
HITLER'S FORGOTTEN GENOCIDES:
THE FATE OF SOVIET POWS

THOMAS EARL PORTER, NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

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

¹ Michael Ellman & S. Maksudov, *Soviet Deaths in the Great Patriotic War: A Note*, 46 EUR-ASIAN STUD. 671, 671 (1994).

² ROLF-DIETER MÜLLER & GERD R. UEBERSCHÄR, *HITLER'S WAR IN THE EAST 1941-1945: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT* 142 (Bruce D. Little trans., 1997).

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina, 1941-1945 gg: voenno-istoricheskie ocherk*, vol. 4, 289.

⁵ Ellman & Maksudov, *supra* note 1, at 671.

⁶ Irina Titova, *Medvedev Orders Precise Soviet WWII Death Toll*, HUFFINGTON POST (Jan. 27, 2009), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/01/27/medvedev-orders-precise-s_n_161433.html?view=screen.

captivity was at least 8 million and possibly as high as 10 million.⁷ An exhaustive investigation by Michael Ellman and S. Maksudov puts the figure at 8,668,000.⁸ The Germans captured between 5 and 6 million Soviet troops, and executed many after their surrender.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Stalin supposedly said the death of one person is a tragedy, whereas the death of millions is but a statistic.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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 upravleniie ispravitel’no-trudovyykh lagerei*,” or Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps) for a decade after the war ended.

⁷ Ellman & Maksudov, *supra* note 1, at 674.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ Ellman & Maksudov, *supra* note 1, at 674.

¹¹ 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).

¹² LUCY S. DAWIDOWICZ, *THE WAR AGAINST THE JEWS 1933-1945* 544 (1975).

¹³ DONALD NIEWYK & FRANCIS NISOCIA, *THE COLUMBIA GUIDE TO THE HOLOCAUST* 45 (2000).

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.¹⁴ But many of the Red Army soldiers who surrendered were turned over to the SS and summarily executed.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.”²⁰ They were left entirely without shelter, not given food or water on a regular basis, and

¹⁴ Förster, *supra* note 9, at 19-21.

¹⁵ WARD CHURCHILL, *A LITTLE MATTER OF GENOCIDE: HOLOCAUST AND DENIAL IN THE AMERICAS 1942 TO THE PRESENT* 48 (Lawrence Ferlinghetti & Nancy Peters eds., 1997).

¹⁶ Förster, *supra* note 9, at 21.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 26.

¹⁸ *THE GERMAN ARMY AND GENOCIDE: CRIMES AGAINST WAR PRISONERS, JEWS, AND OTHER CIVILIANS IN THE EAST, 1939-1944* 142 (Scott Abbott trans., 1999).

¹⁹ OMER BARTOV, *THE EASTERN FRONT, 1941-45, GERMAN TROOPS AND THE BARBARISATION OF WARFARE* 111 (1986).

²⁰ *THE HAMBURG INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, THE GERMAN ARMY AND GENOCIDE, 100* (Paula Bradish ed., Scott Abbott trans., The New Press 1999) (1996).

simply fell by the wayside.²¹ They were then executed.²² The aforementioned German officer thought this unfortunate, as “it was done on the road, even in towns”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.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.²⁵

At his war crimes trial in Nuremberg, Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the *Führungsamt* (*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.”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.”²⁷ The commandant of *Stalag VIII-F/318* (a large camp in western Poland set up specifically for Soviet prisoners

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Jonathan North, *Soviet Prisoners of War: Forgotten Nazi Victims of World War II*, WORLD WAR II, Jan./Feb. 2006, available at <http://www.historynet.com/soviet-prisoners-of-war-forgotten-nazi-victims-of-world-war-ii.htm>.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ THE HAMBURG INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, *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 consumed 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 semolina, 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.

²⁹ ALEXANDER WERTH, *RUSSIA AT WAR 1941-1945* 704 (1964).

³⁰ *See id.* at 703-04.

³¹ ALEXANDER DALLIN, *GERMAN RULE IN RUSSIA 1941-1945* 415 (1957).

³² CATHERINE MERRIDALE, *IVAN’S WAR* 290 (2006).

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

³⁷ ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN, *THE GULAG ARCHIPELAGO 1918-1956* 218 (Thomas P. Whitney trans.) (1973).

³⁸ DALLIN, *supra* note 31, at 415.

³⁹ DANIEL GOLDHAGEN, *HITLER’S WILLING EXECUTIONERS: ORDINARY GERMANS AND THE HOLOCAUST* 290 (1996).

⁴⁰ PETER CALVOCORESSI & GUY WINT, *TOTAL WAR* 256 (1979).

⁴¹ *See generally id.*

⁴² HAMBURG INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, *supra* note 20, at 142.

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*.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵ 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."⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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."⁴⁸ Crowe also rightly asserts that Hitler felt the Jews were the cause of all of Germany's misfortunes since 1914 and that he

⁴³ See generally CALVOCORESSI & WINT, *supra* note 40.

⁴⁴ See generally *id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 256.

⁴⁶ J.P. STERN, HITLER: THE FUHRER AND THE PEOPLE 216 (1975).

⁴⁷ ADOLPH HITLER, MEIN KAMPF 181-82 (John Chamberlain et al. eds., 1941).

⁴⁸ DAVID CROWE, THE HOLOCAUST: ROOTS, HISTORY AND AFTERMATH 94 (2008).

linked them with communism and Bolshevism.⁴⁹ 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."⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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."⁵² Hitler believed that in the coming struggle, a Bolshevik victory would mean "the annihilation of the German people."⁵³ At the 1937 Party Rally, Hitler again demonized Jews as the primary enemy of the Western world, particularly "Jewish Bolshevism in Moscow."⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵

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."⁵⁶ 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:

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 103.

⁵¹ RICHARD EVANS, *THE THIRD REICH IN POWER* 543 (2005).

⁵² *Id.* at 357.

⁵³ ADAM TOOZE, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* 220 (2007).

⁵⁴ PETER FRITZSCHE, *LIFE AND DEATH IN THE THIRD REICH* 543 (2008).

⁵⁵ Föster, *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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ Of this number, 10,000 were to be put to work building a huge industrial complex for IG Farben.⁶⁶ Soon it would become the largest extermination camp in Poland.⁶⁷ 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."⁶⁸ Over sixty percent of the half-million people who passed through Majdanek died there from the harsh labor conditions, malnutrition, or disease.⁶⁹ Of this number, "[100,000] of the victims were Poles, 80,000 were Jews, and 50,000 were Soviet POWs."⁷⁰

The first experimental gassing of the Final Solution took place at Auschwitz I from September 1 through 5, 1941, in the basement of Block 11.⁷¹ Its victims were hundreds of Soviet POWs, some still in their combat uniforms.⁷² According to Hoess, only a few hundred of the 10,000 Soviet POWs used to construct Birkenau survived until the summer of 1942.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ Hoess wrote that "there never was any intention to gas these Russians," suggesting that the prisoners were simply suffering from a mass psychosis.⁷⁵ The Germans also conducted medical experiments upon Soviet POWs;⁷⁶ Dr. Berning, in particular, killed 12 Soviet POWs in *Stalag* 310

⁶⁴ Christian Streit, *The German Army and the Polices of Genocide*, in *THE POLICIES OF GENOCIDE: JEWS AND SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR IN NAZI GERMANY* 1, 11 (Gerhard Hirschfeld ed., 1986).

⁶⁵ *Id.*; DANUTA CZECH, *AUSCHWITZ CHRONICLE 1939-1945* 50 (1989).

⁶⁶ Streit, *supra* note 64, at 11; CZECH, *supra* note 65, at 50.

⁶⁷ Streit, *supra* note 64, at 11.

⁶⁸ CROWE, *supra* note 48, at 263.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 263-64.

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.* at 232.

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ RUDOLPH HÖSS, *DEATH DEALER: THE MEMOIRS OF THE SS KOMMANDANT AT AUSCHWITZ* 134 (Steven Paskuly ed., Andrew Pollinger trans., 1992).

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *See id.* at 132-34.

while performing experiments on them.⁷⁷ In another case, prisoners were used as live dummies and were shot using hollow point bullets.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.⁷⁹ On August 5, 1941, Goering had allowed for the exploitation of "20,000 Russian prisoners of war in Norway."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.⁸¹ The Army also began to change its prisoner transportation policies and no longer forced prisoners to walk to the camps.⁸² It was also forbidden to transport POWs in open conveyances.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.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.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.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

⁷⁷ North, *supra* note 24.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

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.

⁸⁰ *See generally* ROBERT BOHN, *REICHSKOMMISSARIAT NORWEGEN* (2000).

⁸¹ GEOFFREY P. MEGARGEE, *WAR OF ANNIHILATION: COMBAT AND GENOCIDE ON THE EASTERN FRONT* 117 (2006).

⁸² North, *supra* note 24.

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ MEGARGEE, *supra* note 81, at 119.

only to working prisoners.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.”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.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.”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.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.”⁹² Epidemics such as diphtheria, pneumonia, typhus and tuberculosis also afflicted the prisoners.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).”⁹⁴ The Red Cross offered to deliver medicines and equipment in the winter of 1941, but Hitler personally rejected the plan.⁹⁵ The Germans began to shoot the sick or left them in the snow to die of

⁸⁷ North, *supra* note 24.

⁸⁸ MEGARGEE, *supra* note 81, at 118.

⁸⁹ North, *supra* note 24.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ *Id.*

exposure.⁹⁶ Between September 21 and 28, 1941, Police Battalion 306 shot over 6,000 prisoners at *Stalag* 359B.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ In stark contrast, only *four percent* of Western POWs died in captivity.¹⁰¹ The death rate of those POWs captured by the Japanese was but *twenty-seven percent*.¹⁰²

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).¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴ Allied officers at Colditz were allowed Red Cross parcels but were forbidden to share them with Soviet prisoners.¹⁰⁵ 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.”¹⁰⁶ OKW orders of June 16, 1941 stressed that Soviet prisoners of war were not to be treated as “fellow soldiers” but as

⁹⁶ *Id.*

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ *Id.*

⁹⁹ LARRY WOLFF, *INVENTING EASTERN EUROPE: THE MAP OF CIVILIZATION ON THE MIND OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT* 4-5 (1994).

¹⁰⁰ BARTOV, *supra* note 19, at 153.

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 154.

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ EDGAR KLAUS, *DURCH DIE HOLLE DES KRIEGES* 453 (1991).

¹⁰⁴ North, *supra* note 24.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ B.V. VESELOVSKII, *SKRYTAIA BIOGRAFIIA* 76 (1996).

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 them¹¹⁵

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

¹⁰⁷ ALAN CLARK, *BARBAROSSA: THE RUSSIAN-GERMAN CONFLICT, 1941-1945* 206 (1965).

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.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 *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 *Wehrmacht* a racist ideology that considered Jews and Slavs to be *Untermenschen*.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.”¹¹⁸ The German treatment of millions of Russian civilian *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.¹¹⁹ When the Red Army finally liberated them, there were still thousands of *starozhili* (old-timers) that had been in the camps since the beginning of the war.¹²⁰ Overall, there were as many as two million Soviet POWs in German hands.¹²¹ There were also several million Russian civilians still alive who had been used as forced laborers.¹²²

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

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

¹¹⁶ CLARK, *supra* note 107 at 206.

¹¹⁷ OMER BARTOV, *HITLER'S ARMY: SOLDIERS, NAZIS, AND WAR IN THE THIRD REICH* 72 (1992).

¹¹⁸ FRITZSCHE *supra* note 54, at 148-49.

¹¹⁹ *See id.* at 183-84.

¹²⁰ *See id.* at 290-91.

¹²¹ *Id.* at 186.

¹²² *Id.* at 184.

¹²³ Yuri Teplyakov, *Stalin's War Against His Own Troops*, 14 J. HISTORICAL REV. 4, 6 (1994).

¹²⁴ *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 camps¹²⁵

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.

¹²⁶ See Robert Stephan, *Smersh: Soviet military Counter-Intelligence During the Second World War*, 22 J. CONTEMP. HIST. 585, 588 (1987).

¹²⁷ See *id.* at 609.

¹²⁸ CROWE, *supra* note 48, at 425.

¹²⁹ MERRIDALE, *supra* note 32, at 351. These were called *Proverochno-fil'tratsionnyi punkty*, or Verification Filtration Points.

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ *Id.*

¹³² See generally *id.*

¹³³ *Id.* at 353.

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 351-52.

¹³⁵ *Id.* at 352.

¹³⁶ *Id.*

mining.¹³⁷ The camps, which had been slowly emptying during the war, were filled up again.¹³⁸

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.¹³⁹ Their housing conditions were atrocious, without sanitation and infested with lice.¹⁴⁰ 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.”¹⁴¹ One foreman of a Siberian mine told an inmate that “a ton of coal is dearer to us than your life.”¹⁴² 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?¹⁴³

These unfortunates spent up to ten years or more in the camps.¹⁴⁴ 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 1956.¹⁴⁵ 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.¹⁴⁶ These veterans showed remarkable courage and tenacity in their efforts to

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 353.

¹³⁸ See ROSSIA, KOTORUIU MY NE ZNALI 1939-1993: KHRESTOMATIJA 127 (M.E. Glavitskii ed., Chelyabinsk, Izdatel’stvo 1995). According to a memo from the head of the *GU-LAG*, 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* (“vovoy” 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 Tsentri “Mir, Progress, Prava 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

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 “*Vospominaniia 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.¹⁵² Stationed in Belorussia in 1941, he took part in the first battles of the war.¹⁵³ Wounded, he surrendered along with thousands of other soldiers.¹⁵⁴ He had a good knowledge of German and served both as an interpreter in the camps and as a manual laborer.¹⁵⁵ He was sent to a camp in Dzerzhinsk (outside of Minsk) and then to *Stalag Luft 7* in Poland.¹⁵⁶ After a few months there he was transferred to Germany, first to *Stalag 10* and then to a concentration camp outside of Hanover.¹⁵⁷ He remained there until he escaped in 1945 and was picked up by American soldiers.¹⁵⁸ Suffering from typhus, he was turned over to Soviet authorities.¹⁵⁹ 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.¹⁶⁰

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.¹⁶¹ He started a program of studies to prepare for eventual admittance into the Petroleum Institute.¹⁶² But on February 19, 1948, he was arrested as a “collaborator” and imprisoned in a basement jail at the Belorusskii station.¹⁶³ He stayed there for three months, and was ultimately sentenced to 15 years of hard labor and moved to Butyrka Prison in Moscow.¹⁶⁴ He spent another three months in isolation before he began his journey into the whirlwind.¹⁶⁵ The similarities in the modes of conveyance and the parallel conditions in German and Soviet camps did not escape his notice.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵² *Id.*

¹⁵³ *Id.*

¹⁵⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵⁵ *Id.*

¹⁵⁶ *Id.*

¹⁵⁷ *Id.*

¹⁵⁸ *Id.*

¹⁵⁹ *Id.*

¹⁶⁰ *Id.*

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. *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. *Id.*

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ *Id.*

¹⁶⁴ *Id.*

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ *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 osobyi rezhimnyi 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 rezhima* (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.*

mained 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 *Kommunisticheskaia Partia 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 *vovv* 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 Ussuriisk in 1913, he was educated first at the Tomsk Chemical-Technological 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, *TIAZHEL'YE 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.”¹⁸⁷ 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*).”¹⁸⁸

Troitskii could only watch as hundreds died each day during the westward march to a camp near Smolensk.¹⁸⁹ He witnessed arbitrary shootings and the bayoneting of those prisoners that could not continue.¹⁹⁰

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?¹⁹¹

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.”¹⁹² After several days they arrived at a camp run by the *Wehrmacht* near Dvinsk.¹⁹³ Since he had medical training, Troitskii was assigned to the hospital as an orderly.¹⁹⁴

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.”¹⁹⁵ A week after his arrival, Troitskii and several other medical personnel were called out into the courtyard.¹⁹⁶ All of them were Jewish except for Troitskii.¹⁹⁷ He was there “undoubtedly because of my surname, which was similar to Trotsky.”¹⁹⁸ They were marched off to Gestapo headquarters.¹⁹⁹ Called in one-by-one, Troitskii finally entered the office and saw two men sitting there, one German and the

¹⁸⁷ See generally *id.*

¹⁸⁸ *Id.* at 105.

¹⁸⁹ See generally *id.*

¹⁹⁰ See generally *id.*

¹⁹¹ *Id.* at 110.

¹⁹² See generally *id.*

¹⁹³ See generally *id.*

¹⁹⁴ *Id.* at 111.

¹⁹⁵ See generally *id.*

¹⁹⁶ See generally *id.*

¹⁹⁷ See generally *id.*

¹⁹⁸ See generally *id.*

¹⁹⁹ See generally *id.*

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

²⁰⁰ See generally *id.*

²⁰¹ *Id.* at 113-14.

²⁰² *Id.* at 115.

²⁰³ See generally *id.*

²⁰⁴ See generally *id.*

²⁰⁵ See generally *id.*

²⁰⁶ See generally *id.*

²⁰⁷ See generally *id.* This meant that there was an admixture of Russian and “Nordic” blood.

²⁰⁸ *Id.* at 115-16.

²⁰⁹ See generally *id.*

²¹⁰ See generally *id.*

²¹¹ See generally *id.*

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 Osoboditel’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.²²⁵ He was later sent to Nakhodka in the Soviet Far East, where he worked again as a camp doctor before being transferred to one of the Arctic penal camps at Kolyma, first by steamer and then on foot, where there was “mass death among the prisoners on the journey from frostbite and hunger.”²²⁶ The conditions there were horrific, and “there was really no difference between Hitler’s camps and Stalin’s”²²⁷ Conditions eased somewhat after Stalin’s death, and he fondly writes of his illegal fishing and hunting trips with some of the native Yakuts.²²⁸ 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 1995.²²⁹

Another former POW that came to understand the intrinsic evil of both the Nazi and Soviet regimes was Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov.²³⁰ 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.”²³¹ When he was first captured, he was forced to march to a holding camp, and “it was there that we were sorted by nationality.”²³² 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.²³³ “The Germans were looking for Jews and Red Army commissars, they also promised to reward any prisoners that helped point them out.”²³⁴

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.²³⁵

²²⁵ See generally *id.*

²²⁶ See generally *id.*

²²⁷ See generally *id.*

²²⁸ See generally *id.*

²²⁹ *Id.* at 123-30.

²³⁰ Interview with Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov (Nov. 15, 2004).

²³¹ *Id.*

²³² *Id.*

²³³ *Id.*

²³⁴ *Id.*

²³⁵ *Id.*

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.²³⁶ 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.”²³⁷ The prisoners were transferred from camp to camp, ultimately ending up in *Stalag XVIII-C* in Austria.²³⁸ Thousands died en route.²³⁹ 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.”²⁴⁰ In April 1943, he was transferred to another work camp where he and his fellow captives worked at a concrete form factory.²⁴¹ 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.”²⁴² 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*.²⁴³ In January 1945, Vladimirov and the other prisoners were transferred to another camp that held a large number of Russian prisoners.²⁴⁴ 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.*

²⁴² Interview with Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov (Dec. 3, 2004).

²⁴³ ROLF-DIETER MÜLLER, DIE DEUTSCHE WIRTSCHAFTSPOLITIK IN DEN BESETZTEN SOWJETISCHEN GEBIETEN 1941-1943: DER ABSCHLUßBERICHT DES WIRTSCHAFTSSTABES OST UND AUFZEICHNUNGEN EINES ANGEHÖRIGEN DES WIRTSCHAFTSKOMMANDOS KIEW 391 (1991).

²⁴⁴ Interview with Sergei Aleksandrovich Vladimirov (Dec. 3, 2004).

hausted.²⁴⁵ Fortunately, Vladimirov noted, “the Austrian police gave us dead horses, which we cut into meat and boiled. This saved us from starvation.”²⁴⁶

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.”²⁴⁷ At the end of April, these men were seized by the other prisoners and brutally murdered for their disloyalty.²⁴⁸ Vladimirov was overjoyed when the Red Army arrived.²⁴⁹ His happiness was short-lived, however, since he did not successfully pass the “filtration” process.²⁵⁰ Instead, he was sentenced to ten years at hard labor and a five-year loss of political rights.²⁵¹ 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.”²⁵² Sent to the Karaganda labor camp in the Kazakh SSR, he worked at the machine-building complex for several years.²⁵³ He was then transferred to Omsk in western Siberia where he worked in an oil refinery.²⁵⁴ 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.²⁵⁵ He remained in Omsk, where he married and raised several children, but he was not officially rehabilitated until 1982.²⁵⁶ Vladimirov died in May 2007 at the age of 85. It was my great honor to attend his funeral along with several other former *zeki* (“*zakliuchennyie*,” 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.²⁵⁷ 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*.²⁵⁸ In July 1941, Goebbels noted in his diary that "what we have been fighting against our whole lives is now about to be eradicated."²⁵⁹

The plans for a racist war of annihilation were outlined in the "General Plan for the East."²⁶⁰ Drawn up by Himmler, it called for the "removal" of 80 million people from Russia in order to allow for its colonization by Germans.²⁶¹ This document was to have been presented to Hitler on the occasion of the final defeat of the Soviet Union.²⁶² 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.²⁶³ 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.²⁶⁴ 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.²⁶⁵

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.²⁶⁶ Desperate for the delivery of vital raw materials and labor for the German war machine, alternative plans

²⁵⁷ See Rolf-Dieter Mueller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik. Die Zusammenarbeit von Wehrmacht, Wirtschaft und SS* (1991).

²⁵⁸ See HITLER, *supra* note 47.

²⁵⁹ JOSEPH GOEBBELS, *DIE TAGEBUCHER VON JOSEPH GOEBBELS* 497 (Elke Frohlich, ed. 1997).

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.²⁶⁷ 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.*

