# The Soldier's Dilemma - To Fight or Not to Fight: A Study of World War II Defection Through Soviet Leaflets Targeting Wehrmacht Soldiers

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2025

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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**
**School of Graduate Studies**

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**Abstract**

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Simon Malépart

When in 1941 Nazi Germany invaded the USSR, Soviet authorities, aware of the Wehrmacht's initial superiority, hoped they could weaken the enemy by convincing some of their soldiers to defect and surrender. That idea resulted in a large propaganda campaign, whereby the frontlines were flooded with propaganda leaflets, most notably the series titled the 'Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten.' For the Soviets, however, defection was not intended to provide a chance for German soldiers to fight alongside the Red Army. Instead, as will be outlined in my analysis of the leaflets in this collection, the Soviets hoped to convince the German forces that Hitler had betrayed them and Germany, and that the best thing they could do to protect their homeland was to *voluntarily surrender* to the Red Army. To convey these ideas, Soviet propagandists sought to open a rift between the members of the Wehrmacht and the Nazis by pointing out the multiple grievances German soldiers should have had against the Nazi government. Simultaneously, soldiers were told that they could spend the rest of the war, if only they surrendered, in a cozy prisoner of war camp where they might engage in an array of leisure activities, which included everything from playing games to reading books, and partake of services that they would have enjoyed while back home in Germany, such as haircuts and warm baths. The Soviets then hoped that, combined, the grievances pointed out to German soldiers and the appealing alternatives they were offered might convince enough of them to defect and surrender, and that the outcome of the war might be affected positively.

**Acknowledgements**

*I would like to thank my parents, my grandparents Francine and Leonard, my brother Benjamin, and my partner Magali, who supported me throughout this challenging endeavor.*

*To my close friends and colleagues, Vivianne, Erin, Davit, Alonso, Conor, Simone, Karl, Camila, thank you for your support and help over the years.*

*I am also eternally grateful to my mentor and supervisor Dr. Alison Rowley, who over the course of five years instructed me in my research and provided incredible support and guidance. To the other professors who guided me during my academic journey, Dr. Matthew Penney, Dr. Norman Ingram, Dr. Eric Reiter, Dr. Nora Jaffary, and Dr. Gavin Taylor, thank you for helping me reach my goals and for shaping my academic development.*

*Finally, I want to give a special thanks to the people and staff of the Blavatnik Archive in New York, especially Natalia and Julie, whose hard work and support made this project possible.*

## Dedication

*This work is dedicated to my grandmother, thank you.*

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## *Introduction*

*If war was fought by those who wanted to fight it and knew what they were doing and liked it, or even understood it, then it would be defensible. But those who want to go to the war, the élite, are killed off in the first months and the rest of the war is fought by men who are enslaved into the bearing of arms and, are taught to be more afraid of sure death from their officers if they run than possible death if they stay in the line or attack.*[1]

*Ernest Hemingway, 1935.*

*One of the most horrible features of war is that all the war-propaganda, all the screaming and lies and hatred, comes invariably from people who are not fighting.*[2]

*George Orwell, 1938.*

On June 22, 1941, Nazi German forces began their invasion of the USSR. Assigned the code name Operation Barbarossa, the battle against the Soviet Union was supposed to be completed before the onset of winter. As we now know, and as German soldiers at the time would eventually be forced to realize, it was not. Instead, the Third Reich would find itself at war against the Soviet Union for four years, and the USSR, by the end of the conflict, had undoubtably become its most formidable foe.

At the outbreak of war on the Eastern Front, it was clear to most onlookers that German forces, which for the first few weeks marched into the USSR with relative ease, far exceeded their Red Army counterparts both in strength and military know-how. Very much aware of the strenuous conditions faced by the German army, but also of their own inadequacy against the much stronger Wehrmacht, Soviet leaders needed to find some way of weakening Germany's forces. Doing so, however, would prove rather challenging. Indeed, the Soviet Army's military resources, both in

[1] Ernest Hemingway, "Notes on the Next War: A Serious Topical Letter," *Esquire* (September 1935), 19.
[2] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2021), 71-72.

trained personnel and quality of armament, had been drastically affected by the purges of 1937-38 and hence severely lagged behind those of Germany.[3] Weakening the Wehrmacht by crushing German soldiers on the battlefield, at least at the onset of the war, was certainly out of the question. If the Red Army was to eventually defeat the Wehrmacht, the Soviets would have to find another strategy.

The following essay tells the story of that different weapon, one which did not require gun powder or trigger explosions, but that if used properly and if found in the right hands, could become just as powerful: the written word. Indeed, one of the ways Soviet leaders tried to weaken the Third Reich's army was by attempting to convince German soldiers to surrender. They did so primarily by bombarding the men in the Wehrmacht with propaganda leaflets aimed at convincing the soldiers to lay down their weapons and defect to the USSR. The Soviets dropped these leaflets by the tens of thousands and the scattered paper eventually permeated the landscape at the front.

Dropping propaganda leaflets on one's enemy was, by the time of the Second World War, a completely legitimate and broadly used military tactic. In fact, as historian Heike Niebergall-Lackner points out, the use of aircraft to disseminate these propaganda pieces had been recognized as legal under international law since the 1923 Hague Convention. As such, the Nazi government, in turn, certainly produced its own version of leaflets trying to convince Soviets to defect as World War II stretched on.[4] With the leaflets representing a fundamental ideological aspect of the conflict, the USSR propaganda machine produced numerous leaflets of different sizes, some

[3] On the impact of the purges on the Red Army, see Peter Whitewood, "The Purge of the Red Army and the Soviet Mass Operations, 1937-38," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 2 (2015): 286–314, https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.93.2.0286.

[4] Heike Niebergall-Lackner, *Status and Treatment of Deserters in International Armed Conflicts* (Leiden, 2016), 118-119. For a study that considers the leaflets produced by Germany, which incited Soviet civilians and Red Army soldiers to join General Vlasov's forces in the fight against Stalin, see Catherine Andreyev, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement Soviet Reality and Émigré Theories* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

certainly more detailed than others. One collection was titled "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten," which can be roughly translated as 'The Front Illustrated for German Soldiers.' Designed by propaganda artist Aleksandr Zhitomirsky, leaflets from this collection were air-dropped over German lines in an attempt to prompt German soldiers to defect.[5] This collection was, in the words of historian Erika Wolf, the "offspring of the modern mass illustrated press that had developed in the 1920s and 1930s. Its title, format, and photogravure printing evoked the procommunist and antifascist publication AIZ, published in Berlin from 1924 to 1933; it then moved its base of operations to Prague and was renamed Volks-Illustrierte (People's Illustrated) in 1936."[6] The use of printed images to disseminate visual propaganda, however, certainly predated the 1920s. As historian John Fraser points out, picture postcards, among other things, were used widely during the First World War as a tool for propaganda: "The picture postcard proved an ideal vehicle for propaganda: cheap, easy to handle, with an instant visual appeal so that it was easily appreciated, more particularly by those who were illiterate."[7] By the 1920s, however, only three countries still relied extensively on propaganda post cards: Fascist Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union.[8]

The 'Front-Illustrierte' collection was then part of a longstanding phenomenon whereby Soviet leaders and their propagandists believed they could convince people of a certain goal by distributing printed propaganda images, something the German soldiers would have been familiar with, given that their government created similar materials. All forms of propaganda served a crucial role in 'selling' a particular view of the Soviet Union to its own population, something

[5] On his career, see Erika Wolf, *Aleksandr Zhitomirsky: Photomontage as a Weapon of World War II and the Cold War* (Yale University Press, 2016).
[6] Wolf, *Aleksandr Zhitomirsky: Photomontage as a Weapon of World War II and the Cold War,* 42.
[7] John Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1980): 42, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360217.
[8] Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," 43.

which the leaflets similarly tried to do, albeit with a message tailored to the German soldiers on the Eastern Front.

The leaflets of the ‘Front-Illustrierte” collection were extremely and uniquely detailed. Each consisted of between four and eight pages with many colored illustrations and abundant text. In other words, their production entailed a significant allocation of resources at a time when the Soviet Union was struggling to equip its soldiers and feed its population. Measuring from about 30 cm to as many as about 50cm in length, the collection of leaflets used an amount of paper and ink that would be impressive even by today’s standards. The quality of the paper itself also stands out. Most issues of the Front-Illustrierte collection were printed on a sort of glossy, almost greasy material that kept its feel some eighty years after the war, while most other leaflets were printed on rougher and poorer quality newsprint that most of us are familiar with when it comes to old paper documents. As Figures 1 and 2 show, the difference between a ‘Front-Illustrierte’ leaflet and another Soviet leaflet was striking, and suggests that whatever message the Soviets were hoping to send via the ‘Front-lllustrierte’ collection was of particular significance, or that they believed that this collection might have a particularly strong impact on the soldiers who came across the examples.

The attention to detail found in this collection of propaganda leaflets offers historians a unique opportunity to use them as a case study with which to assess what the Soviet government most strongly believed would convince soldiers to stop fighting, thereby allowing us to add to a larger scholarship that considers defection and desertion on the Eastern Front.

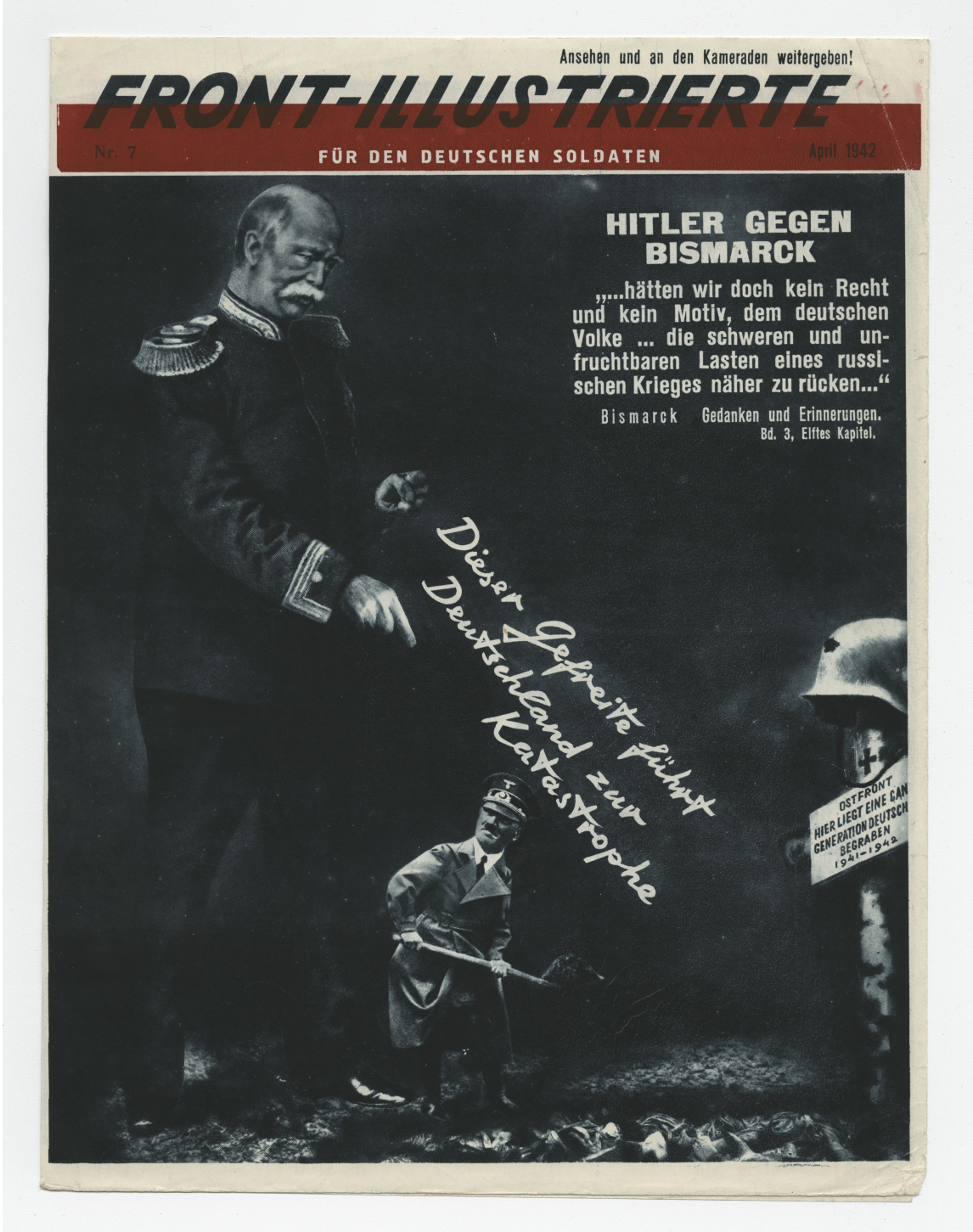



*Figure 1* - Leaflet No.07, “Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten” (April 1942), page 1. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See Item number: FRIL.00007, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4k68c.



DAS

LOS

DAS EUCH ERWARTET!

Soldaten der 3. Kp. des Gr. Rgt. (mot) 30!

Der Sommer kommt. Was der russische Sommer mit sich bringt, wißt Ihr aus dem traurigen Beispiel Eurer Kompanie. Denkt über deren Schicksal nach! Die 3. Kp. hat auf den Rückzugswegen fast alle ihre Soldaten und Offiziere begraben. Am leben blieb nur der Koch, Obgfr. Nenvig. Er kann Euch über diese schrecklichen Tage berichten. Einige Monate bestand die 3. Kompanie überhaupt nicht. Erst im April wurde sie von Euch, GVH-Soldaten und solchen, die der Krieg zu Halbkrüppeln machte, wieder neuaufgestellt.

Was erwartet Eure Kompanie?
Was erwartet Euch jetzt?

Hitler, der nur die Verlängerung des verlorenen Krieges will, vergrößert nur die sinnlosen Menschenopfer des deutschen Volkes.

*Figure 2* - Soviet leaflet produced ca. 1944, page 1. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See Item number: KOGA.00568. http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4hm52q4x.

Focusing on the illustrations and pictures seen on the "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" leaflets, as well as on the written arguments contained therein, I will argue that the type of defection Soviets were hoping to convince the Germans to commit was unique, for while German authorities were dropping leaflets on Soviet cities and populations asking the recipients to *join* their fight against Stalin, the Soviet army asked for the complete opposite – for those who

surrendered not to fight. Indeed, while the Germans eventually made extensive use of Soviet civilians and former Red Army soldiers to fight the USSR, Stalin and his military leaders, in turn, did not form a single German regiment to use against the Third Reich.[9] Thus, this paper will show that Soviet leaders, in their efforts to convince German soldiers to defect, were hoping that such acts would take the form of a *self-prompted and voluntary* surrender, and they never envisioned using the individuals to bolster the forces that were fighting against the German army.[10] Indeed, if Hitler were to be overthrown, it would not be through a joint German-Soviet effort. Because of this specificity, the words voluntary surrender and defection, which for the Soviets, and certainly for the Nazis, would have implied the same actions, will be used interchangeably throughout this essay. The words used by Soviet officials certainly support this claim. In German, 'defector' is translated as 'Überläufer,' which literally means 'one who runs across.' Similarly, the German word for deserter is 'Deserteur.' Yet, neither of these two words ever appears on the Soviet leaflets. Instead, the Soviets asked German soldiers to 'Gebt Euch Gefangen' or to literally 'surrender themselves.'

The fact that the Soviets did not use the specific German term *Überlaufer* adds to the uniqueness of this particular study. As historian Mark Edele points out, the word *Überlaufer* is much more descriptive than its English counterpart 'defector'. As such, Edele argued in his 2017 book *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators, 1941–45* that, because many defectors to the Germans turned out to be POWs, i.e., they did not literally run across a front line, but also because the motives to defect and the circumstances that led to

[9] For a study on how the Germans used Soviets soldiers and civilians against the USSR, see Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators* (Oxford University Press, 2017).
[10] The emphasis here is extremely important. As this essay will show, the leaflets emphasized how Soviet authorities wanted soldiers to give themselves up voluntarily, rather than be captured in combat situations. The German term 'freiwillig' or voluntarily, was constantly used to describe the surrendering soldiers.

defection to the Germans were so varied, defection from the Soviets to the Germans should be understood as a continuum whereby most soldiers fell between two extremes he called the 'ideal defector,' who literally dropped his weapon and defected to the other side, and the 'ideal captive,' who fought against his captors until the end. Most soldiers, Edele argued, fell somewhere between these two poles and did not embody either extreme.[11] Such a framework does not work for our study. Indeed, though the leaflets were asking the soldiers to 'run across' and be what Edele would call an 'ideal defector,' they were also asking them to *run across to surrender and become captives*, which further complicates how we may view the act of defecting.

As such, this essay will offer a unique contribution to the scholarship by showing how extremely fluid the meaning of defection can be, but also how *what* defection entails is highly case specific, i.e., that what constitutes defection is determined by the nature of the conflict, but also by what the states engaged in combat believed represented defection for their and the opposing army's soldiers. In the Soviet case, when it came to German defectors, there was no axiom; the only possibility was for Germans to 'surrender themselves willingly' and become prisoners of war. In other words, in asking soldiers to surrender and become POWs, the Soviets created conditions whereby what it meant to defect from Germany to the USSR was very specific and could only be achieved if a soldier did not already find himself in Soviet captivity. Indeed, because a soldier who was already in a POW camp could not give himself up willingly and defect, German defection to the USSR should be understood, as the Soviets envisaged it, as constituting or encompassing only the actions of soldiers who, while still serving the German army, decided to drop their weapons and run across to surrender. To this point, the leaflets emphasized that German soldiers who had willingly surrendered could expect to receive additional benefits while in captivity, though the

[11] Mark Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators*, 1-10.

Soviets never suggested, at least to the German soldiers, that those of them who were captured would be treated poorly. Instead, soldiers were told that every German soldier in Soviet captivity would benefit from whatever services were available in the camps, the difference being that soldiers who had surrendered willingly, i.e., those who had defected, would receive preferential treatment.

In hopes of convincing the German soldiers to do so, the USSR trotted out a very specific line wherein soldiers had first to be convinced that they had no stake in this conflict and thus their involvement in it was futile. Moreover, Hitler and his Nazi clique were to blame for the war and the only ones benefitting from it. Second, and perhaps most importantly, soldiers were told that their odds of survival would increase in Soviet captivity. Thus, this essay will argue that the Soviets believed they could convince German soldiers to defect by combining two cognitive steps, which eventually would lead to the desired result.

The first step was to dismantle any connection in the soldier's psyche with the Nazi apparatus. In other words, the Soviets, throughout these leaflets, were attempting to delineate a clear distinction between the institution of the Wehrmacht and the Nazi apparatus. In order to create this break, the Soviets relied on multiple talking points, ranging from blaming the Nazis for the lack of equipment available to soldiers at the front to appealing to a form of German nationalism that was shown as being 'under attack' while the Nazis were in power or one which did not have room for the Nazis, as Benedict Anderson would say, within the German imagined community.[12]

[12] In his now seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson argued that what partly explains the rise of nationalism was the emergence of print capitalism, through which an entire community could develop a sense of belonging with people they had never and probably would never meet. The leaflets on the front line played a similar role. Indeed, the Soviets hoped these printed leaflets, in creating a strict distinction between the Nazis and the Wehrmacht, might evoke a sense of unity in these soldiers as a German '*Volk'* to which they, i.e., the soldiers, belonged while the Nazis did not, and one which was literally under attack, in multiple ways, by the Nazi apparatus. For Anderson's discussion on the rise of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2016).

In other words, the Soviets tried to create a picture where the soldier's existence on the front lines defending Nazi power was no longer justified.

The second step offered the German soldiers a solution. As will become clear, the Soviets assumed that simply turning the Germans against Hitler was not good enough to ensure that they would stop fighting and defect. Thus, Soviet propagandists had to offer a convincing alternative, which wound up being voluntary surrender. The Soviet leaflets informed German soldiers that giving themselves up would allow them to spend the rest of the war in a cozy prisoner of war camp, one in which conditions were comfortable and reminiscent of their lives before the war, and where they would enjoy plentiful food and security until the fighting was over.

Combined, these two steps are fundamental in understanding how the Soviets conceptualized defection by German soldiers on the Eastern Front. What is more, they allow us to analyze and certainly broaden the overall meaning of defection during the Second World War. As the pages that follow will make clear, for the Soviets, defection could only mean one thing, and it was not convincing the Germans to fight alongside them. Rather, the defection Soviets were selling was one where further fighting was not required at all. Complicating matters even more, this essay will show how Soviet officials hoped they could convey to German soldiers that defection was not a betrayal of Germany as a nation or community of people, but rather a rejection of the current oppressive social order, in other words, the Nazi state. Indeed, according to the narrative given to the soldiers through the leaflets considered here, it was Hitler who had betrayed their beloved fatherland, completely inverting the way we think about one's loyalty or betrayal through defection. If anything, the Soviets were implying that surrendering and defecting to the USSR was actually the best thing German soldiers could do to defend Germany and undermine Hitler, which in turn would have undermined and destabilized the hegemonic structure of the Nazi state. In other

words, the Soviets were suggesting that in 'running across,' German soldiers were protecting the very place from which they were running, i.e., their homeland, while fighting for the Nazis was shown as being the ultimate betrayal.

By highlighting the contradictory interests and forces within the German state, distinguishing between those of the members of the Wehrmacht and those of the Nazis, the Soviets were hoping to trigger, during the war itself, that which the Marxist tradition and proponents of dialectic materialism would call a shift toward change through clashes or struggles caused by contradictions in the material conditions of the different groups, which in this particular context would have been best exemplified by defection, i.e., the rejection of the interests of the ruling class, meaning specifically the Nazis.[13]

The type of rejection of the social order the Soviets were trying to incite was rather two dimensional and does not fit neatly with what historians usually qualify as class struggle. As this essay will make evident, in hopes of highlighting the contradictions between the material conditions of the soldiers and the Nazi leaders, the Soviets created a strong dichotomy between Nazi and Wehrmacht while still maintaining some sort of hierarchy within the German military institution. In other words, convincing soldiers to reject the Nazis did not imply rejecting the entire social order that predated the Nazi rise to power. The leaflets continued to emphasize, for instance, the difference between officers, including those of higher ranks such as generals, and lower-ranking soldiers, all of whom were nonetheless simultaneously amalgamated into one non-Nazi and thus oppressed group whose members risked their lives at the front, albeit of course in different ways. Though certain generals would have been of higher social standing and would perhaps even

[13] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (Penguin Publishing, 2004).

have economically benefited from the war, the type of dichotomy the Soviets were trying to create, which arguably did not have to be based on the realities of social dynamics within Germany, was one in which the Nazis were a governing and ruling body with specific interests and material conditions of their own. Furthermore, class struggle and defection during warfare is also unique, for it does not necessitate the complete overthrow of the social order, though it might occur, but instead is a social struggle that is specific to the war itself, and which, in most cases, has as its anticipated synthesis the defeat of the state from which the defector originated.

More to the point, this kind of reading of defections positions soldiers as agents of change during a time when common sense principles are usually lifted to impose on people the necessary conditions for the continuation of warfare. In other words, being convinced to defect implied that soldiers rejected the current social order and with it its power to use warfare as a tool for its ambitions or to achieve a certain goal. Also, it required that the defectors - 'the soldiers' - no longer saw themselves as belonging to this group or bloc, and thus no longer saw in the continued existence of this bloc a benefit to themselves. This is true only, of course, for the soldiers who, as the leaflets described, 'surrendered themselves willingly.' The fact that the Soviets asked soldiers not to fight, however, offers a unique instance when this class struggle or fight was in fact non-violent and implied the rejection of fighting as a whole.[14] Furthermore, conceptualizing defection in terms of class struggle implies that soldiers who were at the front were oppressed, at least in the Marxist sense, by the ruling powers, which in the case of the German forces during WWII certainly is hard to convey. The Soviets did not have to actually believe in this dichotomy, of course, for the notions just had to be convincing enough to get soldiers to surrender.

[14] We might never know why the Soviets did not encourage German soldiers to join their fight against Hitler. Perhaps the Soviets recognized that the Nazi regime was too recent to instigate any real sort of historical antagonism against the regime or perhaps Stalin was simply too distrustful to involve former deserters in the defence of the Soviet Union.

Still, in offering such a narrative to the members of the Wehrmacht, the Soviets, perhaps not consciously, recognized that the German army, similar to the police at the local level, were part of what Foucault would eventually describe as a broader disciplinary institution aimed at defending the interests of what Marxist historians would call a ruling bloc, which in this particular case was the Nazi Party, but that this bloc did not define the imagined 'German nation,' i.e., that Germany was not limited or defined by its current Nazi rulers.[15] Indeed, much of the reasoning behind the Soviets' suggestion to Germans to lay down their weapons was underlined by the understanding that most soldiers were not at the front of their own volition and that those who were could not simply go home and give up the fighting whenever they decided that they had had enough.

This view of the army certainly is not unique to the Second World War or to governments ruled by dictatorships. In fact, we need not go far back in history, or really back in history at all, to find instances where soldiers were severely punished for abandoning their duties. The consequences of defection and the oppressive nature of military service, at least in the case of the German army during the Second World War but perhaps even today, meant that weighing the possible consequences of defection – those imposed both by the home country and the one to which soldiers defected – represented the ultimate factor behind the decision to defect, something which Niebergall-Lackner alludes to when she writes: "Whether deserters will actively try to reach the enemy will largely depend on the treatment that they can expect in a given conflict, both from their home country and from the other belligerent."[16]

In Germany, the punishment for defection was extremely severe: soldiers could expect to be shot or killed if caught attempting to defect. In the eyes of the Führer, there was no room in his

[15] For Michel Foucault on disciplinary institutions, see Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Gallimard, 2014).
[16] Niebergall-Lackner, 117.

army for such men. Indeed, as Niebergall-Lackner further points out: "In April 1940, the military criminal code (Militärstrafgesetzbuch "MStGB") was revised and provisions regarding the punishment of deserters were tightened."[17] Hitler himself, in the 1937 edition of *Mein Kampf*, claimed that: "The deserter must know that his desertion brings with it the very thing he wants to flee. One can die at the front; as a deserter, one must die."[18] Aware of the harsh treatment meted out to those who abandoned their posts, German soldiers picking up Soviet leaflets would have been forced to consider the almost certain repercussions they would face if they were caught with such materials.

The Soviets, in turn, did not treat their own defectors with kid gloves. Indeed, some might argue that the Soviets were even harsher towards their soldiers, going so far as to label prisoners of war as traitors, whether they had been captured following voluntary surrender or not. It is worth remembering that, to quote historian Joachim Hoffman at length:

> The Soviet Union is the only state in the world ever to have declared the captivity of its soldiers to be a serious crime. The military oath (Voennaja prisjaga), the article 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code (Ugolovnyj kodeks) and other regulations, such as the Interior Service Regulation (Ustav Vnutrennej sluzhby) and the 'Infantry Combat Provisions of the Red Army' left no doubt that allowing oneself to be taken prisoner (sdacha v plen) would inevitably be punished by death as 'desertion to the enemy,' 'flight to a foreign country,' 'treason,' and 'desertion.' 'Captivity is treason to the homeland. There is no more reprehensible and more treacherous act,' the regulation stated: 'But the highest penalty—shooting—awaits the traitor to the homeland.'[19]

We see, then, that on both sides the decision to defect was fraught with extreme consequences. However, convincing soldiers to do so remained a central aspect of the ideological conflict on the Eastern Front. In the end, as we shall see, the arguments presented to soldiers did

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[17] Niebergall-Lackner, 25.
[18] Quoted in Franz W. Seidler*, Fahnenflucht*: *der Soldat zwischen Eid und Gewissen* (Herbig, 1993), 325.
[19] Joachim Hoffmann, *Stalin's War of Extermination 1941-1945: Planning, Realization and Documentation* (Theses and Dissertation Press, 2001), 106.

not have to be true or be applicable beyond the propaganda's target group. They just had to be convincing enough to get soldiers to stop fighting. Hence, the soldiers who picked up a leaflet from the 'Front-Illustrierte' collection had to see in its pages some element that convinced them that defection was worth the risk, both to them and their families.

To assess what the Soviets believed would be persuasive to German soldiers, I will refer to the contents of 57 leaflets held by the Blavatnik Archive in New York. All of the images reproduced in this essay originate from those leaflets, and they are used by permission. The sample ranges from December 1941 to December 1944, and admittedly it cannot be considered complete since the survival of such ephemeral (and dangerous to possess) objects depended on all kinds of variables and a degree of luck. Indeed, more leaflets were undoubtedly produced, some as early as July 1941 and others as late as April 1945. However, copies are few and far between and have not been made readily available to historians. Still, the 57 leaflets preserved by the Blavatnik Archive span a large enough period of the war to give us a genuine idea of what the overall propaganda campaign looked like.

While I am sure that readers would very much like to know how many German soldiers defected, when, or why, - in other words, if the leaflets worked – it is not possible to answer those questions in this essay. Hampered by time and limitations of access to information from German and Russian archives, I will confine my analysis here to the leaflet themselves and their contents, leaving broader questions for a later date.

As the leaflets were produced in German, all the information pulled from them and offered to the readers in this essay has been translated by me, but I invite anyone who wishes to do so to independently read the original German text found on my illustrations. With these methodological aspects out of the way, but before we jump into an analysis of the leaflets themselves, let us cover,

at least in part, what the scholarship on defection during WWII and the Wehrmacht itself has shown in the last decades so as to see where our own discussion of German defection fits within this overall narrative.

### *On Collaboration and Resistance in Nazi Europe – A Historiography*

Establishing the historiographical landscape of the scholarship on defection on the Eastern Front presents a particular challenge, perhaps even more so in our case because there exists no English-language research on defection *from* the Germans on the Eastern Front. This paper, then, is in dialogue with a broader literature on defection *to and collaboration with* the Germans, as well as literature on the Wehrmacht itself, which as the following section will show, has evolved quite drastically since the war's end, with its evolution influencing in turn the way that historians looking at collaboration on the Eastern Front wrote about their subjects.[20] As is well-known, the literature on the Wehrmacht is extensive, which is why the following lines only hope to give the reader a global idea of the historiographical evolution of it and by no means can my discussion cover everything that historians in this field have so-far written. There is, however, an additional challenge and before we jump into any analysis of the scholarship, let us clarify our terminology.

The study of defection to or from the Germans falls under what is now broadly understood as the field of collaboration and resistance during the war.[21] The term 'collaboration' in World War

[20] These historical inquiries were shaped and taken on by historians writing through what has been recognized as a new approach, emerging after the Second World War: 'New Military History.' Jan Hoffenaar points out that New Military History encompassed a broadening of topics in the study of the military and warfare, and the approach was influenced by the social, cultural, gender, and global turns. See Jan Hoffenaar, '"New" Military History," in *Handbook of Military Sciences*, ed. Anders McD Sookermany, (New York: Springer, Cham, 2021), 2-12.

[21] Though the reduction of two options or alternatives, collaboration versus resistance, suggests a certain adherence to an outdated and certainly limited structuralist view of this issue, whereby the dichotomic nature of the topic, in its binary opposition, is only possible insofar as the latter opposes the former, scholars of this field have shown extensively how we might challenge and offer some nuance to a strict binary understanding of the collaboration/resistance relationship. The use of the term 'collaboration' is certainly important here, for it implies responsibility. It echoes the primary impetus of the scholarship, which has been and remains to hold accountable larger swaths of populations, rather than just the Germans or the Nazis, for the crimes committed by the Reich. It is important to consider, however, how such a term might narrow our understanding of the war and its context. It certainly implies that Germany, and its allies, that is those who collaborated with them, bear the entire responsibility for the Second World War and subsequently the crimes of the Reich. Though critiquing 'Germany' for its actions during the war is essential and certainly unquestionable, we should not be so naïve as to forget the broader context during which the events of the 1920s and 30s occurred. France, for instance, though certainly not a 'collaborator' per se, did much to worsen the lot of the German people following the First World War and, in this sense, played a major role in allowing

II studies tends to have a rather tainted and pejorative connotation. Far from being a simple semantic exercise, it is important that we clear up what historians have usually meant by collaboration and resistance. Because most of the scholarship recognizes that the Nazis were the primary malefactor during the war, a stance which I certainly do not oppose, the scholarship on 'collaboration' generally refers to collaboration *with* the Nazis whereas resistance is understood as representing opposition *to* the Nazis. In accordance with this view, then, when using the term collaboration with versus resistance to the Nazis, defection certainly falls under the umbrella of the latter. As such, the following historiography will show how historians have continuously positioned themselves vis-à-vis this topic and how they have, over the decades, included more and more groups within the fold of responsibility in the crimes of the Third Reich.

As Germany was rebuilding, and rebranding itself, the United States entered the Cold War against its former Second World War ally, the USSR. Eager to build a strong anti-Soviet bloc in Western Europe through the Marshall Plan, the Americans benefitted highly from a strong Germany. It is within this historical context that, writing out of Harvard University in 1950, only five years after the fall of the Third Reich, George Fischer, an American historian of Russian history (not to be confused with WWI German historian Fritz Fischer) published the first broadly-read academic work focusing on desertion and defection on the Eastern Front.[22] In what would

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the Nazi Party to arise. To make sense of this conundrum I often like to use a metaphor I came up with while pondering this very issue: Though we may blame the Germans for pushing the Nazi snowball down the hill, and we certainly must, we ought not to be so naïve as to forget those who made that hill much steeper and who did very little to prevent the snowball from rolling down. To sum up, the term 'collaboration' is at times problematic and hardly without its blind spots and is often used due to a lack of a better word to describe this context. We should be careful, then, when narrowly understanding what 'collaboration' constitutes and I encourage those thinking about this collaboration/resistance paradigm to challenge how they see or understand the nature of participation in historical developments.

[22] George Fischer, *Soviet Defection in World War II* (Harvard University Press, 1950). For Fischer's larger monograph, see George Fischer, *Soviet Opposition to Stalin: A Case Study in World War II* (Harvard University Press, 1952).

later become a chapter of a larger monograph published in 1952, Fischer studied the extent of desertion and defection of soldiers from the USSR to Germany between 1941 and 1945. His position is clear early on as he writes in the opening pages of his work: "Compared with the numbers of Soviet nationals – who provided real additional fighting strength for Germany – the size of the other 'quisling' units was insignificant."[23] Though Fischer's claim at the time was both wrong and misleading, for the number of German collaborators from outside the USSR certainly was not insignificant, it reveals the extent to which his position was embedded in Cold War sentiments, painting Nazi Germany as the lesser of two evils.[24] Indeed, the overarching argument in Fischer's paper was that those who had defected from the Soviets to the Germans had done so because they recognized the corrupted and iniquitous nature of their own state apparatus. Additionally, calling Hitlers' collaborators from non-Soviet countries insignificant embodied, as we will see briefly, the historical narrative that permeated the scholarship for at least a decade. Necessary to this argument was the assumption that only the Nazis had been responsible for Germany's crimes during the war. Indeed, in the years after the war, historians writing within capitalist states argued that Eastern Europe had been stuck at the time of the war, between two evils, one Nazi and one Soviet, and one of them was still standing.[25]

However, as historians Vesna Drapac and Gareth Richard point out, the scholarship on collaboration with the Nazi state evolved along significantly different lines in Western Europe and

[23] George Fischer, *Soviet Defection in World War II* (Harvard University Press, 1950) 7.
[24] Needless to say, Fischer's analysis is one which benefited from hindsight, and which was embedded in the historicist tradition still in place in the 1950s, whereby the critique of the USSR, America's biggest rival, also justified and defended the United States' stance vis a vis their Cold War counterpart. Fischer's work reads more like a brief offered to American authorities than like any serious piece of academic work.
[25] This historical context explains why so many former German soldiers published their memoirs and diaries at this time. In fact, it is during this period that most veterans published their memoirs, and it is also during this period that former Nazi collaborators published their accounts from the war. One notable example is Nazi collaborator Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt who in 1970 published his memoir in which he explained his motivation for help the Vlasov movement during the war. See Wilfried Strik-Strikfelt, *Against Stalin and Hitler: Memoir of the Russian Liberation Movement, 1941-1945*, trans. David Footman (John Day Co., 1970).

the Communist bloc in the 1950s and 1960s. In Western Europe, historians, not unlike Fischer, defended their current government by showing how their nation had been built on resistance to Hitler during the war.[26] This was perhaps best exemplified in Western Germany, where the assassination of Hitler was celebrated and used to argue that non-Nazi elements had been fighting Hitler in Germany even during the war and that it was those same non-Nazis who now embodied the newly reconstructed and de-nazified Germany.[27] Accordingly, as historian Nicholas Berg further points out, relatively nothing was written on the complicity of ordinary Germans in the crimes of the Nazis during this period.[28] Indeed, the scrutinization of 'ordinary men' would have to wait until at least the 1980s and 1990s. Meanwhile, in Communist Eastern Europe, historians in turn argued that the Nazi state and the collaboration of European leaders with the Nazis during the war had exemplified capitalism and imperialism and thus justified the existence of their communist state apparatuses.[29]

And yet, as Pritchard and Drapac suggest, this ossified narrative would start to show some cracks following Adolf Eichmann's trial in 1961 and the publication during the same year of Raul Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews*, which propelled the Holocaust into the field of historical inquiries as more and more historians began to ask who had been responsible for the extermination of the Jewish population in Europe and who had resisted and fought back against the Nazis' Final Solution.[30] Furthermore, when Hannah Arendt published her now famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,* arguing that the destruction of the Jewish

[26] Vesna Drapac & Gareth Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire* (Palgrave, 2017), 27-29.
[27] Drapac & Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire,* 29.
[28] Nicholas Berg. *The Holocaust and the West German Historians: Historical Interpretation and Autobiographical Memory* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015) chapter 2. Read in Drapac & Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire,* 29.
[29] Drapac & Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire,*32-37
[30] Drapac & Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire,* 30-31. See also Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Yale University Press, 2003).

population had been perpetrated 'bureaucratically' by 'ordinary' people and without much care being put into the process, historians began asking to which extent non-Nazis had been responsible for the Holocaust.[31]

As such, the 1960s and 1970s were a crucial moment in the evolution of the scholarship on collaboration and resistance within the Nazi state. As a new generation of historians with little to no direct recollections of the war burst onto the scene, they were keen to criticize the collaboration of state leaders, including their own, with the Nazi apparatus and reject old conservative historical narratives about how only the Nazis had been responsible for Germany's war crimes.[32] For these historians, non-Soviet collaboration was far from being, as Fischer called it, 'insignificant.' As Pritchard and Drapac also point out, this included the elite and the German officers who had attempted to kill Hitler, who in turn were more closely scrutinized.[33] The term 'collaboration' soon began to be applied even to the wider German army.

Indeed, as early as 1965 Hans Bucheim published *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, which as Omer Bartov rightly points out: "included an important analysis by Hans-Adolf Jacobsen of the so-called Commissar Order (the instruction to kill on the spot all political officers attached to Red Army units captured by the Wehrmacht)."[34] This research led to further inquiries into the actions of the Wehrmacht, which up until the mid 1960s, and to an extent up until Christopher Browning's book,

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[31] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Classics: 2006).
[32] Drapac & Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire,* 29- 30. For a German analysis of the Nazi state, see Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and development of the internal structure of the Third Reich,* trans. John W. Hiden (Routledge, 2013), originally published in 1969. For a French critique of Vichy France and French collaboration, see Jean-Pierre Azéma, *De Munich à la Libération, 1938-1944* (Éditions Points, 2002), originally published in 1979. These studies, however, remained focused on the collaboration of the State and their respective political apparatus.
[33] Drapac & Pritchard, *Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Empire,* 30.
[34] Omer Bartov, "German Soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, Research and Implications," *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (1997), 6.

had managed to maintain its status as a clean and professional army removed from and uninfluenced by Nazi ideology.[35] As Bartov further points out, this research was:

> followed in 1969 by a comprehensive study of the policies of ideological indoctrination in the Wehrmacht written by Manfred Messerschmidt, a path-breaking work on the maltreatment and murder of Soviet prisoners of war by Christian Streit, published in 1978, and a thorough investigation of the collaboration between the Einsatzgruppen, the death squads of the SS and SD, and the Wehrmacht by Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, which appeared in 1981.[36]

These studies, however, remained, for the most part, focused on the higher echelons, i.e., officers, of the Wehrmacht and failed to convince the general public of the Wehrmacht's general wrongdoing. This research also suggested that, if Wehrmacht members had indeed committed any war crimes, they had been against a group of people who were, at least until the fall of the USSR, depicted as inferior and barbaric communists who wanted to invade Western Europe; in other words, most Germans still believed that whatever violence had been committed against people in the USSR was justified. This narrative remained broadly accepted at least until the 1990s, when two major controversies and debates in the 1980s and 1990s, namely the Historikerstreit, which questioned the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the Third Reich, and the Browning/Goldhagen debate, which brought to light the Wehrmacht's involvement in the Holocaust, shifted the attention of historians.[37] This is not to say, however, that the narrative of the clean Wehrmacht had not been

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[35] See Hans Bucheim et al., *Anatomie des SS-Staates* (dtv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1965).

[36] Bartov, "German Soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, Research and Implications," 6. The works Bartov is alluding to are the following: Manfred Messerschmidt, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination* (Deckers Verlag, 1969); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen*, *1941-1945* (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978); Alfred Streim, *Die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener im "Fall Barbarossa* Eine Dokumentation* (Müller, C. F., 1981).

[37] In addition to the two debates covered below, i.e., the Historikerstreit and the Browning/Goldhagen debate, it is important to consider the fundamental impact of the USSR's collapse on the literature. Prior to the USSR's dismantling, the 'Greater Cold War' historical context, i.e., up until the 1990s, the literature on collaboration was very dichotomic. As evidenced by Fischer's work cited above, the narrative had remained that those who collaborated with the Germans had done so in order to collapse the USSR, which remained the favourable narrative in most western academia while the USSR was still standing. As it fell, however, and as the nationalist movement within the former

challenged prior to Christopher Browning's research, nor was Browning's position drawing from a pool of never-before explored material. Indeed, as we have just seen, historians had been challenging the idea that the Wehrmacht had been completely innocent since at least the mid 1960s.

More importantly perhaps, a decade before Christopher Browning's research, and certainly primordial in shaping his perspective, Germany underwent what historians now call the first Historikerstreit (historians' debate) and the above-mentioned questions surrounding both the Holocaust and the violence committed by the Wehrmacht, which had been prominent topics especially inside Germany for around two decades, became the subject of widespread public debates.[38] In 1986, German philosopher Jürgen Habermas criticized conservative historians for relativizing the acts of Nazi Germany within what these historians believed was a broader historical period characterized by episodes of mass violence.[39] For Habermas and his peers, the Holocaust and the Third Reich more broadly represented a unique instance in 20th century history and could not be done away with through misleading and wrongful contextualization.

Then, in the wake of the Historikerstreit and the USSR's collapse, Christopher Browning's now seminal work *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*

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Soviet Union emerged, it became increasingly difficult to hide and justify war crimes that had been committed by non-Germans, mostly in Eastern Europe. In a certain way, the fall of the Iron Curtain revealed what countries, both behind, and in front of it, had been so keen to keep hidden up until that point. In addition, any of the Wehrmacht's violent actions in the East, mostly against Soviet citizens, had been justified in the years after the war though anti-communist dialogue. As Germany was reconstructed through the Cold War, its violence against the Soviet population was considered the rightful course of action to prevent the steam rolling of 'Bolshevik hordes' across Western Europe. Indeed, an important point of the Historikerstreit was not only to relativize the Holocaust but also to justify the Wehrmacht's actions against the Soviet Union, something which became increasingly challenging as it collapsed.

[38] For a good overview of the debate and context of the *Historikerstreit* and its broader implications, see Daniel Levy, "The Future of the Past: Historiographical Disputes and Competing Memories in Germany and Israel," *History and Theory* 38, no. 1(February 1999): 51–66, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505316.

[39] Some notable conservative historians were Ernst Nolte, Joachim Fest, and Andreas Hillgruber while some of the more left-leaning historians opposing them were Hans Mommsen, Wolfgang Mommsen, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and philosopher Jürgen Habermas. For a more in-depth analysis of Habermas's role in triggering the debate, see Jeremy Leaman, "The decontamination of German history: Jürgen Habermas and the 'Historikerstreit' in West Germany," *Economy and Society* 17, no. 4 (1988): 518-520, DOI: 10.1080/03085148800000022.

redefined the way we understand Germany's involvement in war crimes during the war.[40] With his research, Browning deconstructed the myth of the clean Wehrmacht, which at this point had been accepted for close to forty years, and proved that participation in the Holocaust and other atrocities had not been limited to SS forces.[41]

The ramifications of Browning's research on the scholarship would extend far beyond a straightforward rethinking of the historical narrative.[42] In fact, once Browning, and to some extent, Omer Bartov, had deconstructed the myth of the clean Wehrmacht, the floodgates of responsibility blew open and gave rise to what we might call a 'responsibility axiom' positioning different groups along what we previously referred to as a collaboration/resistance dichotomy. Far exceeding what Browning envisaged with his own research, and certainly nailing Daniel Goldhagen's metaphorical coffin shut, was the publication of multiple studies on various groups who had collaborated with

[40] Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (HarperCollins Publisher, 1992).

[41] Shortly after Browning published his research, American historian Daniel G. Golhagen published his own take on the participation of ordinary Germans in war crimes. Using the same sources as Browning, Goldhagen pushed the argument one step further and argued instead that the reason Germans had committed war crimes was because they had been and continued to be historically antisemitic. In other words, it was their very 'Germaness' which caused them to commit atrocities. Though Golhagen would eventually be discredited, and his thesis rejected by the historical profession, the implications for his arguments were of extreme importance. If Goldhagen had been right to say that there was a uniquely German character in the atrocities perpetrated in the East, then the study of collaboration in German war crimes might have been severely impeded. Members of the historical profession saw the ethnocentric flaw in Goldhagen's argument, one which dangerously drew from Social Darwinistic positions. See Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1996).

[42] Though Browning's book was the one to receive the most attention and thus certainly had the biggest impact on the scholarship, it is important to mention that other historians had been alluding to the Wehrmacht's criminal activity before Browning did. Omer Bartov, for instance, published in 1985 a book called *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*, in which he lays out how the dehumanization of the Soviet troops played an essential role in increasing the often unlawful and certainly extreme violence German soldiers were ready to unleash on their Red Army counterpart. Bartov would also publish a few years later another book called *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, in which he also alluded to the violent and criminal activities of the Wehrmacht. The reason, perhaps, why Browning's work had such an impact, is because it undoubtedly proved the Wehrmacht's involvement in the Holocaust and showed that it had been guilty of violence against civilians, not just soldiers, which explains why much of the subsequent literature also made sure to emphasize the Wehrmacht's criminal actions against civilians. See Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Palgrave, 1985); and his *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford University Press, 1992). For a good resume of the debates around the Wehrmacht's participation in the Holocaust, see Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Cornell University Press, 2003).

the Germans during the war. Browning's study also served as proof to break down the false narrative that the Wehrmacht had only committed acts of extreme violence against Soviet soldiers, confirming Habermas's assumptions during the Historikerstreit, while the ensuing scholarship in turn endeavoured to include more and more victims into the fold of the Wehrmacht's atrocities.

Thus, following *Ordinary Men*, the historiography split into two main 'branches' with the similar goal of broadening our understanding of what or who constituted the 'ordinary' in the commission of war crimes during the Second World War. Primarily, historians have sought to scrutinize more and more groups which had up until the 1990s evaded criticism and historical investigation.

The first branch of this new field comprised those who shifted away from proving German responsibility in war crimes and committed, instead, to showing how different groups in and around Europe had collaborated with the Germans during the war. This shift was done at different levels over time. Certainly, scholars were publishing studies on collaboration with the Germans before Browning's research. In 1987, for instance, Catherine Andreyev published her book *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement: Soviet Reality and Émigré Theories,* which is now a seminal work for the way we understand the career of the most well-known and perhaps most important non-German military collaborator during WWII, General Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov.[43] Such studies, however, just like Fischer's, did not adopt a condemnatory tone toward the collaborationists and once again remained focused on higher ranking military officials. Moreover,

[43] The case of Vlasov remains a highly controversial one in Russia and in the historical profession more broadly. Some see him as a hero for his endeavour to overthrow the USSR while others see him as a traitor to his country. See Andreyev, *Vlasov and the Russian Liberation Movement: Soviet Reality and Émigré Theories,*1987; and Benjamin Tromly, "Sympathy for the Devil: General Vlasov in the Collective Memory of the Great Patriotic War in Post-Soviet Russia," *History & Memory* 35, No. 1 (2023): 3-38. https://dx.doi.org/10.2979/ham.2023.a885267.

we would see the myth of the clean Wehrmacht collapse alongside the myth that non-German collaborators had not participated in the crimes of the Reich.

As such, the scholarship following Browning took on a much more accusatory tone and became much more widespread in its critique. In 2004, British historian Peter Davies published his monograph on collaboration with the Nazi state *Dangerous Liaisons: Collaboration and World War Two.* In this study Davies offers a look at the collaboration of different European leaders with the Nazi regime during the Second World War, differentiating between various types of collaboration and emphasizing how European leaders had collaborated on different levels and for different ideological, tactical, or political reasons.[44] Using examples drawn from the leaders from countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Scandinavia, Davies' study is one which attempts to create a general framework and categorization of collaboration during the Second World War that would be applicable across Europe. However, showing how the collaboration of Vidkun Quisling in Norway could be compared or analyzed in the same way as that of Ukrainian leaders in Soviet Ukraine completely disregards the fact that they existed in completely different geopolitical settings.[45] If anything, Davies' work is proof that a pan-European framework does not work when studying collaboration during the Second World War. Additionally, Davies' monograph offers a very pejorative view of the working class and peasantry, and the reader is made to believe that those not in power would have simply followed in the steps of those who were. Removing most of their agency and in fact, to some extent, going against the type of argument that Browning made a decade prior, Davies argued through one of his many degrading comments that: "Ukrainian

[44] Peter Davies, *Dangerous Liaisons: Collaboration and World War Two* (Pearson/Longman, 2004).
[45] The most important of these differences is of course that the Nazi racial hierarchy, which held that 'Slavic' people were inferior, created conditions whereby the collaboration of people from 'non-inferior' groups such as Scandinavians or other Aryan peoples, can hardly be compared to collaboration from populations who the Nazis would have considered less than human.

peasants were particularly vulnerable to this kind of pressure [from anti-Soviet/pro-Nazi agitators]. On the whole, they were uneducated and impressionable. Add to this a blissful lack of interest in, and knowledge of, political issues and events, and you have a mass of gullible would-be collaborators."[46]

In a similar vein, in 2013, István Deák and Norman Naimark published their book, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution during World War II*. In their analysis, Deák and Naimark compared the various responses to Nazi invasions and the levels of what they call accommodation, collaboration, and resistance, emphasizing that: "none of the allied governments was a puppet of Hitler. Each had a will of its own."[47] Again, however, Deak and Naimark's study is one which attempts to generalize collaboration across Europe, something which overlooks the important ideological and geopolitical differences between countries on the continent, most importantly between countries on the Eastern and Western fronts.[48] Echoing and certainly influenced by what Timothy Snyder argued in his influential work *Bloodlands* a year prior, Deak and Naimark went as far as to posit that in many cases, countries in Europe collaborated with the Germans in the hope of ridding themselves of 'foreign elements' or minorities within their own borders.[49]

Still contributing to our understanding of collaboration with the Germans, others have shifted their attention away from the political and diplomatic centres to offer more nuanced studies of how and for what purpose non-German combatants had collaborated with the Nazis during the

[46] Davies, *Dangerous Liaisons: Collaboration and World War Two*, 64.
[47] István Deák and Norman Naimark, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution during World War II* (Westview Press, 2015), 8.
[48] Deák & Naimark, 2. For an excellent study on diplomatic collaboration and the collaboration of higher-ranking non-German government officials, see Martin Gutmann, *Building a Nazi Europe: The SS's Germanic Volunteers* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[49] Deák and Naimark, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution during World War II,* 82. See also Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (Basic Books, 2010).

war. In 2017, previously mentioned historian Mark Edele published his book *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators.* In what is the best study on collaboration by Soviet citizens with the Germans to date, Edele drew upon multiple kinds of primary sources to show how heavily contextual defection to the Germans was and how complex and varied the motives for defection had been, ranging from a fundamental will to survive, to antagonism against the Soviet regime, or even the desire to return to family members in occupied territory.[50] Though some soldiers had indeed defected because of their wish to overthrow Stalin, Edele showed that this motive was far from being the only reason for them to do so. Edele would then publish, two years later, a study on defection in Ukraine called "Why Did Ukrainian Red Army Men Go Over to the Germans? The Case of Defectors to the Wehrmacht's 296 Infantry Division, 1942-1943," in which he argued that Ukrainian soldiers had not been particularly nationalistic, that is more than soldiers from other countries, in their defection and in fact that most Ukrainians who had defected had done so to liberate what they envisioned as a multi-national Soviet homeland rather than a specifically Ukrainian independent one.[51]

Still studying Ukrainian defection, in 2023, Myroslav Shkandrij published his book *In the Maelstrom: The Waffen-SS 'Galicia' Division and Its Legacy*. Shkandrij's study offers a thorough analysis of the defection of Soviet Ukrainians to Germany, some of whom came to form an SS division.[52] The book covers both the men's motivations to join the Waffen-SS and the actions

[50] Edele, *Stalin's Defectors: How Red Army Soldiers became Hitler's Collaborators*, chapter 6.
[51] Mark Edele, "Why Did Ukrainian Red Army Men Go Over to the Germans? The Case of Defectors to the Wehrmacht's 296 Infantry Division, 1942-1943," *Ukrains'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal,* no. 5 (2019): 69-85, http://hdl.handle.net.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/11343/238859.
[52] The SS was the branch of the army directly connected to the Nazi party and the Galicia Division included defectors from the Galicia region in Eastern Europe, a geographical region in modern-day Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine.

committed by the members of this unit.[53] In this piece, Shkandrij points out that: "Therefore, although as a unit the Division was formally cleared of participation in war crimes, the biographies of several individuals who were absorbed into the force after serving elsewhere indicate criminal behaviour."[54]

Other historians have, in turn, moved away from the purely militaristic side of the war and showed how local populations collaborated with the Nazis. The most famous of these studies is certainly Jan Tomasz Gross' *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Through his research, Gross showed the extent to which Polish civilians, in hopes of self-advancement, readily participated in the destruction of the Jewish population in Europe. [55]

The second branch of this 'collaboration historiography' includes those who remained focused on the Germans and the German army itself. Following in Browning's footsteps and creating, to an extent, a 'Browning tradition', the goal underpinning their research remained similar to that of *Ordinary Men*'s: to show the extent to which the Wehrmacht was complicit in war crimes both against soldiers and civilians. In 2004, Ben Shepherd published his now well-known study *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans.* In this book, Shepherd showed how Germany's widespread racist mentality toward inhabitants of the Eastern Front, as much as Hitler's own policies of annihilation in the East, were used to justify the brutal treatment

[53] Myroslav Shkandrij, *In the Maelstrom: The Waffen-SS 'Galicia' Division and Its Legacy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023). See also for a study on Soviet collaboration: Boris Kovalev, "Nazi Collaborators in the Soviet Union during and after World War II," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, Vol 17, No. 2 (1998), 43-47, http://www.jstor.org/stable/45411389. For a global study on defection from the USSR to the Germans, including defection after the war, see Erik Scott, *Defectors: How the Illicit Flight of Soviet Citizens Built the Borders of the Cold War World* (Oxford University Press, 2023).
[54] Shkandrij, *In the Maelstrom: The Waffen-SS 'Galicia' Division and Its Legacy,* 287.
[55] Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town called Buczacz* (Simon & Schuster, 2018) and Jan Tomasz Gross, *Golden Harvest* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

of local populations and partisans in occupied territories.[56] Shepherd would later publish a second monograph on the German army, *Hitler's Soldiers: The German Army in the Third Reich,* which offered a military perspective on how and why the Wehrmacht dealt with and reacted to the initial victories of the Reich and how the reactions and attitudes of soldiers changed as the tide of the war changed.[57]

Attempting, then, to focus on the soldier's 'mentalité,' Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer published in 2011 their book, *Soldiers: German POWs on Fighting, Killing, and Dying*. It showed, via a series of recorded and transcribed interrogations and conversations of German soldiers taken in POW camps, the casualness with which they admitted to participation in war crimes.[58] Similarly, one year later Felix Römer published *Comrades: The Wehrmacht from Within.* He, in turn, used conversations between German soldiers that were recorded by American intelligence when these men were interned and interrogated in the American POW camp Fort Hunt near Washington.[59] His study adds an additional layer to what Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer had already shown, which was the extent to which 'ordinary' German soldiers had participated in war crimes and believed their actions to be justified.

In 2014, Jeff Rutherford argued in *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: The German Infantry's War, 1941-44* that German soldiers justified their actions on the Eastern Front through a heavily Prussian doctrine of military necessity by which the need for victory justified

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[56] Ben E. Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Harvard University Press, 2004). For a study offering the partisans' perspective, see Alexander Hill, *The War Behind the Front: The Soviet Partisan Movement in North-West Russia 1941-44* (Frank Cass, 2005).
[57] Ben E. Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers: The German Army in the Third Reich* (Yale University Press, 2016). Again, for the opposite view from the Red Army, see Alexander Hill, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[58] Sönke Neitzel & Harald Welzer, *Soldiers: German POWs on Fighting, Killing, and Dying*, trans. Jefferson Chase (Vintage Books, 2013).
[59] Felix Römer, *Comrades: The Wehrmacht from Within*, trans. Alex J. Kay (Oxford University Press, 2019).

any kind of actions required for victory.[60] Then, in 2021, Bastiaan Willems showed how German soldiers, once they were forced to retreat from the Soviet Union, inflicted violent atrocities on their own population in Germany, arguing then that this violence was the result of the policies of barbarisation of warfare inflicted onto the Wehrmacht when it was sent by the Nazis to fight on the Eastern Front.[61]

In attacking and deconstructing the idea of the Wehrmacht's innocence in every possible way, the historiography left very little room for interpretation; the soldiers of the Wehrmacht were guilty and responsible for the war crimes on the Eastern Front but also for the Third Reich more broadly and questioning this narrative now makes little sense.[62] Yet, somehow, in their understandable quest to show how guilty the German army was, historians have neglected the question of whether some soldiers rejected this violence and defected to the Soviet Union, something which, as this project will show, was a possibility. Additionally, in looking at the German mentality to understand how soldiers justified their actions, historians have interpreted the sources in a very specific way, highlighting how the soldiers justified committing war crimes, omitting, however, any consideration of nuances or reflections that could indicate someone had a desire to defect. Though the following pages certainly do not serve as a counterargument to the previously established scholarship, we will now move away from assessing the Wehrmacht's responsibility for the violence in Eastern Europe. Instead, this essay will add to the historiography

[60] Jeff Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: The German Infantry's War, 1941-44* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[61] Bastiaan Willems, *Violence in Defeat: The Wehrmacht on German Soil, 1944-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[62] In 2021 David Harrisville published *The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-44,* in which he showed how German soldiers justified their actions on the Eastern Front both during and after the war and how this justification was framed within a broadly accepted narrative that German soldiers had clean hands. Refer to this study for a good historical deconstruction of the narrative and how it emerged following the war. See his *Making a Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944* (Cornell University Press, 2021).

by showing that, among all the horrors of warfare, German soldiers were offered an alternative – one created by Soviet propagandists. Let us now turn, then, to this story, one in which pieces of paper that tried to convince German soldiers to give themselves up fell from the sky.

## *Chapter 1 – Enough with the War! Creating a Divide Between the Nazis and the Wehrmacht*

*Leave Hitler and his clique! Hitler is not Germany! The Hitlers come and go, but Germany remains![63]*

*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten, Nr. 06(50), February 1943.*

In most cases, convincing a soldier to defect in times of war requires two fundamental steps. First, the state trying to incite defection must convince the soldier that his connection to the state to which he currently belongs does not correspond to his value system or, perhaps more importantly, that it impacts his, or his family's, odds of survival to a greater extent than defection would. In other words, what we might call the 'receiving state' must ostracize or alienate the 'defector to be' from his home government and incite defection, something which we have previously called a form of class struggle specific to warfare. The receiving state does so in tandem with step two, which is to convince the defector that it, i.e., the 'receiving state,' will improve his or his family's chances of survival and/or standard of living, or that its overall war aims correspond better with his moral principles or aspirations for the future. Both steps can occur simultaneously rather than in sequence, but for the sake of analysis let us isolate step one and see how the propagandists employed by the Soviet government believed they could convince German soldiers that there was a fundamental and unbridgeable gap or contradiction between their material conditions and aims and those of the Nazi regime.

[63] Leaflet No.06 (50), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00019. http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b47q4x.

In the leaflet shown in Figure 3, at the bottom of the text on the left where it is captioned 'What happened at Stalingrad?' the passage concludes with these words: "Leave Hitler and his clique! Hitler is not Germany! The Hitlers come and go, but Germany remains!"[64] Nowhere in the 'Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten' leaflets was the primary goal of separating Wehrmacht soldiers from the Nazi apparatus expressed more clearly. In putting these exact words on paper, the Soviets made their message to readers clear: there existed a distinct difference between the German people, *das Volk*, and the Nazis, and such difference meant that soldiers were sacrificing their lives pointlessly for a conflict they had no stake in. Simply claiming that this difference existed, however, would not suffice in convincing German soldiers to lay down their weapons. Combining what can only be described as a series of reproaches against the Nazi state, the Soviets hoped that in enumerating multiple potential grievances and points of attack that German soldiers *should have* against their political leaders, one of them would eventually prove to be a tipping point for soldiers who picked up the leaflets.

As will become evident, these motives did not follow a strictly linear or temporal progression, i.e., the Soviets reused similar themes or accusations throughout the war. In this regard, I will often cover themes or grievances mentioned by Soviets by using leaflets from different times in the war, sometimes coming months apart or sometimes even having already been mentioned in a similar leaflet a few months prior. Soviet authorities were certainly aware that German soldiers would not have read every single leaflet and thus crammed as much information as possible into each one. Similarly, soldiers might come across a leaflet that had been produced a year before the moment when they picked it up or, given troop movements and the fact that leaflets

[64] Leaflet No.06 (50), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00019, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b47q4x.

may not have been distributed equally over the entire front, a soldier might have read a leaflet from 1943 before he ever read one from 1942. The chaotic reality of the Eastern Front explains why in this essay, the different arguments used by the Soviets will be shown using the leaflets as a collection, i.e., as though they were one whole, though still produced of course at different points during the war. Though the war's evolution and the different battles won by the Soviets certainly gave them additional ammunition to convince the Germans to surrender, the overall goal to create a rift between the Wehrmacht and the Nazis remained.

As the next pages will show, breaking the relationship between members of the Wehrmacht and their home government proved to be a long and continuous process where Soviet propagandists recognized early on that it would require a persistent effort on their behalf to prove to and convince German soldiers that, first, they were not responsible for the war but were in fact victims of it, that is that Wehrmacht members were not at the front willingly, and that they were fighting not for themselves but rather for Hitler's ambitions; and, secondly, that this fight was, in turn, creating conditions unfavourable to the German soldiers' or the soldiers' families' long-term survival. The latter had to be unfavourable enough, of course, to incite soldiers to lay down their weapons and surrender to the Soviets.

In a leaflet from March 1943, for instance, after the German failure at Stalingrad, German soldiers could read the following claim: "Who is to blame for the sad fate of these men? Who is to blame for the fact that, in the last three months alone, 700 000 German soldiers and officers found their end in the snow-covered Russian plains? The culprit is Hitler, who is the one who started this crazy adventure who has thrown millions of lives into the maelstrom of war."[65]

[65] Leaflet No.07 (51), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00020, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4410k.

Responsibility for all aspects of the war was pinned completely on Hitler and any sense that the members of the Wehrmacht might have been to blame for conditions or the nature of fighting on the Eastern Front was only ever assigned when Soviet propaganda suggested that it was the result of soldiers not laying down their weapons.[66] To that effect, in a leaflet from November 1942, a German soldier was shown pointing at what were presumably civilians who had been hanged as well as dead bodies. In the hope of convincing soldiers that surrender meant keeping their hands clean of such Nazi crimes, the leaflet told soldiers that one of their fellow comrades had come to this exact realization while in Soviet captivity: "'I do not want to take responsibility for this. The murderer Hitler and his accomplies are responsible for these misdoings. I have broken away from them and given myself up,' says the prisoner of war Alois IGL."[67]

More to the point, the Soviets hoped that German combatants would eventually believe that they too were victims of Hitler's crimes and ambitious plans for conquest. Hence, the back of a leaflet from October 1943 asked the German soldiers to think about what they were fighting for in the war. In a call to arms, or in this case in a call to lay down their arms, the Germans could read the following bit of text: "For the crimes committed by Hitler and his clique against the German people, may they finally receive the punishment they deserve."[68] The image painted by the leaflets was one in which the war was an attack on the German people themselves and suggested that Wehrmacht soldiers were victims of Hitler's expansionist ambitions.

[66]We should emphasize here that the Soviets did not have to be truthful when it came to the contents of the leaflets; nor was it necessary for the creators to believe the claims they made.
[67] Leaflet No.27, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten"* (November 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00014, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4nx1k.
[68] Leaflet No.26(70), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (October 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00037, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4mt30.



## Was ist vor Stalingrad geschehen?

**Deutsche Männer und Frauen!**

Am 2. Februar d. J. hat die Rote Armee die Vernichtung der bereits am 23. November 1942 bei Stalingrad eingeschlossenen 330 000 Mann starken Gruppierung der deutschen Truppen endgültig abgeschlossen.

Da die Lage der eingekesselten deutschen Truppen aussichtslos geworden war, stellte das Sowjetkommando am 8. Januar — um unnützes Blutvergießen zu vermeiden — dem Oberbefehlshaber der deutschen Truppen, Generalfeldmarschall Paulus, das Ultimatum: die Waffen zu strecken und dadurch vielen zehntausenden deutschen Soldaten das Leben zu erhalten. Das Kommando der Sowjettruppen garantierte den Gefangenen **völlige Sicherheit, die ärztliche Behandlung der Verwundeten und Kranken und nach Kriegsende die Rückreise nach Deutschland oder in ein beliebiges anderes Land, je nach Wunsch des Gefangenen.**

Generalfeldmarschall Paulus lehnte dieses Angebot des Sowjetkommandos ab.

So gingen die Truppen der Roten Armee am 10. Januar zum Generalangriff über. Die Folge davon war, daß **die eingekesselte 6. Armee und die 4. Panzerarmee der Deutschen seit dem 2. Februar nicht mehr existieren.**

**Völlig vernichtet wurden:** das 11. Armeekorps, das 8. Armeekorps, das 14. Panzerkorps, das 51. Armeekorps, das 4. Armeekorps und das 48. Panzerkorps, bestehend aus 22 Divisionen — der 44., 71., 76., 79., 94., 100. (leichten), 113., 376., 295., 297., 305., 371., 384. und 389. Infanteriedivision; der 3., 29. und 60. mot. Division; der 14., 16. und 24. Panzerdivision der Deutschen; der 1. Kavallerie- und 20. Infanteriedivision der Rumänen sowie vielen anderen Verstärkungstruppen.

Von den 330 000 deutschen Soldaten und Offizieren, die bei Stalingrad eingekesselt waren, sind **mehr als 240 000 gefallen.**

Eine gewaltige Menge von Waffen und Kriegsmaterial wurde erbeutet, darunter allein **750** Flugzeuge, **1550** Panzer und **6700** Geschütze.

**Deutsche!** Denkt darüber nach, wem zuliebe Hitler und seine Clique 240 000 Eurer Söhne, Männer und Brüder bei Stalingrad dem Tode geweiht haben.

**Von 330 000 Soldaten und Offizieren haben sich nur 91000 gerettet, indem sie sich gefangengegeben haben. Unter ihnen sind 24 Generäle, 100 Obersten und mehr als 2500 andere Offiziere.**

Die eingekesselten Generäle **zogen die russische Gefangenschaft dem Tode vor. Gefangengenommen wurden folgende Generäle:** 1. Generalfeldmarschall **PAULUS,** befehligte die gesamte deutsche Heeresgruppe vor Stalingrad; 2. Generalleutnant **SCHMIDT,** Stabschef dieser Heeresgruppe; 3. Generaloberst **STRECKER,** Kommandeur des 11. Armeekorps, befehligte die deutsche Heeresgruppe nördlich von Stalingrad; 4. Generaloberst Walter **HEITZ,** Kommandeur des 8. Armeekorps; 5. Generalleutnant **SCHLEMMER,** Kommandeur des 14. Panzerkorps; 6. Generalleutnant **SEIDLITZ,** Kommandeur des 51. Armeekorps; 7. Generalleutnant der Artillerie **PFEFFER,** Kommandeur des 4. Armeekorps; 8. Generalmajor **RASKE,** befehligte die deutsche Heeresgruppe westlich der Stadtmitte von Stalingrad; 9. Generalleutnant **v. RODENBURG,** Kommandeur der 76. I. D.; 10. Generalleutnant **SAHME,** Kommandeur der 100. (leichten) I. D.; 11. Generalleutnant **LEISER,** Kommandeur der 29. mot. I. D.; 12. Generalleutnant **KORFES,** Kommandeur der 295. I. D.; 13. Generalleutnant **v. DANIELS,** Kommandeur der 376. I. D.; 14. Generalleutnant **DUBOIS,** Kommandeur der 44. I. D.; 15. Generalleutnant Sixt **v. ARNIM,** Kommandeur der 113. I. D.; 16. Generalleutnant **v. LENSKI,** Kommandeur der 24. Panzerdivision; 17. Generalmajor Moritz **v. DREBBER,** Kommandeur der 297. I. D.; 18. Generalmajor **WOLF,** Artilleriechef des 4. Armeekorps; 19. Generalmajor **ULRICH,** Artilleriechef des 51. Armeekorps; 20. Generalmajor Martin **LATMANN,** Kommandeur der 389. I. D.; 21. Generalleutnant Otto **RIHOLDI,** Chef des Sanitätsdienstes der 6. Armee; 22. Generalmajor **MAGNUS;** 23. Brigadegeneral **DIMITRIU,** Kommandeur der rumänischen 20. I. D., und 24. General **BRATESCU,** Kommandeur der rumänischen 1. Kavalleriedivision.

Die Offensive der Roten Armee geht auch an den anderen Frontabschnitten weiter erfolgreich vor sich. An der Mittelfront haben die Truppen der Roten Armee die stark befestigten Stellungen der Deutschen durchbrochen und die Städte **Rshew, Gshatsk** und **Wjasma** genommen, die seit 1941 in deutscher Hand waren. Die deutsche **„Festung Demjansk"** existiert nicht mehr.

**Die Rote Armee hat die Blockade Leningrads durchbrochen.**

Auch die Gebietshauptstadt **Kursk,** die die Deutschen 1941 besetzt hatten, wurde von der Roten Armee wiedergenommen.

Die ganze **östliche Küste des Asowschen Meeres** und fast der ganze **Kaukasus** sind feindfrei.

**Rostow a./Don, Schachty, Nowotscherkassk** und viele andere Städte sind von den deutschen Eindringlingen gesäubert.

**Deutsche Männer und Frauen!** Mag die Hitlerarmee heute noch einzelne Teilerfolge in der Ukraine erringen — **Hitlers Sache ist verloren!** Die Generäle und hohen Offiziere, die sich bei Stalingrad gefangengaben, waren zu der Überzeugung gekommen, daß der Krieg für Hitler verloren ist. Deshalb haben sie sich gefangengegeben.

**Versagt Hitler die Unterstützung! Er führt Deutschland in die Katastrophe.**

**Verjagt Hitler und seine Clique! Hitler ist nicht Deutschland. Die Hitlers kommen und gehen, Deutschland bleibt.**

**Durchreuzt die totale Mobilmachung! Sie bringt dem deutschen Volk die totale Vernichtung!**

Ansehen und weitergeben!

**FRONT-ILLUSTRIERTE**

Nr. 6 (50) FÜR DEN DEUTSCHEN SOLDATEN Februar 1943

JETZT BEDROHT NICHTS MEHR IHR LEBEN!

In den letzten drei Monaten haben sich mehr als 300 000 Soldaten und Offiziere der Hitlerarmee den Russen gefangengegeben

GIBST DU DICH GEFANGEN, DANN KEHRST DU NACH DEM KRIEGE HEIM!

*Figure 3* - Leaflet No.06 (50), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (Februart 1943), pages 4 (back of leaflet, left) & 1 (cover of leaflet, right). Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See Item number: FRIL.00019, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b47q4x.

In the early stages of the war no other factor highlighting the disjuncture or contradictions between the Wehrmacht and the Nazis would ring truer than references to the soldiers' material hardships when confronted with the Russian climate. By the summer of 1942, a third of the initial German forces sent to the USSR were dead, with many more men severely wounded. The conditions they faced were unlike any previously experienced, since winter temperatures had reached, at their nadir, -50°C.[69] Wehrmacht members endured these conditions without proper

[69] Aleksandr Kuzminykh, "The Wehrmacht and the Russian Winter: The Impact of Climate at the Front and in Soviet Captivity," in Julia Herzberg, Andreas Renner, and Ingrid Schierle, *The Russian Cold: Histories of Ice, Frost, and Snow* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books), 189-190.

winter apparel and most of those who did not die frozen on the Russian steppes felt the lasting repercussions of frost bite and other cold-related injuries.

Very much aware of their enemies' suffering during the winter months, the Soviets emphasized both in visual and textual elements in the leaflets the horrifying fate German soldiers suffered by being sent to fight in the Russian cold. Blaming the Nazis for the lack of equipment provided to German soldiers, Soviet propagandists often gave German combatants a very specific choice: surrender or freeze to death. In a cartoon mocking the lack of winter equipment, a leaflet from January 1942, for example, showed a member of the Gestapo stealing Christmas stockings from children to send them to the front while the title read: "Soldiers! Even before Hitler and Goebbels provide you with warm clothes, you will all freeze to death."[70]

[70] Leaflet No.01, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (January 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00002, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b46x2x.




*Figure 4* - Leaflet No.01, "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (January 1942), page 4. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See Item number: FRIL.00002, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b46x2x.

The lack of winter clothing was of course blamed on Hitler and his clique – a trope that the leaflets mentioned on a recurrent basis as the war went on. In an issue from December 1941, for instance, soldiers could read the testimony from one of their own, Humbert Lorenz, who

supposedly said the following to Soviet authorities following his surrender: "I do not want to spill my or anyone else's blood anymore. I do not want to freeze and feed the lice anymore. I do not want to die for Hitler's glory. I want to live for myself and my family. Should Hitler be destroyed in 1942, it would be the happiest year for Germany."[71].

The emphasis on Nazi responsibility for the frozen debacle became a recurring theme during winter months. As shown in Figure 5, the back cover of this leaflet from February 1942 featured a cartoon (on the right) meant to antagonize German soldiers by depicting a Nazi official commandeering clothes from German civilians. The bag which the Nazi stuffed the clothes into had the inscription 'for soldiers' written across it, but in the next two panels the same Nazi was shown walking around the city with a woman wearing what were presumably the same clothes that he had taken, while the German soldier in the next panel was shown trying to stay warm with a newspaper wrapped around his shoulders. The text on the cartoon reads as follows: "Jackets, can be made, in the worst cases, out of several layers of newspaper paper (from an order from the General staff about winter clothing replacements for the troops)."[72]

So important was Germany's failure to properly equip the Wehrmacht with warm clothing that every year as winter approached, the leaflets reminded the soldiers of the suffering to come. In leaflet No.26, produced in October 1942, for example, soldiers could read at the top of the second page: "The fierce and snowy Russian winter is coming. See what awaits you if you keep fighting. Your only salvation is captivity."[73] Similarly, in September 1943 German soldiers could

[71] Leaflet No.12, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (December 1941), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00001, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4bm3f.
[72] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.
[73] Leaflet No.26, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (October 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00013, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sq58.

read a leaflet with the title: "The third winter war is at the doorstep," thereby reminding them of the initial catastrophe that had marked the first winter on the Eastern Front.[74]

More to the point, the Soviet propagandists' use of the cold as a deterrent also made reference to events that superseded the Second World War. Letting the past speak for itself, thrice, at the start of the war, the leaflets referred to Napoleon's great defeat in 1812 and directly connected it to the perils of winter. The Soviets combined pictures of famous paintings, such as Vasily Vereshchagin's 'Rest of the Grand Army,' which depicts Napoleon's troops freezing to death during the invasion of Russia, to more caricature-like representations of Napoleon like the one seen in Figure 5 where a Gestapo agent covers a bust of Napoleon with the word 'forbidden,' thereby suggesting that the history of Napoleon and his failures in Russia were not taught in German schools.[75] It seems, then, that Soviet authorities hoped that the current debacle Germany faced in the winter months, combined with historical examples of armies freezing on Russian steppes, would make soldiers think about their desire to fight. It did not matter, of course, that Napoleon's forces had been defeated some 130 years prior when Wehrmacht soldiers experienced similar conditions in the present. Rather, the images implied that Russia's cold had always and would continue to protect the country from foreign invaders.

[74] Leaflet No.25(69), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (September 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00036, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4rh7n.
[75] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.

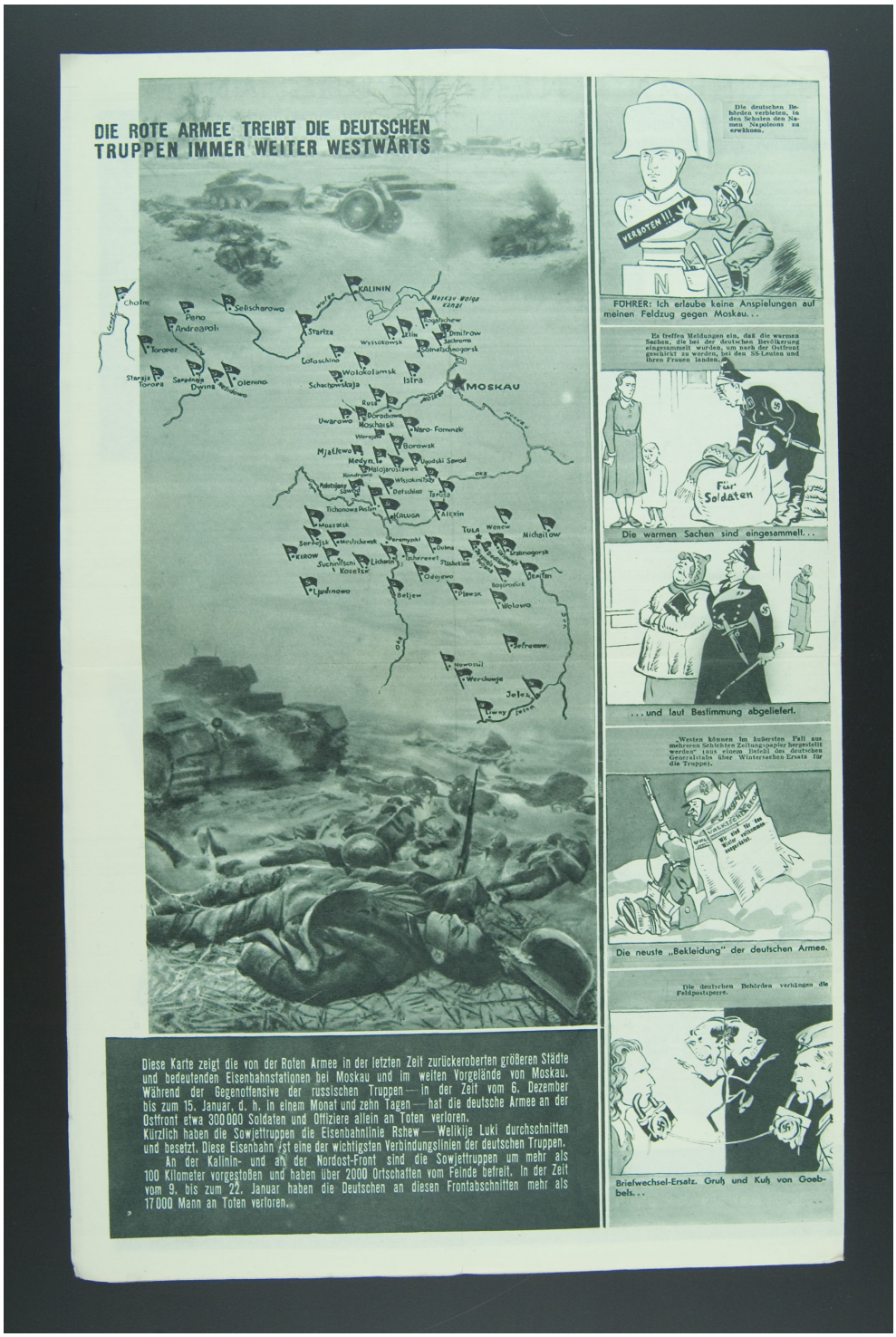



*Figure 5* - Leaflet No.03, "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (February 1942), page 4. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.

As the war progressed, and as leaflets kept falling from the sky, Napoleon would not be the only historical figure to make an appearance in Soviet leaflets. The cover of the leaflet shown at

the start of this essay includes a depiction of Otto von Bismarck, Germany's former chancellor and the individual who initially united Germany after the Franco-Prussian war. The title of said leaflet read: "We had no right and no motive to bring the German people closer to the heavy and unfruitful burdens of a Russian war."[76] Bismarck was pictured on the leaflets on at least two more occasions and with the same message every time. Emphasizing that Bismarck would not have wanted a two-front war or a war against Russia, the leaflets tried to convince soldiers that their great leaders of the past would have disagreed with Germany's Nazi leaders. In other words, the old social order, the old Germany, was undermining the decisions of the current Nazi rulers. Former Prussian Field Marshall Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke was similarly pictured on the cover of a different leaflet, though still with the same message warning Germany and the Wehrmacht against a war in Russia.[77] According to the leaflets, Europe's history, but also Germany's specifically, contained cautionary tales that warned Germans against the dangers of the Nazi invasion of the USSR.

More to that point, on the cover of the leaflet No.28, produced in November 1942, former air fighter lieutenant Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel was pictured holding a leaflet with a portrait of Bismarck pointing at Hitler and exclaiming that Hitler was bringing Germany to destruction.[78] In a bizarre turn of event that would turn out to play into the Soviets' hands, Einsiedel was revealed to be none other than Bismarck's great-grandson. On the second page of the leaflet Einsiedel's rejection of Germany's war against the Soviets was said to echo through the generations. Speaking for his great-grandfather, Soviet authorities claimed in this leaflet that Einsiedel had said the

[76] Leaflet No.07, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00007, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4k68c.
[77] Leaflet No.12, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (May 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00012, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4xd5d.
[78] Leaflet No.28, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (November 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00015, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4rq5z.

following about the war to Soviet authorities during his time in captivity: "A war between Germany and Russia is nonsensical and hopeless. This is what my great-grandfather Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck said, and every frontline soldier is becoming convinced of this fact every day."[79] Through his family and descendants, the Soviets now had the sanction of Bismarck himself to reject Germany's invasion of the USSR. The truth of whether Einsiedel actually uttered those words to his captors is impossible to confirm, though it would not be so surprising given that Einsiedel eventually became a left-wing politician in Germany after the war and his time in Soviet captivity ended. Still, more important perhaps is the fact that Soviet propagandists believed such images and remarks could convince men serving in the Wehrmacht to surrender by appealing to their appreciation for the man who was (A), one of their most well-respected political leaders, and (B), the person who, in unifying Germany, had been a symbol of German nationalism for decades.

Indeed, the appearances of Moltke and Bismarck were not limited to warnings from the past. In fact, there were two fundamental reasons for using former German military leaders in the leaflets. First, it is clear that the Soviet authorities continued to recognize the Wehrmacht's institutionalized respect for its military structure, hierarchy, and history. In fact, across the leaflets, the words 'Soldaten und Offiziere" or "soldiers and officers," were used distinctively, rather than just 'Soldaten,' in a general sense, which suggests that there were two different categories of members of the Wehrmacht. Officers were also told, as we will see, that they would receive better and superior treatment in Soviet captivity if they surrendered. Still, Bismarck's image emphasized how the German army as an institution was not fundamentally Nazi and had roots that predated its existence.

[79] Leaflet No.28, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (November 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00015, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4rq5z.

Secondly, the Soviets wisely recognized that to break the connections between the German soldiers and the Nazis they would have to appeal to some form of German nationalism that presented Hitler and the Nazis as threats to Germany and its interests rather than the country's protector as Bismarck might have been in the past. Embodied best by Bismarck himself, both of these elements, i.e., the respect for the military as an institution and a strong sense of German nationalism, became crucial factors, at least so the Soviets thought, in opening a chasm between the soldiers at the front and the Nazi leadership at the rear. Indeed, the combination of these two ideas created an 'imagined community' to which only the German soldiers (and their families) belonged, and which did not have room for the contradicting interests of the Nazi apparatus. Both elements, in fact, were recurring themes in the leaflets and thus require an in-depth exploration.

From the start of the war and as evidenced by the leaflets themselves, Soviet authorities recognized the importance the Wehrmacht accorded to its strong Prussian-inspired military legacy and hierarchy, something which, as previously mentioned, is what Jeff Rutherford has argued was why German soldiers kept fighting on the Eastern Front even when faced with increasingly bad conditions and slimmer odds for survival.[80] Thus, separating the Wehrmacht soldiers from the Nazis *did not* mean attacking the Wehrmacht as an institution. Nor was it deemed necessary to question established military hierarchies at every turn. On occasion, the Soviets relied on testimonies from high-ranking officers to try to convince German soldiers to give themselves up and become prisoners of war. In addition, the Soviets frequently underscored that the military actions taken by the Nazis were often against the better judgement of high-ranking Wehrmacht officers.

[80] Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: The German Infantry's War, 1941-44.*

As early as February 1942, German soldiers could come across leaflets depicting this disconnect between what the Nazis were trying to achieve in the East and what the German military leadership believed was reasonable. In the February leaflet shown in Figure 6, which was the cover of the leaflet shown in Figure 5, Himmler was depicted in a cartoon holding a hammer with the word 'the stroke' written across it while Nazi officials were seen carrying away German generals in the background. The caption at the bottom of the leaflet told soldiers how Himmler explained the mental and physical collapse of German generals to Hitler: "My Fuhrer, I obediently report, Reichenau has suffered from a stroke. Brauchtisch underwent an operation. Guderian is suffering from pneumonia. List is also in treatment. The rest are under my observation."[81] Soldiers reading between the lines could see how the Soviets were suggesting that any failure endured by the Wehrmacht at the front had been the result of poor Nazi military management. The title of the leaflet, "Epidemic in the German General Staff," suggested that Himmler, with his stroke-giving hammer, was causing military leaders to become ill or incapacitated.[82] The German General Staff, which had originally been called the Prussian General Staff and which had been headed by Moltke decades earlier, was in charge of studying all aspects of war and military strategies. This institution, whose members had long been the pride of the German and Prussian forces, was evidently, at least according to the Soviet propaganda machine, seeing its leading lights suffer from illnesses and strokes because of their interactions with Nazi rulers. [83]

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[81] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.

[82] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.

[83] In the list above, Reichenau was a Field Marshall who actually suffered a stroke 1942, which the Soviets cleverly portrayed as being because of the stress he would have endured dealing with Himmler. Brauchtisch in turn had been the Commander in Chief of the Army before Hitler appointed himself in December of 1941. For most of his time in his position within the German military apparatus, he had been engaged in constant disagreement with Himmler and his will to insert members of the Schutzstaffel in different positions in the army. Guderian was German general in and pioneer of the Panzer divisions and the Blitzkrieg. In 1944, he became the head of the OKH. Finally, Wilhelm List




*Figure 6* - Leaflet No.03, “Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten” (February 1942), page 1. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.

was a German Field Marshall who played a major role in the initial invasion of Poland and who was famously tried and convicted by the Americans for his role in German war crimes. As the cartoon argued, all of these military leaders would have become sick because they had to deal with the mismanagement of the army by the Nazis, most notably in this case because they had to deal with Himmler. It did not matter that most of these high-ranking officers were in fact strong proponents of Nazi ideology and had been, in many cases, instrumental in the Nazis’ rise to power. For the Soviets, the only thing that mattered was to convince the soldiers that the mishandling of the army, which according to the leaflets was caused by the competing forces within the German military apparatus (and it probably was), was causing German soldiers to suffer and die pointlessly at the front.

The leaflet shown in Figures 5 and 6, however, was produced less than a year after the invasion of the USSR at a time when the Wehrmacht, even with the winter disaster the previous year, very much still had the upper hand against the Red Army. The true impact of the divergence between the realities at the front and what the Nazis expected of their armies would be felt most importantly a year later when the Wehrmacht suffered its most important defeat against the Red Army at Stalingrad. Thus, before February 1943 the leaflets frequently emphasized how the mismanagement of the front by Nazi high command often came at the expense of immense losses in materiel. In the back of a May 1942 leaflet, for instance, the Soviets showed German soldiers how month after month the Nazis were pointlessly sending thousands of pieces of equipment to the front such as tanks, artillery weapons and ammunition, only for them to be eventually destroyed or captured by the Red Army.[84] The claims about the destruction of materiel, combined with the soldiers' lack of adequate equipment to survive the previous winter and pictures of Nazis living comfortably back in Germany, would have hit a specific and only recently recovered nerve, given that at this point of the war soldiers still remembered how their comrades-in-arms had frozen to death a few months prior because the Nazis had failed to give them proper equipment.

At the turn of the year, however, the defeat at Stalingrad now allowed Soviet authorities to provide German soldiers with a clear example of a Nazi military debacle. Embodying the image of such a failure, Stalingrad became a turning point in how German soldiers both viewed and lived on the Eastern Front. Showing the extent of the destruction the German army had suffered, both in personnel and in equipment, the leaflets further went on to argue that Stalingrad triggered the rejection of Nazi war aims in the East on the part of high-ranking Wehrmacht officials. In leaflet

[84] Leaflet No.10, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (May 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00010, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b45x17.

number 11, produced and distributed in April of 1943, soldiers could read the following claim by Soviet authorities: "In 140 days of the winter campaign, from November 10, 1942, to March 31, 1943, Red army troops have cleansed of German troops 480 000 square kilometer of Soviet land."[85] In the following pages of this same leaflet, German troops were then told that during the Winter offensive that led to Germany's defeat at Stalingrad, Germany had suffered daily losses 145 anti-tank weapons, over 100,000 artillery shells and other munitions, 66 tanks, and perhaps, more strinkingly, some 6072 soldiers.[86]

These unprecedented losses, in conquered territory and both materiel and human lives, were said to have motiviated hundreds of German officers and military leaders to give themselves up. On the back of the same leaflet, a picture of General Field Marshal Paulus was shown with the following caption next to him: "Convinced that the war against the Soviet Union was hopeless, 33 generals surrendered in the winter of 42/43 (22 Germans, 6 Romanians, 3 Italians, and 2 Hungarians) as well as over 100 colonels and thousands of officers have surrendered to the Soviet Union. Soldiers, now you see that even your generals and high-ranking officers are surrendering. Follow their example."[87] More to the point, the second page of the issue from December 1942 showed in bold: "70,000 German and Romanian soldiers and officers have surrendered. 70,000 of your comrades are living witness that Stalin's command Nr. 55 is strictly enforced. This command guaranties that German soldiers and officers, who have laid down their arms, will live and be treated properly."[88]

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[85] Leaflet No.11 (55), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00024, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b46q50.
[86] Leaflet No.11 (55), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00024, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b46q50.
[87] Leaflet No.11 (55), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00024, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b46q50.
[88] Leaflet No.30, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (December 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00017, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4h68r.

The surrenders of German military leaders at Stalingrad then allowed the Soviet propaganda machine to portray these men as bearers of reason in times of senseless resistance. Indeed, while the military defeats themselves were used to convince soldiers of the Nazis' inadequacy when it came to protecting their soldiers from unnecessary danger and losses at the front, the Soviets hoped to convince German soldiers that the surrender of their officers and military leaders proved that they, i.e., the German officers, were acting out of a sense of a duty to ensure the safety of their men when confronted by unreasonable demands from Hitler and other Nazi officials to keep on fighting. Such a suggestion further allowed the Soviets to show how the ambitions and overall goals of the Nazis did not correspond to those of the Wehrmacht entirely. As such, the officer's duty might, in this case, include allowing them to surrender to the Red Army.

Indeed, even before Stalingrad, Soviet propagandists went so far as to tell soldiers that a true German officer who cared about his troops was one who surrendered with his soldiers when or if resistance became pointless. The cover of leaflet No. 26, from October 1942, simply stated that if their officers were stopping them from surrendering, German soldiers should recognize their mishandling of the troops and kill them.[89] Indeed, an officer who did not know when to surrender was more Nazi than Wehrmacht, and the Soviets went to great lengths to show German soldiers how the Nazis and everything or everyone associated with the Party was responsible for and literally embodied Germany's failures in the East.

The leaflets further emphasized how the Nazis, when faced with the gruesome realities of warfare, which of course they had themselves created, also behaved cowardly at the front. Almost a year before the defeat at Stalingrad, a cartoon on the back of a leaflet from May 1942 depicted

[89] Leaflet No.26, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (October 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00013, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sq58.

Hubert-Erwin Meierdrees, an SS-officer from the 3rd Totenkopf Division, running away from the front, leaving his soldiers behind. The description included in the cartoon claimed the following: "He left his soldiers behind. This is what the bravery of the SS officers, much praised by the Nazis, looked like."[90] As such, the message sent to soldiers through these leaflets was clear: surrendering to the enemy was not cowardice, but running away from the front and leaving your men to die, which according to Soviets became the mark of Nazi officials, certainly was. This narrative reiterated the Soviets' overall main purpose, which was to convince soldiers that they would not be betraying their homeland if they defected to the USSR. Those wearing the swastika, however, certainly were.

Even so, if military failures did not convince German soldiers of their government's inadequacy, the Soviets hoped that a strong sense of German nationalism and desire to protect their homeland, one which did not have room for Nazi ambitions, might become the necessary tipping point. Indeed, part of the strategy developed by the Soviet propaganda machine was to evoke a sense of nationalism in German soldiers that was incompatible in part with the Nazis' position as heads of the state, but even more so with their military endeavours. They did so in multiple ways, from threatening the annihilation of the entirety of the German people if the war continued, to appealing to the Germans' ethnographic and certainly racist nationalism by telling German soldiers about the alleged influx of foreign workers into Germany, which was cast as an invasion. The overall message, however, remained the same, and evoked the opening quotation from this chapter: Hitler was not Germany and, in fact, with Hitler, Germany was heading toward undeniable destruction, both literally and metaphorically.

[90] Leaflet No.12, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (May 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00012, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4xd5d.

Primarily, Soviet propagandists hoped to convince soldiers that the prolongation of Nazi rule meant a prolongation of the threat to their homeland. The leaflets recurringly blamed Hitler for what they called his 'adventurous endeavours' and told the German soldiers of the cost these adventures might have for the German people at home. In a leaflet from March 1942, for instance, the soldiers were presented with the story of the Schuster family, who because of Hitler's war saw at least three of their four sons die in the war: "Through the fault of the bloody adventurer Hitler, three Schuster brothers fell on the Front. We do not know where the fourth brother, Otto Schuster, is. But we know this for certain: if Otto Schuster is still alive and doesn't lay down his weapons, then the same loss awaits him. Mrs. Schuster will only embrace her last son if he surrenders."[91] Of utmost importance in this case was to show soldiers how Hitler's ambitions were indeed attacks on the German nation as a whole, but also more personally on individual families, in other words the basic unit that they were motivated to protect.

Still, convincing German soldiers that the Nazis endangered both their families and their homeland proved to be a tricky point to get across. While the war was being fought on foreign soil, as Hitler had promised it would be, German soldiers were wiser to fear the repercussions defection might have on their families at home rather than fear any kind of distant threat posed by Germany's enemies. As the Red Army started to win some key battles, however, and especially after Stalingrad, it became easier to threaten the Germans with the repercussions the war might have on their homeland. In the war's latter months and years, the leaflets increasingly emphasized this point. Pictures of bombed-out German cities, with promises of more to come, permeated the leaflets and showed the soldiers that now both their and their families' lives were being threatened

[91] Leaflet No.05, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00005, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4tm45.

by what was always phrased as Hitler's war of conquest.[92] In a leaflet from July 1943, the images showed the German leader with text saying: "Hitler remains silent because he has nothing to say. What can he talk about? … About how Germany itself has become a theater of war, how Essen, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, and dozens of other cities have been reduced to rubble and ashes."[93] The Germans were now forced to deal with the difficult reality that they themselves, in continuing to participate in the war, could potentially undermine their family's safety. The Red Army's and the British Army's destructive reply to Germany's war of annihilation now meant increasing possibilities of violence toward the local German populations.

As the Red Army began to advance westward, the leaflets became increasingly geared toward retribution. On the one hand, the leaflets suggest that the Soviets increasingly hoped the Germans would somehow overthrow Hitler. Especially after the failed assassination attempt, the leaflets took on a much more accusatory tone. In a massive 'we told you so,' the Soviets thought they might be able to convince soldiers that the actions taken against Hitler were proof of the military's and of the overall German people's rejection of Hitler's leadership.[94]

On the other hand, the leaflets, especially in the later months of 1944 but certainly also before, flaunted the USSR's military victories in the soldiers' faces, continuously reminding them that all they had had to do to prevent such destruction was to give themselves up. Yet, regardless of the Red Army's continuing advance, the leaflets never encouraged German soldiers to *join* the Red Army in their fight and continued instead to encourage soldiers to simply give themselves up.

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[92] See for example leaflet No.07 (51), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00020, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4410k.
[93] Leaflet No.17 (61), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00029, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4nt39.
[94] See for example Leaflet No.12 (85), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00051, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4n11m.

With the losses suffered by the Germans increasing, Nazi high command eventually issued a total mobilization order meant to mobilize all able-bodied men to the front, while German civilians were sent to the factories to contribute to the war effort. The Soviets were quick to realize that this total mobilization could, in turn, be used for propaganda purposes, specifically to convince soldiers that the risk they were taking now also fell onto members of their families who they had, until then at least, considered relatively safe from involvement on the front lines. In a leaflet from March 1943, soldiers were told that Nazis were now sending young teenagers and old men to the front to be slaughtered by the Red Army.[95] Aware that German soldiers would find it difficult to fight for the defense of their homeland if their entire family had been decimated, the Soviet propaganda machine made sure to tell soldiers that total mobilization meant the total destruction of the German people. As such, the leaflets suggested that Nazi ambitions came at the cost of the very existence of the German people.

[95] Leaflet No.08 (52), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00021, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b40683.




*Figure 7* - Leaflet No.08 (52), “Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten” (March 1943), pages 2-3. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00021, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b40683.

In the leaflet shown in Figure 7, the soldiers were asked: “What does total mobilization mean?”[96] On the left side of the composition, soldiers could see an image of an entire German family and the roles they had been assigned during the war. Every adult in the picture was shown as having either been mobilized to the front and died or had been sent to the factories to produce armaments. The children, in turn, were left at home with no one to supervise them, having become in many cases, orphans of the war. Hitler’s war, so it was argued, was dismantling the very foundation of German lives through the annihilation of families.

[96] Leaflet No.08 (52), “*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*” (March 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00021, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b40683.

In hopes of creating some sort of class-based resentment toward the Nazis, the Soviets told the soldiers on many occasions that the total mobilization of the German populace did not, in fact, actually extend to all able-bodied Germans. As has been emphasized throughout this essay, the Soviets hoped to show soldiers how the way of life they were sacrificing their lives to protect, while seeing their wives and elders sent to factories or relatives to the front, certainly was not theirs to benefit from. In a leaflet produced only a month after the one pictured above, German soldiers were presented with a striking contrast between their total mobilization and that of the Nazis.[97] In this leaflet, of which pages 2-3 are reproduced below in Figure 8, Goebbels was shown explaining to soldiers that in life there were what he called 'lucky mushrooms' (lucky devils) and 'unlucky birds.' The lucky mushrooms were the more well-off members of society, while the unlucky birds consisted of the rest of the German population, most of whom, as the Soviets rightly pointed out, were sacrificing their lives at the front or breaking their backs in armament factories.[98] The second page of the leaflet then described to soldiers the many ways in which these lucky mushrooms' lifestyles diverged from their own. Using a series of binarisms, the composition offered different comparisons between "him and you," with the 'him' representing the Nazi institution as a whole and the 'you' the rest of the German population who were not as well-off.

The Soviets clearly recognized that it would prove difficult to create class antagonism toward the Nazi apparatus by appealing to a clear definition of class differences, at least in the strict Marxist sense, given that most Germans knew that not every rich person in Germany at the time was a Nazi. Thus, what the Soviet propagandists did instead was argue that the Nazis were part of this group of well-off people, not the entire group per say, and that such a position meant

[97] Leaflet No.10 (54), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00023, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4bh7x.
[98] Leaflet No.10 (54), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), pages 1-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00023, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4bh7x.

that their children were not sent to the front, and their wives were not sent to factories. To prove this point, on the cover of the leaflet shown in Figure 8, Göring was pictured alongside his wife in fancy attire, attending some sort of notable event.[99] Similarly, in a leaflet from October 1943, the Soviets, rehashing the very same theme, asked the soldiers what purpose they were serving at the front. The answer they gave them was as follows: "Friedrich Krupp and Hermann Göring wanted to acquire new plants in Mariupol and Dnipropetrovsk, and you will pay for that with your blood."[100] The idea that Nazis were becoming wealthier and paid in German blood was undoubtably believed to be a strong deterrent for the continuation of the fighting. Indeed, as the leaflet seen in Figure 8 vividly demonstrated, while 'common' Germans were literally losing limbs, becoming orphans, or sending their wives to the factories, the Nazis were enjoying nice walks around their properties and boat rides on the lake.[101]

[99] Leaflet No.10 (54), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00023, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4bh7x.
[100] Leaflet No.26(70), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (October 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00037, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4mt30.
[101] There is an important gender element to consider here, though this essay can only do so briefly because of space restrictions and because it would be overwhelming for the reader if every single framework or approach were used to cover this topic. What is of concern to us is that throughout the leaflets the Soviets emphasized the typical gender roles of the 1940s in Germany whereas women should be protected rather than involved in warfare, whether it be at the front or in factories producing weapons. As such, I will leave further analysis on this topic to other historians who see fit the study collaboration and resistance on the Eastern Front through the lens of gender history.




*Figure 8* - Leaflet No.10 (54), "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (April 1943), pages 2-3. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00023, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4bh7x.

Still, the Soviets did not have to wait for the Red Army to achieve military victories or restrict their reprimand to class differences to attack German nationalism on the home front. Allied bombing and physical destruction certainly offered a strong deterrent, but the material shown in the leaflets suggests that the Soviets believed they could use key ideological aspects of German nationalism in the 1940s to convince the soldiers that their homeland was also under attack from non-military threats. Aware of the racialized rhetoric that had been part of the German *Zeitgeist* for some time and was certainly not restricted to the Nazis, though one which they certainly had solidified within the German population with their own propaganda, Soviet officials warned the soldiers about the increasing number of foreigners the Nazis were welcoming into Germany. On the cover of a leaflet from July 1943, shown in Figure 9, the title read as follows: "When the soldier

is at the front. 11 million foreigners now live in Germany, where Hitler drove and lured them, whereas millions of German men fall senselessly and pointlessly on the Eastern front."[102] Pictured on the leaflet were presumably a German woman lying in bed with someone who was described as a foreigner. [103] Then, the back of the leaflet, contained a picture purported to show a German woman with a letter she had sent to her husband at the front:

> You wrote to tell me to send you a new picture. I put it off and I wanted to make you happy - but one picture was always worse than the other. I just can't lie in front of the machine. With the life we lead, it's no wonder I look the way I do. Oh Heinz. It won't go on like this for long. I don't know what else to do. Heinz, my Heinz, isn't it finally over?[104]

This message was placed next to other images of German women replacing their husbands who were away at the front with foreigners who were available at home, suggesting that the longer soldiers stayed at the front, the more likely it was that their partners might reject them for a foreigner too.

These '*Ausländers'* were of course said to be part of the larger scheme by the Nazis to increase their own wealth. In other words, the rhetoric soon became that while the Nazis could not use 'regular' German civilians in factories because they were at the front, they were letting migrants into the homeland to replace the work force. These 'foreigners,' so it was said, now posed a threat to the very foundation of German society and undermined every aspect of the soldiers' lives before the war. The use of racialized rhetoric exemplified how the Soviets employed the Nazis' own ideologies against them, in the hopes that German soldiers might see the presence of

[102] Leaflet No.19 (63), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00031, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4d997.
[103]Leaflet No.19 (63), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00031, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4d997.
[104] Leaflet No.19 (63), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00031, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4d997.

foreigners in Germany as a failure of the Nazis to create what they had once promised the German people, i.e., a racially pure Germany.

Where the foreigner came from, however, did not matter insofar as the soldiers understood they were not from Germany. Though the Soviets often used Italians as the general referent for foreigners, they did so more often, as we will see briefly, to criticize Italy as an ally. It makes sense, however, that the Soviets did not make full use of the Germans' racial thinking, for within the non-sensical and arbitrary Nazi hierarchy of race, the Soviets would have found themselves at the bottom. It thus makes the use of racist nationalism an even more puzzling aspect of the Soviets' methods to convince the Germans of their government's inadequacy, considering that they themselves would have been victims of the racist ideology they were referring to and asking German soldiers to adopt. Indeed, in this particular case, it was as though the Soviets were suggesting that the Nazis really were not being Nazi enough. It seems that the Soviets justified using such rhetoric by emphasizing how they were not the ones invading Germany and by telling German soldiers that, if they were so concerned with racial purity, the first place they should be worried about was their own homes.




*Figure 9* - Leaflet No.10 (54), "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (July 1943), pages 4 (back of leaflet, left) & 1 (cover of leaflet, right). Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00031, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4d997.

Meanwhile and throughout most of the war, Germany's Italian allies were often ridiculed and used to embody the threat foreigners were said to pose to Germany. Soldiers were bombarded with satirical depictions of Italian soldiers failing to support Germany's war effort. On the back of the leaflet from April 1942, whose cover was shown in Figure 1 at the start of this essay, a cartoon titled "The adventures of your comrades in arms at the front and in the hinterland," depicted an Italian soldier running away from the front only to find himself in a German home in Berlin while the crippled German soldier returned home with a missing leg only to find his wife with a new

Italian infant.[105] The juxtaposition on the same leaflet of Bismarck and a satirical depiction of Italians entering Germany to have sex with German women certainly was no coincidence and spoke to the assumed broader acceptance within Germany of ideas concerning racial purity and superiority.

According to Soviet rhetoric the Nazi alliance with Mussolini had led to little more than Italian incursions into Germany and German families. Mussolini was depicted multiple times in cartoons that emphasized his lack of military success. When his government was eventually toppled, Soviet leaflets warned soldiers that Mussolini's fall only foreshadowed Hitler's. In a leaflet produced in August 1943, for example, images of the collapse of the fascist regime in Italy were showed to German soldiers with the following captions: "No more with Fascism, down with the war, is chanted through the streets of Milan, Turin, Genoa…Soon in the streets of Berlin, Munich, Köln, through all the German city streets and villages, there will be giant demonstrations with signs that read: Down with Hitler, down with the war."[106]

Soviet propagandists would then contrast the weakness of German allies to the strength of their own. On multiple occasions, the leaflets showed the massive amount of equipment that the USSR was receiving from its British and American allies through Lend-Lease. On the back of a leaflet from May 1943 for instance, pictures of the production of thousands of American planes were juxtaposed with images of the British Royal Air Force to show German soldiers how the military might of the British and eventually the United States threatened Germany from the

[105] Leaflet No.07, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00007, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4k68c.
[106] Leaflet No.23 (67), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (August 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00034, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b41111.

West.[107] The Atlantic Wall was completely ridiculed, and the Soviets continuously emphasized how Germany had joined forces with the wrong countries in this conflict.[108]

When Germany's allies eventually turned against them, the leaflets increasingly emphasised how the country was now left to defend itself on its own. On the cover of a leaflet from September 1944, an image of the three hands representing the Soviets, the British, and the Americans, were seen holding a pair of clamps around Germany. The image had the following message written next to it:

> The Allied troops have already advanced into German territory and have encircled Germany from all sides. Where are Hitler's allies from yesterday? Romania, Finland and Bulgaria have given up the disastrous game. What's more, Romania and Bulgaria have declared war on Germany, and Finland is disarming the German troops on its territory.[109]

The threats to German soldiers and their families now truly came from all sides and German weapons pointed toward the East could do very little to protect Germany against them.

To resume, as the war progressed, Soviet authorities continuously bombarded German soldiers with information that would hopefully turn them against the Nazi regime. Hoping that they could convince the Germans that their government had deceived them, the USSR presented soldiers with a flurry of arguments, assuming that at least one of them might prove to be decisive and lead their enemies to surrender to the USSR. The concepts of deception and lies remained ever present in leaflets throughout most of the war. Studying this stream of propaganda in general allows

[107] Leaflet No.12 (56), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (May 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00025, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b45t2k.
[108] See for example Leaflet No.17 (61), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00029, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4nt39.
[109] Leaflet No.15 (88), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (September 1944), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00054, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b47t3k.

us to see how both the Nazis and the Soviets were fighting to convince German soldiers that they were telling them the truth, while the other side was deceiving them.

Soviet propagandists, for their part, attempted to undermine the Nazis by showing members of the Wehrmacht how their Nazi leaders had been untruthful during the entire war. In a cartoon published in leaflet form in April 1942, Hitler was depicted talking to a soldier about a furlough. The text at the bottom of the cartoon read: "Early in the Summer Hitler promised Paul a furlough. In the Fall he waits for his furlough, still waits for his furlough in Winter, then finally gets it, forever, in death during the Spring."[110] The caption next to the cartoon then explained how Hitler, though he had promised a furlough to all of his soldiers who participated in the Winter offensive, never kept his word and that the only soldiers who got a furlough were the ones who were permanently removed from battle through death.[111]

Similarly, a leaflet from March 1942 included cartoons of Goebbels wrapping Germany up in lies with his tongue while German soldiers were depicted as blindly following Hitler into battle as he deceived them. Next to these images were claims that Hitler had been lying to the German soldiers from the start: "Germans! Throw off the blindfold!... Hitler is pushing you into the abyss."[112] And yet, as the cover of a leaflet from 1943 shows (Figure 10), Soviets authorities still had to convince German soldiers that the claims about the poor treatment they were apparently receiving in Soviet prisoner of war camps were part of this intricate web of lies woven by the Nazi State and that life in the camps was in fact something highly enviable. At the top right of the image,

[110] Leaflet No.09, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00009, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b49q4j.
[111] Leaflet No.09, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00009, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b49q4j.
[112] Leaflet No.05, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00005, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4tm45.

soldiers could read the following: “In this issue we show German soldiers in Russian wartime captivity. Look at this picture. What your propaganda tells you about Russian captivities are deliberate lies. Here, you will find out the truth.”[113]




*Figure 10* - Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), “Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten” (June 1943), page 1. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.

[113] Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), “*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*” (June 1943), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.

In the hope of successfully encouraging defection and surrender, the Soviets had to dedicate much of their effort to convincing German soldiers that they would benefit from such acts. As we will see in the next chapter, severing the connections of trust between the Nazis and the combatants from the Wehrmacht was only one of two necessary steps in enticing German soldiers to defect. As the members of the Wehrmacht picked up the leaflets and were told to turn their backs on their Nazi government, the Soviets still had to offer them an alternative. We now turn to the utopian way in which Soviet propagandists presented life in prisoner of war camps, places where apparently food and comfort existed in unending abundance.

## *Chapter 2 – Selling Utopia: The Solution to the Wehrmacht's Ills and the Reasons to Defect*

*You will be Full! ... Special provisions of the Soviet government regulate the nutrition of the prisoners of war. The camp serves hot meals three times a day. The prisoners of war are responsible for processing and distributing the food themselves….Don't be alarmed by hunger in Russia! The Soviet Union's food situation allows it to feed many millions more prisoners of war until the end of the war.*[114]

*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten, Nr. 15/16(59/60), June, 1943.*

According to historians Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer, during the USSR's war against the Third Reich, the great majority of Soviet citizens endured the effects, albeit at different levels, of food shortages that were significant enough to be described as a wartime famine. In fact, to quote them at length:

> The food crisis on the home front began to abate only toward the middle of 1944, as the ability of the Red Army to provision itself outside Soviet territory, together with Lend-Lease food aid from the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, made more food available to the civilian population inside the USSR… The problem was simple: given the loss of the agricultural and food-processing base in the occupied territories, the state did not have enough food to feed the Red Army, waged workers, and the urban population.[115]

As most of the USSR's rations went to the front to feed the Red Army, and even then as historian Brandon Schechter's work has shown did not do so in any abundance, there seems to be little evidence that German defectors would have been met with plentiful food supplies if and when they surrendered to the Soviets.[116] And yet, the leaflets showed images of abundant food and their contents were permeated by claims of soldiers being fed to their heart's content. Indeed, in one

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[114] Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (June 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.
[115] Donald A. Filtzer & Wendy Z. Goldman, *Fortress Dark & Stern: The Soviet Home Front during World War II* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 125.
[116] See Brandon Schechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II through Objects* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 79-103.

such leaflet soldiers were told that: "The prisoners of war receive a plentifully and tasty lunch."[117] As shown in a leaflet from June 1943 (Figure 11), the Soviets claimed that German prisoners of war could expect to receive daily rations composed of, among other things, 600 grams of bread or 650 grams for the 'working brigade,' 30 grams of meat, 50 grams of fish, 300 grams of potatoes, and 25 grams of butter. With all of these provisions, soldiers were told, as shown at the bottom right of the leaflet, that: "You will be full!"[118]

In turn, any 'rumours' the soldiers might have been told about the food situation within the Soviet Union were swiftly denied and instead replaced by claims that Soviet authorities had made special provisions for the German soldiers: "The Soviet Union's food situation allowed it to feed many millions more prisoners of war until the end of the war."[119] These assertions certainly did not have to be true, and there often were inexactitudes or inconsistencies in what the Soviets said that German soldiers could expect to receive in the camps. Indeed, while the above-mentioned leaflet promised 650 grams of bread to workers, another one from December 1942 in turn offered 700 grams. Similarly, though the leaflet shown in Figure 11 painted a picture where various foods were given in abundance, a leaflet from November 1942, produced half a year before the other one, claimed that: "A prisoner camp is obviously not a health resort, and the canteen is not a restaurant. The food here is simple, but abundant and filling."[120] Still, as with everything else that the Soviets were promising the German soldiers, the statements did not have to be true, as long as they were sufficiently enticing, and soldiers surrendered.

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[117] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.
[118] Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (June 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.
[119] Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (June 1943), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.
[120] Leaflet No.28, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (November 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00015, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4rq5z.

Undoubtedly, Soviet officials never prioritized the nutritional needs of Wehrmacht POWs. Rather, the promise of food represented one of many arguments, albeit based on what were obvious lies to readers of the leaflets today, that the Soviets were trying to employ to convince the German soldiers of the benefits of defection. Indeed, while the leaflets hoped to create a separation or a rift between the Wehrmacht and the Nazi apparatus on the home front, the Soviets simultaneously, as previously stated, offered the Germans a solution in hopes of convincing them that defection, that is willingly surrendering and entering the POW camps, represented their best chance at immediate survival. In other words, while Soviet propagandists were suggesting to the German soldiers that their government had abandoned them at the front and did not have their best interest in mind when sending them there, they also needed to show the men of the Wehrmacht that the Soviet state would protect those who stopped fighting for the rest of the war.

Abundant food was just one in a set of promises made by Soviet propaganda. It is crucial to remember that these promises or solutions were offered alongside images that emphasized the grievances many German soldiers had against the Nazi government. Leaflets often combined pictures of Nazi failures with positive pictures of the POW camps in hopes that the contrast would lead soldiers to believe that there was a clear and somewhat linear solution to their problems. It was not uncommon to see in the same leaflet photographs where soldiers were shown freezing and dying on the Russian steppes complete with captions blaming the Nazis for their deaths, and other images on subsequent pages featuring German soldiers thriving in Soviet captivity. Indeed, the leaflets over and over again reiterated the two options available to German soldiers: keep fighting and die or surrender and live. To give but one example, in a leaflet from July 1944, the caption on the back cover read: “Not one, not a dozen, but hundreds of thousands of your comrades have

made their choice – they dropped their weapons. You too must now decide what your salvation is: Free yourself from Hitler! Give yourself up!"[121]

With this in mind, the following chapter will outline how the Soviets aimed to convince the German soldiers that the solution to their difficulties at the front lay within the confines of the Soviet prisoner of war camps, where, as we have just seen, food was supposedly abundant, but more to the point, where soldiers spent their days comfortably taking walks around gardens, working, and partaking in just about any activity they would have been doing in Germany before the war. This chapter will demonstrate that via this utopian depiction of the prisoner of war camps, the Soviets were hoping the leaflets would convince the soldiers that POW camps recreated the best aspects of life in peacetime.

The POW camps were transformed into a real home away from home for soldiers who gave themselves up to the Red Army. They featured all kinds of services – from doctors to barbers to educational opportunities – that met the basic needs of their inhabitants. Moreover, soldiers were free to decide for themselves how they wished to spend their time. In other words, the Soviets suggested that surrender was a liberating and emancipatory act that was rewarded by the assurance that the former German combatants would have access to services far exceeding their basic needs. On another level, the depiction of life in the POW camps was also meant to remind German soldiers of what Germany without the Nazis had once looked like, and soldiers were told they could expect to rediscover a sense of normality in the camps. In addition, the idea that Germans were metaphorically returning to their normal lives, almost returning to Germany, by surrendering and entering the Soviet camps, further outlines how the Soviets were intended to convey the idea

[121] Leaflet No.11 (84), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1944), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00050, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4rt37.

that surrendering did not mean betraying Germany. Instead, the leaflets promised that soldiers who surrendered would be the first ones to return home after the war; but for now, the camps, as described in the propaganda leaflets, almost became a second home where soldiers could await their return to their homeland.




*Figure 11* - Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (June 1943), pages 2-3. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.

And yet, in order to be receptive to the idea that life in the prisoner of war camps was cozy enough to incite defection, soldiers had to be convinced, on a more fundamental level, that the Soviet state did not pose a threat to their lives. It is with this goal in mind that Soviet authorities produced, as early as 1942, leaflets telling German soldiers that the USSR would spare their lives

if they surrendered and that any claims that they would be shot if they gave themselves up were complete fabrications. In a leaflet from February 1942, (the one where Himmler was portrayed with his 'stroke' hammer on the cover), soldiers were told the following on the second page: "German soldier! Do not believe your officers. Your fairy tales about the Russians shooting prisoners of war are lies from A to Z."[122] In fact, the proper and adequate treatment of prisoners of war, so the members of the Wehrmacht were informed, had been promised by Stalin in an official order. Indeed, in a leaflet from March 1942, German soldiers could read what they were told was Stalin's official command vis-a-vis the treatment of surrendering soldiers:

> If German soldiers and officers surrender, the Red Army will take them prisoners and spare their lives. The Red Army destroys German soldiers and officers if they refuse to put down their weapons, and with their weapons in hand continue to subjugate our homeland. – From the command of J. Stalin, the People's Commissar for the Defense of the Soviet Union, from 23 February 1942.[123]

Meanwhile, in the leaflet from November 1942 where Bismarck's great-grandson made an appearance, he was said to have experienced first-hand the USSR's rigid compliance with international law: "The Russians strictly comply with international agreements on prisoners of war. Both officer prisoners of wars and I are given the opportunity to do whatever we want to do with our free time. We often walk in the grounds of the prisoner of war camps."[124]

On occasion, the same point - that the Soviet government did not hold any resentments against those who had fought against it and thus would not retaliate against surrendering soldiers – was conveyed via references to the well-known racialized rhetoric the Nazis used to

[122] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.
[123] Leaflet No.05, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00005, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4tm45.
[124] Leaflet No.28, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (November 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00015, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4rq5z.

justify attacking the Soviet Union. In these instances, the Soviets underscored that they did not hold such hateful views toward their German counterparts. On the cover of the leaflet shown in Figure 12, which was produced in March 1942, the soldiers were shown a folded piece of paper which supposedly contained a message from a group of German prisoners of war in the USSR, telling their fellow members of the Wehrmacht that: "The Red Army and the Russian people do not know racial hate and do not want to destroy the German people."[125] Instead, the soldiers were informed that German POWs would be treated with a dignity that even their own government was not granting them. This same message, so it was said, was signed by 16 soldiers and ended with the following appeal: "Only by a collective transition of German soldiers to the side of Red Army, can this senseless war end, against a people who have done nothing to us hate us or want to destroy us."[126] More to the point, a leaflet from July 1943 claimed literally that: "The Russian camp administration respects the honor of German Wehrmacht personnel and treats us politely, correctly and courteously. This is reflected in the fact that we wear our uniforms, rank insignia, medals and decorations."[127]

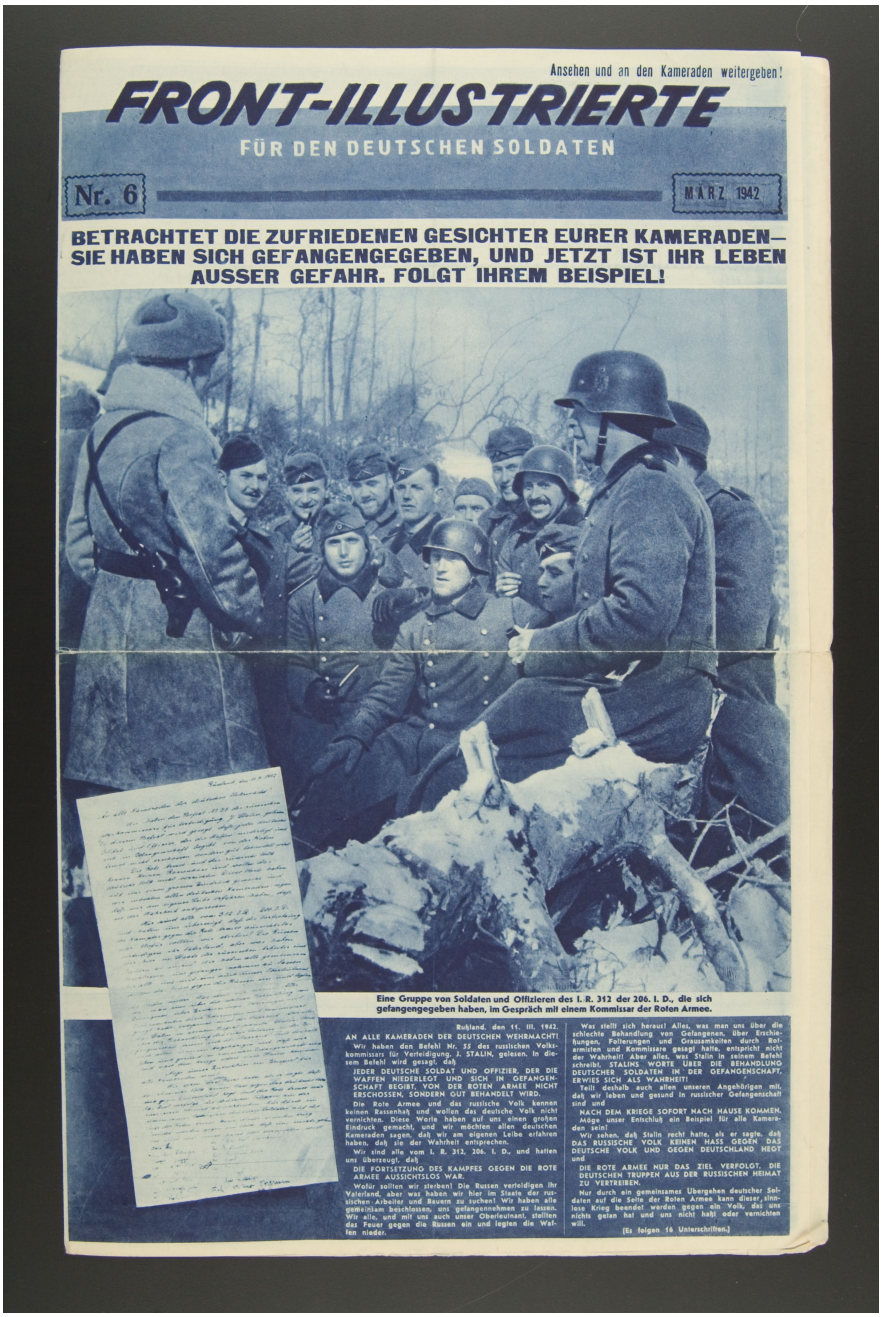
In other words, the Soviet propagandists tried to present their government as a caring institution, as one that was not only interested in its own soldiers, but also the peoples of the countries they were at war against, including, of course Germans, and most importantly Wehrmacht soldiers. To prove this point, the leaflets painted the POW camps as places that would minister to the well-being of the former soldiers, but they also emphasized that the overall mission of the Soviet Union in the war was to liberate different countries and their inhabitants from Hitler's

[125] Leaflet No.06, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00006, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4px1w.
[126] Leaflet No.06, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1942), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00006, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4px1w.
[127] Leaflet No.20/21 (64/65), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), pages 4-5, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00032, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48h6x.

yoke. More than once, the leaflets pictured the Red Army entering the various Eastern European cities with captions such as this one from a leaflet from September 1944: "In the streets of the Polish city Lublin. The population welcomes their liberators - the Soviet troops."[128]

Thus, the Soviets presented themselves as a nation of liberators and restricted any kind of expansionist ideas to Hitler. After all, it would make little sense to ask soldiers to defect to the Soviet Union if there was a perceived chance that the Red Army might subjugate the German population if and when they reached German borders. Clearly understanding that what they were asking the Germans soldiers to do necessitated the maintenance of a positive diplomatic image, Soviet propagandists wrote in a leaflet from May 1944 that: "The Soviet government has expressed to the entire world that it is pursuing exclusively military objectives in Romania and has no intention of conquering Romanian soil or changing the existing social order in Romania"[129] Evidently, the Soviets understood the political aspect of defection and rightly assumed that in order to entice German soldiers to surrender and enter the POW camps willingly, the latter had to be convinced that their captors were acting in a generally benevolent manner as the Red Army swept through Eastern Europe. In other words, the Soviets had to appear as fundamentally different in their treatment of those who came under their control.

[128] Leaflet No.15 (88), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (September 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00054, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b47t3k.
[129] Leaflet No.08 (81), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (May 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00047, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48t3w.



Ansehen und an den Kameraden weitergeben!

FRONT-ILLUSTRIERTE

FÜR DEN DEUTSCHEN SOLDATEN

Nr. 6 MÄRZ 1942

BETRACHTET DIE ZUFRIEDENEN GESICHTER EURER KAMERADEN— SIE HABEN SICH GEFANGENGEGEBEN, UND JETZT IST IHR LEBEN AUSSER GEFAHR. FOLGT IHREM BEISPIEL!

Eine Gruppe von Soldaten und Offizieren des I. R. 312 der 206. I. D., die sich gefangengegeben haben, im Gespräch mit einem Kommissar der Roten Armee.

*Figure 12* - Leaflet No.06, "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (March 1942), page 1. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00006, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4px1w.

Furthermore, the crux of convincing the German soldiers to give themselves up, beyond the initial steps of telling them that they would survive defection or that the USSR was on the good side of this conflict, was to demonstrate that life in the prisoner of war camps was sufficiently appealing that it was worth the risk of surrender. In other words, the Soviets understood that in

order to convince German soldiers to defect, their promises had to go beyond assurances that soldiers would simply *survive* if they chose to do so; they needed to believe that Soviet captivity ensured they would thrive and no longer endure conditions like those faced at the front. What we observe, then, is a genuine effort by the Soviets to figuratively 'sell' the POW camp experience as a utopian one.

As such, recreating the conditions of life that German soldiers could have expected to find at home in Germany became an integral part of how captivity was depicted. In fact, the Soviets repeatedly underscored in their propaganda materials that for POWs life in the camps could mimic their lives in Germany, whether it be through work, activities, or education. To this point, a leaflet from June 1944 made the following claim on its cover: "The German soldiers swapped their rifles for tools with their friends during their time as Russian prisoners of war. For them the war is over. Peaceful work in the camp helped them to forget the old horrors and hardships of war."[130]

In another leaflet – this time from May 1942 – Wehrmacht soldiers were presented with what an ordinary day looked like in prisoner of war camp number 74. The many pictures featured soldiers doing the various jobs. At the right of the image (seen in Figure 13), the text within the box on top of what appears to be a metal worker read as follows: "Berthold Schuster was a blacksmith before the war. In the prisoner of war camp, he is also working as a blacksmith."[131] The idea that soldiers were returning to their civilian occupations was a powerful one. It was a strong selling point and painted the camps as places where soldiers were practically reintegrating into the lives they knew before the war. Even though the leaflets seldom explained what exactly

[130] Leaflet No.09 (82), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (June 1944), page 1, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00048, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4199t.
[131] Leaflet No.12, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (May 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00012, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4xd5d.

the work being done by German prisoners was for, merely emphasizing non-military activities was a way to uncouple the former soldiers from their service in the Wehrmacht. In some cases, the Soviets painted a picture of self-sufficiency, where Soviet authorities intervened very little in the day-to-day life in POW camps.

For example, in a July 1943 leaflet, Soviet propagandists told their audience that the overseeing of POW camps was in the hands of soldiers themselves: "The organization of camp life is largely left up to us. This means order and discipline, the daily and work schedule is in the hands of the German camp elders."[132] Additionally, on one of the pages of a leaflet from the month before, an image showed a soldier working in a field during the Spring harvest at the camp with the caption reading: "Spring in the prisoner of war camp."[133] Whether the soldiers were harvesting food for themselves or for the Soviets was never really clarified, but the sheer fact that the former combatants were now engaged in agricultural labour had to resonate with many German soldiers who came from farm families. Moreover, it was an image of normality, where Soviet captivity did not appear like a form of punishment, but rather consisted of the men in the camps taking care of themselves until the war was over.

Additionally, an integral part of convincing soldiers that life in camps was enviable was to show them, as previously stated, that they could enjoy relative freedom and do whatever they wanted with their time, just as they would have at home. This was even more the case for officers who, so it was said, did not have to work if they did not want to. Indeed, a leaflet from March 1944 outlined what German officers could expect in the camps: "A beautiful, healthy climate, extensive

[132] Leaflet No.20/21 (64/65), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), pages 4-5, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00032, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48h6x.
[133] Leaflet No.15/16 (59/60), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (June 1943), pages 4-5, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00028, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sh6k.

grounds and solid residential buildings - this is where the German officers who were prisoners of war live. Everyone spends their time as they please. This is because, strictly in accordance with international law, they are only called up to work at their own request."[134]

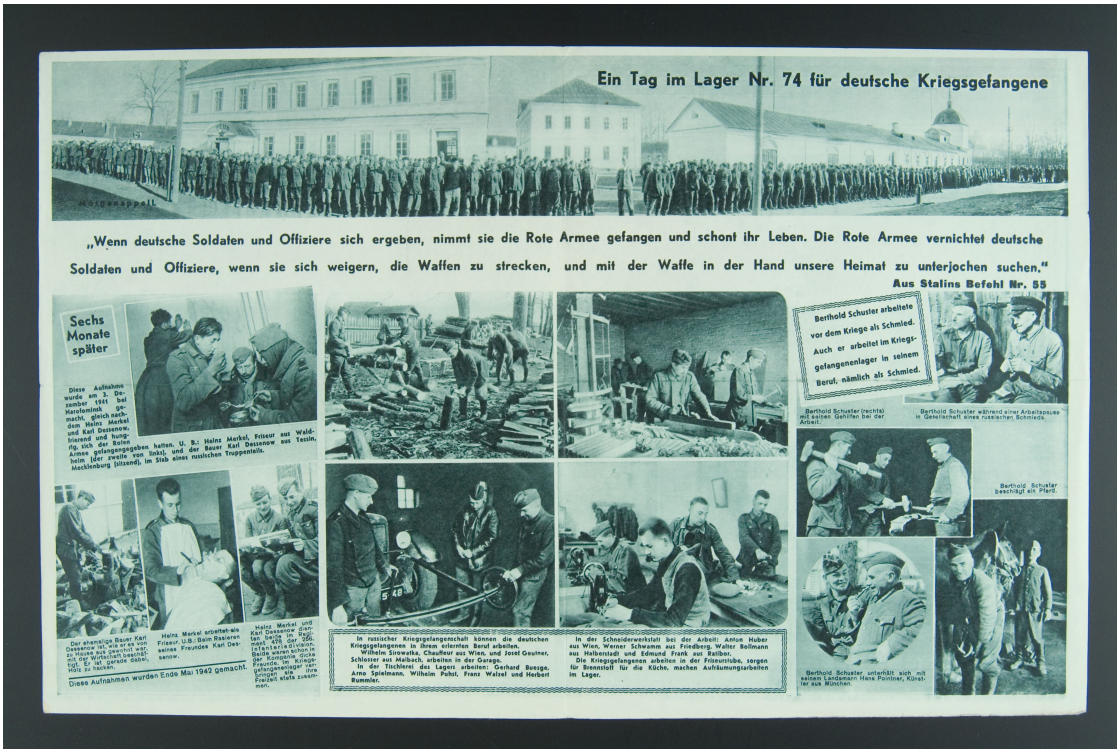



*Figure 13* - Leaflet No.12, "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (May 1942), pages 2-3. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00012, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4xd5d.

The lives of non-officers were similarly far from insufferable. While work was voluntary for officers, men from lower ranks were told that their free time could be spent doing just about anything they would have done while at home in Germany. The contents of the leaflet reproduced in Figure 14, which was published in July 1943, presented an array of possible activities being done by German prisoners of war while in Soviet captivity. At the top of the composition, soldiers could read the question: "How do we spend our day?"[135] Under the text, soldiers were pictured

[134] Leaflet No.06 (79), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00045, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4j97q.
[135] Leaflet No.20/21 (64/65), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), pages 6-7, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00032, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48h6x.

playing multiple sports, exercising in the yard, gardening, or even listening to an orchestra. Such pastimes were shown repeatedly over the months when the leaflets were focused on what daily life looked like in the camps. Obviously, these activities were extremely varied, and presumably every Wehrmacht soldier would find something that appealed to them within the provided images. In an issue from March 1944, for instance, a soldier was shown supposedly writing a new song for the camp choir, while others were pictured enjoying a game of chess.[136] In another leaflet, an officer could be seen creating an art exhibit for his fellow soldiers. In depicting these activities, the Soviets hoped that such images would resonate with men desperate to escape the conditions at the front.

Another steady stream of propaganda focused on the services supposedly made available to the German prisoners of war. Potential defectors were told that they would have access to services related to their physical and mental health. The contents of many leaflets informed soldiers that they could expect regular visits to the barber as well as regular medical check-ups by doctors and nurses dedicated to keeping them healthy. Indeed, every soldier entering the camps would be checked by a doctor upon arrival, and a March 1942 leaflet included pictures of German soldiers and captions reading "German prisoners of war will receive medical attention" and "German prisoners of war after the bath," implying that these services would be available immediately after their surrender.[137] In addition, as early as February 1942, Wehrmacht soldiers could see images of their comrades receiving haircuts in the camps. Meanwhile, the picture at the bottom left of the

[136] Leaflet No.06 (79), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00045, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4j97q.
[137] Leaflet No.06, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00006, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4px1w.

image seen in Figure 14 had the following caption written next to it: "Those who want to can get a daily shave at the hairdressing salon."[138]




*Figure 14* - Leaflet No.20/21 (64/65), "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (July 1943), pages 6-7. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00032, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48h6x.

Furthermore, Soviet propagandists undoubtedly understood the powerful draw that communicating with loved ones held. Hence, in the leaflets dropped over German lines, soldiers were told they could expect to use the POW camps' extensive and thorough mailing system if they surrendered. In a leaflet from January 1944, for instance, soldiers read that those who *willingly* surrendered were guaranteed: "Preferential handling of letters to relatives in Germany."[139] To this

[138] Leaflet No.20/21 (64/65), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (July 1943), pages 6-7, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00032, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48h6x.
[139] Leaflet No.1(74), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (January 1944), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00041, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4xh6t.

point, at the bottom of a leaflet from March 1944, a group of soldiers was pictured reading a letter the Soviets claimed had been sent from Germany to the prisoner of war. Titled 'A letter from home,' the image suggested that mail made it over or around the front lines to reach the soldiers in the camp: "After a long detour, over Switzerland, lieutenant Albert Rechberg's letters from his relatives arrived."[140]

The suggestion that soldiers could contact their relatives if they surrendered was part of a broader effort to convince the soldiers that their mental well-being would be assured while in captivity. If a soldier did not have a partner with whom he could exchange letters at home, or if he did but still longed for a more immediate contact with the opposite sex, the leaflets told soldiers that they could expect the presence of women in the camps. What roles these women played – photographs frequently showed them as nurses or in other care-giving situations – was not fully explained. Instead, the Soviets used the idea of the opposite sex rather reductively, whereby women served as an incentive to attract soldiers rather than being portrayed as people playing any type of genuine role in the camps. These women and the image of care they were made to represent, whether it be physical, mental, or even sexual, did not go beyond the symbolic representation of the stereotypical archetype of 'caring' they were said to embody. In fact, the image of a woman, whose presence the soldiers could enjoy, was shown alongside all the other activities offered to soldiers in the camp. For example, a picture of a woman talking to soldiers was included alongside others that featured soldiers working, playing chess, or reading the newspaper in the leaflet produced in February 1943 mentioned above. In other words, talking to women became one of the many 'activities' available to the POWs.

[140] Leaflet No.06 (79), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1944), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00045, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4j97q.

The camps were also said to offer various opportunities for soldiers to cultivate their mind and receive lectures in various subjects. In the same leaflet mentioned above from March 1944, soldiers were told that: "those who want to can take classes in math, chemistry, biology, and also Russian language."[141] Accordingly, the prisoners of war were said to be readily supplied with books in German to pass the time. In a February 1942 leaflet, one of the images showed a soldier reading a book with the caption: "The German soldiers receive German-language books in the library" written next to it.[142]

More importantly perhaps, soldiers were notified that they could expect to receive daily information about the developments at the front. In a leaflet from April 1942, a picture of soldiers reading a newspaper was captioned as follows: "There is a special newspaper 'The Free Word' published in Russia for German prisoners of war."[143] This newspaper, so it was said, gave the soldiers updates on major global news. Similarly, a December 1942 leaflet, included a photograph of soldiers sitting around a table reading what appeared to be a newspaper, next to which soldiers could read the following promise: "Fresh newspapers have arrived: The prisoners of war are always up to date on world affairs."[144]

Using these activities and services as incentives was no coincidence. In fact, the Soviets would have been aware that they were recreating the cultural sphere soldiers had access to at home and which would have been an integral part of their identity. Literature, arts, games, etc. are all part of a nation's cultural heritage and the war suspended any kind of access to these fundamental

[141] Leaflet No.06 (79), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00045, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4j97q.
[142] Leaflet No.03, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (February 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00004, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4zd63.
[143] Leaflet No.07, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00007, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4k68c.
[144] Leaflet No.31, "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (December 1942), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00018, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4ch6v.

activities. The Soviet camps thus not only promised a return to safety, but also a return to normal cultural life. According to the leaflets, Hitler, in triggering the war, had robbed the German people of every aspect of their lives while the Soviet POW camps became spaces where it was said they were being returned. The defection Soviets were asking soldiers to commit was thus an action that came with a suggested return to normalcy and the cultural forms that soldiers had experienced prior to the Nazi seizure of power.

Indeed, these activities and services, whether it be playing chess, learning, or getting a haircut, embodied an atmosphere of community and comradery that was said to exist within the camps, which in times of war, where one's friends and loved ones might have been lost to the chaos of the front, could certainly have seemed appealing to the soldiers. The idea that 'old friends' were finding each other in Soviet captivity marked another way that propagandists implied the soldiers who surrendered were finding their way back to Germany itself. To this point, in a leaflet from November 1943, two soldiers were shown smiling next to each other while the caption next to the picture read: "Recently, two Berliner friends were reunited in a Russian prisoner of war camp… The two friends had started the journey to the front together. Many of their Berlin acquaintances traveled with them. Then fate separated them. Now they are together again, looking at the old picture from the early days of the war."[145]

This friendly encounter was said to perfectly represent what soldiers could expect if they surrendered to the Red Army. Similarly, on the second page of leaflet No.26, from October 1942, soldiers could read about the story of two friends, Karl Dessenow and Heinz Merkel, who surrendered together and reached a Soviet prisoner of war camp. The text under their picture,

[145] Leaflet No.28(72), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (November 1943), page 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00039, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4c98j.

which can be seen in the leaflet shown below under the title ‘Sommer 1942’ or ‘Summer 1942,’ explained how the two of them refused to endure another winter and entered the camps instead.[146] Their surrender were part of a broader narrative offered by the leaflets, whereby the soldiers’ interpersonal relations, their friendships, could be saved through surrender. Ironically, the picture on the right, which supposedly showed Dessenow and Merkel reading a “Front-Illustrierte” leaflet in the summer of 1942 while sitting in a prisoner of war camp, was also used in leaflet No.12, which was from May 1942 and which can be seen in the bottom left of Figure 13 above. It did not matter, of course, that these pictures were obviously misleading and not at all depicting a real story about two friends who surrendered; it would, in fact, be hard to confirm that any of the pictures used in the leaflets even showed actual German soldiers. Soviet high command certainly understood that members of the Wehrmacht would most likely not come across the two different leaflets or, if they did, that they probably would not remember having seen this exact picture in another leaflet. The general purpose remained, then, to convey a sense of familiarity through these images by suggesting that soldiers might reunite with those whom they had thought lost to the war if only they surrendered and entered the Soviet prisoner of war camps.

To further strengthen this point, on the back cover of a leaflet from April 1943, soldiers were told to tune in to various radio frequencies to learn about the fate of their comrades: “If you want to find out who of your relatives or acquaintances has been taken prisoner by the Russians and thus saved from death, please listen to our transmissions…The lists of prisoners of war are

[146] Leaflet No.26, “*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*” (October 1942), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00013, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sq58.

transmitted 15 times a day on different wave lengths, especially on wave 26,72 31,65 40,21 42,98 and 368,6."[147]

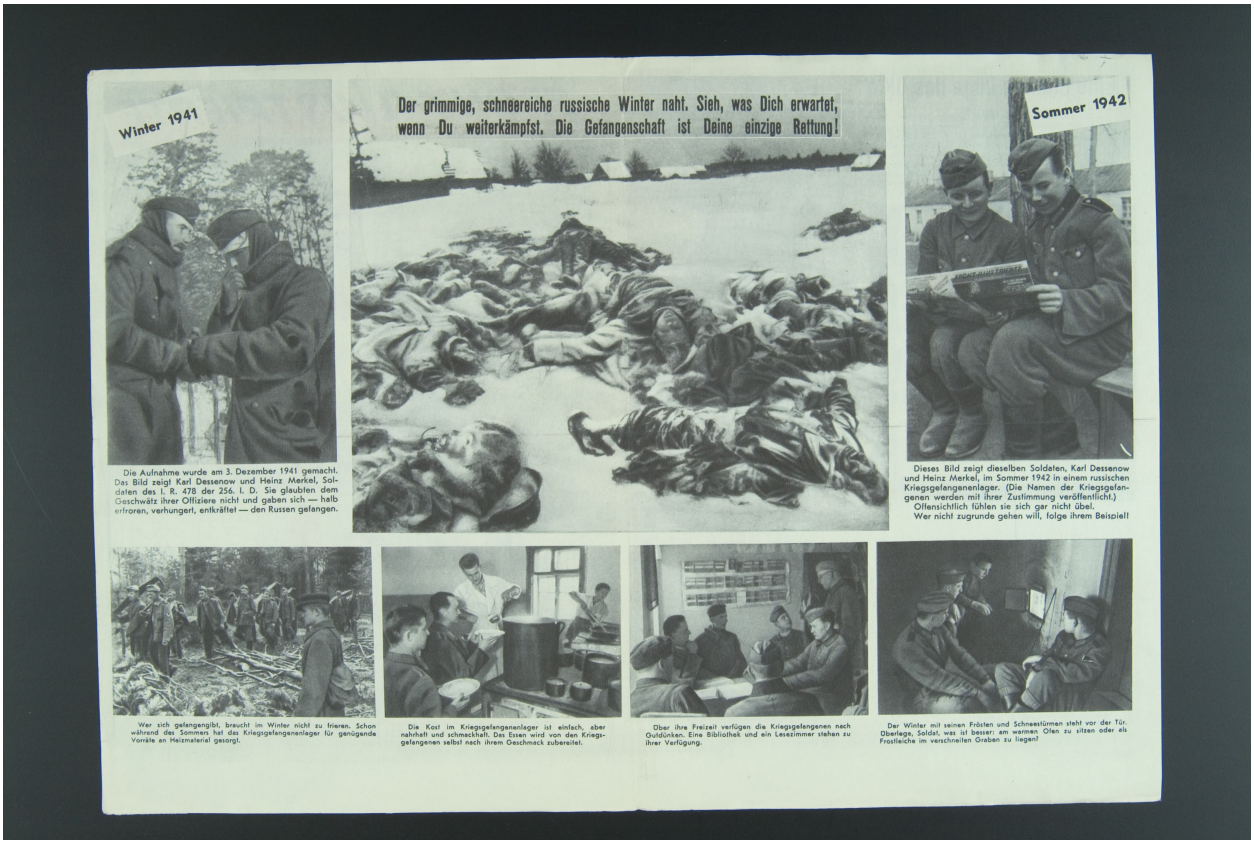


*Figure 15* - Leaflet No.26, "Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (October 1942), pages 2-3. Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00013, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4sq58.

In a sense, this spirit of comradery was part of a broader effort by the Soviets to convince German soldiers on the Eastern Front that it was their comrades themselves who were asking them to surrender. The words 'Folgt ihrem Beispiel,' or 'follow their example' appeared numerous times and nearly every leaflet made use of a testimony from a German soldier – one that told their fellow combatants that they had made the right decision and now lived happy lives as prisoners of war. When soldiers were told that German generals had put out a general call to turn their backs on

[147] Leaflet No.09 (53), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (April 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00022, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4g68f.

Hitler, as we saw earlier, the leaflet in question informed soldiers that all their comrades in the camps saw in this appeal a general confirmation that they had made the right choice in surrendering. Similarly, in a leaflet from August 1944, photographs showed a soldier reading Field Marshal Paulus's appeal to members of the Wehrmacht to lay down their weapons. In front of him sat dozens of what soldiers could assume were German prisoners of war raising their hands. The caption next to the picture read:

> In all camps for German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, the appeal by Field Marshal Paulus was received with great satisfaction… Paul has spoken from the heart - he explained to the group of soldiers… 'Who agrees with the call of Field Marshal Paulus?' he asked, turning to the soldiers. All those present expressed their agreement with a unanimous show of hands.[148]

As the war progressed, it became evident that Soviets propagandists realized that one of the strongest incentives they could give German soldiers concerning defection or surrender to the Red Army was to show them how many of their comrades had already done just that. On dozens of occasions, Wehrmacht soldiers were informed that thousands, sometimes even hundreds of thousands, of their fighting comrades had given themselves up, and that all that was left for them to do was follow that example. On a leaflet from March 1944, for example, under a picture showing thousands of German soldiers who had surrendered, the Soviets described, as they had so many times before, that the number of men doing so grew with every passing day. The text read:

> Among the 18,200 German prisoners of war from the Korsun pocket, there are thousands who voluntarily stopped the senseless resistance and surrendered. Embittered by the deceitful promises of help from outside, outraged by Hitler's unprecedented order, 'better suicide than being taken prisoner,' they decided against Hitler, for life, and surrendered.[149]

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[148] Leaflet No.13 (86), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (August 1944), pages 2-3, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00052, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b4h995.

[149] Leaflet No.4/5 (77/78), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (March 1944), pages 6-7, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00044, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b48k1q.

With a constant barrage of leaflets suggesting that many soldiers had already opted to stop fighting, the only logical outcome that remained for the Wehrmacht men who remained at the front was to follow their example.

Indeed, in a leaflet from August 1943, which we can see below in Figure 16, the Soviets asked the German soldiers who were still fighting: "Was Weiter" or "What's next?" The answer was a straightforward one: "You want to know what happens next? Many thousands of your comrades have already found the answer to this question. Voluntarily going into captivity is the only way to save their lives and honor. Follow your comrades' example who have already done so."[150]As it has been emphasized throughout this essay, in asking the German soldiers to follow their comrades' example and defect to enter the camps, the Soviets were asking them to do the complete opposite of what we might usually associate with defection, i.e., betray their country and people. If anything, when a German soldier picked up a leaflet and saw the countless German soldiers, including highly respected officers, who had supposedly surrendered willingly before him, the only sensible conclusion he might have come to was to realize that he could be in fact *saving* rather than *betraying* his country. When the Soviet propaganda materials told Wehrmacht soldiers that Hitler did not represent the true Germany, and that they should follow their comrades' example by surrendering, the contents of the leaflets were suggesting that it was they, meaning the German soldiers, who constituted Germany.

Indeed, the prisoner of war camps, at least so the Germans were told, were there only as temporary waiting points where soldiers could perhaps hope to find some sense of familiarity, one they had lost while fighting on the cold Russian steppes. The leaflets, and the acts of defection

[150] Leaflet No.22 (66), "*Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten*" (August 1943), page 4, Blavatnik Archive item number: FRIL.00033, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b44t3n.

they encouraged, complicate and redefine the way we understand defection in times of war. Indeed, in what can only be described as a clever turn around on the Soviets' part, if whatever the leaflets were promising the soldiers was true, then soldiers could expect to feel more at home or metaphorically closer to Germany inside a Soviet POW camp than on the front lines fighting for the Führer. During the war, these POW camps, at least on paper, were more German than anything Hitler had ever created inside of Germany.




*Figure 16* - Leaflet No.22 (66), Front-Illustrierte für den Deutschen Soldaten" (August 1943), pages 4 (back of leaflet, left) & 1 (cover of leaflet, right). Image used by permission of the Blavatnik Archive. See item number: FRIL.00033, http://n2t.net/ark:/86084/b44t3n.

## *Concluding Remarks*

*It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.*[151]

Michel Foucault*, 1971.*

Years after the war, former Wehrmacht soldier and Eastern Front veteran Gunter Koschorrek recalled vividly in his wartime memoir: "they tell us in their propaganda leaflets that they will treat us, their enemies, very well if we surrender!"[152] The propaganda leaflets certainly remained part of Koschorrek's memory of the war, though he would never experience for himself whether what the Soviets were promising was true, since he never became a prisoner of war. In hindsight, however, Koschorrek was right to be skeptical of the claims made by Soviet leaflets during his time at the front. Actual Soviet POW camps were far from comfortable places. If anything, the terror of the 1930s and the extensive network of prison camps, known as the gulag, where hundreds of thousands of Soviets citizens met their end, proved to be the place where German soldiers could expect to find themselves if they surrendered to the Soviets. In the gulag, soldiers found a world where death permeated the landscape. The walls of the camps were filled with uncertainty for every prisoner who had the misfortune of finding himself in them, something that Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn captured so strongly when he wrote in his famous work *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-56: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*: "You know

[151] Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky, *Human Nature: Justice Versus Power: The Chomsky-Foucault Debate* (Souvenir Press, 2011), 49.

[152] Koschorrek was not the only former Wehrmacht soldier to recall the leaflets in his memoir. Many published versions of former German soldiers' diaries or letters mention propaganda leaflets dropped on the front lines by Soviet forces. However, to properly use the voice of German voices as a genuine primary source for this essay would have required more in-depth research in German archives rather than combing through the limited printed samples accessible to me at the time. For this reason, except for Koschorrek here, the voices of German soldiers were not used in this essay. See Gunter Koschorrek, *Blood Red Snow: The Memoirs of a German Soldier on the Eastern Front*, trans. Olav R. Crome Aamot (Zenith Press, 2005), 229.

nothing. The door of your cell opens, and they shoot you. You cry out in your death agony, and there is no one to hear your cries or tell of them except the prison stones."[153]

Indeed, though the sources used in this essay presented a world where surrendering to Stalin's forces saved German soldiers from Hitler, the reality was that the Soviet leader unsurprisingly did not behave in the benevolent way that the leaflets promised he would. In fact, to quote historian Christian Hartmann:

> On top of this was the fact that the Red Army was initially harsh in the extreme in its treatment of prisoners of war. Of the between 170,000 and 200,000 German soldiers who fell into its hands between June 1941 and February 1943, 95 per cent did not survive their captivity; in fact, many did not even reach a prison camp… The number of German prisoners of war who went into Soviet captivity is calculated at between around 2.6 and 3.5 million; the proportion who died is estimated at 30 per cent, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less.[154]

These figures mean that a German soldier who picked up a leaflet and followed its primary instruction, which was to give himself up, had an overall two out of three chance at survival with much worse odds if he surrendered between 1941 and 1943. Though Soviet propaganda materials claimed that for surrendering soldiers, the fight was over and that their lives had been saved, the reality revealed by post-war studies suggests that those Germans who did defect to the USSR did not find a home-away-from-home, and they certainly did not find comfort. The leaflets lied; but then the Nazis also lied. So, all a soldier could do was decide what choice would best increase his odds at survival at a given moment.

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[153] Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-56: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 78.
[154] Christian Hartmann, *Operation Barbarossa: Nazi Germany's war in the East, 1941-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 124-125.

Yet, these ephemeral pieces of paper, leaflets telling German soldiers that Hitler was to blame for the war, permeated the landscape of the Eastern Front. Within the pages of the leaflets, soldiers found their multiple grievances reflected. According to Soviet propagandists, German political leaders filled their pockets with money stained with German blood and the wives of Wehrmacht soldiers were sent to the factories to work long hours while also being courted by foreigners whom the Nazis had let into the country. All of that was happening, of course, while members of the Wehrmacht were sacrificing their lives to defend a political system and a way of life which, according to the leaflets, would never benefit them.

Emphasizing the nature of this betrayal, Soviet propagandists hoped they could convince the Germans to defect by offering them an attractive alternative: life in a prisoner of war camp until the end of hostilities. According to the leaflets that have been discussed in these pages, in these camps, soldiers were told that they could expect to spend their time freely and enjoy activities which the war had taken away from them. A warm bath, a well-groomed beard, or even a simple game of chess – all were there for the taking if only soldiers would surrender.

Giving themselves up, of course, was never cast as actions of betrayal of their homeland. Instead, it was Hitler who had done that, and the contents of the leaflets emphatically argued that Hitler and the Nazis did not embody the true Germany. Indeed, life in the POW camps was portrayed in such a way as to suggest that it mirrored the soldiers' lives in pre-war Germany. Despite technically being in captivity, the former soldiers could work in their trades or professions and even contact their loved ones through regular mail and parcel service. In every way, Soviet leaflets cleverly reminded the soldiers what life in Germany had been like without Hitler. Working, walking in parks, reading the newspaper, or playing sports, had all been activities that soldiers could have experienced in times of peace. What the leaflets promised, then, was to remove the

‘soldier’ from the German, and to return him to his former life, untainted by the horrors of war and Nazism.

The type of defection proposed by the Soviets was unique. Because they never considered using Germany’s men to bolster their own forces, the Soviet Union portrayed defection as an act that did not require fighting at all, an oddity at the time of the war. And yet, the uniqueness of this defection is perhaps what best expresses the necessity of this study. It shows, as has previously been mentioned, that what is considered defection is defined contextually, in part by the nature of the conflict itself, but also by how the opposing states define defection. In the German case, defection to the Soviet Union meant voluntarily surrendering. As such, though posterity has so far believed that there was no mass defection from the Germans to the Soviet Union, our study has showed that if understood within this particular lens, defection on the Eastern Front, from Hitler to Stalin, was a possibility, and could have occurred. The leaflets of this essay certainly claimed that German soldiers defected. Whether this was true, and to what extent, will remain, at least for now, one of the many subjects yet to be explored about the Second World War.

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