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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOVIET MILITARY PROPAGANDA DURING THE WAR WITH GERMANY (1941–1945)

## **Abstract**

The victory of the Soviet Union over the National Socialist Third Reich in World War II is still considered in the Russian Federation as the most important, as well as indisputable contribution to the creation and functioning of the modern world. Moreover, contemporary Russia officially upholds its own version of these events and continuously refers to the shared history of the nations that once formed the Soviet empire. The recurrent images of the Soviets as victors and the ever-renewed concept of Stalin as a national hero are, however, no more than a duplication of the old propaganda models used during the Second World War. The present article seeks to examine the indoctrination efforts undertaken in the Soviet Union at the time of its conflict with Germany during the period 1941–5, particularly with regard to the soldiers of the Red Army. It also pays attention to the emotional

appeals of Soviet propaganda and changes in the main ideological directions at various stages of the war.

**Keywords:** Soviet Union, Third Reich, propaganda, indoctrination, war, 1941–1945, Red Army, Ilya Ehrenburg

## Introduction

From the very outset of its existence, the Soviet Union sought to transform the mentality of the inhabitants of former tsarist Russia and the surrounding areas, not only by the force of the army and terror of the political police, but also through various means of indoctrination (Leinwand 2008). In Stalin's view, the ideological front customarily ranked among the most important areas of social change, together with agitation and propaganda, both of which were implemented by means of direct and coercive means of influence (Stalin, 1997, pp. 327–329). While shaping their post-revolutionary state in the mould of Marxist theory, the Soviets also significantly remodelled the media. Using appealing slogans alluding to the idea of common ownership, they subjugated the press, radio, film and other means of disseminating information for the exclusive use of the Party (Pisarek 1970, pp. 5–13; Berezhnoy 1970, pp. 14–21). Newspapers, as the most common media channel of the time, were to play the leading role of collective agitators, propagandists and organisers of the social masses, a role which was doctrinally assigned to them by Lenin (Lenin, 1951). The effect of the implementation of such policies was a transformation of the mass media into submissive instruments of ideologisation whose objective was not so much to depict the reality of the surrounding world, as to make people believe in the image of the world being postulated (Goban-Klas 2002, pp. 167–169).

In the late 1930s, Soviet propaganda efforts were stepped up to a level usually occurring in time of emergency such as war (Kunczik, Zipfel 2000, pp. 265–275). The highly persuasive messages issued in the name of the authorities were meant to induce people to take on specific ideas,

so that they could unequivocally opt for the “right” side in the forthcoming conflict (Szulczewski 1972, p. 62). Gaining widespread trust among the masses of the population was meant to lead to the consolidation of the communist model in the country, as well the legitimisation of the policy to implement internationalism in other countries. The Soviet military, as one of the main pillars of power – also in the neighbouring states – was naturally the first social group where this indoctrination was to be accomplished. The Red Army was therefore to become thoroughly dependent on the directives of the Party and its leader Joseph Stalin. Its role was to be a vanguard of the changes, a politically motivated force worthy of the authorities’ trust and capable of making sacrifices in the name of communist ideology (Beyrau 2007, pp. 25–26).

As part of the proclaimed need to expand communism by means of military force, preparations for a future war began to be made in the Soviet Union, also in the spheres of propaganda and information. However, the ongoing communisation of the country, as initiated and implemented by the Party structures and its media allies, seemed to be insufficient in the face of the necessary mobilisation of society. This called for a specialist support in the army, where true believers, as well as militarily and politically effective staff could be found. At that time, a group of writers was selected to fulfil the ideological needs of the Red Army. Their duties in time of war were assigned by Vsevolod Vishnevsky, the head of the defence committee of the Writers’ Union. In his view, future correspondents should not only have a good understanding of military affairs, but also be able to endure the hardships of the service. Moreover, they had to stop paying attention to their own needs as writers, as what really mattered at the time of the looming conflict was that they convey their message in an ideologically correct manner (Vishnevsky 1938).

The political and educational instructions were implemented at multiple levels of the Soviet Army, including the company, squadron and battery levels. With time, it also reached the lower levels of the military structure, such as the platoon. In each such group there was an officer initially referred to as the political commissar but later known as the Party organiser. The political division in the army had separate



groups of officers in each unit, detachment and grouping. During the war, there were two departments on top of this ladder. One of them was concerned with political agitation, and the other with cultural propaganda. They were both branches of the Main Political Board of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, commonly abbreviated as the Glav PU RKKKA (Petrov 1968, pp. 298–302). In addition to general propaganda, forcing the soldiers to dedicate themselves fully to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and the commands of the Communist Party, the political services of the Red Army were concerned with the dissemination of up-to-date military knowledge and the maintenance of military secrecy. They also undertook the task of spreading education among the soldiers of the Red Army, an endeavour which, it must be admitted, proved to be successful in the reduction of illiteracy. As successful were the emotionally motivated activities organised in order to improve the bonds between soldiers, particularly in the Party groups and the Komsomol youth (Gorlov 2008, pp. 194–204).



## The First Change: Allies and Enemies

The German troops breached the Soviet borders on June 22, 1941. In handing in the diplomatic note in which the Third Reich declared war against the Soviet Union, Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, the then German ambassador in Moscow, defined this act of aggression as a pre-emptive strike. In his view, it had been triggered by the mobilisation of the Soviet troops along the German border in the East (Hürter 2007, pp. 679–680), the very same border that, only two years earlier, had been delineated in a jointly conquered Poland. Vyacheslav Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union, found this to be an act of betrayal by a hitherto ally; a betrayal which, in his opinion, was unparalleled in the history of the world. In the radio speech in which he called for the defence of the country, Molotov claimed that the Soviet Union had given the Germans no reason to breach the non-aggression pact signed by the two countries in August of 1939 (Molotov 1941; Jacobsen 1979, p. 28).

One of the areas in which the Soviet authorities immediately went on the counter-offensive, in their reaction to the outbreak of the war, was the strict control and distribution of information. Only two days after the beginning of the German offensive, the Soviet Information Office of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), usually abbreviated as the Sovinform, was established (Kovalev 1987, p. 15). The secretary of its office—and later head of the Glav PU RKKKA was Aleksandr Shcherbakov. One of the main goals of Sovinform was to report to the public the current situation on the front line and to cooperate with the foreign agencies and the media. Of course, the news was to be encouraging, not defeatist. Moreover, it was supposed to be counterintelligence-safe and thoroughly verified by the censorship office (Blyum 1994). As part of communist ideological doctrine, it was also necessary to modify the main reasons why the Soviet Union had entered the war, since, contrary to the former predictions, it had ended up not attacking but defending itself (Okorokov 2007, p. 5–20). The revised instructions of the authorities were directly conveyed to the Soviet writers by Vsevolod Vishnevsky, who, alluding to the poetic works of Vladimir Mayakovsky, said:

To be among the masses, to carry the living word, to describe the struggle, to single out the heroes, to point the finger at the cowards, to reject the false reports. To work in every place. To use the pen as a bayonet! (Vishnevsky 1982, pp. 23–24).

Once the internal information order has been established, the necessary indoctrination measures were also taken up with the outside world in mind. These included enemy soldiers and the populations of those countries with which the Soviets were at war. To coordinate these endeavours, it was necessary to launch the Party's Military Political Propaganda Bureau, where two new departments of the reorganised Glav PU RKKKA were to deal with the influence of the German propaganda on their allies and the inhabitants of the occupied countries. Special units, the so-called Seventh Departments, were therefore set up in the political branches of the army to carry out propaganda activities in German (mainly for

those serving in the Wehrmacht), in which they regularly appealed to those proletarian ideas that, in their eyes, were a common cause for all the people. Special measures were also undertaken with regard to the Soviet civilians who remained in the German-occupied areas. They were ordered to take an active part in the conflict by disorganising the enemy facilities and establishing resistance groups (Zhukovskaya 2011; Volkovskiy 2003, pp. 378–380).

In this way, from the very first days of the conflict, Soviet society was effectively cut off from real information about the war. The political apparatus of the army, which took over most of the affairs that were once the prerogative of the Party, deliberately masked reality, as showing it without the censor's intervention would have forced it to reveal a picture of German military successes and expose the weakness and incompetence of the Soviet state. Meanwhile, there was an increasing apathy towards the appeals of the authorities, or even cases of open defiance of them among the people. In addition, in the territories that were annexed by the Third Reich there was more and more collaboration with the German occupiers. In the first six months of the war there were more than three million soldiers of the Red Army taken prisoner by the Germans, people who were evidently unwilling to give the lives for communist ideals. This means that one of the biggest challenges for the Bolsheviks was to maintain discipline in the ranks of the army. It led to a sharp counter-reaction from the military authorities, the effect of which was that prisoners of war and front-line soldiers – as well as the people who just happened to find themselves living under occupation – were threatened with the prospect of severe, in some cases even capital, punishment and collective responsibility, should they ever be found guilty of treason or collaboration with the enemy (RGVA, coll. 4, description 12, file 98, pp. 617–622). Acting as saboteurs in the rear of the German Army, special groups were ordered to set fire and destroy any supplies that could be used by the enemy (TsAMO, coll. 208, description 2524, file 1, pp. 257–258). Among other things, in order to be cut off from being exposed to enemy propaganda, people were ordered to dispose of their own radio sets (GARE, coll. 5446, description 1, file 194, p. 51).

Stalin initially hoped for an anti-fascist political turn in Germany. However, since nothing of that sort happened, mainstream propaganda in the Soviet Union had to be hastily modified. This was achieved even before the end of 1941, when the costly publication of several newspaper titles in German was discontinued. The workers and peasants of the aggressor were no longer comrades of the Red Army, but, as soldiers of the Wehrmacht, they now became their mortal enemies (Volkovskiy 2003, pp. 289–299). On the other hand, in the occupied territories, the Germans failed to use the opportunities and possibilities of cooperation with the population, often treating the locals with contempt as an idle work force, mass-murdering the Jews, and starving to death a significant number of their Soviet prisoners of war. In German propaganda, the inhabitants of the Soviet Union were thus consequently depicted and treated as sub-human (Dmitrów 1997, pp. 388–391).

Just as difficult as the neutralisation of memories of the Soviet alliance with Germany were the attempts to show the Allies in a positive light. The problem lay in the fact that, first, Britain, and then, the United States—both model capitalist countries—found themselves on the same side as the Soviet Union, which had hitherto regarded them as enemies. However, the indoctrination specialists quickly solved this problem by disregarding the ideological differences between the new allies and promoting the current commonality of their wartime goals (Zemskov 1982, pp. 277–280).

## The Second Change: Kill the German!

In this new propaganda doctrine, a considerable effort was made to create a strongly negative image of the enemy—the German. The leader of the “fascists”, Adolf Hitler, was presented in the worst possible light as the most glaring example of evil, while his followers were called beasts and practically stripped of any human qualities (Fateev 1999, pp. 114–131). This was not an easy undertaking, given the previous years of collaboration between the German National Socialists and the Soviet communists. The best propagandists were hired to develop a negative image of the Germans, and



then turn it into an attitude of absolute hatred towards the enemy. No doubt, one of the best specialists in this field was Ilya Ehrenburg, the “machine-gun of literature,” who, during the war, penned about 1,500 articles in which he openly attacked the former ally. It was one of his texts of that time, aptly titled “Kill!,” that featured a famous appeal to the soldiers of the Red Army:

“If you have killed one German, kill another. There is nothing more delightful for us than the German corpses. Do not count the days. Do not count the kilometres. Make your mark in only one category—the Germans that you kill. Kill the German!—that is what your old mother implores you to do. Kill the German!—asks you the child. Kill the German!—cries the motherland. Do not give up. Do not miss. Kill!” (Ehrenburg 1942).

In order to win over the Soviet masses as quickly as possible and to finally break the troublesome time of the defensive war, the main emphasis was laid on the national factor, deliberately relegating the hitherto prominent class issues to a periphery subject and, for a time, concealing the Bolshevik concept of internationalism. In this way, Russian pride was restored, accentuating the emotional bond that the soldiers of the Red Army had with their families, their land, and their country (Livshin, Orlov 1998, pp. 99–105). Also restored, if only to a limited extent, were the tradition-based practices of the Orthodox religion. In film and literature, even in the names of the military awards for those who excelled in combat, the previously rejected heroes of Great Russian history such as Dmitry Donskoy or Alexander Nevsky were promoted. In this way, the Russians were placed at the forefront of all the Soviet peoples who were at war with the German enemy (Genkina 1945).

In the summer of 1942, facing a renewed Wehrmacht offensive, the Political Directorate in the Soviet Union once again closed its ranks in order to set up the Military Political Propaganda Bureau, a branch of the Glav PU RKKKA (Petrov 1968, p. 298). Its primary objective was to bolster endurance in the ranks of the Soviet army, the soldiers’ will to win, love for their homeland, and hatred for the invaders. They had

## У Б Е Й!

Вот отрывки из трех писем, найденных на убитых немцах:

Управляющий Рейнгарт пишет лейтенанту Отто фон Шпрэху:

«Французов от нас забрали на завод. Я выбрал шесть русских из Милекого округа. Они гораздо выносливее французов. Только один из них умер, остальные продолжают работать в поле и на ферме. Содержание их ничего не стоит и мы не должны страдать от того, что эти звери, дети которых **може**ть убивают наших солдат, едят немецкие хлеб. Вчера я подверг легкой экзекуции двух русских бестий, которые тайком пожрали святое молоко, предназначавшееся для свиных маток...»

Матаас Памлих пишет своему брату ефрейтору Гевриху Памлиху:

«В Лейдене плещется лагерь для русских, там можно их видеть. Оружия они не боятся, но мы с ними разговариваем хорошей плетью...»

Некто Отто Эссман пишет лейтенанту Гельмуту Вейгану:

«У нас здесь есть пленные русские. Эти типы пожарают дождевых червей на площадке аэродрома, они кидаются на поильное ведро. Я видел, как они ели сорную траву. И подумать, что это — люди...»

Работавладельцы, они хотят превратить наш народ в рабов. Они вывозят русских

к себе, заезжают, доводят их голодом до безумия, до того, что, умирая, люди едят траву и червей а поганый немец с тухлой сигарой в зубах философствует: «Разве это люди?..»

Мы знаем все. Мы помним все. Мы поняли: немцы не люди. Отныне слово «немец» для нас самое страшное проклятие. Отныне слово «немец» разряжает ружье. Не будем говорить. Не будем возмущаться. Будем убивать. Если ты не убил за день хотя бы одного немца, твой день пропал. Если ты думаешь, что за тебя немца убьет твой сосед, ты не понял угрозы. Если ты не убьешь немца, немец убьет тебя. Он возьмет твоих и будет мучать их в своей оккупанной Германии. Если ты не можешь убить немца пулей, убей немца штыком. Если на твоём участке затишье, если ты ждёшь боя, убей немца до боя. Если ты оставишь немца жить, немец повесит русского человека и опозорит русскую женщину. Если ты убил одного немца, убей другого — вот для нас ничего веселее нежнких трупов. Не считай дней. Не считай вёрст. Считай оло: убитых тобой немцев. Убей немца! — это просит старуха-мать. Убей немца! — это молит тебя дитя. Убей немца! — это кричит родная земля. Не промахнись. Не пропусти. Убей!

Илья ЭРЕНБУРГ.

КАЗНЕ

ЛОП  
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Il'ya Erenburg's article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* of July 24, 1942, entitled "УБЕЙ!" ("KILL!"). Source: redstar.ru website

to be strengthened in their confidence that they could not only stop the enemy's advances, but also mount an effective counter-offensive (Sablin 1978, pp. 90–92). The Bureau thus focused its work in the army on mass political agitation and development of cooperation among the soldiers (TsAMO, coll. 32, description 11309, file 157, p. 233). In order to put more emphasis on the necessary ideological activities, indeed make them a priority, on July 10, 1942, the Main Department of Agitation and Propaganda was established within the Glav PU RKKK (TsAMO, coll. 32, description 795436, file 5, p. 363).

At that time, the methods of command in the entire structure of the Red Army were also significantly changed. At every level of the military organisation, the commander was to make all the decisions on his own. In the matters of ideological principle, he was supported by a deputy for political affairs whose duty was to countersign the orders. At the same time, the deputy's burden of responsibilities only lay within those of his particular division of the Party. In effect, collegial governance became something of a façade—the war council of each military unit and grouping was joined by the Chief of Staff



who was responsible for the compliance of all the decisions with the art of war (“Ведомости Верховною Совету СССР” 1942).

By the end of 1943, it was noticed that the Red Army was approaching the borders of the Soviet Union in its westward offensive, a situation which called for entirely new propaganda schemes. With the soldiers soon to be confronted with the enemy’s lifestyle, ideology, and morality, it was deemed that further propagandistic measures had to be taken, particularly with regard to the junior officers, one of the largest groups in the army, who also had a direct influence on lower-ranked military personnel (Sablin 1978, p. 94). The directives were issued by Stalin himself, who compared the Germans to a wounded animal that had to be chased to its den, and then caught and killed there. The People’s Commissar also made it clear that very soon the Soviets would have to return to the promotion of internationalist ideas. Outside the Soviet Union, the Red Army was to be seen as the liberators of those nations oppressed by the Third Reich, bringing freedom and spreading the ideals of communism (Tikhonov 1985, p. 337–339).

## The Third Change: The Harsh Liberation

The propagandists were then ordered to propagate a new, third, emotional current. However, the deeply instilled hatred for the enemy was already at its peak among the soldiers of the Red Army. Once they entered the German territories, this hatred easily manifested itself in the cruel way in which the civilians came to be treated (Senyavskaya 2012b, pp. 85–101; Senyavskaya 2012a). The forms that had previously been collected by the political officers with personal reasons for taking revenge on the Germans now became a ground of justification for the crimes committed against them. The scale of the revanchism could hardly be surprising, as more than 60 percent of the Soviet soldiers admitted in these documents that their loved ones had been either killed or exiled by the Germans (Okorokov 1980, p. 271). In January and February 1945, Ehrenburg’s slogans were finally put into practice in East Prussia and Silesia, and he himself took enormous pleasure in seeing the ruins and corpses on the enemy’s soil. In his own words:



Front page of the *Pravda* issue of July 30, 1942, with the text of the decree of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union of July 29, 1943 establishing the military merit orders of Alexander Suvorov, Mikhail Kutuzov and Alexander Nevsky, and descriptions of the decorations. The lead of the frontpage is a summary of the expressions taken from Stalin’s order no. 227 of July 28, 1942, known as “No Step Back” order. Source: N.A. Nekrasov Library website

The Soviet propaganda leaflet for the German Nazi soldiers entitled "Deutsches Volk in Waffen!" (To the German Nation in Arms!) – the letter signed on August 27, 1944 by 40 German senior officers taken prisoner by Soviet forces, stating that war is lost for Germany, and calling to turn against Hitler, Gestapo and SS. Copy in the State Archive in Radom, Poland, collection "Zbiór afiszów, plakatów i druków ulotnych z lat 1939–1945" (Collection of posters, placards and leaflets of 1939–1945), originally from Kapeliński Family collection, ref. no. 561

# Deutsches Volk in Waffen!

**U**nsere Vaterland treibt immer schneller der großen Katastrophe entgegen. Hitler will den Krieg, der nun schon 6 Jahre andauert, auf deutschem Boden fortsetzen. Die Ostfront ist zum größten Teil bis an und über die Reichsgrenze von 1941 zurückgedrängt. In Frankreich können unsere Armeen die erdrückende Übermacht der Verbündeten nicht mehr aushalten. Geschettert sind die Hoffnungen auf den U-Boot-Krieg. Längst ist unsere Luftwaffe nicht mehr in der Lage, die Heimat vor den schändlichen Bombenangriffen zu schützen und dem an allen Fronten schwer steigenden Meer die notwendige Unterstützung zu geben.

Erschüttert steht das deutsche Volk vor den Gräueltaten seiner Gefallenen und den Trümmern seiner Städte. Der Ring der Feinde schließt sich immer enger um unser Vaterland. Wie 1918 laßen die Verbündeten von uns ab. Rumläuten ist nun auch zu unserem Feind geworden und richtet die Waffen gegen uns. In allen besetzten Ländern greifen die unterdrückten Völker zu den Waffen.

Dieses Tatsachen gegenüber bringen alle auf den Einsatz von Wunderwaffen und das letzte Aufgebot unseres Volkes gerichtete Hoffnungen nur neue Enttäuschungen.

### Der Krieg ist verloren!

Jeder Tag, den er noch weiter bezugssetzt wird, kostet neue sinnlose Opfer und verwandelt unsere Heimat in ein Trümmerteil.

Hitler will mit zum letzten Untergang des eigenen Volkes, weil mit ihm und seiner Regierung keine Macht der Welt mehr verhandelt wird, machen er Verträge gebühren, Versprechungen und Absichtungen nicht gehalten und deutsches Land über viele Völker gebracht hat.

So bleibt dem deutschen Volk nur die Selbsthilfe. Es muß sich selbst von der Tyrannie Hitlers befreien, um endlich das sinnlose Blutvergießen zu beenden und das Letzte – unsere Heimat – vor der völligen Vernichtung zu bewahren.

Wir Generale in der russischen Kriegsgefangenschaft richten an die Wehrmacht und die in ihrem Heutag kämpfenden, durch Verbrechen nicht belasteten Teile

27 August 1944

Paulus, Generalleutnant; W. v. Seydlitz, General der Artillerie, Präsident des Bundes Deutscher Offiziere, Weibach, General der Inf. u. Kommandierender General XXVII. A. K.; Gumbart, General d. Inf., ehem. Kd. C. LIII. A. K.; Müller, Generalleutnant u. Führer XII. A. K.; Freiherr von Litzow, Generalleutnant, beauftragt mit der Führung LXXXV. A. K.; Eßer v. Daniels, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. der 376. I. D.; Hoffmeister, Generalleutnant u. Führer des XXXI. Pz. A. K.; Schömer, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. der 78. Sturm Division; Hitler, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. der 206. Inf. Div.; Böhme, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. der 78. Inf. Div.; Banzer, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. 12. Inf. Div.; Dr. Franck, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. 74. I. D.; v. Karawicki, Generalleutnant u. Kdr. 110. Inf. Div.; Müller-Bühm, Generalmajor, Kdr. 206. I. Div.; Aron v. Lemka, Generalmajor u. Kommandeur 24. Panz. Div.; Dr. Otto Korles, Generalmajor u. Kdr. 206. I. D.; Lallmann, Generalmajor u. Kommandeur 11. Pz. Div.; Gottfried von Erismannstein, Generalmajor; Nedlitz, Generalmajor, 481. S. D.; Contrady, Generalmajor u. Kdr. 26. I. D.; Trowitz, Gen. Major, 27. I. D.; Kwonak, Generalmajor u. Kdr. 206. I. D.; Gübe, Gen. Maj., 707. I. D.; Bichhalls, Gen. Maj., 95. I. D.; Lindemann, Generalmajor, 361. I. D.; Leyer, Generalmajor u. Kdr. 29. I. D.; [unl.]; Engk, Generalmajor, Kdr. 45. Div.; von Sankelster, Gen. Major u. Div. Kommandeur Div. "Feldherrnhalle"; Bussé, Generallt., Kdr. des Fest. Platzes Lubitz; U. Schmidt, Geomj. u. AP/IF; Heyne, Gen. Ltnt. u. Kdr. 6. Inf. Div.; van Hooven, Oberst und Armeebeschäftigtenführer 5. Armeegr. Garmatia, Oberst und Kdr. 206. Inf. Div.; Adams, Oberst u. 1. Adjutant A.O.K.; Schwarze, Oberst u. Kdr. V. Rgt. 51.; Lidwig, Oberst u. Kdr. Panz. Art. Regt. 4. Fhr. v. Beaulieu, Oberst u. Kdr. Gren. Rgt. (mot.) 29; Schöbn, Oberst u. Kdr. Inf. Rgt. 85. Gr. Steiner, Oberstleutnant, Div. Vzt. 201. Inf. Div.

der Waffen-SS, besonders an die unserem Volke verbundenen Führer und Befehlshaber aus heißen Herzen und in treuer Kameradschaft den Appell:

Sagt Euch bis von Hitler Richtet Eure Waffen gegen ihn und seine Mitschuldigen. Verzeiht die Schmach, diese Aufgabe den Truppen anderer Staaten zu überlassen. Wir beschwören Euch, stellt aus eigener Kraft in Reiche Ehre und Recht, Gesetz und Ordnung wieder her. Gebt dadurch einer neuen Regierung die Möglichkeit, einen wagen schmerz, so doch ehrenvollen Frieden zu schließen und den Weg freizumachen für ein neues, freies, friedliebendes und auf einer wahren Volksgemeinschaft aufgebautes demokratisches Deutschland. Diese Gemeinschaft haben wir hier in gleicher Not und Vaterlandsliebe gefunden in unserer Bewegung "Freies Deutschland" – vom Grenadier bis zum Marschall, vom Arbeiter bis zum Unteroffizier, vom Kommunisten bis zum Konservativen.

Zwar haben vorhin Generale und Offiziere, die die tatsächliche Lage übersehen und beurteilen konnten, am 30. Juli sich mutig zum Träger des Volkswillens gemacht. Wie gemeine Verbrecher hat Hitler sie durch den Strang hingerichtet und noch im Tode verhöhnt. Durch ihren Staatsverrät ohne Einsatz von Fronttruppen konnten Hitler und seine mit allen modernen Waffen ausgerüstete Heimpolizei nicht beseitigt werden.

Deshalb rufen wir Euch, unseren Kameraden, zu: Generale und Offiziere, verlasst Euren Männern, sie wollen von ihr den Sturz Hitlers und die sofortige Beendigung des Krieges.

Soldaten, sprecht Euren Haß gegen Hitler, Euren Willen zu seiner Beseitigung und Eure Sehnsucht nach Frieden Euren Führern gegenüber offen aus.

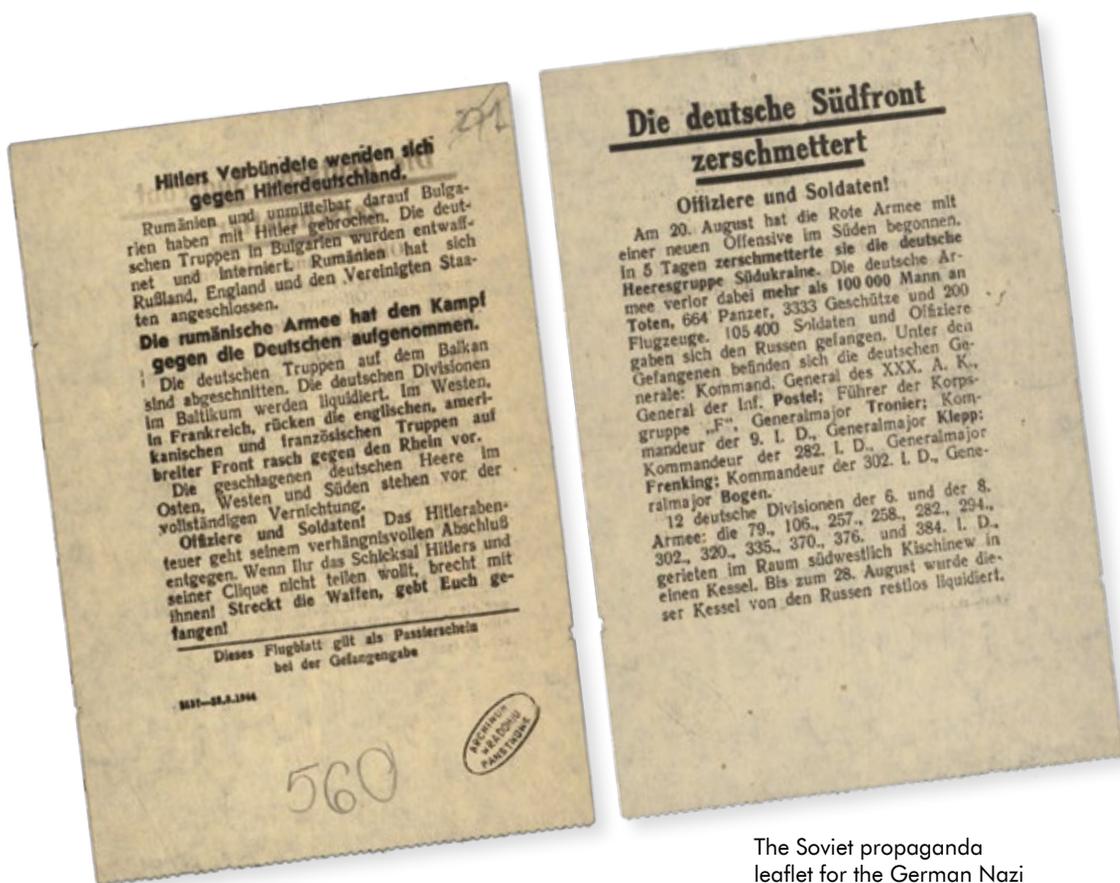
So wie ihr trenn in Hunderten von Schlachten gemeinsam gekämpft und gekämpft habt, müßt ihr auch in dieser entscheidenden Stunde zusammenstehen.

Nicht durch das Halten der Front selbst! Ihr bessere Bedenken für den Frieden, Richtet Eure Waffen gegen Hitler und seine SS und Gestapo! Beseitigt in Euren Reihen die Spitzel Himmlers, die ihr kennt! Gewalt gegen Gewalt! Nur Euer gemeinsamer Kampf gegen Hitler und seinen Machtapparat in der Heimat kann unser Volk und Vaterland vor dem Untergang retten!

Es lebe Deutschland!

The retaliation has begun. Everything will be proven. Germania will not escape with impunity. And for me, for a Soviet citizen, a Russian writer, and a man who has seen Madrid, Paris, Oryol, Smolensk; for me the greatest happiness is to trample on this thieving ground and to know that it has happened neither by chance, nor fortune; no other thing or country saved this world from fascism, but our own people, our army, our heart, and our Stalin (Ehrenburg 1945).

Instead of the anticipated image of the Soviet Army as liberators, the war trail of the victors was marked by drunkenness, rape, murder, robbery, and destruction. However, away from the front line, few people had any knowledge of this



as the reality of war was still very different from the images regularly used in the Soviet media reporting the liberating mission of the Red Army (Senyavskaya 2010). Even the strict directives which came straight from the Soviet Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky of the 2nd Byelorussian Front, ordering his subordinates to curb any breaches of military discipline – some of them punishable by death – proved to be of little help (TsAMO, coll. 963, descr. 1, file 173, document 2128). General Andrei Okorokov, the head of the political division on this front, explained to his dependents that the most important thing was to prevent uncontrolled alcohol consumption, as it tended to lead to further acts of insubordination:

Drunkness brings with it other inexcusable acts: looting, marauding and raping the liberated civilians, defaming the Red Army, and undermining its authority as a liberator (TsAMO, coll. 991, description 1, file. 371, document 240).

The Soviet propaganda leaflet for the German Nazi soldiers entitled “Die deutsche Südfront zerschmettert!” (The German Southern Front shattered!) – informing on breaking the southern part of Eastern Front and crushing the German Heeresgruppe Südukraine by Soviet forces, and about the change of alliances of Romania and Bulgaria, as well as about the general situation of the German forces in Europe. August 28, 1944. Copy in the State Archive in Radom, Poland, collection “Zbiór afiszów, plakatów i druków ulotnych z lat 1939–1945” (Collection of posters, placards and leaflets of 1939–1945), originally from Kapeliński Family collection, ref. no. 560

In April 1945, Georgy Alexandrov, a Soviet statesman and leading ideologist of the Communist Party, also condemned the hitherto undisputed rule to take revenge on the enemy, a rule which manifested itself in the pervasive wish to literally destroy the German state and its people. In his article titled “Comrade Ehrenburg Is Oversimplifying,” he claimed that:

At present, Ehrenburg does not reflect the public opinion in the Soviet Union. Carrying out its great liberating mission, the Red Army is fighting to liquidate not only the German Army, but also the Hitlerite state and its government. However, its goal has never been to exterminate the German nation. That would be unwise and thoughtless (Aleksandrov 1945).

A few days later, on 20 April, this emotional current was confirmed by Stalin himself, who explicitly ordered his soldiers not to expose the Germans to such cruelty in the last phase of the war. He pointed out that treating the enemy with less severity and promising them gentler treatment will result in their lesser resistance, and thus make the enemy more willing to surrender (GARF, coll. 236, description 2712, file 390, pp. 350–351).

The war between the Soviets and the Germans, the so-called Great Patriotic War, which even in its name seemed to be in some way separate from the global conflict of World War II, was, in the official media coverage, once again remodelled into an international struggle. This stemmed from the proclaimed need to bring communist ideas to new regions, this time to a whole group of Central and Eastern European countries, which, following the agreements between the Soviets and the Allies, were placed in the exclusive sphere of Soviet influence (Dallas 2012, pp. 598–622). In order to achieve this without provoking any uprisings and national revolts, in the final phase of the war, Soviet propaganda made an extensive use of all sorts of Pan-Slavic motifs, thus implying that all the Slav nations should fight side by side to defeat the Germanic aggressors (Volokitina 2014, pp. 335–339). Soon, the Red Army also began to expect gratitude from the inhabitants of those countries it came to occupy during the counter-offensive, including the Germans, for the blood that its soldiers had

shed in the process of “liberation.” Numerous war cemeteries and monuments to the glory of the Soviet soldiers were thus deliberately created in the conquered lands, bringing all such efforts in line with the official narrative, according to which the “liberated” nations should jointly celebrate the Soviet victory in a “just” war (Czarnecka 2015).

From the very first days of the Soviet-German war of 1941–5, a mythologised and propagandistically shaped historical narrative was created, its course duly shaped in accordance with the exact guidelines of the communist authorities. Not much was changed after the end of the conflict, with selective and often outright false images of the struggle projected onto the official Soviet historiography. Not surprisingly, these decades of highly restricted freedom of research have resulted in rather fixed perceptions of the war and its celebration in the public sphere. Today, the Russian Federation deliberately draws on the experience of this narrative, seeing the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War as a key event in its history, upholding its role as an imperial state of global significance (Materski 2017).

## Summary

The multiple, often quite substantial changes that could be observed in the military propaganda of the Soviet Union in the course of its conflict with Germany (1941–5) resulted from the changing needs of the communist state. It was those elements of indoctrination in the Red Army that were directly linked to the situation at the front which was subject to change. In the initial phase, shortly after the outbreak of the conflict, the main focus was on the rejection of the peace narrative up to then, committing the whole country to the war and thus granting absolute priority to needs of a purely military character. Yet another strong shift in the propagandistic paradigm was aimed at instilling hostility towards the enemy, countering defeatism, and overcoming the fear of the enemy among Soviet soldiers. This led from defeats to victories, thus giving the Red Army confidence in its own strength and abilities. The propagandistic efforts widely promoted love for the motherland, and created new



war heroes, exhorting the people to emulate them. The third change came with the Soviet westward offensive finally crossing the borders of the Soviet Union. At that point, the communist ideas were revived, and Slavic unity vigorously promoted. With the enemy pushed out of more and more countries, the idea of “liberation” came to be embraced, and with it the expectation of gratitude, as well as positive reception of new ideas. In order to convince the soldiers of the righteousness of the attitudes postulated by the Soviet authorities, a wide range of propaganda tools was employed, including modern media, such as radio, film, and the press. Any weaknesses and shortcomings of the indoctrination efforts in the Red Army were quickly corrected, and, towards the end of the war, effectively obscured by the euphoria that resulted from the ultimate Soviet victory over Germany.

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