942 for the newspapers he received from home, but lamented that he had “no time to read” them.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, Wilhelm Moldenhauer wrote to his wife Erika on May 5, 1942 regarding his receipt of a copy of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and another newspaper from home.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, in that same letter, he later

---

<sup>29</sup> Udke, 52.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>31</sup>“Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 28.3.1942 (3.2002.0827),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed on June 28, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=215>.

<sup>32</sup> Lieb, 206.

<sup>33</sup> Moldenhauer, 216.

mentioned that he visited a movie theater, where he viewed two *Wochenschauen* and a comedy film.<sup>34</sup>

The availability of propaganda materials for soldiers on the Eastern Front provides us with a view of the war from a different perspective. Not only was Nazi Germany waging a physical war but also a psychological one, aimed at shaping the hearts and minds of its soldiers fighting and dying in an increasingly desperate struggle against a numerically superior foe. Given the vast evidence in soldiers' writings about their access to newspapers, magazines, films, and radio broadcasts, it would not be an overstatement to suggest that many German troops were exposed on a regular basis to radical Nazi ideology. Whether or not that propaganda had any impact on the soldiers may be debated, but as has been documented in the previous chapter; as well as in this one, it is my conclusion that indeed Nazi indoctrination achieved some level of success during the first years of the Eastern Front war.

## *5.2. Sieg Heil!: Overconfidence in Success and Faith in the Führer*

Maintaining high levels of morale is an important part of modern warfare, to ensure the cohesiveness and effectiveness of a fighting force in any combat situation. The amount of attention paid to the issue of the soldiers' mentality during the Second World War by the belligerent powers, ranging from military intelligence to psychological warfare departments, underscores the need to understand the ranges of

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 217-218.

ideas circulating amongst the troops at the front.<sup>35</sup> While we know that the Nazis continuously labored at indoctrination through the dissemination of propaganda, it is hard to gauge the effectiveness of Nazism upon the psyches of Germany's ordinary men at the front. Using the diaries and letters of soldiers who fought in the Eastern Theater, it is possible to analyze certain ranges of ideas regarding their beliefs. The goal of this portion of the chapter is to examine the last two themes regarding soldiers' belief in victory versus changing perceptions of the war situation.

The undefeated Wehrmacht that swept into the East in June 1941 consisted of officers and soldiers overconfident about their ability to defeat the Soviets in quick order. Many German field commanders and members of the officer corps were notoriously zealous in their initial belief in victory, such as army chief of staff Franz Halder, who believed the war had been won as early as July 1941.<sup>36</sup> Yet the realities of the military situation were far more daunting, as the Red Army's losses in the *blitzkrieg* campaigns did not destroy the Soviet's war making capabilities.<sup>37</sup> Instead, the Wehrmacht would be caught in a deadly war of attrition, but one where ideology and faith in Hitler would have to shore up any doubts soldiers had about belief in the final victory.

---

<sup>35</sup> For a succinct but fascinating history of psychological warfare, see chapter two of Allison B. Gilmore's *Your Can't Fight Tanks with Bayonets: Psychological Warfare against the Japanese in the Southwest Pacific*, (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Franz Halder, *The Halder War Diary, 1939-1942*, (Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1988), 446-447.

<sup>37</sup> David Glantz has noted that there were 5.4 million soldiers serving in 27 armies, 95 corps, and 303 divisions on June 22, 1941, and the Soviet military increased in size to a force of roughly 10 million soldiers assigned to 94 armies, 253 corps, and 838 divisions by December 31, 1943. For more information, see David M. Glantz, *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War, 1941-1943*, (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 588.

German soldiers displayed a sense of audaciousness when invading the Soviet Union. Some boldly stated in the initial days of the struggle that the enemy was no match for the Wehrmacht and that the war would be over swiftly. A lieutenant in the 211<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, *Oberleutnant G.K.*, confidently prognosticated what events would occur following the end of the invasion in a letter on June 22: “When this war with Russia is completed followed by Arabia (Iraq, Syria, Egypt), and I think it will be in a short time, then I also firmly believe that Ribbentrop will be the only German soldier to have to go to England....”<sup>38</sup> The notions fostered by the lieutenant correspond with the historical narrative surrounding Hitler’s plans for campaigns in North Africa and the Middle East as well as plans to end the war with England.<sup>39</sup>

Other soldiers saw even in the early days of the campaign a change for victory in a short period of time. Sgt. Major Helmut Nick of the 196<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division also echoed the euphoric sentiments of victory in a letter to his wife on June 24, 1941: “Today is the third “*Russentag*” and we have already progressed a pretty piece. I think the greatest difficulties in this war will not be the enemy resistance, but will be navigating the beautiful streets. But there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome. Though I did not believe it would be a blitzkrieg, this is quickly coming to an end.”<sup>40</sup> One perhaps gets the impression that such information was meant more to comfort loved

---

<sup>38</sup> Buchbender, 71.

<sup>39</sup> David Glantz, *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk, 10 July-10 September 1941*, (Solihull, West Midlands, UK : Helion, 2010), 26; H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944: Secret Conversations*, (Enigma Books, 2008) 11-13

“Helmut Nick am 24.6.1941 (3.2002.0274),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, Accessed on May 28, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/feldpost/konvolut\\_skizze.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=116&date\\_from\\_mn\\_name=06&date\\_from\\_yr\\_name=1941&date\\_to\\_mn\\_name=12&date\\_to\\_yr\\_name=1941](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/feldpost/konvolut_skizze.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=116&date_from_mn_name=06&date_from_yr_name=1941&date_to_mn_name=12&date_to_yr_name=1941).



ones at home, but it must also be considered that at least some of the soldiers believed victory would eventually be secured. Yet another soldier, Pvt. Georg Getrost said nearly the same thing to his wife in a letter from June 29: "I think the war with Russia will quickly be coming to an end. There have been great successes. I think the Russians flee the fastest of all."<sup>41</sup> All these types of letters indicate either a deliberate effort at influencing public opinion at home, or reflects a legitimate belief in the outcome of the war in Germany's favor.

The Germans' perceptions of the enemy opposition and the war situation is testament to their initial successes; as well as to their over developed sense of accomplishment at this early stage. Sergeant Karl Fuchs wrote to his wife on June 25 declaring an early victory in the war after battles with Russian tanks. Fuchs wrote: "Yesterday I knocked off a Russian attack, as I had done two days ago! If I get in another attack, I'll receive my first battle stripes. War is half as bad as it sounds and one thing is plain as day: The Russians are fleeing everywhere and we follow them. All of us believe in early victory!"<sup>42</sup> In a subsequent letter dated July 5, Fuchs described the enemy's ability to fight as minimal at best, "Our losses have been minimal and our success is great. This war will be over soon, because we are fighting against only fragmented opposition."<sup>43</sup> By July 11, Fuchs was stationed at Vitebsk and told his wife that he and his comrades were "...only several hundred kilometers away from

---

<sup>41</sup> Georg Getrost, Georg Leideritz, *"Ich glaube hier in Rußland ist es genau so scheisse wie in Afrika" die Feldpost des Georg Getrost aus Zotzenbach/Odenwald von Oktober 1939 bis Juni 1944 ; 11.3.1919 - 25.6.1944*, (Berlin: Berlin Pro Business, 2008), 121.

<sup>42</sup> Fuchs, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 116.

Moscow,” and that they would “...soon be in the enemy’s capital.”<sup>44</sup> For Fuchs, the military victory had practically been won within the span of a few weeks, and all that was left to do was to capture the enemy capitol.<sup>45</sup>

Even as the war continued beyond the summer months, German soldiers continued to hope for victory before the end of the year. Corporal Hans Efferbergen noted in his diary on August 3 that the Soviets were all but finished, stating, “I feel as if the whole country round about, ready for the reaper, had long been ours. We’ve been fighting Russia for six weeks now and if things go all right it won’t last much longer.”<sup>46</sup> Likewise, soldier Georg Getrost believed the conflict was coming to an end, as noted in his diary from August 15: “I expect the war to be over by October 1. Russia is very big, but we do not think that we will have to go as far as the Urals.”<sup>47</sup> Getrost’s predictions were much like many of the Wehrmacht soldiers of the period, filled with ambition but destined to be let down.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Fuchs, 117.

<sup>45</sup> Fuchs was not the only one to air such sentiments. Another soldier Georg Getrost declared on 30 July, “Now it is not too far to Moscow. I hope I am there when there is a parade in Moscow.” (Georg Getrost, 129).

<sup>46</sup> *True to Type: A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians, Collected on the Soviet-German Front*, (London: Hutchinson, 1945), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Getrost, Leideritz, 135.

<sup>48</sup> A similar letter was written by Sergeant Karl Fuchs on August 27 to his father regarding his beliefs about the outcome of the war. Fuchs wrote that: “We’re of the opinion that it’s only a matter of weeks now until the final battles around St. Petersburg and in the Ukraine will be fought. We have news from the Ukraine that Gomel has fallen and we are overjoyed. What will the world say when England, in spite of this immense Russian battlefield, receives its knockout blow? All I can say here is poor Churchill and Roosevelt!” After this lengthy rant about the victories at the front, Fuchs offered his prediction about the end of the war, stating, “I’m convinced that the Russian army, decimated and beaten, will be destroyed by the end of this year!” (Fuchs, 129).

Despite Getrost's hope that the war would be over by October 1 and the victories around Kiev in September, the campaign continued through the muddy *rasputitsa* (mud season) and into the dreaded Russian winter months.<sup>49</sup> A letter by soldier Rudolf Oehus written on October 1 describes the situation, almost in direct response to the sentiments of soldiers like Getrost. Oehus noted in his letter that: "Our division was in fact completely surrounded by the enemy. The greatest danger for us were the tanks, in total 40 tanks have attacked us, of which 29 have been destroyed. In our rear 1,100 prisoners have been taken, can you imagine how foolish it seemed to us." Oehus, like many of his comrades, still believed in victory in the East, yet the continued harassment by the enemy spelled trouble for the future. Oehus further wrote about the propaganda heard on German radio about promises for final victory:

The best had to be the message from the radio that the war in Russia would soon come to an end, of course you can't do anything about it, one must simply conform to everything. Dear Father, if this slogan comes true and we prevail here, and we are pulled out by mid October, while I am on leave we should go hunting for a pair of foxes....<sup>50</sup>

In this letter, one finds both the cynicism of frontline soldiers in the face of worsening conditions and military propaganda, as well as the continued hope that the war would indeed end so that he could visit with family and comrades back home.

---

<sup>49</sup> The semiannual mud season began in October, with alternating heavy rain, sleet, hard frosts, occasional snow, and frequent thaws which causes a breaking up of the roads (Albert Seaton, *The Battle for Moscow*, New York: Sarpedon, 1993, 60); Other soldiers such as Konrad Jarausich had put some hope in the battles around Kiev to end the war. Jarausich noted in a letter to his wife from September 17 that: "Today's report talked about a large scale operation. It looks like the decisive battle is underway. I hope it brings the success we want, so that the campaign will be over, at least in general. It would be good for everyone. Not to mention the overall situation. We need freedom in the East if we want to undertake new measures elsewhere." (Jarausich, 289).

<sup>50</sup> "Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 1. Oktober 1941", *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed May 25, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1628&le\\_fulltext=oehus](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1628&le_fulltext=oehus).

Yet the belief in victory continued throughout the remainder of the year, even under increasingly dire circumstances. While the advance on Moscow progressed in October 1941, Lieutenant K.S. of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division wrote home confidently about the state of the war on the tenth. He noted, “....Coming soon: victory and salvation! Red Front is defeated. ....A deep sense of happiness had filled all of us. The joy of victory is within reach.”<sup>51</sup> Given the large scale operations of September 1941 it is no surprise that many soldiers had renewed hopes in the enemy’s demise, but one wonders how long such sentiments could continue. Pvt. Georg Getrost’s letter from December 8, 1941, written in the midst of the deadly Russian winter and the Soviet counteroffensive, still shimmers with shades of hope as well as a sense of foreboding about the future. Getrost wrote: “Now America and Japan are at war. I think this can only be good for us. I am curious how long the war will last. I think it will take longer than the World War. Well you cannot know. Maybe it will be quicker than you think. Will hope for the best. We have already been away for half a year.”<sup>52</sup>

The overconfidence displayed in many of the soldier’s writings raises the question why anyone might feel so optimistic in the face of increasingly daunting odds, terrible hardships, and miserable conditions. Part of this can be explained by the many victories of 1939-1940, as well as the success of the *blitzkrieg* in the summer and early fall of 1941. However, it seems that an ideological component, personified in this case in the Führer, is another explanation as to why the German soldiers continued to believe in victory well after the goals of Barbarossa became unattainable.

---

<sup>51</sup> Buchbender, 83.

<sup>52</sup> Leideritz, Getrost, 180.

Some German soldiers held a semi-religious faith in Adolf Hitler throughout much of the Second World War. This was especially true during Operation Barbarossa, given the evidence in the writings of the troops from the period. On the day the war began, June 22, 1941, Hitler made an announcement over the radio to the German people explaining the reasons for war against the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup> The troops on the Eastern Front heard this speech, and they had much to say about it as well. One soldier, Corporal Hans Efferbergen, simply wrote the following in his diary on June 22: “At 7.30 hours I tuned in to the broadcast of the Führer’s appeal. I was deeply moved by his closing remarks.”<sup>54</sup> While Efferbergen noted that he was deeply moved by Hitler’s appeal, Sgt. Major Helmuth A. Dittri of the 21<sup>st</sup> Tank Division had much more to say regarding the situation. Dittri wrote the following on June 22, 1941 about the situation: “The Führer’s proclamation is read to us. The time for a show down has arrived. We’ll show them which is the leading power of Europe. The front stretches from Finland to the Black Sea, a line as firm as a wall and exerting a pressure which no force in creation can withstand.”<sup>55</sup>

While Efferbergen displayed a kind of affection for Hitler’s proclamation, Dittri combines the elements of overconfidence in victory and belief in the Führer. Another example is a letter by Wilhelm Moldenhauer to his wife from June 22, whose more

---

<sup>53</sup> For a transcript of the quote, see “Der Führer an das deutsche Volk 22. Juni 1941,” in Philipp Bouhler (ed.), *Der großdeutsche Freiheitskampf. Reden Adolf Hitlers*, vol. 3 (Munich: Franz Eher, 1942), 51-61.

<sup>54</sup> *True to Type*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

somber tone reflects that of a soldier longing for home but feeling the intensity of the announcement:

Together heard a part of the proclamation of our Führer to the German people. Then everything became very tense. I listened to the repeat of the proclamation at 0800, and I had the distinct feeling that you too, dear Lütten, were sitting by the speakers at the same time. Presumably, our little Heide sat there, not understanding how you, dear, felt just then.<sup>56</sup>

The Moldenhauer example provide the most realistic example of the type of impact the announcement had upon the German soldier. Hitler was an omnipresent force in the Third Reich, and upon him many people's lives would depend from 1941-1945. At that exact moment on June 22, Moldenhauer and his family knew that their lives were about to change forever, but what the outcome would be nobody quite knew, except that Hitler played a key role in determining that fate.

The last example regarding Hitler's June 22 proclamation is an excerpt from a letter written in July 1941. In this letter, lance corporal O.B. of the 340<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division provides an interesting discussion of a Nazi era book he had received at the front, and how it related to the present situation in the East. Lance Corporal O.B. wrote on July 6, 1941:

I just received a very timely book by *Wachmeister* Peter: "Riding into the Dawn: A Cavalryman's Life in the Wars of Liberation," a very delightful, diary like depiction of the journey with Napoleon to Russia and back, less delightful of course are the individual experiences, especially the harrowing retreat. At that time, they arrived in Moscow in mid-September. This time the Führer is much earlier than the others 100 years ago....The outbreak of war in the East had frightened me deeply in the first moment. The final sentence of the proclamation by the Führer spoke to me from the soul... 'May Almighty God help us in this struggle!'<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Moldenhauer, 120.

<sup>57</sup> Buchbender, 73.

This excerpt by the lance corporal says a lot about the impact of Hitler's words upon the individual soldier. While this particular German may have been an ideologue or loyal Nazi follower, it appears Hitler's proclamation, particularly his tone of righteousness and invocation of a religious slogan at the end of the statement. The lance corporal also is conscious of the dangers facing the German army, making veiled comparisons between the Napoleonic period and his own time, though he seems confident that the Nazi *blitzkrieg* was more than prepared for the challenge.

The invocation of Hitler in letters during the initial period of the war in the East suggests a sort of ideological affinity by at least some of the soldiers towards National Socialist beliefs. Even if a soldier was not a party member or even a popular supporter of Nazism, the war did create a scenario in which ordinary Germans were faced with Fascism's most dangerous foe. This in turn would help to justify some of Hitler's rantings about Judeo-Bolshevism and the threat to the Reich, which in theory might have made the Führer a more trustworthy figure in the eyes of the soldiers. This manifests itself in their writings, for example, a letter from July 6, 1941 by Moldenhauer, describing the threat of the Soviet Union against Germany and the role Hitler played in averting that danger. Moldenhauer wrote:

A battle between National Socialism and Communism, the latter supported by the Jews, is taking place and one must accept it. It is a collision between two masts. However, just as our Führer triumphed over dark malicious forces in our country, he will also bear against Russia a great victory. If you witness this, one must say that this is a miracle or that a higher power of righteousness and reason granted us victory. I would like to know how many people there are who do not believe what is going on here. They simply cannot believe how something like this is possible. I must honestly say that sometimes I cannot understand it

myself, how our arms can defeat such a well equipped army as Russia. These pigs actually thought they could catch us cold if we were weakened fighting against the whole world. But our Führer is a man, whom no man surpasses in this world. We owe it to him if we can live in peaceful and orderly circumstances once again. Every soldier at the front is a good supporter of our Führer. I'm convinced!<sup>58</sup>

In Moldenhauer's excerpt here we find a number of important elements suggestive of his worldview. Certainly he appears to hold anti-Communist and antisemitic prejudices, and he believes the war was a pre-emptive strike to save Europe from a Soviet onslaught.<sup>59</sup> Moldenhauer also posits that Hitler was leading the fight against Russia, and that only through him could victory be assured. Moldenhauer closes this selection by stating that he believes every soldier at the front is a "supporter" of Hitler, suggesting that in his opinion, he does not find anyone to be a detractor against the nation's dictator or his policies.

A far more reliable example of a National Socialist soldier in the Wehrmacht was Sgt. Karl Fuchs. While many of his compatriot's beliefs varied over the course of 1941, he was one of the core believers who went to his death on November 21, 1941 as a loyal and patriotic soldier. In a letter to his wife on August 3, 1941, Fuchs vehemently attacked the Soviet military, described the threat they posed to Europe, and offered praise to Adolf Hitler for leading Germany through the war. Fuchs wrote the following:

I can only tell you to be glad that you folks back home don't have to look at this "blessed" Soviet Russia. These scoundrels have been dropping idiotic pamphlets from their airplanes, asking us to surrender our arms and defect to their side. It is really laughable since those bums on the

---

<sup>58</sup> Moldenhauer, 131-2.

<sup>59</sup> One finds similar views from other soldiers regarding the defensive war myth. An anonymous soldier wrote a letter to the mayor of Bietigheim on September 14, 1941, in which he cited Hitler as the reason for discovering this plot against the Reich. The soldier wrote: "How fortunate that our great and beloved Führer Adolf Hitler had recognized the danger in time and prevented it...The struggle is hard, victory will be ours." (Lieb, 160).



other side surely know that their time is up. All you have to do is look at the Russian prisoners. Hardly ever do you see the face of a person who seems rational and intelligent. They all look emaciated and the wild, half-crazy look in their eyes makes them appear like imbeciles. And these scoundrels, led by Jews and criminals, wanted to imprint their stamp on Europe, indeed on the world. Thank God that our Führer, Adolf Hitler, is preventing this from happening! We're all of the opinion that it is merely a matter of weeks before these Russians will have to give up. Once they do, England will fall as well, and then I will come home to you forever, never to leave again.<sup>60</sup>

The Fuchs letter bears some things in common with the aforementioned Moldenhauer selection, namely the anti-communist and antisemitic rhetoric as well as the invocation of Adolf Hitler. Fuchs' writings often read like a mirrored image of Nazi propaganda, which can be misleading if his letters were the only source available to historians regarding Wehrmacht beliefs. However, while his views are extreme, they do tell us a lot about the degrees of permeability for indoctrination upon soldiers. While not every soldier expresses himself in the Fuchs manner, it is clear that many do indeed harbor some of these beliefs and stereotypes on either an individual or collective basis.

Even during some of the hardest periods for fighting and weather conditions during the campaign, soldiers continued to look to Hitler and hoped for the final victory to be achieved. Corporal H.B. of the 125<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division wrote a letter on October 14 emphasizing his belief that the war would soon be over:

We are at rest, and not much more is seen or heard from our evil enemy. Soon the war will be over. I assume, that when this letter is in your hands, the bells throughout German lands will be proclaiming victory over the most powerful enemy of civilization. It cannot last for much longer, and for us the Führer's words are gospel.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Fuchs, 122; Note that Karl Fuchs was killed in action on November 21, 1941 near Klin north of Moscow (Fuchs-Richardson, 157).

<sup>61</sup> Buchbender, 84.

In a different type of letter, an anonymous soldier on the Eastern Front expressed sentiments on November 11, 1941 in a letter to the mayor of Bietigheim. The anonymous soldier emphasized the problems of the Soviet Union, writing “...I just wish that all those who are still at home or ever sympathized with communism, could either be forcibly or voluntarily made to see it. No one would see in the communist worldview and in socialism desirable ideas. We can be truly grateful that fate gave us the Führer, and that the Führer saved us from this ‘paradisiacal’ state.”<sup>62</sup>

While the two above quoted letters are different in their content and style, what they share in common of course are the references to the Führer. This link, while at first appearing superficial and coincidental, actually is far more important when considering the phrases “gospel” used by Corporal H.B., and “fate” stated by the anonymous soldier. These keywords are explicit in their meanings, tied to notions of the cult of personality and mysticism surrounding Hitler’s persona as a messianic figure. While Hitler and the Nazis often invoked Christian religiosity to suit their needs, it becomes apparent that some of the soldiers on the Eastern Front connected to those attributes and built up an aura about the Führer as savior.<sup>63</sup>

The last letter to be examined under this thematic category was written by an anonymous soldier in December 1941. This excerpt is a fascinating example of the type of hero worship associated with Adolf Hitler, and reflects how some German soldiers continued to cling to the belief in their Führer and hope for victory despite all of the

---

<sup>62</sup> Lieb, 166-167.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the connections between Nazism and Christianity, see Richard Steigmann-Gall’s *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

odds against them. The letter, written on December 30, is further evidence that the *Wehrmacht's* belief in Nazism did not diminish going into 1942. The anonymous soldier wrote:

The profound awareness, however, that behind us the homeland is protected, provides us with strength and confidence. It is for us soldiers an honor to fight for our great Führer, for our people and Fatherland, to secure a bright future and a long peace. Just as Providence has blessed all the deeds of our Führer and his people so it will continue to bless us in the great battle for justice and for living space for all the people in the world, until the final victory. The Führer is destined by Providence to fulfill a great mission and he will accomplish his task, as certain as there is a sun, moon and stars. We Germans can only be proud and grateful to have this great man, our Führer. Certainly, we live in a hard but heroic time and our descendants will envy us that we were allowed to live in this time and with Adolf Hitler. *Sieg Heil!* With this in mind, I respond to your greetings. Let us bring the deserved victory and peace for all the nations and people of the earth in 1942. This is our sincerest desire of all! One soldier of many salutes from the east, greets his homeland, *Heil Hitler!*<sup>64</sup>

Hitler seems to act like a binding agent in many of the letters mentioned above, with his name and title invoked when soldiers' hoped for victory, when denouncing the Soviets, when facing adversity, and even in the midst of defeat. While it is impossible to know how many of the above examples were written out of genuine affection for Hitler or merely to appease the censors, the sheer numbers of such sources reflects in the very least a pattern towards repetition of learned propaganda. Far more likely a scenario is that at least some of the soldiers did indeed believe in the worthiness of the Nazi cause, and especially were fond of the nation's leader Adolf Hitler for his socio-economic policies and for his strength in foreign policy. Soldiers could find much in common with

---

<sup>64</sup> Lieb, 180.

Hitler's past career as a soldier in the trenches of the First World War, unlike many political leaders who can appear out of touch and distant.

The Führer myth was alive and well at the front in 1941 and in 1942, in part reinforced by the much debated decision by Hitler to assume overall command of the army and begin his anti-retreat policy. Beginning with the dismissal of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, who was replaced by Walter von Reichenau as commander of Army Group South on December 1, 1941, Hitler began clearing out those officers who he believed were disobeying his orders. Then on December 19, Fedor von Bock handed over command of Army Group Center to Field Marshal Günther von Kluge. The most significant of the changes came when Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch resigned his post as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, a position Hitler decided to fill himself on December 16. Hitler demanded that his field commanders hold the line to the last man and not allow any further withdrawals in the face of Soviet attacks. Tactical withdrawals were allowed only in mid-January after an enormous loss of German lives, and these withdrawals allowed for a stabilization of the front with new front line positions.<sup>65</sup>

During the winter of 1941-1942, soldiers continued to express their reverence towards Hitler in their writings. For example, during the battle of Obojan near Kursk and Kharkov, soldier Hans Roth made a specific reference to Hitler and his divisional commander Dostler. Roth wrote on January 11, 1942: "The general, who was awarded the Knight's Cross the day before, thanks his men. He reads a thank you telegram from the Führer, which makes us all very proud. (Only once before during this war has the

---

<sup>65</sup> Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War, 1939-1945*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 209-211.

Führer issued a similar personal telegram: This was to general Dietl at Narvik).”<sup>66</sup>

Another 27 year old soldier, Feldpost number 31810, wrote to his family on February 13 1942 about the role of Hitler’s intervention in the Eastern Front campaign. He wrote that the: “Russian wanted to encircle us, as we had done to him the summer. He nearly succeeded at it. But at the last moment the Führer, as is well known, took the helm on the Eastern Front in his hand. . . .” In these examples, both Roth and the anonymous 27 year old soldier describe Hitler in rather affectionate and positive terms despite the losses suffered thus far.

In a similar display of Führer worship, Hans Roth further exemplified his fervor for Hitler by tying military duty to the supreme commanders’ World War One background. Roth noted in his diary on February 24-28, 1942, that the Soviet winter offensive was “a trial by fire for the German Army,” which could only be truly understood by “the direct leadership and the Führer himself; this man, who as an old frontline soldier, understands the thousands of horrors of the frontline.”<sup>67</sup> Roth’s glorification of Hitler’s wartime exploits helps us to better understand why so many Second World War soldiers found him so appealing, because he was once one of them. Hitler gave the troops confidence in victory, as noted in the letter of a German soldier stationed at St. Petersburg on February 15, 1942, who wrote: “Today for us soldiers is a day of rejoicing, at any rate we have this feeling in our hearts: the entire day new tanks

---

<sup>66</sup> Roth, 143-144; Note: the commander of the 57<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at this time was General Anton Dostler. General Dostler was directly responsible for collaboration with the SS in the execution of Jews and other civilians in the area of Kharkov in 1941-1942, and would later be tried and executed himself by the Allies in 1945 for the deaths of American prisoners of war. For more information, see Geoffrey P. Megargee, Martin Dean, eds., *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1767-1771.

<sup>67</sup> Roth, 164.

of all calibers have been rolling past us from home, and we see this as the great spring preparations of our Führer, the time, when Ivan will muster for his death run....<sup>68</sup> In all these examples, it is clear that in the minds of some German soldiers Hitler played a crucial role in the outcome of the war.

As the German Army fought a defensive battle for survival against massive Soviet counterattacks in the winter of 1941-1942, some soldiers continued to believe in the inevitability of a final victory that was merely delayed. Soldiers wanted to believe that the victory that had been so assured in 1941 would come about in 1942. In the letter of an Anonymous soldier addressed to the mayor of Bietigheim on January 11, 1942, the soldier complained that: "It has now been 15 months since I went away from home and I have in that period traveled and fought through half of Europe." The soldier continued, "Thus we now all hope and wish that the enemy is soon defeated and the war is brought to a victorious end."<sup>69</sup> In another letter by an anonymous soldier dated January 24, 1942 addressed to his wife and children, the soldier thought victory would occur by the end of the summer. He wrote while stationed around Smolensk: "...the situation has improved here and the Russian breakthrough brought to a halt." The soldier continued that he was "100% certain" that by the latest "July-August the Russians will be finished...."<sup>70</sup>

Soldiers had to admit in their letters home that a setback had occurred in their victorious offensive against the Soviets, and focused on the role of the Russian Winter in causing the delay in their triumph. Wilhelm Moldenhauer maintained in a letter to his

---

<sup>68</sup> Lieb, 190.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>70</sup> Christoph Birnbaum, *Es ist wie ein Wunder, dass ich noch lebe*: *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad, 1942-1943*, (Königswinter: Brandenburgisches Verlagshaus, 2012), 24.

wife on February 11, 1942 that he believed once the “severity of this winter” was over, the Russians could “no longer succeed” in making further advances. However, Moldenhauer also admitted that “You can not say that he (the Russians) has lost the war.” Instead, Moldenhauer saw that there could be no end to the conflict until the ground was dry enough to launch a new offensive, likely around “the end of March.”<sup>71</sup> Likewise, a soldier wrote to the mayor of Bietigheim on February 12, 1942 that the “last chance for the Soviets fades with the ice and snow.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, another soldier from Bietigheim wrote to the mayor on February 22 that with the thawing of the winter the Russians would be “completely finished.” He confidently boasted: “...by fall we all hope to be done here in the east.”<sup>73</sup>

Of course, despite the hopes of the troops for a victorious end to the conflict, it was impossible for them to hide the very serious dangers facing them at the front. For example, Georg Getrost noted in a letter on February 21, 1942, that he was engaged in the “heavy defensive fighting of the central front.” Getrost warned his family that while the “Russians want an absolute breakthrough,” he also assured them that they would “not succeed.”<sup>74</sup> Soldiers were also conscious of the fact that they had nearly faced catastrophe in the winter of 1941-1942, but remained confident in their ability to destroy the Soviet Union. Hans Joachim S. believed as much when he wrote to his wife on April 21, 1942, stating: "This difficult Winter, with the continuous attacks of the Russians, the

---

<sup>71</sup> Moldenhauer, 196-7.

<sup>72</sup> Lieb, 188.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 192-193.

<sup>74</sup> Getrost, 201.

terrible cold and hardships is now over, hope begins, now only for an offensive, but also as quick return home.”<sup>75</sup>

Despite the setbacks suffered during the Russian winter, some soldiers viewed the invasion and the actions of their Japanese allies in the Pacific as a sign that the war would turn out for the best, and that there would be a renewed German offensive to defeat the Communists. Klaus Becker wrote a letter to his wife on February 13, 1942, in which he talked about his hopes for an end to the war. Becker stated to his wife that at first he did not understand how the invasion of the Soviet Union would affect the rest of the world, or in his words “its global political context.” Becker believed that Russia was England’s “biggest trump card” against Germany and Japan, and that is why “we had to take action against Russia.” He saw the Soviet counteroffensive in the winter of 1941-1942 as something which would actually weaken Russia because they had to use their “Far East army in the fight against us.” This action would allow “Japan’s flank” to be relieved from a potential Russian threat, allowing the Japanese to “direct its entire force against England in the Far East.” Therefore, once Russia was “crushed,” Germany could concentrate its forces against England and “shatter its empire.”<sup>76</sup>

Other soldiers appear to have looked at the wider implications of the Second World War and found confidence in the actions of their Japanese allies. For example, an anonymous soldier wrote on February 12, 1942 that he believed the “heroic deeds of our

---

<sup>75</sup> “Hans-Joachim S. an seine Frau am 21.04.1942 (3.2002.1214),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 22, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1020&le\\_keyword=Russland](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1020&le_keyword=Russland).

<sup>76</sup> “Klaus Becker an seine Ehefrau am 13.2.1942 (3.2002.0224),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 23, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=205&le\\_keyword=Urlaub](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=205&le_keyword=Urlaub).



Africa fighters, our airforce and navy, the victories of our brave allies in the past few weeks gives us joyful hope and strengthens our faith in victory.”<sup>77</sup> Another soldier Jakob Geimer wrote to his wife on April 10, 1942 regarding the global wartime situation. Geimer stressed that between the Japanese and "our U-Weapons" the fighting would eventually result in a victorious peace. In addition, Geimer stressed that "this year" the conflict in the East would be concluded, and the battle against England would be taken care of by "our Führer.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, it seems that information about the war in Asia provided some reassurance to German troops fighting in occupied Soviet territory that things might turn out for the best after all.

Soldiers stationed in the occupied East longed for a new attack against the Soviets in order to end the war in 1942. One soldier, field post number 06269, in a letter to his parents on April 2, 1942, believed that when the “new spring offensive” started, it would mean “‘Good Night,’ Russians and Bolsheviks.”<sup>79</sup> Another soldier Pfc. Wolfgang Knoblich of the 513<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment noted in his diary on April 5, 1942 while stationed near Kharkov that “...All Germany hopes and believes that this spring this horrible, blood-letting war will at last take a decisive turn. We pray for victory and peace.”<sup>80</sup> Soldier Alfred Marx also tried to assure his wife and children about the war situation, stating that “Eventually it must come to an end. At the end there must be

---

<sup>77</sup> Lieb, 188.

<sup>78</sup> “Jakob Geimer an seine Ehefrau am 10.04.1942 (3.2002.0894),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed 18 June 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=949>.

<sup>79</sup> Lieb, 203.

<sup>80</sup> *True to Type: A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians, Collected on the Soviet-German Front*, (London: Hutchinson, 1945), 56.

victory.”<sup>81</sup> While the anonymous soldier wrote with confidence that the German spring offensive would destroy the Soviets, Private Knoblich and Alfred Marx seemed to express far more concern regarding their hope for victory in 1942.

The German offensive to target the southern oilfields of the Caucasus and to take Stalingrad was to begin in May-June 1942. When the Soviets pre-emptively launched their own offensive to retake Kharkov on May 12, the Germans encircled and destroyed three armies by May 28.<sup>82</sup> As one German soldier noted in a letter to his mother on May 30, 1942: “In the large encirclement battle 240,000 prisoners have been taken according to the count and the loss of Russian dead will not be much less.”<sup>83</sup> The German victories in May reinforced the inflated belief that their new offensive plans would decisively lead to the conclusion of the war. Furthermore, it also reinforced a belief in the inferiority of the Red Army given the enormity of Soviet losses, paving the way for the disaster that was the battle of Stalingrad. Operation Blau, the planned German southern offensive, would begin on June 28, 1942.<sup>84</sup> The campaign, designed to rob the Soviets of their vital oilfields, would destroy an entire German army and signal the beginning of the end of the Nazi empire.

---

<sup>81</sup> “Alfred Marx an seine Ehefrau und Kinder am 13.4.1942 (3.2002.0230),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed 19 June 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=218&le\\_fulltext=marx](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=218&le_fulltext=marx).

<sup>82</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle that Changes History*, (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 56.

<sup>83</sup> Lieb, 221; The soldier is identified by field post number 30024, and is listed as 32 years old.

<sup>84</sup> Roberts, 58-59

### 5.3 *The Realities of War: Combat, Conditions, and Changing Perceptions*

The worldview of the German soldiers on the Eastern Front was not only shaped by the population, politics, and living conditions, but numerous other factors including the fighting, weather conditions, and prolonged nature of the campaign. Many of the Wehrmacht men were forever scarred by the psychological and physical damage of combat, which is evidenced in the memoirs of those soldiers lucky enough to have survived the war.<sup>85</sup> The effects of the war upon the individual soldier varied from person to person, and in the letters and diaries from the period one finds sufficient evidence of the horrors of battle, the impact of the dreaded General Winter, and even a shift in the core beliefs of some of the soldiers. If the soldiers entering the Soviet Union in June 1941 were confident of victory, over the course of the Barbarossa a growing number of doubters emerged as a direct result of Red Army tenacity and the failures of the campaign.

While Operation Barbarossa was the pinnacle period of Nazi successes, it was also a time of enormous setbacks and tremendous hardships for the German army. Soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front were psychologically and physically damaged by the intensity of the campaign, which led to a gradual breakdown of the spirits of many of the soldiers. One finds numerous examples of the ferocity of battle, the mood of the troops, and even changing perceptions of the enemy. The diary of Hans Roth provides a representative example of the intensity and barbarity of combat in the initial days of the

---

<sup>85</sup> Scores of memoirs have been published by enlisted soldiers since the end of the Second World War. Among the more recent include Gottlob Herbert Bidermann's *In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir of the Eastern Front*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); William Lubbeck's *At Leningrad's Gates: The Combat Memoirs of a Soldier with Army Group North.*, (Haverton, PA: Casemate, 2006).

invasion. Roth wrote about the fighting at Babicze and Lokacze in Ukraine on June 24, 1941:

We are able to reach the first buildings in Babicze under the cover of the well positioned fire. The damn spiral mines explode one after another in angry thunder right before us and over our heads. That sound, that nasty and poisonous sound from the swarms of artillery shelling. With our faces contorted by anger, we jump into the Reds' shrapnel trenches. Anti-tank grenades hammer into their fortifications. All goes crazy now and chaos erupts....Ratas (Soviet Fighter Planes) appear and attack us. Thank God, no casualties. We reach the middle of the village around noon. Resistance from the Reds has been broken, an entire Red division has been destroyed. Clusters of dead and wounded soldiers are blocking the street. The number of our own casualties is also high. We are so exhausted we could pass out. Despite this, we reassemble and continue to advance without any noteworthy resistance, to the village of Lokacze. The welcome there is not very pleasant, as wild gunfire was awaiting us. Damn snipers! House after house must be cleansed with hand grenades. Fanatics fire at us until the roofs collapse over their heads and they are buried under the rubble. Others escape their houses at the last minute as human torches. They collapse dead on the street or are beaten to death. Within the hour the entire village has transformed into an ocean of flames.<sup>86</sup>

Roth's very descriptive writings provide a window into combat conditions of June 1941, showing that the Soviets fought furiously despite the overwhelming odds against them during the first weeks of the invasion. Such dangerous conditions were sure to rattle even the most competent of veterans, and there were soldiers who had their doubts and fears as a result. One soldier, Corporal Reinhold Pabel, wrote on June 27 about his longing for home: "What do most of the people at home think about this? Surely they are all waiting. Yes, we all wait. For each other and for an end to the war...I ask and pray for me and my loved ones to avoid hardships in this war, but the fact remains in my mind, even if the danger is over."<sup>87</sup> Soldiers like Pabel were not ardent

---

<sup>86</sup> Roth, 28-9.

Nazis or confident in victory; they simply were men caught up in a terrible situation who wanted to go home to their families.

The Germans suffered considerable losses throughout Barbarossa, which proportionately would prove a major hindrance to completing their objectives. For example, documentation suggests that by July 31, 1941 the Germans took 213,301 casualties, a considerable number when considered proportionately between the Soviet manpower pool versus the Germans.<sup>88</sup> Private Jochen Klepper of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division provides a unique view of the heavy losses sustained by the Wehrmacht in his writings from July 6, 1941: “Scarcely any planes and artillery fire. The Russians retreat, but our division, at the head of a horseshoe, cannot continue because the flanks and reinforcements did not follow. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Division has 60% losses. The troops have been under heavy artillery fire.”<sup>89</sup> Klepper’s description of the situation reveals the massive resistance facing the Germans; as well as the immense losses they faced.

Not only was the Wehrmacht facing a stubborn foe capable of inflicting considerable damage, but some of the Soviet tanks were actually better than the oft glorified German panzers. During an encirclement battle gone wrong near Orscha, Belarus, Lieutenant Georg Kreuter found that the Red Army’s heavy tanks (likely the

---

<sup>87</sup> Kempowski, 122-3.

<sup>88</sup> David Glantz, *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battles for Smolensk, July-August 1941*, (Solihull: Helion, 2010), 303.

<sup>89</sup> Kempowski, 258; Klepper, a private drafted in 1941, served for less than a year. He was engaged to a half-Jewish woman, and because of their persecution by the Nazis they committed suicide together in 1942. For more information see Markus Baum, *Jochen Klepper*, (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2011).

KV-1) were far superior to any he had encountered before.<sup>90</sup> Kreuter wrote on July 7, 1941:

We are cut off by tanks. Russian tanks are attacking us! There are two of the heavy tanks with them. Our Pak, even the 5 cm, can only penetrate this in the weakest spots. There are a heavy tank and four lights tanks knocked out...Our tanks were also powerless and remained quiet....I tried it with hand grenades that I made ready. It is useless.<sup>91</sup>

Kreuter found that the only way he could disable the tank was by tossing a hand grenade down the barrel of the tank's cannon. Likewise, Pvt. First Class Hänsele, a soldier in an anti-tank unit of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, provided an equally grim outlook on Soviet armor capabilities on July 21: "Our company is in Bezhanitsi under the intense fire of Russian tanks. As we were subsequently able to ascertain, one had 10 cm. plate and another 15 cm. plate. What could we do against such thick skinned elephants with our 3.7's? It was a tough proposition."<sup>92</sup>

While the gravity of the situation may not have affected the officer corps, the average German soldier began to develop a changed perception of the situation at the frontlines. Sgt. Major Helmuth A. Dittrich of the 21<sup>st</sup> Panzer Division praised the abilities of the Russian Army in his diary on July 26, 1941: "When you size up the Russians you are struck more and more by the fact, and you can't help admitting it, that they can take an enormous amount of punishment." Dittrich provides specific examples of the types of "punishment" the Red Army soldiers dealt with: "For instance, despite the fact that their

---

<sup>90</sup> The KV-1 was a heavily armored tank capable of matching anything the Germans could field. However, when the invasion began, there were only around 500 in service scattered throughout the Red Army, rendering them less effective. For more information, see John Mosier, *Deathride: Hitler vs. Stalin - The Eastern Front, 1941-1945*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010), 63-4.

<sup>91</sup> Kempowski, 276.

<sup>92</sup> *True to Type*, 17.

artillery received several direct hits today, the gun crews did not abandon their positions. Similarly, the Russian infantry shoots at the tanks at very short range and keeps on firing even though the whole area is already in our hands.”<sup>93</sup> This account suggests that some of the German soldiers learned a kind of soldierly respect or even admiration for the tenacity of their foe.

Admiration for the enemies’ abilities coincided with the setbacks facing the Wehrmacht with each battle. While encamped near Zhitomir, Hans Roth wrote in his diary on July 31 about his fears that the Russian campaign would be much longer than anticipated:

The same subject dominated our conversations: when will this campaign be over? Someone spread a rumor that we will be dismissed after this mess. What an immature religious belief! First, I think that the Russian campaign will last much longer. I even voice this opinion in contrast to those officers who believe that it will be over in two months. Second, does anyone believe that glorious, veteran fighters like us will be sent home to search for fishing worms in their gardens? We shall see if I am not right on at least one of these points.<sup>94</sup>

In a subsequent entry from August 4 written near Kiev, Roth wrote about the continued setbacks facing the Germans:

Three well performed attacks are knocked off by the Russians. Indeed, that is not the way to do it! It appears there are problems at HQ, as things are not going as planned. There are changes in the command structure, and a few generals are exchanged. The number of casualties is just not in balance with our success. I really do not like this shit.<sup>95</sup>

In both of these examples, Roth independently believed that the invasion was less successful than most anticipated, and he also realized that not everything was going to

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 15

<sup>94</sup> Roth, 65.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 67.

plan even on a tactical level. This means that some German soldiers were more than capable of rejecting the propaganda of their superiors, and to rationally deduce that the war was taking a deadly turn in the Eastern campaign.

Roth's disbelief in a 1941 victory coincided with an apparent decline in morale amongst the troops. For example, Roth described in detail the effects of a Soviet artillery barrage upon soldiers' nerves, writing on August 10: "If there is still a God in Heaven, I am begging him to finish us off. Bring this to an end. Just end it...I cannot take this any longer!" Roth even noted that the effects of the bombing causes another soldier to go "crazy," jumping out of his trench and laughing hysterically; only to be killed moments later by shrapnel.<sup>96</sup> Another soldier Lance Corporal M.H. of the 268<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, also complained about the psychological impact of heavy losses upon the troops on September 2, 1941: "...We have hard times and heavy losses. We are already five weeks at the same location and are always plagued by Russian heavy artillery. I do not know for how long our nerves will stand.... It is promised time and again that we will get to go home, but always in vain ...."<sup>97</sup> Both Roth and Lance Corporal M.H. reflected the effects of prolonged exposure to combat situations, denoting a sense of shell shock as well as overall fatigue from several months of fighting.

The consistencies reflected in soldiers' writings from this period reveal the gradual demoralization and slow disillusionment of Wehrmacht soldiers on the Eastern Front. One interesting point of comparison is the writings of two soldiers, Hans Roth and Konrad Jaraus, from documents dated from August 30, 1941. In Roth's diary

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 76-77.

<sup>97</sup> Buchbender, 79-80.



entry, he spends the majority of his time complaining about his unit's need for refitting and leave time in Germany. Roth wrote that the unit's morale had "reached a low point," especially when the "rumors" about being sent back to Germany to "regroup" were proven false.<sup>98</sup> Jarausch's letter to family friend Werner Hass also displays a similar attitude about the state of affairs at the front. Jarausch wrote on August 30, "It's difficult to be happy about being a soldier in such circumstances," lamenting the fact that winter was approaching yet "Bolshevism" was not "dead yet." Jarausch, much like Hans Roth, was upset over the issue that the war was not yet won, as Jarausch noted, "It's becoming more difficult to imagine an end to the war."<sup>99</sup>

In the same documents from August 30, both Jarausch and Roth touch upon an important part of the war regarding correspondence from the East to the home front. Jarausch was becoming quite dejected about not hearing from his wife Lotte, as well as receiving little news about the overall war situation.<sup>100</sup> He noted on August 30: "Of course, given the mail delivery problems we're also not receiving news of any kind. We know nothing of the political events of the day."<sup>101</sup> Here we find that some soldiers depended on their loved ones back home to inform them of events, separating fact from

---

<sup>98</sup> Roth, 87.

<sup>99</sup> Jarausch, 273.

<sup>100</sup> What was worrying Jarausch most of all was the safety of his wife and child in Berlin, due to the increasing British bombing raids across Germany. In a letter from 9 September 1941, Jarausch wrote to Lotte, "...I gather that you have been having air raid alarms. The news from Berlin is making us a little uneasy. What do you do with the baby? Do you go down into the basement?" (Jarausch, 280); Richard Overy conducted comprehensive studies on the Allied air war against Germany. According to Overy, the British conducted approximately 17,000 sorties against Germany between June and December 1941. For more information, see Richard Overy, *The Bombers and the Bombed: Allied Air War Over Europe 1940-1945*, (New York: Viking, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> Jarausch, 273.

rumor, as well as deciphering propaganda from reality at the front. While Roth denounced the “rumors” regarding being sent back to Germany as false hopes, he also noted that his correspondence with his wife was becoming difficult due to the daily hardships he faced. Roth wrote on August 30: “It is becoming increasingly difficult for me to sound optimistic and positive in my letters to Rosel, but it has to be this way; I know how important my letters are to keep her dear soul in balance. She will be happy and joyful, and will not know about our dejected spirits.” This statement suggests that soldiers were inwardly torn between two identities: the loving civilian family man and the battle hardened war weary soldier. These conflicting personas coupled with the downward spiral of events at the front left men like Roth wondering whether he should tell his wife the truth about the war. In the end, he seemed contented with keeping her “happy and joyful,” revealing that he practiced a degree of self-censorship to shield his loved ones from the horrors and tribulations of the Eastern Front.<sup>102</sup>

The most often complained about trope in German soldiers’ wartime and postwar writings was the dreaded Russian winter. As early as October 1941 the temperature began a rapid decline, and with the lack of appropriate equipment the army was forced to forage for supplies from enemy combatants or the civilian population.<sup>103</sup> In the writings of the troops at the front, one notices this sudden change in the weather conditions. In an October 9 diary entry, an unknown Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, complains about the impact of weather upon the offensive. He wrote: “If it keeps

---

<sup>102</sup> Roth, 87.

<sup>103</sup> David Stahel, *Operation Typhoon: Hitler’s March on Moscow, October 1941*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 168-170.

raining or snowing like this, we won't reach Moscow and even less likely go home this year. See one bomber – they have trouble flying in this weather. More of them could have already made our life easier. “<sup>104</sup> Hans Efferbergen noted similar ideas about conditions on October 10, 1941: “On the seventh of this month we started an offensive. It was ice cold and a blizzard was howling the like of which you meet in the steppe only in the severest winters. All our stuff got soaking wet and the wind blew so hard that the different units lost contact with each other. It was next to impossible to distinguish anything twenty yards off.”<sup>105</sup>

The Nazi offensive to take Moscow was kept to a slow pace due to the rapidly deteriorating weather circumstances. Roads became quagmires and vehicles simply could not operate in the conditions as they were. This experience is described by an Austrian soldier on October 15: “It's now almost 5 pm, we've been standing still for 5 hours on the open road and the endless open snowy areas. For the last 50 km, there are hardly any more woods. We're 300 km from Moscow. But we want to halt to the north of it.....Every 10<sup>th</sup> vehicle on the highway has to be towed. Sometimes there are three vehicles towed by one.”<sup>106</sup> The following month Corporal L.B. described how despite the full onset of winter the army did not have the appropriate gear. He wrote on November 11:

One cannot really understand why we do not receive winter clothes. If this continues, it is Napoleonic, in that things will freeze. But I believe, that they were better equipped in 1812 against the winter than we are.

---

<sup>104</sup> Diary of Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, Acc: 2000.146, USHMM, October 9, 1941, Translated by Bernhard Sulzer, 34.

<sup>105</sup> *True to Type*, 10.

<sup>106</sup> Diary of Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, Acc: 2000.146, USHMM, October 15, 1941, translated by Bernhard Sulzer, 47-8.

Almost everyone has damaged socks, no one has earmuffs....It is like this in other units also! So little is provided for us! In 1941! (not 1812!).<sup>107</sup>

The lack of preparedness for the Russian winter is a widely discussed topic, but it is important to illustrate the effects it had upon the physical and mental status of the troops. In both of the above examples the soldiers express the problems with the conditions, creating a sense of disillusionment about the war.

The decline in the morale of the Wehrmacht continued into the autumn and early winter months of 1941. Weather was not the only factor slowing down the German offensive, as the Soviets continued their rugged defense and attempted counterattacks in October to withstand Operation Typhoon.<sup>108</sup> An Austrian soldier described the chaos of the situation regarding the encirclement battle of Vyazma which netted several Soviet armies.<sup>109</sup> In a diary entry on October 9, 1941 he wrote:

Based on reports, 2 divisions (4 armies) are supposedly surrounded....It's raining today for a change. I particularly pity the poor sharpshooters on their posts day and night. In the morning, our commander drove off right under our noses to get ammunition. I felt much safer again when he returned; mentally, one lives much better with what one is used to. Around noon, we want to go get ammunition, but we only get 23 units. This causes me to get rather uneasy; especially because our battery unit keeps shooting continuously. The enemy is always marching towards us. They are one kilometer from us in the woods. We are shooting with our reserve ammunition. This could turn out very badly. In a defensive move, the enemy troops are constantly trying to break through. At 12:45, the Hitler organs start going off like hell, and again, just 2 minutes later. Continuously, individual shooting is going on. At 11 o'clock, one kilometer from our position, there is an enemy tank and many trucks, but

---

<sup>107</sup> Buchbender, 86.

<sup>108</sup> Stahel, 240.

<sup>109</sup> The double encirclements at Vyazma and Briansk trapped and destroyed several Soviet armies in October 1941. For more information, see *Ibid*, 111-124.

they were chased away, the tank without cupola. At 3 pm we (2<sup>nd</sup> Ammunition Column) enter the next village.<sup>110</sup>

The diary entry from October 9 is striking for a number of reasons, but especially so because it reveals that the German offensive against Moscow was up against fierce enemy resistance from the start. In a subsequent entry from October 10, the same Austrian soldier described the ferocity of the fighting near Vyazma. He wrote:

In the morning, the battle noise becomes very loud. Supposedly it's our heavies. Russians are encircled but they break through at many places. The Russians have been pounding the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion only because there is no ammunition. And too much ammo is simply wasted (just shooting anywhere) and the supplies can't keep up. The encirclement can hardly be maintained; from 9 o'clock on we can hear heavy explosions, supposedly the Russians. It's obvious the enemy is stronger. Our defense is weak and with open spots. The fog is moving out very slowly. So the bombers can't come. The situation has now been very precarious for quite some days.... Our shooters and tanks are positioned rather sparsely. We are cooking salty potatoes at nine and are calming down quite well. I never thought food help so much keeping one's outer countenance. All in all, I am not too nervous, but I can't take any disruptions. My feet have felt like lead for two days, the knee hurts as well although I either sit or walk comfortably. We are now 10 km away from Wjasma. The city which can be seen with your eyes has been conquered 4 times; at noon, we hear that none of the columns can move forward or backward; we are supposedly surrounded by Russians, very dangerous. The mood is horrible, understandably. My own mood is changing. It has never been that dangerous. Comrades from other units tell us about bad surprises from Russian attacks. They storm out of their hideouts, their arms linked, rifle under their elbows, screaming 'Hurrah.' They are sometimes cut down with machine guns. The ones who don't fall over stubbornly keep on running...<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Diary of Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, Acc: 2000.146, USHMM, 9 October 1941, translated by Bernhard Sulzer, 32-33; The Germans had their own version of a multi-barrel rocket launcher called the *Nebelwerfer*, a six-barrel rocket launcher. For more information, see Jonathan B. A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 348.

<sup>111</sup> Diary of Austrian soldier on the Eastern Front, Acc: 2000.146, USHMM, October 10, 1941, translated by Bernhard Sulzer, 35-37.

In the October 10 diary entry, the unknown Austrian soldier took careful account of the events surrounding the battle at Vyazma. According to him, the fighting was desperate and the Soviets nearly broke out of the encirclement on many occasions. Achieving victory in this battle may have been a great success, but at the cost of slowing the German advance on Moscow. Hans Roth noted in his diary on October 10, 1941 regarding his skepticism about a radio announcement he heard regarding the situation at Vyazma and Bryansk. Roth wrote:

On the radio we heard news of the victorious encirclement battle near Vyazma and Bryansk. The Eastern campaign has been practically decided. The remnants of the Red Army are one step away from annihilation; the Bolshevik leaders have fled from Moscow. Is the end in sight for the East? We hear this and even more over the loudspeakers; surely this will be the headline in the daily papers at home. I grab my head; how is this possible, has our leadership gone mad overnight? All of this is not true, it cannot be true; all of us here see too clearly what is going on. Do these gentlemen have blindfolds over their eyes!?! What is the homeland supposed to think? Our wives, mothers, and brides will go crazy with happiness when they hear this news; they will cry tears of joy that the horrible bloodshed will be over in a few days, and will expect their men and sons home by Christmas at the latest. For heaven's sake, the reality is totally different. The eastern armies are encountering the ultimate test of nerves. We Germans are not used to winter combat in freezing temperatures and all of this mud. Is it really necessary to employ such devices, such poisonous stuff? At home, there will be a terrible awakening from these happy illusions. In a few weeks the newspapers will be full of black crosses like never before.<sup>112</sup>

By December 1941, the Soviets mounted a massive counterattack against the Wehrmacht on the Moscow Front. The Red Army's efforts would push the Germans back, effectively defeating the *Blitzkrieg* and ending all hopes for a Nazi victory that year.<sup>113</sup> The combined effects of winter conditions and the arrival of fresh Soviet

---

<sup>112</sup> Roth, 118-119.

reinforcements is accounted for by Lieutenant H.H. of the 258<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, who notes on December 7 why the last ditch German attempts to take Moscow failed:

The objective was presumably a shortening of the front, encirclement of Moscow, and then to get Moscow within the firing range of our heavy artillery. The conditions for the attack were very unfavorable, because since 10 November there was bitter cold (temperatures around minus 20 degrees), and also new combative Siberian divisions were used on the Russian side, which have shown no signs of cowardice. Furthermore, the Russians had built extensive defenses such as minefields and field fortifications, which had to be overcome first. . . . The unfavorable weather precluded a systematic use of the Luftwaffe during the attack from the outset. An icy snow storm swept across the country and made it difficult to see. The ground was so slippery that the horses had struggled to keep themselves upright. The machine guns were not working in the cold.<sup>114</sup>

On a similar note, Heinz Postenreider described the ferocity of Soviet attacks, which were pushing the German soldiers to their limits. Postenreider wrote in his diary on December 14: “It is barely light and all hell breaks loose. All around from the heights the Russians shoot into the middle of the dense columns. Horses rear, tumble and fall, or race over the field. In a wild panic everybody flees to the left. The explosions of the ‘Stalin organ’ hit everywhere.” After surviving the initial artillery bombardment, Postenreider took part in a counterattack against the Soviets. During this engagement, Postenreider had “. . . given up hope to see my home and my Christl again,” signifying the terror of battle and the growing sense that the war was leading towards defeat for Germany.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Earl Ziemke, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East*, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 69-71.

<sup>114</sup> Buchbender, 90.

<sup>115</sup> Heinz Postenrieder and Christine Miller, *Feldzug im Osten, 2.8.1941 - 19.4.1942*, (Carol Stream, IL: Publisher’s Graphics, 2010), 212; Note that Postenrieder was captured sometime in 1942 and

As if the Red Army's counteroffensive was not enough to break the spirits of the German soldiers who had been promised to be home by Christmas, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought Germany into a war against the United States. Konrad Jarausch was very depressed about these turn of events, which to him signified a prolonged and uphill battle. Jarausch wrote on December 10: "Everyone's reactions to the expansion of the war were that now there certainly won't be an end to it all. Initial successes of Japan will have the effect of showing the Americans how seriously they are threatened and thereby only make the situation worse. In light of this new aspect of the war I'm very pessimistic about the exemption request...."<sup>116</sup> In a subsequent letter to his wife on January 1, 1942, Jarausch emphasized his fears about the war situation again. Jarausch wrote, "It's a new year, and its beginning brings with it a tremendous feeling of pressure. I think that each of us in this year has come to terms with the fact that the future is completely uncertain. Now that the war has broken out in the Far East.... it seems impossible for each of us, as well as for the whole nation, to predict anything with certainty."<sup>117</sup> These two letters summarize the fears of many German soldiers on the Eastern Front, who now faced an Allied coalition force determined to defeat the Third Reich at any costs.

The future was uncertain for the Wehrmacht at the end of the Barbarossa campaign. Gone were the jubilant cries of the Ukrainian crowds of June-July 1941,

---

survived Soviet internment for the duration of the war. In the postwar period he became an optician, and died in 1979.

<sup>116</sup> Jarausch, 340; Note that Konrad Jarausch died on January 27, 1942 at a field hospital at Roslawl southwest of Smolensk due to typhoid fever. (Jarausch, 365).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 352.



replaced instead by an increasingly hostile populace that took up partisan activities against the Nazi invaders. The situation at the front was not stabilized until the end of the spring 1942, and even then, the recipe for final victory was far less clear than it had been in 1941. The war was going to be long and bloody, and the soldiers could now see that their hopes for victory were far less certain than before. The year 1942 was promised as the year of decision, but what that decision might be was yet to be determined.

As the second year of the Nazi-Soviet war began, the mentality of German soldiers on the Eastern Front was a complex web of disappointment and defiance, misery and promise. Many were susceptible to the propaganda of 1941 that told them they would win the war quickly against the inferior Judeo-Bolshevik hordes. However, as the troops faced devastating subzero temperatures and massive onslaughts of fresh Red Army reserves, they began to question even more than ever the validity of their propaganda and their belief in final victory. Soldier Gerhard Udke echoed these notions on January 5, 1942 in a letter to his wife Dorothea, attempting to reassure her while presenting a mixed tone of both melancholy and mettle. Udke wrote: “For the time being do not be too worried. It seems at the moment as if the Russians are not planning more attacks in our section.” While Udke sought to comfort his wife, he could not mask his emotions with statements such as “We hold to Nietzsche’s words that what does not kill us only makes us stronger,” and “This morning the weather picked up again, it is bitterly cold, and the storm persists.”<sup>118</sup> Udke’s worldview had been changed by the events that

---

<sup>118</sup> Udke, 45-46.

had occurred thus far in the winter of 1941-1942, and it would only get worse before it became any better.

The diary entries of Hans Roth offer a highly intense depiction of the vicious struggle occurring in the East. Roth described fighting at and around the city of Obojan, Russia in January 1942. Roth described the scene of a seesaw battle on January 7:

A little bit later a heavy attack supported by tanks calls us to the northeastern part of the city. The Red hordes arrive, screaming a shrill "Hurrah." Mortars and tank shells transform our defensive position, the Kolchosa yard, within the shortest time into rubble. Half of the defenders are dead or wounded. Our artillery fires at a 52-ton caterpillar. But not one shell penetrates the thick armor plating. We want to despair. Now our second machine gun gives out due to a direct hit. Officer Nold is dead, the other two, who armed it, are heavily wounded. We demand reinforcement but they cannot come through because there is heavy fighting in the west as well as in the east. Finally, after 30 horrible minutes, a tank and an assault gun arrive, and the latter shoots down a Charkow tank. We are advancing our counterattack, and what a miracle: the Reds are retreating....Our losses today are damn high!<sup>119</sup>

Roth's vivid portrayal of the fighting outside of Obojan is the sort of primary source micro-historical narrative of combat situations which memoirs can rarely replicate. Roth describes the intensity of the moment and the toughness of the enemy, showing how desperate and deadly the war in the East had become for the Germans.

In a subsequent diary entry from January 8, Roth continued his description of the intensity and barbarity of the war. Roth describes the assault on a village called Strelezkaya near Belgorod, in which the Germans surprise attacked the enemy, stating: "Without mercy everything and everybody is gunned down or clubbed to death on their sleeping cots. The whole nightmare lasts about a half hour. Strelezkaya burns down to the ground, in every hut there are 20 to 30 dead Russians; the houses become places of

---

<sup>119</sup> Roth, 140-1.

cremation....Well you Asian pack, you certainly did not dream of that!”<sup>120</sup> Later that day, Roth wrote down his thoughts on the battle for the city of Obojan, in which the Soviets relentlessly attacked the German defensive positions. Roth remembered the evening’s events as follows:

Tonight our fate will be determined. At 20.00 hours the concentrated storm on the city begins. At different locations the enemy succeeds in breaking through; in bloody close combat he is beaten, breaks through again at different places, infiltrates the field hospital and causes a horrific bloodbath among the wounded. With limitless fury we force him back again, not being in control of our senses, we are shooting, stabbing and beating around us like in the throes of madness. On a ward in a side wing of the hospital there has been a horrible struggle. The Reds do not have any more hand grenades; with long sticks the Caucasians beat at us, with our rifles we force them towards the windows and throw them hand over feet out the windows into the yard. I look terrible, the hands are bleeding, the uniform is ripped, soiled with brain matter and dirt. A tank shell rips howling through the outer wall, a hand sized fragment rips the head off the body of my companion, nothing happens to me. Damned, am I immune?<sup>121</sup>

Given such terrible combat scenarios, it is no wonder that many soldiers had changing perceptions of the war. Some of the troops at the front began to explicitly note these altering attitudes in their letters and diaries. For example, soldier Otto Madl wrote a letter to his sister Fanny on January 16, 1942 in which he offered his opinions about what the costs of final victory might be. Madl stated:

I am of the opinion that the war will will take a long time and everything that is healthy and vigorous will be used, regardless of age. The final victory will be hard fought since everything has to be used, because the outcome means life or death, the longer the war lasts, the more bitter the fight will be. I may not be right, but such is my opinion.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 142-3.

Likewise, a shift is notable in Hans Roth, who in a January 15 diary entry described the enemy in admirable terms. Roth noted:

They are a crazy bunch, those Caucasians, Kyrgyzsians, and Mongols; stoically, they stay put in their snow dugouts when resistance is hopeless.... The immense Red losses give too easily the wrong impression that our fight here in the East is not that difficult. To the contrary; the true picture of the enemy goes like this: tough, stubborn, and malicious.<sup>123</sup>

While Madl expressed his altering perceptions of the war in terms of the outcome and costs, Roth began to have an equally important shift regarding his views of enemy combatants.

There is significant evidence in soldiers' writings at the beginning of 1942 that the troops were suffering a great deal of physical and mental anguish as a result of mounting pressure from the Soviets. For example, one soldier Rudolf Oehus in a letter to his family wrote about how the Russians attacked "every day with heavy losses." Oehus noted that the Soviets were using "Siberian troops" in these fresh offensives, and hoped his unit would be "relieved" at some point.<sup>124</sup> In a similar tone, Gustav Böker's letter to his parents addresses his father's concerns about his son's enlistment terms, and when the war might end. Böker maintained that there would be no talk of "surrender," and he agreed with his father that the war "this year is not yet over." However, Böker sought to reassure his father by suggesting that he expected to be finished by 1943.<sup>125</sup> Both of

---

<sup>122</sup> "Otto Madl an seine Ehefrau und seine Schwester am 16.01.1942 (3.2002.7163)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 20, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1160&tn\\_name=Langwasser](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1160&tn_name=Langwasser).

<sup>123</sup> Roth, 146.

<sup>124</sup> "Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 22. Januar 1942," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 18, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1637&tn\\_name=Artemowsk](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1637&tn_name=Artemowsk).

these letter excerpts reflect is a shifting mood amongst the troops in their dialogue with family members. While Oehus emphasizes the continual Russian attacks and hopes to be replaced by reinforcements, Böker focuses on his sense of duty and obligation to win the war no matter how long it would take.

The changes in mood and morale at the front coincided with the fact that the battles in the East were beginning to resemble the conflagrations of the First World War. Hans Roth made such a comparison in several diary entries from February 1942, in which he described the similarities and differences between the two conflicts. Roth wrote one entry on February 1, 1942 while stationed at Grasnoje:

The company leader of the infantrymen, a World War I veteran, and an old fighter of the Eastern Front, tells us about the old times. The present war is much more brutal than the Great War 25 years ago, for we are now encountering a fanatical enemy over there on the other side. No one surrenders; both sides will fight to the last bullet. More than anything though, is us being overcome right at this moment, due to the vastness of the space, by a feeling of utter abandonment; confidence in our own power is the only thing that gives us hope for victory. We can hardly count on help or support from our neighbors. We only possess the villages, while the fields in between them, where night after night, day after day, tough battles are fought, are a no-man's land. There is no well-defined positioning system like there once was during the Great War, because the ground was already hard as stone when the German advance was halted. Due to the lack of a contiguous front line, it is possible for the enemy to circumvent individual positions and attack us from the rear or from the front lines. To this, add the difficulty of the terrain, which is traversed by numerous gorges, offering favorable circumstances for the attackers.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> "Gustav Böker an seine Eltern am 28.1.1942 (3.2002.0966)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 19, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=612&tn\\_name=Debalzewo](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=612&tn_name=Debalzewo).

<sup>126</sup> Roth, 154-155.

In this first entry, Roth finds that the current conflict has little in common with the First World War, namely because of the difference in the ideology of the opponent, and also the fluidity of the combat situation. However, in a second diary entry dated February 24-28, Roth once again offered his perceptions on combat in comparison to World War One. Roth wrote:

What makes these defensive battles here in the east so hard and filled with deprivation is the sheer mass of men and material that the enemy throws at our front ruthlessly and relentlessly. It is the battle against the snow, cold, and ice. These are the difficult hours, when ammunition becomes scarce and when from the other side, more and new waves of men are thrown at us. . . . The winter battle during these months has become the Second World War for us. We have been forced into this defensive battle to encounter war in its harshest form, further amplified by the brutality of the enemy. Poland and France cannot be compared to the years of the Great War. Even we young soldiers know this from our own experience. The Eastern campaign, however, and especially the weeks spent here, would stand up to any comparison with the intensity of the Great War.<sup>127</sup>

Roth's analysis of the overall military situation is striking. Not only does he emphasize the inhumanity of the daily struggle for existence, but he also maintains that the campaigns in Poland and France were nothing in comparison to the defensive battles in the East. The only thing remotely similar to the chaos of the Eastern Front was the First War World, a fact which must have been shattering for the psyches of those who survived 1914-1918, as well as a blow to the morale of those who believed in the invincibility of *Blitzkrieg* warfare.

The sense of doubt echoed in the mentalities of some German soldiers also included questioning their capabilities in military service. Most of those men sent off to

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 162-4.

Russia were not professional soldiers but rather the byproduct of general conscription.<sup>128</sup> Gerhard Udke was a schoolteacher before being called up by the Wehrmacht, and in a letter to his wife on February 21, 1942 he openly complains about his situation. Udke stated that “the war may take years,” and because of this “educated” people such as himself would fall into “dullness,” robbed of “any higher intelligence.” For Udke, being in the army meant he could not “show my ability,” for after all, what did he know about “machine guns.”<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Pfc. Wolfgang Knoblich displayed a similar sense of doubt about his abilities in the army. In his diary on April 3, 1942, Knoblich wrote that he felt “as if a stone were pressing on my heart,” and also he had a feeling of “embarrassment and maladjustment” in regards to being a soldier. Due to his inability to fit in, he came to the conclusion that “my only enjoyment has been to recollect the past.”<sup>130</sup>

Even if the lack of confidence displayed by Udke and Knoblich in their writings was unusual or an anomaly, many other soldiers also expressed that they wanted the war to end quickly and to return home to their families above all else. Alois Scheuer, a soldier in the 197<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of Army Group Center, emphasized the impact of continuing weather problems in a February 26, 1942 letter, writing “the snow is still about ca. 50-60 cm. high,” but also hoped that in a “few weeks” it would be gone and then the “warm spring sun shines.”<sup>131</sup> For Anton Böhrer, as late as March 17, 1942 the

---

<sup>128</sup> Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*: (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 159.

<sup>129</sup> Udke, 51.

<sup>130</sup> *True to Type*, 56.

<sup>131</sup> Scheuer, *Briefe aus Russland*, 60-1.

winter weather was still a grave concern, as he was plagued by “cold snowstorms” and “totally frozen” conditions.<sup>132</sup> Scheuer wanted more than anything to be home with his family, as he noted in his letter from February 26, 1942, “let us always maintain hope for a good outcome of the war and for a speedy, happy reunion at home.”<sup>133</sup> Scheuer further stressed this view on March 10, 1942, writing, “How beautiful it would be, if the war were ending soon and one could be at home with his family again.” However, even Scheuer had his doubts about Germany’s chances, stating, “We received replacements this week from the Reich. They are all old people over 40, with whom no war can be won.”<sup>134</sup> Given the stresses of climactic conditions and battle weariness coupled with images of aged reinforcements being sent to the front, it is no wonder that some soldiers had doubts about the war and also longed ever more so to return home quickly and safely.

However, the war against Germany was only going to get worse instead of better, in part because of the increasing Allied bombing campaign against the Reich, and also the growing partisan threat in the occupied Soviet Union.<sup>135</sup> These fears were reflected

---

<sup>132</sup> “Anton Böhner an seine Schwester und seinen Vater am 17.03.1942 (3.2002.0889),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed on June 25, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=848&le\\_fulltext=anton](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=848&le_fulltext=anton).

<sup>133</sup> Scheuer, 60-1.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 61-2.

<sup>135</sup> The city of Cologne was carpet bombed by the British in May 1942, displacing over 100,000 inhabitants and destroying many buildings, roads, and other structures. For more information see Earl Beck, *Under the Bombs: The German Home Front, 1942-1945*, (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 1-2; In regards to the growing partisan problem in the occupied East, it must be noted that the German failures of 1941 coupled with their brutal treatment of Soviet prisoners of war and the civilian population, contributed in the rise of guerilla activities in 1942. For more information, see Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans*, (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2004), 108-112.



in Wehrmacht soldiers' writings on the eve of the new Nazi offensive of 1942. For example, Heinz Sartorio wrote to his sister on May 5, 1942, responding to the topic of the effects of the bombing of Berlin and the damage done to houses. Sartorio proceeded to describe how the effects of the war were causing a "terrible drop in morale," and how people had "no faith and no hope any more."<sup>136</sup> Another major concern amongst troops would be the growing partisan danger behind the lines, as emphasized also by Heinz Sartorio on June 27, 1942. Sartorio noted that "for many the frequent looming danger is sometimes quite great." Sartorio particularly emphasized those "who stand at deserted posts and are constantly threatened by guerillas." Sartorio described a potential partisan force of around "10,000 men" in his area, stating that they received "supplies by air" and could be "regarded as regular troops" given their equipment.<sup>137</sup> The vulnerability felt by the German Sartorio regarding the bombings at home, the dwindling of morale, and of hostile partisan forces all provide evidence of the changing face of the war in the East for the average soldier. Now they were facing an Allied coalition which would not stop until Nazi Germany was destroyed, and the Soviet Union would do whatever it took to retrieve its lost lands and avenge itself for the atrocities committed by the occupying forces.

On the anniversary of the invasion of the U.S.S.R. in 1942, the Germans were little closer to defeating their Communist foe than they had been in 1941. While the

---

<sup>136</sup> "Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 5.5.1942 (3.2002.0827)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed on June 27, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=230&le\\_fulltext=sartorio](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=230&le_fulltext=sartorio).

<sup>137</sup> "Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 27.6.1942 (3.2002.0827)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed on June 27, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=246&le\\_fulltext=sartorio](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=246&le_fulltext=sartorio).

drive to the Caucasus in the summer and fall would bring renewed beliefs about an end to the war, there were many doubts about what might transpire in the weeks and months ahead. Gustav Böker aired these concerns to his parents on June 22, 1942, providing a feeling of opportunities lost and waning hopes for a quick end to a war of attrition:

One year ago today we entered into Russia. I can tell you, that then was a long day. At 9 o'clock we went over the Bug. And today we are in the Worker's Paradise for one year now. Who would have thought that back then? Like many others, I had guessed about ca. 4 weeks of war. And how different has everything turned out. Nobody expected Russia to have such military power. I think, if someone would have said to us on 22.6.41, 'In one year you will still be in Russia,' we would have called them crazy. Now it has become a reality. We are still in Russia. And who knows for how long.<sup>138</sup>

The young lance-corporal Böker stands as the voice of a generation on June 22, 1942, those who survived the first year of invasion only to face another military campaign with promises by the regime to end the war. Those promises would only result in forlorn hopes, as the German Army would slowly meet its end at places like Stalingrad, and men like Böker would perish on the battlefield in the years to come.

#### *5.4. Conclusions*

The time period between Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 and Operation Blau in June 1942 represents a series of major paradigm shifts in military history. Nazi Germany went from being on the verge of nearly destroying the Soviet Union to almost facing a rout in the winter 1941-1942, until the Soviet offensives floundered and the Wehrmacht prepared its own plans for June-July. The psychological impact of this up

---

<sup>138</sup> "Gustav Böker an seine Eltern am 22.6.1942 (3.2002.0966)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed June 29, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=614&le\\_fulltext=boker](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=614&le_fulltext=boker).

and down struggle must have been extremely unnerving for German soldiers, some of who remembered the failures of the First World War, and others who counted on the promises of the Nazi regime to come true. Soldiers' writings from the front reflect the initial confidence in victory in 1941, and then, at least in some cases, show a significant shift in the mentality of troops who began to question the accuracy of their propaganda, as well as the projected hopes for a quick and decisive victory.

While it is difficult to evaluate the inner voice of the troops at the front, whether it be their day to day psychological status or even their general mood, certain conclusions can be drawn after carefully reviewing selections of soldiers' letters and diaries from the front. One theme that must be noted is that troops, from the very start of the military campaign in the east, were constantly exposed to propaganda materials disseminated by the regime and the army. While these resources varied in their content and scope and impacted soldiers differently, the levels to which Germans at the front were affected by propaganda should be taken far more seriously by scholars when attempting to evaluate the motives, attitudes, and actions throughout the war. Conversely, if we were to argue that propaganda had no major impact whatsoever, then we would have to believe that the Nazis not only failed in their efforts to provide media sources to troops at the front, but also that the majority of the troops did not read, listen, or watch such propaganda from 1941-1945. This I believe requires far more of a suspension of rational thought than my conclusion that German soldiers were heavily indoctrinated by the Nazi regime throughout World War II, with varying degrees of impact.

The other two themes examined in this chapter represented contrasting images of the German soldier. On one side, there is the arrogant and buoyant Nazi soldier whose trust in Hitler and belief in the *Endsieg* came across rather openly in countless letters and diary entries. However, the other face of German soldiers was the more human and fragile side, the result of daily life and death situations, fatigue, and the setbacks of the winter 1941-1942. This contrasting image of these soldiers represents an important lesson in understanding the German troops of this period. The duality of human beings becomes ever more apparent through the transformation of soldiers' mentality during 1941-1942. There were many types of soldier on the Eastern Front, whether they were ideologues or dilettantes, militants or pacifists, Nazis or anti-Nazis. This helps to explain why at least some Germans were less sure of victory in 1942, planting the seed of doubt which came to full blossom in 1943.

## Chapter Six

### **“Furlough is the only escape:” Shifting Mentalities during the Stalingrad Campaign, 1942-1943**

On the inside, we are burned out; on the outside, beaten. There used to be a time when hours of fighting were followed by hours of quiet. That time is over. Sun, moon, and blazing fire all share in illuminating this work of destruction and the slaughtering of people. At times you eat whatever you have, carry your ammunition, or rest for a moment on the ground in the cover of a crater. Our faces have become black and haggard. These days, they are never plump and round, allowing the drudgery of the 24 hour days to be seen in them.<sup>1</sup>

—Sergeant Hans Roth, Journal entry, September 16, 1942.

The battle of Stalingrad has often been described as the turning point of the Second World War, primarily because it resulted in the destruction of the German Sixth Army. While countless lives were lost on the Nazi and Soviet sides of the 1942-1943 campaign, the effects of the struggle upon the individual soldier have often been overshadowed for the sake of operational histories or tales of bloody combat. This chapter looks beyond the military history and fighting lore of Stalingrad by examining the major changes in German soldiers' attitudes from the spring 1942 through the

---

<sup>1</sup> Hans Roth, Christine Alexander, *Eastern Inferno: The Journals of a German Panzerjäger on the Eastern Front, 1941-1943*, (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2010), 190.

destruction of the Sixth Army in January-February 1943. The writings of Wehrmacht men reveal how some of the biased perceptions of Russia and Communism altered from the 1941 period, and overwhelmingly what changed more was the morale of the German Army and their evaluation of the Red Army.<sup>2</sup> Many German troops developed a fatalistic outlook regarding the war over the course of the battle, and with the defeat at Stalingrad very few had confidence in a triumphant victory for National Socialist Germany against the Soviet Union. Instead, most simply hoped for a lasting peace that would allow them to return to the Fatherland and rebuild their lives, their homes, and their sense of humanity after nearly two years of dehumanizing warfare.

One of the major findings of this chapter's research falls within the realm of a social-psychological approach to understanding Germany's soldiers. Writings by troops at the front reveal patterns that mirror numerous symptoms of traumatic stress associated with intense combat, as well as an attack on the identity of the soldiers themselves through a breakdown of their pre-existing worldview. According to Nigel Hunt, war trauma occurs when "the threat is sufficiently prolonged or intense," resulting in the overwhelming of the "body's resources." This traumatic stress can result in "permanent changes in the physiology and mental state of the individual," causing damage to the person's psyche and forcing them to develop mechanisms to deal with traumatic memory.<sup>3</sup> While this chapter is not specifically concerned with post-traumatic stress disorder or a detailed psychological profile of German troops, by examining the

---

<sup>2</sup> Note: All translations of German materials in this chapter are by the author of the dissertation, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War, and Trauma*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

evidence of soldiers' writings it is apparent that the failures of 1942-1943 resulted in a paradigm shift in the overall war situation as well as the ideas and points of view for men at the front.

The organizational structure of this chapter will be similar to that of chapter four, namely through the use of thematic categories to emphasize key aspects of German mentality during the period of July 1942-February 1943. Among the themes to be discussed include perceptions of Russia, views of the Red Army, and the changing outlook of soldiers due to the conditions at the front. These themes reveal that while some German soldiers clung to the ideological components of the Third Reich's mentality regarding the Soviet Union and the justifiable nature of the war, many others paid more attention to their daily survival and wrote extensively about the changing war situation in their letters and diaries. Since the war was taking a drastic turn for the worse for the Germans over the course of 1942-1943, the soldiers of the Wehrmacht developed a mindset that clung to a hope for peace with the Allies and an end to the war. No one wanted to consider the scenario of a defeated and ruined Germany occupied by the Soviet Union, so most continued to fight ferociously against the hated and feared Communists to the bitter end.

### *6.1. Humanizing the Untermensch: Perceptions of Russia and Communism, 1942*

A transformation of the German fighting man on the Eastern Front was occurring over the course of 1942 as a result of an extended period of duty in a foreign land. In 1941, soldiers were trained to believe that the Soviet Union and its people were barbaric *Untermenschen*, whose inferior cultural and racial status allowed them to be ruled by a

Communist dictatorship dominated by Jews. However, since Nazi propaganda did not always tell the truth about the rest of the world, the war actually served as a testing ground for the efficacy of Germany's xenophobic ideology. Interestingly, some German soldiers actually came to perceive the peoples of the East in a much different manner, though stereotypes and a superiority complex continued to dominate much of their rhetoric.

In order to accurately examine the changes in perceptions regarding Russia, it is important to look at source materials from throughout the year 1942. This allows us to see if there was any pattern of alterations from month to month, or if the thought processes of soldiers were simply random and arbitrary. This section argues that Germany's extended stay in the Soviet Union forced the troops to develop different views of the local populace than those experienced upon the initial invasion. An invading army became an occupying force, changing fortunes in the war, and a variety of conditional factors proved important in altering the outlook of the Wehrmacht men.

There are a variety of episodes recounted in soldiers' letters about experiences between Germans and non-Germans in the East. For example, one soldier Karl Nünninghoff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division wrote a letter to his parents on January 9, 1942 about his time spent in a Russian village. Nünninghoff described it as follows:

The "master" of this house, in which I am billeted, is a 20 year old boy, he no longer has a father and his mother and sister were deported together by the Russians, and he now lives with a refugee family together here, which has adopted him. If I am to be honest, I must say that I do not regret that I have already been here four days, because every evening he has invited over his friends and the most beautiful girls of this city, who are very sweet, and with whom I have good relations. We sang and talked to some girls who could speak German, then we played games until the



end of the night, it was really nice. The boy told me last night, that if I should ever come back here again, then all the girls would come back once more. Every evening we sat together with 7 girls and 5 boys all aged 18 to 22 years old. Everybody told something about how they knew each other and then we shared about how beautiful it is in Germany compared to Russia. Thus I made myself popular in these happy groups. On the first day the girls were a little afraid of us because they had been told that we would all behave like savages, but now being together has become a matter of course. If I am still here tonight, they will all come back here, and again we will talk about sing with guitars and balalaika music, which sounds completely fabulous, all that would be needed was a radio then everything would be there. Thus I have told you about my experiences again....<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to the belief that all relations between Germans and Russians were terrible, it appears that some soldiers actually adapted quite well to their surroundings and even made friends with the locals. While these relationships were temporary and largely artificial due to the nature of the war, it is interesting to note that the young Nünninghoff (born in 1920) expressed several unique ideas through his letter. Not only did he feel the need to write to his parents about his warm relations with young male and female Russians, but he also expressed the typical ethnocentric approach of many German soldiers when comparing Germany to Russia. Overall, one could argue that Nünninghoff's cordial dealings with the locals suggests that at least some Wehrmacht men looked beyond the propaganda and treated people as human beings.

Another soldier Hans Albring of the 199th Infantry Regiment wrote a letter to his friend Eugen Altrogge on January 25, 1942 describing his dealings with the local population. Albring's sentiments suggest that the Russian people could be very kind and generous to the occupying German forces. Albring wrote:

---

<sup>4</sup> "Karl Nünninghoff an seine Eltern am 9.1.1942 (3.2008.1388), "*Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 2, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=196&tn\\_name=Stalingrad](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=196&tn_name=Stalingrad)

It angers me when I see how inadequately equipped our comrades are for a Russian winter. Even the Russians notice. Yesterday three women carried a soldier who had keeled over into a house. They massaged him from top to bottom...He would have screamed terribly, but instead he repeatedly said thank you because, as explained by a woman, they gave him socks and gloves and he was very grateful. Actually I know a lot of people behave very well towards the natives.....They give whatever they have: bread and some salt, milk and cucumber, a very poor woman took us to her fireplace and gave us two hard breadcrusts. It was literally the last thing she had and was heartbroken that we did not eat them. Our own food is excellent, and since I do not smoke I trade my tobacco for sugar, eggs and butter, our menu is rather diverse and creates jealousy. But one must eat well in the cold. On guard duty, there is little news, only old people and repeatedly young girls invite you over to the fireplace, you must be careful to keep your head during the ordeal. The hospitality of the Russians is entirely genuine and is very helpful.<sup>5</sup>

Albring's commentary provides yet another interesting view of Russo-German relations behind the frontlines. Despite cultural differences, the civilian and military population peacefully coexisted under certain circumstances. Despite the Nazi regime's attempts to prevent relations between its Aryan soldiers and Russian women, both Nünninghoff's and Albring's letters suggest something else entirely.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the regime did not do much to enforce its laws forbidding sexual contact with the enemy and *Sittlichkeitsdelikten* (crimes against morality), with only 5,349 German men ever convicted for sexual violations, sodomy, forbidden intercourse, and abortions.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> "Hans an Eugen am 25.1.1942 (3.2002.0211)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 2, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=935&le\\_keyword=Belgien](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=935&le_keyword=Belgien)

<sup>6</sup> For more information about the problematic sexual relations between German soldiers and the Russian civilian population, see David Raub Snyder's *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht*, (Lincoln, Neb: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Laura R. Cohen, *Smolensk under the Nazis: Everyday Life in Occupied Russia*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 225; By comparison, there were 1.5 million convictions for desertion, self-mutilation, and undermining military morale (Ibid).

Yet it must be noted that such cordiality was likely superficial at best, especially given the violent and repressive nature of German occupation policies, as well as their blatant superiority complex. For example, Karl Nünninghoff's beliefs about the Reich's greatness in comparison to the Soviet Union can be seen in another letter to his parents from March 26, 1942. Nünninghoff wrote:

A good thing, that you do not need to live like the Russians and Ukrainians, when I tell you everything later, you will not believe it. Now reports for the Ukrainian population are sent over the radio from Germany, appealing to boys and girls, about the men and women who went to work in the Reich. Here in Makejewka alone already 2,000 girls are working as telephone operators, kindergarten teachers and who know what else in the Reich, not to mention the boys and men, to work and to witness how beautiful we have it in Germany, compared to their "paradise."<sup>8</sup>

One finds a pattern in Nünninghoff's ideology from his January 9 letter and the letter from March 26. In both cases, he alludes to the inferiority of the Soviet Union in comparison to Nazi Germany. While in the January 9 letter he praises the Russian civilians he stayed with, in his March 26 letter it is clear that he believes many socio-cultural stereotypes in regards to Soviet Russia.

Despite the prevalence of ethnocentrism among some of the German soldiers, there was also a growing level of respect towards the Soviet peoples. For example, Pfc. Wolfgang Knöblich of the 513th Infantry Regiment wrote in his diary on April 1, 1942 about his impressions of the Ukraine. Knöblich commented on what he found in Kharkov and the surrounding areas, stating: "Both in Kharkov and here in our quarters

---

<sup>8</sup> "Karl Nünninghoff an seine Eltern am 26.3.1942 (3.2008.1388)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 2, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=214&tn\\_name=Stalingrad](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=214&tn_name=Stalingrad)

we, to our great surprise, have found books on mathematics, physics, English and ancient history which attest to high mental culture. These are real cultural values. Evidently they did pay attention to public education.”<sup>9</sup> Another soldier, Eberhart Becker of the 12th Infantry Division, wrote a letter to his parents on April 17, 1942 describing living conditions in Russia. Becker noted:

Now we have moved to our new landlords, the respectable Panjes (Russian farmer). I moved with my section group into one of the houses, which consists entirely of two rooms, an entrance hall which serves as a storeroom for some equipment or as a stable for a miserable cow, and a living room in which the whole family resides, and where everything is done, cooking, sleeping, and so forth. When we arrived in our hut, the husband was laying with his wife and child on a single bed, the grandmother and the grandfather with an approximately 12 year old boy on the stove, and took no further notice of us. We prepared a bundle of straw and hewed it, as tired as we were. The next morning we woke up, to our great surprise being eaten by vermin. Up to now I luckily have been spared, but things can always change. The population is friendly and quite hospitable, and we try not to scare them unnecessarily. Amusing communication attempts happen on both sides, but armed with a soldier’s dictionary, we can make do.<sup>10</sup>

Another soldier Heinz Sartorio of the 18<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division wrote a letter to his sister Elly in Berlin on May 20, 1942, in an attempt to provide an image of the Soviet Union as succinctly as possible. Sartorio states that he is providing an accurate if incomplete view of the East, confirming many of the suppositions made by Nazi propaganda. Sartorio wrote:

One more thing: You will now get my report on Russia and the comparisons of National Socialist Germany + Bolshevik Russia. I want to note, that you can give full credence to the newspaper reports on Russia, even if there is a lot of propaganda. It is really terrible, not only now, but

---

<sup>9</sup> *True to Type: A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians, Collected on the Soviet-German Front*, (London: Hutchinson, 1945), 56.

<sup>10</sup> “Eberhart Becker an seine Eltern am 17.4.1942 (3.2002.0225),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 2, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=222&le\\_keyword=Russland](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=222&le_keyword=Russland)

rather also in the past. For reports on the population, many things can be found, although it is not enough to provide a rounded picture. But something as this is consistently stated: Foods, chocolate, alcohol + other luxury items were in great abundance. When a famine broke out, it was due to transportation difficulties. For pleasure + amusements were also abundantly provided for. Working hours were very low but strictly adhered to. Unauthorized absence=sabotage+severe penalties. Travel prohibitions+passport restrictions both at the county or zone levels. Apartments terrible and inhumane by European standards. Roads in great condition. Railway lines amply planned and presently are already constructed. Everywhere large industrial + agricultural production increases. Plenty of foreign trade. But any progress has been exploited for military purposes. The people had bread + games, but otherwise lived poor + depressed, because except for food + entertainment lacked everything including housing, furniture, appliances + household items, clothing, and so forth were scarce + expensive. The proletariat + youth were apparently for the government, but older people, and those who reached a higher standard of living + freedom, were against it. It is interesting to draw a comparison between Germany + Russia and it is pleasant, if one considers German unity, where one people stands united behind its Führer, because it knows that he will lead us through the imposed war in order to give people back their freedom and a more beautiful and better life.<sup>11</sup>

Sartorio's lengthy "report" about the Soviet Union attempts to provide an accurate understanding of conditions before German occupation. However, Sartorio does not attempt to explain what conditions were like under Nazi oppression, nor does he go very far with his comparisons between the two dictatorial states. What is available then is a skewed view of an occupied nation, reliant upon questionable sources of information to base his judgements while attempting to reaffirm the validity of Nazi news sources.

Sartorio's letter to his sister Elly from May 20, 1942 continued, however, with an anti-Communist and racist rant regarding the war and the Reich's enemies. This excerpt gets to the heart of Sartorio's ideological inclinations, proving that he was a supporter of

---

<sup>11</sup> "Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 20.5.1942 (3.2002.0827)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=233>

the National Socialist party's beliefs. Sartorio wrote about how "...England + the Judeo-plutocratic capitalism" were supporters of Russia "...not because it has particular sympathy for Bolshevism," but because "England wants to prolong the war without their own serious sacrifice, in the hopes that Russia + Germany wear each other out..."<sup>12</sup>

Other soldiers tried to explain to their families back home that not all Russians were so bad after all, though one had to be careful not to give the wrong impression either. One instance of this was a letter by Otto Madl from July 20, 1942, who was stationed in Russia somewhere near the city of Dorogobuzh on the upper Dnieper between Smolensk and Vyazma. Madl, who primarily wrote letters to his sister and his wife, described how soldiers could forget about notions of "love" in Russia, because: "...you are lucky if you ever have some time off." Madl seemed to be attempting to console his wife about stories of soldiers mixing with the locals, though he obviously realized his wife would not believe soldiers did not have time for love in Russia, writing: "Not that you believe, that in Russia all women and girls are half savage people, on the contrary, they are dressed just like in Germany, even with bobbed hair..." Madl then humanized the Russian people some more to his family, stating the following: "The people here are not all godless, a portion is also religious but it was forbidden by the Russian state and all the churches closed. But do not worry, I remove myself from the population at night and deal with them only as far as I need to and no more, for they are still our enemies."<sup>13</sup> Madl's letter reads as though it were a badly written apology note,

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Otto Madl an seine Familie am 20.07.1942 (3.2002.7163)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 3, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1164&tn\\_name=Mstislawl](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1164&tn_name=Mstislawl)

with various statements suggesting he found Russian women to be attractive, god fearing people just like in Germany. While one cannot truly know his intentions or actions, it is clear that his perceptions of the Soviet peoples were far more complex than Nazi propaganda distortions.

These mixed messages sent by soldiers to their loved ones or written in their diaries represent contrasting *Fremdbilder* (images of the other). Lieutenant Eugen Altrogge of the 587th Infantry Regiment, 327th Infantry Division wrote a letter to his friend Hans Albring on July 18, 1942, discussing these dual representations of Russia. Altrogge was puzzled by an episode he had with a beggar, and he used this incident to describe his own *Fremdbild*:

Just now a scene, that I have experienced for the first time here: a Russian begged for a piece of bread with incomprehensible words. We had some of our final pieces from breakfast. He took them humbly smiling and twice struck with the sign of the cross. Russia, incomprehensible with your two faces: the humble, faithful mask and the merciless mask of the devil. Was it not always predisposed to two faces? Let us hope that we can help, that the cruel traits can be transformed to a peaceful appearance.<sup>14</sup>

In a similar example, Otto Madl passed through the city of Dorogobuzh, where he witnessed the the results of Soviet anti-Christian policies that had been carried out there. Madl stated in a letter to his sister on July 14, 1942 that: “....there are five churches in existence, but all previously ruined by the Russians, there are machines inside, there were workshops, only the buildings and a few paintings are still readily identifiable, I

---

<sup>14</sup> “Eugen an Hans am 18.7.1942 (3.2002.0210),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 1, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=926&le\\_keyword=Polen](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=926&le_keyword=Polen)

cannot describe how the Bolsheviks defaced the holy icons....<sup>15</sup> In this instance, Madl seems to argue that the Bolsheviks and Russians are one in the same, whereas Altrogge found that Russia had “two faces,” one of righteousness and one of wrongdoing. Perhaps both soldiers believed in similar ideas about Russians, especially given Madl’s other correspondence, nevertheless it brings up numerous issues including anti-Bolshevik rhetoric, “othering,” and socio-cultural differences as well.

The complexity of soldiers’ perceptions of the Soviet Union likely stems from a number of factors: geographic and demographic diversity in the East, situational and conditional experiences for the troops themselves, and the impact of stereotypes and misinformation as well. Thus, while Otto Madl and Heinz Sartorio may have found both good and bad qualities among the people and conditions in Russia, these may or may not actually correspond with reality, rather moreso with reality as they perceived it. For example, the letters of Hans-Albert Giese, who took part in the summer offensive with Army Group South in 1942, reveals the attitudes of a soldier who saw the Soviet Union as a poor and backwards place. On July 20, 1942 he noted that the homes in the area in which he was stationed were “wretched hovels“ no different than “anywhere else in Russia.“<sup>16</sup> On July 27 he also discussed living conditions, noting:

The people live as primitively here as everywhere else in this ‘Soviet paradise.’ Their huts are made of wood or wicker and are smeared with mud or cow dung. The oven for cooking is outside in the yard. Cow dung and sod peated and dried serves as a furnace. The people chew on

---

<sup>15</sup> “Otto Madl an seine Schwester am 14.07.1942 (3.2002.7163),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 2, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1163&le\\_keyword=USA](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1163&le_keyword=USA)

<sup>16</sup> Konrad Elmshäuser & Jan Lokers, Eds., “*Man muß hier nur hart sein...*”: *Kriegsbriefe und Bilder einer Familie, 1934-1945*, (Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 1999), 181.



sunflower seeds all day. Antediluvian life may actually not have been much different.<sup>17</sup>

Giese's depiction of Russia as "antediluvian" and primitive shows a sense of socio-cultural misunderstanding and a seemingly lack of compassion towards the people.

However, other soldiers found the lifestyle and countenance of the Eastern European citizenry to be quaint and likable. Alfred Marx of the *Landeschützen-Bataillon* 480 wrote a letter to his wife while stationed in the Caucasus region near the river Kuban on August 22, 1942. In the letter, Marx favorably depicted the environment and people he saw there, writing: "The area where we are now is much better than the central section. It is very fertile land and the people are very hospitable to us and are glad that the Bolsheviks have been removed." In addition to his, Marx and his comrades took advantage of the bountiful land, which he described as follows: "Here there is a lot of fruit. Apples, pears, plums, eggs and so forth, what we never had in the central section. We are eating a lot of it and the people give it gladly. In general, the German Wehrmacht has made a very big catch with the large herds and fertile soil that has fallen into our hands."<sup>18</sup>

Soldier Otto Madl was a part a Security Regiment of Army Group Center in 1942, and as a result he had frequent exposure to the civilian population. Madl spoke frankly about his opinions of the locals, finding them more peculiar than abhorrent and

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>18</sup> "Alfred Marx an seine Ehefrau und Kinder am 22.8.1942 (3.2002.0230)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 3, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=259&le\\_keyword=Kriegsstimmungen:%20%C3%84ngste](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=259&le_keyword=Kriegsstimmungen:%20%C3%84ngste)

describing them in his letters home with particular respect. In a letter to his wife on August 29, 1942, Madl provided an excellent image of his worldview regarding the Soviet people: “I have been here three months now, but it is not exactly as it is portrayed in the Reich. I too was disappointed, but you always hear that the Russians are half-savage people, moreover, with you, because all the novels say so.“ Instead, Madl describes the Russians as ....“hardworking and decent poeple,“ many of whom were “just like us“ and also were “friendly to us.“<sup>19</sup> Madl works hard in this letter to dispell the myths portrayed about all Russians, going further into detail as follows:

The population is not adversely disposed to us, because Stalin was not good to them. The Russians are simply a poeple, who accept their fate as it comes, and are much more indifferent than we are. If someone dies, it is precisely that, they are dead, they take everything much easier than we do. Now to the women’s world, here you can find neat girls, with blonde hair, blue eyes, that could definitely afford to compete with those in Germany. And in clothing she could calmly be in a city, they wear the same shoes and clothes, and you see fine silk dresses also.<sup>20</sup>

For Madl, it must have been an important issue for him to explain to his wife in great detail the realities of life in the Soviet Union. Madl attempts to humanize those who the Nazis labored very hard to dehumanize as *Untermenschen*, proving that not all Germans believed all the propaganda they were told.

As the battle for Stalingrad raged on in the southern section of the Eastern Front, soldiers at other locations maintained defensive positions and had time to write about what they saw in their occupying duties. Lieutenant Hans-Joachim S. of the *Armee-*

---

<sup>19</sup> “Otto Madl an seine Ehefrau am 29.08.1942 (3.2002.7163),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 4, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1166&tn\\_name=Langwasser](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1166&tn_name=Langwasser)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*Nachrichten-Regiment* (Army Intelligence Regiment) 511, a part of Army Group Center, was stationed somewhere near Rzhev in 1942 when he wrote a letter to his wife about the situation at the front, his condition, and events taking place around him. The lieutenant wrote the following about his perceptions of Soviet Russia, offering some insights on the living conditions there during the war:

How beautiful is Germany, where everyone is taken care of, in which prosperity can be obtained by even the smallest of workers, and which is in contrast to here! Poverty, disease, misery, the dull languishing of the people arouses horror and also pride again and again. What is solely done for the soldiers is just shameful. One takes for granted and complains, when things are lacking at times. The Russians must do without everything, even in peacetime. Young children already have no joy in life, they walk with downcast eyes and look around in the dirt for something to eat.<sup>21</sup>

In civilian life, Hans-Joachim S. was a merchant in Berlin, and his background, as well as his low level officer ranking, reflects upon his ethnocentric disposition towards the people. The lieutenant blames all of the problems facing the Russian people solely on the Soviet state, without recognizing that the Germans had invaded the country, were living off the land, and had essentially occupied the region he was residing in for nearly a year. Interesting to note are his comparisons between Germany and Soviet Russia, providing a point of reference for him to make his value judgments regarding what is good and what is bad based upon life at home.

One fascinating journal entry by Hans Roth of the 299<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division describes the city of Voronezh and the surrounding area in September 1942, two months

---

<sup>21</sup> "Hans-Joachim S. an seine Frau am 31.08.1942 (3.2002.1214)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1026&tn\\_name=Glebocki%20\(Glebockie\)](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1026&tn_name=Glebocki%20(Glebockie))

after a major battle took place there. The battle, which took place from June 28 to July 24, was the first objective in Hitler's drive towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus.<sup>22</sup> Roth first described the city's former impressive industrial sector in the northern and northwestern parts of the city, stating the following in his journal on September 16, 1942:

All the way to the horizon one sees factory after factory, blast furnaces, and steel mills. The engineering works 'Komintern,' which used to have 10,000 workers, is now nothing but a pile of iron and bricks. Then there is the 'Elektrosignal' factory, which employed 15,000 workers, and the 'Dershinsky' factory, where each month 100 to 120 locomotives were built.<sup>23</sup>

Roth also described airport and airplane manufactories, stating: "Further to the west stand the sad, black skeletons of the huge burned out airplane hangars. Next to them are the airplane factories, which as you can imagine were gigantic, particularly when you read that 40,000 people used to work there. I could go on and on...."<sup>24</sup>

Later in the same journal entry, Roth transitioned to a discussion of the landscape in the area around Voronezh. Roth's interpretation of the surroundings are both vivid descriptive detail and telling of his ideas about the east. Roth noted on September 16, 1942: "The barren fields and plains extend for as far as the eye can reach. The roads are nothing more than wide paths of dust on a treeless wasteland. They have an eastern feel to them. The caravan roads of Mongolia must be similar."<sup>25</sup> Roth was not the only

---

<sup>22</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), 333-334

<sup>23</sup> Roth, 189.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 194-5.

soldier to find compare the Soviet Union to Asia. The previous month, soldier Hans Albring of the 246<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division stationed on the center section of the front, wrote a letter in August 1942 to his friend Eugen Altrogge in which he described Russian religious practices. In the letter, Albring specifically described the region he was in as the “Orient,” and found the Russians’ use of “beautiful icons”, “ancient sculptures,” and other traditional Orthodox rather quaint and fascinating from a Western perspective.<sup>26</sup> Together such sources as Roth and Albring reveal how geographical, cultural, and religious issues could play a role in soldiers’ perceptions of the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup>

In a similarly related topic regarding geography and connections between Russia and Asia, Wilhelm Moldenhauer of the 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was stationed along the “Tatar Wall” near Kotluban north of Stalingrad, and in a letter to his wife and children described his experiences with the Russian people there. The Tatar Wall is an ancient ten feet high earthworks which ran for about fifteen miles along the steppe. Once the wall was built to protect Russians from invading Mongols, but during the battle of Stalingrad it provided the Germans with cover by burrowing into the ground around it.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> “Hans Eugen in August 1942 (3.2002.0211),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=942&le\\_keyword=Belgien](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=942&le_keyword=Belgien)

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Vejas Liulevicius has stated that the German “myth of the East” had much to do with the trope of *Kultur* as opposed to barbarism and oppression in the East. It also has to do with how geography can take the form of “mythologized self-understanding,” including oppositional notions between the West and the East. In more recent history, the concept of Orientalism as argued by Edward Said “constituted a mysterious eastern realm to be mastered by western scientific knowledge.” Liulevicius further states that the “Germany myth of the East needs to be situated in a broader comparative context, as it is one of a variety of frontier myths and ideologies of a civilizing mission shared by a number of societies.” For more information, see Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4-6.

<sup>28</sup> William Craig, *Enemy at the Gates: The Battle for Stalingrad*, (New York: Reader’s Digest Press, 1973), 115.

Moldenhauer wrote on October 29, 1942 about how his unit was gathering water supplies with Russian *Hilfswillige* (voluntary helpers) outside of the city of Stalingrad: “We drove along the Tatar Wall, a huge rampart and ditch from ancient times. Although the fighting at this point is already far away, here there are still Russian corpses lying around slowly rotting or being destroyed by animals. The water hole is located in a deep gorge. There were already five trucks there, who all wanted to get water.”<sup>29</sup>

Moldenhauer then stated that he and his comrades “left the Russians there with canisters” so that they could see the “suburbs of Stalingrad.” Moldenhauer found that other than a “large church,” there was “...nothing else of the large city remained intact. A terrible scene of destruction.” Amidst this chaos, Moldenhauer found the sympathy for the people who endured all this death and destruction. Moldenhauer noted as follows: “Many sad images of the refugees who are leaving Stalingrad. Stooped carrying bundles and with children close by, they wander about and try to make their way through. An old man asked us for a hatchet. He then went over and hacked a dead horse for horsemeat from the loin. People are already going as far as eating dead horses.” The sights and sounds of total war appear to have deeply affected Moldenhauer, who could not believe the levels of devastation and the suffering of the people. In the end, he wrote: “What does this war bring but misery? And how thankful we can all be, that this war is not happening in our country. How grateful the entire German people must be that they are still getting their daily bread from the state.”<sup>30</sup> Moldenhauer’s association between

---

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Moldenhauer; Jens Ebert, *Im Funkwagen der Wehrmacht durch Europa: Balkan, Ukraine, Stalingrad; Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Wilhelm Moldenhauer 1940-1943*, (Berlin: Trafo, 2008), 266-7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 266-7.

the events in the Soviet Union and Germany are both ironic and saddening, because of course Germany had caused the war and therefore was responsible for all the wretchedness he witnessed. On the other hand, while he was thankful that the war was “not happening in our country,” the Allied bombing campaigns and the eventual invasion and division of Germany would prove this statement quite wrong by war’s end.

While some soldiers sympathized with the Russians, others such as Wolfgang Knoblich of the 294th Infantry Division found that he simply did not understand the country or its people. Knoblich discussed his impressions of Russia on October 3, 1942, stating:

....For weeks we have been marching through this country, but its plains do not gladden our hearts, do not make us rejoice, but only sadden us, make us homesick and indifferent to life. They leave an ineffaceable impression, an impression that always haunts you. And the people? They are just like the landscape. I simply do not understand Russian man enough to be able to characterize him. He is so unlike us....The endless Russian expanses not only cause us physical suffering but also oppress our souls. Sensitive people with sympathetic hearts are particularly affected by this. How much I have endured in this boundless, limitless land! How eagerly I have imbibed the eternally German spirit!....There is a vast difference between us Germans and the Russians. Their world is not our world. We shall never feel at home here and shall never understand them fully.<sup>31</sup>

For Knoblich, the “Russian man” was an alien entity to him, as foreign and perplexing as the geography and conditions surrounding the invading force. Knoblich emphasizes that there was a “vast difference” between Germans and Russians, and that somehow they lived in two separate worlds from each other. This is quite ironic considering that

---

<sup>31</sup> *True to Type*, 60-1.

Hitler wanted millions of Germans to relocate to Eastern Europe to colonize the region.<sup>32</sup>

One particular source, a pretentious but humorous letter by Heinz Sartorio, provides an extremely detailed view of life inside a poor peasant home in Soviet Russia. Sartorio, an insurance salesman from Berlin prior to the war, was a soldier in the 18<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division of Army Group Center stationed in the Orel region (near Kursk and Bryansk). Sartorio's letter to his sister from November 11, 1942 offers a sense of a soldier's nihilistic humor as well as a German's perceptions of life in the Soviet Union:

At the end of civilization: Yesterday we moved into our new quarters... Everywhere there are feces...Once you open the door, it falls over. The reason for this: An incredible stench, a disgusting vapor hits you and it takes it minute to air out....A small knee bend and you are through the door, which is padded on the outside with tow and burlap. Inside is a sweltering heat. A small iron stove burns. It stands in the middle of the room. In the left corner is the large oven....The entire space it occupies is 5 x 6 meters tall, so 26 meters remain. Now we are inside. Bravely I swallowed my breakfast for the second time and I slowly acclimated. Now I do an inventory of the inhabitants. To quickly survey: 1. Pan. An ancient looking man with a disheveled beard. Ragged and dirty 2. 3 Madgas. Women between 30 and 50 years old. One of them is pregnant. All ragged and dirty. 3. 2 women between 20 and 30 years old. Ragged and dirty. 4. 2 Panjenkis (young girls). Ragged and dirty. 5. Children of all types and sizes, including one infant. Three in total. Altogether 11 persons living here. Ragged dirty and stinking. In addition to the inhabitants: 1 Cat, 2 Gurrus (chickens), lots of bugs, lice, fleas and mice. The cattle and pigs have been stolen by the partisans, otherwise they would certainly still be in the cave. Nevertheless, the shack has one marvel: a wooden floor. 4 little windows are available. They are of course not open....they are so dirty that you cannot see out. There are furnishings: 1 table, a bench, several stools, 2 beds, and a bed with a murky white curtain, and a buffet (!). Then small appliances such as pots, oil lamps, and so forth. The whole place stands somewhat crooked, but this does not bother them. The reason is surely that it is on the edge of a valley. Stop, I forgot the pictures of saints with the furnishings. They are

---

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see Mark Mazower's *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe*, (London, England: Penguin Books, 2008), 204-222.



kitschy colorful prints that are glazed and surrounded with flamboyant gold plated rose frames. The eternal flame does not burn until further notice due to a lack of fuel. Another room exists. We refer to it as an orderly room. Unfortunately it has lost its roof except for a few loose boards. Therefore we must do without it and pitch our tents between the Russians, lice, cats, children, bugs, chickens and a large muck heap.... I went out for 10 minutes, to take a breather, soon I got used to the stench and remember nothing more....Now me and my belongings stink along with the Russians and I am feeling quite comfortable with that. Only I have a near constant headache. From time to time I even have to go air out. We are just very softened by civilization.<sup>33</sup>

Sartorio's account of quartering with Russian civilians is actually rather disturbing, both because the living conditions seem appalling, and also because of his arrogant views regarding the plight of the people in the Soviet Union. The soldier appears to exhibit very little sympathy for the people in this letter, instead describing them in a pejorative manner while making it clear that he finds Germans to be civilized and Russians to be barbarians. Thus, while the war and time spent in Russia may have changed some soldiers' views about the Soviets, for others, exposure to the people and environment seems to only have reconfirmed their pre-existing stereotypes and beliefs.

Despite the prejudicial and derogatory views of some, others had come to find that many Russians were in fact civilized people simply with a different way of life. Otto Madl's letter to a friend Seppel on December 17, 1942 discussed his impressions of a small village somewhere between Vyazma and Rzhev. Madl accosts his friend Seppel regarding his views of the Russian people, telling him that he always thought "the Russians are stupid," but in retort Madl states that: "Anyone who says that in the Reich, is himself rather stupid...." Madl provides a specific example for why the Russians were

---

<sup>33</sup> "Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 11.11.1942 (3.2002.0827)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=275>

not “stupid,” namely that there was “ten year of schooling” in which younger people learned “two languages.” Madl also argues: “The civilians are good to us and would give us their last, however they have only poverty and misery.” While Madl is by all means critical of the Bolsheviks and the “Soviet paradise,” he also recognizes that “in every country there are different customs and traditions.” In addition, he also attacks the notion that all Russians were atheists, stating: “I could not say, that the populace is godless.”<sup>34</sup>

Madl, like many of his comrades in arms, had the chance to experience firsthand what real life was like in the Soviet Union. While propaganda had inundated the German people for years with a black and white interpretation about horrors of Communism, the facts on the ground were quite different than what some had imagined it would be. Instead of godless savages roaming about the countryside, many Germans found sympathy for the ordinary people of Russia, especially given the plight of war and the poverty in rural areas. In the cities, life appeared far less harsh than on the steppe, with all signs of industrialization, education, and modernization. Though there were many faults to be found by the invading and occupying soldiers, overall there seemed to be a realization by many that Nazi propaganda was lying to the German people.

## *6.2. Myth versus Reality: Frontline Propaganda and Hoping for Victory*

One of the major arguments of this project has been that the distance between expectation and actuality is often measured only by the outcome of an event. For

---

<sup>34</sup> “Otto Madl an einen Freund am 17.12.1942 (3.2002.7163),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=116>

example, the view of the Second World War as a “good war“ for Americans is largely predicated on the end results: namely that the United States was victorious. For many years, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, mass carpet bombing, Japanese internment, and other atrocities were excused by the rationale of ends justifying the means or a might makes right attitude. In many ways, this kind of ideology existed on all sides of the war, including the German one, and it is the contention here that expectations and actuality played a significant role in the attitudes of soldiers in the 1942-43 period.

Everything was at stake by this stage of the war, with Hitler making an enormous gamble on the planned success of the Caucasus campaign. Propaganda continued to inundate the Germans at home and abroad, emphasizing the ideas of final victory in the war, perceptions of enemy combatants as dangerous but beatable, and a virulent hatred of Communism and Judaism. However, while propaganda played a role in providing misinformation to the troops, the realities of war at the frontlines helped to make up the soldiers own minds about the overall war situation. In the end, some soldiers continued to cling to a belief in final victory or a hope for a favorable peace settlement, whether because they were influenced by what the propaganda told them about the nation’s chances or, more likely, they simply could not fathom defeat in another World War.

In this section, it is important to first briefly discuss some evidence of the continued exposure to and impact of propaganda at the front in the second half of 1942. As previously discussed in chapter five, soldiers of the Wehrmacht had plenty of access to media materials supplied by the Nazi regime and military apparatus. For example, Karl Nünninghoff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division wrote a letter to his parents on July 9, 1942, in which he thanked them for sending him “three bundles of illustrated

newspapers.” The materials they sent, along with a letter from a close friend, made him “tremendously happy,” for which he offered his “heartfelt thanks.”<sup>35</sup> Information from the outside, whether it was newspapers, magazines, or letters from family and friends, were vital to the psychological connection of soldiers to the rest of the world.

While some soldiers received packages from home providing them with newspapers and other forms of Nazi propaganda sources, others were content with the materials supplied to them via the military. For example, Heinz Sartorio of the 18<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division wrote a letter to his sister Elly on August 4, 1942, in which he described the amount and types of propaganda available to his unit, as well as his interpretation of some of the information presented in them. Sartorio wrote:

I have plenty of reading material. More than time. We regularly receive many newspapers. I also have the library of about 150 books. I also receive magazines from comrades to view. But I have too little time to read and only regularly read “Das Reich.” In Nr. 29 v. 19.7. there is an interesting article by Goebbels; “The so-called Russian Soul.” I can only intermittingly read therefore I cannot comment in detail. But I believe that Goebbels is in general correct in what he writes about the Russians. The Russians do sometimes come across as animals. However, there are enough people amongst us who are not on a cultural level of much higher standing. We have, I think, completely false ideas about the cultural levels of the people.<sup>36</sup>

This is a highly informative letter written by Sartorio, in which he not only elucidates the breadth of exposure soldiers had to propaganda on the Eastern Front, but also how it could impact the individual in various ways. Sartorio finds the Goebbels article “The so-

---

<sup>35</sup> “Karl Nünninghoff an seine Eltern am 9.7.1942 (3.2008.1388),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=249&le\\_keyword=Russland](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=249&le_keyword=Russland)

<sup>36</sup> “Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 4.8.42 (3.2002.0827),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=253>

called Russian Soul” to more or less be correct in its assessments of the Russians, but he is also critical of the assumptions made about Germans believing they were on a much higher “cultural level.”<sup>37</sup>

Other propaganda sources also turn up in the writings of soldiers during the time period of the Stalingrad campaign. For example, soldier Georg Getrost who was serving with Army Group Center, noted in a July 13, 1942 letter that his military activities were “mentioned in the Wehrmacht report (Rzhew).” This likely pertained to Operation Seydlitz which began on July 2 and continued through July 13, in which the Germans launched a successful offensive to clear out the Soviet forces stationed around Rzhev.<sup>38</sup> Getrost also inferred from the *Wehrmachtbericht* that the Caucasus operation was going “quite good as long as it goes forward.” Then Getrost shifts his focus to wondering when the next *Sondermeldung* (special announcement) would come in regarding the situation in Africa or about the war at sea with submarines. Getrost stated that: “...one can barely wait to see what it is, because there are always guesses here with us.”<sup>39</sup> Given Getrost’s interest in the radio announcements and reports, it is likely that he and some of his comrades listened to them as often as they could, in order to be kept apprised of the latest information.

---

<sup>37</sup> For the original text of the Goebbels article, see “Die sogenannte russische Seele,” *Das eherne Herz* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943), 398-405; For a translated text of the Goebbels article, see “The So-Called Russian Soul,” *German Propaganda Archive*, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb11.htm>

<sup>38</sup> For more information, see Svetlana Gerasimova & Stuart Britton, *The Rzhev Slaughterhouse: The Red Army’s Forgotten 15-month Campaign against Army Group Center, 1942-1943*, (Havertown: Helion and Company, 2013), 59-65.

<sup>39</sup> Georg Getrost, Georg Leideritz, *Ich glaube hier in Rußland ist es genau so scheisse wie in Afrika" die Feldpost des Georg Getrost aus Zotzenbach/Odenwald von Oktober 1939 bis Juni 1944 ; 11.3.1919 - 25.6.1944*, (Berlin: Berlin Pro Business, 2008), 252.

During the battle of Stalingrad, one finds that the troops fighting in that region were primarily reliant upon radio and textual sources for information. One soldier, Senior Lieutenant Dr. Willy Meyer, in a letter from November 6, 1942 thanked his wife for sending newspapers to him. Meyer stated: “You can learn much, about what you are interested in” in regards to the newspapers.<sup>40</sup> Another soldier lance corporal Erwin Guhl stated in a letter from November 14 that he hoped for more news about the situation in Africa, even though he was in the midst of fighting the battle of Stalingrad. Guhl commented that: “...now and again we learn from a Wehrmacht report, but in the last few days I have not read more, about how hard it is in Africa, but one day we will find out something more.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps Guhl had a family member serving in Africa, or he was simply worried about the multi-front war developing against Germany. Either way, it proves that soldiers were desperate for outside news, and if they had to rely on official sources to get their information, then so be it.

Outside of Stalingrad, soldier Gerhard Udke wrote a letter to his wife on December 22, 1942 about the terrible weather conditions his unit was facing, and more importantly the news of events taking place at the front. Udke described the reasons for his and his comrades’ melancholy attitude as follows:

Not due to the weather alone is our mood unhappy: the news from the front is indeed anything but pleasant, if one reads between the lines of the Wehrmacht report. It is quite amazing what the Russians can still assemble, after they were allegedly annihilated. But all this thinking does not help, we will have to do out duty and we hope that the final victory will be for our cause...<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Jens Ebert, Ed., *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 55-56.

In this particular instance, Udke emphasizes that one has to read “between the lines of the Wehrmacht report” in order to figure out what was actually happening at the front. Thus even though soldiers were exposed to official propaganda sources on a daily basis does not mean they believed everything they heard, watched, or read. This level of cynicism only increased following the defeat at Stalingrad through the end of the war.

This cynicism would only increase once the soldiers of the Sixth Army found out that they were not going to be rescued from the Stalingrad pocket. One soldier private first class Max Breuer, wrote on December 27, 1942 about how the “OKW report” announced that there was still “continuous fierce fighting” in the Don region, yet there was nothing else of note to give him hope. Breuer wanted to hear something about “...whether the kettle is open,” and stated that: “We are all waiting for this message of liberation.” However, he was cognizant of the fact that it would “...probably not happen this year,” though he remained hopeful that: “The New Year will bring us good tidings.”<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, there would be no “good tidings” for the soldiers of the Sixth Army, who would mostly either die in the city of Stalingrad or in Soviet captivity.

By February 1943 the battle for Stalingrad was over, and with news of the German surrender there were countless letters written by soldiers on other sections of the front who had something to say about the events which followed. On February 18, 1943, the Minister of Propaganda Josef Goebbels made his infamous “Total War” speech at the Berlin Sport Palace, and the speech was broadcast twice on national radio, printed in

---

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard Udke & Gerwin Udke, *Schreib so oft du kannst: Feldpostbriefe des Lehrers Gerhard Udke, 1940 bis 1944*, (Berlin: JKL Publikationen, 2002), 106.

<sup>43</sup> Jens Ebert, Ed., *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 227.

all the newspapers, reprinted in pamphlets, and portions of the speech were included in newsreels. The speech was an attempt to stiffen German resistance after the defeat at Stalingrad, as well as to persuade Hitler to give him more power and to mobilize the war effort.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to his sister dated February 18, 1943, Heinz Sartorio described hearing the speech and the implications of Stalingrad for Germany. Sartorio wrote that he heard “...part of the Goebbels speech,” and noted that the *Völkischer Beobachter* stated it was “...a referendum on the war.” Sartorio argued that it was a “very interesting + the speech at the Sports Palace has caused an unusual stir among the comrades. In general, one is now politically + militarily very interested.”<sup>45</sup>

Sartorio’s commentary about the Goebbels’s speech and its impact at the front provides an excellent transition into the subject of soldiers’ hopes for a successful conclusion to the war. After all, Sartorio had noted in his February 18, 1943 letter that: “Well, we hope that the future brings us a lot of good. I believe in any case to an early peace.”<sup>46</sup> This statement came after the battle of Stalingrad, often called the turning point of the Second World War and the point where Germany had little chance of victory any longer. If even some Germans could still hope for an advantageous peace or even for triumph, than such sentiments likely had their roots in the sustained impact of propaganda, overconfidence in the Wehrmacht, and faith in Adolf Hitler.

---

<sup>44</sup> Randall Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2008), 112-113.

<sup>45</sup> “Heinz Sartorio an seine Schwester am 18.2.1943 (3.2002.0827),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=290&le\\_keyword=Berlin](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=290&le_keyword=Berlin)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



Throughout the months of the Stalingrad campaign from July 1942-February 1943, one can find some evidence of soldiers who continued to believe that the war would have a positive outcome. In the summer 1942, there were some German soldiers who believed that with a new offensive the war was winnable in the East. Theodor Körner of the 328th Infantry Division wrote a letter to his parents on July 18, 1942, in which he spoke about the German advances and plans to seize Stalingrad in the south. Körner's letter reveals the continued confidence of some men:

We are currently advancing with tanks to the south. I believe our goal is tentatively Stalingrad. At least that is what I heard from a tank crew. In the area the Russians are running so fast, that we cannot keep up with them with wheels. And our marches are not certainly not small (50-120 km). When will we be in Irak?...I just heard that Stalingrad had fallen? That would be great.<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, Hans-Albert Giese's letter to Frieda Giese on July 20, 1942 described in retrospect the battles of Rostov and Voronezh which netted Soviet troops in pockets. Giese described how in these "...battles of encirclement" he witnessed "how our tanks shot down Russian colossi." Giese attributed the destruction of Soviet heavy tanks to the Wehrmacht being better than the Red Army. Giese noted: "The German soldier is simply superior all-round."<sup>48</sup> For Giese, the offensive victories achieved provided a renewed sense of accomplishment and hope for an end to the war because of the dominance of German arms. In a subsequent letter on August 1, 1942, Giese described another victory against the Soviets: "Resistance has actually been broken very quickly as

---

<sup>47</sup> "Theodor Körner an seine Eltern am 18.7.1942 (3.2008.1387)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=251>

<sup>48</sup> Konrad Elmshäuser & Jan Lokers, Eds., "*Man muß hier nur hart sein...*": *Kriegsbriefe und Bilder einer Familie, 1934-1945*, (Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 1999), 179-181.

of late. I anticipate that we will go forward again either today or tomorrow. In our section very many Russian tanks have been destroyed in recent days and the prisoners moved in droves towards the rear.”<sup>49</sup> While these successes were not on the scale of those achieved in 1941, they might have provided Wehrmacht men with some confidence that the war could be won in 1942 or 1943.

On July 23, 1942, Army Group B began making its push for the Don River, but the Germans faced stiff Red Army resistance. This area, known as the Don bend, became the site of significant fighting in July-August 1942, and the stubborn Soviet defense meant the Germans were delayed getting to Stalingrad until August 23.<sup>50</sup> Wilhelm Moldenhauer of the 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was taking part in the fighting along the Don, and described his confidence in victory over the Soviets. He wrote on August 10, 1942: “The fighting in our section here in the Don bend is very hard. But eventually, the Russians will be completely destroyed. No one will likely escape from this cauldron. I am curious what tasks await us when we have cleansed the Don bend. My former Panzer Army Kleist has made mighty achievements in the southern Caucasus!”<sup>51</sup> While Moldenhauer’s predictions about fighting in the Don bend would be correct, the

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 183; Note that Hans-Albert Giese was listed as missing during the battle of Stalingrad as of January 1943 (Elmshäuser & Lokers, 30).

<sup>50</sup> David Glantz, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 121-122.

<sup>51</sup> Wilhelm Moldenhauer; Jens Ebert, *Im Funkwagen der Wehrmacht durch Europa: Balkan, Ukraine, Stalingrad ; Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Wilhelm Moldenhauer 1940-1943*, (Berlin: Trafo, 2008), 246-7; Moldenhauer’s reference to Panzer Army Kleist meant the First Panzer Army, which was part of the force tasked with seizing the Maykop oil fields in the Caucasus as well as Grozny and Baku. For more information, see Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 503-505.

offensive in the south would soon grind to a halt due to the battle of Stalingrad and the lack of resources available to the divisions in the Caucasus region.

As the fighting for the city of the Stalingrad began in the last week of August 1942, German soldiers wrote about how they hoped this would be the decisive battle of the war. Rudolf Oehus of the 295th Artillery Regiment was among the soldiers who fought at Stalingrad, and in a letter to his family on August 30, 1942 he explained the situation and his expectations as follows:

Arrived here with my battery on Monday. We are in use, in the section of the front at Stalingrad, now about 30 kilometers away, we stand here all day today in position, it is fairly clear here, but mainly from out side only, there is much artillery fire, and the entire day our airmen are at work, it's mostly infantry or fighter planes as they are called, they can support infantry in direct attacks. It looks very interesting when they curve around here. It will probably not take too long, then Stalingrad will fall....To me it is not to be expected that the war will soon come to an end. But when Stalingrad is taken we will likely remain here.<sup>52</sup>

Other soldiers also believed that Stalingrad would be taken, and they were even optimistic that the war would be decided as a result of the campaign. Corporal J.S. of the 79th Infantry Division described on October 1, 1942 the battle situation and his predictions of the outcome. He wrote while stationed north west of the city: "...I was spared the hard fighting for Stalingrad. There it has been very tough. Stalingrad is the favorite city of Comrade Stalin and is also very important to the Russians. That is why the Russians do everything possible not to lose the city. The fate of Stalingrad is likely already sealed."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Lt. Hermann Henkes of the 578<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 305<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> "Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 30. August 1942," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=165>

Infantry Division believed that the battle for Stalingrad would determine the fate of the whole Eastern Front. Henkes stated on October 15, 1942: “I think the war will be settled on this very spot. These are the last remnants that Stalin could scrape together.”<sup>54</sup> Yet another soldier Theodor Körner of the 328<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was stationed northwest of Stalingrad in October 1942. In a letter to his parents dated October 1, Körner boastfully exclaimed: “It will soon be over with Stalingrad. Only one area is still occupied by the enemy!”<sup>55</sup>

As the battle of Stalingrad reached its turning point in October and November, it seems some soldiers became restless with anticipation. Rudolf Oehus wrote to his family on October 5 that while his position “has not changed yet by and large, and am still engaged in Stalingrad,” he believed that “the Russians are getting forced out of the city more and more.” Oehus then stated: “One can already notice that it is coming to an end here.”<sup>56</sup> However, in a letter from a few days later, Oehus had to admit to his family on October 9 that: “Here everything else is the same, Stalingrad is still not in our hands, and you have certainly been waiting for the special announcement for weeks. But the special announcement is yet to come....”<sup>57</sup> Oehus’ letters spoke with anticipation and a belief

---

<sup>53</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, Reinhold Sterz, *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939-1945*, (München: Beck, 1982), 98.

<sup>54</sup> *True to Type*, 75.

<sup>55</sup> “Theodor Körner an seine Eltern am 1.10.1942 (3.2008.1387),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 6, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=273>

<sup>56</sup> “Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 5. Oktober 1942),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 6, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1657&tn\\_name=Dieppe](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1657&tn_name=Dieppe)

that the battle would soon be over, though as it continued to drag on, he must have been bitterly disappointed.

November 1942 proved to be the pivotal moment in which the battle turned in favor of the Red Army. On November 19, the Soviets launched Operation Uranus aimed at encircling the Sixth Army inside Stalingrad. The success of the offensive ensnared tens of thousands of German troops, who were forced to remain in a surrounded pocket of resistance and await outside aid. Hitler chose Field Marshal Erich von Manstein to deal with the relief of Stalingrad, and he organized a relief force to break through to the Volga.<sup>58</sup> The soldiers trapped inside the encirclement hoped for a successful rescue mission. One soldier in Stalingrad, Senior Lieutenant Friedrich Waldhausen, wrote in a letter on November 28, 1942 about Manstein's promise to save the Sixth Army:

Yesterday evening Field Marshall von Manstein sent the following telegram to our encircled little group: HOLD ON, I WILL GET YOU OUT, MANSTEIN. This has just arrived to us! This is more than a plane full of ammunition and a Junkers full of food! I let it be announced exactly as is to all the soldiers. We will hold out! The mood of the troops is exemplary. All whistles and songs. Most of the sick suddenly become healthy again. Everyone is confident: Hold On, I will get you out!<sup>59</sup>

Waldhausen's belief in the Field Marshal's promises for a relief operation were not entirely unfounded. Previously, the Wehrmacht had managed to save the Demyansk Pocket south of Leningrad after a lengthy struggle from February-April 1942, with the

---

<sup>57</sup> "Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 9. Oktober 1942," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 6, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1658&tn\\_name=Dieppe](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1658&tn_name=Dieppe)

<sup>58</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan Millet, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 286-88.

<sup>59</sup> Jens Ebert, Ed., *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 81.

help of Luftwaffe supply from the air and a breakout attempt.<sup>60</sup> However, events would soon prove that the logistics to supply the entire Sixth Army would prove too great a task for the Luftwaffe.

Another reason soldiers stuck inside the Stalingrad *Kessel* were optimistic about being rescued was a belief in Adolf Hitler. Numerous letters from the frontlines suggest that the Führer myth was alive and well inside the embattled pocket. For example, soldier Helmut Gründling inside Stalingrad wrote on November 29, 1942 that the troops inside the city would "...hold our positions by all means" because "The Führer himself has given the order, and now conducts the operations in our section." Gründling further states that Hitler had actually flown in to direct the battle on the ground, stating: "He was right here yesterday in our vicinity, one of our comrades saw him. You can imagine how calm and confident we are since then. It is a pity that this message will reach so you late, when everything here is clear again..."<sup>61</sup> Such rumors played a role in keeping up the fighting spirits of the soldiers, even if only for a short period of time.

Other soldiers made similar statements about the decisive role of Hitler and belief that they would be rescued. One anonymous soldier named Johann wrote a letter in December 1942, in which he assured his father that everything regarding the battle would be resolved shortly. Johann stated: "We have been surrounded since 20 November....The Führer himself has taken over leadership of the operations and promised to get us out. Then it will be all right."<sup>62</sup> Another soldier named Albert simply

---

<sup>60</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, 285-286.

<sup>61</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe*, 88.

promised his mother in a December 15 letter how they would escape the city: “I myself believe that we will be out of this mess by the end of January. Strong German forces are already battling with the Russians for our liberation from the outside.”<sup>63</sup> One other soldier, Erich Born, had continued faith in Hitler despite having to live on horseback, writing on December 21: “...the Führer will not abandon us.”<sup>64</sup> The power of idealism was an important element behind Nazi logic in regards to propaganda and on the battlefield, but wishful thinking would not save the Sixth Army from annihilation.

As the war continued into 1943, there was a renewed sense of resilience among some of the troops. While some soldiers continued to hope to be rescued, others clung to the belief in final victory. One man named Hans trapped inside Stalingrad wrote to his mother on January 14, 1943, that the soldiers needed to “make the best of everything.” Hans stood by an idealistic belief in triumph, writing: Fight! Work! Victory! That is the slogan for 1943! The battle is yet to be determined in Russia. But a German victory must be achieved.”<sup>65</sup> Likewise, lance corporal Franz Paller wrote from Stalingrad on January 20, 1943, that while he was “still at the old position,” he was hopeful that “...the cauldron will soon be open!”<sup>66</sup> While it is likely true that many soldiers wanted to reassure loved ones that they would survive the war and be rescued, one has to wonder

---

<sup>62</sup> “Johann an seinen Vater im Dezember 1942,” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 6, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=912&tn\\_name=Stalingrad](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=912&tn_name=Stalingrad)

<sup>63</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe*, 150.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>65</sup> Anatoly Golovchansky, “*Ich will raus aus diesem Wahnsinn*”: *deutsche Briefe von der Ostfront, 1941-1945: aus sowjetischen Archiven*, (Wuppertal: P. Hammer, 1991), 218.

<sup>66</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe*, 316-317.

then why so many others were willing to openly speak their minds about their misery and hardships. For some, it may have been a sense of defiance, for others a genuine confidence that their leaders would not leave them to die.

### 6.3. *Eroding Morale: The Effects of Combat and Defeat against the Red Army*

One of the most important aspects of the Nazi offensive campaign in 1942 was the intensity of the fighting, from beginning of Operation *Blau* to the defeat of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad in 1943. Soldiers' writings demonstrate that the Soviets were engaged in relentless attacks and counteroffensives against the Wehrmacht for much of the summer and fall months, causing the soldiers considerable doubt about any chances for an end to the war. By the winter 1942-1943, the Soviets began their decisive assaults against the Germans at Stalingrad, and attempted a larger push to rid the Caucasus region of the Wehrmacht altogether. This pressure combined with attacks on other sections of the Eastern Front proved that the Red Army was not on the verge of collapse, but rather was gaining momentum against an increasingly worn out German foe.

The impact of trauma upon soldiers on the Eastern Front (or in any conflict) can significantly alter a person's identity. As noted by Nigel Hunt, identity can be defined as "beliefs we hold about ourselves, the world and the future." However, war has the ability to change those perceptions, leading to a "breakdown in one's belief systems." Therefore, "many soldiers experience a total physical, psychological and emotional breakdown that can have a long-term or permanent effect on their sense of identity."<sup>67</sup> This breakdown of identity included the corrosion of the concept of *Kameradschaft*

---

<sup>67</sup> Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War, and Trauma*, 10-11.



described by Thomas Kühne, who noted the individual German soldier traded his “individual identity for a collective identity” in the military.<sup>68</sup> Kühne explains that a new type of collective identity emerged as early as 1942, one based on “pure cynicism” and a sense of togetherness based on the “destruction of Them.”<sup>69</sup> This transformation of the individual soldier was not so much a byproduct of a lack of patriotism as it was the combination of prolonged exposure to dehumanizing conditions and the growing tide of defeats experienced at the hands of the Red Army.

One of the most important aspects surrounding this notion of gradual “breakdown” in the German army’s morale is discussed by David Glantz in his book *To the Gates of Stalingrad*. Glantz argues that the Soviets continuously held up the Germans with stubborn defenses and counterattacks throughout Operation *Blau*, often setting the German time table behind schedule and forcing the Wehrmacht to commit large numbers to protecting its flanks rather than spearheading an offensive.<sup>70</sup> This resulted in a process of exhausting German resources and limiting their capabilities, allowing the Red Army time to commit to a major counteroffensive in November 1942 which succeeded in surrounding the Sixth Army and committing to further attacks on the southern sector of the Eastern Front.

---

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler’s Community, 1918-1945*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 167.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 125-6.

<sup>70</sup> For more information, see David M. Glantz & Jonathan M. House *To the Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations, April-August 1942, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume I*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2009); In particular, see chapters four through eight in Glantz’s book, pages 122-395.

On June 28, 1942, the Germans launched Operation *Blau* in the southern sector of the Eastern Front. By the end of July 1942 the Germans occupied the whole of the Donets Basin, much of the Don country and were heading towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus. By the end of August, the Germans were on the Volga River and Stalingrad was under siege.<sup>71</sup> Contrary to Soviet lore about Stalin's grand stratagem to trade space for time against the Germans, on July 28, 1942 Stalin issued an order specifying that retreat was impossible and that any officer to retreat would be punished or assigned to a penal battalion.<sup>72</sup> This meant that withdrawals made by the Soviets from August onward were the result of defeats, but in the autumn 1942 the Germans were having problems of their own. German supply lines became strained in the Caucasus region, and the further splintering of Army Group South on various objectives weakened its ability to achieve victory.

Soldiers' writings reveal the intense resistance facing the German military from early on in the campaign. Hans Roth was among the soldiers participating in Army Group South's offensive, but while he was stationed at Livny near Oryol, his unit was awaiting a Soviet attack. On July 12, 1942, Roth described the angst he felt awaiting a Red Army onslaught:

It is a terrible feeling to sit here and wait for the havoc to commence, which could rage upon us at any moment. Abandoning the position is out of the question in, therefore, it's time to write your will and wait with your frazzled nerves for the volcano to erupt. What a terrible situation! Hours turn into minutes, and minutes into hours; time is now crawling by. It's making us crazy! I could scream, fume, and howl out of rage. Dirty

---

<sup>71</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle that Changed History*, (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 59-60.

<sup>72</sup> John Mosier, *Cross of Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German War Machine, 1918-1945*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006), 191.

jokes and cursing do not help in this case; the men just stare into nothingness, numb and catatonic while they wait for the catastrophe.<sup>73</sup>

Roth's description of a soldier's anticipation of combat helps to explain the strained mentality of the troops at this stage of the war. In addition, it provides perspective on the life at the front in between the battles.

Similar sentiments can be seen in other letters during this period in the summer 1942, such as one by Lieutenant Eugen Altrogge of the 597<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to his friend Hans Albring. Altrogge stated his thoughts about fears of combat and dying: "How hard this war is also, such hard and constant extremes it has previously set upon us: which fills me with thoughts of death, of being hit by a piece of iron, a piece of raw material hurled against you, and you are crippled for the rest of your life."<sup>74</sup> Altrogge's very human statement about the dangers facing both him and his comrades presents a very important instance of vulnerability of a soldier at the front. This vulnerability, whether physical or mental, helps to better explain the impact which a long, bloody war was having upon the ordinary soldier.

As the campaign continued into August, one continues to find evidence of the relentless pressure placed upon the German soldiers facing wave after wave of Soviet attacks and counterattacks while attempting to gain ground for themselves. For example, Georg Getrost, who was serving in Army Group Center, briefly described on August 1, 1942 in a letter to his wife the numbers of Red Army troops the Germans faced. Getrost

---

<sup>73</sup> Hans Roth, *Eastern Inferno*, 179.

<sup>74</sup> "Eugen an Hans am 18.7.1942 (3.2002.0210)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 7, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=926&le\\_keyword=Polen](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=926&le_keyword=Polen)

wrote: “As long as we are here, there is always something to do. The Russians are constantly getting replacements. But they will receive an equal (hit) on the nose.”<sup>75</sup>

Another soldier Wilhelm Moldenhauer described the fighting around the Don bend on August 19, emphasizing the brutality of the Soviets. Moldenhauer stated: “This is the wickedness of war. The Russians are particularly wicked. They take no prisoners, but rather they slaughter everything.”<sup>76</sup> The psychological effects of numerous battles and life threatening situations would affect anyone without some relief. Pfc. Wolfgang Knoblich noted in his diary on August 12, 1942 the effects that military life and a protracted war were having on him. Knoblich wrote:

My strength has been overtaxed and it literally takes my last ounce of energy to grind out these few lines. This terrible war cannot end too soon for me. I am nauseated with it all and wish I could get clear of the whole outfit, including those nice boys a bit higher up, those ordinary sergeants and sergeant-majors who do their utmost to make life sweeter to us. They fairly weigh us down with special jobs (foraging and the like) that really are a nuisance. The life we are compelled to lead is without a ray of sunshine. We are within a few miles of the Don and are told we shall winter here.<sup>77</sup>

The excerpts from Getrost and Knoblich reveal the changing attitudes of many soldiers towards the war. Enthusiasm and confidence had been replaced by pessimism and despair, with hopes for a victory or peace looming ever further away.

As the month of August 1942 wore on, so did the ferocity of the fighting and the wearing down of the German infantrymen across the Eastern Front. Georg Getrost noted in a letter on August 15 that “The Russians always attack.” For Getrost, the battles

---

<sup>75</sup> Georg Getrost, *Ich glaube hier...*, 258.

<sup>76</sup> Wilhelm Moldenhauer, *Im Funkwagen...*, 246.

<sup>77</sup> *True to Type*, 60.

against the Soviets were heavy in August, as his unit had to destroy “some Russian tanks,” resulting in “a Knight’s Cross” to one of the men he was serving with.<sup>78</sup> In another letter from August 19, Getrost commented that “In the south the costs just keep adding up,” in reference to the offensive situation in the Caucasus region. He continued:

For us here, it is not exactly nice either. We have continuous defensive battles. The Russians do not let up. He attacks us, so that we pull troops away from down there. But that will certainly not be the case, here everything stops. In any case he will not come through here, even if he brings up 20 new tanks every day. What he has recently lost in tanks is hard to believe.<sup>79</sup>

Getrost’s frankness regarding the situation facing Army Group Center is striking. Not only does he admit that the Soviets were committed to large scale offensives in his sector, but he also paints a picture of inexhaustible enemy numbers. While Getrost remains confident that the Red Army would not break through German lines, the pressure facing the Wehrmacht leaves little to the imagination about what could happen that year.

The letters of soldier Gerhard Udke similarly echo the bleak existence of soldiers at this time, with the combined factors of frontline conditions, as well as events happening elsewhere in the war. Udke wrote to his wife on August 19-20 about the living conditions: “What we are suffering from the lice and fleas is indescribable; then come the flies. How it is in the winter, where you cannot go without readily hunting lice, is a mystery to us. That must be hell. A very small ‘chance’ still exists. It is beyond words, how fortunate I would be, if I were spared the winter here in Russia.”<sup>80</sup> In the

---

<sup>78</sup> Georg Getrost, *Ich glaube hier...*, 262.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 263.

same correspondence, Udke also lamented that while the night so far had “passed without an attack,” he later noted that “Tonight we will have to stay awake again.”<sup>81</sup> In a subsequent letter on August 29, Udke further expressed his worries, but in this particular case he was concerned about his wife and family due to Allied bombings. Udke asked his wife to write “in more detail about life in the cellars,” and he later stated: “If only the air raids on Berlin were not so bad.”<sup>82</sup>

The war on the Eastern Front’s unrelenting ferociousness left soldiers in a state of increasing misery and despondency. For example, Ludwig Sauter, a former musician turned soldier in the 294<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, wrote in a letter to his sister in Dresden about the war situation on August 25, 1942:

The future has turned black for us and hope is fading away. We have Eastern experience and must die or be victorious here. Thus we are all already resigned to it. It comes to life or death. Such a war the world has not seen. Currently it is going reasonably well for us, the summer was very beautiful, but everyone fears the winter.<sup>83</sup>

Sauter’s letter provides an insightful view into the pessimistic beliefs that increasingly consumed German soldiers.

A letter by Gerhard Udke to his wife on August 29 presents a similar worldview of a soldier deprived of his normal existence with a family and a career back home. Udke’s deteriorating mental and physical status is evidenced amongst other things:

---

<sup>80</sup> Gerhard Udke & Gerwin Udke, *Schreib so oft du kannst...*, 86.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>83</sup> “Ludwig Sauter an seine Schwester am 25.8.1942 (3.2002.0877),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 7, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=262&le\\_keyword=Krieg](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=262&le_keyword=Krieg)

Every night a state of alarm, because the Russians could attack, but then they do not; thus utter fatigue. Today the usual duties. Yesterday we had to sleep for two hours. There were too many falling asleep on guard duty, nervous stomachs and vomiting among other things had been the consequences of overexcitement. I am still suffering from my swollen and inflamed leg. At night you lie awake for a long time, because the bugs plague us atrociously. We've had enough of Russia!!! All of it!! But what is the use!<sup>84</sup>

Udke's rendition of the nightly waiting for a Russian attack and the resulting sleep deprivation paints a very human picture of life in the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front. This was not a heroic existence as described in the Nazi press, rather it was a brutish business that only the lucky few ever managed to escape unscathed. Udke's plea "We've had enough of Russia!!!" is emblematic of the breakdown of soldiers' psychological status, contributing to the overall decline of the German Army's power.

A letter by *Unteroffizier* H.T. of the 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division on August 31, 1942, echoes many of the same sentiments displayed by Gerhard Udke just two days earlier. *Unteroffizier* H.T. emphasizes two key notions; the exhaustion of frontline troops, and the physical strains which climactic and medical ailments had upon the men. He wrote:

When will they leave our decimated bunch in peace? In a few days we will have been in constant use for four months, attack upon attack, hardships, no relief, something like this did not even happen in the World War. And then with this adversary. Yes, the gloriously humble weapon: infantry. Now we have received blankets. The day before yesterday it rained all day and night, and all ailments have been brought to light: Rheumatism, rupture (Reißen) and especially what rhymes with the latter....<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Gerhard Udke & Gerwin Udke, *Schreib so oft du kannst...*, 88.

<sup>85</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, Reinhold Sterz, *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges*, 97.

The *Unteroffizier's* letter excerpt helps us to better understand how fatigue and disease played a role in the declining strength of the German Army's effectiveness in the war. For example, according to Jürgen Kilian's study of disease in the Russian northwest under Wehrmacht rule, Germans' exposure to sickly members of the Soviet civilian population as well as other factors could result in outbreaks of "epidemic typhus, dysentery, influenza, typhus, and even malaria."<sup>86</sup> However, while fatigue also seems to have affected the personal morale of the troops at the front, they had no choice but to keep fighting. The consequences for desertion or protest were draconian, with roughly 20,000 German soldiers executed during World War II, and of those 75-80% for issues of desertion or *Wehrkraftzersetzung* (undermining the fighting spirit of the troops).<sup>87</sup>

Even though the average German soldier continued to fight and die for Hitler until 1945, that did not mean the troops were unaffected by the immense suffering and hardship they faced throughout the war. On the contrary, in many cases it seems German soldiers were often on the brink of mental or physical collapse. For example, Gerhard Udke's letter to his wife on September 6, 1942, details the ordinary soldier's longing for home and the identity changes which occurred to the individual man on the Eastern Front. Udke wrote about how he understood tales about people having "died in a foreign land with a broken heart from longing," reflecting on his yearning to see his loved ones once more. Udke also notes how much the war had altered him as a human being: "What

---

<sup>86</sup> Jürgen Kilian, *Wehrmacht und Besatzungsherrschaft im Russischen Nordwesten, 1941-1944: Praxis und Alltag in der Militärverwaltungzone der Heeresgruppe Nord*, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 310.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 90.



I have experienced here in Russia bears no comparison to my experiences in France, although my letters to you may sound alike. I am deeply troubled; once I come home, you will find me quite changed.”<sup>88</sup>

Udke also described how the Germans had suffered some territorial losses to the enemy in his letter from September 6, and he lamented that these setbacks would contribute to the Wehrmacht’s having to stay in Russia another winter. He wrote:

This morning I learned that our battalion has now received winter equipment. And so it is clear that we will spend the winter here in Russia. I find that the Russians in our section are still quite strong. Recently the report from the front conceded hard fought ‘territorial gains’ by the Russians, though admittedly with ‘innumerable losses to the enemy.’<sup>89</sup>

Udke’s complaints about having to stay in the East through the winter months reflects the agony which the Wehrmacht endured its first Russian winter. Likewise, soldier H.R. of the 389<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division echoed similar concerns in a letter home on September 12: “Hopefully we will not be in southeastern Russia too long. Finishing the task here in the East is apparently not going to occur this year. It also looks as if we will be making winter quarters between the Don and Volga River...Our infantry is now engaging in the decisive battle of the southern sector. The Russians know what is at stake.”<sup>90</sup> As mentioned by Udke, soldier H.R. emphasizes that the war was not going to end in 1942, and that the Russians were putting everything they had into the conflict in the south.

The goals of Operation *Blau* required that the Wehrmacht seize the cities of Voronezh and Rostov, secure Stalingrad, and take control of the Caucasus region. The

---

<sup>88</sup> Gerhard Udke & Gerwin Udke, *Schreib so oft du kannst...*, 92.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 91-92.

<sup>90</sup> Buchbender, *Das Andere Gesicht...*, 97-98.

fighting for Voronezh began on June 28, and by July 3 panzer grenadiers reached the Don River and secured a bridgehead. However, Hitler made a fateful error in only allowing one panzer corps to finish the battle for Voronezh, sending the rest of the forces in the area southwards. Until the end of July 1942 the Soviet defenders held on in terrible street fighting, a tactic which became the centerpiece of Red Army strategy with Stalingrad.<sup>91</sup> Soldier Hans Roth recounted the defensive battles around Voronezh in his journal entry from September 16, 1942:

Our bloody 'settlement' is bolted up against the breakthrough point! For a month it has been lying beneath the gigantic hammer of destruction. Suffering countless numbers of casualties, the Soviets have worked their way into shouting distance of us. Many elite battalions were allowed to bleed to death just to gain a few meters. Whole Bolshevik tank squadrons are burned out. In the short time from July 10 to August 24 alone, 978 enemy tanks were destroyed. The Soviets' goal to take the last 50 meters to reach the cover of the ruins of the settlement's higher elevation has been left unattainable.<sup>92</sup>

Roth indicates that the fighting in the Voronezh sector was a months long affair involving many Soviet assaults against the German positions. While operational histories note that the battle for Voronezh ended in late July, fighting in this area continued well after the city was taken.

The push towards Stalingrad continued, with German forces reaching the Volga by August 23, 1942. Josef Stalin ordered that the city be turned into a fortress, issuing a state of siege on August 25 and ordering Red Army assaults to halt the advancing Nazi units. However, by September 13, massive German air and artillery attacks on Stalingrad

---

<sup>91</sup> Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad*, (New York: Viking, 1998), 74.

<sup>92</sup> Hans Roth, *Eastern Inferno*, 190.

began, and German troops entered the city on September 14.<sup>93</sup> Gunner Rudolf Oehus of the 295<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment fought and died at Stalingrad, and in a letter to his family described the fighting on the outskirts of the city. Oehus wrote:

For two days we have been here in the suburbs of Stalingrad. The city is heavily fortified, and it is a cautious and very slow advance. All military branches are being used here, but one must actually have to accept that the Russians who are in the city will gradually lose their minds because one really cannot believe everything that is set in motion here.<sup>94</sup>

This included bombings by the air force and use of artillery, including Oehus' unit.

Another letter written on September 12 by soldier H.R. of the 389<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division similarly described the immensity of the bombing of Stalingrad. He wrote: "Our pilots, you cannot imagine how many of them, have been flying over cloud after cloud for almost eight consecutive days towards Stalingrad."<sup>95</sup> These excerpts reveal the enormity of the attack on Stalingrad as well as the destructive power of the German military, which leveled the city through artillery and aerial bombardment.

Artillerist Rudolf Oehus wrote on September 27 to his family regarding the fighting in Stalingrad. Oehus described it as follows:

We are still busy here at Stalingrad, it is taking longer than we had thought. Yesterday I was directly in the city center, where I retrieved artillery that was used in the street fighting. There we were a kilometer from the Volga River. The city is all but completely destroyed, nothing remains intact, every house is used as a position and defended by the Russians to the last, and thus we are forced to destroy everything. Today

---

<sup>93</sup> Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 513-514.

<sup>94</sup> "Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 9. September 1942," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 8, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1655&tn\\_name=Artemowsk](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1655&tn_name=Artemowsk)

<sup>95</sup> Buchbender, *Das Andere Gesicht*, 97-98.

again there was a major attack, airplanes were again highly involved, Russian aircraft seem to be somewhat scarce, they do not come as often.<sup>96</sup>

Oehus' detailed description of the destruction of the city of Stalingrad leaves little to the imagination about the terrible nature of combat. At the beginning of the battle it seemed as though the Germans had complete air superiority, with moderate resistance from the Soviet 8<sup>th</sup> Air Army and gradually intensifying anti-aircraft artillery fire by mid-September.<sup>97</sup>

At the end of September the Germans started new assaults against northern Stalingrad, but they soon became bogged down in the Russian factories in bitter hand to hand fighting causing enormous losses.<sup>98</sup> Anselm Radbruch recounted the fighting there on September 29, 1942: "In the northern part of Stalingrad there is still better fighting. I have already been there several times, there are no longer any houses, and all that is left is a burned stone desert, a wilderness of rubble and debris, almost impassable. The Russians defended every house until it falls down over him, a despairing, self-sacrificing defense that is broken step by step."<sup>99</sup> This grinding, arduous type of warfare was in total contrast to the Blitzkrieg style warfare to which the Germans were accustomed.

Wilhelm Moldenhauer was among the soldiers involved in the battle for Stalingrad in late September and early October 1942, and in a letter to his wife and

---

<sup>96</sup> "Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 27. September 1942," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 10, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1656&tn\\_name=Slowjansk](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1656&tn_name=Slowjansk)

<sup>97</sup> Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 133-138.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 187-188.

<sup>99</sup> Walter Bähr, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten, 1939-1945*, (Tübingen, R. Wunderlich, 1952), 174.

children on October 2 he emotionally yearned to be back home with them while detailing events happening around him. Moldenhauer stated:

We are now eagerly awaiting my furlough. But it is likely, that I will no longer get my turn this year. When one considers the difficulties that could occur traveling by rail in December, then a furlough or reduction is entirely unlikely. Otherwise, our situation here in Stalingrad is still quite difficult, so that no immediate relief or alleviation is to be expected in this area. Even once Stalingrad is completely in our hands. We have now begun to bury our vehicles. Large and powerful bunkers must be built. Who would have ever thought of such circumstances? And who knows when we will enter into our winter quarters.<sup>100</sup>

Moldenhauer's realization that the battle for Stalingrad was going to be a drawn out affair and that his chances for furlough were dismal at best, painted a grim picture for him and his comrades. Another Wehrmacht soldier named Paul Wortmann of the 160<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had an equally hard time explaining to his loved ones about the precarious nature of his situation. In a letter to his brother Eberhard on October 6, 1942, Wortmann spends much of the letter complaining about the superiority of Russian weaponry to German equipment. Wortmann also responds to his brother's ideas about whether the war was going to end soon or not, sarcastically noting: "Thank God you now calculate that the situation with Russia will end next year. Nothing is worse than making false hopes." Later in the letter, Paul retorts against his brother's prediction, stating: "Now it is the beginning of October and Stalingrad has not yet fallen. There you have miscalculated, or is it our fault?"<sup>101</sup> Wortmann's rebuke to his younger brother's

---

<sup>100</sup> Moldenhauer, 267.

<sup>101</sup> "Paul Wortmann an seinen Bruder Eberhard am 06.10.1942 (3.2002.0935)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 8, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1502&le\\_keyword=Russla](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1502&le_keyword=Russla)

claims indicates a rather cynical view of the war situation from the frontlines. Since Eberhard was still a member of the Hitler Youth, as evidenced in the correspondence, Paul was likely challenging the propaganda at home which predicted victory against Russia within a short period of time.

By the middle of October, the Germans launched additional assaults to seize the factory district, jeopardizing Soviet bridgeheads along the Volga.<sup>102</sup> The ruthless blood-letting that took place in the factories claimed countless lives on both sides and was wearing the German Sixth Army down considerably. Lt. Hermann Henkes of the 578<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment noted in his diary about the precariousness of his situation in the fight for Stalingrad. Henkes wrote on October 14: “The Russians are stubborn, as always. Their snipers exact their usual toll on our flanks. We make only slow progress. Thank the Lord, we have self-propelled guns with us or we would not be able to advance an inch.”<sup>103</sup> Two days later, Henkes lamented the terrible effects this type of combat was having on him and his men: “Anybody who escapes alive out of this hell fire can only thank his lucky star. Our casualties are heavy and have left big gaps in our roll call. Today I am still among the living; about tomorrow no one can tell. Nobody is guaranteed safety here. Your life may be snuffed out any minute....”<sup>104</sup> This type of fighting was called *Rattenkrieg* (Rat War) by the German soldiers, a dehumanizing affair reminiscent of the death mill at Verdun in the First World War.

---

<sup>102</sup> Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 192, 206-7.

<sup>103</sup> *True to Type*, 75.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

Equally important to note is that the growing technical and numerical superiority of Soviet weaponry by late 1942 was taking its toll on the Wehrmacht as well. For example, many German soldiers commented in their writings throughout the war about the impact of the T-34 tank and the *Katyusha* multiple rocket launchers dubbed “Stalin’s organ.”<sup>105</sup> On October 6, 1942, Paul Wortmann of the 160<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division wrote to his brother Eberhard about the power of the Stalin’s organs and the T-34: “You cannot imagine how strong the Russians are. Many weapons are superior to ours, or at least equivalent. We have no volley gun (Stalin’s organ) and no T-34!”<sup>106</sup> Later on October 25, Wortmann again wrote about the strength of the Red Army in a letter to his parents, but this time in more detailed manner:

The enemy has become bold again...It is really a war against Stalin’s organs, and you have no idea how important this weapon has become! The Russians often attack with dozens of organs. Imagine the barrage: 20, 30 or 40 times 42 shells!...The Russkies construct the volley guns atop of heavy tanks and drive them into battle. Not a bad idea, eh? This is the weapon of the future! Unfortunately, it uses a lot of ammunition. A picture in the *Berliner Illustrierte* shows the armored organ...the Russian Tanks are really great, especially the T-34.<sup>107</sup>

By the end of October, the last great German offensive at Stalingrad ground to a halt due to exhaustion and a lack of ammunition.<sup>108</sup> Given these setbacks and the enormity of the losses suffered, skepticism continued to rise amongst the troops. Rudolf

---

<sup>105</sup> Bellamy, 242-3.

<sup>106</sup> “Paul Wortmann an seinen Bruder Eberhard am 06.10.1942 (3.2002.0935),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 7, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1502&le\\_keyword=Russland](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1502&le_keyword=Russland)

<sup>107</sup> “Paul Wortmann an seine Eltern am 25.10.1942 (3.2002.0935),“ *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 7, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1503&le\\_keyword=Russland](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1503&le_keyword=Russland)

<sup>108</sup> Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 211.

Oehus wrote to his family on October 23 that: “Whether it (Stalingrad) falls before the winter? One should truly doubt it.”<sup>109</sup> Likewise, Paul Wortmann responded to his mother in a letter from October 25 about the potential for leave. Wortmann stated:

Dear Mother, you wrote about furlough and it looks very grim. Not because I have done something wrong, no, but this company is very strong and has many married men who receive furlough more frequently. The majority has received no furlough for over two years, because last year leaves were partially cancelled. But perhaps in the spring 1943.<sup>110</sup>

Wortmann’s answer is indicative of the fact that while he is trying to alleviate his mother’s worries, he likely knows all too well the grim circumstances facing the Wehrmacht and did not want to cause his family further alarm.

The downward spiral of soldier’s spirits as a result of the failed offensives to seize the rest of Stalingrad are evidenced in other writings as well. Soldier K.H. of the 113<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was stationed to the area just northwest of Stalingrad, where he could easily view the destruction and carnage of the battle for the city.<sup>111</sup> He wrote on October 27:

Every day the Russians attack. The city itself is demolished and is still burning everywhere illuminating the evenings in the vast steppe. This matches the words of the Bible, which often passes through my thoughts: No one stone shall be left standing upon another. Here this is the truth. . . . One must not lose courage and their trust in God, even when the machine guns constantly bang and the bombs and shells crack. If it be my fate that I should not get out of this cauldron, then it is God’s will. . . .<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> “Rudolf Oehus an seine Familie am 23. Oktober 1942,” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 8, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1660&tn\\_name=Slowjansk](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1660&tn_name=Slowjansk)

<sup>110</sup> “Paul Wortmann an seine Eltern am 25.10.1942 (3.2002.0935),” *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 8, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1503&le\\_keyword=Russland](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=1503&le_keyword=Russland)

<sup>111</sup> For more information on the history of the 113<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, see Veit Scherzer, *Die Geschichte der 113. Infanterie-Division 1940 - 1943*, (Scherzers Militair-Verlag: Bayreuth, 1990).



Soldier K.H.'s depiction of constant Russian attacks and the chaos of battle in October 1942 shows that the Germans were nowhere near winning this battle for Stalingrad. In addition, his melancholy attitude about life and death signifies that he believed a major defeat could very well be on the horizon.

By November 1942, cynicism dominated the outlooks of many German soldiers, especially those directly involved in the Stalingrad campaign. While the Wehrmacht desperately held on to every piece of land it had conquered, the battle raged for control of the city bearing Stalin's name. Lance-Corporal Otto Flick described in detail in a letter dating November 5 the deteriorating situation in Stalingrad, though at this stage the Germans continued to hold fast in the face of enemy counterattacks. Flick wrote:

Warm greetings from the hell of Stalingrad. We are in the heaviest of fighting here now for past few days. I am still doing well as of yet. I lead a group and therefore have a great responsibility. I've already lost 3 of my men, but we cannot become disheartened. Wicked weeds grow high indeed. I just had to stop writing for an alarm. Today is already 9.11. I am writing from a bunker in the trenches. On the 5<sup>th</sup> we also received alarms. The Russians had attacked, and the attack was splendidly repulsed. Day and night we are under heavy fire artillery. The baptism of fire is already behind me. Nothing more can shake us. In the meantime I have lost some more good comrades. On Friday to Saturday night the Russians attacked our position again. I was lying in position with my machine gun, and suddenly grenades flew against our hole and to the left of me the groups began the attack. I had no support on the right. Our machine gun jammed due to the sand and dirt. But then we repulsed the attack with grenades. The Russians had once again suffered a defeat.<sup>113</sup>

Flick's rendition of the ebb and flow of trench warfare is frightening and reveals the sheer vulnerability of soldiers on both sides of any engagement. In many cases, it

---

<sup>112</sup> Buchbender, *Das Andere Gesicht...*, 98-99.

<sup>113</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 25.

appears as though sheer luck prevented men such as Flick's demise up to this point of the war.

Climate conditions and a sense of isolation played a significant role in the demoralization of the troops as well. Lance-Corporal Heinrich Brakelmann, in a letter from November 14, described the weather as "very cold here, you can say damn cold." Brakelmann emphasized in his letter that the positions the troops had to make do in during the winter were "significantly worse than last winter," primarily because "there are no houses in the area." This meant that the soldiers had to live in an "earthen bunker." After his description of the conditions, Brakelmann broke down and criticized the entire war effort. He wrote: "How it will all turn out, only the devil knows, we must come to terms with our fate. Everything for Germany, nothing for us. The only comfort you have is furlough. Then you get four weeks out of this shit."<sup>114</sup>

The sense of isolation due to the vastness of Russian geography left many soldiers feeling cut off from the rest of the world. In a November 14, 1942 diary entry, Pfc. Wolfgang Knoblich complained that German soldiers were "cut off here from the whole world," and knew nothing of events going on outside of Russia. Knoblich was shocked to learn that "British and American troops had effected a landing in French Morocco and that German troops had entered that part of France which previously had remained unoccupied." These events stunned Knoblich, who then paused to ask "How will this war end?"<sup>115</sup> Senior Lance Corporal Erwin Guhl exhibited such a mood in his

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 56-7.

<sup>115</sup> *True to Type*, 61.

letter from November 14. Guhl stated that: “We can report nothing new at this time about Stalingrad, because it has turned into a large cauldron. The entire war is packed with secrets. At the moment one cannot see what is going to result from the war. One always hopes for the best and that everything still turns out well.”<sup>116</sup> Guhl’s display of frustration about too many “secrets” and an inability to report anything new reflects that same sense of isolation felt by Knoblich.

By mid-November 1942, the battle had reached its critical stage. The Germans continued to fight for control of Stalingrad, but with little success. One anonymous soldier named Ernst wrote a letter to a friend Ludewig on November 18 about why the city of Stalingrad had not been captured. Ernst said:

Stalingrad has not yet fallen. You probably already have been wondering why. We do not know, we are still fighting hard on the fringes. The Russians fight tenaciously and doggedly for every meter. Stalin, of course, is using elite troops, that is, almost exclusively political commissars and officers. Everyone must be killed. And then the Russians masterfully understand how to camouflage themselves in the ruins of the city and defend it. This battle has already cost a lot of blood.<sup>117</sup>

The next day, another anonymous soldier named Franz wrote to his wife on November 19 about the tentative nature of the situation:

Stalingrad has still not fallen. Although there is still only some 100 m. wide and some 100 m. in length, we cannot take this section, even though countless divisions attack against the Russians almost every other day. But every attack comes to a halt and is repulsed. For days, fighting sometimes took place for a single house. This is how it looks here. The Russians still receive strong reinforcements from across the Volga and at night by aircraft...<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 56.

<sup>117</sup> Golovchansky, “*Ich will raus...*,” 120.

Since the Nazis had not yet seized the city, the commander of the German Army Group B General von Weichs decided to help concentrate more forces on taking Stalingrad by sending additional German troops from the flanks into the battle zone. However, this largely left Romanian and Italian troops to guard the northern and southern approaches to the city, providing the Soviets with ample opportunity to strike. On November 19, 1942, the Soviet forces pierced the Romanian and Italian positions, and with an encirclement maneuver cut off the Sixth Army by November 23. Since Hitler would not authorize any withdrawal, the Germans trapped in Stalingrad would have to wait to be rescued or to perish.<sup>119</sup>

As the Soviet pincer movement commenced, the German forces desperately sought to reorient themselves to defeat the impending threat. Wolfgang Knoblich of the 294<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was stationed in the Don River region when the Soviet assault began. Quickly his unit the 513<sup>th</sup> Regiment was dispatched to counter the attack, as he noted on November 21 in his diary. He wrote on November 21, 1942: “We detain. Everybody shouts, for any reason or for no reason....The train was emptied in record time. But we had to wait three long hours in the bitter cold before we marched to Millerovo.”<sup>120</sup> Millerovo, which is west of Stalingrad in the Rostov area, became the point from which Knoblich and his comrades attacked against the advancing Soviet forces.

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 132-33.

<sup>119</sup> David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *Endgame at Stalingrad, Book Two: December 1942-February 1943, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 3*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 3.

<sup>120</sup> *True to Type*, 61.

However, Knoblich's later diary entries reveal that his unit's attempts in battle had gone terribly wrong. Knoblich complained on November 26 about the lack of hot meals and absence of "back rations," forcing him to go hungry and even "beg alms." Due to his condition, Knoblich asked, "And how are we going to go on living, if I can call this living, by any stretch of the imagination? What is yet in store for us? Our lot is a cruel one."<sup>121</sup> In his next diary entry on November 27, Knoblich continued to describe the terrible nature of the situation he was in. He wrote: "What hardships, inconveniences and privations we had to endure! We even had to retreat to our initial positions. It was an infinitely drawn out affair. We had to fight against snow, rain, cold, hunger and tanks. A terrible day."<sup>122</sup> Knoblich's perception of the Soviet offensive shows the impact of macro historical events at the micro level, showing the misery and hardship facing the soldiers.

News of the Red Army's offensive in the south soon spread to the other sections of the front as well. Lt. Walter Heller stationed a Kolpino in the Leningrad area wrote in a lengthy diary entry on November 29 about the new Soviet offensives and the perilous situation facing the Germans in the East. Heller stated:

The Russians have started an offensive north and south of Stalingrad and at Kalinin. You don't have to be a clairvoyant to feel depressed by that fact. Where do the Russians get their almost inexhaustible reserves of man power and equipment? Is this going to last long? We are not going to lose the war for the simple reason that we must win it...However, I have a hunch that the war is gradually reaching a point where it will have to be fought by a German people that is standing on its last legs. We strike everywhere and do the enemy no little damage, but he always finds a

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

weak spot in our defence where he can deal a powerful counterblow, each of which removes us a notch further from peace. But we have no alternative. We must hew our way through to victory. Therefore, no matter what the cost, we must keep on fighting and fighting out of sheer despair. Before when we fought we still had hopes of returning home and anyone who fell by the wayside might have attributed it to his own hard luck. But who can expect to escape unscathed today? The war seems endless. There are more chances of dying than surviving. At times a strong desire for peace, safety and happiness takes hold of me. We are fighting for dear life now, but with less chance of winning, if we have any chance left at all. I must admit that I often become faint hearted.<sup>123</sup>

What is interesting about Heller's lengthy diary entry is that he attempts to describe the overall tactical dilemma of Nazi Germany's campaign in the East using his own personal experience. While Heller does not feel defeat is inevitable, his statements about an "endless" war and a "strong desire for peace" leave one questioning whether or not he believed victory was possible anymore. The fact that he viewed Soviet manpower and equipment as "inexhaustible" also suggests he does not believe the Red Army could ever be completely destroyed.

As the Soviet ring closed around Stalingrad, the Sixth Army fought for its existence within the city. With no attempts at a breakout occurring, the German soldiers were supposed to hold out and fight a pitched defensive battle with little food, fuel, or ammunition. One Unknown Soldier, a Private first class in the 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, wrote on November 30, 1942 about the privations which soldiers were now suffering. He stated, "Early in the morning we contacted our platoon. I dug myself into the cold earth. Pitched battles day and night. In the evening Russian tanks made a break through and we had to take defensive measures. Air raid and mortar bombardment. I haven't

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 67.

eaten for 36 hours.”<sup>124</sup> Later on December 3, the unknown private lamented the deteriorating supply situation for troops, while stationed near the airport at Gumrak. He wrote: “I feel terrible. Am eating snow. In the evening we could find no quarters. It was snowing. I was all wet and there was water in my boots. At last we found a mud hut. There I sat with six mates, cooking a little horse meat in snow water. What may the future bring? We are surrounded. One-twelfth of a loaf of bread.”<sup>125</sup> Once more Germany’s troops would have to suffer through vicious Russian assaults and a terrible winter, only this time an entire German Army was surrounded and facing annihilation.

The conditions inside the *Kessel* (cauldron) were deplorable. Not only did Wehrmacht soldiers have to defend against constant Russian attacks, but they also had to survive the weather, lack of food, and disease. Lance-corporal Wernfried Senkel’s letter addressed to his parents and siblings on December 4 described what circumstances were like there. Senkel wrote:

We are in fact surrounded. What that means for us, you cannot even fathom. This is a difficult time. We need to build new bunkers and vehicle boxes. Since last night we have been working at the front line and improving the positions. Sleep is a luxury. The same with washing.....I have never been so broken and weary. My eyes will soon fall to fatigue. We look dirty and ragged...The Russians have started up an offensive here. They are putting everything into it. His masses of men and tanks are rushing our positions. Once, it was Sunday, we had to retreat. In the last minute the company brought us out of the position with vehicles....I have only one great wish, and that would be: For this shit to soon be over. That we could turn our backs on Russia. Whether we will experience this remains to be seen. We are all so broken hearted.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> *True to Type*, 76.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 76-77.

<sup>126</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 107-8.

Senkel's letter exhibited feelings of a broken and fatigued man. While describing the intensity of Soviet assaults, Senkel shows signs of an impending collapse of his will to fight. His longing for an end to the war was similar to those attitudes of countless other letters sent by German soldiers in Stalingrad.

The deterioration of conditions in the encircled area worsened the spirits of the Germans. For example, the unknown private from the 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division described on December 5, 1942 that matters were "getting worse" due to "heavy snowfall." This resulted in his getting "frostbitten" toes, though his unit made it into the city itself after an "exhausting march." In the city, the unknown private noted the following about the state of affairs for the troops positioned there:

We were welcomed by bursting shells but managed to reach a cellar. Thirty people are there already. We are indescribably filthy and unshaven. Can hardly move. There is very little food. Three or four fags to go round. A terrible, savage mob. I am very unhappy. All is lost. Constant bickering. Everybody's nerves are on edge. No mail gets here. Awful.<sup>127</sup>

In two subsequent diary entries, the unknown private of the 305<sup>th</sup> Division further lamented the decline of his wellbeing and that of his comrades. On December 7 he noted: "No change. Oh God, help me return home safe and sound! My poor wife, my dear father and mother! How hard it is for them now. God Almighty, put an end to all this torture! Give us peace again. If we could only go home soon, return to a human way of life!"<sup>128</sup> Then on December 10 he wrote:

I am in utter despair. Heavens, is this going to go on much longer? The wounded stay with us. We can't get them away. They've got us surrounded. Stalingrad is a hell on earth. We cook horse carcasses. There

---

<sup>127</sup> *True to Type*, 77.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*



is no salt. Many are suffering from dysentery. It's a terrible life. What evil did I do to deserve such punishment?<sup>129</sup>

This soldier's mood echoed the cries of a generation being wiped out on the Eastern Front.

Georg Getrost's correspondence with his wife on December 12, 1942 describes the intensity of the Soviet offensive, the mounting German losses, and exhibits levels of defiance as well:

The Russian means to go as far as he did last year, but he is badly mistaken. You will have heard about the large numbers in the Wehrmacht reports....The Russian campaign is of considerable consequence. In the French campaign, no one in our unit was killed in action. Yet as the time goes by the Russian campaign slowly becomes one's end. The time when this war will be decided has not come yet. But I am hoping badly that it comes to an end in the New Year. With the current battle you need not wait for me because my furlough will still be further delayed.<sup>130</sup>

Getrost attempts to offer reassurances to his wife that the Red Army's intentions were "badly mistaken," but later he describes how the Eastern Front "slowly becomes one's end." Perhaps the most telling point comes at the very end, when he tells his wife not to spend her time waiting for him to arrive because he would not receive any leave time due to the battle of Stalingrad.

As the Sixth Army wasted away inside Stalingrad, Hitler organized a relief force led by Field Marshal von Manstein and General Hoth, consisting of two infantry divisions and three panzer divisions, to attempt a breakthrough against the Russian encirclement. However, this advance would not begin until December 12, and by

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>130</sup> Georg Getrost, *"Ich glaube hier in Rußland"*, 307.

December 19 the German tank divisions were stopped by Red Army forces.<sup>131</sup> The glimmer of hope offered by Manstein's rescue operation provided the German soldiers trapped in the cauldron with some hope for salvation, but the mission's ultimate failure doomed thousands to death in combat or in captivity.

Two days after Manstein's rescue attempt began, an unknown private in the 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division commented on his fate inside the Stalingrad pocket on December 14. He described it as follows:

Fainting spells continue. No aid available. There are many wounded here who are receiving no attention. All because of the encirclement. Lit my last fag. Everything comes to an end. What I have gone through this week is too much for anyone. I have been faint with hunger all the time. Last year was a picnic in Russia compared to this year. Today before noon I had a seventh of a loaf of bread and a tiny bit of butter. All night and even now we have been under fire. Fortune has frowned severely upon us. What a terrible country. I put all my trust in God. I have lost my faith in man.<sup>132</sup>

The above excerpt reads as though it were written by a man who had lost everything. Gone were any hopeful wishes for a better tomorrow, gone were the patriotic slogans, gone were feelings of comradery. All that was left were feelings of despair and hopelessness expressed by a broken soldier.

The writings of the German soldiers trapped by the Red Army in Stalingrad became highly emotional and depressing, manifesting the pain they faced while awaiting their annihilation. A *Landsers* named Albert wrote a letter to his mother on December 15, 1942 about the fighting and worsening situation. Albert stated:

---

<sup>131</sup> Glantz, *Endgame*, 100, 156.

<sup>132</sup> *True to Type*, 77-78.

On 22.11. the Russians attacked with the strongest of forces. For us, everything was very quiet. The Russians succeeded in breaking through the Romanians. Our front was now threatened from the rear, and the command came for us to evacuate the position. On 27.11. we went over the Don to the East. Here the troops assembled. The march itself was very arduous, since it went on without any major rest day and night. Horses fell out, motor vehicles were unable to continue due to a lack of fuel. Unfortunately, I lost everything I possessed....Now we sit between the Don and Volga, west of Stalingrad-South and our defense gets weaker day to day against the Russian attacks. They suffered great losses. Nevertheless, we are still sitting completely cut off from the outside in the kettle. Everything we need is brought by plane. Mail too, but unfortunately no packages.<sup>133</sup>

This account of the Soviet offensive and the Germans' feeling of being isolated behind enemy lines provided a grim view of Albert's chances for escape or survival. While he continued to hope for Manstein's rescue operation, Albert would continue to suffer privations and witness innumerable casualties around him.

One of the most telling examples available displaying soldiers' morale and mentality at this stage of the engagement was written by an unknown soldier. This soldier, a private first class in the 305<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, displays his sense of frustration while facing the horrors of war. He wrote on December 18, 1942:

I don't give a damn about anything anymore. I don't see any way out of this confounded hell. The wounded are not being taken away. They are left in the villages within the line of encirclement. Only a miracle of God can deliver us from this valley of death. No one else can help us. Our artillery is now altogether silent, most likely for lack of ammunition. I am hungry and frozen. My feet are like ice....I still cannot resign myself to the idea of dying; yet the infernal death-dealing symphony of battle goes on and on. It is day; the sun is shining. But round about burst bombs and shells. And I am so forlorn and weary. No mortal exists who can "take" this! Everything totters and turns as if the place had been struck by an earthquake....<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Ebert, *Feldposbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 150.

Accounts of Christmas 1942 on the Eastern Front are particularly harrowing given the changing fortunes of the war. While there are scores of letters and diary entries available, the December 24, 1942 journal passage by Hans Roth of the 299<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Army Group B is one of the better selections. Roth's journal captures the emotional heartache of longing for home while realistically evaluating the military circumstances. Roth wrote:

Christmas Eve! Across the snow and ice and through the black, stormy night, our thoughts are with our families at home, where at this hour the candles of the Christmas tree are casting a gentle light on the children's beaming faces, Erika! Where a pretty, young wife with moist eyes is holding the Christmas letter from her beloved in her hands and her thoughts are reaching out far away, across the ice of ancient old rivers, across the tattered Russian forests where the wolves are hauling, across the rubble of large cities, which have lost their horror under a sad, drab snow cover; past the pitiful Panje huts, all the way to her loved one. Silent night, holy night... Silent?! The thumping and roaring of the front is making the windows shake. Holy?! Ahead, the Red murderers brandish their tenfold superior force against the wretched German reception post. The drunken, yelling thugs stick their bayonets into the twitching bodies of our wounded comrades. 'Peace on earth!' God in heaven when will that be again?<sup>135</sup>

For Roth, the dueling images of the holidays at home versus the bloodshed and mayhem at the front seemed like two separate worlds apart. In this selection, Roth juxtaposes Christmas trees with "tattered Russian forests," his wife and children with the images of "Red murderers," and the "Silent night" with combat and death on the battlements. Later in the journal entry, Roth would ask an important question about what 1943 would bring. Roth wrote: "What is going to happen in the coming New Year? It is fortunate

---

<sup>134</sup> *True to Type*, 78.

<sup>135</sup> Roth, 211-212.

that we don't know. After all that we hear and see, I believe it will come to a decision in 1943. We have used up a lot of our energy in the east and the west, and it is only the Russians who are mobilizing their best resources."<sup>136</sup> Roth's confidence of 1941 had been completely replaced by the realities of the Soviet juggernaut.

Other soldiers on the Eastern Front offered similar views of the holidays in Soviet Russia. One soldier, Georg Getrost, wrote in a letter on Christmas Eve 1942 about his desire to be home and an end to the war:

During the celebration one does not think about the war, only his love for home. Everyone would have liked to have celebrated Christmas at home with his loved ones. But the wretched war does not allow it. Our only hope is that we do not need to celebrate Christmas at war again next year. That is all of our wish.<sup>137</sup>

In contrast, on the day after Christmas, Karl Nünninghoff simply wrote in a letter to his brother Willi that he hoped his brother "will not need to experience a winter in Russia. That I never wish for you."<sup>138</sup> Where Getrost longed to be home with his family, Nünninghoff hoped that his younger brother would never have to experience the horrors he faced at the frontlines.

The hopes and fears displayed in the latter weeks of 1942 are perfectly exemplified in two letters written by Wilhelm Moldenhauer on December 27 and 30. In a December 27 letter to his wife Erika, Moldenhauer reflected on his war experiences and the tribulations he faced, writing: "When I look back on the long period I have been

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>137</sup> Getrost, 308.

<sup>138</sup> "Karl Nünninghoff an seine Eltern am 26.12.1942 (3.2008.1388)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 8, 2014, [http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=282&le\\_keyword=Ukraine](http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=282&le_keyword=Ukraine)

in Russia, I think of the loved ones far away from me here today, so I can only thank God, that he has always protected me through all the dangers. Death has torn many of my comrades from us. And even more are wounded and are now possibly at home.”<sup>139</sup>

In a subsequent letter to his friends Wilhelm and Gertrud, Moldenhauer discussed his outlook on military matters and the problems facing the German Army in the East. He wrote on December 30: “Our whole situation is indeed very serious and I would imagine that you, dear Wilhelm do not have your same bright outlook when discussing politics. Although I am also of the opinion that the war has hardened us for events yet to come, though one can hardly consider it possible in light of recent events.” Moldenhauer then turned to his attention to the incredible odds facing Germany, stating: “But the Russians seem to have an inexhaustible sources of men and material, and we are split up on too many fronts. Despite all of this we will make it, because we must succeed. When you get this letter, you will probably see things a bit clearer.”<sup>140</sup>

The holidays seemed to promise little by way of good fortune for the Germans given the predicament at Stalingrad. While some soldiers hoped for peace or victory in 1943, most simply wanted to escape Soviet encirclement and live to see another day. Two letters sent to family members by soldiers trapped in Stalingrad on New Year’s Eve offer a grim image of the Soviet elimination of the pocket. One soldier named Hans wrote to his aunt about the lack of provisions, stating “supply routes other than air all cut off. For six weeks, no mail, the food very poor, barely enough to keep the body and soul

---

<sup>139</sup> Moldenhauer, 276.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 277; Moldenhauer was never heard from again by his family after his last letter was sent on January 4, 1943 from Stalingrad. He was listed as missing, which likely means he died during the fighting or in Soviet captivity. (Moldenhauer, 24)

together....We eat primarily horsemeat, I have already eaten raw horsemeat out of hunger. There are no better prospects.”<sup>141</sup> Later in the letter, Hans wrote “Hopefully they bring us out from this kettle in the New Year, then all of this misery will soon be forgotten.”<sup>142</sup> Similarly, soldier Rudolf Löbel wrote a letter home on December 31, asking an important question: “Dear parents, what will the new year 1943 bring? Let us all hope, that this is the year of victory & we come home to our families & we can again have a nice normal life, as it used to be, Amen to that!”<sup>143</sup>

In both of the letters there is evidence of personal hardship and sacrifice, and a longing for an end to the bloody struggle. Hans spoke of “fatigue” and having to eat “a few fried horse meatballs....” on New Year’s Eve, and even enduring consuming uncooked horse flesh out of hunger.<sup>144</sup> His mental and physical capabilities appear to be severely inadequate given the task facing him, signaling that the Sixth Army would likely not be able to hold out much longer. While Hans had complain of the German supply situation, Rudolf Löbel noted that the Soviets had the ability to fire shells at them “daily,” which left him to wonder “....where he gets the supplies.”<sup>145</sup> Löbel also commented about how 1942 was a year filled with “hardship” as well as “some great victories.” However, he ultimately concedes that it was a “pity” that “we did not succeed

---

<sup>141</sup> Golovchansky, “*Ich will raus...*,” 164.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ebert, *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*, 244-45.

<sup>144</sup> Golovchansky, “*Ich will raus...*,” 164.

<sup>145</sup> Ebert, 244-45.

in taking Stalingrad....,” which was due to the Russians having “pushed into the fortress here where we stand.”<sup>146</sup>

Outside of the Stalingrad front, the Soviets began relentlessly pushing back against the German invaders in the hopes they would achieve breakthroughs. Lt. Heller stationed near St. Petersburg with Army Group North complained in his diary December 31, asking: “What will the new year bring? Can we still place any hope in it? How shall our hearts not be filled with malice and despair at the thought that we have to face a long, protracted war?” Heller noted that multiple Russian divisions were ready to attack his position near Kolpino, and he dryly commented that in 1942 he had “embarked upon with the boldest plans and expectations and which now ends with prospects far from bright and with the consciousness that we shall have to sacrifice our lives for the sake of posterity.”<sup>147</sup> For Heller, the war was not turning out the way that he and many of his comrades had hoped, leaving much room for doubt and the significant risk of death or injury at the hands of the Red Army.

As the battle raged on into the year 1943, the condition of the Wehrmacht troops inside the encirclement continued to worsen drastically. For example, in a January 4, 1943 letter, a soldier named Theo wrote to his spouse that he was “still healthy,” however, he also describes that “we have been surrounded by the Russians for 7 weeks and are supplied from the air.” While Germans back home might have been misinformed about the catastrophic failure of the Luftwaffe to supply the Sixth Army, Theo later

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> *True to Type*, 68.



wrote in the letter, “Here there is a lot of work and little food.” The subject of nourishment so dominated his writing and thought process that he even stated “The days of full meals will not be back again.”<sup>148</sup> This soldiers’ complaints about the inefficiency of the air supply system is subtle, yet he provides other clues as well. For example, Theo states “The packages are all still outside the kettle” and later writes “I have not received mail in a long time.” These pieces of information were more than enough to let people in Germany know how terrible the situation in Stalingrad was, and also provide a view of soldiers’ opinions regarding the failure of their military to effectively aid them.

The effects of winter weather on German soldiers in early 1943 played a significant role in the decline of morale and in decreasing their fighting effectiveness as well. In a letter to his mother, a soldier named Hans complained on January 14, 1943 about the “very cold” weather which caused his comrades to suffer from “frostbite.” Hans hoped also to escape this ailment, which was plaguing many soldiers filling his bunker with nine men with “minor injuries or those who suffered frostbite,” because the hospital was overfilled.<sup>149</sup> In a comparable source, soldier Hans Roth wrote in his journal on January 15 about the weather conditions and a bitter retreat:

Every soldier on the Eastern Front is familiar with the harshness of the Russian winter: chaos and terror is everywhere; tanks have been abandoned, disabled or burning vehicles lie along the roads; there is constant bombing by the Russians; food supplies are burning; there are long waits in snow banks, and we are frostbitten. The slightest injury can cause major problems, for medical service is non-existent. Nobody helps you anymore; everyone is on his own. The weak ones die in the gutter or in the blizzard. Ten or twenty fear-stricken men are hanging on the sides

---

<sup>148</sup> Golovchansky, 167-8.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 217.

of a truck and are being crushed to death in the convoy. Some have lost their gloves, their fingers are frozen stiff; they are weak and fall down, only to be killed by the trucks that follow along in the convoy. Begging, whimpering, cursing and shooting.... Whoever has been subjugated to this wretched experience will never forget it for the rest of his life.<sup>150</sup>

After a month and a half of being surrounded, the German force clinging to life inside Stalingrad was a mere shadow of its former self. While there were still tens of thousands fighting and dying on a daily basis, the terrible existence those men had to endure was appalling. One soldier named Schorsch wrote to his wife Betti on January 15, 1943: "Now it has been going on 8 weeks and our location and our sad fate is still the same. Never in my life have I been so severely punished by fate and never been tormented by hunger as now." To be able to admit such misery to his loved ones would likely have required a belief that he would not survive the battle. Schorsch continued, "You would not recognize me dear Betti as dreadful as we are, war is a terrible word. If but soon a light of salvation would appear on the horizon, otherwise, we will never leave Russia." Schorsch's ability to essentially write his final goodbyes to his family must have taken great courage, but at the same time he was legitimately worried about the authorities finding out what he said. In the letter, he demanded that his wife: "Destroy these lines or hold onto them only when you are alone...."<sup>151</sup> Even with the fear of death, Schorsch had to worry about the repercussions that his statements might cause for his family, showing that soldiers were indeed afraid of censors as well as the Gestapo.

Outside of Stalingrad the situation was becoming increasingly dire in some sectors as well. For example, Lt. Heller of the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division stationed with

---

<sup>150</sup> Roth, 213.

<sup>151</sup> Golovchansky, 223-224.

Army Group North experienced ferocious Soviet assaults around Kolpino, Schlüsselburg, and Ulyanovka. On January 7 Heller noted in his diary that there were “rumours” that the Russians would attack his section of the line. This stress caused Heller much heartache, as he noted that it “wears more on your nerves than definite knowledge would.”<sup>152</sup> By January 14, Heller penned in his diary that: “The Russians have been attacking along the whole front for almost two months now with what seem to be inexhaustible forces. Now, Jan. 12, after a terrific artillery and air bombardment, they have launched their long-expected attack on our sector, too, east of the Neva.”<sup>153</sup> By January 18, Heller wrote about the “frightful” situation regarding the battle around Schlüsselburg, where German units were surrounded. Heller grimly labeled his own troops as mere “scanty remnants,” testament to the devastating losses taking place there.<sup>154</sup>

The offensive Heller described in his diary was part of the Second Battle of Ladoga, codenamed Operation Iskra, an attempt to pierce the Leningrad blockade. On January 12, 1943 the Soviet Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts linked up, forging a seven mile corridor through the German investment around the city.<sup>155</sup> During this Red Army offensive the city of Schlüsselburg was surrounded and seized by the Soviets, forcing the surrender of the German defenders on January 18.<sup>156</sup> The day after the surrender, Lt.

---

<sup>152</sup> *True to Type*, 68.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>155</sup> John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 60.

Heller commented on the events unfolding around him: “I have gained the impression that the troops surrounded at Schlüsselburg did not stick it out to the end. It is a most shocking experience to witness the defeat of your own troops, to see your own comrades bereft of all spunk, in rags and covered with blood. When will the last cross be placed over the grave of the last fallen soldier?”<sup>157</sup>

The breach of the German lines around Leningrad further frustrated their attempts at seizing the besieged city. Wehrmacht reserves were rushed to plug the gap created by the Soviet offensive at Sinjawino and Workers’ Settlement Number 6.<sup>158</sup> Lt. Heller described the situation in his own unit on January 21, 1943:

I am all on tenterhooks. What is going on? Our division is suffering terrible losses. Almost all the officers of our regiment are dead. . . . All the guns are out of commission so that during the night they brought up 3.7 cm. pieces. The T-34 tanks walked over everything. . . . This is too terrible for words. This rout must have been the result of treachery, either on the part of the supreme command or the command of the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division or of both combined. How will they save the situation now?<sup>159</sup>

Operation Iskra was only a partial success for the Soviets. Two Fronts linked up on January 18 and opened a corridor into Leningrad along Lake Ladoga’s shore, prompting Zhukov’s promotion to the rank of marshal. However, Red Army losses were heavy, and the German Army Group North continued its bombing campaigns of Leningrad well into 1943 even as the siege entered its final stages.<sup>160</sup> While the most important battle

---

<sup>156</sup> Harrison E. Salisbury, *900 Tage: die Belagerung von Leningrad*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 319.

<sup>157</sup> *True to Type*, 69.

<sup>158</sup> Erickson, 61

<sup>159</sup> *True to Type*, 69-70.

continued to be fought in the south, Operation Iskra is an important reminder of the attempts at a major push the Soviets were taking against the Germans all along the front.

At Stalingrad, the battle for the city had reached its final stages. By January 16 the Soviets had seized Pitomnik airfield, the second to last airfield left in German hands inside the pocket. Continued Soviet attacks forced the remainder of the Sixth Army back into the eastern half of the *Kessel*, and the supply situation had completely broken down with only Gumrak airfield under German control. On January 18, General Paulus sent a signal stating that the Sixth Army could hold out for only a few more days due to the lack of fuel and ammunition. The Soviets continued their offensive operations against the pocket on January 20, with Gumrak airfield the primary target.<sup>161</sup>

A soldier named Franz trapped inside the Stalingrad pocket wrote a letter to his friend Peter on January 21, 1943, detailing the hopelessness of the battle despite the best efforts of his comrades:

For some months now I have been at Stalingrad. You will have heard about what is going on here in the Wehrmacht reports. You are surely to be informed about the latest situation in a few days, either by radio or from a direct source. The situation here is very serious....With fanatical force the German soldiers defend themselves against overwhelming odds. The bare minimum supplies are coming by air. We have had no mail for more than 2 months. Ammunition and food which is very heavily rationed comes first. It all hangs by a thread. I am certainly not a pessimist, but this bunker can no longer be held without speedy assistance. If the Russians attempt to break through again with strong armored forces, they could surround and take our last airport, which is considered as the last bastion. To what extent help has been promised to

---

<sup>160</sup> Richard Bidlack, *The Leningrad Blockade, 1941-1944: A New Documentary History from the Soviet Archives*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 63-64.

<sup>161</sup> Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 364-5, 369-370.

us, we do not know. Slogans are buzzing around, whether they are proven true remains to be seen.<sup>162</sup>

Franz's report about the stubbornness of the German defense, as well as the impending threat against Gumrak airport, shows that he was well informed of the overall situation. Though he clung to some hope about either breaking out or being rescued, it appears as though he was very skeptical of being able to save himself from death or capture. Gumrak airport fell on January 22, and by January 24 radio contact was lost with the Sixth Army headquarters.<sup>163</sup>

While the fate of the Germans in the *Kessel* was sealed, soldiers outside of the pocket wrote their perceptions and opinions regarding the impact of the fateful battle. Lt. Heller stationed near Leningrad commented on January 26, 1943 that: "...after our troops in the Caucasus and near Voronezh have been retreating for several days past, our Command informs us that the pressure of the Russians is still increasing. Where will all this lead to?"<sup>164</sup> While Heller questioned the long-term impact of events in the south, others such as Heinz Rahe of the 13<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division stationed south of Stalingrad realized that the battle and the overall war situation was going against Germany. Rahe wrote to his wife Ursula on January 28, 1943:

What moves me these days is much less our retreat as the situation at Stalingrad. I am prompted to compare it to Verdun. Russian propaganda, 'German soldiers, the Caucasus will be your grave!' This is certainly not true. But what will Stalingrad mean for us? We are in a serious crisis it

---

<sup>162</sup> Golovchansky, "Ich will raus...", 234.

<sup>163</sup> Beevor, 374.

<sup>164</sup> *True to Type*, 70.

seems. The second front, which is American aid, is now surely very effective.<sup>165</sup>

While both Heller and Rahe have different perspectives about the overall war situation especially given their geographical locations, Rahe appears to have a far greater grasp of the implications surrounding the battle of Stalingrad.

After the fall of the last airfields, letters from soldiers stopped coming out from the pocket. Outside of the *Kessel*, the Soviets launched Operation Zvezda (Star) on February 2, 1943, the day the Germans inside Stalingrad surrendered, in an attempt to seize Kursk, Belgorod, and Kharkov as well.<sup>166</sup> Hans Roth left an undated diary entry about the fighting he experienced during the Soviet onslaught, especially noting the decline in Wehrmacht morale:

The flood of the Reds is rolling towards the west like an avalanche, crushing everything in its path. Kursk will be overrun very soon....The military command orders the defense of the city, but the rank and file soldiers feel that this is useless, that it is too late. The motivation of the armies, divisions, and the hundred thousand soldiers is at its lowest point. This is the consequence suffered by most soldiers who fought on the murderous front for 41 days and nights without any break, while their comrades were having a good time in France. You can only endure this up to a point. And, God help us in case an unforeseen emergency arrives. Damn we are tired, our hearts are broken!<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> "Heinz Rahe an seine Ehefrau am 28.01.1943 (3.2002.0985)," Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, accessed August 9, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=997>

<sup>166</sup> David Glantz, *From the Don to the Dnepr: Soviet Offensive Operations, December 1942-August 1943*, (Portland, Oregon: F. Cass, 1991), 151.

<sup>167</sup> Roth, 214-215; Note that Hans Roth was listed as missing on June 25, 1944 somewhere southwest of Vitebsk, and information regarding his death or final resting place was never found. (Roth, 237-9).

For Roth and his unit, the Soviet offensive had been a catastrophe, as he experienced a bitter retreat through terrible winter weather. Roth described the desperate situation in a journal entry from February 7, 1943 as follows:

Stalingrad-Rostow-Charkow: the big triangle is now in the hands of the Reds and lost for us. We desperately cling to every village and city. But the enemy is too strong. We have to retreat after a few hours of bitter fighting. Our faces are grey; bitter desperation settles in our hearts as our toughest enemy. It is -40 degrees C; the snow level is as high as our bodies. The steaming, agitated and exhausted horses can't even pull the empty sleds anymore. Our small group becomes smaller and smaller, only half of them are still able to fight. Injured soldiers, many with frostbite, load their carbines and shoot. They lumber through the snow; their faces are contorted with pain. In the midst of the blizzard, some fall behind and lose their group, which was supposed to support them.... We continue to rush through the snow. Everything is so totally useless! The icy cold numbs us so much that we are losing the will to survive. Who cares about the shrapnel of the tank shells and ricocheting bullets from the enemy carbines? We are tired, incredibly tired.<sup>168</sup>

While Roth had to experience the pain of defeat at the hands of the Red Army, the front would soon be stabilized. Operation Zvezda was only a partial success for the Red Army, having seized Belgorod and Kharkov in February. However, by March the Soviet offensive stalled, and a successful counteroffensive by Field Marshal von Manstein allowed the Germans to recapture Kharkov by mid-March 1943.<sup>169</sup>

The fall of Stalingrad took place on February 2, 1943. The Russians captured 91,000 prisoners at Stalingrad, including 2,500 officers and 22 generals.<sup>170</sup> For the Wehrmacht, the destruction of the Sixth Army and the Fourth Panzer Army were

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 218-219.

<sup>169</sup> Glantz, *From the Don...*, 170, 179, 199-205.

<sup>170</sup> Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 550.



catastrophic blows. From the start of Operation Uranus, some 60,000 Germans had died in Stalingrad and 130,000 were captured in total from November onwards. Most estimates suggest that the Axis lost approximately half a million men throughout the entire campaign. In addition, the *Luftwaffe* lost 488 transport planes and 1,000 crew members during the airlift, in addition to the Fourth Air Fleet's losses as well.<sup>171</sup> The Third Reich could no longer win the war in the East militarily, setting Germany on its path to defeat and division in 1945.

#### 6.4. Conclusions

The defeat of the Wehrmacht at the battle of Stalingrad in 1942-1943 signified the turning fortunes of the Second World War. For the soldiers of Hitler's army, the Stalingrad experience would forever alter their worldviews, shifting many towards a harsh realism that the Eastern Front conflict either could not be won or would be a many years long battle of attrition. Wehrmacht troops began moreso to see discrepancies between propaganda talk and frontline action, leading many to begin a mentality shift by which they increasingly distrusted the Nazi party while remaining loyal to Hitler and the military.

However, Nazi ideology and propaganda portrayals of the Soviet Union and Communism had so infiltrated the mindset of the Germans that even changing fortunes in war and disillusionment with the regime would not warm soldiers' hearts to the hated Bolsheviks. Instead, what we find is that in the same way that German soldiers developed a pattern of cognitive dissonance in regards to atrocities committed, they

---

<sup>171</sup> Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 398.

always grew to separate themselves from aspects of Nazism while staying true to their comrades and their cause. Experience at the front did alter their perceptions of the Soviet people and the Red Army, but that did not destroy their overall hatred of Communist ideology and governing policies. As the war reached its final stages in 1943-1945, soldiers would grow increasingly tired of the war, but they continued to fight on in the East to ward off the threat of the Russians reaching the Reich itself.

## Chapter Seven

### **“Who were we?:” Despondent Soldiers, Desperate Ideologues, and the Demise of the Wehrmacht, 1943-1945**

...I stared into the nameless face of war. All the powers might be striving for one another's extermination; what manned the trenches barely deserved the name of man; they were more like soulless tools of destruction, fanatics of doom. There was hardly a pause between engagements for the individual man to think of his being made in God's image and the foes to feel their shared fate. Being made a prisoner was a terror, and being wounded in no-man's-land meant almost certain death. The operation of these elemental forces provided the setting for me to live and be in magic horror, a wanderer between dust and stars in that unhinged time. Death and killing were the only aim of this tussle; there was no conflict of politics or philosophy; each man was fighting for his life and no longer for ideals and a delusory meaning; everything finally devolved to a futile waste of men and materiel.<sup>1</sup>

-Soldier Willy Peter Reese, Personal Account, 1944.

The Eastern Front conflict of the Second World War came to a dramatic and violent conclusion in 1945 after nearly four years of brutal fighting, destructive conquest, and vicious genocide. Following the battle of Stalingrad which ended in February 1943, the Nazi-Soviet War became a murderous battle of attrition, in which the

---

<sup>1</sup> Willy Peter Reese, *A Stranger to Myself, The Inhumanity of War: Russia, 1941-1944*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 111

Red Army crushed the Wehrmacht through numerous offensives. This chapter emphasizes the changing trends in German soldiers' perceptions of the war, the Soviets, and their personal identity. The continuous defeats and retreats suffered by the Wehrmacht following Stalingrad and Kursk made many of the troops question their beliefs about the Nazi regime and their hopes for a victorious outcome to the war. Some of their opinions regarding the war changed dramatically, while others, particularly views on the Soviet Union, continued to display many of the traits borne out of Nazi propaganda, experiences in Russia, and sheer hatred and fear of their foe. Many of those German soldiers who struggled on during the final death throes of the Third Reich came to the realization that the world the Nazis created was forever to be lost. Everything that the Wehrmacht had accomplished militarily was reversed and the Fatherland lay in ruins, leaving the ordinary men of Hitler's army with little to believe in anymore. However, in the wake of defeat, some of the former soldiers made it their mission to convince the Western Allies to continue the fight against Bolshevism, contributing to the anti-Communist rhetoric that characterized the post-1945 period.

This dissertation has argued that Nazi ideology was successful in creating and reinforcing a manufactured image of an enemy nation and its people, for German soldiers held in Allied captivity and at the front consistently believed many of these views throughout the war. Other soldiers appear to have learned from personal experiences that the Nazis had lied about many things and made too many false promises. In order to cover the last two years of the war, this chapter will be organized into two different sections: the views of the soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front in their letters and diaries, and the views of German prisoners of war held in Allied captivity.

These contrasting images will help display the mentality of troops who had endured years of warfare, characterized by their accounts of combat, predictions on the outcome of the war, views of the enemy, and an identity crisis which occurred as a result changes in the fortunes of war. Lastly, this chapter's inclusion of sources pertaining to soldiers in Allied captivity will show how veterans of the war in the East contemplated the postwar world, their own fate, and their perceptions of the Soviet Union.

### *7.1. Visions of War: Combat, Defeat, and the Enemy from Kursk to the Endkampf*

The identity transformation German soldiers on the Eastern Front underwent its most important stage during the downfall period of 1943-1945. Operation *Zitadelle* in the summer 1943 was Hitler's last great offensive against the Soviets, and with its defeat came the final realization by many soldiers that the war could not be won in battle. During this crucial phase of the war, German soldiers wrote down their thoughts about the battles taking place, the tenacity of their foe, and the outcome of the war. Within this particular paradigm, what is found is that the troops increasingly grew tired of fighting, lost faith in their leadership, and simply wanted the war to end. Despite the declining morale and numerous defeats facing the Wehrmacht, the soldiers in the East continued to tenaciously battle against the Red Army. No German soldier wanted to see a Russian victory and the occupation of the Reich by the Soviets. Thus, the troops killing and dying on the Eastern Front struggled on because of their fears of Bolshevik revenge being exacted upon Germany's citizenry and upon themselves.

Wehrmacht soldiers often wrote about the landscape and demography of the Soviet Union in their quiet time throughout the period of German occupation of Eastern territories. Their reflections on the people, places, and events around them provide a

window into the past as they saw it. In the months leading up to the new German offensive in the summer 1943, there was a lull in the fighting due to exhaustion on both sides following the Stalingrad campaign and the battle of Kharkov.<sup>2</sup> During this period, soldiers had the opportunity to write down their views of the East and its people. One soldier Harry Mielert wrote a letter home on March 3, 1943, in which he described his heavily stereotyped perceptions of the Red Army. Mielert wrote:

We are always amazed by the wild tenacity of the Russians. They give the savages practically nothing. A strange impression was made by the Mongolian portions of the Far Eastern Army which competed against us. Beastly undaunted, almost smiling they stepped through our devastating defensive fire, without looking after the fallen. Once they were wounded or overwhelmed by us and had no weapons, they began to whine and beg. It was foreign to us German soldiers, sometimes we could not help but respond with laughter, to which they then abandoned their animal fear and laughed. But many do not approach us too closely. Different of course is the Great Russian who is patriotic, is a dedicated Soviet and who doggedly fights to the last breathe. We Germans are completely different...<sup>3</sup>

Soldiers' depictions of the Russian landscape often presented contrasting views of the region depending on the location and one's biases or beliefs. For example, Josef Kurz depicted Russia to his family in a letter home dated May 5, 1943: "Russia is a vast and large country. Everything is different here than at home. The people, the landscape, the streets, the houses. Not without reason called the 'Soviet paradise.' But when you see these poor people, then we know to appreciate our country."<sup>4</sup> Harry Mielert stated in

---

<sup>2</sup> David M. Glantz & Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 158-9.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Mielert, *Russische Erde: Kriegsbriefe aus Russland*, (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1950), 56-7; Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are by Justin Pfeifer.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Kurz, 'Aber Du war doch Soldat!' *War ich nicht auch ein Christ? Briefe, Tagebuchaufzeichnungen und Reflexionen des Soldaten Sepp K.*, (Linz: Edition Kirchen-Zeit-Geschichte, 2003), 42.

a letter home on May 14, 1943 regarding the Soviet Union that: “In general, this Russia could be romantic, if the war was not going on.” Mielert was “struck” by the “character of the landscape” in Russia, and he found the stillness of the steppe to be “atmospheric” and “melancholic.”<sup>5</sup> As forms of travel writing, such sources provide deep layers of socio-cultural history, showing what soldiers perceived and felt during their tours of duty on the Eastern Front.

The travel writing of German soldiers in the East reveals the extent to which personal surroundings play an experiential role in human understanding. Soldier Willy Peter Reese of the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division wrote a manuscript while on leave in early 1944 based upon his diary entries at the front. When recalling his views of Russia in the early summer 1943, Reese depicted the environment and people as a growing part of his own identity. Reese wrote:

Once more the vast expanse of Russia lay outside the windows. Gray skies, meadows, scattered trees, rarely a building. It was raining. Hay and grain were rotting away. I slept and drank. In the sunset at Smolensk, I heard women singing. They sang between trains that crossed here, east and west, melancholy, lost in their eerie, cruel, fertile country and a soil that would not honor any amount of sacrifice. In the moonlit night, horns sounded. There were calls from obscure distances, coming nearer and losing themselves in other distances, a sound full of yearning, fatigue, and homesickness, and yet a romantic greeting, an embassy from life in the enemy land. In the evening we were taken off the train at Yarzevo. We overnighted in a barn and the next day rested at Filipovo. There, after a long time on the road, I saw girls dancing in the evening again. To the monotonous sound of balalaika music, they stepped and twirled in a ring of young men, sometimes sang in soft plaint, and spun again in a mute dance, took hands with slow movements, parted them again, and exited the ring with a light bow. Their white headscarfs glowed in the sunset and went on gleaming in the rising moon; distance was reflected on their

---

<sup>5</sup> Mielert, 80-1.

impassive faces. Crickets chirped in the mournful balalaika noise, and we soldiers sang and laughed with strangers, as if the distant sound of the front were not echoing in the ancient dance. I was happy. In the middle of Russia, I at last felt at home. This was where I belonged; nowhere other than in this world with its horrors and sparse joys was it good to be. Only here did my soul find its strange element.<sup>6</sup>

Reese had been at war for two years by the summer of 1943, and at the time he wrote his manuscript in 1944 he had been a soldier for over three years. The changes that took place within Reese and so many men like him included not only the impact of the terror of combat and the drudgeries of military life, but also the experience of moving across the vast distances of Eastern Europe made Reese feel like a traveling salesman or explorer. Reese wrote: "I had become an adventurer, a wandering mendicant, a vagabond."<sup>7</sup> Soldiering and warfare became as integral a part of the Eastern fighters' identity as did Russia itself, changing the lives of millions of people for the rest of their days.

Following the tumultuous summer campaign of 1943 and the retreat of the Wehrmacht along the Dnieper, some German soldiers also took the time to describe Russia and its people in their writings even at this crucial stage of the war. In contrast to Reese's views on Russia and its people, soldier Heinrich Böll stationed in the Ukraine wrote negatively about it on November 6, 1943: "Russia is truly gloomy and massive and demonic, the country without fences, really without fences in contrast to France, where each and every small patch of earth is surrounded with a high wall."<sup>8</sup> Later on

---

<sup>6</sup> Reese, 109-110.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 164

<sup>8</sup> Jochen Schubert, Hrsg., *Heinrich Böll: Briefe aus dem Krieg, 1939-1945, Vol. II*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001), 942



November 10, Böll once again wrote to his wife about the population of Vinnitsa located south of Zhytomyr, Ukraine:

...Russia...is incredibly large and gloomy, truly an enchanted land, that you cannot easily “capture,” you have to wait, wait... We continue to hold small rural stations, where the people are not as demoralized by hunger. And in the countryside life is in its more natural form...but sometimes you see the grim, pale, poor, miserable proletarians on the move, foreshadowing Soviet Russia.”<sup>9</sup>

Another basis for comparison between the views of Reese and Böll exists in their perceptions of their counterparts in the Soviet military. For example, in his manuscript Willy Peter Reese described Red Army soldiers in the portion of the text regarding the fall 1943. Reese saw his enemy much differently than some of his comrades:

...I was fighting men I didn't hate, who were never enemies to me, who in their destiny were more like my brothers; and that I was only trying to perform an imposed duty, not unlike a monk serving strange idols yet putting all his devotion and passion into his service and this order. What made us great wasn't what we did but what we suffered. It was God's great game, and we had to be content to be figures in it.<sup>10</sup>

Reese was certainly not a Nazi and did not subscribe to their political or ideological views of the war. For him, the enemy he was fighting was not one he particularly hated, rather Reese saw the Soviets being much the same as him.

In contrast, Heinrich Böll offers a different interpretation of the Red Army soldiers. Böll wrote a letter to his wife on November 23, 1943 describing a failed Soviet attack against his unit: “Today it was very quiet, but last night there was a great dance; the Russians had apparently received Schnapps and then went crazy, they jeered and

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 945-6.

<sup>10</sup> Reese, 138.

chanted like madmen and shot. These types attempted completely undisciplined attacks, which failed of course; but it was frightening, this barbaric swarm against us...”<sup>11</sup>

Unlike Reese, who had some respect and even admiration of the enemy combatants, Böll regarded the Russians as “madmen” and “barbaric,” as many other Germans who had been imbued with Nazi ideology felt about the Soviets.

The barbarity of war continued on at the strategic level as well in 1943, with the German High Command planning yet another offensive for the summer to attempt to break the bloody deadlock against the Red Army. Hitler and the German General Staff decided on Operation *Zitadelle*, a plan to destroy a salient around Kursk through an encirclement maneuver.<sup>12</sup> Some of the Wehrmacht soldiers became very hopeful that yet another attack against the Red Army might produce a victory. One soldier Hellmut K. wrote to his mother on April 11, 1943, in which he hoped for a new offensive that would “destroy” the Russians. Hellmut K. believed that the ordinary Russian soldier also “yearns for the end of the war;” and he hoped that the new offensive would not cause their enemy to “run off again too far” where they could not be pursued and destroyed.<sup>13</sup>

The preparation for Operation *Zitadelle* involved the marshaling of huge numbers of forces. While the Germans hoped their new Tiger and Panther tanks would be decisive elements in the battle, the Soviets prepared for the attack with field fortifications, dense reserves, and an overall force which dwarfed the number of German

---

<sup>11</sup> Schubert, *Heinrich Böll*, 953.

<sup>12</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 157-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ingrid Hammer & Suanne zur Nieden, eds., *Sehr selten habe ich geweint: Briefe und Tagebücher aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg von Menschen aus Berlin*, (Zürich: Schweizer Verlaghaus, 1992), 133.

soldiers.<sup>14</sup> As the battle of Kursk commenced on July 5, 1943, the Wehrmacht had its last chance at attempting to turn the tide of the war in its favor. Gerhard Udke was among the soldiers who took part in the defensive fighting of the battle of Kursk, and in a letter from July 6, 1943 he wrote to his wife about his hopes for the operation's success. Udke stated:

When you receive this letter, the results of the large operation which has begun in recent days will be a bit clearer. Pray God, that the hopes which Hitler ties to this new (last?) offensive may be fulfilled. Apparently we are once again at a focal point; we take note when convoys pass on the nights of bombing raids in unprecedented proportions... Everyone is glad, that we are going forward again. The preparations are meticulous, but the Russians are still very strong... In any case, we must keep the faith...<sup>15</sup>

For Udke, witnessing the preparations for and early onset of the Kursk offensive provided him with a glimmer of optimism that the Wehrmacht could still defeat the Red Army. However, despite his forlorn hopes, he cautiously noted that the Russians were “still very strong,” suggesting he knew that the battle could go either way.

However, the German High Command completely underestimated the Soviets' military capabilities, leading to a battle of attrition which the Wehrmacht could not afford to wage. The Soviet defensive zone consisted of six miles inside the salient, with more than 3,000 miles of trenches, scores of antitank traps, artillery and anti-tank guns, and over 400,000 mines.<sup>16</sup> In terms of overall numbers, the Soviet manpower outnumbered the Germans 2.5:1, the number of tanks was nearly equal, but in artillery

---

<sup>14</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 296.

<sup>15</sup> Gerd Udke, ed., *Schreib so oft Du kannst: Feldpostbriefe des Lehrers Gerhard Udke 1940 bis 1944*, (Berlin: JKL Publicationen, 2002), 147.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Overy, *Russia's War: Blood Upon the Snow*, (New York: TV Books, 1997), 243-44.

the Soviets also exceeded the Germans at a ratio of 2.5:1.<sup>17</sup> Soldiers' letters reveal the extent to which the Red Army was prepared for the engagement and wreaked havoc upon the Germans with powerful artillery fire and tenacious defenders. Harry Mielert recalled the intensity and dangerousness of the situation in a letter home dated July 7, 1943:

...The Russian artillery fire, whose thickness has increased dramatically, is very disturbing. However, we stand fast, and our reinforcements storm past us through the wide gap, that we have broken into the Russian fortifications. We are in high spirits. Many comrades have fallen. But they live on in the undying spirit, which together forms as a spirit of the Fatherland...<sup>18</sup>

Mielert continued to experience bitter combat during the battle of Kursk. A letter from July 8, 1943 focuses on his views of the Red Army as he did in an earlier March 1943 letter, except in this instance he is forced to admit that the Soviets were a worthy adversary. Mielert described his enemy:

The Russians too have fought bravely. Especially the Commissars. Some stood tall on the edge of the trenches and led the movement to counterattack, which cost us many lives. Those are also tremendously resolute men whom one must respect. They fall in great numbers during such battles, but they are the backbone of the Russian army.<sup>19</sup>

For Mielert, the events he experienced during the Kursk campaign forced him to recognize the incredible bravery and skill of his enemy.

The fighting on July 7 and 8 in the northern sector of the attack involved bitter house-to-house battles for control of Ponyri Station. Once the Germans managed to seize

---

<sup>17</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 165; The exact number provided by Glantz for the Red Army were 1,087,500 men, 3,275 tanks, 25,013 artillery against 435,000 German soldiers, 3,155 tanks, and 9,966 artillery.

<sup>18</sup> Mielert, 84-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 85-6.

control of Ponryi, they had to assault the heights at Olkovatka, though the attacks were temporarily suspended due to exhaustion and heavy losses.<sup>20</sup> One soldier Josef Kurz was stationed behind the front when order for the Kursk offensive was issued, and soon his unit was ordered into the deadly conflagration. Kurz wrote a letter to his loved ones on July 9 recounting the events of the battle thus far:

Sunday (4.7.) we were a few miles behind the front in a beautiful forest. When we received and read aloud the Führer command to begin the offensive (Operation 'Zitadelle'), we understood how big of an impact it would have. In the night we started off, just behind forward positions through the Russian lines, which were deeply staggered and well developed. The sky was covered in vast numbers by our airplanes: Stukas, fighters, and bombers. Once a fighter attacked six Russian bombers and in short time shot down four of them. Our new volley guns are superior to the Stalin organ and even more maddening to Ivan. In the evening it was time for our battalion to attack. Under heavy mortar fire it went forward... Luckily the Russians piled up as we were getting closer to them. In the end, we went through a small swamp, so that we stood in water almost up to our stomach. For the night the battalion formed a hedgehog, which is a defense on four sides... On Wednesday we moved to a wooded outpost. The Russians fired a volley from the Stalin organ, and the forest began to burn. Wednesday evening we moved to defensive positions in foxholes on a dominant hillside, and we are still there today. Last night Ivan attacked us on the right and the left of us, he has spared us.<sup>21</sup>

The accounts of Mielert and Kurz continued for much of the fighting at Kursk, displaying a view of events from an infantry perspective. On July 10, Mielert noted in a letter the Russian's attempts at flank attacks and the importance of the artillery and tank fighting. Mielert wrote: "...The attack in our section continues. We have an easier task of securing the flanks against Russian attacks... There is a massive battle taking place,

---

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*, (Lexington: KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 345.

<sup>21</sup> Josef Kurz, 'Aber Du war doch Soldat!', '48-9.

no longer characterized by our breakthrough, where infantry close combat predominated, but more of an artillery and tank battle.”<sup>22</sup> Josef Kurz described his experiences on July 12, noting the ferocity of Soviet counterattacks during the battle: “We are still sitting in our tank foxhole in a defensive position. Apparently the kettle is closed. For five hours the heaviest fire is situated on our position. Five minutes ago a grenade launcher hit two feet from our foxhole. Miraculously, we were both uninjured. Again and again Ivan attacks, and up to now he could not get through...”<sup>23</sup>

While the battle in the north reached a deadlock by July 12, the German forces in the south under Field Marshal von Manstein continued their advance. By July 11, Manstein’s troops had reached the Psel River, broke through defenses on the Donets, and seized heights near Kursk. However, the Soviets planned a surprise counterattack against the Germans, in the hopes of halting the Wehrmacht’s advance on July 12. The battle of Prokhorovka southeast of Kursk was one of the largest tank battles in history, and while the Red Army’s attack suffered heavy losses in the fight, their success at breaking through at Orel put Army Group Center in jeopardy.<sup>24</sup> By the end of July 12 both sides had fought to a standstill, though source materials and scholars differ on the amount of losses suffered by the Germans and the Russians. Nevertheless, the setbacks

---

<sup>22</sup> Mielert, 86-7; Note that Mielert was killed on December 15, 1943.

<sup>23</sup> Kurz, 49; Note that Kurz was wounded in battle on 19 July 1943. He would survive the war and later publish his diary and letters from the wartime era.

<sup>24</sup> Fritz, 347-350.

in the operation, coupled with the western Allied landing in Italy on July 10, caused Hitler to stop the offensive in Russia and transfer units westward.<sup>25</sup>

The German Army was forced to retreat in late July and early August 1943 following a series of coordinated Soviet attacks. While partisans conducted a ‘rail war’ against the Germans by attacking communications and railroads, the Red Army prepared to launch one of its greatest offensives yet.<sup>26</sup> On July 12 Operation Kutuzov began, with the hopes of seizing Orel and to break up the German defenses. After weeks of fighting the Soviets seized Orel on August 5, 1943, forcing a withdrawal of German forces in that area.<sup>27</sup> In addition the Soviets launched Operation Rummyantsev on August 3 against Army Group South, aimed at taking Belgorod and Kharkov. Once again, after bitter engagements Marshall Zhukov utilized mass artillery, air, and tank assaults to seize both locations by August 23.<sup>28</sup> The end of these operations officially concluded the battle of Kursk, and marked the beginning of the Red Army’s late summer and fall military operations.

The German soldiers’ perceptions of the dire situation became very bleak, reminiscent of the thoughts they had regarding Stalingrad and the Soviet winter offensive of 1941-1942. Gerhard Udke wrote to his wife on August 3 about the strains of the fighting post-Kursk. Udke stated: “Greuling days are behind us. The company

---

<sup>25</sup> Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 586-7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 587-91.

<sup>27</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 167-8.

<sup>28</sup> Bellamy, 591-3.

suffered heavy losses, but managed to fight a successful defense. The withdrawal took place entirely according to plan, unlike in the winter...”<sup>29</sup> Later on August 15, Udke put into perspective everything that happened after the Russian seizure of Orel, including scorched earth policies:

While retreating from the Orel pocket we are all setting everything afire: huts, stables, straw and hay, the grain that is placed on the fields in sheaves after being cut; the grain and stalks that will not burn are crushed for the most part. We look like the soldiers of the Thirty Years War. But it is actually quite a moderate withdrawal plan. The losses are sometimes considerable, sometimes less; but the Russians always have up to eight times higher losses in men and material. It has been an extermination campaign. But, how a victory is to be achieved with such methods is of course unclear.<sup>30</sup>

Udke’s description of the withdrawal process shows how the German Army destroyed everything in its wake to slow down the enemy, comparing such tactics to those of the Thirty Years War. In addition, while the retreat appears to be a tactical success, Udke questions how going backwards could ever result in a final victory.

Another soldier Willy Peter Reese was at the front in time for the German retreat following Kursk. Reese provided detailed descriptions of the fighting, conditions, and morale during this phase of the war in his 1944 manuscript. Reese described the fighting near the town of Mileyevo located northwest of Orel and northeast of Bryansk:

In gray, windy morning cool, a violent bombardment of artillery, mortars, and antitank weapons set in against our rifle pits and half-fortified positions. The Russian assault commenced. In broad waves and loose bands, the Russians emerged from their positions on the edge of the forest, a little over nine hundred yards in front of us, and advanced uprightly along the wide slope....Defensive fire from infantry cannons

---

<sup>29</sup> Udke, 150-1.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 152.



punched the first holes in their ranks, but our artillery had no ammunition. Our explosive shells smashed into the enemy ranks, machine guns beefed up the barrage, but the Russians pressed forward, apparently oblivious to their losses... In front of us the attackers were bleeding to death, but to the side of us the last of the infantry who had been pulverized the day before were also dying. There the Russians succeeded in pushing deep into Mileyevo. Toward noon the last of the enemy withdrew from the cornfield in front of us... We stared at each other. Our uniforms had both been holed again, but we were intact. I burst out into wild sobbing. For a long time tears ran down my cheeks, washing white streaks in the layers of grime and soot. I vainly had recourse to cigarettes to calm myself, but it was an hour before I recovered. It wasn't the nearness of death, or the intense experience of danger, or the dreadfulness of the fighting. It was relief that caused me to break down, the fleeting awareness of the appalling things I had experienced and that took the soul out of the mechanical action, so that it resumed its own uncertain being once more.<sup>31</sup>

In another excerpt from Reese's manuscript, he details the continued retreat westwards in the fall 1943. Reese captures the physical and emotional sides of war in his writing, by vividly portraying the destruction, circumstances, and mood of his comrades. Reese noted the following about the withdrawal from Mileyevo:

We were not permitted to sleep. To the east of us Mileyevo was ablaze; to the north, the dark, forbidding forests. In front of us we could make out the outlines of the ravaged village against deeper darkness, struts, chimneys, fences, among the smoldering wood. Death and destruction marked our path, our flight. We stood together, shivering in our coats, now struggling to stay awake and now, with that strange alertness that comes out of extreme tiredness, talking in impassioned tones of indifferent subjects. We sang the wild, senseless songs of the period, songs of drink, adventures, and whores, and finally we started dancing clumsily, like bears, grotesque dream shapes in the Russian night. We were leading a ghost life, refugees dispersed across the immense land, and as we danced in Kvastovitchi, madness flickered around our foreheads, a dance on the ruins of the village as on the ruins of our lives, dazzled by flames, swaying in the wind like hanged corpses. Sluggish morning light seeped across the east. We found haystacks, spread out

---

<sup>31</sup> Reese, 118-119.

blankets, and slept till the sun rose and dangled over the devastation. With hot, fevered faces, with hurting limbs and swollen feet, we staggered on and were given a position to hold in a cornfield, facing the end of the village. There we lay down in the sparse shade of haystacks, tormented by heat and exhaustion, stung to bits by turnip fleas, feeling infinitely empty inside, and playing cards like sluggish, lifeless machines. We were degenerate, lousy, dirty, unprincipled, indifferent. We had long since lost all interest in life and the world.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the month of September, the Wehrmacht and the Red Army rushed towards the Dnieper River. During this process, the Germans continued to destroy the earth in the path of the Soviets, in the hopes to slow down their advance.<sup>33</sup> Willy Peter Reese would be wounded on September 13, and subsequently his unit's withdrawal would continue towards the Desna River, a tributary of the Dnieper.<sup>34</sup>

In Reese's flight westwards he experienced two of the major characteristics of the German retreat from Russia; scorched earth tactics and murder. For example, in his trek towards Gomel, Reese witnessed and took part in the destruction of the countryside around him. Reese described it as follows:

Slowly we headed toward Gomel, seeing always the same thing: harvested fields in a storm, smoke clouds on the horizon. Russia was turning into a depopulated, smoking, burning, wreckage-strewn desert, and the war behind the front bothered me still more, because those it affected were non-combatants. I was partly responsible for this devastation and the grief it brought the people, responsible like all the nameless victims, like all the soldiers. I had almost forgotten that there was anything besides war and flight. I no longer dreamed of going home.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 126-127.

<sup>33</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> Reese, 175.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 148.

Then efforts made by the Wehrmacht to enact scorched earth tactics caused many problems. Militarily, it took time to destroy buildings and crops, evacuate civilians and material, thus delaying the retreat considerably. Many soldiers were unable to carry out their tasks in full given the speed of the Soviet advance, meaning that at most only 20-30% of the economic goods were evacuated in any given area. However, the Germans did manage to force over 2 million civilians out of territory east of the Dnieper River, for use as laborers in Germany or at the front.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the destruction of homes and crops directly affecting the civilian population, Reese also notes that during the battles against the Red Army no prisoners were taken by either side. For Reese, the fighting was as if the Wehrmacht were being "...put to the sword like sacrificial lambs. This wasn't fighting anymore; it was butchery." In the skirmishes and fights against the pursuant foe, Reese noted that the enemy killed German soldiers who had surrendered, so in turn "...we didn't take any prisoners either." In this type of warfare, Reese felt that the troops "...weren't fighting," rather they simply put up a defense "...only until an opportunity arose for flight."<sup>37</sup> The German Army was on the run from parts of the Soviet Union, and in the withdrawal the soldiers continued to annihilate as they went.

While they devastated to the countryside, the Germans also had to face the serious partisan danger disrupting their logistical operations. The defeats of 1943 pushed the civilian population further towards accommodation with the guerilla movement, and

---

<sup>36</sup> Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 372-3.

<sup>37</sup> Reese, 152.

in turn intensified the Nazis elite's plans to "...rape the Soviet Union of its economic and human resources in the name of 'total war.'"<sup>38</sup> Of course, such policies only alienated the population more so and pushed them towards the partisan cause, while the overall war situation made it difficult for the Eastern Army to combat the guerilla forces. For example, in 1943, Army Group center faced an estimated 57,000 partisans in Belorussia in January, and by September there were 103,600 of them. Across the entire rear of Army Group Center, the numbers of partisans grew from 130,000 to approximately 250,000.<sup>39</sup> In order to combat this threat, the SS and Wehrmacht worked together to implement a "dead zones policy," including evacuations of civilian populaces, torture of suspects, reprisals, and destructions of villages.<sup>40</sup>

There is plenty of evidence in soldiers' writings detailing the horrors of the anti-partisan efforts. Two examples from the fall 1943, one from Willy Peter Reese and the other by an anonymous Private H.M., portray the types of policies enacted by the Germans to combat partisans in Russia and the Ukraine respectively. In Reese's account, he describes coming across two executed partisans in September 1943 near Verkhni, Russia located north of Bryansk:

On mud roads we marched through a glade at eventide. Two hanged men swayed on a protruding branch. A musty smell of decomposition hung around their stiff forms. Their faces were swollen and bluish, contorted to grimaces. The flesh was coming away from the nails of their tied hands; yellow-brown ichor dribbled out of their eyes and crusted on their cheeks, on which the stubble had continued to grow. One soldier took their

---

<sup>38</sup> Ben Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 166, 168.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 184

picture; another gave them a swing with his stick. Partisans. We laughed and moved off, along corduroy roads in the broad-leaved wood.<sup>41</sup>

In the next selection, Lance Corporal H.M. of the Corps-Communications Unit 452 wrote in a letter home on November 17, 1943 about the fight against guerillas in the Ukraine. Lance Corporal H.M.'s rendition of an anti-partisan battle illustrates the amount of manpower and resources it took to attempt to quell those forces. He noted:

Here there is only our company of about 60 men and parts of our 2<sup>nd</sup> Company. That is all. We discovered that the partisan group wanted to destroy our vehicles. Last Sunday they had shot the agricultural leader and a corporal, who was with him in his quarters. The day before yesterday in the morning Cossacks were deployed suddenly, scouring immediately with ape-like speed through the village. 40 men yesterday morning were shot dead on the edge of the village....Of course a number of innocent people have lost their lives.<sup>42</sup>

Lance Corporal H.M.'s account of reprisal actions taken against partisan forces in the Ukraine reveals how the Germans used murder and intimidation to attempt to pacify the civilian population. He notes that "Cossacks" were used to carry out the roundup and murder of men in a village, which is likely because Eastern Europeans were utilized extensively by the Nazis for rear guard operations.<sup>43</sup> Such atrocities would only increase the world's contempt for the Germans, helping to speed their defeat.

All of these factors bring up a very important question: why did Germany's soldiers keep fighting from 1943-1945? Omer Bartov's well-known argument regarding the "destruction of the primary group" and the importance of the army as a "social

---

<sup>41</sup> Reese, 134-5.

<sup>42</sup> Ortwin Buchbender, *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges*, 152.

<sup>43</sup> For more information on the utilization of Cossacks by the Germans during World War II, see Richard Overy, *Russia's War*, 161-6, 181, 185, 356; For information regarding the Third Reich's employment of some one million foreign soldiers and volunteers during the war, see Rolf-Dieter Müller's *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers*, (London : I.B. Tauris, 2012).

organization” which shared the ideals of the Third Reich are key to understanding the soldiers’ ability to continue with the war.<sup>44</sup> However, according to Stephen Fritz, the answer is as complex as the multitudes of men who made up the Wehrmacht. This included: “Loyalty to Germany, support for Hitler or National Socialism, racist and anti-Semitic attitudes, primary group attachments, patriotism, fear of Bolshevik revenge, brutalization, and the embrace of destructive passion...”<sup>45</sup> In other words, while the motives of the individual soldier varied, the regime’s willingness to carry on with the war coupled with the growing threat to the Reich from the East (and the West) played key roles in determining what the soldiers would do for the Führer.

Following the disaster of the summer and fall 1943, the Germans had retreated to what they believed would be a new defensible line along the Dnieper River. However, the Red Army managed to secure several bridgeheads before the onset of winter, and in addition managed to isolate the Crimea as well.<sup>46</sup> The winter 1943-1944 provided the Germans on the Eastern Front with no reprieve from the Soviet juggernaut, as the Red Army seized Kiev on 6 November.<sup>47</sup> Then in December 1943 the Russians launched another offensive to clear parts of the Ukraine, resulting in the destruction of the entire Dnieper River line by the end of February 1944.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the siege of Leningrad

---

<sup>44</sup> Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5-6, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 374-5.

<sup>46</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 173.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 184-188.

was finally lifted on February 26, 1944, the Crimea fell in early May, and by the end of May virtually all of Soviet territory in the south had been freed.<sup>49</sup>

On the day of the Allied invasion of France, Gerhard Udke wrote to his wife from the Eastern Front regarding what he thought about the opening of the Second Front. Udke also awaited renewed assaults from the Soviets, whom he believed would be launching a summer offensive. Udke wrote:

Today is now the important day of the beginning of the invasion. I must confess that as much as it has filled my heart with apprehension, it is welcome, in that now the endless waiting is over. However, this truly brings matters to a head. For if the British and Americans succeed in making a foothold in France...then we have lost the war. It would then only be a matter of time...Here everything with us is still quiet. But Ivan will surely soon begin a great offensive that his henchmen have been preparing for weeks. The activity of German reconnaissance has equally been lively lately. I am very uneasy.<sup>50</sup>

Heinrich Böll, who was stationed in Romania, also wrote an impassioned letter to his wife on June 6, 1944, expressing his hatred of the war despite having not yet heard the news about the invasion. Böll wrote the following:

I hate the war, I hate it from the bottom of my soul, the war and every song, every word, every gesture, and anyone who somehow thinks something else about the war other than hate. It is so completely senseless, and the politics are so immeasurably infamous and corrupt, that it can never be legitimate, to start such a war and keep it going to inhumanely long...<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 191-93.

<sup>50</sup> Udke, 210.

<sup>51</sup> Schubert, *Heinrich Böll*, 1056-57.

During one of the most important days in world history, two men on the Eastern Front experienced the event from afar in two different ways, even though they both had similar sentiments about the war and the Allied landings' impact on it.

The following day June 7, 1944, Heinrich Böll wrote again to his wife, after having heard of the landings at Normandy. Böll wrote: "Last night we all learned with great excitement and anticipation of the invasion in the west... This is an incredibly important event, this invasion, can truly lead to a conclusion of the war this year; wouldn't it be great if at last we would be shown a sign of the beginning of the end; oh, this insane, criminal war must soon come to an end..."<sup>52</sup> Three days later on June 10, Böll elaborated on his perception of the war situation, lamenting the problems facing the troops and the state of morale. He stated: "The war disgusts me, it has become senseless chaos, there is no faith nor peace nor enthusiasm any longer, and the suffering by our infantry has met its extent, the officers are no longer any good, and the soldiers yearn for wounds which would free them from this hell."<sup>53</sup> The problems facing Böll were only going to get worse in Romania over the course of the summer 1944.

As the Allies continued their advance into France, the German troops in the East awaited a Soviet assault as well. Gerhard Udke was a soldier with Army Group Center stationed in Belorussia near Babruysk, and in his last correspondences with his wife expressed his fears of the future. Udke described his anxieties about the war in the West and anticipation of a Red Army assault on June 14:

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 1058.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 1063.



We certainly still have a few, small chances; but if fate does not once again come to the rescue, it is over. The battle in France must be enormous; I also believe that events thus far are not very encouraging, though I simply cannot give up hope. Only when we ourselves give up, have we lost everything. I am convinced that not only the fate of the standing armies in foreign lands, but also the population of Germany would be sealed. Having devastated Russia in such a manner, the Soviets will want a terrible revenge.<sup>54</sup>

Udke's words from June 14 are an excellent example of the average soldier's motives to continue fighting for the Third Reich in the summer 1944. Even if one were anti-war or longed for peace, the fear of Soviet occupation and retribution stirred many to battle to the end to save Germany.

In another letter sent to his wife on June 16, Gerhard Udke continued to worry about the events in the east. Udke felt as though the "quiet times" on the Eastern Front were merely the "calm before the storm..." As Udke recounted in the letter, after having gone through the "...terrible winter retreat with the Stalingrad experience then came the summer battle, the failed German offensive and the large withdrawal from the Orel bend," he knew from experience that the Red Army was planning yet another "impending offensive."<sup>55</sup>

While Udke came to terms with the realities of the situation, soldier Georg Getrost was counting on Nazi wonder weapons to save Germany. Getrost wrote a letter home on June 18, 1944 gleefully praising the V-1:

Now it is the West's turn. For the first time they have to experience a new weapon. The scoundrels won't know what hit them. I want to know what it is. I am glad that it is finally ready. This can be seen from the fact that

---

<sup>54</sup> Udke, 217-18.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 221-223

we are introducing even more new weapons. Now everything will be destroyed in London... With us it's been quiet here.<sup>56</sup>

Unfortunately for Getrost, the reason it was so quiet on the Eastern Front was because the Soviets were preparing for their own summer offensive to destroy Army Group Center. The offensive, dubbed Operation Bagration, opened on the third anniversary of the Wehrmacht's attack against Russia, June 22, 1944.<sup>57</sup> The letter from June 18 to his parents would be his last, as Getrost was killed on June 25, 1944 near Lepel in Belarus.<sup>58</sup>

On June 19, Gerhard Udke decided to send one more letter to his wife. The letter, dated June 19, 1944, would be the last she would ever receive from her husband, for he too would be killed in the last week of June around Bobruisk in Belarus during the Red Army's onslaught. Udke wrote: "Hopefully we are strong enough to destroy the invading forces in France. In any case, our morale has changed... My own mood has also been lifted... Ivan is leaving us, thank god, in peace. If his artillery begins firing, and were his planes to come, it would be dangerous to this assembly of men."<sup>59</sup> What Udke feared in regards to a seeming lack of preparedness had much basis in reality. Hitler's insistence on designating cities as fortified places left German defenses in static positions relatively weak. The Wehrmacht had far too few resources and was overstretched to be able to combat what the Soviets were about to throw at them.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Georg Getrost, Georg Leideritz, *"Ich glaube hier in Rußland ist es genau so scheisse wie in Afrika" die Feldpost des Georg Getrost aus Zotzenbach/Odenwald von Oktober 1939 bis Juni 1944 ; 11.3.1919 - 25.6.1944*, (Berlin: Berlin Pro Business, 2008), 511-12.

<sup>57</sup> John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 211.

<sup>58</sup> Getrost, 514.

<sup>59</sup> Udke, 223.

Operation Bagration was one of the most important offensives of the entire war. Beginning on June 19-20, Soviet partisans launched a series of attacks against railroads, bridges, and other important transportation points throughout the rear area of Army Group Center. Then, on the night of June 21-22, the Red Army commenced major bombing attacks against the German rear, while reconnaissance forces moved into sparsely held German forward positions.<sup>61</sup> The first major assault hit on June 22 at Vitebsk, and then on June 23 the Red Army struck threatening Mogilev located northeast of Minsk. Heinrich Böll was stationed at Debrecen, Hungary when the Red Army attacked, and he would later be taken into American captivity in April 1945. Böll wrote the following on June 27 regarding the Soviet attack: “The Russian summer offensive has certainly now begun and will surely bring with it new surprises. At any rate, any week now could bring the conclusion of the war, I am convinced of it.”<sup>62</sup> For Böll, given the events of the month of June to date, it was now only a matter of time before the war would come to an end.

Within twelve days after the start of Bagration, the Soviets effectively destroyed Army Group Center, seizing Minsk on July 3 and costing the Wehrmacht over 300,000 men by July 4.<sup>63</sup> Lieutenant Geert-Ulrich Mutzenbecher was stationed in Belarus during the Red Army’s attack, and he witnessed the destruction of the forces around him. He wrote to his parents on July 4, 1944 about the misery of the overall wartime situation:

---

<sup>60</sup> Fritz, 411-12.

<sup>61</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 204.

<sup>62</sup> Schubert, *Heinrich Böll*, 1077.

<sup>63</sup> Murray and Millett, 448-450; Glantz, 209.

“We have been abandoned once more and are again in a giant mess. Baranovich, south of Minsk, where the Russians have made a massive breakthrough. So you can imagine that it was not possible to write...The situation here is still unclear and in progress. There are probably still many difficult days ahead, and all this without leave.”<sup>64</sup> By July 13, Vilnius had fallen, and in the north the Soviets were close to cutting off the links between the remnants of Army Group Center and Army Group North. Next, the Soviets launched attacks in the south, with plans to seize Lvov and eventually to wipe out Army Group South.<sup>65</sup> The situation on the Eastern Front had reached a breaking point, which combined with events in France signaled the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany.

Given the hopelessness of the situation, many soldiers began to question their leadership and grew fearful about facing defeat against the Soviets. Heinrich Böll wrote home on July 5, 1944 from Debrecen, Hungary, describing how he and his comrades were engaging in “political debates...” due to many soldiers being “...seized with overwhelming anxiety since the invasion and since the disaster on the Central Front of the Eastern Front.” Böll and his comrades were fearful of what would happen in their sector, with Böll expressing his feelings about the Red Army and its’ “murderous heavy weaponry” causing “dread and horror” amongst the Germans. For Böll, not only was the “horror and terror of the war” disconcerting, so was the “Asiatic foreignness of the

---

<sup>64</sup> Geert-Ulrich Mutzenbecher, *Feldpostbriefe an Meine Eltern, 1941-1945*, (Oldenburg: Isensee Verlag, 2009), 158-9.

<sup>65</sup> Murray and Millett, 450.

Russian character...,” which left the Germans reeling with fear and anxiety about being defeated and occupied.<sup>66</sup>

Lieutenant Mutzenbecher and his men continued their retreat westwards from Baranovichi, Belarus after the massive Soviet attack took Minsk and pushed towards Poland. Mutzenbecher found the conditions intolerable, and the morale for him and his soldiers was at an all-time low. Mutzenbecher wrote on July 13, 1944:

With these crazy battles of Baranowitsche, Slonim, Leswas, with withdrawals of about 40 km per day in 30-40 degree heat, Russians in the front and the rear, and encirclements, writing letters is impossible... We are now in Greater Germany and the battle continues in the annexed territories (Bialystok). And you can imagine that we are not cheerful at heart anymore, especially after this flight of 200 km backwards, fighting for five days. This is now the second time since winter that we have experienced something that is simply indescribable. How this will end is a mystery to us right now. Again I have lost many friends...<sup>67</sup>

The disasters which befell Germany in the summer 1944 precipitated the infamous assassination attempt on Hitler’s life by disillusioned members of the officer corps on July 20, 1944. News of the failed bomb plot spread throughout Europe, with Hitler’s address on the radio reaching the German public shortly after midnight, followed by addressed by *Reichmarschall* Göring and Admiral Dönitz.<sup>68</sup> Soldiers at the front soon became aware of the attempt as well and shared their thoughts on the incident in their letters. On July 21, 1944, Heinrich Böll wrote his thoughts on the matter from Szentes, Hungary:

---

<sup>66</sup> Schubert, *Heinrich Böll*, 1083-4.

<sup>67</sup> Mutzenbecher, 159.

<sup>68</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 683-4.

When we can arrived 'at home,' news awaited us of the attempted revolution of the officers and the assassination attempt on Hitler's life. You can imagine that an uncanny fury seized upon us; we sat up all night listening to the radio feverishly discussing it. The discussion in our room was very heated and passionate; I eagerly took part against my habits and took over the action a little, but it is shocking how few Christians there are in the world...after the war we must work with all our strength for the Kingdom of God...<sup>69</sup>

It is fascinating that Böll risked discussing in his correspondence the July 20 Plot, and even going so far to suggest that the failure to kill Hitler was a bad thing. Böll, a leftist Catholic and famed writer in the postwar period, would have found plenty of reason to dislike the Nazis given his antiwar views, conscription into the military, and some of the repressive policies against the Church.<sup>70</sup>

Another soldier, Senior Lance Corporal C.B. of the 210<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was serving in Norway and would later face the Red Army's assault there in October 1944. The lance corporal wrote a letter home on August 1, 1944 expressing support for the Führer following the bomb plot:

Yes, we are living through a very difficult time. Nerves are stretched to the limit. Here we are alone. The war is pushing towards a decision, and this will and must come in a few weeks. If the Führer says we have the means and weapons to expel the enemy from our borders, and that we will ultimately win the day, then I know very well with unbridled confidence and a strong unyielding faith to our Führer that we will get through these current difficult times which have only been setbacks for us. Faith gives us the strength to endure all things harsh and severe suffering. You at home, and we at the front. My faith in the Führer and victory is unshakeable, and nothing would change this belief. The Führer has always kept his word, and he is more than ever doing it today. The events to come will confirm this.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Schubert, 1093.

<sup>70</sup> Robert C. Conard, *Understanding Heinrich Böll*, (Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1992), 6-8.

Since Senior Lance-Corporal C.B. had likely not directly experienced the Soviet offensives of 1943-1944 given his location in Norway, it is possible he did not experience the same disillusionment as other soldiers on the Eastern Front. However, as noted by Ian Kershaw, among many Germans there was "...a widespread sense of deep shock and consternation at the news of the failed assassination."<sup>72</sup> This resulted in major shows of support for Hitler both amongst the civilian population and soldiers at the front, many of whom saw the Führer as the last remaining bulwark against Communism and collapse.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the shows of support, there were some who supported the actions of the plotters. One soldier O.M. of the 320<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division wrote home on August 4 about his views of the events on July 20, which were surprisingly anti-Hitler:

You wrote in your letter about the assassination attempt on the Führer. Yes, we knew about it on the same day. Unfortunately, the gentlemen had bad luck, for there would already be an armistice, and we would have been saved from this mess. Now they are fighting south of Warsaw. Where this will end, one cannot figure out.<sup>74</sup>

Other soldiers such as Senior Lance Corporal V.L. of the 6<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division had similar views about the failure of the attack against Hitler, which some saw as their last chance at salvation from destruction in the war. He wrote on August 11: "Last Sunday, when I was at church, the preacher actually thanked God that he had mercifully protected and preserved the Führer from assassination. I would like to have stuffed his mouth with

---

<sup>71</sup> Buchbender, 154.

<sup>72</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-1945*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 32-34

<sup>74</sup> Buchbender, 146-47.

hay. Our people cannot see how they are being controlled by a satanic force.”<sup>75</sup> The variety of views expressed by soldiers at the front regarding the events of July 2 suggest there were both supporters and detractors of Hitler at this late stage of the war, but none of these men were willing to do anything other than continue fighting and hope for a favorable outcome.

Given the events of the summer 1944, it is clear that the Red Army had transformed itself from an underprepared and ill-disciplined force into a powerful military apparatus. Not only did the Soviets enjoy numerical superiority, they also were able to conduct deep operations with the help of a logistics system made possible by a large number of American made trucks. Deep operations allowed the Soviets to launch offensives that could paralyze the enemy while striking deeply into the rear areas, essentially performing their own version of the *Blitzkrieg*.<sup>76</sup> Hans-Karl Schmidt of the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army was stationed at Sambor west of Lvov in Ukraine as the Soviets drove deeper into German held territory in late July-early August 1944. Schmidt wrote a letter to his wife and parents dated July 31 but not sent until after August 5 due to his unit’s constant movement, in which he described the changing nature of the Red Army’s tactics. Schmidt stated:

I must also say, I imagined something different of the Eastern Front. What I immediately experienced...is actually mobile warfare. There it is an advantage, that we are motorized. The horse drawn units accompanying us are faring poorly. The Russian is performing on all the Fronts a very respectable *Blitzkrieg*. I hope he soon comes to a halt...<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 147-8.

<sup>76</sup> Murry and Millett, 450.



It is important to note that while the Allies had achieved remarkable successes in the summer 1944 with the landings at Normandy, Bagration, the bombing campaigns, and even the July 20 bomb plot; the Nazi regime somehow managed to survive and keep fighting until May 1945. In June, July, and August the Wehrmacht in total lost 750,000 men on all fronts (590,000 on the eastern front), which calculates to a third of the number which had been lost from September 1939-May 1944 (2.23 million).<sup>78</sup> By October 1, 1944 the overall strength of the Wehrmacht was just over 10 million men, meaning that of the 13 million who had served since the war began, 3 million had been lost. Bagration may have been the worst disaster in military history, but somehow the Third Reich continued on in its death throes.<sup>79</sup> The failure of the Allies to win in 1944 meant that the landings and summer offensives were not decisive operations, and in addition it meant that the German military leadership as well as the ordinary soldiers proved capable of dogged resistance and vicious counterattacks.<sup>80</sup> While the Nazis could no longer win the war, they could continue to delay the inevitable in the hopes that something positive might turn up.

As the Red Army poured into east Poland in July 1944, the race was on to seize the city of Warsaw. The Soviets attempted fierce assaults in late July and early August to cross the Narew River and take the Polish capital, but even by the end of September

---

<sup>77</sup> "Hans-Karl Schmidt an seine Eltern, am 31.7. - 5.8.1944 (3.2002.0251)," *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation*, accessed August 30, 2014, <http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost-zweiter-weltkrieg/brief.html?action=detail&what=letter&id=418>

<sup>78</sup> Stephen Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 423.

<sup>79</sup> Kersaw, *The End*, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Fritz, 423.

had made little progress.<sup>81</sup> Lieutenant Mutzenbecher was stationed along the Narew River in August 1944 and participated in some of the defensive maneuvers in Poland. Mutzenbecher wrote on August 10 about the fierceness of the fighting, successes achieved, and exhaustion of the *Wehrmacht*:

Three days ago I was deployed at the front during a large Russian attack. After a fierce barrage fell upon our soldiers, with our last reserves we were able to push Ivan back. A wild day. The day before yesterday he attacked again... Yesterday we were redeployed and are now in a bad location, from which we will probably soon disappear. Incidentally our regiment has shattered six Russian divisions. But our soldiers are now quite, quite finished.<sup>82</sup>

With the fighting nearing Warsaw, the Polish people attempted a revolt led by General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski and 20,000 poorly armed fighters on August 1. The battle inside the city between the Wehrmacht and Polish fighters lasted for two months, but with the Red Army unable to reach the city, the Germans razed the city and exterminated the people. Some 225,000 civilians died, the city was demolished, and on October 2 Bor-Komorowski surrendered.<sup>83</sup>

For the remainder of 1944, the Soviets continued to hammer against the Third Reich until they reached the Oder River with sights set on Berlin in January 1945. As the battles raged towards Germany, the morale of many Wehrmacht troops plummeted as most became resigned to the fact that the war was lost. Lieutenant Mutzenbecher wrote home on July 21, 1944 that he believed that overall "...80% did not have much hope"

---

<sup>81</sup> Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 212-213; Note that the city would not fall until January 17, 1945.

<sup>82</sup> Mutzenbecher, 165.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Overy, *Russia's War*, 296-7.

for victory in the war.<sup>84</sup> Gerhard Becker echoed the sentiments of Mutzenbecher regarding morale of the soldiers, though he clung to some belief in a different outcome. Becker wrote home on August 27, 1944: “It all looks now as if we will lose the war. The Russians are on the border of Germany, and the British and the Americans are in Paris. But where the need is greatest, God’s help is nearest. You’ll probably laugh now, but that is my firm opinion.”<sup>85</sup> For Becker, wishing that a miracle might occur to save the Third Reich was likely more of a way to offer some assurances to himself and his family, but even he found slogans were redundant in the face of everything that was happening.

Other soldiers became very cynical and critical of the war effort, distrusting the news and seeing the end in sight. Corporal B. wrote on August 27 about his fears of the future in case of a Soviet victory: “...The announcements on the radio are truly very bloody awful, and I believe, it is the absolute last moment, and they will have us on our ass soon. We will likely have to continue on working for the Russians. It really looks very dreadful. What will happen? Is this the end of the world or the beginning?”<sup>86</sup> For Corporal B., the constant bad news on the radio coupled with the terrible situation at the front led him to believe the end was near. Fear and uncertainty about the future was the mood of the day, leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair in the face of total defeat.

---

<sup>84</sup> Mutzenbecher, 161.

<sup>85</sup> Gerhard Becker, ‘*Ich wünschte, auf einen Schlag wären alle Räder viereckig,*’ *Briefe und Postkarten 1939/1940 und 1944/1945*, (Aachen: Helios, 2008), 119.

<sup>86</sup> Buchbender, 157.

Some soldiers were simply defiant and spiteful in the face of adversity, clinging to their sense of duty and willingness to battle to the last for their country. Lance-Corporal L.B. of Engineer Battalion 62 in a letter on August 27, 1944 complained about the lies of enemy propaganda and clung to any chances for a reversal of fortunes in the war. Private L.B. wrote: "...those who wanted the war will still be punished. Up to now it has not worked out so well. No one will go unpunished in this war, everyone gets their fodder, at home, and at the front. But let none laugh too soon, it is not too late. An old well known proverb says: 'He who laughs last, laughs best.' That has already been proven. With propaganda war is not won, they will have to look for more foolish enemies."<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Captain H.-G. E. of the 12<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division also complained about Soviet propaganda, expressing racist beliefs as well as mirroring the ideas stated in Nazi propaganda about Red Army pillaging and raping. Captain H.-G.E. wrote on September 17, 1944:

Yesterday I received a Russian leaflet which was addressed to the Russian soldiers. There is likely no appeal or newspaper article that could be as startling as the command of the Jew Ehrenburg: 'Soldiers of the Red Army, now you will take your spoils, German women and girls! Then you shall revel in the death of the fascists! Enjoy the blonde, Germanic women, and thus you will break German spirits!' I must say, reading this was like running ice cold water down my back. One should not continue to think about these words, they are terrible. Boundless hatred and devotion to the last are the only answers we have. We must cling to our colors for victory...<sup>88</sup>

This man's fears of a vengeful Red Army's plans to rape German women was a major theme of Nazi propaganda late in the war. Though it is true the Soviets had engaged in

---

<sup>87</sup> Buchbender, 157.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 160.

mass rape as it fought its way west into the Reich, the blame placed primarily upon Soviet Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg was largely unfounded. There were no direct orders from the Kremlin for the Red Army to commit rape or seek revenge.<sup>89</sup> However, Soviet troops wantonly murdered tens of thousands of civilians, committed countless thousands of rapes, looting, and merciless destruction.<sup>90</sup> Due to Ehrenburg's reputation for powerful anti-German hate propaganda, late in the war Stalin chose to denounce Ehrenburg's rhetoric in an attempt to stop the crimes against civilians and save face with the Western Allies. Soviet propaganda head Georgii Alexandrov wrote an article in the Red Army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* on April 14, 1945, in which he said it was necessary to distinguish between the ordinary German people and the Nazis.<sup>91</sup> Thus, it is important to recognize that Ehrenburg's writings did indeed have much influence in the Red Army, even if he did not call for mass rapes or genocide.

Fear was a prime motivating factor for many frontline soldiers to keep fighting and dying for the Third Reich. They were aware of or had participated in some of the crimes that had been committed in the occupied Soviet Union. Attitudes at the front varied depending on conditions and locality, but most soldiers were fearful of further Soviet offensives which shook their power to resist. However, many clung to their faith in Hitler, abhorrence of Bolshevism, as well as fear of military discipline should their courage falter.<sup>92</sup> A good example of this is a letter by Gerhard Becker from the Eastern

---

<sup>89</sup> Dagmar Herzog, Ed., *Sexuality and German Fascism*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 310.

<sup>90</sup> Murray and Millett, 475.

<sup>91</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 264.

Front written on October 23, 1944. Becker, who was stationed in Poland, wrote about losing hope while also remaining fearful of the Soviets:

Now imagine how it would be if the Russians were to rule in Germany. They are much, much less civilized than the Poles. Now envision the future with the Russian armies. Hence I cannot not say anything different other than if we were to lose the war, justice would no longer exist. Therefore, let's hope for the best, that what they hope for does not come to pass. It will happen, hopefully, as justice demands. At least I have the best hope that we must achieve victory. However, heavy fighting will have to be expected ahead. And because Ivan is just plain Ivan, the English and Americans will likely saddle us with debt that is irreparable. But if the Russian truly would win, then I have no more use for the Lord God. Thus, there can only be a German victory. Well, we hope that it will happen, as it must. Today I have written what I truly think.<sup>93</sup>

Thus “compulsion and duty” were the main reasons why they kept on going, because they felt the homeland had to be protected.<sup>94</sup> As reports of alleged atrocities committed by the Soviets inside the Reich's borders began making their way into the newspapers, many soldiers became convinced they were fighting in a “struggle for their very existence, and that of their comrades and loved ones back home.”<sup>95</sup> Surrender was not an option when considering what could happen to them in captivity at the hands of the so-called bestial barbarians who tortured and murdered on a whim.<sup>96</sup>

By January 1945, the war was for all intents and purposes lost for Nazi Germany, and it was only a matter of time until the final defeat. However, the Allied doctrine of unconditional surrender coupled with the fear of Soviet revenge played a significant part

---

<sup>92</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The End*, 100.

<sup>93</sup> Becker, 157-8.

<sup>94</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 101.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

of bolstering the regime's, as well as the German population's, will to fight. Hitler also wanted to avoid the humiliation of another 1918, and he preferred a heroic destruction of Germany in a battle against Bolshevism. Hitler and the top Nazis fought on due to a number of factors: the cowardice of his military advisers, the ideological indoctrination of young Germans, the perpetrators of war crime's conviction to fight to the end, and Goebbels's propaganda argument that the Allies wanted to annihilate Germany. In addition, the German troops themselves were willing to defend the Fatherland to the end in the hopes of delaying the Soviets entry. The Wehrmacht would suffer another 1.4 million deaths in the last four months of the war.<sup>97</sup>

The Soviet plans for January 1945 were to win the war in about forty-five days, but it took nearly four months to do so. Four major operations were involved: the Vistula-Oder offensive from January 12 to February 3, the East Prussian offensive from January 12 to February 25, the East Pomeranian offensive from February 10 to April 4, and the Berlin operation from April 16 to May 8.<sup>98</sup> By the end of January, East Prussia, East Brandenburg, Silesia, and all the rest of occupied Poland were lost. Across the entire eastern front of 2,400 kilometers, estimated total Soviet superiority included eleven times more manpower, seven times more tanks, twenty times more guns, twenty times stronger air power.<sup>99</sup> By early February, Red Army units were within fifty miles

---

<sup>97</sup> Fritz, 339-340.

<sup>98</sup> Bellamy, 635.

<sup>99</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 167-8.

Berlin, but before they could advance on the city they had to clear their flanks to the north and south.<sup>100</sup>

Meanwhile, German soldiers desperately fought for every inch of ground, but most realized the end was in sight. Gerhard Becker wrote home on January 12, 1945, expressing forlorn hopes for victory while contemplating thoughts of death: “If we should lose the war, which I hope we do not, than I wish that we were all dead. But perhaps victory is closer than we believe.”<sup>101</sup> Lieutenant Geert Mutzenbecher, stationed in East Prussia, wrote home on February 10 describing his mood after combat, as well as witnessing Russian atrocities:

Do not keep false hopes, we are expected to hold to the last. A link exists only at sea, but who knows for how long... You can only do one thing, persevere, continue to fight until the finish... In our incursion to the west, we liberated villages where the Russians had been. Civilians who were still there had not survived, and there was no woman who was not raped. Unspeakable.<sup>102</sup>

Mutzenbecher was trapped in the Samland pocket, and the link to the sea referenced by him was at Pillau, the last remaining port in German hands in East Prussia.<sup>103</sup>

The last correspondence sent by Mutzenbecher to his family was on April 3, 1945 from Pillau, East Prussia. Suffering from two wounds and bronchitis, he and his comrades were holding out in a manor house in view of the harbor. Mutzenbecher described his situation to his family and essentially said goodbye: “The Russians

---

<sup>100</sup> Murray and Millett, 475-6.

<sup>101</sup> Becker, 211; Note that Becker was killed on March 28, 1945 (Becker, 6).

<sup>102</sup> Mutzenbecher, 178.

<sup>103</sup> Kershaw, 251.



attacked us in a chateau and only a basement window saves me and a few others... With burning eyes we can see the navy in the harbor, who are the only ones who have the ability to escape and reach the Reich. I nearly went there, but I stopped myself from doing it...it was the right thing to do in the end.”<sup>104</sup> Mutzenbecher would later be killed sometime in April-May 1945, when Pillau fell and German forces retreated to the *Frische Nehrung* (Vistula Sand Spit) where they held out until the end of the war.<sup>105</sup>

By mid-February 1945, the Soviet offensive came to a halt, due to a significant loss of tanks, as well as the need to wipe out pockets of resistance on the flanks. Not only did this include the fighting in East Prussia, but also at Breslau in Silesia, and even a failed German counterattack in Pomerania.<sup>106</sup> Then on April 14, the Red Army launched its final offensive to capture Berlin, surrounding the city and launching the assault April 26.<sup>107</sup> Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945, but the soldiers and German people were not informed until late on May 1 about Hitler’s death. On May 2, the soldiers in Berlin were ordered to cease fighting.<sup>108</sup> However, even after the fall of Berlin, fighting continued until the last German soldiers surrendered in Prague as late as May 11, 1945.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Mutzenbecher, 180-1.

<sup>105</sup> Kershaw, 251.

<sup>106</sup> Fritz, 447-9.

<sup>107</sup> Murray and Millett, 482.

<sup>108</sup> Kershaw, *The End*, 346.

<sup>109</sup> Fritz, 469.

In a diary entry by Josef Kurz written on May 8, 1945, a soldier of the defeated Wehrmacht expressed his confusion, rage, and sadness at the outcome of the war. Kurz wrote:

On Tuesday, 8 May a ceasefire takes effect with America, England, and Russia. The greatest drama of humanity has come to an end. Millions have died and fallen, millions have lost their homes, and millions upon millions have made heavy sacrifices. Germany is dead! And yet, the German people live, German children play, German workers build, German mothers sacrifice. Can it be true? The end of the war! But no peace – because a people had to die, a people that has produced the greatest poets and thinkers, the most famous musicians and artists and whose breath is woven through all the ages. Dead, finished, to the end, in vain...<sup>110</sup>

Kurz's feelings of emptiness echoed those of a generation who had fought and died for a criminal regime. Millions of men would face imprisonment before returning home to their loved ones, and those who managed to survive Soviet internment and forced labor would not make it back to Germany until 1955-56.<sup>111</sup>

## 7.2. *The Minds of the Vanquished: Reflections on the Ostfront by POWs, 1943-1945*

In 2012, Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer published the groundbreaking book *Soldaten: Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben*, a synthesis of British and American intelligence service protocols of German prisoners of war. The sources utilized by Neitzel and Welzer derived from the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) which was centered in London at the estate of Trent Park

---

<sup>110</sup> Kurz, 119.

<sup>111</sup> Andreas Hilger, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion 1941-1956. Kriegsgefangenschaft, Lageralltag und Erinnerung*, (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2000), 137; According to Richard Overy, of the 2,388,000 German prisoners of war taken in World War II, 356,000 died, leaving a little over 2 million for repatriation. Of the 1,097,000 captured from the nationalities fighting with Germany, 162,000 of those died. Of the approximately 600,000 Japanese prisoners taken, 61, 855 died in captivity. For more information, see Richard Overy, *Russia's War*, 354-55.

in 1939. The Latimer House and Wilton Park were added as facilities in 1942, and in July of that year the CSDIC moved to the Latimer House. Wilton Park was used to house Italian prisoners of war, and Trent Park became a long term internment facility for German staff officers. From September 1939 to October 1945, 10,191 German prisoners of war and 563 Italian prisoners were transferred through three English surveillance camps. The CSDIC made 16,960 protocols from the secretly recorded conversations of German prisoners of war, and 1,943 from Italian prisoners.<sup>112</sup>

The U.S. borrowed the British system of interrogations and surveillance, and the War Department in Washington deciding on building similar centers in the summer 1941. By 1942, Camp Tracy in California was operational to house Japanese prisoners, and Fort Hunt in Virginia to house German prisoners.<sup>113</sup> While only a small percentage of the approximately one million German prisoners of war captured by the Americans and British were brought to these facilities, at Fort Hunt alone some 100,000 pages of documents have survived, including 3,298 reports of conversations between German POWs and 40,000 pages of surveillance protocols.<sup>114</sup> These reports and surveillance protocols are vital sources for historians attempting to reconstruct the mentality and views of German military men. As noted by Sönke Neitzel, while letters tend to “skew our perspective toward better educated soldiers,” the surveillance records showcase the voices of soldiers for whom little other evidence has survived.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing, and Dying; The Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 345-6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 346-7

One of the major arguments posed by Neitzel and Welzer's study is social-psychological in nature. Namely that social and situational pressures greatly influenced the behavior of Wehrmacht soldiers, or in other words, people act as they think is expected of them.<sup>116</sup> Neitzel and Welzer analyzed frames of references in order to understand the "preconditions for psychologically normal people to do things they would not otherwise do."<sup>117</sup> While Neitzel and Welzer's book focuses largely on the British protocols, a follow up study by Felix Römer entitled *Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht von innen* (2012) exclusively addresses the materials from Fort Hunt, Virginia. Römer posed a significantly different set of questions regarding the surveillance documents. Römer asked whether or not all the soldiers had actually internalized the frames of reference posed by Neitzel and Welzer. Römer believes that differences in the habits of soldiers might actually be rooted in individual age and socialization, and thus individual character in history might make a major difference after all.<sup>118</sup>

The second portion of this chapter examines the surveillance protocols and interrogation reports of Wehrmacht soldiers by U.S. officials at Fort Hunt, Virginia. A central argument of Neitzel and Welzer's book dealt with proving that soldiers' "military reference frame" influenced their actions, resulting in their behaving similarly throughout the war regardless of their ideological inclinations.<sup>119</sup> Thus, for Neitzel and

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 349

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Felix Römer, *Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht von innen*, (München: Piper Verlag, 2012), 24-25.

Welzer, the Third Reich experience was the major frame of reference for German soldiers, who went to war ordering their “perceptions, interpretations, and conclusions,” including their categorizations of enemies, based upon its values and beliefs.<sup>120</sup>As noted by Römer, soldiers’ “patterns of perception and images of the enemy were certainly in part ideologically tainted.”<sup>121</sup> A study of the materials, now located at the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland, reveals that while in captivity, some German soldiers offer insights into their perceptions of the Soviets. This includes views of the Russian people, Red Army, fears of Soviet victory and occupation, and questions regarding a postwar world.

Using a simply chronological as well as thematic approach, an analysis of interrogations, questionnaires, and room conversations shows that the German soldiers incarcerated at Fort Hunt had much to say about the Soviets. While these opinion varied from one soldier to the next, many common themes arose about the Eastern Front and their conceptions of the enemy that were reflected in their diaries and letters over the course of the war. Many of the themes that emerged over the course of 1941-1945 in their frontline writings also emerge here. However, one must keep in mind that many other attitudes had changed, ranging from their perceptions of Hitler and the Nazis to the outcome of the war. Much of this has been addressed already in the books *Soldaten* and

---

<sup>119</sup> Neitzel, 43.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>121</sup> Römer, 471.

*Kameraden*, and thus in this section focus will be limited to a discussion of the soldiers' themselves and their views regarding the Soviet Union.

Some soldiers had very negative opinions of the Red Army, such as Lance Corporal Franz Krug of *Pionier Ersatz Kompanie 469* who was interrogated at Fort Hunt, Virginia in 1943. Likely deemed a valuable source as a soldier in the army engineer corps, Krug had served on the Eastern Front in 1941. On July 24, 1943, the interrogator asked Krug about his experiences in Russia, leading to a discussion of Krug's views on various subjects pertaining to the Eastern Front War. Krug, who was transferred to the northern sector of the Russian front in July 1941, had this to say about the Russian infantryman: "The Russian infantryman is stubborn in the moment when the commissar lies behind him with a pistol...Once the commissars had been killed, naturally they deserted. The commissars shoot their own people when they retreat." Krug, a soldier in an engineering battalion, admits that he did not do much fighting and learned many things from his comrades about the enemy.<sup>122</sup> In another interrogation document, also dated from July 24, 1943, Krug told the interrogator that unlike the Americans' good treatment of prisoners of war, on the Eastern Front it was just the opposite. The document summarized Krug's words: "...In Russia this never happened. The Germans were killed in any way possible. Is extremely afraid of fact that Russia will break into eastern Germany."<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Interrogation Report, Gefreiter Franz Krug, 7.24.43, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 504.

<sup>123</sup> Interrogation Report, Gefreiter Franz Krug, 7.24.43, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 504.

Senior Lance Corporal August Wolff of the 7<sup>th</sup> Paratrooper Division had also served on the Eastern Front, and was a passionate ideologue confident in German victory. In the winter of 1941 he was sent to Russia, operating in the Zhitomir-Viasma sector, and later in the fall 1943 fought in the area north of Orel. As a former member of the SA his views were particularly biased, as noted in his interrogations. For example, in a March 9, 1944 examination, Wolff was asked what he thought the outcome of the war would be. Wolff's response is written as follows: "Germany will win the war....At the opportune time Germany and America will make peace and then divide the world into sphere of influence. Believes Germany will win on military merit alone." In a subsequent question regarding "Attitude towards the United Nations," the document notes that Wolff simply "Hates Russians."<sup>124</sup> Wolff's overconfidence in victory and belief that Germany could still conquer territory points to his party affiliation and ideological inclinations.

Others, such as Lance corporal Paul Seidel, were not so confident and had slightly different views of the Soviets. Seidel, who served on the Eastern Front from June 1941-December 1942 when he was transferred out due to frostbitten feet, believed the war was all but lost. In a Morale Questionnaire from April 21, 1944, Seidel remarked regarding the outcome of the war that "...the Allies will win the war and it will end this year." However, despite reporting instances of low morale on the Italian Front, in his experience on the Eastern Front in 1941-42, he suggests that "...comradeship between the officers and men was much better on the Russian front." This suggests a

---

<sup>124</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Obergefreiter August Wolff, 3.9.44, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 566.

deterioration of the morale from circa 1942-1944, but also points to the zeal with which men in the Wehrmacht fought against the Soviets. When asked about “Unconditional Surrender,” Seidel noted that he: “Fears revenge by the Russians,” also revealing his knowledge of German war crimes and occupation policies as well as feelings towards Bolshevism. Despite this fear, he also commented positively on the Red Army, stating in regards to “Fighting qualities” that “Has a high respect for Russian soldiers whom he thinks are superior to Germans in fighting qualities.” In addition, he believed the Soviets had the best artillery, stating: “In Russia he thought the ‘Stalinorgel’ was the most fear inspiring weapon.”<sup>125</sup>

However, there were many soldiers who, despite their lack of confidence in victory, held extreme biases towards the Russian people and Communism. Lance corporal Ernst Swoboda of the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had served in Russia for four months, and in his morale questionnaire on April 29, 1944 he makes some interesting statements regarding what he saw there. Swoboda believed the Allies would “...win this year” because the Germans were “...weak in men and materials” and their “morale was low.” However, despite the low morale, German soldiers were unwilling to accept defeat, particularly at the hands of the Soviets. In regards to “Unconditional Surrender,” Swoboda replied: “The question is, surrender to whom? To Russia, never. Resistance is increased when there is a thought of surrender to Russia...The thought of what the Russians would do to Germans increases the determination to fight to the last man.”<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Gefreiter Paul Seidel, 4.21.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 547.

<sup>126</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Gefreiter Ernst Swoboda, 4.29.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 547.



Thus, even though Swoboda believed that Germany was defeated in the war and he had lost faith in Hitler, whom he described as a “tyrant” and “egomaniac,” he believed the Wehrmacht must continue fighting on against the Soviet Union. Swoboda openly admitted that morale in the army was terrible, stating: “The soldiers have no more interest in the war. Men of 17 are at the front.” However, when asked about “Post-war expectations,” the following was written about what he had to say about the Soviets: “The Russians are worse than wild animals. They would like to capture all Europe. That would be the end of all cultures. He was in Russia for four months; he saw how they fight. He describes a house which was about 8 ft. by 8 ft. square in which 12 people lived.” Important to note is the description of Russians as “animals,” a mirror image of many of the sentiments felt by German soldiers in 1941 or 1942. Lastly, in the questionnaire he was asked to explain his “Attitude towards the United Nations,” to which this was noted: “He is convinced from personal experience that the Russians are a very unpleasant people.”<sup>127</sup>

While the evidence suggests that many German soldiers hated Communism and had biased views toward the Soviet Union, most soldiers spoke of the determination and skill of the Red Army. For example, Senior Lance Corporal Karl Schwarz of the 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had served in Russia from April-October 1942. Schwarz, a Czech draftee, described in an interrogation report on June 7, 1944 how brutal German occupation policies were, the terrible treatment of prisoners of war, and his admiration for the Soviet military. A summary of Schwarz’s opinion is as follows:

---

<sup>127</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Gefreiter Ernst Swoboda, 4.29.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 547.

In commenting on morale in Russia, prisoner said it 'was not bad' in his sector. The Germans got much booty in the way of weapons and food, i.e., bread, butter, sheep, etc. They took all food without ceremony and treated the Russians very shabbily. At first, the Russian peasants received them with bouquets of flowers, but after the Germans had robbed them, all such demonstrations abruptly ceased. Those Russians that were captured were treated 'very badly.' They received practically no food, were herded into barbed wire enclosures and shot on the slightest pretext, such as a slight movement toward the gates or sticking their heads through the barbed wire. For weapons, prisoner noted especially the Russian LMG and SMG, of smaller caliber than that of the Germans. The Russians had two especially effective artillery pieces: the Ratsch Bum (12 cm) and the Stalin Orgel (2 types, 8cm and 12cm). Their T-34 prisoner considers a very good tank. The Russian soldier fights well and is a master at the art of camouflage. P/W does not think the Russians have good leadership in the lower grades. He believes the men are driven into battle by Commissars. His unit of 120 took 600 prisoners because of 'poor Russian leadership.' They also took prisoner a commissar, who although wounded six times by a German LMG, continued to keep shooting. Such fanaticism was common.<sup>128</sup>

Schwarz, who was wounded during the battle of Stalingrad on October 20, 1942 and transferred out of Russia, provided a vivid description of many important aspects of the Eastern Front war. Wehrmacht looting and pillaging, mistreatment and murder of prisoners of war, the skills of Red Army troops, and the "fanaticism" of the commissars are all described in detail here.

Lieutenant Eduard Bornemann of the 383<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division also offered the interrogators his views on the Russians, but much of his information was laced with ideology and hatred of Communism. Bornemann, who was on the Eastern Front from April 1942-July 1943 and fought in the Orel sector, described Russian tactics and

---

<sup>128</sup> Interrogation Report, Obergefreiter Karl Schwarz, 7.7.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 545.

supplies in an interrogation report on July 15, 1944. The following information was given in the report regarding Bornemann:

Prisoner described Russian tactics in making ‘breakthroughs’ as a heavy preparation by cannon fire with the use of an extremely high number of trench mortars. After this preparation, the infantry charge lines up, practically shoulder to shoulder. If the first line does not succeed, another follows. The Russians use an unlimited number of men until the breakthrough is forced... did state, however, that the T35<sup>129</sup> Russian tank was an exceptionally good tank and that it was very difficult to attack, since there were no openings through which demolition charges or other types of explosives could be thrown into them. Prisoner states that during the early part of his stay in Russia, Russians would desert by the regiment, officers and all, because of the food situation being so terrible among them.<sup>130</sup>

In a morale questionnaire from July 16, 1944, Bornemann boasts that Germany would win the war and praises Hitler, but hypothetically states that if they were to lose the war, the postwar situation would be terrible. According to Bornemann, if Germany surrendered they would get “...what they got in 1918, unjust treaty, if dictated by the Western Powers; if Russia dictates the peace they will never stop. They will go through Germany through Belgium, Holland, France, and even over into England, and then to America. There will be no peace terms.” Once again, when commenting on “Post War Expectations” Bornemann repeated that: “The Russians are only to be mistrusted; they will overrun Germany, into France, and then over into Great Britain.” If these statements are not evidence enough of his deep seated hatred towards the Soviets, he described the

---

<sup>129</sup> Likely a typo, probably meant the superior T-34 tank; Note than in a subsequent interrogation report on 16 July 1944, Bornemann mentions that: “T34 ist sehr gut, klein und jetzt sehr schwere bewaffung.” (Interrogation Report, Leutnant Eduard Bornemann, 7.16.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 452.

<sup>130</sup> Interrogation Report, Leutnant Eduard Bornemann, 7.16.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 452.

Red Army soldier as follows: “The Russians are like a bunch of animals. They haven’t got the sense to lie down when they are licked.”<sup>131</sup>

Similarly to Bornemann, Corporal Rudolf Hörer of the 709<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division offers mixed views about his experiences in Russia. Hörer took part in the June 1941 invasion in the southern sector, but in February 1943 was transferred to a Police Unit responsible for rear guard actions and anti-partisan warfare. He was stationed in Russia until February 1944, continuing to work behind the frontlines in various support roles.<sup>132</sup> His views and experiences are far more mixed than others, including his support of Hitler, service in a police battalion, and commentary about Red Army soldiers. In a Morale Questionnaire from August 14, 1944, Hörer admitted that he believed “...the Americans will win the war,” but he desperately hopes that the Germans would have time to withdraw so that “...the western powers arrive in Germany before Russia does.” According to the transcript, Hörer believed it was “...unthinkable that Germany should be occupied by Russia,” citing examples of war crimes committed by the Soviets which the intelligence officer believed “...need not be repeated here.” In regards to his opinions of enemy combatants, he stated that: “The Russians are good when driven. They need to be lead.”<sup>133</sup>

In a recorded room conversation on September 8, 1944, Rudolf Hörer spoke with Lance Corporal Paul Sauermann regarding Russian soldiers. The following is a portion

---

<sup>131</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Leutnant Eduard Bornemann, 7.15.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 452.

<sup>132</sup> Interrogation Report, Unteroffizier Rudolf Horer, 8.6.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 486.

<sup>133</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Unteroffizier Rudolf Horer, 8.14.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 486.

of their conversation, in which Sauermann begins by recalling a conversation between an interrogation officer and himself:

Sauermann: Then he said: How is the Russian soldier? I have never been to Russia, so I only know what comrades have told me. The Russian soldier is a good soldier in his area...camouflage, sneaking...But the mental level of the Russian soldiers is of course far below that of the German. This is a big advantage. Thereupon a single German soldier with a good education and good tactics can be tremendous...But for the Russians to do something themselves on their own, through preparation, that is something he can not do.

Hörer: The Russian has mainly one advantage: the Russian is an improviser. If you put an axe in one hand and say he must build a house, and you do not need a saw or anything, he will take the axe and build a house. He does it. And then you give him a saw and a wood plane to build a home that is even better looking. Exactly the same.<sup>134</sup>

While the conversation is hardly intellectual in its content or scope, it reveals the common perspective on the Red Army soldiers. Much of it is based upon rumors and myths without any objective analysis. This sort of blind acceptance of stereotypes is part of what cost the Germans the continent of Europe and a lost war. Take for example a subsequent conversation between the men on August 9, 1944. Both prisoners were engaged in a conversation in which they worried about being sent to Russia after the war. Sauermann made the following statement to Hörer: "I cannot get my head around it, that our fronts are all collapsing so. The whole Russian war has always been a mystery: you never knew what was really going on."<sup>135</sup> Sauermann's statement reveals the lack of awareness and misunderstanding of facts which many German soldier's

---

<sup>134</sup> Room Conversation, Hörer – Sauermann, 8.8.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 486

<sup>135</sup> Room Conversation, Hörer – Sauermann, 8.9.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 486

experiences, whether due to propaganda misinformation, blind obedience, or overconfidence in their own abilities.

There were a few soldiers who actually had favorable dispositions towards the Soviets. Lance Corporal Friedrich Killmann of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division expressed anti-Nazi views and Communist sympathies. In a Morale Questionnaire from August 11, 1944, Killmann argued that the Allies would win the war in 1944, disagreed with "...the principles which have governed Hitler's actions," and was against the Nazi notion of the Aryan. Killmann's most important statement was regarding his "Attitude toward United Nations," which was transcribed as follows:

P/W's attitude toward Russia is one of sympathetic tolerance. He had read a book about Russia in which it was played up in a favorable light. There were factories placed behind the Urals where they would be free of attack and could work uninterruptedly. Says that the policies which are now being pursued in Russia did not originate with the Communists but are centuries old. The people of the Soviet Union live well if one considers their environment and what possibilities have been at their disposal. Under the old Zarist regime they got along much worse. Admits that the standard of living in Russia is low according to the standards of Europe but hastens to add that the Russians should be allowed to live as they wish.<sup>136</sup>

As the war continued to worsen for Germany, soldiers in captivity began to think more and more about what Europe might look like after the collapse of the Third Reich. Lance Corporal Willi Wolff of *Pionier Infanterie Abteilung 167*, who had served in Russia from June 1941 to January 1942, stated in a Morale Questionnaire on August 25, 1944 that he believed that the situation was "hopeless." Wolff believed that the morale of the army was collapsing, as the report stated: "Prisoner believes that about 90% of all

---

<sup>136</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Gefreiter Friedrich Killmann, 8.11.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 496.

soldiers are definitely fed up with the war. He is convinced that this time the collapse will not come at home but that the Wehrmacht will collapse.”<sup>137</sup> Wolff’s interpretation would end up being quite accurate, as the military would be completely defeated before surrender finally took place in May 1945.

His attitude towards the Allies was pro-American and anti-Soviet, as noted in the questionnaire: “He is very much afraid of the Russians, because they are less civilized and would treat the Germans badly. He is convinced that communism is just as bad as National Socialism, and the Russians would start another war within ten years.” While Wolff was willing to admit that Russian soldiers were “...excellent and well-disciplined and brave,” he was having a hard time facing a reality where the Soviets might occupy Germany.<sup>138</sup> In a room conversation between Wolff and another soldier on August 26, 1944, Wolff had this to say about the war situation:

The end of the war has not been decided yet. They aren’t near Germany and if they get near Germany I’ll begin to wonder, but they can’t get there. I can’t imagine that we will lose, we can’t lose we have lost so many men, we had so much damage, what good would it be if we lost? We must win. We are afraid of the Russians only they are holding us together.<sup>139</sup>

The fear of a Bolshevik occupation of Germany pushed some of the soldiers into the belief that they would have to ally themselves with the western powers to stop the spread of Communism. For example, senior lance corporal Otto Lossa of the 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in a conversation with another prisoner on September 11, 1944 spoke about whether the “...US will have to fight Russia.” Both Lossa and inmate Brix felt

---

<sup>137</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Gefreiter Willi Wolff, 8.25.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 566.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Room Conversation, Wolff – Struss, 8.26.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 566.

that it would happen, and that "...they will be forced to fight against Russia for the US."<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Captain Werner Otto who served in the East from June 1941 to July 1942, believed that the world was destined for another conflict if Germany was defeated and the Soviets prevailed. Otto relayed his sentiments to the interrogator as follows:

Prisoner states that if Germany does not win this war there is sure to another one between Bolshevistic countries and the Democracies. He believes that the communistic influence in Europe is very great and that the evidence he saw there since his capture while on his way to Paris showed that France was already under the control of Communists. He feels that Communism will have to be wiped out....He looks for an alliance between England, America, and Germany to deal with the Communists, provided that Communism does not gain the upper hand in Germany.<sup>141</sup>

The increasingly despondent and desperate German soldiers in captivity found themselves postulating about what a Soviet victory would mean for the Reich. Captain Johannes Berge of the 347<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division fought and was wounded in Russia. In an interrogation on January 3, 1945, Berge discussed his views of Josef Stalin and his designs for Europe. The report described Berge's ideas as follows: "...considers Stalin the cleverest statesman today and the one with the longest vision. Europe will drop in his lap like a ripe plum if we don't play our cards right. At the same time the Russian experience has sobered many a German Communist about Russia and the war has been a terrible lesson to Germans."<sup>142</sup> In contrast to Berge's views, another prisoner Lance Corporal Bruno Richter was a former German Communist who served on the Eastern

---

<sup>140</sup> Room Conversation, Lossa – Brix, 9.11.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 510.

<sup>141</sup> Interrogation Report, Hauptmann Werner Otto, 12.27.1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 524

<sup>142</sup> Interrogation Report, Hauptmann Johannes Berge, 1.3.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 448.



Front for a brief period in 1944. Even though Richter acknowledged that his comrades “...don’t want to see Bolshevism in Germany,” he believed that the “tales of Russian barbarism have been grossly exaggerated.”<sup>143</sup> While Berge believed that the German Communists’ views had been eradicated by the Nazis and the war in the East, a few soldiers of the Wehrmacht such as Richter continued to hold pro-Soviet ideals.

Another important theme that arises from the surveillance protocols and interrogation reports is that the Americans became increasingly interested in military intelligence and other information about the Soviet Union as the war neared its end. Fort Hunt housed the majority of the most important German prisoners in American custody, including the infamous Gehlen Organization.<sup>144</sup> General Reinhard Gehlen, the Chief of the Germany Army Staff’s Foreign Armies East Office, was hired by the U.S. army in the immediate postwar period for his intelligence files and connections.<sup>145</sup> Gehlen, who arrived at Fort Hunt in the summer of 1945, began providing detailed information to the Americans almost immediately, including a report on the Red Army’s leadership and tactics dated June 21, 1945.<sup>146</sup>

However, even before Gehlen’s arrival, the U.S. interrogators had acquired a significant amount of data from German prisoners of war who had served on the Eastern

---

<sup>143</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Gefreiter Bruno Richter, 1.11.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 531.

<sup>144</sup> Derek R. Mallett, *Hitler’s Generals in America: Nazi POWs and Allied Military Intelligence*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 161-2.

<sup>145</sup> Richard Breitman, U.S. *Intelligence and the Nazis*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 449.

<sup>146</sup> Interrogation Report, Generalmajor Reinhard Gehlen, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 472.

Front. Two examples of low level junior officers who provided such information at Fort Hunt were Captains Walter Brandt and Freiherr von Hodenberg, both who had served in the war against the Soviets. Captain Brandt of the 340 *Volksgrenadier* Division had served on the Eastern Front for three years with Infantry Regiment 277, before being wounded and transferred to the west. In an interrogation report dated February 15, 1945, Brandt provided a detailed summation of his views of the Red Army titled "Observations of Russian Military Forces." The following is a lengthy excerpt from the document regarding Red Army leadership and the ordinary infantrymen:

#### 1. Russians Leaders: Officers and Commissars

In general the Russian officers are well schooled in the tactical principles....Officers found to be noticeably weak in tactical leadership are removed by the political commissars who have authority of command. Wreckless employment of Infantry, rather than good leadership, often brings success. Forceful drive is a quality possessed by the officers.

#### 2. Russian Infantrist

Unconditional and strict obedience compels the Russian infantrist to give his best when in action. Those guilty of disobedience and subordination are immediately punished and made an example of by the commissars. The infantrist adapts himself to terrain like an animal, he fits into nature. The more primitive, the more earthy he is, hence a better soldier. He is naturally gifted in camouflage, use of terrain, suited to withstand the worst weather conditions imaginable and capable of holding positions for long periods of time on starvation diet. Most Russian soldiers carry some religious object on themselves (hidden of course). A rather large percentage of the soldiers are not party members. Upon capture most Russians talk free and unfavorably about the regime, however, generally with the hope of better treatment while prisoner. Obedience to their superiors is maintained even after capture. The Russian fears punishment and mistreatment more than death.

#### 3. Employment of Infantry

The infantry is employed in unthinkably large masses and are literally bled white until a planned action is successful, no matter how small a success. Usually two or three waves of troops of poor quality attack, and only after some measure of success has been obtained, are the better and/or elite troops committed. Naturally these later troops suffer less and succeed more often.<sup>147</sup>

Brandt's depiction in this report leaves much to be desired regarding the perceived quality of the Red Army. Typical of many German soldiers in their postwar memoirs, Brandt attempts to create an image of a stumbling colossus which merely used its numbers to overwhelm a far superior Wehrmacht. Further proof of this is found in the final portion of the document, in which he provides an overall summary of the Russian soldier, offering biased praise of the individual enemy combatant while lacing his remarks with ethnocentric and perjorative language:

#### General

The Russian is capable of things which a people of a higher civilized state cannot do. His primitive state, his earthiness, his uncomplicated way of life, his natural animal-like hunting sense and unalterable determination in the face of unsurmountable odds, marks the Russian as a fighter of the first class. He loves to close with the enemy (close combat). His anti-western views and fear of 'Western Idea Infiltration' increases his strength. Stalin has recognized the inner powers of the Russians and exploited their fear, hate, and molded a powerful army from it.<sup>148</sup>

Another example of U.S. intelligence attempting to gather information about the Soviet military is an interrogation report of Captain Freiherr von Hodenberg who served in the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in 1941 in Russia, and later transferred to the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry

---

<sup>147</sup> Interrogation Report, Hauptmann Walter Brandt, 4.15.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 453.

<sup>148</sup> Interrogation Report, Hauptmann Walter Brandt, 4.15.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 453.

Division remaining in Russia until August 1944. Captain von Hodenberg's untitled report is quite different than that provided by Walter Brandt, namely in its attempt at objectivity despite some inherent negative opinions about the Red Army. Captain von Hodenberg had the following to say about Russian morale and reasons for successes:

...the combat morale of the Russians has changed little since the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Russia. Naturally the turn of events has influenced the spirit of the Russian soldier considerably, however, captured Russians expressed and showed a war weariness and the Russian propaganda has not been able to erase this condition to any extent. Only those who had bettered themselves financially, politically, or socially possessed the morale and spirit of a victorious nation. The Russian successes are primarily the result of superiority of manpower and materials, and lately due to capable leadership in the higher echelons. The Russian soldier (as an individual) cannot be compared favorably with the German or Allied soldier.<sup>149</sup>

However, despite this rather unkind introduction to the Red Army, von Hodenburg did provide some favorable opinions about aspects of their military. For example, he had this to say about their military leadership, infantry, tanks, and supply:

**Military Leaders:** (Division level and up) A marked improvement in flexibility of command and cleverness in estimating situations. Quick to take advantage of successes no matter how trivial and developing same into major successes. The higher Russian commands are very adept in shifting reserves to meet new developments.

**Infantry:** Much less aggressive than the German Grenadier. Infantry rely heavily on tank and long range artillery preparations and support. Cohesion between Russian infantry and tanks easily disrupted however, if separated from his heavy weapons support, the Russian infantry fights stubbornly and displays a natural tendency to use terrain to his advantage. The Russian Infantry is best in defensive combat.

**Armored Units (Panzer):** Inexperienced and led by poorly trained officers prior to 1943, but since then great improvements. The present method of massed armored spearheads, the aggressiveness of the troops, the

---

<sup>149</sup> Interrogation Report, Hauptmann Freiherr von Hodenberg, 4.12.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 485.

courageous leadership and much improved tanks are the real reasons behind the Russian successes of late.

Artillery: Mass employment, preparatory barrages of long duration, and perfect coordination with tanks and infantry marks the Russian artillery as the most potent arm of service.

Supply (Nachschub): Without doubt the Russian supply system is superior to that of the German.<sup>150</sup>

Here we find a much more balanced approach to discussing the Red Army as opposed to Captain Brandt's views. Captain von Hodenberg notes that the upper echelons of military leadership had improved, the infantry were good at defensive fighting, their tank tactics from 1943 were better, and even notes the artillery and supply as being "perfect" and "superior" to the Germans. Equally as interesting though was his concluding remarks on the "Vlasov Movement" at the end of the report.<sup>151</sup> Captain von Hodenberg briefly summarizes what the movement was and why it failed, but also attempts to argue that the Americans should consider such a tactic against the Communists: "In the coming war with Bolshevism an army composed of prisoners, deserters, and anti-Bolshevists would be a worthwhile factor to consider, in nature of propaganda if not materially."<sup>152</sup>

Another important finding within the Fort Hunt documents is the vast amount of evidence of German soldiers' participation in war crimes. While this subject has been thoroughly discussed by Felix Römer in *Kameraden*, a few examples will be provided

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> For more information on the Vlasov Movement, a half-hearted German attempt at creating allied Russian military forces using Russian prisoners of war, see Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957), 553-586.

<sup>152</sup> Interrogation Report, Hauptmann Freiherr von Hodenberg, 4.12.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 485.

here to highlight the kinds of things soldiers witnessed. Often times, references to war crimes in the documents are short statements or ramblings which provide very little details or context. One such instance is in an interrogation report of soldier Oskar Egger of *Pionier Bataillon 669*, who while stationed on the Eastern Front witnessed maltreatment of Soviet prisoners of war. The document simply states: “While constructing fortifications in Russia the prisoner saw a certain Uffz. Bauer from Nurnberg beat the prisoners with the butt of a rifle.”<sup>153</sup>

Other soldiers provided more detailed accounts of atrocities committed. Corporal Heinrich Luftensteiner was stationed in Russia from sometime in 1941 with the 133<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment until he was wounded in June 1942. On March 5, 1945, Luftensteiner described SS crimes against Russian civilians in a room conversation. The summary of the conversation states:

An SS unit marching through a Russian village was fired upon. The population was assembled, one man was picked out and nailed on a board than burned alive in front of the assembled villagers. L is disgusted with such brutality...finds it a shame that Germans called themselves *Kulturträger* in Russia, and committed such acts of violence on the civilian population.<sup>154</sup>

Luftensteiner’s account describes the reprisal policy followed by the Nazis to combat partisan fighters and to quell local opposition, but he does not indicate whether the Wehrmacht participated in such actions.

Another prisoner, Corporal Frederich Erlwein who served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountain Division on the Eastern Front, witnessed the massacre of Jews at Lvov, Poland in 1941.

---

<sup>153</sup> Interrogation Report, Gefreiter Oskar Egger, 2.21.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 464.

<sup>154</sup> Room Conversation, Luftensteiner – Tygl, 3.5.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 511  
446

Erlwein described the genocide in a room conversation on January 27, 1945 with Lance Corporal Wery, transcribed as follows:

E: ...In Lviv they spent 3 days shooting people like nothing, terrible. All of the 1st Mountain Division (was there), I was there too. I never thought that people were able to do something like that.

E: With clubs they drove the Jews out of their homes, and they were beaten until they got to the city center, which was near a Church, and they began to place 8 men against a wall and shot them with an MG, the next eight had to load them onto a LKW and then line up themselves, this went on for 3 days. And Jews who tried to flee were shot in the street in a heap...

W: Where were they buried?

E: In a mass grave...I can still remember the exact place in Tarnopol where there is a mass grave 30 m. long and 30 m. wide and 10 m. deep near the prison. Since they shot them with the MG and some were not dead they got a shot to the neck. To me it was so awful, I threw up...The Russians, Ukrainians, who were there...they actually betrayed the Jews.<sup>155</sup>

The events recounted by Erlwein are quite accurate when compared to other historical records. The actions of *Einsatzkommando C* and local collaborators in July 1941 killed approximately 4,000 thousand Jews at Lvov, while at Tarnopol some 5,000 Jews were murdered there.<sup>156</sup> Thus, it is likely Erlwein's account is accurate, making him a bystander (if not a perpetrator) during the Holocaust in the Ukraine.

Given the ordinary soldier's knowledge of mass atrocities committed in the Soviet Union, it is no wonder that so many were afraid of the Red Army seeking revenge in Germany. One prisoner, Corporal Rudolf Müller, a soldier in the 5<sup>th</sup> Paratrooper

---

<sup>155</sup> Room Conversation, Erlwein – Wery, 1.27.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 465.

<sup>156</sup> Ray Brandon & Wendy Lower, eds. *The Shoah in Ukraine*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press: 2008), 131-3, 338-39; Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002), 59-64.

Division, stated in a conversation with another prisoner Bücher that he had heard rumors about the Allies' plans to kill war criminals. The following is a rendition of the brief conversation:

M: I read in the papers that Stalin wants 50,000 shot, and that the big three finally agreed on 40,000. There may be some innocent ones among these. I'm glad to see all the criminals shot...

B: I don't protect anyone who was in the party....

B: I got disgusted with Hitler when he made Ludendorff responsible for the Putsch at his trial.

M: Same thing today. Hitler has said if Germany loses the war it is the people's fault.<sup>157</sup>

Müller and Bücher both were frustrated with the Party leadership and the SS, and felt that they should take the blame for the war and crimes committed. However, despite this attitude of bravado about punishing some Germans, in a Morale Questionnaire Müller made the argument that he wanted to avoid Russian occupation of Germany at all costs. Müller, who was in the *2 Abteilung Infanterie Regiment 11* on the northern and southern sectors of the Eastern Front until 1943, had strong opinions about the Soviets, which he expressed on January 19, 1945:

Prisoner is afraid of Russia and prefers occupation of Germany by the U.S. rather than the Russians. If the U.S. will not help post war Germany, Communism will take the place of Nazism and there is no difference between Nazism and Communism. The Russian soldier is inferior to the German. The Russian weapons are good. Prisoner saw U.S. tanks and fighter planes in Russia which contributed to the success of the Russian army. The Russians have no regard for the lives of their men. Prisoner saw a battalion of infantry, approximately 800 men, march through a

---

<sup>157</sup> Room Conversation, Müller – Bücher, 3.28.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 519.  
448



mine field near Charkov. The entire battalion was killed but the minefield was cleared for the succeeding troops.<sup>158</sup>

Müller's fear of Soviet retribution and disaffection with Nazism appears to have driven him towards support of the Americans. His opinions of the Red Army suggested little respect for them, viewing their soldiers as poor and stating that all their equipment came from the United States. Müller also attacked what he perceived as the Soviets' disregard of their men's lives.

Anti-Communism was thus still one of the dominant subjects on many soldiers' minds, as evidenced by the words of Senior Lance Corporal Herbert Heyer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Paratrooper Division. Heyer, who was sent to Russia in December 1941 and served there until the summer 1942. He was adamant in an interrogation report that the only reason the Germans were still fighting was for the "...opportunity to defend Germany against Bolshevism."<sup>159</sup> In a Morale Questionnaire, Heyer discussed this topic as well as home front morale: "They only keep going because they have a deadly fear for the Russians...the Russians would be a fate worse than death. He claims that is the main reason why Germany is fighting today. They have been told Russia will occupy Germany and murder civilians."<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Unteroffizier Müller, 1.19.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 519.

<sup>159</sup> Interrogation Report, Obergefreiter Herbert Heyer, 1.6.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 484.

<sup>160</sup> Morale Questionnaire, Obergefreiter Herbert Heyer, 1.3.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 484.

In a room conversation between Heyer and prisoner Wehrmann, the topic of the Eastern Front and the dangers of the postwar period were brought up between the two.

Heyer and Wehrmann stated the following:

H: I think we still have the task, to explain to the Americans the danger of Bolshevism, to open their eyes about the intentions of Russia.

W: Well, in France for example it is believed that because Stalin is wearing a Marshall's uniform, that Bolshevism has fizzled out, and now only plutocratic models have taken over.

H: But doesn't Bolshevism have imperialist aims?

W: Yes, certainly.

H: And the Russians use every means to reach their goals, they stop from no measures. (Discuss the possibilities of communism in Europe, decide that if Germany turns communistic, all of Europe will be bolshevized.) As a result America will also be threatened...

H: Why has America undertaken the war in Europe? To destroy the danger of the Nazis. But if Bolshevism emerges as the major power in Europe, then for what is America fighting?

W: If the Nazis have disappointed the people, then do you think the people will try Stalin?

H: I do not think so, the German soldier has heard too much propaganda against it. He has an instinctive abhorrence of Bolshevism and the Russians due to the Eastern campaign.

W: Yes, we must prevent the Bolshevization of Europe, we need to open the Americans' eyes about it. But this war between Germany and Russia is like a fight between Beelzebub and Lucifer! 2 devils trying to strangle each other! And then comes the plutocrat, America, in between them!<sup>161</sup>

In essence, one could argue that at least some of the soldiers of the Eastern Front continued their anti-Communism zeal even in captivity. Embracing defeat and the western Allies was their last hope against the scourge of Bolshevism, and so they turned their backs on Nazism if it meant saving their homeland from the Reds. As prisoner

---

<sup>161</sup> Room Conversation, Heyer – Wehrmann, 1.5.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 484.

Lieutenant Wolfgang Graf von Plettenberg stated in a Room Conversation a month prior to the end of the war: “If America does not bring food to Germany, Russia will do so before anyone starves to death in Germany, than he (the Germans) will choose to become Bolshevik.”<sup>162</sup> This German soldier essentially was laying the blueprint for the Marshall Plan two years before it was even drafted. In this way, German soldiers helped lay the groundwork for the Cold War, having fired the loudest shots of the anti-Bolshevik crusade from 1941 to 1945.

### *7.3. Conclusions*

The final two years of the war in Europe witnessed the rise of Soviet military power, the destruction of the once mighty German Wehrmacht, and the fall of the Third Reich. For many years following the end of the war, people in the West believed that the war in North Africa, Mediterranean, France, and the bombing campaigns were decisive in defeating Nazi Germany. However, as has been painstakingly proven and argued by historians for numerous decades, it was the war on the Eastern Front that truly decided the fate of Europe, and perhaps of the entire world. The millions of Wehrmacht men who served in the East were forever scarred by their experiences and shared in Hitler’s legacy of total war and genocide.

But while Germany had lost the Second World War militarily, the ideological war that was of central importance to Hitler and the Nazis continued far into the twentieth century. Returning POWs in postwar Germany found themselves portrayed as

---

<sup>162</sup> Room Conversation, Eckoldt - v. Plettenberg, 3.30.1945, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 527; Note that Lieutenant Wolfgang von Plettenberg served in the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in April 1942 in Russia, was wounded in May 1942 at Zhitomir, but continued serving in the Don River region in August 1942 and later was wounded at Stalingrad on November 1, 1942.

victims of the Nazi regime and of a cruel war. Christian churches in postwar West Germany provided a voice for vanquished troops, reaffirming anti-Bolshevism in the context of the Cold War while calling for the release of prisoners being held in Soviet captivity.<sup>163</sup> Soldiers could distance themselves politically and ideologically from Nazism while remaining anti-Communist because of their personal experiences in the East.<sup>164</sup> The formation of the Association of Returnees (VdH) in 1950 further provided former Wehrmacht soldiers a voice in West German society, which included their continued opposition to Bolshevism.<sup>165</sup> All of this meant that the battle against the Soviet Union, which claimed the lives of millions of soldiers on both sides, would continue on, albeit in a much different way for decades to come.

---

<sup>163</sup> Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 56-8.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 111-113.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion**

The identity of Wehrmacht soldiers over the course of World War II on the Eastern Front underwent a number of distinct changes from 1941-1945. When the invasion of the Soviet Union began in June 1941, German soldiers were abundantly self-confident due to the past victories in 1939-1940. The soldiers were also heavily influenced by Nazi propaganda's depiction of the Bolsheviks as savage tyrants whose state apparatus and army would collapse once enough pressure was applied. Among many of the Germans, there was also a belief that the war would be over quickly, as had occurred with the fall of Poland and France. Soldiers generally thought that they were fighting a defensive war against Russia, using an offensive strategy to pre-emptively stop an imminent Soviet onslaught. The victories scored in the summer and fall 1941 and the capture of hundreds of thousands of prisoners seemed to confirm the reports of a Red Army buildup on the Reich's borders.

During this first phase of the war from June 1941 to November 1941, soldiers perceived the Soviet Union in person for the first time, and many of them had distinct and opinionated views of their surroundings. For many, their first reaction was to

completely reject the Soviet state and Communist ideology for its apparent failures to prepare its military adequately, to feed its citizenry, and for not providing people with decent living conditions in general. The Germans felt superior both culturally and technically to the Soviets, by contrasting their mental images of the Fatherland with the seemingly squalid and inhabitable Russian landscape. In essence, many Wehrmacht troops felt that the Soviet Union was in many ways a hell on earth.

The German troops viewed the Soviet populace in a variety of ways during this initial period of invasion. Some soldiers saw the locals as peaceful and dignified people who deserved sympathy and tolerance from the invading forces. For others in the Wehrmacht, the local inhabitants were racial inferiors and uncivilized brutes, providing justification for harsh treatment and ethnocentric hatreds in accordance with official Nazi occupation policies. The Wehrmacht entered Russia a conquering imperial military force, but instead of attempting to wage a hearts and minds campaign to win over the civilian inhabitants, they instead looted, raped, and murdered their way across the countryside.

Certainly it must be argued that the propaganda of the period instilled many ideas into the minds of Germany's soldiers, ranging from negative depictions of Communism, the Jews, and the Red Army; to various depictions of the local population and the war aims of the Third Reich. Domestic and military propaganda was readily available to the soldiers throughout the war, and I found that during the invasion year 1941 soldiers seemed very susceptible to Nazi ideology. The likely reasons for the troop's compatibility with the view of the Nazis was due to the following: their belief in Hitler, overconfidence in victory, bearing witness to Bolshevik atrocities in occupied territories,

the perceived threat of a massive Red Army, living conditions in the Soviet Union, and the large Jewish minority population of Eastern Europe. These “facts,” as observed by Hitler’s army, confirmed many of their misgivings about the East, and caused those who might have been hesitant about the regime’s propaganda to reconsider the dangers posed by the Red menace.

As shown primarily in chapter four, many of the sources researched for this study pertaining to the Nazi genocide against the Jews reveal that soldiers wrote the most about their experiences of the Holocaust during 1941 and early 1942. It is likely that there are many sources available which divulge continued Wehrmacht involvement with and culpability in the Holocaust, but the materials involved in this study suggest the heaviest participation in mass shootings took place in 1941 and 1942 coinciding with the regime’s evolving extermination policies. Soldiers’ writings reveal the extent to which the Wehrmacht actively engaged in the persecutions, roundups, and ultimately annihilation of innocent men, women, and children in Eastern Europe. The censors could not filter out everything, though it is clear that the lack of evidence post-1941 might also have to do with self-censorship, as well as pressures put in place by the Nazis regarding such actions.

While the functionalist nature of Nazi policies against its racial and political enemies allowed atrocities and genocide to develop over time, it is also important to note that propaganda from the period reinforced the actions being taken by the regime and its soldiers. Pamphlets, newspapers, books, and films all did their part to persuade ordinary Germans that the war was caused by the Judeo-Bolsheviks, necessitating vicious retaliatory measures in order to counteract their maniacal plans which targeted the Reich

for extinction. Propaganda played the dual function to justify the Nazis' brutal policies as well as to continuously attack the nation's enemies through racism, political ideology, and fear mongering. While discriminatory newspaper articles and bigoted films could not necessarily induce people into tangible actions, what the propaganda could do was act as guidelines to influence one's actions, as well as serving as justification for the misdeeds taking place at the front or behind the lines.

The disastrous winter of 1941-1942, including the failure to take Moscow and Leningrad, left many soldiers of the Wehrmacht feeling powerless and beaten for the first time. While most knew that the Soviets were a different type of enemy combatant due to dehumanizing propaganda, they now came to the realization that the war could be very long and bloody, not unlike the First World War. Some soldiers lost their arrogant tone in their writings, and many others lost their lives, necessitating the regime to call up reserve units and new recruits to answer the Führer's call to duty. Despite the setback of the Soviet counteroffensive, the German Army endured and would plan its own attack for the summer 1942.

German soldier's perceptions of the Soviet Union itself, such as with the people and geography, varied from soldier to soldier. While some still saw their surroundings as a dull, sullen, and lifeless place populated by uncultured and uncivilized people, other soldiers slowly began to adapt to their new environment and even began to accept their new imperial landscape as a place comparable to parts of Germany. These variances in the categories of perception over the course of 1941-1942 present a unique question, namely: what role did the circumstances in the war situation play in soldiers' observations of the East? To answer this question, it is important to look ahead at the



shifts which took place from June 1941 to June 1942, and later from June 1942 to February 1943 period.

During the one year period of June 1941-June 1942, much changed in the war situation on the Eastern Front, with Operation Barbarossa failing, the Wehrmacht struggling for survival in the winter 1941-42, and plans for a new offensive to end the war beginning in June 1942. In the summer and fall 1941 soldiers perceived the Red Army with disdain and scorn, but by the winter and spring 1942 there is evidence to suggest that individuals in the Wehrmacht began to see the Red Army as a stubborn, vicious force capable of achieving at least limited tactical successes. From the time of the summer offensive of 1942 to November 1942, the sources reveal patterns of transformation on some subjects, especially in regards to morale and war weariness, while on other subjects such as a belief in final victory soldiers' steadily maintained their faith in Hitler and success. However, the continuous Red Army counterattacks, stubborn defensive engagements, and seemingly endless numbers of Soviet men and material, left many German soldiers worrying about their chances of survival in a long, drawn out war of attrition.

In general, the period of June 1942-February 1943 is the turning point in which an identity and perception shift is evident due to a variety of factors. The elongated stay in a foreign land, continued exposure to deadly combat, and the contrast between war propaganda and the realities at the front left many disillusioned by mounting losses, the enemy's stubbornness, and ultimately the defeat suffered at Stalingrad. Soldiers became less sure of themselves and of their nation's chances of success, writing about their doubts and fears while clinging to hopes for a better tomorrow. One of the most

important points to be made is that while the Germans were losing the war, rarely do you find Wehrmacht soldiers developing sympathy for Soviet Communism or desiring defeat at the hands of the Red Army. On the contrary, the troops on the Eastern Front felt as strongly as ever about their hatreds towards the Bolsheviks, noting more so a foreboding sense of dread about the Russian juggernaut's capabilities.

None of the soldiers wanted to imagine a defeated Germany as early as 1943, which is indicated in the sources investigated for this project. But instead of the overconfidence or blind obedience evidenced in 1941, there arose a sense of suspicion about propaganda as well as more self-awareness, which is interesting during a time of dictatorial rule. Acknowledgement of the Red Army's strengths rose amongst the soldiers, with the shifting view of conquering heroes being replaced by the image of a defensive struggle against endless Bolshevik hordes. The Wehrmacht championed itself as the bulwark against Communism, and as the only force capable of stopping the Soviets from taking control of all Europe. Anti-Communist rhetoric and a continued belief in the Führer bound the soldiers of the German military together, while fear, loyalty, and hatred were their primary motives for continuing to fight against overwhelming odds.

During the post-Stalingrad period after February 1943, propaganda began to take on a radically different outlook due to the extraordinary circumstances facing the Third Reich. In order to reshape the mentality of the German people and the troops to be geared for a long total war, the propaganda argued that the defeat of the Soviet Union would occur only if the entire nation were mobilized and ready to give everything for the Führer. A spirit of sacrifice replaced *Lebensraum* imperialism in the headlines, though

racism continued to play an important role. In a way, it was as though Germany were not completely capable of fighting a war of annihilation against Communist Russia until 1943, at a point when it was likely too late to achieve operational successes against the Red Army.

Similarly, soldiers' attitudes and perceptions became completely consumed by the growing desperation of the war situation. The troops grew increasingly depressed over the course of 1943, with only the Kursk offensive providing them with any glimmer of hope that the tactical situation might change. Once *Zitadelle* failed in July 1943, the Wehrmacht continued to withdraw when faced with numerous heavy Soviet assaults. In their writings, the frontline soldiers tended to focus more on individual concerns and situational events: combat, weather, meals, and other daily affairs. When soldiers did find the time to write about important political or military events, they offered unique insights into the mindset of men waging a lost war.

However, even in the latter stages of the war, when soldiers experienced lulls in the fighting or were stationed behind the frontlines, some would describe their views of the East. Generally this involved an emphasis on various differences between Germany and Eastern Europe, including language, customs, housing, religion, and the weather. Depending on the location, soldiers could find what they considered good qualities amongst the inhabitants, ranging from education to the attractiveness of local women. Others focused on perceived negative qualities, such as racial mixtures, uncivilized behavior, and an overall strangeness due to their lack of understanding. Poverty of the civilian populace became linked to their barbarity rather than the actions of governments or armies, and retreating soldiers pillaged, marauded, and burned without compassion as

they went. Cognitive dissonance and a cold sense of duty turned soldiers into monsters, laying waste to areas around them in order to trade space for a regime running out of time.

The summer of 1944 was a breakthrough period in the history of the war, a time in which German soldiers faced major external and internal crises. Now it was impossible to ignore the consequences of the impending doom facing the Third Reich, though many clung to the promises of their leadership regarding wonder weapons and predictions of the Allied coalition's impending collapse. The invasion of France and the destruction of Army Group Center foreshadowed the events of July 20, revealing cracks in the Nazi totalitarian state and a growing mood of fear and desperation. Soldiers had little choice but to fight on, given their worries about what the Allies might do to the Fatherland in the event of Germany's defeat. The letters and diaries suggest a continued acceptance of military responsibility, despite acknowledgement of an inevitable defeat. The spirit of sacrifice and faith in Hitler that was pushed by Nazi propaganda manifested itself in reality at the front, even if very few could hope for a successful outcome to the war.

This is the great question which boggles the minds of scholars to this day: why did the ordinary Germans continue fighting for a morally bankrupt and defeated regime in the face of impossible odds in the last year of the war? The secretly recorded room conversations and interrogations of prisoners conducted while the war was still going on provides a mixed yield of answers. There were those men who believed as late as 1944 and 1945 that the war could still be won under the right circumstances. Then there were those soldiers who during the same time period felt the war was completely lost, and that

Germany would be defeated within the matter of weeks or months. In general, those prisoners who predicted an early end of the war actually underestimated the duration of the war. Every soldier had his own personalized opinion of events taking place at the front, and most were divided about their beliefs in either the victory or defeat for the Third Reich.

The only subject with high levels of consistency in all the soldiers opinions were their perceptions of the Soviet Union. Wehrmacht soldiers were fighting against a reviled enemy, one they viewed as the opposite to everything German, including language, culture, history, race, and geography. German soldiers believed they were fighting a just war on the Eastern Front, even if terrible actions had taken place which had sullied the Reich's good name. Communism was the world's greatest enemy, and in their minds if only the western powers had the clairvoyance to see the dangerous threat facing Europe, they would have allied with the Nazis to defeat the Soviets once and for all. This theme of anti-Bolshevism remains the same up through the end of the war; with near remarkable uniformity the Wehrmacht troops had been successfully indoctrinated by the Nazis regarding the Red menace. The Cold War would allow the Germans to continue the great struggle against the Soviets, albeit in a far different form than had existed previously.

Understanding the development of German soldiers "categories of perception" and the transformation of their identity is a crucial part of the Eastern Front war. Benedict Anderson's "imagined political community" in the case of Nazi Germany manifested itself through the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which included and excluded groups

based upon racial and Social Darwinistic classifications.<sup>1</sup> This system of classifications became part of official government policy and was shared by many German men who invaded the Soviet Union, and these men perceived the Eastern imperial frontier and its people as “primitive.” In terms presented by Claude Levi-Strauss, German soldiers made various interpretations about their surroundings based upon individualized and collective systems of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Soldier’s interpretations were influenced by views of the East as “the Orient” in a European imagination of the East-West divide and the Soviet “Other.”<sup>3</sup> The writings of German soldiers and their perceptions of Eastern Europe as an uncivilized place reveal how successful the Nazis had been at transforming a national identity to imperial colonizers and racial warriors.<sup>4</sup>

However, the identity of German soldiers cannot be reduced to archetypes or presupposed images of what scholars characterize the Wehrmacht as being because character is malleable and subject to change due to various circumstances. Individualism is also an important component in understanding the Nazi period because, despite the illusion of an all-encompassing *Volksgemeinschaft* and a totalitarian system, German people were still motivated by personal and self-serving factors which influenced their actions. Some of the troops on the Eastern Front were cold blooded killers, and others were dutiful pragmatists simply following their orders. Some soldiers were dedicated

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Vejas Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to Present*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2, 171-172.

Nazis who wholeheartedly obeyed Third Reich doctrine, and others were former Social Democrats or Communists who were forcibly drafted and desired an end to the war.

This dissertation has argued the importance that wartime propaganda and Nazi ideology had in shaping the perspectives of Wehrmacht soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front during World War II. It has also contended that soldiers had a variety of viewpoints about the war and the Soviet Union, revealing the significance of individual ideas, group-think mentality, socio-cultural difference, racial hatreds, genocidal policies, and the effects of dehumanizing warfare. Over the course of four years of bloody combat, attitudes about the Nazi regime, Red Army, Eastern European peoples, and the outcome of the war changed for many soldiers. The most important finding in this project is the overwhelming evidence of animosity towards the Bolsheviks found in the source materials. While I do not suggest that all the soldiers were antisemitic or even racist, it is clear to me that the Wehrmacht largely agreed with and conformed to Nazi visions of the East, and it did everything it could to destroy the Soviet Union. The Wehrmacht may not have been the primary tool for implementing genocide, but it did much to facilitate Nazi crimes and committed widespread numbers of atrocities in the East, while doing very little to help the local population or prisoners of war to survive an imperialist war of extermination.

## References

### Archival Sources

*Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München, Germany*

ED 181 --- Vaubel, Siegfried, Aktenverzeichnungen, Masch. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen aus dem Beginn des Russlandfeldzuges, Juni bis Oktober 1941: Teil I 03. June-26. August 1941, Teil II 26. August-22. Oktober 1941, Kopien, 1 Band, Bestandsangabe 55916.

*National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland*

RG 165 --- Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, G-2, Intelligence Division, Captured Personnel Branch Records Relating to Prisoners of War, 1943-1945, Boxes 349-772, ARC ID 2788782, Entry P, 179B.

RG 242 --- National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized, Records of Headquarters, German Armed Forces High Command (Part IV), *Mitteilungen für die Truppe*, Microfilm Publication T-77, 2 rolls.

*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

RG-68.076M --- Selected Records of the *Reichspropagandaleitung* (Reich Propaganda Directorate), 1933–1944, Reel 1.

2000.146 --- Diary of Austrian Soldier on the Eastern Front, 23 September 1941-24 December 1941, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of Tom Macklin.

### Online Archives

*Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, Berlin, Germany*

“Feldpost aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg.” Accessed September 11, 2014.  
<http://www.museumsstiftung.de/briefsammlung/feldpost/zweiterweltkrieg/feldpost.html>.



## Newspapers

*The New York Times*. 1941.

*Das Reich: Deutsche Wochenzeitung*. 1941-1945.

*Der Stürmer: Deutsches Wochenblatt zum Kampfe um die Wahrheit*. 1941-1945.

*Völkischer Beobachter: Kampfblatt der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung Großdeutschlands*. 1941-1945.

## Websites

German Propaganda Archive. Calvin College. Accessed 30 September 2014.  
<http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/>

International Historic Films. "Die Frontschau." IHFFilm.com,  
<http://ihffilm.com/22900.html>, Accessed 28 October 2013.

The Jewish Virtual Library. "Chaim Weizmann." Accessed 23 March 2013.  
<<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/weizmann.html>>.

## Primary Sources

Baeumler, Alfred. *Alfred Rosenberg und der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*. München: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1943.

Bähr, Walter. *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten, 1939-1945*. Tübingen, R. Wunderlich, 1952.

Baumböck, Karl. "Juden machen Weltpolitik," *Nationalpolitische Aufklärungsschriften*, Heft 16. Berlin: Verlag Paul Hochmuth, 1942.

Baynes, N.H. ed. *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler: April 1922-August 1939, Volume 2*. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.

Becker, Gerhard. *Ich wünschte, auf einen Schlag wären alle Räder viereckig: Briefe und Postkarten 1939/1940 und 1944-1945*. Aachen: Helios, 2008.

Bidermann, Gottlob Herbert. *In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir of the Eastern Front*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000.

Birnbaum, Christoph. "Es ist wie ein Wunder, dass ich noch lebe": *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad, 1942-1943*. Königswinter: Brandenburgisches Verlagshaus, 2012.

Blunck, Hans Friedrich. *Wolter von Plettenberg: Deutschordensmeister in Livland*. Hamburg: Haneatische Verlagsanstalt, 1938.

- Böll, Heinrich and Jochen Schubert. *Briefe aus dem Krieg, 1939-1945*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001.
- Bouhler, Phillip, ed. *Der großdeutsche Freiheitskampf. Reden Adolf Hitlers, Volume 3*. Munich: Franz Eher, 1942.
- Brehm, Bruno. *Die Dichtung in kommenden Europa: Weimarer Reden, 1941*. Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1942.
- Buchbender, Ortwin and Reinhold Sterz. *Das Andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939-1945*. München: Beck, 1982.
- Bytwerk, Randall. *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2008.
- Diewerge, Wolfgang. *Deutsche Soldaten Sehen die Sowjet-Union: Feldpostbriefe aus dem Osten*. Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag, 1941.
- Ebert, Jens, ed. *Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003.
- Ebert, Jens ed. *Von Augusterlebnis zur Novemberrevolution: Briefe aus dem Weltkrieg, 1914-1918*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014.
- Elmshäuser, Konrad and Jan Lokers, eds. *“Man muß hier nur hart sein....”: Kriegsbriefe und Bilder einer Familie, 1934-1945*. Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 1999.
- Goebbels, Josef & Moritz Augustus von Schirmeister. *Das eiserne Herz: Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1941/42*. Munich: F. Eher, 1943.
- Fischer, Karl, ed. *Die Wehrmacht 1941: Um die Freiheit Europas*. Berlin: OKW, 1941.
- Getrost, Georg and Georg Leideritz. *“Ich glaube hier in Rußland ist es genau so scheisse wie in Afrika“ die Feldpost des Georg Getrost aus Zotzenbach/Odenwald von Oktober 1939 bis Juni 1944; 11.3.1919 - 25.6.1944*. Berlin: Berlin Pro Business, 2008.
- Golovchansky, Anatoly. *“Ich will raus aus diesem Wahnsinn“: deutsche Briefe von der Ostfront, 1941-1945: aus sowjetischen Archiven*. Wuppertal: P. Hammer, 1991.
- Gritzbach, Erich. *Hermann Göring, Werk und Mensch*. München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1938.
- Halder, Franz. *The Halder War Diary, 1939-1942*. Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1988.
- Hammer, Ingrid and Susanna zur Nieden. *Sehr selten habe ich geweint : Briefe und Tagebücher aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg von Menschen aus Berlin*. Zürich:Schweizer Verlagshaus, 1992.

- Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971.
- Jarausch, Konrad. *Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Kempowski, Walter. *Das Echolot: Abgesang '45: ein kollektives Tagebuch*. Munich: A. Knaus, 2005.
- Kempowski, Walter. *Das Echolot: Barbarossa '41: Ein kollektives Tagebuch*. München: Knaus, 2002.
- Kempowski, Walter. *Das Echolot: Ein kollektives Tagebuch, Januar und Februar 1943, Bänden I-IV*. Munich: A. Knaus, 1993.
- Kempowski, Walter. *Das Echolot: Fuga Furiosa: Ein kollektives Tagebuch, Winter 1945, Bänden I-IV*. Munich: A. Knaus, 1999.
- Koppen, Wilhelm. *1848: das Jahr der Warnung und grossdeutschen Mahnung*. Leipzig: Lühe & Co., 1939.
- Koppen, Wilhelm. *Deutsche gegen Deutschland: Geschichte des Rheinbundes*. Hamburg: Hanseat. Verl.-Anst., 1936.
- Kurz, Josef. *'Aber Du war doch Soldat!' War ich nicht auch ein Christ? Briefe, Tagebuchaufzeichnungen und Reflexionen des Soldaten Sepp K.* Linz: Edition Kirchen Zeit-Geschichte, 2003.
- Lieb, Christa. *Feldpost: Briefe zwischen Heimat und Front, 1939-1945: Eine Collage*, Bietigheim-Bissingen: Stadt Bietigheim-Bissingen Stadtarchiv, 2007.
- Lubbeck, William. *At Leningrad's Gates: The Combat Memoirs of a Soldier with Army Group North*. Haverton, PA: Casemate, 2006.
- Mendelsohn, John, ed. *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes. Vol. 10: The Einsatzgruppen or Murder Commandos*. New York: Garland, 1982.
- Miedbrot, Karl. *Die Narren des Kaganowitsch*. München: F. Eher, 1943.
- Mielert, Harry. *Russische Erde: Kriegsbriefe aus Russland*. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1950.
- Moldenhauer, Wilhelm and Jens Ebert, *Im Funkwagen der Wehrmacht durch Europa: Balkan, Ukraine, Stalingrad; Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Wilhelm Moldenhauer 1940-1943*. Berlin: Trafo, 2008.

- Murawski, Erich, *Der deutsche Wehrmachtbericht, 1939-1945: Ein Beitrag zur Untersuchung der geistigen Kriegführung*. Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1962.
- Mutzenbecher, Geert-Ulrich. *Feldpostbriefe an meine Eltern, 1941-1945*. Oldenburg: Isensee, 2009.
- Nationalsozialistische Führungsstab der Wehrmacht, ed. *Offiziere des Führers: Die nationalsozialistische Monatschrift der Wehrmacht für Politik, Weltanschauung, Geschichte und Kultur*. Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1944.
- Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, *Die Frontschau*, Nrs. 2-12. 1941-1943. Directed by Fritz Hippler, Herresfilmstelle, 1941-1943. Film.
- Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. *Die Frontschau: Die unsichtbare Waffe*. 1944. Unknown Director. Herresfilmstelle, 1944. Film.
- Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. *Die Wehrmachtberichte Band 1: 1939-1941*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985.
- Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. *Die Wehrmachtberichte Band 2: 1942-1943*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985.
- Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. *Wehrmachtberichte Band 3, 1944-1945*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985.
- Postenrieder, Heinz and Christine Miller. *Feldzug im Osten, 2.8.1941 - 19.4.1942*. Carol Stream, IL: Publisher's Graphics, 2010.
- Richardson, Horst Fuchs. *Sieg Heil!: War Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937 1941*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1987.
- Roth, Hans and Christine Alexander. *Eastern Inferno: The Journals of a German Panzerjäger on the Eastern Front, 1941-1943*. Philadelphia: Casemate, 2010.
- Scheuer, Alois, and Günter Scheuer. *Briefe aus Russland: Feldpostbriefe des Gefreiten Alois Scheuer, 1941-1942*. St. Ingbert: Wassermann Verlag, 2001.
- Seraphim, Peter-Heinz. *Das Judentum im Osteuropäischen Raum*. Essen: Essener Verlagsanstalt, 1938.
- Seraphim, Peter Heinz. *Das Judentum: Seine Rolle und Bedeutung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*. München: Deutscher Volksverlag, 1942.
- Seibert, Theodor. *Das amerikanische rätsel, die Kriegspolitik der USA in der aera Roosevelt*. Berlin, F. Eher Nachf., 1941.

Seibert, Theodor. *Das rote Russland: Staat, Geist und Alltag der Bolschewiki*. München: Knorr & Hirth, 1931.

Seibert, Theodor. *Wie sieht uns der Engländer*. Berlin, F. Eher Nachf., 1940.

*Das Sowjet-Paradies. Ausstellung der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP. Ein Bericht in Wort und Bild*. Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1942.

Sündermann, Helmut. *Die Grenzen fallen: von der Ostmark zum Sudetenland*. München: F. Eher, 1938.

Sündermann, Helmut. *Der Weg zum deutschen Journalismus: Hinweise für die Berufswahl junger Nationalsozialisten*. München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1938.

Thimm, Gerhard. *Das Rätsel Russland: Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Scherz & Goverts Verlag, 1952.

Thimm, Gerhard. *Der Preis und Kostenstruktur in der Industrieproduktion der Sowjetzone*. Berlin: Berichte der Osteuropa-Institutes an der Freien Universität Berlin, 1956.

Trevor-Roper, H.R. *Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944: Secret Conversations*. New York City: Enigma Books, 2008.

*Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10, Oct. 1946-April 1949, Volume IV*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949-1953.

*True to Type: A Selection from Letters and Diaries of German Soldiers and Civilians, Collected on the Soviet-German Front*. London: Hutchinson, 1945.

Udke, Gerhard and Gerwin Udke. *Schreib so oft du kannst: Feldpostbriefe des Lehrers Gerhard Udke, 1940 bis 1944*. Berlin: JKL Publikationen, 2002.

Wedel, Hasso von. *Die Propagandatruppen der Deutschen Wehrmacht*. Neckargemünd: K. Vowinckel, 1962.

### Secondary Sources

Absolon, Rudolf. *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich*, Volume 5, 1. September 1939 bis 18. Dezember 1941. Boppard am Rhein: Boldt, 1988.

- Alford, Kenneth D. *Hermann Goring and the Nazi Art Collection: The Looting of Europe's Art Collection: The Looting of Europe's Art Treasures and their Dispersal after World War II*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Bachrach, Susan D., Dr. Edward Phillips, and Steven Luckert. *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda*. Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; New York: Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2009.
- Bailey, Jonathan B.A., *Field Artillery and Firepower*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004.
- Baird, Jay W. *The Mythical World of Nazi Propaganda, 1939-1945*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974.
- Baranowski, Shelly. *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Baranowski, Shelley. *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Barnes, James J. and Patience P. Barnes. *Nazis in Pre-War London, 1930-1939: The Fate and Role of German Party Members and British Sympathizers*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010.
- Bartov, Omer, Grossmann, Atina, and Mary Nolan, eds. *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*. New York: New Press, 2002.
- Bartov, Omer. *The Eastern Front 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.
- Bartov, Omer. *The Eastern Front 1941-1945: German Troops and the Barbarization of Warfare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. NY: Palgrave, 2001.
- Bartov, Omer. *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-day Ukraine*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Bartov, Omer. *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Bartov, Omer, ed. *Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Baum, Markus. *Jochen Klepper*. Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2011.

- Beck, Earl. *Under the Bombs: The German Home Front, 1942-1945*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1986.
- Beevor, Antony. *The Second World War*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2012.
- Bellamy, Chris, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.
- Ben-Sasson, H.H. ed., *A History of the Jewish People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Beorn, Waitman Wade. *Marching into Darkness: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belarus*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Bergen, Doris L. *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
- Berkhoff, Karel Cornelis, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Berkowitz, Michael. *The Crime of My Very Existence: Nazism and the Myth of Jewish Criminality*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.
- Bidlack, Richard, *The Leningrad Blockade, 1941-1944: A New Documentary History from the Soviet Archives*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Biess, Frank. *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Bishop, Chris. *The Encyclopedia of Weapons of World War II*. NY: Metrobooks, 2002.
- Borys, Bill. "Mitteilungen für die Truppe: Ideology in Publication." M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1994.
- Boshyk, Yuri and Andriy Wynnycykj, eds. *Ukraine During World War II: History and Its Aftermath: a Symposium*. Downsview, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1986.
- Brandon, Ray and Wendy Lower, eds. *The Shoah in Ukraine*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press: 2008.
- Breitman, Richard. *U.S. Intelligence and the Nazis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

- Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992.
- Browning, Christopher and Jürgen Matthäus. *Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Buchbender, Ortwin. *Das tönende Erz: Deutsche Propaganda gegen die Rote Armee im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1978.
- Burleigh, Michael. *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Burleigh, Michael. *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Bytwerk, Randall L. *Julius Streicher*. New York: Stein and Day, 1983.
- Campbell, D'Ann. "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union." *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (April 1993).
- Conard, Robert C. *Understanding Heinrich Böll*. Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1992.
- Craig, William. *Enemy at the Gates: The Battle for Stalingrad*. New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1973.
- Dallin, Alexander. *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957.
- Damianov, Atanas. *Die Arbeit der Deutschen Orient-Mission unter den türkischen Muslimen in Bulgarien von Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts bis zum 2. Weltkrieg*. Munster: Lit Verlag, 2003.
- Deist, Wilhelm. *The Wehrmacht and German Rearmament*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.
- Dennis, David. *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Desbois, Patrick. *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Diller, Ansgar. *Rundfunkpolitik im Dritten Reich*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980.



- Ebert, Jens. *Stalingrad, eine deutsche Legende: Zeugnisse einer verdrängten Niederlage*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992.
- Ebert, Jens. *Zwischen Mythos und Wirklichkeit. Die Schlacht von Stalingrad in deutschsprachigen authentischen und literarischen Texten*. Berlin: Humboldt Universität, 1989.
- Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983.
- Erickson, John. *The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Etlin, Richard A. *Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Evans, Richard. *The Third Reich at War*. New York: Penguin Press, 2009.
- Florin, Moritz. *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt in der Propaganda des Leitmediums*. Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2009.
- Frei, Norbert. *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Frei, Norbert and Johannes Schmitz. *Journalismus im Dritten Reich*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2011.
- Fritz, Stephen. *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995.
- Fritz, Stephen. *Ostkrieg: Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011.
- Gay, Ruth. *The Jews of Germany: A Historical Portrait*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Gerasimova, Svetlana, & Stuart Britton. *The Rzhev Slaughterhouse: The Red Army's Forgotten 15-month Campaign against Army Group Center, 1942-1943*. Havertown: Helion and Company, 2013.
- Gilbert, Martin. *The Second World War: A Complete History*. New York: H. Holt, 1989.
- Gilmore, Allison B. *You Can't Fight Tanks with Bayonets: Psychological Warfare against the Japanese in the Southwest Pacific*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, 1998.

- Glantz, David M. *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk, 10 July-10 September 1941*. Solihull, West Midlands, UK: Helion, 2010.
- Glantz, David M. *Colossus Reborn: The Red Army at War, 1941-1943*. Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2005.
- Glantz, David M. and Jonathan M. House. *Endgame at Stalingrad, Book Two: December 1942 February 1943, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume 3*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014.
- Glantz, David M. *From the Don to the Dnepr: Soviet Offensive Operations, December 1942 August 1943*. Portland, Oregon: F. Cass, 1991.
- Glantz, David M. and Jonathan M. House. *To the Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations, April-August 1942, The Stalingrad Trilogy, Volume I*. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2009.
- Glantz, David M. and Jonathan M. House. *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995.
- Grünberger, Richard. *The Twelve Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany, 1933 1945*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1991.
- Haggith, Toby, ed. *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*. London: Wallflower Press, 2005.
- Hale, Oron J. *The Captive Press in the Third Reich*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964.
- Hale, Oron J. *The Great Illusion: 1900-1914*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Heer, Hannes and Klaus Naumann. *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941-1944*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000.
- Herf, Jeffrey. *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Herzstein, Robert. *The War that Hitler Won: The Most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History*. New York: Putnam, 1978.
- Herzog, Dagmar, ed. *Sexuality and German Fascism*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005.
- Hilberg, Raul. *The Destruction of the European Jews*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985.

- Hilger, Andreas. *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion 1941-1956: Kriegsgefangenschaft, Lageralltag und Erinnerung*. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2000.
- Hill, Alexander. *The War Behind the Eastern Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in Northwest Russia, 1941-1944*. New York: Frank Cass, 2005.
- Hillesheim, Jürgen and Elisabeth Michael. *Lexicon Nationalsozialistischer Dichter: Biographien, Analysen, Bibliographien*. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1993.
- Hoffmann, Hilmar. *The Triumph of Propaganda: Film and National Socialism, 1933-1945*. New York: Berghahn Books, 1996.
- Humburg, Martin. *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion, 1941-1944*. Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998.
- Hunt, Nigel C. *Memory, War, and Trauma*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Kay, Alex J., Jeff Rutherford, David Stahel, eds. *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*. New York: University of Rochester Press, 2012.
- Kern, Wolfgang. *Die innere Funktion der Wehrmacht, 1933-1939*. Berlin: Militärverlag der Deutsche Demokratische Republik, 1978.
- Kersaw, Ian. *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-1945*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011.
- Kershaw, Ian. *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Kershaw, Ian. *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.
- Kershaw, Ian. *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution*. New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2008.
- Kilian, Jürgen. *Wehrmacht und Besatzungsherrschaft im Russischen Nordwesten, 1941-1944: Praxis und Alltag in der Militärverwaltungzone der Heeresgruppe Nord*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012.

- Kipp, Michaela. *“Grossreinemachen im Osten”: Feindbilder in deutschen Feldpostbriefen im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2014.
- Klee, Ernst. *The Cultural Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. Who was what before and after 1945*. S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 2007.
- Knoch, Peter. *Kriegsalltag. Die Rekonstruktion des Kriegsalltags als Aufgabe der historischen Forschung und der Friedenserziehung*. Stuttgart: Metzler, Stuttgart 1989.
- Knotje, Todd. *German Orientalisms*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Koonz, Claudia. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003.
- Kostianinen, Auvo. “Genocide in Soviet Karelia: Stalin's terror and the Finns of Soviet Karelia,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21(1996).
- Kühne, Thomas. *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Laqueur, Walter, ed., *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Williard, OH: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, 2002.
- Laqueur, Walter. *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1990.
- Lepage, Jean-Denis. *German Military Vehicles of World War II*. NC: Mcfarland and Company, 2007.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Levin, Nora. *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945*. New York: Schocken Books, 1973.
- Liddell Hart, Basil Henry. *The Other Side of the Hill: Germany's Generals, their Rise and Fall, with their Own Account of Military Events, 1939-1945*. London: Cassell, 1948.
- Liulevicius, Vejas Gabriel. *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Liulevicius, Vejas Gabriel. *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

- Löffler, Klara. *Aufgehoben: Soldatenbriefe aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Eine Studie zur subjektiven Wirklichkeit des Krieges*. Bamberg: Regensburger Verein für Volkskunde, 1992.
- Longerich, Peter. *Life and Death in the Third Reich*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Longerich, Peter. *Propagandisten im Krieg: Die Presseabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes unter Ribbentrop*. Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1987.
- Lower, Wendy. *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*. Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2005.
- Lucas, James. *War on the Eastern Front, 1941-1945: The German Soldier in Russia*. New York: Stein and Day, 1980.
- Mallett, Derek R. *Hitler's Generals in America: Nazi POWs and Allied Military Intelligence*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013.
- Marchand, Suzanne L. *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*. Washington, D.C.: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Martens, Erika. *Zum Beispiel Das Reich*. Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982.
- Maslov, Alexander A. *Captured Soviet Generals: The Fate of Soviet Generals Captured by the Germans, 1941-1945*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001.
- Mazower, Mark. *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe*. London, England: Penguin Books, 2008.
- Megargee, Geoffrey P. and Martin Dean, eds. *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- Merridale, Catherine. *Ivan's War: The Red Army at War, 1939-1945*. London: Bloomsbury House, 2010.
- Messerschmidt, Manfred. *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination*. Hamburg: R. v. Decker, 1969.
- Mitcham, Samuel W. *German Order of Battle: 291<sup>st</sup>-999<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007.

- Mogge, Wilhelm. "Zeitungsman aus Berufung und Leidenschaft. Karl Willy Beer (1909-1979)," in *Jahrbuch des Archivs der deutschen Jugendbewegung*, 12 (1980), 147-154.
- Mosier, John. *Cross of Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German War Machine, 1918-1945*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006.
- Mosier, John. *Deathride: Hitler vs. Stalin: The Eastern Front, 1941-1945*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 2010.
- Mühlberger, Detlef. *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933*. New York: P. Lang, 2004.
- Müller, Klaus Jürgen. *Armee, Politik und Gessellschaft in Deutschland 1933-1945: Studien zum Verhältnis von Armee und NS-System*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979.
- Müller, Rolf-Dieter. *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2012.
- Müller, Rolf Dieter and Gerd R. Ueberschär. *Hitler's War in the East, 1941-1945: A Critical Assessment*. Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997
- Murray, Williamson and Allan Millett. *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Neitzel, Söhnke and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing, and Dying; The Secret World War II Transcripts of German POWs*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.
- O'Neill, Robert J. *The German Army and the Nazi Party, 1933-1939*. New York: J. H. Heineman, 1967.
- Orlow, Dietrich. *Weimar Prussia, 1925-1933: The Illusion of Strength*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991.
- Overy, Richard. *The Bombers and the Bombed: Allied Air War Over Europe 1940-1945*. New York: Viking, 2014.
- Peukert, Detlev. *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Pulzer, Peter, *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848 1933*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003.
- Raines, John, ed., *Marx on Religion*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

- Rhodes, Richard. *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002.
- Roberts, Geoffrey. *Stalin's War's: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Roberts, Geoffrey. *Victory at Stalingrad: The Battle that Changes History*. Harlow: Longman, 2002.
- Römer, Felix. *Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht von innen*. München: Piper Verlag, 2012.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Salisbury, Harrison E. *900 Tage: die Belagerung von Leningrad*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989.
- Schaft, Gretchen Engle. *From Racism to Genocide: Anthropology in the Third Reich*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Scherzer, Veit. *Die Geschichte der 113. Infanterie-Division 1940 – 1943*. Scherzers Militair Verlag: Bayreuth, 1990.
- Schirnding, Albert von. "Clemens Hans Theodor Konstantin Maria Graf von Podewils Juncker Bigatto" in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB). Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001.
- Schleicher, Karl-Theodor. *Aus Feldpostbriefen junger Christen, 1939-1945: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Katolischen Jugend im Feld*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005.
- Schmitz, Helmut, ed. *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*. New York: Rodopi B.V., 2007.
- Schoep, Karl-Heinz. *Literature and Film in the Third Reich*. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2004.
- Schumann, Dirk. *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic: 1918-1933*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.
- Seaton, Albert. *The Battle for Moscow*. New York: Sarpedon, 1993.
- Seaton, Albert. *The German Army, 1933-1945*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.
- Segeberg, Harro, ed. *Mediale Mobilmachung I: Das Dritte Reich und der Film*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006.

- Shepherd, Ben. "The Continuum of Brutality: The German Army and the Soviet Partisan War, 1942." *German History*, Jan. 2003, Vol. 21 Issue 1, 49-81.
- Shepherd, Ben. *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Smith, Woodruff. *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Snyder, David Raub. *Sex Crimes Under the Wehrmacht*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2007.
- Stahel, David. *Operation Typhoon: Hitler's March on Moscow, October 1941*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Steigmann-Gall, Richard. *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Steiner, James. *Hitler's Wehrmacht: German Armed Forces in Support of the Führer*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008.
- Steinweis, Alan. *Kristallnacht, 1938*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Steinweis, Alan E. and Daniel E. Rogers, eds. *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.
- Stone, David. *Hitler's Army: 1939-1945: The Men, Machines and Organization*. Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2009.
- Streit, Christian. *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978.
- Tooze, Adam. *Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*. New York: Viking Penguin Group, 2007.
- Uziel, Daniel. *The Propaganda Warriors: The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Waddington, Lorna. *Hitler's Crusade: Bolshevism and the Myth of the International Jewish Conspiracy*. New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007.
- Wedel, Hasso von. *Die Propagandatruppen der deutschen Wehrmacht*. Neckargemund: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1962.



- Weinberg, Gerhard. *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II*. New York: Cambridge, 2005.
- Welch, David. *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Wette, Wolfram. *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2002.
- Wette, Wolfram. *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Williamson, Gordon. *The SS: Hitler's Instrument of Terror*. St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004.
- Willis, Jeffrey Robert. *The Wehrmacht Propaganda Branch: German Military Propaganda and Censorship during World War II*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1964.
- Wippermann, Wolfgang. *Der "deutsche Drang nach Osten": Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981.
- Wippermann, Wolfgang. *Die Deutschen und der Osten: Feindbild und Traumland*. Darmstadt: Primus, 2007.
- Zeman, Z.A.B. *Nazi Propaganda*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Ziegler, Sebastian. "Schreiben im Krieg – Schreiben vom Krieg – Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege," Review of "Schreiben im Krieg – Schreiben vom Krieg." Berlin: Museum für Kommunikation Berlin, 13.09-2010-15.09.2010. *H-Soz-u Kult*. (November 2010), 1-6.
- Ziemke, Earl. *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987.