HITLER’S FORGOTTEN GENOCIDES:
THE FATE OF SOVIET POWS

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The sheer enormity of Soviet losses at the hands of German forces during the Second World War staggers the mind. During the immediate post-war period, Stalin did not want the West to know just how badly the Soviet Union had been mauled or the fact that far more Soviet soldiers had died than German ones (up to three times as many); consequently, the Soviets claimed that the total number of dead was 7 million, while Western estimates were between 10 to 15 million Soviet dead.\(^1\) It was only during the Khrushchev era that the true scale of the disaster was revealed and the more accurate figure of 20 million dead was generally accepted.\(^2\) Of these, only half were soldiers.\(^3\) The rest were at least 10 million civilians, including 2 million who died as slave laborers in Nazi Germany.\(^4\) The death toll has more recently been put at 25, 27 and even 30 million, though I suspect the latter figures also take into consideration the decline in birth rates.\(^5\) In January 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev appointed yet another commission to give a definitive accounting of Soviet losses.\(^6\)

Soviet military records are not particularly accurate, but it is estimated that the total number of its dead from combat, hospitals, or

\(^2\) ROLF-DIETER MÜLLER & GERD R. UEBERSCHRÄR, HITLER’S WAR IN THE EAST 1941-1945: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT 142 (Bruce D. Little trans., 1997).
\(^3\) Id.
\(^5\) Ellman & Maksudov, supra note 1, at 671.
captive was at least 8 million and possibly as high as 10 million.\footnote{Ellman & Maksudov, supra note 1, at 674.} An exhaustive investigation by Michael Ellman and S. Maksudov puts the figure at 8,668,000.\footnote{Id.} The Germans captured between 5 and 6 million Soviet troops, and executed many after their surrender.\footnote{Jürgen Förster, The German Army and the Ideological War against the Soviet Union, in The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany 15, 21 (Gerhard Hirschfeld ed., 1986).} Between 3.3 and 3.5 million Soviet prisoners of war (“POWs”), or well over one-third of the military dead, would perish in captivity.\footnote{Ellman & Maksudov, supra note 1, at 674.} Stalin supposedly said the death of one person is a tragedy, whereas the death of millions is but a statistic.\footnote{It is highly unlikely that Stalin actually uttered these words; in his biography of Truman published in 1992, David McCullough asserts that Stalin made the remark en passant to Churchill while discussing the opening of the second front. See David McCullough, TRUMAN 420 (1992). While McCullough cites Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko’s The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny, as evidence, most scholars agree that the remark comes from Erich Maria Remarque’s Die Schwarze Obelisk. See Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko, The Time of Stalin: Portrait of a Tyranny (1981); Erich Maria Remarque, Die Schwarze Obelisk (1956).} The true horrors of Hitler’s policies are almost incomprehensible to us, but our duty as scholars is to understand the motives behind the Nazi phenomenon and the reason why so many participated in its implementation. Numbers matter, and more importantly, the identities and faces behind each and every one of these numbers matter.

Most accounts of the Holocaust, of course, focus upon its principal victims – the Jews; approximately 5.9 million of them were murdered.\footnote{Lucy S. Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews 1933-1945 544 (1975).} In the popular mind, the figure of six million is given as the sum total of Nazi atrocities. This is literally only half the story, since almost that many non-Jews perished, including Soviet POWs, Roma, homosexuals and others.\footnote{Donald Niewyk & Francis Nisocia, The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust 45 (2000).} It is imperative that we honor the memory of all the victims of Nazi persecution by exploring these “forgotten” genocides of the Holocaust. This article will address the fate of Soviet POWs, and cover not only the horrors and atrocities they suffered in German captivity but also the lesser-known experiences of the repatriated soldiers who were shipped directly to the GULAG (“Glavnoe upravlenie ispravitel’no-trudovykh lagerei,” or Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps) for a decade after the war ended.
I should pause here to mention that not all the Soviets captured and executed by the Germans or sent to the camps were soldiers. While most scholars are familiar with the “commissar” order which called for all communists and Jews to be summarily shot after interrogation, even males not in uniform between the ages of 15 and 65 could be executed or sent to the camps as partisans. But many of the Red Army soldiers who surrendered were turned over to the SS and summarily executed. Jürgen Förster agrees that the documentary evidence proves that at least a half-million prisoners of war were handed over to the SS between June 1941 and May 1943; Christian Streit has asserted that all of these men were simply shot, but Förster is not as certain. It must be kept in mind, however, that since the exhibition The German Army and Genocide in Germany in 1995, the role that the Wehrmacht played in the Holocaust has been extensively researched and documented by many scholars, including Förster. He found that in one month, the 707th Infantry Division, deployed in Belarus, shot 10,431 captives (including soldiers, partisans, and civilians) out of a total of 10,940, while suffering only two dead themselves. So it was not just the SS and Waffen SS that murdered captured Soviets; consequently, it is safe to assume that a very large percentage of the POWs executed by the Germans were shot by regular troops.

Even if they were not summarily executed, the Germans forced these men to walk hundreds of miles to a Dulag (Durchlager), or transit camp, where they were kept in barbaric conditions before being transferred to their final destinations. It was the general policy of the Wehrmacht in the East that Russian POWs, who were presumed to be filthy and disease ridden, were not to be transported in the army’s trucks or trains. One German officer noted that these soldiers, many of them wounded (medical assistance was also proscribed by policy) “make an idiotic impression like herds of animals.” They were left entirely without shelter, not given food or water on a regular basis, and

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14 Förster, supra note 9, at 19-21.
16 Förster, supra note 9, at 21.
17 Id. at 26.
simply fell by the wayside.\textsuperscript{21} They were then executed.\textsuperscript{22} The aforementioned German officer thought this unfortunate, as “it was done on the road, even in towns . . . .”\textsuperscript{23}

One soldier, Nikolai Obrynba, who had been captured at Vitebsk, remembered the horrific details of the march:

It was the fourth day of our march toward Smolensk. We spent the nights in specially furnished pens, enclosed by barbed wire and guard towers with machine gunners, who illuminated us with flares through the entire night. The tail of the column, which stretched from hill to hill, disappeared into the horizon. Whenever we halted, thousands of those dying from hunger and cold remained or they collapsed as we marched along. Those still alive were finished off by soldiers wielding submachine guns. A guard would kick a fallen prisoner and, if he could not get up in time, fired his gun. I watched with horror as they reduced healthy people to a state of complete helplessness and death.\textsuperscript{24}

Another prisoner, Leonid Volynsky, also remembered these arbitrary shootings:

An exhausted prisoner of war would be sat at the side of the road, an escort would approach on his horse and lash out with his whip. The prisoner would continue sitting, with his head down. Then the escort would take a carbine from his saddle or a pistol from his holster.\textsuperscript{25}

At his war crimes trial in Nuremberg, Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the \textit{Fuhrungsamt} (\textit{Wehrmacht} Command Staff) and one of Hitler’s closest military advisors, attempted to explain away these atrocities by saying that the only prisoners shot were “not those that could not, but those that did not want, to walk.”\textsuperscript{26}

Those that survived these death marches and reached the camps found hell on earth. “There were no barracks or permanent housing. The camps were simply open areas fenced off with barbed wire. The prisoners had to lie in the sun, then in mud, and in the fall – with temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees centigrade – faced the possibility of freezing to death.”\textsuperscript{27} The commandant of Stalag VIII-F/318 (a large camp in western Poland set up specifically for Soviet prisoners

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{The Hamburg Institute for Social Research}, \textit{supra} note 20, at 142.
and renumbered 318 in 1943), Colonel Falkenberg, noted how “these
cursed Untermenschen have been observed eating grass, flowers and raw
potatoes. Once they can’t find anything edible in the camp they turn
to cannibalism.”28 Alexander Werth quotes one Hungarian officer’s
description in his Russia at War:

Behind wire there were tens of thousands of prisoners. Many were on the
point of expiring. Few could stand on their feet. Their faces were dried
up and their eyes sunk deep into their sockets. Hundreds were dying
every day, and those who had any strength left dumped them in a vast
pit.29

That would indeed sometimes be only if their comrades had not con-
sumed their flesh. Cannibalism was fairly common in the camps.30 Reichsmarshal Hermann Goering joked about this, telling one diplomat
that “in the camps for [Soviet] prisoners of war, after having eaten
everything possible, including the soles of their boots, they have begun
to eat each other, and what is more serious, have also eaten a German
sentry.”31 In another camp, a German witness stated that the POWs
“whined and groveled before us. They were human beings in whom
there was no longer a trace of anything human.”32 When a dead dog
was thrown into the compound “the Russians would fall on the animal
and tear it to pieces with their bare hands . . . the intestines they’d stuff
in their pockets . . . .”33 One guard, Xavier Dorsch, noted that in Minsk
“the problem of feeding the prisoners being unsolvable, they have
largely been without nourishment for six to eight days and are almost
deranged in their need for sustenance.”34 Another guard, Johannes
Gutschmidt, noted in his diary that “there was nothing to eat, not even
any water. Many died. Finally, they gave them dry macaroni and they
fought over it.”35 A POW named Viktor Yermolayev, confirms that the
Germans “began throwing us packets of semolina, dehydrated semo-
lina, they threw them to us . . . some caught them . . . and others
couldn’t. We fell on it like wolves!”36

Alexander Solzhenitsyn has given us the best description of the
plight of the Soviet prisoners of war in his The Gulag Archipelago:

28 North, supra note 24.
30 See id. at 703-04.
31 ALEXANDER DALLIN, GERMAN RULE IN RUSSIA 1941-1945 415 (1957).
33 Id.
34 North, supra note 24.
35 Id.
36 Id.
A multitude of bonfires; and around the bonfires . . . beings who had once been Russian officers but had now become beastlike creatures who gnawed the bones of dead horses, who baked patties from potato rinds, who smoked manure and were all swarming with lice. Not all these two-legged creatures had died as yet. . . . Not all of them had lost the capacity for intelligible speech, and one could see in the crimson reflections of the bonfires how a belated understanding was dawning on those faces which were descending to the Neanderthal.37

According to Alexander Dallin, “German policy had caused, or at the very least had tolerated the degradation of the prisoners – and then held it up to its own people as something to be reviled, as something typical of a sub-human who could never be like Western man.”38

Daniel Goldhagen probably overstated the excessive mortality rate for Soviet prisoners of war in his *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* when he estimated that nearly three million “young, healthy Soviet POWs” were murdered “mainly by starvation . . . in less than eight months” before the Germans changed their policy to exploit them as slave laborers.39 Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint have more accurately estimated that 3.5 million out of 5.5 million Soviet prisoners of war were deliberately killed or died as a result of criminal negligence by the middle of 1944.40 Though the numbers are imprecise, we can state with some degree of certainty that these deaths cannot be explained or rationalized as the result of poor preparation on the part of the Germans during the first months of Operation Barbarossa. In reality, German military planners had anticipated that they would capture a large number of prisoners. In early 1941, the Wehrmacht calculated that in the opening months of the war it would capture two to three million prisoners, including one million in the opening weeks of the campaign.41 Furthermore, at a conference of German State Secretaries in Berlin in May 1941, it was decided that providing food for the Wehrmacht and for Germany had the highest priority; “as a result, millions of people will surely starve.”42

This callous indifference to the fate of both the Soviet prisoners of war and the civilian population of the USSR points to the difference

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40 Peter Calvocoressi & Guy Wint, *Total War* 256 (1979).
41 See generally id.
between Hitler’s war in the West and the Nazi Rassenkampf (Racial struggle) in the East. Before the invasion began, the SS briefed German army officers with plans for the outright elimination of prisoners by regular army units and the Waffen SS. The racist nature of the war can also be seen in the fact that not only were Jewish prisoners simply shot, but prisoners from the USSR’s Central Asian republics were also often culled from the ranks and executed. Calvocoressi and Wint had it right when they wrote that “[t]his slaughter of prisoners cannot be accounted for by the peculiar chaos of war in the east. . . . The true cause was the inhuman policy of the Nazis towards the Russians as a people and the acquiescence of army commanders in attitudes and conditions which amounted to a sentence of death on their prisoners.” Alan Bullock, whose Hitler: A Study in Tyranny remains one of the most perceptive studies of the man, has rightly noted that, of all Hitler’s decisions, the decision to invade Russia “is the one which clearly bears his own personal stamp, the culmination (as he saw it) of his own career.”

Hitler’s world view was there for all to see in Mein Kampf (My Struggle), where he clearly enunciated his racist, Social Darwinistic policies and wrote of invading Russia to achieve the necessary Lebensraum (living space) for future colonization by the master Aryan race. If we take Hitler at his word, we then can begin to understand why at least 25 million Soviets died in the conflict, a staggering number that simply cannot be explained as being merely the fate of victims of war. Hitler’s ravings clearly indicate that he equated “Jewishness” with “Bolshevism” and he believed that as a result of the communist takeover in 1917, the Russians had been irreparably contaminated by Jews and were now inferior beings whose lives were of little value. The historical record is clear on this point, and yet, though often mentioned, this core belief of Hitler’s is usually glossed over by scholars in the field. David Crowe, however, points out that Hitler believed that Marxism was a Jewish doctrine that “systematically [planned] to hand the world over to the Jews.” Crowe also rightly asserts that Hitler felt the Jews were the cause of all of Germany’s misfortunes since 1914 and that he

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43 See generally Calvocoressi & Wint, supra note 40.
44 See generally id.
45 Id. at 256.
47 Adolph Hitler, Mein Kampf 181-82 (John Chamberlain et al. eds., 1941).
linked them with communism and Bolshevism. He also points out that in Hitler’s little known Second Book he “married his racial ideas with his foreign policy goals of Lebensraum in the East,” and that any “campaign against the Jews was an essential part of the war for Aryan survival and expansion.”

Hitler consistently referred to these ideas to explain his policies in government meetings and before Party gatherings. For example, at the annual Party rally in Nuremberg on September 11, 1935, he declared it was time to take on the Bolsheviks who headed the international Jewish conspiracy. At a cabinet meeting in September 1936, Goering read aloud from a memorandum written by Hitler that declared “[t]he essence and goal of Bolshevism is the elimination of those strata of mankind which have hitherto provided the leadership and their replacement by worldwide Jewry. . . . The German Armed Forces must be operational within four years.” Hitler believed that in the coming struggle, a Bolshevik victory would mean “the annihilation of the German people.” At the 1937 Party Rally, Hitler again demonized Jews as the primary enemy of the Western world, particularly “Jewish Bolshevism in Moscow.” It was not a coincidence that the mass killings of Jews began with Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union. The war against Russia should thus be seen as the “struggle for territorial conquest, a clash of ideologies and the Rassenkampf that it undoubtedly was.”

On March 30, 1941, Hitler told his senior military commanders that he “wanted to see the impending war against the Soviet Union conducted not according to customary military principles, but as a war of extermination against an ideology and its adherents, whether within the Red Army or in a non-military function.” Many Wehrmacht leaders saw the war as a struggle between Aryans and Jews which would require unprecedented harshness. General Erich Hoepner, commander of the 4th Panzer Group, wrote:

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49 Id.
50 Id. at 103.
52 Id. at 357.
54 PETER FRITZSCHE, LIFE AND DEATH IN THE THIRD REICH 543 (2008).
55 Förster, supra note 9, at 15.
56 Id. at 17; see also JEREMY NOAKES & GEOFFREY PRIDHAM, NAZISM 1919-1945 FOREIGN POLICY, WAR AND RACIAL EXTERMINATION: A DOCUMENTARY READER 1086 (2001).
The war against Russia is an important chapter in the struggle for existence of the German nation. It is the old battle of the Germanic against the Slav peoples, of the defense of European culture against Moscovite-Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism. The objective of this battle must be the destruction of present-day Russia and it must therefore be conducted with unprecedented severity. Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron will to exterminate the enemy mercilessly and totally.57

The orders and directives issued by the Germans prior to the attack on the Soviet Union show clearly that this was to be a war of annihilation. On May 19, 1941, the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (“OKW” or Armed Forces Supreme Command) issued a directive that told army commanders that:

Bolshevism is the deadly enemy of the National Socialist German people. Germany’s struggle is directed against this subversive ideology and its functionaries. This struggle requires ruthless and energetic action against Bolshevik agitators, guerillas, saboteurs, and Jews, and the total elimination of all active or passive resistance.58

This was followed by the famous June 6 Commissar Order, which freed German soldiers from legal responsibility for their actions against the Soviet political officers assigned to Red Army units.59 These officers, upon capture, were “as a matter of principle, to be finished immediately with a weapon.”60 Other directives of the same date said that “German troops should deal ruthlessly with ‘restiveness’ among Soviet POWs.”61 Bartov, however, notes that the maltreatment and indiscriminate shootings of Russian POWs, which began in the very first weeks of the campaign, were often carried out by soldiers “in spite of their commanders’ objections to such ‘unmilitary’ behaviour.” 62 He contends that it was not only the “criminal orders” that caused these behaviors but also the “ceaseless and ruthless propaganda of the regime against the ‘Jewish-Bolshevik Untermenschen’ to which the soldiers had been exposed throughout their youth . . . .”63

The Nazis treated Soviet POWs with the same contempt they showed toward Jews. They were completely expendable, but when necessary their labor could be utilized. The Nazis had originally thought

57 Förster, supra note 9, at 18.
58 Crowe, supra note 48, at 197.
59 Id.
60 Id.
61 Id.
62 Bartov, supra note 19, at 153.
63 Id. at 114-15.
that perhaps 100,000 prisoners could be used for labor.\footnote{Christian Streit, The German Army and the Policies of Genocide, in The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany 1, 11 (Gerhard Hirschfeld ed., 1986).} On March 1, Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer SS, ordered Rudolph Hoess SS, the new commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, which had only 8,000 inmates at the time, to build a new camp at Birkenau for 100,000 prisoners of war.\footnote{Id.} Of this number, 10,000 were to be put to work building a huge industrial complex for IG Farben.\footnote{Id.} Soon it would become the largest extermination camp in Poland.\footnote{Id. at 11.} Majdanek, (Waffen SS POW camp Lublin) another sprawling death and forced labor camp on the outskirts of Lublin, was opened in the summer of 1941 to house “from 25,000 to 50,000 forced laborers.”\footnote{Danuta Czech, Auschwitz Chronicle 1939-1945 50 (1989).} Over sixty percent of the half-million people who passed through Majdanek died there from the harsh labor conditions, malnutrition, or disease.\footnote{Streit, supra note 64, at 11; Czech, supra note 65, at 50.} Of this number, “[100,000] of the victims were Poles, 80,000 were Jews, and 50,000 were Soviet POWs.”\footnote{Czech, supra note 65, at 50.}

The first experimental gassing of the Final Solution took place at Auschwitz I from September 1 through 5, 1941, in the basement of Block 11.\footnote{Streit, supra note 64, at 11.} Its victims were hundreds of Soviet POWs, some still in their combat uniforms.\footnote{Czech, supra note 65, at 50.} According to Hoess, only a few hundred of the 10,000 Soviet POWs used to construct Birkenau survived until the summer of 1942.\footnote{Streit, supra note 64, at 11.} He recounted how this remnant, which had only survived because they were “more ruthless, more unscrupulous,” tried a mass escape because they feared they were to be gassed.\footnote{Id. at 263-64.} Hoess wrote that “there never was any intention to gas these Russians,” suggesting that the prisoners were simply suffering from a mass psychosis.\footnote{Id. at 232.} The Germans also conducted medical experiments upon Soviet POWs;\footnote{Id.} Dr. Berning, in particular, killed 12 Soviet POWs in Stalag 310
while performing experiments on them.\textsuperscript{77} In another case, prisoners were used as live dummies and were shot using hollow point bullets.\textsuperscript{78}

Most scholars have agreed that it was only in the fall of 1941 that Hitler conceded to the economic realities of the war and permitted the use of Soviet prisoners for slave labor.\textsuperscript{79} On August 5, 1941, Goering had allowed for the exploitation of “20,000 Russian prisoners of war in Norway.”\textsuperscript{80} Within a few months this had become general policy and Soviet prisoners of war were now to get the same rations as other prisoners of war, but only half rations of meats and fats.\textsuperscript{81} The Army also began to change its prisoner transportation policies and no longer forced prisoners to walk to the camps.\textsuperscript{82} It was also forbidden to transport POWs in open conveyances.\textsuperscript{83} One prisoner recalled his travel to Stalag 304:

The experience in the wagons can hardly be described in words . . . wounds bled and turned everything black. Men died in each wagon. They died of blood loss, tetanus, blood poisoning, or hunger, thirst and suffocation as well as other deprivations. This inhumane ordeal lasted for ten days. The journey came to an end. At noon they unloaded the men. The dead were thrown out onto the platform.\textsuperscript{84}

The POW camps, however, were obviously very low on the Germans’ list of priorities. All foodstuffs were naturally earmarked for the Army and the German civilian population.\textsuperscript{85} During the last ten days of October 1941, nearly 46,000 Soviet POWs died in the Polish camps, while 83,000 more died the following month.\textsuperscript{86} It was about this time that a meeting took place at the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Berlin to discuss the composition of so-called Russian bread (fifty percent rye meal, twenty percent sugar beet mulch, twenty percent cellulose and ten percent straw or leaves) that would be fed

\textsuperscript{77} North, supra note 24.
\textsuperscript{78} Id.
\textsuperscript{79} Herbert Ulrich, Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany Under the Third Reich 140 (William Templer trans., 1997). As late as April 1941 the Wehrmacht asserted that it had no interest in preserving the lives of Soviet POWs for forced labor.
\textsuperscript{80} See generally Robert Bohn, Reichskommissariat Norwegen (2000).
\textsuperscript{82} North, supra note 24.
\textsuperscript{83} Id.
\textsuperscript{84} Id.
\textsuperscript{85} Id.
\textsuperscript{86} Megargee, supra note 81, at 119.
only to working prisoners.\textsuperscript{87} It was stated that “non-working prisoners of war have to starve. Working prisoners of war can, in individual cases, be fed from army supplies. In view of the general food supply situation, unfortunately that cannot be ordered generally.”\textsuperscript{88} Field Marshal Goering, who was at the meeting as head of the Four Year Plan, suggested that the prisoners be allowed to supplement their diet by eating cats.\textsuperscript{89} The Ministry took this advice seriously, but determined that “[a]nimals not normally consumed will never do much to satisfy the need for meat. Rations for Russians will have to be based on horsemeat and meat stamped by inspectors as unfit for human consumption.”\textsuperscript{90} Gabriel Temkin, who was taken prisoner in 1942, recalled later that

all we were getting to eat was watery soup with pieces of rotten meat, a diet that was literally decimating us. It was the flesh of dead horses lying alongside the roads since the German air strikes in the first week of July that was now to become our staple. The horses, their swollen bellies and open wounds full of white maggots and other parasitic worms, were collected by prisoners on adjacent roads.\textsuperscript{91}

Alfred Rosenberg, the Reich Minister of Eastern Territories who had unsuccessfully lobbied for a more humane approach not only toward captured Soviet POWs but also toward the Soviet population in hopes of enlisting them against the communists, complained to Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel that, “in the majority of cases, the camp commanders have forbidden the civilian population from putting food at the disposal of prisoners and they have rather let them starve to death.”\textsuperscript{92} Epidemics such as diphtheria, pneumonia, typhus and tuberculosis also afflicted the prisoners.\textsuperscript{93} One prisoner recalled how once a typhus epidemic began, “up to 500 men died . . . each day. The dead were thrown in mass graves, one on top of the other. Misery, cold weather, hunger, disease, death. That was Camp 304 (Stalag IV-B at Muhlburg).”\textsuperscript{94} The Red Cross offered to deliver medicines and equipment in the winter of 1941, but Hitler personally rejected the plan.\textsuperscript{95} The Germans began to shoot the sick or left them in the snow to die of

\textsuperscript{87} North, supra note 24.
\textsuperscript{88} MEGARGEE, supra note 81, at 118.
\textsuperscript{89} North, supra note 24.
\textsuperscript{90} Id.
\textsuperscript{91} Id.
\textsuperscript{92} Id.
\textsuperscript{93} Id.
\textsuperscript{94} Id.
\textsuperscript{95} Id.
exposure. Between September 21 and 28, 1941, Police Battalion 306 shot over 6,000 prisoners at Stalag 359B.

The two million Russian prisoners of war who died in the first six months of the war was unprecedented. One German official calculated that as of February 19, 1942, only 1 million of the 3.9 million Soviet POWs captured since the summer of 1941 were still alive. The stark contrast between the treatment of Soviet POWs and Western POWs is proof positive of the racist war prosecuted by Hitler and his henchmen. According to Larry Wolff in his *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Western European disdain for the Eastern European “other” has been present since at least the Enlightenment. There was indeed a huge difference between the policies towards prisoners of war taken in the East and those in the West. Of the 5.7 million Soviet POWs captured by the Germans, sixty percent, or 3.3 million of them, died in captivity. In stark contrast, only four percent of Western POWs died in captivity. The death rate of those POWs captured by the Japanese was but twenty-seven percent.

At the same time, approximately thirty-seven percent of German soldiers captured by the Soviets died in Russian camps between 1942 and 1955 (1.2 million of 3.1 million captured). These are staggering figures, but still nowhere near the number of Soviet dead. In the West, French POWs were permitted supplies from German reserves, but no such privileges were extended to Russians. Allied officers at Colditz were allowed Red Cross parcels but were forbidden to share them with Soviet prisoners. One Russian prisoner, B. V. Veselovskii, remembered how “the English prisoners were held in sufficiently good conditions. During the days the English played soccer, rugby and other strenuous athletics . . . they were fed with foodstuffs from the International Red Cross.” OKW orders of June 16, 1941 stressed that Soviet prisoners of war were not to be treated as “fellow soldiers” but as
sub-human creatures that had “lost every right to treatment . . . according to the Geneva Convention.”107 Ostensibly, this was because the Soviet Union was not a signatory to that agreement, but it was clearly understood by all signatories that they were to be bound by its strictures in combat.108 This racist attitude was also seen in German policies toward the civilian population of Russia.

This population was to be mercilessly exploited and, instead of bringing civilians before a military court as provided for in international law, the German troops were to defend themselves ruthlessly against every threat from the hostile civilian population.109 In contrast, orders sent to German troops fighting in France in June 1940 warned that the French should not be mistreated.110 In addition, any illegal acts towards the general population, such as robbery or rape, were considered crimes in France and could lead to a sentence of death.111 Sex offenses such as “rape” in France were considered to be merely “racial offenses” or “fraternization” in Soviet territory.112 German troops in France were supposed to pay in cash for any purchases and were theoretically forbidden from interfering in the cultural life of the country.113 Punishments for plundering in Russia were far lighter than in the West. In fact, soldiers in France were prohibited from living off the land, though records show that plundering by troops, including the senseless slaughter of livestock, was the normal modus operandi of the Wehrmacht in Russia.114 According to Omer Bartov, the troops of the 18th Panzer Division in Russia

plundered and looted the population wherever they could lay their hands on their possessions. Boots and furs were particularly high on the soldiers’ lists of priorities, as also were potatoes, flour and cattle. The men broke into houses and indeed stripped whole villages of their food reserves, shooting down any person who tried to resist them . . . .115

For half a century after the close of the Second World War, the myth of the “untainted” Wehrmacht was sedulously promoted not only

108 North, supra note 24.
109 CLARK, supra note 107, at 152.
110 BARTOV, supra note 19, at 110.
111 Id.
112 See id. at 127.
113 Id. at 110.
114 Id. at 110-16.
115 Id. at 135.
by the Germans but also by the West.\textsuperscript{116} However, official documents definitively prove that the war in the East differed greatly from the one in the West. Omer Bartov concludes in his \textit{Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich} that the German military was not an apolitical professional fighting force but was instead a highly motivated one which was thoroughly indoctrinated through a carefully planned campaign of propaganda, which instilled in the entire \textit{Wehrmacht} a racist ideology that considered Jews and Slavs to be \textit{Untermenschen}.\textsuperscript{117}

The success of this incessant brainwashing can also be seen in the following letter by a non-commissioned officer serving in Russia in July 1941: “[Y]ou read the Sturmer in Germany and look at the pictures, and you will get only a small picture of what we see here and what atrocities the Jews have committed.”\textsuperscript{118} The German treatment of millions of Russian civilian \textit{Ostarbeiter} (East Workers) and captured Soviet Red Army soldiers qualitatively differed from the treatment accorded to those from the West. Few of the prisoners survived long in German captivity.\textsuperscript{119} When the Red Army finally liberated them, there were still thousands of \textit{starozhili} (old-timers) that had been in the camps since the beginning of the war.\textsuperscript{120} Overall, there were as many as two million Soviet POWs in German hands.\textsuperscript{121} There were also several million Russian civilians still alive who had been used as forced laborers.\textsuperscript{122}

In August 1941, Stalin declared that any Soviet soldiers who surrendered were to be treated as deserters.\textsuperscript{123} Aware of the ramifications of this order, many prisoners actually tried to avoid returning to their homeland but were forcibly repatriated.\textsuperscript{124} According to Ilya Ehrenburg,

\begin{quote}
 in March 1945 my daughter Irina went to Odessa on behalf of the Red Star. British, French, Belgian war prisoners liberated by the Red Army were being repatriated from there. There she also saw a troop transport arriving from Marseilles with our own war prisoners on board, among them some who had escaped from German camps and some who had
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{CLARK, supra note 107 at 206.}
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{OMER BARTOV, HITLER’S ARMY: SOLDIERS, NAZIS, AND WAR IN THE THIRD REICH} 72 (1992).
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{FRIEDSCHE, supra note 54, at 148-49.}
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{See id. at 183-84.}
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{See id. at 290-91.}
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Id. at 186.}
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Id. at 184.}
\textsuperscript{123} Yuri Teplyakov, \textit{Stalin’s War Against His Own Troops}, 14 J. HISTORICAL REV. 4, 6 (1994).
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Id.}
fought together with the French maquis. Irina told me that they were met like criminals, that they were isolated, that there was much talk of their being sent to the camps . . . .125

The Red Army liberated many of these survivors who were then interrogated by a special agency, Smert' shpionam (“SMERSH” or “Death to Spies”), who sent ten percent of these POWs to the GULAG.126 Some of them were actually vetted and cleared by the so-called “filtration” process, only to be arrested several years later.127

Of course, we recoil at the thought of this injustice, but it must be kept in mind that in all likelihood many of these men may well have collaborated or cooperated with the Nazis for any number of reasons. Some experts have estimated that as many as one million Soviet citizens served in German ranks.128 On May 11, 1945, Stalin ordered that another series of camps be set up to “process” the repatriated prisoners.129 In effect, another dulag system in reverse was implemented! According to Catherine Merridale, forty-five camps were set up along the Belorussian front, each capable of holding up to 10,000 men.130 By June 1945, there were sixty-nine camps for these “special” prisoners on Soviet territory and another seventy-four in occupied Eastern Europe.131 They could process almost 1.5 million people at a time.132 Most of the former Soviet POWs were classified as “betrayers of the motherland” for having surrendered.133 Merridale recounts the story of one P. M. Gavrilov, who was severely wounded at the Battle of Brest in 1941 and passed out from loss of blood.134 His courage so impressed the Germans that they carried him to a first aid station and transported him alone by truck to a prisoner-of-war camp.135 Soviet authorities sentenced him to ten years hard labor in the GULAG for this “surrender.”136 By August 1945 over a half-million prisoners had been interrogated and assigned to work in construction, timbering, and coal

125 WERTH, supra note 29, at 709.
127 See id. at 609.
128 CROWE, supra note 48, at 425.
129 MERRIDALE, supra note 32, at 351. These were called Proverochno-fil’trotsionnyi punkty, or Verification Filtration Points.
130 Id.
131 Id.
132 See generally id.
133 Id. at 553.
134 Id. at 351-52.
135 Id. at 352.
136 Id.
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mining. The camps, which had been slowly emptying during the war, were filled up again.

The conditions there were almost as bad as those under the Nazis. In some instances the former Soviet soldiers were sent to work without outerwear or footwear. Their housing conditions were atrocious, without sanitation and infested with lice. Many of the camps and mines in Siberia were administered by former kulaks (arbitrarily defined “rich” peasants who had been used as scapegoats during Stalin’s collectivization of agriculture), who mistreated the inmates and said “as soon as the officers’ backs are turned we’re going to kill you with hunger and hard labor. And you deserve it because in 1929-30 you were the ones who dekulakized us.” One foreman of a Siberian mine told an inmate that “a ton of coal is dearer to us than your life.” This unbelievable turn of events, which robbed so many veterans of the respect and honor they deserved for defending their country, was quite possibly the cruelest thing ever done by Stalin. Solzhenitsyn wrote:

It would appear that during the one thousand one hundred years of Russia’s existence as a state there have been, ah, how many foul and terrible deeds! But among them was there ever so multimillioned [sic] foul a deed as this: to betray one’s own soldiers and proclaim them as traitors?

These unfortunates spent up to ten years or more in the camps. Most were not released until after Stalin’s death in 1953 or until after Nikita Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. They would remain marked men for life, with annotations in their workbooks (required documentation, along with internal passports and residency permits, carried by all Soviet citizens) and limits on their civic freedoms, including where they could reside. These veterans showed remarkable courage and tenacity in their efforts to

137 Id. at 353.
138 See Rossiia, kotoruiu my ne znali 1939-1993: khrestomatiia 127 (M.E. Glavitskii ed., Chelyabinsk, Izdatel’stvo 1995). According to a memo from the head of the GULAG, by 1944 the number of prisoners had fallen from 2.3 million to 1.2 million. Id.
139 MERRIDALE, supra note 32, at 353.
140 Id.
141 Id.
142 Id.
143 SOLZHENITSYN, supra note 37, at 240.
144 See id. at 245.
145 See generally id.
146 See generally id.
rectify these blots on their service records, petitioning the authorities again and again for redress. 147 Some were not officially “rehabilitated” until after Mikhail Gorbachev implemented his policy of glasnost’ (openness) in the late 1980s. 148 Sometimes this occurred posthumously, while those that were still alive proudly wore their campaign medals and claimed their rightful place at the head of any lines for consumer goods as _veterany otechestvennoi voini_ ("vovy" or veterans of the [Second] Fatherland War). 149 The author was privileged to meet personally with some of these veterans on many occasions over a four year period in the western Siberian city of Omsk while supervising student exchanges and teaching at the state university there.

In the winter of 2002, while standing in line at the newly-opened Western style supermarket _Omich_ (resident of Omsk), an aged, beribboned veteran stepped in front of me with his purchases. He turned to explain to me his right to do so but I preempted him by noting that I had read the sign posted at the cashier that read “Veterans of the Fatherland War need not stand in line but may go directly to its head.” I thanked him for his sacrifice and service in our common struggle against fascism, and from this serendipitous encounter came a series of teas, invitations to dinner and meetings with other veterans, several of whom had been captured by the Germans. After their “liberation” by their comrades in arms, they had been forced to undergo the “filtration” process and ultimately ended up working as forced laborers in Omsk, where they built oil factories. Some of them had even written their memoirs and told me that these materials, along with other brief autobiographies, personal recollections, etc., had been deposited for posterity’s sake with the _Muzei i Obshchestvennyi Tsentr "Mir, Progress, Prawa Cheloveka" imeni Andreia Sakharova_ (The Andrei Sakharov Museum and Social Center for Peace, Progress and Human Rights) in Moscow. 150 These reminiscences are harrowing accounts of the lost years of their lives.

Anatolii Efimovich Bakanichev was born in a small town near Mozhaisk in 1920. 151 He matriculated at Moscow State University as a

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147 See generally id.
148 See generally id.
149 See generally id.
150 If you cannot personally visit this resource at its Moscow location (57/6 Zemlianoi), part of their database can be accessed online. See The Andrei Sakharov Museum and Social Center for Peace, Progress and Human Rights, http://www.sakharov-center.ru (accessed by searching for “Vospominaninia o Gulage i ikh avtory”).
151 Interview with Anatolii Efimovich Bakanichev (Dec. 22, 2003).
biology student in the summer of 1939 and was drafted into the Red Army in November.\footnote{Id.} Stationed in Belorussia in 1941, he took part in the first battles of the war.\footnote{Id.} Wounded, he surrendered along with thousands of other soldiers.\footnote{Id.} He had a good knowledge of German and served both as an interpreter in the camps and as a manual laborer.\footnote{Id.} He was sent to a camp in Dzerzhinsk (outside of Minsk) and then to Stalag Luft 7 in Poland.\footnote{Id.} After a few months there he was transferred to Germany, first to Stalag 10 and then to a concentration camp outside of Hanover.\footnote{Id.} He remained there until he escaped in 1945 and was picked up by American soldiers.\footnote{Id.} Suffering from typhus, he was turned over to Soviet authorities.\footnote{Id.} He was not overly concerned when he was repatriated since he had “been wounded in the service of the Motherland” and had proven himself blameless by escaping from captivity.\footnote{Id.}

Passing successfully through “filtration,” he was sent back to Moscow in November 1945 and, after signing the usual non-disclosure forms, he received his passport.\footnote{Id.} He started a program of studies to prepare for eventual admittance into the Petroleum Institute.\footnote{Id.} But on February 19, 1948, he was arrested as a “collaborator” and imprisoned in a basement jail at the Belorusskii station.\footnote{Id.} He stayed there for three months, and was ultimately sentenced to 15 years of hard labor and moved to Butyrka Prison in Moscow.\footnote{Id.} He spent another three months in isolation before he began his journey into the whirlwind.\footnote{Id.} The similarities in the modes of conveyance and the parallel conditions in German and Soviet camps did not escape his notice.\footnote{Id.}

\footnote{152 Id.}
\footnote{153 Id.}
\footnote{154 Id.}
\footnote{155 Id.}
\footnote{156 Id.}
\footnote{157 Id.}
\footnote{158 Id.}
\footnote{159 Id.}
\footnote{160 Id.}
\footnote{161 All returning soldiers had to sign this form, in which they promised not to discuss anything they had seen in the West, such as the general level of prosperity, the neat and orderly farmsteads, etc. \textit{Id.} Even the prisoners who were released from the GULAG a decade or more after the end of the war were required to sign this document. \textit{Id.}}
We were transported in railroad cars similar to those used to send us to fascist Germany . . . we were put on a barge on the Enisei . . . as we went along the Enisei for ten days it got colder and colder . . . and then I was in a Stalinist concentration camp, it was basically the same as in the fascist camp, differing only in minor details.\(^{167}\)

His journey ended at the Norilsk Gosudarstvennyi osoybi rejhimnyi lager' ("GORLAG" or State special regime camp) where he spent the next seven years before being released in 1955.\(^{168}\) He tried to escape in 1949 but was captured and sentenced to another ten years.\(^{169}\) In addition, he was also sentenced to four months in the dreaded barak usilenogo rejima (heightened regime barracks).\(^{170}\) "We suffered terribly from hunger and a lack of warm clothing, and there were no proper washing facilities."\(^{171}\)

Transferred to a brick factory, he participated in the Norilsk strike (a two month uprising shortly after Stalin’s death in 1953 where the prisoners refused to work, went on hunger strikes and wrote letters to government officials protesting camp conditions) and even wrote a letter to Khrushchev asserting his innocence.\(^{172}\) These actions convinced Soviet leaders to relax the harsh work regime and reduce the workday from 12 to 8 hours.\(^{173}\) The prisoners were even paid a salary.\(^{174}\)

Finally released in 1955, Bakanichev returned to Moscow and finished his engineering degree in 1962.\(^{175}\) He was assigned to work in Omsk, where he married and began a family.\(^{176}\) In 1965, he was “rehabilitated” and awarded the medal “For the Victory Over Germany,” which he continued to wear proudly until his death in 2005.\(^{177}\) He died believing that “my arrest was a mistake, due probably to some kind of misunderstanding as to the nature of my interpreting duties while in German captivity. They wrongly thought I had collaborated with the enemy because they forced me to be their interpreter.”\(^{178}\) Even after his unjust incarceration and mistreatment, Bakanichev re-

\(^{167}\) ANATOLII EFIMOVICH BAKANICHEV, ZAPISKI KATORZHANINA 2-3 (2004).

\(^{168}\) See generally id.

\(^{169}\) See generally id.

\(^{170}\) See generally id.

\(^{171}\) Interview with Anatolii Efimovich Bakanichev (Dec. 22, 2003).

\(^{172}\) BAKANICHEV, supra note 167, at 2-3.

\(^{173}\) See generally id.

\(^{174}\) See generally id.

\(^{175}\) See generally id.

\(^{176}\) See generally id.

\(^{177}\) Interview with Anatolii Efimovich Bakanichev (Dec. 22, 2003).

\(^{178}\) Id.
maintained a loyal citizen, expressing outrage at the proliferation of fascist groups in contemporary Russia that make use of Nazi imagery and symbols.179 But he also likened his experiences in German captivity to those suffered in the GULAG. “There were only differences of degree, not of kind,” he said. “[I]n 1944 the conditions in the Nazi camps actually did improve, and it was possible to live (zhit’ mozhno), but, of course, many more still died.”180 Like many of his comrades, Bakanichev had rejoined the Communist Party when he was rehabilitated.181 Before his death he had proudly showed me his Kommunisticheskaiia Partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii (“KPRF” or Communist Party of the Russian Federation) party card, with all dues paid up to date.182 One cannot blame him or the other voevy for not making the logical connection between the two regimes and drawing the conclusion that both were evil, repressive systems.

One who did was Nikolai Aleksandrovich Troitskii. Born in Usursiisk in 1913, he was educated first at the Tomsk Chemical-Technical Institute and then transferred over to the Medical Institute.183 He worked as a rural doctor until he was drafted into the army in 1940.184 On October 12, 1941 he went from being a Red Army fighter to being a prisoner of war, but at that time we were not considered as such, we were simply listed as being missing (propal bez vesti). I don’t know what is better for the relatives, news of the death of a husband, father or son or that somehow they had gone missing . . . neither alive nor dead, just missing. My mother’s grief was unimaginable . . . she died a few months later.185

Herded along the Minsk highway, Troitskii estimated that seventy-five percent of those captured with him would die within the next few years; “for those unable to walk, ‘transport’ was arranged. They were loaded onto wagons and taken away, never to be seen again.”186 Troitskii knew captivity would be hard, writing, “we knew that being captured by the Germans wouldn’t, as they say, be like going to one’s

179 Id.
180 Id.
181 Id.
182 Id.
183 See generally Nikolai Aleksandrovich Troitskii, Tiazhelye SNy (Krasnoyarsk, Izdatel’stvo 1998).
184 See generally id.
185 Id. at 103. There is evidence to suggest that the relatives of those soldiers that had “betrayed the Motherland” were also liable to have some kind of punitive administrative action taken against them.
186 See generally id.
mother-in-law for pancakes.” But he was unprepared for the sheer viciousness of the German soldiers and the dehumanizing conditions in the camps. “I quickly came to understand that the Germans’ attitude toward Russians was based on extreme cruelty and merciless extermination (istrebleniie).”

Troitskii could only watch as hundreds died each day during the westward march to a camp near Smolensk. He witnessed arbitrary shootings and the bayoneting of those prisoners that could not continue.

I remembered all this in hopes that someday a future historian would take note of it. All over Russia there are monuments to those that perished fighting for the Motherland, but who remembers the millions who died without glory in German captivity? Why has it taken so long to recognize the heroism of these people?

In January 1942, Troitskii was loaded onto a truck, where “they packed us so tightly it was impossible to sit or lie down . . . it was possible only to stand, like on a Moscow trolley during peak hours.” After several days they arrived at a camp run by the Wehrmacht near Dvinsk. Since he had medical training, Troitskii was assigned to the hospital as an orderly.

The senior doctor was a man named Belentsev; Troitskii “was surprised to see him, as he was a Jew and I knew the Germans usually shot them outright.” A week after his arrival, Troitskii and several other medical personnel were called out into the courtyard. All of them were Jewish except for Troitskii. He was there “undoubtedly because of my surname, which was similar to Trotskii.” They were marched off to Gestapo headquarters. Called in one-by-one, Troitskii finally entered the office and saw two men sitting there, one German and the
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other a Russian.200 Troitskii could only wonder “what had caused this man to serve Satan? Maybe his village had been destroyed in the revolution or his father had been killed. It must have been something huge on the part of Soviet power to have compelled him to help the enemies of his own kind.”201 The interrogation began with the Russian asking the questions: “‘Name and patronymic? Year of birth? You’re a doctor?’ Then, ‘you’re a Jew? Look me straight in the eyes! Are you a Jew?’ ‘No, I’m a Russian,’ Troitskii answered. ‘Where were you born?’ continued his interlocutor, ‘Name and patronymic of your mother? Of your father?’”202

All of this was written down.203 Troitskii was asked the name of his aunts and uncles, where his mother and father were born, and finally, “Are you circumcised?”204 After answering no, an SS officer that he had not previously noticed stepped forward with a large chart in his hands.205 “He scrutinized my ears, nose, and head, and then consulted the chart,” Troitskii recalled.206 Satisfied, the SS officer pronounced Troitskii a “Dinarskii type.”207 Troitskii found out later that according to their racial theories this was an Aryan of the third degree, one mixed with Slavic and other blood. This meant I would remain in the ranks of the living for the time being. The others weren’t so lucky. They had been born under an unlucky star. 1942 was especially hard for prisoners of war, and especially for Jews. People died like flies.208

In the fall of 1942, Troitskii was moved to a camp in Riga, and later sent to one of the small work camps outside of Berlin.209 In 1943, he was moved to Bavaria to a camp named Hammelburg, and then from there to Nuremberg.210 Along with the other prisoners, he built the barracks he would be housed in, and was then transferred to the hospital.211 He had never before seen
such a concentration of people suffering from tuberculosis . . . the standard medicine for these living skeletons was chlorine calcite, which was completely useless. True, the sick were now [only] dying by the hundreds instead of by the thousands . . . since by the end of 1943 the conditions in the camps improved somewhat.212

Still, camp life for the Russian prisoners was harsh and the guards occasionally brutal.213 Troitskii noted that “[w]e Russians lived worse than anyone else in the camps, including the Poles. Of course, that doesn’t include the Jews, who didn’t even have the right to breathe German air.”214 Troitskii recalled the old Russian song: “Mother, mother of mine, why did you give birth to me? It would have been better if you’d drowned me in the river.”215 Some tried to commit suicide while others “would throw themselves on the wire in hopes of being shot.”216

In the spring of 1944, Troitskii was moved again.217 As he laconically noted in his memoirs, this “would be my last camp . . . well, at least, my last German camp!”218 He always told himself, “[y]ou will survive. You will return to the Motherland and to your family.”219 He says he never doubted that the Soviet Union would win the war, and refused the opportunity to join Lt. General Andrei Vlasov’s Russkaia Oswobiditel’naia Armiia (Russian Liberation Army), which was formed from Soviet volunteers in the POW camps.220 During an address to Soviet prisoners in Troitskii’s camp, an officer from the ROA told them that Stalin did not recognize prisoners of war, and considered them to be betrayers of the Motherland.221 If the Soviet leader won the war, he would send them to the Urals and Siberia.222 Troitskii drolly noted that even though this later proved to be true, no one stepped forward to join the ROA.223

On April 14, 1945, Troitskii was liberated by American troops and transferred to the Soviet zone of occupation.224 He was then sent to

212 Id. at 120.
213 See generally id.
214 See generally id.
215 See generally id.
216 Id. at 121.
217 See generally id.
218 See generally id.
219 Id. at 122.
220 See generally id.
221 See generally id.
222 See generally id.
223 See generally id.
224 See generally id.
Prague, where he passed through filtration, and was sentenced to eight years imprisonment at hard labor. The conditions there were horrific, and “there was really no difference between Hitler’s camps and Stalin’s . . . .” Conditions eased somewhat after Stalin’s death, and he fondly writes of his illegal fishing and hunting trips with some of the native Iakuts. Released almost immediately after Stalin’s death in 1953, he lived in Semipalatinsk in the Kazakh SSR for a half dozen years, married and divorced without children, and then moved to Krasnoiarsk, where he died in 1995.

Another former POW that came to understand the intrinsic evil of both the Nazi and Soviet regimes was Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov. He considered himself fortunate to have been captured in the summer of 1942, because “hundreds of thousands of us had perished the winter of 1941-1942 in camps on our native soil from hunger, cold and disease.” When he was first captured, he was forced to march to a holding camp, and “it was there that we were sorted by nationality.” According to Vladimirov, it was a Wehrmacht officer that asked each man his name and nationality; he selected several men and shot them that night. “The Germans were looking for Jews and Red Army commissars, they also promised to reward any prisoners that helped point them out.”

Of special interest here is the fact that, once again, we see Wehrmacht officers doing the selection and ordering the shooting of Soviet POWs. Many Germans wanted to believe that the atrocities committed on the Eastern front, as well as the implementation of the Final Solution itself, was solely the work of fanatical Nazis and the SS.
They wanted to believe that regular soldiers had merely been doing their duty. This myth was shattered in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, when the Hamburg Institute for Social Research put on a controversial exhibition of over 1,000 photographs and numerous official army documents that made it quite clear that it was not just the Nazis that committed atrocities and mass murder. Most of the veterans I interviewed specifically recalled incidents where the Wehrmacht either cooperated with the SS or its subordinate organizations, such as the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, (“RSHA” or Reich Security Main Office), Sicherheitsdienst or SD (Security Service), etc., in numerous war crimes or perpetrated the atrocities themselves.

Vladimirov was marched westward with his comrades to another holding camp, where he was barely fed for over three weeks. On November 14, 1942, the prisoners “were forced to take off their boots and given back wooden shoes . . . I had very good boots, but was compelled to part with them.” The prisoners were transferred from camp to camp, ultimately ending up in Stalag XVIII-C in Austria. Thousands died en route. According to Vladimirov, “every time we stopped they removed the corpses of those dead prisoners who had perished from the cold or hunger. They fed us soup and bread once a day.” In April 1943, he was transferred to another work camp where he and his fellow captives worked at a concrete form factory. In April 1944, he was sent to Schneiderau (a sub-camp of the Bernau POW camp outside Berlin) to remove silt from cesspools, “a filthy and difficult job.” The labor of Soviet POWs and Russian civilians was crucial to German industry. The total value of this forced labor has been estimated to have been as high as thirty billion Reichsmarks. In January 1945, Vladimirov and the other prisoners were transferred to another camp that held a large number of Russian prisoners. There was no work for them to do, and the camp’s food supplies were ex-

236 Interview with Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov (Nov. 21, 2004).
237 Id.
238 Id.
239 Id.
240 Id.
241 Id.
244 Interview with Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov (Dec. 3, 2004).
hausted. Fortunately, Vladimirov noted, “the Austrian police gave us dead horses, which we cut into meat and boiled. This saved us from starvation.”

Vladimirov recounted how there were some traitors in their midst “who collaborated with the Germans and informed them of everything that went on among the prisoners.” At the end of April, these men were seized by the other prisoners and brutally murdered for their disloyalty. Vladimirov was overjoyed when the Red Army arrived. His happiness was short-lived, however, since he did not successfully pass the “filtration” process. Instead, he was sentenced to ten years at hard labor and a five-year loss of political rights. He was completely dismayed by this turn of events because “we were loyal sons of the Motherland, we had fought, bled and suffered for her and then we were treated as if we had betrayed her.” Sent to the Karaganda labor camp in the Kazakh SSR, he worked at the machine-building complex for several years. He was then transferred to Omsk in western Siberia where he worked in an oil refinery. It was there that he learned of Stalin’s death, though he was not released until after the 20th Party Congress in 1956 as part of a general amnesty. He remained in Omsk, where he married and raised several children, but he was not officially rehabilitated until 1982. Vladimirov died in May 2007 at the age of 85. It was my great honor to attend his funeral along with several other former zeiki (“zakliucheniek,” or prisoners of the GULAG).

These men all suffered terribly at the hands of both their German and Soviet captors. In both instances, they were considered completely expendable. The Soviets considered them politically unreliable, while the Germans viewed them as racially worthless. Nazi policy toward Soviet prisoners of war ranged from outright extermination to callous exploitation and complete disregard for their lives. Himmler made it clear that the Slavic population in the East would be left uned-

245 Id.
246 Id.
247 Id.
248 Id.
249 Id.
250 Id.
251 Id.
252 Interview with Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov (Dec. 4, 2004).
253 Id.
254 Id.
255 Id.
256 Id.
ucated and available for Germany’s labor needs. Yes, the treatment accorded Soviet prisoners evidently improved by the summer of 1944, but this was simply to make it possible to exploit them further as forced laborers. Hitler’s future plans for Russia were made clear in his first ravings in Mein Kampf. In July 1941, Goebbels noted in his diary that “what we have been fighting against our whole lives is now about to be eradicated.”

The plans for a racist war of annihilation were outlined in the “General Plan for the East.” Drawn up by Himmler, it called for the “removal” of 80 million people from Russia in order to allow for its colonization by Germans. This document was to have been presented to Hitler on the occasion of the final defeat of the Soviet Union. It is well known that Hitler intended for Leningrad, the cradle of Bolshevism, to be completely eradicated from the face of the earth; numerous other cities such as Kiev, Moscow and Stalingrad were also to be razed. And case studies of the German response to partisan activity in Belorussia show that the Germans used this struggle as an excuse to implement their plans to annihilate the local population. The fate of the 5 million Soviet civilians that were taken to Germany and used as forced labor there has yet to be fully documented, but it was part of the “General Plan” to turn all of Russia into a colony to furnish raw materials and slave labor for Germany while also providing the necessary Lebensraum for German colonization.

Thankfully, final victory eluded the German invaders, and the Soviet Union’s tenacious resistance forestalled the Nazi plans for the enslavement and exploitation of Russia. The plans for colonization and economic exploitation were “temporarily” shelved as the fortunes of war turned against the Germans. Desperate for the delivery of vital raw materials and labor for the German war machine, alternative plans

258 See Hitler, supra note 47.
260 Mueller, supra note 257.
261 Id.
262 Id.
263 Id.
264 See Timothy P. Mulligan, Reckoning the Cost of the People’s War: The German Experience in the Central USSR, 9 Russian History 27 (1982).
265 See Mueller, supra note 257.
266 Id.
were put forward by various Nazi ministries that called for the implementation of less draconian measures in order to meet Germany’s economic needs. Of course, this did not mean that the Nazi Weltanschauung, which considered Slavs to be Untermenschen, was called into question. It was simply that Nazi policies towards the Soviets occasionally fell prey to the vicissitudes of the ongoing power struggles among Hitler’s minions. Himmler and the other top Nazis were clearly “working toward the Fuhrer” and these plans would not have simply remained on paper. Final victory for Germany would have resulted ultimately in the destruction of the Russian people and their historical culture. In the final analysis, Hitler’s lunatic, incoherent ravings first set down on paper in Mein Kampf were indeed a blueprint for his future actions; the true horror of Hitler and Nazism was that he meant every word that he wrote.

267 Id.